Twenty Fantastic Dates

by Popcornjones

Summary

Greg Lestrade has committed to taking Mycroft Holmes out on twenty dates that are 'fantastic' — Fantastic defined as 'fun, romantic and intimate.' Mycroft is the judge of whether a date meets the criteria. And he has terribly high standards.
Or, what happened when Mycroft woke up in Greg's bed on Christmas Day.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
His phone buzzed discreetly. Mycroft picked it up and sighed — it was Mummy.

“What can I do for you?” Mycroft Holmes asked by way of greeting. He had just finished a light meal and was reviewing a memo about the Brexit negotiations prepared for him by the aide he’d placed in Teresa May’s office. There were a few areas where he needed to bring some influence to bear, both in Brussels and among the Tories...

“Myckie, dear, I was just wondering if you were celebrating tonight.”

“Celebrating?”

“Yes. Your father and I are going to Aunt Pansy’s — you know she always has the most wonderful party.”

“I believe you’ve mentioned it.” Mycroft still had half his attention on the memo.

“Sherlock says that he and John are staying home tonight — putting the baby to bed and ringing in the New Year with Mrs. Hudson, if she can stay awake until midnight.”

“How very delightful.”

“What are you doing, Myckie? Don’t tell me you’re home alone again — you should go to Sherlock’s, I’m certain he’d be happy to see you.”

“Mummy, Sherlock hasn’t been happy to see me since he was eight and I refused to allow him to blow up the garden shed.”

“Don’t be ridiculous — Sherlock loves you. You two got along famously at Christmas. It was so lovely spending the day at your flat. I don’t know why we don’t do that more often.”

Mycroft shuddered remembering Christmas day. He’d been a hostage in his own home, unable to escape Mummy, Father, Sherlock, John and John’s offspring. The day had been *endless*.

“We weren’t ‘getting along,’” Mycroft informed his mother. “We were simply united in humiliation by Father’s insistence on playing Father Christmas.” In truth, Sherlock had been furious with him from the moment he’d deduced that Mycroft had slept with Detective Inspector Lestrade. Sherlock never could share his toys.

“I just don’t like to think of you all alone, Myckie.”

“Rest assured, Mummy, if I am alone, it is by design.”
“Sherlock has John and Rosie now, it would be so nice to know that you’re settled too.”

“Mummy, you do realise that Sherlock does not have John. Whatever you or Sherlock — or even I — might wish, they are not a couple. At some point John Watson will marry again and leave Sherlock on his own. You and I both know what that will do to him.”

“Not necessarily — Sherlock and Mary were fast friends....”

“Trust me Mummy, Mary was not Sherlock’s friend.”

“I don’t know what you mean by that, Myckie. Mary was lovely.”

Mycroft sighed. “Never mind. Enjoy your party at Aunt Pansy’s.”

“I just hate to think of you all alone in that big flat of yours when everyone else is out celebrating.”

“If it distresses you so, I urge you not to think of it.”

“Oh, Myckie!”

“Goodnight, Mummy.” Mycroft rang off with relief. As much as he loved his family (and he did love them, in his way), he did not tolerate them well in large doses. Christmas day had been much too large a dose. It had been ghastly having all of them in his home, his haven, without the ability to slip away for much needed alone time. He was an introvert! Time alone to regroup and recharge was a necessity.

It hadn’t helped that he’d barely made it home before they arrived.

Mycroft had, to his consternation, woken in Detective Inspector Lestrade’s bed very much alone. He’d stared up at the Hockney print over his head, still astonished that DCI Lestrade was an art lover. It was fascinating, he was fascinating. Mycroft should have seduced Lestrade years ago!

Mycroft could hear him, Lestrade, turning off the shower and moving about... and abruptly he felt lonely in this strange room. He rolled over, Lestrade’s spot in the bed was already cool. The cheap linens he lay on smelled of the Detective Inspector, and of sex... he found the musky, virile scent incredibly arousing, and his morning wood took decided interest. It was unfortunate that DCI Lestrade had already arisen — he would have very much liked a second round. Mycroft might never have another chance to feel Greg Lestrade’s skin pressed against his own... he’d hoped to take advantage...

He’d had a bit of a crush on Lestrade for as long as he could remember — ever since he’d watched the young Detective Constable Lestrade manhandle his coked-out little brother into a police van then fend off an attack from Sherlock’s just-as-high dealer/boyfriend Victor Trevor. The ease with which Lestrade had ducked Trevor’s punch, grabbed his arm and twisted it up behind Trevor’s back, making the burly geezer squeal like a pig had been exceedingly satisfying... and quite the turn-on.

Ten months after that incident, Mycroft had summoned Lestrade to a meeting and, noting how expensive it was raising a young child (he’d forgone mentioning the cheating wife), had offered to pay the policeman a not-inconsiderable sum if he’d allow the newly-sober Sherlock to consult on some of the less straightforward murders he came across. Detective Sergeant Lestrade — he’d been promoted since their first encounter — had, to Mycroft’s astonishment, politely told him where to ‘get off,’ and walked out. Mycroft’s interest was definitely piqued.

Especially when he discovered that Lestrade had gone directly from refusing payment to Sherlock’s hovel on Montague Street and offered to allow him to consult as long as he was clean and could
prove it. For two years, every time he invited Sherlock to a crime scene, he’d handed him a specimen jar and made a forensic tech watch Sherlock fill it with urine. It didn’t endear the forensic techs to Lestrade or Sherlock, but Sherlock stayed off the drugs and quite a number of murders were solved elegantly and efficiently.

Over the years, Lestrade had only become more attractive — his powerful body filling out and maturing, his dark hair turning to silver, laugh lines adding character to his handsome face. His hangdog charm had been refined by self-confidence — still rough enough around the edges to put butterflies in Mycroft’s stomach, but proper enough now to bring into the front office. Lestrade had advanced (with almost no help from Mycroft) up the ranks from Sergeant to Inspector to Detective Inspector in Charge — DCI.

Though Mycroft wanted him, he’d never imposed himself. It was apparent that whilst the wife cheated, Lestrade was faithful to her. After the marriage finally limped to an end, Lestrade had briefly dated a Crown Prosecutor then even more briefly, the owner of the coffee shop in which he’d bought coffee daily. (Visits to the coffee shop ended with the affair, proving to Mycroft once again the wisdom of keeping one’s personal life separate from everything else.)

Through all the years, Mycroft had never once noted Lestrade looking twice at another man — and Mycroft would have noticed. The detective never made the vociferous protestations that John Watson felt the need to voice, but as far as he knew, DCI Lestrade was not just a straight arrow, he was straight.

Thus, Mycroft never expected the policeman to return his regard. He’d been so certain there was no chance, so sure Lestrade would not even notice, that Mycroft had become careless, indiscreet with his attentions — and Lestrade had noticed.

It had been a very long time since he’d had partnered sex. Mycroft was extremely busy, and relationships were inconvenient and time consuming — even casual hook-ups took time he didn’t have. But when Greg Lestrade had met his gaze, licked his lips and let his hand drift lazily to his belt — offering him what he’d lusted after for years — Mycroft could not resist.

The experience had been amazing, better by far than he’d ever expected. Everything about the encounter had surprised him — the easy way Lestrade had flirted, the way he’d kissed Mycroft, so hungrily — commanding yet tender... then there was Greg’s flat! It was... tasteful. Much more tasteful than should have been possible on a policeman’s budget. The open airiness of the rooms, the simple colour palate, the bare minimum of furniture, the art... Greg’s taste in art had perhaps surprised Mycroft most of all. That Greg even had taste in art...

And the sex! Greg had been tactile and sensual, charmingly silly, virile and a little rough as he’d taken charge, but he’d always been cognisant of Mycroft’s pleasure. He’d trusted Greg enough to allow the man to fuck him — he’d never permitted that the first time with anyone.

It had been so good. His climax had blurred the sharp edges of Mycroft’s brain, quieted his rampaging thoughts, calmed his hyper perceptiveness with a pleasant buzz of white noise... he had fallen asleep next to Lestrade and slept better than he had for many, many years.

Greg returned to the bedroom soon after Mycroft woke, bustling in damp and pink from the shower, his silver hair glistening. He grinned when he saw Mycroft.

“Hey you’re up.” Greg said, advancing on the bed and claiming a kiss.

Mycroft ran his hand down Greg’s chest. "There's my Christmas present." He murmured. He wanted to pull Greg back into bed, strip off the towel and press his face into the man’s groin.
“I wish I didn’t have to be at work this morning. You look gorgeous in my bed.” Greg kissed him again, his lips soft and sweet.

Mycroft watched him retreat to a rather cluttered closet (interesting), where he let the towel drop and pulled on dark boxer briefs that showed both his arse and his package to great advantage. Mycroft was sorry that Lestrade donned trousers so immediately after.

Whilst pulling a vest over his head, Lestrade had turned back to him. “There’s tea, or I can make coffee if you like. And toast. I’m having toast, I’ll put some in for you while you’re in the bog.” Greg’s smile had flashed again, and he was gone, striding purposefully from the bedroom.

Mycroft sighed — Greg was nervous this morning. He was trying to be a good host whilst wanting Mycroft up and out as quickly as possible. Mycroft told himself that was perfectly understandable, and he had no reason to be disappointed. He slid out of the bed, retrieved his boxers from the floor and went directly to the loo. It was still steamy from the shower and Mycroft felt fortunate that he couldn’t see himself in the mirror in his disheveled state. No wonder Greg wanted him to go, he must look a sight. He quickly wet a flannel and wiped himself down, divesting his skin of the dried vestiges of sex. He washed his face and hands, used Greg’s mouthwash and hairbrush, and returned to the bedroom.

His trousers, shirt and waistcoat were hideously wrinkled from their night on the floor. Mycroft loathed putting on soiled clothing — it made him feel grubby. He had no idea how anyone could stand to wear the same shirt two days together. But there was nothing for it. He shook them out and dressed quickly, straightening up as much as possible. He was just tying his shoes when Lestrade returned with a steaming mug in his hand.

“Oh, you’re dressed.” Lestrade sounded surprised.

“You need to get to work, I don’t want to be in the way.”

“You’re all right. How do you take your tea? There’s milk and sugar in the kitchen.”

“Thank you.” Mycroft took the mug and followed Greg into the little kitchen, wondering if he should drink it or simply make his apologies and escape. Then Greg flashed the warm, suggestive grin that filled his belly with butterflies and Mycroft giddily decided to stay. Whilst Greg put bread in the toaster, he added milk and two sugars to the tea and sipped it. It was an English Breakfast, nothing special but solid and homey. It was not dissimilar to the tea he’d been served at Buckingham Palace.

Unlike at the Palace, Greg spread jam on his toast and ate it leaning against the worktop. Mycroft glanced longingly at the pristine dining table once before emulating him. The jam was blackberry and very fresh. Contrary to Mummy's longstanding doctrine, eating it standing up did not take away from the flavour.

“I’d like to see you again.” Greg told him.

Mycroft smiled feeling very pleased. “That might be possible. I’ll check my schedule.”

Greg smirked into his mug of tea. “You do that.” Mycroft had put him off. That had not been his intention.

“I just meant… today is a holiday, my schedule is generally more demanding.”

“Right.”
He had to fix this. Mycroft fumbled a card from his waistcoat and offered it. “This is my personal number, Greg. My direct line.”

Greg took the card and Mycroft saw he understood the import of it. “I’ll call you then.”

“Please. I’d like it if you did.” Mycroft finished his toast and retrieved his suit coat from the floor by the dining table. He found his watch and cufflinks on the table proper. “My parents will be at my door in… oh bugger, less than an hour!”

“I’ll call you a cab.” Greg said immediately.

“I’ve already taken care of it.” Mycroft told him. He stuffed the watch in his pocket and accepted his overcoat and umbrella from Greg. At least they had been hung up.

“Hey.” Greg said, taking hold of his collar and tugging gently. “This was amazing” He pulled Mycroft close and stole a kiss. As Greg’s lips touched his, Mycroft’s brain went offline and the only thing he was able to process was the feel of Greg’s tongue swiping along the seam of his lips, opening his mouth and darting in… the taste of Greg, tea and jam and toothpaste… Greg’s arm wrapping around his back, holding him close, overwhelming Mycroft with his strength and bodily power… his scent, soap and shaving cream and manly musk — musk that grew stronger as they kissed…

Greg released him, and Mycroft stumbled gracelessly. “I wish I didn’t have to get to work.” Greg said regretfully. “There’s nothing I’d like better than to take you back to bed.”

Mycroft felt the same. He remembered the feel of Greg’s fingers pressing inside him… belatedly, he realised he was aroused, his burgeoning erection just visible in his trousers. His cheeks felt hot as they coloured. It was completely unlike him to feel embarrassed, to blush like a giddy schoolgirl! It hadn’t happened in decades! But one sultry look from Greg Lestrade and Mycroft felt warm and dizzy and… bothered.

He should cut it off now, cut the head from the snake before it could really sink in its fangs. Mycroft didn’t have time for an affair.


Later Mycroft wondered why he hadn’t scoffed at the idea of Greg calling the same day, but at the time all he felt was delight and anticipation. “Good. Yes.”

Fortunately, the roads were clear, and Mycroft made it home in record time. He texted the driver picking up his parents and requested that she take the scenic route, delaying their arrival as long as possible. Sherlock and John were traveling via taxi and Mycroft prayed they would be late as he stripped off last night’s rumpled suit and jumped into the shower.

His hair was still damp when everyone arrived, and Sherlock gave him the most scathing look in his repertoire whilst Mummy cooed over the child in his arms. Mycroft told him via the tilt of his eyebrows that he didn’t care what Sherlock thought. The day had gone downhill from there.

Mycroft’s phone hadn’t buzzed until well after 22:00.

“Sorry I couldn’t call sooner.” Greg said as soon as Mycroft picked up. “Body washed up this afternoon and I ended up having to stay late. Then I had to drive to Acton to pick up Georgianna…”
“No apology necessary — we had not settled on a particular time.” In fact, Mycroft had given up on Greg calling over an hour before, chastising himself for anticipating it so eagerly. He’d settled down with a brief on Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Bin Salman’s ties to the American president and refused to check if his phone was still working.

“Yeah. I thought I’d have time after my shift. I wanted to call you then.”

“And now you’re with your daughter.”

“Oh, Georgianna’s OK. She got a tablet for Christmas and she’s watching videos of cats beating up dogs.”

“Sounds… engrossing.”

Greg laughed. “You’d be surprised.” Mycroft began to relax. Greg had called! The delay had been unavoidable. “Did you have a good day with the family?”

“About as I expected.” Mycroft replied dourly. “Sherlock knows, by the way, about last night. Don’t be surprised if he’s in a strop when you see him next.”

“Oh. You told him?”

“Of course not.”

“Right. Erm, he deduced it, yeah?”

“In seconds. We never could hide anything from each other. Doubtless that’s what made our relationship so fractious.”

“Well, thanks for the heads-up.” Greg paused, and Mycroft could hear in the silence that he had something of import to say. “So… I, erm, want to ask you a favour.” Greg sounded embarrassed. “The annual Policeman’s New Year’s Eve Ball is this coming Friday. I wanted to ask if you’d do me the favour of accompanying me. Coming as my guest.”

“Is this a date?” Mycroft asked archly. “Are you asking me out, Detective Inspector?”

“Greg.” He said lightly. “After last night, you should definitely call me Greg.”

“Aren’t you asking me on a date, Greg?”

“No.” Greg told him. “This isn’t a date. A date should be fun. A date should be romantic... intimate. The Policeman’s Ball isn’t a date, it’s a favour. Definitely a favour — it’s hours and hours of standing around in monkey suits and shoes that pinch, drinking cheap champagne and eating soggy party nibbles with 1,000 other cops and their plus ones. Almost no one wants to be there — attendance is unofficially mandatory. The only thing that can make the Policeman’s Ball bearable is a full hip flask and sharing the misery with someone interesting. Which, hopefully, if I’m very lucky and you’re feeling very charitable, is you.” Greg sounded optimistic. “If you did this for me, I would owe you the best date ever. I would owe you twenty dates. Twenty fantastic dates.”

Mycroft didn’t immediately reply — he was attempting to formulate a response but was horrified to discover that he could not decide what to say. Something snarky and dismissive was completely warranted — the Ball sounded dreadful. Mycroft had been to events of its ilk and knew Greg’s unflattering description was accurate and possibly even a bit rosy.

But Mycroft found — to his utter shock — he did not want to be dismissive. There was no way he
could possibly accept... but Greg... hopeful, charming, sexy Greg... Mycroft could not bring himself to crush the beautiful, buoyant hope in his voice. He was slipping.

“Yeah. I didn’t think so.” Greg said, resigned to disappointment. Mycroft felt wretched.

But Greg had said something… “Twenty fantastic dates?”

“What?” Greg asked blankly.

“Twenty fantastic dates, you said. If I attend this New Year’s Eve Ball as your... plus one” Mycroft said the phrase like it pained him, because it did truly. “You will owe me twenty fantastic dates.”

“Erm, yeah. That’s what I said.” Hope had crept back into his voice.

Mycroft assumed the tone he used when negotiating treaties and trade agreements with foreign governments, the tone that said, ‘I am the British Empire, if you fuck with me I will wipe your ridiculous country off the map.’ The tone that had cowed Xi Jinping and made Vladimir Putin blanch… “It would be a binding contract.” He said. “Twenty fantastic dates, ‘fantastic’ defined as ‘fun, romantic and intimate.’ That’s a bit subjective... who determines if a date meets the criteria? You or me?”

Greg’s enthusiasm was palpable. “We’ll need a panel of experts, I guess.”

“Mycroft scoffed. “Indeed.”

“Or you could be the judge.” Greg offered magnanimously. “You could judge whether the date was fantastic or not.”

“I have terribly high standards.”

“Right. Well, if a date fails to meet your terribly high standards, do I get a do-over?”

“If I’m to endure this Policeman’s New Year’s Eve Ball, you’d be obligated to take me on dates until twenty of them are deemed fantastic, subjective to my standards. It could very well take years to accomplish.”

“Years!” Mycroft could hear the detective’s grin. “Mycroft, you drive a hard bargain. But it’s a deal. One Policeman’s New Year’s Eve Ball start to finish, in exchange for Twenty Fantastic Dates.”

Mycroft hesitated only a second before affirming the deal. “Yes.” Immediately, he had deep misgivings — what was he doing, committing to dating anyone, let alone a workmanlike police detective, a middle class, divorced father whose accent betrayed his tower block upbringing… he didn’t have time for this!

“You know, I’m actually looking forward to the bloody Ball now.” Greg was chuffed. “So, erm, you don’t have to rent a tux or anything — black tie is optional.”

Mycroft smiled tightly. “I would never rent a suit. I have my own.”

“Of course... yeah. I should, erm, probably rent something fancy, then.”

“Please don’t trouble yourself, I’ll have something appropriate sent over. This soiree begins at 20:00? A car will pick you up at 20:15, yes? Good.”

“Erm… yeah.” Greg sounded a bit overwhelmed all of a sudden.
“You’ve committed to take me on ‘Twenty Fantastic Dates,’ Detective Inspector, you should sound frightened.”

“Greg. Call me Greg.”

“Greg.” Mycroft found he could not stop smiling.

And that sentimental nonsense was how Mycroft had committed to going to a fancy-dress New Year’s Eve Ball with a lowly policeman. That was why he was retying his black tie for the third time and wishing desperately for a generous dram of whisky to calm his nerves.

Mycroft Holmes took a deep breath and summoned his habitual aloof serenity. Then he examined his appearance in the full-length mirror. Acceptable. He smoothed the waistcoat of the tuxedo and pulled his second-best pocket watch — the one with the opal fob — from the pocket to check the time.

One last glance to make certain his hair was in place and his shoes properly shined, and Mycroft left his dressing room. Walking to the car he texted Greg that he was on the way.

Chapter End Notes

Geeza - Old english slang, referring to someone who has either just done something stupid, wrong, or done something to someone. Thug. Also spelt geezer, geezar. (i.e. Not an old guy.)

Haven’t we all been there, where you really like someone and you’re feeling your way forward, wondering if they like you too.

Hope you enjoyed this prologue chapter! Next time: GREG’S COMING OUT STORY.
Greg comes out. And out. And out...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg dressed in the rental tux Mycroft had messenered to his flat. At a glance, it appeared to be traditional black tie — black with narrow lapels, cummerbund, bow tie, grosgrain stripe down the legs of the trousers. But the shirt was champagne-coloured, pale gold without shimmer and the pocket square matched. The real departure from tradition — and Greg’s comfort zone — were the trousers. They were a severe straight cut, clinging lovingly to his thighs and arse. And they were a mite short for Greg’s taste, barely skimming the top of his shoe. But it was a rental, couldn’t expect it to be perfect. There were thick-soled, round-toed dress brogues included, so shiny he could see his reflection on them. It all seemed a bit poncey, but everything fit, and the material of the suit felt good. To be honest, it was all surprisingly comfortable, more comfortable than any dress-up clothes he’d ever worn. He just had to fight the impulse to think of it as a posh schoolboy’s uniform. He wondered what high-end menswear designer rented out tuxes. Mycroft must have pulled in a favour or two.

He checked out the fit in his mirror. The whole kit was more form-fitting than he was accustomed to, but he had to admit the overall effect was flattering — even the shortish pants and chunky shoes. It made him look taller and slimmer than he was. He fastened the jacket’s single button and regarded his reflection. The debonair man who looked back at him was a stranger — a better dressed, better looking version of himself. Like James Bond... if James bond were a poncey, silver fox.

“You’re an idiot, mate.” He told his reflection.

He’d asked Mycroft to accompany him to the Policeman’s New Year’s Eve Ball in a giddy rush of inspiration — he wanted quite badly to see Mycroft again, and he had to go to the bloody ball... it wasn’t exactly a brilliant first date, but by couching the invitation in terms of a favour (which it most certainly was) he could gauge Mycroft’s interest in seeing him again with little risk. And whilst the party was a dismal slog, there was dancing and the opportunity to kiss at midnight.

It had seemed that Mycroft was interested in seeing him again. He’d given Greg his number — his real number. But Mycroft was so posh, so other, so far out of Greg’s sphere, that he felt like a dirty beggar even asking. Like Oliver Twist holding up his empty bowl: ‘Please sir, I want some more.’

It was bloody ridiculous! He was ridiculous! Greg was never this nervous about asking someone out! What was wrong with him!? God, he hated the Ball.

He’d got out of the whole Policeman’s Ball mess three years ago by pleading his divorce. Two years ago, he’d taken Lydia, the Crown Prosecutor he’d been seeing, and it was the nail in the coffin of their relationship. Last year he’d gone stag and he never wanted to do that again. The only thing worse than going to the thing was going alone. It had been interminable.
So, on Christmas Day, high on great sex and his apparent ability to charm the literal pants off Mycroft bloody Holmes, asking him to the Ball had seemed like a great idea.

And after Mycroft agreed, Greg’d spent a day and a half giddily thinking he was bloody brilliant. He’d tricked ‘The Iceman’ into twenty dates! He’d gotten Mycroft Holmes to agree to date him! Indefinitely!

Greg took Georgianna back to her mother’s on the 27th. Jude invited him in and he’d had a beer with his ex-wife and her new husband, Rupert. All very friendly and civilised. Jude had reminded him of the terrible New Year’s Eves past that they’d spent at the Ball: the year the commissioner stepped on her foot and broken her toe, the year everyone got food poisoning from the prawn rolls, the year the champagne ran out at 22:30...

“Who’s the lucky lady this year, Greg? Who gets to experience the worst party of the year?” Jude had laughed.

Greg opened his mouth to tell her …and like a lightning strike he realised everyone was going to know he was bisexual. Everyone.

Not only had Greg never been ‘out’ at work, he’d never told his wife about his history with men — about Charlie, the first boy he’d kissed, or how he’d met Ravi at college, taken him home to his little bedroom and given his first blow job while his Mum was at work. He hadn’t told her about Ben who he’d loved desperately and had been with for almost two years.

Maybe he’d been a coward. It had just seemed like a can of worms that didn’t need to be opened.

But if he really was taking Mycroft to the bloody Ball — and he was, dammit! He was excited about it! He was looking forward to it! — he had to tell Jude now. If he didn’t, she’d hear it second-hand from gossiping coppers and their spouses — it was bound to get back to her. Greg couldn’t put her in that position.

Jesus, he’d been so focussed on Mycroft, he really hadn't thought this through!

“I’m taking someone new this year.” Greg said, his voice steady despite the fear roiling in his belly. “I’ve known him for a long time, but just started seeing him recently.” (She didn’t need to know how recently.)

No one said anything for a beat. Greg watched helplessly as Jude's face changed from merriment to confusion to... something else entirely. Something he couldn’t entirely parse. She looked upset that the Greg she thought she knew so well, that she’d pigeonholed, could surprise her... she looked appraising and accusing and utterly, abruptly bewildered...

“Him?” Said Rupert, the new husband, not yet certain if this were a joke, but approaching it with barely restrained glee. He was an accountant. Greg wondered idly how many years it would take him to discover that when he worked those long hours during tax season, Jude was out sporting with other men. “I didn’t know you played for the other team, Greg.” Rupert’s eyes shifted between Jude and Greg with fascination.

Greg smiled thinly, hyperaware of Jude’s mind exploding. “Switch-hitter.” He replied. “Though it’s been a long time since I switched it up.”

“Well, that’s pretty brave, taking your boyfriend to a work event.” Rupert thoroughly relished saying ‘your boyfriend.’
“He’s not my boyfriend.” Greg said reflexively. “We haven’t been seeing each other that long. As for brave — there are a lot of LGBT coppers, I’m nothing special.”

“Don’t sell yourself short, Greg. What do you think, Jude — pretty brave, innit?”

Jude blinked several times, waking up to the reality of the conversation. “He’s taking the piss,” she told Rupert savagely. She stood up. “Can I talk to you on the porch?” It was less a question than a demand and she dragged Greg out the front door. Rupert stared after them with a bemused I-can’t-wait-to-tell-everyone-I-know expression.

“What the bloody fuck, Greg!?” Jude shout-whispered when they were alone in the cold night air. “I think I’d know if you were gay!”

“I’m not gay.” Greg said evenly, lighting up a cigarette. “I’m bi.”

“Since when!? Give me one of those.”

He gave her the pack. “Since forever. I’ve always been bisexual. Look, Jude, maybe I should have told you... but it didn’t seem important. We were together, and I wasn’t interested in anyone else, male or female.” She’d extracted a cigarette and Greg traded her the pack for his lighter.

She gave a strangled half-laugh. “How can I believe that?”

Greg exhaled a long stream of smoke and retrieved his lighter. “Jude, you were the one fucking other men in our bed, not me.”

She hit him, furiously, hard enough to bruise his arm. She hit him again. “Fuck you, Greg. Fuck you! Is that what this is? Some naff way to get back at me!?”

“Jude, this has nothing whatsoever to do with you. I only said something because after the Ball you’ll hear about it from Fran and Mia and that lot.”

“Those dozy cows!”

“Thought it better you heard it from me.” He sucked on his cigarette. “You can tell ’em you knew all along if you want. Suck the air outta their sails.” He chuckled humourlessly. “Hell, tell ’em after you left me, no woman was good enough. Had to turn to blokes.” From long experience he saw that pleased her vanity.

But she was still reactive. “Has Georgianna met him?” She demanded.

“Of course not. No — she didn’t meet Lydia or Karen either. I wouldn’t introduce her unless it was serious.” He might be a shite father, but he wasn’t stupid.

“Is that possible!” Jude squeaked. ‘You getting serious with a... with a bloke.” She’d almost said ‘poof,’ only just catching herself.

“Yes, sure it’s possible.” He told her, ignoring the faux pas. “I like him. A lot. Actually, he’s the first person I’ve really liked since... well, since you.”

That was mollifying, but Greg could see the war raging in her head. “I’m just... I thought I knew you, Greg.”

He took a last drag and then dropped the cigarette and crushed it under his heel. “You do, Jude. We were together almost fourteen years, no one knows me better than you.”
“Then how come I didn’t know this?”

Greg looked at her for a long moment, taking in her dark hair and strong features, the flash of her gray eyes he’d always loved. He would have been content to spend the rest of his life with her. If only... “Because I fell in love with you and it was moot.” He shrugged. “I’m off. G’night, Jude.”

“Greg, wait!” He turned back. She was silhouetted by the light from the house, and he couldn’t make out her face. “You have to tell Georgianna. She’ll hear the gossip too. And you know how kids are. Cruel.”

Greg swore. Jude was right. How had he not thought about all this?! By taking Mycroft to the bloody Ball, he was Coming Out. Coming Out officially to everyone he knew, coming out with capital letters up in lights: GREG LESTRADE IS QUEER.

"You could cancel..." Jude suggested. He hated how hopeful she sounded.

“I’m not cancelling...!” He forced himself to stop thinking about his daughter running from him, screaming in disgust, and mentally picture his calendar. “I could pick her up Thursday after work, take her out for dinner. Would that work? Or I guess I could take some comp time and take her to breakfast Wednesday...”

Jude sighed through her clenched jaw. Greg’s job, the long hours and frequent overtime had been a major source of contention in their marriage. “Thursday. But you better be here by 18:00...”

“I will! I absolutely will. And Jude... after I tell her, when she comes to you, you’ll...” Greg tried to see her shadowed face. He spoke quietly. “You’ll support me, yeah? You won’t tell her I’m a pervert or I’m going to hell or anything?”

Jude studied her feet for several long seconds, shifting her weight. “No, of course not.” She said finally. She dropped her cigarette and ground it out savagely. “I want her to have a good relationship with you, I’d never say anything bad. It isn’t bad. But I won’t lie to her — this is a... a shock. It’s going to take me a little while to process.”

“That’s fair, I guess.”

Greg had driven home the long way, smoking half his remaining pack with the window down despite the cold. He cursed as he lit up — he’d been down to two fags a day, had only had one yesterday when Georgianna was there. He’d just chain-smoked through eight...

At least the cigarettes looked good with the tux. Greg thought as he tucked a fresh pack in his pocket and filled his good lighter — the silver one that had belonged to his Grandad — with fluid. He closed it tightly so it wouldn’t leak out on the posh suit.

He emptied his wallet and put bills and a credit card in Grandad’s money clip. He slipped it into an inner pocket with his police ID. His phone went in on the opposite side. Keys were a problem, they interfered with the line of the trousers. Maybe if he left his keys in the glove box and just carried the key fob for the car...

Greg’s text alert sounded. It was Mycroft telling him he’d be there to pick him up in twenty minutes. That reminded him he didn’t need car keys. He felt flustered and rushed as he separated the key to his flat from all the others (mailbox, office, desk, car and that other one that he couldn’t remember but knew must be important) and slid the key into his trouser pocket.

He brushed his teeth again. He should bring breath mints! Did he have breath mints?
On the way to pick up Georgianna Thursday evening, Greg had got a takeaway from her favourite curry shop. She bounced down the stairs to his car, still a skinny kid despite the carefully curled hair and lip gloss. She got in and kissed his cheek, giggling when his hug turned to tickling. The weariness of his work day evaporated.

“Da-ad! Quit it!” She shrieked, pushing him away. Her hands were small like her mother’s.

When Greg began to drive, Georgianna sobered. She fixed him with the penetrating look that Jude had so often given him, her face looking suddenly mature. “What’s going on, Dad?” She asked. “Mum’s being all weird. And Rupert... now you’re taking me to dinner on a work night. You aren’t... you don’t have cancer or something, do you?”

“No! Gigi, no, I don’t have cancer. It’s nothing like that.”

“Georgianna.” She corrected. “You know I’m not ‘Gigi’ anymore.”

“Right, sorry — habit.” He smiled fondly at his daughter. She had Jude’s gray eyes, but his features — feminized on her heart-shaped face, but definitely his.

“So, what is it? It’s something, innit...?”

“Yeah, it’s something.” Greg had thought a lot about this conversation, how to COME OUT TO HIS DAUGHTER. It was terrifying.

“What, Dad?”

Greg supposed he was grateful she’d brought it up now — he would have put it off. But doing it in the car was good — they wouldn’t have to face each other when he told her. Greg took a deep breath... then hedged. “Erm, do you know anyone who’s gay? I mean have any of your friends...”

“Dad! You aren’t seriously going to tell me to stay away from gay people?! Iain is one of my best friends. It’s not like it’s communicable!”

Greg laughed out loud, his relief profound. “No! No, honey, not at all.” Still... a dad was different than a friend. “I’m trying, Georgianna — not very effectively, I guess — to say...” He took a steadying breath. “...that I am bisexual.” He was afraid to look at her. He gripped the steering wheel fiercely and licked his lips. “Yeah. I’ve had relationships with both men and women, the most important, of course, was with your mother.”

He snuck a look at her — her eyes were huge... but there was still a vestige of Jude’s penetrating gaze. She was thinking, assessing. “Is that why you and Mom got divorced?”

“No! No, Georgianna, when I was with your mother, I was happy. There wasn’t anyone else.” That was true, he’d never even looked when he was married, at men or women. “The divorce... it had nothing to do with my sexuality. Your mother and I had problems that, as hard as we both tried, we couldn’t work out.” Greg would never tell his daughter that her mother had repeatedly cheated on him. “I loved your mother very much, I had planned to spend the rest of my life with her. But sometimes...” He sighed. “...that’s not enough.”

She studied her hands gravely. “OK.”

Greg plunged on. “I’m telling you this now because pretty soon everyone will know that I date men as well as women. And I wanted you to know first.”

“Why?” They glanced at each other at the same moment. Georgianna’s face was pinched and
serious. He wondered what she saw on his. “How will everyone know?”

“I’m seeing someone, a man, and I’m taking him to the New Year’s Eve Ball this weekend. Everyone I work with will be there — some of them are your Mum’s friends. Some might be parents of kids at your school. There could be gossip. Or maybe not. I don’t know how people will react.”

Georgianna ruminated silently for a moment. “Are you scared?”

Greg smiled. “I am a little.” He shrugged. “But it’s nothing to be ashamed of. I’m not going to hide.”

The girl nodded in agreement. “Is he your boyfriend?” She asked.

Greg began tentatively to relax. “I haven’t been seeing him that long. If things go well, he might become my boyfriend. But he’s not now.”

“Oh. Will I get to meet him?”

“Do you want to?”

“Yeah.”

Greg smiled at her. “If he ever becomes my boyfriend, I’ll introduce you.”

Georgianna huffed impatiently.

“Gigi...”

“Dad! Georgianna!”

“Right, sorry. Georgianna, listen, I don’t want to introduce you unless it’s serious. Man or woman. No point getting used to someone who isn’t around very long. Does that make sense?”

“Sorta.”

Greg parked outside his building. “Grab the takeaway, honey, yeah?”

“Yeah.” He let them into his flat and she put the food on the table and threw her coat carelessly on the couch. Greg hung his up and took off his suit jacket, draping it over the back of a dining room chair. He started getting silverware for dinner.

Georgianna opened the takeaway bag. She looked up at Greg, her face open and curious. “Have you had dates with other people?”

Greg chuckled. “Yeah. A few.”

“Who?”

“Well...” He set the utensils on the table with a clatter. “I went out with a woman I met in court for a few months last year. She was a Crown’s Prosecutor.”

Georgianna giggled. “Did she have a wig?”

Greg got a couple bottles of water from the fridge. “Yep.”

“Was it silly?”

“Looked alright, I guess — she’s good at her job. Maybe a little silly.” He grinned. They sat down,
and Greg began opening the takeaway containers, passing over the rice.

Georgianna spooned some onto her plate. “So, this bloke... what does he do?”

Well, *there* was a can of worms. “He works for the government.”

“Oh. How did you meet him?”

“He’s the brother of someone I know.”

“Is he cute?” She giggled.

That was a road Greg was not going down. “If you meet him, you’ll have to tell me.”

“What’s his name?”

“What’s his name? What’s the name of your boyfriend? I seem to remember someone telling me to mind my own business.”

“Dad!” She rolled her eyes. “Nabil isn’t my boyfriend!”

“Nabil, is it? Does he know your Dad’s a copper? He’s your year at school, yeah? Maybe I’ll have to come by, check him out...” Greg laughed at his daughter’s outrage.

As they talked, Greg was so proud of his girl. She was smart and kind and *sceptical* — it was impossible to get anything by her. Jude — and it was 95 percent Jude — had raised Georgianna right.

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When Greg climbed into the car, he looked so magnificent that Mycroft almost forgot to gauge the detective’s emotional state.

Greg’s grin lit up his face. He slid all the way across the seat into Mycroft’s personal space. He touched Mycroft’s cheek lightly and kissed him. It didn’t have the hunger of the kisses they’d shared on Christmas Eve, but it buzzed sensually through his overactive brain, narrowing his perception down to Greg’s hand on his face, Greg’s fresh aftershave, Greg’s freshly brushed teeth and sensual mouth...

Mycroft’s damnable cheeks were hot already! “You look very dashing.” He said, running his fingers down the fine fabric of Greg’s lapel, and composing himself.

“Yeah, thanks for sending over the suit. You didn’t have to...”

“It was my pleasure.”

“Well, you do have to look at me mug all night. Can’t blame you for wanting to clean me up a bit.” To Mycroft’s disappointment, Greg sat back and buckled himself in. But he stretched his fingers out to touch Mycroft’s thigh, smiling, and it’s warmth filled Mycroft’s chest. “Let me know how much I owe you.”

“Erm. For what?”
“The suit. Renting something this nice couldn’t have been cheap.”

Mycroft had not rented the suit, he’d had it made. Mycroft was able to perfectly recall every second of his life from the time he was two and a half — a mixed blessing, truly. He’d been replaying Christmas Eve over and over in his mind, savouring it, examining it, deducing and extrapolating from it. It had been child’s play to conjure Greg’s measurements from the memory of his body under Mycroft’s hands.

Faced with explaining this to Greg, Mycroft abruptly became cognisant that Greg would not approve. Greg would insist on paying for the suit — which would surely put a damper on the evening. In his quest to make this evening as close to perfect as possible, Mycroft had neglected to think it through to this inevitable conclusion. He was truly slipping.

He smiled, the slightest upturn of his lips, hoping that Greg would accept it as genuine. “We can take care of it later.” He said.

“Yeah, don’t let me forget.”

Mycroft considered ways to cause Greg to forget as he hummed agreement.

“You look pretty good too. Course, you always look good.” Greg said as he fingered the cuff of Mycroft’s jacket. It was the same fabric as Greg’s, but with a cut more flattering to Mycroft’s own gangly form.

Greg did not seem nervous, which was a wonder considering that tonight he would be effectively coming out of the closet to just about everyone he knew. On the contrary, he seemed relaxed and happy to be with Mycroft. That alone was something of a novelty — whilst Mycroft could recall exactly the last time someone had simply been happy to be in his company, it was more years ago than he wanted to count.

Mycroft smiled and allowed himself to enjoy being with Greg while he could.

“There you are Lestrade!” The Chief Superintendent was hovering near the entrance, his meaty face already crimson from sparkling wine and excitement.

Greg looked like a movie star with his handsome face, striking silver hair, and his stylish suit. The Chief Superintendent definitely noticed, and he seemed confused by it. The man was a dullard.

“You remember my wife, Flora.”

Flora noticed Lestrade too. Her bored mien lifted into a smile and she simpered as he greeted her. Mycroft could not blame her.

The Chief Superintendent clapped Greg on the shoulder. “You’re looking good, Lestrade. That lady of yours, she’s cleaned up your act.”

“Erm… no, sir. Not a lady. This is Mycroft Holmes, my date tonight.” Greg pressed his hand against the small of Mycroft’s back in an intimate gesture, presenting him formally.

“Chief Superintendent,” Mycroft said. “How delightful to see you again.”

“Oh, you know each other?” Greg asked.

“Yes, Angus and I served on the Justice Commission together last year. And this captivating lady is your wife?”
There was a pregnant pause. Mycroft waited patiently for the Chief Superintendent to grasp the situation — that one of his best DCIs was on a date with a man that could make or break him with a word. And that they were both men. “Ahem, excuse me... of course, Mr. Holmes, my wife, Flora.”

“Mrs. McFadden. Charmed.” Flora’s boredom was definitely banished — she clearly could not wait to gossip about Lestrade and his date.

Greg took Mycroft’s hand and entangled their fingers — Mycroft saw that he savoured the dawning comprehension on the Chief Superintendent’s face. He flashed Mycroft a conspiratorial smile and pulled him deeper into the room. After a moment, Mycroft realised he himself was grinning foolishly and attempted to school his features.

The room was huge and crowded, people pressing on all sides as Greg led him by the hand. The queue for the buffet was ugly and the queue for the bar was uglier. The queues for the bogs must be hideous. The farther into the room they went, the warmer it became.

Eventually they joined a small group that Mycroft immediately observed was made up of detectives that worked under Lestrade and their significant others. At least three of them were staring openly at their joined hands. Mycroft steeled himself.

“Hey, Boss.” A sergeant, Mycroft deduced, mentored by Lestrade.

“Donovan. You cleaned up OK.”

“Me? You look like a model, Boss.”

Greg scoffed loudly. “At my age? You angling for a raise... ’cause flattery will get you everywhere.” Greg winked. He moved easily into the centre and gained the attention of the entire group. “Everyone, this is my date, Mycroft. Be nice or you’re on canvassing duty for the next month. Mycroft, this is Donovan, Dimmock, Weiss, Savriponji, and Peters. Now you all pretend to have manners and introduce your partners.”

Greg, Mycroft noted appreciatively, had deftly filled the awkward silence that followed the phrase, ‘my date, Mycroft,’ with two directives and everyone’s name. By the time he’d finished, most had recovered. He also noted that Greg had omitted his last name. Clearly at least some of these detectives had worked with Sherlock and Greg didn’t want their antipathy to prejudice them against Mycroft.

“Good to meet you.” The Sergeant — Donovan — shook Mycroft’s hand. “This is my boyfriend, Gaz. Gaz, my boss and his friend.” Greg greeted the man and then Mycroft took his turn. Sherlock would have been driven to distraction by the banalities, but Mycroft found them comforting. Social rituals were a useful tool in his line of work. They gave him time to observe everyone.

“So... boss...” Donovan turned to snag a glass of the sparkling wine from a passing server. “Turning over a new leaf?”

Mycroft was being introduced to Savriponji’s husband, but all of his attention was on Greg and Donovan. Mycroft fairly vibrated with tension.

Greg hailed the server and took two glasses. Stalling tactic, he did not want the sparkling wine. Mycroft held his breath. “Nope. I’ve always been bi.” His tone was matter-of-fact and slightly challenging. Donovan changed the subject, but clearly, she was still curious.

“So, erm, Lestrade...” A few minutes later, Dimmock took a turn. “Aren't you married, mate?”
“Divorced. What about you? When are you going to make Lizzie an honest woman?” Mycroft almost laughed at the adroit way Greg had turned that around, bringing up what was obviously a sore spot for Lizzie.

Their group grew and there were more introductions. “Anderson here is a forensic tech. Anderson, this is my date, Mycroft… close your mouth, Anderson… erm, Anderson… Anderson?”

“Good for you, Guv.” Young DC Farooqi ventured. “Can’t be easy changing teams at your age.”

“Nothing’s easy at my age, Farooqi.” Greg responded mildly. “Once the knees go, it’s all over.” Greg swallowed a smile at the DCs bewilderment. Mycroft laughed, but only loud enough for Greg to hear.

Bishop introduced his wife, who was unfortunately drunk. “Gosh, you’re pretty!” She told Greg as she clung to his hand and pawed his chest. “Why’re all the pretty ones gay?”

Bishop, red with embarrassment pulled her away. “Sorry, sir. Sorry…” He mumbled.

Not everyone cared about Greg’s sexuality. Gregson was introduced to Mycroft as Greg’s date. “Hey, Mycroft is it? Have you tried the crab nibbles? The food is actually edible this year!”

“So, you’re a shirtlifter now, Lestrade.” Bellowed DCI Culbertson. He was the same rank as Greg.

“AC/DC.” Greg corrected. “He’s the shirtlifter.” He gestured at Mycroft. “Mycroft meet the biggest wanker at the Met. Wanker, my date, Mycroft.” Culbertson guffawed and pumped Mycroft’s hand.

“Undisputed champion wanker. Don’t forget. My sergeant gave me a trophy.”

“Well deserved, I’m sure.” Mycroft murmured, and the man erupted in fresh laughter.

“He’s a keeper, Lestrade.”

The band announced the next song as a ‘Ladies Choice.’ Donovan was at Mycroft’s elbow immediately. “Ladies choice.” She said. “I choose you.”

“Donovan…” Greg began to intervene.

“No, it’s fine.” Mycroft told him. "I'm ready for my close up." Donovan wasn’t going to stop, he wanted to get it over with.

The band — who wasn’t half bad, Mycroft had ensured it over the past week, he could not abide desultory music — began playing what Mycroft recognised was a popular hit from the eighties. “Fox trot.” Mycroft observed.

“Fox trot — do you dance?” Donovan asked.

“Of course.” He offered his hands in hold position and she stepped into them, laying her calloused hand on his shoulder. Whilst most of the other dancers wiggled about in pairs and groups, Mycroft led the Sergeant through the steps of the ballroom dance. She wasn’t near as good as he, but she followed well and moved where he led gamely.

“You look familiar.” Donovan told him. “Have we met before.”

“Perhaps I have one of those faces.” Mycroft offered.

“You really don’t.” She said. “How did you and Lestrade meet?”
“Mutual acquaintance.”

“Right.” She said. "And what is it that you do?"

“I’m a civil servant. I occupy a minor position in the British Government.”

“Mm-hm. How long have you two known each other?” She was determined. A good trait in a police detective. Less charming in a dance partner.

“For many years now.”

Her eyebrows shot up. “So, this isn’t something new? You and him?”

“As much as there is a ‘me and him,’ it’s quite new.”

“You must be important if he brought you here, introduced you to everyone.”

“Perhaps it’s simply his way of coming out of the closet.” Mycroft suggested.

Donovan scoffed. “I don’t think so. This is about you.”

“If you say so.” Over her shoulder, Mycroft saw Greg was the centre of the group’s attention. He said something, and everyone laughed. Greg joined in, but Mycroft could see he was irritated. He said something else, something that changed the tone. He walked away. Mycroft noted the direction he took through the crowd. “This was a pleasure, Sergeant Donovan. If you’ll excuse me…”

Mycroft followed Greg — he’d lost sight of him in the crush, but once he reached the wall, it was obvious where Greg had gone. Mycroft opened the heavy terrace door and stepped out into the cold. There were a number of smokers on the large patio, most huddled together a few meters from the door. Mycroft walked to where Greg stood at the lip, looking out into the dark. He had a half-smoked cigarette in his mouth and was inhaling it greedily.


“I’m telling you, you have to start calling me ‘Greg.’” He held out his pack of cigarettes and Mycroft took one. Greg sparked an old-fashioned silver lighter and cupped his hand around the flame until Mycroft had lit his cigarette.

“If it makes you feel better, I’m beginning to think of you as ‘Greg.’”

“I just like that you’re thinking of me.” Greg stepped closer, so they were touching, their arms overlapping.

“I’ve thought of little else this past week.”

Greg scoffed. “With the Korean elections coming up?” He finished his cigarette and dropped it, crushing it under his heel.

Mycroft laughed and slid his arm around Greg’s waist. “My presence here seems to have enlivened the party.”

“I knew it would go to your head.”

“Yet you asked me anyway.” Greg leaned into him and Mycroft couldn’t help but smile. “They made you angry.”
“No, they’re just giving me a bit of stick. Not as much as I expected, actually.”

It was obvious that everyone liked and respected Lestrade. “The night’s still young.”

“Is it? Jesus, what time is it? I feel like we’ve been here for a day and a half already.”

“23:10. Another hour and we can think about leaving.”

“Another hour… you know, it wasn’t so bad at first. I actually kinda enjoyed it — having you on my arm, showing you off.”

Mycroft scoffed. “I think you mean I was showing you off. You’re the best-looking man in the room.”

“Hmph. Give me some of that.” Greg took a long drag on Mycroft’s cigarette then handed it back.

“You’ve been very relaxed all evening, Greg. It puts everyone else at ease. I would have thought tonight would be somewhat anxiety-producing.”

“I came out to my daughter this week, this is nothing compared to that.”

“Oh!... your demeanor suggests it went well.” Mycroft said carefully.

“Yeah. She’s a good kid. The best.”

They stood quietly for a moment, Mycroft holding him close, looking out into the blackness.

“She said I had to watch something called, erm, Paul’s Drag Race. I think it’s American.”

“RuPaul’s Drag Race.” Mycroft corrected. “And she’s right, it’s delightful.”

You’ve seen it?”

“It’s a very guilty pleasure.”

Greg laughed. “You’ll have to introduce me.

“As long as you promise not to judge me. Or tell anyone.” Mycroft smiled.

“Your secret is safe with me.” Greg said. “You know, it feels good, being out. And it’s great how supportive most of ‘em are. But I’m not used to all the attention. I’m starting to dread going back in there.

“Mmm — I realised something when I was dancing with your Sergeant.” He offered.

“Oh yeah? What?”

“If we dance, no one else can talk to us.”

“I saw you out there — you’re a proper dancer. You don’t want to dance with me.”

“You’re wrong, I only want to dance with you.”

Greg turned and kissed him, pulling his face close with his hands. He nipped at Mycroft’s lips then deepened the kiss hungrily. It was over too soon. Greg rubbed his face against Mycroft’s cheek and pulled away. “Not too much of that or I won’t be fit to be seen in public.”
Mycroft laughed, low and throaty. How he wanted to take Greg somewhere private!

Greg sighed. “It’s cold out here. Dancing will warm us up, I guess.”

“Indeed.” Mycroft crushed his cigarette with the toe of his shoe.

“No one can talk to us if we’re dancing — that’s brilliant.” Greg said as they returned to the ballroom, hand in hand. “I hope you’re not expecting much.”

Greg was not as poor a dancer as he’d let on. He knew a box step, a waltz and a simple jitterbug. Mycroft let him lead and simply enjoyed being in Greg’s arms.

“You’re blushing again.” Greg told him after a while.

“It’s warm in here.”

“I think you’re embarrassed to be seen dancing with me. Everyone is watching.”

“Ah, but not talking.”

Greg laughed and held Mycroft a little more tightly. “Thank you for coming tonight.”

“I am getting something out of it.”

“Oh?”

“Twenty dates. Twenty Fantastic Dates. You haven’t forgotten already?”

Greg laughed again and tucked his face next to his partner’s, his lips level with Mycroft’s jaw. Mycroft turned to press his nose in Greg’s hair. He smelled shampoo and hair product, cigarettes, aftershave and a darker more-subtle scent that was Greg’s own…

Greg kissed his neck below his ear and a tremor rippled through Mycroft’s body.

“Now I am blushing.” He whispered.

“Good.”

Several songs later, Greg stepped back. “A seat just opened up.” He said. “Want to try for it?”

“Lead the way.” Mycroft said.

Greg took his hand and headed into the crush. A moment later they found it, a shallow window seat, built in front of the recessed window, flush with the wall. It had a cushion the same colour as the heavy, velvet drapes. It was only wide enough for two.

Twenty more minutes until midnight.” Mycroft informed him.

“Twenty more. We can do it.” Greg gritted his teeth.

“You realise we’re sitting ducks here.” Mycroft said. "Anyone could come and talk to us."

Greg angled his body inward, towards Mycroft and laid a hand on his knee. “Not so much if we’re having an intimate conversation.”

Mycroft turned towards Greg. Their faces were close. It was easy to lean in and whisper in his ear. “On what topic should we intimately converse?”
“As long as it’s not bisexuality, I’m game.”

“Hmmm.” Mycroft looked around slyly. “See the man over there? With the woman in the yellow dress?”

“Yeah.”

“Magician.”

“What?”

“He’s a magician. Sleight of hand, really. You can tell by the way he moves his hands and arms. Oh! He just stole the Chief Commissioner’s watch!”

“He did! I didn’t see…”

“No, he’s good. Look at his jacket, how boxy — he’s keeping everything he’s pickpocketed in there. Special pockets, probably.”

“Takes some balls doing that here.” Greg said. "I should…” He started to rise.

“You should stay here with me. Delegate.”

“Yeah, hang on.” Greg sprang up and disappeared. Mycroft saw him with Donovan, pointing out the man when his back was turned. A moment later he was back.

“You going to take up solving crimes too?”

“I assure you that was completely inadvertent.”

Greg laughed. “Good. John Watson might enjoy that on a date, but I get enough at my day job. But you are as good as Sherlock.”

“I’m better.”

“Better? OK, prove it. What does that bloke do?”


Greg’s smile sparkled. “And her?”

“Again, balance of probability… but you’re only pointing out people with whom you aren’t acquainted. Primary school teacher.”

“How do you know?”

“Play-doh on her shoe. Inexpensive gown. Magic Marker on her left hand.”

“She could just have young kids.”

“She doesn’t. Too well rested.”

Greg laughed out loud. “I see why John gets such a kick out of this. What about me — did you deduce everything about me? No surprises?”

Mycroft touched his hand, captured it. “Quite a few surprises, actually.”
“Oh yeah? Tell me what surprised you.”

“You’re an art lover. You have a membership at the Tate and you visit regularly. Your flat… you put a lot of thought into the décor. It’s very tasteful. You’re compulsively neat excepting your closet.”

“And paperwork. My taxes are in a heap.”

“Mostly I was surprised that you were interested in me.”

Greg frowned. “Why would that surprise you?”

“I thought you were straight.” Mycroft admitted.

“Really? Sherlock didn’t tell you?”

“Sherlock?” Something terrifying started to grow in Mycroft’s gut.

“He knew I wasn’t straight from the start. Used to try and chat me up when he was high. Or when he wanted something. Or when he was bored. Thought you said you were better at it than he is.”

Mycroft felt the terrifying thing surge. It took him a moment to identify it — jealousy. Jealous anger that his little brother had tried to pull the Detective Inspector. Had tried to pull Greg. And profound relief that he’d never managed to do so. “It can be more difficult to be accurate when personal feelings are involved. I think Sherlock would tell you the same.”

“I was only teasing. About Sherlock being better.” Greg said softly.

With horror, Mycroft realised he must have let his feelings show. “Of course. Forgive me.”

“You’re all right.” Greg said, squeezing his hand.

“Sir?” They looked up. One of the more obvious ‘enhancements’ Mycroft had arranged had arrived.

“Thank you, Byron.” Mycroft told the man, taking the Prosecco in its bucket of ice and setting it by the window. “I arranged for a more palatable sparkling wine.” Mycroft told Greg. “A favourite of mine.” He took the two flutes from Byron and the man disappeared.

“That’s brilliant, Mycroft. Cheers.” Mycroft poured, aware that his cheeks were flaming.

“We should toast.” Greg said as he took his glass.

“To the new year.” Mycroft suggested.

“To Twenty Fantastic Dates.” Greg said.

“Twenty Fantastic Dates.” Mycroft agreed smiling, and they clinked their glasses and sipped.

“This is good! Cheers.”

“I admit, it’s been quite a while since I celebrated the New Year.” Mycroft told him. For once he was looking forward avidly to what the new year might bring.

“I wish I could say the same.” Greg said, gesturing at the party with his flute. “But I’ve never had such a good time.” He caressed Mycroft’s hand where it rested on the seat between them. “You’ve been great tonight. I’m looking forward to our dates.”
“I too.”

“I mean it’s a lot of pressure — coming up with twenty different fun and intimate things to do.”

“Don't forget romantic.”

“How could I forget romance?” Greg chuckled. "Are you free next Friday evening? I have something in mind for our first official date.”

“Friday…” Mycroft made mental notes about which meetings to move. “I can be, yes.” Greg smiled broadly at him and Mycroft returned it.

The music stopped, snagging their attention. The countdown was introduced: “Ten! Nine! Eight!” everyone shouted along. Greg set down his wine, as they counted the seconds to midnight. “Three! Two! One!” The shouts of ‘Happy New Year’ sounded, confetti fell from the rafters, and Greg leaned towards Mycroft, cupped his face, and kissed him. The room disappeared. Mycroft was adrift in Greg’s kiss. His hands found Greg’s shoulders and he clung to them, anchored himself as sensation washed over him.

When they broke apart, Mycroft smirked. “You’ve really given the Met something to talk about.”

“Something to goggle at, more like.”

“Are you worried?”

“If I were, we wouldn’t be here.” Greg told him firmly. “No, I’m not worried at all. I’m happy.”

“Come home with me tonight.” Mycroft said.

Greg smiled, his eyes sparkling. “Yeah, alright.”

Chapter End Notes

I thought coming out to mom was hard...

Next time, Mycroft's flat after the ball. They haven't even gotten to the twenty dates yet and Mycroft almost ruins everything! Relationships are fraught when you're a manipulative control-freak.
After the Policeman’s New Year’s Eve Ball, Mycroft takes Greg home with him.

They had been snogging in the lift, Greg pressing Mycroft against the mirrored wall, snaking his hand under his waistcoat, kissing, inhaling, licking, tasting. Mycroft had wrapped his arms around Greg’s waist, the dreamy look he got when Greg kissed him sliding onto his face. Greg was halfway pissed on fine Prosecco and feeling good. Mycroft’s hands on his body were comfortable and warm, and so provoking.

The lift stopped, and Greg pulled back with a grin. Mycroft, smirking, straightened his clothes.

The lift doors opened directly into a shallow vestibule that was open to Mycroft’s lounge — he had the entire floor apparently. Immediately Greg felt like he was in the rarefied air of a special reserve collection of a well-endowed library. The brown leather Chesterfield couch sat upon the largest, thickest Oriental rug Greg had ever seen. It muffled the sound of their footsteps which by rights should have echoed in the cavernous room. There was an abundance of oak — some dark, some honey coloured — in the parquet floor, the grand fireplace, the bookshelves that lined the walls, the mouldings, the doors and the furniture. It was all very masculine and heavy, lit only by reading lamps in the seating areas, and the many lights of the city that twinkled through the anachronistic window wall. It smelled of tobacco, whisky, and the slightly dusty odour of shelves and shelves of books.

Were it not so large, the room would have been crowded with the collection of green baize chairs, honeyed oak side tables, round, brass-bound coffee table, the eight-foot potted palm, well-stocked bar cabinet, and books, hundreds and hundreds of books! They not only lined the shelves, they were stacked on the side tables and on the floor by the couch. There were stray books on the mantle and an atlas the size of a small child on the coffee table.

There was a pass-through on the far end of the room. The oak pocket doors open wide, revealing a long, heavy dining table and chairs in front of another window wall through which the moon shone over the lights of London.

Surveying the space, Greg saw movement — a pale, petite ball unfurled itself into a blue-point Siamese and stretched its back luxuriously with a yawn. Then it sat down and turned crystal blue eyes on Greg.

“Who’s this little mite?” Greg asked, holding out his hand for it to sniff.

“Bast.” Mycroft said, hanging their coats. “She tends to be aloof, don’t be offended if she hisses.”

The little cat sniffed delicately at Greg’s fingers then rubbed her head against his hand. Taking it as an invitation, he scritched her head, behind her ears and under her chin. She purred like a chainsaw. “She seems fine.”

Bast turned towards Mycroft, jumping down from the sofa with a happy ‘mew!’ She ran to him and rubbed against his leg. “I had to get a white cat.” He muttered as she wound through his black-clad ankles.

Greg laughed at Mycroft’s wry smile.

Mycroft bent to pet the little Siamese and Greg caught sight of the painting over the mantle — it was a swirl of colour depicting a ship tossed on a stormy sea. The sun was breaking through the bank of dark clouds in the sky, casting dramatic orange and gold light on the water.

“Is that a Turner?” Greg asked.

Mycroft smiled. “A late and little-known work. My Great, Great, Great Uncle acquired it not long after the artist’s death.”

“Puts my posters to shame.” Greg grumbled. He loved the Twombly in his living room and the colourful Hockney — had loved them since he first saw the originals at the Pompidou and the Tate respectively. He’d bought the Twombly reproduction over Jude’s objections, she never cared for the ‘black scribbles’ as she called it. But he’d never even dreamed of having the paintings themselves — they belonged in museums. Or, he guessed, the homes of billionaires. Which, now that he thought about it, might also have window walls overlooking Greater London. Greg wondered if Sherlock and Mycroft were wealthier than he’d imagined. The thought made him uncomfortable.

Mycroft said, apparently reading his mind. “If I even wanted one. It’s been a bit of an albatross in the family — Mummy hates it, won’t have it on her walls. Aunt Pansy doesn’t want something that valuable in her house. Says it’s begging to be stolen. They wanted to sell it. Grandfather left it to me with the stipulation that it stay in the family.” Mycroft smiled wryly. “As Sherlock and I are unlikely to produce heirs, I’m bequeathing it to the Tate in my will. It can go live amongst all the other lesser-known Turners.” He walked up behind Greg where he stood in front of the fireplace, placing tentative hands on Greg’s arms. He could feel the heat of Mycroft’s body and leaned back into it. The hands gained confidence and wrapped around him, stroking his chest, and lips found his neck.

“Do you want a drink or…” Mycroft murmured.

Greg turned around in his arms. “I’ve had enough to drink.” He said and kissed the taller man, gripping his nape with his fingers, feeling the cloth of his collar. Greg felt a little lost in the grandeur of the flat and tried to anchor himself, pressing his mouth to Mycroft’s, feeling the firmness of his lips, the desperation of their seeking tongues…

Mycroft took him to his bedroom. It was similar in style to the lounge — the king-sized brown leather Chesterfield bed would have overwhelmed a smaller room. It sat upon another priceless Oriental rug, this one a rich green. There was a fireplace with cozy, Chesterfield chairs pulled up near the two metre tall marble hearth, an open wardrobe with a flat screen telly in it, honeyed oak panelling, and books everywhere — books on the dark oak bed tables, stacked next to the chairs, on the baize bench at the foot of the bed… there was a window wall here too, with green curtains obscuring the night time landscape of lights.

“So, erm… you like to read.” Greg said.

Mycroft laughed, and Greg immediately felt more comfortable. “Most of these are for my work.” He said. “Surprisingly, not everything is on the internet.” He dipped down and stole a kiss. “Does the
clutter bother you?"

“You tell me.” Greg said. He honestly couldn’t decide. Usually he would itch to shelve the books, tidy them away, but they seemed such an integral part of the décor.

Mycroft stepped back and his eyes roved over Greg. “Not yet.” He decided. “But they will if you spend more time here. I estimate I have until our third date to clear out the extraneous clutter.”

“And by then, you’ll know if you want to keep me around or not. Shall we?” Greg sat on a baize tuffet and began untying the thick-soled brogues. “Shoes off before trousers.” He reminded Mycroft with a smile.

“Indeed.” Mycroft crowded onto the footstool and began removing his own shoes.

“Not enough furniture in here for you to sit on? You have to sit on mine?” Greg laughed, pushing back. He had his shoes off and turned to run his hand down the inside of Mycroft’s thigh. He licked behind Mycroft’s ear and began unbuttoning the formal waistcoat. “Let me help you with this.”

Mycroft’s breathing was ragged as he tossed his shoes aside. He pulled off his tie and Greg’s fingers found the buttons on his shirt. Mycroft moaned when Greg’s hands found his skin and wandered across his furred chest. He bit Mycroft’s neck and enjoyed the “Ungh” it provoked.

He started to shrug off his suit coat, then stopped. “Erm… I probably shouldn’t throw this suit on the floor.” Greg said, cognisant that it wasn’t his, that the couture tuxedo had to be returned.

“Hmmm?”

“Is there someplace I can hang this up?” Greg stood up with the jacket in his hands.

Mycroft slowly focussed on the jacket. “Yes...” He gestured for Greg to follow and retreated through a door on the far side of the room. He found Mycroft in a large dressing room, hanging his own jacket on a wooden hanger. He handed Greg one for his suitcoat.

By the time Greg had the cummerbund off and the shirt unbuttoned, Mycroft had shed his shirt and waistcoat and was crowding him up against a highboy. “I want you so much.” Mycroft growled, sliding his hands over Greg’s hips.

Greg moaned and bared his neck for Mycroft. He let him pull the shirt off his shoulders as he sucked open-mouthed kisses on Greg’s throat. Mycroft pushed Greg’s vest up to his neck and Greg lifted his arms over his head, so Mycroft could wrest it off him. It was thrilling to be treated so aggressively, to be so violently desired.

They were both naked to the waist and Greg pressed his hips forward as Mycroft’s mouth again found his. Their kisses were frantic, consuming, and Greg thought he’d never felt so alive. He invaded Mycroft’s mouth, fenced and tangled with his tongue, trying desperately to pull Mycroft closer. His lips slid sideways, and he nipped the taller man’s jaw, tasting salt. He licked the long, pale neck, mouthing and biting the jut of his clavicle, pressing his tongue into the hollow below his throat.

Every touch was pleasure, every caress and grind, pure sensation. He was hard and straining, searching for friction. He gripped Mycroft’s buttocks and pulled him forward, rubbing their cocks together through their trousers and Mycroft groaned loudly. Mycroft tore at his flies and shoved his hand down Greg’s pants before they were fully opened.

Greg shouted when Mycroft’s hand closed around his cock. He was already damp, a wet spot on the front of his boxer briefs. “Fuck, you feel good!” He shoved at the trousers and pants, dislodging the
clinging garment from his hips and kicking them off. Mycroft had one hand on his cock and the other on his face, pulling him up for another kiss, another deep, hungry kiss.

Greg started to work on Mycroft’s flies — the hook and zip opened far more easily than the five buttons of his own, and he quickly had them pooled around Mycroft’s ankles. He took hold of Mycroft’s arse again, revelling in the firm handfuls of flesh, and yanked him closer. They wrestled, Greg’s back to the highboy, Mycroft pinning him there with the weight of his body and the press of his mouth. His hand was between them as they frotted against each other.

“Bed?” Greg panted.

“Yes!” Mycroft answered, a gleam in his eye. He paused momentarily, taking Greg’s hands in his own and pressing kisses to the knuckles. “I can’t tell you how long I’ve wanted you in my bed.” He murmured, eyes sparkling. Without looking away, he led Greg to the huge bed and snatched the bedclothes back.

Greg sat on the bed, tucking his legs under the sheets and reclining. He looked up at Mycroft and licked his lips. “That’s one fantasy.” He said with a grin. “Got any others?” He tugged on Mycroft’s hand and scooted across the bed to give him room.

Then he laughed.

“What?” Mycroft asked — looking equally ready to join the laughter or crumple under its weight.

“This bed is so huge.” Greg said. He pointed to the night stands on either side. “Which one has the slick? We should stick close to that one.”

Mycrof blushed crimson, then immediately looked put out about it.

Greg giggled delightedly, pulling Mycroft closer to spill laughter over his skin. “Jesus, I love your blushes.” He said. “Don’t ever stop — Mycroft, I mean it. You’re beautiful when you blush.”

“You enjoy seeing me humiliated.” Mycroft observed only half seriously.

“Not at all.” Greg pushed him down onto his back and climbed on top, caressing his warm cheeks. “I like to see your feelings on your face — you hide so much. I’m honoured that you’ve let me see you this way.”

“Hmph.” Mycroft said, but he let Greg tease him with kisses, his hands pulling Greg hard against him.

“Oh fuck… Mycroft… yeah… which one has the slick?” Greg asked grinding down.

“They both do.” Mycroft muttered.

“What? Both?” Greg grinned, waggling his eyebrows. “You entertain that much?”

“No! But as you observed, the bed is quite large. I could not calculate which side we’d end up on. Balance of probability weighted it slightly towards that side, but it was within the margin of error. I stocked both with… supplies.”

“You were planning to bring me here all along, then.” Greg said. He felt an overwhelming fondness for Mycroft and his probabilities and supplies.

“I was hoping.”
Greg kissed him. “I was too.”

He reached over and slid open the drawer closest. “Mmm… nice.” He said, extracting an unused bottle of lubricant. Kneeling up, he poured a good amount into his palm and rubbed his hands together, warming the slick. Mycroft watched with baited breath. Greg reached between them and took Mycroft in hand, coating his cock thoroughly. Mycroft groaned. He wrapped his big hands around both of them and thrust up into his fists. “Fuck!” It felt fantastic.

Mycroft spilled lube onto his own hand and eagerly reached for Greg. Greg hissed at the chill but pushed himself into the long fingers despite it. Mycroft began grinding his hips, rubbing his prick against Greg, against his cock and belly and into the circle of grasping hands.

Greg tried to remember to breathe. He wrapped his arms around Mycroft, again grabbing handfuls of his gorgeous arse and pulling him tightly against himself. He kissed Mycroft’s neck and chin, biting his jaw and rubbing his face into the soft place underneath his ear, loving the needy sounds coming out of Mycroft’s throat. The mattress rolled as they frotted furiously.

Abruptly Mycroft pushed Greg flat on his back, and his strength took Greg’s breath away. Mycroft began stroking him in earnest, twisting his palm over the dripping head, smearing precome down the shaft, mixing it with the slick. Greg moaned long and low, his head thrown back against the pillows, his hands gripping Mycroft’s shoulder. “Fuck, yes… like that! Just like that.” Mycroft kissed him, but Greg could do no more than pant into his mouth. “Christ, you feel so good!” He felt teeth dig into his shoulder and the pain undid him. Mycroft’s fist continued to pull and fly, and the pressure in his bollocks exploded blissfully. He swore as he striped hot cum on his chest and Mycroft’s hand. His vision blurred, as he spilled, then cleared… Greg saw Mycroft’s face, cheeks and chest rosy with lust, staring down into his eyes.

Sobered, he scooped the cum off his belly and wrapped his big hand around Mycroft’s prick. He levered himself up onto his elbow and pushed his knee between the other man’s legs. “Your turn.” He said, kneeling up.

Mycroft relaxed back and ran his fingers through Greg’s hair, pushing it away from his sweaty brow. He smiled softly as his eyes wandered over Greg’s face.

Greg firmed his grip, rucking back Mycroft’s foreskin and licked the crimson glans. Mycroft’s entire body tensed in response and he gripped the sheets, groaning. Greg grinned. “I’m getting you off with my cum.” He whispered, taking the entire cockhead in his mouth and sucking hard. He stroked the long shaft and with his other hand, took hold of Mycroft’s bollocks, tugging on them lightly. He was rewarded with a long, panting moan.

Greg experimented with what made Mycroft moan loudest, twisting his sac away from his body and jacking the shaft firmly, using his nails a little. He fucked Mycroft’s slit with his tongue, and he cried out, burying his hands in his auburn hair and yanking.

Greg licked under the ridge, shoving his tongue inside the foreskin as he jacked the throbbing shaft. He sucked the glans into his mouth, and bobbed, tugging on Mycroft’s bollocks. Mycroft moaned loudly, his entire body tense. Hips thrusting up into Greg’s mouth, he keened louder and louder until
he shouted nonsensical syllables and came. He could feel Mycroft’s bollocks pulsing, see the
clenching of his abdomen with each spurt. He didn’t let up until he’d milked every last drop.

He collapsed on the bed next to Mycroft, feeling him twitch and heave. The sheets were damp with
their sweat. Mycroft’s hand sought his and they intertwined their fingers.

After a few minutes, Greg’s eyes were closing. But the cool air was chilling his sweaty body
uncomfortably. He forced himself to sit up. He tossed the slick back in the drawer and looked for
some tissues. What he found was a package of wet wipes. He chuckled as he efficiently cleaned the
sticky mess from their bodies. “You think of everything.” He said in response to Mycroft’s
questioning look.

When he’d finished, he made Mycroft shelve over to a dry part of the bed. “Do you want me to go?”
Greg asked. “It’s fine if you do.” It wasn’t fine, but Greg would live with it.

“No.” Mycroft said, affronted, his arm snaking around Greg and pulling him close. “Why would I
want you to go? Why would you say it was fine?”

“Hey, just trying to be considerate. Not everyone likes sharing a bed.”

Mycroft sat up. “You told me to stay. Did you want me to leave after… at your flat?” He was fairly
vibrating with alarm.

“What? No. Mycroft, if I’d wanted you to leave, I would have said so. I like sleeping with you. Lie
down.”

Mycroft obeyed, but Greg could still feel the tension in his limbs. “This is new, yeah. We’re finding
our way. I hoped you’d want me to stay, but I don’t want to assume. I’d rather we both just be up
front.” He ran his hand over Mycroft’s chest to his hip and back. “Relax, yeah?” He continued
caressing the other man, feeling his muscles slowly unwind. “If we do this again and you do want
the bed to yourself after. Just say so.”

“If?” Mycroft murmured. “Your body language clearly shows that you desire sex with me again.”


Mycroft made an impatient noise in his throat. “For the record, Greg, I want you in my bed. You
never need ask again.”

Greg scoffed fondly. “Well, I guess it’s big enough. If you get tired of me, you can just roll to the
other side.”

“Indeed.”

Greg chuckled at Mycroft’s prickly tone and stroked his neck. His eyelids felt heavy. He let them
close.

There was a sudden, soft impact as a small body leapt onto the bed. Greg felt four paws through the
duvet as Bast walked over him. She found a spot she liked in the tangle of their legs, turned several
times then lay delicately down with a tiny sigh. Her motoring purr lulled Greg asleep.

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Greg woke to a noise, a sort of stealthy opening and closing of drawers.

He lifted his head. It took a moment for him to recognise Mycroft’s bedroom — brown leather, green curtains drawn back from a wall of glass, the soft glow of sun... He lay his head back down on the insanely comfortable pillow, snuggling into the luxurious sheets, and pulling the duvet over his eyes. Mycroft might be up, but Greg was going to enjoy a lie-in for another minute or so.

More movement... a soft shushing sound.... Bast purring...

Greg was abruptly awake and alert, his body tense and ready to spring. Because Mycroft lay next to him! Mycroft’s hand clutched a loose fistful of Greg’s hair and his knee pressed against the back of his thigh. Whoever was moving about Mycroft’s bedroom, it wasn’t Mycroft!

Greg sat up and scanned the room. There was a young woman by the fireplace texting furiously.


“I’ve brought Labour’s changes to the proposed health care bill,” The woman said without looking up from her phone. “...the draft of the briefing for the Prime Minister, a report from the source in the White House, a response from the team advising Putin on carbon emissions, the usual newspapers and — oh!”

She finally looked up and saw Greg. “Who are you!?" She demanded shrilly.


His eyes popped open. Mycroft sat up, pulling the duvet up to his neck. “Anthea!” He snapped. “I left strict instructions that I not be disturbed before half ten!”

“Yes, Mr. Holmes.” Anthea was still staring at Greg. Belatedly he realised his chest was bare. “It’s eleven now.”

“Out!” Mycroft said venomously. She tore her eyes away from Greg and darted from the room, beginning a new text before she reached the door.

After the door closed, Mycroft sighed heavily. “What did you hear.” He asked.

Greg reached out and caressed his back, enjoying the rasp of the auburn hair under his palm. “Don’t worry about me. I’m deaf to everything that’s none of my business.”

“I’m going to have to get you a higher security clearance.” Mycroft told him. “Ideally before you leave the flat.”

Greg stretched his legs out under the covers. Bast protested with a grumpy ‘mew,’ and stood up. “I was just thinking I wouldn’t mind a bit of a lie-in.” He said, poking Mycroft’s leg. “Course, that’s more fun with a friend.” His hand travelled up Mycroft’s spine to his neck and into the short hair at his nape.

“Mmm” Mycroft leaned into Greg’s touch. “Allow me fifteen minutes to clear my schedule for the rest of the morning and I’m all yours.”

Greg was surprised. He’d expected Mycroft to gently toss him out, so he could get to work. “Yeah, erm, take as long as you need.”
“Fifteen minutes.” Mycroft repeated. He slid out of bed and Greg enjoyed the back view of the long-limbed man until he disappeared into the en suite. He idly listened to water running and realised that his bladder was uncomfortably full. Happily, it wasn’t long before Mycroft emerged in a neck-to-ankle dressing gown and slippers. He picked up Bast, holding her like a human baby, and stroking her belly. “There’s a new toothbrush in the cabinet — use whatever you like.” He said to Greg. As he swept out of the room, Greg heard him cooing to the cat about breakfast.

Grinning, Greg made a beeline for the bog and slashed. He studied himself as he washed his hands — Anthea had got quite an eyeful. His silver hair was askew with not-unattractive bed head, his jaw was stubbled, there was a toothy bite mark on his shoulder and a lurid love bite just below his clavicle. He hoped she’d enjoyed the show.

The bite mark wasn’t tender, he thought it would fade quickly. He found the packaged toothbrushes and chose one. He cleaned his teeth.

Then he went back to bed. He could distantly hear a raised voice — Mycroft’s almost certainly. Anthea’s shock at seeing Greg suggested that she’d never encountered anyone else in her boss’s bed. At least, Greg liked to think so. Idly he opened the drawer on the nightstand closest at hand. In addition to wet wipes, two bottles of unused slick and a full sleeve of condoms, there was a leather cock ring, a lavender silicone prostate stimulator, massage oil and a large-ish, realistic dildo with a suction cup on the base. It took Greg a moment to work out its use — and when he did he felt both embarrassed and aroused. He wondered if Mycroft had ever used it. He hoped so.

In the bottom of the drawer was a sheet of paper, a form. The words ‘HIV’ and ‘Gonorrhoea’ caught Greg’s eye and he looked more closely. It was the results of STD screening showing Mycroft was healthy and disease free. Greg chuckled. *He’s prepared.* Good! He hadn’t had sex without a condom since he first discovered Jude was cheating. If he and Mycroft managed to keep seeing each other... if they agreed to be exclusive... raw sex... just the thought made him hard!

He stroked his cock and it began to fatten in his hand. He’d never worn a cock ring — he affixed this one around the base of his penis and under his sac. It took a bit of wrangling to get it fastened around his thick cock AND balls, but when he did, he liked the feel of it. It made his cock feel huge.

The door swung open and Mycroft appeared looking ready to apologise and send Greg on his way. Then he saw Greg laid out naked on the bed, idly stroking his raging erection, cock ring strapped around it, and Mycroft stopped short. A moan escaped his lips and he dropped the dressing gown on the floor and crawled up the bed. He lowered his head between Greg’s thighs and swallowed his cock all the way down, pressing his nose to Greg’s belly.

“Oh, Jesus fuck!” Greg moaned. Just the *sight* was almost enough to make him come.

Then Mycroft gagged. His fingers tightened on Greg’s thighs painfully, and he pulled off choking.

“Hey, greedy boy!” Greg cooed, sitting up and reaching for Mycroft. “Hey, take it easy.” He pulled the man into his arms and rubbed his back. “Slow down, yeah?” He wiped tears from Mycroft’s face.

“Sorry... it’s been a while.” *cough.* “I appear to have lost the knack.”

“Yeah, well if you choke to death, how am I supposed to get off?”

Mycroft barked a laugh and tackled Greg onto his back. He kissed the detective soundly. Licking his jaw and lips, exploring his teeth and palate with his tongue...
Greg savoured it. Mycroft’s hands on his body felt so much more electrifying than any of the hands that had touched him since the early years of his marriage. Was it simply novelty? Was it the touch of another man he craved? Or was there something special about this lanky, freckled toff?

Mycroft kissed his neck then latched onto a nipple with his mouth, the other with his fingers. He rolled them, nipping and tonguing, making Greg writhe and groan, his jutting cock starving for stimulation. Mycroft switched his lips to the other nipple, teasing the hard nub mercilessly.

“Mycroft!” He moaned.

Mycroft smiled into his skin and moved lower, tickling his navel with his breath, then licking Greg’s cock where it lay, fingers massaging his perineum.

“The cock ring suits you.” Mycroft murmured, mouthing over the bound balls. “I think the prostate stimulator would suit as well.”

Greg groaned. “I’d rather have your fingers. Your long, beautiful fingers.”

“Would you?” Mycroft had retrieved the slick and he dispensed some onto his fingertips. He took Greg’s cock in his mouth again, more carefully this time, sucking on the head, licking under the glans, taking half his length and bobbing. He hummed, and the vibrations drove Greg wild.

Fingers probed Greg’s hole and he spread his legs. Slowly the tip of one eased into him. Greg gasped and had to stop himself from thrusting down upon it, knowing it would hurt, but wanting the special pleasure of penetration. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been fingered... certainly it had been Jude, years and years ago now. Her small hands could not compare to the impossibly long digit working into him now. He whimpered at the sensual stretch, the feeling of fullness.

Greg couldn’t wait any longer, he undulated, fucking himself gently on Mycroft’s finger. Mycroft moaned around his cock and Greg jolted, nearly out of his mind with sensation.

“Fuck!” He cried, incoherent.

Mycroft bobbed deeper on his cock, slowly taking more in his throat. He bent his finger inward, stroking over the bundle of nerves. Greg felt the familiar pressure in his balls that signalled his climax, he thrust down now, taking Mycroft’s finger deep and hard — Mycroft matched his rhythm, frigging into him, fucking him with his finger, sucking him with his mouth. He pulled his head back and licked the fat head of his cock and Greg wailed. It was so much! Almost too much, balancing on the precipice of orgasm... but never quite tipping over.

Greg realised with a rush that it was the cock ring! The cock ring was preventing his climax. It was torture — the sweetest, nastiest torture. He jerked his pelvis in hard little thrusts, taking the finger, then the mouth, stimulation on his cock then his hole. He surfed the delicious wave of pleasure that would never crest, panting and keening.

“You’re a sadist.” He accused Mycroft, grinding down on his long finger. Mycroft laughed around his cock.

He pulled off with a lewd pop. “I can’t permit you to achieve orgasm.” He purred. “Until you fuck me.” His finger found Greg’s prostate again and he sang the pleasure lighting up his entire body.

It briefly crossed his mind that if Anthea were still in the flat, she’d be getting quite an earful, but then Mycroft’s mouth descended on his cock again and he did not care.

“You have the filthiest mouth.” Greg accused.
“Mmmm...”

“Have you been thinking about me fucking you?”

“Mmmmm Hmmmm.”

“Oh god!” Greg thrust up into Mycroft’s mouth. “Fuck... I want you! Get off — let me fuck you.”

Mycroft moaned as he pulled away. He liberated a wet wipe for his hand, tossing it aside as Greg pulled him into a kiss. He was inflamed, pressing Greg down into the bed, kissing him with desperate passion. Greg felt Mycroft’s throbbing cock leave a wet trail of arousal across his thigh.

“Are you going to sit on my cock?” Greg asked. “Or can I take you from behind?”

Mycroft groaned and writhed atop him. “Take me from behind.”

Greg slapped his flank. “On your hands and knees.” He ordered. He found the bottle of lube as Mycroft situated himself on knees and elbows, spreading his legs wide, his prick hanging turgid between them. Greg couldn’t help himself, he licked a stripe from the balls, over the perineum, to the tightly puckered entrance. Mycroft grunted with pleasure. Greg pressed his face into the cleft and laid open-mouthed kisses there, groaning his pleasure as he tasted Mycroft’s musky core.

“Oh god...” Mycroft moaned as Greg penetrated him with his tongue, fucking in and out. He could feel the tight ring of muscle beginning to loosen.

Greg’s cock throbbed, demanding attention.

He rested a hand on the furry curve of Mycroft’s buttock and reached for the sleeve of condoms. But Mycroft stopped him.

“No.” He said. “We’re both entirely clean. I want you bare. I want you to ejaculate inside me. I want your seed leaking down my thighs...”

Just the idea paralysed him with want.

But... he hadn’t been tested yet. Greg opened his mouth to ask how Mycroft could be so certain that he was clean. Then with a shock he remembered Mycroft’s job, his access, and his penchant for learning highly personal details about the people around him.

He huffed... and, his cock so hard and wanting, his fingers digging into the muscle of Mycroft’s gorgeous arse... Greg let it go. *For the moment.*

He had known who Mycroft was when he’d taken him to bed Christmas Eve — intrusive, invasive, interfering, a man that ran roughshod over the privacy rights of British citizens. He’d run roughshod over Greg’s privacy on at least one occasion already — the memory of Mycroft bringing up Georgianna then offering to pay him to use Sherlock’s expertise... Greg had thought Mycroft a smarmy, manipulative prick and wanted nothing to do with him. It was only later that he recognised the brotherly desperation, the willingness to do anything to help Sherlock stay off the drugs...

*Of course* Mycroft knew Greg was clean. He probably had a list of all his sex partners typed up in triplicate. Did it matter? Yes! Did it matter *right now*? When he was vibrating with need... Greg looked at the condoms in his hand... it had been so long!

He must have made a noise or betrayed his thoughts in some fashion because Mycroft was looking at him anxiously over his shoulder. “Greg...?”
“Yeah. You and I are gonna have a serious conversation about privacy after I fuck you senseless.” He tossed the condoms back in the drawer and let himself enjoy the thought of his cum leaking from Mycroft’s hole. His cock achingly hard, he poured lube into his hand and began massaging the slick around the tight hole.

Mycroft pressed back into Greg’s hand. Greg penetrated him carefully, working his fingers in, one after the other. He used copious amounts of lube, taking his time.

When he had three of his big fingers twisting in his open hole, Mycroft betrayed his impatience. “Greg... I’m ready...”

“You aren’t ready yet.” Greg told him, idling jacking his hard cock. “I’m putting another finger in you first because I am going to fuck you hard.”

“Ohhhhhhh...” Mycroft groaned and thrust back on Greg’s hand.

“None of that.” Greg commanded, pulling away. Mycroft hissed in disappointment. Greg dispensed more lube and began working four fingers in. “Have you ever had four?” He wondered aloud. “I’d like to put all five in you. Work my whole hand in. Open you so wide...”

Mycroft was whimpering with desire, trembling with the effort of holding himself still. Greg smiled to see it.

“You’re being so good.” He soothed, kissing a tense buttock. “You want my cock so much.”

Greg drizzled slick on his cock one-handed, twisting the four fingers of his other hand in the gape. “OK, I’m going to give it to you good and hard. You let me know if it’s too much, yeah?”

“Greg...”

He pulled out his fingers and, barely pausing to admire the winking gape, positioned his cock and thrust in to the hilt. And fuck! It felt better than anything! The pleasure was insane! His bare prick embedded balls deep in scorching heat... his foreskin rucked back and pinned tightly to his shaft...

“Ungh!”

“Too much?” Greg asked.

“No... good.” Mycroft had his face pressed to the bed, his arms over his head.

“OK.” Greg said and began fucking the wide-open hole. Wide-open, yet still a tightly constricting glove, completely subsuming him in heat and fantastic pressure. “Oh god.” He moaned.

“In me...” He could barely hear Mycroft’s breathy words. “Love you in me...”

Greg set a moderate pace, pumping five or six times then grinding lewdly, then thrusting again. He held Mycroft by the jut of his hips as he fucked into him — each thrust shucking back his foreskin, choking him with pleasure...

He rocked his hips back, not quite withdrawing — the tight muscle of Mycroft’s hole caught the ridge of his pulsing glans — just the sight threatened to push him over the edge! Then Greg pushed in deliberately, biting his lip against the urge to fuck fast and hard, to fill Mycroft’s tight arse with cum.

“God, you are the best fuck!” Greg cried.
“Harder!” Mycroft demanded. He ground down desperately with his hips, and grabbed his damp prick, pumping into the circle of his fist.

Greg fucked deep and hard, his hand grasping and finding Mycroft’s shoulder, pulling him up changing the angle of penetration. Mycroft slid his knees forward, knelt up with his back arched. Greg’s hips slapped obscenely against the other man’s arse, making loud, wet sounds.

His eyes rolled back in his head and he knew without the cock ring he would have cum by now.

“So good!” he rasped and thrust forcefully. He reached up and grabbed a handful of auburn hair. Mycroft whinged and bucked, his long back bowing. Greg moaned at the sight of Mycroft’s tight hole gripping him, the beautiful rise of his arse, the curved length of his pale freckled back.

Greg’s strong arm went around him, holding Mycroft’s heaving back against his chest. Mycroft turned his head and Greg kissed him messily, tongues and teeth sliding and crashing. Mycroft’s body tensed and twitched around Greg’s cock and he groaned against the long, pale throat. He pushed Mycroft forward just enough, so they could both move freely. Mycroft ground his arse against Greg’s urgent thrusts.

“Love your cock...” Mycroft gasped.

“Yeah! Take it!” Greg answered. He pushed himself up higher, spreading his legs wide to pump deeper. He found the sensitive spot, the exact right angle that dragged his pistoning cock over the special bundle of nerve endings inside Mycroft. Mycroft keened lewdly as Greg fucked him, hitting it with every thrust.

Mycroft stuttered a wail, “Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!” He tore at his hair and arched his back... Greg heard the texture of his cries change, heard Mycroft’s long, low shuddering moan and then his arse was twitching and squeezing him so tightly. Mycroft came with jerks of his hips, shooting ejaculate in his hand, onto the bedclothes...

Greg reached down and tore off the cock ring. His balls slapping loudly, he pulled Mycroft tightly against him, pumping as deeply as he could. His climax rose up from low in his balls, his cock jerking and pulsing inside the impossibly tight heat of Mycroft’s body. It only took four or five thrusts and Greg finally — finally — tipped over the bloody edge and fell. He cried out, falling and falling and falling. He sunk his teeth into Mycroft’s trembling shoulder as his insides wrung themselves out in wrenching, tearing spasms, everything so intense, so vivid... he whited out as he shot his load deep inside Mycroft...

He came back to himself laying limp on Mycroft’s prone form, sweat sticking their bodies together. He was still shuddering, still experiencing shock waves of violent pleasure, still panting. Another jolted through him and he rode it... then another... he wondered vaguely if he were still ejaculating...

“I’ve broken you.” Mycroft had rolled him onto his side. He was scrubbing his abdomen free of ejaculate and looking a bit regretful about soiling the bedding.

“Come here.” Greg said and tugged Mycroft closer with pleasure-weak arms. “I want to see.” He hefted himself up and slapped Mycroft’s flank. With a tolerant smirk, Mycroft crouched over, exposing his arse. Greg spread the cheeks wide with his big hands. “Show me.” He said.

Mycroft bore down, and semen dribbled from his red and winking hole.

“Fuck. That’s good. That’s so hot.” He let go and with another slap, flopped onto his back, stretching out, lethargic with post-orgasmic torpor.
Bast alighted on the bed. She sniffed Greg’s toes delicately, then stalked up the bed to rub her face against his rib cage. He laughed softly and heaved a rubbery arm up to skritch her head, which she accepted as her due.

Another shudderingly blissful wave took hold radiating out from his core. Greg giggled lazily as the tickling pleasure slowly faded. He felt very satisfied.

“Jesus, you’re an amazing fuck.” He told Mycroft. Hey, come here.” He held open his arms. “We still have time, right? Or is... erm, Anthea?... yeah, she gonna barge in again any second?”

“We have time.” Mycroft told him, curling up in the shelter of Greg’s arms. Bast walked over their bodies and sat regally on Mycroft’s pillow.

“Mmm. Good.” Greg kissed the other man’s forehead. He ran his fingers up and down Mycroft’s arm, caressing him. Mycroft hummed contentedly. They drifted.

Greg closed his eyes and when he opened them the light from the big window had subtly changed. Mycroft was idly stroking his chest, his fingers combing through the dark hair between his pecs.

He took a deep breath. It was tempting to let his grievance go, so very tempting. But it would be something worse next time.

“So, yeah,” Greg said, taking Mycroft’s hand and kissing it. “Tell me about the last time you got laid.”

“Hmmm?” Mycroft blinked sleepily and pushed himself up on his elbow.

“Tell me about the last time you got laid. Tell me all about it.”

“You were there, I hardly think you’ve forgotten.”

Greg chuckled. “Yeah, OK. The time before that then. Tell me everything.”


“You don’t think I should know your sexual history?”

“You know I’m clean, anything else... oh.”

“Yeah.”

Mycroft sat up. “Greg, I…”

Greg cut him off. “I’d wager real money that you could tell me off the top of your head who my last sex partner was. You could tell me the date and time. Hell, you could probably tell me what we did.”

“I don’t…”

“Please. Let me finish.” Greg cut him off again. Mycroft snapped his mouth shut and turned away. Greg sighed and sat up. He spoke to Mycroft’s back.

“I know you’re extremely... result-oriented, Mycroft. Invading my privacy got you the result you wanted. So, it’d be easy next time — if there is a next time — to take matters into your own hands again.” Greg felt righteous outrage to be sure, but he also felt sad. He wondered if Mycroft really understood why he was pressing this point.
“You might be wondering what difference it makes. You’d already deduced my status. To you it was a foregone conclusion, gathering the proof was just... housekeeping. If you’d gone to the trouble of asking me, it could have taken two or three weeks to get to the same place.” Greg touched the auburn hair. It was curlier than it looked, more like his brother’s. Mycroft must tame it ruthlessly. “So why not just skip to the inevitable result?

“I’ll tell you why... in a relationship — a personal relationship — it’s not just housekeeping. It’s building trust. It’s showing me that my opinions, my participation, my permission — matters. That I matter. This... stunt... just demonstrated that you don’t care about any of that.”

“I do.” Mycroft protested softly.

“Do you? It doesn’t feel like it. It feels like I was manipulated into doing what you wanted. That’s not on.”

“You wanted it too.”

“Yeah, I did. I do. But the end does not justify the means.”

Mycroft sighed. “My apologies, I understand your objections. It was not my intention to offend.”

“Intention is not absolution.” Jude had said that to him once. Greg hadn’t wanted to accept it, that what he had meant was less important than her reaction. They’d fought over it. He wondered how she’d feel to see him on the other side of the argument.

Mycroft pulled away and stood. He went to the window, looking out over the city. He looked good, long-limbed and freshly fucked. Greg saw that his cum was indeed leaking down his lanky thighs. It was fruitlessly arousing.

Greg waited, but when nothing else was forthcoming, he sighed and moved off the other side of the bed, going into the dressing room. It was time to get going. He’d had his say, Mycroft would accept it or not. Greg would make some kind of conciliatory gesture before he walked out the door.

He remembered kicking off his trousers... they weren’t on the floor. It took him a moment to discover that they’d been hung up. Anthea?

“If the twenty dates are off, Detective Inspector, please, just say so.” Mycroft stood in the doorway to the dressing room, swathed in his dressing gown.

“Greg. ‘If the twenty dates are off, Greg.’” Greg corrected. “I didn’t say the dates are off. You held up your end of the bargain, I’ll hold up mine.”

“It’s perfectly clear that you don’t care to continue.”

“That’s what you heard? I say, ‘that was a dick move, mate,’ and you hear ‘I don’t want to see you again?’”

“I read the subtext.”

“I’m not much for subtext. I generally say what I mean. Or... am I not taking the hint? You in a rush to get rid of me? ’Cause I thought you seemed to like me.” Greg took a breath and continued in a softer tone. “And I like you too, Mycroft. So, tell me what it is you want.” He looked around again. “And tell me where me bloody pants have got to. I don’t fancy going commando in rented trousers.”

Mycroft exhaled what sounded like a held breath. He moved to a drawer and took out a dark
rectangle of fabric. He offered it to Greg. “I expect they’re in the laundry. I can lend you a pair.”

Greg advanced on the taller man, his stance purposely aggressive. He was aware that his nudity affected Mycroft, affected the power dynamics in the room, in his favour. “Those were me best pants.” He said.

“They’ll be returned.”

“Friday?” Greg challenged. He wasn't letting Mycroft out of the dates this easily — he would take the man on at least one.

Mycroft blinked. “Yes. On Friday.”

“Good.” Greg took the pants from Mycroft and turned away, feeling self-satisfied. “I’ll let you know what time I’m picking you up.” He held up the pants. “Are these boxers?” Like my Grandad’s?!

“Yes, of course they’re boxers.”

“Right. Of course.”

“Would you... prefer to shower first?”

“Are you offering?” Greg asked, cautiously hopefully.

“I am.”

“Then god yes, I want a shower!” Greg exclaimed. He felt absolutely filthy. “Join me?” He asked, and Mycroft smiled tentatively.

Mycroft’s shower was incredible, big with three shower heads and a steam function. It was made for two (or even three!) — Greg wondered how often Mycroft showered with a friend. He took the initiative and after he'd washed his own hair, he soaped Mycroft’s back, running his hands along his spine, across his shoulders, down over his arse, working his hands around to his front, soaping his chest and abdomen, his soft cock and balls. Mycroft relaxed into his touch. When he was finished, he handed the soap to Mycroft and turned his back. Mycroft washed him deftly, lingering on his neck and shoulders. Then Mycroft stepped close and put his hands on Greg’s waist. Greg leaned back against the taller man and felt him sigh.

Mycroft held Greg close, as if he were afraid Greg would disappear if he didn’t cling tightly enough. He probably did think that, Greg reflected. He wondered when Mycroft last had a romantic relationship.

“May I ask a question?” Mycroft asked.

“Sure.” Greg said.

“Why didn’t you take the money? You brought Sherlock in to consult anyway, why not take payment? I know he was... troublesome. And drugs testing isn’t free.”

That was not a question Greg had expected. “I think you know the answer to that, Mycroft.” He said slowly. “If I took money from a man like you, I’d be indebted. I’d be on the payroll forever. I can’t live that way.”

Mycroft sighed. “Yet you’re here with a ‘man like me.’”

“You may have noticed, just a little while ago I was attempting to explain the differences between
professional and personal relationships.” Greg said, a little snarkily. He dropped the tone. “I’m not beholden to you. And I’m not intimidated by you, Mycroft. That makes a difference.”

Mycroft nuzzled his cheek and held him. “I had my first boyfriend at University and another in my mid-twenties. Jerome and I cohabitated for three years. After we parted, my career was becoming more... involved. I didn’t have time for a relationship and only pursued casual liaisons.

“The last of which was seven years ago. I was at a conference in Prague and I took one of the bell men at my hotel to bed. Twice. There were a variety of acts, but condoms were used stringently. During both encounters, I allowed him to steal the cash from my wallet. Afterwards, I realised that whilst he had, shall we say, scratched a certain itch, the experience, and others of its ilk, left me feeling dissatisfied. I decided that abstinence was not only more efficient but preferable.” He stroked Greg’s chest. “I want you to trust me.”

“I want to trust you.”

“But...”

Greg sighed deeply. He loved the feel of leaning against Mycroft’s chest, his arms wrapped around Greg’s chest and waist. “Thank you for telling me about your history.” He said. “Was I correct that you know all about mine.”

“Not all. But enough.”

“Right. OK.” Greg turned around in the circle of Mycroft’s arms, water and soap making their skin slippery. He touched Mycroft’s cheek and kissed him gently. “Is there anything else that I should know?”

Mycroft’s eyes looked stricken. He was silent, but his hands didn’t still, rubbing Greg’s back and sides. His breathing was shallow — Greg could see he was struggling with what to say. He pulled Greg close, tucking his face into Greg’s shoulder, hiding his eyes. When he spoke, he spoke quickly and all at once.

“I didn’t rent your suit, I had it made for you. I didn’t say anything because you would have insisted on paying for it which is ridiculous as the amount which is negligible for me is significant for you. And you did not ask for it. This past week I threatened to tell the event planner’s husband that he was cheating and skimming money from their business if he didn’t book a better band, purchase an adequate amount of champagne, fire the dodgy caterer in favour of a competent one and double the serving staff.

“You were correct that I went ahead and procured both of our STD screenings. However, I do not know the specifics of your prior sex life — I don’t know dates or acts or frequency. I did not consider that you might feel manipulated — an appalling oversight on my part.”

Mycroft paused. Greg was tense in his arms. Mycroft loosened his hold, allowing Greg to see his face. His eyes were sad. “In my defence, you did enjoy it more.” He said.

“Yeah... right...” The arms that had been comfortable suddenly felt constricting. Greg couldn’t breathe. He broke away. “I think I’m done in the shower.” Greg mumbled and retreated from the marble enclosure. He fumbled a towel and dried himself vigorously, if haphazardly.

Greg heard the water turn off and he stepped aside to let Mycroft reach the towel rack. He wrapped his towel around his waist.
“Look,” Greg said carefully. “I appreciate that you went out of your way to make last night more special. It’s not what I expected, but I can’t say I’m really surprised — except the suit. I don’t even know what to say about the suit.” He huffed a breath.

Before Mycroft could answer, Bast leapt up onto the counter with a pleased little ‘mew.’ She reached out her paw and batted playfully at the fold of Greg’s towel. “Hey, little mite.” He said scratching behind her ears. With a wild look in her eyes, she tackled his hand and pinned it to the counter, thumping the palm with her back feet and biting his fingers. He barked a surprised laugh.

“Bast.” Mycroft chastised, reaching for her. “Apologies.”

“She’s just playing — didn’t have her claws out or anything.”

Mycroft set her on the ground. He opened a jar and fished out a cotton ball which he lobbed at her. She skittered after it on the marble floor.

Greg said, “You got any tea?”

—

After Greg had left — with a kiss and half a smile — Mycroft returned to his bedroom to dress.

Following Bast’s interruption, Mycroft had made tea whilst Greg dressed in the suit. He really did look magnificent in it, even with damp hair and strain on his face. It was too bad it was a tuxedo and not something he could wear daily.

“Tell me to go to hell if you want, Mycroft.” Greg had said, sipping his tea. “When was the last time you didn’t plan ahead and arrange things to your liking — like the Ball? When is the last time you weren’t in control?” There was no accusation in his voice, or irritation. Greg sounded curious, nothing more.

Mycroft looked into his lovely, brown eyes and told the truth. “Christmas Eve.”

“Oh!” Greg ducked his head. “That went OK, yeah?”

Mycroft’s smile was shadowed by worry. “Better than ‘OK.’”

“It was bloody brilliant, is what it was.”

Mycroft’s smile broadened. “Indeed.”

Greg’s smile was warm as he took Mycroft’s hand. “I have a request.” He said.

“Anything.”

“For our date Friday, don’t do anything. Let me arrange it and surprise you.”

The request made Mycroft uncomfortable, and he shifted in his chair at the kitchen table. He’d put out the fresh croissants Anthea had brought, and Greg had eaten two. He’d put in the order for them at his favourite French bakery on Wednesday, the same day he’d procured their test results.

“Can you do that?” Greg asked.
Mycroft wanted to object — he could see that Greg knew it. But the steady brown eyes implored him to agree.

“Yes, of course.” He said.

“Promise?” Greg grinned winningly.

“If I must.”

“I’m holding you to that.” Greg said, sounding happier. “Don’t worry. We’ll have a good time.”

“I have no doubt.”

Greg laughed out loud. “You have nothing but doubt.” He said. “But it’ll be good for you to let go a little.”

“I’m not sure that’s true.” Mycroft demurred.

“Trust me, OK? I’ve got you.”

Greg had no idea what he was asking, how difficult it was for Mycroft to trust anything. But, he reflected, if he did trust someone, Greg would be very close to top of the list. He nodded. And as Greg relaxed and regained his good-humour, Mycroft didn’t regret the promise immediately.

Mycroft dressed in matching running pants and jacket and took to his treadmill. He ached all over from stretching and twisting his body into unfamiliar positions. The exercise helped clear his mind. He thought about this affair he had embarked upon. It was indisputably unwise to expose himself thus. Yet here he was, exposing himself to chaos.

As he’d done earlier in the week, Mycroft retreated into his mind palace, into the room Greg inhabited. With his perfect recall, he reviewed every interaction he’d had with Greg Lestrade, starting with the first time the policeman had arrested Sherlock. Then the first fateful meeting when Lestrade had gotten angry and walked out. The second meeting to which Mycroft had not summoned Lestrade, but had gone to him, hat in hand terribly fearful of a relapse. Lestrade had been tight-lipped but listened to Mycroft’s concerns. The two subsequent meetings when Lestrade had come to him with serious worries over his brother’s health. In the morgue after Sherlock’s ‘death,’ Lestrade looking truly devastated, holding himself together by taking the imploding John Watson in hand. He’d watched the surveillance video when Moriarty targeted the Detective and the drone video from Baskerville. CCTV video from several crime scenes on which Sherlock had consulted. After John moved into Baker Street, and after his divorce, Lestrade had started showing up to the few social events at the flat. Mycroft had met him there on three separate occasions before Christmas Eve. They had even spoken casually once, Greg flush with whisky, gently teasing him... it was a memory he’d often enjoyed late at night when he couldn’t fall asleep, Greg’s humour and kindness had soothed him.

Then on Christmas Eve... when Greg looked at him, he hadn’t been looking at the man who tried to buy him. Greg hadn’t been looking at a meddlesome brother or an interfering prig, a toff wanker, or the ominous leader of a sinister shadow government... On Christmas Eve Greg Lestrade had looked at Mycroft as if he were in some way... desirable.

How could Mycroft possibly have resisted?

Mycroft combed through the memories of their interactions searching for the moment that his feelings for the Detective Inspector had gone beyond attraction, had strayed somewhere into the vicinity of
love.

This affair with Greg was foolish. It was ridiculous and unwise, doomed to failure. A complete waste of Mycroft's precious time.

Sentiment was insidious.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter we might FINALLY get to the first date!

Happy Christmas to all those who celebrate it. And Season's Greetings to everyone. It's winter and the New Year is coming. May everyone have a better 2019 than 2018.

Your comments are your gifts to me.
The 'First' Fantastic Date

Chapter Summary

Greg takes Mycroft out on their first official date. And tells John a thing or two he should know.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Are you certain we have to use the Underground. I could have a car here in ten minutes.”

“I have a car, Mycroft. If it were the best way to get there, trust me, I’d be driving.” Greg smiled and tugged the other man forward. “There’s nothing wrong with the Underground — it’s a miracle of Victorian engineering, after all.”

“Is it?” The remark was filled with disdain.

Greg laughed. “Is your contempt for the Victorians in general or their innovations in public transportation in particular?”

“The latter, of course.”

“Well, Queen Victoria survived rail travel, so will you.”

“Her Highness had her own carriage. Much easier to survive without the teeming crush of humanity.”

Greg laughed again — he’d begun to notice that Mycroft’s face did something whenever Greg laughed, something soft. Greg liked it. “I don’t imagine you suffer the crush of humanity very often.”

“As little as possible.” They entered the station and Greg handed Mycroft an oyster card. Without giving him another opportunity to balk, Greg led them swiftly through the turnstiles and down the long hallway, veering left to the escalators. They jogged down past all the commuters standing on the right side of the moving stairs, down a winding tunnel to the train platform.

Mycroft glowered at the lively platform and Greg laughed at him. When the train came, he pushed the other man onto the carriage first and stepped into the crowded car after. He moved so that he faced Mycroft, his body shielding him from other passengers. Greg studied his features, the sharp, grey eyes, auburn brows drawn low, the patrician nose that defined his profile, the soft, kissable lips, drawn now into an aristocratic sneer, the tawny freckles crowded over his high forehead and across his nose...

At Bond Street they switched to the Jubilee Line where they snagged seats amongst the dwindling commuters. They were sat between a coterie of boisterous city boys out for Friday night drinks (or ‘drinkies’ as Molly would say) and a family of German tourists. The baleful look on Mycroft’s face was priceless — it took everything Greg had not to laugh out loud at him. He wondered how long it had been since Mycroft last took public transportation.

They alighted at Canning Town — which did nothing to assuage Mycroft’s discontent. “If we get
mugged, this date is over.”

“No one’s gonna mug a copper.” Greg assured him. “Relax.” He offered his cigarettes and Mycroft took one. They paused to light up then continued on. “It’s about a fifteen minute walk to where we’re going.”

“And where might that be?”

“You’ll find out in about fifteen minutes.”

“So far this date is less than fabulous.”

Greg laughed. “Humble beginnings.” He said taking a long drag on his cigarette. He was excited about tonight, certain that Mycroft would like what he had arranged.

—

“Sorry I’m late, mate.” Greg said, sliding into the chair next to John. He signaled the bartender. “Got caught up at the morgue. Someone switched a couple toe tags.”

John Watson smirked. “No worries, I managed to fill the time.” Greg saw an attractive woman — blonde, petite, laughing eyes — smile and wink from an adjacent table.

Greg sighed. He wanted to shake John, make him see what he was doing. What he was doing to Sherlock — and himself. Greg was convinced John was as in love with Sherlock as Sherlock was with John. But denial ain’t just a river in Egypt, as they say.

“Erm, OK.” Greg took a drink of his pint. “Yeah, so...”

“It’s done. Got everything you asked for — don’t worry,” John held up a hand to forestall Greg’s protest. “No spoilers. The space is perfect for it. I put in a few things that Sherlock doesn’t know about. And we got Professor Knoughton, she supplied a cipher that took Sherlock a couple hours to break.”

“Good. Thanks! I owe you.”

“Always looking for a babysitter.” John said, half jokingly.


“I might take you up on that.” John said. “What’s this for, anyway? Breaking in new recruits?”

Greg chuckled thinking about the annual crop of clueless recruits. “No. I have a date with someone who I think will enjoy a good puzzle.”

“A date! Nice...erm, I hope she’s a genius... there’s a good puzzle and there’s bloody impossible. It took Sherlock half the night to get through it.”

“About that...” That was the thing about coming out — you were never finished. “I’m not seeing a woman. I’m seeing a man.”

John’s eyebrows shot up. “Oh! Erm... that’s new.”
“Not really. I’ve had relationships with men in the past. I’m bisexual.”

“Oh. I, erm, didn’t know.”

“No reason why you should. I met Jude sixteen years ago. Haven’t dated much since the divorce.”

“But... now you’ve met someone you like.”

Greg smiled, relieved at John’s quick acceptance. “I have. Well, I’ve known him for years, knew he had a bit of a thing for me... the timing was finally right. And turns out I like him a lot too.”

“That’s great, Greg. Yeah. Will we get to meet him? If he can get through that cipher, Sherlock will want to meet him.”


For several beats, John didn’t move. His hand stayed poised on his pint glass, his face stayed fixed... then he grinned. “You’re having a laugh.”

“I’m not.” Greg said. “Though you aren’t the first person to ask me that. I’m seeing Mycroft.”

“But...” John stared. Then he cleared his throat, sat up straighter, and put his hand on Greg’s arm. “Sorry, yeah, just surprised... I didn’t know Mycroft... I guess I thought he was like Sherlock. Asexual... or not asexual but... above it all? I’m putting my foot into it, aren’t I.”

“Little bit.” Greg smiled. “Where’d you get the idea they were asexual?”

“Well, Sherlock. He told me he didn’t do relationships. He’s never brought anyone home — except Janine, and that was all a sham. And Mycroft’s never mentioned anyone... never had anyone to Christmas at his parents.”

“Yeah, I think it’s been a while since Mycroft’s had a relationship. But Sherlock, he always had boyfriends. Regular revolving door at his place on Montague Street.”

“Revolving door... ?”

“I guess that stopped when you both moved into Baker Street. Probably why everyone figured you were together, that he’d finally found the one.”

“We’re not — “


John frowned epically, his eyebrows drawing down dangerously. “What’s that supposed to mean?!?”

“Oh come on, John. The two of you — you don’t function nearly as well alone. You were a complete mess when he was gone. And without you he gets himself into all sorts of trouble he can’t get out of.”

John, stiff with fury, took a vicious pull on his pint. “He’s fine without me. He spent two years running around playing games with Moriarty without a thought... without a care in the world.”

Greg was astonished. “John... has he never told you... you must have seen the scars.”

“No... what scars?”
“All over his back for starters. Then a couple more nasty looking gouges...” Greg gestured vaguely at his ribs where he’d seen a particularly ugly knife scar. “You really never...?” John’s face was a mix of horror, resentment and confusion that told Greg clearly he didn’t know anything. “Sherlock wasn’t out gallivanting, John. He almost died at least three times — that I know about. Mycroft had to go in and rescue him twice. He never told you about Mexico? Or Albania?”

“No.” It was the hollowed out echo of a word.

“You should ask him. You should know — he did it for us after all.”

“What do you mean? He went haring off after Moriarty. It had nothing to do with... us? Why do you say ‘us’?”

Greg sighed heavily. “John. Mate. You really don’t know?” John’s face said plainly that he did not and Greg best explain pronto. “Moriarty told Sherlock that if he didn’t kill himself, didn’t jump, you would be killed. And me. And Mrs. Hudson. Apparently we all had assassins assigned to us — and not just one. We each had a primary, but there were multiple backups if they failed. If Sherlock hadn’t jumped, we’d all be dead. You really didn’t know?”

“No, he never...” John trailed off.

“Sherlock wasn’t chasing Moriarty. He spent those two years hunting down every assassin Moriarty had hired. He almost died making sure we were safe.” Greg ran his hand through his hair. “I know he doesn’t like to talk about some of what he went through. I got it from Mycroft when he first came back — we were trying to spend extra time with him then because... well, because.”

“Because I wouldn’t talk to him.”

“Yeah, honestly. We were afraid he’d relapse again. Not that I would have blamed him, some of what they did to him... I don’t think I would have survived. Then you two made up, I figured you knew everything.”

“I didn’t want to know. He said it was a grand adventure and I couldn’t...” John’s fists balled up. “You know how it was when we all thought he was dead...”

“Yeah.” Greg had continued to check in on John daily for months — regardless of whether John acknowledged him, threatened him, abused him or drunkenly embraced him. “I know.”

“I... I forgave him.” John laughed and it sounded hysterical. “He said he’d been off on a grand adventure and I hit him... I wanted to kill him. We worked it out, I figured you knew everything.”

“You know how it was when we all thought he was dead...”

“You were upset. He was nervous to see you again. Neither of you were at your best. You should talk to him now — after everything, you’re still together. You’re raising Rosie together. You’re more than friends, John. Much more. You should talk to him.”

“We’re not... it’s not like that...”

“I’m not saying it is. But you can’t say you’re just friends. You and I are friends, John. He’s much more. And you know it.”

John closed his eyes with a long sigh. When he opened them, there was a set to his jaw that told Greg that the subject was closed. They both sipped their pints.
“So.” John said at length. “Mycroft?”

——

As they arrived at Trinity Buoy Wharf the seediness of East London dropped away. At this time in the evening, the offices in Container City were closing down and classes were over at the Royal Drawing School, but the studios were buzzing. There were plenty of students and creatives about.

Lestrade led them past the school and the colourful Container park, past the tiny American-style diner out to the edge of the wharf where the Thames flowed swiftly. “Have you been here before?” He asked Mycroft.

“No, but I know of it, of course. Faraday’s experiments here were quite innovative.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” Lestrade said. He pushed open the door. They stepped into London’s only lighthouse and immediately were surrounded by music.

“Is that... singing bowls?” Mycroft asked.

“Yeah. You can hear it better up here.” He started up the spiral staircase that led to the light room at the top. The lighthouse was wide and not very tall, roughly three stories, so the stairs were not daunting. “It’s called ‘Longplayer’.” Lestrade said. “The composition will play for 1,000 years, never repeating itself.” Mycroft knew of Greg’s interest in art, he would think that was why they were here.

Mycroft was listening intently. “There are ... six? Is it six melodies playing simultaneously?”

“Yeah, good ear. Come on up.” As they ascended the music became louder, surrounding them with its song.


“It’s about time on a scale in which human lives are but a blip. Reminds me how insignificant we are really.”

“Speak for yourself.” Mycroft mumbled.

Greg chuckled, leading him ever upward. “The listening room is through here.” He said, opening a thick metal door for Mycroft.

He waited until Mycroft passed through, then followed him into the room at the top of the lighthouse and shut the door behind them. The door closed with an ominous ‘chunk,’ and then came the sound of gears turning and bolt after bolt thunking into place. The music of the Tibetan singing bowls were cut off abruptly.

“Huh.” Greg said, staring at the heavy iron door with the oversized keyhole. He touched the door, took hold of the big lever that stood in for a door handle and tugged. It didn’t budge.

When he turned, Mycroft was looking at him with betrayal. “You did that purposefully.” He accused. “You knew it would lock.”

“Why!?” Mycroft was seriously put out.

Greg advanced on the taller man and shrugged. “A little privacy.” He said and pulled Mycroft into a kiss by the tie.

Slightly mollified, Mycroft returned the kiss. “If you wanted to have public sex, locking us in a room defeats the purpose.” He muttered.

“Public sex?” Greg said. “I hadn’t thought of that. Maybe on a future date.” He kissed Mycroft again, opening his lips with his tongue and exploring.

“Then what is this?” Mycroft’s hands had slipped beneath his coat, found Greg’s hips and rested there.

“A puzzle.” Greg said. “Everything we need to open the door is in here. If we get it open quickly enough, we’ll have dinner in that little diner on the wharf. If not maybe late-night ramen in Canning Town. Or breakfast...”

“We’re having dinner in that diner.” Mycroft said, a stubborn determination lighting his face. He kissed Greg once more then stepped back and began surveying the room. “Everything is in here?”

“Yep. Just have to find it and interpret it properly.”

“What will you do whilst I work out how to open the door?”

“Oh, you’re gonna need my help.” Greg assured him.

Mycroft smirked. “No offense, but anything I don’t know is readily available via google.”

“Is it now?” Greg asked with a smirk of his own.

Eyebrows raised, Mycroft pulled out his smartphone and thumbed it to life. He frowned and held it up, then walked to the far side of the room. He swiped to his settings and looked through the controls. “No signal.” He said. “But there are no dead spots in London. I ensured it.”

“Faraday cage.” Greg said, rapping his fist against the wooden wall. “Michael Faraday lined the walls, roof and floor with layers of woven copper, creating — as you know — a room cut off from all electromagnetic charges. Radio signals, for example — and these days, satellite and wifi.”

Mycroft swore, but looked fascinated despite himself. “The first Faraday cage... my safe at home is a Faraday cage. And we use them at work regularly, of course. I have a Faraday pouch for my laptop so no one can access it remotely.”

“Yeah, John says microwave ovens are Faraday cages.”

“John?!?”

“John and Sherlock helped set all this up. Then they tested it. John said it took them six hours to unlock the door. They’re going to come by at nine tomorrow morning just to make sure we get out.”

“A wise but unnecessary precaution.” Mycroft said confidently, flexing his fingers. He was again scanning the room.

There were two chairs in the centre and several bottles of water, a safe roughly a meter square with a combination lock, a stack of books, a jack-in-the-box — the child’s toy — a spiral bound notebook and a pencil. Hanging on the walls were a mirror, a painting of a landscape, and what appeared to be
an electronic dart board.

Greg took a closer look at the dart board. He poked it and red lights rippled across the surface resolving into one flashing word: *error*. “Hmph.”

Whilst Greg was occupied with the dart board, Mycroft picked up the jack-in-the-box, turned it over then set it on top of the safe. He leafed through all the books, carefully preserving their order. Then he opened the notebook and frowned.

“Look at this.” He showed it to Greg. Scrawled on the first few pages were a series of questions:

1) What is Arsenal Defender Carl Jenkinson’s jersey number?

2) How many goals did Thierry Henry score in his first game this season?

3) How many EPL titles has Arsenal won?

The questions continued, fifteen in total, all about Arsenal football, all asking for a number. The rest of the pages were blank.

“I assume you’re a fan of Arsenal?”

“Oh yeah.” Greg said taking the notebook, amused. “Gooner all me life.”

“That appears to be your task.” Mycroft said, scanning the room once more.

“Try the jack-in-the-box.” Greg suggested.

Looking sour, Mycroft began turning the crank. It emitted a tinkling rendition of ‘Pop Goes The Weasel,’ but it was strange, some notes staccato and others held too long. There were many breaks that made the song limp along haltingly.

“Morse code.” Mycroft stated.

“What?”

“Morse code.” Mycroft repeated. “Hear it? Dash, dash, dot, dash... it pauses between the letters.”

He was right, Greg heard it now. It was difficult to decipher through the familiar tune.

“Right. You know it?”

“I do not.” Mycroft admitted.

“Luckily, I do.” Greg said. “But I’m not fluent anymore. And with the song... I’ll have to write it out and translate.”

“I’ll turn the crank,” Mycroft said. “And you transcribe.” Greg nodded and opened the notebook to a blank page. He pulled his coat off and tossed it over one of the chairs, and sat, pencil poised. Mycroft crouched down by the safe in front of the toy. “It’s already played dash dash dot space dash dot dot space dot dot” He told Greg.

*Of course he remembers.* Greg thought as he wrote it down.

Mycroft began turning the crank slowly. The tinkling notes were eerie... disconcerting. He focused on Mycroft’s voice instead. “Dash space dot dot dash space...”
Greg wrote it all down, happy to recognise letters as he went. Suddenly the top flew open and the joker popped up into Mycroft’s face, making him jump.

“Augh!” Greg shouted, shocked. He cursed the thing. He’d always hated jack-in-the-box!

Mycroft was studying the damnable thing. “Look at this.” He said. The joker was holding a picture — an exact replica of the landscape on the wall, except there was an ‘X’ directly in the center of it.

Greg went to the painting and examined it closely, touched it gingerly. Mycroft joined him, pressing his hands against the paint much less tentatively. “There’s something...” He said. “As I understand, these sorts of puzzle rooms are often... cumulative. I suspect we don’t have the correct tool to access this yet.”

“Ok.” Greg said, unconvinced. He prodded the painting again.

“We should work with what we currently have.” Mycroft said. “The morse code and the football quiz.”

“Right.” Greg returned to his chair and scanned the morse code he’d transcribed. Swiftly he wrote out the corresponding letters. He held up the notebook. GBUVKZFMKBGWVA “What does it mean?” Greg asked.

“It’s encrypted.” Mycroft told him. He took the notebook and flipped back to the first page. “I suspect the answers to these will give us the key.”

“Oh. Ok, erm, let me have a go.” Greg took the notebook, uncomfortably aware that thus far Mycroft had little to do.

“Yes... when you have the answers filled in, let me know.” Mycroft said. He leaned back in his chair looking bored and opened a bottle of water.

“Yep.” Greg sat back in his chair and read through the questions. He started writing the answers in. Number one was easy — everyone knew Jenkinson’s jersey number was 25. But not all the questions were as straightforward, Greg had to wrack his memory, think through individual games, count goals on his fingers — on one or two he could only give a range.

When he finished fifteen minutes later, he handed the notebook to Mycroft. Mycroft transcribed the answers into one long string of numbers: 2559675263667(?)529625375(?)23269

“No ones or zeros.” He muttered. He pulled out his smartphone and opened the phone app. He wrote down the letters that corresponded with each number. 2= abc, 5=jkl, 9=wxyz, and etc.

Quite quickly — after only six letters — Mycroft wrote the phrase ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.’ He rapidly confirmed it.

“Wait, how’d you get that so fast?” Greg demanded.

“Assuming the key is a phrase, ‘A’ must be the first letter — there are no other vowels in the first four places. ‘L’ is the most likely successor, and ‘ALL’ is probable. The vowel ‘O’ is almost certainly part of the second word. Of ‘WXYZ’, ‘WO’ has the most possibilities, followed by ‘YO.’ From there the ‘R’ and ‘K’ are obvious, which gives away the phrase. It’s simple, really. Quite obvious.”

“Amazing.” Greg said, breathless with delight.
“Oh!” Mycroft seemed surprised by the praise. “Yes. Erm, we still need to work out what kind of cipher was used. It won’t be a substitution cipher as there aren’t 26 unique letters. There aren’t even 24 — some ciphers drop letters like ‘j’ and ‘q’ that appear in relatively few words. It’s not Caesar cipher either, that’s clear from just looking at it.”

“Right. Yeah.” Greg agreed. He had no idea what a Caesar cipher was.

“I’m going to plug the key into different cipher types, see what works.” Mycroft turned to a fresh page and began writing the key phrase in a square table ... after a few minutes he put a slash through it and started another. This had letters arranged along the eight sides of a cross. After almost twenty minutes, Mycroft made a disgusted noise and put a slash through that one as well. He began another but discarded it quickly. The fourth table he wrote looked like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Z</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“This is a Playfair cipher.” Mycroft said. “It starts with the key phrase, only using unique letters, for two lines of five. As the ‘L’ repeats, it’s substituted with ‘X.’ The next three lines are the letters of the alphabet minus the letters in the first two lines. I left out ‘Q’ as there are only 25 characters in a Playfair cipher.

“To decode GBUVKZFMKBGWVA, we separate it into digrams — GB UV KZ FM KB GE VA

“GB = SH — the four letters create a rectangle, G subs for S, B subs for H.

“UV are next to each other, they are replaced by TU, next to each other minus one place. Which gives us ‘SHUT.’

“KZ forms a rectangle with UP, FM are next to each other, go back a space any you get MY — I think you can see where this is going, the decoded phrase is ‘SHUTUP MYCROFT.’ The hand of my charming brother, no doubt.”

Greg rolled his eyes. “Git couldn’t help himself. But how is ‘SHUTUP MYCROFT’ going to open a combination lock?”

“Let’s translate the letters back into numbers... that’s 7488876927638. Too many... let’s put them in groups of two and add them up... 11 16 15 15 9 9 8 or 17 if we add the last three... this is obviously not the combination — there wouldn’t be two sets of repeated numbers... let’s add them in threes — 19 23 17 16 8 or 24 if we add the last four together. This is a much more likely solution.”

“So that’s it, that’s the combination?”

“We’ll know soon enough.” Mycroft said, twirling the dial on the safe. 19... 23... 17... and let’s try 24...”

There was a click and the safe door opened.

“Brilliant! That’s brilliant!” Greg said, grinning. “You’re brilliant.”

“You are the one that knows Morse.” Mycroft reminded him with a soft smile.

“That hardly compares.” Greg leaned in and kissed him lightly. “We’re a good team.” Mycroft’s face
abruptly transformed into something much more serious and Greg reflexively retreated from it. “One hour.” He noted, flustered. “Erm, not bad.”

“Hmph. I should have known it was a Playfair... should have tried that first.”

Greg knelt in front of the safe and removed the contents: a book of Sudoku puzzles, a gun, and three metal boxes — one locked with an electronic keypad, one with a key lock and the third with another combination lock.

Greg hefted the gun. It was light, lighter than it should be. He pulled the clip. “Pellets.” He said. “I imagine they’re for the target.” Mycroft gestured at the electronic dart board on the wall.

“Do you shoot?” Greg asked.

“As little as possible.” Mycroft answered. “You?”

“I’m not as good as John, but yeah, I can shoot.”

“Go ahead.” Mycroft said. “I’ll start the Sudoku puzzles — unless you’d rather...?”

“No. No, the Sudoku is all yours.”

“Good.” Mycroft said, opening the book with a look of anticipation.

Greg watched Mycroft begin the first puzzle. He hoped he was enjoying this, hoped it was enough of a challenge. Thus far it hadn’t seemed to be much of one, the only thing holding him back was Greg. Had this been a colossal mistake, highlighting the vast difference in their intellects?

He forced himself to dismiss that line of thought for the moment and turned his attention to the target. He assumed he needed a bullseye, probably multiple bullseyes. He sighted the target and pulled the trigger. The lack of recoil surprised him. His pellet hit just outside the second ring and a spray of blue lights spiraled out from his hit and formed the words: ‘close but no cigar.’

He glanced at Mycroft. He was filling numbers into the Sudoku puzzle with stunning rapidity. Greg sighted the target again.

It took him three of the pellets before he hit the center ring. When he finally succeeded, multi coloured confetti danced over the screen until it meshed into a giant ‘5.’

Greg borrowed the pencil from Mycroft to write ‘5’ on a blank page in the notebook. Mycroft sighed at being forced to pause his Sudoku puzzle.

Greg continued shooting, receiving a number each time he hit the bullseye. When he ran out of pellets, he collected the expended discs and reloaded. He shot until the numbers repeated.

Mycroft was just finishing the Sudoku book.

“What now?” Greg asked, looking at the string of numbers he’d written out.

“We translate the solutions into a usable form.” Mycroft stared at the puzzles muttering to himself distractedly. “Ah!” He exclaimed. “Hamiltonian Cycles!” He began writing equations in the margins of the puzzle book and murmured, “...solve for N...”

Greg understood a little — he’d gotten an A level in maths back in the day — but the speed with which Mycroft wrote out and solved the equations was startling. Greg couldn’t have done it that fast
with a calculator. He watched with baited breath.

After a few minutes Greg took out his phone and wrote the corresponding letters out for the numbers he’d got from the target, as Mycroft had in the first cipher. He worked at it until Mycroft finished with the equations, but the numbers stubbornly refused to resolve into a recognisable word or phrase.

Twenty minutes after he’d begun, Mycroft had another string of numbers. Greg showed him the series of digits he’d gotten from shooting the target, and his lack of progress with the letters from the phone. They set about trying to see what the equation solutions would spell if converted to letters, but again, the numbers spelled out nothing.

They tried adding them together in ditomes and tritomes, trying the results on the combination lock. No luck. They tried turning the added sums into letters. Nothing. After a half hour, Greg had the distinct impression that Mycroft was holding himself back from kicking the stack of books across the room. They were at a loss.

Greg wracked his brain trying to figure out what to try next. They had to be missing something obvious.

“Book code?” Greg asked, a shrug in his voice.

They both looked at the stack of books. Then lunged at them, Mycroft muttering imprecations at himself for not thinking of it.

Greg held up the first book. “OK... which set is page number, Sudoku or Target?”

“We’ll try it both ways.” Mycroft said. He read off the first number on his list and Greg flipped to the page. Mycroft told him the target number and Greg counted five words and showed Mycroft the word. He wrote it down.

Then they switched, using the target number for the page and the Sudoku number for the word. After ten letters each way, Mycroft harrumphed. “This isn’t it.” He announced. “Next book.”

They repeated the process with five more books, Mycroft growing more impatient with each. It barely showed, but Greg noticed the tightness around his eyes and the way he would exhale as if counting out the breath to calm himself. Greg pursed his lips and refrained from teasing him.

Mycroft cheered up at the results of the seventh book. “This is it.” He said. “This is it!”

The book code said ‘What turns everything around without moving?’

“The mirror.” Greg said reflexively.

“What?”

“The mirror — it’s a riddle. What turns everything around without moving? A mirror.” Georgianna had gone through a riddle phase a few years ago after she’d read *The Hobbit*. Greg had gotten pretty good at answering them.

“Oh. Right.” They approached the mirror. Mycroft touched it with his fingertips and squinted at the reflection straight on and then at oblique angles. “It’s just a mirror.” He said at length.

“Yeah... hang on...” Greg said. He was thinking about Jude, how he used to write little love notes in the steam on the mirror whilst she showered. He didn’t remember when he’d stopped. Or why.
He leaned close to the mirror and breathed on it, steaming the surface.

“There!” Mycroft exclaimed. “A number. Do it again.”

It took a minute or two, but breathing on the mirror revealed three numbers. Mycroft tried them on the combination lock and it popped open.

“YES!” Mycroft said under his breath, pumping his fist. Greg couldn’t help but smile.

Inside the box were batteries and a scrap of paper with a neatly typed message: ‘I have keys but no locks. I have space but no room. You can enter, but cannot go outside.’

“Another riddle.” Mycroft said.

Greg frowned, repeating the riddle to himself. “Oh! I get it.” He exclaimed. “A keyboard.”

“Clearly.” Mycroft agreed. Greg felt abashed — of course Mycroft worked it out immediately. “Now how does ‘Keyboard’ get us in there?” He gestured at the box with the keypad.

“I dunno.” Greg said. He installed the batteries into the the keypad. It lit up red, signifying it was locked.

“Keyboard.” Mycroft repeated. He swiftly converted the letters to numbers in his head using a memorised phone pad and typed the result into the keypad. It beeped and the red flashed. He added the numbers in pairs and tried again.

Greg wasn’t completely certain what he was thinking. He flipped through the notebook seeking inspiration. He came across the Playfair Cipher... as Mycroft worked through possible solutions in his head, Greg, for lack of anything better to do, made ‘Keyboard’ into the cipher:

```
K E Y B O
A R D C F
G H I J L
M N P S T
U V W X Z
```

The numbers he’d gotten from the target were on the opposite page, as well as his failed attempts to translate them into a word or phrase. Well, why not? He thought. For each number, Greg took the first letter of the three or four possibilities on the phone keypad — and plugged them into the cipher.

Mycroft was watching him now. It made Greg self-conscious, but he kept on. Decoded it spelled: ‘I HATE YOU.’ This had to be it!

“My brother again.” Mycroft sighed, though he looked thoroughly triumphant. He returned to the keypad and quickly typed in 44283968. The keypad beeped three times, turned green and unlocked.

Mycroft smirked at Greg — he didn’t say it, but Greg knew Mycroft was pleased he’d worked it out. Greg felt a little giddy with the approval.

“What’s in there? The key?” Greg asked. The last box had a keyhole.

“No.” Mycroft said. “Just this.” He held an evil-looking knife, roughly the size of his hand.

“A knife.” Greg said, stupidly. “What’s it for?”

Mycroft tossed the knife and caught it expertly with the blade now the opposite direction. He tossed
it again and caught the blade, holding it firmly between his fingers. “It’s a throwing knife.” Mycroft said. “I think we’ve discovered how to activate the painting.” He biffed the jack-in-the-box holding the tiny reproduction of the landscape hanging on the wall, and it swayed menacingly, the red ‘X’ in the center of the wee painting hypnotic.

“But what...?”

Before Greg could finish the question, Mycroft turned and hurled the knife at the painting in one smooth movement. It thunked into the dead center, the blade disappearing completely. A compartment opened in the frame and dropped something to the floor with a metallic jangle.

Greg stared at Mycroft. “That was...” He let the phrase dangle... he didn’t know how to describe Mycroft’s skill with the throwing knife.

“I started out in the field.” Mycroft said, by way of explanation. “Legwork. So tedious.” He sounded completely blasé, dismissive even, but Greg noticed the hint of self-conscious colour on his cheeks.

Greg touched his arm, gripped it, and smiled at Mycroft’s haughty expression. “I should have let you do the shooting.” He said.

“I always preferred the knife.” Mycroft said. “You’re a better shot than I, these days.”

Greg nodded once, an acknowledgement of Mycroft’s skill, of his service to Britain, of how terrifying Mycroft was when Greg paused to think about it. Was he dating a real-life James Bond? Then Greg let go and collected the thing that had fallen from the painting.

He found a well-worn set of lock picks and handed them to Mycroft. “I hope you know how to use these.” Greg said. “I’ve never had the knack.”

Mycroft smirked and knelt in front of the final metal box. He examined the lock picks then inserted two into the lock. He manipulated them, his ear as close to the box as he could get, listening intently. He discarded one of the picks and chose another. He twisted it carefully... and the box popped open!

“Yeah!” Greg crowed. Mycroft looked up, his cheeks warm and red. Greg leaned down and kissed him.

“Please tell me the key to the door is in that box.” Mycroft said, his hand on Greg’s neck contradicting his impatient words.

Greg smiled and kissed him again, lingeringly. Then he reached over and flipped open the box. “Oh yes.” Greg pulled out a heavy, oversized skeleton key. “Do you want to do the honours?”

“I think I’ve done quite enough.” Mycroft said, but his arms wrapped around Greg as they stood up and he embraced him. “We are a good team.” He whispered in Greg’s ear.

Greg leaned into the embrace. “Yeah.” He agreed. "We did it!” He pulled back to look Mycroft in the eye. “Hungry?”

Mycroft’s hands strayed lower, dipping inside the waistband of Greg’s trousers. “Mmmm, very hungry.” He said, kissing Greg’s neck and jaw and mouth.

“One thing.” Greg said, his hands straying over Mycroft’s arms. “I’m more than happy to have a snog — or a shag — more than happy. But you should know, our official time is recorded when we open the door. It’s fewer than four hours now, compared to Sherlock and John’s six...”
Mycroft stiffened and stepped away. “Unlock the door.” He commanded. “Now.”

Greg, laughing, stuck the heavy key into the lock and began to turn it. The heavy metallic ‘chunks’ of the deadbolts pulling back sounded as it rotated, one after the other. Greg gripped the lever and it moved easily. The door swung open. The sound of Tibetan singing bowls drifted up.

“Figured you were just as competitive with Sherlock as he is with you.” Greg said. He held out a hand for Mycroft to take and intertwined their fingers, pulling him close for another long kiss. “Mmmm. You win.”

“Indeed I do.” Mycroft murmured, kissing Greg’s neck and jaw.

“I could lock the door again.” Greg offered. “We have the key now.”

Mycroft smirked and started to close the heavy door — but Greg’s mutinous stomach growled loudly and he stopped. “You’re hungry.” He said.

“I can wait.”

“You shouldn’t have to.” Mycroft said and tugged him forward. They started down the stairs, their feet clattering, the music growing louder then fainter again as they approached the outside door. Greg felt faintly regretful to leave, but he was hungry. And he was thrilled they had finished before the diner closed. He was looking forward to taking Mycroft there.

The air was crisp outside, cold, and Greg wrapped his coat around himself. He fished out his fags and tapped two from the pack. He put them both in his mouth and lit them, cupping his hand to protect his lighter from the chill wind. He handed one to Mycroft and took a long drag on the other.

Mycroft exhaled a long plume of smoke and steam. “Did you know all the steps we’d have to take? To get out?”

“What? No, I didn’t know anything. John and Sherlock set it up — brought in a few specialists. I just asked they make it as difficult as possible.” Greg said. “Did you enjoy it?”

“Oh yes.” Mycroft assured him. “I can’t remember the last time I had such an enjoyable challenge. Hamiltonian Cycles...” He chuckled happily. “I bet that’s what tripped up Sherlock. He always was slow at maths.”

Greg laughed — Sherlock was quite brilliant at maths, at least on a human scale. Mycroft, it seemed, was better. “You never thought about going into academia? Or research? Some kind of pure scientific inquiry?” He dragged on his cigarette.

“Dull.” Mycroft answered. “I prefer the complexities of large-scale socio-economics and politics. It’s quite engaging.”

“Running the world is worthy of your intellect.”

“It would be, I imagine. Thus far I’ve restricted myself to the British Empire.”

“I think you’re serious.” Greg said, smiling.

“Of course I’m serious.” Mycroft told him. He crushed his dwindling cigarette under his heel and caught hold of Greg. “I’m always serious.” He pressed the detective against the side of the lighthouse, and kissed him tenderly. Greg flicked his cigarette away and slipped his hands inside Mycroft’s coat, warming them under his arms.
“You’re cold.” Mycroft observed. “Where’s this diner?”

Greg pulled him back for a final kiss, then shivering slightly led him away from the lighthouse. “Over here.”

The Fatboy Diner inhabited an old rail carriage with squared-off corners. It was shiny silver and featured a disturbing portrait of the head of a looming fat man. Inside there were booths with vinyl seats and mini jukeboxes, and a long counter with stools that twirled. It was almost completely full, but as Greg entered, two patrons left their stools and made their way to the register. Greg snagged the empty stools before the server — an attractive, middle-aged woman in a pink uniform dress with a white apron — could clear the used plates away. Mycroft joined him warily.

“Trust me?” Greg asked Mycroft.

“Too a point.”

Greg grinned. “Do you trust me with dinner?”

Mycroft smirked back at him. “Provisionally.”

“Good. I’ll order for both of us.” Greg told the server, waving away the menus. “I’d like a skinny boy burger with streaky bacon, chili fries and a vanilla malted, and my friend will have the pastrami sandwich and a root beer float. Oh and two glasses of still water, please.” He swiveled his stool towards Mycroft. “Have you had pastrami before?”

“I can’t say I’ve had the pleasure.” Mycroft said doubtfully.

“Don’t worry, you’ll love it. If not I’ll trade you.” Greg said confidently. ” Jude and I went to New York City for our honeymoon and I’ve been hooked on pastrami ever since. You’ve spent time in America, yeah?”


“Too busy working to sample the local cuisine?” Greg asked.

Mycroft unfolded his napkin. “I always get an authentic bagel when I’m in New York. It’s the only place I’ve ever had a truly good one.”

“Oh man, the bagels...”

“Have you brought your wife here?” Mycroft asked, placing his napkin primly on his lap.

Greg was a little taken aback. “Ex-wife.” He corrected. “No, I never came here with Jude. You’re the only person I’ve ever brought here, Mycroft.”

Mycroft raised his eyebrows. “Yet you know the menu well enough to not need to refer to it.”

“It’s a guilty pleasure. We had a murder in Canning Town a few years ago and one of the DCs knew about this place. Been coming ever since.”

The server brought their water. Mycroft adjusted the position of his glass, moving it directly over his knife.

Greg regarded Mycroft seriously, watched him focus his attention on the water glass. “I was with Jude for sixteen years.” He said. “And we’ll always share Georgianna. She’s part of my life, part of many of my memories.”
“Do you miss her?” Mycroft’s voice was devoid of expression. He took a sip of his water and replaced the glass precisely.

*Was he jealous? Of Jude?* Mycroft had no reason to be, Jude was the past. “No.” Greg told him.

“There are things about the relationship that I miss, but Jude? No, I don’t. For a long time I thought I’d spend my life with her... but the last few years... I should have left sooner. I might not feel so... bitter...” Greg shook himself. “No point moaning. I’m happier now than I’ve been in a decade.” He smiled self-deprecatingly. “What about you? You ever miss having a relationship?”

Mycroft smiled a smile with a complete lack of humour or happiness. “As you say, there are things about it that I cherished, but overall it was a lot of work for little return. I’ve been better off turning my energies elsewhere.”

Greg goggled. He’d thought he was bitter, but Mycroft was taking bitterness to new levels. What had happened to him?

He was saved from answering by the arrival of his malted milkshake and Mycroft’s root beer float. “Oh good.” He smiled his thanks to the server.

“What do I do with it?” Mycroft asked, touching the handle of the long spoon that protruded from the glass.

“If it were me,” Greg said, happy to be back on more familiar ground. “I’d eat some of the ice cream with the spoon — from the bottom, where it’s mingling with the root beer. Then I’d stir it so the ice cream mixes with the pop and drink it through the straw.”

“That’s... detailed.”

Greg laughed. “Try it. And then try this.” He said, holding up his malted. Unless you don’t care to share.”

“I don’t mind.” Mycroft said with a small smile. Tentatively he scooped some ice cream from inside the float and ate it. “It’s... interesting.” He said. “Good.” He stuck the spoon in the glass for another bite.

“Here.” Greg said, offering his milkshake. Mycroft smiled again, took it and slid the root beer float towards Greg. He took a pull on the straw then grimaced.

“It’s good, but OH! Headache!”

“Brain freeze? Ugh.” Greg touched his knee in concern as Mycroft put his hands over his nose and brow.

“Sudden vasodilation of the sinus capillaries due to cold stimulus.” Mycroft said. “Hurts like a motherfucker.”

Greg laughed out loud at the unexpected profanity.

“Why are we having dessert before dinner?” Mycroft asked, concealing his smile.

“This isn’t dessert. They’re beverages.”

“If you insist.”

“I do.”
“Here you go, Hun.” It was the server with their food. She set Mycroft’s pastrami sandwich in front of him — it was magnificent, stuffed with pastrami, topped with coleslaw and Russian dressing on two slices of rye. The sandwich had been toasted and the aroma was exquisite. It was served with pickles and brown mustard.

Mycroft appeared unsure how to approach it.

“Go ahead.” Greg said, picking up his bacon cheeseburger. “Try it.” He pushed the basket of chili fries between them.

Mycroft cautiously picked up half the sandwich. Greg doubted he’d eaten anything larger than a croissant with his hands in years. Greg took a bite of his own sandwich in encouragement.

The bacon cheeseburger was incredible — the piquant combination of the salty streaky bacon, the savoury beef and the nutty tang of the cheese overwhelmed his tastebuds. “Mmm!” He closed his eyes for a moment, enjoying the sensory hit.

When Greg opened them again, Mycroft was smirking at him, his own sandwich as yet untouched. “That good?” He asked.

“Yeah. Eat!” Greg gestured at the hot pastrami.

Mycroft bit into the sandwich as daintily as was possible — more daintily than Greg had thought feasible. Mycroft’s eyebrows shot up whilst he chewed and after he swallowed and wiped his mouth with his napkin, he smiled with real warmth. “Divine.” Mycroft said.

Greg grinned. “Yeah, you like it!” He was chuffed, more chuffed by this even than escaping the light room so quickly. He speared a chili fry — a chip really, but this was an American-style restaurant, so ‘fry’ — and ate it.

They continued the meal, talking companionably. They talked about things they liked in New York, they talked about why Mycroft had to visit the Guggenheim the next time he was in New York, why Greg had learned Morse Code, Mycroft’s six months undercover as a sous chef where he’d learned his knife skills, how he’d been obliged to take on fieldwork at the beginning of his career and had hated every moment of those three years, they talked about Greg’s time as a uniformed copper in South London... Greg finished his burger and roughly half the chili fries. Mycroft ate two thirds of the hot pastrami sandwich (most with his knife and fork) and some of the chips. They finished both the malted and the float, sharing the drinks, and laughing.

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Mycroft felt very full and oddly content as he finished the decadent American-style meal. Greg... Greg was far more amusing than Mycroft had given him credit for. He’d wanted the man, thought he knew him... but Greg was proving to have hidden facets...

Mycroft wanted to discover everything there was to know about Greg Lestrade, to strip him bare, peel away each layer, learn every level, every nuance, to savour it all in his memory forever...

He wished he could have seen young PC Lestrade in his uniform. The very thought made his prick throb.
Mycroft went to the Gents, half hoping the detective would follow him, half appalled at the idea of having sex in a men’s room. Greg did not corner him in the bog — for the best, Mycroft told himself. He didn’t know what he would have done... gone along or protested...

When Mycroft returned, Greg had settled the bill and gathered their coats from the rack by the door. He allowed Greg to help him on with his overcoat, enjoying, just for a moment, the feeling of being cared for.

The night had grown colder whilst they ate and Mycroft turned up his collar against the freezing wind blowing off the Thames.

“I want a smoke, but it’s too cold.” Greg said and slipped his arm through Mycroft’s, pressing their hips and shoulders together, sharing body heat. It was quite pleasant.

Mycroft desired Greg — having had him had not rid him of the desire, rather it had grown aggressively, become a permanent occupant of his mind. He wanted to hear Greg’s panting breaths and soft moans as Mycroft swallowed him down. He wanted the thick aroma of Greg’s arousal in his nose, the bitter-salt taste of him on his tongue, to feel him writhe, skin hot and firm under his hands. He wanted to sink his teeth into Greg’s perfect thigh, leave the impression of his teeth, mark Greg as his own...

It was... terrifying. Mycroft could not remember when he had wanted anything so much. He quickly reviewed his most intense memories: hearing heartbreakingly beautiful music when he was five and weeping at the utter loveliness of it; reading voraciously, in love with knowledge, with the richness and depth and sheer number of books, feeling desperate to learn Latin and French and German so to devour all the words ever written; holding Sherlock, newly born and already frustrated, feeling a deep and undeniable kinship with the red and wailing infant; the first time he’d seen Henry, standing in the sunlight in the churchyard, his golden skin and tawny hair glowing, the air leaving his lungs in a rush as Mycroft understood that he had to touch the beautiful boy... nothing in his later life compared to the excitement and intensity of his young emotions. Not Jerome, not achieving his current high position, not even staring down his tremendously powerful American counterpart and seeing the man tremble!

His desire to know Greg — it was the first time hearing Bach, seeing the sun drenched boy in the churchyard, and realising the sum of the world’s knowledge was held in books and Mycroft could read! His feelings for Greg were all these things... and more...

Was this how Sherlock felt when he looked at John?

As abruptly as Mycroft had desired Greg, he rejected the entire notion. Emotion this strong was foolish, he knew that all too well. Mycroft forced himself to relive everything his desire for Henry had wrought — the humiliation, the exposure. The painful knowledge that beauty could be treacherous. Better to love Bach and Latin, to love knowledge and the excitement of working on a global scale, than something as mercurial as another human. Something he’d tried to impress upon his younger brother...

“Come home with me.” Greg urged just then, flagging a passing cab. He pulled open the door for Mycroft then crawled into the vehicle after him. Greg gave the cabbie his address.

YES! The word was on his tongue and Mycroft swallowed it. He took a breath to demure but Greg kissed him! In front of the cabbie! He pressed Mycroft back into the seat and claimed his mouth, his masculine scent overwhelming. His lips were firm against his own, his tongue seeking, prodding, opening his mouth and exploring... Mycroft could taste vanilla malted...
... the car pulled to a halt and Greg smiled lazily at him. “We’re here.” He said.

Mycroft blinked in surprise — the time had evaporated into Greg’s kisses. He watched stupidly as Greg stuffed bills through the slot and jumped out of the car, holding open the door and gazing at him expectantly.

He blinked — and Mycroft found himself following Greg up the thickly carpeted stairs to his sparsely elegant flat... the door closed behind them and Mycroft felt his back impact the wood as Greg tackled him against it, his mouth and hands demanding. Mycroft could feel Greg’s manly hardness through both their heavy coats...

He blinked again and his gloves were gone and he was wrestling with the buttons of Greg’s coat as he ground his own erection against Greg’s hip. Greg’s teeth and tongue skated over his neck and Mycroft heard a wanton moan that could not possibly have emerged from his own throat...

Mycroft let his jacket fall to the floor next to Greg’s, next to their coats. He took Greg’s hand and they raced each other to the bedroom, laughing. His face ached from smiling. He pushed Greg onto the bed under Hockney’s vibrant swimming pool and kissed him. He nibbled Greg’s jaw, tasting his end-of-day scruff, smiling at the thought of the whisker burn he’d have come morning. Greg grasped his nape and pulled him down for a proper kiss. Mycroft lost himself in Greg’s soft lips and wet, demanding tongue... it was quicksand and he was sinking...

Mycroft buried his face in Greg’s neck, inhaling the scent of him — the salty tang of sweat overlaying the faded spice of his aftershave. He licked down to Greg’s collarbone, pulling Greg’s jumper aside to reach. Greg giggled, the hand on Mycroft’s nape sliding up into his hair.

He found himself again smiling broadly — Mycroft loved Greg’s laugh. He hid it against Greg’s plum jumper and felt Greg’s chest shaking with it. It was absolutely delightful. He wanted Greg so much.

Mycroft growled and bit Greg’s nipple through his jumper and felt the vibrations in his chest change as Greg writhed beneath him, the hand in his hair tightening. Their erections ground together and Mycroft’s toes curled it was so good.

He leaned up to kiss Greg again — a clash of teeth, a smear of wet, hard lips — then slithered down the detective’s body to the floor. Mycroft untied one of Greg’s shoes and pulled it off. “Shoes before trousers.” He said. Greg guffawed on the bed, falling helplessly onto his back as Mycroft pulled off his other shoe. It was astonishing, how much Greg laughed! It was wonderful!

Greg’s laughter transformed into moans when Mycroft buried his face in Greg’s crotch, breathing hot breath against his cock through his trousers. He wondered if Greg could feel his smile.

He unfastened Greg’s denim trousers — denim trousers that hugged his arse perfectly — and peeled them and his pants down at once, until his muscular legs were bare beneath the tails of his shirt and jumper. Mycroft kissed along a darkly-furred calf, over his knee and onto the thick muscle of his quad. He bit into the tender flesh of his inner thigh, near where it joined his torso. Greg gasped and pushed himself up onto his elbows. His big fingers buried themselves in Mycroft’s hair as he nosed Greg’s bollocks and took one in his mouth.

Mycroft pulled Greg’s shaft upwards and licked it’s length. It really was a very nice cock, thick and long enough to seriously challenge his abilities. The foreskin slipped back naturally when Greg was erect, exposing the red and weeping slit. Mycroft licked it, then shoved his tongue inside the foreskin. Greg swore and his fingers tightened in Mycroft’s hair. He shucked the foreskin back with his hand, revealing the entire glans. He sucked on it, tonguing the underside. The heady smell of
Greg’s arousal grew thick.

He bobbed down its length several times, stroking it with his hand, sliding the foreskin along the shaft. He worked it deeper, feeling it intruding into his throat. He clutched his thumbs with his forefingers — a trick to suppress his gag reflex. (Mycroft had been skeptical at first, then he’d tried it.) He sucked more of Greg’s fat cock into his throat and swallowed. Greg cursed loudly and Mycroft hummed, amused. He managed to press his nose into the silver-threaded, black curls. He wished Greg would hold his head down — he’d have to ask him to do so next time. He felt the thick cockhead twitching inside him.

Mycroft pulled off with a loud, wet ‘pop.’ He shoved aside the shirttails and smeared the saliva hanging from his mouth on Greg’s abdomen, wiping it from his predatory smile. He climbed up Greg’s body, onto the bed and kissed Greg, pushing him down, taking control. “I want to ride you.” Mycroft told him, ignoring the heat in his cheeks. “Is that acceptable?” It was another fantasy he’d often indulged in — straddling Greg and using him, riding his cock to glorious orgasm.

Greg chuckled and brushed Mycroft’s hair back from his face. “Acceptable... yeah, that’s acceptable.” His smile was broad and fond.

Mycroft reached a long arm to the bedside table and opened the drawer. He took hold of the lubricant and pressed it into Greg’s hand. “You should prepare me.”

As he had done before the New Year’s Eve Ball, Mycroft had given himself an enema and spent time on the bidet — he was confident that, even after the meal, he was clean and tidy. He couldn’t imagine anything more embarrassing than inviting someone there when he wasn’t...

Still, he felt himself blush and that annoyed him. There was no reason for it!

Greg noticed, of that Mycroft was certain. But his expression didn’t change. He caressed Mycroft’s cheek and kissed him thoroughly. His hands plucked at Mycroft’s waistband. “Shoes off.” Greg said, his voice husky. “Then I’ll unwrap you.”

There was something in Greg’s eyes, something beyond fondness, that reignited Mycroft’s terror. But he obeyed the directive, standing up and removing his shoes and socks.

Greg took that time to pull his jumper, shirt and vest off over his head, revealing his powerful chest and arms. Mycroft reached for him and ran his hands over Greg’s shoulders, down over his pectorals to his trim abdomen, ruffling the dark, damp trail of hair at his navel. It was strange — he’d always imagined a rush of power when he’d fantasised about being clothed with a naked Lestrade. But it felt very much the opposite.

Greg began unfastening Mycroft’s waistcoat, unhooking his watch fob and setting the watch on the night stand. When the waistcoat was open, Greg unpinned the ornate tie bar from Mycroft’s swiss dot tie and set it down next to the watch. He unbuttoned his shirt, sparing a few seconds to thumb his nipples through the fabric, smiling at Mycroft’s audible intake of breath. He picked up Mycroft’s hand and kissed the heel of his palm, then removed the cuff link and pressed his mouth against the delicate skin of his wrist. He repeated the process with the other cuff link. They joined his watch and tie bar on the bed table, Greg flashing an amused smirk at the collection.

Greg’s big hands slipped under Mycroft’s shirt at the shoulders and pushed it and his waistcoat off. He set it gently aside on the chair. He kissed the freckled shoulders then lifted the vest and pressed his mouth to the slight softness of Mycroft’s belly, then his ribs, then chest. He caught a nipple between his teeth and sucked it. The vest was discarded.
He continued his attention to the firm, rosy nipple as he felt for Mycroft’s flies. Greg’s big fingers unfastened it deftly and swept down his hips, shoving trousers and Mycroft’s boxer shorts down before them. The fine wool suiting pooled around Mycroft’s ankles. Greg knelt to suck the jut of his hip and the soft skin where his leg bent at the hip. He licked the pale length of Mycroft’s thigh and nuzzled into the bright auburn hair of his bush. He encircled the long, slender cock with his thumb and forefinger and jacked it, pulling it towards his face and licking around the head. He took it into his mouth and bobbed, his tongue moving enthusiastically.

Mycroft felt on pins and needles, as if any movement would send him flying apart in a thousand different directions. He must have made a sound, given voice to his distress, because Greg stood, his erection large and damp and bumping Mycroft’s hip.

Greg didn’t smile or laugh, but the fierce look in his eyes was still there. It made Mycroft feel queasy. Greg pulled Mycroft into a kiss and used his body to gently bull Mycroft back onto the bed. “Roll over.” Greg told him. “I want to taste you.”

Mycroft blushed hotly again as he sucked in a breath. Rolling over allowed him to hide his face and to avoid seeing that hateful, soft look in Greg’s eyes, so he complied readily enough. When Greg urged him onto his knees, Mycroft remembered the week before when Greg had wanted to take him from behind and despite his earlier suggestion, he longed for it. After years without, rarely missing sex at all, Mycroft found himself craving Greg’s touch constantly. They’d had only two trysts and Mycroft could not stop thinking about it. He’d had to take care of himself morning and night every day this past week. He’d had to stop himself calling Greg.

Mycroft had chastised himself over and over, finding himself anticipating tonight’s date with an acuteness that had begun to unnerve him. He had had to strive to keep his productivity up at work. Twice, he’d caught Anthea looking at him oddly — he’d reviewed his own behavior and discovered a slight lag whilst he’d been daydreaming... unacceptable for someone in his position.

The insecurity that the... disagreement... with Greg had engendered... Mycroft could not stop himself reviewing it, perseverating over it. Greg telling him he felt manipulated. Greg saying he couldn’t be indebted ‘to a man like you.’ They echoed relentlessly in his mind. Greg had been gentle, had insisted he wasn’t calling the off the affair... though he had been deeply relieved, Mycroft could not for the life of him work out why not.

Greg knew him well enough to know that Mycroft manipulated people, situations, institutions. Greg must know that he would do it again — not purposefully, not after Greg had asked him so pointedly not to do so — but inevitably ‘a man like him’ would be true to his Machiavellian nature. It was a matter only of time until Greg ended this.

Mycroft’s thoughts cut off abruptly when Greg pressed his face into the cleft of his arse, panting warmly, his wet tongue tracing downward to the puckered ring of muscle. He spread Mycroft wide with his hands, his thumbs rubbing circles in the soft flesh near his core. Mycroft cursed under his breath as Greg kissed him right there, lapping at the tight knot and moaning contentedly. He alternated teasing up to the base of Mycroft’s spine and down to his perineum with circling licks around the sweet spot. Mycroft felt it slowly giving way to Greg’s fervent attentions.

He could not suppress an exclamation when Greg’s tongue entered him, the muscle spearing him wetly and wiggling within him. He buried his face in a pillow, muffling his obscene cries. He’d experienced this particular act before, but never so ardentely, never with such obvious enthusiasm... it went on and on, saliva dripping down the backs of his thighs as Greg tongue-fucked him with eager zeal. Mycroft lost himself in the sensations, drifting inexorably towards climax. He felt completely unmoored.
When Greg finally pulled away and opened the lubricant, Mycroft was startled to find his hand on his prick, a large, damp spot beneath him on the duvet. He quickly let go, searching for his bearings — only to lose them again as Greg easily slipped two of his thick fingers into his hole.

“God, you’re lovely.” Greg murmured, scissoring his fingers inside him. “I can’t wait for you to ride my cock. Mycroft... I want you so much!”

Greg had said that before, ‘I want you so much.’ To be so desired... it was intoxicating. Greg wanting Mycroft as much as Mycroft wanted him! It was his wet dream come true! His feelings soared dangerously.

Greg slid a third finger up his arse and Mycroft leaned into it. He fucked himself on Greg’s hand... what had he said last week? He’d shoved four of his big fingers into him and said he wanted to put his whole hand in. Mycroft had never been aroused by fisting, but now he wanted it! He wanted Greg’s hand inside him to the wrist — to the elbow! He wanted to consume Greg completely, wanted to feel his tight fist punch inside him over and over and over...

Then Mycroft was empty! He raised his head to protest and saw Greg slicking lubricant liberally over his cock. Mycroft moved quickly, peremptorily pushing Greg down onto his back and straddling his waist. He bent over and kissed Greg, tasting his own musk in the passionate crash of tongue and lips. He nipped Greg’s lower lip, harder than he’d intended, inspiring a yelp from the detective, and a painful tightening of his grip on Mycroft’s thighs. Quickly Mycroft sat up, reached behind himself to grasp Greg’s cock and hold it upright, then sank down upon it. Greg’s yelp of pain morphed into a groan of bliss.

Greg had prepared him well — and perhaps Mycroft’s body was becoming accustomed to Greg’s fat cock — because sliding down onto it was pure pleasure. He braced himself, placing his hands on Greg’s broad shoulders, and began to move. And, yes!, it felt incredible! He moved leisurely back and forth, up and down, Greg’s big hands on his thighs, clutching Greg’s fat cock with internal muscles.

“Fuck! So tight...” Greg moaned as Mycroft rose and fell. Greg’s face was fascinating — wide-eyed and breathless, looking up at Mycroft with wonder and confidence in his soft brown gaze. For a minute, Mycroft met Greg’s eyes with a smile of his own, and the connection was exquisite. Then he saw that other thing in those deep, brown eyes, the fierce, delicate thing that made Mycroft need to hide.

He squeezed his eyes shut and gyrated his hips, grinding down hard, focussing solely on the feel of the cock inside of him. It dragged along his inner walls, touching the deepest parts of him. He shuddered euphorically and it thrilled through his body.

Mycroft increased the pace, impatient now for more stimulation. He bounced on Greg’s cock, the bed’s recoil shoving it up inside him forcefully. Greg’s hands found his hips and the detective murmured encouragements — “Yeah, like that!” “Love being inside you!” “Yeah! Harder! Ride it! Ride my cock!”

He began to lose the plot a bit, every bit of his brain buzzing with physical delight. Mycroft leaned back and braced his hands on Greg’s raised knees, changing the angle, and the fat cock inside him scraped across his prostate. He shouted, keening long and loud, and redoubled his bouncing, taking Greg’s cock harder and faster... oh God! It was good! It was so, SO good! He felt Greg trying to hammer up into him, but he couldn’t stop his own movements, couldn’t stop the divine fucking... he was there! Almost there.... almost...

Almost...
Mycroft used his weight to impale himself on the phallus then lift up, hands and feet planted firmly on knees and mattress — ungainly, ridiculous and completely uncaring — and slam himself down again and again. He had no thought of Greg’s pleasure, no thought of his own jouncing prick or gangly limbs, no thought anything but Greg’s cock and the orgasm building inside him. If he could only fuck himself harder faster more he’d get there! He was sobbing in frustration — he was so close! So close!

A big, wet paw wrapped itself around Mycroft’s prick and stroked it firmly — once... twice... so good! The thumb swept over his glans... and, fuck, FUCK! That was it! Mycroft’s swollen balls exploded, setting off fireworks in his brain. It was so intense, Mycroft threw his head back, eyes screwed shut, a long, low song falling from his lips. He stopped moving, but Greg, bless him, hammered his cock up into Mycroft, fucking him through his climax, jacking his prick, milking it dry.

When he sagged back against Greg’s knees, Mycroft had the vague sense of strong arms then the mattress was under his back and his legs were bent almost to his chest, his knees hooked over Greg’s shoulders, and Greg was pounding into him. Sweat dripped from Greg’s face and his fingers dug bruises into Mycroft’s skin as their bodies slapped together loudly, and it was good... he opened himself up fully to Greg.

“Come inside me!” He urged. “Cum in me... Greg!” Mycroft craved it. Greg thrust and thrust, grunting with effort, until Mycroft felt the thick cock inside him become impossibly thicker and begin to spurt hot floods deep within him.

Greg cried out, ecstasy writ on his handsome features. He stabbed deeply again and again, emptying himself into Mycroft.

Finally he collapsed, limp and sweating. Mycroft had to struggle to release his legs, straighten them out. When he succeeded, Greg’s cock slipped from his slick, stretched hole and the emptiness was devastating. He felt the loss keenly.

Greg recovered enough to roll Mycroft onto his side and gathered him in his arms. Together they twitched with aftershocks. Greg’s manifested as soft giggles and Mycroft liked the feel of his chest vibrating against his back.

Slowly they settled, sweat drying and limbs tangling. Mycroft turned onto his belly, still in the circle of Greg’s embrace, so the ejaculate wouldn’t leak from his body so quickly. There was something about the very idea of Greg injecting his semen deep within him that appealed on a base level, and he greedily wanted it inside him as long as possible.

He felt Greg’s breathing even out and Mycroft allowed himself to close his eyes and drift away.

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Mycroft felt Greg move. It was dim, but the lamp still burned on the bed table. Greg sat up and Mycroft turned to squint at the clock. It was almost three in the morning. They’d slept for hours.

Greg’s hand caressed his side. “Thinking a shower wouldn’t go amiss about now.” Greg said, his voice rough with sleep. “Join me? It’s not as roomy as yours, but it could work.” He smiled at Mycroft.
Mycroft was loath to get out of the comfortable bed — a shower would disrupt his sleep cycle thoroughly. But he had to urinate. And he felt sticky and dirty.

He nodded his assent and climbed off the bed. His legs complained sharply.


“Guess I was a little over enthusiastic.” Greg said chastened.

“No.” Mycroft touched his face. “No, you were perfect.” He leaned down and kissed him lightly.

“You sure? You don’t have to spare me ego.”

“I’m not.” Mycroft assured him. “You were amazing — it’s worth a few sore muscles.”

“You would tell me, though...”

“I would. I promise.” He kissed Greg and grimaced. “In the spirit of full disclosure, I must tell you your breath is appalling. And I’m certain mine is no better.”


Mycroft blinked at the bright light in the bath. Greg started the water warming in the tub and produced an antibacterial mouthwash. He took a slug and passed the jug to Mycroft as he swished it in his mouth. A wise precaution, he recognised taking a mouthful.

Scratching idly at the dried mess matting the hair on his belly, Greg opened a cupboard and handed a packaged toothbrush to Mycroft. He spat the mouthwash in the sink and rinsed, then moved away to allow Mycroft to do the same. He took an electric toothbrush out of the medicine cabinet and applied toothpaste as Mycroft tore the packaging off the new toothbrush.

There was something about sharing the sink, cleaning their teeth together, that appealed to Mycroft. It was... pleasant. Companionable in a way he’d rarely experienced. He and Jerome had had separate loos.

“Hey, erm... I hafta... my bladder is full.” Greg indicated the toilet. “You can step out if it bothers you.”

Mycroft smirked a little. “No, it’s fine. I too...”

Greg grinned, his eyes twinkling, and turned to the toilet to slash. Mycroft couldn’t help but watch out of the corner of his eye. Greg’s cock was so very nice... and it was growing half-hard in Greg’s hand as if it sensed Mycroft’s eyes on it.

When it was his turn, Mycroft found his prick was already awakening. Not so much that it made urination difficult, but enough that he hoped Greg might run his soapy hands over his body again in the shower — as he had done the week before but with more interesting results.

He finished and flushed. Normally he would wash his hands, but he could do that in the shower. Greg held the curtain for him and he stepped carefully over the high lip of the tub into the spray. Greg climbed in behind him.
He reached around Mycroft for the bar of soap as Mycroft doused his head. Strong, slippery hands stroked down his back.

Then Greg cursed softly and his broad open palm ran down Mycroft’s wet buttock to his thigh. “Spread your legs.” Greg hissed in his ear.

Mycroft understood — he’d felt Greg’s semen from their earlier coupling leaking down his thighs.

“Beautiful.” Greg crooned, his voice husky. His hand brushed through the ejaculate, smearing it even as it mixed with water. Something bumped against his arse and Mycroft realised Greg was aroused, was fully hard again. The thought had a similar effect on Mycroft and he arched his back, pushing his arse into Greg’s hand.

“Greg...” Mycroft was blushing again, but he was thankful Greg couldn’t see it. “I want you.” He whispered. “So much. Right now. Take me — fuck your semen inside me. Take me, here. Now.”

Greg moaned and rubbed himself against Mycroft’s arse, the hot water cascading between them. “You must be sore...”

“I’m not.” He was, but he didn’t care in the least. “I need you.” Mycroft moaned. He reached back and pulled Greg against him, his skin hot on Mycroft’s back.

As one strong arm wrapped around his chest, Mycroft felt the soapy fingers of Greg’s other hand stroke his cleft, down over his entrance, across his perineum to cup his bollocks.

“Come inside me again.” Mycroft whispered. “I’m ready for you.”

Greg moaned and Mycroft felt his cock bob and press against his arse. Greg thrust across his hole and Mycroft gasped at the pleasure from just that. “You’re sensitive.”

“I’m ready.” Mycroft repeated, arching his back, rubbing his arse against Greg’s groin.

Greg swore floridly. He thrust his cock up the cleft of Mycroft’s arse and swore again. “I want to fuck you, Mycroft.” Greg said finally. “So much! But this isn’t my first rodeo. I’ve bottomed once or twice...”

“You!” Mycroft exclaimed.

“Yeah, me!” Greg laughed. “After what we did earlier, I know you’re sore. I know it’s not a good idea to go again... not so soon. Jesus... your arse is gorgeous! It would be so easy... but fucking is far from the only thing I want to do to you...”

He was right. Mycroft knew he was right, but he wanted it! He nipped the ridiculous tantrum he felt rising within himself in the bud, disposed of it along with the feeling of rejection. “Yes, OK.” Mycroft said, pulling away.

“Wait.” Greg said, his arms tightening. “Kiss me.” He bit lightly at Mycroft’s neck. Sighing, Mycroft turned his head and their lips met in an awkward kiss. Greg snogged him thoroughly, then scraped his teeth down the long, pale neck to press open-mouthed kisses on Mycroft’s shoulder. “Indulge me.” He urged.

Mycroft’s body was still tingling from the wet kisses. “I draw the line at kneeling on porcelain.” Mycroft told him with the ghost of a smile.

Greg laughed, the puffs of staccato breath warm against his damp shoulder. “I have something else in
mind.” He said. “Cross your legs. Hold them together tightly.”

Mycroft complied, realising his intent.

Greg retrieved the bar of soap and rubbed it between his hands. Then he pressed his soapy cock into the tight crevice between Mycroft’s legs. Mycroft bent forward and braced himself against the wall with both hands, moaning as Greg’s erection stroked over his sensitive hole.

“You like that?” Greg asked huskily. “I’ve been... I’ve been thinking about you all week.”

“Have you wanted my arse all week long?” Mycroft asked, warming to the dirty talk. He pushed back wanting to feel Greg’s cock again.

“Mmmm.” Greg affirmed. “And this.” A big, soapy hand closed around Mycroft’s prick and stroked.

“Oh, god!” Mycroft gasped.

Greg’s other hand grasped his hip, digging into already-bruised skin as he pushed himself into the tight space between his legs, jacking Mycroft’s prick in rhythm.

“I wanted to eat your arse, feast on it. All week, I regretted not doing it last time” Greg moaned, low and long. “I’m so glad you like being fucked.” His slippery cock brushed over Mycroft’s hole again, making him shudder with pleasure.

“I thought about you fucking me.” Mycroft admitted. His nipples were hard, and Greg’s firm hand stroking his prick felt amazing.

Greg began to thrust between his legs, his cock sliding over Mycroft’s perineum and into his bolloeks. “You thought about me?”

“I wanted you.” Mycroft blushed hard, grateful Greg couldn’t see it. “I thought about calling...”

“You should have...” Greg gasped. “Or just come over... anytime.” He was fucking forcefully now, his rough hand stroking and stroking, twisting over the dripping head and sliding back down to the root...

“Harder!” Mycroft gasped. “Greg!”

Greg grunted and gripped Mycroft’s prick firmly, his hand flying as he piston his cock in the snug crack. “You like that?” He groaned. “You like my cock?!?”

“Yes!” He wished vainly that Greg were giving him his cock now. He knew without a doubt, that if Greg had followed him into the bog in the diner tonight — or any time — Mycroft would drop trou and bend over for him, would beg to be used, to be Greg’s personal cumdump.

That thought — being Greg’s cumdump — sent him over hard. His cock erupted and his vision whited out and for a long moment — possibly an eon — there was nothing but sparkling jolts of bliss juddering through his body again and again and again...

He opened his eyes. Mycroft’s toes were curled, his back arched and Greg’s hand was no longer on his prick, but hooked under his arm, supporting his weight. He was still pounding into the crevice between Mycroft’s thighs, still sending sparks up his spine every time he stroked over his sensitive hole.

Greg shouted, it was loud in the small, tiled room, and shoved forward. Mycroft almost fell then, as
Greg’s arms loosened. His rubbery legs, still tightly crossed, buckled and he slid on the slippery porcelain — but Greg caught him and pushed him against the wall with his whole body, still shuddering through his orgasm, cum slick and dripping from under Mycroft’s balls.

They stood that way for a long minute, the water cascading over them.

Then Greg loosened his iron hold and sagged down to sit on the lip of the tub, dragging Mycroft into his lap. The hot spray hit him mid-chest turning his skin pink.

They kissed, finding each other’s mouths, tongues stroking, lips sliding. Greg’s stubble burned his chin and cheeks and Mycroft didn’t care a whit. Slowly the heat of the water faded.

Later — after scrubbing themselves clean in the tepid water as quickly as possible, Greg making him laugh the entire time — Greg took him back to bed under the Hockney print. Mycroft stared up at it, the colours vivid even in the dark.

“Did you really think about me this week?” He asked softly, glad Greg couldn’t see the blush rising on his cheeks in the dimness.

“Oh yeah.” Greg said. “You too?”

“Yes.”

“I meant it, you can just show up on my doorstep. I’d be chuffed to see you.”

“I would call first.”

“Then call.”

“You prefer to text.” Mycroft said.

“Call.” Greg insisted. “If I’m working, I’ll say so.”

“You could call me.”

“You did give me the special phone number.” Greg said. “I thought about it. Figured I’d be interrupting.”

“If I’m working, I’ll say so.” Mycroft batted the words back at Greg.

“Difficult child.” Greg muttered, smiling fondly. His hands roamed soothingly over Mycroft’s back. “How about this, I’ll call Wednesday evening to discuss our next date. I was thinking maybe we could fit in two next weekend.”

“Let’s discuss it now and talk about something more interesting on Wednesday.” Mycroft growled. “Or Tuesday. You could call Tuesday, if you like.”

“Not Monday?” Greg teased.

“Why not Sunday? You want to ‘fit in’ a second date, why not Sunday?”

“I have Georgianna this weekend.” Greg said. “I’m picking her up tomorrow at noon. Or today, I guess.” He chuckled. “She’s been desperate to quiz me about our date on New Year’s Eve.”

Interesting. “What will you tell her?”
“I’ll tell her an extremely ‘G’ rated version of the truth.” Greg laughed. “She’ll love hearing that you threatened the party planner with arrest and divorce if he didn’t change to a better band and caterer.”

“Hmph.” Mycroft couldn’t tell if he was being teased or chastised.

“I think she’ll be excited that we went out again. But I know she’ll be disappointed that I haven’t caught Paul’s Drag Race yet. She keeps asking.”

“Rupaul’s Drag Race.” Mycroft corrected. He took a breath. “It’s on Wednesday night. Why don’t you come over and watch with me. You could stay the night.”

“I have to work in the morning.”

“As do I.” Mycroft told him. “It won’t be a late night.”

“I could...” Greg paused. “I guess I could bring clothes. Go to work from your gaff.”

“Yes.” Mycroft said archly. “From my gaff.”

“Shut it.” Greg laughed, his hands tightening around Mycroft’s shoulders. “Poncey git.” He sighed. “Still can’t believe I get to fuck your gorgeous arse.”

Gorgeous? Was his arse gorgeous?

Greg laughed and Mycroft felt it rumble through his chest. “I love your arse.” His hand dipped lower to caress the curve of Mycroft’s buttock. “Jesus, just touching you like this... if I could get it up again...”

Mycroft kissed him, a little sip on his lips. “If you could, I’d beg you to take me again. Properly.” He whispered. That reminded him, “Once or twice? You?”

“Yeah, of course. I tried it.”

“Twice?”

“Lotta blokes love it so much, being fucked... I wanted to try... then I wanted to try again, see if it... improved for me.”

“It didn’t.”

“No.”

“If I wanted to?”

“Oh, I’d let you fuck me.” Greg said good-naturedly. “Sure. It’s been twenty years... maybe I’d love it now.”

Greg wasn’t tense, wasn’t lying... he really would let Mycroft have his arse. “You wouldn’t.” Mycroft said decisively.

“Probably not.” Greg agreed. “Hard to know.”

“You aren’t actually curious to find out.” It was not a question.

“No.”
“Good. I like you how you are.” A top. A big, strong top.

Greg chuckled softly. “Wednesday night, then.” He murmured, patting Mycroft’s arse. He stopped abruptly. “Erm, no pressure. I’m not expecting anything...”

“Relax.” Mycroft told him. “And put your hand back on my arse.”

“Mmmm.”

“You’ll need me up and out in the morning so you can get your daughter.” Mycroft observed.

“Mmm, by ten. Half ten if you let me suck you off before you go ...”

“I think I can accommodate you.”

Greg laughed. Mycroft smiled against his rumbling chest.

—-

Mycroft found himself in a palace — Grecian columns defined long, cobbled hallways, the walls were built of yellow stone. He walked down the lovely, sun-splashed corridor and found the entrance to another hallway, and another... it was a beautiful place, quiet and safe... but it was a maze. Endless and foreign. Mycroft wandered...

There was light streaming through the window.

Mycroft felt Greg’s strong, masculine body pressed against his back, morning wood a hot protrusion against his buttock. Greg’s arm was wrapped around his chest possessively, and his breath was warm and humid against his neck.

If this wasn’t the best thing Mycroft had ever felt, his perfect recall was failing him. He catalogued every sensation and stored it carefully with his most prized memories.

He snuggled down into Greg’s arms feeling both exuberant and unaccountably sad.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year, everyone! Hope you enjoyed the date as much as Greg and Mycroft. And the little peek into John and Sherlock's saga...

Trinity Buoy Wharf is real, as is London’s only lighthouse. It was used for experiments and innovation and Michael Faraday, inventor of the Faraday cage, did do some work there, but I sincerely doubt the light room is a Faraday cage. ‘Longplayer,’ the Tibetan singing bowls, is real — listen here: https://longplayer.org/listen/live-stream/ — as is Fatboy Diner. However, I’ve never been to the Wharf personally and have invented the interiors out of whole cloth. The items Greg ordered ARE offered on the Diner's menu.

Next week, RuPaul's Drag Race... and a surprise guest.
The Key Holder

Chapter Summary

Mycroft had invited Greg to his flat on Wednesday evening to watch RuPaul's Drag Race on the Telly. Unfortunately, John needs a babysitter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mycroft picked up on the first ring. “Greg.” He said.

The Detective was due to arrive at Mycroft’s flat in just under an hour, calling now, the balance of probability indicated a problem. Either Greg had to work, or his daughter needed him...

“Hey, Mycroft, I was just about to head your way, but something has come up.”

_Something_? “You’ll be late?” Mycroft asked, hoping Greg wasn’t cancelling.

“I just talked to John. He and Sherlock… well, he needs a sitter for Rosie tonight and after they put together the puzzle room in the lighthouse for me, I owe them.”

For a moment, Mycroft indulged in a petulant fit of anger at his ever-inconvenient brother. But it was unproductive, and as was his habit, he banished the emotion to the dungeon where all his filial frustration was locked. He could hardly blame Sherlock, he had no idea that Greg had planned to spend the night with Mycroft. Not that he would particularly care if he did…

“Bring her.” Mycroft heard someone say. “I don’t imagine she stays up very late, we can watch the show after she goes to bed.”

Greg’s laugh sounded disbelieving. “Erm… you’re sure? I’d have to clear it with John first…”

“It’s no problem.” Mycroft had no idea what to do with a child. When she’d been here at Christmas, she’d traumatised Bast, chasing her around the lounge. The little Siamese had not come out for hours after his family had left. And then she’d looked at Mycroft accusingly. “I’ll speak with John if you like.”

“No… no, I’ll talk to him. I was just going to go over there — he might want her in her own bed. I’ll call you back, yeah.” Greg rang off.

Mycroft looked down into the pot of soup he’d been stirring. He’d baked sourdough rolls and the aroma filled the kitchen making the industrial stainless steel seem warm and cheery. He almost never made time to cook these days… now he felt foolish for doing so.

He berated himself for building tonight up in his mind. If he hadn’t, if he’d kept it in perspective he wouldn’t be feeling so let down now. Greg would simply come over another night.

They had another ‘fabulous’ date scheduled for Friday, just two days away, and after the puzzle room, it was logical to anticipate something special. (Or a complete dud — could anything live up to their ‘first’ date?) But, this evening was different, just a casual get-together to watch telly. Nothing
His phone sounded, and Mycroft picked it up. “Greg.” He greeted the detective.

“Yeah, erm, John says ‘no problem.’ If the offer’s still open, that is.”

“Yes, of course. The child is my niece for all practical purposes.”

Greg laughed soundly at that. “Yeah, I guess she is.” He said. “Maybe don’t tell John, I think I pissed him off the other day saying something along those lines.”

“Indeed.”

“Yeah. Anyway, I’m on my way to Baker Street now to pick up Rosie and her ‘accoutrement.’ I’d forgotten how much stuff babies need.” Greg told him. “So, I’ll be a little late. Should I text or just have the doorman announce me?”

“You’re driving?”

“Yes.”

“Pull around to the parking garage. I have several extra spaces, you can park there. Text when you get here, I’ll come down and help you bring everything up.”

“Oh. Yeah, sounds great.” Mycroft cursed himself — he knew his comparative wealth disconcerted the Detective Inspector, and he’d not wanted to flaunt it. Most of the apparent affluence — the flat, the car, the chauffeur — weren’t his anyway. They belonged to the government, perquisites of his position. Necessary ones, security and convenience were paramount…

He gave Greg directions to the garage entrance and to his parking spots, disliking the formality that had sprung up between them.

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“Is he your boyfriend now?” Georgianna asked impishly. She’d peppered Greg with questions about Mycroft from the moment he’d picked her up. He’d distracted her Saturday with a movie marathon — *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy had kept her rapt for most of the afternoon and evening — but she’d picked it up again Sunday morning.

They were at the Tate Modern — one of their regular father/daughter activities. They knew the permanent collection by heart, but Georgianna liked to visit her favourites, and then they’d take in one of the special exhibits. Today was a Picasso exhibit of abstracted nude females. Greg had his thoughts on Picasso’s misogyny vs. his importance to art history sorted, ready for discussion. Picasso was not one of Greg’s passions, to put it mildly. He had about as much patience for Picasso as he did for Hemingway — both so narcissistically wrapped in their male privilege, Greg could barely stand it. He was looking forward to taking his daughter to the Jenny Holzer exhibit in a few months. He thought she’d enjoy the marriage of technology, surrealism and second-wave feminism. Greg knew he would.

“No.” Greg told her. “He’s not my boyfriend.”
“But you’re going out.” She protested.

“We have gone out several times, yes.”

“So…?!”

“Georgianna.!” Greg reigned in his impatience. He changed course. “What exactly is the criteria for having a boyfriend?” Greg asked. “It has to be more than a couple dates.”

She sighed thoughtfully. “Well... you like each other a lot, you go on dates, you only go on dates with each other, no one else... you kiss... and stuff...”

“And stuff?” Greg asked, wishing immediately he hadn’t. “Nabil want to do stuff with you?”

“Dad!” She looked embarrassed — for Greg, not for herself. “Nabil isn’t my boyfriend!”

“No?”

“No!” Georgianna said firmly, tossing her dark hair. She poked her father, all business. “You still haven’t told me your boyfriend’s name.”

“He’s not my boyfriend. And, no, I haven’t.”

She scoffed. “What’s your ‘criteria’ for him being your boyfriend, then?”

“Sarcasm, Gigi.”

“Georgianna.” She said, rolling her eyes. “I wasn’t being mean — I gave you my ‘criteria.’ Now you tell me yours — how am I supposed to learn, Dad, if you won’t tell me?”

“All right.” Greg said, beaten as he so often had been by her mother. He slung his arm around Georgianna’s shoulders and pulled her close as they walked along. “All the stuff you said — though we officially don’t meet all your criteria yet. All that, and then I think you need to have an agreement that you’re serious about each other, that you aren’t just going to disappear at some point. Not like getting married or anything... but invested.

“But... you’re not seeing anyone else, right?... aren’t you already invested?”

“It’s too soon to say. We’re still getting to know each other. You can’t know if you really like someone until you spend some time together, discover a few flaws. There might be a deal-breaker you can’t see right away.”

Georgianna thought about that. “What’s he like?” She asked.

“Well...” How to describe Mycroft Holmes? “He’s very smart — probably the smartest person I’ll ever meet. Proper genius, like Alan Turing. Or Einstein.”

“Oh! What does he do?”

She’d asked this before, Greg remembered. He’d been purposefully vague then. “He works for the government. I’m not sure exactly what he does, but he’s awfully busy. I think he’s pretty important. But not someone you would have heard of.”

Georgianna giggled. “He’s not the PM then.”

“No, he’s not Teresa May.” Greg told her archly, enjoying her giggle. “He’s not like anyone else —
he's not a regular bloke. He’s a bit old fashioned, he wears bespoke suits and has a pocket watch. I think he started dressing like that when he was younger, so people would take him seriously, but now it’s habit.”

“Is he posh?”

“Yeah, I guess so. And a bit poncey too. But he has a good sense of humour. He can laugh at himself.”

“Are you going to be posh then?”

Greg laughed out loud. “Ha! No!” Georgianna laughed with him, her giggle infectious. “Can you imagine me a toff!? No, not me.”

They laughed together soundly at the thought. “Is he rich?” Georgianna asked finally.

“I... I don’t know.” Greg told her. “I haven’t asked. But I think he’s... in-between. He might seem rich to normal people like us — he has a nice flat, went to a posh school — but to people who are really wealthy, they wouldn’t think he was.”

Georgianna digested that. Then she grinned impishly. “Who would he be in Lord of The Rings?” She asked. “Gandalf?”

Sauron. Greg thought immediately. But that wasn’t right — Mycroft wasn’t evil. Not Wormtongue either. “Mmm... maybe Gandalf if he looked more like Elrond. Yeah, Gandalf worked behind the scenes, making sure good things happened and bad things didn’t.” Greg nodded. “Gandalf.”

“Posh Gandalf.”

Greg laughed hard at that. “Posh Gandalf. Yeah.” He mussed his daughter’s hair and she squawked and ducked away.

“Da-ad!”

“What about you? The Lady Arwen?”

“Mmm, no. Pippin.”

“Pippin?! That troublemaker! No — how about Eowyn, sword maiden, battlefield hero.” Greg realised that there were only three women in the damn movies... it was good that Georgianna didn’t limit herself to those characters — as Greg himself just had.

Georgianna grumbled. “Pippin!”

“Alright, Pippin. Who am I then? Gimli Son of Gloin, trying to protect you from Orcs?”

“No, Dad! You’re Aragorn!”

Greg was taken aback — Gigi was serious. He was flattered to bits. “Strider? No... Boromir maybe. The steward not the king.” How much longer would she think of him as a hero? Probably not much... the thought made him sad, his girl was growing up

“Not Boromir! You’re not weak!”

“Isn’t everyone weak in the face of the ring?”
“Not Aragorn! Not Galadriel!”

“So... I’m Galadriel?” Greg asked laughing.

“No!” She punched him, giggling. “Aragorn! Or if you won’t... Faramir!”

“OK. Faramir.” Greg agreed to the more modest character. “Twenty years on when he’s got gray hair and has a smart daughter — a sword maiden like her mother Eowyn.” Georgianna grinned at that.

Greg giggled to himself as she ran ahead into the Picasso exhibit. “Posh Gandalf.” He muttered, imagining Gandalf and Aragorn getting it on. Or Gandalf and Faramir... Ian McKellan probably wouldn’t have minded either too much, he thought.

“More naked ladies!” He heard Georgianna complain. “Why is it always naked ladies?”

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“You should have told me you had a date.” John said. “I could have called Molly.” He was hauling out a folded-up thing that was half playpen, half cot. Gigi had had one just like it. Greg remembered it well.

“No, I owe you, mate. Rosie and I are going to have a good time. Aren’t we?” He asked the toddler sitting on his hip.

“Ya.” Rosie liked him. She’d go right to Greg and lift her arms. Greg had always been a kid-magnet.

“And Mycroft’s looking forward to seeing her.”

That stopped John in his tracks. He turned to Greg with hands on his hips. “On Christmas day Mycroft followed Rosie around his flat with the hoover and a damp flannel.”

Greg laughed. “Did he now?” He addressed Rosie. “Did Uncle Mycroft fuss over the state of his carpets?” He tickled her belly and she giggled.

“You seem really happy, Greg.” John said.

“Do I?”

“Yeah. Erm, it’s good to see.” John zipped up the bag of Rosie’s stuff — a repurposed diaper bag — and handed it to Greg. “Please don’t take this wrong, but... I’m having a little trouble picturing you as a couple.”

“Well, you’ll see it first hand when you pick up our girl.” Greg said easily. “Reminds me, what do you have on tonight? Sherlock have a case?”

“Erm, no. I asked him about... about the stuff you told me last week. When he was... away. He... we’ve been arguing. Or not arguing, we try not to argue in front of Rosie. I thought if we had some alone time to hash things out...”

Greg reached out and touched John’s arm. “Good. That’s good.”
“You know, Sherlock said Moriarty’s dead, that he died even before he jumped.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Well, that’s what I was told, anyway. Didn’t see him meself.”

“Greg… I get that Sherlock thought he had to jump, fake his death. I get it. I do. But he should have told me. He let me believe he was gone for two years. Two years!”

“John… I know. I felt the same way when I found out he was alive and I’m nowhere near as close to him as you are.” Greg sighed. “He had his reasons. You — and I — may not agree with them… but put yourself in his shoes. He sacrificed everything to keep the three of us alive. If he thought telling you would put you in danger… I’m not saying it was the right decision. I’m saying I can understand where he’s coming from. You forgave him once, John.”

“Yeah. It’s just all coming up again.”

“Listen to what he has to say. Wait until he’s finished to make up your mind.” They had moved closer whilst they talked, and Greg put his arm around the shorter man. Greg had seen his suffering up close those two long years. “Give him a chance.”

“My brother’s not enough for you, Lestrade, you have to take John too.” Sherlock had emerged from his bedroom.

Greg laughed at the outburst, completely unbothered. “That’s my cue. Come on, Rosie, let’s blow this popsicle stand.” He slung the bag over his shoulder and picked up the travel cot. The child’s car seat was already strapped into the back seat of his car.

“Don’t forget the Frog.” Sherlock called from the kitchen.

“Oh, right!” John looked around and spotted the stuffed amphibian on the floor by the couch. He retrieved it and tucked it under Greg’s arm. “You don’t want to go anywhere without the Frog. Trust me. Bye-bye, Rosie. Give daddy a kiss.”

“Good luck, mate.” Greg said to him in a low voice. More loudly he called, “Night, Sherlock.” He started down the stairs with Rosie in one arm, her luggage — and the Frog — in the other.

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Greg gave Mycroft the cot, and his overnight bag. He carried Rosie, Rosie’s bag and the car seat. And the Frog. In the lift, Greg grinned at the other man, the smile rising of its own accord and refusing to be replaced by a more appropriate expression.

Mycroft smiled back, a mere upturn of lips. But the sparkle in his eyes betrayed his delight. For a moment, they just smiled at each other.

Then the lift ‘dinged’ and the door opened onto the lobby, allowing a well-heeled couple to join them. “Good evening, Holmes.” The man said.

“Mr. Raleigh. Ms. Laughton. Mycroft said to the couple, no trace of his smile remained to give the greeting warmth. They both stared at Greg.

“Hi.” He said.
As the man inserted the key for their floor, the woman turned her attention to Rosie. She smiled and cooed at the child. “Who’s this beautiful girl?” She asked.

“This is Rosie. She’s visiting her uncle this evening.”

The woman’s eyebrows shot up. “Is Mr. Holmes your uncle?” She asked Rosie. Rosie stared at the woman silently. Ms. Laughton turned her focus back to Greg. “You must be his brother that we’ve heard so much about.”

Greg laughed. “Ha! No, I’m not Sherlock.” He looked into her eyes for the first time and realised she was older than he’d thought. The cosmetic work was top quality, her skin smooth and pale. But the small lines around her eyes and mouth and the brown and speckled décolletage gave her away. “I’m just the nanny.” Greg said.

“Detective Chief Inspector Lestrade is not my brother’s nanny.” Mycroft contradicted as the lift pulled to a stop.

“Oh!” The woman said. The doors opened with a ‘ding,’ and the couple said an uneasy good night to Mycroft and left.

When the doors closed again, Mycroft gave him a look. “The nanny?” He asked.

Greg shrugged, his grin reappearing. Mycroft rolled his eyes, but Greg saw the smile he tried to hide.

The apartment was much the same as the last time Greg had been there, except most of the books had been shelved. Bast lay on the couch and a fire crackled in the hearth under the Turner. The painting took Greg’s breath away — he’d forgotten just how lovely it was.

First things first, Greg unburdened himself of everything except Rosie, and took her over to the sofa. Bast had sat up and was eyeing them warily. The girl wiggled excitedly. “When you meet a kitty,” Greg said. “You want to say hello before you touch her.” He held out his hand for Bast to sniff.

“See? Put out your hand, Rosie. Don’t touch her, let her come to you.”

Rosie looked to be on the brink of shrieking with excitement, but she stayed mostly still, wiggling just a little in the circle of Greg’s arm. Bast extended her neck and sniffed delicately at Greg’s hand. “See, she’s saying hello.” He told Rosie. Bast moved on to the toddler’s little hand, snuffling with interest. Probably still had her dinner on her fingers, Greg thought. Bast licked a finger and Rosie jerked with surprise.

“Oooo!” She said.

“Did the kitty lick you?” Greg asked.

“Ya!”

Bast had gone back to Greg’s hand, butting her head against it. He ran his hand over her back. “OK, Rosie, carefully pet the kitty. Don’t scare her. Isn’t she soft?”

“Kitty so soft…” Bast had found Rosie’s fingers again and begun licking them in earnest.

“Hold still.” Greg urged. Bast eased the side of her mouth along Rosie’s hand and walked under it, arching her back. “Pet her this way, with the fur, not against it. See.” Greg stroked the little Siamese.

Rosie was so excited, she bounced a little, bending her knees and reaching to grab at Bast’s fur.
“Flat hand, Rosie. Kitty doesn’t like to have her fur pulled.” Greg glanced up and saw Mycroft hovering nervously. Taking his eyes off Rosie was a mistake — Bast hissed and ran away, and Rosie burst into tears.

“Kiiiiitteeeeee!” She wailed.

“That went pear shaped rather quickly.” Mycroft observed.

Greg shot him a mildly dirty look as he hoisted the distraught girl. He jounced her on his hip as he grabbed her bag. "Erm... kitchen..." He gestured and Mycroft nodded. In the kitchen. He set her down and opened the former diaper bag, keeping an eye on the tot. She continued to fuss fretfully. Mycroft followed him into the kitchen looking distressed.


Immediately Mycroft's stress was replaced with self-consciousness. “Nothing extravagant, just mushroom soup.”

“Come here.” Greg said, his eyes crinkling as he smiled. He pulled Mycroft into his arms and kissed him. “Hey you.”

Mycroft smiled shyly, and Greg felt him relax.

“I’m sorry.” Greg said. “This isn’t the night you had planned.”

“I’m happy to see you regardless.” Mycroft said.

“Me too.” Greg kissed him again. Mycroft’s arms tightened around him and the kiss deepened. Rosie’s fussing was trailing off into moaning.

“Doesn’t that bother you?” Mycroft asked.

“What? Rosie? After a month of fatherhood, you barely hear it anymore.”

“Fwog... Ungog, I waaant Fwoooog...”

“I’ve been summoned.” Greg said pulling away. He went back to unpacking her bag, pulling out a sippy cup and several Tupperware containers of various snack foods. Mycroft poured two glasses of wine and Greg accepted one gratefully. “Rosie,” He said calmly. “If you’re very good, and don’t whine, you might get a treat before bedtime.”

“Treat?” Rosie asked, with interest, her fussing cutting off abruptly.

“If you’re good and don’t whine, you might get a treat.” Greg repeated.

“I don’t whine, Ungog.” Rosie informed him.

“Good. That’s good. Because I can’t give a treat to anyone who whines.”

“But I wanna treat.”

“That sounds like whining.” Greg told her.

“No! It’s not!”

“Sounded like it.”
“No, I good.”

“Glad to hear it! Now, you were looking for the Frog? Can you ask without whining?”

“Fwog, Ungog, Pweese, Fwog.”

“That was great, Rosie! Good job. Stay in the kitchen with Uncle Mycroft and I’ll go get the Frog. I’ll be right back.”

“Uncof?”

Greg suppressed his laughter and left an alarmed-looking Mycroft in charge as he went to retrieve the Frog.

An hour and a half later, Greg sank down on the sofa next to Mycroft. “I forgot how exhausting that is.” He said.

“The way you spoke to her, she responded... well... better than I expected.” Mycroft said.

Greg chuckled. “Never underestimate the power of a pretty pony sticker. Or candy. Candy works best, but sugar right before you want them to go to sleep is a nightmare.”

Mycroft began massaging Greg’s shoulders. “Oh god, yes.” He said gratefully. Rosie had kept him on his toes — he’d coloured with her, played make-believe with the Frog, chased her around the lounge, picked up cheerios she’d spilled or dropped, sat her on the loo and read to her until she’d finished her business, then cleaned her up and tucked her into the travel cot with the Frog. “Thanks for reading to her.” He said to Mycroft.

Mycroft had been nominally helpful. He clearly had no idea what to do with a child. He had watched Greg interact with her with a sort of horrified fascination. Greg had asked — insisted, really — that he read her bedtime story.

“She can’t read to herself?” Mycroft asked.

“Erm... she’s a bit young yet.”

“Is she? I used to give Sherlock books to read quietly when he was her size.”

“I’m gonna go out on a limb and say Sherlock was not a typical two-and-a-half-year-old.”

“I thought him a bit slow. It took him ages to get through the set of Encyclopaedia Britannica.”

“Rosie has requested this.” Greg handed him the book. It took a bit of prompting, but by the second time through, Mycroft was reading expressively and showing her the illustrations

Mycroft needed no prompting as he kneaded Greg’s shoulders. His hands were strong and sure. Greg moaned a little.

“The saga of The Lonesome Puppy is truly a page-turner. I was on the edge of my seat for all three readings.” Mycroft slid closer as Greg turned to give him better access to his neck.

“I got her that book — Yoshitomo Nara did the illustration.”

“Bought in the Tate gift shop no doubt.”

“Fuck yes! Members get a ten percent discount.”
Mycroft laughed and wrapped his arms around Greg’s shoulders and nuzzled his neck. Greg turned to face the other man and kissed him, his upper lip first and then his lower lip, then both at once, licking across his teeth and pulling Mycroft closer so he could push his tongue deep into his mouth...

“This is nice.” Greg said. They were laying back on the sofa snogging, keeping their hands, for the most part, above the belt, and enjoying each other. It was lazy and sweet, and Mycroft smelled good.

“It is.” Mycroft agreed. They snogged for long minutes, petting and pressing together. Mycroft’s hand traveled up and down Greg’s muscular arm. Greg nibbled Mycroft’s neck, sucking a bit just above his collarbone. He began to unbutton the other man’s waistcoat, but long hands stopped him. “Not yet.” He murmured.

“No?” Greg asked, abandoning the buttons and stroking Mycroft’s back instead. “When?” He kissed Mycroft’s warm, willing mouth, closing his eyes and savouring the clash of tongues.

“When we’re alone.” Mycroft whispered.

“We are alone.” Greg pointed out.

“No truly.” Mycroft said, trying to pull Greg close again.

“What is it? Rosie?”

“Mmm.”

“She’ll never tell.” Greg assured him with a grin. “She wouldn’t tattle on Ungog.”

“It isn’t that… it’s…” Mycroft squirmed uncomfortably.

“Now you’re tense.” Greg observed. “You really can’t relax with Rosie in the next room?”

Mycroft huffed expressively. “I cannot. She could wake at any moment. She could be awake now!”

Greg poked the silent baby monitor. “She’s not awake now. And if she were, she couldn’t climb out of the cot.”

Mycroft smiled and made a heroic attempt to relax. “You’re right, of course.”

Greg sighed and sat up. “Didn’t you make dinner?” Greg asked. “I mean, I snuck a few cheerios, but…”

Mycroft’s smile warmed and softened. “I did.”

“Well, Let’s eat. This thing’s portable.” He lifted the monitor.

Greg poured more wine as Mycroft turned on the hob to heat the soup.

“Didn’t you read fiction when you were a kid?” Greg asked. “Did you just go right to the encyclopaedia and never look back?”

“I read some fiction. Watership Down, Alice Through the Looking Glass. I understood both were metaphorical. And then I read Tolkien.”

“You read The Lord of the Rings?” Greg asked, fascinated. What were the odds — he had just watched all eight hours.
“Yes. Then I read the *Silmarillion* and taught myself Elvish. I wanted to be able to converse with Elves in their own language as well as open secret doors and read hidden inscriptions. I was devastated to learn it was all make-believe. I felt profoundly betrayed by Professor Tolkien. Put me right off fiction.”

“How old were you?”

“Almost five. I remember on my fifth birthday I received *The Borrowers* and *The Bridge To Terabithia.* I thanked my Aunt politely then burned them in the garden the next day.”

Greg took a slug of his wine. He barely remembered Georgianna’s fifth birthday, let alone his own. He felt sad for little Mycroft striving for erudition, looking forward to meeting the cultured and educated Elves, living among them like Gandalf and Aragorn, only to find it was fantasy. “You burned them? You have more in common with Sherlock than you let on.”

“I was never careless enough to get caught.” Mycroft informed him haughtily.

Greg laughed. “You never considered having kids?”

“*I* had Sherlock, isn’t that enough for one lifetime?” Mycroft looked at Greg. “You didn’t want children.” He said baldly.

Greg was taken aback. “No, erm, I never did. Probably why I’m such a shite father.”

Mycroft stared. “Don’t be so hard on yourself.” He said.

“Part of being a parent, mate.”

“You’re an excellent father.” Mycroft asserted as if it were indisputable.

Greg sighed and disputed. “I was never around when she was younger — always working, I guess. And now... I spend two days out of fourteen with her. Not exactly dad of the year.”

Mycroft frowned. “That sounds like...” He broke off and Greg had the distinct impression he had been about to blame Jude. “When your daughter is with you, you dedicate yourself to her.”

“If I can’t try to be a good parent for 40 hours every two weeks, what kind person am I?” Greg asked sharply. More sharply than he’d intended.

“Exactly my point, Detective Inspector —”

“Greg.” Greg corrected, thinking wryly how much he sounded like his daughter in that moment.

“Greg. My father was home every day by five-thirty, had dinner with us, spent evenings and weekends with us. I have never once had a useful conversation with the man — he exhibited no interest in my thoughts or accomplishments, no interest in sharing his own. After Sherlock was born, we exchanged nothing more than pleasantries for twenty years. He was *there* but it hardly mattered.

“You, on the other hand, spent your weekend talking with your daughter, you were interested in her thoughts and shared your own in an age-appropriate manner. You...” Mycroft’s eyes swept over Greg. “You took your daughter to a museum — balance of probability suggests the Tate Modern or the Victoria and Albert, they have the newest exhibits. I’d wager Georgianna has seen more art than most children her age know exists. And more to the point, you discuss it with her. You have an exchange of views... you...” Mycroft squinted at Greg. “You prepare beforehand, read up on pertinent topics simply so you *can* have these discussions with her. Your focus is completely on her.”
Greg frowned, how did he *know* all that?! “That hardly means—”

“Yes, that’s exactly what it means.” Mycroft cut him off. “You’re good with children — you’ve amply demonstrated that this evening. But you haven’t been content with mere mechanics, you’ve striven to connect with her as she grows older, to share your passions with her and learn about hers. Had my father — or Mummy for that matter — been able to do that... Sherlock and I might be very different people.”

“I can’t speak to Sherlock,” Greg said mildly. “But I don’t think you would be different, Mycroft. Not much anyway — you just told me that one of your earliest desires was to be almost exactly what you are today.” He was trying with his easy tone to bring the intensity of the conversation down a notch or two. “Instead of Elves and secret inscriptions, you work with thought-leaders around the world, deal in secrets, open and closing metaphorical doors. What you have achieved isn’t fantasy.”

Mycroft gazed deeply into Greg’s eyes and for a moment Greg saw the little boy who’d taught himself Elvish. Then Mycroft looked down at his pot of soup again. “I wish they were all thought-leaders.” He grumbled. Greg laughed, the tension melting away.

Mycroft served morel mushroom soup and warm sourdough rolls with clotted cream and a dry Riesling in the dining room. They sat at a corner of the enormous table, looking out over the Thames. The Can of Ham, Cheese Grater and Gherkin were all visible. In the distance, Greg could make out the Millennium Bridge that led to the Tate Modern. He’d walked across it with Georgianna three days ago.

“Ah, it was the Tate Modern.” Mycroft observed, following his gaze.


“I wouldn’t have taken you for a fan of Picasso.”

“I’m not. But it’s important to understand his work.” Greg considered. “I don’t want Georgianna to see herself in all those reclining nudes — or I don’t want her to only see herself there. Like Picasso did. It’s remarkable how much of Picasso’s attitudes about women are present, even obvious, in his work.”

“An interesting conversation, then.”

Greg smiled wryly. “She was much more interested in pumping me for information about you.”

“What did you tell her.” Greg thought Mycroft looked alarmed.

“Not much. Probably more than I intended to. I told her I won’t introduce you until we’re serious.”

“Until?” The word was startled. Mycroft closed his mouth looking momentarily furious with himself for speaking, before his expression smoothed into the bland smile.

“Mycroft...” Greg touched his hand. “I wouldn’t even have mentioned you if there hadn’t been extenuating circumstances. A good parent wouldn’t.”

Mycroft nodded. “Of course.” He said, but his expression didn’t change.

Bast chose that moment to reappear, leaping up onto the table with silent ease and stalking towards them. Mycroft made a disparaging noise. “My intention was to restrict her from worktops and table tops.”
The little cat sat down and regarded him solemnly, her bright blue eyes blinking ostentatiously. Her blue-pointed tail wrapped around her blue-pointed toes demurely. Mycroft smiled just a little. “She’s utterly spoilt. She has the run of the place, civility and hygiene be damned.”

“She’s got her eye on the clotted cream.” Greg said. “How long have you had her?”

“Three years in March.”

“She’s a purebred, yeah? She looks Siamese, but they’re tan.”

“Bast is a blue-point Siamese.”

“Well, she’s beautiful. Have you always had cats?”

“No... Bast is the first. She was a ... an accidental acquisition.”

“Oh?"

“The Bahraini ambassador’s wife breeds them. I was there meeting with some… ‘thought-leaders’…” Mycroft made a moue of distaste. “Bast escaped from her enclosure and invited herself to the meeting. There she decided my lap was the best place for a nap. She was... unobtrusive. I allowed her to stay. When the meeting ended, the ambassador and his wife insisted that I take her... I could not refuse — Bahraini custom places great store in gift-giving. My intention was to give her to Mummy or Aunt Pansy... but... she’s still here.”

Greg smiled. “She chose you. That’s an honour.”

“I don’t feel so honoured when I clean her litter box.”

Greg laughed. “At least she doesn’t bring you mice. Me Gran’s cat would bring them into the house and lay them on her bed. They were usually dead, but not always.”

“That does sound charming.”

“Once Tabby brought an entire squirrel. Took ’em an hour to get it out of the bedroom.” He glanced at Bast, trying to imagine her carrying a squirrel into Mycroft’s oak and baize bedroom. Somehow, he thought she’d manage it just fine.

They had finished eating. Greg helped Mycroft carry the plates to the kitchen.

“Weren’t we going to watch telly?” Greg asked. “What’s this show about, anyway?” He listened to Mycroft’s description as they cleaned up, with growing incomprehension.

But when they began to watch, Greg’s scepticism melted away. There was a lot he didn’t completely understand, but Mycroft was happy to fill in backstory, gossip and personal opinion. By the time two queens were forced to ‘lip synch for their LIVES!’ Greg was hooked.

“I can’t believe I’ve never heard of RuPaul.”

“You haven’t exactly kept au courant on gay culture. American gay culture.”

“No, I guess not. Is she — he? — just famous for being a drag queen?” Greg asked.

“RuPaul is a musician.” Mycroft informed Greg. “Alexa, play ‘Glamazon’ by RuPaul.” The music began pumping through the room — not so loud as to wake Rosie, but loud enough they felt the beat.
“It’s dance music!” Greg exclaimed. He grabbed Mycroft’s hands and pulled him off the couch. His hands found the taller man’s waist. “I know it’s not exactly your kind of dancing...”

“Oh it is.” Mycroft assured him, swaying his hips with the beat and grinding against Greg.

Greg laughed and matched the movements with his own hips. “‘Sashay, Chantè, panther on the runway...’” Mycroft was sexier and happier than Greg had ever seen him, relaxed and graceful as they danced, embodying the jubilant music. He nuzzled Mycroft’s jaw, his hands skimming down his ribs as they gyrated together.

When the song ended, Greg collapsed onto the sofa, pulling Mycroft down with him. “‘She’s so bloody tall!’” He laughed and Mycroft laughed with him joyfully.

Greg gazed into Mycroft’s eyes as they grinned at each other. “What else have I been missing?”

Mycroft ran his knuckles down Greg’s cheek, leaned in and kissed his lips lightly. “Lots of this.”

“Mmm... you’ll help me catch up then?” His fingers danced over Mycroft’s nape, pulling him back for a long, lazy kiss. Mycroft’s hands traced his jaw, his collarbones, down over his nipples and back up his ribs. He climbed onto Greg’s lap, straddling him, leaning down into the kiss, ramping up the urgency.

Not worried about Rosie any longer, Greg was happy to note.

Greg’s big hands found Mycroft’s hips, they stroked back over his buttocks then up to his waist. The chemistry between them was undeniable. Abruptly they were both wearing too many clothes. He tugged Mycroft’s shirt from his waistband, his fingers slipping underneath and touching smooth flesh. Mycroft gasped lightly and moved against him and Greg felt his erection grind into his own.

He pushed Mycroft sideways, twisting his body to lay atop him, crawling up to kiss him again. As their lips met, Greg’s cock rubbed against Mycroft’s through their trousers, and they both groaned loudly. Greg smiled and rubbed harder, kissing the man’s neck, sucking on his earlobe. He kissed a freckled cheek and then found Mycroft’s lips again, diving deep. Greg loved kissing.

This time when his fingers sought Mycroft’s buttons, he didn’t protest. Greg opened his flies wide and pulled out Mycroft’s hard cock. He stroked it, pulling the foreskin back from the head... his mouth was watering. He had loved sucking cock so much! It was hard to believe that he’d given it up.

Of course, Greg loved fucking and muff-diving too, he loved all of it. Kissing and stroking and licking and sucking, soft and hard, baps and fannies, firm chests and arses... but right now there was one perfect cock he wanted.

He kissed Mycroft once more, his prick straining in his trousers. Greg tossed a pillow onto the floor and levered himself down to kneel on it. He had Mycroft’s cock in his mouth right away, sucking the head and stroking the shaft. He shoved Mycroft’s trousers down, far enough to free his bollocks and reach a hand between his legs. Greg did just that, stroking his perineum and bobbing on his hot, hard prick. Mycroft gasped loudly and panted, his abdomen rigid.

Greg kissed the base and licked up the long shaft, fingerling the slit as he did, smearing his saliva and the precum over the side and down. He felt Mycroft’s hands settle on his head as he returned to suck the glans. He tried to open his throat and work himself down farther as Mycroft had the other weekend. But if Mycroft was seven years out of practice, Greg was 20. He choked and gagged and pulled back. He jacked it with thumb and forefinger and returned to licking under the glans, tongue-
fucking the slit and sucking on the head. The smell of arousal was thick in the air.

Mycroft was moaning, his fingers tightening in Greg’s hair as he sucked. Greg was so hard! He awkwardly unfastened his own trousers and released his cock, stroking himself as he stroked Mycroft. He found a good rhythm and sucked and stroked them both, tasting the bitter desire dripping from Mycroft’s cockhead. He groaned around the prick stuffed in his mouth… it all felt so good! Even the ache in his jaw felt good.

A loud, long twittering tone sounded, and Greg jerked up. “Fuck! It’s probably John.” He told Mycroft — once again tense and already beginning to wilt. “It better fucking be John.” Greg growled. He was stomping around the lounge, searching for his mobile, trying to tuck his erection back into his trousers.

Another alert sounded, this one deeper. Greg looked to Mycroft, who was also struggling with his flies. “The doorman.” He said.

“Right. Great.” Greg found his phone on the floor by Rosie’s colouring book. “Yeah, John’s here.” He said.

Mycroft was up and reaching for the intercom. “Yes?... Yes, please send Dr. Watson up. Thank you, Benji.”

Greg began gathering Rosie’s things together and stuffing them into her bag. He’d taken care of most of it already, but some of it had got away from him. Mycroft came up behind him carrying a sippy cup, a little Tupperware half-full of Cheerios and three books. Greg stowed them in the bag as well. He looked around — they had everything, he thought. And his erection was becoming less noticeable…

The lift ‘dinged’ and the door opened, and John Watson peered out. Greg realised the lounge was quite dim — his eyes had gotten used to it — and flicked on a lamp. He immediately regretted it when he sawt Mycroft.

Mycroft’s hair was a mess, his lips red and swollen, his collar unbuttoned enough to reveal a purple love-bite by his collarbone, and the tails of his shirt were pulled out over his trousers despite his waistcoat being securely fastened. Greg imagined he looked about the same except his shirt was still tucked in. Mostly. He surreptitiously wiped his mouth on his sleeve. John Watson’s eyes were round and staring.


John appeared to have recovered somewhat. Now he was smirking at them. “I interrupt something?” He asked.

“Oh, fuck off, John.” Greg told him easily. He put his arm around Mycroft’s waist. “You know what the babysitter gets up to.”

John laughed. “I guess I do.” He said. His eyes flicked between the two of them. Greg remembered what he’d said, that he couldn’t picture them as a couple. Well, Greg thought he could now. Vividly. “How was she?”

“Rosie was perfect.” Greg told him. “Put her to bed around 20:30 and she dropped right off.” He led John to the guest room answering his questions about use of the toilet and foods consumed. “There she is, little angel.”
“I hate to wake her.” John said.

“She won’t wake for long.” Greg told him. “Maybe not at all.” John reached into the cot and picked his daughter up, wrapping the blanket around her and tucking the Frog under her chin. Greg began collapsing the cot when he noticed Mycroft had followed along — he’d hurriedly attempted to straighten his hair and tuck in his shirt tails. He grinned and shrugged at the taller man.

In the lounge, John was buckling Rosie into her car seat — she was still asleep, looking as if nothing would disturb her. “I’ll help you get it all downstairs. You have a cab?”

“Yeah, it’s waiting.” John told him.

Greg shouldered the bag and picked up the travel cot. “Be right back.” He told Mycroft, with a smile.

“Oh, wait. Here.” Mycroft opened a cabinet and from its depths, pulled a key. “For the lift.” He said, handing it to Greg.

“Ta.” Greg said, stuffing it in his pocket. "Be right back." John had turned his smirking face away, busying himself with the car seat.

The lift opened immediately when called, still on their floor. Greg and John got in with their burdens. The doors closed, and John immediately began to snicker. Greg couldn’t help but giggle along, both trying to keep quiet for the sake of Rosie’s beauty rest.

“Jesus!” John sniggered. “I feel like I just caught me dad snogging me best mate!”

“Which one am I?” Greg whispered around his laughter. “Your dad or your mate?”

John laughed harder. “His face… his… his shirt tails!… I can’t… I can’t unsee that.”

Greg snorted. “At least you can picture us as a couple now.”

John giggled so hard he cried. “Fuck, I’m acting like I’m twelve years old… but so are you.” He accused Greg.

“Guilty.” Greg agreed as the doors opened. They both attempted to calm down for the walk through the sombre lobby. “Shhh…” Greg hushed John. “You’ll wake your daughter.”

That sobered John some. The doorman opened the door without changing his polite expression a bit. Which made them giggle again. Greg shoved the cot and bag into the cab as John buckled in the car seat.

He poked Greg. “You’re really serious about this.” He said. “Mycroft.”

Greg shrugged. “I’m serious about seeing where it goes.”

John nodded. “He looked at you like… well, like he’d struck gold. If you really like him, I’d say he has.” John pulled the door closed behind him and the taxi drove off.

Greg returned to the lobby. “Benji, right? I’m —”

“Detective Inspector Lestrade.” Benji nodded. “Mr. Holmes has made you a key-holder.” The doorman made it sound like a special title, like an O.B.E. or something.

Greg dug the little key out of his pocket. “You mean this? The lift key?”
“Yes, sir.”

Greg scoffed good-naturedly. “Me and all his assistants, yeah. Anthea and the rest.”

“No, sir. I unlock the lift for Ms. Jones. You are Mr. Holmes’ first and only key-holder.”

“Hmph. Well…” Greg had no idea what to say to that. He’d been seeing Mycroft for three-and-a-half weeks — if the hook-up on Christmas Eve counted as ‘seeing.’

“Good evening, sir.” Benji supplied smoothly.

“Yeah. Good evening.” Greg went to the lift, glancing back at the doorman as he entered. Inside, he fit the key into the keyhole next to ‘Twentieth Floor’ and turned it. The lift began to rise.

Chapter End Notes

Canned Ham, Cheese Grater and Gherkin - https://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/1s6sft/how_london_will_supposedly_look_when_all_currer
Millenium Bridge - http://www.walklondon.com/london-attractions/millennium-foottbridge.htm
The Tate Modern - https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern
Glamazon - https://youtu.be/3v_3oTrclIQ

Greg and Mycroft are getting to know each other better, talking, seeing each other in different situations. Letting some of the edges show. Here's hoping Greg doesn't come across one of those deal-breakers he told Georgianna about.

Next week: Their second AND third official 'Fabulous' dates.
The 'Second' Fabulous Date

Chapter Summary

Official date number two — just dinner and dancing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I think you’ll like this place.” Greg told Mycroft, hoping he was correct. It was an idiosyncratic dim sum joint, a neon floating city with amazing food that circulated the room on a circuitous conveyor belt. He’d only been here once before, meeting with a source for information about a drugs smuggling ring that had been leaving mutilated bodies in its wake. The food was so good, he’d stayed to finish his meal after the meeting ended. He’d always meant to come back. “The trick,” he told Mycroft. “Is to sit near the kitchen. The food is really fresh and you get first pick. If you sit up front, all the best stuff is gone.”

The floor was a bit sticky and Greg winced internally as Mycroft lifted his foot with a moue of distaste.

But as they were seated, Mycroft noticed the films that were being projected on the walls of the restaurant.

“Princess Iron Fan!” Mycroft exclaimed. Greg watched the black and white cartoon flickering silently on the wall.

“You know it?” He asked.

“I’ve seen it before. It was made during the Second World War. One of the first films made in China.” Mycroft smiled primly. “Cinema helps me keep my language skills fluent.”

“Right. You know Chinese.”

“Just Cantonese and Mandarin.”

"Of course... erm...what's it about?" Greg asked, taking a plate of shumai off the conveyor belt.

"It’s just a folk tale.” Mycroft told him doubtfully. “Not very interesting.”

"I’m interested.”

"Alright... erm, Princess Iron Fan is a demon. She lives in a cave in the mountains with her husband the Bull King. Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, wants to borrow Princess Iron Fan’s giant fan to cool active volcanoes so he can travel through the mountains. She refuses and Sun Wukong resorts to shape-shifting and trickery.”

“Mmm, trickery! That’s interesting... go ahead.”

“Eventually,” Mycroft continued with the slightest of eye rolls. “He gets the fan from her, but her husband Bull King shape-shifts into Sun Wukong’s travelling companion, Bajie, the Pig, and offers
to carry the fan. Sun Wukong hands it to him thoughtlessly, so in the moment of victory they are defeated. The Jade Emperor has to send his heavenly army to help Sun Wukong defeat Bull King and Princess Iron Fan for good."

"The Princess isn't the hero of the story?"

"No, the Monkey King is the protagonist." Mycroft picked up a bowl of congee as it passed by. "He’s one of the most enduring of Chinese literary characters."

"Right. The Monkey King."

Mycroft exclaimed in surprise, “Baijiu!” He snatched a pint-sized bottle from the conveyor belt.

"What's that?" Greg asked as Mycroft unscrewed the cap and sniffed.

“Baijiu is the most popular alcoholic drink in the world, though it’s rarely seen outside China.” Mycroft told him, excitement in his voice. “I’ve only had one variety... I wonder if they have all four here?"

Greg hadn’t known, but the Jade Conveyor Dragon Dim Sum Deluxe was one of the only places in London that offered Baijiu. Mycroft seemed more excited by the slightly shabby restaurant than Greg could have hoped! He plucked a second, differently coloured bottle off the belt as it drifted past.

"Baijiu is traditionally drunk in small shot glasses, and downed in one go." Mycroft told him, signalling the server. He spoke to her in rapid cantonese and she smiled shyly and replied. Mycroft smiled back and asked a question. She responded and he repeated her words. "They do have all four here. She's bringing us Baijiu glasses."

"What was that all about?"

Mycroft smiled humbly. “She was so kind as to correct my pronunciation. I’m out of practise.”

The four varieties of Baijiu were Sauce Aroma, Rice Aroma, Strong Aroma and Light Aroma. Each had a different, interesting and quite strong flavour. On an official visit to Beijing, Mycroft had been served Rice Aroma, the mildest variety of Baijiu, which resembled a fruity grappa. The other three were quite the revelation. Greg and Mycroft compared, contrasted and argued their Baijiu preferences, whilst eating their fill of pork buns and prawn dumplings.

“The food at state dinners isn’t nearly as good as this.” Mycroft proclaimed, plucking a taro cake from the conveyor belt. “They either try too hard to cater to Western tastes or go the opposite direction and serve sautéed duck feet and fried pork intestines. Have you ever eaten a duck’s foot? Even de-boned it’s tough. Too tough to bite through — and one can’t cut them with chopsticks — so one ends up with the entire foot in one’s mouth. As I recall my solution was to swallow them whole.”

Greg smirked. “Putting your talents to work.”

Mycroft smilingly rolled his eyes and took a bite of his dumpling. He ate it delicately but with great relish. “Have you tried the red bean dumplings? They’re simply astonishing.”

“Astonishing!” Greg grinned. “I have to try that.” He plucked a dumpling off the little plate and popped it in his mouth. Mycroft looked disconcerted. As Greg chewed and swallowed the bite, he began to feel guilty. “What?”
“It’s nothing.”

“You don’t like to share?” Greg asked.

“It’s never been a ... consideration before.”

“Oh. Erm... I won’t do it again.”

“No, it’s... fine.” Mycroft said, looking surprised at himself. “I don’t mind.”

“Well, good.” Greg smiled. He poured two shots of the unctuously sweet Strong Aroma. “Cheers.” He clinked Mycroft’s glass and they tossed the Baijiu back.

What Greg, and possibly Mycroft, didn’t realise was that Baijiu has a very high alcohol content. Sharing four pints of 80 proof liquor was more than enough to render them pissed.

Greg was drunk enough that by the time they got to the mango pudding and thousand-layer cakes, even the mushroom-scented Sauce Aroma Baijiu was tasting pretty good. He downed a shot, the umami liquor sitting oddly on his tongue. "This stuff's getting better. I think we're drunk."

“I am not drunk.” Mycroft insisted drunkenly, downing a shot of the chamomile-and-fruit Light Aroma. “I don’t get drunk.”

Greg laughed at him and pushed a sweet Sesame Ball across the table. “The Iceman is immune to the effects of strong drink?” He asked. Greg, who through long practise could hold his liquor rather well, thought he was not quite as pissed as Mycroft.

“I am The Iceman.” Mycroft asserted.

“I’ve heard that.”

“I cometh.”

Greg waggled his eyebrows. “Yes, you do.” He said.

Mycroft laughed, but immediately tried to stop himself laughing. “No... ‘The Iceman Cometh’...”

“You know...” Greg drawled. “I’ve seen that. It’s about a bunch of drunks.”

“No!” Mycroft insisted. “I am ‘The Iceman.’ I drew the short straw... had to be ‘The Iceman’ ... didn’t wan to... wanted to be Emperor Jones or The Hairy Ape! I really wanted to be The Hairy Ape! Got stuck with ‘The Iceman’... didn’t wan it.”

“This is my question.” Greg pointed at Mycroft. “Did you cultivate the reputation as one cold motherfucker after you drew ‘The Iceman,’ or did you already have the reputation when you pulled it?”

Mycroft took a few extra seconds to think about that. “Already had it — but think if I’d pulled The Hairy Ape Think what I’d be now!”

Greg thought about it. “Hairy?”

Mycroft giggled. “No! I wouldn’t be one cold motherfucker.”

“The Hairy Ape’s not cold?”
“No!”

"Is he a trickster like the Monkey King?"

"Yes, but not a lighthearted trickster. He's... he's....

“A motherfucker?” Greg supplied.

“Yes! We’re all motherfuckers. Meta... meta... metaphorically speaking. Thas the job. Doing what has to be done. Inspiring fear if necessary.”

“Does The Hairy Ape inspire fear? ‘Cause if this conversation is any gauge, he inspires giggles.”

“Oh yes. The Hairy Ape inspires fear of chaos. Havoc.”

“Because ‘The Hairy Ape’ could go bananas at any moment.” Greg slapped the table for emphasis.

“Yes!” Mycroft looked delighted. “You unnerstand! I shoulda been The Hairy Ape! Not her!”

“She’s terrible at chaos.” Greg agreed amiably. He had no idea what they were talking about. “And I bet her waxing bill is horrendous.”

“She has no unnerstanding of the difference between chaos and havoc.”

“I bet you could wreak some amazing havoc.” Greg grinned.

“I could!” Mycroft sighed disgustedly. “But The Iceman is all about order. It’s so boring.”

“You don’t ever get to wreak havoc?”


Greg’s fingers curled around Mycroft’s. “You can be my Hairy Ape.” He said. “You’ve created havoc in my life.”

Mycroft shook his head. “Oh, Greg. If I had wanted to wreak havoc in your life... you’d be a night security guard right now, renting a room in... in...”

“Slough?” Greg offered the dreariest place he could think of.

Yes! Slough. But I would never do that to you! I would never do that to you! You don deserve it.” Mycroft frowned and scratched his eye. “S’why I’m not The Hairy Ape. He said. “I don have the stomach for it.” He touched Greg’s hand. “I fell victim to your charms long ago. I would never allow anything like that to happen to you.”

Greg stared at him for a minute. Then he laughed. “You’re pissed.” He ordered two glasses of water and made Mycroft drink his. Baijiu had seemed like a good idea at the outset...

“Wanna know a secret?” Mycroft asked.

“State secret?”

“No! No... something I realised after our firs date. Our firs official date.”

“Whas that?”
Mycroft leaned in and lowered his voice to a whisper. “If you followed me to the loo... I’d fuck you... I’d let you fuck me... whatever you want... in the loo.”

“Alright... we’ve had enough to drink.” Greg shoved the Baijiu away. “Finish your water.”

“I would... in the loo... jus you, though...”

“You ever do that? Shag in the loo?” Greg asked, trying to picture it.

Mycroft drew himself up haughtily. “Course not!”

“Never? Not even a helping hand at the urinal?”

“No... have you?”

Greg shrugged. “Sure. When I was young. I was pretty good-looking when I was young, b’lieve it or not.”

“You’re still good-looking!”

“No, s’not the same. Back then, wherever I went, I’d get cruised... propositioned... women, men begging me to go with ‘em. I got phone numbers — didn’t even ask for ‘em... they’d jes hand me their card or a note. Was crazy. Trailed off before I was thirty... jes wasn pretty anymore...” Greg snickered. “I know when someone’s checking me out an’ when they aren’t. I knew you were looking.”

“I was looking ‘cause you look better now than you ever have done.” Mycroft asserted primly.

Greg rolled his eyes. “Les go. You ready?”

“Where?”

“To wreak some havoc.”

Outside Greg felt his head spinning and paused to get his bearings. It was crisp out, but the weather had been warm for January the last few days. The fresh air felt good. He took out his cigarettes and offered the pack to Mycroft. He took one and Greg lit it and then his own with the careful movements of the inebriated. “This way.” He said.

They walked along, smoking. Upright, Greg felt way more drunk than he had sitting — and Mycroft didn’t seem entirely stable on his feet. Greg linked his arm through Mycroft’s and pulled him close. Mycroft leaned into him, nuzzling his cheek.

Greg had had a plan for the rest of the evening, a challenge for Mycroft. But he hadn’t counted on being pissed. He wasn’t sure it was such a good idea now. Or maybe it was an even better idea now. Drunk, they’d probably fit in better.

They walked a few blocks. When they’d finished their cigarettes, Greg pressed Mycroft against the side of a building and snogged him. Jesus, the man could kiss! The things he did with his tongue! If he’d known, Greg would have hooked up with him long ago. But who would have thought Mycroft ‘The Iceman’ Holmes would be so passionate?! There was more ‘Hairy Ape’ in him than he realised. Whatever The Hairy Ape was. That whole conversation had been mysterious. And ridiculous.

When Greg started getting too excited, he broke off and tugged Mycroft back onto the sidewalk. Whether or not Mycroft was up for it in the loo — and Greg doubted that if it came down to it, he
would be — Greg was too old to be shagging in an alley.

At least he was starting to feel more steady on his feet. And the lag he’d been feeling, between *thinking* and *doing* was getting shorter.

They turned onto the high street and Greg saw they had reached their destination, Soho. They weren’t the only male couple on the street here, it was teeming with groups and couples — almost all at least twenty years younger than they. Greg had never been part of this scene. As an ambitious, young copper in the late eighties and nineties, he had not been comfortable coming to places like this. And then he’d met Jude.

There was a distinct party atmosphere on the relatively warm Friday night, young men spilling out of bars and clubs. Music everywhere, men laughing and gyrating to the thumping beats. They all looked... similar. They were of a type — or two or three related types. Everyone was well dressed in their casual best, slim, turned up jeans and shiny, brown wing tips, bright blue dress shirts and tweed waistcoats or pastel polos under denim or leather jackets. Some wore all black on their slim frames, skinny black jeans and doc martens, black turtleneck jumpers and hip-length black coats. There were long, dangling, striped scarves and short, colourful infinity scarfs, here and there a bright silver jacket or long white trench coat... everyone was stylish and attractive, a sea of well-groomed beards and carefully coiffed hair, gym-toned muscles and extremely lean silhouettes.

Greg’s silver hair stood out like a neon sign. He was wearing the cerulean jumper he’d worn Christmas Eve — he knew it fit him well — with jeans and the gleaming, thick-soled shoes that had come with the tuxedo (they were very comfortable and had the added advantage of making him the same height as Mycroft). He’d topped it with a lightweight, black down jacket. Now he felt misshapen, his coat too puffy, his jeans too comfortable ...

He’d encouraged Mycroft to dress casually and he’d responded by eschewing a suit. He wore slim, moss-green trousers with orange-brown Chelsea boots, a dark brown waistcoat with a checked shirt and a green-patterned tie, topped with a hip-length wool coat and dark scarf. Greg had thought he looked fantastic — totally himself, but relaxed. His ensemble actually blended well with the crowd — better quality and bespoke, but conforming to the de facto dress code. Only his high forehead and aristocratic scowl set him apart.

Greg felt terminally down-market, lumpy and *old*. “I feel about a hundred.” He grumbled under his breath. Perhaps this idea was complete shite.

“Tell me.” Mycroft said, eyeing him suspiciously. “What brings us to a part of town that’s making you uncomfortable?”

Greg drew him aside, out of the flow of traffic. After a moment two men joined them.

“Hi, boss.” One of them said.

“Bishop. Farooqi.” Greg greeted the two constables, attempting to appear completely sober. They both conformed more or less to the neighborhood dress code, though Bishop was not gym toned enough and Farooqi not quite as thin as he should be in this crowd. “This is our civilian advisor.” Greg gestured at Mycroft. “You may remember him from New Year’s.”

Bishop nodded, Farooqi blushed. Greg looked momentarily exasperated, but it left his face before either constable noticed.

“There’s a pickpocketing ring working the gay clubs.” Greg told Mycroft. “Watches, wallets, phones, jewelry, anything valuable. The marks generally don’t even realise until long after the fact
that they’ve been robbed.

“The one thing all the reports have in common, the victim spent at least part of the evening in that club.” Greg indicated a lurid entryway with neon palm trees arching overhead.

“These boys are the undercover coppers we have here tonight.”

“And you thought they needed help.” Mycroft observed.

Greg shot Mycroft a warning look. “A team helps each other.” He said. “It’s just an idea. After the way you spotted the pickpocket on New Year’s.” He waved at the busy sidewalk. “They’d probably make me as a copper anyway. I’m not exactly their usual demographic.” He should have known Mycroft wouldn’t be interested.

But Mycroft had cocked his head. “Listen.” He said. The palm tree adorned door opened wide for an influx of patrons, and music blared. It was familiar... it took a moment, but Greg recognised the song they’d danced to on Wednesday evening, *Glamazon*

Mycroft was smiling, his eyes alight. Abruptly, Greg didn’t care a whit if they were out of place, if the sea of young, beautiful homosexuals sneered or if the thieves made him. He took Mycroft’s hand. “All right then.” He smiled.

“Boss, the watches.” Bishop said.

“Right. Almost forgot.” Greg took two flash watches from the Constable. “These have GPS trackers in them. If they’re stolen, the Met can, in theory, trace them to the thieves.”

“That would not stand up in court.” Mycroft informed him.

“Absolutely not.” Greg agreed. “But it could show us who to watch, where to look.”

Mycroft sighed heavily and took the less ugly watch, the silver one, with a look of distaste. “Does it have to be so... shiny?”

Greg chuckled. “We want them to attract attention.” He strapped the chunky gold watch to his own wrist. “You boys have your orders, yeah? See you later.” He took Mycroft’s hand and they crossed the road.

Once inside the club, there was a gauntlet to run — producing IDs, paying the cover charge, getting hand stamps and plastic bracelets, checking their coats, wading through the crowd...

“Bit of a challenge.” Greg said. “Finding the thieves in this mob.”

Mycroft shot him a look that told Greg exactly what he thought of the challenge. “We should dance.” He said. “It’s less obvious.” That brilliant light was still shining in Mycroft’s eyes, so Greg agreed readily, letting Mycroft lead him onto the teeming dance floor.

Now, Greg’s drunkenness was a boon, loosening his limbs and lowering his inhibitions — Mycroft’s too, by the look of it. Greg let the beat take him, gyrating and swirling, stepping and grinding. He had a hand on Mycroft’s hip and felt an erotic charge as he leaned into it. He didn’t know how they might ferret out the pickpockets whilst dancing, but he was hard pressed to care. He wasn’t on the clock.

And really, the beautiful young men weren’t so bad — many even seemed welcoming, smiling at them, dancing a few steps with them... It was heady, the pulsating energy on the dance floor. Greg
was reveling in being part of it. In some ways, it reminded him of when he’d been young.

The more crowded it got, the warmer it became. After a while, Greg felt sweat dripping from his temples, gathering under his chin and rolling down his spine. Mycroft glowed, his shirt sticking to him damply. He loosened his tie, unbuttoning his collar and rolled his sleeves above his elbows. Greg stripped off his jumper, down to the sleeveless white vest he wore underneath. It clung to his torso.

The dance floor was packed, more and more people squeezing in all the time. Greg felt the inadvertent contact of other bodies over and over. He was pressed closer and closer to Mycroft until they were joined at the hips. They swayed together. Greg’s cock thickened noticeably against his left leg. It felt good.

He ground against Mycroft, touching his waist lightly as they matched Samba steps to the music. Mycroft was a great dancer — lithe and graceful. Every move looked good when he did it. Greg was quite sure he looked rather foolish as he followed along — maybe some of those smiling young men were actually laughing — but he simply didn’t care.

After a while, he began to get thirsty. Men all around carried beer bottles and big plastic cups with cocktail straws. “Do you want a drink?” He shouted in Mycroft’s ear. “I need a drink.”

Mycroft nodded, and Greg led them off the dance floor, weaving through the throngs to the bar queue. He wanted water more than anything, but a beer would do. He turned to ask Mycroft what he wanted... but Mycroft was gone. In his place was an attractive, bearded man who could have been 25 or 35 or anywhere in-between. His teeth were white and straight like an American’s, but when he spoke, his accent was pure London.

“Hey, daddy.” Teeth said flirtatiously, and his hand traced down Greg’s sweaty abdomen. “Looking fit.” His eyes flashed promise and he hooked his fingers in the waistband of Greg’s jeans.

For a second, Greg was frozen — this hadn’t happened to him in twenty years, and no one but Gigi had ever called him ‘daddy.’ Then he came to his senses — the man was flirting for a free drink. Or worse, distracting him whilst his partner stole his wallet.

Greg laughed and extricated himself from Teeth’s grip, slipping a hand into his pocket to make sure his wallet was still there. “No, thanks.” He said and turned away. The too-shiny watch was still on his wrist. He found Mycroft on the other side, looking sharp-eyed. “What did he want?”

“Something that’s mostly water.” Mycroft answered, his mouth almost pressed to Greg’s ear. “What did he want?”

“Who? Oh him? Trying to work me for a free drink, I guess.” He interlaced his fingers with Mycroft’s and squeezed.

“Give me your jumper, I’ll put it with our coats.” Greg happily surrendered the sky blue jumper and watched Mycroft disappear into the crowd.

He was almost ten minutes in the bar queue. Greg found himself grooving to the loud music a bit as he waited his turn. The man next to him in line gave him a friendly smile. “Hot in here.” He said.

He looked more business casual than most, clean cut, hair high and tight. His striped dress shirt was unbuttoned halfway to his navel and an open suit jacket did nothing to cover his hairless and toned chest. He had a sheen of sweat on his skin.
“Yeah.” Greg agreed. “Phew.”

“You here alone?” He asked and bumped Greg’s shoulder with his own. "I'm Roy."

"Hey. I'm not alone, no." Greg told him. "Here he is now."

Mycroft had reappeared and he smirked approvingly when he saw Greg. He’d completely removed his waistcoat and tie and his long neck drew Greg’s eyes. He wanted to lick the sweat off it, feel the beating pulse under his teeth...

The man in the suit jacket was still smiling at him. "Erm, Roy, this is Mycroft, and I'm Greg." Roy extended his hand, so Greg shook it.

"You're cute together." Roy said. "Married?"

"Erm, not yet." Greg laughed. "It's our second date." He locked eyes with Mycroft, smiling happily.

"Officially our second date." Mycroft said. "Unofficially there's been a few more."

“Well, good luck.” Roy said and winked. Then he had the grace to leave them alone, turning back towards the bar. "I don't think I've ever seen you so naked... when you're not naked." Greg said approvingly.

Mycroft fingered his open collar self-consciously.

Greg felt a hand on his shoulder. “I love your hair.” Said a deep voice. Greg turned to find a slim blonde twink in a pale purple polo feeling up his shoulder — his bare shoulder, the straps of his vest covered almost nothing.

“What?” Greg asked. He’d heard the kid but didn’t know what to make of it.

“I love your hair.” The kid repeated. “It’s brilliant.” He stepped right up against Greg and moved the hand on his shoulder into his hair, tugging intimately.

Greg had an intense second of deja vu — when he was twenty something, a bloke had put his hand in Greg’s then-brown hair and tugged, suggesting they go back to his place. Greg, who an hour before had been patrolling cruisy toilets in Regents Park, had let the bloke blow him in the bog. Jesus, he’d been a numpty... Greg had been lucky he’d never contracted anything...

He came back to the present and pulled his head away, turning his body a few degrees from the kid. “Not tonight.” His voice was cool, but he gave the kid a brief, apologetic smile before turning back to Mycroft. “Everyone wants a free drink tonight. I must look like an easy mark.” He laughed. “They think I’m some desperate old queen who’ll trade cocktails for their company.”

“I don’t think so.” Mycroft said in his ear.

“You think he's a pickpocket?” Greg asked quietly.

“Definitely not.”

Greg shrugged and stepped up to the bar. The bartender smiled broadly, showing deep dimples. “And what can I get for you, gorgeous?” He asked. He was wearing a green vest, his brown skin gleaming in the bar lights. Greg gave him a wry eye roll and ordered two light beers and two cups of water.

He gave the bartender a twenty pound note, and when the man brought his change his hand lingered
on Greg’s and he winked. Greg chuckled and tipped him generously. It felt nice to be flirted with even if the bartender did it with everyone. He handed a beer and a water to Mycroft and went to put his change away — and found a piece of paper in with the coins. It said ‘Jaime — call me’ and listed a phone number.

Greg looked up, surprised, and the bartender — Jaime — was looking right at him with a flirty little smile on his plush lips. Greg gave him an uncertain smile back and grabbed his drinks. He led Mycroft away from the bar to a patch of wall they could lean against — not that Mycroft deigned to lean against it — and drank half his water down at once.

“What was that, with the bartender?” Mycroft asked, drinking his own water.

“Mm!” Greg set his beer bottle carefully on the floor between his feet and fished the note out of his pocket. He showed it to Mycroft. “Can you believe it?” He asked, laughing. ”I thought this was all far behind me.”

“All too well.” Mycroft replied, taking the note. He wadded it into a ball and dropped it into the dregs of his water.

Greg laughed harder. “Too bad, Jaime.” He said. ”Funny I was telling you this used to happen all the time. Must be something in the water tonight. Or the undercover lads are punking me.” He finished his water and stacked the cup on Mycroft’s. He put them on the tray of a passing bar back carrying empties, and taking Mycroft’s hand, started back to the dance floor.

The cold beer was a good complement to the dancing, quenching his thirst, giving him stamina without making him any drunker. Greg didn’t recognise most of the music, but it all had a pulsing beat to which they could groove and grind. He admired Mycroft’s slender form as he moved elegantly to the inelegant music. Greg felt so privileged to be the one allowed to reach out and put his hands on those limber hips...

Then Greg did recognise a song — _Everybody Wants to Rule the World_ by Tears for Fears set to a propulsive disco beat. That took Greg back! 1985... when he’d bought this album, he’d just finished his ‘A’ levels and was deciding between Uni and the Police Academy. He’d had a brief fling with an older, married woman — she’d probably been thirty, but that was older than Greg’s seventeen. He’d lost his virginity years before, but seventeen was the age he began attracting lots of attention. He’d been a right slag for a while... and in some ways it was good he had. He’d fucked around — a lot — and gotten it out of his system. By the time he met Ben, Greg had been ready to settle down.

As always, the thought of Ben made him feel morose for a few seconds. Ben, the one that got away... if they’d been older, if Greg had been more comfortable being out, if he’d had a different job...

It didn’t matter anymore. It didn’t bear thinking about. He returned his attention to Mycroft who looked at him quizzically.

“The song.” Greg said into his ear. “Brings back memories of my ill-spent youth.”

——

Mycroft was still tight. But the dancing and the water had gone a long way towards sobering him up. He wasn’t blotto any longer. He wasn’t in danger of losing his dinner on the floor. He was just drunk
enough to be having a great time moving his body to the disco beat.

...with Greg...

Mycroft had been out dancing in clubs a few times, mostly during the period after separating from Jerome. But it was entirely different with Greg Lestrade.

Not only was Greg sexy as hell in the clinging cotton vest and jeans, his broad shoulders and built arms on display for all to see, he was... bright. He was a beacon of joy and life and vitality — Mycroft wasn’t the only one who saw it, Greg was constantly on the receiving end of admiring looks and accidental touches. He’d been approached over and over — Mycroft had discouraged several men from trying their luck with his presence, but not nearly all.

Greg was beautiful!

Mycroft was aware that Greg thought himself well beyond general admiration. He’d said himself he’d been rigorously pursued when younger, perhaps he never learned to recognise subtler overtures (not that these men were subtle). The entire time Mycroft had known him, women and men had looked.

Or maybe he simply didn’t care. Greg had seemed not to notice — which was why Mycroft had felt there was no harm if he indulged himself and looked. Greg had given off a ‘taken/not interested/preoccupied’ vibe long after his divorce was final.

But here in this crowded gay club, the appreciation was blatant. He was, if anything, more distinctive now with his full head of silver hair, than he’d ever been.

It was satisfying on several levels to be with Greg tonight. In addition to the usual — he was good company, thoughtful and creative and ridiculously easy on the eyes — Mycroft had the distinction of being this luminescent man’s date. Greg’s attention was focussed on him, to the extent that none of the younger, better-looking men could compete.

It was writ plainly on their faces: ‘Him??’ ‘Why him!?’ ‘He must be rich.’ ‘He must be Greg’s sugar daddy, his meal ticket,’ ‘his husband.’ Beneath that lay the surety that if not for the allure of wealth, they could take Greg from him. And perhaps they could for a time regardless.

It was delicious how wrong they were! How little Greg cared for wealth and position. How Greg would never seek, let alone accept, a sugar daddy. How much Greg appeared to truly like Mycroft!

It was only when the DJ began playing pop hits from the eighties — mixed with the never ending and absurdly loud disco beat — that Greg’s attention wandered. Not to any of Mycroft’s dozens of rivals, but within himself.

Mycroft would be fascinated to know what he was thinking. Memories from the era of the music, obviously, but what were they?! He wanted Greg to tell him — to tell him everything. No detail too insignificant. He wanted to get inside Greg’s head, to know him. To know everything about him.

It was always curious what people remembered. Mycroft remembered everything, but he knew that was atypical. What and why people remembered some things and not others... so intriguing.

Mycroft called up the first time he’d danced with Greg, two weeks prior at the New Year’s Eve Ball: he remembered the exact pressure of Greg’s hand on his waist, leading him through the dance; the confidence Greg had exuded whilst still apologising for his inferior skills; the smell of perspiration mixing with his after shave, the wool of the new suit, and the light almond scent of Greg’s hair product; the look in Greg’s brown eyes, happiness, curiosity, some irritation at their surroundings....
“Pardon me, may I cut in?” The accent was Australian, the speaker was tan, blond and big — broad shouldered, and rangy. The question was polite enough, but the Australian’s confidence presented as rudeness.

“Erm, what?” Greg asked, catching Mycroft’s hand. As if he’d leave Greg with this boor.

The Australian flashed white teeth at Greg. “You’re gorgeous.” He said. “I’d like to dance with ya. If your ball-and-chain’ll give me a fair go.” The last was said with a sly glance at Mycroft and a surreptitious touch on Greg’s arm.

Greg pursed his lips. “I was gonna be polite.” He told the Australian. “Until you insulted me date. No, you can’t cut in. You just lost your bet. Go on back to your mates and pay up.”

“Bet?” The Australian looked confused.

Mycroft, amused and smirking, inserted himself into the conversation. “He thinks you bet your friends that you could get the silver fox to dance with you.” Mycroft spoke loudly enough that they both heard him over the music. “But the truth is that he’s one of the best-looking men in the room, and you thought you’d have no problem pulling him.”

The cocky Australian almost scowled but recovered and flashed his best aw-shucks grin. “No drama — I know when I’ve been knocked back.” He looked directly at Greg. “Tinny pom’s right, you’re spunk, mate.” He winked and moved off.

“I have no idea...” Greg said.

“He said I was lucky and you’re good-looking — correct on both counts.”

Greg shook his head. He downed the last of his beer. “What do you think?” He asked. “It’s too crowded in here to see anything. And this piece of —” Greg had held up an arm to display the flash watch, but it was gone. “Huh.”

Mycroft smirked. “The man at the bar, the one with the jacket on.” He said.

“You saw him take it? Why didn’t you say?”

“I didn’t see him take it, but why else would he have a jacket on when it's this warm?” He gestured at the ocean of men around them stripped down to t-shirts and vests, dress shirts unbuttoned and the sleeves rolled up. “A pickpocket needs somewhere to stow the stolen items, and he’d want long cuffs to obscure his sleight of hand and to temporarily hold watches and rings. And as I recall, he shook your hand. Simple for a skilled pickpocket to take a watch whilst shaking hands.”

“So he’ll have the stuff on him!” Greg was looking around for the bloke.

“I’ve watched him make at least six trips to the loo since we’ve been here. Either he’s handing it off, or he has a stash.”

“Lets take a look at the loo.” Greg said.

Mycroft pointed out where it was, and they worked their way through the crowd, Mycroft watching eyes flick approvingly over Greg. When they reached it, he was mildly surprised that there wasn’t a queue for the loo, but when they entered the hallway, he saw why — the dim hall ran the length of the club and as far as he could see, it was full of men ‘hooking up.’ It was happily too dark to see specifics, but by posture and motion, he inferred a number of sexual acts.
“His handoff could be in there.” Mycroft told Greg. “I didn’t know anything was back here but the
loose.”

“Loo first.” Greg said eying the dark hallway.

Mycroft took a urinal and Greg a stall. He assumed Greg was searching for a stash and was proven
correct when he saw Greg’s head pop up over the top edge and reach up to the ceiling. He must have
been standing on the toilet.

Greg searched the other stalls, then, frowning, took a cursory tour through the rest of the room. More
patrons joined them so they went to wash their hands, Greg checking under the sinks and tugging on
the mirrors. He prowled around the bin, pulling the liner and peering underneath.

Mycroft was annoyed at the broken air dryer, but Greg just shook his wet hands and gestured at the
door.

At that moment it became loudly apparent that at least one couple had decided to use a stall instead of
the communal hallway. The moaning and rhythmic thumping of body against metal wall could not
be mistaken.

Greg caught his eye and burst out laughing. He backed Mycroft against the wall by the broken dryer
and pinned him there with the weight of his body. Greg kissed him, his lips firm and his tongue
softly seeking.

As their mouths met, Mycroft’s mild disgust at snogging in the loo evaporated. All he knew was
Greg’s lips, Greg’s tongue, Greg’s hands... hands...

He pushed Greg back from the kiss. “The hand dryer is broken.” He said.

“Yeah?”

Mycroft turned his attention to the white rectangular box attached to the wall. He felt along the sides
and the bottom...

Greg caught on. He leaned in and examined it closely. His fingers traced scrapes on the brick beside
the dryer. He looked at the opposite end, reached up, twisted the screw and pushed. The entire dryer
moved six inches along the wall, covering over the scrapes and revealing a hole chiseled in the brick
behind it. Piled in the hole were at least ten wallets, numerous watches, two phones and a ring.
Greg’s flash watch was among them. It was the pickpocket’s stash.

“Someone on staff might be complicit.” Greg murmured. “He or she could empty this when the club
is closed.” He quickly pulled out his phone and took photos, then slid the dryer back along the wall,
flicking the screw in place.

They turned to leave and ran right into the business casual man in the suit coat. Roy. He smiled and
winked at Greg and Mycroft, then made a beeline to a stall — which was a bit surprising as the
couple hooking up was still loudly going at it.

Greg took Mycroft’s hand and tugged him out into the hallway where he began texting. "I want to
get a photo of the bloke before I let the lads know what we found." He said and started moving
deeper into the gloom of the long hallway, but Mycroft pulled back — he could see men having sex,
he didn’t want to go back there.

Greg leaned in to whisper in his ear. “I need to get a photo as he leaves the loo. Help me?”
Mycroft nodded and let Greg pull him a short way down the hallway. There he pressed Greg to the wall where he could watch the loo entrance. He busied himself kissing Greg’s neck, tasting the salt on his skin, nuzzling his jaw and nibbling his earlobe. Greg’s one hand moved slowly down his back as he kept half-lidded eyes on the loo. With the other he surreptitiously held his phone up.

After a long minute, Mycroft saw him press the shutter a couple times. “OK, we can go.” Greg said.

“Thank god. Do you know what was happening right next to us!?”

“Erm, yeah, I’m familiar with the act. You should know.” He smirked.

“But right there for all to see. And those two in the stall...”

“You did say you’d shag me in the loo.” Greg said, his eyes twinkling.

“How drunk was I!?” Mycroft was appalled.

“Drunker than you are now, apparently.” Greg thumbed Mycroft’s bottom lip, a gesture that was somehow both fondly affectionate and lewdly sexual.

"Hey boss." Bishop and Farooqi materialised.

Greg drew them close and lowered his voice."I got a photo" He said, bringing up the pictures he’d taken of Roy exiting the loo. "This one's the best of his face. In this one you can see his jacket better. I'll air drop these to you. There may be other thieves, but we’re pretty sure this is one of them."

Greg put his phone away, and looked appraisingly at the two coppers. "Bishop, I think." Mycroft murmured.

"Yeah." Greg agreed. "OK, this is the plan. Bishop, you’re backing me up — I’m going to get this bloke’s prints. Farooqi..." Greg looked the smaller man over. "You have the cameras? Great, put them in the bog pointing at the hand dryer. The stall on the near end has a glory hole, that could be a good spot for one of them."

"Sir... what is a 'glory hole'?” Farooqi asked uncertainly.

"Oh for christs... it's a hole through the wall about hip height. Use your judgement, get a couple different angles on the hand dryer. OK, you both good? Good. Bishop, follow behind us to the bar." He took Mycroft's hand and started for the bar.

"Relax a bit." Mycroft said in his ear. "Your demeanor has completely changed. You look like a cop now."

Greg slowed his pace and smiled wryly at Mycroft. "Thanks." He said. "I need a bottle — I'll get in the bar queue, you circle, see if you can spot him, yeah?"

Mycroft nodded and squeezed his hand. When they reached the bar, Greg joined the line and they smiled at each other for a moment. Then Greg nodded and Mycroft walked off.

Mycroft was gratified to see that Greg watched him, his smile lingering. Mycroft kept one eye on Greg as he slipped through the throng, circling around looking for Roy. He saw Greg relaxing more, letting the music loosen him up, tapping his foot and swaying his hips to the beat. That was good. For a minute there, he'd been so obviously law enforcement.

He located Roy, and watched him surreptitiously. He seemed to be sticking close to the bar. After a
few minutes, Mycroft noticed Greg was talking with the couple in line in front of him. Mycroft drifted closer.

The shorter one was speaking. Mycroft got close enough to hear him say, "Top, bottom or versatile?"

"Erm, what?" Greg often pretended he hadn't heard when he wanted a moment to collect his thoughts.

"We're looking for a stud." The other one said. He was taller and his teeth were straighter, otherwise they might have been twins. Why was it that so many gay couples looked alike? "A stud to fuck my husband while I watch."

"Unless you make him leave the room." The first one said, excitement in his voice. "Then he'll just have to listen at the door." Mycroft watched the young man reach out and run his hand over Greg's shoulder down his arm to his hip. "I bet you're hung."

Mycroft smirked. Greg would not be able to deny that these two were cruising him — though at the moment he appeared to be attempting to formulate an answer whilst suppressing laughter. He took pity on the detective. "You haven't gotten our drinks yet?" Mycroft complained loudly, putting himself between Greg and the man who'd been touching him.

"Line's long, babe." Greg said, mirth in his eyes. "Sorry." He said to the couple. "I'm busy tonight."

The shorter one was not so easily discouraged. He touched Mycroft's arm. "I don't suppose you'd be up for some fun." He asked. "We were all just talking about going back to our place. It's not far."

"We have some primo ganja." The taller one offered, making eye contact with Mycroft. "We could get high."

"You're suggesting," Mycroft summarised. "That you and I smoke marijuana whilst my boyfriend cuckolds your husband in the next room? I think not." He gestured with his head. "You're up, the bartender's waiting."

Greg was shaking with giggles he was still trying desperately to smother. What was the impulse to be polite to people who had just suggested such impolite acts?

When it was their turn at the bar, Mycroft noted that Jaime, the flirtatious bartender, was at the end of the bar loading a large tray with shot glasses, and that the Australian from the dance floor had a stool nearby. The Australian saw them and waved. Greg laughed and waved back. "There's our Aussie friend again."

He seems to have survived the rejection. Mycroft smirked.

Greg ordered two more light beers. "Have you spotted him?"

"When you turn around, he'll be at your two'o'clock."

"Great. Maybe we should both approach him — like our mates with the primo ganja." Greg suggested. "Save me having to explain your absence. Especially if he saw us in the bar queue together again."

"Indeed."

"Ok, do you have a pen on you? Yeah? Perfect. follow my lead." Greg said, tipping the bartender.
Greg led them to an opening in the mob nearish Roy. Roy, in his suit jacket, was talking with another couple. Mycroft watched Greg surveil the man, turning his back and waiting for the pickpocket to finish with his current marks. Mycroft thought he saw Roy lift a wallet, but he was very good, very fast. He couldn’t be certain.

“Oh hey... hi again...” Using the commotion that the large tray of shots was creating, Greg made it look like they’d just happened upon Roy.

Roy smiled warmly. “Second date, right. How’s it going? Will there be a third?”

“Actually...” Greg said with a flirty smile. “You were right the first time — we are married.”

“I can always tell.” Roy said. “You two just have that glow.”

“Glow?” Mycroft asked, unable to stop himself.

“You know, the glow of love. You look happy just being together. A toast!” Roy said, snagging three shots from the passing tray. “To love and happiness.”

Greg took a shot with feigned eagerness, so Mycroft took one as well.

“Cheers!” Roy said.

It was bright green and jiggly. Mycroft wished to decline, but when Greg put his to his lips, Mycroft followed suit. He was put off to discover it was gelatine, sickly sweet and mostly grain alcohol, but he swallowed it.

Greg grinned. “Nice.” He said and Mycroft heard the lie in it. He put his empty shot glass back on the tray, then took Mycroft’s hand. “We really are pretty happy.” He told Roy. “But tonight... we were hoping to... share our happiness...” Greg touched Roy near the belt, his hand sliding under the jacket to cup his waist.

Mycroft noted how tense Roy became, and wondered how close Greg was to a secret pocket filled with loot. But Roy dredged up a confident smile. “Sorry —“

“If you’re busy tonight.” Greg said smoothly. “Maybe another time. Honey, do you have...? Hold this?” Greg thrust his beer bottle into Roy’s hands, took the pen and business card Mycroft produced and wrote ‘Greg’ and a phone number. He took his beer back and tucked the card into Roy’s breast pocket with a wink.

Another tray of the free Jell-O shots came by just then, these bright orange. Greg grabbed one and handed it to Roy, another to Mycroft, then took one for himself — all the time holding his beer bottle by the neck.

“To sharing the love.” Greg said. Mycroft almost forgot himself and winced at that, but turned it into a knowing smirk instead. Greg clinked his shot glass with Roy’s, so Mycroft crowded in to do the same. Then he was swallowing more vile gelatinous grain alcohol.

To Mycroft’s relief, Greg, with a last flirtatious smile at Roy, led him away. Mycroft decided that he hated watching Greg flirt with someone else.

Greg made a beeline for Bishop who, within the cover of their bodies, quickly swapped beer bottles. The Constable immediately left with it — to bag it so prints could be taken from it later, Mycroft presumed.
Greg drew Mycroft into his arms. “What do you say?” He asked. “More dancing? Or do you want to get going?”

“We don’t have to stay for...?”

Greg smiled. “I’m not here in any official capacity.”

“Then let’s go.”

Greg smiled more broadly. “Let’s.”

They retrieved their clothes from the coat check and still hot and damp from the club, plunged outdoors without donning them. It was cooler out, but still temperate for January.

“You were brilliant.” Greg told Mycroft. “Absolutely brilliant. We never would have spotted that guy — or found his stash.”

Mycroft pulled the chunky silver watch off his wrist. “Why couldn’t he have stolen mine!?” He moaned.

Greg laughed. “Those blokes can tell an easy mark, from a tough one. You’re not an easy mark, Iceman.”

“No, I suppose not. What happens now?”

“Bishop took the bottle to the van for fingerprinting, see if the bloke has form. If he returns to the stash, he’ll be arrested. If not they’ll wait until he leaves the club to pick him up — don’t want to alert anyone working with him. They’ll monitor the stash to see who takes it and where it goes.”

Mycroft dug his cigarettes out of his coat, gave one to Greg, took one himself and lit them both. He sucked on it, filling his lungs with the wonderfully uplifting carcinogens. As he so often did, he thought idly that he should quit between the first puff and the second...

“Hey! My wallet!” The shout was loud and outraged. Greg turned first, quick on his feet, Mycroft a second later. Roy was sprinting down the sidewalk towards them, chased by an attractive southeast asian in a green polo. Mycroft could see Roy’s intent, to dart sideways into a laneway just a step past Greg. Mycroft moved to block the laneway, but at the same moment, Greg did something that knocked Roy to the ground. Immediately Greg pinned him with his knee, twisting an arm behind his back.

Farooqi was hot on the heels of the attractive southeast asian caterwauling about his wallet, and Greg took the handcuffs he proffered and snapped them around Roy’s wrists. Bishop arrived with a couple uniformed officers. Greg gave them custody of Roy.

“That was amazing!” The attractive southeast asian gushed to Greg. “My hero!” His hand found Greg’s arm and caressed it, lightly kneading the muscle. "You must let me thank you."

Greg took the cigarette from between his lips — where it had been lodged securely the entire time. “No thanks necessary.” He said, ushering the man towards Bishop. “If you can give your statement to the Constable...”

Mycroft was content to let Greg determine their trajectory. They escaped the bustling high street, embarking on the maze of Soho side streets. There were still plenty of people around, but they walked faster and seemed more insular. Mycroft was buzzing with energy — Greg’s masterful takedown of the pickpocket had aroused him out of all proportion... he wanted to have Greg now!
Was that what Sherlock found so attractive about John Watson? His brute physicality?

He watched Greg pull on the cerulean jumper. As fine as he had looked in his undershirt, Mycroft thought he fancied him more in the fitted jumper. It clung in all the right places and offset his silver hair brilliantly.

And Mycroft preferred Greg’s broad shoulders be something he alone got to enjoy. Especially after watching the attractive southeast asian’s hand travelling over his bicep...

Despite the warm buzz of sexual energy, Mycroft himself was starting to feel the chill. Finishing his cigarette, he unrolled his sleeves and donned his waistcoat. They both carried their coats still.

The Jell-O shots hit Mycroft hard right about then, his face became hot and flushed and all the edges went soft. He turned his head and it took a second before his brain caught up.

“I’m blotto again.” He said, grateful for Greg’s steadying arm.

“Yeah, those last two shots were shite. Just our luck free shots were on offer right then... still, I think it helped. Roy did not like it when I touched him.”

“I didn’t like it when you touched him.” Mycroft said.

“So that glow he saw, was the glow of jealousy, then? Not happiness.” Greg teased.

“It’ll be the glow of abandonment if you keep this up!”

Greg laughed. “Just think of me like the Monkey King, using shape-shifting and trickery to get the Iron Fan.”

“Does that make me the Jade Emperor?” Mycroft asked archly.

“Thought you wanted to be The Hairy Ape. That’d make us quite a pair: Monkey King and Hairy Ape.”

“The Hairy — forget you ever heard that.” Mycroft said, mildly amused. He’d declassified that himself not six months ago but explaining it would take him into dangerous territory. At least he hadn’t said anything about Emperor Jones. That would have been bad.

“Forgotten. Between the Baijiu and the Jell-O shots, not sure I’ll remember much anyway.”

“Good thing I raised your security rating.” Mycroft mumbled, slinging an arm around Greg’s shoulders. “You didn’t notice, Detective Inspector...”

“Greg.”

“Greg, everyone in the club was looking at you.”

“It must be the glow.” Greg laughed.

“How many men hit on you? The bartender—"

“He flirts with everyone, gets ’im better tips.” Greg interjected.

“He doesn’t give everyone his phone number. Then that rid... ridiculous Australian—""

“That was a bet.” Greg insisted. “He bet his mates he could make a fool of the old guy.”
“If that were the case, he would have asked me. He clearly wanted to take you to... to hook-up hallway.”

“Hook-up hallway!” Greg giggled.

“And how many in the bar queue?”

“Jes flirting for drinks — one bloke called me ‘daddy.’ Daddy! And the other one was stealing my watch.”

Mycroft laughed loudly. “That couple wasn’t after free drinks! No — balance of probability suggests that this... this many incidents within a two-hour period — not to mention all the admiring looks...”

“Stop talking shite.” Greg laughed.

“I assure you I’m not. You are strikingly attractive... and very sexy.”

“Mmm.” Greg rolled his eyes, giggling. “You’re the sexy one — the way you move on the dance floor!”

“Now who’s talking shite?”

“Shut it, you tinny pom.” Greg laughed and shoved into Mycroft.

Mycroft felt the world swoop as he staggered sideways, the pavement rising towards his face, then Greg’s startling strength as his hands wrapped around his waist and pulled him upright into his arms.

“Whoa there!”

Mycroft wrapped his arms around Greg’s shoulders, feeling the heat of him through his jumper. He smelled so virile... Mycroft pushed his fingers up into the coarse short hair on the back of Greg’s neck, his consciousness zeroing down to the sensation of the skin under his fingernails pressing into the hairs.

He kissed the Detective Inspector — Greg. Mycroft had thought of him as ‘Detective Inspector Lestrade’ for over a decade. He generally preferred addressing people formally, it kept them at a distance... thinking of him as ‘Greg’ was strange. And wonderfully, erotically intimate.

Greg tasted of the appalling Jell-O shots and cigarette and his tongue in Mycroft’s mouth made his nipples and his prick tingle and harden. Greg’s fingers scraped over his chest and stopped at his erect nipple. He pinched and rolled it, worked it mercilessly as he sucked on Mycroft’s tongue. Mycroft was hard, so hard for Greg... he heard an exceedingly lewd moan emerge from his own throat. Greg groaned roughly in response and gripped his arse with his big hand almost painfully hard. Mycroft felt Greg’s erection next to his own and it kicked their kisses into an even higher gear — sloppy, passionate, hard, biting kisses...

“Jesus!” Greg swore. “I want you! I want you right now.” His hands bruised Mycroft’s hips as he bit Mycroft’s neck, licking the length of it. His skin broke out in gooseflesh.

A loud wolf whistle sounded and they both froze. “Get a room, Grandpa!” Someone shouted. Mycroft looked over Greg’s shoulder and saw the group of teenagers walking by on the opposite side of the street. They laughed and jeered. “Yeah, get some, old guys!” “Woooo!”

Greg was shaking, his chest and shoulders vibrating under Mycroft’s hands... it took a moment for him to realise that Greg was laughing. Helplessly, breathlessly, silently laughing. He leaned heavily
on Mycroft as his giggles robbed his limbs of strength, and tears streamed from his eyes. He managed a deep breath, then he laughed out in loud, long, hearty guffaws.

It was — as it always was to Mycroft — irresistible. He felt himself begin to laugh along. For a second it ignited a sense memory of their first time together Christmas Eve. Mycroft had felt so awkward and off-kilter that night. When Greg had begun to laugh over his shoe, he’d thought Greg was laughing at Mycroft, laughing that Mycroft had ever thought Greg would want him. Laughing at the great joke of getting Mycroft Holmes all hot and bothered and then cruelly making fun... then the great rush of relief when he knew that was not happening, that Greg laughed joyfully because something struck him as absurd or silly. That Mycroft was in on the joke! Not the butt of it.

Greg’s laughter was contagious. Mycroft held him tightly as they giggled, feeling their chests shaking together.

Mycroft’s erection had wilted, but Greg’s still raged, pressed into the soft area between Mycroft’s hip and groin and Greg ground it against him unthinkingly as they snickered and snorted. It was too bad they were so far from either of their homes — the journey would sober them again and he would lose this wonderful loose feeling. He’d never let himself get this inebriated with a lover — he’d never trusted anyone enough. He’d never trusted himself enough.

“Come with me — back here.” Mycroft said, shocking himself — and Greg. But Greg went willingly enough, following him down a narrow alley to an abandoned loading dock. There he pushed Greg against the brick wall and pinned him. Mycroft kissed him, sinking a hand into Greg’s bright, silver hair and tugging.

“Mmmm...” Greg’s laughter had faded on the way to the loading dock, but he still grinned with amusement. Mycroft slid his hand down to Greg’s nape, just above the blue jumper, pulling him close for a kiss. Mycroft tasted his mouth, his soft lips, his seeking tongue.

He taunted Greg with his kisses, flicking and nipping, then diving deep, consuming the other man. Mycroft licked along Greg’s jaw, tasting a hint of stubble and salt. He bit his earlobe, eliciting a low moan. Greg’s silver hair smelled subtly of almonds and less-subtly of cigarettes. Mycroft inhaled the scent then returned to kiss Greg’s mouth again, lips firm with purpose, exploring his teeth and tongue.

Greg’s hands caressed his back and his arse as they snogged, Mycroft’s hands were busy unfastening Greg’s jeans.

“Hey...” It wasn’t quite a protest and Greg made no move to stop him. Mycroft bundled his coat into a ball and dropped it on the pavement. He knelt on his coat, taking hold of Greg’s gorgeous cock and licking it.

Greg harrumphed and flung his jacket over Mycroft’s head, holding it to his chest, shielding the sex act from view. Well, he was a copper.

He licked up the underside to the glans, licking over the foreskin to the slit peeping shyly from its cowl. Mycroft licked back down the veiny shaft to his bollocks and nibbled on them, kissing and sucking them into his mouth. Greg moaned, and Mycroft felt Greg’s hand land on his head through the puffy coat.

Mycroft stroked Greg’s cock and sucked on the crown, tasting the bitter drops of arousal. He took a deep breath, sucked hard and swallowed Greg down, throat twitching around the head of his cock.

“Fuck!” Greg exclaimed. Mycroft pulled off and licked from root to tip, pushing his tongue inside his
foreskin, lavishing attention on the glans. Then he bobbed again, taking him deep. “Oh jesus, yes, suck it...”

Mycroft wrapped thumb and forefinger around the base of Greg’s cock and slid them back and forth, jacking him, peeling Greg’s foreskin down. He exposed the ruddy head and ran his tongue under the ridge. He pulled the head into his soft mouth tongue-fucking the slit.

He edged Greg, kissing his belly while he stroked his shaft slowly, sucking his balls into his mouth, ghosting his fingers over Greg’s perineum.

Mycroft was painfully aroused. He moaned, his throat vibrating around Greg’s cock and Greg cried out, his hand pressing harder on Mycroft’s head. He sucked the fat head of Greg’s cock into his wet mouth and hurriedly unfastened his own trousers, freeing his prick. He stroked both himself and Greg at once.

He swallowed Greg down again, eliciting another curse. Mycroft came up for air then took Greg to the root. He bobbed, jacking his own cock furiously.

Greg was pushing his head down now, conforming to Mycroft’s rhythm, the hand on the back of his head firm. Greg was groaning freely, thrusting his hips just a little. Mycroft let him, let him extract his own pleasure and put both hands on his own prick, tugging and twisting his bollocks as he stroked furiously.

“I’m going to cum.” Greg choked out, the weight of his hand gone from Mycroft’s head. Mycroft sucked him deep and felt him spill in his throat. He moaned, and Greg moaned louder, shooting again. Mycroft came up for air and Greg pulsed on his tongue. The bitter-salt flavour must have pushed some button within him, because abruptly he orgasmed, striping the brick wall with his seed, shuddering with the sharply pleasurable shocks, stroking his cock, milking another and another and another jolt of pleasure.

Mycroft panted, his head resting on Greg’s hip, twitching with aftershocks. Greg was still, occupied with his own recovery... but then he pulled Mycroft up and wrapped his arms around him... and laughed. Greg’s aftershocks were manifesting as laughter once again. It was delightful.

As Mycroft felt Greg’s chest and bare belly quivering with his giggles he smiled, feeling content.

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Mycroft woke to the unhappy feeling of having been run over by a truck.

He coughed, and it raked through his lungs like shards of glass and Mycroft knew he had slept late — his body was impatient for his first cigarette. The cough also set off a pounding in his skull that made him want to curl up and die. He moaned.

The pressure on his bladder refused to let him go back to sleep.

When he opened an eye, it was hideously bright. *Hideously bright.*

His own bedroom would be dim, the blinds drawn if the sun threatened to shine in. Thus, he was at Greg’s. The inferior linens and texture of the mattress should have told him this immediately.
But someone was smashing a sledgehammer against his brain so Mycroft gave himself a pass. Baijiu! Why had he thought that was a good idea!?

He was still wearing his pants but was otherwise nude. They had come to Greg’s flat and fallen directly into bed.

He opened his eyes again, shielding them with his hand, until they adjusted to the light. Then he sat up, noting that he was alone in the bed, and trudged to the loo. The flat was quiet.

As he washed his face and hands, Mycroft tried to scrub off the palm tree inked on the back of his hand. He had better luck with scissors on the plastic bracelet.

Mycroft went back to the bedroom to take stock. It was almost noon. The clothes that he had let fall as he shed them, had been picked up and neatly spread on the chair, his boots tucked beneath. There was a glass of water on the bed table and a note. And two pills. Gratefully, Mycroft swallowed the pills and drank the water. Then he picked up the note.

*Dear Sleeping Beauty — I’ve been called into work this morning but didn’t have the heart to wake you. I’m sorry I’m not there to make you a nice, greasy fry-up — it’d take care of the hangover, trust me — but help yourself to anything you like. There’s coffee and tea in the cupboard over the toaster. Damn it, I’m sorry I can’t be there! Text me. Let me know when you’re feeling human again. I’ll see you tomorrow at 08:00 at the Northwest corner of Greenwich Park.*

*XX*

*The Monkey King*

*If nothing else heat up one of the sausage buttys in the fridge. Really, it’ll help.*

Mycroft trudged into the kitchen in his pants and filled the kettle for tea. Then he walked around Greg’s sombre dining table and hauled open the window. He lit the cigarette he’d liberated from his jacket, leaned out the window and smoked it down in the brisk daylight. His skin was chilled gooseflesh when he stubbed out the butt and secured the window.

He made himself a cuppa and mentally reviewed all the work he had to do. First on the list: locating and erasing the CCTV camera footage at a certain loading dock in Soho.

**Chapter End Notes**

Any date following the escape room is bound to seem tame...

I know I said there’d be two dates this week, but I was at 9,000 words and not a third of the way through date three. So, next week: the third official fabulous date.

Princess Iron Fan - you can watch it on YouTube!
[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess_Iron_Fan_(1941_film)]

Baijiu - [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baijiu](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baijiu)
The 'Third' Fabulous Date

Chapter Summary

A day of exercise, quiet contemplation, and sharing private thoughts

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg was at Greenwich Park when Mycroft’s car pulled up. He was wearing loose, black running pants, assaultively fluorescent trainers, an ancient green nylon windbreaker and gloves. White headphone cables emerged from under his black beanie and disappeared into the collar of his jacket. Mycroft briefly felt self-conscious in his matching tights and jacket with coordinated trainers, and smart wicking cap, but he dismissed the feeling as unproductive.

Greg was jumping up and down — to keep warm, presumably. There was a light sheen of sweat on his face, suggesting he’d run to their meeting place. His overnight bag lay at his feet.

Mycroft climbed out of the car and Greg’s smile dawned like a beautiful new day. Mycroft could not help but smile back. Greg pulled the earbuds from his ears as Mycroft approached, and kissed him in greeting, his big hand on the back of Mycroft’s head.

“Feeling better?” He asked. “Baijiu has quite a bite.”

“Much.” Mycroft’s hangover had plagued him most of Saturday. Perhaps he should have eaten one of Greg’s microwave sausage butties... but he’d never had a butty in his life and didn’t care to start now. “I’ll just put this in the car, shall I.” He said, picking up Greg’s rucksack. His driver was already out of the sedan, taking the pack from his hands. “Thank you, Paul.” Mycroft said.

“Ta, mate.” Greg added. Mycroft was gratified to see that Greg barely looked at Paul (who was worth looking at, Mycroft had indulged upon occasion). He only had eyes for Mycroft. “You ready for this?” He asked. “Do you need to stretch?”

“I’m ready... I generally start slowly to warm up.”

“Slow sounds good today. You set the pace.” Greg looked at him expectantly.

Mycroft began to jog, Greg falling into step beside him. They had discovered that they both ran several times a week for fitness, and Greg suggested they run together Sunday morning. Then Mycroft had done some research online and found that Greg was a much more accomplished runner — he’d run a three-hour marathon.

“Yeah, ten years ago.” Greg laughed when Mycroft confronted him with his PR. “I couldn’t get close to that now. Have to stop smoking. And train my lazy arse.”

Considering Mycroft’s marathon PR was almost twice Greg’s, he wasn’t impressed by Greg’s protests.

But Greg was keen on the idea of starting their third date early with a run, and promised he wasn’t bothered by a slower pace. So, Mycroft had agreed — but insisted on twelve kilometres. It was a
longer run than Mycroft generally made time for, but as Greg would be moderating his pace to accommodate him, he felt it only fair to go farther. Greg had planned their route, a variation on one he ran regularly, modified to end at Mycroft’s flat.

Greg was chatty, the pace, apparently, not challenging enough to cause him to breathe heavily. Mycroft could not say the same for himself.

“Sorry again about yesterday.” Greg said. “Another foot fetish corpse turned up — that’s my case, I had to go in... I called Sherlock, we’re officially hunting a serial or spree murderer now and Sherlock’s great with those. Can’t really count on the usual motivations with serial murderers. They tend to kill strangers. Most murderers kill a family member or romantic rival — someone they know. Well, almost always it’s someone he knows. Men kill three times as often as women... still, the serial killers’ victims have something in common... just have to find it...”

“Oh-huh.” Mycroft said breathlessly.

“Sherlock’s sitting with it.” Greg chuckled. “Got a bit of a lecture for not calling him in sooner. But the second victim was male, we didn’t link him to the first until after the post. Spree killers will kill randomly, serial killers have a criteria... we’ve spent hours combing through the first two victim’s lives, trying to find something they have in common, other than how they were killed... honestly, I felt a little vindicated that your brother didn’t walk in and solve it immediately.”

“Mmmm.”

“On the other hand, if he had, we might have made an arrest by now... I’m not looking forward to a fourth footless corpse.”

“No... (pant)... I imagine... (pant)... not.”

“I got to talk with John a bit, though, and good news... sounds like he and Sherlock are working some stuff out. They’re talking anyway. John said he was beginning to trust Sherlock again — he really hadn’t since he came back from being dead.”

Mycroft was outraged. “After... after everything Sherlock’s... (pant)... done for John... (pant, pant)... he didn’t trust... (pant) him?!” Greg didn’t even know about Magnussen — how close Sherlock had come to going back to the Serbian nightmare — all so John could keep his boring, suburban life with his mostly retired assassin wife! Mycroft did not regret her death one iota!

“Yeah, John didn’t know what Sherlock had done. He didn’t know anything. The way Sherlock came back, making a joke of it, really rubbed John the wrong way. I mean, you and I know Sherlock was just nervous... but John... John really suffered when Sherlock died... making light of it, it made John feel like a fool for mourning him. Then Sherlock told him he’d been off on a ‘grand adventure’ and John didn’t want to hear it. Can’t say I blame him, really. But long story short, John didn’t know.

“I found all this out the other week — when I told him I was seeing you, actually.” Greg touched Mycroft’s arm with an affectionate smile. “I thought John knew all about it... couldn’t work out why he was so tetchy with Sherlock still... but they’re talking now... I think Sherlock’s still downplaying it a bit... doesn’t want to tell John about the really bad stuff... but he showed John his back. John’s a doctor, he knows what had to happen to cause those scars.

“The good thing — what I’m trying to say — is the vibe between them is different. Better.”

“Vibe?” Mycroft managed.
“Yeah, yesterday it was more like it was before Sherlock left. I caught John looking at him like he used to... unguarded... like Sherlock hung the moon... haven’t seen that in a long time.

“So maybe... maybe John ... I dunno... I don’t want to push. That could backfire too easily. And I’m no matchmaker. Just hard to see Sherlock suffer — see them both suffer. You know what I mean?”


“Maybe it’s just hard for me to understand ’cause if I like someone, I’ve never been fussed about their gender.”

“Isn’t it different... (pant)... being with (pant)... women and... (pant)... men?”

"You've never been with a woman?"

"No."

“Some stuff’s different. Some’s the same. Great thing about seeing a man...” Greg grinned. “Men are almost always up for it. Women... you can go weeks without sometimes. Months and months after a baby... and it’s not like you can complain... with a man... it’s not an issue.” They ran a few steps. “Not that I’m saying you always have to be up for it!” He rushed to explain. “No one is all the time, yeah.”

Mycroft smirked at him. “I under... (pant)... stand your... (pant)... point.”

Greg nodded. “Good.” They turned onto a path next to the river. “I love this bit.” Greg said gesturing at the Thames. “I’ve had a couple bodies wash up here... always thought it was pretty... good place for a run... this time of year anyway — it gets rank in the summer. I was happy when they opened the path...”

Greg talked steadily through all twelve k, pausing only to do foot speed drills when they passed along the other side of the park. Mycroft enjoyed both listening to him and watching him sprint fluidly across the green grass, his thick thigh muscles flexing under the black track pants. Later, he thought, I’m going to run my hands over those incredible thighs!

By the time they reached his street, Mycroft had learned three things: 1) Greg was a natural athlete whose body appeared to want to run faster/harder/longer; 2) Mycroft was not a natural athlete and his body preferred to sit quietly whilst he read; and 3) Greg's patience and good-nature must be endless as he never appeared irritated by Mycroft’s slowness. Mycroft had been irritated by his own slowness almost immediately.

As they approached Mycroft’s building, Greg dug a pack of cigarettes out of his jacket and lit up with a great sigh. “Oh, that’s good.” He said.

He offered it to Mycroft who took it, inhaling with pleasure. They lingered outside the entrance, finishing the cigarette, cooling down in the chilly wind.

“When did you start running?” Mycroft asked, admiring the twitch of gluteal muscle in the worn track pants.

“I ran a bit in college.” Greg told him. “I was on the football team and wanted to keep in shape in the off season. I’m pretty lazy, though, didn’t stick with it. I started again after Gigi was born. I got one of those running prams off eBay and went out for an hour in the evenings. Gave Jude a break. And gave me a chance to find me own way with Gigi... be with her without Jude hanging over me telling me I was doing it wrong.” Greg smiled wryly. “I wasn’t smoking then. I could run a lot faster. What
“I was never sporty. But as with many men, when I hit middle age, I realised I had to do something. Running seemed to have the shallowest learning curve… and doesn’t require a lot of equipment.”

“Well, you look good doing it. Maybe it’s the dancing, but you’re very graceful.”

“Oh...” Mycroft felt himself blush. Greg smiled softly and brushed his knuckles along Mycroft freckled cheek.

“There it is.” He murmured. “I’d missed it.” He leaned in and stole a kiss. Mycroft felt his heart flutter. Greg’s sweat smelled intoxicatingly virile.

In the lift, Mycroft pressed his face against Greg’s neck and inhaled deeply. Greg’s sturdy arms held him close. Mycroft smiled against his skin.

A frisky Bast accosted them in the lounge, running over to rub against both their legs. “Mew!” She said, looking up expectantly.

“What’s that?” Mycroft asked her. “All your desires have not been met? What a terrible oversight.” He pulled a metre-long fishing rod with a feather on the line from a shelf and taunted her with it. She panted excitedly and leapt at the feather, catching it and dragging it down to the floor.

Greg crouched down and rubbed the little cat’s belly. She closed around his hand like a Venus Flytrap, all claws and teeth. He laughed and doubled down, tugging her tail gently. She chattered and spun crazily on her back. He giggled and let Mycroft tempt her with the feather until she ran in circles. Bast captured the feather again and Mycroft let her have it. She trotted away with it in her mouth, dragging the fishing rod behind.

Greg laughed at her, delighted. He pulled Mycroft into his arms. “Shower?” He asked.

Mycroft kissed his mouth, enjoying the slide of lips. He didn’t care to admit he’d showered before the run, so he’d looked presentable — he definitely needed another.

In the big shower, Mycroft admired Greg’s body. It was taut, the muscles moving smoothly under his tan skin. He still couldn’t quite believe that Greg Lestrade was here with him, smiling as he rubbed soap on his hands and touched Mycroft’s pale, freckled skin. Greg’s big hands ran over his soft stomach and Mycroft resisted the urge to tense his abs. Greg’s hands travelled upwards to his chest, soaping him thoroughly, and then roamed over his shoulders.

Mycroft took the soap and began sudsing Greg’s broad chest, playing with his nipples. The brown aureoles were big and round and they prickled and hardened satisfyingly.

“Mmmm...” Greg moaned, his heavy cock growing harder and longer. Just the sight made Mycroft’s prick respond.

He reached down and took hold of Greg’s penis, learning the shape of it with his hand. Greg pulled him closer and kissed him, his mouth soft and supple. Mycroft felt the roughness of Greg’s unshaven face as he opened Greg’s lips with his own and plunged his tongue deep.

Greg’s hand sought Mycroft’s long, slim member, thumbing the crown then sliding his big paw down to the root and back up again, his fingertips on the sensitive underside.

“Look at you.” Greg murmured. “I love seeing you like this.”
Mycroft’s cheeks burned, and he kissed away Greg’s knowing smile, jacking him in earnest.

Water cascaded down his back, and a lesser amount down Greg’s chest, trickling through the dark hair, their erections hard between them. They stroked each other, one of Greg’s hands on Mycroft’s hip, holding him close. Their foreheads met as they leaned in, sharing panted breaths as they stroked and pumped the other’s cock.

“You feel so good...” Greg murmured. He sucked on Mycroft’s lip, nibbled his jaw, his breath soft on Mycroft’s neck. “Love feeling you in my hand.”

Mycroft moaned, Greg’s hand flying on his prick, his thumb swiping over the head. “Greg...” He murmured. “Oh... Greg...”

“You’re so hard.” Greg’s hand on his hip clutched more tightly and Mycroft thrust into his fist. “That’s right, just like that. Oh, I feel you.”

Greg twisted his wrist over the crown and the tingling pressure in Mycroft’s bollocks was too much. He clutched at Greg’s arm. “Greg...” Groaning, Mycroft came over Greg’s fingers, his head falling back. Greg pressed his face to Mycroft’s neck, kissing him as he shuddered through the orgasm. “Oh... oh... oh...” Greg stroked it out of him, shocks of pleasure shorting out his brain...

“Mmmm... look at you... flushed and... mmm... gorgeous.” His mouth caught Mycroft’s and kissed him, his tongue caressing his palate hungrily.

Mycroft’s hand had stilled whilst he came. Trembling with aftershocks, he started stroking again. Greg’s hand covered his, exerting more pressure. Mycroft gripped Greg’s thick cock more firmly, feeling the foreskin sliding under his palm. He thumbed Greg’s weeping slit, smearing the wetness down his soapy shaft and Greg grunted in pleasure.

“So good...” Greg moaned. Mycroft reached down to fondle his balls, squeezing and twisting, massaging his perineum with firm fingers. He rubbed faster, and a little rougher and Greg’s groan told Mycroft he was close. Greg’s eyes went wide. “Oh!” He shot between them, thick, hot ropes of cum. Mycroft jacked him through it until Greg shuddered and pulled away, giggling softly.

He leaned against the wall, letting the water rinse the cum from his belly.

“I love that you laugh when you climax.” Mycroft told him.

Greg, laughing, reached out and stroked Mycroft’s neck with his fingers. “That’s good.” He said. “’Cause that’s what happens.” He leaned forward and kissed him sweetly. It went on for a long time.

They washed themselves and dressed. Oddly, Mycroft enjoyed sharing his personal spaces with Greg, it felt wonderfully domestic. It surprised him, how much he enjoyed it. Even Greg’s alarmingly orange trainers looked charming next to Mycroft’s bed.

Greg wore casual black jeans and a striped dress shirt tucked in at his trim waist. Mycroft had taken stock of his casual attire before Friday’s date — and discovered he had very little. He’d just about exhausted it on Friday. For today, he dredged up a pristine butterscotch cardigan that Mummy had bestowed on him one Christmas years ago. With brown tweed trousers, a green collared shirt and brown ascot, the cardigan eked over into acceptability.

But Mycroft had drawn the line at taking the Underground again. There was casual and then there was dreadful. Greg had chuckled and given in to being driven in Mycroft’s big sedan.

Greg’s eyes sparkled as they climbed in.
“What are you thinking?” Mycroft asked. Greg’s brown eyes were lovely.

He smiled. “I’m thinking about the first time I was in this car.” Greg had kissed him for the first time as they had travelled to his flat on Christmas Eve.

Today Greg leaned back, relaxed, sliding his fingers across the seat to touch Mycroft’s. After sex and a big meal, Mycroft could have napped — and he suspected Greg could too. But that wouldn’t do on a date. They both valiantly stayed awake.

After the shower, Greg had made a cooked breakfast in Mycroft’s big, stainless steel kitchen — a cooked breakfast that reminded Mycroft of... well, he wanted to say ‘home’ but it was an idealised concept of ‘home’ embedded in the British subconscious. It certainly wasn’t Mycroft’s childhood home. Cooked breakfast there meant Father made porridge, something that happened every day still. Mycroft hadn’t even had a proper cooked breakfast... until... well, until today.

When Greg had told him his plan, Mycroft insisted on purchasing the supplies. After a bit of back and forth, Greg agreed, but only if he could send the shopping list to the person who would actually do the shopping. Thus, Mycroft hadn’t known what, exactly, to expect.

Mycroft watched as Greg, with a cigarette in his mouth and his cuffs turned up, put Mycroft’s heretofore unused cast iron skillet on the hob, and began frying tomatoes, potatoes, onions and mushrooms, sausage, eggs, bacon, and black pudding. He heated beans and put bread in to toast.

It smelled wonderful. Mycroft resolved to ignore the amount of butter Greg used.

Mycroft made tea, set the table and put blackberry jam into a little serving pot. Then Greg set a plate brimming with food in front of him.

“You are a good cook.” Mycroft said, tucking into his egg. “This is perfect.”

Greg shrugged. “It ain’t brain surgery.”

“I haven’t had black pudding in ages.”

“That’s on you.”

“That’s on my arteries.”


“Not as such. I should quit smoking... until that auspicious day, I do my best to exercise and eat healthily.” Mycroft smiled. “Which up until now has not included a full English.”

“I can’t say I’ve had a proper cooked breakfast recently either. Me gran would make it for us when we visited. And Mum on special occasions.” Greg laughed. “I could really put it away when I was young — a bit of toast or cereal was never enough. But as you say, middle age has required some adjustments. Not that my diet is very healthy... after the divorce I guess I regressed. Started smoking again... eating mostly takeaway... there’s a reason most DCIs die on the job.” Greg laughed without humour, attempting, Mycroft knew, to soften his words. “So, erm, eat up!” He said with a grin.

Mycroft laughed. “After that run this morning, you won’t be able to convince me you aren’t the very picture of health.”

“I think we’re both doing ok.” Greg said, his brown eyes lingering on Mycroft’s long, elegant form.
The Clore Gallery in the Tate Britain has the largest collection of Turners in the world, so many that there is not enough space for them all. The collection revolves, some going into storage periodically to be replaced by others. Room after room is filled chronologically with J.M.W. Turner’s paintings. Greg had been there before, Mycroft knew, as had Mycroft, but not for a number of years.

As they walked through the rooms, Mycroft found himself suppressing a yawn. Turner had been prolific, but they weren’t all masterpieces.

“You know...” Greg said. “Seeing all these again, it really highlights how good your Turner is. You know, it might be... important.”

“Yes, that thought has occurred to me.” Mycroft told him. “I’m certain that the experts will have a fine time arguing over it when I’m dead.”

“You don’t want to know?”

Mycroft shuddered. “No! I want to be safely in my grave before it's 'discovered.' I haven’t even allowed it to be photographed.”

“No?”

“No. My great uncle had it appraised and photographed in the 1930’s. So, there’s a description and a black and white image in circulation. Periodically Mummy or I get a request from some expert or other to examine it.” Mycroft scoffed, amused. “I believe the prevailing theory is that the appraiser in the ’30s was mistaken and/or it’s a hoax. I was even accused of self-aggrandisement by one premiere Turner expert, despite the fact that I have never acknowledged its existence.”

“You don’t think art should be shared?” Greg protested. “That a masterpiece should be exhibited... seen?”

Mycroft sighed. “In theory. In practice I have neither the time nor the will. It can be shown ad nauseum when I’ve departed.”

Greg huffed a laugh. “I guess if it went on tour, you’d have nothing for the mantle.”

“I’d have to sell it to afford the security it would need to stay on my mantle. And the insurance.”

“It is rather exciting.” Greg said. “One day a significant Turner will be discovered. There’ll be a special unveiling... probably a big, fat fundraiser. I’ll have to queue up to see it.”

Mycroft took his hand. “You can see it whenever you like.” He murmured. Greg glanced over, a small smile on his lips, but didn’t remark.

Mycroft remembered the conversation they’d had Wednesday, after Greg had seen John and his daughter to their cab.

Greg had returned alone and had held out the lift key to Mycroft. “Thanks.”

“Oh... you’ll need that to get out of the garage in the morning.” Mycroft told him.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yes. Only ‘official key holders’ are given access to the garage.” Mycroft rolled his eyes. “So, I made you an official key holder. Expedient.” Greg had an odd look on his face that spoke volumes. “If it makes you uncomfortable, I’ll have it revoked. But street parking in this neighbourhood is
"monstrous." He’d walked away to pick up Bast. He held the little cat against his shoulder like an infant in need of winding. She purred and kneaded him with her claws.

When he turned to look, Greg still had the key in his hand. “It’s entirely inconsequential.” He said. “Bed?”

Without further comment, Greg put the little key back in his pocket. “Yeah, I’m getting tired. Bed sounds good.”

They left the Clore Gallery, left the building entirely, and walked around to the side entrance to see the finalists for this year’s Turner Prize — a prestigious award, named for J.M.W. Turner, given annually to a British artist. (Defined as an artist of any nationality working primarily in Britain or a British citizen making art anywhere in the world.)

“I’m surprised you haven’t seen the Turner finalists exhibit yet.” Mycroft said. “It closes in three weeks.”

“Oh, I have. Twice — once on me own to make sure it was acceptable for a fourteen-year-old and once with Georgianna.”

“We can do something else...”

“No — I had planned to come again anyway. It will be interesting to hear your thoughts on the exhibits... you really haven’t been?”

“Sadly, I don’t often make time for pleasures such as these.”

“I know what you mean. I hardly ever got to a special exhibit when I was married — twice a year, maybe. I’d get busy at work and miss the time on me ticket...”

Greg was lost in thought for a moment and Mycroft wanted to know what had happened the day he was thinking about, the day he’d been at a murder scene missing an exhibit to which he’d been looking forward. Did he think of it wistfully whilst he looked over the body? Or did it completely slip his mind until after? Ah! He hadn’t thought of it and he was supposed to meet his wife there — his wife who was only going to the exhibit to prop up their limping marriage... she’d already been looking elsewhere for attention, but she was still feeling guilty about it. Being stood up at an art exhibit she didn’t care about in the first place went a long way towards assuaging her guilt...

Mycroft felt guilty himself for a second, reading the pain of Greg’s failed marriage in the tense set of his mouth and sad look in his faraway eyes. He hated Greg’s wife for failing him far more than he ever failed her. She had never deserved such a fine and dedicated man!

This pain... it was different than the pain Mycroft had caught a glimpse of in the club Friday night, the pain that a song from Greg’s youth — or rather his young adulthood — had inspired. That had been pain for a young love, a first love... a love lost too soon, lost before bitterness and recriminations could bury it...

“Mycroft?”

“Oh, sorry. Just thinking how remiss I’ve been. I’ve missed the Turner finalists for several years now. Thank you for bringing me.”

“When was the last time?”

“2015.” Mycroft told him. “The winner was an architecture and design collective working in South
Liverpool, I believe.”

“Oh yeah, Assemble. Interesting, that. I was more taken with another artist that year... archives about paranoia and conspiracy theories... really resonated.”

“Camplin, yes?” Mycroft supplied. He of course remembered every detail of the exhibit, the chilly arrangement of furs sewn onto Bauhaus Cesca chairs, the overwritten operatic piece about someone named ‘Doug,’ and of course Bonnie Camplin’s invented archive room that one could explore....

“Yeah... you didn’t agree with the winner?”

“No, I thought Assemble was very deserving. As a public servant, though, I found it problematic — private projects such as theirs should not be seen to replace government intervention, leading to further withdrawals of public funds and further atomisation. I recall the PM was gleefully chopping all sorts of programs... I had quite the job, reinstating what I could and reconfiguring others... no additions to the improvements budget that year, I’m afraid.”

“I had no idea you were involved in such... domestic matters.”

“I’m involved in everything,” Mycroft told him sharply. “Everything that keeps Britain running.”

“That’s me told, then.” Greg said with a grin. Mycroft realised he’d sounded rather savage.

“Apologies... I take my job seriously.”

“Don’t apologise. It’s refreshing to see passion in politics — especially about something important, not just Tories making themselves richer and Labour bemoaning the Tories.”

Mycroft smiled blandly. His own political philosophy was completely agnostic. It mattered little to him which party ruled — as long as they didn’t stray too far off the stable path he’d set them on. Though he had to admit, Cameron had been particularly infuriating. Mycroft had strongly opposed putting Brexit to a popular vote... popular votes were notoriously fickle, responding to cults of personality even — or especially — when it harmed the popular voter personally. Not to mention the Russian influence. Mycroft would be dealing with the fallout of Cameron’s folly for decades.

“I’m not in politics.” Mycroft said disdainfully. “I am a public servant, much like yourself.”

“Yeah, just like me.” Greg laughed.

The four finalists of the Turner prize this year were all digital films. The entry into the exhibit was a brightly-lit lounge with sofas and a coffee table. There were four unmarked doorways spaced around the room each dark, each leading to one of the four exhibits.

“Your choice.” Greg said, smiling. Mycroft indicated a doorway and they went in.

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Greg sat back in the comfortable chair and sipped his tea. They’d spent the entire afternoon at the Turner Prize exhibit, watching the videos, taking in the displays. Then Greg had taken Mycroft to the nearest storefront Ladbrokes.

Ladbrokes was a gambling establishment — not a traditional casino, everything was online, cards,
slots, roulette, bingo, etc. More interestingly you could get odds and lay a bet on just about anything. You could bet on the sex of the unborn royal baby; you could bet which song would be number one on the British Pop Charts at Christmas; you could bet on all pro sports, horse racing, dog racing, Eurovision, elections and just about anything else. And you could bet on which of the four finalists would win the Turner Prize.

Greg put ten pounds on his favourite and another ten on Georgianna’s pick. He challenged Mycroft to do the same.

“Do you want me to bet on who will win or to whom I personally would give the prize?” Mycroft asked.

“Bet to win.” Greg told him. “Who would you give the prize to?”

“Ah, Forensic Architecture. The careful analysis and reconstruction of a chaotic situation — the use of footage filmed during the raid with the addition of computer modeling laid the story out so perfectly... in my work, I read so many reports, listen to so many people, that are trying to tell me something that is not supported by the documentation. It’s refreshing to see a lie revealed so fully.”

“Yeah that was really interesting — and just terrible, what happened. But you don’t think it’ll win?”

“Oh no. Prodger will win.”

“How do you know?” Greg asked.

“Because choosing Forensic Architecture's film as a finalist is already more of a rebuke to the Israeli government than Britain is willing to give. There’s no way in hell it will be allowed to win. Charlotte Prodger’s film is emotional and expressive, political in only the most personal way. It criticises no one and glorifies Scotland. It will absolutely win.”

“Well, I hope you’re right, I just put a tenner on it.” Greg said.

Georgianna’s favourite, and Greg’s second bet, was Luke Willis Thompson. Greg’s daughter had been very moved by Thompson’s videos. Projected on the bare walls of the gallery, they were portraits of the loved ones of innocent people killed peremptorily by police. Greg had to admit to some ambivalence... but the survivors — all dark skinned, all staring out at the viewer, blinking but not moving nor speaking — their faces filled with sorrow, anger, accusation... how could he not be affected? How could he not examine his attitudes about police shootings?

Georgianna had asked him about it and they’d had a long discussion — which as far as Greg was concerned was one of the functions of good art. That hadn’t made the discussion easy.

He himself had been captivated by Prodger’s lyrical half hour iPhone video addressing her queer identity and her native Scottish landscapes. The first two times he’d watched it, it too had caused him some introspection, some guilt. He’d been a closeted bisexual coasting along on heterosexual privilege. Well, no longer. The piece still spoke to him...

After laying their bets, Greg had taken them to a pub that on its second floor served tea well after teatime. He’d put a lump of sugar and some milk in his English Breakfast tea sat back and sipped it, enjoying it immensely. The tower of finger sandwiches and tiny pastries were exactly right after the big breakfast and long hours at the museum. Greg almost always brought Georgianna here after they visited the Tate Britain. Georgianna insisted.

“I was surprised there was no painting or sculpture.” Mycroft noted. “Amongst the finalists this year.”
“Digital art is the future.” Greg said mildly.

“Is it? To the exclusion of more traditional art forms?”

“Not to the exclusion. Painting and sculpture can still be relevant. But last year, the painting... there were some... well, even I thought they were weak. You have to admit, all four pieces this year were strong.”

“I will admit as much.” Mycroft said with the slightest smirk over the edge of his teacup. “How did you end up in homicide instead of, say forgery or art smuggling?”

“Ah... my interest in art began after I became a copper. You might even say that homicide led to it.”

Mycroft raised his eyebrows in interest.

“Murder in a gallery. Contemporary place, not far from the Tate Modern actually. Closed now.

"Yes?" Mycroft prompted.

"You want to hear about the murder? It wasn't that interesting. Straight up jealous lover."

"I want to hear how it lead a police detective to a love of art."

Greg sighed. "I don't know really. I was pretty young and... feeling a bit at sea I guess — not at work, I loved my job... I always wanted to be a detective and I worked bloody hard at it..." Greg’s eyes flashed a challenge, but Mycroft just nodded. "But... work...it wasn’t quite enough. Football and pints with the lads didn’t fill the gap. I hadn’t met my wife yet, but romance was not going to be the answer, I already knew that… I felt…” Greg faltered. “A little... empty... when I think about it, I had done for a long time. But it had become more obvious."

It had been after Ben had left him. The gap Ben had left had exposed this hollowness inside him. Greg had known he would never be able to fill the hole Ben had left... but this other emptiness...

“A gallery assistant found the guest curator stabbed to death and my DCI caught it... I’ve never told anyone this before — I walked into the gallery for the first time and just felt... overwhelmed... I had to leave... it was too much.

"The gallery was filled with these huge paintings — wall-sized, too big for anyone's living room, you know?" Greg’s voice was very soft. He could see Mycroft straining to hear and it made him wonder that he was saying these things at all. “They were very bright, almost gaudy... paintings of patterns... like fabric swatches... but for a giant. They made me feel... tiny… but it also made me feel — don't laugh — that giants might exist… it was a magical feeling.”

Greg paused, contemplatively. “Those paintings... I think about them sometimes. What happened to them... where they ended up. I wonder if someday I'll walk into an exhibit and see them again... maybe that’s why I go... maybe I’m looking for them.” Greg grimaced unconsciously. “I don't know. Honestly, I don’t know anything about 'em, don’t know the artist’s name even..." Greg licked his lips, smiled. "But both the Twombly print and the Hockney reminded me a little bit of them... in different ways, of course... they have that same... magic...” Greg scoffed self-deprecatingly.

“I think I’ve felt that once or twice.” Mycroft murmured. “Go on.”

“Erm, well, my DCI assigned me to sit with the assistant — he was in shock and a bit hysterical... to distract him, I asked him about the paintings. I probably understood one word in seven — art has its own language, I don't speak it. I never could learn... but he had such a passion...
“He... I remember he flirted. He had a girlfriend — I met her. But he asked me out... or rather, he asked me to meet him for sex.” Greg couldn’t remember his name. “I wasn’t interested... it wasn’t him — a few years before I would have done. It was...” Greg broke off. It was Ben... he’d been devastated.

“I met him for coffee. It wasn’t him... I wanted something from him. Not sex. Something... I didn’t know what. Something...

"That weekend I went to the Tate — first time I’d been in a museum since a school trip when I was twelve.” Greg chuckled. “Which made it the second time I’d been in a museum. Honestly, I had no idea what I was doing there. It was pretty boring... until I got to Bacon. His work... so violent, so emotional, so... sexual... just vibrating with horror and passion... it tore me apart...

"I stared at them so long, a docent took pity on me and struck up a conversation. She told me a little about Francis Bacon's life, about the paintings... the context... it mattered and it didn't matter... I... it's strange to say, but they filled me.”

Greg stared at his teacup for a few moments. “By the time I met Jude, I was a regular visitor. Didn’t talk about it much. Didn’t talk about it at all really until Georgianna got old enough to start asking questions. Had to study up a bit then... but I discovered that I didn’t mind... not with her anyway. She didn’t look at me like I was crazy like me mates, or like I was an idiot like the proper art crowd. It’s just something we do together, she and I. It feels like I’ve given her something valuable.”

Greg smiled self-consciously and looked up. “I must be tired.” He said, attempting to excuse his sentimental nattering. He changed the subject. “What about you? You must have passions.”

Mycroft pursed his lips. “Must I?”

“Come on. I just told you...” Everything Greg thought. I've just given you everything... almost everything...

Mycroft smiled — a smile Greg had never seen before. “It’s hard to say...” Mycroft said. “I’d hardly call it my passion... it hardly compares... Greg... but analysing systems and improving them, it gives me a deep sense of satisfaction. One could perhaps say it’s my calling.”

Greg took a deep breath and nodded. “Is that what you went to school for?”

“Goodness no. I’ve always had it.”

“Yeah?” Greg asked. “How did you discover it?”

Mycroft took a breath. Greg thought he would protest, demure, but surprisingly he did not. “I’d have to say it started with Sherlock.” He said slowly. “Sherlock was born when I was seven. By then, I knew Father was hopeless and Mummy too self-involved to be depended upon... I took it upon myself to give my brother what I wished I had been given. Companionship, guidance, attention... love...” Mycroft smiled a bit ruefully. “I would say my childhood ended when he was born, but it had ended years before when I comprehended my parents’ shortcomings. I nurtured Sherlock’s passions — made sure he had violin lessons, a microscope, chemistry set... books, lots of books. It was a simple thing to influence Mummy and Father. They almost always took the path of least resistance where Sherlock and I were concerned.

“It was a simple thing to love him. He was such a bright, sunny child. We were... inseparable. I remember that we were happy.” Mycroft would not look up. "I was happy."

"Then when Sherlock was seven, I was sent away to school. It was traumatic for both of us.”
Mycroft cleared his throat and looked up with perfect composure. “I already thought I knew better how to raise Sherlock than our parents. I quickly understood and was disgusted by my school — the social hierarchy, the academic structure, the faculty politics… all discouraging, disorganised, inefficient. It was strikingly obvious to me how it could be improved — but equally as obvious that no one would listen to me.” He looked away. “I loathed it there.

“But the status quo was simply unacceptable, I could not abide being part of a broken system. I set about making the changes on my own. My age and status as a first-year student were obstacles I had to surmount. For that, I needed something significant… some leverage, something to make my status irrelevant. To that end, I decided to make use of the ability to deduce a person’s life, their secrets — an ability that up until then I had considered useless and irritating. Having very personal knowledge allowed me to subtly manipulate people and situations. By the time I left, I’d put about half of my improvements in place and they were successful — students were happier, faculty more devoted, hazing all but obliterated…”

“What did you do?” Greg asked with a grin. "Blackmail the headmaster, like you blackmailed the party planner for New Year’s Eve?"

“Goodness no. That would have achieved very little. I went right to the board of directors.”

Greg laughed. “Board of Directors. Of course.”

“University was much the same. I studied a number of disciplines — economics, sociology, international politics amongst other things — and at the same time, cleaned up the departments. They were running like well-oiled machines by the time I grew bored. I got myself recruited into public service and continued the work on a larger and larger scale.”

“And the rest is history?” Greg asked.

Mycroft sighed sadly. “A few years after that Sherlock decided shooting drugs in London was more interesting than reading chemistry at Cambridge. Turns out I am just as self-involved as Mummy… I hadn’t noticed that he was going off the rails.”

“That’s hardly your fault, Mycroft.”

“Isn’t it? I knew he had no one else. I knew he wasn’t as resilient as I. Yet I... abandoned him.”

“You didn’t abandon him.” Greg said.

“I didn’t pay enough attention.”

“You’ve gone above and beyond for Sherlock. Over and over.”

“Have I?” Mycroft asked softly. “I... worry.”

“I know. But he has John now. You don’t have to worry so much.”

“Yes, he has John. Until he doesn’t. You said yourself that John will remarry, walk away from Sherlock again. What happens then?”

“Same as what happened last time. You and I and Mrs. Hudson will be there for him.”

“It’s never enough.”

“No. It isn’t.” Greg said. “I’ve been trying to get through to John. It wouldn’t be good for him either,
leaving Sherlock. He just has to get it out of his head that a traditional nuclear family is what’s best for him and Rosie."

"Is that all?" Mycroft snarked.

"John isn’t a complete idiot." Greg asserted. "And he does love Sherlock."

"He does." Mycroft allowed. "I simply hope he loves him enough." He took a sip of his tea and looked contemplative. Greg sighed... they were on the same page about Sherlock and John, there was just so little they could do about it.

"What about you?" Greg asked. "You worry about Sherlock... who worries about you?"

Mycroft manufactured a smile. "No one needs to worry about me. As I said, I'm resilient."

"I guess I'm envious then." Greg said, picking at the Battenburg sponge. "As much as I like setting my own schedule, not having to accommodate someone else... I miss having someone who worries about me."

"I'm sure your daughter..." Mycroft began.

Greg cut him off. "She's just a kid. Kids shouldn't have to worry about their parents. Not until they're grown."

"In that case, it's good she doesn't have my parents." Mycroft said. Then he sighed. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be glib."

"No, you're all right." Greg said, not entirely convinced. He was lonely — had been since separating from Jude. Perhaps that's why he'd stayed with her so long... Mycroft had to be lonely too... he'd been alone so much longer...

"Changing the subject completely..." Greg began after a pause.

"Oh, thank god." Mycroft said with a grateful smirk.

Greg laughed. "If you aren’t busy on Saturday, February 12, can you keep it open?"

Mycroft pulled out his phone and swiped a few times. "Yes — the whole day?"

"Yeah. I have a date in mind that should count as fabulous. And in the meantime, next Friday?"

Mycroft grimaced. "Unfortunately, I’m travelling this week. I don’t get back until Saturday."

"Oh. It’s my weekend with Georgianna..." Greg said regretfully. "Erm, well, the Friday after then? February fifth?"

Mycroft swiped through his calendar. "I have a work event... would the sixth work for you?"

"Of course." Greg smiled. It would be strange after the intense conversation... the intense weekend — after four intense weekends — not to see Mycroft for two weeks. "You have to keep Britain running." He said, attempting to sound cavalier.

Mycroft smiled thinly. "I like to think it runs well enough that I can have an evening off now and again."

"Seriously though." Greg said, wondering if Mycroft were too resilient to ever feel lonely,
wondering what Mycroft was doing here with someone like Greg... “I don’t want to be a drain on your time.”

Mycroft looked surprised. “If it worries you, rest assured I wouldn’t allow it.” He sounded sharp.

Greg was taken aback by the tone. “Erm… right.” He floundered for a moment. “It’s, erm, a date then — Saturday, February sixth.” He said. He stretched his legs out and checked his watch. “Well, I have an early start tomorrow… I should get home.”

“Oh… I... I... erm...” Mycroft stuttered to a halt. “What I mean to say is, you’re welcome to stay with me tonight. I would like that very much.”

Greg studied his hands. After confiding some of his most private memories... private feelings... he was feeling exhausted... fragile. They’d been spending a lot of time together — the entire day on top of Friday and Wednesday... the intensity left him feeling drained. Obviously he wasn’t as resilient as Mycroft. “I have to get into work early — those foot fetish murders aren’t going to solve themselves. Believe it or not, Sherlock doesn’t do all my work for me.”

“Oh of course, not…” Mycroft faltered. “Greg… I find… I find that I can’t read this situation. Tell me, please, should I agree gracefully that you cannot stay with me tonight? Or can I make it possible for you to stay with me and easily get to work as early as you need? Though I would greatly prefer the latter, I will do the former if that’s what’s called for.”

Greg met Mycroft’s eyes — he was sincere. “I don’t think,” He said slowly. “I’ve ever heard you sound more like Sherlock.”

Mycroft looked away. “My brother is more willing to make himself vulnerable. I find it deeply uncomfortable.”

What happened to resilient? Impulsively, Greg reached out and took Mycroft’s hand. “I’m honoured that you’re willing with me.” He said. “I’ll miss you these next two weeks.”

“And I you, Greg.” Mycroft said. “Will you stay with me tonight?” He asked uncertainly.

Greg considered. He was feeling worn inside and out and he did have to get to work early. He liked the comfort and familiarity of his own flat. He didn’t have to worry about forgetting something, having to borrow it from Mycroft... or go without...

On the other hand... two weeks felt like a long time. And waking up alone when he could wake with someone special beside him...

Chapter End Notes

More of a traditional date perhaps, but an adventure nonetheless. And now a separation — will Greg discover that he DOESN’T miss Mycroft? Will Mycroft realize that his crush on Greg is fading now that he’s got to know him better?

When I think of JMW TURNER, this is the painting that comes to mind: The Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On) It’s so lovely... until you notice the small drowning figures in the foreground. -
FRANCIS BACON was a truly amazing British painter - the Tate has several of his stunning later works including Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion - https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bacon-three-studies-for-figures-at-the-base-of-a-crucifixion-n06171 and Seated Figure - https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bacon-seated-figure-t00459

THE TURNER PRIZE is worth checking out every year - https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turner-prize-2018

Ladbrokes - https://www.ladbrokes.com/home/en
One Week Later...

Chapter Summary

Mycroft and Greg have missed each other.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Foot Fetish murderer escalated. On Tuesday, two footless bodies were discovered. They were partners, a male/female couple, found in their flat, laid out nude on piles of shoes. Two victims at once was a big change in the killer’s pattern.

But it was definitely their guy. There were blood traces in the bathtub drain, suggesting the bodies had been exsanguinated there, similar to the first and third murders. And most tellingly, their feet, as with the other three victims, had been amputated and were missing.

Trophies, Greg assumed, and Sherlock agreed. The younger Holmes swept into the unfortunate couple’s flat, disrupted the forensic team, ordered John to examine the bodies — something John did reluctantly — and announced he smelled formaldehyde in the loo.

Greg himself could only smell bleach in the loo. It had been scrubbed clean with what smelled like a couple litres of the stuff. But after Sherlock’s announcement, the forensic team actually managed to find traces of embalming fluid.

Embalming fluid. An actual clue!

Unfortunately, embalming fluid was extremely easy to obtain. Amazon sold it, along with many other online and brick and mortar shops.

At least it seemed to confirm the trophy theory. The bodies of the victims left in the flat had not been embalmed.

Greg just had to find someone with ten embalmed feet in their possession.

He worked the case all week, eating at his desk or in the car, barely pausing to sleep, until his loudest and most obnoxious smartphone alarm announced it was time to go pick up Georgianna.

Greg sighed and closed the file he’d been reading, forwarding it to DI Smythe. Being a DCI— a Detective Chief Inspector — was supposed to be a more supervisory role. Lestrade had three DIs (Detective Inspectors), each with a team that included at least one DS (Detective Sergeant) and four or five DCs (Detective Constables).

But — as he had explained to Jude on more than one occasion — it was Lestrade who answered to the Chief Superintendent. All the cases were ultimately his. So, when the second victim was linked with the first, despite Smythe’s competence and Lestrade’s confidence in him, Lestrade stepped in as lead detective.

Greg arrived in Twickenham on time to pick up his daughter, but the dirty look Jude shot his way made it clear she was unhappy. He looked himself over — he’d showered on Friday and shaved last
on Thursday, so yeah, he looked a little scruffy. The bags under his eyes were more pronounced, attesting to how little sleep he’d gotten recently... Jude knew the signs, knew he’d been working nonstop.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” He asked her. “I’m here. I’m on time.”

“Because you’re going to be preoccupied all weekend.” She said. “You might as well have canceled.”

“Oh, don’t start. Please.” Greg said and turned away. Being divorced meant he didn’t have to listen to her complaints, not as long as he was punctual with picking up and dropping off his daughter. “Gigi...” He called up the stairs. “Gi, you ready to go?”

“Georgianna!” The girl announced as she flounced down the stairs with her overnight bag on her shoulder. “Crikey, Dad!”

“I called you ‘Gigi’ for thirteen years, you’re gonna have to forgive me if I forget once in a while.”

She sighed disgustedly, the very picture of her mother. Both of them standing there with their arms crossed looking at him like they just couldn’t... it was too much. Greg laughed. “You’re right. You’re both right. I’m the worst.”

Georgianna giggled and bounced down the last few steps. Greg put his arm around her shoulders as she passed and walked with her to the front door. “Bye, Mum.” She called as they left.

“So... you’re working.” Georgianna said when they’d got in the car.

“No, I’m driving us to Pret for lunch.”

“You know what I mean, you have a case on.”

“Georgianna, I always have a case on. I always have twenty cases on. That’s my job.”

She huffed in frustration. “You know what I mean!” She insisted. “You’re obsessed with a case. It’s obvious — you haven’t shaved, you look like you slept in that suit — you’re wearing a suit! Work clothes.”

“You’re right — I was working this morning before I picked you up. But now I’m all yours.” Greg said, resolving to make it so. “What do you want to do after lunch? Cinema? Black Panther is playing.”

“Black Panther?” She was interested, Greg could tell — it was supposed to be the hot film right now, he’d figured she would be. “If you haven’t seen it yet.”

“I haven’t but Jemima says it’s brilliant!”

“Brilliant?” Greg laughed. “We can see for ourselves after lunch.”

“Not after lunch.” Georgianna said, wrinkling her nose. “After you change your clothes.”

“What, you ashamed to be seen with your old man?” He joked.

“Dad, have you looked at yourself? A mirror would be ashamed to be seen with you.”

“A mirror — that’s almost clever.” He chuckled. “You’re going to have to be seen with me at Pret.”
“I’ll tell them I’m buying lunch for a hobo.” Georgianna said.

Greg guffawed. “Except the hobo will be paying. Unless you’re treating me?”

“Da-ad!”

Greg laughed heartily. He was happy to be there with his daughter, happy to leave the crazy foot murderer behind for a day and a half.

“Is that what you do with posh Gandalf? Cinema?”

Greg giggled at ‘posh Gandalf.’ He’d forgotten about that. “Nope. No cinema. I did watch *Rupaul’s Drag Race*, though. You’re right, it’s pretty good.”

Over sandwiches at Pret they discussed ‘Snatch Game,’ how great Ben de la Creme’s Paul Lynde impression was — Georgianna had never heard of Paul Lynde, so Greg pulled a couple YouTube videos up for her and she agreed Bendela’s impression was brilliant. She found a video of Bendela’s first ‘Snatch Game’ go ’round where she impersonated Dame Maggie Smith as the Dowager Countess of Grantham. It was amusing, but Greg had to admit he preferred Paul Lynde...

He also had to admit he desperately needed the shower and shave she’d insisted on. That and clean jeans and a jumper went a long way towards making him feel... present. Not to mention presentable.

Greg realised that up ’til then, he hadn’t had time to think much about Mycroft, let alone miss him... he probably would have been terrible company if they’d gone out Friday night, as he’d suggested. He wondered if Mycroft had thought about him.

Because Greg *did* miss Mycroft. A surprising amount, if he were honest. In the shower he remembered the feeling of Mycroft’s hands on his body, stroking his cock... as he touched himself. He wondered if Mycroft were back in London yet. He wondered where Mycroft had been... he thought about sending a text...

*Black Panther* was not at all what Greg had expected. It was *much* better! Very entertaining — it was funny, had great action and some excellent scenery chewing. He even managed to stay awake when T’Challa visited his ancestral plain (plane?). Maybe the bloke from *Get Out* was miscast, and the rhinoceros effects were terrible, but Greg wasn’t going to quibble.

He was especially delighted to see all the strong female characters — they were more than just accoutrement to the men, but characters in their own right! And there was more than one! (Once he’d started noticing, Greg had been shocked at how many films had a single female character — the love interest.) It even met the Bechdel Test in letter and spirit! Exactly the kind of thing Greg wanted his daughter to see.

Afterwards Georgianna discovered the scene in the casino was part of a trailer online, and they watched badass Okoye throw her wig at that bloke attacking her over and over.

By the time he drove Georgianna home to the suburbs Sunday evening, they’d been back to the theatre to see the film again, watched *Captain America: Civil War* on Netflix, and Georgianna was talking about joining the jujitsu club at her school.

It wasn’t that long ago they’d spend Saturday watching *Frozen* on a continuous loop. Greg’s little girl was growing up! But he would be fine if she grew up to be a warrior. More than fine. It had been a good weekend.

Driving himself home, Greg remembered a line from *Black Panther*: “It is hard for a good man to be
king.” It made him think of Mycroft.

He’d never thought of Mycroft as a good man until after Sherlock returned from the dead, and Greg saw up close the man’s deep love for his brother. That Mycroft, at seven, had undertaken the role of parent to Sherlock made perfect sense to Greg — Mycroft’s care for his younger brother was more parental than fraternal. The most brotherly thing they did was argue — they simply did that so loudly it tended to obscure everything else.

But for many years Greg had seen the elder Holmes as a shadowy figure, not a villain, but... ethically compromised. At their first memorable encounter, Mycroft had tried to bribe Greg. He could still hear the slimy suggestion that raising a young child was expensive… it was difficult to reconcile that man with the Mycroft he’d been dating…

Mycroft himself had said his role as ‘The Iceman’ was ‘doing what had to be done, inspiring fear if necessary.’ He figured bribery and threats were SOP for the man who reputedly ‘was the British Government.’ Greg had never believed that the ends justified the means. The means were important. No, Mycroft was not a ‘good’ man. He was a charming man, an attractive man, but he was not a good man.

Greg knew that he himself was not a good man either — who could really claim to be good — but he was an ethical man. He’d never taken bribes, never abused his position, never asked for favours... never cheated on his wife... Greg did his best to be a good person. So, what was he doing? He’d gotten so caught up in their mutual attraction, so caught up in designing ‘fabulous’ dates, that he’d let himself forget what Mycroft did.

Mycroft respected him, Greg knew that. He felt instinctively that whatever Mycroft found attractive about Greg, it was bound up with his ethicality. Would Mycroft try to protect him from corruption? Or would he be a bad influence? It would be easy, Greg knew, to be expedient, rather than fair. To fall into bad habits, take shortcuts.

Whatever Mycroft did, Greg needed to be careful, keep his guard up. If he didn’t, he could find himself compromised. He could lose the few things about himself he really valued — his integrity. His honour...

What sort of influence might he be on Mycroft? The question was unanswerable and dissipated within his larger concerns.

Greg was home before he noticed the sound was still turned off on his smartphone and he had a slew of texts.

from: Sherlock
**where are you, Lestrade!? -SH**

from: Sherlock
**Lestrade! This Smythe idiot won’t let me in the crime scene! -SH**

from: Sherlock
**Fire him, Lestrade. -SH**

from: Sherlock
**He’s either in league with the killer or a complete moron. -SH**

from: Sherlock
**I’m leaning towards moron. -SH**
from: John Watson
**Greg, Sherlock’s driving me crazy. He’s driving everyone crazy — can you do something? Or should I take him home? **

from: Smythe
**Boss - Sherlock Holmes should be sectioned.**

from: Sherlock
**DEFINITELY A MORON -SH**

from: John Watson
**Greg, please don’t make me take him home.**

from: John Watson
**The yelling makes Rosie cry**

from: Sherlock
**Lestrade, if you don’t sort this soon, I’ll tell my brother you’ve gone missing. -SH**

from: Sherlock
**Mycroft will launch a thousand ships. Is that what you want, Gavin!? -SH**

from: Sherlock
**Tell me you aren’t with Mycroft. I will murder you both. -SH**

from: Sherlock
**You’re shirking your responsibilities, Lestrade. Aren’t you supposed to be a professional!? -SH**

from: M.Holmes
**Greg, I arrived in London a moment ago to discover thirty-six threatening texts from my overly-excited brother — who unfortunately does not have any new insights on your case. I’ve explained to him that you occasionally have other priorities than catering to his whims. Please accept my apologies for his behaviour. I trust you have had an enjoyable weekend with your daughter. -MH**

Greg’s first thought was that this text from Mycroft was perfect — perfectly, wonderfully Mycroft!

His second thought was that he should update his contacts to include Mycroft’s first name.

His third was that he’d deal with Sherlock and Smythe tomorrow.

from: Greg
**Hey, you! Welcome home. No apologies necessary for Sherlock — I haven’t worked with him this long without developing a thick skin.**

from: Mycroft
**No, I imagine not. Still, it’s mortifying to share DNA with the author of texts such as these. You don’t deserve to be the focus of his ire.**

from: Greg
**I’m only sorry he doesn’t have anything new. I could use it. I hope your week was more productive.**

Were they going to text about anything other than work?

from: Mycroft
**Passably. It should have been done more quickly. I find myself at loose ends in hotel rooms... especially now that I am becoming used to companionship.**

from: Greg
**I missed you too. Looking forward to seeing you again.**

There was no answer. After a minute, Greg set his phone down with a sigh. He had another long, and very possibly frustrating week ahead of him. He should try and catch up on some sleep.

He was supposed to be keeping his guard up! Greg had forgotten already. This Mycroft seemed so completely different from that other Mycroft, the one he’d met all those years ago.

He heard his text alert.

from: Mycroft
**What are you doing this evening?**

Greg felt himself grin as he pondered his answer.

from: Greg
**Did you have something in mind.**

from: Mycroft
**Oh yes. Several things.**

from: Greg
**Would these things be in person? Or are you suggesting we sext. Should I take a picture of my pants? I’m wearing those jeans you like.**

from: Mycroft
**The dark denim with button flies?!**

Greg took a photo of the top button undone, the waistband of his pants showing below ten centimetres or so of bare abdomen. Greg looked at it critically, decided it would do and sent it to Mycroft.

from: Mycroft
**How quickly can you get here?**

from: Greg
**That why you gave me a key? Booty calls?**

from: Mycroft
**And you didn’t believe I’m a genius.**

from: Greg
**I’ve never doubted that.**

from: Mycroft
**How long until you get here?**

from: Greg
**I haven’t said I’m coming.**

from: Mycroft
I won’t sink to a double entendre, no matter how you tempt me. You’ll be busy with your serial murderer the rest of the week, tonight is our chance. I’ve missed you, come over.

from: Greg

Half an hour. You’d better have something good in for breakfast this time — I was starving last Monday.

—-

Mycroft had nothing in.

He’d been in Frankfurt for six days, one more than he’d planned. Dreary, industrial Frankfurt. Why couldn’t the Germans meet in Berlin? Berlin had pleasant walks and a few restaurants that didn’t fall under the umbrella of ‘Biergarten.’

He’d come home to Bast... and a huge, empty flat. The little cat was delighted to see him, weaving around his ankles, climbing into his lap and up his chest to bump her forehead into his kisses. He petted her, and she curled happily in his lap, her chainsaw purr vibrating through his bones as she kneaded his thigh. He watched her poke holes in his bespoke trousers with an indulgent smile.

How had Mycroft never noticed how empty his flat was? Maybe it was the books. He’d shelved them all when he deduced Greg would become increasingly uncomfortable with the clutter...

Or was it Greg? Mycroft had thought about him as he tried to sleep in the luxurious-but-ruthlessly-generic hotel. Greg’s laughter would have warmed that hotel room, his arms would have made the bed more comfortable, sleep more restorative.

But now he was home and felt just as restive.

He stroked Bast absently. Mycroft hadn’t cohabited with anyone since Jerome. Had he enjoyed coming home to find Jerome waiting for him? At times, yes, he had. But increasingly, Jerome had been stroppy about Mycroft’s long hours and all-consuming career. By the time they separated, it had been a relief to have the flat to himself.

What was it Greg had said? After his divorce, he liked setting his own schedule, not having to work around another person’s expectations. Yes, that was exactly what Mycroft cherished. That had kept him from feeling lonely when he had been alone during the past twenty years.

So why was he lonely now? A month of regular sex and a diverting date or two and he was moping around his flat like Heathcliff on the moors. Mycroft needed to be more careful. Falling for Greg Lestrade was not wise — they were completely wrong for each other. Simply because they were sexually compatible, didn’t mean anything in the long term!

The memory of Henry in the sunlight popped unbidden into his mind, skin golden and hair tawny... so very, very beautiful. Henry in the empty chapel, memorising the heat and texture of his wrist, his palm, his fingers... the taste of Henry’s lips...

The taste of betrayal...

He’d fallen for Henry. Fallen fast and hard. Allowed himself to be swept away by the glorious piquancy of love. And he had learned his lesson. He’d learned it well. Mycroft had never allowed
himself that bright, painful emotion again. He’d certainly liked Miles in Uni, and James. He’d cared for Jerome quite a lot and had been attracted to him. But Mycroft had not fallen for any of them.

Falling — falling was dangerous, out of control, injurious. Mycroft didn’t fall. Mycroft was never out of control. He liked Greg Lestrade. He was madly attracted to Greg Lestrade. But Mycroft was not falling for him. That would make him ridiculous!

Almost as ridiculous as Sherlock — throwing a tantrum simply because Greg wasn’t at his beck and call 24/7. He’d blamed Mycroft for monopolising Greg, never thinking that Greg might have other priorities! Simply because John Watson acted as if he only existed to accommodate Sherlock, didn’t mean he should treat Greg as if he did. He’d set his brother straight about that!

Mycroft sighed. He wished he’d been monopolising Greg, not camping out in dreary Frankfurt.

Greg would no doubt enjoy a biergarten.

But breakfast... now that Greg was coming over, Mycroft needed to set aside absurd ideas about coming home to Greg Lestrade every day and focus. Greg was coming over for sex — he’d even referred to it as a ‘booty-call.’ Mycroft would enjoy the sex, enjoy Greg’s company and not make it out to be more than it was.

What was important was that Greg had requested breakfast, and as a good host Mycroft needed to provide it. But he had nothing in to feed Greg for breakfast.

Mycroft didn’t care for a big breakfast. Fruit and a croissant were more than enough for him. But not for Greg. He wondered if it was too late for a grocery delivery tonight. Should he call Anthea? Or he could go to the Little Waitrose on the corner before Greg arrived...

from: Mycroft

**I’m stepping out for a moment, if you arrive before I return, please make yourself at home.**

Mycroft had been in the Little Waitrose — a convenience store-sized version of the grocery store — exactly twice, both times for cigarettes. He was relieved to find it still open and wandered up and down the aisles with a trolley trying to decide what to buy.

He bypassed the pastries, picked up some supposedly fresh croissants and two grapefruit. Mycroft sighed — he needed something more substantial. He grabbed half a dozen eggs, streaky bacon, and a sourdough loaf. Then he caught sight of the same microwaveable sausage butties that Greg had had in his freezer. They were next to the three-packs of mini frozen lava cakes and pear crumbles, each serving in their own miniature ramekin. He stood poised in front of the puddings and butties, uncertain ...

“God, no!” Mycroft muttered, and moved on for milk, cheese, butter and quince jam. He could spare fifteen minutes tomorrow morning to fry eggs and streaky bacon in the cast iron skillet he’d discovered he owned when Greg had made them the full English...

Mycroft doubled back for a tin of beans, porridge, granola with dried fruit, Muesli, yogurt, blackberries and fresh apricots... then rushed through the frozen foods again and grabbed the pear crumbles in their tiny ramekins. On the way out, he added cigarettes and a Toblerone.

When he returned to his flat, Greg was there. He sat on the sofa, stroking Bast who was curled at his side. His overnight bag was on the floor by his feet.

“There you are.” Greg said, standing up. “I was beginning to wonder.” He sketched a gesture in the air that Mycroft understood to express the strangeness of finding the flat uninhabited.
Mycroft felt his cheeks warm as he hoisted the Waitrose bag. “I’ve been out of town. I didn’t have any food in.”

Greg smiled an intimate smile as he closed the distance between them. He took the grocery bag and pulled Mycroft in for a kiss. His arm felt wonderful around Mycroft’s back, his mouth sweet and just a little demanding.

“I guess we should put these away.” Greg murmured.

“I hope that doesn’t mean you expect me to let go.”

Greg laughed softly. “You really did miss me.”

“Don’t let it go to your head.”

Greg smirked. “I’ll try to keep my raging ego in check.”

They put the groceries away together, Greg chuckling over the sheer variety of breakfast foods Mycroft had acquired. When he got to the package of frozen pear crumbles, each in their own little ramekin, Greg held them up.

“I love these.” He said. “But why are there always three in a package?! Before Gigi was old enough, there was always a spare pud’ knocking around in the back of the freezer...”

“Do you keep... what do you do with the small ramekins?” Mycroft asked the question he’d had since he’d spotted the puddings. “After you eat the crumble?”

“Gigi takes ’em sometimes. She used to try to recreate the pudding — with varied results.” Greg laughed. “I’ve seen her using them to paint, as planters and to serve tea to her friends. Jude didn’t care if she destroyed them and they tended to stack up.” He sighed. “I haven’t had one since I got my own place.” Greg looked momentarily unhappy.

What could Mycroft say? He gave Greg a bottle of beer and poured a glass of wine for himself.

“How was your trip?” Greg asked.

“Long.” Mycroft told him. “I had to stay an extra day — didn’t get home until this afternoon... but I achieved what I set out to.”

“So, you won’t have to go back.” Greg grinned.

“No, not right away. And next time we’ll meet in London.”

Greg gave a good-natured shrug. “Anything interesting...?”

Mycroft smiled his professional smile, the one that could freeze a petrol fire. “Anything I can talk about is quite dull... I’m sure you’re not interested in the small print on trade agreements, tariffs and investment guarantees.”

“No, not especially.” Greg said with a laugh. He stepped closer and touched Mycroft’s waist, his big hand warm and solid. “But I’d listen if you wanted to talk about it.”

Mycroft’s smile touched his eyes and his freckled cheeks turned rosy and warm. Greg grinned broadly and stroked his hand over Mycroft’s back and hip. “I would never impose on your good nature like that.” Mycroft told him.
“I’m offering.” Greg said. “Nothing I don’t have clearance for — just... I know I need to vent sometimes. So, if you want to complain about the Home Secretary’s obnoxious cologne, or how unpleasant the Romanian delegation was over lunch... or anything at all... it’s fine.”

“The Home Secretary wears perfectly inoffensive cologne.” Mycroft informed Greg. “But the Foreign Secretary...” He rolled his eyes. “The man can’t walk for tripping over his own rhetoric.”

“That so?”

“He’s a menace to the English language.”

“I hope you didn’t just spend the week with him, then.”

“Happily, not. Although I might have welcomed the diversion by day three. I think they put these meetings in the dullest places possible so there’s no incentive to leave the conference room.”

Greg laughed. “So, you spent a week in Leeds.” He said. “I’m sorry.”

Mycroft pulled him closer. He had a favour to ask Greg. He felt slightly embarrassed by it. “I mentioned a work event this coming Friday evening.”

“Yeah — we’re meeting Saturday, yeah?”

“Yes... I wanted to ask... the work event is a reception at the home of the Argentine Ambassador... most people bring their spouse or partner... would you be willing to accompany me? It promises to be deathly dull — until someone brings up the Falklands...”

“Mycroft.” Greg laughed. “I’d be happy to go with you. As long as it doesn’t matter that I’m not posh.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I want to show you off.”

Greg laughed heartily — but Mycroft could see he was chuffed. “I hope that doesn’t backfire on you.” He muttered.

“It won’t... to be perfectly honest... I have an ulterior motive.”

“Oh yeah?”

“One that’s quite petty.”

“Even better.” Greg grinned.

“Someone I’ve known for many years will be there. A sort of... rival.”

“Uh huh?” Greg’s hand felt wonderful on his back.

“And it would be... satisfying... to have a handsome, sexy, smart...”

“Smart!” Greg scoffed with a grin. “Thought I was an idiot.”

“Most people are idiots. Don’t take it personally.” Mycroft said. “I’m an idiot for caring enough to want to show off...”

“No. That’s just human.” Greg told him. “Who is this bloke?”
“His name is John Clay. We were at Cambridge together briefly until he went into the foreign service. Bit of a thief, but careful enough not to attract notice.”

“How do you know he’s a thief?” Greg asked.

Mycroft just gave him a look.

“Yeah, OK.” Greg huffed a laugh. “Has he stolen anything from you?”

Mycroft paused. “He was a... romantic rival.”

“Ah, stole your boyfriend, did he?”

“Yes.” Mycroft fumed. He hated being so transparent. “Thus, the pettiness.”

“Not so petty.”

“He will attempt to seduce you.” Mycroft said.

Greg laughed. “You want me to bash him in the mug right off? Or string him along a little first?”

“Neither should be necessary… just… don’t trust him.”

“Thought you said this thing would be boring.” Greg said, finishing his beer and setting down the bottle. “Rivalry, seduction... the Falklands. Sounds like a party.”

“Yes, well, I generally find the biggest challenge at events such as these is staying awake.”

Greg stifled a yawn. “Speaking of...”

“You’re exhausted … I’ve been remiss…”

“You’re all right.” Greg said, kissing him. “But maybe we should both… get ready for bed.” He waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Mycroft agreed wholeheartedly.

In the bedroom, Mycroft pressed himself to Greg’s strong back, ran his hands over the plates of shifting chest muscle, and nuzzled his neck inhaling the deeply masculine scent of him. Greg moaned softly reaching an arm over his head to clutch at Mycroft’s hair. The other hand he stretched back to grip Mycroft’s hip.

Mycroft’s prick flushed enthusiastically, plumping against Greg’s arse. Greg moaned again and turned in Mycroft’s arms, kissing him demandingly. His tongue was thick in Mycroft’s mouth, probing, hungry. Mycroft heard a wanton little cry and realised it was his own.

Greg’s hands had found Mycroft’s glutes, massaging and caressing whilst his lips and tongue devoured Mycroft’s mouth. Mycroft felt Greg’s thick tumescence push into his thigh, and his own prick dripped arousal, making a damp circle on his pants.

They stumbled to the bed and stretched out, their shod feet dangling off the edge. Greg pinned him to the mattress with the weight of his body. He licked Mycroft’s neck and jaw, laying kisses on his skin. He rubbed his cock against Mycroft’s through their trousers and it was thrilling. “Ohhh, I missed you.” Greg moaned.

Mycroft hooked a leg around one of Greg’s and rolled. Greg allowed himself to be flipped onto his
back, pulling Mycroft down against him for a nasty kiss. They rubbed together — it chafed Mycroft painfully even as pleasure thrilled through his body.

Greg pushed Mycroft over and climbed back atop him, fingers combing through his auburn hair, holding him still for the rain of kisses. He sucked on Mycroft’s lips, licking into his mouth and panting along his jaw. Mycroft felt Greg’s teeth on his neck, his ear... Jesus! How he wanted this man!

They hadn’t fucked in weeks... Mycroft craved it. He had to have Greg inside him again. “Greg...” Mycroft tugged on the flies of Greg’s jeans, attempting to unbutton them.

But Greg was laughing, his breath puffing against Mycroft’s neck and his abdomen bouncing as he sagged onto Mycroft’s chest. “We’re hopeless.” He giggled. “Still have our shoes on...”

They’d been rolling around on the bed completely dressed... “Well, sit up then. Take them off.” He pushed Greg off him — the policeman flopped onto his back giggling helplessly. Mycroft untied his brogues and set them on the floor, tucking his socks inside. He loosened his tie and pulled it off, rolling it neatly, then started on the buttons of his waistcoat. “Come on.” He prodded Greg with his foot. “Unless you prefer to keep your clothes on.”

“No! No...” Greg, still on his back, lifted his foot into his hands and tugged off his shoe — some sort of fashion trainer with stripes and a flat sole. He tossed it off the end of the bed and repeated the process with the other foot, yanking the sock off as well. Then he unbuttoned his flies and shimmed the dark jeans down his hips letting them drop onto the floor, his cock half-hard in his maroon boxer briefs. Mycroft’s mouth watered at the sight. He began to unbutton his shirt more quickly.

Greg sat up and pulled his jumper and vest off in one, revealing his broad chest, the thatch of dark hair between his pecs standing at staticky attention.

Mycroft unfastened his cuffs and shed his shirt, folding it haphazardly and tossing it in the direction of the bench. He had begun unbuckling his belt when he realised Greg had lain back and was watching his progress with interest.

He felt himself flush red. Greg chuckled and rubbed his cock through his pants. Mycroft watched it grow with baited breath. Greg Lestrade would be the death of him!

He stood up and shucked his trousers. With some self-consciousness he pulled his vest over his head, revealing his narrower chest and the softness of his mid-section, his ginger treasure trail disappearing into his striped boxer shorts.

“Come here.” Greg demanded, suddenly serious. He reached out and strong hands pulled Mycroft back onto the bed. The sensation of Greg’s skin against his own was divine. Greg kissed him, opening his lips with his tongue and tasting him. Mycroft allowed the kisses to subsume him, allowed his world to narrow to Greg’s stroking hands, warm skin, lips, tongue, breath...

Greg reached inside Mycroft’s boxers and took hold of his prick, rubbing his thumb over the weeping tip. “You feel so good.” He murmured. He pulled his own pants down, under his bollocks and rolled on top of Mycroft again, taking both their cocks in his big hand and caressing them firmly.

Mycroft undulated, thrusting his hips, pushing his prick into Greg’s fist, feeling it slide across Greg’s cock. They both moaned. Then Greg kissed him again, one big hand behind his neck, the other holding their erections together.

Mycroft grasped Greg’s arse and ground up against him, licking his jaw — sandpapery at this hour
— savouring the flavour of his skin. He thrust his hips up again. “Lubricant.” He gasped. “In the drawer.”

Greg kissed him deeply, then looked up and reached for the drawer. He giggled and rolled off Mycroft, crawling over the king-sized bed to the night stand.

“What I want to know.” Greg said, tossing the bottle of lubricant next to Mycroft. “Is...” He tossed a sleeve of condoms next to the lube.

“Greg...” Mycroft started, picking up the condoms. He thought they’d settled the matter... unless Greg had slept with someone else...

“...does this feel good?” Greg threw a vibrator after the condoms.

“Oh...” Mycroft felt his cheeks and chest burning.

Greg smirked. “Do you like it?” He asked suggestively, rejoining Mycroft in the center of the bed, touching his crimson chest with the tips of his fingers, then his lips. “I’ve never tried one.”

“It’s... fine. Good.” Mycroft said. “Nothing is as good as the real thing.”

Greg took the condoms from his hands and set them aside. “For foreplay then.” He stroked his hand down Mycroft’s flank, pushing the striped boxers down. “If that’s alright.” Greg kissed Mycroft’s belly and inhaled deeply, nuzzling along his erection, nosing his bush of ginger curls and licking his heavy bollocks.

Greg pushed himself up, skimming up Mycroft’s body, to kiss his mouth again. He sucked Mycroft’s tongue into his mouth and fenced with it wetly. Mycroft pulled Greg closer, hands on his head and neck. Greg let his weight rest on Mycroft’s body, his hands roaming down his sides. “You’re so fucking sexy.” He whispered between kisses. “Tell me what you want.”

Mycroft wanted a dozen things simultaneously — he wanted Greg to never stop kissing him; he wanted Greg’s mouth on his prick; wanted Greg inside him, fucking him; he wanted to suck Greg; wanted to taste his cum; wanted to feel his big hands wrapped around his prick; wanted to know if Greg had fucked someone else whilst he had been away; wanted to know if it was too soon to ask for exclusivity; wanted Greg greedily for himself and himself alone; wanted to wrap himself around Greg and keep him... Mycroft wanted everything...

“Make love to me.” He said as Greg mouthed the long column of his neck. He heard himself and flushed red again — what the hell was he saying?! “I want you inside me.” He amended. “Fuck me.”

Greg smiled against his skin. “Pants off.” He said, rolling onto his back and yanking his own pants down his thick thighs. Mycroft complied as Greg picked up the vibrator and turned it on experimentally. He pressed it against Mycroft’s nipple and watched it pucker and harden. “How do you like it? Inside? Along your cock?” He dragged the vibrator down Mycroft’s belly.

Mycroft took it from him and held it against Greg’s thick member as he stroked it with his hand. “Oh!” Greg said. “Oh... put it on my balls.” He lay back and let his legs fall apart. Mycroft put the vibrator under Greg’s bollocks and pressed upwards. Greg’s head fell back and he moaned. Mycroft massaged Greg’s perineum with the tip and Greg spread his legs wider with a louder groan. Mycroft circled Greg’s hole with it, pulsing it lightly in the center... “Fuck!”

Greg moved quickly, taking the vibrator from Mycroft’s hand and pinning him to the bed. Mycroft wrapped his long legs around Greg’s hips and they frotted against each other. Greg popped open the lubricant, slicking his hand and plunging it down between them. The slick felt magnificent on their
cocks, making them slide against each other perfectly. So perfectly that for a moment Mycroft thought about getting off just like that.

No. It would be good, but a good, hard fuck would be so much better. Mycroft took the lube and held it up. “Should I do it?” He asked. “Open myself up for you?”

Greg groaned and Mycroft felt his penis throb between them. “Let me.” He kissed Mycroft, a hard, biting, hungry kiss, then slid down between Mycroft’s legs. “Let me take care of you.” He squeezed a dollop of slick onto his fingers and pressed them against the tight little bud. He jacked Mycroft’s prick with his other hand.

He circled Mycroft’s opening, slowly pushing a finger inside. As he worked his hole open, Greg took the head of his prick in his mouth and sucked. Suddenly the vibrator was pressed lengthwise along his penis and Mycro moaned loudly and pushed himself down onto Greg’s hand.

Greg worked him open, licking and sucking his cock, pushing more fingers into his hole and finally, rolling a condom over the vibrator and inserting it into Mycroft’s anus, sawing it in and out. “How does that feel?” Greg asked.

Mycro moaned affirmatively. He’d forgotten how good this felt, how loose and hungry it made him. The vibrator was the entire reason he’d got the big dildo — after the vibrator opened him, Mycroft needed more! He needed something big and hard to make him come.

“Your cock.” Mycroft gasped. “Now, please!”

Greg set the vibrator aside, stripping off the condom, and slicked up his big cock. He put the tip to Mycroft’s gaping hole and sank into him with unexpected ease. “Uhn!” Greg exclaimed. “Ahhh... you ok?”

“Fantastic.” Mycroft panted. “Go!”

Greg began to move, leaning over Mycroft to kiss him thoroughly as he pumped his cock gently in and out. He knelt up, pulling Mycroft’s legs against his chest and holding them there, caressing them. “You like that?”

“I love that...” Mycroft sighed.

Greg smiled and kissed along his calf as he fucked with long, slow strokes. In so deeply and then out... Mycroft saw Greg watching his cock appear and disappear, his hands moving restlessly over Mycroft’s legs and hips.

“More.” Mycroft moaned, undulating, trying to find just the right angle.

Greg shifted and thrust and there it was! Mycroft cried out and gripped Greg’s hands with his own.

With a delighted grin, Greg began thrusting his cock into Mycroft with more urgency, leaning in and bracing a hand on the bed, Mycroft’s extended legs still between them. “Oh, baby... yes... take it...”

Greg panted as he thrust... fuck! The stretch felt so good! The friction, the hard plunges deep inside him. It felt like Greg’s cock fucked the very core of him, making him tremble and tingle.

“Harder... please...” Mycroft gasped.

Greg’s brow was sheened with sweat as he worked his hips, snapping them against Mycroft’s, punching his cock into the hot, constricting depths. Abruptly he slowed and ground a sleazy rotation
that made Mycroft’s eyes roll back into his head. “You feel amazing...” Greg groaned. Then he was thrusting again.

It was perfect! Greg’s cock, the damp rasp of his pubic hair, the slap of flesh on flesh. Mycroft gripped Greg’s arms and slid his legs down around his waist, holding Greg fast as he thrust into him over and over and over... 

Then the vibrator was pressed against Mycroft’s prick, pressed to the sensitive underside, sliding in the leftover lubricant and stimulating the glans. All the while, Greg fucking him forcefully, dragging his cock over the sensitive bundle of nerves inside him. “There... baby, you like that? Mmmmm....”

The vibrator played over his slit, the intensity almost too much... then it disappeared and reappeared tight against his perineum. “Right there... oh feel it....” Greg moaned.

Mycroft clutched at his arms. Greg shoved his thick cock into his needy hole, slammed hard and fast, the vibrations penetrating into his prostate as Greg’s cock stroked it... vibrating, tingling pressure filled his balls... 

Mycroft came, back arching off the bed, lungs heaving as his bollocks throbbed and his prick erupted. Pleasure vibrated through his entire body, curling his toes and standing his hair on end as he gasped out strangled sounds. He juddered and wailed, every muscle flexing as Greg’s impossibly fat cock sawed in and out of him, milking his prostate, wringing every... last... drop... of... cum... from... his... body...

Mycroft collapsed in a pool of sweat, still shuddering and twitching. “God, you’re gorgeous...” Greg said, caressing his face. He pulled out and jacked his cock furiously, pressing the vibrator between his own legs until he keened and spilled himself over Mycroft’s softening prick.

Greg fell onto the bed next to Mycroft, shaking all over with pleasure-mirth. Mycroft wrapped his arms around him and pulled him close, loving the feel of Greg’s laughter escaping.

This was perfection — lying here flushed with dopamine and endorphins, holding Greg, feeling his laughter huffing against his sweat-damp neck. Greg reached over and intertwined their fingers, bringing Mycroft’s hand to his lips and kissing his knuckles softly. “Hey, you.” Greg murmured.

Mycroft took a breath. ‘I love you.’ The thought appeared fully formed in his brain and almost — almost! — fell from his lips.

“Mmmm... what’s wrong?” Greg murmured sleepily. Mycroft realised he had tensed, his body suddenly aching with it.

“Nothing.” Mycroft lied. “Just need a wash.” His abdomen was covered with both of their ejaculate, drying stickily in his body hair. He pulled away from Greg and shut himself in the loo, turning on the water and studying himself in the mirror.

Mycroft did not recognise the man he saw in the mirror. That man looked frightened. That man was out of control.

Chapter End Notes

Pret - Pret a Manger - https://www.pret.com/en-uk
Ben de la Creme - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/BenDeLaCreme
Paul Lynde - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Lynde
Bendela as Paul Lynde - https://youtu.be/pADaKVoLaJU

To pass the Bechdel Test, a film must have 1) at least two female characters, who 2) have at least one conversation, about 3) something other than a man. It was coined by cartoonist and author Alison Bechdel. A SHOCKING number of films fail.
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel_test

Waitrose - https://www.waitrose.com/

Next week: the reception at the home of the Argentine Ambassador. Is introducing Greg to old rival John Clay in any way a good idea? What do you think?!
Meet John Clay

Chapter Summary

Greg attends a reception at the Argentine Ambassador’s residence with Mycroft. They run into Mycroft's old friend from Cambridge.

Warning - the second half of this chapter contains descriptions of non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The reception was taking place at the Argentine Ambassador’s residence in Belgravia, a lovely five story mansion built in the mid-1800’s.

Greg wore the bespoke tuxedo that Mycroft had had made for the New Year’s Eve Ball. Wearing it a second time made him feel slightly better about the extravagance — though the suit was comfortable and flattering it was still an absurd indulgence. But he could not help but notice a few admiring looks for the tuxedo. It reminded him of his youth when admiring looks had been plentiful. Perhaps at his age clothes did make the man.

He followed Mycroft into an octagonal reception hall with a feeling of excitement. He could relax and enjoy himself tonight. Thanks to a discussion Greg had had with Sherlock Monday afternoon, the Foot Fetish murderer had been arrested.

“But how is he choosing his victims.” Greg had fretted. “They can’t be random, can they?”

“Doubtful.” Sherlock agreed. He was staring into his microscope in the lounge of 221b Baker Street.

“If we work that out, I think we can catch him.” Greg felt strongly this was the key. They’d exhausted the other avenues — they’d looked at all the CCTV in ever widening circles around each victim, looking at the people in them, checking out the cars... but no two of the murders had the same people or cars. They’d interviewed neighbours of the victims over and over... the families were clueless... they hadn’t found any witnesses... this guy was a ghost. “Or at least keep other potential victims safe.”

“Possibly.” Sherlock allowed.

“I’ve looked at everything I can think of.” Greg told him. He was sitting on the couch with his laptop and several file folders spread out on the coffee table in front of him. “The victims are all Londoners between the ages of 21 and 35, but they’re different sexes, different races, lived in different neighbourhoods, had different social circles... I can’t find any real overlap... where they work, places they shopped... visited... any and all shoe stores... podiatrists...

“The one thing all but one did have in common,” Greg continued. “They had pictures of their feet — we assume they were their own feet — on their phones. That’s gotta be significant. But we can’t find where they sent them. If they sent them. We’ve looked at their computers, their phones... their phone
“Apps?” Sherlock had looked up.

“Other than the couple, there were no emails or texts to each other. Nothing to all of them from a single source.”

“What apps did they have in common?” Sherlock asked. “Social media?”

Greg sighed. “Varied. They were all on Facebook to some degree. Three were on Instagram, four on Twitter, two on Snapchat, one on Whatsapp... we’ve been combing through everything looking for common denominators.”

“Tindr? Grindr? Tumblr?”

“I have a list somewhere...” Greg went to his laptop and clicked through the files. “Here.” He said, turning the screen towards Sherlock.

Sherlock scrutinised the lists, consulted his own phone, scrolled through the computer files, went back to his own phone... Greg sat back and watched, glad for once that John was out. The vibe between he and Sherlock was tense again — not just tense, taut like a wire stretched to breaking. *Something* had to happen, but Greg couldn’t tell which way it would go, if they would finally become a proper couple or if John would move out once and for all.

Sherlock held his phone out to Greg. An app was open. Greg took it. The app was called ‘Mixr.’ It appeared to be a music streaming app.

“Mixr?”

“It’s new. Watch.” Sherlock clicked on small button labelled ‘search the music,’ and a new screen appeared. There Sherlock clicked on ‘share your playlists,’ and then on a playlist entitled ‘Hello There.’ That opened a screen with list of the songs in the playlist. There was only one song listed and it was something called ‘Hook Me Up.’ Sherlock clicked on it and dozens and dozens of profiles appeared. Greg saw they were arranged by proximity to Sherlock’s phone. There were several in the near vicinity.

“Someone decided the profiles on this music sharing app looked a lot like the profiles on Tindr.” Sherlock told him. “It has GPS and messaging capabilities, so people started using it to seek out sexual assignations. It’s been slowly becoming the app of choice for people looking to cheat on a partner — it’s much less obvious than having Tindr or Grindr on your phone. Even if you have a nosy spouse, chances of them clicking through all the Mixr screens to here are remote.”

“Huh. Well, if there’s a way to get off, people will find it.” Greg said.

“Four of your victims were on Mixr.” Sherlock told him, pointing to the list on the laptop’s screen. “The three singles and one of the partners. If you examine their Mixr contacts, I believe you’ll find your common denominator. My guess is the murderer solicited pictures of feet on Mixr and chose his victims that way.”

Sherlock had been correct. The tech team had been able to find the Mixr user with whom all four had had contact — FOOTMAN88 — and going through the exchanges, they found photos of feet. It hadn’t taken too long to get a warrant for Mixr’s records and find FOOTMAN88, a thirty-year-old man named Josh Boorman. Boorman had been arrested at his workplace late Tuesday morning. A search his home revealed that Mr. Boorman had seven severed feet in his freezer and three of the more recently embalmed feet in his bedroom. Satisfied they’d caught their killer, Greg had returned
his attention to oversight of more mundane murders.

The octagonal reception hall at the Argentine Ambassador’s residence was teeming with men in black tie and women in cocktail dresses. Double doors opened off the reception hall into other rooms — Greg could see rose-coloured walls and a fireplace through one — all filled with glamorous people. A grand staircase leading upstairs was cordoned off, and a receiving line of distinguished personages stood in front of it.

Greg heard Mycroft sigh, but when he looked over, Mycroft had a polite smile affixed to his face. “Ambassador!” Mycroft shook hands with the first in the line. “Ambassador Sersale, may I present my friend Detective Inspector Lestrade.” Then Greg was shaking hands and smiling, murmuring ‘nice to meet you’ at half a dozen people, including the Ambassador’s wife, deputy, and honoured guests, a Justice on Argentina’s Supreme Court (Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación) and her partner.

Justice Elena Highton de Nolasco recognised Mycroft, taking his hand warmly. They spoke together in Spanish — Greg recognised the phrase Las Malvinas which he knew was what the Argentinians called the Falklands — but switched to English when Mycroft introduced Greg. There was a hint of deference in the Justice’s otherwise haughtily gracious manner, that extended to her greeting to Greg. Another subtle reminder of Mycroft’s power — power with which Greg was still trying to come to terms.

Within the hall, Greg was introduced to more people. Mycroft seemed to know everyone’s name, including spouses and partners. The few he didn’t — introduced by someone he did know — he greeted graciously with rapt attention. Greg had the distinct impression Mycroft was filing their names and faces away for later study.

Greg himself managed to remember almost no one’s name. There were simply too many too fast. But almost everyone — everyone that seemed to know Mycroft — looked at Greg curiously before remembering themselves (and Mycroft) and expressing utter delight to meet him.

Mycroft’s manner was eerily familiar — here was the man Greg had met over a decade ago, the man who had attempted to bribe him. Here was the shark swimming through an ocean of prey, majestic and terrifying and absolutely implacable. Greg found the reminder unpleasant.

Though he had no title, no uniform or chain of office, Mycroft had power and everyone in the room who needed to know, knew it. They treated him with careful deference, masking it in collegial greetings and ritual small talk — avoiding his direct line of sight, so to speak, not acting like prey. Some few approached Mycroft with the air of needing something from him. Mycroft viewed these with varying degrees of interest — Greg thought he was interested only as long as it took him to work out what they wanted. Mycroft addressed their issues immediately, with impressive subtlety, a tiny shake of the head to one, a nod to another, giving what Greg thought must be coded instructions to yet others. Only one person rated questions in rapid Spanish…

For about an hour, they milled about the ground floor. Chatting politely with strangers, Greg listened to an Argentinian jazz quartet playing ‘nueva tango’ music in the rose-coloured room, got a glass of beer — and one of wine for Mycroft — at the bar in the green room, had excellent canapés in the spacious dining room, and learned a little about Argentinian art from asking about some of the many paintings. Greg made more small talk in that hour than he had in the previous ten years together.

Argentine or English, everyone seemed very posh and sophisticated to Greg — for a while he was entertained by their reactions to his South London accent. He wondered what they had expected from a ‘friend’ of Mycroft’s.
Regardless if Greg was what they expected or not, he quickly realised they all viewed him as an opportunity — in bringing Greg, the Iceman had revealed something about himself. But was Greg a weakness or a strength? And how could he be utilised in forwarding their interests? Everyone prodded and probed him with exquisite delicacy.

It was unnerving. He had to trust that Mycroft knew what he was doing, that Greg would not be a liability.

After meeting twenty or thirty people putting on the dog, the novelty had begun to wane. He’d be well pleased to have a normal conversation with just one of these wankers. Greg was beginning to understand why Mycroft thought these sorts of receptions were deadly when Mycroft’s hand tightened on his elbow.

“Clay.” Mycroft said, with the slightest hint of false bonhomie. To Greg’s ears, it was jarring.

“Holmes!” The man was just slightly shorter than Mycroft — Greg’s height if he weren’t wearing the thick-soled dress shoes — dark-haired and dashing in his black tartan tuxedo and pencil moustache. He reminded Greg of a middle-aged Clark Gable, with warm, blue eyes and an easy smile. “It’s been an age!”

“Three years.” Mycroft replied. “Jessica, lovely to see you again.” He said to the glamorous woman on Clay’s arm, exchanging air kisses on her cheeks continental-style.

“Mycroft Holmes!” Jessica sang with well-feigned pleasure. “You’ve been well? We heard about that business with your brother.” She was blonde and vivacious.

“Ah, yes. Concluded satisfactorily — Sherlock and I are both quite well, thank you. John, Jessica, allow me to introduce my companion, Detective Inspector Lestrade. Greg, this is Mr. and Mrs. Clay.”

Greg smiled and shook John Clay’s hand noting he’d been upgraded from ‘friend’ to ‘companion.’

“Mr. Clay... Mrs. Clay.” He took her hand and instead of shaking, she held on.

“Oh, Jessica, please!” She said, stepping closer to Greg. “Detective Inspector? Does that mean you’re with Scotland Yard?”


“You’re here to keep Mycroft company.” John Clay stated, clapping Mycroft on the shoulder.

Greg smiled fondly at Mycroft. “I am.” He said. “And vice versa.” He was happy to glimpse Mycroft’s flash of pleasure at the statement.

“These two will bore us silly catching up.” Jessica addressed all four of them, slipping her arm through Greg’s. “Let’s you and I leave them to it and entertain ourselves.”

Greg shot Mycroft a look intended to convey irritation — he’d already spent half the party on his own with strangers. But Mycroft gave him that miniscule head shake. “Yes, Clay and I should ‘catch up.’” Mycroft said. “Jessica is much more charming company.”

“I’m all yours.” Greg told her. After a quick squeeze of Mycroft’s hand, he let Jessica pull him towards the bar.

“I’m out.” She said, holding up her empty glass. “A Detective Inspector! Like on the crime dramas? Tell me, do you investigate murders?”
“I do, actually. Though occasionally I get in on some of the larger robbery cases, gangs...smuggling... but mostly homicide.” Was it Greg’s imagination or had she flinched when he said ‘smuggling’?

“And how do you know Mycroft?” She asked, avid. “Don’t tell me he was involved in a murder.”

Greg chuckled. “Indirectly.” He said. “I know his brother.”

She looked confused momentarily, then brightened. “That’s right, I read in the papers about Sherlock’s little hobby. ‘Boffin Sherlock,’ stolen paintings and kidnapped dignitaries... I have to say, I thought it might be some sort of tabloid spin. I mean, the hat!”

“No, no.” Greg said, feeling mildly defensive. “Sherlock’s the real deal. Solves the ones no one else can.”

“Really?! But wasn’t he a...” She dropped her voice to a stage whisper. “...drug addict?”

“Recovered.” Greg said tightly. “We all have our challenges in life.”

“Oh, that’s true! It seems like we’re always up against it, John and I.” She mugged. “So, Mycroft! How long have you and he...?”

“I’ve known Mycroft for years.” Greg said, purposely misunderstanding her meaning. He didn’t mind a bit of gossip but wasn’t used to being so shamelessly pumped.

“Years! He’s certainly kept you hidden.” She exclaimed.

Greg laughed. “Not at all. We haven’t been seeing each other that long.” They’d reached the bar. “What are you having?”

“Manhattan.” She said, surrendering her empty glass to the bartender.

“And the IPA.” Greg added. “How do you and your husband know Mycroft?”

“Oh, they were at Cambridge together. Thick as thieves back then. Every time they get together, it’s like they’re Uni students again.”

“Oh yeah?”

“It’s dreadful.” She laughed. “All this time and you’re the first ‘companion’ of Mycroft’s I’ve met — I was starting to think he had a mad wife hidden in an attic somewhere.”

Greg chuckled. “Does that make me Jane Eyre?”

“Good lord, no! Jane was a plain little thing. You’re much too good looking!” Jessica exclaimed. “No secret what Mycroft sees in you!” Her eyes raked appreciatively over his body. Greg had not felt so objectified in twenty years.

He coughed, unamused, and used the distraction of collecting their drinks and tipping the bartender to let that subject drop. She was probing him more relentlessly than anyone else had yet dared, watching his reactions to her every word.

“Your husband is in the foreign service?” He asked, changing the subject. “Are you stationed abroad?”

“John works for the Americas desk. We’ve been in Buenos Aires for the last few years. Before that
we were in New York, Havana and Bogotá.”

“All over the place! What was your favourite?”

“They all have their good points... but...” She dropped her voice to a stage whisper. “I loved New York. Almost as much as London.”

“Yes?”

“It’s filthy and crowded and the traffic is even worse than London’s ... and it’s huge and colourful and has every kind of restaurant and every kind of people. And art and the theatre... it’s just such a vibrant city.”

Greg agreed, but decided he didn’t care to share that with her. It would beg for questions. “Do you work for the Foreign Service as well?”

“Goodness no! I’m a writer. Non-fiction, reportage mostly.”

Greg wasn’t entirely certain what that was. “That’s compatible with how much you move around?”

“Oh yes, one of the few careers that is.”

“Lucky. Do you have kids?”

“We do.” She smiled proudly. “Two boys, thirteen and sixteen.”

“How do they like Buenos Aires?”

“Oh, they’re not... they’re in school, of course — Harrow, where John went. They come to Argentina on their holidays. Or here if we’re in town.”

“It must be hard, the distance.” Greg mused. “Honestly, I couldn’t imagine my daughter being so far away.”

“Oh! You have a girl!? You’re so lucky, John always wanted a girl. How old is she?”

“I am lucky, she’s a great kid. She’s fourteen this year.”

“Fourteen! Where is she? Cheltenham? Or do you keep her in London? Does she stay with you and Mycroft?”

Greg laughed — amused by the absurdity, the class dissonance. “No. She lives with her mum in Acton, goes to school there. I have her on weekends and holidays.”

“Her mum...” Jessica murmured looking at Greg with fresh eyes. “Of course. But I’m sure Mycroft adores her. He practically raised his brother.”

Greg wasn’t sure what one had to do with the other. He was tempted to lie to her, say ’yes’ and change the subject... he was saved from answering at all by a gong and the announcement that the ballroom was opening. The Ambassador and the honouree led the procession up the grand staircase to the first floor.

“Oh! I should find Mycroft.” Greg told her, looking around the reception hall. “He loves to dance.”

“Does he?” Jessica asked, surprise in her voice.
“Ah, there he is.” Greg escorted Jessica through the throng, taking Mycroft’s hand when he reached him. He was still with John Clay and Jessica latched on to her husband.

“I believe you promised me a dance.” Greg told Mycroft.

Mycroft had the most grateful look in his eyes — he hadn’t had a partner to aid him socially in a long time, Greg remembered. “I did.” Mycroft affirmed fondly. “Clay, Jessica, if you’ll excuse us.”

Holding hands, they made their way to the grand staircase and up into the ballroom.

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Greg was feeling weary. He made his way to the toilets with a cautious sense of relief — he hoped they might leave soon.

Dancing with Mycroft had been a pleasure — it reminded Greg of the first time they’d danced together at the New Year’s Eve Ball. It was only six weeks later, and Greg felt so much more comfortable — they were in synch now. Which was good — the Argentine Tango was a more complicated dance than Greg was used to. Even though they’d gotten together Wednesday evening to practice, Greg ended up giggling his way through most of it. It felt great having Mycroft in his arms.

The shocked looks and outright scowls they received from portions of the crowd were not so great. Still, Mycroft’s reputation kept anyone from saying anything to them, so Greg tried not to notice the hostility. Homophobia was a fact, he’d been extremely fortunate and privileged to have mostly avoided it thus far.

The hostility didn’t keep anyone from descending on him and Mycroft and demanding a dance. The guest of honour, Justice Elena Highton herself, made a point of dancing with both Mycroft and then Greg. As the evening wore on, Greg found himself spoiled for choice — he could not finish a dance without being claimed by another woman for the next one. He attempted a Paso Doble with the Ambassador’s wife, a Tango with Lady someone-or-other, a Rhumba with a member of the House of Commons, a Samba with a statuesque woman who spoke as little English as Greg spoke Spanish… after a while, their faces began to run together.

His partners seemed to fall into roughly three categories: women who wanted to curry favour with Mycroft; women who wanted to pump him for information about Mycroft; and women who wanted to flirt with Greg.

There had been times in his life — not that long ago, honestly — when he would have given his eye teeth for this sort of attention from such beautiful women. Hell, from just one relatively good-looking woman. Now, however, he found himself uninterested. He found himself searching the dance floor for Mycroft, guiding his partner closer so he could catch his eye, exchange fond or exasperated looks...

A number of men flirted shamelessly with Greg as well, but unlike the women, they approached only when Mycroft was otherwise engaged. Taking a few minutes to get a drink and lean against the wall, Greg was chatted up twice and slipped three separate phone numbers. It was a bit crazy.

When he and Mycroft stole a few minutes together on the terrace for a cigarette, Greg handed the phone numbers over with a laugh. “This tux gets me more action than I’ve seen in me life.” He
joked. “You’ll regret having it made yet.”

“Hardly.” Mycroft replied. “You weren’t wearing the tuxedo the other week at the Neon Palms.”

“Where?”

“The dance club. The dance club where you were chatted up constantly.”

“Oh that. That’s just what happens at gay clubs.”

Mycroft arched an eyebrow. “No one gave _me_ their phone number. Or massaged my shoulder. Or suggested I should have intercourse with his husband…”

“All that tells me is that club was filled with blind idiots.” Greg said slipping his arm around Mycroft’s waist. “Dance with me again?” This time when they danced, Greg only had eyes for Mycroft. If there was hostility, Greg didn’t care.

“I realise now,” Mycroft said softly. “Bringing you here was completely selfish. I must apologise. This party is even more ghastly than I feared.”

“You’re all right.” Greg told him, stroking his thumb over Mycroft’s knuckles as they danced. It was flattering that Mycroft wanted to show him off.

“And after you have taken me on such interesting adventures.”

“You might even say ‘fantastic dates.” Greg said with a grin. “Wait until tomorrow night. You can make it up to me by enjoying yourself.”

“Ah, yes. Fantastic date number four. It’s absurd that we’re only at four. What will we do?”

“Have to wait and see.” Greg teased. The music ended and almost immediately someone joined them with the clear intent of dancing with Mycroft. Greg watched his face go from warm to a business-like chill in an instant. He wondered how integral this sort of reception was to his work, how much was accomplished in a single dance. He gave Mycroft’s hand a squeeze and left him to it.

John Clay was amongst those who attempted to charm Greg with flattery and innuendo. Maybe Greg was dense, but it was a few minutes and an arm rub before he realised that Mycroft’s old Uni buddy, his rival, his ‘frenemy,’ was trying to pull him.

“John... what are you doing?” Greg asked pointedly as John Clay massaged his upper arm.

Clay smiled mischievously, moving farther into Greg’s personal space. “I think that’s obvious. Loo’s just through that door, Greg. You could meet me there.”

Greg already had a hand on the man’s chest, pushing him back. “You’re here with your wife, I’m here with your friend.” He said.

“Yes.” John Clay agreed, his hand moving up towards Greg’s shoulder.

“Are you seriously suggesting we hook up? Here? Now?”

“If you’d rather get together tomorrow...”

“No!” Greg said firmly, pulling his arm from Clay’s grasp. “I’m not interested. No. Don’t ask again.”

“Or what?” John Clay asked flirtatiously. “You’ll tell Holmes?”
“Oh, I’m already telling Mycroft.” Greg said, trying to hold onto his temper. “Ask again and I’m telling Jessica.”

“Jess and I have an understanding. An open relationship.”

“Bully for you. I don’t. And even if I did, I’ll say it again, I’m not interested.” Greg shoved past him, a bit harder than necessary, just to make his point. God, if Clay laid it on like that with women... what a bloody creep. Why in hell did he think Greg would even consider fucking him in the loo at this bloody reception!?

He was beginning to see why Mycroft didn’t care for the man.

Jessica Clay, for her part, claimed two dances with Greg. The longer he spent with her, the more trying he found it. She pumped Greg for information about himself and Mycroft endlessly. Greg found his answers becoming more and more vague.

She also continued to flirt. Knowing she had an open marriage, Greg couldn’t decide if she were serious or simply amusing herself. Regardless it made her difficult to talk with. When Greg attempted to politely confront her about it, she retreated into a silly, dumb girl persona that put his teeth on edge.

Perhaps John Clay wanted a threesome with his wife. They both seemed eager enough. The thought was not appealing in the least.

He needed a break from the crush, from the surfeit of unwanted attention and the lack of time with his date. Greg was pretty easy-going, he rarely lost patience with someone. But the Clays and their relentless probing and cajolery were testing his limits.

Greg found the corridor adjacent to the ballroom that had all the toilets. He locked himself into one of the claustrophobic loos for a moment of respite. Mycroft had been right when he said the reception was ghastly. The novelty had kept Greg’s attention for the first half of the evening, but that had long worn off. The only pleasure left was in exchanging long-suffering glances with Mycroft, holding his hand and listening to his acerbic comments in the few moments they weren’t being monopolised by others. If Greg somehow ended up attending more of these, they’d have to work out some kind of code or set of hand signals, so they could be secretly offensive in front of everyone. And so Greg could beg for a reprieve.

Greg couldn’t quite parse the relationship between Mycroft and John Clay. Neither liked the other, that was clear. But they seemed drawn together over and over again. He wondered what the story was. A lot more than Clay stealing Mycroft’s boyfriend, Greg was certain. He presumed that Clay’s advances on him were related to his competitiveness with Mycroft. He’d have to ask Mycroft about it later. Perhaps after Greg ravaged him thoroughly. After tonight, he was due a thorough ravaging.

Sighing, Greg flushed and washed his hands in the worn, white marble sink, wondering idly if it were original to the house. The entire room was done up in marble, it went halfway up the walls and cradled the sink. Almost two hundred years of feet had worn down the marble floor unevenly between toilet, sink and door, but it was polished to a slippery shine. He dried his hands on one of the folded cloths from the neat stack then tossed it in the special copper bin for the used cloths, thinking that someone would have to put them through the laundry and refold them for the next party. Hell, someone ironed those glorified napkins... posh people were weird.

Now he was just wool gathering. He squirted some lotion on his hands and rubbed it in. Vetiver scented. He sniffed at his hands. Vetiver was OK, not floral or cloying at all. Vetiver…
Reluctantly, Greg turned to leave the little refuge, thinking he wouldn’t mind another smoke. Feeling his pocket for his fags, he snapped open the thumb lock and opened the door...

—and walked directly into John Clay.

“Oh... pardon —” Greg started but Clay abruptly shoved him backwards hard and Greg lost his footing on the uneven marble floor. For a moment Greg was suspended in the air, hovering over all the marble and porcelain, staring at John Clay’s handsome face as it wrinkled in surprise, then his head struck something hard and the room stuttered and spun...

When it righted itself, Greg was on the floor, disoriented. The room wasn’t big enough for him to lay down and he sprawled awkwardly, knees and elbows bent.

His head hurt. Pain echoed through his skull, through the room, through every movement... he curled in on himself, foetal. His elbow and hip were throbbing, but he barely felt it over the pounding in his head.

John Clay was straddling him, bent over, his cologne cloying in Greg’s nose. “Greg?” He asked.

Greg took a deep breath and gathered himself. “Help me up.” He croaked, lifting an arm to the other man. The words hurt.

Clay took his arm and pulled Greg into a sitting position. “Are you all right?!?” He asked, concern in his voice.

“Yeah, I don’t know.” The room was swaying, and Greg couldn’t focus his eyes properly. He bent his aching head down and felt a little more stable. Clay had pushed him... hadn’t he?

“You cracked the toilet seat.” Clay said.

Cracked? Greg ran a hand through his hair, yelping when he got to the back of his head. There was a lump there that throbbed violently when he touched it. The back of his neck felt wet.

He blinked and focussed on his hand on the white floor and incomprehensibly, it was red. He pulled his hand away and it smeared. Blood. Abruptly, Greg was disgusted to be sitting on the toilet floor — no matter how white and polished the marble appeared, it had to be filthy!

He reached out to John Clay. “Give me a hand, yeah?”

Clay took his arm and Greg propped the red hand on the toilet seat and tried to get his feet under him. The thick-soled shoes gripped the marble helpfully and Greg, flexing his powerful runner’s thighs, managed to rise halfway — then his head objected, and he reeled dizzily.

“Whoa there!” Greg felt Clay’s hands on his arms as he began to fall, the hands tugged at him pulling him higher. Greg finally staggered upright, finding his back pressed against the wall.

He panted, his eyes squeezed shut against the nausea and dizziness.

“You OK?” Clay asked, and his knuckles brushed Greg’s jaw. Greg opened his eyes and found John Clay much closer than he expected. He had a steadying hand on Greg’s arm, and was peering at him intently. “You almost fell again.”

“Got me bell rung.” Greg muttered.

Clay held up a finger. “Can you follow this with your eyes?” He moved it back and forth.
Greg thought about rolling his eyes, but he honestly felt like he might not be able to, his head hurt so much. He successfully followed Clay’s finger.

“What day is it” Clay asked.

“Friday.” Greg told him. “Erm, February fifth. Look, John... what are you doing here?”

“Saw you heading to the toilets. I knew you couldn’t resist me.” Clay said with a wink. “No — bad joke. Currently I’m holding you upright.”

“John...” He tried to push away from the wall and a wave of dizziness hit him hard. “Ugh...”

“Careful there.” Clay said, pressing him back against the wall. “Can you breathe? Let me undo your collar.” Greg didn’t have the wherewithal to protest. Clay tugged on his bow tie, untying it, then unbuttoned the top button of Greg’s shirt. It was uncomfortably intimate. He could feel the other man’s breath on his neck, in his ear, smell his musk and the sweaty bourbon of his cologne. Greg’s stomach protested, lurching.

“OK... enough...” Greg pushed Clay’s hands away from his collar.

Clay’s lips were hot on his face and his hands stroked down Greg’s body. “You look like a bleedin’ film star.” Clay whispered as his thumb slid over Greg’s nipple.

“You can’t be bloody serious.” Greg protested. He tried again to push away from the wall, bull past Clay, but the other man had him pinned with the weight of his body. And every time Greg moved, his aching head spun sickeningly.

He felt John Clay’s erection press into his thigh through his trousers, and he wanted to vomit.

“Don’t…” Greg snapped, shoving at Clay’s chest. He was shocked at the sudden turn, at Clay’s boldness, at the relentlessness of his hands. He knew Greg wasn’t OK!

Clay’s hands gripped Greg’s arms like vices. “I see the way Holmes looks at you.” He said, grinding his erection into Greg’s thigh. “He’s in love with you, did you know that? I’ve never seen him in love — didn’t know the ice-cold freak had it in him.”

“Let me go, John!” Greg repeated in his best authoritarian copper’s voice. He grappled, trying to use his weight to push Clay back — if he could just get an inch or two between them he’d knee the bastard in his balls.

But he couldn’t, he couldn’t! Surges of dizziness kept sweeping over Greg, weakening his struggles. And the pain! He’d never in his life felt so... so helpless...

Clay’s mouth closed on his neck and Greg twisted away frantically — and found himself trapped in the corner behind the toilet, with even less room to move. Clay’s mouth was attached like a leech to his neck, his erection still pressing rudely into his hip.

“Stop... bloody stop...” Greg grunted, angrily. He felt teeth and Clay’s slobber dripped along his collarbone. Greg shuddered with repulsion. For a strange second, he believed Clay was some sort of vampire, one hand on the back of Greg’s neck, teeth sunk into Greg’s jugular...

“No!” Greg cried, panicking. He jerked back from Clay and his head hit the wall behind him and exploded in agony! He reeled, the room spinning dizzily. Black swam at the edges of Greg’s vision...

When Greg came to, Clay was supporting him entirely, his arms wrapped around his torso. “I’m
Clay held him as he knelt over the toilet vomiting violently, every regurgitation increasing the throbbing misery in his head. The other man’s hands were gentle under his arms, his breath warm on his cheek.

Greg tried to make sense of what was happening... he’d hit his head... he was dizzy... nauseated... maybe he was concussed, because hitting it again had dropped him... but John Clay... shuddering, he tried to pull away from Clay now, brace himself over the bowl as he retched and spat. Clay rubbed his shoulders, spoke soothing words.

He saw the crack in the toilet seat. My head did that. Greg thought dully.

As his stomach slowly settled, Greg bowed his aching head, trembling. The back of his neck felt hot and stretched. “Come on, Greg.” Clay was pulling him up. “Water.”

Greg felt relief — relief that the violent spasms that had wracked his body were finally ending. Relief that the pounding in his head was subsiding to a dull aching as his stomach calmed. But more than that, he was profoundly relieved that John Clay understood he was injured, that he was not OK, and had stopped dicking around. The man was a real wanker — Greg wondered that Mycroft had ever been friends with him.

He allowed Clay to help him stand and lean against the sink. Moving upright brought back the vertigo and he swayed alarmingly. Greg hunched over, clinging to the edges of the basin. His limbs felt heavy and his eyes didn’t seem to want to open fully. Clay ran the water, then moved to rub Greg's back. Greg bent over the sink, grasping it tightly to hold onto his elusive balance, and rinsed the gorge from his mouth.

Blood spattered onto the porcelain. “What the hell?” Greg touched his nose, but his hand came away clean. He groped at his face and neck until he found the blood trickling along above his clavicle. He grabbed one of the cloths and ran it under the water. He mopped at the blood, seeking its source.

Arms encircled him, Clay pressing into his back. Greg, still trying to clean the flowing blood from his neck, was suddenly frightened. “No!”

“I’m sorry about this, Greg.” John Clay said in his ear. “You seem like a decent enough chap. But Mycroft... you have no idea what he’s really like... this is all his fault.”

“What?” What was he talking about? Greg tried to stand up and shake Clay off. "Let go, John!"

Clay had unfastened Greg’s trousers and was pulling them down.

Greg yelped, dropped the bloody cloth and grabbed for his pants as they slipped away — but the room spun, and he spun with it... falling... then Clay had him, arms tight around his chest. He felt Clay’s cock against his naked arse, hot, hard, protruding... Greg began to dry heave as Clay bent him over the sink top. He pressed a hand between Greg’s shoulder blades, holding him down. The other hand gripped his hip keeping him still, trapping him against the marble sink. Clay rubbed his bare penis against Greg’s arse.

Horrified, Greg felt his own penis begin to harden.

"Fuck! Fuck, let me go!" He bucked, kicking the copper bin of used hand cloths over, slipping on loose cloth. Greg clung to the sink as he tried to get his feet back under him.
Clay was thrusting his hips hard against Greg’s exposed bum and Greg struggled to stop him in vain. His head felt like it might split open and his stomach lurched and twisted. Blood dripped onto the porcelain... Greg laid his cheek on the cool marble, gripping the edge of the sink... he closed his eyes...

Cold fingers smeared lotion down the crack of his arse. *Vetiver scented* he remembered.

“No... fuck, stop!” Greg cried, a spike of adrenaline opening his eyes and clearing his vision. He clenched his glutes down hard, kicking back desperately...

His flailing almost took them both to the floor and the fingers moved to grip and steady his hip. But the erection kept thrusting, sliding through the lotion. Greg felt coarse pubic hair strafe his arse as Clay forced his cock between Greg’s thighs. He was buffeted by waves of dizziness and nausea as he tried to battle out of the other man’s embrace. Swearing, he writhed and kicked, and the copper bin went clanging into the wall opposite.

With a grunt, Clay ejaculated, hot and sticky on Greg’s arse. He felt it dripping between his cheeks, onto his thighs as Clay groaned and spilled pulse after pulse of semen onto Greg’s skin.

Greg shuddered and choked, feeling hysterical — *how was this happening*!? Clay’s hands roamed over his hips and clutched Greg’s bare penis. Clay began to stroke him rapidly. “No!” Greg cried. “No!” Panicked, furious, frightened, he bucked and twisted, wrenched an arm free and elbowed Clay in the face.

The moment Clay was off him, Greg bent forwards and yanked his pants and trousers up over his arse, covering his genitalia. He strove to fasten them, to shove in his shirt and protect himself from the next attack before the dizziness overwhelmed him again. He crouched next to the sink, holding a defensive hand over his head.

But Clay didn’t try to stop him. Rather he tucked himself neatly away, slid in next to Greg and washed his hands. As Greg watched, stunned, John Clay primped in the mirror, straightening his hair and his tuxedo. As if he’d not just been molesting him.

Greg lunged for the door, desperate to escape, grabbing the knob as the room swooped and his vision blurred. It was locked, dammit! He clung to it and thumbed the lock open just as Clay reached him again. Greg half-turned to ward him off, wrenching open the door at the same time.

Once again Clay caught him as his balance failed. He propped Greg against the door frame. “Hold on, babe.” Clay said calmly, as if they hadn’t just been fighting, as if he hadn’t just *sexually assaulted* Greg. “Your hair.” And he crowded into the open doorway and ran his fingers through Greg’s fringe.

“Stop...” Greg hissed and pulled away again, into the hallway...

— *face-to-face with Mycroft and Jessica Clay*!

“Ooops.” Clay sang behind him.

“John!” Jessica whinged. “You bastard! Not again! You promised!” Then she burst into tears and ran off.

“Jess... honey...” John Clay ran after her, leaving Greg alone with Mycroft.

For a second, Greg was only relieved — relieved Clay was gone, relieved Mycroft was there, relieved he was *safe*! And so relieved he could collapse into Mycroft’s arms and let *him* worry about
the crippling dizziness and nausea, the throbbing lump on the back of his head...

Then Greg’s eyes focussed fully, and he saw the look on Mycroft’s face...

It was chilling.

Abruptly, Greg comprehended what Mycroft was seeing — his dishevelled clothes and hair, his flushed face damp with perspiration, the mound of his not exactly hard but not exactly soft cock through his trousers, the smell of sex and John Clay’s cloying cologne...

His vision swam, and Greg grabbed hold of the doorframe before he fell over. He knew it had been a setup. John Clay had primed him, and Jessica Clay had made certain Mycroft saw what looked like an assignation.... they’d engineered this, a false betrayal to cause a rupture between them. Why?

Surely Mycroft would not fall for it.

But Mycroft’s face only grew colder. He opened his mouth... then frowned very slightly and closed it. He turned on his heel and left.

Greg watched, dazed and helpless, as Mycroft strode directly to the grand staircase and descended out of sight.

Cries of “Las Malvinas son Argentinas!” echoed from the ballroom.

Chapter End Notes

Well. That happened. This fic has taken a sudden turn, one I hadn't really expected. And with seventeen dates to go. Trauma, misunderstandings, injury and hurt feelings...

Next week: twenty plus years ago, Mycroft Holmes met John Clay and gained that rarest of things, a friend.

You too can visit the Ambassador's mansion in Belgravia - https://openhouselondon.open-city.org.uk/listings/2060
“John Clay looked at Mycroft with mocking triumph. A look that told Mycroft he had been a fool to trust either of them, his lover or his friend.”

Note: referenced non-con

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mycroft had been unforgivably complacent, thinking himself untouchable. Thinking he could dangle something as precious as Greg Lestrade in front of John Clay just to rub salt in the wound. Just to show the bastard that despite what he’d done, what he'd taken, Mycroft had someone wonderful, someone handsome and interesting and substantive. And that Clay was powerless...

He hadn’t thought it could still hurt so much.

When Jessica Clay had mentioned that she’d lost track of her husband, Mycroft hadn’t liked the look of calculated worry he saw in her eyes. He’d just been glancing around for Greg, thinking he must have ducked out onto the terrace for another cigarette when Jessica approached him.

“They were talking earlier.” She said. “Maybe John went out on the terrace with Greg.”

That notion hadn’t sat well with Mycroft. He was relieved to find neither man there.

Jessica was beginning to fret. Mycroft would have rather looked for Greg on his own, but he was too chivalrous to abandon her. She took him into the long, dim corridor that led to the toilets where they met Justice Highton’s husband looking cross.

“Hay un par de maricones en el retrete. ¡Chocante! Simplemente impactante!” He groused as he stormed by them.

Mycroft and Jessica exchanged a glance. “Fairies going at in the loo…” She repeated. There were at least twelve doors on the corridor, each leading to a separate toilet, but only one had noise loud enough to penetrate the thick walls.

When they’d come out of the toilet, Mycroft saw the mocking, triumphant look on John Clay’s face. His stomach twisted inside-out, and he could barely breathe for the crushing pressure in his chest.

He’d seen that look before.
At seventeen years of age, Mycroft Holmes was entirely confident that he knew everything — and if he didn’t know it, he could find it out easily enough. The world was his for the plucking.

He’d been at Cambridge for over a year already, and with his ability to read people, had been a smashing success at everything he undertook. He could deduce what a professor wanted from a paper after a few minutes of class. And with his memory, tests were absolutely no problem. After a few months, he’d convinced his professors to give him the final tests and/or assign a research paper in lieu of attending classes. In this manner, he earned his undergraduate degree in fewer than two years.

When he was due to matriculate he decided to take on concurrent master’s programs. He was still a bit too young to be taken seriously out in the world, and in-between internships and travel, he didn’t want to be bored.

Mycroft took on Economics, Business, and because the department was a mess and he itched to set it to rights, Sociology.

Mycroft joined the department in January and discovered that John Clay was the star of the program. Not only was the twenty-four-year-old beautiful, he was socially and politically adept. He had the knack of making everyone feel as if he were interested in them — the interest of such a strikingly attractive man being something of innate value.

When Clay smiled crookedly at him from across the graduate students’ mixer, Mycroft discovered that he was not immune to the man’s charms.

“You’re Holmes.” Clay informed him. “You’re supposed to be terribly bright.”

“Indeed.” Mycroft looked Clay over, deducing — he was reasonably intelligent but leaned too much on his physical appearance. He’d been raised by his Greek mother and English father in Kent, was less affluent than he pretended, had returned to university after a two-year hiatus, mostly spent in America, and had had steak and kidney pie for lunch. He was closeted, and he was a natural leader. People would follow where he took them.

“I’m John Clay.” He held eye contact with Mycroft for a moment, his bright blue eyes mischievous. “Heard a rumour about you, Holmes.” He said. “And now I’m thinking it’s true.”

Mycroft raised an eyebrow. “Do share.” Balance of probability suggested Clay was referring to Mycroft’s homosexuality. Mycroft had never seen the point in being closeted — but he understood not everyone had his talent of reading people’s secrets and, if necessary, using them to gain an advantage. A bit of blackmail neutralised the most virulent homophobe.

Clay’s crooked smile flashed blindingly. “I’m having a party Saturday night.” He said. “Why don’t you come? Meet some like-minded individuals.”

Definitely homosexuality. “Thank you for the kind invitation. Unfortunately, I’m quite busy.”

“Oh, I’m sure. Aren’t we all. But let me give you my address, just in case. D’you have a pen?”

“Just tell me, I’ll remember.” Mycroft told him with a smirk.

He saw Clay’s eyes sharpen with interest as he rattled off the address of his flat.

Mycroft was curious. And he was seventeen, he was as libidinous as the next boy. He’d never enjoyed parties, but the idea of a roomful of young gay men was... appealing. Thus, on Saturday evening he found himself ringing the bell of Clay’s flat.
There were maybe twenty-five people crowded into the little two room flat. It was in the garret of a building in the old part of Cambridge. It’s defining feature was an ancient, drafty window wall made up of dozens and dozens of foot-tall, leaded panes. It overlooked the surrounding city, a dramatic view of rooftops and city lights.

“Holmes!” Clay was effusive. “You came! Everyone meet Holmes. If you thought you were the smartest chap in the room, think again. Holmes here is a bona fide genius. And terribly cute too.” Clay winked.

With a recent growth spurt, Mycroft had lost the last of his adolescent pudginess. He was now tall and very thin with a full head of auburn hair. He knew he was not handsome, with his beaky nose and freckles — next to John Clay, he was all but invisible — but in pegged designer jeans and a bespoke black waistcoat that emphasised his long legs and narrow waist, he knew he was reasonably attractive. But he was completely unused to any sort of positive attention for his physical appearance. He blushed bright red.

Mycroft waited for the inevitable — laughter, jokes at his expense, jeers. Over the years, he’d learned to take it with perfect equanimity, but it did not endear him to the jokers.

And come it did. “Golly, that’s marvellous.” Clay said with a smirk. “You are the sweetest baby.”

“Oh, let him alone, Clay.” Someone called. “Don’t mind him, Holmes, he’s a right wanker.” The speaker was blonde and burly in a way that suggested he’d be fat in ten years. His accent was 100 percent authentic posh and his jeans and jumper were carelessly shabby in the way only the very rich could get away with. Here was a man brought up with the money and privilege to which someone like John Clay aspired. “I’m Miles.” He said, sticking his hand out. “And you are cute. First year?”

“Erm, no.” Mycroft said shaking Miles’ hand. “I graduated early. I’m in the post graduate program.”

“Told you he was a genius.” Clay interjected. He liked being the centre of attention, Mycroft noted. “Let me get you a drink.”

It was a networking event as much as a party. John Clay had formed a homosexual cabal made up of bright, educated young men who were going places. The idea was to offset the drawbacks of being gay in the ‘80s, and soon to be ‘90s, by helping each other out, gaining footholds and building a wide-ranging power base. Clay’s goal, he confided to Mycroft after a few drinks, was to become Foreign Secretary by the time he was forty.

As Clay outlined his plans, Mycroft was impressed with his level of organisation and forethought. He’d found it rare in the neuro-typical. He imagined Clay was good at chess.

Mycroft met and assessed the other men at the party and whilst they all had some merit in Clay’s scheme, Clay himself had the most interesting abilities. He thought the man could be quite useful to him.

“Tell me, Holmes.” Clay said a couple hours and quite a few drinks later. “Are you a virgin?”

He smirked broadly as Mycroft blushed. “No.” He said, feeling cross but hiding it behind impassivity.

“Too bad.” Clay’s hand found Mycroft’s knee and travelled upwards. “I was planning to take it.”

He leaned in and kissed Mycroft, cupping his face. He was insistent, invading Mycroft’s mouth with his tongue. He tasted of beer and cigarettes. Mycroft assessed both Clay’s motivations (conquest) and his own arousal (negligible) and pulled away.
“I’m very flattered.” He told the strikingly handsome man. “But I don’t think this would be wise.”

“I think it’s a terribly good idea.” Clay’s hand pushed higher on his thigh and he leaned in for another kiss.

Mycroft let him but didn’t return the kiss. He remained impassive until Clay pulled back. “Come on, Holmes, be a sport.”

“You would be better served to turn your attention to one of the twelve men in this room who are desperately in love with you and meet up with me tomorrow to discuss how we’re going to reorganise the Sociology department.”

Clay narrowed his eyes. “Reorganise the department?”

“It’s a mess. Let’s fix it. Leave our mark.” Mycroft appealed to Clay’s vanity, his craving for recognition.

“How do you propose...?”

“Replace the department head and streamline the secretary’s duties to start.”

“How—”

“Tomorrow.” Mycroft said. “When you’re sober.”

Clay sat back and regarded him. “Twelve? Which twelve?”

Mycroft smiled and told him.

*

Over the next year, John Clay became an important ally in Mycroft’s quest to make the Sociology Department a well-oiled machine, rather than the leaky, limping collection of parts it was. Clay had a talent for making himself indispensable — something on which Mycroft was careful not to rely, but which allowed them to take over and reappoint responsibilities in the department. Clay was so good at it, Mycroft could envision John Clay working for him in the years to come, a top lieutenant in his quest to make the British government more efficient.

In exchange, Mycroft made himself valuable to John Clay. His ability to finagle favours and work deals was second to none. Mycroft found it to be extremely useful to practise this skill. He used it to begin laying the foundation for his future career in government.

“How’s it going with French Literature?” Clay asked rather cattily over lunch one day. It had been four months and with Clay’s help the Sociology Department was coming along nicely. Mycroft was working on the infrastructure to ensure the department didn’t devolve back into chaos as soon as he left.

“I’m not going to sleep with you.” Mycroft told him.

“Why not?” Clay whinged. “It can’t be because of Miles. You don’t even like him.”

“I like Miles quite a lot, actually.” Mycroft said placidly. Despite the fact that he had been seeing Miles, Clay had never stopped trying to get a leg over with him. He’d considered just doing it, giving Clay his conquest, so he’d shut up. Of course, that was ridiculous.

“But he’s reading French Literature.”
“You’re reading Sociology.” Mycroft pointed out. French Literature at least required proficiency in French. He had yet to see in what Sociology required proficiency.

“So are you!”

“I defended my thesis last month. I’m officially done reading Sociology.” British Relations with the US and the USSR in the late Cold-War Era had been a smashing success with the committee. They were lobbying him to expand the paper into a dissertation and join the department.

“Bloody show off.” Clay grumbled. “What are we doing for your birthday?”

Mycroft was turning eighteen on Friday of that week. “My brother is coming Saturday to visit for the weekend, so I hadn’t thought to do anything. Father will ring, of course, and Mummy will shout ‘happy returns’ from her study when he holds up the phone.”

“Miles hasn’t planned anything? Golly, that’s shocking.”

Mycroft smiled with mild amusement. “I don’t imagine he knows it’s my birthday. Not everyone has bothered to steal my University file.”

“You were holding out on me, what was I supposed to do?” Clay complained.

“I tell you everything pertinent.”

Clay shot him an irritated look. “Pertinent! You didn’t even say you were reading three graduate subjects concurrently!” Mycroft didn’t know why that rankled Clay so much. Envy was part of it, that was clear. And Clay’s overwhelming desire to be at the centre of things, to be ‘in the know.’ But he’d mentioned it three times now.

“It’s not a secret.”

“You’re impossible!” Clay informed him. “You know everything about everyone, but you reveal nothing about yourself.”

“How?”

“Oh, shut up. We’re going out for your birthday. Eighteen! I’ll tell the lads to meet up at The Safari.”

“Ugh.” The Safari was the name of a dim and sad gay bar on the outskirts of Cambridge.

“You’ll go, and you’ll like it.” Clay insisted.

Oddly, Mycroft had enjoyed it. He had never been the centre of attention in a social context and whilst he wouldn’t want to make a habit of it, it had been... interesting... to discover that the other men — his friends he supposed — held him in esteem.

That birthday was unique in Mycroft’s experience — by his nineteenth birthday many members of Clay’s cabal had grown to despise him, and his early twenties were spent in the field, undercover...

The Safari was in a corporate district abandoned at night. It could only be accessed by walking round back of several businesses, through an alley, to find an unmarked door. It never advertised, word of mouth being sufficient in the late 1980s, to bring in gay men from three counties. It was hardly a secret — not the way Mycroft knew secrets — but its anonymity was sufficient to make the closeted comfortable and keep the coppers away.

There was another gay bar in Cambridge, much glitzier, much more out in the open. Clay and his
cabal preferred the dingy back rooms of The Safari.

They took over a large portion of the bar that night, toasting Mycroft and buying him drinks. He’d danced half the night with Miles and half the night with everyone else. Clay was a divine dancer and Mycroft always enjoyed partnering with him. There were some gag gifts — flavoured condoms and edible underwear, and a stolen Tudor Bonnet that they forced Mycroft to wear. (He discovered its owner and returned it the next week.) Miles slipped him a little gift that turned out to be outrageously expensive, perfectly understated cuff links. All-in-all it was Mycroft’s favourite birthday memory.

The next day, Mycroft met Sherlock at the train. At ten, Sherlock was weedy and skinny with perpetual bed-head and a serious mien. Mycroft was beginning to worry about him — he didn’t seem to have the ability to buffer himself from the world’s every sight, sound, smell, and sensation. It all hit the boy at once, all the time.

Mycroft knew how that felt. He’d struggled with it himself, but he’d been younger than Sherlock when he’d taught himself to record all the input without consciously experiencing it. To put it in a ‘buffer’ in his brain, to be examined later if necessary. He’d been attempting to teach Sherlock the technique.

Sherlock’s face lit at the sight of his older brother. They were still best friends then, alike enough to understand each other as no one else ever would. Mycroft read his brother’s relief at seeing him, his irritation with their parents, impatience with his school and an excitement that meant he had a hundred questions saved up. As was their custom, Sherlock used the walk to Mycroft’s rooms to begin his interrogations.

He was much more interested in the natural sciences than Mycroft had ever been, so he’d arranged for lab time with one of the chemistry professors. (The professor had a second family living six kilometres from his first, he would happily spend an afternoon with Mycroft’s little brother in exchange for Mycroft keeping that to himself.)

Sherlock had come armed with experiments he wanted to try. Don Higgenbottom looked through Sherlock’s notes noting the experiments that were overly explosive, flammable, corrosive or actively poisonous — whilst Sherlock complained he never got to do anything — until he found one he deemed acceptable. Mycroft could tell by his brother’s face, it was the experiment he’d intended all along.

Mycroft spent the afternoon and evening reading quietly in the corner, whilst Professor Higgenbottom insisted Sherlock follow the scientific method and clean up properly as they went — good laboratory practices were invaluable — until his brother could barely keep his eyes open. Then he took him home and put him to bed on the couch.

Sunday morning, Mycroft made breakfast and Sherlock complained he wasn’t hungry, insisted Mycroft ate too much and was fat, and eventually devoured a waffle with strawberries and bacon. They had finished, and Mycroft was haranguing Sherlock into his clothes when John Clay came in.

“Holmes! Where’ve you been, old chap? You disappeared off the face of the earth yesterday. Oh!”

“Clay, this is my brother, Sherlock. Sherlock go clean your teeth.”

Sherlock had looked at Clay with a furrowed brow. “That shirt isn’t yours.” Sherlock said. “You steal things. You want something from Mycroft, but you’re nervous about asking.” His pale, thin face turned stormy. “You don’t really like my brother. You’re ashamed of it though. You’re ashamed of your mother too, and because you like boys…”
“Sherlock!” Mycroft snapped. “Enough.”

“But he —”

“We talked about this.” He said with more kindness. “You can’t just blurt out everything you deduce. Keep it to yourself.”

“But he doesn’t like you!”

“Friendship is complicated, Sherlock. And people feel differently at different times. And even someone who has some animus can be useful.”


“You’re not stupid, Sherlock. You’re just undisciplined. If you’d kept your observations to yourself, you would have deduced his usefulness sooner.” Mycroft told him. “Now go clean your teeth whilst I talk to Clay.”

Clay stared, angry and resentful at being laid bare. “That little psychopath is your brother!?"”

Mycroft glowered warningly, but before he could speak, Sherlock stuck his head out the loo door. “I’m not a psychopath,” he declared in his high, piping voice. “I’m a high functioning sociopath. You should learn to tell the difference.”

“Sherlock!” Mycroft snapped.

“I am cleaning my teeth.” He waved his toothbrush and disappeared back into the loo.

“No offense Holmes,” Clay spat. “But your brother is bloody mental.”

Mycroft gave him a hard look. “Clay, simply because I don’t blurt it out, doesn’t mean I’m not perfectly cognisant of everything he deduced. And more.” Mycroft informed him, sharply.

“Now, Holmes, you can’t believe…”

“I know you have ambivalent feelings about me and many others. I know about the scandal with your athletics master that sent you to America for two years, about your mother’s heritage, and why you stole that bracelet you always wear. If it had mattered to me, I would have said something long ago.”

“I didn’t —”

“Don’t embarrass yourself by denying it, Clay. You took the bracelet from the sister of your first lover because he let his family separate you. You have an unfortunate vindictive streak that you should learn not to indulge. It will get you into real trouble someday.”

“How…!” Clay’s eyes burned. Mycroft waited patiently whilst his emotions warred — he read them clearly on the handsome face. So, he was prepared when John Clay spoke. “Golly, Holmes…” Clay began to laugh. “Remind me not to get on your bad side.”

“That would be foolish indeed.” Mycroft said, allowing some threat into his voice.

Mycroft was aware that for all his talents, all his usefulness, John Clay’s sense of entitlement manifested as jealousy of other people’s possessions and advantages. That he had quite a few of his own made no difference. He felt he deserved it all.
He was clearly envious of Mycroft’s intelligence — Clay craved the approval of his professors and begrudged Mycroft’s ability to procure it almost effortlessly. But Mycroft believed that was of minor importance. The envy of other students had never impacted him negatively in the past. It simply was. He didn’t brag or flaunt his achievements unnecessarily. And he knew that he was too valuable to Clay to alienate.

Almost exactly a year later, Mycroft realised his mistake.

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Greg staggered back into the loo and locked the door, crouching down and leaning heavily against it. He swore out loud, chanting curses into his hands. “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!”

Mycroft’s face...

His head ached. He really might have a concussion... the dizziness… that wasn’t good… he should get checked out.

He just wanted to go home!

Greg shuddered feeling filthy. He could still feel John Clay touching him, thrusting against him… he could still feel Clay’s climax spattering on his arse…

He retched and lunged for the sink. Hanging his head over the basin, Greg dry-heaved painfully. There were still drops of blood on the rim.

Greg glanced in the mirror and regretted it immediately. His tie was gone, his collar open and he had a bright purple love bite on his neck, covered in Clay’s disgusting spit. His skin crawled.

He heaved again, his stomach spasming and his throat burning. His head throbbed mercilessly.

Greg turned on the tap and rinsed his mouth. He cupped water in his hand to wash Clay’s repulsive saliva off his skin...

— and then he stopped.

Greg swore again, over and over. He could feel, John Clay’s disgusting ejaculate drying on his arse. His eyes ached, and his cheeks were wet. Tears dripped into the sink as he choked on the realisation…

He had been sexually assaulted.

It seemed absurd. But it had happened.

It would sound absurd to everyone. Greg was a strong bloke, sturdy and able. Athletic. They would think it had something to do with his oh-so-recent coming out. Men who fucked other men were always at it in public toilets. They would think Greg had been asking for it. He would be a bloody joke.
“Fuck! Fuck!” His head was aching with a vengeance. Another wave of dizziness struck. Clinging to the sink, Greg put the toilet seat down and sat on it sideways, putting his head between his knees.

He had to do it. He didn’t want to, but he had to. He sat there… trying to talk himself into it… talk himself out of it… his eyes focussed on the red smudge on the floor… where had the blood come from? He’d never found the source…

He didn’t want to do it… he didn’t want to! He didn’t want to be a goddamn punchline.

Fuck you, John Clay!

Greg pulled his phone from his jacket and thumbed it to life. He squinted at it, willing his eyes to focus. When he could see, he scrolled through his contacts, hesitating over several of the names. Finally, with a last weary “Fuck…” Greg chose a name.

Greg wrestled his cigarettes from his pocket and lit one, sucking on it like oxygen. He rocked on the toilet seat as he smoked. It was comforting, the gentle motion and the nicotine. His head was still splitting, his hip and elbow throbbing, his entire body feeling strained and sore, but the slow back and forth slowed his breathing and calmed the frantic beating of his heart.

He finished his cigarette and stubbed it out. Greg looked at the phone again, at the name, and cursed. He initiated the call.

She answered on the third ring.

“Gregson? Lestrade… Hey… I’m in trouble, I need some, ah, help… no… no… not a homicide… something personal… I… Gregson, shit, you’re my outcry witness… outcry witness… yeah… that’s what it means… that’s exactly what it means…”

——-

Miles graduated in the Spring and moved to London. They remained friendly, but neither really saw the point of continuing their relationship long-distance. It had been a thing of mutual convenience as much as attraction. But Mycroft thought of Miles fondly and missed having his large, warm body by his side in bed.

Mycroft kept in touch with the Sociology Department, making certain his improvements became permanent. He spent little time in the department physically, however — Clay was there, getting ready to defend his thesis and keeping an eye on things. Mycroft had gotten him an interview with the Foreign Secretary’s office, and he had acquitted himself well. He would be getting a posting as soon as he graduated.

Over the summer break, Clay had begun dating women. Mycroft understood that Clay’s family did not accept his homosexuality and that Clay believed that having a wife and children was imperative given his career goals. Mycroft understood… yet he did not understand. Perhaps Clay was more bisexual than he. Mycroft simply couldn’t imagine sleeping with a woman, let alone disrespecting a woman enough to, as a gay man, date her.
Clay appeared to have three criteria for the women he dated. In order of importance they were 1) that she be wealthy, 2) beautiful, and 3) intelligent. With his own beauty and intelligence, he had no problem attracting qualified candidates.

He continued to have parties for the homosexual cabal, continued to recruit for it and still had a go with most of the members. But now he had to balance that with a girlfriend. All whilst writing his master’s thesis.

* 

Several months into the fall term, Mycroft met Professor Haliday. Haliday had been recruited for the Sociology Department from Harvard — he was part of Mycroft’s overhaul, a younger professor to balance the aging faculty, one with good organisational skills that could lead the department in a few years. Mycroft had thought Haliday would do perfectly.

He was somewhat surprised, though, when the new don contacted him, requesting that they meet. He had been awarded his Master’s in Sociology already and was deep into Economics. But he was curious. He agreed to lunch.

Haliday was not handsome, but he was charismatic enough that he didn’t need to be. He’d grown up on a farm in the rural South country, and still looked like a rough farmhand. Everyone had a bit of a crush on the big, powerfully-built don. Mycroft could not entirely except himself — when the professor turned the bright light of his attention on Mycroft, he felt himself responding.

When Mycroft told him, Sherlock hypothesised it was pheromones and demanded that Mycroft procure swabs from Haliday’s nasal passages. Mycroft had praised the hypothesis but nixed the swabs. When Sherlock visited, he made sure to keep him away from Haliday. He wouldn’t put it past his brother to ambush the professor with swabs. (Then he noted that Sherlock had begun experimenting with sleeping potions and stopped drinking or eating anything his brother gave him.)

“Mr. Holmes, I’ve been looking forward to meeting you… but now I think we’ve met before?” The Professor said as they sat down to lunch in a quiet restaurant outside the university district.

“Don Howell was kind enough to let me observe your interview last year.” Mycroft told him. “What can I do for you?”

“May I ask…? You’re younger than I expected, Mr. Holmes.”

“I’m eighteen.” Mycroft told him blandly. “I began University early.”

“And now you’re what, on your second master’s degree?”

“Second and third. Economics and Business respectively.”

“Mm. How are your theses coming along?”

“Quite well. Economics is almost ready for review. Business should not take more than a few months.”

“What is your topic?”

“For Economics? The Effects of Consumerism on Developing Countries — with a special section for former British colonies and how colonialism changed their economies.”

“That sounds fascinating.” Haliday honestly sounded fascinated. “It sounds like more than one
“I can send you a copy, if you like.”

“I would like that very much, Mr. Holmes.” Haliday said. “What I wanted to discuss with you today is your Sociology thesis. I’ve read it over several times, it’s brilliant, Mr Holmes.”

“Thank you. That’s very kind.”

“I showed it to a friend with contacts in MI6 and they are very interested to speak with you.”

Mycroft raised his eyebrows. “That explains why my telephone suddenly has an echo.”

“Oh… erm…” The don chuckled. “May I say, you seem very calm about this.”

Mycroft smiled blandly. “This isn’t the first time I’ve caught the attention of the security services. I’ve spoken with MI5 several times. I believe I’m no longer considered a foreign agent.”

Haliday laughed. “You’re a cool customer, Mr. Holmes. I want to make a counter offer before MI6 — or MI5 — snaps you up.”

“You’re advocating for academia, yes?”

“Yes.” Haliday sighed. “We’d love to keep you at Cambridge, Mr. Holmes. You could consult with the security services if you like, give graduate lectures, travel, research, write… I understand from some of the other faculty that you’ve undertaken the education of your brother. If you enjoy teaching…”

“My brother is very like myself.” Mycroft cut him off. “Neurologically. I’m afraid lecturing graduate students would be a very different experience.”

“Ah, I see. That makes sense.”

Mycroft smiled — a genuine smile, and he saw that Haliday registered it. “My brother has demanded that I procure nasal swabs from you, Professor Haliday. I declined on your behalf, but if an unkempt eleven-year-old accosts you with cotton swabs, you’ve been warned.”

They laughed together, Mycroft enjoying the man’s company. He had a feeling that, if they met, Haliday might actually like Sherlock. “Why nasal swabs?”

Mycroft explained Sherlock’s theory. He noted that when Haliday blushed it looked lovely on his broad cheeks.

“I have a proposition for you, Mr. Holmes.”

“Indeed?” Mycroft felt his prick wake up with some surprise. He was physically attracted to Haliday.

“Take on a class next term. Lecture on your thesis. Once a week — that’s fifteen lectures, you’ll be hard pressed to cover the material in that time. I’d like to make it mandatory for all the graduate students… and if you’d like you can handpick some undergraduates…”

“And in exchange?” Mycroft asked, calculating in his head how long this would delay his Business degree.

“We’d pay you, of course, as a guest lecturer, give you don’s rooms, and your thesis would be published by the University Press.” Haliday grinned. “And I’d provide as many nasal swabs as your
brother wants.”

Mycroft found himself smiling back. “You think I can write fifteen lectures in the next month and a half? Whilst finishing my Economics thesis?”

“Mr. Holmes, I think you’ve already begun writing them. In there.” He pointed at Mycroft’s forehead.

Haliday was correct. He already had the syllabus envisioned in its entirety.

“Give me a few days to consider your offer.” Mycroft told him. “Why are you smiling?”

“You didn’t say ‘no.’”

“I didn’t say ‘yes.’”

Haliday shrugged, insouciant. “We should meet again next week.”

They met in Haliday’s cottage three kilometre’s outside Cambridge. It was one largish open room, uncluttered by anything extraneous, with a sleeping loft in the eaves. “I love the city.” Haliday told him. “As long as I can leave it at the end of the day.”

Mycroft thought of London and how very small it made Cambridge seem. How he itched to be back in a real city. “You live here alone?” He asked.

“No one to share it with.” Haliday shrugged.

Haliday served homemade game pie and cider. “Me mum’s recipe.” It was delicious. They talked about Cambridge, Massachusetts vs. Cambridge, UK, why Haliday had wanted to stay in academia despite offers from several large corporations and think-tanks. His current research, Mycroft’s Economics thesis, his thoughts about his Business thesis, Sherlock and his fascination with chemistry, Haliday’s siblings…

After the cheese, Haliday set down his cup and looked at Mycroft. “What have you decided, Mr. Holmes?” He asked.

Mycroft sighed. “Your hope is that if I teach this course, I’ll want to stay, join the faculty permanently. Yes?”

“Guilty.” Haliday admitted.

“I don’t foresee that happening.” Mycroft told him. “However, I am intrigued… I’m not likely to have an opportunity like this again…”

“Mr. Holmes, you could write your own ticket to any institution!”

Mycroft smiled blandly. “Be that as it may, I have… other priorities. To be perfectly candid, I chose to stay another few years at Cambridge because I looked my age. Eighteen-year-olds have difficulty being taken seriously no matter what their qualifications. And perhaps that’s for good reason. I’ve found the past year and a half invaluable. And enjoyable. Your proposition is interesting, and I’m inclined to take you up on it. But please don’t bank on me staying.”

“Is that a ‘yes?’”

“I believe it is, Professor Haliday.” Mycroft smiled. The smile touched his eyes and Haliday smiled back.
“Then you must call me James. No more of this professor nonsense — we’re colleagues!”

Mycroft’s smile broadened. “James.” He tested the name on his tongue and found he liked it. “Mycroft.” Haliday held out his hand and they shook.

*

Within the week, Mycroft found himself in John Clay’s drafty garret sharing a curry.

“But that’s brilliant!” Clay exclaimed at the news of Mycroft’s guest lecturer position. Mycroft felt relieved — more relieved than the situation called for. He would have to examine that later.

“I’m terribly glad you agreed.” Clay continued. “I admit I wasn’t certain that you would.”

“You knew about it?”

“Who d’you think slipped the committee your thesis?” Clay crowed. “As soon as Alice Wiśniewski cancelled.”

Mycroft nodded. “I’m certainly convenient.” He muttered with a smirk.

Clay laughed. “You’re more than just convenient, Holmes. So, what do you think of him?”

“Him?”

“Don Haliday, our new bright light.”

“You know him better than I.” Mycroft demurred. “What is your impression?”

“He’s definitely one of us.” Clay told him. “I’m recruiting him. He’s well-established in academic circles and consults with the government. He can only help our cause.”

“And he’s interested?” Mycroft asked, curious.

“Early days still. Can’t just invite a professor to a party or fix him up with a boyfriend.” Clay winked — he had long taken credit for introducing Mycroft and Miles.

“I imagine he already has a boyfriend — if he is indeed gay.”

“Oh, he’s gay.” Clay grinned. “I’ve caught him looking.”

Mycroft chuckled. “Well, you are the prettiest.”

Clay preened. “I’m thinking of taking him on myself.” He said. “He’s definitely interested.”

Mycroft felt disappointed with James Haliday. “You’re having a flirtation?” And disappointed for himself.

Clay shook his head. “He claims he doesn’t sleep with students. Have to wait until after I finish my thesis.” He waggled his eyebrows.

“How is the thesis?” Mycroft asked and listened to Clay talk about his research, his challenges, his progress. He sounded upbeat.

*

James Haliday sat in on Mycroft’s first lecture.
In the month and a half since the lunch at his cottage, Mycroft had seen him now and again, but not one-on-one. He was friendly and helpful and unfailingly professional. He had offered to review Mycroft’s lectures, and Mycroft was forced to admit he had nothing written down.

“It’s easier to revise if I don’t have to take the time to type it out.”

“But... Mycroft, you need notes! Bullet points at least! It’s too easy to get flustered up there! To forget.”

Mycroft smiled indulgently. “James, never fear, I won’t forget. I don’t forget.”

James had looked at him with a combination of concern and admiration. Finally, he shook his head and smiled. “Bullet points.” He said. “Please. Listen to the voice of experience.”

Mycroft shrugged as his smiled broadened. “If you insist.”

At the first lecture, Haliday sat near the front with Clay and several other students. Without comment, Mycroft handed him a sheet of paper containing bullet points of his lecture. He himself had nothing on his lectern but the control for the slide deck.

He delivered his lecture, taking care to go slowly, to allow more deliberate minds to follow along. As he reached each bullet point on the list, he glanced at Haliday and raised an eyebrow slightly — just enough for the man to know he was teasing him.

For his part, Haliday tracked the bullet points through his lecture, smiling as Mycroft worked his way down the list flawlessly.

When the two hours were almost up, Mycroft took questions. They weren’t as insufferable as he feared, but he was glad he’d limited the time to ten minutes. When it was over, he announced his office hours and ended the lecture.

“Holmes!” James Haliday was beaming but it was Clay who spoke. “I knew you were terribly smart, but I didn’t know you could perform like that! The time flew by. I tell you, you’ll be PM one day.”

“Oh no.” Mycroft chuckled. “Not PM. Not me. I’m not cut out for public life. That’s your bailiwick, Clay.”

*  

Memory is such a strange thing. Mycroft could remember everything with perfect clarity… but it was still tinged with his biases. Sometimes he wondered what he had missed, what he had misinterpreted, wondered if he went through the memories one more time, he’d see something new, something obvious. Something he should have seen before…

Within a week of that first lecture and the triumphant lunch at the Goose and Swan afterwards, two things happened, 1) Mycroft and James Haliday became lovers, and 2) John Clay received critical feedback on his yet unfinished thesis. It suggested he rewrite large portions and perhaps continue his research, make it more robust. He received this bad news from his faculty mentor, James Haliday.

If one had happened and not the other, Mycroft was convinced everything would have been different.

*  

Their first kiss happened two days later. Mycroft ran into James on the quad, and they began
talking... and talking....

“James... it’s cold out here.” Mycroft finally said. “And my rooms are right there. Let’s talk inside.”

“You’re inviting me back to your room?”

Mycroft smiled a very little bit. “It’s about time, don’t you think?” He led the way into the building and up the stairs. He unlocked the door and walked inside, shedding his coat and hanging it up. He took James’s coat.

“Mycroft... you know I’m sixteen years your senior.”

“Problem?”

“I don’t want to take advantage.”

“Of me?” Mycroft almost laughed.

“I’m serious.” James said.

“James, what’s the worst that could happen?”

“I could break your heart.”

Mycroft did laugh. “I assure you, that’s extremely unlikely. But if it helps, I accept the risk.”

James touched his face. “You have no idea what you’re getting into.”

“Show me.”

James’ kiss was demanding, his arms were strong around Mycroft’s back. He smelled virile, bay aftershave and the wool of his don’s robe and his nascent stubble scraped across his chin. It swept Mycroft away, wiped all thought from his mind. That had never happened before and it was glorious!

It took a moment after James pulled back for Mycroft’s brain to come back online. When it did he leaned in eagerly for more.

Not a month had passed before Mycroft all but lived in James’ cosy cottage outside of Cambridge. The sex was the best Mycroft had ever had, and the most plentiful. At 34, James was experienced and attentive, sensuous and adventurous.

Mycroft successfully presented his Economics thesis to the committee and then focussed his attention on Business. Once a week he gave a lecture and almost every weekend, Sherlock came to visit. If the younger Holmes was surprised that his brother had taken up with the pheromonal professor, he didn’t show it. He was even marginally civil to James.

Though he spent less time with the cabal, Mycroft had lunch with Clay after each lecture. They discussed their ongoing projects — who was going where when they graduated and how that could best be put to use, the stability of the Sociology Department’s reorganisation, any favours that Mycroft might be able to finagle for his ‘like-minded’ peers.

Mycroft didn’t discuss his affair with James, but he was quite certain Clay knew of it. And it crossed his mind that Clay might begrudge him. But Clay showed no sign of it.

In any case, the affair would not last past his matriculation. Mycroft had agreed to a term as a field
agent for MI6 — it was the next logical step in his education. He would be out of contact with family and friends for three years. Whilst it would be sad to leave James behind, Mycroft was much more preoccupied with how it would affect Sherlock.

Missing three years of his brother’s life was regrettable. He spent time discussing it with Sherlock and between them they came up with a system of communication involving a dead drop and substitution code. It was not strictly legal, but Mycroft wouldn’t be writing anything sensitive in his coded letters. If an enemy agent intercepted one, he or she would be sadly disappointed by it. Or more likely, confused.

Perhaps he was distracted by his new lover, but Mycroft did not become aware that Clay was having difficulty with his thesis for over a month after the review. When he asked if he could help in any way, Clay politely declined.

By mid-May, Mycroft had finished his Business thesis and only had two more lectures to give. He was finding himself more attached to James than he expected, even entertaining fantasies of returning to him when his three years in the field were finished. It was laughable, of course. James would not await his return. It was a four-month affair, nothing more.

But Mycroft cherished his time with James, even going so far as to tell him so.

* 

A photo surfaced of James Haliday engaged in sexual relations with a young male student.

When he saw it, Mycroft’s first thought was that he didn’t recognise the student. His second was that they were in James’ sleeping loft, in the same bed he so often shared with James.

The third was that the pain he was experiencing was crushing.

Mycroft bore it for ten agonising minutes before he partitioned the pain. He put it into a room in his Mind Palace and locked the door. He felt cold afterwards, icy. As if by cutting off his emotions, he’d cut himself off from all warmth.

James rang. His heart like ice, Mycroft hung on him.

He delivered his lecture two days later and afterwards, as usual, went to lunch with John Clay.

“Don Haliday’s been suspended… I can’t believe it.” Clay said.

Mycroft did not wish to discuss James Haliday. “Indeed.”

“Did you ask him about the photo?” Clay asked gently.

“What would I do that for?”

“He could have an explanation.”

Mycroft felt hope flare. He crushed it. “Why should I care?”

Clay looked at him, exasperated. “Because he’s your lover. Golly, Holmes, you’re being terribly obtuse.”

Mycroft took a moment to calm himself. There was no reason for all this ridiculous turmoil inside himself. “Was.” He told Clay. “He was.”
“You broke up over the photo.”

He wasn’t hungry — any appetite Mycroft had had for lunch evaporated with the conversation. “Why the interrogation, Clay?”


Mycroft scoffed. “There’s no need. I’m perfectly fine.” Clay raised his eyebrows sceptically. “Sentiment is nothing more than a chemical reaction, Clay.”

“You must feel something.”

“Would you be happier if I beat my breast and rent my clothes? Wore sackcloth and ashes?”

“I’d think you’re human.” Mycroft scoffed again. Clay made a helpless gesture. “Maybe you should give him a second chance. At least hear him out.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes, searching Clay’s face. “You’ve seen him.”

“He’s terribly keen to talk to you.”

Mycroft sighed. “I have nothing to say.”

“You’re terribly cold, Holmes.”

“You’ve no idea.” Mycroft told him, feeling the ice in his veins.

Three days later a second picture of James in his sleeping loft with a different student came to light. Mycroft locked his fury and humiliation in the room with his pain, with all of his feelings for James Haliday, and got on with his life.

His jaw ached from clenching his teeth. He would consciously relax it, and find himself clenching again a moment later.

And then a photo of James and Mycroft together surfaced.

Mycroft was livid. He was mortified. Completely humiliated. And enraged. Everywhere he went, everyone stared at him. His last lecture was a nightmare.

He was vaguely surprised that Clay wasn’t there. He’d stuck with Mycroft throughout it all, checking in with him daily. It was irritating, but it was also comforting to know that not everyone thought he was a joke.

Then someone handed him a copy of that day’s student newspaper. The picture of Mycroft on his hands and knees beneath James Haliday was published on the front page of the Varsity, right beside the first two photos. There was a black rectangle across his eyes to preserve his anonymity — as if everyone didn’t already know it was him.

The article insinuated that ‘Student C’ had been given a guest lecturer position because he was shagging the don. And worse, that Haliday had written his lectures for him.

No, that was not acceptable. Mycroft found himself in a taxi driving towards James’ cottage filled with an ice-cold fury. He was going to find that bloody camera and smash it. Then he was going to tell James Haliday exactly what he thought of him.

Mycroft paid the cabbie and slammed the door. But as he approached the cottage, John Clay
emerged.

John Clay was flushed, his lips ruby red and swollen, his shirt untucked, and he smelled of sweat and lubricant…

"Clay?" Mycroft’s mind rejected the obvious conclusion. There must be another explanation.

John Clay looked at Mycroft with mocking triumph. A look that told Mycroft he had been a fool to trust either of them, his lover or his friend.

Clay shrugged. “I figured if everyone was having a taste, I might as well. Nothing personal, old chap.” He swaggered away, snagging Mycroft’s taxi.

Mycroft was shocked. Clay was his friend! He felt utterly, completely foolish — how had he allowed himself to be taken in?! Something inside himself unsnapped. He would never trust anyone again, not completely. He would never again allow himself to be vulnerable.

Inside he found James sitting at the table looking dazed. He appeared to have worn the same jeans and t-shirt for several days. He hadn’t shaved and his scruff was coarse and black. On the table was an official termination letter from the university.

“Mycroft!”

“No.” Mycroft snapped. He slammed the Varsity down in front of him, the picture of them large and lurid. “Don’t speak. You don’t get to talk to me.”

Up in the sleeping loft, a bottle of lube lay uncapped on the floor. It turned Mycroft’s stomach. Of all the people James could have slept with, he chose John bloody Clay!? Mycroft’s closest friend!

Former friend. Mycroft no longer had friends.

From the angle the three photos had been shot, Mycroft knew where to look for the camera. He found where it had been, but of the camera there was trace.

Mycroft stalked back down to the main floor, glowering. “Where is it?” He demanded. “Where’s the camera!?”

James was standing by the table, waiting for him “I don’t know. I don’t have one.”

“Don’t mess me about, James!”

“I’m not! Mycroft, I wouldn’t lie to you.”

Mycroft scoffed loudly and turned on his heel.

“Wait... you left some things.” James told him softly, hefting a box. “I was going to mail them.”

Mycroft looked at him coldly. He took the box. Despite James being so tall and broad, he seemed small.

“Mycroft, I didn’t sleep with those boys. I don’t even know who they are! The photos must be doctored somehow.”

“And the photo of us?” Mycroft demanded through clenched teeth.

“I didn’t... I don’t know where it came from!”
“And I suppose you don’t know how John Clay’s cock got in your mouth either.”

“That…” James couldn’t look at him. “That was a mistake. He… he was here, and everything is shite… Mycroft… please understand… you were gone, you wouldn’t…” He swallowed. “I love you.”

Mycroft scoffed in disbelief. “John Clay has herpes.” He told James. “I doubt he informed you before exposing you to the virus.”

Mycroft left Cambridge that same day.

*

A year was a long time when one was young. And Mycroft had three long and harrowing years in the field. He was one of the most successful agents in the history of MI6 — having ice where one’s heart should be was a decided advantage in that line of work.

He was asked to take on another term. Mycroft declined. Legwork was tedious. And he needed to get back to Sherlock.

At fifteen, Sherlock was gangly and awkward, all skinny arms and legs bumping into furniture and tripping over his own feet. His hair was somehow more of a bird’s nest than when he was eleven, and he had spots. Mycroft had never seen a more beautiful sight.

They had communicated sporadically whilst Mycroft was away, long coded letters about Sherlock’s latest enthusiasm, latest outrage, latest explosion… but it hadn’t been the same as being there. As he greeted his brother, Mycroft knew he had a lot to make up for.

He found, though, that it was hard to thaw. Even for his beloved brother.

That night, after their parents left them alone, Sherlock had turned to Mycroft with a look on his face that he’d never seen — part glorious excitement, part preening accomplishment, part worried concern.

“Your mail came here.” Sherlock told him. “While you were away.”

“Yes?” Mycroft knew that. He lit a cigarette — he’d developed the habit within the first few months of his term with MI6.

“I nicked one of your letters. I read it.”

Mycroft sighed. “I assume you had a good reason.”

“Yes?” Mycroft knew that. He lit a cigarette — he’d developed the habit within the first few months of his term with MI6.

“I nicked one of your letters. I read it.”

Mycroft sighed. “I assume you had a good reason.”

“It was from James. I liked James. He didn’t talk to me like I was a kid. Not like your other friends.”

Mycroft could hear his heart beating in his ears. He’d tried to forget James Haliday, forget how much he’d cared for him. Forget his betrayal. Keep him locked up tightly in that room. But even after three years, he still dreamed of his lover sometimes.

He sucked on the cigarette, letting the nicotine calm him. He looked at Sherlock, his avid eyes, the way he chewed on his lip. “You still have this letter?”

Sherlock nodded and put a file folder on the table. On the tab, he’d written ‘Haliday.’

Mycroft opened it. The first thing in the file was a newspaper clipping. It was an obituary for James Haliday dated almost two years previous.
“It isn’t necessarily the same person,” Mycroft said, feeling numb.

“The age is right,” Sherlock pointed out. “And I spoke to the coroner in Exeter. It’s him.”

Sherlock had spoken to the coroner?

“I told him I was a Detective Constable from the Met. He read off portions of the coroner’s report right over the phone — shoddy that. They really should have some rules —.”

“Sherlock!”

Sherlock abruptly looked younger, smaller. “James hung himself.”

That was a punch in the gut. Mycroft took a moment to regain his composure. It was difficult. He took a long pull on the cigarette. “I presume you’re telling me this for a reason.”

Sherlock handed him a letter.

The date was roughly contemporaneous with the obituary.

Mycroft,

I’ve thought about writing you so often. I think about what happened… one day I had my dream job, the respect of my peers, and a boyfriend that made me very happy. And the next, I’d lost everything. I still don’t know why or how.

I wasn’t lying when I told you I didn’t know the boys in those pictures. To this day, I don’t know who they are or where those photos came from.

And I don’t know who took the photo of us. I’ve wracked my brain trying to figure out how, think of who would do that, but I can’t think of anyone. If I had an enemy, I was unaware of him. But someone wanted to ruin me, and they succeeded. I’m sorry you got caught up in it.

I know you won’t believe me. Why should you, after what happened with John Clay. I admit, I did have sex with him. It was a horrible mistake, but I did it. I’m so sorry I hurt you. I wish it had never happened.

I thought that I’d get over it. I’d put it all behind me. I’d find a job somewhere, return to academia, rebuild my reputation. It wouldn’t be easy, starting over, but I was willing.

But I can’t. No one will hire me, that’s been made crystal clear. I’ll never teach again. I can’t publish, my submissions come back unopened. My friends — good friends — don’t return my calls. All the job offers I received from the private sector have been rescinded. Even my family have distanced themselves. I’m isolated now, no more than a ghost haunted by memories.

I think of you often, Mycroft. I think of our time together. I’d never met anyone like you, hiding your heat behind such a cool exterior, always watching, always observing, always soaking up knowledge. It was such a joy to see behind your mask, to take you apart and feel your inferno. I think I fell in love with you at that first lunch. And I never stopped.

I thought, once in a while, when you’d smile at me, really smile, that I made you happy. I wanted to make you happy all the time. Today my only regret is that I never got the chance. Nothing else matters.
Be well, Mycroft, and be happy.

James

Mycroft read the letter through several times, attempting to understand it. Finally, he realised that the tears in his eyes were making it impossible to focus and put the letter down. He’d never cried in front of Sherlock — Mycroft hadn’t cried since he was four and learned that Elves didn’t really exist. He struggled for composure, stubbing out the butt of his cigarette.

“I took the case.”

“What?” Mycroft asked.

“I took the case.” Sherlock repeated. “Why,” He asked intensely. “Why would he admit to sleeping with one, but not the others? This is his suicide note, Mycroft, he’s no reason to lie. On the contrary, he’s unburdening himself.

“He says someone wanted to ruin him. But who? And why?”

Sherlock sprang up and began pacing, all skinny arms and awkward legs. “I started with the assumption that James was telling the truth and looked for an explanation for the photos. I tracked down both of the students he was with in the pictures. One, Thomas, was relatively easy to find — he’s in finance in London. He refused to talk about the scandal but did confirm he was with Haliday in the photo.

“Thomas wasn’t lying, but there was something about his manner… he wasn’t telling the whole truth.” Sherlock shook his head in remembered frustration. “It took longer to track down the other student, Paul. He had become an addict, using meth, crack, heroin, whatever he could get his hands on. He left Cambridge after the photo was published. And within a year, he was homeless and hustling on the streets. When I found him, he was HIV positive, living in a halfway house in Leicester and trying to stay clean.”

“You went to Leicester?! Sherlock, how did you get to Leicester?!”

“Train — that’s not important. Mycroft…” Sherlock sank down and put his hand on his brother’s arm. “Mycroft, he told me that John Clay had paid him to pose with a drugged James Haliday.”

“John Clay?” Mycroft felt exhausted, drained of all emotion. John Clay had taught him well not to trust anyone, and he’d taken it to heart... but he never imagined the extent of his malignancy. He leaned back in his chair and let Sherlock’s words wash over him.

“Paul didn’t know how Clay had drugged him or what he’d used, but James was very high. And even then, he protested, he didn’t want to do it. He said James kept babbling about ‘someone named Mike.’ But he was too potted to resist. He wasn’t surprised that James couldn’t remember anything afterwards.

“Thomas was there the same night, and Clay took the photos. Then they just left James in bed.

“Clay must have hidden the camera for the photo of you and retrieved it later. That had to have been his goal all along, to ruin both you and James Haliday.”

“Both of us...” Mycroft muttered numbly.
“Convincing James to have sex with him too was just the cherry on top — a final thumb of the nose for both of you.” Sherlock said awkwardly with a glance at his brother.

“Then, in the letter,” Sherlock hurried on. “James says that he’ll never teach again, that that was made clear to him. Even with the scandal, he should have been able to find work. Plenty of smaller Universities would consider him, schools in Australia or America — especially if he continued to publish his research. But someone — or some group — was working against him there too. His submissions came back unopened? They were intercepted!”

“Clay’s cabal.” Mycroft said dully. It made sense. The men in the cabal might not yet be powerful, but they were plentiful and well-placed. They could have done it, kept James from finding work, from starting over.

Mycroft took a deep breath, remembering the look of mocking triumph on his friend’s face when he’d caught him leaving James’ cottage. It had all been a set up. He had been the target just as much as James and he’d never suspected.

How often had he ignored John Clay’s jealousy? How many times had he overlooked his vindictiveness? Mycroft had thought himself too valuable to the cabal, that Clay would not risk losing his favour.

He’d assumed sleeping with James was simply Clay’s compulsive sex habit, his need to rack up conquests — that that was more powerful, more primal, than any friendship. That Clay thought it of so little importance that Mycroft would forgive him in time...

How had he missed the truth?! How had he missed that Clay had plotted against him?!

Slowly he gathered himself together until he could speak.

“If I had ambitions like Clay’s, he certainly would have ruined me. But he never understood that wasn’t what I wanted.” Mycroft shook his head sadly. “Thank you, Sherlock. I appreciate your efforts.”

Sherlock preened at the praise. “I remember, I met him once, John Clay. He was bleeding resentment towards you, but you just said, ‘friendship is complicated.’”

“Yes. Clearly, I was mistaken. Clay was useful to me then.” Mycroft felt a deep pit of despair and enmity open within himself.

Sherlock snorted, his skinny arm knocking the lamp almost off the table. “Useful! What are you going to do, Mycroft? You can’t let him get away with this!”

“Trust me, Sherlock, he will suffer.”

*

Mycroft began keeping tabs on his old friend, John Clay. After three years, he was doing well in the Foreign Service, distinguishing himself. He was engaged to an heiress, and after his marriage next month, they would be stationed in Bogotá.

He would continue to do well, Mycroft decided, for another few years. And then his career would stall. Mycroft would make it his mission to keep John Clay in middle management for the rest of his hopefully long, dull, disappointing life. There would be no triumphs, no recognition, no advancement, no awards. His reviews would be, at best, uninspiring. All his hopes and dreams would die, one by one. He would never be Foreign Secretary.
Perhaps one day, Mycroft would let John Clay know that it had been he that had done this to him. Perhaps he’d send him a copy of James’ obituary... or the story from the Varsity... Let him understand that it had been Mycroft who had trapped him forever in mediocrity, and that he could do nothing about it. Let him know he’d done it for James.

Perhaps he wouldn’t have to. Perhaps John Clay would just know.

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Mycroft had been unforgivably complacent, thinking himself untouchable. Thinking he could dangle something as precious as Greg Lestrade in front of John Clay just to rub salt in the wound. Just to show the bastard that despite what he’d done, what he’d taken, Mycroft had someone wonderful, someone handsome and interesting and substantive. And that Clay was powerless...

He hadn’t thought it could still hurt so much.

When they’d come out of the toilet, Mycroft saw the mocking, triumphant look on John Clay’s face. His stomach twisted inside-out, and he could barely breathe for the crushing pressure in his chest.

He’d seen that look before.

Chapter End Notes

Mycroft didn't see Greg outside the loo, he saw Clay. He saw James and John Clay and his utter humiliation when he was nineteen. Can he see beyond that?

The Safari is based on the disgusting backroom gay bar in my college town. It had an unmarked door in a strip mall. You went in, down a long dingy hallway, and through another unmarked door into the bar. It was three ugly rooms, the first had some seating, the second had a bar, the third a mirror wall for dancing. One time my girlfriend stole the framed illustration of a lion (on a mirror) they had just inside the door. NO IDEA how she managed that without anyone noticing! It hung proudly in our apartment.

Tudor Bonnet - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tudor_bonnet

Edible Underwear- it’s disgusting btw - https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-02-29/edible-underwear-was-never-meant-be-eaten-or-so-say-its-creators

Next week: DCI Gregson arrives to take care of Greg... and to question Mycroft.
A Serious Head Wound

Chapter Summary

Mycroft realises he made a mistake and works to make amends. Greg is in hospital.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The love bite, lurid and purple on Greg’s neck, had filled Mycroft with rage.

When they had been together, Mycroft had taken pains not to mark Greg, to be respectful. To wait until permission had been given, and then he would have marked Greg somewhere private, somewhere only the two of them would see. His thigh perhaps. Or on his ribs.

It would have been special. Intimate. It would have signified… something… some coming together that Mycroft was loathe to name. Greg would have touched it and smiled at him in that way that lit his whole face…

That would never happen now.

Greg had allowed John Clay to mark him. Mark him coarsely, where everyone could see!

Who was Greg Lestrade? Mycroft had no idea anymore. The man he had been dating was not the man who had stood there with John bloody Clay's love bite on his neck!

And Clay! Mycroft wanted to carve that triumphant smirk off his bloody face. His fingers itched for his knives… he hadn’t used them in years but he’d never forgotten the feel of flesh under his blade… Mycroft had abhorred wetwork, had detested the way it cut all the heat out of his soul…

But there was no heat in his soul any longer. He was cold. Entirely, icily cold

Mycroft strode blindly through Belgravia. It was chilly, but he barely felt it. That great, purple love bite! That triumphant smirk! Clay calling Greg ‘babe’ and touching his hair! The bloody love bite! He could not escape that bloody purple love bite!

The searing pain inside him was an iceberg, huge and threatening, frozen with fury.

Mycroft knew exactly where his knives were, his throwing knives, his fighting knives, his artery slicing knives. He knew exactly how long it would take to retrieve them. He knew where the Clays stayed when they were in London. He knew exactly how to get there, how to infiltrate the building, get into the flat…

Bright purple and still moist from John Clay’s smirking mouth… a blight on Greg’s lovely, tan skin…

A blight on Greg.

Mycroft wanted to howl his grief like a widowed wolf on an arctic plain. He was cold to the bone.
He wasn’t in Belgravia anymore. Mycroft could orient himself easily, look at a few street signs and he’d know exactly where in London he was.

But he didn’t want to know. He wanted to be lost.

His mobile chirped. Mycroft ignored it. The love bite! The **love bite**! Why was it called a ‘love bite’ when all it signified was lustful imprudence, sensual excess!? It was salt in the wound!

It chirped again. And again.

Cursing, Mycroft pulled it from his pocket. “What!” He demanded.

“Sir, police have been called to the Ambassador’s residence. Do you need assistance?”

Mycroft let that sink in for a moment.

“What?”

“My sources say police are responding to an assault that took place in a first-floor toilet. All guests are being held for questioning. An ambulance has been summoned.”

“Find out who was hurt and how badly. Call me back.” He rang off.

*Let it be Clay*, Mycroft thought. *Let it be Clay, beaten and bloody and barely clinging to life.*

He laughed at himself. “Wishful thinking.” He muttered. If Clay had been assaulted, it was probably by Jessica. Mycroft didn’t care for the woman, but she didn’t deserve Clay.

Mycroft could have killed him back then, back when he’d discovered James’ suicide, learned what Clay had done. He’d considered it, despite his antipathy for wetwork. But murdering the villain would not have modeled appropriate behaviour for fifteen-year-old Sherlock.

Instead he’d gone to Richard Paul and Benedict Thomas himself and heard their confessions. Both were much more forthcoming with him than with his little brother. Mycroft hadn’t spared himself anything, he heard every detail, every awful sordid thing that had been done to James.

He didn’t have to ask why. Clay’s envy and sense of ill-use had grown into hatred of both James and himself. At some point that last term, Clay had begun playing chess against them and they had never guessed.

Instead of killing Clay, Mycroft had chosen to join the chess game.

Mycroft had made his moves, stagnating Clay’s career in terminal mediocrity. He'd had him at ‘check’ for over a decade now.

Showing off Greg… was that supposed to have been his ‘checkmate?’ If so, Clay had turned the tables, captured Mycroft’s queen, desecrated it and smirked.

His phone chirped. “What have you discovered?” He demanded.

“Sir…” His assistant hesitated. Mycroft frowned. His minions didn’t **hesitate**, they related facts efficiently and in detail.

“What!?”

“It’s Detective Inspector Lestrade, sir. He was just taken out of the Ambassador’s residence on a
stretcher and loaded into an ambulance. A DI Gregson went with him — she’s the primary. She left DS Sanjipongi in charge of the scene. And, uh, the assault… rumour is that it was a sexual assault.”

That hung in the air around Mycroft’s head for long seconds. The minion waited. Finally, Mycroft spoke. “Are you saying that Detective Inspector Lestrade has been the victim of a sexual assault?”

“Uh, yes, sir. Yes. Forensics are in the toilet now and DS Sanjipongi is organising officers to take statements from the guests.”

Greg the victim? It was difficult to imagine how John Clay could overpower Greg Lestrade… unless he’d drugged Greg as he’d drugged James!

Mycroft pulled up the memory of Greg and John Clay emerging from the toilet together. Clay had one hand on Greg’s chest, pressing him into the doorframe and with the other he’d brushed hair off Greg’s temple. He’d called Greg ‘babe.’ Mycroft had seen the love bite on Greg’s neck, bright purple and huge, bigger than a fifty pence coin…

Greg had shoved Clay away and stepped out into the corridor. His clothes were askew — his tie was missing, and his collar unbuttoned, showing off the love bite to great effect. His shirt was pulled out a bit, as if it was not securely tucked in. His cummerbund had been folded up on itself — that was odd, now that Mycroft remembered it. Surely one would straighten that before emerging. The top button of his trousers had not been fastened properly and below that was the telltale bulge of a semi-hard cock.

Greg had been flushed, colour high on his cheeks and forehead, but beneath it he’d looked pale. His skin had been damp with perspiration, and his hair was untidy. His arms had been akimbo, extended out from his sides a bit, as if he were searching for balance.

He’d squinted at Mycroft, as if it were too dark to see him properly. Then his eyes had flown open with surprise. He had smelled of sweat and semen and Clay’s too-strong cologne… and bile?

As Mycroft had begun to walk away, Greg had staggered back and grabbed hold of the doorframe. The ice in his veins boiled.

All he’d seen was the lurid love bite and Clay’s sleazy smirk. All he’d seen was Clay mocking him, laughing at him, showing him once again that there was nothing that Mycroft held precious that Clay could not defile.

Mycroft had been unforgivably blind.

“Tell Anthea to follow Greg to hospital. She is to make certain he has everything he needs and is inconvenienced as little as possible. Tell her I want regular updates. I will join her presently.”

“Yes, sir.” Mycroft ended the call. He oriented himself quickly, calculating exactly how much time he needed to get to the Clay’s flat in London.

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When the Clays were in London, they stayed in one of Jessica’s parents’ London properties. They had purchased this upscale flat specifically for the purpose of housing their daughter’s family, and it
was more than large enough for Jessica, John and their two boys. Mycroft had been in the flat three times, once by invitation and twice by infiltration. It always paid to have access to one’s enemies.

Mycroft had never outsourced John Clay. He had always done everything himself.

As he climbed the telephone pole onto the roof of the adjacent building, Mycroft reflected that he hadn’t done anything like this in black tie for over twenty years. It made him feel young and grim and determined.

Stealthily, he crossed to the roof of Clay’s building. He was fortunate that the Clay children weren’t in town tonight. If they had been, he would have had to lure Clay out of the flat and the man would have been on his guard. This was infinitely easier.

Mycroft shimmied down the drainpipe to the third-floor windows. The lock on the window in the utility room was false. It appeared to be securely fastened, but it was not. Mycroft lifted it silently and climbed into the flat.

Closing the window behind him, he wiped his fingerprints from the sill. Mycroft opened the hidden panel beneath the utility sink and retrieved the items he’d cached there years before: a large paperback dictionary, plastic zip ties, a prybar and a close-fitting pair of flexible leather gloves.

Donning the gloves, Mycroft stowed the zip ties in his trouser pocket and pushed the prybar through his belt. He pulled the razor-thin stiletto he always carried from its hidden sheath in his waistcoat. Mycroft longed to use it, to feel the metal warm in his hand as he carved his name across John Clay’s face. Instead he slipped it under the special band inside his right shirt cuff, just in case Clay tried to resist. Mycroft hoped he would.

He hefted the fat, somewhat floppy dictionary testing his grip. It would do nicely. He removed his bow tie regretfully — he hated not being properly dressed, but the tie could be used against him too easily. Mycroft had learned that the hard way. Satisfied, he crept to the door and opened it a crack. He could hear Jessica talking. They were home.

“You really are a foul creature, John.” Jessica was saying. “I don’t care where you put your prick, as long as you don’t embarrass me — so you decide to fuck someone at Justice Highton’s bloody reception!?”

John replied, but Mycroft couldn’t make out the words. She was in the master bedroom, he must be in the master bedroom’s en suite loo.

“And Mycroft fucking Holmes’ boyfriend! Do you have any idea how badly you’ve screwed us? Holmes isn’t just your old uni mate, John, Mummy says he’s the power in Britain. He has the PM’s ear. He has everyone’s ear!”

“Mycroft Holmes is the most powerful person in Britain. Mummy knows these things. When she wanted to expand to Manchester last year, he got in touch and let’s just say, Mummy was very impressed.”

“But the Manchester expansion didn’t happen.”

“Exactly! One word from Holmes and you’d finally get your promotion!”

“No… he was a laughingstock at Cambridge. Left in disgrace.”
“I don’t know about that, I just know what Mummy says. No one crosses Mycroft Holmes. They call him ‘The Iceman.’”

Clay laughed, loud and long. “‘The Iceman.’ That’s about right. He was always a cold fish.”

“What is it with you and him, John? You always go out of your way to be a right wanker when he’s around.”

“He owes me a favour and he won’t pay up. Are you going to bed?”

“Yes. Get out. You’re in the guest room from now on.”

“Jess!”

“Get out. You still stink of sex. You’re not getting in my bed.”

Mycroft heard a door close and footsteps. Distantly, he could hear a shower turning on — that was good, less chance that Jessica would hear him. John Clay passed by the utility room door and went into the kitchen. He was whistling softly. Jauntily. For a moment Mycroft saw red.

Then he felt the icy calm come over him.

Mycroft waited another moment whilst Clay turned on a television. A news programme blared. Mycroft stepped out of the utility room into the short hallway and entered the kitchen.

“Clay.”

John Clay whirled around, reaching a hand into his trouser pocket. Mycroft was on him before he could remove whatever he’d been reaching for — one hand on the offending wrist, the other slamming the dictionary hard against the side of his head in a big roundhouse ‘thwap.’ John Clay reeled.

Mycroft dropped the dictionary on the worktop and wrapped his gloved hand around Clay’s throat just as he recovered from the heavy blow. He shoved the man back hard, his butt against the worktop, his back bowed and his head held against the cupboard.

Clay registered who it was holding him, and his eyes flew open wide — a combination of fear and mocking in them. His hand strained in his pocket.

“What’s in the pocket?” Mycroft hissed as Clay batted and clawed at him with his free hand. “Tell me.”


“I’m going to pull your hand out of your pocket and it better be empty. If it’s not, I’m going to break your wrist.”

Clay snorted derisively but choked on it as Mycroft’s hand on his throat tightened.

“I suggest you take me very seriously.” Mycroft told him. “I’m not the boy you knew at Cambridge.”


Mycroft pulled the hand from the pocket and it was indeed empty. With practiced ease, he twisted the arm up behind Clay’s back, turning the man away from him as he did so, shoving him face down on the worktop. He let go his neck and caught Clay’s free hand and quickly zip tied the wrists
together, pulling it brutally tight.

“What the…!” Clay all but shouted.

Mycroft mashed his face into the worktop and put his lips close to Clay’s ear. “If Jessica comes in here, I’ll have to kill you to deal with her. Is that what you want?”

“No.” Clay panted.

“Good. What’s in your pocket?”

“Nothing.”

“Clay, you assaulted someone very important to me tonight. I wouldn’t play games if I were you.” As he said this, he slipped the stiletto from his cuff and held it under Clay’s eye.

“Fuck! Holmes! You’re insane!” Clay shouted in a hoarse whisper.

“I know what you did to James Haliday.”

“I…”

“I talked to Richard Paul before he died. I spoke with Benedict Thomas. They were both very informative.”

Clay cursed. “You can’t prove anything.”

“My knife doesn’t require proof. What’s in your pocket? I suggest you tell me quickly if you wish to continue enjoying the miracle of sight.”

“Ungh… fine. Scopolamine.”

“The drug? Why do you have scopolamine in your pocket?”

“Because I was going to use it on your boyfriend. But he hit his head and I didn’t need it.”

“You planned the rape? Or do you always carry poor man’s rohypnol in your pocket?”

“I knew you’d be at the reception, Holmes. I wanted to be prepared.”

“Prepared for what, exactly? What was the scopolamine for!?”

“I know it’s you that’s been holding me back!” Clay exploded. “I got your little message a few years ago. Terribly clever. I brought the scopolamine for you.”

“But you didn’t use it on me. Why Lestrade? Why attack him?” Mycroft gripped his stiletto hard enough for his knuckles to turn white.

“Everyone thinks you’re so cold. Heartless. But you’re not, are you. Not at all. I saw how you looked at him and I knew the best way to hurt you was to hurt him.”

“You had to know I’d retaliate.”

“I don’t care! You’ve already taken everything, Holmes! There’s nothing you can do to me!”

Mycroft pressed the point of the blade against Clay’s cheek, just below his eye. “Oh, there’s so much more that I can take from you!”
“Stop!” Clay whimpered, cowering on the worktop. “Stop, please.”

“What did you do when Greg Lestrade asked you to stop?” Mycroft hissed, pressing the point into Clay’s skin. A single bead of blood swelled around the blade and dropped to the worktop.

“Holmes, please… I’ll do anything.” Clay grovelled. “I’ll do whatever you want…”

Mycroft withdrew his knife, wiped the blood on Clay’s shoulder, and slipped it effortlessly back into his cuff. Holding Clay down firmly on the worktop by the back of the neck, he muted the telly, then accessed his phone and turned on the ‘record’ app. He held it by Clay’s mouth. “Tell me what you did to Detective Inspector Lestrade.” Mycroft commanded.

Clay scoffed querulously. “What do you want me to say?”

Mycroft paused the record app. “If you force me to get the knife out again, I will use it.” He threatened. He switched the app back on. “I want you to tell me exactly what happened from the moment you entered the toilet.”

Clay talked. After a few moments, he warmed to his subject, describing how Greg had tried to fight him off. “I could tell, he’s a terribly strong chap. I wouldn’t have stood a chance against him if he were fit. But he was terribly out-of-it. He could barely stay upright. Passed out at one point. Then he puked for five minutes. I thought he’d never stop. I felt a little sorry for him — he had this great gory gash on the back of his head. I don’t think he even realised…”

Mycroft clenched his teeth and restrained himself from punching the stiletto through Clay’s beady eye into his brain.

When he’d finished, Mycroft turned off the record app and turned the volume back up on the news programme. He texted his driver the Clays’ address. As he did, he saw two texts from Anthea. It was not good news.

Mycroft retrieved his dictionary. He slammed it down on Clay’s head.

“Ow! Stop that!”

Pressing Clay’s face firmly against the worktop with one hand, Mycroft balanced the dictionary on the top of Clay’s head, ignoring his cry of confusion. He pulled the prybar from his belt and crashed the heavy prybar down onto the book. It was an old torturer's trick, a way to hurt someone without leaving marks. Clay’s cry of pain was extremely satisfying. He did it again.

“That’s for the purple sucking mark on his neck.” Mycroft snarled, and beat the prybar against the dictionary with all his strength until the dictionary’s cover tore. Then Mycroft forced himself to tuck the prybar back through his belt. He shoved the mangled dictionary aside. ”Come on.” He said, pulling Clay up from the worktop by the hair.

“Where are you taking me?” Clay cried, real fear in his voice.

“You’re very, very lucky, Clay.” Mycroft hissed in his ear. “Detective Inspector Lestrade reported the assault to the police. If he hadn’t, I wouldn’t be using a book to cushion the blows. I would be cutting you into little pieces like I should have done twenty years ago.

"But you’re lucky. We’re going to the Met and I’m turning you over.” Mycroft leaned closer into his ear. “I suggest you make a full confession, Clay. Because if you’re ever released, I’m coming for you. And I promise, I’m very good with a knife.”
“You're insane!”

“You have sexually assaulted two men that I care for deeply out of pure vindictiveness. One eventually committed suicide because of your actions, the other you have given a severe head injury — for no other reason than you didn’t do as well in school as I. *Which one of us is insane?*” He yanked Clay in front of him, holding onto his arm. “We’re walking out the front door. Again, if you alert Jessica. I’ll kill you. I’d hate for her to have to see that.”

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“You’re here.”

Greg had opened his eyes to a blissfully reduced headache. It wasn’t gone, but it wasn’t the relentless pounding agony that it had been. His entire body felt... calmer. It had unclenched as the pain receded.

It was full daylight and there was a lean figure in a tuxedo sitting by the bed...

Mycroft looked up at the words and smiled — a smile of infinite fondness and regret. “Yes.”

Greg stretched out his hand and Mycroft took it, his fingers caressing Greg’s knuckles.

“How are you feeling?” Mycroft asked.

“Better than last night.”

Contrition was etched in every line of Mycroft’s face. “I should have been there for you.” He said.

“You sent Anthea. I didn’t know if you’d come or not.” Greg admitted.

“I should not have walked away. I didn’t understand what I was seeing. Clay…” Greg saw Mycroft’s eyes fix on the lurid purple mark on his neck. He touched it self-consciously and the other man looked away.

“We’ll talk later.” Greg said. “Right now, just be here.”

“Anything you need, Greg, just ask.”

Greg shifted, pushing down the blankets, stretching his shoulders.

Greg sighed. “I would give me right arm for a shower. I haven’t since...” He closed his eyes against the memory of John Clay’s mouth on his skin...his hands... “Can you make it happen?” He showed Mycroft the orange bracelet with ‘FALL RISK’ emblazoned on it. “They won’t let me out of bed without a nurse under me arm.”

Mycroft eyed him intently. “Of course. I’ll arrange it immediately.” He stood and squeezed Greg’s hand, then left the room.

Greg watched him go, relieved that he would be bathing soon. Last night, after the nurse had taken swabs of the blood, semen and saliva dried on his skin for the rape kit — and the doctor announced that he could not go home — Greg had begged them for a shower. He’d been handed a box of wet wipes. Greg had wanted to scream. There were not enough wet wipes in the world...
DI Gregson had been great, advocating for him as she could. But Greg had never been on the other side of the questioning. He'd told her everything that had happened twice over and then answered her many, many clarifying questions... it had felt endless. And endlessly redundant. Added to the humiliation of being stripped, photographed, swabbed, prodded and poked by so many latex-covered hands, it had been a nightmare. The pounding headache was the cherry on top of the shite sundae.

“This wasn’t your fault.” Gregson had told him before she left. “You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I know.” Greg replied, though he didn’t know. Not really. “I’m going to sleep now. Thanks, Gregson. thanks. All this... I don’t know...”

“Lestrade.” She'd touched his shoulder. “You did the right thing, calling me. I’m going to take care of everything. You don’t need to worry.”

He'd thanked her. “Ta, Gregson… ta…” But Greg expected that he would worry.

Then the CT scan had given him a whole new set of worries.

Greg rubbed the sleep from his eyes, irritated that the IV limited the use of his left arm. He wanted to roll onto his back, but the swollen lump on the back of his head made that painful, so he sat up instead and stretched out his spine. He was happy to note that sitting up didn’t cause any dizziness, no wave of nausea.

He grasped hold of every good sign, however small. The scan had showed that Greg had an open, slightly depressed fracture on the lower part of his parietal bone — a serious head wound. Because it was ‘open’ — his scalp was lacerated over the fracture — he was on antibiotics to attempt to prevent infection and/or meningitis. If there was bleeding on the brain, Greg might need surgery to drain it. He would have another scan later today to see if there was bleeding or swelling — those were the sort of things that could happen days after the initial injury, causing more damage.

Chances of him going home today were roughly nil. He’d be mad about that if he could stay awake long enough.

The doctor had told him that it could take several weeks before symptoms of a traumatic brain injury manifested. Greg knew a cop who’d had a brain injury. It had changed him profoundly, his entire personality... he had become unrecognisable ... he even looked different.

It was... terrifying... to know that in a few weeks he might no longer be himself.

The kicker was that he might not even realise it was happening. He would need someone to tell him. Someone he trusted. Sherlock, he'd decided, and John. They would be honest with him. They would not try to spare his feelings — at least, Sherlock wouldn’t.

If you had two weeks left, what would you do? Laying around in hospital was near the bottom of Greg’s list. But what was at the top? His daughter...

He would have to tell Georgianna. Prepare her. She would lose him as he lost himself. Greg didn’t know how to say goodbye to her. Take her to the Tate Modern one more time? Visit their favourites in the permanent collection? Greg might not care about art afterwards...

What else? Greg wanted to have sex again. Amazing, mind-blowing sex. That might mean putting off the conversation with Mycroft about John Clay until it was moot. Whatever their relationship became, Mycroft would not continue to sleep with him when he was no longer himself.

It was depressing to think about. He wondered what he would become. This metamorphosis would
not yield a beautiful butterfly. Greg would be diminished.

If it happened. It might not happen. Sherlock would tell him.

If it came to it, he knew where John kept his gun.

Mycroft came back into the room with the daytime ward nurse and his aide. Greg hastily rearranged his features, but he caught Mycroft’s worried look.

“Hello, Mr. Lestrade, I understand you need a wash. Let me just get your blood pressure checked.”

Greg submitted to the test, watching the ward nurse make notes on his chart. "Can you move your arms and legs for me? Great. Let me check your eyes." The young and very fit nurse, shone his little torch in Greg's eyes, checked his nose and ears and the cap of gauze covering his wound, and went through the litany of questions Greg was asked every two hours. Then the nurse clamped off his IV and wrapped cling film around his arm to protect the port.

“How is your head feeling, Mr. Lestrade? Still having dizziness?”

“Erm... headache’s not so bad. We’ll see about dizzy when I stand up.”

“I have a shower cap for you — don’t want to get your stitches wet. And Kitty’s bringing the shower chair. Did you want me or your friend to assist you while you bathe?”

“Oh!” Greg looked at Mycroft. It hadn’t occurred to him that they’d let Mycroft do it. Mycroft looked just as startled as he.

They spoke at the same time. “Oh, you don’t have to —”

“I’d be happy to —”

Greg laughed and for just a second his headache was gone. “It’s up to you, Mycroft. You certainly don’t have to.”

“No... I would like to... if you’re amenable...”

The nurse laughed at them. “It’s all you, Mr. Holmes. You might get that fancy tux a little wet though. Be sure to stay beside him at all times. No telling if he’ll get woozy again — we don’t want Mr. Lestrade to fall in the shower, do we?”

“No.” Mycroft agreed. “We surely do not.” He had removed his suit jacket and was rolling up the sleeves of his shirt.

Kitty, the nurse’s aide, had started the shower. The nurse — Paco, his name was Paco — helped Greg stand up and he had a momentary head rush. Two deep breaths and enough oxygen got to his brain to steady him. He was pleased that the dizziness had gone.

But two steps later his head was swimming. The nurse’s hand under his arm gripped and stabilised, and Mycroft was immediately at his other side, his elegant hands supporting him.

Greg cursed. “How long will this bloody vertigo last.”

Paco clucked. “Give it time, Mr. Lestrade. You have a —”

“Serious head wound.” Greg finished for him. “Yeah, everyone keeps telling me that.”
In the loo they sat him on the toilet seat. Not exactly the height of dignity, sitting on the toilet in a thin hospital gown. Greg sighed.

"Here’s your shower cap." Paco handed it over.

Greg frowned, fingering the gauze wrapped around his forehead. “If I promise to be careful, can I wash me hair? I’m proper grubby.” When he'd taken it off last night, the entire back of his shirt had been soaked in blood — somehow the front had remained pristine. He cringed to think what his hair looked like.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Lestrade, you need to wait 48 hours before you get that wet. I shouldn’t even be letting you in the shower at all.”

“I can wash his hair, making certain not to wet the wound.” Mycroft volunteered.

“Mr. Holmes, you’re very persuasive, but you don’t want it getting infected, do you? You can wash your hair day after tomorrow.” The nurse said with impressive finality. “Press the call button by the bed when you’re dry and dressed and I’ll come put a fresh dressing on it.”

He left them in the loo, showing them the emergency call button by the toilet ‘just in case.’

Greg pulled off the yellow hospital socks. “You’re going to get wet.” He told Mycroft.

“I was waiting for him to leave before I undressed.” He said. “Assuming that’s not distasteful...”

“Don’t be silly.”

“I, erm, took the liberty of sending Anthea to your flat.” Mycroft said, retrieving a valise. “To collect a few things I thought you might need.”

“Oh, Mycroft...” Greg sighed, watching as the other man unpacked. “You’re bloody amazing! After I scrub off a layer or two of skin, I’m putting on real pyjamas! I’m done flashing the staff.” He ruffled the gown around his knees.

“Paco will be the poorer for it.” Mycroft twinkled as he undressed, stacking his clothes neatly on a chair near the bed.

"They took the tuxedo." Greg said. "The one you had made for me. It's evidence now." Greg had been sorry to see the thick-soled shoes go into the plastic evidence bags. He'd liked those shoes. They were comfortable.

"It's just a suit." Mycroft said. "Easily replaced. I'm much more concerned about you."

As he should be. Two weeks and they'd see exactly how serious Greg's head wound was. "I'm ok." He said.

Mycroft saw his discomfort. "I had her pick up a few things from my flat too." He said, hefting several of the enormous bath sheets from his loo, and the dopp kit Greg had left to use when he stayed over.

“Oh, that’s brilliant.” Greg said, taking the dopp kit. “Maybe I can shave.” Maybe — he was flagging already. Bloody exhaustion!

“Phone charger and nicotine patches.” Mycroft said holding them up.

“Thank god! I’ve been gagging for a smoke.” Greg said gratefully. “Is there anything you haven’t
thought of?”

“I’m certain there is.”

“You’re spoiling me rotten.”

“Not at all.” Mycroft was down to his boxers.

Greg stood up and put the shower cap on, carefully covering the gauze wrapped around his head. He pulled off the hospital gown and started towards the shower, holding onto the doorframe. Mycroft ‘tsked’ and put a firm hand under his arm. “I’m not an invalid.” Greg grumbled.

“Think what Paco would do to me if I let you fall.” Mycroft chided.

The shower chair was more of a short bench. Mycroft adjusted the spray and handed Greg the soap and a flannel. Greg groaned with pleasure as he soaped his chest and thighs. He washed and washed and washed, letting the water cascade over his abdomen and into his lap.

“I wish this would wash off.” Greg said, rubbing the love bite on his neck. He was covered in bruises, some quite ugly — his right hip and elbow were both red and swollen and there were finger marks on his arms and hips and ribs — but Mycroft’s eyes continually fell on the purple sucking bruise.

“It will fade. They all will.” Mycroft said.

Greg sighed. With a hand on the wall, he pushed himself onto his feet. “I hafta get my back.”

Mycroft stepped into the shower and put an arm under Greg’s and around his back. “Allow me.” Mycroft said, taking the soap. “It will be more efficient.”

“Mm.” Greg put both arms around Mycroft’s neck and leaned into him, inhaling the scent of the bay aftershave on his skin. Mycroft soaped his back and arse and upper thighs thoroughly, taking the shower head down and rinsing him off. He replaced the shower head and rested his hands on Greg’s waist. It was then that he must have registered the shaking.

“What is it?” Mycroft asked, wrapping his arms around Greg and holding him close. “My dear one... what’s wrong?” He rubbed Greg’s broad back.

Mycroft’s hands cleaning his skin, sliding over the slippery curve of his arse, removing John Clay’s fluids, his traces, his touch... replacing it with his own. How could he express that to Mycroft?

“Did I hurt you?” Mycroft asked, real fear in his voice.

“No!” Greg forced himself to lift his head, look Mycroft in the eyes. “No. Just the opposite, really.” He could see that Mycroft didn’t entirely understand. Greg kissed the other man tenderly, relishing the slide of their lips. “You read the police report, yeah?”

“No.” Mycroft told him.

“No? I’d thought you’d have commandeered it immediately.” Greg said with a smile.

“In this case,” Mycroft said softly. “I thought it better to await permission.” Greg raised his eyebrows. “You can let me know as much or as little as you’re comfortable with.” He said. “I, erm, do know a little... I fetched Clay to the Met personally, he said a few things... mostly about your injury.” Mycroft rubbed his back.
"You didn't do anything to him? Mycroft, that could kill the case against him!" Greg felt himself on the edge of tears. He'd gone through so much to do this the right way... if Mycroft had undone everything...

"Hush. Of course not. He has so many overseas contacts, I thought it wise to get him into custody as soon as possible. I handed him over to DI Gregson's team completely intact."

Greg sagged in his arms and Mycroft pulled him closer. "Do you want to know?" Greg whispered into his shoulder. "What he did?"

Mycroft kissed his forehead gently. "Greg, it’s your decision. I want you to tell me whatever you think I should know, whatever you’re comfortable with me knowing — without fretting that I’ll do anything drastic. If it would be easier for you that I read the report, I can have it in hand in thirty minutes."

Greg had laid his head back on Mycroft’s shoulder. “Yeah, I think it would be easier if you read it.” He said. “Would you wash my back again? It felt lovely.”

“Of course.”

Afterwards Mycroft wrapped one of the enormous towels around him and he sat on the toilet seat and brushed his teeth. Then Mycroft helped him don track pants and a soft t-shirt. He wished he had something to cover the ugly love bite — a jaunty scarf perhaps. The image made Greg giggle. Back in bed, he put on a pair of thick, woolly socks Georgianna had given him at Christmas and pressed the call button for the nurse.

Mycroft, he noted, had not put last night's tuxedo back on. He wore narrow indigo trousers and the butterscotch cardigan with an olive-green shirt.

“Mycroft! Are you wearing... jeans!?"

The blush that coloured Mycroft’s freckled cheeks was darling. Greg reached for his hand. “They look good.” He said. “Very good.” If possible, Mycroft blushed darker.

The nurse returned and hooked Greg’s IV back up. Then, as Mycroft tidied the room, he snipped the gauze and unwound it from Greg’s head. He tugged the sterile bandage from his wound and examined it. Mycroft came to the bed to peer at it anxiously. Greg wondered how bad it looked — he hadn’t seen it himself. They'd shaved his hair around the laceration, cleaned off the blood, then stitched it up. Eight stitches, the doctor said. It was swollen and tender and he was supposed to hold an ice pack on it for fifteen minutes out of every hour. So far, he'd fallen asleep within five minutes almost every time.

“Not too bad.” Paco pronounced. Greg tried not to flinch as the nurse put an ointment on it then fresh bandages, again wrapping gauze around and around Greg’s head to hold it in place. “It occurred to me.” He said. “That your light-headedness might be helped if you ate something. You haven’t eaten anything yet today.”

“You haven’t eaten?!” Mycroft’s concern was palpable.

“Bit of nausea.” Greg explained. “Couldn’t stomach anything.”

“Do you think you could now? I can send out for anything that appeals to you.”

“I’m sure they’ll bring lunch soon.” Greg said. His eyes were heavy with exhaustion. He wouldn't be awake much longer.
“Greg…”

Greg smiled sleepily at him. “If it makes you feel better, I could probably go for a curry. But don’t go to a lot of trouble.”

Mycroft smiled back primly. “Of course not.”

Feeling clean and safe, Greg allowed his eyes to close and sleep to claim him.

Chapter End Notes

Greg’s putting off the conversation about John Clay for when he feels better — probably wise. And it gives Mycroft time to show Greg how contrite he is, how much he cares. Greg’s already impatient about his health and hospital stay — not to mention his worry about potential long-term impairment — I don’t imagine his mood is going to get better.

Next Week: Greg talks with his daughter. And other stuff.
Chapter Summary

Greg suffers complications from his head wound.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The street door buzzer sounded.

Greg didn’t move. He lay on the grey couch in his lounge, under the Cy Twombly print. He’d dragged his duvet from the bedroom and made a warm cocoon.

The buzzer sounded again.

He’d been home for two weeks now. Greg’s stay in hospital had been prolonged by complications — his brain had swelled, and he’d had to have a hole drilled through his skull and a subdural catheter implanted to drain excess cerebrospinal fluid.

Swelling was the body’s natural response to trauma. Usually it was a good thing, rushing extra nutrients and oxygen rich blood to the wounded area. However, as the brain is encased within the confines of the skull, swelling was dangerous. It would compress the brain, causing all sorts of complications. Complications that could have lasting, even permanent effects.

The good news was they’d successfully drained the excess fluid from his skull, and there hadn’t been bleeding on the brain. Nor, by some miracle, infection. And Greg had only had one seizure.

The buzzer sounded a third time. Greg turned over and burrowed deeper under the duvet. He heard the distant alert of his mobile, chiming in the bedroom.

He tried to remember the last time he’d felt anything approaching happiness.

It must have been the first day in hospital, before all the complications set in, when Georgianna had visited. It had been dinnertime and the nutritionist had brought Greg a tray. The sight of the institutional bangers and mash and mushy peas had turned his stomach.

John Watson had been first in the door that evening. “Heard you were malingering — had to come see for myself.” He said. “How are you feeling?”

Though it had improved, Greg’s head still ached. His hip and elbow were throbbing from the fall. Many other muscles ached from the struggle and strain — his ribs, his neck, his abs and back. His calves. He felt violated, vulnerable. Bleak. “I’ve felt better.” He told John. “I want to go home.” He gestured at the chart. “What are the chances?”

John picked it up and flipped through the pages. “Looking at your chart, they’d be foolish not to keep you another night or two. Longer if there are complications.”

Greg swore. More than anything, he wanted to be in his own bed in his own flat.
John frowned sympathetically. “I’m sorry, Greg”

Sherlock followed John, swinging Rosie and talking animatedly with Jude, Greg’s ex-wife. *That* was interesting. He hoped Jude had brought Georgianna...

“Lestrade,” Sherlock said. “Tell me you didn’t crack your skull open simply to prove you have a brain.”

Chuckling, Greg greeted them. His heart sank as their eyes found the ‘love bite’ on his neck and lingered.

Then Greg heard his daughter’s voice outside his room. He perked up, forgetting his embarrassment. He was happy he’d had the chance to wash and dress earlier — he didn’t want her thinking he was *too* sick. He hoped the gauze wrapped around his head wouldn’t alarm her.

Jude kissed his cheek and asked how he was feeling. He wondered how much she knew, how much his daughter knew about the assault... it seemed limited to the head injury.

Then Georgianna bounced into the room carrying an enormous bouquet of flowers... with Mycroft.

“You’re awake!” She crowed. Georgianna offloaded the flowers into Mycroft’s arms — he looked bemused — and ran to Greg’s bedside. “I was afraid you’d sleep through! But mum said you needed to rest, so we didn’t wake you. How are you? Dr Watson says you have a headache.”

Greg was grinning at her so hard his cheeks hurt. “Come here.” He said hugging her. “I won’t break.”

She hugged him hard and came up with a look of profound relief on her face — Dad was still Dad, strong and comforting and a little silly.

“Looks like everyone’s already introduced themselves.” He said, locking eyes with Mycroft for a moment. He seemed more reserved —perhaps because of Jude and Georgianna?

“Indeed, we have.” Mycroft said. He hefted the bouquet one-handed and went to fill a vase with water in the loo.

“Do you have a headache, Dad?” Georgianna asked.

“Yeah. Doctor says it’ll probably last a week. Guess I hit my head pretty good.”

Georgianna lowered her voice, nodding towards the loo. “That’s him, right? That’s posh Gandalf.”


“Of course, we came.” Jude told him, rubbing Georgianna’s shoulders. He could tell that she too was relieved to see him awake and lucid.

“You’re lucky, you missed me in the backless gown.” He told them. “That was a treat.”

Mycroft brought the bouquet in and set it on the nightstand next to Greg’s phone. “Those are from us.” Georgianna told him. “Mum and me and Mr. Holmes went in together and got you the biggest one.”

“Thank you.” He told her, glancing at Jude and a self-conscious-looking Mycroft. “They really brighten up the room. Though I hope I won’t be here much longer.”
“Dr Watson says they might let you go home tomorrow or the day after, but only if you stay home.”


She giggled. “No! And no working. Just resting!”

“Skive off at home? That sounds boring.” Greg told her. “You’ll have to visit, keep me from going barmy.”

Georgianna laughed — a sound like bells — and agreed. “I will! Whenever you want.” She told him. “We brought you some dinner. Mum says hospital food is awful and you’d want something better.”

“Yeah? What did you bring me?”

Georgianna dragged a hot box Greg hadn’t noticed over by the bed. They’d brought curry from the curry house the three of them had gone to all through their marriage. It hurt a little, not having that still, not being part of that nuclear family... but he was OK.

Greg let his daughter make a plate for him and displace the hospital tray. “Looks like you brought the whole menu.” Greg remarked.

“Just about.” Jude affirmed. “Enough for everyone.” She handed plates to Sherlock and Mycroft and indicated they should dig in. They hesitated while Jude fished out more plates until Greg gave Mycroft a look that said ‘well, come on!’ Then Mycroft took Sherlock over to the hot box. John was chivvied into eating too and then Jude and Georgianna filled their plates. Even Rosie had some tandoori chicken and gulab jamon.

“This is a proper party.” Greg commented. He tried not to look like he was just picking at the food. It tasted like ash and sat heavily in his stomach. He made himself eat pulao rice and muttar paneer. Both Mycroft and Jude were not-so-surreptitiously monitoring his intake — and if that wasn’t fun enough, Sherlock started in.

“Should I cut up that chicken for you, Gavin? Like I do for Rosie?”

“Me stomach’s a bit wonky.” Greg said. “I’m a right mess.” He told his daughter. She had pulled her chair right next to the bed. If he leaned over an inch, they would be shoulder to shoulder. He pressed his shoulder to hers, feeling happy simply to have her near.

Later that evening, when everyone had left but Mycroft, Greg asked if he could spoon him. Mycroft gamely fitted himself in the too-small bed and let Greg press against his back.

“Young daughter asked if I were your boyfriend.” Mycroft murmured. “I told her that we hadn’t discussed particular labels, but that sounded apt.”

“What did she make of that?” Greg asked with a small smile for his daughter.

“She seemed pleased.” Mycroft told him.

“What else did Georgianna say?”

“Your daughter wanted to know about your injuries, how serious they are, how long it would take them to heal. Dr Watson was very helpful, telling her what to expect but keeping the bent positive.” Mycroft caressed Greg’s knuckles with his thumbs. “She was curious about the, erm, mark on your neck. I told her it was a bruise caused by friction or suction rather than force, which she accepted
“She wanted to know,” Mycroft continued, “what she could do to help you recover. You obviously enjoyed her presence, we thought if she visited regularly, it would be good for you.”

“I didn’t think this was how you would meet her.” Greg said.

“She’s wonderful, Greg.” Mycroft said seriously. “She has your laugh. Seeing you together... you’re different with her. Happy.”

Greg lifted his head to look at Mycroft, studying his features in the light from the monitors over the bed — the strong nose and mobile mouth, his green eyes and his freckles... Greg could not love Mycroft’s freckles more. He wasn’t handsome, per se, but he was attractive, his features lit with intelligence and humour... “I’m happy other times too.” He said.

“You are. But you have a special happiness with her. It was... instructive.”

Greg smirked. “What did you learn?”

“How a parent should look at their child.”

“You might be giving me too much credit.” Greg muttered.

“You might not be giving yourself enough.” Mycroft replied.

In the cocoon of the duvet on his grey couch under the Cy Twombly, Greg tried to feel the warmth he had felt then. Georgianna’s laughter, holding Mycroft in the little bed, enjoying the easy presence of John and Sherlock and Jude…

Greg couldn’t conjure it. He knew it had happened, but he couldn’t feel it. It was too distant now.

There was a knock at his door.

Greg sighed. It had to be Mycroft. The only other person with a key was his daughter, and this wasn’t her day. He didn’t want to see Mycroft. He didn’t want to see anybody, he just wanted to be left alone.

Greg hid his face under the duvet, feeling the soft stubble on his head rub sensuously against the cushion.

He heard the key in the door, heard it swing open. “It’s me.” Mycroft called.

Mycroft would be disappointed — he hadn’t bathed or cleaned his teeth. He hadn’t shaved or bothered to dress himself. He hadn’t eaten. It was just too much work.

Greg didn’t move. What was the point?

There was rustling in the kitchen, the refrigerator door opening and closing. Water running… Mycroft was filling the kettle. Greg would be obliged to drink tea. At least tea didn’t taste like ashes.

Didn’t Mycroft have some high-powered job he was supposed to be doing? Shouldn’t he be too busy to barge into Greg’s flat every day and hassle him about personal hygiene and meals?

He knew Mycroft felt responsible for the assault. Greg needed to relieve him of that shite. Mycroft had arrived at hospital that first morning, still in his almost pristine tuxedo and had never left. He’d arranged for the top neurologist in Britain to treat Greg. He’d called the nurses when Greg had seized
and waited with Georgianna while Greg was in surgery. He’d sent cars to pick up his daughter when Jude couldn’t drive her into town. He had been there day and night, looking after him.

When he was finally released from hospital, Mycroft had wanted Greg to stay in his flat while he recuperated, but Greg had insisted on going home. To his own home. Mycroft had gotten him here with the minimum of pain and inconvenience. He’d taken Greg to his first follow-up appointments, to a scan and to the therapist he’d picked out — some sort of expert on male survivors of sexual assault. Mycroft had done it all without being asked, and only occasionally being thanked.

Greg absolved him of all guilt. Mycroft could go away now.

Except he couldn’t.

Greg would have told him to leave the key and not come back... but Mycroft had become part of Georgianna’s life. Even though he felt like he was wrapped in layers of cotton wool, Greg still took that seriously. He couldn’t sever that connection on a whim. His daughter needed stability, especially now that he was... changed.

That was exactly the reason Greg had not introduced them sooner. He’d wanted to be certain, to have a commitment... not simply a man with a guilty conscience and a strong sense of responsibility.

The kettle boiled.

“Your daughter will be here in exactly one hour.” Mycroft announced.

Greg swore under his breath. “It’s not her day.” He said, his face still under the duvet.

He felt Mycroft moving around near the couch. Looking at Greg, probably. “It’s Saturday. Not only is it her day, she’s staying overnight.”

Saturday? How could it be Saturday already? Especially as time dragged now that he wasn’t working. Greg wasn’t allowed to work. He wasn’t allowed to exercise either. If he could feel anything, he’d feel enraged.

“I expect you’ll want to bathe before she arrives.” Mycroft stated to the room at large.

With a last miserable curse, Greg forced himself to sit up. The room was repulsively bright, sun shining in the windows. He stood up and took hold of his duvet, bundling it into his arms and over his shoulder. Without comment, he shuffled to his bedroom and dropped the duvet on the bed.

The Hockney print hurt his eyes. So much colour...

Greg gathered clothing — black track pants, a t-shirt and a soft jumper — and dragged it all into the loo.

He still wasn’t used to seeing himself with the shaved head. Two-and-a-half-weeks growth was an odd in-between length, not quite long enough for a crew cut, shapelessly fuzzy, still revealing the hot pink scars on his scalp. He found his hat, the black beanie he wore running — when he’d been allowed to run. Now he wore it whenever he went out.

Greg showered. He still had vestiges of the bruises from that night. There was a dark patch on his hip and a largish green and yellow stain emanating from his elbow. The rest were gone, including the damnable sucking mark on his neck. If he never had another one of those, it would be too soon.

He hated bathing, hated the water beating down on his thin and wasting body. He longed to go for a
long run, feel his feet pounding on the grass, his lungs expanding as he pumped his thighs…

At least he’d quit smoking. He had as much appetite for a fag as he did for food.

Greg cleaned his teeth. The toothpaste made him gag. He found the electric razor and gave his jaw a cursory pass. He put on the clothes. The track pants had a draw string, which made them about the only trousers he could wear right now. He pulled the t-shirt on over his shrinking chest and arms. The jumper hung on him. With the shaved head, he could pass for a chemotherapy patient.

Ironically, nude, he looked cut. He was thin enough that every muscle he had left showed. He had an eight-pack. It was ridiculous.

He went back to his room and dithered with socks and trainers, putting off the inevitable. He heard Mycroft hoovering.

Greg made himself a cuppa in the kitchen and sipped his tea. Mycroft had laid out his pills — antidepressants — with some toast. Greg managed to swallow them. They upset his stomach, but taking them was the path of least resistance.

When the buzzer rang again, Greg answered it.

“It’s me, Dad.” Georgianna’s voice could still stir something in him, some echo of feeling.

“Come up.” He pressed the button to allow her to open the street door. Mycroft put the hoover away and sipped at his own cup of tea. Greg opened the door to his flat — Georgianna had keys to both the street and flat doors, but she rarely used them.

“Dad!” She burst in, overnight bag over her shoulder, her dark hair arranged in stylish waves that she pushed out of her eyes and tucked behind her ears.

He hugged her, her arms tight around his back. Greg reached desperately for what he knew was there — love, happiness, enchantment, pride… everything he felt for his daughter. But it remained elusive, slipping through his fingers like water.

“Hullo, Mr. Holmes.”

“Ms. Lestrade. Would you care for some tea?”

“Ta. I brought that movie you wanted.” Georgianna told Mycroft. Greg was aware that they texted. He wasn’t certain how much. But Jude read all of their daughter’s texts, so Greg knew it wasn’t excessive. He’d have heard about it otherwise.

“Excellent. I thought we’d have lunch first.”

Greg cursed him. With Georgianna here, he’d have to force something down. It was so onerous, eating. It was difficult to remember that he used to enjoy it, that most people still did.

“What is it? Can I help?” She asked.

“That would be splendid.” Mycroft told her. It was simple, soup and sandwiches. Soup because Greg had an easier time with it, and sandwiches for them. Not that they wouldn’t make him eat some too. Greg sat down at the dining room table and watched them. He was tired. And the thought of the turkey and avocado sandwiches made him want to cry. It would be like a great wad of paste in his mouth.
He tried to feel grateful that Mycroft was here. That he’d reminded Greg that Gigi was coming. That he’d brought food and was willing to entertain her while Greg acted like a lump.

Later that evening, after they’d watched *Groundhog’s Day* — and Georgianna and Mycroft had had a philosophical discussion about it — and *Tootsie*, which was as funny as it was problematic, they ordered Lebanese takeaway. Greg had soft pita and hummus with his lentil soup. He’d even had a bite of the baclava.

“Thanks.” Greg told Mycroft as Georgianna did the washing up. “Just… thanks.” He could not imagine how he would have coped on his own. Which rankled him vaguely. Sherlock notwithstanding, Greg had never liked having to depend on someone else to do his job.

Mycroft’s eyes looked sad. “She’s a wonderful girl, Greg. Spending time with the two of you is no hardship.”

Greg took his hand and held it. “I’m sorry.” He said. He’d apologised to Mycroft many times the past few weeks. “I’m sorry I’m… you don’t have to do all this. It’s too much. You don’t owe me anything.”

“I’m exactly where I want to be.” Mycroft told him softly. He nuzzled the velvety short hairs behind Greg’s ear. “This is growing in quickly.”

Greg turned his face towards Mycroft’s. The other man kissed his jaw and rubbed his face over Greg’s cheek. He didn’t try to kiss Greg’s mouth, the affection was nice, but more was overwhelming. It made him feel bleak and bare. But this, just this with their hands in his lap, their heads together and Mycroft’s warm breath on the sensitive skin of his neck, this was OK. This ignited a little spark of fondness for Mycroft.

“Finished!” Georgianna proclaimed. “Are you *snogging*!? Da-ad!”

Greg smiled at her as they broke apart. “None of your business, Georgy-girl.”

Mycroft looked at his watch. “It’s time I should be getting home.” He said. “Would you like to go to brunch tomorrow? There’s a place walking distance from here that does American-style hotcakes with maple syrup.”

“That sounds brilliant! What do you think, Dad?”

“Yeah, brilliant.” Greg echoed, trying to drum up a modicum of enthusiasm for Georgianna’s sake. “What time will you come by?”

“Why do you always go home?” Georgianna asked Mycroft. “I mean… you’re Dad’s boyfriend, right, Mr. Holmes? And you’re *grownups*. You sleep over when I’m *not* here, why not now?”

“Did your mum have sleepovers with Rupert before they were married?” Greg asked her. He felt extremely ambivalent about Mycroft sleeping over with or without his daughter in residence. On one hand, it was nice. They didn’t have sex, but Greg did enjoy spooning him, holding Mycroft against his chest, tucking his face to Mycroft’s neck and inhaling him. It made him feel safe. He had fewer nightmares with Mycroft in his bed.

On the other hand, Greg just wanted to be left alone. He didn’t want to have to try so hard, to have to exert himself over and over, to talk, to eat, to bathe… It was so much easier when he was on his own.

“Maybe.” Georgianna told him disingenuously.
Mycroft smiled. “Your logic is sound, Ms. Lestrade. However, I have a cat at home that would be very put out if I didn’t return and feed her.”

“You have a cat!? I love cats! Can I meet her? What’s her name?”

“Her name is Bast, after the Egyptian lioness god. I imagine you’ll have the opportunity to meet her when your father is feeling better. I believe she would enjoy having someone new to play with.”

“Gi,” Greg interjected. “Why don’t you cue up *Ghostbusters*, while I walk Mycroft out?”

Georgianna huffed. “Fine!” Then she hugged Mycroft briefly. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Mr. Holmes. If you have time, maybe you can look over my maths homework? There was an equation I got confused about.”

Greg saw Mycroft’s lips twitch in amusement, but he wasn’t sure if it was for the homework or his daughter’s faulty grammar. “It would be my pleasure.” He told her.

Out in the hallway, Greg allowed Mycroft to fit himself to Greg’s body, his face tucking into the space between ear and shoulder, his arms encircling his thin body, legs slotting together. Greg wrapped his arms around Mycroft’s back and matched his breathing to the other man’s. He closed his eyes against the light and focussed on the warmth between their bodies.

“I miss you.” Mycroft murmured so softly Greg wondered if he was supposed to hear it. He kissed Greg’s neck, little sips of his skin.

Greg pressed his lips against Mycroft’s temple. It felt good to be held, he decided. A tear wet his cheek and he sighed. “You don’t have to do all this. Any of this.”

“Don’t, my dear one.” Mycroft whispered. “Don’t worry about me.”

Greg was raw, bloody. His body folded in on itself protectively. Mycroft supported him, lips pressed to his neck for long, long seconds. Greg could hear them tick by, each taking a century, or longer for the echo to fade and the next to boom in his ears.

Slowly the numbness returned, and Greg dropped his arms and stood up straight. Mycroft pulled back, fingers caressing Greg’s jaw softly, painfully. He leaned in and kissed Greg chastely.

“Tomorrow at ten a.m.” He said, resignation in his voice. “I’ll see you both then.”

Greg returned to the flat, and sat on the couch near where his daughter sprawled on the floor. The rawness was a roiling pit inside him now, covered only by a thin veneer of ice. He was afraid of it, afraid that one word from Georgianna and it would boil over, and he would rage or cry or break down in some way that a daughter should never see her father.

Carefully he touched her hair then her shoulder and she leaned against his knee as Dr Venkman got himself and his colleagues kicked out of Columbia University. They’d watched the remake with Melissa McCarthy and Kate McKinnon in the Fall, long before Greg’s injury. Long before he even began seeing Mycroft. They’d both enjoyed it. Greg distantly remembered talking with her about the male backlash against the female update. He’d confessed he had no idea what they were on about. It was just ridiculous, knee-jerk misogyny to any perceived slight to male domination.

The passion and scorn he’d expressed was foreign to him now. Greg knew he’d felt it keenly... but it was like remembering a scene from a film he’d seen long ago.

“I like Mr. Holmes,” Georgianna remarked. “He’s interesting.”
“He is.” Greg agreed. “You and he have hit it off.”

“He doesn’t treat me like a kid. He tells me stuff, like you used to.”

Like you used to. That echoed painfully in the raw, roiling depths inside him. “What does he tell you?”

She shrugged. “He told me you were depressed.” Georgianna said offhandedly. “Mr. Holmes asked your doctor about it and she says this is pretty normal for your kind of injury, and that it’s almost always temporary. In a while you’ll be OK.”

Greg remembered the neurologist telling him the same thing. He should have thought to tell Georgianna.

“It’s hard right now.” Greg said. “For you.”

“It’s OK.” She hugged his knee. “Mum said I could come during the week if I want to, after school. Would you like that? I could make dinner.”

“You can cook?” Greg non-answered. He both desperately wanted her here and desperately wanted to be left alone.

“I can make eggs and toast. We could have breakfast for dinner.”

He’d have to be in the kitchen with her, wouldn’t he? Could fourteen-year-olds cook unsupervised? Greg couldn’t remember. He didn’t know why everything was so hard. He didn’t know why he wanted to retreat to his bed and just sleep forever. “Gi, you don’t have to take care of me. You should be with your friends.”

Georgianna laughed, a painfully beautiful sound that tugged at Greg’s heart. “But I want to cook dinner for you. You’ll tell me it’s good, even if it’s terrible.”

Would he? Greg sighed and supposed he would.

—-

Mycroft left Greg’s building in a rush. His car was waiting, and he picked up his tablet as soon as he’d fastened his seatbelt, turning his focus firmly to work. During the drive, he thought of nothing but an upcoming debate in Parliament and possible tariffs on lorry drivers to the continent if there was no Brexit deal worked out.

At home, he greeted Bast and fed her. She followed him into his office and after a few passes across his desk, settled in his lap. She was warm and comforting, her chainsaw purr acting as white noise drowning out everything else. Mycroft worked for several hours.

It was when he went to bed, when he couldn’t distract himself with Russian meddling, Brexit negotiations and back-channel gossip with his contact in the US White House, that his mind turned back to Greg Lestrade.

They’d only been dating for two and a half months — seven weeks when Greg had been attacked — but when Mycroft had arrived at hospital at dawn that first morning and had seen how small Greg
looked lying on his side on the hospital bed, Mycroft’s heart had broken.

Greg had been curled up, almost foetal. Though the blankets were tucked up under his chin, a pale triangle of his back was exposed, skin that the flimsy hospital gown had not covered visible for all to see. Mycroft pulled the blanket over his back, in a vain effort to protect him.

He had sunk down into a chair and studied Greg’s handsome face in repose. He looked younger and shockingly vulnerable with the bandages across his brow... and all at once Mycroft realised that he was in love with this man.

And that it might be too late.

Abruptly he understood why Mummy had always insisted that caring was not an advantage — and why she’d spent so many years not bothered much with caring about her children. It was shattering.

That epiphany came at the beginning of a long and interesting day. After he’d assisted Greg with his shower, experiencing first-hand how weak and ill Greg was despite his stubborn refusal to succumb to it, Mycroft had spent an hour educating himself on Greg’s injuries. Then he’d stepped out and contacted the best neurologist currently working in Britain and engaged her services.

Mycroft ticked that off his mental list and moved to the next item. He contacted Greg’s ex-wife. They spoke for almost ten minutes.

Returning to Greg’s room, Mycroft had overheard part of a conversation between Greg, Sherlock and John Watson.

“How happened?” John Watson was asking. Mycroft stopped outside the room, eavesdropping shamelessly.

“Took me by surprise.” Greg said. “I was arse over tit before I knew what was going on.” He sounded more upbeat than he had earlier.

John chuckled. “Wasn’t a dust up with Mycroft, I hope?”


“Jesus! Really?” John exclaimed.

“Lestrade, was this man’s name ‘John Clay?’” Mycroft heard his brother’s voice loud and clear.

“Erm… yeah… you know him too?”

“I met him once.” Sherlock said with undisguised contempt. “Knowing what he knows about John Clay, my brother is a bigger fool than I ever imagined exposing you to that amoral prat. Honestly, Lestrade, it’s clear you’re upset that he’s not here, but if he treats you so cavalierly, you’re better off without him.”

“Like John would be better off without you!?” Greg sneered. “Because you’ve never treated him cavalierly, never thoughtlessly broken his heart. You bloody, fucking narcissist!”

There was a pause — John and Sherlock must have been just as shocked as Mycroft. He’d never heard Greg lose his temper, never heard him sound anywhere near so nasty. Greg’s patience and good-humour were legendary.

“He hasn’t... Greg, we’re not...” John stuttered.
“Seriously?!” Greg demanded, sounding like he was absolutely at the end of his tether. “John, just admit it, for fuck’s sake! You’ll feel better. Relieve him of his bloody virginity so you can both just fucking relax! You’ll neither of you be happy until you do!”

Mycroft could only imagine his brother’s panic, John’s bantam flapping…

“Fuck!” A little voice shouted happily. “Fuck-fuck, Ungog!” Rosie was in the room with John and Sherlock. “Fuck!”

“Oh, for chrissakes…” Greg muttered. “Don’t listen to me, I have a head injury.” To Mycroft’s horror, he heard Greg sob aloud. “I’m sorry. Fuck... I’m a mess. Don’t listen to me…”

“Greg... it’s alright.” John Watson rose to the occasion, showing his golden heart. “Mood swings are to be expected with an injury like yours. They’ll pass, just like the vertigo.”

Mycroft had crept away, disturbed at Greg’s un-Greg-like behaviour.

Later he encountered his brother in the corridor. “You’ve been to see Greg.” He observed.

“John Clay?! Whatever were you thinking, Mycroft?”

Mycroft closed his eyes. What had he been thinking?! “I suppose I thought I was making a statement of some sort. It was... utterly foolish of me.” He admitted. “How did you find Greg?”

“Weak but lucid. He’s terrified he’ll end up with long-term brain damage, which considering his injury is a valid fear.” Sherlock grimaced. “He wasn’t entirely… himself.”

“In what way?” Mycroft asked, though he knew.

“He was unusually short-tempered and blunt. John said it’s more likely caused by the headache than a personality-change due to brain injury.”

Mycroft wanted to believe that. He was sure they all wanted to believe it.

“I told him about John Clay.” Sherlock said.

“I… appreciate… that.”

“He’ll have more questions.” Sherlock said.

“Indeed. When he’s feeling more himself.”

“You turned Clay over to the police?”

“Don’t worry, brother mine, I was careful not to leave marks.”

“Too bad. You would have had to find someplace to dump the body. But that can’t be too difficult.”

“I was tempted.” Mycroft admitted. More tempted than anyone would ever know. John Clay had no idea how close he’d come to a messy and torturous death.

On the way to the Met, Clay had tried to goad him to petty violence. He wanted Mycroft to punch him, bruise him — something that Clay would be able to use to his advantage.

“I don’t know what you’re so hacked off about, Holmes.” Clay had taunted. “Hitting his head, that was just an accident. He slipped. It could happen to anyone on those bumpy old floors.”
“Shut up.” Mycroft could not stand the sound of his voice.

“And it’s not like I fucked him. I wanted to… but even injured, your copper, he’s a fighter. I’m going to have bruises. I probably could have had his mouth, but he’d just vomited his guts up. Ugh. Even I have some standards.”

Clay scoffed. “Have to hand it to your copper. I never expected he’d report it. Most men don’t, you know. Too afraid of the stigma.”

Most men? “That scopolamine… have you used it before, Clay?” Mycroft asked.

“Why?”

“I’ll have to let the detectives know they may be dealing with a serial rapist.”

That had shut John Clay up. The idea of justice for more victims... no, if Mycroft were honest, it was the thought of exposing Clay’s monstrousness to the world that had appealed to him. It most probably saved Clay’s life. For the moment.

Mycroft would never let on, but he had plans… plans that would make John Clay rue the day he crossed Mycroft Holmes!

Four days after the conversation with Sherlock, Mycroft had watched in horror as Greg seized on his hospital bed, jerking uncontrollably, insensate. Within an hour, Greg was in the surgical theatre having a subdural catheter implanted in his skull. Mycroft had waited alone… until Georgianna arrived.

“Hullo, Mr. Holmes.” Georgianna stood in front of him in her school uniform, her dark hair pulled into a pony tail that made her look younger than fourteen.

“Ms. Lestrade.” Mycroft replied. “I apologise, I didn’t hear you come in. Sit.”

The girl took the chair beside him. Once again, he was enchanted by how much she resembled Greg — she had his colouring, his soft brown eyes, his smile. Not that she was smiling now.

“Your father is still in theatre. I expect they’ll give us an update soon.”

“What happened?” She asked. “Yesterday he said his scan looked good.”

“It did.” Mycroft told her, then explained about the seizure, the new scan and the catheter.

He had listened that first day in hospital as Greg had softly told his daughter about the potential side effects of his head wound. It had affected him, hearing Greg try to explain that in a few weeks, as a result of the head injury, he might change.

“Change how?” Georgianna asked. Mycroft could hear her alarm.

“There are different ways the brain can be affected, so it’s hard to say. Some people forget how to read, how to tell time and tie their shoes. They have to learn it all again — that probably won’t happen to me.” Greg told her. “Some people lose some sense perception, for example they may smell things differently or not be able to move their arms and legs normally.”

“That’s weird.” She said uneasily.

“It is. It happens to some people.” Greg said. “There’s a greater chance that I will have some personality changes. I might not act the way I do now, the way you expect me to. It might be as
simple as depression and mood swings. Losing my temper easily. Or it might be more complicated — difficulty with language, trouble remembering things and paying attention, problems thinking things through. Sometimes the changes last for a few months. Sometimes... they’re permanent.”

“But it hasn’t happened. You’re alright.”

“The thing with this kind of injury, Gi... it can take a few weeks for something to show up. I’m OK now. And hopefully I’ll stay that way. I have great doctors who are taking good care of me. I just want you to know that I might have some problems. I might... change. And if I do...” Greg sighed heavily. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry that it will be hard for you. I’m sorry that I won’t be able to help you with it the same way I can now. I’m sorry if it hurts you.”

The girl had hugged him tightly and Greg had held her and continued to talk. But Mycroft could no longer hear the words.

“Do you think...” Georgianna looked up at Mycroft, fidgeting with her skirt. “He’ll be OK?”

“I hope so.” Mycroft told her. “I think there’s a good chance he’ll be just fine.”

She nodded but her face was pinched with worry.

“Do you wish your father hadn’t told you?” Mycroft asked. “Would that have been kinder, to spare you the worry?”

Georgianna thought about that. “It would be nice not to have to worry... but if he’s going to... to be different, I’m glad he told me why. And I’m glad you told me all the ways the doctors can fix him.”

Mycroft nodded. “Don’t be alarmed when you see him. There will be more bandages and more tubes and wires attached to him. They will give him drugs for pain as well, so he may not be as alert as we’re used to.”

She searched his face. “You love him, don’t you?”

Mycroft smiled at her wistfully. “I suppose I do, yes.”

“Have you told him?”

“It’s not the right time. When he’s better, perhaps we’ll discuss it.” Mycroft patted her. “Did you bring homework? Ah, physics. Let’s have a look...”

He had been enjoying getting to know Greg’s daughter. The bright and happy girl was his companion at Greg’s bedside more often than anyone else. John and Sherlock had taken to coming separately — Mycroft wanted to knock their heads together. Partly because they both should “just get over it,” and partly because it made Greg worry that his outpouring of irritation had affected them negatively. Greg worried enough without adding his ridiculous brother’s ridiculous crush on his ridiculous flatmate into the mix.

Mycroft also shared Greg’s visiting hours with a parade of his friends and colleagues.

Detective Inspector Lestrade, Mycroft was unsurprised to learn, was popular at the Met amongst peers and underlings alike. He had mentored dozens of detectives and learned from still more. His patience, good-humour, and lack of ego had endeared him to many, and earned the respect of all. Mycroft detected more than a few who would have been happy to get closer to the handsome DCI.

Detectives and uniformed officers, people from Greg’s gym, from his local, from his amateur football
league, all walked through his hospital room, bringing bunches of grapes, flowers and well-wishes.

Greg gritted his teeth and endured it. “Bunch of looky-loos.” He said.

“What do you mean?”

“Not every day your mate is… is raped. It’s a joke. I’m a joke.”

“Greg, I can assure you, of the people who even know about the sexual aspect of the assault, no one thinks it is a joking matter.”

“Course they do. I knew it would happen when I called Gregson.”

“You’re projecting your fears onto them. They’re visiting because they like and respect you and honestly want you to get well.” Mycroft told him. “If anyone were here out of prurient curiosity, I would have them removed immediately. It hasn’t been necessary.”

“You’re not just trying to make me feel better.”

“No. But you should feel better. No one is laughing.”


Perhaps it had been inevitable from the moment he fractured his skull — even those first few, relatively good days, Mycroft had seen the beginning of the depression. Greg had valiantly tried to stay upbeat, but it worsened after the catheter was implanted. As the days went by, Greg spoke less. His mood darkened, but instead of fits of temper, he became listless and uncaring. Physically he improved enough to go home, but Mycroft dreaded what would happen when Greg was left to his own devices.

Mycroft had been right to worry. Greg spent entire days in bed, and when he forced himself up, he was quiet and outwardly vacant. He refused to eat, saying that he couldn’t taste it, that his stomach was dodgy, that he wasn’t hungry. Greg lost weight, his easy strength and athletic physicality fading. He went to his follow-up appointments like a zombie shambling mindlessly through a post-apocalyptic landscape.

Mycroft walked on eggshells, afraid if he pressed him too much — to eat, to get up, to take the antidepressants — Greg would ban him from his flat. And that couldn’t happen.

The only thing that motivated Greg at all was Georgianna. Even that seemed to take a herculean effort.

Knowing the girl was having a hard time with her dad’s depression, Mycroft had gotten her mother’s permission to text with her and keep her updated on Greg’s condition. Mycroft was happy to be useful to her, to be an outlet for her anxiety whilst Greg couldn’t fill that role. He tried to project optimism.

However, the way she was with Greg, one would not guess she was anxious. Georgianna tried, with great self-possession, to be normal — to approach her father with the same affection and expectations that she always had.

It was brilliant. Her manner coaxed Greg to respond more like he used to: Mycroft saw him smile when she giggled; after Mycroft had a conversation with her about one of the films, Greg had made an effort to engage with her more; at dinner, he ate without being prompted, following along and, even contributing occasionally to the word games Mycroft played with Georgianna.
After dinner, Greg had finally come out of his benumbed shell just a little. Instead of feeling cocooned, Greg seemed to experience emotion — positive and negative — as extremely painful. Mycroft was gentle as he desperately tried to connect with him. But just when it felt like Greg was opening up, he closed down again.

Mycroft despaired. The man he knew was overshadowed by blight.

He slept poorly that night, despite Bast curling up in the shelter of his arm and lending her warm, raspy comfort to his bed. Mycroft stared at the ceiling for a long time. He rose early and worked out on the treadmill, trying to outrun the weariness and the foreboding feeling that haunted him.

In the shower, Mycroft reflected that Greg wasn’t the only one who had lost weight. The last month, staying with Greg in hospital and then visiting his flat almost daily, had whittled away the regrettable softness around his middle and sharpened his already sharp features. He contemplated the dark smudges of weariness under his eyes... he needed more sleep. Or fewer worries.

Sentiment... whatever had possessed him!?

He touched himself remembering the glorious day not much more than a month ago that Greg had been in the shower with him, his big hand on Mycroft’s cock, wringing pleasure from his body...

In the car, Mycroft texted Georgianna a photo of Bast. She was in raptures, texting back breathless appreciation and envy. When he buzzed at the street door, she punched the reply button immediately. “Mr. Holmes?”

“Yes.”

“Come up!” Georgianna was excited for brunch. “I don’t think I’ve ever had American-style hotcakes! Dad says they’re a cross between waffles and crepes. Have you had them, Mr. Holmes? Are they good?”

“Yes, I have had them and yes, I find them quite tasty.” He told her. “I haven’t had them at this restaurant, however. Let’s hope it lives up to our expectations.”

“Your kitty is so cute! Dad says she’s a Siamese — a blue Siamese.”

“Bast is a blue point Siamese. Her tail, her ears and her toes are blue — well, blue-ish — all of her ‘points.’”

“She’s really pretty. I bet she was happy to see you last night.”

“She was at that.” Mycroft said, thinking how the little cat had curled up in his lap whilst he worked. “Of course, I feed her.” He smirked. “Is your father ready to go?”

“I’ll check!” Georgianna ran into Greg’s bedroom calling out for him. She danced about the flat impatiently whilst her father apathetically tried to find a belt with enough holes to keep his jeans from falling down.

Telling himself he was concerned, not controlling — and ignoring Sherlock’s voice in his head coming down firmly on the side of the latter — Mycroft took advantage of the distraction to count out the remaining antidepressants in Greg’s prescription bottle. He was relieved to discover that Greg had been taking them. Mycroft had feared they were languishing in the bottle whilst Greg languished in bed day after day. He prayed they would help.

Greg’s jeans were baggy, but not ridiculously so. The cerulean jumper he’d worn on Christmas Eve
still tried to cling in all the right places. With his black watch cap and Doc Martens, Greg looked like a model, lean and angular and beautiful. He shrugged on a peacoat and for a second, as he smiled at his daughter’s impatient enthusiasm, Greg looked like the man with whom Mycroft had fallen in love.

In the street as they walked to brunch, the sun shone brightly, its warmth foretelling the coming of Spring. Greg touched his hand and Mycroft intertwined their fingers.

Chapter End Notes

I feel badly for Georgianna, though she seems to be bearing up well. She has a good support system.

Does Mycroft have someone he can turn to when it’s all too much? I doubt it.

Thank you all for your comments! They make me think and work harder on this fic.

Next Time: Another date. Will it be fabulous? That’s a big ask about now.
Mycroft pressed the intercom button and listened to it buzz. He was at Greg’s for the first time in four weeks. After almost three months of seeing Greg daily, he’d thought the respite would be a relief — he had a mountain of work to catch up on, after all. But he’d discovered that he missed Greg Lestrade keenly.

The realisation had surprised him. He’d seen Greg at his absolute worst. He’d cleaned up after him, chivvied him into eating and bathing, taken him to his doctors’ appointments, endured his fits of temper… and as the antidepressants did their work, brought groceries and cooked, entertained Greg’s daughter, talked quietly or sometimes not at all as they sat together in the sparsely-furnished lounge.

The four weeks had been Greg’s therapist’s idea. He thought it was time for Greg to get back to doing things for himself, as he had done before the injury. Mycroft supported Greg’s recovery completely, thus he’d agreed to the break without a fuss. He’d kissed the other man goodbye tenderly, and left.

The weeks had passed slowly — despite ten days of travel and spending almost every other waking hour at his office. He’d been extremely busy taking care of what he’d deferred and checking in on what he’d delegated whilst he had cared for Greg. Mycroft threw himself into his work — in the past, that had always overcome any unfortunate residual feelings he might have.

Not so this time. It was almost two weeks before Mycroft could put a name to the emotion that gnawed at him day and night: loneliness.

Mycroft had grown too used to the presence of another… of a specific other.

Was it too soon to think about moving in together? If Greg lived in Mycroft’s flat, slept in his bed every night, if he stumbled into the kitchen and drank the tea that Mycroft made in the morning, got in the shower with him, complained that he couldn’t find his socks and would be late for work, if he sent terse texts saying he’d be home late and would miss dinner, or came home early and cooked a hot meal, if he fell into bed with Mycroft every night, sometimes exhausted, sometimes randy, sometimes settling down companionably with a book for half an hour… if Greg lived with him, Mycroft thought the terrible empty, lonely feeling might be assuaged.

It was too soon — it was only six months ago that Greg had taken him to bed on Christmas Eve. But what good was waiting? Mycroft wasn’t getting any younger. He knew how he felt. He wanted Greg Lestrade.

Perhaps he’d bring it up today…

Greg answered the intercom immediately. “Mycroft? Come up.” Mycroft eschewed the lift in favour
of the stairs, thinking the activity might burn off a modicum of the unsettled excitement sitting at the bottom of his stomach. Greg had texted on Tuesday and invited him over Saturday afternoon — exactly four weeks from the day they’d said goodbye. Mycroft had been looking forward to it greatly.

The door to Greg’s flat was open. Mycroft shut it behind him, and Greg looked up from the kitchen, where he was brewing tea. “Hey you.” He said with a smile. He met Mycroft halfway and hugged him, wrapping his arms around him tightly and kissing him.

His silver hair had grown back. It was still a bit short, but it had shape and style again, and it covered the scars. Since he’d been allowed to exercise, Greg had been religious about it, regaining a portion of the strength he’d lost. He was still thin, still struggled with his appetite, but he’d lost the gaunt, grey look he’d had at his nadir.

And he’d acquired clothes that fit his leaner frame. Mycroft detected Georgianna’s influence in the narrow jeans and slim-cut shirt Greg wore. He looked amazing and it felt right to have him in his arms again.

“Tea?” Greg asked.

“Please.” Mycroft did not care about tea. He could have stood there with his arms around Greg all day.

Greg poured him a cup, surprising Mycroft by adding exactly the amount of milk and sugar that he preferred — a bit less milk and more sugar than Greg himself took.

“So…” Greg said, sitting down on the grey couch. Idly, Mycroft wondered if he’d bought it to match his hair. “I think it’s time that we talk. I appreciate that you let me put it off until I, well, felt myself again.” Greg ran his hand through his hair — to avoid eye contact, Mycroft decided.

Mycroft struggled to accept that there was still something that needed talking about, whilst keeping his surprise and consternation from showing on his face. “Yes,” He managed to say. “The conversation has been long deferred.”

Greg nodded, studying his tea. “John Clay.” He said. The man’s trial was approaching. Clay had engaged a bulldog of a barrister who planned to mount a robust defense. Part of Mycroft — the part that played with knives — hoped he succeeded. However, Mycroft’s hunch about the scopolamine had been accurate. The Met put out an appeal for victims with John Clay’s picture and received a deluge of replies, more than a dozen of which were strongly believable. There were hospital records and outcry witnesses. Two of the victims had even kept items of clothing with Clay’s DNA. Added to Greg’s testimony, it should be more than enough for John Clay to serve at her Majesty’s pleasure for a long time.

The cherry on top was what the search of Clay’s London flat had turned up. Mycroft had always known he was a thief, Gregson found his cache of stolen ‘mementoes’ — some quite valuable. He was being prosecuted for grand larceny as well as the sexual assaults.

“What would you like to know?” Mycroft asked.

“Sherlock told me about him. Why did you want to introduce me to him?”

Mycroft had thought about that often — what had been his motivation? The answer was something of which he was not proud. “That will take a bit of explanation, I’m afraid. If I may?”

Greg nodded and gestured for Mycroft to continue.
“Clay… first I should say, for several years he was someone that I considered a friend. I trusted him. To an extent — I think you know by now that that is not something I do easily. It was foolish of me, obviously, but I was… regrettably young. I underestimated how much he was motivated by envy and spite. It wasn’t until several years after leaving Cambridge that I knew what he had done.

“By then, he was an up and coming star in the Foreign Service — that had always been his dream, to be a star, to be vaunted and admired. His ambition was to become Foreign Secretary. He might have done it too. He has a talent for long-term planning and organisation that I personally found very useful. Had he not betrayed my trust, we could have a mutually beneficial relationship even now.”

Greg made a small noise of disgust.

Mycroft acknowledged it with a self-deprecating nod. “As punishment for ruining a good man, driving him to suicide, for betraying me and… and humiliating me, I hobbled his career — I trapped him in middle-management. He will never be a star again.

“I wish that had been enough… that I’d simply left him to suffer. But I did not — clearly I am not free of vindictiveness. Several years ago, I sent him a greeting card, congratulating him on his promotion — one for which I’d made certain he knew he was being considered, and that I then sabotaged. My way of telling him that I knew what he had done, and he had not got away with it. Before that, if he had any thought that his lack of upward mobility was purposeful, he had not known that it was me holding him down.

“I’ve made a point of seeing him socially when he’s in London. Perhaps it’s petty of me, an ill-advised way of ‘rubbing his nose in it,’ if you will. But I thought he could not touch me.

“Bringing you…” Mycroft sighed. “I must admit it was nothing more than vanity. He took something from me — not just James, but my willingness to count on others, to form friendships… lasting bonds. I’ve been alone for years at least in part because of his actions. And he knew it. I might have crushed his dreams, foiled his ambitions, but he had... stunted me... emotionally.

“You… Greg, I’m ashamed to say, I took you to that party to show him that he had not broken me.

“Whilst I’ve always known he was a thief, and I learned that he was amoral, and willing to go to extremes to satisfy his vindictive nature… I had no thought that he could touch you, Greg. It was unforgivably naive of me after what he did to James. I thought of you as invulnerable. Immune to his evil… I underestimated him again and I can’t tell you how sorry I am.”

Greg, he saw, was taking deep measured breaths as he stared at his teacup. Eventually he nodded. “Why… in the corridor outside the loo, after he’d… when I was injured and I needed you… Mycroft, why did you walk away? Did you honestly think I would be with him consensually?”

Mycroft flinched at Greg’s words. “No. I didn’t think that of you. I’ve gone over and over this in my mind… replaying it… I’m ashamed to admit that I didn’t see you. I saw him. He looked the same way he’d looked after he’d slept with James — triumphant and… scornful. I saw his face, the way he leered at you, and I saw this…” Mycroft touched his own neck, where the sucking bruise had been on Greg. “And I looked no further.” He closed his eyes against the starkly humbling truth. “I have no excuse.”

He had been there for Greg every day since, staying by his side in hospital, coming to his flat — willingly happily, not out of a sense of obligation… Mycroft hoped that he might have redeemed himself somewhat… proved, at least, that he could be depended upon. But he could not imagine how Greg could forgive him... he did not expect it. He tried to resign himself.
“OK.” Greg said.

“OK?”

“Yeah. I don’t understand how you could do that, but I’m willing to let it go.”

Mycroft digested that. “Thank you.” He said.

“And I want to thank you for everything that you’ve done for me. I know you say that it wasn’t out of guilt…”

“It’s not.” Mycroft declared. “I’m happy to be of whatever use I can.”

Greg smiled a little sadly. “Yeah. I appreciate it. I don’t know how I would have got through without you.”

Mycroft took Greg’s hand and held it, caressing the big, rough knuckles with his thumb. “Can we move past this? All of this?” He asked.

“I hope so.” Greg said. “Because I like you very much.” He pulled his hand away and took a nervous sip of his tea. “We’ve spent so much time together, I almost feel like you’ve moved in.”

“Indeed.” Perhaps Mycroft could bring up the idea of cohabitation after all… but Greg’s manner suggested otherwise.

“Mycroft, this is difficult to say after you’ve spent months being here for me, being my de facto boyfriend… but I’m not ready to make that commitment. I’m not ready to be exclusive. I know it’s a cliche to say ‘it’s not you,’ but it’s really not you, Mycroft... it’s everything else.”

Greg sprang up and paced to the window. “I’ve felt… I’ve felt so helpless. I couldn’t stop John Clay, and then I couldn’t stop my brain from swelling, I couldn’t stop the depression… I couldn’t work, I couldn’t run, I couldn’t take pleasure in anything. I dreaded Georgianna’s visits because I couldn’t feel anything for her, no matter how much I tried… every day,” he sighed deeply. “I hoped that I would die in my sleep, just not wake up... that it would be over. And now, I’m finally, finally, getting myself back, I can’t be what you want me to be, Mycroft. Not yet.”

Mycroft struggled not to show what he was feeling on his face — pain, shock, foolishness, rejection, mortification, concern, care, worry… he bottled it all up for examination later and turned to Greg what he hoped was a brave face. “You no longer wish to die?” He asked the most important question first.

“No, not at all. I want my life back.”

“Good.” Mycroft took a deep breath, feeling tremulous. “For the sake of clarity, are you telling me that our… romance… is over?”

“No! Mycroft, no.” Greg returned to the sofa and sat down close to him, knees touching. “I still owe you seventeen dates.” He said with a small smile.

“Greg, you don’t owe me anything.”

“No? You owe me then. Seventeen dates are owed, and I’m very much looking forward to them — I was hoping we could schedule something for next weekend.”

“Friday evening? I have Georgianna on Saturday.”

“Yes, Friday evening.”


“For what?” Mycroft asked feeling lost.

“Everything. Your kindness. Your honesty. For giving me space.”

“All I want is for you to be happy.” It was true.

“Then kiss me. That will make me happy.”

Mycroft smiled very slightly and allowed Greg to kiss him. There was a war inside — half of him wanting to close down and protect himself, lick his wounds and go home, the other half wanting to open himself up fully to Greg, blossom in his sunlight…

“Friday,” Mycroft said, instead of all the questions buzzing around nervously in his brain. “Will you stay over at my flat?” Greg hadn’t been to Mycroft’s flat since before the accident.

Greg’s handsome face brightened. “Yeah, I’d like that.”

“It’s a date.” Mycroft told him, feeling very slightly reassured. He gathered Greg close and kissed him.

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Mycroft dressed with care in the dark indigo dungarees with the bit of red on the selvage that showed on the turn-ups. It had been that sassy red stripe that had decided him on the jeans...

Greg had told him to dress casually, comfortably, and to be sure to wear socks without holes.


Greg laughed and Mycroft revelled in the sound. Greg had only just begun to laugh again. “Yeah, some people do.”

“Clearly we’re going somewhere where we will be obliged to remove our shoes. Swear to me we aren’t going to a ‘ball pit.’ Or a ‘bouncy house.”

Mycroft enjoyed more of Greg’s laughter. “I swear.”

“Does it require taking the Underground?” Mycroft asked delicately. Greg was doing very well, but he still tired easily.

“We’re going to your place after, you might as well drive.” Greg allowed good-naturedly. Mycroft was pleased — Greg, understandably, fought the physical limitations his injury had imposed, stubbornly overextending himself and then paying for it with exhaustion and headaches. Mycroft wished to avoid anything that caused Greg pain.
And he wished to avoid using the Underground ever again.

It was a warm evening. Mycroft paired a red checked collared shirt and a dark brown summer-weight waistcoat with his jeans. Greg was more casual, wearing jeans and a thin, rust-coloured cardigan over a t-shirt that appeared to have been acquired when Greg was in fifth or sixth form. It featured the name and logo of a heavy metal band.

He must have seen Mycroft’s look as he slid into the car next to him. “It fits.” Greg told him. “It hasn’t fit in over twenty years.” He laughed. “Yeah, I can see on your face that you can’t believe I kept it. Sentimental value — I bought it at the first concert I ever went to. I’m guessing they didn’t sell t-shirts at your first concert.”

“No.” Mycroft agreed. The London Symphonic Orchestra regrettably sold t-shirts now, but they had not when Mycroft was six. “Where are we going?”

They were going bowling.

“Have you ever been bowling?” Greg asked as they entered Twelve Pin Lanes.

“I have not.” Mycroft admitted. He had doubts about the fabulousness of bowling. But as long as Greg was enthusiastic, Mycroft was determined to make the best of it. “Have you?”

“A couple times. I’m not very good at it, but it’s fun.”

The first thing Mycroft decided was that if he ever bowled again, he was buying his own bowling shoes. Putting on the same pair that who knows how many feet had worn was repulsive. Greg laughed at him. “You’re wearing socks. Get over it.”

Mycroft got over it.

Greg had reserved a lane. It came with a pink table and a turquoise vinyl bench wrapped two thirds the way ‘round it, a digital scoreboard mounted over the lane, and a server — or more accurately, a waitress — in a turquoise polyester minidress and white apron all with pink piping, and a matching hat that sat upon her back-combed bouffant beautifully.

Greg ordered one of the beers on tap. Mycroft asked what sort of wine they served, and she rolled her eyes and replied, “Wha’ever’s in the box, pet.” Greg thought that was hysterical. Mycroft ordered the same beer as Greg.

They bowled. It was not a difficult game. One rolled a heavy ball down a long wooden lane with the intent of knocking down the weighted pins at the end.

Mycroft was spectacularly bad at it.

He could see the maths of it, the physics, the spatial relations. He could calculate the force needed to propel the ball, he could calculate the exact trajectory, taking into account the slight dip on the left side of the lane, the oiliness of the surface, and the spin on the ball. He could visualise the equations, the lovely geometry of the game. But he could not translate that into the movements of his arms and legs.

Greg, with his natural athleticism, took to it quickly. After a few turns, he got his first strike. Then he mastered taking out his spares. Mycroft was still bowling gutter balls half the time.

“Bugger!” He muttered as yet another ball fell into the gutter halfway down the lane.
“Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.” Greg said.

“Nonsense.” Mycroft told him. “One cannot be afraid to fail.” He smiled wryly. “Perhaps if you gave me a few pointers?”

Greg’s pointers had them both giggling like schoolgirls. All of his suggestions on posture and when and how to release the ball, made Mycroft’s game worse, not better.

“How can you dance so beautifully and bowl so badly?!” Greg laughed.

“Perhaps the lack of music.” Mycroft suggested.

Greg pointed at the ceiling where speakers blared tinny pop hits almost undistinguishable over the sounds of heavy balls hitting weighted pins.

Mycroft gave him his ‘you’ve got to be kidding me’ look and Greg giggled merrily.

Greg’s laughter was such a beautiful sound, Mycroft gamely continued bowling — until he caught the tell-tale look of fatigue on Greg’s face.

“Perhaps we should order dinner.” He suggested. “There appears to be any number of pizza and nacho options.” Mycroft said waving at the people eating at nearby tables.

Greg sat down gladly. “I’ve never had the food.” He admitted. “Not exactly gourmet fare.”

Mycroft scanned the menu. “They have root beer floats.” He said with a smirk.

“Like on our first date.” Greg smiled. “Our first official date.” His smile faded. “This… I’m sorry, Mycroft. I don’t know what I was thinking. Bowling… this isn’t fabulous.” He looked around, self-consciously.

“How can you dance so beautifully and bowl so badly?!” Mycroft had not been good at it.

Greg laughed. “Come on, you.” He swallowed down the last of his beer and stood up.

Mycroft was partial to Spanish cuisine, and this little restaurant was a treasure. Run by a Basque family who did everything — host, cook, wait tables, and serve wine from their excellent cellar.

Their host recommended the gently sautéed salt cod with vizcayan sauce and red tolosa beans with cabbage and blood sausage. Mycroft was not one to argue with such an excellent suggestion. He was happy to see that Greg’s appetite was improving. He ate, if not with gusto, at least with an appreciation of the flavors and textures of the meal.

The antidepressants, he thought, were truly a godsend. Though Mycroft didn’t have the fascination with it that his brother had, he appreciated the power and complexity of chemistry.

Afterwards, as they walked the few blocks to the car, Mycroft selfishly regretted that Greg no longer smoked. He himself had not stopped entirely, but limited himself to one cigarette in the evening.
Outside his flat, he didn’t want it to smell of cigarettes.) The stroll down the quiet street after that beautiful meal would have been the perfect time to share a satisfying smoke.

Mycroft dismissed the thought, taking Greg’s hand instead.

Remembering the night they’d gone dancing in the gay disco, ferreting out the pickpocket, Mycroft thought wistfully of their drunken tryst in the abandoned loading dock. ‘You ruined all that,’ echoed unbidden through his mind. He firmly locked the idea away — if they were ever going to have a fresh start, Mycroft could not allow himself to be haunted by guilt.

They had not had sex since before the assault. They’d slept together in Greg’s bed, Greg’s back always firmly against the wall, Mycroft spooned to his chest, but it was companionable and safe, not sexual. Greg had clearly had no interest and Mycroft respected that.

But tonight... tonight they were sleeping at Mycroft’s. He hoped that meant Greg was in the mood. It was fine either way, of course. But it would be lovely...

It was a short journey to Mycroft’s flat. For once, he’d chosen to drive rather than be driven — he’d thought it would put less pressure on Greg to take physical intimacy out of the equation whilst they were in the car.

He felt nervous as he pulled into his building and parked in his spot. The empty parking space that Greg had used when he’d stayed over in the past seemed huge — a void that only Greg could fill. Mycroft wondered if Greg felt it too.

When they were alone in the lift, Mycroft felt even more awkward. He remembered feeling awkward the first time Greg had come here, but Greg had put him at ease, kissing him as they ascended the floors to his flat. This time Greg leaned casually against the mirrored wall, seemingly at home in his body, with himself. It was good to see his self-confidence returning.

“Are you going to see other people?” Mycroft blurted as the doors opened on his flat. He blushed at the timing, at the question — he had wanted to ask it since Greg had said he didn’t want to be exclusive. But he hadn’t intended to burst out with it thus.

He strode into the flat, kicking himself. “If we’re continuing to see each other, it affects me.” He scooped a mewing Bast off the sofa into his arms, busying himself with petting her.

“Mycroft...” Greg followed him in. “It’s not about anyone else. It’s not about you.”

“I apologise.” Mycroft said, facing the painting over the mantle, the Turner. “I’m out of practise... relationships...”

He felt Greg behind him, breath hot on his neck as Greg pressed his lips to his skin. Mycroft sighed at the touch. “I just need some time, Mycroft. Some space.” He kissed Mycroft’s neck again. Greg’s hands slipped up his torso, holding him, traveling over his arms and the little cat in them.

“I’m out of practise.” He repeated. Bast rebelled, squirming. Mycroft allowed her to jump from his arms.

“I know.” Greg’s strong arms covered Mycroft’s empty ones.

Love was hideous. “Would you, erm, like a drink?” Mycroft asked for something to say.

“No.” Greg said, his arms tightening. “Turn around.”
Mycroft obeyed, unable to refuse him. Greg kissed him, his tongue wet and hungry. “Do you want me?”

“Always.” My dear one — the words were in his mouth, but he swallowed them.

“Then take me to bed.”

Mycroft leaned down and kissed Greg again, thrilling at the touch of his hands and his mouth. It had been so long! He let Greg tug him towards the bedroom.

“Take your shoes off.” Mycroft said and Greg laughed — it was such a joyous sound, Mycroft began to relax. It was so lovely simply having Greg here again!

Greg made a little production of removing his shoes, as Mycroft toed his wingtips off with a smirk. “Socks too — who knows where those bowling shoes have been.” He said with a moue of disgust. Greg laughed again as he pulled off his socks.

Mycroft pulled him to his feet with a sensation of wonderment. He’d forgotten how this felt, intimacy with Greg. Greg unbuttoned Mycroft’s waistcoat then continued down unbuttoning the jeans. “I like these on you.” He said. “Have I told you that?”

Mycroft smiled and stroked Greg’s shoulders, pushing the cardigan off, letting it drop. “You have now.”

Greg shoved the jeans down Mycroft’s thighs, crouching to pull them all the way down. Mycroft stepped out of them as Greg reached for his already-tented boxers and rucked them down. He tipped Mycroft onto the bed — Mycroft gasped a surprised laugh — kneeling between his thighs and taking hold of his prick. He stroked it to full hardness.

Mycroft propped himself up to watch — then exerted himself to lean over and pull Greg’s appalling heavy metal t-shirt over his head, tossing it aside. Touching Greg’s jaw, Mycroft kissed him, delighting in Greg’s responsive lips and seeking tongue. It had been so long!

Breaking off the kiss, Greg grinned at him and hurriedly began to unbutton Mycroft’s checked shirt. “Get this off now.” He said, kissing him again and again.

Mycroft finished unfastening the shirt and shrugged out of it. With a lingering kiss and a hand on his chest, Greg pushed Mycroft backwards. He complied, leaning on his elbows and taking in the view. Greg was very thin now and it gave him a boyish quality. But his shoulders were just as broad, and the same dark hair decorated his ripped chest.

He watched as Greg licked the head of his prick, running his tongue under the foreskin in a way that made Mycroft moan. He licked over the slit and down the shaft, kissed up the sensitive underside and it felt incredible! Hot and wet and sensual. Greg pulled Mycroft’s foreskin back and licked under the glans, then took the whole head in his mouth, tonguing the underside. He bobbed lower taking part of the shaft, his hand meeting his lips as he jacked it.

Mycroft’s toes curled as Greg’s other hand stroked his bollocks. One finger moved lower, massaging his perineum and he couldn’t keep from gasping aloud. Greg smiled around his cock and hummed.

In an almost embarrassingly short time, Mycroft felt the inevitable tightness in his bollocks that signaled he would climax very soon. Greg eased off, letting the head of Mycroft’s prick pop out of his mouth loudly, and jacking the shaft lazily whilst he nuzzled taut testicles.

Mycroft stroked Greg’s silver hair, avoiding the scars it hid. He pulled him up to kiss him, tasting
himself in Greg’s mouth. “I’ve missed this.” He murmured.

“Me too.” Greg said, nipping Mycroft’s lower lip, holding it between his teeth for a moment, then mashing his lips to the other man’s, licking deep into his mouth. His fingers wandered to one of Mycroft’s nipples and rubbed it until he moaned into Greg’s kiss.

Greg returned his attention to sucking cock, bobbing low, taking more of the shaft in his throat. His saliva dripped down and lubricated his stroking hand. Mycroft was cursing now, holding a fistful of silver hair as Greg licked and sucked and bobbed enthusiastically. It was fantastic, being with Greg this way again. It was everything.

Greg’s mouth was so hot. Wrapped around his cock, sucking him in, humming... his bollocks veritably vibrating in ecstasy...

“I’m going to...” He managed before he spilled down Greg’s throat, in his mouth, over his tongue. He saw stars as Greg continued to massage his perineum and jack his cock, milking shot after shot of semen onto Mycroft’s belly, the bursts of pleasure like waves on the shore, cresting and breaking and falling into the one that had gone before...

Panting, Mycroft found himself flat on his back on the bed, sated and so, so content. Greg crawled up beside him and Mycroft pulled him close, cradling him to his chest. “That was... magnificent.” He managed and Greg laughed, vibrating against Mycroft’s skin.

When he’d recovered himself, he rolled Greg onto his back and, whilst kissing him, unfastened his jeans. Greg was prodigiously hard in his boxer briefs and Mycroft stroked him through the cotton, thumbing the growing wet spot. Greg groaned appreciatively.

“Take these off.” Mycroft commanded, tugging at Greg’s jeans. They both sat up, then Mycroft stood and helped yank the trousers off Greg’s legs. Then he carefully lifted the waistband of this briefs over the rude erection and dispensed with them as well. With a little shove, Mycroft indicated that Greg should scoot back fully onto the big bed, then he crawled over the other man, kissing his chest and neck and jaw, finding his mouth and plunging his tongue in to plunder.

He caressed Greg’s cock, spreading the prodigious precome down the shaft as he tongued a nipple. He sucked on it then bit, and Greg arched his back in pleasure. Mycroft rolled the nipple between his fingers as he kissed down Greg’s lean, hard body to his groin. He nuzzled into the dark bush, absently noting it was threaded with silver, and sucked a testicle into his mouth. Greg moaned as Mycroft moved onto the other testicle, pulling it into his mouth and cradling it with his tongue.

He’d been lazily jacking Greg’s prick all the while, now he licked up the shaft, tasting the salty precome. He lapped at the slit and lavished attention on the head, licking and kissing, nuzzling under the glans and stroking the shaft with his deft fingers. Greg was tense and vocal, moaning loudly and writhing on the bed. Mycroft finally took the head in his mouth and sucked on it happily. He pushed down, taking more of Greg’s handsome cock down his throat. He came up for breath and then went down again, taking him to the root and pressing his face into the coarse hair.

Mycroft bobbed, his hand meeting his lips as he sucked and stroked in a rhythm he knew drove Greg wild. Greg grasped his shoulder as he panted and moaned. Taking a leaf from his book, Mycroft began massaging Greg’s perineum with his other hand, stroking it firmly, reaching farther back to play with the tight bud of his entrance, caressing it with his fingers.

He sucked and sucked and stroked and jacked, massaged and caressed... but the tension slowly left Greg’s body and his hands retreated from Mycroft’s head and shoulders. His jaw aching and his fingers cramped, Mycroft finally pulled off, stopping his ministrations and stretching. Greg tried to
“Is there something else I can do for you?” Mycroft asked softly, running his hand up Greg’s lean flank. “I can get the lube...” He said with a smirk and a wave of his fingers.

“No.” Greg said. “Thanks… this felt great… amazing… but...”

Mycroft carefully lay down next to Greg, leaning his head on his hand and stroking his palm over Greg’s chest muscles. “What is it?” He asked. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong. It’s the antidepressants. I can’t... I can’t come. I thought with you, it might be different... but... I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologise.” Mycroft said. “Anorgasmia is a relatively common side effect of SSRIs.” He mentally kicked himself for not considering it sooner.

“I hate it.” Greg said. “I get right up to the edge… and then... nothing...”

“It’s frustrating.” Mycroft supplied.

“Yeah. And I don’t want you to feel bad, Mycroft — it’s not that I don’t want you, I do! You feel so good — it feels great!”

Mycroft caressed Greg’s brow and kissed him gently. “Please don’t trouble yourself with my ego, dear one. This is chemistry, nothing else.”

“You’re sure you’re not upset?”

“Not at all.” Mycroft assured him. “Have you spoken to your doctor?”

“No. I can’t quit the antidepressants. I hate being dependent on pills, but it was horrible... before... but this... sex... I don’t want to go without...”

“Talk to your doctor,” Mycroft encouraged. “It’s not either/or — there are other antidepressants that might not affect you the same way. Or perhaps the dosage can be adjusted.”

“Ok.” Greg burrowed against him, hiding his face.

Mycroft wrapped his arms around his lover, fighting the guilt threatening to overwhelm him. This wasn’t about him! He could not make this about him! His role was to support Greg, not wallow uselessly in sentiment!

“We’ll work this out.” Mycroft told Greg. “And perhaps,” he said lightly. “We’ll try again in the morning. As long as it feels good, another attempt harms no one.” He felt Greg trembling. Abruptly he feared Greg’s gratitude — if Greg thanked him, it would send him into a tailspin of guilt. “Let’s get under the covers.” He said quickly. “I’m getting cold.”

Mycroft listened as Greg’s breathing slowly evened out. After a time, he became too warm. Rather than move Greg from his chest, he eased the duvet off himself, keeping Greg covered. Eventually, he drifted off.

He was woken abruptly by loud moaning. Mycroft lay there confused... then he comprehended — Greg! Greg must be having a nightmare. He’d rolled away from Mycroft, wrapping himself in the duvet. He was struggling against it. Mycroft pulled it off him, tossing it to the foot of the bed.

“No...” Greg moaned. “No!”
Mycroft hadn't witnessed a nightmare since Greg had been in hospital — Greg had told him that his presence kept them away. Not tonight. Was his bed too big? Had Greg strayed too far from his side? Or was it the unfamiliar surroundings?

*Why* hardly mattered now. Mycroft pressed himself to Greg’s back, caressing his hip gently. “I’m here, dear one.” He attempted to reassure his lover. “I’m right here.”

“No!” Greg lashed out, his elbow striking Mycroft hard in the solar plexus, laying him out flat, gawping for breath.

Greg leapt off the bed and pressed his back to the wall, waking himself in the process. He moaned piteously and collapsed in on himself, sliding down to sit on the floor and rest his head on his knees. He hid his face behind arms wrapped ‘round his legs.

Mycroft slowly caught his breath — Greg had hit him hard. He sat up, swinging his legs off the side of the bed. His solar plexus still ached from the blow, and he rubbed it. “I’ll, erm, make some tea.” He said aloud. “Do you want to come with me?” Greg might want a moment alone.

He saw Greg’s shoulders ripple ominously, but when Greg looked up at him, his eyes were dry. He stared at Mycroft, seeming to take a moment to focus on his face. “Uhm...” He sighed. “Mycroft.” He looked around, recognising Mycroft’s bedroom. “Sorry... sorry... I shouldn’t have come...”

“Greg...” Mycroft was horrified by the suggestion but struggled not to show it. “What do you need?”

Greg shook his head, defeated, resigned. “I don’t know.”

Chapter End Notes

Poor Greg. He’s such a sweet-natured fellow, he doesn’t deserve any of this!
Chapter Summary

Greg has an appointment with his therapist. And then with someone else.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg looked at the man sitting in the chair across from him. He wasn’t that much older than Greg, ten years maybe, but he had a grandfatherly air. That didn’t mean he wasn’t attractive, he was... natty. Debonair. Rather like Mycroft himself, but Dr. Ephroem’s suits seemed more comfortable, softer... lived in.

He wore a well-trimmed beard that was polar white, Santa Clause white — a strange juxtaposition with his dark skin. The first time Greg had met Dr. Ephroem, in the depths of his ennui, he had been unable to focus on much but his black and white head.

Over time, other details about the man fascinated Greg — his diamond pinky ring, the tasteful gold hoops he wore in his ears, the merry twinkle in his eyes that must be involuntary. Why else would his eyes twinkle as he asked Greg questions about the assault, his moods, his love life, job and his frustrations?

By now, Dr. Ephroem knew just about everything about Greg. When he thought about that, it made him uncomfortable. But Greg was happy in the knowledge that he was nothing special — just one among many patients. Without his notes to remind him, Dr. Ephroem would like as not barely remember Greg’s name, let alone the dull details of his life. They certainly bored Greg enough, he couldn’t imagine Dr. Ephroem felt differently. He admired the man’s professionalism, never yawning in Greg’s face nor nodding off.

“How have you been this week, Greg?” He’d seen the doctor three times a week at first — a compromise Mycroft worked out to keep Greg from being sectioned. Mycroft had agreed to visit Greg daily, and make sure he kept the therapy appointments. Greg had had to exert himself to convince them that while he wished he were dead, he wouldn’t actively kill himself.

Of course he wouldn’t. He’d never do that to Georgianna.

“Yeah, OK. I’m working full days now. Not every day, but more often than not.” He sighed his annoyance. “Feels wrong, leaving in the middle of an investigation... but if I stay, try to push through, the headaches keep me out for a day or more. It’s not worth it.

“Still, I feel like I’m shirking. I hate not being able to do my job.”

“You are doing your job, Greg. It’s good you’re taking care of yourself. Other than your stamina, how are you finding work? Does it still interest you? Any concentration issues?”

“Yeah, it still interests me — well, I’ve never been fond of the paperwork, and that’s really stacked up. But I don’t have any problem concentrating. I get so into it sometimes, I forget to take breaks when I’m supposed to.” It irritated Greg, his need for regular breaks.
Dr. Ephroem wrote notes on his legal pad in his looping script. “The trial was this week, was it not?”

“Yeah, it was.”

“It went well?”

“I guess. As a witness, I haven’t been there for anything but my own testimony.”

“How do you feel your testimony was received?”

“Clay’s barrister tried to make out it was consensual, which I guess I expected. Badgered me about whether I had an erection. Tried to tell me I’d enjoyed it.”

“It’s just a physiological response to stimulus, it’s very common.”

“Yes, that’s what I told him. Told him the assault was worse because of it. Then he tried to get me to say I’d teased Clay, led him on, and Clay thought it was consensual.” Greg scoffed. “Even implied I’d injured myself to add credibility to my story. Wanker. I don’t think anyone was buying it. I’ve given evidence before, as a cop, I knew what it would feel like having my credibility attacked. So I didn’t lose me shit.”

“It didn’t upset you?”

“Yes, it upset me. But I didn’t let it show. He would have loved it if I’d lost me temper or broken down, innit — anything he could point to and imply I couldn’t be trusted.”

“How did it feel seeing John Clay again?”

Greg had thought about that a lot. “Strange. Seeing him in the dock... he’s smaller than I remembered. If he hadn’t surprised me, if I hadn’t hit me head, there’s no way he could have overpowered me... although Gregson said he had planned to drug me... so who knows.”

“You sound upset.”

“I am. I don’t like feeling vulnerable.”

“Seeing him made you feel vulnerable?”

“Yes, well, I was. He surprised me, got the upper hand. I couldn’t defend myself.”

“He’s locked up now, he can’t hurt you.”

“Not physically. But... there are other lunatics like him.”

“You don’t feel safe.” The doctor’s eyes twinkled incongruously.

“No. Is this how women live their whole lives, doc? Terrified that the next bloke will attack them? Afraid to turn corners or answer the door because of what might be on the other side?”

Dr. Ephroem looked at Greg sympathetically with his dark, twinkling eyes and Greg hated it. “I believe so. Yes.”

“How do they stand it? How do they cope?”

“More to the point, Greg, how do you cope?”
“I don’t know! I think about what happened… he touched me, so what!? I didn’t want it, I didn’t like it. But that’s nothing next to cracking me skull. I’m… I’m bloody handicapped! Every time I have to leave work early, it’s because of him! Every headache — it’s him! The exhaustion, the nightmares, the depression, the fits of temper — it’s all John Bloody Clay! I hate it!

“Seeing him there in the dock, all I could think about was everything he’s taken from me. I hate him. I hate what he’s done to me. I hate what I’ve become!”

Dr. Ephroem waited to see if he were done. When Greg stared at him challengingly, he nodded. “Your anger is normal, good even if you can channel it in a positive direction.”

Greg huffed. “Positive direction? Like what?”

“You could channel the energy into rebuilding your stamina and self-confidence. It would cheat him of his victory.”

Exhausted, he sighed. “Yeah.” He agreed listlessly.

“Greg, this is something that happened to you, but it’s not you. Even with the health challenges, you don’t have to let it define you.”

“You don’t understand…”

“I know it must be profoundly distressing to not have the control over your body that you’re used to having. But I see you taking back that control. Your progress since you first started coming here has been amazing.”

Greg scoffed bitterly. “You make me feel ungrateful.”

Ephroem twinkled. “That’s not my aim.”

They sat together in silence. It was so frustrating! Greg knew he should feel grateful for his rapid progress. But he wouldn’t have to make progress if he hadn’t been injured in the first place! It would be easier to take if it had been in the line of duty — but it wasn’t, it was at the hand of some bloody rapist. It was hard to feel grateful when he was so damn angry!

Channel the bloody anger into something positive. Cheat John Clay of his victory. So easy for the doc to say.

“I’m going to run another marathon.” Greg said abruptly.

“Oh?”

“Yeah. I’ve started training. When Georgianna was still wee, I ran a three-hour marathon. Now I’ve quit smoking again… I know I’m ten years older… and the cracked skull has put me back… but…” Greg trailed off.

“I think that’s a smashing idea, Greg — as long as your medical doctor has signed off on it.”

Greg rolled his eyes. “I can’t let my heart rate go above 150. Which is shite, but I don’t have time restrictions any longer. As long as my head doesn’t ache, I can run all day long.” He eyed the doctor combatively… then gave up. What was the point being angry with Ephroem? “I loved running fast. My age though, that top end goes. Running far… I can do that forever… but fast… I bloody loved being fast.”
“We all get older, Greg.”

“Yeah. But I didn’t need a head injury to help me along.”

“You’re feeling bitter.”

Greg closed his eyes against the guilt. “I spend so much time pretending to be ok. At work, for me mates, for Georgianna… for Mycroft…”

“But you’re not ok.”

“No. Yes. Sometimes.”

“It’s a process, Greg.”

“It’s fucking frustrating.” Greg rubbed his eyes wearily. “Let’s talk about something else.”

“Alright.” Dr. Ephroem said. “How is your daughter?”

Greg smiled just a little at the thought of Georgianna. “It’s been hard on her. She’s… relieved… that I’m not so depressed any longer. We went to the V&A last weekend to see an exhibit of couture from the ‘60s. Her choice, I’m not so much interested in dresses. But it was fascinating, the shapes and textures. So intricate some of it, all sewn by hand… anyway, Georgianna liked it.”

“You’re getting back into a routine with her then.”

“Yeah. I don’t want her to worry about me so much.”

“It’s natural to worry about people you care for.”

“She’s the kid. I worry about her, she shouldn’t have to worry about me.” Greg said. “Not for another twenty or thirty years anyway.”

Ephroem nodded in his grandfatherly way. Greg wondered — not for the first time — how much action he got. Did he have a partner or did he pick up trade? Or both? He tried to imagine the kindly doctor’s Grindr profile. “Is she still in touch with Mycroft?”

Greg forced his thoughts away from the psychiatrist’s sex life. “They play Words With Friends. He trounces her mercilessly and insists he’s teaching her summat. She says she’s losing by less now. Figured out how to utilise the triple word score.” Greg shrugged. “I never cared for Scrabble. Mostly I’m happy he hasn’t abandoned her, that she can count on him still.”

“Did you doubt that?”

“You never know, do you. Mycroft doesn’t have kids... though the way his brother is with his partner’s daughter... I guess it runs in the family.” Greg felt guilty about referring to John and Sherlock as partners — as far as romance was concerned, they were still circling each other warily. John had finally had a breakthrough and admitted he was attracted to Sherlock — not to mention in love with him. Unfortunately, Sherlock himself had pulled back nervously, leading Greg to speculate that he actually was a virgin.

Greg had lost track of the conversation. He searched his short-term memory and came up with the last thing the doctor had said. “You mentioned friends. Are you spending time with them?”

“Some, I guess. Met a mate for a pint the other day.” It had been John. Greg shook his head angrily. “I said some stuff… in hospital, I lost me temper and let slip a bunch of shite I shouldn’t have.
Personal stuff. He’s a doctor, he knows why it happened. I don’t think he holds it against me… but it’s still uncomfortable.” Greg sighed. “Something else John Clay will never be held accountable for.” He made a careless gesture meant to describe his frustration. John hadn’t brought it up, but Greg couldn’t forget. What had possessed him to say such things?!

Dr. Ephroam made a note on his pad. “It’s good you’re getting out more.”

“I guess.” Greg allowed.

“How are things with Mycroft?”

“Ok. Fine.” Greg laughed, a single self-deprecating syllable. “He moved his bed so I can sleep with me back to the wall at his gaff. Looks ridiculous — his bed is mammoth, innit, and it wasn’t made to have a side pushed against the wall like that. But I haven’t had nightmares since.” Greg sighed. “Am I going to have to sleep with my back to the wall forever, doc?”

Dr. Ephroem shrugged slightly. “I don’t know, Greg. But clearly Mycroft cares for you if he’s willing to make changes for your wellbeing.”

“I don’t doubt Mycroft cares.”

“How are you feeling about him then?” Ephroem asked calmly, asked the question Greg had been asking himself for weeks.

It was Greg’s turn to shrug. “When I’m with him I feel one way. When I’m not, I feel another.” He sighed and leaned back, studying the ceiling. “I’ve known him for years, yeah. And he’s always been this… this somewhat ominous figure — someone who could make bad things happen if he wanted. A dangerous man. The first time I met him he’d pulled strings to get his junkie brother out of lock-up without being charged. The second time, he tried to bribe me, implied threats included. I called his bluff, but I have no doubt he could have ruined me if he’d wanted. If I’d been important enough.

“Seeing him, sleeping with him, I met a different Mycroft. One I hadn’t expected. He’s... smart and interesting, charming. He can laugh at himself... it seems like he hasn’t let himself enjoy life in a long time, which is a shame because he’s gorgeous when he’s enjoying his life. He’s good company, good in bed. He’s... vulnerable even.

“I really like him. I like him enough that I forgot all that other stuff. John Clay... I guess he brought it back to the front of my mind. It’s hard to reconcile the two Mycrofts.”

The doctor nodded. “I’m sure you’re a different person at work than you are at home too.”

Greg felt inexpressibly tired. Grandfatherly Dr. Ephroam wasn’t going to understand about Mycroft — he played the benign civil servant too well. “Yeah. He still claims he doesn’t feel obligated to help me… I’m not convinced.”

“Do you blame him?” The doctor had asked this before.

“No. I really don’t. I asked him why he’d wanted to take me to that party, introduce me to Clay. His reasons were so… human... he admitted to being flawed, to having been hurt… honestly, I understand. I don’t blame him. I blame John Clay.”

Dr. Ephroam nodded, glancing at his watch. The hour must be winding down. “Has your sexual function improved since we altered your meds?”
Greg grinned wryly. “No. And yes, but mostly no.”

The doctor looked at him quizzically.

“We’ve been having some good sex. It’s satisfying to get him off… and it feels good… still frustrating that I can’t climax.” Greg took a breath. “Except once I did… but it was a bit of a one-off.”

“What do you mean?”

Greg laughed self-consciously. “It was right before I gave evidence at the trial. I was… keyed up… Mycroft found the cleaner’s closet and… well, he blew me. And I came. That’s the only time though. Not before and not since.”

“Interesting. I imagine the nature of such an assignation would change the brain chemistry somewhat — the fear of discovery, the thrill of public sex…”

“Yeah, I don’t want to have to have sex in public to get off.”

“No, of course not. Have you noticed any other side effects of reducing your dose? Any return of the depressive symptoms?”

“I haven’t gotten worse.” Greg allowed. Not much better either.

Dr. Ephroam scribbled on his note pad. “I’m going to reduce your dose further and add a second anti-depressant, a non-SSRI. Some people notice fewer side effects with the combination. I’ll write you a new prescription.”

“Erm, OK. Thanks, doc.”

“I’ll see you again next Tuesday?”

“Of course.”

Greg left Dr. Ephroem, bidding his office manager goodbye. On the way out of the building, he passed other offices — a dermatologist, a dentist, other psychologists and psychiatrists — and out into the street.

He had another appointment, a different sort of appointment after the session with Dr. Ephroem. Greg regretted making the date, but it was too late to cancel now. Greg wasn’t the sort to stand someone up.

He made his way to the tea shop. Greg saw her through the window and watched her for a minute. She looked up and waved at him.

“Hey, Daphne.” He said, kissing her cheeks in greeting. She smiled and Greg remembered why he’d asked her out.

Daphne was a dentist, they’d met accidentally outside his therapist’s office. Greg had been taken with her humour and down to earth manner — she’d made him laugh.

When she gave him her number, he’d already told Mycroft he couldn’t be exclusive... and the idea of spending an hour with someone who didn’t know anything about his head injury or the assault, someone who didn’t expect him to be the same Greg Lestrade he’d been before was appealing. And she was attractive, age-appropriate, single...
“Am I late?” He asked her as he sat

“No, you’re right on time.” She smiled and he admired her dimples. They ordered coffees and Greg, conscious that he’d skipped lunch, ordered an orange and walnut scone. He wasn’t hungry — quite the opposite — but he’d lost more than enough weight. He was trying to eat *something* every mealtime.

Greg remarked on the weather and she responded. Then she laughed. “We’re following Miss Elizabeth Bennet’s guidelines then.” Daphne said.

“The size of the room *does* seem more than adequate for the number of couples.” Greg replied with a grin.

“You know your Jane Austen.” She said approvingly.

“I’m British, aren’t I. They’d revoke me citizenship if I hadn’t read *Pride and Prejudice*, at the very least.” Greg laughed. “Though if you’re expecting Mr. Darcy, I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed.”

Daphne smiled. “No, you’re much too personable... though you *do* have a brooding quality.”

“Do I?” Greg chuckled. “It doesn’t come with a fortune, sadly.”

“What do you do, Greg? Wait, let me guess...” Daphne regarded him sharply for a moment. “Show me your hands.”

Greg complied. He couldn’t help but remember Sherlock instantly identifying him as a cop. Something about the way Greg looked at *everything*, but not as if he were sizing it up for weaknesses as a criminal would.

“School master.” She said.

“Nope.”

“Hmmm... you’re in management then. You write a lot... and you’re used to giving instructions to your underlings.”


“Thirty-six!? What do you investigate? Not murder.”

“Actually, yeah. I head up the Central Division Homicide Investigation Unit.”

“Oh. You’ve seen all sorts of horrible stuff, then.”

He had. “I expect the insides of some people’s mouths could give most murder scenes a run for their money.”

She laughed but stopped herself abruptly. “We shouldn’t joke about murder.”

Greg clicked his tongue. “That’s most of my material gone, then.”

Daphne chortled. “You’re terrible.”

He agreed. He *was* terrible. Greg tried to decide what he was doing in this twee little tea shop with a
very nice, very attractive woman.

He hadn’t eaten his scone yet. Greg smiled at her and asked about her hobbies. He listened to her talk about her allotment garden and her passion for Italy while he smeared jam and clotted cream on his scone and ate it. It sat in his stomach like lead.

Afterwards, Greg wandered around. He was in fashionable Kensington, a short tube ride from just about everywhere in Central London. Instead of heading into the Underground, he tramped through the handsome residential streets to the brightly attractive high streets to the choking crowds of Piccadilly and beyond, eventually turning towards his flat.

It was dark when he finally arrived home, weary and footsore. He let himself into his flat, kicked off his shoes and stretched out on the grey couch under the Cy Twombly print. He did not turn on the lights.

After coffee, Greg had walked Daphne to her car. She had kissed him, pressing herself against his chest, and he’d been reminded of how soft and appealing women are. He’d stroked her arm and kissed her back carefully. When they broke apart, Daphne had smiled at him, showing her pretty dimples. “Call me.” She’d said, touching his hand. “I’d like to hear from you.”

Her perfume was light and feminine, floral, and it had clung to his shirt for a while as he’d wandered the city.

After a time, his phone alert sounded. Greg exerted himself to pull it from his pocket and glance at it. He had texts from Mycroft, John and a mate from rugby. And he had a reminder to himself to eat dinner.

He turned the phone off and closed his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

A shorter chapter this week because I had A JOB INTERVIEW that I needed to prepare for. Wooo. I’ve been looking for ten months now and this job would be a pretty good fit for me. Probably won’t get it — I’m not the best at speaking extemporaneously, a skill that really helps in interviews, but who knows! Cross your fingers for me.

ANYWAY... Greg’s still struggling along the road to recovery, but he’s making progress. Daphne... well, what can you say? He’s struggling.

If you live somewhere where Daylight Savings Time is observed, I hope you remembered to set your clocks ahead?
Greg and Georgianna are at the shore. Mycroft joins them for a weekend.

Greg lay back on the blanket, the midsummer sun heating his skin. It would be unpleasantly hot without the salty breeze off the ocean. The air smelled fresh and the sand under the blanket conformed to the contours of his body. Greg dozed.

He was at the shore. He’d rented a caravan in a holiday park outside of St Ives on the Cornwall coast for a week, and brought Georgianna as he’d done since she was a baby. As his own parents had done when he was a kid.

It had been odd four years ago, the first holiday without Jude — the first time Greg had spent that much time alone with his daughter. Back then Georgianna was still angry at him for moving out. It had been salt in the wound, Georgianna blaming him. Greg would never tell her what her mother had done, that Jude had cheated on him for years and years with a string of blokes. He’d never tell her he should have moved out sooner.

He would not tell her that he’d stayed because he loved his wife in spite of her cheating, then he stayed because of Georgianna herself. That he’d thrown himself even more completely into his work to avoid the tension at home... until even his patience and good-will was used up. He wouldn’t tell her that it had been an utter relief to leave Jude... and that it had been a great sorrow, a rupture, an amputation. It had been grief and guilt and pain. And freedom. Greg would tell his daughter none of it.

Greg understood Georgianna’s anger that first holiday alone together, but that didn’t make it easier to bear. He’d done his best to bond with his daughter, and when they got home, he’d asked Jude to talk to her about the divorce, to explain to their girl that the failure of their marriage had not been his fault alone.

Greg sat up and squinted into the sun, locating his daughter amongst the knot of young teens nearer the water. Georgianna was giggling with another girl, comfortable in her sporty swimsuit and shorts, her dark hair pulled into a utilitarian ponytail. She had grown several inches recently, stretching her slim frame. Her long legs were stick skinny, her knees knobby and scarred. The ocean air had made her lips and cheeks rosy, had turned her dark waves into curls, giving Greg a glimpse of how beautiful she would become. He wasn’t the only one who noticed, several of the teen boys — and at least one girl — were buzzing around casting eyes her way.

Georgianna bypassed all of them, running over to Greg’s blanket. “Dad, when Mr. Holmes gets here, what are we going to do? Can we take him to the museum?”

Greg sat up. “We went to the museum yesterday, Gi.” The holiday camp was close to St Ives which boasted a branch of the Tate. They’d spent a long afternoon looking at an exhibit of Otohong Nkanga’s paintings. Greg admired the scale of the work, liked the colourful, geometric images of cut
up body parts that were somehow non-threatening.

“No, the other one — the one with the sculpture garden.”

“The Hepworth? I guess... maybe, since he’ll only be here one day, we should ask him what he wants to do.”

“Oh, he said he’s fine doing whatever. We could go to that chippy you like.” She wheedled.

“We could go to the chippy now if you want. Georgianna... you aren’t texting him too much, are you?” Greg wasn’t sure what to make of her enthusiasm for Mycroft.

“Dad!” She rolled her eyes and collapsed down onto the blanket, trailing sand onto it. “I barely message with him at all. Just when we’re playing Words with Friends — sometimes it takes him ages to message me back, but I don’t say anything. I know he’s busy.”

“Just checking,” Greg told her. “I think he wants to go running with us.” Georgianna had joined him on his morning runs this week, loping easily beside him on her gangly legs, telling him about the track and field team at her school and how her junior girls football league team coach had encouraged all the players to increase their stamina with running.

She brightened. “He does!? I didn’t know he ran too! What time does he get here?”

“His train gets in at 7:23 pm. We’ll pick him up and take him to his hotel.”

“Hotel? He isn’t staying with us?”

Greg sighed. “No, there’s no place for him to sleep in our cabin. You should have thought about that before you invited him.”

He’d been at Mycroft’s flat, lounging on the couch watching Drag Race one evening, the other man fiddling with his phone periodically. Greg had assumed it had to do with his work, but it had not. Mycroft had been decimating Georgianna in the online Scrabble game.

“Oh!” Mycroft’s soft interjection caught Greg’s attention.

“What?” He asked.

Mycroft had almost seemed... embarrassed. But Greg might have been mistaken — the expression vanished into blankness as Mycroft turned his mobile towards Greg. “Your daughter has just invited me along on your holiday.”

Indeed, she had. Greg read her message, telling him when and where they were going. He blushed a bit when he got to the part about himself. *Dad gets bored with just me to keep him company. He tells me to spend time with the other kids, but I don’t want to leave him alone too much. If you came, you could keep him company.*

He read the subtext clearly — after Greg’s depression, the prospect of being alone with him for a week had Georgianna a little frightened.

Greg made himself laugh. “I’m sure we could ‘keep company’ with each other.” He said, waggling his eyebrows lasciviously. “Don’t worry, I’ll talk to her.”

Mycroft clearly comprehended Georgianna’s fear and Greg’s discomfort. “Perhaps,” He said delicately, clearing his throat. “This is fortuitous... I’ve been looking for an excuse to get away...”
“Mycrof.” Greg called bullshit. “You never take holidays.”

“That’s not true. In fact, I missed my usual getaway to Greece this spring.” Because you were in hospital — Greg heard the unspoken words. “Of course, I couldn’t take a week, not this time of year, but a day or two at the shore would be a welcome respite.” Mycroft looked at him defiantly. “Of course, I wouldn’t dream of intruding on your holiday. But a long weekend in Brighton... or Lyme Regis... sounds like just the thing.”

Greg laughed — sincerely this time. He saw it pleased Mycroft, softened the anxious lines etched in his brow. “Why don’t you join us then?” He said. “Come Friday night for the weekend. St Ives is no Lyme Regis, but it’s pretty and the beaches aren’t crowded. I definitely want to see you on the beach.”

And that had decided it. They’d joked about wearing Speedos to embarrass Georgianna, while Mycroft booked a room at a B&B near the holiday park, and that was that. Greg let Mycroft tell his daughter the plan. He must not have mentioned the sleeping arrangements.

His daughter looked at Greg with astonishment. “He’ll stay in your room, of course. A hotel!? That’s just silly!”

“Georgianna... we’ve talked about this. I’m not having overnight guests when you’re here. Period.”

She grinned. “I could stay in the hotel....”

Greg laughed out loud. “No chance.” He handed her her sunglasses. “You should go back to your friends, let me read my book. There are a few boys — and girls — over there missing you desperately right now.” It was true. They were circling like wolves.

“Da-ad!” She protested. “Don’t be so weird.”

He giggled and she joined him, and he loved her more than life itself.

—-

Mycroft caught sight of the Lestrades on the platform and for a moment he was breathless at their incredible, careless beauty. Both father and daughter were striking, she with messy chestnut curls and flashing brown eyes, carrying her new height gracefully on long legs. He, brown as a nut beneath sparkling silver hair, lean and muscular in tidy swim shorts and a t-shirt that skimmed his torso — both new and fitting him perfectly.

As he stepped off the train, Mycroft felt grotesquely overdressed in his summer-weight suit. He had sent Anthea out for appropriate beachwear, now packed in his leather overnight case. He prayed she had gotten him some sort of summer footwear other than the beastly flip-flops everyone else seemed to be sporting.

“Mr. Holmes!” Georgianna hugged him enthusiastically. He found himself smiling at her brightly, her happiness infecting him.

“It’s a delight to see you, Ms. Lestrade.” Greg smiled at Mycroft and rubbed his arm. “Greg.” He caught Greg’s hand and squeezed it as they walked together out of the station, to the car park. Greg tangled their fingers.
“I trust your holiday thus far has been satisfactory.” Mycroft asked Georgianna.

“Oh, it’s great! The holiday park has two kitties that live there — not Siamese like your kitty, a calico and a ginger. But they’re super friendly and sweet.”

“Is there a reason you don’t have a cat of your own?” Mycroft asked.

“Her mother’s allergic.” Greg supplied. “And I’m not home enough.”

“Ah, yes. Something to look forward to, then. For when you live on your own.”

Greg chuckled. “That won’t be for a few years yet.” He said.

“Too bad you aren’t staying at the park with us, you’d like the cats.”

“I imagine I’ll be invited to visit, perhaps you’ll have a chance to introduce us.” Mycroft said as he buckled himself into the passenger seat. He eyed Greg’s flip flops dubiously. Was it safe to drive wearing such footwear?

After the three-week break — and Greg’s announcement that he wasn’t ready for a commitment — Mycroft had pulled back. Not emotionally, he found he was unable to do that. No, he had removed himself entirely from Greg’s medical care — something he probably should have done sooner — and scrupulously respected every boundary that Greg erected.

What was the trite saying? ‘If you love something set it free, if it returns, it was meant to be…’

He was aware that Greg had had dates with other people since then. Three other people, to be exact. Mycroft took small comfort in the fact that Greg had not seen any of them a second time, and he had continued to see Mycroft regularly. Perhaps it was simply part of Greg’s recovery.

Or perhaps they weren’t ‘meant to be…’

Regardless, Mycroft was in St Ives with Greg now, and he intended to make the most of it.

“Georgianna, why don’t you run the itinerary past Mycroft, see what he thinks.” Greg suggested.

“Ok.” The girl agreed readily. “After you check in to your B&B, we’ll go to our cabin for dinner. We went by the Cornish Deli and got a deli tray. We were going to get crabs or herring or summat, but Dad said we don’t know how to cook seafood, so we went to the deli.

“Afterwards, if you want, we can walk down to the beach. It’s pretty at sunset. In the morning we’ll all go running together. Then maybe the sculpture garden, lunch at The Mermaid, and back to the beach for the afternoon. Do you like the beach, Mr. Holmes.”

“I can’t say I’ve spent enough time on beaches to really know.”

Georgianna looked astonished. “Where do you go on holiday? Where did you go when you were a kid?”

“Let’s see... when I was young, we usually went to Provence to visit our Grandmère — my mother’s mother. It’s a lovely region, but Grandmère lived rather far from the coast. I recall we went to Marseille once. My brother was taken with the idea of ‘sea vegetables,’ and ate a stalk of winged kelp he found washed up in the sand. He was violently ill. We never went back.” Mycroft himself had been in his chubby phase and had refused to put on the swimsuit Mummy had bought him. He went to the beach in loafers, khaki trousers, a white buttoned up shirt and a navy blazer. His one
concession was leaving off his tie. Sherlock had had no such compunction and had run across the beach like a terror, leaving them all behind. That’s how he’d gotten hold of the kelp.

“How old was your brother?” Georgianna asked.

“Oh, erm...” Mycroft had been eleven. He’d started getting taller when he was twelve, but before that birthday, he had been a short, pudgy ball of a boy. “He was not yet five. He’d been reading through our set of encyclopaedias and had ‘S’ with him on that trip. ‘Sea vegetables,” Mycroft recited, “are algae that can be eaten and used in the preparation of food. They typically contain high amounts of fibre. They may belong to one of several groups of multicellular algae: red algae, green algae, and brown algae.”

“Algae!” She exclaimed. Mycroft savoured Greg’s amusement.

“I still enjoy visiting Provence, though I rarely get there these days. For several years in a row, I went to Greece...” Back when he had looked for easy sex with big, strong men. “These days, I travel so much for work, I prefer staying home when I have a little time off.”

“Staying home?!” Georgianna was horrified.

Mycroft chuckled and Greg laughed. “You’ll understand when you’re older.” Greg told her.

“I hope not!”

Greg pulled into the tiny lot of Mycroft’s B&B. “We’ll wait in the lobby while you get changed.” He told Mycroft, after he’d checked in. Greg’s hand lingered on his back and Mycroft wanted to lean into it. Instead, they shared a smile and Mycroft went up the stairs to his room.

It was small, but the view from the picture window was magnificent. He set his case on the bed and unzipped it, curious to see what Anthea had packed for him.

The tasteful, navy swim trunks were on top. Mycroft shuddered and set them aside. In addition to his running kit, there were Bermuda shorts, polo shirts, leather sandals, a largish, white linen shirt that he supposed was meant to be worn with the swim trunks, loose fitting tan linen trousers, a navy windbreaker, sunglasses and a sun hat.

He shed his suit and donned the linen trousers, pairing it with the black polo and the sandals. He peered balefully at his hairy toes — he’d have to trim that in the morning. Picking up the windbreaker, he made his way back downstairs.

Greg eyes travelled from his feet up to his face and he gave Mycroft an appreciative smile. Mycroft felt his cheeks warm and turn ruddy.

He had never been to a holiday park before. The neat rows of silver metal caravans looked grimly prison-like to Mycroft, the heated pool and colourful cabanas incongruous. But the families in the pool, grilling outside the caravans, trooping in from the beach in damp, sandy towels looked content enough — the cream of British suburbia playing happy families on holiday.

The inside of the Lestrades’ caravan was modest, a lounge at one end, a galley kitchen adjacent to the entrance, a bar with stools standing in for a dining table, a tiny bath and two small bedrooms at the other end. But the place was spotlessly clean, smelt good and the couch was comfortable. Mycroft settled in whilst Georgianna set out the deli tray and Greg opened a bottle of wine.

“Pastrami.” Mycroft observed. The deli tray could have come straight from Zabar’s, replete with rye bread, Swiss cheese, mustard, sauerkraut, potato salad, a selection of charcuterie heavy on pastrami
and corned beef, and an array of olives and pickles.

“Yeah.” Greg said, his warm eyes sparkling, and Mycroft knew he’d chosen it thinking of their first official date. They held eye contact for a long moment until Georgianna interrupted them.

“Do we need forks?” She asked, setting plates and napkins by the deli tray. “Knives?”

“Yes.” Greg told her, handing Mycroft a glass of the wine. It was an acceptable Pinot Noir that paired well with the deli meats.

They ate in the lounge, their plates on the wide coffee table, and Georgianna recounted the exploits of the last five days. Greg was relaxed and quiet, interposing here and there as his daughter talked with Mycroft. He’d left his flip flops at the door and his bare toes rested against Mycroft’s ankle. It was surprisingly, secretly erotic, that small contact.

When they’d finished, Georgianna wrapped the leftovers and stowed them in the galley fridge whilst Greg stacked their plates in the sink. They left the caravan and took the well-trod path to the beach. The sun glowed orange on the horizon, painting the sky hot pink and red. It was gorgeous.

Georgianna ran off to the knot of caravan teens, leaving Mycroft alone with Greg. They wandered along the shore together, bumping shoulders occasionally. The ocean breeze was fresh and cool and as it got darker, they walked more slowly.

“I’m glad you came.” Greg said.

“I was pleased to be invited.”

“Gigi likes you.” Greg stopped and turned towards Mycroft.

“I hope her father likes me too.” Mycroft said, his hand roving over Greg’s broad chest, catching on an erect nipple.

Greg pulled Mycroft into his arms and kissed him, his lips soft and warm. “Mmm, I’ve wanted to do that since you walked off the train.”

“Me too.” Mycroft pulled him back, his hand in Greg’s coarse silver hair. He closed his eyes as their lips met, as their breath intermingled. The kiss was long and slow, wet, and a little lazy... lacking urgency. Mycroft understood that Greg was purposely avoiding becoming too aroused. He wondered if they’d be able to steal a bit of time alone.

There were footsteps, voices, people lighting a bonfire up the beach. Greg took his hand and tugged Mycroft back towards where they’d left Georgianna.

“It is lovely here.” Mycroft said, watching the sun begin to dip into the ocean, the rosy orange sky reflected in the water. The beach was getting dim, lit by the stars and the lanterns strung along the path from the park.

“I know it’s not your thing.” Greg demurred.

“I was not raised going to the shore, that doesn’t detract from perceiving its loveliness. It rather adds, I suspect.” He rubbed his thumb over Greg’s knuckles. “I can’t allow Sherlock to ruin the coastlines of the world for me forever.”

Greg chuckled. “Tomorrow will be the real test, with the sun and the bathing.”
“I admit, I cannot remember the last time I wore a swimsuit.” That was not true, of course. Mycroft remembered vividly the swimming lessons he had endured. Even at three, he had understood the necessity of learning to swim — it would be inconceivably stupid to drown at some point because he did not like wasting time on the lessons — but he had never enjoyed it. He put an end to them four years later when Sherlock was born, but Mummy had wanted him to resume when it was Sherlock’s turn for lessons. Three-year-old Sherlock was not the pragmatic creature that Mycroft had been, and stubbornly refused to learn. Mycroft was forced to accompany him, but he never put on the dreaded swim shorts and never dipped a toe in the water. Rather he had made it a game in which Sherlock showed off for his big brother. He sat on the bleachers, watching dutifully as Sherlock splashed and wriggled through the pool. The little boy had taken to it, loving the weightless sensation, the way he could propel himself so quickly from one end of the pool to the other, the giant splashes he could make when he cannonballed illegally into the water. Even now, Sherlock’s shrill voice as he shouted “My-Coff! Watch!” from the far side of the natatorium, before leaping into the smooth blue water made him smile.

“I thought you remembered everything.” Greg said with a fond smirk.

Mycroft shrugged. “Some things don’t bear thinking about.” He said. “But tomorrow, like as not, there will be swim trunks.”

Greg laughed, a gorgeous, ringing peal. “Don’t sound so enthusiastic.”

“It *has* been a long time.”

“Mm... I’m lucky then.” He said, nuzzling Mycroft’s shoulder.

Mycroft scoffed. “We’ll find out tomorrow.”

They found Georgianna sitting shoulder to shoulder with a blonde girl who looked at Greg’s daughter as if she hung the moon. A couple boys had flopped down on the sand near them, trying to steal the girls’ attention from each other. Mostly they were failing.

Greg pulled Mycroft high up the beach to a large piece of driftwood that served as a bench, where he could keep an eye on his daughter. “I’m paranoid about leaving her out here. When I was her age, I ran wild with the other kids, me parents were happy to ignore me as long as I stayed out of trouble. But I’ve seen too much... I know how easy it would be for a predator to take her — or any of these kids. I can’t bring myself to leave them out here alone. But I try to stay out of the way.”

A woman dropped onto the driftwood next to them. “Oh, hi, Carole. Erm... this is Mycroft.”

“Hi.” She smiled and shook his hand, but her attention was clearly on the teens. “Always thought my girl would be boy-crazy like I was.” She said. “Never thought she’d be competing with the boys for the prettiest girl on the beach.” She eyed Greg and Mycroft, noting how closely they sat together. “Doesn’t bother you then?”

Greg chuckled, pulling Mycroft’s hand onto his lap. “I wouldn’t have a leg to stand on if it did.” He said.

“I wish Nigel were as accepting.” Carole said. “My husband.” She told Mycroft. “He’s not taking it well. He’s in the Caravan sulking right now.”

“He’ll come around.” Greg told her. “I’ll be out here for a while if you want to go talk to him.”

“Not sure what else I can say.” She said.
“Erm... at least they won’t get pregnant.” Greg offered.

Carole laughed. “That’s what I told Nige!” She said. “Monica — I mean ‘Mo,’ I’ve got to get used to that — Mo couldn’t have picked a nicer girl to be gone on. Georgianna’s lovely. So smart and friendly and... kind.” She scoffed. “Wish my first crush had been half so kind.” Carole peered at Mycroft. “Do you have kids?”

“I’ve never been blessed.” He told her.

She guffawed. “Blessed! That’s a good one.” She grinned at Greg, indicating Mycroft. “I like him.”

“Yeah, I do too.” Greg said.

Carole stood up, taking the hint. “I’ll let you alone... oh, Greg, Mo’s curfew is ten-thirty. If Georgianna had to be in about then, Mo might actually make it on time.”

“Understood.” Greg said glancing at his watch. “Night, Carole.” He stretched his legs out and leaned into Mycroft’s side. “That’s about half an hour.”

Mycroft wrapped his arm around Greg’s waist, holding him close. Greg had been in the ocean earlier, and he smelled of salt and sunscreen, laundry detergent, pastrami, and just a hint of aftershave. Greg must have dabbed some on before coming to pick Mycroft up at the train.

Greg kissed him, a soft brush of lips, a mingling of breath. Mycroft caressed his cheek, feeling the sandpaper of his end-of-day stubble, and pulled him back for another. It was deeper, Greg’s tongue opening his mouth and exploring. As their tongues met, a jolt shot through Mycroft, straight to his groin and his nipples, awakening all his erectile tissue. He sighed into the kiss.

Greg pulled away, panting. He had a bulge in his swim trunks that told Mycroft he was becoming excited. Greg crossed his legs.

The beach had gone from dim to dark navy — the sun was disappearing, the horizon alight with layers of colour. Orange, pink, rose, red, purple... it was stunning. Mycroft had rarely sat still for a sunset.

It was the most tired of clichés, sitting on the beach, watching the sun set with the man he loved — the man he hoped loved him back — holding hands and kissing. But Mycroft would not be anywhere else. Not for the world.

As the colours faded, the stars shone more brightly — trading one beauty for another, one cliché for another. Mycroft idly identified several constellations. (Sherlock might ‘delete’ information he deemed unnecessary, Mycroft loved knowing. He deleted nothing.) He considered pointing them out to Greg — then Greg laid his head on Mycroft’s shoulder and he was content to press his nose into Greg’s shining hair, kissing him softly, inhaling his essence.

“Oi! Wassat!? Couple’o poofs!” Rude laughter interrupted Mycroft’s reverie — and Greg’s, he felt the policeman become tense.

“Oh my god! Look at ‘em!”

This had happened to Mycroft before, but not for years. He’d never had the misfortune of the taunts becoming physical, but they were unpleasant all the same. He hated that it was happening to Greg.

“Get off the beach, you old sods! There are kiddies here.” The speaker had changed trajectory and was now leading his group directly towards Greg and Mycroft.
Greg sighed deeply. “I guess I have to do something.” He murmured grudgingly and stood up.

“Is that wise?” Mycroft asked in a low voice. “Another blow to the head...” The aggressors were a mixed group of young adults, seven in total. They were quite drunk, carrying cans of lager and, in one case, an open bottle of rum. Mycroft read them easily, the men were backpackers on holiday staying at the local hostel and partying on the beach. The women were locals, happy to join a party, happy to interact with someone new.

“These clowns aren’t going to touch me.” Greg growled.

“Whadd’ya want, shirt lifter?!” Mycroft rolled his eyes. The term ‘shirt lifter’ had always annoyed him. He stood up next to Greg.

“Greg...” Mycroft couldn’t stand it if Greg were injured again.

“I don’t need kid gloves!” Greg whispered fiercely. “I’m fine.” He stepped forward, earning a shout of, “Arsé bandit!”

“Dad?” Georgianna and her blonde friend had come over, the friend — Mo, he remembered — looked especially brassed off. Georgianna looked more nervous than angry, her eyes enormous.

“Come here, Gi.” Greg said, holding his arm out to her. “Both of you.” Georgianna, with a nervous glance at the approaching gang, skittered the three metres to Greg. Mo followed more slowly with a dark glare at the catcallers. “Stay here with Mycroft.” Greg looked him in the eye, charging him with the health and safety of the young teens, of his daughter. Mycroft put a hand on each of their shoulders protectively, wishing he could do the same for Greg.

Greg took four steps forward holding his arms out to his sides in casual supplication — making himself the target, shielding the girls. And Mycroft.

“You’re causing a disturbance, mate.” Greg told the group as they approached, laughing and clowning. One of the young men mimed fucking another from behind.

“Us? I’d say you an’ yer mate are more bloody disturbin’!” The leader of the group said. He was a scruffy, skinny man wearing only oversized swim trunks low on his hips. He held a beer and had a hand-rolled cigarette behind his ear.

“Yeah, ok. Show’s over. Move along.”

“You gonna make us, faggot?!” Scruffy asked, getting in Greg’s face. Mycroft could smell the cannabis and alcohol three metres away. He desperately wanted to shield Greg from this belligerent, scruffy man. Instead Mycroft pulled his mobile from his pocket and opened the phone app.

“If I have to.” Greg told him calmly.

Mycroft urged the girls onto the well-lit path and handed Georgianna his phone. “If this starts to go badly,” he murmured in her ear. “Call 999 and go to the caravan. Better yet, go to Mo’s — her parents are there.”

She nodded solemnly — frightened but showing no hint of panic. She was as solid as her father in a crisis.

“Oooo! Big words for a poofster...” Scruffy danced in front of Greg whilst his mates — four more men and two women — laughed and hooted.
Greg calmly stood his ground. Mycroft could see he’d shifted his weight forward to the balls of his feet. Silently, Mycroft flanked Scruffy, keeping a wary eye on the other six. From here he could jump in if needed — Mycroft was, in some ways, more dangerous than Greg. His combat training had not included restraint. He willed Scruffy to back down.

But Scruffy was either too stupid, too drunk, or too invested in putting on a show for his friends to abandon his homophobic showboating. He took a swing at Greg — it was slow and clumsy, and Mycroft almost rolled his eyes. Greg easily deflected the blow and put Scruffy on the ground. Lager splashed onto the sand as Scruffy lost his grip on the can.

Scruffy’s friends laughed. “Oi! That faggot got you, Gazzer!”

Mycroft sincerely wished they’d shut up. Scruffy bounced to his feet angrily and flung himself at Greg.

Greg sidestepped him neatly, tripping him. Scruffy’s momentum put him face down in the sand. Mycroft caught Greg’s momentary grin — he needed this. After what Clay had done to him, he needed to know that he could still defend himself and his family.

One of Scruffy’s companions started towards Greg, but Mycroft put himself between them. “People tend to forget that gay men are men — men who can kick your arse given enough provocation.” He said with his coldest expression. The young man shrank back as if Mycroft had burned him.

“Come on, lad.” Greg said to Scruffy, offering his hand to help him up. “Time to go home.”

Scruffy batted his hand away and staggered to his feet on his own, reeling drunkenly.

“You.” Mycroft said, pointing at the man who’d flinched away from him. “Take him back to the hostel. Now.”

The flincher hesitated only a moment before grabbing hold of Scruffy. “Come on, man, these poncey poofs aren’t worth it. Come on.” Scruffy looked confused as his friend dragged him down the beach after the already retreating gang.

Mycroft watched until he was certain they would not turn back. He found Greg on the path with his daughter and put his hand solidly between Greg’s shoulder blades, feeling his heat and strength, imparting what comfort he could.

Greg smiled faintly at the touch but didn’t lean into it. “I’m going to walk Mo to her caravan. You’ll take Georgianna home, yeah?”

“Yes, of course.” He scraped Greg’s spine with his thumbnail. “We’ll see you there.”

Greg nodded and walked away with the stolid blonde teenager. Mycroft heard him talking to her — she would face more harassment in her lifetime, Mycroft was sure. It was good of Greg to prepare her.

Mycroft turned to Greg’s daughter, she held out his mobile. “I could have used my own phone.” She said.

“So you could.” He’d given her his cell as calls from it were given priority. A wise precaution when facing seven drunken bigots. “Let’s go back to the caravan.”

“Those people... has that happened to you before?”
“Yes. Not in a long time.”

“What did you do?”

“Depended on where I was and who I was with. Removing myself from the situation was generally effective.” Mycroft’s ego did not require him to stand up to every cretin who had a problem with his sexuality. “But not always. Your father... he knew those people tonight wouldn’t allow us to simply walk away. Though he may have confronted them regardless.”

She giggled nervously. “You don’t approve.”

“I always urge caution, Ms. Lestrade.” Mycroft didn’t want to detail his fears for Greg to Georgianna, even though she must share an amorphous version of them. “But as you saw, your father knows how to take care of himself.” The Lestrade’s caravan came into view, third row on the left. “How has he been this week?”

“Good! Well... mostly. It rained on Tuesday. When I got up, he was on the couch... just lying there... you know how he does. I was afraid he’d lay there all day.”

“Did he?”

Georgianna grinned. “I made him play Scrabble. He’s total crap at it.” She unlocked the caravan door. “That got him off the couch.”

Later, after they’d finished the bottle of wine in the lounge, talking with Georgianna about the episode on the beach, Mo, and her jujitsu class amongst other things, she’d gone to bed.

Greg and Mycroft sat together on the couch, talking softly, kissing a bit, listening to Georgianna moving around, getting ready to sleep. When it had been quiet a while, Greg roused himself, standing up and stretching. Mycroft felt disappointed — this must be his cue to return to his hotel.

With a smirk, Greg produced a hand rolled cigarette. “You still carry a lighter?” He asked.

Mycroft offered it up. “I thought you quit.”

Greg handed the roll-up to Mycroft. “I did.” He said. “Smell it.”

It was cannabis — high quality cannabis going by the odour. “This belonged to that... that unpleasant person on the beach.” Mycroft pictured it tucked behind Scruffy’s ear.

“Yeah. He lost it.” Greg said. “I thought it might be good for us to relax a little.” His eyes searched Mycroft’s.

Mycroft saw how much Greg needed a respite — as much as he’d needed to stand up to Scruffy and his friends. He raised his eyebrows. “Drugs, Detective Inspector?” He asked with a smile.


Mycroft hadn’t smoked marijuana in well over a decade — closer to two decades. Sherlock’s troubles had ended his own very minor drug use. “Lead the way.” He said.

On the other side of the holiday camp from the swimming pool and the colourful cabanas, sat several picnic tables and a copse — all in view of the Lestrade’s caravan. Greg led him into the grove where two more picnic tables sheltered. Greg sat on the farthest bench, leaning back against the table, and lit the joint. He pulled smoke into his lungs and held it, then handed the cigarette to Mycroft who
imitated him.

It was strong stuff. Greg took another lungful and before Mycroft’s eyes, his shoulders relaxed. He realised he hadn’t seen Greg’s shoulders unbunched, hadn’t seen Greg lean back so lazily in ages. Abruptly Mycroft thought the cannabis was an excellent idea. He sat down next to Greg, feeling his own muscles loosening comfortably. He saw the caravan was still in view between the trees, but they were hidden in the dark of the grove. Only the glowing tip of the joint might be visible if someone looked in exactly the right place.

Greg kissed him with an easy smile, exhaling the potent smoke into his mouth. Mycroft had never cared for the flavour of cannabis, but it tasted lovely on Greg’s tongue. He sucked on it feeling greedy for more.

He took another turn, inhaling deeply and keeping the drug in his lungs for long seconds. Greg’s thumb found Mycroft’s nipple through his polo and scraped it, it felt divine. It stood at attention as Greg’s fingers scratched and pinched it through the cloth. Mycroft moaned. His prick was taking definite interest. He handed the roll-up back to Greg and followed it for a kiss, tracing Greg’s lips with the tip of his tongue, just the barest touch, but he felt it in every cell of his body. He moaned.

Greg responded with an urgency that pleased Mycroft beyond measure, an urgency Greg hadn’t shown in a long time. Then he pulled away — Mycroft was dismayed until he saw Greg stub the joint out carefully. Smilingly, Greg placed teasing kisses on Mycroft’s back, the other continued to explore Mycroft’s chest, fingerling his nipples, dipping lower to caress his abdomen lingeringly.

“Oh, I’ve missed you.” Greg sighed, his hand finding the hem of Mycroft’s polo shirt and slipping under it. His fingers burned trails across Mycroft’s skin.

“Mmmm...” Mycroft tugged a fistful of Greg’s hair, making him groan lustily. His fingers slid over swim shorts to the heated bulge. Mycroft palmed it, stroked it, squeezed it gently.

“Fuck!” Greg moved quickly and suddenly he was straddling Mycroft’s lap, their bulges lined up. With the smallest move of his pelvis, Greg rubbed them together, panting in Mycroft’s ear.

Mycroft grasped his waist, then let his hands drop to Greg’s arse, cupping and clutching the thick muscle as they rocked together.

Greg licked his neck sloppily, sucked on his ear. Mycroft could feel, hear, his excited breaths. Mycroft had missed this too! Missed Greg’s unrestrained passion, his outright lust. He moved under Greg, increasing the friction between them. A small, desperate noise escaped Greg’s throat.

“I wish I could fuck you right now. I would fuck you right now!” Greg crooned, his hands under Mycroft’s shirt, burning his flesh.

Gasping, Mycroft nipped Greg’s jaw. “You can!” He said. Just the thought had set him afire with need.

“We don’t have...”

Mycroft fished the packets of lubricant from his pocket, pressing them against Greg’s chest. “Hope springs eternal.”

Greg laughed. It was loud and glorious, the ringing of huge, tower bells echoing over the landscape. He took Mycroft’s face in his hands and kissed him hard. “God, I love you.” He murmured. “I love you.”
Mycroft was too high to do anything but laugh. Later... later that phrase would torment him. Now it only added to his joy with this easy, happy Greg.

Greg leapt off his lap and tugged him upright. With another sleazy kiss he turned Mycroft and pushed him face down on the picnic table. Greg’s forcefulness made him throb, and Mycroft arched his back in anticipation. He felt Greg’s hands caressing his buttocks through the thin trousers, his fingers pressing into his crevice.

Unfastening Mycroft’s trousers, Greg slid them down his thighs. He pressed his hard bulge into Mycroft’s arse as he stripped off his own t-shirt. Greg dropped it on the table top next to the packets of slick, and untied his swim shorts.

His hands returned to caress Mycroft’s back, shoving his shirt up and pulling his boxer shorts down, exposing him from mid-back to knee. Greg rubbed his bare cock against Mycroft’s arse, leaving a wet smear of lust. He could smell it, Greg’s heated arousal, over the cannabis scent that lingered in his shirt and the woody odour of the picnic table. “You’re so bloody sexy.” Greg mumbled.

Thick fingers wet with lubricant massaged the bud of muscle between his legs, skated over his perineum and reached through to slick his hard prick where it bobbed under the table. Greg pressed one finger inside him and it felt amazing. Mycroft hadn’t been touched there in months. He pushed into it, savouring the stretch and fullness. It was so intense, he felt it in his entire body. Greg introduced a second finger.

It was good, it was so good! “I’m ready.” Mycroft panted. “Give me your cock.”

“You’re sure?” Greg leaned over his back, the rasp of his chest hair tickling Mycroft’s spine. His breath was hot on Mycroft’s neck.

“Oh yes.” It must be an effect of the cannabis, the quick relaxation of his sphincter muscle. “I want you now.”

The fat, damp head of Greg’s cock assailed his hole, popping inside him. Mycroft groaned — the usual discomfort was missing, just a long, slow slide of pleasure filling his entire being. “Good…” He groaned.

“You’re so tight…” Greg sighed, fully seated within him. Mycroft moved his hips, fucking himself on Greg’s big cock. God, it was fantastic! “Mmm… greedy…” Greg said. He slid back then thrust forward, filling Mycroft again with a soft grunt.

Mycroft’s toes curled with pleasure, his eyes crossed. Greg set a slow, sleazy rhythm, fucking him with long thrusts. Mycroft dug his fingernails into the table top, groaning with the surfeit of ecstasy. His scalp tingled with it, his skin shivered with it.

Greg pressed on the small of Mycroft’s back and abruptly his cock strafed the sensitive bundle of nerves within him and Mycroft was electrified! “Ohhh!” He moaned aloud. And then again, “Oh!” as Greg’s cock slid in and out, in and out, hitting the spot over and over and over again. “Ohhhhh!!”

Abruptly Greg stopped. “Wha—?” Mycroft was cut off by Greg’s hand covering his mouth. He felt hot breath on his neck, his ear.

“Someone’s coming.” Greg whispered. They lay there, frozen, and Mycroft heard it, the footsteps, the murmur of conversation. A man and a woman passed into their view, she holding a torch. The beam of light swept their way and, Mycroft was certain the couple were coming towards them. The light played over the picnic tables outside the copse of trees and Mycroft held his breath.
Then the torch swung back the other way and the conversation slowly faded from their hearing.

Greg collapsed on top of him, his hand falling from Mycroft’s mouth. Instantly, they were giggling. Their bodies shook together, trembling with mirth and relief. “Oh god!” Greg gasped. “I forgot how paranoid pot makes me.”

“That wasn’t paranoia, that was a close call.” It felt so good to laugh together.

Greg strained to reach his mouth and they kissed awkwardly, rekindling their lust. Big hands traced the lines of Mycroft’s back and gripped his flanks. Greg rolled his hips and his big cock slid a lewd path inside him. He groaned, feeling it everywhere.

Their lovemaking took on an urgency — the idea that they were on the verge of being discovered was impossible to shake. Greg thrust with force and intention. He reached around and clutched Mycroft’s prick, jacking it in time with his fucking. With a small sound, Mycroft took over stroking his prick, his hand flying. They raced each other to climax, Greg pounding him from behind, slapping against him savagely. Mycroft floated on the thrilling sensation, floated a metre above the picnic table with a ten-foot, stone cock reaming him out…

The orgasm flooded through him, overwhelming him with ecstasy. Mycroft lost touch with his physical being, surfing a never-ending wave of pleasure. It whited out his brain, his vision, his understanding, leaving only fleshly joy. He was suspended inside the climax, drunk on it…

It dropped him gently onto the table. Greg again lay atop him, their sweaty skin sticking together. As Mycroft became more cognisant, he felt Greg’s softening cock slip out of him with a dribble of cum and his toes curled again with a mini-climax that turned him inside out once more. They lay there gasping.

Eventually, Greg stood up, pulling their moist flesh apart. The air on his damp back was cool. Mycroft straightened up as well, pulling his boxers and his trousers back up and fastening them.

Greg used his t-shirt to wipe himself down, wadding it up with the empty lubricant sachets. He re-tied the laces of his swim shorts and was again simply a more-attractive-than-average dad on holiday.

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Greg was up early. He showered the smell of sex and pot off his body before he dressed for running. He felt a bit ashamed of himself — he’d snuck out after his daughter went to bed to get high and fuck. It had been a crazy thing to do. Irresponsible.

That joint had been stronger than Greg expected. And it had made him up for it — way more up for it than he remembered pot ever making him in the past. It was someone’s special sexy blend, for sure. Scruffy Gazzer would be upset that he’d lost it. He wouldn’t be happy to know that the two poofs that’d made a fool of him had had a real party with his pot.

*He’d told Mycroft that he loved him.*

That wasn’t good — he wasn’t ready for all that yet. Surely Mycroft knew it was the marijuana speaking. Greg fretted over it… he’d have to say something. Dammit.

Mycroft knocked on the caravan door at half eight and accepted a cup of tea from Georgianna. He
was dressed in one of his impeccable running ensembles, black compression shorts with a red stripe down each side, a red and black wicking t-shirt, red socks and black trainers. He looked amazing — long, lean, absolutely edible. If his daughter weren’t there, Greg and Mycroft would not be running this morning!

Georgianna wore bright white trainers, baggy football shorts in her school colours and a form fitting white top with overlapping straps diagonally across the upper back. Greg suspected it doubled as a support bra, though she had little to support. It was ten centimetres shy of meeting the waistband of her shorts, and a tan strip of belly peeped out. On a skinny fourteen-year-old, it was girlishly cute.

Greg himself wore a sleeveless vest and a pair of running shorts from a bygone era — one in which men ran in *very short* shorts. They were light blue with white piping around the hems. As he tied his fluorescent trainers, he had to be careful not to flash his cock at the room — the mouse definitely wanted to escape the house. He’d bought them, much to Georgianna’s horror, at a vintage shop that she had dragged him into one Saturday. The look she gave him when she saw Greg was wearing the shorts today was *priceless*.

Mycroft’s face was equally as expressive — a flash of shock, then lust followed closely by a narrowing of eyes.

“How long have you had those?” Mycroft asked.

“I dunno. A while.”

He stepped behind Greg, his breath ruffling the short hair on the back of his neck. “You don’t think those are more appropriate for the bedroom than the running track?” He murmured in Greg’s ear.

“You sound jealous.” Greg teased softly.

“Perhaps I am, Detective Inspector.”

“You’ll get over it.” Greg said carelessly.

They ran on a path adjacent to the ocean, up into the hills where the beaches were at the bottom of craggy cliffs. They followed the path past scenic outlooks, through a small forest, and around the grounds of a stately manor that had been converted into a hotel for wealthier holiday-makers.

Greg liked the hills — they were a good challenge to his returning stamina. Georgianna took them very much in her long, loping stride. Mycroft huffed up them, red in the face, looking personally affronted by gravity. But he didn’t give up. He followed Greg closely, giving the icy eye to anyone who dared look at Greg in the short shorts.

Running in them was surprisingly comfortable.

Afterwards, they toasted bagels in the caravan and sat, barefoot and sweaty, in the lounge to eat them with heaps of cream cheese and bottles of water. Greg made Georgianna laugh with stupid dad jokes that she’d heard a hundred times before. Then Mycroft disappeared with Greg’s car to wash and change at his B&B.

It was a treat to see Mycroft in Bermuda shorts, his white, sinewy legs with their ginger fur exposed to the world. Greg had a hard time not smirking his pleasure as they strolled through the sculpture garden. Mycroft discussed the huge, mid-century bronzes with Georgianna. Greg was proud of his girl, listening to her talk confidently about the art. The conversation extended through lunch at The Mermaid, Georgianna’s favourite seafood restaurant from when Greg and Jude brought her to the shore when she was little.
That afternoon, Greg spread the blanket out on the sand and planted himself on it. Mycroft sat gingerly down beside him, and painstakingly brushed the sand from the edges. Greg swallowed his amusement. They watched Georgianna playing tag in the surf with Mo and a few other kids her age, laughing and dodging and splashing and screaming.

“Let me get your back.” Greg said to Mycroft, holding up the sunscreen. Mycroft was so pale, the sun could burn him through the thin fabric.

Mycroft murmured consent and shed his linen beach shirt. Greg sat behind him and massaged the lotion into his pale, freckled skin. He’d run his hands over this back so many times...

“So... last night...” Greg began.

“Greg,” Mycroft cut him off. “Last night was unique — a pleasant bubble outside of the real world. Let’s leave it be.”

“... alright...” Greg agreed slowly.

“Unless you’re suggesting we make a habit of it.” Mycroft smirked.

Greg laughed. “No. No, I like my job too much.”

“I too.” Mycroft said. He cleared his throat with what sounded like embarrassment. “What happens on holiday...”

*Stays on holiday.* He didn’t finish the phrase — in fact, he seemed chagrined to have uttered anything so trite — but Greg understood. Mycroft wasn’t going to push him. Greg smiled with relief. “Like these swim shorts.” He teased, snapping the waistband gently. “They’ll be our secret.”

Mycroft turned on him with a horrified expression. His pale chest was as ruddy as his pale cheeks, darkening the orange trail of fur that started at his navel and disappeared into the navy swim trunks. “What’s wrong with them?” He asked, reflexively trying to cover himself with his long arms..


“Hmph.” Mycroft was not amused. He picked up the linen shirt and put his arms through it with staccato movements, clutching it closed over his chest.

He was really bothered. “Hey.” Greg said. “I’m sorry. It was a joke — I didn’t mean to upset you.” He leaned in, rubbing a long, freckled thigh. Mycroft looked fantastic, tall and lean, muscle outlined under his pale skin. He was elegant, moving gracefully, the blue of the shorts highlighting the ginger fur on his legs and abdomen, highlighting his delightful freckles. “You must know how good you look, darling.”

“Don’t call me that.” Mycroft snapped.

“Oh!” Greg recoiled in surprise. “Ok...”

“You want it both ways.” Mycroft said. “You want to treat me like your boyfriend whilst you see other people!” He closed his mouth abruptly, looking away. “Never mind. I shouldn’t have...”

“You’re all right.” Greg said automatically. He pulled his hands into his own lap. Of course Mycroft knew. Greg had let himself forget again who Mycroft was. He was so stupid. He stood up, indecisive. “You’re right... sorry...” Greg mumbled. He walked away, down the beach, the opposite
direction from where Georgianna romped with her mates.

This had been a bad idea, inviting Mycroft along on holiday. Greg had wanted to allay his daughter’s fears — and if he were honest, he’d wanted to see Mycroft himself — but he’d let it all get away from him.

God, he missed Jude — not her per se, but having a partner. Having someone. On holiday the absence of a partner was magnified, he’d felt it keenly. And then Mycroft was here, looking so cool and gorgeous. The new wardrobe suited him — without his usual three-piece armour, he’d seemed more... open. And seeing him with Georgianna, so warm and engaging, ever so slightly flustered... Greg could not resist Mycroft’s charm on a normal day, having him here, out of his comfort zone, was overpoweringly seductive...

“Stupid! Stupid!” Greg excoriated himself. He’d let himself forget what Mycroft was — the puppet master, The Iceman, the bloody British government!

Did Mycroft have someone following him? Someone keeping watch, reporting back his every twitch and swallow? Or did Mycroft track him via CCTV? He’d certainly demonstrated his access to the ubiquitous cameras over the years. Or did Mycroft even need to watch him to know he’d gone out with other people? Maybe he’d only needed to see Greg to read everything he’d done in the set of his eyes and the position of his fingers.

Greg felt so alone.

Mycroft was right — Greg had treated him poorly. What had he been thinking, getting high with Mycroft? Letting his guard down so completely? Telling the man that he loved him!

Did he love Mycroft? Did it even matter? Greg wasn’t ready to commit to anything or anyone right now. His daughter, his job, his physical and mental recovery — he had no bandwidth for anything beyond that.

Yet he was drawn back to Mycroft over and over.

Greg turned around, squinting down the beach at the blanket he’d left. Mycroft was there, sitting with his chin on his knees, his arms wrapped around his long legs. Georgianna was with him, standing, searching the beach.

He knew the second she spotted him. His daughter drew her thin frame up to her full height and began marching towards him. She looked so much like her mother when she was angry, Greg wanted to laugh. Or maybe he wanted to cry — he could not name the surfeit of emotion welling within him.

He waited for her, wondering what Mycroft had told her (very little, he was certain), what she had seen, what she had assumed... he sighed as he watched her stalking down the beach. Greg could not deny that Georgianna had dogs in this race now too.

Greg had been bloody stupid.

Chapter End Notes

A longer chapter this week.
Greg’s fighting his feelings... does he unconsciously blame Mycroft for Clay? Or does he simply just need some time.

Mycroft might be more affected by the ‘I love you’ than he’s willing to admit.

Holiday Park - https://www.stivesbay.co.uk/

Tate St Ives - https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-st-ives


Otobong Nkanga - http://www.otobongnkanga.com/

Words with Friends - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Words_with_Friends

Chippy - https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/chippy

Brighton - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brighton

Lyme Regis - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyme_Regis

Cornish Deli - https://www.cornishdeli.com/

Mycroft’s B&B - http://www.tenoceanview.co.uk/

The Mermaid - https://mermaidstives.co.uk/

Greg’s running shorts - https://www.pinterest.com/pin/358951032794384229/
Eminently Suitable

Chapter Summary

Mycroft moves on.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mycroft was officially not seeing Greg any longer.

Greg was not his boyfriend, not his lover, not his date. Greg was not his friend. Greg was his brother’s police handler, his brother’s friendly cop, and as such he was useful to Mycroft. But nothing more. Not any longer.

The Detective Inspector and his daughter had driven Mycroft to the train station. They’d all climbed out of the car and Georgianna had hugged him.

“Thanks for coming, Mr. Holmes. I hope you liked the beach.”

“I liked the beach very much, Ms. Lestrade. I have never seen a sunset so beautiful.” It was the truth as far as it went. “Thank you for inviting me.”

“Will you still play Words with Friends with me?” She asked.

Mycroft smiled with real fondness. “Of course. You have yet to beat me.” He heard Greg shuffling on the pavement. “If it’s OK with your parents, that is. Goodbye, Ms. Lestrade. It’s been a pleasure.”

“Goodbye, Mr. Holmes.”

“Wait here, yeah.” Greg said to his daughter. He walked Mycroft to the station door, out of her hearing. “I wish you weren’t leaving like this.”

Mycroft met his gaze. “You’ve given me no reason to stay.”

“I apologised, Mycroft. I don’t know what else to say.”

“And that, Greg, is the problem. Goodbye, Detective Inspector. Take care of yourself.” He’d walked away, onto the platform. Greg had not followed him. When his train arrived, five minutes later, Mycroft boarded.

That had been two months ago.

Tonight, Mycroft was where he was most nights since he’d stopped seeing Greg — the same place he’d been before he’d started seeing him — at the Diogenes Club drinking very good whisky.

Something had happened today, something Mycroft needed to consider.

The interesting part had actually happened several weeks ago: he’d been in a meeting, another endless Brexit meeting, with his usual EU contacts — Van Kessel, Marbelle, Hütter, Van Kiersbruck, Hushovd and Trentin. Van Kiersbruck had brought her new aide. Mycroft barely
registered him except to note his accent was northern Italian.

The aide spoke intelligently on several issues — trade tariffs, trucking and shipping, all things that would be affected by Brexit — he had a good grasp of how these things fit into the larger picture. Mycroft briefly observed that he wasn’t a complete idiot and might be a useful tool in the future.

As the meeting wrapped up, Mycroft was already mentally moving on to his next task, briefing the hardcore Brexiteers, when the new aide had approached.

That in itself was notable, most people with whom Mycroft met could not wait to escape his presence — either because their schedule was just as packed as his own or because they were rightfully terrified of him. Generally, some combination thereof.

Mycroft dredged up the man’s name, Michelé Cancellara, and affected a patient air.

Michelé Cancellara wasn’t handsome, but he was urbane, cultured. He wore an Italian suit that hugged his tall frame perfectly, and handmade shoes of soft cordovan leather. His nails were perfectly manicured and his facial hair carefully sculpted. Small diamond studs sparkled in his earlobes.

“Yes?” Mycroft asked.

Cancellara had an engaging smile. “I was trying to think of an excuse to speak with you... but you would see through that, yes?”

“Yes.” Mycroft agreed, wondering where this was going. If he didn’t know better, he’d think the man was flirting with him.

With a cosmopolitan flourish, Cancellara gave Mycroft his card. “I would enjoy taking you to dinner sometime, Mr. Mycroft Holmes, if you would allow it.” He said. His lightly accented English was near perfect, suggesting he’d attended an English-speaking school during his formative years. He smiled at Mycroft’s blank expression. “Telephone me at your convenience, yes?”

Mycroft had tucked the card away and promptly put it out of his mind. He was busy with the Brexit nonsense, putting out fires right and left. In addition, the Chinese were being mulish, the Russians were still fighting the Cold War and they were winning some key battles, and the Americans... well, the Americans were off the rails. He could no longer trust they were allies.

Today he had walked into a meeting that he’d delegated to Anthea — he’d managed to free up ten minutes and he wanted to see how negotiations were faring. Cancellara had been in the meeting. He’d looked up from his chair and met Mycroft’s eyes with just the slightest smirk — a smirk that said he knew Mycroft had forgotten all about him, that he’d expected it. Normally, Mycroft would have stared him down coldly, freezing him with his glare... but there was something about the man...

Instead, Mycroft had nodded at him and favoured him with the smallest of rueful smiles. Back in his office, he’d found the man’s card in his desk.

Sipping his whisky, Mycroft contemplated the card. It was thick enough that the corners were sharp, and it had a satiny finish that felt good under his fingers. Michelé Cancellara’s name was printed in pale gold on a deep aubergine field. On the opposite side, the background was gold and Cancellara’s contact information had been printed in the aubergine. It was a lovely object.

Mycroft found that he was intrigued. Not least because he missed having sex — he’d gone for years without, but now he craved it again. He’d found himself considering looking for a quick hook-up more than once. He had, of course, dismissed that idea. He’d been going cold turkey, but perhaps
Cancellara offered another option.

Balance of probability suggested that Michelé Cancellara wanted something from him — not sex, rather a favour of some sort or advancement… though he was willing to have sex with Mycroft to get it.

Michelé took him to an Italian restaurant. Mycroft had to admit to being just a bit disappointed — he wasn’t the biggest fan of Italian cuisine as a whole. There was nothing wrong with it, but every Italian he’d ever met was arrogantly proud of the country’s food — so much so that it was nigh impossible to get any other sort of cuisine in Italy. Mycroft assumed it was some sort of deep-seated cultural inferiority complex given them by the French.

Honestly, he’d hoped for something unexpected — nothing as elaborate as a puzzle room in London’s only lighthouse or sussing out the thief in a crowded gay club... just something... interesting.

“This restaurant is run by a family from my hometown, Como.”

Mycroft mentally prepared himself for osso bucco. At least there was less of a chance of pasta.

He hadn’t called the Italian immediately — he didn’t want Cancellara to think him too keen. And he needed time to conduct the rigorous background check.

Mycroft had found nothing amiss. Cancellara had been born and lived in Como until the age of twelve when he was sent to boarding school in Switzerland. That school’s primary languages were French and Swiss German, but English was the unofficial third — Cancellara was fluent in all three in addition to his native Italian. (The school’s primary sport had been skiing, with slopes right outside the school doors, but that was neither here nor there.) He’d been arrested once in Milan when he was seventeen for public intoxication and causing a ruckus, but that was the extent of his form. He’d attended King’s College in Oxford, reading economics, and afterwards moved to Rome where he earned a law degree. For the next ten years, he worked as an aide for several influential Italian parliamentarians.

Two years ago, in his mid-thirties, Cancellara had moved to Brussels to work for the EU. He’d been with Sanna Van Kiersbruck only four months — she’d stationed him in London whilst Brexit was being negotiated. It was wise to have a trusted man on the ground, a back channel for information. Mycroft himself had several people positioned around Europe and one in Washington.

“Mr. Cancellara.” Mycroft said, when the man picked up his call. “This is Mycroft Holmes.”

“Ahh! Mr. Holmes. I was hoping that you had not forgotten about me. Please, you must call me Michelé.

Mycroft tasted the name. “Michelé.” It felt good on his tongue. “What is it that you wanted?”

“Only your company, Mr. Holmes. Only to get to know you. I am alone here in London, you see.”

“I’m sure someone such as yourself could not want for companionship.”

“Please excuse me, but you are wrong. Perhaps I am too particular — I don’t desire the company of just anyone.”

“I’m rather particular myself.” Mycroft told him.

“Yes, that I could see, even in the large meeting. You are solitary, no?”
“Yes.” Mycroft admitted.

“It is intriguing to me how such a fascinating man is alone.”

Mycroft sighed aloud. “Mr. Cancellara, you have potential, but I’m rapidly losing patience. Tell me what it is that you’re after and if it’s in my interest, I’ll see what I can do.”

“Mr. Holmes… Mycroft… you misunderstand me. Or perhaps it is my fault, yes? You are a man who does favours for many people, you think that is what I want too. I had not considered that aspect. I can only assure you, that I do not have an ulterior motive.” Michelé paused, but when Mycroft didn’t reply, he plunged on. “If you are available Saturday evening, allow me to take you to dinner. I know a place with an excellent wine cellar. If you do not enjoy yourself, you have lost nothing but a few hours.”

“Mr. Cancellara…”

“Michelé, please. Say ‘yes,’ Mycroft. You will not regret it.”

Balance of probability suggested that Mycroft would, at some point, regret it. But he was lonely, missing Greg more than he would ever admit. The loss wore on him, ground him down. Perhaps that is what Michelé Cancellara saw in him — desperation.

“My car will pick you up at 7 pm at your lodgings.” Mycroft told him sharply. “I’d better not regret it. Goodbye, Mr. Cancellara.” He rang off before Michelé could respond.

The Como Inn, the restaurant Michelé had chosen, did have a very fine wine cellar with many vintages from the region. They shared a bottle of Sforzato di Valtellina, a full-bodied, dry red, rich in flavours of stewed plums, tar and roses. It had a high alcohol content for wine but was nowhere near the potency of the Chinese Baijiu.

That thought inevitably led Mycroft to compare the rich veal and risotto with the conveyor belt dim sum…

He put it firmly out of his mind. Dwelling on things lost did him no good.

“Are you enjoying London?” Mycroft asked the Italian.

He smiled mischievously. “I have lived in Belgium for almost two years. Yes, I am enjoying London very much.”

Mycroft laughed. He rather liked Belgium himself. But after a decade with the excesses of Rome, Brussels must feel very dreary and small.

“You have travelled very much, I think.” Michelé remarked.

“I have. For work more than for pleasure.”

“What was your favourite? Outside of the United Kingdom?”

“My favourite… that’s difficult. New York City is singular in many ways… Mexico City… I enjoyed Venice very much when I was young… Hong Kong… Macau… there are so many interesting places.

“But I’ve found that there’s something to recommend almost every place. Australia, for example, is largely uninteresting — it looks very much like the dull parts of the United States, but with more
poisonous snakes. However, I had the opportunity to sit down with wallabies, to feed them. The smaller ones would draw your hands towards them by grabbing your fingers with their dexterous front paws. It was completely charming. And the quokka… a large, attractive rodent without predators, and thus without fear — it walked into my lap of its own accord like a cat and looked up at me with its pleading eyes… it is an experience I could have had no where else.”

“That does sound redeeming — worthy of a nineteen hour flight. You are a lover of animals?”

Mycroft shrugged and sipped his wine.

“What of Brussels? There are no little marsupials, what is there to enjoy?” Michèle asked with his winning smile.


“And Prague? The Astronomical Clock?”

“Goodness no — Cerny babies. Cerny babies crawling up and down Zizkov Television Tower. Family crests made of human bones.”

Michèle smirked. “New Zealand?” He asked. “What makes it worth the long plane ride? Certainly not the sheep?”

“Milford Sound and many other areas of incredible scenic beauty. Hokey-Pokey ice cream.”

“Texas?” Michèle challenged.

“American-style biscuits and gravy. Collard greens with ham. Banana pudding, fried chicken and waffles — although to be fair, that’s what’s good about most of the American south. Possibly the only thing.”

Michèle laughed. “Frankfurt.”

“Almost nothing. But I did have an excellent currywurst there once.”

“You make the best of it, yes. In Roma, everywhere it is interesting. Around every corner, there is an ancient fountain or fantastic restaurant, a charming villa or a clothier of surpassing taste… and everyone is beautiful…”

“It’s an embarrassment of riches.” Mycroft observed wryly. “You must miss it terribly. Especially here in the damp, grey north.”

Michèle shrugged. “London too has its charms.” His fingers brushed lightly over Mycroft’s wrist.

Mycroft met the dark brown eyes, took in the generous mouth, the aquiline nose, the ghosts of acne scars on his olive cheeks. He studied the wavy, dark blonde hair, brushed back and shining with pomade, the tidy beard and mustache, the studs sparkling in his ears, the fine Italian suit and tie… You’ll do, he thought to himself and smiled.

After dinner, after strong Italian coffee and a shared bonet — a Northern Italian version of crème brûlée that was mercifully less sweet than its French counterpart — they walked out into the warm August evening.

Six months ago, this would have been the perfect time for a cigarette. Mycroft half hoped Michèle
would light-up so he’d have an excuse to start smoking again.

Michelè did not oblige him. He tucked his hands in his pockets as they strolled together down the high street. They were in Whitechapel, rather close to Mycroft’s flat in Moorgate — walking distance — but he let the Italian lead him in the opposite direction.

“Would you care to come to my place for a digestif?” Michelè asked.

Mycroft suppressed his smirk. “Fernet-Branca I presume.” Fernet-Branca was a bitter Milanese liqueur traditionally drunk after a big meal.

Michelè punched him lightly on the arm. “Do not make fun of me, Mycroft Holmes.” He said. “I prefer limoncello, but I have an Armagnac for your more refined British palate.”

“How could I possibly turn that down?”

“You cannot.” The Italian smiled his mischievous smile and slipped his arm through Mycroft’s. “We should get a taxi.” His flat was in fashionable Pimlico, nearer the government buildings he frequented. Like Mycroft himself, Michelè’s flat was courtesy of the government he worked for.

Michelé flagged a cab and held the door open for Mycroft. But Mycroft didn’t move from the pavement.

“What is it? What is wrong?” Michelé asked.

“I think, perhaps, not tonight.” Mycroft told him. He worked to keep his face expressionless.

Michelé apologised to the cabbie and let him go.

“You do not like me?” He asked.

“You’re very direct.”

“I am Italian.”

“Indeed. It’s not that I don’t like you...” Mycroft said as they resumed walking. “It’s...” For once, words failed him. He wasn’t certain what he was trying to express. “Why do you want to take me home?” He asked with genuine curiosity.

Michelé sighed. “I saw you in the meeting and I thought, ‘he is hungry.’”

“Hungry?”

“Like a wolf who has not eaten in too long, yes? A lone wolf with no fellows with whom to hunt.”

Mycroft laughed angrily. “And you thought you’d offer yourself up as prey?”

“You misunderstand me, Mycroft.”

“Illuminate me, please.”

“You are a beautiful man. Elegant. Strong. That is obvious to everyone, yes? And you are a wolf — dangerous and cunning. But wolves are not meant to be solitary. It is a burden on your heart. Me... I am not a wolf, but I can ease your burden. I can make you less alone... ah, I see. You are suspicious of me, yes? You are feral, you are suspicious of everyone.”
Mycroft didn’t answer. What could he say to that? A feral wolf?

Michélè stopped walking, taking Mycroft’s arm to stop him too. “Perhaps next time you will want a digestif.” He said.

“Perhaps.” Mycroft allowed.

The Italian smiled. “I will look forward to next time.”

Had he just agreed to another date? Yes. Yes, he would like to see this man again. “You have my number. Text me.” He said.

They didn’t go out again for ten days and then just for a quick lunch, but they texted several times a day. Michélè was a witty and amusing correspondent and Mycroft enjoyed it very much, suppressing a private smile at his smartphone during meetings and in front of his aides.

Friday night, Michélè invited Mycroft for a homemade dinner at his flat. Mycroft feared that meant pasta, but he supposed he could eat it politely. Perhaps he’d be fortunate and Michélè would make fish. He brought a bottle of Rosé produced near his Grandmère’s home where he had spent summers as a child. Rosé was refreshing when it was hot.

It had been hot in London for days, the temperature reaching to 35 in the oppressive afternoons. Mycroft’s flat had air conditioning, but most of London was without. His office was stifling despite the fans moving the heated air around.

Many politicians had abandoned London, flocking to the seaside in Britain and Europe. Most civil servants did not have the luxury of taking a vacation simply because the weather had become very un-British. Mycroft supposed he could escape if he were so minded… but he would never go to the beach again. He didn’t need to be reminded of his humiliation. And he had so much work to do…

But the humidity made the heat nigh unbearable. Mycroft was not afraid of a little perspiration — he ran religiously. But sweating enough to wilt his crisp summer suits, feeling a river flowing down his spine, soaking through his vest and shirt, drenching the waistband of his trousers… the contents of his pants a swampy horror… he showered at least twice a day, morning and evening. If he had an important meeting in the afternoon, he went so far as to return home to bathe and put on a fresh suit of clothes at midday.

He had done just that after work, showering and changing into a more casual outfit, before going to Michélè’s for dinner. But within ten minutes of leaving his flat, sweat was soaking through his shirt front and his smart seersucker suit was drooping damply. Before he rang the bell, Mycroft mopped vainly at the sweat dripping from his hairline and glowing uncomfortably on his neck with his handkerchief.

Michélè was used to the hotter weather of southern Europe, and somehow looked perfectly comfortable in his pale polo and khaki trousers. Mycroft hated him intensely.

He lived on the second floor of a lovely regency three-flat. It was airy and open, all one room but for the bedroom and bath. The hardwood floor sported several large woven rugs delineating the lounge, the dining area and the study. A small kitchen nestled adjacent to the dining table. A pony skin couch stood out boldly on a large bright kilim near the centre of the room, a coffee table and flat-screen telly in front of it. The dining set was Scandinavian and rested on its own brightly patterned rug. A large figural painting dominated the open wall by the kitchen. The result was cacophonous.

The windows along the front wall had a southern exposure, protected from direct sunlight, and they
had been thrown open. Their gauzy curtains waved in the light breezes. The big room had a ceiling fan and Michelé had a rotating fan, turning lazily in a corner. The flat was at least twelve degrees cooler than outside — still too warm, but not nearly so stifling.

Michelè took his suit coat, raising an eyebrow at the state of Mycroft’s olive shirt. At least the grey-striped seersucker hid its dampness. “I can lend you a shirt, yes? Wait here, I will get it.” He walked off without waiting for an answer — which Mycroft appreciated. He would have demurred given the chance, but he wanted desperately to shed the sodden shirt and stand under a cool shower…

The Italian brought him a pristinely white polo shirt and ushered him to the loo. Mycroft stripped off his collared shirt and vest and wiped himself down with a wet flannel. He washed his face and soaking the flannel in cold water, rested it on the back of his neck. Slowly his core temperature cooled, and the sweat stopped dripping from his brow, neck and underarms, drying on his skin.

The white shirt looked good with the seersucker trousers. If Mycroft’s face was still ruddy from the heat, well, there was nothing to be done about it.

“Better, yes?” Michelè asked. He was in the little kitchen. The Rosé was open, breathing on the worktop, as he arranged antipasto on a platter. “It is too hot to turn on the oven.” He said apologetically.

“No, this is perfect. I would be hard pressed to consume anything hot right now.”

Michelé put the tray on the dining table with a fresh caprese salad and a sweating bottle of fizzy water. He put the wine in an ice bucket. “It is not sparkling, but it would not do to drink warm Rosé on such a night.”

Mycroft agreed wholeheartedly.

Before he sat down, to get it out of the way, Mycroft took Michelè’s hand and pulled him close, inhaling the Italian’s musky bergamot cologne. He touched the man’s face and kissed him, tasting salami and wine on his tongue. His moustache tickled strangely. Touching the other man in the warm room made him hotter. He let go.

For a moment, Michelè looked ready to dive into the deep end, swaying towards Mycroft. Then he smiled slightly and stepped back. He indicated a chair at the dining table. “Sit.”

Mycroft sat. The antipasto was genius — Mycroft had barely any appetite in the heat, but the cool meats, cheeses, figs, olives and artichoke hearts were delicious, and he found himself eating heartily. The Rosé was an excellent accompaniment.

He told Michelé about his Grandmére’s home in Provence, how he still felt an attachment to the area. Michelé told him about Como and Milan and the village outside Zurich where his boarding school had been. They talked of their childhoods — Michelé’s sounded both more prosaic and more idyllic than Mycroft’s own.

“Your brother, yes, many people talk of your brother. He is a detective — with the police, no?”

“Sherlock consults for the police, but he is not one of them. He takes private clients as well.” Mycroft couldn’t hide his slight moue of displeasure.

Michelé smiled. “You don’t approve?”

“I don’t disapprove. Not that my brother cares much for my approval or disapproval. I’m… content… in the knowledge that he has found an occupation that interests him.” Interests him enough
to keep him sober — Mycroft didn’t care to share that caveat.

“He has a partner, yes?”

Mycroft went still, wondering at Michelé’s interest. Would he characterise John Watson as his brother’s partner? In some ways, yes, absolutely. In other ways… “Why do you ask?”

Michelé laughed. “I’m a very poor detective. I look for clues in your brother when you sit here before me. I am told he is like you and yet unlike you… he has someone to whom he is close… have you?”

“I have had partners.” Mycroft told him.

“So cold… but you have had your heart broken, yes? I too. Perhaps that is why I left Roma when I did, to mend my heart far away from the one who damaged it.”

“The human condition. We none of us can escape it.” Mycroft downed the last of the wine and stood up. “Excuse me for a moment.” He said and escaped to the loo. He was not willing to speak about Greg, not even in the abstract.

When he returned, Michelé had cleared the table and was standing at the cupboard that doubled as his bar. “A digestif?” He asked.

Mycroft smiled lightly. “I believe I owe you that.” He said. “Fernet Blanca, was it?”

“Limoncello.” Michelé replied, pouring a small glass. “But you do not prefer that, yes? I have Armagnac?”

“Armagnac would be lovely.” Mycroft said, hoping it would be drinkable. He’d once been served a Tesco brand Armagnac that had put him off the liqueur for years.

Michelère poured their drinks and gestured towards the pony skin sofa. Mycroft eyed it dubiously but situated himself on it. As expected, it was both slippery and rough. The Italian changed the music, from ballads to some sort of non-symphonic instrumental. He joined Mycroft on the uncomfortable sofa, his knees pointed towards the other man.

“It’s horrible, no?” He said, plucking at the pony skin. “The rooms were furnished. I suspect the designer wanted rid of it, so here it came.”

“A sound hypothesis.” Mycroft murmured, sipping his drink. To his relief it was passable bordering on good. “When you left Rome, what decided you on sombre Brussels?”

“Bicycles.”

“Bicycles?” Mycroft asked.

“I like the racing. There is a lot of racing in Italy, but there is more in Belgium. Every weekend there are races. If I have to leave Roma, I wanted to go where there were races.”

“Bicycle racing.” Mycroft felt mildly incredulous.

Michelé smiled. “And Italian politics… it is a circus. I got tired of trying to...” He gestured expressively. “Herd clowns.”

Mycroft chuckled appreciatively. He’d dealt with Italian parliamentarians in the past.
“The European Union... I wanted to be more serious... to do something meaningful. That it is the heart of bicycle racing... it was... fortunato... destino.”

“Destino... yet you find yourself here in London.”

“Alas.” Michelé smiled winningly.

“Are you happy with your position?”

“For now, yes. Signora Van Kiersbruck is very good, very smart. It is an education, working with her.” He took a swallow of his Limoncello. “You, I think, have worked with her for many years?”

“I have. Sanna is effective, efficient. I prefer it when our interests align.” Mycroft pursed his lips. “Does she know that you and I are socialising?”

“Oh yes. She warned me — told me not to cross you. You are powerful, yes?”

Mycroft smiled into his drink. “Indeed.”

“And you are dangerous, yes? A wolf.”

Mycroft looked for a sign that Michelè was mocking him. He didn’t find it. “Yes.” He agreed seriously. “When necessary.”

Michelè reached over, brushing his knuckles over Mycroft’s knee. “Let us hope it will not be necessary, yes?”

Setting his glass down on the coffee table, Mycroft captured the Italian’s hand. He slid over the pony skin until their knees touched. Smiling softly, Mycroft reached out and caressed Michelè’s whiskered jaw, down his neck and around to push his fingers into the curls above his collar. They were slightly damp, betraying the Italian’s seeming imperviousness to the heat.

He pulled Michelé forward into a kiss. Mycroft let it last, surrounding himself with musky bergamot and almond-scented pomade, and the unaccustomed tickle of a moustache.

Michelè made a small noise as they kissed, a moan of pure lust. It woke Mycroft’s libido, firming his nipples and making his prick take notice. The Italian pulled him closer, his hands stroking Mycroft’s arms and back. They were hot on his burning skin.

The Italian’s hands found the hem of the white polo and his manicured fingers stroked over Mycroft’s chest and abdomen, whilst he placed beard-fuzzy kisses along his cheek and temple. Mycroft nuzzled Michelè’s neck, tasting salt.

The Italian rose up and pushed Mycroft against the back of the slippery pony skin sofa, straddling his lap and kissing him lustfully. He was erect and straining in the tight khaki trousers.

Fingers found his nipples as lips travelled over his jaw, trailing raspy moustache kisses down his neck. Mycroft caught his breath as his prick responded, thickening and pressing against the molten heat of Michelè’s erection. He was sweating again, feeling it drip down his ribs and spine, but now he didn’t care. He undulated his hips, seeking friction — and slid on the slippery sofa, dumping Michelè off his lap.

Mycroft tittered, but Michelé was not amused. “Cazzo!” He swore. “Questo pezzo di divano merda!”

“Calmati.” Mycroft told him gently, taking his hand and pulling him onto his feet. “Come back.” For
just a moment, Mycroft could not help thinking that Greg would have giggled madly at being dumped on the floor by the pony skin sofa. He firmly put Greg out of his mind.

Michelé looked mildly abashed, but still out-of-sorts with the sofa. “Would it be too forward to ask you to come into my bedroom? It is air conditioned.”

Mycroft chuckled. “An excellent idea! Lead the way.” He allowed the Italian to pull him up and took the opportunity to kiss him again, holding his face with his hand.

The bedroom was dim and wonderfully cool, a window unit buzzing quietly on the far sash. The shades had all been pulled tightly down, keeping the heat of the sun at bay. A large, low platform bed dominated the room, and a closet had been built along the short side, its sliding doors covered with full-length mirrors.

As the sweat cooled on his body, Mycroft pulled the polo over his head and dropped it on the bed. Then he took hold of the hem of Michelé’s shirt and lifted it off over his head as well. They wrapped their arms around each other, kissing, Michelé’s fingers tracing down Mycroft’s spine like silk, just a whisper of sensation that made him mad for more. He pushed himself forward, grinding against the Italian. They were of a height, making it easy to press lips and hips together.

Manicured fingers found his flies and unfastened them. As his trousers were shoved down his thighs, Mycroft spared a thought for his sweaty genitalia, hoping he was not too disgusting. But Michelé’s hands on his prick drove all such thoughts from his mind. He scrabbled at the khakis, opening them and freeing the Italian’s cock.

Michelé was very slim, and nude he looked almost boyish — Donatello’s David made flesh. He either had very little body hair, or he had it removed — his olive skin was smooth and soft, marred only by a series of small moles. Even his bush had been tended, trimmed short around his prick. It was average-sized, not long like Mycroft’s own, nor thick and longish like Greg’s — a utilitarian five inches, its dark red tip emerging from its cowl like a shy monk.

Neither of them managed to take their trousers completely off — Greg’s rule of removing the shoes first had been ignored. Trousers and pants rucked down to their knees, they rubbed together and kissed, consuming one another, fighting with tongues and teeth and hands...

Michelé produced an expensive-looking bottle of vanilla-scented lubricant. He pushed Mycroft down onto his bed, and they lay across it awkwardly, their shod feet hanging off the end. Michelé kissed his chest, tongued his nipples, his hand caressing Mycroft’s arse. He lapped at the salty sweat on Mycroft’s neck and shoulder, he worked his way to Mycroft’s underarm and pressed his nose into the damp copper hair. Lifting Mycroft’s arm, Michelé rubbed his face deep in into his pit.

It wasn’t an unusual desire, smelling a man’s sweat — Mycroft had experienced it before, men licking and snuffling under his arms. It had never turned him on, but it wasn’t enough to turn him off. Michelé thoughtfully kept his mouth closed, so Mycroft wouldn’t be faced with kissing his own underarm scent.

Sex is never elegant, Mycroft told himself as they stroked each other off with their hands. And he too had desires that not every man that slept with other men shared. Not everyone liked to be penetrated. Not everyone was willing to rim or be rimmed. Not everyone wanted to get high and bend over a picnic table for a thick cock.

Some didn’t care for kissing. That, for Mycroft, was a deal breaker. If he were going to have sex, he wanted to be snogged silly.
Michelé clearly enjoyed kissing and he was quite good at it. Mycroft was willing to indulge his interest in underarms — it could have been so much worse, he thought. It could have been bondage or group sex. Or urine. He shuddered a little — then reminded himself that there was nothing wrong with any of that if one were aroused. If both parties were aroused. He himself had dabbled…

He was thinking too much. Mycroft shut his eyes and put everything out of his mind except Michelé’s hands on his prick… it felt amazing, someone else’s hands on him… masturbation never felt like this! His hands were so clever... hot and slick and squeezing him just right... cradling his bollocks and stroking his perineum… twisting his wrist on the upstroke, thumb smearing the wet arousal that dripped from his slit…

He came in a rush, shooting onto Michelé’s chest with a soft exclamation. The Italian wrung the pulses of pleasure from him and he floated, shivering, in ecstasy... it was over too soon and shaking with an aftershock or two, he scooped up some of his come and resumed stroking the other man, smearing it on his prick with the vanilla-scented slick.

He pressed Michelé onto his back and lay on his side next to him, kissing him, his hand flying, twisting… instead of reaching down for his bollocks, Mycroft pulled the Italian’s face into his moist underarm, forcing his nose deep, feeling his lips and tongue working enthusiastically, the scrape of his beard… the man came, grunting and crying out, his come copious and thick.

Mycroft didn’t stay long afterwards.

“Sleep with me tonight, yes?” Michelé asked.

He’d kissed the man, tasting salt on his lips and running his fingers through the damp and dishevelled, dark blonde waves. “I can’t tonight. I have an early meeting tomorrow for which I must prepare.”

“Tomorrow, it is Sunday.”

“No rest for the wicked.” Mycroft told him wryly. It was half a lie — he didn’t have an early meeting, but he did have plenty of work piled on his desk. He was feeling restless to get to it.

Michelé relented with good grace. Mycroft kissed him goodbye — he was getting used to the facial hair, it was really, quite a pleasing sensation — it didn’t hurt that Michelé was excellent with his tongue and lips and teeth… Mycroft wagered that he gave a good bocchino.

“Text me.” He told the Italian. “I like it when you text me.”

“I will. I will see you again, yes?”

“Yes.” Mycroft affirmed. “I look forward to it.”

Michelé nodded, satisfied. He kissed Mycroft again, lingeringly, and then let him walk out the door.

The night was still hot and muggy — Mycroft loathed August with every fibre of his being. And he was gasping for a cigarette. It was relatively early still, the streets well populated with Saturday night revellers. Mycroft wended his way along the Thames, sweating through his olive shirt again, past the Tate, past Westminster Abbey and the PMs residence towards Embankment.

Abruptly he was tired of walking in the oppressive air and flagged a taxi. It was mercifully air conditioned and he luxuriated in it, the rivulets of sweat chilling his heated skin. He was home in ten minutes, enveloped in the cool, dry atmosphere. He greeted Bast, carrying her with him into the bedroom like she were a little queen. He set her on the bed, but she jumped down and followed him
into the loo where he stripped off his sweaty clothes. He wanted a wash badly.

In the shower he could not help but think of Greg, compare the dates with Michelè to his assignations with the policeman. Sex with Greg had been easy — he was madly attracted to the man and their desires just seemed to fit together. It had been fun and a little wild, enthusiastic certainly. He loved how much Greg had laughed — during sex, after orgasm, at Mycroft’s blushes...

But Greg was the past. Mycroft liked Michelè Cancellara. He had a good mind and they shared a number of interests. He was attracted to the Italian — he had a wiry strength belied by his boyish frame — and he had no complaints about the sex they’d had. And whilst he might spend time watching men in Lycra ride bicycles, Michelè did not spend hours shouting at men kicking a ball around a field — that had been one of Greg’s least attractive traits. And the Italian would not insist they take the Underground.

Michélè Cancellara was eminently suitable — charming, attractive, intelligent… and if he were doing this because he wanted something — something more than the companionship he claimed — well, it wouldn’t be the first time. Perhaps Mycroft would even grant it. And if things didn’t work out, well, Michelè would leave London for Brussels or Rome or wherever he liked, and Mycroft would not have to think of him again.

Clean and cool, Mycroft slipped into bed — he’d moved it back to where it belonged, the massive headboard against the wall between the loo and the dressing room doors, the footboard centered on the fireplace on the far wall. The room was in balance again, orderly, and that pleased him. Bast jumped up and walked over his legs, mewing softly. Mycroft lay on his side and made a circle with his arm. She settled herself in it and he pet her, feeling her chainsaw purr reverberate in his chest until he drifted off.

Chapter End Notes

I think he misses Greg more than cares to admit, even to himself. But it hurt too much to stay with someone who wasn’t ready for the same level of commitment. He'd been patient and caring... but Greg had different needs.

Lombardy, the region of Italy where Michelé is from - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lombardy


Sforzato di Valtellina wine - https://www.wine-searcher.com/regions-sforzato+di+valtellina


The Atomium – it’s SO cool! - https://www.wine-searcher.com/regions-sforzato+di+valtellina
Belgian street waffles - https://www.tastecooking.com/waffle-town/

René Magritte - https://www.tastecooking.com/waffle-town/

James Ensor – Check out ‘Christ’s Entry Into Brussels!’ - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Ensor

David Cerný Babies and Zizkov Television Tower - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babies_(%C4%8Cern%C3%BD)

Milford Sound - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milford_Sound


Southern biscuits and gravy - http://www.spoonforkbacon.com/biscuits-gravy/

Banana Pudding – yes, those ARE nilla wafers! - https://www.myfoodandfamily.com/recipe/050744/easy-southern-banana-pudding

Chicken and waffles - https://www.williams-sonoma.com/m/recipe/ad-hoc-fried-chicken-and-waffles.html

Currywurst - https://www.willflyforfood.net/2018/08/13/germany-the-currywurst-phenomenon/

Bonet, Italian crème bruleé - https://www.justcrumbs.ca/2018/05/31/bonet-how-the-icco-taught-me-about-this-northern-italian-dessert/

Fernet-Branca - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernet-Branca

Limoncello - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limoncello

Armagnac - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armagnac


Donatello’s sculpture of the Biblical David - https://www.thoughtco.com/donatello-profile-1788759

Next week - We check in on Greg.
The Absurdity Of It All

Chapter Summary

Greg’s Autumn had been pretty good...

What’s Martin Freeman’s problem with Sherlock and John getting it on?! Cumberbatch doesn’t seem to have an issue — although I believe Martin has actually looked at fan art and perhaps read an intro to a fic or two, whilst Ben is oblivious. Still, it’s not a reflection on Martin’s manhood. Chill out, bucky.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg surveyed the scene.

Four dead, blown to bits by a parcel bomb — the second parcel bomb in ten days.

He felt grimly angry watching the forensic techs placing red flags where they found human tissue. None of the four bodies were intact — the largest of the remains was a ragged, armless, headless torso with one leg. Greg wasn’t certain if it had belonged to a man or a woman. Mercifully it had been covered with one of the yellow tarpaulins that forensics used.

He saw bits of burnt wrapping paper, the festive red and green jarring amongst the slaughter. This was like the last one, then, the explosives had been wrapped for Christmas inside the brown paper.

Who did that? Who wrapped a bomb twice?

“Donovan, CCTV.”

She was already on her mobile. “On it, boss.”

“Do we have the mail carrier?”

“Bishop’s tracking him down. Him or her.”

“Tell Farooqi to stay here, see if the techs come up with anything we can use.”

“Will do, boss.”

“And have him help collect statements from the rest of the office staff, anyone who was in the building. Do we have names for the deceased yet?”

“Pending official confirmation, yes.” The Sergeant read off their names.

Greg sighed. “Dig up next of kin. We can interview their families when we tell ‘em.”

“We can’t have the families ID them.”

“DNA, Donovan. We’ll need to collect a sample for each — hairbrush, toothbrush, something like that. We’re not making anyone look at what’s left.” Greg said. “Talk to the hospital, let me know
when we can interview the wounded.”

“Yes, boss. None of ‘em were in the room though.”

“No, Donovan, everyone in the room is dead.”

Greg’s autumn had been going well before some nut job started mailing explosives wrapped as Christmas parcels to offices around London. Interviews of people at the bombing indicated that the parcel appeared to be from a vendor. They’d expected a dried fruit basket or individually wrapped Christmas puddings for the office to share. One woman had tearfully shown Greg the break room — the ceiling partially collapsed from the blast — where she’d set out the spiced nuts and biscuit tins that they’d been sent by companies that relied on them for business.

“I put it on his desk.” She sobbed. “He liked to open the gifts.”

Only one person had been killed by the first bomb. He’d made DI Samuels lead on the case, looking into who might want to kill the businessman.

But now there was a second explosion, Greg stepped in. DI Samuels and her team became part of a task force headed by DCI Lestrade.

Greg didn’t need this. Ten months on, his recuperation was almost complete — he no longer became so exhausted he had to leave work early. His stamina was greatly improved, in large part due to his renewed dedication to running. His speed and endurance had returned to pre-skill fracture levels, and then some — helped by the fact, certainly, that he’d not picked up the cigarettes since. He’d run the Berlin Marathon in September. He wasn’t down to his personal best of three hours yet, but he would be by March when he planned to run in the London Marathon.

After the marathon in Berlin, Greg had pulled a gorgeous distance runner from South Africa. They’d had an athletic go in her hotel room before they both flew home. It had been... freeing.

The weight loss and the exercise had honed his body and taken years off his face. Men and women had begun reacting to him as they had when he was twenty — smiling at him, flirting with him, buying him drinks, outright propositioning him... the silver hair suited him he guessed. Greg had begun taking judicious advantage, enjoying sex now and again. When he felt like it. When all the stars aligned. He remembered why he’d grown tired of it, why he’d looked for monogamy... but he also remembered how much fun it was to slag around a bit.

Since Berlin, he was plagued less by the nightmares. He didn’t always have to sleep with his back to the wall anymore either. Though he rarely slept over with his assignations, he felt that he could if he chose.

And John Clay was in bloody Wakefield — the high security prison in West Yorkshire — locked up with all the other dangerous sex offenders. He wouldn’t be eligible for parole for ten years!

Greg had a little celebration all by himself when he heard Clay’s sentence. He went to his local and had the bartender pour a dram of her best whisky. He’d savoured every sip. It had cost him 32 quid and it was worth every penny.

A Royal Marine, still dewy with youth — and built like a bloody fitness model — had taken the stool next to him.

“Oi, chief.” He said softly. “Spot ye a pint?” He had a dense Glaswegian accent.

Greg looked the kid over sceptically — the green beret angled over the gingery crew cut, the dark
‘commando’ t-shirt that clung to his ripped torso, his crisp tan uniform jacket and pants tucked into combat boots. The freckles standing out on his cheeks. The freckles tugged at Greg painfully, but he liked them. He liked them a lot. The Marine seemed earnest, but Greg didn’t trust it. “Suit yourself.”

The Marine hailed the bartender and ordered two pints, sliding one in front of Greg. He sipped the beer.

“Whit like?” The kid asked.

The accent was thick enough, it took Greg a moment to work out what the Marine was saying. “Oh, erm, fine.” He said, then couldn’t help but smile into his pint. “Actually, right now I’m brilliant. Yeah.”

The Marine smiled a little. “Celebratin’?”

“Yes. I am... look...” Greg turned and looked the young Marine in the eyes. “What’s going on here?”

The Marine held his gaze with cocky confidence, the sort of eye contact men use when they want to hook-up. He stretched out his fingers and brushed them over Greg’s where he held his pint. “Ah’m out on the skite and yer well tidy, chief.” He winked. “Fancy a gobble?”

Greg blinked. If he had his Scottish slang right, the kid had just offered to blow him. “How old are you?” He asked.

The Marine shrugged and turned back to his beer. “Twenty-five.”

“No, how old are you really?” Greg scoffed.

The kid grinned. “Nineteen.”

“Hmph.” Greg glanced around the pub, looking for the Marine’s mates, the ones that had sent him over to bait the old poofter. “You lose a bet or sommat?”

“Nae, chief” The kid snickered. “Jes fancy yeh. Yer pure quality, innit. Chum me to me gaff, ah’ll hep ye celebrate.” He made the word ‘celebrate’ sound suggestive.

“I’m Old Bill.” Greg told him, using slang for police. “You should sod off.”

“Yer takin’ the piss.”

“I could show you me badge.”

“Ah could show ye mah gun.” The Marine returned with a leer.

Greg laughed. “Bugger off.”

“E’en Auld Bill fancies a gobble summat.” He said bumping Greg’s shoulder lightly with his own.

“Cheeky.” Greg was beginning to enjoy this. Beginning to consider it.

The Marine drank the rest of his pint down in several gulping swallows. “Mah gaff’s nae far.”

Greg scoffed. “I’m not going anywhere with you, mate.” He sipped his beer. He didn’t drink much since the skull fracture, a pint or two, three at most if he were being sociable. He was at the age where it affected his running negatively. And who knows how it interacted with his meds. The
whisky and now the beer were going to his head.

Signalling for another pint, the young Marine sighed. “Yer makin’ mah feel laeke a warmer.”

“I’m guessing that’s not good.” Greg ventured.

“Feckin’ sasannach.” He muttered as the bartender slid his pint across the bar. “Ye makin’ mah feel laeke ah numptie. Ah wank.”

“Can’t have that now.” Greg murmured. “Fine boy like you, serving our country...” He hummed. “I just wonder what you’re doing in here. You could have found a fit bloke on Grindr and had a shag in the time you’ve been flappin’ at me.” Greg took a swallow from his pint. “I’m probably older than your father, lad.”

“Mebbe thas what ah fancy.” The Marine’s ears had turned red. He was telling the truth — he liked blowing older blokes.

“Ok. I get that. But why me?”

“Ye gave mah the look when ah got in haere — ye know ye did. And yer braw, chief. Quality. Nae wan ever told ye tha?”

Greg swallowed a laugh. “Not in so many words.”

The young man gave Greg a searching look. Then he gulped half his pint and wiped his mouth. “Ah’rn fer the lavvy.” He leaned closer to Greg and whispered, “Follow mah, chief.”

It took Greg a minute to make up his mind. He should just leave. Go home, have a wank and get some sleep. He set his unfinished beer down and stood up, gathering his coat.

Today of all days though... maybe he should have consensual sex in a bloody loo. Really celebrate. Really take back his bloody power — as Dr. Ephroem kept telling him.

Greg walked to the bog.

He had a little thrill of panic as he opened the door — the Marine commando could fight circles around him, he could overpower Greg if he wanted to...

He was in the last stall and when Greg squeezed in with him, the kid dropped to his knees. He wasted no time, taking off his beret and stuffing it in his back pocket, unfastening Greg’s belt and trousers and freeing his hardening cock.

“Thahs ah bonnie tadger.” He sighed. The Marine took a deep whiff, pressing his face against Greg groin. He looked up with worshipful eyes. “Call mah ‘lad’ again.” He said, his ears turning bright crimson. “Ah laeke aht.” He pressed Greg’s hips against the wall of the stall and swallowed him down to the root.

“Fuck!” Greg whisper-shouted. “Fuck, lad, but you’re good at that.” He was throbbingly hard now, desperately hard in the tight heat of the young man’s throat.

The Marine moaned around his prick when Greg called him ‘lad.’ He pulled off and licked the head, sucking it into his mouth and laving the underside.

“Ahh... lad...” Greg’s hands skated over close-cropped hair as the kid bobbed, taking him deep. The Marine fumbled with the flies of his own trousers, exposing his tumescence and stroking himself
while he worked Greg over.

The Marine made love to Greg’s cock with his mouth and his hands, jacking the thick shaft and slurping his bollocks wetly. Greg could hear the slap of the kid wanking and it turned him on even more knowing the Marine wanted him so much, was so aroused by sucking him.

It couldn’t last long — he couldn’t let it, they were in a pub bog for Christ sakes. “I’m gonna come... lad...” Greg gasped, giving him a token shove that meant ‘get out of the way if you don’t want it down your throat.’

The Marine moaned huskily and swallowed him down and Greg came and came and came, his back arching and his toes curling, white explosions behind his eyelids as he gripped and twisted the Marine’s shirt. “Fuck... fuck, yeah...” Greg murmured.

The kid sat back on his heels his own spent cock still in his hand. Aftershocks making him giggle under his breath and still trembling, Greg tucked his softening member away and zipped up. He tousled the kid’s too-short hair. “Good, lad.” He said. He left the stall and washed his hands, checking to see how sexed up he looked in the mirror. Not too bad. As Greg exited the bog, he slipped his coat on. The pub had begun to fill up. Greg made his way through the throng and left.

—-

While he still took the antidepressants and still talked to Dr. Ephroem biweekly, entire days went by where Greg didn’t even think about the assault or his injury. He still had bad days here and there, days where he wanted to lay on the sofa under the grey Twombly forever... but he had fewer.

The only thing that had not shown improvement were the headaches. Before the skull fracture, he’d occasionally get a tension headache. But that was nothing like the excruciating brainstorms he now suffered. They would start in one of his eyes, a deep ache that grew and twisted and gnawed like an animal, a weasel, a worm in his brain. In the throes of one of the headaches, Greg would gladly take an axe to the head if it would chop out the parts that hurt.

Dr. Ephroem had given him a prescription for miracle pills that, if he took them at the first sign of trouble, would halt the agony of the headache. They made him logy and tired, but he gladly made the trade. He could still go to work feeling a touch worn-out. He could not do anything when the headaches raged.

He’d taken a pill before driving to Westminster — his last pill, he had to remember to get to the chemists — but his headache had only worsened as he drove. Greg sat in his parked car white knuckling the steering wheel, waiting for the medicine to take effect. His relief when the pain began to ebb was profound. He left the car, confident that soon he would be fully functional again.

But he wasn’t at his best as he climbed the stairs to 221b Baker Street.

In Greg’s defence, the door was open.

Had he been firing on all cylinders, Greg would have snuck back down the stairs the moment he saw John standing so close to Sherlock, his hand on the taller man’s jaw as they stared intensely into each other’s eyes. Sherlock looked so hopeful...

But Greg wasn’t as clear headed as usual, and he stood there gaping, watching them move closer. He
held his breath, willing it to happen, willing John to kiss Sherlock...

Remembering himself — realising he was intruding on a very private moment — Greg stepped backwards intending to leave them to it. But the board under his heel creaked loudly and the two men startled apart.

“Hey, sorry... door was open... just leaving...” Greg began, but Sherlock stepped towards him, away from John. The colour was high on his face, his hands trembling.

“Lestrade! You’re here about the bombings! I knew it — I told you, John!”

John Watson’s face was shocked, it was crimson and beginning to look distinctively panic-stricken...

Greg wanted to shake him. He wanted to shake John Watson until that look disappeared from his face entirely. He had no idea what he had in Sherlock.

Sherlock was oblivious to John’s state. He pulled Greg into the lounge — Greg steered them judiciously into the kitchen, giving John some space.

He told Sherlock what they knew about the two bombings, talking it through even though he’d brought a copy of the files for him to read.

“No, I can’t let you on the scene, Sherlock.” Lestrade was telling him. “You have the photos and you can look at the physical evidence down at the Met.”

“Lestrade!” Whatever Sherlock was going to say was cut off by John walking out the door. “John? John, where are you going? We have a case! John!” He called from the landing.

But John continued to clatter down the stairs and out the door. Sherlock came back to the kitchen.

“What’s going on, Sherlock?” Greg asked sympathetically.

“Nothing.” Sherlock eyed him beadily. “What do you mean?”

“I mean...” Greg waved his hand in the direction of the lounge. “That.”

Sherlock’s eyes took on a speculative look as he examined the police detective. Greg started to feel uncomfortable. He forced himself not to fidget.

“You’re a handsome man.” Sherlock accused.

“Erm... thanks?”

“In fact, you’re very attractive.”

“Erm...?”

“ATTRACTIVE enough that my brother gave up almost a decade of celibacy for you.”

“That’s not exactly...”

“Shut up, Lestrade.” Sherlock said, starting to pace. “John finds you attractive.”

“I don’t think...”

“He does. Not consciously, but I’ve tracked changes in his heart rate, eye dilation and increased
respiration at least eight times when his attention was focussed on you.”

“That doesn’t...”

“It does, Lestrade. Human sexual response is obvious when you know what to look for. It’s science — a biochemical reaction.” He stopped pacing and stared at Greg.

“Sherlock...”

“I require your help, Lestrade.” Sherlock announced.

Greg felt completely lost. “With what?”

“Chemistry! An experiment! Are you busy Christmas Eve? What am I saying, of course you aren’t. I require your presence at Mummy’s holiday party. Pick me up here at 4 p.m. — it’s a bit of a drive...” Sherlock smiled gleefully. “Yes! You’ll have to stay the night! Perfect!”

“Sherlock, wait... I can’t go to your mother’s party.”

“Mmmm... I’m sure you can.” Sherlock was tapping busily on his smartphone. “I just told Mummy I’m bringing a ‘plus one.’” His phone trilled. “There! She’s delighted.”

“That’s not... Sherlock why do you want me to go to your Mum’s party?”

“I told you. It’s an experiment.”

“What kind of experiment? No — it doesn’t matter. I can’t go.”

“Why not?” Sherlock asked plaintively. “I need you.”

“Because your brother and I broke up earlier this year, and we haven’t spoken since — I can’t just randomly show up at a family party. It would be... awkward... it’s not done...”

“Never mind Mycroft, he never comes to Mummy’s parties. There’s always something — a dead parliamentarian, or a royal scandal to cover up... he always has an excuse.” Sherlock said airily. “So you’ll come.”

“No!” Greg sighed. A tendril of his headache wormed it’s way free of the medication and throbbed warningly. “Why do you want me there? What is this experiment?”

“Stimulating heightened activity in John’s cingulate cortex and lateral septum through increased production of oxytocin, testosterone and cortisol.”

“Sherlock...!”

“Jealousy, Lestrade! I need to make John Jealous.”

“Wait.” Greg stood up, his chair scraping loudly on the lino. “You want me to pretend to be your date at your mother’s holiday party, to make John jealous?!”

“Yes. Problem?”

“Yes! Yes, I have a problem! Sherlock, that nonsense that only works on telly! In real life, it’s a disaster — no one will believe that you and I are... are...” The tendril of pain grew thicker, curling through his lobes.
“Having sexual relations? Sit down, Lestrade.” Sherlock waved at his chair. “Why wouldn’t we have sexual relations? I’m not unattractive, and we’ve already established that you are a desirable sex partner...”

“Stop! Stop talking. Trust me, Sherlock, even if I did agree to this harebrained scheme — which I won’t! — no one will believe it. John won’t believe it — you’ve spent a decade telling everyone I was an idiot, you’re barely civil to me, you aren’t going to suddenly decide to take me to bed. Not to mention that I would never sleep with you.”

“Everyone’s an idiot, don’t take it personally, Lestrade.” Sherlock swept his protestations aside. “You slept with Mycroft after a decade of barely tolerating him. How is this different?”

Greg bowed under the growing headache and sat back down. “That’s completely different.” Maybe he should take a second pill. Fuck! He was out until he refilled the prescription.

“Why? Why is it different?” Sherlock demanded.

“Because Mycroft was attracted to me from the start. You aren’t. You’ve never been interested in me that way. I don’t need to know your heart rate to know that.”

Sherlock looked at him curiously for a moment. “You knew about Mycroft?”

“How oblivious do you think I am, Sherlock?” The Detective opened his mouth, but Greg cut him off. “Don’t answer that.” He rubbed his eyes. They were beginning to be sensitive to the light.

“How didn’t you sleep with Mycroft sooner then?” Sherlock asked guilelessly.

“Seriously?” But it seemed Sherlock was serious. “You might remember I was married.” Greg told him. “And he didn’t exactly make a good impression.”

Sherlock frowned. “True. What changed your mind?”

Greg sighed. “I got to know him better... and then I was single... I guess the timing was right.”

“Timing... yes, that’s what we’ll tell John.” Sherlock crowed. “That’s why we didn’t get together sooner. He’ll believe that.”

“Sherlock, you aren’t listening. I’m not doing it.” His head was aching in earnest now.

“But it’s the only way, Lestrade! He’s so close! You saw it! He wants to be with me, but he can’t get over the last hump, he can’t admit to himself he wants it. Me. I need to shock him, make him think he could lose me.” Sherlock looked at the copper sideways — which Greg didn’t like at all.

Greg dug the heels of his hands into his eyes. The headache was back full force. “I’m sorry, Sherlock. I can’t do it. You’ll have to find someone else. Listen, I should go.” He stood up. “Oh! Head rush.” He said, grabbing the edge of the table. Greg took a deep breath, trying to get oxygen to his brain... but it didn’t help. The headache took over everything — all his thoughts and cares subsumed in its pain. Greg wanted to die. Sherlock was peering at him with interest. “Got to go home.” He muttered.

Sherlock took his arm gently. “You’re not fit to drive, Lestrade.” He led Greg into a dark room — a wonderfully dark, cool room. “Take your shoes off and lie down.”

Lie down... yes, that’s what he needed. Greg toed his shoes off and let Sherlock guide him to the bed.
Greg woke slowly. His head felt thick and his mouth pasty. He was hungover. He must have drunk a lot because he couldn’t remember anything.

He rolled over, cursing under his breath. Greg wasn’t in his own bed. At least he still had his clothes on. Most of them anyway — his trousers had gone missing. Jesus, he hadn’t woken up in a strange bed since he was twenty-one.

No, scratch that. It’d happened only a month ago.

Greg had stopped by his local after his long run. It was early Saturday evening, warm for late October. He’d decided a nice carb-y pint would be the perfect recovery drink.

He didn’t frequent the pub. Greg was too busy with other things these days to sit around drinking for long. But he stopped by once a week or so.

Finishing his pint, a familiar voice greeted him. “Oi, chief.” It was the Marine. He was wearing civvies instead of his uniform, but Greg remembered his face vividly — cocky smirk and freckles under his short gingery hair.

“Lad.” Greg acknowledged him. He watched as the single word turned the kid’s ears red and his nipples into hard nubs beneath his tight t-shirt.

The Marine ordered two pints and slid one in front of Greg. “Oh, what the hell.” He’d been on the verge of leaving, but one more wouldn’t hurt him.

He could see the kid was keen. But there was no way Greg was risking sex in the loo again. They’d been spectacularly lucky last time. Greg had chalked it up to the whisky going to his head.

“Ah bin hoping ah’d set een on ye again.”

“Yeah?”


Greg snorted. “You’re blowing smoke.”


“Yeah, maybe.” Greg chuckled. A football game came on the telly over the bar. They watched the ‘fitba’ in companionable silence. Greg bought a round and they shared a bag of crisps.

The Marine was a smart kid — commandos tended to be, the selection process and then the training was rigorous — in London on special assignment. Greg didn’t ask what sort of special assignment, he knew the Marine couldn’t talk about it. He did ask what the kid’s specialisation was, and got a terse, “Combat Intelligence.”

Greg took a second to marvel that a kid could be an openly gay Marine commando. He remembered worrying about being outed as a young copper, at the same time feeling guilty about not being out. The world had come a long way in twenty years.
“Three’s me limit.” He told the Marine when he tried to buy yet another round.

The kid looked at Greg like he was crazy.

“I should get home.” Greg told him. “Thanks for the pint, lad.” He clapped the kid on his back, feeling the plates of muscle shift under his hand.

He had not got a block before the Marine caught up and fell into step with him. Greg had not expected this, but he couldn’t say he was surprised either.

“Mah gaf’s jaes down ‘ere.” He said, touching Greg’s elbow softly. “Chum wit mah, chief.”

“Don’t you live in the barracks?” Greg asked not answering the question.

“Nae at this time.” The kid said, his face taking on the shuttered look he got whenever the conversation steered near his work. “Ahm keen, chief. Keen for a feck. It’s been tae long.”

They had slowed and now Greg stopped. The Marine’s ears were beetroot red, the flush rosy on his freckled cheeks. He stepped forward, into Greg’s personal space and Greg could smell him — beer and musk and deodorant. They were close enough to kiss and Greg was very tempted.


“You have condoms?” Greg asked.

The kid grinned. “Aye.” He took Greg’s hand and led him down a side street. The front door was anonymous, and the four flights of stairs ominous, but the Marine’s flat was nicer than Greg expected. He looked around, taking in the Victorian skylights, the brand new kitchenette, the tiny, two-seat dining table with a closed laptop at the place closest to the kitchen, the spare IKEA living room organised around a big, flat screen telly and gaming system. The small windows all had white paper on the lower panels in lieu of curtains. A glass door past the kitchenette led to a tiny roof garden. Greg knew how expensive a flat like this was in London. He revised his assumptions about the kid’s rank and importance up several notches.

“You wanna drink, chief?”

“No. No, lad I don’t.” Greg pressed himself against the hard body and kissed him, brushing his mouth over the other man’s rough jaw, licking along the seam of his lips.

The Marine moaned and wrapped his arms around Greg and the kiss deepened. Greg felt the kid’s cock firming up against his thigh. He pushed the hoodie from the kid’s broad shoulders and let it fall to the ground. The Marine grinned and stripped off his t-shirt. His body was as insane as Greg expected, his pecs and delts huge and defined, his abdomen ridged with muscle, his bis and tris popping.

Smiling in appreciation, Greg set his pack on the table and shed his own hoodie. He’d been running in loose warmup pants and a wicking shirt, the hoodie in his little, lightweight pack with his water bottle, energy gels, wallet and keys. The hoodie tightened the load so it didn’t bounce on his back and it was handy to have for his cool-down. He pulled the wicking shirt over his head.

Greg didn’t have near the muscle of the kid — he never had. But he knew he looked good, his powerful shoulders in proportion with his furred chest and tight belly. The Marine obviously liked what he saw. “Oi, chief.... proper quality...”
Later, as Greg sank into his molten tightness, he ran his hands over the kid’s impressive lats, and watched the muscles shift over his ribs and shoulder blades. He ran fingers up the strong spine to the thick neck, then Greg grasped hold of massive shoulders and gave the nineteen-year-old the fuck of his life.

They hadn’t drawn out the blow job in the loo, the sense of urgency had been part of the thrill. But in the privacy of the Marine’s bedroom, Greg lingered on the sensations. He edged the kid, edged himself, taking them both to the brink then pulling back. When he finally came — when he finally let the Marine come — it was fierce, an epic explosion that leeched all the tension from his body. Greg was completely wrung out. He collapsed on the bed, letting the kid snuggle up with him, caressing him gently and calling him ‘a good lad.’

Greg had woken at dawn, still in the Marine’s bed, the kid still tangled in his arms. It had taken a long, sleepy moment for him to comprehend he wasn’t in bed with Jude, and then that he wasn’t with Mycroft. He was with a trick, a hook-up. A thrill of panic buzzed through him unpleasantly, waking him fully.

Silently berating himself for falling asleep, Greg extricated himself from the arms of the Marine. He found his clothes where he’d shed them, by the little dining table, and dressed quickly. Pausing only to fill his water bottle from the tap, Greg left.

Instead of going directly home, Greg had run his scheduled ten k in yesterday’s kit. He watched the sun coming up as he ran along the Thames. It was... cleansing.

Greg had run hard, faster than he done in a long time. It had felt great.

There was no way he was going to get his run in before work this time, dammit. He had sixteen k. He’d still be running at 22:00 tonight. Greg swore again.

He needed the loo. Greg was alone in the bed —the covers thrown back where his companion had slept — alone in the bedroom. But the door was ajar and he could hear someone moving around — several someones. Greg could hear the cadence of their conversation.

Abruptly he knew where he was — in Sherlock’s bed. The headache... he’d lain in the dark, dozing fitfully for hours, the horrible aching a constant companion, before finally passing into blessed oblivion.

He thanked whatever crazy architect had put a door in the bedroom that led directly to the loo. Greg stumbled through it and relieved his bladder at length. Then he drank water directly from the tap, trying to hydrate a little.

Washing his hands, feeling slightly more alert, he found some mouthwash and took a swig. He could pick John’s voice out, and Rosie’s. John sounded terse — he must have heard Greg moving around, flushing, running the water. He wondered how often Sherlock had overnight guests, platonic or otherwise.

“Oi.” Greg jumped as someone knocked on the the door. “You going to be all day? Other people need the loo!” John. Sounding cranky.

Greg opened the door, and if there was any humour to be found in this strange situation, it was John Watson’s face when he saw Greg Lestrade, in his loo, wearing only boxer briefs and a wrinkled shirt.

“Er... hey, John. Erm... this isn’t what it looks like.” Greg joked.
John’s eyes flicked down Greg’s body, snagging on his navy boxer briefs before taking in his strong thighs and lingering... then abruptly snapped back up to Greg’s eyes with the sublest intake of breath. Greg saw a hint of a blush on John’s cheeks.

Was Sherlock right? Was John Watson attracted to him? Greg had no idea what to do with that.

John turned on his heel and marched away.

Greg followed him. “John, it really isn’t.”

“Relax, Lestrade.” Sherlock sat at the kitchen table supervising Rosie as she made a complete mess of her scrambled eggs, and reading an article entitled ‘Early Foetal Development In Androgen Deficient Pigs.’ “John’s a grown up.” He did not look up from his reading.

“Unca Gog!” Rosie cried, egg spilling down her chin. “Yook! Eggs!”

“Hey there, Rosie.” Greg kissed her on the top of her head.

“And as John was quick to inform me last month when he was trying to sneak his assignation du jour out the door, Rosie’s too young to care. Or remember.” Sherlock said, still staring at his medical journal.

“Yeah but I’m not...”

“There’s coffee in the French press.” Sherlock cut him off with a significant look.

The conversation the night before came back to him in a rush — Sherlock wanting Greg to be his pretend boyfriend to make John jealous. As if this were an episode of ‘Full House’ or summat. He gave Sherlock a disgusted look as he poured himself a coffee.

Sherlock smirked triumphantly at Greg’s silence. “And as John has slept with at least two of his sister’s ex girlfriends, he can’t possibly care about Mycroft.” He said it loudly enough that John couldn’t help but hear.

Greg frowned at Sherlock. “Yeah, ok, I have to get to work. Erm...” He was going to drink his coffee and then clear all this up. “Shoes.” He murmured and wandered back to Sherlock’s bedroom.

“Clean pants in the top drawer.” Sherlock called. “Help yourself... but don’t touch my sock index!”

“Your what?” He’d have to go home and change — his shirt had the grubby, wrinkled look of clothes that had been slept-in. Smelled none too good either. He found his trousers in an untidy heap, and put them on, found his jacket and his shoes, made sure his wallet and phone were in his pockets. The phone needed charging. Greg sat on the bed and drank his coffee slowly. There was a bottle of lube open on the bedside table. Greg didn’t want to think about that. He hoped it was just window-dressing for John.

Coffee finished, Greg returned to the kitchen and rinsed out his mug. “Erm, Thanks for the coffee. I gotta get going.”

He started towards the landing. “Lestrade...” Sherlock had finally put the bloody magazine down and stood up. “Aren’t you forgetting something?” Sherlock asked, putting his arms around Greg’s neck and kissing him. “Ugh, your breath.”

Greg couldn’t stop himself, he laughed. Which helped this fucked up situation not at all. He pushed Sherlock gently away.
“Don’t forget about Sunday.” Sherlock said, his voice pitched low, intimate, but his eyes steely with
determination. He fussed with Greg’s lapels.

“Sunday?” He asked taking Sherlock’s hands firmly off his chest.

“Christmas Eve! Mummy’s party. You promised you’d come.” Sherlock pouted. “I already told her
you would.”

“No. I didn’t, Sherlock...” Greg insisted. “I can’t... no.”

“Don’t worry, Mycroft won’t come. He never comes to Mummy’s parties. Pick me up at four?”

“Sherlock...”

Sherlock cut off his denial with another kiss. His lips were lush, Greg noted, not at all like Mycroft’s.
He hated himself a little just for thinking it. He took hold of Sherlock’s arms, keeping him from
hugging him again and keeping him from walking away. “I’m not doing this, Sherlock.” He
whispered. “It’s stupid!”

Sherlock’s hands slithered down his chest and he giggled. “You say the naughtiest things, Detective
Inspector.”

Greg found himself furious. Mycroft called him ‘Detective Inspector!’ It hurt to hear Sherlock say it.
“Don’t call me that!” He snapped. “This isn’t happening.” Greg ducked another kiss and ran down
the stairs. He breathed a sigh of relief as he walked out the front door... but it was short-lived — John
Watson followed him.

“What the hell, Greg!” He exploded.

“John...” Greg said weakly. “This isn’t — I had a headache...”

John wasn’t listening. “You fuck him about and you’ll have me to contend with.”

“John, you don’t understand...”

“I understand that Sherlock doesn’t fall into bed with just anyone — but you! You slept with him.”

“I didn’t...”

“You aren’t going to disappear on him! John stuck out his chest and pointed his finger at Greg.
“You’re taking him to that bloody Christmas party!”

Sherlock and his little drama be damned, Greg wasn’t going to mess Mycroft about. “I haven’t
spoken to Mycroft in months. I can’t show up at his mother’s party! I won’t! It wouldn’t just be
awkward! It would be...” Greg cast about for the right word.

“Hurtful? Unfeeling? Callous?” John’s finger poked into Greg’s chest. “You should have thought of
that before you seduced his brother.” He seethed. “But you’re in it now, you’re in it and you’re
going to do right by him if I have to break your legs and wheel you to Mummy’s myself.”

“Why are you so worried about me doing right by him?!” Greg asked, tired of John’s hypocritical
misapprehension. “When you won’t.”

John turned bright red. “You don’t know anything about it!

Greg wanted to laugh at the absurdity of it all.
A loud booming crash startled them both, and Greg felt the ground shake beneath him. “That’s an explosion!” John told him breathlessly, unnecessarily.

Greg turned, looking for the source and saw a dust cloud on the cross street. He started to run towards it, John Watson at his side.

Chapter End Notes

There’s no way Greg will go along with Sherlock’s ridiculous scheme.
Mummy’s Holiday Affaire

Chapter Summary

Greg finds himself at Mummy’s party.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mycroft’s smartphone vibrated discretely. He felt a tentacle of irritation growing in his mind. He’d asked Michelè not to text for several days — Mycroft’s schedule was chock-a-block with meetings of the highest importance.

Though very few people had this number, there was a small possibility it wasn’t the Italian. Of his assistants, only Anthea could contact him on his personal phone, and she knew better than to do so today. It could not be Mummy or Father, their calls were routed through Anthea. It could perhaps be Sherlock, but he hadn’t texted in months, not even to reply to Mycroft’s missives — he’d stopped answering Mycroft’s calls ages ago. John Watson might contact him if there were an emergency with Sherlock, but Mycroft was content in the knowledge that Dr. Watson could capably deal with any situation that might arise until Mycroft was free to join him. No, it was almost certainly Michelè.

The tentacle of irritation writhed.

Several hours later, he had five minutes free — the documents he needed to review for his next meeting were being held up in Lady Smallwood’s office. Mycroft squelched his annoyance and thumbed on his phone. Peevishly, he hoped that Michelè’s text was at least amusing.

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**Hey, I hoped to keep you out of this, but I thought I should warn you that your brother has conscripted me into a mad scheme to make John jealous. It’s bound to go bad and I’m worried about the fallout when it does.**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**Hope you’re well. Probably should have said that up front.**

Greg.

Mycroft was appalled at how much it hurt to miss him so much. Still.

It took three attempts before he found the words for a reply, two more than he’d ever needed before. Even so, Mycroft was not satisfied with the text he sent to Greg.

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**Thank you for alerting me. I am unfortunately engaged for the next few days. I understand you must be terribly busy with a bomber on the loose, but if you would keep me apprised of any downturns, I would be in your debt.**

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**I am quite well. I trust you too are thriving.**
Would Greg interpret that as the question it was?

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**You’re doing well?**

Mycroft sent the last before he allowed himself to think about how desperate for contact it must sound.

What had Sherlock involved Greg in?

Greg replied right away. Mycroft imagined his infectious grin as he read his texts. His life had 88.728 percent less laughter since he’d stopped seeing the policeman. He’d calculated the percentage during his many sleepless nights.

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**I’m reasonably well. You’re right this bomber is up my arse. Happy to keep you in the loop. If you go to your mother’s holiday party, you’ll likely get the whole story. Just don’t believe ANY of the stuff about me sleeping with/dating your brother. It isn’t true, but I can neither convince John of that nor make Sherlock leave off spreading it around. At least it’s stopped the nice lady in accounting from trying to chat me up.**

Mycroft read Greg’s text over several times, unaware of the smile gracing his lips. It was chatty and open... natural. So very Greg. He furrowed his brow over the part about sleeping with/dating Sherlock — it was painfully obvious what his brother was trying to do, and Greg was right to worry about a bad end.

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**Is he being a pest? I can send someone to talk to him.**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**No, he’s alright. He’s helping us with the bomber, so I’m thinking of it as his payment. Or my penance. Or something.**

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**I worry about him so.**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**I know you do. I worry about him too.**

Mycroft’s documents arrived then. Reluctantly, he put his phone away, zipping it back into the Faraday pouch that ensured no one could hack his microphone and listen in on his meetings and conversations. They were de rigueur in Whitehall.

He did not pick it up again until the ride home. It was ridiculously late — as Mycroft had feared, the day had run long. He had no new texts.

After reading through the conversation with Detective Inspector Lestrade again — and wishing he’d had a chance to respond to him — Mycroft wrote a terse note to his brother.

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**Leave Detective Inspector Lestrade alone.**

Sherlock must have been staring at his mobile, because his reply came in seconds.

From: S. HOLMES
**You ARE still speaking. I suspected as much despite Lestrade’s protests. I’m bringing him to Mummy’s holiday party. The festivities will be much less boring this way. –SH**

From: MYCROFT HOLMES  
**What part of ‘LEAVE HIM ALONE’ is confusing to you, brother mine?**

From: S. HOLMES  
*I know tiresome is your default, Mycroft, but do try to put up at least a token fight. –SH*

Mycroft fumed.

The next morning, as he drank his tea and endeavoured to look like he hadn’t been up all hours listening to world leaders row, he received another text alert.

It was Michelè, wishing him good morning.

He tapped on Greg’s texts and reread them. Both he and Sherlock had mentioned Mummy’s party. It had struck him oddly when he had first read Greg’s message...

From: MYCROFT HOLMES  
**Good morning, Detective Inspector. My brother informs me that he’s bringing you to Mummy’s Christmas Eve affaire. I recommend bringing nougats or Turkish Delight — they’re Mummy’s favourites.**

Mycroft did not receive an immediate reply this time. It was almost an hour before he felt his phone vibrating against his heart. He pulled it discreetly from his chest pocket and read the message.

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE  
*I’ve told Sherlock over and over I’m not going. I wouldn’t do that to you.*

“To me?” Mycroft murmured. His emotions were a torturous mix of longing, pain, fondness and irritation — at himself for feeling such things. It wasn’t sensible. He needed to be rid of it.

From: MYCROFT HOLMES  
**Don’t hold back on my account, Detective Inspector. It might be better if you are there to keep Sherlock in check.**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE  
**If you think I have any influence over Sherlock, you’re not nearly as smart as everyone says.**

Mycroft smiled in spite of himself.

From: MYCROFT HOLMES  
**Touche.**

That was, regrettably, the last exchange Mycroft had with Greg. He didn’t know if the Detective Inspector would come to Mummy’s little social gathering or not. He wasn’t certain if he wanted to see him there.

No, he was lying to himself. Mycroft wanted to see Greg. As painful and harmful as it might be, he wanted to see him again. He’d attempted to convince himself otherwise, with a stunning lack of success.

That’s how he found himself on the train out to Stow-on-the-Wold: ambivalent in the extreme.
Not least as he’d neglected to warn the Detective Inspector that Michelè was coming. Or that Michelè existed. If Greg knew, he certainly would not come.

“Tesoro, you are very preoccupied, no? It cannot be so bad, your family.”

Mycroft scavenged up a smile for his companion. “You know how trying family can be.” He said vaguely. “My brother has been on a tear lately... or so I hear. There could be some... drama.”

“But I will be there for you, yes? Relax, tesoro.”

Mycroft had been considering breaking things off with the Italian. Nothing was wrong per se... he liked Michelè well enough... sexually, they were relatively compatible — Michelè was more of a bottom than was strictly ideal, but Mycroft could top... and Michelè was appropriate for someone in Mycroft’s position. Perhaps it had simply been too soon after Greg. Mycroft could not put his heart into the relationship.

It occurred to him that he had unconsciously engineered a potential disaster, inviting Michelè and the Detective Inspector to attend Mummy’s soirée. That was disturbing — Mycroft was fastidious about keeping all his efforts completely conscious and intentional. Even now, he could not parse his motivation. Did he hope Greg would suffer by comparison to the Italian? Did he expect seeing the Detective Inspector would free his heart for Michelè? Mycroft certainly did not wish that Greg might want him back — he had more self-respect than that!

Father met them at the station. “Good to meet you, Mee-kay-lay.” He stumbled over the foreign name. “Pleased you could come — you must miss your family this time of year.”

“I do, Mr. Holmes, but I must miss them all the year. My dear Mamma and Papà, they have departed.”

“Oh... erm sorry to hear. Say, you don’t mind waiting a bit, do you Myckie? Your brother will be along on the next train.”

Mycroft struggled not to betray his intense annoyance at the loathed nickname — it wouldn’t do for Michelè to see him snap at his father first thing. “Why would I mind? I travelled all the way from London expressly to tarry in the train station for forty minutes.” He muttered, pulling out his phone to summon an Uber. “I’m confident that Michelè and I, Sherlock, Dr. Watson, his spawn and all their accoutrements will fit nicely in your old Mercedes sedan.”

“Tesoro... rillasarti...” Michelè murmured, making Mycroft feel murderous. If the Italian wanted him to chill, perhaps Mycroft should introduce him to The Iceman.

With difficulty, Mycroft controlled his temper. Interacting with his father always made him impatient, he should not force Michelè to bear the brunt of his irritation.

“Myckie never brings his friends home,” Father was telling Michelè. “You must be right special.”

The Italian glowed and smiled at Mr. Holmes as Mycroft ground his teeth. He already regretted bringing Michelè.

He was rescued from further humiliation by the arrival of their Uber. Mycroft ushered Michelè into it as he bid his Father a hasty, “I will see you later.”

“You did not tell me your father makes you so tense, Mycroft.” Michelè chided.

“Hmm... isn’t that the way of family? The people who installed the mechanism, know exactly which
levers to pull.”

“At least now I understand why you resist all my attempts to give you a pet name, yes?” Michèlè grinned.

“Don’t say it if you wish to survive this car ride.” Mycroft warned him with a small smile, his sense of humour returning somewhat as the distance between himself and his father increased. “I will never understand why they can’t manage to struggle through to the end of the name they gave me. It’s not so difficult.”

“The pet name, it does not suit. I am surprised your Father does not see that.”

“Don’t be. My father is content with his ignorance.” Mycroft muttered darkly.

Michèlè hummed in sympathy and stroked Mycroft’s neck with long, comforting fingers for the rest of the drive.

They passed through picturesque villages filled with thatched roof cottages, down country lanes bordering verdant fields, past an old church, and a dovecote in which Mycroft had once found young Sherlock sleeping rough, until finally they pulled up in front of the grotesque Tudor pile his parents called home.

“What do you think? It’s drafty and cold, impossible to heat properly, the rooms are arranged oddly, the plumbing is positively medieval and the electric dodgy at best.” Mycroft told him. “So yes, very grand.”

Michèlè laughed. “You will show me your room of childhood, yes?”

“Lucky you, we’re sleeping there tonight. You’ll understand my aversion to this heap soon enough. Hello, Mummy.” Mrs. Holmes had bustled out to meet them.

“I told your father not to bother picking you up.” She said with a hint of triumph. “I knew you wouldn’t wait for the next train. And where was he going to put all of you?” She held out her hand to Michèlè. “You must be Michèlè. My son has told me nothing about you.” She captured his arm and walked him into the house chattering in Italian. Mycroft retrieved their overnight cases from the boot and sent the Uber on its way. He oughtn’t leave Michèlè alone with Mummy for long...

In time, Father arrived with Sherlock, John, his daughter and Detective Inspector Lestrade in tow. Mycroft watched them through the front window, taking the opportunity to study the dynamics of the group.

Sherlock was unhappy and hiding it. John was furious and trying to hide it from Rosie and Father. Detective Inspector Lestrade was feeling decidedly awkward and was busying himself with John’s
daughter, avoiding both John and Sherlock as much as possible. He held the little girl’s hand and talked to her in a way that he must have done with his own daughter once upon a time. Father was oblivious.

They clattered into the front hall, Rosie ‘ooohing’ over the vaulted ceiling. Father had them leave their overnight bags and Rosie’s accoutrements, and brought them into the morning room.

As he feared, Michelè was the focus of much of the groups’ animosity. Mycroft had warned him that this would be the case, but the Italian was still taken aback.

Sherlock ostentatiously ignored both Mycroft and Michelè, slipping his arm through an uncomfortable Detective Inspector Lestrade’s and presenting him to Mummy. Greg gave her the nougats he’d brought as a gift — Fortnum and Mason’s, score one for the Detective Inspector.

Mycroft had already informed Mummy about the situation, so she refrained from announcing aloud that her younger son was being completely nonsensical. But it was crystal clear in her manner — at least it was to Mycroft and Sherlock. The latter narrowed his eyes at her as she conversed calmly with Detective Inspector Lestrade.

John fixated on Michelè to distract himself from Sherlock and Greg.

“You’re Mycroft’s friend? Right... erm... how did you meet?”

“We met at work.” Mycroft told him, keeping a weather eye on Greg’s blank equanimity. The Detective Inspector had sussed who Michelè was to Mycroft and was studiously looking anywhere but at them.

“Sì. I am in London for a while. I go to so many meetings! My work, all meetings. Then I go to the meeting and there is this attractive man! I cannot let ... what is the word... ah, destiny! I cannot let destiny pass by, no? I must ask him to dinner.”

“Destiny... yeah. Wow.” John murmured. “That must have been some dinner.”

“It was, yes?” Michelè smiled at Mycroft, tucking his hand into the crook of Mycroft’s arm and leaning into him.

Detective Inspector Lestrade abruptly asked after the loo and excused himself.

Sherlock, without his ‘date,’ floated into John’s orbit, as helpless against the doctor’s gravity as the planets are to the sun. He gave Michelè an appraising look, rolled his eyes at Mycroft and took himself off to tell Rosie about the five kinds of parasites that thrive in Christmas trees.

“And you are a Doctor, yes? What is your specialty, Dr Watson?”

“It was trauma surgery.” John said matter-of-factly. “I was an Army doctor. Now I do locum work — mostly GP.”

“That is a big change, yes? Did the Army not suit you?”

“The Army suited me fine.” John bristled.

Mycroft interceded. “Dr Watson was wounded in Afghanistan and invalidated home to Britain.” He tactfully chose not to mention that the injury had caused enough nerve damage that Dr Watson would never again perform surgery. That was understandably a sore spot.
“Oh, but that is terrible, no?”

“Yeah, well... I met Sherlock. I help out with his cases... gives me something to do.”

“You must be invaluable, yes? A combat trained doctor? I see why Sherlock wants you.”

Though he flinched at the word ‘want,’ Mycroft detected the pleasure this statement gave the good doctor.

“What is it that you do, erm, Michelè?” John was thawing.

“I work for the EU. I am in London to help with Brexit. After that... back to Brussels.”

“Well, doesn’t look like that’s getting resolved any time soon.” John muttered. “You might be in London a while.”

The Italian shrugged expressively. “There are consolations.” He said, squeezing Mycroft’s arm.

“I see that. Yeah.” John said, eying Mycroft curiously.

Mycroft excused himself. Mummy had taken over Rosie, and Sherlock and Father had wandered off to the kitchen to bother the caterers and sample the puddings. In the front hall, Mycroft picked up several of the overnight bags that cluttered the space — a rucksack, a crammed diaper bag that no longer carried diapers, and a disreputable looking duffel — with the intention of carrying them upstairs. He rather desperately wanted to be alone for a moment.

He had barely set foot on the staircase when a familiar voice hailed him. “You making off with the luggage?”

Mycroft turned to regard the Detective Inspector. He looked good — healthy, athletic. He’d put on a couple kilos of muscle since Mycroft had seen him last, and although he was still very lean, he’d lost the fragile look he’d had in the depths of his depression. The turquoise jumper he wore was form-fitting, snugly highlighting every muscle and making his silver hair gleam. He seemed unapproachably handsome, his soft brown eyes guarded.

“Just taking them upstairs.” He smiled slightly. “Hello.”

“Let me help.” Greg said, grabbing Sherlock’s valise, Rosie’s little suitcase and the folded up furniture, tucking the latter under his arm. “Lead on.”

Feeling utterly self-conscious, Mycroft marched up the stairs. “Mummy wasn’t sure if you’d prefer to stay in Sherlock’s room or have one of your own.” He babbled. “She decided to put you in the blue room and let you make up your own mind where to sleep. It’s in the same wing as Sherlock’s room.”

“That’s, erm, kind of her.”

“I told her about Sherlock’s scheme. She would have known the moment she saw him anyway and I didn’t want you to be more uncomfortable.”

“That’s hardly possible.”

They reached the top of the circular stone stairwell where it opened out into a small vaulted, and quite cold, room — it had been a bedroom four hundred odd years ago, but more contemporary owners had transformed it into an ersatz hallway for the second floor, with corridors to other parts of the building radiating from it.
Mycroft turned to the Detective Inspector. “You regret coming.” He observed.

“Honestly, I have no idea what I’m doing here.” Greg glanced very briefly at Mycroft, then away once more. Mycroft read his discomfort easily. Less clear was the exact mix of components about which he was uncomfortable. “I hope we can be friends, you and I... but maybe it’s too soon...” Greg shrugged, and Mycroft watched him force a smile onto his handsome face. It did not touch his bleak eyes. “You’re doing well, though. Michelè seems...” Greg cleared his throat. “Ahem... like a nice enough chap.”

“I should have warned you about him.” Mycroft said guiltily. “Apologies, Detective Inspector.”

Greg looked away. “You don’t owe me anything, Mycroft.” He said softly.

“Whether or not that’s true, I do not like to see you discomfited.”

“Is it serious with him?” Greg asked, then answered himself before Mycroft could begin to formulate a reply. “It must be, you’ve brought him home to meet your parents. I’m, erm, happy for you. Really.”

“I didn’t bring him here to meet my parents.” Mycroft blurted. He smiled ruefully. “No, I brought him for reasons even stranger — I found I did not like to think of him alone on the first holiday he’s spending in a foreign country, away from his family. Whilst I don’t put much store by holidays, I understand that a preponderance of people do.”

Greg’s troubled expression cleared somewhat — a small smile finding its way onto his face. “Mycroft Holmes! That sounds suspiciously like empathy!”

“I know. It’s dreadful.” He was rewarded with Greg’s laugh.

“Go on, show me where this blue room is — and where I can drop Rosie’s cot. It’s getting heavy.”

Mycroft led him down one of the corridors. “The unfortunate feature of the blue room is that one must walk through it to get to the rose room.” He showed Greg the spacious-yet-claustrophobic bedroom to which he was assigned. This room was not vaulted and the ceiling was disconcertingly low, mere inches over Mycroft’s head. There was dark wood panelling throughout, and dark indigo on the few stretches of unpanelled wall, lit starkly by the row of square windows along one chilly wall. There was an indigo coverlet on the bed and a blue patterned rug. Mycroft set Greg’s worn duffel on an indigo upholstered chair.

He showed Greg the door on the far side of the room that opened out into an equally claustrophobic, but much brighter room with windows lining two sides. “The rose room.” Mycroft informed Greg, setting Dr Watson’s rucksack on the bed. Greg set Rosie’s folded-up cot and little suitcase down by it.

“I apologise for the inconvenience, Detective Inspector. You and the doctor share the en suite, through there.” Mycroft waved at a door opposite the windows.

Back in the corridor, he led them to the lone door on the other side of the hallway. “This is Sherlock’s.” He said, taking his brother’s valise from Greg and setting it inside the door. He stepped back to let Greg look inside.

“That looks... god, it looks just like 221b!” Greg exclaimed.

It rather did, with shelves and shelves of scientific tomes and curios, a table heaped with dusty test tubes, Erlenmeyer flasks and mouldy Petrie dishes, notes stuck to the mantle with a flick knife,
ancient medical charts pinned to the walls, several animal skeletons that had been painstakingly wired together and hung from the too-low ceiling, and a bed covered in books and bits of detritus.

“My brother has his habits.” Mycroft said, closing the door again. “Greg...” He said softly. “If Sherlock’s being too overbearing....”

Greg had brightened slightly when Mycroft used his name, but it faded quickly. “I’m not worried about me.” He told Mycroft. “I’m not the one lying about a relationship in a ridiculous bid to get in someone else’s pants.” He started back down the chilly corridor. “Your room is in a different wing?”

“Yes.” Mycroft affirmed, feeling just slightly giddy that Greg was asking after his bedroom. “Through there.” They were back in the high-ceilinged room at the top of the stairs, and Mycroft indicated one of the other doorways. “And my parents are down there.” He said, waving at the third. “Far away from either of their offspring.”

Greg glanced at him making Mycroft think he’d heard the slight bitter edge in his voice. Of course he had — Greg knew him well enough. “We’d best get back downstairs. The other guests will be arriving soon, and Mummy will be monstrous if anything goes awry.” He almost touched Greg’s shoulder as he indicated the stairwell but held himself back at the last moment. He wasn’t ready for that — he couldn’t touch Greg casually and not feel it like a sadness in his bones.

He saw Greg had noticed the abortive gesture. Something like regret crumpled the Detective Inspector’s face as he turned away.

Downstairs, Aunt Pansy had just arrived with her partner Patty. Patty had been Uncle Patrick until ten years ago when, at the age of 59, she had transitioned. She was a tall, willowy woman who favoured floral prints and vibrant nail varnish — much as the shorter, plumper Pansy herself did.

“Myckie!” Pansy exclaimed. He heard the Detective Inspector’s startled snicker as his aunt embraced Mycroft forcefully. “Your mother tells us that both you and Sherlock have brought friends for the holiday! That’s marvellous! Just marvellous! About bloody time too. Is this him?” She demanded turning to Greg and capturing his hands.

“This is Detective Inspector Lestrade.” Mycroft told her noncommittally. “This is my Aunt Pansy — my father’s sister — and her partner Patty.” Mycroft shook hands with Patty, her grip just as firm now as it had ever been.

“Come meet the rest of the party.” Mummy commanded, leading the way into the morning room.

Several other guests had already arrived. Mycroft did his duty, introducing Michelè to Pansy and Patty and a succession of neighbours and relatives. Sherlock was with John and his daughter by the tree, which fascinated the little girl. Greg drifted aimlessly until Patty brought him a glass of punch and struck up a conversation. Bless, Patty. Mycroft had always rather liked her.

Time passed slowly, the sun setting, grey light fading to blue. Mycroft found his time, if not his attention, monopolised by Mummy and a procession of her neighbours. Anyone other than Mummy, Mycroft would have had no compunction about abandoning... but Mummy, for all her benign neglect of her children, could still command and control them better than either cared to admit. Mycroft had always found it more profitable to go along rather than against her — and by now it was habit.

He lost track of Michelè for a while. Mycroft cornered Sherlock to warn him against trifling with Detective Inspector Lestrade.
“One would think you had a *personal* stake, brother dear.” Sherlock taunted. Mycroft swallowed his anger, recognising it would only incriminate him in Sherlock’s eyes, and change his behavior not at all.

As stars appeared in the deep black sky, Mycroft found Michelè sitting near the fireplace getting quietly drunk with John Watson.

Rosie had held court for several hours, until, over tired and over stimulated, Sherlock had taken her down to the kitchen and fed her fish fingers and fairy cake. Then her father took her up to the rose room — warm from the fire that had been lit earlier — and put her to bed.

Now John cradled a portable baby monitor through which Mycroft could hear the little girl softly breathing. He was drinking what appeared to be whisky — confirmed when Michelè pulled a half-full bottle of Aberlour from the cushions to refill his own glass.

Greg sat nearby, still with Patty who seemed quite taken with the policeman — she was flirting rather shamelessly. Sherlock lounged on the floor, near Greg’s feet, watching John as he drank with the Italian.

Mycroft could not think where he himself might fit into the tableaux. Surely, he should take the seat next to Michelè. But he found himself reluctant. He dropped into a chair adjacent to Greg, close to no one, but able to watch over all.

It struck him as an apt metaphor for his life — removed from the day-to-day, keeping a watchful eye on the world, on the country... on the people about whom he cared.

Clearly he’d drunk too much punch and it had made him maudlin.

Greg glanced over and caught his eye. He looked tired, worry lines etched in his forehead. Mycroft knew he would do almost anything if it would ease those lines.

It hurt, loving Greg so much. He’d told the Detective Inspector to come to Mummy’s party to prove to himself that he was no longer vulnerable to his wretched feelings for the man... but all he’d proved was that his feelings were as strong as ever. He saw Greg read it on his face... for a moment Mycroft hoped... then Greg glanced at Michelè and his face shuttered. He said a few words to Patty, got to his feet and left the room.

Sherlock didn’t notice, so completely did John hold his attention.

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The endless party was finally over. Pansy had taken Patty home and the caterers were cleaning up. Father was napping in his chair and Mummy sat in front of the fire looking for all the world like Sherlock rambling in his Mind Palace. Mycroft was whispering with Michelè on the divan, his elegant hand resting on the Italian’s hip, and John was contentedly watching Sherlock devour leftover Christmas pudding...
Greg found his coat and slipped out the kitchen door. It had been the servants’ entrance for hundreds of years, the path to the lane as well-worn as the paths to the woodshed and through the garden to the decrepit outbuildings 500 or so metres off. Greg could just make them out in the moonlight.

Who was Greg kidding? It was still the servants’ entrance — he watched as a trio of caterers carried empty serving trays to a van in the lane. They stowed them in the back, climbed in and with a wince-inducing grind of gears, drove off.

It was times like this that Greg missed smoking. A fag would have calmed his frayed edges nicely, would have occupied his hands and soothed his unease... he could have amused himself blowing smoke rings at the gibbous moon.

He was disgusted with himself — he still hadn’t figured out what had possessed him to come to this bloody party. The new therapy that Dr Ephroem had instigated was working wonders, Greg was beginning to feel better than he had in... in years, really, able to let things leftover from his marriage go, as well as the PTSD from John Clay, and the trauma of his head injury... he was running six days out of seven, getting faster. His daughter was thriving, and he felt that they were getting closer, talking more. Greg was doing well at work, closing cases, keeping up with the paperwork... the task force investigating the bombings was kicking his arse a bit (bloody whack job! He had to catch that nutter!)... but by in large, life was good. So what was he doing in the bloody Cotswolds chasing a pipe dream? It was stupid. Stupid and hopeless. A certain Italian made that perfectly clear.

Sighing, Greg turned to go inside, up to the wide, low blue room...

John and Michelè Cancellara tumbled out the kitchen door. They were laughing and shushing each other drunkenly. The Italian’s dark blonde curls shone goldenly in the moonlight as he set off across the field. Greg hated him a little bit more.

“Greg!” John hailed him, his short locks a platinum shimmer. “Come with us.” He grasped Greg’s hand and pulled him along, interlacing their fingers in an unconsciously intimate gesture. “I’m mad at you.” He confided loudly.

“I know, mate.” He’d best go with them, Greg thought with a sigh. Make sure the pissed wankers didn’t hurt themselves. The night wasn’t very cold, maybe 12 degrees Centigrade... but cold enough for hypothermia if one drank enough and passed out.

Although, he couldn’t work up much concern for the Italian.

The man rubbed him the wrong way. Greg knew why, that was beyond obvious... but even if he hadn’t been seeing Mycroft, Greg told himself, Michelè’s effusive European manners, trendy beard and slicked back curls would have put him off. He tried to banish the thought of Mycroft kissing that whiskered face...

Greg was just about to suggest they go back, when Michelè plunged into a thick copse. Swearing, he tugged John along faster and followed him. It was pitch dark in the trees and at least four degrees cooler. They stumbled through the forest blindly for a minute but could not find the Italian. Greg walked into a low-hanging branch and swore colourfully. “Michelè!” He called out crossly.

“Vieni qui! Sì!”

Greg followed the excited outburst, emerging from the copse into the moonlight. John uttered a cry and pointed, Michelè’s golden head was advancing on a horse barn on the other side of a wooden fence. “Wait up, Micky!” John called.
John clambered over the fence, falling gracelessly into the pasture beyond and giggling. Greg followed, feeling his patience wearing thin. He hoisted John to his feet and they joined the Italian as he found the barn door and unlatched it.

It was a working horse barn, redolent of fresh hay with a hint of manure. A horse bumped against a stall and heavy feet skittered. Several of the animals blew air through their lips, nickering in welcome or warning — Greg didn’t know horses well enough to be able to tell which.

It was nominally warmer in the barn, but dark with the door closed. Greg pulled out his phone and lit the torch, shining it around the room. He saw that he had no bars, no reception. It caused him some disquiet — the last time he’d had no bars was on the moors near bloody Baskerville. He shuddered remembering the glowing red eyes of the hell hound — and the gory remains of the man who’d stepped on a mine. The stuff of nightmares. Mycroft — the other Mycroft, the Mycroft who projected an air of menace — had politely requested that he drive up and make sure Sherlock didn’t get in too much trouble... he’d had to shift two of his cases to other DIs to follow Sherlock’s flight of fancy that time...

Michelè lit a match.

Greg hissed, aware of how much flammable material lay around them, but the Italian had found a hurricane lamp and was lighting it. As the space was illuminated, Greg made certain the match was out, flattening it under his heel. Then he picked it up and put it in his pocket — no point leaving evidence for the owners. It’d likely just get the local teens in trouble.

“Why are you angry with Greg?” Michelè asked John.

John was swaying so Greg steadied him, feeling for all the world like a babysitter. “Sit down, mate.” He said, resigned.

“’Cause he’s Sh’lock’s boyfriend.” John slurred, allowing Greg to sit him down on the floor of the barn.

Greg overturned an empty bucket and perched on it. “I’m not Sherlock’s boyfriend, John. I’ve told you that.”

“Sh’lock says you are.”

“Yeah, well, Sherlock’s been known to bend the truth when it suits him.”

“Maybe this will help, yes?” The Italian had produced something from his pocket. He put it between his lips, and before Greg could protest, struck another match, inhaling deeply. As Greg confiscated the second match, the particular scent of cannabis began to permeate the room, overlaying the hay and horse smells.

Instantly, it took Greg back to Cornwall, to one of his last good memories of his time with Mycroft. They had gotten high together and made love... sleazy, lewd, earthy love, Mycroft bent over a picnic table...

Michelé offered the joint to John who took it and dragged.

“I haven’t smoked pot since Uni.” John giggled.

Greg refused the fag, figuring one of them should stay sober. He didn’t want to be discovered passed out in the horse barn when the owner came by in the morning. He didn’t want to pollute a cherished memory.
Michelé sat down across from them and leaned back against a stall door, his elegant dove-coloured overcoat draping perfectly around his thin frame. Greg could see the horse’s hooves shifting restlessly beyond the Italian’s hip. “You two are friends, yes?” Michelè asked, taking a pull on the marijuana. It smelled like the good stuff.

“Yes.” Greg answered, wondering if John would contradict him.

“Yeah...” John echoed. “Greg’s a mate. Yeah.”

“And Sherlock is your friend, yes?”

John took the joint from Michelé’s long fingers. “Sh’lock’s my best friend. He was my best man... gave a speech. A nice speech...”

Greg remembered Sherlock’s barely couched declaration of love at the wedding reception, remembered how bravely he had faced Mary, welcoming her, embracing her, giving John to her — doing whatever he had to to keep John in his life. To make John happy.

“You do not like your friends to become a couple?” Michelè asked. “That is... strange, no?”

“We’re not a couple.” Greg told them both.

“You just...” Michelé inhaled deeply, sucking on the marijuana cigarette. “…have sex without the strings, yes?”

“No.” Greg told him, meeting Michelè’s confused eyes frankly. ”No sex.” The air was redolent of cannabis, the smoke sitting heavily in the air. Greg was beginning to get a bit of a contact high.

“Sh’lock stays over at his flat all the time.” John said glumly. It was true, Sherlock had taken to showing up on Greg’s doorstep and refusing to leave. Greg had no idea what Sherlock did in his lounge all night long, but sleeping didn’t seem to enter into it. Neither did making morning tea, though Sherlock had no compunction about drinking the tea Greg made for himself. “I don’t like that.”

“Ah! John, you want Greg for yourself, yes?” Michelé pressed.

Greg laughed. “You got that backwards, mate.”

Michelé frowned, his inebriated brain trying to piece together the puzzle.


“I’m not gay.” John volunteered, accepting the joint.

“Neither am I, John.” Greg pointed out.

“I jus... I just can’t imagine it...” John moaned. “Kissing a man...”

“It’s not that different.” Greg said.

“But you do not have to imagine!” Michelé cried. “We will kiss you, yes? Then you know!” He knelt up eagerly.

John giggled. “I dunno, Mickey... Mycroft wouldn’t like that!”

Michelé sank back, deflated. “No, he would not. He is possessive, yes?” He took the marijuana
Greg asked, telling himself he wasn’t upset, just interested.

“Ah, yes. He insists upon… what is the word? Monogamy, yes? Someone must have been faithless, it hurt him very much.” He blew a lungful of smoke at the ceiling.

Greg wanted to slam out of the horse barn. Or to punch the bloody Italian in his stupid bearded face. But he did neither, taking a deep breath instead. He felt the mellowing effects of the second-hand marijuana smoke — it was making him tippy and just a mite hysterical... but also deeply complacent. He half fell, half crawled off the upturned pail and sat down clumsily on the cement floor next to John, resting his head against the wall. He noticed that his fists were clenched. He noticed that his hands were much larger than Michelé’s hands.

“But you!” Michelé brightened as he handed the joint back to John. “You can kiss John!”

“What, me?” Greg asked.

“Yes! Show him that it is not so bad, kissing a man, yes?”

John giggled rather helplessly.

“You must do it, Greg.” The Italian insisted. “For Sherlock.”

Would that work? If he kissed John, would John get over whatever it was holding him back and live happily ever after with Sherlock bloody Holmes?

“That’s ridiculous.” Greg told him.

“You are very handsome. John would be lucky to be kissed by one such as you, no? I would kiss you in an instant.” Michelé appealed to John. “You will let him do it, yes? Then you will know, once and for all.”

“Does that make any sense?” John giggled.

“I can’t tell.” Greg admitted, his brain foggily convivial. He turned towards John, the shorter man sat leaning against the wall with his legs outstretched. He looked incredibly comfortable, like he was reclining on soft pillows instead of cement, his eyelids at half-mast.

Tentatively, Greg reached out and stroked John’s face. It was rough with stubble. He traced John’s upper lip with his thumb and John sighed, his eyes opening a little wider. He touched Greg’s hand, pressing it to his lips. He took the very tip of Greg’s index finger between his lips and tasted it.

Greg felt a rush of arousal as John’s tongue touched his finger tip. Carefully, he pressed his finger forward and John accepted it into his mouth, sucking on it with growing intensity. Greg pulled his finger out to the first knuckle, ignoring John’s whine of protest, then slipped it back into the wet depths of John Watson’s mouth. He repeated the act, slowly fucking John’s mouth with his thick finger.

Abruptly, Greg fell forward and kissed him, pulling his hand free to tangle in greying locks. John greedily sucked on his tongue, then plunged his own tongue deep in Greg’s mouth. They wrestled, Greg climbing on top, manhandling the other man until they lay together on the hard, cement floor, still kissing wetly, furiously — hard, male kisses. Greg reached down and palmed the hot, hard tent in John’s trousers, stroking him through the fabric. John made a lust-filled noise and ground his hips up into Greg’s hand. He could feel a small damp spot under his fingers. John’s clever fingers found
Greg’s arousal...

*What was he doing?*

Greg flopped onto his back, beside John, ignoring his needy groan. He was as hard as John... it would be so easy to keep going, to unfasten John’s trousers and his own, to kiss and kiss and rub together, to put his cock in John’s greedy mouth and feel him suck it...

“Oh Jesus.” Greg muttered, staggering to his feet through the thick fog of cannabis. He snatched the joint from Michelé’s lips and stamped it out on the floor, reaching down for the flattened butt and pocketing it. “Come on.” Greg said in his ‘I’m-a-cop-don’t-fuck-with-me’ voice. “Time to go back.”

“But…” John protested as Greg grabbed his hand and hauled him to his feet. He wrapped his arms around Greg, lifting his face for another kiss.

Greg extricated himself, ignoring the throb of his cock. “You should talk to Sherlock, John.”

“Yes!” Michelé stood and wrapped an arm around John’s shoulders. “Yes! Now you know it is good — you don’t have to be afraid, yes? Go to Sherlock!” He dragged John to the door and flung it open.

Greg lingered in the barn to blow out the hurricane lamp and make sure they hadn’t left anything. Then he hurried after John and Michelè, latching the barn door securely. The fresh, chill air sobered him, and he could not believe what he’d just done with John Watson. Greg felt a bit queasy.

John and Michelé were draped on the wooden fence, giggling like fools. Greg sighed. He herded them over it and into the copse. They wandered around in the darkness, the three of them, swearing (Greg) and giggling (John and Michelé) and clinging together, until they miraculously emerged in sight of the Holmes’s Tudor mansion.

The Holmes’s ridiculous Tudor mansion, Greg amended internally. Greg strode across the field as John rabbited ahead and the Italian chased him. He heard the kitchen storm door slamming behind them as he rounded the woodshed.

Greg entered the kitchen more quietly, aware that Rosie, at least, was sleeping — and very possibly others. It was later than he’d realised.

The scene in the kitchen stopped him in the doorway. Mycroft and Sherlock were there, their coats and Rosie’s baby monitor on the table. John had thrown himself into Sherlock’s arms. “I know what it’s like now!” He announced and stretched up on his toes to kiss him. Sherlock looked gobsmacked.

“We showed him, yes?” Michelé crowed. “Now you can be happy.”

John kissed Sherlock again, and Greg saw the taller man’s hands wrap around John’s waist. He ducked his head to press his lips to John’s, wonder in his eyes.

“Some privacy, perhaps?” Mycroft said peevishly to the room at large. “Or at least, not in front of your brother.”

“John…” Sherlock said the name like it had bells on it, each ringing joyously. “John.” He tugged him gently and without letting go they disappeared up the stairwell. Greg spared a hope that tomorrow, when John was sober, he would not lose this enthusiasm.

Mycroft surveyed Michelé and Greg, his face carefully blank. “We were just going to mount a search party.” He said.
“Greg, he is sober, yes?” Michelé draped himself over Mycroft’s shoulder, his face pressed into his auburn hair. “You did not need to worry, tesoro.”

He saw Mycroft recognise the odour permeating Michelé’s clothes and hair, watched him realise the Italian was high as a kite. He glanced sharply up at Greg who met his eyes evenly. Was Mycroft remembering their tryst in the Holiday Park? Was he remembering how Greg had taken him, how wonderful it had felt to be together?

“He is selfless, Greg, yes?” Michelé told Mycroft, with an expressive gesture towards the policeman. “He gives up Sherlock because he knows John loves him so! He cannot stand in the way of amore!” The Italian staggered a little and Mycroft righted him, his arm around Michelé’s waist.

Greg felt ill. He knew now with utter clarity that he’d thrown something of inestimable value away on that beach in Cornwall. His resentment of the Italian gave way to a flood of regret. “Yeah, erm… I should let you… erm…” He attempted to walk past them to escape the suddenly stifling kitchen.

Mycroft’s hand on his arm stopped him. Greg stared at the long fingers wrapped around his bicep. “A moment… please.” He pushed the Italian gently towards the stairs. “Michelé, would you go up and get ready for bed? I want to… to thank… Detective Inspector Lestrade.”

“Tesoro…” Michelé rebounded back onto Mycroft’s shoulder, his hand stroking his jaw. “Sí, tesoro… soon you will join me, yes?”

“Yes.” Mycroft said stiffly. “Go on.”

They watched the Italian as he made his careful way up the stairs, then listened to his footfalls fading as he climbed higher, listened for the closing of the door that meant they were alone.

“You don’t need to thank me.” Greg said roughly. “In fact, I wish you wouldn’t.” Mycroft’s hand was still on is arm, burning hot through his coat and jumper. Greg felt himself sway towards the other man.

“No, I… I wanted to make certain that you’re alright.”

“I’m not the one so pissed I can’t walk straight.” Greg said. “I’m fine.” He pulled his arm out of Mycroft’s grasp and saw the sadness it caused in the other man’s eyes. It made him pause. “You never answered my question.”

“No?” Mycroft asked. “Which question was that?”

“Is it serious between you and Michelé?”

Mycroft looked pained. He hesitated and something else twitched to life in his face. “If I said ‘no.’” He asked very softly. “What would you say?”

“Is it serious between you and Michelé?” Mycroft asked. “Which question was that?”

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Mycroft looked pained. He hesitated and something else twitched to life in his face. “If I said ‘no.’” He asked very softly. “What would you say?”

Greg fidgeted, impossible hope swelling in his breast. Mycroft was wearing one of his impeccable suits — this one was a copper tartan that made his auburn hair flame in sympathy. His shirt and pocket square were grass green and his tie viridian. A mother-of-pearl tie pin was affixed precisely equidistant between collar and waistcoat. Greg wanted to touch it, trace it with his fingertips. He licked his lips. “I would tell you … I miss you, Mycroft, and you miss me.” He brushed his knuckles down the copper lapel, feeling the roughness of the tweed. Greg took a deep breath and dove into the deep end. “Give me another chance.”

The stillness in the room was absolute, the only sound Mycroft’s breath susurrating shallowly. Greg thought that if he took the other man’s pulse, it would be speeding. He didn’t know what that might
mean — outrage or elation or some other emotion too complex for Greg to name.

“Move in with me.” Mycroft blurted, his green eyes more vulnerable than Greg had ever seen them. It hurt his chest.

“What?”

The wary look returned to Mycroft’s face. “I won’t go back to how it was… Greg… I can’t… I can’t bear it when you see other people. I… rationally I know that polyamory works for many couples… but I... I cannot. I need exclusivity. I need commitment.”

“I can commit.” Greg said. “I want to.”

“Do you?”

“I’m sorry I put you through that… I was… lost… for a while.” Greg told him. “No excuses. But now I know I want to be with you, Mycroft. Just you.” He stepped close and brushed his lips over the taller man’s. “Just you.” Mycroft pressed into the kiss, his hands coming up to stroke Greg’s arms. Greg smiled into the kiss. “Just you.” He repeated.

Mycroft sighed and rested his forehead against Greg’s. Then he pulled back, panting a little, his expression haggard. “We should live together.” He said, enunciating carefully. “Cohabitate. In my flat, I think — yours is too small.”

“Me flat’s not small.” Greg protested.

“Comparably. You know how many books I have. And we need someplace to put the Turner. And the litter box. My flat makes sense.”


“If I did, I would not have suggested it.” Mycroft said sharply.

“I want to be with you, Mycroft. Really. But... I can’t move into your flat.”


“’Hate’ is a strong word… your flat is beautiful… I just… I don’t know where I would fit…”

“We could redecorate.” Mycroft offered.

“Please, Mycroft…”

“Knowing that you would be there every night… that I’d see you…” Mycroft stroked Greg’s arm tenderly. “…that I’d come home to find your coat hung in the hall... your shoes on the mat... Greg…” His eyes were pleading.

“I could just buy you a ring.” Greg said with a smile.

Mycroft did not return it. His face fell. Greg reached out instinctively, pulling the taller man into his arms. Oh, he felt so right! And he smelled right… and the way he moved, his elegant hands stroking up Greg’s back! Maybe... maybe living together wasn’t such a bad idea. He’d missed living with a partner when he’d left Jude. He would enjoy coming home to Mycroft’s fond smiles and indulgent kisses...
Greg kissed Mycroft now, gripping his shoulders tightly, allowing some of the desperation inside him show. “Don’t say ‘no’ to this.” He whispered. “Say ‘yes.’”

“Yes.” Mycroft said very softly. “But I need to know…” He buried his face in Greg’s shoulder.

Greg kissed his auburn waves, his freckled brow. “How about this.” He asked slowly. “We’ll look for a place together, one we can share. And in the meantime, I owe you seventeen more dates.”

Mycroft straightened, looking Greg in the eye. “Are you serious?”

Greg shrugged. “It’d be nice to have a bigger room for Georgianna.”

“You want me to move house?”

“You want me to move house!” Greg pointed out.

Greg waited, feeling Mycroft’s gaze boring into him, reading him, deducing and interpolating, reaching conclusions. Slowly, he shook his head. “Acceptable.” He said.

Greg laughed with relief. He kissed Mycroft, feeling his body pressing against his own, feeling him opening up to him again. It was joyous! Heady. He pulled back a little to look into Mycroft’s glowing face. ‘He is mine.’ Greg thought, feeling the wondrousness of the moment. ‘He is really mine!’ He kissed Mycroft tenderly, caressing his jaw and neck with his rough fingers, licking along his upper lip and tasting him again… and again… they embraced, hard and happy, holding one another intently. Holding on, letting go of the hollow loneliness he’d felt without Mycroft.

“I love you.” Greg told him breathlessly.

Mycroft stiffened. “You do?”

“I’m not high, I know what I’m saying. Mycroft, I love you.”

“Oh!... I... I do as well. You.”

Greg laughed heartily, sagging against the other man’s chest. “You’re a true romantic, Mycroft Holmes.”

“I’ve missed your laughter.”

“I’ve missed everything about you.” Greg sighed, his hands trailing down Mycroft’s hips. He ground his pelvis lightly against the other man’s, feeling a thrill of arousal. “I wish we could be together tonight. It is our anniversary. Sort of.”

“We can.” Mycroft murmured, his arms tightening around Greg.

“He’s waiting for you.”

“He would not know….”

“He told me that you were exclusive, Mycroft.” Greg could not help but think of Jude, the hell she’d put him through — and how he’d hurt Mycroft. “Let’s not start with a betrayal. We’ve both had too much of that.”

Mycroft nudged his nose against Greg’s face, inhaling deeply. “You are correct, of course, Detective Inspector. Greg. I owe him that. At the very least.”
Greg pressed a kiss to his lips. “I’m going to leave early tomorrow.” He decided. “Take the first train. I need to get back to London for Georgianna. And the last thing you — all of you — need is me hanging around.” He kissed Mycroft again, a sweet kiss, full on his dear mouth, breathing in his familiar scent and letting it fill him. “If you like, you can come to mine on Boxing Day. I know Georgianna would be thrilled.”

Mycroft’s smile bloomed into happiness. “Yes. Yes, I would like that very much. It’s… it’s a date?”

Greg grinned. “Yeah, it is. And I think it’ll be pretty fabulous”

Chapter End Notes

Not going to be a very good Christmas for Michelè.

Is Mycroft’s desire for Greg to live with him premature? He’d wanted it long before they stopped seeing each other. It represents the commitment, the security he craves.

Sorry this posted later than usual. The Ronde van Vlanderen was this morning — one of the biggest days in bike racing — so I had to watch while I pedalled on the turbo. GREAT race! Super exciting. Both the men’s and women’s races. Ironically, a double Italian win!

Love all your great comments!

Next week: an explosive Boxing Day
Boxing Day

Chapter Summary

How Greg and Mycroft spent Christmas and Boxing Day.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg had gone directly from the train to the Met on Christmas day and worked until it was time to drive to Acton for Georgianna. He’d left work early on Christmas Eve to catch the train to the Cotswolds for Mummy’s party — and Greg certainly didn’t regret how that had worked out! — and he was off Boxing Day to be with his daughter, but there was still a bomber out there somewhere who needed catching.

The third explosion had killed one woman and would certainly have killed another had John Watson not sprinted to the scene with Greg, arriving ten minutes before the paramedics. John’s time in Afghanistan had prepared him well for the gory scene, and he had known exactly how to save her life.

Greg wasn’t sure how he might feel, waking up with the sort of catastrophic injuries she had sustained — she would have a long recovery and would never be the same — but the woman’s family had been incredibly grateful. The doctors didn’t know when she would awake, didn’t know yet how her brain might have been injured. Greg just hoped she could remember something that could help them.

Because despite the special task force, despite the involvement of the Met’s Special Terrorism Unit and MI5, they had not gotten farther than blurry CCTV footage of a man, average height, average weight, wearing jeans, trainers and a hoody with a carry bag that could have fit the second parcel bomb, walking into the Greenfield Avenue Post Office in bloody Ealing — they knew from a surviving cinder of brown paper that the bomb had been posted from there. The branch had been busy with holiday traffic and no one remembered that particular man or that particular parcel. Greg himself had helped comb through all the surrounding CCTV footage in an attempt to trace the suspect, but he had disappeared into a blind spot and not come out the other side. They’d lost him.

Now all packages bigger than a jiffy bag were being x-rayed — a process that had slowed mail delivery to a crawl. Greg himself had given a press conference explaining why holiday packages would be arriving late. He’d appealed to people, and especially businesses, to call the specially set up hotline if they received a suspicious parcel. After three explosions, the public seemed understanding.

The task force had numerous calls on the hotline. The most explosive things they’d yet found was a box of Christmas Crackers.

It was a relief when he had to leave it all behind in favour of Georgianna.

Greg was on the way to collect his daughter when he received a text. When he saw who it was from, his heart beat a little faster.

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
Happy Christmas, Detective Inspector. I trust your holiday has not been too trying. I must admit, mine has not been the best, but then, I received the only gift I desired on Christmas Eve.

Greg smiled at the message, relieved and happy. His chest filled with butterflies that fluttered to his stomach and back up to fly woozily around his heart.

He’d slept very little after leaving Mycroft in the kitchen, too full of the possibilities to close his eyes. He was up and ready to leave long before the household stirred. Greg had decided he’d rather leave without thanking his hosts and wait for his train at the station than risk Mummy forcing him to stay. Greg had no illusions about Mummy’s willingness to exert the full force of her personality to indulge her whims, and he wanted, above all else, to avoid a scene — and almost as much, to avoid seeing Michelè with Mycroft again.

He’d booked a ticket from Moreton Marsh to London Paddington online — Moreton Marsh was farther away from the Holmes’s Tudor monstrosity than Stow-on-the-Wold but had an earlier train and faster travel time.

Greg ordered a taxi and made his way quietly to the dramatic front hallway to await it. A small noise startled him and Mycroft appeared spectre-like from the dark. For a heart-rending moment, Greg was certain the tall, solemn figure had repented, regretting the decision made so hastily the night before. Then Mycroft’s lips curled into a soft, sincere smile and Greg breathed more easily.

He saw the questions in Mycroft’s eyes and smiled to reassure him that he too was elated by their reunion. They came together in the little vestibule by the front door, Greg drawing the taller man towards him for a gentle kiss. They rested their foreheads together, and Mycroft sighed softly, an exhalation of joy.

“I didn’t expect to see you.” Greg whispered. “It’s a lovely surprise.”

“I found I could not wait for tomorrow.” Mycroft murmured. Greg kissed him again, his heart full and overflowing. “I’ve brought a few items for your journey. To make you more comfortable.” He pressed a carry bag into Greg’s hands.

“What is this?” He asked.

Mycroft drew a scarf from the bag and wrapped it around Greg’s neck. It was dark and decadently soft, settling into his collar like a warm cloud. “The temperature dropped overnight.” Mycroft told him. “There’s a cap and gloves as well.”

“I can’t take your scarf — is it yours?” Greg asked suddenly worried he was depriving Mycroft’s father of his warm scarf.

“It is mine, one I haven’t worn for many years. It’s been languishing in a cedar chest for at least a decade, along with the other things.” Mycroft told him. “Please take it, I’ll be easier knowing you’re warm enough.”

“Oh... erm, thanks. I appreciate it.” Greg caressed the taller man’s neck, realising he was dressed in the same clothes he’d worn the night before — the copper tweed waistcoat and trousers and the green shirt under his dressing gown. Did that mean he had not slept with Michelè?

Dismissing the thought quickly, before it could begin to bother him, Greg smiled at the taller man, hefting the bag. “Gloves must be heavy.”

“I’ve taken the liberty of making you tea.” Mycroft whispered. “There’s a thermos and a bit of breakfast. I’m sorry I couldn’t manage something hot.”
Greg grinned. “You’re mad.” He muttered and kissed him again, feeling his passion beginning to surface. The kiss lingered, becoming harder, wetter. Mycroft pinned him to the wall with his body, his hands stroking down Greg’s sides, over his coat. Greg wanted to strip the heavy garment off, expose himself to the wandering of those elegant hands. He felt happy, happier than he had in a long time. It felt almost foreign.

Slowly they pulled apart. “You wore this coat last year.” Mycroft murmured, rubbing the cloth between his fingers. “On Christmas Eve.”

“It’s my coat.” Greg said, smiling broadly.

Mycroft returned the smile, caressing Greg’s face tenderly from brow to chin.

“I was thinking...” Greg said slowly. “If you want to wait to tell Michelè, I’d understand. It’s a shite thing to do on Christmas.”

“It’s already done.” Mycroft said. His eyes skittered away, and the cop in Greg knew there was a story there.

He didn’t ask. Instead Greg simply rejoiced as a weight lifted off his shoulders. He could not help but smile. “Selfishly, I’m glad.”

“I, too.”

Greg rested his face against Mycroft’s neck, inhaling the scents of wool and pomade wax and sleep-warm skin with just the barest hint of aftershave spice. It hit Greg hard — he didn’t want to leave Mycroft behind. After all the months apart, Greg was hungry for his touch, for his proximity. He wanted to hold Mycroft close for hours, lose himself in the feel of his skin and the sound of his voice.

A loud squawking honk sounded, and they both jumped. His taxi had arrived.

“I should go before he wakes the whole house.” Greg mumbled. He kissed Mycroft goodbye, not allowing himself to linger. Mycroft stepped back and opened the door and with a last searing look, Greg left.

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**My Christmas would have been infinitely better if I could have spent it with you. But I had to work, so I couldn’t have done anyway. Are you back in London?**

He pressed ‘send’ just as the traffic light turned green.

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**I am, just. I presume you are on your way to collect Georgianna?**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**Yep. Still coming over tomorrow? G will be happy to see you.**

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**If I am still invited.**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**Of course you are!**

From: MYCROFT HOLMES
**Then I will be delighted to see Georgianna as well — almost as delighted as I will be to see her**
father. What time would be convenient? What can I bring?**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**How does noon sound? We can get lunch. You don’t need to bring anything but yourself.**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**And… if you want to stay over, you can. You’re invited. It won’t be more than a kiss and a cuddle with G in the flat, but if we’re serious — and if we’re planning to move in together, I think we are — there’s no reason why you shouldn’t.**

From: DETECTIVE INSPECTOR LESTRADE
**Just saying. You’re under no obligation.**

There was no immediate reply to the flurry of texts. Greg began to feel paranoid — had he come on too strongly? Mycroft was the one who had pushed for Greg to live with him... At Jude’s he was invited in for a few minutes, and given a bottle of beer while Georgianna gathered her things.

“How are you doing, Greg?” Jude’s husband, Rupert, asked, shaking his hand. “You’ve had a pretty tough year.”

“Much better, thanks.” Greg suppressed a smile, thinking that things were pretty fantastic just now. He took a swig of his beer, noticing that Jude was not sitting by Rupert as she had on every previous visit since their marriage. Rather she’d chosen Greg’s side of the table. He knew her well enough to know that wasn’t happenstance. Greg examined his ex-wife and her husband. There was tension between them that hadn’t been there last year. “It was a bit rough for a while,” Greg told Rupert. “But the neurologist tells me there should be few, if any, long term effects.”

That wasn’t 100 percent true. She had warned him that he could very well be subject to depression and mood swings indefinitely. But he took the antidepressants faithfully and that seemed to stave off those complications. (Thank god they’d weaned him off the SSRIs, the side-effects had been murder!)

“Good, I’m relieved.” Jude said, leaning closer. “Your hair’s really grown out.” She ran her fingers through Greg’s silver hair, a sign of easy affection. “You’d never know it had been shaved.” Her casual touch made Greg uncomfortable, and he could see from the tensing of his jaw that it upset Rupert too. Greg pulled away from her as naturally as he could, taking a long swig of beer.

“Yeah, that’s great.” Rupert echoed. “Jude tells me your boyfriend was at hospital with you every day.” He emphasised the word ‘boyfriend’ very slightly.

Greg’s smile was thin. “Erm, yeah, he was.”

“Mycroft was it?” Rupert pronounced the name slowly, drawing out the two syllables. “Some kind of toff.”

“Yes.” Greg said tightly. “Some kind...”

“He took very good care of you.” Jude said, more to her husband than to Greg.

“Yeah... look is Georgianna ready? I don’t mean to be rude, but it’s a bit of a drive to me flat.”

“I’ll check.” Jude said and abandoned Greg with Rupert.
“Georgianna seemed to like him. Your boyfriend. Said he went to the shore with you over summer.”

“Just overnight.” Greg said. He eyed Rupert beadily, daring the man to make some snide comment about the way he raised his daughter. Yeah, Rupert was *here* with her all the time, but that didn’t give him license to second-guess Greg’s decisions. Jude could, Rupert, no.

“She said she liked him. Georgianna.” Rupert repeated. “But he hadn’t been around for a while.”

Greg was in too good a mood to be affected by the needling. “Everything ok?” He asked, redirecting the conversation. “Just... Jude seemed a little tense — how she is when she’s brassed off.”

Red spots appeared on Rupert’s cheeks and grew. “Jude’s fine.” He snarled.

Greg held up his hands placatingly. “Hey, I’ve been there. I get it.” He said into the face of Rupert’s growing fury.

“Dad!” To Greg’s relief Georgianna bounced down the stairs. She’d filled out in the past few months, wasn’t quite a string bean any more. Her hips and bust had begun to blossom, her long legs were shapely and strong... she looked like a young woman all of a sudden. Her clothes, Greg decided, her clothes were different too, more grown up. Her jeans were tucked into riding boots and her jumper clung to her curves instead of covering them. Her dark curls were caught in a messy knot and the hint of makeup she wore accented her big grey eyes. It was disconcerting how beautiful she was.

She hugged him the same way she always had, and grinned showing her mouthful of shiny orthodontia. Jude had decreed that she didn’t want Georgianna to have ‘British teeth,’ so Greg had ponied up for braces. He was glad he had, it made this young woman look like his teenaged daughter again.

“You ready?” He asked her.

“Yeah, let’s go. Bye Mom, bye Rupert.”

Greg took Georgianna’s bag, a new-looking sports duffel, and hoisted it onto his shoulder. “Geez, kid, you got rocks in here?”

Georgianna giggled. “No! Just stuff I need.”

Jude laid her hand on Greg’s shoulder and leaned in to kiss him. He *almost* let habit pull him into a deeper kiss than he wanted — than was appropriate — but at the last second turned his head so her kiss landed on his cheek.

“Erm... happy Christmas, Jude.” Greg said, pulling away. “Night, Rupert.” He turned and raised a hand — and was floored by the rage on the man’s face. All directed at his wife. Greg guessed she must have begun cheating on him in earnest.

As they climbed into Greg’s car, Georgianna sighed. “I thought you’d never get here.” She announced.

“Uhm, I was on time, wasn’t I?”

“It’s not you, Dad. Mum and Rupert have been fighting all day. It sucks.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.” Greg said. He *was* sorry, but not surprised.
“Mum’s being weird.” Georgianna stared out her window, avoiding eye contact with her father.

“Weird? Weird to you?”

“No, just… weird…” She said. “When you were married, did you ever get really mad at Mum?”

“Yeah, of course. And she got really mad at me once or twice.” Or a hundred times.

“What did she do that made you mad at her?”

“Mph…” There was no way Greg was going to wade into that morass. “Georgianna… does this have something to do with your mum and Rupert fighting?”

She didn’t answer immediately. When she did, her voice was uncharacteristically small. “I think Mum has a… a boyfriend.”

Greg had no doubt that she did. “Erm… what makes you think that, honey?”

Georgianna shrugged. “She had a new necklace, a nice one. She said she got it for herself, but Rupert doesn’t believe her. I heard him ask her if it was from Tony.”

Bloody hell! He was going to have to have a conversation with Jude about this — and he was dreading it already. “You know, it’s easy to jump to conclusions, but one thing I’ve learned from being a detective is that things aren’t always what they seem. Especially in relationships.”

Georgianna considered that silently. “You know, if it gets to be too much, you can call me, and I’ll come get you.”

“Thanks, Dad… I know you’re working.”

“Hey, don’t worry about that, Gi. Call me anytime. OK?”

“OK.” She agreed. They drove in silence for a few minutes. Georgianna was restless, changing the music from Queen to Gang of Four. It suited the mood in the car and Greg began to hum along, murmuring some of the lyrics. He wanted to tell her about Mycroft…

Georgianna took a deep breath. “Dad… did Mum have a boyfriend when you were married? Is that why you got divorced?”

Greg felt panic gathering in his guts. Panic and bitter anger. Goddamn Jude and her bloody cheating! Goddamn Rupert!

He had never expected Georgianna to ask this question — he didn’t want her to know, didn’t want her relationship with her mother to suffer. Even when he had been devastated by Jude’s cheating, when they could barely speak to each other without screaming, they’d always presented a unified front for Georgianna. No matter what else was going on, he and Jude made certain their daughter felt secure and loved. They’d fought viciously, but never where their daughter might overhear. Clearly Rupert had no such compunction. And Georgianna was older now. She understood more.

“Your mother and I had a very different relationship than she has with Rupert.” Greg told her, keeping his voice calm. “I don’t know what’s going on with them, but I’m sorry you had to hear it. Whatever it is, I hope they can work it out. But seriously, Georgianna, if it’s ever too much, call me. Day or night. Yeah?”

“OK.”
“OK. Good.” Greg glanced at her, she was sitting pensively, her huge grey eyes fixed on the road ahead. “I have some good news.” He told her.

“Yeah? What?” Georgianna shook off her dark expression and looked at Greg expectantly.

“I, erm… Mycroft and I… we, erm, decided to give it another go. He’s coming by tomorrow.”

Her eyes widened. “Really?”

“Yeah, really. I guess he’s, erm, officially my boyfriend now.”

“Really!”

“I wouldn’t lie about it.” Greg chuckled.

“How…? What happened? Oh! I knew you belonged together!”

He snorted a laugh. “Did you? Well, you knew better than we did, I guess.”

“Was it romantic? I thought you didn’t see him at all anymore… did he send you a letter? Did he… did he find you and… and pour his heart out to you?!”

Greg laughed out loud. “Nothing like that.” He wondered if she’d been reading romance novels or overloading on soap operas.

“Well? What happened?!”

“What happened… you know I work with his brother sometimes? I was worried about… some of the decisions he was making. I texted Mycroft about it. We texted back and forth a bit, mostly about Sherlock, but we caught up a little…” Greg trailed off.

“And then?!”

“You are keen!” He laughed. “I was trying to look out for Sherlock and so was he… we ended up in the same place…” Greg shrugged. “We started talking and here we are.”

“You saw him and you knew you couldn’t live without him.” Georgianna said dreamily.

Greg giggled. “Something like that, I guess... ow! What was that for?!”

Georgianna had punched him on the arm. “You never should have broken up with him!”

“I didn’t…” He didn’t need to justify himself to her, but maybe he could explain better now. “Georgianna, it’s not that simple. You know I wasn’t myself then. And for all I knew, I never would be again. I didn’t want him… taking care of me. Do you understand?”

She frowned, her penetrating gaze reflecting confusion. “But isn’t that what you do? Take care of your partner when they’re sick?”

“Yeah. And if we’d been together longer, I think that’s what would have happened. But it had only been a few months when I was injured. If it was... a few years... but it wasn’t.” Greg said firmly. “I didn’t want our relationship to be defined by my injury.”

“You didn’t want him to feel like he had to take care of you?”

“Yeah, exactly. And I needed to know I could take care of myself.” Greg told her. “I needed... time.”
“But weren’t you afraid... weren’t you worried that he’d find someone else?” She asked.

Greg glanced at her, saw the assessing look on her face. He wasn’t about to tell her that Mycroft had found someone else. “I couldn’t worry about that, Gi. I didn’t expect that we’d get back together. I didn’t know if I’d even be able to have a relationship again... with anyone. Happily... I feel mostly OK now.”

“But you missed him, didn’t you?”

“Yeah. I did. I just didn’t know how much until I saw him again.”

“That’s so romantic.” She said mistily. Greg could not stifle his guffaw.

—

After Mycroft had started seeing Michelè, his political peers had sensed an opportunity — a potential weakness in The Iceman. Attractive assistants and attachés, deputy secretaries and associate directors, men and women, young and not-so-young had begun flirting with him, some openly, others more subtly. They were, he quickly realised, put up to it by their bosses.

He put an end to it with a particularly vicious put down. He hadn’t intended the American Ambassador’s attaché should cry... but he couldn’t find it within himself to be sorry.

After some reflection, Mycroft continued seeing Michelè. He had no evidence that Sanna Van Kiersbruck, for whom he worked, had asked Michelè to try to pull Mycroft... and he could see that the Italian’s attraction to him was authentic. But he kept a close eye on Van Kiersbruck.

On Christmas Eve, after the conversation with Greg, Mycroft had tarried in the kitchen. He’d lusted after Greg Lestrade for years, he’d very possibly been in love with the man since the moment the Detective Inspector had told him off and then taken Sherlock under his wing anyway, caring for him better than anyone who had been paid ever had. Now he was learning that Greg had the singular ability to surprise him — he’d not thought Greg would ever return his regard in the first place, let alone want him again.

Mycroft had grown up in the big Tudor manor house, he’d spent his childhood in and out of the kitchen. He had many memories of the room, but now it took on a special patina — it was the place Greg had come back to him. Mummy’s kitchen would never feel the same.

If he were honest with himself, Mycroft could admit he’d fantasised about Greg wanting him back. He’d thought it was impossible, a pipe dream, and he’d resigned himself to a cordial relationship with the Detective Inspector — after a long enough time had passed to allow Mycroft to lock away the memories of their affair. Six months was not nearly long enough for that, but he’d found he wanted to see Greg regardless of the damage to his heart. If Greg had not come to Mummy’s party, Mycroft knew he would have sought the Detective Inspector out another way.

And somehow, improbably, Greg had looked at Mycroft and had wanted him! He’d asked if they could rekindle their romance! Mycroft could hardly believe it! He wanted to rush to the blue room
and demand that Greg account for himself! To assure him it wasn’t all a dream!

At the same time Mycroft was afraid to see Greg again. What if it was, after all, just a dream?

When Mycroft finally went to his room, head buzzing with astonished happiness, he found Michelè waiting for him. He was startled — in his reverie he’d allowed himself to forget about the Italian.

“It took a long time, talking with Greg, yes? Is everything good?” He eased the suit coat off Mycroft’s shoulders, his narrow hands skimming down his arms. It made him shiver.

“Apologies... Michelè... time got away from me.”

“You are here now, yes?” Michelè murmured, wrapping his arms around Mycroft from behind and nuzzling his neck. “I missed you.”

Mycroft shrugged him off gently and turned to face him. “Michelè... I know this is terrible timing... and I’m sorry about that... but I can’t see you anymore.”

The Italian regarded Mycroft for a moment, a complicated expression on his face. “You have found out, no? I’ve been afraid you would discover what I hide... Mycroft... it may have begun that way, but I care for you truly...” He spread his arms out, offering himself. “I know you see. You can see what I say is true, yes? I care about you very much.”

Van Kiersbruck had put him up to it! Now that he knew for certain, it was obvious. Mycroft must have needed the distraction he provided badly enough that he had not wanted to see it. He turned away from Michelè, rubbing his eyes tiredly and going over everything he’d ever said to the Italian. He’d not given Van Kiersbruck anything — quite the opposite. He’d suspected this and taken every precaution. He would consider the appropriate retaliation later.

“I’m willing to be congenial for the holiday celebration — there’s no need to ruin anyone else’s day. But after we return to London, I won’t see you again. Tell Sanna to send someone else to fill your post.”

“Mycroft, please...”

“Save your breath.” Mycroft told him as he strode to the door. “I’ll sleep elsewhere.”

Any guilt Mycroft might have felt dissipated entirely, and he focussed all of his attention on contemplating his future with Greg. He settled in the green room, another tiny corner room that his father used as a study. (Oh the irony!) He lay on the threadbare sofa, dozing with his feet hanging over the arm, tossing and turning restlessly, longing to be with Greg, to be in his own flat, to be anywhere than in his parents’ blasted folly of a home...

The silver lining to his sleepless night was seeing the Detective Inspector off Christmas morning — a small moment of happiness in a very long and trying day.

On Boxing Day, Mycroft drove himself to the Detective Inspector’s home. He stood a moment, feeling the bags he carried weighing down his arms, before pressing the button to ring his flat — a last second eruption of nerves stilling his hand. “You’re being ridiculous.” He told himself and stabbed the buzzer.

“Is that you?” Greg’s voice was tinny through the intercom.

“Yes, Detective Inspector.” Mycroft said to the door. “It’s me.” He heard the door unlock and pushed it open, giddiness hurrying him up the flights of stairs to Greg’s door. It was open, and
Georgianna Lestrade was standing in the hall. Since he’d seen her last, she had begun to look more like an adult than a child, resembling her father more than ever. “Miss Lestrade.” Mycroft could not keep himself from smiling. “You’re looking well.”

“Mr. Holmes!” She made a slight gesture, as if she wanted to hug him but, unsure of its reception, thought better of it. Then Greg stood in the doorway, his hand on his daughter’s shoulder, a lovely smile dawning on his handsome face. Mycroft felt his cheeks heat as he, mortifyingly, blushed.

“Come in.” Greg said. “Give us minute, Gigi, yeah?”

The girl rolled her eyes. “Dad! Georgianna!”

He laughed and kissed her on the side of her head. “Give us a minute.”

She huffed a little, but flashed a metallic grin at Mycroft as she brushed past her father.

Greg held out his hand and Mycroft took it, letting the other man pull him close. “I missed you.” Greg murmured.

Mycroft felt his face warm even more. “And I you.”

Greg touched his fingers to Mycroft’s burning face, smiling with delight. “There you are.” He leaned in and pressed his lips to the apple of Mycroft’s cheek, his jaw, then the corner of his mouth. Mycroft couldn’t stand it — he grasped Greg’s face and pulled him into a fierce kiss, pushing his tongue into his mouth and tasting him... tasting him...

He found himself held in strong arms, crushed against Greg’s broad chest, the warm, familiar scent of cotton-soap-hair gel-Old Spice-Greg in his nose.

“I, erm, told Georgianna that you’re my boyfriend.” Greg said.

Mycroft looked down into soft, brown eyes with a troubled cast. “Are you worried I wouldn’t agree?”

The policeman shrugged. “I shouldn’t have assumed.”

“We’re planning to cohabit, it’s safe to assume that I am yours.”

Greg smiled. “You’re mine!” He said softly and kissed Mycroft again, wholeheartedly, his big hands tracing up Mycroft’s spine. Reluctantly he pulled away. “We should go in.” He said. “I guess.”

“Quite right.” Mycroft realised he’d dropped his valise and the carry bag he’d brought and retrieved them. Greg’s home was almost the same as the first time he’d been there, the row of windows letting in the bright, winter light, illuminating the patterned rug and severe, black dining table. The same liquor bottles sat neatly in their place on the kitchen worktop, and the Twombly print reigned over the lounge. There were two new photos of Georgianna on the fridge, one, he recognised, from the beach in Cornwall. Mycroft allowed himself to dwell, for just a moment, on what the place he and Greg would share might be like. Uncluttered for certain — Greg would not abide an untidy home.

Mycroft set the carrier bag on the kitchen island and let Greg take his coat and valise. Georgianna was in the lounge with a suitcase record player, clearly a Christmas gift from her father. She had two boxes of old vinyl albums — Greg’s obviously, brought out of storage for the occasion — and had several on the floor around the record player. Mycroft recognised the song currently flowing from the surprisingly good built-in speaker, Life On Mars. Mycroft’s sixth form roommate had had that same
album on cassette and though he’d never admitted it, Mycroft had become rather fond of several of the songs. Hearing it now gave him a sense of intense nostalgia.

The rude trill of a mobile sounded, interrupting his thoughts. Greg grimaced and fished his phone from his pocket. Looking at the screen, he frowned epicly. “I have to take this.” He said, putting the phone to his ear. Turning his back, he greeted the caller with, “This better be a bloody emergency.”

Mycroft knew from Greg’s body language that it was indeed an emergency. Greg would have to leave, go to work, instead of spending time with him. Mycroft’s disappointment was acute.

“There’s been another bombing.” Greg announced, his face grim. “I’m sorry... I have to go.” He was already pulling on his coat, the scarf Mycroft had given him settling comfortably around his neck.

“Perfectly understandable.” Mycroft told him, swallowing his chagrin. “Do not worry about us, we’ll be fine.”

Greg froze, seeming to comprehend at that second that he was leaving Mycroft and Georgianna together. “Oh god... Gi, I’m sorry... Mycroft...”

“Go.” Mycroft ordered. “Your daughter and I can entertain each other until you’ve finished.”

“It’s fine, Dad.” Georgianna sighed. “Go catch the nutter blowing people up.” She had stood up without Mycroft noticing.

“You’re sure...? Bloody hell...” He grabbed his wallet and keys, stopping to toss two twenty pound notes on the worktop. “Get some lunch, yeah? I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Mycroft grasped him and kissed him, briefly capturing his full attention. “You’re sure about this?” Greg inquired anxiously.

“I’m certain.” Mycroft kissed him again and adjusted the scarf — he was pleased to see Greg still wearing it. “Don’t worry about us.”

With a painfully grateful look, Greg kissed Mycroft one last time, waved over his shoulder at Georgianna, then rushed out the door. It closed behind him leaving only the chorus of Life On Mars to fill the void.

Georgianna was surveying Mycroft with huge, tremulous eyes. Mycroft raised his eyebrows, silently asking what she was thinking. “Dad... Dad won’t be gone long.” She asserted.

“I should think another explosion might keep him a while.” He studied her. “What are you worried about, Miss Lestrade? Your father shouldn’t be in any danger.”

“No, it’s...” She stopped herself.

Mycroft tilted his head curiously. “Tell me.” He urged gently.

Georgianna took a deep breath. “Me Mum... she would have a fit when he had to go to work... when... when they had plans.” She told him. “She’d give him hell.”

Mycroft smiled humourlessly. “That’s unfortunate.” He remarked.

“You’re not upset?”

“I’m disappointed.” He admitted. It was frustrating that he had got Greg back, but had spent hardly a
half hour with him. It didn’t quite feel real yet. And he had cleared his schedule today expressly for
Greg. “But needs must.” He told Georgianna. “I too have a demanding profession, I know how hard
it is for him to go, and I know how necessary it is. Now, what would you like for lunch? I’ve always
thought Thai goes especially well with David Bowie, but I could be persuaded otherwise...”

He stopped talking — the girl had hugged him ferociously. He patted her awkwardly. “I won’t leave
your father over his job, Miss Lestrade. You have nothing to worry about on that front.”

Chapter End Notes

So! Speaking of jobs, I finally got one!!!! Eleven months unemployed and I finally have
been offered a good job with reasonable pay and good benefits! What this means for
you? I’ll have to see if my new work schedule will affect how much writing I’m able to
do each week. I may need to put up updates every other week... but we’ll see how it
goes.

Next week - another fabulous date. FINALLY!
Chapter Summary

Greg has an idea for a ‘Fantastic Date.’ Will it work out how he hopes?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Negotiating the parameters of flat-hunting together had been... interesting.

When Greg had divorced, he’d taken his portion of the sale of the little house he and Jude had bought and rehabbed together — the house where Georgianna had spent her first ten years — and gone to an agent. “I need two bedrooms, as close to central London as I can afford. Doesn’t have to be fancy.”

He’d looked at seven flats before he walked into the place he now lived. It was in unfashionable West London, a neighbourhood revitalised by the Tate Modern, the Millennium Bridge and a flood of gentrifying hipsters. The building was a nondescript mid-century low-rise, and Greg remembered feeling dubious as they approached. But when he stepped into the flat and saw the row of big windows in the airy main room, Greg felt like he could live there — not just live but thrive. He’d crossed his fingers that the bedrooms and bog were OK, because he wanted this flat.

The larger of the bedrooms was not especially large, but it had two big windows, room for a double bed with space leftover, and a huge closet in which Greg could fit all of his clothes and shoes and assorted accoutrements. The loo was nothing special, but it was clean and in good repair. It had a small linen closet, an adequate medicine cabinet and a towel warmer. The smaller bedroom didn’t have a closet, but there was space enough for a wardrobe — and it wasn’t like Georgianna would be spending the bulk of her time there. It didn’t have to be perfect.

He’d leased it immediately and put a fresh coat of paint on the walls himself. He let Georgianna choose the colour for her room (pea green) and pick out some furniture at IKEA. And he’d done the rest himself with an eye towards keeping the open, airy feel in that main room. Greg supposed he’d under-furnished it — there was a large stretch with naught but carpet — but he didn’t care. He liked it.

The house he’d shared with Jude had never made him happy like this flat. Living there, Greg realised that it was because, no matter how many walls Greg knocked down, how many rooms they combined, the new spaces ended up full of stuff — couches, chairs, plants, bookshelves, cabinets, desks, occasional tables, coffee table, breakfast table, dining table, footstools, wardrobes, dressers, beds, bed tables, lamps, gewgaws, knick-knacks, bric-a-brac… STUFF. It was cosy instead of airy. Charming instead of elegant. Cluttered instead of spare.

Greg supposed he was a little spoiled by his flat — it wasn’t a big place, but it was all, with the exception of Georgianna’s room, his. He didn’t have to deal with anyone else’s junk cluttering up his space.

As for Mycroft’s flat, there were things Greg liked about it — it was enormous, for one. And it had fireplaces in the lounge and the bedroom — Greg missed having a fireplace. The bathrooms and the
dressing room were huge and **glorious**! And who could hate the dramatic window-walls overlooking London?

But it was dark. All the wood, the bookshelves, the floors, the panelling — all dark. The dark, heavy furniture suited the space, giving it a silent grandeur. It made Greg feel like he was in the world’s fanciest library — a nice place to visit, but he didn’t want to live there. The window-walls with the beautiful views… well they gave Greg vertigo if he stood too close. And the architect was an idiot — the bedroom had southern exposure and the dining room, northern. It was great if you wanted to watch the sunrise from bed or the sunset from the dining table. But the heat and glare of morning and afternoon sun made heavy blinds necessary in both rooms, so for large parts of the day, the view was obscured, the light cut off. And the kitchen… the kitchen with its sterile white and stainless-steel décor resembled nothing so much as a laboratory. Greg felt like he should don latex gloves every time he entered.

Even if they got rid of all Mycroft’s furniture and painted the walls and bookshelves white — the mention of which had made Mycroft visibly shudder — they’d still have to deal with the sun.

No, it was better that they find someplace new, someplace they could both feel at home. A place they could furnish together — a place light and airy for Greg, a place that was easily secured and large enough to house his library for Mycroft.

Which meant they had to have a conversation about money. Greg knew there would be landmines galore in such a conversation, and he said as much.

Mycroft disagreed. “Any dwelling with the security that I require will be far out of your price range, my dear.” He told Greg. “Since I am the one with the requirement, you needn’t trouble yourself about it.”

“What does that mean?” Greg asked dangerously. “That you have some complicated algorithm for how we’d split the rent or that I shouldn’t worry me pretty head about it?”

“Oh dear, will I be in trouble if I say the latter?” Mycroft fretted facetiously. “I see why you anticipated that this conversation would be fraught.”

“Don’t be a knob.”

“Security is necessitated by my work thus the government provides funding.” Mycroft explained. “The sale of my current flat plus the accrued housing allowance of which I haven’t had need in many years will be more than ample to purchase a suitable dwelling.”

“Purchase!?"

“Modifications will have to be made. Buying makes it all much simpler.”

“Nothing about this is simple.” Greg grumbled.

“Detective Inspector… Greg… please accept that this is the way it has to be.”

“Mycroft… I can’t *not* contribute. I understand that there’s a disparity here, that just splitting it down the middle won’t work, but I have to *pay* something. I can’t just live in your new flat for free.” Greg told him.

“It won’t be mine, it will be ours. And I was thinking we should look at townhouses.”

“Jesus, Mycroft. Are you even listening to me?”
“My dear man…” Mycroft’s eyes swept over Greg, assessing. “Is it too late to tell you that I have a complicated algorithm for how we should split the costs?”

“Yes!”

“I can show you the maths.”

“Would I understand the maths?”

“No.”

“Would you be making it up on the spot?”

“Possibly.”

“Mycrof!”

Mycroft held up his hands making a ‘calm down’ gesture. Greg ground his teeth. “I have a proposition…”

Greg scoffed. “Mycrof…”

“Please at least listen before you reject it, Detective Inspector.” Mycroft said severely.

Greg raised his hands in surrender. “Fine. I’m listening.”

“Am I correct in the assumption that you would not be moving house if you were not planning to cohabit with me?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“Then I don’t feel you should be penalised for it. I suggest that you contribute the amount you currently pay for rent and household expenses. Would that be acceptable?


“Too much? Perhaps just rent then.”

“No, Mycroft. No, it’s not too much. I just want… to pay my fair share.”

“Greg… is this… is this an excuse to avoid cohabitation? If so…”

“No! No, I want to live with you, love. You’re right, it makes sense for us — and the more I think about it, the more I know it’s what we need.”

“Well, then?”

“Alright… alright. Give me a little time to get used to the idea. Yeah? I’ve never been a kept man before.”

“And you won’t be now, my dear. You do know that?”

“I do. I guess. Just give me a little time.”

“I hope 24 hours is enough, we have an appointment with the agent tomorrow evening. She has several places to show us.”
“Jesus. No flies on you!”

“I put my flat on the market this morning.”

Greg huffed in surprise — then wondered why anything Mycroft did surprised him. “It might not sell right away…”

“There’s currently a bidding war between three parties. I expect it’ll be settled soon.”

“A bidding war…”

“Yes.” Mycroft smiled his most reptilian smile. “We should be able to afford quite a nice townhouse.”

Greg bowed to the inevitable.

In self-defence, Greg took over dealing with the estate agent. He needed some say in the process — and Mycroft had outsourced it to Anthea, so it seemed right to take it off her plate onto his own.

Mindy, the agent, was a stylish, middle-aged woman with the ability to be so unobtrusive that one could forget she was in the room. Greg suspected she used this to her advantage quite a lot — it took a special person to be the estate agent for MI5. He also suspected that while Mindy seemed so friendly and helpful, she could have his balls on a platter in fewer than thirty seconds if she felt the need. He tried to keep this in mind whenever they spoke.

Georgianna was on a skiing holiday with a classmate and her family, which meant Greg wouldn’t see her on his regular weekend. And he had decided months ago to eschew the Policeman’s New Year’s Eve Ball this year. He’d had a second thought after he’d reunited with Mycroft — but only one. Revisiting their first outing had an appeal, but the thought of putting on a tux made him… angry.

Dr Ephroam had started Greg on EMDR therapy in August. Greg had been sceptical at first — laying back, thinking about John Clay attacking him while moving his eyes back and forth rapidly (Dr Ephroam used a metronome and Greg shifted his eyes with each tick) seemed like complete quackery. But it had worked! The entire event was less traumatic now. He rarely had nightmares, and he was sleeping much better — he didn’t need a wall at his back any longer. He no longer felt panicked when other men used the bog at the same time as he. In addition to desensitising him to the assault, Greg had devoted sessions to his fears and his frustrations about his head injury and his ongoing health. He’d devoted sessions to his divorce, his remaining anger over Jude’s cheating, and even his anger at Mycroft’s ‘abandonment.’ Mycroft had not abandoned him, but sometimes it felt that way. Greg had desensitised himself to the lot.

But the shocking rush of anger at the thought of donning black tie and going to the Ball let him know that his work was not done. He made a mental note to explore that at his next appointment.

The explosion on Boxing Day had been a horror — something to which Greg might well devote a session of EMDR — but it had also supplied them with vital clues to the bomber’s identity. The parcel had been delivered over a week before Christmas — before they’d realised there was a serial bomber, before they’d begun screening and x-raying packages. The office had been closing for the week, and the receptionist had been the only remaining employee when it arrived. She told the police that the package was stamped ‘perishable,’ so she put it in the break room fridge on her way out the door.

It had been discovered there at lunchtime on Boxing Day and opened on the break room table. Of
the seven people in the room two had been killed outright and four were in intensive care. One lucky bugger had walked to the ambulance, conscious and stable, and Greg had been able to interview him in hospital.

Bernardo Gomez told Greg that he and his co-workers had joked about the bombings before opening the parcel but had assumed it had been X-rayed and was safe. “Joey said we’d better have a butcher’s. Might be radioactive plum pudding, innit... Joey was having a laugh... then there was this noise, and everything went white...” Joey Pope had been killed instantly, but his body and that of one of the injured had shielded Bernardo and another man from the worst of it, allowing them to survive.

Also affecting the survival rate: the explosion was weaker than the previous explosions. Nine days in the refrigerator had done something to the explosives and a large swath of the brown paper it was wrapped in had survived intact. It not only had the post office frank from which it was mailed, it had fingerprints — including one on the inside of a strip of strapping tape.

The strapping-tape fingerprint wasn’t in the system, and it didn’t match any of the fingerprints on the brown paper — some of which they discovered were from the mail carrier, other postal workers and the receptionist. Several of the fingerprints belonged to Joey Pope.

The Church Street post office in Stoke Newington had more CCTV blind spots outside the building than the post office in Ealing, but more robust coverage inside. They found a figure very similar to the man in the hoodie with a carry bag at the Ealing post office CCTV, and once again in Stoke Newington, he walked into a blind spot and didn’t walk out. But they had footage of him inside the post office including a clear shot of his face.

While several Detectives were working with the photo, putting it through facial recognition software and sending it out to law enforcement around the city, country and around the world, two of Greg’s Detectives were poring over the CCTV footage on the other sides of the two blind spots into which the man had disappeared — and discovered a person in a skirt and ball cap emerging from both of the blind spots. They were able to track her — in Stoke Newington she went into the Underground where they’d eventually lost her irrevocably in the holiday crowds. But in Ealing, she got on a bus. The bus’s internal camera showed her sitting quietly until she alighted in Wapping. They were able to track her to a tower block.

Dozens of detectives and uniformed officers — with an armed response team waiting nearby — had gone door to door with the photo of the man in the post office. Within three hours, they had enough information from the neighbours to isolate a flat they thought the bomber lived in. They evacuated the surrounding residents and the armed response team stormed the flat — with the bomb squad close behind. They found William Tenny on the couch eating Cheerios and watching telly. They took him into custody easily. In the flat they found bomb-making supplies, including explosives stolen from a nearby construction site. His left index finger matched the fingerprint on the inside of the strapping tape.

As result, Greg had two days off. *In a row.* He planned to have a long lie-in on the first day, then plough through the mountain of laundry he’d amassed. He’d almost had to resort to buying clean pants…. and then, he thought, it was long past time for a Fabulous date.

To this end, Greg conspired with Mindy, the estate agent. She had a list of properties that fit Mycroft’s specifications, Greg looked through them online — images of kitchens and loos, floor plans, Google street view, 360-degree photos — and tried to narrow them down. It still felt wrong, ridiculous really, looking at houses and flats in that price range, but it was either that or move into Mycroft’s current flat — and that was no longer an option.
Greg had worked late into the evening on Boxing Day coming home to find Georgianna asleep and Mycroft awaiting him with food. He had eaten gratefully, almost fallen asleep in the shower, and then collapsed into bed with Mycroft.

“I’m sorry. Mycroft, I’m sorry about today.” He murmured, letting the other man cradle him in his arms.

“Hush.” Mycroft said, stroking Greg’s hair. “No one knows better than I the demands of an important job.”

“Mmm... was Gigi upset?”

“She would be if she heard you calling her ‘Gigi.’ Mycroft chuckled. “She was less upset than afraid that I was upset. I assured her that you’d have to do a lot worse than go to work to get rid of me.”

“She’s having a rough time at home, I think.”

“Well, we had a splendid day. Pub lunch...”

Greg chuckled. “When is the last time you had a pub lunch?”

“John Watson subjected me to a pub lunch whilst Sherlock was... away.”

“You felt guilty.”

“Possibly. It was more enjoyable with your daughter. We spent the afternoon at the Churchill War Museum...”

“Good choice.”

“One of my favourites. For dinner I taught her how to make a perfect omelette, then we played Scrabble until she went to bed.”

“Scrabble?”

“I brought it as a gift.”

“You didn’t have to bring a gift.”

“It’s just a token. I thought she’d enjoy it.”

“God, I’m tired.”

“Go to sleep, my dear man.”

“Mmmm.”

In the morning, Greg was up early to drive his daughter back to her Mum’s, but Mycroft was up even earlier. He handed Greg a mug of tea when he stumbled into the kitchen.

“Is this what it’ll be like when we live together?” Greg asked, giving him a kiss. “Hot food when I get home and hot tea in the morning?”
“And, ahem, hot loving in between?” Mycroft asked archly.

Greg laughed and kissed him again.

“Unfortunately, I do need to get to work early today.” Mycroft told him. “I suspect you have a full day ahead of you too.”

Rubbing his eyes, Greg moaned. “I do. Text later?”

“Yes.” Mycroft paused, then pressed something into his hand. Greg looked at it — it was the lift key, the key to his flat. “Come to mine tonight.” Mycroft said.

“Yeah, ok.” Greg agreed.

He’d worked late then driven himself to Mycroft’s building, using the key to unlock the garage door and then, after parking, the lift controls. It automatically took Greg to Mycroft’s floor.

Mycroft hadn’t been home a half hour. He looked tired as they ate the takeaway pasties Greg had brought — as tired as Greg felt. Later Greg realised he’d completely forgotten the meeting with the estate agent to look at townhouses — Jude would have hit the roof, but Mycroft did not even mention it. They walked through Mycroft’s shower like zombies, drying cursorily and cleaning their teeth by rote. They fell into bed and Greg didn’t even remember saying ‘goodnight.’ His alarm sounded way too early and with an apology to an irate-at-being-awakened Mycroft, Greg left for his flat to squeeze in a run before rushing back to the Met to work on finding the Christmas Bomber.

They traded off nights, meeting for hurried takeaway and sleep at Greg’s the next night, then Mycroft’s again. It was, Greg admitted to himself, both wonderful to see Mycroft daily and a complete and utter hassle to do so.

They could not move in together fast enough!

Thus, on New Year’s Eve, after the piles of clean laundry had been folded and put away in the big closet — that was completely and satisfyingly ordered for once — Greg went to the Tesco for groceries. Mycroft was coming for dinner and it had to be fabulous. Although at this point, just seeing him again would be fabulous.

Mycroft looked fatigued when he arrived, the back-and-forth schedule wearing on him as well. But his charcoal pinstripe suit was impeccable as always, a crimson pocket square shocking the eye with colour. Greg toyed with it, the silk soft under his fingertips. He wanted to ruin Mycroft against the wall. He kissed the man lightly, teasing him with soft presses of his lips.

“It’s been too long, Detective Inspector.” Mycroft moaned, biting at Greg’s mouth. His hands roamed over Greg’s chest, tweaking firming nipples between his fingers. “I’ve been anticipating this moment.” They had barely even kissed all week — they hadn’t made love since that night in the holiday park in Cornwall, high as kites in the picnic area. It seemed like it had been years, decades, rather than months.

“Oh, Mycroft.” Greg whispered, electricity surging from his erect nipples directly to his cock. He shoved the jacket off Mycroft’s shoulders, pin stripes pooling on the floor and pulled him close, kissing him hard and wet. “God, I missed you!” He felt Mycroft growing hard against his hip.

Fingers gripped Greg’s back, digging in painfully. “Take me to bed, Detective Inspector.”

“Fuck, yes.” He panted into Mycroft’s mouth, biting savage kisses against his lips. Mycroft’s hands found Greg’s arse and squeezed.
They stumbled down the hall towards Greg’s bedroom, tangled together licking and nipping tender necks and stubbled jaws. Greg struggled with waistcoat buttons, desperate for skin. Crashing into the bedroom he shoved Mycroft down onto the bed and straddled him, leaning over to kiss him deeply, tongue searching. Mycroft curled up meeting him halfway, clutching at his arms. He yanked Greg down abruptly and rolled on top of him, Greg giggling as Mycroft pinned his wrists to the mattress and rained kissed onto his face.

“Shoes off, Detective Inspector.” Mycroft murmured, sliding off the bed.

“I’m not wearing shoes.” Greg pointed out kicking off his leather slippers. He stood up and peeled off his t-shirt then finished unbuttoning Mycroft’s waistcoat. Mycroft moaned as his hands ranged over Greg’s broad chest. “Naked! Now.” Greg hissed. Mycroft pulled off his tie and tossed it aside. “You look gorgeous, but you wear too many bloody clothes.” Greg muttered, starting on the shirt buttons.

Mycroft tore open Greg’s button flies and shoved them down his hips as Greg focussed on the endless shirt buttons. He was cursing and giggling by the time he thrust the shirt off Mycroft’s shoulders and grabbed for his belt. Mycroft tittered as they grappled with his remaining clothes.

“Oh God!” Greg moaned when they were finally skin to skin. They fell onto the bed, kissing and caressing each other. The heat of Mycroft’s mouth, the rasp of his chest hair against his skin, the scrape of fingernails along his thigh — it was distractingly sensuous and Greg lay back and let it all roll over him. Mycroft was in his arms again! Greg could have wept with joy. Instead he wrapped his hand around Mycroft’s erection and stroked it light and fast the way he knew Mycroft liked best, twisting his wrist and rubbing his thumb over the dampening head.

Mycroft shuddered and reached blindly for the drawer in the bed table, jerking it open and pawing around. “Where’s the lubricant?” He mumbled. He lifted a box from the drawer and spilled its contents on the bed. Mycroft’s body grew abruptly tense. “Condoms.” He said, his voice blank.

Greg lifted the lubricant from the drawer and pressed it into Mycroft’s hand, taking the condom box from him and tossing it away. Greg kissed him, nipping his jaw and tracing his lips with his tongue. Mycroft resisted.

“What is it, love?” Greg asked, his brow wrinkling. “You’re counting condoms? Mycroft?” He knew there weren’t many left in the box. Greg saw Mycroft’s expression and sighed, falling back on the bed. He closed his eyes and covered them with the heels of his hands for a moment, then let them fall away. “You had a boyfriend — did you think I was celibate?”

“I was under the impression you weren’t ready for a relationship.”

“I wasn’t.”

Mycroft dashed the condoms off the bed angrily. “Then what’s this?”

“I didn’t have a relationship.” Greg said carefully. “I had sex.”

“I see.”

Greg took Mycroft’s face between his hands and kissed him carefully, putting all the love he felt for this man into the press of his lips and the probing of his tongue, willing Mycroft to understand. “All that’s over now.” He said softly. “I have always been honest with you. We, erm, both should get tested again.” Greg continued. “But I was careful, I think my blood test will be clean. Beyond that, does any of it matter? We’re here now, we’re moving in together. I will never cheat on you.”
For a moment Mycroft’s body remained taut... then he sagged against Greg, his arms going ‘round him tightly. “Apologies. I was... taken off guard...” He sighed. “You are offered... opportunities for coitus... with great frequency. Why shouldn’t you avail yourself.”

Greg relaxed and cuddled the other man to his chest. “I’ll make you a deal — you never say, ‘opportunities for coitus’ again and I’ll try to forget about that poncey Italian sod.”

“You aren’t jealous of him.” Mycroft asserted.

“I’m not?” Greg ran his hand down Mycroft’s ribs, over his waist to his hip and then back up, enjoying the feel of the pale skin under his fingers. “I may have fucked around a bit, but you had a relationship. You cared for him.”

“He was a distraction. A placeholder.”

“Is that all?” Greg asked mildly. In truth, the enmity he felt for Michelè had dissipated as soon as Mycroft had told him he’d broken it off with the Italian.

“You know he was.”

“Why are you upset, love?” Greg asked kissing Mycroft’s temple. “Really?”

Mycroft burrowed into Greg’s side, hiding his face and stroking Greg’s flank. “I... I don’t know what you’re doing with me. You are beautiful...”

“Mycroft —”

“Let me finish. You are attractive! Handsome, rugged. Desirable. I’ve watched men and women throwing themselves at you. You could have anyone, Greg. Anyone! And I’m just... average... I don’t know...”

“Mycroft, stop.” Greg protested, pressing his lips into the copper hair. It smelled faintly of almonds, a vestige of his pomade. “You are beautiful!” Mycroft made a sound of negation, but Greg talked over him. “I love your body! You’re so long and lean. I love touching you, making you feel good. I love your freckles. And you can dance! The way you move, you’re so sexy when you dance. And I love this, right here.” He caressed the muscle along the front of Mycroft’s hip. “And I like you. I like spending time with you. You’re never boring, Mycroft. And no one has ever cared about me the way you do. No one can hold a candle to you, love.” The speech had aroused Greg, and his cock swelled to half-mast. “Jesus, Mycroft, you can see how you turn me on.” Mycroft had blushed as crimson as his lurid pocket square. “I love how you look with colour in your cheeks.”

“It’s wretched.” Mycroft complained.

Greg rolled him onto his back and crawled on top so Mycroft could not hide from him. “It’s gorgeous.” He said, kissing a warm, rosy cheek. “And you only do it for me. I’m the only person with the privilege of seeing you blush.”

“You are.” Mycroft admitted, running his fingers through Greg’s silver hair.

Greg grinned, kissing his mouth. “Can we get back to it then? Can I suck your cock now? Would that be alright?”

Mycroft sighed, rolling his eyes. “If you must.”

Greg snorted and tickled Mycroft’s ribs until they were both giggling madly.
Greg woke slowly, the light through the window telling him it was late. He rolled over to find he was alone. He wasn’t surprised.

He found Mycroft in the kitchen, drinking tea and reading the news on a small tablet.

“I overslept.” Greg said, scratching his belly.

“You needed the sleep.” Mycroft smiled at him and Greg leaned in for a kiss. “Tea’s still hot.”

“You’re an angel.” Greg made himself a mug of tea. “I see you’re ready to go.” He fingered Mycroft’s coordinated running kit.

“Only three months until the London Marathon.” Mycroft observed. “It’s key training time — especially if you’re going to better your PR.”

“Right. I’ll get ready then. Might have to cut it short, we have an appointment at 13:00 and I need to eat beforehand.”

Mycroft looked up. “An appointment?”

“Yep. We’re looking at townhouses.”

Mycroft’s eyebrow arched upwards, but Greg could see he was pleased.

“I’ll get changed.” Greg told him, smiling.

They ran together for the first twenty minutes as Greg warmed up, then Mycroft bid him train in earnest and Greg flew away from him swiftly with a clear conscience. It felt great, running hard, feeling his lungs swell as he counted out his inhalations and exhalations, forcing his body to break rhythmically. The air grated through his throat — it was a bit sore from the previous evening’s activities. Greg grinned to himself, remembering Mycroft going to pieces, losing himself loudly in a frenzy of pleasure under Greg’s ministrations.

The sex had been intense — a ravenous reconciliation. Mycroft had wanted to consume him, biting, sucking, licking, kissing every part of him. Claiming Greg as his own. In the shower he’d discovered that Mycroft had marked him, sucked a red mark into the soft flesh between his chest and shoulder. He’d touched it with his fingertips and smiled.

Greg could not get enough of Mycroft’s touch, his taste, his smell... he’d known he missed Mycroft’s presence — talking with him, being with him. But he hadn’t known how very much he’d missed kissing Mycroft, making love with him. He’d shagged a lot of people in the six months they’d been apart. A lot of people. Maybe he’d been searching for something... but he hadn’t found it. It had been empty. Not that it hadn’t been fun — it had been great for his battered ego and it satisfied a nagging itch — but ultimately it was trivial, hollow.

Running, on the other hand, was unequivocally good for him. It had given him confidence, stamina — it had gotten him back to work full time — been an outlet for his frustrations and fears...

It calmed him now. Fucking Mycroft had been fantastic, and afterwards Greg had made them dinner. They’d sat at the black dining table eating grilled cheese and tomato sandwiches, smiling at each other like fools. The toasted bread had hurt his ravaged throat and Greg had not cared a whit. But then it hit him suddenly — moving in together, giving up his flat, becoming financially dependent... it was such a huge leap... a colossal change...
It scared him.

Greg knew it was the right move at the right time — he loved Mycroft and he wanted to be his partner — after living without him all these months, he knew that unequivocally — and this back and forth was exhausting. But he was utterly terrified. He’d lain awake for a long time after they went to bed, listening to Mycroft breath, feeling his heat and his heartbeat...

Running made the terror small, insignificant, as it made Greg feel powerful and in control. He floated home on a runner’s high, excited for the afternoon’s adventure.

After doing the research on the townhomes, Greg had settled on three properties that he thought promising — a new construction, a mid-century townhouse and a regency row house.

They met Mindy after lunch outside the mid-century townhouse — the closest to Greg’s flat.

“Mr. Holmes, I presume?” Mindy held out her hand and they shook, then she turned to Greg. “Greg!” Mindy kissed him on both cheeks in the European style, holding his hands and smiling appreciatively. Greg caught Mycroft’s raised eyebrow over her shoulder and comprehended for the first time that she was flirting with him — in front of Mycroft. Or maybe she was just being flirt-friendly, the way straight women are with gay men. Jude was like that with her school chum, Christopher. (Who had given Greg ‘the look,’ smiled knowingly and not told Jude a thing.)

Greg let Mindy lead them into the building, an early Brutalist structure, the severe lines of its cement walls both pleasing and alienating. Inside there was a mix of raw cement and dingy, white plaster walls — and the back wall of the structure was all glass overlooking a neglected garden. The floors in the entry and the big lounge were wooden. Greg liked how open it was, the lounge reaching all the way to the rear window wall.

There were dusty stairwells leading up and down. Mindy took them downstairs to a kitchen-dining room. The floor down there was cement, and it too extended to the window wall, but it had wide, drafty, double doors that opened out onto a small patio and the larger garden. Greg poked around, finding a little powder room under the stairs that needed a good scrubbing. The kitchen appeared to be original to the house, replete with 1960s stove and exhaust hood. The worktop was old and scarred here and there and the fridge was newer and didn’t quite fit the slot the original fridge had occupied.

“How to redo that.” Mycroft muttered under his breath, with a significant look at Greg.

Greg had actually rather liked the comfortable feeling of the kitchen. It reminded him of his Nan’s growing up. And he really liked the amount of light filtering in through the huge windows.

They tramped upstairs to the third level half of which was the master suite. Not only did it share the window wall with the floors below, it had skylights illuminating the space. The en suite loo had been redone in the past ten years — it looked good, but it was smaller than Mycroft’s current loo, and the adjacent dressing room was little more than a big closet.

There were two other rooms and another loo. Greg figured one could be Georgianna’s bedroom and the other — the one with the cold concrete wall— a study for Mycroft.

Mycroft’s expression suggested that was unlikely.

The Regency row house was next. It was absolutely lovely, straight out of a Jane Austen film adaptation, full of large rooms with large windows — more rooms than Greg knew what they would do with. The kitchen had marble worktops and a gleaming marble floor, the cupboards glass-fronted,
showing all the fancy china inside, making Mycroft nod approvingly. It was relentlessly elegant and — as far as Greg was concerned — vastly over-furnished by the current owners. So much so that Greg felt crowded and uncomfortable. He tried to imagine his furniture in it... it would be interesting, the spare, simple pieces inhabiting the enormous white rooms...

Who was he kidding, it would be ridiculous! Ikea flat packs didn’t belong in such splendour.

“Row house.” Mycroft murmured. “There would be problems securing walls shared with the neighbours...”

The new construction was a bit farther from Whitehall than Mycroft preferred, but it was in a gated community of which Greg could see he approved heartily.

Inside it was quite the ugliest place Greg had ever seen. If he thought the kitchen in Mycroft’s flat was sterile, this place outdid it tenfold — the kitchen worktops and walls were industrial stainless steel, the floor a paste white tile that extended out from the kitchen island and, confusingly, into an adjacent room. The lounge had durable-looking wall-to-wall carpeting that was a strange mix of beige and grey. Greg supposed it wouldn’t show dirt. The windows were large but polarised glass let in little light. The deficit was made up with fluorescent light sculptures flowing sinuously across the ceilings, casting their glaring blue light throughout. Greg didn’t even bother going upstairs, he hated the place so much.

Greg knew Mycroft favoured the Regency townhome despite the issues inherent in securing a row house. Greg had liked the mid-century townhouse — he knew Mycroft didn’t care for it, it was smaller than he wanted, the study wasn’t ideal, and he’d insist on renovating the kitchen. Greg knew from experience exactly how messy and tedious that would be.

He supposed he could get used to the Regency. Greg wished it weren’t so very grand. He couldn’t imagine feeling at home there.

They held hands in the cab, but Greg felt his spirits sinking. “We will keep looking.” Mycroft said when they’d alighted by Greg’s flat. “The chances of finding the right place the first time out were slim.”

“I guess.” Greg sighed. He’d done so much research and these had been the most promising. “Not especially fabulous.” He muttered.

“My dear man, every moment I spend with you is fabulous.”

Greg snorted in disbelief, laughing at the mock-hurt look Mycroft gave him. “I need a drink.” He walked away from his building, looping Mycroft’s arm through his own and tugging him along.

“Where are you taking me.”

“Somewhere thoroughly mediocre.” Greg told him. “In keeping with the day.”

“Detective Inspector...”

“Greg. Call me Greg right now. Yeah?”

“Greg...”

Greg pushed through the door of the local pub. It wasn’t very busy yet, but in a half hour, it would be packed. *No blow jobs in the bog tonight.* He thought wryly. He sat down at the bar and waved down the bartender. “Double of the Aberlour, neat.” He said. “What do you want?” He asked
“Same.” Mycroft told the bartender. “Greg, what’s bothering you? Have I done something?”

“What? No, it’s not you... it’s just...” Greg sighed, feeling his mood blackening inexorably. “This week has been exhausting, going back and forth.”

“Do you want to stop?” Mycroft asked quietly.

“No! Well, yes, but because we have a place together. I love seeing you — it’s the highlight of me day.” The bartender set down their drinks and Greg gave him some cash. He took a slug of his whisky, then leaned towards Mycroft, touching his shoulder to the other man’s. “I’m just disappointed, I guess. I know it was stupid to think we’d find the right place today.”

“Optimistic, perhaps. Not stupid.” Mycroft said, his arm a solid, reassuring weight against Greg’s.

“If we’d found the place, the end would be in sight.” Greg said glumly. “I wanted today to be fabulous — I owe you fabulous! But here I am, moaning. I should have taken you to bed and fucked you before our dinner reservation.” He took another healthy swallow of the Aberlour.

“It’s not too late.” Mycroft said, closing his hand over Greg’s and holding it.

“I’m sorry, love. I’m not usually a moaner.” He wasn’t. Greg was generally patient and good-natured. What was wrong with him? He leaned his forehead on his fist and pulled his hand from Mycroft’s to reach for his drink.

Mycroft grimaced and took his first sip of the whisky. “Nice. Not peaty at all.” He said.

“Mmm.” Greg was silent, contemplating his drink. Mycroft let him brood, calmly sipping his Aberlour. I’ve lost me touch. Greg thought to himself. He felt lousy. Maybe he was coming down with something. More likely this was a mood swing, his depression manifesting despite the medication. That thought, that this could be because of his broken brain, sunk him even lower.

“Oi, chief.” Greg started at the voice interrupting his train of thought.

It was the Glaswegian Marine Greg had had sex with. Twice. He’d slipped into the empty seat on the other side of Greg. “Oh, erm, hey lad.”

“Lookin’ tidy tonight, chief.” The Marine murmured. This was exactly the sort of mood that would have made Greg go home with the kid... the Royal Marine seemed to have an unerring sense.

Mycroft set his whisky glass down with a thump. Greg sat back, revealing Mycroft to the young Scot, and vice versa. “Lad, this is me boyfriend.” He put his hand on Mycroft’s shoulder.


“Indeed.” Mycroft said frostily.

“Mm.” The kid took in Mycroft’s antipathy. “Aeh’m nae goon, aeh’m off.” The Marine stood up rubbing Greg’s back. “Goan yersel’, chief. Hope ah didnae get ye in trouble.”

“Ta.” The Marine wandered away and Greg downed the rest of his whisky in a long, burning swallow, taking note of Mycroft’s rigid posture. “From bad to worse.” He muttered. “Let’s get out of
“I haven’t finished my drink.” Mycroft said calmly, his face a study in neutrality.

“You can’t be upset.” Greg told him very quietly. He didn’t want everyone in the pub to know their business.

“Can’t I?”

“No! We weren’t together.” Greg whispered fiercely. “You were with that Italian twat.”

“I didn’t realise you liked them so young.” Mycroft said, each word clipped.

“I don’t!” Greg hissed, still keeping his voice low. “If it matters, he’s into older blokes. Daddy complex. I never would have... he worked hard for it.” Greg scoffed bitterly. “He’d likely do us both if we let him.”

“Is that what you want? To pick up trade together? Menage a trois? Spit roast the laddie?!”

“Jesus, this day just gets worse. Mycroft, is that really what you think?”

Mycroft turned away abruptly. He was silent, staring into his glass. “You’re right.” He said presently. “We should go.” He stood up, straightened his waistcoat and brushed invisible lint from his jacket. Greg grabbed their coats and held Mycroft’s out for him to slip his arms into. After a moment, Mycroft tensely allowed Greg to help him on with his coat. He waited stiffly for Greg to don his own. They left the pub.

The sun was setting and it had got colder out. Greg shivered. They walked together down the sidewalk, Greg wishing he’d brought a scarf. He wished he’d brought the scarf Mycroft had given him.

“Sentiment defies logic.” Mycroft said quietly. “One of the reasons I avoided it for so many years.” Greg, hearing the hesitance in the other man’s voice, slipped his arm through Mycroft’s, huddling into him for warmth. “You’re cold.”

“It’s cold out.” Greg said.

“Where are your gloves?”

“Left ‘em at home, I guess.”

Mycroft took Greg’s hand in his gloved one and tucked them both in his pocket as they walked in step briskly towards Greg’s building. “You’re right, it shouldn’t bother me so. I simply didn’t expect...” Mycroft murmured. “I apologise for making a scene, Detective Inspector. I’m still... unused... to the effects of sentiment.”

“Mycroft... stop.” Greg stopped walking and pulled Mycroft into his arms, right there in the street, pressing his forehead against the other man’s. “You have no reason to be upset. No reason, Mycroft. You must know that. When we weren’t together, I was just... passing the time...”

“Is that what we’re doing? Passing the time?”

“You know it’s not.”

“Tell me, Detective Inspector, what are we doing?”
“Living.” Greg told him then kissed him gently. “Looking for a place where we can live together.” He took a breath, striving to pull positive emotions up from the gloom. “Mycroft, I’m content to sleep with no one but you for the rest of me life.”

Mycroft kissed him back and Greg sighed with relief into the kiss. “Is that what you expected from your marriage?”

*Jude.* Fuck. “Yeah.” Why did that still hurt? Why did it still feel like he was bleeding from a thousand cuts? After all this time... all the therapy...

“She was a fool to cheat on you.”

“Mm. I’m not blameless.” Greg stared at his feet. His black boots were scuffed. He thought about the combat boots he wore every day when he was eighteen. He thought about the shiny, black dress shoes Mycroft had given him with the tuxedo.

“Perhaps. But if she hadn’t cheated, she would still have you.”

Greg wasn’t so sure about that. But it was moot, she *had* been unfaithful. “But then...” He told Mycroft. “I wouldn’t have you.”

He felt Mycroft settle in closer, his arms locking comfortably around Greg’s shoulders and waist. “You’re still shivering, my dear.” Mycroft murmured.

“It’s still cold.”

Chapter End Notes

A few bumps on the road. Mycroft has his insecurities, Greg is still affected by his head injury and everything that caused it. And house hunting can be stressful.

I start my new job tomorrow! Fingers crossed it’s a good fit for me and for my soon-to-be coworkers. After eleven months freelancing from home — and having ample time to write and work out — it’ll be an adjustment going back to 9-5.

As for what will happen in our next chapter... well, we’ll see. I have some stuff sketched out, I’ll keep you apprised of my progress if I can’t post next week.
At three-and-a-half years of age, Mycroft Holmes was a bright and curious child who could converse in three languages, read at a college level and beat everyone he knew — except his mother — at chess, backgammon and go.

He had, a few months previous, come to the undeniable conclusion that his father was... severely limited and thus boring and was still feeling disappointed and resentful about it. Mummy was always busy, barely having the time to instruct her son how she wanted him to proceed with his education each week. He had learned long ago that there was nothing he could do change that fact of life. Mummy was immovable — whether the mountain or Mohamed, Mycroft went to her. Thus he had learned to entertain himself, methodically reading the many books in Mummy’s library, practising writing his letters in cursive with grim determination — his eye-hand coordination was not so advanced as his intellect — and taking swimming lessons and piano lessons. He could float and paddle with ease, but his tiny hands were unable to stretch far enough yet to make chords on the piano.

In good weather, Mycroft loved nothing better than to run in the garden on his short legs. He insisted the gardener tell him the names of all the plants — he would look them up in the huge, illustrated botany tome in the library and learn their Latin names and practical uses. But he mostly loved running and leaping, weaving in and out of the thorny rose bushes, lifting his wee arms to the blue sky and hollering, charging after ants and bees trying to understand their trajectories, and inhaling the thick aromas of cut grass and ripe blooms. It made him feel alive.

Mycroft’s Aunt Pansy and Uncle Patrick lived in the village — too far for Mycroft to walk on his own. (Much to his continued dismay, being three was horrid!) But his Aunt and Uncle, having no children of their own, were frequent visitors. As Mycroft was the first child born into the Holmes family for thirty years, he was something of a novelty — his extreme precociousness was recognised, but perhaps not as fully as if he’d had neurotypical cousins with whom he could be compared.

Pansy was almost as good at Chess and Go as Mummy, and Mycroft was always keen to play with her. Uncle Patrick.... Uncle Patrick was different from Father. He didn’t play football or cricket and more importantly, didn’t expect Mycroft to be fascinated by sport. He asked Mycroft’s thoughts and opinions — of which he had many — and they would have long, genteel conversations in which Mycroft was free to say exactly what was on his mind. Be it fanciful or rambling, esoteric or silly, Uncle Patrick would listen. Mycroft might be gently questioned, challenged even, but he was never chastised or told to organise his thoughts and habits, to be concise, and cut away the extraneous. (To stop bothering Mummy — there was no point talking to Father.) No one else took the time to take Mycroft as seriously as Uncle Patrick.

In the weeks before Christmas that year, Aunt Pansy and Uncle Patrick sought and received
permission to take their nephew into London. Mycroft was excited to go to a place he’d read so much about — the House of Parliament was in London! The Prime Minister, the government, MI5 and MI6 — it was all in London!

Mycroft had seen images of London on telly — Father had watched Prince Charles’ wedding to Lady Diana in Westminster Cathedral. It had been largely dull, but Mycroft had been fascinated by the people lining Lady Diana’s carriage route to the cathedral. He had not known there was such a crowded and busy place, that there could be so many people all together! Mycroft could not wait to go there himself!

The two weeks he had to wait were endless! He tried to be rational, as Mummy demanded, to cultivate an aversion to instantaneous gratification, to make patience and good sense his habits. Mycroft knew how to tell time and he had a calendar of his own in his room. He could count the days and mark them off. But each minute that ticked by on Father’s pocket watch seemed to take an hour to pass! It was agony!

Finally — finally! — the day arrived! Mycroft wore his crisp, pleated khakis and navy jumper with his brown overcoat and freshly shined saddle shoes for the train ride. He’d read every book he could find about trains, their history, their invention and refinements, facts, figures and schematics — everything! He was ready! It was so exciting! The feel of the engines in his belly, the landscape speeding by through the window, the powerful vibrations...

From the moment they stepped off the train at Paddington, Mycroft was required to hold either Aunt Pansy’s or Uncle Patrick’s hand at all times. He did so willingly, as afraid of losing himself as they were of losing him. People were everywhere! He’d known that... but he hadn’t known what that meant, how it felt to be small in a crowd of giants who didn’t look down. The adrenaline, the movement, the danger and the terror! The noise and the smell! It was equal amounts fascinating and repulsive.

They took a taxi to the hotel — it was even more fascinating than the train! Mycroft stared at the city through the windows. He talked to the cabbie! The man knew every street in London! Mycroft was determined to learn them as well. What could be more useful than having the whole map in one’s head!? The hotel had a vast lobby with white couches and gilt mirrors. A bellman took Mycroft’s valise and put it on a cart with Aunt Pansy and Uncle Patrick’s luggage. Their suite had three rooms — if you included the enormous loo, and Mycroft couldn’t see how it could be overlooked. Mycroft would sleep on a rollaway in the lounge and Aunt Pansy and Uncle Patrick were in the bedroom. Mycroft climbed up on the bed — it was ridiculously large, as big as some of the rooms in Mycroft’s house!

That afternoon, his aunt and uncle took him to see a Christmas Panto. Mycroft had been disdainful when Aunt Pansy told him was based on fairy tales, but Mycroft had to admit it was ludicrous good fun. All three of them laughed and shouted and sang and clapped along. Afterwards Mycroft actively looked for opportunities to tell Uncle Patrick that what he was looking for was “BEHIND YOU,” and then giggling madly when his Uncle turned around.

After the Panto, they visited Carnaby Street to see the lavish light displays. Mycroft looked up in wonderment, attempting to calculate the number of bulbs and the number of watts it would take to light so many bulbs. He was quite happily distracted for over an hour, his lips moving silently as he stared up at the lights and worked equations in his head. He had not finished when his Aunt and Uncle took him away and suspected he could have worked at the problem all night and not finished. After tea, Aunt Pansy fed him Christmas puddings until he felt ill. He fell fast asleep in the grand hotel room and did not remember when and how he’d undressed.
The next day, after Mycroft experienced his first breakfast buffet (three different kinds of potatoes!), and first live ‘Santa’ (an actor, obviously), the three of them went to a performance of *The Nutcracker* and Mycroft fell in love.

Mycroft knew it was love because it *hurt*. The dancing was so beautiful it made his heart beat faster and his lungs ache, it made his eyes fill with tears and his stomach feel funny. He was rapt. After the first few minutes, Mycroft climbed into Uncle Patrick’s lap for a better view. He stayed there, leaned forward, eyes big and round, until after the curtain calls.

He had never seen ballet before — or formal dancing of any kind — but he loved *everything* about it — the way the dancers defied gravity, the way they took tiny, perfect steps on their tiptoes, the way they spun and pranced and pirouetted. Their grace and delicacy. Their sparkly costumes.

Mycroft knew he had discovered something important about himself — or perhaps he could now name a thing that had been inside him all along. He wanted to dance! He *needed* to dance!

In the ballet there had been boys and girls dancing. Men danced alongside the many beautiful women. *Boys could dance! Men too!* Mycroft decided right then, that he would do whatever he must to learn to dance.

Mummy sighed when he announced his intention to dance. Mycroft was frustrated by her lack of enthusiasm. She didn’t see how wonderful dancing was! She must not know how breathtakingly beautiful the dancers were as they leapt and twirled! She did not take Mycroft seriously. She didn’t want the hassle.

But Mycroft would not be put off.

It was Aunt Pansy who finally took him to a beginning ballet class at the Village Hall. It was spring, months after he’d seen *The Nutcracker*, and Mycroft suspected Mummy, grown weary of his relentless campaign for dancing lessons, had put her up to it. *He did not care.*

The instructor was a tiny dictator in a black leotard and wrap jumper who smelled of cigarette smoke. Mycroft was fascinated. He was the youngest pupil by several years, and one of only two boys. But he was also much less intimidated by Madam Petrill than any of the other students.

She sighed dramatically when she saw him and muttered under her breath in gutter French. “Putain gros bébé...”

“Je ne suis pas grosse, Madame, vous êtes maigre comme un épouvantail.” Mycroft replied huffily in his piping voice.

“Mycroft!” Aunt Pansy began to chastise him, but Madam Petrill laughed throatily.

“Votre accent est merde... mais au moins c’est français. Viens, gros bébé, je vais te montrer la première position. Vous serez maladroits.” She gestured at the barre and after demonstrating the first position, brusquely but gently adjusted his posture and his arms, abusing his form under her breath. This was it! Mycroft was learning to dance!

Madam Petrill shouted at the other children in English, never swearing nor ridiculing them. They were terrified of her. With Mycroft, she continued speaking French exclusively, giving him extra attention simply for the joy of using her mother tongue. She was never encouraging — “Vous êtes trop gros pour danser!” — but she grudgingly respected his diligence. She might call him the ‘fat baby’ and the ‘ugly ginger idiot’ (what was wrong with ginger hair?) but she could not call him lazy.

And he did work hard. Not because he was afraid of her or stung by her insults — but because he
wanted to dance! Mycroft had watched The Nutcracker again at home on the telly. It had been a very different interpretation, which was fascinating! There were all sorts of possibilities! He found a very modern version of Swan Lake at the video rental shop, and insisted Father let it for him. Over and over he watched the dancers floating weightlessly without any apparent effort, then turning on each other, their bodies making ugly, angry shapes, and hurling themselves to the ground with stunning ferocity...

Mycroft took twice weekly lessons with Madam Petrill for sixteen months... when she was found to have died suddenly at home.

Now, almost five, Mycroft had grown more pragmatic. Madam Petrill had been interesting and he missed her. But a far greater issue was convincing Mummy to find a new dance class for him. He had begun to be more subtle, attempting to influence her, persuade her to his way of thinking, without making requests or demands. It was tricky. Mummy hated feeling as if she were being manipulated. Mycroft had to manipulate her without appearing to do so.

He campaigned this way for several months before Mummy brought a flyer home from the University. She set it down in front of him. It said, ‘Learn To Dance!’ In big letters.

“Don’t think I don’t know what you’ve been doing, Mycroft.” She said pointedly. “You’re not as clever as you think. This at least will be useful.”

Feeling triumphant despite her chiding, he read the rest of the flyer. It promised to teach him ballroom dancing — which sounded very glamorous, but it wasn’t ballet! Mycroft fixed her with his best ‘you must be kidding me’ look, but Mummy just raised an eyebrow that told him it was ballroom or nothing. She knew he’d been playing her and she’d turned the tables!

Mycroft raged internally. Being a child was a complete horror. He could not wait until he was old enough to take himself where he wanted to go! He loathed being at the mercy of adults.

Without any further discussion — for what needed to be said? They both knew what the other was thinking — Mummy drove Mycroft to the dance studio and enrolled him in the children’s ballroom dancing classes with Mr. Norman.

Mr. Norman was tall and thin and extremely elegant. He wore a charcoal wool suit with orange, green and aubergine check brightening it — managing the astonishing feat of being simultaneously subdued and bright. His tie matched his pocket square and his shoes were so shiny Mycroft could see his face in them. He wore a gold tie bar with an emerald set in the center and it flashed as it caught the light. Locks of dark hair curled rakishly over his high forehead and his hands were lovely — like pale birds fluttering to and fro. He laughed, his voice carrying, vibrating through Mycroft’s skin and reverberating through his chest. It made his heart ache with longing. He had never met a man nearly so charming.

Mr. Norman’s voice, as he spoke to Mummy, was a resonant baritone with the slightly exaggerated plumminess of someone covering over a regional accent. Except Mr. Norman enunciated with a wink and a twinkle that clearly said he didn’t expect anyone to believe he was posh. Mycroft could make out hints of working-class Northern England, someplace like Liverpool or Manchester. Somehow this made Mr. Norman even more exotic — this wasn’t a poncey poseur pretending to be better than his fellows, this was a poncey poseur who was poncey for the joy of ponciness, who let everyone in on the joke of someone as special as he being born into a rough neighborhood in a rough city.

Abruptly Mycroft was intensely interested in ballroom dancing. He would do anything to please Mr. Norman, to be held in his regard.
As Mycroft stared at the marvelous man (wishing he’d worn something nicer than his khakis and blue blazer), Mr. Norman made eye contact and smiled at him. Mycroft saw something pass over Mr. Norman’s face... it took Mycroft a moment to determine what it was... recognition. It was the look one has when their favourite Uncle appears unexpectedly from a crowd. Or their best friend. Or their lost dog...

_He knows me!_ Mycroft realised... _AND I KNOW HIM!_ He didn’t know how or why, only that he wanted to be just like Mr. Norman — just as graceful and well-groomed, just as expressive with the same glint of humour in his eyes...

“Attención.” Mr. Norman called clapping twice. He was British to the core, but affected a slightly comic French accent. Even Mummy smirked. “Today we learn to _Samba_!”

Mycroft did not know what the Samba was, but he was _thrilled._

When Greg told the driver the address, Mycroft was confused. Where could they be going in South Kensington? The neighborhood was largely residential and upper middle class luxurious. There were many fine restaurants, pubs galore and, in the daytime, shops... but they’d already eaten, Greg wouldn’t take Mycroft to another pub anytime soon, and they weren’t going shopping at 22:00.

In addition to their mysterious destination, Mycroft found the Detective Inspector’s clothing... curious. The slim jeans, turned up to show cordovan Doc Martens boots — a bit of red on the denim’s selvage showing on the turn-ups — the pornographically tight black t-shirt and thick leather belt with the chunky buckle highlighting the flat plane of his stomach. Over it he’d donned a red hoody and a worn leather biker’s jacket that fit him like a glove. Whilst Greg looked as delicious as ever, Mycroft imagined this outfit was leftover from the policeman’s rebellious youth. He did not want to contemplate where such apparel might be appropriate.

Outside Mycroft’s bedroom, that is. That t-shirt did something special for Mycroft.

Under Bast’s unblinking blue eyes, Greg had ransacked Mycroft’s closet, nixing the corduroys and tweed waistcoat he’d selected for himself. Instead Greg unearthed the pair of skinny black jeans Sherlock had ordered him online in what Mycroft could only think was an unparalleled fit of fraternal nastiness. Mycroft had sneered and tucked them behind his summer suits, tags still attached, and not thought of them again until now. After he’d shimmied into the ridiculous trousers, Greg had wolf-whistled his approval, causing Mycroft’s chest to turn as warm and ruddy as his cheeks.

Greg had also found a brilliant red tartan waistcoat that Mycroft hadn’t seen in years, and a thigh-length brown leather coat he’d bought in an unaccustomed fit of fancy and never worn. This with brown leather brogues and belt and a crisp, white dress shirt encompassed his outfit for the evening. It was... comfortable. Mycroft could say _that_ about the ensemble.

Surprisingly, the jeans didn’t look too ridiculous. Sherlock would be sorely disappointed.

As the car turned towards South Ken, Greg took Mycroft’s hand and grinned at his questioning look,
which Mycroft found both irritating and enormously attractive. “Where are you taking me?” He demanded.

“Back in time.” Greg said. He’d been positively effervescent the last few days, the exhaustion of trading off nights at each other’s flats falling away as his mood lightened.

The bomber had been caught! That alone had cut Greg’s stress in half — he cared so deeply about his work, about helping people. Dissolving the task force had been a weight off his shoulders, a weight he’d been carrying the entire time they’d been back together. Greg seemed to awaken into happiness — glowing with joy when they were together. When he opened his eyes in the morning, Greg smiled spontaneously at Mycroft. *He sang in the shower!* Mycroft wanted to hear Greg’s sweet baritone every day — whether or not he had a grasp of the melody he was attempting.

“So this crazy twat was made redundant last December.” Greg told Mycroft over baingan bharta and lamb biryani — they were eating at an Indian place near Mycroft’s flat, and for once Greg had an appetite. “And hadn’t found another job. So this nutter decides sending parcel bombs to businesses where he applied for work was a good idea. Didn’t matter if he got an interview or not, or even if he was qualified, he just decided to blow ‘em up. Eight dead. Another seven in hospital. I wouldn’t be surprised if he was found unfit to plead and sectioned... but I hope not.” Greg sighed looking glum and Mycroft’s own spirits sank.

“The task force has been disbanded?” He asked.

“Yeah. I’m back to being more supervisory than hands on. I have a stack of paperwork to catch up on.”

“We none of us can escape the paperwork.” Mycroft smiled. Greg smiled back around a mouthful of biryani and the grueling days since they’d gone house-hunting evaporated.

The sex that night — the night after they’d looked at houses, after Mycroft had met the young soldier who’d aroused all of his insecurities, the first time they’d made love since they’d reunited — had been... healing. Greg had wrapped his arms around Mycroft tightly and they’d kissed and kissed and held and pet one another. Greg had worshiped every inch of Mycroft’s body with his lips and tongue and fingertips. It was intense, overwhelming, but not urgent. They’d made a meal of foreplay, gorged themselves on a buffet of sensation, and shared orgasms for dessert.

“It’s always better with you.” Greg had told him afterwards as they lay tangled and sweaty on his bed. “Always.”

“Is that why you came back?” Mycroft asked, knowing full well it was not.

“If it were, I wouldn’t be looking at bloody townhouses.” Greg muttered, his hand stroking over Mycroft’s hip. “Wouldn’t bother going to dinner, or having a conversation. I certainly wouldn’t trust you with Georgianna.”

“So ‘I love you’ isn’t your standard pickup line?” Mycroft teased. He’d had a revelation before dinner earlier that evening and was feeling much more secure.

Greg scoffed. “If I had a pickup line, you’d have heard it by now.”

“That’s right, you have to fight suitors off with a stick.” Mycroft made it sound like a joke, but it was not. Greg, it seemed, could not turn around these days without being propositioned.

It had happened again at the restaurant whilst they awaited their table. Mycroft had been conversing with the bartender, procuring cocktails, and when he returned, an attractive thirty-something woman
was giggling and touching Greg, her determined hands ranging across the Detective Inspector’s chest. Greg was politely attempting to fend her off, his eyes shifting back and forth, searching the bar for her companions, wishing them to intercede... that was the moment that Mycroft had his epiphany! It wasn’t simply that Greg was attractive and fit, that he had sexual magnetism to spare, no, it was that he was approachable! He was open and relaxed, unassuming, comfortable in his own skin. He was willing to strike up a conversation with just about anyone — and he would enjoy it.

Mycroft should have realised this sooner — the man cared about anonymous Londoners. He not only tolerated Sherlock, for God’s sake, but liked him! Greg cared for Mycroft’s impossible brother. He went out of his way to help him when no one else would. Before John Watson, there were times that Greg alone — Greg and a murder he could very well have solved on his own — had held Sherlock back from the precipice of relapsing into drug addiction.

It was this quality, this sincere kindness and amiability that people sensed. Mycroft watched Greg charm the woman even as he turned her offers of sex down cold. When her companions, at long last, dragged her away, she was happily singing Greg’s praises. No, Mycroft realised, it wasn’t a wonder that Greg had slept around whilst they were separated — it was a wonder he hadn’t slept around more.

For that moment, Mycroft could see Greg Lestrade clearly. He saw that it was no accident Greg had never cheated on his cheating wife. He saw that even when single, Greg eschewed most propositions — he was oblivious or he didn’t take them seriously or he simply wasn’t interested. Mycroft realised that the Marine ‘lad’ (did Greg even know his name?) and Greg’s other assignations had had to labour to win him. They had to have something a little bit special, something that caught Greg’s fancy. The Scottish lad, at least, had an inkling of how very lucky he was that Greg had chosen to spend time with him.

In that restaurant bar, finally free of the insistent woman, Greg had caught sight of Mycroft and he’d beamed. His face lighting with happiness — and abruptly Mycroft was keenly aware how lucky he was.

“Oi, you could have helped a bloke out.” Greg said with faux irritation, taking his Manhattan from Mycroft’s hand. “The lady wouldn’t believe me when I told her I had a boyfriend.”

“You should have told her you’re a monogamist.”

Greg snickered. “She was too drunk for big words.” He took a swig of his cocktail. “How come you never end up fending off drunks? They never bother you.”

“I have a carefully cultivated air of menace.” Mycroft told him. “For just that purpose.”

Greg snorted, his hand sliding easily around Mycroft to rest on the small of his back. “You’re a menace alright.”

That was the moment Mycroft stopped worrying that Greg was shining him on for some devious and unknown reason. That was the moment he allowed Greg fully into his heart.
The car pulled up outside a row house on a residential street — right around the corner from the high street. There was a line of glittery young people queued adjacent to the entrance. A behemoth of a man guarded the door.

“A club?” Mycroft asked, feeling a bit disappointed. “Must we queue?”

”Not just any club.” Greg said. “Come on.” He bypassed the queue and flashed a brilliant smile at the behemoth, who smiled back so sweetly Mycroft’s teeth ached. “Hey,. Paulie” Greg said.

“Lestrade! It’s been an age. You’re lookin’ fit.” He patted Greg on the back, then his giant hand lingered. Mycroft’s sharp eyes assessed the man... he had not slept with Greg but he wouldn’t pass up the chance.

“Ta, Paulie. I’m running the marathon this year.”

“Masochist. This your bloke? I heard you’d come over to our side.”

“This is my bloke.” Greg grinned, pulling Mycroft close and taking his hand. “Paulie’s a Sergeant down at the fifth. Moonlighting at this disreputable hole in the ground.”

Mycroft nodded politely as Paulie opened the door for them — ignoring the protests from the queue. “Have fun, mate.” Paulie winked as they slipped into a dim hall.

Inside it was dark, but Mycroft was immediately aware of a figure — male — lurking to one side. He tensed — there was a luminescence down the hall away from the male figure, and he could hear music and a hum of voices. Mycroft stepped towards it.

“Not that way.” Greg said, tugging his hand. “This way.”

He pulled Mycroft towards the shadowy figure. As his eyes adjusted to the gloom, he saw the man slouching carelessly against the wall. Greg leaned close to him and said something softly, just low enough that Mycroft couldn’t make it out. The slouching man grinned and opened a door Mycroft had not noticed in the dark. Greg stepped through the door, pulling Mycroft with him.

“Did you tell him the secret password?” Mycroft asked, amused in spite of himself.

“Yep.” Greg grinned, his teeth gleaming in the dimness.

Mycroft found himself at the top of a narrow, irregularly lit, circular staircase. They started down, their footfalls echoing. By the sound, Mycroft could tell it was a very long stairwell. It brought to mind the catacombs of Paris, the long sets of stairs corkscrewing into the earth, down and down to the mass graves of millions.

Where did this stair lead? Mycroft imagined endless dusty crypts stacked floor to ceiling with bleach-white human bones, piles of skulls and femurs on macabre display...

That would be preferable to what was probably at the bottom — a dank disco, a low-ceilinged basement with dub-step blaring so loudly one could not distinguish the lyrics over the pulse of the beat — the beat that was vibrating the stairs under their feet even now. Mycroft was dubious, to say the least.

Perhaps this was why Greg had insisted on dungarees — they were destined to spend the evening in a dirty, crowded dungeon. Mycroft should be grateful to be sparing his corduroys.
The stairwell circled and circled down and down and down. If he didn’t know better, Mycroft would think they were descending into a particularly vexing Underground station. One without escalators.

And then... they were at the bottom. Greg pushed open a door and they entered a wonderland.

This was no dank basement. This was an enormous vaulted chamber, Victorian brick arching far overhead. Light and air filtered in from... somewhere... there was music, but it wasn’t deafening. And there were acrobats, dangling, twirling, spinning from the arched ceiling, performing feats of athleticism Mycroft admired. He’d often thought that an acrobat would be a deft assassin.

Surprisingly — given the queue outside — the club was not crowded. There were people, but no crush. There were still empty velvet chairs and couches tucked, lounge-like, in intimate grottoes, and the dance floor played host to a wide assortment of bright, graceful creatures.

Watching them, Mycroft understood why Greg had chosen the bright red waistcoat for him — he believed Mycroft belonged amongst the beautiful people frolicking on the glowing floor.

If he still had niggling doubts haunting the black crevasses of his mind that Greg loved him, really loved him, this dispelled those doubts completely.

That didn’t mean Mycroft agreed with him. He enjoyed dancing, had done since he was a boy, but he wasn’t a performer. Not of that kind anyway.

He might be persuaded to perform for Greg. Privately. The thought brought a small smile to his lips.

They checked their coats, Greg revealing the tight black t-shirt stretched over his broad chest. It tucked behind the belt buckle, a detail that inexplicably made Mycroft’s knees weak. That and the way the deep blue jeans skimmed Greg’s arse and thighs.

He trailed his hand down Greg’s sternum, the cotton fabric like a second skin. “Where did you find this?” He asked, voice low. “Your daughter’s wardrobe? That’s not a complaint, mind.”

Greg laughed musically, a lovely sound that traveled directly to the butterflies in the pit of Mycroft’s stomach. “Had a case in a poncey men’s clothing shop.” Greg told him. “I let the owner talk me into trying on the shirt. I thought it was too small, but it’s surprisingly comfortable.”

“That doesn’t look bad either.”

“It looks fine here. Anywhere else I’d be a laughing stock.” Greg chuckled.

“And yet you bought it.”

“I was distracting him so Donovan could search his office without him hanging over our shoulders. We had a warrant.” He added defensively.

“I’m sure you were very distracting.” Mycroft purred, basking in Greg’s lazy smile. His fingers finished travelling down the black t-shirt and came to rest on the chunky belt buckle. Mycroft used it to tug Greg towards him and steal a kiss.

A server interrupted to ask if they wanted drinks. He was dressed in a pink tutu and tights his hairless chest bare. He was en pointe, ribbons crisscrossing his calves. He balanced a small round silver tray on the fingertips of one hand.

Mycroft listened to Greg quiz him about what beers they had on tap vs. in the bottle. Eventually he chose one and the ballerina turned to Mycroft. “Gin and tonic.” He said tossing his credit card on the
silver tray before Greg could give the ballerina his. “With lime.”

“Hey, I’m taking you out.” Greg protested as the server danced away.

“You’re taking me dancing.” Mycroft told him, pulling lightly on the belt buckle for emphasis.

“Then let’s dance.” Greg’s big hand was warm on the small of his back as he propelled Mycroft to the glowing dance floor.

As he began to move, Mycroft was struck once again by the joy of it. He’d... not forgotten (as if he could), but he couldn’t avoid Mummy’s voice in his head: “Mycroft, stop leaping about, it isn’t dignified.” “Mycroft stop swiveling like an idiot. Certainly you didn’t learn that at your lesson.” “A recital? Whatever for, Mycroft? Do you want to put yourself on display?” “Tango?! Certainly you don’t need to know more than how to waltz properly.” “Ballet lessons? Haven’t you done that already?” “Jazz?! Isn’t that how they dance in the theatre?!” “Modern dance... are you feeling well, Mycroft? Do you have a fever?” Her voice kept him from dancing indiscriminately during the day, kept him from dance halls and discos at night.

Though she’d dampened his appetite for public exhibition, he’d never felt the shame Mummy worked so hard to instil. He never lost the unadulterated joy in movement. Mycroft’s ballroom dance teacher, a debonair man named Mr. Norman, recognised his aptitude and enthusiasm and encouraged him. He taught Mycroft, and later both Holmes brothers, ballet on the sly, demonstrated jazz, tap, modern and Bollywood styles of dancing in between teaching them to waltz and quickstep. At home in his room, Mycroft would strip to his vest and pants, and, because bare feet were quieter, choreograph elaborate modern dance routines for himself. Routines he never performed for anyone, not even Sherlock. Some things, he recognised, were private. (He also recognised that no one wanted to see a chubby redhead flinging himself about.) How often his secret dancing ended in imagined ovations and fierce masturbation was nobody’s business.

The way Greg’s eyes lit as Mycroft began to dance made all of Mummy’s scolding fall away. He wanted nothing more than to please Greg, to seduce him with the graceful sway of his (no longer chubby) body. The black jeans had an unexpected amount of give in them (five percent lycra, his brain supplied), and he flitted and frolicked, jigged and whirled and danced as he used to dance alone in his room.

Other dancers gave him room, moved back to clap along with the beat and watch him, and Mycroft did not care. He let the music move him — he let Greg move him.

A lithe woman stepped up, twirling, dancing. Mycroft took her hand and she fell instantly into step with him. As he pulled her into hold, a distant part of his brain recognised that she was clearly a professional dancer. Mycroft, with subtle pressure on her waist, morphed smoothly into the Samba. They swiveled together, Mycroft’s hips freed from constraint, he strutted and pranced, twirling her, arms extended, feet moving frenetically. He’d always loved the Samba, had practised it with Mr. Norman obsessively.

One of Mycroft’s best childhood memories was dancing with Mr. Norman and laughing gleefully as the dance teacher twirled and twirled and twirled him. Little Sherlock had run around the two of them as they danced, dizzy circles making him giggle and screech. Mr. Norman had been no older than Mycroft was now, but he had seemed agelessly old to his child self — and magical. Wonderful in a way other men weren’t.

One day, when he was ten, when he’d known Mr. Norman for half his life, when he’d begun to notice the fraying of a shirt cuff or how the heels of his beautifully shined shoes were worn... notice a certain sadness in his eyes that was simply wrong on his ebullient teacher... Mycroft had abruptly
seen the man in one of the uncanny insights that came so easily — they didn’t always make sense, but he’d learned to trust them. What he saw was a man who had suffered, who despite his charm and graceful manners was well-acquainted with tragedy...

Mycroft saw a kind, gay man who was being ground down by the relentlessness of the homophobic mainstream, by all the little things (millennials would call them ‘micro-aggressions’) day after day that piled on and on and on...

He saw that Mr. Norman recognised in Mycroft not just his love of dance, but a deeper kinship. Gay recognised gay, recognised a boy whose parents had certain expectations that Mycroft would never fulfill, recognised a boy who would face bullies and shame, a boy who would have to be strong to the point of brittleness or be torn apart. Mr. Norman wanted to protect Mycroft from it all, wanted to keep the wolves from harming him, changing him as he himself had been harmed and changed.

But Mr. Norman was terrified. If he got too close, he was afraid people would willfully misunderstand how he cared for the boy. Afraid that getting too involved would ruin him, his business would fail, he would be targeted by angry parents, by homophobes. His neat little house would be graffitied and the police would question him about what he was doing with the child of the local squire...

They would not believe that his intentions were pure. That he cared for Mycroft not lasciviously or pruriently, but like an uncle or a much older brother cared. Mr. Norman wanted to hug Mycroft, help him understand what was coming, reassure him and enlighten him, tell him about gay history and gay culture — all the amazing, important things straight parents were unprepared and unwilling to give their gay children.

Mycroft saw how much Mr. Norman wanted to reach out to him and exactly why he never would. He understood that the time and attention Mr. Norman gave teaching him to dance was all that he could give, but he would give it gladly and in abundance. Mycroft loved Mr. Norman for that, and he’d felt sorry for him — sorry that the teacher’s fears were so well-founded. Sorry that he was being ground down by a hostile world.

From then on, Mycroft was careful not to talk about his dance lessons too much, not to enthuse about the teacher and everything he was learning. Not to talk about how good it felt to move his body freely, to leap and whirl and flit ...

All this hit Mycroft at once, a speeding locomotive of sense-memory, as he danced the Samba with a woman he didn’t know in an underground club under the eyes of his gorgeous lover. He wished with all his heart that Mr. Norman could see him right now, see that not only was he ok, but he was thriving — and still dancing. And he hoped fervently that Mr. Norman had someone he loved as much as Mycroft loved Greg. Someone with whom he shared his neat little house. Someone with whom he danced.

The DJ morphed one song into another, the Samba beat disappearing. Mycroft swung the woman into the hustle and they discoed side by side. She was a glorious dancer, too tall and heavy-boned for success in ballet, she used her physicality to advantage in ballroom and jazz. Fluidly reading her movements, Mycroft caught her foot in his hands and pushed up, and she flipped backwards and landed lightly on her feet.

Mycroft laughed in delight. She pulled another woman onto the dance floor, and then another man, and the four of them cavorted. Soon enough, the floor filled again and Mycroft took Greg’s hand, pulling the man against his chest. He felt a telltale hardness bulging into his thigh and raised an eyebrow.

“This place... how did you find it?”

Smiling, Greg squeezed Mycroft’s waist. “Paulie, at the door. He suggested I check it out after my divorce. It’s definitely more fun with you.”

Mycroft felt himself blush, exertion disguising the heat and rosiness of his cheeks for once. “You flatter me, my dear.”

“Not nearly enough.” Greg said, holding him close. They danced together, a simplified fox trot until Mycroft saw the ballerina hovering at the edge of the dance floor with their drinks. Greg went to retrieve them and Mycroft followed him from the glowing floor.

“Where are you going?” A man appeared in front of Mycroft with impressive suddenness.

Mycroft looked at him coldly as he attempted to shoulder the man aside. He was surprisingly solid and difficult to move.

“Wait, luv...” He nodded at the dance floor. “That was spectacular, yeah.”

Mycroft eyed the man — he was good looking, lean and muscular, clearly a dancer. Relatively successful given the designer togs he wore, all high-end brands. He had a full head of shoulder-length hair which he wore loose, and a bit of cosmetic covering the telltale signs of age beginning to appear on his face.

He wanted... Mycroft blinked, feeling startled — the man standing in his way wanted to seduce Mycroft. He wanted to dance with Mycroft and captivate him, beguile him into sexual relations.

“I’m Patrick.” His hand fell onto Mycroft’s arm, brown against the white of his shirt. It was warm. “Dance with me.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes sceptically, but Patrick had honestly appreciated his dancing. He favoured the man with a real, albeit small, smile — the way this man’s black eyes devoured him, Mycroft would have been very tempted...

“I’m keeping someone waiting.”

Patrick leaned in, his eyes burning. “Let him wait.” His hand closed around Mycroft’s arm, brown against the white of his shirt. It was warm. “Dance with me.”

Mycroft froze, Mummy’s voice loud in his head. “Stop fidgeting, Mycroft. Stand up straight. No one will ever take you seriously if you can’t stand still.”

His smile died — Patrick saw it and his hand loosened, but didn’t pull away. “You’re very kind.” Mycroft said. “But, I think not.” He fixed Patrick with a look that made him step back. Mycroft brushed past him to where Greg was stood watching, trying not to smile.

“Shoe’s on the other foot.” Greg snickered, handing over Mycroft’s drink. “Where’s your menace now?” He eyed the black-haired man on the dance floor. “You might want to dance with him though — if that’s who I think it is, you’d have a bash. And it’d be amazing to watch.”

Mycroft inhaled Greg’s scent, it never failed to affect him. “I didn’t take you for someone who liked to watch his boyfriend with other men.”
“Dancing. I have no problem watching you dance, whoever your partner.”

“You seem awfully confident for a man whose boyfriend is being cruised by fit strangers.”

Greg’s smile turned serious. “Mycroft, if I thought you’d ever cheat on me, I wouldn’t’ve brought you here.” Of course he wouldn’t. Not after what he had endured with his wife. He shouldn’t have to remind himself of something so obvious. “No — I never would have asked for another chance.” Greg grimaced. “I know that’s rich, after last spring...”

“You were very clear, Detective Inspector, we were not exclusive.”

“But now we are.”

“I would not have given you another chance if we weren’t.”

“Can you forgive me? For being such an arse?”

“My dear man, there’s nothing to forgive.” Mycroft leaned in, his hand on Greg’s cheek, and kissed him. Mummy’s voice wanted to say something about public displays, but Mycroft shut her out and deepened the kiss.

“Wow.” Greg whispered when Mycroft finally pulled away. “I’m the luckiest man alive.”

Mycroft smirked and took a drink of his cocktail. “Hardly. You do have to put up with me.”

“I don’t know why you think that’s a hardship.” Greg led them to an empty couch with a good view of the dance floor. An acrobat twirled overhead and Mycroft observed her, unconsciously counting rotations. “I’ll watch you from here.” He said. “Go ahead, you must be itching.”

“I don’t know what you mean.” Mycroft murmured, sitting down next to Greg and nuzzling his neck.

Greg giggled. They sat back, the velvet upholstery soft under his hands. “Look at ‘em.” Greg said. The dancers still on the floor were putting on a show — they all seemed to know the many steps of an acrobatic group dance that saw some of them flipping and others flying overhead whilst the rest twirled and pranced. As they watched, Mycroft began to understand the pattern, the choreography. It was simpler than it appeared — except for that twisting bit... and that other bit...

“You’ve got a look on your face.” Greg told him.

“Do I?”

“Join them.” Greg urged. “You’re a dancer too.”

Mycroft chuckled. “I know how to dance, but I’m not a dancer. Dancers have appalling feet. You would be aghast.”

Greg scoffed. “My job is looking at corpses.”

“Yes, but you don’t sleep with them.”

“Good point.”

“Indeed.”

“Go.” Greg said. “I’ll be right here, love. Show me what you can do.”
“For you.” Mycroft said, feeling astonished that Detective Inspector Greg Lestrade might look at *him* with such love and joy in his eyes. “Only for you, my dear.”

He quaffed his gin and tonic, stood up and marched onto the dance floor, slipping into the group seamlessly, the memorised moves flowing through him. Patrick whirled his way to Mycroft’s side, the predatory grin on his face half covered with his straight, black hair. Mycroft twirled with him, then turned and lifted the slight boy on his other side, helping him to pop up and fly over the other dancers as they bent and turned. Mycroft’s feet stepped in unison with thirty other dancers as they shimmied and swooped. A woman flipped over his head, landing on her feet and picking up the dance seamlessly. Then he was face-to-face with Patrick. Mycroft leaned in, swiveled and leapt, feeling Patrick’s hands lifting him.

Catching sight of Greg watching him intently from the couch, Mycroft pushed off and flew.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for waiting! I fear this chapter meanders a bit — still short on time. I thought I could write during my commute on public transportation, but I rarely use that time so wisely. Job seems to be going well — still employed anyway.

What will happen in two weeks? WHO KNOWS!? I welcome your thoughts.
Chapter Summary

Greg and Mycroft look at another townhouse. Greg has a crisis.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Greg was at work when he got the call.

Paperwork didn’t do itself, more’s the pity. Greg had been slogging through a report on DI Singh’s most recent case, noting all the overtime and cringing internally about what that was going to do to his budget. Greg would have to lay down the law with Singh — he would have to get Greg’s approval for overtime from now on. All his DIs would. If they were naffed off about it, well, it would be perfectly obvious who’d been abusing Greg’s trust.

Singh had been taking advantage of Greg’s good nature since he’d transferred here in November. Greg had been too busy with the Christmas bomber then to give Singh the oversight he clearly needed, but that would all change now.

He disliked this part of his job — cracking down with one hand, guiding errant detectives into the light with the other — but that didn’t mean he wasn’t good at it. If Singh couldn’t be a grown-up and follow the damn rules, Greg would treat him like the unruly child he was.

Greg knew the man had a problem with his sexuality. But Greg was his boss, dammit! Singh could be a professional and hide whatever feelings he had, or he could go back to being a Sergeant, work for a DI who knew how to be responsible.

The trill of his mobile brought him out of his reverie. He fished it from his pocket — and sighed. It was Mindy, the estate agent.

He and Mycroft had looked at a score of townhouses over the last several weeks and Greg was beginning to regret not jumping at the Regency, shared walls and intimidating elegance be damned. Nothing else they’d seen had appealed to either one of them. Greg still liked the too-small mid-century best, but if he’d never seen it, they might be happily ensconced in the Regency now.

Instead they were living out of boxes at Mycroft’s flat — he had to be out in nine days for the new owners to take possession, ideally sooner. Anthea was lining up temporary housing. He knew Mycroft would rather just stay at the Diogenes, but he couldn’t have Greg overnight there. The suggestion that he simply move into Greg’s flat had earned him a look of such pure distaste, Greg had literally cringed away.

Greg himself had not begun packing. Between work, the logistics of spending time at Mycroft’s, Georgianna and looking at houses every weekend, he really hadn’t had time. He could tell it was beginning to bother Mycroft.

“I just haven’t had time, that’s all.” Greg told him when he saw the look on Mycroft’s face. He’d just arrived, and Greg was cooking dinner, something he’d been looking forward to all day: food that
wasn’t takeaway.

“Of course.” Mycroft’s expression smoothed away immediately, the bland smile he presented to
Greg for a kiss as good as a mask. Greg kissed him anyway.

“It’s not like I have staff to do it for me.” Greg turned back to the stove and stirred the goulash.

“it would be simple enough to arrange.” Mycroft’s arms slipped around his waist from behind, his lips
pressing into his neck. It felt wonderful and Greg relaxed into the embrace.

“Let’s find a place first, yeah? Living out of boxes at your flat is bad enough. Doing it here too...”

“Indeed.”

Greg leaned back against the taller man, setting down his spoon and putting his hands over
Mycroft’s. “It doesn’t mean I’m not all in.” He said. “I am. It’s just... stressful... looking for a place. I
honestly didn’t think it would take this long.”

“I suppose you found this flat right away.” Mycroft sighed.

“I wish.” Greg groused. “I looked at seven other places first. It was a long day.”

“But you found it the first day.”

“Yeah. Erm, I guess I did.” Greg admitted. “And the house... Jude and I saw it was for sale and
contacted the agent. We didn’t look at anything else.”

“Perhaps it’s a sign, then.” Mycroft said softly. “We aren’t meant to live together.”

“Ha!” Greg scoffed gripping Mycroft’s hands tightly. “You aren’t getting rid of me that easily!” He
felt Mycroft’s body loosen, the tension melting away. He nuzzled behind Greg’s ear, nibbling on his
neck. It felt fantastic. “Stop that.” Greg instructed, shaking him off. “I bought paprika for this —
you’re not distracting me.”

“Heaven forfend.” Mycroft murmured with a smile in his voice.

Greg took the call from Mindy. It gave him an excuse to put off dealing with Singh for another ten
minutes.

“Where are you?” She asked instead of saying ‘hello.’ “Something just went on the market that’s
perfect for you!”

“Yeah?” Greg asked.

“Renovated Victorian — freestanding — not far from Mr. Holmes current residence.”

“Victorian.” Greg said doubtfully. Every Victorian they’d looked at was full of dim, narrow rooms.
Greg didn’t have the stomach for knocking down walls in yet another house. It had been bad enough
the first time with Jude. If he had the slightest interest, he could probably trace the start of their
problems to when they were living in a bloody construction zone.

“Renovated Victorian! The place was gutted by an architectural firm five years ago — the principle
architect intended it to be his family home. But his wife left him and took the kids to America and it’s
been empty ever since. You have to come see it now before anyone else can snap it up.”

“Now?” Greg said dubiously. “I’m at work. Maybe I could find time tonight...”
"It has to be now." Mindy insisted. "It’s going to go quickly. It’s not like anything else you’ve seen. Here — I’m texting you some photos."

Greg’s mobile vibrated in his hand. He opened his messaging app and clicked on the first photo. He scrolled through the four that appeared as he examined the first.

"You see!?" Mindy demanded.

"Yeah… erm… where should I meet you? Have you called Mycroft?" Greg was already grabbing his coat.

"I left a message with his assistant. Perhaps you’d like to ring him?"

"Yeah, erm… yeah." Greg muttered. He hurriedly typed the address she gave him into his maps app, and with a brusque, "I’m taking some personal time. Hold down the fort, yeah?" to Donovan, he ran out of the building. He forwarded the photos and the address to Mycroft before he got to his car, then asked Siri to ring him.

Mycroft picked up on the first ring. "I’ll meet you there." He said.

"Good." Greg rang off and started his car.

The front of the townhouse looked like almost every other Victorian in London — tall and narrow, red brick and gingerbread. But the second level windows had been redone into a single large window with 24 panes, yet somehow retained the style and severity of Victoriana. That was promising. The front garden was walled by a seven-foot privacy fence, Greg figured Mycroft would approve of that. Probably want to have it electrified. Maybe put up some pikes with severed heads.

Mindy unlocked the gate with a fob and led the way into the garden. A flagstone path meandered away from the main walk and disappeared around the side of the house. Though the plant life was brown and dismal with the February weather, there was beauty in the low shrubs and the moss between the stones. It would be lovely in the spring.

As Greg surveyed the landscaping, Mycroft arrived, pushing through the gate and closing it carefully behind him. Greg heard the lock catch. He smiled faintly at Greg but seemed distracted. Well, he had just left work in the middle of the afternoon. Greg took his hand and Mycroft’s smile warmed.

Mindy brandished a key. She inserted into the lock on the bright red front door.

The front door opened into an entryway that led to a large hall. Sunlight filtered through the glass on either side of the front door, and there was a large chrome light fixture centred in the hall — a sort of mid-century chandelier. There was a door on one side of the entry, that opened into a substantial coat closet.

The hall itself was roughly four metres long and the width of the house minus metre-wide stairways hugging the walls on each side, one up and the other down. Greg could see light filtering from both. The far wall, the one facing the door was gently curved between the two sets of stairs.

Greg looked around there appeared to be nowhere to go but up or down one of the stairwells.

Mindy gestured towards a door Greg hadn’t noticed — it looked a lot like the wall. "Here’s the first loo." She said, flipping on the light in the powder room. It was tiled in black, grey and white — the walls and the floor — making bitmapped patterns throughout the little room. Greg stepped in, liking it.
But Mindy was already pulling them to the down stairway. The narrow stairs were lacquered a deep, Kelly green. Greg had never seen anything like it.

He forgot them immediately upon arriving downstairs — the open plan reminded Greg favourably of the mid-century dwelling. The architect had dug down, lowering the basement floor, turning it into a bright, open space. (Victorians had notoriously low-ceilinged basements. Greg had toured several in the past few weeks and had not been able to stand upright in any of them.) The kitchen was at the bottom of the stairs taking up about a third of the room — which had been extended out beyond the footprint of the house into the back garden, making it twice as large. The extension looked to Greg like a big box with glass on top and facing the garden. Heavy metal beams striped the top, holding the it together. Huge glass doors opened onto the garden and light shone in through the glass ceiling of the extension between the beams. Greg stood under the broad skylights and gazed at the back garden. The doors opened onto a stone patio, wide stairs at the far end led up to the garden at the original level of the house. It was glorious!

A dining table would be perfect under the skylights. On warm days, they could open the wide glass doors and eat out on the patio. Greg spotted a firepit to one side — maybe they could be out there on cooler evenings too…

The kitchen was new, but not sterile, big but not intimidatingly so. The worktops were white with coloured confetti suspended in the material, the floor was black and white parquet, and tiny confetti coloured tiles covered the backsplash. The refrigerator was enormous — white, not stainless — and there was a poncey wine cabinet under the island counter. He saw Mycroft’s eyes light at the sight of it.

There was ample space between the kitchen and the extension for a small lounge or a desk in addition to the big dining table… or maybe it would be better to leave it alone, have some open air. Greg could see himself spreading files he’d brought home from work over the dining table, drinking tea and concentrating in the serenity of the big room.

Behind the kitchen was another loo with handsome, contemporary fittings, a pantry, a utility room with a washer and dryer, and a storage room, all kitted out with parquet floors — except the loo. The entire loo was tiled with one-inch square, grass green tile.

Greg loved it.

Reluctantly, he followed as Mindy led them back up the stairs to the front hall. Greg realised the front hallway was a sort of mezzanine between the ground floor kitchen and the first floor, situated over the storage and utility rooms, pantry and loo — there were no other rooms on this level.

The stairs to the first floor were gold, bright in the pale, sunlit hall. Mindy took them up.

Greg found himself in a large, airy lounge. The 24-paned window he’d seen from the outside glowed with vivid afternoon light. Greg wondered how many walls had been ripped out to make this large of a space — there were a pair of unobtrusive buttresses up the walls, curving into the high ceiling that stood in for the bearing wall(s) that had been removed. Mycroft examined them with a look of satisfaction making Greg think they were sturdy enough to keep the house from collapsing.

On the far side of the wide, empty stretch of sunlit oak floor was a grand fireplace that must have been original to the house. It was almost two metres tall, the mantle a solid plank of polished cherry that was in harmony with the pale gold walls. There were panels to each side of the fireplace, beside the cherry pillars, that were marbleised — Greg saw the inspiration for the golden stairs and walls in the veins of rich gold and green-brown painted on the panels. It was a gorgeous antique, it’s geometric lines simple enough to suit almost any decor.
He sighed, mentally placing a sofa and chairs in the room and marvelling at the amount of space leftover. Jude would have been compelled to fill it with furniture, make ‘conversation pits’ — Greg loved the emptiness of it now, he would be careful not to clutter it. If he got the chance.

“The architect intended this to be his home office.” Mindy said. She’d disappeared down a short hallway. Greg followed and found her in a room at the back of the house. It was large and bright, with bookshelves built along two of the walls and extra electrical outlets. Greg caught Mycroft’s eyes, saw the consideration in them. He needed a home office, and this was just about perfect.

There was a toilet on this floor too, done in shiny blue glass tile. I was larger, almost lavish, and very convenient for anyone in the lounge or studio.

They took the blue stairs — the entire first floor hallway was blue — to the second floor where they found three roomy bedrooms and two loos. Greg tried to work out which was the master suite, but they were all about the same size. All three had fireplaces and tall windows. One had a window seat overlooking the garden. They’d all been kitted out with generous closets, including the loos. The one with the en suite must be the master, he decided. He swallowed the minor disappointment this caused — no house was perfect.

“These were designed for the kids.” Mindy announced. “I’m sure one would do for your daughter, Detective. The others you can do what you like with them — guest bedrooms maybe.”

“Erm… where’s the master bedroom?” Greg ventured.

Eyes twinkling, Mindy showed them the red stairwell that led upwards.

The third floor had once been a ballroom — a common feature in larger Victorian homes — but had been made over into a palatial master suite. It was drenched in light from a row of skylights and large, stately windows overlooking the garden. There was so much space! Even a king-sized bed — Mycroft would not budge on that — would seem small in this room! The fireplace was oak, the pillars to either side carved into caryatids. It and the plank floor — both had to be original to the ballroom — had been bleached almost as pale as the bone-white walls.

Greg knew exactly where he would put the bed, and where he’d hang the Hockney print. And he’d have an upholstered chair by the tall front windows…

There were two large closets cum dressing rooms adjoining the biggest bog Greg had ever seen — bigger even than the marble monstrosity in Mycroft’s flat. It had a massive claw-footed soaking tub right in front of one of the big back windows, a huge steam shower, two sinks, a bidet, mirrors and lots of light through multiple skylights.

A drunken line of glowing red glass tile staggered around the room, sometimes two rows thick, sometimes three, here and there, just one. The claw feet of the tub grasped ruby-red glass balls, and the steam shower had an entire wall of the wee red tiles. The doors to the dressing rooms were lacquered Chinese red. They would need a red bath mat, red flannels, red bath sheets…

Greg loved this house. He loved it so much, he knew there had to be something wrong with it. He didn’t even want to look at Mycroft, afraid he’d see a raised eyebrow or disapproving smile.

Mindy left them alone in the master suite, tapping unobtrusively down the stairs. “Greg?” Mycroft’s voice was soft, questioning. “What do you think?”

Greg turned towards him. “I think it’s too good to be true.”

Mycroft smiled. “You like it.”
“I bloody love it.” Greg pinched the web of skin between his thumb and forefinger and reminded himself to breathe. “We can’t afford it.”

“I assure you, we can.”

“Do you like it?”

“Very much. And I like the thought of you here, inhabiting this place.” Mycroft said. He walked the four steps to Greg and kissed him. Greg tilted his head up, seeking the comfort of his touch. “You’re uncertain.”

“I’m nervous. I can’t...” He pulled away from Mycroft, feeling like he might explode. “It’s a dream house. It has to be so bloody expensive!”

“It’s fine. Truly.”

Greg tried to accept that. It was difficult. “What will you have to change? For security?”

Mycroft nodded and walked towards the window. “We’ll have to install a more robust alarm system, cameras, new locks and replace the glass in the windows with bulletproof glass. Perhaps a new front door, one that’s armoured. The room behind the kitchen should serve nicely as a security room — it has a separate entrance. A guard can watch the camera feeds from there.”

“A guard?!”

He turned back to Greg. “Of course.”

“You don’t have a guard in your flat.”

“I do. He doubles as the doorman.”

“Huh...” Greg felt slightly stupid. “Right. I suppose if we have a guard, he — or she — can accept packages when we’re out.” He guessed they didn’t strictly need a storage room — not with two extra bedrooms on the second floor. Mycroft could stack his extra books in one of them.

“So, I’ll talk to Mindy, shall I?”

“Erm... yeah.” Greg was sweating.

Mycroft leaned close and ran his hand down Greg’s back. “The Turner will look wonderful over the fireplace in the lounge.”

It would, at that. “Are we doing this?”

“We are.” Mycroft murmured against Greg’s neck. “We’re going to do it in every room in this house.”

Greg moaned and clutched the taller man. “Stop or we’re doing it right now.” Mycroft drew back, still smiling. Greg looked around the high-ceilinged room. It was larger than his entire flat. “Jesus, do they even make rugs this big?”

Mycroft smiled primly. “They do. I look forward to seeing what you choose.”

“Me?”

“I like your aesthetic.” He left unspoken, ‘and you don’t care for mine.’ “Let’s talk to Mindy before
someone else purchases it."

“They wouldn’t dare!” Greg watched Mycroft disappear down the stairs. He turned taking a big breath of the room. It smelled dusty, but that would be remedied easily enough.

He ran his finger over his lips where Mycroft had kissed him. He felt deeply unsettled about all of this — the house, the money, the trust this leap required...

Greg was terrified.

It was stupid. He wanted to live with Mycroft. And Greg loved this house. It was amazing!

He didn’t deserve it. It was too much for the likes of a simple policeman. The little suburban house he’d bought with Jude had seemed like a castle... which made this place the bloody Taj Mahal!

There were papers to sign at Mindy’s office, cheques to write for ridiculous sums, future meetings to arrange. Mycroft would have someone look over the house, make certain the plumbing wouldn’t spontaneously explode or the ground wouldn’t open up and swallow the house whole... that it wasn’t built on a haunted Druid graveyard... Greg’s anxiety steadily increased.

“Guess I have to start packing now.” He mumbled. Mycroft looked up from where he was reading over the contract, a question on his face. Greg tried to smile back.

“Come here.” Mycroft said. “Sit.” Greg complied, sliding into the chair next to this handsome man who loved him. “Should I not sign?” He asked softly.

“No, of course you should!” Greg was startled by his own vehemence. “If you want to, I mean.”

“You’re having second thoughts.” Mycroft murmured stoically.

“No — no second thoughts. Not about us, love.”

Mycroft smiled very faintly at the endearment. “What is it, then? Not the house?”

“I love the house... I love it... so much there must be something wrong with it.”

“If there is, the contract protects our interests.” Mycroft assured him. “I have some knowledge of architectural and construction standards and it appeared to be perfectly sound.”

“Good. That’s... good.”

Mycroft’s eyes narrowed and he scanned Greg’s face intently. Greg felt completely exposed. “Ah. It’s the expense.”

It was. Greg had seen the asking price and it had made him want to throw up. The thought of that much debt... and how did one furnish a place that cost millions? Greg’s idyllic vision of a simple upholstered chair by the bedroom window seemed laughable now. He knew nothing about interior design! How would he even afford the sort of furniture that belonged in such a swank house!? What was he even thinking, he didn’t belong there!

“Stop!” Mycroft said. His voice was soft but commanding and it jolted Greg from his spiralling thoughts. “Stop. This house costs significantly less than the proceeds of the sale of my flat. We have the funds to purchase and furnish it.”

Greg felt shell-shocked by the amounts of money they were talking about so casually. “How much did your flat... no, sorry... not my business.”
“Of course, it’s your business, Greg. My flat sold for ten point three million. This house is less than four — a steal in that neighbourhood, we’re fortunate Mindy alerted us early, before a bidding war cost us... well, a significant amount.” Mycroft smirked at some internal thought. “The math is simple enough—"

“If you say, ‘even for you,’ I’m leaving you here.” Greg threatened.

“I should have told you what our budget was sooner. Please accept my apologies.” Mycroft said primly. “After the security upgrades and furnishings, we should still have a tidy sum to lay by for the future.”

“You mean... retirement?!”

Mycroft shrugged expressively. “Retirement, emergencies, a holiday cottage in Provence, bailing out my brother, Georgianna’s education —"

“Wait — that’s... you aren’t paying for Georgianna...!”

“It’s *our* bankroll...”

“That’s shite. I haven’t contributed a cent. I haven’t contributed anything!”

“On the contrary, my dear man. You have contributed *everything*.”

“Mycroft...”

“Please, Greg... please.” Mycroft’s pleading was a like a slap — *Mycroft Holmes* didn’t *plead!* He made men plead. It wasn’t right.

“Hey, love.” Greg covered the long elegant fingers with his own rough, tan ones. Right there, was the whole story — his working-man’s paw covering Mycroft’s posh, manicured digits. Greg took a deep breath and told himself to get over it. “It’s ok. Everything is ok... or it will be. This is all so... Jude and I paid just over £300,000 for our house — with a thirty-year mortgage. And now we’re talking about... millions of pounds... like it’s nothing. It’s... jarring.”

Mycroft pulled his phone from his jacket and set it in front of Greg. He’d photographed every room of the house.

Greg leaned close and the scent of Mycroft — aftershave, fine wool and a distinctive manly musk — filled his senses. He took a deep breath as they scrolled through the photos — the view of the stone patio outside the glass doors, the colourful backsplash, the black, white and grey tiled loo, the large, golden lounge, sunlight falling across empty bookshelves, the tree branches out the window above the cozy window seat, the narrow, red staircase leading to the master suite, the graceful, Grecian women carved into the bleached oak fireplace, the long, lovely windows at the end of the vast room...

“It’s gorgeous.” Greg sighed. He caressed Mycroft’s pale knuckles, grasping for the words to express his unease. “I guess... I’ve never had anything I didn’t work for. it’s a strange feeling... knowing I haven’t earned this. Give me a minute to get used to it.”

“I wish you didn’t feel that way.” Mycroft said, intertwining their fingers. “You have given me so much more than I ever thought I’d have... than I thought I deserved. This is nothing compared to that. This is just money.”

Greg laughed, more bitterly than he’d intended. “The words of someone who has never had to worry
if he could afford the gas, electric and groceries on a beat cop’s pay check.”

Mycroft’s face shuttered, whatever else he might have said, sealed away behind the bland mask.

Greg squeezed his hand. “Don’t do that, love.” He said, “Don’t shut me out. This is more difficult
than I... it’s probably some outdated idea of manhood... a man pulls his own weight, if I don’t... what
am I?”

“Is that really how you feel?” Mycroft asked, his voice ashen, almost without sound. “Emasculated?”

“That’s not... no. I know it’s ridiculous.” Greg was frustrated with himself.

“What can I do?” Mycroft asked quietly, still terribly self-contained, but no longer hiding behind his
unemotional mask.

“Just... bear with me. Yeah? I’m not bailing — I love you. We are together. I need a little time to get
used to this, is all.” He scoffed softly. “To get over myself, really.”

“Whatever you need.” Mycroft vowed.

Greg poked Mycroft’s phone — the image of the long rectangles of light on the bleached floor of the
master bedroom, their bedroom, was on the screen. He zoomed in on the windowsill, sun making it
glow brilliantly. He chuckled. “Once I get used to it, I’ll expect you to buy me pretty things all the
time.”

A regal horn sounded. “Erm... my mobile.” Greg muttered. “Gigi’s ring.”

“Georgianna’s ring.” Mycroft corrected as Greg fished his phone from an inner pocket.

Greg shot him a look, then chuckled, grateful for the break in tension. “She always texts, she
probably butt-dialed me.” He pressed ‘speaker’ expecting to hear the ambient sounds of whatever
room or car she was in.

“Dad?” Georgianna sounded upset. Mycroft’s head snapped up, his eyes burning as Greg hastily
took her off speaker.

“Georgianna, what’s wrong?” He asked, turning away from Mycroft — and Mindy who was
bringing in another stack of documents.

“Dad, I’m... I’m sorry to bother you at work...”

“Georgianna, what’s wrong?” he asked, turning away from Mycroft — and Mindy who was
bringing in another stack of documents.

“Dad, I’m... I’m sorry to bother you at work...”

“You’re not bothering me. What’s wrong, honey?”

“Can I come stay with you?” Her voice was tremulous.

“Yeah, of course. Georgianna... where are you?” A million scenarios rushed through Greg’s head,
each worse than the one before. Adrenaline surged through his veins — if anyone had hurt her...

“Home.”

Greg shrugged on his overcoat. “I’m coming right now. Are you hurt?” He could have patrolmen at
her house in five minutes.

“No.” She said, and his relief was a physical thing. “It’s just awful here — they’re fighting all the
time...”
“Who!? Who’s fighting?” He asked even though he knew.

“Mum. And Rupert. They scream at each other... he broke a lamp. They smashed the dishes... I hate it! I don’t want to be here. You said I could call you…”

“I’m on my way. Pack some stuff, yeah? School clothes, whatever you need.”

“Really?” Her voice was small and shuddery.

“Yes, of course.”

Georgianna’s sigh was half a sob. “Ok.”

“I’m going to call your mum now. I’ll ring you back after I talk to her.”

“Ok.”

“Love you, honey. Hold tight, I’ll be there in half an hour.”

“Ok... thank you, Daddy.”

It had been years since she’d called him ‘Daddy.’ It brought back many sweet memories of the little dark-haired girl who would wrap her skinny arms around his neck and cling with startling strength. Back when his hair had been dark too.

“Call me if you need anything. I’ll be there soon.”

As he rang off and began dialling his ex-wife’s mobile by muscle memory, Greg realised that Mycroft was beside him, his mouth a thin line.

“She’s unharmed?” Mycroft clipped.

“Yeah, I think so. Just upset… scared.” Greg pushed through the door of Mindy’s office into the crisp, late afternoon air. “I have to go get her…” He stopped in his tracks. “I have to go — we won’t lose the house?”

“No.” Mycroft looked pleased at the urgency of the question. “I’ll ensure it.”

“No.” Mycroft looked pleased at the urgency of the question. “I’ll ensure it.”

“Thanks... you’re...” Greg touched Mycroft’s shoulder, abruptly ashamed of all his sturm and drang. “You’re... I love you — Jude...!” His ex-wife had picked up. “Erm...” He struggled momentarily to switch gears. “I was talking to someone else... hold on a tick, yeah?” He turned back to Mycroft. “Meet you at my place?” It was supposed to be Mycroft’s flat tonight, but Georgianna would be more comfortable at his.

“Yes. Go.”

Greg squeezed his shoulder gratefully and continued on to his car. “Jude, hi, sorry about that. Listen, Georgianna just rang...”

The conversation was short and unpleasant. Greg had been scrupulous about not arguing where their daughter could hear. Jude had often accused him of sticking his head in the sand, refusing to admit their problems — and she probably had a point. But certainly, it was worse to brawl in front of Georgianna — not only did it frighten her, disrupt her sense of home, of safety, of who her mother was, it modelled terrible behaviour. His daughter and his ex-wife were alike in certain ways — the keen, sceptical intelligence looked fiercely from both pairs of grey eyes. But Greg hoped Georgianna had inherited his temperament. His easy-going nature would serve her better than her mother’s hot-
blooded intransigence. Greg had long thought that Jude, for all her compelling strength and intelligence and beauty, was not happy, could not let herself be happy…

Georgianna was ready when Greg arrived, rabbiting from the front door to his car the moment he pulled up, dragging her enormous overnight bag. Her face was pale and sharp, her eyes pink. “Dad!” He watched her expression unclench as he hugged her. He put her heavy suitcase in the boot and opened the passenger door for her. She climbed in and sighed.

“You’re ok?” He asked. She nodded, looking tired. She’d pass out soon after dinner, he thought. He wondered how many days and nights she’d been listening to her mother’s nineteen-month marriage falling apart. “Wait here. I’m going to talk to your mum for a minute.” Before she could protest, he shut her door and walked to the house.

Jude, predictably, looked marvellous. Anger suited her, bringing a rosy glow to her lips and cheeks, her sharp eyes glittering dangerously. Greg was, he realised with surprise, attracted to her. It had been a long time since he’d felt that for her — not since he’d walked into the garage and caught her at it with the spotty eighteen-year-old from down the street.

But she’d been furious when they’d met, and he’d wanted her immediately. Greg had thought her spirited rage was gorgeous, so different from any other woman he knew.

“She has school tomorrow.” Jude said. “It’s ridiculous to take her into the city now.”

“Jude, she’s going to stay with me as long as she wants — she shouldn’t have to listen to you and Rupert having it out.”

“That’s not your business!”

“No, it’s not. But Georgianna is my business.” Greg told her. “And you’re frightening her, Jude.” She had refused to listen to him on the phone, and she turned her back on him now, stalking down the hall towards her kitchen.

Greg followed her. Something crunched under his shoe — broken china. Georgianna hadn’t been exaggerating. He stopped walking, arguing with his ex-wife was a habit he’d thought he’d broken.

“She’s better not be late for school in the morning!” Jude shot after him. “Are you going to pick her up afterwards? Going to leave your precious job to pick your daughter up from school?!” She’d always hated his long hours, had used it as an excuse for all manner of bad behaviour. He was done feeling guilty about it.

“I’ll manage.” He said mildly as he walked out the front door.

She was standing in the open doorway looking stunning in her rage as Greg drove away. He gave his daughter half a smile. “Wanna talk about it?” He asked.
Georgianna closed her eyes. “Not now.”


“Could we get pizza?” She asked, uncharacteristically tentative.

“Yeah. That wood-fire place? What do you want on it?”

They talked about dinner for a few minutes, then lapsed into silence. Traffic into London was not as bad at this hour as the traffic out, but it was still tedious. He hoped Mycroft would be there when they got home.

“Oh! We found a house.” Greg said, remembering the bloody dream house his boyfriend was buying for him. He laughed — at the joy the thought of that house brought him, at the joy of the thought of Mycroft. He glanced at his daughter — she was grinning, her face glowing with shared happiness.

“You did?! You’re moving in with Mr. Holmes!?”

“Yeah. Yeah, we are.” He’d have to talk to Mycroft about what she should call him now. ‘Mr. Holmes’ seemed goofy — absurdly formal for a nominal parent figure. “There are a few bedrooms — you can choose the one you want.”

“I can?” She seemed surprised

“Of course. I wouldn’t get a house without a room for you Gi.” He marvelled that she might think otherwise.

“Mr. Holmes won’t mind?”

“Georgianna, if he minded, I would not be moving in with him.” Greg said with finality. “And you’re the one who said we belonged together.” He teased.

“You do!”

“Well, that’s settled then. One of the rooms has a window seat with a pear tree outside.” Greg changed the subject back to the house. “And all three have fireplaces.”

“I can have a fire in my room?!?”

“Well… we’ll see. You’re fifteen, old enough not to burn down the house.” Greg chuckled but the thought made him feel ill. “We’ll have to have a serious talk about fire safety.”

“Da-ad! I’m not stupid!” She rolled her eyes at him, looking much more herself all of a sudden.

Greg giggled and mussed her dark curls. She squawked, ducking away from his hand, but quickly joined in the laughter. Her braces glinted in the headlights of oncoming traffic.

He took a moment to appreciate how very lucky he was that the two most important people in his life got on so well.

Mycroft was waiting for them when Greg opened the door of his flat. He’d taken off his jacket and tie and unbuttoned a few buttons of both his shirt and waistcoat. He’d rolled his shirt sleeves above his elbows and his freckled forearms were shapely and muscular. Greg wanted him desperately — they exchanged a look that let him know the feeling was mutual.

Greg ordered the pizza. Then as Georgianna dragged her bag to the little bedroom off the lounge, he
took Mycroft in his arms and kissed him. “Hi.” He said when they came up for air. “Did we get it? The house?”

“Oh, yes.” Mycroft assured him. “We take possession on the twelfth.”

“Oh, yes.” Mycroft assured him. “We take possession on the twelfth.”

“Of February?!” That was a little more than a week away! “Wow! That’s.... Mycroft, I’m sorry about before.”

“You have nothing for which to apologise.” Mycroft asserted. “I was pleased that you trust me enough to confide such personal feelings.”

Greg smiled, taking Mycroft’s face in his hands, his big paws reaching around the taller man’s neck where his fingers touched. He leaned in and kissed Mycroft deeply. “I was being a git.” He said. “I love you.”

Mycroft’s face completely lost its wary blandness — it melted away into something so tender and sweet, Greg had to kiss him again. “I love you too, my dear man.”

“I’m still... uneasy.” Greg said softly. “But there’s so much more important here than my... my macho hysteria.”

“Georgianna.” Mycroft agreed.


Mycroft’s expression was heartbreakingly open and vulnerable. Greg kissed him, pressing his mouth against soft lips and licking slowly along the seam until Mycroft let him in. But he pulled away too soon. Greg raised his eyebrows questioningly. Mycroft tilted his head towards Georgianna’s bedroom with a pointed look.

“We have to get used to her being with us.” Greg told him. “Her mum’s having a bad time, she might be around a lot more.”

Concern etched itself deeply in Mycroft’s face, looked out from his green eyes. “Is she... coping?”

“Georgianna is tough.” Greg assured him. “And we will look out for her.”

“We will...” Mycroft murmured. “Because we are partners... it will be my very great honour to assist you in ensuring your daughter’s happiness.”

Greg could not hide his grin. He kissed the earnest, freckled face, the sweet lips, his residual uneasiness fading quickly away.

Georgianna loudly left her bedroom, looking very young in her slippers, training pants and an old jumper of Greg’s that had become too big for him. It dwarfed her.

Mycroft stiffened, but Greg didn’t let him go. Instead he held out an arm to his daughter, inviting her into their embrace. She approached hesitantly, but when Greg pulled her in and Mycroft put a hand on her shoulder, she threw herself into the hug, clinging to them both fiercely with startling strength.

Mycroft’s face shone with astonished, defenseless love for father and daughter. Greg had thought he could not love the man more, but found he’d been wrong.

Chapter End Notes
I was inspired this week and managed to knock out 5,000+ words for you all. Hope you enjoyed it. Mycroft is suddenly part of a family — as Sherlock is with John and his daughter — and I think he’s surprised by how much he likes it.

Happy Mother’s Day!

More in the next two weeks.
Gross Misconduct

Chapter Summary

As moving day approaches, Greg hits a speed bump.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mycroft began to get worried when Georgianna called.

Holmes.” She said. They had discussed what to call each other given the increasing intimacy of their connection. She had been resistant to calling him ‘Mycroft,” and they had both recoiled at the suggestion of ‘Uncle Mycroft.’ Ultimately, they agreed to drop the honorifics and be simply ‘Holmes’ and ‘Lestrade.’ It had the cachet of being something no one else called either one of them.

“Lestrade.” Mycroft answered. He was in his office trying to clear out some of the busywork — he wanted to take several uninterrupted days to move into the new house with Greg. (Not that he planned to hoist any boxes himself, but he’d discovered it was necessary to be there to direct when one’s own possessions were being shifted.)

He glanced at his watch and was surprised by the hour — he had expected a text from Greg long before. Georgianna ringing was novel, she texted almost exclusively. (Often through the Words with Friends messaging.) Mycroft’s mind put these two things together and began to worry.

“What can I do for you?”

“I’m not sure.” She said, sounding uncharacteristically uncertain.

“Is something wrong? Is your father with you?”

“I’m at Dad’s. Yes, he’s here... are you coming over?”

“I had planned on it. Your father said he’d ring when dinner was imminent.”

“He’s... he’s lying on the couch.”

Alarm bells. “Yes?”

“He says he’s not hungry.”

Mycroft heard the fear in her voice. “Let me speak to him.”

“Hold on.” There was a pause then he heard her talking to Greg. “Dad... Mr. Holmes is on the phone. He wants to talk to you.” There was a longer pause. “Dad? Dad...” Another pause, then a distant mutter. “I’m sleeping, honey.”

Mycroft’s heart sank. He’d heard those words too many times — “I’m sleeping.” “I’m tired.” “Leave me alone.” “It doesn’t matter.” — back when Greg’s hair was just growing out, prickly-soft, after his skull fracture and surgery.
He heard Georgianna try again and receive another rebuff. “Mr. Holmes... er, Holmes... he says he can’t talk. He’s tired.”

A sharp spike of guilt drove itself into Mycroft’s gut. He indulged it for exactly one second then shut the emotion ruthlessly away. It would do them no good. “Have you eaten?” He asked the girl, grasping onto practicalities.

“No. Dad told me to order takeaway.”

“Have you?” It was late, she should have eaten by now.

“No.” Georgianna’s misery was evident in her pinched voice.

“Allow me to suggest a course of action: I will bring dinner and we can all eat together?” Mycroft asked smoothly. “Roasted chicken?” He named the first comfort food that came to mind. “I’ll be there in half an hour.”

“Ok.” Her relief broke his heart. “Thank you.”

He had been remiss not to expect this, or something like this. The neurologist had warned them that Greg’s head injury made him prone to mood swings and depression. Greg had implied that he had not suffered such symptoms during their time apart, that the new therapy and regular exercise had steadily improved his emotional state. He’d said that he felt like himself again.

And Greg had certainly seemed as healthy and good-natured as before.

Mycroft told himself not to jump to conclusions — there was an equal probability that Greg had the flu, or really was exhausted than that he had relapsed into the crippling depression that had characterised the long weeks after his release from hospital.

But...

... if Greg was depressed, was it the new house? Had the stress and tension proved to be too much for his injured brain to manage? Greg had tried to tell Mycroft that he had reservations, that he was troubled about the financial aspect and uneasy about the class disparity. He had dismissed Greg’s concerns, thinking only that he had to see his beautiful man living in that townhouse.

The house had charmed Mycroft completely, not on its own merits (which were considerable), but because he had watched Greg fall in love with it during that first tour. Greg’s eyes had widened in wonder as he’d surveyed the contemporary addition with its glass ceiling and back wall opening into the garden. Mycroft had seen the way he’d caressed the green tile in the loo, the way he’d gazed at the lounge, furnishing it in his mind, had heard his gasp as they climbed the scarlet staircase into the master bedroom. Mycroft would have found a way to give Greg this house regardless of cost or culture clash.

But in the process, he had not heeded Greg’s protests. Mycroft felt the very portrait of blind selfishness.

“My dear Lestrade,” He greeted Georgianna. “Can you take this.” He handed her one of the aromatic bags that held their dinner.

She took it from him, a smile transforming her pinched face into loveliness. “It smells great.”

“It is. It’s from Le Maison Bleu, a restaurant I frequent. I believe the chef uses an entire kilo of butter in the mash.”
Georgianna laughed. “Dad will like that!” She exclaimed… then drooped, her smile falling with her shoulders.

“Has there been any change?” Mycroft asked her.

She shook her head. “No.”

“How long has he been on the couch?”

“He got home late — almost seven.” She told him. “After school I had jujitsu, so I didn’t get here until half five.”

“Did he say anything?”

“He said he was sorry that he was late, that he’d got caught up at work. He sounded… flat.” She looked at him trying to discern if he understood. Unfortunately, Mycroft understood all too well. In the depths of his depression, the lack of affect in Greg’s speech had been jarring.

Mycroft began unpacking the bags, setting out the chicken, the roasted Brussel sprouts and a cauliflower-potato mash that was to die for. “Did he do anything before he retired to the sofa?”

“He changed clothes.” Georgianna said. “His phone rang, and he turned it off. I was doing homework so I didn’t… is he… is it like before?”

Mycroft dredged up a smile for the girl. “Let us hope not. If you can lay the table, I’ll call your father to dinner.”

She searched his face, looking for reassurance, he supposed. Then she nodded and turned to the cabinet that held Greg’s sturdy ceramic plates. The ones Mycroft had been looking forward to ‘losing’ in the move.

Before heading to the lounge, Mycroft detoured into Greg’s bedroom. His work clothes lay in a heap on the floor. That was not good — unless they were in the throes of mad passion, Greg hung his suit up and put his shirt, socks and pants in the laundry hamper. Mycroft picked up the discarded dress shirt and sniffed, taking in the scents of beer, grease and cigarette smoke that said “pub” in big glowing letters. Could it be simply that Greg had gotten very drunk and was attempting to hide it from his daughter?

He knew he was grasping at straws — Greg had not drunk to excess since the attack at the Argentine Embassy.

Mycroft dropped the shirt and methodically searched the suit. He found Greg’s wallet and keys still in his trouser pockets. His phone lay on the bed table, forlorn without its charging cord.

There were boxes in the lounge, some open and half full, others closed, but everything tidy and spare. Mycroft knew that Greg had not gotten very far into his packing and had intended to do the bulk over the weekend. Mycroft had already engaged a company to come and help, though he hadn’t yet informed the Detective Inspector.

Greg did indeed lay upon his couch in the dim lounge, under the black wool blanket that was usually folded over the back of the sofa. He’d pulled it up over his face so only the silver of his hair was exposed. It caught the light from the kitchen and gleamed. The blanket wasn’t as long as the Detective Inspector, thus his bare feet protruded from the other end, the hair on his toes still dark. The blanket rose and fell with each breath, but Mycroft was certain Greg was awake. Awake and despairing.
Mycroft perched on the edge of the couch, shoving Greg towards the back with his hip to make room to sit. Greg grunted a complaint. Mycroft ran his fingers soothingly through the silver hair.

He’d tried a dozen different approaches last Spring, a dozen different ways to motivate Greg off the couch, to get him to eat and participate, however nominally, in society. There was only one that had had even limited success.

“You’re frightening your daughter.” Mycroft said, quietly enough that Georgianna couldn’t hear. “She cannot at present depend upon her mother. Her grandparents are deceased or far flung. There are no aunts or uncles who aren’t overwhelmed with children of their own. All she has, right now, is you. You cannot disappear.”

“I’m here.” Greg’s voice was the merest suggestion of a whisper. Mycroft strained to hear it. “I’m just tired.”

“But you aren’t here. I don’t know where you are, but you aren’t here. Georgianna needs you here. I’m not telling you anything that you don’t already know.”

Greg stirred and Mycroft caught a glimpse of his ear and the tan skin of his neck. “I’m not… can’t you let me alone tonight. Just one night. I need to rest.”

“No. In as much as you aren’t resting, Greg. You’re sinking. The farther you sink, the more difficult it is to come back. And you must come back. You must be here. You know this is true.”

Greg rolled onto his back — with difficulty as Mycroft was still perched on the edge of the couch — and looked up at him with melancholy eyes. “I hate you.” He murmured.

Mycroft allowed himself the barest of smiles. “My dear man, I expected nothing less.”

Passing his hand over his eyes, Greg blinked miserably at the light from the kitchen. “Mycroft.” It was a plea.

Mycroft leaned down and kissed him tenderly. “I know. I know you don’t feel well. All you have to do is join your daughter and me for dinner.” He helped Greg sit up, wrapping an arm around his back and feeling the muscles twitch and flex. He was reminded how very thin Greg was still.

“I can’t do this again.” Greg mumbled. “It was too hard. I can’t do it.”

Mycroft wrapped his arms around Greg, pulling him against his chest, petting his hair and rocking just slightly. He’d read this was the most comforting and reassuring position. Mycroft imitated the motions exactly, praying it would offer some measure of solace. “You’re not alone, my dear.”

Greg slumped, and Mycroft sensed he was struggling not to weep — something he did not want Georgianna to see. “I hate feeling this way.”

“Tomorrow we’ll go see your neurologist. And Dr. Ephroem —“

“I can’t.” Greg’s voice was husky and thick. “I have a meeting first thing.”

“Surely you can postpone it.”

Greg’s laugh was the most bitter, joyless sound Mycroft thought he’d ever heard — more so as Greg’s laughter was normally jubilant, happy. Greg’s laughter had never failed to warm Mycroft’s heart. This sound was an abomination.
“It’ll happen with or without me.” Greg said. “Better for me to be there.”

Abruptly Mycroft understood that Greg’s sudden plummet into depression had a precipitating event. *Something had happened to him, likely at his work.* Something had thrown him off-kilter. On top of the stress of moving, Mycroft had discounted his uneasiness about the circumstances around buying the house, his ex-wife was doing to her new husband what she had done to Greg, but with more immediate effect, and as a result Georgianna was staying with him 100 percent of the time now...

Mycroft was sorely tempted to wallow in self-recriminations. But knowing it would be nothing but counterproductive, he refused to allow himself.

“Greg...” He wanted to demand to know what had happened, but this was not the time. “Your daughter is ravenous. Come sit at the table and eat with us. Later, I’ll want you to tell me everything. But Georgianna first, yes?”

“Yes.” Greg agreed wearily. Mycroft stood up and offered his hand. Greg swung his legs off the couch and rested his head in his hands, sinking into himself. Mycroft reached down and took hold of his upper arm, tugging him upright. Greg stood and Mycroft watched as he visibly steeled himself for the torturous ordeal of dinner with his lovely daughter.

Georgianna had laid the table, set out the food and poured three tall glasses of fizzy water. She looked up anxiously as her father approached. Greg sat down next to her and rested his huge hand on the back of her chair, touching her casually. Mycroft marvelled at the apparent ease with which Greg executed the comforting gesture. Two minutes before, he had been struggling not to break down sobbing. Examining him closely, Mycroft could make out the strain of effort in the way Greg hid the balled-up fist of his other hand under the table and avoided looking at the food.

“Georgianna... I didn’t mean to worry you.” Greg said it calmly, with a fair, if flat, approximation of his usual charm. “Feeling a little under the weather. Thanks for helping organise dinner.”

Her face brightened immediately. Mycroft could see she *wanted* to believe he was simply ‘a little under the weather,’ even though she couldn’t entirely.

“How was jujitsu?” Greg asked, his bicep flexing as he ground a fist into his thigh where his daughter could not see.

Thus prompted, she chattered on about the class, the other students, what she’d learned. She’d managed a swift and decisive take-down of a bigger boy, and she was rightfully proud of herself.

Greg left it to Mycroft to make encouraging comments, though he clearly tried to pay attention. He had to be aware that both his daughter and his lover watched every bite he took, weighing it in their minds against memories of meals past. Mycroft found himself attempting to bargain with fate — if Greg ate most of his chicken, perhaps he could shake this episode off quickly. If he finished his mash, perhaps he *was* just a little under the weather....

Greg ate without appetite, pushing the food around his plate. He agreed that it was delicious and put some in his mouth whenever he caught Georgianna looking concerned, but it was obvious to Mycroft that he couldn’t taste it and did not enjoy it.

After dinner, Mycroft sent Greg to bed. “I’ll be in soon.” He said kissing the Detective Inspector’s forehead. “I’m going to clean up first.” Leaving a mess was guaranteed to sink Greg’s mood further.

Greg said goodnight to his daughter and shuffled away down the hall. She watched him for a moment, then began clearing the table. “He hardly ate anything.”
“I don’t think it’s quite the same this time.” Mycroft told her, scraping the plates into the bin. “But if it is, we’ll deal with it together.”

She sighed, taking dishes from him and stacking them by the sink. “Ok.”

“By the end of next week, we’ll be in the new house.” Mycroft told her. “I don’t think it’s possible to be depressed there.”

“You aren’t going to postpone the move?” She said it lightly, but Mycroft saw the tension in her shoulders and back.

“Of course not — my dear Lestrade, I want nothing more than to settle down with your father. And you! He will have to do a lot worse than this to get rid of me.”

She smiled at him, some of the tension easing.

Mycroft had been looking forward to moving into the house with Greg — and his daughter, and little Bast — permanently. He would have difficulty expressing how very much he had been anticipating it...

He’d been anticipating tonight as well. He and Greg hadn’t had nearly enough sex since they’d been back together. Between work, trading flats every night, house hunting and Georgianna’s presence, there had not been as much opportunity to indulge their carnal passion as Mycroft would have wanted.

He’d been planning to address that lack this evening. Mycroft knew his unwillingness to relax with Georgianna in the flat had been a large part of the issue lately. But as the girl would be with them quite a lot for the foreseeable future, Mycroft had a stern conversation with himself about priorities, letting go of ridiculous scruples and pleasing his man. He’d been determined to seduce Greg tonight, had spent a pleasant twenty minutes fantasising about it in his personal loo at the office...

Sex with Greg was always good. Always — they had a crackling chemistry together that made even the most perfunctory of hand jobs into an internal fireworks display. But the night Greg had taken him dancing stood out... it had been a special night in several ways. Greg had relished it too — he had watched Mycroft dancing, and it had aroused him.

Mycroft could have danced all night. But when he caught sight of Greg... he saw how much Greg wanted him, and Mycroft’s own arousal had soared. He tripped off the dance floor and into Greg’s strong arms. The way they kissed, he thought they might make love right there in the subterranean club.

They made it back to Mycroft’s flat somehow, ripping each other’s clothes off in the lift and as they stumbled into the bedroom. Greg had drunk more than usual — just enough to free him from constraints. He’d been... demanding, forceful and a little jealous. Mycroft had loved it!

They’d fucked. As Greg had pushed into him from behind, he’d pulled Mycroft tightly against his chest, and growled in his ear. “Did he do this to you?”

Mycroft was thrilled to answer truthfully. “No!”

Greg had gripped him almost painfully, his big cock filling Mycroft completely. “Did he!? Did he fuck you?”

“No.” Mycroft gasped. It wasn’t Greg’s business what he and Michelè had got up to together, not his business at all! But... but... it made Mycroft’s cock terrifically hard to know that Greg was feeling
possessive.

“Your arse belongs to me.” The wet slap of Greg’s hips against his buttocks punctuated the statement.

“Yes!” Mycroft writhed against Greg’s chest feeling the rasp of wiry hair on his spine. He moaned, surprised at himself, surprised at how much Greg shoving his head firmly down onto the bed made him shudder with desire. “Greg!” He choked. “Fuck me!”

And Greg had fucked him, slow and sleazy, dragging across his prostate until Mycroft thought he would lose his mind. Then faster, harder, his hips thrusting energetically. Greg corkscrewed his pelvis, grinding erotically, and Mycroft moaned and shuddered with pleasure. It felt amazing! Greg’s hands clutched Mycroft’s hipbones hard enough that later, he found bruises in the shapes of Greg’s fingers.

And he had talked! “The way you move... Mycroft... I wanted to have you right there on the dance floor. You’re pure sex... fuck, Mycroft... I can’t believe you’re mine... you’re mine...”

When he’d said that, “You’re mine.” Mycroft had come hard, crying out. Greg’s hand moved on him, ripping pleasure from his body in great, heaving, ecstatic waves. A white noise descended, and he had floated above his prone form, bathed in bliss, watching as Greg finished with a shout and toppled slowly onto Mycroft’s back.

When Mycroft opened his eyes, Greg had been caressing Mycroft’s neck, running his fingers through his hair. He was sweaty and sticky, lying in a wet spot but Greg was grinning, his brown eyes twinkling, and Mycroft did not care about anything else.

Greg leaned in and kissed him. Mycroft could feel Greg’s smile as they kissed, and his spirits soared even higher than they had whilst he danced. How did this golden-hearted man love him?! It was quite possible that he’d never been more confused... or happier.

Mycroft had carefully filed the memories and sensations of that whole night to savour again and again. He might compare it with his other prized recollections, rate it amongst his top five best memories. Whatever else happened in his life, Mycroft would always know that he had loved and been loved by a beautiful man with a joyous spirit.

The fear he felt tonight, so few weeks after that wonderful (no, fabulous) date, left him aching inside.

When Mycroft joined him, Greg was lying in bed, his face to the wall. He caressed the strong lines of his love’s shoulders and pet his hair soothingly.

“How is she?” Greg’s murmur was so soft and low, Mycroft barely heard it.

“Georgianna is a sharp, well-adjusted young woman. Despite her mother’s sudden decompensation — and other challenges — she is adapting quickly and well. She will be fine.”

“Jude’s taking her to lunch on Saturday.” Mycroft heard the unspoken, I can’t let her see me this way.

“Yes, I made note of it on the calendar.” With the addition of Georgianna to their daily routines, they had begun sharing a Google calendar. “If your daughter wishes to stay with you, no one will take her, not even her mother.”

“I wonder if that’s the right decision.”
“Trust your daughter, Greg. Trust yourself.”

Greg sighed and in it, Mycroft heard all his frustration and regret... and something deeper... something gloomier... “Tell me, my dear.” He said, running his fingers through Greg’s silver hair. “Tell me what happened today.”

----

Greg counted to ten.

He liked to think he could work with anyone — he worked with Sherlock, for God’s sake! Greg usually had a thick skin — insults didn’t bother him much. It took a lot to make him angry. Jude could do it, had done more than anyone else. Early in their acquaintance, Mycroft had infuriated him, but he hadn’t been angry. He’d been offended. He’d told the posh git off and done what he wanted. (Without being paid for it, thank you very much.) Greg could not recall ever getting angry with Georgianna. He’d been disappointed once or twice, irritated certainly, and impatient more than he wanted to admit. But never angry.

Right now, Greg was so angry he could barely restrain himself. The words the man in front of him had said were still hanging in the air, vile and ugly. Greg needed to scream! He needed to smash in the windows of the nearby cars, tell the Chief Superintendent to fuck himself sideways and beat the wanker standing in front of him until he cried and begged for mercy. Adrenaline surged restlessly in his veins and he was hot. He clenched his fists to hold the anger in, digging his fingernails into his palms, panting with the effort.

He didn’t need this!

Before Greg reached ‘ten,’ his mobile chimed. It was Georgianna’s alert — it should be her after-school text checking in, but he didn’t look. He swallowed the string of angry curses that threatened to spew from his lips.

Swearing would only make things worse. The man in front of him didn’t swear. He didn’t smoke or drink alcohol or caffeine. He never joined the other coppers at a pub to celebrate a win or to lick their wounds with a few pints — when Greg asked him along, he just sneered and begged off. Singh claimed it was religious — and Greg wouldn’t contradict him — all he knew about the Sikh religion was what he read on Wikipedia and what his mate Sukjinder had told him twenty-odd years ago. (and Sukjinder had drank and smoked with abandon. So had his father come to think of it.) But Singh wasn’t the only Sikh in the department. He probably wasn’t the only bloody intolerant bigoted bellended twat either, but he was the only bigoted bellended twat to display his animus openly.

Greg had had the little talk with Singh about the overtime a few days ago. The man had been impassive, seeming to stare at Greg from behind a blank wall. It had been a disappointment — Greg had hoped to improve their working relationship and said as much. The man had shrunk from him as if frightened or disgusted, without changing his disinterested expression.

A half hour ago, the Chief Superintendent called Greg into his office. The big man wasn’t happy. “Why does Anil Singh think you have a problem with him?” Had been his greeting.

“I have no idea.” Greg said, eyebrows high with surprise. He told the Superintendent about the overtime issue, related the conversation he’d had with Singh about it. Gave an overview of Singh’s
performance — his closure rate wasn’t on par with the other detectives, so Greg had assigned DI Phelps to mentor him. He’d hoped Singh would take the hint and apply himself.

When he had finished, Greg learned that Singh had filed a complaint against him with Scotland Yard’s Directorate of Professional Standards.

“You’re being investigated for gross misconduct, Lestrade.” Chief Superintendent McFadden told him, looking abashed.

Greg stared at him with incomprehension as his brain rejected the words and their import. “Wait... what?! Why?!?”

McFadden pushed a paper across the desk. Greg took it — it was a notice of gross misconduct, outlining Greg’s alleged transgressions. He began to scan it... then his eyes snagged on several of the words and stayed there. He made himself start over, read the thing closely.

“He’s delusional!” It was out of Greg’s mouth before he could stop it. With effort, he reined in his outrage. “I don’t even know what religion he is, and I don’t care. All I care about is how he does his job.”

To his relief, the Chief Superintendent nodded sympathetically. Greg had never worked directly with the Chief, but the man had promoted him twice, and while he had not been an ally during the cock-up with Sherlock’s apparent suicide and alleged fraud, he’d backed Greg’s reinstatement as soon as Moriarty’s lies had unravelled. In the year since Greg had come out, taking Mycroft to the New Year’s Ball, McFadden had seemed slightly uncomfortable with Greg, but he’d given the Chief the benefit of the doubt and chalked it up to Mycroft’s vast influence rather than homophobia.

Somewhat reassured, Greg continued reading, but it wasn’t long before he was squirming with confusion and offense. “He said I sexually harassed him?” He asked, shocked. Greg had always been careful, fearful in the early days that someone would discover his bisexuality and make an issue out of it. He’d always made a point of being scrupulously professional with his colleagues, especially the women. They had a hard-enough time being taken seriously Greg didn’t want to do anything that might jeopardise their standing in the eyes of the other men.

He tried to think what Singh could be upset about, but there was nothing. Greg hadn’t told any off-colour jokes, hadn’t told any jokes at all in front of Singh that he could think of. Had he been culturally insensitive? Singh was from Brixton, not far from where Greg himself had grown up — how different could he be? There must be a misunderstanding that Singh had built up in his mind into something worth complaining about. That or he assumed Greg would come down on him for his sorry closure rate and this was a preemptive strike.

“How? How am I supposed to have sexually harassed him?”

Chief Superintendent McFadden sighed heavily. “I’m probably not supposed to be talking about this with you.” He said. “But DPS is coming tomorrow to interview you, and I don’t want you to be blindsided.” The Chief Superintendent paused and took a deep breath. “Singh claims...” He said slowly. “That you give preferential treatment to female detectives, and that you belittled him by making him report to Phelps instead of to you. And...” Greg watched McFadden become quite red in the face, his embarrassment a spreading rash. “That you made a sexual overture and implied if he didn’t go along, his career would suffer. He claims he has witnesses.”

Greg was astonished. After a few long seconds he realised his mouth was hanging open and closed it. “You know that’s not... he’s a... a complete fantasist.”
“I suspect that you’re spot on, Lestrade. And I’m sure DPS will agree.” Greg studied his boss’s face and nodded. He wasn’t certain, but he didn’t feel up to contradicting McFadden just then. The man was doing him a favour, telling him about the Gross Misconduct Notice.

Just thinking about it made him want to throw up.

“He asked for a transfer out of your squad.”

Relief flooded Greg’s system — until he saw the Chief Superintendent’s face and knew Singh had been denied.

“DPS will interview Phelps and the detectives Singh claims witnessed you propositioning him tomorrow too. In the meantime, stay away from him…”

“How am I supposed to supervise him?” Greg asked.

“You’re taking holiday time next week, yeah?”

“Yeah.” Greg had forgotten all about that — next week they were moving into the new house. A half hour ago he’d been excited about that.

“I hope this will all be cleared up by the time you come back. They’ll do the preliminary interview tomorrow morning, and unless they find cause, that will be it.” McFadden pinned Greg with a penetrating stare. “They aren’t going to find anything, are they Lestrade?”

“No!”

“I’m serious, Lestrade, if there’s anything…?”

“Chief, there’s nothing. I asked Phelps to mentor him, not supervise him. I continued to check in with him just like I do all my DIs — you know I like to be pretty hands-on.” Greg loved being a detective too much to step back too far. “I haven’t treated him any differently — if any of ‘em had their squad rack up that much overtime, I’d have a serious chat with them too. He did need more instruction than the others — seemed a bit clueless sometimes — but he’s the newest DI. I figured he was just wet behind the ears.” Greg scoffed impatiently. “I was busy with the task force hunting the Christmas Bomber… maybe I should have paid more attention.”

The Chief Superintendent had started taking notes as Greg talked. He finished and looked up. “Don’t worry about this, Lestrade. No one has ever made a complaint against you before… well, Donovan that one time, but that wasn’t anything like this…” Her complaint had been about Sherlock, back before he jumped off a building. They’d worked through it — Greg knew Donovan respected him. She’d wanted to protect Greg from making what she thought was a catastrophe waiting to happen. “You’re on holiday in two days. I know it will be awkward until then. Just… don’t be alone with him, whatever you do.”

Those words rang in his head when Greg saw Singh coming towards him in the parking lot. He’d grabbed Donovan. “I need you to stay with me while I talk to Singh.” He told her. She’d wrinkled her brow but mercifully didn’t question him. Perhaps she saw something in his eyes…

Moments later, Greg found himself standing opposite Singh in the parking lot, desperately trying to hang on to some self-control as his blood boiled. Singh looked defiant and Donovan looked outraged.

It crossed his mind that he should laugh this off, that at one time he would have. The Notice of Gross Misconduct made that impossible. That and Singh could not insult his superior officer without
consequences.

“You heard that, Donovan?” Greg asked, his voice raspy with rage.

“Yes, boss, I heard it.”

“Take notes. I want you to write it up when we’re done here.” Greg said through gritted teeth. “DI Singh, if I ever hear you say anything like that again — to me or anyone else — I will have no choice but to suspend you without pay. Do you understand?” Singh just looked at him, his disgust writ plainly on his face. “Answer me.” Greg demanded.

“Yes.”

“Yes what?!”

“Yes, sir.” The loathing dripped off the word. “I understand.”

“The Chief Superintendent has denied your transfer request.” Greg told him, savouring the new expression on Singh’s face — panic laced with guilt. “You’re stuck with me. From now on, for my protection and yours, I will be recording all our in-person communication. Do you consent to be recorded, DI Singh?”

“Recorded? Why?!”

“You have filed a complaint accusing me of gross misconduct.” Greg said, his voice clipped. He ignored Donovan’s surprised snort. “DPS is conducting a formal investigation. While that happens, I will feel more comfortable with a record of all interactions. I would think you’d want that as well, DI Singh. Do you consent to be recorded?”

The man fumed. He’d already told Greg exactly what he thought of him, and it wasn’t at all nice. Greg suspected that Singh wanted to disagree, to contradict whatever Greg said. To spit in his face and walk away. But Greg was his boss, he couldn’t do that and keep his job — not unless DPS found in his favour. “Answer me, DI Singh, do you consent to be recorded? The alternative is to have at least two witnesses in any room we share. Is that what you want?” Greg asked. “Can we agree that the Chief Superintendent would be an impartial witness? I doubt he’d appreciate the drag on his time, but needs must, yeah? Are you writing this down, Donovan?”

“Yes, boss.”

“What will it be, Singh? Answer me.”

“Yesss.” Singh spat.

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, sir, I consent to being recorded.”

“Donovan?”

“Got it, boss.”

“I believe you have a lot of work to do, DI Singh.”

“Yes, sir.”

Greg smiled an ugly, angry smile. “Then get to it, detective. There’s only a few hours left of your
shift.” He couldn’t resist the dig about the overtime.

He didn’t watch the man stalk off. Greg turned away and closed his eyes, feeling the rage roiling in his gut, feeling his grasp on his temper slipping. There was darkness there that scared him. Doom… it was doom, lurking, waiting to claim him. This would not end well, Greg could feel it. He wouldn’t come out of this whole. He might as well tender his resignation right now…

“Boss? You ok?”

Greg opened his eyes and found Donovan looking at him. He tried to shake off his anger and melancholia. “It’s not the first time someone has called me that.” He said, not sure if he meant to reassure her of his resilience or confide a shameful secret. But it wasn’t the first time — long before he’d met Jude, he’d lived with a beautiful boy named Ben. Greg had been baited and insulted more than once when they were out together. “It’s not even the words, offensive as they are.” He told her. “It’s the tone of voice.”

“Like you were something nasty he wanted to scrape off his shoe.” She agreed.

“Why did I think it would be different now?” This wouldn’t be happening if he hadn’t come out. Greg felt like a fool. What had made him think he could flaunt his male lover and suffer no repercussions?

“Because it is different now, sir.” Donovan insisted.

Greg sighed, his spirits sinking. “If he’s saying it out loud, half the Met is thinking it.”

“No, they aren’t, sir.”

“I don’t even give a toss what he thinks about me — but I’m his boss! He has to at least pretend to respect me!”

“Like the rest of us do, sir.”

Greg looked at her, saw the mischievous twitch of her lips. “It’s not funny, Donovan. He’s… ugh, I shouldn’t talk about it.”

“He’s accused you of gross misconduct. Isn’t that, like, taking kickbacks and changing witness statements?”

Greg grimaced. “Not in this case. According to the notice, it’s religious intolerance, sexual harassment and singling him out for harsh treatment.”

“You’re kidding!” She laughed. “You!? I’d sooner believe you’d taken bribes.”

“Don’t say that tomorrow if they interview you.” Greg rubbed his eyes. All of a sudden, he was exhausted. “And do me a favour, don’t spread this around…” He sighed. “Everyone will know soon enough, I guess. Write up a report of everything you saw and heard today and give it to the Chief Inspector.”

“Yes, boss.” She looked worried.

“What, Donovan?”

“Let me shout you a pint down at the Otter.”

A pint sounded wonderful. “I don’t have time.”
“Make time.” She said, taking him by the elbow and starting down the pavement. “You look like shit, boss.”

Greg didn’t resist — one wouldn’t make him too late. Georgianna had jujitsu after school anyway. He let Donovan guide him up the block to the Otter and sit him down at a table. He watched her at the bar, ordering pints. They’d come a long way since she’d made that complaint about him working with Sherlock. She’d become something of a ‘work wife’ the last couple years, been someone he could depend on. She had, he strongly suspected, delayed her own advancement to DI to stay with him. He needed to put a stop to that, send her on her way.

“Did you tell him a naughty Muslim joke or something?” She asked as she set a pint in front of him.

“No!” Greg burst out. She’d caught him by surprise — it was one of her best tricks in the interrogation room. He gave her a baleful look. “He’s not Muslim, by the way. He’s Sikh. According to the Chief Superintendent.”

“Oh. Then why’s he teetotal?”

“You’re asking me?”

She sipped her beer, peering at Greg over the lip of her glass. “Sexual harassment?”

Greg swigged his own beer unhappily. “According to the complaint, I tried to pull him. When he refused, I allegedly told him it would hurt his career.”

She snorted. Then she laughed outright. “You?! Tried to pull him!? Who is he kidding?” She guffawed. “He wishes you wanted him.”

“He claims to have witnesses.”

She giggled into her beer. “He says you chatted him up in front of people? Boss you are the most oblivious bloke I’ve ever met! I’ve seen widows flirt with you over the corpses of their husbands and you don’t even notice! You’ve never shown a whit of that kind of interest in anyone at the Met. You were very married and now you’re all goo-goo eyed for that boyfriend of yours.”

“Honestly, Donovan, I don’t know what he’s on about.”

“What he’s on is more like it!”

Greg scoffed. “He’s teetotal, remember.” He took a meditative swallow of beer. “You heard him — he really hates me.”

“It’s not you, boss. Or if it weren’t you, it would be someone else. He can’t take criticism, and he clearly has issues with his sexuality.”

“I don’t give a toss about problems with his sexuality. Just leave mine out of it.”

“I really thought you were going to punch him. He deserved it.”

“It was a close thing, Donovan.” Greg said. “Better that I didn’t give him something to make a real complaint about.”

“I guess. How did he ever make DI.” Donovan mused.

“He was a hard-working Sergeant. Productive.” Greg told her — he’d done his due diligence when Singh was assigned to his squad. “My guess is that all this overtime he’s billing, he used to do that
for free.”

“If he’s working such long hours, why’s his clearance rate shite?”

Greg shrugged. “No DI to put him on course, to make the connections. He is a hard worker. But something’s missing, yeah?”

“Maybe you should sick Sherlock on him.” Donovan suggested lightly.

Scoffing, Greg set his pint down with a thump. “I like Sherlock too much to expose him to that wanker. You think he’s made of stone, but he’s not.” He gave her a warning look and she swallowed whatever she was going to say with her beer. “I asked Phelps to mentor Singh.” Donovan already knew about Phelps. “And he was offended that I asked a woman to help him out.” He contemplated his nearly empty pint, beginning to feel numb to his anger and outrage. “DPR is sending someone to interview me tomorrow.”

“You talked to your Rep?”

“Yeah. Called right after I talked to the Chief Superintendent. It’s some kid out of Hounslow! I don’t know, he sounded sharp enough…” How had this happened? Greg asked himself. How had he ended up needing someone half his age to defend him against the specious claims of a homophobic knob?!

As Donovan went to the bar to order another round, Greg thought seriously about resigning. He could escape all this rot and just walk away. No more wankers like Singh to deal with. No more paperwork. No more serial bombers or rank decomposing bodies…

But what would Greg be if not a copper? He could not envision it. Hell, he was already too close to being a bloody kept bloke, a trophy boy toy for a wealthy and powerful man. He needed to keep something of his own — more than running the marathon, more than raising his daughter, more than a house and a relationship. Something more.

Being a copper was it. Or it had been until now.

Greg watched the first throng of after work drinkers descend on the Otter. He was glad Donovan had chosen a secluded table — the last thing he wanted was to talk to anyone. The smell and the noise took him back twenty years to when he’d gone to the pub every evening with the other PCs. He’d been so young.

It had been exciting back then. Every shift was an adventure, walking his beat, talking to the shopkeepers and housewives. There had been a murder on his beat and he’d been first on the scene! Greg had secured the area, and stood guard until the detectives and forensics showed up. It had been thrilling!

As a forensic tech erected a tent over the remains, the DS had interviewed Greg about finding the body.

The sergeant was middle-aged and had approached Greg with something akin to dread. But he’d been pleasantly amazed to find that young PC Lestrade had done everything right. He’d even found what appeared to be the murder weapon in a crevice between the buildings (that had been pure luck). DS Pfingston remembered Greg, and when he was promoted to Detective Constable, Pfingston put in a word. While his fellows were shipped off to little hamlets all over Britain to cut their teeth, Greg got a prime placement in London.

He hadn’t wasted the opportunity. Twenty odd years later and he was a Detective Inspector in
Charge with four DIs and their squads under his supervision. Greg had worked hard for it.

So why did his life’s work suddenly seem trivial? Had he made any difference at all? Murders stacked up no matter how many they solved. He sipped his pint and tried to smile at Donovan, but he was tired. So very, very tired.

Greg had intended to stop by Tesco on the way home and cook dinner for Mycroft and Georgianna — like a real family. But now he didn’t see the point. What did it matter if he cooked or they had takeaway?

Did it matter, in the greater scheme of things, if Greg kept his job or walked away from it? Nothing would change — nothing important. His job would be filled by another capable detective, Donovan would finally put in for promotion to DI, murders would be solved. With or without DCI Lestrade, murders would be solved.

Greg wasn’t that excited, ambitious kid who had impressed a jaded Detective any more. He wasn’t a young detective throwing himself into his work, or a newly minted DS trying to impress his Inspector. He wasn’t a DI with his own squad and his own cases. He’d worked so long and so hard... and for what? To have a direct report fling homophobic slurs at him and accuse him of gross misconduct? The more he thought about it, the more clearly he saw the truth.

He wasn’t anything much.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks everyone for the nice notes last week. I appreciate your patience and kindness.

The doctors warned that Greg’s head injury would most likely have some lasting effects. An unpleasant challenge, that before Greg would simply have handled and moved on, now puts him in a tailspin. Mycroft's impulse to take him directly to the doctor isn't a bad one, it's unfortunate that they have to put it off.

I was originally thinking that Georgianna would call Mycroft because Greg was MIA, and that he’d show up late and drunk. But even a severely depressed Greg would not abandon his responsibility to his daughter. Thus, back to the couch. He shouldn’t drink that much anyway.

I expect Mycroft is very tempted to dispose of Greg's headache — Singh — with a single sentence to one of his assistants. But that would do nothing to improve Greg’s state of mind. This is something he has to find the wherewithal to see through himself. Time for a tune up with the old trick cyclist! (As James Sholto would say.)

I appreciate that Georgianna can depend on Mycroft too.

Next chapter: the new house! Has Greg's relapse cast a pall over his pleasure in his new home?
Bast charged up the stairs, skittering on the polished wood floor at the top, sliding sideways until her feet gained purchase and she tore across the lounge, past Georgianna who giggled. With a happy chortle, the little cat galloped around the girl and the new sofa, a crazy light in her blue eyes. She tore through the room, around the shopping bags stacked by the stairs, then back again up onto the sofa where she chortled again.

“You’re insane, kitty.” Georgianna said scritching under her chin. Bast endured it for several seconds before running away and making a circuit of the big room. She stopped abruptly at the mirror that took up five feet of the wall opposite the fireplace and arched her back, tail straight up. She chirruped at her reflection and bounced along the mirror, appearing to defy physics or gravity — or perhaps neither of those things applied to felines.

“Ffffft-fffffft.” Mycroft called from the doorway of his office and with a joyful chirp she left her reflection and flew back across the room, leaping over a shopping bag rather than running around it. She overshoot Mycroft’s position and reversed herself in the corridor (that led to the loo and the stairwell to the third floor), her claws skating over the floor until her powerful hindquarters slid into position and she launched herself at her favourite person.

He crouched and ran his hand down her back as she passed by, then again as she u-turned and brushed against his trousers, her chainsaw purr loud in the almost empty room. Playfully, she attacked his hand, clutching it between her paws and flopping on her back to kick it over and over with her hind legs. “Oh!” Mycroft extracted his hand, careful of her claws.

Bast jumped up and ran off up the stairs, her chortle ringing delightedly.

“Did she scratch you?” Georgianna asked from the sofa.

“Oh no!” Mycroft sounded scandalised. “Bast would never scratch me. She’s my *doux petit bébé*.”

The girl giggled again, falling back on the couch. “You sound like an old cat lady, Holmes.”

“That seems a dire condition indeed.” They were alone together in the townhouse, the two of them, and it was remarkably companionable. Georgianna was looking through his boxes of vinyl record albums with the intention of playing some on Mycroft’s turntable — one of the few items in the vast lounge.

“Dad says you didn’t choose her — she chose you.”

Mycroft smiled remembering the tiny, blonde bit of fluff that had decided to kip in *his* lap. “As you say.”
The teenager wiggled, her bare feet looking too big for her skinny frame. “What would you have named her if she was a boy? Bast is a goddess.”

“Oh, I never gave it much thought.” He told her. “Schrödinger, maybe.”

Georgianna giggled and Mycroft was pleased she understood the reference — though balance of probability suggested it was from internet memes rather than the study of quantum mechanics, despite her proclivity for maths and science.

“Do you have anything other than classical records?” She asked, again leafing through the boxes of vinyl.

“Of course. There’s quite a lot of Baroque actually, and some Romantic. And a number of more modern compositions. You might find the Schoenberg interesting.”

Her eyes rolled almost out of her head. “Symphonic.” She said. “Do you have anything other than symphonic music?!”

He smiled at her aggravation. “Let’s see... I went through a period where I listened exclusively to American jazz of the 1950s and 60s.” He flipped through a different box and showed her. “I found it stimulating.”

She made a face that showed what she thought of American jazz. Mycroft hid his amusement.

“I’m afraid this is the most contemporary, non-symphonic record I have.” He handed her an album and she studied it.

“The Next Day.” She read. “Why is there a big white box over his face?”

“Heroes is a very well-known album — the cover is iconic. It is so recognisable, that one knows who and what it is regardless of the white box. Using the same album art thirty-five years later in this manner... it’s arch... playful — a comment on the ridiculous nature of fame, of his own fame... a rejection of it.” Mycroft sighed. “He knew he was dying when he made this record. I was curious what that might sound like.”

“Why?” She asked with the scepticism of the very young.

“Sooner or later, we all must grapple with our own mortality.” He told her, his thoughts straying grimly to Greg’s injury and the fallout... to the events of the afternoon. To the assurances that had fallen so blithely from his lips. ‘I will get us to the shore...’

She glanced up and he read her look perfectly: ‘Yes,’ it said, ‘you’re pretty old.’ Mycroft forbore, with some amusement, to inform her that he was several years younger than her father — that would simply reinforce his aged status in her fifteen-year-old eyes.

“What does it sound like?” She asked, turning the record over and studying the back.

“Play it and find out.” He told her. She shrugged and pulled the vinyl from the sleeve — careful to handle it by the edges — and put it onto the turntable. As it began, she folded down onto the floor and leaned against the couch, all sharp, skinny angles and big brown eyes.

“‘Look into my eyes,’ he tells her. ‘I’m gonna say goodbye,’ he says, ‘yeah.’ ‘Do not cry,’ she begs of him, ‘goodbye, yeah.’ All that day she thinks of his love, yeah.”
Georgianna had been out with her mother again, having lunch and shopping for linens and a duvet cover for her new full-sized bed. They’d given Greg’s former wife the grand tour — sans the master bedroom suite — when she picked her daughter up. Greg, fresh from his long run and wanting a shower had greeted her at the door.

“Come in, Jude. Georgianna’ll be down in a sec.”

“Ugh.” Greg’s ex-wife sniffed as she air-kissed his cheek.

“Just got back from a run.” He told her with the smallest of smirks. He’d purposely timed his training to end as she arrived — it served the dual purpose of putting her off and giving him an excuse to cut his participation in her visit short if he felt the need. Greg did not want his former wife to know of his setback and fight him for custody. Though coming to live with them had been entirely Georgianna’s choice, Greg was, despite his low mood, relishing it.

“I recognised the odour.” She air-kissed Mycroft next. “Mycroft, you’re looking well.”

“Thank you, Judith. Allow me to return the compliment.”

Her eyes sparkled and she laughed — a sound like bells that Mycroft had heard from Georgianna’s mouth many times. It was... odd coming from her mother — despite his current depression, Greg was the source of his daughter’s inborn good humour and merry disposition — but it was natural, he supposed, that mother and daughter might sound alike.

“You’re such a gentleman.” She told Mycroft, batting her eyes, as Greg hung her coat in the closet. “How do you put up with old smelly, here?”

Mycroft could almost hear Greg grit his teeth. He smiled and she simpered, not noticing that his smile was as false as a three-pound note. “I rather wonder how he puts up with me, but I dare not question it too closely.”

He expected another crack about Greg — something offensive masquerading as a joke along the lines of Greg knowing which side his bread was buttered on or how she’d never expected Greg to land a sugar daddy — but Judith did not say it. Rather, she was staring around the large front hall. “Georgianna said this place was palatial.”

“You thought she was exaggerating?”

“Her description doesn’t do it justice.” She ran her hand along the edge of the mirror they’d mounted over a narrow table (for mail, keys, gloves...). “It’s...”

“Mum!” Georgianna bounded down the stairs. Mycroft was certain she would trip on her gangling limbs and fall headlong down one of the narrow staircases. Thus far she had not. Once again, he bit back his entreaty that she have a care...

The leggings she wore made her long legs look even longer. Her jumper, though not tight by any stretch of the imagination, clung fetchingly to her budding breasts and narrow hips, showing off her nascent curves. Mother and daughter looked very much alike, both with the same dark hair and identical expressions on their lovely faces. Mycroft looked away, disturbed by how much Greg’s daughter had changed since he’d met her, less than a year ago.

Georgianna hugged her mother who looked a little weepy as she clutched her daughter. Clearly, she missed the girl fervently. She would again attempt to convince Georgianna to move back to Acton with her. One look at the girl told Mycroft it was a fruitless endeavour. But he supposed parenting was a bit like an addiction — one craved it no matter how appallingly awful it became.
“Come on, Mum, let me show you the rest.” Georgianna pulled her mother towards the green stairs that led down to the kitchen.

When they were out of sight, Mycroft took Greg’s hand and kissed his knuckle, capturing the Detective Inspector’s attention. It had been a difficult few weeks. Though there were good days, Greg was still struggling with depression. Right now, after his run, his spirits were lifted to enough of an approximation of his usual good nature to remind Mycroft how often Greg used to laugh, how wonderfully attractive his confidence and... and silliness had been. He missed that Greg desperately. When he allowed himself, Mycroft felt hideously guilty — it was ultimately his fault that Greg’s moods were unstable...

As the day wore on, like as not, even this pale shadow of easy-going Greg Lestrade would wilt and sink down into the dull lethargy that characterised his despondence. By dinner, he would struggle to the table, eating as little as he could get away with under his daughter’s watchful eyes.

Right now, right after Greg returned from his run, was the best part of a bad day. Mycroft no longer allowed himself to relive memories of happier times. He couldn’t bear the comparison. He simply had to believe that one day soon he would hear Greg’s unrestrained giggle again.

Greg smiled at Mycroft — a lovely smile despite the strain evident in his eyes. And the lurking flatness. He pulled Mycroft close and kissed him. “She’s flirting with you.” Greg murmured.

“You’re saying she can’t help herself?”

Mycroft shrugged expressively. In his considered opinion, Judith Moore Lestrade Dawlish was the most phenomenally foolish person of his acquaintance — she had had Greg Lestrade’s love and complete dedication and she had frittered it away as if it were not the most precious gift imaginable. If he could have but a fraction of the devotion Greg had wasted on that woman, Mycroft would cherish it for the rest of his life. He leaned close and kissed Greg, feeling rough stubble under his lips and wanted nothing but to feel that roughness all day. “We should join them.” He sighed reluctantly.

Georgianna was with her mother by the glass doors that (in warmer weather) opened onto the garden terrace, holding Bast in her arms whilst Judith cooed at the little Siamese. Greg’s mouth curved into a smile at the sight of his daughter. Mycroft wondered what he saw. He had been absent when Sherlock was that age — on his three-year stint with MI-6 — and when he returned the child-man who greeted him was both shockingly familiar and disturbingly strange. Perhaps if he had not left the country, he and his brother would still be close...

As he trailed along after mother and daughter, he reflected. Regrets were a waste of time. Mycroft could no more change the past than he could levitate. There was no use dwelling on mistakes other than to ensure they weren’t repeated. As he had no other siblings, a repeat was impossible. It had changed him, and it had changed his relationship with Sherlock, but his time with MI-6 had been invaluable. That had not been the mistake.

The tour felt endless. Georgianna’s mother lingered in the empty rooms, asking the dimensions, asking how they intended to furnish them.

“You don’t have a housewarming planned?” Judith’s eyebrows shot up. “Greg loves throwing
parties. At least he used to — when we bought our little shack, he invited half the force and the entire
neighbourhood. Best way to avoid noise complaints, eh punk? Bash lasted ‘til daybreak...
remember?”

Greg’s expression was frozen somewhere between horror and blankness. “We were younger then.”
He mumbled.

“We haven’t planned anything as of yet.” Mycroft cut in. He hadn’t missed the old pet name she’d so
casually thrown down. “Georgianna, why don’t you show your mother your room?”

“Yeah! Come see, mum! It’s brilliant! There’s a window seat and a massive closet! There’s a big tree
right out the window…” The girl towed her mother up the blue stairwell to the third floor.

“We’re not showing her ours.” Greg muttered.

“Heaven forfend.” Mycroft replied. “Although it might finally force her to contend with our
relationship.”

“I don’t care what Jude thinks about our relationship.” Greg growled. “She’s not important… no…”
He sighed. “That’s not true — she’s my daughter’s mother. She raised Georgianna.” He sounded
tired.

“Until now.” Mycroft re-joined.

“Until now.” Greg agreed. “But that’s Georgianna’s choice.”

“You are grateful for her presence.”

“I’m grateful that you don’t mind.”

“My dear man, she’s yours. How could I not care for her?”

A small smile illuminating his face, Greg embraced him fervently. “You’d be surprised.” He
muttered.

Mycroft clung to him for a moment, feeling the power of Greg’s body — even as thin as he had
become, his physical strength was palpable. It was arousing, a sensation Mycroft struggled to
subdue. “Why don’t you bathe? I’ll see them out.”

Greg pulled back far enough to study Mycroft’s face. “I will if you’ll come up when they’re gone.”
He said, a glint in his eyes that Mycroft recognised. It surprised him — he hadn’t seen it these several
long weeks.

“You have but to ask.” He replied lightly, unwilling to trust the signs he was reading in Greg’s face
and body. There had been intermittent bouts of physical affection since Greg’s setback, but nothing
more.

“I’m asking.” Greg’s big hand cupped his cheek, his thumb caressing his cheekbone.

“Then of course I will.”

Greg kissed him, his mouth warm and soft against his own. He caught a heady whiff of sweat damp
wool and failing deodorant and it fanned a fire deep inside him, something he knew from long
experience that he could not subdue. For many years he’d believed it hopeless, believed this burning
passion would forever be unrequited. That he was here, now, Greg Lestrade’s hand hot and gentle
on his neck as he lipped softly at Mycroft’s panting mouth was... inconceivable.

Yet it was happening, had happened. Greg had wanted him, courted him. And he had come back and committed to this relationship. To Mycroft. And now they shared this home…

With a last burning look, Greg released him and disappeared up the stairs.

Mycroft took a moment to compose himself. He turned, looking around the barren room, putting off following the Detective Inspector up the stairs to join Georgianna and her mother.

He had a gift for Greg, a surprise that Mycroft had intended to give on moving day — a gift intended to not only add colour and beauty to the townhouse, but to make Greg giddy with happy excitement. A gift that would show Greg just how much he was loved and appreciated and known.

But Greg had been in no shape for surprises, let alone gifts on that trying day. Thus, Mycroft had stored it away for another time. Reluctantly. He was quite eager to bestow this gift.

The move had been difficult. Contending with Greg’s relapse into depression whilst moving house was nightmarish. At least Mycroft had had the forethought to hire a moving company that not only shifted boxes, they packed and unpacked them. Georgianna had been at school for the bulk of it, and Mycroft had been kept busy directing the movers, telling them where to unpack each box. It was mid-afternoon when he realised that he had not seen Greg for hours. With a chill in his soul, he searched the new house.

Despite the size of the townhouse, there weren’t many places one could hide. Mycroft toured through the master bedroom, the dressing rooms and en suite, then the three bedrooms and two baths on the third floor, peering into closets. He found no one but movers hanging clothes and assembling Georgianna’s new bed. He had a quick look in his office — uninhabited — and Greg was clearly not in the empty lounge. Mycroft made his way down the gold and green staircases to the kitchen. A quick look around made it plain that Greg was not in the long, open room capped off by the contemporary extension.

He finally found Greg in the security room — the converted storeroom under the entry mezzanine — curled up on the narrow cot with his back turned to the array of video screens showing views of the gate, gardens and doors. Only four days prior, Greg had asserted that he would shift his own boxes, thank you very much… but here he was, listless and grim, as divorced from the proceedings as was possible.

In the weeks since, Greg had submitted to a small battery of scans and tests at the hand of his neurologist. Mycroft had been relieved to learn she’d found nothing amiss. This was, she assured them, not unexpected after an injury like Greg’s. She had warned them.

This was backed up by three other top neurologists that Mycroft had arranged to see Greg’s medical file. They each recommended medicating him with the antidepressants that had the unpleasant sexual side-effects. That was the best way, he was told, to ensure this would not happen again.

Mycroft had declined to pass their advice on to Greg. Instead Greg began seeing Dr. Ephroem twice a week. (Mycroft had seen to it that a second slot became available in the doctor’s busy schedule.) The doctor had upped the dosage of Greg’s current medication and added a second antidepressant “just for now.” Greg complained that the new prescription made his mouth feel dry. But he took it faithfully.

It was excruciating, watching him trudge dispiritedly through the beautiful, empty rooms, his eyes as empty as the house.
Before Greg’s setback — to Mycroft’s everlasting relief — they had agreed upon several important issues: they had agreed that Greg’s couch would fit in the ample open space between the kitchen and the extension, the Twombly print mounted on the wall adjacent. Greg had consented to keep Mycroft’s dining table. The open space of the former basement and contemporary extension was more than large enough, and Mycroft was really rather partial to the simple, ebony wood design. Greg had also shown a favourable inclination for a black and grey tartan, mid-century style sofa, eight feet long and pure elegance. It now sat almost alone in the enormous lounge, its only company a few survivors from Mycroft’s flat: a gigantic, guilt-framed mirror leaned against a wall, a Bose sound system, and the Turner hung over the mantle.

(“I’ll get you a Bluetooth speaker that sounds just as good as your poncey stereo.” Greg had laughed when Mycroft told him he wanted to keep the Bose. “It’d cost fifteen quid and fit in your hand.”)

However, Mycroft was most thankful — by a large margin — that they had agreed on a bed for their bedroom. The larger than king-sized, minimalist platform of ash-coloured wood was positioned towards the centre of the former ballroom. The memory foam mattress rested on the elegant dais leaving ample room on the edges for a book, a beverage — honestly, it would fit entire trays of food. One could sit on it comfortably and put on shoes. Mycroft was slightly apprehensive that he might find himself waking on the lip one day, it was wide enough.

It was a toss-up, when Mycroft arrived home from work, between the new bed, new tartan sofa and Greg's grey couch, where Mycroft would find him curled. He had attempted to discover the pattern, the logic behind each day’s choice, (the pursuit distracted him from the guilt and longing) but thus far it eluded him.

The morning after Georgianna’s phone call, after that first awful evening listening to Greg relay, in his flat voice, the events of the day that had sent him spiralling back into depression, Greg had surprised Mycroft. He had dragged himself, dead-eyed and monosyllabic, out of bed early, dressed carelessly in running pants and a jumper from the laundry basket, tied on his trainers and went for his customary run. Afterwards he shaved and dressed carefully, ate two pieces of toast and a mug of milky tea without being prompted and went to work to face the Directorate of Professional Standards.

Every day since, he’d continued running, continued training for the approaching marathon. Greg forced himself out of bed or off the couch every day, donned the layers of clean wool, spandex and wicking fabric that Mycroft made certain was to hand, tied his trainers and set off into the cold of February where he ran kilometre after kilometre after kilometre... was he trying to outrun the depression? Was the short-lived reprieve afterwards worth the disappointment when he relapsed into his sad torpor? Was it the only thing keeping him functional?

Mycroft found Judith in the back bedroom that held his treadmill and free weights.

“This is such a big house for the three of you.” Greg’s ex-wife exclaimed, sliding her arm through Mycroft’s chummily, her breasts just brushing his elbow. “All these stairs… good you don’t have a toddler… or aged parents… at least you’ll get your exercise.”

With dismay, Mycroft realised she thought his parents might move in with him in their dotage.

"That’s your bedroom, yeah? Up the red stairs?"

Her obvious desire to see his and Greg’s bedroom did not diminish his dread. “Yes.” He said, guiding her back towards the blue staircase. “Unfortunately, the Detective Inspector is bathing.”

She laughed at him — for calling Greg ‘the Detective Inspector’ he knew. “That’s ‘Detective Chief
Inspector!” She corrected. “And it’s nothing I haven’t seen before. That’s one thing we have in common, yeah.”

Mycroft fixed her with a look. “You are mistaken, Madam. I doubt very much that you have seen what I see.” His voice was chilly.

“You’re a possessive one.” She purred, squeezing his arm with the air of a person who believed she could take Greg from him with a crook of her finger. “He is a bit of a tomcat, yeah?”

For a millisecond Mycroft was furious. But abruptly he understood that she was flirting with him. By implying that Greg might stray she was attempting to make him feel insecure. If she could undermine their trust, she could move in on Mycroft. The high she would get from an assignation with Mycroft was too heady a thought for her to ignore — it would serve the dual purpose of punishing her ex-husband for leaving her and scratching her compulsive itch.

Mycroft considered toying with her — allowing her to believe that he was amenable, that he was beguiled by her charms. She was a striking woman — the Lestrade’s had been a very handsome couple — and he had no doubt she was quite used to being admired. It would be child’s play to convince her…

…no, he was treading perilously close to a truth he acknowledged but on which he did not care to dwell: if Greg left him — no, when Greg left him — it would be for a woman. Greg Lestrade almost certainly preferred sex with men, but he also preferred relationships with women. It might be the social acceptance, or the social construct of having a helpmeet, a wife, someone to take care of him and for whom he could provide. It might simply be that Greg simply enjoyed women’s more complicated personalities and warm demonstrations of affection. Regardless, Mycroft couldn’t be for Greg what a female partner could…

“Heave you two been rowing?” Judith asked, squeezing Mycroft’s arm suggestively. “I thought Greg seemed... off.”

“Mum?” Georgianna appeared in the doorway of her bedroom her eyes huge when she saw her mother pressed against Mycroft, her arm entwined intimately with his. Mycroft was relieved he was still standing aloof, staring coldly at Judith Dawlish — the last thing the girl needed was to feel insecure in this home as well.

“There you are.” Her mother said as if she had been looking for the girl. She drew her daughter close, slipping her other arm through Georgianna’s. “Mycroft was just going to show us the master bedroom.”

“Unfortunately, that pleasure will have to be delayed until another day.” Mycroft told them. “I must get back to work and you have a reservation for lunch.”

Judith pouted — an alarmingly coy version of the silly faux pout Georgianna occasionally employed whilst teasing her father. It had made Greg giggle...

“Come on, mum.” Georgianna wriggled free of her mother’s grasp and towed her to the blue stairs. “I’m hungry.”

With a last assessing glance at Mycroft, she acquiesced and followed Georgianna down.

It did not take long to see Georgianna and her mother out after that. He watched them, their postures already tense, as they walked together down the garden path.

He closed the door after the outer gate’s lock snicked shut.
He had told Greg he would come up…

Mycroft prepared himself for disappointment. He prepared himself, as he climbed the scarlet stairs, to find running kit on the floor and Greg lying on the bed, his face buried under the blanket.

It took a moment for him to identify the sound coming from the loo. Mycroft stood stock still, listening to a sound he’d heard the first time five hundred and nine days ago (five hundred and nine days, four hours and fifty-seven minutes…) Christmas morning… waking in an unfamiliar bed after sleeping so deeply his bed-mate stirring hadn’t disturbed him. He’d heard this sound then — and any number of times since.

Whistling! Greg was whistling along with music from his phone! It was something he did whilst showering and shaving when he was feeling chipper — the morning after they’d had sex, after a particularly good run, after closing a tough case at work, Greg Lestrade whistled.

Mycroft crept from the staircase towards the en suite, listening to the tuneful whistle. It warmed his heart. It melted tension from his spine that had been keeping him upright — and aching — for weeks. He listened, afraid to interrupt, afraid he was mistaken, afraid he would somehow ruin Greg’s elevated mood...

The loo was warm and steamy. Close. The mirror was covered in condensation everywhere except a small circle Greg had wiped away. The weak winter sun shone through the skylight, illuminating the cloudy steam. It cast shadows on Greg’s broad back. The sound of young David Bowie singing, and Greg Lestrade whistling filled the room.

“…Things that happened in the past only happened in your mind, only in your mind. Oh, forget your mind, and you’ll be free, yeah…”

The silly song never sounded so good as it did accompanied by Greg Lestrade’s happy whistle.

Greg stood in front of the mirror a towel wrapped around his waist, his foot tapping along with the music. His tan skin was ruddy and damp from the shower and his silver hair was slicked wetly against his head. He was shaving, scraping the safety razor down his cheek to his jaw and then swishing it in the basin. As Mycroft stepped into the room, Greg set the razor aside and leaned close to the small clear spot on the mirror to examine his face for any whiskers he might have missed. His whistling became fainter and trailed off as he wiped the excess shaving cream from his jaw with a damp flannel. He pulled the plug in the sink and rinsed the basin clean.

“…Just remember, lovers never lose 'cause they are free of thoughts impure and of thoughts unkind. Gentleness clears the soul love cleans the mind and makes it free…”

Mycroft watched from the doorway, rapt. He was almost afraid to call attention to himself, afraid of wanting too much from Greg when he couldn’t give it. Afraid of the depression that had again swallowed his lover whole. “Let this be a good day.” He thought to himself fervently. “Please.”

Greg turned just then and saw Mycroft. He smiled and it lit his eyes. With two strides, he was close, wrapping Mycroft in his strong arms. He smelled of the bergamot shaving cream Mycroft had stocked in the medicine cabinet.

“…fear's just in your head, only in your head, so forget your head and you’ll be free!”

Greg’s kisses were demanding, opening Mycroft’s mouth with his own and exploring hungrily with his tongue. Mycroft allowed himself to be swept away, allowed himself to think and feel and sense nothing but Greg. He clutched Greg’s face with his hands, the six-point-five-centimetre difference in
their height disappearing as Greg rose onto his toes. He nipped Mycroft’s lips, ran his fingers along the tender area under his jaw and panted kisses into his skin, puffing hot breath on his neck and cheek. Mycroft felt his entire body waking with desire. It was almost painful, the way his nipples strafed along the fine cotton of his shirt, needing to be touched.

“love will clean your mind and make you free…”

Greg reclaimed Mycroft’s mouth, his tongue stroking along his teeth, fighting with Mycroft’s own tongue. He felt the hot kisses reverberate in his groin, in his hole, tingling and wanting. He stepped on something uneven and realised Greg’s towel had fallen away. Mycroft could feel the rigid line of Greg’s hardness pressing against his own.

Hands tangled in his clothing and Mycroft could not comprehend why he was wearing them. He wanted them off, but Greg’s mouth and tongue were hindering his coordination, shutting down the racing of his facile mind and the deftness of his fingers. He could do nothing but try to pull Greg closer as they consumed one another.

Vertigo struck, tectonic plates shifting beneath him. Mycroft giggled giddily as Greg lifted him off the ground. He wrapped his legs around Greg as the countertop materialised under his bum.

Big hands worried the perfect Windsor knot of his tie. “You’re wearing so many clothes.” Greg groaned into his mouth.

“I cannot fathom why.” Mycroft’s hands slid over the damp expanse of Greg’s back.

“I want you... I want you naked...”

Mycroft moaned, desire spiking in his belly. His cock was full hard and straining against his flies. “Yes!”

Tie flung aside, the hands moved to the buttons. Mycroft shrugged out of his suit jacket, leaving it lay on the countertop behind him. His shirt caught on his wrists as Greg shoved it and his waistcoat down his arms. For a moment he was trapped, his hands bound by the cuffs. Greg began grappling with Mycroft’s belt as he struggled to free himself without removing his tongue from Greg’s mouth. One gave way, the cufflink clattering to the floor, and he was able to unfasten the other.

Mycroft’s hands went directly to Greg’s neck, his shoulders, pulling him close, pulling him deeper into their kiss. He had missed this! He felt his shoes being pried from his feet, and he stopped kissing for the second it took to pull his vest over his head, laughing joyfully. Then his cock was in Greg’s hand and Mycroft felt nothing but the immense, swirling pleasure of that touch.

They were on the bed. Mycroft knew if he thought about it hard enough, he could remember how they got there. But the swirl of sensation that had replaced the countertop underneath him with the mattress on its broad wooden platform was so extraordinary, Mycroft chose not to penetrate its veil. Greg pushed him down onto his back and, tugging on the cuffs, pulled his trousers and pants off in one. Then the weight of Greg Lestrade settled on top of him, pressing him down into the memory foam.

He clutched at Greg’s hips, seeking more contact, seeking friction. Their erections slid together — it felt both intensely pleasurable and uncomfortably sticky. The damp of Greg’s skin and body hair chafed.

“Ow, fuck…” Greg grumbled, stilling himself. “Lube.”

“Medicine cabinet. In the loo.” Mycroft told him.
“What the hell is it doing in there?” Greg asked.

“It hardly seemed politic to set it out on the platform… and we have no other furniture as of yet.”

Greg cursed as he climbed off the bed and stood up. He stalked to the en suite. Mycroft enjoyed the view — Greg’s firm, muscular runner’s arse and thick thighs, then after a rummage in the loo, his hard cock bobbing against his abdomen, leaving traces of precome on his belly...

“What are you looking at?” Greg asked as he set the lubricant, his smartphone and the little Bluetooth speaker streaming the music on the lip of the platform bed. A new song had begun, the voice solemn now, crooning. “In the event that this fantastic voyage should turn to erosion... and we never get old...”

Greg held up a final item — a package of wet wipes. He grinned, almost a laugh, and Mycroft’s heart ached at the memories of the first few times they’d made love. Greg had been so quick to laugh...

He dropped the wet wipes by the lube and joined Mycroft underneath the duvet. Mycroft slipped his arms around the hard body and kissed him. “Are you fishing for compliments, Detective Inspector? I can bestow a profusion if that’s what you’re after.”

Greg pushed him back onto the bed again, rolling on top and framing Mycroft’s face with his hands. “You know that’s not what I want.”

“We’re learning to live with somebody’s depression.”

“What do you want?” Mycroft ran his hands up Greg’s ribs. They were much too articulated, braille under his fingers that spelled out how little Greg had been eating.

“And I don’t want to live with somebody’s depression. We’ll get by. I suppose.”

Greg descended and the kiss was deep and languorous and again there was nothing but Greg. Greg’s hands and Greg’s mouth, Greg’s skin and tongue and smell and hardness and it felt so good!

But when he pulled back, his face was troubled. “All I want is for me head to stop being wrapped in bloody cotton wool...”

“You’re here now.” Mycroft told him, not wanting to think about Greg sinking back into the numbing despair. Every minute he had Greg like this was precious.

“Yes.”

“Then make love to me. Be inside me.”

“You’re sure? I know I haven’t been...”

“Greg. You’re here now.”

“And the wrong words make you listen in this criminal world. Remember it’s true, loyalty is valuable. But our lives are valuable too.”

Greg hummed softly. “I won’t argue.” He caressed Mycroft’s face and kissed him again, gently at first, but beginning to unleash the restless, possessive passion Mycroft craved.

For one short moment, Mycroft thought about Judith Dawlish... Judith Lestrade... had Greg been like this with her? Rough and physically imposing, forceful — the way one could be with another
man — though always, always careful and cognisant of his partner’s pleasure? Had he been as joyful, as quick to laugh with her? Had he grinned and licked her and put his fingers in her the way he did with Mycroft?

Had Greg looked into her eyes and whispered, “you’re so gorgeous,” before he pushed his fingers inside her — as he did with Mycroft?

“But I'm still getting educated but I've got to write it down and it won't be forgotten, 'cause I'll never say anything nice again, how can I?”

Mycroft absolutely loathed the thought of Greg with her. Obeying Greg’s order to turn over, he attempted to chase her from his mind, focussing instead on what he’d told Greg — here, now. Nothing that came before — for either of them — was important.

He gasped, the woman falling completely from his thoughts as Greg’s tongue traced wetly around his pucker. Mycroft hadn’t felt this particular sensation in such a long time. Such agonising pleasure! Greg’s tongue penetrated and through the blissful thrill, Mycroft felt his muscles unbunching, felt tension falling away from his back and shoulders. He groaned and without volition pressed back. Greg gripped his hips tightly, burying his face in Mycroft’s arse, feasting.

He persisted until Mycroft was rubbery with relaxation, barely able to continue supporting himself on his elbows and knees. He tugged at his hair in distraction. Greg chuckled — such a beautiful sound — and replaced his tongue with a well-lubricated digit. Mycroft’s body contracted, electrified as Greg frigged his finger in and out of him.

Mycroft shuddered as a second finger slipped inside him and stroked lightly over the sensitive bundle of nerves. He dripped arousal onto the sheets and fucked himself back on a Greg’s fingers, gasping at the pleasure. It hadn’t been so long — before Greg, he’d gone for years without — but now a few weeks felt like an eternity.

“So piggish.” Greg murmured. “I love how greedy you are.”

“For you.” Mycroft moaned.

The third finger caused a moment of discomfort. Greg noticed and stilled his hand. He reached around and stroked Mycroft’s leaking prick, twisting his wrist on the upstroke. “You ok, love?” He asked.

“Oh yes.” Mycroft said as the discomfort passed and the pleasure again began to build. “Be inside me.” He had missed this, the bond they forged during sex, the intimacy. He had missed it terribly.

“I will.” Greg told him, kissing his glute and nipping lightly. “When you’re ready.”

“I’m ready.” Mycroft insisted.

“Not for what I’m going to do to you.” Greg purred and Mycroft shuddered in anticipation. Greg continued his slow, steady ministrations, running one hand over Mycroft’s flanks and thighs, placing kisses in the tender crease where thigh became arse,ghosting his fingers over his heavy prick and testicles. “I love you like this.” Greg said softly, twisting his broad fingers inside Mycroft. ”Beside yourself.”

“Get on with it!” Mycroft gasped and whinged as Greg stroked his prostate.

Greg laughed — a glorious sound! A sound Mycroft had not heard for twenty-seven days, sixteen hours and thirty-two minutes. (Mycroft had stopped to gaze at a canopy bed as they browsed in a
furniture shop. “No!” Greg had said, laughing, and pulled him away. He had laughed about the canopy bed thrice more that day.)

“Ok, love.” Greg said. “I’ll get on with it.” He removed his fingers and inspected the gape, sighing contentedly as it winked at him. He grabbed the bottle of lubricant and opened it.

Mycroft twisted over awkwardly. “I want to see you.” He said. Greg looked gorgeous, his silver hair and tan skin luminous as he smiled down at Mycroft. He couldn’t help himself, he sat up and kissed the dear man, tasting his own muskiness. He didn’t care — he’d clean his teeth and use the antibacterial mouthwash later.

Greg pushed him onto his back, following him down. Mycroft’s hands were in Greg’s hair, his thick, silver hair, grasping tightly, holding him close. Their kisses were impatient. Feverish. Lips sucked lips, tongue slid across musky tongue...

Greg’s masculine scent clouded his senses. Mycroft’s hands moved over the lean, hard body, digging his fingers into flesh. He wanted to rip Greg apart, bite into him, taste him. He needed to know every molecule of his body, to consume him completely... he wanted Greg to feel the same passion, the same intensity. In that moment, Mycroft knew that he did.

Mycroft wrapped himself around the other man, drawing him close, pulling him down against his chest. The sensation of the erection bumping against his well-lubricated entrance was making him writhe and surge, wanting it — wanting Greg — inside his body.

“Yes!” He choked, barely breaking the kiss long enough to utter the syllable. “Greg!”

“I love you so much.” Greg whispered and pushed in.

Abruptly, Mycroft could think of nothing but Greg inside him. “Give us a minute.” Mycroft gasped, clutching at Greg’s arms. The stretch and the fullness was uncomfortable — vibrantly, viscerally, shockingly uncomfortable.

Greg’s face crumpled into worry. “I’ve hurt you.”

“No… just give me a minute.” Why was it so difficult this time? “Let me breathe.”

“Mycroft… love…” Greg wanted to pull out, pull away, that was clear — but Mycroft didn’t want that. He wanted — he needed — the incredible, vulnerable closeness of intercourse. He needed that fierce connection to Greg — he needed it! He clung to Greg’s shoulders and pressed his thighs firmly against Greg’s hips, trying to hold him in place.

He was tense. That was the issue. Despite all the stress Greg had released from Mycroft’s achingly stiff muscles, there was more, much much more. It had got to him, the possibility of a good day — the possibility of a good day devolving into a bad one… Mycroft was constantly, even now, attempting to read Greg’s body language, the look in his eyes, the tone of his voice…

“Mycroft.” His voice was soft, and Greg leaned closer. “I need this. You. Help me to relax.”

Greg wavered, his concern for Mycroft’s wellbeing was clearly paramount in his mind. But he nodded, and his face smoothed over, tucking the worry neatly behind his eyes. Greg transferred his weight to one elbow and with his other hand, caressed Mycroft’s skin. He started at his neck, his thumb rubbing along Mycroft’s jawline, then travelled down his chest to pinch lightly at his nipples. At the sensation, Mycroft exhaled and felt his body begin to slowly draw down. Greg bowed his head to nuzzle Mycroft’s neck as his big hand moved lower, tickling Mycroft’s belly, circling his navel and scratching along his hip. He massaged Mycroft’s flaccid cock, bringing blood back to the
region. He licked his fingers and returned to worry Mycroft’s pink rosebud nipples. He could see on Greg’s face that he wished he could suck on them, kiss and nip at them.

Mycroft had control of his breathing now and each breath dispersed more of the tension. Time passed slowly, but eventually, the attentive, sensual fondling had his skin crackling with arousal. The discomfort dissipated, and he was hard again in Greg’s broad, callused hand.

He began to move, rocking slowly underneath Greg, taking more of him. It was easier now and his confidence grew. Greg remained still, except for his hand stroking Mycroft’s prick, allowing him to set the pace.

Simultaneously, Greg’s thumb swiped over the glans of his penis, smearing fluid down the shaft, and, due to a change in angle, his cock strafed along Mycroft’s prostate. He gasped in pleasure, his back arching and hands clutching.

“Mycroft? Love?”

“Good! It’s good.” He assured Greg. “It’s so good.”

Greg’s smile was luminous. He released Mycroft’s prick to redistribute his weight and kiss him. Mycroft took control of the kiss, pulling Greg down on top of him and devouring him. He was so hungry for this! Mycroft undulated and sucked on Greg’s tongue. He felt rapacious, wanting as much of Greg inside him as he could possibly manage. “Fuck me.” He gasped.

Greg began to move slowly, carefully — but Mycroft was impatient now. He urged Greg to take him harder. He loved feeling the other man’s strength and power…

Greg sat up and grasped Mycroft’s thighs in his hands, changing position to thrust effectively. Immediately, Mycroft missed the weight of him, missed kissing him. He reached out and touched Greg’s knee — a sad consolation. Gaining purchase, Greg began to fuck him. It was deliberate, forcing Mycroft to feel every millimetre of flesh stretching and sliding along his inner walls. Touching him where he longed to be touched. The slow, overwhelming intensity of it was incredible. His bollocks churned and tightened, making his eyes roll back into his head. It was blissful.

When he looked at his lover again, Greg didn’t meet his eyes. The dreadful flatness flitted over his face, dulling the warmth and joy that had been writ there.

“Greg!” Mycroft gasped. Greg’s attention snapped back to him, startled. He took Greg’s hands, interlocking their fingers, trying to force the intimacy back into focus. “Don’t stop.” He said. He bit back the ‘please.’

The sex became desperate. Greg bent over him, pinning his hands to the bed to either side of his head, thrusting faster now. Mycroft felt Greg attempting to slow himself, to draw it out and enjoy it. But the fear of Greg’s creeping despair, of it returning to lay its crushing weight on his shoulders was so great that they rushed, sprinting to stay ahead of the demons.

Even so, it was good... so very, very good. Mycroft’s entire body was alive with pleasure, with need. With Greg.

His climax was explosive, a series of flash-bangs going off, blinding him, deafening him, throwing him off-kilter into brutal ecstasy. Greg spasmed simultaneously — Mycroft knew it, felt it. He gripped Greg with throbbing fingers as they immolated together…

Too soon it was over. They lay side-by-side, sweat-drenched and deflated, trying to recover. Greg’s
post-orgasmic giggles were manic, laughter ripped out of him unwilling, his broad back shaking. At last his laughter softened... but lingered. Mycroft wasn’t certain when it had become sobbing. Greg turned his face away, hiding under the pillows.

Mycroft held the too-thin, too-hard body in his arms as he wept. He did not know what to do. Mycroft could have wept himself with the frustration of it all!

The song playing softly from the speaker was an instrumental. Mycroft recognised it — Neukölln from the sombre Berlin period. The idiosyncratic saxophone wailed like a lost child, like the entreating horn of a boat adrift in the fog, like despair itself...

“I’m sorry.” Greg snuffled.

“Don’t be silly, my dear.” Mycroft kissed his temple. He ached from the intrusion into his body, ached from the emptiness as he leaked semen onto his thighs, ached for his lover, his love, who was slipping away again.

“I hate that I’m putting you through this.”

“Hush. We’re going through together. It won’t be long until we reach the other side.” Mycroft wanted that to be true. Needed it to be.

Greg was silent, his body stilling but for an erratic hiccough.

Another song had begun. “Sons of the silent age pace their rooms like a cell’s dimensions, rise for a year or two then make war, search through their one-inch thoughts then decide it couldn't be done.”

Greg rolled over, turning his tear-wet face to look at Mycroft. “What if there isn’t another side? What if this is it?” His voice was hollowed-out and it hurt to hear it.

Mycroft gathered his courage and smiled softly. With a caress he pushed silver fringe off Greg’s brow. “There is.” He said. “I can see it from here.”

Greg shook his head. “I wish I could.”

“You’ll have to trust me then.” Mycroft embraced bravado — he had to believe it for both of them. “I’ll get us both safely to shore.”

“Oh, baby, baby, baby, I won't ever let you down. I can't stand another sound. Let's find another way...”

The trill of the smartphone cut off the music. With a groan, Greg pulled himself away from Mycroft and rolled over to pick up his mobile. “It’s work.” He said flatly, answering it. The muscle in his jaw leapt with strain as he clenched his teeth.

Mycroft could hear DS Donovan’s sharp voice from where he lay. “Sorry to bother you at home, boss, but there’s been another one.”

Greg swore. “Where?”

She told him, but Mycroft could no longer hear her — Greg was out of bed and heading to his closet to dress.

Silence lay heavily in the large, empty room.
WHAT IS THE GIFT MYCROFT HAS FOR GREG!?

Here are links to the excellent songs referenced above — along with two bonus tracks that I considered using as well. I especially recommend Fantastic Voyage and Fall Dog Bombs the Moon.

*The Next Day*: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Next_Day

I don’t know if Bowie knew he was dying when he made this album. He certainly knew when he made *Black Star* two years later (it was released posthumously). But it’s very possible that in 2013 he’d already been diagnosed with the cancer that killed him. A number of the tracks are melancholy, evoking cherished memories and lost loves. Some songs recall his time living in Berlin in the late 70s, which is when *Heroes* was made. I wonder if the white box over his face on the cover also signifies absence, erasure.

The Next Day- https://youtu.be/7wL9NUZRZ4I

Check out this track- Where Are We Now?: https://youtu.be/QWtsV50-_p4

Fantastic Voyage: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBQdns5bV5g

Neukölln: https://youtu.be/v0BgFC3R3-A

*Sons of the Silent Age*: https://youtu.be/DFCKgEvQhT8

*Fill Your Heart*: https://youtu.be/dIog1vxXN4U

*Fall Dog Bombs the Moon*: https://youtu.be/yb1pLoYp1S8

Fear's just in your head... but Greg is in his head, unfortunately. His ‘good days’ are both encouraging glimpses into future recovery and heartbreaking reminders of what is missing — for all of them. That he's aware of how difficult this is on Mycroft, that he feels guilty about it, can't be helping Greg’s state of mind. That Mycroft and Georgianna can laugh together, despite her parent's issues, has to be good for both of them.

Next time - the London Marathon and a look at the state of DI Singh's complaint.
Marathon

Chapter Summary

Greg and Mycroft run the London Marathon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Greg was in the green starting group, along with thousands and thousands of other runners.

He’d ridden to the event with Mycroft, to Maze Hill and — despite Mycroft’s protestations (“It’s raining!”) — walked from there to the designated Green Start area. He arrived forty-five minutes before his start time and deposited his kit bag in the proper lorry. He found a dryish area under an overhang to stretch and begin his warmup. Greg smiled to himself, wondering where Mycroft was warming up. He’d probably commandeered a restaurant or cafe near his start area. Or a private home...

Unzipping, Greg carefully pinned his race number to his shirt, making sure it was visible below the water-resistant jacket. He knotted the little GPS tag into to his shoelaces — it would record both the time he crossed the starting line and the finish line. Then he zipped all his layers back up and left his shelter to go in search of the three-hour pacer.

It was cold — just 11 degrees — and damp, a chill misty rain softening the angles of St. John’s Park. Greg wore old wind resistant trousers, a stained grey hoodie and a ripped puffer vest for warmth over his running gear. He’d bought all three at a charity shop a few days ago and planned to deposit them in the nearest bin right before his start. Greg felt a bit like a hobo — and Mycroft had looked at him as if he were a lunatic — but he needed to be warm and dry now and unencumbered by the layers during his run. His kit bag had clothes for after.

“Lestrade! Over here.”

“Tony, hey.” Greg greeted the other copper with a warm grin. “Weather’s shite, mate.” The weather meant running times would be slow. At least there wasn’t much of a wind.

“It’s bollocks.” Tony agreed. He looked miserable in a plastic rain poncho over his Police Widows and Orphans t-shirt with a merino wool long-sleeved base layer underneath, and shorts.

Greg didn’t always run alone, occasionally he ran with the Met’s running club — coppers who ran marathons, half marathons, triathlons, even five Ks, to raise funds for the families of police killed in the line of duty. Greg had run as part of the group in the past, but his time in the Berlin Marathon in the fall had qualified him for a ‘fast for age’ entry. Tony was one of the few other runners in the group that would be following the three-hour pacer. (He was ten years younger than Greg, so not “fast” for his age.)

“Where’s everyone?” Greg asked. There were at least fifty coppers running today, their lurid orange t-shirts should be visible in the grey mist.

“Ah, here and there. I saw Bob, Christiansen and St. Clair with the 3:30 pacer. Higgins has rounded
up pretty much everyone else.” Tony looked at his watch. “Twenty more minutes.” He was shivering. “Let’s get to the flag and warm up, yeah.”

“Yeah, I’ll meet you — I see someone I need to say hi to.” Tony nodded and walked off, hopping up and down to warm up. Greg made his way to the edge of the start area. “John?”

“Greg? Hey!” John Watson greeted Greg warmly — Greg was relieved. After the drunken snog at Christmas, John had largely avoided him. Greg had only seen him at the few crime scenes Sherlock had consulted on. Maybe he was just preoccupied with Sherlock. Greg hoped so.

“What are you doing here — you’re not running are you?”

“God, no.” John said. “I had enough of that in the army.”

“It’s easier without a fifty-pound pack on your back.” Greg told him, glancing at John’s gear bag.

John huffed a laugh, hoisting the bag. “Can’t seem to get rid of it.” He said. “I’m working today. Treating hypothermia mostly, I’d wager.” He looked quizzically at Greg’s puffer vest. “You’re running though.”

“I am. Gotta bin this before me start.” He said. “If I can find a bin.”

“I’ll take it.” John volunteered. “S’long as I don’t have to carry it ‘round all day.”

“Would you! You’re a lifesaver, John. No, don’t carry it, it’s all rubbish. First bin you see.”

“Deal.” John grinned. “Isn’t Mycroft running?”

“He’s in the red start group. Just as well, we wouldn’t be running together anyway.”

“No?”

Greg shrugged. “We run at different paces.”

“Ah... right.” John worked out what Greg meant. “You’re faster than he is.”

“A bit.” Greg grinned. John laughed... but when it died away, there was an uncomfortable silence.

“So...” Greg said awkwardly. “Sorry I’ve been MIA — between house hunting and the move, I’ve become downright antisocial.”

John’s face twisted guiltily. “No, it’s my fault... I haven’t been answering your texts... I...” He trailed off.

“Everything ok?” Greg asked, with real concern.

“Erm... conversation for another day — when we have more than two minutes.”

“Ok. Are we ok, John?” Greg asked. It had hurt, the fourth and fifth time he’d texted and gotten no reply. And then the depression descended, and everything hurt.

John looked up at him unhappily. “Yeah... yes. Yes, Greg. I’m sorry, I’ve been a bit of a wanker.”

“You’re all right.” Greg told him.

“If you still want to, we should meet up for that pint.” John said. “Catch up.”
“I’d like that.” Greg said. “But you text me this time.”

John laughed his relief palpable. “Deal. Oh, hey — it’s starting... you wanna give me that rubbish puffer vest?”

“Shit! It’s bloody cold!” Greg complained as he stripped off.

Greg had met the pacer before, an extremely lean woman with blonde hair tucked under a billed baseball cap. He didn’t remember her name.

“Jane Simpson. You look familiar.” She told him as he joined her under her flag.

“Greg Lestrade.” He said. “I think we were in a running club ten or twelve years ago? In Hampton Wick.” His little house with Jude had been in Hampton Wick.

“Right.” She said squinting at him. “Greg... cute little girl, very married?”


“Damn. Time flies.”

“Tell me about it.”

Jane nodded, about to end the conversation when she paused. “Still married?” She asked.

“To someone else.” Greg admitted.

“Ah. Well, can’t blame a girl for asking.” She said with a wink.

Tony snickered. “When did you get married again?” He asked.

Greg smiled good-naturedly. “We moved in together. It’s as good as.”

“If you say so.” Tony said, eying Jane Simpson’s arse. He glanced at Greg, then frowned and examined him more closely.

“What?” Greg asked.

“You come into some money?” Tony asked blandly.

“What? No.” He was confused. “Why?”

“Your gear. You’ve had an upgrade.” He plucked at Greg’s water-resistant windbreaker.

“This?” It had been mixed in with his other running gear — a number of new things had done when he’d been too depressed to question it. By the time he’d been recovered enough to care, it was too late. He’d already worn most of the new things. And he had to admit, he liked them — they were comfortable, warm or cool as needed, wicked sweat away from his skin, kept rain from soaking him through, and did it all much better than his old bargain kit. They were so good, Greg realised he was completely dressed in the new gear. “It was a gift... why?”

Tony chuckled. “A gift? Someone likes you a whole lot. No, no — don’t ask. Someone gave that to you I won’t spoil it by telling you Jay-Z has one just like it.”

“Yeah, and the crown jewels are just a few trinkets. This marathon is just a little fun run with the kids...”

“Tony? Shut it.” Greg said as the gun went off and the front row of people in the Green Start were off.

The three-hour group was near the front of the wave, so Greg didn’t have to wait long to begin running. He stayed on Jane’s heels as she set the pace, running directly down the blue line on the road painted on the optimum path through the marathon course. It wasn’t long before they were merging with runners from the Blue Start and then the Red Start waves that had gone off the same time they had.

The crowd along the route was robust —especially for the weather — and rowdy. Greg was high-fived several times by exuberant spectators.

After a kilometre, the mass of runners began to thin just a bit, faster groups pulling away and slower runners falling back. Jane set a punishing pace that had Greg wondering if she’d given in to the enthusiasm and gone out too fast. He settled into the pack of roughly thirty men and women behind Jane.

People along the road shouted encouragement — it always made Greg feel a little high, all the cheering. He no longer felt the chill. The rain had stopped for the moment and the sun was trying valiantly to burn off the fog.

As his body warmed up and the positive high suffused his body, he began to feel good. No, he began to feel great. Greg smiled to himself.

Mycroft had been in the kitchen when Greg arrived home from work last night. “I didn’t expect you to be home.” He said.

“I thought I’d cook dinner.”

“Part of your pre-race ritual?”

“Goodness, no.” Mycroft drawled. “But you need to fuel appropriately.”

“Me? You don’t have to cook — I don’t need anything special. I could have ordered a pizza.” Mycroft looked fantastic, jacket off, shirt sleeves rolled up, several buttons of his waistcoat unfastened, a smudge of flour on his freckled brow where he’d shoved still-errant auburn locks out of his face. They curled naughtily around his ear.

Mycroft glanced at him appraisingly. “We have, what? Fifteen more dates?” He asked. “I don’t think they should all be on your shoulders.”

“But that was the deal.” Greg protested.

“I’m changing the terms of the deal. Consider tonight a fantastic date.”

“But we need to negotiate before changing terms?” With one hand on Mycroft’s neck, Greg pulled the man into his arms. The long, lean body felt right pressed against his own, felt comfortable and stimulating. He kissed the orange freckles on the sharp jawline, finding his favourite, a big fellow just under Mycroft’s chin, and tasted it. Then he allowed Mycroft’s impatience to lead and kissed his lips. God, he was so hungry for him! He held Mycroft’s neck tightly and ravaged his mouth, invading with his tongue, feeling the other man’s passion and arousal...
“Yuu-uck!” Georgianna clattered down the stairs, the two syllables drawn out in a teenager’s sarcastic twang. It was a bucket of cold water poured over his ardour.

Greg didn’t release Mycroft, but he pulled back and smiled ruefully. “Sorry.” He said.

Mycroft smirked back, looking pleased and superior. “If we had carried on, dinner would have been ruined.”

“I could have lived with that.”

“Shouldn’t you be saving your energy for tomorrow?” Mycroft asked softly.

Greg grinned. “Studies have shown that having sex the night before running a marathon can take over five minutes off your time.” He said in a voice just low enough that his daughter couldn’t hear.

“Five minutes more or less won’t make a difference to my race, but you’re fast enough that it will. I’ll be happy to do my part for the cause.” Mycroft’s eyes glittered with anticipation.

“That’s good of you.” Greg murmured, brushing the errant curls back behind Mycroft’s ear again. They teetered for a moment, between coming closer and pulling away until Greg leaned in. The kiss was slow and sensual and...

“Yuu-uck!” Georgianna insisted from the couch.

“We heard you the first time.” Greg called over his shoulder.

“But you haven’t stopped. You’re worse than Mum.”

With a sigh, Greg released Mycroft and turned to his daughter. “You weren’t saying ‘yuck’ last night when Charlie Pope brought you home.”

Georgianna turned crimson, but she narrowed her eyes. “You..! I didn’t see you! Where were you watching from?” She demanded.

“From where were you watching.” Mycroft corrected from the kitchen. He had returned to his dinner preparations.

The girl scoffed and rolled her eyes. Greg could hardly keep a straight face. “From. Where. Wereyouwatching!?”

“Dad sees all.” He said. Her expression was exactly like Jude’s when she was mad and embarrassed and trying to remain dignified while willing Greg to stop being that way — whatever way it was he was being. He gave up trying to hold it back and guffawed.

“It’s not funny!” Georgianna protested. But she was not her mother, she was already starting to laugh along. “You’re the worst.”

Greg dropped down on the grey couch with her, sprawling out and loosening his tie. “I thought you were staying at your Mum’s tonight.”

“Yeah, she’s picking me up at six.”

“I’ll see you Sunday, then?”

Georgianna looked at him pleadingly. “Do I have to go?”
Greg was surprised. “No... you don’t have to. But I know your Mum wants to see you. If you really
don’t want to, we can talk to her together when she gets here.” Greg dreaded that conversation.
“What’s up? Why don’t you want to see your Mum?”

His daughter shrugged, glancing at Mycroft in the kitchen then down at her hands.

“If you’ll excuse me.” Mycroft interjected smoothly, turning off the heat under a saucepan. “I have to
retrieve something from the bedroom.” He mounted the stairs, leaving Greg alone with his daughter.

“What is it, Gi?” Greg asked gently.

“Her new flat is small.”

“My flat was small too.”

“Not like hers.”

“Well, honey, I guess she got the biggest place she could afford.”

“She wouldn’t have to afford a flat if she hadn’t cheated on Rupert.”

Greg sighed deeply. “You’re angry with her.”

“I know she cheated on you too, Dad. She told me.” Georgianna said it so softly, Greg could almost
pretend she hadn’t said anything.

But she had. Greg felt a curious rush of relief and resentment. And suspicion — what was Jude’s
motivation in telling their daughter this?! What did she get out of it? “What did your mother tell
you?” He asked.

Georgianna shrugged again. “She said she’d ruined every relationship she’d ever had by cheating.
She said she’d been faithful to you longer than anyone else... but when you were promoted you put
your job before her. She hated that. She wanted to punish you.”

That’s right, how had he forgotten — Jude’s cheating was all Greg’s fault. She’d told him often
enough, accused him, of course she’d told Georgianna the same. The familiar rhythm of their
arguments played out in his head — he’d take responsibility for his part, but she had to take
responsibility for hers. Her refusal couched in her continuing attacks and complaints...

He didn’t want to fall back into that. The therapy with Dr. Ephroem had given him much-needed
insight into the dysfunction of his marriage, had allowed him to forgive himself and to understand
Jude’s motivations better.

Telling Georgianna, Greg didn’t understand Jude’s motivations for that... god! He’d never intended
to have this conversation with his daughter, he was completely unprepared.

“I’m not sure...” Greg began slowly. “...why your mother told you any of that, Georgianna. Even
before I started seeing Mycroft, I made my peace with what happened. I don’t have any ill-will
towards your mother, I want her to be happy. And more than anything, I want you to be safe and
loved and to have every advantage I can give you.”

“But aren’t you furious with her!?”

Greg chuckled — of course he’d been furious. But what was lovely was that he could no longer taste
that anger. “That’s ancient history. But you’re angry with her now, yeah?”
“I just don’t know how she could do that to you!”

He couldn’t help it, he laughed. Georgianna looked shocked. “You don’t need to worry about... about defending my honour.” Greg controlled himself. “We talked about this when the divorce happened, Gi, your mother and I both made mistakes that led to the divorce.”

Georgianna looked scandalised — and like she’d just discovered Santa Claus wasn’t real. “You... you cheated on her too?”

“No! God, no! Of course not.” Her relief brought tears to her eyes. “I made plenty of other mistakes though. Neither one of us is blameless.”

She hugged him, hard. Greg wrapped his arms around her, loving her so immensely he thought he might burst.

“That’s... that’s what Gran meant.” She mumbled. “When she said you were too good for her.”

Greg laughed, letting her go. “Your Gran has strong opinions — that doesn’t make them right. Listen, you don’t have to stay with your Mum if you don’t want to. But I know it means the world to her to see you.”

Georgianna sighed heavily. “I don’t even have a room in her flat. I have to sleep on the couch.”

Though he wasn’t happy about it at all, that was a conversation he would have with Jude when Georgianna wasn’t around. Greg snorted and tickled her sides. “Poor you! Not the couch!”

“Shut-it!” She warned. “You don’t know.”

“Yes, I have never slept on a couch before.” He teased.

Before she could protest, the bell sounded — Jude had come for Georgianna.

“What do you think?” Greg asked. “You going or staying?”

“Going, I guess.” She harrumphed.

“Ok. If you want to come home just ring. Or text. Anytime.”

“Ok, thanks, Dad.”

Mycroft had already answered the door when Greg and his daughter climbed up to the front hall.

Jude took one look at Greg and took her coat back from Mycroft. “You’re very kind, but Georgianna and I should be going. Say goodbye to your father, I’ll... erm... I’ll make sure the taxi waits.” She buggered off down the walk and out the gate.

Georgianna gave her father a pointed look. “It’s completely up to you.” He said.

“I know.”

“Just ring —“

“Or text — I know. You’ve only told me a thousand times already.”

Greg suppressed his snort if laughter — and from the look on his face, Mycroft was also hiding his amusement. “Mycroft’ll pick you up at noon on Sunday.”
“It’ll probably be Anthea.” Georgianna grumbled.

“You like Anthea.” Greg pointed out.

“Tomorrow I will collect you personally.” Mycroft interjected.

“Unless the Bulgarians start acting up again.” Georgianna said. “Or the PM needs guidance, or Angela Merkel calls...”

“Yes.” Mycroft said blandly. “Unless there’s a national emergency, I will collect you tomorrow personally.”

“You got everything, kiddo?” Greg asked. “Yeah? Give your old man a hug, then.”

“Good luck tomorrow, Daddy.”

He hugged her harder than he intended — it made his chest ache with sentiment when she called him ‘Daddy.’ “Thanks, honey. Go easy on your mum.”

“Good luck to you too, Holmes.” She hugged Mycroft quickly then followed her mother down the walk and out the gate.

Mycroft closed the door. “Your ex-wife shared something with your daughter... something you’d rather she hadn’t.”

“Yeah...” Greg started back down to the kitchen. “She did. And...” He sighed “...as usual, I have to deal with it.”

“Your daughter is like you, Greg.” Mycroft said, following him down the stairs. “She will give her mother the benefit of the doubt.”

Greg shook his head, turning to face the other man at the bottom of the staircase. “She’s enough like Jude that she won’t.”

“Ah, yes.” Mycroft caressed Greg’s shoulder almost tentatively, brushing some lint from his jacket then allowing his long fingers to venture closer to Greg’s nape.

Greg smiled at the gesture. “Where were we?” He asked, pulling Mycroft into his embrace and pressing his lips to his long, freckled neck. He inhaled the scent of the other man, a faint hint of bergamot overlaid by wool, basil and oregano.

Mycroft leaned into Greg, stretching his arms around him. Greg dipped lower, cupping the firm arse. He nipped Mycroft’s long neck, tasting the skin open-mouthed, nibbling under his ear.

Music swelled — the speaker in the kitchen was streaming something symphonic. Greg recognised Purcell, one of Mycroft’s favourites, but couldn’t remember the name of the piece. It was Baroque and English and goddamn it, Mycroft’s skin felt so wonderful under his lips! Greg put his ex-wife firmly out of his mind and kissed Mycroft properly, sinking into it. He started to loosen Mycroft’s tie and clawed at stubborn waistcoat buttons.

But Mycroft wasn’t having it. He shoved Greg against the refrigerator, grabbing his wrists and pinning them near his shoulders as he ground his pelvis into Greg’s. The kiss started with a gasp-inducing clash of teeth, and rapidly became ravenous, lips and tongues and the rasping of five-o-clock shadow.
They were chest-to-chest as they kissed, Mycroft pinning Greg bodily to the fridge. He was strong — stronger than he usually let on.

The kisses were distracting, but Greg wanted more. He struggled to free his hands — he wanted to touch, to dig under the layers of clothes to the expanses of pale, auburn-furred skin he craved, but Mycroft held tight. Tightly enough that Greg would have to hurt him to free himself. This was new.

“Mycroft?” He murmured.

“This is about you tonight.” Mycroft panted, resting his forehead against Greg’s. “Let me make love to you.”

Greg laughed. “Don’t I always?”

“You always try to please me — you always do, never fear, my dear man. But tonight, I want all focus on you, on your pleasure.”

Greg smirked and with a sleazy thrust, rubbed his hard cock against the other man’s, making him gasp. “Your pleasure is my pleasure, love.”

“Indulge me. Please.”

“OK.” Greg said slowly. He flexed his hands, the bones of his wrists moving under Mycroft’s palms. “You gonna tie me up?”

Mycroft smiled fondly as he released Greg’s wrists. “No. Take your tie off. And your jacket.”

What followed was the best — and longest — blow job Greg had ever experienced. Sprawled out on the grey couch, wearing nothing but his vest bunched up under his arms and one sock, Mycroft bobbed between his legs, two of his long fingers massaging Greg’s prostate.

“Oh god!” Greg sighed. “Your fingers… I bloody love your fingers, Mycroft… uhn… you have magic fingers… harder, yeah… yeah, like that… Oh fuck…” It went on and on, Mycroft edging him expertly, slurping on his cock, licking and sucking, taking him deep. He fondled Greg’s shaft and his balls, stroked his perineum, and thrust his fingers deep inside. More than once, Greg was sure he was about to come, but Mycroft would back off, he’d slow down and tease Greg until he was pleading for more… then he’d build back up again until Greg was about to go out of his mind.

When he finally did come, shouting and convulsing, pleasure pumping through his body, curling his toes and arching his back, Mycroft swallowed, and sat back with a Cheshire smile, clearly pleased with himself. Greg dragged him down next to him, not caring that he was sweaty, and Mycroft was fully clothed. He held the other man tightly, burying his face against his chest as the paroxysms of laughter shook him to his core.

As he began to recover, Greg saw that Mycroft was hard and straining in his trousers. Still sweaty and giggling, Greg insisted on giving Mycroft a hand job. “Just a quickie.” It wasn’t five minutes before Mycroft was muffling his cries against Greg’s neck as he spackled Greg’s belly with his seed. Then they both lay on the grey couch, sated and sleepy until Mycroft heaved himself up to finish making dinner and Greg mounted the four flights of stairs to shower.

Dinner had been magnificent — Mycroft had made gnocchi from scratch and served it in a rich Pomodoro with balls of raw mozzarella melting in it.

“You don’t like Italian food.” Greg observed, eating the gnocchi with gusto.
Mycroft shrugged, smiling at the quick work Greg was making of his dinner. “I like it fine when it’s interesting. And in moderation. And it will be excellent fuel for you tomorrow.”

Greg laughed at Mycroft and stole a small sip of his wine. (“Don’t pour me any — it gives me log legs when I run.”) “And you.”

“Yes.”

“I appreciate your sacrifice.”

“It’s no sacrifice, my dear man, to make something that you enjoy.”

Greg took his hand and kissed it. “You make me happy.” He told Mycroft, meaning it. He’d put the man through so much the last few months with the damned depression.

Fleeting Mycroft’s expression dissolved into panic... but almost instantly his face lit with a lovely smile, so perhaps Greg had been wrong.

It began to rain in earnest as Greg’s group crossed Deptford Creek at the seven-mile marker. He heard someone curse, but Greg was firmly in the zone. Now that he was warm, the rain actually felt good.

He’d worn shorts — he didn’t want to be bogged down by wet tights — but had taken the precaution of rubbing embrocation onto his exposed knees, thighs and calves. It made his leg hair look crazy, but Greg didn’t suppose anyone would be looking at his legs much. It burned pleasantly.

He wore a running belt — sort of a flat butt bag. The pocket held his phone, a credit card, a few quid and a tiny tube of body glide. There were slots along the belt to carry nutrition, and he had carefully inserted gels in several of the the slots. More than once, a gel or two had saved his bacon on a long run — hunger knock was no laughing matter. Once, when he was much younger and immeasurably more stupid, he’d ignored the symptoms of hunger knock and a hideous, energy-sucking fog had descended over his brain and he had almost run into traffic. He’d always carried something to eat after that.

Greg also had a heart rate monitor strapped around his chest. It spoke to the Garmin he wore on his wrist, charting his efforts, tracking his mileage, estimating his calorie burn. It was covered by a thick, long-sleeved shirt that wicked sweat away from the skin underneath it. The rain jacket he wore was a transparent white. It was breathable, but like a windbreaker, it protected his torso from becoming cold and damp. Greg hadn’t thought about it until Tony said something, but it was rather stylish with its whisper-thin carbon fiber weave. Flashy even.

Though he generally wore a watch cap in the cold — something easy to take off and stuff in a pocket when he got too warm — in the rain, Greg wore a bucket hat to keep the water out of his eyes and ears and off the back of his neck. He hated the feeling of water dripping down his neck. It too was a technical fabric that dried quickly even as it wicked sweat away from his scalp.

His shoes and his gloves were both waterproof and both were getting a workout today. The shoe material was supposed to shed water rather than absorb it to keep from becoming sodden and heavy. And indeed, his feet felt light and his hands were warm as he followed Jane down the blue line that marked the marathon’s path.

He grabbed a sport drink from a volunteer and poured it down his throat. The rain felt nice on his face as he tipped his head back.

By the time they were approaching Tower Bridge — twelve plus miles in — Greg noticed that his
group had gotten smaller. Not only that, but they were overtaking runners that had either been too ambitious with their pace or were more affected by the rain and chill than he was. Greg still felt pretty good.

Over the bridge and into Wapping, then Limehouse along the river to Canary Wharf, down to Millwall and the Isle of Dogs and swinging around and running back to Canary Wharf by way of Marsh Wall.

He began to suffer on the Isle of Dogs, his gait shortening and his energy flagging. For a few desperate moments, he barely kept pace, sure he was one of the many who had started too fast and would now fall precipitously in the standings. Without taking his eyes from Jane’s heels — if he lost her, he would never catch up — Greg took a gel from his running belt and ripped it open with his teeth. He filled his mouth with glucose-rich vanilla pudding and swallowed it. It wasn’t a minute before he began to feel better and giggled to himself about swallowing.

Greg stuck to Jane, taking water at the next station and gulping it down. He’d gotten into his own head and become careless, he needed to be more careful, keep up with his nutrition and hydration. The last thing he needed was hunger knock — he’d hemorrhage time then.

His energy was better now. His mind began to focus again and it frightened Greg how much he’d lost track of. He quickly set his watch to remind him to eat again in twenty minutes.

Greg’s group overtook another scraggly clot of runners. He figured they, like so many others, had gone out too hard and were paying for it now.

Two of the runners attached themselves to their group, matching their strides to Jane’s and Greg’s. Neither of them ate — maybe they didn’t have anything, were relying on the sports drinks and gel stations provided by the marathon. Greg always brought enough for the run, one for every half hour after the first hour and then one or two extra, just in case. He wasn’t going to risk becoming so addled he’d run in front of a truck again. These blokes should have brought some gels.

One of them pulled up beside Jane. He was working hard to stay a half-stride ahead of her. Stupid — he’d burn himself out faster that way. Greg spent a minute considering whether the wanker was just overly competitive in general or if he couldn’t stand to follow a woman. There were idiots like that.

Greg lengthened his stride for a few paces and positioned himself next to Jane. She smiled when she saw him and rolled her eyes about the half-stepper. Greg laughed. He hoped she didn’t have to deal with blokes like this often. He glanced at the man running next to him.

Abruptly Greg recognised the runner they had overtaken — the sharp features of Anil Singh twisted bitterly under his white billed cap. He was clearly not happy to see Greg.

The business with Singh had hung over Greg’s head for almost two interminable months. His first interview with the detectives investigating the Gross Misconduct charge Singh had levied had been contentious — not the simple formality Greg had been encouraged to expect. It was a three-plus-hour interrogation that strained his ability to keep a cool head. It did not help that whatever he said it didn’t matter kept running through his head.

They’d brought up the old complaint Donovan had lodged. They’d gone over and over his role in Sherlock’s disproven criminal fraud. They’d questioned him rigorously about the faked suicide. Greg had no problem answering all their questions calmly — it was over and done years ago and he’d been exonerated along with Sherlock. But it was exhausting and pointless.

Greg had almost been relieved when they switched to another line of questioning. But these
questions *did* make him angry.

“DCI Lestrade, have you ever had an inappropriate relationship with another detective?”

“Of course not.”

“How would you say your divorce affected your job performance?”

“Positively — I had more time to spend at work.”

“How would you say your divorce affected your relationships with your coworkers?”

“Not at all.”

“Have you ever dated a colleague?”

“No.”

“Have you ever asked another police officer on a date?”

“No.”

“Have you ever asked another police officer for sex?”

“No!”

“DCI Lestrade, I understand that you brought a man to the Policeman’s New Year’s Eve Ball as your date fourteen months ago.”

“How could that possibly have any bearing on DI Singh’s complaint?”

“Please, DCI Lestrade, just answer the question. Did you bring a man as your romantic date to a police social function?”

Greg fumed, clamping down hard on his temper. “It’s not a secret.”

“Is that a yes.”

“Yes.” He bit off the word. “Can you please explain to me how my personal life has any bearing on DI Singh’s complaint?”

The interrogators ignored the question. “How long have you identified as homosexual, DCI Lestrade?”

“Never. I’m not gay.” Greg said, glaring.

“You’re not—“

“How does this have bearing on your inquiry?” Greg’s rep interrupted, finally speaking up.

The interrogators looked pointedly at each other.

“DCI Lestrade… would you say that your life has changed in the last year?”

“My professional life has not.”

“It says here that you took several months off for medical leave.”
Greg’s rep interjected again. “And it says why. DCI Lestrade has worked hard to recover from his injuries. Since he’s returned to the job, all indications are that he’s the same excellent copper he was before the assault. Period.”

Greg was so grateful he could have kissed her. But that wouldn’t have impressed the Directorate of Professional Standards much. Not in the right way.

The woman shuffled through her papers. “It says here that you had complications from the injuries you sustained — mood swings and depression.”

“‘Yes.’

“In fact, you suffered a personality change.”

“No.” Greg said stolidly despite the dark, sinking feeling inside. “I was depressed. It’s a common side-effect.”

“I have the report from your neurologist. You were severely depressed for more than two months.”

“I’m lucky it was only two months.”

“You’re medicated for the condition?” The more aggressive of the interrogators asked.

“DCI Lestrade is recovered.” Greg’s rep snapped.

The interrogator sighed heavily but moved on. “Did your depression lead you to destructive behaviours?”

“Only if you think lack of appetite is a destructive behaviour.” Greg told him.

It went on and on and on. Prurient, invasive questions and insinuations with no regard for Greg’s privacy. They tried to say that he’d fostered inappropriate relations with his staff in any and every way possible. Tried to make him admit he gave preferential treatment to the people he wanted to sleep with. Tried to make him admit he gave preferential treatment to the people he didn’t want to sleep with. Tried to force him to admit his “long denied homosexuality” had resulted in him targeting male colleagues for special treatment — variously good and bad. Ultimately, Greg wasn’t even angry anymore. They were fishing, trying to find some meat in Singh’s accusations. It was bloody unpleasant.

“Do you make a habit of touching your direct reports?” One of them asked eventually.

“Touching? No.”

“You’ve never touched any of your subordinates?”

“Well, I guess I might have shaken hands or given someone a pat on the back now and again, but nothing untoward.”

“A pat on the back? Have you ever rubbed a subordinate’s back?”

“Erm... no.” Greg’s confusion was like a fog blanketing his brain. “No, that’s not something I do.”

“You’ve never given a colleague a massage?”

“No.” He heard a strange bark of laughter and was mortified to realise it had come from himself. He cleared his throat. “No, I have not.”
“You seem nervous, DCI Lestrade.”

“I’m not nervous, I’m... baffled. No, I don’t give massages, I don’t rub anyone’s back. I don’t chat up the people I work with.” Greg said. In his head, Mycroft said ‘with whom I work.’ Greg stifled the hysteria that was rising in his throat. “I’m a professional and I work with other professionals.”

“Have you ever asked any of these professionals out for drinks?”

“Well... an after work pint — sure. Haven’t you?”

“Have you asked your DIs to have drinks with you?”

“Not with me, as a group. Team bonding and all that. I don’t, actually, go to the pub all that often — the boss being there just makes everyone stiff. When I go, I buy a round and then bugger off.”

“You’ve never gone to a pub one-on-one with any of your detectives?”

Greg sighed. “Course I have. I’ve worked with some of the lads for years. I meet up with DCI Culbertson every few months for a pint. DS Donovan — I’ve worked with her for a decade — we’ve gone for a pint once or twice. Usually to chew over a case.”

“How often would you estimate you go for drinks with your subordinates?”

“I don’t know — once a month, if that. Honestly, I don’t drink much anymore.”

“Oh? Why not?”

That wasn’t his business. “A variety of reasons, none of which have anything to do with seducing anyone.”

“DCI Lestrade...”

“Look, Let’s cut to the chase. I know DI Singh has lodged a complaint. For the record, I never chatted him up, I never fancied him, I never touched him in any way but professional. If I suggested he come to the pub, it was in the context of work and everyone was invited.”

“Are you finished, DCI Lestrade?”

“I’m just getting started. I have been critical of DI Singh’s work because his closure rate is substandard and the overtime for his squad was astronomical — it was blowing the budget for the whole unit. You can look at the numbers yourself. I asked another DI to mentor him, thinking that would help bridge his experience gap. And I talked to him about the overtime — told him he’d abused the system and now all the DIs would have to put in a request for overtime and have it approved beforehand. If he thinks I’m singling him out, he’s wrong. I would treat any detective with his numbers the same.”

It had gone on and on after that, touching on every aspect of Greg’s job, every decision he’d made concerning Singh. They were relentless, yipping and nipping at his personal life. At one point, despite his determination to say as little as possible about anything outside of work Greg felt compelled to remind them: “Gay and straight aren’t the only options. Some of us are neither.”

That had struck both the interrogators dumb for a long moment.

As for telling them what Singh had said in the parking lot... Greg wasn’t interested in playing the victim. He’d had enough of that, thank you very much. He’d given Singh a verbal warning and
made sure Donovan wrote it up in case the wanker did it again.

Afterwards, Greg had a splitting headache for the rest of the day. Paracetamol barely took the edge off. He managed to make it through the afternoon then dragged himself back to his flat and collapsed. His plan for the evening had been packing up his kitchen and his clothes for the move, but the idea was so onerous. He’d do it in the morning...

When Greg had returned to work after moving house, the atmosphere was different. Donovan told him they’d all been questioned by the DPS detectives — her interview had lasted for several hours.

It had hung over his head for weeks and weeks while the depression weighed him down. And through it all Greg had to convince his people that he was still trustworthy, still the good copper they thought they knew. And he had to supervise Singh.

The resolution was both disappointing and infuriating. Greg received a one page form letter — so anonymous he had almost tossed it aside — telling him that the DPS had found no grounds for Singh’s allegations. After interrogation his detectives rigorously for days, insinuating that he was a sexual predator, intimating that his sexual assault had been a sleazy hookup gone bad, and asking leading question after leading question, DPS sent him one bloody piece of paper.

Angry and exhausted, Greg handed it to Donovan and took some personal time. He knew she’d spread the word and he wouldn’t have to deal with any of it again.

Except he was wrong. Greg did have to deal with it. It was common knowledge that Singh had lodged the complaint — DPS’s questions had made that clear — some of the coppers, detectives and uniformed officers, were taking it upon themselves to make life hard for Singh.

Greg couldn’t even take it as a compliment — the sort who would do that were more apt to be corrupt themselves. They were simply enforcing omertà, snitches get stitches and all that. Greg had to gather his entire staff together — not an easy task — and give a little speech that made it clear all harassment and hazing would end or Greg would put the offenders on desk duty. He wasn’t some blushing maiden that needed their honour defended. And if it didn’t stop immediately, there would be suspensions.

He ended it with an invitation for any of them to come talk to him one-on-one with any questions or complaints. Singh had been in the room, of course. Last thing Greg was going to do was single him out in any way.

And now, here DI Singh was, half-stepping a three-hour pacer in the misting, spitting rain, his Police Widows and Orphans t-shirt clinging damply to his back. Greg was completely certain that Anil Singh wouldn’t have felt the need to stay a half-stride ahead if Jane were a bloke.

When he recognised who was beside him, Singh’s stride stuttered, but his jaw set truculently and he pulled forward. Greg considered letting him go — he’d be going backwards soon enough. But something petty bloomed inside him. He’d been taking the high road at work — it was part of the job... and part of who Greg was.

But out here on the course... he didn’t have to ignore how much the loathing of this small-minded git hurt. He didn’t have to tell himself not to let it get to him. He didn’t have to laugh it off, have to focus on how insignificant Anil Singh was, how sad his bigotry made him.

Downing another gel, Greg matched his stride to Singh’s, slowly leaving Jane behind and dogging Singh’s heels instead. He didn’t say anything, he didn’t try to outrun the man or even pull up bedside him. He simply kept up.
he new pace was ok, actually. Maybe it was the second gel, but Greg wasn’t feeling the strain. It hurt, yeah, but no more than the three-hour pace had hurt. He felt comfortable, confident. He knew how to breathe and how to measure his effort, he knew his endurance was solid and he knew he was relatively fast.

He remembered something that was easy to forget — ‘suffering’ was part of every endurance sport, one’s mental ability to suffer was key — running a marathon involved suffering at your maximum for hours, holding yourself on the knife’s edge of so much and too much. But this was the part that was easy to forget: with enough conditioning and fitness, at a certain point the suffering didn’t increase. Your speed and effort could increase, but it didn’t hurt any worse. You felt like you couldn’t go faster because you couldn’t suffer more, but you could! This faster pace felt the same to Greg’s legs and lungs as Jane’s three-hour pace!

Singh noticed Greg about a half a kilo later when he looked back to gauge his distance from Jane’s group. He was clearly beginning to tire again but seeing Greg gave him the impetus to run harder. Singh sped up, sprinting five meters ahead before settling back into a punishing pace.

Greg didn’t break stride, but kept to the pace Singh had originally set — that was another thing endurance athletes had to remember, going into the red, sprinting, taking yourself over the knife’s edge, would make you blow up. Your body would simply shut down and you would slow to a crawl (literally sometimes). Greg had feared he might do that to himself by following Singh in the first place. He hadn’t, but sprinting after the man would certainly do it.

Singh however, had forgotten. He couldn’t keep this faster speed up and almost immediately Greg was making up ground, slowly chasing him down. He focussed on Singh ahead of him, focussed on the shortening space between them. By twelve to go, Greg had closed the distance and was running confidently. Singh was struggling to keep up.

Then, all at once as if someone had pulled the plug, Singh disappeared. He had blown himself up. Greg resisted the twin temptations to look back and to run faster. He stayed steady, running within himself. Jane’s group would catch him up within the next mile or so and Greg wanted to be able to fall in with them again. He knew Singh would not be able to.

It was easy to zone out, to let his legs move on their own as his head buzzed with runner’s high. But this far in, nutrition and hydration were key. Greg took a drink at the next station — it was a sports drink. He would have preferred water, but he needed the liquid in whatever form it took.

The rain stopped. Greg’s sodden shorts began to dry. His knees and hips were complaining, and his feet ached. His left hamstring was twinging a little up by his glute. He’d have to stretch it out afterwards. He focussed on his gait, on his foot striking the pavement and rolling all the way forward, over his toes. Greg pronated and had a bad habit of digging his toes in rather than using his whole foot. He had brilliant prescription insoles that helped, but they were more than a year old now.

(He’d gotten them before John Clay. No — don’t think about that!)

Ten to go. Greg’s mental strength was cracking. He forced himself to keep pace... but he felt like sobbing... everything that had happened in the last year... coming out as bi... dating Mycroft... being assaulted and injured... disappearing into a despairing fog, losing himself and trying so desperately to get himself back... and when he had, missing Mycroft so much! Realising he was in love with the wanker, long after Mycroft had moved on with another bloke... long after he’d hurt him... discovering Mycroft still cared for him, still wanted him, and committing to the relationship... moving in together... bloody Anil Singh and his spurious complaints triggering a return to the consuming depression... sloughing it off slowly, like a snake shedding his skin... or like a foetal bird trying to
peck its way out of a horrible, constricting shell... being reborn into happiness with Mycroft and Georgianna, the three of them together...

Tears were streaming down his face. Spectators were urging him on, other runners were telling him to keep going. Someone patted him on the back. “It’s ok.” A voice said. “It comes out sometimes, for all of us. I think emotion gets trapped in our bodies, in our muscles and fat. You’re using it up, it’s natural that it would come out now.”

Total bollocks, of course... but the very idea was strangely calming. All the highs and lows, all the trauma he’d suffered and the sheer volume of emotion, good and bad... maybe releasing it would free him to be the father he wanted to be... to be the partner Mycroft deserved...

As rain again began to fall, Greg achieved a rare peace. It would all be ok! He felt stronger now, more able. He thanked the man who had talked to him — he’d stayed with Greg, gently encouraging him through the crisis. Greg took a gel, and after a moment’s thought took another and pressed it into the man’s hand. “Cheers, mate.”

Greg was in the home stretch now, fewer than five miles to go. He was passing other runners. He started keeping track, counting how many he caught, feeling uncharacteristically competitive. For a mile or so he had company, a man and a woman who fell in behind him, drafting in his wake. Greg didn’t mind, he knew he was a good wind block. But then they were gone and he was on his own again.

With a bit more than three to go, Greg took an ooho sachet — an edible pouch made of seaweed encasing more of the slightly salty sports drink. He put it in his mouth and bit down. It exploded, filling his mouth with the vaguely citrus flavour. He considered chewing and swallowing the pouch for roughly a second before spitting it out. It was 100 percent biodegradable — Greg had read the brochure included in his race pack along with his number and kitbag — he tossed it at a gutter.

Only two more miles. He ached, but he also felt exhilarated. He wasn’t tired or worn out — this was hard, but it was well within his abilities. Greg was glad he’d quit smoking. He’d be dying right now if he still smoked. He’d gotten so much faster since he quit. He wondered if all the toxins he’d absorbed smoking had gotten trapped in his body too, if he’d released them...

It occurred to him that Jane and her group hadn’t caught him yet. Greg started to think that maybe they wouldn’t. He’d only broken the three-hour mark once, at the pinnacle of his more youthful fitness. It was possible he could run a negative split and finish inside three hours today.

The idea gave him a rush of adrenaline and he had to force himself to keep to the steady pace. After more than 24, two miles could last a lifetime. Greg would not sprint until he saw the finish. Maybe not even then. He laughed out loud at himself, imagining the pathetic sprint he might manage at the end of a marathon.

He unzipped the jacket. Now that the rain had once again stopped, the sun had made a belated appearance and Greg was warm. The breeze was cool on his chest and he felt the strap of his heart rate monitor as his skin pebbled under the long-sleeved shirt. There was a woman ahead of him — she’d been there for a long time, getting closer very, very slowly. Greg focussed on her, on her hot pink compression sleeves and the way her shapely arse moved in her black tights. His goal, he decided, was to catch her up before the finish line. She was his rabbit.

One more mile. Greg was reeling her in, but not quickly enough. He experimented with upping his pace very slightly, seeing how it felt. Just one more mile, he could do it for one measly mile. He didn’t even want to pass the woman — if he did, what would he chase? No, Greg needed her in front of him. He became so grateful for her, for being his rabbit, for giving him the wherewithal to
keep putting one aching foot in front of the other without slowing, that he felt weepily sentimental. He wanted to hug her, thank her...

There it was! The finish line! Greg gathered himself and began to sprint. He’d trained for this, running sprinting drills at the end of his training runs. The explosive power boomed through his body as he pumped his arms and lifted his knees. There was a searing pain in his lungs, but he ignored it, thinking instead of the finish line, of crossing it with the woman in the hot pink compression sleeves.

He saw the clock as he crossed the line — and almost tripped from the shock. 2:43:13!

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone, hope you enjoyed the chapter — thanks for being so patient! Glad Greg’s feeling more himself. It’s a relief.

Embrocation - a cream containing chemical irritants such as cayenne that dilate the blood vessels, warming the skin. https://www.bicycling.com/training/a20050540/6-things-you-didn-t-know-about-embro/

Negative split - a racing strategy that involves completing the second half of a race faster than the first half. It is defined by the intentional setting of a slower initial pace, followed by a gradual or sudden increase of speed towards the end of the race.

Next week: Mycroft has a birthday.
A Fly In The Frosting

Chapter Summary

Greg insists on celebrating Mycroft’s birthday in grand fashion... but Mycroft’s certainty that Greg will leave him one day gains a face.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The quality of the light was different here — more pure. It brightened the buildings and made the paving stones shine. Mycroft had thought that his childhood memory of the sunlight had been heightened by the patina of foreign lands and exotic architecture. But it hadn’t. The sunlight bathed everything in its dazzling golden rays. It made him feel young.

Mycroft wondered what Greg would look like in this glittering luminescence. His silver hair would blaze white and his tan skin would glow. He would be magnificent, a Greek god in Bermuda shorts.

He had only to turn his head to see if he surmised correctly. Greg and Georgianna Lestrade bracketed Mycroft, one to either side. He could hear the girl’s exclamations. He could imagine her father’s grin at her excitement.

Mycroft did not look. His happiness in this moment was so extreme... he feared disrupting the delicate rotation of the earth, disturbing the gentle pull of the tides. Could one be too happy? Mycroft already felt the exquisitely painful certainty that this perfect moment would end far too soon. If he could choose a single minute to live within forever...

It was warm, 27 centigrade — even warmer in the sun — and Mycroft was beginning to perspire as they climbed the precipitous grade of the street that corkscrewed up the hillside village. Greg’s fingers brushed his own and Mycroft smiled as he allowed the other man to take his hand. The calloused fingertips were fierce in their familiarity — Mycroft knew them so well it made his heart ache.

“Look!” Georgianna had skipped ahead and was peering in the open door of a medieval church. It was both grand and modest, its imposing spire not so tall, its cruciform shape compressed by the hillside. Its windows were small, the glass leaded, but not coloured — there was no rose window here. “Can we go in.”

“Yes.” Mycroft told her, squeezing Greg’s hand. “The door is open for tourists.” They followed her in, dropping a few euros in the collection box.

It was as dark inside as it was bright outside. Mycroft waited in the entry for his eyes to adjust. It smelled dusty, but not unpleasant. Candles mounted on rickety metal votive stands were lit in a far corner, illuminating a statue of the Virgin in her blue cloak. Other forms began to appear in the dimness — pillars, pews, the main altar under an enormous agonised Christ on the cross, and to one side, a secondary altar over which Mycroft identified a statue of Saint Jeanne d’Arc. It was hemmed in by flowers, Saint Joan looking ready to leap off her plinth and into action.

Mycroft moved towards Saint Joan, taking in her gold armour and swirling black cloak. She stood
upon the black body of a vanquished foe. The flowers were luridly colourful next to the austere Saint.

Greg — who had been tracking Georgianna through the stone arches that lined one side of the church — came up behind him now, his warm hands settling on Mycroft’s waist, his breath tickling his neck. He leaned back into Greg — feeling the perspiration that had dripped down his back stick his shirt to his skin. It was an unseasonably warm September day in Provence.

“Sorry.” Mycroft muttered, pulling away.

Greg did not release him. “Where are you going?” He asked softly, pulling Mycroft back against his chest.

“I’m disgustingly damp. I wanted to spare you the horror.”

Greg chuckled, the rumble in his chest vibrating against Mycroft’s back. “You’re not gonna let that come between us.” The heat didn’t bother Greg much. Hot or cold, wet or dry, weather seemed not to affect him.

“I suppose not.” Mycroft settled more comfortably in his man’s arms.

“Forecast says it’ll be cooler tomorrow. Might even need a jacket.”

“One can fervently hope.” Mycroft felt the vibration of Greg’s mobile — it was in the front pocket of his tidy Bermuda shorts, currently pressed against Mycroft’s arse.

The mobile vibrated a second time, but Greg ignored it. “It wouldn’t dare be hot on your birthday.” He murmured nuzzling behind Mycroft’s ear. “My love.”

The words sank into Mycroft’s psyche, rendering him both physically boneless and mentally tense. He hadn’t celebrated his birthday in years — not since he had parted from Jerome. Mummy made some noise about celebrating every few years, but Mycroft deftly put her off. It never took much.

“To whom did you speak about my birthday?” Mycroft had been curious since Greg brought the subject up. Not Sherlock, surely. It could have been Mummy. He had trouble imagining Greg contacting Mummy, but the man had surprised him before.

“Anthea.” Greg confessed. “Before we stopped seeing each other last year.” He chuckled. “I thought maybe I’d take you somewhere nice for dinner... but you always eat somewhere nice, so that wasn’t much of a plan.” Greg pressed a kiss to Mycroft’s neck. “It was in me calendar, on my mobile. I thought about calling last year... but you’d asked me not to.”

“Balance of probability suggests that I would have reacted poorly.” Mycroft said. He hadn’t been seeing Michele then, and his ego — not to mention his heart — had still been terribly bruised.

“So, this year, I figured I owed you something really special.” Greg snickered. “I even let you help plan it.”

Mycroft had been ambivalent when Greg had suggested taking a trip together. He really would have rather they skip any mention of his natal day, but Greg had been bursting with excitement. He’d outlined his plan — a few days in Provence where Mycroft had spent holidays as a child, Provence of which Greg had heard him speak with a tender nostalgia bordering on sentimentality. Greg’s earnest warmth and enthusiasm were (as always) impossible for Mycroft resist, and he had found himself agreeing to the trip.
“I have some familiarity with the area.” Mycroft’s only condition was that Greg allow him to help plan the holiday.

The proposed long weekend had stretched into a week, half of which was to be spent at Grandmére’s farm, the other half in Marseille on the ocean — Greg had insisted on the beach.

When Mycroft discovered that Georgianna had never been off the British Isles, he decided she had to be integrated into their plans. She was excused from her new school for the holiday — it was the only thing Georgianna was more excited about than her new Science instructor, the stern, and surprisingly youthful, Miss Austin-Greene.

And now, here they were, hiking up the steep road winding through a mountaintop village, remarking on the architecture, surmising who might live in the homes lining the road, looking out over the jewel-bright valley below, standing in the village church staring at the slim figure of Saint Joan...

“This will be the finest birthday of my life.”

“Whoa, don’t jinx it.” Greg laughed, but his arms tightened around Mycroft’s waist.

Once again, Mycroft let himself have this. The depth of his feelings, and Greg’s apparent return of them, still astonished him.

Greg’s mobile vibrated again, jarring Mycroft from his reverie. He was irritated at the interruption. “Should you get that?”


“It might be John.”

Greg hummed a negative. “I spoke to John this morning. Sherlock’s driving him crazy, of course, but he says the second round of drugs isn’t too bad.”

“He’s lying, of course.”

“Of course.” Greg agreed.

Another annoying vibration. “Work then.” Mycroft suggested.

Greg scoffed, loosening his hold on Mycroft. “They wouldn’t dare.” He shifted his weight, kissing the nape of Mycroft’s neck. “It’s probably Sanne. She said she’d text me a map of a good trail run outside of Aix.

“Ah yes. Sanne.”

Sanne, the new fixture in Greg’s life.

“Holmes! What is this?”

Mycroft chuckled and felt Greg’s laugh reverberate through both of their bodies. He pulled free of the big, calloused hands. “Duty calls.”

“Mycroft… you know you don’t have to…”

“Don’t be ridiculous, my dear man. Talking with your daughter is my pleasure.” He started across the nave towards Georgianna in the transept.
He glanced back once, Greg was smiling at his phone, his thumbs flying as he returned Sanne’s texts.

—

As Mycroft finished the marathon — some five hours eleven minutes and fifty-nine seconds after he started — Anthea met him at the finish line with a bottle of water and a hand towel. As he drank the water, she walked alongside him holding an umbrella over his head to shield him from the spitting rain. He hid his exhaustion from her, turning his tired feet towards the meeting point he and Greg had pre-arranged. He wanted nothing more than to find Greg, sink with him into the buttery leather seats of his car and go home. Perhaps by the time they got there, he’d feel like sharing the shower. The thought made him smile.

“ Took you long enough.” A familiar voice sighed.

“Brother. What brings you here? I thought you hated displays of physical exertion.” Sherlock carried Rosie Watson, the little girl heavily asleep on his shoulder — which explained why he was bothering to use an umbrella.

“John has cancer.”

“Yes, Acute Myeloid Leukemia.” Mycroft had been expecting a visit from Sherlock ever since John Watson’s unfortunate diagnosis and subsequent denial into a cutting-edge clinical trial.

Sherlock stepped close, attempting to loom threateningly. Mycroft allowed that it might seem threatening if he were shorter... and couldn’t think circles around his little brother. “I cannot lose him.” Sherlock snarled.

“No one wants you to lose John less than I, Sherlock, believe me.” His brother had become almost domesticated since John Watson and his daughter had moved back into the flat on Baker Street. Even more so since John had taken his blinders off about the love they shared. If the physical part had had its... challenges... for the doctor, well, perhaps it simply took time to shed the habits of a heterosexual lifetime.


“No.”

“Mycrof!” There was an edge of hysteria in Sherlock’s deep voice.

“Anthea.” Mycroft prompted his assistant, taking the umbrella from her hand. Without looking up she typed rapidly on a smartphone. An alert sounded in Sherlock’s pocket. “This programme is much more promising than the one to which you applied. He begins tomorrow.”

Sherlock shook his head. “You might have said so.”

“I just did, brother mine. And you might thank me.” Mycroft pointed out.

Sherlock glowered. “I’ll thank you to keep your mouth shut. John doesn’t want it bandied about.”
“God forbid someone think him weak in any way.”

Sherlock tossed his head in a gesture of defiance. “If you grew up the way John did, you wouldn’t show weakness either.”

Ah yes. John’s unfortunate upbringing. Mycroft had occasionally wondered whose childhood had been more challenging — Greg, his father absent, living hand-to-mouth with his mother in a tiny council flat, or John Watson’s more middle class upbringing with an abusive, alcoholic father. John had been a small boy who learned the value of privacy early — and how to protect his privacy with his fists — but he had always had enough to eat, new clothes every year and pocket money for games and sweets.

“Mycroft!”

Startled from his thoughts, Mycroft brought out his most reptilian smile. “Indeed. Now if you’re quite finished…”

“Yes, you’re keeping your stolid policeman waiting. Except I don’t believe he’s minded the wait a bit.” Sherlock said as he swirled away.

“Sherlock…” Mycroft should have saved his breath — his brother had got what he wanted and would spare no more time for his sibling.

Which was just as well, Mycroft was wrung out from running the marathon and only desired his stolid policeman and his bath.

Sending Anthea for his kitbag, Mycroft texted his driver and continued on to the appointed meeting spot.

Mycroft heard Greg before he saw him — the Detective Inspector’s laugh rang out through the rain, then devolved into a nasty, hacking cough, mixed with more laughter.

Circling around a clot of sodden runners fishing their kitbags from a lorry, he searched the area, his eyes sweeping the crowd for the silver hair and handsome face he knew so well. But it wasn’t until Greg laughed again that Mycroft laid eyes on his beloved.

What he saw stopped him in his tracks.

Greg stood under a crowded overhang leaning against a crowded wall, standing very close to and sharing a bag of chips with a very beautiful woman. That did not bother Mycroft per se. What bothered him was the way Greg and the beautiful woman looked at each other, her eyes consuming him and his admiring her. And their body language... it was familiar. Intimate. As he watched, Greg smiled softly and reached out his fingers to push a lock of her blonde hair off her forehead. That he should kiss her next seemed inevitable.

Greg had had carnal relations with this woman.

Mycroft’s world collapsed. For an eternity there was nothing but scorched earth and a dark, howling pain.

“I don’t believe he’s minded the wait a bit.” Sherlock’s taunt brought him back to the now — Greg might have slept with her when he was single. Mycroft controlled his nausea and thought it through, clearly this was a woman from Greg’s past. Greg had not cheated. Not yet.

Perhaps this was the beginning of losing Greg —Mycroft could not hope to compete with her, she
could fulfil needs that he could not, needs to which Greg would deny he was subject (breadwinner, protector, head of household, soft, yielding flesh)...

But Mycroft hadn’t lost Greg yet! He would fight! Mycroft pulled himself together — He was awake now, as alert to danger as a wolf. He smoothed his hackles back into place. Mycroft would not let her know she had rattled him.

When he saw Mycroft, Greg’s grin lit his face.

“Mycroft!” He sprang forward and, disregarding the rain, left the shelter of the overhang. He grabbed Mycroft’s elbows and pulled him close for a kiss. Mycroft found himself responding. “You finished.”

“Clearly.”

“Come out of the rain.” Greg pulled him under the overhang, taking the umbrella from his hand and collapsing it neatly. He handed it back to Mycroft and slung his arm around Mycroft’s back. The beautiful woman was examining him with interest. “How was your run? How do you feel? (Cough, cough, cough) Oh, this is Sanne — we met at the Berlin marathon. Sanne, this is my partner, Mycroft Holmes. (Cough, cough)"

“Sanne van Poppel.” She introduced herself and Mycroft immediately sussed that Greg had not known her last name. “I’ve heard so much about you.” Sanne smiled.

Mycroft hated her intensely. “South Africa?” He asked, noting her accent. He returned her insincere smile.

“Greg told you?” She sounded pleased.

He slipped his arm around Greg’s waist so they stood closer together. “Unfortunately, I haven’t been afforded the pleasure — I recognise your accent. Berlin, you say?” Mycroft saw how little she liked that — then saw her decide that Greg had purposely kept her secret. Mycroft leaned against Greg’s strong shoulder and felt him suppressing the cough that plagued him. “What brings you to London? Other than the marathon, of course?”

Her eyes flicked to Greg for just an instant, but it was enough to betray her intent. “Sanne just took a job in London.” Greg said. “(Cough) She’s headed to the Estate Agents this afternoon.”

“Ah. Well, best of luck. We spent six weeks looking at houses before we found the right fit.” That’s right, Sanne, Greg lives with me! “I hope your search is not so time-consuming.”

“It was worth it though.” Greg said. He tried to say more but the cough got the better of him. “Sorry... sorry...”

“Are you all right, my dear?” Mycroft asked, turning to Greg with real concern.

“Yeah. (Cough) Yes, (cough) I’m fine. It’s just (cough) track hack — the hard effort makes me cough (cough, cough) sometimes. (Cough)"

“But you must have finished hours ago!” Mycroft felt Greg’s forehead and then the side of his face. “You don’t have a fever. Any wheezing?”

“No. (Cough) It’s track hack. (Cough, cough).”

“Your lungs are irritated.”
Greg shrugged. “(Cough) It’s the cold.”

“And the pollution.” Mycroft told him. “We should get you home.”

Greg’s warm eyes gazed up at him. “You’re soaked through.” He murmured, suppressing the cough. Mycroft was wet, and now that he’d stopped moving, he was beginning to feel the cold. For a moment he allowed himself the pleasure of Greg’s complete attention. Then he turned back to beautiful, dangerous Sanne. “Where are my manners?” Mycroft tutted. “Can we offer you a ride? It’s no trouble.”

“Ah, no, shot. The Estate agent is picking me up here.”

“We must have you to dinner soon. Greg has your contact information?”

“Actually, (cough) I don’t. (Cough, cough)” He reached for his mobile, but Mycroft had his to hand immediately.


“You’re trembling.” Greg exclaimed, taking Mycroft’s shaking hand. “And your lips are turning blue. (Cough) I’m texting for the car right now — which lorry has your kitbag, Mycroft, (cough) I’ll go get it.”

“D-don’t bother, my d-dear. Anthea has it.” Mycroft shivered. “And the c-car is on Suffolk, by Tr-Trafalgar. Close as he c-can get, I’m t-told.”

Greg turned to Sanne, still holding Mycroft’s hand. “I’ve gotta get him home (cough, cough).”

“Yes, of course. It was kif to see you again, Greg.”

“Yeah! I’m glad I ran into you! (Cough, cough, cough) And, er, thanks for being me rabbit there at the end. Not sure I could have finished so well without you.”

She laid her delicate hand on his arm as she laughed, massaging the muscle. “You would have.” Sanne asserted. “It was good to meet you, Mycroft.” She leaned into Mycroft quickly, kissing his cheeks, then hugged Greg more slowly, pressing her lips almost to the sides of his mouth. “Give me a bell anytime.” She said. “Shot for the slap chips.”

Mycroft was glad Greg opened the umbrella and bundled him away before he could control his shivering enough to glare at her. He mustn’t ever let her know she’d rattled him. It would be like blood in the water to a shark.

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The original farmhouse on the Vernet family estate had been pulled down in 1948. It had suffered occupation by German soldiers, partial disintegration by German bombs and scavenging by locals trying to rebuild their own homes. It had been replaced with a lux mid-century gem, a long, low domed structure rising from the vineyards, its biomorphic forms leading the eyes in Escher-like circles.
At least, it had been lux. It had been largely uninhabited since Grandmére had passed fifteen years ago. There was a caretaker, but the crumbling cement foundation and dusty air of abandonment told Mycroft that the elements had got ahead of the old man. He would have to look into hiring an ‘assistant’ to the caretaker...

However neglected the structure, hospitality was maintained. There was fresh fruit, bread, butter, cheese and wine in the kitchen, clean linens on the beds and thick towels on the warming racks. Once Greg had thrown open the windows, the breeze filled the house with life again.

There were seven bedrooms, including a mother-in-law suite on the ground floor where they installed Georgianna. It was the farthest from the master bedroom — Greg had implied they might make a bit of celebratory noise and, for the comfort of both father and daughter, they wanted her to hear as little as possible.

“This place...” Greg looked around appreciatively, taking in the polished cement floor, the narrow cedar planks bowing across the domed ceiling, the oval wall made of glass so clear it appeared not to exist. There was a dark rhombus of a fireplace cut into one cement wall where it rounded away from the window. It floated a foot and a half from the floor where the black and white striped area rug, and the long, low, curved mid-century sofa sat. Mycroft remembered hating it — it was so very comfortable that he never could stay awake whilst reclining on it. He’d miss hours of the banal adult talk he’d plumbed for deeper meanings...

“Yes... well, it will do, I guess. Or I could have Anthea get us into a hotel. There’s a rather nice one in Aix...”

“I love it.” Greg said fervently, catching hold of Mycroft’s hands. “It’s brilliant! I didn’t think there was a house in the world to rival ours in London... but this place... it’s like living in a museum!”

Ah. Greg’s appreciation of art, of course he loved this house. It reminded Mycroft of the gift he had yet to give the Detective Inspector. He had considered bestowing it after Greg’s breakthrough marathon. But the insecurity Sanne inspired made it feel desperate and grasping. This gift was a pure expression of his regard for Gregory Lestrade. Mycroft would not have it cheapened. Perhaps for Christmas...

“What’s wrong, Love?” Greg’s big hand touched his cheek, travelled to clasp the nape of his neck where his thumb rubbed circles.

Mycroft found a smile on his lips. “Just wool gathering. I haven’t been here since Grandmére died.”

“What was she like, your grandmother?”

 Suppressing his chuckle, Mycroft’s smile turned rueful. “Exactly as you’d expect the woman who raised my mother would be — stern and self-interested. She married into the Vernet family for their money. Having a child was a debt she was obliged to pay.”

Georgianna burst into the room — Greg’s hand dropped away from his neck as he turned to her and Mycroft missed it. “There’s a swimming pool!” She announced breathlessly. “Can we go swimming?!”

Mycroft nodded infinitesimally at Greg who shrugged with his eyebrows. “I don’t see why not, honey. Let us get settled, yeah? Oh — you don’t go in without one of us there.”

“Dad, I’m sixteen! I know how to swim.”

“There’s no lifeguard, innit? Your mum would murder me if you drowned — take pity on your old
The girl rolled her eyes, but could not keep a smile from vanquishing her look of disgust. “Fine. I’m unpacking my swimsuit.” She stalked off to her room.

Greg stared after her for a moment. “It’s hard not to love your kid, no matter how little you wanted to be a parent.” He mumbled. “It’s... impossible.”

Mycroft took his hands and held them. “Not everyone has your heart, my dear man.”

Greg scoffed and Mycroft barely caught the words he muttered. “I almost divorced Jude when she got pregnant.” That sentence spoke volumes to Mycroft, volumes of pain and frustration. Indecision. Volumes about a man buckling down to do the right thing, to do what his own father had not... “Do you have any good memories of this house?” Greg asked.

“Oh, yes. Sherlock and I were left largely to our own devices. When he was very small, he fancied this house was his spaceship and ran through the halls shooting a laser gun.” Mycroft made a gun with his fingers and pointed it at Greg. “Or we’d tramp out to the vineyards or the dairy barns. He was fascinated by the milk cows — their size and their docility. He devised experiments... mostly testing the reactions of the field and farm workers to various stimuli. I generally read whilst he tormented them, but I did help cause a small stampede.”

“Mycroft Holmes!”

Mycroft smirked. “As we got older, we were allowed in Grandmére’s laboratory.”

“Laboratory?”

“She was a theoretical physicist. Mummy went in for pure mathematics, which I understand was a disappointment. Sherlock reading chemistry was almost embarrassing.”

“And you?”

“Grandmére’s judgement meant little to me.” Mycroft moved away from Greg, past the window wall — so different from the wall of square plexiglass that fronted the back garden of their townhouse — to a hidden door in the wall opposite the fireplace. He found the latch and the door popped open. Gesturing that Greg should follow, Mycroft led the way into a medium sized room with blackboards on three walls. They were covered with cramped writing — numbers, mathematical formulae, words and phrases.

“When I was eleven,” Mycroft told Greg, erasing a section of blackboard. “I found a flaw in Grandmére’s maths that neither she nor Mummy had caught. She was... disconcerted.” Mycroft picked up a piece of chalk and in his strong hand wrote out a long and complicated formula. When he finished, he set the chalk down and stepped back to survey his work. “Grandmére stared at the chalkboard for hours, mumbling to herself. It was morning before she admitted I was correct. Whatever I did after that, neither she nor Mummy questioned it.

“Whilst Sherlock wanted their approval badly enough to ensure his own failure rather than risk doing his best and falling short, I already had their respect. That rankled, I expect.” Yet another step in the souring of his relationship with his brother.

“They stopped parenting you when you were eleven.” Greg clearly disapproved.

Mycroft scoffed. “My dear man, Mummy stopped her spotty attempts at parenting when I was three. When I was eleven, they stopped treating me like a child.”
Greg moved close to him, close enough that Mycroft could feel warm breath on his neck, feel the heat of Greg’s body on his back. “I’m sorry.” Greg said softly. Then his big, rough hands drew him close and held him.

He was momentarily at a loss — until he comprehended that Greg was sorry Mycroft had not had more loving parents. This man whose own father had walked away when Greg was small. Instead of protesting, he turned his face towards Greg’s and invited a kiss. When it came it took his breath away. He sank into the strong, supporting arms, allowing himself to be swept along...

“I would not be the person I am without them.” Mycroft murmured eventually.

Greg caressed his face, brushing a fall of unruly, auburn curls off his brow. “You would be you, love. Of course, you would be you. But maybe you wouldn’t have been the you that tried to bribe me... maybe we would have gotten together sooner...

Mycroft pulled away, troubled — possibly even a little angry. “You had Judith when we met.” He said sharply. “Your daughter was not yet five. No matter what sort of person I was, I could not have had you!” Even now, Greg held that unfortunate episode over him! Would he never consign it to the past!? Mycroft had been desperate for Sherlock!

“Mycroft, love... stop! Whatever you’re thinking right now, stop, please.” Greg pursued Mycroft and pinned him, bodily, to the far side of Grandmére’s French oak desk. “I love you. As you are. Do you understand? I love you! You’re right, I wouldn’t have left Jude... but maybe I should have. Maybe I would have been better off — happier — if I’d let you in sooner. You’re remarkable, Mycroft... I’ve never known anyone like you. There is no one else like you.”

“I thought we were going swimming!” Georgianna stood in the doorway to the laboratory, leggy and gorgeous in a one-piece swimming suit. It was dark like her lustrous hair, which she had bound back into a tight plait.

For a moment, it reminded Mycroft of his severe Grandmére — she too had been beautiful, her skin milky instead of tan, her eyes bright blue... very much like Sherlock. But Grandmére had been distinctly cognizant of her beauty, unlike the girl in front of him now. Like her father, Georgianna did not yet know — or care — the devastation she could wreak.

Mycroft smiled at father and daughter, sliding out of the former’s embrace. “How terribly remiss we’ve been.” He said. “Give us ten minutes to change.”

“You can go out now.” Greg told her. “But not one toe in the water until we get there.”

“You know!”

Swimming in the old lap pool turned out to be much more enjoyable than Mycroft had anticipated. Greg’s new swimming trunks were a form-fitting pair of navy shorts, not unlike boxer briefs, but a thicker material and much shorter in the legs. He moved well in the water, his imperfect stroke propelling him easily from one end of the pool to the other. Rising from the liquid, shaking droplets from his silver hair, Greg was a tawny Adonis.

Georgianna might have been a young Artemis, her bow and quiver set aside for a moment whilst she
splashed and swam. She was lithe as an eel, sliding through the water as effortlessly as her father.

Mycroft lounged on a chaise, watching them. Their beauty was completely unselfconscious.

Not so Mycroft, who felt terribly self-conscious in his swimming trunks. He’d known he needed a swim suit — he had destroyed the pair that he’d worn in Cornwall, worn the day of their rupture — but Mycroft refused to shop for one, refused to try on dozens of trunks, staring at himself in a full-length mirror. The horror!

Rather, he’d had his tailor construct a tasteful pair that would fit and, if such a thing were possible, flatter. They were white with red piping, slim cut with razor-sharp creases, and they buttoned — no tawdry drawstring for Mycroft Holmes!

He had pulled them on at the tailors. The mirror had shown him a long, pale man with a softness at his middle and an unremarkably muscled chest and shoulders. He looked like every balding, middle-aged man who tried to keep in shape whilst spending too much time behind a desk.

It was a far cry from the reflection of the chubby, ginger boy whose royal blue swim shorts had strained at his waist and caught and ridden up the insides of his pudgy thighs, but Mycroft would never shake the image. He could live within that memory with appalling ease, it came unbidden and unwelcome whenever he felt wrong-footed. He remembered the heat of the tears pricking his eyes, the sad smallness of his penis when he had stripped off the offending trunks, the pathetic organ surrounded by the heavy curves of encroaching fat. Turning away from the mirror, Mycroft had dressed quickly in pressed khakis and a blue blazer. He was immovable in his determination to never wear a bathing costume again.

Greg Lestrade had somehow made him forget that promise to himself. Twice.

When Mycroft donned the white trunks and the coordinated red, collared shirt, leaving only the top button undone, Greg had complimented his arse — with a lewd suggestion of what he wanted to do to it — tossed him a towel, and carefully said nothing else.

Mycroft suspected that Greg still wasn’t 100 percent certain why they had broken up on the beach that day. Not knowing what he’d said that had upset Mycroft so, only that he had upset him enough to walk away, Greg prudently chose to hold his hand and say little as they made their way out to the pool. He didn’t press Mycroft to join them in the water, but he aimed his lazy grin in Mycroft’s direction often.

Georgianna challenged her father to a race. Mycroft listened with one ear as they bickered over the rules — would they dive or push off from the wall? One lap or two? Crawl one way, backstroke the other?

There was splashing and Mycroft looked up in time to see them both flip over underwater at the far wall and begin the swim back to his end. Georgianna was quite good for her age and size. He wondered if she’d choose to participate in athletics at her new school.

She touched the wall a second before her father.

“I’m not a baby, Dad! You don’t have to let me win.” She chided him.

“Who says I let you?” Greg challenged.

Georgianna rolled her eyes. “Dad. Seriously?”

Greg grinned. “I only held back a little, G. If I didn’t, I bet it’d be really close.”
“No! You always do that! It’s really quite annoying — I want a fair race! Fair and square! Don’t hold back at all!”

Mycroft watched with interest this time as Greg cut efficiently through the water, his strong stroke easily propelling him ahead of the girl. He reached the far end and flipped neatly, pushing off and gliding away underwater before Georgianna began her own flip. His chest looked magnificent as he backstroked towards Mycroft.

Greg beat his daughter by half the pool length. He wiped the wet from his eyes, looking abashed, but Georgianna just giggled. “Maybe you should do that triathlon, Dad.”

Mycroft turned away. Triathlon was Sanne’s idea. Sanne who looked amazing in her golden triathlon suit, soft in the right places, but unapologetically sinewy in others. With her golden hair let loose and her sun-bronzed skin, she and Greg appeared to be perfect together — even more gloriously gorgeous than he had looked with his wife. It was... intimidating. Next to the two of them, Mycroft felt like a ginger lizard, a sad homunculus on whom Greg had taken pity for a short time.

Worse was the way Greg’s eyes drank in her loveliness, appreciating every smooth curve and twitching muscle. They had slept together in Berlin, Greg had obliquely admitted it, and it was abundantly clear Sanne was interested in a repeat performance.

Mycroft had occasion to see her in her swimsuit twice a week when she swam before running. She and Greg ran together daily now — she had offered to coach him.

“I’ve never had coaching!” Greg had said almost breathlessly. “Sanne thinks I could break 2:30 next year. At my age!”

He’d bitten his tongue. Greg had not wanted coaching before, had not even thought about it — Mycroft would have known if he had, would have found him a very good, very, very heterosexual male coach. Someone old and grizzled. Or glossy and callow. Someone to whom Greg would never be attracted. A buddy, a mate like John Watson.

(Except there was something there, with John. Something about which Greg occasionally and fleetingly felt guilty.)

He was becoming paranoid — Sanne made Mycroft see threats everywhere. He calmed himself with thoughts about how easy it would be to have her deported.

Later that afternoon, in the bedroom Mycroft still thought of as his Grandmére’s, Greg stripped off the form-fitting, navy trunks. Crouching to step out of them, his muscular buttocks flexed so invitingly that Mycroft shed his own trunks and followed Greg into the loo.

“I didn’t think you were going to shower.” Greg said, leaning in to test the water. His hair was damp and smelled faintly of bleach from the pool. Mycroft had not ventured into the wet, thus had planned to skip the bath and simply dress for dinner.

“You changed my mind.” Mycroft purred, reaching round to grip and handle one firm gluteal.

Greg looked doubtfully at the shower — a claw-footed affair with a tall, metal pipe fitted over the spout. The shower head was at the top of the pipe where a flimsy-looking ring was mounted. Secured by another thin pipe to the ceiling, the tub-sized ring had a plastic shower curtain dangling into the tub.

“I’d love to have a wrangle.” Greg said smiling lazily, and scratching his flat belly. “But,” he pulled back the curtain revealing the small space inside. “This doesn’t really suit.”
“You’re spoiled, my dear, by our shower at home.” Mycroft chided. “We’ll have to bathe after. Or
before and after.”

“We can’t, love.” Greg sighed. “We don’t have time.”

“Not if you’re going to argue about it.” Mycroft purred. “We don’t.”

“Mycroft...”

“Please.” It was a word Mycroft almost never said, but today it came easily to his lips.

Greg understood. “Come here.” He pulled Mycroft into his arms and kissed him. His body radiated
heat, his cock beginning to thicken and rise. “We only have time for a quickie.”

“You’d best get to it then.”

Greg hesitated only a moment, laughing, he reached behind Mycroft and turned on the water in the
sink. Nudging Mycroft back, Greg pinned him against the counter. “You’re so dirty.” Greg
murmured into his jaw, licking up behind his ear to that sensitive spot that made Mycroft clench and
shudder. “So very filthy.”

For a long moment, Greg did something with his hands behind Mycroft’s back, and when he took
hold of Mycroft’s prick, his hand was soapy. “You need a wash, dirty man.”

Nuzzling his neck, Greg pushed Mycroft up onto the counter and inserted himself between his legs.
He jacked Mycroft’s cock with one slippery hand and lifted Mycroft’s leg with the other until his calf
pressed against Greg’s shoulder. He reached under the leg and massaged Mycroft’s perineum and
hole with blunt, soapy fingers.

Mycroft moaned his desire, wishing he could shove himself down onto those big fingers.

“That’s right.” Greg cooed, kissing him, his tongue fucking Mycroft’s mouth, licking and exploring
and making Mycroft’s bollocks and hole tingle.

A finger breached, sliding inside of him with a wonderfully soapy slickness. It felt so good, Greg’s
thick digit pushing in past the knuckle. “Yes!” Mycroft bleated. “Yesss, more!”

Greg hummed into their kiss and a second finger slipped in next to the first, carefully avoiding the
sensitive prostate. “Greedy, greedy.” Greg’s fingers began to thrust firmly, his knuckles stretching
the hole wide as they forced their way in and out, in and out...

His other hand slid up and down Mycroft’s shaft, his thumb sweeping over the head, smearing the
fluid of Mycroft’s desire into the suds. “Gotta clean you up.” Greg grunted.

Mycroft relaxed into the sensations, letting his head fall back, enjoying Greg’s hot, nibbling kisses on
his neck.

The velvet iron of Greg’s erection bumped against Mycroft’s thigh, leaving a damp smear. Greg
gasped and began rubbing himself back and forth along the crease between Mycroft’s leg and torso,
in time with his thrusting and stroking.

Mycroft cursed, reduced to blasphemy by Greg’s hands. Sitting up he found Greg’s arse with long
fingers and pulled his hips closer. “Give me the soap!” He demanded.

Greg let go his cock and Mycroft heard him splashing in the water they’d neglected to turn off. Greg
laughed as he tried to pick up the bar of slippery soap with a slick hand. Giggling, he dropped it on Mycroft’s groin, between his thigh and the furl of his ginger bush.

Mycroft reached for it, finding Greg’s hand instead. Their fingers tangled and Greg kissed him. His lips were wet and insistent and Mycroft felt the buzz of his arousal heighten. Greg guided Mycroft’s hand to the soap and returned his own to stroke Mycroft’s erection.

With his hand covered in suds, Mycroft dropped the soap and grasped Greg’s thick cock, making a tight tunnel with his fist. Greg pumped his hips, fucking Mycroft’s hand in rhythm with his fingers moving in and out of Mycroft’s arse. He began to jack Mycroft’s slippery erection in earnest, digging his toes into the tile floor for purchase.

Mycroft wrapped a leg around Greg’s waist, and slung his free arm around Greg’s neck, holding tightly, rotating his hips lewdly. It made the stretch around the blunt fingers more intense as he moved against Greg’s hand.

“Uhn! Harder!” Mycroft commanded, squeezing Greg’s prick as he jabbed into his fist. “Fuck me harder!”

“Bloody menace, you are.” Greg muttered.

“Do it!” Mycroft urged. “Harder!”

Greg let go his prick to grab hold Mycroft’s shoulder, anchoring himself to propel his hips and hand. He turned his wrist and began to stroke Mycroft’s prostate with each shove. Mycroft cried out, writhing frantically.

The staccato thrusts made Mycroft’s head thump against the mirror, made his red prick slap against his belly. Mycroft clutched Greg’s shoulders, hugging him close as thick fingers reamed his arse, strafing his most sensitive spot over and over. He abandoned Greg’s cock to grab hold his own — the moment he touched himself, he knew it was over. His testicles clenched and surged with pleasure and he cried out as his climax jolted through him.

Greg muffled his cry with a kiss, the hand on Mycroft’s shoulder moving to cradle his neck, holding him close whilst he shuddered and seized, spilling hot seed on his own belly. “That’s right.” Greg cooed. “That’s right, love.”

Mycroft panted into Greg’s neck, blind with ecstasy, blinded by the sweat pouring down his brow. The judders receded into trembles and he became aware of Greg holding him close, stroking his back with a slippery hand.

“Happy birthday, my love.” Greg whispered, and pulled back just enough to kiss his top lip gently and let Mycroft’s leg off his shoulder.

Mycroft felt like a big, lazy cat. He wanted to stretch and purr and take a nap. But there was unfinished business. He slowly stood up, allowing Greg to assist him. He twisted his back, feeling it crack.

“You ok?” Greg asked.

“Very.”

Smiling, Greg stepped towards the shower. Mycroft pulled him back. “Not yet.” He said, taking Greg in hand again.
Greg groaned, letting Mycroft reverse their positions. He leaned his hip against the vanity and rested his forehead against Mycroft’s shoulder. Greg began to move, little thrusts into Mycroft’s jacking fist. His thick cock felt good in his hand. Mycroft found a nipple with his other hand, long fingers rubbing and pinching the erect tissue.

Swearing, Greg leaned into his touch, bracing himself against the sink with one hand, holding tight to Mycroft with the other. Mycroft’s palm slapped wetly along the shaft, the sound base and lewd as his hand flew.

“Yes... like that, love... yesss... oh! Fuck!”

When he began to cum, Greg sounded more relieved than anything else. He muffled his cries against Mycroft’s shoulder, his body tense and shaking as he shot his load between them, spattering them both. Slowly, very slowly, he began to relax, sagging until Mycroft’s hold was the only thing keeping him upright.

When the giggles erupted into his shoulder, Mycroft realised he’d been holding his breath. He gulped in big lungfuls as he pet Greg’s coarse hair and murmured to him. The reflexive mirth faded and re-erupted several times before Greg heaved himself upright and with a soft smirk, kissed Mycroft.

“You’re still dirty, birthday boy.” Greg murmured, tracing his finger through the cum on Mycroft’s torso.

“You’ll have to share the shower with me after all.”

Greg sighed. “We’d best hurry before G comes looking for us.” He laughed heartily at Mycroft’s expression of horror.

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Sanne van Poppel arrived early the first time she was invited to dinner. Despite Mycroft encouraging her to bring a friend — “Dinner parties should always have even numbers.” — she’d come alone. She had a bottle of South African wine in hand and a dress that put colour into John Watson’s pale cheeks for the first time since he’d begun the new drug protocol.

Sherlock shot Mycroft the dirtiest look — he was hypersensitive about John, more so than before. The combination of their nascent romantic relationship and John’s illness was wearing on him — Mycroft had not seen him so thin since he left the cocaine behind.

Mycroft shrugged — or rather performed the equivalent micro expression. Sherlock’s eyes narrowed — he couldn’t really think Mycroft was setting John up with the noxious woman!

Heaving a sigh, Mycroft glanced at Greg, giving himself away completely to his brother. It was that or endure an epic snit all evening. Sherlock’s look of outrage changed to exasperation. He rolled his eyes, indicating that Mycroft was overreacting, that he had nothing to worry about.

The tightness around his mouth told Sherlock that Mycroft was worried, a shift of his eyes communicated his abject misery at the eventuality of losing Greg.

Sherlock huffed impatiently — Mycroft was being ridiculous. If only that were so...
Greg’s laugh interrupted them. “Knock it off, you two.” He said. “It’s not polite to exclude the rest of us.” They were sitting outside the glass doors of the extension, at a table that he and Greg had carried out onto the garden patio not an hour earlier. The weather was pleasant, warm with a fragrant breeze ruffling through the late Spring blossoms. John and Sanne sat side by side, Greg leaned against the heavy table, his brawny arms flexed as he rested his weight on his hands. He was at ease, his striking beauty on unintentional show.

“Oh, leave off, Greg. You’ll never get them to stop.” John said good-naturedly.

“What are they doing?” Sanne asked, affecting curiosity. Or perhaps Mycroft was being unfair and she was actually curious. Sherlock’s left eyebrow said that Mycroft had lost all perspective when it came to this woman.

“They have an impenetrable sibling language.” Greg told her. “They stand there looking at each other for a few seconds and have an entire conversation.”

“Mostly they just throw insults.” John added. “Get under each other’s skin.”

“Always makes Mycroft a little huffy afterwards.” Greg smirked.

John chuckled. “Sherlock sulks, sometimes all day.”

“I don’t sulk! I never sulk.” Sherlock insisted, sulking.

John laughed heartily and Sherlock blossomed, his entire demeanour changing, opening and relaxing for John. Mycroft hoped he never looked so pathetically obvious with Greg. Then John gave Sherlock a special smile and took his hand and Mycroft repented — when Greg smiled at him like that, Mycroft felt nought but pure happiness.

With John focussed on Sherlock, Sanne turned to Greg, standing up and leaning against the table next to him.

“Howzit my China?” She asked him.

“Er... China?”

Sanne grinned. “Chum. Pal. How is it going, mate?”

Greg giggled. “Oh, me? I’m fine. How’s the flat search? You find something yet?”

“I think so. It’s not really what I wanted, but I need something now-now.” She said.

“Huh. Where is it?”

“Not too far from here, actually.” Sanne said, studying her fingernails. “If you fancy it, we could train together sometime.”

“Yeah?” Greg was enthusiastic. “That’d be brilliant. You can put me through me paces.”

“You’re sure? I don’t want to make it hectic.”

“Are you kidding? I never get to run with anyone faster’n me — with someone who really knows what they’re doing. I’d love it. Maybe I could break 2:30 next year...” Greg laughed uncomfortably. “I know it’s probably impossible...”

“What? No, it’s not — you can definitely do it! You were, what? Fifth in your age group? Next year,
you can win it!”

Greg scoffed. “That guy ran 2:20.43. I’ll never be that fast.”

“Not with that attitude, you won’t.” Sanne said seriously. “Leave it to me, China, I’ll get you in shape.” She bumped her shoulder against his.

Laughingly, Greg leaned into the bump.

Mycroft had been pretending to listen to Sherlock and John’s conversation whilst he eavesdropped on Sanne and Greg. He was appalled at the turn of events — Greg might see her daily!

“Where are my manners?” Mycroft interrupted. “What can I get you to drink?”

Her attention torn from Greg, Sanne smiled — there was triumph in her smile, Mycroft decided — and took his arm. Mycroft forced himself not to recoil from the intimate gesture. “I’d love a dop!” She said.

Judith had taken hold of him the same way — proprietary, assuming. What was it with Greg’s exes ignoring his personal space? “Would you like some wine? I have some breathing in the kitchen...” He hated leaving her with Greg, but he found her overly-familiar manner abhorrent.

“Oh, let me help you!” She exclaimed tightening her grasp.

“Oh of course.” He put his hand over hers where it curled around his bicep and led her inside.

“This house is so larny!” She cooed, using the South African equivalent of ‘posh.’ Mycroft suspected that she hated it.

“Greg fell in love the moment he saw it.” Mycroft informed her, pulling free as they arrived at the kitchen. “Do you prefer red or white?”

“Oh, red. Shot.” She tailed him into the kitchen proper. “It’s so colourful. So unique.” She murmured looking all around. “And what about you? Did you fall in love with the posie too?”

Mycroft looked her square in the eyes. They were green and tilted exotically. “How could I resist when it gives Greg so much joy?” He asked softly.

Her smile was disingenuous. “That’s so sweet, Mycroft. How long have you been together?”

Sanne wanted to know if Greg had cheated on him with her. She wanted to know if Mycroft knew that he’d slept with her.

Mycroft busied himself with the wine — red for her and Sherlock, white for himself and Greg, fizzy water for John. “We began seeing each other romantically last year. After six months, we... agreed to end it. Circumstance brought us together again at Christmas and he asked if we might try again.” Mycroft’s lips twitched upwards at the memory. “My only condition was that he were serious.” He glanced at Sanne. “As you might imagine, I was unwilling to completely disrupt my life if he were not.”

She nodded silently, looking pensive. “Why did you stop seeing one another?” She asked softly.

“I fear you’ve wandered into private territory.” Mycroft said blandly. He handed her her wine with his coldest smile. “Suffice to say, we were not together when Greg went to Berlin last autumn.”

“Ah, you know.”
Mycroft smirked acerbically. “You’re far from the only person with whom Greg had relations whilst we were separated. It has nothing to do with me.”

“Mm.” She sipped her wine and smiled appreciatively. “It doesn’t bother you?”

“To what exactly are you referring?”

“That Greg and I are friendly?”

Mycroft shrugged. “I would never presume to tell Greg with whom he could or could not be friendly.” He told her.

Sanne nodded. “But it bothers you.” She pressed.

“Not in the least.” Mycroft lied.

“It’s lovely that you have such a secure relationship.”

Mycroft smiled serenely. “What is the point otherwise?”

She blinked, clearly frustrated that her attempts to rattle Mycroft had not succeeded. “Aren’t you worried that having disrupted your life for him, bought this big house, Greg feels beholden?”

Mycroft gazed across the long room at Greg, talking with Sherlock. “No.” He said simply.

“No?”

“If he felt that way, I would know.” He told Sanne.

“Would you?”

“Of course.” He saw she doubted him. “Just as I know that you’ve been married at least twice, that you took this job in London for a change of scenery after your second divorce, that you don’t care for the English weather and prefer cappuccino to tea.” Mycroft met her startled gaze calmly. “And whilst Greg was free to do as he liked in Berlin, you were not. That you did it anyway was the death knell for your marriage.”

“How...! You had me investigated!” Sanne was outraged.

“Not at all.” Mycroft assured her. “The tan lines on your ring finger told me you’d stopped wearing your wedding band quite recently. Thus newly divorced. Balance of probability says your move to London was not coincidental. You’re wearing expensive jewelry, the sort that husbands buy for their wives, but your earrings and your necklace are distinctly different styles, definitely not given by the same partner.

“You aren’t dressed for how cool the evening will become, and you brought no wrap or cardigan. Whilst outdoors, you glanced several times at the accumulating clouds with annoyance. And,” Mycroft allowed himself a small, cruel smirk. “You have the tiniest dash of cappuccino foam on your upper lip.”

Instinctively Sanne touched her lip, searching for the errant foam. Her green eyes had gone dark and hard. “You couldn’t know that what happened in Berlin ended my marriage unless you spoke with my ex-husband.” She snarled.

“Balance of probability.” Mycroft assured her. “The timing suggests it was a factor — it was a guess. Obviously it was a good guess.”
Sanne van Poppel blinked several times, shock warring with her temper. She was realising at last how outclassed she was — Mycroft saw the knowledge wash over her face. She looked at him differently now, respectfully. Almost fearfully. It was a look Mycroft had seen many, many times over the years. Sanne finally understood what Greg might see in Mycroft. She understood who she was attempting to rob.

 Abruptly Sanne laughed. “That was quite the party trick.” She said, only sounding slightly forced. “Though it seems more likely to get you a klap than free dop.”

 “As you say.”

She nodded, refusing to meet his eyes.

They returned to the patio, carrying drinks and canapés. Sanne resumed her place next to Greg, but his brown eyes sought out Mycroft and he soon joined him by the fire pit.

 “Everything ok?” Greg asked in a voice pitched for Mycroft alone.

 “Of course, my dear. Did we take too long?”

 “Depends what you were doing, I guess.”

 “Just getting to know one another better.” Mycroft assured him.

 Greg leaned in and kissed him. “Good.” His lips were soft and warm and their brief touch filled Mycroft with wild joy.

 As they parted to attend to their guests, the breeze picked up and the sh-sh-sh of wind through the leaves whispered about betrayals and lies.

Chapter End Notes

If you’re ever in the South of France, check out the many medieval hilltop villages — they’re interesting and charming and just lovely.

 Marseille is also interesting, and Aix en Provence is well worth a visit but skip Monaco. It’s crowded and tiny and the famous casino is closed to all but bonafide high rollers (as it should be, but boring).

 Some South African slang:
Larny (pronounced lar-nee): fancy, posh e.g. "This hotel is larny".

Now-now (pronounced now-now): similar to just now, but usually more imminent, e.g. "I'm on my way, I'll see you now-now".

Posie (pronounced pozzie): home, e.g. "Come over to my posie when you're ready"

Shot (pronounced shot): cheers, thanks, e.g. "Shot for the tickets, bru".

Slap chips (pronounced slap chips): fries, e.g. "Can I get some tomato sauce with my
slap chips?".

Kif (pronounced kif): cool, awesome, e.g. "The waves were kif today".

Hectic (pronounced hectic): extreme, usually stressful, e.g. "That conversation was hectic".

Howzit (pronounced hows-it): used to ask someone how they're doing, e.g. "Howzit my china?".

China (pronounced china): friend, e.g. "Hey china, it's been a long time".

Dop (pronounced dop): alcoholic drink, e.g. "He's had one too many dops".

Klap (pronounced klup): slap, e.g. "You deserve a klap for that".

Next time - Greg spends some quality time with John; Mycroft finally gives Greg the gift.
Before the day is over Greg has three visitations from his past: one innocuous, one distressing and one remarkable.

Greg was tired. It was still only late afternoon when they landed at Heathrow, but it had been a very long and trying day. He’d been up early to run and spend a few hours at the beach before their flight. His alarm had sounded before dawn and Mycroft gave him a hateful glare. “Sorry, love.” Greg murmured, kissing his brow. “Go back to sleep.”

Mycro reached for him. “Stay.” He said. Looking back later, Greg wished he had stayed — that he’d stayed in bed until it was time to leave for the airport.

But he’d had an excellent reason to get up. A necessary reason.

Greg took Mycroft’s hand and kissed his palm. “You know why I’m doing this.” He said. “We can have a lie-in tomorrow, yeah?”


Greg laughed out loud. “Go back to sleep, pitiful. I’ll be back in a couple hours and we’ll go to the beach.”

“Oh goody.” Mycroft deadpanned.

“We promised Georgianna.” Greg laughed, pulling on his running shorts.

It wasn’t that Greg wanted to leave Mycroft alone in bed — he would have loved a long, lazy morning with ample time to wake up and have decadent morning sex. But Greg needed a long run. Holiday or no, if he slack off too much, he started feeling... he hesitated to say ‘unstable,’ but certainly more susceptible to mood swings and fits of temper. It was a result of his brain injury, Greg knew, just as the precipitous sink into bloody depression seven months ago had been. He told himself he was lucky, that it could have been so much worse — and that was true. But without regular exercise to keep him level, Greg didn’t feel so lucky.

He was out of the hotel ten minutes later, putting his AirPods in his ears and starting one of his playlists (old school rap). Sanne had researched routes online, seeing what was popular on Strava and checking in with her Facebook group of international runners. She’d texted him several options that he’d tried the past few days and was planning to repeat the route along the Mediterranean Sea. There were a few good hills and he wanted to run sprint repeats up them. He was looking forward to it, the effort, the pain...

It was beautiful out, cool and dry, the sun just beginning to send its orange rays over the horizon as Dr. Dre urged him to Fuck The Police. He wished he’d thought to bring the little, clip-on blinking
lights Sanne had given him, but he’d be careful on the road. The reflective stripes on his jacket really lit up when they came in contact with headlights.

Greg told himself the creeping melancholia he was beginning to feel was natural on the last day of a brilliant holiday. He ran harder.

Sixteen kilometres later, Greg was drenched in sweat, his t-shirt had salty crusts down the sides and over his chest as he kept pace with the beat of New Jack Hustler. He mouthed the words along with Ice-T, then laughed out loud at the thought of a middle-aged Brit rapping “Move like a king when I roll hot. Try to flex, BANG, another (redacted) drops...” Especially now that he was solidly middle class — solidly upper middle class since he’d given up his objections to Mycroft housing and dressing him.

He remembered the first time he’d heard rap — it had been Public Enemy and he’d been blown away by the energy, by the anger. Greg had been Georgianna’s age, a denim-jacketed, spiky-haired punk all about Gang of Four and Public Image Limited — music he still loved... but rap... rap had felt life changing.

His quads ached with lactic acid and his lungs hurt. And he was feeling immeasurably better. What’s up? You say you wanna be down, Ease back! Or motherfucka get beat down, Get out my face! Fool, I’m the illest. Bulletproof, I die harder than Bruce Willis...”

The sun was bright and the tang of the surf was in the air. It felt like it was going to be a brilliant day. “I had nothing, and I wanted it. You had everything and you flaunted it. Turn the needy into the greedy, with cocaine my success came speedy...”

Growing up hand-to-mouth in an inner-city tower block rife with gangs and drugs, Greg had related to the music, adopted it as his own. At the same time, it made his situation seem small and tame in comparison. Then he’d been accepted into the police academy — and he’d met Ben — and his situation had changed rapidly.

Georgianna was already at breakfast. Greg sighed as he took the AirPods from his ears and said goodbye to his briefly reclaimed youth. The irony of the expensive AirPods was not lost on him.

“Beach.” His daughter said crossly. She could have gone on her own — possibly she had and come back — but it was ‘boring’ without them. She might be the only sixteen-year-old who wanted her dad on the beach with her.

“Twenty minutes.” Greg promised, grabbing two coffees and an English muffin with egg, cheese, beans and streaky bacon on it. He tried to eat it while balancing the coffees in the lift.

“You’re up.” Greg told Mycroft when he got back to the room. “I brought coffee.”

Mycroft grimaced slightly as he took the cup. “Thank you.” He was freshly showered and dressed in the hot, little, white swimming trunks that showed his arse off perfectly.

“You’re ready for the beach.” Greg kissed him. “There’s tea in the breakfast room.” He reminded his partner. “G’s down there — told her I’d be down as soon as I shower.”

“Something has come up that needs my attention.” Mycroft told him.

Glancing over his shoulder, Greg saw Mycroft had one of the security cameras from the townhouse showing on his iPad — the one in the lounge. Bast was pacing past the fireplace, stalking a feathered toy.
“I can see that.” Greg smirked.

Mycroft smiled. “I’ll join your daughter at breakfast.”

“I’ll meet you in the lobby.” Greg said, turning on the shower.

Greg washed the run off his skin. He’d have to shower again after the beach, and his skin was beginning to feel dry. Maybe he’d use some of Mycroft’s poncey moisturizer...

Georgianna was waiting in the lobby. She had a t-shirt and shorts on over her swimsuit and the exact same knockoff Adidas slide sandals that Greg himself wore. Sometimes he wondered if he was doing her a disservice — Jude would have kitted her out in some kind of over-the-swimsuit dress sort of thing with coordinating sandals. Greg never thought about that stuff until it was too late. And even then, he had no idea where he’d find clobber like that.

His daughter, however, didn’t seem bothered to be wearing running shorts and a t-shirt with her new school’s logo on it. She was talking with a good-looking bloke who, while young, was way too old for his daughter! Greg hoped he wouldn’t have to pry her away...

Greg watched them as he walked down the staircase and across the lobby. Georgianna was tall — almost as tall as Greg himself — but this bloke was taller. He wore loose jersey shorts that skimmed his knees, flip-flops, a bucket hat and a loose vest open under the arms halfway to his waist. It showed off his ripped torso. Greg hated him.

Georgianna was exasperated, Greg knew the toss of her head and the stamp of her foot only too well. She put her hands on her hips and as he got closer, he could hear her voice. She sounded impatient.

Curious, Greg stationed himself at the concierge’s desk and eavesdropped.

“I really like your accent.” The bloke was saying. “It’s sexy.”

“I told you I have stuff to do.” She said bluntly.

“But you haven’t told me your name yet, beautiful.” Greg rolled his eyes — the lad clearly thought he was God’s gift. “Tell me your name.”

Georgianna shook her head and turned to walk away He grasped her wrist with one of his hands. Adrenaline shot through Greg, bringing the sour taste of panic to his mouth. The memory of what John Clay had done to him slammed into his consciousness. He started forward, but stopped himself.

Georgianna was ok — he hadn’t hurt her and Greg wanted to see how she handled the situation. This wouldn’t be the last time a random wanker harassed her. Sadly.

Georgianna had gone completely still. She stared at her wrist trapped by his big hand. Her fingers twitched.

“Don’t go. I’m a lot of fun.” The American whinged.

“Let go.” Georgianna demanded softly. Greg heard her mother’s steel in her voice.

“I will if you tell me your name.”

“Let me go.” Her voice was measured and calm, exactly the way her mum’s voice was right before she lost her bottle.
“Come on, don’t be a bitch... I’m a good guy...”

And there was the end of Georgianna’s patience. With lightning speed, she turned her arm over, turning his with it, and lifted it to chin height where she grabbed his wrist with both her hands and twisted, hard, pulling his arm up behind him in a stress position. She’d freed herself and put him in difficulty in roughly three seconds. He looked stunned.

But only for an instant. He pulled his arm roughly from her grasp, using brute strength, and rounded on her.

Greg didn’t remember closing the metres between the concierge’s desk and Georgianna, but he found himself separating the young man from his daughter with his body. “That’s enough.” He said firmly.

“Who’re you?” The American scoffed.

“Meet my dad, the copper.” Georgianna said.

“Copper?”

“Cop.” Greg supplied. “Policeman. The bloke that’ll throw you in the nick if you don’t walk away right now.”

“I knew you were a bitch.” The callow American sneered. He stalked away deeper into the lobby.

Greg turned to his daughter, and wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “Are you alright?”

She was shaking. “I’m fine.” She didn’t sound fine, she sounded angry and exasperated.

“How long has he been harassing you?”

“God, all morning!”

“Who is he?” Greg asked.

“I don’t know — he was on the beach earlier.” Georgianna told him. “I went running... I think he followed me back to the hotel.” She was touching her wrist where the American had held it.

Greg nodded. “That was an impressive move. You learn that in tae kwan do?”

“Self-defence. We did a whole unit in athletics.”

“Well, you executed it perfectly.” Greg told her. He felt her relax a little under his arm. “You haven’t been to tae kwan do since you moved in with us — I’m sure we can find you classes in the city if you want.”

“I’d like that.” She said, sounding more upbeat.

“You’ll be kicking ass like Okoye.” Greg said, naming the warrior woman from Black Panther — the one who had inspired Georgianna to take up martial arts.

“Dad.” She rolled her eyes.

He wanted to wrap her in cotton wool and keep her safe forever. God, he wished he could. After what had happened to him, Greg was painfully aware of how very easily Georgianna could be victimised. Now that it was over, Greg was surprised that he’d kept such a cool head in the face of
some brute manhandling his daughter.

Mycroft joined them. “What did I miss?” He asked, looking from one to the other.

Though it was late September, they were far enough south that the beach was still hot. Mycroft had arranged for an umbrella and chaise lounges, an ice bucket with bottles of water and an abundance of thick, white towels.

“This is the life.” Greg said, reclining on his chaise. “Thanks for indulging us.” He told Mycroft, taking his hand.

“For you, my dear, anything.”

Greg smiled and closed his eyes, still loosely clasping Mycroft’s hand between the lounges.

On Mycroft’s birthday, they hadn’t swum at all — it was his one request, no water, no beach, no swimsuits. It was a cool day, with a high of 21 and a low of 17, so they all wore long trousers and jackets.

They’d gone to another hilltop village, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, where Marc Chagall had lived his last years and been buried. They’d wandered around the cemetery looking at the French-style graves — instead of earth, there were large rectangular vaults covered with heavy stone all lined up, abutting each other. There were gravestones and monuments at the heads of the vaults, and some were decorated with flowers and plaques. They found Chagall’s vault, it was decorated with small stones, in the Jewish tradition.

They walked through the church, another small affair that reached for the sky. This one was more Romanesque than the one they’d toured the previous day and had paintings as well as the obligatory sculpture.

One was Greg’s favourite sort of religious painting — the holy conversation. It depicted Catholic saints of different eras together, presumably in heaven, having a chat. St. John the Baptist in his bear skin stood with arrow-pierced St. Sebastian, St. Francis of Assisi with his tonsure and robe, blind St. Lucy holding her eyes on a plate, St. Jerome reading a large book and St. Teresa of Avila in ecstasy, wearing her dour nun’s habit. The grouping wasn’t a classical pyramid, it seemed more random, and the painter had been competent but not brilliant — but for Greg those things added to the charm.

“It might as well be my birthday.” He muttered, hoping Mycroft was having a good day.

After lunch — rustic bread and soft cheese sandwiches that tasted better than bread and cheese had any right to taste (Georgianna kept making little “Mmm!” noises as she ate and Greg could not blame her) — they went to the nearby Maeght Foundation museum.

Greg loved it. Filled with Miró, Léger, Giacometti, Braque, Calder and other giants of the middle of
the last century, the sparsely attended museum was something of a paradise. There was a sculpture
garden filled with surreal pieces large and small, rooms and rooms in the long, low, mid-century
building chock-a-block with paintings and drawing — many of which Greg had never seen, not even
in books — and a chapel designed and decorated by Chagall himself. He went through taking
pictures with his phone wishing he had all day to wander through the rooms and gardens.

He was telling Mycroft the difference between automatic surrealism and veristic surrealism — there
were many examples of both in the Maeght — when he caught Mycroft staring at him, rather than
the painting.

“Sorry.” Greg said, feeling a little embarrassed. “You know all this already.”

“No, please continue. I’m always interested in your views on art.”

“You’re not even looking at the art.” Greg countered.


Greg scoffed at him — he appreciated that Mycroft enjoyed the way he looked, but he hardly felt
worthy of it. He wasn’t young and pretty anymore. Maybe he was good-looking, but mostly Greg
was just... regular, just a normal bloke, like tens of millions of other blokes. He wasn’t special. Not
like Mycroft with his genius.

But Mycroft treated Greg like he was some rare treasure. It was flattering and delightful and utterly
ridiculous...

“I’m glad you think so.” He grumped. Otherwise why would someone like Mycroft even notice
him? Everyone thought Greg was the brilliant and powerful man’s boy-toy... well, they were right,
weren’t they?

“No, no, my dear man, you have it all wrong!” Mycroft said, taking Greg’s hand. “You are
especially good looking, and yes, I’m madly attracted to you.” He said into Greg’s ear. “But that
wouldn’t matter an iota if you weren’t a stubbornly ethical, relentlessly patient, insufferably selfless,
ridiculously caring, delightfully charming, unashamed art lover with a brilliant sense of minimalist
design. Yes, you’re handsome and you’re sexy, but so are hundreds of thousands of other men.
Greg, do you really think I would want you more than once if all you had to offer was the physical?
Do you think I’d want to live with you?”

Greg was stunned. “But you... you’re magnificent! You’re a genius. You’re important, Mycroft.
You matter! You could have anyone.”

Mycroft chuckled. “I fear you overestimate my charms, my dear.”

“No — I see how people look at you. I see the frisson, the electricity. They all want you.”

“That,” Mycroft told him. “Is fear. You are the only person — the only person to whom I’m not
related — who has never been intimidated.”

Greg laughed — he felt bewildered and upended, his place in the world abruptly shifting. “I’m pretty
sure John Watson’s never been intimidated.” He said, his mouth moving to cover his confusion. As if
he could hide anything from Mycroft.

“Yes, well, I saw very quickly how good he was for my brother and chose to terrorise him only
enough to force him to ‘dig in his heels,’ so to speak. Doctor Watson has no idea of what I am truly
capable.” Mycroft said softly. “I believe that you do.”
The words were naked, as were his eyes, revealing more of the terrible history Mycroft had lived than he’d admitted before. Greg had suspected, especially after learning of Mycroft’s stint in MI6. “Mycroft... whatever you’ve done — whatever you’ve had to do — I’m confident that you did the right thing.” Greg remembered when he’d doubted Mycroft, when his power and the use of it had nagged at him. He was startled to discover he was no longer worried. Greg found he trusted Mycroft implicitly.

”And that, my dear, that expression on your face at this moment, is the best gift you could ever give me.”

Greg took Mycroft’s face in his hands and kissed him soundly, deeply. Mycroft clutched at his elbows, drawing him closer.

“A-hem!” An elderly patron of the Maeght whacked his cane against a doorframe, startling them. “Hommes dégoûtants!” He hissed.

Mycroft stepped back putting a decent distance between them, but he caught hold of Greg’s hand. “Pardonnez-moi, monsieur, je ne peux tout simplement pas résister à l'idée de jouer avec mon petit jouet.” He said rapidly in what Greg believed to be a perfect, posh French accent.

The old man sneered and hobbled away.

“What did you say to him?” Greg asked. His schoolboy French had gotten him as far as ‘Pardon me, sir, I...’ and no further.

“I told him I could not resist playing with my boy-toy.”

“You did not!” Greg protested.

“I’m not in the habit of lying to you, my dear.” Mycroft tutted. “Would you have preferred ‘arm-candy?’ I believe that’s the term. Or ‘my bit of rough?’”

“I’ll show you a bit of rough!”

Colour heightened Mycroft’s cheeks, obscuring his freckles with a rosy glow. Greg loved Mycroft’s blushes — all the more now that he saw them so infrequently. “Promise?” Mycroft asked, arching an eyebrow.

“Count on it.” Greg told him.

Mycroft’s breath hitched. “Where is your daughter? Isn’t it time we got back?”

Greg laughed with delight and anticipation.

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Arriving back at Grandmére’s chateau, Mycroft disappeared immediately.
“Erm, G... Mycroft and I are gonna take a nap, yeah. Can you amuse yourself for a few hours?”

“I can go swimming.” Georgianna said hopefully.

“Not on your own.” Greg reminded her. He saw she was ready to argue and cut her off. “Listen, it’s Mycroft’s birthday. Give us a few hours on our own, yeah? Erm... if you stay in, maybe wear your headphones.”

“Why...? Ew! Dad!” She tried to grimace but Greg could see the giggles she fought to hide.

“No swimming. And don’t wander too far. Mycroft says there are dairy barns half a klick down the lane. Or stay in and read or sommat. We’re leaving for dinner at 19:40.” He left her in the cavernous lounge with the oval window.

Mycroft was in the loo with the door closed. “Take your time.” Greg called out. “We have all afternoon.” He stripped off and lay down naked on the bed, thumbing through the photos he’d taken at the Maeght, stroking himself idly.

There was one... a painting from the early ‘80s, in a style reminiscent of Chagall, depicting two men standing on the roof of a house, pissing over the side their hands obscuring their impressionist cocks. One wore the head of a donkey, the other a stag. The sky behind them was a glorious blue painted over a bloody crimson. Greg didn’t know what it meant, but it made him feel... rebuked.

The colours — the brightness and the layering — reminded Greg of the first paintings... what he thought of as his first paintings, the huge, wall-sized canvasses in that long-ago exhibition whose vivid colour and powerful beauty had changed him. Those paintings had pulled him back to the gallery over and over, and when they’d gone, he’d mourned.

Greg had felt driven to seek out more art, searching for the feelings the first paintings had inspired in him. He’d gone to the Tate where he’d found Bacon and Hockney... Bacon, all the violence of love and sex vibrating out of his canvases… Hockney whose homoerotic images had moved Greg in an entirely different way than the huge colourful abstracts had. He’d bought the largest Hockney reproduction he could find after his divorce and hung it over his bed... looking back, Greg was astounded he hadn’t even thought about dating men again... he’d been ripe when Mycroft had looked his way that Christmas Eve.

Mycroft climbed into bed next to him — Greg had been lost in his contemplation of the pissing Stag and Donkey and had not heard him come into the room. “Hey.” He said, turning off his phone.

“What were you looking at?” Mycroft queried.

Greg thumbed the phone back to life and showed him the painting. Mycroft studied it for long moments.

“It makes me feel... like the things about myself that I’m proud of... make me look like a fool.” Greg confided.

“The colours are extraordinarily vivid.” Mycroft observed.

“Yeah.” Greg agreed, turning the phone off again and setting it aside. He turned his attention to the vast, beautiful expanse of pale, freckled skin.

An hour later, when Mycroft was bent over the foot of the bed, Greg behind him, arms wrapped around his torso, holding him close, jacking Mycroft’s prick as he thrust up inside him, he vaguely registered his phone alert going off. Greg ignored it. He was making a lavish meal of birthday sex,
and they’d finally got to the meat.

Greg hadn’t fucked Mycroft for a few weeks — more than a few if he thought about it. It was quicker and cleaner to get one another off other ways. But he knew that while Mycroft enjoyed all the sex they shared, he loved bottoming more than anything.

He couldn’t blame Mycroft — it made Greg feel so close when he was inside him, it made him feel connected in a way nothing else did. And physically it felt amazing, shoving up inside the hot, tight confines of Mycroft’s body until he lost control and came, filling his arse with cum, fucking it into him...

“Harder! Bugger me... harder... damn it!”

Greg knew when Mycroft started swearing, he was close, he was ready to explode. That’s what Greg loved best, making Mycroft Holmes lose his bloody, brilliant mind.

When they finally collapsed onto the bed, Mycroft held him through the laughing fits until they were both still and sleepy. “I should probably set an alarm.” Greg said. “So we get up in time for dinner.” He fished his phone out of the bedclothes and turned it on. It lit up with missed texts.

“John?” Mycroft asked.

“Sanne.” Greg told him lazily, navigating to the alarm app.

“Mph.”

“Hmm?” Greg turned to his partner. “What’s that look on your face, love?”

“Nothing... I thought perhaps today... it’s not important.”

“Mycrof... love...” Greg frowned. “You don’t like Sanne. OK.” He could see it on Mycroft’s face — how had he never noticed before? Greg navigated to the alarm app and set it, then turned his mobile off and tossed it aside. “There, she’s gone.”

Mycroft closed his eyes and cuddled closer to Greg’s side. “For the moment.” He muttered softly.

Greg pet his hair, running his fingers through the auburn locks, turning Mycroft’s words over in his mind. He was loath to ask what he meant, not right now. Not with endorphins swimming through his brain. Not when he felt so close and connected to Mycroft.

“Is it because I slept with her?” Of course, it was! How had Greg not seen that?

“Not per se.” Mycroft said.

Greg kissed Mycroft’s forehead, inhaling his almond-scented pomade. “Pretend I’m too stupid to understand what you mean by that.” He said affably. “Boy-toys aren’t expected to have brains.”

Mycroft chuckled into Greg’s side, warm puffs of breath tickling his ribs. “She expects you to sleep with her again.”

Greg laughed. “Don’t be daft.”

“That’s not something of which I have ever been accused.”

“Well, I’m accusing you.” Greg said, pulling Mycroft closer and tangling their legs. “And even if you’re spot on, it doesn’t matter. You’re the only person I want to shag.”
“Mmmm.”

“Not convinced? I might be offended.” Greg joked, kissing Mycroft’s forehead again.

“Mmm.”

“Go to sleep, love.” Greg crooned softly. “You have nothing to be jealous of…” He paused then corrected himself. “Nothing of which to be jealous.”

He felt Mycroft’s smile against his skin.

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“Greg? Greg Lestrade?”

It was jarringly incongruous, that voice! That voice from his past didn’t belong on a beach in Marseille with his daughter. It belonged in a garret efficiency in Fitzrovia. It belonged in a lumpy double bed under a skylight. It belonged in his youth.

Hearing it now made Greg feel queasy with adrenaline.

Greg stepped out of the surf and turned around. It had been more than twenty years, but he easily recognised his first love, the man who’d shown Greg the height and depth of that word.

“Ben.” The name strangled in his throat.

“Greg...” Ben smiled and it hurt. “You look... great. God, Bunny, you look... fantastic.” He stepped closer, his expression one of wonder. “My God! Greg! How are you?”

Greg couldn’t breathe. Ben. Ben! He couldn’t wrap his head around it. There was an awkward moment where they just stared at each other.

Ben still had a full head of wavy chestnut hair pushed back from his face and curling around his ears — ears in which he wore absurd diamond studs — he was still slim as a rail and wore loose, white linen trousers sat low on his narrow hips. The years had changed him — his chest had filled out and sprouted a thatch of hair, he was tanned, lines creased his face and criss-crossed around his stormy grey eyes, which were no longer hidden behind lenses — but he was achingly familiar even now.

And his voice... his voice was exactly the same. It resonated in Greg’s chest, filling his lungs with pain. He felt like he’d been kicked in the balls.

“Good... I’m, erm, good.” He managed. “Ben.”

“God, Greg... come here, you.” Ben stepped forward and after just a second’s hesitation, embraced Greg.

Ben smelled of sunscreen and surf and Ben. Greg felt familiar/strange wiry arms wrap around him, dry, sun-warmed skin press against his own skin wet from the sea, and stiffly returned the hug.
“Yeah, erm... yeah...”

Fingers strayed down his back to the sodden navy swim trunks — all Greg was wearing. It made him feel completely naked. “Still fit for modelling underwear.” Ben murmured in his ear.

“Don’t...!” Greg warned him, panic crawling up through his chest.

“Dad?”

“Oh!” Greg pushed the other man away, hastily wiping the tears that threatened to roll down his cheeks. He held out his hand to his daughter, wrapping an arm around her shoulders, anchoring himself to something real. “This is me daughter, Georgianna. G, this is, erm, Ben Lane, an old friend.”

“Hiya.” Georgianna said, and Greg heard the reserve and suspicion in her tone.

“Your daughter! I never expected...” Ben shook off his surprise. “Pleased to meet you, Georgianna.” He paused. “Is, uh, your mum here too?”

“No.” Georgianna said. “But Holmes is.”

“Mycroft Holmes, at your service.” The words were chilly.

Mycroft stepped up to Greg’s other shoulder, tucking his phone into a hidden pocket in the red beach shirt he wore with the white trunks. He extended his elegant hand formally and Ben shook it, looking from Mycroft to Greg.

The two of them together created a cognitive dissonance in Greg’s brain. “My partner.” Greg managed to say. “Mycroft’s me partner.”

A smile lit Ben’s serious face. “Ben Lane. I’m pleased to meet you too, Mycroft. Are you a copper like Greg — oh, are you still a copper, Bunny?”

“Yeah, I’m a detective now.”

“That’s what you wanted! Good on you.”

“And you? Still at the bank?”

“I head up the economics department at London University.”

Greg snorted. “Poncey bugger.”

Ben beamed.

Mycroft cleared his throat. “Clearly you have some catching up to do. Why don’t Georgianna and I meet you back at the hotel?”

Greg turned to Mycroft, trying to read his expression — after discovering his jealousy of Sanne (as unfounded as that was), he didn’t want Mycroft to misconstrue what was happening here. Not that Greg knew what was happening. “That’s not...” He took Mycroft’s hand, interweaving their fingers. “Mycroft...?”

“It’s fine, my dear. We’ll see you at lunch.” He lifted Greg’s hand to his lips and placed a kiss on his knuckles, but his eyes were hooded. “Mr. Lane, you are welcome to join us for lunch at the hotel. Bring your traveling companion if you like. Come, Lestrade.”
Georgianna ducked Greg’s arm. “See you at lunch, Bunny.” She jeered, bouncing away. They abandoned him too quickly.

“You have a lovely family, Greg. Your daughter is a knockout. And Mycroft is some kind of intellectual? You’ve always had a soft spot for the smart ones.”

Greg turned back to the man who’d left him, who’d shattered his heart into shards he had never been able to properly reassemble. They were too small, too sharp.

He cleared his throat trying to think what to say. “What are you doing here? You hate the beach.” Greg closed his eyes, wondering if he could have said anything less banal.

“You hate children.” Ben returned.

Greg felt grimly defeated. “Life doesn’t always go the way you want.” He sounded bitter.

“No. No, I suppose it doesn’t. How old is she, your daughter?”

“Sixteen.” He saw Ben doing the math, working out how long after they’d parted that she’d been born.

“What changed your mind? About having kids.”

Greg scoffed. “I wasn’t consulted.”


“No, I didn’t.” Greg said, frowning. What was he doing here exchanging too-intimate pleasantries with the bastard who had abandoned him? He should be with Mycroft and Georgianna.

“Sorry. Sorry, I don’t mean to pry. None of my business.”

“No.” Greg agreed. “It’s not.”

“I’m here on holiday.” Ben volunteered. “With my husband, Julian. He’s around somewhere. Probably cottaging — the gents up the beach is a banger. Have you tried it? You and Mycroft.”

“Erm, no. That’s not...” Greg trailed off. “I should head back. Our plane’s leaving in a few hours.” Greg turned towards the hotel and forced his legs to move.

“Greg, wait.” Ben caught up and kept pace with him.

“What do you want?” He didn’t bother trying to keep the irritation from his voice.

“Ah, you’re angry. I can’t blame you for being angry, Greg.” Ben said. “I was a cock. I shouldn’t have left the way I did. I’m sorry... we were just... so young.”

And the memory Greg had been avoiding, the feeling of utter devastation, came flooding back. He was transported back to the day he’d come home and found their garret empty — only Greg’s clothes were left, his clothes, the few CDs and books he owned, three cans of lager in the fridge and a single, chipped mug. Everything else had been Ben’s — the dishes, the linens, the pots and pans, knives, towels, the bread box, the bread, duvet, table, chairs, pillows, rug... if the bed hadn’t come with the flat, Greg was sure Ben would have taken that too. He’d left Greg a blanket, a disposable razor and the shaving cream.
Greg remembered that entire day with perfect clarity. He’d woken next to Ben, the other man pressed against his back. They’d had a quick wrangle, relieving their morning wood, and had breakfast together, a breakfast like a hundred others. They’d kissed goodbye and Ben had smiled the special smile he saved just for Greg. He’d given no clue that he was planning to leave.

Greg walked a beat back then and he’d been involved in an active threat situation. A man with a knife was threatening to harm his co-workers. There was a foot chase and Greg had caught the man, tackling him to the ground and disarming him. He’d been pretty proud of himself for that... he’d been obliged to accompany the other officers to the pub and accept congratulatory pints and had missed tea. He had been hungry and tired and looking forward to a kiss and a cuddle with the brilliant and handsome man he loved so much.

Greg’s first thought was that they’d been burgled, that Ben might have been hurt or even kidnapped. But he quickly realised that no burglar would have taken so much that was essentially worthless. No burglar would have taken everything. Ben had packed up his possessions and moved out. Hunting for him wouldn’t accomplish anything other than to humiliate Greg further.

Numbly, he’d drunk one of the lagers, smoked a fag, then stripped off and laid on the lumpy mattress wrapped in the blanket. He’d used the wadded knot of his shirt and vest as a pillow.

He hadn’t slept so much as he’d drifted in a state of semi-unconsciousness, his misery intruding into his dreams like shadows, like a sky darkening for an oncoming storm... in the morning, he woke alone. Greg found a dusty tin of beans in the cupboard, but had nothing to open it with and naught but his fingers to eat the beans if he had. He had no towel, no shampoo, no deodorant, no hair wax, no fingernail clippers, forks, knives, spoons, plates, food, loo roll... Greg made a list with the only paper and pen he had, his copper's notebook — the little hand sized book he wrote down the details of his beat, of his calls and interviews, bookings and incidents.

In lieu of breakfast, Greg had drunk water from the tap and smoked through the remainder of his cigarettes. He’d gone to work bleary-eyed and bed-headed, depending on yesterday’s deodorant to keep him from being offensive. He’d slept-walked through his shift, going through the motions, retaining none of it but the devastating reality that he was alone... that Ben hadn’t even loved him enough to say goodbye...

“I was too young.” Ben continued. “And I was a coward. I knew if I saw you again, I couldn’t go through with it...” Greg had stopped walking away at some point, and now he stood, staring at their feet. Beyond the long, linen trousers, Ben was barefoot.

“Would that have been so bad?” The words were out before Greg could stop them, their soft melancholia cringe-inducing.

“No.” Ben said. “But I didn’t know that then. If we’d met five years later...”

“Was there someone else?” Greg demanded huskily.

“No! No... only you... I just wasn’t ready... to be tied down...”

“Right.” Greg said crisply. He turned and began walking again.

“Greg... Bunny...” Ben caught his arm and somehow Greg’s feet could no longer move. Ben’s fingers whispered across his neck and onto Greg’s shoulder. “Come here.” Hands stroked his arms, his sides, his jaw. Breath ghosted his cheek, warm and smelling of fags.

For a long second, Greg was suspended in time, in the past, and Ben! Ben was with him again. The
texture of his lips had not changed… not in over twenty years.

Twenty years! Greg jerked away. “What are you doing!?”

Ben looked at him intensely. “We should talk, don’t you think?” He reached out again but Greg shied away and Ben didn’t press. “I’ll give you my mobile number. You can ring me.”

“I don’t want your number. I don’t want to talk.”

Ben shuffled his bare feet in the sand. “I know I don’t deserve it… but seeing you… it’s unfinished… Greg…” He sucked in a breath his once-dear face crumpled with regret. “If you change your mind, ring London University and leave a message with the economics department. I’ll get it.”

“Ben, why on earth would I want to talk with you?!”

“When I said ‘talk,’ I meant talk. Nothing more.”

“You kissed me.”

“You let me.”

The fury rose like a tidal wave, like a hurricane, consuming and destroying everything in its path. “Fuck you!” Greg whispered harshly. “I loved you! I loved you beyond reason! I thought I was going to spend my life with you! I was gonna introduce you to me Mum — I was gonna come out! But you! You left and couldn’t even be bothered to say goodbye! You disappeared from my life, from our friends’ lives, from our neighbourhood... you vanished! And you didn’t even leave me a bloody towel! Let alone an explanation.”

“Bunny…”

“STOP CALLING ME THAT!” Greg demanded. How could this still hurt so much!? “I was... I was wreaked when you left. No one has ever hurt me like you have. Not me wife... no one! Just go away, Ben Lane. You’re good at that.”

Ben grabbed Greg by the arms. “It destroyed me too.” He said with an urgency that astonished Greg. “I’m sorry I wasn’t… wasn’t smart enough to know better.”

Greg pulled away from Ben’s burning touch. Then he scarpered, as fast as the faux Adidas sandals would let him.

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Greg took the long way back to the hotel — that’s what he told Mycroft. In truth, Greg had run aimlessly away from his past, until he tripped on the bloody sandals, landing heavily on his hip and shoulder. He’d lain there in the sand, his head buzzing with thoughts he couldn’t quite grab onto. Eventually he roused himself and started walking, leaving the beach and tramping inland, vainly attempting to escape his poisonous reflections…
When the trilling of his phone became too annoying to ignore, he saw the worried texts from Georgianna and Mycroft — and that they were in danger of missing their flight. Greg looked around — he had no idea where he was. Not that it mattered. He paged an Uber and took it back to the hotel. He met his daughter, his partner and his luggage in the lobby.

Mycroft had thoughtfully put a change of clothes in his carry-on and Greg pulled on the shirt immediately. He was grateful that no one talked much in the cab to the airport.

After they’d checked in for their flight and been ushered to the quietly extravagant lounge that Mycroft’s status afforded them, Greg went to the bog to change. He was sandier than he’d realised — it was in the delicate areas under his trunks, in his hair, sticking to his body...

He brushed off as well as he could, donned the khaki trousers and tied his shoes. Greg washed his hands and his face, regretting that he hadn’t showered. He studied himself in the mirror — he looked haggard and sunburned... but mostly he looked shockingly, astonishingly the same. It felt deeply wrong.

Ben fucking Lane! For years Greg had held out hope that he’d run into Ben somewhere — on a case, at the Waitrose, on the tube — and that Ben would explain, would tell him how it had all been a terrible mistake... and beg Greg to give him another chance... years into his marriage to Jude, he’d carried a little torch for the man.

But time had finally snuffed it out. Greg had slowly become able to appreciate the good parts of his first relationship and try to forget the ending.

Now his fantasy had come true and, after he’d gathered his ridiculous wits, Greg had not wanted any part of it. It was twenty years too late. He wished Ben had stayed gone.

Seeing him shouldn’t have been so painful. Greg sighed. He’d tell Dr. Ephroem — maybe he could make sense of it. Maybe his therapy could inure Greg to it, relieve the hurt.

On the plane, Greg settled into the seat next to Mycroft. Georgianna was across the aisle — she had the window seat and an affluent older man had the chair next to her. On the way to France, Greg had switched to sit next to his daughter on her first plane ride — though her first was so much more plush with complimentary champagne and warm ramekins of mixed nuts to snack on. This time he lifted the armrest that divided his seat from Mycroft’s and reclining the chair, curled into his partner’s side. “Is this ok?” He asked.

“Of course it is, my dear man.” Mycroft sounded pleased. He reclined his chair to match Greg’s, and stretched his arm around Greg’s shoulders, holding him close. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No. God, no.” Greg put his AirPods in his ears, pressed his face against Mycroft’s ribs, crossed his arms over his chest and closed his eyes.

The old school hip hop playlist Greg had listened to on his run started up. It was soothing, the loudness, the anger — going back to a time before Ben, back to a time when his biggest problems were eating packaged ramen three meals a day, and making out that his patched charity shop jeans were on trend.

He’d been wearing patched second-hand jeans when he’d met Ben. Greg had just turned nineteen and was working three shit jobs while he waited to start at the police academy. He felt excited and lucky and terrified and very, very, very grateful he didn’t have to enlist in HRH Armed Forces — this was back in the day they didn’t like queers in the military. Greg knew he’d have an easier time passing if he didn’t have to shower and sleep with the other men.
He’d gone with a girl he’d liked and her gay friend (who liked him) to a gay club. A boy on the dance floor caught his eye immediately. He was an androgynous, gamin twink with big blue eyes and bleached blonde hair. His t-shirt was too short and as he danced it rode up to reveal his hairless abdomen. He was so thin and pale Greg would have thought he was ill if he hadn’t been dancing so boisterously.

At that time (with the arrogance of youth and beauty) Greg rarely thought about pursuing anyone — people were interested in him, they flirted and bought him drinks and asked him to dance and asked him out for coffee and asked him home for sex. He’d never had to ask for anything — making eye contact was enough.

Greg waited (ignoring the club clones vying for his attention). The pretty boy was at the club with two thirty-something men who were clearly together and a bookish looking bloke closer to his own age. He flitted amongst them, laughing and drinking, checking out the muscle queens and sniggering at the hairy leather-men.

Eventually, he looked in Greg’s direction and Greg caught his gaze and held it. It was electric, the connection. It felt like more than just the meeting of eyes. With a grin, the boy swaggered through the melee to where Greg sat at the bar.

“Erm, hi.” The boy smiled and Greg saw the familiar light of approval in his eyes.

“Wanna dance?” He asked.

“Cheers.”

Two hours later, Greg was snogging the boy in a taxi on the way back to the boy’s flat. The only uncomfortable part was the boy’s three flatmates in the cab with them. But he had drunk enough not to care much. He recalled being intimidated by the posh neighbourhood the cab took them to, but the pretty boy’s closet-sized bedroom was smaller than his own in the tower block and he relaxed.

The sex was unexceptional. Greg barely remembered it.

Greg stumbled out of the boy’s tiny bedroom early. He was hungover and needed a wash. He’d put his second-hand jeans on in the loo, finding a flannel to wipe the dried cum from his skin, and toothpaste to excise the foul taste from his mouth. When he was dressed and passably groomed, Greg went looking for the exit.

“There’s tea if you want it. And toast. Probably help the hangover.”

It was the bookish flatmate, the one with the black-framed glasses and shaggy hair that curled around his ears. He sat at the table in the big, spotless kitchen, newspaper in hand, waving at a steaming mug. Greg took it. “Cheers. Hope I didn’t wake you.”

“No. No I have to get into work early — the Asian markets, you know.”

Greg didn’t know, but he didn’t ask. He accepted the toast offered to him and began to butter it.

“Where do you work?”

“Price International. It’s a bank.” The flatmate added seeing Greg’s blank look.

“Posh.” Greg remarked.

The flatmate rolled his eyes behind his glasses. “What do you do?”
Greg grinned — he knew it was disarming. “This and that. Nothing worth mentioning.” He stocked shelves and bagged groceries, delivered Chinese takeaway, hauled boxes with a removal firm and, when he could get it, worked construction. “I’m starting at the police academy next month.”

“You want to be a cop?”

“A detective.” Greg confided. “But I have to be a cop first.”

He was regarded sceptically from behind the black-framed glasses. “I wouldn’t have expected someone like you to want to be a cop.”

“Detective.” Greg reminded him. “What do you expect of ’someone like me’ then?” He asked with a good-natured chuckle.

“I don’t know… underwear model.”

Greg laughed out loud — then caught himself and lowered his voice. “Sorry. Don’t want to wake anyone.”

“Don’t worry, they sleep like corpses.”

Greg was still laughing. “No one who’s seen me in me pants has ever suggested that.”

“Too busy taking them off you, I’d guess.” The flatmate said dourly, turning away to gather freshly toasted bread onto a plate.

Greg couldn’t deny it. “What do you do at the bank? Don’t tell me you show off your pants.”

The bespectacled flatmate scoffed. “There are a few senior partners who probably wouldn’t mind… no, I’m an economist.”

Greg didn’t bother hiding his surprise. “What does an economist do?”

“I analyse data in order to predict trends in interest and exchange rates.”

Greg snorted in surprise. “I can’t decide if that sounds dead interesting or deadly dull… but what do I know, I put tins of veg in bags at Tesco.

Perhaps responding to Greg’s expectant look, the other man answered. “It’s relatively interesting — and it pays well enough. But I’m not staying — I’d rather do pure research.”

“Will someone pay you to do that?” Greg felt entirely out of his depth, but he was enjoying talking with a bloke so different than anyone he knew.

“If I got my doctorate. Academia will never pay as well as banking, but I could do my own research. I wouldn’t be stuck with interest rates.”

“And exchange rates. Don’t forget the exchange rates.” Greg joked.

Grey eyes sharpened behind the glasses. “You’re smarter than you look, I think.”

Guffawing, Greg covered his mouth to avoid spraying toast crumbs across the table. “I’ll have you know modelling underwear is a highly skilled profession. Takes years of study.”

The smile changed the serious face into one vastly more welcoming. “Sorry. Yeah, I admit to some prejudice. The blokes my brother brings home are generally daft as rocks. My brother’s not the
sharpest stick himself.”

Greg pointed towards the door he’d emerged from earlier, in his pants, as it happened, carrying his clothes. “He’s your brother?”

“I know. We don’t look a thing alike. He’s the pretty one and I’m the smart one.” It was said with resignation, like an oft-repeated mantra.

“You got the better end of that deal.” Greg told him. “’Cause you’re not hard on the eyes. Not at all.” He wasn’t, now that Greg really looked at him. He hid behind the serious demeanour and shaggy hair, but he was as lean and graceful as his brother. Greg bet that without the glasses, the grey eyes were more beautiful than the blue ones. Certainly, there was more going on behind them. “Are you blushing?” Greg grinned.

“No, of course not.” The man lied. “Stop laughing.”

“I’m not laughing.”

“You are.”

“I’m not laughing at you.” Greg told him.

“Then why?” He demanded. “Why are you laughing.”

“Because I’m delighted. You’re delightful.”

Greg saw he’d caught the economist completely off guard. “Do you flirt with everyone you meet?” He asked after a moment, with a challenging glare.

“Nope.” Greg said, leaning back in his chair. “Only the very few who’re interesting.”

“Last night you were happy enough to flirt with my brother.”

“I didn’t flirt with your brother.” Greg told him truthfully. “I didn’t have to.”

“No, I guess not.” The defensiveness in his posture slowly dissipated. “Tell me,” he asked curiously. “Looking like you do, aren’t you worried no one will take you seriously? I mean, as a cop.”

Greg shrugged. “Most people just see the uniform, so no, I’m not worried about that. And if I do make detective — when I make detective.” He amended. “I figure it’s a good thing if people underestimate me. It makes them careless.”

The economist nodded. “And you’ve never been tempted to… coast. You could get by nicely on your looks and charm.”

Greg snorted. “Not going to look this way forever, am I?” He said affably. “And ‘coasting’ is boring.” It went against the grain. The last thing Greg wanted was to be kept.

“Is it?”

“Look, I’m not above taking the occasional bit of preferential treatment, but I’m not going to depend on it.” Greg told him. Then, feeling incensed, he added, “And I’m not going to be one of those empty-headed wankers who get promoted beyond their competence and make a fool of themselves and their profession. I’m not saying I’ll know everything, part of it is knowing when to ask for help, but I will be the real deal.” Greg sighed, he hated feeling defensive — especially when he had no reason to be. “Yeah. Thanks for breakfast. It has helped my hangover.” He took his mug and plate to
the sink and headed towards the door.

“Wait.” The economist had followed him. “Which Tesco?”

“What?”

“You said you bag groceries at Tesco. Which Tesco?”

“Erm, down on Garvey high street. Why?”

“So I know where to find you.”

Greg stared. “What does an economist want with a bag boy?”

“Detective.”

“Future detective. Maybe.”

“Definitely. You’ll do it.”

Greg paused, wondering where the man’s certainty came from, wishing he shared it. “What’s your name?”

“Ben.”

“Maybe I’ll see you at Tesco, Ben.” He said turning to go.

“Wait, you didn’t tell me your name.”

For half a second, Greg considered being coy, not telling him. But he hated knobs who did that. “Greg. Greg Lestrade.” He said, offering his hand.

Ben took it firmly and they shook. Ben’s hand lingered in his and, looking into stormy grey eyes, Greg felt his interest in this peculiar man growing.

Six months later they moved into the drafty garret flat together.

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London was much the same as when they’d left, grey and threatening rain. Greg was looking forward to being home. He was exhausted from the long, strange day and wanted only to retreat to their bedroom, stand in the shower for fifteen minutes to rinse all the sand from his crevices, and collapse into bed. He was aware that Mycroft would want him to eat — Greg had missed lunch and had dozed through the snacks on the plane. But he wasn’t hungry. He hated that seeing Ben had affected him so deeply. Ben, that bastard, that utter knob… why hadn’t he stayed in the past!?

In the car, Mycroft looked anxious. To anyone else (Sherlock and Mummy aside) he looked as pristinely self-contained as usual. But Greg knew his tells. He felt guilty — he’d spent half the
Spring depressed and Mycroft had been nothing but patient and calm. He’d given Greg space when he needed it and crowded in on him when he hadn’t, reminding him of the joys of the world and of their relationship when it no longer seemed real.

Greg reached out and took Mycroft’s hand. “Sorry.” He said softly. Greg didn’t want to say more in front of Georgianna, but he’d answer his partner’s questions when they were alone.

“Quite all right, my dear.” Mycroft said patting his hand and Greg almost believed him. But the air of anxiety clung to Mycroft, clouding the car with unease. It made the drive seem interminable.

Finally, they were home. The driver popped the boot and unloaded their bags. One of the agents on duty came out to help carry them inside and up the narrow flights of stairs.

Greg put his arm around his daughter as the gate closed and locked behind them. He should ask her how she’d liked France, what her favourite part had been… it would have to wait until tomorrow… Greg would go running and then he’d feel himself again.

Mycroft entered the wrong code in the front door lock. Greg stared — Mycroft never made mistakes like that. “Are you OK?” He murmured.

“Fine.” Mycroft insisted, entering the correct code and pulling the door wide for Greg and Georgianna. His anxiety was a shroud of tension knotting his jaw and his fists.

Greg had his and his daughter’s carry-ons in hand, so it was difficult to stifle the huge yawn that split his face in half. Distracted, he was in the centre of the room before he saw it. But when he did, it flattened him. Greg dropped the bags. They thumped on the parquet floor.

For an eternity, Greg couldn’t speak — he couldn’t believe his eyes. He stood there stupidly, gaping at the far wall.

Hung there, consuming almost the entirety of the gently curved wall, was one of the paintings, one of Greg’s first paintings, one that he’d seen in that long-ago gallery, that he’d never thought to see again. Huge swathes of colour danced and intertwined, other colours peeked from beneath them, smaller shapes and strokes appeared, floating amongst the bold hues… the entire thing moved and seduced.

“Mycroft…?” It was barely a croak.

“Do you like it?”

“Do I…?” Greg couldn’t take his eyes off it. It was stunning… amazing… how had Mycroft known? Had Greg told him? “Where…?” He tried to clear the confusion from his throat. “Where did you find it?”

“It took a bit of research, as you might imagine. But knowing the neighbourhood, the timeframe and the description, it was possible. The artist’s name is Karen Van Dyne and she was very generous in helping me track down paintings from that particular exhibition. I chose this one… the movement and tension is compelling… I hope I chose correctly.”

“My God, Mycroft… my God.” Greg abruptly sat down on the floor his legs unable to hold his weight.

“Dad?!”

“Greg?”
His face was wet and he could hardly breathe. The colours lost focus, blurring outwards, inwards, swimming and swirling towards him... it was a riot, it was joyful and angry and playful, energetic and still, violent and seductive, breath and wind and the aroma of spring flowers, the song of a bird in the morning and the setting of the sun... it was sharp and drew blood and it was a balm that soothed softly... and it was so, so difficult... it was everything all at once. It was too much. Too much. It would overwhelm him.

It was all the shards of his heart. It was love.

Slowly Greg opened his arms in welcome.

Chapter End Notes

A lot going on here.

First off, Provence is gorgeous, completely worth a visit. There are tons of medieval hilltop villages — because hilltops were easier to defend from marauding pirates. (!) Every single one of them is insanely picturesque. They all have a church filled with indifferent paintings and sculpture, and many have a cemetery. St. Paul de Vence really does have Marc Chagall's grave and the fantastic Maeght Foundation museum. And if that's not enough, the food is fucking insane. The bread and cheese alone is like nothing you've ever tasted before. And it's the birthplace of Rosé, which is much better than pink wine has any right to be.

NWA, Fuck The Police - https://youtu.be/9jOqOlETcRU

Ice-T, New Jack Hustler - 'I die harder than Bruce Willis.' Oh Ice-T, how I love you! - https://youtu.be/3_RoP_9mMh8

Chagall’s grave - https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/3759/marc-chagall

Holy Conversation - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacra_conversazione

The Maeght Foundation - https://www.fondation-maeght.com/

Automatic vs Veristic Surrealism - https://elearning.psu.edu/demos/art010/automatism-and-veristic-surrealism

Marseille - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marseille

Next week: John Watson
Confessions

Chapter Summary

A happy event in less than happy circumstance. Confessions lead to greater understanding.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had taken Greg by surprise, discovering how insecure Mycroft felt in their relationship. He always projected confidence, control. Learning that he considered Sanne a threat had been... revelatory. Greg had figured Mycroft could read him like he read everyone else, figured that he simply knew how much Greg had invested in their relationship, how little anyone else interested him.

He liked Sanne, sure. And he valued her coaching and her company on his long runs. But Greg had never considered sleeping with her again. It had been fun in Berlin — possibly even necessary for Greg to believe he was more than a broken man, brain-injured, impaired... a mental cripple — necessary for Greg to believe he could be fully himself again. He was grateful to her for that, he always would be. But after sleeping with her, he had none of the urgency to see her again that he’d had with Mycroft.

God, taking Mycroft apart — proper, reserved, buttoned-up, preternaturally controlled, untouchable Mycroft Holmes — taking him apart slowly with his hands and tongue and lips and his cock, turning Mycroft into a blushing, panting, desperate, wanton beast, begging Greg, demanding from Greg fulfilment... satisfaction... pleasure... it was intoxicating. It was pure and beautiful and addictive. There was nothing and no one better than that. Greg had craved it ever since that first Christmas Eve hook-up... it made his prick perk up just thinking about it.

After the London marathon, almost the first thing Greg had done was tell Sanne about Mycroft. He had, he thought, been unequivocally clear — he was in a relationship, he was in love, he was romantically and sexually unavailable. It was astonishing to him that Mycroft hadn’t deduced it.

And then the painting... the bloody amazing painting!

It told Greg so much about the man he’d fallen for. The incredible thoughtfulness, the understanding, the effort it had taken to secure the painting — this special painting — it was overwhelming. It was... love.

While Greg was still trying to get his head around seeing the painting again, having it here in his home — and what that meant — Mycroft had misinterpreted his reaction.

“I can have it removed...” Mycroft began. He was trying to sound composed, but he couldn’t hide his distress. “I apologise... I miscalculated...”

Georgianna made a small, inarticulate noise. “Don’t worry, Miss Lestrade... don’t...” Mycroft broke off his attempt to reassure her. They neither of them understood. “Can you run down to the kitchen and get your father a glass of water?” Greg heard her clatter down the stairs.
He had to tell them. Tell him. “Mycroft.” Greg began to push himself to his feet. “Mycroft...”

Mycroft rushed to help him and Greg grabbed hold of his lover, pulling him into his arms and clinging to him with a ferocity he hadn’t felt in decades. A ferocity he’d forgotten he was capable of. “Thank you!”

“What?”

“It’s perfect. It’s perfect, Mycroft. Thank you.”

“You like it?”

“I love it. Of course I love it! It’s... I can’t believe you... remembered... you brought it here... for... for me.”

“Well...” Mycroft seemed to be shifting gears, his demeanour changing. “Then I must persuade you.” He murmured, and Greg heard the relief and joy in his voice. “I assure you the evidence is compelling.”

Greg laughed and that somehow made Mycroft look and sound even happier.

They’d talked for a long time that night, Greg and Mycroft.

“I want to tell you about the beach today... about Ben.” Greg said softly.

They were in their bed, Greg still damp from the shower, in the big, mostly empty bedroom. Moonlight shone through the tall front windows, illuminating Greg’s Hockney print on the far wall. Bast was curled in a little ball at Mycroft’s side, sighing in her sleep.

Mycroft kissed Greg’s forehead. “My dear, you don’t need to explain.”

Lying in Mycroft’s embrace, it was easy to talk — perhaps, as with sitting in a car, it was that they were close but weren’t looking at each other. And there was comfort in having Mycroft’s arms around him. Especially this relaxed and contented Mycroft.

“I want to... I’ve never talked about him... I want you to know what he was to me... what happened.” Greg did not want Mycroft to feel insecure about Ben. Especially not Ben.

“I admit to having... some curiosity.”

Greg chuckled briefly, but it died leaving his throat dry as dust. “He was...” His voice was a husk. He swallowed and licked his lips and began again. “He was my first love. I was nineteen and I fell hard. It was amazing... I thought it was incredible.” Greg scoffed. “I thought I was bloody Cook in New Zealand, I thought I had discovered love.

“We lived together for over two years.” Greg swallowed. “And then he left me — I came home one night and he was gone. Not a word, not a... a note, not a hint... it was... devastating. All these years, I’ve wondered what I had done wrong — what I had said or done. Or hadn’t done...

“I thought it must be because I wasn’t out, wasn’t ready to come out. I wouldn’t hold his hand in the street... I was a bloody police trainee — the Met wasn’t exactly a bastion of tolerance back then. I didn’t see how I could!” Greg shifted restlessly and Mycroft’s hands began rubbing soft circles on his skin, petting and calming him.

“It’s so different now, innit? No one bats an eye at the Met — well, mostly. Thirteen-year-olds come
Gay marriage... the love that dare not speak its name is now... just love. I never thought it could happen, not in my lifetime.

“But it was different then. It was threatening somehow, being gay or bi. Like maybe it was a disease a man could catch, so he had to keep it away, belittle it, kill it, at any cost. Gay men were taunted, attacked, beaten... ‘faggot’ was about the worst insult you could hurl. So, I lied. I lied to me mates and me mum. I lied to the other coppers. I hated lying. It was like agreeing with them...

“We didn’t argue about it, Ben and I... not exactly. But I knew it wasn’t what he wanted. He was discrete, but he was out. I thought he was so brave...

“All these years... seeing him again wasn’t anything like I expected — like I’d hoped for. I guess I built him up in my mind... today, seeing him, I realised how sad that is.

“At first, it was just shocking, seeing him. And then the nostalgia hit — like a cricket bat to the head. It was disorienting. It felt like... well, like ‘I know him.’ He was so familiar...God, it hurt.

“Because I don’t know him — I don’t think I ever did. I should have gone with you back to the hotel. I wanted to — after all this time I had nothing to say to him.

“But he... he talked.” Greg sucked in a tremulous breath, holding back the flood of emotion threatening to spill forth. “It wasn’t me! All these years, blaming myself... It wasn’t me. It wasn’t about coming out. It wasn’t about anything I did or... or not being good enough. It was him... his... immaturity...

“I was furious. At him, yeah. But mostly at myself for loving him. God... I feel so stupid! I loved him for so long. He left me and I still loved him. I thought I’d never love anyone as much. But I never knew him.

“And he had the gall to proposition me today! After what he did... what he put me through, he actually thought I’d be willing to... I was such an idiot, thinking this... this wanker was worth my time... my pain. I was so angry, I had to get myself away before I battered him.”

Greg was gritting his teeth, his entire body clenched with tension. He blew out a breath and consciously attempted to calm down. Mycroft’s hand moved into his hair, massaging his scalp. Greg wanted to arch his back like Bast and push into the caresses.

“I remember when I started seeing Jude, she was so straightforward. Brash. I thought ‘I’ll always know how she’s feeling’— but turns out the joke was on me. I had no idea she was... was cheating... until bloody Sherlock said it. Then it was just... obvious. I was a fool. I am a bloody fool.

“Mycroft... fuck. I know you love me — you’re affectionate and caring and I can tell when you’re happy. Hell, this house, the painting, you love me better than I deserve.”

“My dear...” Mycroft began, his voice tender.

“No, listen, please. I know that you love me. And sometimes I know that you’re tense or preoccupied. If I ask, you tell me it’s work.” Greg sighed. “Maybe I have a type. Maybe I’m too ridiculously stupid to even be in a relationship.”

“Greg...”

“Mycroft... all I’m asking is don’t blindside me. If something is bothering you — like Sanne, or anything, for the love of god, please just tell me. Talk to me. I love you! I don’t want to lose you! God, I so desperately don’t want to lose you, Mycroft.
“Please, promise me just that — if it’s about us, I don’t care how awful it is, or how obvious you think it should be — just *tell me*. Give me a chance.”

_____

Greg worried the ring in his pocket, its smooth, unyielding surface growing warm in his hand. It was platinum, its narrow surface biting into his fingertips. If he touched the inside of the band, he could feel the slight roughness of the engraving.

John Watson struggled to his feet — Greg stopped himself from helping, John had been clear that he wanted to do this part on his own.

He saw his worry reflected on Sherlock’s pale face, but when John turned to look at him, it had vanished, replaced by a pleased smile with just a hint of arrogance. Greg exchanged a glance with Mycroft who shrugged infinitesimally — he didn’t disapprove of what was happening (on the contrary, he was grateful), but Greg knew how troubled he was over his brother’s state of mind.

John recited his vows in a clear, strong voice and Greg thought, ‘*If I close my eyes, everything will be normal.*’ John would be healthy and vigorous, Sherlock impatient as usual and overly dramatic. They would bicker until Greg intervened, reminding them of the murder they were meant to solve...

Greg recalled the last time Sherlock had made a vow to John, his rich baritone steady despite the devastation he had to have been feeling. A half hour before, Sherlock had stood next to John as he pledged himself to Mary, and Greg had just felt sad. *It was too bad*, he remembered thinking, *that John doesn’t go both ways, because no one would ever make him as happy as Sherlock made him. And no one would ever love him better.*

Fishing the ring from his pocket, Greg handed it to John and watched as he slipped it on Sherlock’s finger, then accepted an identical one. Everyone pretended not to notice how much his hands shook. The kiss was brief. To the sound of applause, John dropped heavily into the wheelchair, exhausted from his efforts.

Sherlock took command of the chair, pushing it down the short aisle and out of the municipal wedding chapel, passing the other guests: Mrs. Hudson, holding little Rosie’s hand; Molly Hooper from the morgue; a chubby bloke Greg recognised as a doctor from St. Bart’s; three teenagers who were almost certainly homeless; John’s surly-looking sister; Janine, Mary’s maid of honour; Bill Wiggins, a known drugs dealer; Aunt Pansy and Aunt Patty; Randall, the strapping home nurse Mycroft had hired to care for John; and Georgianna.

Greg took Mycroft’s hand as they followed — they’d witnessed the marriage license and stood up with the couple. Mycroft had held Sherlock’s ring to give to John.

“Where are your parents?” Greg whispered as they led the guests outside.

Mycroft concealed a shudder. “I sent them to Ibiza. Sherlock requested I arrange it so that they would be unable attend. He claims they sap John’s energy.”

Everything sapped John’s energy these days.

Mycroft had provided a car to ferry the happy couple (along with child, landlady and nurse) to Baker Street where Mrs. Hudson had put together a little reception. As Sherlock carefully helped John from
the limo and held him up for the walk to the front door, Greg grabbed the wheelchair from the boot and followed them.

The wedding had been a surprise — a spur-of-the-moment decision, hastily organised and carried out as quickly as possible. It was a beautiful gift, Greg thought, from John to Sherlock, a way to tell him how much Sherlock meant to him. A way to demonstrate how much John loved him. If he didn’t survive the cancer — or the experimental treatment — the marriage would be inconvertible proof for Sherlock that it had all been real.

Greg prayed that John would survive. He’d seen Sherlock at his lowest — when he was a full-on junkie, filthy and sick, using his prodigious brain to scam cocaine and heroin. And then after John’s marriage to Mary. It was almost worse then, watching him sink slowly into depression and degradation. Sherlock took careless risks with his life, for the high, Greg presumed, and for the chance that he’d fail and end his lonely misery.

Greg had still been reeling from his divorce from Jude then, still trying to get his feet on the ground. He’d been preoccupied with Georgianna who had blamed him, and who he didn’t see enough, and by his own loneliness. Greg hadn’t paid as much attention to the consulting detective as he normally might.

One night a few months after John’s wedding, Greg called Sherlock in on a case. He showed up late, bruised, blood-stained, reeking of drugs, cigarettes and vomit. Greg had taken one look, delegated the case to DI Pringle, and dragged a protesting Sherlock back to his own flat. There he’d made Sherlock strip off his filthy clothes — he’d been wearing track pants and trainers! — and thrown him in the bath.

“Stop pulling, Lestrade!”

“I’ll stop when you get in the tub, Sherlock.”

“You’re being ridiculous. I can take my own vest off.”

“Then take it off. Your arse is already hanging out,” Greg didn’t mention the other bits that were hanging out. “What’s the big deal with baring your chest?”

“What happened to privacy?!”

“You gave that up when you came to my crime scene high.”

“I’m not high!”

“Good, you’ll detox faster. Take your bloody vest off and get in the water.”

“Lestrade...!”

“This isn’t the first time I’ve seen you starkers, Sherlock. Considering the state you’re in, it’s not exactly a thrill. Have you been in a punch up? I thought you said you tripped over some bins.”

“Fine!” Sherlock ripped the vest off over his head and dropped it defiantly on the floor. The look on his face was... difficult to read. Fearful? No...

Then Greg saw Sherlock’s back, the raised mass of angry, red, criss-crossing scars. It was ugly, brutal — evidence of the sort of torture that could kill a man. He flashed on Mycroft’s haggard face when he’d appeared in front of Greg the day after Sherlock’s miraculous return. Mycroft knew. Mycroft would have gotten his brother the best care possible, yet it was still... ugly... he would carry
those scars for the rest of his life.

Greg bit his tongue to keep from gasping, and turned away to pick up the soiled vest. Sherlock submerged himself to the neck in the water, hiding the evidence of the flogging he’d endured. Uncharacteristically, he didn’t complain about the temperature of the bath, which proved beyond doubt that he wanted to hide the grisly evidence of what he’d suffered. Greg gathered up the rest of his clothes.

“I’m putting these in the wash.” He said. “Shampoo your hair while I’m gone.”

“And if I don’t?” Sherlock asked poking disdainfully at Greg’s cheap shampoo with one big toe. Sherlock somehow managed the haughtiness of a grande dame being presented at court.

“I’ll shampoo it for you when I get back. Looks pretty tangled. Georgianna hated it when I had to comb the knots out of her hair. Course that hasn’t happened since she was five.” Greg told him. “Wash your damn hair, Sherlock.”

Holding his nose, Greg put Sherlock’s clothes in to clean, setting the dial to ‘heavy soil.’ After a thorough handwashing, he ducked out to the corner store for a package of fairy cakes — something he was relatively certain he could persuade Sherlock to eat. If he had been high, the sugar would help the crash. Nominally, but it was better than nothing.

And if he hadn’t been high — Greg supposed it was possible, he hoped it was — well, Sherlock was a bit of a sugar hound. The way he starved himself most of the time, his body must crave simple carbohydrates.

When he returned, Greg could hear Sherlock slopping around in the tub. He grimaced at the thought of the mess he’d have to clean up... but that was the thing with Sherlock, wasn’t it — there was always a mess of one sort or another to clean up. And John Watson didn’t have the time to do it any longer.

After the bath, Greg had given Sherlock pyjamas to wear — which were comically large on his thin frame — and watched him devour the fairy cakes, half a box of jammy dodgers and a ham sandwich. By then his eyes were glazing over with fatigue. Greg put him to bed on his brand new grey sofa. Sherlock had fallen asleep abusing Cy Twombly.

Greg put Sherlock’s clothes in to dry, cleaned the kitchen and the bathroom, scrubbed the grey ring from inside his tub, retrieved the dried clothes, folded them and left them by the inert form on the sofa, and then retired to his own bed.

He’d dreamed of Ben — something that hadn’t happened in a decade at least. Ben was warm and solid, and unmistakably male. He was pressed against Greg’s back as he always was in the morning, his hands wandering under Greg’s t-shirt as his lips tasted Greg’s neck...

Abruptly Greg was awake, shaking the disorientation from his brain and twisting away from the body pressed against him, away from the hands, that couldn’t be Ben.

“Sherlock! For fuck’s sake!” Greg cried. “Get off!”

“I’m trying to.” Sherlock purred, rubbing a pronounced hardness against Greg’s bum.

Swearing, Greg stopped a hand from reaching into his pants.

“I know you want me.” Sherlock whispered clinging to Greg. “Admit it, Lestrade.”
“Bloody hell!” Greg grabbed Sherlock’s hands and rolled, using his body weight and bullish strength to put Sherlock on his back. He pinned the pale hands to the mattress and sat on his legs. The skinny detective was mercifully still wearing the overly-large pyjamas — though it did little to hide his arousal. “Christ, Sherlock!”

Sherlock just smirked and nodded at Greg’s crotch — he too was hard inside his pants. “You do want me, Lestrade. All these years, you’ve been waiting for your chance. Now you can have me. I want it.” He humped his pelvis upward.

Greg released him with a disgusted sigh. “It’s just a physiological response — it doesn’t mean anything.” He sat back on his heels, not bothering to cover the bulge. If nothing else, Greg was comfortable with his body.

(Even if he was getting rather out of shape. Have to do something about that if he ever wanted to date again. Ugh! He couldn’t even think about that! Not yet.)

Sherlock pouted. “No one wants me.” He meant John didn’t want him, Greg knew. He felt sorry for Sherlock — and sorry for John too. He hoped John’s new wife was worth it.

“I’m sorry John got married, but you can’t just climb into bed with people — sleeping people.”

Smoothly, Sherlock sat up and leaned forward. It put him much closer to Greg and he reached out and touched his face, peering at him clinically. “But you haven’t had sexual relations in… sixteen months.”

“Get out of my bed, Sherlock. Or I’ll call Mycroft and tell him to come get you.”

Sherlock sat up and slid back, clasping his knees to his chest, and drawing himself up haughtily. “Don’t get testy, Lestrade. No need to bring my brother into this. Though seeing you like that would make his day.” Sherlock snorted. “It’d make his decade.”

“I’m tired, Sherlock. I have to work in the morning. Get out of my bedroom.”

Sherlock slid off the bed and slunk to the door. He jittered slightly — Greg thought Sherlock was coming down from whatever drug he’d taken and had sought a sexual high to replace it. He sighed, knowing Sherlock would simply look elsewhere for a hit. Maybe he should call Mycroft.

Hand on the door knob, Sherlock paused. “You do like men, though.”

“Yeah, so what? Doesn’t mean I’m going to sleep with you.”

“I knew it!” Sherlock crowed, then he took on a didactic tone. “You shouldn’t be ashamed, Lestrade.”

“I’m not ashamed. It’s simply not…”

“Not anyone’s business?” Sherlock sneered.

“Not relevant.” Greg corrected. “Not to how I do me job and certainly not to you.”

With a sniff, Sherlock flounced out, slamming the door behind him.

In the morning, Sherlock was gone. Greg thought about what he’d do if Sherlock outed him. “I’ll own it.” He decided. Sherlock was right, Greg shouldn’t be ashamed — he wasn’t ashamed. It really wasn’t relevant. Or it hadn’t been for the more than fifteen years he’d been married. Greg had no
idea what was relevant now that he was divorced, and he was in no rush to find out.

But Sherlock never referred to Greg’s sexuality again. He acted as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred — although, who knew what was ordinary for Sherlock Holmes. Maybe he had been high and had forgotten when he sobered up. Or he’d decided it was unimportant and deleted it. Regardless, Greg was much happier pretending it had never happened. He did his best to delete the memory himself and it faded into something dreamlike and unreal.

But it had been all too real. The very last thing anyone wanted was a distraught Sherlock invading their bed on his way to hitting bottom. And Greg wasn’t sure there would be a bottom to Sherlock’s misery and degradation if John didn’t survive.

The newlyweds were arguing when Greg arrived in the lounge with the wheelchair.

“It’s my bloody wedding day, Sherlock!” Sherlock had clearly carried John up the stairs and still held his frail form in his arms like a groom carrying his bride across the threshold. “I’m not going to bed! I’m going to sit in my chair, have a glass of that bloody sparkling grape juice you bought, eat a piece of Mrs. Hudson’s cake and accept the congratulations of my friends. And your brother, if he deigns to give it.” John said querulously, struggling against Sherlock’s hold. “Put me in the damn chair or I swear you’re sleeping alone on your wedding night!”

“But John...”

“Let him do what he wants.” Greg intervened. Normally he wouldn’t, but he hated to see John waste what little energy he had fighting Sherlock’s instinct to wrap him in cotton wool — as understandable as that instinct was.

And John himself had asked Greg to intervene.

Two weeks after the marathon, John had invited Greg for a pint. He arrived twenty minutes late — he’d been delayed at work, he’d texted — and found John at a corner table in the back. He looked... not quite himself. Tired and pale. Greg thought maybe he hadn’t been sleeping.

“John! Sorry I got held up — what’re you having, let me get you another.”

“Oh, erm, ta, Greg. Just fizzy water for me.”

He’d shrugged at Greg’s quizzical look. Greg got John a fizzy water with lime and pint for himself and made his way through the growing crowd to the table.

“What’s up, John? You keeping fit?” Greg meant the water, but he’d hit some sort of nerve. John looked away.

“Not really. Erm, I have cancer.”

“What!? John... I’m...” Greg stopped himself from saying ‘sorry.’ John would not want anything that sounded like sympathy. Greg cleared his throat and adopted a more business-like tone. “What kind? How advanced is it?”

Greg saw John’s relief and gratitude. They were two blokes with a problem to chew over, not hold a pity party.

“Acute Myeloid Leukaemia.” John answered. “My blood is overcrowded with underdeveloped cells. It’s... serious.”
“Serious like you broke mum’s favourite china plate or serious like buy a black suit serious.

John actually chuckled. “Somewhere in the middle.” He said. Then he sobered. “The five-year
survival rate is 24 percent.”

Twenty-four percent was not nearly high enough, but Greg simply nodded pensively. “What’s the
treatment?”

“I’m starting chemotherapy along with a targeted drug protocol tomorrow — it’s a new drug...
Mycroft got me into the trials.”

Greg shouldn’t be surprised that Mycroft already knew — he probably had John’s medical records
routed directly to his laptop (not to mention Greg’s own) — but he hadn’t said anything... no,
Mycroft wouldn’t, would he.

“I asked him not to tell anyone. I wanted to talk to you myself when I had a better idea what I’m
dealing with.”

Well, that was fair, Greg conceded. “And now you do?”

“Yeah. From everything the doctors tell me, and what I’ve read, this new treatment is going to be
rough. It’ll pretty much kill me in order to eradicate the cancer cells. But if I survive it, there’s a good
chance at full remission. Over ninety percent... if I can get through the entire protocol.”

Greg waited — clearly John had already decided he was doing this. He was a fighter. Greg didn’t
ask the odds of surviving the treatment.

“I’m worried about Sherlock.”

Greg nodded. If John died... he could imagine what that would do to Sherlock and it was nothing
good. If John’s marriage to Mary had sent him on a self-destructive spiral...

“He’ll be taking care of Rosie — he and...” John sighed. “Harry. Sherlock is great with her — I want
her to have that continuity, that stability. And having her will give him something to hang onto. And
Harry’s really stepped up since Mary died.

“Problem is, if I don’t survive, I don’t trust either of them to stay sober. I need to be realistic and put
contingencies in place — plan for the worst, you know?”

“Yeah.” Greg agreed.

“If Sherlock relapses... would you step in, Greg? You and, erm, Mycroft, I guess.”

“Yes, yes of course we will.” Greg assured him even as he cursed whatever force in the universe it
was that kept saddling him with children. “Whatever you need, mate. You and Rosie.”

He could see John... lighten. A burden had been lifted from his mind. Greg was grateful he could
help his friend — and a little ashamed at how much he dreaded becoming a parent again.

“I’m having papers drawn up — well, Mycroft is. Sherlock’s going to adopt Rosie officially — and
she’s already spending some nights with Aunt Harry.” John smiled a little. “I have to hand it to
Mycroft, he’s invaluable in a crisis.”

“That’s what he does.” Greg said, feeling proud. Mycroft managed crises on a national and even a
global level. He was brilliant.
“That’s the other thing I want to ask you... if he tries to manage Sherlock... well, don’t let him. The worse off Sherlock is, the worse it’ll backfire.”

“Not sure I can stop him, John.” Mycroft would do anything and everything to prevent his brother relapsing.

“Greg, you’re the only person who can talk to him about Sherlock. The only person he’ll listen to.”

That could be true — other than John himself, Greg couldn’t think of anyone. “I’ll try. I can’t promise I’ll succeed.”

“At least have him hold off until you’ve had a chance to intervene.”

“Me?” Greg asked, surprised.

“You can handle Sherlock, Greg. I’ve seen you with him — he listens to you. He pretends he doesn’t but he does.”

“That’s, erm... are you sure?” Sherlock sure as hell didn’t listen to him at any crime scenes they’d shared.

“Yeah, I am.” John paused, eyeing Greg and chuckling. “I wasn’t there, but I get the impression that when you started bringing him in on cases, he developed a little crush on you”

“All right, stop.” Greg demanded.

“I think he did.”

“I can’t think about Sherlock like that.”

John snickered. “He’s pretty good in bed, are you sure?”

“Stop it you pervert.” Greg laughed. He regarded John closely. “How’s that going, by the way?”

“Better. Or it was before my diagnosis. It’s... well, you know, you must know, it’s different. The intensity... I never thought...”

“Yeah. I know — a man’s desire surely isn’t stronger than a woman’s, but the focus... the ferocity of it... it’s incredible.”

“Even... Mycroft?”

Greg frowned. “He’s a man, John.”

“I know, I know... he’s just so... prim.”

“Yeah.” Greg grinned wolfishly. “Imagine him on his knees.”

“Oh...” John looked uncertain... then his features hardened with comprehension. “Oh!”


“Ok, I get it, I guess.” John agreed. “Mycroft... never thought about it like that.” He looked up at Greg abruptly. “Is that how you see Sherlock?”

“I told you — I can’t think of him that way. He was young when we met. Too young and very, very
high.” Greg huffed. “He was in trouble and I helped him out. Watched out for him. That dynamic
doesn’t lend itself to attraction. Not for me.”

John scoffed. “Maybe if he had a waistcoat and watch fob...”

“Fuck off.” Greg laughed. “Listen, I’m thrilled you two are together, and if the time ever comes —
and I hope it never does — I’ll talk to him if you think it’ll make a damn bit of difference. You can
thank me by never bringing Sherlock’s sex life up again.”

John giggled — and Greg thought he looked a little relieved. Maybe Sherlock really 
had had a

crush... “The important thing is that he listens to you. And he likes that you’re with Mycroft — he’ll
claim otherwise with his dying breath, but Mycroft is, and I quote, ‘36 percent less annoying since
he’s been with you.’”

“Only 36?”

John shrugged. “He’s still Mycroft.”

Greg chuckled along, but not enthusiastically. John’s antipathy for Sherlock’s brother never sat well
with him.

“Oh shit.” John exclaimed, as blood dripped onto the table. Greg grabbed a handful of paper napkins
and shoved them at John who tried to staunch the flow from his nose. “It’s the leukaemia.” He said.
“Bloody cancer.”

“Should I get some ice?” Greg asked.

“No, it’ll stop.” John said, sounding angry.

“How is Sherlock handling... well, this.”

“About how you’d expect.” John said, his anger dissolving into weary exasperation. “Clucking
around like a mother hen, demanding that I rest or eat or whatever — when he isn’t outright
panicking... or staring into his microscope insisting he can cure cancer if everyone will just let him
alone.”

“Sounds about right.”

“He’s going to drive me around the bend.”

“I guess I could...” Greg tried to think what he could do. “I don’t have any crime he’d consider
worthy... I could send some cold cases over.”

“I thought you already gave him everything. He was working Victorian era cases last year.”

“Manchester heard he cleared 90 percent of ours and wants to send theirs.”

“I don’t know. He leaves the photos out where Rosie can find them. I’m already... feeling tired and
it’s only going to get worse when the treatment starts. I won’t have the energy to get after him.”

Greg nodded. “John, if there’s anything I can...” He stopped himself, John had just asked him for
help for Rosie and Sherlock, he’d never ask for himself, would turn down any offers. “You know
what, I might be underfoot more often. If you get sick of me mug, just toss me out.” He’d coordinate
with Mrs. Hudson — she’d know better than anyone what ‘her boys’ would need.

Mrs. Hudson had been relieved to hear from Greg. She had a master calendar with all of John’s
medical appointments and Rosie’s complicated schedule and was attempting to find volunteers to bring food and provide transportation. She shared it with Greg, it showed up on his phone in red, standing out against the blue and green of his and Georgianna’s schedules.

(Mycroft’s was black. It was vague and changed so often, Greg paid little attention to it. Mycroft told him if he wouldn’t be home at his usual time.)

Initially, Greg signed up for dinner duty two nights per week. As John’s treatment progressed, he began to drop by more often. Greg would stop after work and help Mrs. Hudson tidy up. He might feed or bathe Rosie, giving Sherlock some time with John. Before he left, Greg would sit with John for a bit, listen to whatever he had to say.

“Sherlock’s driving me up the wall.” John had trouble keeping food down and had lost weight and hair. He was looking increasingly sickly when he tottered from his chair by the fire to the loo. He barely looked like himself, but his voice hadn’t changed. John’s put-upon sighs and cranky shouts sounded the same as ever — as did his giggle on the rare occasions he laughed. Greg found that comforting, evidence that John was still, well, John.

“Yeah, so what’s new?”

“I swear to God I’m going to kill him. I’m going to survive this bloody treatment just so I can kill him.”

“I think he’d agree to that.”

“If I weren’t so bloody tired, I’d kill him now.”

The week after the trip to the South of France, John had become too weak to walk unassisted. Mycroft had hired a home nurse and sent him to Baker Street with Greg. (“Less chance my brother will throw him out if you’re there to perform the introductions, my dear.”) Randall was a big, strapping Navy vet who favoured Arsenal and played rugby on his days off. He was also a highly qualified nurse with a reputation for being able to handle difficult patients.

Sherlock took one look at the nurse. “Oh, of course Mycroft sent you. Don’t worry, Lestrade, he’s straight. Mostly.”

“Worry about what?” Greg asked, exchanging confused looks with John.

“Randall — Rrrrrranndallll — Randall is exactly the type of rugged specimen over which Mycroft likes to make a fool of himself.” Sherlock squinted at Greg. “But you’re not given to jealousy… a bit of jealousy might have served you in your marriage…”

“That’s enough.” Greg told him at the same time John said, “Sherlock!”

Sherlock had closed his mouth with a guilty look at John, but it wasn’t long before he was deducing Randall.

As he ate wedding cake, Greg reflected that Sherlock was right about Mycroft. Talking with Nurse Randall made Mycroft look warm and slightly distracted. Greg smiled to himself — Mycroft would be primed for sex when they got home. If he could wait that long...
John Watson’s cancer was keeping Mycroft up at night.

Sherlock was already beginning to decompensate, looking haggard and skinny. John had become too weak to care for his daughter thus Sherlock was tending to both of them when Rosie was in residence. Mrs. Hudson made certain the child was fed and had clean clothes — made certain there was food and clean linens for everyone in 221b — but there was a limit to what that aging lady could do.

Mycroft wanted desperately to help. But no matter what he said or did, Sherlock would not listen. He could lecture his brother for hours on how important it was to take care of himself so that he could give John the quality care he needed. (Mycroft himself had grimly forced himself to eat well-balanced meals all through Greg’s hospitalisation and subsequent bouts of depression.) He could suggest strategies and common-sense solutions to the myriad of challenges his brother now faced daily. He’d even offered to hire a coterie of caregivers, freeing his brother to devote all his time to John’s well-being — all to no avail. The best he got was silence, and he rarely got that.


“I’m endeavouring to be helpful.”

“He’s an adult, Mycroft. You can’t treat him like your little brother and expect him to accept it.”

“He is my little brother.”

“He’s your younger brother. He’s not little anymore. God knows he should have gotten over rebelling against you by now, but he’s stressed. And he knows it’s safe to lash out at you.”

“Safe? I’ve had people killed for less.”

“Don’t exaggerate.”

“Fine, I’ve had them... removed.”

“Yeah, but you can’t remove him from being your brother.”

“But he has to eat.”

“I’ll go by tonight and make sure he eats something, yeah? I want to check in on John anyway.”

Somehow Greg was able to accomplish what Mycroft could not. Greg would put food in front of Sherlock and he’d eat it. Greg could quiet Rosie, put an end to arguments between Sherlock and John, set Sherlock to cleaning the dishes or stowing Rosie’s toys away, and lift some of the exhaustion from John Watson’s expression. Most miraculous of all, with only a few words, Greg could calm Sherlock when he was energetically spiralling out of control. It almost made Mycroft believe in witchcraft.

“There’s no trick to it.” Greg claimed.

After John’s third round of chemo and drug therapy, Greg began going by 221b Baker St. almost every evening before coming home. Sherlock would abuse him soundly — water off a duck’s back
to Greg — but dinner would be eaten, the child would be cared for, and the flat would be put to rights whilst Greg sat with John, talking about nothing in particular, until John fell asleep. All reports concurred that the household had begun to depend upon his daily visits, depend upon the swathe of calm and good-nature Greg brought with him.

Selfishly — and Mycroft knew it was very selfish — he begrudged every second.

Their schedule had been upended — Greg still ran most mornings before work, but he didn’t get home until well after the evening meal had been consumed, the dishes washed and the kitchen abandoned.

Mycroft would have dinner with Georgianna most nights, then retire to his study to work until Greg found his way home. If he left his study door ajar, he could hear the front door and he found himself listening obsessively. He missed the evenings they used to spend together.

He had begun craving cigarettes again. Stepping out onto the patio to smoke would calm his nerves, make the evenings more bearable, and assuage his worry over his brother’s state of mind and health. Sherlock was sneaking cigarettes by Mrs. Hudson’s bins whilst John slept, it did not seem fair that Mycroft could not join him — especially as he was the reason Mycroft needed a cigarette so badly.

Grimly, Mycroft denied himself.

Friday evening Georgianna went to her mother’s. Mycroft was tempted to stay late at the office, as he used to do as a matter of course. But habit had his fingers texting his driver and his feet moving to the door.

He arrived home to an empty house. Not empty, really, the security team would be at their stations at the front of the ground floor, watching him on their monitors. But the front hall was dim and his footsteps echoed in the lonely room.

Mycroft flipped on the lights and was confronted with Greg’s chairs.

After receiving the gift of the painting, Greg had purchased two white leather and chrome mid-century modern chairs and placed them in the spacious mezzanine.

“I need somewhere to sit.” He’d said to Mycroft’s raised eyebrow. And he had sunk down into the white leather and contemplated the painting on the far wall.

“There are two.” Mycroft observed.

“Might need a different angle.” Greg told him. “But you can join me if you like.”

The chairs were deceptively comfortable. Greg spent time sitting there each evening — often Mycroft would find him in one of the chairs when he arrived home. Before he began stopping at 221b Baker Street every day.

Tonight, the empty chairs had him patting his pockets for his cigarettes and lighter until he remembered he didn’t smoke any longer. Mycroft cursed aloud. Were he still in his high-rise flat with its comfortable oak and baize decor, there would be caches of cigarettes he could raid. But he was not there, he was in this absurd folly of a house with its narrow flights of coloured stairs and all its rooms stacked on top of each other.

Mycroft had been used to viewing the townhouse through Greg’s eyes, seeing only the delight and wonder it engendered in him. He enlivened every room with his evident pleasure, filled it with the force of his joyous presence.
Without Greg it was naught but a too-big, too-empty pile of brick and glass.

Dropping into one of the white-leather chairs with a sigh, Mycroft repented. He loved their home too… but he would not be able to live here without Greg. There was too much of him here. The townhouse needed him to shine.

What wouldn’t he give right now for a cigarette?! He still had his coat on, he could walk to the tobacconist on the high street…

The November air was crisp and cool but Mycroft’s long strides kept him warm. He walked several blocks before he realised he wasn’t traveling in the direction of the tobacconist.

“Oh, this is ridiculous.” He said aloud and hailed a cab.

An impatient half hour later, Mycroft alighted in Baker Street. Without pausing for reflection, he unlocked the door to his brother’s flat and climbed the stairs.

The lounge was empty, the flat quiet. Mycroft peered around the untidy room with a growing dismay. Were they not here? Abruptly there was a shriek and Rosie sprinted into the room, looking behind her — and ploughed into Mycroft’s legs.

“Oh.” She bounced off and fell onto her bottom, looking around in surprise at finding herself sitting on the floor.

“What are you doing here?!” Sherlock had chased Rosie into the lounge and now he stood with his hands on his hips and a scowl on his face.

What was he doing here? His presence only irritated his brother and their bickering was more than John could tolerate. What had he been thinking?

“Mycroft!” Greg appeared from the depths of the flat, arms full of bed linens. He grinned happily and shoved the linens into Sherlock’s arms. Stepping around Rosie, he hooked a big hand around Mycroft’s neck and pulled him into a kiss. His other hand unerringly found Mycroft’s nipple through the several layers of wool and cotton he wore. Mycroft shuddered with a sparkling of arousal.

Greg’s smile curved against his lips. “I’m glad you’re here.” He said softly.

Not softly enough for Sherlock. He rolled his eyes epically. “Lestrade, you didn’t invite him?”

“Ignore him.” Greg said. “Dinner will be here in a minute, you’re staying.”

“Mycroft hates curry.” Sherlock sniffed.

“Mycroft loves curry.” Greg informed him. “Put those in the wash, John’ll want them tomorrow.”

With a huff, Sherlock disappeared into the kitchen and left through that door. As he passed behind Mycroft he paused. “Does Lestrade know you’re smoking again?"

Greg looked startled as Sherlock descended the stairs. Mycroft could see the disappointment his partner was trying to hide.

“I’m not smoking again.” He assured Greg.

“But he wants to.” Sherlock called up.

“I also want to have you dismembered, brother mine, but I’ve managed to abstain this long.”
“Come in, take your coat off.” Greg tugged his arm and Mycroft stepped over Rosie. As he removed his overcoat, Greg picked the girl up.

“I’m hung-ee, Unka Gog.”

“Let’s get you fed then, pumpkin.” Since Mycroft had seen her last, the child had transformed from a chubby tot into a little girl. He felt stunned by the abrupt change.

Mycroft followed them into the kitchen and watched as Greg set her in a booster seat and pushed her up to the kitchen table. He pulled a box of goldfish crackers from a cupboard and dumped a handful in front of her. He must have seen Mycroft’s look of horror.

“That’s to keep her occupied while I make her dinner.”

Why was Greg making the child’s dinner? Mycroft knew the answer, but the question still rebounded and echoed pettily through his mind. He watched Greg heat leftover chicken and broccoli, cut it into bite-sized pieces and plate it on a plastic dish with a cartoon character gambolling over its surface. He set it on a placemat with more of the characters. “There you go, pumpkin.”

That done, Greg moved to where Mycroft was standing. He pulled a chair out from the kitchen table. “Sit.” He said in a tone of voice that wanted obeying.

After only a second’s hesitation, Mycroft sat. Rosie was singing tunelessly over her plate as she painstakingly navigated her fork.

Greg immediately straddled his lap and cupped Mycroft’s face. With a soft smile Greg leaned in and kissed him, opening Mycroft’s mouth with his tongue and sinking into a leisurely snog. “Such a nice surprise, you being here.” He said between kisses. “Whatever emergency or bit of paperwork brought you here, I’m grateful.” Greg pulled back. “Is it an emergency? Do you need to talk to Sherlock?”

“No, my dear.” Mycroft said, pulling him back for another kiss.

Mycroft wasn’t in the habit of confessing anything. But perhaps he should… Greg’s rambling soliloquy about Ben Lane had been exactly what Mycroft had needed to hear. His pleas — ‘Don’t blinds ide me,’ ‘Give me a chance,’ — had echoed in Mycroft’s mind ever since. He did keep himself to himself, hiding his less palatable emotions from Greg. It was a difficult habit to break.

He took a breath and confessed to the sin of neediness. “I simply missed you.”

“Yeah?”

“Our house is empty without you. I cannot ask you to neglect my brother and John, but I can join you.” Mycroft told him. “It does not seem unwelcome.”

“No, it’s very welcome, love.” Greg said. His brown eyes were soft. “You’re staying for dinner.”

“If it’s not inconvenient.”

Greg’s grin was worth whatever punishment Sherlock would attempt to inflict upon him for daring to intrude upon John’s sickroom. Not that he’d dream of entering that particular room without express and urgent entreaties.

The bell sounded. “That’ll be the curry.” Greg said. With a last kiss, he stood up. “Keep an eye on her, yeah?”
“Of course.” The child was still singing to herself as she examined a bite-sized stalk of broccoli held between moist fingers. Mycroft could hear Sherlock and Greg arguing companionably as Greg descended the stairs.

Lips buzzing pleasantly from Greg’s kisses, Mycroft was glad that he had come. None of the obstacles he’d envisioned had presented themselves — Sherlock’s objections were naught but a token, a sop to the prickliness of their relationship. Greg was delighted to see him. He should have come sooner, days ago — weeks ago.

“Mr. Holmes. Hello.” It was Randall the sturdy day nurse. “I didn’t know you were expected this evening.”

Unconsciously, Mycroft had straightened his spine and crossed his legs. “I don’t believe I was.” He drawled, cursing his heart rate that would quicken despite his efforts to calm it. At the wedding reception, the nurse had been provocative, his eyes wandering boldly over Mycroft’s body. It had been... disconcerting. He’d needed to be quite rude to discourage the man.

“Mm. Can I get you something? Water? Tea?” The nurse had come to stand beside him, his tight abdomen at eye level. Mycroft refused to allow his gaze to drop the few inches to the well-packed scrub trousers.

“No, thank you.” Mycroft said. When the nurse didn’t move, he asked, “Is there something you require?”

“Pardon me, Mr. Holmes. I usually bring John’s wheelchair through here. He eats dinner with the family.”

“Ah.” Mycroft stood up. “Indeed.” He pushed the chair in which he’d been sitting neatly to the table. “I trust I won’t be in the way here.” He said over his shoulder.

Instead of moving away, Randall stepped up behind Mycroft, trapping him against the table. He was close enough that Mycroft could feel the nurse’s body heat, feel the warmth of his breath on his ear. He’s taller than Greg. His mind automatically noted. He clenched his teeth unhappily, attempting to purge his mind of comparisons.

“Do you mind?” Mycroft asked in his coldest tone.

“I don’t mind at all.” Randall whispered in his ear, his hot hand coming to rest on Mycroft’s arm. He smelled of soap and mint and heady masculinity.

His pulse was pounding in his ears. Mycroft had taken advantage of situations like this for many years, enjoying the opportunism of such men, fucking them and paying them to go away. Eventually it had become so hollow and lonely, Mycroft had sworn off, insulating himself within the frozen earth of celibacy.

Until Greg. Greg was the sun, the water, and the gardener under whose tender ministrations his libido had once again blossomed.

Now it was growing out of control, and Mycroft hated nothing so much as losing control. He simply could not abide it... so why did the nurse’s distracting proximity feel so good?

No, his mind rebelled, the situation was absurd. Randall was completely out-of-line. Improper. Indecent. Didn’t he know of what Mycroft was capable?!! “You’re playing with fire.” He warned.

Mycroft felt rather than heard the man’s chuckle and his traitorous body shuddered eagerly. “Don’t
be angry, *Mr. Holmes.*” Randall purred as his other hot, hot hand found Mycroft’s hip. “Greg won’t mind. We’ll let him watch. He’ll like that.”

Greg’s name on Randall’s tongue was a bucket of cold water. “Clearly you don’t know the Detective Inspector at all.” Mycroft hissed. If he’d had his umbrella, Mycroft would have whacked Randall smartly on the shin. Instead, he stepped back, digging his heel down on Randall’s toes. (Ignoring the press of muscular chest against his shoulder blades.) the nurse’s strangled grunt was satisfying. “You’re being exceedingly foolish.”

Randall backed off, but when Mycroft turned his icy glare on the man, he found him smirking.

“Did my brother put you up to this?” Mycroft asked.

“No, *Mr. Holmes.*” The nurse said, his smirk growing. Mycroft wanted to slap it off his handsome face... and then grab him, rip the clothes off his body, taste him, consume him. He felt his nostrils flare. His heart rate sped on, pumping heat into his fingers and toes, a rosy glow onto his cheeks. His prick, Mycroft realised with horror, was awake and interested.

“Mycroft.” John’s voice was remarkably unchanged. He was staring between Mycroft and the nurse.

“Dr Watson.” forcing his attention from the home nurse and focussing on John, Mycroft smoothly buttoned his jacket over the most obvious evidence of his deshabille.

Without the knit cap he’d worn at the wedding, Mycroft saw the doctor had lost most of his hair, the lack of eyebrows and eyelashes giving him an odd, alien look. His skin was slightly jaundiced and stretched so tightly over his skull, it had the appearance of parchment on the cusp of tearing. Maroon shadows were smudged under his eyes and on his neck — exhaustion or bruising, his leukaemia made him victim to both. He was thin and unsteady, sitting in his wheelchair, sagging to the left a bit. Mycroft wanted to right him. He tucked that impulse firmly away. “I trust your treatments are going well?”

“I’m still alive.” John said stoutly, manoeuvring the wheelchair with determined but shaking hands between Mycroft and Randall. Mycroft wanted to help, to push the wheelchair for him, but Greg had warned him against treating John any differently than he typically would. So he clenched his fists at his sides until John had the wheelchair pulled up to the table next to his daughter. Mycroft had completely forgotten about the child. She was staring up at him with big, round eyes the same dark blue as her father’s.

“Hey little bug, what do you have for dinner?” Rosie told him — at least that was what Mycroft presumed. The sounds she uttered bore little resemblance to either ‘chicken’ or ‘broccoli.’ “Finish up and you can have a biscuit.” John promised.

“Biscuit!” Rosie gleefully enunciated that word perfectly. John nodded at Randall. The home nurse crossed the kitchen and retrieved a package of ginger biscuits from the same cupboard that housed the goldfish crackers. With a napkin, he handed one to John who reiterated to his daughter that she had to finish her broccoli before she could have the biscuit.

Mycroft wanted to tell her that it was just a ginger biscuit, not worth finishing the broccoli if she didn’t feel up to it. But his attention was again straying to the rugged home nurse. He had opened a plastic container on the worktop and extracted a brownie. He plated it and set it in front of John, who frowned at the sweet.

“Cannabis.” John remarked, poking the brownie. “It’s supposed to stimulate my appetite. But I’m too nauseated to eat it.”
“Give it a go, mate, yeah?” Randall urged. He leaned casually against the counter and locked eyes with Mycroft. He wore plain blue scrub trousers and a white t-shirt that stretched across his broad chest, outlining his nipples and making his powerful arms look positively chiselled. The man’s informal pose belied his combat readiness. Mycroft had chosen this nurse — despite his inconvenient attractiveness — for his military training and ability to defend the household against any and all threats. With John Watson currently out of commission, 221b needed an insider capable of protecting Sherlock. Very few people combined the two skills, fighting and nursing, Randall would be difficult to replace.

Mycroft tore his lingering gaze away from the nurse — whom, he noted, was once again smirking — and returned his attention to his brother’s spouse. Regrettably, he felt the heat again burning his cheeks. John looked from him to Randall suspiciously.

Mycroft was greatly relieved that, with a maximum of clatter, his brother returned to the kitchen. Sherlock dropped the sack of food in the centre of the table and immediately began fussing over John.

Greg followed him in.

Mycroft’s attention was captured by the look of bemusement on Greg’s face as he noted Mycroft’s buttoned jacket. His heart sank as Greg glanced at Randall speculatively and then turned his gaze knowingly on Mycroft’s warm, red cheeks — which had the effect of heating his face further.

Before he began unpacking the takeaway, Greg’s hand rested briefly on Mycroft’s shoulder. His touch was usually a comfort, but now it only put Mycroft more on edge. John had perked up and was leering at him. Randall’s smirk was beginning to turn ugly. Even Rosie was staring at Mycroft accusingly. He was used to his brother’s scorn, but it was untenable that everyone should comprehend his moral and practical failure.

Mycroft stepped back abruptly, knocking into a chair that scraped loudly across the lino.

“Apologies… I cannot stay. I have a… a previous commitment. Best wishes, Dr Watson, for your health. Brother… Greg…” He turned on his heel and strode out the door, plucking his overcoat from the hook as he passed through the lounge and donning it on his way down the stairs.

He thought of nothing but escape. Thus Mycroft was at the bottom of the stairwell and had his hand on the doorknob before Greg tackled him from behind.

“What the hell, Mycroft!?” Greg was angry, that had not been Mycroft’s intention. “Why are you running away from me?”

“I’m not…”

“You didn’t say good bye. You didn’t answer when I called out.”

“I… I didn’t hear you… I was thinking.”

Greg rubbed his eyes tiredly. “You know how many times Sherlock has said that? Mycroft… you’ve always heard me. You’ve always listened.”

“I… apologies…” Greg was correct, he’d never shut Greg out. He’d never been able to shut him out. “It was not my objective to ignore you. Forgive me.” Mycroft had little hope that he would be forgiven. He did not deserve Greg’s forgiveness.

Greg nodded, his anger draining away into something much less vibrant. “What just happened, Mycroft? Why did you leave?”
Wasn’t it obvious?

‘Please, promise me — if it’s about us, I don’t care how awful it is, or how obvious you think it should be — just tell me. Give me a chance.’ The words reverberated through his brain, Greg’s plea and his own silent vow to accommodate this wish.

It was so much more difficult than he ever could have anticipated.

Mycroft was not in the habit of confessing — certainly not confessing anything as humiliating as his basest animal instincts waking for someone other than his avowed partner — especially for a bounder like the home nurse. Had Greg confessed something comparable, it would be a knife in Mycroft’s heart. Despite his charms, Randall would never succeed with him, thus it seemed cruel to tell Greg. He recognised that he was both unwilling to hurt Greg and fearful of his reaction.

He equivocated. Mycroft offered up what he considered his lesser moral defects. “I do want to smoke.” He blurted. “I’ve been craving a cigarette for weeks. And I miss you. I have found your absence… difficult… lately”

Greg’s soft eyes examined Mycroft’s face quizzically. “That’s why you left? To buy fags?”

“No, of course not.” If he’d needed a cigarette that badly Mycroft could have raided one of Sherlock’s several stashes. The one in the fireplace was convenient, if it did soil his cuffs to reach for it.

“Well, it doesn’t make sense that you left because you miss me.”

“No.” Mycroft agreed.

Greg waited. He still had Mycroft pressed against the wall like a rugby player in a scrum. Mycroft imagined he’d had occasion to restrain suspects in just such a hold.

’Give me a chance.’ Greg’s voice, stripped bare of ego. Vulnerable and plaintive. ’I don’t want to lose you.’

“I left because I was… mortified.” Mycroft admitted.


“No, it wasn’t Sherlock.” Sherlock had been the only one ignoring his ignominy. He would have sussed Randall’s appeal immediately upon meeting the nurse. It was old news to him.

“Mycroft, why is this starting to feel like pulling teeth?”

“I find these things difficult to discuss.”

“I’d be more sympathetic if I knew what things.”

Mycroft took a deep breath. “I had exposed myself and everyone, sans Sherlock, was revelling in it.”

Greg’s eyes were sharp. “You exposed yourself. How did I miss that? You aren’t exactly… small.”

It took a painfully long second to comprehend Greg’s meaning — when he did, Mycroft rolled his eyes. “Not in that way.”

“What other way is there?” He could see that Greg was amused. Something inside Mycroft curled
into a ball and began rocking back and forth.

“I’m so pleased that I’ve amused you. Now if you’ll allow me…” Mycroft reached for the door, attempting to push past the other man.

“You’re not going anywhere until I know what the hell is going on.” Greg said, easily pinning him back against the wall. “I’m not amused. Honestly, Mycroft, I’m starting to get worried.” And angry again. Mycroft did not enjoy inspiring Greg’s anger.

"I do not wish to hurt you unnecessarily."

For a moment Greg looked frightened. "I'd rather know."

He looked deep into the sweet, brown eyes until he could bear it no longer and dropped his gaze. “The nurse.” He said.

“Randall?”

“Yes. He... he took advantage of his obvious... physical attributes... he... made advances.”

Greg stared — then comprehension flooded his features. “He flirted with you.”

“Aggressively.”

“He tried it on with you. Mycroft...” Greg seemed at a loss. “I’ve seen people try it on with you before.”

“Have you?” Had he? When was the last time Mycroft had noticed someone’s interest? “What was my reaction?”

“You either don’t notice — or pretend not to notice — or you insult them with increasing viciousness until they leave you alone.”

Mycroft licked his lips. “I noticed Randall.” He confessed bleakly.

Greg blinked several times. Processing slowly… oh so slowly… “You’re attracted to him. I thought you looked a little... warm.”

“Indeed.” Mycroft studied his shoes, waiting for Greg's anger, the smothered hints of pain.

“But why’d you leave? I mean, he’s a fit bloke. You noticed. So what?”

So what? Startled, Mycroft raised his gaze to his partner’s. “Perhaps I imagined that you’d… care.”

Greg’s fingers brushed Mycroft’s jaw and he could not help but lean into the touch. “I admit, I’m not fond of you blushing for someone else. You know how much I love it. I’d like to think you save your blushes for me, but…” He shrugged. “Attraction is normal. You’re a healthy adult male — no one knows that better than me.” Greg grinned rapaciously. “And Randall is aware of the the effect he has on people, he’s pretty shameless. You saw how he was flexing up?”

Mycroft did not know how to respond. Was Greg truly so nonchalant?

“Ok, did you flirt with him?”

This was more what Mycroft had expected. “I threatened him. And I stepped on his toes.”
He watched Greg suppress his laugh. “How did you expose yourself then? How were you mortified into running off?”

“You — everyone — could see I was... compromised. Randall was gloating.”

Greg examined him for a long moment. “Ok.”

“Ok?”

Sighing, Greg brushed an imaginary lock of hair back from Mycroft’s temple. “I understand. You lost some of your composure. That’s unusual and it made you uncomfortable. That’s why you left.” He smiled fondly. “It’s happened once or twice before. I’ve seen how vulnerable it makes you feel. If it’s any consolation, most people can’t tell the difference. You might feel exposed, but you do not appear to be.”

“It does not bother you at all? That Randall is... sexually arousing?”

You’re allowed to look, Mycroft. Everyone looks.”

“Do they?”

“Yeah, of course. Everyone looks.” Greg clicked his tongue. “Everyone hates photos of themselves and how they sound on tape. Everyone is self-conscious in a swim suit, everyone cheats on their diet and everyone looks.”

“You have no reason to be self-conscious in your swim suit.” Mycroft declared.

“It has nothing to do with reason.” Greg told him. “It’s human nature.”

“Mm. At whom do you look?”

Greg laughed. “I’m not prone to insecurity or jealousy, Mycroft, but I strongly suspect that you feel both far more than you let me see.”

“Where you are concerned… that may be the case.” Mycroft allowed.

“And I don’t want to do anything to make you feel like that.” Greg smiled winnily and winked. “I’m sensitive that way.”

Mycroft scoffed.

“I think your imagination runs away sometimes.” Greg said.

“It’s... possible.”

“If you imagine I think Randall is any sort of threat to our relationship...” Greg shook his head.

Had Greg reacted to Sanne’s flirting the way Mycroft had reacted to Randall just now, Mycroft would have been devastated. He would have begun calculating the hours until Greg gave in to the inevitable and slept with her... left him for her...

Rough fingers traced along his temple and down past his ear. It felt wonderful. “Definitely your imagination.” Greg said the barest moment before his lips touched Mycroft’s. “Thank you for telling me. Come on, let’s go home.”

“Aren’t you expected upstairs. For curry?”
“I’m done. All I want is time with you.” Mycroft suddenly saw Greg’s exhaustion, saw the haggardness of his posture and the lines etched into his face.

He pulled Greg into his arms and held him. “My dear man, you’re dead in your feet! And I’ve been... how do you bear my selfishness?”

Greg laughed — a sound so beautiful Mycroft’s heart swelled up into his throat. “Believe it or not, it’s part of your charm.”

Mycroft did not believe it. But as he walked out into the chill dark hand-in-hand with his lover, a weight he’d been carrying for as long as he could remember fell away.

Chapter End Notes

I think of Mycroft as an unreliable narrator — his POV is skewed by his insecurities. He finds Greg irresistible, DO other people as well? All of them? Or is Mycroft projecting?

Randall is a knob. He’s just fucking with Mycroft because he can. With his power and intellect, it’s not something Mycroft experiences often. I suspect Randall will be looking for another job soon. If Mycroft allows him to have another job.


Next time: the holidays and a return to the Policeman's New Year's Eve Charity Ball.
Mycroft poked Greg with his toes, then snuggled them under his thigh. They lounged together on the grey sofa, under the Twombly print, listening to Vince Guaraldi’s A Charlie Brown Christmas, the jazz walking and running, dancing and slowing...

“The music sounds like the swirling Cy Twombley looks...“ Mycroft thought, laying back. It was possible he was a bit drunk.

“It’s my favourite Christmas music.” Greg had declared earlier in the week, peering at the screen of his smartphone. “I should download it, I guess.”

“If we had an Amazon Echo or a Google Home, you could just ask it to play A Charlie Brown Christmas — and it would!” Georgianna had been lobbying hard for the household to ‘join the twenty-first century’ and get a smart home personal assistant.

“Mm, instant gratification.” Greg remarked. He was chopping carrots for dinner. “Exactly what we need.”

“It would also record every word we said.” Mycroft chimed in from the dining table. “It’s impossible to secure. We cannot risk it.”

Greg grinned. “That’s what you get for living with the British Government, Gi.”

Georgianna rolled her eyes. “We can’t have an Echo Dot, but we have cameras in every room.” She grumbled.

“The cameras can’t hear you.” Mycroft said. “And they go no further than the security room down the hall.”

“They’re not in every room.” Greg added. “None in your bedroom. No cameras in the loos.”

“That we know of.”

Greg grinned. “Don’t worry, security chief Steve isn’t watching us in the loo.” Georgianna had a little crush on Steve.

“Shut it.” She said.

“That’s how you talk to your dad?” Greg snickered.

His daughter turned her back on him sulkily.

She had gone to her mother’s for Christmas Eve, leaving Greg and Mycroft alone in the townhouse
— but for Steve who kept himself to himself in the security office.

Mycroft had taken the opportunity to carry his Bose stereo down to the dining room. He’d sent Anthea out for a brand-new vinyl copy of A Charlie Brown Christmas and now he was warming his bare toes under Greg’s thigh whilst they listened.

“We made it.” Greg said, his hand encircling Mycroft’s ankle. “Our third Christmas Eve.”

It had been an entire year since Greg had brought John into Mummy’s kitchen and asked Mycroft for a second chance. A year since Mycroft had given him his conditions, flush with hope and a tight, small kernel of happiness.

He recognised that the kernel had expanded like a sponge, quickly at first, then more slowly as it encountered Mycroft’s inherent distrust and scepticism. It had been difficult to let them go — if nothing else, Mycroft had a strong sense of self-preservation.

But Greg... Greg had somehow managed to convince Mycroft’s deepest self to let go his fears, let go his suspicions, and commit fully to their relationship.

Mycroft was aware that by doing so, he had allowed himself to become vulnerable to an unprecedented and dangerous extent. He had allowed his emotional well-being to become dependent on Greg Lestrade. So even as his happiness expanded to displace the distrust, Mycroft had initiated a strict security protocol around his Detective Inspector — one almost as robust as he had for Sherlock and his small family.

Moriarty, were he still alive, or Eurus at her most active, would certainly have targeted Detective Inspector Lestrade as they had targeted John Watson. (And in fact, Jim Moriarty had targeted Greg. He shuddered to think how close the Detective Inspector had come to being on the receiving end of a sniper’s bullet.) Mycroft knew other villains lurked awaiting their moment. He knew the names and shapes of some, others were still vaporous, only just detectable by Mycroft’s vast intelligence (both neural and networked).

And it wouldn’t necessarily be a notorious villain who wanted to harm Greg. Case in point, the home nurse Randall. After he’d gotten the man out of Baker Street, Mycroft had had him struck off. A man with the terrible judgement to toy with Mycroft Holmes really shouldn’t be trusted with anyone’s health.

Mycroft would have left it at that but, after having been let go, Randall had attempted to approach Greg. Perhaps Randall had simply wanted to talk, but Mycroft’s agents had discovered a razor sharp Navy-issue diver’s survival knife on his person. Mycroft had him sectioned within ninety minutes of the attempted approach — the nurse was clearly unstable. Presently he was spending time in an institution with extensive security. Upon his release, Mycroft intended to encourage Randall to find somewhere other than London to call home. Perhaps he could emigrate to Canada. Or New Zealand.

For good measure, Mycroft had Ben Lane reinvestigated — everyone with whom DCI Lestrade had shared an address, office or significant friendship had been investigated when the policeman had taken Sherlock under his wing. Since his seemingly accidental reunion with Greg, Mycroft had initiated light surveillance on the economics professor. He, at least, had made no move to contact Greg.

One could never be too careful.

“Yes, my dear, we have.” Mycroft concurred, wiggling his toes. “Am I disturbing you?”
“You’re all right.” Greg smiled and caressed Mycroft’s calf with his calloused hand. Mycroft had pulled out a bottle of the Rosé they’d procured in Provence to accompany the fruit and cheese tray Greg had prepared. Greg was sipping his wine appreciatively as his hand pushed Mycroft’s trouser leg up towards his knee. “We stopped counting dates you know. I must still owe you a few.”

“You may have stopped counting. I have not.”

“Yeah? How many have we had?”

“We have had exactly 41.346 fabulous dates.” Mycroft informed him. “Would you like me to recount them for you?”

“How can we have had .346 of a fabulous date?”

Mycroft shrugged. “Nine of the dates were fractioned — ‘fabulous’ enough to be counted, but not enough to constitute an erasure of an entire debt point. For example, the trip to France constituted 3.69 dates — I penalised you for time spent on the beach or at the pool.” He caught Greg’s bemused expression. “I assure you my calculations are accurate.”

Greg laughed. “I trust you.” He set down his glass and leaned towards Mycroft, sprawling across the couch until he could reach the other man’s face. Their mouths touched and Mycroft’s awareness shrank to Greg’s lips, Greg’s fingers, Greg’s scent, his tongue, his rough jaw…

He blinked several times when Greg pulled away. “Your face still does that thing when I laugh.”

“My face does a thing?” Mycroft felt faintly appalled — more faintly than he probably should.

“I like it.” Greg said, kissing him again. “Your face doesn’t do it any other time.”

“I’m quite certain that my face — and the rest of me — has a number of behaviours that are triggered by you and you alone.”

“Mm. Good.” Greg said.

“This looks fetching on you.” Mycroft observed, straightening Greg’s cardigan. The colour suits.”

Greg sat back with a good-natured eye-roll. “If you say so yourself?” He laughed. “You’ve replaced all my suits and now you’ve moved on to the rest of me clobber.”

“I’m certain I’ve not touched your clobber.” Mycroft replied. “As for your clothing, nothing’s been replaced. I’ve simply added a few things.”

“A few?” Greg asked, his hand sliding up and down Mycroft’s calf possessively. “Seven suits have appeared since April. And mine have disappeared.”

“It’s possible they’re at the dry cleaners.” Mycroft examined his fingernails intently. “You’ll have to ask Wioletta.”

Greg dug his nails into the long calf muscle. “Problem, that. Unlike you, I don’t speak Polish.”

Mycroft smiled primly and opened his mouth to speak — but Greg cut him off. “Don’t you dare say ‘it’s not so hard.’”

“It’s really not.” Mycroft protested.

“For a polyglot. You taught yourself Elvish when you were four! How many other languages did
“you know by then?”

“Mm... how many are there?”

“Ha!” Greg laughed, loud and happy.

Greg had not objected to the addition of new, high-tech running tights — in fact he’d shown a preference for them — thus Mycroft had added a few more useful items for running. Wicking t-shirts, cushioned socks, a rain jacket…

With no complaints forthcoming, Mycroft had become bolder, introducing tailored shirts and a suit that fit Greg so much better than any that he had purchased for himself. Greg had cocked an eyebrow at the suit, but he’d worn it. And he’d taken evident pleasure in wearing it. After that, Mycroft allowed himself rather a lot of latitude.

“It’s no wonder Sherlock overreacts if you do the smallest thing for him. Give an inch and you take a mile. You take all the miles.”

“I have no idea what you mean.” Mycroft smiled.

“Mmm… right. You have no idea…” Greg leaned into the space Mycroft occupied with a grin.

Mycroft met him in a kiss.

“It’s our anniversary.” Greg murmured. “Two years ago, we, erm, hooked up. One year ago, we got back together.”

“I am delighted to celebrate with an utter lack of drama.”

“Yeah, well, I’m just happy this past year was better than the year before. I mean, it had its high points…”

“And terrible lows.” Mycroft supplied. “Not that there haven’t been challenges this past year as well.”

“You’re right. I’m being selfish. Only thinking of myself.”

“You are far from selfish, my dear.”

“See if you can say that when I’ve dragged you to the Policeman’s New Year’s Eve Ball next week.”

“You’re labouring under a false assumption. I’m looking forward to the soiree.”

“No one looks forward to the New Year’s Eve Ball.”

“I have only delightful memories from the first we attended together. I’m certain this year will be the same.”

“You threaten the caterer again?” Greg scoffed.


Greg chuckled. “Anthea threatened the caterer.”

“Anthea rarely resorts to threats. She merely makes suggestions.” Mycroft told him. “Do you
object?”

“No. No. No one wants to run out of bubbly before midnight. Or get sick off the prawns.” Greg pulled Mycroft close again. “You improve everything.”

Mycroft accepted the kiss, enjoying the attention. “You used to tell me I was too controlling.”

“Oh, you’re definitely too controlling. But you’ve gotten better at letting me have the wheel now and then.”

Mycroft pursed his lips ruefully. “I don’t have much choice, do I? You do what you want regardless.”

“Not regardless.” Greg protested. “I always take your… suggestions… seriously.”

“Most people don’t regard them as simple suggestions.” Mycroft grumbled.

Greg ignored him, stretching out and laying his head on Mycroft’s chest. Mycroft settled his arms around his partner, feeling pleased.

“We don’t do this enough.” Greg murmured.

Mycroft wondered when they were supposed to find the time to curl up on the couch together more often. Greg was up before dawn almost every day to run — Mycroft no longer woke when he left their bed. Most days the first sight he had of his partner was at breakfast when he returned from the exercise. Greg would join him at the table and refuel. Mycroft would put down his newspaper and smile indulgently at the beautiful, sweaty man opposite and they’d chat amicably for fifteen minutes. Then Mycroft was off to work and Greg was off to shower.

Too many days, he did not see Greg again until one or the other crept into bed, attempting not to disturb their slumbering mate. Mycroft had to take some of the blame for the time apart — he’d had to travel and work late any number of evenings with the mess in Hong Kong, the hoopla with Iran and the new (disastrous) PM. Greg’s job didn’t keep him late as often, but when it did, Greg gave it his all.

However, now that he’d completed the course of chemotherapy and the experimental drug protocol, John Watson’s health was less precarious. The doctor had regained the energy to indulge the occasional unpleasant fit of pique. His frustration was perfectly understandable — Mycroft would be entirely bloody-minded had he been confined to a wheelchair for so long — but that made it no easier to endure. Greg viewed it as an excellent sign and left them alone several days a week.

Thus, Mycroft and Greg met at home for dinner more often than they had since before the trip to Provence.

Mycroft treasured those days. Somehow, he’d taken evenings with Greg for granted, and their loss had hit him hard. A night like this, where they had nothing to do but pay attention to each other, was long overdue. Mycroft was even willing to indulge the ‘anniversary’ theme.

It hardly seemed like a year. Mycroft’s hands moved over Greg’s broad back. Every day with him — whether they spent hours together or mere minutes — was an unadulterated joy. Only a year... only two since they’d begun their relationship... so little time and it seemed like less... but Mycroft could not countenance a life without him.

For so long he’d looked for the end, seen the ending in Judith and Sanne and any other woman who looked at Greg twice. Mycroft had looked for the end of their union because not to expect it meant
giving in to the absolute necessity of it never ending.

*All things end. All hearts are broken. Caring is not an advantage.*

He’d said something of the sort to Sherlock once, attempting to warn his sensitive brother against becoming too attached. Mycroft never thought he himself would be so susceptible to sentiment...

Mycroft had given up *smoking* for God’s sake! He was a veritable marshmallow.

Greg’s fingers stroked idly over his chest until they snagged on the nub of his nipple through his cotton shirt. The stroking lost its idleness quickly, worrying the erect tissue with single minded intent. Mycroft sighed.

With a fingertip, Mycroft tilted Greg’s face upwards, towards him. He stretched his neck to kiss him, lingering over the soft caress of Greg’s lips, the heat of his tongue...

He would have to erase this section of security tape. Mycroft knew the in-home camera feeds were not being watched — they would be reviewed only if there were trouble. Mycroft was quite certain the last thing Agent Steve Jones wanted was to see was his employer being intimate with his live-in boyfriend.

Greg moved, levering forward with his knees, wrapping a big mitt around Mycroft’s neck, pressing his weight down and grinding. As he lay back, Mycroft felt a judder of arousal as Greg’s thigh lodged between his legs. He reached down to grip Greg’s buttocks, the wool of his trousers was soft under Mycroft’s palms, the iron flex of his glutes, hard.

They needed this. It had been too long since they’d found time for sex — in addition to all the other demands on their time, Mycroft had been travelling for the past week. He hadn’t touched Greg’s bare skin in any meaningful way for over ten days.

Ten days. When Mycroft said it in his mind, it did not seem so long. But it was! They hadn’t gone so long without since Greg’s last bout of depression. And even then, they’d found themselves wrangling under the duvet once or twice a week.

Ten days and Mycroft began to feel distant and disconnected from the relationship. He began to feel the worries he’d put away begin to whisper their insidious poison... *Sanne... Sanne... Ben...* It was incredible how far Greg’s touch, his kisses and amorous attention, went towards silencing the whispers.

As they kissed, Greg unfastened Mycroft’s belt and began to unbutton his trousers. His hand caressed the burgeoning erection through the cloth of his boxers and Mycroft squirmed underneath him. The first touch of Greg’s fingers against the hot skin of Mycroft’s prick made him moan aloud.

Greg grinned broadly. With a last kiss, he slid back, off the sofa onto his knees between Mycroft’s legs. He licked a wet stripe up the underside, pulling the foreskin back with his hand and tonguing under the head. He took the glans in his mouth and sucked Mycroft into the molten heat. His hand worked the shaft as he bobbed.

Greg hummed and Mycroft’s brain stopped processing any other information. His whole world was the vibrations, Greg’s mouth, his throat, his coarse hair under Mycroft’s fingers, his hands pulling at the fabric of Mycroft’s boxers, stroking his bullocks...

As he sucked Mycroft’s prick, Greg yanked Mycroft’s trousers down. Laughing, he managed to pull them off one of Mycroft’s legs, over his bare foot. Mycroft felt Greg’s hot breath as he spread his legs wide. He worshiped Mycroft’s shaft with his tongue, licking wetly, sliding his tongue inside the
foreskin, inside the slit…

Mycroft heard Greg’s belt jingling, heard the slap of Greg’s hand on his own cock, heard him pleasuring himself as he went down on Mycroft. It was arousing, the knowledge that Greg was turned on simply by performing fellatio on Mycroft. It was so exceedingly arousing the muscles in his pelvis convulsed with the thrill, pushing drops of precome into Greg’s mouth.

Greg groaned aloud and the sounds of his hand moving sped up.

Stroking Mycroft’s member, Greg nuzzled his bollocks, sucking them into his mouth, one and then the other. He pressed his lips and tongue against Mycroft’s perineum, massaging the sensitive area. Saliva ran over his hole, his greedy, greedy hole, and Mycroft lifted his hips, panting.

“Please…” The word was broken, a low moan of need.

For a moment, Mycroft felt Greg’s smile against the skin of this thigh, felt his teeth as they nipped the tender skin, then he dove down and his strong tongue found Mycroft’s centre and broached it.

Crying out, Mycroft slipped his hands under his own bum and spread his arse for Greg. The humid heat of his breath felt amazing, the press of Greg’s nose on Mycroft’s perineum, the long, thick tongue fucking Mycroft’s hole as his hand jacked Mycroft’s cock, twisting over the head and smearing the copious fluids of his arousal down his shaft.

With a sigh, Greg switched — taking Mycroft’s prick back in his mouth and pressing his thumb into Mycroft’s taint. A thick, wet forefinger penetrated him and twisted to stroke the sensitive spot, gently trapping the bundle of nerve endings between finger and thumb. Greg kneaded his prostate and Mycroft felt it from the tips of his curling toes to the top of his buzzing scalp to the tight, churning heat in his sac.

Abruptly, Mycroft’s orgasm overtook him. Pleasure ripped through his body, a series of explosions from deep in his bollocks, from between Greg’s thumb and forefinger. Every muscle in his body rigid, he convulsed. Distantly, he felt the heat of his cum splashing on his belly as Greg stroked it out of him, felt his back arching and his calves flexing…

Then Greg was kneeling over him, furiously jacking his own cock as he milked the dregs from Mycroft’s prick. He leaned forward and with a deep groan, came, adding his jism to Mycroft’s, painting his abdomen…

Mycroft shuddered with pleasure as Greg let go his spent prick and leaned heavily over Mycroft, balancing on one arm, still flogging his own cock with the other. It protruded rudely from Greg’s flies, each stroke making his loose belt buckle clack and clang. His face — hung just above Mycroft’s own — was screwed up with effort. As Greg wrung out the last, halting drops of cum, Mycroft shivered with the echoes of his climax.

Greg swiftly shed his jumper and the t-shirt he wore under it, mopping up the mess on Mycroft’s stomach. Tossing the t-shirt away, he collapsed down next to Mycroft, laying on his side against the back of the sofa. He sighed deeply, but Mycroft could feel the quaking in Greg’s chest that presaged his giggling aftershocks.

Mycroft himself was a limpet, unable to lift his arms or his head — unable and uninterested… though it would be nice to put his arms around Greg. Instead he snuggled more tightly against Greg’s warmth and let his eyes close. He felt the rasp of Greg’s furry chest against his cheek, felt coarse fingers in his hair, smoothing it back from his face, and lips pressing delicate kisses to his brow. Greg’s laughter reverberated through his chest cavity, shaking them both. His breath puffed warmly
over Mycroft’s auburn waves. Sleepily, Mycroft drifted on a cloud of pure happiness.

The arm on the record player lifted and reset itself at the beginning. *Skating* filled the room, each note flawless and perfect, walking and running, dancing and swirling with joy.

Chapter End Notes

A shorter chapter this week (But then we’ve just had two longer chapters). I decided to separate Christmas Eve and the New Year’s Eve Ball into two chapters. So next week, our heroes once again attend The Policeman’s Ball.

British Navy diver’s knife: http://www.sheffieldknives.co.uk/acatalog/4-99.html

Given my druthers, I would have said *Linus and Lucy*, but the B side of the vinyl record begins with *Skating*. https://youtu.be/m3ZG8MJ64ic

End Notes

I will attempt to update this story every Sunday...

but as I’m simultaneously updating THIS little nugget of Mystrade on Wednesdays — https://archiveofourown.org/works/16633883/chapters/38996792 — I may not make that schedule every week. Please be patient — the twenty dates WILL be truly fantastic.

I love you all.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!