A Cure For Boredom
by emmagrant01

Summary

They'd never talked about sex in the year they'd known each other. Well, that wasn't quite correct: Sherlock had never said a word about sex; John had bemoaned his personal dearth of it on many occasions.

Notes

Thanks to the amazing Freckles42 for the beta and Britpick. Set sometime during series 2, pre-Reichenbach. Tiny spoilers for the first two episodes. I had every intention of writing something long and plotty and serious, but this is what happened instead: sheer porn. OMG, I don't EVEN know, y'all.

Fan mix by AbbyKate!

And here's another fanmix by thedoctorloves221b.

Cover by Moonblossom.

Cover by Blackmoods

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I've linked to fanart and gifsets within the fic. Some links may be NSFW, so consider the context before you click. A HUGE thank you to everyone who's created art of every sort for this fic. I can't begin to express how much it means to me! ♥

Podfic by Finnagain.

Translation into German by Mycroftsparplu.
"Decisions, decisions." John Watson frowned as he looked back and forth between the plastic tubs of yoghurt he held in each hand. He should just pick one at random, probably; Sherlock would complain either way.

"Get the Greek kind," said a voice to his left. He turned his head just as a fall of auburn hair swept past him to pluck a tub of yoghurt from the shelf in from of him. She smiled as she placed it in her basket, the slight lines around her blue eyes crinkling in a way that always made him stop and look again.

"You prefer it, then?" he replied, sliding into flirting mode with practiced ease.

"You should try it with honey." She swept her hair over her shoulder with her left hand; his eyes caught the flash of a gold band with more than a little disappointment.

"Honey?"

"It's heavenly." She wet her lips and smiled, and his hopes flickered up again. Attached, but still interested. He was almost desperate enough to consider being the other man.

Almost.

"Thanks, I will," he said and looked away as he returned the tub of Danone to the shelf. His phone buzzed the instant he put the Greek yoghurt into his basket and he reached into his pocket to retrieve it.

Wrong. -SH

"What the--" His eyes shot upwards, scanning the ceiling for security cameras. Sherlock couldn't have seen that; it wasn't possible.

His would-be affair had moved a few feet away and was scanning a selection of cream. Even John could tell she was stalling for time, waiting for him to pursue her. He glanced at her hand again to see she'd removed her wedding ring in the interim. Definitely interested, then. He sighed and tapped at the keyboard of his phone with his free thumb.

The Greek yoghurt or the married woman?

No, you. Were wrong. -SH

John rolled his eyes. As if that was a new piece of information. He paused a moment more, staring down at his phone.

She'd just want a shag, probably, nothing more. She might know somewhere they could go and it would be quick and dirty and they wouldn't have to see each other again. He could buy condoms while he was here; they were two aisles over. He risked a glance in her direction to see her watching him. She smiled, tilted her head just a bit. She wasn't his usual type: she was stylish and self-
confident, taller than him, and probably close to his age. There was nothing girlish or coy about the looks she was giving him, no trace of innocence there. What she wanted was very clear. It was surprisingly hot.

The phone in his hand vibrated.

*Come home now. Important. - SH*

He shoved the phone back in his pocket and sighed. Cock-blocked by Sherlock, as always. Maybe it was for the best.

He smiled politely at her and shrugged before turning away and walking in the opposite direction. She didn't follow. He half-wished she would, that she'd just take his arm and lead him out of the shop, take him to some dark corner and press him against the wall and--

He punched the buttons of the chip-and-pin machine a bit harder than was strictly necessary. Why couldn't he catch a break, just this once? He looked back once more before leaving the shop, but she was nowhere to be seen. He walked out the door, alone.

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In retrospect, he shouldn't have been surprised to see Sherlock draped across the sofa and staring at the ceiling, his dressing gown wrapped tightly around him. In the exact same position he'd been in when John had left, in fact.

John set the shopping bag on the cluttered kitchen table and sighed. "Well?"

"You were wrong."

Sherlock's bored-voice was starting to grate on John's last nerve. It had been weeks since they'd had a proper case and Sherlock had rejected everything that had come their way since. He hadn't left the flat in three days. Possibly not even the sofa.

John willed himself to be patient as he crossed to stand in front of Sherlock. He folded his arms over his chest.

"I realize I'm frequently wrong, but it would help if you'd be a bit more specific."

Sherlock's expression was a mildly indignant glare.

"I told you it wouldn't work and it didn't."

John frowned, thoroughly confused. "I've no idea what you're talking about."

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John frowned, thoroughly confused. "I've no idea what you're talking about."

Sherlock rolled his eyes and flailed an arm dramatically across the back of the sofa. "I said I was bored and you said I should just shut up and go have a wank like a normal person."

John felt his eyebrows rise of their own accord. He had indeed said that just before he'd stormed down the stairs to get some fresh air and an hour away from Sherlock's nattering, all-consuming tantrum of boredom.

"That's what this is about?" He eyed a crumpled tissue on the floor next to the sofa. "You actually… on the sofa, Sherlock?"

"Yes. I was on the sofa. Where else should I have done it?"

"In your bedroom? Somewhere I don't sit, perhaps?"

Sherlock have him a withering look. "You masturbate in the shower, which we share, every other morning."
"How do you--" John began and then held up one hand. "No, never mind. I don't want to know how you know that."

"It's completely obvious. You--"

"I said I don't want to know!" John collapsed into an armchair and pressed a hand against his forehead. Silence stretched between them for a long moment.

"At any rate, you were wrong."

John bit the inside of his cheek to keep himself from responding. He glanced over at Sherlock, who was staring up at the ceiling with a strangely discomfited expression.

"All right, I'll bite. How exactly was I wrong?"

"You said it would help and it didn't work."

John paused. "When you say it didn't work, do you mean you couldn't…" He made a vague gesture with his hand.

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm perfectly capable of masturbating, even if I don't practice as frequently as you do."

John smirked; personal attacks meant he was getting close to the real issue. "So you were able to--" He paused, choosing his words carefully. "--bring yourself to orgasm?"

One hand flopped over Sherlock's face. "Of course, though it didn't make a bit of difference. Still utterly bored. In fact, I feel worse now than I did before, which is why I usually don't bother."

This was rapidly descending into the realm of too much information, but John's curiosity was piqued. "I wasn't sure you masturbated at all. How often, then? And I'm asking as your doctor, not as your friend."

Sherlock was silent for several seconds and John wondered if he'd crossed a line. They'd never talked about sex in the year they'd known each other. Well, that wasn't quite correct: Sherlock had never said a word about sex; John had bemoaned his personal dearth of it on many occasions.

"Every month or so," Sherlock said at last, his voice uncharacteristically tight. "Whenever I wake up with an erection that won't go away."

"And that only happens once every month or so?" John almost managed to keep the tone of surprise out of his voice.

"As I've told you on multiple occasions--" He waved a hand above his abdomen. "--just a vessel."

"A vessel you neglect far too much." John sat up in the chair and leaned forward, elbows on his knees. Launching into a lecture about the health risks of complete abstinence was probably pointless, but it was clear that something about this topic was bothering Sherlock. That alone was unusual enough to encourage John to keep pushing. "Is it that you're not interested or that it's not satisfying?"

Sherlock's arm flopped down to his side again. "It's tedious."

"Tedious," John repeated. Then you're not doing it right.

"Honestly, John, if occupying my mind was that simple, don't you think I'd have wanked myself into oblivion before now?"
"I was only trying to help. It helps me clear my head, so I thought… Never mind what I thought." John stood, ready to head upstairs to his room for a while.

"You think I'm doing it wrong."

"Are you asking me to help you?"

"Oh, lovely, I'll defer to your expertise in this matter, shall I? Please, John, help me learn how to rub one out in the shower as proficiently as you do."

"Was there a 'yes' under all of that sarcasm, or was it merely a 'piss off'? I couldn't tell."

Sherlock was silent for a moment. "If you like, yes. I suppose it couldn't hurt."

John took a deep breath and released it again, trying to decide if he should really have this conversation. It wasn't his concern, after all. If he couldn't get Sherlock to eat on a daily basis, it was unlikely he'd be able to help him with this. But this was as close as Sherlock had come to asking for help in, well pretty much ever. John sat in the chair again. "All right. What do you think about while you masturbate?" He winced and hastily revised: "You don't have to give details; I just mean in general."

Sherlock turned onto his side to face John, apparently having decided to take this conversation seriously. "What I normally think about. Everything."

"You actually think about cases while you wank?"

"Experiments, books I'm reading, celebrity gossip, redox reactions in--" John laughed before he could stop himself and Sherlock's face clouded. "What else would I think about?"

"Most people think about sex. They fantasize about someone they're attracted to, that sort of thing. Or they look at porn."

Sherlock's eyes narrowed. "That helps?"

_Oh my god_. John pressed his lips together in a tight smile. "Definitely."

"What do you think about?"

John's face warmed and his gaze fell to the floor. "I imagine I'm with someone else, that it's someone else's hand on me… or mouth." He cleared his throat and glanced back at Sherlock, who was watching him with the same sort of detached interest he reserved for fresh corpses.

"Who?"

"It varies. There was a woman at Tesco just now who will likely make an appearance."

"The married one?"

John nodded and looked towards the window to where the light was already fading.

"What will you think about her?" Sherlock's voice was quiet, cautious.

John took a measured breath. This was uncharted territory for them, but it was a step towards something resembling normal conversation between mates. Well, perhaps not for men their age, but in this particular area Sherlock seemed stuck in his teens. And after John's years in the army, he wasn't actually sure what constituted normal male conversation about sex anyway.
"Well, I'd start by thinking about what she looked like: long reddish brown hair and blue eyes, and a tight body, like she goes to the gym daily and is probably a lot stronger than you'd expect." The fantasy began to spin in his mind and he smiled. "God, the way she looked at me. Like she wanted to drag me out of there and into a dark alley, maybe push me up against the wall and kiss me, rough. Then she'd drop to her knees and suck me off, but she'd stop when I started to get close." His eyes lost their focus for a moment. "And I'd pull her to her feet and hike her skirt up -- no knickers -- and press her back against the wall, her legs around my waist, and--" He stopped and inhaled shakily, his trousers growing tight. "You get the idea."

He heard Sherlock exhale slowly, like a long, intense sigh. "Yes."

John couldn't bring himself to look at him. "Well. On that note, I'll just…" He stood and tried to adjust his dick in his trousers as subtly as possible. "Go up and change."

He didn't have to look to know there was a smirk on Sherlock's face as he left the room. He took the stairs two at a time and closed his bedroom door behind him. As he unfastened his trousers and fell back on his bed, he tried not to think about the fact that Sherlock knew exactly what he was doing right now, and would probably be unable to refrain from making a comment when John finally went back downstairs.

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He was just pissed enough to have trouble unlocking the door to 221B, but he managed after a moment of fumbling. It was late enough that he tried to be quiet for Mrs. Hudson's sake, tiptoeing up the stairs and pausing with his hand on the doorknob to listen for Sherlock.

The room was dark but for a faint glow coming from the sofa. Despite the late hour John wasn't surprised to see Sherlock sitting on one end, legs folded beneath him, dressing gown draped loosely around him and a laptop balanced on one knee, illuminating his face. He was completely focused on the screen and didn't even look up when John stopped in front of him.

John eyed the numerous crumpled tissues on the floor and immediately tried to think of something -- anything -- else. "Stamford sends his regards."

Sherlock didn't answer, and after a moment John realized that there were noises coming from the laptop. Very distinct noises, in fact. And come to think of it, that was his laptop.

He slid onto the sofa next to Sherlock and gaped at the screen. Two young women with absurdly large fake breasts were fondling each other and kissing messily, and making noises John had never managed to extract from a lover. It was a moment before he managed to speak.

"Why are you watching porn on my laptop?"

"I didn't want to risk infecting mine with a virus."

"But you're happy to risk mine?" He'd meant it to sound more biting, but one of the women onscreen pushed her partner's thighs apart and was fingering her bare pussy, and he found himself a bit distracted.

"Considering that I've mostly visited sites that were in your browser history, I doubt any new damage has been done."

They sat in silence for a moment, both transfixed by an extreme close-up of a pink tongue lapping enthusiastically at an engorged clitoris.
"Right," John managed at last. "How long have you been watching porn, exactly?"

"What time is it?"

"Nearly midnight."

"Eight hours. More or less."

It took 3 seconds for the words to be processed in John's brain, at which point he finally managed to drag his eyes from the screen and look at Sherlock. "Eight hours, solid?" That explained the tissues. "You should use lubricant. You're going to get chafed."

Sherlock's hand fumbled at his side and he held up a small tube.

John snatched it from his hand with a frown. "Where did you get this?"

"Your room, bedside table. Is this doing anything for you? I'm finding it a bit boring, to be honest."

"I've asked you to stay out of my bedroom, Sherlock," John muttered, even though it was pointless.

"Hmmm." Sherlock pulled his own computer from where it had been tucked next to him in the sofa, opened the screen, and balanced the machine on his other knee. The screen flickered to life and displayed an extensive Excel file.

"What is that?" John asked, squinting at the screen. "Oh, God, don't tell me this is an experiment."

"Of course it is." Sherlock's fingers danced over the keyboard in a way John could only envy. "I'm keeping track of twenty different variables that stimulate a sexual response." He paused and glanced briefly at John. "Twenty-one, actually. So far this--" He indicated the screen of John's laptop with a nod of his head. "--is ranked right at the bottom."

"After eight hours you'd be fairly desensitized, you know. Are you taking that into account?"

Sherlock frowned at the screen. "Interesting. I'll factor it in." He closed the lid and tucked his computer away again before returning his attention to John's laptop. He paused the video and clicked on another tab in the browser. Another video began to play, this time showing a shockingly large purple dildo being worked in and out of an arsehole of indeterminate gender.

John felt a familiar pull in his groin. "That... looks uncomfortable."

The moans coming from the soundtrack were distinctly female, a conclusion that was confirmed when the camera angle changed. The dildo was pulled out and after a moment an enormous erect cock came into view and pressed easily into the actress's arse. The rhythmic grunting and sound of skin slapping on skin was fairly mesmerizing.

Sherlock closed that tab a few minutes later and opened yet another one, this time displaying double penetration, then a minute after that opened another showing a woman deep-throating a massive cock. It was like porn surfing, just catching bits and pieces of graphic sexual acts with no context, almost with no faces -- body parts isolated, pure carnal fucking.

It was incredibly dirty. John was rock hard.

Sherlock clicked through some videos of people bound, gagged, whipped, and John wondered if he thought of Irene Adler when he saw that. Hell, John wondered if Sherlock thought of anything at all beyond the data he was collecting.
Now a leather-clad man onscreen was getting his prick sucked by a rather androgynous and barely-legal girl, and John couldn't bear it any longer. He fumbled at the fly of his jeans and shoved a hand into his pants. "Do you mind?" he asked with a quick glance at Sherlock. His voice was far rougher than he'd expected.

"Of course not," Sherlock said, his gaze affixed to the screen.

John lifted his hips and pushed his jeans and pants down enough to get his cock out, and fisted it under his shirt. This wasn't going to take long.

"So you like this?" Sherlock asked. The tone was casual, but there was an unmistakable hitch in the middle of the last word.

"Stunning deduction, that." He'd have to explain the no talking during a circle jerk rule later. God, the girl in the video had a talented tongue.

"And you--"

"Shut up," John said. "Analyze later."

God, that mouth. It had been a ridiculously long time since his cock had been in anyone's mouth. He fumbled for the lube, his fingers brushing Sherlock's thigh, and squeezed some onto his hand before starting to stroke himself in earnest. Oh, that was better.

He watched the man on the video grab a fistful of short hair and start to roughly fuck the girl's mouth. Actually, he was starting to suspect that was a boy, and a moment later this fact was confirmed rather graphically. He didn't care; hot fucking blow jobs were hot, God.

A bit of movement caught his attention and he tore his eyes from the screen just enough to see Sherlock's hand moving rhythmically inside his dressing gown, which was now draped over his lap. John's brain nearly stopped functioning -- he knew theoretically that Sherlock had a functional penis, but he was seized by sudden urge to yank that fabric away and see for himself. Just the idea of Sherlock sitting next to him on the sofa, touching himself while they both watched porn -- gay porn, at that -- was nearly enough to melt his brain.

He stroked quickly and let his head fall back against the sofa cushions. His shirt no longer covered his dick but he couldn't be arsed to care. He could hear Sherlock's breathing beside him and he had to close his eyes to keep himself from looking. That didn't prevent his brain from imagining, though, to his not-quite-dismay.

The man onscreen came with loud grunts. John bit the heel of his hand and twisted his fingers on the upstroke one last time and-- there, Jesus, fuck, oh. He groaned around his own hand as he came, trying his best not to sound like a complete idiot. A muffled moan to his left seemed to indicate he wasn't alone. He sank into the cushions and exhaled as he started to come down again. His head felt fuzzy and his body light, and he grinned up at the ceiling.

The box of tissues was thrust at him.

"Thanks," he said as he pulled one and began to dab at his shirt. It was a lost cause, so he finally just wiped his hand clean and tossed the crumpled tissue to the floor with the others. "Was it good for you?" He turned to grin at Sherlock, who hastily looked away. John yanked his shirt down over his groin, then stretched and yawned in an attempt at retroactive casualness. "I don't know about you, but I think I'll sleep well tonight."

Sherlock was busying himself with his computer again and didn't respond.
John suppressed a sigh. That had probably, no had definitely crossed about eight lines they'd never ventured close to before. He had no idea if Sherlock had much experience with sex at all -- hell, he didn't even know if the man was gay or straight or something else altogether. And to be honest, that hadn't exactly been the most heterosexual moment of John's life, and that was saying a lot, considering.

Though it was the best wank he'd had in years. Frightening thought, that.

"I'm going to bed." He stood and stretched, and willed Sherlock to look at him.

He didn't; he only offered a perfunctory, "Good night." As if nothing had happened at all.

"Right," John said. They should probably talk about this, but not now. "Good night."

He was grateful for the mild buzz of alcohol as he sank into his bed. This was going to be weird enough when he sobered up. No need to ruin a decent night's sleep first.

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"Sherlock?" The flat seemed empty, to John's surprise and relief. The fact that Sherlock had gone out at all was a good sign.

He pulled off his coat and slung it over a chair, and spotted his laptop on the sofa. Finally -- he hadn't updated his blog in days. Not that he had much to say. *Sherlock and I watched gay porn last night and had a wank together on the sofa.* Right.

There was always email, of course. He settled at the desk and flipped the machine open, grumbling when he saw how low the battery was. Of course Sherlock would run the battery down and then not plug it in. He fumbled for the power cord, got it plugged in, and finally looked at the screen.

There were still several browser windows open displaying porn videos. He tried to close them, but to no avail -- the damn thing was frozen. He hit ctrl-alt-del, cursing under his breath. That didn't work, so he held down the power button until it shut off, waited ten seconds, and then powered up again. There was more whirring and humming than usual and then the screen went horrifically blue.

"Shit, bugger, and fuck!" He had to close his eyes and take a calming breath. He really needed to change his password, preferably to something utterly random that Sherlock couldn't possibly figure out. He shut down the machine again, shaking his head.

He looked over to the sofa to where Sherlock's machine was sitting, plugged in and open. He stood and crossed to it to see that the screen saver (starfield, naturally) was on. He touched a key and the screen fired to life. It was unlocked. He grinned with glee: Sherlock must have just left.

He settled on the sofa with the machine, only intending to check his mail, but there was that Excel file right on top, just begging to be looked at. It wasn't the sort of thing that would normally have interested him, but the columns were intriguingly headed with words like "oral sex" and "ball gag", and filled with numbers below. The row headings were more difficult to decipher, but there were ten variants being considered for each column. Sherlock had put some serious thought into evaluating his own reactions to porn.

John scrolled though, noting that there wasn't much pattern to the numbers, though when various sexual acts were categorized by gender there was definitely a trend towards the male. Interesting, if not surprising. He scrolled to the right, and there were even more columns. The last one was titled simply *John.*
"Oh my god," he whispered, feeling his cheeks flush. He shouldn't be looking at this. He really shouldn't. It was an incredible invasion of privacy, and wow, the numbers in the John column were fairly off the scale. He scrolled back to the beginning, and then noticed the tabs at the bottom. The sheet he was currently viewing was labeled "Main", and the second one was labeled "John". He clicked it with not a small amount of trepidation.

The columns headings were all the same, though they were only sparsely filled. It was clear what was going on, though: Sherlock was cataloguing both their reactions to various sexual scenarios. It was a typically Sherlock response to a problem John had posed, so he shouldn't be surprised really.

Except that he was, and also more than a touch intrigued.

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"I want to go out."

John looked up from the newspaper to see Sherlock emerging from his bedroom, impeccably dressed. "Go out where? It's half ten already."

"Perfect timing for where we're going."

"We?" John asked, though he was already setting the paper down.

"You'll want to change into something a bit more fashionable. Dark colors would be best."

It was only after they were in the cab that it occurred to John he hadn't even bothered to ask where they were going. As if it would have made a difference.

The taxi dropped them off on Shaftesbury Avenue and Sherlock ushered John up the crowded pavement. He turned at Greek Street and scanned the numbers above the doors of each establishment they passed until he stopped before one, apparently having found what he was looking for.

"Wait here," Sherlock said before pushing the door open and stepping inside, leaving John standing on the pavement alone.

John rolled his eyes and stuffed his hands in the pockets of his jacket. He still had no idea what they were doing there. Sherlock's demeanor suggested there was a case; it wasn't unusual for him to neglect to mention the details to John until the last possible moment.

Sherlock reappeared a minute later, looped his arm through John's and walked him through the door. The interior foyer was dimly lit and a thumping bass seemed to permeate the air. The doorman gave Sherlock a cursory nod as they passed and didn't spare as much as a glance for John. Sherlock led him through a door at the opposite end of the foyer and into a room packed with people: people drinking, people dancing, people shouting conversation at each other over the din of dance music. They made their way to the bar and Sherlock leaned over it to chat with the bartender while John turned and scanned the crowd.

"It would really be helpful if you'd tell me what we're doing here," he said when Sherlock finally turned back toward him.

"We're having a drink." Sherlock's eyes scanned the crowd as well.

"No, what we're really doing."

"Cheers," Sherlock said, handing him a martini glass.
John took the glass, but sniffed at it suspiciously. "What is this?"

"No idea. I told him to make it strong."

"Aren't you having one?"

"Not tonight." Sherlock's eyes were scanning the crowd again.

John sighed. The odds of him regretting this excursion were growing by the minute. He took an experimental sip of the drink and winced. Strong indeed. "So you're getting me drunk. Mind telling me why?"

The corners of Sherlock's mouth twisted upwards. "All in good time, John. Drink up; I've already ordered another."

Twenty minutes later John had quite a pleasant buzz going. Sherlock was still watching the crowd, though his attention was also clearly focused on John's progress towards inebriation. As long as Sherlock was buying, John decided not to complain. After the events of the previous night, it was a fantastic alternative to awkward conversation.

He was nearly finished with the third drink when Sherlock leaned in close. "I'll be right back. Don't move from this spot."

"Sure," John said in reply, the word oddly thick around his tongue. He leaned back against the bar and watched Sherlock thread through the crowd to where a small group of young women were standing. His demeanor changed completely when he reached them, and John couldn't help but smile. Sherlock's ability to completely change his appearance with nothing more than a facial expression was always impressive.

Sherlock seemed to be having an animated conversation with one of the young women, and then he turned and pointed to John. The woman looked at John and grinned, then waved. Sherlock grabbed her hand and laughed, as if embarrassed, and they talked more. Finally they seemed to come to an agreement and Sherlock crossed back to the bar.

"Who was that--" John began, but froze when Sherlock's arm wound around his waist and pulled him close.

"Trust me." Sherlock smiled in a way John knew was fake, but it was clearly for the benefit of someone else.

"All right. What do you want me to do?"

"Finish your drink. It's almost time to head downstairs."

"What's downstairs?"

"You'll see."

John clenched his jaw and did his best to swallow his frustration. There'd be time to talk about this later -- at least, if Sherlock wasn't about to get them both killed.

"Let's go." Sherlock's arm around him tightened and gave him a small push forward, and John let himself be steered through the crowd toward the back of the club. The same doorman they'd seen before was standing before an oddly ornate doorway with a red velvet rope stretched across it. He nodded at Sherlock and took the rope down so they could pass.
They went down into a deep, dark stairwell, seemingly descending several levels below the street. At the bottom of the stairs was another door, and Sherlock pushed it open to reveal a long, dimly lit corridor.

"What the hell is this place?" John asked. "What are we looking for?"

"The door marked 8." He stepped through the doorway and walked briskly down the corridor.

John followed, his senses on alert despite the buzz of alcohol in his brain. "Any time you want to let me know what's going on--" Muffled sounds came through a closed door as he passed and he stopped. "Sherlock?"

"That's none of our concern. Here we are." He'd stopped before a door marked with a large brass number 8. He turned the handle and opened it.

John followed him in, his eyes finally adjusting to the darkness. The small room was lushly decorated with red velvet on the walls and ropes of light draped from the ceiling in loopy patterns. There was a black leather sofa on the far wall large enough for several people to sit on. John crossed to it, then turned back just as Sherlock closed the door.

"What's going on?"

"Do you trust me?" Sherlock asked. His voice was quiet and clear, his expression utterly serious.

"The fact that you're even asking that question is making me nervous."

"I don't think you'll have any problem going along with this, but if you change your mind and want out, we should have some sort of signal."

John's stomach was in knots. "What, like a code word?"

"Exactly. You should choose. It will help you remember."

"It would help me tremendously if you'd just tell me--"

There was a knock at the door and Sherlock reached for the handle. "Pick a word, John."

"Okay, fine…. cinnamon."

Sherlock nodded and opened the door. Standing on the other side were two young women; one John recognized as the woman Sherlock had been talking to earlier.

"Clara, was it?"

She grinned at Sherlock in greeting and nodded her head toward the woman standing next to her.

"This is Abby. She wanted to play too."

"Fantastic," Sherlock replied and John couldn't help but gape at the quickness with which his entire countenance had changed. "Lovely to meet you, Abby."

Abby crossed the room to where John was standing, smiling at him. She was pretty, probably in her early 20s. Her long reddish-brown hair framed her face and swung behind her shoulders when she tilted her head. "You must be John."

John managed to tear his eyes away from her long enough to shoot a questioning glance at Sherlock.
Sherlock was whispering something to Clara and they were both staring at John intently. Clara said something that made Sherlock burst into utterly uncharacteristic giggles and he whispered in her ear in response. She quirked an eyebrow at John.

Abby reached out to cup John's cheek, drawing his attention back to her face. "Don't worry, darling. Your boyfriend explained everything. This is going to be fun."

_Cinnamon_, John thought, but nothing came out of his mouth; she'd leaned forward and pressed her lips against his. His brain must have exploded into small shards, or something, because he promptly lost the ability to think. He'd been prepared for just about anything, but this -- my God, this -- was not something he knew what to do with.

There were hands on his shoulders pulling him backwards, and the backs of his knees hit the sofa. He nearly toppled onto it, suddenly aware that there were two pairs of hands roaming across his chest, under his shirt, and fumbling at the fly of his jeans.

He opened his eyes to see that Abby had settled herself on the floor in front of him, pressing his thighs apart. Clara was next to him on the sofa now. She turned John's face toward her and kissed him. One of her hands was unbuttoning his shirt and the other was around the back of his skull, holding his mouth against her own.

His hands were still limp at his sides and he wasn't sure what he should do with them. Was he allowed to touch or to do anything to influence where this was going? He opened his eyes and twisted his head just enough to see Sherlock leaning against the door, watching. Now that the girls were occupied he'd dropped the gay boyfriend act and the expression on his face was completely familiar.

He wasn't just watching; he was observing. Something clicked in John's brain then and he knew what it was Sherlock wanted him to do. There was something going on with these two women, something they were involved in, and the entire point of this outing was to collect information. John's job was to distract them or to be a distraction, so that Sherlock could get the information he needed.

Right. He could do this. As fucked-up situations-Sherlock-frequently-placed-him-in went, this one was turning out rather pleasantly.

Abby had unfastened his jeans and was tugging at them; he raised his hips to let her wriggle them and his pants down to his knees. He was half-hard already, but the sight of her settling between his thighs was enough to finish the job. Clara's mouth was busy on his neck now, her hands stroking his bared chest, and Abby's hair brushed his thighs just before he felt his cock engulfed in wet heat.

He couldn't help the moan that escaped from his lips -- it really had been quite a while. He closed his eyes and let his head fall back, his fingers scrambling for purchase on the smooth leather of the sofa. He tried to keep control of his senses, tried to keep his mind on the task of stretching this out long enough for Sherlock to get what he needed. Not that it was a hardship, particularly, but the idea of looking like a minute man in front of his best friend wasn't terribly appealing.

Clara's mouth moved to his chest and he managed to open his eyes. It took him a moment to focus on Sherlock again, but he needed to ground himself somehow. There was heat in Sherlock's gaze, a heat of the sort John had only ever seen directed at one other person. It was startling, but not as much as the spark that lit somewhere in John's belly when Sherlock's eyes flicked up slightly to meet his.

Abby did something with her tongue then that made his eyes roll back in his head and he gasped. There was a hand at the base of his cock and another cupping his balls, and yet another pinching one of his nipples, and how the hell had Sherlock managed this when John couldn't even get anyone to
Focus, focus, focus. He snapped his eyes open and found Sherlock's gaze again. The sensations being wrung from his body were intense, but there was something insanely hot about being watched this way. He wondered if Sherlock would have done this, would have put himself in this position, out of control of his own body.

Both girls' mouths were on his prick now, and that was something to check off his bucket list because **seriously**. He threaded his fingers into two sets of hair, trying to hang on a bit longer. Sherlock shifted his position and John looked up to see that his eyes had narrowed. John let his hands fall back to his sides again and Sherlock smiled very slightly.

So that was the rule, then. No touching. Just feeling.

And fucking hell, the feeling. He was no longer trying to keep quiet, was no longer trying to hold back. One mouth was expertly working the head of his cock and the other was sucking on one of his balls, and then there was a slick finger pressed just behind and he felt the pressure in his balls reach the point of no return.

He managed to grunt out a warning and then he was being kissed again while his soul was being sucked out through his dick. God, the last girl he'd been with hadn't even wanted him to come in her mouth, and Abby wasn't letting go, still working his dick even after he was done.

Clara released his mouth and dove for her. "That was so fucking hot," she whispered, holding Abby's face in her hands. "You are so fucking gorgeous." They began snogging right in John's lap.

He stared weakly at them, wondering if he might be able to get it up again. Oh hell, even if he couldn't, maybe they'd just let him watch? That would fuel his wanking for years.

He couldn't help but grin at Sherlock, whose face was settled into observation mode again. Whatever he'd been looking for, John hoped he'd found it. On the other hand, if they needed to return tomorrow night to do a little more "research" John thought he could probably suffer the hardship.

Sherlock pushed off the wall and crossed to the sofa, settling back into character as he threw an arm around John's shoulder and planted a kiss against his cheek.

*In his alcohol-and-orgasm-induced haze,* John managed not to react at all.

"Happy, darling?" Sherlock said, his lips brushing John's ear in a way that was decidedly pleasant. "Is that what you wanted?"

"Yes. God, yes." The girls broke the kiss and grinned at him. Sherlock laughed and John began to wonder when he'd landed in some sort of alternate reality. Because this shit? Did not happen to him.

"That was fun," Clara said as she rose to her feet and pulled Abby up with her. They twined their arms around each other.

"He has a gorgeous cock," Abby said. "Thanks for sharing it."

John wasn't sure if he was blushing from the compliment or the fact that Sherlock's fingers were stroking the curve of his ear.

"You're welcome."

"Any time," John added, which earned him a small slap on the cheek from Sherlock.

Abby and Clara laughed and straightened their clothes before leaving. The moment the door closed
Sherlock sat back, putting some space between them on the sofa.

John blinked at the sudden loss of heat and then realized his jeans were still around his ankles. He pulled them back up as quickly as he could, keenly aware that Sherlock was watching him.

"I assume we're done here?" he said as he pushed to his feet, a bit unsteadily.

"Mmmm," Sherlock replied, apparently in processing mode now.

John settled back on the sofa and closed his eyes. The room was spinning a bit, but in a good way. It distracted him from the chaos inside his head.

"We should get a cab."

John sat up and blinked; Sherlock was already standing by the door and winding his scarf around his neck. "Right, of course."

The chilly air outside cleared his head a bit. By the time they slid into the backseat of a taxi, John's curiosity was nearly killing him.

"I hope you found what you were looking for back there."

Sherlock's smile was enigmatic. "I've a bit more research to do, but that was very enlightening, yes."

Silence stretched between them and John sighed. Like blood from a stone sometimes. "So, the case?"

"What case?"

John frowned. "This case, the one you're working on. When are you going to tell me about it? What are we looking for?"

"I've no idea what you're talking about, John."

"But… Then what was this all about?" The moment the words left his lips, it all worked itself out in his mind. The anger that filled him was shockingly intense. "Oh my God. This was part of your experiment? Are you fucking serious?"

Sherlock stared at him, apparently surprised by his reaction. "You looked at my data this afternoon. I assumed you'd worked it out."

"Of course I hadn't; I'm an idiot, remember?" He pressed his hands against his face. "I can't believe you would put me in that situation, I just--" He lowered his voice to a whisper. "They didn't use a condom!"

"Yes, I was surprised you didn't make a fuss about that, especially considering there was an entire drawerful of supplies in that table."

"How was I supposed to know that?"

"It was a sex club, John. What else would they keep in the drawers in the private rooms?"

The fury coursing through John's veins was being tempered with embarrassment now, because he really should have noticed where they were. He had just followed Sherlock blindly like an obedient puppy, as he always did. "How could I be so stupid?" He groaned. He heard an intake of breath to his left and held up a hand. "That was rhetorical."
They rode the rest of the way to the flat in silence. John hopped out of the cab and bolted for the door of 221B -- he'd be damned if Sherlock was going to make him pay the fare. He stalked up the stairs, through the door and into the kitchen. He fumbled through the contents of the fridge for something safe and drinkable, finally settling on a small container of juice that he knew he'd purchased himself. He leaned against the table and chugged it, and waited.

Sherlock had barely had a chance to get his coat off before John lit into him.

"You took me to a sex club without disclosing it to me, got me drunk, and then led me right into a sexual scenario without my consent."

Sherlock's face fell slightly before the placid mask of indifference fell into place again.

"You consented. We discussed it."

"Sherlock, you got me drunk, so by definition my consent was iffy at best."

"But there was a safeword, and you didn't use it."

"Oh, is that what we did there right at the last minute? Fucking hell, Sherlock."

John emptied the juice carton and binned it before stalking towards him. Sherlock shrank back a step, a flicker of fear on his face, which John found immensely satisfying. He felt an impulse to hit him, shove him, make him see just how angry John was.

But dammit, this was Sherlock, and even though he was a genius he could also be a complete idiot. John scrubbed at his forehead with one hand and sighed.

"Sit. We need to talk about this."

Sherlock nodded, not quite making eye contact. He crossed to sit in an armchair, tucking his legs under him. He looked like a boy who'd been caught out and John had to stifle a smile.

He sat in the chair across from Sherlock and leaned forward, elbows on his knees.

"What you did tonight was at the very least unethical. Do you understand that?"

"But you enjoyed it."

"That's beside the point. Look, I'm not opposed to participating in this insane experiment of yours, but you cannot keep me in the dark like this. You have to be honest with me, all right?"

Sherlock stared at his hands for a moment before looking up at last. "All right."

"Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Sherlock made a noise of frustration. "Of course I understand. It won't happen again."

John's lips twisted slightly. "You don't understand at all, do you?"

Sherlock scowled. "Then enlighten me, please."

"I'd like it to happen again. In fact, I'd be disappointed if it didn't." He couldn't help but smirk at the look of utter confusion on Sherlock's face. "I get that this is an experiment. I'm fine with that. You want to understand how sex works, how people respond to sexual stimuli."

"Not people, John. You."
John felt his cheeks flush, but he forced himself to hold Sherlock's gaze. "Just me. Okay then. And against my better judgment, I'm somehow still fine with that. I'll even be an enthusiastic participant. But only if you're honest with me."

There was something strange in Sherlock's eyes again, something John could only identify as heat. It sent a shiver down his spine and settled itself uncomfortably close to another part of his anatomy.

"Agreed." Sherlock's expression was nearly predatory now. "Shall we continue tomorrow night?"

John nodded. "Tomorrow night."

Sherlock smiled and sank in the chair, steepling his fingers. Already planning.

John swallowed. What exactly was he getting himself into?

Chapter End Notes

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**Art for this chapter:**

- [A Cure](https://www.penswoods.com/) by Pennswoods
- [WTH we do...](https://www.tumblr.com/) by Dallamar (This link goes to DA, must be logged in to view). View on Tumblr [here](https://www.tumblr.com/).
- [Sherlock's Spreadsheet](https://www.tumblr.com/) by me. :-)

Gifsets by [martincrief](https://www.tumblr.com/):

"Are you asking me to help you?"
"Why are you watching porn on my laptop?"
"Oh my god," he whispered, feeling his cheeks flush. He shouldn't be looking at this. He really shouldn't.
"Aren't you having one?"
"Don't worry, darling. Your boyfriend explained everything. This is going to be fun."
Chapter Summary

John had fully expected it to get weird, perhaps even weirder than he could imagine. At least for now, he'd made up his mind to enjoy the ride.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*****

"I was 12. Her name was Sonya. She was a year or two older than me. We were at a party at someone's house; I can't remember what the occasion was. I was sitting with some mates, all of us sharing one bottle of beer someone had nicked from their parents' fridge, and she just came right over to me. She told me to come with her and all my mates went ooooh or something, but I had no idea what was going on." John paused to take a swig from the beer bottle in his hand. "She led me to another room and closed the door. It was dark and I could barely see her. She pushed me back against the door -- she was a lot taller than me, but all the girls were at that age -- and she asked me if I'd ever kissed anyone. I don't even know if I managed to answer her; I was so surprised. And then she kissed me." He turned to where Sherlock was sprawled on the sofa. "That's it, really."

"What did you think at the time?"

John shrugged. "I remember being a bit grossed out at first, to be honest. I didn't realize until that moment that people used their tongues when they kissed."

"What did it make you feel?"

"Turned on after I got over the tongue thing. I got hard and I was terrified she would notice, and I kept pulling away from her. I think she thought I didn't like it. Eventually she stopped kissing me and left me there in the dark with a serious hard-on."

"Did you want to have sex with her?"

"Yes. Well, no, not really. I mean, I knew how sex worked -- theoretically, anyway -- but I was terrified of girls. I was perfectly happy to fantasize about them from afar for a while after that." He drained the beer and pushed to his feet, heading to the kitchen for another.

"Why were you afraid of girls?" Sherlock asked, his voice still timbred for someone sitting three feet from him.

John rolled his eyes as he rummaged for another beer in the fridge. Ah, the last bottle; he'd have to go get more. Of course, it was early yet, and as far as he knew, they were going out tonight. Which was why he was already drinking at this hour. He wasn't sure he could take the suspense sober.

He uncapped the bottle and crossed back to the chair, thinking about how to answer that question. "I don't know what I was afraid of. It seems bizarre now."

"It doesn't. Women are frightening enough as adults; as teenagers I imagine they'd be utterly
terrifying."

John had no idea if Sherlock was joking or not. "I was 16 before I kissed another girl. It took me four entire years to work up the nerve."

"This is incredibly disappointing, I have to say."

John turned to stare at him. "Disappointing?"

"I'd imagined you had quite a sordid youth. It pains me to know I was so very wrong."

"You imagined I was shagging every girl in school by the age of 15 or something? Definitely not." John paused. "Wait, why would you think that?"

Sherlock didn't respond, instead staring at the ceiling.

"Did you talk to my school friends?"

"No. Should I?"

"They probably wouldn't remember me."

"I find it hard to believe anyone could forget you, John."

"I happen to be extremely forgettable. Just ask my string of ex-girlfriends." John paused to take a drink. "What about you?"

"What about me?"

"When was your first kiss?" He let the assuming you've had one remain implied.

"This isn't about me. It's about you."

"I'm not asking to collect data. I'm asking because I'm interested."

"Why are you interested?"

"No idea. In fact, I'm becoming less interested by the second. Never mind." John picked at the label on the beer bottle, peeling the corners back slightly. Silence stretched between them for several minutes, and it was oddly pleasant. As infuriating a roommate as Sherlock could be, it was nice that they could sit in silence like this and just hang out.

Eventually Sherlock sat up and opened his laptop. John finished his beer to the light tapping of keys, trying to resist the urge to ask Sherlock what he was doing. He had a strong suspicion it had something to do with the experiment.

"Want to order take-away?" he asked at last. "I've a craving for Thai."

"Not hungry."

"Of course you aren't. But I'll get that curry you like, just in case you change your mind."

He stood and crossed to the door, plucking his coat from the chair he'd draped it over earlier. He glanced back once, but Sherlock was completely focused on the glow of the screen before him.

*****
"You need to get ready," Sherlock said as he emerged from his bedroom. John looked up from the telly to see him buttoning the cuffs of a dark blue shirt.

The fluttering that had finally eased in John's belly flared up again. "Are we leaving soon?"

"Now, in fact." Sherlock's eyes raked over him. "White shirt, tie, jeans, trainers, and a jacket. Nothing too fancy; casual is fine."

John swallowed. "All right. I'll just… okay." He fumbled for the remote and hit the power button, casting the room into near-darkness. He found his way to the stairs and up, through the door, and dug out clothes he thought would suffice. He changed quickly and finally turned to stare at himself in the mirror on the back of the door.

"What are you so nervous about?" he whispered as he knotted the tie. He was basically guaranteed to get laid, after all. Why be nervous about that?

*****

Neither of them spoke during the excruciatingly long taxi ride. John wasn't sure whether to be relieved or worried. They needed to talk about what was going to happen -- he'd made that much clear last night -- but Sherlock had shown no indication that they would discuss this at all. It wasn't until they were standing before the door of the club that John finally took Sherlock by the arm and pulled him aside.

"We need to talk."

Sherlock looked instantly annoyed. "I thought we discussed this last night."

"Honesty, remember? I need to know what…" John had to force himself to look Sherlock in the eye. "What you expect of me."

Sherlock's eyes narrowed. "I don't understand."

"Right. So." John ran one hand through his hair and took a deep breath before continuing. "This is your experiment, so you're calling the shots. I'm fine with that, but if you have any… rules you want me to follow, now would be a good time to tell me."

Sherlock stared at him for a moment, as if considering, and then nodded. "I'll need you to follow my precise instructions at all times, without question. If you're uncomfortable with what you're being asked to do or with anything that's happening, use the safeword. Otherwise I'll assume you consent. Our cover is that we're a couple; you should behave accordingly, but don't overdo it. You don't get to pick your partners; that's my job. You also don't get to choose what they do to you and when. It's important for the purposes of data collection that you aren't aware what's coming next, so I won't explain anything, even if you ask."

"Okay." John swallowed; that was a bit more than he'd expected, certainly.

"And no touching," Sherlock continued. "They can touch you, but you will not touch them."

"Why not?"

Sherlock didn't answer, though. He opened the door of the club and indicated with a nod of his head for John to walk through it.

"I feel loads better now," John muttered. He forced a tight smile and walked through the door.
They made their way towards the bar again. John ordered a pint and drank a third of it in one go.

"I thought alcohol interfered with consent," Sherlock said softly, his mouth so close to John's right ear that he could feel warm breath against his skin.

"Are you kidding? I need a drink after all of that." He exhaled and scanned the room, though it was essentially pointless. Sherlock may as well have said no looking for all the good it did.

"Finish your drink and head downstairs, room five. I'll meet you there shortly." Sherlock headed out into the crowd, leaving John standing at the bar alone.

He downed his beer and decided to find a toilet on the way. He'd half-expected people to be having sex in the stalls, but all was quiet. He supposed there wasn't much need when there were private rooms for that purpose below.

He lost track of time in room number five. He couldn't get a signal on his phone and there was little else to do but sit and wait. This room was similar to the last one, though slightly smaller. The sofa was smaller and there was a chair by the door, almost as if it had been placed there precisely for someone to watch.

And Sherlock, apparently, liked to watch. That much seemed clear.

The door opened without so much as a knock, startling him to his feet. Sherlock closed the door behind him and leaned back against it, staring at John.

"Well?" John asked after several excruciating seconds of silence.

The corners of Sherlock's lips turned up very slightly, and just at that moment there was a knock on the door. He pushed off it and turned to open it.

The first thought that flashed through John's mind was of that one Britney Spears video he used to guiltily wank to while at university. The woman who now leaned against the door frame seemed to be going for exactly that naughty schoolgirl look, complete with blonde braids, a very short plaid skirt, long white socks up to her knees, and a shirt that was missing far too many buttons to be regulation. She gave him a smoldering look, handed Sherlock her purse -- the resulting expression of annoyance on his face was almost a distraction -- and walked straight across the room to drape her arms around John's shoulders.

Oh my God. This was just. God.

"I was playing Truth or Dare just now, and do you know what your boyfriend dared me to do?"

"Didge ah--" John began and then shook his head to clear it. "Ah, no. No idea."

She grinned and gave him a shove and he landed hard on the sofa. She straddled his knees and climbed into his lap, her short skirt riding up to reveal white cotton knickers underneath. She nestled into his lap, the warmth of her pussy pressing right into his cock, which strained up against several layers of fabric to say hello. She wriggled a bit, earning a whimper from John, and then grasped his tie in one hand and tugged him up towards her.

"He dared me to make you come from kissing alone. Do you think I can do it?"

He wanted to ask, Did he actually say it just like that? Because that was not a combination of words he could imagine coming out of Sherlock's mouth.
What he actually said was, "I think you probably can, yeah." A bit more breathlessly than he'd intended, but what the hell.

She leaned forward and brushed her lips across his, just the slightest touch, then leaned forward to whisper in his ear. "I'll cheat a bit, if it's all right with you." She shifted her hips ever so slightly, grinding against him, and he moaned.

Yes, this was definitely going to work.

Her lips brushed his again, open-mouthed, her breath laced with some sort of strawberry liqueur that made this entire thing seem even more naughty. They remained like that for a surprisingly long time, not really kissing, just breathing into each other while she rocked against him in a way he hoped Sherlock wouldn't notice. His hands were clenched into fists at his sides; it was all he could do not to take control and pull her hard against him. He closed his eyes and let himself sink into the sofa cushions, clearing his mind completely. No thinking. Just feeling. Only feeling.

The tip of her tongue brushed against his own and he sighed at that brief contact. Her tongue circled his before disappearing again and she began to kiss his mouth softly, tugging at his lips and running her tongue along the sensitive skin just inside. He tried to deepen the kiss, but she pulled away with a small laugh.

"You don't want it to be over that quickly, do you John?"

"No." It was more a whimper than a word.

After another minute of teasing she finally kissed him properly and his appreciation for her tongue increased ten-fold. He'd kissed girls who seemed more interested in inspecting his tonsils than anything else, but this woman was expertly fucking his mouth with nothing more than her tongue. She was pressing her cunt against his cock in tiny circles now, hitting a rhythm that was clearly more for her than for him. Not that he minded; any kind of friction was going to do the trick at this point.

She captured his tongue between her lips and sucked it lightly while swirling her tongue around the tip, and he moaned. God, what he wouldn't give to have that tongue somewhere else. He managed to catch her tongue then and flicked his own against hers while sucking; she whimpered and ground against him. Her expert kisses turned into open-mouthed groans and he was momentarily stunned by the intensity of it. He was dimly aware that she was coming, but all he could do was hang on for the ride.

Ride, he would later tell Sherlock, was quite the appropriate term.

She stopped moving just as he was on the verge of coming himself and he thrust up against her. She took the hint and started moving again, and pressed her forehead against his whispering encouragement. He didn't need it.

"Oh fuck oh god, that's... right there... fucking hell." Words left him for incoherent moans after that. She was still riding him after he was done, and then she came again -- something he frankly hadn't been sure was physically possible until that moment. She collapsed against him, both of them flushed and John sweating in that damn jacket.

He was fully clothed, for fuck's sake. How did that even happen?

He looked over her shoulder to grin at Sherlock, but instead saw that annoyance was emanating from him in waves that were practically visible to the naked eye. John sighed.

"That wasn't what was supposed to happen," Sherlock spat after their guest had collected her purse
and left. He dropped onto the sofa beside John with very nearly a pout on his face. "I told her she could only kiss you. That entire experiment was a waste of time."

John ran a hand over his face. He still felt a bit fuzzy. "Oh, I wouldn't say that."

"Yes, well. You clearly enjoyed it."

"Jesus, Sherlock. I'm not even sure what you wanted to happen is possible, but seriously? I just had an orgasm fully clothed. I'm fairly certain she had two. That's damn amazing and definitely good enough for your spreadsheet."

"That's not the point."

John shook his head. "Of course not. Enlighten me here: what exactly is the point, if not to observe me having sex with various women and analyze… whatever it is you're analyzing?"

"It may just be sex for you, but it's science for me. This kind of data collection requires careful controls or the information is essentially worthless."

John smirked. "Ah, of course. I see the real problem now."

"Then enlighten me, won't you?"

"You can control me, but you can't control anyone else who walks through that door. It's just not possible. So you're going to have to find a way to deal with a certain amount of unpredictability in this experiment. And damn if I'm not going to enjoy watching that."

Sherlock shook his head. "That's completely perverse."

"Pot, kettle." John raised an eyebrow at him and was rewarded with a rude gesture. He laughed.

*****

Sherlock had hailed a cab while John was cleaning himself up in the toilet, and they rode in silence for the first half of the journey to Baker Street.

"Fifteen," Sherlock said at last, nearly startling John out of his own tangled thoughts.

"Sorry?"

"My first kiss."

"Oh." This was an interesting turn of events. "What happened?"

"It was at school. I'm fairly certain she did it on a dare. She never spoke to me again, at any rate."

"That bad at it, were you?" John quipped and immediately regretted it. "I mean, no, I didn't mean--"

"It was completely horrible all around. It put me off the entire idea for years."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be."

John's eyes narrowed. "But that implies something put you back on, doesn't it?"

Sherlock stared out the window and didn't reply. John watched the rhythmic flash of streetlamps
across his face for nearly a minute before getting lost in his own thoughts again.

*****

John spent the afternoon out of the flat, only returning to Baker Street when it was too dark to ignore the fact that the day was over. Sherlock was on the sofa as always, staring at the screen of his laptop in minimal light.

"Are we going out?" John asked as he stripped off his jacket.

"Yes." He didn't look up, not that John expected him to do.

"Should I... I mean, is there anything you want me to... wear or...?" John closed his eyes for a full second. This was still fantastically awkward.

"Whatever you like is fine tonight. You'll be taking it all off as soon as we arrive, so it won't matter."

John gaped at him for a moment, but he still didn't look up. "All right then."

A drink was definitely in order. He rummaged through the small collection of liquor they'd amassed and ended up with something that was half vodka and half citrus soda. It was terrible, though; he gave up halfway through and drank a beer instead.

He watched telly for a couple of hours, losing himself in a *Big Brother* marathon. Ironic, that: for the first time he felt something like sympathy for the contestants and their predicament. He glanced over at Sherlock occasionally, but the man hadn't moved from the spot. John wondered when he'd eaten last.

He didn't ask when they were leaving -- there was no point. Sherlock would tell him when it was time, and John would blindly follow him into whatever sexual scenario he'd managed to set up. John had no idea how he was doing it, whether he had a plan and arranged everything in advance, or if there was just a loose set of parameters and Sherlock found someone suitable once they arrived. But really, it didn't matter: he trusted Sherlock in this. God help him.

*****

"So this club we've been going to -- it's a private club, isn't it?"

"It is," Sherlock replied, staring out the window of the cab.

"Pricey, I imagine?"

"Absolutely."

John frowned. "You didn't actually buy a membership to this club, did you?"

"Of course not. I borrowed one."

"Who did you--" John began and then grimaced. "Oh, don't tell me."

Sherlock's lips twisted into a smirk. "My brother's interests are rather diverse."

"God, I wish I hadn't asked," John said, turning to look out the window again for a moment. A thought occurred to him and he whipped his head back around. "When you say *borrow*, you mean you nicked it, right? Just like that all-access pass?"
"No. He hasn't forgiven me for that just yet. This time it was honestly borrowed."

"And you told him... what, exactly?"

Sherlock's phone buzzed and he pulled it from the pocket of his coat to glance at the screen. A smile traced his lips and he tapped out a text before putting the phone away again. "The truth, naturally."

John swallowed. "Which is?"

Sherlock's sigh was long-suffering. "That I am conducting a series of experiments about human sexuality, with your assistance."

John felt the blood drain from his face. "Fantastic."

"I'd expected him to refuse but he seemed rather pleased about it, actually. No idea why."

John only barely resisted the urge to bang his head against the taxi's window. Now Mycroft probably thought he and Sherlock were having kinky group sex, together, in a club Mycroft himself belonged to and -- oh God.

"Do you think he's spying on us?"

"Of course he is," Sherlock replied. He paused and turned to look at John. "Does that bother you?"

John snorted. "Oh no, not a bit. The idea of your brother knowing exactly how much sex I'm having and with whom is a bit of a turn-on, actually. Should we cut out the middle-man and invite him to join us?"

Sherlock rolled his eyes, but then looked thoughtful, to John's horror. "There is a more public space on a different level of the club. We could--"

"No," John said, a bit more sharply than he'd intended. Sherlock's eyes narrowed and John sighed. So that's where this was going. "Not yet, anyway."

Sherlock's expression smoothed out again and he nodded. For the fortieth time in the last few days, John wondered what the hell he was doing here.

*****

"Room seven," Sherlock said as soon as they entered the club. "Unless you need another drink first?"

"No, I'm good. Room seven."

It wasn't until he was standing inside the room and examining the furnishings -- two chairs facing each other, one armless -- that he realized it hadn't even occurred to him to ask Sherlock what he should expect tonight. Not that Sherlock would have told him, but still John had just blindly obeyed. That ought to worry him, but really, how was it any different than any other part of his life? John took charge when it seemed necessary, but quite a lot of the time he simply did what he was told, even when what he was being told made no sense.

And really, none of this made sense. Assuming things continued tonight as they had done, he would have had more sex in the last two days than he'd had in the last few years, and every bit of it had not only been arranged by Sherlock, but witnessed -- no thoroughly examined -- by him as well. That ought to have put John off, but somehow it didn't. He had fully expected it to get weird, perhaps even
weirder than he could imagine, but for now he'd apparently made up his mind to enjoy the ride.

The door opened and a couple entered, laughing with arms twined around each other. It was a moment before John recognized one of them as Sherlock.

"And then he said, 'You want me to put it where?' and I--" The woman who was currently wrapped around Sherlock stopped abruptly and stared at John. "Well, now. Hello." Her eyes blazed.

He'd never before heard hello come out quite so clearly as please fuck me. She untangled herself from Sherlock and crossed to stand in front of John. Her hair was short and dark, her face heart-shaped, and her eyes a startling and unlikely shade of green. Shiny black boots with spiky heels covered her legs up to her thighs. She was dressed, or rather, squeezed into a red latex mini-dress that not only threatened to ride up over her arse but also barely contained her breasts. She was one abrupt move away from a massive wardrobe malfunction, and John was already half-hard.

He glanced at Sherlock, who had already dropped the drunk act and was settling into observation mode now that her attention was no longer focused on him.

She reached out and stroked one finger down John's cheek, then grasped his chin with her hand. "He's explained everything. Too bad about the no touching rule. I'd have loved to know what your tongue can do." She pressed her thumb between his lips and he did his best to show her just what she was missing. Her eyes fluttered closed for a moment before opening again, now dark. Her lips were the same shade of red as the dress.

"Let's get started, shall we?" She took a few steps backward and without taking her eyes off John said, "Unzip me, will you, Sherlock?"

Sherlock looked momentarily stunned to John's delight, but then stepped forward and fumbled with a zipper at the nape of her neck. He drew it down slowly; whether this was because it was difficult or to draw out the suspense was unclear. She peeled the latex dress off slowly, revealing skimpy underthings made of red satin and black lace, and made a sound not unlike a purr as she stepped out of the dress. The combination of boots, lace, satin, and pale creamy skin was like something John had previously only paid to see online.

She walked back toward John and pressed one finger against his chest, pushing him backward into one of the chairs. She then sprawled into the other, hooking her knees over the chair's arms and spreading her thighs wide.

"Are you allowed to speak?" she asked, fingers sliding under the satin knickers to touch herself.

John flicked his eyes at Sherlock, who shook his head. John turned back to her and she laughed.

"He keeps a tight leash on you, doesn't he? I can't say I blame him." She sighed and let her eyes fall closed as her fingers circled under the knickers. John squirmed in his seat and clenched his hands into fists. She grinned and opened her eyes, leveling a heated look at him. "You show me yours and I'll show you mine." He frowned, uncertain for a moment, and she licked her lips. "Strip, John. Right now."

He sat up and pulled his jumper over his head, then unbuttoned the shirt underneath. He stood and unfastened his trousers and let them fall, realizing too late he should have toed his shoes off first. An awkward minute later he was standing before her clad in nothing but a pair of tented boxers.

"Those too," she said.

John exhaled shakily. He'd been naked in front of Sherlock before and Sherlock had seen him with
an erection, but the number of times he'd stood in front of anyone both naked and aroused was very small. There was something about this moment that felt like crossing yet another line, and John found he couldn't take it lightly.

"From what I can see you've nothing to be embarrassed about," she said with a smile. "I'll even give you a sneak peek, if you like." She pulled the crotch of her knickers aside and pressed two fingers into her vagina, slowly.

John shucked the boxers as if they were on fire.

"Good boy. Sit now. And no touching yourself either."

He settled into the chair again and grasped the sides of the seat, digging his fingers into the worn leather. She slid her knickers down her thighs and let them dangle from one booted foot, then hooked her knees over the arms of the chair once again.

"Oh, if only you were allowed to speak," she said, sliding her fingers between her labia slowly. "You could tell me exactly what you want to see me do."

John shot a pleading glance at Sherlock, who rolled his eyes in response, damn him.

"No matter," she said, circling one fingertip around her clitoris. "I think we'll have fun anyway."

She stood then and crossed to the small table between their chairs. She rummaged inside the drawer for a condom, which she immediately ripped open. She dropped to her knees between John's thighs and reached for his cock. His eyes rolled back in his head when her fingers wrapped around the shaft and gave it a firm stroke. "Mmm, so eager. Is he always this sensitive, Sherlock?" Happily, there was no answer. She rolled the condom onto him and rose to straddle his thighs.

"Have you ever fucked a woman before, John?" He nodded emphatically and she laughed. "Of course. I see. He's gay and you're bi, so he brings you here to let you fuck women, but only the women he chooses for you. And then he dictates exactly what they can do to you, and you're not allowed to touch them back. In that way, it's really like he's the one fucking you, isn't it?"

John swallowed hard. He wanted to look at Sherlock, to see his reaction to that statement, but at that moment she grasped his chin with one hand and shook her head as if to say eyes on me from here on out. Her other hand was between her thighs, doing something he couldn't see, and the occasional brush of her wrist against his cock made him impossibly harder. God, he hoped she was planning to fuck him.

"Do you think I'm wet enough?" She pressed two slick fingers against his lips and he opened his mouth, groaning at the taste of her spreading across his tongue. He nodded, sucking her fingers, and God that was hot.

She shifted her hips forward and grasped the head of his cock and sank onto him, engulfing him in the heat of her body. He gasped and closed his eyes. It really had been a while, Jesus fuck.

She started moving then, angling her hips just so, and his hands went to her hips without thinking.

"John," he heard Sherlock say, and dropped them to his sides again. He gritted his teeth. This was going to be more difficult than he'd thought.

She grinned and leaned forward to whisper in his ear. "Oh, you're a good little boy, aren't you? Is he like that at home, always wanting to be in control?"
He risked a glance at Sherlock to see his face was impassive, observing. He hadn't heard. John looked back to her and nodded.

"Do it again," she whispered. "Grab my arse."

He suppressed the urge to laugh: oh, she was a fun one. He grasped her hips again and pulled her down hard onto his prick, and they both gasped.

Once more, with feeling this time: "John." John dropped his hands again, but he was smiling.

"I don't know if he'll be able to resist," she said to Sherlock. "You might have to tie his hands to the chair."

John gasped and she laughed. "Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you?"

He had to admit the idea didn't sound unappealing.

She kept a smooth rhythm going with her hips and it was a gorgeous slow burn. He could feel her fingers stroking herself while she fucked him and he wished he could do it for her. He wondered what Sherlock would do if he tried it.

"You feel so fucking good," she whispered and he shuddered at the feeling of her lips against his ear.

"You don't get to do this much, do you? I'll bet he doesn't even bottom for you. You love the feeling of his cock inside you, so you don't complain because he does this for you, finds you a girl who'll fuck you blind."

John wondered if she was just inferring this or if it was what Sherlock had told her. God, what if he had?

"I'll bet he gives fantastic head, though. He sucks you until you're right on the edge and then he fucks you on the sofa, maybe even the kitchen table. He's good at it, isn't he? He's got a lot of self-control, that one. He can probably fuck you for an hour, until you beg him to let you come."

He was glad he wasn't allowed to speak because he had no idea what he would have said to that. He tried to focus on the delicious things she was doing with internal muscles he hadn't been aware women even had -- he wasn't a gynecologist, after all -- but his mind was beginning to tinker with images of another sort altogether.

"This is getting you off, isn't it? Your cock is buried in me but you're thinking about him, about what it would be like to fuck him like this."

*I'm not I'm not I'm not*, John thought, but it was like the old saying about not thinking of an elephant: he couldn't not think it now, couldn't not see that image of Sherlock spread out beneath him while John pounded into him.

"He's good with his tongue, I'll bet. Does he lick your arsehole and fuck you with his tongue until you're gagging for it, until you'd do anything for more?"

John was vaguely aware that he was making truly embarrassing noises, but he didn't care. *God*, what she was doing to him. He'd had no idea words could do that.

"He likes to dominate you, doesn't he?" She punctuated her words with snaps of her hips and it was all threatening to send him over the edge. "Does he tie you up? Does he like to hurt you? Maybe you like to be hurt. Maybe you love feeling the burn the next day, the bruises under your clothes where no one can see."
Oh my God. His eyes flew open. He'd never even considered anything like that, but she made it sound sexy.

"Come on, John, fuck me. Come for me." She threw her head back and grasped the chair over his head with one hand while she rubbed at her clit with the other. She slammed her hips against him over and over and he could feel the moment she started to come, could feel her pulsing all around his cock.

She kept moving through it and her cries were loud enough to bring him back out of his head. He felt his own orgasm building just as she was starting to lose her rhythm and he thrust up into her, grabbing her hips to hold her in place.

"Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck," and he was seeing stars behind eyelids squeezed shut. God it felt good to come into another body like this, to feel like he was connected and buried and grounded in another person. She collapsed against him when he stilled, both of them panting.

He felt her plant a gentle kiss on his lips just before she pulled off. He felt dizzy, but managed to open his eyes and grin lazily at her. She winked at him and plucked her knickers from the floor.

"Thanks for the party, boys. It was lovely." She dressed quickly and had Sherlock zip her into the red dress again. He looked a bit perplexed and struggled with the fastenings while she grinned at John and rolled her eyes. She planted a kiss on Sherlock's cheek before leaving and waved once more at John as she closed the door behind her.

John sank even further into the chair, still feeling tingly. "I need a few minutes. God, I can't feel my arms."

"Really?" The look on Sherlock's face was priceless.

John didn't know whether to laugh or feel sorry for him. "Do you have a column on that spreadsheet for dirty talk?"

"No."

"Add one." He closed his eyes. He could sleep right here.

"What did she say?" Sherlock asked after a full minute of silence.

"Ah… well." John bit his lip. He'd walked right into that one. "Just… things."

"What things?"

"Dirty things."

"You'll need to be a bit more specific."

John groaned. "Oh, for fuck's sake, can't something in all of this be private?"

Sherlock made a sound of frustration, but didn't reply. John could hear the pout all the way across the room.

"It was just, you know, fuck me just like that and your cock feels so good. That kind of thing. I barely remember the exact words." He didn't dare look at Sherlock; he always knew immediately when John was lying.

"I'll make a note of it," Sherlock said, though he didn't sound particularly convinced.
"Great. Thanks." He really wished he'd said nothing.

"Are you ready yet?" The tone was bordering on whinging.

John sighed and opened his eyes. He glanced over at Sherlock, who quickly looked away. John flushed: he was stark naked, sprawled in a chair, and still wearing a used condom. If that didn't meet the definition of awkward, he wasn't sure what did.

He dressed quickly and pulled his jacket on, already thinking about making a sandwich when they got home. Sherlock would probably bury himself in analyzing tonight's data and with luck John would be able to put those disturbing images out of his mind. It was harmless fantasy, and honestly, it wasn't as if he'd never thought about it before, back in the early days of their friendship. His mind just worked that way and he'd had to rely on masturbation fantasies for far too long. But the fact that he'd just had his dick in a beautiful woman and had spent a significant amount of that encounter imagining it was in Sherlock instead -- well, that was not something he wanted to analyze anytime soon.

"Ready," he said, and followed Sherlock through the door.

At the top of the stairs Sherlock turned toward the bar, to John's surprise. He settled against it and spoke with the bartender, who returned a minute later with a pint of beer.

"What's this?" John asked as Sherlock gestured him closer.

Sherlock gave him an odd look. "A pint of Stella. I recall it's one of your favorites." He held out the glass.

"Oh. Thanks." John took the glass; he wasn't about to turn down a free drink. "We do have beer at home, you know."

"We're not going home just yet. Ah, I forgot to ask: would you say your refractory period is about half an hour?"

John nearly choked on the beer. "My what?"

"That's what I've assumed from observation of your masturbation habits, but I thought I should probably ask."

John was still gaping at him; it was another few seconds before he could manage to speak. "We're not done tonight?"

"No. I realized the pace of data collection could be increased significantly and I've made arrangements for another encounter in--" He paused to dig his phone from his trouser pocket. "--twenty-five minutes. Will that be enough time?"

"Oh my God," John replied, leaning back against the bar. He sucked down a fourth of the beer.

"If not, I can ask them to wait a bit. At least, I think I can."

At the moment the idea wasn't terribly appealing, he had to admit. He was satiated, sleepy, hungry, and honestly ready to be horizontal between his own sheets. On the other hand, it wasn't as if he had to do much but lie there while someone else did all the work. And Sherlock had apparently made an arrangement, so. So yeah.

"Okay," he said and raised his glass to his lips.
"Good," Sherlock replied as he slid an arm around John's waist and leaned into him.

Even though it was part of the cover, John couldn't help feeling a bit of alarm at the tingle that ran down his spine at that contact. This experiment was fucking with his sanity in ways he hadn't anticipated.

It was a good thing he could rely on Sherlock to be completely disinterested.

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Sherlock stopped before the door marked with a brass 4. "The rules about talking and touching will be suspended for this session, by the way."

John blinked in surprise. "Okay. Should I bother to ask why?"

"No."

"I don't suppose you've ever seen 'Behind the Green Door', have you?"

Sherlock frowned. "No. Why?"

"No reason. Forget I mentioned it. Ready when you are."

Sherlock opened the door and gestured John inside. John started forward, but froze in the doorway: there was a naked couple entwined on the sofa.

"So sorry, we must have the wrong--"

Sherlock gave him a perfunctory shove from behind just as the man and woman on the sofa looked up and laughed.

"You're in the right place, darling," the woman said. The man whose lips had just a moment ago been locked on her neck popped his head up to grin at him.

"Should we do introductions?" the man asked.

John looked to Sherlock without thinking; Sherlock nodded.

"I'm Ryan," the man said, settling in a relaxed pose on the sofa with his thighs spread. John had to force himself to make eye contact. Ryan was approximately 30 with sandy brown hair that was styled in that way that seemed to be fashionable for young men. He was good-looking in a rugged, boyish way, and he was completely naked. He smiled and nodded his head at the woman curled up next to him, who put her feet in his lap and giggled. "This is my wife, Annie."

John's eyes moved to her face and he nodded in greeting. Her wavy brown hair was shoulder-length and she had a pretty face with large bright eyes. She looked like the sort of woman who'd be in an advert for loo paper, a typical wife and mother.

"Wife. Hell, he'd had no idea people who were married did this sort of thing. Whatever this thing was. Oh God."

"I'm Sherlock," he heard from behind him, "and this is John."
"Hi," he said after a moment, remembering that he was allowed to talk this time. "Nice to meet you." God, that sounded pathetic. He tried not to wince.

Ryan and Annie grinned as if he were an adorable child. "Thanks for meeting us on such short notice," Ryan said. "We've been trying to set this up for a while."

"Of course," Sherlock said, winding one arm around John's waist. "This is going to be right up John's street, I think."

John forced himself to smile and leaned back into Sherlock. Giving up control this way was like walking a line between aggravation and excitement. It annoyed him to no end that Sherlock enjoyed keeping him in the dark, actually liked to spring these surprises on him. It was almost as if he were testing John, that if John was just a bit more clever he should be able to figure out what was coming. But he couldn't deny that it was exciting to stand there and not know what was coming -- just that it was going to end in an orgasm.

"Relax," Sherlock whispered. His hand stroked up John's chest and John shivered. He felt lips press lightly against the side of his neck and he struggled not to respond. It was all part of the act, but his body didn't know that. And hell, Sherlock couldn't know he was kissing exactly the spot on John's neck that made his knees weak. John closed his eyes briefly and opened them again to see Annie and Ryan watching them in fascination.

Sherlock released him and gave him a little push toward the sofa. John took three steps forward and stopped, not sure what he was supposed to do. Annie stood up and closed the distance between them. He did his best to keep his eyes on her face, though honestly he wasn't sure what the etiquette was in this situation.

"You're completely adorable," she said, cupping his cheek with one hand. He smiled in response and she leaned forward and kissed him. It was a sweet kiss at first, but it quickly morphed into something more. He remembered he could touch and so he pulled her against him and deepened the kiss, taking actual control of something for the first time in days. When she pulled back she looked dazed, and he grinned at her.

"You're a bloody good kisser," she said, looking at him with something akin to wonder on her face.

John's eyes darted to Ryan, who was grinning at them from the sofa.

Okay, this was just fucking weird.

Annie tugged at the hem of his jumper with an almost girlish smile. "Time to get undressed."

John pulled off his jumper and she took it from him, folding it carefully and setting it on the room's small table. She rummaged through the drawer while he unbuttoned his shirt, and then she took that from him as well.

"Thanks," he said as he tugged his shoes off and tossed them aside. Annie dropped to her knees and unfastened his trousers and he couldn't help but gasp.

"Let me help with this," she said as she stroked his dick through the thin fabric of his boxers. He went from interested to erect in a matter of seconds.

He glanced at Ryan again, who was still sitting on the sofa and watching his wife slowly pull John's trousers off. Ryan gave him a sly smile and stood, and John felt a flicker of apprehension.

He has absolutely no idea where this was going. Oh, God.
He didn't stop himself from looking at Ryan's body, all long lean lines and defined muscles. He was a few inches taller than John, enough that John had to look up at him. Ryan stopped beside him and turned John's head toward him with one hand. "You are adorable, you know," he said, and then he kissed John.

John had kissed a man before, though to be honest he'd been quite drunk and desperate at the time, and, well, what happened in the army stayed in the army, to a certain extent. He hadn't thought about it for a long time, but now it flashed through his mind: the feeling of lips that weren't quite as soft as a woman's, the roughness of stubble pressed against his cheek, the undeniably masculine jaw pressed against his own.

Ryan kissed exactly like his wife, which was not something John really wanted to think about right now. He was emboldened by Annie's compliment, though, and he took control of the kiss. He tried to remember everything the woman in the schoolgirl outfit had done with her tongue -- Sherlock wasn't the only one cataloguing information -- and repeated it all as best he could, one thing after another. Ryan whimpered into his mouth and John felt an erection press against his bare thigh. He grinned: it was definitely easier to tell when one was successful with a man.

"Fucking hell, you're an amazing kisser," Ryan breathed against his cheek. His mouth found that spot on John's neck and then it was John's turn to groan. There was a mouth on his cock then, swallowing it down, and for a moment he thought he was going to come on the spot. The mouth disappeared and he looked down to see he was now wearing a condom.

"You have to show me how to do that," he blurted. Hell, he might have a need for that trick at some point. Only Sherlock knew where this was headed.

"I'll show you right now," she said and ripped open a second packet. She squeezed the condom between her fingers and popped it into her mouth with the tip pointing inwards. She wrapped her fingers around Ryan's dick and tugged him forward, then swallowed the head and worked her mouth down the shaft slowly. Ryan's eyes fluttered and he clenched a handful of her hair, and John was surprised at how erotic it was to watch them like this. Annie pulled off and the condom was on, rolled all the way down to the base. She winked at John.

John suddenly realized that the fact they were both wearing condoms limited the number of possible sex acts considerably. He liked these two and he really didn't want to safeword out of this, but there were some things he needed to think about for a while before he could agree to try them.

Having anything in his arse was definitely on that list.

Ryan leaned in to kiss him again, which helpfully distracted him from these thoughts, and Annie pressed both their dicks together and stroked, and Jesus fuck that had no right to feel as good as it did. If being bisexual meant doing things like this, he might just jump onboard that train with more enthusiasm than he'd ever thought possible.

"Ready," he heard Annie say, and he untangled himself from Ryan to see that she'd spread a blanket on the floor. "John, you'll lie here."

He felt a flutter in his stomach again, but he ignored it. He settled back on the blanket, noting that it did little to temper the hardness of the floor. Annie had a small foil packet of lube in her hand now, which caused him a bit more trepidation, but she straddled his thighs and then stroked his cock with a slick hand. She then handed the packet to Ryan, who had settled on his knees behind her, and shifted forward on her knees. She grasped John's cock in one hand and guided it into her vagina, then sank all the way down on him.
John exhaled and grinned at her. She felt different from the woman in red earlier that night -- he hadn’t been with two women in quick enough succession to ever notice that before. Ryan's hands touched John's thighs then and pushed them apart and John felt him settle between them.

Annie leaned forward and rested her weight on her hands on either side of John's head, smiling down at him. "I've never done this before, but I've always wanted to. God, I'm a bit nervous."

John smiled at her and pushed up on his elbows to kiss her. Ryan's hands occasionally brushed against sensitive skin on John's thighs, but his attention was definitely on Annie. With a sigh of relief, John finally realized what was going to happen.

"Ready?" Ryan asked. His tone was casual, but he chose that moment to stroke slick fingers over John's balls, earning a whimper in response.

"Ready," Annie said. Her eyes were wide as Ryan crouched behind her, and she stared down at John. He watched her face as Ryan pushed into her, watched her jaw slacken and her eyes close, but he didn't see any indication of pain. It seemed to take a long time for Ryan to press all the way in, and when he was done John was amazed that he could feel the pressure of Ryan's cock against his, separated by a wall of muscle inside her body.

They remained still like that for another minute, Ryan stroking her back and John staring up at her face, amazed to be included in this. This wasn't just casual sex, this was something more, something she wanted to experience, something her husband had wanted to give her, and for some reason they both trusted John enough to bring him into it. It was beautiful.

"All right," she said at last, and opened her eyes. She shifted her hips, sliding up on both their cocks, and then sank down again. There was some adjusting behind her and it seemed to take a while to work out the rhythm, but once they found it, it was amazing. He felt her clenching around him and he felt Ryan pressing into her and against John's cock indirectly, unerringly hitting the sensitive spot under the glans with every stroke. It was only the fact that he'd come in the last hour that allowed him to keep himself from losing control.

"Can I touch you?" he whispered and Annie nodded, guiding his fingers to her clit. He couldn't see what he was doing and was afraid to shift his position at all for fear of disrupting the whole operation, but he managed to circle his fingers on her. She was amazingly wet, and fuck, this whole thing was just -- he didn't know how to begin to process it.

"Oh god oh god," she cried, and then she was coming, nearly collapsing against his chest. Ryan bent over her, still fucking her, his balls brushing John's on every stroke.

"Oh shit," Ryan said, eyes closed tight. "Oh fuck, that's good, that's--" and then he groaned and shuddered and John would later swear he'd felt both of them come.

They all lay in a sweaty heap for a moment, panting. Ryan pulled out and then helped Annie to her feet. John was perfectly happy to lie on the blanket while Ryan cleaned her up and wrapped a dressing gown around her. She settled on one side of the sofa, looking dazed and happy.

John pushed to sitting and looked over at Sherlock, whose face was a mask of concentration. John was desperate to know what he'd gleaned from watching this. He'd have to sneak a peek at that spreadsheet later, at the very least. Ryan's hand appeared in front of him, and he took it and allowed himself to be pulled to his feet.

"I'm so sorry we neglected you," Ryan said, looking down at John's erection.
"It's fine, actually. This wasn't about me."

"We're not going to leave you wanting," Ryan said with a grin. He turned him and pushed him toward the sofa until the backs of John's knees hit it and he toppled onto the center cushion next to Annie. She grinned at him as Ryan sat on the other side. Ryan's hand wrapped around John's dick and he stroked, and John let his head fall back against the sofa cushions. The condom was still slick from a mix of lube and Annie, and his hand moved easily over it. "Tell me what you like," Ryan said, his mouth at John's ear.

"That's perfect, actually," John replied. "Maybe a bit more pressure. Oh god, there."

Ryan's mouth moved on his neck, up to his ear, and then captured John's lips again. Ryan was a quick study, it seemed; he'd already picked up some of the kissing tricks John had used earlier. John found himself moaning incoherently in short order. Even through the condom Ryan's fingers were doing amazing things to his cock, squeezing in just the right places and stroking with a perfect amount of pressure.

"Close," John gasped into his mouth and Ryan stroked the head of his cock with short, quick jerks of his fist. It pushed John over the edge and he thrust up into that hand as he cried out. Ryan kept stroking through it, finally pulling away when John began to wince from sensitivity. It had been a while since he'd come twice in an hour. A long while. God.

Ryan kissed him again, more of a sweet, slow slide of tongues this time, and John felt like he was melting. He didn't want it to end; he was fairly certain no one would ever kiss him that way again, like they just wanted to hang on a bit more, not to let go of him just yet, even though the sex really was over.

The fact that this person was male was something he was going to have to think about later. Much later.

"So fucking gorgeous," Annie said with a sigh. "If I weren't utterly spent I could sit here and wank just watching you two."

And wow, there was a whole new level of threesome that John hadn't even considered. He laughed and looked over at Sherlock to make sure that note was received, and froze. Sherlock was chewing on one finger and wearing an utterly dazed expression. John stared at him for a moment, uncertain exactly what he was seeing. Sherlock's eyes met his then and John saw the closest thing to embarrassment on Sherlock's face as he'd ever seen before. Sherlock looked away quickly, his cheeks tinted, and began inspecting a spot on his trousers with the same sort of fervor as when he'd just discovered an important clue at a crime scene. John's eyes narrowed.

"Shit, it's nearly midnight," Annie said.

"I totally lost track of time," Ryan said, his eyes wide. "Can you text her?"

Annie fumbled with her mobile. "I can't get a signal down here. I'll get dressed and run upstairs." She winced when she stood, but put her clothes back on surprisingly quickly.

Ryan scrambled to dress as well, smiling apologetically. "Sorry we have to dash. The babysitter has an important exam in the morning, so we can't make her wait. Thanks again for this. It was fantastic, just what Annie wanted."

"It was, thank you!" Annie said as she headed out the door.

"Of course," John replied, now trying to wrap his brain around the idea that they had children; his
entire world view was in threat of being turned on its head.

He stood and pulled the condom off and dropped it in a bin by the table. He started to gather his own clothes and paused to glance over at the chair by the door where Sherlock was sitting. He was lost in thought now and seemed to have regained his composure.

John had just pulled his pants and trousers back on when Ryan touched his shoulder. "I mean it," he said, and kissed John softly. "Thank you. It was amazing." He smiled and then headed out the door after his wife.

John stared at the door for several seconds, his shirt hanging in his hands. He looked at Sherlock, whose face was utterly unreadable. "Are you all right?"

Sherlock's mouth opened but no sound came out. He blinked and closed it again, then nodded. "Yes, of course."

"Because you seem a bit--"

"I'm fine," Sherlock spat, not quite meeting John's eyes. "We're done for the night, so whenever you're dressed, we'll go."

"All right." John pulled his shirt on and buttoned it, then pulled his jumper over his head, keeping his eyes fixed on Sherlock. Sherlock stood and began pacing before the door, hands shoved into his pockets.

John sat on the sofa to put his shoes back on and watched Sherlock for a moment. There was no point in asking him about it, John knew. He could only guess at what had Sherlock so wound up. And besides, it was very likely he'd find out soon enough.

He stood. "I'm ready."

Sherlock whirled to face him, his eyes hard. And yet, there was something else there, something that reminded John quite a lot of that first evening on the sofa when they'd wanked and he hadn't been sure if Sherlock had come because of the porn or because of him. Sherlock's eyes narrowed and John felt that familiar stab of suspicion that the man was actually telepathic. John cleared his mind, just to be on the safe side.

Sherlock nodded and opened the door. "Let's go home."

John followed, watching that dark silhouette dash up the stairs before him with more than a bit of unease.

Chapter End Notes

Gifset by Martin Crief: "Should we do introductions?" the man asked.
History and Objectivity

Chapter Summary

This entire situation was definitely fucked up, but there was something comforting about knowing exactly where he stood with Sherlock. It made John feel secure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Define sex."

Sherlock frowned. "What do you mean?"

"If you mean the first time I had sexual intercourse, that's a different story from the first time I had an orgasm with someone else. Or the first time I gave someone else an orgasm. Or--"

"The first one. Intercourse."

"All right, but it's the least interesting of the lot." John paused to sip his coffee. "I was seventeen and it was with the girl I was seeing at the time. It was her first time as well, so it was fantastically awkward and neither of us enjoyed it very much."

"You were spectacularly boring as a teenager, weren't you?"

"Completely. You'd have hated me."

He wasn't going to leave it there. He couldn't possibly resist. John took another sip of coffee and waited. Three... two...one...

"The first time you had an orgasm with another person: was it before or after that?"

John smiled and balanced the mug on his knee. "Before. I was still in school, actually. I went to a party and there were some girls there from another school. We all paired off and found dark corners to get off in, and the girl I was with -- God, I can still see her face but I've no idea what her name was. I think I had a hand up her shirt, so I thought I was doing all right, but then she unbuttoned my jeans and stuck her hand down my pants and started wanking me. I think I lasted all of a minute."

"What happened after that?"

"We carried on snogging. I had a hand in her knickers, but I didn't know what I was doing, so eventually she put a stop to it."

"Did you think of that as sex at the time?"

John pressed his lips together and considered. "I don't know. It was a long time ago and everything about sex was confusing and weird. It was more like checking sex acts off a list: Squeezed tits, check. Fingered a girl, check. Got hand job, check. Got blow job, check. But I suppose it's true that intercourse was the big one on the list."
He glanced over to see Sherlock staring up at the ceiling, his fingertips pressed together in what John called his "thinking pose." The wheels were definitely turning. He waited.

"First time you gave someone else an orgasm."

"Sadly, it was much later. My third girlfriend took pity on me and taught me how to perform oral sex properly on a woman. Apparently my failures up to that point had been due to--" He made air-quotes with his fingers. "--treating a cunt like a cock."

Even from this distance he could see Sherlock's consternation. "So up until then you hadn't been able to satisfy a partner?"

"Well… I was never quite sure before that, but after, it was painfully clear I'd been shit in bed." Talking about his teenaged sexual ineptness was really quite depressing. "Sorry to have disappointed you."

"Oh no, it's quite all right. My expectations weren't terribly high."

John sighed. "Yes, after the last few days I suppose they weren't." He stood and took the empty mug to the kitchen.

"What have the last few days got to do with it?"

"Nothing. I'm going out for the afternoon. When should I be back?"

"Whenever you like."

John pulled on his jacket. "I meant, what time are we leaving?"

"For what?"

_Jesus._ "The club."

"We aren't going tonight."

John froze halfway through pulling his arm through a sleeve, his stomach twisting unpleasantly. Had what happened last night been too much for Sherlock? Had John somehow crossed a line and Sherlock wasn't interested anymore? Or had this obsession run its course and just like that, just as John was really starting to enjoy it, they were done? "But… why not?"

"It's Monday." The tone implied that should answer John's question completely.

John blinked. "And… there's no sex on Mondays?"

"The club is only open Thursday through Sunday."

"Ah. All right then." That sudden rise of anxiety quelled, but it was now replaced by a realization of how disappointed he would have been if this were actually over. There was something to mull over on his walk.

A few nights off might be a good thing, though. He'd be well rested for Thursday, at any rate.

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"John, is that you, dear? Are you all right?"
John winced and pushed himself to standing. "Yes, I'm fine, Mrs. Hudson, thanks. It's just a bit dark and I tripped over this -- who the hell moved this table?"

"Sherlock was doing something down here earlier, I think. He seems to have perked up a bit. Is there a case?"

John smiled weakly. "Of sorts. Some experiments, anyway."

She made a face. "Oh, he hasn't got anything too beastly up there, I hope. I don't know how you live with him sometimes."

"I wonder myself."

"But we love him anyway." She gave him a knowing look and shook her head. "Oh, there's my kettle. I do love chamomile before bed. Put some ice on that leg now, and get some sleep."

"Yes, of course. Thank you. Good night." As soon as she disappeared around the corner, his face contorted in pain. Fuck, but that had hurt. He was going to have a nasty bruise on his shin in the morning.

He limped up the stairs and opened the door to the flat. To his utter non-surprise, Sherlock was embedded in the sofa, his face eerily lit by the glow of his laptop. As usual, Sherlock didn't acknowledge his entrance. John shed his coat, hung it by the door, and crossed to sit on the opposite end of the sofa. He rubbed at his bruised shin, which made it feel slightly better. Sherlock still didn't look up.

John waited three full minutes before giving in and speaking first. "How's the data analysis going?"

"Did you bring it?"

"Bring what?"

"I asked you to look for a copy of QX while you were out."

"You do realize that when I'm not here, I can't actually hear you?"

Sherlock's gaze remained fixed on the laptop screen, though there was now a bit of tension in his voice. "I texted you."

John fumbled for the phone in his pocket; sure enough, there were three texts from Sherlock. "Sorry, I never heard it ding. What's QX, anyway?"

"Just something for research. It can wait until morning." His fingers flew over the keys for a solid minute.

John sighed and leaned back into the cushions. No response. He sighed again, more dramatically this time. "I had a fairly miserable night out, in case you were wondering."

"I wasn't." Sherlock turned his head and gave him an odd look. "Oh, is this where I'm supposed to ask you to tell me about it?"

"Yes, that's the expected response to a friend saying they've had a miserable evening."

Sherlock turned back to the laptop. "Fine. What happened?" There was nothing remotely approaching interest in his tone.
"Well, if you must know, I spent the better part of three hours in two different pubs chatting up half a dozen women, and every single one of them rejected me."

Sherlock frowned and paused his typing, turning to look at John again. "You went out with the intention of meeting someone?"

"Yes, and I failed spectacularly."

"Why?"

"That's exactly the question, yes. I had four straight nights of spectacular sex arranged by you, but on my own I can't get a woman to let me buy her a drink." He shook his head.

"Three nights, not four. And I meant, why did you want to meet someone?"

"Because I'm horny, Sherlock. I got off four nights in a row and now I've apparently been conditioned to need it on a daily basis."

"We only went to the club three nights." Sherlock's eyes widened fractionally. "Are you counting the night we..." He waved a hand between them.

John felt his face flush; thank God it was dark. He had indeed been counting that night. "Three nights, of course. Last night seemed like two nights, I suppose. My point is, none of it has helped me a bit. I'm still just as hopeless with women as before, only now I know exactly what I'm missing."

Sherlock rolled his eyes and turned back to the spreadsheet. "It's only three more days until the club is open again. You couldn't wait that long?"

John groaned and closed his eyes. "I only wanted to find someone who'd suck my dick. After the sex club, I didn't think it'd be that difficult."

"Want me to do it for you?"

John froze; a sliver of something like electricity shot down his spine. "What?"

"If you're that desperate, I will. Three more days of you moping around the flat will completely destroy my concentration."

_Breathe._ John inhaled, exhaled again, and forced himself to turn his head and look at Sherlock. He was scrolling quickly through a discussion board now, so fast John doubted he could actually be reading. "I don't... I... Are you sure?"

"It's not as if it would be a hardship. I'm at an impasse with my analysis anyway and could use a bit more data." He turned to look at John then, his face completely blank.

John could only stare at him. His mind helpfully supplied an image of Sherlock shifting onto his knees on the floor, pressing John's thighs apart, reaching to unfasten his trousers. _Oh God._ He was already hard. "This is insane, Sherlock."

"It's no different than what we've done the last few nights. Certainly the women in a bar are less of a sure thing, but the gay boyfriend routine seems to work well enough. I'm sure I can talk someone into giving you a blow job. Give me two minutes to finish this up and I'll change clothes." He stopped and narrowed his eyes at John. "What?"

John blinked, finally realizing they were having two completely different conversations. He was
filled with a sudden urge to laugh, and he wasn't sure whether it was from relief or something else altogether. He looked up at the ceiling. *Fucking hell.* He drew a shaky breath.

"You know, I'm knackered. I think I'll take a shower and go to bed. Thanks, though."

Sherlock shrugged. "I'll be up for a while if you change your mind."

John stood and walked to the bathroom as casually as he could manage with an erection. He closed the door and turned around to press his forehead against the cool wood. This was not good. On so many fucking levels.

He started the water and stripped off his clothes, trying to think of anything except what his alcohol-fueled libido was encouraging. When it grew hot enough he stepped under the spray and stood still, letting the water sluice over his skin. The sensation was glorious and did nothing to abate his arousal. He sighed and let one hand slide across his chest, down his belly, down the where his cock stood straight out, and he gave it a slow stroke.

He tried to think about Abby and Clara, who'd sucked him together that first night, and then the Britney Spears lookalike who'd fucked his mouth with her tongue and ground against him until they both came. He thought about the woman in red who'd nearly talked him into coming -- *oh, no, bad idea, no no no.*

Annie, then. Annie's sweet face, the way she kissed him, the way it felt to be inside her. Ryan's hand moving on him, Ryan's cock pressed against his in Annie's hand.

He stroked faster, searching for something that would light that fire in his balls, that would be the spark he needed to get this done. He just needed this release and then his mind would be clear and he could go to bed and not *think* any more. He thought about Ryan's fingers, imagined the hand on him wasn't his own, remembered sitting on that sofa being kissed and brought to orgasm while two other people were watching. He'd never thought he'd be one for exhibitionism, but--

Sherlock's face flooded his mind now, the look on his face after John had come that last time. He'd never been affected by any of it, not until that moment.

*Want me to do it for you?*

For just a minute John had thought Sherlock actually wanted him, and he was unbearably turned on by the idea. God, just the *idea* of Sherlock on his knees, of John's cock in that mouth that could be so hard and so clever, of John's hands tangled in that insane hair of his, fucking his mouth, rough, hard, *shit.*

He caught his breath. Well, there was the spark.

*It was just a fantasy. No need to feel guilty about it.* Sherlock would never know. John let the fantasy spin, let it go where it wanted. His hand flew in short jerks at the head of his cock, the taut foreskin moving with his fingers, his mouth open, his forehead nestled in the crook of his elbow now, arm pressed against the cool tile, warm water sheeting down his back, and it was Sherlock's mouth around his cock, his tongue pressing *there right there oh god.*

He groaned into his arm, louder than he'd intended. It was intense, but it was over far too quickly. He closed his eyes. There had been almost no satisfaction in that orgasm: he felt completely empty and unbearably alone. His breathing eased after a few more seconds and he pushed off the wall. He lifted his face to the spray. The water pounded down and he held his breath as long as he could.

He was so, so fucked.
By Thursday morning, John was crawling out of his skin. He hadn't let himself wank since the night in the shower for fear that he'd end up fantasizing about Sherlock again. He'd awakened with sticky sheets that morning anyway, with a vague memory of a dream involving sex with a stunning variety of people, with Sherlock in the middle of it all, dispassionately observing.

God, *that* particular facial expression was going to induce erections in him for years to come. Crime scenes were going to be horrifically awkward.

Sherlock was, predictably, on the sofa when John came down to make coffee. "Sleep well?"

John was probably imagining the innuendo is his tone, but he shot Sherlock a dirty look to be on the safe side. Several minutes later he sat in a chair opposite the sofa, mug in hand. "Please tell me you slept last night."

"Of course not. I--"

"Just a vessel, I know."

"True, but not the point. I decided to reanalyze the data from a different perspective."

"What perspective?"

"Was Sunday night your first sexual experience with a man?"

John blinked at him. "Was there supposed to be a segue there?"

Sherlock's expression was one of mild annoyance. "There was. Do keep up, John."

John sighed and took a sip of coffee. "No."

Sherlock looked directly at him for the first time all morning, undisguised shock on his face. "No?"

John smirked. "Didn't see that one coming, did you?"

Sherlock's expression became one of raw interest. "I must admit I didn't."

John grinned and drank more coffee. Drawing this out was going to be a pleasure.

"Well?" Sherlock said at last.

"Oh, right. You'll want details." It was more than a bit frightening that John felt completely at ease now about providing them. He crossed one leg over the other and settled more comfortably into the chair. "It was in the army. I was stationed for several months in a fairly remote location, a medic with the infantry. I went out with them on patrols quite a bit, mostly because that's where I'd be needed if something went wrong."

"Did things go wrong?"

"More often than I care to remember." John smiled tightly. "But to the point, there was another medic stationed there and we spent a lot of time together. One night we were drinking, just blowing off steam, and he told me he was gay. I told him about my sister, you know, trying to make it clear I wasn't prejudiced. But after that he flirted with me when no one else was looking. For some reason people often make that assumption about me." He raised an eyebrow at Sherlock, who responded with a noncommittal shrug.
John took a deep breath. "Anyway, there was a day that was bloody horrible. A platoon was ambushed and three men were killed. Matt -- that was his name -- was with them, and they commed me to let me know what to expect when they brought the injured back. Matt climbed off that chopper covered in blood, and for a minute I thought the worst, but it wasn't his own. It hit me then how close of friends we'd become, though, and that was something I had learned not to let happen because... Well, because." He looked up to make certain Sherlock was still with him. This amount of silence generally meant Sherlock had long since tuned him out, but he was staring at John with a look of fascination, and it encouraged John to continue.

"We were up half the night patching guys up and making arrangements for the dead, and the whole thing was completely horrible. It was one of the worst days I'd had at that point. We had a tiny office off the clinic, and by oh-two-hundred we were sitting on the floor -- nowhere else to sit -- and sharing a bottle of horrid whiskey we kept stashed in there for shit days. We didn't talk; we just sat there. I'd had far too much to drink, and I looked at him and he looked at me... and then he kissed me. I was so wrecked I kissed him back." He paused and stared into the depths of the coffee mug. "There's something about being that close to death that makes you want to feel alive, any way you can. So we sat there on the floor of the office and snogged like teenagers. I was filthy and covered in blood so was he, and neither of us cared."

"Did anything else happen?"

"We ended up wanking each other. And it was completely bloody awkward after. Neither of us knew what to say. He was on duty so he stayed and I went back to my bunk, and that was it. The next day two of the injured guys were evac'd out to a proper hospital and I went with them. It was a few weeks before I made it back and by then Matt had been rotated out. I never saw him again. I never even emailed him or anything after that night, and... I still regret it."

Sherlock's expression was incredibly endearing -- it was as if he were trying very hard to look sympathetic and wasn't sure quite how to do it. "Did you ever try to find him later, after you got home?"

"Hell, no."

"Why not?"

John pressed his lips together and inhaled. "He could be dead. If he is, I don't want to know. No reason to add to an already long list of regrets." Sherlock's brows knitted together at that, whether from surprise or confusion was unclear. Time to change the subject. "Hungry? Thought I might make a scramble, assuming we've got eggs." He stood up and crossed to the kitchen, not waiting for an answer.

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The moment the cab stopped, John practically leapt out. He was ready, so fucking ready to get in there and get started and get his mind off of the insane things that had been running through it for the last few days. He envied Sherlock's ability to be so dispassionate, to completely separate himself from the physicality of his body and its needs. John was seriously considering taking up meditation or yoga or something to help him channel it all. Another several days like the last few and he'd be a basket case.

Sherlock was three paces behind him the entire walk to the club. John stopped at the door and bobbed on the balls of his feet impatiently; he could swear Sherlock was walking slowly on purpose. It made John want to punch him.
Once inside, John was practically giddy. He didn't even bother heading towards the bar, walking instead in the direction of the door down to the private rooms. He'd almost reached it when he felt Sherlock's hand on his arm, clenching the bicep. He turned to grin at him and was met with a stony expression. He swallowed.

"What?"

Sherlock pulled him close and spoke into his ear. "Calm down. I'll get you a drink."

"I don't need a drink," John replied, twisting his head to look up at him. "I'm ready to go."

The grip on his arm tightened to the point of pain. "I'll be the judge of when you're ready."

"But--"

"No more talking." There was something in his tone that made John's entire body go still. "I need you relaxed and open to the experience, not wound up like a spring. I go to great lengths to arrange these encounters and I won't have you fucking it all up."

Sherlock rarely swore, and only when he was dead serious. John fixed his gaze at a spot on the floor, uncertain how to respond. The grip on his arm eased and Sherlock pulled him closer; it would have looked like an embrace to anyone watching them.

"Do as you're told and I'll make certain you enjoy it. Step out of line and we're done here." Lips brushed against John's ear and he shivered. "Do you understand?"

John nodded, still unable to make eye contact. He felt a bit like a child who'd been scolded for laughing in church, and it ought to have made him angry. After all, this was Sherlock; even people who liked him wanted to punch him on a regular basis. But somehow he didn't feel angry at all. He felt an odd sort of relief to let it all go, to know that Sherlock was going to take care of it. Was going to take care of him.

God, this was even more fucked up than he'd realized.

"Good. Now, a drink." Sherlock steered him toward the bar and ordered a pint of beer for him, along with a glass of what looked like brandy for himself. John wanted to ask him why he'd decided to drink tonight, but he didn't.

The moment John finished his beer, Sherlock downed the rest of his brandy and nodded his head toward the door at the back. John followed him through and down the long stairway. He let his mind wander as he walked, something he hadn't been able to do for days; he arrived at the door marked "2" without quite remembering walking there. He stared blankly at the door until Sherlock opened it and led him through with a hand on his arm. It was a room they hadn't been in before, smaller than the others with a small sofa. The décor was a variation on the club's theme of red and black, colors he was likely going to associate with sex for the rest of his life. He stood in the middle of the room and watched as Sherlock stripped off his coat and scarf and hung them on a hook by the door.

Sherlock held out a hand and John pulled his own coat off and handed it to him. They stood there in silence for what seemed like several minutes, and John marveled at how pleasant it was. He hadn't felt this calm in days. Was this what yoga did? He wasn't sure how to replicate the feeling without the place and the circumstances, but he was willing to try.

"Are you all right?" Sherlock asked at last. He put his hands on John's shoulders and stared at his face. "Your eyes are dilated."
John managed a smile.
"You can answer me."
"I'm fine, fantastic. Don't worry."
"Safeword?"
"Cinnamon. I remember."

Sherlock stared at him with narrowed eyes, then cupped John's cheek in his hand. John stared back at him, marveling at how green his eyes were. Sherlock had the most amazing eyes. One day John ought to tell him that.

There was a knock at the door. Sherlock turned away to answer it and John felt a pleasant flutter in his belly. He was ready for this, so very ready.

Their guest was a woman with long dark hair and soulful eyes framed by angular glasses. She was petite and dressed casually compared to their previous guests. John wondered if Thursdays were just like that here.

"I'm Becca," she said, not taking her eyes off John.
"I'm Sherlock and this is John. Thanks for meeting us."

"What do you think?"

She tilted her head and gave John an appraising look. "I like him. What did you have in mind?"

Sherlock smiled. "Blow job. I'll help."

John's eyes flicked away from Becca's face to Sherlock's at that. Part of the act or something else altogether? Fucking with John's mind, perhaps. Ah, whatever. At the moment, he didn't actually mind.

"I see. That could be hot."

She gave him an odd look. "I'm quite good at it, you know."

Sherlock's gaze turned to John now. "I'm sure you are, but he'll like it better this way."

He had no idea what Sherlock was thinking. And of course, his own thoughts may as well have been inked on his forehead.

"I see. That could be hot."

She unfastened his trousers while Sherlock rummaged in the supply drawer. A minute later John was naked from the waist down and sitting on the sofa with Becca kneeling on the floor between his thighs.

His cock had been hard for what seemed like an hour now. She gave it a few strokes with one hand and John hissed. Oh, this was going to be bloody amazing.

Sherlock handed her a condom packet and she sighed. "It's never as much fun this way."

"Perhaps, but I'm the only one who gets to have him without one."
Those words would have driven John round the bend an hour ago, but now they just floated through his mind, oddly disconnected.

"He's not allowed to touch, by the way."

She gave John a sardonic look. "Yes, your email made that quite clear."

John smiled and clasped his arms behind his head. He loved it when they pushed back. If John wasn't allowed to do it, he could at least enjoy watching others make Sherlock squirm.

"Go ahead," Sherlock said. "Start slow." He was standing closer than usual, John realized.

Becca rolled the condom on and then licked up the underside of his cock, pausing to linger at the head. She swirled her tongue around the tip, teasing him with flicks that weren't quite enough. He watched, biting down on his lower lip. It went on and on, sheer torture. He clenched his hands in his own hair.

"Now take it in your mouth."

No longer content to merely observe, then? This was going to be interesting.

He exhaled at the sensation of her mouth around the head of his cock and groaned when she kept going, taking the entire shaft in to the base. He knew he didn't have a huge penis -- he was average at best -- but that was still something rare in a blow job. He closed his eyes and sank into the feeling, his world rapidly narrowing to her mouth and his cock.

"Oh, you are talented," he heard Sherlock say. "Do that again."

Yes, please.

She pulled up, working her tongue as she moved, almost coming off the head at the top, and then worked her way back down again. Her tongue was amazing; even through a thin layer of latex he could feel every movement. This wasn't going to take long.

"Back off, he's too close," Sherlock said, and John made a noise of frustration. He was impressed that Sherlock could read him so easily -- but of course, that was what Sherlock did, wasn't it?

Becca's hand wrapped around the base of the shaft and squeezed gently as she resumed her torturous licking.

"Good, a bit more."

She pressed the flat of her tongue against the underside of the glans and massaged. John exhaled shakily. He wanted to open his eyes, but he was frankly terrified to see the look on Sherlock's face.

"Suck him again, just the head." The clinical tone was creeping back in, as if Sherlock just couldn't help himself. He was testing ideas, John knew, trying to refine his understanding of what John liked. Of course Sherlock wouldn't do something as mundane as to simply ask John.

Warm lips closed around the head of his cock again and, combined with that tongue still working small circles in just the right spot, severely limited his ability to think. His hands fell to the sofa; he caught himself from tangling them in her hair just in time.

"He's going to come. Let him."

It was as if his body was obeying a command: he felt the stirrings of his orgasm, the building of
pressure and the tightening of his balls, and then she took him in so deeply that he was practically coming down her throat. His hips arched off the sofa as it rolled over him and she pushed him back down again, digging her fingernails into his hips to the point of pain.

Oh, but it was a good pain.

She pulled off when he stopped pulsing, and sat back on her heels. He squinted at her and scrubbed a hand over his face.

"That was perfect," Sherlock told her. John risked a glance at him, but it was pointless. He was completely in character.

"That was more fun than I expected," she replied with a grin. "God, he's so responsive. I hate it when they just sit there and stare at me, but when they're like this I want to suck them all day long."

John whimpered. *That could be arranged*, he wanted to tell her. He tuned out of the discussion after that, and started when he heard the door close. He opened his eyes.

"You have thirty-five minutes until the next one," Sherlock said. "Will that be enough?"

John pushed himself upright and pulled the condom off. He nodded.

"Good. I'm going upstairs for a few minutes." He was completely clinical, utterly unaffected. He'd just talked a woman through giving John an amazing blow job, and he wasn't even flushed.

Once the door closed behind him, John fumbled for his pants and pulled them back on, then his trousers. He curled up on the sofa, tucking his bare feet beneath him. Yes, it was definitely fucked up, but there was something comforting about knowing exactly where he stood with Sherlock. It made him feel secure.

He closed his eyes.

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He wasn't sure how much time had passed when the door opened again; he'd apparently dozed off in his post-orgasmic daze. He opened his eyes to see Sherlock standing beside the sofa. He held out a bottle of water.

"Thanks."

John slid up to a sitting position and uncapped the bottle; Sherlock sat on the sofa next to him, still watching him. John drank a third of the water, surprised at how thirsty he was. He hadn't even noticed until now.

"Are you all right?" Concern was an unusual enough expression on Sherlock's face that it gave John pause.

"I'm fine. Better than fine." He drank again. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." Sherlock's eyes narrowed a bit, as if he saw something on John's face that indicated he didn't quite believe him. "We have ten minutes until our next guest arrives."

John nodded and settled back against the sofa, oddly content. That alone ought to worry him. But he could worry later. Tomorrow. Tonight he was going to enjoy it.

"Well?" Sherlock asked after nearly a minute of silence.

"Well what?"
"Did I get it right?"

John burst out laughing and turned to face him. "I should have known that was what was bothering you."

"It isn't only that. I actually am genuinely interested in whether you're enjoying this."

"Only to the extent that it affects your data," John retorted with a grin. Sherlock seemed prepared to protest and John patted him on the thigh. "Yes, it was good. You did very well. I'm surprised that wasn't obvious."

"It was obvious, but... could it have been better?"

A pleasant tingle worked its way down John's spine. "Oh, I see. Let me think about that." He tried to imagine things she could have done differently, less pressure here, more tongue there. Sherlock caught his hand after a moment and moved it off his thigh where John had been absent-mindedly stroking with his fingers. "Oh, sorry. I can't think of anything specific to make it better. But--" He raised his eyebrows suggestively. "--I'm open to new ideas."

Sherlock nodded, his expression switching immediately into search mode. That would have worried John a week ago, but at the moment it just turned him on. Sherlock was proving to be unusually creative in this particular area.

There was a knock at the door and they both started.

"Five minutes early," Sherlock said with a glance at his phone.

"Not a problem," John said. God, it really wasn't. He was like one of Pavlov's bloody dogs at this point. He finished the water and tossed the empty bottle into the bin across the room. Perfect shot.

He turned back to the open door and froze. Standing there next to Sherlock was a young man. He was young, maybe twenty, and was dressed not unlike John's mental image of a 70s glam rock star. He seemed almost to be posing in the doorway. "Hi."

John forced himself to relax. After their conversation that afternoon he'd been expecting this; honestly he was surprised it hadn't happened before now. But it didn't change the fact that John's stomach twisted into a knot at the idea. With Ryan, there had been a woman in the room, so he hadn't had to think about it very much. His fantasies about Sherlock were just that, fantasies. He had no expectation they would ever be anything more.

But this was different. There was no denying that he was about to have sex with a man -- hell, a boy, really. God, he was probably old enough to be this kid's father, which was not a thought to dwell on right now, Jesus. But there was also no denying that he'd thought about what it would be like to have sex with a man, sex that went beyond that one frantic fumble in the army. There had always been a spark of something there, something he'd always known went beyond mere curiosity. He'd never pursued it; he liked women without a doubt, so why go looking for trouble?

Sherlock closed the door, pulling John from his thoughts.

"I'm Cam," the boy said, smiling slyly at John now.

_Hello, Trouble_. How the hell had Sherlock figured this out? Or was this about John at all?

"I'm Sherlock and this is John."
"Does he talk?"

"Not tonight."

Frankly, John was grateful for that rule. It made things so much easier.

"He's cute," Cam said. He settled on the sofa next to John and leered at him. "What did you have in mind?"

"Blow job. I'll help."

_Aha._ A direct comparison. Now quite a few things were becoming clear.

"Can I kiss him first?"

Sherlock hesitated for a moment. "Yes."

Cam leaned in and pressed his open mouth against John's. It was all tongue and John couldn't help but smile. He mentally adjusted Cam's age down a couple of years. Fortunately, controlling a kiss without looking like you were taking control was something he'd learned how to do quite well by now.

After a few minutes Cam sat back with a dazed expression. "Fuck, you're a good kisser. I'm hard already." He took John's hand and pressed it against his groin. John smiled and stroked his erection through his trousers as subtly as he could.

"Moving right along," Sherlock said, suddenly hovering over them.

"Oh, right. He's not allowed to touch. Pity. I'm going to have dreams about that tongue." Cam slid to the floor and unfastened John's trousers. John lifted his hips to let him pull them off. Cam tossed them aside and regarded John's half-erect penis with an expression John could only describe as hunger. He leaned forward and nuzzled the foreskin with the tip of his nose, inhaling.

"Condom." Sherlock dropped the packet onto John's belly.

Cam groaned. "Ugh, do we have to? I hate giving head through latex."

"Non-negotiable," Sherlock replied, his tone almost possessive. John bit his lip in an effort not to grin.

"Fine." Cam stroked John's dick to hardness with one hand and then ripped the package open. He rolled the condom on and leaned forward, swallowing John's cock in one quick movement. He sucked hard and moved fast, his hand steadying the base.

John's eyes flew open in surprise. _Shit._

"Oh, for fuck's sake." Sherlock grabbed a handful of Cam's hair and yanked; Cam howled and sat back, rubbing at his scalp. "How old are you, really?"

Cam glared up at him. "That's what guys usually like."

"In the back alley, just after they give you a fiver?"

"Oh, fuck you. I didn't come here to be abused."

"Sherlock." Cam and Sherlock turned to look at John, both equally surprised. "Not. Helping."
Sherlock looked like he was at war with himself for a moment. His face smoothed out and he forced a smile. "Apologies." John knew he didn't mean it, but hopefully Cam would buy it.

"Accepted," Cam said, still looking miffed. He glanced up and John smiled reassuringly. "What would you like me to do, then?"

"Start slow," Sherlock said. "Use your tongue and take your time. His Mum's not going to barge in on you, so there's no rush."

Cam rolled his eyes, but he seemed to have made up his mind to stay. He flicked his tongue against the head of John's cock experimentally and John rewarded him with a moan.

"Good," Sherlock said, stroking his fingers in Cam's hair. "Do you see how he's relaxed? He likes that."

Cam swirled his tongue around the head and kissed the tip, lightly sucking. The difference in sensation was amazing. He licked his way down the shaft and back up again, and John squirmed when his lips grazed the head.

"There, he wants your mouth now," Sherlock said softly.

"Can I suck him then?"

"Not yet. Draw it out a bit longer."

John groaned and pressed his hands against his face. Fucking torture, it was. Oh, the irony of Sherlock teaching someone how to give head.

Cam went back to work, using his tongue to great effect. It was delicious and not nearly enough, and John finally thrust his hips up slightly, trying to send Cam a subtle message.

"Impatient, John," Sherlock said. "Go on then, but slowly."

Cam sucked the head in and kept working his tongue, and John moaned. One hand flew to Cam's head without thinking about it.

"John." He sounded annoyed. John let his hand fall to his side.

Cam popped off long enough to say, "I don't mind."

"But I do. Move down to his balls now."

Cam pressed John's thighs further apart and wriggled his tongue against John's scrotum, and oh fuck that particular part of him had been ignored quite a bit lately. Cam drew one ball into his mouth and sucked gently. John closed his eyes.

"Use your tongue as well."

Cam did and John whimpered. God, that was amazing. He sank into the sofa even more and Cam shifted so that his shoulders were supporting John's thighs. It was a position John loved having a woman in, and he'd frankly never expected to be there himself.

"And the other." Sherlock's voice was soft and John couldn't quite tell where he was, how closely he was watching. Cam released one ball and moved to the other, swirling his tongue around the sensitive skin before working it into his mouth. His nose was pressed against the base of John's cock, breathing heavily. He pulled off and flicked his tongue against the skin just behind John's balls.
"Oh, fuck," John said, unable to stop himself. That was just -- God, close enough to being completely filthy that it melted his mind.

"Up again," Sherlock said, and John wasn't sure whether to be disappointed or relieved.

Cam kissed and licked his way up John's cock again, and then sucked the underside of the head. He was a quick study.

"I want you to finger him now," Sherlock said. John's eyes flew open.

"Oh hell, yes," Cam replied, sounding a bit breathless now.

Oh God. This was new territory, completely new. Hell, he'd only fingered himself once out of curiosity, and it hadn't really done anything but weird him out. Open mind, open mind. He closed his eyes again.

There was another ripping sound -- lube packet, he assumed -- and then Cam's mouth was around his cock again, sucking the head lightly and working it with his tongue. He tried not to tense when he felt a slick finger probing at his arsehole. It pressed into him surprisingly easily.

Sherlock whispered something John couldn't make out. Cam hummed as if in acknowledgment, and oh God, twisted his finger and pulled it out again, timing it with a long slow movement up his cock and Jesus fuck but that was intense.

Okay then. That explained a lot. John was definitely onboard with things-in-his-arse now, because damn.

"That's perfect," Sherlock said. "Keep doing that."

Oh, yes please.

It was stunning how much that one finger changed the intensity of everything, and John found himself moaning incoherently in short order. The pace was slow enough to hold off his orgasm and he felt like he could keep this up for hours. It was incredible.

Cam's finger twisted and brushed up, and there -- John's hands flew to Cam's head again, clenching tightly in his hair.

"Hands off," Sherlock said, his tone one of warning, and John dropped them to his sides. "You found his prostate. Do that again."

Cam pressed up and John winced.

"Too much," Sherlock said. "Just stroke, very lightly."

And oh yes, that was definitely what John needed. Fuck fuck fuck. Cam's tongue flicked the sensitive spot at the base of his glans with the same motion and John cried out. God, he wasn't even coming yet. What was that going to be like?

"John!" he heard and realized his hands were in Cam's hair again. He couldn't move, though. He wanted to obey, but he couldn't do it. He stared up at Sherlock helplessly.

Sherlock's eyes narrowed, but he didn't say anything else. He circled behind the sofa, reached over John to pull his arms up roughly, and then pinned his hands against the sofa just above his head.

God, this was just... God. John twisted his wrists so that he could clasp Sherlock's hands and
He was hanging by a thread now, stretched and suspended between Cam's mouth on his dick and his fingers -- there were two now -- in his arse and Sherlock's hands clenching his own tightly over his head, his breath hot in John's ear. Everything else disappeared around him, nothing but pure sensation was left. His head was light and his arms felt numb, and the universe contracted down to his cock and his balls for a long moment. And then it all expanded again with shocking intensity.

He was fairly certain he made an embarrassing amount of noise, but it was hard to tell. There were things happening around him that he wouldn't be able to process for a while yet: Cam moaning around his cock, Sherlock's rhythmic breathing in his ear, sharp fingernails digging into his wrists. He was left shaking when it was over, struggling to catch his breath.

Sherlock released his hands, but didn't move from the spot. He petted John's head like he was a cat. John would have purred if he could.

Cam released John's dick and pulled his fingers out a bit too quickly; John winced at a scrape of fingernail on sensitive tissue. Cam's forehead pressed against John's thigh and he panted, and John realized he was wanking. He should probably offer to help. It would be the polite thing to do. As soon as he could speak again. A moment later Cam groaned and stilled, his face still pressed into John's bare skin.

Sherlock's lips brushed John's temple as he stood and backed away. John tried to open his eyes, but they still weren't cooperating. Actually, he couldn't really move at all. Not that it mattered at the moment.

"That was insanely hot," Cam said, pushing back on his heels and fastening his trousers. "Every guy I fuck, ever, is going to implicitly thank you two."

John managed a laugh at that.

"If you're going to fuck him now, can I watch?" Cam asked.

"No," Sherlock replied.

"If you're not going to fuck him, can I help you with that?"

John opened his eyes just in time to see Cam's hand cup Sherlock's groin. Sherlock pushed his hand away immediately, and there was no doubt he was completely hard. "I can assure you that is in good hands. Thank you."

"Suit yourself." Cam shrugged and then turned to John. "Later, boys. It was fun."

John managed a little wave before Cam walked through the door, a definite swing in his step.

"Oh my God," John said at last, pressing his hands over his eyes. "That was un-fucking-believable. I don't want to move ever again." He dropped his hands and grinned at Sherlock.

Sherlock was leaning against the wall, staring back at John. He looked dazed. John's eyes flicked down to the obvious tent in his trousers. "Has that ever happened before?"

Sherlock frowned. "Of course it has."

"I mean, here. While you were watching… me."
Sherlock's cheeks tinted and he looked away. "Certainly not to this extent."

John stretched and then curled up on the sofa, wincing at the slight twinge in his arse. *Note to self: trim nails before you ever do that to another person.* He pulled the condom off and looked up to see if Sherlock had regained his composure yet. He hadn't. John patted the sofa next to him. "Sit."

"I can't."

"I won't bite."

"No, it's… a bit difficult at the moment."

John smiled. "It's nothing to be embarrassed about. If anyone should be embarrassed, it should be me, right?"

"I'm not--" Sherlock began and then stopped. He couldn't seem to meet John's eyes.

John pressed his lips together. There were a dozen questions he wanted to ask, at least twenty things he would like to say, but now was not the time. Instead he pushed himself to his feet and redressed, giving Sherlock as much privacy as he could manage. "Ready when you are," he said at last.

"Right," Sherlock said, his eyes darting around the room. "Could you just give me a minute? I'll meet you upstairs. Have a drink if you like. Charge it to Mycroft."

John frowned, but nodded. "All right. I'll be upstairs."

The bar was busy and it took him a few minutes to get the bartender's attention. He finally managed to get a beer and he stood off to the side of the main room, watching the action. As always, there was an amazing variety of people: young and old, couples and singles, people who were incredibly attractive and people who were average-looking at best. And all of them were laughing, talking, and so clearly looking. The barriers that he would normally see in a bar, the walls people put up around themselves and their small groups of friends -- none of that seemed to exist here. Over there a portly middle-aged man was flirting with a pair of girls who looked like university students; nearby a fairly geeky-looking young couple were entwined around a woman who'd be generously described as a "cougar". It was incredibly refreshing.

But then, how exactly did he fit in here? He wasn't out there, meeting people and defining his own sexual boundaries. He wasn't exploring his own desires and fantasies. Sherlock was doing all of that for him, and John just let him. And John actually enjoyed letting him do it -- that was the fucked up part. Tonight when Sherlock charged in all pissed off and domineering, John's knees had gone weak, literally. It was as if his brain had shut itself off, handed the controls of his body over to Sherlock, and smoked a joint… or something. He wasn't quite sure how to describe it.

And that didn't even begin to touch on the extremely gay sex he'd just had. It was practically a threesome, if he included Sherlock. And really, he felt like he had to. God, that was going to be an awkward conversation.

"Ready."

He turned to see Sherlock standing next to him, his eyes scanning the crowd as well. "That was fast." Sherlock's jaw clenched and John gaped at him as realization dawned. "Did you seriously just kick me out of that room so you could wank?"

"Yes."
John had to look away to keep from glaring at him. "Un-fucking-believable."

He put his half-finished beer on a nearby table and headed for the door. Sherlock was right behind him and had the good sense to say nothing as John stalked down the street and hailed a taxi. They rode back to the flat in silence. John kept his eyes firmly fixed on the passing scenery. Sherlock was squirming in the seat next to him; John could practically hear the thoughts spinning in Sherlock's head as he tried to work out what he'd done wrong.

Well, no, John doubted Sherlock thought he'd done anything wrong. More likely he was trying to work out why John was being such an unreasonable wanker.

And fuck it all, he was probably being completely unreasonable, but he didn't give a shit. He felt like he'd been turned inside-out tonight for Sherlock's viewing pleasure, and the man didn't even trust him enough to let John see how much he'd been affected. Always putting up fucking walls, Sherlock was. Never letting anyone inside that brilliant head of his. It was infuriating.

Neither of them spoke until they were standing in the parlor in the flat, in the near-darkness lit only by the streetlamps outside the window. John's eyes adjusted at last and he saw Sherlock standing by the window, facing him.

Sherlock's voice was tight. "I assume we need to talk about this."

John sighed and made his way to the sofa, intentionally sitting in Sherlock's customary spot.

"Go on then," Sherlock said.

Jesus, where should he start?

"Fine. I don't understand why, after everything that's happened, you wouldn't feel comfortable wanking in front of me."

"I have wanked in front of you."

"Yes, but--" John paused. It was hard to believe that night on the sofa was just a week ago. "What are we doing, Sherlock?"

"You know exactly what we're doing."

"I thought I did, but now I'm not so certain. I thought this was about you studying my responses to sexual stimuli."

"That's precisely what it's about."

Sherlock sounded frustrated now.

"But it's also about you, isn't it? You're trying to figure out what turns you on as well."

"I'm not trying. It just happens."

There was a pause. John waited, fairly stunned by that admission. He'd only heard Sherlock admit to feeling anything a few times, ever.

"I thought I could be objective. And I was, to a point."

"I see." John felt a twinge of guilt. He'd been so confident in Sherlock's ability to remain detached. God, he hadn't even considered that it might be otherwise.

"This is all rather more complicated than I'd anticipated." Sherlock crossed to the sofa and sat on the
other side, an arm's length from John. He folded his arms over his chest and planted his feet firmly on the floor.

John considered his next words carefully. He could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times Sherlock had ever even hinted that he was wrong about something. "Was that the first time you've wanked after?"

Sherlock stared resolutely ahead. "No. It happened Sunday as well."

"After you saw me with Ryan."

"I waited until we got to the flat, at least."

"I did wonder why you went straight to bed." John grinned and was pleased to see Sherlock finally crack a smile. "Tonight was different, though, wasn't it?"

"Clearly I lose all ability to be objective when I see you with another man."

John bit his lip at the choice of the word another. Best to let that one go for now. "Can I ask you a personal question?"

"You've earned the right, haven't you?" Sherlock turned and looked at him for the first time since they'd come home.

"Are you gay?"

Sherlock looked away again, pursing his lips. "It's not a question I've thought about for years, but in light of recent events, I believe the answer is yes."

John nodded. It was utterly fucked up that they were only having this conversation now, after all this time and after the last week, but at least they were having it. There was another question he'd wanted to ask Sherlock for a while now. "Have you ever been in a relationship with... anyone?"

"No."

"Have you had sex?"

"Yes." There was a pause during which John picked his jaw up from the floor. "Does that surprise you?"

"Absolutely. With a man or a woman?"

"Both."

John toed off his shoes and turned his body sideways, pulling his feet up on the sofa. "Tell me."

"Why?"

John gave him a long look and Sherlock sighed. "You're going to be horribly disappointed, I assure you."

"Trust me, I won't."

Sherlock leaned back into the sofa cushions and stared up at the ceiling. "My last year at university, I worked in a lab run by a brilliant scientist. Her research was something I was mildly interested in, so we spent quite a lot of time working together. At the end of term we were in the lab late one night..."
and she asked me if I'd like to come back to her flat for a drink. I honestly didn't know she was propositioning me until we got there."

John struggled to contain his glee at this information. "You lost your virginity to your professor? That sounds like the plot of a porno."

Sherlock shrugged. "I wasn't interested in her -- she was attractive enough, but..."

"You're gay."

"Well, there is that. But I was curious. Everyone else went on about sex constantly, and I decided that since I had the opportunity I should find out what the fuss was over."

"And what happened?"

"It was fine, nothing spectacular. She kept me up half the night, which was kind of annoying." John smirked. "How many times did you do it?"

Sherlock thought. "If you simply count orgasms, five." At John's looks of shock he added, "I was twenty."

"What, did she have you in every position she could think of?"

"Something like that." Sherlock's lips twisted as if he were trying very hard not to smile.

John laughed -- he couldn't help it, the mental image he had of this situation was completely insane -- and after a moment Sherlock laughed as well. John stretched his legs out and pressed his socked feet against Sherlock's thigh. "What happened after that?"

"It was horribly awkward. It turned out she had a boyfriend and they'd recently had a row. I seemed to represent some sort of revenge on him. The next time I saw her she barely spoke to me."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, no, it was a relief. I was terrified she'd think we were dating after that. I liked her, but not personally so much as professionally."

"So did that turn you off to sex completely?"

Sherlock's fingertips stroked the tops of John's feet. "For a bit. It was pleasant enough, but it was messy. It was difficult enough to interact with people on a daily basis. As hard as it may be to believe, I had even more problems with social interactions then than I do now."

John let that one go, though it took effort. "What about casual sex? Strangers in bars, that sort of thing?"

"Heroin was so much easier." A tight-lipped smile at that.

John closed his eyes. The idea of Sherlock as a young man so adrift and alone made his guts twist. "You said there was a man as well."

"Yes. He was the son of a man Mycroft knew. He introduced us, at least. The timing was good; I needed a distraction."

"From what?" John asked. A single look from Sherlock answered his question. "Right. How old
were you?"

"Twenty-four. He was a bit younger. I thought he was a complete idiot, though that's hardly unusual for me. But there was something about him that I found fascinating, and it took me a long time to understand that it was sexual attraction."

"Was that when you first thought you might be gay?"

"Yes, but that didn't matter. I needed a distraction desperately and he made it clear he was interested. One night we had dinner and I invited him to my room and he proceeded to shag me most of the night."

"And then what happened?"

"He wanted to see me again and I said no."

John frowned. "Why?"

Sherlock shrugged. "I got bored, essentially. In one night we'd tried everything once. I realized it really was just about the sex, and sex alone wasn't enough to justify putting up with him outside the bedroom. He really was an idiot; you've no idea."

"So you ended it."

"I assumed I knew all there was to know about sex with a man. So I moved on."

"And you survived on occasional masturbation for the next decade." John shook his head. He understood choosing celibacy when it was otherwise inconvenient and he understood that some people simply weren't interested in sex, but this was something he couldn't really wrap his brain around at all.

Sherlock shrugged. "It seemed extremely unlikely I'd encounter anyone I'd actually enjoy being around for any length of time, whom I'd be attracted to and who would also be attracted to me. The rational thing to do was not to waste time on it, to focus myself on other things."

John bit his lip and considered that statement for a long moment. "You said the experiment had become more complicated than you expected. What did you mean?"

Sherlock opened his mouth and closed it again and shook his head.

John sighed. "We have to be honest with each other about this. Whatever this is, there's sex involved, even if it's not between us, and that's going to make things messy. If there's even a chance of losing your friendship over this, I won't go back to the club again. I'll end it right now."

Sherlock turned to look at him, but still said nothing.

"Do you need some time to do a bit of exploring yourself? We could switch for a few days. I could find partners for you."

"No." Sherlock's tone was surprisingly sharp and John drew his feet away in response, pulled his knees into his chest. Sherlock exhaled smoothly, almost as if trying to choose his next words carefully. "I'm not interested in sex with strangers. I already know that's not what I want."

"Then what do you want?"

He threaded his fingers into his hair and clenched his hands, something that always made John think
he was trying to corral the thoughts spinning chaotically in his head. After a moment he pressed his palms over his face and exhaled. "I need to examine my own reactions more closely. If you're willing to continue, I would appreciate it." He looked at John then, his expression as open as John had ever seen.

John took a deep breath. "All right."

He desperately wanted to qualify his participation in this, to set limits, to tell Sherlock what had happened to him tonight and how much it had turned him upside-down. But he had a feeling it would be a bad idea, that the timing wasn't right. Sherlock was fragile now as well, maybe even more than John. Best to keep walking forward one step at a time and trust that their friendship would be strong enough to survive whatever happened.

"For what it's worth, Sherlock, I trust you."

"I know." Sherlock stood and stretched.

"Do you trust me?"

"I do." No hesitation.

"Good. I need to borrow your laptop."

Sherlock's expression changed to one of suspicion. "Why?"

"Well, mine is still at the shop, being repaired after someone spent eight solid hours viewing porn on it and contracted three separate viruses, requiring the hard drive to be wiped completely." He raised his eyebrows.

Sherlock waved a hand in the general direction of the computer. "The password is the 15th through the 22nd digits of pi with the obvious letter substitutions in the 16th, 18th, and 19th places."

"Thank you," John replied, already reaching for it. It'd take him fifteen minutes to work out the damn password, but it was doable.

Sherlock disappeared into his bedroom and John sat in the darkness for a long time without moving, clenching Sherlock's laptop to his chest. It had indeed become complicated, much more so than he'd ever expected. For all his comments about the importance of honesty, he was keeping a few things close to his chest.

All in good time. First, he needed to do a little research of his own. He opened Sherlock's laptop and took a deep breath.

Chapter End Notes

Incredibly hot NSFW art HERE by Doublenegativemeansyes for the hand-holding scene. *___*

And another version of that scene was drawn by Mayracs/KrisKenshin: On LJ here and on Tumblr here.

Gifsets by "A Cure for Boredom" Gifsets by Martin Crieff:
"Blow job, I'll help."
"Did you seriously just kick me out of that room so you could wank?"
"Are you gay?"

Art by Classyhiddles: http://classyhiddles.tumblr.com/post/31064433027/so-i-ended-up-reading-the-fic-a-cure-for

It was just a fantasy.
Cinnamon

Chapter Summary

Enough people thought they were a couple as it was; masquerading as one for the purpose of an experiment was hardly going to help matters. Of course, the line between masquerade and reality was growing more than a bit blurry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It took ten minutes and much swearing at his phone, but John finally worked out the correct password for Sherlock's computer. He opened a browser window and stared blankly at Google's search page for a solid minute, uncertain where to begin. How exactly did one search on a phrase like I love it when my flatmate chooses my sexual partners, orders me about, and then holds me down while they perform sex acts on me? That was only slightly more awkward than kinky platonic gay relationship.

And of course, he had to assume Sherlock would see any search term he used. Anything too extreme and he was setting himself up for a truly boundary-pushing night of sex. He was fairly open-minded and adventurous, but there were some things he was going to need quite a lot of time to consider before going anywhere near them. Sherlock had already shown he had no trouble commandeering John's body and mind for nonsexual experiments; John shuddered to think what situation he might casually thrust upon him if John did a search on "flogging".

Right, so. Proceed with caution.

Five minutes later he had typed and deleted at least a dozen phrases, never once clicking "search". Perhaps he needed to think about this more? He checked his email instead. The blog had got a few comments he needed to approve, mostly from his friends, but a few from stalkerish fans. He never quite knew how to respond to those, so he generally deleted them. The weirder ones he sometimes saved to a file for entertainment purposes, but--

Should he and Sherlock be using their real names in the club? He knew Sherlock was setting up many of the encounters via email -- surely he wasn't using his own email address? What if the next newspaper article about a case they'd solved mentioned that they frequented a private sex club in Soho? John closed his eyes and groaned. Enough people thought they were a couple as it was; masquerading as one for the purpose of an experiment was hardly going to help matters.

Of course, the line between masquerade and reality was growing more than a bit blurry. Which brought John back to the reason he was sitting in front of this computer in the first place.

He briefly considered Googling their names to see if anything new came up. On second thought, no. The last time he'd done that, he'd been scarred for weeks.

Sherlock's spreadsheet was minimized in the tray at the bottom of the window. He would probably assume John had looked at it, so John had no choice but to open it, really. He clicked the icon with more than a touch of trepidation and watched it fill the screen. It had grown immensely since the last time he'd seen it, with two entire rows of tabs across the bottom. The current tab seemed to represent
some sort of analysis and John couldn't make any sense of it. The columns headers were so heavily
coded that it was unclear what they represented. He clicked on a random cell and the string of
formulas that appeared in the entry bar may as well have been Greek.

He clicked on several other tabs, but none of it made much more sense. John was hardly a Luddite
and was actually quite good at maths, but his Excel skills were limited to extremely basic accounting.

He finally found the original sheet, the one he'd seen that first night a week ago. It remained much
the same, as if Sherlock hadn't added any more information to it. Of course, this had been the porn
response sheet, so somewhere in here there were probably sheets dedicated to everything from
watching John have orgasms to details about how he liked his dick to be touched. What Sherlock
planned to do with that information was anyone's guess. Perhaps he could summarize it in a quick
report that John could hand to all future lovers. *On the Proper Care and Handling of John H.
Watson.* Or something.

Of course, at this rate John might be able to write a treatise on what got Sherlock off as well: John
getting his cock sucked by a man; John losing control of his cognitive abilities when there were
fingers up his arse; John enjoying being watched so very closely. As long as Sherlock didn't have to
get his hands dirty and John was willing, it seemed like it worked for him. He knew John would do
anything he asked, anything he whispered in John's ear.

John closed his eyes and shivered. The sound of Sherlock's voice alone was starting to be enough to
get him going. He didn't know what to make of that, nor of the way he felt when Sherlock took
charge like he'd done tonight.

Ah, there was a place to begin his search. He minimized the spreadsheet and began typing.

*****

It was nearly noon when John finally made it downstairs. He rarely slept that late, preferring to keep
himself on a regular schedule, but the combination of late nights out and much on his mind was
pushing him steadily towards nocturnal.

Sherlock stood by the window, bow in hand. The music was what had finally roused John; as alarm
clocks went, it was a fairly pleasant one. Sherlock was standing stock still now, the violin tucked
under his chin, the bow pointing toward the ceiling, and his brow furrowed in concentration.

John had long since learned not to speak to him at moments like this. He headed straight for the
kitchen, intending to make some coffee. Unfortunately, they appeared to be out of coffee, even the
horrid instant kind John kept on hand for emergencies. He cast a suspicious glance in Sherlock's
direction, but said nothing. Asking would be pointless and counter-productive. He might as well go
out.

He pulled on his shoes and his coat while standing in Sherlock's line of sight, though there was no
acknowledgment of his presence. He might as well be invisible. Maybe if he took off his trousers,
Sherlock would notice. Hell, he could probably stand right in front of him and jerk off, and Sherlock
would barely blink. On second thought, no -- he'd probably open his laptop and take notes.

The day was cool and clear and he ended up going for a long walk in Regent's Park. He finally
decided to get a sandwich at the Pret around the corner from the flat, a place he'd never managed to
talk Sherlock into going to. Now it was a place he went alone when he needed to think. Someone
had left a newspaper on the adjacent table and he scanned the headlines, looking for possible cases
out of sheer habit. It occurred to him then that Sherlock hadn't mentioned wanting a case in the last
week. Even on the days when the club was closed, he'd been perfectly content to think about… well,
whatever it was he was thinking about. Was watching John have sex really fascinating enough to keep that mind occupied for this long?

Perhaps it was. He contemplated his sandwich, feeling his cheeks heat. Last night Sherlock had said it was complicated. It seemed clear he felt some sort of sexual attraction to John -- or at least in the presence of John -- but was he interested in acting on it? And if he did, how did John feel about that?

He circled his fingertips on his temples and tried to clear his mind. He cared about Sherlock. He liked him a lot. He'd jump at the chance to have sex with him, that much was clear. But would their friendship be able to survive that?

He had no idea.

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"I found one," John said, dropping a copy of QX on Sherlock's chest.

"Ah, thanks," Sherlock replied, pushing himself to sitting. He flipped through it quickly, giving each page a cursory glance, and then tossed it aside.

"Glad I didn't go to much trouble," John mumbled. Which he had; he'd searched for a good half hour. He'd asked every news kiosk operator on Marylebone Road where he might locate a copy, only understanding their bemused expressions when he finally found one. "Why did you need a guide to the London gay scene? Isn't all of that online?"

"It is. So while I appreciate the gesture, it was essentially pointless."

_Fantastic._ John stripped off his jacket and hung it up, then sank into a chair and sighed.

"What happened?" Sherlock asked, leaning back into the cushions of the sofa. He knees splayed open and John caught himself looking at the slight bulge leaning to left between them before forcing his eyes away.

"Nothing happened. Why?"

Sherlock frowned. "I thought you were trying to hint I should ask. You can just tell me when you want me to do the listening thing, you know. It's infuriating to have to work out when you want me to ask and when you want to be left alone."

John laughed and Sherlock looked even more confused. "Sorry, it's just that coming from you, that's actually rather sweet. You're trying to be a good friend. I appreciate it."

"I've done better than try, I hope."

John smiled. "Yes, of course. You are a good friend. My best friend, actually."

Sherlock looked pleased at that. They smiled at each other for a long moment.

"You were thinking very hard when I left," John said at last. "Make any progress?"

"Yes. The websites you left open last night were rather helpful." His expression shifted to one of calculation.

"I'd hoped you'd find them useful." John raised his eyebrows. "Nothing too extreme, mind. I'm open to trying things, but within reason."
"Safe, sane, and consensual, right?" Sherlock stretched like a cat and then sank even further into the sofa. "You really get off on it, me telling you what to do."

"When it comes to sex, yes. But most of the time it makes me want to punch you, so don't get the wrong idea."

"Hence my surprise." He paused, his eyes flicking away from John for a moment and then back to him. "Why do you like it?"

John paused, pursing his lips. He'd spent much of his walk thinking about that very topic. How much of it he was prepared to tell Sherlock was an open question. "I like not having to think about it. Sex had become this elusive thing I couldn't manage to get. It was stressful going to bars and trying to meet someone and wondering if she was going to like me and whether it would go anywhere."

"I thought you were fine with masturbation."

John snorted. "It's good in a pinch, but nothing compares to the real thing. Touching another person, being touched."

Sherlock looked away, towards the window. Sunlight streamed in at this time of day, catching dust particles in the air. John wondered if he took any pleasure in being touched, if it was something he wanted or even thought about.

"With you in charge, I can just relax and enjoy it, I suppose."

"But it's more than that, isn't it?"

*I like the fact that watching me turns you on. God, I really do.* He wasn't going to say that part aloud, honesty be damned. He tried to look thoughtful for a moment and then shrugged.

The calculating look returned to Sherlock's face. "How far do you want to go with this?"

"I'm not sure. I'll tell you when it crosses the line, though."

Sherlock smiled darkly and John struggled not to squirm in the chair. God, he wanted to sink to the floor, press those knees apart, and--

*No, stop.* He really had to stop fantasizing like this. Or at least keep it in the shower. He closed his eyes for a moment and cleared his mind before opening them again. Sherlock was staring at him, watching him.

John wondered what Sherlock wanted to watch done to him tonight. "Should I assume you've planned a surprise for me this evening?"

"Yes." There was that expression again, the one that made John's cock twitch in anticipation.

He smiled. "Good."

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The moment John crossed the threshold into the club, he felt himself start to relax. The excitement that had been thrumming in his veins for the last few hours began to settle into something more like quiet anticipation. Sherlock turned to look at him, his eyes narrowed, and John swallowed the urge to grin. Time to play.

They made their way to the bar, where John waited while Sherlock ordered drinks. The crowd was
denser tonight and there was energy in the air. People were looking at each other with definite interest, flirting, touching, negotiating. It was amazing that he hadn't known any of this existed until just a week ago.

"I've arranged something special for you tonight," Sherlock said quietly into his ear.

John felt a shiver run through him and he closed his eyes. He leaned back a fraction of an inch and his shoulders touched Sherlock's chest.

"I want you silent and obedient. It may be difficult, but I'll make it worth your while."

John exhaled and nodded.

"Very good." Sherlock dropped a soft kiss on his neck, right in the spot he knew did John in. John only barely managed not to whimper.

Wait, did "silent" include sounds other than words? If so, he was in trouble.

Sherlock leaned against the bar and stared out at the crowd impassively. John sipped his beer and waited.

And waited.

Ten minutes later he began to wonder if this was some sort of test of his patience. Sherlock had barely moved; his drink was nearly untouched. John had been letting his mind wander, running through possible scenarios. He tried to remember what had been on the web pages he'd intentionally left open, but the possibilities were nearly endless. He took a deep breath and pushed it all aside, letting his mind go completely blank.

He wasn't sure how much time passed after that. At least three songs started and ended, and he just listened and watched and waited, feeling oddly content. A movement to his right caught his eye: Sherlock finally raised his glass to his lips and downed its contents. He set the glass on a nearby table and, without a word to John, walked away.

John fell into step behind and followed him across the room to the familiar door, through and down two flights of stairs. Sherlock led them to a doorway near the end of the corridor and into a room, closing the door quietly behind them. They'd been here before; the art and the arrangement of the furniture in the room looked familiar. He turned back to where Sherlock was stripping off his coat and waited.

Sherlock turned to face him. "Our guest will arrive shortly. You should get undressed."

He didn't usually strip this early on, but perhaps it was part of the game tonight. He pulled his coat off and toed off his shoes, aware that Sherlock was watching very closely. Interesting. He met Sherlock's eyes with his own as his fingers moved up to unbutton his shirt. He took his time, moving as slowly as he dared. Something like a smile played at Sherlock's lips just before he closed the distance to John to a mere arm's length.

John pulled the shirt off and let it drop to the floor, watching Sherlock's eyes slide down his chest. This was new. New was definitely interesting. Sherlock's eyes flicked up to John's briefly before moving across his shoulders, down his arms. John wondered what he was thinking, if he liked what he saw. He really ought to join a gym now that people were seeing him naked on a regular basis. He'd been in great shape not so long ago; his chest and arms had actually been something to look at.

"Trousers," Sherlock said as he circled behind him.
John fumbled with the button of his trousers, his fingers suddenly uncooperative. This was oddly unnerving. He was used to being watched by Sherlock, so why would this be different?

There was movement to his right and then Sherlock was in front of him again, standing far too close. He tilted his head and pushed John's fingers away from the resisting button. "Need help?"

John managed to nod, or at least he thought he did. He may simply have stared in shock as Sherlock's fingers quickly opened the button and the zip, his eyes fixed on John's. Then Sherlock dropped to his knees and John stopped breathing altogether. He was instantly hard. *Oh fuck.*

Sherlock tugged his trousers down, careful not to take John's pants with them just yet. His erection strained against the fabric and *oh God* Sherlock was definitely focused on it. He stared at the bulge in John's pants for a long moment before tucking his fingers into the waistband at John's hips and pulling the pants down, moving them carefully over John's cock and down his thighs. John felt the fabric slide down and finally hit his ankles, but he was afraid to move. If he lifted a foot he might fall over, or worse, forward. Sherlock sat back on his heels, and John took a shaky breath and looked down.

His cock jutted straight out from his body, fluid already leaking from the tip. Sherlock tilted his head slightly, just *looking.* His expression was one of unbridled curiosity; John realized he'd never been close enough to examine like this before. He tried to relax, tried to clear his mind, but it was impossible with Sherlock kneeling before him, close enough to his hard cock that he could just lean forward a little bit and--

*Oh fuck, oh God.* He exhaled shakily and clenched his hands into fists. He didn't know how much longer he could stand this looking-without-touching. How the hell Sherlock could be so completely fucking impassive was beyond him. He had to know what this was doing to John; he couldn't possibly misunderstand it. He was seized with an impulse to thread his fingers in Sherlock's hair, to press the head of his cock against those lips. He wondered what Sherlock would do.

He glanced down to see that Sherlock was now looking back up at him, just watching, *damn him.* Sherlock stood then and brushed his fingers against John's cheek before circling behind him again. John exhaled. Jesus, he had to get a grip on himself before their guest arrived. He kicked his pants off to the side and wiggled his fingers to relax them.

Sherlock's hands touched John's shoulders and John bit his lip to keep himself silent. Those hands smoothed across his shoulder blades, across the scar where a bullet had left his body, and down his arms, finally pulling his hands together at the small of his back. He held them there for a moment, and then John felt something against his wrists. His mind whirled when he realized his hands were being tied.

Sherlock stepped back when he was finished and said, "Okay?"

*Okay?* Bloody hell, he was naked and hard with his hands tied behind his back. Of all words he might use to describe this situation, *okay* was not one that came immediately to mind.

He tugged against the bind; it was tight enough to keep his hands in place, but not so much that it hurt or would be impossible to get out of if he really wanted. This was unexpected, but it was -- he rolled his eyes -- fine, it was *okay.* He nodded.

"There's one more thing he wanted," Sherlock said, his voice soft. John frowned, confused for a moment before realizing that Sherlock was referring to their guest. And then there was a strip of cloth over his eyes, being pulled tight around the back of his head.
He froze, uncertain for a moment. There was still time to back out, time to say no. He hadn’t been blindfolded since that bizarre stress training exercise in the army five years ago, and though he’d kept his cool better than most it had still fucked with his head. He had no idea what to expect from this, and that idea was both terrifying and exciting. Maybe a bit more terrifying at the moment.

"Tell me if you don’t want to do this," Sherlock whispered. He was so close John could feel the heat from his body against his back.

John took a deep breath, released it, and remained silent. He had no idea what he wanted right now. He felt Sherlock move away and then there was some movement in front of him.

"Kneel." A hand on his arm, steadying him.

He knelt and there was a folded blanket under his knees. Sherlock’s footsteps receded to the door and John settled in to wait. The silence became heavy around him and he used it to settle his mind, to calm his nerves. Sherlock would still be in charge, and he knew John. He’d watch and observe and he’d make sure John enjoyed it. John trusted him. Completely.

The knock at the door ought to have startled him, but somehow it didn’t. He heard the door open, heard Sherlock talking quietly with someone, footsteps crossing toward him.

"This is John," Sherlock said.

"Beautiful," said the man. His voice was soft, friendly, even warm.

"Yes, especially like this."

John felt his cheeks warm at that, even though he knew it was part of the act.

"Thanks for sharing him. If he were mine, I don’t think I could."

John felt fingertips brush his shoulder. The voice was oddly familiar, but he couldn’t place it.

"He makes it worth my while."

"I imagine he does. Where should I begin?"

"Just touch him for now."

It was odd being talked about as if he wasn’t there, as if he had no agency, but it also heightened his anticipation in a palpable way.

"Mmm, happily." Hands that were smaller and warmer than Sherlock’s pressed against his shoulders and stroked slowly down his back. Fingertips traced the line of his spine, carefully running over every vertebra, then out along the ribs. He felt the flats of palms smooth down his sides to the small of his back, where the tightness of the leather strap binding his hands was tested. Fingers slid up his arms to his shoulders, and then one hand grasped his right arm. "Here, stand." John’s knees were stiff; he hadn’t realized he’d been kneeling in that position for quite so long.

Those hands smoothed over his chest now, sliding through the sparse hair there, tracing along his clavicle. Clever fingers tugged at his nipples and John gasped softly.

"Does touching include kissing?" the man asked, his voice definitely husky now.

"If you like," Sherlock replied. His voice echoed around the room and John couldn’t tell where he was.
"Good," the man murmured and John felt warm breath against his skin just before a tongue flicked across one nipple. He had to clench his jaw to keep from moaning. That tongue swirled and licked and sucked and then moved across his chest to the other nipple. John seriously wondered how long he was going to have to remain standing, because honestly? This was an unreasonable expectation.

After that the man's mouth moved down his belly and that tongue swirled around his navel and John could guess where this was headed. The man worked his way down to one hipbone and John felt hot breath at the base of his cock and *God*. His pulse was racing now; he could feel his body thrumming with it.

Fingers trailed down the back of his thigh, almost tickling him. John realized he was holding his breath. He wanted that touch on his dick so fucking badly, but he could only wait.

"Do you want me to suck him?"

"No," Sherlock replied, and John nearly whimpered. "I want you to pay more attention to his arse first."

"Right." The man grasped John's hips and turned him 180 degrees. That hot breath was brushing against one of his arse cheeks now and John swallowed, hard. The man's fingers dug into his hips. "Down on your knees." John complied, relieved to find the blanket under him again. "And lean forward. The sofa is right in front of you."

It was only when John's forehead was pressed into the cushions of the sofa that he realized the implications of the position he was in. His hands were still bound at the small of his back and his upper body was being supported by his head. It was awkward, even uncomfortable. He shifted forward on his knees, trying to find a more comfortable position. Hands caught his hips then, as if trying to keep him from moving too far away.

He shivered as those hands stroked over his arse cheeks and squeezed, massaging them. This was another area that hadn't been explored very much until now. Kisses and bites followed and he squirmed, startled at how ticklish his arse apparently was. How had he not known that until now?

And then there was a tongue flicking at the cleft of his arse and hands pulling the cheeks apart and *oh fuck oh fuck* was this going where he thought it was? He barely breathed as that tongue worked its way south, getting closer and closer to his arsehole, and *God* why did he want this so badly? It was filthy and weird and *oh my God* that tongue flicked ever so lightly across his hole. He whimpered, simultaneously thrilled and mortified.

It was gloriously dirty and perfectly amazing, and why the hell hadn't he done this before? That tongue circled his hole slowly, lightly, spiraling ever closer to where he really wanted it. Just when he thought he couldn't bear it another moment, the tip of the tongue pressed into the center and *fucking hell*. It probed again and again and he found himself squirming, pushing back against it, wanting it to breach his body. There were thumbs pressed against either side of his arsehole now and that tongue pushed in ever so slightly, slick and hot and perfect and *God*. He moaned into the sofa, unable to keep quiet any longer.

One of the man's hands reached around and gave his cock one long stroke, and everything intensified. Between the hand working him and the tongue wriggling into his arsehole, damn near fucking him, *oh God* -- he was close, far too close, but it was so good.

"Stop," Sherlock said, and John was startled by the proximity of his voice. He had to be right next to the sofa. "Don't let him come yet."
The tongue disappeared and the hand on his dick moved to the base and tightened uncomfortably, and John winced. A hand stroked his thigh for a moment. There was another hand petting the back of his head, and wait -- that made three hands. John wondered which one of them belonged to Sherlock.

"Go on," Sherlock said at last. His voice came from almost directly above and then John felt the sofa cushions compress. Sherlock was sitting right next to him.

Fingers pried his cheeks apart again and that tongue went back to work, flicking lightly across his hole at first. Sheer torture, that, and John tried to press his hips back, anything to get more of it. Sherlock's hand tightened in his hair, almost pressing his face into the cushion, and he had to turn his head to be certain he would be able to breathe. The tongue moved more slowly now, wider lathes, and then there were lips pressed around his hole and that tongue pressed into him again, more easily this time.

John could barely breathe now; his body just wasn't capable of managing more than one function at a time. Those lips were moving against his arsehole in some sort of obscene kiss, and that tongue pushed into him further than he would have thought possible, and then the hand on his cock started moving again and oh God oh God.

He wasn't sure he'd be able to think about this later without blushing like a schoolgirl. Or coming in his pants at the memory alone.

"Finger him," Sherlock said after what seemed like an eternity. His hand stroked John's hair once more and then retreated.

John wasn't ready for the tongue to stop, but the wet finger pressing into him also felt rather damn good, so he couldn't really complain. Unlike Cam, this man knew what he was doing, and John was soon a quivering mass of nerves from the finger fucking his arse and the hand moving expertly on his dick.

"Stop," Sherlock said, and John groaned. God, he just wanted to come. Was that really too much to ask?

The man pressed his forehead into John's back and exhaled, apparently sharing John's frustration.

"Go ahead," Sherlock said after a moment.

Two fingers pressed into his arse now, twisting, and John groaned. That had no right to feel as good as it did, really.

"Can I fuck him now?"

There was a moment of hesitation, and then Sherlock said, "Yes."

He'd heard women describe the last stages of labor as like being underwater, able to hear everything around them but being so far inside themselves it was difficult to communicate. He'd felt a bit like that up until now, like everything was slightly warped. It took his brain a few seconds to process the words he'd just heard, but when his faculties finally caught up, it was like being doused with cold water.

No. He didn't want that, actually. No.

"Sherlock," he breathed.
There was no response; instead there was a distinct fumbling behind him. His hands were still bound and he wriggled his wrists, but he couldn't free himself. Panic flooded him and he tried to sit back on his heels. What was it he was supposed to say? His mind had gone blank.

"Down, love." There was a hand pressing between his shoulders, pushing his face down to the floor. "That's perfect."

Oh God, think. Think.

"Cinnamon," he whispered. Then again, more loudly, "Cinnamon."

Everything stopped and grew quiet. John exhaled, sinking into the floor. He curled up on his side, suddenly overwhelmed. He heard voices but the words were muffled. The room grew silent and oddly cold.

There were hands on him again, this time stroking his back, soothing. His hands were untied and he reached up to tug the blindfold away. Sherlock was staring down at him with the most genuine expression of concern John could ever remember seeing on his face.

He closed his eyes; it was too much to process.

"John."

Fingers on his cheek, then stroking his hair. The blanket was over him and the floor suddenly felt icy in comparison. He opened his eyes again and pushed himself to sitting. He tugged the blanket over him and leaned back against the sofa.

Well, shit. That hadn't gone well at all.

He pressed a hand against his forehead, not quite ready to look at Sherlock. Fortunately Sherlock seemed prepared to wait until he was ready. He sat on the floor next to John, his hands clenching the edges of the blanket as if it was a substitute for John himself.

John took a deep breath. Oh God, this was embarrassing. He'd completely freaked out and he wasn't entirely sure why. This was probably going to put Sherlock off doing anything like this again.

After a long moment he finally forced himself to speak. "I'm sorry."

"No, don't be sorry. That's exactly what the safeword was for."

John pressed his forehead into his knees. He needed to explain before Sherlock jumped to any conclusions. He just didn't want to; he would rather melt into the floor, honestly. Maybe Sherlock would curl up with him on the sofa and just sit, silently, maybe pet his head a bit.

He sighed and looked up, focused on the door across the room, and finally turned to Sherlock. "I should explain."

"If you like. You don't have to." God, he really had read the web pages John had left open for him.

"No, I want to. But first, can we get off the floor?" He pushed himself up onto the sofa and pulled the blanket over him again. Sherlock settled on the other end, his body turned toward John, his legs folded beneath him. The expression of concern was incredibly endearing.

"It was too much, wasn't it?"

John shook his head. "No, it was amazing. I just…" He paused and searched for better words than
the ones that came to mind, but found nothing. "I didn't want him to fuck me."

"Oh," Sherlock replied, his tone indicating he didn't understand this at all. Which wasn't unreasonable, considering that John actually didn't understand either. "All right."

"But the rest of it was good. Great, honestly. That thing he did with his tongue was just..." He blushed at the memory, God. He laughed, unable to help himself.

Sherlock looked very confused. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I promise." He smiled in a way he hoped was reassuring. "I didn't want him to leave. I just didn't want that."

Sherlock nodded, clearly relieved. "Duly noted. What do you want to do now?"

John settled back into the sofa and considered. His erection had flagged, but the tension was still there. Being stopped on the verge of coming twice had left him feeling a bit desperate for release. He looked at Sherlock. "I want to come."

Sherlock looked surprised for a moment before a smile slowly formed on his lips. "Good. Go to it then."

John groaned. "I have to do it myself?"

"Our guest fled when he realized you had safeworded. I could go upstairs and find someone else, but the most efficient course of action would be for you to take matters into your own hands. So to speak."

John mock-sighed, but his hand was already moving under the blanket. Wanking was fairly anticlimactic after everything that had happened, but it would suffice. Of course, if Sherlock could give him a bit of direction...

"Will you... talk to me?" John looked away, suddenly embarrassed by what he wanted.

There was a pause. "Of course." The blanket was tugged away and John shivered at the feeling of being exposed. "Slowly, long strokes."

God, that voice. It did things to him, things he couldn't explain. He let his hand obey, stroking his prick from base to tip slowly, rolling his thumb over the top before sliding back down again.

Sherlock scanned the floor by the sofa and leaned over, coming back up with an unopened packet of club-supplied lubricant. "Here, use this."

"Yes," John hissed in reply, snatching it from him. He ripped open the packet and squeezed a generous amount onto his hand. Three more long slow strokes and he was completely hard.

"What do you think about when you masturbate?" Sherlock asked, his voice pitched lower than usual.

John turned his head to look at him. He was curled on the end of the sofa, his body turned toward John. His eyes flicked up from John's cock to his face, but he didn't seem embarrassed about it. He liked to watch and he knew John understood that.

"Right now I'm thinking about that guy's tongue in my arsehole. Have you ever done that?" Sherlock shook his head. "Neither had I until tonight. God, it was bloody amazing. Add that to your spreadsheet."
Sherlock didn't respond to that, just stared at him. John kept his strokes long and steady, relishing the slick slide of his hand on lubed skin. He could grip his penis a bit tighter this way, could replicate the feeling of being inside someone just a bit more closely.

"What do you think about while you watch?"

Sherlock's eyes widened fractionally and his gaze broke away from John's eyes, back down to the movement of his hand. "You're so expressive. You are all the time, but when you're just feeling like that, when you seem to lose yourself in sensation -- it's breathtaking."

"Is it?" John's hand lingered at the head on the upstroke a bit, his fingers massaging the foreskin against the glans. "You get off on it, don't you?"

"Yes."

"It gets you hard. You're getting hard now."

"Yes." It was barely audible.

"Care to join me?" He tossed the packet of lube into Sherlock's lap with his free hand.

Sherlock exhaled shakily. He picked up the packet of lube and turned it over in his long fingers. God, those fingers. John wondered what they'd feel like inside him. Sherlock's eyes flicked back up to John's at that, and John only barely stifled a moan.

Oh please oh please oh please.

Without breaking the gaze, Sherlock shifted his hips on the sofa and unfastened his trousers. After a moment's fumbling his cock was in his hand and he was stroking, and John had to still his own hand to keep himself from coming on the spot. He stared back at Sherlock, open-mouthed. He'd been teasing, hadn't actually expected Sherlock to take him up on it, especially not after last night. And he'd never seen this before, not really. He'd been next to Sherlock on the sofa that one night, but he hadn't looked.

But now, now he looked. He stared, he observed, he memorized every little detail. Sherlock's cock was long and thin, like the rest of him. His grip was tight on the shaft and his fingers tugged the foreskin over the glans on each stroke. John mirrored the movement, matching him stroke for stroke. Sherlock smiled, apparently realizing what John was doing, and John grinned back. It was unbelievably hot and strange and more than a bit fucked up -- seriously, who did this? And John fucking loved it. If he couldn't have Sherlock, then he could at least have this. No one else got to have this, no one else got to see him this way. If no one could touch him or kiss him or fuck him, then at least John could have this part all to himself.

"So what do you think about when you masturbate? I assume your answer has changed since the last time I asked."

"It's obvious, isn't it?"

"I still want to hear you say it."

Sherlock exhaled shakily and stroked slightly faster, and John thought it was one of the hottest things he'd ever seen. "I think about how you respond when people--"

"Men," John added.
"--touch you. Your face when you come. The way they watch you." He didn't acknowledge John's correction.

"God, Sherlock," he breathed. It was almost too much.

Sherlock's cheeks were flushed and his hand was moving faster now. The movement was growing erratic and it was difficult to keep up. He was close, John realized, very close. Sherlock's mouth opened and his eyes closed, and the hand on his dick stilled and the other came up to cover it and--

"Ahhh, fuck."

John's orgasm came out of nowhere just at the sound of that. He gritted his teeth and groaned and felt it course through him. He leaned back on the sofa cushions, gasping.

"That was…" he said, and then stopped himself. Would any good come of saying it out loud?

"Yeah," Sherlock replied, still breathless.

John looked up and saw that Sherlock was looking at the blanket, which was now splattered with John's semen. He grinned. "I imagine it's had worse on it."

Sherlock smiled and wiped his hand on the blanket, smearing his own semen next to John's.

John laughed. "Oh, God, I shudder to imagine what the laundry folks must think."

Sherlock laughed and tugged the other end of the blanket over his lap. John stretched out his legs and wriggled his toes under Sherlock's arse, and Sherlock made a sound of surprise and leapt off the sofa. His trousers were still around his thighs and he almost lost his balance trying to tug them back up. John laughed so hard his sides hurt.

"Glad to be a source of entertainment," Sherlock said, tossing John's trousers to him. "Get dressed."

John took his time and Sherlock watched more closely than was strictly necessary. But John didn't mind. Not at all.

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John yawned and raised an eyebrow at the cup of coffee Sherlock held out to him. Sherlock rolled his eyes. "You can't think--"

"I don't," John said, taking the cup. "But I haven't forgiven you either."

Sherlock smiled tightly and to his credit, said nothing. John took a sip of the coffee.

"Well?" John said at last.

"What?"

"You only do things like this when you want something. Spit it out."

"I want to ask you about something you said last night." Sherlock paused and sat on the sofa, his fingers wrapped tightly around his own coffee cup. "You said you didn't want him to fuck you."

John nodded. "Right."

"So…" Sherlock paused and chewed his lower lip. "Does that mean no anal sex at all? That's fine,
by the way. It's not a problem. I just want to make sure I understand, so I don't put you in that position again." It was practically an apology. Sherlock's apologies often came with beverages, John was learning. It was rather charming.

John sighed and leaned back in the chair. "It's not that I don't want to do it, because I do. But not like that."

Sherlock nodded, though the expression on his face indicated he didn't understand at all.

"I need to know it's coming and to have more control over the situation. I don't know why it seems like such a big thing compared to everything else. He had everything but his dick in my arse last night, but..."

"Because it's about the gayest thing you can do." Sherlock raised his eyebrows. "And under the wrong circumstances it hurts like hell."

John hoped he wasn't speaking from experience, but he probably was. "That's not the problem. I'm not worried about it being gay." He paused and took a sip of coffee. "But there's something about being penetrated like that -- I would need to be more in control than I've been lately, not tied up and blindfolded. Not that I didn't enjoy that," he added quickly, worried that Sherlock would get the wrong idea. "Because I did. I really did. But for this... I'd need to know I could trust the person."

"You want me to find a stranger you could trust?"

"Well, obviously strangers are out, at least for the first time. In fact..." He paused again. "...there are only two people I can think of whom I'd trust to fuck me."

"Who?"

"Ryan, for one." John barely knew the man, but he'd seen how gentle he was with Annie. Something about that made John trust him implicitly.

"And the other?"

"Isn't interested." John was proud of himself for maintaining eye contact as he said that. He hadn't even flinched.

Sherlock nodded, and John could see the wheels turning already. "All right then."

John exhaled and focused on his coffee. "My turn to ask you a question. I think I know why you tied my hands last night, but why the blindfold? You said it was his idea."

"He requested it. It was one of his conditions for playing with us."

"Why?"

Sherlock shrugged. "I assume because he didn't want to be recognized."

John felt the blood drain from his face. "Oh God, was he someone I knew?"

"Well, no, not personally. I had the impression he was someone famous. A film star, perhaps. He was very good-looking."

John couldn't help the strangled laugh that escaped him. "Are you serious? Did he tell you his name?"
"I assume Dr Zhivago wasn't his real name."

John covered his eyes with a hand and laughed. "Oh God, he had his tongue in my arse and he's famous and I had no idea."

"He would've fucked you as well," Sherlock added with a smirk. "I imagine you'll regret that one day."

John smiled. "I probably will. Shit, I'm going to wonder who that was for the rest of my life."

"He seemed to be a regular, so it probably won't be your last chance." Sherlock's face clouded for a moment. "Assuming you want to keep going to the club, of course."

John smiled. "I do. In fact..." He took a deep breath. "I want to try something different tonight. I want to be the one doing the touching."

Sherlock's eyes narrowed and he looked down at his hands. John hadn't expected him to like the idea.

"Look, I need... I am definitely attracted to men, that much is clear. I've enjoyed everything that's been done to me, but I need to know how it feels the other direction. I want to know what it feels like to be the one doing the... whatever. Everything."

Sherlock looked up at him again. "Are you trying to work out if you're gay?"

John shook his head. "I know I'm not gay. But I think I'm bisexual and I just need a bit more time to think on that, to try things out."

Sherlock's forehead furrowed. "But you are bisexual. It's obvious. Surely you know that by now. Why do you have to... do things to other people to find out? You enjoy it when they do it to you. Isn't that enough?"

John stared at him for a long moment. He shook his head. "Jesus, Sherlock. For all your thinking and plotting and experimenting in the last week, you know fuck-all about sex." Sherlock looked as if he were about to protest and John held up a hand. "It's not about getting off, you idiot. It's about connecting with another person, using your hands and your mouth and your body to make them feel good. They usually return the favor and that's fantastic, but the most amazing thing about sex is giving pleasure, sharing it -- not merely getting it." He shook his head. "I would have thought you knew that, considering that you've essentially been doing that to me for the last week. Not directly, certainly -- you had other people do it for you, but from a certain perspective you've been having fairly amazing sex with me for a solid week now. And I know you get off on it. Don't you dare deny it."

Sherlock gaped at him. John waited, but it seemed he'd rendered the man speechless.

John looked away, paused to catch his breath. He hadn't intended to say all of that, but now that it was out, he might as well go all-in. "I want, no, I need to be able to participate more. Not every night, but at least every now and then." He looked up at Sherlock again. "I was thinking we could start tonight. Hoping, anyway."

Sherlock still said nothing. He looked a bit shaken. John exhaled. He'd probably crossed the line and scared Sherlock off for good. There was nothing for it now, though. Honesty, as he kept saying, was the most important thing.

He smiled tightly. "Well then. I'm going to get dressed and go out for a bit. Thanks for the coffee."
When he came back downstairs fifteen minutes later to collect his coat, Sherlock still hadn’t moved from the spot. John thought about saying something, but he didn't. Best to let him think on it for a while.

*****

John set the sack of groceries on the kitchen table and opened the refrigerator. He was getting used to it being used only for food. Too bad it wouldn't last.

He felt an odd twinge in his gut at that thought. It wouldn't last, because nothing ever did. It would run its course and Sherlock would get bored, and they would stop going to sex clubs together and John would probably never get laid again.

God, that was a depressing thought. And that was even assuming that he hadn't completely freaked Sherlock out this morning.

"Ah, you're back."

He turned to see Sherlock standing in the doorway, shirtless in his pyjama pants. At four in the afternoon. This wouldn't have caused John a moment's pause a mere ten days ago, but now it seemed incredibly intimate. He forced himself to look away from the sight of all that pale skin over a wiry and oddly muscular body. Did Sherlock work out when John wasn’t around? Because seriously.

John forced himself to look back to the sack he was emptying. He definitely needed to get past this crush on Sherlock.

"Oh, bananas. I'm famished." Sherlock plucked a banana from the bunch John had just removed from the sack. John couldn't help but stare at him as he peeled it and downed half of it in one bite.

"Who are you and what have you done with my flatmate?"

"Hmmm?" Sherlock replied through a mouthful of banana. "Sorry, just woke up. When did I eat last?"

"Thursday, I think. You took a nap?" Curiouser and curioser.

"I was tired. Did you get my text?"

John nodded. The text had simply said yes and he'd had no idea what it was referring to.

"Good. We'll leave at nine. Do you want to order a takeaway later? I'm going to shower."

John swallowed down his anxiety as Sherlock practically skipped off to the bathroom. This behavior usually meant Sherlock had worked out something important. Whatever it was, John had a feeling he was going to find out tonight.

At least they were on for tonight. He smiled at that.

"Oh!" he heard Sherlock call from around the corner. "And wear that black shirt tonight, the one that you always complain is too tight."

God. John pulled a banana from the bunch, pocketed a box from the sack, and headed upstairs. Maybe he should take a nap as well. Definitely a shower.

He smiled.
Fantastic (NSFW) art by Doublenegrativeansyes: Cinnamon

Judgmental Jawn is so judging this fic.

"You really get off on it, me telling you what to do", by sherlock-undercover.
Three

Chapter Summary

He had no idea what Sherlock had in mind for tonight. A week ago it would have driven John mad, but tonight it was just a small detail.

Chapter Notes

Beta'd by the amazing Freckles42. Special thanks to Chaeche and Pennswoods for talking about this fic and Sherlock's sexuality and a million other things on Skype last night. ♥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The doorman didn't even bother to check their membership credentials anymore; he just gave them a quick nod as they walked through the front door and past him to the main area of the club. John exhaled as a wave of sound and warmth washed over him. He could feel himself relaxing already, could feel his mental state shifting. Now that he understood what was happening, he looked forward to it, to letting himself sink into the role. He wondered if Sherlock experienced something similar.

He had no idea what Sherlock had in mind for tonight. They hadn't even discussed what that texted Yes had meant. A week ago it would have driven John mad, but tonight it was just a small detail. Terms had been renegotiated that morning and that was that. He trusted Sherlock completely, especially after the events of last night.

The touch on his shoulder made him smile and he melted into it, letting Sherlock direct him toward the door at the back. They paused just outside it.

"No drinks tonight?" he asked.

"We're going to the other bar. I'll explain when we get there."

He hadn't known there was another bar; the idea that there was something here he hadn't yet seen was quite exciting indeed. They walked through the door and down the stairs, stopping this time before a door one flight down. It looked more like an emergency exit than anything else; he'd passed it a dozen times without giving it a second glance. Sherlock pushed the door open and motioned him through into a narrow corridor. There was a door at the other end attended by another familiar security guard, and he also let them pass with a cursory nod. John didn't know whether he should be amused or embarrassed that they were now such regulars at a sex club.

Through that door was a huge room full of people. It was dimly lit, so dark he couldn't make out much at first. The ceiling was low here and hung with all sorts of eclectic decorations, which gave the space a cellar-like feel. There was a large open space in the middle of the room where people seemed to be sitting in groups on low furniture. Alcoves lined the walls and small groups of people filled those as well, sitting on sofas and on the floor. The music was distinctly different from what was playing upstairs; it was quieter and the beat was slower.
There was a long bar to the left and Sherlock steered John toward it. "Wait here," he said as he headed to talk to the bartender.

John's eyes finally began adjusting to the light and he looked out across the room. The people weren't just sitting, he realized, some were moving, almost as if--

Oh.

The people in this room weren't just sitting around and talking. Well, some of them were, to be certain, but the vast majority of them were having sex. And not merely having sex, but having it in nearly every configuration John could think of, and a few more that hadn't occurred to him at all.

Sherlock had mentioned a more public space, hadn't he? John had forgotten.

Was it impolite to stare? He had no idea, but he was fairly certain his eyes were as wide as saucers at the moment. His eyes settled on a group of six or seven men and women all performing oral sex on each other in one large circle. And he'd thought being in a couple of threesomes made him fairly experienced. Bloody hell. There went his worldview, turned on its ear yet again.

"What do you think?" he heard at his ear. He turned to see Sherlock scanning the room impassively, as if this was something he'd seen a hundred times before. He held out a glass and John took it.

"About the fact that there are dozens of people having group sex right over there, or about the fact that you're about to ask me to join them?"

Sherlock laughed quietly and took a sip from his own glass. "I have something a bit simpler in mind for you."

Fingers curled around the back of John's neck and pressed lightly, and John closed his eyes. Sherlock stepped closer, his chest pressing against John's back, his mouth brushing John's ear. John felt anticipation curl inside him.

"I'm going to pick three men -- one at a time, obviously -- and you're going to approach them and convince them to let you suck their cocks. They aren't allowed to touch you and you cannot touch yourself."

Oh, God, that was… fuck. John leaned back against him and exhaled.

"I'm going to enjoy watching you give a blow job for the first time. In fact, I spent a good part of the afternoon thinking about it." Sherlock's lips brushed the shell of his ear in something very near a kiss, and John bit back a whimper.

He knew, he fucking knew how badly John wanted him. It was the only explanation.

"Do you understand?"

John nodded and one of Sherlock's arms wound around him, one hand smoothing over the too-tight black shirt stretched across his stomach.

"Good. When you've finished your drink, we'll begin." Sherlock stepped away.

John chugged it, handed the glass back to Sherlock, and nodded.

"Right." Sherlock said, surprise evident in his tone. He dropped John's empty the glass on the bar and held out a hand.
John took it and let Sherlock lead him around the perimeter of the room. Sherlock stopped at a partition between two alcoves and pulled John back against him. John leaned into him, relishing the feeling of Sherlock's arms wound around his chest. Even though it was all part of the act, he was going to enjoy it. How he'd gone so long without being touched like this was a mystery; he couldn't get enough of it now.

"There," Sherlock whispered, turning John's head to left with one hand on his jaw. "There are three men over there by that sofa." John found them after a moment and nodded. "The one in green. Condoms are in your front left pocket." Sherlock's fingers slipped into the front pocket of John's jeans.

"Right." Shit. John took a deep breath and stepped forward. He had no idea how he was supposed to do this; he'd only rarely had success picking up women in bars in the last few years. Of course, these men were in a sex club and were, well, men, so it was likely that none of his previous experience would apply anyway. He turned back to look at Sherlock for support, but he only smirked and shook his head. Wanker.

His mind raced. What could he possibly say or do that wouldn't result in him being ignored, or worse, punched? Oh God, what if they were all straight? He supposed he could refuse, go back and safeword, tell Sherlock no, he didn't want to do this. Except that he actually sort of did. Oh, God.

He mustered his confidence and crossed the short distance to them. As he stopped in front of them, all three men turned to look at him. The one in green was in the middle, leaning back against the wall. He looked to be in his early thirties and had shoulder-length dark hair and dark eyes. His gaze flicked down John's body before settling on his face again. He smiled.

Gay, then. That was going to make things a bit easier. John smiled back and said nothing, keeping his attention focused completely on his target. The men on either side were now exchanging looks, but no one said anything.

"Hi," John said at last.

"Hi," Green Shirt said, his lips twisting into a smile.

There was nothing else for it. John took three steps forward, grabbed a handful of shirt, and pulled the man into a kiss. For a single long second, he wasn't sure what was going to happen next, but then Green Shirt's hands were on either side of John's head and he was deepening the kiss and pulling John against him. The men on either side were whispering furiously, but no one seemed about to jump in and pull John off their friend.

The kiss was brutal and John quickly gave up trying to control it. His hands fumbled at the fly of Green Shirt's trousers instead. He slid a hand inside and wrapped his fingers around a half-hard cock and stroked.

"Fuck," the man said, gasping into John's mouth. "Oh, God."

John decided not to waste time explaining. He broke the kiss and flashed a cheeky grin before falling to his knees. The look on Green Shirt's face was priceless, something between shock and excitement, with a touch of wonder at his luck. John worked his trousers and pants down, freeing his cock, and then stared at it while fishing a condom packet from his pocket. Best not to think very much about what he was going to do. Just do it and see what happens.

He opened the condom packet with his teeth and popped the condom in his mouth, arranged it the right way, and rolled it down Green Shirt's dick in one swift movement. His hand around the base
finished the job and he pulled off again, pleased that had gone so well on a first try.

"Oh, shit," Green Shirt said with a hiss, and John grinned.

Time to get to work. He started with his tongue, flicking it around the head while stroking lightly with his hand. It wasn't as weird as he expected, though the condom certainly helped. He wrapped his lips around the head and sucked, letting his tongue work the underside, and looked up to see Green Shirt's reaction. His mouth was open and he was staring back down at John, pleasure clear on his face.

"Oh, that's good," Green Shirt whispered when John took more of his cock in. One hand fell to John's head and grasped his hair, pushing John down further.

It seemed like what Green Shirt really wanted was to fuck his mouth, and John soon gave up trying to use his tongue. He focused instead on hanging on and breathing at regular intervals, all the while cursing himself for any time he'd been this inconsiderate during a blow job. Fortunately Green Shirt was getting close. John pushed his hips back against the wall and held them there with one firm hand, then used the other to stroke Green Shirt's dick. He focused all of his attention on the head, sucking hard and working his tongue, keeping his hand moving fast, and then Green Shirt's fingers in his hair tightened to the point of pain. John winced but didn't stop, and Green Shirt came, grunting loudly.

John sat back on his heels when it was over and wiped a hand across his mouth. He looked up just as Green Shirt slid to the floor, his trousers still around his thighs.

"That was fucking amazing. Give me a minute and I'll--"

"No thanks. That's all I wanted." John winked at him, then stood and walked away. Green Shirt's friends stared at him as he passed and he saw them exchange a glance. He didn't respond; he kept walking all the way back to where Sherlock was standing.

"Well?" Sherlock looked as if he was trying very hard not to laugh.

John rolled his eyes. "Do I get some sort of reward after I've done three? Because I will fucking deserve one."

"I thought this was what you wanted." He took a sip of his drink and looked exceedingly smug.

John clenched his jaw. "When exactly did I say that I wanted that?"

"You charged in and jumped the man. How did you expect him to react?"

John glared at him. A biting retort was on the tip of his tongue, but just as he opened his mouth Sherlock's eyes narrowed.

"Careful, John."

The tone alone made John shiver. He looked away, closed his eyes, swallowed his frustration. It hadn't been what he'd expected, certainly. He'd had something different in mind altogether, and of course Sherlock would turn it into a game of domination: You want to touch other people? Fine, but only the ones I choose and only when I say you can.

All he wanted was for something in all of this to feel normal. Whatever this was that he had with Sherlock was fun, even exciting, but he was beginning to realize he wanted something more. If Sherlock wasn't going to give it to him, couldn't he at least let John get it somewhere else? Was
that really too much to ask?

For now, the only way he was going to get what he wanted was to play Sherlock's game. He knew his role here: he was the submissive one; he had to follow the letter of the law -- but perhaps not the spirit.

And yes, he could have done that differently, could have approached Green Shirt with a bit more finesse. As much as he hated to admit it, Sherlock had a point. Sherlock had carefully negotiated the terms of every sexual encounter he'd had here, and when John finally had his turn, he'd simply stormed in and taken. Did he really have anyone to blame but himself?

*Shit.* He opened his eyes and looked up at Sherlock. "Okay, so… that was out of line. I'm sorry."

Sherlock regarded him silently for several moments before finally nodding his head. "Come with me."

He led them back to the bar and ordered another round of drinks. John took the offered beer and sighed, his enthusiasm for the evening dissipating rapidly.

They drank in silence, watching the crowd around them. It had grown busier in the last half-hour and noisier as well, an odd mix of chatter, laughter, and moans. John finally turned to look at Sherlock, who was watching him intently.

"Are you all right?" Sherlock asked.

John nodded. Reverting back to silence was easy. He had a bizarre urge to just sit at Sherlock's feet and wait.

"Ready for round two?"

John looked at his nearly-full beer, uncertain what to do with it.

"Take it with you," Sherlock said, sliding an arm around his shoulders.

They circled around to the other side of the room slowly. Sherlock was casually looking, for what exactly John couldn't be certain. He let himself be led, let his mind drift. They finally stopped before an alcove where a man sat on a sofa, watching two women entwined on the floor in front of him. Sherlock stared at the man for several seconds before smiling and pulling John back against his chest.

"That one. Ex-military, comes here with his wife. She's one of the two on the floor, not sure which. She's bisexual, he claims to be straight."

"But?" He didn't even bother asking *how?* anymore.

"Look at the way he's watching them. He's interested, but not obviously aroused. They come here a lot; it's her idea. He's not freaked out by any of it, probably was in the beginning, but now he's starting to consider that he's actually bi-curious. He's just afraid to admit it."

"You can't possibly know he's afraid to admit he might be interested in men. Maybe he's just not interested tonight."

"Oh, please. Look at the way he's dressed -- it screams *trying too hard to look straight.* Even the way he's sitting, thighs splayed, leaning back, arms crossed over his chest -- very overtly masculine. All he needs is a cowboy hat."
John snorted at the visual.
"No, this is how he usually dresses when they come here. It's the *I'm-not-queer* uniform. And yet he's stared at the arses of the last two men who've walked by."

John shook his head. "And you want me to go over there and break through all of that?"

"Yes, though not literally. The last one was actually gay, so the aggressive approach sufficed, but you're going to have to work harder for it this time."

John took a deep breath. "Can't we just--"

"*John.*"

God, that tone. John melted into a puddle of want. Fuck it all, he was -- what was the expression? *Whipped.*

Sherlock's mouth moved closer to his ear, his words whispered now. "I don't care how you approach him; that's down to you. *As long as it ends with his cock in your mouth, I'll be satisfied. Now go.*"

John whimpered. "Okay."

Sherlock give him a little shove from behind and he stumbled forward. He steeled himself and walked around the naked women snogging on the floor, was momentarily distracted by the fact that they were both fingering each other, and then sat on the sofa next to the man, who was now staring at him with a look somewhere between surprise and suspicion.

He opted for the direct approach. "Hi. I'm John."

The man stared back at him for a moment. He was a bit younger than John and was ruggedly good-looking. His reddish-brown hair was quite short, though not regulation, a look John often saw on guys who'd been out of service less than a year. Old habits and identities were hard to lose. The hand clenching a pint glass had a wedding band on one finger. John smiled: Sherlock was amazing, as always.

"Jack." His expression was carefully blank, but his attention was fully on John now.

John slid closer and turned his body sideways on the sofa so he could lean in under the guise of not having to speak so loudly. "Army?"

Jack's guarded expression changed to one of surprise. "No, RAF. How did you--"

"We tend to recognize our own, don't we?" He smiled, his confidence growing already.

Jack shook his head as if not sure what to make of him. "I suppose so. Afghanistan?"

"Yes, RAMC. I was a medic with the infantry, actually. Invalided out a year and a half ago. You?"

Jack's eyes scanned him quickly, as if looking for a sign of obvious injury. "My tour ended eight months ago. I flew choppers, mostly pulling out madmen like you." He smiled tentatively and John grinned back, and yes, there was definitely a spark of interest there. Sherlock was right again.

"Cheers," John said and took a drink of his own beer.

"So you're here with…" Jack's eyes flicked down to John's hand.
"My boyfriend," John said, pointing at Sherlock casually leaning against the wall just at the edge of the alcove, drink in hand. Jack's eyes widened fractionally. "He's like you. He likes to watch." John raised his eyebrows and smiled in a way he hoped was suggestive.

"What exactly does he like to watch?" Jack's eyes moved briefly to the women on the floor and then back to John again.

"Me, mostly. With women or men, it doesn't matter." He took another sip from his glass and kept his eyes fixed on Jack's. "Of course, I'm hoping you're interested in more than just watching."

Jack's mouth fell open and John wondered if anyone had approached him like this before. "I don't..." he began, and then stopped. John moved a few inches closer, slid an arm around the back of the sofa. "I mean, my wife... I... She..."

"She looks busy at the moment."

Jack blinked at him in response; he almost seemed lost.

John leaned in closer. "Would she mind if I kissed you?"

Jack's eyes got even wider and he made a sound like a strangled laugh, but he didn't turn away. "I suppose a better question would be would you mind?" He reached across Jack to set his glass on the table next to the sofa and heard Jack suck in a breath as John's arm brushed against his chest. John moved back slowly, stopping when their faces were just inches apart. It had been a long time since he'd successfully seduced anyone. The thrill of this moment, the will-we-or-won't-we, the sheer power of it -- it was heady. God, he almost felt high. This was what he'd wanted. He smiled. "Just a kiss. That's all."

Jack seemed unable to breathe, but he nodded his head very slightly. John leaned in to press his lips against Jack's before the man changed his mind. There was a slight tremble there, as if Jack had never done this before and was terrified at what it might make him feel. John could relate.

He kissed Jack softly at first, just a slow slide of lips, mouths open but no tongues, very restrained. After several seconds he felt Jack relax against him and John stroked the inside of Jack's lip with the tip of his tongue. Jack whimpered and a moment later was kissing him back with definite interest. John slid a hand around the back of his head to pull him closer and Jack fumbled to set his beer down on the table before pulling John nearly into his lap, where there was even more distinct evidence of Jack's interest.

"Straight, my arse."

John let himself be snogged senseless for a bit, not really worrying about what might or might not come next. He was enjoying this and Jack was enjoying it, and that was the point, wasn't it? His own trousers were tight, but since he wasn't allowed to do anything about that anyway, he didn't pay it much attention.

Jack was a fairly enthusiastic kisser and was clearly used to being in charge in such situations, and so it took John several minutes to get the kiss back under his own control. But once he did, Jack melted beneath him, and there it was again, that incredible high of knowing he'd done that.

The answer to the bisexual question was looking more and more like a yes.

He shifted in Jack's lap so that he was straddling him, pressing their cocks together and rocking slightly. Jack's head fell back against the sofa cushion and John took advantage of the opportunity to
kiss his neck and work his way over to one ear.

"I really want to suck your cock," he whispered, accentuating the last word with a bit of a grind of his hips. Jack gasped and John nearly grinned. "You don't have to do anything, just let me do that for you, please." He traced the shell of Jack's ear with the tip of his tongue, which apparently was the right thing to do because Jack's hands grasped his hips and pulled John roughly against him. "I want to hear you say yes," John whispered, his own breathing ragged now, God.

"Yes." It almost seemed torn from his lips.

"Yes, what?" Okay, now he was just being mean, but he couldn't help himself.

"Yes, suck me. Oh, fuck." Jack caught his mouth again in a bruising kiss.

"With pleasure." John grinned as he slid to the floor, his hands pressing Jack's knees apart and sliding up his thighs.

Jack exhaled shakily and his eyes focused on something over John's head. John realized it had become very quiet behind him. "Is she watching?"

Jack nodded and smiled. There was clearly some non-verbal communication going on there.

John felt a stab of something he couldn't quite identify. "Is she okay with this?"

"She is," he heard in his ear, and turned his head to see Jack's wife -- he presumed, anyway -- kneeling next to him. "I've been trying to make this happen for months, in fact." She grinned at John. She was completely naked, of course.

This would have utterly freaked him out a week ago. So many things about this situation would have been unthinkable -- here he was, in a sex club, on his knees, about to suck the cock of a total stranger just because Sherlock had fucking told him to do it, with the man's wife watching enthusiastically. Fucking hell. Who did this?

"John, is that you?"

He turned the other direction to see a familiar face framed by a mass of blonde curls: one of the girls from the first night, but oh God, which one was she? "Clara?" he ventured.

"How lovely to see you!" She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks. "Is Sherlock here as well?"

John pointed to where Sherlock was standing, now with an odd expression on his face. "He's over there, watching as always."

Clara giggled and gestured him over. God, she was also naked. This was just not the sort of thing that happened in John's life. Except that lately, it did.

She stood and greeted Sherlock in a similar fashion. He looked surprised, but not at all unnerved that a curvy naked blonde was wrapping herself around him.

"I'm so thrilled to see you both here! I didn't know if you played in public."

"Is Abby here?" John asked, having just remembered the other one's name.

Clara made a pouty face. "No, she had to work tonight. Saturdays are the busiest for her. She waits tables at a posh restaurant." She looped her arm through Sherlock's and smiled at the woman who
was now whispering something into Jack's ear. "Ellen keeps me busy when she's not here, though."

"And we've so rudely interrupted," Ellen added, ruffling her husband's hair. "Clara, why don't you introduce me to your friend while Jack and -- John, was it? -- get to know each other better."

Clara tugged Sherlock behind the sofa farther into the alcove and Ellen followed. All three of them were behind Jack now, but still in John's line of sight. Giggling like schoolgirls, damn them.

"Are you all right?" John asked, finally looking back up at Jack.

"Yeah," Jack said after a moment. "I should probably tell you that I've never even kissed a man until just now. I mean, I suppose I've thought about it, but that was the first time."

John smiled. "Want a second time?"

Jack smiled and nodded. "I think I do, yeah."

John rose onto his knees and Jack leaned forward, pulling him close, and kissed him again. It wasn't quite the tense and fiery kiss from before; it was languid now, more certain. Jack had made up his mind. After another few minutes, there was serious heat between them again. Jack's hands slid down John's back to grip his arse and pull him tightly against him. Jack's erection pressed into John's stomach and John grinned.

"So that thing you offered to do," Jack breathed against his lips. "Still interested?"

"Absolutely," John replied, his fingers already working at the button of Jack's jeans. He freed his cock and sat back on his heels, digging in his pocket for a condom. There was a burst of whispers behind the sofa and he looked up to see three faces watching him expectantly.

He rolled his eyes, though he honestly didn't mind. Sherlock was supposed to watch; that was the entire point of this. The other two -- well, it was what this space was for. He ripped open the packet and swallowed at that realization. Sherlock watching was the point, wasn't it? John wanted to do this, but it was also for Sherlock, on some level. On many levels.

His eyes flicked up to Sherlock's and for just a moment, he saw the gay boyfriend act drop, saw an honest expression on his face. It was a mix of heat and something else, something he hadn't really seen before. He stared back, but Clara whispered something and the real Sherlock was gone again just as quickly.

"He likes to watch?" Jack asked softly.

John turned his attention to Jack again, pushing everything else out of his mind. "He gets off on it."

"I've a feeling my wife is going to like watching as well."

"So everyone's happy." More or less.

He popped the condom into his mouth and gave Jack's prick a few swift strokes before rolling the condom on with his mouth. The round of giggles he heard from behind the sofa indicated the move made an impression. He set to work.

He liked this, he realized after a few minutes. He actually liked the way a dick felt in his mouth, that perfect fit of the glans against his soft palate, right where his tongue could work the sensitive underside. He'd never been remotely religious, but that perfect match was almost as if by design. He enjoyed this position as well, being between Jack's knees and able to see his face, to see his reaction.
It allowed him to experiment with pressure and suction, to see the impact of flicks of his tongue versus long slow slides of lips.

Jack was on the quiet side, but his face showed everything he was feeling. John was going to get a crick in his neck from trying to watch, but it would be worth it. One hand moved into John's hair, but there wasn't any pushing; it was more a caress. John wouldn't have minded a bit of pushing now -- from Jack it would have been weirdly hot.

His jaw was starting to ache, something he'd never considered before. He'd have to work on building up his stamina in this area. Just as he was considering backing off to give himself a break, Jack's breathing became heavy, and John felt a thrill of anticipation.

Jack was going to come, all because of him -- God. He kept working his tongue, kept the suction the same, using his own experience on the receiving end of head to guide him through this part. He tugged lightly at Jack's balls with his free hand and increased the pressure of his mouth on the head, and then Jack's fingers tightened in his hair and his mouth fell open and he swore as he came. John was astonished that he could feel the moment of orgasm, could feel Jack's dick get slightly harder at the last moment. He kept working the glans gently with his mouth as the tip of the condom filled.

What would it be like without a barrier? He knew what his own semen tasted like -- every man did that at some point -- and he'd been lucky enough to have been with a few women who hadn't minded him coming in their mouths. But now he couldn't help but wonder what that would be like. Would he ever have a chance to find out?

He released Jack's dick and pressed his forehead into a denim-clad thigh. He closed his eyes, suddenly overwhelmed. Was this what he wanted? Casual sex with random strangers, always a thin sheet of latex between them -- while Sherlock watched?

Jack's hand petted his head and he looked up at last. Jack hauled him up for a kiss and John found himself leaning into it.

"That was bloody fantastic," Jack whispered. "I know I should reciprocate, but--"

"I'm not allowed," John said with a shrug. "Not tonight, anyway."

"So that's how it works, then? He shares you, but not the other way round?"

"More or less. He makes the rules."

"And that works for you?"

John hesitated a moment too long and Jack's face clouded. "You should tell him."

"Oh no, it's not -- I mean…" John looked away. "It's complicated."

Jack kissed him again, quickly. "Sorry. It's none of my concern, is it?"

John smiled and looked over to where Sherlock was engaged in some sort of serious-looking negotiation with Clara. God, what was wrong with him tonight? His emotions were all over the place. He'd done fairly well keeping emotion out of this whole insane affair, but something about tonight was breaking down barriers he hadn't even realized he'd erected in his mind.

Clara pulled Sherlock by the hand and led him back to the front side of the sofa. He sat on the end opposite Jack and nodded at him in greeting. Jack smiled back and then seemed to realize his penis was still hanging out; he scrambled to refasten his trousers, not even bothering to take the condom off.
first. Ellen sat on the edge of the sofa by Jack and leaned down to whisper something into his ear, giggling. John sat back on his heels and watched as Jack pulled her into his lap and kissed her, grinning.

That was what he'd always thought he wanted, a relationship like that. Well, he'd honestly never thought about it being quite so sexually open, but that was fine. He didn't mind that part, he was starting to realize; he even liked it. But this thing with Sherlock was nothing like that. It was definitely sexual, but it didn't seem Sherlock was interested in actually having sex with another person at all. John wasn't sure that was something he could live with in the long run.

He sighed and turned to look at Sherlock, who was watching him with a strange sort of amusement. At least John's emotions weren't written on his face as they usually were. Either that or Sherlock didn't care. John closed his eyes.

"Having fun?" He looked up to see Clara extend a hand down to him. He took it and let her pull him to standing. She'd acquired a man's button-down shirt from somewhere; it was halfway buttoned up, exposing a tantalizing amount of cleavage, and hung just to the tops of her thighs in a manner that was incredibly sexy. She was exactly the type of woman he never bothered to chat up in a bar -- completely out of his league.

She took his arm and pulled him toward Sherlock. "You've one more to do, right?" Her tone was conspiratorial. She turned him 180 degrees and pushed him backward into Sherlock's lap, and then leaned over them both, grinning. "He says that if I find another dick for you to suck, I can have you."

"Did he, now?" John grinned, trying to imagine those words coming out of Sherlock's mouth. Sherlock shifted under him a bit and spread his thighs to allow John's bottom to slide down between them.

"Don't move," Clara said, tapping John's nose with one sparkly-nailed finger. "I'll be right back."

John let his head fall back against Sherlock's shoulder and watched her disappear into the crowd. The idea of Sherlock offering John's body up to random people should probably bother him, but somehow it didn't. It didn't right now, at any rate, now that Sherlock's arms were winding around his chest to pull John back against him. John almost hummed with pleasure. Sherlock made a surprisingly warm and comfortable chair.

"We're heading home," Jack said, drawing their attention as he stood.

Ellen was redressing now; she looked up and smiled at them. "I suppose we'll see you around?"

"I hope so," John replied with a wink at Jack.

Jack grinned and blushed. The two of them walked away hand in hand, leaving John and Sherlock alone in the alcove.

John sighed. "I'm not getting up, so don't even bother to ask." Considering how much of the evening he'd spent on his knees, he deserved a little comfort.

"I wouldn't think of it. Having fun?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"I like watching you. And this evening is about you."

John smiled. "Is it?"
"Of course." He could almost hear the smile in Sherlock's voice. "Is this what you wanted?"

John paused. It wasn't, not really, but he couldn't think of a reason he could comfortably explain to Sherlock. "I want to try something different with the next one, assuming Clara is successful."

"She will be. She can be incredibly persuasive. Or hadn't you noticed?"

John grinned at that. "With the next one, I want you to tell me what to do."

"I've been doing that all night. All weekend, in fact."

"No, I mean I want you to... direct." He paused and stroked Sherlock's forearm with one hand. "Tell me what to do, the same way you tell the others when they're having sex with me."

"Ah." Sherlock sounded surprised and the arm around John tightened a bit. "I see."

"Is that all right?"

"Very much so." Pleasure was evident in his tone and John felt a small thrill at that. "So I have to ask: when did you learn how to put on a condom with your mouth?"

"Annie showed me, remember?"

"She showed you once, a week ago."

"I practiced a bit."

**Sherlock's tone went from curious to incredulous. "Practiced? How?"**

"On a banana." Sherlock snickered and John felt his cheeks heat. "It worked, didn't it?" The snicker was threatening to become an actual laugh now, and John rolled his eyes. "Oh, for -- not a word, Sherlock."

"I didn't say anything," Sherlock protested, and it sounded like it took effort to keep his voice even. "It's just that the visual image--"

"Shut up, you. I'm fucking serious."

Sherlock's chest was heaving with silent laughter. Fortunately for them both, the conversation was cut short by the sight of Clara heading back toward them, leading a young man.

"Oh, God," John said as they drew closer. The man was breathtaking, perhaps one of the best-looking people John had ever seen in person in his entire life. He was in his late twenties, tall with dark hair that was artfully arranged around a chiseled face. He was not only shirtless, but utterly ripped. If he didn't model for a living, it was a waste of all that beauty. "Thank you, Clara," John whispered.

Sherlock chuckled behind him.

"Even you have to appreciate that."

Sherlock's lips brushed John's ear. "I'm going to appreciate it even more when he comes in your mouth."

That voice and those words went straight to his cock, and John whimpered. *Fucking hell.* "Assuming he doesn't take one look at me and change his mind."
"Why would he do that?" Sherlock asked. It was clear that he was being completely sincere. John squeezed his fingers affectionately.

"Well, here we are," Clara said with a mischievous smile. "That's John and Sherlock. This is Christopher."

Christopher smiled, and God, he even had perfect teeth. "Hi. Clara explained everything."

"Good," Sherlock said. "Then there's no point wasting time on conversation."

Christopher's smile widened and Clara giggled. She winked at John and settled on the other side of the sofa to watch. Christopher's eyes fixed on John's as he reached down to unfasten the fly of his trousers. John stared, utterly mesmerized. How, again, was this his life? Fuck.

Christopher pushed his trousers down to his knees -- no pants, of course, and John gaped. His penis was not only on the good side of huge, but it was also perfect. He even heard a slight gasp from Sherlock at the sight, which was saying a lot, for him.

John forced his eyes back up to Christopher's face, which now wore a smirk. John couldn't help but grin: he was sandwiched between his not-quite-platonic boyfriend and the most gorgeous man he'd ever laid eyes on -- this evening was turning out very nicely indeed.

He fished the third condom from his pocket and leaned forward. His fingers wrapped around that unbelievably thick cock and tugged its owner towards him. He was half-hard already -- or at least John hoped he was; otherwise he was going to feel inadequate for the rest of his life -- and the glans was just peeking out from the foreskin. He was seized with an urge to slide the tip of his tongue just inside, just to see what it felt like.

But alas, not his destiny. He gave Christopher's cock several long strokes, watching it grow even bigger, and had a moment of panic. Would the condom even fit? Could he actually get this thing in his mouth without gagging? And hell, this was only the third blow job he'd given ever. This dick would have intimidated anyone, let alone someone who didn't even consider himself bisexual until a few days ago.

He felt Sherlock lean forward, his hands sliding down to John's thighs. "Condom," he whispered, as if he thought John might be considering skipping it.

John nodded and ripped open the package. Fortunately these things were fairly stretchy and he didn't have a problem rolling it on. He didn't dare use his mouth this time.

"Lick," Sherlock said. His fingers were stroking John's thighs lightly, almost as if he didn't realize he was doing it. "Go slowly for now. See how he responds."

It occurred to John that in a weird way, Sherlock actually had more experience with this than he did. He leaned forward and swept his tongue around the head, lingering at the underside with light flicks for a moment before moving down to the base. He licked one long stripe up again and Christopher hissed above him.

"Again," Sherlock said. "Use your hand at the base to steady it."

That helped tremendously, it turned out. John licked up the shaft again, letting his tongue flutter as he did.

"Ah, fuck," Christopher said as he shifted closer. He was standing between John's knees now, and between Sherlock's by default.
"Take the glans in your mouth, slowly. Not a lot of suction just yet. Keep using your tongue."

John nearly moaned at the combination of sensations: glorious hard cock in his mouth, Sherlock's mouth against his ear, his hands stroking John's thighs, his body pressed against him from behind. He slid a hand around Christopher's thigh and dug his fingers into an incredibly muscular arse. Jesus.

"How much can you take in?" Sherlock asked. His lips brushed the shell of John's ear in a way that could only be deliberate.

John worked his mouth down as far as he could, only pulling back when the sensation actually became unpleasant.

"Impressive." He was rewarded with a kiss just behind his ear. "But unnecessary, it seems. Focus your attention on the head and use your hand to make up the difference. Stroke up when your mouth moves down on the shaft, and twist your hand just a bit."

It seemed like a lot to coordinate at first, but it worked instantly: Christopher made a hissing sound and rocked his hips slightly with John's movements. John settled into a rhythm after that, gradually building pressure. Christopher clenched and released his fists at his sides several times and his breathing become ragged.

"He wants his hands on your head. Let him."

John released his grip on Christopher's arse and guided one of his hands to his head. "Oh, yeah," Christopher said, stroking his head as if he were an affectionate pet before sliding it down to the back of his skull. This interfered with Sherlock's direction, unfortunately, and he had to move to the other ear. That hand exerted pressure, holding John's head in place while Christopher pressed his hips forward slowly, as if testing to see if this would be allowed. John tried to relax, but it was nearly impossible, and a moment later he was on the verge of gagging.

Christopher's hand jerked away from his head, taking a few of John's hairs with it. "None of that," Sherlock said, his tone sharp, and it was a moment before John realized it was directed at Christopher, that it was Sherlock who had pulled his hand away.

"Sorry, sorry," Christopher grunted, and John went back to work with a renewed appreciation for breathing. "He's just so fucking good at this, God."

John would have grinned if he could. His confidence bolstered, he ramped up the pressure, using his tongue to massage the glans as he worked his lips down the shaft as far as he could. He was mastering that counter-stroke now, his hands sliding easily on the condom through his own saliva.

"You are good at this," Sherlock whispered. "You hardly need me." John reached down to catch his hand and squeezed it. God, he needed Sherlock. It was just as well his mouth was occupied, because he had no idea what he would have said otherwise.

Christopher moaned and John managed to look up enough to see his mouth open, his face contorted with pleasure. He was getting close. John wondered what Sherlock wanted him to do.

"Oh, fuck, I…" Christopher said though gritted teeth.

"Finish him," John heard.

It took less than a minute. John steadily increased the pace and pressure, and then Christopher's hands clenched John's shoulders as he cried out, shuddering into John's mouth. It seemed like an impressive orgasm and John was rock hard from listening to it, from feeling that cock pulse under his
tongue.

He leaned back against Sherlock and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. God, he must look a sight after that. He was stunned by how much he'd enjoyed it, though. It was incredibly ironic: if anyone had ever told him he'd one day love sucking cock, he would have decked them.

"Beautiful," Sherlock said, his arms sliding around John's chest again, his voice practically a purr.

John's dick got impossibly harder. Now that he thought about it, it was unclear whether it was the cocksucking he liked, or rather Sherlock's mouth against his ear, telling him to do such dirty things.

Ah, who cared? The end result was the same either way.

He grinned up at Christopher, who was already refastening his trousers. "Thanks for that, gents. Clara, I owe you one."

"I'll keep it in mind," she said. John turned to look at her; he'd forgotten she was there. Her hand was between her thighs and her eyes were wide and dark. She'd clearly enjoyed that as much as anyone.

She stood and crossed to Christopher, indicating with a jerk of her head that he should go. He grinned and left, and she turned to face John and Sherlock.

"My turn. Up now, trousers off." She was smiling, but her tone made it clear she meant business.

John slid out of Sherlock's arms and pushed to his feet. Though they were in this darkened alcove, there were people everywhere. Anyone passing by could look in and watch his trousers and pants fall to his knees, watch him kick them off. And yet he stripped anyway, until he was standing there half-naked with an erection. Even after years in the army, he'd never felt this amount of comfort with nudity. It was bizarre and a bit liberating -- as long as he didn't think too hard about it.

"Sherlock, budge over a bit," Clara said, though her eyes remained firmly fixed on John. He heard movement behind him and couldn't help but smile at the quickness with which Sherlock had responded to that order. Best to put that thought aside for now. "You, unbutton me."

"With pleasure," he whispered. When all the buttons were unfastened he pushed the shirt off her shoulders, his eyes sliding over the curves of her body.

She wrapped her fingers around his prick and tugged him toward her, and he gasped. "It seems a shame to exclude your boyfriend. So we won't. Not exactly, anyway."

John didn't have time to respond with anything other than a look of shock before she turned him and pushed him backward onto Sherlock's lap once again.

"Knees together, Sherlock. John, stay just like that. Oh damn, who has a condom?"

Sherlock dug into his pocket right under John's arse and produced one. She ripped it open and rolled it on him, and climbed onto the sofa, straddling them both.

"I almost came watching that, you know," she said, her eyes gleaming. "And though what I really want is to be between you getting fucked on both ends, this will have to do." She raised her hips and lowered herself onto John's cock.

He closed his eyes and exhaled. Oh this part: this was one of the best parts of sex, this moment of entry, this breach of another person's body. Her felt her mouth brush against his, then her hair brush his cheek. He heard her kiss Sherlock and felt him turn his head away from her, and she laughed.
"I know, you don't participate. No one else gets to fuck you, do they, Sherlock? Lucky for John."

John bit his lip at that. If only he were so lucky.

She wriggled against him, trying to find the best leverage on the slippery sofa. The position was awkward, and he wasn't sure what exactly she was trying to do until she began moving. She'd slid down his cock only three times before there was a soft "Damn" and a hand moving behind him as Sherlock adjusted the position of his dick in his trousers.

John's mouth fell open at the realization: Sherlock was hard and John's bare arse was pressed against his erection. With every movement of her hips, Clara rocked John's arse right against Sherlock's cock, ensuring that Sherlock's cock pressed right into the cleft of John's arse, Jesus fucking hell. He could feel Sherlock's breath against his neck, hot and even, as if he was doing his best to control it. What John would give to see him lose that control, just once.

Clara shifted her hips slightly and then change in angle made John see stars. God, how was she doing that? He was going to be ruined for sex for the rest of his life when this thing was over. Best not to think about that.

"Can I touch you?" he asked and she nodded, apparently somewhat beyond speech now herself. His fingers circled her clitoris without really making contact, for fear he'd do it incorrectly.

"More, faster," she said, and changed the angle of her movements, now clearly focusing on herself.

Sherlock's hands settled at John's waist and pushed him forward enough to put some space between them. John swallowed his disappointment, focusing instead on Clara's breasts bouncing right in front of his face. He cupped one with his free hand, but she was moving too much for him to do anything else.

He'd hadn't realized how close she was to coming until she pushed his fingers away and worked her clitoris hard, bucking against him. He leaned back against Sherlock, already feeling her body start to clench around him. The combination of her cries and the friction and Sherlock's erection pressing against his arse and all the pent-up sexual tension from the evening pushed him incredibly close to the edge now. He didn't have enough leverage on the ground to push up against her, instead he dug fingers into her hips and tried to control her movements, to direct her body to where he so desperately wanted pressure.

They fell off of Sherlock's lap and wound up on the floor, her on her back with her legs wrapped around his waist and him pounding into her roughly. He was close, so close, and he hoped she'd forgive him this, but God he just needed to come. Her arms were around him now and she was howling, so loudly that he'd later wonder why they hadn't attracted a crowd.

It was only then that he realized she was coming again, and then he was there with her, his thrusts becoming erratic and finally disintegrating into pressure, pushing as deep inside her as he could get. They lay there in a heap for nearly a minute, both of them hot and a bit sweaty.

"Sorry if I got a bit too enthusiastic there," he whispered, pushing himself up.

"Oh honey, there's no such thing," she replied with a laugh. "It's what I love about you boys who go both ways. You're not afraid to fuck hard."

He laughed and looked away. Shit.

She wriggled underneath him and he took the hint to pull out, wincing slightly as he did. He sat back
on his heels and pulled the condom off, then turned to look at Sherlock. Sherlock smiled, though his expression was incredibly controlled, intentionally impassive. He looked cool, completely collected, but John knew better.

Clara sat up and leaned against the sofa, grinning at Sherlock. "Well? Did I take good care of him?"

"I believe you did," Sherlock replied. He was still reclining into the sofa with his thighs spread, one hand curled into a fist over his groin.

"Have I earned the right to watch?" She raised one eyebrow suggestively.

"Watch what?"

Her eyes flicked over to John and back. "Whatever happens next."

"What happens next is that John and I are going home." He smiled coolly at her.

"So the voyeur doesn't like to be watched either? Pity. Can't blame me for asking, can you?" She plucked her shirt from the floor and pulled it around her before standing. "Thanks for the party, boys. See you next time." She winked at John and walked away, her hips swaying under the fabric of the shirt.

John sighed. Two weeks ago that would have been the highlight of his sex life to date. He would have thought he could die happy having been so thoroughly shagged. But now -- now he had no idea what to think.

He fumbled for his trousers and pulled them on, feeling Sherlock's eyes on him. He waited until he was fully dressed before looking down at him. "Going to do something about that?" His eyes slid down to the bulge at Sherlock's groin.

"Don't worry about it. Let's go."

The cab ride was quiet; they both seemed lost in thought. The evening had been a strange and enlightening experience for John, though it left him even more confused about what was happening between him and Sherlock. He knew he should just ask, should get it out in the open. *Do you want to fuck me? Because I'd like that, I really would.*

But he wasn't sure he could handle it if Sherlock said no. And at this point, John rather suspected that would be the answer. After two weeks and multiple opportunities, Sherlock had done little more than brush a few kisses on John's neck. He seemed satisfied with watching John have sex and jerking off in private. In fact, tonight he'd seemed more collected and certain of what he wanted than he had the entire weekend.

John was more certain of what he wanted as well, but it was looking more and more like he wasn't going to get it.

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"Sherlock."

Sherlock stopped and turned to face him. Light from the street lamp outside the flat streamed through the window and lit his face starkly, making him appear even more angular than usual.

John took a deep breath. "Thanks for tonight. I hope you enjoyed it as well."
Sherlock's smile was oddly unreadable. "It was interesting."

"Interesting," John repeated. "You watched me suck off three strangers, and it was merely interesting?"

Sherlock half-laughed and looked away. "If you're asking if I enjoyed it as much as what we've done before, the answer is no. But this wasn't about me tonight. It was about you. And as you made very clear this morning, this isn't just about what I get out of it."

John smiled at that. "But it's not supposed to be entirely one-sided either. You did get something out of it, didn't you?"

"I suppose I did get a bit chafed there at the end."

"I'm serious, Sherlock."

"So am I. The zipper on these trousers probably left a permanent imprint."

John winced. "Ah. Sorry. I could kiss it better."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"Of course. I told you before."

"You didn't answer when I asked before."

John's lips quirked into something like a smile. "It was definitely interesting."

"Glad to hear it," Sherlock said, turning away.

John gritted his teeth. Sherlock knew John was lying and he was letting him do it, walking away rather than pressing for more. "Don't."

Sherlock stopped, looked slightly over his shoulder. "Don't what?"

"If you're planning to close that door and jerk off by yourself, then don't."

"Can't something in all of this be private?"

John rolled his eyes. "Fine, whatever. If that's what you want, then good night." He turned and headed toward the stairs.

"John." Sherlock sounded annoyed, and John was glad. "I already did."

John turned back to him. "Already did what?"

"While you and Clara were on the floor. I was close from the friction alone, and when you had her on the floor, I just..." He ran a hand through his hair and laughed. "I didn't think I could do it that quickly. I barely got my trousers fastened back up in time."

"Why didn't you want us to see?"

"I didn't want her to see. I don't mind you watching. In fact, I like you watching."

John felt a flutter in his belly. "I like you watching as well, but I think you know that."

"I do." There was a pause, and John's breath caught in his throat. At last Sherlock's expression
melted into the familiar calculating one. "We'll go back to the usual way tomorrow night, if you don’t mind."

"The usual way being you find someone to fuck me in a private room while you watch?" He smirked.

"Precisely."

So that was how it was going to be. John sighed. "It's a date, then. Good night, Sherlock."

It wasn't until he was stretched out in his own bed that it occurred to him that Sherlock may have been lying about wanking in the club, that he might be in his own bed right now with a hand curled around his dick.

It was at least clear that Sherlock was keeping John at arm's length in a way he hadn't before. Even when he'd touched John tonight, it had been deliberate, almost manipulative. And John was… he had no idea what he was feeling. Neither of them was being honest with each other at the moment, though, and that wasn't a good sign.

John closed his eyes and tried to clear his mind. They had tomorrow night and then he had a few days to think. He was going to need it.

[End of part 5]

Chapter End Notes

There's a little shout-out in this fic to Foxestacado, who taught me how to cheek condoms at Lubricus last summer. Yes, using a banana. Shut up, it works. ;-)

Details about John's military service heavily influenced by Abundantlyqueer's meta on the topic.

Gifset by Martincrief: "As long as it ends with his cock in your mouth, I'll be satisfied. Now go."

Very NSFW Art by Headless Girl for this chapter is here.

Another piece by Headless Girl here.

Art by KrisKenshin: Practice Makes Perfect.

Art by Headless Girl: the almost-threesome with Clara

Art by Saki: looking for a target
Chapter Summary

Something had shifted between them in the last twenty-four hours, something important.

Chapter Notes

Beta and Britpick: The ever insightful Freckles42, who has been incredibly supportive throughout the writing of this fic.

Special thanks to Pennswoods and Pinkfinity for their thoughtful and supportive comments on this fic over drinks on Friday night. It was great to see you two!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was drizzling as they walked up Dean Street. John shivered and pulled his jacket more tightly around him. He was looking forward to walking through the door to the club, not only because it would be warm and dry, but also because he knew it was the one place he could calm his mind. Well, he hoped so, at any rate. He'd spent the day lost in anxious thought. Even worse, he and Sherlock had barely spoken all day. That wasn't particularly unusual, of course -- Sherlock sometimes went days without saying a word. It hadn't bothered John before, but something had shifted between them in the last twenty-four hours, something important.

John scowled and pushed that thought out of his mind for what seemed like the twentieth time today. He'd never enjoyed dwelling on his emotions; the fact that he'd spent so much of the day doing just that annoyed him to no end. The way this entire thing had begun to consume him was ridiculous, really. He needed to do something with his time, something constructive. He'd left the surgery after they'd started picking up regular cases (and regular money along with them), but there hadn't been a case for nearly a month. He'd been so preoccupied with the sex experiment that he hadn't even thought to ask Sherlock about it. Hell, he hadn't updated the blog in weeks.

As they neared the door of the club the wind picked up and they rushed inside right after another bundled-up couple. They all stood shivering in the foyer, unwrapping themselves, and with a start John recognized them both.

"Annie?"

"Oh, John!" She kissed both his cheeks in greeting, her lips warm against his cold skin. "And Sherlock, hello. We were afraid we'd be late."

"Not at all," Sherlock replied, leaning forward to kiss her as well. "Ryan, lovely to see you."

Oh. It wasn't coincidence: Ryan and Annie were meeting them here. John suddenly knew exactly where this was going. And he'd asked for it, hadn't he? He'd thought he might have more than two days to think about it, but apparently not.
"Hi," he said to Ryan. There was a flash of warmth in Ryan's eyes and John smiled in return. 

*Breathes.*

They made their way into the main area of the club and Annie looped her arm through John's. "John, will you help me get drinks? We'll be right along if you two want to go on downstairs."

"Yes, perfect," Ryan said immediately, turning to smile at Sherlock. "What room should they meet us in?"

Sherlock's eyes narrowed slightly, but he didn't otherwise react to this obvious ploy to separate them. "Room one."

Annie and John both gaped at him. "One?" Ryan repeated. "How the hell did you get into room one? Are you related to someone famous or something?"

"Something like that," Sherlock replied with an enigmatic smile. John rolled his eyes; there was no telling what Mycroft thought at this point. Sherlock nodded his head toward the door that lead downstairs. "Shall we?" He winked at John before he turned away, Ryan following close behind him.

Annie tugged John's arm toward the bar. "God, I didn't think room one even existed. I assumed it was just a false door."

"What's special about room one?" John asked with more than a touch of trepidation.

"It's by special reservation only, but no one knows how you get on the access list. I've only heard rumors about what's inside. Oh, and we're buying tonight. What'll you have?"

"Oh, thanks. A pint of Stella for me, brandy for Sherlock."

After she'd ordered the drinks, she turned back to John with a determined expression. "I have to ask: How do you feel about this, honestly?"

"About the drinks?" John blinked at her for a moment. "Oh, you mean…" His cheeks heated almost instantly. "What did Sherlock tell you?"

"That he wants Ryan to top you and that you've never done that before."

John exhaled. "Right. That." Where should he even begin?

"It's none of our concern, so feel free to tell me to leave it. But we're both wondering…" She paused, as if looking for the right words.

Might as well cut to the chase. "Why I wanted your husband to be the first person to fuck me?"

Her eyebrows rose, but she nodded. "So… no offense, but you've clearly waited a long time to do this and the fact that it's not with your boyfriend -- I mean, I'm not judging and I know that relationships can take a lot of different forms, but I -- we, actually -- just wanted to make sure you're okay with this. That he's not coercing you into doing something you don't want to do."

*Wow.* John's jaw dropped -- was that actually what they thought was happening here?

"Here's your order," the bartender called, and Annie turned back to the bar to sign the check.

John was grateful to have a few seconds to think. He hadn't talked to anyone about any of this. He wasn't sure now was the best time to start, but he felt weird about lying to her when she was being so
kind and sincere. God, he really did like them both.

She turned back and handed him two pint glasses, and looked at him expectantly.

He took a deep breath. "All right. I haven't done it before because… well, to start, I've never been in a relationship with a man until a few weeks ago. And if I'm to be completely honest, Ryan is my second choice. But Sherlock isn't…" He pursed his lips. Saying it out loud made it real, and he'd been so carefully avoiding reality in this particular area.

"Oh!" she said, her hand flying to her mouth. "You mean he can't--"

"No, nothing like that. He's perfectly capable. He just… doesn't want to. With me. Or with anyone, probably. Maybe. I'm not actually certain, but definitely not with me."

She stared at him, clearly trying to understand. "So he doesn't top. That's not terribly unusual, you know."

John cringed. "No, I mean he doesn't anything. He likes to tell other people what to do to me, and he likes to watch, and then he wanks. And that's kind of it."

Her face was a study in control. "Okay. So… all right. So you don't have sex at all? I mean, with each other?"

"No."

"How do you feel about that?"

"How do you think I feel?" John laughed, inexplicably. "He's never even kissed me. What the hell am I doing, Annie? Who does this?" She looked taken aback and he realized he was venting at her now, but he couldn't stop. "No, seriously, this is perhaps the most fucked up relationship I can possibly imagine, and I've no idea what I'm doing or how I got here. And he's my flatmate, and my best friend, and I was actually chuffed about it at first because I was getting laid and we were both enjoying it, but now I just…" He stopped and shook his head, afraid to let himself say more.

She took the pint glasses from his hands and set them on the bar, and gently put a hand on his arm. "How long has this been going on?"

"This? Not long, a few weeks. But we've been sharing a flat for more than a year and if I'm to be brutally honest, there was always something there. I suppose I should have seen this coming."

"You're in love with him, aren't you?"

It was a good thing he was no longer holding the drinks; he would have dropped them at that. He could only stare at her with what he was certain was a look of horror on his face.

She cringed. "Or not, you know. Whatever. You're good friends and that can get… ah, shit. I'm sorry." She pressed a hand to her forehead. "I should have said nothing. It's just… I'm a doctor and I work in a clinic where we see loads of crazy and abusive relationship issues and, God, I really need to learn to turn it off and not poke my nose in where it doesn't belong."

"No, no, it's fine. I understand, believe me." John took a shaky breath. "And it's a good question. I've no idea how I feel about him right now."

"How does he feel about you?"
"Oh God, who knows? I don't think it's possible for him to be in love with anyone other than himself." At her raised eyebrows he added, "I'm not being sarcastic. If you knew him you'd understand that remark completely."

"So what do you want to do? Tonight, I mean."

He inhaled, exhaled again, and smiled tightly. "Oh, that's an easy one. We're going to go downstairs and I'm going to have sex with your husband."

"Are you sure? You seem a bit--"

"Emotionally compromised? Manic? Confused about my sexual orientation?" He reached for one of the beer glasses and chugged a good fourth of it.

She sighed and looked impossibly more concerned. "Look, I know you're new to this, to all of this. Ryan and I have been doing it for a while, and I can tell you that it's incredibly important that your relationship with your partner is in a good place when you come here to play. If you're angry or upset with each other, or if there's something going on that's interfering with your ability to communicate honestly, this is not the place to be. It will only make things worse, I promise you."

Shit, shit, shit. John winced. "Yes, I know, but… I really don't want to deal with it tonight. I just want it to be like it was at first, when we both had a good time and I didn't worry about all this other shit." He paused, trying to find a way to explain that didn't make him sound horrifying. "I think he's found a way back there, but I haven't. And this, tonight, is about me. It's something I've never done, something I said I wanted to do. And he's giving it to me. Hell, maybe he does love me. He's giving me something he knows he'll never be able to give me himself."

"You're certain?"

"No." He shook his head, tried to smile. "But I think I need to do this."

"You have a safeword, right?"

"Yes."

She nodded. "Well then... we should head down. They're probably wondering what's taking us so long."

He followed her down the stairs, each of them carrying a pair of drinks. His glass was nearly empty by the time they walked the length of the hallway and found the door marked with a large brass "1".

"Before we go in," he asked, nudging her elbow, "I have to ask... what should I expect? I assume a penis feels very different from fingers."

"You have to relax. He knows you're new at this and he'll go slowly. He's very good at watching and listening, so if something doesn't feel right to you, just tell him. You should be on top at first so you can control the pace. And bearing down helps, believe me."

He nodded and exhaled. No reason to be nervous. It would all be fine. People did this all the time, and hell, millions of gay men couldn't be wrong. He already knew he liked things in his arse, after all, and this was a natural extension.

Fuck. Why wasn't this helping?

He exhaled and forced a smile. "Ready to see what's behind this door?"
She grinned. "Absolutely."

He set his empty glass on the floor by the door and then turned the handle. The door swung open and they both gaped at the sight that greeted them. The room itself was large, at least twice the size of any of the other rooms. In lieu of furniture a large circle in the interior of the room was sunken. There was a ledge around the perimeter of the circle that seemed meant to serve as a bench, and the floor of the circle was covered with what seemed to be a large cushion, making it like a gigantic bed. There was a Jacuzzi tub in one far corner and a small bar in another corner, presumably stocked. It was definitely a room set up for an orgy.

All of this registered in John's mind in half a second, but none of it was what had stopped him and Annie in their tracks. What had done that was the fact that Sherlock and Ryan were in the center of that sunken circle, kissing. No, kissing didn't quite describe what they were doing; heartily snogging was a slightly better description. They were both kneeling and their hands were all over each other, and they were so preoccupied they hadn't even heard the door open.

It took another two seconds for John to process what he was seeing, and by then Annie had already tugged him back through the door and into the hallway.

"Are you all right?" she whispered. "I swear to you, Ryan had no intention of getting off with Sherlock. I have no idea what happened, but this wasn't planned."

"That makes me feel loads better," John hissed in reply. "Because that means it was probably Sherlock's fucking idea."

"Oh, God, what should we do?" She looked genuinely distraught.

John felt anger rise in him. He tamped it down quickly, but not before it cleared his head. He knew exactly what he wanted to do.

He walked back through the door and cleared his throat. "Sorry to interrupt, but we've brought drinks."

Sherlock and Ryan pulled out of the kiss, both clearly surprised. Ryan looked a bit helplessly embarrassed; Sherlock, on the other hand, looked mortified. He couldn't even meet John's eyes. Good. John was going to enjoy this. He was going to fucking enjoy this hell out of this, and he was going to do everything he possibly could to make sure Sherlock knew just how fucking much he loved getting fucked by Ryan tonight. Fuck.

He kicked off his shoes and crossed over to the sunken circle. Ryan shot him an apologetic look as he passed, apparently on his way to where Annie was now standing glaring at him. John stepped down onto the cushion, crossed to Sherlock, and extended a hand down to him. Sherlock closed his eyes briefly and seemed to steel himself before taking it. John pulled him to his feet.

"Having fun?" He smirked when Sherlock finally turned to look at him. "I think it's my turn now, isn't it?"

Sherlock didn't respond. He stared at John for a long moment, his face unreadable.

For once, John didn't care what Sherlock saw in his face. He was hurt and bewildered and embarrassed, but mostly, he was angry. It wasn't that Sherlock didn't want to have sex -- it was that he didn't want to have sex with John, even though he knew, he fucking knew how John felt about him.
Sherlock closed his eyes again and nodded. He had the decency to look chagrined, but John didn't care. There was only one thing he wanted right now.

"Then you should go find a good spot to watch, shouldn't you?" He realized he'd been squeezing Sherlock's hand rather more tightly than necessary, and he let it go. He pressed the glass of brandy against Sherlock's chest and a bit of it sloshed onto his shirt. Sherlock took the glass and walked away, over towards the side of the circle where Annie and Ryan were whispering animatedly. He sat at the edge of the circle a few feet from them, staring straight ahead.

Annie gave Ryan a shove and he crossed back to where John was standing. "Jesus, John, I'm sorry--" he whispered, but John grabbed a handful of shirt and pulled him into a kiss. They broke apart after nearly a minute, both panting.

"Don't worry about it," John said softly, reaching up to cup Ryan's cheek.

Ryan looked almost panicked. "I wasn't expecting him to kiss me and when he did I just assumed the rules had changed."

John winced: he hadn't actually wanted confirmation, but there it was. "I really don't want to talk about it right now, okay?"

"Right, of course. Are you sure you want to do this right now?"

"Completely." John kissed him again, this time putting all of his pent-up frustration into it. His arms wound around Ryan and pulled their bodies tightly together.

Ryan melted against him, whimpering already. "I must admit," he whispered against John's lips, "that I've been thinking about this almost constantly since Sherlock called us yesterday. There's something about you that drives me completely mad. I don't generally feel this way about men, but Jesus, John--"

John's mouth was on his neck now, searching out sensitive places. He usually didn't put much stock in compliments, but he rather enjoyed hearing them right now. "Oh?"

"You have no idea how hot you are, do you? That makes you even hotter."

John laughed at that. "I appreciate it, but you do realize I'm kind of a sure thing?"

"So you are. Do you want to get right to it, or do you want to take it slowly?"

"Slow is good. Very slow."

"Good. I was planning to ignore you if you answered otherwise."

John grinned against Ryan's neck. "I can come twice if we time it right."

"I do love a challenge. Do you want to make him jealous?"

"God, yes. Anything you can do along those lines would be fantastic."

"Not a problem." Ryan's fingers began unfastening the buttons on John's shirt now, one at a time. He paused after each one to kiss and lick newly exposed skin, and it was glorious. He slid the shirt off of John's shoulders, pausing at the scar he'd never seen before.

"Afghanistan," John said, hoping he wouldn't get distracted now.
Ryan stared at him for a long moment and then pulled him into a scorching kiss. John found himself leaning against him, almost dizzy. He tugged at the hem of Ryan's tee shirt and Ryan stripped it off in one smooth movement. He tossed it aside and then hooked his fingers into the waist of John's trousers, pulling him forward with an impish grin. Closer to Sherlock, John realized. Good.

John looked over Ryan's shoulder to where Sherlock was slouching against the ledge. He almost flinched when John's eyes met his, but he didn't look away. Annie was sitting a few feet away, clearly still worried. John smiled at her in a way he hoped was reassuring and she returned it weakly.

Ryan's mouth had moved to his ear now and John closed his eyes. Lips brushed the shell of his ear and the sensitive skin just behind, and his mind was flooded with the memory of Sherlock pressed against him the night before, whispering directions in his ear as he sucked another man's dick.

His eyes flew open, found Sherlock again, but his expression had changed completely. He wasn't watching; his eyes were unfocused, as if he was lost in thought. He looked miserable and John felt an odd tug inside him at the sight. He ought to have been glad, he wanted to be glad -- but he found he just couldn't.

Sherlock had been in charge of this experiment all along, but it didn't mean he knew what he was doing. He'd had the least sex of just about anyone John had ever met, and yet here he was, orchestrating all of this. For John. Whatever was going on in that brilliant and insane head of his, John knew for a fact that deep down somewhere, Sherlock cared very deeply about him. And right now, Sherlock knew he'd fucked up and didn't know what to do about it.

Goddammit, why couldn't this just be about sex? If anyone could have separated sex and emotion, he would have expected Sherlock could do it.

"Are you all right?" John looked up to see Ryan watching him with genuine concern. He'd been so distracted he hadn't even realized Ryan had stopped kissing him.

"Yeah," John replied. He kissed Ryan and turned them both around so that his back was to Sherlock once again. He needed not to see him for a while, to get his mind back on Ryan and what was coming.

"Will you suck me?" Ryan asked, his voice barely a whisper.

John nearly whimpered. "Oh, yes, that's exactly what I want to do right now." He fumbled with Ryan's trousers and pushed them down. Ryan stepped out of them and John dropped to his knees, fishing in his pocket for a condom. Ryan was already hard and John bit his lip at the thought of having that cock in his mouth. He'd wasted so many years trying to convince himself he was completely straight.

Once the condom was on he took his time, starting with licks and kisses and going torturously slowly. He hadn't even taken the head in his mouth before Ryan stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "Stop, too close. Shit, that's amazing."

John waited, watching Ryan's face until he nodded. He wrapped his lips around the head of Ryan's cock right away, afraid he wouldn't get the chance otherwise. He'd managed one slow slide down and back up before Ryan stopped him again. He extended a hand down to John and John took it, let himself be pulled to his feet.

"I'm not going to last if you keep doing that." He unfastened John's trousers. "Maybe we should move this along."
"Right," John said, his stomach doing a flip. He stripped off his trousers and pants and then turned back to Ryan. "How do you want me?"

Something flickered across Ryan's face and then was gone again. "Hands and knees for now. Facing Sherlock."

John clenched his jaw. Five minutes ago he happily would have complied with that, but now he really didn't want to. He hesitated, pressing his lips together tightly. *Shit.*

Ryan put his hands on John's shoulders and turned him around to face Sherlock. He pulled him back against his chest and planted soft kisses along his neck. "Look at him," Ryan whispered, his breath warm against John's ear.

John forced himself to meet Sherlock's gaze. The impassive mask he generally wore during these encounters was nowhere to be seen; instead his face was completely open, even childlike.

"He loves you, you know." Ryan's hands moved to John's sides, stroking gently.

John's eyes fell closed. "No, he doesn't."

"Shit. John--" Ryan pressed his forehead into John's shoulder and groaned. John turned to look at him, confused. Ryan's jaw was clenched, his eyes narrowed. "Look, I'm not safewording, all right? But I need to talk to Annie before we continue. Just give me a minute."

"Of course." John took several steps backward and wrapped his arms around himself. Had he fucked this up already?

Ryan motioned to Annie and they crossed to the far side of the room. After several minutes of whispered conversation, Annie threw her arms around him and kissed him.

John looked over at Sherlock at that, but he seemed just as confused about what was happening.

Annie and Ryan crossed the room again, both of them smiling. Annie held a hand out to Sherlock and nodded towards the door. He looked perplexed, but he took it and allowed her to lead him out of the room. John watched them go and then turned to look at Ryan.

"There's been a minor change of plans," Ryan said, smiling.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not going to fuck you tonight. You're going to fuck me."

John gaped at him. "What? But--"

Ryan reached out for him and pulled him close. "It's not our concern, I know, but… neither of us wants to see you make a mistake like this."

"Mistake?"

"You're pissed off at him for kissing me, and I don't think that's the only thing that's wrong."

John groaned. "Yes, fine, I'm angry at him. But I did say I wanted it to be you. He set this up because I asked him to, so it's not--"

"John, listen to me." Ryan's hands cupped his face, pulling him even closer. "It's obvious this is a big deal for you, and it's also obvious that I'm not the one you want the first time."
"Oh, God," John said, leaning his forehead against Ryan's shoulder. It was completely true and apparently everyone knew it. Hell, Sherlock probably even knew it, which only made it worse. "But he doesn't want to."

"Maybe not tonight. But it's what you want and that's what matters. Don't do this tonight because you're pissed off at him. It won't help anything."

John exhaled. He felt relieved, honestly, but also terrified. Shit.

"Fine. Okay. But he's not going to like it."

"Fuck what he likes, John. It's not up to him."

"Isn't it?" John knew he sounded bitter, but he couldn't help it.

"The fact that you feel that way is all the more reason." Ryan sighed and squeezed John's hand. "Do you want to fuck me tonight? If you don't, it's fine. I'm sure we'll have another chance."

John did want to do that, actually. Now that his nerves were settling, it sounded like a fairly fantastic idea. He nodded.

Ryan grinned and kissed his forehead. "Then I'll go get them." He crossed to the door.

"What were they doing out there?"

"She was telling him the same thing, I imagine."

John winced. Oh, God,

Sherlock's face was unreadable, of course. He and Annie crossed to the edge of the circle, her arm looped through his. She winked at John.

"Right, so," John said, turning back to Ryan. "I'm not sure where to start."

"Don't worry, I'll tell you exactly what to do." Ryan pulled him by the hand into the center of the circle. "Just sit, wait here." He crossed to the bar area and rummaged for a moment, then came back with supplies. He settled on his knees next to John and handed him three packets of lube. "First of all, you can never have enough lube. Two of those are for me and one is for you. I don't need a heck of a lot of prep, but I love being fingered, so feel free to go there all you want."

John was sure he was beet red by now, but Ryan was kindly ignoring it. "So you've done this a lot, then?"

"Oh yeah, loads. Well… actually never with a man before."

John blinked at him. "Sorry?"

"Just with Annie."

John's eyebrows shot up. "I know for a fact that Annie doesn't have a penis."

Ryan gave him an odd look. "No, but she has a strap-on." The duh was left implied.

"Ah, right." There went his worldview yet again. Holy shit. "So this is the first time for you… with a man?"
"It is. And I choose you." He grinned at John.

John stared at him for a moment. This was certainly an interesting turn of events. "Are you sure? I mean, it's got to be different and…" He waved a hand between them, not certain what he was trying to say.

"I'm sure it will be, but -- no offense intended --the dildo she uses is fairly big, so--"

John held up a hand. "Don't finish that sentence."

Ryan blushed. "Right. Anyway, ready when you are."

John exhaled. Jesus, this was one of the weirdest sexual experiences of his entire life. And considering, that was saying a lot. He knelt in front of Ryan and kissed him, letting his hands slide down his back, over his arse. Ryan melted against him and his half-hard erection brushed John's thigh. Bizarrely, the condom from earlier was still on.

John smiled; he knew exactly where to start. He pushed Ryan down onto his back, then settled between his thighs. "I don't want you to come just yet, so tell me if you get too close."

He reached for the packets of lube and ripped one open. Ryan's penis hardened quickly in his mouth, but he kept the suction and motion light while he slicked his fingers. He circled his fingertips slowly against Ryan's anus before pressing one finger inside. He stroked in and out slowly, timing it with the movements of his mouth until Ryan began to writhe beneath him. He added more lube, then another finger, and just as he was really finding a good rhythm, Ryan grabbed a handful of his hair.

"Too close, fuck."

John was starting to envy Ryan's sensitivity. "Hands and knees," he said, his voice huskier than he'd expected.

Ryan scrambled into position while John put on a condom. He'd positioned himself facing Annie, which of course also meant John would be facing Sherlock. He lined himself up behind Ryan and stroked a hand over his back, and finally looked up. Sherlock was chewing on his finger in that way he did when he was lost in thought. The moment his eyes focused on John's felt almost like a physical contact: John reeled, nearly gasped, suddenly completely hard. Sherlock's dazed expression became a sly smile.

John had to break the gaze at last, had to focus on what he was doing. He opened the last packet of lube and used it to slick himself, and Ryan again for good measure. He leaned forward to plant a kiss between Ryan's shoulders, then pressed the head of his cock into him slowly.

Ryan hissed beneath him and John closed his eyes at the sensation.

He'd done this once before with a woman, one of his few successful bar picks-ups in his pre-army days. They'd both been drunk and he didn't actually remember much about it. But this, this he was going to remember: the heat, the tightness, so much more intense than a vagina. The pressure was fantastic between the two sphincters -- anatomy charts popped into his mind, bizarrely -- and he stopped moving when he felt his glans push just past the second one. In this position, he could easily push in too far if he wasn't careful.

Well, in theory a penis could push in too far. In reality, he doubted his penis could do much harm.

"Okay?" he said after a moment.

"God, yes, that's fantastic," Ryan said, panting. "I'm good. Go."
John pressed a bit further in and pulled back out, fascinated by the sight of his dick disappearing into Ryan's arse. God, he'd love to have Sherlock in this position, to see all that pale skin spread out before him, to clench his hips and push into him hard, just *fuck* him into the mattress. He looked up and caught Sherlock's gaze, knowing his thoughts were probably written on his face. And shit, he didn't care. Sherlock knew by now. He had to know.

Just as he was about to get distracted, Annie stood and crossed to them, kneeling beside John. She put a hand on Ryan's shoulder and pressed his torso down until his face was on the floor. The heat in her expression was stunning; it was clear she liked seeing her husband like this, that this was something new and *good*.

"Down, good lad. Short, quick strokes, John. You can angle slightly down when he's in this position and hit his prostate. He'll come untouched if you do it right."

He stared at her, shocked.

Her eyes narrowed. "Now, John. Move!"

*Fuck*. He did, and wasn't a bit surprised when she repositioned him twice, not timid about putting her hands on his arse or even guiding his dick into Ryan exactly the way she wanted it. He had no doubt who was the dominant one in this particular relationship. She settled in front of Ryan when she seemed satisfied, and to John's amazement, slid off her jeans and knickers.

"Oh, fuck yes, please," Ryan moaned. She spread her thighs and positioned herself right under him, and he buried his face in her pussy. She threw her head back, her mouth open, and gasped.

John grinned, almost laughed. Here he was again, playing a supporting part in another of their fantasies. It was insanely hot, but it was also a relief not to be the center of this. This wasn't about him and Sherlock anymore. He'd needed that space so badly, and Annie and Ryan had given it to him. God, he could fall in love with them, the both of them.

He focused his attention on Ryan then, doing his best to fuck him exactly like Annie had instructed. He knew when he'd found the right angle; Ryan made an obscene amount of noise.

"Oh God, Ryan, oh fuck," and Annie's hands were on Ryan's head, her hips pressing up against his face. She collapsed onto her back and moaned, arms stretched over her head. Ryan was making a valiant effort to fuck her with his fingers while gripping the cushion beneath him for purchase as John slammed into him from behind.

John clenched his jaw and tried to think about anything other than what he was doing. He had to last long enough to make Ryan come. God, he hoped that would happen soon, because this amount of stimulation was almost more than he could take.

Movement caught his attention and he looked over to where Sherlock was sitting and *oh fuck*, Sherlock's hand was inside his trousers, moving slowly. He stared back at John almost helplessly, biting his lip, his eyes blown wide. John very nearly lost control.

*Focus*. He gripped Ryan's hips hard and shortened his strokes, trying to find the right angle again. Annie's moans took on a familiar rhythm. She pulled her knees apart, spreading herself open for Ryan, and John had to close his eyes because *Jesus fucking hell*, that was hot. Another minute and she was coming, pressing up against Ryan's face. Ryan lunged forward and John's dick slipped out completely; he had to scramble to get back into position.

"Sorry," Ryan said when he surfaced, pushing his arse up again.

Annie pulled herself to sitting and smiled lazily at him. She stretched and glanced over at Sherlock, and her eyes widened. She turned back to John and grinned. Sherlock's eyes were still fixed on John; he hadn't even noticed. John gave in at that, let himself watch. Sherlock paused long enough to tug his trousers down a bit, and looked back at John as he began pulling his dick again.

He was making it easier for John to see. *Fuck.*

John was so fucking close and dammit, Sherlock wasn't helping. He pulled Ryan's hips up a bit and leaned forward, doing his best to reproduce the angle from before. Just as he was about to reach under Ryan to pull him off, he cried out, and John could feel Ryan's orgasm coming, could feel the contractions in Ryan's arse and *oh God* that was just--

He looked back at Sherlock, at the heat in his eyes, and then he was there, careening over the edge. His thrusts became erratic and Ryan's knees went out from under him, taking John down with him. John scrambled to keep moving, just the head of his dick inside Ryan now, but it was enough. He shuddered through his orgasm and collapsed on top of Ryan afterwards, still shaking from the intensity of it.

*Fuck.*

"Oh my God," Ryan said, his voice muffled by the cushions beneath him. "That was fucking perfect."

John rolled to the side and pressed his hands over his face. When he opened his eyes again Annie was grinning down at him. He laughed and pushed himself to sitting.

Sherlock was, of course, completely collected now. If John hadn't seen him jerking off with his own eyes, he'd never have known it happened. He breathed a sigh of relief at that -- he probably hadn't been lying about last night after all.

Ryan rolled over onto his back and smiled up at John. "Was it good for you?"

John grinned. "Must I actually dignify that with an answer?"

Annie leaned down to kiss her husband. "That was so fucking hot. I have so many ideas right now."

"I can't wait," Ryan replied, and pulled her down against him to kiss her properly.

John watched them kiss with a happy sigh. He liked this, he realized. Sex with strangers was awkward and messy even when it was hot, but this was different. He felt like he knew Annie and Ryan, cared about them, trusted them, and that made the sex a completely different experience from anything that had happened the night before. And they knew John and Sherlock surprisingly well, it turned out. He was grateful for that.

The evening hadn't gone at all according to plan -- it had gone much better.

He looked back at Sherlock and managed a tight smile. Sherlock smiled back and ran a hand through his hair, an expression of relief on his face.

John felt something twist inside his chest. This wasn't exactly what he wanted, but it might be something he could live with. And that might be enough, for now.

*****
"Good night, Sherlock." John was ready to head up the stairs to his bedroom, exhausted physically and emotionally, and seriously not fucking interested in talking right now. Seriously.

"I owe you an apology," Sherlock said, and that stopped John in his tracks. Sherlock had never directly apologized for anything. Ever.

He turned and stared at him. "What?"

Sherlock's expression was pained. "Would you just…" He gestured towards the parlor, his eyes not quite meeting John's. "Please."

John groaned. God, he just wanted to go to sleep and ignore all of this until tomorrow. He'd be in a much better state to deal with it in the morning, with some distance.

Sherlock's face, though -- hell, he might be acting, but he did look rather sincerely miserable. He'd spent the taxi ride looking over at John every ten seconds while John ignored him. John could hear him out, at least.

John shrugged. "Fine. All right."

He followed Sherlock into the parlor and sat on the opposite end of the sofa from him. "What exactly are you apologizing for?" The list in John's head was really fucking long, but that was beside the point.

Sherlock sighed. "Where should I begin?"

Oh lovely, John got to choose. "Ryan. Why did you kiss him?"

"I'm not entirely certain. I've thought about that quite a lot in the last hour, obviously." He fell into silence for nearly a minute.

John rolled his eyes. "Well, that was incredibly insightful. I'm knackered, so why don't you think on it and let me know in the morning?" He started to stand.

"You chose him. Why?"

"Oh, for --This isn't about me, Sherlock."

"Please, John." He sounded as exhausted as John felt.

John sat again, leaned back into the sofa cushions and stared at the ceiling. "I like him, for one thing. I'm attracted to him. I also knew that he was experienced in that particular area. I saw him do it with Annie, so… I suppose I thought I could trust him."

"He was the first man you kissed as well, the first one who made you come. The first in the experiment, at any rate." He paused, exhaled. "I suppose I was curious."

"Curious," John repeated. This should be interesting.

"You said he was one of two people you would let penetrate you. That's quite a statement, considering you barely know him. I could only conclude that something happened between you that first night to make you feel that way."

"And that's why you kissed him? To find out if he had some magical power in his mouth to make
men bend over for him?" John groaned and rubbed at his forehead with his hands. Why was he still sitting here? God, he didn't want to have this conversation right now.

"I'm serious, John." Sherlock sounded frustrated, and John was glad. He ought to be frustrated. He deserved a hell of a lot more than frustration for what he was putting John through.

And he had so carefully navigated away from the one of two people remark, hadn't he? Sherlock knew damn well who the other one was.

"Then I'll ask again: Why did you kiss him?"

"Because he was standing there looking at me and he was beautiful, and I just… wanted to know what it would feel like to kiss him. It's been a decade since I kissed anyone, John. You know that."

John closed his eyes against the twinge in his chest. That was essentially the opposite of what he'd wanted to hear.

"Thanks for being honest. Apology accepted. I'm going to bed." He stood.

"John--"

"No," John snapped, whirling around to glare at him. "I'm sorry, Sherlock, but I can't do this right now. I'm fucking exhausted and I just can't… I can't, all right? Please." He looked away, astonished at the emotions rising in his chest. He had to get out of here before he said or did something truly pathetic.

He felt Sherlock's eyes on him, scrutinizing, observing, trying to work out what John was thinking and what he could say to keep him there a bit longer. John had no idea why he was still standing there. He didn't need Sherlock's permission to leave, not here. He didn't submit to him at home, and certainly not when he didn't want to. But yet, he couldn't move.

Silence stretched between them for a long moment, and at last Sherlock sighed. "All right. Good night."

John exhaled, nodded. They needed to talk and they would. But not before he'd had a chance to work out what the hell he was feeling.

He didn't look back as he walked away, up the stairs and to his room. He collapsed on the bed and didn't even bother undressing. He closed his eyes and tried very hard not to think at all.

*****

The music woke him up: sharp, angular, and erratic. He listened for a while with his eyes still closed, trying to work out if he'd heard it before. The same sequence of notes -- there was a word for that, damn his ignorance of music -- was repeated three times, and then there was a pause. Then again, with a slight variation.

Composing, perhaps. That was never a good sign. Though John had to admit he was somewhat pleased that Sherlock was emotionally affected by all of this as well. If he'd gone downstairs to find him sitting on the sofa staring benignly at his laptop, John might have punched him.

Sherlock didn't look up as John headed to the bathroom to shower, so engrossed was he in the music. Another bad sign. John almost smiled. Misery did indeed love company.

Once showered, he settled at the table in the kitchen with toast and coffee, and scanned yesterday's paper. The music stopped abruptly; a moment later Sherlock sat across from him at the table. He looked exhausted.
"Did you sleep at all last night?" John asked, unable to keep the concern out of his voice.

"No." Sherlock's eyes bored into him and John looked away. "Did you?"

"More or less." He dropped his toast, suddenly not hungry. "About last night--"

"I pushed too hard, I know. I assumed that because you said you'd let Ryan penetrate you, it meant you were ready to do it. It didn't occur to me that you wouldn't want to do it. I just…" He broke off, and John looked up at him.

"Is that what Annie told you when she took you out of the room?"

"Yes. And that she was worried you were doing it for the wrong reason."

John swallowed. "Did she hazard a guess as to what that reason was?"

"She said I ought to ask you that question."

Sherlock's eyes were pale green this morning, astonishingly bright considering the dark circles around them. He badly needed a shave and his hair was on the verge of Einsteinian unkemptness. And still, he was fucking beautiful. John couldn't tear his gaze away, even knowing that he probably looked like a lovesick sot at this very moment.

He couldn't lie to Sherlock, not while looking straight at him. But he couldn't say this now. Maybe not ever. He pressed his lips together and forced himself to look away.

"To be honest, I didn't realize I didn't want to do it until Ryan told me I didn't."

Sherlock exhaled shakily. "I know. I'm sorry."

John shook his head. "I can't believe I'm going to say this, but you really don't have to apologize this time. It's not your fault."

Sherlock looked away, his jaw clenched. "Is it my fault, John. I'm supposed to know what you want and what you don't. I'm supposed to pay attention to that, not to put you in a position of having to safeword."

"I wouldn't have safeworded, though. I would have done it."

Sherlock made a sound of frustration. "That's precisely the problem. I put you in that position, not because I thought you wanted it, but because I wanted it. I wanted to see him fuck you. I was so wrapped up in what I wanted that I didn't notice you didn't want it. My job in this is to take care of you. It's what a dom does, and I failed completely."

"You didn't--"

"Annie barely knows you and she saw it. She had to take me out of the room like a child and tell me I was in danger of abusing you."

John gaped. "She said that?"

"She implied it heavily."

John could only stare at him in disbelief. None of this had occurred to him at all and he honestly wasn't sure what to make of it. It was clear that Sherlock was taking it seriously, though. In fact, this represented some of the most human, considerate behavior from Sherlock that John had ever seen.
He cared about John; he really, truly did. He was angry at himself at the thought he'd almost damaged their relationship. He'd stayed up all night worrying about it, even.

"What?" Sherlock said, giving him an odd look.

John smiled stupidly; he couldn't help it. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For that. For everything." He only barely stopped himself from reaching for Sherlock's hand; he wrapped his fingers around his coffee cup instead.

Sherlock blinked at him, completely confused. "I don't think you understand what I'm saying."

"Then tell me. I'd love to hear it again."

"I was selfish and inconsiderate, and I'm sorry. It won't happen again."

John scanned the table. "Wait, let me get my phone. I think I want a ringtone of that."

Sherlock gaped at him. "I'm fucking serious, John."

"So am I." John grinned. "I'm telling you that it means a lot to me, Sherlock."

Sherlock shook his head and stared at John across the table, his relief so evident he almost glowed. John felt a sudden impulse to kiss him. If the table hadn't been between them, he might have done.

"So we're sorted, then?"

John nodded. "We're sorted."

They weren't really, but it didn't matter. John's fucked-up emotions needed far more than a chat over coffee to be sorted.

Sherlock sighed. "Well, that's a relief. I think I might be able to sleep now."

"Going to take a nap?"

He rubbed at the stubble on his chin and grimaced. "Shower first, but yes. You?"

John's mind helpfully supplied an image of him climbing into bed with Sherlock and wrapping himself around him, watching him sleep. He pushed his chair back from the table. "I think I'll go out, go for a walk. I'll pick up the shopping on the way back. Need anything?"

Sherlock cocked an eyebrow. "We seem to be out of bananas."

John rolled his eyes.

*****

It was mid-afternoon by the time he found himself staring at the yoghurt selection at Tesco. He might as well get the brand he wanted; Sherlock hadn't touched the last tub he'd brought home.

"Did you take my advice?"

He turned to see a woman standing next to him, her shopping basket dangling from one hand. Her long auburn hair fell across her face and she pushed it back with her free hand, smiling.
"What advice was that?"

"About the honey."

Oh. Her. "Sadly, no. But I'm reconsidering."

Her smile settled into something almost inviting. "We weren't properly introduced before. I'm Alexa." She held out a hand.

"John." He took it and she didn't let go, traced a circle in his palm with one fingertip. "I'm sorry I left so abruptly last time. Something came up at home."

"No, I understand. I was hoping I'd run into you again." She raised her eyebrows just a bit.

He could have her, he realized. She was offering and all he had to do was say yes. His thumb caressed the back of her hand, traced over the smooth metal of her wedding band. It would make a nice change from the club scene, wouldn't it? "Would you like to get a cup of coffee?"

Her smile became a smirk. "If by 'cup of coffee' you mean something else entirely, then yes."

He smiled. "Fantastic."

They abandoned their shopping baskets and left together, walking side by side down the pavement. There was a Starbucks two streets down and she steered him into it, walking straight to the counter.

"Tall latte," she said. She and the barista both turned to John.

"Oh, erm... the same," he said, and reached for his wallet.

"Can I have the key for the loo?" Alexa asked. The barista rummaged under the counter and produced a large plastic ring with a key attached.

After John paid for the drinks, Alexa gave him a sly smile and walked towards the back of the café. He followed her through the maze of tables and into a narrow corridor that wound around a corner to the toilets. If they hurried, no one would see them go inside together. She unlocked the door and walked through. John looked over his shoulder once more before following.

He latched the door behind him and then found himself pressed back against it, her mouth crushed against his. He pulled her against him, kissing her back.

A few weeks ago this would have been unbelievably thrilling. He would have been astonished at his luck, would probably be hard already just from anticipating what was about to happen. But the last few weeks had changed his perspective on sex so thoroughly that he found he had time to think, to decide what he wanted to happen here.

That was a novelty, wasn't it? He didn't usually get to decide; Sherlock generally did that for him.

Alexa's hand cupped his dick and he groaned into her mouth to encourage her. He'd had several fantasies about her since their first meeting. Now he had a chance to make one of them happen, but he was nearly overwhelmed by the array of possibilities. He unfastened the buttons on her coat and wriggled his hands inside, around her waist and over her arse. She was wearing a skirt again today; he wondered if he could simply tug it up around her waist.

Oh, but... shit. He broke the kiss long enough to ask, "Have you got a condom?" He was used to them being readily available at the club.
"In my bag," she replied, her mouth working its way down his neck now.

Her fingers fumbled at the button of his jeans, interfering with his attempts to get a hand up her skirt. It was frantic and hot, but also strange. Club sex had been so much more straightforward, generally speaking, not this desperate bid to get it done as quickly as possible before someone else needed to use the loo. It was the sort of thing Sherlock might like to examine more closely.

Something washed over him at that thought and suddenly he wished Sherlock were here. He'd stand over in the corner by the toilet, his eyes narrowed, his jaw set, and he'd tell them exactly what to do. Alexa's mouth was on his neck now, sucking hard enough to leave a mark. He had one hand on her arse and the other cupping a breast, and somehow he felt oddly apathetic about the entire situation. It was almost as if...

Oh, no. *Oh God.*

He clenched his jaw against his own frustration and pushed Alexa away gently, put a bit of space between them. He gave her a tight smile. "I'm so sorry, but... I can't do this right now."

She stared at him, her face oddly frozen. "Sorry?" She probably wasn't used to any man saying no to her. Honestly, who would?

John would, apparently. He sighed. "So... I sort of have a boyfriend, and--"

"You're gay?" She looked completely shocked.

He blinked at her. "No."

"You just said you had a boyfriend."

"And I was just getting off with you."

"But you have a boyfriend."

"You do realize there are more than two possibilities, right?"

She stepped back, shaking her head. "I don't believe this."

"Look, I'm sorry, and I know the timing is horrible, but... I don't think I want to have sex with other people without him." It was true, he realized. *God.*

"What do you mean, without him?" Her eyes were insanely wide.

John's lips twisted. "Ah yes; that probably made very little sense."

"What, you want him to watch? That's completely twisted."

"Oh, that's rich, coming from a woman who's cheating on her husband with random strangers from Tesco."

Alexa gaped at him. "How dare you! You know nothing about me."

John rolled his eyes. "I know you're married, have been for at least a decade judging by the state of your wedding ring. Clearly not happily, else you wouldn't be here, would you? The first time I saw you, you took the ring off straight away because you didn't want me to know. This time you didn't even flinch when I touched it, so you're comfortable with the idea of fucking around on your
husband. You even carry condoms in your bag, which says that you're prepared and careful -- good
for you, by the way -- but also that you're not worried about him finding out. He doesn't go in your
purse at all, which says a lot about the state of your marriage, frankly. Either that or he's traveling,
and as they say, while the cat's away. Should I go on?"

She refastened her coat and glared at him. "Fuck you, Jake."

"John."

"Whatever. Go back to your fucking boyfriend. I should have known you were queer the moment I
laid eyes on you."

Queer. It was a word he'd heard all his life, one he'd heard applied to his sister almost daily when he
was a teenager. And now it applied to him. Damn, it really did.

She'd meant it as an insult, but the effect on him was somehow the opposite. It emboldened him.
Yes, he was queer. It was part of who he was and always had been, though he'd tried very hard to
ignore it until recently. He smiled, almost laughed, and she stared at him as if he'd gone mad.

"If you have a problem with me being queer, the door is right there. But I'll tell you this." He took
the tail of her scarf in his hand and tugged her close. "You have no idea what you're missing."

She glared at him and jerked her scarf out of his grasp. He shrugged and took a step back, watched
her open the door and walk through it, her nose in the air.

Well, then. He closed the door and leaned back against it, and exhaled. That was… Enlightening.
Frightening. And rather damn funny, actually. He grinned, already thinking about what he would tell
Sherlock.

His heart pounded in his chest at the thought. They didn't have a commitment outside the club. There
weren't any rules. Hell, they weren't even a couple by any standard definition, so it hardly made
sense to broach the subject of exclusivity. And what did exclusivity even mean in this context? We
can have sex with other people, but only in the other's presence -- perhaps. But could he bear to see
Sherlock with someone else when John couldn't have him for himself?

The memory of Sherlock kissing Ryan flooded his mind. It had made him jealous, yes, irrationally
so. He had no right to be jealous of a single kiss after all the sex he'd had himself, but yet he was. In
fact, he was still angry that Sherlock hadn't chosen him; even now he felt a stab of nearly physical
pain at that thought.

If he'd had sex with Alexa, would Sherlock have been jealous? Angry? Ambivalent? He wasn't sure
which one he would prefer.

There were two paper cups marked "John" at the bar and he picked them up as he left. He'd take
them home and they would have a talk over coffee. They needed to talk about this, and he needed to
do it now, before he lost his nerve.

His heart began to pound as he reached 221B; by the time he'd climbed the stairs to the flat he was
almost shaking. He pushed the door open and looked around, but the flat seemed empty. He set the
coffees on the kitchen table and pulled off his coat.

"Sherlock?"

There was no response. He wasn't there. John exhaled and tried to calm himself down. All right,
then. He had time to think about this, to plan what he would say. That was good.
His phone buzzed; he pulled it from a pocket to glance at the screen.

_Crime scene. Come immediately._ - _SH_

John frowned at the phone, his mind spinning. A case? They hadn't had a case in a month. And where the hell was this crime scene?

He texted back _Where?_ and put his coat on again, already heading out the door.

By the time Sherlock texted the address, John's mind was spinning. Lestrade must have called, and it would have taken something big to distract Sherlock from the whole sex experiment thing. But the fact that he was suddenly distractible at all was unsettling. Sooner or later Sherlock was going to get bored with sex, and then where would John be?

The taxi let him out at the address Sherlock had sent and John crossed the street to the taped-off crime scene. The staff sergeant on duty took one look at him and waved him through, apparently recognizing him on sight.

"They're through there," he said, gesturing to an alleyway between two residential buildings.

John walked in the direction indicated and saw a small group gathered around what was clearly a body on the ground. He drew closer and the crowd parted. Sherlock was crouched next to the victim's head, studying her face intently. He stood and walked around the body, his coat swirling around him as he moved.

John didn't see the half-dozen police officers or Greg Lestrade looking at him, nodding in greeting. He barely registered the body of a young woman lying twisted on the ground. All he could see was Sherlock, as if he wore blinders that filtered out everything else. He stood and stared, taking in every detail: the way he moved, the way his hair fell into his eyes when he leaned forward, the way he clasped his hands together.

_Oh, God._

John felt a strange sense of foreboding.

Sherlock looked up and saw him standing there, and he smiled. The universe condensed down to the two of them in that alley; nothing else even registered. All he could see was Sherlock. John knew he was staring back at him, possibly gaping like an idiot, but there was nothing else he could do.

He was in love with Sherlock.

_Oh, God._

"John?" Sherlock asked at last. The expression of concern on his face clearly said _Are you all right?_

"I… wow." John looked away, ran a hand over his face. Shit, he had to pull himself together. "Sorry, just… right, how can I help?"

Sherlock waved him over and John did his best to ignore the pointed stares of the police officers as he passed. He crouched next to the body on the ground and tried to focus his attention on the fact that a young woman was lying here dead.

She was young, sixteen at the most, with long blond hair that fanned out beneath her head on the pavement. Her pale eyes stared up at the afternoon sky and her limbs were strewn about her unnaturally. Bruises at her throat indicated strangulation was a likely cause of death, though John had learned not to leap to conclusions in the last year. Her clothes were stylish and neat, and she looked like a completely normal teenager. Perhaps she'd been on her way to meet friends for a film or a cup
of coffee.

He forced himself to stare at her face. Had a few things in his life gone differently, he could have a
daughter this age. Her parents were out there somewhere now, perhaps unaware that their little girl
was lying dead in this alleyway, a group of strangers gathered around.

Shit, how could he be so wrapped up in himself right now? This was far more important.

"What do we know?" he asked.

"Not much," Greg said, crouching next to him. "No identification on her, and her likeness hasn't yet
shown up in any missing persons databases. No one has reported anyone missing that meets her
description."

"It may be a bit early for that yet," John said. "She's only been dead a few hours. She may have
skived off school and got herself in a bit of trouble. Her parents won't know she's missing until she
doesn't turn up tonight."

"But there's something more," Sherlock said, and turned the body sideways. He tugged at the
waistband of her jeans to reveal a strange mark on her hip, a series of lines and curves that almost
looked tree-like.

John touched the mark; the skin there was blistered and raised. His fingers recoiled almost
immediately. "Shit, it's a brand. Judging by the state of the scar tissue, this was done to her several
years ago. God, who brands people?"

"Who indeed?" Sherlock asked. John could tell by the sound of his voice that he was struggling not
to grin. He loved this sort of thing. "And the others' marks were identical?"

John's head popped up at that. "What others?"

"There were two others," Greg replied. "A week ago we found a young man, mid-20s, had also
been strangled. He had this same mark in the same spot. Four days before that we found a boy,
approximately 14, exactly the same. All the bodies were dumped in residential areas, found by
people walking by. No one saw a car or heard anything."

"So this is a serial killer?" John's eyes shot to Sherlock immediately.

"Perhaps," Sherlock replied. "But I'll need to think on it some more. And I'll need to see the other
bodies."

"Too late for that," Greg replied. "They're already in long-term storage. You'll have to make do with
the photos in the file."

Sherlock's face twisted in that way that generally meant he was about to have a tantrum.

"Oh, don't start with me," Greg snapped. "If you'd come last week when I first called, you could
have seen the bodies for yourself. Who knows, if you had done maybe this girl would still be alive."

"If the Yard wasn't full of utter imbeciles, none of them would have died, would they?" Sherlock
retorted.

"Okay, enough!" John said, glaring at both of them. "What do you mean, you called last week?"

Greg's glare was still focused on Sherlock. "I called and asked him to help. He said you two were
busy with something more important."

John turned to gape at Sherlock, who immediately began inspecting the brand on the girl's hip very closely. *God dammit, Sherlock.*

He had to close his eyes for a moment, take a deep breath. "Well, we're here now." He looked back at Greg and attempted a smile, but was sure it came across as more of a grimace. He did *not* need to think very hard about this right now; he'd drive himself mad. "And the photos will do, thank you very much."

Greg nodded. "I'll get them to you as soon as possible." There was something in his expression that John hadn't seen before, something far too much like sympathy.

John looked away, forced his gaze back to the body. "What else?"

Sherlock launched into a tirade of facts and deductions at that, and John had to force himself to focus. He was used to having to perform under this sort of pressure, wracked with fear and emotion; it had once been a regular feature of his life. But this felt different, so much more painful and personal. He wasn't sure how to navigate it. He'd always been able to erect a wall around his heart before, but Sherlock had knocked it down, had stormed right through it before John had even realized it happened.

How had he fallen in love with this man? Even if he set aside the obviously shocking fact that Sherlock was a *man*, he was also a borderline sociopath, so brilliant he could be incredibly stupid, and so self-centered he would turn into a spoiled child when the world didn't turn exactly the way he wanted. What the hell was wrong with John that *this* was the person he'd fallen for?

He wasn't even sure Sherlock was capable of loving him back. *Fuck."

"John?" He looked up to see both Sherlock and Greg staring at him with equal expressions of concern.

"Sorry," he said, scrubbing at his forehead with one hand. "I'll catch up, I promise."

Sherlock stood, fingers pressing together. "I have an idea of where to start, but it's best I go alone. John, I've already emailed you a photo of that scar. I want you to get online and see what you can find out. Lestrade, I want those photos and anything else you've got." With a snap, he pulled off the nitrile gloves he'd been wearing, turned up the collar of his coat, and strode out of the alley.

John rose to his feet and watched him go, feeling a twinge in his chest that he didn't want to examine too closely.

Fucking hell. He had no idea what to expect after this. None at all.

[End of part 6]

Chapter End Notes

I usually prefer to write about real locations I’ve been in, but I couldn't find out much about the layout of the particular Starbucks on Baker Street that was a setting for one scene. I took some liberties with that bit, and hopefully it won't throw you off if you've actually been there. :-(
Art for this chapter by Headless Girl [here](#).
John watched the figure of Sherlock disappear around the corner of the building. It was a moment more before he could tear his eyes from the spot where he'd vanished from sight. Fuck it all -- why did this have to be so hard? What was wrong with him?

"So, what's new with you?" He turned to see Greg standing next to him, also staring down at the end of the alley. "Beyond the obvious, I suppose."

John felt the blood drain from his face. "The obvious?" God, it wasn't obvious, was it?

"Well, that Sherlock is being a prick."

_Breathe._ "That's hardly new."

Greg smiled. "Yeah, I suppose not." He turned to look at the crime scene behind them. "The lads have a bit more to do here. It's technically Wilson's case; he just brought me in to deal with Sherlock."

"Officially his handler now, are you?"

"Well, I wouldn't want to step on your toes." Greg winked.

"I could use a break from it now and again." Did he sound bitter? Probably.

"The paperwork can wait until tomorrow. There's a pub a few streets over. Fancy a pint?"

John sighed. "I'd love to, but you heard him. I've got to get to work on this--" He held up his phone. "--symbol brand… thingy."

"Since when do you jump when Sherlock orders you about?"

John felt his cheeks heat at that. "I don't _jump_. I just… you know how he is."
Greg shoved his hands in his pockets. "You'd best get to it then, seeing as the internet closes in an hour or so."

John smiled despite himself. "You know, I think I would like a pint, actually."

Greg smiled. "Give me a few minutes to wrap things up here."

*****

"It's not the cheating that gets me, mind." Greg paused to drain his glass and then signaled the barman for another. "It's the dishonesty of the whole thing. We've been married for a decade and I don't mind that she wants to get a bit on the side. As long as I knew it was only sex and that she still loved me at the end of the day, I'd be fine with it." He shook his head and glanced over at John. "That probably sounds completely fucking twisted."

"Actually, it sounds rather reasonable."

"It's just nice to have someone to come home to, you know? Well yes, you know."

"I suppose I do."

"Let me get this round."

"Thanks. What about you?"

"What about me?"

"Sherlock really didn't tell you I'd called last week?"

"No." John sipped his beer.

"He's a right piece of work. I honestly don't know what you see in him."

"Nor do I, most of the time."

"He must be fucking hard to live with."

"Absolutely."

"He is good-looking, though; I'll give you that."

"God, he is," John said, smiling. "It almost makes up for all the shit he--" He stopped, realizing he'd fallen right into a trap. He sighed and turned to look at Greg.

Greg grinned at him. "He must be a lunatic in bed. God, I can't imagine."

John cringed. "Is it that fucking obvious?"

"It's been obvious for a long time, John."

"Well, to be fair, there was nothing going on until fairly recently."

Greg's face lit up. "Brilliant. I might win the pool."

John groaned. "Oh, God, don't tell me--"

"I had my money on a year. Some of the lads thought you two were shagging right off, but I reckoned you wouldn't give it up so quickly."
John's face was burning. "Please tell me you're taking the piss."

"I'm not," he said, and his voice was kind. "And don't think anyone at the Yard thinks less of you for it. Quite the opposite, in fact."

"How so?"

"Most of those men have known Sherlock for years. And trust me, we all prefer the After John version to the Before John one."

John snorted. "So everyone thinks I've settled him down or something?"

"We don't think it; we know it. You've no idea what he was like."

"I think I probably do."

"Oh, but he was so much worse before you came along. Everyone hated him then."

"Everyone hates him now."

"No, they tolerate him now."

Greg paused to sip his beer and then set it on the bar and turned towards John, his expression serious. "I've never told you this, but one night three years ago I pulled him out of the gutter, strung out on God knows what. He'd been banned from the lab at Bart's for doing something foul, can't remember what now. And he hit bottom so fucking fast, it was unbelievable. He'd been missing for a week, and of course he'd managed to hide from his brother completely. I was able to keep him from being charged, though I had to pull some strings. Mycroft got him into some facility to clean up."

"Shit."

John stared at him, feeling the blood drain from his face. He knew it had been bad in the past, but no one had ever told him how bad. And he'd never asked, come to think of it.

"I heard he drove the rehab staff mad."

John rolled his eyes. "I can imagine."

"And then he somehow got himself back into Bart's. I think Molly had something to do with that, poor girl. He was still just as much of a prick as he'd ever been, but I think people were afraid of what would happen to him otherwise, if he didn't have something constructive to do with all that intelligence of his."

"And you think I changed all of that?"

"I don't think it. I know it. Everyone knows it. Even the ones who didn't know him before, they see the way he looks at you."

John sighed. He wanted that to be true. God, he wanted it so fucking badly.

Greg leaned in and lowered his voice. "So, what is sex with Sherlock like?"

John gave him an incredulous look. "You aren't seriously asking for details?"

"Oh, God no. Just… generally speaking."

John's lips twisted a bit as he considered how to respond. "It's weirder than you can possibly imagine," he said after a moment. It wasn't far from the truth.
"You might be surprised. I've got quite a vivid imagination." He winked at John and drained his beer.

John exhaled. "Oh God, I've just come out to you, haven't I?"

"More or less."

There were other people he ought to tell: his sister for one. Maybe Stamford. Come to think of it, there weren't many people he wanted to tell that didn't already know. And of course, it might all be over just as quickly as it had started. Then what would he do? Get on with his life, he supposed. One benefit to being bisexual was that there were more potential people he could date, perhaps.

Could he ever bring home a male lover with Sherlock in the flat? He felt a twinge in his chest at that and his smile faded a bit.

Greg plucked one of the full glasses from the bar. "You follow cricket?"

"Sometimes. Yeah."

He launched into a lengthy diatribe about the recent poor performance of his favorite team, and John leaned against the bar to listen. God, it felt good to have a conversation with someone who wasn't Sherlock. He needed to do this more often.

*****

John opened his eyes. It was morning and he was on the sofa. He'd fallen asleep with his now-repaired computer on the table next to him, looking at the screen sideways toward the end of the night. He squinted at the table to see that the computer had been shut down and closed. A blanket had been draped over him as well.

That was a level of thoughtfulness he wouldn't have been able to imagine from Sherlock not so long ago; it made something like hope blossom inside him. He tugged the blanket more tightly around him and smiled.

He hadn't heard Sherlock come in last night. The flat was still empty when he'd staggered up, properly pissed for the first time in weeks. He had a vague memory of singing some club anthem he didn't know the words to with half the pub cheering him on, Jesus fuck. He should go drinking with Greg more often.

He pushed himself to sitting and winced, though honestly he deserved to feel worse than he did. Shave, shower, and some coffee and he'd probably feel better.

He stumbled to the bathroom and got undressed. The sound of the shower reminded him that he'd actually fallen asleep watching porn -- which was a sad state of affairs, honestly. Sherlock had probably had a laugh at that, especially since John was watching gay porn towards the end, having decided to throw himself into this thing fully. Whatever this thing was. And there'd been one with two blokes in a shower taking turns sucking each other off, and now he was thinking about it again, wasn't he?

Well, damn.

It didn't take long to jerk off. The images in his head had nothing to do with barely-legal and weirdly hairless eastern European boys showering together, but instead were rather focused on his own sexually distant and utterly frustrating flatmate. He was almost angry by the time he came, which didn't make him feel any better. In fact, it made him feel worse.
He and Sherlock needed to talk, but the more time passed, the more difficult it was going to be, and the longer the list of things they needed to talk about grew. There was something fairly critical at the top of the agenda, though, and he needed to get it over with.

He didn't have any clean clothes to change into, but one of Sherlock's dressing gowns was hanging on the back of the door, so he appropriated it. It was long on him and he had to roll the sleeves up a bit, but it would do.

Sherlock was sitting on the sofa when he emerged from the bathroom. He was still in his pyjamas and was staring at his laptop with an expression of concentration on his face. He didn't look up, but John hadn't expected him to do.

John headed to the kitchen to make coffee, trying to work out the best way to broach the subject. He had to get Sherlock's attention first, of course, which was no small matter in the middle of a case. Coffee cup in hand, he picked up the newspaper he hadn't managed to read the day before and sat in a chair opposite Sherlock. He flipped through it for a solid minute before finally working up the nerve to speak.

"You were right."

"Yes," Sherlock replied. He didn't look up from the screen.

John sighed after a moment. "Don't you want to know what you were right about?"

"I'm right about everything. The details are insignificant."

John dropped the newspaper to the floor with a bit more force than was necessary and Sherlock finally looked up. His eyes slid over John quickly, probably only making note of the fact that John was wearing his dressing gown, but it still made John shiver.

"If you feel the need to explain, I'm happy to confirm, of course."

"Wanking is tedious," John said flatly.

Sherlock's brows knitted together. "I disagree. Lately I've found it quite enjoyable."

John's eyebrows rose. "Are you saying you were wrong?"

"No. My previous approach to masturbation was insufficient to meet my needs, it seems."

John grinned. "You're so fucking predictable sometimes."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Anyway, thank you for your assistance in that area. I'm much better at it now."

"Are you?"

"Yes. I find it clears my mind when I'm trying to focus on a problem."

"Better than a nicotine patch?"
Sherlock frowned. "Define better."

"Well, I now find it tedious and depressing." John sank into the chair and sipped his coffee.

Sherlock went back to staring at the screen of his laptop. "Are you saying you can no longer bring yourself to orgasm?"

"No, of course not. It's just… not very satisfying lately."

"And the porn didn't help?"

John winced. "I'm not talking about last night. I meant just now, in the shower."

"I tossed off while you were in the shower and I found it very satisfying."

John looked away and pressed a hand over his forehead. He'd always heard it was possible to love and hate someone simultaneously, but he'd never believed it until now.

Still, he had Sherlock's attention, which was the goal.

"I went out with Greg last night."

Sherlock's eyes flicked back up at him. "Out? Where?"

"To a pub. I had far too much to drink and we had a fantastic time. Jealous? he wanted to ask, but it was off-topic. "We talked about you."

"Oh?" His tone was far too casual.

"He told me that he found you on the street three years ago, so strung out that Mycroft sent you to rehab. He looked over at Sherlock.

Sherlock's eyes were hard, but he'd definitely gone pale. "True, he did, and probably saved my life. It's the reason I volunteer my services to the Yard."

John gave him a long look. "No, it's not."

"No, but I was planning to tell him that one day when he's really pissed off at me. Do you think it would work?"

"Not really." John paused and took a deep breath. "Anyway, it got me thinking, and I have to ask: Is the reason that you don't want to engage in sexual activity with other people that you don't know your status?"

Sherlock stared at him. "My what?"

"Your status, Sherlock. HIV."

"That's not the reason, no." He looked down at the screen again, typing furiously.

"But do you know your status?"

Sherlock paused. "I'm not concerned. There's nothing to be concerned about."

"Have you been tested since you last used?"

Sherlock's jaw clenched and he closed his eyes. "No."
"I want you to get tested, today. I'll call in a favor."

Sherlock groaned. "There isn't time for this, John. There's a case--"

"Fuck the case, Sherlock. You're going to get tested if I have to hold you down and do the draw myself."

Sherlock looked as if he wanted to argue for a moment more before something like resignation settled over his face. "Fine, all right. What about you?"

"It's been two years since I was tested. But if you like I'll do it with you."

Sherlock shrugged, still focused on the screen. "Anything else?" His voice was tight.

One victory for the morning would have to be enough. "No, that's all. I'm going to get dressed and make a few calls. And don't go anywhere. I want your arse on that sofa when I come back down."

Sherlock rolled his eyes, but said nothing.

John stood and left the room, feeling simultaneously relieved and more anxious. God, three days of celibacy were going to kill him. That was assuming they would go back to the club on Thursday, of course -- and that seemed a rather big assumption at the moment.

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"John, a word?" Sarah smiled at him and gestured toward her office. "Sherlock, nice to see you again."

Sherlock smiled tightly and returned his attention to his phone.

John followed her and she closed the door behind them.

"Getting tested together? How romantic."

He struggled not to roll his eyes. "It's not what you think."

She smirked at him. "Oh, come on, John. I've seen that one coming for ages."

"I'm here for moral support. I thought he'd be more willing if I did it as well."

"You're honestly telling me there's nothing going on between you two?"

He paused and pursed his lips. "I didn't say that."

She smiled. "Right. Anyway, I wanted to tell you that I should be able to expedite this. I can get results back to you by Thursday morning, maybe even late tomorrow."

He exhaled. "That's perfect, thank you."

"I'm happy for you, you know."

His smile was tight. "Well, that makes one of us."

She raised her eyebrows, but apparently decided to leave it alone. "Jodi will call you back to do the draw in a few minutes. I'll be in touch soon." She opened the door and smiled.

"It's nice to see you again. I do appreciate it." He kissed her on the cheek and walked back out to
wait with Sherlock.

Sherlock frowned at him as he sat. "What was that about?"

"I told you I'd called in a favor."

Sherlock's jaw clenched, almost as if there was something else he wanted to say. He stared at the door to Sarah's office for a moment and then looked at his phone again.

John had to struggle not to smile. That was the closest thing to jealousy he'd ever seen on Sherlock's face. He had a weird impulse to lean into him, to take his hand or do something to reassure him. Better to let him squirm, though. At least for now.

Of course, he might only be seeing what he so desperately wanted to see. He frowned.

"Sherlock Holmes?" They both looked up to see Jodi smiling at them from an open doorway. "Right this way, please."

John watched him disappear through the doorway. He wasn't exactly worried about the outcome of this test; it was more for peace of mind than anything else. But he'd definitely feel better when those results were in.

Fifteen minutes later they left the surgery with matching plasters on their arms.

"I need you to go to Scotland Yard and see if you can get those pictures and anything else they've got."

John frowned. "Greg said last night that they'd send it over."

"And then the two of you proceeded to get spectacularly pissed. Did you do the research I asked you to do last night?"

"No."

"Exactly. He'll have forgotten to send the file, which is why you need to go and fetch it for us."

"What are you going to do?"

Sherlock gave him a sidelong glance. "I'm going to go think for a bit. See you at home."

Of course. Though it was just as well that Sherlock didn't come along. It was bad enough under normal circumstances, but now that he knew everyone thought they were shagging, John probably couldn't have stood it anyway.

He winced. At some point he was going to have to tell Sherlock that. Or perhaps not: the man had been oblivious to all the innuendo that surrounded them in the last year as it was. What was a bit more?

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Sherlock spent much of the day reclining on the sofa in hard-core thinking mode, and John decided it was best to leave him alone. He knew that attempting to feed him was pointless, but the cup of coffee he placed on the floor next to the sofa was empty an hour later, so he felt a small bit of accomplishment there.

John spread the photos he'd brought back from the Yard on the kitchen table and studied them yet
again. When he'd first returned, Sherlock had given them a cursory glance, nodded, and headed for
the sofa without a word. John knew better than to ask what he saw in them; instead he focused on
the task Sherlock had set him the day before: to try to find a meaning behind the symbolism of the
brand.

It wasn't until later that evening when he was out picking up a takeaway that he finally had an idea of
what might be going on. He rushed home to tell Sherlock, but the flat was empty. He spent the next
two hours huddled over his laptop, searching.

"I think I've got something," he said the moment Sherlock walked through the door.

"Have you?" Sherlock sounded skeptical, but John didn't actually care. He'd figured it out this time,
he was certain. Sherlock pulled his coat off and crossed to stand behind John, peering down at the
screen.

"It's a cult of some sort. Look at these images." He opened one tab after another showing pictures of
people wearing markings very similar to the ones on the victims. "These are all from a religious
group that calls itself 'The Lightness'. They're mostly active in America, it seems, but there are some
message forums that indicate there are members in the UK as well. No history of violence, though.
They're mostly into hallucinogenic drugs from what I can gather, but they might have enemies,
someone who's killing off their members."

"Interesting hypothesis," Sherlock said, and John winced at the condescension dripping from his
tone. "Quite clever, actually."

John sighed. "But wrong?"

"Completely wrong." Sherlock's hands fell to his shoulders and squeezed.

"And I take it you've got it all worked out then?"

"First, even though most of those images of the cultists are fairly low-resolution, the lines are far too
distinct to be the result of branding. They're most likely tattoos. Second, it's not quite the same
design, though it's close. That's probably a coincidence; branching lines are fairly common imagery
for certain kinds of religious groups. Third, those tattoos are located on a variety of body parts:
ankles, shoulders, arms. They're meant to be seen, a statement to show the person is a member of the
group. But on our victims, those marks are on the hip, nearly on the buttocks."

"So the brands were supposed to be hidden."

Sherlock's fingers stroked the back of John's neck almost absenty and John closed his eyes. "Not
only hidden. Think about it: under what circumstances would a brand on a person's buttocks be most
visible?"

"When they're naked?" His voice hitched a bit on the last word, to his embarrassment.

"Exactly. And when are people naked?" His hands slid down over John's chest and he leaned into
him a bit, his stomach pressing against John's shoulders now.

John let his head fall back against Sherlock's chest. "Well, when they're having sex, for one thing.
But two of our victims were kids, so that can't--" He sat straight up and turned to look at Sherlock.
"Oh, God."

Sherlock nodded. "Who brands people, John? Who brands them on the backside as if they were
cattle?"
John closed his eyes. "Shit. This is a human trafficking ring we're looking at, isn't it?"

"Precisely. There's a reason none of these victims were reported missing."

"Because they went missing a long time ago, probably from somewhere else."

"Eastern Europe, Russia, perhaps from institutions who were struggling to make ends meet and willing to accept bribes for shady adoptions."

John rummaged through the stacks of paper on the table and found the close-up shots of the brands. "These are old scars. They were branded as very young children."

"How young?"

"Four, maybe five years old." John turned to look at Sherlock again. "How long have you known?"

"I suspected it from the start, but I've only just tonight confirmed it."

John clenched his jaw. "If you'd told me, I could have helped. It would have given me a place to start my searching. Instead you sent me on a wild goose chase for two fucking days."

"It was only one day. And you needed a distraction."

John gaped at him. "I needed a distraction? What the hell does that mean?"

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Oh honestly, John. You had me tested for HIV this morning."

"For very good reason, and you know it."

"Besides, I'm always hopeful you'll work it out on your own one day."

"How gracious of you." John turned back to the computer screen. It had been a month since they'd been John-and-Sherlock-on-a-Case, rather than John-and-Sherlock-in-a-Sex-Club. He'd almost forgotten how infuriating Sherlock could be when he was being brilliant. There was silence behind him, and John could imagine the frown on Sherlock's face as he worked out what it was he'd said to piss John off so spectacularly. "You said you confirmed it."

"Yes," Sherlock replied, and as if on cue, the door buzzer sounded. "Put the kettle on, John. Our guest has arrived."

John winced; he would never again hear those words and not immediately think of the club. Damn it.

A minute later Sherlock returned with a young woman trailing behind him. She was a girl really, and the longer John looked at her, the younger she seemed. Her brown hair was tangled and her face was dirty; her clothes were mismatched and torn. She looked somewhat familiar, though, perhaps one of the Homeless Network that John had encountered before.

Her eyes narrowed when she saw John and she glanced around the flat suspiciously, arms folded across her chest.

"Hello," John ventured, smiling in a way he hoped was kind. He looked at Sherlock and nodded toward the sofa.

Sherlock smiled at her. "This is John. We want to ask you some questions. Won't you have a seat?"

"I know what you want to ask about," she said, her eyes falling to the floor. "But that's all I'm doing,
Sherlock's forehead furrowed in confusion. "All right."

John sighed. "Would you like something to eat?"

She looked up at that and nodded.

"I'll be right back," John said. He rummaged in the kitchen and returned several minutes later with some biscuits and cups for tea.

The girl was sitting on one end of the sofa, her hands clasped together. A tattered backpack was on the floor by her feet. She looked up at John with a carefully blank expression, but it was clear she was nervous. She snatched the biscuits from the plate he held and had devoured them before he'd finished pouring tea. He went back for more; he still hadn't done the shopping and they didn't have much in the way of food at the moment.

"Do you know these people?" he heard Sherlock ask.

He returned to see her staring at the photos of the victims. Her eyes were wide with shock and her face had gone pale, making the dirt stand out against her skin even more.

John swore under his breath and crossed to sit near her on the sofa. It was completely typical Sherlock to jump right in that way, with no regard for people's feelings. He shot a glare at him, but only got a look of confusion in return.

"What's your name?" John asked her.

"Mandy," she said, her eyes still fixed on the picture she held. "His name was Karl. I knew him."

"What can you tell us about him?"

She bit her lip, as if choosing her words carefully. "He was trying to help. He knew they would come after him, but he didn't care."

"Who was he helping?" Sherlock asked, leaning forward in his chair. "And who are they?"

She looked up at him. "The others, the kids. The men who--"

"What men? You must be more specific."

"I don't…" She looked down at the photo again.

John saw Sherlock's jaw clench -- he was getting frustrated. Time to step in before he scared this poor girl off completely. John took the stack of photos from her hand and flipped through them.

"What can you tell us about this mark?" He held up one of the photos showing a close-up of the brand.

She stared at the photo for a moment and then stood. Sherlock and John exchanged a look -- if she was about to walk out John wasn't sure what they'd do. But instead she pulled her three layers of shirts up, pushed down the waistband of her worn track bottoms, and turned to show them a matching mark on her hip.

She sat down again and pulled her knees to her chest, her eyes focused on the floor in front of her. "I don't remember getting it. I don't remember anything but the trade. I don't even know how old I am
or where I come from. Some of the kids remember, but I don't."

John glanced over at Sherlock to see his forehead furrowed, his expression now torn between frustration and sympathy. He always hated it when clients told their life stories. Sherlock didn't think in terms of personal narratives; his brain just didn't work that way. He never understood why people felt the need to put important information in context before stating it. But the sympathy here was new, and that was striking. John turned his attention back to Mandy.

"And the trade?"

"Sex." She blinked at him.

"I'd assumed. What was your life like, though?"

"They moved us around a lot. There's a network of houses. Some were nice, others not. They usually kept us in groups of four or five. Sometimes we'd stay with the same kids for a long time and start to feel like a proper family, and then they'd split us up again. The people who looked after us were nice enough. Well, except that they took what they wanted when they wanted it."

John sighed and leaned forward on his elbows, looking away from her to give her space. He really didn't want to hear any of this, but the fact that it had been her life was fairly horrifying.

"Usually the clients would come to us. There were rooms where they'd take us, and we had to do whatever they wanted. We weren't allowed to cry, even if they hurt us. Crying would get you a beating, but if you were good you'd get lots of sweets after."

John pressed his lips together for a moment before continuing. "When did it stop? I mean, you're living on the street now, so did you run away or did Karl help you escape?"

"The clients like the little ones the most. You aren't as valuable the older you get. Sometimes the older kids would get sent off to work in other places, other countries. I didn't want to be sent away. There were others who'd run away and were living on their own. Karl was one of them. He helped people."

"How did he help?" John asked.

"He could get you out with no one seeing. He had safe places you could stay for a bit, though we were always running. The ones they caught ended up dead, or worse." She broke off, chewed her lower lip for a moment. "So we ran a lot. Being on the street was easier after a while. Nobody asks questions there. Nobody sees you."

No one except Sherlock.

"But they finally got him, didn't they? Along with a few others." John sorted through the photographs and handed her shots of the other two victims.

She nodded. "This was James. He was really sweet. I hadn't seen him for a while, but I heard they got him. And this--" She looked at the other photo and froze, her eyes wide.

"Who is it?" John asked after a moment.

"Steffi." Her voice sounded incredibly hollow. "She was a friend. We escaped together. When did this happen?"

"Yesterday."
Mandy's eyes closed for a moment, but she didn't cry. Her face was blank, as if she was utterly unable to express emotion. "When I didn't see her last night, I wondered if… They've said they'll kill us all, you see. To show the others that you can't really escape. I suppose I'm next."

John's eyes flicked to Sherlock's again.

"Will you tell the police what you've told us?" Sherlock asked. She nodded and Sherlock stood, already pulling his phone from his pocket. He tapped out a number with his thumb and pressed it to his ear while walking into his bedroom. "Lestrade, it's Sherlock. Can you… Of course I know the time. This is important." He closed the door behind him and his voice became muffled.

"You're going to be safe," John said. "You're going to be fine."

Her eyes flicked up at him and back to the floor again. She didn't believe him. But then, why should she?

He poured her a cup of tea.

A minute later the door to Sherlock's bedroom flew open and banged against the opposite wall. "Lestrade can't come until morning. Family thing, apparently." The sneer on the word family showed precisely what Sherlock thought of that.

"You can stay here tonight," John said to Mandy. "You'll be safe here."

Mandy's face went stony and she looked away. "I can't. I'll find a place, I know a bloke who's got room. I can take care of myself."

"They want to kill you. You're not going anywhere."

Sherlock crossed to the sofa and stared down at her. She looked back and forth between them, her face unreadable. Her hand, though, was trembling. Oh. She'd been in this position before, John realized, and there had been expectations. He could hardly blame her for not trusting the two of them.

He held a hand out to Sherlock. Sherlock gave him an odd look, and John shot him back one that said as clearly as possible take my fucking hand, you twat. Sherlock crossed to him and took his hand, let John pull him close. John wound an arm around his hips and leaned against him.

"Darling, you've nothing to worry about here, all right?"

Sherlock caught on at that and threaded his fingers into John's hair. John looked up and Sherlock looked down at him, smiled affectionately, and petted John's head. John smiled up at him and just for a moment let himself imagine it was real, that Sherlock really did love him back. If Mandy hadn't been there, John would have pulled him down onto the sofa and kissed him.

He looked back at Mandy, whose cheeks had tinted a bit. She gave him a small smile and nodded.

"You can have a shower if you like. You'll sleep in there." He gestured to Sherlock's room and felt Sherlock tense against him. He only barely suppressed a smirk.

She nodded again. John pushed Sherlock away with great reluctance, though he allowed himself a lingering touch at the small of Sherlock's back as he stood and excused himself to go upstairs. He quickly made his bed and then fired off a text to Greg:
She's a victim of sexual abuse. Bring a female officer with you in the morning, if possible.

He headed back down with a set of pyjamas.

"We're about the same height, aren't we?" She stood and yes, they were almost exactly the same height. He handed her the pyjamas. "These should fit you, more or less. Bathroom is over there. If you'd like a shower, feel free. I'll get you a towel."

She nodded and headed toward the bathroom. John handed her a towel through the doorway and then heard the lock click the moment the door closed again.

"I suppose I'm to sleep on the sofa, then?" Sherlock said.

"No," John said, crossing to the desk in the corner. "You'll sleep in my room." He opened the box he kept the Sig in and pulled out supplies to clean it. Shit, it had been a while since he'd even fired the thing.

"In your room?" Sherlock asked. John turned to see a stunned expression on his face.

"Yes. I'll take the sofa."

"That's hardly necessary. I'm perfectly fine on the sofa."

John stepped closer to him. "The killers may know she's here tonight, and they want her dead. Someone needs to keep watch."

"And you don't think I can do that?"

"Tell me, Sherlock, how many times in your life have you slept with a gun next to your head, just in case you were ambushed during the night?"

Sherlock's jaw clenched. "None."

"Exactly. This is my area. I'll take the sofa and keep watch, and you will sleep in my room."

"Fine." Sherlock looked adorably annoyed, and it was all John could do not to hug him. God help him, he loved this man. So fucking much.

"Toss off on my sheets and I'll kill you."

Sherlock almost laughed at that, and John grinned.

*****

The night was quiet, to John's relief. There wasn't so much as a squeak on the stairs, and he actually managed a few hours' sleep. Sherlock came down early and made coffee, then sat on the other end of the sofa, lifting John's feet up and placing them in his lap. John flexed his toes and Sherlock's hand stroked his bare foot. John pretended to be asleep as long as he could, but when Sherlock's gentle strokes turned to a firm footrub, he groaned. God, Sherlock was fucking good with his hands. That surprised him, somehow.

"Morning," he grumbled. Sherlock pulled his hand away and John whimpered. "Don't you dare stop." The hand returned and John sighed. "Feels good."

"Did you sleep?"
John smiled; concern was such a rare thing to get from Sherlock, and he'd had it in spades lately. He was going to be spoiled soon. "A bit. You?"

"Yes. Your bed is surprisingly comfortable."

"You're welcome to sleep there whenever you want."

Shit, did he say that out loud? He went as still as possible, pretending he'd gone back to sleep. Sherlock’s hands stilled for a moment before continuing again.

John actually did drift off again after that, his consciousness slipping into a dream in which Sherlock spooned against him on the sofa and pressed his erection against John's arse. In the dream John shimmied his pyjama bottoms down and pressed back against him, and Sherlock rocked his hips and—

"John."

John opened his eyes. God, he hoped he hadn't actually moved during that dream.

Sherlock squeezed his foot. "She's awake."

"Right," John said, pushing himself to sitting, realizing almost immediately that he had an erection. He gathered the blanket over his lap. "I'll just… I need to sit here and wake up for a moment, actually. How much coffee did you make?"

Sherlock smirked at him. "Are you suddenly incapable of fetching it for yourself?"

John glared at him. "There's a teenaged girl in the house, for fuck's sake. I'm not parading around in front of her with a--"

Said teenaged girl emerged from the bathroom wearing John's pyjamas. She smiled tightly at them and then disappeared into Sherlock's bedroom once again.

"If you need to take care of that, the bathroom appears to be free."

"Oh, shut up."

Twenty minutes later they were all dressed and sitting at the table, eating toast and scrambled eggs in silence. The buzzer sounded, and John and Sherlock exchanged a glance.

"That'll be Lestrade," Sherlock said, popping up to go open the door.

"Are you all right?" John asked Mandy when he was out of earshot.

She stared at her now-empty plate. "What's to become of me?"

He tried to smile. "Something good."

He heard several sets of feet coming up the stairs and turned to look, thinking, Please not Donovan. Happily, Greg had brought Amy Kempton, one of the officers everyone kept referring to in hushed tones as a "rising star". She smiled tightly at John in greeting.

God, he was never going to live down that time he'd chatted her up in a bar with her husband sitting right beside her. He'd sworn Greg had said she was single.

He introduced the two of them to Mandy and they all moved to sit in the parlor while she recounted
her story. Greg took notes and let Amy ask most of the questions. Mandy kept her focus on Amy almost the entire time, and John was relieved his instinct had been correct there, and also that Greg had understood the situation from just the one text.

She spoke more about her life and the myriad ways she'd been abused, and John found it no easier to listen than it had been the night before. This was the sort of thing that happened in fiction; the idea that there were real people, children, forced to live this way was hard to fathom.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see Sherlock standing next to him, leaning against the chair John was sitting in. He'd been unusually quiet during this entire meeting; in fact, he'd almost stayed on the periphery. John looked up and gave him a tight smile, and Sherlock returned it, giving his shoulder a squeeze before withdrawing his hand again.

John let himself be distracted by hope for just a moment. These touches in the last two days were astonishing in so many ways. Sherlock had never enjoyed being touched as far as John knew. His displays of affection were rare and limited to Mrs. Hudson, for the most part. John didn't know what it meant, but he'd apparently decided to take whatever crumbs Sherlock would toss his way.

Pathetic.

"I'd like you to come down to Scotland Yard with me now," Amy said, kneeling before a shaken Mandy. "You can talk to a counselor and we'll find a safe place for you to stay. We're going to make sure no one can hurt you ever again."

Mandy looked up, her eyes suddenly hard. "You're going to catch them, aren't you?"

"We will," Greg said. It was the first time he'd spoken in what seemed like an hour. He sounded the way John felt. "That I can promise you."

"Come on, then," Amy said, and held out a hand. Mandy took it and let Amy lead her out of the flat.

"I'll be right down," Greg called after them, and then turned back to John and Sherlock. "You two coming as well?"

"Absolutely," Sherlock said, pushing off the back of the chair. He was across the room and out the door before John even managed to stand.

Greg winked at John.

"He's happy to have a case," John said. "It's been a while."

"Has it?" Greg asked. "I thought you had one last week?"

John clenched his jaw. "Ah, right. I meant a criminal case, obviously. You know how much he loves murders."

*****

"Remind me again: How did I let you talk me into this?"

It was well past midnight and John was operating on a handful of hours of sleep as it was. Yet here they were, sweeping through yet another of the cleared safe houses Mandy had told the police about. This was seriously the very, very last thing he wanted to be doing right now.

John wrinkled his nose as a large rat skittered away from the beam of his torch and disappeared into
a gaping hole in the wall. God, this place was disgusting. The faded and peeling wallpaper -- where it hadn't been peeled from the walls -- seemed to date back to the 1960s. The floors were filthy and stained with substances John didn't want to examine too closely. Rubbish, mostly junk food packages and cigarette ends, was piled everywhere, the detritus of the flat's most recent occupation. He'd seen his fair share of squalor in Afghanistan, but something about seeing it in London -- and knowing that children were living like this -- was harder to process.

John stifled a yawn. He still wasn't sure what sort of evidence they were looking for, and asking Sherlock for hints had got him nowhere.

"This was hardly my first choice," Sherlock said as he examined the stains on a tattered sofa arm. "I'd get much more useful information from questioning the children."

"Yes, well, there's a good reason they're not letting you anywhere near those children."

Sherlock turned to stare at him. "What reason?"

John winced. "Oh, God, not again."

"I resent the implication that I'm ineffective at questioning people."

"It's not an implication. It's a fact." Sherlock made a sound nearly like a snarl, and John stepped forward and pressed his face into Sherlock's shoulder with a groan. "I don't want to argue about this right now. I'm exhausted."

Sherlock's arm slid around him tentatively and patted his back. John wrapped an arm around his waist and smiled. It was almost a hug. Had Sherlock ever hugged him before? He wasn't sure. There was a brush of lips against his forehead and John stilled. He was suddenly wide awake, his heart pounding in his chest. All he had to do was tilt his head up, pull Sherlock closer, and kiss him. Sherlock's arm tightened around him. John inhaled and tried to work up his courage.

There was a sound in the next room, and they jumped apart. John headed to the open doorway and pressed his back against the wall next to the frame, gun already in his hand. He motioned for Sherlock to stay back.

Sherlock nodded, listening.

They heard two sets of footsteps and then it went silent again.

"They were here, I swear," a voice said in a hoarse whisper. "They must have left within the last few hours."

"Shit," the other hissed. "It'll be my head if we don't find them, so you'd best double-check your sources next time."

"I'm telling you, they were here this evening. I saw them with my own eyes."

"Yeah, well, maybe they saw you as well."

"They're getting smarter."

The second man made a sound of derision. "No, they're not. Half of them can barely read. No, someone is helping them. Someone--"

It grew silent again and John mouthed the word "Fuck." They had realized whoever was helping the kids could still be here. He glanced over at Sherlock, who nodded. They were ready.
The men seemed to draw closer, clearly trying to minimize the sound of their footsteps. The wooden floors were old and creaky, though, so it was virtually impossible. John raised the gun to shoulder level and shifted his weight slightly so he'd be prepared to spring forward the moment they walked though the doorway. The floor beneath his feet creaked very slightly.

Shit.

The men on the other side of the doorway stopped moving. John concentrated, listening for any sounds that might indicate they had weapons. It was eerily silent.

His mind ran quickly through half a dozen scenarios, estimating possible outcomes. Remaining hidden seemed to be their best bet for now. His heartbeat settled down after a minute. He inhaled quietly, exhaled again. If their opponents were in the same position on the other side of the wall, he could wait them out. He was incredibly fucking patient. And thankfully, Sherlock was more than happy to let John be in charge at moments like this.

"There's no one here," one of the men whispered.

"Shhh, you dolt. I know what I heard."

"Maybe they slipped out the back."

Footsteps started forward again and John smirked. These two really were idiots.

The barrel of a gun appeared through the doorway first, and John let the man walk completely through before he moved to press the barrel of the Sig against the back of the man's head.

The second man shouted in surprise and raised the gun in his hand, but Sherlock surprised him from behind the doorway and delivered a painful blow to his forearm. The gun crashed to the floor; Sherlock snatched it up and had it aimed at the man before he'd even finished his howl of pain.

"Evening, gents," John said, grinning. God, he loved this shit. "I'll take that weapon, thanks."

Two minutes later he had both men face down on the floor with their hands stretched out to the side while Sherlock phoned Lestrade.

"On their way."

"Good." He handed one of the men's guns to Sherlock and tucked the Sig into his trousers again. He was fairly certain Greg knew and looked the other way, but there was no need to invite trouble.

Fifteen minutes later the men were cuffed and led away, and Greg Lestrade shook his head at the two of them. "How did you know someone would come tonight?"

"Just a hunch." Sherlock's smile was incredibly smug.

John nearly groaned. That would have been good information to have about two hours ago. "From the conversation we overheard, it seems the organization is starting to panic a bit."

Greg nodded. "And now they know we're onto them, so they'll tighten up security."

"At least some of the kids are safe," John said.

"Mandy was able to pinpoint the locations of some of the brothels as well. We've got teams staking them out right now." He smiled tightly at them both. "We'll get them. It's only a matter of time."
John nodded. He really wanted to believe that.

"I'm sure I'll be in touch. You two should go home, get some sleep. Or something." He winked at John, who rolled his eyes and did not look at Sherlock.

"Hungry?" John asked Sherlock once the police had released them for the night.

"Starving. Thai?"

"At this hour?"

Sherlock smiled. "I know a place." John grinned and followed him down the pavement. Sherlock eating was always a good sign.

*****

Sunlight was streaming through the windows when John opened his eyes, and the scent of coffee was thick in the air. He stumbled downstairs to see Sherlock sitting in an armchair, his computer in his lap.

"Good morning," John mumbled, stretching.

"It's nearly one o'clock," Sherlock replied.

John picked up his phone on the sofa table. Sure enough, he'd slept half the day. "You texted me at four in the morning?"

"You missed the excitement. Apparently they managed to rescue five children from one of the brothels during the night."

"Fantastic."

"Little ones, from what Amy said."

John frowned. "Amy called you?"

"I called her."

"At four in the morning?"

"She was awake. She didn't actually seem all that annoyed."

John sighed. "Have we got anything to eat?"

Sherlock finally looked up from his laptop. "How can you be hungry? You ate not ten hours ago."

John rolled his eyes. "Some of us are actually human and need to eat about that often." He pulled on his coat and yawned. "I'll go shopping. Need anything?"

"No." Sherlock was already focused on the screen again.

John stared at him for a long moment. These last few days had been so strange, which was odd considering that they'd been exactly like the majority of the days he'd spent with Sherlock. He knew he shouldn't be surprised things had changed between them after the last few weeks. At least, they'd changed for John -- it wasn't clear whether that was actually true for Sherlock or not. But it was still hard to go through the day and want to touch him and kiss him, and not know if that would upset this
strange balance between them. If he fucked this up, they could never go back to the way there were before. They may not even be able to be friends at all.

He had no idea what would happen if he told Sherlock what he really wanted. But he wasn't sure he could go on like this much longer, either.

"We need milk," Sherlock said after a moment.

"Right." John sighed and walked down the stairs.

*****

He was staring blankly at a selection of crisps when his phone rang. He glanced at the screen and recognized the number instantly.

"Sarah?"

"John, hi. I've got your results. You're both non-reactive, so nothing to worry about."

He exhaled. "Fantastic."

"This particular test is accurate to ten days back, for what it's worth."

"Good to know. And thanks. I owe you one."

"How are you?"

"I'm fine, I am. How are you?"

"Good, no complaints. Busy."

"Yeah."

There was a moment of awkward silence. It summed up their entire relationship.

"How is the private investigative business… thing?"

He laughed. "Oh, surprisingly interesting."

"I imagine Sherlock keeps you tied up with work most of the time."

"Quite literally, on the good days." Oh shit, the innuendo -- did he seriously just say that?

"I'm happy for you, John." She sounded like she was smiling.

"Thanks. I mean it."

"I'll talk to you soon."

"Of course. Bye."

Well, then, that was one less thing to worry about. One less thing on a very long list.

*****

"I just spoke to Sarah," John said as he set the sack of groceries on the table.
"Non-reactive," Sherlock said.

"Yes." John didn't bother asking how he knew. There was probably something about the way John had started the conversation or had carried the fucking sack of groceries that had clued him in.

"So that was a complete waste of time."

John gritted his teeth. "Well, now you know, at least."

"I knew before."

"No, you didn't."

"I was reasonably certain."

"Since when is reasonably certain good enough for you?"

Sherlock gave him an odd look. "Since I knew for a fact that I had not engaged in any risky behavior."

"Yes, you did!"

"How do you know?" Sherlock retorted. "You didn't bother to ask; you just assumed I was shooting up heroin with a dirty needle."

John pursed his lips and looked away. That was true; he hadn't asked. He'd assumed, but it was a damn good assumption, considering. "I'm only trying to help you, Sherlock."

Sherlock's eyes narrowed. "You aren't usually this concerned about me. Is something wrong?"

John blinked at him. "I'm always concerned about you, you git. I-- I'm your friend. I'm…" He closed his eyes and inhaled. "What am I to you, Sherlock?"

"What are you going on about?"

John scrubbed at his face with his hands. "Oh, God, never mind. It doesn't matter."

Sherlock was quiet for a moment and then set his laptop aside and leaned forward on his elbows. "Lestrade seems to be under the impression we're dating."

"Aren't we?" John couldn't look at him. "How else would you characterize these last few weekends?"

"It was an experiment," Sherlock said, and John felt something wilt inside him.

"Yes, it was, wasn't it? All of it recorded there in a fucking spreadsheet. Everything we did, everything that happened. What will you do with all of that data now?"

"After last Sunday, I'm honestly not certain I want to continue."

"Fine, whatever," John said, unable to keep the pain out of his voice. He had to get out of this room, away from Sherlock. Jesus, how had he got himself in this situation?

"John, stop." Sherlock's voice had that edge to it that John's body responded to instantly. "I said I'm not certain I want to continue the experiment. I didn't say I wanted to stop… this."

Sherlock was looking at the floor in front of him. "Good. So we'll… continue."

"Tonight," John blurted. "I want to go to the club tonight. It's Thursday, isn't it?"

Sherlock's jaw clenched slightly. "Okay. Yes."

"I know we're in the middle of a case, but--"

"Lestrade made it clear he'd call when we were needed."

"Since when do you listen to Lestrade?"

Sherlock snorted. "Well, in the past I'd have ignored him completely. The alternative would have been boredom. But in this case there is a very un-boring alternative."

John shook his head, unable to keep himself from smiling. "There are murderers on the loose, and you'd really rather go to a sex club tonight and watch me fuck people?"

Sherlock considered for a moment and then looked up at him. "Yes."

John ran a hand through his hair. "That's… that's brilliant, actually."

Sherlock's lips twisted into a smile. "The murderers know we're onto them, anyway. They'll lie low for a few days. We might as well wait until they make a mistake."

"Quite sensible."

"Of course it is. Nine o'clock?"

"It's a date." Emboldened, John crossed to Sherlock and cupped his cheek with one hand, traced a thumb over his lips. "Think about what you want to see me do tonight. I'll do anything for you, you know."

Sherlock stared back at him, his face carefully blank, though his eyes were dark.

John smiled and walked away before he was tempted to do anything else. The next few hours were going to be torture as it was. He'd have a bite to eat, shower, and get his head together.

He had a feeling it was going to be a good night. He fucking needed it.

*****

[End of part 7]

Chapter End Notes

Warning for this chapter: potentially triggery mentions of child sexual abuse in the context of a case.
Choosing

Chapter Summary

Just a few more steps and everything would be all right. It would be fine. Sherlock would take care of him, would take care of everything.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Ready?" John's hands braced either side of the door frame. His stomach was in knots.

Sherlock was looking out the window onto the street below, his face striped with shadow. He turned to John and nodded.

They were silent during the cab ride and silent during the walk to the club. John felt his pulse quicken as they approached the door. Just a few more steps and everything would be all right. It would be fine. Sherlock would take care of him, would take care of everything. He wouldn't have to think about this bloody mess for a couple of hours and if he was lucky Sherlock would touch him or hold him or something, and he would enjoy the fuck out of it.

He paused when they entered the main area of the club, and smiled. This place: God he loved it. It was like an oasis in his life, a place where the rules were all different and that was okay.

Sherlock's hand pressed against his back, steering him toward the door that lead downstairs. John melted into the touch; the tension of the last few days was already leaving his body. He considered resisting for a moment, just so Sherlock would have to apply more force, maybe speak softly into his ear and make him move. But no, there would be time for that. John could pick at the sharp edges of this relationship later; at the moment he was far too excited to get started.

They stopped before the door and John took a deep breath. Anything could happen now. Sherlock would have a plan in mind, and this moment before John had even an inkling of what it might be -- it was delicious. He turned and smiled at Sherlock.

"What?" Sherlock's expression was adorably puzzled.

John grinned and took his hand, intertwined their fingers. He could do that here; that was acceptable. Sherlock wouldn't think it strange; he wouldn't pull away.

Sherlock smiled and squeezed his hand, and led him downstairs. They paused before the door to the public play area and Sherlock glanced at John once more before opening the door. They nodded at the security guard and crossed to the bar.

Sherlock ordered them drinks and John turned to scan the room. It was quieter than it had been last Saturday night, with perhaps half as many people. The ones that were there were no less enthusiastic, though. There was a couple fucking rather vigorously on the floor not far away, and just beyond them a threesome was apparently starting to form. John let his mind wander for a few seconds, imagining what might happen next. Sherlock appeared at his side again and handed him a pint glass, and John cleared his mind completely.
They drank in silence, both of them watching. John waited. This part had driven him mad early on, but now he liked the sense of anticipation that curled inside him. He liked the not knowing, the peace that came with accepting that this was out of his control, that Sherlock would take care of him.

At last Sherlock moved to stand behind him, his chest pressing into John's shoulder, and John's heart rate increased. Here we go.

Sherlock's lips brushed his ear. "I want you to choose someone. Don't approach, just return here and tell me when you've decided. I'll do the negotiating."

John nodded and drained his pint glass. He'd never chosen before; it hadn't even occurred to him that it was a possibility. Perhaps Sherlock wanted to know what John liked, to see whom he found attractive? Or maybe since he hadn't expected them to come tonight and hadn't had a chance to make plans, he was improvising.

He handed Sherlock his empty glass and wandered out into the room. He walked around the perimeter slowly, taking it all in. This was a complicated choice, really. If he chose a man, the night would likely turn out differently than if he chose a woman, or a couple. What did he want to happen tonight? He wasn't certain.

He was surprised to see a few familiar faces. A woman who looked remarkably like the woman in red latex from the first weekend was perched on the lap of a man in an alcove. He paused for a moment, wondering if he should choose her. In a way she'd started all of this for him; she'd been the one to plant the idea in his head that he might want Sherlock.

He kept walking. In another alcove he saw a young man who looked very much like Cam snogging another boy while a portly middle-aged man sat on the sofa and watched, drink in hand. Would he want to be in the middle of those two? He winced; it would probably make him feel horribly old.

He wasn't sure he liked the idea of choosing. It unsettled him; it wasn't the way it was supposed to be. Sherlock was in charge here and John liked that. He didn't want to be the one to make decisions, to decide where it was going.

He walked on, past other alcoves where people were intertwined in an eye-popping variety of ways, past others where people were talking, flirting, laughing, drinking together.

And then he realized he had walked completely around the room and was now by the entrance again. Sherlock was still standing by the bar, drink in hand, staring out at the room. He looked cool, collected, like he knew exactly what he was doing and why he was there. He fit in perfectly with his beautifully tailored clothes and his insanely good looks. John wondered what was really going through his head when they were here, when he watched John with other people. Did he let himself sink into this role like John had done, or was it more complicated than that?

He'd never asked. There were a lot of things he'd never asked Sherlock.

A young couple made their way through what had become an orgy in the center of the room and crossed to Sherlock, hand in hand. He nodded at them in greeting and they began talking to him. The woman put a hand on Sherlock's arm and smiled at him, and her male partner was looking at Sherlock with definite predatory interest. Jealousy spiraled up through John's chest, along with a touch of bitterness. How could perfect strangers do so easily what he couldn't? He watched helplessly, his mind already spinning thoughts of Sherlock sandwiched between these two, the man pressing into him from behind while the woman sucked him. What would it be like to watch that, to watch others touch Sherlock and make him come, and to know he could never have that for himself?
Hell, maybe that's what was really happening tonight. Maybe Sherlock wasn't asking John to choose someone for himself, but for John to choose someone for Sherlock. God, what would he do if that were true?

Sherlock smiled at the couple and said something John couldn't hear at this distance, shaking his head. They nodded and walked away, disappointment clear on their faces.

John sighed, both relieved and frustrated. He crossed the distance between them and stopped before Sherlock. He stared up at him, not exactly sure what to say.

Sherlock didn't look at him; he kept his eyes on the orgy in front of him. He raised his glass to his lips and took a drink, swallowed. "Well?"

"You," John blurted. He felt a touch of panic, a tingle at the base of his skull, but there was nothing for it now. He couldn't take it back.

Sherlock turned to look at him. "What?"

John forced himself not to look away, to hold his gaze. "You asked me to choose someone, and I choose you."

Sherlock seemed frozen for a moment, his eyes wide and his face pale. He opened his mouth and closed it again, and swallowed hard before finally speaking. "John, don't--"

"No, listen to me." John felt his chest constricting, but he was all in now and he couldn't back down. He stepped closer and lowered his voice as much as he could, even though there was no one close enough to hear. "You have to know by now how much I want you. I wouldn't ask if I didn't think you wanted me as well, just a bit. Please tell me I haven't read everything wrong."

Sherlock closed his eyes and seemed to steel himself. When he opened them again he was looking at the floor. "You haven't. But I can't. Please just… go and choose someone else."

John pressed his hands against the sides of his head, willing himself to remain calm. This was exactly what he'd been afraid of, exactly why he'd said nothing all this time. "Why not? Tell me why the fuck not, after all of this?"

"Please don't do this."

"Do I not even deserve an explanation, then?" John glared at him and suppressed a strong urge to shove him, to hit him, to make him angry -- anything to get a reaction that showed he was feeling something close to what John was feeling right now. "I thought for a while you weren't interested in having sex at all, but we both know that's not true. I've eliminated all the other possibilities and the only fucking thing that remains is that you simply don't want me."

Sherlock's mouth contorted. "That's not true."

"Then what is it?" He grasped Sherlock's shoulders, willing him to look at him. "Please just… let me touch you. That would be enough. You don't have to do anything, just let me--"

Sherlock's glass crashed to the floor. His sudden grip on John's arm was astonishingly tight, as was the power with which he hauled John away from the bar and over to a corner. He pushed John against the wall with both hands on his shoulders and held him at arm's length. Any complacency that had been on his face was long gone; what remained was raw and almost painful to look at.

"I know you think you want this," Sherlock said in a hoarse whisper, "but you don't. Trust me, John,
you don't want this from me."

John stared back at him. "I do, God, I do."

Sherlock's eyes were almost frighteningly hard. John shrank back against the wall, his mind racing. He had only seen Sherlock this close to losing control a few times, ever.

"You don't know what you're asking of me." The words were nearly snarled. "You think we can just have sex and be boyfriends and go on with our lives and be happy, but it's not that simple."

"Then how is it? Tell me."

"I can't just love you, John. I would consume you. You know what I'm like. You know what would happen."

John shook his head. "I don't know, and neither do you."

"You don't know what I want, what I think about when I look at you." He stepped closer and his hands moved from John's shoulders to his face, his grip almost vise-like. "I want to see you do things you cannot possibly imagine." His eyes roamed over John's lips and nose, anywhere but his eyes. "I want to do things to you, things that frighten me. I want to watch other people do things to you. I want to hurt you and..." His eyes locked on John's and he stopped. His face paled, as if he'd just realized he'd said those words out loud.

"It's okay," John whispered, staring up at him.

Sherlock's hands moved to his own hair and he grimaced. "It's not okay. I will push you and push you and one day you're going to decide you've had enough and you'll leave, and that will destroy me."

"You don't know that. And you don't know what I want."

Sherlock looked for a moment as if he might explode, but he calmed himself. It seemed to take effort. He finally pressed his lips together and nodded. "Fine. Tell me what it is that you want, John."

"You. I want you. I want all of this, all of you. Dammit, look at me." John grabbed a handful of his shirt and twisted, yanked Sherlock closer to him. Sherlock's eyes met his with clear reluctance. "I am so fucking in love with you that I will take anything you'll give me."

Sherlock shook his head and took a step backward, looking even more distraught. "That's precisely the problem. It's happened already. You couldn't say no on Sunday, and if Annie hadn't put a stop to it, I effectively would have you raped, and I would have enjoyed it, and I would not have given a shit about what you wanted until it was too late. That is why this can't happen, John. I can't--"

"Oh, for-- That's not what was going on there at all." John took Sherlock's hands in his, pulling him close again. "I was angry at you for kissing Ryan, and Ryan knew I was going to do it just for revenge, just to make you jealous. He said I'd regret it, and he was right." He shook his head, now wishing he'd cleared this up that first morning, because shit. "If I really didn't want to do it, I would have safeworded. I've done it before."

Sherlock stared at him. "Why would you have regretted it?"

"Do you really not know the answer to that question?" Sherlock shook his head and John was incredulous. "You may be a genius, but sometimes you can be incredibly stupid, you know." He let go of Sherlock's hands and smoothed his palms up Sherlock's sides, over his chest. Sherlock tensed
at the touch, but John didn't care. God, he'd wanted to do that for a long time. "Because I wanted it to be you."

Sherlock nodded slowly, but his expression was still pained.

"I may be a sub, but I'm not some fucking wilting flower. If I don't want to do something, you'll know. I invaded Afghanistan, remember? I can handle you, and I can kick your arse if I have to."

Something like a smile played at the corners of Sherlock's mouth. "Oh, I doubt that."

"Try me sometime."

"That can be arranged."

John smiled at the sparkle that lit in Sherlock's eyes, and oh God, he wanted this so badly. It was so close he could almost reach out and touch it.

"This all went to hell when we stopped being honest with each other. So I'm being honest now." He cupped Sherlock's cheek with a trembling hand. "I want you to push me. I want you to use me to make every twisted fantasy you have come true. I have fantasies too, things you don't know about." He traced the outline of Sherlock's lower lip with his thumb.

He paused, realizing how close together they were now, their faces just inches apart. Sherlock was staring at him with a glazed expression, his eyes dark, his lips parted. John's free hand slid down his chest, down his side and cupped Sherlock's dick through his trousers. Sherlock's eyes closed and he gasped softly, and John felt it grow completely hard beneath his fingers. He leaned forward, his lips brushing against Sherlock's ear.

"I want you to give me to other people and tell them how you want them to fuck me. I want you to tie me up and find out just what my limits are. I want you to bruise me and patch me up again and then fuck me until I can't see straight. I want you to own me, to consume me." He paused for a moment, surprised at how quickly those words had poured out of him. He stroked down the length of Sherlock's cock with his palm "So tell me: is that what you want?"

Sherlock gasped and pulled away from him. "I… Oh, God." He braced himself against the wall with one hand and adjusted his erection with the other, wincing slightly.

John blinked at him. "Did you just--"

Sherlock's eyes widened. "No! Of course not." He looked genuinely mortified, though.

"You're blushing."

Sherlock's hands went to his cheeks immediately. "I'm not blushing."

"Yes, you are. Did I embarrass you?"

"No, no. I just… That was… God, John." He shook his head and looked genuinely stunned.

John stared at him for a moment. bewildered. But of course --despite the events of the last few weeks, Sherlock had very little actual experience in this area. A bit of dirty talk and a single touch and he'd nearly come in his pants, apparently. John's lips twisted into a smile. "Just when I think I've got you all worked out, you surprise me."

"That's what I'm afraid of." Sherlock made a sound like a strangled laugh and looked away. "You
have to understand what I'm asking of you, John. Please understand. Because if we do this and you
change your mind..." He sighed and looked at John again, and there was sadness there -- and
something else as well.

Oh. John's eyes widened and he had to put a hand over his mouth for a moment when he finally
understood. "You think there's something wrong with what you're feeling. You think it isn't normal."

"I know it isn't normal."

John shook his head, almost laughed. It was so bizarrely Sherlock that he didn't know why he hadn't
thought of it before. "Oh, God, this is how everyone feels, Sherlock. You just don't know because
you haven't let yourself feel it before, but it's utterly normal. Certainly the average person doesn't
have your particular set of kinks, but the rest of it, the possessiveness, the obsession, the sheer terror
at the idea of loss -- that's how people feel when they... well." He wasn't going to put words in
Sherlock's mouth, no matter how much he wanted to.

Sherlock stared at him. "This is how you feel?"

"Yes. Absolutely, yes." John allowed himself to smile.

"But--"

"But nothing. My God, when you said you didn't understand love I didn't think you meant it
literally."

Sherlock shook his head, incredulous. "How do people function like this? How do they get out of
bed and go to work and not explode? It's paralyzing!"

"Yes, it is. It's fairly miserable, especially when you think it's one-sided."

"But... it's not one-sided."

John swallowed. "Definitely not."

Sherlock exhaled and ran his hands through his hair. "So. Okay. So this is where you're going to tell
me that relationships are difficult and there are no guarantees. We may be perfect for each other, or
we may end up killing each other, but if we don't take a risk we'll never know."

John shrugged. "Yeah, basically that."

Sherlock pressed his hands to the sides of his head, grimacing. "I am... fucking terrified of this. I
would rather keep things as they are than risk losing you completely."

"You'd be happy to go on watching me have sex with other people, never having me yourself?"

"Not happy, no. But it would be better than the alternative." He dropped his hands and his eyes were
solemn, and John knew he meant it.

"It's not enough for me, not anymore. Please, Sherlock. Trust me."

Sherlock exhaled and stared at John for another moment, and then nodded. John pulled him into a
hug and they clung to each other for a full minute.

"So we're going to do this," John said. He hoped he didn't sound the way he felt, God. If Sherlock
said no...
"Yes." Sherlock's arms tightened around him. "Yes."

John closed his eyes and smiled, squeezed him even tighter. "Okay then. Okay, God." He exhaled, not quite sure he should let himself believe it. "What happens now? What do you want to do?"

Sherlock pulled back and looked down at him. "I want to go home."

John smiled and nodded. "Then let's go home."

For some reason it took forever for an unoccupied taxi to pass them, and they'd walked nearly to Trafalgar Square before they finally caught one. They sat close together in the back seat, their thighs touching, and John realized with a start that this was real. He could touch Sherlock outside the club, and it would be fine. Sherlock was his now.

He rested his hand on Sherlock's thigh and glanced up at his face. Sherlock placed his hand over John's, not quite touching, but close enough that John could feel the heat between them. John turned his hand so the palm was facing up, intending to intertwine their fingers, but Sherlock began tracing a circle on John's palm, slowly, spiraling toward the center. John's breath caught in his throat at that touch. There seemed to be a direct line from his hands to his balls, and fuck why was something so simple turning him on like this?

Sherlock's expression was a blend of heat and curiosity, and John couldn't resist trailing his fingertips along Sherlock's wrist. He watched his face, saw his breathing quicken just slightly, his eyes widen in surprise. John traced a line down over the heel of his hand into the center of his palm, and Sherlock's eyes fluttered closed. John made a mental note to try this with his tongue sometime.

Sherlock finally caught John's hand to still his fingers. He clenched his other hand into a fist and shifted in the seat, and looked out the window. John's eyes flicked down to Sherlock's trousers, and yes, he was definitely in the same condition John was.

The remainder of the cab ride was excruciating. They couldn't look at each other, couldn't even speak. John could feel his heart beating in his fingertips, could feel Sherlock's pulse in the palm of his hand. A bead of sweat trickled down the back of his neck, but that was nothing compared to the utter discomfort of sitting in that cab with a raging erection he could do nothing about until they got home, while they caught every fucking traffic light between Trafalgar Square and Baker Street.

When the cab finally stopped before 221B, John tugged his wallet from his back pocket and threw a twenty at the driver. He bolted for the door, rifling through his pockets for the keys. Sherlock pressed against him from behind and that erection pressing into John's arse was seriously not helping at all. He dropped the keys and for a moment thought Sherlock was just going to bend him over right there on the doorstep. He finally managed to unlock the door and push it open, and they toppled over into the entrance. John pushed himself to standing and headed for the stairs, but Sherlock caught his hand and spun him back around, pressed him against the foyer wall.

Sherlock stared at him for a moment, his eyes nearly wild, and then he kissed John. It was a crush of lips more than a kiss, and John threw his arms around Sherlock and held on for dear life. It was hard and furious and perfect, and John whimpered into Sherlock's mouth, astounded by the intensity of this feeling of not being able to get close enough.

Sherlock's hands worked at the fly of John's trousers, and the next thing John knew there were long fingers wrapped around his cock and Jesus fuck, they were still in the foyer.

"Upstairs," he whispered, pushing off the wall and walking them backwards.
"Can't wait that long."

"You've waited three weeks."

"I've waited more than a year."

John's heels hit the bottom of the stairs and he toppled over backwards, taking Sherlock with him. Sherlock's chin hit John's stomach and John winced, but then Sherlock slid down his body and settled between his thighs, staring at the erection jutting out of John's trousers.

"Oh my God," John said, clutching at the stairs. All thoughts of making it to the flat were abandoned. All he could think about was how much he wanted that mouth on him, right now. Sherlock leaned forward and there was hot breath against his cock, and John closed his eyes.

There was a sound down the corridor of a door opening and a shuffle of slippered feet. "Sherlock, John? Is that you?"

"Shit!" John hissed and a second later Sherlock had thrown himself across John's body. John grimaced: there were definitely some directions in which an erect penis was not supposed to be bent. He managed to work a hand between them to adjust it to a more comfortable position just as Mrs. Hudson rounded the corner.

"Oh, heavens!" she said, clutching her nightdress tightly around her. "Are you boys all right?"

"Yes, yes, we're fine," Sherlock said. He sounded remarkably calm, considering.

"I just… I fell," John offered. God, it sounded lame even to him.

"He did, he fell. And then I fell… on top of him. We've had a bit much to drink this evening, haven't we, John?"

John laughed; he couldn't help it. "Oh God, we have. I'm so sorry, Mrs. Hudson."

"So don't worry, we'll be fine. Sorry to have disturbed you." Sherlock smiled tightly at her.

"You aren't hurt, are you?" she said, taking several steps toward them.

"No!" they said in unison, and she stepped back again, her eyes wide with concern.

"We're fine, really," John said. "Please don't trouble yourself."

"Yes, we'll be fine," Sherlock added. "I think we just need to… lie here for a bit. You go back to your telly, and we'll just…"

"Oh, honestly, Sherlock. Don't just lie there on him. Those stairs must be terribly uncomfortable."

"Yes, it's really… hard," John said, grinning.

"Sherlock, give him a hand, won't you?"

"I was about to do just that," Sherlock replied, completely deadpan.

Mrs. Hudson shook her head as if thoroughly scandalized, though there was a hint of a twinkle in her eye. "Drunk on a Thursday night. What's got into you?"

"Nothing yet," John replied. He felt delirious. It was all he could do not to burst out laughing. "But
Sherlock clamped a hand over his mouth. "I'm sorry you had to see him like this, Mrs. Hudson. Please don't trouble yourself. I'll take care of him."

"You two," she said, shaking her head. She turned and headed back to her flat, and a moment later they were alone once again.

They burst into quiet laughter and John pulled Sherlock down into a quick kiss. "Can we please go upstairs now, before Mrs. Hudson gets an eyeful for real?"

Sherlock sat back and John refastened his trousers. He stood and held a hand out to Sherlock.

John led him up the stairs and into the parlor. Sherlock pulled the door closed and let go of John's hand long enough to take off his coat. John tossed his own coat aside and stared at Sherlock, waiting. The room was oddly lit by a combination of ambient light from the street and the light over the sink that one of them had forgotten to switch off earlier, and it was perfect.

Sherlock stared at him for several seconds before crossing to stand before him. He was still a moment more, his gaze moving across John's face as if studying him, memorizing the way he looked this moment.

"If you don't kiss me this instant--" John said, and then Sherlock's mouth pressed against his.

It was almost tentative at first, a gentle slide of lips, nothing like the full-on snog downstairs. John wound his arms around Sherlock's waist and let himself feel, let Sherlock control the pace. It was astonishing to stand in this spot where they'd had so many arguments and conversations, where Sherlock had paced and ranted about cases and lack thereof, where they'd built this friendship over the last year -- and share a kiss.

John whimpered at the first brush of tongue across his lower lip, but he forced himself to wait, to see what would happen next. If they were at the club he would know exactly what to do, what to expect, but it was different here. They were home, and the rules were all different.

One of Sherlock's hands moved to the back of his head and the other smoothed down his shoulder, over his back. John lost himself in a slow slide of tongues, in the astonishing heat of Sherlock's mouth, and he had to remind himself yet again that this was Sherlock and that it was real. His hands moved to Sherlock's hips and he pulled them closer together, pressed the hard length of his cock against Sherlock's. Sherlock moaned into his mouth at that touch and the sound had an electric effect on John.

He took control of the kiss and had Sherlock melting against him in less than a minute. There were a few things he knew he was good at and this was definitely one of them. Just as he was considering unfastening Sherlock's trousers, Sherlock pulled out of the kiss and pressed his forehead against John's, panting.

"I think I could actually come from that alone."

"We'll have to try that sometime." John took advantage of the opportunity to work his lips down Sherlock's neck.

"But not tonight. Oh, God."

Sherlock's ears seemed to be sensitive. John grinned; he could work with that. "What do you want to do now?" he whispered.
"I--" Sherlock began, but John's tongue tracing the shell of his ear seemed to distract him completely.

John was torn between distracting him to the point that he was incapable of speech and stopping to make a plan. It was, after all, the first sex in a decade or so for Sherlock. John definitely wanted it to be memorable.

He settled for nuzzling Sherlock's cheek with his nose. "Tell me what you want."

Sherlock exhaled shakily. "Oh, God, everything." He held John's face in his hands and stared down at him, his eyes dark in the dim light. "I want everything. I've no idea where to start." He blinked at John and genuinely seemed on the verge of being overwhelmed.

John put his hands over Sherlock's, pulling them away from his face. "Do you want me to do this?"

Sherlock stared at him a moment more and nodded. John squeezed his hands and released them, and took a step back. He regarded Sherlock for several seconds, trying to decide what he would want if he were in Sherlock's position. There were so many possibilities, so many things they could do together. And they would do them all, eventually -- but where to start?

"Strip," John said at last. Sherlock's hands flew to his shirt and began unbuttoning it, and John added, "Slowly."

He watched one button after another pop open, his eyes fixed on the slow reveal of pale skin. When Sherlock finally let the shirt fall to the floor, John stepped forward and smoothed his hand over Sherlock's chest, his fingers lingering on the dusting of dark hair there before moving on to brush across a taut nipple.

He pressed a kiss to Sherlock's shoulder as his hand smoothed down across his stomach and over his navel, following the trail of hair below with his fingers until it disappeared beneath fabric.

Fuck. He had to take a steadying breath; he'd wanted to do that for a long time.

"Trousers now." He circled behind Sherlock, watching muscles flex in his arms and shoulders as he unfastened his trousers and pushed them down over his thighs. Sherlock paused, remembering his shoes, apparently, which he toed off and kicked aside. He stepped out of his trousers and waited, his head turned slightly as if he was tempted to look back.

"Pants." He was very proud that he'd said that without even a hitch. Sherlock seemed to take his time with this last article of clothing, and John could almost imagine the smirk on his face. Sherlock bent over to push the fabric down to his ankles -- really, that was so ridiculously unnecessary that John almost laughed at the cheekiness of it -- and the sight of his arse in that particular position was far too much to resist.

"Stay right there, just like that." John stepped forward and pressed his still-clothed erection into the crack of Sherlock's arse, and Jesus fuck but he wanted this. He stroked one hand down Sherlock's spine and shifted his hips slightly. He could have this. All he had to do was unfasten his trousers and-- Well, it was a bit more complicated than that, but still. His hands moved to Sherlock's hips and held them still as he ground into his arse slowly.

"Have you ever been fucked?"

"Yes," Sherlock replied, his voice barely more than a whisper.

"Did you like it?"

There was a pause. "Yes."
Sherlock turned and his eyes found John's immediately. The flush on his cheeks had spread to his chest and his cock was fully erect, jutting out from his body. John stared at it, then looked back up at him and smiled. He smoothed a hand slowly down Sherlock's belly, down over his hip, his fingertips brushing against the dark hair at the base of his cock before giving it a single stroke from root to tip.

Sherlock's mouth fell open and his eyes closed.

"How long has it been since someone else touched you like this?"

Sherlock's brow furrowed. "Oh, God. Years." The fact that he didn't bother to provide an exact answer was a good sign.

John stroked again, fascinated by the slide of foreskin over the glans as he pulled towards him, then the slow exposure of slick, delicate skin as he stroked back down. There was a bead of fluid at the slit and he ran the pad of his thumb over it, smearing it. He hadn't had the chance to play with anyone else's penis yet. Somehow that hadn't happened in the last few weeks.

"Tell me what you like."

Sherlock exhaled. "This is working fairly well at the moment."

"Do you still think about me when you toss off?" John stroked again and watched Sherlock's face. He'd seen him come before, but this was going to be something else altogether.

"I think about little else."

"What do you think about me doing?"

"It would be far more efficient for me to tell you what I don't think about."

"Go ahead then."

"I... can't think of anything."

John grinned; he liked Sherlock slightly incoherent like this. "I can't decide if I want you to come in my hand or in my mouth. Do you have a preference?" He gave Sherlock's dick another slow stroke, twisting at the top to slide the foreskin laterally against the head.

Sherlock's eyes rolled back for a moment. "Uhnnn... Both?"

"Well, I suppose I could try, but--"

"Your mouth."

John dropped to his knees and grinned. "I was hoping you'd say that." He ran his hands up Sherlock's thighs and just looked for a moment. He'd seen Sherlock's dick before, had even seen it hard, but never this close and with Sherlock's hands out of the way. He glanced up to see Sherlock watching him, his expression one of sheer want.

John leaned forward and flicked his tongue across the slit. Sherlock's hands were on his shoulders instantly; John had the impression he was suddenly finding it difficult to stand. John's tongue circled the glans slowly, darting across the frenulum. He wrapped a hand around the shaft and pulled forward, tugging enough foreskin up to run the tip of his tongue underneath -- something else he'd wanted to do.
"Oh God, please." Sherlock's hands were trembling on his shoulders now. This probably wasn't going to take very long.

John sucked the head into his mouth and worked it gently with his tongue. It was surprisingly different without a condom: the taste and feel of skin against his tongue was intense, and combined with the slightly bitter taste of pre-ejaculate made the entire thing seem far more intimate than it had ever been with strangers in the club. And then there was the fact that this was Sherlock, who hadn't had a proper blow job in more than a decade, and John wanted to make this one the best he possibly could.

He kept the suction light and focused on using his tongue to massage the underside of the head, and after thirty seconds there was a hand pushing against his hair.

"Wait wait wait," Sherlock said through gritted teeth, his eyes squeezed shut. "I'm not going to last much longer."

"Then maybe we should just take the edge off. I don't know about you, but I think I have a few in me tonight."

Sherlock nodded, eyes still closed, and John swallowed his dick again, this time not holding back. It was less than a minute before Sherlock swore and tightened his fingers in John's hair, and it wasn't until John had a mouthful of semen that he realized he'd forgotten about that part entirely. It wasn't bad -- it wasn't like he hadn't tasted it before -- but it felt like quite a lot more in his mouth than he would have expected based on personal experience. He pushed it to the back of his mouth and swallowed before he could think much about it. It was a weird sensation -- he was definitely never going to take that for granted again.

Sherlock sank to his knees with a groan. "I take it back. That was far superior to masturbation."

John quirked an eyebrow at him. "So you were right after all?"

"I'm always right." Sherlock pulled John into a kiss. "Oh God, you swallowed, didn't you?" he said against John's lips. "What did that feel like?"

"Want to find out?"

"I think I said before that I want everything when it comes to you."

Sherlock's fingers worked their way under John's shirt; John pulled it over his head quickly and tossed it aside before diving back in to capture Sherlock's mouth with his own. When Sherlock's fingers moved to unfasten his trousers again he pulled away and grinned.

"Wait, I have an idea." He stood and kicked off his shoes, then sat on the sofa, letting his thighs fall open. "Come here."

Sherlock gave him a quizzical look, but crawled over and knelt before him, his hands on John's knees. He raised his eyebrows.

"Humor me. I have my reasons."

Sherlock gave him a dark smile before sliding his hands slowly up John's thighs. He stroked teasingly at the fabric stretched over John's erection before unfastening the button and tugging the zip down. John lifted his hips to allow his trousers and pants to be pulled down to his knees. Sherlock's hands ran down his thighs again and pushed them farther apart. He leaned forward until his mouth was so close to the head of John's prick that John could feel his breath against it.
"This is a fantasy, I take it?"

"Oh, yeah," John said, nearly panting now, God.

Sherlock flicked his tongue across the frenulum and John groaned. Oh, this was going to be good.

"Tell me."

"I'd be sitting on the sofa and you'd be sitting in that chair and then you'd just come over here and--" Sherlock's tongue started at the base and licked slowly up to the tip, and John let his head fall back onto the sofa cushion. "Oh, fuck, that's amazing already."

That tongue swirled around the head and flicked lightly against sensitive spots before moving down the shaft again. He planted open-mouthed kisses up the underside and then slowly, torturously, ran the tip of his tongue along the ridge of the glans. Sherlock had clearly paid attention to what John liked in these last few weeks. Just when John thought he couldn't bear it any longer, that tongue wormed against the slit and Sherlock's lips touched the tip in a soft kiss.

John looked down at him again. Sherlock was watching him, observing, adjusting what he did to John's reactions. Somehow John hadn't imagined he would be a particularly thoughtful lover, but now that they were here it made perfect sense. Sherlock studied everything, obsessed about it, made sure he did it perfectly. He'd finally understood what John had been trying to tell him about sex, and he was not only getting it right, but getting it perfect. John had a lot of catching up to do, it seemed.

Those lips closed around the head of his cock and John moaned. Jesus fuck, but that was amazing. The feeling of heat and wetness with nothing artificial between them was so perfect he nearly felt guilty. Sherlock's tongue massaged the underside of the head and he worked his mouth down, taking in a remarkable amount of the shaft before moving up again with a perfect amount of suction.

"Oh, fuck, that's…" John threaded the fingers of one hand into Sherlock's hair -- yet another item on the long list of things he wanted to do to Sherlock -- and pushed down just enough to let him know what he wanted. Sherlock repeated the movement and John petted his head. He sank down into the sofa, his hips sliding forward. Sherlock's hands gripped his arse and pulled him forward even more; he seemed to be settling in to take his time.

"Oh my God, your mouth. I've no idea how you're doing that." His tongue seemed to be everywhere, and John was melting. It was amazing and perfect, and yet there was something else he wanted. He reached down and found Sherlock's hand, pulled it up and sucked two fingers into his mouth. He heard (and felt) Sherlock moan as he worked them with his tongue for a moment before releasing them. "Finger me," he said, pushing that hand back down again.

"God, yes," Sherlock said as came off John's cock. He tugged John's trousers off completely and tossed them aside. He pushed John's knees up into his chest and watched John's face as he pressed one wet finger into him, slowly.

"Both," John said, trying to push back against him. He needed that and he needed more of it, as soon as possible. Sherlock added the second finger and John hissed. God, yes. "And suck me, come on."

Sherlock grinned and grasped the base of his cock with one hand. He looked as if he wanted to say something, but he didn't; he just took the head of John's cock in his mouth again.

"Oh shit oh fuck," John said, and closed his eyes. The fingers inside him twisted and pulled out slowly until just the tips were stretching his hole open, then slowly worked their way back in again, over and over. Between the fingers in his arse and the mouth on his dick, he was floating, utterly
blissed out. It was incredible, but he wasn't on the verge of coming. That was intentional, he realized. Sherlock wanted to make this last as long as possible.

God, he knew John's body incredibly well for someone who hadn't touched it until tonight.

"You're bloody amazing," he said, opening his eyes and looking down.

He stroked Sherlock's head and Sherlock pulled off and looked back up at him. His cheeks were flushed and his mouth was wet -- oh God -- and his hair was just fucking insane from where John had his fingers in it. His eyes flicked down past John's balls to where his fingers were still working their way in and out of John's arse. After a moment he looked up again, and his eyes were astonishingly dark. His other hand released John's cock and disappeared from view, and his mouth fell open slightly. He was stroking himself, John realized.

"Are you…?" John asked. Sherlock nodded, his eyes fixed on John's. Oh, God. That was quick. And now he knew exactly what he wanted. "Do we have lube? We fucking have to have some."

"Yes," Sherlock said, his voice incredibly husky, and John thought he might melt into the sofa at the sound of it.

"Where?"

"Bedroom."

They scrambled off the couch and nearly sprinted across the flat. John pulled the duvet off of Sherlock's bed (no need to make more of a mess than necessary) while Sherlock rifled through a drawer in the bedside table. They both stood up at the same time, on opposite sides of the bed. They stared at each other.

John settled on the center of the bed and held his hand out to Sherlock. Sherlock seemed to take a steadying breath before climbing onto the bed next to him. John kissed him and lay back, pulling Sherlock on top of him.

Sherlock lifted his head after a moment and stared down at him. "I haven't done this before."

"That makes two of us, then."

"I suppose I know what to do in theory, but--"

"Something tells me we're going to figure it out." John captured his mouth in another kiss. "We've both done it the other way, after all."

"Right." Sherlock shifted down John's body and a moment later slick fingers were pressing into John once again. It was a lot of lube and it felt unbelievably wet, but John had it on good authority that you couldn't overdo it.

Sherlock's fingers curled up and stroked his prostate gently, and John gasped, desire spiraling through him. He'd had a girlfriend years ago who had once described a sort of desperate feeling of wanting him inside her, and now, all these years later, he understood exactly what she meant.

Now, right now.

"Okay, I'm good." He sat up and shifted onto his knees. "On your back."

Sherlock blinked at him -- that was apparently not what he'd expected -- but he leaned back onto his
elbows. John took the lube from his hand and looked at the erection jutting up from his body. The fact that he'd got hard again so fast said a lot about just how much Sherlock wanted this tonight.

John squeezed lube onto the palm of his hand and straddled Sherlock's hips. And hesitated.

*Shit.*

"Umm..." He looked up at Sherlock, frowning. "Do you want to use a condom?"

Sherlock stared at him for a moment. "No."

John hesitated. He hadn't had sexual intercourse without a condom in more than a decade and a half - it had been drummed into his head at some point that condoms were absolutely necessary outside of monogamous relationships. And hell, he and Sherlock were definitely not monogamous. He knew his own history and he knew Sherlock's, and they'd just been tested for HIV, but still. He sat there and stared at Sherlock, frozen.

Sherlock pushed himself to sitting and reached for John's hand. He pulled it toward his penis and wrapped John's fingers around it, moving it on the shaft and spreading the lube on his skin.

"No condoms, not between us. No one else gets to have this. No one else gets to touch you without one. But I do."

John exhaled and nodded. "Okay. Yes." Something like relief flooded him and he kissed Sherlock. He pushed him back down onto the bed and stroked his dick a few more times, watching his face. Sherlock's expression was completely open, as honest as John had ever seen.

It was clear that he wanted this and trusted John. He knew how much John wanted this, what it meant. But there was still apprehension there, still a touch of fear about what would happen. John supposed he couldn't blame him for that.

John shifted forward and grasped the headboard of the bed with one hand while squatting over Sherlock. He reached underneath him to grasp Sherlock's cock and lined it up, then took a deep breath, trying his best to relax. Annie had said to bear down, and he did as he pushed himself down. The head breaching his body was the weirdest part and he had to clench his jaw against the stretch. It didn't hurt so much as it was strange to feel his body struggle to accept this intrusion. He felt every inch of the slow slide down, astonished at the feeling of fullness and heat. It was simultaneously completely weird and insanely hot.

After a long slow push down, he realized his arse was touching Sherlock's thighs. He exhaled and looked down to see a stunned expression on Sherlock's face. "Okay?"

Sherlock nodded. His expression didn't change.

John pushed his hips up and gasped at the sensation of Sherlock's cock sliding inside him. Sherlock closed his eyes and let his head fall back.

"Oh, my God."

"I know," John whispered. His arms were shaking and his legs were shaking, but it felt fantastic, even more so than he'd expected. He pushed back down again, still going slowly, his body still adjusting.

"Wait," Sherlock said, and John froze, looked down at him. Sherlock reached up to grasp John's hips and rolled them over, somehow managing to keep his dick inside John as they moved. John ended
up on his back with Sherlock between his legs, staring down at him. Sherlock pulled back in a long slow slide and pushed into him again, and John groaned. "That's better," Sherlock said, pulling out again slowly. He paused with the head of his cock just stretching John's anus open, and he pushed forward just slightly, rocking in and out of the most sensitive stretch of John's rectum. The sensation was incredible.

John's cock was achingly hard now. There were nerves firing in places they didn't normally do, and he was rapidly restructuring his conception of what sex could be. Sherlock pressed in a bit deeper and angled up, and the head of his cock brushed John's prostate, and oh, God. It was becoming completely clear why people liked to do this.

"Oh God, that's incredible," John said, digging his heels into Sherlock's thighs. "That, more of that, harder."

Sherlock hesitated a moment and then pushed into him faster, deeper. It was better, but it wasn't enough. John raised his knees trying to get the angle right, and that was better, but he still wanted more.

"Harder," he panted. He dug his fingers into Sherlock's arse and braced his other hand against the headboard. "Come on, I won't break. Fuck me." Sherlock stared down at him as if he didn't quite believe him, and John growled, "Fuck me! Move!"

Sherlock made a sort of strangled sound and proceeded to pound into him. John gritted his teeth and put the other hand behind him on the headboard and did his best to push back, and then oh fuck oh God, that was it.

"Yes, yes, perfect, fuck, Sherlock." And it was perfect. He couldn't believe he hadn't done this before, that he'd spent his entire life until now not having felt this. Sherlock leaned into him, one hand on the headboard as well and the other pushing one of John's knees nearly into his chest. The concentration on his face was intense. John's cock was trapped between their bellies and was getting a firm stroke with every thrust, and Jesus the feeling of Sherlock's cock ramming into him was just unbelievable. "Oh my God, that's--"

Sherlock's dick slipped out completely and they both swore.

"Sorry, sorry," Sherlock said as he scrambled onto his knees. He pushed back into John and lowered his body again, trying to find the right rhythm.

"Yes, like that, but… more, harder, fuck."

Sherlock's forehead was furrowed in concentration and John would later be embarrassed about having been quite so demanding, but at the moment he didn't care. He just wanted more, faster, deeper, harder.

"God, John," Sherlock grunted. "I can't… I'm going to…"

"S'okay," John said. He was close, so close, just change the angle a bit and it he'd be there as well. He arched his hips up, trying to find it.

Sherlock cried out and his movements became erratic, and John wrapped his arms around him, pulled him in close. Sherlock buried his face in John's shoulder and groaned, his open mouth pressed against John's skin, and he pushed into John as far as he could and stayed there.

"Oh God oh God oh fuck…"
John felt the moment he finished, felt the tension leave Sherlock's body. He pressed kisses against his temple and squeezed his arms around him.

Sherlock pushed up out of the embrace, pulled out of his arse and shifted himself between John's thighs. John's eyes flew open and he looked down just as Sherlock swallowed his cock.

"Oh my God." John gasped and arched up into his mouth, and then gasped again when Sherlock pushed several fingers into his arse and continued fucking him, brushing against his prostate with every stroke. John felt himself on the edge of orgasm, perfectly balanced, waiting to fall for what seemed like minutes. It was as if Sherlock was holding him there, not quite letting him go, waiting until John couldn't bear it another moment.

"Please," he breathed. "Oh please, I--"

Sherlock's fingers changed the angle just slightly and he sucked a bit harder and then John felt his body hurtling over the edge, felt his balls constrict, and everything shrunk down to Sherlock's mouth and fingers. He was vaguely aware that he was shouting as he came, but he didn't care. His hands were clenching Sherlock's hair and he was probably hurting him, but he couldn't do anything but feel it wash over him.

He was shaking when it was over and he could barely move. He felt Sherlock's fingers slide wetly out of him and his legs collapsed onto the mattress. He couldn't even open his eyes.

"God, John. That was incredible."

John whimpered in response. Sherlock left for a minute and came back with a wet cloth. John thought he ought to have been embarrassed, but he couldn't be arsed at the moment; he felt too fucking good. He took it and cleaned himself off and tossed it aside. Sherlock settled next to him and pulled the duvet over them both.

"Are you all right?"

John exhaled. "That may have been the best orgasm of my life."

There was a pause. "Are you serious?"

"Of course I am." John opened his eyes to see Sherlock staring up at the ceiling, looking extremely pleased with himself. He'd opened his heart to John tonight, had told him his darkest fears and wants, and had admitted to being so terrified of his own selfishness that he would watch John from afar just to keep him in his life. And then he'd made sure the sex was almost completely about John.

How could he not see how incredibly pure his heart actually was?

John closed his eyes again and sighed. "I love you."

It was silent for a moment. Sherlock shifted onto his side and pressed his nose into John's cheek. "Do you really?"

"Yes. It's not just the post-coital bliss talking."

Sherlock sighed. "As much as I want to hear it, I'm not certain that's a good thing. If you love me you won't be able to walk away from this, even if you should." He snuggled into John's side, almost wrapping himself around John's body, his actions adorably incongruous with his words.

"I'm not going anywhere," John said. He shifted onto his side and kissed Sherlock softly. Sherlock
sighed and kissed him back, and they lay there together for a long time, just kissing, arms wrapped around each other, lips sliding together slowly. It was perfect and John didn't want it to stop, ever. He could lie here forever and just kiss Sherlock, and it would be perfect.

"So you like it a bit rough," Sherlock said at last. John could feel a smile against his lips.

"Apparently I do." He'd surprised himself with that.

"I can work with that."

The words sent a shiver down John's spine and he grinned. "I'll look forward to it."

"Maybe not right away. You're going to feel that in the morning, trust me."

John laughed and kissed him again. "I feel it now. I feel like you're still inside me."

"Maybe I am. Maybe I'll never leave."

"Perfect," John whispered. It actually was perfect, he thought as he finally slid toward sleep.

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The first time, it was the sound of the shower that woke him up. The plumbing was much louder than usual, and it was a moment before he remembered he hadn't fallen asleep in his own bed. He smiled and drifted off to sleep again.

The second time, his body woke him. He opened his eyes. He would have loved to lie there and think of ways to get Sherlock to come back to bed, but his bladder was insistent. He pushed himself to sitting and winced.

Ow.

Sherlock hadn't been kidding. He smiled at the memory, though: it was worth it. He wondered how long it would be before they could do that again.

He stood and stretched and then pushed open the door to Sherlock's bedroom. Sherlock was sitting in a chair in the parlor, fully dressed, a cup raised to his lips. He froze when he saw John, his eyes wide. For a fraction of a second John thought he must look far more impressive in broad daylight than Sherlock had expected.

"Ah, good morning, John." Mycroft was sitting opposite Sherlock. He seemed completely nonplussed that John had just emerged from his brother's bedroom stark naked.

"Shit," John said, and turned around again. He closed Sherlock's door behind him and groaned. He still had to piss, but his clothes were out there somewhere, strewn about the parlor, assuming Sherlock hadn't tidied up. Oh, who was he kidding? Of course he hadn't. Not that it would have mattered; Mycroft would have figured out what had happened within two seconds of walking into the flat.

He briefly considered finding a container to piss in and hiding out in Sherlock's bed until Mycroft left. But hell, they were all grownups. Well, John was a grownup, at any rate, and there was nothing to be embarrassed about. He rifled through Sherlock's wardrobe until he found a tee shirt (who knew Sherlock even owned tee shirts?) and a pair of boxers. He put them on and was at least moderately presentable. He opened the bedroom door again.
"Good morning," he said with a curt wave and then disappeared into the bathroom. He stayed as long as he dared, but after he’d brushed his teeth and even flossed, he was either going to have to shave or shower to buy himself more time. He stared at his reflection in the mirror for a moment. Best to get it over with.

He crossed to the sofa, pleased to see Sherlock had set out an extra cup for him. He took it and sat on the sofa, remembering too late that he needed to be careful with that particular end of his body. He clenched his jaw and shifted, and tried valiantly to smile at the two faces that were staring at him.

Mycroft raised his eyebrows and glanced pointedly at Sherlock, who smirked and looked away.

John only barely resisted the urge to flip them both off. "Nice to see you again, Mycroft."

"I understand congratulations are in order," Mycroft continued, as casually as if he was discussing the weather.

John glanced at Sherlock, whose expression clearly said, ignore him. John forced a smile. "Is that what brings you around on a Friday morning, or is there something else going on?"

"Oh, this is a purely social visit. You two have been rather busy of late and I simply wanted to drop by and see how you both were."

"He wanted to know if we were shagging yet or still dancing around each other," Sherlock said.

John coughed, having chosen precisely the wrong moment to take a sip of tea.

"I didn't put it quite so crudely," Mycroft said, "but essentially, yes. Sherlock hasn't returned my calls."

"I never return your calls."

"No, you generally send a text telling me to bugger off, thereby assuring me that you are in fact alive and well. Hearing nothing from you is rather unusual."

"You knew exactly where we were and what we were doing."

"Forgive me for being concerned that you were not only behaving very unusually, but also ignoring multiple opportunities to insult my concern for you."

"Don't take it personally, "John said. "He even turned down a serial murder case last week."

Mycroft's tea cup paused midway to his mouth and he turned to gape at Sherlock. "You actually are in love, aren't you?"

Sherlock rolled his eyes, though the tint of his cheeks tempered the expression into something almost adorable. Mycroft turned back to John with an incredulous expression. John shrugged.

Mycroft set the tea cup back in the saucer and sat back in the chair. "Well, this is perhaps a good time to mention a certain borrowed membership card."

Sherlock sighed. "Yes, of course. I'd assumed you'd want it back as soon as possible."

"I don't," Mycroft said, and Sherlock and John exchanged a glance of surprise. "Keep it, at least for now. It isn't the only such institution of which I am a member, after all. Feel free to keep it as long as you like." He smiled magnanimously.
"Thank you," John said.

"Oh, don't thank him," Sherlock spat. "This way he can continue to spy on us."

"I regret that I have to resort to covert means to maintain a presence in your life." Mycroft's voice had taken on that pleasant tone that meant he was imagining strangling his brother in his sleep. "But more to the point, my aim is actually a practical one. I am a member of three private clubs in London that cater to, shall we say, a variety of interests. You are welcome to borrow my membership credentials to any of them whenever you wish — one at a time, of course. Left to your own devices, I'm sure you'd find a way into each of them eventually, which could lead to a rather embarrassing incident I'd prefer to avoid."

John had once again made the mistake of taking a sip of tea. He sputtered and set the cup back on the saucer, and pushed it out of his reach.

Mycroft gave him a long look before continuing. "I am, of course, very supportive of your relationship and am happy for you both. So please consider it a gift."

"Thank you," John said again, with a pointed look at Sherlock. "We sincerely appreciate it." Sherlock rolled his eyes. "Well I appreciate it, at any rate." He smiled at Mycroft.

"Yes, of course." Mycroft stood and refastened the button on his suit jacket. "Well then, I imagine you've things to do this morning, so I'll be on my way."

John bit his lip trying not to grin at the attempt at innuendo. Sherlock grimaced as if the comment had actually caused him physical pain.

John walked Mycroft down the stairs to the front door.

"Thanks," he said, holding out a hand. "He does appreciate it, even if he can't say as much."

Mycroft took his hand and shook it firmly. "I know." He looked for a moment as if he wanted to say something more, but instead he smiled tightly and opened the door. John closed it behind him and leaned back against it, grinning.

Three sex clubs. And to think they'd only explored one so far. Fuck.

He dashed up the stairs and into the parlor. Sherlock was staring out the window, apparently having watched his brother leave in his usual extravagant-limousined fashion. John crossed to him and wrapped his arms around him from behind.

"So Mycroft approves."

"I don't require his approval for anything."

John smiled into his shoulder. "That's not the point. He's your brother."

"Would your sister approve?"

"It's none of her business."

"Precisely."

"But your brother could make our lives fairly difficult if he didn't approve."

"I suppose." Sherlock's tone indicated he resented having to concede the point.

John brushed his nose against Sherlock's shoulder and tightened his embrace. He wasn't sure when
he'd get used to being able to do this whenever he wanted. Sherlock pressed back against him and a curl of desire flared in John's belly. Jesus, he was insatiable. It was glorious.

"Want to try something?"

Sherlock's hands smoothed over his own. "What did you have in mind?"

John turned him around and kissed him for a solid minute, only pulling back once he felt the beginning of an erection pressing into his hip. "Strip. I'll be right back."

Sherlock stared at him as he crossed back to the bedroom, but by the time John had returned with the tube of lube, he was stepping out of his pants.

John set the lube on a side table and took Sherlock's hand. He led him to the sofa and kissed him again before dropping to his knees. He teased Sherlock's dick with his tongue at first, finally taking it in his mouth when it was completely hard. God, he loved this feeling of firm flesh against his tongue -- he could do this all day. In fact, he should consider trying to keep Sherlock from coming for as long as possible. He wondered how long he could go before Sherlock finally lost control and just fucked his mouth. Rough.

Shit, he was getting distracted.

Sherlock groaned and stroked John's head. "I'm not complaining… oh, God, that's amazing… but this isn't exactly new."

"Not yet. Come down here." Sherlock knelt and John pushed the boxers off before taking both their cocks in hand and stroking them together.

Sherlock leaned in to kiss his neck. "That's nice too, though I think I prefer your mouth."

"Funny you should say that. Turn around."

Sherlock blinked at him for a full second before his eyes widened slightly. Without another word, he shifted on his knees so that his back was to John.

"And over, there you go." John pushed between his shoulder blades and smiled as Sherlock pressed his chest into the sofa. John ran his hands down Sherlock's back and settled right behind him. He nudged Sherlock's knees apart and smoothed his hands over his arse, and grinned at the flush that was spreading across Sherlock's body. His balls hung heavily between his thighs and John paused to cup them in one hand and tug gently. He wondered what they would feel like in his mouth.

Sherlock's thighs spread a bit farther apart and John groaned. "You're so fucking hot like this," he whispered. His hands moved back up to Sherlock's arse and squeezed. Oh, he was going to enjoy this. Possibly even more than Sherlock.

John leaned forward and bit his arse playfully, and Sherlock jumped.

"Just checking." He ran his thumbs down the crack of his arse and pressed the cheeks apart, and Sherlock made a sound like a whimper.

It was amazing that just a few short weeks ago this was something that hadn't been on his radar at all, but ever since it had been done to him, he'd wanted to try it on someone else. He leaned forward and trailed his tongue from the top of the cleft down, slowly, teasingly. He felt Sherlock tense beneath him as he got close to his arsehole, and grow even tenser when he skipped over to flutter his tongue just below. He circled the hole with flicks of his tongue for a torturously long time, his own cock
aching in sympathy, and then finally spiraled in. When John's tongue pressed delicately into the center of his hole, Sherlock's legs nearly went out from under him.

"Oh my God… Oh God."

That was the reaction he'd hoped for, certainly. He lapped at his arsehole gently at first and increased the pace slowly. Sherlock seemed to be struggling not to squirm and the sounds he was making were less coherent by the minute. John tensed his tongue and pressed the tip into him as best he could, moving in and out with small movements to work him open slowly.

"Oh fuck, John" was the only thing he could understand in the string of words that came out of Sherlock's mouth as he slowly fucked him open with his tongue. Sherlock seemed to be pushing back against him and John was surprised at how far inside his body his tongue could go. The skin just inside him was slick and soft, and God it was incredibly weird and filthy that he not only had his tongue up Sherlock's arse but also that he liked it. John wondered if he could make him come just from this. He pressed his lips around the hole and that helped him work his tongue even deeper. He focused on stroking it in and curling the tip of his tongue just a bit on the way out again.

Sherlock was incoherent now; he'd turned out to be surprisingly vocal when he liked something, to John's pleasant surprise. Drawing that reaction from him was amazing and John wanted to see more. He wanted to see him come undone. He wanted to make him beg. He wanted so many things that it was almost overwhelming.

His jaw was finally starting to ache and he sat back a bit reluctantly. He reached for the lube and squirted some on his fingers, then worked two into Sherlock's body. There was almost no resistance, not that he was surprised. Sherlock groaned again, boneless against the sofa. John leaned over him to place kisses along his spine.

"Is this okay?"

"As long as you're planning to fuck me, yes." Sherlock's voice was slightly muffled by the sofa, and John grinned.

He'd planned to take his time with this part, to work out exactly what Sherlock liked, but less than a minute later Sherlock was squirming again.

"I'm good, I'm good, just… please."

"Right," John said, and slicked his cock as quickly as he could. "Here, off the sofa." He tugged at Sherlock's hips and positioned him on his hands and knees, facing the window. "Just tell me if--"

"Oh, God, just fuck me already!"

John couldn't resist smacking his backside while he got into position. "Cheeky, aren't you?"

"Why, do you like it?" There was a definite smirk in his voice.

John grinned. "Save it for later." He pressed the head of his cock against Sherlock's arsehole and moved forward as slowly as he could manage. Sherlock made a strangled sound and John stopped.

"Tell me if-"

Sherlock pressed back against him almost immediately. "No, keep going, it's fine. It's amazing." His voice was tight, but John decided to take him at his word.

John exhaled and pushed forward slowly until he was all the way in. He smoothed a hand over
Sherlock's back and groaned. "Oh fuck, you feel good." It felt different than it had with Ryan, and not just because there was no condom. He supposed that shouldn't surprise him. "Can I--?"

"Oh God, if you don't start moving now--"

He started slowly, searching for the right angle. Somewhere he heard a phone ringing -- Sherlock's phone. Sherlock either hadn't heard it or was ignoring it.

"Head down," he said and pushed at Sherlock's shoulder. "Sorry about the floor."

"Don't care. Just… oh, fuck, that's..."

He'd apparently found the right angle. He stroked in and out slowly, watching Sherlock's response. This was about the point when he'd wanted to be fucked into the mattress, but he had no idea what Sherlock might want.

Another phone rang -- his this time -- and he swore, momentarily distracted. "That's got to be Lestrade. No one else would try both of us."

"Don't stop, don't you dare."

"God, no. Whatever it is, it'll wait ten minutes." More like three minutes, honestly. He wasn't going to be able to keep this up much longer. "Oh, fuck, this is good. Tell me what you need."

"Like that, like that, a bit harder… yes, ahh…" Harder he could definitely do. Sherlock rapidly lost the ability to form words after that, and John wasn't far behind him.

He had to struggle not to lose himself in the drive to pound into the body beneath him. He could hardly believe they were doing this, weeks after he'd first let himself fantasize about it, and it was even better than he'd imagined. The friction and heat were perfect and he was so close now, so close he was starting to worry he wasn't going to be able to make Sherlock come like this.

Something brushed his thigh and he realized it was Sherlock's hand, that he was pulling himself off. John grasped his hips and leaned over him as best he could without losing his balance, and drove into him hard. The strain of the position pulled him back from the edge just enough.

Sherlock's hand stilled and John felt his body tense, and Sherlock pushed back into him, swearing loudly. John leaned over him and pressed his forehead against Sherlock's back, struggling to keep moving. Just the sound of Sherlock's voice as he came was nearly enough to push John over the edge, and the feeling of his arse contracting was glorious. When he was certain Sherlock was done John finally allowed himself to be selfish and fucked him with quick shallow thrusts, pressure right where he needed it.

"Oh God, you're perfect, that's so--" The rest dissolved into a shout as he pushed in as far as he could, toppling both of them onto the floor. They lay in a panting heap for half a minute before John could manage to move again. He pulled out slowly and patted Sherlock's side in sympathy when he flinched. "Sorry. Got a bit enthusiastic there at the end."

"No, it was perfect." Sherlock pushed himself to sitting and grimaced at the floor. "This will need cleaning."

"I'll take care of it." John stretched and smiled up at him. "When I can move again."

Sherlock leaned down to kiss him and John pulled him down on top of him. "We should definitely use the bed next time. My knees are going to hurt for days."
"Only your knees?"

"Among other things." Sherlock shifted onto his side. "Though I have to say that was far more pleasant than I expected. I remember it being more of a pain-turning-into-pleasure thing, but that didn't hurt at all."

John smiled for a moment, and then his eyes narrowed as a thought occurred to him. "Hang on. What are you saying?"

Sherlock's eyes narrowed. "Nothing. I--" His cheeks flushed. "Oh, God, no. Not that. I love your penis; don't you dare insult it."

"My penis loves you too." John felt his cheeks heat and he smiled.

"I think it was the rimming, actually."

"I didn't realize you knew that word."

"I know quite a few words that might surprise you."

John grinned at him. "Such as?"

Sherlock leaned forward and kissed John very softly, and whispered, "I--"

The sound of the door buzzer below startled them both.

Sherlock groaned and pressed his face into John's shoulder. "I have never been less enthusiastic to talk to a client."

"We can tell them to come back later. Leave a number."

"We could pretend we're not here." Sherlock raised an eyebrow.

John grinned and kissed him. The buzzer sounded twice more and they ignored it. Sherlock's tongue trailed across the inside of John's upper lip. John caught it and sucked on the tip of it suggestively, and Sherlock whimpered. John wondered how long it would be before either of them would be ready to go again. He should be satiated after that, but somehow he wasn't. He wanted more, to lie in bed all day and touch, kiss, suck, play. He'd felt this way a few times before in his life, but it had been a long time.

He really was in love. It was fantastic.

There were footsteps on the stairs, and they pulled away from each other and scrambled to their feet.

"Shit shit shit," John hissed as he plucked Sherlock's boxers from the floor and pulled them on.

There was a knock on the door and a voice behind it called out, "Sherlock? John?"

"Just a moment, Mrs. Hudson," Sherlock said. He nearly fell over pulling his trousers up, and John burst out laughing.

"This is ridiculous!" he whispered as he pulled the tee shirt back over his head.

"That's one word for it." Sherlock plucked his shirt from the floor.

"Are you all right?" Mrs. Hudson called from behind the door. "Inspector Lestrade is here and he
seems concerned about you. Says you haven't been answering his calls."

John headed for the door with a glance back at Sherlock, who was frantically buttoning his shirt. He nodded.

John took a deep breath and unbolted the door, then opened it enough to stick his head out. "Hi. Good morning." Mrs. Hudson looked startled and took a step back. He must look even more debauched than he'd thought. He smiled at Greg, whose face had gone a bit pale.

"Well, then. See? He's just fine. Is Sherlock fine?"


She nodded and turned, heading back down the stairs.

John opened the door wider and gestured Greg in with a tight smile.

"Sorry," Greg said, his cheeks flushing now. "It's just that... well, Sherlock always answers or texts or--"

"Not anymore, apparently. You may as well come in."

Greg looked torn between walking through the door and turning on his heel and fleeing, but he nodded. His eyes widened when he saw Sherlock. John turned and almost laughed. Sherlock looked utterly debauched: he'd misbuttoned his shirt and it hung at an awkward angle, and his hair was... well. John grinned at him.

"Yes, we were shagging," Sherlock said, hands on his hips. He looked a bit like an angry puppy.

"You interrupted."

"Well, technically were we done," John said.

"For the moment. But I was going to--"

"Too much information, lads." Greg's face was as red as John had ever seen it. "I can come back later. It wasn't all that urgent."

"Which explains why you came over to check on us personally and had our landlady let you in when we didn't answer?" Sherlock raised an eyebrow.

"I was concerned, for fuck's sake. I called you last night and again twice this morning, with no response. I sent half a dozen texts, all of which you ignored. I thought maybe you'd gone and done something stupid on your own with this case and--"

"Clearly not," Sherlock said. "But if we had done, it would hardly have been stupid."

"Considering what we're dealing with, yes; it could have been a disaster."

"Well, happily for Scotland Yard we were otherwise occupied." Oh lovely: Sherlock was in full sarcasm mode now. John groaned and pressed at the bridge of his nose with his fingertips. Seriously, what was it with these two?

"And since when do you not even respond to a bloody text message? I don't know what's got into you lately but--" Greg broke off and pressed a hand to his forehead. "Oh, God, I didn't mean it like that."
"Ironically, that actually is the reason," John said, unable to keep himself from smirking. "Both of you, shut up and sit down. I'll make coffee."

Five minutes later Sherlock had straightened out his clothes and Greg was able to look at them both without blushing, and everyone had a cup of coffee in hand. John sat on the sofa next to Sherlock and felt weirdly, deliriously happy.

"At any rate, we're proceeding well with the human trafficking case. There was another raid last night and we have leads on several more locations. The people we've arrested so far have been surprisingly cooperative."

"There are things worse than cooperating with the police, I imagine," Sherlock said.

"Such as being thrown into the general prison population as a known child sex offender?" John added.

"Yes, there is that," Greg said. "Funny how a quick reminder of that fact encourages people to talk."

"It sounds like you have it all under control, then," Sherlock said. "What do you need us for?"

John turned to look at him; bored was written all over his face. He'd worked out the mystery of the brands and all that was left was to catch all the baddies. Sherlock had little patience for the actual cops and robbers part of the operation; if there was no puzzle left to work out, no intellectual game to play, he was done.

"This is starting to look bigger than we'd first imagined. We're on our way to arresting everyone we can track down in England, but the network is international. At some point we'll need to include other government agencies."

"I think you're talking to the wrong Holmes." Even his tone screamed bored now. John pressed an elbow into his side and hoped he took it as a hint to behave.

"What makes you think I haven't talked to him already? Your strength is analysis, Sherlock. You can look at all the information and see patterns no one else can. You can tell us where to start, and that will give us a tremendous advantage when we have to begin negotiating with foreign law enforcement agencies."

John raised his eyebrows at Greg. Flattering Sherlock was a bit like stroking a cat. Sometimes it got you a purr and sometimes it got you lacerated. John waited to see which it would be this time.

Sherlock looked thoughtful and nodded. "All right."

"Good." Greg's lips twisted into a smile. "If you could come down to the Yard this afternoon, I'd appreciate it."

Sherlock looked at John, and John shrugged. "Apparently we're in."

He felt a hand on his back, fingers tracing the outline of his vertebrae. John curled into the touch and smiled. He wasn't sure if Sherlock thought John needed it or if he just wanted to touch him, but either way it was nice. When it started to tickle, John leaned into him and Sherlock's arm went around his shoulders. Oh, he could get used to this.

Greg's gaze flicked over to Sherlock and back to John again. He smiled. "Around two, then?"

"We'll be there," John replied.
Greg set the coffee cup on the sofa table and stood. "Try not to look quite so well-fucked when you turn up. I don't need my people distracted right now."

John grinned.

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"Before we go, can we talk about this?" John leaned against the doorway watched Sherlock button his shirt. His hair was still damp from the shower -- the shower they'd both managed to squeeze into. John's eyes glazed over at the memory of Sherlock on his knees, sucking John's cock while hot water poured down over them both. Jesus, the things he could do with his tongue.

"About what?"

He was getting distracted again. "What exactly are we doing? I mean, we're a couple now, and I'm assuming we're not going to keep it a secret. Well, unless you want to. Do you want to? Because--"

"Why would we keep it a secret?"

John shrugged. "Well… Some people might not be very accepting. It could hurt the business, I suppose."

Sherlock frowned. "Everyone thinks we're a couple anyway, don't they? It hasn't hurt us yet."

"No. Then it won't be a secret. Good." John paused. "So… are we going to keep going to the club, or…?"

"I don't see why not. It's a bit annoying that Mycroft insists on being involved, but--" He paused.

"Are you suggesting we stop going?"

"Oh God, no. I want to keep… pushing things. I like it. Is that what you want?"

Sherlock's expression grew heated and John felt a twinge in his belly. Again? Jesus, he felt like he was eighteen.

"I think I've already detailed the list of things I want. One of the other clubs Mycroft belongs to is well suited for some of the more… interesting ones."

John flushed. "Interesting?"

Sherlock stared at him a moment more and then looked away. He cleared his throat. "Perhaps we should discuss the details later."

John's lips twisted as he tried not to grin. It was good to know he wasn't the only one in a constant state of arousal today. "All right. Since we're going to keep doing this, I think we should agree on some ground rules."

"Such as?"

"Commitment. Are we exclusive? I mean, outside the clubs?"

Sherlock's face clouded for a moment. "What do you want?"

"I want to be with you. I have no interest in pursuing anyone else. I didn't even like the idea of choosing someone last night, to be honest."
"All right. But…"

"But when we go out, we do the dom/sub thing. You can share me, control me, use me -- I'm fine with that. I like it, you know I do. Mostly I like knowing that how much it turns you on. But at home--"

"At home it's just us. Yes, that works." Sherlock turned to the mirror and ran fingers through his hair.

John exhaled. "So… Is this power thing going to always be… I mean, for example, am I going to share you?"

Sherlock's eyes met his in the mirror. "Do you want to?"

John hesitated. "I like the idea in theory. In reality I'm not sure. What do you want?"

Sherlock's eyes were locked on his. "For now, I don't want anyone but you."

John crossed to him and wrapped his arms around him from behind, pressing his forehead against his shoulder. "And if one of us changes his mind?"

"We can discuss it." Sherlock turned in his arms and kissed him. "As I said before, everything is a possibility. I have no frame of reference for a healthy romantic relationship. And frankly, I'm not sure what that would even mean for me. As long as we're honest with each other, it will be fine."

John smiled. It was incredibly freeing to think that this didn't have to be anything, didn't have to follow any prescribed pattern. They could make it whatever they wanted. God, the possibilities. He'd always thought he'd eventually meet a woman, get married, have children -- but there was no reason it had to be that way. The future seemed far more open right now than it had in a long time. Anything was possible.

He was tempted to let his hands drift down over Sherlock's arse, but they were probably going to be late as it was and that would hardly help matters. "Do you want to go out tonight? Assuming we don't end up chasing criminals halfway across Europe unexpectedly, of course."

"Do you?"

John pursed his lips. "No, not really. I'd honestly rather spend this weekend in bed with you, only leaving it when we absolutely have to." John nuzzled his neck. "Maybe next weekend?"

"Or the one following that." Sherlock's lips pressed against his forehead and trailed down his temple before moving over to one ear. "There's no rush. I was thinking of starting a new spreadsheet, actually--"

More experimenting -- John found the idea oddly exciting. "If we don't leave right now, all of these clothes are going to have to come off again."

"Not necessarily. We could--"

"No, we're expected." John reluctantly took a step back. "Ready?"

"Yes."

They pulled on their coats and walked down the stairs. Sherlock paused with his hand on the door and turned back to John.

"What?" John asked.
Sherlock smiled and pulled him close. "I love you, you know," he whispered.

John smiled. "I do. And I enjoy hearing it, so say it as often as you like."

Sherlock kissed him and John worked his arms into Sherlock's coat, snuggling in close. Oh God, they were never going to make it out the door, were they? They might as well give up, tell Greg that they'd have to come in on Monday instead.

He could imagine the text already: Regrets for this afternoon -- something's come up. For the third time that morning. He smirked.

"Oh, you two," they heard behind them. John whirled around to see Mrs. Hudson shaking her head at them. "I'd have thought you had enough last night, and again this morning."

John gaped at her. "What?"

Sherlock snickered behind his shoulder and John elbowed him in the stomach.

"The walls are quite thin. Do keep it in mind. I'll have to get one of those noise machines, most likely." She gave them a long-suffering sigh and disappeared back into her flat.

"Oh my God," John said. "Did that actually just happen?"

Sherlock grinned and opened the door. "Let's go." He walked out into the shockingly bright sunshine, his dark coat billowing after him. John paused a moment more as his eyes adjusted to the light. God, blue cloudless skies in London -- what else would this day bring?

Sherlock's magical ability to produce a taxi from thin air worked yet again, and he spoke to the driver before opening the door and gesturing John inside.

John slid across the seat and looked out the window. Sherlock settled beside him and the cab pulled away from the kerb. John felt something brush his hand and looked over to see it that it was Sherlock's fingers. Sherlock was looking out the opposite window, already lost in thought.

John took his hand and intertwined their fingers, and Sherlock squeezed back.

John smiled.

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FIN

Chapter End Notes

HUGE thanks to Freckles42 for her insightful comments and her incredible patience at beta-ing what turned into a much longer fic than I'd originally planned.

Thank you to everyone who read this story as a WIP, who fed me incredibly insightful and encouraging comments on a weekly basis, and who patiently waited as it kept getting longer and longer. This is the longest fic I've written in seven years, and I sincerely appreciate your indulgence and support as I posted what is essentially a souped-up PWP over the course of two months.
Art for this chapter:

Gifsets by MartinCrief:
"I choose you."
"I understand congratulations are in order."
"Yes, we were shagging."

Art by Headless Girl for this chapter: here and here

Incredible art by Reapersun that basically summarizes the entire fic HERE (NSFW).

Works inspired by this: Alternate and Missing Scenes from "A Cure for Boredom" by emmagrant01, A Cure by pennwoods, Cover for A Cure For Boredom by moonblossom graphics (moonblossom), Watch and Learn by phoenixhowl, Cover for A Cure for Boredom by hechicera, Interlude by emmagrant01, [Podfic] A Cure For Boredom by finnagain, Cover for A Cure for Boredom by Fabulae, Cover for A Cure For Boredom by emmagrant01 by gurkenpflaster

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