Food for Thought

by WyrdSmith

Summary

Just who is the new resident of 221C Baker Street? And why is Mycroft Holmes suddenly visiting his brother Sherlock so much more often?

AN: Bringing this to AO3 from FFN, one chapter at a time!
Mycroft Holmes looked up to see his PA, Anthea, standing in front of his desk. In one hand she held her ever-present Blackberry and in the other was a bright green file folder which she placed directly in front of him on his desk.

Oh, dear. Bright Green. Something to do with Sherlock.

Sighing internally as he wondered what his sociopathic brother had done now, he nodded slightly to Anthea and opened the file. Even as he began to read, he noted with the part of his considerable brain that he reserved for situational awareness that his assistant had moved to seat herself across the office, her eyes fixed on the Blackberry as she texted busily. He raised an eyebrow slightly. As she had not returned to her own desk in the outer office, claiming instead the seat she had designated as hers within his office, clearly she expected to be needed once he read the file.

Blue eyes darkened in interest as he absorbed the information in front of him with rapid ease. Reaching the end of the second of two pages within the file, he flipped the page over and scrutinized the photo on the back. After a brief moment, he raised his eyes quizzically to peer at Anthea, who responded promptly, "None of the photos taken, from any source, are of any better quality than that."

Keeping the fuzzy photograph in his hand, he leaned back in his large, comfortable chair and gracefully crossed his legs, tapping a finger thoughtfully on the edge of the photo as he considered. The last known address was 'somewhere in Surrey', over twelve years ago? "No hints anywhere of this person until now? In… any part of the country?" His sharp eyes noted the slight hesitation of his assistant's fingers as she listened to his question while working her Blackberry like a lover. He knew full well the answer to his question had been affirmative, but judging from the miniscule smile that formed on his assistant's face after her brief pause, that answer had now changed.

His deduction was confirmed when she glanced up and his own Blackberry chimed quietly, Anthea explaining, "I just forwarded new information. It seems that Mr. Evans is a well-known gentleman from the Morgana Province." Anthea knew better than to try to verbalize any more than that. Even here, the sanctity of that particular project was absolute. She couldn't have spoken of it if she wanted to. Only certain items of electronic equipment, those from the more exclusive lines of WTW, would ever communicate any of that information, and not even Mycroft Holmes would give voice to the Morgana Project without additional measures being taken. After a briefest pause to process her words, he removed his Blackberry from his pocket and held it in his left hand, discreetly tapping a seemingly random pattern on the back as if lost in thought. Instantly, a low, gentle hum billowed out and blanketed the office, effectively rendering all possible methods of surveillance, both magical and mundane, useless. This fact was confirmed when the scrambled code Anthea had entered from her own Blackberry emerged on his screen in a flood of gibberish – to the eyes of anyone other than Mycroft Holmes. To him, the message was clear and somewhat shocking.

*Harry James Potter has forced the MOM to honor their Oath. The Great Balance is now fully in effect. Potter has announced his 'retirement' and is relocating, hence green file.*

Mycroft's extraordinary mind immediately retrieved all of the data, pertinent or not, regarding that
young man and the powerful Oath he had redeemed against the Wizarding World, forcing the Ministry of Magic into making binding agreements over the past decade. He had exploded into Mycroft’s sphere of influence over a decade ago. That had been a dark time in the world, although most of the mundane people in the world, the non-magical people, had no idea how very dark it had become. How much worse it would have been without Mr. Potter and his remarkable friends. Mycroft Holmes knew because, despite the fallacy that he was simply a man who held a minor position in the British government, he was, in fact, on par with the Prime Minister. Truth be told, if it came down to a pissing match, Mycroft would win. His brother Sherlock’s pseudo-facetious manner of referring to his elder brother as “the British Government” was not entirely in jest. And so, Mycroft Holmes was one of exactly three mundane citizens of Britain who knew everything there was to know about the British Wizarding World. If one also counted the Queen as a citizen, the number rose to four.

So… they now officially lived in the Era of Balance…. How very extraordinary! Mycroft exchanged a tiny smirk with Anthea, each thinking of how that fact must sit like a rock in the stomachs of several of the more obstreperous people they knew from both sides of the Balance.

Face expressionless but dark blue eyes alive with interest, Mycroft recalled everything he knew about the situation as pertinent to this latest revelation.

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LOST IN THOUGHT

Ten years or so ago, fifteen-year-old Harry James Potter, a remarkable young wizard forced by prophecy and the machinations of Supreme Mugwump (ridiculous title!) Albus Dumbledore and the insane Dark Lord Voldemort into literally saving the world at the probable cost of his own life and soul, shocked the powerful wizard Dumbledore, the Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge, and the entire Wizengamot, by seizing control of his own destiny along with every living witch and wizard. And by that, Mycroft did not mean that the other living magicals had also seized control of destiny. No, he meant that thought exactly as he had phrased it. Harry Potter had seized his destiny, and had also seized every living witch and wizard, the extent of control depending only on where said people had lived during the past quarter century and the extent of their involvement in the last two wars.

During an emergency session of the Wizengamot, called by Fudge and Dumbledore in a joint effort to pass legislation that would have turned Mr. Potter from a free citizen into the enslaved, legal property of the Ministry of Magic under the direct control of Fudge and Dumbledore, Potter surprised all in attendance by emerging from hiding in the courtroom and standing to speak when the formerly vacant Black and Potter seats were called out during the vote. Those seats had been voted en absentius by Dumbledore for over a decade. Potter took full advantage of the shock he caused when he threw his hood back and rose to speak, declaring under force of a vocal-amplifying charm known as a sonorous, "I, Harry James Potter, Lord of House Black and House Potter, do hereby declare that every living wizard and witch in England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and all other potential locations is in violation of the multiple life debts owed to me by Merlin's Law. I name you all fhealltoir fiach saol, traitors of life debt, and I invoke all just punishments upon you according to my rights. Lig Magic breitheamh m'eilleamh! Let Magic judge my claim!"

Mycroft’s photographic memory easily replayed the magical holographic video of those moments, provided through the fact that young Potter had thoughtfully brought numerous members of the World Media into the formerly-impenetrable closed session. He had never explained how he had smuggled them in, and none of them were able to reveal the information, having found themselves, like virtually every other living witch and wizard throughout all of Europe and most of Asia, to be
suddenly entirely bound to the will and whim of the scrawny teen with eyes filled with cold rage. Within mere moments of the invocation, every magical human or humanoid creature on the planet was aware of the event, as the combined magical obligations of several million witches and wizards raced around the world through the one force that bound them all – Magic. Those who Magic judged to hold a life debt to the young wizard were instantly bound to Mr. Potter’s grace. All others, including a chilled and horrified Voldemort and a grand total of two of his Death Eaters, were faced with the realization that the pissed-off fifteen-year-old now held, in addition to his own considerable power, the combined magical strength and mass of over three million wizards and witches. Furthermore, by Right of Forfeit due to the betrayal of their life debts, Harry Potter was now Lord of every noble House and minor Family in Wizarding Britain.

Effectively, he was King. Mycroft considered that statement a moment, then revised it upward to Emperor, possibly even Pharaoh. The young man's power was, after all, absolute.

The repercussions within the British mundane government had been felt immediately, as the Queen was jarred from her sleep by the sharp enforcement of the monarchy's side of the Statute of Secrecy, a Merlinic treaty that she had only been able to recall on an as-needed basis prior to that day. Mycroft had already been in attendance with the Prime Minister, and so he did not miss a single instant of the frantic hours and days that followed.

It had been the most exciting, wondrous period of Mycroft Holmes' entire life. To this day, over a decade later, he could remember every emotion and thought that raced through him as he, along with the Queen herself and the Prime Minister, found themselves and their key personnel abruptly inducted into the rather terrifying power and history of the British Magical World. Never before had these three been in the same location at the same time, much less out of the protective sights of their bodyguards and MI2K. Nevertheless, there they were, inexplicably transported through space by means of a loud bang and a truly, sickening physical sensation, emerging shocked and shaken in a large room brightly lit with thousands of floating candles. Mycroft sneered as he recalled how, even after being fully apprised of the situation by a grim-looking but remarkably intelligent teenage girl with the bushiest brown hair he had ever seen, the Prime Minister made loud, indignant assertions that Mr. Potter should be attending them, not summoning them to his presence.

The young woman's response had been priceless, in retrospect. She had simply given the PM a hard stare and said to the other wizards, "Harry was right again. Apparently it is the title that turns formerly intelligent statesmen into pompous windbags." The sputtering from the lime-green-suited former Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, had been entertaining, but no less so than the pinch-faced reaction of the mundane Prime Minister. The Queen, oddly enough, had smirked, and Ms. Granger had smirked right back. Fudge had then been removed from the room, having only been present to drip some blood unwillingly upon the hearthstone and formally cede his title. Mycroft sneered as he recalled how, even after being fully apprised of the situation by a grim-looking but remarkably intelligent teenage girl with the bushiest brown hair he had ever seen, the Prime Minister made loud, indignant assertions that Mr. Potter should be attending them, not summoning them to his presence.

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Those two had certainly formed an odd friendship, if his intel on the Queen's visits with the bright young witch were correct. They had apparently bonded during the months that followed, primarily over the ruthless interrogation of Fudge, who was the Queen's former counterpart, as they relentlessly examined every action and inaction taken by the inept, greedy politician during his time as Minister for Magic. Together, they reduced the man to quivering servility and then sent him, freed of his ill-gotten money and his magic, to live in the mundane world. Recent reports indicate that he had been promoted to Assistant Manager, and had gained two stone from all of the free Big Macs he got as an employee. He was also very fond of their Shamrock Shake, which was unsurprising considering the lime-green bowler hat and suit he wore constantly.
Rumor had it that more than one child believed he was the Hamburglar's nemesis. Eager for acclaim, Fudge had cunningly admitted his guilt as he handed out Happy Meals, and was frequently seen telling stories of his daring deeds to the wide-eyed McKids.

After Fudge was removed from the room, Ms. Granger had then answered their questions, the first of which had been to inquire as to why they were meeting with her rather than with Mr. Potter. She had peered inscrutably at the advisor who had asked the question, before she explained very carefully to the man that Mr. Potter, having mere hours ago conquered half of the world, was a little busy right now. Her attitude clearly said that she felt he should have figured that out for himself. The advisor – former advisor, Mycroft mentally amended – had puffed up like a toddler told to hush while mummy was on the phone. His grating whine had been abruptly silenced by a sharp wave of Ms. Granger's wand, and the "silent" message regarding who had the real power in the room was well and truly made. That message was reinforced by the warning looks sent to the other mundanes in the room by the twin red-headed teens guarding the door and the young redheaded woman guarding, for some reason, the fireplace.

Mycroft had met Ms. Granger's steady gaze calmly as he assessed the situation and unobtrusively placed himself in the best possible position to protect his Queen. Ms. Granger had immediately reassured him that they were in no danger from those in the room, and that the wizarding guards were here to protect them, not harm them. Phenomenally skilled in the art of reading people, Mycroft knew without a doubt that Ms. Granger spoke the truth, and relaxed somewhat.

Oddly, the Queen had never seemed in the least concerned, except to ensure that the mouthy Advisor was not capable of interrupting them again. Ms. Granger had then calmly explained that Mr. Potter's instructions had been to secure the safety of the Queen, the Prime Minister, and Mycroft Holmes, along with the few people who had been deemed either important members of their entourage or important to the smooth transitioning of power. At this, all three of the powerful mundanes had shown alarm, thinking that Mr. Potter and the wizards meant to seize their government as well. The snickers of all three redheads in response to their reaction had been … disconcerting … but Ms. Granger had only offered a small smile as she explained that the last thing Mr. Potter wanted was to take over the mundane side of things.

As she went into a lengthy but remarkably concise explanation of the history of mundanes versus magicals and the fears and prejudices of wizards toward mundanes – known back then as 'muggles' – Mycroft Holmes began to understand more clearly what these extraordinary teenagers had accomplished and were yet intending to achieve. Mr. Potter wanted nothing less than to bring Wizarding Britain and Mundane Britain into sync with each other, slowly expanding their influence until all of the world's governments served to check and balance each other. Coincidentally, he secured his own freedom in the process. When Mycroft learned of the multiple times that Potter had defeated the Dark Lord and his minions with no reward save endless harassment and the attempt at enslavement by those who ran the government, he was only barely able to suppress his desire to stand and applaud the absent young man. Mycroft felt that Mr. Potter truly deserved the power he held, and the elder Holmes' only real concern was to whether Potter would see that power as something to be used – or abused. Ms. Granger's pragmatic attitude soothed those worries considerably.

Potter's first action as Overlord was to issue a Proclamation declaring slavery and subjugation of any sentient beings, magical or mundane (with the detailed exceptions of Potter's penalty-bond as well as that of a race known as 'house elves', who apparently preferred enslavement), to be heinous and punishable by death. He then permanently executed Voldemort for those crimes among others, which also greatly reassured Mycroft as to his aspirations and the wizarding world as to their own survival. The young wizard accomplished the task within hours, simply by calling upon the freed Death Eaters. As it turned out, all but two were bound to Potter via the life debt magic, which
meant that only two of the Dark Lord's followers would have survived to the present day without
the young man's actions in repeatedly defeating Voldemort and his followers. There was also
something about a basilisk that Mycroft still wanted to get data on.

In the end, Voldemort's execution was remarkably straightforward. Potter sent his commands
through the penalty-bond, and all of the former Death Eaters who were near the Dark Lord hit their
former master en masse with killing curses. Potter then tapped into the massive magic available to
him to find the small slice of Voldemort's newly-released soul and retrieve anything that it
matched. Potter's own horcrux, a concept that disgusted Mycroft and the Queen wholeheartedly,
was ripped from his scar and left the young man stunned and bleeding on the floor. The dour,
large-nosed man healing him had been pelleted with five items bearing bits of the Dark Lord's
shredded soul. When the furious, wildly-hissing snake had slammed into the greasy-haired man, it
had shocked the man so badly that he had severed the snake's head in a burst of accidental magic
that had greatly embarrassed the sarcastic wizard. Mycroft had been vastly amused to learn in the
later briefing, courtesy of two snickering red-haired twins, that bursts of accidental magic in an
adult wizard were roughly comparable to premature ejaculation.

That day, a decade or so ago, had marked the beginning of what was now known as 'The Great
Balance.' Great Britain in all of her glory now served as the role model for the world's countries.
Magical Great Britain had modernized and integrated with Mundane Great Britain, although it
remained secret from the vast majority of non-magical people. And Mundane Great Britain now
had access to the remarkable abilities and protections of Magical Great Britain. Thanks to Mr.
Potter, Ms. Granger, most of the Weasley family, Mr. Malfoy (the younger), Ms. Parkinson, Ms.
Lovegood, Mr. Longbottom, and various other teenage members of the group formerly and
presently known as 'The Defense Association,' the two governments of Great Britain regulated each
other, and the country in its entirety had benefited immensely by the arrangement.

Although Mycroft now had numerous items that had been created by Weasley TechnoWizards, a
private company created by Frederick, George, William and Percy Weasley (reputed to have been
funded by Mr. Potter), the man known as the 'British Government' had never once actually met Mr.
Harry Potter. He had been in the younger wizard's presence many times, but with only a few
exceptions, the brilliant young man had used his Team to carry out his edicts. It seemed that Mr.
Potter, like Mycroft himself, preferred to work from the shadows of power. His effectiveness in
doing so was extraordinary.

Still tapping the blurred photograph in his hand, Mycroft took some time to enjoy the memory of
the first time he had ever seen Harry Potter. After that initial briefing with Ms. Granger, she had
escorted Mycroft, the Queen, the mundane Prime Minister, and the various men and women who
made up their entourage, into the huge amphitheater that hosted the Wizengamot. Their entry
stirred the unsettled, oddly-dressed people into a muttering, wildly-gesticulating crowd. Seated
calmly in a large, throne-like chair on a dais of what Mycroft would have called the 'stage'
carrying out the theater analogy was Harry James Potter. He looked thin and wiry, with wild
black hair and piercing green eyes and a lightning-bolt scar on his forehead. Mycroft and his party
were courteously seated at their own table off to the right, given clear visibility of the entire room.
Guarded by the redheads and Ms. Granger, they watched as the crowd tried to turn into a mob and
were put down hard by Mr. Potter's implacable use of the penalty bond. Looking around in awe, the
mundanes realized that all of these people had made it the task of the child seated in the throne to
defeat the most dangerous wizard seen in this world in over a millennia. Not only that, but these
people were present in this room right now because they had gathered with the express purpose of
enslaving Mr. Potter. They were now furious to find that he had turned the tables on him, and
struggled like bugs on a pin to get away.

When Mycroft voiced that analogy aloud, Ms. Granger smirked somewhat evilly and tapped a
harsh finger against a glass jar she had placed in the middle of the table. Peering closely, Mycroft made a mental note of the distinctive, poisonous green markings around the eyes of the beetle that was imprisoned in the jar, and wondered if he should inquire. Given the malicious look Ms. Granger wore as she tapped the glass, he decided in favor of discretion.

An elderly man with awful robes and ridiculously long hair and beard peered over half-moon spectacles at Mr. Potter, before he rose imperiously to his feet and the babble ceased. Mycroft later learned that this wrinkled eyesore was Fudge's accomplice, the ridiculously titled 'Supreme Mugwump', Albus Dumbledore. The man's attempt to approach the throne failed as his feet were immediately secured to the floor by Mr. Potter, who watched him silently with mocking, green eyes. Mycroft recalled noting the old man's duplicitous body language, finding his efforts to disguise his rage with false concern and faux wisdom to be utterly transparent. Apparently, Mr. Potter saw through him as well, as a smirk formed on the attractive young face.

Dumbledore had met Mr. Potter's eyes and said into the silence, "Harry, you realize you are not the only one to whom the wizarding world owes an unredeemed life debt. I am the defeater of Grindelwald, please recall. Should I choose, I, too, can call upon the penalty magic of vast numbers of unfulfilled life debts, and as my claim is older and the wizard I defeated more powerful than Voldemort, I will be able to take away your status." Excited shouts and relieved smiles ran rampant throughout the gathered Wizengamot, only to fade into puzzled stillness at Potter's lack of reaction. Mycroft, of course, easily interpreted that Potter was confident and unafraid. The young man simply waved a hand graciously at Dumbledore and said, "By all means, go ahead and call in that … debt. Please do. I want to see how magic handles dispensing the information about your actions that day. However," Mr. Potter smirked and beckoned sharply, causing the gnarled wand the old wizard clutched to soar through the air and slap into the young man's hand, "you will not be using this wand to do it. Hermione, why don't you lend Ms. Skeeter's wand to Albus here? I'm sure she isn't using it." At this, Ms. Granger smirked and reached into a pocket of her robes, retrieving a very short, slim wand and sending it floating over to the old man.

Mycroft and the Queen watched the old wizard pale a bit as he glanced around, before he seized the tiny wand floating in front of him, drew himself up to his full height and said warningly, "Harry, I will do this. Cease your actions at once or I will see you imprisoned."

Mr. Potter had simply laughed at the bluff, and replied, "No, I don't think so. After all, the entire blame for my actions today belongs to you. If you had not tried to enslave me, I would have let everyone stay free. I've known for years what I could do, and despite the crap the Wizarding World gave me, and all of the torture you heaped upon me, I would still have let everyone stay free. But the second you decided to declare me a fucking piece of property, I decided to retaliate. So I hope that each and every witch and wizard in Britain takes the time to personally tell you how they feel."

Dumbledore had glared around as the angry mutterings now turned against him. Wizards were fickle, apparently. The old man had abruptly focused on the Queen and Mycroft, and became furious. Mycroft learned later that apparently it had been Dumbledore's efforts that had kept the mundane government from ever being able to protect its people from the "terrorist" attacks of Voldemort and his people. The white-haired old man had then tried to summon the magic of broken oath for himself, only to find to his horror and everyone else's disgust that his unwitnessed methods in defeating Grindelwald had been somewhat less heroic and altruistic than he had claimed. Furthermore, magic felt no pride in the old man, as the only part of the penalty for a betrayed life debt that it rewarded Dumbledore was the punishment part, which Magic sent zinging through the old man relentlessly. After learning the truth of the defeat of Grindelwald, no one felt confident that Dumbledore was quite the Light Leader he had pretended to be.
After all, as effective as it was, giving a man a blow job and then knocking him out as he orgasmed wasn't exactly heroic, now was it? Apparently, Dumbledore's 'blow by blow' description of his defeat of Grindelwald more figurative than literal. Depends on how you look at it.

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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Mycroft abruptly brought himself back to the present, closing the file folder and placing it into the desk safe. Anthea followed as he gathered his coat and his umbrella and left the office, heading to 221B Baker Street to visit with his brother.

He was also eager to meet the new resident of 221C Baker Street. He was very curious to find out why Harry Potter, after finally setting the world on track and removing himself from politics, had chosen to move into the vacant apartment in his brother's building.

Mycroft shuddered at the thought of Sherlock's brilliant, dangerous experiments and Potter's power. Because if ever there was a recipe for trouble, this was it.

He wondered what the young wizard looked like now. Mycroft hadn't seen him in person since that last brief glimpse almost two years ago, in which Mycroft had felt someone watching him as he conversed with the team of WTW during a planning session for items that would aid him in his work. He had covertly looked around, only to find himself caught and held by a piercing, gemlike green gaze that inexplicably sent shivers down his spine and goosebumps across his skin. Potter's evaluation of him had been quite intense, and Mycroft had wondered and (he would admit only to himself) fantasized about the young wizard known as Harry Potter.

Having pulled up at Sherlock's building, Mycroft gracefully exited the car and opened the front door to the familiar building. Stepping into the hallway, the first thing to register on his senses was the overwhelmingly, wonderful aroma of cinnamon and baking bread. Closing eyes to enjoy the incredible smell, Mycroft considered just why Mr. Potter was baking Mycroft's absolute favorite culinary delicacy.

Nearly floating up the stairs after the aroma, Mycroft Holmes decided that, regarding the mysterious Mr. Harry Potter, today had definitely given the elder Holmes food for thought. He was going to greatly enjoy sinking his teeth in.

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Chapter Summary

First meeting at Harry's place.

CH2: THE FIRST BITE IS THE SWEETEST

Nearing the top of the stairs, Mycroft heard a small "yoo-hoo" whistle to his immediate left. Turning his head to glance up, he caught a flash of bright green eyes smiling down at him. Before he could utter a greeting, a seeker-swift hand popped a bite-size piece of the most incredible, warm-from-the-oven cinnamon bread in his mouth. Mycroft immediately abandoned his momentary startlement in favor of simply savoring the delicacy, closing his eyes and moaning just a little, although he would never admit it. My God, if Mr. Potter cooked like this, Mycroft would buy him the whole damn building just to keep him in place. Reluctantly swallowing, the British Government opened his deep blue eyes and met smiling green head-on.

"Mr. Potter, if this is how you greet all of your guests, I imagine this building will become quite popular in the near future," Mycroft managed, somewhat overcome at the sight of a jeans and t-shirt-clad, barefoot Harry Potter leaning casually over the railing. In the two years since Mycroft had last seen this young man, he had changed considerably. His black hair was longer now, just sweeping his shoulder blades, and there were no more spectacles blocking one's view of those amazing, verdant eyes. But what struck Mycroft most profoundly was the general air of relaxation the young man wore, as if his decision to retire had lifted a massive weight from those slim shoulders. Which, by all accounts, it had.

A quirky grin flashed over the handsome young face as Harry gestured for Mycroft to come all the way up the stairs. As Harry headed down the hall to his own flat, he said over his shoulder, "Your brother and the two not-gay, not-boyfriends are over here, Mycroft. It seemed more effort than it was worth to keep Sherlock on his side of the fence, so I just waved a surrender flag before the siege could begin. I used the universal sign for peace – homebaked desserts. I see it works on scary government types as well as sociopaths, doctors and Detective-Inspectors! I must remember to tell Hermione." A laughing, green flash of eyes over his shoulder beckoned Mycroft further into the open doorway of 221C Baker Street.

Bemusedly following Harry into his new apartment, Mycroft could not help but pause and stare at the sight that met him. It seemed that overnight – and, considering Mr. Potter's abilities, that may well be fact – the somewhat old-fashioned apartment had been completely redone. Light, wooden floors gleamed underfoot, showcasing the bright area rugs and comfortable furniture that decorated the room. What had been a small front room and a tiny kitchen was now one suspiciously large, open, airy space. Tucked along the joining wall to Sherlock's apartment was a state-of-the-art kitchen, half of which occupied what had been a 10 x 8 dining nook and wrapped around into the open space of the living area by way of a long, circular counter with a folding-counter doorway off to the side. Seated on solid, plush dining stools on one side of the opening were Detective Inspector Gregory LeStrade and Doctor John Watson, each of whom waved briefly as they voraciously consumed the warm cinnamon bread placed before them. To the other side of the
opening, seated by himself (naturally) was Sherlock, who surprisingly had accepted a plate of the cinnamon bread, too, although he did not appear to be eating it so much as inspecting it. The entire room gave off a sense of airiness and comfort and conviviality, greatly helped by the intoxicating aroma from the dessert du jour.

Harry ducked under the counter and gestured toward the coat hooks on the wall. "Hang your stuff up and have a seat, Mycroft; I'll get you a plate. What would you like to drink? I've got pretty much everything non-alcoholic." He busied himself in the kitchen as Mycroft found himself simply obeying the younger man, shedding his coat and placing it and his umbrella on the handsome pewter hooks lining the wall. He noted the benches below for removing and storing footwear, and nodded approvingly. Very efficient.

Sherlock answered Harry, "Mycroft will have tea, Mr. Potter. He always has tea." He continued to poke suspiciously at the aromatic bread in front of him, wearing a look of deep puzzlement.

Mycroft seated himself next to Sherlock, taking a moment to appreciate the surprising comfort of the raised chair, and said easily, "I would indeed enjoy a cup of tea, Mr. Potter, if you don't mind. Sherlock, what exactly are you afraid of there?" He nodded a greeting to Watson and LeStrade, who were completely focused on appreciating every bite they took and uttering decadent moans and sighs as they did so.

Harry flashed another grin over at the elder Holmes as he placed the kettle back on the stove. "No trouble at all, Mycroft. And since I've already insisted on calling you Mycroft, do call me Harry, yeah?" At Mycroft's agreeable nod, he added, "And Sherlock, I'd like to know what you think is wrong with my sin-bread, too. It's not poisoned, I promise you. From what I hear, such concerns would be greater in your kitchen than in mine."

John snorted a little, suffering a small flashback to the reason why he always checked the milk before he poured it now, and covered his mouth so that he could speak with some degree of politeness without giving up any precious consumption time. "You've got that much right, Harry. Our kitchen is classified "Hazardous" at all times. But Sherlock is probably trying to figure out what you did with the bread to make it smell so damn good."

Mycroft smiled in thanks as Harry placed a square, black-lacquer plate in front of him, loaded with three, thick slices of cinnamon bread. He sighed in resignation, knowing that this would absolutely ruin his dieting efforts for the week, but having no intention of demonstrating willpower. He accepted the tea that Harry poured and busied himself preparing it as he commented, "It would be my guess that Sherlock is puzzling out exactly why he wants to eat the – "sin-bread", did you call it? Apropos! – rather than dissect it."

This caught Harry's attention, and he turned to look piercingly at Sherlock. The World's Only Consulting Detective froze beneath the gaze, stunned by the impact he suffered under the full force of those intelligent, emerald eyes. Blinking in shock, he wrenched himself back under control and glared equally at Harry and Mycroft, who had a suspiciously knowing smirk on his face, and said haughtily, "I would indeed like to know why this food seems so appealing. Have you drugged it, Mr. Potter?"

Harry stared at the younger Holmes incredulously, before looking to the others to see if Sherlock was having him on. Based on the rolled eyes of the two not-daters in the corner and the smirk on Mycroft's handsome face, it seemed the younger Holmes was serious. How very interesting. "Oh, now, you know I can't let that pass. Why would you assume that a food item you watched me prepare is drugged, just because you find it appealing? Do you not normally find food appealing, Sherlock?"
Sherlock glared at the younger man and said sharply, "You do realize that I have not given permission for you to use my given name, Mr. Potter?" Three grins flashed along the counter at Harry's prompt, "Yes, Sherlock, I caught that. Now, what about the food?" It seemed that Sherlock was going to be out-Sherlocked today. Promising entertainment, indeed. Lestrade laughed outright as John quoted from one of many movie-vids, "Oh, look, dinner and a show!" And although the reference went right over Mycroft's head as well as Sherlock's, Harry's enthusiastic "Save the melon!" reduced the two jokers at the end of the counter to giggles, made much worse by the utterly perplexed look on Sherlock's face.

Sherlock's attention abruptly refocused on Harry when the young man tapped two fingers demandingly on the counter in front of Sherlock's plate. He looked up in irritation, and actually found himself swallowing in slight intimidation at the piercing green gaze that confronted him. After a moment of stubbornness, Sherlock huffed slightly and said irritably, "It is fairly well-known that I am not terribly fond of food. It is merely sustenance, a necessary evil, to be undertaken as rarely as possible whilst still fueling the body. Therefore, the fact that I actually seem to want to partake of this bread is highly suspect."

Anticipating mockery or even simple amusement, none of the four guests were expecting the thoughtful look that appeared on Harry's face. He studied Sherlock for a moment in silence, and then asked, "Have you ever tasted any food that appealed to you? Is there any food you particularly enjoy?" At Sherlock's look of incomprehension, Harry nodded as if having had a suspicion confirmed. He did not miss Mycroft's wistful look as he gazed yearningly at the second and third uneaten pieces of cinnamon bread before him. Leaning forward a bit, he focused on the elder Holmes and asked, "And what is your story, Mycroft? Was it not to your taste?"

Mycroft could have wept at the fallacy of that. "Harry, this was easily the most delicious food I have tasted in years. I would like nothing more than to finish off this plate, but my diet is already in quite enough danger as it is." Looking up at the young man staring intensely at him, he took a moment to mentally enjoy the verbal twisting of the fact that he was puzzled by the young man's puzzlement.

Harry folded his arms and thought deeply. The four men simply watched him, unsure if he had been offended by the incomparable Holmeses. Sherlock, at least, didn't particularly care, but it was interesting, all the same. After a moment of silence, Harry raised his startling eyes to Mycroft's and asked, "Why are you dieting?"

Sherlock immediately snorted, ignoring Mycroft's feeling as he always did, and said baldly, "Because his stomach gets fat, of course! Mycroft loves food far too much." He ignored John and Gregory's glares with practiced ease, but found himself once again frozen under the piercing gaze of Harry Potter.

Harry leaned over to Sherlock, locking their gazes in pure challenge, and said with some menace, "In my home, Sherlock Holmes, you will be civil to my guests. You may apologize to your brother, or you may leave and not come back."

Sherlock and Mycroft both stared at Harry, equally shocked. Sherlock because no one had ever managed to intimidate him in this manner, and Mycroft because no one had ever defended him before. It seemed the other two were simply holding their breaths, waiting for the inevitable, scathing retort. It did not come. Sherlock shifted his gaze to Mycroft, taking in the signs of wounded feelings that no one but he had ever been able to read before. He winced internally, angry at himself for once again letting his mind run ahead of his admittedly limited concern for others. Meeting Mycroft's deep blue gaze, he allowed a shred of his genuine remorse to show in his eyes and his voice as he quietly said, "Harry is quite right, Mycroft. The slight to your feelings was
unintentional. I apologize."

Mycroft simply stared for a moment or two, before he blinked past the shock and said just as quietly, "Thank you, Sherlock. Forgiven, of course." They continued to watch each other for a few moments more, assessing and determining for themselves that all was well between the Brothers Holmes. They did not look away until Harry regained their attention by seating himself behind one of the work stations. Mycroft had to smile at the sight; it seemed Harry was like Sherlock in his refusal to sit normally. Whereas Sherlock would sit on a couch with his long legs drawn up in front of him and his hands resting in a prayerful pose while he thought, Harry seemed to relax wherever he was. Presently, he was sitting on the stool with one leg tucked beneath him and the other freely swinging, munching on a slice of sin-bread and thinking deeply. With his long, black hair spilled wildly around his shoulders, ivory complexion, brilliant green eyes, straight black brows and black curly lashes, and dark pink lips being nibbled on by straight white teeth, he looked ….. decidedly edible. Glancing at Sherlock, Mycroft surprised a look on the younger man's face that he felt was mirrored on his own – a look of mingled interest, intrigue and desire. He met Sherlock's speculative look with a raised eyebrow, speaking in the nonverbal manner they had used since Sherlock was in nappies. 'You, too? Wonderful. What now?'

Deciding to set the subtext aside for now, Mycroft turned back to Harry and asked the question that had brought him here today originally. "Harry? Why did you decide to move here?" Unspoken was the question 'why here, when you could live anywhere in the entire world, do absolutely anything you wanted with anyone you pleased, why move to a small apartment next to my brother?'

Harry smiled understandingly at Mycroft and said simply, "Because I could. I was able to do anything I wanted. So I did." Which hardly answered Mycroft's question at all, but it certainly gave him many more questions. Those, however, would have to wait for another time, as Harry was still focused on the prior discussion.

"So, let me get this straight. Sherlock, you have never liked any food, at all. You only eat when your body absolutely demands it. Do people worry about you eating too little?" Three emphatic nods from the counter-sitters and one disinterested eyebrow from Sherlock answered that nicely. "And, Sherlock, does food mostly just taste bad to you? Like, you can't for the life of you figure out why people enjoy it?" Surprised at this accurate assessment, Sherlock offered a slow nod, wondering at the line of questioning the young man was pursuing.

Harry then turned to Mycroft. "And you, Mycroft. Despite being beautifully built, you are dieting and I gather from the gist of the conversation that this is a long-standing situation, yeah?" Slightly flustered at the fact that Harry seemed to think he was 'beautifully built', it took Mycroft slightly longer to nod affirmingly. "You love food, though, and when you gain weight, it's always just in your belly? Like, almost like a lump?" Sherlock snorted softly and Mycroft flushed, a moment of embarrassment that was immediately dispersed by Harry's prompt glare and quick assertion, "I'm asking this clinically, gentlemen! You aren't gaining weight in the belly like the way people describe having a 'spare tire', all the way around – you get an actual sort of 'lump' in the belly, yeah?"

Mycroft murmured a reluctant, "Yes, that's true," while trying to dismiss his discomfort. Ridiculous! He was one of the deadliest men in the world, had more political clout than the PM, and yet he was flushing in mortification over a discussion on weight gain! He could have ended the conversation, but sensed that Harry had a purpose to these questions, other than Mycroft's embarrassment.

The young man ruminated a few more moments, then asked, "Mycroft, when you eat, do you ever
feel satisfied? I know you enjoy the taste, but do you ever feel like, … um…., like "Yes, that was
JUST what I wanted! Now I don't want to eat anything else 'til I'm hungry again!" He watched
Mycroft closely, and was unsurprised to see Sherlock do the same. Mycroft's cheeks were pink but
he met his gaze determinedly as he said simply, "No."

The fact that Harry then smiled broadly, as if relieved, puzzled all four men, as did the young
man's burst of activity as he jumped to his feet and began to move around the kitchen, gathering
food items from the refrigerator and the cabinets.

Mycroft and Sherlock were briefly distracted by the sight of that tight, denim-clad butt perfectly
framed for them as Harry bent over to peer into the fridge. "Hey, John? You have any veggies or
fruit over at your place? If so, what kind?"

John was trying not to snicker as he watched the Holmes brothers watch Harry's ass. "Um, yes,
Harry, I do. I have some brand-name sugar-snap peas and a couple of apples. Why?"

Harry's flushed face came into view as he grinned over the door at the doctor. "Can you go get
them right now, please? Also, bring back some bread and milk, if you have them." John simply
nodded and rose to cross the room. "And an egg!" Harry called after the departing doctor. John
waved in reply as he disappeared into the hallway.

Sherlock's burgeoning irritation was abruptly silenced at Harry's cheerful, "We're going to conduct
an experiment!"

oooooo0000000000000000

Twenty minutes later, Mycroft, John, Gregory and Sherlock watched and waited while Harry
muttered over the notes he had made. Upon John's return, Harry had immediately begun the
experiment by placing two nearly identical sugar-snap peas in front of Sherlock, ordering him to
taste each and tell him which was not awful. After a moment of reluctance, Sherlock complied, and
found to his surprise that one of the peas was, indeed, not awful. It was quite good, in fact. This
was followed by similar commands about scrambled eggs, apple slices, pieces of bread, glasses of
milk, and finally – oddly enough – water. Harry noted all of Sherlock's responses down on what
looked to be actual parchment, watched with fascination by the four men. Then it was Mycroft's
turn.

Mycroft was given the same foods, but was ordered to tell him which of the two choices was "most
satisfying." He had thought such a decision would be impossible to make, as he had spoken the
truth when he admitted he was never actually satisfied by anything he ate. Harry proved him
wrong, though, as Mycroft found to his immense surprise that in every instance, one of the two
items before him just tasted right somehow. Harry simply nodded, as if in confirmation of a theory
he had already known would be proven.

Eventually, Harry looked up at the four men and shook his head in dismay. "I don't know if I
should be more worried for the state of the world, or for the future of you four." At this, both John
and Gregory immediately took umbrage. "We four? What the hell, Potter? John and I are just
sitting here; what've we got to do with this?" Harry's withering stare silenced him immediately, and
left all four of them wondering how the petite young man could be so intimidating.

The four, older men felt like school children at detention when the twenty-five-year-old Harry
Potter stood and looked at them, one after the other, shaking his head in disgust. "So, let me just
clarify this for you. Here we have four, grown men, who have known each other for seven years –
John for four. Two of you are geniuses. You specialize in noticing things that nobody else sees,
yeah? And then, of course, we have a Detective Inspector, who has apparently risen through the
ranks at Scotland Yard because he excels at solving crimes, which I presume means that you, too, have to notice things and connect the dots, yeah?” At Gregory's slightly fearful nod, Harry simply smiled grimly, before his darkening green gaze turned to the hapless John. "And here, we have a doctor. Not just any doctor, no, we have a doctor who also partners the genius consulting detective that he has lived with for four years. Based on the way the teasing about food went earlier, I'm betting you all have mocked and scoffed and worried about Sherlock's lack of eating and Mycroft's dieting all this time, yeah? Come on, you may as well 'fess up; it isn't like I don't already know."

Four reluctant nods. Sherlock was fascinated by Harry's performance. Mycroft was captivated. Neither of them could figure out where Harry was going with this, other than he had apparently found some brand name of food that the Holmes brothers liked better than others. Glancing briefly to the side, he saw that Gregory and John were bewildered and slightly offended, judging by the tight lines around their mouths and the red high in their cheeks. A quick look at Sherlock confirmed for Mycroft that both he and his brother were not offended; they were enraptured. Whatever Harry was doing, he was reeling in both of the brothers while he did it.

Harry, on the other hand, was ticked off. "Seriously, I'm a little bit afraid for our world all over again, and I just finished cleaning it up!" Only Mycroft understood that comment, although Sherlock had definitely filed it away for further clarification.

The black-haired man paced in agitation, bare feet squeaking slightly as he turned abruptly on the new wooden floors. Standing still, he put aggravated hands on his hips and glared at the four men. "Two geniuses, a Detective Inspector and a doctor…. and none of you noticed that the Holmes brothers have a simple food allergy." He glared at the dumbfounded looks that met his comment, plopped back down onto his stool, arms folded across his chest, and waited for the others to catch up.

It took a while.

Slowly, the four men replayed all of the facts. All of the times that Sherlock spat food out in disgust. All of the times Mycroft would graze from one menu item to the other, searching, searching. And although the two geniuses and the Detective Inspector were deeply embarrassed, it was John the doctor who was ashamed. How could he not have thought of that possibility, not even once?

Gregory spoke up hesitantly, "But, why do they react to food differently? I mean, is it the same allergy?"

They could see the struggle as Harry forced his aggravation down. Honestly, none of them could blame him, really. He had been in their lives as a unit for a grand total of perhaps four hours, and seemed to have addressed a problem that had tormented both brothers and the people who cared about them for years upon years. At the very least, the young man deserved the opportunity to grandstand, to humiliate them with their inability to piece together obvious facts, the way Sherlock did every time he solved a case. But, this was Harry, and despite all of his intelligence and all of his power, at heart, Harry was a man of a gentle nature.

And so, rather than launch into a diatribe, the young man simply sighed deeply, taking a moment to gather his thoughts, before he looked at Gregory and said, "Why do you like lager and John likes ale?” At Gregory's blank look, he shook his head slightly and explained, "Look, Gregory. Lager and ale are both beer, yeah? But they appeal to you two differently, because you're different people. Same with this. Same food allergy, but two different people have different reactions. They perceive the taste differently and that causes different responses. That's all."

He then turned to the stunned Holmes brothers and said, "And for the geniuses in the room, you
need to switch to organic-only food and drink. And Mycroft, you may want to consider a medically-supervised colon-cleansing; I'm betting that 'tummy' you think you have is actually just food your body refuses to digest." Mycroft's disgusted look brought a burst of laughter from the young man, which spread to the other four and had the happy effect of relaxing everyone.

Eventually, Sherlock leaned forward, chestnut hair falling against a sharp cheekbone, as he fixed Harry in an analytical stare. Unfazed, Harry continued to sit cross-legged on the bar stool, munching on organic sugar-snap peas and watching Sherlock with an amused expression.

"Harry," Sherlock drawled leadingly, "did you know that cinnamon bread is Mycroft's favorite sweet?" Mycroft tensed slightly, having wondered about this himself.

Harry simply smiled winsomely, taking the time to devour another sugar snap before he calmly said, "Of course I did, Sherlock. That's why I made it." He was very aware of Mycroft's dark blue eyes locked on him, mirrored by Sherlock's own blue eyes, and kept his composure through sheer determination. He had come here to 221C Baker Street out of a need to address his decade-long fascination with Mycroft Holmes, only to find himself confronted by twice the impact in the forms of both Mycroft and his brother Sherlock. Caught in the nearly identical blue gazes, Harry began to understand exactly how Neville felt when he caught the Weasley twins' interest. He made a mental note to send Neville some chocolate frogs or something, and used the sugar-snap in his mouth as an excuse to swallow against the tension building up in his system as neither gaze wavered.

Deciding to man-up and be a Gryffindor, Harry dropped his legs down and leaned over to snag another plate, on which he placed a still slightly-warm piece of cinnamon bread. Turning, he set it down in front of Sherlock and said teasingly, "Since you decided to dissect my first offering…." He gestured at the decimated remains on Sherlock's original plate before he overturned them into the trash and turned back to meet Sherlock's unwavering stare. "Or has Sherlock Holmes finally found an experiment he is afraid to try?" Both Mycroft and Sherlock wondered if Harry was, in fact, talking about sin-bread, which was becoming more aptly named by the minute.

John and Gregory did their best to simply fade into the background, fully aware of the tensions and questions that seemed to swirl all around the three other men in the small kitchen. They saw the moment Sherlock accepted the challenge of their fascinating new neighbor and observed how both Harry and Mycroft seemed fascinated by the long fingers that delicately tore off a piece of the sticky bread and raised it to the lips that sometimes even featured in their own, secret dreams, even though they were both adamantly not gay. And they watched as the beautiful blue eyes closed in surprised bliss, astonishment written openly across the handsome face, and knew they would remember this as the moment that Sherlock Holmes discovered he had a sensuous, decadent side to his exacting nature.

But, considering how closely Harry and Mycroft watched Sherlock, and how intensely the three men locked gazes when Sherlock's eyes blinked open in heavy-lidded enjoyment, neither John nor Gregory was entirely certain that the tension in the room was due to Sherlock's new enjoyment – of food.
One Bite at a Time

Chapter Summary

Mycroft has an unexpected guest, and Sherlock and Mycroft come to an understanding.

Chapter Notes

A/N: Some folks (well, two) from FFN had issues with the food allergy ::::rolling eyes::::: Regarding the food allergy, it is based on a real condition within my family, but people, I beg you, remember that this is not just fiction, but it is fantasy. I am not a doctor, I don't play one on TV, and am basing an idea off of the fact that I am intensely allergic to many chemicals found in foods that are not grown in a specific manner and chemical-free. And the consequences that Mycroft suffers? Yeah, that's real, too. And, ick.

A special nod to slayer of destiny, who hauled my ass into this fandom. And, although I love every reviewer (except the arrogant, anonymous git who declared "Schooled" a Mary Sue & advised me how to fix it), I need to offer a special thanks to Marksmom, Rowan Valadosa, pikachumomma, hprareslashfan, Aelirenn, Winter Mother (and your Circle), and slayer of destiny. Happy Reading!

WyrdSmith

CHAPTER 3: ONE BITE AT A TIME

Arriving at his flat later that evening, Mycroft Holmes was the embodiment of a man lost in thought. As he rode the private elevator up to his two-story flat, which was in truth the penthouse of a luxury-apartment building that had been converted from an early 20th century factory, Mycroft sent one last text to Anthea regarding tomorrow's schedule and put his phone away. As always, he would remain accessible, and odds were great that he would continue to be consulted throughout the night, but for now, Mycroft simply wanted to relax and think.

Unlocking the exquisite, molded-steel door while placing his hand on the WTW section of the vines and birds that the craftsman had welded masterfully, the door opened easily and he breathed a sigh of relief. The abilities of the Weasley brothers never failed to comfort him at times like this, when he knew that the unobtrusive measures they had taken to ensure his safety and privacy worked so well. Had his home been breached in any way, the pressure of his hand on the magical panel would have activated pre-set commands, not the least of which would have been another gut-wrenching portkey experience into a safe room. Having endured travel both by apparation and portkey, Mycroft was able to say that he preferred walking, thank you very much.

Closing the massive door behind him, he heard the telltale sounds of the door re-sealing itself and
finally allowed himself to relax. That is, until he heard a deep, male voice coming from his living room say, "Mr. Holmes? The safe word is 'plethora,' although why 'Mione would pick a word like that is anyone's guess."

Startled into a defensive posture, holding his trusty umbrella like the weapon it actually was, Mycroft moved enough to see clearly into the room. After a long moment in which the tall, lanky young man with the distinctive red hair and freckles of the Weasley family remained relaxed and unthreatening, Mycroft lowered the umbrella and said smoothly, "Perhaps you would care to explain who you are and why you are in my private home, Mr. Weasley?"

The young man smiled broadly, chuckling. "Yeah, kind of hard to hide my Line, isn't it? Not that I want to. Or could, for that matter. Knowing my brothers, your place has wards preventing such things." He watched Mycroft move into the room and gracefully seat himself in the large reading chair near the fireplace. "Mr. Holmes, I'm one of Harry Potter's oldest friends. He floo'd me about an hour ago, said that you had need of a healer and he wanted it to be discreet. He had my brothers give me portkey access into your wards. So, here I am. Healer Ronald Weasley, at your service."

Mycroft stared for a moment, completely taken by surprise. Harry had contacted a private healer for him? And so soon? He had just left Baker Street 90 minutes ago. His thoughts raced furiously, although nothing would show on his face. He was far too practiced to allow any of his confusion to show.

"You're confused." Healer Weasley's soft comment shocked Mycroft completely. How could he possibly have known that? He looked closely at the young man seated across the room, taking in the fine quality of his casual clothing and the quiet confidence that he exuded. Mycroft could not help but want to trust this man; it was an instinctive response, and that fact made him very wary, indeed. As if he could read his thoughts, which Mycroft knew was not possible with the measures that had been taken, the redhead smiled understandingly and explained, "I'm an empath, Mr. Holmes. It's a gift that gave me a fair bit of trouble in my younger years, always picking up on other people's strongest emotions and thinking they were my own. I've had a lot of training since then, though. Can't beat empathy to aid a Healer. How about I do this, first? I'd like to make a Wizarding Oath to you, but to do so I need to take out my wand. I don't want to alarm you if I do that. What do you say?"

Mycroft, of course, knew all about such oaths; magical vows and obligations were one of the first groups of information he consumed when he was introduced to the Wizarding World. After all, it was a magical obligation that had allowed Harry to seize control of his life in such a spectacular fashion. After a slow moment of consideration, in which Healer Weasley remained calmly relaxed, Mycroft nodded in agreement.

Weasley wasted no time. He produced a wand from his sleeve, a trick that never failed to interest Mycroft, and held it flat on the palms of his hands. "I, Healer Ronald Bilius Weasley, swear on my life and my magic that I have been sent to Mycroft Holmes by my friend Harry Potter in the role as private healer. I will keep Mycroft Holmes's confidentiality in all matters, and will fully disclose to him all information relevant to his health and to my presence in his home. So mote it be." A gentle flash of light briefly illuminated the young man, then faded. He looked at Mycroft expectantly.

"Well, that certainly is reassuring, Healer Weasley." He nodded in agreement at the redhead's easygoing, "Call me Ron." Pausing briefly to gather his thoughts, Mycroft then asked, "What did Harry tell you?"

Ron grinned a little, shaking his head fondly at the thought of the brief talk with his old friend. "Well, he said that he thought he had discovered something about your health, that you knew what
he thought, but that he wouldn't tell me because he wanted me to run my own scans and draw my own conclusions. So, may I?" He raised his wand and quirked a quizzical eyebrow at Mycroft. At Mycroft's somewhat reluctant nod, he stood and crossed the room, stopping a comfortable distance from the tense older man. "No worries, Mr. Holmes. I won't even touch you. Just going to ask your body to tell me what's up." He made several intricate gestures with his wand, whispering words beneath his breath, and watched closely as small flares of light and flashes of illuminated words and numbers began to appear on and around Mycroft.

Mycroft was fascinated. He felt slight tingles and bits of warmth and cold throughout his body, but was in no way uncomfortable. Healer Weasley's body language would have fed Sherlock's mind for several hours; the wizard was clearly a master of his own responses.

Cancelling the spells, Ron once again looked at, rather than into, Mycroft and quirked a one-sided grin. "So, for the most part you're remarkably healthy, Mr. Holmes. I do see, though, that you have a sensitivity to something you've been ingesting and that your body is fighting back. Is that what you and Harry discussed?"

Mycroft could not help the slightly-amazed smile that lifted the corners of his mouth. "Yes, Ron, it is. Harry believes that my brother and I each share a food allergy, specifically to foods that are not labeled as being organically grown or raised. Do you agree?"

Ron hmmmmed for a moment, tapping his wand thoughtfully on his chin as his eyes went distant. Thinking carefully, the young healer said slowly, "I do, and I don't. I imagine there were Muggles around when Harry was discussing this with you?" Mycroft raised his eyebrows sharply, simply nodding. This was getting more interesting by the moment. Ron simply nodded back and continued, "That's why he wanted me here so fast. Well, this is intriguing."

He re-seated himself, leaning forward with his long arms resting across his knees as he looked piercingly at Mycroft. "Mr. Holmes, while the explanation Harry gave you is certainly sufficient to explain your symptoms – and I'll want to look at your brother, as well – there is more to it. Naturally, Harry saw it; he sees everything when he cares about someone." He sighed briefly, ignoring the emotional flare he detected from Mycroft at his words, and thought about how to explain this. "Mr. Holmes, I know that you are a remarkably brilliant man. From the genetic information I just read, I assume your brother is, as well."

Mycroft said steadily, "Yes. Sherlock and I are both at the higher-range of genius intellect." He saw no reason to dissemble; it was the truth.

Ron hmmmmed again, then said, "Okay, here's how I'll explain this. Wizards use a portion of their brains that muggles – sorry, mundanes – don't. You, and probably your brother and possibly other members of your family, are also using those portions of your brains, although not for the same purpose as wizards. That is to say, you use your expanded access to your brain for intellect, while wizards use it for magical manipulation. But, we're both using the same type of energy, you see? Like, one person may be a Keeper and another may be a Chaser, but they both sit on their brooms the same way, yeah?"

Well, Mycroft had been with him up until the broom thing. His slightly perplexed look won an unwilling grin from Ron, who shook his head in amusement. "Okay, never mind that last part. Try this: one person kickboxes for protection, and one person dances for the enjoyment or art or whatever. They're both still using leg muscles, but for different reasons. The legs don't care, though; they get a workout either way, and need the same care. Make sense?"

Mycroft looked at him wryly. "Ron, you realize that your efforts to dumb this down for me are unnecessary, don't you? I am a genius; I believe I can keep up without the simple analogies. But, to
answer your question, yes, I understand. I am using my brain in the same way a wizard does, although I am not magical. Presumably, therefore, I require some of the same healthcare or nutrition as that of a wizard."

Ron looked sheepish. "Errrr… yeah. Sorry. I'll keep the stick figure illustrations tucked away then, shall I?" He grinned at Mycroft, who could not help but grin back at the affable young man.

Mycroft sat back in his chair, steepling his fingers against his chin as he gazed at the healer. "So, what is required? Harry said organic-only food and drink, but I presume there is more to that?"

Ron nodded firmly. "Absolutely. First off, I need to take care of some of the damage that's been done to your system. Nothing major, and it'll only take a minute or two, but you'll feel a lot better, I promise. That okay with you?"

Mycroft nodded cautiously, watching as the young man again rose and approached him. He could not help but tense as the wand was raised, but all he felt as the lights again settled around him was a sense of comfort, warmth and a great lessening of pressure that he had not even been aware of until it was gone. His ever-present slight headache also disappeared, leaving him feeling somewhat lightheaded with the relief. A decisive flick of the wand, and the lights then settled into Mycroft's body and faded, although he was aware that something had changed. He looked at Ron in query and simply waited. The young healer did not disappoint.

"So, that was a full cleansing spell, which removed all traces of the chemicals and foods and general gook that had settled in your system. Then I gave you a healing treatment, which eased any damage that had begun to occur. The last bit is a healing transfiguration spell, which will take anything that you have to ingest that doesn't suit your needs and convert it better for you. You'll have to remember, though, that you're going to have to follow the dietary needs of your body and eat the kinds of foods we show or provide. It'll be okay to eat at all those formal dinners that I've heard Harry and Mione bemoaning and assume you have to attend, but they won't fully nourish your body. I'll send you all the information you need, and either Harry or I can get you in touch with the grocers and meat markets from the magical world that suits us best. Draco has an incredible ranch that produces the best beef around; you'll love it! That, and a few potions to keep in stock just in case you feel uncomfortable, and that's about it!" he finished cheerfully, beaming at Mycroft.

Mycroft just looked at him, feeling, although he wouldn't admit it, slightly overwhelmed. Ron's empathy must have picked up on it, though, as the young man's expression softened again and he smiled sympathetically at the older man. "Look, it's simple. Just eat a few times a week with Harry. I've had his cooking; that won't be a hardship, I promise."

Mycroft must have still been sending out slightly lost vibes, as Ron handed him a business card. Mycroft recognized it as the magical kind, from Weasley Techno Wizards. He only had to take a picture of it with his WTW cell, and all of the information would be uploaded into his phone. Ron said comfortably, "That includes an emergency alert for me. If you need me – and I mean, in any way, Healer, friend, whatever – don't hesitate to call or text me. If you're in a health crisis, the charm in it will automatically send me an alert. Also, I'm going to need to see your brother. 'Sherlock', right? I'm going to need to give him a checkup, too. Can you arrange that?"

Concern began to course through Mycroft at the thought of trying to explain this to Sherlock without betraying the myriad secrets of the Wizarding World. "Ron, Sherlock is a Mundane. And he is not on the 'need-to-know' list regarding Magical Britain."

At that, Ron simply smiled enigmatically and told his worried patient, "Look, Sherlock is your brother and apparently Harry's neighbor and new friend, yeah? So, again, leave it to Harry. He'll
probably put a confidentiality spell on Sherlock, the same kind that thousands of other Mundanes get when their kid turns out to be magical. Then, you won't have to worry about it. He may even add a little more power, so that you can share more with your brother about what you do. Harry may be 'retired' but his word is still law. If he wants you to be able to talk with Sherlock about us, no one's going to challenge him. I'm going to recommend it to him, in fact. From the little I gathered, you three are going to be around each other quite a bit, and there is nothing Harry hates more than feeling like he has to lie to someone or being lied to. Trust Harry; he'll take care of it." He expertly ignored Mycroft's flare of interest at Ron's assumption that he, Sherlock and Harry would have cause to be in each other's company frequently. Rather, he pulled out a WTW phone and tapped a quick series of notes with his wand, then tucked both seamlessly back into his clothing.

And with that, the redheaded healer clapped a friendly hand onto Mycroft's shoulder, pulled a pendant from a long chain beneath his collar, and said, "Sin-bread." The last thing Mycroft saw before Ron apparated out of his flat was the wickedly amused grin on the freckled face.

Mycroft laughed softly. Harry's dessert was aptly named, indeed.

Sherlock lay in bed, listening to the quiet sounds of the old building around him and running each detail of the surprising afternoon through his brilliant mind.

The arrival of his new neighbor should have been of minimal interest. That flat had occasionally been occupied during the years he had lived in 221B, and had always been vacated – thankfully – within months. None of the previous tenants had been in any way interesting; it was as if the flat itself was incapable of attracting anyone who was not irrevocably boring, dishwater, dull.

Until now.

Sherlock had first migrated to the hall to look at the invitingly open doorway when he realized that both John and Gregory, who had been carefully not-flirting with each other in the kitchen, were no longer in the flat. Following the obvious clues, Sherlock deduced that the two had gone to meet the new neighbor. Pathetic. Approximately half an hour after he noticed their absence, the aroma of cinnamon and baking bread began to permeate the building, and a flushed, smiling John Watson appeared long enough to grab Sherlock's arm and try to pull him down the hallway. Naturally, Sherlock refused.

He withstood the curiosity for only five minutes or so before the moaning began, and he was forced to investigate. Whatever he had anticipated, it was not the sight of a completely redone flat, two of his acquaintances making love to a freshly-baked dessert, or the shock to his entire system that was Harry Potter.

Now he was an interesting young man. Sherlock was fascinated. He could read anyone, even his ridiculously self-contained brother Mycroft, and yet …. Harry Potter. Hmmm. That young man was a delectable mystery. Pure brain food, in a beautiful, tempting package.

Sherlock replayed the moments that made up his time with Harry. John and Gregory were there, as well, but that was trivia. His whole focus that entire time had been Harry. It had gotten even more interesting when Mycroft arrived, and Sherlock realized that the two knew each other. The body language was wrong, though; it was as if they knew each other, but didn't. As if they were very familiar with each other, but weren't.

It was all very fascinating, and fascination was better than food for Sherlock. Although, sin-bread
had definitely raised his estimation of the latter.

And that thought, of course, led him to the odd revelation Harry had shared about food allergies. Sherlock would have scoffed, but the young man had conducted experiments – an action that made Sherlock feel just that much more territorial about the emerald-eyed man – and those experiments had provided clear conclusions.

They were conclusions that were supported by the fact that Harry's sin-bread had nearly given Sherlock a hard-on. He had never, ever tasted anything that delightful.

But what was keeping Sherlock's mind buzzing at present were the moments after he tasted the sin-bread, and then opened his eyes to find himself inexplicably locking gazes with a gleaming-eyed Harry and, of all people, Mycroft. Those moments had been filled with intensity, and Sherlock could still feel the sensation of long-held beliefs slowly crumbling as he gazed somewhat heatedly back at his surprising new neighbor and his brother.

Wrinkling his brows, Sherlock thought that he should be much more disturbed by all of this than he was. Instead, he felt as if he had just landed the most interesting case of his life.

Smirking, he reached for his cell phone and texted Mycroft. He's going to be mine. SH

The reply came within moments. And, yet, he will be mine. Your thoughts? MH

Sherlock raised an eyebrow, stroking one long finger thoughtfully over sensuous lips. After a moment of lightning-fast analysis, he had reached a decision. It seems we will be dining together. SH

He waited patiently, knowing full-well that his older brother had reached a similar conclusion to his own. Mycroft's reply confirmed it. Three for this banquet, then? MH

Long, chestnut hair curled over a sharp cheekbone as Sherlock dropped his head in contemplation. This was territory that would be dangerous to them both. He hoped Mycroft's power as the British Government would protect them, and especially Harry, from what was to come, because it was already certain that neither Holmes would back away. How do we indulge in this small but delectable meal together? It is not a popular dish. Ideas? SH

He grinned ferally at his brother's immediate response. One bite at a time, dear brother. One bite at a time. MH

Setting his phone aside, Sherlock leaned back into his pillows, staring at the ceiling while he considered what was to come. Mere hours after meeting one Harry Potter, life for both Mycroft and himself had become … surprising, suddenly.

How utterly delicious.

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CHAPTER 4: SWEET DREAMS

Hermione Granger, while not a genius, was an exceptionally bright witch. She had worked hand-in-hand with Harry before, during and after his takeover of the majority of the wizarding world, and had earned her position as Harry's Regent through intelligence, grit, common sense and honor. In a way, Wizarding Great Britain, with the added territories of magical Canada, Asia and most of magical Europe, mirrored mundane Great Britain. In the mundane government, the three power-players were the Queen, the Prime Minister, and Mycroft Holmes. And in WGB, although the arrangement of power was different, the three power-players were the Regent, the Prime Minister, and Harry Potter. Although Harry was officially retired, he remained the most powerful person in the wizarding world. With his retirement, he had turned much of his discretionary powers over to his Regent, and Hermione had, in turn, created her own cabinet that mirrored the Wizengamot.

Accepting the lunch her assistant placed in porcelain dishes on her desk, Hermione smirked slightly as she considered the august body of magicals that made up the Wizengamot. The dusty old wizards and witches who had clung to tradition and personal power were long gone, and probably still sputtering in outrage over the fact that the Wizengamot now held representatives of every sentient magical race. Surprisingly, Aragog himself had chosen to sit on the Wizengamot, and he and Tamarrion, the centaur high-priestess, headed a solid coalition of non-wizarding beings that often voted their interests together. Neither Harry nor Hermione objected; it was a good strategy, and if the other members of the Wizengamot were unable to work together to counter them where needed, then they would just have to deal with issues such as increased funding for the protection of natural territories and allowing non-wizarding beings to shop Diagon Alley and TechMagic Way alongside witches and wizards. There were non-aggression spells in place to protect everyone, and the laws were now adequate to address anything that circumvented those spells or managed to emerge outside of the bounds of non-violence.

The Wizengamot was purely in charge of minor legislation and funding issues, anyway. The Prime
Minister, currently Lady Adamantine Zabini, was required to have a Mastery in Economics and Law. There was a new judicial branch to their government, following in part the methods of the Colonies in that there was a jury of peers (always spelled to be impartial during the course of a trial or hearing), but there was also a three-person group of overseers (who answered to Hermione) who had the right to amend judgments. The more vital issues that confronted the magical world were the purview of the Regent and her Cabinet. It was they who maintained the interactions with the mundane world, who negotiated treaties and addressed issues with other nations. In the rare instances where their own actions could not adequately address a situation, they called Harry.

Often enough, merely the threat of bringing Harry into it usually settled the issue quickly, particularly after the last time his intervention had been necessary. Two months before Harry officially retired, a particularly thickheaded but politically and magically powerful group of wizards from the Colonies decided they wanted a large piece of Canada for themselves. They had decided to simply take what they wanted, and began setting up broad-territory Fidelius charms over the Northern Territories, apparently because they wanted the vast natural and magical resources that area held. The wishes of the residents were disregarded with extreme prejudice by the usurpers. Their initial success made them quite confident, and they had turned down Harry's one and only offer of Peace Talks. Their second encounter with Harry was, for most of them, their last encounter with anyone. He had ripped through the Fidelius charms as if they were tissue paper, his already-enhanced power fuelled greatly by his rage at the knowledge that a school of young children had been the victim of one of the usurpers' demonstrations, and had then seized each of the would-be overlords and cast them directly into a pod of hungry, young Dementors. The return of the soulless bodies into the midst of the usurpers' compound had caused the immediate capitulation of the survivors, who, in addition to being added into the penalty-bond that Harry held, were sentenced to making reparations to the victims and their families in the form of schools, hospitals, and financial reparation. Furthermore, the Dementor Lord, who also sat on the Wizengamot, was well-pleased with Harry's acknowledgment of the needs and uses of his people, and was now one of the Regent's staunchest allies. Harry's belief that every race exists for a purpose and serves a benefit to the magical world now had absolute proof that Harry Potter, while preferring to have his peoples work toward peace and prosperity, would not hesitate to decisively handle any and all rebellion or violence.

Shortly thereafter, Harry retired from an active role in their governance, having finally led the Wizarding World, some of them still kicking and screaming, into the Age of Balance. Hermione smirked, thinking of the old wizard who had tried hardest to rally people against Harry. Dumbledore's power had been siphoned off and returned to the people from whom he had stolen it. Irma Pince, Arabella Figg, Rubeus Hagrid and Argus Filch were now classified as medium-power magicals, and had been gifted with over half of Dumbledore's vaults as well as the earthshakingly expensive youth-restorative potion, bought at Dumbledore's expense (the latter of which had pretty much wiped out the rest of Dumbledore's fortune). Harry had made that ruling, deciding that the four magicals had the right to live their youth over as reasonably powerful witches and wizards, and had earned himself a great deal of respect in doing so. Dumbledore himself was now enjoying the comforts of a shared cell with his ex-lover Grindelwald, who had been forewarned of Dumbledore's arrival and greeted his treacherous old friend with a frightening leer and some truly unique modifications to the cell that ensured Dumbledore would be re-living his "defeat" of Grindelwald over and over again.

Harry's decision to stay in London had surprised everyone except Hermione and Ron, both of whom had noted his fascination with the mundane British Government Mycroft Holmes. Neither was surprised; apart from Holmes' distinguished good looks and incredible intelligence, the man preferred to work in the shadows of power and kept a low profile – very much like Harry. Hermione had spoken to Mycroft Holmes many times, and found that she both liked and respected
the refined man. Betsy really enjoyed the elder Holmes' company, as well, having known him even longer than the current Prime Minister. Mycroft Holmes was the man who made it all work. The Prime Minister had his own role, and it was vital to the functioning of the country. The Queen had her role, as well, and although most thought she was primarily a figurehead these days, those who truly mattered knew that the Queen had distinct powers awarded the Sovereign from the Merlinic Treaty – powers that were kept tightly confidential. It would have probably caused a riot if the mundane world, as a whole, knew that the Queen could cause their entire nation to vanish behind a mass-Fidelius, or that she could activate a spell that changed the way the people actually thought about certain things. As far as Hermione knew, the latter powers had been used only rarely, the latest being to counteract the efforts of a dark wizard that caused the populace to disregard the plight of children being used as slave labor – and worse - in 19th century factories. The Queen's intervention had cleared the minds of her people, and it was they who ended that particular horror.

As for Mycroft Holmes, well, he was the scary part of government. He was the man who controlled the shadowy aspects of power, the one who made choices without regard to legality or morality. Mycroft always acted in the interests of the people, but not necessarily in agreement with them. He had ordered secret executions, and was more than capable of carrying them out himself if need be. Mycroft maintained a level of surveillance that put Orwell's Big Brother into sharp perspective. He also controlled those who would have used his information for the wrong purposes. And, like Harry, in the end, it was Mycroft who decided what "right" and "wrong" would be. The fact that he had unswervingly served his country, his people, and the world as a whole, with honor was a testament to the steel in the man's character. Given so much power, he could have taken over the nation. He could have grown distant from the people he served. Instead, he remained stalwart and true to his larger purpose, untroubled by moral ambiguities. He had no problem using his power to protect and aid those whom he cared about; most notably his own brother, Sherlock. He was unapologetic about his choices. He enjoyed his power and his wealth, and he wielded them decisively, but he never veered from the values he served.

And Harry Potter was completely fascinated by the man, Hermione smirked. So much so, in fact, that her oldest friend had ignored all opportunities for travel, or to buy and settle on a remote island somewhere, and had instead bought the flat next door to Mycroft's brother, Sherlock Holmes, at 221 Baker Street. Harry had spent long hours with her and Ron, talking about his hopes. He had looked at them with his brilliant green eyes shadowed in pain, and had said quietly, "I never actually had a home, you know? I've lived places, and loved Hogwarts, but I've never once had a place that was mine, where I was safe and comfortable and free to put my feet on the table or walk around in my skivvies or drink from the milk carton." The old Ron would have protested, would have been defensive about a perceived insult to his family, but the new Ron, the trained empath and healer, had just smiled sympathetically and let his old friend talk. They both knew that Harry only spoke the truth.

The Weasleys, with the obvious exceptions of Molly and Arthur, were as close to family as Harry had, but it was only natural that Harry would not have felt entirely comfortable in someone else's home. Even back when they all thought Molly and Arthur were sincere in their professed care for Harry, the boy had never had a proper bed in their home; he was given a cot. Considering that transfiguration of similar objects was simply Third Year work, the elder Weasleys failure to turn a cot into a bed for young Harry should have clued the children in. But who expects their parents to be traitors? Thank Merlin for Percy! It was he, in his exacting, slightly officious way, who had opened their eyes, and it was his careful review of his parents accounts that showed the discrepancies between what they actually earned, and what they spent. Hermione knew that what hurt all of the Weasley children and Harry, and even her, the most, was the fact that Molly and Arthur had stolen from Harry without any encouragement or guidance from anyone. It would have been comforting, somehow, had they been part of one of Dumbledore's plots, or even Fudge's, but
they weren't. The day Dumbledore gave Molly Harry's vault key, with the instructions to help
Harry get to Gringott's to get funds for his school supplies, was the day Molly and Arthur Weasley
proved they had no honor. Even Dumbledore had been surprised when the truth came out.

At least it had united the rest of the family, and they had rallied behind Harry. And Harry, in turn,
had proven his loyalty a thousand times over. The Weasleys, which no longer included the
disgraced and disinherited Arthur and Molly Prewitt, had sworn Family Fealty vows to the Potter
Line, and were rewarded for their actions with prosperity and respect. They had gained status in the
Wizarding World, and had been wise enough to accept Harry's aid in pursuing education and
economic opportunities. Ron was now a respected Healer, operating a private practice rather than
work under the public attention of St. Mungo's. Bill was the Wardsmaster of Weasley Techno
Wizards. Percy ran the business office of WTW. Fred and George were the main forces behind
Research and Development. Together, the four men had founded and grown a business that now
employed over one hundred and seventy five magicals, not all of whom were witches or wizards.
They had found that other races offered great innovations; for example, they employed three
acromantulas whose primary function was to spin silk and shed armor. Charlie had followed his
passion, and now ran Dragonsbreath, a ranch that fostered dragons and harvested the naturally-shed
scales and claws and collected willingly-donated blood and venom from his charges. Ginny had
gone into the field of Private Security, and was one of the most formidable private body guards
available for hire. She was currently guarding Betsy, in fact.

That thought brought Hermione back to the Queen, which then sent her mentally back on her
original path: Harry's retirement. She had just ended a private call with her old friend, and felt an
urge to giggle, a habit she thought she had gotten over during her first two years in government.
But Harry was just so cute about this! He was completely flustered, utterly confused that he was
apparently attracted not only to Mycroft Holmes but also to his brother Sherlock. His description of
that little scene in the kitchen convinced Hermione, if not the mostly oblivious Harry, that the
brothers were both attracted to Harry, too. Poor Harry had only moved into 221C Baker Street
because he knew that Mycroft's brother lived in the building, that Mycroft frequently visited, and
that Sherlock was known for being as interesting as his older brother. Harry had thought – and both
Ron and Hermione agreed – that, even though there was simply no way he would ever have a
"normal" life and probably wouldn't even really want one now, there was a good chance that he
could form a solid friendship with Sherlock. He had thought this basis not so much on his interest
in Mycroft, but on the fact that he felt Sherlock was interesting and that they shared some common
ground. Sherlock was also a loner and an outsider and was known as a "freak." (And hadn't that
revelation gotten Harry's eyes glowing in rage! Hermione briefly pitied Detective Anderson, who
was apparently the one most prone to calling Sherlock such slurs, but her pity died when she
recalled all the harm that had been done to Harry under the shelter of the term "freak.")

Munching on sliced vegetables, Hermione replayed her call with Harry. The poor man had been
worried sick, wondering if he should move out rather than risk causing problems by falling for
both of the Holmes brothers. Harry knew himself very well, at least on an instinctive level,
although he didn't talk about his wishes and wants much. If he was to the point where he was
concerned about developing a romantic interest in both brothers, then Hermione knew that he had
probably already done so and just wasn't ready to face it yet. Harry had valid concerns, the first
being not wanting to be a cause for problems between Mycroft and Sherlock, the second being the
possibility of having to choose between the two. Left unspoken was the possibility of Harry
becoming involved with both brothers at the same time. Hermione knew full well that Harry would
not even consider risking the wellbeing of others, particularly people whom he cared about.
Relationships that were accepted in the magical world were very much forbidden in the mundane
world, and with good reason. The Weasley twins had bonded with Neville Longbottom, and magic
allowed and accommodated such a union. Magic prevented the problems that occur from
inbreeding; it was a fallacy that close-breeding resulted in people like Marcus Flint or Gregory Goyle or squibs being born. The only truly inbred families were those who did not bring in new blood with each generation – people like the Gaunts. Tom Riddle Jr. really hadn’t stood a chance of being normal; his muggle father was the first blood outside of the immediate family in three generations. Bellatrix LeStrange's infamous insanity was not a result of the narrowly-branching family tree between the Blacks and other Pureblood families, but because of her improper training in Dark Magic. The same was true for the Flints, and a few others. But people like the Weasley Triad would be fine, blending Neville's blood and magic into theirs would undoubtedly result in powerful, intelligent children.

In the mundane world, however, inbreeding was a valid concern. Magic was not as prevalent in their bloodlines and would usually not take corrective measures; however, having one magical person in a triad would overcome that worry. If there were to be a future union between Harry and the Holmes brothers, a thought that would probably turn Harry into a gibbering mess if Hermione voiced it aloud too early, magic would happily compensate. Actually, given what she knew of the incredible intelligence and attractive appearances of Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes, Hermione suspected that Magic herself may be pushing a bit for this union to occur. That did not, however, address the problem of legality and social prejudice against such a joining. Where the magical world would see the truth and value of such a union, the mundane world would see only scandal, incest and homosexuality, probably with a healthy dose of deviance thrown in for good measure. Mobs had formed for less.

Pushing her plate away decisively, Hermione's jaw firmed and her eyes hardened. Harry Potter had gone through far too much, given far too much, lost far too much, for him to have to lose out on a relationship that Hermione's instincts fairly screamed was meant to be. For that matter, the same could be said for Mycroft Holmes: the man's entire life had been lived primarily for the British people and for his family. His interest in Harry had not gone un-noted even before Harry retired. Hermione was fully aware of the fact that Mycroft wanted to get to know Harry as much as Harry wanted to get to know Mycroft. Now, it was true that she didn't know this Sherlock fellow, but she did know some of what she'd read about him. Even if she didn't trust Harry's instincts, the fact that Sherlock Holmes had sacrificed his own reputation and happiness in allowing himself to be declared dead while he hunted and eliminated those assassins who would obey the supposedly-deceased Moriarty said quite a lot about the man's character.

Rising to her feet, she crossed her elegant office to the life-size painting of a garden gate. Running a caressing finger down the feathered back of the little songbird perched on the latch, Hermione listened with pleasure to the gentle song. She only had to wait a moment or two before she heard Betsy's distinctive voice calling out, "You may enter, Mione. I am alone." Unlatching the gate, Hermione swung it open and stepped through the painting, gracefully closing the gate behind her as she looked up and smiled at the Queen, who was calmly sitting with a book in her lap on her favorite divan with her beloved corgis gathered around her feet. "Betsy, remember when we discussed what to get Mycroft Holmes for his birthday? Well, I have an idea."

Mycroft stared in shock at the parchment in his hands. His mind, for perhaps the first time in his entire life, was a complete blank.

He had been sitting in his private office on the lower floor of his penthouse when the portal-drawer in his desk chimed. He considered that drawer one of the finest offerings of the magical world; through it, he could instantly send and receive original correspondence and even small items sent from anyone who had a similar drawer and shared access. He and the Queen often used the portal-drawer, and found it had been tremendously effective both in reducing Mycroft's travel time to and
from the Queen's offices as well as in increasing the speed and efficiency with which they managed vital paperwork. The Prime Minister had access, as well, although he was less inclined to its use and favored face-to-face communication. (Mycroft and the Queen both knew that it was simply a small power-play on the part of the PM, in calling Mycroft to his side, but they allowed the man his little whims as it kept him out of trouble.)

When his drawer chimed, Mycroft had simply reached in, utterly unsuspecting of the private and shocking nature of the correspondence within. He had been initially mortified at the letter the Queen had written, charmed (thankfully) for his eyes only unless he gave another access. His blue slate eyes scanned the parchment again, shuddering occasionally as he encountered a particular phrase or sentence.

"...Through the inestimable Miss Granger, it has come to Our attention that you have encountered a romantic situation that We doubt you had anticipated.... Whilst a romantic relationship between members of the same gender has of late become more commonly acceptable within Our nation, and whilst a legal union can occur between two males or two females in the form of a Civil Union, the relationship between three persons is more ambiguous .... Miss Granger has given to Us detailed information regarding the nature of Magic as it pertains to romantic relationships between close blood relatives .... Should Miss Granger's and other of Our intelligences regarding your interests prove correct, We believe that you, being a man of strong conviction, would strive to find a way in which to secure your relationship whilst also protecting Mr. Potter and your brother from the threats and punishments, both legal and societal.... It is Our opinion that you deserve every chance at happiness, howsoever unconventional to Our mundane world your triadic relationship may be.... It is further Our opinion that Mr. Potter also deserves such happiness .... WE have therefore decided to employ one of Our most rare privileges and powers upon the behalf of yourself, Mr. Potter and your brother Sherlock, should you determine that such is the course of happiness for you three together .... Upon your request, WE shall use Our Merlinic gifts to influence the legality and the societal perception of your triadic union alone, not to be employed on behalf of others unless future, individual circumstances similar in importance and nature to your own should occur... It is not Our intention to force you into such a union, nor to embarrass you in any way. Rather, it is Our wish that you should achieve such happiness as you deserve, and that nothing should prevent such an event... We wish you all blessings and good fortune. And I personally wish you joy, old friend." Her signature, although unnecessary, was simply "Betsy."

Mycroft sat at his desk late into the night, alternately staring out the window and re-reading the letter that trembled in his hands. His thoughts had gradually resumed, and he spent the hours relentlessly exploring all possibilities and potentialities. He had spent considerable time wondering what conversation had occurred between Harry and Miss Granger to awaken the Regent to this situation. He had been floored by the perception of Miss Granger, not to mention her proactivity in going to the Queen. The Queen's reaction was beyond astonishing; the woman was forty years plus his elder and was not exactly known for revolutionary thinking. Still, her actions and reactions during the past decade or so of revelation about the magical world had been telling; she had seemed to come alive again, delighted with life and the mysteries it offered. That she had been invigorated, rather than intimidated, showed him once again how the woman had guided the nation through so many trying times. Still, she had just handed Mycroft Holmes the legal right to have a sexual relationship with two other men, one of whom was his own brother.

Mycroft felt justified in his surprise.

Eventually, disregarding the fact that the handsome clock on his wall showed it was just after 1 a.m., Mycroft picked up his cell phone and sent a text. Need to see you immediately. I'm sending a car. MH
Sherlock replied within moments. *On my way, of course. Hints? SH*

Mycroft thought a moment before a slight smile formed on his tired face. *We need to plan the menu. Betsy gave me the recipe. MH*

He chuckled quietly at the long pause, easily picturing his brother's wide-eyed reaction. A few minutes later, came the sly reply. *I'm salivating already. Be there soon. SH*

Allowing his phone to go back to sleep mode, Mycroft spun slowly in his chair and set his feet up on the credenza that bordered the window. He had a moment of dark humor as he ruminated on how Harry would respond to being hunted by both Holmes brothers. Reaching back to snap off his desk lamp, he allowed the dim lights of his office to remain on as he gazed out into the night sky, searching out stars that were usually hard to see through the fog and smog of London. Tonight, for some reason, the stars seemed to glow brightly in the black velvet sky. It seemed … magical.

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Sherlock quietly closed the door to 221B, pulling his scarf on carelessly as he turned to leave. He was on the top stair when he was surprised by Harry's distinctive voice. "Sherlock? Everything okay?"

Startled, he looked up and saw Harry silhouetted in his doorway, soft light streaming around him as the younger man stared at him in concern. Sherlock's throat went momentarily dry as he realized that Harry was wearing only a pair of low-riding, black sleeping pants and a thin, white tank top. In the dim light of the hallway, the white of the top blended into the ivory of Harry's skin, leaving Sherlock with the overwhelming impression of partial nudity. That impression was further enhanced by the fact that Sherlock could see the faint shadows of navel and nipples through the thin fabric. A single, bare hipbone peeked at him between the low-slung pants and the rumpled shirt. Harry's ebony hair was rumpled, his bare feet peeked out from the bottom of the trousers, and his brilliant green eyes were heavy-lidded and sleepy. As Sherlock watched, Harry yawned lightly, briefly covering his mouth before raising his hand to brush a lock of black hair from his face.

'Temptation, given form and breath,' Sherlock quoted to himself, staring with deep appreciation.

"Sherlock?" Harry questioned again.

Sherlock blinked, realizing that he had simply been standing on the stair, gazing at the young man. He sent a quick smile at Harry as he said reassuringly, "Perfectly fine. Just off on an errand. What are you doing up at this hour?" His sharp gaze now swept assessingly over Harry, picking up the evident signs – well, evident to him, anyway – that Harry, while clearly having been asleep not long ago, had been awake long enough to be up and near enough to the door to have heard Sherlock's footsteps and come to investigate. Looking closely, he saw in the wildly-mussed hair and tense shoulders the proof that Harry had suffered some manner of disturbance to his sleep.

His assessment was confirmed by Harry's studiedly-offhand reply. "Oh, just a little trouble sleeping again. No big deal. You sure you're all right, then?" Sherlock did not miss the casual 'again', indicating that the weary young man was accustomed to having trouble with sleep. Sherlock scowled slightly, displeased that Harry seemed to suffer from one of the conditions that also plagued him. Harry simply gazed at him inquiringly, a look that struck Sherlock as remarkably adorable.

Aware that he should be alarmed by that thought but wasn't, Sherlock paused a moment longer, gazing with interest at the pseudo-naked young man. Well, all right, he was only pseudo-half-naked, but those sleep pants weren't exactly leaving much to Sherlock's decidedly-excellent
imagination either. Glancing down the stairs, he saw the telltale beam of headlights through the entry door. The car was here. He looked back undecidedly at Harry, leaning against the doorjamb of 221C, before tossing his scarf over his shoulder as he stepped back off the stair and walked down to Harry's doorway. The young man stood straight on seeing Sherlock approach, swallowing nervously as Sherlock walked right into his personal space.

Having those wide emerald eyes gaze up at him from a distance of mere inches, Sherlock gained further insight into the nearly overpowering pull this young man had on his senses. Although every instinct urged Sherlock to simply back Harry into his flat and not stop until they reached the bed, Sherlock resisted. Not only was it too soon for such caveman tactics – although their day was definitely coming – Sherlock owed it to Mycroft to ensure they met Harry on equal terms.

Still, since Mycroft had the pleasure of knowing Harry longer, it fell to Sherlock to have the pleasure of 'knowing' Harry first. In the Biblical sense, that is. Smirking to himself, he amended, 'At least his lips. Those are mine.' He smiled down predatorily at the beautiful, slightly-breathless young man before cupping Harry's face in his hands and leaning down to drop a gentle kiss on the silvery lightning bolt that graced his forehead. Harry's slight gasp went straight to Sherlock's cock, a complication that was enhanced by the tempting little O formed by the dark pink lips. Unable to resist, Sherlock pressed a slow, succulent kiss on the delightfully parted lips, exerting rigid self-control as he ended the kiss and gently turned Harry around and gave a gentle push to send him back into his flat. He watched as Harry looked back over his shoulder, momentarily entranced at the sensual image of a sultry, emerald eye peeking through the long, raven tresses.

Sending a final, gentle smile full of teasing and dark promise, Sherlock murmured deeply, "Sweet dreams, little tempter." Gently shutting the door, he turned resolutely and headed down the stairs and out to the car Mycroft had sent.

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Alone in his bed, Harry wrapped his arms around a pillow and squeezed his eyes shut, trembling at the leftover reaction from his brief meeting with Sherlock. 'He kissed me! Merlin, he kissed me!' The thought spun through his head, over and over. One moment he had been talking to Sherlock across the distance of the hall, and the next the chiseled face and large warm hands were right there, and then there was touching, and then the kiss and ….!

Burying his flushed face in the pillow, Harry could not help but replay that kiss. It had been gentle and sweet and hot. There were open lips involved, and a touch of Sherlock's tongue, and ….

Harry shook his head violently, refusing to believe that he had an erection from a simple goodnight kiss. The fact that it was from his handsome, sexy neighbor Sherlock Holmes, instead of from his handsome, sexy crush Mycroft Holmes …. and the fact that he was perfectly okay with that, but wanted one from Mycroft, as well …. and the fact that he didn't want to have kisses from only Sherlock or only Mycroft …. !

Harry punched the pillow viciously, ready to fall apart at the fact that he wanted what he could not have. Again! 'Fucking luck!' Was he ever going to want what he could have, and have what he wanted, all at the same time? Considering his intense attraction to both of the brothers Holmes, Harry resigned himself to the probability that he was doomed.

Settling down, he replayed the kiss once again, then snorted in irritation at his persistent erection. Sherlock's parting words had certainly been ironic, the teasing prat. Slowly relaxing into an image-filled sleep, Harry's dreams were filled with tempting memories of both Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes, filling in impossible images of what he wished could occur, while Sherlock's dark-chocolate voice murmured in his mind. "Sweet Dreams, little tempter."
As if they could be anything else!

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Squash, Anyone?

Chapter Summary

Anthea joins the plotting, lunch, Sherlock's paradigm shift, and the boys enjoy squash. Also food.

Chapter Notes

A/N: ABOUT THE FLAT: I have set it up just a bit differently from the show. I realize the traditional term "flat" means the full level of one building, but what I've chosen is to instead have both apartments be two-levels, side-by-side, so that their main entry doors are essentially available from the same hallway. So, enter 221, go up one flight of stairs to their main level, and 221B and 221C are on either side of the stairwell. Sorry if that confuses anyone. It's how I've always envision it working, and trying to change it up in my head will just make for logistical errors that'll be more irritating than a small paradigm shift. Thanks for bearing with me!

Happy Reading!

WyrdSmith

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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CHAPTER 5: SQUASH, ANYONE?

Anthea watched her boss Mycroft Holmes discreetly from her position seated across from the handsome older man in one of his luxurious private cars. She knew most people thought she never took her eyes off of her beloved Blackberry – and, for the most part, they were right. That didn't mean she ever lost sight of what was going on around her. She had learned to optimize the information she gleaned through her excellent peripheral vision, and that ability, added to the tweaks and perks that a flirtatious William Weasley had added to her phone, ensured that Anthea was never caught unaware by the events around her. (The redhead's decision to test her on that resulted in his broken nose and a two-hour luncheon with the charming wardsmaster of WTW. Smiling internally, Anthea decided that she would probably allow William to escort her to one of the upcoming soirees to see how he interacted with an overwhelming percentage of non-magicals.)

She knew she was supposed to use the term "mundanes" to describe non-magical beings, but that would include Anthea and both of the Holmes brothers, and frankly, there was nothing mundane about any of them.

At present, despite her practiced expressionless expression, Anthea was greatly amused. Watching him watch a browsing Harry Potter as the young man casually wandered, shopped and chatted with friendly storekeepers was quite enlightening. She knew by his careful attention that he was gathering data, but the tapping of his fingers on his umbrella said much for his state of mind.
Frankly, she was delighted; this was the perfect solution to a conundrum that had plagued her for years now.

She had been marginally aware of Mr. Holmes' simmering interest in Harry Potter over the past decade or so, but in truth had never thought events would progress to the point where her deadly but lonely boss would be free to pursue Mr. Potter. In fact, it had been in Anthea's mind that there was really no one who could truly capture and hold Mr. Holmes' interest, with the possible exception of the other Mr. Holmes.

Living and working at the levels of danger and intrigue that were as much a part of her life as her morning coffee, the frighteningly efficient woman had long ago lost all capacity to think within the box, so to speak. Anthea was personally responsible for a number of unusual but successful solutions to various 'situations of interest' that checkered her professional employment – indeed, it was she who suggested that the former Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, would do well in the fast-food industry, an idea that Ms. Granger had giggled over with Her Royal Majesty as they plotted the ex-wizard's second career, an operation they had named 'McFudge'. And it was not unusual for her odd imagination to be consulted by various members of their 'minor governmental department' in order to jump-start a brainstorming session here and there. Sometimes, her ability to dismiss societal norms had resulted in a great deal of private amusement for Mr. Holmes, particularly in situations where Anthea's broad-spectrum thinking ran roughshod over narrowminded paperpushers. They had both greatly enjoyed the furor over the legalization of homosexual 'civil unions', for example.

Despite a truly extraordinary amount of success in a field she had not known even existed within the career opportunities generally provided to Personal Assistants, Anthea remained fully aware of her roots. If not for Mycroft Holmes, Anthea would probably be an Executive Secretary somewhere in the true minor government or corporate worlds, chugging coffee and valium with equal gusto while she evaded the sweaty hands of the higher-ups and the painful flirtations of the mail room clerks. Instead, Anthea was living a life most people only fantasized about – and she loved every single moment of it.

And for this happiness, she felt she owed Mycroft Holmes a very great deal. Lesser people might think her life restrictive. Certainly, her loyalty was entirely committed to her boss, and her personal life was so intermixed with her work as to be nonexistent as its own entity. But she was happy as well as successful, and really, how many people could truthfully say that?

She had been on the alert for years now to find a way to help repay Mr. Holmes in kind – happiness for happiness. But, as far as she could tell, all that Mr. Holmes truly lacked was someone with whom to share his life. His brother, Sherlock, had been the man Anthea had deemed most suitable to partnering her boss, despite the obvious issues with regard to their blood relationship. In all of her years with Mr. Holmes, Anthea had never seen the man so personally committed to the wellbeing of anyone as he was for his brother, although their parents were close to those standards. Only Sherlock was capable of understanding Mr. Holmes – not just the childhood they shared that had helped shape them, but the painful intensity of intellect that blessed and tortured them both, the sheer force of personality that enshadowed anyone within their sphere of influence, and the ability to focus so intensely upon one person that they would burn the world to protect such a soul.

She had come close many times to beginning some of the subtle hints and machinations at which Anthea excelled, but one thing had held her back. (And, unlike most would believe, that one thing was not the issue of incest. To her, Mycroft Holmes and Sherlock Holmes were much like the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, who had often taken to spouse their own brothers or sisters. Even the Windsors had a great deal of close intermarriage amongst their Line and one or two others. Barring legality, as far as Anthea was concerned anyway, it was a non-issue for certain people, of whom
the Holmes' led the pack.) Anthea felt that, although Sherlock and her boss were really the only possible romantic partners for each other, there was too much intensity and similarity between them to provide either man with a satisfying life. Should they respond to her nudges, their relationship would be combustive. They were both alpha males, to use a fantastical analogy, and would forever be at each other's throats to establish dominance. No, they needed … another.

She had seen her Mr. Holmes's quiet fascination with young Harry Potter, even back when her boss first returned from the history-making trip to attend Mr. Potter's takeover of the Wizarding World. At that time, Anthea was still somewhat further down the proverbial hill from Mr. Holmes, and was beginning to catch his interest through her ability to avoid, redirect or convert to a bed of flowers the shit that rolled down it regularly. She had been instrumental in managing the – to continue the analogy – shitstorm that had hit during those months of chaos. In fact, she had thrived on it, and her ability to maintain a cool, disinterested demeanor in equal measure whilst facilitating an order for lunch one moment or an execution the next had resulted in her present position, firmly atop the hill, albeit tethered to Mr. Holmes. If he were ever to fall, so would she.

But Mycroft Holmes would never fall. There were very few aspects of life that Anthea considered a certainty, especially considering some of what she had learned of the magical world. Death was a certainty for most – but not all – species. The sun was the center of the solar system. Sherlock Holmes was an arrogant git who, despite his sarcastic mien, was as loyal to Mycroft as Mycroft was to him. And, if the world were to end within his lifetime, Mycroft Holmes would be the last man standing, and he would be carrying those few he loves.

Given what she now was observing, that would shortly be – if not already – one Harry James Potter and one Sherlock Conan Holmes.

Entering a privacy code into her Blackberry, she sent a quick text to Hermione. "Progress."

Two seconds after she hit 'send', the message and all traces of it disappeared, as did the reply that showed onscreen just long enough for her to read. 'Betsy came thru.'

Not a trace of Anthea's shock showed in any way. Nor did her delight.

Expertly directing the myriad details that flowed in and out through her enhanced Blackberry, Anthea flawlessly directed the activities of a veritable army of administrators while she watched her boss watch Harry Potter.

She couldn't help but think it was sweet.

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Harry looked around in surprise at the warm hand that suddenly rested on his back. The happy chattering of the veggie stall owner faded into the background as six-and-a-half-feet of breathtaking politician suddenly filled his vision.

"Mycroft! What are you doing here?" Resisting the urge to sweep his fingers nervously through his hair, Harry smiled up at the tall man standing next to him and absentmindedly paid for three gourds of organic squash. Caught up in the visual treat of the elder Mr. Holmes, he felt a heavy weight land in the basket he carried and stared in confusion at the three ugly gourds that now sat atop his fresh parsley and a box of mushrooms.

"Well, I thought to invite you to luncheon with me, unless you were planning on snacking as you shop?" A dark twinkle in the deep blue eyes that rested on him sent a shiver through Harry even as he aimed a faux-frown back up at Mycroft.
"And I thought you were so bright, Mr. Minor Government. I couldn't possibly eat this now!" he grinned up at the handsome face so close to his own. "Ron suggested I make sure you and Sherlock eat properly. This is for your dinner!"

Harry laughed in delight at the look of pretend horror the dignified man wore as he uttered a dry, "Delightful. I can barely wait."

Nodding in acquiescence to Mycroft's raised eyebrows, he allowed the older man to escort him down the street to a small café that sat unobtrusively in the middle of the bustle. He could sense Mycroft's amusement as he carefully inspected the building, and gave another delighted shiver when Mycroft leaned down and said quietly in his ear, "No magic here. Just good planning."

Flushing a little at his sudden proximity to the powerful body that loomed over him, Harry concentrated on not walking into anyone as he followed the discreet older hostess to a comfortable table set into a private nook of the room and determinedly ignored the amusement he sensed coming from Mycroft. Only when he had accepted a seat and allowed Mycroft to tug his shopping basket from him to set on the floor nearby did Harry allow himself to glance at his urbane companion. The darkly amused twinkle in Mycroft's eyes had not abated at all.

Huffing in embarrassment, Harry rolled his eyes and muttered, "Yes, very good, kudos for discomfiting the Vengeful Savior."

He blinked at the warm hand that suddenly rested on his face and turned him slightly to look into gentle, deep blue eyes. "I will accept 'kudos' for having an enjoyable effect on my luncheon companion, Harry. It is a fact that delights me, in truth. As I recall, I've never actually met the supposed 'Vengeful Savior', although I imagine that man is vastly misunderstood. I wish him luck, but it is my belief that he has nothing to do with either of us at the moment."

Harry wasn't sure whether he was holding his breath at his intense reaction to the strong hand on his face or to the gentle, understanding words, but either way, he was deeply moved.

Mycroft gazed soberly at Harry, allowing the young man plenty of time to read and believe his sincerity. He could not help but feel compassion for Harry, this young man who had never been seen as simply himself from the first moment he entered the Wizarding World at age eleven. There was a vast amount of information in the files on Harry Potter, most of which read like a combination adventure and horror story, depending on one's perspective. To Mycroft, it was horror, knowing that a mere child had been forced through the traumatic events and life-threatening machinations that littered Harry's life with barely weeks in between for the boy to recover from yet another stay in the Healer's Wing at Hogwarts. Harry had endured more from age eleven to fifteen than any two dozen other wizards could claim, and his actions that literally saved the world and secured his own position of freedom and power had earned the young man countless haters amongst the wizarding population.

Although he had a large percentage of supporters, for the most part, Harry was feared and vilified for his actions, despite the fact that standard of living for virtually everyone had improved dramatically. Fred Weasley had once told Mycroft, after George had departed from their meeting in haste to go increase the anti-recording and privacy measures they had taken for Harry, that he could not recall a single time when Harry Potter was not a renowned public figure in the wizarding world. Even as an infant, young Harry was famous for surviving the terrorist assassination attempt that had killed his parents. Little was known about the years from that date until he re-emerged at age eleven, but there were occasional dark hints from the various Weasleys of WTW and Miss Granger regarding holidays. It was evident that the boy had not had a supportive home life to help him manage his fame in all of its incarnations, much less the amoral machinations of Dumbledore
and Fudge (among others). There was never a time that Harry was not enduring the weight of public opinion, be it approval or scorn, that was heaped endlessly upon his small frame. Somehow, Harry had born up under it, and continued to move forward toward his goals. He had accepted the help of some truly remarkable friends, and they had taken as much weight from him as they could, but in the end, it was Harry Potter who personally dragged the Wizarding World kicking and screaming into the age of The Great Balance. Despite the fears that had run rampant at his coup, Harry Potter had not established himself as Emperor or despot or tyrant. He had done his very best to ensure that the world was safe and on the right path, and he stepped deeper into the shadows. He remained only just visible enough to remind people that their peaceful, honorable actions were in their own best interests, because if Harry Potter was summoned from the shadows, it would be the renowned Vengeful Savior who confronted the reason for his summons.

But, as Mycroft gazed closely into the deep, emerald eyes so close to his own, he knew with certainty that Harry had paid a terrible price for the life he had led. Such a beautiful, delightful young man should be carefree and swarming in boyfriends, but Mycroft could see the scars on Harry's spirit. Harry was too accustomed to being unseen, except for his public face. He was far too used to being misunderstood and criticized for every choice he made and action he took. He did not expect anyone to care about Harry, beyond the firm circle of friends who stood with him through it all. More than any other public figure Mycroft could think of, Harry Potter had learned that the vast majority of people would choose to view him as however the day's publicity painted him. He did not believe that anyone new to his life would ever see – much less care about – the Harry Potter who cooked for friends and neighbors and accidentally bought squash from overeager shopkeepers.

And, watching Harry's tentative trust peek out at Mycroft's words, the elder Holmes brother was determined to prove this young man wrong. There were many people who were new to Harry's life, or still to emerge, who would care deeply for the young man with whom Mycroft was lunching. Some, like John and Gregory, were certain to become young Harry's friends. Others would become much, much more.

Mycroft could think of two.

It was fully four days later that Harry was finally able to host a dinner for the busy Holmes brothers. During that time, at the urging of Mycroft and, oddly, Hermione, Harry had taken a couple of hours to reveal the existence of the magical world to a surprisingly accepting Sherlock Holmes.

He had chosen to begin to put Sherlock's mind on the right track through the use of his … well, of his mind. He chose not to follow the tradition of Hogwart's professors, who greeted the parents of muggleborn students by baldly stating, "Magic is real. Your child is a witch (or wizard). Congratulations; you have no choice but to send your child off to a school that you can't see for the next seven years," usually following that icebreaker by turning a coffee table into a goat or charming their housecat to fly (neither of which was ever well-received by the traumatized muggles).

No, Sherlock Holmes was a particularly brilliant and logical man, and it would be through his intellect that the magical world would become viable to the younger Holmes. With that in mind, Harry had dropped by Sherlock and John's flat one afternoon.

Following John's voice which had called out, "Come in, Mrs. Hudson!" at Harry's knock on the door, the ravenhaired young man found himself in what was probably the kitchen. He wasn't certain of that fact, because most kitchens did not include a jar of severed fingers on the kitchen
table and a fiercely glaring genius who was peering through a microscope at what looked to be some unfortunate person's eye. Even Sherlock grinned over at Harry when he said dryly, "And finally, you encounter someone who can stare back at you without blinking first."

Hurriedly and emphatically rejecting John's offer of tea, which he seemed ready to set to boil on the stovetop that was within six feet of the various body parts, Harry tore his mesmerized stare from the microscope and consciously focused on the dark, blue-gray gaze of Sherlock Holmes, which Harry suddenly realized was intently focused on him. He drew in a sharp breath when the man straightened to his full height and Harry found himself once again gazing upward at the august features of another handsome Holmes.

The darkly-amused twinkle in the git's eyes was also familiar to a flustered Harry.

Tsking in annoyance, Harry glared up into blue-slate eyes and resisted the urge to hex that knowing little half-smile that quirked Sherlock's mouth. Unwilling – and, admittedly, unable – to recall the small speech he had prepared, Harry growled irritably, "Deduce this, genius. When you figure it out, talk to your brother; I'm busy." Slapping an object down next to the jar of fingers, Harry turned on his heel and stormed out of the flat, ignoring John's hearty laughter in favor of a hasty retreat.

Sherlock had obsessively played with the little item over the next 30 hours or so, anytime that he was not involved in the case that LeStrade had forced upon him. His growing suspicion as to the true nature of the item were greatly helped by the partial revelations Mycroft had shared with him the other night. Still, it was one thing to learn that the Queen had promised immunity should they wish to pursue a relationship with Harry and each other. It was quite another to consider, based on his understanding of the nature of the item Harry had left him, that it was possible when Mycroft said the Queen could provide full immunity from all legal and social repercussions, that he was talking about a power beyond the normal scope of the world as Sherlock knew it.

Two days later, an irate and, frankly, incredulous Sherlock Holmes barged into Mycroft's penthouse an hour or two before dawn, to hurl his long length atop the covers next to his abruptly-awake and resigned brother, and raised his hand in the air to release the golden snitch that was now his most prized possession (apart from his violin, that is). Together, the two Holmes' watched the winged ball take flight and zip around the elegant bedroom, easily avoiding every object no matter its location. Eventually, the little snitch seemed to realize it was not being hunted, and settled into a contented hover that reminded Mycroft of a hummingbird in a nectar-rich garden.

After a few moments of silence, Sherlock turned to stare piercingly at his older brother. His deep baritone seemed almost hesitant when he said, "I have ruled out every possibility but one. That which is left... seems unlikely. But, it is the only conclusion I can reach."

Slate-blue eyes stared into deep-blue eyes, as Sherlock searched his brother for any indication of trickery before he finally gave voice to what had, until now, been an impossibility. "Magic?"

Even though he had expected Mycroft's confirmation, Sherlock was still glad to be lying down as he spent the hours until dawn, side by side with his brother, learning of the world of magic, and the truth of Harry James Potter.

Inexplicably, Hermione Granger was waiting at the breakfast table that morning when the bleary-eyed brothers sought sustenance. After casting numerous spells involving privacy and secrecy on a suspicious Sherlock, she entertained the two with stories of Harry's youth.

They were equally amused and distressed at some of the events others dismissed as Harry's 'adventures', and were incensed at the way the young man had been forced to participate in a contest that involved close proximity to an actual, fire-breathing, irate mother dragon, which was
just one in a series of horrors. Miss Granger was pleased with their response, and began to ask increasingly personal questions regarding their intents and wishes regarding Harry and each other.

A mortified Sherlock was certain he would never forget the sight of Mycroft laughing so hard that he had to rest his head on his forearms just to retain consciousness. He hadn't even known Mycroft had that much of a sense of humor. And really, it hadn't been all that amusing.

Although, he supposed that if the situation were reversed and it was Sherlock watching Mycroft declare his burgeoning interest in and increasing passion for his brother and his new neighbor, he would have laughed just as hard – especially if the look of horrified realization on his face had been as profound as he suspected. He had to remember to find a way to torture Ms. Granger for that particularly humiliating memory.

Veritaserum. Evil stuff … in the hands of someone else, anyway.

And now, four days after Harry's luncheon with Mycroft, the brothers were joining Harry in his flat for dinner. Although Sherlock had reluctantly relayed to John the invitation to join them for dinner, he was both delighted and smug at his flatmate's stammering, shifty evasion. Given that Gregory had done the same, it was not difficult to conclude that the not-gay, not-daters who spent so much time not-flirting with each other were moving past their obliviousness. Apart from the entirely separate happiness that was the result of an upcoming evening with Harry and Mycroft, Sherlock was also happy for Gregory and John.

Not that he would ever admit it, of course. Happiness for one's close acquaintances...all right, friends ...was too banal for a Holmes to advertise, for all that the sentiment was genuine.

Although, if the two started to not-shag in his flat, Sherlock was going to demand Harry employ one of those oh-so-useful silencing spells over John's room. There was only so much information one needed about one's flatmate, even considering Sherlock's rather notable lack of consideration for personal space.

With another hour or so until it was time to join Harry and Mycroft for dinner, Sherlock wandered into his living room, determined to actually finish the paperwork for the latest case. He had hated that case, as Gregory had pleaded with him to take it even though it meant that Sherlock would have to take time away from stalking Harry, and so Sherlock had solved it with vicious haste. Anderson was certain to still have Sherlock-prints on the seat of his trousers, considering the vigorousness with which Sherlock had kicked Gregory's team into high gear.

After a long chase through the back alleys and over one or two rooftops of one of the less-prosperous neighborhoods in London, resulting in a spectacular flying-tackle by Sherlock that brought the fleeing track-star murderer to the ground, a panting Gregory had then pleaded with him to never listen to Gregory's pleading again. Sherlock had simply smirked at the gasping, wide-eyed Detective Inspector and summoned a cab, his single-minded focus to return to his flat and figure out the intriguing little golden device that Harry had left on his kitchen table before fleeing from his own blushes.

Frankly, Sherlock had thought it was all entirely too adorable, and was determined to cause as many repeats as possible.

Dropping onto his couch, Sherlock crossed his long legs atop the coffee table and picked up the topmost folder from a rather intimidating stack. Starting to read, he became aware of a shift in the directional light in the room, and glanced up at the windows irritably to assess the cloud cover, when he realized a small change had been made to his living room.
Thirty seconds later, he was still staring at the beautiful, arched doorway that had seemingly appeared sometime this afternoon in the common wall between his flat and Harry's. Sherlock could see straight through into Harry's large, open kitchen/living room, and was presently looking at Mycroft, who was seated at the long counter lining Harry's kitchen and looking back at him with an amused grin on his face.

Sherlock's normal verbosity failed him, and all he could manage to utter was a laconic, "Huh!"

Eventually, Sherlock rose to his feet and somewhat cautiously approached the new doorway. As he got closer, he heard Harry's cheerful voice coming from the inset nook of the kitchen to the left of the new archway, where the stove and double ovens resided. Pausing to inspect the doorway, Sherlock was actually quite pleased with the workmanship, although how Mycroft had managed to accomplish this in the mere hours that Sherlock was out earlier was … impossible. It was impossible. And therefore …

"Magic?" he asked inquiringly, one quizzical eyebrow raised at his amused brother. He simply nodded at Mycroft's broad grin and glass raised in a mocking toast, then leaned around the wall to look into the kitchen. He was delighted to find himself nose to nose with a startled, emerald-eyed chef.

Taking quick advantage, Sherlock leaned down and dropped a firm, lingering kiss on that oh-so-tempting mouth, raising a hand to sink it into the wild black hair and hold Harry in place while he explored. Kissing Harry, like playing the violin and annoying Mycroft, was an activity Sherlock knew he would never tire of. When the weight of Mycroft's glare became heavy enough to leave bruises, Sherlock finally released Harry's lips, running a caressing hand over the silken cheek, and smiled down wickedly into dazed emerald eyes. "Good evening, little tempter. Been remodeling?"

Harry's synapses seemed to be firing a bit slowly, but eventually he nodded jerkily and blinked, saying somewhat breathlessly, "That's twice you ninja-kissed me. Careful now; once more and it's a habit."

The sudden heat in Sherlock's slate-blue eyes caused Harry to step back reflexively, only to find himself suddenly back to chest with another, surprisingly hard body in his kitchen. Gasping in reaction, he looked wildly around and had just enough time to register the intently focused blue gaze and predatory descent of Mycroft Holmes before he was seized in another, unexpected kiss.

Where Sherlock's kissing was all heat and seduction, Mycroft's kissing was of dominance and deeply passionate possession. Mycroft's strong arms wrapped around Harry's waist and held him firmly pressed back against a sculpted, masculine chest, and the lips that touched his own barely paused to sample before they were firmly encouraging his to open and admit Mycroft's talented tongue. Harry attempted to keep control, to remember that someone was watching, but failed the second he felt Sherlock's tall, strong body press against his chest and cool lips that somehow pressed heated kisses all along his throat.

Harry would later at least be proud that he could formulate a coherent thought, and never admitted to either brother that it mostly consisted of actual incoherence that sounded like, 'Kissing. Both… Them… kissing me…together…oh, Merlin!…' There was also definitely moaning involved, and possibly a pathetic whine or two, but he would never admit it.

After an intense exploration of his mouth that left Harry completely rattled, Mycroft slowly drew back, tongue licking along that delicious bottom lip before he dropped a gentle kiss on Harry's nose as he smiled down into the lovely, flushed face. Sherlock was pressed along Harry's front, and Mycroft along Harry's back, and none of the three was exactly composed as they panted with desire and wrestled their aroused bodies back under conscious control. For the first time that either
Mycroft or Sherlock could ever remember, they each felt completely content. Finally, the equation added up. Harry did not even have the experience to know that the strange emotion that hummed beneath the surface of this sudden passion in the arms of the Holmes brothers was actually a strong sense of safety.

Of course he didn't recognize it. He had never felt safe before.

Tightening his arms around Harry's waist, Mycroft allowed one hand to twist and grasp Sherlock's shirt, pulling his brother tighter against the petite man held between them before he rested his hand on his brother's firm stomach, lightly caressing. At the same time, Sherlock's left arm cupped their young man's neck while his right arm stole past Harry's shoulders and over Mycroft's, to sink gently into the fine dark ginger hair that barely brushed his brother's collar, kneading gently in the silken locks.

For the Holmes brothers, an idea that had been expressed and tentatively agreed upon had abruptly shifted from possibility to commitment. Sherlock had just experienced his second taste of Harry's lips and would say with absolute certainty that he would never willingly stop. The close presence of his brother, Mycroft, who had always represented love and acceptance to Sherlock, just served to make the connection more solid and safe and tempting.

Mycroft had finally seized his own chance to savor Harry, nearly undone by the passion that had roared through him at his first, long-denied touch of the beautiful young man. He had also used the odd courage from his passionate impulse to finally reach out to Sherlock in a manner he had never allowed himself to even consider before Harry, although the wordless yearning had always been present beneath his thoughts. It seemed like he had wanted to hold these men forever.

It was more likely that the world would burn around them than that Mycroft would let either one of them go.

Snuggled tightly between the two brothers, Harry was definitely feeling the squeeze – and loving it. He wasn't even entirely sure what had happened; one moment he had put a stasis charm on the main dish and was walking around his counter to see what Sherlock thought of the new doorway, and the next moment was all about possessive older men and hard bodies and talented mouths and warm, wet, experienced tongues.

In a hundred years, he would never, ever have believed that Sherlock and Mycroft would be open to a moment such as this. He had the odd sense that they had expected it, though, even though he hadn't. He would definitely have to confront them about it. They couldn't just make completely shocking plans about something like this and not include him. He would be raking them over the coals about their highhandedness.

Later, though. He was a little busy right now, trying to breathe, since they were pressing so closely to him that Harry could feel every little line and … bulge … of their bodies. He was probably just a little claustrophobic. Because that was the only possible reason why he was still panting, even though the kissing that stole his breath had ended several moments ago.

He was almost sure of it.

The loud 'ding!' of the oven timer brought them back to reality, somewhat, although neither of the Holmes brothers released Harry immediately. Still, they had to laugh, one handsome head dropping onto either side of Harry's messy black hair, when Harry ineffectually struggled lightly to push them back and gain some distance, before blowing an exasperated breath up at the hair in his eyes and huffing, "At least I picked the right side dish for dinner. Squash, anyone?"
Holding their delightful young man between them, Mycroft and Sherlock thought that squash sounded just perfect to them.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Feel free to send me some possible food analogies for future chapter headings, please. I'm feeling lazy.

Thank you for your tremendous support. You hear it a lot, but that really is what keeps a writer joyous and productive about creating and sharing her work.

WyrdSmith
CHAPTER 6: CHOCOLATE FIXES EVERYTHING

The day after their first dinner with Harry seemed endless to Sherlock and Mycroft. The night had been filled with quiet conversation, teasing touches, bouts of laughter, and a series of delightful blushes and adorably bewildered looks from Harry that had both Holmes brothers establishing a mental catalogue of ways to earn more from their little wizard. Knowing that Harry was somewhat overwhelmed, the brothers kept the evening lighthearted and gave their raven time and space.

After ending the evening with equally gentle kisses, Sherlock and Mycroft had stepped through the arched doorway, and Sherlock had watched in fascination as Mycroft showed him how to touch the hidden WTW panel to cause the intricately carved wooden door to slide silently across the entrance. Only they would even see the doorway, although the three had reached a decision – while the Holmes's savored the incredible, homemade lemon sorbet Harry had prepared for dessert to clear their palates – that Gregory and John would be included in some of their secrets in the near future. Apart from the remarkable friendship and support the two men had gifted to the Holmes's, it was simply not feasible to maintain such a secret while sharing living space with John and having frequent visits (professional and personal) from Gregory.

When the archway closed, Mycroft had silently beckoned for Sherlock to join him. Donning his favorite coat and distinctive, silk scarf, Sherlock had cooperated, for once without complaint, and followed his older brother out onto the street and into the private car that waited. Despite the occasional searching look at each other, they had remained mostly silent until the vast, intricate steel and ironwork door had closed behind them in Mycroft's penthouse.

Then, over a bottle of expensive wine, Mycroft had filled Sherlock in on all that he knew about Harry Potter. He left nothing out, not even the fact that he had first been attracted to Harry when he was just a fifteen-year-old wizard with barely-controlled rage in his eyes. He clarified any points that had surfaced during their conversation with Hermione, and together they identified what they still did not know about Harry James Potter.

Neither man had failed to conclude that Harry's demeanor was not what one might expect of a physically beautiful, tremendously powerful, extremely wealthy twenty-five-year-old man. Mycroft and Hermione both had repeatedly cited examples for Sherlock of public times, when Harry was in his public role as the so-called 'Vengeful Savior', when the emerald-eyed wizard showed himself to be fully deserving and capable of his role. Hermione's detailed explanation of the Canada affair, particularly the powerful and decisive manner in which Harry had ended it, had sent chills into both Mycroft and Sherlock. Of course, being themselves, the chills were not of fear, but arousal. Under the right circumstances, it would be wonderful to witness Harry showing his
BAMF wizard side. Just knowing it existed, somewhere within the deliciously tempting young man they had identified as their own, was both intriguing and erotic.

Nevertheless, the facts properly laid-out – along with, or perhaps more especially, because of the glaring holes in their information – proved that Harry James Potter was a deeply-lonely, misunderstood young man. Sherlock and Mycroft were intimately familiar with how it felt to live constantly under the scrutiny and critical judgment of other people. They knew how deep the wounds could go when they were scorned and mocked and isolated for their gifts. They saw in Harry all the signs of a wounded soul, of a man who had made difficult choices for which he would not apologize, and for which he would be forever regarded with suspicion and dislike by the very people who had benefited the most from his actions.

And they empathized.

With false dawn, they retired to rest. It did not cause more than momentary awkwardness between them, that Mycroft simply tugged Sherlock past the room he normally crashed in when he was forced into Mycroft's company and led him into his own master bedroom. Opening a drawer, he tossed a pair of linen pajamas at Sherlock before entering the huge bathroom to perform his ablutions. The silence in the room was comfortable as they went about preparing for bed, each lost in deep thought. When Sherlock emerged from the bathroom, eyes still almost gray with introspection, Mycroft was already nearly asleep on the far side of the bed. And the only thing that felt in any way wrong as the two settled in was the Harry-shaped empty space between them.

A space they would see occupied as soon as possible.

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And so, the day after their dinner, both Sherlock and Mycroft went about their lives preoccupied. In addition to the normal intensity of running the Shadow Government, Mycroft immediately began to tug on the strings and press the buttons that would get him more information about Harry Potter. Anthea, with a tiny, smug smile that Mycroft chose to overlook, helped.

Sherlock, meanwhile, was called to assist Scotland Yard on yet another baffling murder. He had hesitated on his way out the door, wondering if Harry might like to join him and see a bit about what he did. John was at the clinic, having exited for work humming and smiling stupidly over the results of his own not-date-night with Gregory. This would be a good opportunity to bring Harry further into their lives. He finally left only when Mrs. Hudson bustled through the main entry and – after gaping for a moment at his uncharacteristic behavior - called up the stairs to the indecisively-hovering Sherlock, "Mr. Potter has stepped out to take a bit of a wander down by the park, dear!"

That information had sent Sherlock practically leaping out the door, leaving the goggling Mrs. Hudson to shut and lock it behind him as he hurried off down the street. For some reason, the fact that Harry had expressed his intent to wander in the very area that now hosted a murder investigation by the Yard sent apprehension racing through the system of the unflappable consulting detective.

Arriving on the scene and noting with detached, mechanical observation the familiar flashing lights and crime scene tape that defined so much of his life, Sherlock acknowledged that this time there was only a small thrill of interest in the possibilities of the case. Most of his attention was occupied on the lithe, petite figure of his delicious new neighbor standing off to the side, a comforting arm wrapped around the shaking shoulders of the traumatized older woman who had born unfortunate witness to the bizarre scene in the park.

Ignoring the sneering faces of Donovan and Anderson, and the beckoning gesture of DI LeStrade,
Sherlock immediately headed over to Harry's side. His heart warmed in the unusual fashion he was beginning to expect around this young man at the look of welcome and relief Harry wore when he spotted the tall, graceful figure of Sherlock approaching. Despite the circumstances and the detestable forms of Anderson and Donovan that accompanied LeStrade in following after him, Sherlock could not help but smile down into Harry's worried face. His smile grew when Harry, despite the stressful situation, immediately smiled back.

As soon as Sherlock's eyes moved to inspect the shivering woman pressed up against Harry like a cat rescued from a storm, Harry spoke up, quickly and efficiently providing what information he knew for the consulting detective in a manner to be envied by the substandard 'professionals' who reported to LeStrade. "This is Mrs. Genevieve Stapleton. Mrs. Stapleton, this is my friend Sherlock Holmes. He's a consulting detective and will help figure all this out. Sherlock, I was just strolling past that flower vendor over there," nodding a messy, black-haired head down the street, "when I heard the squealing of tires and the roar of a car engine – sounded like one of the big gas-guzzlers from the eighties – and a woman's scream of fright. When I looked up, I saw Mrs. Stapleton here, who was crossing the street, almost get hit by the small, red Fiat over there – the driver said he was swerving to avoid the other car. Fortunately, the Fiat missed her. Poor dear's just a little bit shaken up, because when she jumped to safety, the first thing she saw was – that."

Turning in the direction of Harry's gesture, Sherlock again took in the crime scene tape, although he could not see the details of the scene from here. He turned back sharply to stare at Harry when Mrs. Stapleton stammered shakily, "I could have sworn I was right in that car's path when I looked up at it. It was a-coomin' right at me! I don't know how he missed me, or how I was suddenly off to the side like I was. It's like a blessed miracle, like me verra own angel was flittin' about and sent me to safety!"

Harry avoided Sherlock's intense stare as he patted the woman on the back of her hand and soothed, "I'm sure it was just your adrenaline kicking in, ma'am. They say remarkable things can happen when a person's fight-or-flight reflex triggers. Good thing you moved so fast; you may just have chosen to throw the car over your head instead, and then you'd be all over the news!" He chuckled uneasily along with the now-tickled older woman and continued to avoid looking at Sherlock.

His evasion was answer enough. Reacting quickly, Sherlock took out his cell and quickly texted to Mycroft. At crime scene with Harry. Pull vids, if you haven't already. SH

Absently adding his own reassurances to Harry's, completely unaware of how his uncharacteristically understanding words seemed to the antsy police surrounding them, Sherlock waited tensely for his brother's reply. Less than a minute later came the text. Left meeting; thank you for that. Your location? MH

Smirking slightly, amused that even Mycroft could sometimes want to skip out of a meeting, he immediately texted the address and added Follow the red Fiat, as well as the gashog it supposedly avoided. Show me later, please. SH

Satisfied with Mycroft's prompt Of course. MH, Sherlock studied the scene for a moment, taking special note of the crowd of spectators even as he sneered slightly at them. Most of them were hoping to be able to relate the story to someone gullible who might believe that the storyteller was actually somehow important to the event. It was obvious that the self-important, unemployed man currently giving a statement to Dimmock was claiming that he had pulled Ms. Stapleton to safety. Sherlock wondered if Dimmock knew the man with whom he was talking had applied -- and been denied -- repeatedly to various Law Enforcement Academies. His cold stare moved on, missing nothing. He was especially irked by the group of giggling teens who were already exaggerating the
story to each other, trying to impress and frighten each other with predictable, hormonal jostling for a stronger position in their little pack.

Annoyed with the predictability of so many dull people in one spot, he turned away with a scoff, and ran a comforting hand down Harry's back, ignoring the raised eyebrows from Dimmock. He was just about to return his phone to his pocket and talk to LeStrade when another text dinged in. He could not help but raise his eyebrows at Mycroft's enthusiastic Remarkable! You'll want to see this soon. Tell H he's safe, please. Am having the Buick traced. MH

Tucking his phone away, Sherlock said casually to Harry, "Mycroft sends his regards," and watched some of the worry hidden in the green eyes fade. He couldn't wait to see the video.

LeStrade and Sherlock watched, impressed, as Harry expertly soothed the last of the fear from Mrs. Stapleton and sent her away on the arm of a young detective to give her statement. It was for this reason that both men saw the young man's stark reaction when a strident, impatient voice said snidely, "I'm done waiting on the Freak! He's useless anyway! Come on, Anderson!"

Sherlock would not have even acknowledged the familiar disparagement of Sergeant Sally Donovan, considering her insults far too plebian to merit much attention, but Harry looked as if he had been punched in the gut. Sherlock's full and immediate focus was on his smaller companion.

Standing next to Sherlock, Gregory LeStrade proved his worth by gauging Harry's reaction and immediately acting to defuse the situation by spinning to glare with unusual ferocity at Donovan, who froze with the sneer still on her face beneath the condemnation of her superior officer.

"Donovan," LeStrade snapped out, "remove yourself from the scene. Return to the station and drive a desk for the next three days. Maybe when I let you return to the field, you will remember a little more about behaving like a professional. Move!"

He ignored her excellent impersonation of a fish and glared until she reluctantly backed away and stomped over to her ride. Anderson barely had enough time to telegraph on his rodent-like face his intention to protest when he, too, found himself summarily dismissed from the scene. Gregory LeStrade didn't even hesitate; feeling certain that the overprotective Mycroft Holmes would use his influence to ensure he did not suffer professionally for taking what measures he could to help Harry and Sherlock.

Glancing at the pale young man who had unobtrusively nudged John and Gregory forward in their wary not-dance, Gregory's instincts flared wildly. Even as he managed the crime scene, carefully arranging logistics to give Sherlock and Harry time to handle whatever crisis was occurring, LeStrade felt a deep concern welling within him for the engaging young man who had taken up residence in 221C. The look on Harry's face when Donovan mouthed off was achingly familiar to the seasoned cop. It spoke of old pain, learned responses, and possible abuse. Although LeStrade hated that it was on the face of someone he knew and liked, he had been doing this work for a long time, and knew that victims lived everywhere.

The look on Sherlock's face, however, had been entirely new. It was odd to see open concern so clearly evident on the refined features that more customarily wore an expression of dispassionate observation, scorn, or wild exhilaration at the thrill of the hunt.

Following his well-honed and very insistent instincts, LeStrade only hesitated a moment before texting Mycroft Holmes. Even if the issue of privacy was a concept either Holmes acknowledged, this incident happened during an investigation. He could argue for his own defense if it became necessary, although he doubted it would. LeStrade knew he had not imagined the depth of interest Sherlock and Mycroft had in Harry the day he fed them sin-bread and called them all fools. M -
They need you. H reacted badly to "Freak". DI/GL

He knew it was enough; Holmes would know who had uttered the familiar slur, and if anyone other than Sherlock knew what was going on with Harry, it would definitely be Mycroft Holmes.

Sighing, LeStrade waved his remaining team on and ordered extensive pictures of the mutilated body that decorated the flower beds. Glancing over at the rigid figure of Harry Potter and tall man with chestnut curls who was positioned protectively over – and speaking urgently but softly to – the smaller male, LeStrade shook his head and resolved to put Donovan on report for unprofessional behavior that endangered an investigation. Shaking his head, he signed the forms that would allow the body to be removed from the scene once all evidence and video documentation had been taken.

He was certain that Sherlock Holmes would not be personally investigating this scene anytime soon.

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Harry wasn't entirely sure what was going on. He remembered talking to the feisty old lady who thought his unthinking protégo-accio was the work of her guardian angel. He remembered sending her off to talk with a young detective. He even remembered hearing a strident, whiny voice that reminded him nauseatingly of Petunia and Dudley Dursley. And then … what?

It was only when strong, warm hands cupped his face with a feel of authority and a hard, familiar mouth pressed demandingly upon his own that Harry's vague sense of consciousness began to sharpen again. He blinked when a deep, frustrated growl was immediately followed by a tightening of the hands on his jaw and the sudden presence of a tongue that forced its way into his mouth and insisted on Harry's response. The commanding invasion gentled to a soothing, comforting exploration just an instant after Harry hesitantly began to return the kiss that was wonderfully familiar.

Dazed green eyes blinked open and focused on him as Sherlock slowly ended the kiss he had initiated in the rather desperate need to ground Harry's magic, which had begun to fluctuate so much that Sherlock could actually feel it dancing on his skin and beginning to issue dangerous sparks. He stared down into the small face he held cupped between his hands, carefully inspecting Harry for additional signs of shock or rage or other evident trauma. Harry's skin was cool beneath his hands, and a detached look of bewilderment in the normally vitally interested green eyes caused Sherlock's anxiety to ramp up a notch. Harry had reacted to Donovan's slur as if he were shot. Given the nature of the fool woman's comments, the only obvious trigger for Harry's – fugue – was the word "freak", which was unfortunate, as it was the Sergeant's preferred pet name for Sherlock.

If she ever said it again around Harry, Sherlock would personally break her teeth. Good luck with voicing a fricative without front teeth. Sherlock was aware, in the part of his mind he allowed to function and catalogue events other than whichever one he designated of primary importance at a given moment, that his violent reaction to Donovan was out of proportion to her 'crime', but he didn't particularly care. Her insistent childishness had hurt Harry, and that was all Sherlock needed to justify any actions he would take against her.

That there would be a retaliatory action was a given. But right now, Harry needed him.

Relief rushed through him as Sherlock saw sense and vitality returning to the eyes that had dulled so frighteningly fast. Public appearance be damned, he was not releasing Harry now that he'd gotten him back from whatever place the young man had fled to within his own psyche. As Sherlock ushered Harry into the sleek, black car that had stopped in front of them, he sent a mental thanks to Mycroft and grimly considered the near-certainty that their missing information about
Harry included something very pertinent to the last ten minutes.

Settling onto the luxurious seat, Sherlock tightened his arms comfortably around the younger man when Harry's soft voice emerged from his shelter against Sherlock's chest.

"Sherlock? What just happened?"

The older man couldn't help but rock Harry a little in his arms as he debated how to reply. Rubbing his jaw soothingly in the wild, black hair, his voice was even deeper than usual with the strength of his emotions. "A member of the police, an especially childish Sergeant, called me something that she often uses with me in an attempt to reduce her insecurity and inferiority. Do you remember what she said, Harry? You reacted to it rather badly."

Sherlock knew, based on the way Harry's relaxed thoughtfulness morphed into rigid embarrassment, the exact moment that the young man remembered. He easily resisted Harry's struggle to free himself, simply pulling the small wizard more firmly against him as Sherlock leaned back and settled Harry against his chest. His voice was calm and resolute when he commanded, "Cease this at once, Harry. You will not hide from me and I will not be letting you go anytime soon. Now settle down."

And, although he felt Harry's shock at obeying Sherlock reverberate through the small body he cradled against him, Sherlock was not in the least bit surprised that Harry complied and did, indeed, settle down, albeit into a watchful, apprehensive stillness.

Sherlock and Mycroft were already aware of the dynamics of this triad, despite Harry's ignorance regarding the choices they had made to have the younger man for their own. The treasure in Sherlock's arms, despite (or maybe because of) his immense power and success, was very much under the protection of the two, dominant Holmeses. Sherlock had reluctantly acknowledged to himself -- and therefore, Mycroft automatically knew it, too -- that his elder brother would be the top 'alpha' in their relationship.

Sherlock was not, in the vernacular, a Beta -- he was far too dominant for either he or Mycroft to mislabel him that way. In a relationship with anyone else on the planet, Sherlock would have full dominance, regardless of whether or not it was defined in that manner. But, this relation included the only person in existence who had proven to Sherlock that he, too, was safe and protected and cherished by the man. Mycroft was the only person to whom Sherlock would ever truly defer. So, no, he was in no true way a Beta; rather, Sherlock was more like a second Alpha, just slightly less powerful and vicious than Mycroft.

And Harry was their treasure, their person to cherish and protect and support. In this one place in the young wizard's life, the Holmes men were going to give Harry absolute safety and acceptance, and the ability to relax his guard, trust his dominant partners, and be as strong or submissive as he truly wished to be.

Smiling inwardly as he held Harry comfortingly close, Sherlock wondered how long it would take before Harry figured that part out and gave himself permission to be taken care of. For the moment, Harry had little choice in the matter; he had suffered a crisis and Sherlock was not letting him go anytime soon. Still, he -- they -- needed Mycroft.

Ten minutes later, and the two were ensconced together on Harry's comfortable, oversized couch. Harry was stubbornly silent, and Sherlock was just as stubborn, although his resolution was entirely devoted to keeping the young man close to him and unable to retreat in any way from the emotional situation. All Sherlock had to do was hold on to Harry until Mycroft arrived, which Sherlock was absolutely certain would happen even though his brother had not summoned him.
Either LeStrade would have told him about the incident, or Mycroft's incomparable sources would have clued the elder Holmes in without external help, but one way or another, Mycroft would be there as soon as he possibly could. And he would then, somehow, make it better.

Sherlock's faith in his older brother was rewarded mere minutes later, when the soft click and light footsteps behind them indicated Mycroft's arrival. To Sherlock, the assured and confident figure of Mycroft Holmes was a welcome sight, indeed, as the man rounded the edge of the couch and took in the situation.

Mycroft leaned down and carded a caressing hand through Harry's long, midnight hair, dropping a gentle kiss of comfort on Harry's forehead and them shocking both himself and Sherlock when he unthinkingly did the same to his brother. Blue-slate eyes stared into surprised slate-blue before Mycroft quirked an amused half-grin at his brother before moving to settle easily into the couch on Harry's opposite side.

Tugging Harry's chin up from where it was digging into the slender chest, Mycroft huffed an amused laugh at the mulish expression that marred the lovely features. Sherlock's amused snort earned an answering grin when the two watched their little love scowl even more stubbornly in an effort to resist the loving comfort they lavished upon him. They both knew perfectly well that Harry was determined to keep his walls high and keep them firmly on the other side, well away from the reasons for his overreaction half an hour ago.

When Mycroft disarmed Harry, he did not do it with kisses or hugs. He did it with chocolate. Tucking Harry firmly against his chest and ensuring that Sherlock was adequately pressed against the young man's other side, Mycroft then reached down to the bag he had set on the floor and retrieved three cups of steaming, gourmet hot chocolate with homemade whipped cream. The brothers fought their own grins at the adorable twitching of a petite nose when the luscious treat was waved temptingly in front of him.

If they had learned one thing about the nature of Harry Potter, it was that Harry firmly believed that chocolate fixes everything.

Snapping on the telly and finding a show that seemed to appeal to Harry --although neither brother could understand why a wizard would be interested in a show about three Wiccan sisters with romantic issues -- they spent the next several hours quietly cuddling and comforting Harry. His tenseness had been especially apparent to Mycroft, having not seen Harry for a day or so.

Rather than the interrogation Harry obviously expected, Sherlock and Mycroft simply sat with their little love, letting the hot chocolate soothe him while their warm presence and reassuring company slowly comforted the distressed and embarrassed young man. They allowed him the quiet he needed to relax again, and occasionally dropped gentle kisses on his hair or his face or, when they could sneak it in, on his incredibly tempting lips. They counted their patience well-rewarded when the man they counted as theirs finally relaxed fully, his neck muscles unclenching beneath the gentle massage of skilled fingers and his stomach settling with the rich, hot chocolate with a healthy dollop of the natural calmative of marshmallow. Eventually, Harry's breathing deepened, showing not only his trust in them as protectors, but also in their silent reassurance to not force him into any painful revelations.

Linking the hands that rested along the back of the couch, Mycroft and Sherlock studied the lovely, sleeping face that snuggled into Mycroft's thigh while small, bare feet rested trustingly on Sherlock's lap, one large, strong hand gently caressing the delicately arched instep. When Harry slept, his power was muted, his strength of will less evident, and his true, delicate features and petite size became apparent. He must have been a tiny, beautiful child.
Once again, blue-slate eyes met slate-blue, the need for words unnecessary at the twin looks of hard determination and the non-verbal language the two shared like the savants they had always been.

Mycroft mouthed a single word to his brother – a name. "Dursley." Sherlock simply nodded in grim understanding.

For the first time in a long time, the Holmes brothers were going hunting together.

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Chapter End Notes

A/N: Thanks for the food analogies! I'm especially fond of "al dente" – you realize that literally means "to the tooth", right? Heh-heh-heh.

Oh, to the pissy little stalker reviewer: Do you feel better now? Good, sometimes it helps to just let it all go. Next time, try to put it where it really belongs, but grown-ups understand it can be hard to control yourself sometimes. Some of us grow up a little faster than others, that's all. Now, when you're done, go back on the playground til the bell rings. Change your Pull-up first, and don't get any on the floor this time! Wipes are in your special drawer. Remember to wash your hands after you clean up. Run along now.

WyrdSmith
CHAPTER 7: BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW

The blond, heavily-muscled young man who walked into the manager's office of "The Total Dud" gym and community center had a pleasant face, despite the faint look of worry in his watery blue eyes. Dudley Dursley was well-liked and respected in the run-down community, and was the final authority here on his own turf. His slightly-hoarse voice was normally soft and low, and he was known to glare rather frighteningly at anyone who used the volume of their voice as a weapon or intimidation tactic. He tended to be soft-spoken, preferring to guide his charges via the empathetic understanding of one who has been both a bully and bullied, and only rarely demonstrated that his powerful build and knowledge of fighting styles were not just for show.

He was not what either of the Holmes brothers expected to find. They, however, were exactly what Dudley had been worrying about.

They first began to suspect that he had been given something of a 'heads-up' about them when their
polite knock on the closed door of his office was met with a somewhat long pause, followed by a resigned "Come in, gentlemen." When they entered, Dursley was returning to his sturdy executive chair in the haphazardly furnished room, having just finished setting out two, comfortable guest chairs in front of the huge, battered desk. The presence of a large, simple tea pot and three chipped mugs on the desk ended their speculation. Clearly, they were expected.

Mr. Dursley remained standing as he watched them enter his office and shut the door behind Sherlock. The watercolor-blue of his stare was deceptive, as the man was clearly observant and wary, although he was not anxious. Given what little they knew of Harry's cousin Dudley, Mycroft would have expected the blond man to spent the time given by his obvious foreknowledge of their arrival to become fearful or defensive; instead, Dursley seemed cautiously friendly, approachable and even a bit relieved. Glancing at Sherlock, Mycroft felt a fond smile want to form on his poker-face, knowing that Sherlock's incredible brain was delighting in the puzzle before them.

"Have a seat, Mr. Holmes and Mr. Holmes. Obviously, I've been expecting you. I got a little bit of a warning from the lady who tipped off your assistant, sir." Dudley nodded respectfully to Mycroft, seating himself easily and reaching over to begin to pour out the steeping tea. He offered a somewhat sober smile at Mycroft and added, "'Ginger' Weasley sends her regards, and told me to remind you that you still owe her for saving your umbrella from the devil-twins."

Sherlock sat back and observed, having noted Mycroft's covert gesture of reassurance to him at Mr. Dursley's words. This was interesting; it seemed likely that they had, if not an ally in the younger Mr. Durlsey, at least a probably source of bloodshed-free information. Mycroft, although not relaxed by any means, was no longer showing the subtle signs of combat-readiness which would indicate they were in a hostile situation. Even if Sherlock's own experience and observation had led him to a different conclusion, he could admit (if only to himself, and very, very quietly) that he would trust Mycroft's judgment even over his own in situations such as this.

Mycroft studied Dudley, his deep blue gaze seeming to glitter slightly with the intelligence that powered it. He was completely composed and somehow, despite his expensive, three-piece suit and gold watch chain, fit easily in this pugilistic environment. By contrast, Sherlock felt distinctly out of place, but his discreet admiration of his brother allowed him to dismiss any of the awkwardness a normal person might experience. His only discomfort came via the swift, knowing glance Mycroft sent him before focusing again on Dursley. It was distinctly odd to be the one whose secrets were being read by a Holmes. Sherlock could now understand why others didn't enjoy it when he did it to them. Choosing to ignore the faint color that he just knew rode high on his cheeks, Sherlock aimed a glare at Dudley Dursley.

He then had to ignore Mycroft's subvocal chuckle when Dursley stared back at him, nonplussed, and offered him tea. It seemed that even the small blood connection he shared with Harry led the blond cousin to also share Harry's generally-unimpressed attitude toward Holmesian glares. How very irritating.

All of this interplay occurred in the two minutes or so that had passed since their knock on Dursley's door. Sensing Sherlock's impatience, Mycroft bypassed his preferred tactic of waiting out the opponent and instead smoothly began to apply charm and intimidation in equal measure. "As you have surmised, Mr. Dursley, I am Mycroft Holmes and this is my brother Sherlock Holmes. May I inquire why you would be receiving confidential information from Ms. Weasley?" His bland smile did nothing to hide the cold ruthlessness in his eyes, exactly as Mycroft intended.

Dudley sat back comfortably in his chair, cupping the steaming mug of tea between his large, calloused hands, and sipped contemplatively as he studied the men in his office. He liked what he observed. These were powerful men, dangerous men, and from the little Ging had told him, they
were moving into a romantic relationship with Harry. Ging had been a bit hesitant to tell him much
about that, rightfully expecting Dudley to react with narrow-minded fervor over the fact that they
were brothers who were considerably older than Harry. The old Dudley would have done exactly
that.

As far as he was concerned, the old Dudley was long-dead, and good riddance.

"Mr. Holmes," he began slowly, deciding to cut through all of the crap and handle this like the
straightforward man he had become, "I get why you want to, but I'm not going to do this the way
you two are going for. Mainly because I'm not Harry's enemy, and I will definitely be one of the
people doing my damnedest to make you gentlemen bleed if you hurt him." He didn't expect them
to be intimidated, and they weren't, but he did see that he caught their interest. "I'm willing to tell
you everything I know, even the stuff I'd give an arm to have removed from my own conscience,
but I want something from both of you first." He looked at them levelly, sipping his tea, and
waited. Dudley had long ago learned the value of patiently waiting.

Sherlock's only visible reaction was to raise an eyebrow before turning his gaze to his brother.
Once again, he found himself fascinated with the masterful underplay of power that was as natural
to Mycroft as breathing. In the back of his mind, he found a spare moment to appreciate the
growing dimension to his relationship with his brother. His deliberately antagonistic approach to
Mycroft had begun to become exhausting, but it was his best defense against a desire that – up until
just a few days ago – had been so far past inappropriate as to be illegal. He wondered if 'Betsy'
liked violin music, because if ever anyone deserved one of his rare, private compositions, she did.
He supposed Ms. Granger deserved something, as well, but he was still sulking about 'the
Veritaserum Incident' and had no plans on acting mature about that any time soon.

Mycroft was peripherally aware of Sherlock's unusual inner dialogue, wishing he could actually
read his brother's mind, but was presently focused on the surprisingly likable young man behind
the desk. After a moment of close scrutiny of an unflappable Dudley Dursley, Mycroft glanced to
Sherlock for confirmation. At his brief nod, Mycroft glanced to Sherlock for confirmation. At his brief nod, Mycroft sat back in his chair and fixed his intense
focus on the large blonde. "Mr. Dursley, I refuse to provide you with any information that could
potentially harm Harry in any way. As yet, I do not know how he regards you, and the information
we do have regarding your past interactions with Harry do not exactly lead us to want to make you
feel better about anything … at … all." The brothers watched coldly as Dursley flinched slightly as
the unvarnished truth scraped along his conscience. "Your cooperation is helpful, and even
desirable, but I am certain you understand that it is not entirely necessary. We are more than
capable of getting the entire, undoctored truth from you with or without your willing assistance."

Dudley's level gaze earned him a small measure of respect from the admittedly deadly men who
faced him, and prompted Mycroft to make a small gesture on his behalf. "I will tell you this much,
Mr. Dursley, and you may make of it what you will, so long as you do not hurt Harry. Sherlock and
I do not make such choices lightly. The decision we have reached is accompanied by a rather
extreme level of commitment on both our parts. Regardless of the choices Harry may make
regarding us, there will never come a time when we two will be anything less than supportive and
protective of him. Now, until we know more about you, that is all the information you will have
about this situation."

This time, it was Sherlock who moved the conversation forward. After allowing Dursley a moment
or two to digest Mycroft's words, Sherlock leaned forward and fixed Dudley with a piercing look
that was accustomed to being obeyed. His liquid baritone seemed at odds with the cold, deadly
intent that permeated his voice. "Your turn, Mr. Dursley. All of it, now." And, for the first time in a
very long time, Dudley Dursley found himself intimidated by a non-magical person. He was
suddenly very, very certain that Sherlock Holmes was, in his own way, possibly even more
dangerous than his brother Mycroft, even though it was the latter about whom Ginger had warned him.

Seated with comfortable ease, Mycroft Holmes watched the interplay before him and found that this was one of those moments when his remarkable brother faded into the subtext and was vividly superimposed by the strong, virile, deadly man who occasionally haunted Mycroft's most secret dreams. Abruptly forced to deal with the very situation he had subtly teased Sherlock about just moments earlier, Mycroft glared lightly at Sherlock's knowing gleam and willed the light color that rode high on his cheeks to fade. As fascinating as their new, more honest reactions to each other might be, this was neither the time nor the place.

Clearing his throat uncomfortably, Dudley shifted in his chair, ignoring its squeak of protest, and stared at his desk as he began. His first words were enough to bring Mycroft and Sherlock to full, coldly horrified attention. "I was seventeen years old before I actually realized that other, supposedly 'normal' families did not have a freak locked in the cupboard beneath the stairs."

The three men sat together in the small office, and as the minutes and eventually hours passed, Dudley talked and the Holmes brothers listened. Sometimes they would ask a question, or seek clarification, but mostly they sat rigidly in front of the desk and listened in appalled silence. After the first hour, Dudley reached into the locked cabinet behind him and retrieved a full bottle of brandy and three, cheap glasses. "A gift from Ging when I opened this place," was his only explanation for the magical label on the bottle that showed a portly man chasing a giggling peasant girl around and around the circumference. After the first compulsive sip, the annoying label was ignored as the potent liquid tried to ease the rigid postures and clenched jaws of the three men.

Sometime in the middle of the day, a silent Anthea appeared and distributed heavy, linen bags that held a remarkably tasty lunch. The discreet, parchment menu with the slogan "Lovegood's lunches for fast, healthy munches" and another wizarding photo of a fae-looking woman picking vegetables from a lush garden with small, odd creatures flitting about, was all the explanation they needed. Clearly, Anthea was seeing to the new dietary needs of the Holmes brothers. The fact that they actually enjoyed the food, as Dudley evidently did, too, was a gift to the men whose stomachs and emotions were deeply unsettled with the truths that Dudley forced himself to voice through the long hours.

Mycroft's recordings would ensure that no facts or nuances were missed, but some of the revelations were to be forever burned into their remarkable minds.

"Our crazy, cat-lady neighbor, Arabella Figg, somehow talked my gang and me into taking pictures of him and giving them to her. Hundreds and hundreds of pictures. She gave us this incredible chocolate in exchange, and we thought she was just kind of sick and twisted and was somehow getting off on seeing Harry all broken and bloody. Only later did I learn that she was a squib – well, now, actually, she's a witch and fucking Dumbledore is the squib – and she was doing the only thing she could do to help Harry. She was gathering evidence. The chocolate had this potion in it – seems squibs have just enough of little bits of magic here and there to make some potions and do other little types of magic – anyway, the chocolate made us keep our mouths shut and made us want to keep taking pictures and getting more chocolate." Dudley had uttered this part in a monotone as he reached beneath a clever little bottom panel in his desk drawer and retrieved a sturdy brown envelope. Hesitantly sliding it across the table to Mycroft, Dudley said somberly, "These are ugly, you guys. There's a DVD in there with all of them on it. Figg gave them to me at my grand opening – told me to use them to keep me focused on why I started this place to begin with. But I don't need them or want them around; most of it's burned into my mind's eye anyway. I doubt she gave me the originals, but seems like you two are the right people to have these. Just … god, don't leave them anywhere that Harry'll see." His desperate blue eyes moved pleadingly
between Mycroft and Sherlock. Their agreement seemed to ease his worry, but not his sorrow.

Dudley raised his arm abruptly, as if trying to stop his action, when Sherlock decisively took the envelope and unwrapped the linen tie that held it closed. His movement died in mid-motion, however, and instead the young man sat there, fist tightly pressed against his own mouth as his jaw worked against the sobs that tried to force themselves from his control.

With the first few photos that Sherlock pulled randomly from the envelope and spread on the desk, the brothers were fighting their own intense reactions. This was … horrific.

---START TRIGGER ALERT---

This one … this tiny, broken little boy with a heartbreakingly familiar mop of unruly black hair … this, Dudley whispered, was Harry on his sixth birthday, after innocently asking Vernon why he didn't get presents like Dudley did.

And this … this was when Harry's school reported the time Harry was found on the roof of the building. Dudley's tears rolled unchecked as he choked out the facts. That the little boy had been fleeing from Dudley and his gang during a particularly vicious episode of 'Harry Hunting'. That he had already been badly injured by the violent boys before being returned to Privet Drive by an ominously silent, puce-colored Vernon…. That this was the first time Vernon had actually stripped the little boy down to his cousin's old underwear and whipped him with Vernon's leather belt…

And this next one was Harry that same day, tiny and tear-streaked, struggling to mop up his own blood from Petunia's clean floor, a pinch-faced, disapproving Petunia standing over him with folded arms as Harry's bloody back dripped onto the floor even as he used his own, torn t-shirt to clean what he could.

One after another, dozens, then hundreds, of horrifying, condemning photographs. Some showed Vernon Dursley in the act of violence, a look of insane lust evident on his face as he tortured the little boy. Some showed Petunia, always cold and disapproving, moving around the abused boy with complete disdain. A few showed the woman in an act of violence – pressing a small hand into the side of a boiling tea kettle, 'cleaning' Harry's 'filth' away with a wire-brush and turpentine, screaming at the small figure that was struggling to manage a huge, cast-iron frying pan from his precarious position on a chair in front of the stove – and others showed the truest extent of their dehumanization of a little boy whose only crime existed entirely in the minds of his tormentors. It was those photos, even more than the others, that finally brought to the surface the tears Mycroft and Sherlock had fought to contain.

It was unheard-of for a Holmes to cry. Unthinkable. But, staring in the hopeless face of their littlest love, how could they not?

Because, in this one, was a tiny, painfully thin little boy with hungry green eyes, seated empty-handed at the far end of the loaded dinner table across from his 'family', two of whom were morbidly obese from their own excess, each of whom had overflowing plates and full mouths. And here, in the next one, was the same little boy, serving the Dursleys dessert like a slave, while Petunia poured salt over the leftovers to ensure they were inedible.

The last one that Sherlock could bear to see, despite the hundreds that remained in the large envelope, was one that Dudley informed them had been taken by Arabella Figg. She had captured the 'family' on Christmas Day. In the far background was an idyllic scene that could have been from a Christmas card, of the Dursleys and the vile Aunt Marge gathered in their living room, Christmas tree sparkling and unwrapped gifts everywhere, all smiles and laughter. And in the foreground was the shabby doorway to the cramped cupboard under the stairs, which was opened a
cautious two or three inches, and just barely visible in the shadows of the closet was a tiny face with curious green eyes that watched the happy scene, one little hand wrapped around the vent of the door in preparation of slamming it shut in haste if he were caught.

It was the loneliest, most awful image either brother could ever recall. Considering the depth and breadth of their experiences, nothing more needed to be said.

---END TRIGGER ALERT---

Eventually, Dudley stopped talking. His voice had become rough and hoarse over an hour ago, and his moderately attractive face was red and blotchy, eyes swollen and sore from painful, shamed tears. He just sat there, waiting for the two to decide whether or not to kill him. In his mind, he deserved it.

Mycroft and Sherlock, luckily for Dudley Dursley, were men of remarkable intelligence. They were capable of seeing truths that most people could not see. And while self-proclaimed sociopath Sherlock did not especially understand human nature, he did understand fact and truth. Dudley had been a victim of his upbringing. He had obeyed his parents. He had honored their beliefs. And, when he reached the age of independence, he had rebelled. Fortunately for Dudley's continuing life beneath the deadly regard of the Holmes brothers, he had rebelled by growing up, by forcing himself to think, by gaining the conscience that his parents tried to deny him. He had begun to see Harry as a person the day the boy he barely saw at all saved him from the singlemost horrifying monster Dudley could ever have imagined. After his brush with the Dementor, Dudley's sleep had been tormented by dreams that were actually memories. The gift and curse of the Dementor had forced Dudley to see – to really, truly observe – what his family had done to the innocent child who lived in the cupboard and was enslaved to his family.

And from that awful experience with a creature from nightmare, Dudley had rebuilt himself. He now lived a life dedicated to bringing other children to the point where they, too, could clearly see the truth of victimizing and being a victim. He helped to empower them – some to resist the call to violence, others to resist violence itself. And, day by day, Dudley Dursley tried to redeem himself for what he had done to his cousin. For the most part, he was successful. He had found his calling, and he pulled many people onto a path that would lead them into confident, contributing adulthood.

His most notable failures were his own parents, Vernon and Petunia Dursley. He had given up on their redemption long ago, to the point where he just this morning had signed the papers that would change his last name to Evans and sever his last tie to the odious people who had birthed him. Dudley had fully faced the fact that the Dursleys were not people who were victims of their parents' teachings or their own lack of options. No, Vernon, Petunia, and even Marge Dursley were the freaks they hated so passionately. THEY were the real monsters.

And the Dementor that had attacked Dudley?

Dudley saw it as a benefactor and, eventually, a friend. He had even talked with the creature, after its podleader was elected to the Wizengamot. And although he would never be able to sit nearby and chat with it, Dudley did exchange written correspondence and had formed a friendship that continued to force him to see the world differently from the comfortable default he occasionally tried to fall back into.

Silently, the three men shared the last of the brandy between them. There was nothing more to say, not for a long while. Although Mycroft and Sherlock would probably never regard the soon to be renamed Dudley Evans in a friendly light, he had managed to earn their respect. He had been unflinchingly honest with them, even when the horror of his own actions made him vomit into his
wastebasket as he struggled to reveal them. He lived a life devoted to helping youths and the occasional adult overcome all aspects of violence and bullying, from whichever side of the spectrum that person occupied. He was doing more for the world than most people would ever be able to claim. And he did it in atonement, in hope, and in the genuine belief that everyone deserves the chance to truly see and understand their own actions.

When the Holmes brothers left "The Total Dud", they carried with them an envelope that was so much heavier than its actual, physical weight, a sheet of paper listing addresses, names and various facts that could be used to either track, attack or torture the Dursleys, and a promise that Dudley would lend any aid Harry needed, without question, regardless of the nature of the task. Implicit within the sober earnestness of the watery blue eyes was the understanding that he was agreeing to assist in the torture and murder of his own parents and Aunt, should that be required.

They left behind them an exhausted, somehow lighter Dudley Evans, a promise that Harry Potter would never be without love and support again, and a sizeable check that Mycroft slipped into the donations box that sat on the scuffed reception counter.

oooooooooooooooooooo

SWEET, NEW MEMORIES

That night, Harry Potter was the delighted, albeit confused, recipient of behavior he daringly described to the perpetrators as "cuddliness". The resultant sneer of disgust on Sherlock's face brought Harry into a fit of giggles, a description he emphatically denied and tried to re-label as "chuckles". With Mycroft as the deciding vote, final results declared that Harry was definitely giggling, albeit due to the "cuddliness" of his suitors. Officially, no one was pleased, but unofficial opinions conflicted strongly with that position. Had anyone else been present, they would have witnessed the normally acerbic Sherlock Holmes with a broad, open smile and happy eyes wrapped around a grinning Harry as the smaller man expertly seasoned the aromatic concoction he had simmering in the large frying pan.

Of course, it was the sight of the frying pan that had pulled Sherlock off the couch and over to his little love's side, his teasing theft of an organic sugar-snap belied by the dark look of memory in the blue-slate eyes that stared at the heavy pan.

The unseen witness would also have seen the normally dignified Mycroft Holmes seize Harry and lift the wildly giggling, struggling young man over Mycroft's surprisingly broad shoulder, to then carry his youngest love up the staircase to the second level of the apartment and then further up to the roof, followed by Sherlock who teased Harry and ensured they did not fall. Harry met their gift of a rooftop garden, complete with comfortable outdoor furniture and a powerful telescope, with huge eyes and awed silence, closely followed by several delightfully enthusiastic hugs and sweet, shyly-offered kisses. When the brothers softly revealed that the telescope was set on Sirius, the Dog Star, and that tonight was one of the best times to see that star most clearly, they were rewarded with a teary, trembling smile and many more gentle kisses of gratitude and affection.

Later, the three simply reclined on their backs on the soft, cushioned outdoor carpet and stared up at the night sky, talking softly while Mycroft and Sherlock cuddled (although they still flinched at the word) their little love between them and concentrated on making another in what they were determined would be an epic series of memories of happiness, love, laughter, safety and acceptance for themselves and one very special young man.

And as a sleepy-eyed Harry allowed them to tuck him in bed, regrettably alone, and woke up a little bit at the unexpectedly passionate goodnight kisses he was given by two gleaming-eyed Holmes men, all three were left with the sweetest of memories to begin their collection.
The Dog Star shone very bright that night.

Late that same night over in Surrey, furious bellows and ear-shattering shrieks of rage woke the neighbors and brought curious, malicious attention to the residents of #4 Privet Drive, home of the unpopular Dursley family. The cause of the twin tantrums was an equally irate Marge Dursley, who had just phoned her brother with the news that somehow, her confidential records on the puppy mill she ran as part-owner with Vernon had been stolen from within her own, locked safe, along with the property deed to #4 Privet Drive that showed the owner of the house to have been Lilly Alicia Evans. Marge had only discovered the theft because she had opened the safe to add in the falsified breeding and registration records of her latest bitch.

All she found in their place was an envelope of highest-quality linen, from which she drew a richly-embossed card with a few, finely-calligraphed words. The message was ominous, indeed.

"Merely the first of many bitter pills to swallow."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: One of my rants, straight from original posted text on FFN. No need to read it unless you like bitchy, sarcastic women!

RANT: I love that y'all love my stance against rude reviewers and stalkers! I see them the way I view June bugs: annoying, disgusting, worthless and oddly crunchy, but I'm totally happy to sick the cats on them if they get too close. With that in mind, to the two reasonably civil reviewers who advise that my writing style doesn't suit them, being too "clunky", and recommend I fix that – you can't please everyone, nor would I want to. Although I certainly am capable of doing so, I won't get into a dissertation in defense of my writing style, other than to say that every writer's voice has fans and haters, no matter how verbose or sparse the author's verbage. Witness the differences between Hemingway and James Joyce, or (more suited to my own spot in the card catalog) the odd popularity of Tiny Tim's version of "Tiptoe Through the Tulips", as opposed to the orchestral rendition. In other words, my personal favorite bumper-sticker-for-life: "Don't Look for Logic".

To make my position on this perfectly clear, I wouldn't change my socks to a color you like better, why would I change something as intensely personal as my writing style? C'mon, children, keep a little perspective here; the "Review" function lets you give a (hopefully) valid opinion, but it isn't actual power. Thanks for giving your opinion, though. So long as it stays polite, I won't extend my claws – too far.

To the truly beautiful souls who have gifted me – once or regularly – with reviews that encourage, heal, applaud, assist and contribute, I can only say again that I am deeply grateful for every, blessed word. You people totally get what it's all about.

To Ryuze, slayer of destiny, pikachumomma, Hortensia, TDLV666, marksmom, hprareslashfan, Rowan Valadosa, Winter Mother and all of you who have migraines and other health issues, as well as the massive joy and pressure that comes from Real
Life going nuts on and off, I want to say thank you. Y'all let me vent it out, and I am happy to listen to your venting when you need. All I can about my migraines is that at least they keep me writing, which is why you got this update. Go pain!

Blessed Be, y'all!

WyrdSmith
The Other White Meat

Chapter Summary

Undesirable blasts from the past, bondage, bonds, revelations and Earl Grey. Also, badassedness times three.

Chapter Notes

This chapter owes its title to the brilliant suggest of bettyboop, although I'd bet good money she didn't expect me to use it this way.

I did get a couple "huh?" reviews about what "The Other White Meat" means. I'm not sure if it's a Brit/Yank thing or an age thing (I'm of the age when my kids don't realize that Mikey Cyrus's dad was a popular singer in MY TWENTIES, so it's hard to keep perspective.) To clarify, the US pork industry had a campaign to promote pork as being as healthy as chicken, which is the favored white meat (although, naturally, I prefer the dark!). "Pork: The Other White Meat" was on commercials and billboards everywhere and became a joke, often used to riff on politicians ("pork") and other WTF people and topics. There, that should be more than enough on that topic; if you need more, I'd say either Wiki it or let it go.

Happy Reading!

WyrdSmith

CHAPTER 8: THE OTHER WHITE MEAT

It started when the mutilated body in the park's flower bed turned out to be a second-generation milkman named Colin Creevey.

Although Mycroft's incredible information network would certainly have found the link, and possibly Scotland Yard's horde of Inspectors might have identified something "off" as well, and certainly Sherlock's unparalleled deductive capabilities would have led him in the right direction (particularly in light of his new perspective on the world), in the end, it was Harry who found the connection that solved the case.

Despite Harry's stubborn refusal to discuss his "freak-out" days earlier, he did agree to allow Sherlock and Mycroft the right to worry about him. Unaware of their meeting with his cousin, Harry was still the recipient of what he called 'gentlemanly stalking' by Mycroft and Sherlock. Considering Harry's unrelenting independence and consistent use of the phrase "I'm fine", even during instances when he had lost a limb or a godfather, the young wizard's grudging concession to the concern the Holmes's felt about him was earth-shattering. When word of it reached Hermione and the Weasleys via an exceptionally sneaky PA, the disbelieving silence that fell was only
eclipsed by the party-like atmosphere that erupted shortly thereafter. Those who had been deeply worried that their friend would just be that much more solitary when surrounded by people who could not understand his history and his behavior were finally able to draw deep, relieved breaths and relax. In her gardens at Lovegood Farms, Luna smiled serenely at a tattletale hinkypunk and offered it dinner amidst the convoluted thoughts of her father as payment for her own little information network.

Naturally, Harry knew none of this. As far as he was concerned, his dividends for agreeing to allow Sherlock to keep the archway open were paid out through an awesome opportunity to ogle a truly fine specimen of human male genius in its natural environment. Although, that occurred to Harry only after he hissed something about "bloody annoying men sticking their big, unwanted noses in other people's business" before storming off into his bedroom to pout.

He saw later, when he wandered out to make some tea, that his attitude had no effect on the smug consulting detective who was clearly visible through the arched doorway, reclining on his own sofa with crime photos scattered around him while a befuddled John Watson wondered why his slightly-insane roommate kept smirking at the wall.

Eventually, Harry settled down and stopped glaring into Sherlock's living room every few minutes. Losing himself in the creation of a new song he was picking out on his godfather's guitar, it took a while before his eidetic hearing clicked in and his head popped up in surprise at what he had overheard. Without thinking, he quickly stood and almost ran through the archway into Sherlock's living room before shouting, "COLIN-BLOODY-CREEVEY?"

John nearly had a heart attack at Harry's sudden appearance in the room, and the wall above the fireplace would forevermore bear the stains of the Earl Grey he reflexively hurled at it. Fortunately, Sherlock was not in the path of the boiling liquid, although he did trace its flight with dispassionate interest. Even more fortunately, the archway was behind John's chair, or they would have been explaining why the new neighbor could walk through walls, rather than the dismissive, unsatisfying explanation he got from Sherlock about Harry obviously overhearing from the hallway ('honestly, John, don't be an idiot!') and using the key that Sherlock had supposedly given him.

Of course, the information was shared out reasonably soon anyway. Besides, later that night Sherlock did give Harry a key, so it wasn't really a lie.

Not that Sherlock would have cared if it was, of course.

Still and all, the important part of that afternoon was the fact that Colin Creevey, former occupant of the mutilated body that had further traumatized sweet old Mrs. Stapleton along with a lifetime's worth of unwilling victims of his overeager camera (including the new resident of 221C), turned out to be one of Harry Potter's old classmates from his exclusive boarding school in remotest Scotland. The nonverbal subtext of that information had Sherlock immediately texting Mycroft, who then texted Gregory LeStrade to meet him at Sherlock's flat immediately.

Within thirty minutes, John and Gregory were seated and staring in bewilderment at the mutinous look on Harry's face while Mycroft and Sherlock seemed to be trying to will the young man into saying … something. Based on the intensity of the glares shooting between them, it was something pretty damn important, too, and the three men clearly did not agree on how, or even if, it should be revealed. The real surprise to John and Gregory was the fact that phenomenal-secret-keeper Mycroft and taciturn Sherlock seemed to be the ones in favor of revealing whatever this was, and friendly, open-minded Harry was the one digging in his heels. Eventually, the tension in the room rose so much that the two not-daters were tightly not-holding-hands as they tried to disappear into
the tea-stained wall rather than catch anyone's attention.

Because anyone who has ever watched a wildlife documentary knows that one should never get between predatory and prey…. even though the unwilling witnesses weren't entirely certain who, of the three men, was whom. The point was that they were each very, very intimidating at the moment, and neither the seasoned Detective Inspector who routinely handled violent people nor the ex-Army Doctor who had survived Hell in Afghanistan had any intention of drawing notice until this - whatever this was – was resolved. After all, they had plans later on today. Well, not-plans, anyway. .....Ahem!...

Locked in place beneath the blue-gray stares of two genius brothers who believed themselves capable of wordlessly 'persuading' Harry to their way of thinking, it was just the misfortune of the Holmes's that the person they were trying to intimidate was Harry James Potter, natural Lord of two Ancient and Noble Houses, ShadowLord of the entire magical world, Oath Lord of every noble House and Line in Wizarding Great Britain, otherwise known as the 'Vengeful Savior.' Compared to him, Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes were rank amateurs.

He caved within seven minutes.

"Why do I have to be the one to tell them? They barely even know me!" Harry whined petulantly, his pouty lower lip tormenting both men with sensual fantasies even as they focused on their argument. Mental multitasking: blessing and bane of sociopathic geniuses everywhere.

"Harry," Sherlock purred, leaning in to Harry's personal space and initiating a new game he and Mycroft had recently invented out of their private, non-verbal language and a mutual interest in tormenting their sexual innocent. "You must admit this is more your purview than ours. We would be much more likely to be convincing them of its opposite, you realize." He aimed a quick look at Mycroft: 'First shiver, mine.'

Mycroft leaned back in his chair, catching Harry's attention, and lightly caressed his umbrella as he watched his young man from beneath hooded eyes. "Furthermore, you are much better … equipped … to provide proof." A flicker of eyelash toward Sherlock: 'Dilated pupils, mine.'

Emerald eyes narrowed, and Harry seemed to be arguing with himself, before he abruptly spat out, "Look, I didn't want to do this to begin with. It goes against everything I was taught! Sherlock, you shouldn't even know about this, really!" He seemed oblivious to the fact that he had just reached out and grasped Sherlock's hand, stroking it absentmindedly as he worried. A blue-slate smirk to Mycroft: 'First touch, mine.'

Mycroft simply leaned forward this time, setting his umbrella to rest point-first between his feet as he stared into Harry's eyes. "Little Raven, I know this is hard, but we will back you up." His strong hands wrapped gently around the umbrella, twisting absentmindedly. Harry swallowed heavily, seemingly unable to pull his gaze off of Mycroft's umbrella. A slate-blue blink at Sherlock: 'First sexual thought, mine.'

Harry finally blinked, seeming a little dazed, before he caught their undivided attention with a single, wide-eyed look of worried innocence. Biting his pouty lower lip, he then gently licked it before he confessed softly, "It's not like I do this a lot, you know. In fact, I've never done this before. Maybe you two could at least show me what to do? I'll be very, very good about it next time, I promise. I'll just sit here patiently and learn how you go about this, okay? If you will, I'll let you watch me when I try for myself."

He looked blankly from Mycroft to Sherlock and back, taking in their suddenly darkened pupils, flushed faces and rapid breathing as they stared at him with suddenly predatory eyes. After a
moment, he abruptly stood up with an obvious smirk and turned to leave, saying over his shoulder, "First double erections, mine. Amateurs!"

Gregory and John dissolved into helpless laughter at the mixed looks of shock, pride, and sexual frustration on the handsome faces of the Holmes brothers. Their laughter ended rather abruptly when they started to choke and panic at the sight of their new neighbor vanishing into John's living room wall, forcing Mycroft and Sherlock to aggressively subdue them and offer the explanations they had been trying to convince Harry to provide.

And that was how Harry Potter broke the news of a magical world to Gregory LeStrade and John Watson.

Once they were all on the same page regarding Colin Creevey and his magical/muggle background (and all of John and Gregory's hysterics had finally faded), Mycroft returned to his office, Gregory helped Harry prepare a late-afternoon tea, and Sherlock and John began the well-established routine that had led to several spectacularly-solved cases. Considering the victim's unusual background and abilities, the Consulting Detective and his blogger relied heavily on what information Harry was willing to provide, although it was made abundantly clear to both John and Gregory that their brand-new secrecy spells did not entitle them to most of the information known by Sherlock and Mycroft regarding WGB and Harry Potter.

Initially, John had annoyed Harry to death, asking for greater and greater demonstrations of magic. Quickly tiring of smaller forms of magical proof, Harry finally used the standard professor's tricks, and John was suitably impressed with the coffee table-turned-goat until the creature started to devour the crime scene photos. Lacking a housecat to enchant, an exasperated Harry made John fly around the room, and that was pretty much the end of John's requests for proof.

Gregory only needed to suddenly find himself clad in fuck-me pumps, shredded tights and a vinyl skirt before he hurriedly declared himself a believer and begged to be restored to his regular attire. He spent the next several hours avoiding John's heated stare and turning bright red every time he sat down on his cheap, vinyl-covered kitchen chairs.

It most emphatically did not help that Sherlock laughed so hard he collapsed to his knees, then dropped sideways to the floor like a log as he cackled uncontrollably. Unable (or possibly unwilling) to delete any of the details, the reaction was repeated every time Sherlock pictured LeStrade's expression of horrified mortification. He finally gained a modicum of control by placing a mental block/redirection program around that particular memory, enabling him to enjoy it only when it was appropriate and wouldn't irritate the hell out of everyone in the room.

Sometime in the midst of the investigation, which Harry emphatically refused to participate in apart from providing information when he deemed appropriate, Harry did offer them the use of his pensieve. THAT little bit of magic prompted Mycroft to leave his office in an actual hurry and rush to Baker Street, there to spend the next several hours playing with … err, analyzing … the fascinating object. Seeing his two whatever-they-were so enamored with the pensieve and its possibilities, Harry's natural generosity overrode his instinctive resistance to overmixing the magical and mundane worlds. Briefly going into the locked and warded small bedroom that he used as his office, he returned fifteen minutes later with a grin on his face and headed straight to the living room window, opening it wide and causing the screen to vanish into thin air. His withering glance at John's excited squeak made the good doctor flush in embarrassment. Shortly after Harry re-seated himself on the arm of the couch, a beautiful, pure-white owl soared in through the open window and caused Gregory to reflexively reach for his gun. He then found...
himself frozen both by magic and by the blazing, emerald glare of a furious Harry Potter, who was standing with the snowy owl on his forearm with his body placed protectively between LeStrade and their new guest.

Immediately, Mycroft and Sherlock were standing close to Harry, Mycroft's hands carding reassuringly through the ravel tresses as he smiled understandingly into eyes of heated green and said calmly, "Gregory was simply reacting to a perceived threat; he did not intend to threaten your owl, Harry. Is this Hedwig? I've heard a lot about her. She's somewhat well-known for her extraordinary abilities and the strength of her bond with you. Will you introduce us? First let LeStrade go, though, Harry. He will not hurt her; he wouldn't even think of it, you know that." At the same time, Sherlock was caressing and cooing to the beautiful owl, who returned his attention with interested, sharp amber eyes. Eventually, she turned her head sideways and nibbled gently on Harry's ear, catching his gaze and staring deeply into them, amber to emerald. Mycroft and Sherlock were enraptured by the first, visible example of the same type of communication the two brothers shared. With an abrupt gesture from Harry, LeStrade snapped from his rigid posture and collapsed back into his chair, gasping.

For the next few moments, John comforted LeStrade and Mycroft, Sherlock and Hedwig comforted Harry.

When they finally relaxed, with a shaken apology from LeStrade returned with Harry's stiff acceptance and awkward return apology, Harry finally got around to the reason for Hedwig's visit. Reaching down to the pouch with a gold "G" embossed on the front, Harry released the strap that bound the pouch to Hedwig's breast and gently tugged it away from his oldest friend. He rewarded her with a good, deep scratch, and grinned at the amused smiles of the others at Hedwig's growly-hiss of contentment. With a quick gesture that sent her back out the window and, according to Harry, up into the new rooftop garden, Harry glared warningly at John and Gregory and then reluctantly enlarged the pouch. Fortunately for Harry's nerves, the two newbies managed to control their rampant awe and simply watched.

Smiling at Mycroft and Sherlock, Harry reached into the briefcase-sized pouch and pulled out two, large, beautifully carved wooden boxes that should not have fit in the slim pouch. Ignoring that mystery, they each accepted one of the boxes Harry handed them and settled onto the couch, tugging Harry down between them. "Go ahead, open them!" Harry urged.

Carefully investigating the boxes, they found the hidden latch at the same time and exchanged small grins. With perfect timing, they opened the boxes and stared, awed, at the exquisite pensieves. Mycroft's was made of agate and mother-of-pearl, and seemed to glimmer independently within the velvet-lined box. Sherlock's was of topaz and tiger's-eye, and gleamed as if it were alive. They were exquisite.

Neither Holmes bothered with false protestations or elaborate expressions of gratitude. They knew Harry, and he knew them. He wouldn't want any of that, and they wouldn't have expressed such platitudes anyway. Rather, they ignored the wide-eyed shock of Gregory and John, and simply wrapped around their little love, each sharing a deep, loving, exploratory kiss with Harry while they held the smaller man between them.

As far as Harry was concerned, this was one of the increasingly frequent, perfect moments of his life. Odd, how many of them seemed to feature Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes.

Days later found all three men in a much darker frame of mind. The investigation of Colin Creevey's death had led in a most unexpected direction. They discovered just a little bit too late that
the body did not belong to Colin Creevey; in fact, his brother Dennis was actually the unfortunate victim, not only of murder, but of mistaken identity. Dennis had lived his life fairly quietly, preferring a mostly-muggle lifestyle with only small bits here and there of magic to assist his aging father, a retired milkman. Although more and more people simply obtained their milk from stores, the Creevey family actually partnered with a small, organic dairy and personally distributed milk daily or weekly to their small group of customers. Dennis had taken over his father's responsibilities, including running the milk route and chatting with the customers.

Colin Creevey, on the other hand, continued to be the annoying photographer-stalker that Harry had known in school. He lived in a small, somewhat remote home set back into some rather uninviting woods, warded against muggles and pests and anything else Colin could think of that might signify another lawsuit in the works. Although Hermione had ensured that Colin did not retain possession – either mental or photographic – of any of the tens of thousands of photos the older Creevey had taken of the magical world and its residents (including nearly thirty-eight-thousand featuring a beleaguered Harry Potter), the wizard had kept up his annoying habit of capturing everyone and everything on his camera. For the most part, that led to a lot of annoyance and several small lawsuits, but several months ago, he had managed to capture dozens upon dozens of photographs of a certain infamous consulting criminal who was commonly believed to be dead.

His death, in fact, had been witnessed by Sherlock, and had precipitated three awful years during which Sherlock was also believed to be dead and was vilified in the media and by the very police he had aided over his career. LeStrade continued to carry a great burden of shame and regret over that incident. Sherlock had spent those three years systematically hunting down and exterminating the vermin that continued to serve Moriarty's postmortem orders. Only when the entire network had fallen beneath the combined efforts of Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes did Sherlock re-emerge and allow himself to be vindicated.

It had taken his loyal friend and blogger, Dr. John Watson, many months before he started to recover from the nightmares and the emotional trauma he endured while trying to manage joy, intense relief, and a furious sense of betrayal. Even though he was able to understand, intellectually, Sherlock's reasons for his actions and Mycroft's reasons for keeping Sherlock's survival a secret, emotionally, John Watson was in the same place as any other victim and survivor of a dark past. John was blessed with a remarkable spirit, however, and now boasted a friendship with both of the Holmes brothers that was made stronger by the whole ordeal, and a burgeoning relationship with Gregory that might not have happened had they not sought to comfort and console each other during the worst of their grief.

And all of it could be laid at the feet of James-fucking-Moriarty, megalomaniacal consulting criminal and all around genetic mistake. And there he was, smiling insanely with his cohorts on film for the always oblivious Colin Creevey.

Even worse than catching Moriarty on camera more than three years after his supposed suicide, was the fact that Colin had also captured evidence of the mastermind's most recent criminal activity and several of his associates and accomplices. Moriarty's criminal interests had ramped up from challenging Sherlock Holmes to – something much darker and more horrific. Rather than let the truth be known before he was ready, Moriarty sent every hound he had after Creevey. All unknowing, the rabid photographer had been the subject of a nationwide manhunt for over a month. Somehow, someone identified Dennis Creevey as matching the description provided, and within days, Dennis was yanked from his milk run, sent through the threshers on the adjoining farm that provided wheat for their cows, and then hurriedly tossed into a park's flower bed rather than be found in the Buick that had been hit by the slightly-drunk driver of an out-of-control red Fiat.
They would never even have known about poor Dennis, had Moriarty not demanded the body as proof of the hit before it was returned to the threshers.

Unfortunately, during the course of the investigation, Moriarty's people followed John and Sherlock into an abandoned building where one of Sherlock's less-reputable snitches often hung-out, and overheard John telling Sherlock that he was "going back to the Creevey's for more pictures." From this, they concluded that John Watson and Sherlock Holmes had viewed and probably possessed the photographic evidence against Moriarty, and promptly kidnapped them. (By the time they realized that John had been talking about taking photographs of the property and Dennis's milk run route, it was far too late to do anything but move forward with their activities.) Their plan was to find out where the photographs were through any means necessary, although torture was definitely the group favorite.

While Sherlock and John were unconscious, Mycroft texted Sherlock with a thankfully ambiguous John not answering cell. At Harry's? MH, and Moriarty, laughing insanely, teased John in his strange, high voice that it looked like they were going to have to bring John's sister Harry to the party, too, and wouldn't little Harry have fun entertaining all of his boys?

John's controlled anger nicely covered up Sherlock's immense, intense cold rage, which seemed to burn through the pathways of his own mind and extend urgently outward in different directions toward …. someone?…

21.6 kilometers away, in a luxurious, sleek black, private car, Mycroft Holmes jerked in shock as his entire body felt the impact of his incredible mind linking tightly with that of his brother's. Even as he reeled under the strain, he was talking to Anthea and giving voice to everything that he was suddenly seeing through his beloved brother's eyes.

Surrounded by a veritable horde of snipers and assassins, the truly deadly version of Mycroft Holmes sped to save Sherlock… and, of course, John. He had given orders for John's protection and survival; nevertheless, if it came down to one or the other, he would stand at Sherlock's side and support him through John's funeral.

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James Moriarty was not just brilliant. He was FECKING brilliant, spelled with an "E" for extraordinary. He giggled maniacally at his own wit, and tightened the cuffs around Sherlock's legs. No sense letting his pet detective get loose, right? "Ha!" he cackled, his high, erratic voice echoing through the large, empty hangar, "I just called you my 'pet detective', Lockie! You'd suck at that; you haven't found any pussy in simply years!" He continued to giggle at his own cleverness, glaring around him until obedient chuckling came from his various sycophants and minions. He had decided when he died but didn't that he was genuinely evil, not just psychotic and insane, and that if he was evil, then that meant he didn't have associates. No, James Moriarty now was the proud owner of his very own minions. He just added 'sycophants' in to give the more talented among them a sense of rank.

And now, with Lockie and John-John, he was going to have his very own harem, too. Poor little John-John was going to be especially surprised, since he was so obviously straight. Not that it mattered, of course; he didn't have to be queer to stick his ass in the air and spread his cheeks for Moriarty's cock. Giggling again, he ran a caressing hand down John's chest and let it settle on the doctor's crotch. Beneath his touch, Watson froze in disgusted fear.

"Awwww, don't be like this, John-John," Moriarty moaned in John's ear. "I'm going to make you feel soooo good…. or maybe sooo baaad…. either way gets me off, John-John!" He started to giggle again, letting his breath catch in a deliberate simulation of sexual play, and actually felt an
erection bloom when Watson shuddered violently.

Moriarty let his oddly-focused gaze move to Sherlock, who stared at him coldly, as if studying every aspect of his enemy's face. Moriarty paused for a moment, considering, and then mused aloud, 'You know, Lockie, if I were to blog this like little John-John here, I would have you call me your 'nemesis.' But I just wanted to say that it looked like you were studying every aspect of my face, and I couldn't exactly say 'It looked to me like my Lockie was studying every aspect of his nemesis's face,' now could I? That just sounds stupid. 'Nemesis's!'" Moriarty snorted in laughter, jabbing at Sherlock to prompt him to join in. Not surprisingly, Sherlock was a buzzkill.

"It is not the word that sounds stupid; it is the narrator," Sherlock remarked disinterestedly, focusing his observations all around the warehouse as if documenting facts and faces. Knowing the conceited prick, he probably was. Without changing his delighted expression, Moriarty drew his arm back and swung, backhanding Sherlock with enough force to split the skin along those sharp, to-die-for cheekbones. 'Blood looks nice on my Lockie,' Moriarty mused, casually licking his hand before wiping it in John's hair.

Sherlock barely even blinked, sitting gracefully in the chair as if he were not bound tightly with cuffs, assorted spikes and knives arranged for optimum posture – no one likes a slouching cockwhore, after all! – and imprisoned by a man he had seen die.

"How does it feel, Lockie?" Moriarty crooned softly. "How does it feel to wake up in a masochist's wet dream, once again living in a world with your greatest nemesis? How does it feel to find out that your worst nightmare, the man you thought had died right in front of you, is suddenly alive again?" He stared hungrily at Sherlock, eager for the words that would confirm the horror the man must be feeling.

Sherlock glanced back casually, utterly unimpressed. "You tell me, James. You did it first." He smiled cruelly at Moriarty's flinch and added deliberately, "That really does just make you a copycat, now doesn't it, James? Not very original at all."

This time, the backhand sent him into unconsciousness, but Sherlock felt it entirely worth it. He hoped John would continue to endure until Mycroft arrived.

Sherlock had no doubt at all that his brother would come. Even without this intriguing method of communication that had sprung up between their minds with the urgency of the situation, even if there had never been a single clue or hint from anyone, Sherlock still knew that Mycroft would come.

And he was entirely right. The surprise, for everyone, is that Harry Potter came with him. A frightening, furious, powerful, deadly Harry Potter.

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Harry was actually napping when the wards began to blare. Within seconds, he was fully awake, fully armed, and pulling information from the ley lines and the wards and the charms and every other conceivable magical means of gathering and conveying data.

He had placed aural tags on several people so far. Mrs. Hudson, his landlady, was the first to be tagged, closely followed by John, Gregory, Sherlock and Mycroft. Next was the veggie shopkeeper, and the flower vendor, and sweet Mrs. Stapleton. He had tagged people who were close to him physically or emotionally (and, in certain obvious cases, both), whose auras were clean and deserved a little extra protection, or who were simply in a position or location to help him pull in data when needed.
Sherlock and Mycroft also carried certain wards and protections on them, very special creations of Harry's own design and power signature. He hoped they didn't hate him for it, but the similarity in their aural signatures was so similar that he had set up a default protection spell in the event of an emergency, which seemed to be likely given the natures and professions of his men.

Pausing very briefly in his rapid preparations, Harry inspected and savored his choice of wording. 'His men.' …. Nodding decisively, he added a mental 'true enough' and flowed back into the familiar dance of summoning his inner 'Vengeful Savior.' Whoever had dared touch his people would suffer. That was a certainty. All that was to be decided was the degree.

Directing his actions back to the dance, he allowed the back of his mind to mull and reflect and consider, a trick he had developed once he finally managed to convince his stubborn, snarky, greasy-haired git Potions Professor that his mind really did operate differently than that of a standard Occlumens. Once Harry had lost all patience and simply bound the man, refusing to release him until the bastard calmed down and observed rather than seeing what he wanted to see, Snape had finally understood what Harry had been trying to tell him. It was not possible for a wizard of Harry's power to 'clear his mind' – the very thought worked against the theory and will of magic. Every ounce of power demanded attention, and the greater the power, the more one's mind had to be able to multitask. Consequently, the greater one's mind, the greater the power; and the greater the power, the greater the requirements on one's mind. It certainly had the capacity to drive a powerful wizard or witch insane (witness the unfortunate Tom Riddle, who Harry pitied greatly). But it also proved that Harry Potter was not the 'dunderhead' that Snape kept wanting him to be. Back then, Harry had not learned to manage all of the information he gathered and processed, and that was why he seemed forgetful, or stammered, or seemed to have great bursts of insight.

Once he accepted the truth of Harry Potter, Snape had settled down and helped him devise a way to keep his busy thoughts humming and connecting and mulling in the back of his head while he used his newly-partitioned higher intellect to the purposes he needed most. Which, in this case, was to use one section to gather specific data and process it, a second section to take him through the routines and protocols for battle-readiness, a third to move him through the real world and manage the actions and interactions that needed to happen to manage the emergency, and a fourth to assess the magical situation and act appropriately. Mentally, he was very busy at the moment.

It was an unpalatable truth for Severus Snape that, despite his usually unprepossessing demeanor, Harry Potter was a genius. In fact, Harry was as much of an intellectual giant as Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes, although his intellect was employed – and deployed – differently.

And that was why Harry saw the potential for an emergency mental link that existed between the two brothers. The moment he examined them, identified the food sensitivity and saw the reason behind it – the real reason, the one Ron shared with Mycroft and presumably with Sherlock – Harry saw that, although his cherished men were not magical, they had all of the potential of a high-level squib and all of the mental capacity of master mages. That meant that, if a situation occurred to trigger a huge adrenaline burst, both Holmes' had the potential to use that adrenaline to activate some of the genetic defaults of the human species. Harry had teased Mrs. Stapleton about throwing a car over her head, which was possible if the woman was a squib and briefly used adrenaline to activate the abilities she would have otherwise had if given more power. That would work for Sherlock and Mycroft, too, but to a much more dramatic degree. These men routinely used the areas of their brains generally used by master mages. They would not default to a low-level genetic fight-or-flight; in fact, given the right pathway – which Harry had thoughtfully provided, albeit without their knowledge or permission – the adrenaline rush would flow through the new path, light up the master mage portion of their brains like a Yule celebration, and activate the strongest of their magical potential.
In other words, Harry had provided them with surge protectors, which had redirected an unexpected burst of power and turned on another appliance. In this case, an enhanced mental link between Sherlock and Mycroft. Who would probably be really pissed at him when this was all resolved.

Harry was okay with that.

With one last, brief sweep of data, Harry had all of the information he needed. He knew that Mycroft was entering the Hangar from the northernmost corner, following the professionals who were clearing the way. Through the leylines, he saw the electrical charges and pulses that indicated traps and triplines, and identified three separate points which Mycroft's men were likely to fail in deactivating, considering the insane mount of backloops and knots that Moriarty himself must have installed in the system and, in some cases, the wires themselves. There was no possibility of anyone non-magically deactivating those points; they were kamikaze triggers. Tracing back along the aural shifts, Harry spotted several assassins and others who occupied covert positions throughout the building and external to the building to a rough estimate of 6 kilometers. Moriarty, then, had chosen a 'no one gets out alive' course of action. Studying the aural coronas, it was remarkably easy to separate Mycroft's people from Moriarty's – all of Mycroft's people had an organized core, probably having gone through the same training program which had clearly included logic and other academic training. Likewise, all of Mycroft's people radiated from a unified core of platinum – the color of purpose and intellect, united. White for purpose, charcoal for intellect, shined up to a pretty metallic finish through concentrated training and dedication.

By contrast, Moriarty's people were nauseating swirls and flashes of corrupted color – what should have been the ruby flare of violent defense was instead the brownish-red of old, infected blood. Gangrenous veins poisoned every other color, and there was not one person who served Moriarty who was not, in the end, an addict to corruption and chaos. Compared to some of the deaths Harry had caused, this would not be an execution; this would be an extermination.

In the center of the hangar, exactly like a badly-written script for an overblown evil villain, Moriarty paced and giggled, delivering his conceited monologue just like every other wannabe bad guy Harry had ever encountered. From Voldemort all the way down to Dolores Umbridge, every single one of them just had to ramble on and on about their own greatness and cleverness and power and glory and …. blah, blah, blah.

'So endlessly dull!' Harry flashed a grin, hearing Sherlock's distinctive voice within his mind and realizing that Sherlock and Mycroft were now fully-linked and had together found the segue that led them to Harry.

He felt, rather than heard, Mycroft's anger at his presence near the hangar and hurriedly interrupted the diatribe he sensed building up. 'Not now! Just look,' he pleaded mentally, showing the clearest rendition of a schematic he could create out of the bizarre information of leylines, auras, trips, triggers and hundreds of other data points. Winning their momentary silence as the two fine minds cast assessingly over the information he offered, Harry obligingly highlighted and zoomed in on the most urgent points. He felt Mycroft's alarm at the kamikaze-triggers, and mentally nodded in agreement. Then he drew their attention to the most frightening aspect – above and beyond Moriarty's overused move of multiple assassins aiming laser sites on Sherlock and John.

Harry winced at the horror that momentarily seized his two men, before their intellect and experience seized control of their innate emotional responses and wrestled them into compliance. 'Your two men?' came Mycroft's distinctively-flavored mental voice, taking a millisecond to brush approvingly along Harry's aural core. From elsewhere – beneath? above? around? It was impossible to quantify in a dimensional reality that existed only within intellect and magical
perception – Sherlock swept through and left a quivering Harry with the impression he had just been expertly groped.

'Sherlock was so going to pay for that!' Harry pouted to himself. 'Later, beloved,' came Mycroft's commanding essence, and Harry immediately complied, though the lower part of his mind fairly purred with pleasure at the endearment – and the groping.

Snapping to full attention as the first of the kamikaze-triggers was approached, Harry showed Mycroft and Sherlock his intention. Barely waiting for the briefest sign of their agreement, he acted.

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Staring greedily at the monitors in front of him, absently fondling himself as he leered over at John and Sherlock, Moriarty suddenly froze. Hand still gripping his own cock, he peered at the monitor and the sub-displays in confused denial. All of Mycroft Holmes's people were suddenly – not there. Not like they retreated or anything, they were just …. gone. Muttering wildly, the madman did not notice the smirk on Sherlock's battered but handsome face – but John did. John Watson had been watching Sherlock from the corner of his eye for several minutes now, hoping to see one of those barely-there signals that told him a plan had been formed and action was needed. John had faith in Sherlock, faith that had never proven to be misplaced. It was that faith which had earned John's immediate agreement the first time they were together in Moriarty's crazed sights, and had led to Sherlock shooting the explosives while John launched the two of them headfirst into the pool to avoid a rain of bullets. This felt a lot like that time, only right now John was one hundred percent certain that Sherlock knew a lot more than John did and whatever he knew was far, far from being 'bit not good.' Based on his experience with Sherlock's body language, both subtle and acute, John was certain that their salvation was near at hand – somehow. And given the recent revelations about Harry Potter, not to mention the obvious love triangle developing between Sherlock, Mycroft and Harry, John expected that both his mysterious new neighbor and Sherlock's admittedly terrifying older brother were 'coming soon to a maniac near you!' His semi-hysterical thoughts burst through in an unexpected little giggle that erupted from John's chest before he could stop it, earning the good doctor the immediate, quizzical attention of James Moriarty.

"John-John?" Moriarty purred dangerously, his high-pitched voice sounded eerie and bone-chillingly evil in the echoing Hangar, "care to share with the class? What do you know, little John-John? Where did all the good guys go?"

Moriarty pouted at John's obvious bewilderment. "Well, clearly, you don't know what's going on, do you, John-John? It isn't nice to pretend, you know. It makes me feel all disappointed in you, and earns you special punishments." He leaned over dangerously, trailing an invasive finger down John's chest and circling through the thin shirt over John's tightening nipple. "Ooooh, bad boy, John-John. You have special reactions for danger, don't you, baby?" His other hand began to trail up John's leg, only to pause at Sherlock's mocking voice.

"Once again, James, you are losing the plot right at the best part. Or did you forget about the fact that dozens of men with very big guns just disappeared off your radar? Of course, if you'd rather spend your last minutes pretending that a common physiological response to any stimuli at all is a sign of some deep well of hidden lust with your name on it, go right ahead. It is immensely helpful to his true love interest, so by all means, continue convincing John that he is strictly a one-man man. Please, be my guest." Moriarty actually cringed from the smooth, dark-chocolate baritone that poured acidic truth all over his happy moment.

Sometimes, James Moriarty really, really didn't like his Lockie.
There wasn't enough time for Moriarty to share this revelation, though. There was barely enough time for John to sigh in relief before, suddenly, there just wasn't any more time at all. Not for action, anyway. Now, for Moriarty, it was all about reaction.

One heartbeat, and all of the electronics froze.

Another heartbeat, and all of Moriarty's people froze.

Another heartbeat, and Sherlock and John vanished from their bindings, knives and shivs remaining mockingly in place around the forms that were no longer there.

Another heartbeat, and a somehow-silent crack of pressure on his eardrums, and suddenly Sherlock Holmes, John Watson, and Mycroft Holmes appeared roughly ten feet in front of Moriarty, an odd, shimmering energy dancing around them in an entrancing play of static-made-light.

Another heartbeat, and this time Moriarty froze – not by the same means as his men and his electronics. No, James Moriarty froze himself through purest fear. Because suddenly, staring at him from a position between and slightly to the side of the other three ‘good guys’, was a being from legend.

He had to be. No one on this earth, not the real earth, the one that had fleas and bigotry and Paris Hilton in it, could ever be that beautiful, that cold, that powerful, that level of wet-your-pants-while-you-run-away terrifying. It just wasn't possible.

But, here he stood, staring at him from an emotionless face with eyes like emerald ice.

Moriarty tried; he really did. He managed to hit the ‘panic button’ he had programmed on his control desk. It was an actual big, red button, glowing light and everything. If ever Moriarty pushed it down, all of his men were supposed to rush to his side, firing weapons all-out at anything and everything that was not James Moriarty.

All that actually happened was a shockingly loud "AH-BDEAH-BDEAH-BDEAH, THAT'S ALL FOLKS!" and a priceless look of befuddlement on the face of this week's evil villain. Silence gave way to John's slightly-hysterical snort and Mycroft, who was pinching the bridge of his nose, muttering, "Harry, we must upgrade your sense of humor a bit, love." Sherlock simply smirked approvingly at the emerald-eyed creature.

It sounded to Moriarty's bewildered ears as if the petite demon-man snapped back, "Hello! Marauder!" but he couldn't be entirely sure.

He couldn't be entirely sure of anything.

It did seem as if, maybe, the two Holmes's and the demon-man were somehow communicating mentally, which was also not possible in the real world but seemed probable at the moment. Moriarty's suspicions firmed when Mycroft Holmes said, as if continuing a conversation, "Very well, Harry; my part is now concluded. I need nothing further. All of the data has been stored in a FailSafe drive. Sherlock, love, do remind me to have Anthea thank the senior Mr. Weasley personally for that device, won't you? I think she'd enjoy that."

Did Sherlock Holmes actually wink at his brother? Didn't they hate each other? What the fuck was going on?

Moriarty stood and stared at them. He didn't even realize that his failure to move was not a voluntary decision. This was so far beyond insane that even he couldn't keep up. What the fuck was going on? "What the fuck is going on?" It had sounded so good in his head he could not help but
voice it aloud. To his everlasting surprise – which really only gave him another five minutes or so – he got an answer.

Sherlock Holmes spoke up – naturally. He couldn't get his bizarre explanation from the urbane British Government, who had declared himself done. Fuzzy-jumpers/adrenalin-junky John Watson was notably silent, probably having not forgiven Moriarty for his little bits of psychotic fondling earlier. He was actually okay about not hearing from the perfect demon-man. That left mouthy, sarcastic, superior, unfairly-sexy Sherlock-fucking-Holmes.

Actually, maybe he deserved to be called "fecking", too. He was extraordinary, even if Moriarty did hate him… and want him … and hate him.

It was confusing.

"It's like this, James. You should have been dead several years ago. Time's up."

Well, as far as lengthy explanations went, it made a great caption. Still, it was something. But obviously, these four assholes hadn't thought of everything. Moriarty started to giggle, watching his computer as all of the electronics sputtered back to life and his twenty-three assassins came back into view as beautiful, vivid dots scattered around the five men standing in the center of the hangar. Unfortunately, his giggling was fairly loud, and so Moriarty didn't hear what Mycroft Holmes murmured to the demon-man.

He did see the three invaders – because even though Moriarty had captured Sherlock and John, they had escaped and returned, breaking the rules; therefore, he decided they were invaders, too – he saw the three invaders in the back push their fingers into their ears, but didn't have time to react before the demon-man raised a hand and then jerked it back, as if forcefully plucking an apple from a tree.

The resulting sound of twenty-three machine guns firing was just as deafening as the three seemed to expect, although what actually left Moriarty gaping was the way all twenty-three lights blinked out on his computer at the very same time. His ears were ringing too loudly to hear the resounding thud of twenty-three bodies hitting the floor in unison, guns clattering on the concrete all over the hangar.

Farther away, Mycroft's team silently and efficiently captured all of the outposted members of Moriarty's gang, snapping off their life-alert signals one by one until Moriarty's screen, remote-site popups included, was just as silent and frozen as before.

The demon-man never flinched, not even once.

And the three invaders and the demon-man were still standing, untouched. What the fuck?

"WHAT THE FUCK?"

Well, it had worked the first time.

This time, the demon-man just cocked his head, studying Moriarty like he was a bug. Even now, as he began to realize that he was physically frozen and unable to move - which he discovered only when his belated fight-or-flight reflex kicked in and he tried to run away – James found himself almost ensorcelled by the sheer beauty of the creature standing between the three invaders and himself. The man, if he was a man, was petite and lithe, with the kind of fuck-me-stupid body that James wanked to with every rape fantasy he had. Long, wild black hair seemed to move on its own, like it carried a breeze within it – although sometimes, it almost seemed like maybe Medusa was one of this guy's distant relatives. Frigid emerald eyes still managed to blaze forth from a
porcelain complexion, and the guy's black eyebrows and curly lashes looked like they could have been painted onto his face by a talented artist. The picture was completed with a perfect, almost rosebud mouth that managed a sardonic twist despite its sheer – cuteness. But what really set the man apart, what made James Moriarty believe he spoke the truth when he called him a demon-man, was the nearly-visible, nearly-audible flaring snap and flash of static that the guy seemed to wear and breathe like it was his usual atmosphere.

As far as terrifying creatures went, Moriarty would definitely have given this guy the top spot. The Alien queen could go fuck herself – again.

Realizing that he was probably actually going to be dead soon – for real this time – Moriarty managed to pull one last smirk forth. He still knew something they didn't know. He was still going to win. It didn't matter that they didn't know the rules, or even what the game was – Moriarty was going to win.

The biotoxic bomb he had activated twenty-seven minutes ago assured it.

Feeling himself regain control over his body, Moriarty decided to make his execution memorable, rather than try to run away. He could probably make his escape, too, knowing all the little hidden passages he had built into this hangar, but why bother? He was dead anyway. They all were.

Smiling ecstatically, James Moriarty spread his arms wide, dramatically positioning himself to mimic his own crucifixion, and began to sing, "Blackbird singin' in the dead of night… spread these broken wings and learn to fly …"

His grand exit was ruined by Mycroft's painfully dry, "Spare us the dramatics, James. This will be an execution, not a rock opera. And just so you understand the extent of your failure, James, Harry has a little gift for you before you depart."

John Watson blinked and jumped right along with Moriarty, although the madman was far too shocked to notice, at the sudden crack that accompanied the broken remains of Moriarty's beautiful biotoxic bomb arriving at high speed out of thin air in a long, curving, screeching, skidding 7/10 split that would have done any bowler proud. What had once been a thing of apocalyptic beauty was now a melted, twisted hunk of metal, all the lovely crystal decanters bubbling with vaporous death now filled to the brim with some type of greenish-gray sludge that seemed to be consuming the contents.

Sherlock paced forward to stand next to Harry, quirking an inquiring brow down at the smaller man as he studied the sludge. He made a mental note to get some texts of magical creatures and such, when Harry just shrugged and offered, "Luna told me last year to keep some nargle-algae hybrids on hand for a rainy-day. Said they'll eat anything and turn it into awesome fertilizer that she can use on her farm. She was right." And, after a moment of thought, he added, "Remind me to stop eating Luna's lunches, okay?"

He was unsurprised at Mycroft's and Sherlock's solemn nods of agreement. John just stared; he was trying to act like he was in the loop, but all he really wanted was for someone to kill Moriarty and for them all to leave so he could find Gregory and inform the man that they were not 'nots' anymore. They were not not-dating. They were not not-flirting. They were not not-gay. They were not not-frotting.

Frankly, LeStrade had better just hope he was also not at work, because wherever John found him was where John Watson was going to snog Gregory senseless and declare that they were now officially gay men who were dating after a lot of flirting and frotting and would very soon be shagging!
Actually, he kind of hoped Gregory was at work. It would be worth it just to see Anderson's pinch-faced reaction. Besides, John had heard make-up sex was the best, and if he embarrassed Gregory enough, there would definitely be a need to make-up. After the angry sex, of course. Oh, god, he was so damn horny. Adrenaline really messed him up. Dropping his head in despair, John uttered a soft whimper at Mycroft's mocking but sympathetic pat on the shoulder.

Staring at the floor, John sensed Mycroft move past him and looked up to see the elder Holmes join Sherlock and Harry, who were now staring dispassionately at the weeping figure of James Moriarty, who was sitting on the floor cradling as best he could the twisted wreckage of his attempt at genocide.

Somehow, John still expected there to have been more of a build-up. He had expected a farewell speech from Sherlock, maybe, or some sort of grand magical display by Harry. Maybe even for Mycroft to summon a firing squad.

What actually happened was that Sherlock Holmes raised a .50 caliber Desert Eagle semi-automatic handgun and fired several bullets into the head and heart of James Moriarty, waiting long enough to ensure that the loss of blood, bone, flesh and brain was unquestionably adequate to ensure death this time, before tossing the gun into the midst of the greenish-gray sludge and watching as it was consumed. Watching the sludge spread, John was nauseatingly aware of the way in which the body would be disposed.

Sherlock and Mycroft then wrapped strong arms around the slowly-wilting figure of Harry and converged around their new but deeply treasured littlest love. Despite the fact that the youngest of the four had literally just executed at least two-dozen men, neither of the Holmes' seemed in any way inclined to treat Harry with less than warm concern and passion that was considerate only due to Harry's exhaustion, rather than to any trepidation on their part. Clearly, as far Sherlock and Mycroft were concerned, nothing had changed – and perhaps, considering how much more they knew about the young man's past than John did, nothing really had.

John felt very much like a voyeur, but could not seem to look away, especially as he watched Mycroft keep Harry pressed against him with one hand while sinking his other deep into chestnut curls and pulling Sherlock into a hard, almost desperate kiss, his hand gripping Sherlock's hair tightly as he plundered the willing, sensuous mouth beneath his own and reassured himself that his brother was alive, was safe, was here. Sherlock's hand rested on Mycroft's jaw, pressing hard against his brother's face, head slightly tilted as he accepted, and returned, their first real kiss.

And the only thing that shocked John - even a little bit - was the fact that he was not shocked at all – even a little bit.

Sandwiched comfortably between the two, Harry had wrapped fierce arms around Sherlock's waist and burrowed into the tall man's side, seeking comfort of his own in the surrounding embrace. Rather than be set apart by the fierce kiss the brothers were sharing, Harry seemed very much a vital, important part of the three-way embrace. Judging by the possessive hold both Sherlock and Mycroft kept on their little love, even as they kissed and caressed each other, the brothers clearly agreed.

John finally managed to look away, turning slightly and granting the three as much privacy as he could without walking away. He would have done the latter, if he could, simply to give them all the time and space they might need, but he was a survivor of what was mostly guerilla, urban warfare and knew full well that one never separated from their squad while in the field. Instead, he distanced himself emotionally and mentally, allowing his body language and directional positioning to relay his respect and reasoning, and simply waited. He occupied his thoughts with
plans for Gregory, allowing himself to actually form the words they had been avoiding and cautiously letting his hope and happiness bubble up.

He was so lost in thought that he didn't notice when the three returned to themselves and noted his actions, easily reading his body language as he had known they would. His first return to the reality of the hangar where he and Sherlock had been imprisoned and tormented, and the bloody, crumpled body of James Moriarty huddled on the floor beneath a spreading, greenish-gray sludge, was when he became the startled recipient of a strong hug by one Harry James Potter. Looking down in surprise, briefly registering how very petite this man was if even John looked down to see him, John's medical training kicked in as he took in the young man's pale, trembling form and obvious exhaustion. Immediately wrapping a supportive arm around Harry's shoulders, John dropped a hand to Harry's throat and began automatically taking his pulse, counting respirations as he expertly assessed any other outward symptoms. Harry just leaned against him briefly, laughing quietly as he muttered sleepily, "I'm okay, John. Just used a ton of magic and am really tired. Probably sleep a couple days. Just – are you okay?" Weary, dull green eyes still showed a spark of vitality as Harry assessed John even as John assessed Harry.

The moment ended when Harry was lifted into Mycroft's arms and John found himself with the strong arm of his dearest friend wrapped around his shoulders as Sherlock forced John toward the door by dint of walking forward without releasing his grip. Stunned at the unexpected contact and support, John walked with Sherlock and, after a moment of indecision, allowed himself to relax slightly and sink into the reassuring warmth of his stronger and much taller friend. Confused but happy, John grinned slightly as Sherlock raised the hand from his shoulder and briefly ruffled John's hair, saying in that incomparable baritone, "You did well, John. Really, really well. LeStrade had better be in your bed tonight, beating back the nightmares and … other things one might beat in bed… or I will personally kick his ass for you. Perhaps tenderize it a bit." His smug grin at John's immediate, choked silence and bright red face was broad and unapologetic.

Just before they left the hangar building, John glanced back and saw that the bloodied form on the floor was now entirely obscured by the efficient, greenish-gray sludge that had consumed several vials of the most dangerous biotoxins known to mankind. Even now, poking up through the cracks and crevices that the close-impact bullets had made in the concrete floor, John could see green shoots and a couple of newly-budding wildflowers emerging. He thought perhaps it made a very poetic analogy for the symbolism of life from death, and a suitable triumph over the fear and darkness that had filled the room less than an hour ago. And although he did anticipate that one of them would make a fitting comment as the door closed on the horrifically hopeful scene, John did not expect Harry's irreverent summary.

"James Moriarty – the other white meat."
Into the LIMElight

Chapter Summary

Not "not" jokes, charming healer, Gdansk, Mycroft and Sherlock interface, and a very sensitive bond.

Chapter Notes

A/N: There is a LIME in this chapter (hence the title; clever, eh?), and it involves a little Holmescest. If you can't stand it, skip it – or skim it. You know, peeking through your fingers, like you do horror movies and accidental porn. Well, other accidental porn. The pertinent section is titled One Moment in Lime. (Oh, shut up; it's 5:30 in the morning; I'm entitled to bad porn puns since I'm feeding you citrus.)

Blessed Be & Happy Reading!

WyrdSmith

CHAPTER 9: INTO THE LIME-LIGHT

Not 'not' jokes

DI LeStrade could be forgiven for his shock when a bedraggled Doctor John Watson stormed into his department, trailed by two amused Holmeses and a sleepy-eyed wizard. Watson shouldered his way past numerous startled members of Scotland Yard, walked right up to Greg, seized his lapels and pulled him down into a fierce, passionate snog.

The frantic fragments of thought that ran through the mind of the Detective Inspector – mostly phrases such as "this isn't happening!" and "Anderson's gonna' freak!" – disappeared into a throaty hum of enjoyment as he forgot all about the goggling witnesses and wrapped his arms around the smaller man to make sure he didn't stop the kissing anytime soon.

Eventually, it was the sheer silence of the normally bustling room that sank into his consciousness and caused the stalwart cop to end the impromptu snogging session and allow himself to separate slightly from John. He smiled down into the now-worried face of his not-boyfriend – okay, never mind, this was pretty much a definite and defiant declaration of rampant boyfriendship - and squeezed him reassuringly as he cast a narrow-eyed glare around the room, blatantly daring anyone to say anything stupid.

It was an offer Donovan could not resist. "What the hell, LeStrade? You and Watson fags now? You actually turned me down to fuck a hangdog pillow-biter like him?" She stood at her desk belligerently, disbelieving stare fixed on the arms that LeStrade refused to take from Watson's waist.
Surprisingly, considering the quantity of people who were ready to slap Donovan down (including, happily enough, several cops and detectives), it was Sherlock's distinctive baritone drawl that momentarily silenced the woman. "Because, what would a decent, successful person like LeStrade want with an attractive, charming physician who is also a decorated war hero when he could have sloppy-second-hundreds from you? Hard to imagine that the only male in the building who has not been blown by you in an alley, men's bathroom or his wife's kitchen would actually prefer someone with a clean bill of health and no carpet fibers ground into their knees, hmmm?" Cold, blue-slate eyes stared unflinchingly at the shocked sergeant, who was equally as floored by the fact that Sherlock Holmes had actually insulted her as that he had been so poisonously accurate about it. Despite years of insults and name-calling and accusations by Donovan, Holmes had never directly insulted her, even though she herself might unwillingly agree (if drunk and under torture) that she deserved it. He had a no-holds-barred open warfare with Anderson, but the most he had ever said to Sally was to mock her for the affair she was having with the rat-faced, married cop.

Until now.

Apparently, whereas before Holmes didn't particularly care if she was verbally attacking him, and had allowed Watson for the most part to defend himself and sometimes Holmes as he saw fit, something had changed. And now, staring down the room into the eyes of the man she had mocked as a freak and personally believed was a fag and a wimp, she suddenly realized that she had essentially been poking a dragon with her billyclub. Because the blue-slate eyes that pierced her own were definitely the eyes of a pissed-off alpha predator, and Sally had just tried to hurt one of its nestmates. Or maybe two of them.

Oh, shite.

Sergeant Sally Donovan was a bitch. Not a cast-iron bitch, who had earned the respect she got. No, Sally was the kind of bitch who got flipped off in traffic and made little kids cry. She was rude and opinionated and had the morals of a shrew in heat. But she was not particularly stupid, and she had a very well-developed survival instinct. Even if her career could survive the dressing-down she was certain she was going to get from LeStrade, she was fairly certain that the fastidiously-dressed elder Holmes brother – who often made her think that he was exactly what Lucifer would look like if he made it back to this plane - would see her walking a beat on the docks within days if she didn't fix this. From the cold look in the man's eyes, Donovan wasn't positive she wouldn't shortly thereafter find herself pushed off the docks with a few hundred pounds of barbells chained to her legs. And THAT was assuming she lived long enough to even get assigned to that crap beat, because Sherlock Holmes made her feel like a field rat under the malevolent eye of a timber wolf.

And, although she still didn't know who the creepy green-eyed twink was that had seen her bumped to desk duty last week just for calling Sherlock her personal pet name for him, Sally Donovan was getting the worse vibes of all from him. He was Dangerous with a capital 'D'. It was definitely time for Donovan to roll over a little, no matter what Anderson thought of her for doing so.

Although he liked it a lot if she did it for him. Nasty little prick. And she did sincerely mean 'little'.

Taking a deep breath, she glanced around the squad room and cringed at the glares she was getting from most of her co-workers, too. It didn't matter if most of them agreed about Sherlock Holmes or not; John Watson was well-liked and DI LeStrade had earned enough loyalty from the team that most of them would stand between the man and a car bomb if they saw the need. The only one smirking to cheer her on was Anderson – and, really, didn't that just say it all? Allowing her shoulders to drop from their automatic pre-fight tension, she turned her eyes – not to LeStrade and Watson, who deserved her apology – but to Sherlock Holmes. Bravely meeting his cold stare, she
cleared her throat and said with only a touch of her customary harshness, "I hate you, Holmes. You're an insufferable prick, and you have no good reason to be on any crime scene at all, except as the suspect. However .... this time, I agree that I was out of line. I should have you cooling in the holding tank for what you just said, but since it was payback for my own insults, let's just call this one a draw. Deal?" She stared him down, willing him to agree so this could all blow over.

Holmes, cool and arrogant as ever, merely raised an eyebrow and sneered slightly as he replied in that damnable, wonderful voice of his, "Of course there is no 'deal', Sergeant. That would imply an equal exchange of some sort, as well as an agreement between two or more parties. This is not that. I owe you nothing of lenience or cooperation, and your attempt to avoid the consequences of your actions is utterly transparent. Frankly, Sergeant, unless you see fit to try to attack any of my people again, I have no interest in you at all. You should believe with all your bigoted little heart, Donovan, that my lack of interest in you is a very good thing."

Well..... shite, again. It was worth a try, anyway. And what the hell did he mean by 'his people'? Shrugging carelessly and looking with false confidence toward her boss, she saw with a sinking heart that the usually easygoing man was looking distinctly hard-assed at the moment. Actually, even Little-John there looked a bit dangerous, despite being tucked up against LeStrade's side like a proper little missus.

"Donovan," LeStrade said ominously, his voice cold and clinical without a hint of his usual tired warmth, "I've had all I'm going to take out of you. You just got off desk duty and were still on report for unprofessional behavior, open antagonism at a crime scene, and jeopardizing an investigation. Then you pull this? In front of an entire squad room of cops? How stupid are you? You are pathetic, you are out of second chances, and you are suspended, effective immediately. Dimmock, remove our property from Ms. Donovan and escort her from the building. Donovan, IPCC will be in touch. Leave. Now."

Staring in shock at her boss, Donovan couldn't seem to process the meaning of his orders. She didn't move until DI Dimmock tapped her elbow and gestured for her to precede him to his desk. She felt every set of eyes in the Met boring into her back as she walked mechanically away (except Anderson, who was hiding at his desk), barely able to think over the roar of blood in her ears. Glancing at her watch, she found herself staring in disbelief.

Six minutes. She had just time-stamped a report when Watson stormed the Met and attacked LeStrade with his tongue. Six minutes ago, life was normal. Three-hundred-and-sixty-seconds ago, she'd had a job she loved, even though she mostly hated the rest of her life. And now she was getting ready to hand her badge over to Dimmock and leave the Met as a suspended cop.

All because she couldn't keep her mouth shut about her disgust with fags. God, she was so pissed at herself! Sally Donovan was brutally honest with herself at all times; it was one of the few things about herself she actually really liked. She had long been aware that the real reason for her antipathy toward Holmes was less about his smug brilliance and more about the fact that, if he had to choose between herself and Dimmock to share his bed, he'd be getting his cock sucked by the DI even now. She hated that! When that ridiculous Civil Partnership law passed and queers got the right to marry – even if it was disguised as a "civil partnership" – she had been right next to the rest of her family writing letters of protest and outrage. It was DISGUSTING. But she had known, goddamit, she had fucking known, that she'd have to keep her mouth shut and her opinions to herself about it if she was going to be a cop at the Met. And she had. Calling Holmes a "freak" wasn't the same as calling him a "fag"; she had even looked up the rules to make sure. She had taken refuge in that, knowing that in her heart she was really calling him something much worse, and she was sure the bastard knew it. Just like he knew everything else. She had figured he hadn't challenged her because he didn't want his filthy little secret out.
Judging by the way the little green-eyed twink was looking at him, and how he was looking back, she may have been wrong about that.

Weird that the creepy devil-brother seemed to have the same look.

Replaying Holmes' words as she automatically handed over her rights to be an active cop and signed where Dimmock pointed, she winced. Damn, that rapier wit could cut like ... well... like a rapier ... when Holmes' unsheathed it. So much for her illusions of a mutual understanding. Clearly, Sherlock Holmes didn't give a damn who knew about his predilections, and had apparently only been humoring her.

That hurt more than she wanted to admit.

Exiting the building, Sally Donovan stood still on the pavement for a few minutes, staring blankly around and wondering where to go. She didn't really want to go back to her walk-up. And she sure as hell couldn't go shopping or grab lunch somewhere – not if she'd read the look in Mycroft Holmes' eyes correctly. She still didn't know what the hell the guy did, although she'd bet her red silk thong that the impeccable man's supposedly "minor position in government" was a lot more major than minor. Sherlock Holmes had scared the piss out of her today, she could admit that to herself, at least. But Mycroft Holmes scared the piss out of her every day.

Wanting to punish herself for letting her mouth run off with her job, she ignored the cabs and started to walk miserably down the street. Clearly, if she was going to be able to talk herself even back into a desk job at some remote station that probably also served as a sheep dip on weekends, she was going to have to get a handle on her prejudices. Not that she was going to let herself be convinced that fags – 'homosexuals', she corrected herself bitterly – were anything but perverts, but she did have to get it buried a lot more deeply. She had completely lost control of her mouth when she looked up and saw LeStrade and Watson trying to choke each other with their tongues.

'Lost it,' she smirked darkly to herself. 'True enough. Lost respect, lost my job, lost my only reason for self-esteem, lost my unlimited supply of unavailable men ...' She was so deeply into her own, grim thoughts that Donovan failed to notice the luxurious, black car that pulled up next to her on the sidewalk until the door opened practically in her face and forced her to stop. Startled, she looked up, automatically reaching for her weapons only to find herself empty-handed. Glaring intimidatingly, she stared into the composed face of a lovely, young woman dressed in an ensemble that probably cost as much as the rent on Sally's walk-up – for half a year.

Her glare was wasted on the woman, who barely glanced up from her Blackberry when she said, "Get in, Miss Donovan."

Naturally, Donovan immediately stepped back, only to find herself blocked by two, suited men who gave off a definite air of – competence – as they stood at a respectful distance and herded her back to the car. Her plans to take a running jump up and over the car fell to ashes at the young woman's next words, "You have one chance of recovering your job as a detective, Miss Donovan. My employer, Mr. Mycroft Holmes, has instructed me to take you to your new volunteer position, where you will be spending your time for the next several weeks. Unless you prefer being a shopgirl? Or, perhaps, selling chicken nuggets and chips to harried mothers and screeching children? If so, I have an "in" with a new Assistant Manager at the Surrey location."

For some reason, the woman's cold smirk was even more frightening than the two men standing behind her. Resigned to whatever fate held in store for her, suspended Sergeant Sally Donovan got in the car.

Half an hour later, she was standing on another sidewalk in a fairly run-down neighborhood,
watching the shiny black car drive impersonally away. Turning, she glared skeptically at the building in front of her and wondered what the hell she was supposed to do at a crap gym called 'The Total Dud.'

Overdrive

Having successfully captured his new boyfriend, John Watson was feeling quite generous toward the world in general, despite the completely terrifying events of the past day and a half. He had only learned on the way over to the Met that he and Sherlock had lost over twenty hours being unconscious during their abduction, and had then spent roughly ten hours or so enduring Moriarty's insanity and groping.

Of the two, it was the groping that had John burying his face in Greg's shoulder as the car Mycroft had waiting for them wound through traffic toward Greg's apartment. He was grateful to Sherlock, who had taken Greg aside for a few minutes after the Donovan debacle and had quietly explained the gist of what had happened and how Moriarty had treated John. It was surprising behavior for Sherlock, who didn't precisely care about tact and diplomacy. He was, however, remarkably chivalrous at times. During that whole ordeal, every time Moriarty's insanely perverted eyes and hands moved to John, Sherlock had all but forced them back onto himself. And then, despite having just executed the man who had caused him nothing but hell for over four years, Sherlock had still taken steps to help John. Not that he'd admit it, of course; he'd be scathing in his denial, in fact. Still, John was tremendously grateful to – and for – his friend. In all honesty, John didn't think he would have been able to tell Greg all of the details – certainly not the parts about the madman's invasive touch on John's crotch and nipples and his terrifying insinuations regarding his plans for John and Sherlock. It was just so … God, it was…

Suddenly furious with himself, John tensed and tried to straighten up, to pull away from the reassuring arm wrapped around him and to remind the world – and himself – that he was far from helpless. He may be shorter than the average man, but he wasn't exactly a pansy! He had survived hell in Afghanistan. He'd been shot – a few times, god damn it! He had shot and killed more than one man, including that damn cabbie the day he met Sherlock. He routinely ran with Sherlock into incredibly dangerous situations, and he was almost never the damsel-in-distress who needed to be rescued. And here he was, acting as if a little unauthorized pawing by a dead man was the end of the world! What the hell?

He would have been on the other end of the car seat, if Gregory would just … let … go! "Fuck, LeStrade!" John exploded, face reddening in anger, "Take a hint! Let me go!"

Despite John's Army training, Greg was bigger, stronger, and even better trained. One might think that forcibly confining a recent victim of physical and sexual assault would be a ridiculously bad idea. One would be right.

Except in this case. Because Greg LeStrade, despite long months of denying his interest in the man at his side, had studied John Watson almost compulsively. He knew this man very well. And the last thing Greg was going to let happen right now would be giving John enough time and space to retreat from being comforted, time he would use in tacking his affable, nothing-really-gets-to-me shell back into place.

Ignoring both John's angry expression and his raised fist, Greg kept his arms wrapped with comfortable strength around his … boyfriend? lover? … and hauled a protesting John back across the seat and against his chest. He ignored John's struggles, which would have incapacitated him had the ex-Army doctor really wanted to get away, and dropped his face to rest in the crook of
John's neck. Breathing in the distinctive scent of antiseptic, tea and soft wool that was purely John, Greg placed his hand comfortingly on the back of John's head and said quietly, "No matter what happens. No matter how angry you get with me. No matter how bad things are, John, I will never, ever let you go. I swear it."

John's abrupt stillness in his arms told Greg how strongly his words had resounded. Greg just held on, letting his warmth and his strength wrap around the smaller man, and tucked John more securely into his arms and beneath his chin as the slight trembling Greg felt became stronger shudders. And as the black car made several unnecessary trips around the neighborhood through the remarkable tact of a nameless driver in Mycroft's employ, John Watson – held securely in the strongest arms he knew – cried.

ooooooooooooooooooo

Just Charming

Later that night, Sherlock and Mycroft escorted a nearly-comatose Harry Potter into his roomy little flat and tucked him in to the too-large bed. He looked tiny, defenseless and desperately pale in the king size bed. Despite Harry's slurred reassurance, both men were deeply worried for their exhausted, deadly little wizard, and summoned professional help without even needing to consult each other.

Sherlock's phone had been taken by Moriarty, and so it was Mycroft who used Healer Weasley's emergency contact charm in his Blackberry. Having immediately answered the call, they were both deeply reassured by the matter-of-fact manner of the redhaired empath. Only later, as the brothers huddled together in Sherlock's bed and tried to sleep, did the recent events and information begin to sort themselves out in the two, brilliant minds.

Healer Weasley had apparated into a nearby alley, because even though he had been granted entry by Harry, he was unable to gain access while Harry was unconscious and held the wards in his defenses. Apparently, Harry had been considerably more worried than he had conveyed to the brothers, and had subconsciously locked down every possible way for anyone to get to Sherlock or Mycroft. Ron, who had calmly reminded them both to call him by his first name, had explained with some amusement that the wards that kept him out were not around Harry but around the Holmes men. Even with their willing cooperation, the strength Harry poured into the wards made it impossible for even an above-average wizard such as Ron to break through. Hence, Sherlock had to step out and go to a designated "safe-AP" (apparation point) nearby, whilst consciously willing the wards to allow Ron entry. It had worked, although Ron had assured them that if it hadn't, he would simply have apparated a little further away and walked himself in.

Still, both Sherlock and Mycroft made mental notes to discuss this with Harry. If their little love needed help, they were not willing to have to separate again in order to get it to him. Nevertheless, they were each quietly jubilant at what the information revealed about Harry's feelings for them both.

Sherlock had surprised Mycroft when he told his brother to stay with their deadly little wizard while Sherlock went out to meet the healer and escort him back. Traditionally, Sherlock was adamantly self-involved, particularly in any interaction with his older brother. Things were better now, though, thanks to Harry – and the bond their little wizard had awoken in them. The brothers' mental bond had settled into a very quiet hum, and felt completely natural to both brothers, as if it had somehow always been there and they had just never noticed before.

Possibly, it had.
Upon entering the bedroom, Ron's Talent had reached out and soothed both men. He had explained what he was doing, knowing as he seemed to know so much else that neither brother would react well to having any emotion forced upon them. He had simply put calm into the room and allowed them to absorb it if they wanted to. Apparently, both of them really wanted to, as they had immediately felt a lessening of the stress and worry that had gripped them both over the past day and a half. The experience with Moriarty had shaken them deeply, serving not only to awaken the bond between them but the intensity of emotion that was thus far unexpressed, as well.

Watching Harry slide into a near-coma while they could do nothing to help him had increased their strain almost unbearably. Interestingly, their bond had not heightened that, even though logically they would have expected it to echo back against them both. Rather, they had instinctively used it to siphon off some of their worry so that they could continue to think and function with their normal supernormality.

Still, Ron's presence and calm treatment of their ashen-faced littlest love was really what settled them down. He had administered a few potions, explaining every step and reason without prompting, giving them what they needed without fuss. He had then drawn two drops of Harry's blood, which had immediately set Mycroft on edge until he saw that the healer had placed one drop each on a pair of matched hematite stones, which had promptly glowed a healing green before it faded. He then used his wand to attach each stone to a fine, silver chain and handed one to each brother.

"These are monitoring gems. I hope that they can help you two worry a little less and reduce your stress a bit. With Harry's blood, they will tell you how my troublesome best friend is doing at any moment, and should help you handle your worry a little better. Harry would never think of giving you this, because he knows damn well that trouble follows him, and he hates it when people worry. He still doesn't quite understand that we have the right to worry about him the way he does about us." Unspoken was the knowledge that Harry probably didn't particularly understand why anyone would even want to worry about him overmuch. The brothers briefly wondered if Ron was aware of Harry's childhood. The man's somber expression and venomous eyes told them he was, and the three shared a moment of perfect accord over their mutual rage.

Having handed them the charms, Ron leaned his lanky body back against the dresser behind him and looked thoughtfully at – and into - the two men in front of him. Sherlock was sitting on the bed next to Harry, his long legs off to the side as he twisted to keep an eye on the dark-haired wizard and one, long-fingered hand resting on Harry's bare arm as if to ensure that he stayed put. Perhaps every third breath or so, he would look around to make sure Mycroft was where he belonged, as well.

Mycroft stood at the end of the bed, arms folded across his chest. His jacket had been draped across a club chair near the window, silk tie trailing out of a pocket, and was accompanied by Mycroft's tailored vest. His shirt sleeves were rolled up very precisely, exposing surprisingly strong forearms. Despite his neat appearance, he was considerably more disheveled than anyone normally saw him, and his face looked tired and worried, his eyes slightly shadowed as he almost continually glanced from Sherlock to Harry and back again. Ron's empathy was going haywire at the moment, greatly heightened by the intensity of the emotions felt by the two self-contained men who loved Harry Potter – and each other.

Reaching a decision, Ron smiled slightly at the men in front of him and offered levelly, "I can enhance these charms, if you like. Right now, they will tell you based on a temperature and vibration differential whether Harry is safe, well, upset, angry, in danger, etc. I can strengthen that. Normally, I'd never even consider it without a patient's permission, but this is a special circumstance and my friend there is something of an idiot when it comes to letting other people
take care of him."

Mycroft watched him speculatively, feeling Sherlock's interest quirk through the bond. "I would very much appreciate it if you would explain in a little more detail, Ronald." He smirked slightly at Ron's wince and saw Sherlock do the same when Ron whined, "Merlin, you sound like Hermione when she's right pissed."

After a pause in which Ron seemed to gather his thoughts, he began to explain. "Your bond is awake, which is good. Helpful for this type of thing. If I add your blood into each charm, along with a nifty little spell or two, I can ramp up the sensitivity of the hematite to … hmmmm ….. to echo off your bond, I guess is the best way to explain it. The end result is that the charm would also change color to increase information, and you'd probably even get vague emotions coming through it if the intensity is strong enough. You'd definitely feel something like rage, especially if it's Harry's rage, and probably fear as well. The rest just depends on your abilities and your concentration, mostly." He was watching them as closely as they watched him. Hesitantly, he added, "I could even add in a bit of a locator beacon, just in case. Assuming, of course, that you protect me if he ever finds out. Or kill me before he can get to me." His wry grin was oddly reassuring in the dim light of the quiet room. Harry's stillness in the bed was very disconcerting for the two who watched him somewhat obsessively.

This was the moment, Ron thought, when he would truly learn what these men were made of and whether they were adequate guardians for his friend. Would they make a choice of keeping a secret from Harry in order to protect him, or would they choose an honorable path and have to trust Harry to tell them when he needed help?

Surprisingly, they chose door number three, as Hermione would have said.

"I want the full power of whatever you can offer, but personally, I have no intention of inviting his distrust by keeping it a secret. I am fairly certain we can persuade him to our way of thinking in this," Sherlock drawled. Briefly lost in the rich timber of the distinctive baritone, Ron sent a wry grin at the two along with a burst of amusement/envy/admonishment when they each smirked at him knowingly. He was surprised when Sherlock chuckled in reply, his thumb stroking absentmindedly across the soft skin of Harry's inner arm.

Mycroft simply watched – well, as much as Mycroft did anything 'simply' – and nodded in agreement. "I am confident he will see this our way, given the proper encouragement." He felt Sherlock's amusement through the bond, and quirked an eyebrow at his brother before turning back to Ron and saying decisively, "Please create the most extensive charm you can, Ronald. We will take care of defending your honor."

Both men laughed as Ron muttered piteously, "Fuck my honor! Defend my white, freckled arse!"

Sent to Their Room

After giving each man the newly-enhanced hematite, Ron explained that the charms would also help them in locating each other, which would be helpful should their bond be rendered nonverbal due to incapacitation of one or the other. The sense-memory burst of worry that poured from Mycroft at that comment had made Ron abruptly pause and stare at them both with narrowed, thoughtful eyes. He had then nodded decisively and ordered them to leave for the night.

Oddly enough to Mycroft and Sherlock, Healer Ron Weasley was impervious to the combined force of two, synchronous, Holmesian glares. It seemed to be becoming epidemic: first Harry, then
Dudley, now Ronald. What had served to intimidate criminals, terrorists and politicians the world over had as much effect on Ron Weasley as if they had flicked water droplets at him on a hot day.

It was infuriating.

"You will not do Harry any good staring at him while he sleeps through a healing coma," Ron explained, as if to two small boys who were pouting over sweets rather than two of the most frightening muggles around.

"Coma! I knew it was a coma! 'Healing sleep', my arse. Damn it!" Sherlock exclaimed. His blue-slate eyes were worried but resolved as he studied Harry and declared firmly, "Absolutely not. I will not be leaving him unattended." Mycroft simply nodded, his jaw set and arms folded tightly, as if he were trying not to lash out at the good healer.

Ron sighed exaggeratedly as he said, "I didn't say he would be unattended. I told you both to leave, and explained why. I will be right here with him, and I promise you I am quite capable of managing anything Harry might come up with, especially while he lays there completely out of it. YOU two, on the other hand, are both exhausted, far too stressed, and need to talk freely." Having lived decades with the real thing, he completely ignored the faux-twin, affronted glares that tried to laser through his forehead, choosing instead to aim a dark smile at the men that actually caused them both to rethink their stances. "You seem to be missing a big piece of information about magical healers, gentlemen. When it comes to our patients, we have absolute authority. If I make this an order, you are gone. And since you are also my patients, if I choose to enforce it, I can make you both go to bed – separate, isolated beds – and force sleep so you can't even talk through your bond. Either you cooperate and go away for the next twelve hours or so of your own free will, still capable of directing your actions, or you go night-night when and where I command, like it or not. Are you catching what I'm casting here?"

They could have gotten furious. They could have fought back like Gryffindors, or pleaded like Hufflepuffs, or debated like Ravenclaws. But if these men had gone to Hogwarts, they would unquestionably have been Slytherins. So, they negotiated.

In the end, they only had to stay away for nine hours. If their charms revealed any distress at all by Harry, they were allowed to come back. However, during that nine hours, they were each required to eat a decent meal from Harry's kitchen, sleep at least six hours, and 'decompress'. If, when they returned, Ron determined that they had disobeyed him or were continuing to suffer unduly from stress or exhaustion, the healer would take matters into his own hands. The look in his eyes assured them that this was not a result either of them wanted. And so, ignoring the healer, each of the Holmes brothers said a quiet goodnight to their little wizard and left the room, leaving their threats regarding Harry's continued wellbeing unspoken but very, very clear.

They appreciated the fact that Ron did not gloat in the least. Having achieved his goal, he returned easily to the affable, comfortable healer they knew he was.

Of course, now they also knew that he was considerably more than that, under the surface. Then again, who wasn't?

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Bonding Moment

"I'm proud of you, Sherlock."

Mycroft said it quietly, as if knowing that the words would be surprising enough to his younger
brother. He watched as Sherlock turned around to look at him, the emotion in his eyes indefinable. After searching Mycroft's face, he extended his arm and offered his brother a mug of tea. He had already placed a few slices of Harry's homemade bread and a selection of toppings on the counter. Without speaking, he walked around the counter and seated himself on the tall chair next to Mycroft, setting his own mug down before reaching reluctantly for a slice of bread. Despite his recent discovery of enjoyable food, Sherlock was still very much an emotional eater – if he was in any way stressed, he had to be forced to eat.

Ron Weasley had forced him. Glaring at the bread in his hand, Sherlock mumbled petulantly, "Doctors are all assholes." Mycroft huffed a quiet laugh of agreement, sipping his tea as he mulled over the fact that Harry seemed to prefer American mugs to traditional tea sets. He considered the weight of it in his hand, the way the thickness of the mug kept the heat, the greater quantity of tea to drink before it had to be repoured and prepared once again. Taking another careful sip of the scalding liquid, Mycroft said quietly, "I believe I prefer Harry's mugs."

It might have been a random comment to anyone else, but the Holmes brothers, as always, understood each other. Sherlock just nodded slightly, and added a little more milk to his. Now that he had been introduced to raw milk, as opposed to the homogenized version, he had developed a liking for it in his tea.

They ate in comfortable silence for several minutes. Halfway through his second slice of bread, which he was diligently picking apart and consuming with dogged determination, Sherlock glanced over at his older brother. "I must admit I feel the same of you, Mycroft." He saw Mycroft pause briefly in surprise, and smirked to conceal a pang of regret that this was the first time he had ever said such a thing to his brother. Mycroft had never been anything less than Sherlock's anchor. Somehow, as long as Mycroft was around, Sherlock knew that he was safe – that his brilliance could not consume him … that his lack of understanding of 'normal' people would not cause irreparable harm … that he would never, ever be alone. Mycroft had become tremendously successful, and – despite his vocal scorn and dismissive attitude – Sherlock had followed his career and his life carefully and with growing respect. He was actually rather desperately proud of his big brother, and had done little things here and there over the years to unobtrusively assist Mycroft in his endeavors. Not that he would ever admit to such a thing, of course. Especially since it included murder. Repeatedly.

The time Mycroft had been hospitalized in Gdansk following an assassination attempt, Sherlock had somehow known his brother was endangered and had obtained all the data he needed within four hours of breaking into Mycroft's office in the highest-security building in Great Britain. In retrospect, that may have been one of the surer indications of their unusual bond manifesting.

He had been at Mycroft's bedside within twenty-one hours, fully disguised as a male nurse/hired companion for the sedated 'executive' in his private hospital suite, to ensure his brother was safe and well. Despite the 'official' story, the orderly on duty that night had not actually slipped on the ice and fallen in front of the ice-breaking blades of the snowplow. Sherlock had actually placed the man there, shortly after he had slid a deceptively slender knife through the fake orderly's sternum and up into the heart as he tried to smother Mycroft with a pillow after slipping through three layers of supposedly 'topnotch' bodyguards.

As far as Sherlock knew, no one had ever found the second assassin. Of course, destroying evidence was what hospital furnaces were for, in Sherlock's opinion. And, quite frankly, Sherlock had no intention of ever telling Mycroft a single thing about his own intense pride and interest in his brother's life, nor his gratitude and need for the man who had never let himself be driven away by Sherlock's excesses and intensity.
The willingness to murder for Mycroft was understood, anyway. He was a Holmes, after all. They weren't exactly a family of milkmen, like the regrettable Creeveys.

Unfortunately for Sherlock, and probably serving as an excellent indication of his exhaustion, he forgot about his and Mycroft's new bond. As seemed to be the new norm, it had awakened again due the emotions both men were feeling, and was amplified by the charms given them by Ron Weasley. And that was how Mycroft Holmes learned everything that his little brother refused to tell him.

Mycroft stared into his tea mug, momentarily shocked speechless at the flood of information that had just rushed through his mind. Although this was the second time he had felt the bond 'wake up', this time he wasn't entirely certain that Sherlock was aware of it, as well. Perhaps he should test it?

"Thank you for Gdansk, Sherlock."

'Ah, apparently not,' Mycroft thought with amusement as explosive coughing due to tea mixing unexpectedly with bread and surprise answered Mycroft's question. Patting Sherlock on the back as his brother struggled for breath and composure, Mycroft simply smirked back at the defensive glare aimed his way. Mycroft was quite elated. He had always truly loved his little brother, and would do anything in the world to ensure Sherlock's happiness and wellbeing.

It was an incredible feeling to know, with absolute certainty, that his devotion was returned. Mycroft just laughed as Sherlock felt his brother's smug delight through the bond and snapped in a biting, vicious tone, "I hope you choke on it!"

"I love you, too, Sherlock."

Surprisingly enough, Sherlock had nothing to say in reply, although the small, upward quirk of his mouth spoke volumes.

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One Moment in Lime

Shortly thereafter, they wandered together into Sherlock and John's flat. Mycroft was accustomed to being awake and functioning for days on end, as was Sherlock, but this time both men felt like their eyes must look like burned sockets in their heads, they were so exhausted. Without discussing it, they each knew that this was due more to the emotional strain of the past two days, rather than the physical. The opening of the bond was a blessing, for none of the words that had always been so difficult between the brothers was needed. They had always instinctively understood each other, anyway, even to the extent of being able to communicate nonverbally but in extreme detail. The bond spared them the need for too much deep, emotional discussion.

After all, they were Brits. Stiff upper lip and all that. Compared to that, being male was just an added handicap to any attempt to talk about feelings. Of course, if one listened to the proponents of stereotypes, being gay should negate all that.

Considering that neither man was particularly inclined to even discuss their mutual joy when Sherlock came back from being 'dead', they could safely dismiss that particularly misconception.

This time, it was Sherlock who tugged Mycroft past the couch, past the stairs leading to John's empty bedroom, and into his own room. Without comment, the two worked together to empty Sherlock's bed of a collection of books, papers, a magnifying glass, and various other items.
Mycroft did quirk an amused eyebrow at his brother when he picked up a half-empty bottle of lube buried in the tangle of sheets, but Sherlock's challenging quirk back changed the atmosphere completely. As they changed the sheets to a crisp, clean set Sherlock dug out of John's closet, the silence between them was laden with a new tension, and their bond had begun to hum slightly each time their hands brushed together or their eyes met.

Finishing the bed, Sherlock moved into the bathroom, tossing Mycroft a brand-new toothbrush he had stolen from John's bathroom drawer. They exchanged a grin, knowing that the shy man had probably stressed rather desperately about buying a toothbrush and keeping it on hand in the event that his not-gay, not-boyfriend actually spent the night with him. At least that little drama was successfully resolved, judging from John and Gregory's epic snog in the Met earlier this afternoon.

Accepting the toothbrush, Mycroft also moved toward the bathroom to prepare for bed. Sherlock did not offer him any nightwear. Mycroft didn't ask.

And the bond hummed louder.

They worked around each other in the bathroom, giving privacy when needed, flowing back into each other's presence when it was not. This was a familiar routine, now being dusted off, learned from holidays at home with Mummy and Daddy when they were forced to share a room because the house was too full of visitors even for their huge manor home to hold without doubling up. Mycroft left the bathroom light on and shut the door most of the way, letting only a slice of light into the room as Sherlock shut off the lamp on his nightstand and slid into bed silently, saying nothing to his brother as he pulled back the bedclothes and settled in on the other side. In these ways, it was much like they were boys once again.

In more important ways, it was not. For one thing, they were both naked.

Unlike the night at Mycroft's place, when Mycroft and Sherlock slept in the same bed and Harry was an aching absence between them, this time they had the charms. They had been aware of their littlest love from the second they put them on, feeling him sleeping peacefully in the backs of their minds, a viable part of them, safe and present. With Harry snugly tucked in and no need to worry, Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes had time … and opportunity … and a king size bed with crisp, clean sheets.

It was time to dare.

Chestnut curls dark and soft against the clean white of the pillow, Sherlock watched his brother move across the bed to settle next to him, reclining on one, long arm as he leaned over to look down into Sherlock's face. Mycroft studied his younger brother carefully, taking in all of the honesty in the blue-slate eyes that looked up at him, the slightly-bemused look on the handsome face, the tension in the long limbs, the increased exhalations and the pulse that pounded visibly in the long, elegant throat.

Sherlock studied Mycroft, as well. His brother had simply slid over to a spot next to Sherlock, and now sat pressed hip to hip, torso twisted so that Mycroft could lean on one arm and look down into Sherlock's face, less than two feet away from his own. Mycroft was not conventionally handsome; his features were elegant and refined, and Sherlock had always thought of the man as a private treasure. He did not sparkle obviously, like a diamond. No, Mycroft was more subtle than that. Even his looks helped him to shine from the shadows, like a flawless moonstone. Staring up into the slate-blue eyes that were darkening now as Mycroft's breaths and pulse increased, the flawless hair now softly ruffled and falling onto the aristocratic brow, Sherlock wanted to touch his brother. He had always wanted to touch him. And now, finally, he could.
Betsy said so.

They moved at the same time, each quirking another smile as their minds again moved in tandem. Sherlock reached a long arm up and lightly touched Mycroft's silky hair, surprised at the softness under fingers. He allowed his hand to explore a little, lowering to glide down his brother's cheekbone and chin, tracing the strong jawline and sliding up a little to run a questing finger over the lips he had always privately regarded as sensuous. The serious expression in Sherlock's dark eyes lightened suddenly as those lips unexpectedly opened and captured his exploring finger, kissing it gently, before a daring tongue peeked out and wrapped around Sherlock's finger before luring it to follow as it retreated back into Mycroft's mouth. In seconds, Sherlock's heartbeat had gone through the roof, as he watched his finger being suckled and fellated by his brother's talented mouth.

As Sherlock had reached for Mycroft, so too had Mycroft reached for Sherlock. Mycroft's questing hand, however, had started at the long, elegant throat that had always tormented him. Even as he kissed and suckled Sherlock's finger, Mycroft's hand explored his brother's incredible torso. From the throat, Mycroft's hand wandered freely, across broad shoulders, down a defined chest, stroking over Sherlock's quivering abdomen and back up to circle and lightly, gently touch each pebbling nipple.

'Oh, God, my brother is beautiful,' the thought moaned over the bond, making each man shiver and stare more deeply into each other's eyes. They had both thought it. And they both heard it.

Mycroft could not bear it any longer. Not one more second could go by in his life before he finally dropped down, letting his supporting arm bend beneath him as Mycroft lowered his head and finally, FINALLY, captured Sherlock's mouth beneath his own.

It was …. Indescribable. It was heat, and moisture, and intense elation. It was fear and shock and sudden, painful arousal. It was denial and guilt and exhilarating freedom. It was a slick, hot tongue stroking along sensuous lips, daring them to part, and diving eagerly into wet, warm depths as soon as they did. It was wicked and wonderful and desperately surprising.

It was delicious.

Moaning, something he just did not do, Mycroft settled his strong body on top of Sherlock, deepening their kisses until they flowed one into the other and became a continuum of mutual delight and wonder. Sherlock's reaction to their naked chests and hips and groins pressing together was exquisite, his breath caught in shock, briefly held to process the sensation, and released in an erotic moan of pure desire that seized Mycroft's cock and forced blood into it at an almost painful rate. Moving his hips experimentally as his knee settled between his brother's, Mycroft bit his lip and dropped his forehead down to rest on Sherlock's shoulder, struggling with bliss as Sherlock rocked back against him and their rigid manhoods slid against each other like crossed swords.

It was a duel to the death.

Well …. the little death.

Rather than allow his brother to take the lead in this, their first true experience with shared intimacy, Sherlock wrapped a long leg around Mycroft's, pulling his brother's groin tightly against his own, and bent his other leg up to brace his foot on the mattress. Satisfied with the logistics, Sherlock gripped a handful of silken, dark ginger hair and pulled, forcing Mycroft's head back off of Sherlock's shoulder and within close enough range that his mouth could be seized with Sherlock's own. Thus positioned, sliding slickly against each other as pre-cum gathered and dripped and lubricated their increasingly urgent movements, Sherlock and Mycroft dueled together
fiercely. Hips rolled and thrust and rigid cocks rubbing against each other in an erotic battle of friction and tension. Mycroft's talented fingers rubbed and pinched Sherlock's pebbling nipples, and he gasped in delight as Sherlock repaid him by separating their heated kiss and forcing his older brother upward, enough for Sherlock to bend his head slightly and lean up to capture one of Mycroft's nipples with the hot suction of his mouth and the skilled swirl of his tongue.

Unable to slow them down, despite desperately wanting to prolong this experience, Mycroft reached down and ran his fingers teasingly through the moisture that coated Sherlock's stomach from the frantic drooling of both their turgid cocks. Allowing their combined pre-cum to coat his palm and fingers, Mycroft dropped his head to run a slick tongue into Sherlock's ear just as he positioned their cocks together, wrapped long fingers around them both and began to stroke in earnest. Gasping as Sherlock's teeth briefly sank into his nipple at the shock of sensation, Mycroft nipped his brother's ear in retaliation and moaned in encouragement as Sherlock's musician's hand joined his own.

Their bond vibrated.

Heated whispers and murmurs pledged and guided and mocked as the brothers worked together toward one goal: rutting against each other, hands stroking in unison, frantic breaths matching and heartbeats pounding. Their toned bodies strained as they moaned and demanded and grunted, each man completely enraptured by this first, powerful experience with each other.

Finally, Sherlock felt his balls tightening and drawing up, and knew by Mycroft's now-erratic thrusting against him and his flat, clenching stomach muscles – 'So much for any trace of a weight issue!' Sherlock thought irrelevantly - that his brother was close, too. He watched Mycroft's face, and Mycroft watched his, each obsessively interested in the other as they strained together. Sherlock was captivated as he watched Mycroft's face flush, his eyes becoming wonderfully bright before they closed involuntarily and Mycroft threw his head back, throat and stomach muscles tightening and buttocks clenching as the building pleasure sharpened and crested. Long ropes of semen spurted between them as Mycroft spasmed against him, hips thrusting uncontrollably against his younger brother as the pleasure took him.

And then, it was Sherlock's turn to surrender. Heart pounding, body still clenching in the odd burst of ecstasy, Mycroft gazed in amazement down at his beautiful brother as Sherlock lost himself in bliss. Once again, white bursts of pleasure pulsed between their abdomens and coated their joined hands, as Sherlock tightened the leg he had wrapped around Mycroft's thighs and pulled his brother tightly against his groin, demanding every possible bit of pleasure that they could wring together from their overwhelmed bodies and minds.

Shuddering together as their bodies began to unclench, breath hitching at the random, leftover stuttering of hips and small pulses of residual pleasure, the brothers watched each other quietly and carefully, assessing, deducing, testing. As their bodies began to shed their excess heat and heartbeats and breathing calmed, Mycroft returned Sherlock's tiny, wondering grin and dropped to press a gentle, amazed kiss on his brother's lips. Without hesitation, Sherlock kissed him back, moving with him as Mycroft slid to the side to settle against, rather than on top of, his delightfully nude brother.

They looked at each other in surprise as their bond, which had been humming enjoyably between them, suddenly gave them the uncanny sense one gets when a clogged ear suddenly pops. Clarity, almost painful in its crisp cleanliness, formed through the bond as if pure water had suddenly run through a fogged, glass tube. The muted, distant sounds they had been getting from each other opened up and crystallized. It wasn't louder; it was just – cleaner. Clear.
And best of all, in addition to their new sense of each other – there was Harry. Still deeply aslee.

And he was theirs.

Enjoying the affection and comfort that ran along the bond between them, Sherlock just rolled his
eyes as Mycroft, ever-prepared and gentlemanly, reached over to his table and took up the damp
washcloth he had placed there. Accepting his brother's desire to take care of his loved ones, even in
moments such as this – perhaps, especially, in moments such as this – Sherlock flung his arms out
dramatically and allowed Mycroft to clean him of their combined semen. Mycroft just smiled down
at him, fondly and with amusement, and went about his self-appointed task with gentle care.

Of course, his smile deepened to a grin as his attentions to Sherlock's nether regions caused an
interested twitch of his brother's cock and a shocked gasp from somewhere in the region of the
chestnut curls on the pillow. After carefully and mischievously ensuring his younger brother was
absolutely as clean as he could possibly get, Mycroft rose from the bed and returned to the
bathroom, cleaning himself quickly before returning to the bed and laughing out loud at Sherlock's
indignant expression and half-hard erection.

Settling back into the bed, this time staying on 'his' side, Mycroft closed his eyes wearily but
stretched out a long arm in invitation and waited patiently. Finally, with an irritated huff, the other
occupant of the bed shuffled over and settled against Mycroft, chestnut curls spread on the broad
shoulder as Mycroft's arm curled around Sherlock and his long hand rubbed soothingly down the
toned back. Eyes closed, he smiled gently at Sherlock's haughty, "Don't get used to this. As soon as
we seduce our little tempter, these logistics change, you know." Dropping a kiss lightly on the
damp, silken curls over Sherlock's handsome forehead, Mycroft murmured sleepily, "So long as I
have you both, I will not complain."

He was almost asleep when Sherlock whispered very quietly, "Me, too, My. Me, too." A light kiss
pressed to Mycroft's shoulder, and they were both asleep.

Of course, if Mycroft woke later and helped Sherlock with his persistent problem leftover from
Mycroft's concerned attention with the washcloth, it was nobody's business but their own.

Right?

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WEARY WEASLEY

Over in Harry's bedroom, roughly two hours after he had sent the disgruntled Holmes men out of
the room, a chuckling healer waved his wand and cleaned his patient of the emissions from a
'special' dream. If Harry ever found out about this, he'd be completely mortified and would
probably turn bright red every time he looked at Ron for several months. Hermione would be
absolutely pissed at Ron for 'messing' with Harry like that.

'It'll be totally worth it!' Ron chortled to himself.

Sending a somewhat pained grin down at his unconscious patient, Healer Ron Weasley muttered
with reluctant amusement, "At least this time I know why I felt all that. With this happening for
years surrounded by dozens of adolescents – especially 'Shameless' Finnegan – in the Gryffindor
dorms, no wonder I was such a confused, horny mess. But damn, Harry, if you're picking this up so
strongly already through the bond, I pity you when all three of you finally hook up completely.
Poor kid."
At 4:30 a.m., the third time Ron was waving his wand for this particular task, he wasn't quite as amused, although he was definitely impressed. He hoped his friend was ready for what was … err… coming.

Because it seemed that, in addition to a remarkable refractory period for non-magicals above the age of twenty-eight, the Holmes men definitely had stamina.

Times two.

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You Can't Eat Just One

Chapter Summary

Oblivious Harry, maybe what happened to Delores Umbridge, Harry publicly debates pro-homosexuality and incest -- and wins!, getting comfortable, and possible sphincter-lock.

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CHAPTER 10: YOU CAN'T EAT JUST ONE

Almost two days later found all three men awake, alert, refreshed, fed at least twice and united in the morning's effort of fending off a confusing (to Harry) number of smirks over breakfast from Ron Weasley before literally shoving the snickering healer out the door. Sherlock and Mycroft, geniuses that they were, had a very good idea why the empath kept breaking into entertained grins in their presence. It was especially evident when Harry poured a mug of tea for Sherlock and innocently asked, "Cream?", to which Ron replied dryly, "Oh, repeatedly!" He smiled blandly as his friend looked at his askance while Sherlock rolled his eyes. This time it was Mycroft who did the surprising thing when he cut a second slice of fresh sin-bread, plated it and slid it in front of the redhead, saying urbanely, "I have recently learned that you can't eat just one."

The Holmeses shared vastly amused, smug grins when the healer's head dropped to the counter so that Ron could crack up without danger of sliding to the floor. It only got worse when all three men caught sight of Harry's bewildered expression, which swiftly changed to annoyance when three of the four supposed grown-ups in the room dissolved into juvenile giggles. He could have demanded an explanation, but his instincts were screaming at him to shut up and remain ignorant. He obeyed, and chose instead to dispossess his best friend of his bar stool in a most emphatic manner. Typical of the redhead, Ron elected to hit the floor abruptly rather than risk any damage to his sin-bread, arm wrapped protectively around the plate all the way down. Nonchalantly regaining his feet, he waved his wand over his posterior to ease the bruising and then sauntered toward the door, saying over his shoulder, "You may want to learn that particular healing charm, Harry. I have a feeling it's going to come in handy in the very near future." After that, both Sherlock and Mycroft propelled him into the hall with such momentum that he nearly choked on the sin-bread he had just popped into his mouth. Slamming the door after him, they all heard his sputtering chuckles as he stampeded down the stairs, off to meet with the surviving Creevey brother for an empathic therapy session.

And to deliver Harry's latest restraining order. Colin liked to frame them, and although most of his home was decorated with a wide assortment of subpoenas and protective orders, the walls of his den were lined with his collection from Harry.

settling down, the three talked quietly and took the time to appreciate just being together without a crisis pulling on their attention. Mycroft had been put on three days forced vacation through the combined powers of Betsy and Anthea, much to Sherlock and Harry's amusement. Despite his affronted look, the British Government didn't actually seem to mind overmuch, as long as he was still allowed to send and receive texts and do a little paperwork.
At the moment, he was doing the latter, sitting with elegant grace in the comfortable, wing-backed chair-and-a-half Harry had placed near the window just a few days after he moved in. Although he said nothing about it, both Mycroft and Sherlock suspected that Harry had brought the chair in specifically for Mycroft. Sherlock, of course, was familiar with Mycroft's preference to sit in a comfortable reading chair when he did his more casual work, but Harry had no such excuse. Unless one considered the possibility that the wizard had observed a lot about Mycroft Holmes during the mundane's many visits to WTW and the MOM. Rather than embarrass Harry, who both men had noticed was not comfortable being thanked or complimented (the latter condition of which they were especially determined to change through repeated exposure), Mycroft showed his appreciation through frequent use of 'his' chair. Over the days that followed the chair's arrival, other changes occurred in Harry's home. The small table that had been next to Mycroft's chair was quietly replaced with a larger, square table that had an extendable top, with a cabinet and drawers below. A multi-intensity floor lamp with directional lighting appeared just where Mycroft needed it most. A comfortable hassock also made an entrance, and Sherlock—observing the unobtrusive hinges on the side—discovered that it opened up to reveal a filing drawer within.

Sherlock was not left out, either. With no fuss at all, the original couch somehow lengthened and curved slightly, while the end Sherlock preferred also developed a chaise extension that enabled the detective to extend his long legs or to draw his knees to his chest without struggling to keep his feet on the edge of the cushion. After one particularly long think-session, when Sherlock unfolded and winced slightly at the crick in his neck, the back of the couch developed the silhouette of a long wave, with the crest exactly where Sherlock's head would rest as he contemplated. Once again, a small end table disappeared, this time to be replaced with a beautiful cabinet that was specifically crafted to house a violin and sheet music, while the built-in lamp had an extendable arm that served as a music-stand.

Each brother had also discovered that their particular, favorite pieces of furniture also worked very well in groups of two or more. As with the other little accommodations, they enthusiastically explored this aspect, as well, with a flushed wizard as their favorite enhancement of all.

Even better than their personal furniture (at least when they were seated alone) was the fact that the large cabinet in the corner of the room opened to reveal a pensieve-library, filled with stored memories ranging from personal moments to historical events. Through it and the beautiful, sapphire-and-gold House of Potter pensieve, the Holmes brothers viewed numerous events that had long fascinated or puzzled them. Watching the rescue efforts for the survivors of the Titanic and the Lusitania was heartwrenching when seen through the eyes of a nurse who had served on—and survived—both ships. Viewing the creation and signing of the Magna Carta through dozens of memories over several days had been an extraordinary experience. Determining for themselves precisely who shot the American President JFK through the memories of numerous bystanders was immensely satisfying.

Then again, watching the blustery, 1969 Beatles' farewell concert on the rooftop of their Savile Row Apple headquarters from the perspective of the occupants of a nearby roof was invigorating in a different way. Sherlock amused his companions with an ongoing, scathing critique of the police who arrived to break it up due to the noise, and resolved to torment the Beatles-mad Greg LeStrade with the experience. His offhand question later to Harry as to whether Greg would be allowed to watch any pensieve memories—"perhaps for a birthday or some such rot"—had both Harry and Mycroft pulling him close for a kiss or two. Sherlock really could be remarkably sweet, so long as no one was looking.

And so, Harry's place slowly evolved into being their place, made comfortably large through the open arched doorway leading into Sherlock and John's flat; although, that was—at least half the time—more John and Greg's than Sherlock and John's. The kitchen in Sherlock's flat became the
lab, and it was Harry's kitchen that fed the masses. Seeing the contentment on their little wizard's face whenever one of the four other men came sniffing around whatever Harry was cooking assured them all that they were not taking unfair advantage of their emerald-eyed chef.

Still, they all enthusiastically complimented the cook and tried to help him clean up. After several times when Harry could not find his favorite utensil or pan, he banned everyone from his kitchen (barring drinks and snacks). The first time a guilt-ridden John tried to wash the dishes and found himself once again floating around the room, the men got the message. Harry did explain, quite helpfully, that he had built protections into his kitchen that would recreate the most disturbing experience each man had with magic – hence, John's impromptu flight. After that, a bright-eyed John kept trying to lure a shuddering Greg into doing Harry's dishes, each sharing vivid memories of - but dissimilar reactions to – the time Greg found himself wearing fishnets and vinyl skirt. He did explain to a snickering Sherlock that it wasn't so much the vinyl skirt that bothered him as it was the fuck-me pumps. His legs had hurt for days.

Of course, he turned down Harry's offer to modify the outfit with leather hip boots, to John's clear disappointment.

Before the final incident with Moriarty, Mycroft had always returned to his home at night, although he had successfully managed to get over to Harry's several times a week, even if it was only for afternoon tea. After the incident, however, he was much more rarely at his own place. Many of his clothes migrated to Sherlock's and were stored in a wardrobe – locked and magically coded to only open for Mycroft – in Sherlock's bedroom. The brothers were slowly, carefully seducing their skittish little love, but had not yet moved much beyond some truly epic snogging sessions. Somehow, they were able to gauge Harry's reticence and relative inexperience, deducing a lot of it and sensing much through the charms and bond. Harry was not ready, not yet. Still, that did not keep Sherlock and Mycroft from expanding on their own relationship, and the brothers were now comfortable with the shocking turn their lives had made.

Worries about John and Greg's reaction were addressed one Tuesday night, when a completely knackered Mycroft had actually stumbled into the flat after three, solid days and nights of managing some international incident or another. Considering the man's unrelentingly impeccable appearance and impressive control over his own demeanor regardless of the circumstances, Mycroft's loosened tie and slightly ruffled hair stunned the doctor and the cop. Harry, however, had exchanged one quick, telling glance with Sherlock, and immediately started to make a much-needed dinner for the weary British Government while Sherlock moved to his brother's side. Without sparing even a glance at the other pair, Sherlock had set to work, tugging away Mycroft's attaché case and umbrella, stripping off his brother's suitcoat, vest, tie and cufflinks, unbuttoning the top two buttons of the fine, white shirt and rolling up the sleeves to a comfortable relaxation. Pushing Mycroft into 'his' chair, Sherlock gracefully dropped to the floor and removed his brother's shoes and socks, setting them aside and then, most shocking of all to the two gaping observers, began to carefully and expertly massage Mycroft's feet. Within minutes, Mycroft was dozing, forced past exhaustion into relaxation by his brother's ministrations.

Harry had then moved quietly into the room, settling next to Mycroft on the extra-wide chair and setting a mug of tea on the table before temptingly waving a bowl of savory beef stew beneath Mycroft's nose, sharing a slightly worried grin with Sherlock as he did so. The aroma won, at least temporarily, over Mycroft's need for sleep, as his stomach growled and reminded him that he had not actually eaten more than a biscuit here and there in over a day. Eyes half-open and fingers somewhat clumsy with weariness, Mycroft carefully accepted the bowl and began to eat, proving his unfailing gentlemanliness by offering a slightly-slurred thanks. He ate slowly and with the exaggerated care of the truly exhausted, pausing to moan in appreciation occasionally whenever Sherlock's clever fingers would work on a particularly stubborn bit of tension in his feet or calves.
It was Harry who sent a look of pure challenge over to the still-stunned John and Gregory, who were slumped together on 'Harry's section' of the long couch. John met that look levelly, allowing Harry to see all there was to be seen in the good doctor's eyes. He had already observed the kiss between the two brothers at the hangar and wasn't blind to their growing closeness to each other or to Harry. Frankly, he didn't give a fat damn about proprieties; if anything in life made sense, it was these three men together.

Gregory, perhaps seeing the tension in Sherlock's shoulders as he faced away from the couch and massaged Mycroft's feet, merely observed Sherlock's efforts on the long, elegant feet in his lap and commented helpfully, "That works better when you add a little tongue."

John's immediate flush and vehement punch to the DI's arm brought the laughter Greg had been aiming for, and the remaining tension drained from the room along with Mycroft's remaining consciousness. Handing over the half-eaten bowl of stew to Greg, who promptly finished it, Harry then levitated Mycroft to his and Sherlock's bed and turned to leave. He was only slightly delayed … well, considerably delayed … by Sherlock's determined efforts to lick Harry's tonsils, insisting it was a valid, scientific experiment.

When a wildly flushed and trembling Harry fled their room, Sherlock looked over at his brother and smirked at Mycroft's sleepy stare and slurred compliment on technique and diversionary tactics. Sherlock just replied haughtily, "I've no clue as to your meaning, brother. I was simply conducting necessary tests to prove out a hypothesis." He set about tugging and pulling off Mycroft's shirt, singlet and trousers as Mycroft clumsily attempted to assist, or at least cooperate. Sherlock simply slapped away his brother's hands and continued with his task, snorting in amused agreement when Mycroft muttered, "Tonsil licking … will definitely require … a progressive series of trials before you succeed…. May even need a … control scenario… and a comparative series run by a… close colleague…" His heavy eyes closed compliantly and a small smile lifted his well-formed lips when Sherlock dropped a gentle kiss between his brows and murmured gruffly, "Shut up and go to sleep, genius."

After that, there was a relaxed acceptance shared among the five men that managed to soothe and comfort them all. No judgments were made, for or by any of them. Here, within these walls, was sanctuary.

A few days later saw Harry joining Sherlock and John at yet another crime scene. This one, to Sherlock's disgust, was an open-and-shut case. He spent roughly two minutes studying the overwhelmingly pink candy store and its wildly-scattered contents, ignoring the woeful wails of the store's pink-clad owner, and noted various details that meant nothing to most of those watching. On the floor in the middle of the store was the body of the owner's daughter, a plump young woman with stringy, dyed black hair, black lipstick and nail polish, and a piercing through her eyebrow. She wore the pink dress uniform and shoes of an employee of the store, and twisted around her swollen throat was a thin, spiked-metal chain, digging into the now-swollen tissue and causing a slim but vicious slice in her throat from which multiple, little streams of blood had flowed to form a puddle around her upper torso and soak into her hair. Her face was puffy with strangulation, her heavily-made-up eyes were clouded and staring, and traces of foamy saliva had dried on her cheek and chin.

Sherlock had looked briefly but carefully, those clear, blue-slate eyes missing nothing, and then rose to his considerable height to cast a sweeping gaze around the room, focusing intently on the display cases of the expensive sweets. He then turned to leave, obviously done, and declared in his remarkable baritone drawl, "Suicide."
Anderson, predictably, had a meltdown, complete with sneering and insults as to Sherlock's IQ, parentage and – with a meaningful, vulgar smirk at Harry – sexuality. Despite LeStrade's temporary absence from the scene, Anderson did not use any slurs, apparently having learned from his ex-lover's experience, but his venomous diatribe was otherwise breathtaking. Through it all, Sherlock ignored him, focusing instead on Harry's eyes, which had begun to glow ever-so-slightly the more Anderson spewed. Rather than risk betraying Harry's rage to the assembled cops, Sherlock stared meaningfully directly into the nearest CCTV camera, which had of course swiveled to follow them the instant they entered the store, and intentionally sent a very strong pulse of worry through his brother-bond as he crowded somewhat close to Harry to press a warning hand on the young man's arm.

Mycroft's immediate, reassuring pulse back down the bond made Sherlock draw a relieved breath. His brother was on his way, ready to help him calm Harry, and now Sherlock could focus on containing the situation. Over the past weeks, Anderson had been deliberately pushing Harry every time he saw him at Sherlock's side, poking and prodding like a nasty, little kid pulling the wings off of flies. Both Sherlock and Mycroft had noticed that their little wizard was definitely losing patience with the man's behavior, and worked together to keep Harry calm and controlled enough to refrain from blasting the rodent-faced cop through a building. Gregory, too, was aware of the problem and had warned Anderson more than once to contain himself or accept the consequences from one or both of the Holmes men.

They, of course, didn't give a damn about Anderson. They just didn't want for Harry to lose control and betray magic irretrievably, barring Betsy's Merlinic solution. Obliviating a nation could definitely lead to complications.

Sherlock cast a warning glance over to Greg, who was just entering the scene from having escorted the hysterical mother over to an ambulance. The DI's eyes narrowed as he caught part of Anderson's rant, and his sharply-barked order for silence actually caused Anderson to jump slightly as he whirled to face his boss. Paling under LeStrade's cold stare, Anderson immediately began whining defensively, "It's not what it seems like, boss! The fr….uh….'consulting detective' over there says this is a suicide. Like anyone's going to buy that tripe! I'm a fucking forensics expert, and I can clearly see the signs of murder. Hell, my first 'clue' is the garrote around her neck!"

Harry's glare moved from slightly-glowing to brightly-glowing. In reaction, Sherlock calmly reached into his pocket and pulled out a pair of aviator sunglasses, tucking them gently onto Harry's nose and behind his ears while murmuring quietly, "Control, Love." Sherlock was doubly-rewarded, first by Harry's deep sigh and nod of thanks, and second by the sight of a familiar, shiny black car pulling up on the blocked-off street. He took a brief moment to tilt his head toward the car, directing Harry's attention, while they both enjoyed the sight of the elegant, graceful, impeccable, and thoroughly intimidating Mycroft Holmes emerging from the vehicle, umbrella firmly in his grip.

"Sherlock, perhaps you can explain all of this before you and Harry pop-off to lunch?" LeStrade said drily behind him. Standing off to the side, Anderson looked like he was going to blow a blood vessel any minute.

Sherlock wished he could prolong Anderson's torture, but his priority was unquestionably with his angry little wizard and the white knight who had just ridden in via a shiny, black car. Sighing dramatically, he painstakingly explained for the tiny minds in the room – of which he did not include Gregory. "The girl was allergic to peanuts. She hated her life. Adolescent, angsty, obviously rebelling against her controlling mother. Goth tendencies forced to conform to a soft-pink, Barbie existence. The chain was already there, a home-made choke-style fashion piece; the twist is downward and tucked under, clearly done by herself. It sliced her throat when she went into
anaphylactic shock and her airways swelled and closed. Despite the broad selection of chocolate candies with peanuts, only the Death by Chocolate case is empty. All the other listed items are fully and freshly stocked, suggesting that the girl consumed a large quantity of candies that were deadly to her. There is no sign of a struggle, nothing conduce to a seemingly healthy young woman being suffocated or garroted by another party. The salival foam on her face contains traces of chocolate, and there are smears on her lips and her fingers. She killed herself by eating a large amount of peanuts. Clever. Not dull at all, for an adolescent. No doubt the choice of candies is a message to her mother, who clearly forced the girl to work here; had she wished to work here, the girl would have removed her 'goth' accoutrements for her shift. We are done."

He turned to greet Mycroft, who was now standing at Harry's side, debonair and charming as ever. Blue-slate eyes met slate-blue, and volumes of information were exchanged without anyone but Harry ever even realizing it. True, their little wizard felt some of it through the bond, but it was also true that there were three geniuses in the vicinity, and Harry was definitely one.

Typically, it was Anderson, bitter over yet another defeat by Sherlock-fucking-Holmes, who forced another scene in the hopes of making trouble. "Oh, look. It's the genius and his genius brother, together at last. Both of you seem unusually fond of that pretty young man there, Holmes. That's completely okay, of course; homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle, after all," he sneered insincerely. Feeling Harry tense again, Sherlock had the unusual desire to actually punch the pestilent cop. "Is he dating you both? What, does he swap out? Or are you competing for his attention?" Seeing the trio of men begin to glare at him, and nearly ecstatic at his success in rattling the insufferable Sherlock Holmes, Anderson gleefully took it one step too far, "Or are you all just dating each other?"

He barely had time to register the cold threat in the double pair of grayish-blue eyes that stared at him from either side of the twink in sunglasses before DI LeStrade's icy voice popped his happy bubble. "So, you really liked what happened to Donovan, then, did you, Anderson?" Turning carefully, Anderson glanced up at his pissed-off boss and gulped. He quickly replayed what he'd just said and got a sinking feeling in his gut. Shite. He had definitely gone too far.

Once again learning from Donovan's mistakes, Anderson immediately turned back to the three, frozen men and began his apology. "That was stupid. Really stupid, and completely insulting, and just ..... wrong of me. I'm really sorry. I apologize to you both, of course, but mostly I apologize to you, sir." He looked cautiously at the petite, black-haired man, and flinched slightly as the eyes hidden behind the sunglasses seemed to glow in the weird, noonday sun. "Detective Inspector LeStrade, I know I was completely out of line. I won't do it again, sir." Anderson was feeling a little frozen himself, caught in the icy stares of his enemy, his enemy's brother, and their ... what? Love interest? Fucktoy? Whatever the young man was to the Holmeses, even Anderson knew he had better not try to make it his business again. That way lay unemployment, and – judging from the definite sense of threat coming off the men – possibly a serious beating followed by death.

With that happy thought, he swallowed hard and tried again. "Listen, I get it. I implied something worse than homosexuality; I implied ... um ... incest. Honestly, I'd never think that. No one thinks that. I was just pissed and mouthy and really, really stupid. I'm sorry!"

Going strictly from the increased weight of the silence, he should really have shut up right after his first 'I'm sorry.' Again, shite!

Just as his boss was about to speak, no doubt to condemn Anderson to another fun-filled week or two of driving a desk, the young man removed his sunglasses and trapped the rodent-faced cop in a piercing, emerald gaze that seemed – unnatural. Somehow unable to move or talk, Anderson watched warily as the deceptively small man paced forward, pausing only when he was directly in
front of the mouthy cop. The Holmes brothers stalked right along beside him.

Standing there, staring him down, Anderson was suddenly very aware of the condemnatory silence by his fellow cops and his own boss. Whatever was going to happen now, they were obviously choosing to just be observers until the full-up forensics team arrived and activity resumed on the crime scene – well, the suicide scene. He hated it, but odds were pretty much certain that Holmes was right, as always.

Harry studied the nervous man in front of him. He wasn't particularly attractive, and whatever appeal he may have had was sullied by the unpleasant expression the cop habitually wore. He did not interest Harry at all – except that he was trouble. And Harry Potter, although he kept a very low profile, was extraordinarily well-equipped to deal with trouble.

Neither Mycroft nor Sherlock had yet told anyone else, including Harry, about Betsy's offer. They did not want to pressure their littlest love into a relationship with them – although, if it seemed like a last resort, they unquestionably would do so, and then work to make it up to him. It was vitally important to them to give Harry a chance to grow fully into this triad, eyes open and heart willing, and so all Harry knew was that the little rodent he was glaring at had endangered his – men? – by hinting at incest. And, although Harry was certainly capable of obliterating everyone here, he preferred not to. After all, the situation would not go away just because one memory of it was gone.

Cocking his head slightly to the side, Harry fixed the shifting man with a gimlet stare and set to work. "Anderson, is it? Your name is Anderson?" At the cop's nod, he continued, "So, you just said a few things that, apart from the fact that you were actually accusing my friends and I, struck me as interesting. You're clearly only paying lip service to the official position on homosexuality. You really dislike gays, am I correct?"

Anderson immediately began to dissemble, and Harry cut him off before he could dig another hole. "Stop. How about this? For the purposes of debate, I will not press any kind of charges against you for bigoted statements, nor will my friends. LeStrade? You agree?"

Startled, Greg looked first to the men next to Harry. Catching slight nods of agreement, he frowned slightly but said reluctantly, "Fine. For, say, the next fifteen, maybe twenty minutes, so long as no slurs are used or anything illegal happens. Say what you want to say, Anderson. Consider this your one and only chance to get this off your chest."

Anderson stared closely at his boss for long seconds, before he nodded slowly and said with satisfied malice, "So be it. I'll say what I want to say, and nobody writes me up for it? Sounds perfect." He spat the last word out like a dart, and turned to look at the man in front of him. "What do I call you, anyway?"

Harry's lips twisted in a slight sneer. "You mean, apart from fag, queer, pillow-biter, twink, etc.? My name is Harry Potter. Try some variation of that."

Anderson just sneered back and said, "In answer to your question? I loathe you people. Homosexuality is disgusting and wrong." He glared defiantly at the three men, and noted with mixed-emotions that the Holmes men were apparently willing to take a wait-and-see approach and let the green-eyed catamite handle it for them.

Harry's voice was clinical and unemotional. "Why? What's wrong with it? What authority declares it wrong?"
Anderson raised his chin belligerently. "The BIBLE says! And whaddaya mean 'what's wrong with it'? You can't have kids together, so it's wrong – obviously!"

"Really? Let's take that one point at a time. We can't have kids together. True. So, only people who can procreate together should have sex?"

Anderson sensed a trap. "Theoretically. You should at least be able to, anyway."

Harry's small smile was patently false. "Ah. So, every person in the world should reproduce?"

"Of course not!" Anderson exploded. "That would be incredibly stupid, like this argument!"

Green eyes were unimpressed. "So, not everyone should reproduce. But those who have sex, should reproduce?"

Anderson just glared.

"No to that one, too. Then. So, in your opinion thus far, homosexuality is wrong because gays can't have babies when they have sex, so they shouldn't have sex, even though everyone else in the world is allowed to have sex and also not have babies. … hmmm …. Gosh, that sounds … fair."

The skepticism in the young voice was painful, and Anderson reflexively winced but kept stubbornly silent. "Moving on! I think we can agree that your first argument is moot. So, your second argument – the Bible says homosexuality is wrong. That implies that the Bible is a good authority on societal rules? Would you agree with that?"

Anderson knew all about this particular trap. "The Bible is a guideline from God. We should try to obey its rules. And YES, Sherlock, I know adultery is wrong! My bad!" he snapped angrily.

Once again, Harry's smile was cold. "So, you also agree that men should beat their wives? And that God doesn't love women much at all?"

At this, Anderson just stared, bewildered, before stammering, "What? What the Hell are you talking about? NO, men shouldn't beat their wives! I am a cop, you know! And why would God not love women? What are you playing at, Potter?"

By now, everyone was listening closely. This had started as a way to watch Anderson get humiliated, but it was beginning to get interesting on its own merits. They waited quietly for the composed young man's answer.

"Anderson, you may want to revisit your beloved Bible a little before you continue to spew its graces. No matter what the book may or may not have been originally, or what it represents now, it has been edited heavily by bigoted, prejudiced men through the centuries. And, if you don't believe me, take a good look at the history of the phrase 'rule of thumb'. People use it all the time. You know where it came from originally? Your beloved Bible. Yeah, it was originally used in the Bible to describe the maximum thickness of the rod or stick a man was allowed to use to beat his wife with. It wasn't supposed to be any thicker than the husband's thumb."

Now, Anderson was staring along with all of the other listeners. Was that true? You could bet your ass he'd be looking it up real damn soon. "What about the other thing? That God doesn't like women, or whatever. What was that about?"

Here, Harry scowled. "It was one of the modifications by a particularly misogynistic pope and cardinal – around the Middle Ages, I believe. The Bible declared that women were last in God's love, behind cattle and oxen." He smiled darkly at the shocked crowd, and added, "Of course, that was around the same time when devoted Christians buried women who had died in childbirth or..."
from rape in unhallowed ground, next to their rapists and murderers. Also, if they died while menstruating. They were sinners, too, you see. Unclean. According to the leading religious leaders of that era, anyway."

Anderson gathered his scattered thoughts and tried to pull them all back on track. "That is NOT the point, but thanks for the history lesson, kid. We were talking about fa… err… homosexuals." He was not comforted by all of the teeth in Harry's smile.

"Yes, we were. And you cited the Bible, and subsequently those who administer the Bible, as definitive sources of authority on what is right or wrong for this era. My point, Anderson, is that these so-called authorities are fallible, and have always been so. I do not disparage anyone's faith, so long as one lives a life that truly serves a living conscience, but to blindly obey any leader, religious or otherwise, is dangerous. It is logical to believe that if the religious leaders and guidebook of the Middle Ages was wrong about advocating domestic abuse and misogyny, those of the present day can also be wrong about some of their supposed certainties, too. Can you concede that, or will you choose bullheadedness over grace – any version of grace you like?" Harry stared piercingly into the man's eyes, willing him to think.

After a long moment of silence, Anderson let out an explosive breath and said grudgingly, "Okay. I can see your point. Don't mean I like homosexuals." He even grinned a little when Harry said promptly, "It doesn't mean you have to. I don't much like bigots, but I'll accept your right to believe as you choose, so long as you can actually say you have done so thoughtfully and not as a member of the sheeple."

Thinking they were done, Anderson started to turn away, wondering if he should extend his hand to the young man who had defused the situation. He was taken aback when Harry then continued with the debate, "Moving on again, Anderson. Not done yet!" Harry's teasing grin was returned somewhat unwillingly by the resigned cop.

"What? You wanna make me question my fashion choices now?" the snide comment was offered with a half-grin, successfully removing any sting Anderson's words may have delivered.

Once again, Harry's smile had extra teeth. "Not at all; brown is the new ugly, you know!" Small laughs were heard around the area, as everyone stared at yet another brown suit and brown tie worn by the unpleasant forensics expert. "No, you had two specific accusations against my friends and me, Anderson, and I would be remiss if we didn't debate them both. So, let's talk about incest, shall we?"

Anderson just stared in disbelief. He was not alone. Surely, this kid wasn't about to defend that? Taking in the cleverness in the green eyes, Anderson shook his head and accepted that, yes, he was. Saying nothing, he just waved his hands in a gesture for Harry to continue. This ought to be good.

"So, incest is bad. A sin, right? Go to Hell for it and all that?" Harry's ingenuousness was patently fake. Anderson just nodded dumbly. Where was this going, now?

Green eyes laughed at him. "But, you're a Christian! Yet, you say incest is a Hell-worthy sin. How does that work? Talk about contradictory!"

Now, Anderson was getting mad, along with several other witnesses to their debate. "You better have a damn good explanation, Potter. Sounds like you're saying Christians are incestuous!" He was grinding his teeth around the words.

Once again, the young man was completely calm and rational. "Not at all. I'm saying your ancestors were." A little grin of anticipation played around the tempting mouth.
The mouth Anderson was really wishing he could punch right now. "Fuck you!" he bellowed. "What the Hell? You take the piss when I'm a little prejudiced, then you say this?" He was breathing so hard he sounded like a bull – or like Vernon when he tried to hurry.


Not catching the point, Anderson just nodded, before hastily snapping, "Yeah, except for whoever this Lilith is supposed to be."

Behind Harry, Sherlock and Mycroft exchanged definitely amused glances. Harry went for the kill. "Fine. So, instead of admitting there were three people in your proverbial Garden of Eden, you want to keep it at two. So be it, although it actually skews the argument even further toward my point. Tell me, Anderson, who did Adam & Eve's children mate with? And who did their grandchildren mate with? There was no one else in the world, right? So … what? Did they spontaneously bud? Clone? Or did the parents, grandparents, sisters and brothers all have sex with each other? WHO did they beget all those people with, Anderson?" He was now glaring into the cop's face, daring him to find an answer that didn't admit the truth of Harry's argument. Sickened, Anderson just stared back, jaw clenched. After a moment, Harry then said softly, "And let's look at the Great Flood. Only Noah's family was left, and only two of each animal. Which means, they had to start it all over again. By your own beliefs, Anderson, the entire world's populations – all of them – started with incest. Twice."

The long, heavy silence was broken by the arrival of the coroner's van. Slowly, the thoughtful men and women of the Met went back to work, doing what Harry most wanted of them – thinking. Exchanging a proud look with his brother, Sherlock sent a quick nod at Greg, who was smirking as he waved Anderson back to his duties, then followed Mycroft and Harry into the waiting car. The second the door with its wonderful, tinted windows slammed shut, Mycroft and Sherlock attacked. Watching their littlest love use pure logic and icy debate to take apart one of the most bigoted men they knew was intensely arousing. Sherlock, who had been dosed once or twice with professional-grade aphrodisiac as part of an experiment, knew that none of his prior experiences would or could ever come close to the intense reaction he had to their little wizard.

Mycroft, who had seized Harry's mouth in his own the second it dropped open in surprise at the ambush, was equally aroused. The demonstration of Harry's intellect had nearly undone him, and it was all he could do to keep himself under control until the door shut behind them. 'God, Harry is perfect!' Once again, the brothers' bond paid host to the odd synchrony of the Holmeses, as each moaned the same, exalted opinion at the same time.

Harry, lost in the sudden assault of touch and tongue and sensuality of two, aroused geniuses, had no opinion about his own intellect. He had no opinion about anything, really. All he could manage to think, apart from a heartfelt 'WOW' was ….

Nope. That pretty much covered it all.

After that incredible car ride, Harry was left with no doubt at all regarding what his men wanted (him and each other) and how much they wanted it (enough for Harry to find himself unexpectedly writhing and shuddering beneath the extremely-coordinated efforts of two geniuses with unbelievably talented mouths and the will to use them).
One unfortunate (for him) consequence of that event was his inability to look at any of the nameless, faceless drivers of Mycroft's fleet of luxurious black cars without blushing fiercely and stammering a little. Upon discovering this, and due entirely to their deep and abiding concern for Harry's wellbeing and having nothing at all to do with their delight in a blushing Harry, both Mycroft and Sherlock began insisting that Harry be driven absolutely everywhere he wanted to go.

It was the least they could do.

The relationship between the three men was a little more open now. Having successfully taken their littlest love through another phase of their seduction, the brothers were not about to relent. Subsequently, Harry often found himself sitting on someone's lap rather than the couch, or attempting to cook while his neck was being nibbled, or accepting a tea mug from a hand that immediately stroked down his arm and across his chest and … Yeah. Harry was not lonely.

He was also not complaining.

Neither Holmes missed the fact that their little tempter was opening like a flower in bloom beneath their combined, increased attentions. He did not behave as many victims of touch deprivation and child abuse do; he did not avoid or retreat from their touch. He moved into their arms like a moth moves to light, but although he was warmed and comforted and sometimes set afire, he was never burned.

Still, they moved forward slowly. Harry was now willingly accepting their deeper caresses, and shyly returning them. One night, Mycroft just watched, captivated, as Sherlock carefully lured Harry step-by-step through a session of frottage that both brothers would both forever recall with lyrical, dreamlike, almost sepia-tones. When the brothers once again tucked their beloved into bed and returned to their own bedroom, Sherlock then gratefully and tenderly took care of Mycroft's insistent arousal. As his breathing slowed afterward, Mycroft found himself on the receiving end of a warm washcloth, wielded by a remarkably soft-eyed Sherlock, who pressed a kiss to his brother's face and murmured in a hushed voice, "Thank you, My. Once again, you let me move first with him. Thank you." Mycroft's only reply was to tug Sherlock down against him and settle into sleep.

It was the only reply that was needed. That night, dreams were sweet, and enhanced through the bond, and both the brothers slept soundly.

The next day, however, started with a bang. Or, more literally, a shriek. From Harry.

The second they felt their love's panic, they were moving. Sherlock, having just rinsed his mouth, threw his toothbrush so hard it stuck like a dart in the bullet-riddled wall, and joined Mycroft in a mad dash through the flat and into Harry's. The sheer horror that Harry was experiencing had them near panic themselves. Together, they burst through the open archway, ready to defend or attack and found …

Harry.

He was standing in the corner, as if driven there from the pure shock of whatever he had seen. His eyes were wide and staring, one hand was pressed against his mouth and the other was extended in front of him as if warding off danger. He was shuddering visibly, and shaking his head back and forth in horrified negation.

But there was nothing there! No one was attacking. No fire had started anywhere, there were no monsters or demons or madmen in the room. All they saw or sensed was Harry – terrified, horrified, disgusted Harry.
Wait… disgusted?

Exchanging confused looks as they tested the charm that was calming slightly and their own, small bond with their delightful wizard, they realized that they were definitely experiencing waves of their littlest love's combined fear and disgust.

Finally, after carefully investigating the empty flat and sensing that Harry was now calm enough to talk a little, Sherlock tentatively asked, "Harry? What happened?" The wizard was still shaking in the corner, the way a person who was afraid of snakes might be if there was a cobra in the room. Or a garden snake.

In answer, Harry's warding hand, still extended, slowly turned and pointed, shakily, at an innocuous piece of paper lying on Mycroft's hassock. Cautiously approaching it, they both realized it was a photograph. A wizarding photograph, as it was moving. Looking more closely, certain they were about to see some version of wizards committing a horrible crime or atrocity, they realized at the same time what they were looking at.

Oh.

Well. There were definitely wizards.

Picking it up, and ignoring Harry's moan of protest, Sherlock looked at it curiously, before slowly turning it around to try and determine what he was actually seeing. His eyebrows shot upward as he studied the scene. Damn, that was impressive.

Okay, so there were wizards. Naked wizards. At least … what? Three of them? Looking quizzically up at Mycroft, Sherlock tried very hard to steel his expression into an emotionless, or at least a serious, mask. It did not help at all that Mycroft, who had immediately turned his back to Harry to hide his own expression, was fiercely biting his lip and fighting desperately against his own, uncontrollable grin. Glaring at his brother in a rather ineffective attempt to look stern and concerned, Sherlock looked back at the picture and turned it again.

Mycroft snorted. Sherlock kept his stare rigidly locked on the photo in his hands, and willed his shoulders not to shake.

It was definitely three wizards. Two redheads, and one brunette. Natural redheads, at least that much was certain.

Even as the brothers watched the photograph, one naked redhead pulled back while the other thrust forward into the same, somewhat impressively stretched, opening. Sandwiched between them, the brunette shrieked soundlessly. The look on the brunette's face was of purest ecstasy. Or agony. Hard to tell, actually. Especially from this angle.

At least the redheads looked happy to be there. Still standing with his back determinedly to Harry, Mycroft choked out, "Weasleys. Twins."

"Ah!" Sherlock commented, nodding wisely while trying mightily to concentrate on facts in order to overcome his increasing hilarity. "The masterminds of Weasley Techno-Wizards. A married triad. Fred, George…"

"And NEVILLE!" Harry burst out, his voice shaking. The horror in his voice when he shouted the young man's name had Mycroft dropping his chin to his chest and closing his eyes, struggling for self-control.

Sherlock wasn't doing much better, although his fascinated study of the moving photograph in his
hands did help a little. "Harry," Sherlock began slowly, pitching his voice a little lower in the hopes of control its inevitable quavering, "I'm not certain why you have this, but it is a perfectly natural …" He stopped talking abruptly at Harry's appalled stare, and had to pinch himself rather fiercely to keep from bursting into laughter at Harry's frantically stammered, "Nuh-UH! I can still only just barely believe even one would fit, no matter what Hermione's damn book says about 'proper preparation' and stretching spells! Putting two in the same place -- at the SAME TIME!!! -- is … is …!" Words failed this little wizard, and Sherlock had to bite his lip and pretend to study the area of the photo that most concerned Harry rather than risk losing all composure at Harry's freaked-out expression.

"DROP IT!" Harry ordered hysterically. "Put it down and back away. Oh, Merlin! I'm going to kill them! How could they? Poor Nev. Did you see his face? Did you see his… his….!" Harry's hand wavered worriedly in the general direction of his own rear-end. Shuddering violently as he caught sight of the distinctive movement of the photo, Harry began to inch along the wall toward the kitchen, turning his head away from the photo and moaning, "Oh, Merlin! Please, put it down, Sherlock!"

Mycroft avoided Sherlock's eyes, having finally gotten control over his own face, and nodded to Sherlock. "Perhaps you should put it down, brother. Harry seems to want very much for you not to be touching it." The suppressed laughter in his voice almost broke through Sherlock's careful façade. Rather than accidentally meet Mycroft's eyes, Sherlock dropped his head and placed the photo back on the hassock.

Looking up, they saw that Harry's retreat had gotten him as far as the couch, although he'd had to inch along behind the chair and over the lamp cords to do it. The pure distress on his face as he glared at the photo was heartbreaking.

And hilarious.

But mostly heartbreaking.

Both men moved to reach Harry's side, only to leap forward reflexively when Harry raised his shaking hand and sent a burst of absolutely intense flame rocketing to the photo. It was ash in less than a second, although Mycroft's hassock remained untouched.

The overall effect of the normally dignified brothers leaping forward while flame shot out behind them was best left to giggle over another day, as right now Harry was definitely in need of comfort.

"Harry, love?" Mycroft asked, his voice as soothing as he could manage in the circumstances, "How did that get here?" Sherlock, too, was curious about that.

Given something else to think about, Harry began to regain a little composure. Now he looked uncomfortable for a different reason. "Um … well, I just thought maybe you wouldn't mind having a portal-drawer here," he mumbled, eyes downcast in discomfort. "I put it in your side table, and asked Fred & George to test it out by sending something."

Sherlock nodded carefully, hand pressed firmly over his mouth to control the twitching. Mycroft stared resolutely at Harry's left ear, as he surmised in an extremely controlled voice, "And so, you opened the drawer, and they had sent you … that. And it upset you, a bit."

Harry raised disbelieving eyes off the floor and glared, flat-out glared, at the elder Holmes. He looked like an angry kitten. Now it was Sherlock's time to turn away, although he disguised it better by tilting his head down so his chestnut curls covered his face, seating himself on his part of the couch and reaching for his violin and bow. Carefully tuning it in a deliberate exercise of self-
control, he shook his head determinedly at Mycroft's prompting nudge and concentrated on keeping his face turned away from Harry. No chance. Mycroft was on his own.

Despite his best efforts – and really, for Mycroft Holmes, his best efforts were really extraordinary – a small laugh burst forth from his clenched jaw. Harry was scowling and practically spitting in anger. His eyes had narrowed, and hair was snapping with static, and he looked completely adorable. 'If he hisses, it's all over for me,' Mycroft sent down the bond.

A discordant shriek of violin was Sherlock's only reply. His hands were trembling too much to offer anything better.

"Upset me?" Harry bit out, completely unaware of the fact that his men were trembling from suppressed laughter, not fear of their little wizard. "UPSET me?" His glare intensified, and Sherlock's shoulders began to shake. Harry raised an accusing finger and pointed it at the both of them, moving back and forth in hysterical condemnation. "YOU are NEVER doing that to me! Got that? NEVER! NEVER!" He turned and stormed into the kitchen, banging pots and pans and muttering to himself, occasionally raising his voice in an outraged shout. Lips twitching uncontrollably, Mycroft walked around the couch and leaned against the back, arms crossed, long legs outstretched and crossed at the ankle as he watched Harry raging back and forth within his view, talking to himself and abusing cookware.

Sherlock, calming slightly, began to play scales in an ongoing effort to force himself under control, although he still refused to look at either Mycroft or Harry. His wandering eyes caught sight of the smoking ash on Mycroft's hassock, and another discordant shriek of sound ripped from the violin.

Catching the thought through their bond, Mycroft's control was already dropping again when Harry suddenly appeared in full view, still glaring accusingly at the two men, and shouted, "Don't even think of it! EVER!" Turning on his heel, he stormed back into the kitchen, which was fortunate for Mycroft, who dropped his head to his chest and laughed silently.

Behind him, on the couch, the violin in Sherlock's arms suddenly laughed along with Mycroft, chortling in sprightly notes and chuckling through the air. Sherlock's shoulders began to shake again when Harry growled, "Assholes! All of you!" accompanied by a particularly loud crash of pots and pans from the kitchen. But then they heard their adorable little kitten pause for a moment, muttering, "Tell Anderson I changed my mind. I'm in FAVOR of abstinence…. Oh, Merlin, speaking of assholes…!" before hissing something about rescuing Neville and having Ron look at his 'injury'. The sudden, vivid image of that in his head broke Sherlock's control, too.

Hoping fervently that their little wizard stayed in the kitchen, the Holmes brothers began to surrender to the sheer hilarity of the moment. They lost it completely at an especially violent bang of cookware, and Harry's furiously muttered, "Oh, I get it! 'Can't eat just one!' We'll just see about that, ASSHOLES!"

In the front room, the self-contained Holmes men laughed helplessly, while the bond laughed and sang between them. Somehow, every day with their little wizard was a genuine treat.
A Lot to Chew On

Chapter Summary

Mycroft banks on Vernon's obnoxiousness, the Holmes men explore their bond, Neville to the rescue, a shocking new fact and citrus.

Chapter Notes

The last part of the prior chapter won a lot of happy reviews and some confusion. Apparently, I'm even more sexually liberated than I realized, since I literally just assumed everyone else is aware of the concept of double penetration. So, I have a fic I'm going to rec – a wonderful M-rated, 4,000 word fic (alluded to in this chapter), but it isn't on this site. I'm going to try and give you the link for it and some … errr … kick-ass artwork for it (and no, the art isn't nasty-- not that there's anything bad at all about that!! It's brilliantly rendered, actually). The story is "Modern Warfare" by entangled_now, and the link is as follows: libraryofsol.livejournal160412. The art by Daunt is a four-panel sketch and is what you need to see to get an idea (honestly, in non-vulgar, non-explicit terms) why Harry was so freaked out. That link is: dauntdraws.livejournal 34491.

Also, this story is not mpreg for Harry, although I may do a sequel. And this chapter is intentionally absent of Harry's perspective, because the next one will feature it heavily. This is last of the transferred chapters from FFN; new update coming soon. Thanks!

Blessed Be & Happy Reading!

WyrdSmith

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER 11: A LOT TO CHEW ON

A Real Bite to It

Vernon Dursley walked into the bank, all four-hundred-and six pounds of him stuffed importantly into an expensive, custom-made suit. The gray linen suit and starched white shirt did a startling job of enhancing the man's florid complexion (although the striped green and yellow tie cast a certain queasiness over his appearance), but were otherwise an excellent match for his bushy, salt & pepper moustache. He bypassed the tellers and plowed arrogantly through the bank's more polite customers, expecting them to move aside for such an important personage as himself and showing a smug, tight-lipped smile when they complied. Certain of his own superiority, it did not occur to him that none of the smaller people in his vicinity wished to be trod upon by the obese man. Stomping over to the desk of the Bank President's assistant, Dursley put both hands on the polished surface and leaned on it, breathing heavily from the unaccustomed exercise. Glaring around at the apparently empty area, he waited less than ten seconds before he straightened up and shouted angrily, "Where is the bloody chit who sits here? I demand service immediately!" He stared at the
door to the executive's office, fully expecting it to open instantly beneath the trembling hand of an intimidated Bank President.

Deeply annoyed when the door remained closed and no one rushed to his assistance, he drew another breath to shout again when he saw a tall, well-dressed man in his early thirties approaching, an older woman at his side wearing a nicely tailored, red pants suit. He sneered down at the woman's trousers and black flats, and muttered contemptuously, "No respect for a dress policy, I see." Looking up, he saw the man's raised eyebrow and look of inquiry and smiled unpleasantly. "In my company, women still dress appropriately. I don't see any reason for women to wear unprofessional gear like that in a respectable business environment." His fat hand gestured to the older woman's trousers, making his meaning clear. Nevertheless, the woman flushed indignantly and said coldly, "Women have not been required to wear skirts to work for over fifty years now, sir."

Vernon just sneered again and turned his attention to the taller man. "I need to talk to you immediately!"

In response, the man's expression chilled further as he asked calmly, "What can I do for you, sir?" The older woman remained at his side, shrewd eyes fixed on Dursley, and interrupted before he could reply, "Perhaps you would tell us who you are first?"

Vernon glared at her and said nastily, "Return to your desk, woman. It's too late to try to look good now; you weren't in your place when I arrived, when giving you my name would have done some good. Go about your business; your superior and I are busy." Striding importantly over to the President's closed door, he opened it and gestured to the man to follow him, turning back to the outer desk to huff, "Make yourself useful and bring us some tea, there's a good girl." He entered the office of President Michael A. Stratton and seated himself in the comfortable chair in front of the large desk, barely refraining from the urge to sit behind the desk and show the bank executive his true place in the scheme of things. He resisted, though. After all, the matters he had to discuss were somewhat delicate, and he needed to schmooze the executive a little. Keep him thinking Vernon held him in some regard, at least until he gave Vernon what he wanted.

Ruminating heavily – considering his girth, how could it be anything less? - over the disturbing correspondence he had received in this morning's mail from the bank regarding the accounts of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Dursley, he barely registered the presence of the red-suited woman moving around the office. He did take notice, however, when she seated herself behind the desk, vicious gleam in her eyes, and prompted coolly, "Well?"

Vernon stared at her, his small, watery blue eyes making his face seem even more porcine, and barked out, "What is this? Where is the Bank President? Get him in here immediately, woman; I've no business with you!" His pudgy hand slapped the desktop for emphasis.

Behind him, the man's voice said calmly, "Security is here, should you need it, ma'am." Vernon tried to twist his obese frame around to look at the door, but he barely managed to catch a glimpse of the suited man he had met minutes ago standing in the open doorway, two uniformed men behind him, before his excessive poundage forced his body back to face the woman. He stared at her, bushy moustache bristling in outrage, as the older woman showed her teeth in a barracuda-smile.

"I am Bank President Michaela Stratton, and I am a busy woman. Who are you and what do you want?"

Vernon's eyes flickered nervously around the room, taking in the pictures on the credenza of the woman on the arm of an older man, others showing various children and young people gathered
around the older couple. He finally noted the plaques and certificates on the wall, and the discreet business card holder on the desk. Rifling hastily through his suit pockets, he pulled out the envelope from the bank and tugged out the letter, piggy eyes going immediately to the letterhead and noting the name: Michaela Stratton, Bank President.

Michaela. Not Michael A.

Now sweating copiously beneath the malicious stare of the woman who suddenly held an awful amount of power over someone who had just insulted her, Vernon smiled painfully at her and said weakly, "Ah. Err… Vernon Dursley, Vice-President of Grunnings." The woman seemed unimpressed, lessening his hopes that perhaps she was the type to respond to flattery from a handsome man. Still, nothing ventured ...

Wiping his forehead with a monogrammed handkerchief, Vernon gathered his wits. "My apologies, of course. I cannot think how I could not have seen that such a lovely, older woman as yourself wasn't just an office girl. Err….please accept my compliments on your daring fashion. Setting the bar, eh?" His moustache lifted as he flexed his upper lip in a parody of a smile.

Ms. Stratton's eyebrow raised slightly. It was her only reaction; apart from that, the woman could have been carved from ice.

"Sorry to take up your time," Vernon offered, wishing he could start this whole thing over. Suddenly seeing hope, Vernon blundered on, "You know, I didn't make an appointment, and as you said, you're a busy girl. Perhaps I could speak to the other executive? You know, the businessman?"

Ms. Stratton's expression was as cold as her voice, making Vernon wonder wildly how he could be so hot and sweaty in such an arctic environment. "Mr. Dursley, for the record, I stated that I am a busy woman. Not a girl, nor a 'chit', as you commented earlier." She sat back slightly in her seat, arms relaxed, and nodded slightly at the man who remained in her doorway.

Obeying her unspoken command, he entered the office and asked politely, "Yes, Ms. Stratton?"

Vernon looked up at the composed man, noting his quality suit and fine haircut. Yes, this was someone he could do business with. It would be much easier to discuss the issue with another male. A women's-libber like Stratton would never understand the nuances of a negotiation/bribery session such as Vernon required; he needed an old-fashioned, man-to-man chat, off the books, to handle this situation properly.

Attempting to rise to his feet, a move that was complicated by the fact that his girth had settled under the arms of the chair and effectively saddled him, Vernon finally sat back with fading dignity and stretched his hand out to the dignified man who watched him. "Vernon Dursley, my good man. Vice President of Grunnings Drill Company. Wondered if we could have a private chat in your office. No need to take up this little lady's time with my boring financial matters!" His loud joviality was painful to watch.

Failing to take the outstretched hand, the man stared at Vernon incredulously, turning to look at Stratton for guidance. At the executive's amused nod, he turned back to Vernon, who had dropped his hand and tried to look like the snub didn't matter, and said with barest civility, "Mr. Dursley, you seem to be under a misapprehension. I am Adam Jennings, Ms. Stratton's assistant."

Shocked into full stupidity, Vernon gaped and said with disbelief, "You're a bloody secretary? To a woman? Are you people having me on?"
Outside the office, the uniformed men smirked at each other and hoped that Dursley gave them reason to enter. Based on the puce color of the fat man's neck and chins, it was a fair bet that today would be less boring than usual.

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In London, deep in one of the highest-security buildings the world offered (which, it should be noted, Sherlock had broken into within four minutes during the Gdansk incident), Mycroft Holmes sat in his luxurious office and smiled maliciously. Sitting back comfortably in his burgundy, leather executive chair, he sipped his freshly-poured tea appreciatively, enjoying how the new mug Harry gave him maintained perfect heat for his drink, and watched the double-layer, panoramic, flat screen television currently playing live-action of Michaela Stratton's office. The one-of-a-kind monitor stretched all the way down two walls, rounding the corner smoothly, and was capable of displaying up to two hundred individual views or, as today, a nearly 360-degree view of Michaela's office and the main lobby of the bank. Presently, the CCTV images spooling onto the monitor were clearly showing both Michaela's subtle expressions and Vernon Dursley's florid, horrid face and increasingly irate body language.

Sherlock had originally suggested that Anthea introduce Dudley Evans and his worthy efforts at 'The Total Dud' to the Stratton family, who were well-known for their efforts in the area of domestic violence. Much good was being done from that introduction, and one of the most surprising players in some of the new plans was the 'involunteer', Sally Donovan. Like Mycroft, Sherlock was something of a savant regarding making connections, and that included doing so with people. His additional suggestion of having Michaela and Adam, who was affianced to Michaela's granddaughter Natalie, approach Dursley together - leading the bigoted man to blunder into his first of many errors in judgment in his dealings with the bank - had been inspired. Now, Dursley was further handicapped in his efforts to obtain a bank loan to cover some of his injudicious use of company funds for private matters. Michaela would be twisting the knife with her usual delicacy, drawing out Dursley's ordeal with skill and ease. It really was a shame that she had not followed in her own father's footsteps; Michael Stratton was renowned for his interrogation techniques within the shadow government.

Mycroft was particularly looking forward to the part where Michaela extracted from the overbearing bastard precisely what those "private expenditures" actually were. It would be interesting to see how Dursley attempted to disguise some of his little … excesses. He wondered idly how the exotic dancers hired by the grossly obese man even managed a lap dance, given that the man's belly concealed whatever approximation of lap the man had.

Sometime in the next half an hour or so, shortly after Michaela gave Dursley a business-card charmed to make the bellicose man fairly shout in the belief that no one could hear him clearly, Adam would enter (leaving the door open) to serve tea with a dose of Veritaserum in it. After he drank most of a cup, Michaela would use a framed photo honoring her charity work to lead Dursley into a discussion about his thoughts on abnormal children – she was instructed to use the word 'freaks' - and the best way to discipline them. Mycroft was confident that Michaela would have no difficulty leading the bellowing Dursley to confess enough about his treatment of Harry that Detective-Inspector LeStrade and his lunch companion, a local reporter who had requested a day's ride-along with Gregory for a story, would have sufficient cause to overhear, detain and arrest him. The waiting security guards would be more than agreeable to assisting that endeavor. The situation was contrived, yes, but not enough to cause overmuch suspicion from anyone who mattered. And those who mattered were, in fact, party to the plan.

Mycroft made a mental note to frisk Sherlock later for the Veritaserum he had undoubtedly helped himself to while provisioning Adam. If the frisk of Sherlock's delectable form was sufficiently
entertaining, he might even allow Sherlock to keep the truth potion. After all, it was good form to gift his lovers with little treasures here and there, and Sherlock was not the type for jewelry or chocolates. He would be more likely to go dewy-eyed over a pickled human spleen appropriated from Molly over at St. Bart's. The elder Holmes brother could not contain an amused smirk at the thought of presenting his brother with various sections of a cadaver, all wrapped up in a pretty bow. Taking up a self-inking quill – really, he found he enjoyed the eccentricity of it – Mycroft made a small note on his calendar near Sherlock's birthday.

Ah, good. Dursley was now expounding at top volume on his own wisdom and experiences in disciplining his freakish, criminal nephew. The disgusting man waved his teacup expansively as he chortled over a particularly vicious beating of the boy, not noticing the rigid posture and white-knuckled grip of his primary audience. In the lobby, Gregory had followed the appalled reporter, who was holding his cell phone in the recording position and listening to the poisonous self-conviction with intent focus. Gregory and the security guards were looking especially grim and businesslike at the moment.

From this event, Dursley would experience an ever-expanding ripple effect, including public humiliation, incarceration, financial ruin, etc. While enjoying the hospitality of the British government's jails and prisons, he would be in the close proximity of some of the more brutal inmates, who would learn 'through the grapevine' that their repugnant, self-important cellmate was a child-abuser who was – despite the attempt he would doubtless make – ill equipped to follow through on any bribes he offered. Also on the agenda were a great number of acts of torture against Vernon Dursley, designed with as much cruel creativity as the Holmes brothers and the Weasley twins could achieve.

Petunia Dursley would in no way be spared, either. Considering that she, at least, should have been Harry's protector in the Dursley household, Mycroft and Sherlock had designed a very special gauntlet for the skeletal bitch to run. Dudley Evans's Dementor friend would be assisting with both of the Dursley parents.

And, as the beginning of her own Holmesian nightmare, Marge Dursley was already enjoying the benefits of being a known owner of an expansive illegal puppy mill that had earned her the attention of animal rights activists throughout Great Britain. Her thuggish face and form were plastered on billboards and fliers throughout Great Britain, along with photos of some of her more pathetic canine victims and a few, salient statistics. Oddly, the surviving Creevey brother had been useful in that regard; once Ronald Weasley informed Harry's dog-loving stalker that Marge Dursley was not only cruel to animals but was also cruel to Harry Potter, Creevey – and his father - had proven his value. Apparently, fanatical photographers and devoted milkmen were especially effective at mustering grass-roots activism. Marge Dursley was presently being harassed and picketed everywhere for her actions. It seemed that many people were willing to speak up on behalf of puppies and adorable young men with a devastating mastery of 'puppy dog eyes'.

Eyes in a tiny, bruised face that had peeked out from a dark and airless cupboard, watching those who were meant to care for him as they celebrated another Christmas without him.

Mycroft's slate-blue eyes darkened to agate with his thoughts, and anyone who happened to see him at that moment would have been terrified at the expression on his face. This was not the urbane gentleman known to most, and was certainly not the minor governmental bureaucrat he pretended to be. This was a deadly man, a frightening man, with cold rage in his eyes and murder in his heart for those who had dared to harm his family. It mattered not at all that Harry Potter hadn't even known or been known to Mycroft Holmes at the time of the young man's torturous childhood. What mattered was that it had happened at all.
Unnoticed by Mycroft - who was lost in his pained, pitiless thoughts as he watched the screen showing a sputtering Vernon Dursley trying to explain himself to Michaela and Gregory in full view of the local reporter and several horrified witnesses - the mug of tea in Mycroft's hand had begun to boil. He did, however, notice that the bond between Sherlock and himself had become supremely sensitive, as if sunburnt, and he felt Sherlock's alarmed attention focused on him from across London.

"Mycroft, enough!" Heightened by the strength of emotion, Sherlock's smooth baritone rang authoritatively through the bond, sufficiently startling his brother and allowing his extraordinary self-discipline to reassert itself. Blinking slowly, his breaths even and calm, Mycroft allowed Sherlock's mind to flow across and into his own, seeking answers. When they came, Sherlock, too, had a moment of renewed rage. Somehow, with the newness of their little love's horrific childhood gone, the knowledge of his ordeal was exponentially more devastating to each of them. Separated by dozens of miles and nothing at all, the two brothers flowed around each other, their spirits intertwining in sinuous harmony, sharing rage and comfort in a fleeting, endless moment before they separated again.

They breathed together, minds resting against each other in shared meditation, seeking and finding control and composure. It was then, in the clarity that always accompanied a flexing of their bond, that they realized they had instinctively sheltered Harry from all of it. They could feel him, almost see him, with their minds this close to each other. They couldn't help it; curiosity was the blessing and the curse of both men. This amount of heightened observation was not common and was usually accompanied by a precipitous event of much greater immediacy. Here was an unlooked-for opportunity, a moment when their minds were close, their bond was fully open and nothing catastrophic was happening. Naturally, they checked on Harry, which just as naturally turned into Harry-watching. His contentment buzzed happily through the bond, his mind occupied but not busy – he must be creating something. Was he cooking? No, the general sense – or perhaps, sensation – of that was off. Not cooking. What? Motivated by the moment, for the first time, the two men moved their minds in unison, working to heighten their perceptions. There! It was … music. A guitar.

Harry was writing a song. No, not a song. A complex, beautiful, subtle piece of music and lyrics.

Mycroft and Sherlock were unreasonably delighted by this discovery. It was yet another new aspect of their little love, and that made it wonderful. They had known that he had a guitar, that he dabbled on it.

They had not known he was what they, in purest snobbery, would call a musician. Even better, he wasn't just a 'songwriter'; he was a composer. With their unique, brilliant understanding of the shades of accomplishment and the nuances of language, these definitions meant vastly different things.

But ultimately, they meant that Harry remained surprising. To the Holmes brothers, that was simply astonishing.

And perfect.

And that meant that Harry was even more perfect than just a few moments ago. And, to brilliant minds such as theirs, that was in no way impossible.

At least, not with Harry.
It wasn't possible. No matter how hard he tried, Mycroft Holmes was now entirely incapable of remaining in his own home unless his beloveds were there, too.

Sighing in resignation, Mycroft looked around his beautiful, luxurious flat, and took up his umbrella. He was either going to have to work out a schedule with Harry and Sherlock that they travelled between their homes, or sell his flat. Or … lips pursed in thought, Mycroft paused and mulled over the possibility that had just occurred to him. While it was true that what he was contemplating was, perhaps, an abuse of privilege, he didn't particularly care. He was more than entitled to abuse all the privileges he wanted, and rarely took advantage of that fact. And Harry was deserving of every consideration. And Sherlock? Smiling fondly, Mycroft shook his head and walked out his door, casually passing his hand over the WTW panel and setting all of the locks and defenses. Strolling to his elevator, he finished the thought: Sherlock was deserving simply because he was Sherlock – unique, beautiful, mercurial. He, too, deserved the best that Mycroft could afford; and Mycroft could afford practically everything.

Whistling lightly, Mycroft sent off a text to Fred Weasley. Explain why I shouldn't kill you. MH

He smirked to himself. After the double-penetration debacle, Harry had remained traumatized and deeply disturbed (although John had simply described the wizard's condition as "freaked out") for three full days and nights, and was only slightly improved after that. Sherlock and Mycroft had not been allowed into any position that was even remotely sexual, a condition Harry had justified by stating his concern that any activities would eventually lead to the two of them wanting "that" activity. He did not seem to hear them when they explained that an act of double-penetration was not particularly common and was certainly neither necessary nor high on their list of desirable bedplay. All he seemed to recall clearly were details about Neville; specifically, his expression of agonized pleasure, his tears and his somewhat brutalized, overstretched anus. Despite reassurances, he could not really believe that Neville had wanted that done to him.

Truthfully, given what they recalled, neither Mycroft nor Sherlock would especially want it done – by then or to them - either.

Harry's forays into internet research on the topic had not improved Harry's fear. He had even found a short story – reading it had been Sherlock's first experience with the phenomenon of fanfiction – in which one man had been taken by his two lovers, who were also brothers. The parallels to their own situation were enough to capture Harry's attention, and although the story had ultimately portrayed the three as having a pleasurable experience, the recipient of the brothers' attentions had apparently experienced enough discomfort to merit Mr. Longbottom's facial expressions in that thrice-damned photograph. Only now, five days after the Weasley twins' prank, had Harry returned to Sherlock and Mycroft's arms without fear.

Well, with lessened fear. And that made Mycroft want to kill Fred and George Weasley. He could do it, too, regardless of their magic and their prominence. And he knew that they were fully aware of that fact. Anthea's reports were always wonderfully inclusive of precisely the details Mycroft wished to know.

It had been five days' worth of reassurances by Harry's suitors that they would never push their young lover into any situation or act he did not wish, and he had almost made them swear an Oath that they would never even consider "that". Their beautiful young love's abusive childhood and torturous experiences with authority figures in the wizarding world were working actively against the three men in regards to this. Harry was excruciatingly aware of both the hurt and the harm that could be done to him by those for whom he let himself be vulnerable – those who were supposed
to love and protect him. Despite his innate power and his decision to trust Mycroft and Sherlock, Harry's deepest fear was being intentionally, knowingly harmed by those who were meant to love him. Added to his astonishing naivety regarding matters of lovers and sex – witness his shocked reaction to The Photograph – and Harry was becoming crippled by his fears and his memories. Mycroft and Sherlock had endlessly soothed, reassured and comforted him, carefully luring him back like one might an injured, feral cat, and were prepared to swear the proposed Oath should it be the only way to placate Harry's distress. They were certain, however, that he would then experience guilt for having failed to trust them.

Once they learned of his reaction to their thoughtless prank, courtesy of an enraged Hermione Granger via a tip from Anthea, the Weasley twins had only made the entire thing worse by activating Harry's fireplace into a floo so that they could appear together – red hair on seemingly floating heads nearly flaming in the dark grate - to apologize. The fact that they did not warn any of the residents first, and made their presences known by making raucous catcalls as they watched Sherlock finally succeed in luring a wary little wizard into his arms and his lap, did further damage to Harry. Sherlock's expression at the redheads was murderous when Harry leaped away from him, and Mycroft's was not much nicer as he glared at the smirking, disembodied heads in his beloved's fireplace. They had then spent too much time loudly assuring Harry that 'Neville really liked it – even the pain! Merlin's truth, Harry, he came all over himself even as he was crying!'

Sherlock had then terrified the two redheads into silence by reaching straight through the floo – something muggles were in no way supposed to be able to do – and seizing Fred's throat in a tight grip, squeezing hard before shaking the twin like a rat and throwing him back into his own home. Harry had fled to his bedroom in tears, leaving Mycroft and Sherlock staring grimly at each other, at a loss as to how to help their youngest love.

Neville himself had finally saved the day, arriving unexpectedly at the door bearing a magical lily he had cultivated. The beautiful flower was capable of bonding almost like a Familiar with children, glowing softly in the dark, emitting stinging hexes in defense and crooning quietly when children were near. The flower's delicate scent induced calm sleep and restful dreams, too. After placing the unique, botanical guardian on Harry's nightstand, the soft-eyed, soft spoken young wizard had taken Harry to the rooftop garden and simply talked with him for the majority of the afternoon. Many of Harry's fears and worries had been addressed and soothed.

Afterward, Neville had kindly asked John to take a walk with Harry to the park, and had spent that time talking with Sherlock and Mycroft, the latter of whom had arrived soon after Sherlock's text informed him that the young men were coming back down the stairs. Neville was a remarkably restful person, calm and gentle. It was difficult to see why he had chosen to bond with the rambunctious redheads, but doubtless the entire wizarding community was grateful to him for doing so. The possibility of those two being bonded with someone of similar temperament to themselves was enough to make even the unflappable Mycroft Holmes shudder.

Neville had flushed rather fiercely when Sherlock, whose only previous experience with the young wizard was "that" photograph, inspected him with his thoughts clearly written across his handsome face. Surprisingly, Sherlock had contritely apologized, and Neville – unsurprisingly – accepted. Neville had then gone on to explain a few things that had baffled both men about Harry. Ultimately, by the time Harry returned from the park, the brothers understood why Harry was so shy, naive and inexperienced in sexual matters despite his power and prestige and the opportunities he would have had for dalliance. They had a greater understanding of their littlest love, from the perspective of the other prophecy child, who had roomed with and befriended Harry and, despite Neville's seeming timidity and Harry's renowned courage, shared very similar temperaments. In a way, Neville and Harry could also have been twins, with each choosing to display different traits to the world but possessing equal amounts of courage, bashfulness, fierceness and gentleness.
Suffice to say, Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes liked Neville Longbottom a great deal, and were determined to see that young man's friendship fully cultivated. And they treasured the insights Neville had given them about Harry.

Despite the outgoing personality Harry had shown during his residence at Baker Street, Harry was a very private person. This, they knew. Their young love had never had a lover; this, also, they knew. However … he had never had a boyfriend. Nor a girlfriend. He had rarely been comfortable being touched – apparently Molly Weasley's smothering hugs had been somewhat traumatic for the young man (not to mention, when he finally let himself be vulnerable to his 'substitute mum', she had betrayed him). He had always been inhibited – first by his upbringing, then his ordeal and reputation, then by his power and success. He hadn't the time for anything shallow and ephemeral, and did not dare accept anything more for fear of betrayal. Prior to his activating the famous Oath, taking a lover could very well have meant his death, or worse, and afterward, there were only friends, supporters, servants or enemies. And ultimately, given his goals and ambitions, there was no time for personal interests. He had barely ever even touched himself in a sexual way, much less had another do so. For all of his life experiences, his power, his ruthlessness, Harry remained - not just untouched - but innocent.

Pure.

Looking out the window, Mycroft took note of the car's progress and returned to his thoughts. He could practically see the Weasley twins staring at his text message and hyperventilating. Finally, halfway home (and Mycroft did smile somewhat gently at the word his mind automatically supplied when he thought of wherever Harry and Sherlock were), his cell phone chimed. One or both Weasleys had finally worked up enough courage to reply.

Because it would hurt Harry? We're so sorry. We didn't think about it; it was just funny. A prank. It never occurred to us that it would scare him, or embarrass our Nev. We acted like kids again, thoughtless and stupid. Really, really sorry. What can we do to make it up to him? Please don't kill us; we're too young and successful to die! Besides, Nev has sentenced us to a month of chastity. (He means it, too – got the belts and everything! Pissing is a bitch!) Besides, he's pregnant and needs us. Sorry, so sorry. We would never intentionally hurt our little brother. Please? FW/GW

Shaking his head in disbelief at the sheer volume of run-on thought that spewed across his small screen from the always loquacious Weasley twins, Mycroft found himself gaining an entirely new appreciation for Sherlock's succinct texting. He took a long moment to absorb the shock of a bit of news he had not known about the wizarding world, and resolved to have Anthea address the lack of information on this topic. Really, considering his and Sherlock's relationship with the "Vengeful Savior" of the wizarding world, it would have been appropriate for them to know that wizards could carry children! Unexpectedly, Mycroft felt a surge of excitement and happiness race through him, and calmed Sherlock's sense of query through the bond with the promise of Mycroft's imminent arrival home. Given Harry's present state of mind regarding sexual issues, it might be best to relay this latest bit of information to Sherlock later on, after Harry had retired for the night and Mycroft and Sherlock were in their own bedroom. However he told Sherlock, it was important to ensure Harry was otherwise occupied at the time. Smirking, he enjoyed a brief moment contemplating Sherlock's reaction.

He quickly typed his reply to the penitent Weasleys. You will start by gifting us with a doorway from my penthouse into Harry's flat, and will provide portkeys and ward access into my flat for Mrs. Hudson, John Watson, Gregory LeStrade, Sherlock and Harry. From there, any further penance hinges on how much damage remains for Harry. Knowing they would gladly accept his terms as a way to earn forgiveness from Harry, as well as from their most 'Dark Lordish client Mycroft Holmes' and his 'equally Dark Lordish brother Sherlock'. They had given Mycroft a
fuschia soccer shirt bearing the epithet Scarier than Voldemort with PMS, which Mycroft promptly gave to Anthea for a sleep shirt. He had learned her nightwear preferences the hard way when he shared surveillance detail with his assistant for a week. Anthea had reported that Bill Weasley greatly enjoyed that particular nightshirt, and his thanking the twins had earned a pensieve-worthy moment or two.

Hitting Send, Mycroft started to put away his phone, then paused to type Congratulations on Neville's news. I will allow you to live. MH

Sending his reply, he returned his phone to his pocket and looked up as the luxurious black car pulled up to the door at 221 Baker Street.

Home.

A Lot to Chew On

He smiled at a startled Mrs. Hudson and raced up the stairs like a much young man, just for the joy of this moment. Standing before Harry's doorway momentarily, he drew in his breath and opened the door wide, entering and looking around in a single movement.

Harry was working in the kitchen, delectable smells wafting through the air and stirring appetites with each passing minute. Sherlock was helping Harry in the kitchen, having apparently abandoned his fear of having his worst magical experience replicated – after all, he barely cared what anyone except for the two in his heart thought of him and had only the barest concept of personal privacy, so why should a little involuntary veritaserum-session be troubling amongst family and friends? Of course, Sherlock's idea of assisting was open to criticism. Currently, he was pressed full length against Harry's back, whispering in his ear and watching his face flush and his beautiful emerald eyes glaze. John was seated next to Greg on their usual places at the counter, and was warning Sherlock that his behavior was 'more than a bit not good'.

At Mycroft's entrance, John and Greg looked at him with relief, Greg calling out, "Mycroft, you gotta make Sherlock stop. He's distracting Harry and it's gonna ruin dinner. He keeps offering to make things like two sausages and a bagel, and two bananas and a pineapple ring. Food is getting creepy around here!" John nodded emphatically along with his not-so-not-boyfriend, reminding Mycroft of two annoyed children telling tales to their mum. Leaning back against Gregory, John then chimed in with gusto, "And Harry's laughter is getting weird, like he can't decide whether to fry Sherlock's dangly bits or ignore everything. And Greg and I have been forced to just sit here!"

Sherlock's voice then drawled from beneath the raven fall of Harry's hair, where he was nibbling on the distracted wizard's ear, "Oh, that's not entirely true, John. You have also been feeling each other up beneath the counter, in between bouts of laughing lightly at Harry and me and pretending that you aren't really scared."

Harry turned to smile at Mycroft and winked brightly, emerald eyes alight with laughter. He suddenly shuddered at a particularly inventive movement of Sherlock's tongue and then rolled his eyes at Mycroft's raised eyebrows. "He's trying to desensitize me with immersion therapy on sexual innuendo and positive reinforcement when I don't overreact."

Mycroft laughed as Sherlock abruptly surfaced from beneath the ebony locks, his expression proud as he gazed fondly down at Harry. "Such a bright young man, isn't he, My?" Sherlock asked his brother. "I think that deserves a little more positive reinforcement!" He then tunneled back under Harry's long, unconfined hair and proceeded to reward their little lover. Harry's gasp and muffled
moan went straight to Sherlock and Mycroft's cocks, but only Mycroft was in a position where he could cast a narrow-eyed, possessive glare at Gregory and John for their momentarily predatory looks.

Satisfied with the almost-visible wilting of their respective interest beneath his deadly stare, Mycroft gave them a last look of warning before turning back to watch Sherlock do his best to ruin dinner. 'No, not his best,' Mycroft mentally amended. 'His best would have both Harry and I naked on the kitchen floor regardless of who might be watching.' He felt Sherlock's smug acknowledgment and phantom caress of reward whisper down their bond, and chuckled as he said aloud, "Sherlock, I do not require positive reinforcement, but I willingly encourage it anyway."

Ignoring John and Gregory's confused expressions – Harry was far too distracted to pay attention – Mycroft unbuttoned his suitcoat and vest, removing them and loosening his tie as he moved into the living room. Smiling lightly as he soaked in the atmosphere and his remaining tension eased, Mycroft confirmed that he had hung up his umbrella upon entering the flat, marveling on the fact that he was relaxed enough here to pay no attention to his own actions. Setting his attaché case next to his chair, he rolled up his shirtsleeves and sighed in contentment, all the while reveling in the familiar warmth and wondering a little at himself and his brother. Where had the cool, dispassionate Holmes men gone?

Moving into the kitchen past the flushed not-so-nots at the counter, he quirked an amused grin at their efforts to ignore the action at the stove, and then honed in on his true targets. Running a strong, caressing hand over Sherlock's broad back, he leaned around and pressed a slow, deep kiss onto Harry's lips, growling softly at Harry's immediate, heated response. 'We owe much to Neville,' murmured Sherlock's smooth, deep voice over their bond, and Mycroft hummed in agreement as he explored Harry's mouth thoroughly, burying his hand deep in Sherlock's hair and massaging as he did so. With impeccable timing, he ended the kiss and allowed a flushed, frazzled wizard to briefly return his attention to the sizzling mixture in the frying pan, and suddenly understood why Sherlock had chosen this time to 'recondition' Harry. Mycroft had not missed the fact that, ever since they viewed Dudley's photos and saw the way a tiny Harry had been forced to cook – laboring with a heavy frying pan much too heavy for him even if he had been of proper age to use it - Sherlock never allowed Harry to fry anything without venturing over to kiss, comfort and cuddle their little wizard.

Dropping another kiss on Harry's nose, Mycroft then tugged on chestnut curls til Sherlock's heavy-lidded stare and sharp cheekbones emerged from their haven beneath Harry's hair, and settled his mouth hungrily over Sherlock's, each running sensitive, long-fingered hands over Harry's stomach and chest. Harry leaned back into the two men, welcoming their connection as he tipped his head back and smiled into the nibbling kisses the brothers bestowed on him. The bond between the three filled with love and welcome and happiness. As they slowly separated, Sherlock pulled Harry back into another kiss with him, before he allowed the younger to return to the important business of cooking.

Despite initial appearances, Sherlock had actually been efficiently helping Harry prepare their dinner, and he returned to his assigned duties as Harry finished up at the stove. Mycroft flowed along with them, easily fitting himself into the rhythm and harmonies of the task, and the three together quickly and easily finished preparing and plating the meal in record time. At the counter, Gregory and John leaned against each other and watched the three other men in awe as they worked a familiar magic.

It was when they all settled at the counter to eat - Harry taking his customary stool on the other side of the counter to face the others and guard his kitchen - that Sherlock remembered that Mycroft owed him an explanation for the flare of excitement and happiness he had sent echoing
through the bond earlier. He allowed his brother to take several appreciative bites of the delicious food and go through his established routine of casually asking after everyone's day. Sherlock knew better than anyone that Mycroft used this time to determine for himself that those he loved were truly well, and to make mental notes regarding the unobtrusive actions he would take to ensure their wellbeing. Oddly enough, Mycroft's routine was deeply comforting to Sherlock, who now had a clearer understanding of how carefully the older man had monitored and assisted his erratic, prickly, lonely little brother all these years. Unable to resist, even as he mentally sneered at his own sentimentality, Sherlock sent a nudge through the bond, and when Mycroft responded with a flare of query, he flooded the bond with affection and gratitude. He did not have to look at Mycroft to know that the familiar, blue-slate eyes were, for a few moments, brighter and shinier than usual. Of course, Mycroft had returned the affection to Sherlock, and so his own slate-blue eyes were perhaps a bit suspect, as well.

Eating meals was a genuine pleasure these days. Sherlock enjoyed his food, after a lifetime of simply enduring the necessity, and was finally eating enough to satisfy his tall frame. He found that eating well allowed him to sleep well, too – in addition to a vast increase in relaxation techniques, courtesy of Mycroft and Harry. He was also determinedly avoiding the revelation that he was, apparently, something of a cuddler in sleep. Naturally, he hadn't known that before, because Sherlock had rarely before slept, and never with another person in the bed. Apart from Mycroft, that is, who assured him that he had been just as 'affectionate' back in their youth when they'd been forced to double up for the holidays. Sherlock had pouted at that comment, holding determinedly to his sulk for almost five full minutes before Mycroft's persuasive hands and tongue soothed his pride sufficiently.

He still tried very hard to ignore the painfully obvious truth that everyone had been right all these years about sleeping better with a full stomach. It had never helped Mycroft, after all, so why would he have believed it would apply to himself?

Mycroft, too, found meals shared with his lovers and the not-so-nots to be vastly enjoyable. It was an unparalleled pleasure to be able to eat what he wished, enjoying every guilt-free bite, and to know that it would not be necessary to try – and fail – to battle the result. Once again, the brothers' thoughts merged over the bond, each of them following a similar idea, and they wordlessly resolved to further express their gratitude to the brilliant little wizard who fed them sin-bread and solved their troubles for them.

At a lull in the conversation, Sherlock turned to look at Mycroft and asked curiously, "Just a bit ago, you felt shock about something. Happy shock. What was that about?" Smiling calmly, Mycroft turned to Harry and said "I'm having a doorway installed between here and my flat. Is that acceptable, my dear?" Harry's startled pause was followed by a delighted shriek and enthusiastic smile. Had he any doubts, they were assuaged when the young man leaned over the counter and pulled Mycroft forward into a vigorous hug.

He then looked closely at Sherlock, who was smiling at the display, and used the ensuing conversation between Harry and the not-so-nots to say through their bond, "Brace yourself, love. Young Neville Longbottom is pregnant. I've sent congratulations." He watched with amused sympathy as Sherlock's eyes slowly widened in comprehension and his face reflected disbelief, acceptance, wonder, delight, ecstasy, fear, and – finally - almost grim determination and a sense of fiercely protective possessiveness. It was all rotating around their littlest love. When Sherlock's raging emotions calmed somewhat and settled into an amalgam of them all, Mycroft wrapped a strong arm around his brother / lover and sighed deeply, absorbing the younger man's minute trembling. Yes, the news was sudden, and the potential was mind blowing. But the decision did not have to be made this moment, nor any time soon. In truth, it would never be their decision, only Harry's. They would accept the possibility with joy, and move on.
Later that night as they readied for bed, Mycroft watched from his reclining position against the handmade pillows he had insisted on as Sherlock mechanically put down his toothbrush, shut off the light and left the bathroom. Guided only by the glow from the small moonlight gem Harry had placed in their room, Sherlock wandered over to the bed in a trance and climbed in. For once, he did not bother with his nightly reminder that the dynamic would change as soon as Harry joined them. Instead, Mycroft found himself with chestnut curls and wide, vulnerable, slate-blue eyes staring at him from a distance of mere inches as Sherlock settled on the older man's chest, crossing his arms and resting his chin on them as he stared at his brother. His expression was both loving – and lost.

Mycroft did not need any words, nor did Sherlock offer them. Instead, he wrapped strong, comforting arms around the man he had known and loved most of his life, tapped a finger admonishingly on the teeth that nibbled worriedly at Sherlock's bottom lip, and dipped his head to reward his brother with a long, sweet kiss. Perhaps it was Betsy's assistance, or perhaps it was simply the magic of their bond, but there was very little that still troubled the two men about the nature of their relationship with each other or with Harry. It was so natural, so damn perfect, that any arguments to the contrary were just – unimportant. This, right now, this love and comfort and understanding, was right. It was life blood. The only thing that would make it even better – and it would happen soon - was Harry's presence in their bed, too.

And, possibly, a child.

The repercussions of a future, pregnant Harry were enormous and undeniably overwhelming. The sheer, magical impossibility of it left them gasping as their incredible minds tried to grasp the reality. But as their bond hummed once again, both Sherlock and Mycroft were of one mind – again – about their hopes and their ever-increasing happiness. Even if Harry did not want children, which struck them both as entirely unlikely, the fact that he probably could have them was … well. It was a lot to chew on.

Very aware of Sherlock's momentary docility, Mycroft seized his chance and rolled them over, rising over his brother and allowing his more dominant nature out in response to Sherlock's need. Sharing kisses and thoughts and caresses with equal interest, the two men wrapped their bodies and their bond around each other with rising passion and sending long, teasing, loving tendrils of lust through the bond to wrap around their absent little lover. Multitasking as only a Holmes can do, they caressed and plotted, licked and planned, and murmured breathtaking options and breathless moans into each other's lips and skin.

'We'll see,' one of them whispered, and the other murmured in agreement. 'We have time.' And then, using that time well, there were no more words.

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Chapter End Notes

A/N2: RANT (generated from a couple reviews on FFN and being targeted by a group of holier-than-thou censorship Nazis): No, I will not stop having Sherlock & Mycroft think of or refer to Harry as "their littlest love" and other such phrases. In this story, Harry is the single most powerful wizard EVER, and has all of the wealth, clout, power and prestige to rule the world. He also has proven repeatedly that he can and will kill without remorse. He couldn't be emasculated with a scythe, much less by an
affectionate phrase. The endearment "littlest love" is used by two men who stand a foot taller than he is and are powerful, brilliant males, who know all of the truths about Harry – and his awful background - and are determined to protect, cosset, romance, and cherish him. I understand that there are people who dislike such things, who want nothing to do with any hint of possessiveness or dominance in a relationship, and I respectfully advise you not to read my work. I will probably always include elements of what some may see as overprotectiveness, dominance, presumptiveness, etc., because I like that element. Frankly, as an intelligent, successful career woman, mother, wife and pagan, I completely understand your knee-jerk reaction against such traits, but I have no problem admitting that I would adore it if one or two Holmes men (or various Slytherins, vampires, two of the Weasleys, Veela, etc) would sweep me away without asking first and demand the right to coddle, cosset and comfort me. Twist my arm, PLEASE!

So, respectfully, to those very few who are insistent that I change this story, "Schooled", "Did You Know", etc., and write a politically-correct romance, PLEASE just move on to the next author, and let me and the other readers enjoy ourselves, 'kay? You insult your own intelligence by reading a story and then writing to the author to have the story changed to suit your sensibilities. You have confused the immediacy of the internet format and the ability to interact with the author as actual power. I ask you this: how often have you written to the author of a published paperback and demanded the plot and characters be changed to suit you?

One more thing. For the record, no, I'm not incestuous (really? Flamers are too stupid to procreate, dont you think?) Do I actually have to remind anyone that, apart from my uncontrollable devil's-advocatism, I am writing fiction? Fantasy fanfiction, no less? For the record, I am also not a wizard (well, apart from my joy of writing and my ability to piss people off), nor male, nor gay, nor fictional. (But, if I had a handy plot-device-potion, bet your ass I'd be living in slash-fanfictionland and jumping into the role of Mr. Potter in every damn one of my stories and most of yours!) Let me be clear: incest is bad -- probably. I read a lot of studies when I started this fic, and frankly, it takes a lot more inbreeding than I thought to get fish-people offspring. (It explains Umbridge though -- well, unless there is a magical toad creature I missed.) The point is, I am not a yellow-hammer, even though I grew up near Wilmington IL (which is actually a nice enough town). I am also not anti-Christian or anti-religion; I am just opposed to the refusal to think thoroughly and well. I'm not even anti-hypocrites; some of my best personal traits are hypocritical. BUT I have thought about them carefully and know why I've made my choices.

Thus ends my verbal fuming for the day. As always, special thanks to all of you for reading and reviewing & to Rowan Valadosa (hugs!) for the idea of a doorway from Mycroft's office to Baker Street.

Blessed Be, y'all!

WyrdSmith
When Life Gives You Lemons

Chapter Summary

Just what it sounds like. Very lemony!

Chapter Notes

A/N: Here it comes! This one is dedicated to Hortensia, who I would hire as a researcher/archivist if I were still a career woman.

This story addresses Harry's overwhelming sense of responsibility and the way his lovers ease that for him. Many fics touch on this, one of the best being "Again and Again" by Athey (also spelled 'Athy' on AO3). I thought I'd mention this because another author, Charlie Chaos, just caught some flack for using the concept of a mass life-debt in one of her stories; the issue being that some readers felt it was my idea only. Please know that I enjoy both authors and feel that there are only so many original ideas, and what makes a good story is our ability to tell a new tale using those concepts. Plagiarism is when someone uses one person's work and claims it as their own.

Oh, and one more thing. It’s a lemon and then some, folks. Blessed Yule! Enough said. Blessed Be & Happy Reading!

WyrdSmith

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CHAPTER 12: WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS...

Sherlock leaned against the kitchen counter, daringly situated within Harry's territory, waiting with uncharacteristic patience for his younger love to finish his self-appointed task so that they could head out to meet LeStrade and team at what the DI swore was a baffling case.

In the past, nothing would have kept the Consulting Detective from the case, despite his natural pessimism that he would find the same degree of bafflement that seemed to so regularly strike LeStrade and Dimmock and … well, pretty much everyone except for Mycroft, Harry and himself.

Although he did feel some eagerness for more brain food, Sherlock had recently realized that long sojourns between cases did not torture him as they used to. ‘The Work’ was still important; it was just not all-important. That designation was reserved for Harry and Mycroft.

It was Harry’s intention to knock on Mrs. Hudson’s door on the way out to the airport and deliver to the motherly woman a fully cooked and beautifully prepared meal. They had heard the poor woman sneezing and coughing as she came in from gathering the newspaper this morning, and
Harry had promptly set about making a homemade get-well basket for her.

While watching Harry prepare the meal, Sherlock snatched up a crisp slice of green pepper, munching thoughtfully before offering a bemused, “Isn’t a traditional gift for an ill person supposed to be a pot of soup? Specifically, chicken?”

Snapping the heavy plastic lid closed over the steaming, spicy taco meat, Harry gathered the other containers of tortillas, lettuce, chopped tomatoes, onions and shredded cheese. Efficiently stacking them together in a white wicker picnic basket, he turned and scoffed at Sherlock as he beckoned his tall companion to follow him out the door.

“Anyone can do chicken soup, which will do nothing much to make you feel better. Just one of my tacos will open Mrs. Hudson’s sinuses and actually help the poor woman! Besides, what about me has ever given you the idea that I am a traditionally-minded person, Dear Heart? What gave me away: the being an all-powerful wizard bit, or the part where I’m in a homosexual relationship with two brothers?”

Smirking at Harry’s audacious wink, Sherlock admired the view as the smaller man walked ahead of him and dryly commented, “Actually, I think it was the purple dragonhide trousers you’re wearing.”

He was startled into laughter as said trousers showcased a flirtatious shimmy before Harry disappeared into the hallway. Quickly closing the door and sealing it with an efficient press of his hand against the WWW security panel, Sherlock hastened after his little lover, drawling in amusement, “Why is it you only get so daring when we are on our way out?”

Emerald eyes sparkled up at him as the two men headed down the stairs. “Because it took too much effort to get these blasted trousers on. If I teased when we were still in the flat, it would have been a wasted effort!”

Pausing in front of Mrs. Hudson’s flat, Sherlock knocked on the door and then leaned down and breathed into a small, damn near perfect ear, “Now that is purest truth, little tempter. I will be sure to demonstrate how quickly I can reverse that effort when we return, hmm?”

Harry shivered at the warm breath in his ear and the image that flooded his mind. Just as they heard footsteps approach the door, Sherlock murmured devilishly, “Of course, that does not mean I won’t be seizing every opportunity throughout the day to explore the tactile properties of dragonhide trousers on your delectable bits.”

The woman who opened the door was confronted with the sight of a very flushed Harry Potter and smug-looking Sherlock Holmes, both somewhat hidden behind an enormous picnic basket. It took Harry a moment to register that the shocked woman was not, in fact, Mrs. Hudson. The three stared at each other for several seconds before the woman stuttered, “Harry!??”

Blinking in surprise as Sherlock tapped his gaping jaw, Harry snapped his mouth shut and then grinned slowly as recognition dawned. “Hello, Mrs. Figg. What’s new with you?”

Sherlock would later replay the next moments in a pensieve, trying to figure out how such an incredibly normal-looking female could move so quickly. It seemed to take barely a second before the thirtiesh woman had seized the basket from Harry and shoved it into Sherlock’s arms, then seized Harry in a nearly-desperate hug and rocked him, muttering tearfully, “Oh, Harry! Merlin, how can I possibly thank you? Are you all right? Are you well? Tell me the Dursleys are dead! If not, please let me help kill them! Thank you, thank you, thank you!”
Mrs. Hudson finally shuffled over to the open door, leaning tiredly against the door jamb as she observed the rare visual treat of a shocked and speechless Sherlock. Deciding to rescue the sweet young tenant who stood rigidly in her cousin’s grip, she sniffled pointedly and said in congested tones, “Bella, let the poor boy go. Come in, come in, clearly there’s a bit of storytelling to be done.”

Nodding dumbly (a fact which he would deny emphatically should anyone ever by stupid enough to point it out), Sherlock followed his landlady and her guest, who was manhandling his little lover past an oddly-intelligent-looking cat into the flat, and took out his phone.

Small delay. And this one actually is baffling. SH

He ignored LeStrade’s immediate texted reply, already knowing that the man would be going ballistic about another example of Sherlock’s seeming arrogance – ‘Really, is it arrogance if one actually is better than everyone else?’ – he mused – and turned his attention to the situation at hand. It was far too interesting to leave right now; the Case could wait half an hour.

But that did not mean he wasn’t going to remove the strange woman’s hands from his lover’s person immediately!

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…Add a spoonful of sugar…

Half an hour later, Sherlock ushered Harry into a cab, curtly issued the destination to the interested driver, and pulled his distressed little wizard into his arms. Harry just huddled against the older man, turning his face into Sherlock’s expensive mackintosh and breathing in the comforting, familiar scent.

Dropping his chin to rest on top of the endearingly messy, black hair, Sherlock ran a soothing hand up and down his little love’s slim back and considered everything. With his arms full and unwilling to free one in order to text, he chose to nudge the bond with Mycroft. His brother must have already sensed Sherlock’s disquiet, as he immediately opened the bond fully. Rather than explain, Sherlock simply released the memories of the past thirty minutes for Mycroft to review, and spent the time quietly comforting the slim body shivering in his arms.

Poor Harry. He had not known that his older lovers were aware of his ‘lost years’ in Surrey, with the despicable Dursleys. He had never intended for them to know about it. To suddenly be confronted with Arabella Figg, the only person to have ever been kind to him as a child, had shocked him to the core.

Honestly, Sherlock had been rather shocked, as well. Neither he nor Mycroft had any knowledge of the fact that Mrs. Hudson was a squib, nor that her maiden name was Figg. Somehow, that little nugget had slipped through Mycroft’s net, and Sherlock could feel his brother’s steaming anger at the omission.

Given the increasing frequency and urgency of LeStrade’s texts, Sherlock had been forced to cut the visit short, and he had not even considered leaving Harry there. Even without the charms and the light bond he shared with Harry, it would have taken considerably less than Sherlock’s normal degree of observation to know that the young man was overwhelmed and bordering on tears. To be suddenly faced with such a solid reminder of an unbearable childhood, particularly when it came as out of the blue as this one had, would knock anyone off-kilter.

Sherlock felt the cab suddenly change direction, away from the destination he had given the driver.
Looking up sharply, he warily met the eyes of the driver in the mirror just as his cell dinged discreetly. Reluctantly shifting, he retrieved his phone and glanced at the screen, relaxing slightly at Mycroft’s reassuring strength coming through the bond as he read: **Redirected cab to my flat. Muzzled LeStrade. Meet you there. MH**

Nodding briefly at the driver, who dropped his eyes and focused on the busy traffic, Sherlock marveled at the reach of his brother’s influence and once again pulled Harry close.

Harry heaved a deep sigh, which Sherlock felt more than heard, and said quietly, “She looks really good. I’m glad the Youth Restorative Potion worked. Snape is an amazing brewer, the prick. I assume you and Mycroft know Arabella was a victim of Dumbledore?”

Nodding against the rumpled hair, Sherlock murmured, “Yes. She is a ‘Muggleborn’. During her eleventh-birthday orientation visit, Dumbledore stole her magic, and three others that you know of, and left her nearly a squib and tied to him in a near-slave bond. She was your neighbor and was kind to you, despite her orders to the contrary. And when you activated the Life Bond Penalty, one of the many inspired actions you took was to return the magic to those four people, along with their youth. I was unaware that she and Mrs. Hudson were related, however.”

He felt Harry’s smile on the sensitive skin of his throat. “Succinct, as always, Dear Heart.”

They sat in silence for several more kilometers, before Harry hesitantly asked, “What else do you know, ‘Lock? About Surrey, I mean?” The poor young man could not even make himself say the name ‘Dursley’, and the strain in his voice was heartbreaking,

Tightening his hold on the deceptively fragile form in his arms, Sherlock sighed and then said deeply, “Quite a lot, Little One. Let’s wait to discuss this a bit; we’re on our way to Mycroft’s flat. He’ll meet us there and we can talk together.”

Harry’s apprehension was evident in the tension of his back and shoulders and the tense silence he fell into. Dropping a gentle kiss into the raven tresses, Sherlock sent one, clear message through his bond with Mycroft, which was returned with firm agreement.

No matter what else came out, Harry was never to know about the photos. Arabella Figg had done a courageous thing, an outrageously brave thing, in defying her so-called ‘master’ and gathering proof of the horrors he and the Dursleys inflicted on Harry. She deserved – and would get – tremendous rewards for her actions, her compassion and her intelligence, particularly in light of her own victimization.

The photos had served their purpose, and might be used again at some point, well away from every possibility of Harry ever finding out about them.

It was well past time for Harry to heal.

oooooooooooooo0000000000000000

**Squeeze Firmly**

Merlin, he was exhausted.

Mycroft had met them as soon as the lift door opened, his beautiful steel doors thrown wide to allow the man to stride forth protectively from his flat and gather them both into a strong, simply wonderful, embrace.

Sherlock had visibly relaxed, much of the tension flowing from his tense form as he allowed his
head to rest briefly on Mycroft’s shoulder. Sherlock was strong, confident, brilliant, gorgeous, all-around amazing.

Mycroft was … Mycroft.

Without ever intending to, Harry had dissolved into tears the second both of his beloved men were embracing him. It was as if a spring had been released and he had been given permission to stop fighting against everything that had pained him, tortured him, warped him. Finally, he had both a soft place to fall and a fortress to fall into. Sherlock and Mycroft. Mycroft and Sherlock. Love, safety, laughter, devotion, protection, companionship...

Home.

And it was that moment, that single revelation, that tunneled past the Vengeful Savior, dismissed the Boy Who Lived, and released Harry.


Of course, that epiphany caused much emotional purging. Tears and sobbing were involved. Also sore, reddened eyes and far too much snot. Frankly, it was disgusting.

But neither of the elegant, dignified, beautiful men who held him seemed to care. They should have. With anyone else, they definitely would have. But, it was Harry, and so they didn’t.

It was just that simple.

After the ‘Great Purge’, as Harry sardonically called it, he was hustled down the hallway, into the gape-worthy Master Bedroom, and straight into a steaming bubble bath in an enormous tub in a bathroom that could have been in Architectural Digest.

Actually, he was pretty sure it was, in fact. The January issue. Smirking tiredly at the fact that Mycroft had sneaked that past the public even while protecting his privacy and his beloved illusion of minor-government-ism, Harry raised a wrinkled hand and blew at the diminishing bubbles. It was time to get out.

But Merlin, he was exhausted.

He never even registered the deep, soft voices that chuckled lowly, or the strong arms that lifted him from the water and held him while gentle hands toweled him dry. He did have a vague sense of movement, which must have occurred when whichever Holmes was carrying him entered the bedroom. He reasoned that fact out sleepily because the sudden chill air of the bedroom after the superheated bathroom made him shiver and try to tunnel into the closest strong chest, earning a chuckle that vibrated against his cheek.

Then he was tucked into a massive bed with what had to be a magical mattress. Warm, familiar bodies settled on either side of him, and he moved instinctively into one while tugging the other closer. Again, soft, deep chuckles vibrated, this time against his chest and his back. Soft blankets were pulled over him, and Harry drifted off to sleep listening to the steady thud thud of the heart beneath his ear and the slow, calm breaths of the Brothers Holmes.

Perfect.

ooooooooooooooooooooo

Taste for Perfect Blend
Mycroft woke first.

He used to snap awake, fully alert and assessing a million details before his eyes even opened fully. That had begun to change when his relationship with Sherlock deepened into the comfort of sharing a bed. He had begun to awaken more deliberately, to push away that which was urgent for the world, for the country, for his career, and instead to take moments for the simple enjoyment of waking with the warm body of someone he loved next to him.

But this…. Ah, this was perfection.

Keeping his eyes closed, he savored the feel of the sleepy contentment coming through the bond with Sherlock. For once, his brilliant brother was not obsessing or deducing or plotting. He was resting.

Mycroft could feel Sherlock’s hand on his hip, and his own was on Sherlock’s. They crossed protectively over, and rested upon, the most precious person on the planet.

Cracking an eye open, Mycroft’s face lightened into a smile as he studied the deceptively petite young man currently cuddling between himself and Sherlock. Flushed cheeks, pink lips slightly parted in sleep, thick black lashes resting against creamy skin, and ebon-black hair every-which-way. With his head resting both on Sherlock’s arm and Mycroft’s chest, tiny little snores that sounded like purring, and sleep softening his features even further, Harry was nothing short of adorable.

Sensing gentle amusement flooding through the bond from an awakening Sherlock, Mycroft opened his eyes fully and met the sleepy, slate-blue gaze focused on him. No words were necessary. They never had been, for them. And since the bond fully bloomed, words were mostly superfluous.

Especially in moments like this, with the three of them wrapped nearly naked around each other in the gentle light of dawn as it filtered through the dove gray drapes across the room.

Studying each other, Sherlock and Mycroft reached a conclusion at the same moment. They were here, together, with Harry. Yesterday, the worst of their fears and worries had hit the light of day and been overcome. And they were still here, together, with Harry.

Nearly naked. Here, together, with Harry.

It was time.

Carefully lifting his arm with a gentle caress of Sherlock’s hip, Mycroft stretched and reached behind him to the nightstand, finding his cell phone with unerring ease. Moving it to where he could see the screen, he carefully selected Betsy’s number and began to type. Once complete, he moved the screen so Sherlock could read it. Sharp eyes scanned the message quickly and a confident nod was all Mycroft needed to hit Send.

Reaching back, he set the cell carefully back down on the nightstand, not bothering to clear the screen. The words remained visible for 15 seconds, before the screen blinked back to sleep mode.

**Betsy, for myself and my partners, I am gratefully accepting that offer you extended. We thank you. SH, HP & MH**

No reply was needed. Betsy – and Hermione, and possibly Anthea – would see to the details. Mycroft had other, much more immediate, concerns to handle.
And Make Lemonade!

Harry wasn’t sure when he transitioned from wonderfully asleep to wonderfully awake. All he knew was that he had been completely relaxed, warm, safe and comfortable, and now he was not-so-relaxed, but still warm and safe. ‘Comfortable’, however, was disappearing with a rising tension … and other things.

“Oh, God!” Green eyes flashed open, immediately focusing downward as his toes curled and fingers clenched in the silk sheets. Familiar chestnut curls trailed teasingly over the bare skin of his hips and thighs, and Harry just barely had time to visually confirm that Sherlock’s mouth was indeed hovering over Harry’s erection before Sherlock lowered his head. The return of the insanely-incredible sensation that woke him caused his eyes to roll back before he closed them with another gasping moan.

“Sh-She-Sherlock! Wha--?!” Unable to form words properly as Sherlock’s tongue went to work on his cock, Harry reached out wildly and grabbed for chestnut hair. Before he could seize Sherlock’s hair, his hands were taken into custody by Mycroft, who had been pressed against Harry’s side watching avidly.

“I think…not, Little One,” Mycroft chuckled. His tone was purest chocolate, dark and smooth and sinful. “Until we say so, let’s just keep this right … here.” He raised Harry’s arms deliberately and gently but firmly pressed his hands to the scrolled bars in the headboard. He met slightly alarmed emerald eyes evenly, but did nothing to ease Harry’s concerns except to caution, “Hold on. If you let go before we tell you, there will be consequences. Understand?”

Sherlock’s head did not stop bobbing as Mycroft issued his instructions, making it incredibly hard … er, difficult… for Harry to think clearly. Mycroft was issuing signals of pure control and just a touch of sensual threat, and Harry knew damn well that he should be protesting. He should. He really should.

Nodding compliantly was not what he had intended to do, but once it was issued it seemed fairly lame to take it back, so he tightened his grip on the headboard and tried to glare his own warning. He tried.

He really did.

Apparently it came across more as a confused pout, because Mycroft grinned down at him and apparently Sherlock was somehow managing to watch Harry even as he tormented him, because he chuckled. That sensation damn near broke Harry’s resolve to hold to the headboard, but something about the dark anticipation in Mycroft’s intense gaze made him tighten his grip instead.

The next twenty minutes or so made it very, very clear to Harry just why Mycroft-bloody-Holmes was so successful in, well, everything. The man was far too detail-oriented. He was also evil.

Now Harry knew why Mycroft had always held back so much during previous intimate moments. Always before, Mycroft had allowed Sherlock to gently lead Harry through new experiences. He had always been present, involved, participatory, but he never took the reins, so to speak. Harry knew for a fact that Sherlock had even thanked the man (in various, creative ways) for allowing Sherlock to do most of the guiding. Harry had just always assumed it was because Mycroft was so remarkably considerate of both his lovers. But now, he knew the truth.
When Mycroft Holmes took the leash off of his control and allowed himself free rein, he was downright dangerous. All of that powerful intellect and self-discipline was now concentrated entirely on Harry Potter. Specifically, on Harry’s undulating body, shivering skin, quivering muscles and dozens of erogenous zones. (Really, who else would figure out that nibbling the inside of Harry’s elbow would make him moan like that?) Mycroft’s entire, frightening intellect was focused on exploring and exploiting Harry’s body.

The fact that Harry was losing his mind was just a bonus.

And Sherlock! While Mycroft was occupied with mapping out, analyzing and conquering new territory, Sherlock was using his most irritating personal characteristic to devastating advantage. Nothing could get him distracted from his chosen occupation.

He was like a dog with a bone. A quivering, leaking, twitching bone.

Wanker.

At one point, Harry was left staring down at his men in helpless, erotic fear, watching with self-preserving detachment as both of his lovers’ tongues played with Harry’s cock and testicles, licking, lapping, nipping, suckling, teabagging like only a true Brit could, then sliding apart to pursue their own interests before closing in on one area – and each other – for endless moments of pure, erotic torture. Every time Harry’s breath changed or his sac tightened, he was either distracted by a wayward brother, temporarily ignored in favor of nibbling his hipbone or his navel, or rudely pulled away from the edge of orgasm by an authoritative hand tugging his testicles down where the owner of the hand wanted them.

It was maddening! Nothing could be worse – or better – than what Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes were doing to him. He couldn’t think of any possible way they could make this situation more intense than it was.

And then, they turned him over.

His first clue was when Sherlock finally took his incredibly talented mouth off of Harry’s pleading cock. Well, not really pleading. More like weeping. Copiously.

Then Mycroft took one of Harry’s hands and gently but firmly unclenched it from the headboard, and Sherlock did the same with the other. This was enough to make Harry blink and begin to refocus, but just as his eyebrows drew together and he opened his mouth to berate them … probably … Mycroft descended. And there was fierce kissing, and Harry found that he could express his indignation fairly well in this manner. He thought he was making his case, anyway. He was battling back against Mycroft’s all-too-knowing mouth. His tongue fought for dominance. He was holding his own. He felt reasonably triumphant.

Until Mycroft chuckled, the sound dark and sensual.

And threatening.

And sexy.

Harry had just enough time to figure out how much he had been played, meeting Sherlock’s intense, teasing stare with trepidation, before he was lifted, turned and laid back down on the bed. Each brother took a hand and reintroduced it to the headboard, which was probably already bearing the imprint of Harry’s grip. Then, in perfect synchronization, Mycroft and Sherlock kept one hand locked around one of Harry’s and ran the other down Harry’s shoulder, over his slender back,
skating delicately over each rounded buttock before tightening their grip just enough to separate
Harry’s cheeks and reveal to their intense stares his pink, twitching center.

They were working the bond. ‘Oh, God!’ As if they heard his somewhat terrified, aroused
exclamation, they chuckled again, and left his hands to cling to the headboard of their own accord.
They seemed quite certain he wouldn’t be letting go for a while.

Actually, so was he.

And then it began again. Mycroft started at Harry’s neck, and Sherlock started at Harry’s toes. Not
a centimeter went unexplored. Every twitch and quiver, moan and gasp was recorded, documented,
analyzed, and numerous experiments were repeated to ensure the results could be replicated.

Fucking geniuses!

Harry couldn’t decide whether to bury his face in the pillow to stifle his moans and whimpers, or to
turn his head to the side to gasp for air. It didn’t matter, really, because everything he did was
noted by the dangerous intellect and libidinous attention of the Holmes men.

They met in the middle. Holy….fucking….hell!

Just as they once again separated his cheeks, Harry felt a cold, smooth stone pressed against his
anus and suddenly a wash of magic – literally – left him feeling empty and quite alarmed. Raising
his head, he almost unclenched his hands as he squealed …. erm, shouted…”What the hell?!”

Their response was another darkly amused chuckle from Mycroft, followed by Sherlock’s smooth
baritone asking, “Do we owe thanks for that nifty little charm to Ronald or to Hermione?”

Horrified, Harry’s head whipped wildly from side to side as he tried to look at them without
releasing his grip and pleaded, “Ron! Please, oh, please, don’t let it be Hermione!! …. 
Mycroft??…Please?”

He did manage to turn his head enough to see Sherlock drop his chin to his chest and laugh, but the
scowl he wanted to form was lost when he slammed his face back into the pillow at the sight of
Mycroft’s head descending to Harry’s rear, blue-slate eyes intent and curious.

After that, all of Harry’s verbal utterances were pretty much whimpers, gasps and whines. He
couldn’t even swear, although he really did try.

He had assumed that Sherlock was the one with the oral fixation and abilities, and Mycroft was the
control freak. He was right. And wrong. And right.

“Oh, god!” Poor Harry couldn’t hold a thought; his brain was like a sieve, sloshing from side to
side with every devilish swipe of Mycroft’s tongue. It was torture. It was incredible! It was
unbearable!

And then, he let go of the headboard. And everything stopped.

The silence and sudden cessation of torment was enough to wake him to the danger. His hands
were clenched in his own hair, they hadn’t really moved far, and they were still holding on to
something, just not the headboard and… Wait, why was he mentally babbling? He had a right to
pull his own hair if he wanted to! Turning his head to glare back at his torturers… um, lovers … he
had an abrupt change of heart. The look on Mycroft’s face was distinctly predatory. And Sherlock
looked like Christmas had come early, and Santa had left him viscera.
Mentally backpedalling, Harry tried for a grin and offered weakly, “See, now, suddenly I have a reason to thank Ron for the charm, too! Heh! Heh!”

The joke, such as it was, fell flat. Well, not really; both men grinned back at him, but in a wicked, ‘where’s the cockring’ kind of way. Sherlock was running one finger very lightly down Harry’s sensitive spine, and Mycroft … was reaching into his nightstand drawer. Harry’s eyes grew wide when Mycroft drew his hand back and clasped in it … was a wand. An actual, ‘you’re a wizard, Harry’, off to Diagon Alley wand!

Maybe.

Sherlock’s hand had finished its journey down Harry’s spine and was now settled ominously on the right side of Harry’s pert butt. His other hand followed, to rest on the left side. His expression was anticipatory.

Mycroft leaned down and gently kissed Harry’s lips before straightening and watching him intently. “Harry, our little Innocent, did you ever consider the economics of Ollivander’s wand shop?”

Blinking at the odd segue, Harry’s dark brows drew together in a confused expression, before he hesitantly shook his head. He didn’t really have enough spit left to try to speak.

Mycroft smiled, elegant fingers tracing the slim, almost metallic wand in his hand. Held like that, it was distinctly phallic. Suddenly, Harry got the punch line to a lot of jokes that had pretty much gone over his head during his years in the dorm.

Sherlock began to knead Harry’s buttocks, slowly reawakening the burning desire that had been banked somewhat. He placed a gentle kiss on Harry’s hip, then nipped sharply and suckled, drawing the blood to the skin for a moment before drawing back to study the love bite in satisfaction. Tracing his new mark on their little tempter, he drawled, “12 galleons a wand. Perhaps forty new wands a year. Not much of an income, considering everything, don’t you agree?”

Completely confused at the topic, but willing to go along with anything that did not involve reminding anyone present that he had disobeyed Mycroft’s command, Harry thought about it briefly and then nodded. Clearing his throat to speak, he stopped abruptly at Mycroft’s admonishing finger on his lips. Scowling, he glared up at his lover, who smiled down lovingly at him.

“Harry, my love, we three know full well how powerful and intelligent you are. No sane person would contest that fact. But here and now, in this bed, you do not have control. You have no worries, no obligations, no responsibilities. You have us for all of that.” He leaned down to meet a bewildered, emerald stare, carding his hand tenderly through Harry’s hair. “Do you understand, love? Here, with Sherlock and me, all you have to do is let us love you.”

He and Sherlock watched as that idea slowly sank into their littlest love’s psyche, and knew the exact moment that he accepted their offer. They could practically feel the incredible weight of his responsibilities lift from his slender shoulders and valiant spirit. They had known from his second day of residency on Baker Street that this would be an unimaginable gift they could give their beloved, overburdened wizard. That their offer would also suit them both perfectly made this just that much more ideal than their relationship already was. This young man had literally born the weight of the world from his eighteenth month of life, and had never once been truly safe and free. But here, with them, they took his control but left him choice. They set him free but gave him something to hold onto. They took the decisions and worry, but gave him clear rules and consequences.
Speaking of consequences…

“Now, back to our lesson,” Mycroft smiled down into Harry’s face, watching as curiosity and trepidation crossed it openly. It was telling that Harry still did not speak. It was a clear acceptance of their offer. He could not be more suited to them if he had been crafted by the gods for them alone. Perhaps he had.

“Wandmakers specialize not in crafting only wizarding wands, but in designing and crafting focuses, tools, wands and weapons ideally suited to a magical being. For every wand, there is a plethora of other items you can purchase from your wandmaker. So long as they know what materials are in your wand, they also know with what materials to craft, say, a sword… or a shield ring….” he paused briefly to smile into fascinated green eyes, his smile widening as he sensed Sherlock leaning over to get a better view of Harry’s face for the next bit, “…or a sex toy.”

He raised the slender wand to tap it lightly against his lips, sternly controlling his urge to laugh as Harry’s wide eyes fixed on the wand and he visibly gulped. Sherlock didn’t bother; his laugh rang out in wicked, joyful amusement at their little Innocent’s expense.

Rather than give Harry time to get anxious or to second-guess himself, Mycroft pressed another gentle but firm kiss onto his lips, tapping admonishingly on the teeth that worried at the lush lower lip. He then straightened, as did Sherlock, and dropped the tip of the cool wand gently onto Harry’s spine, following Sherlock’s hand as it ran a long, caressing line down the slim back. As Sherlock once again began to knead Harry’s buttocks, Mycroft allowed the wand to gently settle into the delicate crevice he had been tormenting with his tongue earlier.

Sherlock purred the sensual warning, “Put your hands back on the headboard, Love. You’re going to need it.” He waited just long enough for Harry to draw a deep breath and grip the headboard again, then gently parted Harry’s cheeks, exposing the tempting rosebud to their view. Without a moment’s hesitation, Mycroft tapped the wand with his finger, activating its core, and swiftly inserted it into the twitching hole.

Harry’s entire body reacted. His hands tightened, his toes curled, his hips thrust forward into the mattress, and he uttered a long, low, gasping moan that practically ignited their need for him. Even now, in the midst of the event that they had yearned for and planned and fantasized for months, they could not help but analyze the information.

They knew what the wand did. It was named a Wanton Wand (just called ‘Wanton’ more commonly) for an exceptionally good reason. It was not sentient, but it knew its purpose and could modify its functions according to the needs of the participants. Its specific purpose was threefold: lubrication, perfect stretching of anus and rectum, and enhance sexual pleasure. They understood that the Wanton would, to some degree, follow their needs and wishes. For example, it knew precisely how much Harry’s passage needed to be stretched to suit both Mycroft and Sherlock’s size (or, God, Merlin and Harry-forbid, both together). It also could interpret their wishes, to a certain extent.

Mycroft knew for a fact that the terrible twins had lost a bet with Anthea regarding that particular aspect. As a reward to his devoted P.A., he had allowed Ollivander to provide enough information for the twins to learn that both Mycroft and Sherlock were significantly larger than either of the redheads. Anthea had smirked for days, having won the bet and forced the twins to pay for an Ollivander-special for her and William. It probably did not help their mood that young Neville was still enforcing the chastity-belt punishment. (Although, that fact improved the Holmes brothers’ moods every time they thought of it.)

At the moment, it seemed to be quite cognizant of the fact that they wanted it to delicately tease
their little tempter’s prostate, but not to the extent that he orgasmed. Frankly, it was fascinating and definitely merited further study. ‘Poor Harry,’ he heard Sherlock purr mockingly over the bond.

He felt Sherlock’s surprise when he replied back through the bond, ‘Indeed! How useful. It seems our bond is enhanced to verbal communication not just at stress triggers, but also sexual. When we activated it to a verbal level when Harry was composing, we could speak with ease for several hours afterward. I wonder…,’ he trailed off considerably, his brilliant mind actively calculating even as he savored the delicious moans of their beloved little wizard.

Sherlock snorted in amusement, for once understanding why other people were irked by his ability to multitask in any situation. If he were not of similar mentality, he might be offended that Mycroft could speak coherently and make complex plans and calculations even during an intensely personal, sexual moment such as this. Fortunately, he was a Holmes, and thus could not help but add over the bond, ‘Perhaps, if we space out sex with Harry to correct intervals, we can keep the full bond active all the time.’ Not to mention, the ‘work’ required would be of the most enjoyable variety imaginable.

This Wanton would, theoretically (as they were bonded to Harry and each other) work on them, too. Certainly, they would find out – eventually. For now, it was just too much fun to torment Harry.

Not once during their mental meandering did either man lose focus on their little lover, except to share frequent, deep, plundering kisses with each other. They ran teasing, comforting hands over Harry’s sensitized skin as he writhed and moaned, they murmured praise and approval as he kept his hands fastened to the headboard, they dropped kisses and touches everywhere.

In short, they worshipped him.

Finally, Mycroft removed the Wanton from Harry’s quivering body. Exchanging a brief glance to ensure their logistical plans remained unchanged, Sherlock immediately stretched out on the bed, gently tugging Harry’s hands free of their grip, and he and Mycroft maneuvered Harry til he was stretched out atop Sherlock’s naked form. Still somewhat dazed and badly wanting to cum, Harry did little more that shudder at the skin-to-skin contact and grip the strong biceps of his lover, but Sherlock moaned so desperately and passionately that it went straight to Mycroft’s already engorged cock. That moan, and the sight of his two lovers naked and glowing and snugged together so perfectly, ended any further hope of foreplay.

Harry managed to focus enough to understand the situation and that it meant he was not only going to complete his bond with Mycroft but also that he would finally be able to cum. That knowledge motivated him enough to begin trying for his own bit of payback, dropping his lips to Sherlock’s chest and beginning to kiss, lick and nibble what seemed an endless expanse of ivory skin. He was delighted at the ragged gasp he elicited when he suckled one of the puckered nipples below him.

Sherlock retaliated by positioning his knees between Harry’s and then raising his legs, separating them so that Harry was fully exposed and positioned for Mycroft. He felt Harry gasp and shudder, and looked over his love’s shoulder to see that Mycroft – ever-considerate and careful of his loved ones – had just tested Harry’s readiness with his long fingers.

Sherlock was transfixed at the sight of his brother rising above Harry and himself like a feral warrior, powerful muscles no longer hidden by expensive suits and all civilization stripped away, fully aroused and poised at the pink entrance to their needy and moaning little love. Mycroft suddenly raised his gaze, blue-gray locking with gray-blue, and held Sherlock’s stare as his rigid cock sank effortlessly into Harry’s passage. Shock and ecstasy exploded through the bond, flaring
between all three of them and causing mirror-synapses to fire in frantic bursts, reflecting and refracting in overwhelming sensation.

Magic roared.

Even as Mycroft was reeling from the incredible feel of Harry’s tight heat gripping his cock, Sherlock was feeling it, too. Mycroft was trying to resolve the perceptual conflict of entering his littlest love and also feeling himself cradle Harry, engorged cock sandwiched between his and Harry’s stomachs, as he watched himself through Sherlock’s eyes. Sherlock was experiencing similar multiplicities. They, at least, were somewhat familiar with the feel of the bond. Harry was completely overwhelmed, feeling himself fucking, being fucked and frotting, all at the same time with no warning at all.

When Harry’s perceptions also flared through the bond, causing both Sherlock and Mycroft to feel what Harry felt as Mycroft entered him for the very first time, it forced them all to pause for one single, crystalline moment. In that instant, something seemed to snap into place, the feeling both exquisite and agonizing. And then, finally, a full, functional, tribond blazed into life.

Of the three men on the bed, each was brilliant. Each was powerful. And each had been fiercely independent. Loners, all of them. Until now.

The power of the bond faded slightly, and the power of the bonding blazed again. Drawing his hips back with a nearly-inaudible hiss, Mycroft accepted the mental and emotional adjustment needed to feel what all three of them were feeling, and then found the part of the bond that was his self-perception. It glowed brighter to him. Relieved at the restoration of his separate identity, even as it bonded with his partners, he called their attention through the bond and showed them what he had discovered. It was obvious to all of them when Sherlock and Harry also found their own individuality; the relief was tangible.

Yes, they were happy to be bonded. Melded? Not so much.

Amused at the thought that only three, multitasking geniuses could go through an incredible experience of soul magic, experience both loss and restoration of self, and still keep an erection, Mycroft again caught Sherlock’s gaze …and smirked. That was all the warning Sherlock got before Mycroft snapped his hips forward and thrust back into Harry, winning startled shouts from both his lovers before they, too, returned fully to the moment.

And, oh, God, it was glorious!

Each man was convinced they were the luckiest of the three. Mycroft, because he was finally burying his cock into the arse that had tormented both he and Sherlock for months, and was able to watch as his brother surrendered to the pleasure of holding naked Harry during the ultimate frottage experience. Sherlock, because he had the voyeuristic bliss of watching Mycroft take Harry, watching Harry be taken, and enjoying the mind-gasm that was three-way mental sex with his most important people. Harry, because he had never experienced or even imagined such intense pleasure, and because he was safely sandwiched between the only two people in the world that he could envision sharing his body and soul with.

When the brothers finally allowed Harry to orgasm, he took them with him. Yes, the bond would have ensured that, but even without the bond, the spasming of Harry’s passage around Mycroft would have guaranteed orgasm for him, while the flood of semen and uncontrolled thrusting against his cock made Sherlock’s orgasm a certainty. If that hadn’t done it, the pleasured awe on Harry’s beautiful face would have. Nevertheless, the fully-alive bond ensured that each man felt what the other felt. It was like having three different orgasms at the same time, layered one atop
the other. In a word, it was intense.

For several minutes afterward, the only sounds in the room were frantic gasping and long, shuddering breaths. Finally, their bodies had recovered enough for Mycroft to carefully separate from Harry, pulling himself gently from the smaller man and cradling him in trembling arms as he lowered himself to lay at Sherlock’s side, nestling the exhausted wizard between them.

Sherlock turned with them, dropping a heavy arm across Harry’s stomach and resting his hand on Mycroft’s hip. He could feel his muscles shaking, and knew without any doubt that if he tried to get up to get a warm cloth to care for his lovers, he would end up crawling to the bathroom and back. He would make it, because he would not allow any less, but there would definitely be little dignity in the act. Given those factors, he decided to wait.

Mycroft was of the same mind, and for once was unprepared to care for his lovers as he deemed proper. He knew he should be more concerned about that, but his mind was still shaking from the incredible upheaval. He, too, decided in favor of caution.

Harry, snuggled between them, covered in the fluids of all three of them and exhausted to the point of near-stupidity, couldn’t have cared less. Wandless magic was out of the question at the moment, given that he’d just as likely blow them all up. If he had his wand handy, he might have managed a little post-coital courtesy, but considering what he now knew about wands, maybe not.

Eventually, Harry uttered a trembling sigh and said in a voice that shook, “Holy fucking hell!”

Mycroft raised a heavy, slightly uncoordinated hand and patted him gently on the chest. “Or holy fucking heaven. One cannot be sure.”

Moments passed before a sleepy Sherlock offered the final comment of the night, “Either way, it was definitely a religious experience.”

Mycroft made a mental note to smirk at that in the morning, and joined his bonded lovers in sleep. It wouldn’t be for another 24 hours that any of them remembered to contact LeStrade about the case at the airport. Even more notable was the fact that none of them particularly cared.

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Chapter End Notes

AN2: Two FYIs: (1) Although I know this takes place in England, you know I’m an American. There probably are BritsSpeak gongs going off all over the place, and I’ll try to correct them when they are pointed out. However, for the most part, let’s just pretend that language has progressed a century and is now a complete amalgamation of Britican, okay? (I considered using ‘Amerish’, but it sort of made me want to take up barn raising and quilting, so I changed it.) (2) This story is only MPreg incidentally, through Neville and the subsequent revelation for Mycroft and Sherlock that Harry could get pregnant – conceivably. (Hahahaha!!) I hope to have a sequel later on that features the formation of the next Potter-Holmes generation.

Blessed Be, y’all.

WyrdSmith
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