The third, and final, installment of the Ages of Man series finds Mycroft and Greg navigating the waters of their relationship as Mycroft manages college/work and Greg moves from being a schoolboy to a policeman. What sounds simple and placid is, of course, nothing of the sort, due to the small goblin population of the area, whose names are Sherlock and John, as well as the standard joys, turmoil, passions and pitfalls of being in love...
Chapter 1

“I cannot promise that I will never again cause you pain. Nor can I promise that I will not give you cause for distrust…”

Mycroft dug in his pocket and curled his hand around the one anchor he had to help him make to the end of this in one piece and gripped it fiercely.

“With another you could have a safer life, an easier one… a life where you knew each day what the next might bring and know that the joys and troubles you face would always be with your partner at your side…”

Unmindful of what truly disgusting matter he might encounter, Mycroft got down on one knee and held out Gregory’s pendant in his hand.

“… but that partner could not love you as deeply as do I. You would not be the other half of their soul and the reason their heart beat each day. I can never offer you a perfect life, my beloved, because I am not a perfect man. Far from it, in fact, but I can offer you a life where I try and I learn and I strive each day to be a better man than the day before. I can offer you my heart, my body, my devotion… I can offer you everything that I am and offer it gladly. You know my flaws, my beloved, you know them well and I ask you now, before those you call both friend and enemy if you can accept them and the love I offer. The love which has never wavered and which I treasure above all things on this Earth.”

Wiping his eyes, Mycroft stared directly into Lestrade’s widened gaze and smiled as hopefully as he could.

“Gregory Lestrade… will you marry me?”

Mycroft continued to watch Lestrade, trembling all the while his love drew in great heaving breaths and failed to notice anyone in the room but the man on his knees begging for… well, for everything of importance in his life. Slowly rising from his seat and gently removing the hands that were unsure if they were frantically pushing their friend towards his future or desperately trying to keep him from making the worst mistake of his life, Lestrade slowly walked forward and reached down to take the pendant from Mycroft’s hand, affixing it around his neck, then Mycroft’s hand itself, drawing the rest of him into a passionate kiss that scandalized half the onlookers and set the other half grinning, yelling cheers of congratulations. If the lunch period hadn’t finished, it was unlikely the spell would have broken until the final bell, but the audience reluctantly obeyed the call to their classrooms, leaving the couple to continue their embrace, which only ended after what seemed a millennium of time.

“Oh, Gregory. My dearest, dearest G… Gregory…”

“Shhhh, Mycroft. It’s alright. Don’t cry.”

Mycroft kissed his fiancé again, this time tenderly and sweetly, savoring the flavor of the man he loved with all his heart.

“You deserve my tears, Gregory. You deserve each for I have behaved so shamefully. But now… now, I shall prove that I am worthy of this great gift you have given me. I love you, my dear. My beloved, beloved husband…”
“And I love you, Mycroft. That’s never changed. But… you do realize I didn’t say yes, right?”

Lestrade smiled as Mycroft’s body went rigid as a bar of iron and counted the seconds until his partner was able to actually function well enough to say a word.

“But… you… of course you did!”

Taking as great care as he would dealing with someone suffering a terrible fright, Lestrade led Mycroft to a table and gently coaxed him to have a seat.

“No, I didn’t.”

“You did! You… you took your pendant and…”

“My pendant. The one I bought for myself.”

“I… no! That was not… well, yes, that is true, but that is not the important thing!”

Lestrade reached out and stroked Mycroft’s cheek, wiping away the tears that were leaving red streaks down his lover’s face.

“Maybe not, but it doesn’t mean I agreed to marry you.”

“You kissed me! In view of… scads of witnesses!”

“That I did. I kissed my boyfriend who did something that was brutally hard for him because he wanted me to know that he was serious about apologizing. I know how miserable that was for you, love. I know that was the worst possible thing for you to have to do, but you did it anyway. Maybe you did it because you knew what it would mean to me and thought it would get you what you wanted, but I suspect you also know what it would mean if I found out you did that for show and not because you were serious about it. I kissed you, Mycroft, because you did something brave and wonderful, not because I accepted your proposal.”

Now, it was Mycroft heaving large breaths and Lestrade ran his had up and down his partner’s back, talking soft nonsense to him until Mycroft calmed down enough to keep the conversation going.

“You… you will not marry me.”

“I didn’t say that, either.”

“You did! You said you did not agree to marry me!”

“I didn’t agree to this proposal, but… I’m not saying I won’t agree to any others. I can’t say yes right now, Mycroft. I love you, I truly do, but you have no idea how much pain I’ve been in. And there’s been a smaller ache for a couple of months now that’s been sitting in my chest, refusing to die. I can’t marry you with that inside of me, Mycroft. It wouldn’t… I just can’t.”

“What… what can I do? Anything, anything you ask Gregory, I will do. Anything you want or need will be yours. I cannot lose you, my dear. I know I have behaved atrociously and I do not deserve a man as good as you, but I will do everything in my power to help you lose the pain. I cannot bear the thought of your suffering, whether I am the cause or not, though I know I am wholly at fault here.”

“I know you will, Mycroft. I just… look, can we go somewhere else to talk? This is… I really need to get away from here.”
“Of course, my love. Come, the car is waiting and we may go wherever you wish.”

Mycroft hesitated only a moment taking Lestrade’s hand and walking him out of the cafeteria, ignoring the stares from classrooms and students in the corridor.

“Gregory… as I was incorrect in my assumptions…”

“I know. The word is going be all over the village that we’re engaged, and grandly at that, before school is even out for the day.”

“But… I…”

“What they think is what they think and they’ll do it anyway no matter what I say. They can have their story, but we know the truth and that’s all that really matters. We’ll have to talk to Sherlock and John, though. Mum and Grandmama, too. But, I don’t care about gossip right now. I really don’t.”

“Of course, my dear.”

Squeezing his lover’s hand, Mycroft knew Lestrade didn’t care about much at all for anything right now besides the talk they were facing. Not that he felt particularly ready for it, but that was completely inconsequential. Gregory would get his attention, his honesty, his love and whatever else was needed to help him heal this horrible wound and, perhaps someday, help to gain for him the forgiveness he so desperately needed to feel worthy of the man squeezing his hand in return.

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Nothing was said in the car after Lestrade directed the driver to take them to his mother’s house, where they moved to Lestrade’s vehicle and sent the driver back to the Holmes residence, prompting Mycroft to finally break the silence.

“You do not drive to school?”

“Sometimes. Money has been tight, though and petrol is expensive.”

Deciding not to comment, Mycroft took the passenger’s seat and experienced no small surprise when they drove to his house. However, his partner continued on beyond the house itself and followed the property road until they reached a place Mycroft remembered fondly.

“I thought we could sit here awhile if that’s ok with you.”

“Of course, my dear. It is a lovely choice.”

Lestrade sighed and got out of the car, looking at the large tree under which he and Mycroft had first gone beyond a simple kiss in a car, as well as had their first real talk about them as a couple. It was a good place and he really needed that bit of support right now. As well as the towel that was in the boot because Mycroft would certainly be more comfortable if he wasn’t sitting directly on the ground.

“Oh. Gregory… that is most considerate of you.”

“Trying to save your nice suit, though you’ve done your own bit to make your tailor angry.”

Putting the towel on the ground, Lestrade sat next to it and reached over to brush off Mycroft’s knee, which still bore traces of Mycroft’s grand proposal.
“Yes, well… I had hoped a tangible gesture would aid my cause.”

Mycroft took his prepared spot and felt the nearly-choking nervous energy begin to flow out of him as Lestrade reached over and began softly rubbing his neck.

“It did, love. I don’t know I would have listened to you any other way. I’d already promised myself I wouldn’t answer your calls or agree if you tried to get me to come here to your house. And Mum was ready to toss you into the street if you came knocking on our door. At least… at least until I could lose some of this… pain, anger, humiliation. You did exactly what I needed to be willing to hear you out.”

“And that is my greatest desire, Gregory. I would ask the chance to, not make my excuses, but offer explanation, pathetic and insufficient though it be. I wish, also, to hear your own thoughts. I want to know everything you have felt and thought, for it is your right that I know all of the wrong I have done you these weeks.”

“No, I really think you don’t. It’s been… it’s been struggle enough to try and keep it inside and not let the boys or Mum have a good look because… it’s not a pretty thing.”

“Nor should it be! But, please, Gregory… do not hide what you feel. I shall say this, though it may hurt my cause terribly, but… I believe, or choose to believe for I am a blackguard, that if you had released that blackness and let me see it that… that I would not be sitting here now terrified that I have lost the person I love more than my own life.”

Mycroft panicked when Lestrade removed his hand, but breathed easier when it was laid over his on the ground instead.

“I don’t see how you couldn’t have known something was wrong, Mycroft.”

“I did! I knew we were apart and you suffered my neglect, however… however, I believed it no different than the pain I suffered, which was tortuous, but… manageable, for lack of a better word.”

“That’s because you were getting it soothed with nights at fine restaurants and the theater!”

Lestrade cursed at his words and the sharpness of his voice because this was not how he had wanted this conversation to go.

“There… you have upset yourself, have you not?”

“Wh… what do you mean?”

“You laid an accusation that, to my disgrace, was proper and valid, but it upset you to say it aloud.”

“I… yeah, I suppose that’s true. I just didn’t want to be nasty or harsh about it because that won’t get us anywhere.”

“That was not, as you say, ‘nasty,’ Gregory. It was harsh, but I would expect nothing less. I did salve my own distress with entertainments that I pointedly denied you and you are perfectly justified being angry about it. You deserve to shout, to accuse, to roar and rage at my conduct. Do not hold it inside, Gregory… what I do not know, I cannot address, let alone work to change.”

Lestrade scowled, but nodded at Mycroft’s words.

“I suppose you have a point. I just don’t… I hate sounding like that. It’s not productive.”
Mycroft filed the comment away for later, but put a very large star on the file because this was not an issue he wanted to let die away. He would have done something if his lover had reacted differently to his slights. Frustrated resignation was something he felt every moment he was apart from his love, so receiving it back did not sound any alarms. True anger or hurt… those he would have set aside everything to fix. However, that was not the issue now. The issue of the moment was the slights he perpetrated and he would not, in any manner, allow the conversation to deviate from that path.

“Then let us do that. Let us be productive and begin, though, truly I do not know where to begin. Is there something you most wish to ask or know?”

“That’s easy. Why I wasn’t enough. Or good enough. That’s what I want to know.”

Rethinking! Productivity was a horrible thing and should be banned immediately! But, his beloved was baring his heart and he must honor that with bravery from his own.

“Then know that none of that is true, Gregory. You are far more than I have ever dreamed for my life and there is none who I hold in as great esteem.”

“I have a hard time believing that, Mycroft. I understood that you had to be away a lot, but you’ve not wanted me to visit at all or even talk on the phone. Then I find you’ve got loads of time available, but can’t be bothered to spare any of it for a simple call. I’ve had to sit here, trying to handle school, work, Sherlock and John… they’re hurt, too, and I’ve had to try and help with that as much as I can without making you look the villain. It’s been like that first time at Grandmama’s, only worse. It’s like you found the right nanny and then went off to live the life you actually wanted now that you don’t have to do all the things you had to do here before you met me.”

Mycroft felt his stomach clench at the words, but hiding from them was not an option, no matter how much he wished it was.

“The actions I cannot deny, but the intent I can. The only life I want is one with you, though I have done nothing to make you believe that, of late. I have not treated you well, Gregory, but it was not because my love for you has faded or I view you as a tool to facilitate my own wants. In truth, it is difficult for me to even express properly how deeply I both care for and respect you, though I know… I know I fall into the most insipid romantic twaddle when you are near.”

“Then what happened! I thought… I thought we were happy. That there would be the weekends in London now and then, regular phone calls so… so I could hear your voice and get the chance to share the events in our day so I didn’t feel so alone.”

Sighing sadly, Mycroft wished he had a better, more satisfying answer to give beyond his pathetic, yet honest one, but that was not to be the case.

“What happened was my failure to remember those things are necessary. I… you are a part of me, Gregory. A part that I feel always, like an arm or the beating of my heart. You are always there, in my mind and soul and… I forget that is not enough to hold together a relationship. I suppose it is not untrue to say I have taken you for granted, but that has not been purposeful. It is more a certainty in my mind that with you, our home is safe and well and our love endures. True, there have been issues of work that have taken my attention away from you, but not to a degree to produce the neglect you have suffered. I know, also, that our relationship has offered you no satisfaction, regardless of how I might feel or how profound is my love for you.”

“No, it hasn’t. I’ve tried not to be a bother because I do know you’re busy, but… I saw the newspaper, Mycroft. I saw the pictures and I read the story. I know you’re entitled to enjoy yourself, love. I know you’re entitled to have friends and find things to do, but…”
“Yes? Please, Gregory, go on.”

“I’ve always tried to make time for you. I have my friends and I have fun with them, but I always make time for you. And… that bloke in your dressing gown. He’s the one in that photo. I know you said you’ve been faithful, but… you don’t have to shag someone to be cheating with them.”

Mycroft slowly nodded and tried to envision the shock and pain his lover endured seeing such a sight. And, in one sense, he had been unfaithful, substituting a handy escort for the man who deserved to be on his arm, but that unfaithfulness had be in act only. Never in his heart and, certainly, never in his bed.

“Edmund is simply… I cannot even say he is a friend for that is not what I feel for him. Looking upon it, though, after seeing the evidence Grandmama presented me, the conclusion to be drawn from it can be none but that which you would most fear.”

“I feel bad involving her in this. It was dumb to go to her house and make a fuss. I was just so… I wasn’t thinking very well at the time.”

“You had every right and she, undoubtedly, is delighted that you felt safe to share with her your troubles, though you likely felt it was the last of her you would ever see.”

“I did, too. I didn’t think I’d see her or you ever again and that was alright, awful as it sounds. I was so dead and empty… but, it felt better than hurting, if that makes any sense. I had my answers… why you didn’t want me anymore, why you didn’t care… dead and empty is easier to take than constant, constant hurt.”

Mycroft had promised himself he wouldn’t lose control again of his emotions, but was finding that a losing battle. Only with Gregory did his emotions come surging to the fore and his love was absolutely worth every tear, though stung like acid trailing down his face.

“Never. I never stopped wanting you and I care… I care for you to the ends of the Earth.”

“Not enough to take me nice places, though, or even let me come to London, at all.”

“That I do not understand, my dear. There is no ‘let’ to be discussed. You are free to come to London at will.”

“Wrong. You’ve told me I couldn’t in no uncertain terms more than once!”

Sighing loudly and wiping his face, Mycroft wished more than anything he could turn back time and make all of this right. He had erred in so many ways, so many times…

“I know and I bemoan my irredeemably ineffective choice of words. I cannot prohibit you coming to London, Gregory. You are free to travel at will and the house… the house is yours! It is yours as much as it is mine by our names on the deed. It is to my discredit that I… I am arrogant and, though not precisely controlling, I do present poorly to you at times for such matters. I more hoped to impart that I had little time to devote to you and I would hate to see you go to such effort for little reward. However, in hindsight… I seem too often have more time than I believe. Not a bountiful quantity and, sometimes, not until I take to my bed, but it is a bed we could have shared, as well as breakfast in the morning. And you could have enjoyed your days, albeit without me, seeing the sights and enjoying what London offers. I would ask… and I am not, in any manner, attempting to lessen my culpability in any of this, but… you know I cannot order you to do or not do anything. Why did you not simply come?”
Lestrade began plucking blades of grass from the ground and tying them into knots to throw, a gesture Mycroft remembered well from the last time they sat in this spot.

“I don’t know. I wanted to be there. I even thought about exactly what you said… exploring the city during the day, maybe just having a late dinner or early breakfast with you, sleeping in your arms… I thought about it a lot.”

“But you didn’t come.”

“I suppose… I suppose I felt you if you didn’t want me there you didn’t want me there, if that makes any sense.”

“After the events of late, I am sad to say it does. I admit that it never occurred to me that my agreement was not necessary for your travel any more than it occurred to me the issue existed at all. In my way, I was trying to spare you the disappointment of a hoped-for weekend being one that you still spent, for all intents and purposes, alone and unentertained.”

“You’ve done a LOT of entertaining, Mycroft.”

“Yes, there is that.”

“How many times you told me not to come actually turned out to be a nice time with your new friends and that Edmund character?”

“More than I feel comfortable admitting. Not that it was planned in that manner, my dear. Never once did I forsake you specifically to spend time with others. I would have stated it clearly if that was the case as you do for me when you have a night with your friends. It was more… they were there when I ran across a free measure of time and we willing to help me fill it.”

“And you never noticed that I was never part of any of that?”

“Yes and no. I simply… it seems trite to say I never made the connection, but I did not. You lived in my heart and there you were, whether your body was with me or not. It was not until I saw, in one collected portfolio, the enormity of your neglect and how truly active I had been, despite my protestations to the contrary, that the pieces fell into place, forming a truly deplorable picture.”

“I have hard time believing that. I’m sorry, but I do.”

“And I do not fault you for it. I offer only in my defense that… what is common to you is not common to me.”

“What does that mean?”

Mycroft wished he could simply shrug and pretend idiocy, but that was the poorest possible disguise and disrespectful to Gregory in the extreme.

“How many friends do I have, Gregory?”

“How would I know? I’m never in London to meet them, let alone count them.”

“Very well, limit your answer to home. How many friends do I have?”

Lestrade winced because he was highly aware of the answer and it was something that had long troubled him about his partner.

“I’ve never met any here, either.”
"Because they do not exist. The passing acquaintance, to be certain, when I was still attending school, however… I have not known what you so easily accomplish - the making and maintaining of friends. I have always admired that about you and have rejoiced that you have a body of individuals to satisfy those areas of your life where I would not make great contribution and to whom you could turn when I had left you here while I was away. At your fingertips are those you might phone or visit, stop in the corridor at school to make an impromptu plan for the afternoon… you enjoy the camaraderie of those who include you in their circle and I am positively gleeful for that.”

Stopping a moment to catch his breath, Mycroft took great strength from the fact that Lestrade budged closer to him and lightly wrapped an arm around his waist.

“But I have none of that. I have never had that in my life and… here I am in London, savagely missing you and suddenly there are those who phone and issue invitations. Those who, when I find my work completed earlier than expected, I can reach out to and ask to join me for a meal or a spot of entertainment. My doorbell rings, Gregory. It rings and there I find individuals who will pass the afternoon or evening with me and I am not alone as you are not alone when your friends call upon you.”

“But… you said they weren’t friends. Or, at least, this Edmund wasn’t.”

“And I was honest in that. Your friends handily meet the definition, however… I am entirely aware that they care for me not as a person but as a figure. A man with money from a good family who will pay for his share of amusements and, apparently, attract the attention of those who watch the goings on in society.”

“That’s terrible! Why in the world would you… you’re a proud man, Mycroft. Proud and rightfully so. You could find a lot better than what sounds like a bunch of parasites!”

“So you say, but show me the evidence that is the case?”

“I… I can’t say anything about your own class of people, but my mates think you’re… thought you were… a good person. They liked you coming out with us.”

“They know me only because of you, Gregory. Would they have given me the time of day had they met me in the street?”

“Depends. If you had something to talk about and if you were willing to talk to them.”

“Perhaps you are correct. Or, perhaps, they would, seeing my normal garb and presentation, believed me not one of their sort and simply left me alone.”

“That’s not fair. It’s… possibly true, but it’s still not fair.”

“Truth often isn’t. I have no cadre of friends, Gregory, and those I have met in London certainly do not meet that description. Those with whom I have been spending time ask nothing of me beyond the shallow. They do not engage me intellectually or emotionally… they are, for lack of a better term, convenient, yet I will not deny that I have clung to them for the experience of… being someone who has anyone with whom to spend their time.”

Lestrade tightened his grip on his partner and laid a kiss on his cheek. Mycroft had made him so angry, hurt him so deeply, but… this part he could understand. He’d seen it often enough before with people at school. Get the attention of a group and all else falls by the wayside even when you know it really wasn’t the best thing for you, that the people want you for something you have or can do for them, but… he’d seen it and always thanked his lucky stars that he wasn’t one of them. His
Mycroft, though, being in London, working more than someone his age should ever have to and never before having a real pack of friends to turn to for support and company… he’d fallen into the pit and hadn’t climbed back out.

“I’m sorry for that, love. And I’ve always been sorry. Someone like you has so much to offer, but I admit I can’t think of anyone who has reached out to take it. In fairness, though… you don’t seem to try very hard.”

“It is a valid point and, perhaps, that was a factor of note. I did not have to try, in this case. A small mention of being in residence in our London home and I was lit upon by the entire bevy of birds! I did not have to try and… it is no excuse, none at all, but it is all I can give you besides the assurance that you would choke in their presence. You would despise them and their vapidity. I did not choose them over you, my dear, I chose you over them. In my heart you always were always held dear and I was not about to subject you to their version of socialization. They were part of my London life and you… you were part of my real life. Yes, I see now why that was a stupid and foolish notion and I realize how it disadvantaged you, but I did not see it then. I simply did not see.”

“I can’t say it makes me feel good that you didn’t even really notice I wasn’t part of things for you in London, because it doesn’t. It doesn’t at all, but… if I’m honest, I can say I understand it a little. Just a little, mind you, but I won’t lie and say none of it makes sense or I think you’re trying to lie to me.”

“I would not lie, Gregory. Not to you, not for this.”

“And I believe you. I still want to know about that bloke, though. He… he seemed to get a lot of your attention and your dressing gown. That’s hard to get past, love.”

“That night… there was nothing there to cause you distress, though I am highly aware of how the situation must have appeared. I would have been livid encountering such a scene and felt myself utterly betrayed, as I know you did. It was simply a matter of Edmund overindulging and my offering him a room for the night. He left, entirely untouched, immediately after breakfast. But, I will not deny that I have seen him with greater frequency than the others for he is brasher, perhaps, about seeking my attention. I believe that he sees me as an agreeable addition to their activities, mostly for what he hopes to win in social standing. That he will rise through association and, even, win introductions that might otherwise slip his grasp.”

“You make him sound like such a prize.”

“For he is not. I take no pride in the fact that I have consented to his games, but… there were no others on offer.”

“Wrong. I was on offer.”

“Not in those moments where… you were not. Again, I make no excuses, my dear. Not a one. I am guilty of everything and I shall not do a thing to attempt to lessen the blame I deserve.”

Mycroft cut his eyes over to his partner, who was staring off into the distance, and read the exhaustion and sadness on his features. However, there was not, not yet, the tinge of defeat and Mycroft mentally crossed his fingers that there was still some chance to salvage the life they had started to build.

“What else, my dear? What else can I tell you? For what else can I ask forgiveness or offer explanation? Please, Gregory… do not allow any issue to remain unraised. Not now, not when it might linger and rankle and continue to spread its poison.”
“I… I don’t know. And I’m not trying to avoid anything or hide from what’s bothering me, it’s just… it’s just a lot. I’ll be honest, Mycroft… when I left my pendant at Grandmama’s, I was done with you. I was done with the loneliness and the pain and trying to hold on to a relationship that was… that had stopped working. My life was going to be simpler now and that… there was a lot of relief there. All I had to figure out was what to do about Sherlock and John, but… I was sure I could find a way to do that without getting involved with you again.”

Lestrade paused and tried to find the words to articulate what he wanted to say. Why couldn’t he be like Mycroft when it came to words? Maybe that was part of the problem… he always had trouble talking about big things, important things, and if he couldn’t pull his head out of his arse and just talk, how in the world did he expect Mycroft to know what was going on in his head!

“I’ve heard everything you’ve had to say, Mycroft. And, I can’t say it hasn’t made a difference, because it has. But… there’s one piece missing and the fact that it never came up…”

“Yes, my dear? Please, Gregory. I am trying my utmost and…”

“That’s what’s bothering me. In all of this, love, you’ve never said one thing about changing any of it. You didn’t say you’d call more or make yourself more available to me and the boys, put us back in your life. You say you’re trying your utmost, but not a word about actually making anything better.”

“I… I may not have expressed such a thing verbally, however, you must know that it is implied. That it is a certainty I will act to correct the wrongs I have committed?”

“No, I don’t know that. I’ve heard a lot of explaining, but I can’t say it doesn’t feel a bit like you’re hoping I’ll just understand and let things to back to the way they were.”

“Absolutely not! Under no circumstances will that happen. Sitting here now, though, I… I am seeing a tendency in myself and it is not one that has served either of us. I assume. I know my own thoughts and believe they are both recognized and agreed to by you. It is not something I do in any other area of my life, in fact, I always believe that my thoughts are entirely on a level that is not accessible by the others with whom I work. Yes, I am well aware how utterly smug and arrogant that sounds and I somehow doubt that will ever change, but… that is not how I perceive you. I have unquestioned faith that you know my mind and, I suppose, that a conversation unspoken is a conversation unnecessary for we are already of like mind.”

“That actually does sound exactly like you sometimes.”

“Something I have just come to realize.”

“And… I don’t exactly push for anything else. Speak up, I mean, when something is bothering me.”

“I do not wish to say it, but… no, no you do not. Not appreciably, in any case. Or perhaps you do and I am simply too oblivious to recognize it.”

“No, that’s not true. When I do make things plain, you don’t ignore it. You never have. Grandmama warned me about this… stand in quiet support when things were rough, then demand my due. I’m good at the first bit, but shite at the second.”

“Is there… do you know why?”

Mycroft hated shifting the focus of the conversation from any direction but him, but if there was to be a chance of reconciliation, all avenues must be explored, including ones that sat on his lover’s
shoulders.

“I don’t know. It’s funny, too, because I’m not like that with my mates! When it comes to the boys or to you… things are different. Maybe… yeah, no… I don’t want to talk about that.”

That set Mycroft’s mind clearly on his partner and everything else was shoved to the side.

“What, my dear. I would say that now is precisely the time to speak of things, especially painful ones, while that is, for all intent, the purpose of this conversation. And, again, if I do not know, I cannot help.”

Lestrade scowled and tore a handful of grass from the ground, hurling it past his feet and frowning as the blades fluttered to the ground.

“You know I didn’t have it easy as a kid. I saw Mum try and try and try to get my dad to be less of an arse and all it left her with was a throat sore from yelling. Then it was eyes stinging from crying all night after trying to reason with him. And he never wanted to hear any complaints from me. Finally, Mum stopped worrying about trying to change him and got on with the business of keeping her and me with food and clothes as best she could until he finally showed a bit of sense and left us.”

Now it was Lestrade with tears on his face and Mycroft took his partner’s hand and held it tightly for support.

“Then… you know how bad Mum had it after he left. Not that he was much help, but my dad did bring in some money and it was money we needed and she… she was going through her own problems. Same ones, really, I was going through… why did he treat me like rubbish, why can’t I find someone who really cares, what’s wrong with me, what’d I do to deserve all of this… Some nights I was scared from the dark or a nightmare or I was hungry because dinner had been a bowl of cereal and I’d go to talk to her about it and she’d be crying at the kitchen table, so I wouldn’t say anything because I didn’t want her to feel worse. And, when I got upset because I couldn’t have a new toy or money to see a film with my friends… the look on her face destroyed me. It’s not Mum’s fault. It’s not. That’s not what I’m saying and don’t you dare think I am…”

Mycroft wiped the tears off of Lestrade’s face and smiled as comforting as he could.

“Shhhh… I know perfectly well you are not casting aspersions. Do not fear for a second I believe otherwise.”

“Good, because she doesn’t deserve it. Mum did the very best she could for me. No one could have done better.”

“I agree wholeheartedly. But… you still feel hesitant about expressing your upset or anger to someone you love. It is easier with those you do not know or if you are acting for the benefit of another, I suspect.”

“It is. I’ll stand up for anyone who’s having a hard time, but… I guess even with my mates I’m not as good at it as I’d like to believe. One of the sods will make a comment about how stupid the police are, for instance, and it bothers me because that’ll be me soon and… I don’t say anything. Not anything real, I mean, that shows I’m actually upset and not just having a spot of argument for fun.”

Mycroft leaned in and gave Lestrade a kiss on his cheek, then on the lips when his lover turned his head and gave a small, weary smile.

“If it is any consolation, my dear, I believe my personal issue with communication is far worse
than is yours, so you may consider yourself quite the better man and award yourself all the points and congratulations you are due.”

Lestrade laughed and dried the last remaining moisture from his face, marveling how, even after such misery, his partner could make him laugh.

“T’im not sure about that, because you didn’t have Grandmama warn you about yours and still manage to fall on your face.”

“Oh, but she did. And my face is highly bruised from the force of its collision with the floor. Your mother, also, cautioned me. She said, and I hope she will not mind the breach of confidence, that you would be… easy to misuse in precisely the way I have done.”

“She said that?”

“Yes. She remarked that your kind heart and dedication to the welfare of others would make it easy for a body to take advantage, which is precisely what I have done. I had more than fair warning about my behaviors and still failed to pay heed to any of it.”

“Huh… well, I guess Mum was looking out for me. That’s probably why she was so fucking furious at what happened. I mean… you probably don’t want to be near her for awhile.”

Oddly, that gave Mycroft quite a boost of hope, because the only reason he had to be near his mother-in-law was because he was still involved with her son.

“I shall keep that in mind. Though, I would not begrudge her the chance to have her say since, as your mother, I know your pain was hers to share. In truth, I should very likely approach her and make apologies for how I have treated the son she loves so dearly. And, I cannot say this enough or with sufficient ardency, Gregory… I do apologize. If I could undo the past, I would and in the blink of an eye. I would right each wrong and prevent this breach from ever occurring. I love you, my dear. I love you deeply, passionately and enduringly. Know, with full confidence, that I will do everything in my power to better my treatment of you. I will beg your help, though, for I know there will be mistakes. I would take great pleasure saying I am perfect, however, I know well that is not the case and I will make mistakes. May I ask that you work with me on this? I desperately want to be the man who… oh dear. I am doing it again, aren’t I?”

Lestrade cocked his head and watched Mycroft’s face twist in a mix of worry and exasperation.

“What, love?”

“Assuming. I am assuming again and it is highly inappropriate in this circumstance. I am sitting here assuming that you… that you will honor me by allowing me a chance to prove that I can be a better partner for you and that, most certainly, is not an assumption I have right to make. But… I would know… I would pray that my assumption is not a poor one.”

“Oh. Right. I guess we haven’t decided about that, have we?”

“No… and the decision is yours to make, Gregory. You were the one wronged and… I am simply… is there hope, my love? I understand if you cannot answer or if you have not seen a change of heart but… is there any hope for us?”

It wasn’t easy for Mycroft to meet his partner’s eyes and, to his shame, he did a terribly poor job of it, settling, instead, for focusing his gaze on his lap while he waited for Lestrade to either swing a sword or hand him an olive branch.
“Are… are you really going to try, Mycroft? Not say you’re going to and then not do a fucking thing different because I’ve taken you back, so why bother?”

“I give you my most solemn oath, Gregory, that I will make every effort to give you the respect and attention you deserve.”

Lestrade nodded and Mycroft would have given all his wealth to have a single peek inside his lover’s mind for the silence was tearing at him like lion’s claws.

“I love you, Mycroft, and before things went… bad… we were a good couple. A very good couple, actually, and I can’t say I’ve ever been happier. If it’s possible to have that happiness again, to go on with what we’d planned and have the life we wanted, then I’m not sure if I could forgive myself letting that possibility slip by me. We both did things that weren’t smart, but we know that now and that’s the first step to fixing all of this.”

“Is that… is that yes?”

“It’s… it’s yes to trying to fix what’s broken and… keeping our relationship going. It’s not yes to marrying you, so don’t get any ideas.”

“I… well, I will not lie and say I was not hopeful that you, perhaps, had changed your mind.”

“I can’t say yes if I don’t know things will work out, Mycroft. We’ve had one go at what’s going to be our life for a few years and made a mess of it. Now, we try again with what we learned from that disaster and see if we do it right this time. Anyway, we originally said we’d look at that particular question at the end of summer, right? Before you went off to college? You did sort of jump ahead of schedule, so… think of it as getting back on track. By then, if we’ve figured things out… then I don’t see why you wouldn’t get the answer you want.”

Mycroft felt a flood of relief so strong his body shook with it and Lestrade held him tightly until he calmed back down.

“Thank you, Gregory. Thank you from the depths of my soul. I will not fail you, my love. I will not fail you in this.”

“And I’m going to do my very best not to fail you either, Mycroft. Start speaking my mind about things that bother me, but then it’s up to you to do something about it, even if it’s argue with me because you think I’m daft.”

“I will give your concerns my most serious attention, Gregory, and I will dedicate myself to being more aware and observant for issues involving our personal lives.”

“Ok. Ok ok ok… then I suppose we’re back together. Which is what everyone in this entire area is already getting an earful of, but… we should make certain to explain the real story to the boys, Mum and Grandmama. And do it soon.”

Mycroft grinned widely and took a much-needed kiss from his partner’s lips, adoring that Lestrade was smiling with just as much glee as was he.

“I agree. The children will be home from school in a short while, but we can phone Grandmama and apprise her of the situation.”

“That’s smart. Just… can we sit here a little while longer? It’s silly, maybe, but I could go for a bit of quiet and time… well, just a little time to hold your hand and not think about serious things.”
“I can think of nothing more enjoyable.”

Mycroft slid his hand into Lestrade’s and relaxed into the moment which, he vowed, would only be the first of countless in their new, permanent relationship. Gregory had said from the beginning that they would succeed as a couple because they worked to solve their problems and did not believe they would magically disappear if left ignored. Well, that was certainly going to be the case here. They would work and fight and give their all to overcome this terrible time and find again the happiness they had so greatly treasured. They would be victorious in this… neither he nor Gregory took well to losing and this particular battle was the most important of their lives…
Chapter 2

Mycroft set down the phone and stared at it a moment to make certain it was not coming back to life to strangle him because Grandmama had changed her mind about his life having some limited value and decided to remove him from the family tree much as one would any diseased limb.

“Well?”

“We are, needless to say, commanded to present ourselves on Saturday for what I am certain will not be a jubilant visit. Well, at least for me.”

“Is she… how mad is she?”

“Grandmama prefers a colder fury and she is positively frigid at the moment, however, do not fear she is enveloping you in her icy shroud. I believe she hopes to have us both there to verify that you are fully informed and not making an coerced decision. Grandmama is a staunch ally for you, my dear, do not fear she is not.”

“I know. And that helps a lot, actually. If Grandmama doesn’t think I’m off my nut or making too much of things, then… yeah, it helps. What’d she say about your proposal?”

Nothing that should likely be repeated in polite company, though nothing that was not well-deserved.

“To summarize, I am tasked to reflect upon whether my actions were honest or a manipulative attempt to gain what I desire.”

“Oh. Yeah, she’s mad.”

“It is a valid question, for she knows it is entirely within my ability to perpetrate such a thing and do so spectacularly well.”

“Mycroft… should I start worrying?”

Yes. For a thousand reasons, though not this one in particular.

“No. That very question plagued me incessantly as I prepared to see you and I could, ultimately, not give it credence. I have wanted you as my spouse for so very long, as you well know. Perhaps I thought it would give us a more concrete platform from which to rebuild our union or something you greatly deserved after my neglect, but there is no doubt that I desperately want you for my husband. My proposal was sincere, Gregory, please do not worry it was not.”

“Ok, if you say so, I’ll believe you. I can ask Mum to watch Sherlock and John so…”

“Oh, they are to accompany us for my untimely demise. I assume Grandmama believes the entertainment is something they might enjoy.”

Lestrade stepped behind Mycroft, wrapped his arms around his partner and rested his chin on Mycroft’s slightly-slumped shoulder.

“Or, she hopes that a little time with all of us together away from school, work and gossip is going to be a good thing.”

“You are laudably optimistic, my dear.”
“Sometimes. Now… it’s my turn. No matter how hard it was for you to call Grandmama, it won’t even compare to me talking to Mum. You might want to stand back from the phone because I wouldn’t be surprised if she tried to kill you with her voice if that’s at all possible.”

“I would not blame her for it. Would you… if you prefer, I will make the call.”

“Oh, I’d much prefer it, but it should be me to do this. Hand me the phone. Waiting isn’t make it any easier and, if I do it now, she’s at work and can’t actually leap through the phone to give my head a knock.”

Mycroft passed the receiver to his lover and changed position with him so he was now the one providing comfort and support.

“Elizabeth Lestrade speaking. How may I help you today?”

“By not killing me.”

“GREG! YOU… you have a LOT of explaining to do Gregory Lestrade! What… what were you thinking? Have you lost your mind? Did you… did you need help, son, and I didn’t see? There’s something wrong in your head if you agreed to marry that good-for-nothing Mycroft Holmes and I’ll see you get every bit of help you need to pry that arsehole off of you and…”

“MUM! Mum… calm down and listen. Mycroft and I aren’t engaged. Not any more engaged than you thought we were the last time and for the same reason. It’s just gossip, people making stories out of nothing.”

“NOTHING! Don’t tell me thirty people calling me to say that snake proposed to you in front of a hundred witnesses at school is some form of… mass hallucination!”

“No, that part’s true. I didn’t say yes, though.”

“You… you didn’t?”

“No. I told him we had to talk first. We had to do a lot of talking and fix what’s broken before I’d consider saying yes.”

“What! How can you… saying yes to that… there’s no way you’re going to let that entitled, privileged, deceitful, arrogant, self-absorbed…”

“Mum, you really need to calm down.”

“I will not! My son is not going to ruin his life and being calm isn’t going to help with that!”

“I’m not going to ruin my life, Mum.”

“If you’re actually considering giving that miserable fucker another chance, then I’d say you’re already speeding down that road with a beer in one hand and a ticket to hell in the other!”

Lestrade smiled weakly at the eavesdropping Mycroft and was glad he’d already prepared his partner for the firestorm.

“That’s not what I’m doing. I’m just agreeing to see if we can work things out. Figure out where things went wrong and try to fix it.”

“He was a complete bastard, that’s what was wrong! Unless the doctors have learned how to give someone a brain and personality transplant I can’t see that changing!”
“It’s not that simple, Mum.”

“It is that simple and god help you for not seeing it. I should have listened to you, kept you away from school for a few days. I thought going right back would be good for you and show the other bastards in your life that you were stronger than all of this. I’m sorry for that, Greg. You felt pressured, didn’t you? All those eyes watching you? You don’t want people to think you failed, is that it? Where are you son? I’ll see if I can leave early and we’ll have a nice, long talk.”

“I think that’s a good idea, but I’m telling you now that I’m going to bring Mycroft with me when we do.”

“Oh no! That bastard is not setting foot in my house again unless he wants those feet cut off of his ankles!”

“Then we’ll sit on the steps and talk, but I’d like you hear what we have to say, what Mycroft has to say, because it’s important. Sherlock and John are going to be home in an hour or so and we have to talk to them, too, so why don’t Mycroft and I see them sorted then we’ll meet you at our house when you get off of work?”

“Greg, please… you’re not thinking clearly. You’re hurt and that makes a person do things that aren’t smart or good for them.”

“I know that and that’s part of why I didn’t agree to Mycroft’s proposal. But… I do love him, Mum, and we had a good relationship before things changed. I just want to see if we can have that again. Now, are you going to let us talk about it with you or am I going to do all of this without your input?”

“That’s not fair. You know I want to be there for you.”

“Then that’s what’s going to happen. Mycroft and I will see you tonight and do not hit him with anything when we get there.”

“Well, there went my fun for the night.”

“Mum…”

“Fine! I’ll hear what you have to say, but don’t believe I’ll just sit there quietly and not say anything in return.”

“I never actually thought that would happen, so things are about right on what I expected. I’ll see you tonight, Mum.”

Before the conversation could continue for any reason, Lestrade hung up and did his own bit of waiting for the phone to enact motherly mayhem on him and his partner.

“Well… that went well.”

“Your attempt to wear a brave face is most heartening, Gregory, yet entirely unconvincing.”

“Yeah, I know. This is what the prisoner feels like when they’re putting his head in the guillotine, I think.”

“Take strength in the fact that I will do my level best to keep your mother’s wrath directed at me, so that you are spared her tongue’s severest sting.”
“She’s going to have more than enough sting for us both, don’t worry about that. I can’t blame her, not at all, because she saw what a mess I was when I came home that night and that wasn’t a sight for the faint of heart. And, even though she never said anything, I think she caught her own bit of evil from people who thought it was uppity to have a son going with a rich man, especially after she got to go to a few parties and the like.”

“And she does believe you are making a mistake.”

“Absolutely! I won’t say I don’t think that way a bit, too, because I do. Or, at least I’m concerned that I’m relying on hope and not being smart and looking at things rationally. That’s why I need time and chances to see we can find our way again.”

“Thus, one of my plentiful reasons for admiring you so. I know it would be foolish on your part to accept me blindly, though my heart feels otherwise, and I must admit that your caution is most appropriate. You have always been the more level-headed of us, in matters of our relationship, my dear, and I have known that from the onset. Here is but another example.”

“Something else Grandmama and I talked about. I was the practical one for this sort of thing, the one with his head on his shoulders and not in the clouds. That’s another reason I’m willing to work on this before saying goodbye. I should have been the practical one here, not hiding away from what was going wrong and making me hurt. I should have pushed up my sleeves and done what it took to make you see things from my point of view. I know you can lose touch with what’s real about love and being together. That’s not a criticism, though, it’s actually a good thing in some ways. You are romantic and say the most treacly things sometimes and I adore it. I absolutely adore all of it, but I know it’s got to be me sometimes that breaks the mood with reality and I… I just didn’t do it. “

“All of which we shall discuss and reflect upon as we move forward. I am not precisely looking forward to the process, for that I shall not lie, for it will be a hard and painful thing, but I am committed to taking whatever steps are necessary to keep you at my side. I would ask, though… how much has been revealed to Sherlock and John.”

“There, we have a spot of luck. I haven’t told them about, well… us. The final bit, I mean. They were miffed I didn’t see them after school the day… well, the day I found out about things, but I pulled myself together enough to see them the next day and didn’t let on that there was anything wrong. At least more than usual. I was actually trying to decide how to tell them we were done because they deserved to know, but… I had no idea how to break the news. I still don’t.”

“At the very least, you do not have to bear the tidings alone and it is no longer quite the story you had feared to tell.”

“That’s true, but we’re not going to make this sound better than it is, Mycroft. I’m fine with not giving details about what happened in London or the mess afterwards, but they have a right to know we’re having problems. They already do know, I suppose, but they should hear it plainly so they understand things that might or might not happen while we try to work this out.”

“I see your point. I am certain it will not be the most pleasant of conversations, however, I expected nothing less for today and believe unquestionably that I deserve it all.”

Lestrade hung his head a little and shook it slightly, much to Mycroft’s confusion.

“Stop, love. Just stop. It doesn’t make me feel better to hear you beat yourself bloody.”

“It should! You should crave every aspersion I cast on myself!”
“No, what I should crave is every idea you have to make this better. You showing me that you see where things went wrong and telling me what you plan to do about it. I know you made a mess, I don’t have to hear it over and over. I want to hear why it won’t happen again and how things are going to change.”

Mycroft looked into his partner’s eyes and wondered how he ever, ever, could have not brokered and bartered every minute of time possible to spend with this man. The feeling in his heart was profound and undying, but it did not stimulate him with the full richness of their love as did being with his Gregory and finding the numerous opportunities to fall in love with him anew.

“As always, I bow to your wisdom and wish I had a modicum of it in my own life. I suppose I view self-flagellation as a gift to bestow for your own suffering, but you are correct. It is not productive and you are right to value a more practical and useful gift. Shall we… shall we discuss that now? We do have some time before the children arrive.”

“The library?”

“Exactly my thought.”

Lestrade nodded and smiled as Mycroft reached out to take his hand for the very short trip to their favorite room in the house, smiling even wider when Mycroft sat an inch away from him on the sofa, turning to face him for conversation.

“I’m not going to run away, you know, Mycroft.”

“No, that is not something about which I am certain. I am well aware that if my attempts fail the outcome shall be most horrifying.”

“I promise I won’t run away without telling you about it first, alright. And that will only be when I’m sure that we’ve tried everything and nothing is going to work. How does that sound?”

“Like a blessed bit of reassurance in which I have utmost faith, for you are, unquestionably, a man of your word.”

“Good. So… what are we going to do?”

“Attack the specific points of issue. I have not and will not forget each slight we have discussed and will see them addressed thoroughly. Maintain more regular contact, encourage you to visit our London home, make you a visible and notable part of my life in London so there is no misapprehension as to who is my true partner in this world. And I will not allow other personal interests to eclipse the time and attention that is due you and the children. I cannot promise to be here any more often than now I am, for that is not something I can control, however, I can promise to take active stock of the time I do have available and ensure you are not found to be absent from it.”

“Oh. It sounds easy the way you say it.”

“Which is why I feel such shame at my actions. However, I am not so arrogant as to believe it shall be that easy. I will have missteps, Gregory. I am not a perfect man, though I would adore pretending to own the title, and I will fail to meet these expectations on occasion. In this, I will need your assistance to stop my failure from growing to the proportions that it has now reached.”

“That’s where I have to do something besides mope. Follow my own advice and take steps that can make a difference. And I’m going to, but, like you, I can’t say I’ll be perfect about it. I’m going to let things slide sometimes because I won’t think they’re important enough to bother you with and end up angry or hurt. That’s where I’m going to need my own help, maybe from Mum or
Grandmama, so I don’t let things get away from me again. Tell them they have to kick me in the right direction which, in Mum’s case, will probably be taken literally. If she’s speaking to me anymore after today, that is.”

Mycroft ran a hand across Lestrade’s shoulder and down his arm, wishing this could be easier on his lover. Though he would say aloud that self-recrimination was not helpful to their cause, in his heart, he would continue for as long as his beloved suffered. It was the fire that would burn in him as a reminder of what he had nearly lost and how easy it would be to fall back into the patterns that would lose him his Gregory permanently.

“Your mother would never, for any reason, forsake you, my dear. Her anger is simply a manifestation of her worry that you shall again be hurt. It will be my duty to salve that fear as best as I am able, though I harbor no illusions that her complete forgiveness will be forthcoming for a very long time, if I am ever to win it at all.”

“I’m not going to wager one way or another because Mum’s hard to predict sometimes. I probably should ask when you have to go back to London. It would be good to give her time to hear you out once and then come back for more questions, but I know you likely have to…”

“I am here for as long as you need me, Gregory. In truth, this is something I have to learn to manage more successfully, in any case. I will soon need to actually attend my classes and will not be able to be personally present for certain matters as I am now. That is in addition to the time I must devote to you and the children. I… I will not lie and say I do not have moments when the thought of that feels somewhat overwhelming and, perhaps, I have been attempting to hide from the ever-increasing demands my upon my time. Not that I consider you a ‘demand,’ my love. It is a sterile and rather unpleasant term in some ways and that is certainly not how I view the time we share.”

Lestrade thought, and not for the first time, that he was very happy he wasn’t his partner because he had no idea how Mycroft was able to keep himself sane with all the directions he seemed torn in. Maybe that was part of why he just didn’t speak up when he should have – it just seemed cruel to add more hands grabbing at his lover when there so many doing it already.

“I know you don’t. Sherlock and John, though… how about we have a bite to eat before they come home? That’s going to be its own battle and a little fortification will likely do us some good.”

“An excellent idea. I believe my stomach is finally calm enough to accept something without revolting.”

“Ok, then. Come here, first.”

Crooking his finger, Lestrade drew his partner closer and gave him a small kiss and an encouraging smile.

“It’ll be alright, Mycroft. One way or another, it will be alright.”

Something Mycroft could only hope, but is near-husband had faith, then he would, also. After all, Gregory was the genius for matters of the heart, was he not?

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“Shop boy! Attend us!”

Mycroft stiffened at the sound of Sherlock’s familiar shriek and drew in a deep breath as the library door swung open to admit the two boys.
“Mycroft!”

John ran forward, wearing a large smile, then stopped, began to glare, and ran back to stand next to Sherlock with his arms folded and his eyes fixed on the returned family member. For his part, Sherlock had been glaring since seeing his brother returned home.

“I see. Fatcroft has decided to grace us with his presence. I blame you, lackey, for allowing him to cross the threshold. That your lust outweighs your moral indignation in no manner surprises me.”

“What do you want, Mycroft? How about a punch? You want that?”

John showed his fist and Sherlock nodded forcefully in support of his friend’s sentiments.

“Good heavens, I expected a lukewarm greeting, but certainly not a violent one.”

“Greg’s the one who should have punched you but he’s not so good at giving you the punches you deserve so I’ll do it if I have to.”

John showed two fists now and Sherlock’s applause did much to make Mycroft feel right at home.

“Hey! What’s gotten into you two? Stop being little bastards and come over here for a chat. We’ve got a lot to talk about and starting with this nonsense isn’t helping.”

“Silence, stall-mucker! You are obviously under the sea cow’s hypnotic spell and it falls to John and me to see you protected from Mycroft’s influence. Our hourly wage will be most reasonable, given you are as poor as the muck you rake.”

Mycroft and Lestrade shared a look and both wondered where this degree of animosity was coming from.

“Sherlock, John, you want to tell us what’s bothering you so badly?”

The two boys shared their own look, followed by a nod of agreement and threw their schoolbags on the ground before making a ‘wait here’ gesture and disappearing up the stairs.

“My dear… you did not properly prepare me for their ire.”

“That’s because I didn’t know their ire was so… ire-ful. Really, love, I had no idea they were this upset.”

“Apparently, our family has a great deal of work ahead of us on the subject of communication.”

“I guess we do. There’s good in that, though. Put all out heads together towards one goal. We can all help each other and that has to be a positive thing, doesn’t it?”

“I suppose that is a very encouraging manner in which to view the situation. And I do hope to give the children what help I can to ease their minds on the issue. They are far too young to bear such worries.”

Though worry was not what was on their faces when Sherlock and John stormed back in, arms loaded with notebooks and folders.

“You disparage our contempt, beluga, so prepare, now, to face the evidence.”

Sherlock dropped his load on the sofa and snatched up one of the notebooks, handing it to Mycroft with a snort.
“This is record of the phone conversations you actually permitted. Take note of the graph on the last page, which documents the length of conversations and witness the inverse relationship between date and duration.”

Mycroft obediently scanned Sherlock’s painstakingly-crafted line graph which showed a downward-sloping line through time.

“Evidence! Here, have more.”

Sherlock nodded at John who dumped his own load and grabbed another notebook, which was pushed into Mycroft’s hands as John took point in the prosecution.

“This one is a call record. I marked down every time you called and made a graph, too. See, it slides down just like the first one. That’s because you don’t call anymore.”

“And I have a correlating data set documenting calls placed to you. You can see from the plot that the number of calls answered also shows a damning pattern. We have similar empirical evidence for visitations.”

All of which was duly presented to Mycroft, who sat with a stoic face through the denouncement of his actions via properly-labeled axes.

“Now… this next set of data will likely unnerve you, peasant, however, it is time it was revealed.”

John and Sherlock, again, shared a nod and began picking up folders, spilling the contents across Mycroft and Lestrade’s laps.

“You have been cuckolded! Behold the proof that this… pestilent pot-belly… has been unfaithful! If you require a cloth to dab your tears, John will provide one.”

Which John extracted from his pocket and held at the ready, just in case. Not that Lestrade needed it because the photos and articles that littered his legs had already been cried over until he was as dry as a bone.

“However, John and I suspect you had some knowledge of this owing to your excessively shifted tone of voice on the telephone the day this particular photograph was published.”

Sherlock pointed to precisely the one Lestrade had seen the day his world fell to pieces around him.

“You’re evil, Mycroft!”

The punch that landed on Mycroft’s arm left said arm numb from that point downwards and Mycroft had to shake the limb like flag of surrender to restore any feeling to it.

“No hitting! Sorry, John, but that’s not the way we solve problems in this family.”

“You did know! John, make note that the shop boy had awareness of the infidelity. This is very important data as it proves he is completely lacking in dignity and self-respect.”

“Note being made!”

John grabbed a notebook to start writing, only to have it taken away and set next to Lestrade who was slowly counting to ten before speaking so he could actually speak and not yell.

“Look… I only saw that picture the day I… I probably did sound off because I was upset and…
no reason hiding anything since it’s all out in the open, apparently… because I broke off Mycroft and my relationship. I found out that day and ended it there and then. Alright? But that’s not the actual story, so you two need to… hey! What did I say about hitting?”

John’s innocent eyes couldn’t cover up Mycroft rubbing his ankle and grunting in pain, not that the boy really cared.

“I didn’t hit! I kicked and you never said anything about that!”

“You’re not a toddler, so don’t act like one! And where did you two get all of this anyway?”

“Do not take your self-disgust out on John! For your information, the house receives a bevy of newspapers and we study them carefully for matters of scientific interest.”

“And football!”

“It was not difficult to discover copious proof of Bloatcroft’s nefariousness, though it took an age to wash the unseemliness from my fingers after the said proof was extracted from the newspaper and added to our files.”

Lestrade felt an ugly rolling in his stomach looking at everything the boys had and shrugged off Mycroft’s calming hand because, at that moment, he just didn’t want his partner touching him.

“Sherlock and I already boxed up Mycroft’s things so he can take them with him and live in London forever. We… we were going to talk to you about his, Greg, but… it’s hard to talk about stuff like this! We’re not going to let him hurt you anymore, though. You hear that, Mycroft! Your evil isn’t going to hurt Greg ever again!”

This punch was only one of a series as John jumped on Mycroft’s lap and began pummeling the older Holmes with all the outrage and anger and betrayal he had kept bottled up since he and Sherlock had started their investigation. Luckily, Lestrade didn’t share Sherlock’s view and, instead of cheering, dragged the small boy off of Mycroft and held him while he struggled to jump back into the beating.

“Calm down, John. Just… calm down. I promise you it’s not what you think, but I’ll thank you for looking out for me. Ok? Can you calm down for me so we can talk?”

John kept squirming, but turned his head a little to see Greg and felt the fury dribble out of him, seeing both the honesty and the sadness in his friend’s eyes.

“Fine… but I’m not going to promise I won’t punch him again.”

“That’s fair. Come on, hop up on the sofa and we can talk. Ooohhh… that’s going to be a black eye, love. Sherlock, get your brother some ice.”

“No.”

“Be nice!”

“No.”

“It is alright, Gregory. Nothing less than I deserve.”

“The confession is made!”

“No, Sherlock, I have not confessed to infidelity. I will confess to neglect and ignoring my loved
ones, to fumbling my responsibilities and presenting poorly, which brought Gregory incalculable distress and humiliated him in front of his peers. To all of that I will gladly confess, but I did not betray the man I love. Not in the way you believe.”

John sat on his hands to keep himself from throwing another punch, but refused to let his mouth hold back from delivering its own blows.

“‘I don’t believe you. Why would you tell us the truth? You don’t love us anymore. You don’t want to be in our family. You probably have another one with that snooty-looking person that you want to be with now, instead of us.’

“That is not true, John. I love you, Sherlock and Gregory with my whole heart and soul. There is no other family, no other man in my life. I know that is not the appearance of things, but it is the honest and abiding truth. I… I have made mistakes. Terrible, damaging mistakes, but never have I made the mistake of believing my life could continue without the love I have for the three of you. No, I have not demonstrated that love appropriately of late, but it has never wavered or faded and I am committed to rectifying all wrongs against you. I… oh, you shall surely hear the story, so there is no reason to keep it secret… I already tried such with Gregory, offering him my most sincere proposal of marriage. You will be happy to learn that he refused me.”

“Finally, the lackey does something right.”

Sherlock sneered at his brother, but felt an unpleasant thread of disappointment in his nerves because he was very good at discerning when his brother was lying and he was seeing none of that today. It was still nice to see John give Mycroft another punch, though.

“You ask Greg to marry you after being so mean to him? Are you stupid? Or just… mean! He couldn’t say yes after you were so awful… that was mean and terrible and probably made Greg feel guilty for saying no and…”

Mycroft’s cut off shout at this next punch was very small satisfaction for the small boy who just wanted to hit something for an hour or two to help get rid of the burning sensation in his stomach. He and Sherlock had talked about this a lot and how they were going to help keep their family together once they’d pushed Mycroft out the door and made him go away to London. Why did Mycroft do these things? Why did he ignore Greg when Greg was great! He was nice and funny and he loved Mycroft, that was so obvious even a dumb person could see it. He’d thought that after they’d poisoned Greg at Grandmama’s that Mycroft would never ignore Greg again, but…

“Is your stomach alright, lad?”

Realizing he was holding his stomach like he was in pain, which he was, so it wasn’t a lie, John shook his head at Greg and didn’t protest when the older boy picked him up to sit on his lap.

“It’s ok, John. Mycroft and I have talked and we’re going to try and work on what went wrong. It was a lot, I know, but remember all the good times we had together? That wasn’t a lie… actually, I think that was the truth. The real relationship Mycroft and I have. We just… got lost, I guess. Doesn’t mean we can’t find our way back, though.”

“Why would you want to? It’ll just happen again.”

Greg hugged John and wished he could say he didn’t share that worry. He wasn’t convinced of it, but he also couldn’t deny that it wasn’t tugging at the edges of his mind.

“I don’t know that. But, if it does, Mycroft knows he won’t get another chance with me. We
talked about that, too. Now, you need to understand that Mycroft didn’t cheat. He didn’t have another boyfriend or anybody else in his life besides us. That… that was actually part of the problem. Mycroft found some people to do things with and… well, you know how it is when you find someone to have some fun with. You can forget about the other people in your life.”

Lestrade remained very still while John leaned in to whisper in his ear.

“You… you mean like my aunt?”

Something that gave Lestrade a punch much harder than anything John could muster. Since going to her new job, there hadn’t been many calls or letters and, though John didn’t say much, it was clear it hurt him.

“Yeah, like that. But, if you think about it, since you met Sherlock, you didn’t call her or send many letters, either.”

John’s shocked gasp drew Mycroft’s hand rubbing his back for comfort and it was a sign of the boy’s upset that he didn’t react poorly to the gesture.

“I… but…”

“I know it’s not the same thing, John, but you have to admit that once you met Sherlock and me and Mycroft, you didn’t think about her as much anymore. Do you care about her any less?”

“No… I don’t.”

“And Mycroft doesn’t care about us any less, either. It’s just easy to get distracted, I suppose. Lose sight of what you have when you find something newer. That’s why it’s going to be our job to make sure that doesn’t happen again. Mycroft’s going to do his very best to pay more attention to us and we’re going to say something if we’re feeling a bit left behind. Mycroft has always done everything he can for us, hasn’t he, when we’ve needed something and asked for it? We just have to remember to ask now and then if he starts to get distracted again.”

John narrowed his eyes at cut them towards Mycroft, who was entirely unsure what expression to wear to help convince the boy that their family was not irreparably fractured.

“Really?”

“Yes, John, Gregory is quite correct. We have already discussed what sorts of steps are to be taken to repair this breach and will both give our all to see the healing commence and be successful.”

“I don’t know if I can trust you.”

If there was anything left of his heart by the time this was over, Mycroft would be thoroughly surprised. Already it was broken into a hundred pieces…

“I will not dishonor you by saying your caution is unwarranted, but I will assure you that I will strive to earn your trust and demonstrate that I have never lost my affection for my family.”

“What about that person you’ve been dating in London?”

“A picture does not tell a full tale, John.”

“Really, brother dear? I thought a picture was worth a thousand words.”

“Thank you, Sherlock, for the situation truly called for a cliché.”
“Statements become cliché because they are true.”

“No, not necessarily. And, I have no romantic interest in the person about whom you are speaking. I scarcely have a collegial interest and, yes, I will be reducing the frequency of our interactions, if not ceasing them altogether.”

“I don’t want you to push everyone away, love. I know you said they aren’t your friends, but if they give you the chance to do something now and again… I’d rather you did that than be alone and lonely. I just want time for us, too.”

Mycroft reached out, then drew his hand back from trying to caress Lestrade’s cheek, until his partner gave him a tiny nod that it was alright to continue.

“I understand, my dear, and am honored that you still spare a concern for my happiness in the wake of this debacle.”

And that his lover still leaned into his touch.

“I care not for your happiness! Your conduct has been deplorable and what you deserve is a thrashing far worse than what John has given. My forgiveness will not be bought cheaply, so prepare for my demands, which will be legion and mighty.”

As Mycroft and Lestrade exchanged a grin, John realized that, whereas thrashing had its own rewards, demands could be a more profitable thing and hopped off Lestrade’s lap to stand next to Sherlock.

“Yeah, we’ve got demands.”

“Very well. Might I request that you prepare a list so that I can have it on my person always and tend to the items in a timely fashion?”

“Hmmmm… that is not an entirely pathetic idea. We may have remaining sufficient paper to host John and my list. We will begin as soon as we have replenished our energies, which have been drained to naught by the combination of our prison-like school experience, your odiousness and the need to protect your forsaken concubine from your clammy clutches. Come, John. We shall obtain nourishment then being scribing our wants.”

“We can think while we eat.”

“Actually, we may begin making notes while we enjoy our pre-dinner repast. We must not forget a thing for Mycroft’s suffering must be such that the balladeers will sing of its agony for ages to come.”

With that poetic turn of mind, Sherlock and John gave a final glare at the older boys, then marched off towards the kitchen where their afternoon snack could be found.

“Think that’s the end of it, love?”

“No… I believe that is the first salvo in the battle, but I also believe it will be the worst. There shall be lingering doubt and the need for reassurance at times. Perhaps a trip to London will be of benefit for this and… we must see Grandmama this coming weekend, but the weekend after might offer a bit of family time in the city.”

“That’s not a bad idea, actually. Give them a chance to scent mark their territory and put their stamp on things again.”
“And you, my dear. The house has sorely missed your presence.”

“Yeah, well… ok, no starting a conversation on something we’ve already talked about until we’ve taken some steps to make another conversation necessary. Or not. Besides, Mum will likely travel that ground anyway, so…”

This time, it was Mycroft who took his lover in his arms and held him gently while Lestrade took a few breaths to relax.

“Consider that in a few scant hours we shall see that conversation ended and we may have time to relax and speak on whatever topic you might like. May I ask, and I know it is likely inappropriate of me, but… will you be staying the night?”

Mycroft hoped the soft sigh was not the extent of his lover’s answer.

“I don’t know.”

Not much better than a sigh, but not a definitive ‘no,’ either.

“That is perfectly understandable and I shall, of course, not harbor any expectations either way. I intend fully to let you guide me in the pace of our recovery and I want you never to feel as if I hope for more than you are willing to give.”

“I appreciate that, Mycroft. Let’s just see how things go, alright?”

“An excellent plan. Now, shall we join the children? I am certain they will be most happy to begin sharing their thoughts on remuneration for their troubles.”

“Don’t let them take too much advantage, love.”

“Perish the thought. However, they do deserve something as repayment for their pain, as well as reward for their stalwart support of you.”

“That was pretty amazing. Collecting all that data and worrying about me. We should probably get some ice on that eye of yours, though. It’s definitely turning color. At least, this time, I actually know how you got it.”

“Ah, yes. I had forgotten the previous one. Truly the tale was a similar one, though the reason for the assault was not so personal a one. And, I’m afraid your offer of ice is not one I will spurn. Perhaps several ice packs, actually. John landed many a hefty blow… perhaps we should look into finding him training in boxing.”

“Let’s not encourage him, Mycroft. I’ll take him outside tomorrow and kick the football around so he can work off some of this energy. Give you and Sherlock some time together. He really didn’t say much today, so…”

“Yes, you may be right. I will inquire about his most recent experiments. That will give me opening to broach a conversation between the two of us where he may feel more confident to express his emotions.”

“That’s good. He put a LOT of work into his data collection for us and he wouldn’t do that if it wasn’t important to him.”

“Yes, you are surely correct. And I do believe I am overdue for ice.”
“Starting to ache?”

“Rather.”

“Ice and some aspirin for my Mycroft. Get ready for the boys to laugh at you.”

“I shall staunchly gird my loins.”

“At least John didn’t get a shot at those.”

“I did my best to protect them. I have great hope they shall be of use to me one day.”

With a smile at Lestrade’s laughter, Mycroft pulled himself to his feet and held out his hand for his partner to take, which Lestrade did gladly and held it fast as they followed the boys to the kitchen. Only the grande dames of the family to go and all the necessary conversations would be had and they could make a real start on reforming the bonds that had become strained and frayed. Of course, that was assuming that after the conversations with those grande dames, there would be anything left of them to make the effort…
Neither Sherlock nor John was in a very talkative mood after their snack, at least not towards the older boys, so, finishing their remuneration list and a few games of chess occupied the time until Mycroft and Lestrade had to leave to meet Lestrade’s mother, something both contemplated avoiding by continuing on in the car until they found something more restful to fill the hours. Like a prison riot.

“Well, we’re here. And it looks like the neighbors aren’t at home so we won’t disturb them if things get loud.”

“Gregory… perhaps I should do this alone. I do not want for you to suffer any further agitation because of my insensitivity and stupidity.”

“Tonight, tomorrow… Mum’s going to have me by the ear at some point and, this way, we can get it over and done with quickly and in one go. Though, like with the boys, she’s probably going to have select words for me over the next several days, anyway, so this won’t be the last of it. Come on, let’s get this part over with.”

Lestrade got out of the car then, just to be silly, ran around to the other side, to open Mycroft’s door just as he had on their first date.

“Are you ready, kind sir?”

“I am, you polite man.”

Stepping out as regally as he was able with watery knees, Mycroft stopped a moment and took a kiss from Lestrade’s lips before linking their arms and turning to face the door.

“Into the valley of death.”

“Let’s hope we fare better than that poor lot.”

“I think it’s rather guaranteed.”

“Hey! The evening is looking up already!”

Starting them walking, Lestrade favored his lover with a smile he hoped looked convincing and steered them up the steps before opening the door a crack and peeking in to see if the immediate coast was clear. Seeing it was and no flying skillets were waiting to pounce, Lestrade walked the rest of the way inside, instinctively keeping Mycroft slightly behind him just in case the skillets were hiding around a corner.

“Mum? Are you home?”

As if her car parked outside was not a clue.

“Kitchen.”

The flat finality of his mother’s tone set Lestrade’s nerves up a notch and he squeezed Mycroft’s arm tightly before continuing on to find their host waiting for them at the kitchen table.

“Sit.”
Neither man was happy about sitting because it was harder to start running from that position, but, obediently, took their seats, holding what they hoped was placating smiles on their faces.

“Don’t grin at me. Either of you.”

And their discussion begins on a failed foot. Really, this was going… about as expected.

“We’re not grinning, mum. Just… trying to be respectful and not look like pouting toddlers.”

“It didn’t work. At least, if you were pouting, I’d think you’d recognized how much trouble you’re in and not that you were hoping I was going to put some cake in front of you and call you good boys.”

“That is the very last thing Mycroft and I think. Really, there’s not a thing laster-er than getting cake and a pat on the head. We know you’re angry, mum, and we’re here so we can talk about it. And you’re right to be upset, we believe that, too. Just… we just hope you’ll come to understand that there’s no reason to be angry. We’re not doing anything stupid, mum. I promise you.”

“I’ve heard that from you before.”

“And it was true! I said Mycroft and I weren’t going to get married or anything until we were older and more settled and we haven’t, have we? And I didn’t say yes to Mycroft’s proposal because I knew we had far too much to push through before I could even consider it.”

“Which implies that you will consider it in the future. Greg, can’t you see he’s using you?”

Mycroft hoped the laser glare beaming through his skull would also cauterize the flesh wounds so he might have a chance to call an ambulance before bleeding to death on the Lestrade kitchen floor.

“I know that is the appearance of things, Mot… Mrs. Lestrade, and I will not deny that my neglect of Gregory has amounted to that in a practical sense, however, that has never been my intention. I have never wanted that for him and, further, never realized what my actions were accomplishing until the evidence was presented to me. And it was undeniable evidence; I do not, will not, turn a blind eye towards it and gladly accept all blame for this situation.”

“You’re damned right you will! Greg… take a walk, but don’t go far, because it’s going to be your turn soon enough.”

“No.”

“Pardon me?”

Lestrade folded his arms across his chest and tried to look as formidable as he could.

“I’m not going to leave.”

“Oh, I think you will.”

“No, Mycroft and I are in this together and we’re going to stay in this together.”

“Gregory… perhaps this is for the best.”

Damn Mycroft using his soothing tone and deflating his formidableness!
“I don’t like it, love.”

“Neither do I, but you know I hope to minimize your distress and whereas I cannot take upon myself your own conversation with your mother, I can free you from the burden of hers with me. I am certain there is something entertaining on the television that you might use to pass the time, why do you not go and indulge yourself.”

Lestrade reached over and rubbed Mycroft’s shoulder, trying his best to read any hidden messages in his partner’s face, but finding none that screamed ‘I’m lying, don’t leave me!’ nodded slowly and left the table.

“Well, I’ll give you this. You know how to pull his strings.”

“Something you do not mean flatteringly, though I do not begrudge the sentiment.”

“Of course I don’t mean it flatteringly! You… you use him as a fucking servant, dangling the promise of love and a family in front of his face because you know he’s desperate for it, but go on with your merry ways without any intention of having anything real with him! And I’m a daft one, too, because I didn’t see it until it was too late. I really did think you cared about my son… I was as deluded as he was. But no more.”

There was not a hint of lowering intensity in those laser eyes and Mycroft simply hoped the wall behind his head wasn’t being eaten through for there was no cash in his pockets to take from his dead body to pay for the ensuing damage.

“I love Gregory, that is a truth that will never change. I have misused him and treated him in a manner than shames me, something that will forever leave a stain upon my soul, but do not believe that I have ever ceased to care for him. It is to my disgrace that I allowed that caring to blind me to the need to demonstrate to him what I felt. That I fell into a… well, into some contented place in my mind where our lives were often separate but our feelings were ever strong and true. It did not occur to me, in this blissful mindset, that without reassurance and attention, such a thing could not continue and that Gregory would suffer because of it. I took him for granted, though I did not see it, and it is upon me now to see this never again happens, something to which I will dedicate myself with unflagging effort.”

Mycroft was not expecting a slow round of applause for his words, but received it, along with a contemptuous sneer from his potential mother-in-law.

“What a lovely speech. Not that I’d expect anything less. That’s your strength, isn’t it? Words? Making pretty speeches so things go your way? The problem is that I don’t believe a word of it. The problem with people like you is that you don’t have any issue using your words to get what you want and then using them again when the first set is found to be nothing but shite. All you’ve got to do is push out a little more breath and you’ve got lots of that to spare.”

“I will not refute that, for your statements do have merit, but I would assert that your argument does not apply to the situation at hand. Gregory, himself, will support that I have never attempted to manipulate him into anything, though it is, I freely admit, in my range of abilities.”

“As if he would know you were doing it! My Greg is a clever lad, but I don’t fool myself into thinking he would know if you were twisting him around. And he’d probably do exactly as he has been doing… letting you get away with it. He’s got a heart too large for his own good and believes in people more than he should. I… I warned you about that and never realized that I was just setting him up as the perfect victim. Well, you’re not getting another chance to hurt him and that’s the end of it.”
The wave of his future, hopefully, mother-in-law’s hand a sickening finality to it, but Mycroft refused to be deterred.

“I have no intention to hurt Gregory and am committed, frankly, to exactly the opposite. I must first redress the wrongs I have perpetrated, then I will ensure that Gregory never again suffers at my hand. Some things I cannot change, such as my absences, but I can change how that time is used and I will change it.”

“Until you don’t. And why should you? I’ve seen the photos, read the articles. Believe me, there was a queue of people around me who were happy to push them into my face once Greg caught wind of what was going on and I must say, you have a nice thing going in London. Rich, handsome lad on your arm, all your wealthy friends going to places you’d never think to take my Greg… well, it stops here. You go and live your fancy life, but you leave my son out of it.”

“That is something I will not, I cannot, do. Gregory is my life and I will not abandon him, regardless of the virulence of the hate you might harbor for me. He and I have agreed to try to repair our relationship and I take that agreement seriously. He had bestowed upon me a great gift, one I likely do not deserve, and I will honor it by seeing our life together righted so we might continue on with the future we hope to share.”

“Simply beautiful. And when you fuck up again, it’ll be something just as beautiful. And the next time and the next time and the…”

“I am not your husband, Mother Lestrade. Do not mistake me for him.”

Lestrade’s mother reared back as if slapped and Mycroft prepared for that very thing to happen to him, wishing for all the world that he could take back the words that had slipped out of his mouth without his mind’s permission.

“That… I… well… that just gives me a better eye for this sort of thing! I lived through the ‘everything is wonderful ‘ phase, then round after round of ‘be a bastard then apologize for it,’ and, of course, the ‘not even bothering with the apology because who really cares anymore’ piece. If you think I don’t want my son to become me, then you’re right. You’re absolutely right and I’m not sorry for it. I don’t want him wasting his youth on someone who’ll only take advantage then leave him when there’s just no more blood to squeeze from the stone.”

“And you know that of me? You know I am incapable of learning from my mistakes?”

“I know you’ve let him down before and slid right into the same pattern. So, yes, I think I can say I know that.”

That arrow hit home, but it was something for which Mycroft was prepared.

“A single occurrence is not a pattern. It is but a potential. Now… now the pattern is clear. I love Gregory and when I proposed to him it was sincere and without a hint of artifice, but I do see, now, a pattern and that is critical. I assume of him, I embrace a magical immutability that exists without support or input, I exclude practicality and reality from my view of our love and focus on the romantic… I see the pattern, I see my faults and failings and I see it all with the most painful clarity. I am armed now with what I need to repay Gregory for what he has suffered and rekindle in him the faith and trust that I have diminished. I know you believe me unhealthy for him and I understand your viewpoint. I also know… you feel I have betrayed the trust you placed in me. Again, I will not attempt to refute that, for it is a valid perspective. All I ask is that I have opportunity to show I have learned from my blunders and that I can be the man you once believed me to be.”
Mycroft remained as still as possible as he was scrutinized by the woman across the table from him and prayed she was seeing what she needed to see, at the very least, not stand as his enemy and between him and his Gregory.

“I trusted you once, Mycroft. I don’t know if I have it in me to do it again.”

“Something you share with young John, though it is my greatest hope that I might see that changed.”

“John and Sherlock… they can’t be handling this well. Poor lambs, they’re right in the center, though none of it is their fault or within their power to alter.”

“They are not in the best frames of mind, that is true. At least, not at the moment. We spoke at some length today, though it was not an easy thing, and much was expressed that illustrated how deeply is their pain. But, inroads have been made into the darkness of their hearts and, I hope, allowed some light to enter.”

“Let me guess… John gave you that eye.”

Mycroft smirked and lifted his hand to touch the very colorful mark on his face.

“I was wondering about it, I will confess, but it’s too small for a fist of Greg’s size. And… my son couldn’t have done it in the first place. One of his mates, he could wallop and laugh about it the next day with them, but not you. You had his whole heart, Mycroft, every single bit of it…”

A concept that seemed to leave a bad taste in his adversary’s mouth, but Mycroft could not help but make note of the change of both tone and energy in her voice.

“And do not believe that I am not eternally grateful for that fact and for the boon he gave me of discussing our situation in a non-physical fashion. In contract, John expressed his opinion of my behavior in a most vigorous manner and I shall carry the reminder for some days to come. Gregory will speak to him again tomorrow and I will take time to converse with Sherlock, for he has not been so forceful in voicing his views, which is most atypical for him.”

“Divide and conquer.”

“Rather, give each boy a more private ear to hear their words. I am not, in any manner, oblivious to what my actions have meant to the children and am keenly aware that I have bridges to rebuild with them, also.”

“At least you’re not hiding from the amount of damage you’ve done.”

“I would sorely love to, but I have already dishonored myself to a point that shall haunt the remainder of my days and I have no desire to see further ghosts added to the foray.”

The urge to apply a foot to Mycroft’s bum and send him bouncing down the street was still incredibly high but… he wasn’t backing down. Not making excuses, but not backing down, either. For that matter, he also wasn’t making any outlandish promises. Or say she was overreacting or that her son was, in any way, at fault for this mess. Though Gregory did have his share to answer for, too. It was all so hard to trust, though, because… well, he was Mycroft Holmes and this sort of thing was child’s play for him… time for a little more information.

“Greg! Stop eavesdropping and come in here.”

The fact that Lestrade’s head immediately appeared around the edge of the kitchen door frame
served as proof of his guilt and, with a sheepish smile, he quickly took the seat next to Mycroft at the table.

“What do you have to say for yourself?”

“There wasn’t anything good to watch on the telly?”

Lestrade rubbed his arm where his mother punched him and ignored Mycroft’s tiny snort of laughter at not being the only one of the couple to now sport bruises.

“I mean about all of this, you prat.”

“I don’t have anything to add, if that’s what you’re asking. Mycroft and I want to make another go of it and working on fixing what went wrong. We’ve talked how we feel and have some ideas about what we need to do to get back on the right path. We don’t think this is going to change overnight or that it’s going to be easy. It’s going to take work on both our parts, but… I think we can do it. If Mycroft had actually cheated on me, things would be different, but he didn’t, so… I can move past what did happen if he’s honest about trying to change things and follows through on making those changes.”

“And you want that? After the hell you went through, after knowing how bad it can get, you still want a relationship with him?”

It bothered Mycroft that Lestrade hesitated slightly before answering but his partner had good reason to hesitate and he would never begrudge him the instinct for self-preservation.

“I do. If we can make real progress, that is. I’m not a masochist… despite appearances… and if things don’t get better then that’ll be the end of it and I wash my hands of the whole thing. Mycroft knows that and he knows I’m serious. I… I don’t want the life you had, mum, as miserable is that is for me to say. I saw how much you hurt and I know what you lost in all of it and I don’t want that to be me. When I thought it was, I broke off things, so make of that what you will. And know that I’m only willing to give this one more chance because I’m convinced Mycroft is sincere about trying to be better about making time for me. And I’m going to be better about making it known when I need something from him, even if it’s just to hear his voice for awhile.”

Now it was two boys suffering scrutiny and Greg wondered when it had gotten hot in the kitchen, because he was certain he was starting to sweat.

“I can’t say I agree, but I also can’t say I’ve seen you two try to do anything about this fiasco yet so I can point out how bad an idea this was when it’s fallen to pieces again. I don’t like it, but… ultimately, I can’t tell you what to do. You’re not a child anymore, Greg, and if that means you have to make your own mistakes and grow from them, then that’s what has to happen. I will always be here for you, son, will always listen to you and give you whatever you need from me, but I’ll step back and let you make your own decision here… and take the consequences be they good or bad.”

Lestrade reached under the table and grabbed Mycroft’s hand to hold and steady himself from the rush of relief that was flooding his body. If his mother had decided to stand against them, he’d not had any idea of how he’d be able to handle the stress and pressure, which was already at a nearly overwhelming level.

“Thanks, mum. Really, thank you. And I’m not walking into this with my eyes closed… I honestly believe we have a real chance and we’re both dedicated to making the effort to take best advantage of it.”
“Well, we’ll see. Now, I assume you’re staying the night at My…”

“Here.”

Mycroft was not proud of the squawk that erupted from him, but… this was certainly not the way he had hoped the evening would end.

“I’m staying here tonight. I have school in the morning, don’t I?”

Neither Mycroft nor Lestrade’s mother would admit to the look they shared but, on this point, they had common ground.

“Son, there’s no reason for you to go to school tomorrow.”

“Your mother is quite correct, Gregory. They day shall likely be unproductive for you, owing to the increased level of attention and, besides, we are slated to visit Grandmama the following day and it might be good if you see some rest and quiet before that occurs.”

“Rowena wants her own piece of you, does she? Good.”

“Yes, well… Grandmama pointed out to me, originally, the extent of my negligence and inconsideration, and now wishes to make further her disapproval known, especially after my proposal.”

“That’s my spirits raised nicely. But, you should take the day tomorrow, Greg. You’ve got to be knackered after the day you’ve had and a little relaxation will be good for you.”

“No, I’m going. Let everyone see that it’s business as usual. But… I’ll probably stay at Mycroft’s tomorrow night. Just so we can get an early start to Grandmama’s.”

That helped Mycroft settle down only a little, though he had to admit he was thrilled his dearest was considering any degree of closeness at this point in time.

“I believe that to be a very good idea, my dear, for I am certain Sherlock and John will want to maximize their time with the amusements they have established for that particular home away from home.”

“Then let me take you home at home and I can look at having a shower and getting some sleep. Mum’s right… I’m exhausted right now and what I really need is a good night’s rest.”

Something that brought Mycroft’s worry down even further. His Gregory was visibly fatigued and it was likely that a return to his home, and bed, would result in continued conversation, as well as other things if he was extremely blessed, though little sleep for the man he loved. As ever, his dear, yes, he would again think it, his dear husband, was the one to bring reason and reality into their life.

“An excellent suggestion. Mother Lestrade… I thank you for your time and your attention, further, for your willingness to allow Gregory and me to work through our problems in our own manner. He is fortunate to have a mother such as you.”

Before any further words could be had on the matter, Mycroft rose and nodded to Lestrade who hopped up and escorted him out of the kitchen, leaving Lestrade’s mother to remember just how… unguided… Mycroft was in this world. No father and a mother who, by all accounts, scarcely merited the title. His grandmother loved him dearly, but could not be there the way a parent needed to be for their child and, as much as she hated it with a ferocious passion, her own maternal heart broke a little for the boy who had very much lost his way. Well, she said she’d stay out of their
business and she would but… maybe a bit of motherly arse kicking should have happened before now and if she simply played a few cards that had already been sitting in hand, that wasn’t a violation of her promise now, was it? Anyway, it would give her more cause to trounce that poncy little bastard if he hurt her Greg again, and that was something of its own reward. Should it happen, of course…

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Lestrade hated the desperate pull that made him want to change his mind and just spend the night in his Mycroft’s arms, but it wasn’t stronger than the rest of him, so not a step farther than the front door would he go.

“Goodnight, love. It’s… it’s been quite a day.”

“That it has. A momentous one, in many ways, and I am glad for it.”

“Me, too. And, just so you know, I am tired. But, I also need some time to clear my head. So much has happened and I just need to… saying I need to be alone for awhile sounds a bit awful, but it is the truth.”

“Of course you do, my dear, and I completely understand. I would prefer if you allowed that time alone to extend through tomorrow’s school day, but I know you will wag a finger and pooh-pooh me nigh unto death if I make the suggestion.”

Lestrade giggled and took his partner in his arms, not ignoring how perfectly Mycroft fit in his embrace.

“I will, too. I need to do it, love. Just let everyone see that nothing’s changed about who I am. They’ll think what they want to about us, but about me… I’m still me and that’s important for everyone to know. Even if I’m spending the weekend in a castle.”

“Oh dear, Grandmama has not affixed that designation to the house again, has she? Tourists are dreadful at the best of times…”

This time, both boys laughed and that laugh became a kiss that only ended when they were pushed apart by two small pairs of hands whose owners took the place between the older pair as their domain to defend to the death.

“That is enough. Your lusts are not to be satisfied on the doorstep like a wanton pair of rutting canines.”

“Yeah! That’s just wrong!”

“I believe we are being chaperoned, my dear, so it is, perhaps, time you fled to avoid further censure.”

“Perfect timing, you miserable goblins. I was just leaving, so not a bit of lust got sprayed all over the nice steps.”

The boys rolled their eyes and John decided to take point in breaking up this nonsense before it went any further.

“Sherlock, you take Mycroft inside and I’ll make sure Greg actually leaves and doesn’t sneak back in for more kissing.”
“Yes, his strength of will is not something on which we might count at the moment.”

Sherlock grabbed Mycroft’s hand and dragged him into the house, the older Holmes waving over his shoulder at Lestrade who made a grand show of boo-hooing at his departing lover.

“You’re being embarrassing, Greg. But, at least you’re not going to let Mycroft kiss you anymore. He needs to… he should have to win that right like one of those knights that had to fight a duel for the lady to give him a kiss.”

“Oh… well, that’s right medieval of you, John. Nicely done.”

“He should have to fight a dragon, after what he did. Maybe he’d get eaten and then you wouldn’t have to worry about him anymore.”

Yes, today’s talk was only to be the first of a series, apparently, but that was nothing more than he’d expected and nothing less than the boys deserved.

“Want to talk about it, lad?”

“No. I mean… it won’t change anything.”

“Maybe not, but that doesn’t mean you can’t talk about how you feel or that I won’t listen to you and take it seriously.”

Lestrade watched John frown and fiddle with his fingers before shaking his head.

“Are you sure, John?”

“Yeah. I mean… I don’t have anything else to say besides what I already said, so it’d be a bit pointless.”

“No, it’s never pointless to need to talk about something, but how about this? I’m coming back tomorrow and staying over so we can make an early start to Grandmama’s. I thought we could play a little football in the afternoon, just you and me, and if you think of something else to talk about, we can do it then.”

“Oh… I’d like that, actually. I’ve been practicing against the side of the house, but we haven’t played in at least a week, so you can see how good I’ve gotten since then.”

“Then it’s a date.”

“No. Dates have kissing and I’m not kissing you.”

“Not even a little one?”

“Go home, Greg. You’re getting strange.”

Lestrade ruffled John’s hair and made a very slow shamble to his car, driving away at a pace slower than a snail could crawl, waving at John out of the driver’s side window the whole, lengthy time. Yes, they’d talk tomorrow, after John had his own sleep and time to clear his head. And there was little doubt Mycroft would have his ear bent by Sherlock. Today had been loony, but it had moved them forward, both with themselves and with the boys, and that was what they all needed. Move forward and keep moving.

They even had mum on their side, in a very loosely-applied use of the phase, and the boys had sheathed their fangs a little so their bites had a bit less sting. Now, it was Grandmama to face and,
for the life of him, he couldn’t see that being worse than what they’d lived through today. Of course, he could be sadly, pitifully wrong, but… yes, a good night’s sleep was certainly what he needed. His brain didn’t want to think and good for it taking a stand on the issue. One good sleep, one silly day at school then back here to keep working on rebuilding their family. See? A plan. A real plan to follow and that was always a good thing. Which meant, of course, something was going to happen to throw all of that into the rubbish and make his head hurt. Or not. Really… who could predict anything at this point? But, if he was a betting man, he’d say that even if the skies fell, he and Mycroft would see it through together. Each carrying a complaining boy on their back…
Chapter 4

Mycroft stared at his room which housed, as promised, packed luggage and a few additional boxes filled with his earthly possessions, and groaned slightly before starting the unpacking process. When he’d finally been released from Sherlock’s grip and subsequent to being sternly admonished not to race away to find his beloved and, to use his brother’s phrasing ‘disgracing further the family name by rutting on the peasant’s lawn like a libidinous canine,’ he had decided to take a moment to compose himself away from younger and wary eyes, but that time would have to be put to better use, instead because tomorrow, his Gregory would share his bed, hopefully, and everything could be nothing less than perfect.

If the fortunes favored him and he was so honored, he would lie with his spouse and share, again, the warmth and affection of the man he loved. If he was so honored, of course... there was, by no means, any surety of that. They were in a much better place in their relationship than when he first arrived at Gregory’s school, but this was still very early in the process to make any form of assumptions. He had seen with painful clarity the damage done by assumptions and those mistakes would not be repeated. So, a bit of refitting his rooms and a check that all relevant ‘supplies’ were still in their exceedingly well-hidden hiding place. The fact that he was not presented with certain items by small, snooping boys and asked to explain their function was a mercifully hopeful sign...

Though snooping was not precisely on Sherlock’s and John’s mind, as the night wore on. While not incorrigible in the strictest sense of the word, they did appear to be fueled by a source of somewhat manic energy that only ebbed after an odd and impromptu leaping competition that had both boys aping an Olympian long-jumper and carefully measuring the results of various launch speeds, angles, body postures and noise production. When it seemed the chaotic vitality had finally been sapped, Mycroft was positively giddy that neither protested a pre-bedtime shower and gladly sought their pillows in preparation for whatever tomorrow would bring them at school. And, no, he would not complain to his spouse about the difficulty of minding the children. Though it was unlikely that Gregory would follow John’s rather physical model of expressing displeasure, having his remaining eye blackened was not precisely how he wanted tomorrow’s reunion to begin.

Further, given the house was quiet and there was nothing pressing for him to manage, there was no reason not to follow Sherlock and John’s example and seek his own much-needed rest. Though he would remain home and tend to matters of his own studies and work, a good night’s sleep was the most agreeable suggestion his mind had delivered in what seemed an eon. If only his actual rest could have approached an eon in length, but such was, apparently, not meant to be, if the weight now sitting on the edge of his bed was any indication.

Wiping the sleep from his eyes, Mycroft focused on the patch of darkness that was slightly more solid than the rest of the darkness in the room and sighed softly.

“Sherlock? Is everything alright?”

“I see you have unpacked your belongings.”

Ah... and, apparently, it was Sherlock’s turn to expose his tender, bruised heart. It should have been predictable from the franticness of the evening’s activities, for Sherlock often avoided his emotional distress with displacement behaviors. However, he could not avoid them forever...

“I have. I will still, to my extreme regret, spend much time away from home, but this is home to
me, Sherlock, as long as my family resides under its roof.”

“I find that challenging to believe. There are no concert halls or fine restaurants in the medieval hamlet that haunts this region.”

The bitterness in Sherlock’s voice was expected, but painful to hear, nonetheless.

“No… there are not. However, their absence is inconsequential. What matters is on these grounds. The people I love are here and that is all I truly need to be happy.”

The dark patch remained quiet until Mycroft reached over for the lamp, when the silence was broken by a tiny ‘no,’ that made Mycroft’s heart ache fiercely. Deciding a compromise was in order, Mycroft took out one of the small candles he and Lestrade occasionally lit for their personal time and started it burning with a glow that faintly illuminated the small boy who was wrestling with a very difficult set of emotions.

“I am not being dishonest, brother dear. I have held you fast in my heart from the first moment I saw you as a tiny baby and, now, I have a place there for Gregory and John. Nothing London or any location in the world offers is more important than that.”

“Mummy claims to love us, yet she happily remains as far away as she can from our door and for reasons that are not unlike those you claimed in your bid for absolution.”

Mycroft choked out a startled breath and sat up more fully to find some support to tackle Sherlock’s on-the-mark accusation.

“Mummy is a supremely social creature and that she draws strength, pleasure and esteem from the attention of others, which is not necessarily akin to my own situation. Further, Mummy has behaved in such a way since… since I can remember. I believe Father would gladly have enjoyed a quieter, simpler life, however, there were often parties here, large and grand events and frequent trips to London for further entertainments... and this was her pattern even before she and Father met. You know well that was not the case for me, Sherlock.”

“Only because you are just starting along the path, whereas Mummy has trod it for decades.”

Sherlock’s mind might be young, however, it was a formidable thing.

“Do you honestly believe that? Do you, knowing me as you do and for all your life, believe that I am hoping to follow Mummy’s example, given what we have suffered because of her antics and inattention?”

“The evidence says yes.”

“I did not ask about evidence, Sherlock; I asked about your own instincts. Your own, deepest feelings… am I Mummy’s son or Father’s?”

Sherlock sat silently a moment before his face twisted into a distraught snarl.

“The question is moot. They both abandoned me.”

Sherlock’s voice broke tragically and Mycroft leaned forward to drag a protesting Sherlock into a firm hug.

“Father did not abandon you, Sherlock. You were the world to him and only death could remove him from your life. He loved you desperately, though I know you may not remember the
depth of his devotion. We... we do not speak of him, you and I, but that will change. I had thought
to, when Gregory entered my life and I was reminded how powerful an impact was the presence of a
father figure to a boy. I remembered the times Father and I shared that are likely not in your memory
and hoped to share them with you... but, that good intention fell to the wayside as did so many
others of late. Never believe Father abandoned you, Sherlock. He adored you, as does Gregory.
And me.”

Mycroft held his brother while Sherlock most certainly did not cry, until the not-crying slowed to a
quiet snuffling.

“And I will never abandon you, Sherlock. Never. You are and always will be the brother I love
with my whole being.”

“What does it matter? You will never be here to give proof of it.”

“I would not agree with that assessment. At times, no, I will not be here, but I have learned the
necessity of utilizing the telephone to maintain connection with you, John and Gregory. And, I will
discuss with Gregory what we might do have more time together as a family, regardless of where we
might find ourselves. These next few years will be hard, there is no doubt, but if there is good to
come from this experience it is that we have learned the extreme importance of maintaining fertile,
productive and continuous lines of communication. It cannot be something taken for granted and we
all must do our part.”

“We must come crawling to you, you mean.”

“No, but I would hope that you would be honest and vocal if you believe you are being ignored
or neglected. And that you would encourage John to do likewise. I will not abandon you,
Sherlock. No matter where I am or where you might find yourself in life, I will never abandon you.”

Sherlock wiped his eyes of his non-tears and scrutinized his brother with the full force of his
observational power, finding nothing but naked sincerity in Mycroft’s features.

“I have your word?”

“You have my word. If you prepare a document, I shall gladly affix my signature at the bottom.”

“Very well. I will have it for you in the morning.”

With some of the previous heaviness missing from his brother’s voice, Mycroft breathed a silent sigh
of relief. Poor Sherlock... it only had been the two of them for so long and, with his brother’s
natural personality, it was easy to forget, or fail even to consider, that Sherlock would be significantly
impacted by a separation. It was also easy to forget that Sherlock was just a small boy and his
impressive intellect did not change that in the slightest.

“I will tend to the matter at breakfast. Now, do you believe you might find some sleep tonight?
It is... it is quite late, but there are a few hours to salvage before you must prepare for your day.”

“I... perhaps.”

Or perhaps not. Well, it was not as if he had not spent countless sleepless nights already in his life...

“Then let us we occupy ourselves with something to see the time pass more quickly. A game of
chess or an experiment for which you require an assistant?”

“I do have a test I wish to perform on differences in human hair for tensile strength, chemical
resistance, flammability and electrical conductivity.”

“I would rather my hair remain on my head, brother dear.”

“I have already collected the relevant samples for the variables of color, gender, age and lifestyle.”

“Lifestyle?”

“Peasants versus the worthy class. Lestrade’s mongrel pack provided the samples for lazy, dullard alcoholics.”

“Which you duly informed them.”

“Of course. Secrecy is not relevant for this experiment.”

Although his brother was certainly not fully recovered from his emotional lapse, he was undoubtedly past some of the stormier clouds…

“Then give me a moment to dress and we will take up your research.”

“I will, also, require time to script my contract.”

“Naturally, and I will offer what assistance I am able for wording and avoidance of loopholes.”

Sherlock nodded and hopped off the bed, tapping his foot impatiently while Mycroft rose and donned something other than pyjamas. The thought of waking John briefly flitted through Mycroft’s mind, but he decided to let the boy rest, as he had not the Holmes stamina for wakefulness. Also… his attention needed to be fully on Sherlock for this bit of time. Tomorrow, the larger family group would be together but, for tonight, a group of two was sufficient…

“How long is this?”

John was only slightly put out that there had been activity going on without him but, since the hair experiment wasn’t very exciting, he’d lost his pout quickly and turned attention to the document that was presented him by Sherlock.

“A mere fifteen pages, however, I also have a stored copy on computer disk if any particular page is lost or I suspect tampering with this physical document post-signature.”

“And… you really put my name on it, too?”

“There may never be another chance to pin down the beluga to a course of action, therefore I ensured that all relevant parties are covered by this contract.”

John quickly grabbed the proffered pen and signed his name on the proper line, noting that one line remained unsigned.

“It’s good you put Greg on here, too. Contracts are legal and if they’re broken you can get lots of money or send people to jail.”

John’s pointed look at Mycroft made the older Holmes brother want to laugh, but he did his best to keep a somber face and nod solemnly at John’s wisdom.
“Gregory shall be here when he is done with school for the day and you may make signing Sherlock’s document the very first order of business after his arrival.”

“I will. And, since Sherlock and I aren’t going to school today, we can give this another look to make sure it’s perfect before Greg puts his name on it.”

Two boys adamantly staring at him was not increasing Mycroft’s confidence that the morning was going to proceed placidly.

“I believe you both are attending school today as no state of national emergency has been declared and no holiday exists for this date on your school calendar.”

“John and I are traumatized and require a day of recovery.”

“Whereas I grant you suffered upset yesterday, the exuberance with which you are eating your breakfast and utter lack of emotional dishevelment stands in contrast to a declaration of traumatization.”

“Do not mock our suffering! We are bravely camouflaging our distress so as not to upset the mendicant.”

“Who is not present at the moment, Sherlock, so your argument is rather fraught with holes.”

“Practice! Sherlock and I are practicing our camouflage so we don’t make Greg upset when he comes here this afternoon. See? We’re nice and you should be paying attention.”

Yes, the trauma was nearly overwhelming and Mycroft simply hoped the boys would not dissolve in the acid of their bitterness and sorrow. However, as it was entirely possible that word of yesterday’s somewhat dramatic events had infiltrated the boys’ school and their scholastic experience might not be a terribly productive one with the questions put forth in their direction, an extended weekend might be a wise decision. And tomorrow was Grandmama…

“If I permit this truancy, will you agree to use the time in a non-destructive fashion so that I might tend to various matters that are awaiting my attention?”

The small huddle was waited upon patiently until Sherlock was nominated to present their response.

“No.”

Of course.

“Explain.”

“John has been hopeful of testing certain configurations of catapult derived from our previous models and today is the day we have chosen to do so.”

So… directed and educational destruction. This was not as dire as expected, to the great surprise of everyone in the universe.

“Alright, I will amend my statement with a codicil to permit the testing, outdoor testing, of your devices.”

“That is acceptable. We will complete the construction after breakfast and, then, begin testing. We will also require a shopping excursion for more notebooks. And chocolate.”

“Yeah, because Greg hasn’t brought us shopping in… ever… and he hasn’t bought us any
sweets, either!"

“Oh, Gregory has been that busy?”

“No, he just doesn’t have any money. The car needed repairs, then Mrs. Lestrade’s telly broke and Greg helped pay for that because... well, he suspects that, maybe, giving it a hit during a really awful match might have been part of the reason it started showing everything as purple and hissing now and again. Then, Sherlock and I both needed some things for our geography projects and then we broke Mrs. Lestrade’s window, but it really was an accident because not even Greg thought that the rocket would launch that fast with only kitchen ingredients to make it fly…”

“Yes, yes I see. That does leave little room for incidentals and luxuries. In that case, we shall gain for you that which you need for your work and Grandmama will certainly have a plethora of sweets and cakes for you to enjoy tomorrow.”

Although the boys seemed pacified by the compromise, Mycroft was certainly not pacified by the news of the recent financial outlays. Yes, his spouse would have fought against taking monies, but at least the argument could have been had and some form of bargain might have been reached. Communication... that was, if he remembered correctly, covered in some detail in Section 9, Subsection 4, Paragraph 6 of the family contract and he would ensure Gregory’s signature was affixed firmly on the document to bolster future arguments on the subject of monetary issues...

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Ok, he would admit it. Mycroft and his mother had been right. Going to school was a terrible idea! Half the time he was being congratulated, verbally, with notes or signals on his upcoming marriage, half the time he was being warned, verbally, with notes or signals about his upcoming marriage, half the time he was catching shite for having no self-respect, being a fortune-hunter or a gigolo and half the time he had to sit through class! That was too many halves for a man to bear!

At least his mum had been nearly normal this morning. Breakfast was actually fine, with non-fiery conversation about what the day was likely to bring and whether or not he was coming home after school to pack for the weekend or if that was going to wait until tomorrow morning. Her blood surely wasn’t boiling as hot as last night, but he wasn’t about to say she was over the situation.

That was alright, though, because he wasn’t either. Every one of his mates had asked about the dark circles under his eyes, because no matter how exhausted he was last night, sleep just didn’t want to come. And, in hindsight, he was stupid to think it would, not after the day he’d endured. There wasn’t a roller coaster in existence with a ride as wild as that one. On top of everything else he’d gone through over the past few days... or weeks and months, it had just been too much to let his brain rest. Not even Sherlock’s violin recordings, of which he now had six and normally were perfect for soothing his mind when it had troubles, could help bring the sleep he needed. They had lowered his anxieties to a manageable level, though, and that had allowed him to make it through today without actually committing murder. A good murder might have been nice to take more of the edge off, though...

Now, unfortunately, those anxieties were back up on the high end of the scale and with Mycroft’s house looming into view, they were climbing even higher. He’d said he’d probably stay here tonight and had to decide if he was going to follow through. He loved Mycroft and desired him just as ferociously as he ever had, but whether it was time to act on that was a very big question. It was an evil thought, but he still had a little worry that if he, again, gave Mycroft everything they’d had, at least so soon, there wouldn’t be any further reason for his partner to try to make things better. But, he also recognized that this was his own worry and Mycroft hadn’t given him any real reason to think it was true...
Parking the car and taking a deep breath, Lestrade marched up to the front door and poked his head inside, a little leery since he could hear the boys’ voices with ear-splitting clarity and they should still be in school...

“GREG! Sherlock’s killed me!”

Which actually seemed true, what with the concentration of red stains right over John’s heart and the two on his forehead.

“Any reason why?”

“We built a... well, it’s like a crossbow, but it fires little balloons that we filled with paint... and he won the coin flip.”

“So he got to shoot and you got to be the target.”

“Yeah... I think I had more fun, though, because I could run and try to keep from being hit, but he had to stand in one place since he fell over the first few times he tried to run and fire at the same time.”

“Then I’d say death is a small price to pay.”

“I have to agree. But, you’re here now, so you can shoot and we can both try and not be killed.”

“Well... ok. Isn’t... isn’t Mycroft home?”

That would just be a paint balloon to his own forehead that he really did not need right now.

“He is, but this is still his negotiated two hours of office time. We set up a schedule for today since he had to read a stack of papers that was as tall as my head, so he gets to do that and still have fun with us, too.”

Ah ha. Apparently his lover was already trying to see that Sherlock and John got their share of time. That was... encouraging.

“I suppose, then, that I can be a murderer for awhile. Let’s see if I can get Sherlock as red as you, ok?”

“Yes! He’s wearing a white shirt, too, so it’ll be very dramatic, and you know how much Sherlock likes to be dramatic.”

It was good to be home.

“That he does. Alright, lad, come on. Mass murder until Mycroft’s done and then we’ll see what we can find to do together.”

“And you’ve got a contract to sign.”

“Contract?”

“Oh, I’ll tell you all about it. Don’t worry.”

Worried now. Very, very worried...
Mycroft despised the word ‘spying,’ but, sometimes, it was really the best fit for the situation. Take now, for instance, when he was gazing upon the sight that never failed to fill his core with a cozy and joyful warmth. His family engaged in an afternoon of play… it was a glorious sight. A red and rather massacre-y sight, but glorious nonetheless… And, now that he was again contracted to the boys for a few hours, he could join in the glory, albeit in a slightly less-messy fashion.

“Mycroft! All done with the paper reading?”

Taking a kiss from his partner, Mycroft also took a moment to breathe in his scent. Gregory smelled wonderful when the sun had been soaking his skin.

“I am. The children have very kindly allotted me several intervals today to tend to certain concerns, but it is awhile until the next, so I am free to join you.”

“Great! Want to be the killer? Those two scarcely have a place left on them that hasn’t been riddled with balloon bullets, but I’m still hale and hearty.”

“And you wish to be otherwise.”

“Well… only if you’re actually able to hit me, of course.”

A challenge? A Holmes never shied away from a challenge.

“I believe the expression is ‘your doom is sealed.’”

Lestrade laughed and handed Mycroft the boys’ homemade weapon before running and grabbing both Sherlock and John to use and human shields.

“Fire away if you’re alright with slaughtering innocent children!”

“Given that you are holding Sherlock and John, innocent is not a relevant factor.”

And, as the firing commenced, with pinpoint accuracy to the small boy’s chests, the next phase of the afternoon began and continued until there were four exhausted and three filthy males begging food and beverages from a highly-amused kitchen staff.

“You know, I don’t mind dying a lot if you get food afterwards.”

“Your stomach is nearly its own entity, John Watson. One day it shall declare sentient independence from you and demand its own name.”

“Will that mean it’s going to have to come out of my body? That would seem a little foolish since it doesn’t have legs and wouldn’t be able to walk around or do anything fun.”

Sherlock threw his hands up in frustration and glared at the older boys who were chuckling at John’s use of his own peculiar brand of logic.

“Worry not, John, for my brother is simply envious of your appreciation of culinary matters. He can hardly differentiate between a pie and a pea.”

“That is a lie! Peas are vile creatures from the hellpits and pies are, by and large, pleasant things that sit quietly while you consume them, as opposed to rolling around and further disturbing your meal.”

Lestrade watched the back and forth and couldn’t have stopped his hand reaching out to begin rubbing his lover’s back if he’d tried. This was what he was fighting for. This was why he was
giving Mycroft another chance. Days like these were precious as gemstones. No, they were actually more precious, because gemstones just sat there and looked lovely, whereas they’d had a fantastic
time racing about and laughing. This was why he was willing to hold on a little longer… there was a
lifetime of days like this at stake and those stakes were too high to ignore.

“I am certain, dearest sibling, that there shall be few peas on your dinner plate tonight, or this
weekend, as Grandmama has never been terribly fond of them.

“It is clear from which line of the family I inherited the better of my traits.”

“The dogs?”

Sherlock roared at John’s interjection which began a loud and gesture-filled argument that spanned
the remainder of their rest break and the setting up of the chess board by the older boys so the
younger ones could begin to calm their humors and settle into the quieter part of the day. Well, as
quiet as it could be, given Sherlock and John’s more active method of playing.

“A brandy, my dear?”

“I would love one. It’s been awhile since I had a sip of that happy nectar.”

“Oh?”

“It… well, it feels wrong to have any unless we have it together. And I don’t relax alone here
very often. I’m usually occupied with those two or, now and then, my mates are over so I can stand
my turn at having a night with a good match or film.”

Mycroft hated hearing the slight shift away from the contented in his partner’s tone, but there would
much of that in the days to come, so it was pointless fretting about it. Changing the situation was the
key and the mission to which he was unwaveringly committed.

“That is understandable, I suppose. But, I hope you do recognize that if you desire a quiet
location to relax for an evening, this is one you can consider to be yours.”

“I know, love. And thanks for that. For this, too. I do adore this brandy.”

Lestrade took a sip and sank slowly onto the sofa, Mycroft quickly following, sitting further from his
partner than he would normally, given the circumstances. In such things, he would let his dear
husband take the lead… as, apparently he was doing now by patting the sofa next to him to urge a
budging closer. And closer still. Which meant his dearest could now rest a hand on his thigh and
give it a comforting squeeze.

“This is… this is indescribable, Mycroft. I know it’s all simple and we’ve done it a hundred
times, but I never get tired of just being here with you, enjoying a bit of quiet and locking out the
cares of the world.”

“I wholeheartedly agree. It is a true balm to the soul and an image that I keep tightly held in my
mind. It is rather shameful how often I turn to this image and similar when I am enduring the
frustrations that seem to eternally beset me, but it has become an almost meditative tool for clearing
and calming my mind so I might again focus on the task at hand.”

“Glad to be of help. And we’ll have more time to do it tomorrow night, I hope. Any firm idea of
what we’re in for?”

“No, not really. It could be the wrath of the gods or a simple assessment that we have a
consensual agreement to continue our relationship, along with a plan to remedy our issues. It will depend greatly on what Grandmama has pieced together through her own sources and what she gleans from us upon our arrival.”

“Fair enough. I do want to hear what she has to say, though. Advice and that sort of thing. A scolding is well-deserved, but I doubt she’ll do that without some suggestions tossed in so we have a few extra thoughts to work with as we soldier on.”

“True, Grandmama does tend to make the most of the time she allots to an endeavor. I do admire your optimistic turn of mind, my dear. It is an admirable quality.”

“Keeps me going.”

That particular shift in tone was one Mycroft believed he could interpret and, with the boys occupied, now was an acceptable time to broach the subject.

“Was your day that arduous, Gregory?”

Lestrade’s soft, tired laugh was really all the confirmation Mycroft needed.

“It wasn’t easy, that for certain. From any side, actually. The good and the… not good.”

“Your friends… they are still offering support, are they not?”

“Oh, sure! Some think it’s great and some think it’s daft, but they’re all on my side no matter happens. And not everyone at school is being a bastard, either. Some solid support from those I don’t know better than to nod to in the halls, for instance. It was just… a lot. Lots of people in my face, lots of questions being fired at me, lots of words being thrown all over with me in the middle… Maybe I should have taken your advice and stayed home, but I do think I did what I set out to do – let everyone see that it’s all business as usual. It’s only a brief while, anyway, until I don’t have school to worry about any longer, but I surely didn’t want to end on a low note.”

“Both courageous and strategic, I feel. When you begin your tenure with the police, you will need a reputation that commands respect and I see your choices as demonstrating a strength of will that is most laudable. Nicely done.”

Which deserved a small reward and kisses were the perfect thing to serve as small rewards, were they not?

“Ugh... they’re kissing again.”

“The relationship between Gregory and me is, as ever, a source of celebration for me, John, and tokens of affection are a very proper way to celebrate the love we share.”

“You know what I think is a good token of affection? Sweets. I’d rather have that than kissing anytime.”

Fortunately, it would be a number of years before John’s mind changed on the subject and both Mycroft and Lestrade were extremely grateful for the fact. The eruption of puberty in the younger generation was not something they had the strength to contemplate at the moment.

“Then aren’t you lucky Mycroft and I won’t be kissing you. We won’t be tossing sweets at you, either, so don’t go hoping for that.”

“You’re not fun anymore, Greg.”
“I’m not a new dad anymore. The novelty has worn completely off and now you’re left with boring, miserly me for the rest of your days.”

John sighed and shook his head, receiving a commiserative pat on the shoulder from Sherlock, who took the opportunity of the distraction to move a few pieces on the chessboard to help ensure his victory.

“You have disillusioned the child, my dear.”

“He’ll survive. Just wait until I can’t be here after school to help with assignments or race over to referee an argument or soothe a fright from a scary film.”

The look of disappointment on Lestrade’s face screamed to Mycroft that the ‘novelty’ had certainly not worn off and the thought of adult employment was going to be something to which his lover was going to have to fight to adjust. As would the boys, which would be the topic of a family discussion sometime in the near future. But, that could wait for now, as there was quite enough on their agenda at the moment.

“I have full faith that the demands of your work will still leave sufficient time to see to the children’s needs. Others who wear the uniform have families, do they not? When you have actually commenced your duties, you might ask them how they manage and what strategies they implement to have a contented home life.”

“That’s true. And a very good idea. Of course they’ll probably laugh at me having ‘kids’ I’m too young to actually have, but maybe that will make them take pity on me and not give the new lad too hard a time when I get started.”

“Oh, I am certain an initiation period is requisite and will be enacted to its fullest, but you shall weather it manfully and gain their admiration, I have no doubt.”

“I’ll threaten them with Sherlock and John if they get too evil. One visit to the station and a few of them will probably looking for their retirement forms.”

“Which will leave open positions available for your advancement. You should consider implementing this protocol sooner than later.”

Lestrade laughed and leaned in to give Mycroft his own brandy-flavored kiss. Definitely what he was fighting for. This was what life was all about and he had it in his hands. Just had to close that fist and hold on for dear life…

It was absolutely no surprise that it took witchcraft and torture to get Sherlock and John to bed, but after their limbs had been picked up and sewn back on, the boys were showered, into pyjamas and under their blankets. Then it was time for the older boys to find their own bed, something that had both of them a bundle of rather frazzled nerves. Given he was the reason for the predicament and their bed was staring at them with a ‘well, now what?’ expression, Mycroft decided it was on him to see what could be done about it.

“Gregory…”

“Yes?”

“I want you to know that I have no expectations for tonight. I know that we are healed to the barest knitting of the most fragile of tissues and I am not of the belief that anything particular will
happen. In fact, I shall not be at all put out if you choose to use one of the spare rooms for your rest. I will not think ill of you or consider it an insult.”

Lestrade moved forward and took his lover in a kiss that expressed better than his words ever could how grateful he was for the decided lack of pressure.

“Thanks, love. That means more than you can know. I am going to sleep in here tonight because I want to be near you. I want to be near and share your bed… but can we just do that? Just sleep together? I can’t tell you how many nights I’ve lain in my own bed or this one just wishing you were there in my arms, nothing more, and… that would be really nice tonight.”

Something which, rather unexpectedly, seemed to lift a weight off of Mycroft’s shoulders. Apparently he was a bit more anxious about reigniting their intimacy than he had thought.

“I would welcome it. We have a rich intimate history, however, the closest I have ever felt to you is when we simply lay together and shared our rest. You knew the difference, even when we were newly bonded… such amazement that I would want from you nights in my bed for sleep as greatly as I wanted nights of passion.”

If his spouse smiled any more brightly, Mycroft had faith he would be blinded by the brilliance.

“Great! And I am ready for a little sleep, too. I didn’t see much last night, at all.”

“It was to be expected, I suppose. I saw little either, for… there was a reason you were sat down this evening and instructed on the contract you were required to sign.”

“Oh… Sherlock?”

“He reached his point of need and it was my good fortune that I was able to provide what was required.”

“Want to talk about it?”

“Yes, actually. Would you… might we take to our bed and have the discussion there? It has always been a good place for us to discuss serious matters.”

“Perfect. Just give me a moment to grab some pyjama bottoms. I keep a set or two here for when I stay overnight. Join me?”

“I would be delighted.”

And that was the honest truth. Even shrouded in cloth, his spouse’s body was a comfort to hold and an object of immense beauty. There was no one in the country more blessed than him, of that he was quite certain and… oh, how kind of Gregory to don his pyjamas in here so his physical delights could be viewed by interested parties. Blessed… truly, there was no other word for it…

Lestrade woke and immediately burned the sensation of his Mycroft resting against him, curled around his body and head on his chest, into his memory. What a night! It was… well, it was, for lack of a better word, perfect. Just lying quietly and talking until neither could keep their eyes open any longer and drifted off in each other’s arms. It felt normal and familiar and spectacular and helped loosen something in his chest so he could breathe better. That night… the night he’d found that bastard in Mycroft’s… their… house, this is what had slashed his mind to pieces. Not the idea of them having sex, but doing this. That had torn everything in him to shreds, but… there was some
definite mending going on at the moment.

“Someone is awake and, I do believe, smiling.”

Mycroft had the sexiest just-woke-up voice of anyone in the world.

“And how would you know that? You’re… looking at my arm, if I’ve got the angle right.”

“Oh, I simply know these things.”

“Psychic, huh? You could make a lot of money with that talent.”

“It shall be of significant assistance should we fall upon lean times.”

“I’ll have your staff set up a nice tent for you, because they’re good at that, and find a crystal ball and some cards for you to use as props. Sherlock and John can make your costume. They’re getting a lot of experience with disguises and the like lately, so it shouldn’t be much of a problem and will certainly be fabulous.”

“How gladdening to hear. We are supposed to enjoy a shopping excursion soon and they can purchase the necessary colorful fabrics and accessories. Might they have, yet, a sewing machine to make their own garments?”

“Hah! No, not yet. Mum did threaten, though, to see if one of our neighbors would teach them. I think she hopes that the two goblins will sew themselves together so we only have one hurricane to mind and not two.”

“I would not be so certain that is the fate in store for them. They have demonstrated quite the talent for handicrafts and would likely excel with their new pursuit.”

“Forgot about that! One shopping trip for fabrics on the list.”

Something which opened another door of opportunity, though Mycroft was loathe to pursue it.

“And… would you be upset if I asked to fund that trip? I have… I know you have experienced some financial hardship of late and I would like, if you are willing, to discuss the matter.”

“Now?”

The exasperated tone in his spouse’s voice warned Mycroft to tread very carefully.

“I admit I had not sought to broach the topic so soon, but… well, the discussion will not be made easier by waiting.”

“How’d you find out?”

“A very small bird tweeted the information to me. Not with malicious intent or out of petulance, of course, but simply to explain a point in our conversation.”

Lestrade huffed a frustrated breath and Mycroft found himself tightening his hold on his partner out of a near-fear that he would leave their bed.

“It’s nothing. Not really.”

“Gregory… we are working to communicate in a more meaningful fashion, are we not?”
“Me and money wasn’t part of it.”

“I believe it was, in the encompassing manner of our discussions.”

“Can I say I don’t remember any of it?”

“You can, but I will not, of course, believe a word of it and chide you most severely.”

“Drat. Look… it’s just normal things, you know? The car had a few problems, for instance. Nothing to worry about.”

“And you funded the repairs yourself.”

“Yeah… Georgie’s uncle did the work, so I got a good deal. And he let me pay over a couple of weeks, so it was fine. Just had to tighten the belt a little.”

“I see. And your mother’s television?”

“John told you about that, too? Little bastard… oh, I know he didn’t mean anything and I’m not mad, but… it’s nothing! Mum found a good second-hand one we could afford and…”

“And you have been funding the children’s’ school expenditures.”

“Just small things! A bit of glue here, some paper there…”

Mycroft ran a hand across his partner’s stomach and laid a small kiss on his chest. Gregory had no idea what he was saying. In his lover’s mind he was simply taking care of things, while failing to realize that he was not a fully-employed adult who shared oversight of the children and was half of a partnership towards that end. Not that he had been doing his part on that front, but, now, things were quite a different story.

“And all of it you have been attempting to fund with the wages from your job at the shop. Your half-time job… my dear, do you not see how that is an untenable situation?”

“No! It’s not as if I have to pay rent or buy groceries or anything like that. And the car is mine, so I’m responsible for its maintenance.”

“You have taken on financial responsibility for the children, which is not inconsequential, as we both know, and the car is our family vehicle, so I also have responsibility for its welfare. It is a joint endeavor… I know I have not been available to you, my love, and I am painfully aware that I have not maintained lines of communication, however, I harbor doubts that you would have broached this with me, even if we spoke every night.”

“We agreed that I would pay for what I could and I’d let you know if I needed help. I’m not at the ‘needing help’ point yet. Besides, those costs are done, so I can save up again.”

“Can we not renegotiate a compromise? Something that is more equitable and does not leave the apparent lion’s share of expenses on your shoulders?”

“It’s not like that and you know it.”

“I do not know it, actually.”

“Love… this is one of those things that… it’s normal to have lean periods! To have to cut back for a bit because something comes up unexpectedly.”
“I grant that, due to my circumstances, that is not a concept with which I have a great deal of familiarity, but I would ask you this – do the ‘normal’ people enjoy this?”

“Of course not!”

“Do they hope and strive to have fewer of those times.”

“Naturally, they do.”

“Then why do you resist, with noted vehemence, any attempt to move you to that point?”

“I don’t! I just… I’ve already taken a bloody car from you, for god’s sake!”

“That was necessary and practical, not extravagant or luxurious. All I hope to do is contribute, my dear. Because I will not be physically present as often as before, it will not be possible for me to directly reach into my wallet to make purchases. I must have you do it in my stead. Our situation has changed since we last entertained this conversation and we must modify accordingly.”

“Mycroft, really… it’s alright. It’s under control.”

“As long as another emergency does not arise.”

“Mycroft… most of the world lives like I do. Or worse!”

“And join their funds, as well as their efforts, with their partners and spouses to secure for both the best possible life.”

“Oh, don’t use logic on me.”

“It is a mighty tool, so use it I shall. I have no intention of ‘keeping’ you, Gregory, and you know that very well. However, it makes little sense for you to endure a hardship when it can be avoided, especially when Sherlock and John are contributory to it. A house fund, perhaps? Something to which we both contribute, even in equal parts, so there is a greater reservoir of monies at hand should you find yourself in need for life’s little eventualities? And, as we would naturally help Mother Lestrade should something go awry, it would also be of use should you send another television to its untimely demise.”

“Hmmmm…”

Mycroft peeked upwards and felt very hopeful, seeing the thoughtful look on his partner’s face.

“You did not dismiss the idea out of hand, so am I to assume you are considering my proposition?”

“Maybe.”

“I was thinking that if we use your average wage as a baseline, I might simply make available an equal amount, either in cash or, perhaps, we might open an account at the bank in both our names and deposit our funds there to be accessed via cheque or bank card.”

“That’s… not a bad idea.”

“It might also make more efficient a transfer of funds in the event of a true emergency, as with Sherlock’s occasionally-apocalyptic science experiments. I can, with a phone call, move monies from one account to another and enable you to directly manage the situation without meeting with the bank manager first to access funds.”
“That would be helpful. He was very accommodating when I had to deal with him for the smoke bombs, but it would have been nice to know I could have written a cheque myself if I had to and not had to wait, perhaps, for him to get into work on a Monday morning. Sherlock and John’s chaos doesn’t recognize weekends or holidays.”

“No, it doesn’t. Do we… it appears that we have found some middle ground that satisfies us both.”

“Just matching my shop wages, right? And it’s for the boys and car and the like?”

“You have full discretion on how it is disbursed as you are the one most proximal to the daily household matters.”

“Then… yes, I suppose I can agree to that. I mean… even if things don’t work out for us, and, no, I’m not thinking that way, so don’t believe I am, but if the absolute worst did happen, I would still be there for Sherlock and John and some help with their day-to-day things would be useful.”

Mycroft smiled broadly and uncurled from Lestrade’s body, just enough so he could kiss his lover and stare into his warm, brown eyes.

“Thank you, Gregory. It is a great worry now removed from my mind.”

“And thank you, love. It amazes me how you can find a way to make things work so we’re both happy.”

“Something I shall fare better with for certain issues as we move forward. And if I forget, Grandmama shall likely have it tattooed upon my brow so I am provided with a reminder with every instance I catch my reflection in the mirror.”

“HAH! She would, too. In very lovely script with perfectly legible letters.”

“Undoubtedly. And, speaking of…”

“Yeah, we should probably get ourselves ready to meet the day. I’m surprised Sherlock and John haven’t beaten down the door yet.”

“Oddly, I believe they are giving us time to do just as we are… sharing the moment and reconnecting on the most personal of levels.”

“The little romantics.”

“I believe they would say they are protecting their investment, but we can operate under your lovely illusion, if that suits your fancy.”

“I believe it does. And can I say, you are absolutely gorgeous in the morning?”

“Only if I may return the compliment.”

“Flatterer. But, honestly, this was what I needed, Mycroft. Just some normal, quiet time together. Maybe to let myself know that it still feels the same and I adore it just as much as ever. Crave it, is more the truth, actually. And, it’s still as wonderful as it’s ever been. Waking up with you, smelling that amazing spicy scent you have first off in the morning, feeling those lovely waves of hair brush against my skin… it’s all so perfect.”

This kiss held more fire than the first and it did not help with either Mycroft’s or Lestrade’s already-
demanding anatomy.

“We really need to get out of bed now, love.”

“Must we? It is simply delicious in this delightfully-warm bed.”

“We must. Yes, it’s delicious, yes it’s warm and, yes, I feel how hard you are and it’s making my blood boil. You’re still the sexiest man I’ve ever known, Mycroft, and your body does things to me that are absolutely sinful. But, the boys won’t leave us alone that long…”

Mycroft felt a luscious thread of electricity race down his spine and wriggled appreciatively, which made Lestrade moan slightly in response. His Gregory was not opposed to lovemaking! If the circumstances were different, his beloved would succumb to their lust and they would writhe in the throes of passion. This was unutterably encouraging! And so, so desperately wanted…

“Don’t lick my nipple, you evil thing! We’ve got to make a start and that’s not going to start… what needs to be started!”

Perhaps the ‘different circumstances were now at hand.

“Actually, I think it will. In fact, I believe it already has.”

Because you are moaning the most stimulating sound, my dear, and the slight arching of your back is most expressive.

“Why are… oh, that feels fucking amazing. Just a little slower and… yes…”

“You are delicious, my dear. The flavor of your skin is indescribable.”

“Mycroft, please… we need to… nooooo, don’t kiss my belly…”

“Why not? You take such pleasure from it. As do I.”

“Oh, you basta… oh god…”

Mycroft rolled his tongue around the head of Lestrade’s very-appreciative cock and adored the way it gave a leap of joy at the attention.

“Your body intoxicates me, Gregory. Every sense I possess is drunk with pleasure when you are with me.”

Especially when you run your strong hands through my hair and pull lightly, nearly trembling with restraint.

“Your mouth, love… what you can do with that mouth of yours…”

“All the sea cow can do with his mouth is graze his sea lettuce patch.”

Mycroft’s heart nearly leapt from his chest and Lestrade scrambled for the blankets until they realized they were still very much alone in the room.

“Sherlock Holmes! Come out of your hiding place and present yourself this instant for a very stern chastisement at this unforgiveable violation of Gregory’s and my privacy.”

“And me! I’m here, too! But, not, so there is that.”
“John Watson! You will also present yourself front and center and do so immediately!”

Lestrade laughed and dragged his partner towards the head of the bed, kissing him soundly and arranging them both to greet the boys. Who weren’t there. And still weren’t there. Where the hell were they?

“Mycroft, do you…”

“We are arrived!”

Sherlock and John burst through the bedroom door and stood proudly at the foot of the bed.

“We… that is, Gregory and I… what in Descartes’s name is going on, Sherlock?”

“Isn’t it brilliant, Mycroft? Sherlock built a spy listening device and this is the first time we tested it. And it worked!”

Mycroft frowned at Lestrade’s interested ‘really?,’ and put it on their list of topics to discuss at a later time.

“I see. You, as they say, bugged our bedroom.”

“And it was a complete success! It was nauseating to listen to your and your faithful hound’s insipid discourse, however, we were only forced to endure a few sentences before our ears began to bleed and my device was shown to function perfectly. John and I were able to collect our information from John’s bedroom, so there was no chance of discovery while we accomplished our mission.”

The boys did not appear overly scandalized, so nothing of true erotic inappropriateness seemed to have reached their ears… thank heavens for small favors.

“I will credit the quality of your product, however, I will also scold you for using Gregory and me as test subjects. It was rude to eavesdrop on our private conversation, especially when it was taking place in our bedroom.”

“Mycroft, Sherlock and I have heard you and Greg kissing a lot of times and saying silly, lovey things to each other. It wasn’t much of a surprise.”

The older boys looked at each other and, once again, took great comfort in young John’s naïveté.

“Regardless, John, when Gregory and I are here, we often discuss matters of an intensely personal nature that is for no ears but our own. Now, as this was your and Sherlock’s first infraction, there shall be nothing further enacted for punishment but a warning, but you will remove your listening device and not place it here again.”

“But…”

“But me no buts, Sherlock. If you like, you may retrieve your contraption and bring it with you to breakfast so we may examine it while you tell the tale of its creation. Both Gregory and I would be most happy to hear the story of your success.”

Sherlock and John pouted and complained loudly as they removed the bug from behind the base of the lamp at the side of the bed and began winding up the wire that ran along the baseboards and had been painted to match the color for additional camouflage. With an even louder reminder that they would not wait breakfast long, Sherlock and John left the room of sexual frustration, reverently
carrying their hidden microphone to the breakfast table.

“Well… that was interesting.”

“And you, Gregory Lestrade… you should not encourage them so.”

“What? You have to admit, that was pretty amazing. Building something right out of a Bond film… that’s our boys. And, besides… if they hadn’t interrupted that way, they’d have been in here in person and maybe gotten an eyeful that they really don’t need at that age.”

“True, but…”

The needy whine in Mycroft’s voice made Lestrade grin and lean over to put a tiny kiss on the tip of Mycroft’s nose.

“Later, love. I’ll be honest and say I didn’t know whether… well, whether I’d be able to do anything with you for awhile and I found out that I can. I’m dying for it, actually, and that’s a massive step, in my opinion. The fact that I’ll have to wait a little to enjoy that anything isn’t the end of the world. And I don’t think it is for you, either.”

“I believe you are mistaken.”

Mycroft’s pout was as precious as Sherlock’s and John’s, in Lestrade’s opinion and he made a vow to get a photo of all three in a power-pout at his earliest possible opportunity.

“Nah, I know my Mycroft. He’s got more self-control and poise than anyone I know and can easily manage one day of thinking about my cock in his mouth.”

“Gregory… you are an evil, horrible man.”

“Which makes you very happy, doesn’t it.”

“I admit it does.”

“And I’m happy about your evil horribleness, too. Let’s get dressed, shall we? Wear something that will make Grandmama happy, have a belly full of breakfast and then set off to meet our fate.”

“Yes, I suppose that is the proper course of action, at this point. But… later?”

“There will definitely be later. I’ve missed you, Mycroft.”

With a final kiss, Lestrade jumped out of bed and, further, out of Mycroft’s reach for anything that might draw him back in. They really did have to get today over and done with, but once that happened… later could occur. Most likely, a lot of later. His body would never forgive him if he didn’t.

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The moment the car stopped in the drive, Sherlock and John shot out like racehorses and ran towards the house, claiming sweets deprivation, leaving the older couple behind in their dust.

“There went our last line of defense, love. I’d hoped we could distract Grandmama with their cute little faces, but that’s gone to shite now, unfortunately.”

“It would have been but a temporary respite, I’m afraid. Grandmama is immeasurably tenacious when she has a bit between her teeth.”
“Got your loin gird on?”

“Handcrafted by the finest armorer in the nation.”

“Then, let’s go. Edwards is peeking out of the window anyway and it’s probably best we not keep the lady of the house waiting.”

“Bravery in all things, my dear.”

“Those are lovely last words.”

“I do try.”

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“Ah. There you are. I had wondered if you were going to make camp in your vehicle and scavenge for your supper much like a pair of vagabonds.”

Oh, this was not going to be a joyful conversation.

“No… Gregory and I were simply sharing a few words away from the children’s ears.”

“Formulating a strategy for your incursion into hostile territory?”

Two hands shot out and reached for the other, squeezing tight when contact was made.

“I… we… are hopeful that is not the case.”

“That remains to be seen. Follow me. Edwards will watch the children.”

There was no arguing if flesh desired to continue its welding to bone, so Mycroft and Lestrade quickly followed Grandmama towards her private study where she motioned them to take a seat on the small sofa while she sat behind her large and ornate desk.

“Now, I am most aggrieved at this situation and I shall not mince words. You both have disappointed me terribly and I am currently uncertain as to whether I should continue to support your relationship.”

Two hands clasped again and the urge to throw themselves onto their knees and beg for mercy had both boys on the edge of their seat.

“We didn’t mean to! We… we’ve just had a rough patch, but we’re working on it. Already we’ve made some progress, too, so… can you not be too disappointed with us?”

“Given, young man, your complete disregard of my advice and demonstration of exceedingly poor judgement, I would say no.”

“Oh. Well, I tried.”

“And failed.”

“Always happy for some constructive criticism. Mycroft, you want a turn?”

“Passing responsibility to another is not a mark of character, Gregory.”

Apparently he was in the hot seat whether he wanted it or not, so Lestrade nodded as meekly as
possible and murmured a placating ‘no ma’am, sorry ma’am.’

“Obsequiousness is also not a mark of character.”

“Oh… ok. Was I doing that?”

“You were.”

“Sorry. I guess… I don’t know what to say.”

“You might start with some explanation as to why you permitted this situation to continue for such a disgraceful amount of time.”

Mycroft started to usurp the center of attention role, for he certainly had not planned for his Gregory to be in the very-distinct crosshairs, then decided it would only do more harm than good. Grandmama’s doubt was for the strength of his beloved’s spine and interference would only help confirm her suspicions.

“Because I was a bit thick. I also didn’t like the idea of being someone who whinged all the time about things the maybe were only bad in my mind or things I couldn’t fix anyway. I didn’t want to upset Mycroft, either. I know he’s busy and has a lot on his mind that is fantastically important… far more important than having to cancel visits or not staying on the phone for very long anymore. Maybe he was doing the best he could and it wasn’t fair for me to complain and nag when he couldn’t do any better.”

“How much of that do you actually believe, Gregory, and how much are you telling yourself you believe.”

“I… I actually believe… most of it.”

“Clarify.”

“Well… maybe I sort of suspected Mycroft had more time than he was admitting to. Or if he truly didn’t have much time, he could find a spare minute here or there just to phone and say hello. Ask me to come to London, even if he had to work, so we could see each other even a little. Things like that.”

“I see. And it did not occur to you, despite your and my previous conversation, that confronting him about the situation and making your feelings plain was the proper course of action?”

“Yes… and no.”

“That is decidedly unhelpful, Gregory. Your lackluster attempts at meaningful communication are not doing you credit.”

“I know! That’s the problem! I’m just crap for things like this! Ok? I know I made a mess of it. I was upset and scared and…”

“That is the feeblest riposte I could have expected. Whatever was scaring you, boy?”

“Losing him! And losing myself. I… maybe I thought if I just didn’t say anything the problem would all go away. That it wasn’t real if I just didn’t speak up. That maybe things would get better if I just waited and kept doing my part.”

“But you were not. Your ‘part’ is advocating for your own needs as surely as it is helping satisfy
your partner’s.”

“I know.”

“Yet, you did not do and that is the crux of the issue. Mycroft’s life will not ease, Gregory. In fact, it shall grow more onerous as time passes and if he cannot trust that you will speak when you are distressed, then he must question if you are the correct partner for him as it will only exacerbate the guilt and sorrow he suffers when he finally discovers the truth of your heartache. I had not believed such disregard for another’s feelings would come from you, Gregory Lestrade, and it pains me to be proven wrong. Mycroft is next in line to manage our family’s responsibilities, however you are next in line to manage a Holmes family and I am becoming of the mind that you are not up to the task.”

Mycroft could hold back no longer and glared at his grandmother with the full force of his wrath.

“NO! No… that is wicked of you Grandmama and I will not permit you to speak to Gregory in such a manner. True, my beloved has difficulty expressing his upset, however, we have already discussed the root of the issue and are setting in place concrete strategies to see this rectified. You sling your slander without even inquiring where we are in the process of mending our bond and correcting our actions or inactions. I will not allow, not for a moment, any further recriminations against my Gregory and I am of a mind that we shall gather the children and leave this very instant if this exceedingly high-handed misconduct continues!”

Lestrade stared wide-eyed at his infuriated partner, and quickly laid a soothing hand on his back, rubbing in circles to help calm Mycroft down.

“It’s alright, love…”

“It certainly is not! You have expertly shepherded our family, none, no one, could have performed more effectively. Your selfless, loving heart has been our salvation and I will not allow your efforts to be besmirched by Grandmama’s accusations. If she wishes to spew her bile, let her choose a more suitable target, say, for example, the one she freely allowed to marry her only son and leave Sherlock and I to fend for ourselves as best as we have been able.”

“Mycroft Holmes!”

Mycroft rose to his feet and slammed his hands onto Grandmama’s desk, leaning forward and staring her dead in the eye.

“Save your astonishment for someone who will be impressed by it, Grandmama. The troubles with Gregory and my relationship are mine to own and own them I shall. You will not lay the blame at his feet or those feet will never set foot across this threshold again. Nor shall mine. He and I will happily work each day to re-weave the threads of our relationship, no matter the effort or time required, and if you are not present to see it, it matters not, for we will work tirelessly nonetheless and we will emerge victorious. I have failed my beloved, but I admit it and, with his grace, I will not fail him again, though, if I do, I shall do the honorable thing and step aside so he might finally find someone who will treat him as he deserves. There is no doubt that on my journey to be worthy of him I will stumble, yes, but I know that my Gregory will catch me and help me regain my footing. He will help me, teach me and I will repay his compassion and patience with all the love in my heart, my unwavering support and my eternal faithfulness. And I will gladly, gleefully even, stand between him and any who might be his enemy, whether they be stranger, friend or family. Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

Lestrade was terrified to even breathe and potentially break the electric tension that felt like the only
thing keeping the two titans from all-out war.

“I see. Leave us now, for Gregory and I have matters to discuss.”

“No.”

“I shall guarantee that your partner will not be subject to further denigration in your absence.”

“I have little confidence in that.”

“I would think that you had greater faith in my word.”

“I believed you were my husband’s ally in this and found myself astoundingly deceived. I will not make the same mistake twice.”

Again, two steely sets of eyes locked and it was several tense moments before Lestrade worried he’d shatter from the thunderous silence and broke it with a discrete cough.

“Mycroft… it’ll be alright. Why don’t you go and check on Sherlock and John while I talk to Grandmama?”

“I will not leave you undefended.”

“I know you won’t, love, but I don’t think it’s going to be necessary. Not anymore. I don’t think Grandmama’s stupid enough to do anything knowing you’re not far away and ready if I need you.”

Mycroft turned and Lestrade nearly gasped at the feral, gleaming flare of protectiveness in his lover’s eyes.

“You do not have to do this, Gregory.”

“No, I don’t, but I know you’re there for me, so it’ll be alright.”

The glint in Mycroft’s eye flashed more brightly for a moment, before he stood upright, straightened his waistcoat and left after kissing his lover on the cheek and throwing a final warning glare at his grandmother.

“I’m sor… Grandmama?”

Lestrade was shaken to the core seeing the faint hint of moisture in the older woman’s eyes and found himself moving towards her the moment she started to rise from her chair.

“Come here, Gregory.”

Obeying immediately, the rest of the short distance was covered in the blink of an eye and Lestrade found himself subject to a hug fiercer than he’d suspected the elderly woman could manage.

“I apologize, dear boy. You have no idea how sorry I am or how greatly I wish I could take back the words I said. They accomplished their task, however… I wish you did not have to suffer them.”

Grandmama gave her adopted grandson a final squeeze and motioned him towards the sofa, taking the seat next to him after he sat back down.

“I… I don’t understand.”
“Nor do I expect you, too, Gregory. *I am* cross with you for you did know better than to let Mycroft go so far astray, but I am not laying the blame for this situation at your feet. What I needed to know was the truth of Mycroft’s feelings, especially after his marriage proposal, which was as ridiculous a response to the situation as I could have imagined.”

“Wh… what?”

“Either he was acting to manipulate you into a situation through an avenue he calculated would be effective – your emotions – or he was behaving most immaturity and certainly not in the manner of a man who realized the depth of his errors and was committed to a healthy and sustainable relationship with you. I had to know, Gregory, in truth, for your protection.”

“How?”

“I love Mycroft dearly, do not doubt that, but I recognize that he has, in his blood, the arrogant and calculating streak for which the Holmes family is known. It is not outside his nature to perpetrate a deception if he hoped to maneuver you into something which he desired, for no reason save possessiveness, and do it sufficiently convincingly that you would never notice a thing was amiss. It will serve him well in the work he must do, but it would be disastrous for you if you, in this case, were its victim.”

“My protection?”

“There are few in this world who are truly good men, Gregory, and you are among their ranks. I do want to see you happily joined with my grandson, but only if you gain benefit equal to his. My own dearest husband had his… stumbles… and it did seem at times that I was tasked with an unfair share of responsibility for the condition of our marriage, but, ultimately, it was not a price I was unwilling to pay. My husband had, as does Mycroft, his share of faults and that he tried, made tangible effort to overcome them and make amends when they overcame him, instead, was the reason that our love stayed strong until… well, I was going to say the moment of his death, but I love him now as deeply as ever. I had to be certain that Mycroft was treating you as you deserve, Gregory, his recent lapses notwithstanding. It is to my extreme regret that you had to suffer because of it.”

“I understand… I think. And I admit that I wondered, for a moment at first, if his proposal was real.”

“Something I am highly pleased to hear. As pleased, perhaps, as when I learned you did not accept his offer of marriage.”

“It didn’t seem right to do it. Not now, anyway. Not until we can fix what’s gotten broken.”

“And how will that be assessed?”

“HAH! Oh, by science.”

“Details, pray tell?”

“Sherlock… well, Sherlock and Mycroft had their own talk and Sherlock wrote a contract for what Mycroft has to do if he wants to stay in our good graces. He put in a lot of detail about how he’d measure how well Mycroft was following the agreements they’d put on paper. He’s got data collection plans and surveys about… what’d he call it… familial satisfaction! Yeah, that was it. Mycroft helped with a lot of it, so he’s very aware of what’s expected and how it’s going to be tracked.”
Lestrade was practiced enough to know what that small crinkle above Grandmama’s nose meant and felt his heart lighten seeing it peek out quickly on the older woman’s face.

“That is a very efficient plan, I must say.”

“Sherlock’s a proper genius, that’s for certain. Mycroft and I have had our own conversations about that, too. What it’s going to look like when we’re on the right path and we’re going to check in with each other about that very thing on a regular basis. Just take a little time to talk specifically about how we’re doing and what’s working and what’s not. We’re not going to avoid talking about things, we’ve both promised that. And I’m going to visit Mycroft in London more often, too. And when he goes off to school. If he can’t come home, then I can take the time and go to him now and then. We’re not just saying we’re going to work on our problems, Grandmama, we’ve got real plans and goals we’re working towards.”

“Most impressive. And very much what I had hoped to hear today. It is easy to make grand proclamations of love and devotion, but much more difficult to focus on the tangible realities necessary for that love and devotion to be maintained and put in place specific mechanisms to support those realities in a meaningful way. Tell me, Gregory… what have you learned from this situation with Mycroft?”

“Oh… that we’re not perfect, I guess. That our relationship isn’t perfect, either. We’re both going to make mistakes, we both have weaknesses to go along with our strengths and it’s up to both of us to recognize that and work together to see that those weaknesses don’t drag us down again.”

“Very good. And, I suspect you would have acknowledged all of that before this debacle, yet… it is a different thing to see the ramifications of forgetting what we already claim to know.”

“It is! I mean, like you said, I know all of that, but I still let things slip.”

“Which is not to be considered out of the ordinary, grandson. It is called learning. And growing. To have truly failed would be either to believe that your breach was fully healed and forget these lessons so you fractured your bond again, potentially permanently, or refuse to believe learning could occur and not give each other the chance to show those lessons had been taken to heart. I would say you and Mycroft have not failed and I am very glad for it.”

“Thanks! Really, thank you, because I know you wouldn’t say we had a passing mark if it wasn’t true.”

“You are correct. Lies can be pleasant things, but for situations such as these, they are certainly not helpful. I hope you will forgive me my methods, though, to verify the score you would be awarded.”

“I won’t say it was pleasant, but I have to admit I’ve never seen Mycroft like that before. He’s not going to be happy you tested him, you know that, right?”

“I am very well aware of how hot will burn his temper, but I will not deny he has a right to his fire. My grandson has proved himself worthy of a second chance with you, though, and that is worth the snarls and snaps until his blaze cools.”

“I’ll talk to him. I know Sherlock and John have a thousand things they want to do and that will help take his mind off of any snarling, too.”

“Excellent. Now, I have some matters of business to attend to, but I will join you all for dinner. Edwards will see to anything you might need, so do not hesitate to ask.”
Recognizing a dismissal when he heard one, Lestrade took a deep breath and rose, taking another deep breath for good measure.

“That sounds good. Thanks again, Grandmama. None of this has been easy, but it’s been productive, I think.”

“Which is why I have faith in you and Mycroft, my boy. You do not shy from admitting to missteps and take defined and concrete actions to recover from them. You will do well moving forward and, when Mycroft poses again his question, I am confident in your answer.”

“I… I think I am, too. I told him we’d wait until summer, though, to bring up again the topic of getting married. That was our original plan, so it’s not really as if anything is being pushed back because of what went wrong, but it gives us time to take those active steps and make some repairs. If things haven’t gotten better, I won’t say yes, though, and Mycroft knows that. But… I don’t think that’s what’s going to happen. Not if we stay attentive and proactive, which I’m going to make sure we do.”

“Again, I am impressed by your managerial skills. Now, your family is waiting, Gregory. Go enjoy them, as well as this lovely day.”

Lestrade grinned, his mind already filling with images of his Mycroft lit by the sun’s rays and he scampered off quickly to find where his partner and the boys had gotten to. Once he was gone, the lady of the house sighed a large, cleansing sigh and permitted herself a small, private smile. How excellently her grandsons were navigating this terribly rocky section of their lives’ river. There would be others, there always were, but the first was always the most telling and the outlook for the future was extremely positive. Now, it was simply a matter of speaking with Cook and ensuring that nothing of a staining nature was served with the evening meal. Mycroft’s temper and in-reach food-based weapons was surely not a felicitous combination…
Finding the rest of his family wasn’t very difficult for Lestrade because the debris field of sweets wrappers, lost clothing and, a little worryingly, snippets of hair strewn through the massive house’s corridors made for a very visible trail. That it led outdoors wasn’t much of a surprise, either, since it was a gorgeous day and John had been nearly crazed with anticipation about having the run of the grounds.

“Why not?”

Oh, that was a sad and pathetic sound. John was already using his mighty weapons and there was little doubt that peeking around the hedge separating him from the others would find a champion pair of puppy eyes and quivering lower lip.

“Do you not remember your last adventure with Grandmama’s horses, John? It was not what one would call a successful venture and was a painful one, as well.”

“Mycroft… that was a LONG time ago. You can’t say something that happened a long time ago is going to happen again… a long time away from ago.”

“John, as usual, is speaking the truth in his completely inane fashion. I have several observations I wish to make on the movement of equine musculature during different aspects of motion and this is the ideal opportunity to see those observations made.”

“I think not.”

“We think so and, since Sherlock and me total two and you only total one, we win.”

“Your political arithmetic is built upon a flawed foundation, my boy, as you assign equal weight to each of our votes. Mine, by dint of imparted responsibility has a greater measure than does either of yours, even when taken in sum.”

“What?”

“There shall be no horseback riding today.”

Lestrade admired the rather sorcerous dancing and arm waving from the two indignant boys and decided that they deserved some reward for their spirited performance.

“How about we rethink that, love? It’s a glorious day and I suspect if we’re very polite and respectful to the horses, they’ll give us a nice turn around the property.”

Mycroft’s head whipped around and all of his senses immediately began collecting information about his dear spouse’s appearance and manner for his brain to process.

“Greg still has his head! You owe me six truffles, Sherlock, and you’d better not try to say you don’t or I’ll tell your horse you think he’s ugly and stupid so he makes your ride truly awful.”

Sherlock pouted and glared at Lestrade for not being decapitated by the force of Grandmama’s wrath.

“Very well. When we abscond with our next box of chocolates, I shall pay your winnings. Of course, any infractions of conduct or lost wagers until that point will be deducted from the total.”
“You’re going to try and cheat me out of my chocolate, aren’t you, Sherlock, just like the evil little cheater you are.”

“Do not impugn my honor! If there is one amongst us whose dignity and reputation boasts nary a black mark, it is me!”

John’s explosion of laughter almost drowned out Sherlock’s roared response and Mycroft took the opportunity offered by the distraction to leap over to Lestrade’s side for a closer inspection and a soft caress of his face.

“My dear, how are you? Grandmama was not too beastly was she? Though, given her recent behavior I expect you to regale me with appalling tales of the most villainous heinousness.”

“And you’d be wrong. Really, Mycroft, I’m fine. Better than fine, actually.”

“You need not sport a brave face on my account, Gregory. Let me be your comfort in this time of need.”

If Mycroft’s fortunes ever failed, Lestrade was convinced he could take up a career as a bodice-ripper writer and earn a tidy quid from his efforts.

“You can be my comfort every time I need it, love, but this isn’t one of them.”

“This isn’t one of what? Something fun? Which is what we would be having now if we were on the horses.”

John staring straight up to look the older boys in the eye was necessitated by the fact he was standing directly between them like a small wedge between a door and the floor.

“Oh, have you and my brother finished your calm and well-reasoned argument?”

“I distracted him with a bug.”

Which Sherlock was currently on the ground examining with his small magnifying lens.

“Well played.”

“Thanks, Mycroft! Now, about more important things…”

“Here’s an idea, John. Why don’t you and Sherlock go and ask the lads in the stables if the horses are in a mood to be taken out for a ride today and see if they’ll get four ready for a little trip if they are. Mycroft and I will join you in a minute.”

“YES! HORSES!!!”

John raced off, grabbing Sherlock’s arm on the way and dragging the thin boy an impressive distance before Sherlock dug in his heels long enough to scramble upright and follow after his attempted kidnapper on foot.

“Gregory, this is, in no manner, a wise idea.”

“It’ll be fine. I’m certain Grandmama’s staff with get four gentle horses ready and you said you, at least, know something about riding, even if you don’t do it much. You can show me what to do and, besides, I think John will be satisfied as long as the horses move, even if it’s only at a slow walk, so we’ll have a leisurely hour out in the sunshine and he can get this out of his system.”
“But, my dear… surely you require some rest and quiet after your ordeal. I am enraged at Grandmama’s behavior and… yes, I should return and have a conversation with her on this issue. There was no reason for your abuse and she cannot claim some form of dementia to excuse her behavior for I know well that her mind is as sharp as ever.”

“Mycroft, I’m alright and the truth of the matter is…”

“That you are a valorous, compassionate, loving man who was treated cruelly by one who pretended to the title of friend.”

“No, now, you need to listen to me for just a moment…”

“You need not belabor your suffering, my love. I know what you endured and you should not revisit that terrible thing and reopen the wound.”

“Mycroft, just listen to what I’m saying and I think you’ll…”

“I shall be ever at your side during the remainder of our visit, Gregory, so do not believe for a moment that… urk.”

Lestrade jerked Mycroft behind the hedge and made very short work of unfastening Mycroft’s trousers, wasting no time getting on his knees and taking his partner’s cock into his mouth, working it quickly with his tongue until it stiffened as nicely as he happily remembered.

“Gr… Gregory… what are you… oh yes…”

When his Holmes’s brain was stuck in top gear, a bit of distraction was very much called for and this was a form of distraction that had Lestrade’s full approval. The flavor of Mycroft’s skin was absolutely delicious and the salty bitterness from the fluid that was beginning to leak in approval of his technique was the perfect accompaniment. He had intended this to be a quick thing, but maybe not so quick. How many nights had he dreamt of this? Making his partner happy and drinking up every little sigh, gasp and moan Mycroft made while he showed this beautiful man how much passion their love ignited in his soul.

“Faster, my love. You are… ohhhh… harder… this is… oh heavens, but your tongue is… do that again… a little more?… just a little… just a tad… just a… yes… oh, Gregory… yes…”

Lestrade made certain to get every drop of semen Mycroft’s body had to offer and reveled in the feel of Mycroft’s hand tightening and relaxing in his hair in the same rhythm as the tremors that shook his lover’s body.

“There, that make you feel a little less upset, love?”

“I… you are supremely talented in the giving of pleasure and I am rid of any emotions other than delight and adoration for you.”

“That’s what I want to hear. My lovely Mycroft all out of breath from having a nice time and wearing a gorgeous smile on his face.”

Taking a moment to get Mycroft put together before any young eyes came looking for them, Lestrade then gave his partner a long, tender kiss, holding him gently when he was done.

“Now that you’ve got a little calm in your mind, just listen to me, ok? Grandmama wasn’t upset with me, beyond some irritation I’d not done what I promised, but that was fair and I’m not unhappy about it. What she wanted was to know your heart, Mycroft. Wanted to be certain you weren’t
being possessive and just trying to get what you wanted because you wanted to win the game or something. If it helps, you made a good show of it and she’s happy with you, so don’t be too upset with her, alright?”

The look on Mycroft’s face was not a happy one and Lestrade tried to smile as winningly as he could to keep his lover’s calm in place.

“I see. Grandmama tested me.”

“Basically. She thought, I suppose, that having a go at me would be the best way to really see what you were feeling. You have to admit, she was right. You were ferocious in there. Made me hot as hades, if you want the truth, but taking you right there on Grandmama’s desk didn’t seem a very good idea at the time.”

His lover’s wide, wicked grin did a lot to calm Mycroft’s rising anger, and the residual sexual satiation took care of most of the rest. However, there would be no forgiveness, yet, for this affront and Grandmama had best watch her back for he was not without his own ways of causing mayhem when it was needed. Sherlock’s shenanigans were mild compared to what he could perpetrate should he put his mind to the task and, at this moment, his mind was very much turned in that direction.

“Yes, well… be that as it may, I am most certain she could have found a less stressful method to satisfy her curiosity and I will not forget her treatment of you. Her gift for next Christmas will surely not be as well thought-out as for the last.”

Lestrade laughed and took Mycroft in his arms, breathing in the scent of his long neck and imperious indignation. His partner was special, that much was certain, and, a few things aside, he wouldn’t have him any other way.

“Are you two going to hide and hug the rest of the day or are we going to ride horses?”

Speaking of imperiousness… John was growing his own wide streak, god help them all.

“Has Sherlock already galloped away and failed to help you alight your mount, dear boy?”

“No! He’s not that much taller than I am, Mycroft, in case you haven’t noticed. Anyway, he’s taking scrapings from under the horse’s hooves. Actually he’s directing the stable hands how to take the samples and put them in his vial, but I still think he’s loony. Poop, dirt and hay – what’s to learn about that?”

John’s exasperated tone brought a smile to the older boys’ faces and they officially declared their couples-only interlude at an end.

“Then let us join Sherlock and lecture him on the poor use of his time, shall we?”

“Yes, because the horses are waiting for us and I don’t to waste any time talking when we could be riding.”

The little prince strode away, with Lestrade and Mycroft kindly waiting until he was out of earshot to laugh and share a final kiss.

“Sounds like we’ve got our orders, love. I think we’d best be off.”

“I have to agree. John is most single-minded about this activity and it would not do to summon his wrath.”
“He’s another one to exact a high price for all things wrathful.”

“Yes, it does seem to be a family trait.”

“I am such a lucky man.”

“I wholeheartedly agree.”

“This beast, unlike the last, recognizes who is master and who is servant. I am pleased.”

And Sherlock did look pleased, with a satisfied grin on his face and a cushion affixed between the saddle and his tender bottom.

“I like mine, too. She’s very sweet and ate all the carrots I gave her. She’s likes food, just like me, so it stands to reason we’d be friends.”

John had his own cushion for bum protection and was riding a small mare whose expression was actually well-described as sweet and kind, in contrast to the firebrand the boy had last experienced. The grooms had chosen very wisely for the two impatient, novice riders.

“Good to hear it. I can’t say anything bad about mine either. Haven’t been bucked off yet, so he’s tops in my book.”

What was tops in Mycroft’s book was the look of his husband on horseback, back straight, sun dancing off his skin and the breeze gently tossing his warm locks in the most sexually intoxicating of manners. Perhaps he had been hasty dismissing riding as an approved activity for his leisure hours. If Gregory’s kingly appearance was a more frequent visitor to his life, that could, in no conceivable way, be considered a tragedy.

“And how masterfully you command your steed, my dear. It is clear it respects your authority and is proud to have you in its saddle.”

“I think the horse is just happy I’ve got a decent sense of balance and I’m not wobbling around on it or yanking on the reins every other second.”

“Do not disparage your talents, Gregory. I have known more than a few of my peers who have spent more time face first in the dirt than atop their mount when learning to ride.”

“Mycroft was thrown into a lake, which offered an even greater level of amusement. I nearly split my sides with gleeful laughter when Mummy told the tale at one of her dreary parties.”

If it was not a cruelty to the beast, Sherlock’s horse would find itself the recipient of a hearty slap at some unexpected moment and Sherlock would have his own firsthand experience with what it meant to be a human projectile.

“Really, love? That does sound funny.”

“It was a minor matter. The horse had a difficult time finding its footing in the rather muddy soil at the lake’s edge and I failed to secure myself sufficiently to prevent a fall.”

“Well, if I’d been there, I would have made sure you got a nice massage afterwards so you didn’t have any muscle aches to worry about.”

“You are an angelic creature, Gregory, though do not discount the possible need for just that
once this ride is concluded. There is a great deal of… bouncing… involved, is there not?”

“With your enormous rump, the level of shock to your system should equal that of an enchanted trip aboard an especially-luxurious flying carpet.”

“Thank you, Sherlock. As ever, you are too kind.”

“Your brother’s rump is perfectly sized, you little bastard. You don’t hear any complaints from me about it do you?”

The choking and retching from the two small boys was music to their elder’s ears and they shared a loving smile at the oh-so normal family dynamics.

“John and I are now rendered imbecilic by the withering of our brains from that particularly gruesome mental image.”

“Lucky your horse knows the way home then, isn’t it? John you feeling ok with your brain being withered and feeble?”

“I’m fine, Greg. But, yeah, no more talking about Mycroft’s bum. Or any bums. Maybe the horse’s bum if it poops or something, but that’s all.”

“I believe Gregory and I can agree to your conditions, John. Now, do we have an idea when we would like to turn for home?”

“Not now!”

“When I am ready and not a microsecond earlier or the consequences will be dire!”

Mycroft huffed a soft laugh at the boys’ loud and vehement responses and took the idea of a short ride completely off the plan for the day,

“My dear, the children have offered their votes, might I have yours?”

“Oh, I think we can go on a little longer. Of course, we do have to leave time for a shower before dinner because… well, I suspect I’m not the only one not smelling fresh as a spring flower.”

This, of course, was incredibly funny from John’s perspective and it took a quick-acting Mycroft to prevent the chortle-induced fall John was heading towards.

“Ha! Greg stinks.”

“And you will have a concussion, young man, if you do not stay on your horse.”

“I’m not going to fall, Mycroft. Sherlock says I’m part monkey and monkeys are good at staying on things. You don’t see them fall out of trees, do you, on those nature programmes on the telly?”

“A well-reasoned response, though tree limbs do not, generally, move under the monkeys as they sit and enjoy their bananas.”

“They do if there’s wind.”

This laugh was not at all soft and Mycroft had to admit John was using his most intense powers of debate.

“Touché. You are a master of analytical thinking today.”
“Hurray!”

“And me? Why is my formidable mind not being showered with praise?"

“Because you have been concentrating more on remaining upright than participating in our scholastic discussion, brother dear. Do toss in your opinion concerning simians and their agility level for balancing upon wind-shaken limbs while retaining possession of their fruit and we shall weigh its merits to decide upon the degree of lauds you shall be awarded for your contribution.”

Sherlock’s wet and protracted rude noise started John laughing again and Mycroft was very happy he had remained close to the small boy who seemed to have no sense of self-preservation when it came to giggly hysterics. Further, Mycroft had no small suspicion that an offer to repeat their ride would be met with enthusiasm from the younger members of their little family. Every day he learned more about these people and himself and, while not all of it was pleasant, it was a positively dynamic experience and he could not say he failed to treasure it. However, Gregory was correct… a shower was absolutely required upon their return. The waft of nature was not always sweet…

“That was fantastic! Can we ride again tomorrow?”

John barely contained his enthusiasm as he was lifted off his horse and as soon as his feet hit solid ground he was doing an energetic victory dance. One long, gentle ride with lots of fresh air, warm sunshine and an unbruised bottom had made for a highly enjoyable afternoon.

“If it suits us, I am certain the horses would not mind another outing. If not, they shall be available to us when next we visit.”

Which, to Mycroft, was a still a somewhat debatable topic. Grandmama may have thought her tactics to be sound, but the brutality of them was not to his liking. Of course, he had implemented similar in dealings for some of his own matters, but those did not concern his husband, so the situation was entirely a different one.

“Yes! Sherlock and I have a big list of things we want to do and we want to do as many of them as we can.”

“I have a bounty of research questions that must be investigated and I will tolerate no impediment to the conduction of my research. Lackey! You will be tasked with maintaining a clear throughway for my progress and if even a single bump or hole appears to make my journey a less than tranquil one, the consequences will be both many and agonizing.”

Lestrade ran his hand along his horse’s haunch and collected enough of the warm day’s moisture, along with dust and whatnot, that rustling Sherlock’s curls was a particularly satisfying experience.

“I am contaminated! There is a legion of equine-diseases to which I have been exposed and if I am not desperate for hay and producing feces at a disgustingly-frequent rate by nightfall, I shall be dumbstruck with astonishment!”

“Perhaps it shall be a whinny rather than a cockerel’s crow that wakes the household in the morning. My dear, do make most certain to lock our bedroom door before we retire so our rugs are not soiled by Sherlock’s rampant defecation.”

John, as he was apt to do with certain topics of conversation, collapsed into uncontrolled laughter and it was Lestrade’s kind heart that prompted the older boy to reach down to set the small boy upright and give his bottom a swat to get him moving towards the house.
“Ready to go, love? We might as well move while John is in motion or we’ll be picking him off the ground again and the servants might be wondering why the lad keeps dropping like he’s been shot by an arrow.”

“If John is to be shot by an arrow, I demand a movie camera to film the event so that I might study it in detail at a time of my choosing!”

Sherlock got his own bum swat and continued to both complain and demand in his most strident tone as he marched after John towards the house and, to the relief of all, a hot shower.

“It is as nothing is amiss, Gregory. That… I find that a highly-encouraging omen.”

“My poor Mycroft… let’s get you inside and see what we can do to make you more comfortable.”

Lestrade put his arm around his partner’s waist and gave him a small kiss on his cheek. This was a wonderful afternoon, exactly the sort they all wanted whenever they could have them. Keep on the right path, keep the promises, keep an eye on the future and there would be plenty of them to be had over the years. Likely with a giggly John and a pouting Sherlock to keep things lively…

Getting the two boys washed and into fresh clothing was its usual herculean effort and it was only by pulling out the chess set and letting the boys take the library as their private domain that Mycroft and Lestrade were able to have the chance for their own shower, which both agreed should be a shared experience.

“Oh my…”

Lestrade grinned widely as he took a moment to stretch his newly-undressed form and gained a great deal of satisfaction from Mycroft’s reaction to it.

“Like what you see?”

“Always. I… I am ashamed to say I had lost sight of how utterly magnificent is your body.”

Nothing could have stopped Mycroft’s hands reaching out to touch the spectacular creature who was bewitching him with his smile. His Gregory was utterly beguiling and there was no other who inspired in him such passion. The feel of his skin was simply inebriating…

“It’s strange, isn’t it, how much of a difference it makes to be totally naked, compared to having on, say, a pair of pyjama bottoms.”

“The difference is immeasurable. All of your beauty on display… it is a heady thing.”

“I don’t suppose you might consider giving me something lovely to look at, too?”

Mycroft had no idea why his Gregory would desire to gaze upon his decidedly subpar form, but he would never consider denying his spouse anything he desired. In a trice, he was as bare as his beloved and enjoying the feel of hands upon his own skin.
“You are a marvel, Mycroft. Smart, funny and so sexy it’s nearly unbelievable. You could be a model for a painter or sculptor.”

“Such would not be a piece of art to command a very steep price, however, I would gift it to you to keep close for times when I am absent.”

“You know Sherlock and John would do something horrible to it, don’t you? It wouldn’t make any sense either, since they’d probably wear blindfolds during their mayhem and make a mess of it.”

Mycroft laughed and stepped into Lestrade’s open arms for an embrace that allowed their flesh to make contact in so many delightful places.

“You are undoubtedly correct. Then I shall save my art for just our eyes alone and allow you access to it whenever you desire.”

“Which will be often. Think we can actually do any washing in that shower?”

“I think it likely. The sensation of running my hands over your well-lathered skin is one I utterly adore and some degree of cleansing must occur while I satisfy my rather powerful need to know every inch of your body.”

“Efficiency! Good, sexy efficiency… just perfect for us. Come on, then, let’s get started. Sherlock and John won’t wait forever and I’d rather not have them banging on the door while we’re in the middle of something personal and mind-blowing.”

Mycroft swallowed this fresh surge of emotion because he had, despite the encouraging start of the day, worried that after his Gregory’s savaging, and even after their highly unexpected pre-ride interlude, he might shy away from their intimate life, but that was, apparently, the polar opposite of the truth. This was why he must do better and fight to be worthy of this man. Gregory was a marvel, a wonder, and deserving of everything this poor decrepit individual could give. At the moment, that would be nerve-shattering pleasure and a wealth of it…

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Staring at his Gregory while he dressed was juvenile, but not even Mycroft’s incredible force of will could turn his eyes away from the details of his partner’s actions. Of course, his force of will was suffering some impairment at the moment since he had just spent the most erotically-stimulating half hour in the shower with his love, ultimately pinning that exquisite body face first to the shower wall and stroking his lover’s diamond-hard cock while he latched his teeth onto Gregory’s warm and welcoming skin, leaving the enchanting mark that was now teasing him from his partner’s shoulder. Perhaps he was somewhat possessive, but a good bit of his thrill was from the fact that a being as indescribable as Gregory would allow him to place that mark. It was a mark of acceptance, really, and that was something that never failed to make his heart sing.

“I can feel you staring, you know.”

“Is it an agreeable sensation?”

“Very agreeable, actually. Come here and let me feel a little more, why don’t you?”

Mycroft smiled and sauntered towards his partner, who was leaning back against the wall in absolutely the sauciest of manners.

“How shrewdly you wield your power over me, Gregory. You have but to beckon me with your eyes and I am completely under your spell.”
“I can’t seem to find any reason to call that a bad thing.”

“Nor should you! One should always take pride in one’s attributes and abilities.”

Taking Mycroft in his arms and kissing him softly, Lestrade admitted to himself that it was actually the other way around. Mycroft only had to bat an eyelash and he was nothing but putty in his partner’s hands. There was a lot of good in that, but, also, something he had to work on. Couldn’t let Mycroft extreme charms cloud his judgement. He couldn’t let anything cloud his judgement, in truth. Both eyes wide open – that was how he had to go forward. Mouth open, too, and not just in a porny way, either. Speak up, be honest, keep his eyes open… it sounded so simple, yet it had proven to be quite the challenge and one he’d not met very successfully up to now…

“Then I will. I am very proud of the fact that I’m able stay on a horse without breaking my neck, give my lover a few fireworks in his eyes, see two miserable goblins using water in the bath for its intended purpose and not to determine if all my personal possessions are seaworthy…”

“Which they will undoubtedly do at some point. They do show a fondness for experimenting with items that are not precisely theirs.”

“Speaking of which, I suppose we should go and check on them.”

“Yes, our absence has been somewhat a prolonged on, given the circumstances.”

“Think they’re still here?”

“Here there is chocolate. Elsewhere, that is not certain.”

“You’re right. Lost my head there for a minute.”

“However, since you did not lose your body as well, I am not entirely grieved by the situation.”

“Randy bastard.”

“Always.”

Sherlock and John, as predicted, were still engaged in their fight to the death over the chessboard, faces, also predictably, smeared with the traces of the chocolates they had stolen and incorporated into their game as spoils of war.

“Finally. John and I were debating having you declared dead so I could take my rightful place as controller of the family finances.”

“What a joyful plan. And, in that scenario, did you factor in that neither of you is sufficiently tall to be seen over the edge of the clerk’s desk at the bank to capitalize on your ill-gotten gain?”

“That is a lie! I am a full inch taller than last I made an entry in my growth journal!”

Which Sherlock had been keeping since he was three years old. And, there was no denying the boy was growing. Growing quickly, much to Mycroft’s wistful displeasure.

“Then, I suggest you measure the relevant heights next time you accompany me to the bank and table your revolution until such time as your personal measurements are up to standard.”

“Very well. You have won this round, but expect it shall be the last for some time to come.”
Mycroft nodded sagely and motioned Lestrade to the sofa while he poured for them a much-needed brandy.

“Thanks, love. And we just have enough time to enjoy it before dinner.”

“Three might be necessary, at least in my case.”

“Are you still upset at Grandmama?”

“Yes.”

Said with a tone so cutting Lestrade checked for bloodstains on Mycroft’s lips.

“You need to let it go, Mycroft. It was for good reason and you can’t say she didn’t have a right.”

“I most certainly can.”

“Alright, Sherlock, you can, but it would just be for spite.”

“I disagree. I find my objections to her methods most supportable.”

Lestrade sighed and reached out to rub Mycroft’s neck. His partner had the strongest mind of anyone he had ever known, but it could get stuck in the mud now and again and needed a lorry to pull it back out.

“Then just try and be charitable. Good methods or poor, she did it for us because she cares and that deserves… something.”

Mycroft’s trumpeted snort received a vocal approval from John, who admired both the volume and technique of Mycroft’s response.

“Lovely. My partner is a man of grace and poise.”

“Thank you, my dear. I cherish each and every of your compliments.”

This sigh was far more a fond one than the last and Lestrade just shook his head, grinning at Mycroft who tried to remain stoic, but couldn’t stop his own smile peeking out to meet Lestrade’s own.

“I’m sitting between you and her at dinner, you know. No silliness while we’re eating. We’ll have enough of that from the princes of evil, anyway.”

“Your devotion to order and civility does you credit, my dear. You shall be a fine officer of the law.”

“After all this practice? They should immediately make me a sergeant.”

“I have no doubt you shall rise to that rank in short order, in any case. There is none who could fail to recognize your talent for the position and commitment to hard work, as well as honest compassion for those you serve.”

“Want to write that down? I’ll slip that into my application envelope to give myself a little leg-up.”

If it was at all possible to do so without his spouse discovering his influence, more than that would factor into his Gregory’s application. Though he had full faith, utter and complete faith, that his
partner would win the job he wanted, it never hurt to…

“No! Don’t you dare!”

Eep!

“I… whatever do you mean?”

“You’re planning on doing something to help me get the job or get promoted and I’m putting my foot down right now for that. I get that job myself or not at all. I won’t accept anything else.”

“How on Earth did you…”

“You’re not as inscrutable as you think, Mycroft. I can tell, sometimes, what’s going on in that head of yours and this time it was clear as crystal. Do not interfere, do you understand?”

Mycroft’s stormy pout was positively adorable, but Lestrade refused to budge an inch.

“I’m waiting.”

“Fine! Fine… I will not take steps to interfere.”

However, if another was assigned the task…

“And no having someone else do it for you.”

Witchcraft!

“I know you’ve got people you get to do your bits of legwork and not a one is going to stick even a toe into this. I’m serious, Mycroft. I get the job on my own merit or I don’t want it.”

“Don’t worry, Mycroft, you can get me a job if you like.”

Both older boys turned towards John who was happily using his queen to pound Sherlock’s bishop into submission.

“I see. Well, I shall keep that in mind for the future, John. Still hoping for a profession in medicine, I assume.”

“Yes! And, when I pick where I want to work, you can get me a job there, as well as all the holiday time I want.”

“Which will be necessary since John’s ridiculous pursuit of a career will undoubtedly interfere with his role as assistant in my own work.”

Apparently, Sherlock and John had sorted out their futures in a very tidy fashion.

“There you are, love. You can see John with lucrative position at a prestigious hospital, where he only works a day or so a week so he’s got time to help Sherlock with his experiments.”

“I shall make note of such and keep it in my safe so that I may revisit it in the future.”

“Thank, Mycroft! You’re not nearly as useless as Sherlock says you are.”

And, with that ringing endorsement, Mycroft felt a tiny bit more of his internal weight ebb away. Though John meant his words somewhat in jest, they were something he realized he needed to
hear. He was not useless to his family. They had missed him desperately and not for what he might buy or provide them, but, rather, because they valued his company and affection. He filled something in their lives, made a contribution and, despite what he had perpetrated, they still held him in their hearts.

“Mycroft is even more useless than I verbalize for if I dared utter the degree to which he squanders organic molecules and oxygen, it is most certain the seas would boil and the skies would fall and I have far too much to accomplish before Armageddon to bring it now to my doorstep.”

“Your support is, as always, highly encouraging, brother dear.”

“The truth is not always pleasant, but one must embrace its illumination, nonetheless.”

Both Mycroft and Lestrade declined to mention that, to Sherlock, the truth was as fluid as bathwater.

“Yes, veritas lux mea. Now, might I suggest…”

Whatever Mycroft had in mind was lost to the announcement of dinner, which had both small boys racing for the dining room and the larger boys following at a more sedate pace. This was mostly, on Lestrade’s part, to give his lover time to brace himself for facing his current nemesis. If potatoes weren’t hurled by the end of the meal, he would be greatly surprised…

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“Stop snarling. Your gran just asked if we had a nice day.”

“Her tone was derisive.”

“Your hearing is selective.”

“Balderdash.”

“Unless that’s the type of fish we’re eating, you need to relax.”

“Relaxation is for those who lack moral standards.”

“Good to know.”

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“Don’t hiss, you bastard!”

“Did you not hear the brazen slander directed towards you?”

“You mean the mention that my water was about to meet an untimely death because I’d put the glass too close to the table edge and nearly elbowed it over?”

“Where you set your stemware is entirely your choice.”

“And stopping me watering the rug like a garden is hers.”

“The rug has survived two centuries of beastly manners and other nefarious doings. You are experiencing harassment and I will not let that stand.”

“Then it’s a good thing you’re sitting”
“Scoff if you will, but I will see your dignity safeguarded with my last dying breath.”

“If that happens soon, can I have your cake?”

“You are fortunate I love you.”

“Especially since I’m getting extra cake.”

“Don’t you dare!”

“I have no idea what is the root of this latest bit of hysteria.”

“If you don’t think I recognize Sherlock’s cutlery-based catapult design, you’re loony. And those beets stain!”

“Avert your eyes from the carnage if your sensibilities are perturbed.”

“I’ll perturb you, you evil thing, with a handful of butter down your shirt.”

“It shall simply add lubrication to our bedroom activities this evening.”

“You won’t survive eight seconds with gooey butter in that chest hair of yours.”

“I… I am made of stern stuff!”

“Gooey, squishy, greasy butter…”

“I hate you.”

“Oh, that’s lovely. Really lovely.”

“Mwat?”

“What do you mean ‘what’? Filling your mouth full of chocolate cake and grinning your dirty brown grin at Grandmama like a toddler.”

“Pfle.”

Don’t you piffle me, Mycroft Holmes. You grow up this instant or you’re sleeping with Sherlock and John tonight.”

“Wl nt.”

“Will, too, and that’s my last word on the subject.”

“Yr a hrbl mthr.”

“I am a fantastic mother, thank you very much. And wipe your mouth. You shame me in front of the other mum’s and your bottom is going to glow.”

“Prmse?”

“Not if your teeth are still shite-colored.”
“Vsigth.”

“What the fuck was that?”

“Thtz fr me t’knw.”

“You’re the most mature man in the world.”

“Thnk u.”

Nobody was happier when dinner ended that Greg, who’d had to mind three children and knew, absolutely knew, that Grandmama was laughing at him the entire time. He was a mum! And the biggest baby was his own partner who made a noise so rude when Grandmama rose to take her leave that John slid under the table laughing.

“You’re all bastards and the devil can have the lot of you!”

“If there is a more boring person in the universe, I pity those who stand in his vicinity for the soul-draining ennui must leave them shriveled husks before three breaths are drawn.”

“Thank you, Sherlock. And where are your trousers?”

“They were chafing.”

“While you sat and ate.”

“Chafing knows no timetable.”

“John, you want to come out of your mole hole?”

“Not necessarily. It’s cozy under here.”

“Wonderful. Mycroft… no, I’m not even talking to you, I’ve got enough of a headache. In fact, I’m not talking to anyone right now, so just pretend I don’t exist while I have a lot to drink and we’ll all get on very well.”

Rubbing his temples, Lestrade slowly walked out of the dining room, knowing he’d have about three minutes of quiet before his charges invaded his kingdom of silence, claiming they’d been abandoned for an eternity, but those would be three blessed minutes and he would savor every one.

“I think Greg might be mad.”

John’s head peeked out from under the tablecloth, his face wearing its best ‘oops’ expression.

“The peasant’s constitution is of the weakest water and if he manages a fortnight when employed by the constabulary, I shall be greatly surprised. The theft of a bicycle will require he quaff a nerve tonic and sit in a sturdy chair until he ceases to tremble from agitation.”

Mycroft snorted, but cast a hesitant glance towards John, worrying with growing confidence that the boy was correct.

“Do you truly believe Gregory was upset?”

“His eyes looked like they did when Sherlock and I spilled green stain on his jacket. It was a
pretty green, at least in the bottle, but that didn’t seem to make much of a difference to Greg.”

Oh dear.

“Then, perhaps, I should speak with him.”

“Mr. Lestrade is enjoying a restorative at the moment, Mr. Holmes. Instead, might we have a small word while he soothes his nerves?”

Three pairs of eyes turned towards the newcomer to the dining room and Mycroft felt the most uncharacteristic tendril of dread begin to wind through him from Edwards’s genial smile.

“Oh. I see. Grandmama desires a conversation.”

“No, if Madam wanted a word I would have stated that plainly.”

The tendril was now the size of a kraken’s tentacle and Mycroft was most certain that if Edwards was closeting him for ‘a word,’ that word would not be a joyful one.

“I… yes, of course. Sherlock, John….”

“I believe Mr. Lestrade would not begrudge their company, as long as the young masters promise to temper their innate enthusiasm and allow him some degree of relaxation. I have ordered a pot of warm chocolate to be delivered to the library for their enjoyment. I know they enjoyed a chocolatey treat after dinner, but a bit of indulgence is the pleasure of childhood.”

Sherlock and John left small vapor trails as they sped away and Mycroft had never felt the loss of their presence so dearly. A word with Edwards. This was unprecedented. Little that was good in this world came from the unprecedented…

Mycroft hated that he followed meekly behind Edwards, but his body seemed to have its own plan for this meeting and did not require his mind’s approval to see it done. At least the small sitting room to which he was led was a fairly festive locale. Birds in the wallpaper. How delightful.

“Do have a seat Mr. Holmes. I promise not to keep you from your family for long.”

Somehow that was not terribly reassuring, because returning him in small pieces to his beloved would see the promise kept, though he, himself, would not be alive to verify it.

“I would appreciate that. We have had little time of late to simply enjoy each other’s company.”

“No. No, you have not. And that is, partially, the subject about which I would like to speak.”

Oh dear. Again.

“I suppose… I suppose it is not unwarranted that I receive a further chastisement for my behavior these past terrible weeks.”

“That is not quite the timeframe of my concern. I am more of a mind to discuss matters of the past days.”

Ah. Well, that, at least, made some degree of sense. The man was charged to keep watchful eye on Grandmama…
“Yes… I recognize that I may have aggrieved Grandmama this evening, however…”

“What do you remember of your Father’s last months, Mr. Holmes?”

Not a single question could have thrown Mycroft more awry than that particular one. He felt as if he had seen his legs kicked out from under him by one of the afternoon’s horses.

“F…Father?”

“Yes. If you cast your mind back to that time, what do you remember?”

That was something he had not wanted to do, ever, in this life. Why suffer the rending of one’s heart if one could avoid it?

“Little, in truth. Father was not home a great deal, but that was not entirely out of the ordinary. Then, we received the notification that he had suffered heart failure and… died while being transported to hospital.”

The lump in Mycroft’s throat was thick and hot, but he swallowed it down. After a fashion.

“Yes, that was very much the case. Perhaps you lack a few bits of information, however, to make the picture complete. For instance, were you aware that your Father asked Madam to be relieved of a portion of his responsibilities in the months before his death?”

The lump came roaring back and it was a good several seconds before Mycroft could push out a response.

“What? I mean, no. No, I did not.”

“Your Father knew his heath was failing. He had seen it in his own father and knew the signs, which, with corroboration from his physician… well, he suspected that he did not have a great deal of time left in this world. And he wanted desperately to spend as much of it as possible with you and Sherlock.”

Mycroft felt a hole opening in the pit of his stomach and the rest of him folding to fall into its depths.

“He did?”

“Oh yes. He met with Madam and they had quite the discussion on the issue, one that had her most fervent agreement. It was not an easy conversation for either of them, but it was one that exemplified the deep and abiding love your father had for his own family.”

“I… but, no. No, he was not with us often in the months before his death.”

The mournful smile on Edwards face made it clear he was well aware of that painful fact.

“You are correct. Madam agreed that he would only be called to service for the most important and delicate matters, however…”

A small light flickered on in Mycroft’s brain and it shed an unpleasant glow on his thoughts.

“Matters arose.”

“Yes. Or, should I say perhaps. That is a question Madam has never settled in her own mind. She, like you, as well as your grandfather and father, live two lives. One for service and one for family. It is easy to let one overshadow the other if one is not eternally vigilant and… not even
Madam is infallible. She was aware every time she telephoned your father or sent him correspondence. She knew when she assigned him some task to perform. None of it was done outside her view, yet… she missed the pattern. Every day was a day anew and she did not see, not until after her son’s death, that the one thing he had asked, begged, really, had been denied him. Not by intent, not out of malice or conscious neglect, but… the result was no different. And, much like your Gregory, your father was not the sort to issue complaint when, in his mind, there must be reason, compelling reason, that his wants were being placed behind other concerns.”

Mycroft was not sure he was even breathing at the moment and, honestly, he didn’t care.

“Madam is angry with you, lad, but she is more angry with herself. She keeps many eyes on all of you and, again… she did not see the pattern. She, like you, had all the pieces, but not until an inciting event arose did they coalesce into a definable picture. You are still most culpable for your actions, but a warning word earlier on would have forestalled much of yours and your Gregory’s suffering. That warning word did not come and she is well aware of that. You very nearly lost the one you love and, let us say, that was a terribly distressing déjà vu moment for your grandmother. I know she has been hard on you, tested you in a rather savage fashion, but realize that she… might be acting not entirely based on the events of these last days. And that she would have suffered endless heartbreak, and guilt, had you and your partner gone your separate ways. She loves you, Mycroft. She loves you more than you can fathom, though I realize Madam is not the most demonstrative individual in creation and will never let the depth of that love show. Never doubt, however, her affections and her hope that you and Gregory enjoy for your lifetimes the love you have come to share. So, I would take it as a personal favor if you could find it in your heart to forgive her recent, rather draconian, behaviors. At the very least, leave her gowns free from the stains of beetroot. The laundry staff would be most cross having to face that challenge and I would rather not find my pyjamas shrunk to Master John’s size because of their peevishness.”

Without another word, Edwards smiled, rose from his seat and gave Mycroft’s shoulder a reassuring squeeze before leaving the younger man alone with his thoughts. Thoughts which were making Mycroft’s brain boil like an unattended kettle though… though he could not say he was not glad for it. In some ways. Taking his cue from Grandmama’s PA, Mycroft took his own leave and made his way to the library, not entirely remembering the steps he took to get there, and felt his eyes water quickly when he saw his lover and the boys smile at his entrance.

“Love? Are you alright?”

A nod was all Lestrade received as an answer until Mycroft took a seat next to him on the sofa, which quickly morphed into their familiar position of reclining, this time with Mycroft laying solidly against Lestrade’s chest.

“I… I am. Surprisingly. And, I offer you every crumb of apology that I can for my conduct at dinner. It was juvenile and placed you in both an awkward and difficult position, one you surely did not deserve.”

“Oh. Well, thanks for that. I admit I wasn’t very happy with that silliness, but I know how upset you were.”

“Yes, there was that. But… I am feeling… I was going to say better, however, ‘different’ might be a better descriptor. Settled is another apt term.”

“You want to talk about it? Sherlock and John told me you got pulled aside for a chat.”

“I do want to talk about it, but later. I require time to think, to evaluate and…
Mycroft cut eyes towards the boys, who had gone back to their game of cards once they realized there wasn’t going to be any interesting tirades for their entertainment.

“…when there are fewer ears in the vicinity.”

Lestrade wrapped his arms tightly around his partner and laid a kiss on his neck, then on his temple.

“Whatever you want, love.”

“And, at the moment, that is simply to rest here with you. Is that acceptable?”

“Nothing could be more acceptable. And look! I have a few sips of brandy left that I would be honored to share with my gorgeous and brilliant partner.”

Nestling deeper into Lestrade’s embrace, Mycroft began to let some of his turmoil make its way to his mind’s surface in preparation for processing. In this very safe and comforting place, he could reflect on what he had heard and what he could learn from the information. One thing was certain, however, and that was Grandmama’s dresses were hereby safe from any nefarious attacks by food products. He was not quite ready to bestow complete forgiveness, but he could bestow some and that was enough for now. Besides, if his beloved had to suffer breakfast with as much nonsense as their dinner, he would undoubtedly be as divorced as a man could be. One brush with that fate was quite sufficient for this century…
Chapter 6

“That’s going up your arse in about 5 seconds.”

John’s shocked gasp nearly drowned out Sherlock’s condescending snort as the small boy continued to poke Lestrade with an unusually long courgette that he and John had stolen from the kitchen while they negotiated for a pre-breakfast snack. The fact that they arrived in the kitchen clad only in their pants, claiming their servants had yet to affect their dressing, did a lot to get them their heart’s desire.

“Your pathetic threats fail to impress me, lackey. You will now rise and see John and I dressed so we may have our breakfast. Then, you will serve as our indentured man for the day so that our needs and wants are fully and properly met.”

“If I wasn’t so tired, I’d show you what happens when an indentured man gets hold of a vegetable and has longer, faster legs than the miserable goblins shrieking at him at fuck o’clock in the morning.”

“Faster? John! Make note that the peasant has tipped fully into the pit of delusion and now believes himself fleet of foot.”

“Making note! Sorry, Greg, but I’ve seen you play football. A lot. That story about the tortoise and the hare? You’re not the hare.”

Mycroft remained in his cozy cocoon of blankets and manflesh and tried not to make his laughter visible to said miserable goblins, lest their puny wrath be turned in his direction. Truly he was as comfortable as a man could ever be and would bemoan loudly any movement from this state of being.

“Hey! I’m not that slow. Maybe… maybe some of the others are a tiny bit quicker than me, but I make up for it with strategy.”

Lestrade actually experienced no surprise when Sherlock and John burst into peals of fake laughter because he’d known the moment he said it that his defense wasn’t exactly one to impress the magistrates.

“Strategy? You chase the ball like an overexcited and easily amused puppy and simply tackle anyone in your way, adding whatever acts of violence you deem necessary to gain total satisfaction from the encounter. If by some chance the ball veers towards the goal after contact with your foot, it is purely a stochastic event and cannot, in any manner, be credited to your ability for sport. Which is nil.”

“Wrong. Oh so very, very wrong. And, for that…”

Lestrade snatched the courgette from the distracted Sherlock’s fingers and took a large bite, disabling their tool from its intended purpose.

“…feel free to leave.”

“Sorry, Greg. We’re hungry and we only have until afternoon to play, so we have to make the most of every moment. Just because you and Mycroft want to be lazy and stay and bed and kiss, that’s no reason for Sherlock and me to suffer.”

Sherlock nodded his abject approval of John’s assessment and Lestrade wondered of there was any
chance raw vegetable could produce a paralyzing effect when rubbed on the face of the particular goblin species that was infesting the bedroom at the moment.

“The sun… the sun’s barely above the horizon!”

“Invoking astronomy will not aid your cause, plebian. Rise and make yourself useful to us!”

Lestrade gave a small groan and for the smallest of moments regretted his and Mycroft’s long night of sex and… more sex. There was conversation sprinkled in there, of course, when they needed a bit of time for certain anatomical regions to reenergize for another go, but… they’d had a LOT of sex. Which only ended, likely, when the Demonic Duo began to crawl out of their beds.

“How about you two get your breakfast and start on something sane while I get a little more sleep so I actually can be useful to you?”

“Pshaw.”

“Yeah, pshaw.”

“It was worth a try. Can we leave Mycroft to sleep awhile or do you need both of us to horsewhip?”

“Fatcroft can do as he likes as the sight of his quivering blubber shall surely put me off my breakfast and I have not the necessary anti-emetic on hand to prevent the subsequent vomiting.”

“Nice, Sherlock. Oh so very nice. Really, you’re a prince of a man.”

“Is that an attempt at sarcasm?”

“Yes.”

“You require lessons. We shall begin at breakfast. Which will commence immediately. Come, John… we shall be magnanimous and gather the lackey’s garments while he drags his coitus-drained body from its den of iniquity.”

This time, Mycroft’s laughter betrayed him and he received a gentle pinch of chastisement from his beginning-to-shuffle-out-of-bed partner.

“You just be quiet, evil thing, or I’ll rub raw vegetable on parts that won’t appreciate it very much.”

“I am quaking in fear.”

“You should! Quake like Sherlock’s curls when he’s giving one of his His Majesty performances.”

“I will begin anon. However, I will combine my quaking with a slow and purposeful rise from the bed to join you and the boys at breakfast.”

“You don’t need to do that, love. Get another few hours of sleep. I can handle the masters of misery well enough on my own.”

“True, but you do not have to mind the miseries alone and I am more than willing to do my part. Another day, when the circumstances are different, I might accept your kind offer, however, you and I are equally fatigued due to evenly-matched… exuberance… for out night’s activities. I shall continue the theme of equity into our morning.”
Lestrade grinned at the head that was only now fully emerging from its burrow and leaned in to kiss its lovely nose.

“Then I’ll gladly accept your equity in the spirit it’s given. Sherlock! John! Find Mycroft some clothes, too, while we give ourselves a quick wash and brush.”

“I refuse to lay hands on his vestments! They are undoubtedly saturated with some noxious chemical that increases their resistance to stretching when they are worked over his globular form and I have no wish to die before the summer holiday!”

“John, you’re in charge of Mycroft’s clothes. The nasty little yappy dog next to you can get mine. We’ll be out of the bath in a minute.”

Before Sherlock’s shrieks started plaster falling from the ceiling, Lestrade grabbed Mycroft’s hand and led him to the bath where the quick face wash, shave and brushing of teeth totaled only a fraction of the time they spent away from young eyes. Luckily, as Lestrade had anticipated, the arguments of clothes choices kept the two boys from noticing the passage of time until their elders were ready to face the day.

“And what is the fate of my suit jacket, John?”

“Uhhhh…”

John’s eyes cut towards a bedroom window that was still partially cracked provided all the answer Mycroft required.

“Why did you let my brother lay hands on my jacket? You know well it incites his humors in the most destructive of ways.”

“It’s not in pieces, at least. Just… out there. Besides, you don’t need a jacket today since it’s warm and nice and we might be outside enjoying the… warmness and niceness.”

It wasn’t charitable to giggle at his partner’s plight, but Lestrade’s sense of charity was feeling a bit depleted at the moment.

“Very well. Oh, and Gregory. How fetching shall you look.”

And the universe delivers it’s punishment for his giggling. Really, Lestrade wondered why he thought it wouldn’t.

“Funny. Very funny, Sherlock. Where did you find a dress?”

“That is not your concern.”

“It even looks like it would fit!”

“I have an impeccable eye for body volume.”

“Well, put that back where you found it and I’ll get some actual clothes I own to put over my body volume.”

“What’s wrong with wearing a dress, Greg? I think they’re rather nice, actually.”

Says John, the boy who had several pretty dresses in his closet for when he and Sherlock decided to perform some undercover work in the village.
“There’s nothing wrong with wearing a dress, but, first, I don’t want to get a lovely frock filthy with whatever you have in store for me today and, second, I’m not certain how comfortable it will be climbing trees or running about after things or swordfighting.”

“You may have a point. Sherlock put the dress back in our luggage and Greg can wear it when we’re home and don’t have all of that planned for the day. He can come with us into the village, too, and we can see if he can get any kisses from boys or girls who like to kiss other girls.”

If it wasn’t bad form to push his lover back into bed and smother him with a pillow, Lestrade would have immediately enacted revenge on the sniggering Mycroft.

“That sounds very interesting. Off you go, then. Mycroft and I will meet you in the kitchen, unless you’ve heard word we’re having breakfast with Grandmama.”

“Not today. She’s already on the phone and Mr. Edwards said not to wait breakfast. Maybe for lunch, though.”

Something that put a little more air in Lestrade’s lungs. He and his partner had enjoyed a rather emotional conversation before the sex began, but he still worried that Mycroft’s behavior might not be its usual poised perfection when he saw his grandmother.

“The kitchen it is, then. Thanks, John. Love, let’s get dressed and put some food in that luscious belly of yours.”

The combination of ‘luscious’ and ‘belly’ was enough to send the small boys fleeing from the room, allowing the opportunity for a little affection before the official donning of garments began.

“I do want a photograph of you in your frock, Gregory, if I am not there to witness the spectacle in person.”

“I’ll have the boys do my face, too, so I’ll look ready for a night out with the other girls.”

“Simply divine. And that does put me in mind… I would like to make somewhat of a habit of having evenings out when we are able. A dinner or night at the cinema. In London, we may broaden the scope of opportunities, but I am hopeful that we can have time where we might, alone, celebrate our love and enjoy each other’s company.”

“I’d love that! We did sort of leap over a lot of the basic dating and doing the simple things like that, so… yeah. That’s a brilliant idea.”

Something Lestrade made certain to emphasize with the next kiss he have his delighted lover. Their relationship had followed an unusual path and… yes, it would be a welcome thing to put a little of the ‘usual’ back into it.

“Consider it done. We shall make a point of doing that very thing. I will have a discussion with Sherlock and John and impress upon them the necessity of that time together and the inappropriateness of invading our evening with their typical shenanigans.”

“Good luck with that. They’re going to be hiding in the boot of the car or calling out an ambulance to the restaurant for some daft reason, just to make us loony.”

“Hence the focal point of our discussion which will be their allowances and the ease with which the flow of their monies can be stemmed.”

“Hit them right in the purse… very smart. Those two do go through a lot of cash when they’ve
"got a scheme going."

"Such as purchasing dresses for their disguise collection?"

"That’s the least of it. You should see what they drag into the shop when they’ve had an afternoon in the village. Someone sold Sherlock a mannequin! It took me a dozen phone calls to find out who it was and plead with them to take the blasted thing back!"

"Oh, I would think that a rather benign purchase, given Sherlock was the purchaser."

"They wanted to experiment with a kitchen cleaver and see if they could figure out attack angle if you took a hack at someone."

"Yes… perhaps benign is not the proper term, now that I consider the matter further."

"I wonder if I can still be a policeman with two kids in prison."

"I shall investigate the situation and see if an exemption can be had for you should that particular turn in the road be taken."

"Thanks, love. You do have your uses, sometimes."

"My heart is aflutter from your fulsome praise."

"How about your stomach aflutter from a full breakfast."

"Nearly as agreeable."

With access to multiple vehicles, it wasn’t surprising that Sherlock and John wanted driving practice, and the two boys carefully loading of the boots with various sacks and boxes of sampling supplies and their favorite swords. With Mycroft overseeing John and Greg in charge of Sherlock, the slow parade of cars through a section of Grandmama’s property commenced and only came to a halt when Sherlock turned his car, narrowly avoiding the one tree in visual range and brought it to a stop.

"An empty field. Well, that’s not exactly what I would have expected, Sherlock, so well done you for surprising me."

"Fool. My research as indicated that there was a dwelling on this site and I will uncover its secrets."

"What sort of secrets can a non-existent house have anymore?"

"Dolt. Your mind is akin to a piece of unmarked white paper which has been scribed upon by white ink."

"What did that even mean?"

"Boob. The vast wasteland of your cognition is an insult to brain tissue."

"Are you hoping to distract me so I don’t mention you nearly denting the car with the one tree in the vast wasteland of grass I see before me?"

"Fool. I was fully in control of the automobile at all times."
“You used that piece of slander already, so I know you got nervous. Just pay better attention next time. Even going slow can be tricky if you hit a bit of uneven ground or a tree root. We’ll practice a little more with that sort of thing, so you can better manage it.”

“Cretin.”

“That had two syllables, so you must be calming down a little. And look! There’s John trying to pick the lock on the boot so he can get the supplies.”

Sherlock turned around and knelt on the seat to glare at his partner in crime who was in criminal fine form as he worked the lock with what appeared to be a spring that he’d partially straightened.

“Ugh. He is a talentless fumble fingers for useful skills. I see more lessons are in order. I would already have conquered the lock and won my prize.”

“Is that before or after you crashed the car into the one solid object for a league in any direction?”

The loud snort made Lestrade grin as Sherlock dramatically flung open the car door and hopped out onto the ground. Deciding not to unlatch the boot lid and let the boys get some practice, the vehicle’s passenger got out in a decidedly more sedate fashion than the driver and met the other vehicle’s passenger with a kiss.

“Was Sherlock seeking to experiment on the malleability of the metal used to fabricate the car’s body?”

“There was a little divot in the ground and it startled him, I think. He recovered nicely, though. Sherlock says there was a house on this spot and he wants to ‘discover its secrets.’ Any idea what that’s about?”

“Oh, yes, actually. A relatively modest bachelor’s residence for… I believe it was the middle brother of one Grandpapa’s ancestors. A bit of a rake, if memory serves. The reason the house no longer stands is that it burned to the ground during one of the blighter’s rather ribald parties. No one was harmed, thank goodness, but that was, apparently, the final bout of independence he was permitted until a suitably somber-minded bride could be found for him.”

“Poor bastard. Having a little fun and down comes your house around your ears.”

“Yes, I have no doubt it brought the festivities to a somewhat abrupt end. However, the various pieces of stone and salvageable wood were put to commendable use in various livestock minding ways. There were quite a few sheep in this section of the property at one time, all with tidy fences and walls to keep them from running off to their unknown fates because of my relation’s unintentional gift.”

“Think the boys will find anything?”

“It is possible, I suppose. A bit of broken crockery or window glass. Perhaps a spoon or other small item.”

“We are prepared!”

The two older boys turned to find Sherlock and John armed with shovels, sacks, sieves and…

“Where did you get that?”

John posed with their new metal detector and grinned proudly.
“Grandmama. Sherlock said he wanted one to help with our investigations and Mr. Edwards gave it to us today! He even told us where to look for treasure. We’re going to do that before we swordfight, so we have something to fight over which is a lot more fun than fighting only for fighting.”

There was a logic to that which had both Mycroft and Lestrade sharing a ‘he’s got a point’ look before sighing and preparing for a LONG morning in the field.

“That was most magnanimous of Grandmama and I hope you will thank her most sincerely for her gift.”

John’s and Sherlock’s rolled eyes were as synchronized as the most highly-choreographed dance routine and Lestrade laughed at their antics. Part of that laughter, however, was for the additional evidence that his lover was starting to let go of his anger and that was something to celebrate, even if only with himself.

“If we find some gold and jewels, we’ll give her... one.”

“One, John? For the gift of allowing you to find your precious treasure horde?”

“Mycroft, Grandmama has a lot of gold and jewels already. We don’t need to give her a lot just to say thank you. Actually, if we just say thank you, that should probably enough, especially if Sherlock says it too and isn’t grimacing when he does it.”

John’s ability to craft a persuasive and rational argument was progressing by leaps and bounds.

“Very well. We shall see Grandmama properly thanked at our first opportunity and, if by some chance, you discover an item with which you believe you might part, you may present it to her to commemorate the success of your day.”

“Sometimes, Mycroft, you’re almost good at thinking.”

And, with that grin-delivered jab and the onset of Sherlock’s argument as to why his brother never had a good thought in his life, John began marching towards their treasure site, Sherlock matching him step for step.

“My dear, have you any headache tablets?”

Lestrade ran a hand up and down Mycroft’s back, then gave him a small shove forward to begin walking.

“Look at it this way, love. We’re in the middle of nothing, so there’s no real chance they can find anything disastrous to do. We’ll just mind they don’t hit each other over the head with their new present and guard whatever bits of rubbish they find. In fact…”

Lestrade darted back to the cars, looking first in one and then the other, before holding up his own prize in triumph.

“We’ve got our blanket to sit on, too! Not a bit of dirt on that beautiful bum of yours. We’ll enjoy the day, let the treasure hunters have their fun and have an adventure on our record before we leave this afternoon. Tomorrow is a school day, so we should get a somewhat early start for home.”

“Eminently practical and I do appreciate your consideration of my trousers. Let us join them, then, shall we?”
Lestrade held out his arm and Mycroft laughed before he took it to be escorted towards their adventure or, at least, their vantage point to watch the adventure. A restful day with pleasant conversation, some welcome affection and two children who would be happily engaged and out of their hair for several hours at minimum. How very little it took for one to be truly happy. Something he could never again afford to forget…

__________

“This is amazing!”

John’s unbridled glee was mirrored by Sherlock who failed utterly to hide his delight behind his very lackluster scowl.

“It is somewhat satisfying, I suppose, though the utter lack of gold or precious gems mars the flavor of the victory.”

Mycroft and Lestrade picked through the collection that was carefully dumped from the boys’ sacks and marveled at the quantity and diversity of items. Bits of cutlery, some pieces being real silver, enough sizeable shards of pottery and china to reassemble into what seemed to be two teacups, a vase and substantial platter, two small, tarnished picture frames that could be polished and mended back to use, an assortment of antique coins, the head of a small porcelain doll whose body could be re-made if desired and a collection of porcelain animals that might have been part of a set with the doll, a pair of intriguingly mangled candlesticks and a variety of other small items of interest. The older boys shared a look that confirmed each would offer Edwards their thanks for seeding the earth with this treasure trove and commiseration for a night that probably found him greeting his pillow at a painfully-late hour. It was worth it, though, because Sherlock and John were glowing brightly with excitement and the work on restoring their treasures would continue their joy for days to come.

“You two did a brilliant job at being treasure hunters! This is interesting stuff, more interesting, really, than some lumpy old gold or a piece of colored stone. I think we can fix a lot of this, too. This is the sort of things those archaeologists chaps like to find. They tell a story, not just sit there and look lovely. I think this is a grand find. Love, what do you think?”

“I agree wholeheartedly. Truly, the academic and historical interest of your artifacts is substantial and I have no doubt you will properly restore and curate your find to showcase this achievement.”

“Naturally! Though the social sciences are disgracefully poor pretenders to the ‘science’ term, I shall, regardless, elevate their lackluster standards to an unrivaled level. If the British Museum does not immediately dispatch an offer of employment to me, they prove again their poor judgement and perilously-feeble efficiency.”

Mycroft bit back his smile because any interest his brother took in matters outside his normally-narrow range was something to encourage and applaud.

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maybe someone can sew you back together so you won’t scare people when they look in your coffin at your funeral.”

And, with his gauntlet hurled into Sherlock’s face, John picked up his sword and tossed it back and forth from hand to hand like he’d seen done in the films, only dropping it once because he was trying to grin smugly at Sherlock and couldn’t do that and sword toss at the same time.

“‘You are a bounder, John Watson, and will meet the fate destined for those of that ilk. Prepare to meet thy doom.”

Neither of the older boys let even the smallest facial muscle twitch as Sherlock grabbed his sword at a rather awkward angle and had torque work against him, stumbling a bit before he could contort properly to get sword and body aligned to take a stand against his opponent. With the battle now waging fiercely, Lestrade wrapped his arm around Mycroft’s waist and drew him close for a quick peck on the cheek.

“‘They’re having fun.”

“Most certainly. It is a delight to see, Gregory. I despaired, so very often, that Sherlock would develop to an astounding level academically, but languish for other areas of his life. Now, I know it will not come to pass and I am overwhelmed, at times, with both joy and relief from the knowledge. And dear John… he is flourishing, is he not?”

“I’d say so. I’ve been trying my best to keep him with doors open for things he likes or wants to try, even if Sherlock pronounces it all a spectacular waste of time. He’s even met a few other lads and spends an afternoon now and again with them while I keep Sherlock occupied with other things. And Sherlock’s not reacted as poorly as I thought he might. As long as John’s time is mostly devoted to him, an afternoon of football or extra time after school to play with his Top Trumps doesn’t get John out of his nibs’s good graces.”

“And my delight escalates by leaps and bounds. I do admit it was a worry of mine, that Sherlock would feel abandoned if John broadened his scope of friends.”

It took only a second for Mycroft to realize the reason for Lestrade’s slightly frustrated huff of breath and he budged closer to his lover to offer what comfort he could.

“I am sorry, Gregory. The hypocrisy of my statement is not lost on me and my heart leadens because of it.”

“It’s alright. I know it’s not the same situation.”

“But, it is. It is exactly the same situation. I worried that John, with his affable demeanor, would gather a bevy of friends and reduce the time and attention he provided my brother. I admit I never thought I would find myself in that position, and I cannot say friends are what gather around me, but I should have made some connection in my own mind. Again, I failed you.”

“It’s different when you see something from the outside and when you’re in the center of it, Mycroft. But you know now, right? That’s the important thing.”

Mycroft repositioned slightly to take his partner in a hug that said he certainly saw his error and realized to his very core what he had nearly sacrificed in making it.

“I do know and commit myself utterly to rectifying the slights you have born. I am committed to that, my love, though I know I will continue to fail you on a depressingly regular basis.”
“Nobody is perfect and I know that. Grandmama and I talked about that, too. Your grandfather… he had his, well, Grandmama called them ‘stumbles,’ and they didn’t magically end when he saw he’d had one. What mattered was that he tried, honestly tried to avoid them and made amends when he had them anyway. That’s all I can ask of you, Mycroft, and it’s all that I will ask of you. Just try, really try.”

“You are both gracious and wise, Gregory. I live in surprise that you are not on the arm of another.”

“Almost was.”

Mycroft froze in a rictus of terror and it took Lestrade’s brightest smile to unfreeze his partner from a life as a statue.

“G… Gregory?”

“Don’t worry, Mycroft, I didn’t take any of the offers, but… well, I think when people saw that you weren’t home much and I… I suppose I was losing some of my enthusiasm for our relationship… I started getting chatted up again. Got invitations and offers for this and that. Some from people who I had a little history with and some from new faces, but I think that there started to be some idea growing that I might be going on the market again, or, was already there. I’m a little surprised, actually, none of my mates simply came out and asked me about it, but they didn’t. If I asked them now, they’d probably tell me… well, what I expect but would rather not hear because things are different now and that’s behind us. I can’t say, though, that it didn’t do me a little good to have some interest tossed my way. It picked my ego up on a few bad days, too. But, I didn’t accept any, so don’t worry about anything. I think… I think that’s another reason I was so upset when I found that bastard in your… our… house. I’d been turning down offers for a bit of fun and here you were accepting them. Made me feel pretty stupid, along with everything else.”

Mycroft struggled with the unseemly and wholly unwarranted surge of jealousy that flooded him and Lestrade waited patiently for his obviously-disturbed partner to get a grip on himself.

“Feeling better now?”

“I… it is, again, to my shame that I did not consider for a moment that my neglect would make you seem an opportune target for the sordid and reprehensible among your peers.”

“Now, now… it’s not necessarily to my credit that I had a fairly, shall we say, active social life before I met you and you can’t fault people for thinking I’d turn back to that if our relationship was dying. Wanting to capitalize on poor, lonely, but extremely handsome and sexy me.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes and glared at Lestrade who laughed and gave him a kiss on his nose, feeling his laughter die when something else rose in Mycroft’s eyes that wasn’t something to laugh about.

“What is it, love?”

“I… I should not inquire, but…”

“What?”

“Did you… did you consider, at least, any of the presented offers?”

That took the air out of Lestrade’s lungs and he busied himself a moment watching Sherlock and John slaughtering each other to put together an answer.
“Truth or lie?”

Which was not really the answer he wanted to give, but it would certainly help pave the way.

“I would prefer truth. No, that is not entirely correct, I would prefer that which will not make my heart ache, but that might not be the most helpful of responses.”

“Alright… then, I can’t say I seriously considered any of them, but… I did let a few sit in my head a moment or two before I kicked them out. Not really to do anything about them, but… just to have some assurance that I was still someone that people might want. A brief bit of fantasy that I knew wouldn’t come to pass and that I didn’t even want to come to pass but… it was a welcome change of pace from feeling nothing inside of me but an emptiness that was starting to fill with something much darker. But, I don’t cheat, Mycroft. That’s one thing I don’t and would never do. I even told the boys that once upon a time. But, I’ll be honest and say that if you hadn’t come back when you did… the way I was feeling, I might have taken up with someone for a little quick and dirty fun. We were done, in my mind, and… having some evidence that I wasn’t just a bit of rubbish you’d tossed aside would have been a good thing. It wouldn’t have been fair to the other person and that would be a ration of guilt I’d have to shoulder afterwards, but… I wasn’t thinking very clearly, so…”

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders and Mycroft’s heart broke anew from knowing what he’d put his beloved through.

“Something I can, strangely, understand, perhaps, because it was at the core of my own behavior. There is validation, esteem, even, in the attention of others, even if the reasons or motives are not particularly honorable. And I would not have blamed you for it. It would have savaged my soul, but I would not have thought less of you for snatching an opportunity to bolster your spirits. And I find that, if I even consider the thought of your infidelity, it seems as absurd as any of Sherlock’s ridiculous proclamations. There is simply not a thread of belief in me that you would do such a thing. It is a notion that seems unable to exist in this universe.”

“It’s good to know you trust me.”

“With my life. With my heart and my soul. I… I do not lie when I say you own them all and that would not be possible if I did not have for you absolute trust. Oh, I am not so juvenile to believe that there will not be times you tell me untruths for one reason or another or even… even that you shall disappoint me in some manner, for though I see you as an angel, I know that you are perfectly human. But, I also know that none of it will be of any real importance or nefarious in any way. My hope is that you can, one day, envision me in the same fashion.”

This kiss was more than a quick peck, starting softly and slowly increasing the warmth and depth until Lestrade felt the uneasiness that had risen in him settle back down again.

“As long as I know you’re trying, Mycroft, doing your best… we’ll be alright. And the same for me. You have a right to point a finger if I’ve not held up my end of things. In fact, I’m hoping for that to help me stay on the path. I am human, and I will have my own stumbles, so I need to you do the same. Point them out and give me the chance to fix things.”

“I will do that very thing, though… it will not be easy for me. I find myself exceedingly unwilling to speak a word against you, let alone towards you if that word is not a pleasant one.”

“Well, you’re going to need to and I am trusting that you will. Even if it makes me angry or hurt, I’m going to expect that of you and I’ll just be angrier and more hurt if I find out you didn’t do as you promised.”
“Then fear not that I shall withhold my censure. It shall be both forceful and immeasurably precise.”

The giggling lasted until each member of the couple realized they were under siege, being held at sword point.

“John and I require prisoners. Though you are pathetic examples of the breed and surely will not secure us any appreciable ransom, you will have to do.”

“Lawks! We’ve been taken captive! Luckily, we Lestrades have our ways of evading our captors.”

Diving forward, Lestrade grabbed Sherlock’s ankles and in a move that rather arousingly impressed Mycroft, tipped the smaller boy so Sherlock was face down on top of him, keeping hold of Sherlock’s ankles while he stood up and beamed like a man bringing home a prize pig for the holiday table.

“Unhand me, peasant! I will not submit to your manhandling and malodorous body waft!”

“You might want to keep a civil tongue in your head, Sherlock. Your face is near a certain body part that can make some very impressive malodorous wafts when it’s got a mind to and we did have a hearty breakfast to provide the necessary fuel.”

“Your vulgarity is incalculable, however, it is not unexpected given the limb of the evolutionary tree on which you sit.”

Mycroft used John’s dissolution into a fit of giggles to disarm his attacker and, in his own impressive display of strategy, pushed the sword upwards under the back of John’s shirt so the tip extended to the top of the boy’s head and wedged the hilt under the waistband of John’s trousers so that, with John’s short arms, extraction was impossible without help from an ally. Who was currently pouting and considering applying a firm bite to Lestrade’s bum.

“My dear? Have you an idea of what to do with our prisoners? We have little to build a fire, making a flesh-based feast out of the question, so I am most open to suggestions.”

“Don’t have any twine either, so tying up their limbs and using them as marionettes won’t work.”

“Quite the conundrum, I’m afraid.”

“It is already the most egregious form of capital punishment that John and I are condemned to listen to your mind-dulling blather and crippled attempts at jocularity. Release me!”

“I don’t want a sword in my bottom!”

“Hmmmm… I believe, my dear, that if we must endure the shrill and overwrought declarations of our detainees, it might sour the remainder of our fine morning. Should we, do you think, allow them some small measure of freedom so we might better enjoy the loveliness of the day?”

“If you think it best. My one isn’t very heavy so I can carry him awhile longer and one little, shall we say, bottom burp and he’ll be unconscious for an hour or two, so there is that to consider.”

“You can’t gas Sherlock! That’s not fair! He’s weedy and he’ll probably die!”

“I am not weedy, mouse dropping!”
“You are! The wind from swinging my sword can knock you over!”

“Intolerable! Lackey! Release me so I might trounce John Watson for his impertinence!”

“Love, want to watch a bit of trouncing?”

“Attempted trouncing is more the case, most likely. But, I suppose, without a contest we shall never know the truth.”

With a deft bit of untangling, Mycroft extracted John’s sword and presented it to the small warrior.

“Go and do your worst, Mr. Watson.”

Grinning widely, Lestrade lowered Sherlock to the ground and dusted him off once the boy returned to his feet.

“Let’s see what you’re made of, Mr. Holmes.”

The roar that ripped the air from the two boys’ battle cry was music to the older pair’s ears as it ensured them another hour of uninterrupted relaxation while the carnage raged. And, the more energy Sherlock and John dissipated now, the less would be available when they tried to get the two gladiators into their beds that night. Every bit of help an overworked parent could get was always appreciated…

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“Dear me, I would declare this venture an unparalleled success.”

Grandmama surveyed the proudly-presented treasure horde and made all appropriate nods and hmmm’s as she cataloged the various items of her house that were now off to live a new life in a far more energetic home.

“It is not surprising, given I was the director of the expedition.”

“You were not, Sherlock. We were both directors, even though I had to do most of the digging because you said the dirt was beneath your dignity.”

“Regardless of the titles you each bore, your synergistic approach to the job certainly bore an abundance of fruit. And, I am aware of several more locations on the property that would be ripe for harvesting by two dedicated treasure hunters such as yourselves.”

Edwards’s soft, resigned sigh earned him a sympathetic nod from Lestrade as he welcomed another victim into the fold.

“Yes! Thanks, Grandmama. We’ll bring our metal detector with us when we visit next. Which will be soon, right Mycroft?”

John’s sincerely pleading face brought a smile to Mycroft’s lips and he found it not as difficult as he’d predicted to share it with his grandmother.

“I have no doubt. And, with the summer holiday looming, I suspect we might elongate our visits a touch to more fully take advantage of the amenities on offer…”

Lestrade’s quiet clearing of his throat puzzled Mycroft for a moment until a bit of blinding reality hit him directly in the face.
“… however, we shall, of course, have to consider how that will be managed with Gregory’s new situation. I am afraid his time will not be as freely available as it is now.”

Something that Grandmama was just realizing, as well, much to her discontent. And, in the next instant, to her shame as she reminded herself that the boy was not the children’s mother and had his own life to lead, independent of the demands of their little family.

“I have full faith Gregory’s career with leave him sufficient time to enjoy family experiences, though, yes, we must be mindful that his schedule will not be as fluid in the near future as now it is.”

The small nod the older woman gave Lestrade put a shaky smile on his face as he hoped Grandmama actually understood the upcoming change in circumstances and wouldn’t be upset when he couldn’t bring the boys to visit every other weekend as it seemed they did of late. Or remind them to phone or, in a nod to traditionalism, write a letter…

“The wage slave shall do as I command or the price exacted will be a steep one.”

Lestrade had a thump ready for Sherlock’s head, but pulled it back because there was a hint of something in Sherlock’s voice besides his usual imperial tone. The soon-to-be policeman made a mental note to have a family meeting about him starting on his career as soon as possible. Things were going to be very different for them all and, unfortunately, not in ways that Sherlock and John would like very much.

“Between you and my superior officer, Sherlock, I think I fear them more.”

“There is no one more superior than am I, laborer, so your point is moot.”

“As always, brother dear, your self-absorption is unexcelled. Now, shall we begin gathering our things? We should make a start for home if we are to arrive with time to prepare fully for tomorrow.”

“How much preparation do you need for your slothful lounging about the house, Fatcroft?”

“So peevish. Have you, perhaps, something at school tomorrow that you are not gleefully anticipating?”

“We have to recite a poem in front of the class and Sherlock hasn’t memorized his yet. I have, though, so I’m going to do a brilliant job of it.”

John’s self-satisfied grin brought the expected volume of Sherlock’s rebuttal and Lestrade took the opportunity to start pushing the two boys out of Grandmama’s study to see their clothes packed and find a box and tissue to pack their treasure for the trip home. Which left Mycroft and Grandmama alone. In the same room.

“Has Gregory submitted his application for the police force?”

And, already, Mycroft was seething, though it was not precisely the older woman’s fault for his ire.

“I… I have not asked.”

“Then do so with all due haste. It will require quite the quantity of preparation to see the children’s needs met when Gregory begins his work. I will admit, not to my credit, that I wish he was prepared to rest awhile after his studies and make his application to the police a bit further in the future, but I know that is a particularly selfish wish and not one to his benefit.”
“It is also to my discredit that I have harbored a similar wish. And, no, it is certainly not to his benefit. Gregory is greatly looking forward to the start of his career in law enforcement and it is not his fault that he is incomparable in his ability to rear children as unique and vital as Sherlock and John.”

“The traits he employs to manage the children will serve him well in dealing with the public.”

“Who are ghastly.”

“At their best. Nevertheless, I predict that Gregory will make an exemplary policeman, though, his practical nature and true desire to make a proximal and tangible difference could preclude a desire to advance significantly through the ranks.”

“That, unfortunately, is true. Gregory’s talents would be very well-used in the upper echelon of the administrative levels, however, I cannot envision him being so far removed from the people he longs to serve. I will do my utmost, in any case, to encourage him to rise to the rank that offers him proper recognition, yet allows him to retain the satisfaction he derives from his work.”

“Excellent. And when the time comes to affect a transfer to London, do not worry there shall be a lack of position available.”

“I suspected such would be the case. Gregory would not appreciate that piece of knowledge, though.”

“No, he likely would not, so isn’t it a gladdening thing that he need never know about it.”

“Agreed. Now, if you will excuse me, but I should assist my partner with Sherlock and John. They can be such a bother when they are being herded in a direction that does not suit their fancy.”

And, with a small nod of truce, Mycroft strode, shoulders back and head held high, from the study much to his grandmother’s approval. There would be countless times in his life he would need to look past slights and stings and interact positively with those around him. This was a lesson he was learning well and it would serve him in good stead as the years went on. Now, it was time to cast an eye over the situation in the here and now and ensure that her grandsons had some time together before Mycroft would be required, again, away from his near-fiancé’s side. And then… well, there would be the need for keeping Mycroft mindful of the full breadth of his responsibilities so this disaster did not once more rear its ugly head. Fortunately, Edwards’s rather pointed suggestion that he take on the task of keeping tabs on the personal side of her grandsons’ lives was a highly agreeable one. And, soon… it might be time to see Mycroft with an assistant of his own to take up that particular responsibility. Being a Holmes was made a far easier thing when there was a competent body at the ready to keep the Holmes-ness in check and offer the kick to the bustle that was sometimes required. Edwards, for instance, had particularly pointy shoes…

“Now, who could that be?”

Lestrade pulled their car next to the one that sat in the drive of Mycroft’s house and tried to place it with anyone he knew, but failed utterly. Mycroft found himself doing the same and meeting with the same level of non-success.

“I do not know. A visitor of one of the staff, perhaps? They usually park in the rear, however.”

“Sherlock and I can find out! There are probably all sorts of clues in the car and we’ll find every one of them.”
Mycroft reached back and grabbed John’s collar, preventing the boy from bolting from their car and invading the other one.

“I think a more parsimonious route would simply be to inquire once we are inside. It is not polite to rifle through another’s possessions.”

“Politeness is for failures.”

The shared look between Lestrade and Mycroft said John might need an extra day or two away from Sherlock to purge some of his friend’s particular viewpoints from his impressionable brain.

“Nevertheless, we embrace it gladly. Exit, if you please, and confine your actions to retrieving your luggage and not committing burglary.”

John huffed, Sherlock snorted and Mycroft simply hoped that their visitor was busy playing cards with the kitchen staff and was not in the path of the tiny typhoons when they crossed the threshold. And, for a few moments, that seemed very much to be the case, but the fantasy was dashed when he was handed a note just a moment too late to stop Lestrade from shepherding the two boys into the library, where he stopped short and stared at the man sitting on the sofa, with a glass of their brandy in his hand.

“There you are, son. A little later, though, and I could have likely begged some dinner from the people who work here. I bet the food is great in a house like this, am I right?”

“Dad?”

“Had to come and congratulate my son on his engagement, didn’t I? And meet the person he was going to marry? What sort of father would I be if I wasn’t on top of something as important as that?”
Lestrade stood staring at the man on the sofa and wondered what in his life he’d done to deserve this much misery dropped on his head at once. Something horrible, apparently.

“You… Dad, you’re here?”

“In the flesh! And delightful flesh, I might add. Like the tie? Thought I’d dress for this special occasion.”

Delightful, unfortunately, was the part that was making it hard for Mycroft to say anything to support his spouse because… oh dear. Gregory’s father… was Gregory in twenty years! The resemblance was uncanny and it was… damn it all but it was a breathtaking resemblance! The villain was simply stunning and that would be his Gregory in what was not an unimaginable amount of time. His future was going to be a highly enjoyable place, it seemed…

“Stop ogling my dad!”

The hiss in Mycroft’s ear brought him back to the present and a quick clearing of the throat ensured his voice would work without a sexually-transfixed warble.

“Perish the thought, my dear. Perish the thought… I was simply… evaluating.”

“You even think about shagging my dad and I’m going to give you a knock so hard your head will ring like a gong!”

Oh, that thought had already played happily across his mind, thank you very much, though if it was his husband wearing that face or man who held himself in a far more roguish posture, he had no desire to discover.

“Calm yourself, Gregory. Simply evaluating…”

“Why has no one thrashed the blackguard? Must John and I do everything? Come, John… ready your fists.”

Having their target laugh a laugh that gave Mycroft tingles in very unmentionable places was not at all the desired effect of their threat and the two boys’ righteous wrath transformed into heavy pouts in the blink of an eye.

“Those two have potential! Show me that fighting pose again, lad. That looked ferocious.”

John jumped into his best gladiatorial stance before he realized he was cooperating with the enemy, then turned back to smile sheepishly at the rest of the family.

“You are the most pathetic people-pleasing puppy in existence, John Watson. I would spit my scorn upon you, but I fear you would simply offer me your thanks.”

“That’s disgusting! Keep your spit to yourself, Sherlock. We have enough of it in that bottle in your lab anyway.”

“True, though it is not fresh and well-provided with my contempt.”

“I have an idea. Why don’t you lot come in for a sit and we can introduce each other. Have a little more of that brandy, too. Very much the sort of thing that puts purr in your voice, that’s for
Mycroft was walking forward before a strong hand grabbed him by the back of the shirt and dragged him to stand next to the person who’d done the grabbing.

“Funny, but I thought this was Mycroft’s house and his job to say who gets to sit and have brandy.”

Straightening his waistcoat, Mycroft tried to nod severely, knowing, unfortunately, that he had already undercut his own taciturn authority in the most scandalous fashion. Ridiculous libido… just because you were seeing your future before you, and that future was positively exquisite, there was no reason to demonstrate anything less than complete mastery… co-mastery… of this domain.

“You’re absolutely right, where are my manners… Mycroft was it? How about you take the honors?”

That was not cementing his reign! That was… flippant. Well, sir… you shall see what becomes of those who take a flippant tone with Mycroft Holmes.

“Le-et us perhaps…”

Sherlock’s evil laughter at his brother’s voice cracking like a pubescent boy gained him a swat on the head from Lestrade and it was with a heavy sigh that the swat was followed by three pushes to get three non-father persons in motion. His dad! What could he possibly be doing here? No… no there really was one answer to that question and it rhymed with honey. Big Winnie-the-Pooh-sized pots of honey owned by the person who was going to get a severe lecture about lusting after family members as soon as said family member was the fuck out of the house. The very last thing he needed in his life right now was a person who… well, who certainly didn’t want to have anything to do with his life right now, except as a path to Mycroft’s money.

“Sit down, love. I’ll pour you something to drink.”

“I could use a refill, too, son.”

“How many have you already had?”

“Ooh… someone’s in a mood. He get in a mood when you’ve had a few, Mycroft? I hope not because this is very fine stuff and it would be a shame if you weren’t able to enjoy it without some finger-wagging to go along with the loveliness.”

Sherlock had an essay ready to verbalize on his brother’s near-Dionysian drinking, but bit it back in indecision. It was a particularly erudite treatise, however… this was a profoundly confounding individual. That the pea-picker had yet to hurl him from the premises was also confounding. The peasant was even pouring him another brandy! Why did he not have his notebook on hand to collect data! This was an excellent opportunity for study and he was unprepared. Fortunately, his memory was most excellent. Though… the excellence also extended to the information gained on the lackey’s father which was… something rather difficult to reflect upon, in truth.

“Here. Get that down your throat and let’s see about getting the rest of you to the door.”

Lestrade pushed a brandy into his father’s hands and gave Mycroft an ‘I’m watching you’ scowl when he handed over his partner’s. Dad being here was not good. Not good at all and the faster he was gone the better it was for everyone.

“Hospitality, son! You’re going to be a married man soon and you have to learn how to treat
your guests. Besides, I haven’t really met your Mycroft, yet. I admit, Greg, when I first heard you liked cock, I was… surprised. Not upset, mind you, but… oh shite. Probably shouldn’t have said that with those wee ones listening with their big ears. Forget I said anything… Sherlock, wasn’t it? And my little boxer was John, right?”

Lestrade reached over and closed the easily-shockable John’s mouth and silently counted to five.

“Dad…”

“No, I’m sorry about that son. Really, so stop frowning so hard or you’ll get wrinkles that won’t make your fiancé very happy. We Lestrade men have more than our fair share of good looks, but every little bit helps. Anyway, as I was saying, when I first heard you… had a taste for the males of the species, it gave me a bit of a shock, but I wasn’t angry or anything. Whatever my boy likes is fine with me! Besides, you like both, right? Men and women? Smart… very smart. Gives you a nice selection to choose from when you’re looking to pull a willing partner on a lonely night. Not that you need to anymore, of course. I can tell, got an eye for that sort of thing, that you’ve found the one for you. So tell me, Mycroft, how did you and my Greg meet? He swept you off your feet, didn’t he, charming bastard that he is?”

“Dad, quit trying to talk to Mycroft and just tell me why you’re here. Why you’re really here.”

“That is why I’m here! In all honesty, Greg, I’m here to meet my future son-in-law and congratulate the both of you. I still have mates in the village, you know, and we get together now and then, so I hear stories. Heard you had someone you were fairly serious about and that pricked up my ears. My son… I had thought you might be taking after me a little, finding the fun under whatever skirt… or trousers… it might be hiding under and, suddenly, there was a new song in the air. Needless to say, I got curious. And, then… I had four phone calls telling me about the proposal! That was nicely done, by the way, Mycroft. Grand, romantic gestures rarely ever let you down. Unless you’ve truly done something wrong then not much will save you, but it might buy you a few seconds of a head start before a skillet comes flying towards your skull.”

“Alright, Dad…”

“Gregory…”

It had taken some time, but Mycroft had cleared the stardust from his eyes and had used them to observe the man who had come crashing into their day. What was bothering him most of all, eating at him rather savagely, actually, was that the invader appeared… truthful.

“… perhaps the philosophy that the only way out is through might serve us well this evening. Besides, it is good for Sherlock, John and me to make better acquaintance of your father so we have a face to put to the stories with which we have been regaled. As for your question, Mr. Lestrade, I met Gregory through his work.”

“Wait… I head Greg was working at his uncle’s shop. You met him there? Well, I can’t say I was expecting that. Not the place I’d expect to find a fine lad like you, but if it brought you and my Greg together, then what does it matter! He gave you a smile, didn’t he? Drew you right in with that sexy grin of his.”

Which was being given in a supremely professional fashion by the man whose genes made his Gregory’s grin possible.

“The stench of Fatcroft’s and the lackey’s immorality erupted like the odor of a burst rotten egg the moment foot first crossed the accursed threshold! My chocolate was entirely spoiled by the
sulfurous plume wafting beneath the wrapping.”

Mycroft and Lestrade joined forces this time to swat the back of Sherlock’s head and Mycroft had, further, to suffer again hearing his husband’s laugh in a deeper and rougher than normal tone.

“Well, I know why you were at the shop, now don’t I, Mycroft? Love at first sight, too. Can’t say I’m surprised, after seeing the two of you together. ‘That’s a proper couple,’ was the very first thing I thought when I saw you. They give you a reward for being their Cupid, Sherlock?’”

“NO! No, they did NOT line my palm with silver or part with even the smallest word of eternal indebtedness. I feel sorely ill-used.”

Sherlock’s diva-like dramatics won him John’s hand fanning him to recovery and more laughter from their guest.

“That’s a good lad, John. Have to take care of your mates when they’ve come over all emotional from being ill-used. You deserve something special, too. Let’s see, what does ol’ Danny Lestrade have in his pockets for two good boys who aren’t rewarded enough for their hard work. Oh, well, I seem to have found five quid in my ‘good boy’ fund. That should buy you two something fun to take your mind off being ignored and neglected.”

Two small blurs shot across the room, and, after the sonic boom passed, each was back in their seats holding one edge of their prize to maintain an equal claim on the sum.

“Dad, don’t give the boys money.”

“Why not? Boys need money! Probably have all sorts of sweets and toys they want and they deserve a treat now and then.”

“This will fully fund the maggot order I am hoping to place!”

“Or they can buy maggots. That’s a new one in my experience, but all boys are different.”

“I don’t want maggots! I want shoes to match my blue frock!”

Greg suffered his father grinning at him and wished that, at least, he wasn’t so accepting of… everything. Just a little disapproval would be enough to put a boot up his arse, but the misery wouldn’t even do that to be cooperative!

“Have a lot of pretty frocks, do you, John?”

“A few. Sherlock and I have a lot of disguises now, but dressing as a girl takes the most effort. There’s hair to do and our cosmetics and finding knickers that fit and look nice… it’s a lot of work to be a woman.”

“Something I’ve noticed over the years. Disguises, you say? That sounds very professional. Why don’t you two tell me about the adventures you need disguises for?”

Lestrade pursed his lips and glared at his father as both small boys began a simultaneous and non-harmonious oration on their very important adventures and escapades and swallowed down the familiar ache, seeing his dad interact with others in the most charming and engaging manner possible. Charm, charm, charm… and not a bit of real caring underneath any of it. At least he knew that now… it wasn’t like when he was small and held out hope that the big smiles and a lolly now and then meant his dad still loved him.
“My dear…”

Looking over at his partner who had spoken softly so as not to disturb the boys’ performance, Lestrade sighed and smiled slightly.

“Those two are excited to have someone new to tell their stories to, aren’t they?”

“That is not really my concern, Gregory. How… how are you faring?”

“Me? I’m fine. Just waiting for Dad to ask you for money so you can say no and we can send him back where he came from.”

“Ah, so you think that is his intent.”

“Of course! It’s my dad, Mycroft. He doesn’t care if I’m happy or not; he does care that the man he’s heard I’m marrying lives in this house and has the money to maintain it. Mark my words, he’ll make his pitch at some point or another, then we can show him the door and that will be that. Until next time. I can’t guarantee he won’t be a problem again if he thinks a little persistence will win the day.”

Mycroft mulled disclosing what he was observing and decided to wait until they were alone for the evening. Already his spouse’s father was keeping half an eye on their conversation and it would not do to give any indication of the nature of their discussion before the proper time.

“Then let us hope the plea will come soon and we may continue on with our evening.”

“I’ve been hoping that since I opened the library door.”

“Brave heart, my Gregory. Brave heart…”

Mycroft patted Lestrade’s knee and smiled, settling back to listen to Sherlock and John’s epic sagas which were buying his lover some time to come to grips with his emotions. Silly Gregory… trying to hide that this was highly distressing to him. But, the later discussion would come and they would explore those feelings in depth. Until then… no, no reflecting on the lovely future spread out ahead of him. Though, perhaps the tiniest amount would not be disastrous. For instance, a modicum of reflection on how well Gregory would keep his delectable frame as he aged. It was nigh on magical…

“And then we had a treasure hunt today! A real one!”

“Treasure hunt? That I can’t believe, lad. I’d need to see some proof for that one.”

As if the large sacks in Sherlock and John’s hands weren’t evidence enough.

“You doubt our veracity? John! Present the evidence and damn the naysayer with our booty!”

John grinned and carefully laid out their find for inspection while Mycroft groaned a little because the hoped-for brief visit was certainly turning out to be nothing of the sort, especially when their guest got on the floor to more closely observe the artifacts.

“You really found all of this? That’s proper treasure hunting, I have to say. Where’d you find it all?”

“On Grandmama’s property. This is, undoubtedly, a vast fortune hidden beneath the unregarded soil and we shall discover it!”
“It was fun, too! We got to use our new metal detector and dig all day while Mycroft and Greg kissed.”

Both Mycroft and Lestrade ignored the knowing grin directed at them and, as well, felt a niggling worry about how easily the two boys seemed to be taking to the man lavishing on them their much-adored attention. It might be time, Mycroft thought, to remove them from the equation before this went any further.

“Yes, it was a joyful day for us all. Now, I think it is a very good time for the two of you to take your valuables upstairs to your rooms and begin the remainder of your unpacking. Take also an inventory of what you require for tomorrow’s school day so we might complete any assignments or locate materials as need be.”

“But why, Mycroft? It’s still early!”

“Do not attempt to curtail our well-deserved adulation, behemoth! If the peasant’s progenitor properly recognizes my genius he should be free to express it and it is my due that I receive it abundantly!”

Taking a cue from his partner, Lestrade waded into the fray.

“Upstairs, you two. I know you have schoolwork to finish and the sooner that’s done, the sooner you can play a little chess or work on one of Sherlock’s experiments. And, of course, you know you get a nibble while working on your studies and I’m certain you’re about due for one what with dinner all of minutes away.

“But…”

John looked ready to lob another plea, but closed his mouth instead and looked at Sherlock with an expression that made the dark-haired boy very curious. And the curiosity was greater than his desire to remain and be praised.

“Very well. John and I will accede to your demands. For now. However, if we are not provided with a hot pot of chocolate and biscuits in an acceptable amount of time, the consequences for you will be calamitous.”

With his most withering scowl, Sherlock began marching upstairs, leaving John to quickly pack away their treasure, snatch up their weekend bags and begin running after him.

“Poor tykes, you two are harsh parents.”

“And that’s our business, Dad. Look, it was nice of you to come by, but as you can see we’re a little busy, so…”

“I bet they do tremendously well in school, don’t they? I can tell that, too. I knew you’d be a clever lad, Greg, and from what I’ve heard, that’s certainly the case. Mycroft though… you’re different. On a different level, aren’t you? That’s good. I like the idea of my Greg being with a very intelligent person. That’s what you need in this world to be successful, a right bit of intelligence, so you’re both going to do well and what father wouldn’t be proud of that?

Lestrade felt something snap and he experienced the strangest feeling of peace wash over him. A lot of which was the complete confidence that his Mycroft would take over from here, lust-blindness or not.

“I wouldn’t know, would I? You were never proud of me a day in your life. I’m going to check
on the boys. Love, show the man to the door, will you?”

Walking as sedately as he could, Lestrade almost made it out of the library before his father’s voice caught his ears one last time.

“It’s not true, Greg. I’ve always been proud of you. We’ll talk, ok son? I’m staying in the area awhile, so we’ll talk. You and me, a good long talk, that’ll be helpful, right? I am proud of you, Greg. You’re my son and that’s the greatest joy of my life, but we’ll talk, you and me. I’ll make certain we get the chance, alright?”

Mycroft waited quietly for his partner to make some response and wasn’t sure if he was relieved or regretful that Lestrade started walking again, without saying another word.

“Certainly doesn’t have his mother’s temper. Lucky thing for my nose.”

Hearing no real mirth in the man’s voice, Mycroft found himself as off-footed as ever.

“Gregory is a man of dignity and fisticuffs are categorically beneath him.”

The fact that his lover relished a vigorous skirmish now and again with his friends at his side would remain confidential information.

“That must be it. I suppose I should leave, give you and him a chance to talk. Do that for me, will you Mycroft? Make sure he’s ok and has a chance to talk about what’s bothering him?”

As if that was something he would be reluctant to do. Good heavens, but the man’s understanding of a relationship was poor. It was little wonder that he proved himself unworthy of Mother Lestrade.

“Gregory will receive whatever he needs of me and it is my honor and privilege to bestow it.”

“See? A true and proper couple. Something… yeah, not really something I can claim to be an expert at, but we’re all who we are, right? And, I’m serious about staying in the area for awhile. We’ll all get together soon for a little fun, how does that sound? I want to get to know my Greg’s new family and this is a grand time to do it, don’t you think? A very grand time, I’d say, so…”

Mycroft watched the older Lestrade unfurl from the ground with a limberness that started his internals showing expectant interest again, prompting the harshest of mental scoldings for betraying their current lover with his future incarnation.

“… I’ll be off so you and he can have your nice evening. Here, though…”

Digging in his pocket, Greg’s father pulled out a small card for one of the inns near the village.

“… here’s where I’m staying. Friend of mine owns the place so I’m getting a good rate, which is always a blessing. Stop in or phone… or I’ll do the stopping in and phoning. Either way, I’ll see all of you soon. And tell Greg for me… well, nothing different from what I already said, but tell him I’m not lying about it. You know that, though, don’t you? Smart lad like you knows what’s what. Just… talk to him. This way’s the door, right? I can find my way out, so you go and talk to my Greg. Give those little terriers a good pinch on the cheek, too, while you’re at it. Soon… we’ll have a little fun, all of us.”

Nodding as if the deal had been sealed, the other Lestrade in the house made his way out of the library and Mycroft felt absolutely no shame peeking around the library door to make certain the man actually did continue out the house and not detour to the kitchen or start looking for a safe to crack. This was an astonishingly odd situation and… he still was exceedingly unclear about what to make
of any of it. The one action that might bring clarity was also going to be the most difficult – getting his husband to speak from the heart about a subject that was punishingly difficult for him. Well, their weakest points were certainly being tested of late, were they not? Fortunately, their family was particularly good at test-taking…

"Sherlock! You could have given me some help with these heavy bags."

"I could, but I chose not to. Now… reveal yourself."

John set down their bags in Sherlock’s bedroom and ran an eye up and down his body, hoping Sherlock wasn’t planning an experiment that involved him naked. Again.

"Not your body, microboy! Your thought processes. Your single synapse was struck by a wayward thought and I would know its content."

John thought a minute, then bit his lip and hopped up to sit on Sherlock’s bed, with Sherlock quickly following.

"I just realized… we weren’t being very loyal to Greg, were we? His dad was terrible to him and Mrs. Lestrade and we were being nice! But he was being nice, too, and interested and funny, which wasn’t much like what I expected, so I did get a little confused, but… we should have thrashed him like we wanted to in the first place!"

"Ah. Yes… I cannot lie and say I did not harbor similar thoughts. The man is a blackguard, but… he is an affable example of the breed. I also did not imagine him to be personable and… the juxtaposition of his history and his personality is vexing."

"Does that mean you agree with me?"

"For some value of agreement, yes."

"Good. It’s just… I started to feel bad that we were having a nice time and Greg was probably upset, even though he wasn’t showing it much. He was actually fairly quiet, which isn’t like Greg at all. That’s why think he was especially upset and not just a small bit upset and that made me feel worse. Greg’s had it hard lately what with Mycroft being awful and now… I think we need to be nicer to him and not his dad."

"Perhaps you are right. The peasant was unnervingly placid and I felt some small twinge of concern that he might have suffered a mental break that was disabling his fury. An alternative hypothesis is that his internal distress rendered him sufficiently numb that he was verging on a dissociative state. Neither is a condition that I would recommend for his continued well-being."

"I don’t either and I don’t know what that last bit even meant."

"That is not surprising, however, it is not relevant, therefore, I shall not point out your idiocy."

"Thanks! So, maybe… we need to be on Greg’s side in this and not his dad’s?"

"Yes, our allegiance must lie with the plebian, painful though that may be. Here and now, I vow that the miscreant shall never be called Father Lestrade."

Something Greg, who had arrived and taken pains not to announce himself, felt as hard as a kick to the chest. He had the best boys in the world and, unlike his dad, he was proud of them. So proud
that, some days, it was hard to breathe his chest was puffed out so far. Today was certainly one of those days.

“Try not to hurt yourself too badly, Sherlock. I’d hate to have to take you to hospital before you got your chocolate and biscuits.”

“Greg! Is… is your dad still here?”

“No, John, he’s not. Well, I should say that if he is, he’s not here for long. I left Mycroft to show him out and you know Mycroft doesn’t take no for an answer.”

“Let us hope your father lacks any food on his person, or the distraction the mastodon will suffer shall entirely undo your hoped-for eviction.”

“None of that, Sherlock. Your brother has a commanding air about him and my dad’s just an average bloke like me. We’re not bred to stand up posh types being commanding, so Dad’s arse will be on the steps in a minute or two, probably holding his hat in his hand apologizing for being a bother.”

“Except your dad wasn’t wearing a hat.”

“Thank you, John. Your eye for detail is really improving.”

John beamed at Lestrade’s compliment, which gave Sherlock the chance to run his own eye over the new arrival. And the eye was not a happy one at the moment for the shop boy was not behaving coordinately with his emotions. The fool. Did he think he could hide his distress from someone who stood supreme in observational prowess! It was utterly doltish to attempt to camouflage his upset, however… however, it was typical of the peasant to show an agreeable face to the world when he was suffering emotional upheaval. John would likely say that it was because of caring or some such. That the lackey did not want them to worry or feel pain because he was pained, but John was, himself, an emotional creature, so that explanation would, obviously, quickly pop into his diminished brain. Of course… that did not necessarily preclude the fact that it might be the correct explanation…

“And what has dear John noticed today? Surely not a wrinkle on your youthful visage, I hope.”

Mycroft stood behind Lestrade and wrapped his arms around his lover’s waist, hoping that particular use of levity was not out bounds for his troubled partner.

“Nope. Face is as smooth as a baby’s bottom, thank you very much. I do have to admit, though, that Dad’s kept his age off his face fairly well. Must be buying all of that lady-cream that keeps the skin supple and flexible so it doesn’t get saggy or wrinkly.”

“I want some! I don’t want sags and wrinkles!”

“You, John Watson, are the vainest pea in the entirety of the world’s pod.”

“You’re going to sleep in a big tub of lady-cream and you know it, Sherlock.”

“That is a lie! My skin’s elasticity and radiance is beyond compare and will remain so until they lower me into the ground.”

“Because you sleep in lady-cream. You’ll probably have it in your casket, too, because you’re in love with it.”
While the boys began the great lady-cream war, Mycroft leaned in and kissed Lestrade gently on the neck and tightened his grip just a little.

“Dad’s gone, right love?”

“He is. But, he asked me to inform you that he shall be remaining in the area for some time and that he wishes to speak with you further about… I suppose about the relationship you share of the lack thereof.”

“He’s staying around?”

“He was quite adamant about it, actually. Your thoughts, my dear?”

“That we need to go. Now.”

That was not exactly what Mycroft was expecting, but emotional turmoil could manifest in such unpredictable ways.

“Of course. Would you enjoy a ride in the country? Or, perhaps, a visit to the pub for some ale and camaraderie?”

“What? No! We’ve got to talk to Mum!”

Oh. Oh…

“I take it she is not aware of his presence.”

“Mum would have phoned immediately if she knew dad was skulking about. We need to talk to her, especially if he’s going to be making himself known here and there. Come on, we should do that now.”

“Yes, that is likely wise. Should we…”

Mycroft looked at the boys, who were merrily engaged in their skin-care product battle while unpacking their bags, and nodded in their direction.

“No… let’s leave them here. I’m… I’m not sure how Mum is going to react and I don’t want them being in the middle of something… upsetting.”

“Soundly reasoned.”

A clearing of the throat brought a temporary halt to Sherlock and John’s combat, something which peeved each boy mightily.

“The elephant trumpets its presence, something entirely unwarranted as forgetting the sight of its near-to-bursting waistline is not likely soon forgotten.”

“Thank you, Sherlock. For that… you are in perilous danger of losing the treat Gregory and I were going to bring you from our errand.”

The word ‘treat’ did as much for pricking up the boys’ ears as it would two energetic puppies.

“Where are you going, Mycroft? Can we come?”

“Not this time, I’m afraid, John. Gregory and I will be…”
Truth or lie… one was kinder, but one was honest and their family did need honesty at this difficult time.

“… visiting Mother Lestrade and informing her about our guest this evening. It is certainly something that shall pique her interest and the discussion shall not, in all likelihood, be a pleasant one. I trust you and Sherlock will demonstrate proper behavior while we are gone and earn what small surprise we might have in store when we return.”

Enduring the skeptical and contemplative stares from the two young boys, which were interspersed with whispered conversation, Mycroft and Lestrade waited patiently for the response.

“John and I will, this single, time cooperate with your attempts at tyranny. However, our spoils best merit our agreement or you shall rue your failure until your final breath.”

Surprisingly, the response was actually a great deal more useful than the older boys had been anticipating.

“Don’t worry, Sherlock. You’ll get something nice for being less than satanically evil.”

“Very well. Begone, peasant, and take your fatted cow to his sacrifice. I am certain Mother Lestrade will welcome having a target on which to vent her rage. I will begin quantifying the subsequent bruising and welting upon your return.”

And, on that happy note, the couple took their leave, with Mycroft only slightly worried that his brother had a creditable point. He was more than slightly worried, however, about the silence that accompanied their walk to the car and the drive away from the house.

“Gregory… you are most quiet and I would… I would rather you speak to me of your troubles than suffer them alone.”

Lestrade sighed heavily and loved his partner for being caring and supportive and hated him for wanting to talk about this. The fact that he probably needed to talk about this was completely beside the point.

“What do you want me to say?”

“I have no particular wants here, my dear, beyond the truth of your thoughts so I might be of some help to you, if possible.”

“Honestly… I don’t know how I feel. It shouldn’t bother me, you know? He’s not been a part of my life for years and not much of a part even before he left, so I shouldn’t feel anything, but…”

“It is not so simple a thing.”

“No! It’s not! There was a part of me, a weak and stupid part of me that was actually glad to see him! That wanted to believe he actually came to congratulate us and wish us well. It was like I was small again and him being happy with me was so bloody important… something I wanted so desperately. You’d think… you’d think I’d see him, after all these years and not care a fucking thing about him. But that’s not… I felt… and it was fucking, fucking stupid, but…”

“Gregory… stop the car. Pull over right there where there is space.”

Mycroft kept his voice calm and ran a hand along his lover’s shoulder until Lestrade had the car on the roadside and the engine turned off. Then, he took his partner in a fierce hug and let him breathe through the torrent of conflicting emotions that had been battering him since he first opened the
“Nothing in life is as easy as one would hope, my love. I wish it were otherwise, but it is not. But, I will be here for you, every possible moment, to provide what support I am able. Do not believe you need to weather this storm alone, my beloved, for you have my love and my very willing ear to listen whenever you wish it. I will be there for you, Gregory. In this I will not fail, you have my solemn oath.”

Lestrade fought back the emotions that kept trying to rise in his eyes and held fast both to his lover and the promise he made. He did need help with this… it was too much on top of everything else he was working through and… yeah, it was on him to reach out and take that help. Maybe this time, he could actually do it.

“I know you won’t, love. And… we will talk. I know I don’t say much about my dad, but maybe it’s time I do. You’ve met him now so… things might make a little more sense than they would have otherwise.”

“He is… a colorful character.”

“That he is. I don’t ever wonder why Mum married him, that’s for certain. And, speaking of Mum…”

Lestrade pulled back a little from Mycroft and gave his partner a slow kiss that helped soothe his nerves enough to put the car back on the road.

“…we’d better keep on with that. This isn’t going to be fun, Mycroft. I’m glad… I’m glad you’ll be there, for me and Mum’s sakes.”

“Consider me your anchor, my dear, for I will not allow you to drift away into despondency.”

His lover said the most dramatic things sometimes, but, Mycroft meant every word of his theatrical speeches and that was something that never failed to put some light in Lestrade’s soul. And that light was definitely needed right about now…

“And I believe that, Mycroft. I really do. Now… onwards.”

“I feel as if there should be some form of theme music playing.”

“I could turn on the radio.”

“Is there a classical broadcast scheduled?”

“Maybe I’ll just hum, instead.”

“Courage, my dear.”

Lestrade stared at his door for a few seconds more, then, turned the knob and peeked in with a small hope his mother had found something or someone to do tonight and their conversation could be postponed until tomorrow.

“Greg? Home already?”

Damn.
“Yes. Maybe. It depends. Oh, and Mycroft’s with me, so… yeah.”

“What is wrong with you?”

“Well…”

“Would you just come inside!”

Realizing he was still outside and having a conversation across the threshold with someone several rooms away, Lestrade took a deep breath, held Mycroft’s hand and started towards the kitchen.

“Now, Mum… don’t glare at Mycroft or anything because we’ve got something to talk to you about and…”

“Please tell me you didn’t do something daft like get a flat together or join the military.”

“No… that’s not it.”

This time, the peeking was around the door of the kitchen and was accompanied by a check that his mother wasn’t armed with dinner-preparation tools of the sharp and pointy kind.

“Then would you please just come in a sit. I promise not to make a roast out of Mycroft’s arse or give his head a knock, tie him up in a sack with rocks and toss him in the river.”

“It sounds like you’ve been giving it some thought, Mum. That was pretty detailed.”

“Murder fantasies help pass the time.”

Worrying even more that Sherlock’s own fantasies might actually come true, both boys continued to enter the kitchen, wary of any stray burlap or stones that might be in evidence.

“Are you going to tell me what all this is about?”

Squeezing Mycroft’s hand for support, Lestrade took a deep breath and nodded.

“Dad’s back.”

The clatter of the large pot on the kitchen floor was not quite ear-shattering, but it underscored the evening’s events quite nicely.

“What did you say?”

“Dad’s back. When we got to Mycroft’s tonight, he was there waiting for us.”

Mycroft’s deeply-ingrained manners had him moving forward to offer a steadying arm to his future mother-in-law as she took a few shaky steps towards the table for a seat.

“I… oh, it’s you. Well, thank you anyway, Mycroft. Greg… what… why the fuck is he here?”

Both boys took their own chairs and tried to appear as calm and collected as possible, given the circumstances.

“Said he’d heard about me and Mycroft getting married and wanted to congratulate us.”

“Bollocks.”

“That’s what I think, too.”
“How much did he… Mycroft, do NOT give that man any money. No matter what he tells you, it’s not true or even if it is, it’s completely his fault and… just don’t give him anything.”

“Gregory also believes that the purpose of the visit was to obtain funds.”

“That’s because he knows his father. Congratulate you? Congratulate his windfall, is more like it. I’m so sorry, Greg… it never occurred to me that he’d find out and come sniffing for whatever he might get. That was stupid of me… of course he’d learn about you and Mycroft! Bastard had enough friends, or, at least, people who didn’t want to push his teeth in on first sight, that it stands to reason one of them, at least, would call and pay their respects. Mycroft’s bit of theater is the talk of the village! I wasn’t thinking… did you… does he know you’re not actually getting married yet?”

Lestrade cut eyes over to Mycroft who cut eyes back.

“No… that didn’t come up in conversation.”

“What!”

“We… it didn’t go the way… not that I had any expectation about what would happen when I saw Dad again, but I didn’t imagine him sitting on the floor with Sherlock and John playing with them like they were his grandsons! It was… strange and Dad was his pleasant, charming self and…”

The look on Lestrade’s face told his mother more than his words could and she mentally declared a more formal truce with the person reaching out to quietly comfort him. How could her wanker of a husband think he could stroll in and… no, it was easy to see why he’d do that and that was just another armful of shite to add to his record when he met his maker. Luckily, Mycroft might be a bit thick when it came to certain things, but none of those certain things were about money, so he’d not be fooled by whatever lies came slithering out from between that arse’s grinning lips.

“It’s alright, Greg, I understand. Your dad was his smiling, laughing, everybody’s-best-friend self and made you and everyone else forget for awhile what a bastard he is. Good to know he hasn’t changed his game. That’ll make it easier to kick his bollocks into his mouth if he’s daft enough to try and pay me a visit. Not that I think he will. He knows I don’t have a spare quid to my name and wouldn’t shag him if he was the very last man on Earth, so there’s no interest for him here.”

“Well, that sends Mycroft to the top of the list, now doesn’t it? For both reasons.”

Mycroft wondered if the heat on his cheeks would do the roasting Mother Lestrade had threatened and he stoically endured his fiancé’s grin of vengeance-taken, as well as the growing one on his semi-nemesis’s face.

“I see. Liked what you saw, Mycroft? I take it he still has his looks going for him.”

“Mycroft lusted. He lusted hard.”

“That… that is entirely untrue. I was simply struck by the similarity of your appearances. You must admit, my dear, your father is very much your doppelganger, albeit a few decades the senior.”

“I think he swooned a little when Dad laughed, too.”

“Ooh, that rough and sexy laugh. Does things to a person. Things in places decent people don’t want to mention in polite company.”

“I hope you two are enjoying yourselves.”
“Oh we are, love. We are.”

“Excellent. I am most happy to be of service.”

“Don’t say that around my former husband, Mycroft, because he will take that offer seriously. Got some of those knee pads the lads who lay flooring wear? You’ll need them.”

“I am officially ignoring the remainder of this conversation.”

For some small measure of ignoring, that is. It was worth the teasing, villainous and black-hearted though it was, to see a true smile on his poor partner’s face.

“That might be best. Don’t want you coming over all lusty again while we’re talking about Dad.”

“My, the silence in here is blissful. So restful a place I have discovered.”

Mother and son shared a smile that was for more than Mycroft’s antics. No matter what happened with this reappearance of old ghosts, it was something they could handle because they had each other. And the ‘each other’ piece was quite a bit larger than it had been before.

“While Mycroft enjoys his mental holiday, why don’t I fix us a nice cup of something warm? I suspect you want to get back to the boys and dust them for your father’s fleas before long, so we’ll have ourselves a nice chat and send you on your way.”

Lestrade watched something serious come into his mother’s expression and he prepared for the question he knew was coming.

“But tell me first, Greg… how are you doing with this? It can’t be easy for you, so tell your mum how you’re feeling.”

“Better. Better than I was before now that I’ve got a little off my chest. I’m sure it’ll come back around a few times and kick me in the head, but, for the moment, I’m alright. I could ask the same of you, you know. That’s why Mycroft and I wanted to be here in person, so we could… well, be supportive.”

“And that’s why I love you, Greg. And tolerate Mycroft. But… truthfully, I’ve been expecting this for a long time. I’m actually surprised Danny hasn’t stuck that nose of his in our business before now, even if only to try for a place to sleep when he’s been kicked out of wherever he’s been living because they’re tired of him living there for free. And maybe… maybe I hoped he would, so he could see we’ve done just fine without him. Made a good life for ourselves, all things considered, and without any need for him in it. I’m going to say it’s that karma thing I’ve heard talk about… you’re set for a brilliant future and I’ve got a decent job that leaves me a little extra in the bank now and again to have a night out or save for a lovely dress. All of that is spit in his eye and, well… there’s nothing not to like about that.”

Once again, his mother-in-law’s train of thought was something Mycroft greatly admired. Yes, revenge was ever a soothing balm for an injury and this one had festered longer than most.

“As always, Mum, you’re thirsty for blood and I can’t see anything wrong with it. But… Dad said he wanted to talk me, just him and me. I haven’t decided what to do.”

“Think about it carefully, Greg. Think about what you want, what’s good for you. Not your dad, not me and not Mycroft. I can’t honestly say what I think your father has in mind, but if it’s something you think you should do, then do it. Or don’t if that seems right. You’ve got a family
who’ll love you either way and you know, ultimately, it won’t make a bit of difference to your father.”

“I… I might beg to differ.”

Two sets of eyes turned towards Mycroft who felt his cheeks heating up a second time.

“Want to explain that, love?”

“I had… I had hoped to discuss this with you later when we were alone, however… I do believe your father was truthful when he declared the reason for his visit to be a congratulatory one. Also, later, when he asked me to reinforce to you that he did consider you a source of pride. I am most highly skilled at detecting falsehoods, especially in those not trained to hide them, and I discerned nothing of the sort in your father. Though it pains me greatly to admit it, I believe him to be sincere, at least as far as someone of his character can be sincere for such a thing.”

Now, two sets of eyes were glaring at him, having their own turn at observation and twin sighs of frustration sounded loud in the kitchen when they were done.

“Shite.”

“And twice that from me. Mycroft, are you sure about that? Greg’s father cares for one person in this life and that’s himself.”

“And I will not argue the point, since you have far more evidence of his behavior and motivations than do I, however, I stand by my assessment. That being said, it might be the man is simply succumbing to sentimentality and feeling the twinges of middle age nipping at his heels, which often prompts individuals to reach back to reconnect with vestiges of their youth, even if the purpose only is some form of making of amends. Perhaps that is being overly charitable, which, oddly, I am not given to in most situations, but… it is something to consider, nonetheless.”

“You could have a point. It’s still your choice, though, Greg. Think on it and don’t feel you have to make any decisions right away. You’ve had a difficult time, lately, and the tosser I married isn’t worth you hurting yourself, even if he is worried about being old and lonely. But, since he’s only a year older than me, I’m going to erase the ‘old’ from old and lonely and let you fill in the blank with something else. Why don’t you take tomorrow off of school? Last week murdered you and an extra day to relax, especially after tonight, is probably a good idea.”

“I concur, my dear. Some rest and time to think without the burden of your studies weighing on you will surely be beneficial.”

Rubbing his neck and giving his shoulders a shrug to loosen the tension that had crept into them these past few minutes, Lestrade gave the suggestion some thought and found it very much to his liking.

“That’s not a bad plan. Mum… would you mind if I stayed with Mycroft tonight? We probably need to talk to the boys and… I guess I could use…”

“Go. Don’t even wait for tea. You two go and have one of those chats that only a couple can have.”

“You really don’t mind? I mean, this isn’t easy for you either. I’ll stay, if you prefer. Mycroft, too. Talk as long as you like.”

No, it wasn’t easy, but that’s what a lot of wine and her own friends were for. A few girls over who
remembered what a dog her husband was and delighted in blackening his name was the medicine she needed right now and that was best done out of sight of her tender, young son.

“I’ll be fine. I’ll probably phone a friend or two and have my own chat, which will do my soul some good. In fact, I’ll get started on that now. Off with you two and be careful going home. I’ll see you tomorrow, Greg, and we can have our own talk then.”

Nodding slightly, Lestrade rose from the table and held out his hand to give Mycroft a lift up.

“Then that’s settled. Come on, Mycroft. We still have our bribe to buy before we see Sherlock and John and the shops will be closing soon.”

“So, that’s how you got them to stay home. I wondered about that.”

“They’re easy to manage when you know their weak spots. Speaking of, Mum, any baking on the horizon for little hands to help with.”

“Maybe. If they behave themselves and… that was silly, wasn’t it. Tell them Wednesday looks like a good day and if they keep more flour in the bowl than on the floor, they can have little packages to tie to their bicycles and take home with them.”

So, Wednesday would be a very good day for very loud sex with his Mycroft once school was out and he begged an afternoon off from the shop. An excellent thing to know…

“I’ll pass along the word. Bye, Mum. I’ll be home tomorrow.”

“Have fun, son. Mycroft… don’t have too much fun.”

“I shall endeavor to take only marginal entertainment from my evening.”

“Good lad.”

And, with the small armistice holding strong, the house’s two males moved quickly to the car to see the remainder of their night get its start.

“That… that went a lot better than I’d expected.”

“Your mother is a formidable woman, Gregory. I believe she is concerned and unsettled, but I suspect that with her own conversations with willing ears and a good night’s rest, she shall find equilibrium.”

“I think you’re right. So, all I have to worry about, now, is Dad.”

“No, all you have to worry about at this time is what flavor of ice cream you would have us purchase.”

“Ah, so that’s our bribe?”

“Can you think of a better one?”

“At this time of night? No. Actually, anytime is a good time for ice cream, but now seems especially appropriate. Have I told you tonight that I love you, Mycroft?”

“You know my memory is a faulty and unreliable thing, so some refreshing is likely required.”

“I love you, Mycroft. And, thank you for being what I needed tonight.”
“I love you, also, Gregory. It was my honor was to be of help.”
“I think I’ll need more help later, though.”
“Of what form?”
“The sexy form. Your sexy form, to be precise.”
“I have confidence I am up to the task.”
“What time do you think the boys will go to bed?”
“Unknown. However, I do have a small amount of sleeping draught left from their Christmas cordial.”
“That would be mean.”
“True.”
“Mean’s not necessarily bad, though.”
“Needs must when the devil drives, my love.”
“And look who’s behind the wheel. Someone as handsome as the devil. What a coincidence!”
“Then let us make a start. There is devilry to be done and the night grows short.”

Giggling like schoolboys, the two bid a final, silent goodnight to the woman already pouring a nice glass of wine with the one hand not holding a phone receiver to issue the first invitation for her impromptu my-fucking-ex-is-back party and set off to satisfy their small dictators and see them, hopefully soon, to bed. Then the devilry could begin in earnest. And might continue until the sun rose…
“Good heavens!”

Mycroft gave his brain a moment to stop sloshing around in his skull and sighed his umpteenth sigh of the day, staring at the hedge that was his only view out the passenger’s side window of their car.

“Gregory… why are we, again, in hiding?”

“We’re not hiding. Why are you being silly?”

“We are behind a hedge. There is nothing in this location that fulfills the various requirements of our day, so I can think of no other function except to prevent us being seen by curious onlookers. Which are likely legion, given the loud squeal of tires and spray of dust that accompanied our going into hiding.”

“See? Just a load of silliness. We’re… pulled out of sight for a nice little cuddle.”

“No, you have, for the fifth time today, believed you saw your father and propelled us into an obstructed-view location.”

Lestrade glared at his partner, but it held little true heat. Mycroft’s stupid brain… why was it so smart! And why wouldn’t Dad just go away! It’d been four days and he was still lurking around the village, having pints with old mates and even stopping in at the shop! Luckily, he’d been off that afternoon, but what if he did it again? Arse… he should just go away so everybody could get back to their lives. Or not.

“Gregory? Are you again lost in thought?”

“What? Oh… yeah, I suppose I am. And I’m not convincing you about our not hiding, am I?”

“No more than the previous five times you have jerked me into a shop or pushed me behind a tree.”

“Sorry about that. It’s just…”

“Your mind is creating scenarios that do not exist, perhaps to remind you of business left unfinished.”

“That sounded very professional.”

“Thank you. Was it also correct?”

“Yeah.”

Running a hand along his lover’s arm, Mycroft wished there was more he could do to ease the mind of the man suffering a terrible weight of confusion and indecision. Gregory could scarcely be coaxed to speak about his feelings beyond that first night of conversation and the pressure was doing terrible things to the man he loved.

“It appears your father is perfectly content to lay siege until you either send him away or confront him in person. If you choose the former, I will happily relay the message if you do not want to converse via the telephone.”
“Thanks, love. And…”

Mycroft waited while Lestrade tapped his fingers on the steering wheel and stared out the windscreen.

“… I just don’t know what to do! Every time I think I’ve made a decision, I change my mind and… I’m just spinning in a circle. It shouldn’t be this hard! Just face the bastard and say fuck off, but…”

“I do not believe anyone would view this as a simple situation, Gregory. And I would not dare to tell you what to do, however, I worry that if you do not make a decision soon, you will suffer more than if you simply took action, one way or the other.”

“I know. Mum says the same thing. Her friends are keeping track of Dad and giving him the evil eye if he even turns in the direction of our house, so he won’t bother us there, I suspect, but… I do have to do something. He’s here for me and I’m the only one who can make him go away again.”

“His persistence is notable, I do admit. Could that… is that not an encouraging sign? I doubt he would expend such effort and capital if his intentions were not serious.”

“They are serious. Very serious. He very seriously wants your money.”

“Then… should we simply offer some?”

“Pay Dad to leave? That’s a novel idea.”

“It is not an unknown strategy for being rid of a complication in one’s life. However…”

“What?”

“I still believe you would suffer, not having taken the opportunity to learn what it is he wants to say to you. Or to have your own chance to say to him the things that have sat quietly inside you, hoping for an opportunity to be heard.”

The rude noise that exploded from the driver’s seat was an adorable release of frustration, but Mycroft held his somber expression so his partner had nothing to grab to turn direction away from their current discussion.

“Did I do something to the universe to make it hate me so much?”

“Doubtful, but if you wish to claim otherworldly influences in your life, I would suggest you keep the confession to yourself so Mother Lestrade does not worry the pressure of these days has not had an ill-effect upon your mental health.”

“Funny.”

“I try my best. But, in truth, my love… I recognize fully that you have been under tremendous strain and I do not belittle your hardship. It is not a thing you should ever have been forced to endure, but as we cannot change the past, the focus must be on the future and how it can be made a brighter one for you.”

“Keep your logic to yourself.”

“But, it so desires to be spread like pollen on the wind.”
The tiny twitch of his lover’s lips was a triumph Mycroft would claim proudly.

“Evil bastard. But, I know you’re right and that’s the worst of it. I know what I have to do, I’m just having a devil of a time doing it.”

“May I ask what is your decision?”

“I need to talk to Dad. I’ve always known, even before he came back. Thought about one day going and finding him and asking why…”

“Why what, Gregory?”

“… why he wanted to leave. What wasn’t good enough about me and Mum and our family. Why he didn’t give me a chance to try to…”

Waiting again, Mycroft hoped his dear Gregory would continue on and speak his feelings. This was terribly difficult for his partner, but it was so desperately what was needed for him to find any measure of peace.

“… a chance to convince him out of it. Not that he was a real part of the family by then, but…”

“You wished it were otherwise.”

“Yes! I wanted my father to be part of my life! To love me like my friends’ fathers loved them. To come to my school things and take an interest in what I did. He wasn’t a demon, don’t get that idea, never hit me or mum and when he wasn’t chasing a woman or setting up household in the pub, he could be alright. Read to me, kick a football around, watch a match or a film on the telly… it just wasn’t enough to make up for everything else.”

“I see. Nevertheless, the choice is yours, Gregory, and I will support you in whatever you decide. I will, also, accompany you, if you wish, to your meeting with your father if you choose to have it. You will not be without support, so do not let that misconception stand as a roadblock to your decision.”

Lestrade drew in a deep breath and hoped that, one day, his life would go back to the uncomplicated thing it was before Mycroft went off into his own daydream and Father Doom strolled back into his life. But, that day wasn’t today and being a child about things wouldn’t make reaching that point happen any more quickly.

“I know you’ll be there for me, love. Let me… just let me…”

Whatever Lestrade was being asked to let do was lost to the sharp rapping on the driver’s side window.

“Uh oh…”

Rolling down the window and smiling as brightly as he could, Lestrade looked up into the eyes of one of the village constables and tried to appear as non-hooligany as he could.

“Hello, officer. May… what can I do for you?”

“You can move your vehicle off of private property, for a start, lad. And explain why you seem to be lying in wait to surprise someone in a way they might not exactly want to be surprised.”

Shite. And he’d be working with this bloke! Lovely…
“I’ll move the car right away, sir. Just… I had a terrible cramp come on me suddenly and I pulled over the car so as to not endanger any oncoming motorists or pedestrians. Or bicyclists! Can’t forget them. Have to share the road, right?”

Mycroft wondered if his partner actually thought he was being convincing or was as amused by his attempt at duplicity as his partner and the policeman seemed to be.

“I see. You certainly didn’t inherit the ability to lie from your da, did you?”

Fuck!

“Oh… you know Dad.”

“Unfortunately for you, you look just like him. Heard Danny was about, too, which is always a joy. Went to school with him, think he still owes me 20 quid.”

“There’s a queue if you want to try to get it back.”

“Ha! No, first thing to learn about Danny Lestrade – every loan is a like a bird. Enjoy watching your money fly away because it won’t be coming back. And… didn’t I hear talk that you were looking to start with the police when you leave school, or was that just a rumor.”

“No… it’s true. I need to get my application ready, actually, but it’s been a busy time.”

“Well, you best get to it because we do need a body or two and we generally get several applications when spots open. Hate for you to lose out and have to wait because you dawdled.”

“I will. Police work is really what I want to do, so I’ll see it done this week.”

“If your father is here to stay, being a man of the law could be a good deal of fun. The lot of us did our fair share of time in the jail when we were younger for this and that and Danny may have seen a bit more than most. It was a close thing between him and me, but he edged me out when he decided that ghastly statue of St. Somebody near the vicarage looked better with a wig, dress and a suspiciously-nice cosmetics job on the face.”

Mycroft snorted softly at the apparent genetic component of female costuming in the Lestrade family. Gregory was highly skilled at touching up Sherlock and John’s faces before they made one of their forays in feminine disguise.

“That doesn’t surprise me, actually.”

“Nor should it. A lot of mischief, Danny is, but his heart isn’t a black one, which is the important thing. Now, be off with you and find somewhere else to do whatever it is you young people are doing now that you don’t want people watching. And get your papers in, young man. Eagerness and diligence makes a good impression, you know.”

“Yes sir, I will.”

With a nod, the constable gave the car’s roof a few taps to remind the younger pair to move along and went about his business, with Greg and Mycroft waiting until he was out of earshot to start laughing.

“I thought we were going to dragged in for suspicious behavior!”

“Fortunately, my dear, your quick-witted reply forestalled that unhappy fate.”
“That was bollocks, I know, but we’re not in jail, so well done me. And he knew Dad! I’m not certain if that worked for or against us.”

“For, I suspect. The constable did not seem to view your father with an appreciable amount of vitriol.”

“No, he didn’t. No one really does, truth be told. Everyone says he was a drain on their purse and one to make mischief, not to mention chase any woman he saw, but nobody ever really says anything bad about him. I guess me and Mum were the only ones close enough to him, though, to really feel any hurt from his stupidity.”

“I would not argue against that. Your investment in him was far greater and the disappointment and pain was also far greater because of his conduct.”

“Just my luck. That’s probably why Dad is still here; nobody is chasing him off with a club and he’s likely reconnecting with people who remember that he was fun to have a pint with when he had a few pennies in his pocket.”

“No, your father is still here because he is waiting for you to give him some sign you wish to have the talk he requested.”

“Did you have to punch a hole in my little fantasy?”

“It was worth the bruising and skinning of my knuckles to reinsert some reality into your musings and bring you back to the previous thread of our conversation.”

“Boo!”

“Such a churlish audience. Nevertheless, I am certain the critics will laud my performance and shower me with awards.”

“The man I love is a comedian.”

“Excellent. I shall have a career to which to turn should my college experience leave me disillusioned with the course of my life.”

This rude noise was even more flamboyant than the last and Mycroft wished sorely he had a camera to document the performance for Sherlock and John to judge.

“I believe you have spattered my waistcoat with your saliva.”

“Oops. Sorry about that. Give me a day or two, alright? Just a day or two to sort things in my mind.”

“Of course, Gregory. Whatever time you need, you shall have, as long as you do not continue to implement the Ostrich Protocol.”

“Not putting my head in the sand, thank you very much. Too hard to get that stuff out of my ears.”

“Very good. Now, shall we continue on to secure your new shoes? The longer we linger, the greater the probability that Sherlock will have perpetrated a similar desecration on any remaining pairs you own.”

“He melted them! How do you melt a shoe? Doesn’t that violate science?”
“Apparently not. Though, dissolved might be a more accurate descriptor. I have confiscated his elixir, however, he is most adept at circumventing my confiscations.”

“On we go, then! And, I am thinking, Mycroft. I’m not ignoring things hoping they, or he, goes away. It’s just… a lot.”

Mycroft reached over and gave Lestrade’s leg a squeeze, then leaned over to give his partner a supportive kiss.

“I know and I hope you do not hesitate to reach for me or Mother Lestrade to help you with your burdens.”

It was strange how shouldering the weight of his life felt as if it was crushing him, at times, but asking for help felt nearly the same. Regardless, he had to do something to move forward because Mycroft was right… being an ostrich was the least useful thing he could do for himself. A day or two and that was all he’d allow himself before he’d do something. What that something would be was still to be decided, but it would be a real something and not another excuse. He was very tired of making excuses and now was a good time to make changes to that. Give the excuses a hard kick in the arse. Once he had shoes to kick in, of course…

__________

“HALT!”

Mycroft and Lestrade had to admit that making a full six steps into the house without being assaulted by Sherlock and John was a very good showing for a weekend day when they’d left the boys without slavish attention for more than five minutes.

“Yes, brother dear?”

“You are commanded to communicate.”

“Very well, in what language and on what subject would you prefer our discourse?”

“Not with me, Bufo. Grandmama.”

Both Mycroft and Lestrade winced and each crossed their fingers this was a simple check in and not something more serious. Such as sending Mycroft back to London. This had been a much-needed bit of time together and it would have to come to an end sometime, but neither wanted that time to be now.

“Yes, perhaps I should see to this immediately. My dear, would you excuse me?”

Kissing his lover, Mycroft turned towards his study and Sherlock stormed after, announcing that any attempt to stop his monitoring the content of the conversation would be met with catastrophic reprisals.

“Looks like it’s just you and me, John.”

“I think so. I mean, that’s why Sherlock…”

John’s hand flying to cover his mouth and his wide ‘oh no!’ eyes gave Lestrade the small suspicion that something was going on he should know about.

“Just tell me, John, so we can get on with putting away these supplies you two wanted and,
maybe, have a little while to kick a ball around while Sherlock spies on Mycroft.”

“We can put things away while we talk.”

Picking up one of the smaller bags the older boys had brought home, John began his own march, this one up the stairs, with Lestrade shaking his head before gathering the rest of the cargo and following along.

“Alright, lad, what’s going on?”

“Ummmm… you might not like this, so don’t get mad.”

“Ok. Ok… I’ll try.”

“Your dad was here while you were gone.”

Perfect. Simply perfect.

“Wanting to see me, I suppose.”

“Yes, but you weren’t here so he visited with Sherlock and me instead.”

Perfecter. Simply perfecter.

“And how much money did you get from him this time.”

“None. But he did bring sweets and that’s as good as money in some ways.”

What was more perfect that perfecter? That was probably something he should ask Mycroft. He was good with those types of words.

“I see. And was it a nice visit?”

John made a grand show of considering the question and Lestrade wondered how much of that was a reluctance to divulge just how much he and Sherlock had enjoyed it.

“It’s alright if you had fun with Dad, John. I know you don’t want to upset me, and that makes me very happy, but if you had a nice time, don’t feel guilty. That’s something, in a way, that Mycroft and I were talking about earlier, in fact. Lots of people have fun with Dad, it’s very much who he is.”

“We didn’t want to have fun, but… Sherlock mentioned his lab and your dad wanted to see it and I showed him my room and we talked about Sherlock’s experiments and school… but Sherlock didn’t call him Father Lestrade! And made sure to talk a lot about you and how you took care of us in between school and work and Mycroft going off and leaving you alone.”

“Then I’d say you were very loyal and I thank you for it.”

“Thanks! And we are, Greg. Sherlock doesn’t behave that way sometimes, but he is loyal and cares. Me, too. This…”

John waved his arms around to indicate his room.

“… this is great, but it wouldn’t be so great if you and Mycroft and Sherlock weren’t here, too.”

There was a tiny change in the tone of John’s voice that put Lestrade on alert that the point of this
conversation was about to get a little sharper.

“Is there something you want to talk to me about, John? More than Dad visiting?”

“Maybe.”

“Then hop up and let’s chat.”

Lestrade took a seat on John’s bed and patted the mattress to encourage John to follow suit, which the small boy did quickly enough to underscore the importance of the upcoming discussion.

“So, what shall we talk about?”

“Your Dad.”

“I thought we were talking about him.”

“I know, but… he’s not mean.”

“I suppose not. At least, not always. He could be mean when he drank, though.”

“Is he a drunk?”

A small light went on in Lestrade’s head. A few, actually, and they spelled out a flashing sign that read ‘tread carefully.’

“No. He did drink, though. Sometimes a lot and he could get stinking when he had a mind to, but he’s not an alcoholic, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“My dad is.”

“I know. Does all this have you thinking about your dad, John?”

The tiny nod seemed to ring as loudly as a bell and Lestrade wrapped an arm around John’s shoulders to draw the boy a little closer.

“Was your dad mean, is that why you asked if mine was?”

“No, not really. When he drank he could get… angry, but he wasn’t mean. Some of my friends had mean dads, but they weren’t taken away like I was.”

“I think that had to do with people worrying that your dad was having trouble keeping you fed and well. You can be mean and still do that, so people don’t go and take your kids the way they might someone who wasn’t paying their bills or whose kids were starting to look thin and a bit dirty.”

“I was doing alright, though. We were eating most meals and I knew where the clinic was if I got hurt.”

“That’s because you’re a bright, self-reliant boy, but not all kids are like you and… well, someone needs to look out for them if their mums or dads can’t.”

John nodded again and Lestrade sat silently while the boy gathered his thoughts.

“Why’d your dad leave, Greg?”
“I don’t know, exactly. He took off while I was at school one day and I never heard from him again. I presume he got tired of having a wife and a child hanging around his neck like a pair of albatrosses.”

“Don’t you want to know for certain?”

“Some days yes, some days no. I guess I’m worried I hear an answer I don’t like very much.”

“He wants to talk to you.”

“He said that, did he?”

“Yes. Sherlock told him that he wouldn’t, what was it… tolerate any harassment or intimidation… but a chat should be alright, shouldn’t it? I mean…”

John’s tiny sniff made Lestrade’s heart ache fiercely and he leaned down to press a kiss on the top of John’s head.

“… if my dad came to find me, I’d want to talk to him.”

“And you’re a good boy for it, John. You know… if that’s what you really want, I wager Mycroft could find him for you.”

“No… not now. If my dad hasn’t looked for me, that means he’s not better yet and not ready to talk to me or visit or anything like that. When he is better, he’ll look for me and see how good I’m doing in school and how happy I am and he’ll be happy, too.”

John’s firm, determined nod gave Lestrade’s heart another kick because it was clear the boy was trying harder to convince himself than anyone else.

“That sounds very smart. Very wise, in fact. You don’t talk about him very much, John, but you know you can, if you’d like. It won’t hurt our feelings if you want to talk about your dad and good things about him.”

“It won’t?”

“No, not at all. We love you, John and that’s not going to change. You’re our family now and having other family doesn’t change that, either.”

“If my dad comes to talk to me, will you be upset?”

“Not at all…”

As long as he kept his bloody hands to himself and didn’t try to snatch the boy away from them, that is.

“… he’s your father, John, and it doesn’t seem as if he treated you poorly, despite things. If you wanted to get to know him again, nobody would object.”

“And we won’t object if you want to get to know your dad again, either. That’s what he wants, too. He said so and Sherlock did that thing he does when he scrunches his eyes and stares very hard, just like Mycroft does, but without as much scrunching, and he said your dad was telling the truth.”

Still needed a word for more perfect that perfecter. Why did Sherlock and Mycroft have to be so fucking observant?
“Oh, he does, does he?”

“Yes, and I know Sherlock was telling the truth because he wasn’t happy about it in the least.”

There really wasn’t any better evidence than that.

“Well, for your information, Mycroft and I were talking about this, too, and I’m thinking about it. I haven’t made up my mind, but I am giving it some thought.”

“When are you going to decide?”

“When I do and not a second sooner.”

“You don’t have to rush because your dad said he’ll be around for awhile, so do a lot of thinking, if you need to. You have time.”

Lestrade fell back and landed on the bed so hard John caught a little air and giggled loudly before flopping back himself.

“Marvelous. He’s haunting me. Like a fucking ghost that nobody summoned, he’s haunting me.”

“I told him where you play football with your mates and he said he’ll stop sometime and watch.”

The anguished scream into the pillow Lestrade pressed over his face made John giggle again and start to feel the knot in his stomach begin to unwind. It had tied good and hard with Mycroft’s being horrible and had started to re-tie when he began to think about his father. Sherlock said talking to Greg would probably help and he was right. Which meant he had to let Sherlock collect the yuck at the corner of his eyes for a whole month, but it was worth it because a knotted stomach wasn’t very much fun.

“Thanks for that, John.”

“You’re welcome. He said he used to play football when he was your age. Is that true?”

“I don’t know, really. Probably. Most lads around here did. And do.”

“Mycroft and Sherlock don’t.”

“They’re not exactly from here, are they? I mean they are, but they aren’t.”

“That’s true. Then it can just be me, you and your Dad playing football, while Sherlock and Mycroft watch. And cheer.”

Apparently, John was very much in favor of being adopted by the Lestrade clan, as well as the Holmes one. Poor little thing… this was hitting him hard and it wouldn’t hurt to keep his bubble unburst for the time being. Dad would do that soon enough on his own, so any kindness on his part would… be a kindness.

“We’ll see. Dad’s really staying in the area?”

“He said he was. I asked if missing so much work was going to get him sacked and he just laughed. Maybe he has a lot of money and doesn’t need to work anymore.”

John giggled while Lestrade screamed into the pillow again, and waved at Sherlock who was peeking around the door to check the coast was clear before entering.
“You have informed the indigent that his father is seeking to squat within our territorial boundaries.”

“What!”

“Not yet. I was waiting until Greg stopped screaming. Since he has… Greg, your dad also said he might look at houses and see if any suited him. I think he may be hoping to live here again.”

“Open the window, John. I’m going to jump.”

“Your carcass is sufficiently hideous, lackey, that the ensuing carnage from your collision with the ground will not appreciably alter your appearance so we can continue to allow Mother Lestrade the illusion of your continued existence by propping your mutilated corpse in your chair when we share dinner with her.”

“Mum! Oh, she is going to scream when she hears this.”

“I shall carry a recording device on my person when we inform her. I have few copies of female rage in full flower and it will be a valuable addition to my research collection.”

“You’re a unique boy, Sherlock.”

“That is true. Now, when your tantrum is complete, you will assist me with my experiment. I require several cheek scrapings and 13 grams of sputum, at minimum.”

“Is that a lot?”

“That the peasant-grade education you have received forsook mention of the metric system comes as absolutely no surprise.”

This day just kept getting better. Might as well cough up some sputum to liven things up a bit.

“Is Mycroft finished talking to Grandmama?”

“No, and I was nearly bored to death by their dreary conversation, which would have been a loss to the scientific community of gargantuan proportions.”

“Then it’s time for sputum, I suppose. John, give me a push?”

John jumped behind Lestrade and heaved him upwards, with Lestrade making sure to be very dead weight so the boy could have a spot of fun before he actually made it to his feet.

“You are nearly as fat as the elephant. I will instruct Cook to reduce your meal portions and donate them to John so he might see the gain of an inch in height before summer holiday.”

“I have gained an inch, Sherlock! Well, part of an inch, anyway.”

As the height debate began, Lestrade took a moment to look out of the window he valiantly hadn’t leapt out of and checked for a few horsemen of the Apocalypse or fire raining down from the sky. Dad moving back? No… he must have been having a joke with the boys. Just a bit of teasing, nothing more. No reason to come back to a village that waved happily as you made your exit with a legion of creditors dogging your heels. Yes, just a bit of harmless teasing. Wonder if the offer to go to college with Mycroft was still on the table, though. That was far away, wasn’t it? Far, far away…
“Yes, I think the hedgerows would appear far more tidy with a closer clip, Grandmama. That is a most tasteful suggestion.”

And… done. Sherlock had now slid fully onto the floor in a puddle of boredom and was beginning to ooze his way towards the study door. Whatever the reason for his insistence on monitoring the conversation, it had taken a rather surprising quantity of purposeless small-talk to finally rid the room of the pestiferous fly on the wall. Now, something approaching the purpose of Grandmama’s command could be gleaned.

“Has Sherlock gone?”

“Yes. We are blessedly alone.”

“And the reason for his uncamouflaged surveillance?”

“I have no idea, though, I suspect I will learn it soon enough. Now, what might be the true purpose of this summons, Grandmama. It is certainly not hedgerows.”

“Edwards presented to me a folder documenting the rather troubling event of the past several days and I would have you provide a more robust picture of the situation than the reports describe and account for your failure to eliminate the problem at its source.”

Ah. Well, it was to be expected that Grandmama would hear of their current domestic upheaval, but he had hoped they might have a bit more time to sort it out before other fingers began to play in their pies.

“Gregory’s father is not properly described as an event, though he likely has a different opinion on the matter.”

“Now is not the time for levity, Mycroft. I doubt Gregory finds anything about this amusing.”

“No, he does not. He is most distressed and suffering from a watershed of emotions, confusion…”

“Is he speaking to you on the subject.”

“Precious little, but we have engaged in some conversations that were meaningful and, I believe, helpful.”

“And Gregory’s father… your assessment of the man?”

“A bounder. An unrepentant rogue. A womanizer and spendthrift.”

“Then why have you not seen him off, with the use of persuasion, if necessary?”

“Because… because there is also an ember of honesty in the man and that honesty has manifest in ways that are most important to Gregory.”

“Explain.”

“Gregory’s father desires, I believe, to repair to some degree the frayed, perhaps severed, bonds with his son.”

“Balderdash.”

“Such is Mother Lestrade’s opinion, but I read a different story in the man’s visage. I know not
the reason for his intentions, nor are they necessarily relevant, but he wishes to speak to Gregory concerning their relationship and I believe him honest in that desire.”

“And what else? I have made my own inquiries, you know.”

Of course. Grandmama would not have phoned until she had her own stockpile of ammunition.

“Both Gregory and Mother Lestrade believe the man to be here to finagle money from me.”

“From what I gather, that is not an unrealistic belief.”

“True, and I will not argue that might not form a portion of the foundation of his actions, but a portion is not an entirety.”

“You seem to be the man’s staunch supporter, Mycroft. This is not at all what I would have expected.”

“Because you have not seen as much as I the pain in Gregory’s eyes when he mentions his father. He carries unhealed wounds that bleed still and, if it is at all possible to see them mended so that he suffers less, then I will support the actions or persons to make it so.”

“Old wounds can also be reopened so they leave harsher scars, my boy. That is something to consider.”

“Something I have done already. I did not invite the man, Grandmama, but the opportunity is one that could be leveraged for Gregory’s benefit and I want not the opportunity wasted.”

“He seems to have little to offer. His employment history is uninspiring, there is naught in his bank account but dust and spiders, Edwards became bored cataloging his romantic conquests and left ellipses at the end of an already unwholesome list.”

“None of which impinges on the relationship between himself and his son. If there is any chance that Gregory might heal even a morsel of his pain, then I want to see that chance realized. If it is not possible, then, rest assured, I will see him out of Gregory’s life regardless of the mechanism required for his removal.”

“That, at least, is encouraging. I am concerned, Mycroft, about that I will be most plain. Gregory has already endured a traumatic upheaval and his welfare will not benefit from another. And, what of Elizabeth? She cannot be enthused about this turn of events.”

“That is a certainty. Oddly, I do not sense in her as great a perturbation as in Gregory. Perhaps she has made peace with her history, I honestly do not know. We… we are not precisely on cordial terms at the moment.”

Though Grandmama would never laugh out loud, Mycroft could hear her silent laughter ringing in his ears like a gong.

“No, I suppose you are not. I will phone her and make my own inquiries. Regardless, Mycroft… this requires extreme delicacy and the stakes are of the highest nature. Be cautious, grandson. Gregory is strong, but the strongest oak can break given the proper pressure.”

“That it can and I do not blind myself to the fact. I want only what is best for Gregory and I will try my utmost to safeguard him through this difficult period. He has my full attention, Grandmama, do not doubt that in the slightest.”
“Are you not expected at college this week to sit several examinations?”

“I have already made arrangements to conduct one via telephone and the other two on the same day, in the morning, so I may leave before dawn and return here by afternoon.”

“Laudable forethought. Your fullest attention, Mycroft, and not a bit less. This has the pungent whiff of disaster about it and that is something you can ill afford at this juncture.”

“Of that I am well aware. Now, if you will excuse me, my family awaits and we have a plethora of activities in which to engage before dinner.”

“Legal or otherwise?”

“As John had a great deal of say in the planning, I would say legal, on balance. However, he has demonstrated far greater moral fluidity as his proximity to Sherlock has continued.”

“That will serve our John well in the future. He is too special a boy to be mired by any particular scripture of conduct guidelines. He is of brave heart and good character and that is true making of a man.”

“I agree. We will speak again soon, yes?”

“Of course. And you are expected for a visit next Saturday, so do plan accordingly.”

“Yes, Grandmama. Goodnight to you.”

Oh joy. Grandmama and Edwards were monitoring the situation. That simplified matters immeasurably. Oh, did he say simplified? Complicated, that was the correct term. Silly brain… definitely time for the feel of his lover’s lips and the sound of contented children playing happily with their new possessions. Or, at least the feel of his lover’s lips. They would have to rent children for the rest and the appropriate child-rental brokers would not open their office doors until Monday…

“Are you certain, my dear?”

The look his lover was giving him said the question was not entirely appreciated, however, given the tumult of the past two days, it was an appropriate one. His alarm over the news of a potential paternal relocation and the worry over dear John’s frame of mind had anguished his Gregory until he finally threw up his hands at the breakfast table and declared a day off school to see this matter settled. Now, that declaration would, seemingly, be made good.

“For the last time, I am completely certain.”

“You have used the phrase ‘for the last time,’ a good baker’s dozen of times in the past days and each time from a different side of your line in the sand.”

Lestrade heaved an exhausted and frustrated breath and nodded in agreement.

“I know. And you’re good not to give my head a knock for being stupid. But, yes, I am completely certain. I need to know what’s going on, love, and there’s only one way to find out.”

“And you still refuse my participation?”

“Not refuse, Mycroft… I just have to do this myself. There’s a taproom here, so I’ll meet you there when I’m done. That’s if you can wait.”
“I shall wait as long as it takes. In fact…”

Mycroft pulled a book out of his jacket pocket and waved it merrily in the air.

“That’s my love, always prepared. See you soon, then.”

After one long kiss, the couple were going their separate ways, one to wait and one to put a cap on the volcano that had been rumbling in his center since his father set foot in their library. But, no matter how ‘completely certain’ he was, it was still the work of several moments before Lestrade was able to knock on the door.

“Greg? Oh son, I’m glad to see you.”

“You wanted to talk, Dad, so I’m here to talk.”

“Good. Really, that’s wonderful. Come in and we’ll have a proper conversation. We’ve got a lot to catch up on, you and me. And I’m certain you have a lot of questions, don’t you? I’ll answer all you have, Greg, whatever you want to know, and I’ll ask a lot, too. I want to get to know you again, son. No matter what you might believe, you’re my pride and joy and I want you to know it’s true. So, let’s get started, shall we?”

Greg nodded and tried not to notice how hopeful and happy his father looked. The arse had something up his sleeve and he was going to find out what that was before anyone in his family got hurt. That’s what you did for family, you took care of them. Mum, John, Sherlock, Mycroft… he’d see this sorted one way or another, learn the real story and make sure they weren’t going to be hurt by any of it. The fact that he was probably going to ache like a bastard was completely beside the point…
Chapter 9

“Have a seat, Greg. It’s a nice room, isn’t it? Comfortable, too. Want a beer? I can call for a few and…”

“No, I don’t want a beer, I want to talk. Can we just make a start with that?”

“Oh. Sure! Just wanted to be a good host, that’s all. Nothing but the best for my Greg. Or, at least as ‘best’ as they offer here. Which is actually not bad. I’ve known the chap who runs this inn for what seems like my whole life and he’s a smart one. Give people quality and be fair with your prices… you’ll make a good living and he does! Admittedly, he’s not making a fortune off of me, but I’ve taken a few shifts behind the desk and in their restaurant so he could have more time with his wife. I’ve worked in a lot of places so I’m good for stepping in when someone needs a break. You know, right after your uncle bought his shop…”

When he was small, he could listen to his father talk for hours, go on about all sorts of things that seemed terribly interesting to his young ears. Now…

“Can we just come to the point, Dad?”

“That we can. Listen to me go on… I suppose I’m nervous, is all. I’ve gone through this conversation a hundred times in my head over the years, so you’d suppose I’d be well-rehearsed, but that’s…”

“Shite. It’s shite is what it is.”

“That’s not true, Greg. I know it… you probably think I never gave you a second thought after your mum kicked me out, but… Greg?”

No… didn’t hear that correctly. Lovely, now his ears were telling him stories! How could he be a policeman if his ears couldn’t be trusted?

“Greg? Son, that’s the face of someone I might think about calling a doctor for.”

“What? Oh… Dad, let me just be very, very clear about one thing. I’m not hear to listen to you lie. If you want to talk, we talk honestly or my feet are walking out the door right now.”

“Lie? What are you talking about? You’ve only been here two minutes! What could I lie about in two minutes?”

“You said mum kicked you out! That’s a lie if I ever heard one. You left! You left one day and that was the last I ever saw of you! Not a word! Not… you left me, Dad. Don’t lie about that!”

“No… not that’s the right story, Greg. I didn’t leave. I mean, I did, after a fashion, but your mum… oh. Oh…”

“Oh what? Dad, what’s this all about?”

“Nothing! Really, nothing. So, let’s talk about you, Greg. How have you been doing? I hear some, you know, but that’s not nearly enough. John says you play football with your mates. My layabout friends and me used to do the same. How much ball-kicking goes on compared to bashing each other’s heads together? Not much, I suspect. We used to drag ourselves to the pub after a so-called match and the barman would throw a handful of plasters on the tray our beer was delivered
Those were good times. And a lot of those bastards are still around! It’s been a grand time catching up with them, hearing the news… news! Yes! What’s your news, Greg? Besides getting married, of course. I’m so proud of you, son. Mycroft seems like a fine fellow, like someone who would make you very happy. Very happy, indeed. Which is the most important thing, of course. Not fine cars or houses, but being happy, don’t you think? Of course you do, who wouldn’t? Silly me, listen to me talk about what you already know…”

Dad could talk. He could talk a lot. He could talk like a professional. This wasn’t professional. This was babbling. Oh god…

“What do you mean mum kicked you out, Dad? And don’t try to shove the cat back into the bag because it’ll just claw its way out again.”

“Did I say that? I am silly today, aren’t I? Slip of the tongue, Greg, nothing more. Now, back to you…”

“NO! Back to… well, sort of back to me, but mostly back to you. What are you on about, Dad? You left us. I came home from school, mum set me down and said you’d done a runner and we’d seen the last of you in our lives.”

“Yes! That’s what happened. Exactly what happened. Not my finest moment, I admit, but I want to make that up to you, Greg. I want to be what I couldn’t when I was young and stupid. All I want is a chance to show you that I can. That I can be the father you should have had in your life.”

“You’re lying.”

“I’m not! I’m sorry for the past, son. I sorrier than you can imagine. I thought that maybe, what with you starting a new chapter of your life, maybe there’d be room for me in it. That’s all, son. I mean, not all, because that sounds like not much and I know it’s a lot I’m asking, but…”

“AAAAARRRRRGGGGH!!”

“Ooh, that sounded painful.”

“I came here to find out why you ran out on us and now you’re telling me you didn’t run out on us!”

“Slip of the tongue!”

“Bollocks!”

“Fine! Slip of those then!”

“Tell me the truth!”

“I am! I was a shit father and a shit… er husband! I was no good, not for anyone and your mum was right to… it was to be expected I’d do something disgraceful!”

“Mum did toss you out! Fuck me… she did, didn’t she?”

“It’s… it’s not important. What’s important is us having a chance to know each other, son. If you want it, that is. I do. I’ve kept my ears to the ground, you know. Caught a few words here and there about how my boy was doing. Made my heart swell, it did.”

“Back to mum tossing you out…”
“How about not. Sure you don’t want that beer? I know! We can go down and have them pull a few pints for us. Very nice place they have here for a pint or two.”

“Mum!”

“She can come if she likes! That’s fine with me. Haven’t seen Lizzie in ages and I bet she’s as lovely as the day we met.”

“Stop it! Just stop it! Tell me what happened. I go to school, come home and my family is minus a full third. Not that you were much of a third, but… I deserve to know what really happened, Dad. I deserve to know. Why you left or whatever the fuck happened, why you… why we weren’t ever satisfied with mum and me. Why you couldn’t love us. Why you couldn’t love me.”

Greg slumped in his chair and ran his hands through his hair, wishing suddenly that he was anywhere but there.

“Wrong, Greg. I loved you more than you can imagine. Nothing in my life has hurt more, nothing has made me feel the rat I truly am than the fact I couldn’t be what you needed for a dad. Not that I didn’t try… I was just balls at it. I was scarcely twenty when you were born! Your mum and me hadn’t been together that long and… I was just a young idiot! I mean if Lizzie hadn’t got pregnant, I doubt we’d have… oh shit. Forget I said that.”

“What! You… Mum said I was wedding night baby!”

“Maybe for someone’s wedding night, but not ours. She was two months along when we were married. Luckily, no… strike that… your mum still smoked so you being a small baby made her mum’s story about you being our little wedding night miracle believable. I didn’t see a reason to say anything different.”

“This is… I can’t believe this!”

“What does it matter, Greg? You were our little miracle, no matter what side of the blanket you were born on.”

“It matters! It matters a lot.”

“No, it doesn’t. What matters is your mum and I loved you with everything in us. And she was a great mum to you. A truly great mum. It was me that fucked everything up… there was nothing wrong with you or her. I couldn’t make things work. I was a no-prospects yob who couldn’t hold a good job or say no to any bit of skirt that came my way. Me, Greg. It was me that drank more than was good for me… or you… and had a bit of a temper when I overindulged. It was me who remembered after the fact that you had a school play or it was parent’s night because I was at the pub instead of at home where I should be.”

“Then why weren’t you home! That’s where I wanted you to be! I wanted my Dad! I just wanted you there to talk to and to watch me do the stupid things kids want their dads to watch… to be proud of those stupid things. To love me because I was just as stupid as every other kid and because I loved you!”

Kids shouldn’t see their dads cry, so it wasn’t a gleam from moisture in his dad’s eyes that shined so much. It was… something else. Maybe some of that pollen Mycroft had been going on about…

“I did love you, Greg. I still do. I just… I was nineteen when Lizzie got pregnant. I wasn’t ready for a wife, let alone a family. I wanted to be like my mates… chasing the birds, having a few pints, taking a job when we needed cash and walking away when we didn’t. Not the most motivated
bunch, I admit, but we were young and certainly didn’t have Uni in our future. A few lucky ones had dads who could take them into the trade, but the rest of us… I guess we were waiting for our ship to come in. They were solid lads, really… still are! Wives, kids, good jobs, but when you’re that age, you’re not thinking about wives, kids and good jobs. You’re thinking about the night ahead and what fun might be waiting for you when you dove into it.”

“And then I came along.”

“Don’t make it sound like a bad thing, Greg. If I’d been anyone other than a useless bastard, you would have had a great childhood. It was my fault, son. It was me that rolled my eyes when I was walking out the door and your mum was on me to buy nappies and bread on my way home. It was me that lost the nappy and bread money on a race or a few drinks with a willing lady. I was an immature, selfish clot and… yeah, I did feel trapped in something I knew wasn’t right for me and that I wasn’t right for. I did try for you, though, son. I did try to be something of a father, but even my best wasn’t very good. I told your mum when she put the boot in, though, that I’d like to be part of your life. Send money when I could and, maybe, see my son now and then, but… she was right. I would only have done more harm than good. Set a bad example. Keep disappointing you. I did want to know you, Greg, but… your mum was right. I’ve not had my hand in anything worthwhile… moved job to job, no steady relationships. I just… when I heard about you and Mycroft… I couldn’t stay away anymore. My boy is a man now and there’s not much I can fuck up in your life, is there?”

Oh, there was loads that could still be fucked up, but, strangely, his father wasn’t the person who could do it. The one person who could was waiting with a nice drink and a good book; his dad… no, there wasn’t any more he could do. It had all been done long ago.

“I’ll probably still be a disappointment to you, Greg, but I’d like the chance to see you now and again. Those little ones of yours, Sherlock and John… my son has sons of his own! They love you dearly and you’re already a better father to them than I ever could have been for you. Never thought I’d have grandsons, especially with you marrying a man, but… maybe I can be a child minder now and then, huh? They’re mischief-makers and deserve a bit of spoiling from someone who appreciates a fine bit of mischief.”

“Dad, don’t spoil the boys.”

“Why not? They’ve got you and your mum to not-spoil them. Mycroft doesn’t seem much like a spoiler, either. Whose got those little things’ backs for a spot of fun?”

“They have more fun than they need, thank you very much.”

“See! Already you’re the stern dad. They need someone to hide the bodies when things get a bit out of hand.”

“With Sherlock and John, dead bodies are actually possible, so please don’t encourage them. And don’t grin like you’re looking very forward to being… everything to them that you weren’t to me.”

Greg had seen enough punches taken and taken enough himself to recognize he look on his father’s face extremely well. And he couldn’t find it in himself to be happy or satisfied over the fact.

“I’m looking forward to being for you what I wasn’t. I always loved you, Greg, but loving someone isn’t enough to make you a good father or husband. Now… now I’m better equipped to be a decent human being, at least. Get a proper job and be someone you won’t be embarrassed to be seen with. I’m not asking for Sunday dinners, just the opportunity to have a pint or two with my son,
have a visit now and then, be part of your life in any way you’ll let me. I know I hurt you, Greg, and I know you don’t owe me a fucking thing, but please don’t think you weren’t important to me. That I didn’t love you. That I don’t hate myself because I wasted all these years and it’s all because I wasn’t good enough for you and your mum in the first place.”

“You’re here to be a family with me again. That’s your final story?”

“If you’re willing to do that. And on whatever level you’re comfortable with. Maybe I’m just the old gent you see once in awhile after work…”

“You’re 37.”

“Wait until you’re that age and let’s see if you don’t say you’re old. And I won’t say that wasn’t another reason I wanted to reach out to you. I’m nearly 40 and without a thing to show for it. The very best thing in my life is the only thing I’ve ever really had and I just want to be able to see him when I’m able. I don’t want much, Greg, whatever you’re willing to give. I just hope you’re willing to give something.”

That was the crux of the issue, wasn’t it? Was he willing to give anything to the man who’d left… or not… without a word? Who wasn’t much of a father before he… was gone… either. Fucking right he didn’t owe Dad anything, but… this was all so confusing! What he’d believed about Dad leaving wasn’t the truth, but what he’d seen with his own eyes certainly was. The universe did hate him! Stupid cosmos and all its stupid, stupid mysteries…

“I don’t know, Dad. Not one word from you in all these years. Not a single word. You were my dad, maybe not a brilliant one, but you were my dad and then you weren’t. How do I forget that?”

“You don’t! You don’t ever forget it because if you remember, you won’t make the mistakes I made. You’ll be a good husband to your Mycroft and a good father to those two boys of yours. I’m simply hoping you can forgive, even without the forgetting. Not now, maybe, but one day. Maybe after we get to know each other again. I don’t expect miracles, Greg, just the chance that one day you won’t be ashamed of me. That you’ll have some good memories to go along with the bad.”

Greg stared into the older version of his own face and wished, not for the first time, that life could be easy. Simple, straightforward, predictable… maybe not the last one so much because that would be boring, but why was his life suddenly such a mess of tangles and complications! And Mum! Oh, that was something he didn’t really need right now…

“John said you were looking for houses.”

“Might be. Might not be. Just a passing thought. I’m between jobs at the moment and there’s not much holding me where I’ve been living. It’d be nice to be back where I’ve got my own good memories, but I’m not… I’ve not got any firm plans.”

And there was no denying that a big part of that might-or-might-not was what one Mr. Greg Lestrade had to say about the whole matter. And Mr. Greg Lestrade had no idea what that was going to be.

“I’m going to need to think, Dad. It’s… there’s been lots going on and I just need time to think.”

“Smart. My boy’s a smart one. You talk to that fiancé of yours, he’s smart, too and I think he’s got good head on his shoulders, on top of that. How about in a few days we talk again? I told your Mycroft we’d get together, all of us, so maybe we can do that. You two and those boys of yours, we’ll have a nice time of it. I’d like to know them better, too. They’re important to you, so I’d like
to know them and, maybe, be a part of their lives, as well. Not a big one, just someone to see once in awhile and share a few stories.”

“You’re not dying are you? Is that what this is all about?”

“NO! At least, not that I know of. I’m being honest, Greg, nothing but honest. Maybe it took something specific to give me that final push I needed, but I’ve thought about this a lot since I took the bag your mum had packed for me and walked out the door.”

“She even packed your fucking things!”

“Your mother is a very smart and efficient woman. Not at all like me. She was the smart, hard-working, serious one in the family. I wasn’t. She always deserved better than me. Truth be told, I don’t think we were ever really in love. Not like you and your Mycroft. Things just… they moved fast and in a direction neither of us really expected and if I’d been a good man that would have been alright. We probably would have split at some point anyway, but not the way we did. And I’d have made the life we did have together, and with you, something worthwhile. I can’t change the past, Greg. I would if I could, I would in an instant. But… I can do my best, my very best, to make something of the future.”

Time. He needed time to think. This was not the way this conversation was supposed to go, not at all and he had no idea how to respond to any of it. Dad was right, though – you couldn’t change the past. The question was whether or not the future had any chance of being different. And did he want it, even if it could.

“Are you sure you don’t want a beer, Greg? You look like you could use one.”

“I’m… I’m sure. At least… look, Mycroft’s waiting for me and it’s rude for me to make him wait too long.”

“That it is! See? You do exactly what real couples do… he’s waiting to hear how this went and be supportive and you’re worrying about him… sitting.”

“He’s got a book.”

“I knew he was a reader! You can tell that about a person, if they read or not. You go to him, Greg, and, it’s early so you find something fun to do with the day. Don’t think I don’t know you’re supposed to be in school, either. Another thing I’m proud of. My boy could have left already, but he’s still there learning because that’s important for a good future. I left the very second I could and look at me! Your mum did, too, though, so I guess that’s not a very good example. But a day off to do something important never hurt anyone, so good for you! Really, Greg, good for you. Go make a day of it, son, don’t worry about all of this or about me… just go and enjoy some time with that fiancé of yours while the little badgers are in class. Hard to get any ‘personal time’ when you’ve got small ones knocking on the bedroom door, isn’t it?”

No, do not grin knowingly at me. You are not allowed, not allowed at all, to comment in any way on Mycroft’s and my sex life. Mum is prohibited and you’re doubly prohibited because you seem to think it’s even funnier than she does.

“Sherlock and John don’t knock. They pick the lock. Or install listening devices.”

And you can’t laugh either! Don’t be proud of them and think they’re clever and creative and full of life… you’re not making it any easier on me!

“You’re lucky, Greg. So very, very lucky. And you know you are, which is why you’re going
to have a great life. No, be off with you and we’ll talk in a couple of days, alright?”

Reaching out, Lestrade’s dad offered his son a hand up and felt his heart light up when Greg didn’t hesitate taking it.

“Yeah, we’ll see. It was… I can’t say it was good to see you, Dad, but… it wasn’t as miserable as I’d expected.”

“Good! That’s something, at least. Tell your Mycroft hello for me, alright? And Sherlock and John?”

“Oh, I thought you were building your own roads with the boys.”

“Wouldn’t you? They’re cute as baby chimps and just as interesting.”

“You do have a point. Just… I hope you’re not trying to use them to get me to give you what you want.”

“No! I wouldn’t do that, Greg. You inherited your mother’s brains so you’d fathom it out quickly enough and what good would that do me? Besides, I do need to see them at least once more because I promised Sherlock that I’d give him a… what do you call it… dental impression! That’s it. He want’s to make a model of my teeth to compare with yours for some science project. Probably wants to investigate the Lestrade grin and all its seductive wonder.”

“Great. Just great. Goodbye, Dad.”

“I’ll see you soon, son.”

No, I don’t want to shake your hand. Apparently, though, my hand is too polite to ignore your extended one and, yes, now we’re shaking and you’re smiling and this is officially one of the worst days ever.

Hurrying before anything else happened, Lestrade turned and fled… strolled casually… out of the room and double-checked that the door was solidly closed behind him. Stupid, stupid universe… it had no sense at all of fair play. Now, grab Mycroft and have another talk. With Mum. Might as well make this day suck as hard as possible…

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“Oh my. That… that is rather a lot to take in.”

“I know.”

“I am sorry, Gregory. I know you were hoping for a cleaner, more black-and-white conversation.”

“Would that have been so bad? Greg, I left because I met another woman I loved more than your mum. Greg, I left because I was bored. Greg, I left because I got involved in a cult and had to move to some island in the South Pacific. Easy! No… I get anything but that.”

“Does it… how has your thinking been affected by all of this?”

Lestrade’s flailing hands and frustrated expression made Mycroft want to take the wheel of the car and steer them somewhere quiet and private where they could sit and talk, as opposed to crashing into an unhelpful tree.
“That is a rather vigorous response.”

“What am I supposed to think, Mycroft? Nothing undoes that Dad was anything but a real father to me, but…”

“You have seen, somewhat, the view from his vantage point?”

“It could have been me! I… you know I had my share of fun before I met you, Mycroft, and there were definitely times I… well, I wasn’t as careful with that fun as I should have been. It could have been me with a wife and kid, neither of which I planned for. Or even wanted.”

“You would not have behaved as did your father, however. Of that I am supremely certain.”

“Maybe not, but… I can’t lie about how I would have felt.”

“It is a mark of character that one does the honorable thing, regardless of one’s feelings on the subject.”

“I know. I’m not excusing him, Mycroft. Not at all. It’s just…”

“It is harder to maintain a cold heart with the knowledge you now possess?”

“Something like that. If my heart was ever cold in the first place. This is all a big jigsaw puzzle where none of the pieces fit or even look like they come from the same picture! I love my Dad or loved him, I don’t know which. I hate him or don’t because maybe it’s just disappointment or confusion or exasperation. He walked out on us but wait! He got the shove from mum, instead and actually asked to be part of my life while getting heaved out onto the lawn. I have no idea what to think or feel or believe right now. I just don’t.”

Mycroft ran hand along his partner’s arm and found himself in the very unusual position of being at a loss for what to say. Well, with one exception…

“With time, I am certain you shall make meaning of the maelstrom, my dear. That being said… where are we going?”

Because it certainly wasn’t home or to the pub or to London or any of the other places Mycroft might imagine the car would be pointed after such a tumultuous morning.

“We’re going to see mum.”

“Oh. She is at work, is she not?”

“Not for long.”

“I… I see. Gregory, do you believe this is wise?”

“Wise or not, it’s what’s happening.”

“Alright. And where would you have me wait?”

“You’re coming with me.”

“That cannot be a good idea.”

“Good or not, it’s what’s happening.”
Apparently his lover had become most single-minded and, perhaps, it was best if he kept a close eye on him for the time being. Mother Lestrade would not be happy if her only son had to be collected from the police station because he had been found wandering the village after crashing the car because his mind could only process one train of thought at a time. Their alliance, strained though it may be, would be very important to his dear Gregory and a supportive front might be the best way to proceed from this point forward as his partner fought to regain his balance. Which, based on the rather glassy appearance of his Gregory’s eyes, might not be an easy thing to accomplish.

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“Greg! Mycroft… what’s wrong?”

“Why would you think anything’s wrong, mum?”

Because you look a fright and Mycroft is trying to send me warning signals that are out of your line of sight.

“You’re visiting me at work, Greg and, unless you’ve mistaken this office for the pub, I’m not sure why you’d be here.”

“How about a break, mum?”

If Mycroft looked any more pleading the poor boy would wet his trousers. Fortunately it was a slow day and an early lunch wouldn’t be a problem. Something was bothering her son and that was the most important thing, anyway, slow day at work or not.

“Alright. The café next door does a good cuppa and I could use one. Angie, I’m on lunch, if anyone needs me.”

Grabbing her purse, Lestrade’s mother followed the couple, who elected to keep silent until they had a table in the small restaurant and orders for tea had been placed.

“There. Now, what brought you out to visit your mum on a school day?”

Hoping to provide some gentle paving-of-the-way, Mycroft decided to take point.

“There were a few matters about which Gregory…”

“Why’d you tell me dad left us when you actually tossed him out.”

Mycroft quickly reached over to stabilize the small vase of flowers at the table’s center that had wobbled sharply when Mother Lestrade reared back in her chair and used the table to brace the rearing.

“You’ve been talking to Danny.”

“Yeah, and the fact that’s your response tells me he wasn’t lying.”

“Greg, you don’t understand…”

“No, I don’t. All my life I thought my dad just left me behind and now I find out that he didn’t.”

“He wasn’t a father to you, Greg, and you know that.”

“He was a father who was willing to stay, even if he was shite! He didn’t want to go!”
“Don’t be so certain. It didn’t take a lot of convincing to get him to leave.”

“Because you told him I’d be better off if he went! You got him to leave because he thought it was the right decision for me!”

“It wasn’t like that, Greg. Not… not exactly. We needed him out of our lives and I did what I had to in order to protect us from being dragged down even further. It wasn’t going to get better, if that’s what you’re imagining. It was just going to get worse and we were already struggling to stay afloat!”

“Maybe so, but you could have told me the truth! I come home and you tell me dad ran out on us. Didn’t look back. You let me think, all these years, that my dad didn’t think twice about abandoning me. That I didn’t matter to him! That I disappointed him. That it was my fault because I was bad or dumb or…”

Mycroft quickly wrapped his arms around his partner, more to give Lestrade an anchor to grip while he wrestled with the thunder of old ghosts that were stampeding through his brain than to offer comfort, which would likely not even be noticed at the moment.

“God, Greg… is that what you thought? It had nothing to do with you, son! Your father was a sad excuse for a person and he had no issue letting others suffer for his faults. There was nothing wrong with you, Greg. Never. Not ever.”

“I didn’t know that, though, did I? I already knew that Dad didn’t care if he spent much time with me, but to leave… to just go away…”

“He would have at some point, anyway! When he couldn’t wring anything else out of me, he would have moved on, don’t think he wouldn’t have.”

“But we don’t know that for certain! He said he was trying and maybe… maybe with more time…”

“Bollocks! Whatever your dad told you, he was just trying to get you to feel sorry for him.”

“He told me you only got married because you were pregnant. I have to say, I did feel a bit sorry for him over that one.”

A soft hushing, and ‘do not agitate yourself so, my dear’ didn’t seem to be quelling his partner’s rising agitation and Mycroft could only hope that the tenuous hold on his emotions was enough to keep his lover from doing something rash. He was highly excited at the moment and there were only two viable targets available for the brunt of his upset.

“I see. My unbeloved ex certainly had a lot to say today, didn’t he?”

“Was any of it a lie?”

“That’s not the point. You didn’t need to carry that around, Greg. You already had enough with that tosser doing his best to make your life a misery.”

“Dad was young and, apparently, pretty fucking stupid… that’s not the best choice for a husband, I’d say.”

“What would you have me do? Try and raise you alone!”

“Which is what you did, anyway, but with me thinking I was a complete failure!”
“None of this was about you, Greg!”

“It was! Dad loved me! He was balls at showing it and was more of a child than I was, but... he wanted to keep in touch! Maybe... maybe that was all he could really do – see me once in awhile and kick a football, but he didn’t get the chance to even do that!”

“I cannot believe you’re defending that bastard!”

“I’m not! But it didn’t have to be this way! It didn’t!”

“It did! That day I tossed his worthless self out of our lives... I get a call from a friend who says he’s doing his usual bit with some woman in the village. Buying her drinks and a few rounds for the girl behind the bar, too. This after he told me the night before there wasn’t any money for new coats that we needed for winter. Do you know what I said when I dragged him home to confront him about it? ‘Oops.’ That’s it! We didn’t matter to him Greg. You don’t forget your family needs clothes if you care about them!”

“You do if you’re still an emotional 6-year old!”

“I can’t believe you’re on his side for this, Gregory Lestrade.”

“I’m not on anyone’s side! I... I just want to not be lied to! To actually be sure that the people who supposedly care about me aren’t hiding things from me! Is that too much to ask? Tell me! No, I’d probably just get another lie.”

Launching himself from the table, Lestrade stormed out and held out a ‘stop’ with his hand when Mycroft tried to get up to follow.

“Where’s that bastard Danny, Mycroft? I am going to kill him for this.”

“Something that would simply infuriate Gregory more, I’m afraid.”

Waving at the nervous waitress to bring over the tea she was carrying, Mycroft made sure to push a cup into his mother-in-law’s hands and waited while realized she had it and took a sip.

“I thought I was doing the right thing, Mycroft. What was best for Greg and me. Was I wrong?”

“I would not presume to judge since I cannot begin to imagine what was your life at that point. If pressed, I would say... you made the choice you believed the right one given the circumstances and your own interpretation of those circumstances. You would not willingly take action to harm Gregory and he is aware of that also, though his thoughts at this time are clouded and confused.”

“I was trying to protect him. To make a clean break and put the blame entirely on the person who deserved it. I didn’t think... I knew he hurt, but I never knew how much of that hurt... poor little thing. I fucked up grandly. Leave it to Danny to find a way to squirm his way out of this and make me the villain.”

“Not being party to their conversation, I cannot comment on the last, but I feel the root of this present discord lies in trust, something for which I laid very fertile ground. Another blow in that area was bound to be received poorly. Gregory does not trust his father, that much is true, but it has ever been true. What is new is a question if you can be trusted, either. If there is a thing for which to apologize, it is that you held from him information. Gregory knows that you worked tirelessly to provide for him a good life, he remarks upon that often. Be sincere that you did not predict his reaction to your words and actions and are sorry for them. That they were done to protect him and shield him from what you felt were harsher truths. He will forgive, I have full faith, though it might
“Take some time for him to say so.”

“That your expert analysis?”

“It is.”

“Then I suppose I should listen to it. You’re supposed to be a genius.”

“I am.”

“And humble.”

“It is one of my more stellar qualities, though I have an abundance of others which shine nearly as brightly.”

“I can see why Greg loves you, Mycroft. Just as I can see, and have always seen, why I didn’t particularly love Danny. I should have talked about this with Greg a long time ago, I suppose. Been honest with him from the start.”

“Something that did not seem warranted until this moment. Gregory and I have both vowed to work on communication, which is not his strength, either, if we are to be honest. Perhaps that is the manner in which to broach your next conversation with your son.”

“You’re probably right. Whenever that conversation actually happens. I’ll assume he’ll be staying with you for awhile, until he cools down.”

“And I will do my utmost to hasten that event. Gregory’s upset is more generalized than specific, and I am confident I can help him realize this and speak to you about it.”

“I would appreciate it. Well, can I buy you some lunch?”

“That sounds delightful. I suspect Gregory is in need of some time alone and I will respect his wishes.”

“Then lunch it is. But, Mycroft… do what you can to protect him from his father, alright. Emotional 6-year old or not, Danny Lestrade wasn’t the man Greg needed in his life and I can’t imagine that has changed much. Do what you can to make sure Greg doesn’t get hurt again, alright?”

And, from my very pointed look, realize that ‘do what you can’ is my way of saying do what it takes to get that bastard away from my son so Greg doesn’t suffer any more than he already has.

“I will. Rest assured that is certainly my intention.”

“Good. Glad we understand each other.”

We do, dear Mother Lestrade. And our understanding will be acted upon as soon as I have verified that Gregory is safe, well and have soothed his distress. Fortunately, I am most skilled at ridding myself of nuisances and Mr. Daniel Lestrade is not likely one of the more tenacious ones. A few pushes of selected levers and he will surely be on his way. And those levers will make scarcely a dent in his personal accounts, not that his Gregory will ever be the wiser…
“Master Gregory! This is a surprise. Please do come in.”

Lestrade peered around the door of the small office and tried not to look guilty for showing up unannounced and uninvited at Grandmama’s house, but he hadn’t known where else to go. Not home, because Mycroft would find him there and want to talk, when the last thing he wanted to do right now was talk! Except… it was also exactly what he wanted to do, just not to Mycroft. Or Mum. Certainly not Dad. They were all in the middle of this and… he needed a fresh perspective. Something more objective and honest. Grandmama was good for that, when she wasn’t acting out her own bit of theater, but that was different. Or not. His brain just didn’t want to work!

“Gregory? Are you going to come in?”

“Oh… sorry, Edwards. I was hoping to talk to Grandmama. Is she here?”

“Madam is at home, yes, however, she is currently occupied with a rather pressing matter. Can you wait? I cannot guarantee when she will be free, but I do know she would be happy to see you.”

“I… yeah, I can wait. I’m not in a hurry for anything.”

Edwards didn’t need his years working with Mrs. Holmes to deduce the young man hesitant to enter his office was upset and in need of someone to listen to his troubles. Fortunately, listening was a talent he possessed in hefty quantity.

“Very good. I was preparing to enjoy a late lunch, if you would care to join me. A simple thing in the kitchen, I’m afraid, but our cook doesn’t allow that to prevent her being rather lavish with her portions.”

He’d had no appetite earlier, but Lestrade’s stomach quickly changed its mind on the subject and thought, now, that food was an excellent idea. At very least, it would absorb some of the acid that seemed to be eating a hole through it at a rather frightening rate.

“That sounds good. Simple and plenty. My sort of meal.”

“Excellent, then let us be at it.”

Lestrade followed the older man towards the kitchen and gratefully accepted his heaping plate and large mug of tea.

“If it is not out of place, might I ask why you wish to see Madam, Master Gregory? Perhaps there is something I can do for you in the meantime while we wait for her to be free.”

“Can you wave a wand and make people honest?”

“If I could, I believe I would be more of an assistance to Mrs. Holmes than I am already. I wonder how that would affect my wages? I’m due for a rise.”

“It’d be of help to me, too, but I can’t do much about your pay. I can throw a few bags of sweets your way, though, if that helps.”

“Show me the merchandise and we can talk.”

“It’s a deal.”
“Out of curiosity, however, to what use would I put my magical truth wand?”

“Wave it over my fuc… flaming family and get them to just be honest. Or make them smarter and more responsible, in Dad’s case. I guess it needs to be a multi-purpose tool.”

“My personal sonic screwdriver?”

“Perfect! Does Grandmama know people who can make one?”

“I shall draft a memo about that very thing. However, that does not address the reason for its need. I take it there have been developments in your family situation with your father now returned.”

“Dad… I genuinely don’t know if it’s good or bad he’s back. I thought it was a disaster, at first, but now…”

“Has something changed in your relationship with him?”

“I don’t know! I just… I suppose I just learned some things and they’re making me think. Right now, with everything else going on, that’s punishingly hard to do.”

“Overloaded?”

“That’s a good word for it.”

“Something we all suffer, at times, but it is rather like a tempering of metal… we develop skills and strategies, identify resources and mechanisms to raise the threshold for that occurring in the future and manage it when it does. For example, you have Master Mycroft as a resource, as well as your mother, both closer to home. Why were those not effective for this situation?”

“Because Mum’s part of the problem and Mycroft…”

“Is there still a rift between you?”

“Not really. But, for this… it’s hard to trust that he will be truthful with me and not just tell me something he thinks will make me feel better.”

“In an attempt to prove his abilities as a considerate and comforting partner?”

“Probably. We have our own problems and I don’t think he’d want to upset the apple cart by saying something I might not want to hear.”

“Even if it was honest?”

“I don’t know. That’s the problem… I just don’t know right now. And it hurts to add that to everything else I have to think about.”

“Would you be aggrieved if I say that should be the first thing to address with Master Mycroft when next you see him?”

“No, because I know you’re right. I just… I just don’t want that time to be now. I’ve got too much… school, Dad, the boys, Mum, work, Dad, Mycroft, Mum and Dad, applying to be a policeman, Dad and Mum…”

“And you sought to distance yourself from all of that so a clean wind might blow through your mind?”
“Something like that.”

“Often an effective strategy. Step away from a situation and surround yourself with various stimuli not directly related to the problem. I am certain Madam will be happy to provide whatever stimuli might be helpful for you or allow you the time you might need for those stimuli to do their duty.”

“I… I was wondering about that. If I could stay a day or so and just breathe awhile.”

“We do have pleasant air.”

“It’s one of the nicer things about visiting here. All the pleasant air.”

The two men quietly ate their lunch a moment and Edwards waited for the inevitable next bit of woe to come from their young visitor. It was a terrible thing to see any of Mrs. Holmes’s family in distress and what assistance he could render, he would, though Mrs. Holmes would surely add her own personal touch the very first moment she could.

“Edwards…”

“Master Gregory?”

“Did Mrs. Holmes have my dad investigated?”

“Yes. I conducted the inquiries myself, actually.”

“Did you… did you find anything… well, anything?”

“A diversity of jobs, a variety of flats, a plethora of female companions… none of which lingered long in his life…”

“That sounds like Dad.”

“He is not entirely destitute, though his bank balance would not successfully finance a one of Master Sherlock’s beloved pots of chocolate.”

“That also sounds like Dad.”

“He has wrested copies of each of your school photographs from the original photographer.”

“What?”

“Every year, your father obtains a copy of your school photograph.”

“Oh.”

“You were also in a sports program, were you not? He has a copy of your team photograph, as well.”

“I… Mum paid the fee for a year, but I had just as much fun with my own mates and our foolish matches, so I told her one year was enough. Dad really got a copy of the photo?”

“Some other small inquiries indicate that he has taken steps to stay abreast of your various adventures.”

“He… he said he had.”
“Was there anything specific you desired to know?”

“Not really. Just…”

“Trying to broaden your picture?”

“You said resources, right? Information is resources, isn’t it?”

“That it is. And a powerful resource is information, one of the most powerful, in point of fact.”

Another few minutes of silent eating passed before Edwards caught the characteristic intake of breath that preceded another probing question.

“Do you… from what you’ve read and such… what’s your opinion of my Dad?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t dare…”

“Yeah, you would since I’m asking. It’d help, actually. Fresh perspective, and all that.”

Edwards wiped his mouth and made some show of thinking about the question before answering.

“A rapscallion.”

“Brilliant.”

“I believe so. A man who does not mean any harm, but does not understand or predict the harm he does cause. A mischief-maker, but without malice. However, that does not erase the sadness or upset he may leave in his wake.”

“No, it doesn’t, I suppose.”

“Reminds of an uncle of mine. A droll individual, quite the entertainer at family holiday gatherings, a world of fun to have with you at the races or for a drink at your local tavern. But…”

“Yeah?”

“Not one to whom to loan money. Or call for advice on any matter of seriousness. Certainly not to whom to entrust an ailing pet or relation in their time of need. He has his place, his use and one cannot actually find fault with his heart for it is not a dark one. But one relates to him knowing these things and sets expectations accordingly.”

“Doesn’t that… it’s not really fair to the family is it? Bloke gets to do as he pleases and everyone ignores the bad because there’s some good?”

“You certainly do not ignore the negative and when it causes problems, you address the issues accordingly and with a firm hand. However, those individuals… one often holds them at arm’s length and manages them appropriately. Do not invest in them what you cannot afford to lose. But, if there is gain to be had… reap it, do not allow it to go to seed.”

“You mean have fun when you can, but don’t expect them to hold your hand in hospital.”

“That is a successful summary.”

“Is it supposed to be this hard?”

“Oh yes. Once one abandons the wearing of sailor suits and carrying lollies, one does not expect
life to be easy. Satisfying, joyful, interesting, fun... but not easy. We work for all of that, suffer sometimes... but gain a bonus reward of growth and wisdom.”

“You’re saying Dad’s a growing experience.”

“Would you deny it?”

“No, actually I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t at all.”

“I am most certain Madam will have a far more penetrating and comprehensive analysis and will shed a great deal more light on your predicament, but from my own experiences I will say that there are scant few individuals who are truly so worthless that they cannot be mined for, if not gold, then some form of useful ore.”

“That’s a touch mercenary.”

“Is that a problem?”

“No... might be a solution, actually.”

“Are we turning buccaneer, Master Gregory?”

“Puts me on better footing than I was when I came here.”

“How lucky for you.”

“And what is the reason Gregory has found good fortune?”

Greg’s head whirled around to see the new arrival, so he missed the smirk that lit up Edwards face. Mrs. Holmes really should have that left sole looked at. It made quite the distinctive ‘schitp’ sound when she was approaching and ‘schleep’ when she was walking away...

“I'm turning pirate.”

“Well, the family does have precedent, so you shall be in good, if infamous, company. Now, might I know the reason why you are flying the proverbial Jolly Roger?”

“Would Madam care to join us for tea to accompany her edification?”

“Is it strong?”

“Master Gregory’s help might be needed for you to lift your cup.”

“Then, by all means. I do believe that the punishment for one’s past sins is to be closeted with a room filled with ambassadors who have yet to see their nappy changed or provided with their afternoon bottle. A good cup of tea might take some of the sting out of the chastisement.”

Grandmama took a prim, but determined seat at the small kitchen table and Lestrade made a vow to visit more often without Mycroft or the boys. Apparently, the hair got let down a bit when it was just the mums at home.

“And, Gregory... I will say that this is somewhat of a surprise. A pleasant one, but a surprise nonetheless. There is nothing wrong, I hope.”

“That... that depends on your point of view, I guess.”
“Most cryptic. Are you certain the pirate’s life suits you? An aged, practitioner of vaguely dark arts might be a more fulfilling career path.”

Tea in the kitchen was definitely going to be something to repeat often in the future…

“I’ll keep that in mind if policing doesn’t work.”

“Excellent. And, now, the point of your visit?”

Lestrade cut eyes at Edwards who gave his very best ‘go on, lad’ nod, and took a deep breath before starting talking. He wasn’t sure if he breathed again until he was finished.

“Dear me, this is rather more entertaining than the daytime television dramas.”

Once a fucking month, tea in the kitchen. That was now part of Lestrade’s life’s agenda.

“Welcome to my life. I just wish I understood it all.”

“In that, you simply lack the proper life experiences, though you are acquiring them at a somewhat bracing pace. Having a son and grandsons, I understand your own mother’s choices, though they may be distressing to you now. And I have known men aplenty like your father. They have their uses, though they do wreak their fair share of havoc. What does Mycroft say on the matter?”

“About Mum, I don’t know. I… I sort of went off in a snit during that conversation and kept on going. I’ll have to phone at some point to let him know where I am. About Dad… he thinks Dad isn’t entirely full of shite about wanting to get to know me again.”

“Mycroft is trained to evaluate an individual’s motives, even if they are taking pains to hide them.”

“That’s a tad unsettling, just so you know.”

“Mycroft will be most pleased. He does enjoy being perceived as an unsettling presence.”

“You’re probably right. It doesn’t help a lot right now, though. I’m still…”

“Off-footed?”

“Yes, ma’am. I was wondering… would it be alright if I stayed here tonight? I just need to be away from it all for a little while. I know it’s probably not the brave thing to do, but…”

“Nonsense. A strategic retreat is often the most difficult decision to make and, as often, the wisest. Why do you think so many great individuals have their own little hideaways, even if it is only a room in their home, a cottage in the woods or a potting shed in the garden? A place to forget for a time the problems of the day and clear the mind. In fact, I would recommend two nights, at minimum. One to clear the mind and one to restore the spirit. More, if you feel you can be away from your family for longer.”

“I don’t know about that… I’ve got school. And work.”

“I feel certain that will not be an impediment.”

“Grandmama… don’t have my uncle tossed in jail or something.”

“Perish the thought… that would increase the need for you to man the till. Quite contrary to our
needs, I would think.”

“That it would.”

Lestrade felt a real smile start across his lips as the tightness in his chest began to loosen. He’d thought long and hard about coming here but it had been the right decision. Of course, Mycroft would likely have a very different reaction, and somewhat of a heart attack, but… he’d return the favor at some point. Actually, this could be considered calling in a favor for all the bloody times he’d been left alone with the boys while Mycroft swanned about London. Oh, that was a happy thought. And Mycroft had exams this week! Hee hee… have fun revising with Dad’s favorite baby chimps gibbering about and tossing banana peels at your head.

“Maybe two days would be what the doctor ordered. Want some earplugs for when I tell Mycroft?”

“Heaven forbid. That is an entertainment I would scarcely want to miss. Now, if you will excuse me, I have ambassadors who are surely done with whatever they substitute for thinking and require me to score their efforts. Do make yourself at home, Gregory. If possible, I will join you for dinner.”

“Thanks, Grandmama. I appreciate this. A lot. I think it’s really going to help.”

“Anything for family, dear boy.”

Rising to draw Grandmama’s chair out for her, Lestrade missed the look she gave her PA, which thanked him for looking after her grandson and empowering him to continue doing so during his stay. Dear Gregory needed concerned eyes on him at the moment and none would be spared while he was in residence. It was difficult enough to manage a Holmes family, let alone another on top of it. The child needed some relief… perhaps there were a few ideas to pursue in that arena. Certainly something on which to ponder while pretending to listen to yet another political tirade by individuals with very little skill with presenting a proper tirade. It might be worth considering the renting of Sherlock to interested parties for lessons in tirades, tantrums, declarations, proclamations and holding one’s breath until one received what one desired. The boy would likely fetch a very good price and one did not ignore easy profit, no matter the size of one’s current accounts...

“Once again?”

“Mycroft, I know you’re not deaf so stop pretending you are.”

“But, my dear…”

“I’m sorry, love, but I’m taking a couple of days to shake my head and let the loose bits fall out.”

“Gregory, can you not return home so we might discuss the events of today? I assure you my full attention.”

“We will talk when I’m home, Mycroft, but right now I just need a bit of time to look at things with my own eyes and make my own peace with the situation. I’m tired, my head’s muddled and I really could use the rest.”

“But… the children!”

“Are half yours, by our strange family arithmetic.”
“Y…yes. That is true, however… they are particularly rambunctious at the moment.”

“Already making you loony?”

“I am currently viewing a pasta map of Africa on the library table.”

“That’s not loony-making.”

“The pasta is cooked, Gregory. And sauced. The cooking performed by Sherlock and John without Cook’s permission so you can imagine the state of the kitchen.”

“Fond memories, Mycroft. All that makes for very fond memories. Try to gather lots while I’m here, alright?”

“Oh…”

“Brave heart, love. Brave heart. Call Mum for me, too, will you? Tell her I’m fine and not to worry when the school calls and asks why I’m not exactly attending at the moment.”

“GREGORY!”

“You negotiate international crises, Mycroft, you can manage Mum.”

“She did purchase my lunch this afternoon, so I assume we have somewhat mended fences. I fear this might hammer out a few slats, however.”

“All my fault. You can commiserate over what a rotten person I am. Really, Mycroft… between Dad, Mum, everything else… just a little time, alright. I need to get some things sorted and that’s not going to happen with all those voices clattering about in my ears. Love, I don’t ask you for much…”

“I know… I do know that, Gregory, and it is to my shame that I cannot claim the same.”

“Then be happy you can do this for me when I need it.”

“Has Grandmama been coaching you in negotiation tactics?”

“No, that’s all me. Like it?”

“I find it most arousing.”

“Then you hold onto that feeling and I’ll collect when I’m home. Actually, you’re supposed to visit Saturday, aren’t you? That’s an idea…”

“Gregory, that is ages away!”

“No, it’s only a small extension to my original plan. It’d be silly to go home only to turn around and come straight back, now wouldn’t it?”

“And now you are being efficient. Truly, the mighty weapons are in use today.”

“Have to with you, your formidable bastard.”

“Compliments! Verily I feel lightheaded.”

“You’ll manage. You’ve got plenty of pasta, apparently, to keep up your blood sugar.”

“I am not entirely certain it was cooked in water. There is a vaguely petrochemical odor about
their bit of cartography.”

“Sherlock’s special cleaning fluid?”

“Not quite, a touch more kerosene-y.”

“Then it’s a new blend. Keep the matches away just in case.”

“I shall. Will you phone, my beloved?”

“I promise I’ll phone.”

“And write?”

“Mycroft…”

“The post is swift! Or, even better, you could write a letter in the morning and have one of Grandmama’s diplomatic couriers deliver it before…”

“Mycroft! You go off to London for ever and a day and I hardly hear a word from you!”

Lestrade could hear the petulant brooding all the way from home and if it wasn’t so adorable he might be a tad miffed at the hypocrisy.

“Tit for tat does not suit you.”

“You’re precious, you know that? Precious as one of those toddlers who smooshes up their faces when they’re not given the toy they want.”

“My face is certainly not smooshed.”

“I bet it is and you look as cute as a smooshed toddler can be.”

“You could be here enjoying it in person.”

“Nah, my imagination is good enough. It can make you naked, too. Actually, I think I’ll let that sit in my head awhile.”

“Something else you could enjoy in person if you were home.”

“I’ll be home… just not now. The ship is yours, captain. Guide her well.”

“I’m in agony.”

“Sherlock probably has a salve for that. Goodbye, love. I’ll phone later and see if you’re alive.”

“How amusing.”

“Smooshy face… don’t let John see you or he’ll take a snap with that camera of his.”

“Remind me why I love you?”

“Dunno. I’ll give it a think and make a list if I can find a pencil. Love you, too.”

Setting down the receiver, Lestrade shimmied in the chair and almost experienced a pang of guilt at how free he felt at the moment. No husband, no kids, no parents… oh yes, this was absolutely what he needed. Along with the enormous bathtub in his room. And the lovely spot of brandy waiting for
him afterwards. Didn’t matter if he might have to dodge ambassadors in the corridor, this was turning out to be a grand day all around… and his little holiday was only beginning…

Gregory Lestrade… what a despicable villain. That he deserved every possible measure of mental and physical rest was entirely beside the point. That rest should be in the arms of the man who loved him! Of course, those arms would, concomitantly, have to hold at bay the children who were already escalating their nonsense, something which the newest player on their game board seemed to serve as fuel. Dental plaster… where did Sherlock believe he was going to find that! And Mother Lestrade… she might not ache as savagely as his beloved, but she did ache, owing, in large part, to this new set of troubles with her son. Oh Gregory… his love was so very disturbed, levity on the phone notwithstanding. Well, there was nothing for it today, as there was far too much to tend to with the children and his own studies, but tomorrow, after his by-phone exam… there would be time to make some adjustments to the population of the heretofore-mentioned game board. For that, it was, perhaps, most fortunate that Gregory was enjoying his little rest and would only hear the tale after his return…

“Mycroft! Oh, this is a surprise. A good one, too. Come in! Lucky you caught me, I was thinking of going out to meet a few people. Share a few stories, have a few drinks… plenty of time for you, though. Have a seat! Greg’s not with you? Oh, that’s right. School day.”

“Actually, Gregory is taking a small holiday at the moment. He did not have the most pleasant of conversations with his mother after he left you and required a respite to restore himself.”

“Shit. I knew when my mouth started running it was stupid. He didn’t blame his mum for things, did he? I told him it wasn’t her fault. None of it was, not a bit.”

“Regardless, he was most unnerved and required some time to find his balance.”

“Oh. Well, that shows again he’s a smart lad. You… you didn’t go with him?”

“I shall join him on Saturday. I have several examinations this week and someone must mind the children, of course.”

“Right! Forgot those little buggers for a minute. I can keep watch on them if you’d like. I know I might not be your first choice, but I’m actually good with little scamps like those. Not like when I was young, when I’d forget Greg at the dentist because I’d found a good game of cards going on… those days are long behind me! What examinations are you sitting? Smart lad like you… could almost be in Uni now.”

“I am, actually. I formally start in residence in the fall term, but I am making some advanced progress while I have the opportunity.”

“Brilliant! Really, that’s amazing. Greg found himself a jewel, he did. Let me know, though, if you need someone to keep the boys occupied for awhile. I never was very good at exams… or school… but I know it can be hard to concentrate when you’ve got all their energy about you.”

At least someone in the Lestrade family understood his desperate plight. Unfortunately, it had to be the family’s flea-plagued hound.

“You are most kind, but I do not believe it will be necessary. Actually, I am here to discuss your availability for such things, so on that we might make a start.”
“Want to hire me? I could use the job and you’ll get family rates. I can take Sherlock and John to school, see they get their schoolwork done when they come home, find them something to do while you and Greg tend to other, more adult things. And I mean like an evening out, not something torrid, though I can take those little ones to a film now and then to give you the run of the house. Plenty of… interesting… places for a spot of adult fun in that house of yours, am I right?”

“I certainly have no idea what you mean. In any case… I was hoping to discover how long you intend to remain in our lovely area?”

“Oh! Well, I don’t have a particular timetable. Knock about, have a holiday of my own… see if there are any jobs open that I might find interesting… have a nice time with my son and his new family…”

“I see. So there is nothing concrete holding you in place.”

“I wouldn’t say that. Greg is as concrete a reason as a man could ask for. I know he wonders if I’m telling the truth about wanting to get to know him, Mycroft, but I am. I absolutely am and I can’t think of a reason more important for staying in place than getting to know my son.”

“Quite. Yes, that is certainly a worthy cause. However, I wonder if, perhaps, a small respite from your quest might be in order?”

“What’s that mean?”

“Well, you have made your original salvo and there is often a tactical benefit to allowing that to simmer before making another strike.”

“You’ve been watching war films lately, haven’t you, lad? Not exactly my favorite, but the battles can be fun to watch.”

“No, I am not a particularly ardent military enthusiast.”

“I like action-y films, myself. Or a good comedy. Some of those really old ones are super! You hire me to watch the boys and we’ll do lots of films. Let me guess – they can eat their weight in popcorn, can’t they? Most boys can… fill those little bellies with a good dinner and they can still find room for treats at the cinema. Greg was amazing for that. His mother would fill his plate twice and then we’d take in a film while he ate the largest popcorn my pockets could afford. Ran it all off playing, of course, but… yeah, I see those two tots being the same way.”

All his life, Mycroft had believed himself rather too fond of words, but, apparently, there were those in the universe who had a greater fondness for them than him.

“Yes, what a delightful traipse down the trail of memory. Going back to my original point, I was rather suggesting the prudence of taking a step back and allowing Gregory the time to process this reunion so that he might internalize the experience and come to grips with the emotions it engenders.”

“You know I have no idea what you’re saying right? Which is fantastic! Shows my son is truly a smart lad if he can keep up with you. And you’re raising those two boys to understand what you’re saying, so their little brains are going be smart, too. I believe that, you know. Raise kids with smart people and they’ll be smarter because of it. Greg was lucky his mum is an intelligent woman… he certainly inherited her intelligence and I’m ever so thankful for it.”

This was like conversing with Sherlock when he was being his most recalcitrant!
“Do pardon me… I become rather used to discussing matters with individuals who value the quantity of words over their quality and I become a touch needlessly garrulous at times.”

Yes, please smile at me as if you are most impressed with my polysyllabic speech. This is highly exasperating, you horrid man, and if I do not require a rather large brandy when this conversation is complete, I will deeply surprised.

“In any case…”

Oh, cut to the chase, you ridiculous orator.

“… you have mentioned, now several times, that you are in need of gainful employment. Perhaps I might be of assistance with that.”

“You know where there’s a job open? I’d appreciate that, Mycroft. Can’t live on good looks and charm alone forever. Well, I mean you can if you find lonely women who don’t mind paying for your upkeep, but…”

“That is not a career path one associates with good character. I was thinking of something else, actually. I know this is not a fertile time to secure well-paying employment, so I propose to offer, shall we say, a cushion to prolong the time required for you to find something which meets your exacting standards. A fulfilling position that will support you in your current residence for as long as you find it interesting.”

“You want to pay me to find a job?”

“That is not an entirely incorrect way to phrase things. I am well aware that there are few opportunities in this particular area, but, surely, with your wealth of connections and keen eye for the comings and goings around you, you will, at some point, discover something to your liking. In the region of your current permanent address, of course.”

“Oh… I think I’m catching your meaning.”

Finally!

“And, now that I think about it… there was a rather promising business venture I’ve had my eye on.”

YES! The leopard shows its spots! Oh, happy day… there was little easier to manipulate than those with an avaricious streak…

“How felicitous. I imagine you to be quite the entrepreneur when you have a mind for it.”

“Does that mean I’m a good businessman?”

“After a fashion.

“Well, you’re not wrong. I’m not the best with all the financial bits, but I’m very good with customer service and whatnot. And giving deliverymen a good knock when they’re lax on the job.”

“Excellent. And you say you say you have something in mind for this?”

“I might. Of course, it’s not cheap…”

Hallelujah!
“Nothing of quality ever is.”

“And I don’t have much of what one might call a.. credit history.”

“Many do not. These are hard times, you know.”

“That I do. However, if someone was hoping to… invest… in this, I expect they’d see a very good return on it.”

“That is most intriguing. And it is a proper fit for your skills?”

“I think so. I’ve done a lot of things in this life, you know, and that makes a fellow… what’s the word.. versatile! Never really tried my hand at being the boss, though. Having a little something on my own. Skills are skills, though, whether you give them away or use them for yourself.”

“Well… that does sound promising. You know, I am always in search of advantageous investment opportunities.”

“Are you? Well, I suppose being a young lad doesn’t hamper a good business sense, does it? Especially one as smart as you. Think… this might interest you?”

If it removes you from Gregory’s life, you infernal parasite, then yes. It interests me immeasurably.

“I believe it does. In fact…”

One comes prepared if one is serious about an initiative.

“… I have my chequebook with me, by good fortune. Let me see…”

Was this the time for frugality? No, it most certainly was not.

“… might this do?”

Ogle the number of zero’s, villain, and make the correct choice, for my next option is not one you will find nearly as profitable. Or enjoyable.

“Are you serious?”

“Do I appear as if I am joking?”

“No, but… this is a lot of money, Mycroft. More than… well, that I’ve ever seen or hoped to see in this world. I can really use it? Can you spare this?”

“You did say there would be return on the capital, did you not?”

“I did! And I’m not lying about that, either.”

Of course not. Not at all. Marvel at my complete belief of your words. Not a whit of incredulity in evidence. No, not one single whit.

“I am most certain that is the case. And what a joy it is to assist my Gregory’s family with such a positive and profitable venture. I assume you will make use of this with some alacrity, correct?”

“What?”

“You will quickly act upon the opportunity?”
“Yes! Yes, I will. I’ll get started today, in fact. Get in touch with a solicitor I know, make a few other calls… does Big George still have cars for hire?”

“Big George?”

“His Dad sold cars when we were young and he had a little side business hiring them out when his father wasn’t looking. He’s got his own boy named George, now, too. George the Third, actually, which is something I’m going to give George the Second grief over when I see him. Maybe I’ll do that today, actually.”

“Ah, yes… I know to whom you are referring and he does sell automobiles to this day. I am certain he will allow you to hire one for your purposes.”

Especially as soon as I make the arrangements and ensure they are very much to his benefit.

“Fantastic! Hate to have to take the train back home or a bus when I’ve got lots to do and want to do it quickly. Thanks for this, Mycroft. You won’t be sorry, I promise you that.”

“It is my own joy to see you eager to begin this new chapter of your life.”

A chapter that lacks my Gregory as a character, which is the only important thing in my mind right now.

“You’re a fine fellow, lad. Really, my Greg couldn’t have found better. I’m going to get right on this, just as I said. You’ll… you’ll tell Greg for me, right? That his old dad is going to make something of himself? That I’ll do him proud?”

“Absolutely and I know he will be of glad heart when he hears the news.”

“Thank you! Thank you a hundred times. This is… this is completely unexpected…”

By someone who does not know you, perhaps.

“… but I won’t look the gift horse in the mouth.”

“I am terribly gratified. Now, if you will excuse me, I do have a rather full day and it has only begun.”

“Sure! No problem with that. I’ve got things to do now, myself, besides warm a stool with a pint in my hand.”

Mycroft’s years of practice kept the disgust off of his face as he rose and shook his adversary’s hand, though it erupted full force when he was out the door and behind the wheel of his car. What an odious man! Well, Mother Lestrade would be very happy to know she was correct in her assessment of his character and that the problem was now one of the past. And, when his Gregory returned, he would return to still waters, which was a gift he was delighted to bestow. Protect his spouse’s physical, as well as mental, well-being… in his own life that was now a guiding principle and one that he held fast in his heart. A heart that would join with its mate in only a few days…

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Not that those few days were quick in coming. Good heavens, but Sherlock and John were… vivacious. It had taken a herculean effort to curtail their more chaotic tendencies, ensure their schoolwork was completed and set aside an hour here and there for his own preparations for his exams, which his forethought had ensured were conducted in a very efficient and child-friendly
fashion. Fortunately, they had not mentioned the notable absence of Gregory’s father and, with their extremely-overflowing basket of entertainments, it was likely they would not notice until such time as he had broached the subject with his love. It had been a rather hectic time of late but, now, it was finally time to relax and enjoy the leisurely ride to Grandmama’s and join his beloved for a day of frolic.

“No! I am not eating a worm! I don’t care if its already dead!”

“You squeamishness severely reduces your use to science, John Watson!”

Of course, frolic could be interpreted in so many different ways…

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“Mycroft!”

“Where is our greeting?”

“Can I have another breath, Sherlock?”

“Breathing is boring.”

“Good to see you, too.”

Lestrade took his lover in a much-needed kiss and took pains to catastrophically-ruffle both Sherlock and John’s hair.

“My hair! I don’t want to look like a hobo when I see Grandmama.”

Oh yes, must remember that John’s vanity was something of a force of nature.

“Don’t worry, John. We’ll give it a comb before you start your visit. Grandmama is finishing a few things, but we can begin on the tea, chocolate and nibbles.”

With the expected cheer and rocketing away of the two boys, Lestrade took the opportunity to give Mycroft another kiss and long, firm hug.

“I missed you, love.”

“And I missed you, Gregory. Are you… are you better, my dear?”

“I am! This was just what I needed. Really, I feel worlds better and… well, we’ll talk about the and. Come on, we don’t want to have Sherlock and John clear the food, do we?”

Mycroft wasn’t entirely certain if he should be relieved or worried, but settled for curious, and let that carry him along behind his partner to find the boys, who were happily making Lestrade’s prediction a reality.

“Leave some for us, you greedy things.”

“Pfft. You have been indulging yourself shamefully at Grandmama’s table, peasant, and do not think John and I are unaware of that fact. While we have been subsisting on gruel and grubs, you have been feasting like the king you most certainly are not.”

“Yeah! Gruel and grubs!”
“Love, you put the boys on a diet?”

“The thought had crossed my mind, if only to reduce their supply of readily-available energy, however, that is most certainly not the case. The breakfast they enjoyed, for example, would happily have nourished the most pampered of prancelings.”

“That is a lie! Was there chocolate present? No, there was not. You hope to break our spirits, Fatcroft, but you will not succeed.”

Lestrade leaned in and nuzzled Mycroft’s neck before whispering in his ear.

“They’ve been a handful, haven’t they?”

“Decidedly. I believe they stockpile their more troublesome behaviors for the times I am alone to battle against them.”

“I doubt it. You’re just not used fighting that battle alone.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes and glared as Lestrade strolled towards the tray of refreshments, flashing his most wicked grin as he walked.

“You are enjoying my pain. I feel most ill-used.”

“Poor thing. Come here and I’ll give a rub to whatever aches.”

If the children were not present, that offer would be quickly accepted and his lover knew the anticipation would be its own source of discomfort. What an incomparable foe…

“There will be no salacious utterances while I am present.”

“Are you chaperoning again, Sherlock?”

“Someone must, lackey. Mycroft’s libido has not found outlet in recent days and that imperils both John and my eyesight since he is most likely, if sexually provoked, to leap upon you and scandalously, as well as ineptly, enact his lusts.”

“Love, can you keep your lusts in check until we’re home.”

“I shall do my best.”

“There you go, Sherlock. Not a bit of scandal to worry about.”

But, on that note…

“However, my dear… your rather cryptic comment a moment has given me a measure of pause.”

“I’m getting good at cryptic aren’t I! If I didn’t already have my career chosen, I’d have other options to pursue, at least. And that’s a good bit of what I meant, too. I got my paperwork in. For applying to the police force, I mean.”

“You… you did? When did this occur?”

“This week! Edwards ‘just happened’ to have a copy of the application package…”

Gregory’s use of air quotes was clearly understood by Mycroft, who was well aware of Edwards and Grandmama’s skill at ‘happy coincidences.’
“… and he helped me fill it out. I did most of it on my own, but Edwards helped a bit with some of the wording for the longer written parts. Tidied up a few verbs and adjectives and the lot.”

“Gregory! That is wonderful news. I know you have been somewhat trepidatious about the application process, so I am delighted to hear you have seen it done.”

“Me, too. There’s still a lot to do, some tests and interviews, but… someone may have copies of the various training manuals, testing guidelines and the lot to help prepare.”

“My dear… such an admirable use of personal connections. I am most impressed, though somewhat astonished by the fact.”

‘I know! But, it’s nothing more than any bloke might have if their brother or dad was on the job. Maybe some of it is even available if you ask at the local station or visit the library. I don’t know, but Edwards ‘just happened’ to have that, too, so why turn a blind eye to useful resources when they’re staring you right in the face?”

“You have my wholehearted agreement. I am very happy with this particular turn of events.”

And that his partner was willingly accepting help to attain his goals. Not that he could not reach his heart’s desire on his own, but Gregory had been so stressed and strained of late, that any easement of the mundanities of the application process was certainly to be celebrated.

“Why can’t Grandmama get the answers to all of my exams?”

“Grandmama did not obtain for Gregory quite that degree of assistance, John, for that would be patently dishonorable. If, however, you would like to have additional books and materials delivered to supplement your current texts, I am certain she would happily see it done.”

“More books? No, thank you. I can hardly lift the ones I have now!”

“Then we shall leave matters as is.”

“Well, since I’ve seen the last of my own books, schoolbooks at least, I can help you carry yours, John, to rest your weary little arms.”

Three pairs of eyes fixed on Lestrade, who leaned back on the sofa, with his hands behind his head and a large grin on his face.

“Will you be so kind as to explain that, my dear?”

“Someone you know, who might be me, is officially done with school.”

“WHAT! That is unacceptable! You are far less intelligent and replete with knowledge than am I!”

“Sorry, Sherlock, but you’re not old enough to leave school. Besides you’re going to need all those A levels to get into college. Grandmama had a chat with my headteacher and he agrees that my time is better used preparing for work. I don’t know when I’ll find out about my application, but a little time to focus on things other than classes is going to be a welcome thing. Decide what I’m going to do about housing and start looking for my flat if that’s the direction I choose to go, for instance. I’m not certain, but I do know that with all the drama going on, school for me hasn’t been terribly educational lately and that probably won’t change while Dad’s here, so… get that off my back and breathe a little easier.”
Sherlock and John scowled ferociously, but Mycroft silently gave a shout of glee. His Gregory’s small respite had reaped tremendous benefits, apparently, and if there was anyone who deserved such glad tidings, it was certainly his lover.

“Again, I applaud your decision, Gregory. Your argument is well-reasoned and the very idea most inspired.”

“Thanks! I have to admit I feel a lot lighter with all of that settled. Like I can go home and face anything that gets tossed my way.”

“Then we might consider making a small, quiet holiday a more regular occurrence for you in the future.”

“The peasant should not have his sluggardly nature rewarded! He should be horsewhipped for his laziness and lack of dedication to self-improvement, which should be a priority for him since he is among the lowliest of creatures in existence.”

“Thank you, brother dear, and I am certain Gregory will find something appropriate with which to reward you for your kind assessment of his personal attributes.”

Sherlock’s wet noise made John giggle and Lestrade reveled in the feeling of being reunited with his family. Yes, he would definitely have to take better care of himself in the future, make a real effort to step away when he needed a break and ask for help when he needed it, too. Breaking from stress wasn’t going to help him or his family and it certainly wouldn’t help with enjoying times like these to their fullest.

“Kindness will not help your concubine scratch from the earth some form of productive life. Honesty will and I, as we are well aware, am nothing if not scrupulously honest.”

Really, how poor would life be without times like these… well, they would be boring, even if they weren’t poor and that was just as terrible. A boring life wasn’t one for Gregory Lestrade and that was certainly the life in store for him. Of course, little holidays made the not-boring parts a lot easier to take…

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“Has Grandmama become destitute? I have never been so egregiously denied sustenance.”

“Sherlock, you consumed fully two pots of chocolate on your own and a maharajah’s ransom of biscuits, cake and sandwiches.”

“Which, for you, sea cow, is scarcely a light lunch. I am famished and, undoubtedly, withering to nothing from lack of caloric intake.”

“I’m famished, too!”

John’s sucked-in stomach was a frequent punctuator of his claims of starvation and, again, made a welcome appearance in their conversation.

“There is plentiful food at home and I am certain Cook will prepare for you a hearty snack upon our return.”

“Ugh… boiled weeds and braised tongue, in all likelihood.”

“I don’t want weed and tongue! I don’t even think a witch would want that!”
Deciding not to pursue the magical turn of John’s thinking, Mycroft rubbed the bridge of his nose and chose, instead, to pursue his partner’s spirited laughter.

“I am overjoyed you are finding amusement in this, my dear.”

“It’s leftover relaxation coming out as amusement. But…”

“Yes?”

“I could use a pint after this drive and if these two get chips we can barter that for some quiet later on while we enjoy a good book in front of the fire. Besides, my mates are probably out for a pint or two, as well, and nothing would spoil that faster than hearing of my good fortune. So, trip to the pub? How does that sound?”

Dangerous, in point of fact. The odds the community knew of Gregory’s father’s turning tail was exceedingly high and that particular subject needed to be broached with extreme delicacy. This was not, at all, a good idea.

“Chips!”

“Chips!”

“Beer!”

“Good heavens, Gregory, must you shout?”

“When it comes to beer? Yes. You voting with us, love?”

“I… well, the children are already most filled with treats and I am not confident that further insulting their stomachs with greasy chips is necessarily a good thing for their health.”

“Slander! My stomach is fully capable of digesting today’s sparrow’s portion of food as well as two platters of chips, if I desire it. Peasant! Point the vehicle in the direction of the pub and do not allow it to deviate from course if you value your comfortable position as my manservant!”

“Yeah! We can eat sparrows and chips if we want and not get even a tiny stomach ache!”

“I’m not sure I have the heart to disappoint them, Mycroft.”

“Can we… given the children are rather boisterous at the moment, might we agree that if the pub appears to be bustling, we might forego the experience for the evening and look to another night to satisfy these particular urges?”

“If it’s too busy and these two have too many targets to agitate, we can wait until another time. I’d rather not have my relaxing holiday end with a dust up because Sherlock and John goaded the place into all-out war.”

“That is agreeable.”

Now, one could only hope that there was some activity occurring to occupy the denizens of the village and keep them away from the pub. Would it be possible to clandestinely place a call to bring the circus to town in the next hour? Perhaps a quick petrol stop and use of public telephone was in order… or a sad, yet inevitable, mental collapse that required a rush to hospital. Surely Gregory would not throttle to death a mentally-impaired partner, would he? Unfortunately, he might soon find that out…
“Hurray!”

John raced from the car to the door of the pub, hopping up and down in excitement, much to Lestrade’s amusement and Mycroft’s frustration. Could the boy not see fit to buy him even a modicum of extra time to craft a contingency plan? Or, better yet, an exit strategy?

“Eager for something, John?”

“I’m dying, Greg. I haven’t eaten in… a long time.”

“You poor lamb. Well, we’ll see you sorted in a minute.”

Opening the door, Lestrade let the two empty stomachs race in ahead of him and his partner, though he and Mycroft nearly bowled over the small boys when they walked in and ran into the stock-still forms still standing in the doorway.

“Greg… why is your dad behind the bar?”

“Son! And Mycroft! This is brilliant! First day here and my admirers come out to wish me well! And you, too, Mycroft. After all, you sort of own the place now, along with me, so…”

Leaping out from behind the bar, the older Lestrade darted over to give each of the new arrivals a big hug and push them along to the bar where he waved his arm around proudly.

“Told you, Mycroft! Isn’t this great! Old Charlie has been wanting to sell since his daughter moved to the States and asked him to come along. Nobody had the money to pay what it was worth, though, until you staked me for it. Oh! And I got that solicitor I know to draw up papers, proper ownership papers, too. We can talk about how you want to divide the profits, but I got some advice on, that, as well, and I think you’ll like what I came up with. No cheating my family, no worry about that! I wouldn’t cheat my son-in-law for love nor money. Not even for money! And I’m not going to change a thing here, either, except for a few repairs. It does great business, I have the figures for you to look at when you’d like, and only a fool tinkers with what’s already working wonderfully. Where are my manners, though. First drink is on me! Hold on a moment and I’ll pull a pint for the both of you and find some of that fizzy soda for those two little imps.”

Lestrade’s head cleared just enough to order itself to turn in the proper direction so he could stare at his partner who appeared poised to make a quick and permanent getaway out the door.

“You bought my dad the pub?”

“I… no, not as such, but… yes, that is the appearance of it.”

“You bought my dad the pub?”

“Not by intent… though, in a roundabout way… the whims of fate, you know…”

Bracing for the wholly expected throttling, Mycroft found himself self-choking when his lover burst into laughter and nearly fell off the stool he’d dropped onto when he heard the news.

“Gregory?”

“You bought my dad the pub! You ridiculous prat! Oh, have fun dealing with that mess. You bought the most irresponsible man in England a business! Mum is going to have your bollocks on a
platter for this one, too. You’re doomed…”

Laughing so hard, he could hardly see, Lestrade missed the look on Mycroft’s face, which displayed such an unholy amalgam of emotions and thoughts that the most venerated psychologist in the world would not have a prayer of deciphering it all.

“I am glad you find this so wildly entertaining, my dear.”

“Oh, I do, I do. You tried to buy him off, didn’t you?”

“I… I shall give no confession.”

“Pfft. You tried to pay him to go away and had it blow up in your face. I think that’s the funniest thing in the world! I got some good advice from Edwards and have a fairly sound idea of how to deal with Dad now, but you… you’re in thick! You’re going to have to keep an eye on the ledgers, see the taxes are paid, licenses renewed, take care of things when he gets arrested for doing the sorts of shady things Dad is famous for… HA! And it’ll be me doing the arresting! Oh this is perfect… this really is the very best way this day could end. My Mycroft does his own bit of shadiness and gets his pants tugged over his head as a result. Glorious! And there’s my mates! Bring over my pint, will you? I have a lot of celebrating to do.”

Mycroft glared as Lestrade swaggered over to the table full of his friends, to their loud cheers of congratulations for being the predicted reason for their future discounted nights out. This was… no, disaster was not even the correct term. That man. That Lestrade man. He planned this. Not as stupid as he appeared, apparently. Now there were three Lestrades who could outmaneuver him and that was a demonic record to tear at his soul! Oh, the agony…

“Here you go, lad. And I’ll keep them coming, don’t worry about that. It’s a party, tonight! My first night as proprietor and my family and friends are here to celebrate it with me. Really, this is absolutely the best thing that could happen. What a night! I told you I’d do my son proud and I’ve got my start on that now, thanks to you. Really, Mycroft… I can’t thank you enough.”

Suffering an over-the-bar, nearly-blubbery hug, Mycroft silently died inside and completely missed the growing smiles on the faces of the two small boys that were just overcoming their shocked paralysis.

“Sherlock… you know what this means, don’t you?”

“Yes, John… I do.”

“Chips.”

“All we can possibly consume.”

“For free.”

“Whenever we would like.”

As the clamoring commenced and calls of Papa Lestrade! We need chips! sounded loud and clear, Lestrade leaned back in his chair and admired the happy family scene stretched out in front of him. Yes, this was the funniest thing imaginable, and… he could cope. This, he could deal with. Have a little talk with the boys about remembering who his Dad was and not putting too much faith in anything he said, of course, and having that talk often, but… if he kept an eye on things, their little hearts wouldn’t be too broken if his Dad fucked all this up and went off again to parts unknown. Reap the benefits… that was the right way to think. He knew what to do now, how to protect
himself and his family, but, maybe, also how to enjoy what was on offer, at least as long as it lasted. No, it wouldn’t be as easy as it sounded, but he would never make the mistake of expecting things to be easy. That was certainly a lesson learned…

And here came his suffering partner with a much-needed pint. Oh Mycroft… the things you were going to be doing later to make up for this foolish mess. Filthy, sweaty things that no sane person would ever dream possible. Really, did life get any better?
Chapter 11

“I am delighted you find this amusing.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes heavenwards as the 11th second of straight, unbridled laughter spilled out of his mother-in-law, with his husband’s own deeper tones providing accompaniment.

“A… amusing? This is fabulous! Really, Mycroft… all the shite I wished on you after what happened with my Greg… none of it compares to this! You were tricked by the stupidest man in Britain!”

“I do not find Daniel particularly stupid. Cunning is more the case.”

“He’d spell cunning with a k.”

“Regardless, it is clear he was fully aware of my intentions and used them to his advantage on two separate fronts. That is not precisely the behavior of a stupid man.”

“It is when you’re giving him too much credit in hopes of not making yourself look even more ridiculous that you already do. Not working!”

“Don’t forget, Mum… Mycroft’s in on the ownership of the pub now, so any problems are going to land on his head. He’s going to have to be the responsible parent for Dad and I get to be the fun one!”

Mycroft made a grand show of inspecting the state of his fingernails while the revelry continued and was simply happy that Sherlock and John were involved in a television program so their dulcet screeches were not added to the chorus.

“Well, good luck to you for that, Mycroft. I tried to be the responsible parent for that bastard and you know how well that worked! Maybe you’ve got a bigger club than me, though. Give the arse a good knock when he steps out of line. Of course, with a skull as thick as his he might not even notice it.”

“Be that as it may, should it become necessary I shall simply have someone tasked to act as overseer for my new business venture and…”

The “OH NO!” and the “FUCK NO!” sounded in devilish harmony and Mycroft knew his pout was just making his tormentors infinitely more pleased with themselves.

“Wrong as wrong can be, love. This is your mess and you have to take care of the cleaning. It shouldn’t take more than eighty or ninety percent of your time.”

“Joyful. I am utterly gratified that our mission to comfort your mother after her receipt of the dark news has been such a success. Rarely are my efforts and expectations so profoundly rewarded.”

Lestrade finally took the smallest mote of pity on his lover and reached over to give his leg a squeeze, while his mother continued to giggle at Mycroft’s sad plight.

“You have to understand, Mycroft… Greg and I lived through this and we know exactly what you’re facing. The fact that you brought it on yourself is simply a little bonus, though, I will admit that I did my own bit to push you in that direction. To keep with the theme of family honesty,
Greg… I did give Mycroft a touch of encouragement to… do something about your father. I may have even, just for a moment, debated asking him to write a cheque to send Danny on his way, but, I forget our Mycroft has a slightly different view of money than the rest of us.”

The ’our Mycroft’ did an immeasurable amount of good lifting Mycroft’s hopes that his mother-in-law was well along the path of forgiveness for his sins. That was, at least, one war on one front he didn’t have to fight.

“Oh, so your brain was in on this… really, Mum, didn’t either of you think I could cope with Dad being here?”

“That was not the actual concern, my dear. It was more that you did not need to, as you say, cope when the stress could be reduced or eliminated at the source.”

“And Fatcroft wanted to meddle, as his busybody alleles were inflamed to the point that if he did not act, his internal temperature might rise to the point where his adipose tissue began to melt and he found himself and increasingly sloshy bag of oil not fit for cooking rats in a prison kitchen.”

“Ah, dear brother. How gladdening it is to hear your pleasant tones.”

“John and I are bored. We require a hammer.”

That was very much the signal to move the proceedings back to where the breakables might cost more, but the household budget was more easily able to absorb the repair and replacement.

“Mycroft, why don’t you get Sherlock and John to the car and I’ll gather something for Greg to bring with him. I assume you’re staying with Mycroft tonight, correct?”

“I… I hadn’t thought about it…”

“You just assumed you would. Poor Greg, already forgetting his old mum’s alive. Go on with you, Mycroft. I’ll see he follows along in a moment.”

Knowing a dismissal when he heard one, Mycroft nodded his goodnight and took the opportunity to shove Sherlock out of the kitchen before the hammer was not even necessary for his spirited destruction.

“Alright, Mum… what did you want to talk to me about?”

“Nothing, really. I… I just want to check with no other ears to hear, that you’re alright with all of this. Fun and game aside with poor Mycroft…”

Greg nodded because he’d suspected this was the reason for holding him back, but it was still good to hear his mother’s concern.

“I wasn’t, for awhile. With all that’s gone on recently, it was too much, especially with what I learned from Dad. Taking a few days to simply clear my head and focus… well, focus on myself… it was a tremendous help.”

“It definitely is. That was the very reason I dropped you on your Gran’s doorstep now and then when you were small. Even an afternoon when I didn’t have you to mind and could let myself not worry about cooking, cleaning, shopping… it wasn’t a luxury, really, more like a necessity or I’d go stark raving mad. When Mum passed I told her ghost it was very unkind of her to leave me with a ready child minder.”
“I’m certain she appreciated that. So… you understand?”

“Oh yes, and it’s shame on me for not suggesting that sooner. It’s a good idea, too, about school. I know it’s not been easy or productive for you and you’ve got too busy a life to waste time like that. I’ll phone Rowena and give her my thanks for helping you get sorted. And that secretary of hers. He sounds like a smart man.”

“Do not get any ideas about Edwards, Mum.”

“Why not? Sherlock says he’s as old as a phonograph, which is pretty much the same as what he says about me so…”

“No! No flirtation, no… dress with frontal skin… nothing.”

“Frontal skin?”

“You know what I mean.”

“Not really. If you mean cleavage, then say so, though my phonograph-era cleavage is still an eye-turner, so…”

“I’m leaving, laden or not.”

“You are absolutely no fun. But, it was good of him to give you some advice. I know you don’t have any men to talk to besides your uncle, who is useless at real conversations, and… well, I’m happy someone was willing to step up. Heavens knows you can’t talk to your Dad. Speaking of the bastard… are you really going to be able to do this, Greg? I can avoid him like a professional, but he wants to see you and if there’s any worry you can’t handle that, then I’ll have a talk with him that won’t end with a cheque.”

“No, I can do it. Edwards really did have some strategies for me that I think will work. I was able to get through tonight without any problem, for instance. Had a nice time, actually, what with my own private drinks waiter serving me pints and Sherlock and John too occupied with the mountains of chips Dad kept sending out to them.”

“Those two… they seem to be having fun with Danny, more’s the pity.”

“I’ll talk to them, remind them that the fun doesn’t always last and if Dad starts drinking… but he didn’t do badly tonight. Had a few, but nothing like he used to drink. And… it’s strange. This is the Dad I remember really loving and he adores Sherlock and John already. I don’t know how long he’ll be able to keep this up, but I can hope he’ll settle into a pattern that’s not a familiar one and the boys end up hurt. Who knows, maybe he’ll be a fairly good grandfather.”

“Oh, kill me now.”

“Sherlock could call you Grandmother Lestrade, you know, so you got rather lucky, I think.”

“He does that when we’re in the village, you know. I see a respectable romantic prospect and Sherlock makes me sound like I’m a dowager. I think he does it on purpose, too.”

“Oh, he likely does. Doesn’t want to share his gran with anyone. He’s greedy that way.’

“You can leave now.”

“Not until I’ve got my special treasures to take with me. You know you won’t hear the end of it
if I go out there empty handed.”

His mother’s loud huff didn’t fool Lestrade for a moment and he smiled proudly as she began pulling together a package fit for two very small kings.

“At least you have to deal with them and their bellies when they start to ache at an hour only the devil thinks is proper.”

“I’ll have Mycroft handle it.”

“No, you will not! He’ll just phone me for advice and I’m not losing beauty sleep because you’re an overindulgent parent.”

“Boys need spoiling now and again.”

“Oh, I’ll remember you said that when I have them next. Won’t you have a jolly time cleaning chocolate out of places you’ll need gloves and a torch to excavate.”

Still smiling proudly, Lestrade decided he was a very lucky person to have his mother in his life and that she fit in beautifully with his whole new family. And, wasn’t she showing a sense of humor now that their world was a little larger than before? As well as a sense of… female. Was it menopause? Didn’t women get… sexy thinking when they got to that? Was his mum even old enough for that sort of thing? Well, the question would go unasked because he didn’t really feel like leaving with a bump on his head the size of her soup ladle…

Home… it was massive, cost more than a lifetime of his wages, but he was actually beginning to think of this as home…

“Lackey! Port my refreshments to the library and prepare a proper of arrangement for maximum efficiency of their consumption. Then present me with a suitable beverage.”

Sherlock’s regal flick of his wrist earned him a flick on his ear from Lestrade and a long-suffering sigh from his brother.

“Sherlock, I recognize you have been shamelessly indulged today, but might you divest yourself of your monarchical aspirations for the evening so that the rest of us might find some peace?”

“Nay!”

“Sherlock’s caught a case of horse!”

“Your dunderheadeness never fails to astound, John Watson. Nay, not neigh.”

“You said the same thing twice and call me a dunderhead. I think your brain is too full of chips to think properly.”

“Homonyms, you homunculus!”

John’s exceptional impersonation of disinterested Sherlock waving off any argument was quite well done in the older boy’s opinion and the fact that it sent Sherlock into a silent, hair-pulling rage was simply a pleasant side bonus.

“How about, John, I’ll get you settled in the library and we can see what Mum’s sent along for you to enjoy. Mycroft has some things to work on before bed which, for him and I, is going to be
fairly early because, frankly, I’m a bit knackered.”

“Papa Lestrade has centuries of age to his name, yet I am certain he is still actively and eagerly pursuing lucre, as well as females, as we speak. You obviously inherited the genetic dregs of your progenitors.”

And, so, it begins.

“Emotionally, Dad’s younger than me, Sherlock, so it balances out. Go on and take your edible booty into the library. I’ll meet you there a second.”

Handing the boys one package each, Lestrade turned them and gave them an affectionate bum swat to set them in motion.

“Might I ask what I am to be doing while the children are being occupied?”

Lestrade turned towards his partner and Mycroft’s toes curled from the intensely wicked smile he was being given.

“Oh, you’re going to be very busy. You’re going to be getting naked, and doing whatever it takes to stretch yourself nice and wide for me, because when I come up to the bedroom, I’m going to take you and take you hard. Whatever preparation you give yourself is all you’re going to get, so be thorough.”

“P…pardon?”

“Now.”

It was rare his lover ran, so seeing Mycroft dash up the stairs at full tilt was a sight to savor. Especially since his bum did many wonderful things while the rest of him sprinted on the steps. And it would be doing other wonderful things as soon as he had a little overdue chat with the boys.

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Opening the library door, there was no surprise that a banquet had been laid out and the feasting had begun.

“Mum certainly loves you. Or hopes you explode and are forever out of her hair.”

“My body is extremely elastic and would withstand any internal pressure, regardless of the perilousness of the Pascals.”

“What did that even mean, Sherlock?”

“Perhaps it is wise that you abandoned education before you further diminished the intelligence of the other peasants confined to your workhouse.”

“I’m courteous that way. Now, while you’re stuffing yourselves like geese, how about we have a talk.”

“It’s alright, Greg. We already know and we understand. So we can just eat. Can you get us something to drink?”

Lestrade hoped as hard as a man could hope that John wasn’t catching a case of Sherlock, to accompany Sherlock’s equine transformation. That was far too much shifting of species for one night.
“I will happily get you something to drink if you tell me what you’re talking about already knowing.”

John wiped his mouth and finished chewing the fist-size lump of something that was inside it.

“Your Dad. You want us to know that he’s fun and likes to play with us, but not to forget that he’s…”

John looked at Sherlock who, also, finished chewing what was certainly a full bale of hay before answering.

“A reprobate.”

“Yeah, that.”

Maybe this was actually going to be easy. Easy would be a very nice change of pace.

“And do you know what that actually means?”

“It means he can be fun, but he’s not… well, he’s not like you or Mycroft or Mrs. Lestrade or Grandmama. He is younger than you, in a strange way, and you don’t rely on babies when you need to get your schoolwork finished or you bump your head and you need it rubbed.”

Very easy, indeed.

“Well, you’re right and that is what I wanted to talk about, but it seems you already have Dad deciphered. I’m glad you’re having a nice time with him, though, if he really starts drinking, find somewhere else to be. His temper can be harsh when he does that. He doesn’t hit, but you don’t have to be hit to be hurt, so… just be aware and use your heads.”

“We will. Sherlock says when his usefulness to us is over, we can drive him away with torches and pitchforks, but I told him that was for vampires or werewolves, so he needs a new plan.”

“Looks like you have everything covered, then. Alright, it’s two large juices to wash down your dining pleasure and then we can get you set up for chess or started with an experiment.”

“Is Mycroft going to help, too?”

“No, he’s busy with other things, but you two don’t need us to keep an eye on you tonight. With the four stone of food you’ll have in your stomachs, I doubt you’ll even be able to move much beyond a slow crawl.”

“Cease your inquiries, John. Obviously the shop boy is hoping for coitus and trying to disguise the fact. Which, in the fullest of honesty, I must say earns my approval for even the slightest mention of physical relations with Blimpcroft makes my skin feel as if I am beset by a horde of agitated ants.”

This was the easiest night in the history of the world.

“Then I won’t mention it if you promise to give us a little uninterrupted time together tonight.”

Sherlock and John shared a look and a massive put-upon sigh, but nodded in agreement.

“However, you will be at our disposal tomorrow. We have a plethora of items on our agenda that require attention and attend them we shall.”

“I think that’ll be possible without much trouble. I’ll get your juice.”
As Lestrade left the room, he missed the sad shakes of the boys’ heads and the ‘poor pathetic fool’ glances they exchanged.

“He’s silly in love with Mycroft.”

“Which is why we must be vigilant the mastodon does not again forsake his spousal duties.”

“Yeah, if we don’t do it, nobody will. At least we can get chips and pizza after our vigilance as a reward. That part will be nice.”

“I concur. We must keep careful records so that we are properly recompensed for our marital management.”

“You have fresh a notebook don’t you?”

“I will prepare the initial chart after the concubine retires to his boudoir.”

“Then we can work on our gliders. I want to test them tomorrow and mine still puts its nose down.”

“Yes, that is an acceptable suggestion. And it will provide sufficient distraction that any mooing emanating from their bedroom can easily be ignored.”

John giggled and shoved more food in his mouth to celebrate their plan for the evening. Greg and Mycroft might be silly with being in love, but they did love each other. They loved him and Sherlock, too. That was the best sort of house you could ever want to live in and he got to do it every day! Well, good food was also important, but that wasn’t a problem, either…

No, it wasn’t necessary to knock on the walls of the corridor as he slowly approached the bedroom, but Mycroft deserved a bit of forewarning that he was on his way. Or a bit of sexy torture. Which was a lot more fun to think about…

“Now, there’s a sight to behold…”

His Mycroft, very naked and lightly trembling, laid out on the bed waiting for him… that was positively gorgeous sight…

“Knees up and feet on the bed for me, love.”

“Wh…what?”

“I have to check you did a good job, now don’t I?”

Mycroft’s whimper made Greg’s expanding cock tingle in delight and he made sure Mycroft was watching as he readjusted before sitting on the edge of the bed and running his hand along Mycroft’s inner thigh.

“Look at you… so beautiful. All this lovely skin that’s mine to touch. And could you be any harder? Let me see…”

This time Lestrade’s hand ran over something far more sensitive than Mycroft’s thigh, which twitched sharply with the contact.

“No, I don’t think you could. Someone enjoyed getting himself ready for me. Thinking about
what I was going to do when I got here. Likes me looking at him, too. Next time, I’ll sit back and watch while you prepare yourself. You can give me a show, how does that sound?”

From Mycroft’s long, highly-aroused whine it, apparently, sounded like a fantastic idea.

“Did you use your fingers or one of our toys? It doesn’t matter, I suppose, as long as you did a thorough job. Speaking of…”

This time, Lestrade’s hand trailed down Mycroft’s cock and kept going until it reached a very slick area that quivered at his touch.

“Nice and wet… very good. Now, did you stretch well?”

Something easily investigated with the insertion of a finger, which made Mycroft shudder sharply and keep trembling as Lestrade moved his finger in and out, adding a second and thrusting harder to make Mycroft sing a very sexy song.

“Not bad, at all. My Mycroft showed himself a very nice time, it seems. I’ll definitely watch that the next time I want you this way. Listen to you moan while you fuck yourself… that’s going to be a brilliant show. Now, though… it’s my turn.”

Letting Mycroft have a little more anticipation… Lestrade very gradually slowed his pace, then removed his fingers, using his clean hand to unfasten his trousers and draw his pants down so his aching erection was free.

“On your knees, love. And I expect you to wait for me, of course. If you come before I say so, you’re going to be a lonely man for awhile. I’d say I’d spank you, but…”

Running his hand over Mycroft’s now presented bottom, Lestrade grinned at the bitten groan as his partner imagined the things they liked to do specifically on that topic.

“… you enjoy that too much. If you’re good, though, maybe you can have a little of that tonight as a reward. Will you be good for me?”

Mycroft’s frantic nod almost made Lestrade laugh, but he turned his mirth into a firm swat to Mycroft’s bottom, running his hand over the reddened skin and soaking up his partner excited gasp.

“A few more?”

More frantic nodding earned Mycroft several more swats that had his cock bobbing heavily and his teeth biting back the orgasm that was already trying to crest.

“That’s my love, always good for me. Now, don’t worry about this, ok?”

Lestrade climbed behind his lover and placed his palm between Mycroft’s shoulders, pressing his upper body onto the mattress.

“There, just perfect. My Mycroft, all slick and open, ready for me to do what I will with him. So very lovely…”

Several more firm swats, these harder than the last, had Mycroft moaning loudly and begging in a breathy whisper that stoked Lestrade’s inner fires to a very agreeable level.

“P…please, Gregory. Please…”

“Ask me. Be specific.”
“Please, Gregory…”

“Go on.”

“Fuck me. Fuck me hard until I come.”

“Well, since you asked so nicely…”

Leaving on his trousers so the fabric rubbed against his partner’s already sensitized bottom, Lestrade positioned himself and slowly sank into Mycroft’s body, highly alert for any sign of undue pain or discomfort.

“Oh… you feel so good, love. Your body loves my cock, rubs it beautifully. And I know you’re wanting to come, wanting it so badly you can hardly bear it, but remember what I said and wait for me.”

And, with no further warning, Lestrade began to thrust and thrust hard, taking his lover with a ferocity that drew out Mycroft’s voice and a legion of sounds that stirred Lestrade to an even higher level of need.

“You like that, don’t you? Putting your arse in the air for me to take as hard as I please. Doing anything I please.”

Shifting slightly to one side, Lestrade laid another hard swat on Mycroft’s bottom and grinned at the throaty ‘Yes!’ that rang out in the air.

“Filthy boy… so perfect and filthy and I couldn’t love you more if I tried.”

Another fierce swat had Mycroft groaning loudly and Lestrade followed it with hard, angled thrusts that hit a very sensitive spot and had his partner nearly swearing with arousal and desperation to hold back his orgasm.

“Good… so good…”

Running his hand across Mycroft’s warm, pink bottom earned Lestrade a delicious wriggling that made him have to fight back his own pleasure so their evening didn’t end quite this second. Instead, he tightly grabbed Mycroft’s hips and thrust quickly, listening to his partner’s nearly-sobbed begging until he reached down to carefully pull Mycroft’s hair to urge him upwards, wrapping an arm around Mycroft’s chest and pulling him upright on his knees while he grabbed his lover’s cock and began to stroke quickly.

“Alright, love… come for me.”

Which was the signal for Mycroft’s body to release with a force that had all parts of him clenching, which was the last stimulus Lestrade needed find his own orgasm, holding Mycroft tightly as he poured hot semen into his partner’s stiffened body.

“Oh god… oh god, but that was… ummmmmmm…”

Grinding lightly against Mycroft’s bottom, Lestrade hummed into his ear and ran hands over Mycroft’s belly and chest. His Mycroft had a dominant streak, there was no denying it, but also had a taste for being the recipient of a little dominance himself, now and again. Which just meant they had so many wonderful things to do to make each other happy…

“How are you, my gorgeous ginger?”
“I… I am in a world beyond this one.”

“A good world?”

“One more excellent than words can describe.”

“Then I pleased you properly, which is always my goal. And, to continue on that line, I’m going to give you a nice, hot shower where I’ll wash us both very clean, slide your freshly-dried body between clean sheets and let you curl against me while we talk or sleep or whatever takes our fancy.”

“I love you, Gregory. I love you, adore you and devote myself entirely to you.”

“Well… it seems as if we think alike. Which is a very lucky thing, in my opinion.”

“I agree. Shower now?”

Lestrade chuckled against Mycroft’s neck and nipped him lightly on the shoulder.

“Yes, shower now. Ready?”

“With you, I am always ready.”

“Something I’ll keep in mind. With enough preparation time given, of course.”

“You are a god among men.”

“I try my best.”

There probably wasn’t a snake in the room, so…

“Sherlock, what are you doing?”

Lestrade didn’t even bother to lift his head to see the culprit, more to keep from disturbing Mycroft, who was doing a very good job of being an affectionate octopus, than to verify his suspicions as to the reason for the hissing noise.

“The stench in here vaults so far beyond malodorous as to make the word meaningless. I am using my proprietary formulation of room deodorizer to pave the way for an incursion into this space.”

“How about you don’t incur and you won’t need to worry about the smell?”

“Imbecile. My right to move freely through my home shall not be impeded by your carnality.”

Mycroft giggling against him agitated Lestrade in very wonderful ways, none of which were appropriate with Sherlock standing in the doorway.

“This room falls outside your territorial rights, little man, and you should see about remembering that, especially when you obviously have no reason to wake us except to be irritating.”

“That is untrue. John is hungry and is boring me with his demands for victuals.”

“Then… go and have breakfast.”

“We have attempted such and been thwarted.”
“How nasty were you to your Cook, Sherlock?”

“I said nothing to Cook. I simply remarked to one of the staff that we should dock her wages as the increased girth of her waistline is coming entirely from the household accounts funding her gluttonous tendencies. Cook is perpetrating an act of solidarity, as one would expect, I suppose, from the union-loving rabble class.”

“Do you mean that young woman who’s going to have a baby?”

“Oh. Well, how am I supposed to glean the reason for her enormity without the proper data!”

Mycroft’s laughter was silent and deadly to Lestrade’s libido, which was hoping to see a continuation of last night’s pleasures, something that was certainly not going to come to pass with boys already stirring the household staff into revolution.

“If you took an ounce of interest in any person besides you, you’d have all the data you need.”

“If there was another person as interesting as me, I would.”

“This is a path of argument that will not lead far, my dear.”

Daring to leap into the fray, Mycroft mournfully disentangled his limbs and propped himself up to lean against the headboard of the bed.

“Ugh… an unclothed sausage is a nauseating thing to behold.”

“Really? I would think it would appear much as a clothed one, but, perhaps Cook has been serving you something far different as part of her pro-labor initiative.”

“You jest, but I shall inspect every speck of my breakfast for signs of poison or foreign objects. And I will do that soon for you are now rising from your bed and making yourself ready to act in John and my benefit.”

“I *may* rise from my bed shortly to escort the man I love to his morning meal.”

“If your delusions better enable you to serve me, I shall allow them.”

‘Your munificence is most appreciated.”

With a glare that both older boys found highly adorable, Sherlock left the room after a few final sprays of his formulation.

“That stuff is actually a little green, isn’t it?”

“In the air, yes… fortunately it does not seem to stain the rug.”

“He’s a considerate little bugger when he wants to be.”

“Quite so. Well… I believe we must rise.”

“I’ve already risen, thank you very much.”

Lestrade turned down the blankets to provide evidence of his statement.

“You certainly have. And proudly, at that.”
“Do we have time to make use of it?”

“Hmmmm….”

“Someone’s thinking.”

“That I am. I had not intended a shower this morning, however…”

“Can’t call us lazy for showering before we feed the animals, now can you?”

“Not at all. Hygienic is more the word. Shall we?”

“I think we shall. Busy day ahead, might as well start it with a rousing shower.”

Motioning Mycroft down to give him a kiss, Lestrade watched the ease of his partner’s motion and decided that asking if he was sore wasn’t needed. His Mycroft had done a very good job making ready for him last night, so today shouldn’t be an uncomfortable one for the beautiful man. Of course, that didn’t mean he couldn’t take the brunt of the boys’ nonsense and give his lover a rest, though. Strangely, he felt energetic today and a good bit of the outdoors sounded like just the thing to run it off. Surely the boys had something outdoors-y to do. If not, he’d find something to do. Like his partner.

“Gregory? Have you drifted again to sleep?”

“What? No, just thinking about using up all my energy.”

“Oh, well then. I have suggestions to offer, if you care to hear them.”

“Hear or see? Or feel?”

Mycroft hopped out of bed and crooked his finger for his lover to follow as he darted towards the bathroom to start the water for their very energetic shower. Lestrade took one more moment to thank his lucky stars before following after him. Some days, his lucky stars were very lucky indeed…

“Gregory… do be careful.”

I will, love. Just because I’m teetering on top of a pointy section of the roof and am vividly remembering the last time we had to stage a rescue due to misuse of the top of the house, doesn’t mean I’m not being careful.

“I am, love. Now, what was I supposed to do, Sherlock?”

Sherlock’s ‘your stupidity galls me’ huff could be heard all the way to the loftiest of heights.

“You will toss John’s glider with a perfectly horizontal trajectory using the throw speed we have previously calibrated. I shall compare the time in flight to what it would obtain were it a purely horizontally-launched projectile for evidence of its aerodynamics capabilities. You will, then, repeat the action with mine.”

Oh yes, calibrating. Throwing a rock over and over while John took measurements and Sherlock did maths. Fortunately, it was a gorgeous day for throwing and Mycroft looked amazing sitting on a blanket watching the antics, so all was right in the world.

“Alright. Here we go…”
One glider was launched and to the loud cheers of the boys, one of which was cut off quickly as Sherlock realized he was giving evidence of enjoying himself.

“Look at it, Mycroft! It’s flying!”

“Marvelous, John, truly marvelous. You and Sherlock have shown great talent for problem solving and your diligence is to be commended.”

“Thanks! It’s going a long way, too!”

When the glider finally landed, another hurried round of measurements was taken, along with the flight time and duly entered in their glider research notebook.

“Now, you will launch mine. Pray do not give it lesser launch speed than John’s or you will be thrashed!”

“Your arms aren’t long enough to reach me.”

While Sherlock formulated a pithy response, Lestrade launched the second glider to another round of hurray’s and smiled at the amount of fun the boys were having. It was going to hurt when he began full-time work and couldn’t give them as much time as he wanted, but he would give them as much time as he could. Make certain they got attention, and make certain his partner did, too. And… make sure he got time for himself, with his friends or not. See everyone was taken care of and include his own silly self in that. That was the smart thing. That’s what would work. And give Mycroft a knock on his head if he didn’t do the same. Which… might be something to think about starting now…

Lestrade watched from his perch as a long, dark sedan pulled into the drive and his eyes followed it, knowing where it would stop, but hoping otherwise. Then, he heaved a sigh and called down to the family below.

“We have visitors. Well, you have visitors, Mycroft. Get ready.”

Mycroft’s quizzical stare didn’t last long as one of the staff joined them outside for a whispered conversation with the older Holmes, who nodded and sent the man back inside.

“My dear, I hate terribly to impose, but…”

“I’ll keep Sherlock and John out of your hair, don’t worry.”

“John and I have no interest in his ridiculous hair, which will soon begin to swiftly recede if the photographs of Mummy’s father are taken as genetic evidence.”

I’ll love you when you’re bald, Mycroft. Don’t worry about that swift hair.”

Mycroft smirked and did his best to turn Sherlock’s mane of curls into a nest of snakes before walking towards what he prayed would be something short and to the point. It likely wouldn’t for a visit to be necessary, but one could always keep a good thought.

“Greg! Are you going to come down now?”

“Dunno, John. It’s actually nice up here. Quiet and the view is lovely. And I don’t have two insects buzzing in my ears.”

“We don’t buzz and I bet there’s bird poop all around you, so that can’t be a lot of fun.”
John did have a point. Too bad there weren’t any of those owl pellets lying about to collect. The boys were running low and that was very quiet and time-consuming activity which fully had his approval.

“Well, I am thirsty, so, yes, I’ll be down in a moment. Try not to explode the world before I get there, alright?”

“We shall offer no promises!”

Thank you, Sherlock. And, now that I’ve put the idea in your head, I’ll have to hurry this along because I don’t need Mycroft to have to deal with an international threat that started on his own grounds.

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Drawing new versions of their gliders, assembling the shards of the platter they’d found in their treasure, inventorying their disguise collection to prepare a shopping list for the next venture in to the village, and eating their weight in chocolate because Lestrade didn’t have it in him to say no today, filled the rest of the day and the sun was setting before Mycroft joined them in the library.

“There’s the handsomest man in the world. And looking like he could use a brandy. Have a seat, love, and I’ll pour one for you.”

“You grace my days with innumerable blessings and joy, Gregory.”

“But you’re still leaving, right?”

Mycroft smiled ruefully and chided himself for not keeping the news off of his face until he could better prepare his partner for the revelation.

“Yes, but only for a short time, I suspect. Simply a few days in London to see to a matter of some small importance.”

“Hmmmmm… ok. I think these two can manage without us for that long.”

It was such a treat, such a delicious treat, to drink in the shocked look on Mycroft’s face.

“Did… did you say ‘us’?”

“I did, at that. It’s been a long time since I’ve been to London… for happy reasons, that is… and I fancy a trip.”

“Intolerable! If the peasant is to go to London, John and I demand the same!”

“Not this time, Sherlock. You have school and Mycroft’s going to be busy with work. I’m hoping to be busy, too, getting to see the city and getting familiar with the house again. Next time, though. We’ll look to a weekend we can all go and have a nice time together.”

“This is discrimination of the rankest form.”

“Spray some of that deodorizer on it. So, Mycroft… when do we leave?”

“Tomorrow morning, though most early. I have certain matters than can be addressed by telephone and will tend to them first before departing.”

“Alright, I’ll tell the staff they’re in charge of getting these two ready for school and to sharpen
their axes because we’re not going to be standing between them and the barbarians for a couple of days.”

“I am not a barbarian! John is somewhat properly described, as such, but not without a suitable qualifier to denote his rudimentary ability with language.”

“Mycroft, was I just insulted? Again.”

“Marginally, John, but it was not nearly Sherlock’s best effort so it almost qualifies as a compliment.”

“Thanks, Sherlock!”

“I am far too advanced for this conversation. When dinner is prepared, I may be located in my laboratory. Alone.”

“Can I come, too?”

“How am I to work without my assistant?”

John got up and trailed after Sherlock who marched grandly out of the library, leaving Mycroft and Lestrade to rejoice how Sherlock’s ‘alone’ was something quite larger and happier than it was before.

“I’ll let Mum know that she’ll probably have visitors, both when she is and isn’t home, so she can be prepared.”

“Very wise. This way she might leave available in the shrubbery the various tools Sherlock and John have borrowed from your neighbors to perpetrate their housebreaking.”

“They’ve made certain to break into the house through every possible entranceway, too. Mum even had my uncle install a few new locks and latches to make it more of a challenge.”

“It is good Mother Lestrade recognizes the value of obtaining and practicing life skills. And… you truly wish to accompany me to London?”

“Don’t you want me to?”

“I do. I very much do. I simply… your last visit was unutterably horrid and the wounds are so fresh…”

Lestrade took Mycroft in a gentle hug and kissed him softly before speaking.

“That’s why I have to go. Face it, kick it and be done with it. You’re right… that’s our house and it’s time I started treating it that way.”

“I am overjoyed, Gregory. And I will, I promise you, do everything to support your efforts.”

“I know you will. Now, do you need to start on things or…”

“Yes, I should make inroads sooner than later. Do not wait dinner for me, my dear, as I shall likely work through the night.”

“My poor Mycroft, always sacrificing so the rest of us can sleep and sleep in safety. I’ll see you’re brought something, though, in case I’m with the boys and can’t get away to do it myself. Oh! And… do you remember what I have to wear in London?”
“I would bring along something lighter as the garments you possess are for cooler weather.”

Something that made Mycroft’s heart ache. It *had* been a long time since his love had been in residence. But, that was going to change and the change was beginning now. Gregory in London for several days… there was a very strong possibility that he would have his evenings free and those he would make merry ones for them both. The chance to wine, dine and entertain his beloved husband? Yes, change was on the wind and it was blowing with the sweetest aroma one could imagine. On second thought…

“I’m going. What in the world are they doing up there? It smells like… pickle and burnt motor oil.”

“Might we simply erect a cage and incarcerate them for the duration?”

“They’d just find a way to use the bars to build something they’d get arrested for. Let me check on them and I’ll check on you later.”

With a final kiss, Lestrade ran upstairs towards the current chaos and Mycroft heaved a breath to straighten his spine for his own brand of chaos management. Two words, outer and inner… he and his Gregory managed both exceedingly well. And, for a few days, they would be able to celebrate their success in a variety of delightful ways… hopefully, their mattress would stand the strain…
There she is, looking beautiful as I remember.”

Mycroft smiled and patted his excited spouse on the knee.

“I am relieved our home continues to meet your standards, my dear.”

“Exceeds them, really. I’m happy with four walls, a toilet and a telly.”

Mycroft shuddered as visions of domicile-based horrors danced through his head.

“I will inspect every of your prospective flats before you make a decision concerning relocation. On that, I will not be swayed.”

Laughing and leaning over to kiss his lover, Lestrade adored how protective was his Mycroft and how easy it was to bring that protective urge to the foreground.

“I know you’ll make certain I’m not squatting in an abandoned dog’s house though if the view is nice and it’s close to work, we may have to talk. Look! We’re here!”

Nearly before the car came to a full stop, Lestrade was bolting out of the rear door and running around to open Mycroft’s before the driver could even think about spoiling his fun.

“You are inspiringly chivalrous, Gregory, my love.”

“Anything for you. Come on, I can’t wait to have a look at her again without my head being muddled with storm clouds.”

Escorting Mycroft as proudly as a new husband, the walk to the door commenced, with Lestrade making a show of using his happily-retrieved key to perform the unlocking before walking inside.

“What happened in here?”

There were animal heads on the walls, for pity’s sake!

“Ah… yes. I followed some rather disastrous decorating advice. Do not fear, however, for the previous items and furniture remain on premises and can be restored at any time.”

“Well, I know what I’m starting my day with. This house was glorious and I’ll see it glorious again. This decorating advice… do I need to guess who gave it to you?”

“Likely not, for I feel confident you would guess correctly and on the first attempt.”

“I thought so. That will add a happy element to the whole business, then. Tossing out the trash in more ways than one.”

Mycroft rubbed his partner’s back sympathetically and hoped the activity would be therapeutic for the man who still struggled with his thoughts at times.

“A laudable point of view. I shall see a lorry delivered so that you might fill it with any items you find abhorrent and see them handily taken for disposal. Extra hands, too, for things of a larger and bulkier nature.”
“Oh god… what haven’t I seen?”

“Some… measure.”

“Luckily we had a large breakfast!”

“If you wish, my dear, we might postpone this activity until I return this evening. I do not expect to be excessively late and…”

“Oh no. I’m going to scrub away the nonsense and, then, you’re treating me to an excellent dinner and a large measure of stiff drinks.”

Something for which he was far better suited, which was utterly considerate of his Gregory to consider.

“Unquestionably. I find that a highly agreeable suggestion.”

“Alright, then, be off with you. Can’t be late to work or you’ll be sacked.”

“True, though, may I count on you to support me while I labor to find other employment, limited though my skills may be?”

“Absolutely. And you’ll get to be Mum to Sherlock and John in the meantime. I saw the prettiest apron in a village shop about a week ago that would be perfect for you while you tend to the washing, mending and defusing of high explosives.”

“My heart is aflutter. But… shall you really be alright here, my dear?”

“I will, Mycroft, I promise. I knew I’d be here alone and that’s actually what I want. Just some time to let the house sink back into my bones and, actually, this will be a good way to make that happen. Take some action to make it ours again, instead of… what it is now.”

Mycroft leaned in and kissed his partner, marveling anew at the strength, courage and… forgiveness… that his dear Gregory could muster.

“Then I shall take my leave. If I am to be late, I shall phone to inform you.”

With one more kiss, Mycroft was gone and Lestrade took a very deep breath before taking a stroll through the house to see the new look. Which was awful. Definitely the taste of people with more money than sense, which was neither Mycroft nor himself, thank you very much. His poor love… caught up in a net of people who’d probably change his clothes, hair and anything else they could by the time they were done with him. Well, Greg Lestrade was on the case now and putting a stop to any of that nonsense was priority number one. His Mycroft was fine as he was and didn’t need any redecorating like this grand old house. Speaking of which, hopefully the lorry got here soon and had a few strong lads along with it… that massive, chrome, swirly thing that passed for sculpture had to go before his eyes began to boil. Maybe they could sell it and give the money to charity… something good had to come from its existence, because viewing pleasure certainly wasn’t happening…

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“My heavens! Gregory, you have… did you do anything except redecorate today?”

Mycroft looked around the house, agog that it was entirely restored to its former self, an appearance that, in full honesty, he adored. Why he had listened to the dimwitted gadflies that he’d allowed
beyond the threshold was something he would never be able to fathom. Even his beloved umbrella stand was returned to its proper place by the door with Gregory’s Christmas present nestled happily inside. Truly all was right in the world again.

“Not much, but I loved it! Actually got to dig through every nook and cranny and get a proper feel for the place. But, I did have the telly on or the radio, so I was entertained and took a walk to that park we sat in the first time we were here. It really is beautiful, just as I predicted. Maybe we can have lunch there one day. Sit on a bench and watch the people.”

“I would be delighted. And I do hope this evening finds you hungry, for I have reservations for us at a restaurant I believe you will enjoy greatly. Their portions are quite hearty and the food most delectable.”

“That sounds perfect! Let me clean up a little and… what should I wear?”

No, do not look trepidatious, my dearest spouse. All is well, I would permit no less.

“Oh, one of the more casual suits in your wardrobe.”

“You mean the wardrobe that magically appeared in the bedroom when I opened the door?”

Mycroft’s sheepish grin earned him a tap on the nose and a very knowing look from his partner.

“I informed Grandmama of our intentions to spend a few days in residence and she had delivered certain items of clothing she felt appropriate for the weather and our likely activities.”

It was a mark of how far he’d come that a wardrobe of expensive and exquisite clothes appearing out of nowhere, certainly not out of his pocket, didn’t ruffle Lestrade’s pride in the slightest. Not that it should, since it was a grandmother gift and those were always to be accepted gladly, regardless of how many pound notes were involved in the purchase.

“She’s very efficient. Good, then. One quick shower and you can talk to me about your day while I wash and dress. At least, you can talk about what you can about your day.”

Was there a time Mycroft would fail to be grateful that his dearest beloved understood the necessities of his work and that silence was certainly one of the most necessary? He hoped and prayed that was a day that never came. The outcome of taking his love for granted was a scathing lesson to be learned, but one could never say Mycroft Holmes was a poor scholar.

“The particulars of the situation I cannot discuss, however, you do enjoy my little tales concerning those with whom I associate while I tend to the particulars.”

“Gossip about the people you work with? Oh yes, I’m very in the mood for that.”

Taking Mycroft’s hand, Lestrade pulled him along up the stairs so they could get the ‘together’ part of the day going. Mycroft was taking him to dinner! In a restaurant that needed a call ahead before you could have a table. This was going to be great and he was ready for great. One amazing night out with his lover and then back here to let that lover live up to his title. With no Sherlock and John to invade, what a world of fun they could have in their big, soft bed which, thank heavens, had survived the ghastly makeover intact…

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Now, this was… expected. The deep breath he just took was simply reflex.
“This is a very nice place, love. Are you certain I’m properly dressed?”

Even though Mycroft was wearing something similar, Lestrade was having difficulty shaking the sensation that he should have shinier shoes.

“Absolutely. The façade does not quite tell the tale of the interior. Oddly, for the prices they demand, the proprietor encourages a more relaxed atmosphere. It is a most popular choice for those who wish the luxury of a fine meal, impeccable service, a wine list that is the envy of many, but might see the evening through in something that is actually comfortable to wear. Shall we?”

“We shall. This sounds like something I’m going to like, actually.”

“The very reason for its choice.”

And because his beloved deserved an experience where he could enjoy his evening without the worries that often plagued him when a more upscale situation was at hand. There was a bounty of time for such, perhaps even before they returned home, but this first voyage into their new London life should offer nothing in the way of concern.

“After you, then.”

Mycroft gave his dearest near-spouse a small bow as Lestrade motioned towards the door, which opened as if by magic, though it was actually a well-dressed man who greeted them warmly and escorted them inside, where they were handed over to another well-dressed person who continued the escort, this time to their table. Something that made Lestrade wonder, since Mycroft didn’t actually give his name.

“Do you come here often?”

“Hmmm? Oh, somewhat. I have a few establishments that I prefer, either for convenience or ambiance and I do tend to fall into a pattern of habit, I’m afraid. Fear not, however, for I am most eager to expand my horizons through exploration with you at my side.”

“I like the sound of that. I really do want to get to know London and I can’t imagine a better person to join me in the fun. Speaking of… I wonder what Sherlock and John have perpetrated since we’ve been gone?”

“For most children, a single day away would pose no appreciable concern, however, we are truly blessed with a pair that can splinter a continent in an hour’s time, given a spade and a box of chocolates.”

“I’m more worried about them splintering the pub. Or, to be precise, that they’ll convince Dad to help them with it and we’ll have to sort out the shards when we’re home.”

“Yes, I rather doubt your father will be a strict disciplinarian. However, if the children continue to consume chips at the rate they practiced when last they were there, they shall be a tad too heavy to instigate an appreciable quantity of mayhem.”

“And Dad won’t stop them, I’ll tell you now. You probably should buy part ownership in a potato farm to keep up with their demand. I’ll be cheaper in the long term.”

“A sound economic suggestion. I shall make the appropriate inquiries when we return.”

As the waiter arrived to discuss wines, Lestrade left the task to Mycroft and simply basked in the simple normalcy of it all. Yes, the surroundings were posh and the cost of their little night out would
make him gulp, but it was normal. Dinner with the person you loved, talking about ridiculous domestic things, focusing on your lives and what you shared… so much of their lives wasn’t well-described as normal, but this sort of thing was and he’d realized how much it meant to him when what few bits they could claim withered away.

“Is that acceptable to you, my dear?”

“What? Oh, sorry… got a bit lost in my thoughts. I’m sure it is, though. You have a talent for choosing the perfect anything to go with the occasion.”

Being publically praised was still something new and unexpected to Mycroft and he hoped his slight flush was not noticeable to the waiter. Though, by the twinkle in the man’s eye, it was likely the mission was a failure.

“So good of you to say. That will be all then.”

You may take you knowing twinkle to the next victim, if you please, good sir. I am well aware my response to my husband is somewhat marked, but all should love as deeply and passionately as do we. So there.

“I see why you enjoy it here, love. There’s certainly a good feel about it. If I use the fish fork instead of the salad fork or take the wrong direction to the loo, I doubt someone will come after me with a sack and trap like they would any other rat.”

“Yes, the sack-and-trap derby is not until August, I’m afraid, so we shall not be able to enjoy that particular amusement for quite some time.”

“Good to know! Gives me the opportunity to set Sherlock on making a blisteringly effective rat trap so we can win. Are there prizes?”

“A trophy of the loftiest height and sparkling brilliance.”

“That’ll look perfect in the entranceway next to the mirror.”

“Most assuredly.”

While Greg snickered at their silliness, Mycroft had his own moment of relishing the simple bliss of time together with the man he loved. Yes, he would certainly encourage his dearest spouse to visit often, whether he was in London or at college, even if the only time they might see in each other’s company was when they shared a meal and a bed. Truly, this was what made his heart gladdest… time devoted purely to his Gregory, celebrating the bond they had formed and…

“Crofty! I told you he’d be here, you silly arses!”

Mycroft’s shocked gasp was completely lost on Lestrade as their table was quickly invaded by a good half-dozen people who were dragging extra chairs from adjacent tables to make their siege a more comfortable experience.

“Voice of reason and you lot never give me any credit. Crofty, you old thing, where have you been? We had plans for that party at your digs and there we were with champagne in one hand and some rather good cigarettes in the other and not a soul at home to welcome us in. We really were put out, you know, but I’m certain you’ll make it up to us now that you’re back.”

Mycroft gaped at the spectacles-wearing speaker and dared not look towards his lover, for his gaze would have to run the gauntlet of the new bodies at their table to reach Lestrade’s eyes.
“Eustace, yes… how kind of you to remind me. I… I was called away most unexpectedly and our small gathering quite slipped my mind. But, do allow me to present…”

Not that Mycroft’s presentation had an audience, as the new arrivals were busily summoning the waiter to put in orders for drinks, food and more drinks.

“We’re going to a smashing little club later that I know you’ll love, even though you say it’s not your cup of tea. Lots of handsome fellows about, if you fancy that sort of thing, which you do, and lots of beautiful ladies for the rest of us. Dancing the evening away is the perfect end to this ghastly day. You’ll just love this, let me tell you just how ghastly is ghastly…”

He was in the whirlpool! Oh dear heavens… not a day back in London and things were spiraling him into the abyss! This was disastrous!

“…can you imagine? What presumption… well, I told him that if he wanted me to correct my ridiculous essay, then I’d need a week at least, because I have a very full schedule and these things simply can’t be shuffled about like a deck of cards! Fortunately, tutors are easy to ignore at the best of times, so that particular matter can simply wait until I get to it. Or, I’ll just pay some poor chap to write it for me like I did for the last one. Anyway, I was completely put off my lessons and gathered the lads for a trip to London to give myself a boost. When I saw your light on, but nobody was home, I just knew where to find you. Oooh, lovely. You always do choose an excellent wine for dinner.”

One life preserver! One, single tossed rope in this sea of inanity… wait. Who was he? Mycroft Holmes., that was who. The indomitable, formidable, undefeatable Mycroft Holmes. He had no need of a sliver of braided hemp to secure his rescue! All he needed was…

…there. Looking at him with the brightest sparkle of mirth in his eyes. With Gregory at his side, no maelstrom could ever sink him to the inky depths… however, the subject of being laughed at in his hour of need would be discussed in some depth in the very near future.

“Yes, that I do. And it is with regret that I shall not be able to join you later for Gregory has joined me in the city and we have already made plans for the remainder of the evening.”

“Gregory? I don’t know a… oh! Do you mean Gregsy Bassington? God, is he here? What a dreary individual… how can you have plans with Bassington? You’ll die of boredom!”

Mycroft reached out to his companion, grabbed his chin and turned the offending face in the direction of the man he loved.

“Gregory Lestrade. My partner. I have spoken of him if you choose to remember.”

“Oh!!! The fellow who minds that brother of yours. Dear me, he does look like he could keep a terror like Sherlock in order. Rather a rough chap, isn’t he?”

“Do remember that Gregory is the man I love and shares my life with me as well as my heart. Now, would you like to describe him again?”

“Good lord, Crofty! You don’t have to smile at me like one of those piranha fish! Or a shark, whichever will eat you alive fastest. I didn’t mean any offense. Just because he’s got that look about him doesn’t mean he’s not a fine fellow once one gets to know him. In fact, I’ll do that right now. Hello, Gregory, old thing! Oswald, change seats with me so I can talk to Gregory. What a mouthful, though, don’t you think, Crofty? We’ll have to think of something snappier to call him.”

A quick reshuffling of chairs brought Mycroft a new, but equally prattle-tongued conversation
partner and embroiled Lestrade in a discussion where he only had to nod on occasion to be considered scintillating, since his participation was not actually required for the chat. If the small non-verbal conversation between the not-quite-engaged couple hadn’t indicated that Greg was alright with the interruption of their evening and it wasn’t necessary to give the lot the boot out the door, Mycroft would be doing just that and with his pointiest, sharpest-toed shoes. As it was, he could only hope that his partner wasn’t soliciting stories about his London conduct that might be used later for blackmail purposes. There were a few, perhaps, that might fit the bill and the longer their discovery was put off, the happier he would certainly be… Gregory would absolutely be ferocious if he learned of the… snooker incident…

“Go ahead, you know you desire it greatly.”

Mycroft sat patiently, signaling their driver to start for home, while Lestrade burst into laughter and continued to the point of tears.

“They’re dreadful!”

“I was most honest when I said they were not precisely my friends.”

“Oh, I believe you. I can’t say they’re what I expected though. I thought they’d be tremendous arses, but they’re… it’s like those blokes in Jeeves and Wooster! All the Drones and my Mycroft in the center of them like their Queen.”

“No, that would be Edmund, who was blessedly absent. He is not quite so… buoyant of spirit, and often directs the flock hither and yon as per his wants.”

“Well, I’m glad he wasn’t. I can’t say I would have had as nice a time if he was there at the table.”

“Gregory… do you still… worry?”

Lestrade reached over and stroked Mycroft’s cheek, reading all of Mycroft’s worry in his partner’s eyes.

“No, I don’t, not really, he doesn’t sound like quite the silly sort I can have a giggle with and tolerate in small doses.”

“I am inclined to agree. But you… you found some enjoyment of the evening, I take it?”

“I did! I was a bit annoyed when they first landed, but… well, they’re not mean-spirited, just a touch ridiculous and depending, I suspect, on family money to see them settled in life rather than doing it through hard work and a fair amount of brains.”

“Oh, very good. Yes, each has their strengths, but among them shall be found neither work ethic nor intellectual prowess. They shall find admirable and high-earning positions from the influence of family and lead a very comfortable life, I have no doubt.”

“Until then, you can have a nice time now and again with a bit of entertainment to fill your free hours.”

“I believe I have purged that particular urge from my being, my dear.”

“Don’t be too hasty, Mycroft. It’s alright to have a nice time, even if it’s just a bit of nonsense to
occupy an evening. Just don’t forget about the other people in your life who’d like to have a nice
time with you, too. Actually, I suspect that after a long, dreary day, a dose of something foolish is a
good cure for your ails, even if most of what you’re doing is having your own fun watching the
foolishness play out.”

“I will heed your wise words, but I feel my taste for such a thing has waned, now that I have
rubbed the glamour from my eyes. I saw most clearly tonight the reality of my amusements and,
though there may have existed some transitory appeal, I cannot imagine myself continuing long in
their company.”

“Well, know that I won’t be upset if you do. Besides, if they do get nice, well-paying positions,
they might be useful to you someday and it would be a shame to burn bridges when a night at the
theater or a spot of dinner and drinks would keep the roads open for you.”

“Hmmmm… as always, your mind is an incisive one. I shall reflect somberly on your advice and
choose entertainment opportunities that will refresh my spirit, yet not embroil me in the depths of
injudiciousness. And I will not, under any circumstances, neglect you, my beloved, for such
pursuits.”

“That sounds like a very smart plan. Especially that last piece. And, to celebrate, I’ll treat you to
a lovely massage when we’re home. Where we go from there… we can discuss that when you’re
relaxed and in a sexy mood.”

“With you, Gregory, my mood always lingers on the edge of arousal and desire.”

“Which is why I consider myself an extremely lucky man.”

Lestrade leaned in and kissed Mycroft tenderly, then with a little less tenderness as Mycroft ran a
hand under his jacket to stoke his body through his rather fine shirt.

“You continue along that path, Mr. Holmes, and your driver is going to learn a lot more about
you than he probably wishes.”

“True, but regrettable, for I would very much enjoy learning what depravity you might perpetrate
in the rear seat of such a comfortable automobile.”

“Much the same as for our little, tatty rear seat, but without the periodic ‘ow!’ and ‘oof!’ from us
banging into things.”

Mycroft wasn’t sure what was more exciting, the memories of the few times they had dallied in the
family car or that Gregory so easily used the term ‘our’ to describe their family car. Truly, both were
utter bliss.

“So… ecstasy?”

“Absolutely. But I’m still not showing your driver my bare arse, no matter how much you want
to get your hands on it.”

Gregory’s bottom was a treasure beyond price and a treasure he intended to keep very much to
himself. Not available to other eyes, let it be known, especially to those that should remain firmly on
the road.

“You have my wholehearted agreement. Later?”

“Later you can have your hands all over my bare arse and any other bare bits of me you’d like.”
Mycroft’s happy smile made Lestrade laugh and give his partner yet another kiss. Lovely dinner, free mealtme entertainment and the rest of the night spent indulging in other entertainments that he and his partner both very much enjoyed. Not the least of them was simply sharing the experience and sleeping in each other’s arms. Maybe a fellow his age shouldn’t find that the nicest part of the night, but… it really was. The sex was phenomenal, but the closeness, for lack of a better word, was truly the best part of it all.

“Though we should, perhaps make a brief stop for I think we have neither chocolate sauce nor honey in our cupboards and I find that highly deleterious to my intentions.”

Though his lover’s taste for sweet drizzles and salty skin was very much near the top of the list.

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“This is really not necessary, Gregory…”

“I think it is. You’re off to work and I don’t have anything pressing, so making breakfast for you is my pleasure. Besides, I know you’ll likely skip lunch because if someone’s not there to remind you to eat when you’re busy, you simply don’t, so I consider this a smart strategy for keeping my Mycroft going through his hectic day.”

“Well, when argued so eloquently, I cannot refuse.”

“Good, because it’s about ready and I’d rather not ruin all of this when half of it is mine.”

Giggling while he took a seat, Mycroft basked in the domesticity of the experience. Some days, it would be him preparing a meal for his intended, once he learned better the rudiments of food preparation, of course, for he was committed to be a true partner to the man he loved. Though, in fairness, it was highly likely his offerings would not smell quite so delicious.

“There we are. And a nice cup of the tea you like in the morning.”

“Thank you, my dear. This is a most admirable feast.”

“I have to admit that I very much enjoy cooking in this kitchen. It’s… it makes me feel like trying new things. Exploring possibilities. There’s just so much space and tools and places to store all sorts of different types of foods, which I’m certain London offers in grand style. It’s like a laboratory and, though science was never my strong area, I’m having a lot of fun experimenting! Oh god, I’m turning into Sherlock. I need more bacon.”

Lestrade shoveled a few bits into his mouth and made a grand show of calming his becoming-Sherlock anxieties, much to Mycroft’s amusement.

“Yes, that would be a fate worse than the cruelest death. However, might you be considering a change of career? I would happily support your turning attention to the culinary arts, especially since… oh my, this is wonderfully scrumptious.”

“Thanks! No, I’m still set for arresting Dad, Sherlock and John on a regular basis, but it’s good to know that you’ll eat what I concoct in the kitchen. That’s going to be important for those times when a quick meal before falling down into bed and not waking until the alarm blares is the only thing keeping body and soul together.”

“And you do tend to both my body and soul with equal diligence, something for which I am eternally grateful and blessed. For the rest of your day, though? What have you in store for yourself?”
“Thought I’d start to learn the public transport system. Get familiar with how to come and go around the city and use that learning to stop in and see a few sights. It’s a touch strange to have a full day to myself with nothing specific to do and I intend to do the most with it.”

“An excellent agenda. Shall I... have you...”

The small motion of Mycroft’s hand to the jacket pocket where he kept his wallet made Lestrade and shake his head.

“I’ve got a few quid in my pocket, don’t worry about that. That’s part of what I want to learn, actually. How much does it cost to get around, have a bite of lunch, that sort of thing. Have to start thinking about those things if I want to live here permanently someday.”

Certainly not learning that had Mycroft’s enthusiastic approval, but he knew well that his say was not the final word on the subject. There would be much discussion and negotiation in their future, but that was also a normal part of a relationship and he found himself looking forward to it. His Gregory was wildly dashing when he was engaged in verbal combat.

“Most prudent. If you like, I shall have prepared a summary of various expenses, as well as the salary values for policemen serving in London at various ranks to facilitate your forward thinking.”

“I’d appreciate that. No time like the present for planning. I’ve learned that lesson... dragging feet only gets you scuffed shoes, and who wants that?”

“Nary a soul, I’m sure. Now, unfortunately, I must be off. However, I feel much bolstered after this hearty repast.”

“I’ll do my best to have dinner made, too. Something that’s easy to reheat in case you’re late coming home.”

“You are an angel, my dear. I cannot predict my time to return, but I have no indication, at present, it will be unduly late. A kiss to see me through my labors?”

Mycroft rose and caught his nicely eager partner in his arms to receive his affection, which lingered nicely and reminded parts of him of the more intense affection they had enjoyed the night before. His Gregory was indescrivably talented in both the giving and receiving of pleasures of the flesh. And the flesh in question was absolutely tantalizing...

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Now, that was a day. A fucking brilliant, marvelous day. Racing about London, feeling the pace of things, learning the best ways to get here and there and spending a bit of time in a few of those here’s and there’s when there was something interesting to see or learn. This was going to be something to repeat every time he came to visit, that was a certainty. Get his own feet on the ground he’d be walking someday and start to make it a very real part of who he was. Mycroft could do his work all day and he could get some advancement on the future.

That was when he could get away to advance, of course. It wasn’t likely he’d get a generous amount of time off when he started his new job; the new lads rarely did. You got assigned the worst schedule, did the volunteer work, put in extra time to learn the job and make a good impression… that was going to be his life now and any free time was going to have to be used wisely. The boys, Mum, Grandmama, Mycroft… and himself. That was a lot of people for a small amount of time...

“Oh, who are you?”
Lestrade spun at the unexpected voice and felt his blood run cold. He hadn’t seen the face very well, but he knew that silhouette and it was one that showed up in his dreams when he was having a bad night, though no night was as bad as the one where he found the bastard in this kitchen. In Mycroft’s dressing gown.

“I don’t think that’s any of your business, mate. I, at least, am supposed to be here, unlike you.”

And don’t look down your nose at me while you think about having a walk around my kitchen, thank you very much, you wanker.

“Mycroft’s having work done, is he? Well, let me tell you something that may save your wages. Being cheeky with your betters won’t maintain your current job nor secure you another if I see fit to phone your employer.”

“That’d be my uncle, currently and he’ll not be happy with you interrupting his day with a load of nonsense. Now, care to explain why you felt it was alright to walk into someone else’s house without knocking?”

That sounded confident, right? He was doing a good job being as devil-may-care and confident as the arse he was talking to, wasn’t he? This was important, damn it all, and he couldn’t let anything slip in front of Mr. Edmund Noseintheair if he had an ounce of dignity in him. And he did, so this was important!

“You are an impertinent fellow. I’ll speak to Mycroft about this and I can assure you there will be no payment for whatever work you are performing. Not that he would likely do it in any case, for I feel certain your skills are of the lowest order, if your manner is any indication of your competence.”

“Well, you’re right about that much, at least. Mycroft won’t be paying me for making dinner because I said I’d do it this morning at breakfast and, more importantly, you don’t pay your partner for that sort of thing because it’s something that’s done gladly. So, it appears that your threat is a bit off-the-mark, now doesn’t it?”

Still confident and self-assured. Doing it like a champion, even though he was staring at the fuse that lit the bomb that exploded his life. The handsome, well-dressed fuse, at that. Surely Mycroft had been a little tempted… no! No, don’t think that way because that’s how this bastard wins the day and there would be no victory here unless it’s Greg Lestrade waving the flag! It was thus declared. Mycroft would like that bit, it sounded very emphatic.

“Partner? Oh… you’re the chap whose got his fingers in Mycroft’s pockets. Yes, I’ve heard about you. I must say, you do appear very much as I expected. Not a remarkable sort, obviously with few productive prospects in life. Rough, coarse, not particularly intelligent, but with some keenness, in the manner of any of the lower classes when there’s money to be had.”

Confidence fading! No! No… stop. He’s trying to be a bastard. Throw the stones he thinks are going to hit a target. You know how to deal with people like him, so don’t start coming apart now.

“Handsome, too. You forgot about that. All of which Mycroft must appreciate because he loves me and is very happy with the life we share.”

“Share? How sadly mistaken you are in this context. Mycroft tolerates you for the benefits he derives from your association. If you believe that you have a real place in his life, one that shall continue past the fulfilment of your immediate use, then you are sadly mistaken.”
Don’t listen to him, Greg. It’s all lies and you know its lies... no matter if it’s echoing your own past thoughts to a frightening degree…

“I think you’ll find you’ve got the wrong end of the stick. You don’t propose marriage in front scores of people unless you actually take what you’re saying seriously.”

“What? My god, whatever possessed him? Was he drunk? He must have been. Well, I’m certain his family will sort this out, though I’m certain it will cost them. That being said, a substantial bribe to your set isn’t exactly purse squeezing for us, so I doubt he’ll really care.”

Ok, the bribe bit was true, because he could ask for the moon and it probably wouldn’t dent Mycroft’s accounts, but that wasn’t relevant so getting on with ignoring the prat like someone whose won prizes for ignoring things and offers ignoring classes on Saturdays.

“You’re probably right. But, this house is half mine, so I’ll have a nice place to live, even if he doesn’t. Nice of Grandmama to realize Mycroft and I are going to be good husbands and settled us with a lovely house for when we move to London. Together.”

“You… the house is yours?”

“Half mine, but yes.”

“I see… well, I’m astonished actually. Usually it takes a bit longer for one of you social climbers to sink in your claws so deeply into someone, but you’ve done an excellent job. Bravo, really, well done. What have you had to do to gain such a hold on Mycroft? Incredibly filthy things, I’m sure. How far into degradation do you have to go to keep the money flowing? Is there an itemized cost list, perhaps, for budgeting purposes?”

It was a little hard for Lestrade to follow what happened next, because his nemesis being spun so his face could collide with Mycroft’s balled fist seemed to happen all at once, which Sherlock would happily tell him was disallowed by science.

“NEVER SPEAK TO GREGORY IN THAT MANNER! In fact… never speak to him again. Ever. Or me. You are hereby barred from this residence, Edmund Pierce, and consider yourself persona non grata for any social gatherings I may host or sponsor. You are a vile creature and I will not allow my beloved soon-to-be spouse to suffer your presence a moment longer. Begone and never darken my door again.”

With a hearty shove, Mycroft pushed the sputtering Edmund out of the kitchen and waited until he heard the front door slam to turn towards Lestrade and say what he most wanted to say at the moment.

“I think I’ve broken my hand.”

Lestrade let out a loud bark of laughter and rushed to take his brave lover in his arms.

“Let me see… oooohhh, yeah that does look bad. Put your thumb in your fist when you hit, didn’t you? Poor payment for being the most courageous and wonderful man in the entire world. That was amazing, love. I’m stunned, I really am, and more thankful than you can imagine.”

“I could not… I could not believe what I was hearing. How dare he? How dare he… oh dear, this is beginning to throb rather alarmingly.”

“Off to hospital it is! We’ll get that looked at and I’ll make certain my brilliant lover gets all the attention he needs. I love you, Mycroft. For so, so many reasons…”
Mycroft looked into his partner’s eyes and felt his heart soar with the depth of the love he saw shining in them.

“I love you, also, my dear. Passionately, deeply and eternally.”

“You’d love me more if I got some ice for that hand, though, right?”

“I was not going to mention it, however…”

“Ice on the way! While you tell me how to phone for a driver to get us to hospital because I know you don’t want public transport to add to your misery.

“That particular agony would dwarf that which I am currently experiencing.”

Kissing Mycroft softly, Lestrade settled him in a chair, then grabbed the phone with one hand as he used the other to pull a cloth from drawer and begin filling it with ice. His Mycroft hit someone! Could this evening have gone any better? Well, yes, it could have, but this was a respectable second place.

“My arm is writhing in torment!”

The drama, though, might bring things back to the lead position in very short order…

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“There we go… how’s that?”

“Incomparable. I am as content as a babe in its mother’s arms.”

And swimming in pain killers, as a bonus. Lestrade tucked the blankets cozily around his chemically-altered partner and began to get himself ready to join him in bed.

“That’s good to hear. And aren’t you lucky there weren’t any broken bones! Evil sprains aren’t pleasant, but I tripled checked with the doctor that you should heal nicely with some rest and proper care.”

“You are a doting, compassionate man, my husband, and I adore you in a manner nearly indescribably in intensity.”

Mycroft reached out with his heavily-wrapped hand and Lestrade obediently leaned in so his cheek could be caressed by Mycroft’s fingertips.

“And I adore you, too. Do you think you can sleep?”

“Shall you remain with me?”

“Of course.”

“Then I believe sleep might be possible. After, perhaps, a small measure of brandy.”

“No brandy with those pills they gave you, sorry. Water, juice or some of that nice herbal tea you sometimes like in the evenings. I saw some in the cupboards, so I can make a cup if you’d like.”

“Will you have to leave me for the preparation?”

“Uh… yes.”
“Then I do not want tea.”

“I can get you water from the tap in the bath, if that works. I’ll just have to hop beyond that door right there and you can even hear me do it.”

“That is quite a distance. I already mourn the separation.”

“But, you’ll endure.”

“If I must.”

“And then you’ll sleep?”

“Shall you remain with me?”

“I haven’t changed my mind about it, so yes, I will remain with you.”

“Then I might find some rest.”

“Alright, then. Just a moment and I’ll have your water.

Moving very slowly so Mycroft could succumb to his drooping eyes and dreamy speech, Lestrade walked to the ensuite bath and waited until he was certain that when he peeked around the door, his lover would be asleep. Maybe, just maybe, he’d convinced the doctor on duty that a little extra nudge to help his Mycroft rest would be extremely helpful since his partner was the most stubborn man in existence and could easily fight doing what it would take to start the healing process properly, such as decide he had work to do tonight in case he had a hard time with it tomorrow when he’d be terribly unhappy with the smaller prescribed dosage of his lovely medication.

And, right now, his only thoughts were towards making Mycroft as comfortable as possible. It felt a tad strange to be the one a punch was thrown over, but it was a good strange. A very good strange, actually. His Mycroft went primal and there wasn’t much in the world he would have predicted would make that happen, but happen it did. Coming to London was supposed to be a chance to get some time to focus on their relationship and this went a long way towards turning the focusing wheel. However, a bit of instruction on teaching a bloke a lesson he won’t forget might be something he should provide and provide quickly. Mycroft’s long, delicate fingers would likely appreciate the gesture…
Chapter 13

“Am I privileged to have reached the residence of Mr. Joe Frasier?”

Lestrade laughed at Grandmama’s prim and proper tone and shook his head in wonder at the speed with which she acquired information. He’d thought about phoning last night, but decided that this morning was soon enough to share the news. It was nice that someone spared him the effort.

“You are, but as his trainer, I have to restrict visitors at the moment, because he needs his rest.”

“Then you are most fortunate I have no intention of visiting. I would hate for my visage to be rearranged in the fashion of Mr. Frasier’s most recent opponent.”

“Since you won’t have done anything bastardly to deserve it, I suspect your visage is safe.”

“Excellent. Now, do tell me how my grandson fares today. Given his lack of experience in fisticuffs, I suspect he is in less than stellar condition.”

“One very sprained thumb and a miserably bruised hand, but he’ll be fine with some rest and a bit of healing. I insisted he go to hospital just as a precaution, though, but the doctor said no broken bones and Mycroft will be alright with time. I also insisted he stay home today and only permitted a few things be delivered for him to read and have a few phone conversations over. Nothing stressful and nothing requiring the full power of his mighty brain because that’s dimmed a bit with the medication.”

“He is taking that much pain reliever?”

“Well… I convinced the doctor that Mycroft’s nature would keep him from resting unless he had a little help and the man had seen enough stubborn patients to believe me. So…”

“Mycroft is a touch more medicated than a normal individual so that he does not prolong his suffering or aggravate his condition into something troubling.”

“That’s the sum of it. Only for last night and today, though. And tonight, most likely. Then, I’ll switch him to the less potent prescription, because I know he’s in London for a reason and I suspect that reason really can’t wait for him very long.”

“In that you are most correct; however, the needs for the day will handily be met from his bed and through the telephone lines. There will be several additional deliveries today of papers for Mycroft to review, so I must ask that if he appears too muddled to thoroughly read and interpret them, that you move forward with your schedule and reduce the level of his medication.”

“I will, I promise. I know he’d rather endure more pain and do his work properly than be comfortable and make errors that could be costly to... whoever it is this is benefitting.”

“Very good. Then I shall leave the situation in your capable hands, but do phone me immediately if the situation changes. And pass along my well wishes to Mycroft, if you will. I suspect he can use whatever quantity of supportive thoughts he can garner.”

“The very first thing I’ll do. After I get him another cup of mostly lukewarm chocolate.”

“Chocolate?”
“I have no idea, but I think his medicine has given him a sweet tooth. He had me layer jam on his breakfast toast a good thumb thick and has sent me to the kitchen every fifteen minutes for biscuits, sweets and some tinned peaches that he said were abominations to nature when he saw them two days ago, but now are ‘semi-solid presentations of nature’s finest nectar.’ I’ve already phoned the people who deliver the groceries and there should be another half dozen tins arriving soon, along with everything else Mycroft’s asked for that we either didn’t have or didn’t have enough of when he started eating and nearly dissolved into tears when it was gone.”

“Are you sure he is not gestating the next generation of the Holmes family?”

“I suppose we’ll know soon enough. He’s lean, so I expect he’d start to show a baby bulge fairly early on.”

“I shall await your announcement before purchasing the christening gown. Brave heart, Gregory, and do tell Mycroft that I am most proud of him. You might also confide the knowledge that his grandfather once nursed a similar injury from similar cause when a decided non-gentleman dared overstep his bounds towards me at a charity function. Though, now that I come to think of it, my husband was caught consuming a full day’s baking of shortbread in the aftermath of his battle. Apparently, genetics will prevail, regardless of the age or era.”

Laughing while he made his goodbyes, Lestrade wished, not for the first time, that he’d known Mycroft’s grandfather. Or father, for that matter. The Holmes line definitely had colorful streaks if you knew where to look…

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“Peaches?”

“Not yet, love, but soon. I have your chocolate, though, and, when that last round of biscuits digests, I’ll bring another bowl of the yoghurt/honey/chocolate-coated nut mix-up I made for you earlier.”

“Ambrosia, simply ambrosia. I weep for those who have not experienced your culinary prowess.”

“I’m just happy you’re happy. And Grandmama says hello. She already heard of your adventure and is very happy you took a swing at that arse.”

“For your honor, I would fight a hundred blackguards. A thousand even.”

“If a queue begins to form, I’ll let you know straight away. Grandmama also said to expect a few more deliveries of papers and the like. You need to tell me if you have too difficult a time reading or understanding what it is you’re reading. I know you don’t want to make any mistakes and I’ll lower your medication if your brain feels too fuddled.”

“Oh, bother. I am very much enjoying my current level of medicated bliss.”

“I have no doubt and you deserve every moment of it, but I also know you won’t be happy tomorrow if you’ve found you’ve grandly fucked the situation you’re working on.”

“Most true. Have I mentioned today how arousing I find your mind?”

“Not today, but I am always happy to hear a compliment.”

“I find your mind terribly arousing, Gregory Lestrade. It heats my blood and delivers the most
wonderful diversity of salacious thoughts to my imagination.”

“I promise to be as smart as possible for you so you can have all the lusty thoughts you can bear.”

“Delightful! And, might we… make an inventory, shall we say, of a few of them?”

“No randiness while you have work to do.”

“A soupcon.”

“No.”

“A scosche.”

“No.”

“A smidgen.”

“How many more of those can you think of.”

“Scads.”

It was actually a relief when the doorbell rang because Lestrade was perilously close to having his resolve fail in the most pleasant way imaginable.

“Oh, what a shame. I’ll see who that is while you make a start on… this folder.”

“I have already read and memorized that folder.”

“This one then. It’s a pretty green, so you should like that.”

“Ooh… I do enjoy the robustness of a bold, virescent presentation.”

Leaving Mycroft with his papers, a stroll down for the hopefully-arrived groceries gained Lestrade a slightly different delivery at the front door.

“Oh. Hello. May I help you?”

“Yes, I was hoping to speak to Mycroft Holmes, if he is available.”

“I’m sorry, but he’s not at the moment. I’ll give him a message, though.”

“No broken bones, I hope.”

A tingly thread began to wind through Lestrade’s spine as he looked more closely at the fellow in front of him. There was something about the eyes… oh no.

“Look, if you’re here to make trouble…”

“Good heavens, no. Edmund is a child and deserved to be chastised like the most spoiled of the breed, of which my brother is the undisputed king. I was more concerned about Mycroft. Such an altercation is very much not his forte and I simply wanted to ascertain that he suffered no lasting harm. I would also like to speak to him to offer my apologies on Edmund’s behalf. None will be forthcoming from the source, however, some amends should be made for his disgraceful behavior.”

“I… ok. That’s… I’m sure that would mean a great deal to Mycroft. Come in.”
Eyeing the blonde man and hoping terribly this wasn’t some form of ambush attack for revenge, Lestrade left their guest in the sitting room while he raced upstairs to alert Mycroft to the situation and help him out of bed, since his lover refused to meet a guest in the bedroom like a ‘consumptive invalid.’

“Ah, how good of you to pay us a visit. I hope you were not inconvenienced by the trip.”

Even a touch wobbly on his feet, Mycroft Holmes was the epitome of politeness and Lestrade gave him a tiny rub on his back as a reward.

“Mycroft, good to see you though the circumstances are other than I would wish. Not too worse for wear it seems.”

Their guest raised his hand and made a ‘and this?’ expression that had Mycroft chuckling and raising his own in response.

“Merely a sprain. It shall be as new in but a few days.”

“Excellent. I did garner from Edmund, at least in his highly edited manner, the reason for the incident and I would offer my deepest apologies to both you and your…”

“Partner is term we prefer.”

“… your partner, Gregory. Edmund’s superciliousness is the least of his undesirable qualities, but it is certainly sufficient on its own to wreak havoc and I am very sorry that havoc was visited upon you both. If there is anything I can do to make the situation more comfortable for you, Mycroft, you have only to ask.”

“I do appreciate that and if a need arises, I shall certainly see you informed. For the moment, though, Gregory is tending to my wants with care and devotion and I suspect I shall muddle through this silly sprain quite handily.”

“I am happy to hear it. It rankled Edmund, I suspect, that he could not make your devotion sway, given what he sees as his incomparable charms. Dear brother has yet to learn that men of character are not distracted by the superficial or that there exists such a thing in this world as honest and true love. If he does not mend his ways, I expect he will never learn, but, perhaps, not all are suited in this life for a devoted relationship and thrive best from adulation given in quantity rather than quality. Regardless…”

A card was removed from their guest’s wallet and passed over to Mycroft who grinned as he reached for it with his bandaged hand and had to swap mid-grasp.

“I am most serious about stepping up if you require anything during your convalescence. And do contact me for lunch the next time you are in London. Gregory, please do feel included in that invitation. Now, if you will excuse me, time waits for no man, I’m afraid, and I do have certain matters that require my attention. Mycroft, Gregory… thank you for seeing me and I hope the remainder of your day is most pleasant.”

Taking the hint, Lestrade escorted their guest to the door and returned to find Mycroft smiling somewhat triumphantly at the card in his hand.

“I take it you’re satisfied with the apology.”

“Most. Harry, unlike his younger brother, is a most cordial fellow and serious about the work he does. In fact, I had hoped to use my association with Edmund to come to know him better and, it
seems, I shall have my chance.”

“Government man, like you?”

“Yes, though he has some rather firm connections with members of the royal family that will be most useful in the years to come. Grandmama is well tied to the older generation, but Harry went to school with and associates with many of the younger ones and I expect that will carry through his lifetime. In addition, he is simply an honorable, affable individual and if one is to actually have friends in this damnable business, then he is certainly a candidate of quality.”

“Well, I was certainly impressed. Not everyone has the decency to apologize when it needs to be said. And, if you win a real friend out of this disaster, then I’ll say that’s worth celebrating.”

“Peaches?”

“As soon as they arrive. But, since you’re on your feet, want to stay on them a little longer and direct me making whatever mishy-mashy sweet and luscious thing we’re able in the kitchen?”

“A superlative idea! Have we walnuts?”

“We have walnuts.”

“I saw in one of our recipe books a lovely idea of toasting walnuts with butter and sugar and would that not make an exceptional thing to add to the vanilla ice cream you scurrilously stole from me before I could see it finished?”

“You were going to eat the entire container! That would not have been good for your stomach.”

“It would have been soothing.”

“You don’t have a bad belly you have a bad hand.”

“My hand requires soothing, also. Walnuts and ice cream now?”

Lestrade shook his head and laughed as he leaned over to give his lover a kiss and take his good arm to escort him to the kitchen. Another turn at the pans this morning was certainly a small price to pay to see Mycroft content, especially with more work coming for his partner to deal with. And, maybe, he could convince Mycroft to eat something approximating real food in the process. Mentioning he was becoming just like Sherlock should do the trick. Or, at least, he could shovel a bit of meat and veg into his partner’s mouth when it dropped from shock…

“Come again?”

“Every of the fermented atrocities you offer. One glass of each.”

“The Old Bill does turn a blind eye to slightly underage guests in my establishment, because most of them are their own kids, but I think you and John might be a bit too underage for their liking.”

“Science shall not waver in the face of age-discrimination!”

Sherlock glared at Lestrade’s father and nudged John to produce their intentions, which John waved about in the air with a great deal of fanfare.
“Got yourself a magic wand, lad? See if you can conjure me a lovely lady to spend my off hours with tomorrow like a good boy, why don’t you?”

“Ugh… you have as little science acumen as paltry as the simian you claim as an offspring. That is a hydrometer. We will now determine the specific gravity of your substandard offerings to begin our database of properties of the libations of the lower class. In the event of poisoning via alcoholic vector, my data will prove invaluable in determining which purveyor of misery-numbing alcohol provided the means by which the victim was murdered.”

“Oh. Ok, then.”

Puffed with pride at the forcefulness of his argument, Sherlock motioned John up on a bar stool, then got off his own and boosted John onto the adjacent bar stool, before clambering back to receive the first of his pints.

“What’s that thing?”

“Of course! I do not sully myself with physical money that has passed through countless diseased hands.”

“That’s probably smart. I watched this programme and they looked at how filthy everyday things were and money certainly didn’t do itself proud, let me tell you. Ok, what do we do now?”

“I shall lower my hydrometer into the liquid and John will record the result.”

“Is that thing clean?”

“Naturally.”

“Good, because I fancy a pint of lager and since this one’s paid for, it’d be silly to draw another.”

“Whilst I deplore your tendency towards drink, I must admire your efficiency.”

“You’re a good lad, Sherlock. Test away!”

The intensity of Sherlock and John’s expressions tickled the older man’s heart, but one didn’t discourage honest curiosity, even if it was a little left of the norm for boys their age.

“1.125. John record the value, along with the name of this libatory perversion.”

“Ummm… no.”

Two sets of eyes looked up at Lestrade’s father, who was shaking his head and wearing a mournful expression.

“Do not naysay my results, plebian!”

“That’s a fairly basic lager, lad, and your number’s far too high.”

“What! How dare you… you have no knowledge of science to contract my findings.”

“Science, no. Alcohol, yes. Told you I’ve done a lot of jobs and more than a few have been behind a bar or selling the things that go into bars. I picked up a few scraps along the way and I’m telling you, not to be mean, mind you, but so you don’t record poor data, that your specific gravity number is too high for this particular beer. Are you sure you set your hydrometer right? I mean... it’s a lovely thing, but not exactly what I’m used to, which is why I didn’t recognize it straight off.”
Sherlock’s face was turning the angriest of reds, but John’s broke out into a wide smile.

“Does that mean I don’t have a bladder infection?”

“Uh… I don’t know. Do you feel like you have one? Hurts when you piss?”

“No, but Sherlock said my wee had a high specific gravity and that was a possible reason. He was going to do more tests later, but I feel alright, so I suppose I am! That’s a real diagnosis! I’m going to be a great doctor.”

“WAIT! Are you impugning my device?”

With his fortress being assaulted on two fronts, Sherlock’s temper was fraying faster than a rope being nibbled by a goat.

“No, lad, because I’m not entirely sure what impugn means, but maybe it needs a bit of fiddling to get it to read properly. How about we do this? I’ll pour your samples and you record what your device says. I’ll tell you what the number should be around and you can see if there’s a pattern or something to learn. You’re good at maths, so that should be easy, right?”

With a compliment to salve his ego, Sherlock’s mind was eased into conceding there was some small measure of merit to the suggestion.

“That is the most ridiculous suggestion that has ever insulted my auditory canals. However, since John and I had allotted this block of time specifically for this purpose, I suppose wasting it in that fashion is not the most egregious waste imaginable, though it does rank squarely in the top ten percent of the list.”

“Good! And we can check John’s wee again, too, and make certain his bladder’s tip-top. In fact, I’ll start that off with some of the juice blend you two like so he’ll have a lot of wee for you to investigate.”

“And chips.”

“Naturally. Growing boys need their strength and there’s little in this world more strengthening than potatoes and grease. Lived a good bit of my life on them and look at me!”

Sherlock’s pantomime of being struck blind was growing more dramatic by the day, with John tutting and patting his friend’s hand with the utmost of sympathy.

“Do not accost my vision with your pathetic attempts at striking a muscle-demonstrating pose. Accept your dotage gracefully or interact not with those who are still young and supple.”

Sherlock and John visiting the pub after school was an absolute joy in the opinion of the new owner, even with Sherlock’s silliness, and he desperately hoped it would continue after the older ones returned from London. His son was raising two smart, unique boys and that he could be a small part of that was like a dream come true. Not a dream he had when he was a young idiot, admittedly, but being older and marginally less of an idiot changed a lot of things.

“Perhaps if you double the size of John and my repast, the additional weight to lift might promote the muscle growth you desperately crave. And I require another pint!”

Having grandsons was a treat and nobody could ever tell him otherwise…
“Why do you two reek of lager?”

Two smelly boys stood in front of Lestrade’s mother, squirming slightly from the scrutiny and John decided he should probably answer since Sherlock’s answers to questions didn’t always make a situation better.

“Because Sherlock spilled his fourth pint. And his sixth. One on him and the next one on me, but I think the one on me was just because he was feeling strange about being the only one wet.”

“Pints?”

Counting to ten was always handy when dealing with children, but with these two, counting to twenty was generally a more stabilizing tactic.

“We went to the pub.”

“Oh, I gathered that, John. And that fucking idiot let you drink?”

“If you mean Greg’s dad, then yes. We drank a lot of juice, more than usual, but that was because we needed another sample of my wee and that was the quickest way to get it.”

Life with Sherlock and John was anything but ordinary, something that had both its good and bad points, and which side wee fell on was anyone’s guess, but, as it was really the least of the day’s worries…

“Leaving aside the wee part, can I, at the very minimum, assume my stupid ex didn’t let you drink any of what you spilled on yourself?”

“We weren’t drinking the beer, that’s true. We were testing it.”

“Testing?”

“Sherlock’s collecting data. And we put all the pints on Mycroft’s tab, so the pub made money! Or not. I’m not sure how that works since Mycroft owns half of the pub, so he’s paying himself, actually, but at least we tried. That counts, right?”

Drat. Couldn’t call the police and have the arse arrested for serving beer to very-minor minors. But, he did have to manage the two during one of Sherlock’s science projects, so that was some bit of disaster levied on his day, though not nearly as much as the aforementioned arse deserved.

“I think it does. Now, should I ask why you’re here or just see what I have that’s made of chocolate and sugar and drop it on a plate?”

The fact that the two boys conferenced about their decision indicated quite clearly the intent of their visit.

“We came to say hello and see if you needed anything what with Greg away in London.”

Said with John’s most winning smile, as a bonus. One day, that boy was going to be a prize charmer, which made association with her ex-husband even more worrying…

“You’re both such good, caring boys. How could I not reward all that concern with anything but my best sweet treats. Or the best the shops had when I paid them a visit, since I haven’t had time to bake anything lately. Come on, let’s see what we can find.”

The sugar-anticipating shudders of glee made Sherlock and John’s honorary grandmother laugh as
she followed them into the kitchen. The dads away for a day or two and these two were already grabbing whatever they could from their gran and… that other one who would remain nameless because he was a bastard. If the whiff of beer hadn’t been so strong, she was certain she’d be able to smell chip-scented oil on the boys’ fingertips…

“Oh look, one unopened package of biscuits. A few of these and some milk?”

“Few?”

“Yes, Sherlock, few. If you can find room for them in your stomach, then we can see about increasing that number. How many orders of chips did you eat at the pub today?”

“Quantification of chips is not necessary for their consumption, so I paid little attention.”

“Did any of that consumption involve actual food?”

“Potatoes are highly nourishing! Though Papa Lestrade is in no manner a superlative example of anything except penury, that he has dined on them frequently is testimony to the fact that one is not left weedy and frail if they are the primary component of one’s diet. Along with the extremely large provision of micronutrients in chocolate, I have crafted a diet that has provided me, undoubtedly, with the soundest physical constitution of the modern age.”

Strip away the pretentious vocabulary and Sherlock’s argument was precisely what a lad of his age would mount. It was good to know that underneath that incredible intelligence was a young boy who still behaved very much like one. It certainly made child management a less-daunting task…

“And it’s good! But… yeah, we had to eat real food or we couldn’t have a second order of chips.”

“Oh? Real food defined as what, John dear?”

“The cook heated a pie for us and we shared.”

And, considering the pies that pub generally offered, it was even odds that it was more heart-killing and growth-stunting than the chips, but… it was a nod towards something nourishing, so the food police couldn’t be called either. Was that pillock ever going to commit an arrestable offence so she could have some fun? Prick.

“Alright then. Good to know I don’t have to worry about you contracting scurvy or rickets or whatever diseases you get when you don’t eat well. At least your cook will… oh, hold on…”

The ringing phone offered little distraction to the boys who were merrily eating their biscuits, but that changed when they heard who was on the other end of the call.

“Greg! My son remembers me, I’m so proud.”

“Tell Greg I said hello! So does Sherlock!”

“Do nt puht werds n’to my mowf, Jn W’tsn.”

“Can’t. There’s no room what with those three biscuits you just shoved in.”

“The boys say hello and pass some of that along to Mycroft. So tell me, how are things with the both of you?”

“Things are… interesting. The first two days we were here, especially. We should be home
tomorrow, though. Whatever Mycroft was working is getting settled right on schedule, all due to Mycroft’s talent and enormous brain, so we’re relaxing tonight and will probably get to spend most of tomorrow together, if all goes well. Are Sherlock and John already driving you insane?"

“Rowena said you two were having your fair share of adventures and you’d have stories to share, but wouldn’t part with the details. I suppose I’ll have to wait until you’re home to start the interrogation. And, no, the boys haven’t made me lose my mind quite yet, I’ve just lost all my food since they’re eating like a pair of wild dogs.”

“So nothing special, then. Good! Nice to know they’re behaving.”

“For the moment. Have you had a chance to do anything fun, Greg? Tell me you haven’t been housebound this entire time.”

“Oh no. Got to see the city and escorted to a very fine dinner by a certain special someone. We’re going to visit what passes for Mycroft’s local tonight and then watch a film if it’s not too late. Tomorrow is going to be a bit of shopping for the boys and I’m also promised an excellent lunch, so I’d say this has been a grand time. And… well, let’s just say Grandmama was right and there were a few other things to make it grand, but I’ll save those stories for when we can talk in person.”

“I don’t want to hear about your sex life, Greg. On second thought, mine is a bit dry now, so a little thrill wouldn’t exactly be unwelcome. Please begin and be as detailed as possible.”

“Ending this conversation now. Thank you for making me deaf. Lovely thing to do to your own flesh and blood.”

“I have no idea where you inherited your prudish sensibilities, but it certainly wasn’t from me or your father. Maybe you are the milkman’s son. He did offer some especially fine cream…”

“There was no milkman, cream or not. I’ve had too many people, now that Dad’s back, remind me that I’m the mirror image of him for any random milkman to have passed me his genes. Speaking of Dad, has he been arrested yet? Paid a visit by the taxman?”

“You would think so, but no, he’s keeping himself well out of trouble from what I hear. Making Sherlock and John plump, though.”

Two scandalized gasps and identical turns to check status of bellies and bums preceded twin fiery glares at the woman who doused their fire by waving the biscuits package at them in warning. The resulting soggy pouts were enough to win them another two of their prizes.

“Lovely. Tell me they haven’t been at the pub every afternoon?”

“Have you two been at the pub every day since Greg and Mycroft went to London? I’ve got two heads nodding happily at me, so I’d say yes and Mycroft’s tab now dangles from bar top to floor.”

“Even lovelier. Let me guess, they visit with Dad until you’re home, then visit you, getting their little faces fed each time. Are they even remembering that they have schoolwork? Have they bathed? Are you looking at two cavemen who can’t spell or do maths?”

“Listen to you sounding just like a mum. You’re having your holiday, Gregory Lestrade, and they’re having theirs. But, I don’t see any necklaces made of dinosaur bones and Sherlock still sounds like someone reading a letter from a Victorian literature professor, but I’ll check. John, how far behind are you and Sherlock on your schoolwork?”
John wiped his mouth and burped in very caveman fashion before answering, prompting a closer look for vegetables growing behind his ears and mice living in his hair.

“I only have a little to do and Sherlock is going to help me since it’s science questions and drawing a picture of a cell, but we can do that later. We have to do at least one assignment when we visit the pub after school or we have to wash our own dishes. Writing a paragraph about our favorite book isn’t so awful when the other choice is washing plates.”

Now the parenting police were thwarted! What had come over the man? Did he receive a brain transplant? He couldn’t afford that! If he had the cash, his liver was more needy than his useless brain, anyway…

“Apparently your father is making them do some of their schoolwork at the pub, so they’re mostly done for the day.”

“What? Mum, are you alright? Have you suffered head trauma or something?”

“I’m just as shocked as you are, but Danny might be trying to stay in Mycroft’s good graces, so he doesn’t turn around, sell the pub and put a boot in your father’s arse.”

“That’s a more plausible an explanation than Dad actually being responsible, which we both know is as impossible as John saying no to a new suit from Grandmama.”

“Which reminds me…”

“Yes?”

“Rowena phoned this morning and is hoping for a bit of family time this coming weekend. I’ll give you the warning now that Mycroft’s mother will be there. Along with her new… whatever.”

“What!”

“I think it’s to get a good look at this bloke and see if he has designs on any of the family money, but that’s just my opinion. So, brace yourself, but you might break the news to Mycroft so he has time to prepare himself, too.”

And, now that she realized it, Sherlock and John were just getting the news, and two more biscuits on their plates wasn’t enough to erase the shock on their faces.

“Wonderful. Are any other people going to be there? Is it another party?”

“I think it is, actually. I’m invited and told that my new dress would be perfect for the occasion, so I suspect there’s going to be some degree of party going on.”

“Is it… it’s not an engagement party for Mycroft’s mum, is it?”

“No… that much Rowena was clear about. There was actually a little venom in her voice as she said it, too, so I suspect she’d not be heavily in favor of a step-father for Mycroft and Sherlock.”

“Which was why Mycroft’s mum was a snake and threatened John that night she broke the news of her new fellow to us. Wanted to gain Mycroft’s support if she ever did want to marry again. Good to know that time’s not now, though. I don’t think his heart could take much more stress, what with everything else going on the past several weeks.”

“I’m more concerned about yours, Greg. She doesn’t like you very much, you know.”
“Yes, but I don’t care, so there’s no stress in that. My only stress is from seeing how horribly it eats into Mycroft when she’s having a go at him, though he’s handling it a lot better now that he was the first time I saw them together. In any case, I know that for any trouble she tries to cause, you’ll show her what real women are made of and bloody her nose good and proper.”

“That’s the truth and don’t forget it for a moment. Nobody says evil things about my family unless they really aren’t’ happy with the current number of the teeth in their heads.”

“Something you and Mycroft have in common.”

“What?”

“When we come home, Mum. That’s a story for later.”

“Oh, now I’m very curious. Tomorrow, right?”

“Unless something happens. Let me go and talk to Mycroft and we’ll continue with this conversation tomorrow. I think I hear hungry tigers growing in your kitchen, anyway, so you might want to throw them something and save yourself a mauling.”

“It’s a very good thing you and Mycroft got them bicycles for Christmas, since these two need something to help burn up all that food they’re eating. But you’re right, they’re beginning to chew on the table and I don’t have the money right now to buy a replacement. Goodbye, son. Enjoy your last night of peace and quiet.”

“Thanks. Did I forget to mention that Sherlock and John are staying with you tomorrow night so…”

The click on the other end of the line made Lestrade grin and almost washed out of his mouth the sour taste of another visit with Mycroft’s mother. Never a joyful thing, but they should probably meet the bloke she was going to be spending a lot of time with, regardless of whether a ring was put on a finger or not. Well, that would make two members of the family who would happily throw punches to defend his honor, if it came to it. Sherlock and John would toss in, too, even if all they could do was do a low tackle and take the villain down at the knees. That was helpful, though… kicking a person when they were down was a lot easier than when they were up and able to run away…

“Alright… get them out now. All your questions, I’ll answer what I can.”

Sherlock and John swallowed, then realized they actually didn’t have any biscuit to swallow and tried not to look sheepish as they struggled the frame their questions.

“We… Sherlock’s mum… she has a… real boyfriend?”

John, apparently, was taking point in the conversation, which was a good thing since Sherlock seemed to have fallen a bit into himself as he let the idea percolate in his brain.

“That’s what I understand. That chap she met in America. He’s still around, from what I gather.”

“Are they… you said they’re not getting married but…”

“That’s not the plan, no. At least, not at this point. Your Grandmama was very adamant about
that. Just someone she travels with and goes to parties with and the like. It’s… it’s not a bad thing, really. Having someone to do things with, like a boyfriend or just a friend, even. Does that bother you?”

“I… no. Not really, I guess. She’s mean, though, and that probably means he’s mean and I can’t say I like that very much. Especially…”

John cut his eyes towards Sherlock, who received a motherly, calming hand smoothing his hair while he frowned and chewed his lower lip.

“Well, we don’t know he’s mean, so let’s not get ahead of ourselves. People can be very different and still enjoy each other’s company. Look at Mycroft and Greg, for instance. I tell you what, though… you can write down all the things you’re worried about or want to know and bring them with you when we go to Rowena’s house for the party. Do a little investigating, some detective work. How does that sound?”

That perked Sherlock’s ears and made a break in his wall of silence.

“Yes. Yes, that is the correct strategy. I require data, therefore, data I shall have. John! We will begin preparing our observational chart as soon as we return home.”

“After you help John with his science work, you mean.”

Sherlock scowled at his current nemesis, who decided that a small concession was warranted due to the circumstances.

“In fact, why don’t you do that now? Greg did his schoolwork right here, so there’s no reason you can’t either.”

“And we shall be provided with victuals?”

“Does that mean biscuits?”

“Or biscuit-related products.”

“You may have a couple more, but that’s all. And no calling me because you’re suffering tonight from a dodgy stomach.”

Both Sherlock and John waved off the warning and stared at the biscuits package, until its contents were placed on their plates. Then it was the gathering of school materials and Greg’s mother was transported back to the past when a single boy had sat there, with something to tide him over to whatever dinner was going to be and his books strewn over the table. One son raised and now helping to raise her son’s sons. Some might rebel at being a grandmother at her age, but they were daft. This was the best thing in the world and nobody could ever tell her otherwise…
“Mycroft punched someone?”

John’s shock was so intense that he completely forgot to pat down the new arrivals for gifts, though it was insignificant compared to Sherlock’s, which had the small boy sputtering and engaged in a disoriented ritual of staggering in a vague circle around the library.

“That he did. Championing my honor with the bloke in that photograph, in fact. The one you took a pencil and drew horns on. Got a bit mouthy and rude to me and Mycroft showed him the error of his ways.”

Rubbing Mycroft’s back, Lestrade smiled at his partner and soaked up the returned shy smile his praise had produced.

“That’s… was it a good punch?”

“Good? That evil git probably had to get a doctor to put his face back in order and Mycroft had to make a little trip to hospital to get his hand checked out. Didn’t think once about the possible pain, just threw the hardest punch he could and knocked that idiot silly. Pushed him out the door, too, as an encore.”

“The cataclysm is at hand!”

Sherlock was now on his knees, raising his hands heavenwards and both Mycroft and Lestrade breathed in the experience of being back at home.

“Fear not, brother dear, for I am now most practiced at combating the vilest of demons and shall defend you accordingly.”

Now, Sherlock was on his side, loudly weeping at the turn of events, so the older boys stepped over his distraught body to have a seat on the sofa.

“Does it still hurt?”

Mycroft had, at least, one admirer among the younger generation and John stared eagerly at the colorful hand that Mycroft held up for further inspection.

“A bit, however, the worst of the pain has passed. Gregory took great care that I rested and did not take steps to further irritate the injury, so it is well along the path to healing. He also provided some instruction in the proper manner of configuring one’s hand when such an action is taken, so I might not find myself in quite such dire straits, should again the occasion arise for me to raise fists to protect Gregory’s good name.”

The memory of teaching Mycroft how to throw a proper punch, using a pillow and Mycroft’s non-dominant hand, was one that Lestrade would long savor. In truth, with Mycroft’s natural grace and command of his body, he could likely train to be a highly-skilled fighter, but the idea of that wasn’t one he was going to voice aloud. Fighters got hurt, even if they won, and the thought of Mycroft being hurt wasn’t one his brain, or stomach, managed easily.

“Can you teach me? I’ll probably have to punch someone to protect Sherlock’s good name at some point because… well, because Sherlock… and I don’t want my hand to look like that when it’s over.”
Sherlock’s muffled retort was absorbed by the library rug, so the other three mentally filled in something appropriate in their minds.

“We’ll see, John. Now, why don’t you tell me what trouble you’ve gotten into these past few days, while Mycroft and I haven’t been here to keep you on your leash.”

“We didn’t get into trouble! Well, not much. We did have to stay late at school one day because we were passing notes and the teacher caught us. I think we got into trouble more because Sherlock wouldn’t tell him what the notes were about and he couldn’t understand them on his own. I really didn’t understand them, either, since they were about an experiment Sherlock wanted to do and there was a lot of maths and pictures and things that don’t really make sense to anyone but Sherlock. I just write ‘yes’ or draw a check mark or smiling face for notes like that and Sherlock seems happy, but that didn’t seem to be enough for our teacher.”

So, no buildings suffering structural damage, no loss of life or limb… a success all around.

“That doesn’t sound too bad. Good! Then Mycroft and I know we can go away for a few days and you two will be alright.”

“Not that you’ll get to often, because you’re going to be starting work soon and that’s not going to leave you time for holidays.”

“True, but, I’ll worry about that when, and if, I’m actually wearing my uniform.”

“That’s next week.”

Lestrade stared at John, then at Mycroft, who shrugged convincingly enough that his lover didn’t start to suspect him of anything of an interfering nature.

“Come again, lad?”

“Well, there’s this…”

John went over to a small table near the library door, stepping over the now-truly-dead Sherlock, and returned with an envelope which had, unsurprisingly, already been opened.

“You have your interview on Monday morning and you have to take some tests on Tuesday. You have to visit a doctor for a check, but Sherlock already called their doctor and he’s going to do it Monday afternoon. Besides, we talked to Mr. Lestrade about it and he talked to his friends in the police and they said you already look to be the best person for the job so unless you do something stupid…”

Sherlock’s moaned ‘which is highly likely’ went entirely unremarked.

“… you have the job! We didn’t tell your mum so it would be a surprise, but we told Grandmama and she said that we get to go back to her house again and have a big dinner to celebrate. Isn’t that great!”

Greg leaned back on the sofa and let out a large breath, staring so hard at John that Mycroft began to fear for his vision, which needed to be in top shape for his physical examination!

“Gregory… are you alright?”

“N… next week?”
Sherlock’s feebly-groaned ‘unless you disgrace yourself in the interim, which is also highly likely’ went as unregarded as his previous ghostly utterance.

“Gregory?”

“I mean… next week?”

Even John was beginning to worry about the stunned man on the sofa because the one thing the library didn’t need right now was another dead body.

“I take it you were not expecting your application to be acted upon so swiftly, my dear.”

“Nooooooo…..”

Mycroft patted his lover on the knee and asked John to fetch their patient some water, then, changed his mind and sent the boy on a brandy mission, instead.

“ Might you be able to add any further details to your thoughts or shall we simply sit in silence while we watch Sherlock decay?”

As Sherlock’s corpse began reciting its treatise on why they should be honored to witness his putrefaction, Lestrade took the exceptionally-large glass of brandy from John’s hands and took a healthy swallow before feeling his brain start to function again.

“I… I just didn’t think it would be so soon. A few weeks, at least, I thought before they’d start on things, but… but I suppose if they need a body, waiting isn’t going to get the job done. I just…”

“You hoped for a slightly extended interval between your freedom from school and the start of a new responsibility?”

“That’s a good way of putting it, I suppose. Sounds rather lazy though, doesn’t it?”

“No, not really. You have not enjoyed a great deal of ease these last weeks, Gregory, and no one would think the lesser of you for wanting some time to recover your energies before embarking on the next phase of your life. If you like, I could…”

“No, whatever it is, no. I appreciate you wanting to help, love, but if they’re moving things along this quickly, it’s because there’s a need and it’s not right to ask them to wait a bit just so I can have an extra week or two of idleness. I’ll… I’ll make do. Shite! I have to… where are those books Edwards gave me. I’ve got to start reading! I can’t go to a party this weekend! Call Grandmama and tell her…”

A kiss cut off Lestrade’s rapid dissolution and the urging of another swallow of his brandy helped steady his breathing a bit more, though John stood at the ready to refill the glass or run for a cold compress, or a doctor, if the need arose.

“You shall certainly need and will see time for your studies, my dear, do not worry about that for a moment. I did look through the various manuals and I believe that the majority of what you shall have to demonstrate are skills appropriate for the post and not an encyclopedic knowledge of law or any other academic topic. We shall, of course, bring with us your materials to Grandmama’s and I shall…”

Mycroft took his own sip of Lestrade’s brandy before continuing.

“… act as primary caregiver for the children while you prepare yourself for your exams and for
the party. It will be alright, Gregory, that I promise you. Apparently, you are already the candidate of choice and I suspect it would take a great deal to remove you from that position."

"Your dad promised free beer all night at the pub for the policeman the day they hired you, so I think they’ll give you the job just for that.”

Lestrade laughed a brittle, ‘why am I not surprised’ laugh and then a real one at John’s highly-pleased smile.

“That’s Dad… getting right to the heart of the matter and mucking in in his own special way. Love, you ready to absorb the cost of our village’s finest taking advantage of free beer and, likely, anything else they want for bringing me into their ranks?”

“I shall ensure my little business venture suffers not a whit for that particular bit of munificence.”

“Don’t forget, you also have to absorb the cost of these two and their chip consumption.”

“Perhaps Grandmama will grant me a small loan.”

Lestrade laughed and shook his head, draining the last of the brandy in what he hoped was a get-me-drunk-fast manner and moved himself around so he reclined on the sofa with his head in Mycroft’s lap.

“I’m a normal bloke, you know. Common, basic education, no talent for art or music or anything special… how can my life be this loony?”

“I believe the universe grants to all of us what we both deserve and can bear. You deserve the finest this life can offer, my beloved, and so you are granted a loving near-fiancé, two stalwart charges, albeit one is currently deceased, and the career for which your heart has longed. Truly, I see no dissonance here.”

One kiss on his partner’s forehead and the motion to John to begin hunting through the luggage for what treasures he might find earmarked for him and the deceased marked the official start of the relaxation portion of the evening. At some point, respects must be paid to his mother-in-law, but an hour’s delay or so would make little difference. His Gregory needed time to let both the news and the brandy seep into his brain and it was his privilege to provide support and comfort while that occurred.

“A spyglass! Just like the pirates use! Sherlock, we can spy on people now and build a boat and be pirates!”

The dearly departed leapt up and began his own search for more gifts, crowing in triumph at the vial of sediment from the Thames and the book of microfauna species to use to identify the beasts in his muddy treasure.

“Sherlock’s going to be busy for the night. And John will be setting up trying to see treasure-laden ships on the horizon. I think we have the evening to ourselves, my dear Mycroft. How about a few more brandies and an early turn to bed?”

“Or… we see you provided with a hearty meal to fortify your stomach for the rather copious amount of brandy you recently quaffed and then a phone call to your mother to soothe her mind as to our safe arrival home.”

“Boo!”
“Gregory Lestrade… you will thank me for my forethought in the morning.”

“I’d thank you more if… drat. Foiled in my sexy suggestions by very big ears attached to very small heads.”

And two sets of ‘oh no Greg’s going to embarrass himself’ eyes staring at him from those very small heads was another welcome bit of feeling right at home.

“You two can bugger off now, you know. Sherlock’s alive again, so nothing’s stopping you.”

“Libidinous fool. We have been promised cake and your lusts shall not alter the course of our evening.”

“Let me guess. Mum.”

“It is surely not the Queen.”

“Dunno about that. Mum seems to be growing regal aspirations lately.”

“We shall depart as soon as I properly store my sediment sample. Find a breath freshener for I suspect Mother Lestrade will not appreciate you smelling as if a lit match will spell doom for your hovel and all its inhabitants.”

With his edict pronounced, Sherlock marched out of the library, closely followed by John who was clutching his new possession with as much gentleness as one would a tiny puppy.

“All I wanted was a quiet, relaxing homecoming. Was that really too much to ask?”

“Apparently, my dear, it was. However, it is most probable that our visit shall not be a long one as the children will lose interest once they have consumed their spoils and we may leverage their inevitable misbehavior towards a hasty departure.”

“That is very true. Alright, we say hello to mum, pass on my joyful surprise, then come back here to continue on with the more delightful aspects of the evening.”

“You are most single-minded tonight, Gregory.”

“Problem?”

“Admiration, actually.”

“Then I’ll make certain I give you lots more to admire as the night goes on.”

“I am aflutter with anticipation.”

Wriggling slightly to emphasize his point, Mycroft kept to himself the small worry that his mother-in-law might respond somewhat poorly to the news of her son’s imminent change of status. No serious discussion had been undertaken about his Gregory’s living situation or any other changes associated with real employment and, given the tumult of recent times… well, if Mother Lestrade had proven one thing, it was her resilience and he could only hope that held now…

“Mum, it isn’t polite to laugh at injured people.”

Yet, dear Mother Lestrade was doing it so well. And so loudly.
“I feel most denigrated.”

“Oh, Mycroft… I’m just… if you could see the image in my mind right now of you fighting for Greg… that’s one for the memory box, let me tell you. Actually, it brings up some other memories, too. Once, I don’t think Greg was more than two years old, I’d left him with my mum for the night because Danny and me were supposed to go out for a bit of couple time. Well, he doesn’t come home and I decide to go and look for him, not being at all surprised I found him at one of his favorite pubs, chatting up a woman and… let’s just say she wasn’t happy about being told to shove off. I have to admit, though, the bastard cheered when I put my fist in her face after she turned more than a bit rude and didn’t do a terrible job tending to the damage once I dragged him home. That was a painful few days, let me tell you. None of the lovely painkillers Mycroft’s so fond of to make life pleasant, which was not at all fun with a toddler to mind.”

Mycroft gently patted Lestrade’s hand and closed the mouth that had dropped in shock. Apparently, now that the largest cats had been released from the familial bag, Mother Lestrade was content to let kittens escape, as well.

“It is good to know I am in such stellar company.”

“Greg’s thrown more than his fair share, so I’m sure he’ll teach you how to survive the experience a little more successfully the next time you’re called to defend his honor. Or ask Danny. He showed me how to throw a punch, where to lay in a kick, best places to bite… he’ll be happy to do the same for you if Greg worries that his Mycroft is too delicate for a real dust up.”

“I don’t want to hear this. I’m too young and fragile.”

“Reality is harsh sometimes, son, but you’d best get used to it what with next week being what it is.”

And, if his mother beamed any brighter, Lestrade was certain he’d be blinded by the glow. It had been a tie as to which bit of information spilled out of Sherlock and John’s mouths first when they walked into the house, his career trajectory or Mycroft’s pugilism, so the large slabs of cake they were enjoying was serving double-celebration duty.

“Don’t remind me. I’m still…”

Wildly-waving hands was fast becoming Lestrade’s primary means of communication.

“I wouldn’t expect anything different, but you’ll do fine, son. I mean, consider who we actually have staffing our proud police contingent. If they got the job, you’re guaranteed a spot. A few of them were your dad’s friends when they were young and just as useless as he was, for pity’s sake. Someone bright and hard-working… they’ll snatch you up and put you in the first uniform they find that fits. My Greg… I’d better check that I have film for the camera because I’m going to want a LOT of pictures of you looking smart on your first day on the job. Mycroft’s probably already hired the artist to paint your portrait, so that part’s done.”

Utterly ridiculous. It would take weeks to determine which of the various painters here and abroad could best render his Gregory’s majesty on canvas. The fact that he had come to that conclusion via some degree of previous research would remain his little secret for now.

“I daresay Gregory shall not have the time to sit for a formal portrait, though, one might see something suitable rendered from a quality photograph. We shall choose the appropriate one from your portfolio, Mother, when the first round of Gregory’s posings have been developed.”
“That’s it… I’m going on the dole.”

“Eat more cake, my darling offspring, you’re becoming hysterical and Sherlock is going to be very upset his territory’s being invaded.”

Lestrade hefted a mighty chunk of baked goods onto his fork and wrestled it into his mouth, grudgingly admitting to himself that cake wasn’t the worst soother of nerves in existence.

“Good boy. It’s just a shame we don’t have those photos right now because… no, it would be uncharitable to say I’d like to be able to push them under a certain someone’s nose and brag about my son, but… Mycroft, do you know any way we can get some photos of Greg in a uniform so I can dangle them in front of your mum?”

“I am afraid Mummy would react much as if Gregory was garbed as an usher at the symphony. She has little regard for law enforcement, I’m afraid, or, for that matter, any individual who actually works for their living.”

“Drat. Well, that’s that evil plan foiled. I guess I’ll just have to make do with the others, which are sufficiently evil on their own.”

Both Mycroft and Lestrade suddenly had a much happier outlook about the coming jaunt to Grandmama’s party than they had before.

“No fighting, Mum. I’d hate to have to run you in as my first act as a member of the police force.”

“You’ve taken no oath. There’s no blue on your arse. I’m safe until that changes, so we’ll see what we’ll see.”

“No! None of that. This family is going to gain a reputation and I’m not certain I want that haunting me into my new job.”

Mycroft shared a look with his mother-in-law and reached over to gently clasp Lestrade’s hand.

“I hate to break the unpleasant news, my dear, but given Sherlock and John are part of our family, which is now increased by the addition of your father, I believe a reputation is already well and truly established and, in all likelihood, it is one of somewhat epic proportions.”

“AAARRGGHH!! You’re right! We’re that family, aren’t we? We are, don’t bother to answer. God help me, but we are. That’s were I’ve come in life.”

Lestrade’s dropped head on the table was dutifully patted by his spouse and mother, then by the rather chocolatey fingers of the youngest family members who had returned to the kitchen for their next piece of cake.

“Greg’s dead, now? There’s a lot of death in this family, I have to say.”

The groaned ‘thanks, John’ was very reminiscent of Sherlock’s earlier spectral moanings, which was expected given the family-sized net that had them ensnared.

“Given the lackey is deceased, I demand his portion of cake in recompense for the aroma of his decomposition which has already begun to waft from his disintegrating from. I will, however, require samples of his flesh and body fluids for examination and will continue to take such for some time to acquire a detailed inventory of the process of human dissolution. What remains shall be given to the household staff for saponification so that the soap produced can be used to offset the cost
of the headstone Mycroft will insist be added to the family burial plot regardless of the lack of body for it to earmark.”

While Sherlock positioned himself at the kitchen counter, next to his delicious prize, John inspected Lestrade’s body for signs of rigor mortis and the remaining two members of the party took a moment to enjoy being the normal ones in that family. Though each was also rather certain that their counterpart was actually best placed on the familial side with the deceased and sugar-obsessed, but would keep that particular viewpoint to themselves for the sake of family harmony and future alliances…

Mycroft knew the depth of his love for his spouse approached that of the Marianas Trench since he had not knocked once on the library door to beg help with the rampaging hordes that had overrun the house, disguised as two small boys. His love’s stentorian announcement that he was locking himself in the library to begin revising for his police exams had been repeated every time something had drawn him out of his bolt hole, such as a need for food, drink or elimination of these things, and now, with the making ready to leave for the party, some sharing of the herding duties might finally occur.

Not that he was complaining, mind you. That would be terribly churlish and ungrateful. Gregory, however, would certainly be willing, from the kindness of his heart, to take point with the evil forces while he enjoyed a soothing bath after this most troublesome time. With a large brandy. Or three.

“You look most edified, my dear.”

“What?”

“You appear bright with the light of knowledge.”

“Oh! Thanks. I’m better than I was before I dug into the material. If I had a brain in my head I’d have started as soon as I sent in my application, but… well, live and learn.”

“Gregory… you shall conduct yourself admirably and I have no doubt, not a single one, that your performance will handily exceed their expectations.”

“I wish I could be that sure. Some of the stuff is confusing and I’ve worked a few of the practices and… it’s not easy!”

“I shall make myself fully available to you to assist in any way I am able. Perhaps offer certain strategies for problem solving or deciphering a more convoluted body of text…”

“That’s sounds wonderful, actually. I want to do this on my own as much as I can, but I’m not too proud to refuse a bit of help like anyone might get when preparing for something like this.”

“Given the stupidity of the local constabulary, Mycroft could don a wig and present himself as you for the entirety of your interrogations and see this over and done with, which is very much my preference, as your continued bleating and wailing is causing me dyspepsia.”

Sherlock had actually left Lestrade alone while he drowned in his books, but the goblin was, apparently, preparing to make up for lost time.

“Poor little thing… you skip the pub one afternoon and now there’s no chips in your stomach to absorb all that upset. Why don’t you and John go to the kitchen and see if there’s some bread or something to help you cope.”
“We didn’t want to skip the pub, Greg, Mycroft told us we had to come straight home from school because we had to pack our things since we didn’t do it last night.”

“True, John, but you did learn that Sherlock’s new glue can withstand almost every solvent in the universe, so I’d say it’s a small price to pay.”

“I still itch.”

“Your arms aren’t stuck to your sides anymore and you can wiggle all your toes, so, again… small price to pay.”

“I suppose so. I do want some bread, though. With jam. It’s a long drive to Grandmama’s house and it’s been… a very long time since we had anything to eat.”

“You mean an hour?”

“That’s forever if you’re… a moth or something.”

Lestrade cut eyes towards Mycroft who was nodding sagely and struggling to contain a smile. John’s appetite was becoming somewhat of a local legend.

“See what Cook will do for you and then check you have everything you want to bring. Mum will be here in a few minutes and then we’ll leave.”

“I fail to see why Mother Lestrade shall be riding with us. Already we are packed into your donkey cart like sardines in a tin and, now, our oily school has expanded. If I am not forced to ride in the boot much as a discarded shoe which has seen its end through means most foul and pungent, I shall be greatly surprised.”

“That is why, brother dear, we are taking a larger vehicle. You are sufficiently foul and pungent without additional assistance and there is no point further compromising the trip for the rest of us. Do accompany John and make your final preparations, if you will. If we ‘accidentally’ leave without you, it would be to everyone’s sorrow, I am certain.”

Sherlock glared at Mycroft, but the lure of potential delicacies in the kitchen finally won the day and he stormed off, nose in the air, with John following close behind.

“You know, love, it is possible that I’m on the job by the end of the week. We need to talk about what to do with those two, once I’m not easily available to watch them.”

“Yes, that we must. It is strange how I know, truly know, that they are able to be left alone, and for days of time, if need be, yet…”

“It’s the ‘yet’ that’s a bugger.”

“Quite. Many changes, so little time.”

“Is there going to be a lot of alcohol and Grandmama’s party.”

“Oceans of it.”

“Good.”

“I concur.”
Lestrade was more than slightly happy that he successfully drove the large Jaguar to Grandmama’s, having taken the duty so Mycroft do a bit of reading for his own studies while the demons were expertly minded by the family co-matriarch. All in all, barring two stops to retrieve items flung out the window by Sherlock to test their aerodynamic properties, it was a pleasant trip.

“That was intolerable! I have never suffered such torture! Starvation, thirst, imprisonment… I am not a war criminal! I have perpetrated no massacres! The unfairness of it all is an indelible black mark on your moral ledger, Fatcroft. Yours, as well, dogsbody.”

“I notice you left Mum out of your blackening, you miserable troll.”

“Mother Lestrade, at least, understands proper tribute.”

“What?”

“Your mum had sweets in her purse for us to eat. And biscuits.”

“Oh, thanks Mum. The not-food I had to eat while I played chauffer tasted amazing. Light and airy, in fact.”

His mother’s royal wave as she strutted away confirmed in Lestrade’s mind that she was hoping for a crown sooner than later. Maybe she’d like Sherlock’s. It really was too small in that nest of curls and it would fit her head far more smartly…

“Shall we, my dear?”

“Her Majesty’s left us alone with the palace hounds, so it’s probably wise to get them inside and to their water bowls before they start frothing at the mouth or something.”

“I demand proper libations in my bowl! The liquid with which Papa Lestrade attempts to buy our affection will suffice.”

“I’d like something fizzy, too, Greg. I need it after all those biscuits I ate. And Mrs. Lestrade gave us a bag of crisps, too, which I waited to eat since we didn’t have anything to drink and crisps make me thirsty.”

This dual exit was also made in regal fashion, leaving the loving couple to wonder if they were the designated court jesters.

“It’s going to be a long weekend, love. Ready for it?”

“No, but that is not particularly relevant.”

“We’ll commiserate tonight, once I get you very naked in that big bed after you have a chance to soak in the bathtub. Don’t think I don’t know that’s what you have planned once you can sneak away from the storm.”

“You know me as no other, dearest Gregory.”

“And you deserve it, so make it a long soak, alright? Ok… let’s go and get this over with.”

Linking their arms, Lestrade marched the two of them towards the house, ignoring Edwards’s smirk when he peeked through the door before entering.

“Mrs. Holmes, the younger, has yet to arrive, so the coast, as they say is clear, sir.”
Neither Mycroft nor Lestrade would admit to their sigh of relief, but it felt blessedly good, nonetheless.

"Thank you, Edwards. Gregory and I shall use the respite to meditate and prepare our souls for the experience."

"Very good, Master Mycroft. If you require incense or that I play the flute for ambience, do let me know."

As Edwards left them to their own devices, Mycroft felt a strong pang of upset strike his chest. Now and then, the loss of wasted years hit him with a painful force and this was, unfortunately, one of those times. He and Sherlock had missed a criminal amount of joy in their lives and, he felt certain, his grandmother and her PA felt the same. Fortunately, that situation was now a thing of the past and the person responsible was gazing at him with all the love one could hope for shining in his smile.

"What say, love? Fizzy drinks and steal the boys’ crisps?"

"An excellent suggestion. And, perhaps, some degree of study with our respective materials?"

"Perfect! Think we can find a place to hide where the various goblins and empresses can’t find us?"

"Hmmm… I do not know, but it is well worth a try."

"Race you to the kitchen. Winner gets sucked in any position they want tonight once we…"

Watching his partner dart off to cheat for sexy reasons was one of Lestrade’s greatest pleasures in life. The other was paying the cost of losing their various wagers…

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"… and the poor dears have wept themselves dry over the loss of their small luxury."

Mycroft and Lestrade affected the most insincerely contrite expressions possible by any human being, which matched well with Grandmama’s insincere tone of chastisement.

"Our crisps!"

Sherlock sniffed back his tears of anguish while he held John tenderly as the small boy fell apart in his arms.

"And you were well aware of your disreputable conduct, for you hid yourselves and your ill-gotten gain in the loft above the stables."

Which had made Mycroft balk, at first, but learning the meaning of ‘roll in the hay,’ changed his mind on the subject quite quickly. Nothing in the way of serious study had occurred, but… one needed to take care of the whole person, didn’t they, not just the mind?

"Mycroft and I both knocked our heads on a beam in the loft and we can’t remember a thing."

"Oh… well then, there is no use in further pursuing the matter. Carry on and make yourselves ready for dinner. Mycroft, your mother arrived moments ago and… let us leave things at that and recognize the situation for what it is. Your suits have been laid out and, Sherlock… I expect to see you in the suit I chose and not another or your loss of crisps shall not be the greatest tragedy of your day."
Sherlock and John’s indignation warred with their uncertain emotions on the subject of the new arrival, producing a strangely silent and still tableau that had Grandmama reach out to feel below each boy’s nose for signs of respiration.

“Excellent. Now is not the time to move from the quick to the dead. I am most certain Emma would have a great deal to say on the issue and I am very nearly at the end of my limit for dramatic speeches for the evening. It is now your turn, grandsons, to act as audience, so do enjoy yourselves.”

Mycroft and Lestrade smiled as graciously as possible, as each grabbed one boy to wrestle through the dressing process.

“Did Mum already reach her limit, too? She’s suspiciously absent…”

“Your mother, Gregory, has entered the preparation stage for dinner. Do not attempt to turn her from that path or the consequences to you shall be most dire, though entertaining to witness, I have no doubt. There will be cocktails before dinner so budget your time, and tempers, accordingly.”

With that pronouncement, the boys found themselves left alone and with a ticking clock until dinner, also known as doomsday.

“Alright, you two, you heard Grandmama. Dressed, in the right suits, and all smiles while we meet this new bloke.”

“What if he’s mean?”

Lestrade knelt down and smiled warmly at John.

“Then Mycroft and I will step in and show him that we appreciate polite behavior in this family, how does that sound?”

“Sort of like a lie, since politeness isn’t really what our family does very well, but if that means Mycroft will punch him like that other evil person, then I’m happy.”

Sherlock nodded strongly in agreement and Lestrade was absolutely certain that if dinner came to blows, there would be two small fighters jumping into the ring with his lover.

“As long as you’re happy, then that’s fine. Let’s go and get dressed, ok? Love, you want this one and I’ll manage the suit-slayer?”

“I would be delighted. John and I might share pummeling tips while we affect his grooming. I am never opposed to learning new skills.”

John leapt into his standard fighter pose, then giggled loudly and took Mycroft’s hand to drag him along towards the suit that was lovingly waiting for him.

“Well, Sherlock, are we going to do this the easy way or the hard way?”

“I intend to dine in the nude, so you decide which of your ‘ways’ that condition satisfies.”

“Wonderful. Hard way it is.”

Lestrade hoisted Sherlock over his shoulder and carried the screeching nudist towards his fabric prison to begin the evening’s incarceration. It was going to be a blistering night, no matter which way you looked at it, so no use getting any ideas that this might end early or easily. And a party
tomorrow night to cap things off. Yes, this was the perfect way to usher in his new career… handle that domestic chaos like a champion and do the nation’s police presence proud. Wouldn’t do to have to run in the family members for disturbing the peace and public… punching.

“You shall not break my spirit, mendicant! Expect retribution and expect it in abundance!”

Was it too late to get Sherlock shipped to the North Pole to keep the domestic chaos to a mostly-manageable level? Definitely time for a talk with Grandmama about increasing the frequency of household postal visits…

“Oh no…”

“Greg, son, you look sick. It’s not a good look for you.”

Where did Mum get that dress? That very tasteful, very posh dress that certainly wasn’t the one she bought for the last party and wasn’t the one she brought for tomorrow. There was… insinuations of cleavage, too. The dress was evil. This evening was already in hell.

“Thanks. Want to explain why you’re wearing a stolen dress?”

“That sounded very official. Too bad I didn’t have a tape recorder so you could bring it with you on Monday to show how official you can sound when you want to.”

“Answer the question, or this conversation will become official.”

“You’ve been watching too much telly. Sherlock, like my dress?”

“I am not speaking to anyone wearing clothes, for they do not stand in support of my position on the subject of enforced garmenting.”

“Quiet dinner tonight, then. Things are looking up. Mycroft! And John, how handsome you look.”

John exchanged his fighter’s pose for a model’s pose this time and strutted to and fro to show off his suit.

‘I do look handsome, thank you.”

“Mother Lestrade, might I compliment you on your gown? It is very lovely example of the species.”

“Compliment all you like, Mycroft. Rowena did a little rummage through the closets and found this old thing for me to wear. Hate to sit at dinner with a burlap sack over my skin.”

The magnitude of the lie was charitably ignored by the males in the room, but sparked a light in both Mycroft and Lestrade’s mind when a second female walked into the library. A female wearing her own exquisite dinner gown and showing some annoyance that she was not, as expected, the most stylish woman in the room.

“Ah, Mummy. It is good to see you. You look stunning, as usual.”

A statement that Mycroft happily noticed did not completely satisfy his mother, as she continued to scrutinize her feminine competition.
“Yes… and who is this?”

Lestrade decided that if someone was to present his mum, it should likely be him and stepped up to the task, only to be beat to the honor by John.

“This is Mrs. Lestrade, Greg’s mother. Isn’t she beautiful?”

The frost that bloomed on the furniture made very lovely patterns, in Mycroft’s opinion, especially the tendrils of ice that spiraled around his mother’s feet as she sent them forth to freeze the room into a solid, frigid mass.

“I see. It is good, I presume, that you were able to find an appropriate dress to rent for the occasion. I know how sparse are the wares in that quaint little village in which you must shop.”

Oh good, the frost was now being vaporized by the flames erupting off Mother Lestrade. A balmy atmosphere was always more conducive to a happy dinner and Mycroft’s digestion was terribly glad for the change in climate.

“I know now where Sherlock inherited his sense of humor, as well as his… unique color sense. Aqua… not really the shade I’d choose for someone with your complexion, but daring choices define a person, don’t you think.”

And now the thunderclaps were sounding loud in the night, inspired by the falling-boulder tones of dear Mother Lestrade voice. What a bracing evening for a family meal! Perhaps, though, a small intervention was required before the first course was swept away by a tidal wave.

“And where is your companion, Mummy? We are greatly looking forward to meeting him.”

Mycroft took a slight step to the right to break the locked gaze of the two women and smiled as ingratiatingly as he could, finally getting his mother’s attention, though it was very grudgingly given.

“Robert is using the telephone. He has a rather important business deal in the works and must remain attentive to it, lest lesser minds bring it to ruin.”

“Ah, yes, one does what one must for business. Grandmama! Oh good, you are here.”

And appearing as highly amused as Mycroft had ever seen her.

“That I am, though it would be a happier event if I had a glass of wine in my hand. Mycroft, do the honors, if you will, and see one poured for Gregory, his and your mother, as well.”

“Shall John and I desiccate? Is that the plan for our untimely demise? Is not the rending of my flesh from this suit of thorns and nettles enough torture to fulfill your ghastly quota?”

Reciting his speech from bended knee was a very nice touch, in Lestrade’s opinion. Sherlock was really maturing his technique for dramatic proclamations.

“How about I pour out some of that juice I see on the sideboard, Mr. Hamlet? Will that keep you hydrated enough to make it to dinner?”

“Cough cough… it shall be a near thing.”

“Good enough.”

“Thank you, Gregory. Emma, I am sorry I was not able to greet you upon your arrival, but, there were matters to attend to, which I am certain you understand. Elizabeth, I am most anxious to
continue our conversation from earlier. Did you know, Emma, that Elizabeth is also an admirer of our Dame Agatha Christie? We were having quite a stimulating discussion about her works before I was forced to take my leave.”

Mycroft decided this was the shaping up to be the most fun he had every enjoyed with his mother present. Grandmama was certainly primed to use the opportunity to full advantage and that, alone, was worth the price of admission.

“No, I did not. Not that it…”

The clearing of the throat turned the eyes of the room to Edwards, who was smiling a smile that set Mycroft’s senses tingling and he quickly distributed the drinks so he could take a large swallow of his own.

“Ah, Edwards. Yes?”

“Your remaining guest, madam.”

“Of course, thank you.”

Mycroft suddenly wished he wasn’t swallowing his wine, because it took several sharp hits to his back to keep him from choking, though John had to apply them, standing on tip toe to apply the blows, since Lestrade was utterly useless at the moment.

“Dad? What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Greg! I’m invited, for your information. Oh, Lizzie… you look like a man’s fondest dream. And… well, as I live and breathe… hello, Emma. It’s been a long time, hasn’t it? Still looking gorgeous, as ever.”

Lestrade watched in horror as his father crossed the room to kiss his mother on the cheek, then do the same to Mycroft’s mother.

“Didn’t know you knew the Holmes’s, but… well, don’t know why I would. We didn’t exactly spend a lot of time talking, now did we?”

Two small thuds preceded a much larger one, as three bodies hit the ground and Lestrade stepped over the corpse of his dead lover to stare his newest nightmare in the face.

“You shagged Mycroft’s mum?”

“Did I?”

“Yeah, I think you did.”

Two pairs of male eyes turned towards Mycroft’s mother, who was glowing a shade of red that unquestionably failed to flatter her complexion.

“Oh. Well… looks like we have something to talk about at dinner.”

“Yeah, Dad… I think we do.”
Chapter 15

The silence in the room grew to such a level that it became its own ominous vibration that thrummed life into the corpse of one Mycroft Holmes, who dragged himself from his final resting place and stood, wavering slightly, as he glared at his mother with the full power of those raised whole-body from the dead.

“Would you care to explain this, Mummy?”

“I… no.”

“That answer is not sufficient from Sherlock and it is nothing less than pathetic coming from the one who birthed him.”

That his mother waved off his retort, rather than reply verbally, spoke volumes about the level of her upset. And guilt.

“What’s the problem, lad? I mean… I suppose no young man likes to think of his mum having a sexy time, but there’s nothing wrong with it.”

“Your input, Daniel, is not required at this moment.’

“Do not… do not tell me this princess was one of the birds you were shagging when you were married to me, you prick!”

Lestrade patted his mother on the shoulder and wasn’t surprised his hand vaporized into atoms from the furious energy she was radiating like a blazing sun.

“What? No! No, Lizzie no… I met Emma a couple of years ago at this seaside hotel I work at sometimes when I need money. Owner doesn’t mind paying cash and keeping your real name off the records so the tax man doesn’t get a bite of your earnings, evil devil that he is. Of course, lovely Emma wasn’t using her real name, either. Were you, Miss Vernet?”

“An alias! Using your maiden name for your unseemly affair… Mummy… does your duplicity and depravity know no bounds?”

“That’s a bit harsh, Mycroft. Your mum was just having a bit of fun, as people do when they’re enjoying a nice seaside holiday. And it must have been an especially nice holiday, since she came back a few times, with and without her gaggle of friends.”

If his father’s smile had been any more lascivious, Lestrade would have had to clap it in irons and run it in for public indecency. This was a disaster! And they hadn’t even eaten yet!

“Harsh is the poorest descriptor for my perspective, sir, and you would do well not to seek to plum the depths of my viewpoint, for you will not fare well in the analysis, either.”

“Oh. Ok, I’ll just help myself to a little of that wine and the rest of you can talk amongst yourselves. Pick up the little ones while I’m at it and see if I can breathe some life into them.”

Of course, ‘picking up’ entailed leaning down to grab little hands and drag them over to a chair, so they could be propped up and posed like a pair of dolls. Breathing life into them involved dipping fingers into the juice carafe and flicking it into their faces until they felt the surge of resurrection come upon them.
“Assault!”

“I don’t think you can assault someone with a bit of juice, Sherlock, but you can ask Greg about it. I just hope he doesn’t arrest his poor dad before we’ve had a spot of dinner. It was a long drive and I really could murder something hearty right now.”

“We could give you crisps, but Mycroft and Greg stole them and ate them all.”

“Really, John? That was a dastardly thing to do. Seems a bit hypocritical for them to be nagging at me for a simple bit of fun when they’re thieving from their own family.”

“Now’s not the time to try and recruit people onto your side, Dad. You’ve got enough on your record to account for already.”

“Talking like a true constable! Lizzie, are you hearing this? Our son is going to be a brilliant policeman and nobody can tell me different.”

“You’d do well to keep your mouth shut, Danny Lestrade, because I’m trying to decide if I’m willing to risk this lovely dress by kicking the shit right out of you and it won’t take much to tip me into doing it!”

“Still got that spirit that made our own bits of fun something remember, don’t you? That’s my girl.”

Lestrade leapt forward to block his mother who took that special step forward that meant the situation was going to end with someone headed to hospital and Dad had one thing right… he could murder a big plate of something filling right now and that wouldn’t happen if he was needing to collect Mum from the local jail and having a grim chat with the undertaker.

“How about we set all of this aside for awhile and just agree that some of us know each other better than we might have assumed. Doesn’t change anything, right? Still just a nice family dinner so we can all have a lovely time and enjoy a tasty meal. How does that sound?”

The various glares he was receiving told Lestrade that his little attempt at peacemaking was going about as well as he had predicted, but no one could say he didn’t try. And, since he was the only one trying, that was worth another glass of something as a reward, though that something was going to have a much stronger kick than wine. On the way to the beckoning brandy, he gave his partner a nudge and a special glare all his own, hoping to push Mycroft into some form of action.

Not that the action was soon in coming. Mycroft was still having trouble moving forward from the thought of his mother doing… anything, though he was well aware that was certainly the case for her age and the lifestyle she lead. And… with Gregory’s father? Where the… anything… was sure to be vigorous and varied and long-lasting and nerve-tingling in sensuality… oh bother. He was lusting again. Damn Pater Lestrade and his breathtaking masculinity!

“I fail to see any reason for this nonsense, as failure to keep one’s husband on his leash deserves whatever wandering might occur because of the inexcusably lax hand holding the leash.

Oh no, Mummy… your sons are too young to be orphans!

“I’ve got two legs available for kicking, you presumptuous, three stone of wrinkle-concealer wearing tart, and I’ve no trouble using one for that clot and the other to send your bony backside to Brighton!”

“There. Evidence that violence is ever the solution for the lower classes.”
Now, Mycroft was stepping in to intercept his mother-in-law and swallowed his smile of pride that the determined look on her face actually rattled his normally-smug mother.

"Emma, love… you need to watch your tongue about my Lizzie. I know you might be a bit jealous right now, but…"

"Am I interrupting something?"

The new and unrecognized voice caused heads to spin towards the latest arrival and Mycroft was most happy for the distraction and this individual certainly didn’t have a whit of breathtaking masculinity to speak of.

"No… no, dear, it is nothing. Simply a little family tiff such as one would expect when colorful personalities are brought together. Nothing more."

Mycroft smiled at Sherlock’s braying laughter at his mother’s gargantuan lie and the still-cherry color that glowed brightly on her face.

"Now do come here and give me a kiss, Robert. Oh, and I suppose I should make introductions. Robert Walker, this is… this is my family and a few unexpected… guests."

Mycroft continued to scrutinize the person, now identified as his mother’s current romance and… well. The man was best described as… non-descript. Average height, average build, nothing particular striking about his features, expression or posture… the graying hair bore the rather tired shade certain middle-aged men sported that certainly did not inspire carnal daydreams. Given he was on Mummy’s arm, the man seemed… somewhat out of place. Perhaps his personality was what had drawn them together…

"Oh, how do you do? Very good to meet you all."

That wasn’t scintillating. Or colorful. It was… polite. But, polite was good! Certainly a change from the acidity of Mummy’s normal tongue… But, speaking of tongues, one had been notably silent throughout the various interchanges and it was certainly not Grandmama’s nature to remain quiet during family arguments.

Turning his attention now to another target, Mycroft ran his practiced eye over his grandmother until she noticed his inspection and granted him the tiniest of grins, which served only to confirm his suspicions. Apparently, the bringing together of such specific individuals, with shared history, was not as much of a surprise to everyone in the room as he’d believed… oh, there was something in the works and this was not at all to his liking. Wasn’t their familial keg already provided with a bounty of black powder and fuse? Was a lit match really necessary? Gregory was going to be terribly cross at this development, which imperiled their post-dinner lovemaking and that was not something for which Grandmama would earn his forgiveness!

"Well, if no one is going to start this off properly, I’ll volunteer. Danny Lestrade, Rob. That one’s my son, Greg, about to be one of our nation’s finest constables and he’s engaged to this one, Emma’s son, Mycroft. Got a tremendous future ahead of him with that massive brain he’s hiding in that head of his. Already at Uni, can you believe it? Those two little miscreants are Sherlock and John. Sherlock’s Emma’s other son, a true and proper genius and John… John is hand-chosen to be part of the family because he’s bright, loyal, strong and the nicest young man you’d ever want to meet. And, of course…"

Danny sidled up to his ex-wife, who vowed that if he put an arm around her, she was going to tear it off his body and pound him to death with it.
“… this is Elizabeth Lestrade. No longer my lovely wife, but still as lovely as the day I married her. And…”

Mycroft’s inner ‘oh no’ made his chest heave as this next sidle was up to Grandmama and he could only pray his father-in-law had no cheek-kisses in store… oh, he did. Well, that was one execution to schedule tomorrow… did Grandmama giggle? THE UNIVERSE WAS COLLAPSING!

“Our beautiful hostess is the elegant and very hospitable, Mrs. Rowena Holmes. Watch yourself around this one, Rob. She knows tricks the rest of us are far too young and tender to learn about.”

Oh good, Sherlock and John were dead again. That was one quarter that would not require either monitoring or comforting as creation drew itself to a close. And his husband seemed to be on a mission to discover how much brandy he could quaff before the event. How delightful.

“Yes, I’ve heard about… some of you. Mrs. Holmes, I’m very grateful for the invitation. I had hoped to meet Emma’s family at some point and was very pleased to receive your note. And, Mycroft, Sherlock… Emma has told me a number of good things about you. I’m certainly happy to meet you both. An engagement, though, you say… that must be new.”

Something Mycroft was just realizing from the fact that his mother’s eyes were doing their level best to explode from her head.

“What! Mycroft Holmes… you are certainly not engaged!”

“I… that is to say… the notion of such a thing cannot come as quite the surprise you seem to be experiencing, Mummy, for you know well that Gregory is the man I love and with whom I will share my life.”

“Intolerable! You are far too young to consider such nonsense, especially with… we have discussed this before, what that type of man can… inspire within a person. I see another conversation is required.”

“Exactly why they’re perfect for each other, Emmie! My Greg inherited a good bit from his old dad and Mycroft deserves that, don’t you think? Someone who loves him and can keep him with a smile on his face, if you know what I mean. Make sure he’s warm on those cold nights. That’s a grand thing to wish for a person and I suspect Mycroft’s got the stuff to do that for my Greg, too. I mean… look who his mother is.”

Mycroft watched his mother wage a fierce internal war between indignation and self-satisfaction and he was most surprised that he didn’t hear his brother’s pencil scribbling every nuance of the performance for his ever-growing collection of human behaviors. Unfortunately, death was not conducive to successful note-taking.

“Am… I take it you know Emma, Danny, was it?”

Please do not be honest, Daniel, please do not be honest, this Robert really does not need honesty at this particular moment…

“Sure! For a few years now. Just… in passing, mind you. What a wonderful bird she is, too. Beautiful plumage and her voice… well, I don’t have to tell you how lovely her voice is, especially when she’s really excited about something, now do I?”

Thank Euripides that this Robert person appeared as banal as a footstool or there would certainly be a duel in preparation. Good heavens, man, did not even the wink serve as some clue as to this hedonist’s insinuations? Sherlock and John would even glean the meaning, were they alive to have
functioning eyes. Oh, but they likely did hear the pained ‘whoof’ from the force of Mother Lestrade’s fist colliding with said hedonist’s arm. Mother surely had no issue exercising her rather formidable physical prowess in combat situations, did she? Well, from where his dearly beloved inherited his taste for a bracing brawl was well and truly determined…

“Oh, well, you must be especially happy for the engagement, then, since your families have history together.”

Now would be a pleasant time, Gregory, to leap in to help manage matters, but you appear to be most content to cling to the brandy as a vine to a fencepost.

“Madam? Dinner is ready to be served.”

Thank you, Edwards. You are now my most favored individual in the existence of humanity. So sorry, my loving spouse, but it is only through dear Edwards that I might find my long soak in the bath and that now is exceeding in anticipation our potential tryst, which you shall, in any case, be too flammable to dare risk anything of a lustful and fiery nature.

“Good. Shall we? I am certain we will all be happy to continue our various lines of discourse at table. Daniel, may I have your arm?”

“I’d be honored. Greg, step up for your mum, will you son?”

Grandmama had well and truly gone to the devil. Not that it was not entirely unexpected, for various high-ranking individuals had wished that upon her for years, but likely had not envisioned this precise demon to do the duty. Oh and look, his spouse was happily tossing a final lethal quantity of spirits down his throat before presenting his arm to his mother. I shall collect the corpses, shall I, and begin the funeral procession to the dining room? Yes, I believe I shall…

The agony…

“You alright, love?”

“Is an answer even required?”

The torturous, torturous agony…

“Actually yes, because you still look a bit as if you’ve been made of wax and that can’t be healthy.”

Sherlock and John had decided the social experiment spread out before them was well worth a revivification and they were finally engaged in the data-collection process, filling every available scriptable material with observations; Mummy was primed to erupt much as Mount Vesuvius; Mother Lestrade was gripping her knife in a most threatening fashion in between bites of food; Grandmama was happy and gay as a girl enjoying a spring afternoon with her closest friends and his lord highness Satan… Gregory was certainly not exaggerating his father’s ability to be the proverbial life of the party. Regaling his audience with stories, which brought riotous laughter from the goblin pack that had pledged their fealty to his demonic influence. The only person seemingly enjoying a placid and peaceful dinner was Mummy’s paramour. The poor man must be deranged!

“I am suffering the appropriate level of internal discord for this catastrophic occurrence.”

“Sounds painful. Want some brandy?”
Which he had to physically stop his lover from rushing back to retrieve once Gregory had delivered his mother to his seat.

“No, I would rather not compound my turmoil with an impending physical debilitation due to overindulgence of spirits.”

“You’re so good with words, love.”

And you are glowing gorgeously from your alcohol-promoted inner warmth, my dear.

“Thank you. But, you do understand the… debacle, the cataclysm that has befallen us?”

“Ummmm… not as much as I did before. Of course, that could be the brandy pulling my strings, but… what’s the harm?”

“Harm? Good heavens, Gregory… the sordidness cannot be overstated!”

“It’s not a bad thing to have a little sexy fun with someone, as long as everyone’s agreeable.”

“The mental images alone are cerebellum-curdling. Mummy and… that man…”

Oh no… that glint was not at all gorgeous.

“What you mean that man?”

“I…”

“Are you saying my dad’s not good enough for your mum?”

The cataclysm has escalated!

“No… not in so many words…”

“But in some words, it seems.”

Careful treading is mandatory!

“No, my dear, that was not at all my meaning. It is simply that he is your father! Does that not engender in you some feeling of unwholesomeness about the situation? We are pre-engaged, for heaven’s sake. This skirts the area of incest!”

“Oh. Well, I suppose it’s a bit strange, but not as strange as your mum and that new bloke of hers. What’d Sherlock call John when he met him… oh yeah! A vanilla custard on a cream-colored table.”

“Ah, so you also find something rather peculiar about him.”

“Not peculiar, so much as peculiar for your mum. Seems like she’d find one of those European princes or something, who yachts about and drops in at Monte Carlo for a coffee or something. Is he… was your dad like that?”

“No, not at all. Father was not as… energetic… as Daniel, however, he was a lively man. He appreciated laughter and acquiring new experiences. He was… a fun person, for lack of a better term. There was a vital spark in him that was visible to all he met and, though not as socially-focused as Mummy, he appreciated time spent with the people they knew and participating in social events.”
“I really wish I could have met him, you know. He sounds like someone I really would have liked.”

“You would have; I believe that wholeheartedly and he would have adored you in turn.”

Lestrade reached up and ran his fingers along Mycroft’s cheek, wishing he could take away some of the hurt his lover still carried from the loss of his father. But, he had a lifetime to try and was more than happy to do it.

“Thanks, love. I suppose we have to give this Robert a chance, though. He’s not mean… so that’s already a mark on the positive side of his ledger, which will reassure John and Sherlock.”

“True. Besides, he keeps Mummy far away from home and that is never something to be condemned.”

“All that matters is being happy and if she’s happy, then that’s all that matters.”

Smiling proudly at his circular logic, Lestrade then pursed his lips until Mycroft leaned in and gave him his reward.

“You kiss wonderfully, Mycroft. Even a quick peck sets things stirring.”

Would it be unacceptably rude to make their excuses and dart away to begin the more pleasant portion of their evening? Gregory was ever so amenable to a wide diversity of pleasurable pursuits when he was limber and languid from a few relaxing brandies… unfortunately, the likelihood that Grandmama would have any number of staff restrain them and return them to their seats was stratospherically high.

“Something we can explore in more depth at our earliest opportunity.”

“I like the sound of that. And… oh.”

Mycroft followed Lestrade’s eyes and Edwards quietly entered the dining room and had an even quieter word with their previous topic of conversation, which prompted the man to make a quick apology and follow Edwards back out of the room.

“Another pesky business call. Robert is forever plagued by them. Men of his status generally are, however, so it is to be expected.”

“Of course, Emma. The Holmes family knows well the burdens of responsibility, do we not, Mycroft?”

Mycroft glanced at his grandmother and wondered again about the nature of the game in play, but, since acting without information was never wise, chose to affect his best show of family support.

“That we do, Grandmama. Gregory is forever suffering my lack of attention due to matters that cannot be ignored. My gratitude for his patience and indulgence knows no bounds.”

“No matter how important, though, you can’t forget family. Our Mycroft’s learned that the hard way, but I think it’s a lesson well-learned.”

Mycroft tried not to smile at how quickly his mother’s haughty expression changed to one of pure venom at his inclusion under the umbrella of Mother Lestrade’s skirts.

“Quite right, Elizabeth. One cannot shirk one’s duty, but that is also applied to one’s duty to
spouse and family. Finding the balance is profoundly difficult and a constant struggle to maintain, but it is the hallmark of a true bond that no energy is spared to see that occur.”

Venom that increased in both potency and quantity given Grandmama’s apparent alliance with the enemy camp.

“And Mycroft there is certainly a hard worker, I could tell that right away. Going to be a brilliant husband to Greg. Simply brilliant.”

“If sloth were silver, Fatcroft would be the richest individual in the history of the world. I will forgive your inept analysis, Papa Lestrade, for you are both unobservant and entirely lacking in critical-thinking ability, however, the obviousness of the situation should become crystal clear to you once you are a week or so further into your association with the sea cow.”

Dear me, Mummy could hiss like the most viperous of reptile. Apparently, Sherlock adopting her former lover into his sphere of minions was something of a disagreeable surprise. What a shame.

“That’s a lot of words just to be silly, Sherlock, my boy. Thought geniuses were supposed to be efficient with things.”

“The volume of my vowels is indicative of the quantity of fat cells in Mycroft’s brain, pint-glass polisher, so my speech was descriptive in more than a single fashion. Hence – efficient.”

“Oh, well you do have a point. Want my strawberry? Got some chocolate on it.”

Sherlock’s snatch broke the sound barrier and the wail of despair John was readying was quickly stifled by the dropping of the strawberry from Mother Lestrade’s tart onto his plate. Setting the children between their grandparents had been somewhat a stroke of genius in Mycroft’s opinion and he was certain his spouse would grandly reward him for his forethought.

“No that we have seen the issue settled… Daniel, did you bring with you the papers for Mycroft to evaluate? I am certain my grandson will want to thoroughly examine your business partnership agreement and make suggestions, if required.”

A reptilian hiss and now a chickenish squawk. My, Mummy was covering the animal kingdom most thoroughly this evening…

“In my bag! I’ve been wanting to sit down with Mycroft to give them a look over, but what with them going to London and Mycroft being a sight under the weather after his big fight, never got the chance. Meant to say how grateful I was for that, Mycroft. Defending my Greg like a true champion! Bruising doesn’t seem so bad, but it has been a few days, I suppose. How the fingers feeling?”

Something that Mycroft gladly held his hand up to inspect before answering. No, Mummy, you completely failed to notice the lingering discoloration and that you appear now as if the chicken you previously mimicked has leapt down your throat is all the compensation I require for your lack off attention.

“MYCROFT! A FIGHT!”

“You’d have been cheering for him, Emmie, what with stepping in to teach that worthless twat a lesson. Got the whole story from Rowena and I puffed like a partridge hearing the news. That’s a fine lad you’ve got. He’s going to do us all proud a hundred times over.”

Satan was evil, that was a certainty, but he occasionally cloaked his evil in a rather pleasant garment
of compliment and praise.

“You will explain yourself, Mycroft Holmes, and you will do it now!”

“Oh dear… things do seem to happen whenever I’m not in the room. I hope that’s not an omen.”

Eyes turned again to the freshest face in the room and Greg nudged Mycroft a little to acknowledge the tiny show of humor from the custard.

“Robert… we were just… again, a ridiculous little family thing that struck a few forceful chords.”

“Well, I would expect nothing less, given your own vibrant nature, Emma. However, the news is bad, I’m afraid. I’m needed in London. That acquisition hit a snag and it’ll be the work of a couple of days to untangle the threads. I am sorry… I know you were looking forward to a restful break from the hustle and bustle.”

Hoping the incredulous look he shot his spouse went unobserved, Mycroft was doubly-happy the staff had placed an eclectic assortment of items in front of Sherlock and John, who were now busily occupied building a device to surreptitiously steal the dessert plate from a fellow diner, an endeavor that was fully supported by Gregory’s father, who continued to move his plate around the table or add items for weight so their testing was both rigorous and thorough.

“They cannot manage without your input, darling, so, of course, you must go. You have been brokering this particular deal for a month! It would not do to allow some lowly office staff bring it to ruin.”

“I’m glad you understand. Mrs. Holmes, I apologize for this. I know it is terribly rude of me and I promise that if I can get away I will return so we can get to know each other better.”

“One does what one must, something I know quite well. Emma, shall you be remaining with us or are you, also, returning to London?”

Something everyone at the table paused to hear.

“I… well…”

“Stay, Emma, enjoy your little vacation. Your sons are here and I’m sure they’d love to have some time with you.”

John’s hand quickly clapped across Sherlock’s mouth, which had just begun to open to begin an oration that would rival that of any of Shakespeare’s best efforts.

“That is very sweet of you, Robert, dear. A day or two with my Mycroft and Sherlock is always a blessing.”

Now, Lestrade was the one having to be preemptively silenced, though Mycroft did it with a quick glare, rather than a flesh-based gag.

“Thank you, Em. Well, I’ll be off. It was nice meeting all of you and… I’m certain we’ll see each other again soon.”

Quickly escorted by Edwards out to a waiting car, already provided with luggage, the supposed man of the hour made his exit, leaving the rest of the dinner party to swallow down their comments as the staff cleared the table and Grandmama made the decision to move things to a less formal location.
“Shall we retire to the library? I am certain the children would appreciate a game of chess and Daniel might demonstrate his skill at serving cocktails.”

“I’m your man! Professional man, at that. Might I escort you, madam?”

“I would be delighted.”

This time it was Lestrade giving his partner a quick cut of the eyes and Mycroft heaved a silent, yet heavily put-upon sigh.

“Mummy? May I have the honor?”

Yes, narrow your eyes suspiciously, but you would seethe with a mighty force if I left now and Gregory then escorted his mother to the library, so do please cooperate and make this painless for both of us.

“Very well.”

Taking his cue, Lestrade winked at his mother, who grinned, stood and curtsied before taking her son’s arm to leave the dining room.

“Sherlock… want me to escort you? I don’t know why you’re supposed to do that, but it seems important.”

“I am taller, therefore, I should escort you.”

“I look better in a dress, too, so maybe you’re right.”

Sherlock snorted, but hopped off his chair and presented his arm to John, who, also, curtsied, then took it to follow after the others. This was a very strange dinner, but it was fun, so it was all fine with him. And tomorrow was a big party! Everybody should have as much fun as him…

“Do not, however, expect that I will serve you a cocktail, laugh at your attempts at witticisms or comment favorably on your appearance.”

“I don’t think I’d ever expect any of that, actually.”

“Then we understand each other.”

With Sherlock and John in their traditional spot on the floor, chessboard between them, the rest of the family members placed their drink orders and were soon served with a smile by their resident bartender.

“Love this work! Really, owning the pub is a like a dream come true. It’s going to turn a tidy profit for Mycroft and me, that’s for certain.”

“A pub! That’s your… business partnership! Oh my lord… how are you ever a son of mine, Mycroft Holmes...”

“And what’s wrong with that? It’s a respectable business and is always busy. Mycroft made a good decision, in my opinion.”

Which was the polar opposite of Mother Lestrade’s opinion when the purchase was announced but no mention would be made of that fact by either her son or his partner.
“The list of things ‘wrong with that’ would stretch to Paris.”

“Just because it’s not the type of place the nose-in-the-air types deign to visit, doesn’t mean it’s not a good investment.”

“Given the propensity to drink by those who frequent such establishments, I have no doubt there is profit to be had, however, it is not the sort of profit I approve of my son chasing.”

The two Lestrade men stood slightly apart from the group and Greg was not surprised when his father nudged him and grinned widely at the female bickering, which showed no signs of slowing down, let alone stopping. Oh look, Mum was winding up for another swing.

“There’s nothing wrong with a nice pint or good gin and tonic with friends. But friends really aren’t what the world-touring sort are about, are they? People you meet and air-kiss in a hundred cities across the globe, but not really anyone to build a little history with, isn’t that the way it goes?”

Another nudge in Greg’s ribs said far too much about his father’s enjoyment of the after-dinner entertainment.

“Your mother’s still ferocious, isn’t she? Look at her… that’s a fire that burns anything in its path.”

Lestrade did his best to wash his father’s whispered, slightly purred praise out of his mind with the strongest brain cleaner his body was able to generate.

“Emmie’s holding her own, though. That’s a colder ferocity, but it’s just as hot, if you know what I mean.”

Stronger brain cleaner needed! The stuff with skulls and crossbones all over it and DANGER written in big, industry-safety approved red letters. Shuffling away from the source of his misery, Lestrade found his new best friend, the brandy decanter, which had happily been refilled by the helpful staff.

“The cackling of hens is retarding my ability to think! John Watson must be trounced and I cannot do that when incessant clucking and the sound of claws upon sod, scratching for corn, is distracting me!”

Sherlock’s in-stereo motherly chastisement drew a twitch from Grandmama’s lips that Mycroft noticed immediately. Damn her inscrutability! Why could he not discern every detail of her motives! Well, it appeared to fall upon him to intercede and see the ship of this evening righted.

“How about you tell Mum and… your mum about your latest experiments, then, so you don’t have to listen to scratching and pecking and crowing.”

Oh, apparently his husband was willing to wade into the sea and do the job instead. How agreeable of dear Gregory, since he was woefully behind on brandy consumption and his glass was waiting patiently for his tender attentions.

“Hens do not crow, plebian. It is perhaps fortunate that you did not apply to any form of animal control service, for your ability to discriminate between species, let alone gender of species, is deplorable. I would fail to experience any surprise if I discovered you attempting to provide the elephant with a joint of roast beef, instead of the metric ton of hay and peanuts that is his usual repast, for you labor under the belief that he is classed as Homo sapiens.”

“What’s food got to do with the fact your brother likes coc… male attention? I don’t follow you
sometimes, lad, but you use a lot of words so you must have some actual point in there somewhere.”

Greg looked at his mother, who was having the first laugh she’d had since her new archenemy walked into the room and sent up a small thank you to the universe that what he inherited from his father didn’t include academic ability.

“Ugh… Homo sapiens, dim of wit, not homosexual.”

“Oh…. yeah. Got it.”

Sherlock threw up his hands and John used the opportunity to rearrange the chess board to his advantage, earning him a nod of approval from Grandmama who very much admired an individual who capitalized on the opportunities presented them.

“There is a cosmic maelstrom above this house and it is draining all available mental energy from the occupants into the vastness of deep space!”

“See! None of that made a bit of sense, but it was interesting to listen to anyway.”

This time, there was another laugh in the mix and both female adversaries looked at each other in surprise, and, dare Mycroft think it, agreement, then pretended nothing had happened and continued to hate each other with the intensity of a blast furnace.

“If I find for you a bottle of pure ethanol, will you simply drink it and lapse into a silent coma so I might begin my recitation on the results of my latest experiments?”

“No, because I’ve tasted that and it’s crap. Can’t even mix it with fruity juices and make it lovely. I’ll take a spot of whisky, though, if you can find some.”

“I’ll take care of that, Dad. Have a seat, why don’t you, because Sherlock’s recitations are better handled in a sitting position.”

Being glared at by the two women sitting on a settee each made dragging a chair from the other side of the room and sitting next to Mycroft an appealing option and, with that done, the wave could be given to Sherlock to begin his lecture. Watching the circus as he found and poured his father a drink, Greg found himself smiling, and not all of it because of the very relaxing warmth that his own many drinks was producing in him. This evening had started on a disastrous foot, but… now, it was just entertaining. Mycroft might not agree, but you couldn’t buy this quality of entertainment! The dramas on the telly had nothing on their family and that was something to treasure. Oh no… Dad just winked at Mum. And licked his lips! Oohhh… apparently, a heeled shoe was a fairly accurate throwing weapon. Might as well add some extra ice to Dad’s drink because he’d need to keep that swelling down…

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That the rest of the night passed with no further injuries was a victory both Mycroft and Lestrade took great pride in as their peacekeeping skills were certainly paramount in making it happen. And their efforts were nothing if not amusing to Grandmama, something which Mycroft vowed would be paid for in some fashion. Perhaps Sherlock and John would enjoy spending their summer holiday under her roof. Yes… that was an idea with potential…

“Christ almighty! You’d think with everything happening, people would want to just go their separate ways and find their beds, but no… what time is it, anyway?”

“Most late, my dear, but we do not have to rise early, so there is still sleep to be had.”
“Did you forget Sherlock and John came along for this visit?”

“If we start building the barricade now, we might have a satisfactory deterrent to their incursion crafted before the sun rises.”

“Too tired. Let them incur… I’ll keep some rope and a cloth under my pillow so I can tie them up, gag them, and toss them out of the window until we’re ready to get out of bed.”

“A noble plan. I admit that my mind is far too scattered to concoct anything that might be comparable.”

“Still upset?”

“Perhaps that is not the proper description for it, but I can offer nothing better.”

“Come here, then…”

Lestrade took his lover in his arms and held him gently, laying a kiss on his cheek and then on his lips.

“It’s going to be alright, you know? Not our business, ultimately, and certainly not our problem. Let them work out whatever needs to be worked out and don’t worry about what you can’t fix or change.”

“You make it sound so simple.”

“It can be if you want it to be. I tell you what… just for tonight, let me do all the worrying and you just get some rest. Do you want your nice bath?”

“No… the hour is so late and I know you will remain awake until I finish, so…”

“That’s a yes if I ever heard one. Yes, I probably will be awake when you’re done, but only because it’s been an eventful night and, despite the hour and all my delicious brandy, I’m not ready for sleep. You go and have a soak, a very long one. I won’t even come with you and distract you with my sexiness, because I really do want you to just relax and let all that worry bleed away.”

As much as Mycroft very much wanted to be distracted by his partner’s sexiness, relaxation certainly wouldn’t happen if that were the case and… he did very much need that right now.

“I will, though, if you like, give you a massage when you’re done.”

No angel in heave was as pure and good as his Gregory.

“The deal is sealed. I shall return… at some point.”

Kissing his lover once more, Lestrade gave Mycroft’s bum a swat to set him in motion towards the bath and allowed his eyes to linger on the bum he’d just swatted. Just a beautiful thing, in his opinion and, since no other counted on this topic, the matter was closed. Now, he could change into something more comfortable and make further headway on his study materials. Or hang that and just read a good book. Given he wasn’t entirely confident in his brain’s ability to process any real information at the moment, a bit of fiction might be a better choice. Wasting brain activity wasn’t useful, so he’d make the strategic call and work on revising tomorrow. Sherlock, at least, would be proud of his efficiency.

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Of course, reading would go better with something liquidy, since the brandy had left him thirsty and trying to pretend it wasn’t the case hadn’t worked and neither had the mental argument that another of those fizzy drinks the kitchen stocked would be something his mum would frown on before bedtime, so out of bed and, after a quick knock to let Mycroft know he was stepping out for something cold, it was time to sneak through the house, not at all playing spy hiding from the evil forces chasing after him.

“Oof!”

“Dad!”

“Oh… hi, Greg.”

When a person shoves their hands behind their backs, you know your life has taken a sour turn.

“What are you hiding, Dad?”

“Me? Nothing! Clear as crystal, I am. No secrets in my closet. Skeletons, either.”

“For someone who lies like a professional, that was a shite effort.”

“Yeah, it was balls, wasn’t it? Sorry about that, it’s been a long night.”

“Which has gotten longer now that I know you’re sneaking around Grandmama’s house in… where did you get that dressing gown?”

“In my bedroom. It was laid out for me, along with some slippers that I would be very tempted to steal if Rowena wasn’t about to become family. Stealing from family is wrong, but I’ll forgive you nicking Sherlock and John’s crisps, since it’s hard to resist that salty, crunchy goodness.”

“I see. And… cologne?”

“That’s mine, actually. Like it? I can get you some if you want. I don’t think it’s sold in the village, but it’s brilliant, isn’t it? Not too much of any one thing, so it’s subtle, but distinctive.”

Officially in the land of Not Good.

“Let me see your hands, Dad.”

“Why? You’ve seen them before. Haven’t changed much.”

“Now.”

“That sounded pained, son. Why don’t you go and get some rest with that fiancé of yours. He must be lonely without you.”

“What’s in your hands, Dad?”

“Back to that? What could possibly have changed about them in thirty seconds?”

Darting one way, then the other in a super-spy distraction maneuver, Greg snatched the contents of one of his father’s hands and…

“Champagne! Where the fuck did you get this? It’s even cold!”

“I… got thirsty.”
“Wrong.”

“I… was stealing it.”

“More believable that your first lie, but still a lie. Try to remember when you say something like you don’t steal from family, before you say you steal from family, and someday, someone might believe you. Not tonight, though, especially…”

Another quick dart around the human maypole and Greg’s gritted teeth scream filled the corridor.

“Two glasses! Two fucking… are you insane! Setting aside the fact that Mycroft’s mum is Mycroft’s mum… she’s with someone!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Have you gone mental? Mycroft will… strike that, I’ll say this isn’t happening and not even let it get to his level of disapproval. Dressing gown, cologne and champagne… I’ll credit you with the romance, Dad, but take it away again for the very, very stupid decision about who you were going to try and shag under Grandmama’s roof.”

“What would it even matter if I was planning something with Emmie, which I absolutely am not, so you’re an evil thing for even suggesting it. You know that bloke isn’t right for her? It’s not going to last another few months if I’m right about things, and I am right about this, just you watch.”

“That is absolutely not the point! I… I’ll admit I’m a little confused about her and the cust… Robert, but that’s not at all relevant. They’re together and you are not, I repeat, not, going to do anything to stick your nose or any other part of your anatomy into the picture!”

“She did look gorgeous tonight, though, didn’t she? And cut me her fair share of admiring glances when she thought I wasn’t looking.”

“NOT THE POINT!”

“So, you noticed that, too. That’s my boy… already a proper policeman, noticing all those little details.”

“That’s… I am going to walk you to your room and confiscate this champagne and you are going to be a good dad and stay there until morning, so I don’t to miss my police interview on Monday because I’m at your fucking funeral.”

“Monday! Greg, that’s great! Definitely a reason for ol’ Danny Lestrade to enjoy a bit of a celebration…”

“March! And don’t even think you can run, because I bet you’ve still got that dodgy knee and I could take it out with one swing of this very fine champagne.”

“You’re harsh, Greg.”

“Now.”

Dealing with Dad was like dealing with Sherlock! He even pouted! Stupid, stupid man… what was he thinking? No, it was clear what he was thinking and what he was thinking with. At least he was able to nip this stupidity in the bud… with Dad, though, there was enough stupidity for a hundred, nasty little buds to sprout…
To tell or not to tell… that is the question… fuck it, Mycroft would find out somehow and he might as well be the one to break the news…

“Love? Can I come in?”

“Gregory? Of course! Is everything alright?”

Lestrade peeked into the bath and held up the champagne to help soften the coming blow.

“Ta dah!”

“Champagne? I… dear me, when you said you needed something cold to drink, that was certainly not what I predicted you meant.”

“Neither did I. It’s just… well, I don’t know how to tell you this, love, but to say it straight out. I caught Dad sneaking off to have a go at romancing your mum. Dressing gown, champagne, cologne… the whole package. Yes, it’s true, my Dad is a complete hound and neither age nor location, apparently, is ever going to change that. Want to get drunk?”

“I… yes, that is a stellar suggestion.”

Rushing over before Mycroft had a chance to slide into the water and drown, Lestrade quickly popped the top of the champagne and filled the two flutes, handing one to his highly-shocked lover.

“How you doing, love?”

“I would say… I have no idea.”

“I can understand that. Want me to go and heave his arse out the door?”

“What? No… no, that is certainly not required. It is not as if he has behaved out of character and… given their history and Mummy’s personality, it is not exactly an unreasonable assumption on his part.”

“You’re taking this a lot better than I thought you would.”

“Yes… most strange. I find myself not able to muster a great deal of either surprise or censure which, given my mood before I entered the bath, is quite puzzling.”

“Use any of those scented things that’s supposed to make people calm or something like that?”

“No, I have simply been using the time reflect upon your advice and could not find in it any real flaw to refute it. Mummy’s life is neither my business nor my problem, so far as it does not pertain directly to Sherlock and myself… I have said as much to her about our relationship, so I cannot stand as a hypocrite and believe the same does not apply to myself.”

“So, you reasoned yourself into serenity?”

“Well said.”

“It’s the champagne. This is actually very good. I’m not usually fond of the stuff, but I could grow to like this.”

“I shall make note and have our house staff keep several bottle stocked at all times.”
“You’re too good to me, Mycroft.”

“I am precisely as good to you as you deserve, my dear. However, I feel I am beginning to prune. Would you hand me my towel?”

“Can I dry you?”

“Why on Earth would I stop you?”

“It could lead to other things, you know.”

“Sleep is for the weak.”

“That’s my Mycroft…”

Glorious… his Gregory was a glorious creature and so breathtakingly virile. It was simply decadence to repay his vigor with a thorough anointing with the most intimate of fluids and then send him to the bath to enjoy a morsel of his own time alone with warm, soothing water. Now, though, the lack of any appreciable intimate fluids in his body was promoting a replenishment that was draining his other tissues of moisture and… something cool and refreshing, besides champagne, would be most appreciated. One of those accursed fizzy drinks Gregory was so fond of, perhaps. Well, accursed might not be quite the proper term, for they had a peculiar power to refresh that was completely at odds with their lack of nutritional merit.

A quick knock on the door to let his dearest know of his departure and a sedate stroll through the corridors, not at all envisioning any form of gothic horror novel where he battled the foul specters that threatened to harass and bedevil his beloved spouse, all while wearing the most elegant and extravagant of costume…

“Oof!”

“Daniel!”

“Oh… hi, Mycroft.”

The thrusting of one’s hands behind one’s back was akin to shouting one’s guilt for some undiscovered sin to each of the four winds.

“What do you have in your hands, Daniel?”

“Umm… nothing.”

Good heavens… the dressing gown. And… yes, cologne. The whiff of debauchery was pungent, indeed…

“I assert that your ‘nothing’ is actually something and I would suggest full disclosure, for the sake of familial peace. Gregory would be most upset to learn you have, again, decided to woo my mother when he has expressly…”

“No wooing! I’m not a wooer. Couldn’t do a proper wooing if I had a book on how to woo and it was written in very small, simple words. Which leaves out Sherlock being the author, doesn’t it? Lad has more words in his head than one of those dictionaries and that’s a very fine thing, to my way of thinking.”
Why could nothing be easy with Daniel Lestrade? It was as if he was dealing with Sherlock!

“Present your hands.”

“You and Greg have a thing for hands, don’t you? I suspect that leads to some very interesting things when the little chimps are asle—”

Oh, it did. Gregory’s hands were masterful in of ways too copious to count and… NO VEERING FROM THE PATH!

“Be that as it may… present.”

“How about I toddle along instead and we…”

Mycroft would not admit that he counted on certain knowledge of his partner’s anatomy to predict the ticklish spots on his opponent, but one used whatever tools were at hand.

“I see. Champagne. And two glasses. Daniel, I am most disappointed in you. Gregory would be terribly distressed to learn his words went completely unheeded and…”

“I heeded! There was heeding. Went right back to my room as he told me. Little bugger even followed along and looked for a way to lock me in before he left. Wasn’t too happy that he couldn’t find the key for the door, but he did a proper look around for it, nonetheless. That’s a skill that will come in handy when he’s on the job.”

“And now you are not heeding and intent on pursuing debauchery.”

“Is that what I’m doing?”

“It is and, why I cannot entirely fault you for believing Mummy would accept your libidinous advances…”

“She’s a lovely one, that’s for certain. Embarrassment of riches tonight, wasn’t it? Lizzie looking positively gorgeous and not only because of the expensive dress, either. She was a joy to behold when we were young and that’s just gotten better with time, am I right?”

Leer not, devil. It is enough to know… wait. Wait… oh dear heavens, this is worse than first believed!

“You are hoping to romance Mother Lestrade!”

“I bet there’s a lot of blokes hoping that. I hope Lizzie’s taking full advantage of it. She deserves a handsome, sexy man rumpling her sheets.”

“NO! No! This shall not be! Firstly, Mother would end your life. She would lay hands on the closest object bearing a sharp point and have your heart on the floor before a minute had passed.”

“That’s a fairly brutal firstly.”

“SECONDLY, Gregory would be distraught! He would unravel entirely and I cannot allow that. I will not allow that. No, this ridiculous notion of a dalliance is hereby at an end. I shall take these…”

Mycroft plucked the champagne and glasses out of Danny’s hands and turned his glare full force to cement his point.
“March. To your room, this instant.”

“That sounded very paternal. You’re going to make a great dad someday, Mycroft. I meant to ask, too, you and Greg planning any kiddies of your own? The two of you are brilliant parents and I think you’d do a smashing job with some tiny, nappied toots to call your own.”

“I will now count to three.”

“See! Just a brilliant dad.”

Mycroft pointed down the corridor and watched as Danny’s grin morphed into a very tiny, nappied pout that preceded the second march back to his father-in-law’s bedroom. Infernal man… had his libido no limit? Not that he could complain much for, again, it foretold very wonderful things about his future with his own beloved spouse. However, fornication with either motherly figure currently in residence was not, in any manner, going to occur. Not now, not ever. It was so decreed. The placidity of his own home life depended upon it.

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“Do I really have to hold up my hand?”

“Yes. Begin.”

“I, Danny Lestrade, do solemnly swear that I will not try to shag either my ex-wife or my ex-lover and cause untold… what was that next bit again?”

“Perturbations.”

“Right! Perturbations in the harmony of the co… a little help?”

“Co-mingled.”

“Co-mingled Holmes and Lestrade families. Can I have the champagne back as a reward?”

“I sincerely doubt you require more alcohol.”

“Neither do you and Greg, but you’re hoping to sneak it back to your own room for a private celebration, am I right?”

The devilry was incessant.

“No. However… as you have taken a sworn oath, I suppose having you drink yourself to sleep is simply insurance that the oath will be upheld.’

“Very kind of you, sir. You’re a true gentleman, Mr. Holmes.”

Mycroft pursed his lips at the insincerely-submissive tone and, after a final warning glare, left his headache behind with his liquid reward. And, completely failed to notice that the glasses had been lifted from the pockets of his own dressing gown by said headache who was now smiling and waiting for the coast to be clear. Greg and Mycroft… absolutely wonderful boys, but a bit too narrow in their thinking sometimes. Didn’t they even notice the bounty of lovelies that Rowena employed in this palace? That tall, ginger lass who showed him to his bedroom was an especially fine example, for instance. And, one he had happily chatted up and now had an opportunity to visit to continue their discussion in a more… physical fashion. Thank heavens Mycroft had left him the champagne, though. Rowena had said to make himself at home, but three bottles of expensive
champagne in one night was stretching the bounds of hospitality a little thin by even his standards…
“This is dire.”

“I agree. Dire.”

“The whale and his remora will be utterly useless to us, too lost shall they be to their moaning and wailing.”

“I agree. Moaning and wailing.”

“You are simply thinking about jam, aren’t you, John Watson?”

“I agree. Jam.”

Sherlock threw up his hands and made a mental note to keep a container of jam on his person at all times to ensure the attentiveness of his assistant.

“Can you not ruminate upon something more critical to our investigation and fantasize about the sugary ooze at a later time?”

“Can’t. Haven’t had breakfast and I’m very hungry. I barely had anything to eat last night and we didn’t even get any snacks after dinner. Not one. None at all.”

“Your distress is duly noted and will feature prominently in your weekly performance evaluation. Now, we must find…”

“Look who’s here! My little chimps come to call before the sun’s even up in the sky.”

The boys whirled at the voice coming from the bedroom door, which had just opened as the occupant returned from wherever he’d spent the previous few hours.

“John! Make note of the obvious debauchery and defilement!”

“Note being made!”

John whipped out his small notebook and spelled the damning as best he could.

“And the stench! It burns my nasal epithelia with the corrosiveness of the strongest acid.”

“Stinky note being made!”

Danny lifted his arm and gave a sniff, conceding the young scientist had a point. Which was why he was awake and moving towards his shower before other family members were to be found roaming the corridors. Again.

“I don’t know about that first bit, but yeah, I could use a shower. Which is fortunate because that’s first on my list of things to do this morning!”

“We will continue our interrogation while you do. Prepare to speak loudly so your protestations are clearly audible through the door of the bath.”

Sherlock pointed to the bathroom and glared at his target while Danny grinned and gave John a good hair rustling.
“Going to check that I did a good job?”

“John! Make note that the malefactor is attempting to commit murder through disgust!”

“Note being made! Please don’t kill Sherlock, Papa Lestrade, at least, not before breakfast. They’d probably make me wait to eat until they took away his body and I can’t last that long without my toast!”

It was good to know that no matter how unique these two boys were, the critical things in life weren’t being ignored.

“Toast is certainly important! I could use a slice or two, myself, and something good and greasy to go with them. Alright, no killing Sherlock, so we save the toast, and I’ll be quick in the shower. Want to find me some clothes so I can hop right into them when I’m done?”

John darted towards the large wardrobe along the wall and began rummaging, while Sherlock made a show of avoiding any contact with Lestrade-family effluvia as the older man walked past him into the bath. Of course, Danny then jumped back out and snatched Sherlock up for a big hug, which made the boy squeal like a pig with its foot caught in a hole.

“I am being perverted!”

“Makes you a lucky boy! Out in a minute.”

Setting Sherlock back down, the elder Lestrade left a crack in the door so whatever ‘interrogation’ was going to happen would go more smoothly. Of course, a little less smoothly would be more fun, but Sherlock’s feathers were already thoroughly ruffled and any more could bring the house down around their ears. Maybe a little ruffling would keep the walls in place though…

“Want to collect any data while I’m showering, Sherlock? How much water I use or how the soap lathers on my manly skin?”

“Paedophile!”

“And here I was thinking I was one of those common lab rats. Instead, I’ve got a fancy title!”

“Ugh… I was manhandled by the stupidest molester in the history of deviancy.”

“I’ve picked out some nice clothes, though, so you’ll be a handsome molester, Papa Lestrade.”

John shoved the shirt and trousers he’d chosen through the crack in the bathroom door and waved them happily.

“Thanks, John! Excellent picks. Always pays to look good when you’re molesting. So, what am I being interrogated about anyway?”

The water started running while Sherlock and John shared a knowing nod and John scrambled back to get his notebook so he could record the data. And he had to record every bit, too, because Mycroft and Greg had sounded very upset last night when he and Sherlock spied… happened to listen in on their conversation… while they were looking for colored film to put over their torches so Sherlock could do an experiment with… something. It hadn’t made much sense, but that was true for a lot of Sherlock’s experiments, so it’s wasn’t much of a problem.

“I will begin when I am ready and not a moment sooner, besmircher!”
“Ok, then. I’ll keep washing.”

John looked at Sherlock who motioned him closer so their conversation could be whispered. Of course, Sherlock’s whisper was roughly equivalent in volume to the average fire alarm.

“The fiend is a known liar, so we must have empirical, unequivocal evidence. Go and make off with his garments.”

“What?”

“His garments! They are surely upon the floor and you will gather them to bring to me for inspection.”

“No! You don’t walk in on people when they’re showering! If they’re babies or are sick or something you can, but… you do it.”

“I am not imperiling my eyesight! Gazing upon the blackguard in the nude would boil my vitreous fluid and render me sightless!”

“Well, I’m not going to be sightless, either! Besides, why do you want his clothes?”

“Evidence! The forensic evidence is certain to be plentiful and it will penetrate any lies the fornicator might tell.”

“I still don’t want to get them.”

“You will do it, John Watson, and do it now. Ensure, also, that you collect the undergarments. That is extremely important.”

“What! No! I’m not touching his pants!”

“You will!”

“I will not! You touch them!”

“That is your job!”

“I’m not the pants-touch! Show me where it says that!”

“Your service contract is in Mycroft’s vault, as you well know!”

“Ha! No proof, I don’t touch pants. Pffft!”

“You doubt my veracity!”

“Yes!”

“How dare you, dust mote! I challenge you to a duel!”

“Another one? Oh… that actually sounds like fun. More fun than touching pants.”

“No! You must touch the pants first!”

Which became unnecessary as a towel-clad Danny exited the bath and dropped his underpants onto Sherlock’s head, prompting a laudably soprano-like shriek and plummet to the floor as if the end of the opera brought his tragic and sudden death.
“Now you’ve got my pants. Want to tell me why you want them? John, you’re still alive, so you can answer.”

“Uh…. Maybe I should try and wake Sherlock instead.”

“You can give him that mouth-to-mouth if you want, but…”

Sherlock’s muffled combination of threats and indignation stood as testament to his good health, so the fresh clothes were lifted from the bed where John had tossed them and their model returned into the bathroom to change.

“Let’s get on with it, lad. Toast is waiting.”

“Right! Oh… well, Sherlock wants to find out who you were kissing last night so we can tell Mycroft and Greg and they won’t have to worry about who’s mum, let me get this right, ‘voided her life’s supply of dignity and succumbed to the gigolo’s lustful intentions.’ That’s what Sherlock said, at least.“

“Ah… got it. Your dads still worried that ol’ Danny’s been up to no good, are they?”

“I think so. Sherlock and I were going to find out who voided so we could answer the question for them.”

“That was nice of you. And, I suppose, though you’re far too young to know about that sort of thing, pants aren’t the worst place to start. Shirts are good, too, especially undershirts, though I wasn’t wearing one. Bare skin’s the best, though. Probably the best source of things like lipstick, perfume or stray hairs… maybe some of that DNA they’re always going on about, and that would do the trick nicely, I suspect. Should have told me before I got in the shower and you could have checked.”

“That’s a smart idea. We’ll remember for next time.”

“Good lad! Always learning and that’s important. And, for your information, I paid not a single visit to either my lovely Lizzie or my lovely Emmie. Unless they had a nice time with one of the footmen or that bloke who seems to be the one keeping an eye on things… what’s his name?”

“Edwards?”

“Yeah, him… well, unless he or another gent was doing the visiting, the ladies had a decidedly non-exciting night.”

And the mournful look on Danny’s face as he exited the bath was evidence on how sad and sorry he believed that particular condition to be.

“Oh.”

“That’s another thing you can do, too. Just ask a person. Sherlock’s right that people do lie and I lie more than most, but it’s a good place to start, especially if you’re a bit fussy about touching underthings.”

“I sort of am, actually, which won’t be helpful when I’m a doctor, so I guess I should work on that.”

And to show resolve, John strode, shoulders back, into the bath and picked up the dirty clothes, pants and all, to deposit on the floor by the door of the bedroom.
“There. They take you clothes when you’re not here and bring them back clean, so now they don’t have to walk very far to get yours.”

“That’s very considerate of you, John. You have a kind streak and that’s also important for being a doctor, so I know you’ll be brilliant at it.”

While John beamed, Sherlock used the distraction to scrutinize his quarry and had to admit that there was little to indicate the villain was dissembling about his trysts, but more specific data would be required to verify the verbose assertions. John had lifted the garments once, so he had no standing to refuse to lift them again.

“Thanks! And… you really didn’t kiss Mrs. Lestrade or Mrs. Holmes?”

“Nope. Well, that’s not true, because I did give them each a hello peck when I got here, but not one kiss beyond that. Not that I’d mind, of course, because both of them are very good kissers when they have a taste for it, but I’m not one to kiss when I’m not welcome to do it and I don’t think either of them is going to be very welcoming if I give it a try.”

“I think you’re right. Not to be mean, but they didn’t look very happy to see you. Not at all.”

“They certainly didn’t and that’s not a good thing if you’re looking for a bit of fun between the sheets. That’s alright, though. It wouldn’t be alright if they were the only two women in the world, because that would mean a very lonely fate for poor, pitiful me, but there’s lots more than two out there, so I have plenty of other options.”

Such as the very delightful Donna who made his first night in the Holmes house one to remember.

“Ok, then. We’ll tell Greg and Mycroft so they stop worrying. Worrying can’t be good before breakfast and we have a party tonight, too! You definitely can’t be worried when you go to a party. Parties are for having fun and worrying isn’t any fun at all.”

“Such a smart lad you are, John. Really, your brain is top-notch.”

“John’s brain is a top-notch for a garden pea, at best. Do not encourage him to have aspirations above his station.”

“Sherlock! Back with us, are you? How about you, then? Decided I’m not roaming the hallways looking for luscious ladies to drag back to my lair for a bit of a cuddle?”

“I have yet to analyze the evidence and assess my findings.”

“Fair enough. Think we can make it to breakfast, at least, without me doing any defiling and debauching so John gets put off his toast?”

“I put your eagerness for wanton females on similar standing as your eagerness for free food.”

“Is that a yes?”

“It is.”

“Good! Let’s go, then. We’ll get in there before all the others so we get the best stuff the kitchen has to offer.”

“How can you have ‘best’ toast, plebian?”

“Could be rye? Rye’s not good toast for breakfast. Crap with jam, no matter what the jam is and
makes your tea or coffee taste funny what with all that… ryness lingering on the tongue.”

“You have made a credible point. That the seas did not boil and skies did not fall astounds me.”

Danny’s victory gesture was surprisingly reminiscent of those Greg used when he’d scored a triumph and Sherlock filed the information under ‘genetics’ in his mental database.

“Danny Lestrade is winning the morning! And toast is my trophy. A tall stack of lovely toast with jam sticking it all together so it doesn’t topple.”

“I want a toast trophy!”

“And another for John! Sherlock, shall we make it three?”

“Mine will be the tallest or there shall be repercussions.”

“Architecture was never something I had a talent for, but I’ll do my best. Come on, lads. You know we’ll get the bent eye from your dads if they catch us doing anything fun, so let’s get this underway before they piss in our milk.”

On that, Sherlock had to grudgingly agree, albeit without the urinous imagery, and started the march out the bedroom, followed quickly by John. After a quick check of his appearance, they were chased by the third juvenile delinquent in the house, who had full intentions of perpetrating as much delinquency at the breakfast table as he could manage. What were grandfathers for if they couldn’t stir up some shenanigans with their grandsons? And, as a little bonus, there was likely to be a few pretty lasses in the kitchen who hadn’t met Mr. Daniel Lestrade, but would certainly want to once they saw the Lestrade grin flashed in its full glory. Hopefully, their uniforms held their knickers on tightly because John was an easily shockable young boy…

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Oh dear heavens…

“Mycroft! Which tower is the best, mine or Sherlock’s?”

Sherlock and John sat at the kitchen table with fully a dozen loaves’ worth of toast between them, modeled into skyscrapers, with jam, apparently, as the mortar for the bread.

“Mine is better, bacterium! Not only is it taller, it is more aesthetically appealing.”

“Wrong. So, so wrong. Mine looks nicer and is better built. Yours would topple if an ant walked into it. Mine won’t, so it’s better.”

And the apparent child-minder was merrily grinning at the food-based construction, while casting appraising glances at the kitchen staff who were, yes, making more toast and obtaining fresh pots of jam.

“Dad!”

“Hello, Greg. And Mycroft! Both of you looking… well, I was going to say rested and fresh, but… had yourselves a fun night, did you? That’s my boys! Don’t let a little thing like sleep stop you from having a fun time with the person you love. Or a reasonable facsimile.”

“Dad, what… why…”

“It’s alright, Greg. Papa Lestrade said we could feed the toast we can’t eat to the dogs or horses
or bring it to the lake for the ducks and fish, so none of it will go to waste. Oh! And he didn’t kiss your mum or Mycroft’s mum, either, so you can stop worrying.”

Lestrade’s eyes widened and looked to Mycroft, who eyes were doing a terribly good job widening in surprise and narrowing in curiosity at the same time.

“But the fornicator did perpetrate some degree of vileness, that much I am certain. I must gather more data, however, to add detail to my report.”

As the female kitchen staff cut eyes at the man at the table, said man simply grinned wider and, in Mycroft’s opinion, more seductively, which gained him a few thoughtful smirks in return.

“How… what…”

“Having problems talking today, son? Mycroft… hats off to you! If you can leave a body that tongue-tied, you’ve definitely done something very right, if you know what I mean.”

Greg slumped into one of the kitchen chairs and tried to remember a day that had gotten off on the wrong foot as quickly as this one. Realizing that most of his days had gone this way since he met Mycroft, some of John’s building supplies were stolen and a start was made on breakfast because all, really, was perfectly normal in his strange and confusing world.

“That is certainly not a breakfast table topic of conversation, Daniel.”

“Oh, the little buggers don’t follow along for things like that, Mycroft. Look! They’re too busy building amazing towers! Besides, they were the ones hoping for a look at my pants to see if they could identify a lipstick smudge, so I think being prudish isn’t really necessary.”

“Sherlock Holmes! What in the world…”

“And John! Do not deride my research methodology, beluga, without squawking your interminable squawk at my assistant, for he was tasked to gather the underpants and turned traitor, as well as squeamish, setting back my data collection to an intolerable degree!”

Now it was Mycroft dropping into a kitchen chair and stealing construction supplies, if only to put something into his mouth so words didn’t flow out, instead. All he had hoped for was a quiet pre-breakfast nibble and cup of tea with the man he loved and he finds, instead, Puck and his fairy henchmen already making mischief though the cock had scarcely crowed. Well, if one was to be accurate, a cock had crowed, and, given the looks he was continuing to give the kitchen staff, was hoping to crow again in very short order.

“Sherlock…”

“As it stands I can only press the accusation of rampant coitus, but cannot place specific name to the person who was damned to suffer the lecherous fondlings of the older Lestrade, save it was neither Mummy nor Mother Lestrade.”

“Can you say ‘elder,’ lad, and not ‘older?’ I’d appreciate it.”

“Ugh… your vanity approaches the level of John’s, mendicant, a feat I did not believe achievable by another member of the human species.”

Mycroft shared another look with his lover and cautiously felt a wash of relief race through his system. The discussion about the… situation… had gone on for a long time after he had returned to their bedroom and the vast and varied plans they had crafted to prevent matters proceeding down
dangerous paths had occupied quite the quantity of their mental energies. Perhaps, just perhaps, those energies could now be devoted to more pleasurable pursuits.

“Here that, John? You and me are at the top of the mountain! I’m feeling rather proud of that.”

John cheered loudly and used his flailing arms to ‘accidentally’ knock the top two stories off of Sherlock’s toast tower, much to Sherlock’s shrieked displeasure.

“Vandal! This shall not go unchallenged! Prepare for searing and scathing retribution!”

“Oh, this is fantastic. Greg, Mycroft… this what you get to enjoy every morning?”

Wondering just how much alcohol it had taken to permanently destroy his father’s brain, Lestrade simply shook his head and ruminated on following that particular path to make the coming years a bit more pleasant. Unfortunately, a pickled brain wasn’t advised if one wanted to move up the police ranks, so that plan might have to be set aside for emergencies only.

“More often than not, Gregory and I are regaled with this particular pre-breakfast symphony; however, it does serve to make whatever complications and disasters the remainder of the day presents seem simple, nearly soothing, by comparison.”

“Lucky. You two are as lucky as two lucky bastards can be. HA! This is quickly becoming the best weekend I’ve ever and I’ve had some amazing ones, let me tell you. Had company for some of those, too. I’d mention names, but I don’t want to see you lads get flustered before you’ve put more in your stomach than a bit of toast and tea.”

The large wink set Sherlock gagging and Mycroft felt a highly uncharacteristic urge to join in, stopping only by considering his dignity and the fact that a distracted Sherlock left his edifice unprotected from pilfering and another few slices of toast was just the thing for settling his suddenly-distressed stomach.

“Dad… don’t. Just don’t. Not this early in the morning. In fact, not ever. This I do declare. Like that, love? Did I sound commanding and regal?”

“Without question, my dearly beloved.”

“First the sexual braggart and now the cooing insipidness of the over-fattened turtledove. My ears cannot stand the continued assault! I demand to be provided with hearing protection and a large pail to vomit my ever-increasing loss of faith in humanity.”

The parental generation settling comfortably into the morning and the grandparental representative stretching for the kitchen staff’s viewing pleasure before rising to get another cup of tea was a sound statement on the health of the family ship, which weathered the stormiest of seas, and Sherlock, with grace and poise.

“Sausages! They would make great beams for our towers. Papa Lestrade! Smile nicely at the ladies so they give us lots of sausages, as well as toast!”

Of course, John was shaping up to be his own force of nature and… they might need a bigger boat.

“And, off they go.”

Armed with two large sacks of used toast, Sherlock and John started on their humanitarian mission of
feeding the beasts of the field, stable and water bodies, carefully watched by Mycroft and Lestrade for any instances of testing how well toast cushioned a vehicle during a collision or taking an unscheduled ride on the horses when there was a party looming large on the horizon that would certainly suffer a loss of gaiety if the guests were being press-ganged into search parties for tiny truants.

“Which means we can do this.”

Lestrade leaned in and kissed Mycroft tenderly, adoring the soft moan that rose up in his partner as turned up the heat just a little to give a hint of future kisses to come.

“Lovely, my dear Gregory. Always a benefit of Sherlock and John going off on one of their adventures. And this one finds them carrying with them not a single lethal substance or illegal weapon, so it is truly a day of days.”

“And Dad didn’t shag our mums! Can’t ask for a tastier icing on the cake of our day of days than that.”

“Agreed. Though… I do feel somewhat contrite that my mind leapt to the erroneous conclusion.”

“Don’t. It’s a numbers game, really. Just assume Dad’s doing something he should feel contrite about and you’ll be right 99% of the time. That 1% you’re off is nothing fret over.”

“Perhaps.”

“Besides, you have something else you should be using your brain for.”

“Oh? And what might that be?”

“Why did Grandmama invite him here at all? I mean… she had to know this was a landmine waiting to be stepped on, even without his history with your mum, which I’m also wondering if she knew about. But, Dad? At a posh party? She has something in mind and I’d very much like to know what that is.”

“Ah, yes… you also believe there is an ulterior motive on Grandmama’s part.”

“Of course I do! I mean, there’s always an ulterior motive with Grandmama, but this time it’s like a big, flashing sign over her head. I just can’t quite make out what it’s saying.”

“My thoughts have been very much along those lines, as well. However, Grandmama tends to reveal herself precisely when she wishes it and not a moment sooner.”

“Maybe. Of course, you might just ask her. She could be waiting for that. Grandmama’s sneaky that way.”

Something Mycroft hadn’t considered, but now… his dear Gregory did bring fresh perspectives that challenged his own in the most useful and delightful ways.

“A very viable hypothesis. Let us see how tonight progresses and we may take the offensive tomorrow.”

“Always good to have a plan. But…”

“Gregory?”
“I hate to say this, but if you want me to be your lab assistant, I probably should remind you that I need some time today or tomorrow to continue revising for my police exams.”

The fact that situation had completely slipped Mycroft’s mind was another thing worthy of contrition and he kicked himself in the head with the mighty force of his imagination as penalty.

“I will ensure you have all the time you require, Gregory, worry not about that. There are extra hands available this weekend to grasp the children by the collar and drag them away from the edge of the abyss, so we will manage to keep hearth and home together, though, I admit, not as successfully as you would do the deed.”

“You’re a great abyss snatcher-awayer, love, so I suspect everything will be fine. In fact, you can start now.”

Mycroft looked over to where his partner was nodding to see two boys engaged in a toast-projectile war where, apparently, the end game was to hit your opponent with as many jam-laden sides as possible. It was ever a joy to raise children.

“However, you are not with book or pencil in hand, so I believe you cannot plead academics as an excuse for avoiding your familial duties.”

“You’re a hard man, Mycroft Holmes. Want the short one or the loud one?”

“The short one, I believe. He seems less provided with jam and will spare my wardrobe any berry-based staining.”

“Yeah, Sherlock’s aim needs work for lightweight missiles. Loud one it is for me, then.”

The happy couple walked forward to negotiate a ceasefire and orchestrate the collection of the spent ordinance for delivery to the horses who had taken an interest in the proceedings and were happily watching the chaos with hopes that a stray warhead might make it their way. Given the heft of the war chests the two boys were carrying, horse happiness was going to be a very easy thing to assure…

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“Falcon, this is Eagle.”

“Go ahead, Eagle.”

“Are you still in visual contact with the wildebeest?”

“I am sitting three feet to your left, Sherlock.”

“Silence, wildebeest! Your trumpeting is disturbing our mission!”

Which seemed to be stealing the chocolates that Mycroft had procured from one of the many hiding places they lived now that Sherlock and John were frequent visitors to the house.

“If you simply asked, brother dear…”

“SILENCE! Falcon, deploy the device.”

Which appeared to be some form of elongated grasping device that was slightly too heavy for John to wield, so Mycroft had to assist with the theft of his chocolates or suffer Sherlock’s wrath from John’s plummeting to the floor.
“Oh dear. Apparently, your device is more a chocolates crusher than a chocolates stealer.”

Or so the flattened mass of chocolatey goo between the pincers of their tool seemed to indicate.

“This was not a predicted outcome of my design. I must refine the tension in the cables. John! Bring the device and a full box of chocolates so that the recalibration can commence.”

“No, brother, you shall not destroy a box of expensive chocolates simply to satisfy your engineering urges.”

“I most certainly shall! This prototype has failed a critical test and redesigning it is of extreme importance!”

“Besides, Mycroft, we can still scrape off the chocolate from the grabby part and eat it, so none of it will go to waste.”

“Thank you, John, for you nod towards frugality, however, I believe your goal can be accomplished through the use of less expensive and sensitive materials such as... olives, or something of the sort.”

“Olives have an entirely different compressibility than chocolates, Blimpcroft. They are utterly useless for my tests.”

“And they don’t taste that good, either!”

That his dearest husband was enjoying a quiet few hours with his study materials while he battled alone against the forces of evil would heavily leveraged for certain favors in the post-party hours when they were finally warm and comfortable in their bed.

“Then I’ll take them because I’ve heard you two have already eaten a plantation’s worth of sugar today and I could use a little something sweet.”

Ah, Mother Lestrade... my only ally against the diminutive goblins who have set up a campsite and begun to sow their discord in this lovely and formerly-peaceful library.

“Unacceptable! You cannot confiscate our research materials! You have not a single advanced degree to your name!”

“Oh, poor me. Think I’ll eat these lovely chocolates to salve my crippled self-esteem.”

Taking a chair near Mycroft’s, who made a show of presenting her the contested chocolates, the current maven of the Lestrade clan, blood and otherwise, plucked a plump specimen from the box and popped into it her mouth with a nearly sexual moan.

“These are magnificent. I’ll tell you this much, Mycroft... this might not be a lifestyle I could live forever, but it’s a grand thing to visit now and then.”

The snort from behind them was very familiar to two people in the room and they braced for the coming, and stinging, retort.

“Yes, I can see where you might hope for the occasional chance to suck on the family teat.”

“Yours aren’t that impressive, Emmie, so don’t get above yourself, if you know what’s good for you.”

Another bracing occurred and was muddied by confusion when the only response was another
snort. And not even one of Mummy’s better ones.

“Impressive enough to render on canvas and present in the Tate Gallery.”

Sherlock and Mycroft gasped in shock and John joined in, more for support that a firm understanding of what the gasping was all about.

“That one of those where the people are blue and have three eyes? That does make sense, now that I think about it.”

This gasp was quieter than the first, because this could last awhile and there were only so many gasps one could heave in a day, so breath-rationing was a prudent strategy.

“I shall talk to the director about hanging a portrait of you, Lizzie, for individuals painted with an envious shade of green are always welcome to grace their walls.”

This snort was of the Lestrade variety and mixed with a laugh, which was met with three sets of ‘what?’ eyes and a shared look of acknowledged confusion from the audience of the mothers’ performance.

“As long as they pay me to model, I’m all for it. Got a new pair of shoes I want, as a matter of fact. Can always use a few quid to put away for the little luxuries in life. Here, eat chocolate. Then you’ll be too fat to worry about them putting your ladies in a frame for blokes to gawk at.”

Damn Gregory! He should be here to… do something! He was the practical one, for heaven’s sake. A peace keeper who was failing utterly to keep any semblance of peace, the wastrel…

“Oh. Well, Mama does procure the finest chocolates available…”

Plucking her own treat out of the box, then making certain the box was taken away from Mycroft and set out of his reach, the newest arrival took her own seat and tossed the scrumptious morsel into her mouth.

“Always a delight. The horrid thing has certain specimens crafted specially for her and not even I can convince the chocolatiers to make them for anyone else, including me. I do believe she has some form of blackmail material that she uses to cement her monopoly on the hazelnut and those indecently dark ones. If the deed to that bit of extortion is the only thing left to me in Mama’s will, I shall be most content.”

Mycroft cut eyes towards his brother, who threw up his hands and began repositioning his theft device to take a stab at collecting the entire box for his and John’s tasting pleasure. Mummy was not being quite her usual self and that had both Holmes brothers on alert for some greater assaults lurking in the shadows.

“Not a bad thing to hope for. When my mum passed, all I saw was her cat, which her neighbor was happy to take off my hands so I didn’t have another mouth to feed at home.”

“Are your neighbors not the helpful sort? Between these three, I am certain the mice have not a fighting chance to see even a crumb from your pantry.”

The three males in the room favored their detractor with their most affronted glares, though John had to admit, at least to himself, that he was happy to keep the food away from the mice because Mrs. Lestrade was a very good cook and didn’t mind if you cleaned your plate more than once. Or twice.

“That pack of dogs will eat me into debtor’s prison, that’s for certain. But, it’s free entertainment,
especially if I put something green on Sherlock’s plate. Might as well be watching one of Shakespeare’s tragedies unfold on stage.”

“That is a lie! Shakespeare’s so-called tragedies are nothing of the sort, for nothing occurs but the boring deaths of even more boring characters. It is an affront to my intellect that his insipid scribblings are continually paraded before my eyes, with the clear intent of making me some form of worshiper in his tedious church of prose. But, they shall not succeed! I shall maintain my literary atheism at all costs and damn the rheumy-eyed dull-wits who attempt to convert me to their stultifying observances!”

The chocolate that landed directly in the center of Sherlock’s forehead was quite unique in that it was one of the uncommon honeyed-cream examples and the thrower was neither John nor Mycroft.

“Battery!”

“It’s tasty battery, though, Sherlock. This is a good one.”

Living with Sherlock had given John quite an impressive set of reflexes for unattended edibles that might suddenly be available for the quick and determined.

“Good boy, John, taking advantage of someone else’s tragedy. Maybe that Shakespeare fellow should have written a play about poor, uncoordinated lads who get hit with tasty things and their fast-fingered friends. Probably be considered one of his best.”

John beamed at Mother Lestrade and made his own theatrical show, this one of savoring every molecule of his prize.

“Now I am maligned! And by a member of the uneducated, menial class! Woe is me!”

“You are lying on your back, so your clothes are rumpled in the unseemliest fashion, have an excrement-colored smudge on your forehead and are wailing like a petulant infant. I believe you are self-maligning, my dearest son, though it is certainly a performance worthy of the codpiece-wearing thespians who perform the works of your favorite playwright. Well done.”

“I have been nursed on the sourest, most curdled of mother’s milk!”

“And the conversation makes its circuitous route back to breasts. Redundancy does not do you credit either, Sherlock. Do try to keep the topics of discussion fresh or you will surely bore your companions, in the unlikely event they number more than John, absolutely to death.”

“Abandoned! I am abandoned… nay!… slaughtered by the cruel and cutting discourse of Medea herself!”

“Oh, are we now on to Euripides? I do prefer Sophocles in both written and performed form, however, if you would like to debate their styles and influence on modern theater, I believe I can do justice to either.”

“You are failing to inspire humor in me, Mummy.”

“You are failing to wipe your forehead, Sherlock.”

Mycroft had occasionally viewed the television program ‘The Twilight Zone,’ but never thought he would gain a starring role in one of the episodes.

“I am now ignoring everyone. John! Continue our research and report to me the results.”
“But, you’re ignoring me!”

“I am ignoring everyone. You are John and fall into a different category.”

“Oh. Ok.”

As John began to wrestle their invention, Mycroft cut eyes towards his mother and added to his folder of confounding information the fact that she was watching John work with, if not fondness, for it did not venture quite into that zone, but, at least, tolerance.

“Mrs. Holmes? You are wanted on the telephone.”

The maid peeking into the library smiled hesitantly, knowing the reputation of the woman she was addressing and was very happy that the only dismissal she got was a ‘oh, very well’ flick of the wrist.

“Likely, that is Robert. He is most attentive to me, the dear man.”

Watching their mother exit the room, without any last-second slights or criticisms, left the two brothers as confused as ever, especially with Mother Lestrade’s grin in Emma’s wake.

“Mother, is there something you would like to share?”

“Not particularly.”

“Confess! You are grinning like the Cheshire Cat and that is not appropriate without a deluge of data to explain your glee!”

“Was the Cheshire Cat gleeful, lad? I’d say knowing and enigmatic was closer to the mark.”

“John! Ready our device for application to human flesh! We shall torture the subject until all is revealed!”

John looked over the large contraption in his hands and decided standing quietly was the best option since Sherlock would likely get diverted in a second and forget all about the flesh and torture, which was really for the best. Mrs. Lestrade probably wouldn’t give them biscuits anymore after a round of torturing.

“Sherlock, do behave. Mother… would you kindly enlighten us, despite your lack of enthusiasm for the topic?”

Another fat chocolate popped into her mouth gave the family matriarch remaining in the room a moment to make a serious show of considering Mycroft’s request, before answering.

“What do you want to know?”

“CONFESS!”

Mycroft reached over to grab another chocolate to toss onto Sherlock’s forehead, adding one tossed into John’s hands to distract him long enough for Sherlock to leap upon his prey, which filled his mouth and silenced his tongue.

“I believe our curiosity centers on the, shall we say, altered tone in yours and Mummy’s relationship.”

“Ah. Yes, I can understand why that might seem curious to you.”
“Good, then kindly elucidate.”

“Come again?”

“Might you impart the reason for the proverbial shift in the winds?”

“Oh, well… I suppose.  Your mum and I both decided, apparently, to do a little reading before bed and ran into each other on the way here to the library.  Before the claws came out, my ex ran into the both of us while he was sneaking away, apparently, towards the servant’s quarters.  That man does not change for love nor money.  At least his intended companion for the evening was getting a spot of romance with his raggedy old body.  After that, your mum and I decided a little of that brandy you and Greg adore sounded more interesting than any old book, so we did a good bit of damage to a bottle of the stuff which, on top of what we’d already enjoyed earlier in the evening, put us in what I would call a rather a good mood.  Spent some time laughing, and loudly, about Danny and his utter uselessness.  Well, beyond the very, very obvious, that is.”

Watching the three younger males suffer severe intestinal distress was certainly worth the price of admission to his particular show.

“Anyway, we shared a few stories about that rubbish example of a good and decent man, and commiserated a bit about being women in this world of ours, which, despite your mum’s world being leagues from mine, is a fairly similar experience no matter the number of naughts at the end of your bank balance.  Talked about you and Greg…”

“Oh no…”

“Well, I can’t say it was anything other than I expected and nothing I can really take offense to, if I’m honest.  Your mum doesn’t know my Greg, not really, beyond he’s a common boy who’s got nothing to speak of in the bank and no plans for Uni or anything like that.  It’s not unheard of, not at all, for that to be a bad situation for someone like you.  I’ve heard of it, seen it, too, though not with someone as wealthy as you are.  Your mum has, as well.  What I can fault her for is not taking the time to get to know my son and learn that’s not what he’s about.  Told her that and in no uncertain terms.  There absolutely are people who think Greg’s mining your pockets for gold, but they don’t know him, or you, and are just making evil assumptions.  That’s what your mum did and words were had because it, I can tell you.”

“Well… I… I see.  I assume she was not happy with the conversation.”

“Well at first, but we began to see each other’s side of things and that helped.  It also helped that she learned Danny was Greg’s dad.  Greg could have turned out just like him and didn’t, even meeting him once is enough to know that, so she had a some basis to be willing to look a little further at things.  I worried about you, too, at first, if you remember.  Difference was I took that time to know the person you were, not just the labels you sported.  And I had to think about you again after… well, you what I’m talking about.”

To his lingering shame… yes.

“But, I’m still watching and seeing how you do.  Nobody’s perfect, but if I didn’t think you were learning from your mistakes, I’d be having a talk with Greg about keeping on with you.  Your mum didn’t know about your problems, did she?”

“No, that is not information I felt the need to share.”

“Didn’t think so, because she was surprised by it.  In some ways maybe not, because you were
throwing over Greg for more time with your lot, which she had sort of hoped for, but in other ways it seemed strange for you and I think it shocked her that you went down that road. I’d say we both learned a great deal from our chat and in a number of different areas.”

“So… it was positive?”

“You could say that. Don’t start to think we’re friends because that is not the case, but we should be able to be in the same room and not hurl really nasty words at each other. And… if it’s not out of place for me to say, I believe she might be a touch easier on you, John and Mr. Smudgeface, too. Your mum said right out that she’d never seen Sherlock so lively before and…”

Following the motion for him to lean forward, Mycroft moved close to his mother-in-law and hoped the news wasn’t foul.

“… happy. Said she couldn’t actually remember a time the lad seemed honestly happy, even with all the standard antics and nonsense that goes along with his particular flavor of happiness.”

A little tap to the side of her nose clued Mycroft in that this information would stay between them because Sherlock would certainly do his best to prove them wrong if he was in the know and Mycroft breathed a sigh of relief for both the information and the perspicacity of his conversation partner.

“Yes, I believe I understand.”

“Of course, your mum and I were more than slightly pissed by the time we wobbled off to bed, but… I can say I set aside the thought of asking John to make a doll of her for his next art project so I could have a bit of fun with some pins. Take that for what it’s worth.”

What it was worth was not measurable, in Mycroft’s opinion. Mummy would never be a warm person, neither nurturing or doting, but maybe the small shifts he had read in her since Christmas were not aberrations but part of a new pattern. Not tremendously far off of the norm, but far enough. Certainly, and encouragingly, far enough.

“I shall. And, thank you. It is a good thing to know all of this and I will admit to feeling some light shining in to what has been, for a very long time, a terribly upsetting darkness.”

“I’m happy for that, Mycroft, I really am. Now, I’m off to check on my layabout son and meet Rowena for a little nibble and a lot of gossip. Going to be some familiar faces at the party tonight and some new ones, as well, so I want to be ready for any potential prospects. Your mum’s spoken for, so those lords and colonels are all for me to inspect.”

Taking one last chocolate as a parting gift, the lady of the hour took her leave after a pat on the head for John and a shared “I’m watching you” gesture with Sherlock.

“Mycroft?”

“Yes, John?”

“I didn’t follow along with all of that because I’m not certain Sherlock and I were part of the conversation and it’s not polite to eavesdrop when you can get caught, but… is your mum still mean?”

John’s moral fluidity was alive and well, it seemed.

“I cannot speak definitively on the matter, however, Mother Lestrade did give some indication
“that she might be more… accepting of certain things and that would not incline her to her more cutting and caustic of comments and behaviors.”

“Oh. So, is she still mean or not?”

One day words would be currency and his family would roll in sacks of notes the likes of which the world had never seen.

“I would anticipate the level of meanness to have diminished somewhat, though, do not expect her to be as openly loving as Mother or Grandmama.”

“Ok. I understood that, at least.”

John shared a look with Sherlock and, though he could not translate the language, Mycroft could easily see the unspoken conversation going on between the boys, one which ended in Sherlock sitting up on the floor and waving his hand towards the chocolate box.

“I require chocolate to soothe… the lack of chocolates in the previous minutes of my life.”

Mycroft seriously debated another missile strike, but, observing beneath the surface of his brother’s imperiousness, decided to indulge the boy just a bit. Sherlock had suffered much because of Mummy and any alleviation of that suffering was to be celebrated.

“Of course, brother dear. I would hate for your blood to actually return to its standard cellular nature and lose its cocoa-based properties.”

And, as soon as Gregory released himself from his isolation, there would be more chocolate and the sharing of news that would certainly please his husband. Their domestic road had its share of bumps and holes, and any chance to flatten or fill was a joyful thing. Surely, their post-chocolate and conversation time would be testament to the joy and delight from this specific turn of events. His spouse was always eager to make merry when they were gifted with something other than tribulation in their lives and, undoubtedly, there was sufficient time before they made ready for the evening for some rather vigorous merrymaking.

Which, based on the outcome of Grandmama’s gathering, might be a fond thing to look back upon as they collapsed in exhaustion onto the bed they’d previously graced with their passion. Dire and deadly perils were on the horizon and from a multitude of directions…
“That’s… that’s a bit unbelievable, actually.”

Getting his lover to break from his studies was nigh on a herculean effort, but Mycroft had never let the size of the obstacle obstruct him from his intentions. Which, in this case, was time and gleefully-given affection with his husband.

“My thoughts precisely, at least, at first. However, your mother’s explanation was both a strong and compelling one.”

“Good for mum, then. And… good for all of us! I really didn’t want to think about family dinners or Christmases or whatnot with those two at each other’s throats. Or dad’s. No, that last part would be fun to watch, so that can still happen, but I’m all for lowering the heat of the family conversation to a cozy simmer as often as we can.”

Mycroft stretched out on the bed and smiled, as he tended to, every time his dearest used the term ‘family.” Especially with such delicious ease.

“And I’m more than happy for you and Sherlock. I know how much you’ve suffered with your mum and if that can change, I’m positively ecstatic.”

“A feeling I wholeheartedly share. It is difficult, perhaps, to understand the weight of what one endures until one experiences a shift in the winds and can evaluate the contrast. It was a rather surreal experience to hear Mummy demonstrating something other than condescension and criticism towards someone outside her social circle, let alone interact in what can only be termed a positive fashion with Sherlock, but I shall keep tightly crossed fingers that she enjoyed herself sufficiently to adopt this as her new pattern of behavior.”

“Well, we’re here through tomorrow, so you can gather a little more evidence for your theory. Like that? Did I sound professional?”

“Most professional. May I assume, then, that you have completed your work for the day?”

“No, you may not assume that, thank you very much. Edwards is going to be here in a minute to test me a little and whatever I muck up, my nose is back in the books for. He’s going to give me some practice interview questions, too, to see how I handle myself.”

“I… I can do all of that, my love.”

“True, but you’re hoping for some happy distractions of the very sexy type and I need to focus.”

“That… that is not entirely the case.”

“Alright, but it’s 98% the case, I’ll wager.”

“No…”

“Mycroft…”

“Not a smidgen over 90%, my beloved, and I am entirely honest in that estimate.”

Mycroft’s sad puppy eyes were getting better and better, Lestrade thought, but, today, he wouldn’t be swayed by them. At least, not more than a kiss’s worth…
“There. Consider that a taste of things to come. *After* the party.”

“I believe I require another to fully assess the value of what I am being offered.”

“Out.”

“Gregory…”

A basket filled with sad puppies would have to work hard to match Mycroft’s sorrowful expression, but that didn’t stop Lestrade pointing towards the door and glaring until his partner dragged himself off the bed and slunk out of the bedroom, where, to his somewhat lack-of-surprise, he ran directly into his evictor’s older, saucier twin.

“Mycroft! Just the man I was looking for. Well, not really, but now that I’ve seen you, my brain’s had a knock and I remembered that you need to look over the papers for the pub. Want to do that now, while we have a bit of quiet?”

“Quiet? Are the children deceased?”

“Not that I know of. Last I saw of them, they were debating going back to the stables to look for some straw. It’ll take them some time to work it up into something as large as person, though.”

“Person… oh dear lord…”

“Something about burning in effigy, but I’m not entirely sure who the effigy fellow is supposed to be. Guess we’ll find out, because you know they’ll want an audience for that.”

Mycroft could only hope that the staff made the very clear connection between the pyromaniacal tendencies of England’s smallest goblins and the necessity of keeping all fire-starting materials out of their talon-tipped fingers, then decided that having an alibi witness should the house be set ablaze might not be the worst strategy he could muster at the moment.

“Ah, yes. Papers, you say? I suppose we have some time until we must make ready for the party…”

“Great! I think you’ll be happy with them, Mycroft. Real professional, they are. Nothing but professional and businesslike for our little pub, am I right? This is fantastic thing, my son, just a fantastic thing.”

How lovely. The adoption was official. Truly this was a joyful day from all perspectives…

‘Hmmmmm…’

“Was that a good hum or a bad hum?”

“Hmm? Oh, neither actually, simply the audible expression of my intensity of thought.”

“High intensity or low intensity?”

“Low, on balance. Your solicitor has done an admirable job preparing these documents.”

“Reggie’s a good lad and a smart one, too. Knew his mother a long time ago and I still pay my respects when I’m in the area. And I don’t mean that in a sexy way, either, because her husband’s on the enormous side and not afraid of using that to his advantage, if you know what I mean.”
Yes, do point to my hand and wink knowingly. I truly expect nothing less.

“Well, it is good to know that the protection of one’s love is still a common thing in this land.”

“Such a romantic. Which is brilliant because my Greg deserves that. Romance and protecting… speaking of, have you set the date for the wedding? I’ll help however I can, so just let me know what to do and it’ll be done and done well. Nothing but my best effort for this! I expect you’ll have the wedding party somewhere posh and nice, but we could do a smaller one at the pub, too, maybe earlier on to celebrate. All the celebration… that’s what my son and son-in-law should have. Lots and lots of celebration.”

Ah yes, the wedding day. Perhaps it was time for some information to be revealed.

“We… we have not precisely set the date of the wedding, but I imagine you will be informed most quickly when the event does occur.”

“What’s holding you back? Don’t have cold feet already, do you?”

Winking and nudging… the Lestrade males certainly enjoyed their various methods of non-verbal communication.

“Under no circumstances. It is simply… neither of us believes a wedding at this point will be to our benefit. We shall lead somewhat separate lives for a number of years and that is not the ideal circumstance for a wedded couple. The emotional burden would be increased, we feel, with the formal bond between us and we shall suffer sufficient torment without it to leave us with heavy hearts, at times.”

“Oh! That’s smart. Yeah, that’s smart…”

The trailing words set Mycroft at the ready for more to come and he was quickly satisfied.

“… but you need to stay smart, know what I mean?”

Not precisely, for your patterns of thought are nearly as chaotic as Sherlock’s, at times, unless the subject of the conversation centers on women or the lack of them in the immediate vicinity.

“I… I am not certain I do.”

“It’s like this… and I know I’m not the one this should be coming from since, well… since it’s me… but… you make sure that even if you’re not together, you’re together, know what I mean? It’s easy to forget that, though I forgot about it more than any man should, but… do what it takes to always remember Greg and let him know you’re thinking about him. That you love him and sentimental things like that. Don’t forget the little things like birthdays and that he mentioned the roof needs repair, even if all you can do is call a bloke to do the work and write a cheque for it. And don’t forget the little monkeys, either! Ask about school and do what you can to be there when they need you. I didn’t do any of that and was an awful person for it, so don’t follow my lead. Not for an instant.”

That was rather sound advice and, yes, it was notably alarming coming from the worst husband in the history of Great Britain.

“I shall do my utmost not to follow the path you tread in your youth.”

“Good! And, if you want me to, I’ll keep an eye on things and give you a shove if you do anything daft. It’s easy to get distracted, have your eye turned by something interesting and whoof!
everything else flies out of your brain. But if you keep that in mind, you should be alright.”

“Yes… I suspect it shall. I admit, however, it is not advice I would expect you to bestow. In fact, your conduct has been somewhat exemplary of late, much to the curiosity of both Gregory and Mother Lestrade.”

“Like it! That’s the new me! I had a friend, who was a bit of a berk like me and he met a woman a few years ago. They’re happily married now and doing great, just great. Do you know what he told me? He told me that the reason they were doing so well was that he had a trick for doing right by her and keeping house and home together. Know what that trick was? It was making certain that when he went to do something, he asked himself if it was something I would do. If it was, he’d do the opposite! He actually sat down, too, and thought about all the things I didn’t do that I really should have and made certain those things were tended to properly, like the house gets a coat of paint and there’s always money for groceries and heat. Can you believe that? Used me as a bad example and his life is wonderful! So, I thought, why not take that advice myself? I mean, it’s been a long time and I have learned a few things along the way, but every bit helps, right?”

Mycroft stared at the grinning man and conceded that being that family meant many strange fruits on the genetic tree.

“What a… unique model to follow.”

“Whatever works, works, don’t you think? And it is working! Got myself a good business and my son doesn’t spit at me when I see him. Other rewards, too, like my little Sherlock and John paying visits and letting me hear about their day. What a glorious thing that is, too.”

“Not to darken your lens, but do remember that their behaviors are frequently influenced by the benefits they might gain. Edible benefits are among their favorites.”

“HA! Oh, they can clean a plate, that’s for certain. Nothing wrong with that, though. Growing boys need full bellies and I’m happy to keep them as full as possible. Won’t cut into our profits very much, so don’t worry about that. Businesses like this always factors in some family and friends costs so the important people stay happy and everything runs smoothly. Not too much, though! Have to watch for the brother-in-law who brings his useless mates in for a few or the aunt with a bit too much taste for the gin, but you know what I mean, right?”

Apparently, this was one instance where what one might call ‘life experiences’ translated well into the area of business. That was some measure of worry off of the mind, which, given the legion of other worries happily in residence, made Mycroft’s mind sit slightly lighter in his skull.

“A most prudent strategy. Of course, offering our hospitality to the local police presence too often might find us in debtor’s prison, which would be a rather ironic turn of events as the constables would be the ones to take us into shameful custody.”

“They can drink like fish, too, believe me for that one. No one can match a copper pint for pint. But, I know that lot and when I say pay your tab, you worthless dolts, they’ll pay. But a little goodwill with the local law is another smart investment. This is a good pub, with good people who pay it a visit, but every establishment like ours sees trouble now and then and having the lads keep an eye on things and be willing to do a little leaning on anyone being a bother is something to support.”

Not a bit of which could Mycroft argue against and he began to hope that the grudging suspicion this investment would not end the way he previously predicted was not clearly presented on his face.

“And, of course, it will engender goodwill for Gregory with his brethren.”
“Exactly! No harm in that, either. Not one bit.”

“No, not at all. Along that path… John indicated you had engaged in conversation with your acquaintances on the police force and… they are well-disposed towards Gregory’s application, correct?”

“Oh, they’re hoping he doesn’t drop dead anytime soon, so they can hire him on and get him to work. Being my son isn’t a strong selling point, I admit, but they ask around when an applicant is local and they’ve liked what they’ve heard.”

“That is most gladdening to hear. Gregory is very worried at the rapidity of his application process and that he will make a poor showing at his interview and when sitting his exams.”

“We both know he won’t, but I understand how he’s feeling. It’s a big step and he’ll worry until they hand him his uniform and tell him to get dressed and get started. Do what you can for him, alright? The good thing about being a couple is you’ve got some powerful tools in your hand to help with relaxation when a body’s tense.”

Do not wink and nudge at me another time, you unrepentant lecher. The fact that I have plans very much along those lines already in no manner undercuts my admonition, either.

“Yes, well, that is our business, I’m quite sure. Now, if we might return to these documents…”

“Which are exceptional.”

“Which are… sound and equitable. I believe these terms are most satisfactory for my preferences and I see no reason for renegotiation.”

“Told you that Reggie was a smart lad. I said straight off to make sure my partner got his due and not to give me a spot of extra because I knew his mum. As long as I have enough to keep food in my mouth, clothes on my back and something to set aside for when I’m old, but still ridiculously good-looking, I’m more than happy. Got me the whole upper part of the pub to live in, too, so that’s a very nice bonus. Good, solid flat and Charlie did a nice bit of work putting in that sound dampening whatsit so it’s quiet, too. Had an afternoon off already and I’d have never known there was money being made right beneath my feet. Even has a spare room so, if you or Greg need a place to sleep after a row, I’m all set and ready for you! Not that I expect that to happen often, but it’s pays to be prepared. Or if you and Greg want a lovely evening to yourself that you suspect is going to become a lovely night, it’s a perfect room for two, tiny sleepers, so keep that in mind, too.”

Yes, winking and nudging… it is now our special code for all things salacious. Such is the stuff of my dreams…”

(Of course. Now, just a moment to affix my signature… and for my copy… and done.”

“This is a proud day for me, Mycroft, let me tell you. And… it’s silly, perhaps, but I’m just proud to be here, actually. Part of the family, not that I deserve it much, but it’s a marvelous feeling and… well, I told Rowena that very thing and thanked her honestly when she called and asked me to come.”

Along those lines…

“Yes, it was most hospitable of Grandmama. Do you know why, perhaps, she extended her invitation at this particular time? Not that it is not warranted, of course, for you are Gregory’s father, past missteps notwithstanding, but it seems rather a hurried thing given the newness of your return to the community and Gregory’s life.”
“I wondered that, too, since she didn’t know me and what a gift I am to any party, but your gran said something about having all the players under one roof or something of the like. She talks a lot like you, which is brilliant, by the way, and I didn’t follow everything beyond the actually asking to come for this weekend. I’m glad she did, too! Oh, this has been amazing and we’re not even at the party yet! Bit of a surprise to run into your mum and find out she is your mum, but that’s… what do you call it?”

“I have no idea.”

“Sure you do! You’re good with those big words.”

“Felicitous?”

“Isn’t that a girl’s name?”

“Alright, then… serendipitous?”

“What’s that mean?”

“A fortunate or happy coincidence… an occurrence that has an unexpected, and pleasant, outcome.”

“That works! It’s serendipitous and if you’re worried I’ll try and steal Emmie away from her bloke, you can stop. No more of that for me! Did my fair share of stealing ladies who didn’t mind being stolen from their men at home, but that’s not my story anymore. But, it does make for a tidy situation for us, doesn’t it? Tighten those family bonds and the like? Everyone knows everyone else… I can’t say I ever expected anything like this when I decided to pay my respects to you and Greg, but I wouldn’t trade it all for the world. Not for the very world itself, and that’s the honest truth.”

For a man who had shirked his familial responsibilities shamefully, Daniel did look extremely pleased and Mycroft had to shake his head and remove a little of his confidence in the old dogs and new tricks adage. This old dog was showing quite a few new tricks, though, of course, the test would be in their longevity.

“I am gladdened to hear that you are finding satisfaction with your new interactions and associations.”

“And did I hear that there will be a healthy number of lovely ladies at the party tonight? Interactions and associations are a fine thing to spread about as widely as possible, if you know what I mean.”

The man’s level of predictability sat soundly at one-hundred percent.

“There are, generally, a substantial quantity of women attending Grandmama’s social events, however, they are most certainly inured to the advances of any and all varieties of gentlemen.”

As well as those not, at all, deserving of the title.

“Is that a challenge?”

Oh no. Pack away that gleam and grin, Daniel Lestrade, for I have not the wherewithal to spend the evening countering your sexual proclivity.

“Nothing of the sort.”
“Yeah, it was. And you’re going to lose, lad, though you may not have physical proof of your crippling defeat. I haven’t had an audience for a bit of fun since…”

“NO! No and no again. Consider that an infinite no that shall extend truly to the horizon of the extinction of this universe and any that may follow.”

“That’s a long time.”

“Verily.”

“You get flustered easily, lad. I’ll pass that along to Greg for when he wants a little something that you’re making a ‘no’ face over.”

“You will not enhance Gregory’s already voluminous arsenal of weaponry to manipulate me into getting his wants.”

“That’s my boy! Use what you’ve got and use it well. While he’s revising, want me to teach you a few tricks guaranteed to take his mind off whatever it is you’re arguing about and make him very agreeable to… anything?”

Yes!

“Of course not. How utterly sordid.”

“Naturally! That’s the best tricks. We’ll start with things you can do with your tongue.”

“DANIEL!”

“Nothing to give you the vapors! Don’t even have to touch a person to get them very distracted with your tongue.”

And, there was no doubt you would demonstrate, was there? Behold the lack of surprise that you are doing something incalculably filthy and… oh, if that was done, instead, to a rather sensitive part of the body, the pleasure would be… DEMON! Distraction has occurred in less than a heartbeat!

“Oh yes, that turned your brain around the corner. I’ve got lots like that, so let’s get started.”

It wouldn’t be the worst strategy to plump his own arsenal of persuasive tactics. Oh, do not think the word ‘plump.’ It was far too likely an anatomical, self-fulfilling prophecy if Daniel again did ACK! That was worse than the first! What Gregory would do if, instead of a finger that was something far more delicious… this was going to be hell. But one must know hell to know heaven, true?

“Mycroft, why are you holding a cushion on your lap?”

Thank you for noticing, John. And thank you, also, for blaring your observation like a foghorn warning of rocky shores.

“I was examining its construction and fabric more closely. Gregory and I do enjoy using the sofas in our home to their fullest potential and a new suite of cushions might supplement our comfort most satisfactorily.”

And, please, do not pursue the subject further for it has been a number of minutes since Daniel took his leave to begin preparing for the party and the erection being hidden under this lovely cushion has shown no signs of ebbing. Villainous man… but an informative villain, truth be told. Gregory
would now be the proverbial putty in his hands, but must remember to use newly-acquired seductive powers only in situations of dire emergency. Or extreme privacy…

“Oh. Well, it’s a nice cushion, don’t you think so, Sherlock?”

“I think you should yank it from his hands, John, and reveal the true reason he is clutching it with the entirety of his strength to prevent that very thing.”

“What?”

“Puberty shall not be kind to you, John Watson, and I shall not uptake the responsibility of providing the necessary lecture to see you through that particularly hormonal period of your development.”

Neither would Mycroft, now that he had a far better, and less flusterable, candidate in mind.

“That’s all words I don’t care about since they don’t concern my suit. Which I think I’m supposed to be in now, isn’t that the case, Mycroft?”

John’s pointed look made Sherlock’s eyes roll and Mycroft cast a glance at the nearest clock to prepare a mental timeline for the remaining time until the guests arrived.

“It is a touch too early for that, I believe, however, it is a proper time to find for yourself a small meal and then a shower. You… what precisely is it I smell?”

“Well, there are a lot of possibilities, actually. We’ve been a little busy.”

As if the frazzled hair, rumpled and stained clothes, as well as single missing shoe for each boy weren’t their own clues to the busyness of the day. At least their unsupervised state had not led to a national state of emergency being declared.

“Yes, I am certain of that. When it is time to make ready, Gregory and I will see you properly dressed and ready to enjoy yourselves with our guests.”

“Enjoyment shall be the least of all potential outcomes for the evening. Being surrounded by an assembly of aged mummies, harrumphing and seeking coitus with the few that remain young enough to bestow it is, in no manner, to my entertainment tastes.”

“I have no doubt you have alternate activities scheduled, brother, though I do hope none involve John and a chimney. That is a tradition that I, for one, am happy to see broken.”

The shared look between the two boys made Mycroft sigh and mentally ready himself to supervise the extraction of one soot-coated, naked child from his favorite vertical den.

“John and my actions are none of your concern, beluga. Besides, you shall be charged with monitoring the behaviors of not only the freeloaders on our largesse, but Mother Lestrade and Papa Lestrade, as well. Mother Lestrade’s behavior in the presence of unattached and desperate males is well-documented and Papa Lestrade’s behavior can be predicted without a single application of even the most rudimentary statistical analysis. If you have not a leash and muzzle at the ready, I weep for you.”

Perhaps there was a canister of chloroform in the house to incapacitate the family’s resident incubus sufficiently long to protect the honor of any and all females crossing their threshold. At the very least, sufficient condoms to keep the number of paternity suits at a manageable minimum.
“Your exaggeration, as always, Sherlock, is impressive and duly noted. Now, do see if the kitchen has something delectable for your enjoyment and I will see if Gregory is completed with his work for the day.”

“There is not enough time in existence for the lackey to decipher what he sees as confusing hieroglyphics on the toddler-level tomes given for his study, so be ready to assist John and I the very moment we present ourselves.”

And, with his royal proclamation made, Sherlock turned and strode out of the room with John close on his heels, leaving Mycroft to sigh and take a quick peek under his cushion to verify that, yes, his anatomy was back to business as usual and it was safe to mill amongst polite society. Though, in this house, that demographic was somewhat… very much… the minority…

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“This is not fit for a leprous beggar. Take it away.”

If he wasn’t, now, very well informed on the penalties for things such as murder, Lestrade’s thoughts might be happily traipsing down a very lethal path, flower basket in hand, and whistling while he throttled.

“This is a spectacular suit and you’re going to keep it that way. You do one, and I know very well you can count to one, one single thing against this suit and you are not going to be happy with the outcome.”

“Pfft… if there is not a naked transient presenting himself at the kitchen door, inquiring about his stolen garments, I shall be most surprised. And you are becoming as fat as the whale, given your recent lack of exercise and tendency to indulge in both spirits and gout-inducing foodstuffs, so the likelihood of your being sufficiently fleet of foot to catch me to enact any reprisals for my justifiable suiticide stands directly on the nil mark of any tool of measurement.”

Why didn’t he ever get to oversee getting John dressed for these dinners and parties? Why did he always let Mycroft have the easy job? And where the FUCK did Mycroft learn to do that with his tongue and thumb? How could a bloke have any thoughts in his head, let alone an argument on the subject of goblin dressing, when he was looking at that? Evil sod…

“Don’t count on that, you little bastard. The one thing I’m positive I’ll do well on is my physical exam and I have plenty of fleet left in my feet to run you down like the criminal you are. Anyway, look at it from this perspective… you wear your suit and wear it nicely and you make Grandmama happy. When Grandmama’s happy she keeps your mouth filled with chocolate and tells the kitchen to turn a blind eye when you and John steal even more sugary morsels from the cooling racks. You ruin another suit and I suspect that bit of blind-eyedness is going to change and change quickly. Hope you like living on peas and turnips when you visit, because that’s about all you’ll be able to find to eat. Unless, of course, John’s willing to share his treats, which he’ll have, and in abundance, because he treats his suits with respect.”

“Intolerable! Just because John is a vain little virus, he should not receive preferential treatment! I have a far superior mind and deserve the lion’s share of any and all edible rewards!”

“Keep your suit clean and in one piece and you won’t lose any of your nibbles. It’s a simple relationship, actually. Probably don’t need any math at all to piece it together.”

“I despise being oppressed.”
“We all do, so be happy your oppression only amounts to wearing a suit to a nice party where you get free food, drink and entertainment.”

“If I do not expire from the torture before the clock strikes midnight, my surprise will be extreme.”

“Good to have something to look forward to.”

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“No… still not right.”

“John, this is the sixth time I have combed your hair…”

“But it’s still not right! I want it like Greg combed it for the first party!”

“I have combed it exactly as you have described…”

“Sorry, Mycroft, but you’ve got to try again. I’m not going to have hobo hair! It’s dumb to wear a nice suit and have hobo hair and I’m not going to be dumb. Comb.”

At this rate, the party would be over before John was satisfied. Perhaps it was not the wisest course of action to tip the scales in his favor to secure the task of tending to John instead of Sherlock. No… no, what was he thinking. Gregory was far more masterful with Sherlock and this was undoubtedly the most efficient, and nerve-calming, division of labors.

“That’s even worse! I need some of that spray that makes hair stay in place. And you need to practice combing!”

Maybe a renegotiation was still possible…

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“Yours alive?”

“Yes, with his hair properly combed to satisfy his sense of style.”

“Good. Mine’s wearing clothes, so that’s a victory. Looks like we succeeded all around!”

Lestrade leaned in and kissed his lover, careful not to rumple Mycroft’s own exquisite suit, which, as always, his lover wore more sexily than the law probably allowed.

“I share your sense of jubilation, my dear, and offer my compliments on your own presentation. You are indescribably handsome tonight, Gregory.”

“Very happy you approve, though, is Grandmama ever going to stop having suits made for us? I’m not sure there’s enough storage space even in a house this size to store them all if she keeps going at this rate.”

“I do not foresee a cessation of her little hobby, no. Her enjoyment of planning for us something that complements our appearance, both individually and collectively, sits rather high on the scale, I’m afraid, and that will ensure us a wardrobe a prince would covet.”

“John will be happy.”

‘John will experience nirvana.”
“And… oh no.”

Mycroft followed his lover’s eyes to the figure that just strolled into the room being checked over for party-readiness and felt his anatomical issues again threatening to commit treason against his person.

“Dad… that is not your suit.”

“I wear it like a gent, though, don’t I? I’d shag me and without one regret, too.”

“Where did you get the suit, Dad?”

Not that Lestrade had any real confusion about the issue, but he was going to be a policeman now and little things like suspicions didn’t stand up in court.

“The suit pixies.”

“Funny. Try again.”

“No, really! I found it in my room just as if it had been conjured up by a band of pixies. It’s a majestic thing, isn’t it?”

Mycroft and Lestrade shared a look and shook their heads at Grandmama’s now officially out of control addiction to ordering bespoke menswear.

“Do not get one spot on it, do you understand. Maybe Grandmama can sell it or something after you’re done with it.”

“Oh no, this is mine. The note pinned on it said it was a gift and I can do with it as I like. Leave it here, even, for other parties if I’ve a mind for it, which I believe I do. Nothing in our little village to wear something like this for, but it seems as if there could be a number of goings-on here that require a fine-looking man to wear a fine-looking suit. Just like the two of you, actually. I have to admit, if there is any competition for best-dressed and handsomest man present tonight, it’s got to be my two boys here. My heart is the size of a melon right now, let me tell you. So very handsome and even handsomer together. Not a single couple going to be any more stunning than this one right in front of me.”

“Untrue! I am the most comely individual in residence and I can offer empirical data on the symmetry of my features to support my hypothesis!”

Sherlock and John made their way towards the house’s other males, with John making very certain to use his runway walk to emphasize his nearly-blinding handsomeness.

“I stand corrected! You two look amazing! I didn’t know they even made nice suits that small, but you two wear them well. And look how fetching you are making a family portrait.”

“Which is why Madam is having a photographer arrive tomorrow to document the attractiveness of her family.”

John and Danny’s cheer nearly drowned out Mycroft, Greg and Sherlock’s groans at Edwards’s announcement and both sides considered the battle lines clearly drawn.

“I’m going to get a lot of pictures of me, Sherlock, and put the all over your room so you can see my face no matter where you look. Even at night when you’re trying to sleep, I’ll be watching.”

“Pachyderm! Chain the gnome pimple in the cellar immediately!”
“I think not, brother dear, for the more eyes upon you the better, even if they be in photographic form.”

“Edwards! Summon a car and provide it with sufficient fuel to bring me to the nearest, high-quality hotel. I shall not suffer this abuse a second longer.”

“I do apologize, Master Sherlock, however Madam has given clear instructions that the staff festoon the ground with traps and the cars be disabled so that any escapes might be thwarted before we must summon a bounty hunter to return wayward family members to the fold. They do tend to be a dusty lot and the maids have quite enough to do without adding that to their day.”

“I am abandoned even by Grandmama’s dogsbody! The bleakness of the day cannot be overstated!”

“John, why don’t you take your mate off to see if my lovely ladies’ are ready to show us just how lovely they are? They might need help with a zip or something, too, and you can get in their good graces by lending a hand.”

John’s helpful genes leapt to the fore and he began dragging Sherlock off to offer their services while Danny patted himself on the back for a job well done. Sherlock was a joy, just a joy, but he did need to be outmaneuvered now and again to keep the joy at a joyful level.

“Nicely done, Dad. You do know Mum is going to blame me and Mycroft for turning those two loose on her party preparations?”

“Your mum will manage just fine. She lived with me, didn’t she?”

That was actually a powerful argument.

“I’m still pointing my finger right at your smug face when she starts to give me the what for and you’d better not run off when I do it.”

“I suspect Mr. Lestrade will be far too occupied with our guests to notice your indictment, Master Gregory. Madam’s guest list was both large and varied, so there shall be a diversity of personalities and interests in attendance. Many of whom, from my understanding, are most unattached at the present time.”

Mycroft and Lestrade’s heavy sighs harmonized exceptionally well with Danny’s happy humming and rubbing together of his hands.

“Perfect! You staying around for the party, Edwards, or got quieter things to do?”

“I shall, as they say, Mr. Lestrade, be haunting the halls in case I am needed, but I do tend to stay well away from the hustle and bustle. Besides, I have but a single party gown to my name and it would not do to be seen in it too often for I would lament greatly being labeled as unstylish. Now, if you will excuse me, I need to check on the status of the kitchen.”

As Edwards walked away, Greg used his blossoming police talents to give his dad a look over and suffer the resulting shiver down his spine.

“No. No, Dad. Just no.”

“What? You get a knock on your head when I wasn’t looking, son?”

“You’re not hooking up Mum and Edwards.”
Mycroft felt his mouth drop, but had to admit it was something of a thought that had darted through his own mind a time or two.

“Not this second, because I’m talking to you.”

“Not this second, not ever. No.”

“What’s wrong with Edwards? Solid chap, got a sense of humor and a good bit of intelligence. Probably makes a decent wage working for Rowena… she doesn’t strike me as one of those posh birds who pays the help in lumps of coal and loaves of bread. Not bad looking, either. Sounds like a good choice for Lizzie, actually.”

“Mycroft, you want to jump in here and help me with this?”

“Of course, my dear. I… I do believe he has an interest already, so is, most likely, not available for a matchmaking effort.”

“See! Even your fiancé agrees!”

“That’s not what Mycroft said!”

“It’s what he didn’t say, my soon-to-be-a-policeman son. Just said Edwards wasn’t available, not that he wasn’t suitable and that’s as good as agreement. You ask around Mycroft and find out if he’s still seeing his current lady and, if not, we’ll have a little chat on the subject.”

“NO! Dad, Mycroft… no. No matchmaking Mum!”

“Why not? Lizzie deserves a nice gent in her life and she’s done for crap on her own, so…”

“What part of NO don’t you understand, you… infant! And you… why are you so quiet? Where’s you big words now, Mycroft, to tell off this enormous baby!”

“Enormous handsome baby, if you’d be so kind, fruit of my loins.”

Mycroft wisely kept quiet, especially since he wanted to giggle at his partner’s outrage and said partner’s father’s contentment with stoking the fires of that oh-so-entertaining outrage.

“I need a drink. Do not follow me, either of you. And no talking to each other, either. Just stand there quietly like statues and wait for someone to dust you.”

Greg stormed off and the two remaining males politely waited until he was out of earshot to start laughing.

“Oh, that was fun. This is already shaping up to be a grand evening, wouldn’t you say, Mycroft, my boy?”

“I would not disagree entirely, however, you do not have to share a bed with Gregory after this grand evening, so I suppose I should tread lightly from this moment forward.”

“No… it’s good to get his dander up now and again. Besides, he’ll probably be apocalyptic by evening’s end and you’ll be sleeping on a sofa, anyway”

“What! Why on Earth would you…”

“We’ve got a mission, Mycroft… get our Lizzie sexed up and this is as good a time as any to make a start on it.”
“I… no! I have not agreed to an alliance for that!”

“Sure you did. Maybe you just don’t remember.”

“My memory is impeccable!”

“Well, peck at it a bit more and something will come to you, I suspect. Let’s join Greg for a drink, what say? See how many times we can chase him away before he runs out to places to avoid us.”

The man was a baby! A baby in a highly-expensive suit. There were now three immature specimens of humanity within these walls and the newest was as much of a handful as the other two. Yes, a drink was certainly required… four was actually a more accurate estimate…

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“Eagle, what’s your count?”

“Eight, Falcon.”

‘I’ve counted eight, too, but I’m not sure about another, which could make it nine.”

“Albatross, if you have mastered numbers, provide your count.”

“I’m going with seven because one of those chaps was actually just being polite and not chatting my Lizzie up. Still, a good showing, though, what with it not even being two hours into this party.”

Sherlock made note in his research journal and nodded his head thoughtfully.

“Mother Lestrade is fully on course with her last timetable, so we may consider this, now, the norm. It is fortuitous that the peasant will soon depart their hovel as there is certain to be a legion of squalling larvae taking his place and the space will be needed for their cribs and prams.”

“Nah, Lizzie’s too smart for that. Made the mistake once of being incautious and look what it won her – me. Well, Greg, too, and that was the best possible thing that could happen, but you can’t argue she paid a large cost for that precious bundle in the form of yours truly.”

“Yes, that is true and Mother Lestrade, despite her menial-quality genetics is not entirely unintelligent. Very well, I shall withdraw my prediction of offspring from the analyses. For now.”

“Good lad. Now, it’s time for me to add to my own count, I do believe. That lovely lady has yet to meet Mr. Danny Lestrade and she’s suffering mightily for it, I can tell.”

With a confident saunter, the boys’ other test subject approached his quarry, with John and Sherlock standing at the ready to record his results.

“Greg’s mum and dad have a lot of fun at parties. I think that’s a good thing.”

“Only you, John Watson, would advocate a positive interpretation for their libidinousness.”

“There’s nothing wrong with liking to talk to people and maybe find a new boyfriend or girlfriend because of it. And they make other people smile, too. Look at the lady Papa Lestrade is talking to right now, for instance. She’s smiling. She’s smiling a lot. I wonder if they’ll take a walk together like a few of the others did. They came back smiling, too, which is nice.”

Sherlock shook his head and wondered if John was ever going to realize the utter tawdriness of
human interactions, for humans besides himself, of course, and decided that it was probably for the better if that realization came later than sooner. John’s delicate constitution would likely not withstand the shock and he had no time to nursemaid a nervous assistant through his maturational awakening.

“You’re mum is smiling, too. I think she’s having a nice time, even if her what’s his name isn’t here.”

Something Sherlock had noted, also, and was still uncertain about how to interpret the behavior. Or any of his mother’s behaviors since her arrival.

“Mummy’s enjoyment of social attention requires no documenting, for I drew all possible conclusions and collected all relevant data on that subject when I was three.”

“You did not.”

“I did. I shall show you my notes when we return home.”

“I can’t read baby writing.”

“I beg to differ, however, my script was superb and easily intelligible.”

“Now I know you’re lying. Your writing looks like someone gave a weasel a pencil and let it chase a bug around a piece of paper.”

“Slander! I shall not allow your denigration to stand!”

“You’ll have to for now, because Papa Lestrade’s put his arm around that woman and you need to write that down.”

“Yes, that is important data. We shall table this discussion for later.”

“And we need to collect more on Greg, too. He’s being chased again.”

Sherlock looked over to the other side of the room where Lestrade was being pursued by a woman a decade his senior while he hustled off in search of his missing partner.

“My work on the inheritance of sexual appeal shall win for me international acclaim, about that I am supremely certain.”

“Will they give you money? If so, I want some because I’ve helped you the entire time.”

“I shall remunerate you appropriately for your contribution.”

“Was that a yes?”

“It was a yes.”

John’s cheering earned him a smile from Grandmama who was closely observing each member of her little family, including Mycroft who was now pursing the woman pursuing his lover and seemed bent on delivering the sternest of lectures. Such a delightful evening this was and there was still so much more to come…

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“There you are, my little bartender. How about getting old Danny here another of these fine
whiskies? Can’t say I’ve had nicer and a body should always take advantage of nice things when a body has a chance.”

John looked up at slightly tipsy man and felt a thread of worry work its way through his brain.

“How about some juice, Papa Lestrade? It’s very good and they’ve got lots, so nobody will mind.”

“Whisky, if you please. Or scotch. Vodka will work, too. Whatever you can reach is good, actually, so surprise me!”

“I’m not sure if I can reach any of it, but I can reach the juice and I’ll bring a big glass.”

John started to dart off, but was caught by the collar by the person who most certainly did not have a taste for juice at the present time.

“John, want to tell me what’s going on?”

“Ummmm… nothing?”

“You know you just told me fairly clearly that something’s going on, don’t you?”

“I’m beginning to understand that.”

“Smart lad. Now, why don’t you start talking and continue to show me how smart you are. And why I don’t have my whisky yet.”

The truly uncertain and somewhat distressed look on John’s face gave Danny pause and looking over to find a quiet spot, led the boy over to a small sofa where he sat and patted the cushion for John to join him.

“Alright, lad… you’ve got something on your mind, so let’s hear it.”

“Do… do I have to?”

“No, I suppose not, but I think you’d be happier if you said what you have to say. And I’d like to hear it, especially if it’s bothering you, which it is.”

“I don’t think you want to hear this, actually.”

Now, Danny was starting to worry and he tried to make his expression appear as encouraging as he could.

“I do, so go on. It’ll be good for you, I promise.”

John thought a moment, then a moment more before nodding.

“Ok. You’re getting a little drunk and Greg said when you got drunk you could be mean.”

Whatever Danny had expected, it wasn’t that and he sucked in quite the large quantity of air in surprise.

“He said that?”

“Yeah, and that Sherlock and I should run away when you started to drink a lot because you had a temper when you drank.”
“I see.”

“Told you that you didn’t want to hear it.”

“True and you’re right, I didn’t. But, I’m also glad I did. Very glad, actually, and I’ll thank you for it.”

“You… you will?”

“Absolutely. And I’m going to thank Greg, too, for looking out for you little chimps. He’s not wrong, John, or, I should say, what he remembers isn’t wrong. I did drink a lot more when I was young and, a lot of the time, I just got stupid and silly and was more of an idiot than anything else. But sometimes…”

John felt his stomach start to hurt seeing the look on Danny’s face, because he remembered it from his own dad, when his dad was trying to apologize for something he’d done, usually when he was drunk.

“Sometimes I drank when I was angry and that never ended well. Win a little from a spot of cards and come home to a grocery list shoved into my face which ate that money up straight off. Have my mates go off for a night of fun and I couldn’t ride along because the wife told me that if I didn’t come home directly from work, I’d find my clothes in the street. Same mates decide on a weekend in London and I’m home with a toddler to watch because Lizzie’s mum took sick and she had to go and tend to her. I was a massive prick, John, a truly massive prick and it wasn’t Greg or Lizzie’s fault that I’d get angry at all of that. That I felt as if my world had constricted to a tiny point and I was trapped inside. It was me being selfish and stupid and when I sobered up… I remembered the stuff I said. Being mean, like you said. Making my Greg upset, cry even, because I said nasty things to him that felt good at the time because if I was miserable, he should be, too.”

John gasped softly and earned him a large hand on his shoulder for comfort.

“Yeah, like I said, a massive prick. Then, I’d sober up and hate myself for being a pathetic excuse for a father and… well, it would make me even angrier because I couldn’t do anything right, not even for the little boy I loved with everything in me. So, yes, there was a time it was very, very true that when I drank like that it was a smart plan to be anywhere except near me but… it’s not like that anymore.”

“It… it’s not?”

“No, though you didn’t want to know me at all the first months after I caught Lizzie’s shoe in my arse. I drank a lot after that. Did my fair share of wallowing in self-pity and rolling around in self-loathing, too. On top of spending every last cent I could lay my hands on for more drink and company to drink it with. I got better, though… slowly. I’m still a fairly worthless sod, but I don’t blame anyone else for the stupid things I’ve done and still do. I do like my cocktails, but I don’t drink when I’m angry or feeling like I’m swimming in treacle trying to keep my head above the surface. But, how about we agree to this? If you think I’m starting to get, what’d you say… mean! Yeah, mean… if you start to think that, you absolutely take Sherlock and find somewhere else to be. But, after my hangover’s passed, come and tell me, ok? Tell me you were worried and why you were worried so I can apologize. Do something to make it up to you? Can you do that for me? Talk to me so I can try to make things right? It would help me a lot if you and Sherlock could do that.”

John thought a moment, then nodded firmly, his mouth set in a very determined line.
“I can do that. I will do that. It’s fair and that’s important.”

“Fair is important and so is compassion, which you’ve got a lot of, John. And I thank you for using a little of it on me. Now, do you feel better about things?”

A quick check on the status of his stomach confirmed that, yes, John did feel better, which was a relief since he really didn’t want to have a stomach ache through the rest of the party. And… he didn’t want to worry about Papa Lestrade through the rest of the party, either.

“I do. I’ll even get you more whisky.”

“That’s my boy! I’m gearing up for a happy, sexy drunk, if you want the truth, so I’ll let you know this for free. That sort of drunk makes me very entertaining, so be ready to take a lot of notes for that research of yours. Actually, got a camera?”

“In Sherlock’s pocket!”

“Be ready with that, too. Rowena might want some lovely pictures of you, all posed and formal, but pictures that are none of that are fun to have in the family album, too. Why don’t you be in charge of that this evening. Get a lot of fun pictures that will make people laugh when you show them around?”

“Hurray! I get to be in charge! Wait here and I’ll get your drink before I get my camera!”

John sped off at the speed of sound and Danny leaned back on the sofa, feeling his heart slowly resume its normal rhythm. Poor little thing… such a good soul. And if there was one thing he was certain about, it was that he wasn’t going to do a single thing to hurt that sweet boy. Either of those sweet boys. Going to be a proper grandfather, thank you very much, and not one that made them… made them feel like his own son had felt sometimes when his dad failed him utterly.

“Well, that was quite the speech.”

Danny looked over to his right, where his ex-wife stood leaning against the wall, slightly behind a large, potted plant.

“Hiding from your admirers, my beautiful girl?”

“Checking to see that you weren’t training John to be a small copy of you.”

“Oh, no worries there. He’s more mature now than I am… now, so I think I’d fail fairly quickly.”

“That’s true.”

Watching while his Lizzie bit her lip, in exactly the way she used to when she was thinking about something, Danny took the initiative to pat the sofa and felt more than a little surprise when she took the offered seat.

“What’re you thinking about, love?”

“You. I heard what you said, you know.”

“It would have been hard for you not to, what with the spying and all.”

“It killed Greg, when you slashed at him like that.”
“I know it did. If you think it doesn’t choke me sometimes when I remember the things I did, then you’re wrong. Chokes me so I can’t breathe. I’ll never make it up to him, it’s not possible, but I can try to do better for him now. Him and his own little family.”

“I’m not sorry, either, that I threw you out. I’m sorry Greg found out the way he did, but I’m not sorry I got you out of our lives.”

“I’m not either. I… I would have liked to kept a toe in the pool. See my Greg now and then. But I know I didn’t deserve it and, like John said, it was fair after everything I’d done. Or didn’t do.”

“You’re right you didn’t deserve it and we did alright without you. Better than alright, actually. But… you’re here now and… Greg’s happy you’re back, I think. It means something to him and I won’t get in the way of that.”

“I appreciate that, Lizzie. I’m not here to hurt him again and I’m not here to make a mess of his life. I just want to know my son and, maybe, let him get to know me. Nothing more.”

“Then we understand each other.”

“That we do.”

“You’re still an incredible arse, though.”

“You mean I still have an incredible arse, don’t you? Something else my darling son inherited. There he goes, actually, with another one chasing his luscious bum.”

Elizabeth looked over to her son who was, again, separated from his partner and in the sights of a bejeweled woman who seemed very keen to walk him into a quiet corner for a private conversation.

“Policing doesn’t work for him, I can think of another career he’d succeed in, from the looks of things.”

“What a terrible mum you are, selling your son’s assets to the highest bidder.”

“Have to think about my old age, don’t I? I don’t want to be one of those old dears in some home where they pat you on the head and toss you a biscuit if you’re a good girl and get on with your knitting.”

“You’d stab someone with your knitting needles before week’s end and find yourself in the home for evil old birds who smoke, drink gin and pay the male nurses for a bit of a cuddle when the administrators aren’t looking.”

“Promise?”

“I’ll see to it myself. Consider it a present for being such a cock when I was younger.”

“Alright, and I will hold you to it, mark my words.”

It wasn’t exactly a truce, but Elizabeth finally decided that her stupid ex being back on the radar wasn’t going to be the worst thing in the world. As long as he didn’t change his song and hurt any of her boys, then… things were fine. Not having family dinners with the bastard, that much was certain, but… things were fine.

“Here’s your whisky, Papa Lestrade. And…”
John rummaged in his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper.

“A note from that lady with the red hair near the piano.”

“You’ve got John being your pimp?”

“You have one, too, Mrs. Lestrade. From the man with the spectacles.”

“You were saying, Lizzie?”

“That we’re not getting the job done sitting here.”

“I quite agree. Thanks, John, and get your camera ready. I think the evening is catching a second wind, so there’s still a lot of fun to be had. And photographed.”

Watching the two adults vault from the sofa and stroll towards their victims, John smiled and let a happy shiver roll through him so he shook around like a dog right after a swim. He was the luckiest person in the world! Parties and experiments and a family that was the very best in the world… nobody, nobody in the world was as lucky as him!

“There you are, John Watson! I have been waiting an eon for your servitude and here you stand, smiling like the village idiot and completely lacking any tangible proof of data collection in my absence. Why I tolerate you is something I can scarcely fathom, at times.”

Nobody. There was no possible way anybody was this lucky. There couldn’t be, because there simply wasn’t enough luck in the world for that…
“You appear to be enjoying yourself, Mycroft.”

Hoping his uncertainty as to how to respond was not evident on his face, Mycroft made the effort to smile genially as he answered his mother.

“I am, actually. Grandmama’s soirees offer some degree of entertainment, even for someone not particularly interested in social gatherings."

“I suppose there is fun to be had, though, defending your lover from being stolen by rivals. It is certainly good exercise, if nothing else.”

Mycroft’s shocked gasp made his mother smile and acknowledge that her son was growing, but was still the prim little boy she had always known.

“I have no need to defend Gregory, for he is most skilled at deflecting any who might approach him for anything other than simple conversation.”

“I would agree, having observed him for what seems like countless occasions on this single evening. He is somewhat of a potent attractant for those of our set, is he not?”

“Gregory’s masculine beauty is discernable to all, regardless of the ‘set’ in which they find themselves.”

“I cannot entirely deny that is the case… his father certainly garnered the attentions of individuals from highly diverse walks of life. The apple, apparently, falls not far from the proverbial tree.”

“One cannot deny genetics, especially when they are manifest in such a visible fashion. Witness, also, the fullness of Mother Lestrade’s dance card. My Gregory is well-provided with successful genes and it is my honor that he has chosen me upon which to lavish them.”

Being pondered thoughtfully by his mother was not a gladdening feeling, yet Mycroft bore it as best he could.

“You love him.”

“I have said that a multitude of times and with conviction on each occasion. Did you really have doubts, Mummy?”

“Yes, in point of fact. Desire easily masquerades as love, especially with the young. However… I might be reconsidering.”

Sniffing his mother’s glass to determine which mind-altering substance might have been added to her cocktail would not be a terribly subtle act, so Mycroft simply nodded as if his mind was clear and concise on whatever was going on to prompt his mother’s admission.

“I am grateful for that. I do intend, most seriously, to spend my life with Gregory and I would be happier to have your support than the lack of it.”

“Be that as it may, I still believe, Gregory as your partner or not, that you are too young for an engagement.”

“Consider it, then, a pre-engagement, as no formal announcement has been made…”
And because that is the more truthful perspective, in any case.

“… and neither Gregory nor I have any plans to move our relationship towards a wedding for quite some time to come. We are not being hasty in our actions, Mummy. Neither of us is blind to the hardships these next few years shall impose and choose instead to devote our time and attentions to enjoying each other’s love when we are able and seeing the children reared and supported to the best of our abilities.”

“That sounds surprisingly mature of you.”

“Surprisingly? You have remarked on more than one occasion that I was born with the soul of an aged solicitor.”

“Aged solicitors do not engage in fisticuffs and purchase pubs.”

“Perhaps they appoint a legate to do such things for them.”

“As you say, perhaps. Or, perhaps, my son is demonstrating a spark of spirit.”

That was surprising. And, if Mummy never learned the circumstances around which the pub was acquired… well, there was such a thing as too much information…

“Stranger things have happened.”

“Oh, I agree. Your brother has found a friend, your grandmother has… I have no idea on that score, but she is evincing her own spark and that is more than slightly curious… our family has been quite upheaved of late, though, I am finding it difficult to score this poorly.”

Was Mummy including herself in the upheaval? This was certainly not her norm. Not that any mention would be made of it lest the bubble be burst.

“I, too, am finding it something refreshing. Sherlock’s growth… I cannot overstate how far he has come and what an elating thing it is to see him fully able to experience and enjoy his world. And now… the net of his support is large, indeed.

“However…”

“Yes, Mummy?”

“Elizabeth indicated that your Gregory will take his police examinations this week. I believe that indicates he is soon to be employed and in a career that is not known for short or regular hours.”

Mycroft wasn’t certain what startled him the most, his mother’s use of the term ‘your Gregory,’” the fact that she seemed convinced that Gregory would pass his exams, or the subtle acknowledgement that his husband was a critical component of Sherlock’s life.

“True, and it is something we are laboring to gauge in terms of impact on the lives of the children. Unfortunately, we will not fully know the scope and burden of Gregory’s responsibilities until he fully uptakes his work.”

“Elizabeth also indicates he is considering living away from home.”

“That is also true. Gregory is contemplating the idea a suitable flat so that he might have some degree of independence. He has yet to make a firm decision, however.”

“He is worried about leaving his mother without companionship?”
“Partly. It is also a single location for the children potentially to find both him and Mother Lestrade, when required. In any case, he has not begun the search process as of yet, so I do not expect him to relocate in the very near future.”

“Hmmm….”

That was a thoughtful hum.

“Yes, Mummy?”

“I suppose he is opposed to your providing financial assistance or taking a room in our home.”

Choking and sputtering would not impress his mother, so Mycroft swallowed hard and desperately tried to fathom where this path was leading.

“Y… yes to both. I am not particularly content with the former, but I do understand his reluctance to the latter. It would undermine the purpose of the exercise to some degree, in that he would not have a residence that he could consider ‘his.’ And, of course, he would be accessible every possible moment to Sherlock and John which, while not entirely an undesirable thing, is easily an overwhelming one.”

“Hmmm….”

“Mummy, what in the world are you thinking?”

“Have you considered… the cottage?”

The cottage? *Mummy’s* cottage?

“I… no. The cottage? It is a ramshackle thing, last I saw.”

“It is, to some degree, however, the last report on the status of *my* properties stated that it is structurally sound and the various repairs are of a cosmetic and habitability nature. Given the vastness of your Gregory’s network of laborer acquaintances, I would assume he could find individuals to do the work at a fair price, or do the work himself, if he is familiar with the necessary tools and techniques.”

Mycroft hoped his bottom jaw was not on the floor because… this was unprecedented! Mummy was being helpful! To Gregory! If he suddenly woke and found this was a dream, he would be extremely displeased. Father had purchased that small parcel of land from a neighboring landowner, with the associated cottage, specifically for Mummy when she was, apparently, navigating an artistic phase and desired a separate space to… be artistic. It *was* hers and not part of the family holdings, per se, so… no, there was absolutely no precedent for this.

“I had not thought of that.”

“So I surmised. I would assume it is located at a sufficient distance from the main house that it might satisfy his need to feel master of his domain, but close enough that Sherlock and John were able to reach him handily in the event of emergency. Do you feel you can set an appropriate rent and, perhaps, see bartered any repair work Gregory performs in lieu of rent monies, at least, for the period until the cottage is in good form?”

“I… I shall make the offer this very night. It is… it is most gracious of you, Mummy.”

“It is a prudent investment, nothing more. At some point, the two of you shall certainly find a
home together and the cottage will be in good repair to continue earning a tidy rental income for me.”

Disbelieving entirely his mother’s reasoning, or, at least, the majority of it, Mycroft felt a substantial surge of something in his chest that made it difficult, for a moment, for him to speak.

“V…very sound financial planning, I am certain. Thank you, M.. Mummy. This is, I feel, is a workable solution to Gregory’s dilemma.”

“Good. Now go and rescue him from Lord Denby before Gregory learns something that his Lordship has worked very hard to keep most secret from those not so approving of your personal romantic tastes. And that his Lordship has exceedingly cold hands.”

Choosing to simply dart off and not fall into a lengthy speech on any number of uncomfortable subjects, Mycroft’s decision was watched closely by his mother and had her staunch approval. As, it must be said, did his blossoming personality and maturation. Apparently, her son needed a fuse to ignite him into becoming a man not living in his father’s shadow and, certainly, not mummifying in that house, bereft of friends and chained to his brother for all eternity. Admittedly, that the fuse was Danny Lestrade’s son was not exactly the optimal situation, but… it would do. Besides, Sherlock and his little friend John needed every possible eye on them and Danny did have such gorgeous eyes to pass down to the next generation…

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“There’s soot in my bum!”

In any other family, that statement would seem odd.

“You, again, John, believed yourself a sweep’s boy and made your way up the chimney, for what reason, no rational person will ever be able to fathom, and you express surprise that your behavior was coincident with a thorough dirtying?”

“It itches.”

Mycroft simply sighed and pointed to the bath, ignoring the giggling coming from the slightly tipsy person at his side.

“We’re blessed, love. Truly blessed.”

“I prefer my blessings a touch tidier, my dear, thank you.”

“Sherlock’s clean. And dressed!”

“True, that is some small consolation.”

“And Dad didn’t get tossed out on his ear for being a prat or challenged to a duel by anyone’s husband.”

“Also true and a somewhat more substantial relief.”

“Dad volunteered too, to get Sherlock sorted, so that’s less we have to do, but it was a bit suspicious of him. It could mean they’re escaping on a motorcycle with a sidecar this very instant so Sherlock can do something nefarious to the countryside, but that’s a worry for the morning.”

“As Grandmama lacks said mode of transport, I feel we might rest assured that any escaping will be on foot and, as we know, Sherlock’s tolerance for protracted foot-based travel is exceedingly
You’re right. They’ll probably just invade the kitchen like a fucking army and clean it out of any leftover treats from the party. Dad needs to watch himself or he’s going to get one of those middle-aged man-bellies…”

Gregory would be positively alluring with a small amount of padding around his midsection when he reached that age. The tactile delight, alone, would be incalculable.

“… and, I have to say, the mums had a nice time, too. Lots of talking and laughing and flirting… it’s good to see mums happy, don’t you think?”

Which opened the door very nicely for the topic of conversation Mycroft hoped to broach. His lover was such a considerate man.

“Yes, it is certainly heartening to witness them enjoying themselves. Though, I did have a chance to speak with Mummy about a matter of some import, in between her laughing and flirting.”

“Are you ok, love? She didn’t upset you, did she?”

The bottomless concern in your eyes, my spouse, makes me love you with an even deeper ardor, if that is at all possible.

“Quite the opposite, actually. Again, I was surprised by her somewhat altered attitude.”

“Towards what?”

“You. And us.”

“Oh. She hates me less than she did?”

“I believe that is an accurate synopsis. And, she made an offer that was most unexpected, but one, I hope, you will consider very seriously.”

While Mycroft outlined the details of the conversation with his mother, he kept close watch on his lover’s face for any sign of anger or indignation.

“That little place set back from the road? With the trees and big stone wall?”

“The very one.”

“And it’s not yours.”

“No, it is not. Father purchased that piece of land and put it in Mummy’s name.”

“She… she’s really offering to let me live there?”

“If you choose to accept. It will need work, Gregory, you have seen it sufficiently well to know that is the case, so an immediate occupancy is not feasible, however…”

“However, she’s right that I do know a lot of lads with good skills in trade, or, at least, their dads and brothers or sisters do.”

“Who would be most happy, I am certain to see the work, as well as assist you in obtaining your own residence.”
“Which you plan of paying for.”

“I did not say that, though, as appointed landlord, it is my responsibility to contribute to the maintenance of the structure and to make it habitable in the first place. I am more than agreeable, however, to negotiating a fiscal division of the materials and labor that is to your liking.”

“That… that’s fair. And you’ll charge me a proper rent, right? Not something foolish, but a real value for what the cottage is worth?”

“I would, of course, set a rent according to the guidelines we have previously discussed. Once you are officially hired and we have a definitive value for your salary, a figure will be set that is fair, but does not leave you destitute.”

“But, if the cottage could fetch more…”

“Gregory… one makes allowances for family, do they not? Your father happily feeds the children, as does your mother, without seeing so much as a button donated to their coffers for it. You will pay rent, but it will be one that is equitable on all fronts. The cottage has generated no income at all since Father made the purchase, so any monies you contribute will be far and above the current situation.”

“It could be a nice little cottage, when it’s seen a bit of work.”

“That it could.”

“And… it’s like your mum said, not so close to the house that I’d feel odd about things, but not so far that I’m out of reach for Sherlock and John.”

“True.”

“It’s away from a lot, actually, so if things get a bit loud, with the telly or a bit of music… or my mates… there’s no one to bother.”

“A strong selling point.”

“It’s not really a bad idea, is it?”

“Not at all. I admit to experiencing some chagrin that I did not, myself, think of it, however, that does not diminish the efficiency of the plan. Are you… are you considering it?”

“I’d be a bit daft if I didn’t at least give it some thought. It’s a good situation for someone like me and if it gets the cottage back in order so that, even when I leave, it’ll be able to see your Mum with a profit, which isn’t something to ignore.”

“Might we… might we take a closer look at the property? Perhaps on Monday, after you have finished obligations?”

“I think that’s a good idea. Get a firm idea of what it would need to be livable and what I might be able to do myself during my off hours. I wager I’d have at least one eager little helper wielding a hammer or paint brush for whatever work I can manage on my own.”

“I believe you are likely correct and that would gain you, also, a supervisor who would certainly oversee your efforts with a most critical eye.”

“Very true. This… this could work, love.”
Mycroft smiled and reached out to take his partner in his arms and give him a warm, congratulatory kiss.

“I am so happy you see the merit of the idea. We shall have to take advantage of every possible bounty if we are to make these next years tolerable and this one does seem to offer substantial benefit.”

Lestrade provided his own kiss and mentally laughed at how happy his partner was with the situation. Mycroft was very predictable for certain things, but compromise was what couples did and he wasn’t going to be a dunce and walk past an excellent opportunity because it flew a bit in the face of his desire not to live in Mycroft’s pocketbook. Besides, the thought of bringing a poor, neglected cottage back to life had an appeal of its own…

“That we shall. Speaking of opportunities… once John’s out of the shower and in pyjamas, think we have the time and energy to take advantage of a few others?”

“Licentious others?”

“Precisely.”

“I believe that can be managed. We should likely, however, clap eyes on Sherlock first, to ensure he shall not provide his particular brand of interruption to our activities.”

“That’s probably wise. You know Dad would think it simply hilarious to poke at Sherlock until he did something miserable. I know for a fact he still has that camera and plenty of film… and he’s been hoping to design a remote mechanism for it. I’d rather not have lovely pictures of us completely starkers making their way to the police before my interview.”

“I do feel that Daniel would prohibit their distribution at the present time so that your acceptance onto the police force was not influenced by the existing constables’ jealousy over your manly assets however, he would certainly sell them for profit once you donned your uniform.”

“Probably have them printed on the beer mats so everyone can have a look. He’d consider it advertising.”

“Hmmm…. .”

“You’re not putting my bum on your beer mats!”

‘It would certainly increase the volume of female clientele and the positive impact on our profits would be considerable.”

“No.”

“I had no idea you harbored such anti-business leanings, my dear.”

“Anti-bum, leanings, thank you. At least for my own and its full-color display for the drinking public.”

Maybe one day Mycroft would tire of silly conversation with his spouse, but today was certainly not that day.

“We could opt for a more artistic, monochrome approach, I suppose. Perhaps to coordinate with a poetry night we host for local bards to share their compositions.”
Lestrade glared at Mycroft so hard he started himself laughing and took his lover in a warm, firm hug.

“That I’ll agree to. I am very much one to support the arts and gentrifying your tatty old pub.”

“Such a lucky man am I. My tatty old pub, as well, thanks you.”

“My bum still itches.”

A naked, wet John was the perfect distraction to draw the couple back to reality and their in-unison sigh was testimony to the renewed tightness of their pre-marital bond. And their family’s fascination with the concept of bums.

“Love, can you find our sweep one of those bath brushes?”

“I believe it may be possible.”

“Good. I’ll mop the floor while you do that and John stands in the tub so I don’t have any further mopping to do.”

“Ugh… you just want me out of sight so you can kiss.”

“Yes, John, that is Gregory and my dastardly plan. Alleviating your pruritic bottom and saving Grandmama’s flooring are simply ancillary benefits.”

“What? We didn’t collect data on you, Mycroft, but I think you’re a little drunk.”

Lestrade spun the naked boy and used a single finger to the center of John’s back to poke him back towards the bath, following along after a final kiss with Mycroft. After dealing with their own little troublemakers, policing the village was going to be easy. Of course, Sherlock and John did live in the village and had bicycles now… this was going to be the hardest job in the world…

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“How can you be awake? I know for a real and true fact you were not in bed until nearly dawn!”

Waking to Sherlock glaring at him was a familiar sight to Lestrade, but why did the goblin have to be so fucking alert this time of the… what time was it anyway?

“Your ridiculous need for sleep highlights your membership in the sluggardly ranks of the biosphere’s surplus human population. When the time comes for the well-deserved and long-overdue culling, expect to be pushed to the front of the queue for the reaper.”

“I have an idea, why don’t you go and wake Mu…”

NO! What was wrong with you, brain? Even half-asleep, you’re smarter than that.

“… Dad. Go play swords or have him teach you to smoke or something. At this point I really don’t care.”

“Papa Lestrade is being wakened by John so that we might continue our research on the correlation between location within the monthly fertility cycle of females and desperation for even the most substandard of males to satisfy their reproductive urges. In any case, your Y-chromosome contributor confiscated my pack of cigarettes earlier this week and bored me senseless with his wandering and haphazard lecture on the evils of smoking. That he was smoking one of the cigarettes
he seized from me while he delivered his lecture further illustrates how hypocrisy and dullwittedness typify your male genetic line.

Perfect.

“How the *fuck* did you get cigarettes? I told every shop in the area and all my mates that I’d knock heads if you got sold cigarettes again.”

“I stole them.”

“Oh god. From where?”

“Your sock drawer.”

“Ah… yeah, you’re not supposed to know about those.”

“You are a hypocritical dullwit.”

“You already said that.”

“It bore repeating.”

“Fair enough. Let me guess… an experiment?”

“I was attempting to extract the nicotine to add to my poisons collection.”

“Wonderful. First suspicious death I’m assigned, you know I’m going to have to check that.”

“I would be insulted if you didn’t.”

Waking to his spouse arguing with Sherlock was a familiar sound to Mycroft, but why did their discourse have to occur at such an unreasonable hour? Was the bed even warm? Had they lain long enough for the fabric to absorb their body heat?

“Fatcroft! I see your blubber quivering, indicating your wakefulness. Rise and drag your manservant with you. We have scant few hours remaining before we must leave and an unacceptable amount of them shall be squandered by Grandmama and her objectionable desire to increase her collection of daguerreotypes and cabinet cards. We shall break fast in ten minutes. Be there or suffer hunger that shall go unabated, regardless of the loudness of your trumpeting or stomping of hooves.”

Sherlock pivoted on his heels and marched out of the bedroom, leaving two groaning bodies in his wake, neither of whom was entirely certain at what point they had lost positive control of their lives.

“We can ignore him, love. If I put a chair under the knob, it’ll take them awhile to break through and we’ll have a good hour’s more sleep because of it.”

“True, my dear, however, I fear a window incursion would be the second course of action and the glass is not intruder-proof.”

“Shite. Are you sure Sherlock’s even human? Humans need sleep, don’t they? I’m almost positive I read that in a book at some point.”

“His personally-conducted blood tests do lend credence to his human origins, however, I remain confident some mutation haunts his DNA that sets him apart from the rest of our species.”
“It’s lucky we showered last night, I suppose, because I suspect it’s going to be a long day and…”

“Gregory?”

“Just remembering what tomorrow is. I have got to see some sleep tonight or I’m going to make a crap impression at my interview.”

“I shall ensure it, my love. And, given the seriousness of the situation, I feel certain that the children will honor any restrictions we place on them in terms of waking you.”

“I hope so because… balls, but I’m tired.”

“The kitchen offers very strong coffee.”

“Can I have one of those intravenous things that just puts it right into my blood.”

“Sherlock likely has one in his effects somewhere.”

“Probably next to his poisons.”

“Then it shall be easy to find.”

The only thing making the morning bearable for Lestrade was the sight of his father, with his head down on the staff table in the kitchen, cup of coffee steaming next to him, and his wrist tied with some rope to John’s. At least someone’s morning was going more poorly than his.

“John?”

“He tried to escape.”

The pained groan was music, also, to Lestrade’s ears.

“Bit hungover, Dad?”

That was more a long stringing together of expletives than a true groan, but it did the trick of making Mycroft and Lestrade smile as they pulled out chairs and took their seats for breakfast.

“I gave him a headache tablet, but it hasn’t worked.”

“That’s being a good doctor, John, but he’ll need a few hundred more is my guess. And about ten more pots of coffee. Toss any grease down his throat yet?”

“The cook is making something greasy, I think. She said she knew exactly what he needed, besides a spanking, and would see he got lots of it.”

“You’re right on top of things! And showing a lot of compassion keeping Dad in one place so he doesn’t wander off and die alone and neglected. The medical profession is going to be lucky to have you.”

And the torturer profession was going to be lucky to have Sherlock, who was currently tapping the victim on the back of the head with his spoon and recording the volume and indecency of the responses.
With a grin at his lover, Lestrade rose to save the kitchen staff the job of bringing coffee for himself and starting tea for Mycroft. Then, it was carrying a decidedly greasy plate of food to his father and smaller plates of less-greaser offerings to the two boys waiting with varying degrees of patience for their meal. Here they were, in a no-we-don’t-call-it-a-palace palace, acting like any family after a good party. Well, not entirely, because every queen bee was, apparently, still having a nice sleep in their cozy beds. Couldn’t say the boys were stupid about that, though, because happy queens made for happy families and their queens were slightly more bloodthirsty than most…

Several hours later, when Mycroft and Lestrade were near to propping each other where they stood by leaning and forming an inverted-V shape, the call was finally given to don the appropriate attire and gather in the library for the photographs. Of course, the call was given a good hour before the photographer was scheduled to arrive, because of the time and effort required to get Sherlock and John cleaned and into their Grandmama-chosen suits, as well as to let the older generation guzzle another twenty pots of coffee and have icy showers so as not to appear as zombies in the official family photographs. Or, at least, somewhat less zombie-like. Maybe the photographer had some especially kind filters with him today.

“You look like shite.”

“Thank you, Lizzie. Don’t worry, once I smile I’ll be the handsomest man… in this suit.”

“Why are you wearing that, anyway? Family photos, remember?”

Maybe it was her own slight hangover, but Greg’s mother actually felt a bit of sting at the flash of hurt that flitted across her ex-husband’s face.

‘Yeah, I remember. But… thought I could have one with Sherlock and John, at least. Greg and Mycroft, too. Just for me to have, you know. Something to put in my flat or behind the bar so people can see how handsome my son’s family is. I’ll pay Rowena for them, don’t worry about that.”

Waving off Danny’s words as regally as she could, Elizabeth diverted the conversation in a more… comfortable… direction when she saw John storm into the room, looking for the camera.

“Where is he? I need my picture taken now before my suit wrinkles!”

“Are you certain John’s not your son, too, you bastard? He’s got your vanity, that’s for certain.”

“I’d claim him in an instant, if I could. Too bad, Greg and Mycroft have already snapped him up.”

“From what I heard, he had you snapped up this morning. Or, at least, tied up.”

“John’s a smart lad. I’d hoped to find a dark corner to crawl into, but he wasn’t having any of it.”

Nor was John having any of this absentee photographer business, taking out, instead, Sherlock’s camera and setting in on a table so he could use the timer to take his own pictures. Of himself in his suit.

“You are defiling my film stock, John Watson.”

“You’re just envious, Sherlock Holmes.”
Who was also put out by the absence of the photographer, since he wanted nothing more than for this nonsense to be over and done with as soon as possible.

“Envy of a mold spore is a rather impossible thing.”

What was possible, however, was a rude noise and gesture from John which was handily captured on film when the timer of the camera went off, making John giggle and Danny cheer until his ex-wife punched him in the arm.

“Mum, don’t hit Dad. At least, not until after the photographs so the bruises aren’t captured for posterity.”

Mycroft rubbed his partner’s back and crossed his fingers that the various shenanigans would settle soon, so there would be sufficient time to see everyone home and his lover relaxed and calm before bed so his sleep would be sound. Said lover’s nervousness about tomorrow was, seemingly, contagious and he was feeling his own small case of jitters over the upcoming events.

“And Mama will certainly not be amused by any smile that is missing one or more teeth.”

Ah, good. Mummy was on scene to further stir the proverbial pot.

“I’ll smile with my lips closed. Might should do that anyway, what with my grin being brighter than the flash.”

Mycroft had to admire his mother’s rolled eyes at the vainest adult in the room, besides her, because it was a very impressive example of the act.

“Excellent, everyone is present, on time and still garmented. I believe we are ready to begin.”

Eyes turned towards Grandmama, who had arrived with the photographer in tow, along with an assistant who immediately began unpacking equipment and taking light readings.

“Now, I am certain everyone has their personal list of wants for today and, as long as they are decent, we can see them satisfied. Anything indecent will require separate negotiation with the photographer that I certainly do not wish to know about. Shall we make ready?”

John jumped to attention and quivered with excitement, earning him two male Lestrade hands reaching out to ruffle his hair, then pulling back at the last second before they had John dissolving into a hair-mussed puddle of crushed modeling aspirations. Everyone else, except Sherlock, did last-minute checks of clothing and appearance before the long list of pose combinations began, starting with individual portraits, moving to various pairs, then to larger groups, such as Mummy Holmes with her two sons and, to some great surprise, Mummy’s flicking her hand to motion John over to have a photograph with the three of them, as well.

It was about the same level of surprise that erupted when Elizabeth nodded her son over to join her for a photo then, after a massive sigh, made a ‘get over here now and don’t make me regret it’ gesture to Danny, who leapt at the chance and quivered as excitedly as John as he stood for the portrait.

By the time the full-family portrait was taken the photographer was trying to remember when he’d had to work this hard for his fee, then remembered the size of his fee and quickly rededicated himself to providing the highest quality service in his profession because Mrs. Holmes seemed the type to want to repeat this with some frequency, especially with small boys who would grow quickly for a number of years. And, was that a wedding he’d heard mentioned…
“Are we finished or are we going to continue on with this narcissism until the sun goes nova in the sky?”

“Yes, grandson, I believe we are done, for now. Do take John and make ready for lunch. After that, I’m afraid, you will need to prepare to depart for home.”

The standard amount of protesting erupted, with the non-goblins in the room waiting patiently for the ritualistic dancing and shrieking of sacred songs to die down to a trickle.

“You two heard Grandmama. Off with the suits and start filling your bags with your things and not what you like to believe you’ve been allowed to have even though you haven’t actually asked anyone about it yet. Do it fast enough and you can probably get another experiment going before we eat.”

The evil eyes that Lestrade caught in the chest were deflected by his long-hardened armor and the two boys finally stalked off to prepare for the end of their visit.

“Mama, I will also be leaving today to meet Robert in London. We shall, however, return in a few days to spend an evening before we continue on to Paris. I will be in the bath for the next hour, so that would be a good time for the help to pack my luggage.”

While Danny suffered another bit of violence, this time a flick of his ear by his son who noticed his father was admiring his future mother-in-law’s bottom as she strutted out of the room, Mycroft thought a moment and decided that time was growing short, though his curiosity was looming large.

“My dear? Once you have completed your chastisement, would you escort your mother and father to their rooms to prepare for lunch, while I discuss a few matters of business with Grandmama.”

Lestrade was rather proud of the fact that he and Mycroft and gotten to the point in their relationship where a lifted eyebrow and slight pursing of the lips was as good as a dictionary of words for getting his lover’s point across.

“Absolutely! Come on, you two old people. Let me keep an eye you don’t fall and break your hips, which would completely spoil the lunch my stomach is very much looking forward to.”

Getting his own ears flicked, in stereo, wasn’t pleasant, but it was worth it to hear his partner giggle as the Lestrade clan strolled out of the library, leaving Grandmama waiting for whatever it was Mycroft wanted to discuss. Which certainly wasn’t business.

“I do believe we shall have a robust quantity of admirable photographs from this session, do you not, Grandmama.”

Looking over at the photographer, who was finishing putting away his equipment with a member of the staff waiting to show him and his assistant to the door, the lady of the house began to narrow down the likely topics on her grandson’s mind and took in a few additional visual cues from Mycroft’s posture and expression to winnow the list to a single candidate.

“We shall. And aren’t we fortunate that Gregory’s father was here to participate.”

When the day came he outflanked his grandmother, Mycroft would reward himself with a glass of the finest champagne and a night of sexual abandon with his husband that would set their sheets on fire.

“Yes, it was truly a delight. Especially with Mummy in attendance, also.”
With the photographer fully out of the room, Mycroft mentally rubbed his hands together for the meat of their conversation.

“Yes, that was an added bit of excitement to our weekend.”

“And, when did you learn about Mummy and Daniel’s, shall we say, history?”

“Not as early as you might expect. I took pains to deepen the exploration into his past when it became clear that Daniel was to remain a part of your and your partner’s lives and… let us say I noticed a pattern that drew my attention.”

“Mummy’s visits to the hotel at which he worked.”

“Visits, in plural, is the truth of it, as well. A single example would likely not have raised any questions, but your mother has little overall interest in the British coast. Her return to a single hotel now and again over a period of two years was most telling.”

Two years? This was more disturbing than Mycroft had thought.

“Oh, do not be so scandalized, grandson. I assure you that, from my inquiries, there was nothing particularly serious about the situation, simply your mother ascertaining if a certain individual was employed at the moment and spending a few days in that establishment if the answer was yes. When her attention was kept in other places over a summer, the pattern broke.”

“Why did you not inform me?”

“Because, firstly, it was not my place to do so as it is your mother and Daniel’s business, not yours and, secondly, because it was a certainty that, with your family situation, they would cross paths and that would be a far more entertaining revelation. I am not so young anymore that I would walk past such an opportunity and leave it ungrasped. Besides…”

“Oh god, what else?”

“What do you think of her new gentleman?”

“I… he seems a pleasant sort. I had little time to get to know him.”

“You had enough.”

“We scarcely shared a meal together!”

“I do know what rather descriptive name you and Gregory have given him.”

“I… I have no idea to what you are referring.”

“Say it, Mycroft.”

“I refuse.”

“Grandson…”

“The custard.”

“And I would agree.”

Mycroft blinked in surprise, then blinked again for good measure.
‘P… Pardon?’

‘Bland and without protracted interest.’

‘I… I would have thought you would find him… agreeable.’

‘Oh, I do. A very agreeable person, in fact. That, however, does not mean he is a lively person or one with a degree of… spark.’

‘I would suppose Mummy has sufficient spark for them both.’

‘Or that her own measure of spark is halved since it must stand for two.’

Mycroft suddenly felt more than slightly off-footed and began to realize his Grandmother’s plotting was for more than a bit of familial entertainment.

‘You do not approve of him for Mummy.’

‘It is not my place to approve or disapprove.’

‘I shall rephrase. He is not the specimen you would choose for her, if it were your place to choose.’

‘Such could be the case.’

‘But… why? I would think that a… stable, less colorful individual might appear, to you, to potentially act as a moderating force for Mummy’s behaviors.’

‘There is moderating and there is stultifying. The former is desirable. The latter is not.’

The off-footedness was now segueing into a queasiness as an idea began for form in Mycroft’s mind.

‘Grandmama… are you hoping to broker a renewed relationship between Mummy and Daniel?’

This day would be scribed in large letters in his journal for this was the first time Mycroft had ever made his grandmother laugh.

‘Oh… oh dear me… good heavens, Mycroft. No. No, that is not my intention. However… you would admit, I wager, that he presents a striking contrast to Robert.’

‘Daniel provides a striking contrast to Casanova.’

‘Again, I would agree. He is carefree, libidinous, risk-taking, fearless, in his way, but, also irresponsible, immature, self-devoted… certainly an example of petrol that we do not wish to hurl onto your mother’s flame.’

‘Then… I do not understand.’

‘Daniel represents one extreme, Robert represents the other. Though Robert may seem, at first, a better situation, in truth, a doused flame is as regrettable as one that rages out of control.’

‘You are worried for Mummy.’

‘She is my daughter-in-law and your mother. Yes, I worry. Emma’s various… behaviors and habits are not always to my liking for the damage they have done to you and Sherlock, however, that does not mean I do not have a care for her welfare.'
Mycroft watched his grandmother take a seat and quickly followed her invitation for him to do the same.

"Your mother… well, it is a truth more relevant, unfortunately, to women than men, but… she is of the age where certain things are becoming more striking. She looks around her and sees her friends paired, happily or not is immaterial, and know they look at her with some curiosity in their eyes. They, and she, wonders if this is… all. And, if it is enough. To be an unmarried woman at her age… it is not an easy thing, in some ways and that she is a widow provides no additional grace. It is a time of taking stock and making assessments. Your mother is at a crossroads, for lack of a better word, and is evaluating what she has in terms of what she wants, the latter being a very difficult thing to delineate, for each of us have a myriad of wants, often fantastical or contradicting in nature."

Thinking a moment, Mycroft felt a small stab of… something… for his mother. Not that she had ever demonstrated much concern for him or Sherlock, he still loved her and it was difficult to reconcile the image of the free-spirited society flower with an uncertain woman staring into the future and fearing what it might bring.

"She hears stories of children and grandchildren and realizes she can contribute little for she has scant news of you and your brother. News that is, in actuality, plentiful but is ever further being eroded as you and Sherlock build lives with others and leave no place for her."

"She has never desired a place in our lives."

"That is true and do not believe for a moment she is not becoming keenly aware of that fact. Witness this weekend, where you and your brother clearly demonstrated independence and, moreover, alliance with individuals with whom you have formed strong bonds."

"Mummy is feeling marginalized."

"That is a sliver of the pie, yes, but I suspect it is a sliver that is beginning to grow in importance."

"And Robert?"

"The custard? Well… he is, for lack of a better word, safe. He is happy to travel and accompany your mother to her various functions… at least when he is able. He makes no demands and ensures that she neither arrives nor leaves an event without an escort. For some women, that would be sufficient, however…"

"You do not believe Mummy is that sort of woman."

"Do you? It is, perhaps, boastful to assert that your father was the correct type of man for her, straddling the middle ground between Daniel and Robert and, when he passed… it is unlikely that she shall find another like him, though it is not impossible, I suppose. The question becomes, does she settle for someone who does not properly suit her or… does she recognize that another in one’s life is not necessary for that life to be complete."

"I… I do not know if I agree. If Gregory was not with me…"

A thought that filled him with a dread even his extensive vocabulary had not sufficient words to express.

"You would endure. You would ache, at times you would ache terribly, but you would continue with the others with whom you have connection and forge a path that brought happiness. Perhaps,
one day, find someone to love in a way that is different than the love you shared with Gregory, but a true love, nonetheless. Or perhaps not, but that does not negate that your life is deserving of happiness and that happiness is achievable without another to walk beside you. I greatly miss your grandfather, Mycroft, you know very well that I do, however… I would not, in any manner, say my life is either unhappy or unfulfilling.”

“I do not think I was happy before I met Gregory. Nor was Sherlock, for that matter.”

“And, I would agree, but you know, as do I, that you did little to bring happiness into your life. And that is not an admonition, grandson, for I know very well the pain with which you struggled after your father’s death and the continued pain from your mother’s neglect. Perhaps I made seem somewhat insignificant the influence of a true friend of love in one’s life and, if so, then I do apologize. Gregory, and John, have been to you and your brother nothing less than a godsend, however… would you agree that, in many ways, they served as a spark, rather than the fuel for your transformation?”

Something Grandmama’s earlier conversation with her daughter-in-law indicated was recognized for Mycroft, but not said daughter-in-law herself.

“I… no?”

Though, even as he said it, Mycroft knew that was not true. It felt, it felt deeply as if his happiness flowed from his beloved and filled this empty shell, but… that was not exactly the case.

“Is your reconsideration complete?”

“Yes. Very well… I believe I understand to what you are referring.’

“Good. Each of us is the source of our own happiness and satisfaction, though, yes, it often takes others to draw it out or show us how it might be accessed. But, they are there within you… that is something with which your mother is wrestling.”

“I… I would say Mummy has been most happy and satisfied since Father’s death.”

“Your mother has been busy and distracted since your father’s death. Oh, I shall not be disingenuous and state she has not had her fair share of entertainment and enjoyment, but that is a different thing than happiness. A very different thing, indeed.”

Something Mycroft had learned most clearly from his time in London. Entertainment and enjoyment… they were powerful and effective distractions and, for some, they could be enough in this life. More than enough, even…

“Terrible people, Mycroft, can disable us from finding the happiness within and wonderful people can enable us to reach out and grasp that joy with both hands. It is really the burden of existence to surround ourselves with individuals who support and exclude those that detract so that our inner light may shine. Further, we must recognize there is not a correct type or number of persons on either side of that particular coin; each of us is unique and must seek the formula proper for who we are as individuals. Your mother is wondering if the formula she has crafted is truly the best one for her or if, as they say, the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Whatever fence that may be.”

“I see.”

“Do you, grandson?”
Oddly, he did.

“When Mummy informed me of her new interest, she said it was in hopes of securing my support should she, at some point, decide again to enter a more permanent relationship. Even a marriage. She worried your support would not be forthcoming. I... it was a strange conversation, given her history, but, even then, I wondered if she was seeing her life with new eyes and contemplating change.”

“Men have an easier time, in some ways, in that society does not impose a specific set of circumstances one must follow if one is to be ‘happy.’ Be you a bachelor, a recluse, a married man, a playboy... all is acceptable and you are not necessarily viewed as lacking or lesser based upon your choice. Women must suffer the demands of their own heart, as well as the pressures that come from the world around them and... it is not easy, regardless of the strength of your mind or will. Even the well-meaning can add weight to your days with suggestions, encouragements and advice, though it all is given with an intent to help.”

“You... do you believe Mummy is...”

“I have no idea where your mother’s journey will ultimately lead, but I do know she should not simply pitch her proverbial tent along the wayside before it is done. Would you deny her eyes lit most brightly when Daniel was being his most roguish?”

“No, that was highly evident.”

“What light did you observe with her Robert?”

“That emitted by a shattered bulb.”

“Precisely. Emma is a vibrant woman and will never, I feel most certain, be a traditional wife and mother, for it is not her nature.”

“And you hoped Gregory’s father would serve as a reminder.”

“To some degree. As well as for Elizabeth.”

What?

“What?”

“Good heavens, Mycroft... surely you have noticed that Elizabeth has taken great pains to ensure that, since Daniel’s arrival, they have never crossed paths?”

“I... no, I have not given any thought to the matter or noticed anything that aroused my attention.”

“Then, let me inform you. Elizabeth has done everything possible, including varying her own standard routine and habits to prevent any contact with her former husband.”

“Isn’t that... is that not to be expected, given the circumstances?”

“That she allows their past to so darkly cloud her present?”

“Their past is not a happy one, Grandmama.”

“True, but not a dangerous one. If there was history of violence or directed abuse of any form, her caution would be warranted, but after meeting Daniel, do you believe him a threat?”
“No. A threat to one’s patience or bankbook, yes, but a physical threat, no.”

“Elizabeth has very good reason to wish nothing to do with the man, however, there is a difference between not desiring his company and actively avoiding it, especially if that means one reconfigures one’s own life to do so. It speaks of a lingering influence of that person on you and scores for them a victory, even if they never know of it.”

“Why would one seek out a painful encounter, though, if it can be sidestepped? And, I would argue that even an amicable separation would leave a lingering influence upon those involved.”

“And, I would not disagree. But, the issue centers on the outcome of that influence. A pang in the heart, a few moments of memory, harsh or glad, the sharing of stories on the telephone with a dear friend, perhaps even a look through old photographs… perfectly acceptable. Altering the places you visit, enlisting friends to pre-screen locations prior to leaving work so you are ensured a certain party is not present, changing your own alliances, even subtly, because you worry that they are, again, associating with your nemesis… that is not acceptable.”

Mycroft heaved a small sigh and made the shameful mental admission that he had not thought an appreciable amount about the effect of recent events on his mother-in-law, believing his Gregory was the only one who would suffer appreciably from his father’s return. Certainly he had not taken steps to verify this assumption, which was sloppy from any point of view and not a mistake he would make again.

“You have kept close watch on the situation.”

“Of course. And I do not begrudge Elizabeth’s wish that her life remains free of Daniel’s presence, for she did suffer and suffer greatly during their marriage, but to allow him the power of structuring her actions and behaviors? That is not what I wish for her and, again, a reminder of her own power and strength seemed in order. Once the surprise of his arrival this weekend abated, would you agree that she easily, as they say, held her own against her former spouse?”

“The bruising on his arm indicates that most clearly.”

“As does the fact that he has not perpetrated any disrespect or attempted to insinuate himself back into her good graces. Elizabeth is a spirited, independent woman who radiates her self-authority with a laudable brilliance and Daniel, despite appearances, is not an entirely stupid man. Their marriage was one, as with many, that never should have been, however, the gift they gave to the world in the form of their son does counter that position, somewhat. Regardless, he has correctly gauged the situation and taken no steps to agitate or perturb her unduly. In truth, I believe he harbors a friendly affection for Elizabeth, as opposed to a romantic ardor, and has no desire of any form to complicate her life or cause her distress.”

“And you hoped to demonstrate to Mother that her concerns were groundless.”

“It seemed prudent. It is a small village and already her vigilance was taking a toll. Further, they do share a son and, now that Daniel is making the effort to broker a new connection with Gregory, it was inevitable that they have communication, unless she took her actions to the extreme, such as changing addresses to a new village and finding other avenues for work.”

“I would not believe that of Mother. Not for a moment.”

“I would not, either, but one does not leave open the road to a saddening possibility simply because one crosses one’s fingers that it shall not come to pass.”
No, that is not what one did and Mycroft vowed that a more watchful eye would be kept on his family and all of the members therein from this point forward. Grandmama's eyes reached far, but he would need to be ready for the day when *his* eyes would be the only ones overseeing their health, safety and happiness.

“I credit the point. Along happier lines, however, you might wish to know that Mummy offered Gregory her cottage to let.”

It was exceedingly rare that Mycroft surprised his grandmother, so it was with some satisfaction that he savored her raised eyebrow of surprise.

“Very interesting. He will accept, I hope.”

“He is considering that option most strongly.”

“Excellent. An exceedingly practical solution to matters and I must commend Emma for thinking of it. I suspect you will enjoy most greatly watching Gregory work and toil, likely shirtless, to see the cottage brought to order.”

Her Mycroft could affect the most adorable of scandalized expressions, especially when it was tinged with a bit of contemplation about the source of the scandal and how delicious it would be.

“I shall not dignify that with a response.”

“Most noble of you. Now, do you feel your curiosity has been satisfied or are there additional questions you wish to pose.”

“I believe I am content for the moment. It… both Gregory and I were uncertain of the motives behind inviting his father into what could certainly be an explosive situation and… I feel that I can offer him an explanation that will address his concerns.”

“Something for which I am certain he will reward you in kingly fashion, though, do make an appearance at lunch, if you please. I am very much enjoying meals with our extended family and take pride in seeing our table surrounded by those I hold dear.”

Mycroft debated launching into a lecture on the inappropriateness of speculating on his Gregory’s method of reward and decided a chastising glare would suffice for the moment, making his most ferocious one before rising from his seat, smoothing his waistcoat and striding regally out of the library. For her part, Grandmama nodded her approval and marveled anew at how far her grandson had come and what a stellar man he was growing to be. It had taken a very long time, but he *had* found his formula for happiness and the people necessary to make it his reality.

Of course, that didn’t mean her own vigilance could flag with him or any of her family. Being a matriarch was terribly hard work, but the rewards were indescribable. And so, if she was honest, was the fun…
Chapter 19

Lestrade let out a huff of breath, after listening to Mycroft’s report and had to admit that he’d known something was in the wind, but nothing of that sort. Or that magnitude. Especially the bit with his own Mum. In all his worry about his own feelings around Dad returning, he’d forgotten a little about hers but, apparently, Grandmama hadn’t.

“No offense, love, but I think Grandmama’s smarter than all of us combined.”

“I suspect you are correct, however, a portion of the credit must be given to the number of years she has lived. I am beginning to realize with some profundity the value of simply existing and experiencing to enhance one’s intellect.”

“That ‘with age comes wisdom’ business?”

“Yes, in point of fact. It is a highly interesting concept and one that I am, only now, beginning to grasp. For example, it is only through this time with you that I am better able to interact with and understand Sherlock. And John, for that matter. Place me, prior to our meeting, in a group of children and I would have absolutely no idea how to proceed, but I feel more confident, now, that I would have some strategies in my portfolio to, at the very least, prevent open rebellion and wholesale hooliganism.”

“Another benefit of the weekend! Which is now at an end and we face the sure-to-be-torture trip home. Though… I do have an idea about that…”

“Yes?”

“…”

“… well, this is cozy. Me sitting back here alone, like one of those old ladies who got sent along to mind the courting couple when they went for a carriage ride. Smart plan having Danny take the boys back in his car so they could… do whatever it is their child-like brains tell them is a good idea. They may not be back until Wednesday, but that’s going to be your problem, son. First duty as a constable is finding three lost children, who are probably sleeping off a binge of crap food and loony experiments that the tallest child thought was perfectly fine to let the shorter ones conduct. Take a snap, will you? It’ll make a find addition to the family album.”

Neither Mycroft nor Greg made any comment that, despite the tepid vitriol, Greg’s mother hadn’t raised a single objection to bundling Sherlock and John into Danny’s borrowed car and actually waved enthusiastically as they drove off for what was certain to be an eventful trip home. It was a show of trust and a rather substantial one, at that.

“I will. Probably have to document the criminals and whatever stolen, broken or kidnapped property they have on their possession, too. None of the local farmers are likely to sell them any animals, are they, love?”

“Hmmmm… depending upon the price, I suspect that they…”

Mycroft heaved a sigh, checked his pocket, and rolled his eyes heavenward.

“… yes, my chequebook has been pickpocketed, so we might be wise to make our own stop to purchase a bag or two of grain to feed the new pet.”
“Perfect... and you can stop laughing, mum!”

“Oh no! This is completely laugh-worthy and I’m going to take advantage of it. Reminds me of the time your dad brought home a snake for you as a pet.”

“What! I don’t remember that!”

“That’s because I made him take the thing away as soon as he opened the box and showed it to me. He won it as part of a wager and thought you’d love it. Of course, the clot had no idea if it was poisonous or not, one of those that squeezed its prey to death, so your weedy little neck would be easy to constrict… pouted the whole time and spent the rest of the day going door to door until he found someone who already had a few of the beasties and were happy to add another to their collection.”

“Wonderful... Mycroft, know where we can buy some mice or something? That’s what they feed snakes, right?”

“I believe so, however, we might consider allowing the creature free run of the cottage for a week or so to take care of any rodent problem that might currently exist.”

“Good idea. Of course, knowing Dad, they’ll come home with a sheep instead, because it was large enough to give the boys a ride.”

“Then you shall have free lawn maintenance.”

“Yes! Suddenly, I have no worries.”

Watching from the rear seat, Elizabeth smiled and shook her head slowly. They fit so well together, past problems aside, but she was still glad her son was going to have his own space before they decided to make a home together. She hadn’t done that, really. Have a chance to learn who and what she was when there was nobody else to have a say. Moved straight from her mum’s right in with Danny and that was a regret that still stung. Actually... Greg’s leaving would mark the first time in her life that she actually lived alone and, truth be told, she was looking forward to it. The companionship was wonderful and there would still be people in and out regularly, but... it was good to think about having a place to herself for once in her life. Greg was fortunate that he could have that chance now, though she’d seen the cottage and it was in need of help. Oh well, the landlord had deep pockets... even though his chequebook was off buying sheep at the moment…

—

“Daniel, a... are you certain?”

“Sure! Greg’s got his interview tomorrow, right? Well, let me tell you that I’ve got two balls of fire sitting in front of me, and it’s probably best they burn out here rather than there. Told you I had that extra room in my flat, so they can work off all this energy, have a sleep and not be there in yours and Greg’s hair while he’s trying to settle his brain down for tomorrow.”

“I... well, that is a very kind offer, but the children have school tomorrow and...”

“That’s easy enough. I’ve got to drop the car back at Big George’s in the morning, so I can use it to see the chimps right to their school beforehand. You’ve about a hundred people working for you, so find a lovely one to pop by with their books and such. Don’t worry, Mycroft, everything’s under control. John’s even won two quid so far from my mates! Of course, Sherlock’s using some of his spy gear to help John cheat, but it’s brilliant to watch.”
“They… they are gambling!”

“Well… yes. In one sense.”

“What other sense could there possibly be?”

“The sense that my mates know they’re being cheated and are having more fun trying to circumvent Sherlock’s nonsense than actually paying attention to winning. Anyway, what bloke wouldn’t throw a few hands so clever little boys can earn chips money.”

Mycroft heaved another of his life’s countless large sighs and knew there was only one question he really needed to ask.

“Are sheep involved in any manner?”

“What? No. Where did that come from?”

Thank heavens.

“Just… a remnant of a conversation from earlier today.”

“Sorry I missed that one! In any case, if it makes you feel better, there are maths involved. Sherlock’s doing all sorts of sums and… things… in between the cheating. So, you can think of this as an educational experience.”

On one hand, Sherlock and John were in training to become some form of American riverboat gamblers and on the other… they weren’t here training to be riverboat gamblers.

“You will ensure the children are delivered to school on time?”

“Hand on heart! And they’ll be home on time, too, because they want to be there when Greg gets his bollocks squeezed.”

“What!”

“His physical exam. I suppose, though, they can stand outside the door for that part.”

“Ah. Yes, I can predict their level of interest in that particular event and there will be a rather bracing round of negotiation required to set appropriate boundaries. Very well… thank you, Daniel, for this small respite. I am certain Gregory will benefit greatly from the uncharacteristically-relaxed atmosphere of the household.”

“Better for some energetic… and loud… fun times, too, though, am I right? Not going to let that go to waste, are you?”

“No comment.”

“Wear him out, Mycroft, my lad… make certain he can scarcely keep his eyes open so his brain doesn’t keep him awake half the night because he’s worried about tomorrow.”

That was good advice. How unsporting of Daniel to offer it.

“Again, no comment.”

“I’ll take that as ‘message received’ and bid you goodnight. I think Sherlock actually needs help hanging one of his spy mirrors, so I’d best see to that before he hammers his thumb. I’m fairly sure
we can afford to replace all the glass in the windows, but why spend money when you don’t have to, right?”

“Yes, that is a sound business strategy. Good evening, Daniel.”

Quickly hanging up the phone just in case his eardrums were imperiled because Sherlock did hammer his thumb, Mycroft then turned and strolled to the library, where Lestrade was reclining on the sofa wearing a look that told Mycroft Danny’s advice was very good indeed.

“Already trepidatious, my dear?”

“Wouldn’t you be? No, forget that. You wouldn’t be nervous, at all. Anyway, are the boys with Dad?”

“Firstly, I undoubtedly would be nervous given the circumstances and, secondly, yes, they are. Currently, John is relieving your father’s friends of their wages through cardsharping and Sherlock is enacting whatever nefarious means he can to bolster the thievery.”

“Bloody brilliant. Dad thinks it’s wonderful, too, doesn’t he?”

“Absolutely. However, he has also offered for the children to stay overnight with him so you are not tasked with their management and can use the time this evening to relax.”

“Stay with Dad? That’s… that can’t be a good idea.”

“He already has space for Sherlock and John to sleep and will see them to school in the morning. There is, at minimum, one level head on premises, so I do not anticipate the Apocalypse to be the outcome of their visit.”

“Yeah, John’s a good lad for stopping the Four Horsemen in their tracks. Sometimes.”

“Then let us hope this is one of these times. Now, might I suggest some music and the opportunity to simply enjoy this rare bit of unfettered time together?”

“You may suggest and I’ll… I’ll heartily agree. Thank you, Dad, for… he didn’t buy a sheep did he?”

“Blessedly, no.”

“Thank you, Dad, for not buying a sheep and being an old duffer who is happy to mind two thieving and cheating goblins so we can have a quiet evening at home.”

“Between Mother Lestrade and your father, I am… well, I am a touch more confident that no matter our individual work situations, there shall ever be loving eyes on the children. Grandmama also has her sources and I have some confidence that a holiday with her for Sherlock and John would be a most lovely thing to add to their summer recreation.”

“Edwards would kill us. He would murder us and I actually believe he could do it in a way that nobody could prove wasn’t an accident.”

“There is that. In any case, we have some time to contemplate it and, perhaps, fund for him a small holiday of his own when the children visit. Now, let me instruct Driver to deliver the children’s schoolbooks and uniforms and, I shall see for us prepared a small platter of refreshments to nibble while we relax. One moment, my dear.”
Lestrade smiled as Mycroft left the library, but it faltered slightly when his lover was out of sight. Tomorrow… that was really the start of things wasn’t it? Or maybe not. He was more confident than before about the tests, but an interview? He’d fumbled his way through it with Edwards asking the questions, but fumbled was the right word for it. He just wasn’t good at selling himself! Maybe he could borrow a bit of Sherlock’s self-confidence. There was plenty to spare, so it wasn’t likely to be missed. Maybe Mycroft was right… have a cozy night together, clear his mind and everything would be fine. Just fine…

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“Gregory?”

“Fine, just fine…”

Mycroft smiled and kissed his lover’s naked thigh for what would be, hopefully, the last time tonight. Two and a half hours of sweaty, heart-pounding sex had Gregory’s eyes heavy and that particular smile said sleep was only minutes away.

“I shall tend to the cleansing then, shall I?”

“Fine, just fine…”

Minutes might be too generous an estimate…

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“Is this alright?”

Trying not to how too much amusement, Mycroft favored his partner with an approving smile and took a moment to straighten Lestrade’s borrowed tie.

“If I were interviewing a candidate for a position, I would make note of their cleanliness…”

“I’m clean!”

“… their attention to grooming…”

“Hair’s combed and fingernails trimmed!”

“… the message presented by their choice of garment…”

“I… do my clothes have a message?”

“They do. They proclaim most loudly that you are taking this matter seriously, but are not unaware of the practical nature of the position for which you are interviewing.”

“Then, I’m messaged!”

“Excellent. You shall make a stellar showing, Gregory, of that I have absolutely no doubt. Now, do you remember what I told you?”

“Be respectful, but not fawning. It’s alright to think before answering a question. Make eye contact. Remember that they want to fill this position and are hoping that I’ll fit the bill.”

“Then, I declare you prepared. Go forth and gleam.”
“Kiss first?”

Mycroft leaned in and gave Lestrade a soft kiss, carefully avoiding the small bit of coverage they’d raided Sherlock and John’s cosmetic supply to acquire, since, naturally, his dearest had found two spots on his skin that nearly sent the morning into a Sherlock-worthy spiral of despair.

“I’ll be back soon. I hope.”

Lestrade walked as calmly as he could to the car, then drove, as calmly as he could to the police station, to wait as calmly as he could on the small bench outside the Inspector’s office, before strolling as calmly as he could into said office when he was summoned to, finally, sit as calmly as he could in the chair in front of the desk of the man who held his future in his hands.

“Gregory Lestrade. Greg, is it?”

“Y… yes, sir. Only my partner calls me Gregory.”

Shite! First thing out of his mouth was mention of his same-sex partner! Lost the job in under a minute; that had to be a record. Dad wasn’t even that incompetent!

“Right, that fellow who lives in the manor we all envy.”

Was that code for get the fuck out of my office? Why didn’t he know interview code!

“Is… is that a problem, sir?”

“If it was, you wouldn’t be sitting there now. I had you checked, Greg, so I learned that bit fairly quickly. The lads and I did talk about it, but, I have to admit, about as much as we talked about your Mycroft being richer than the rest of us put together and that you swam out of Danny Lestrade’s bollocks. In some ways, you wanting a bloke in your bed isn’t actually the most notable thing about you.”

“Oh. Well done me?”

“I’d say so. Despite all of that, it seems you’re a reputable lad, hard worker, good in a fight, loyal to your mates, ready to muck in when someone needs a hand. Those are the sorts of things we look for in a PC and I haven’t gotten a single story that contradicts any of that. We’re not that many of us here and even the few who might not be happy about the bloke-in-your-bed part of your life agree that as long as you don’t try and give them a feel up in the locker area, there won’t be a problem.”

“Oh. Ok… good. And I really don’t think there’s any chance of me doing that.”

“No, I suspect not. Want to tell me, though, why you want a copper’s job?”

A question! A real interview question! Luckily, he’d practiced this one. Just had to actually remember the answer…

“It suits me, I think. For the reasons you listed and because… I like to help, when I can. I know arresting someone might not seem like helping to some, but, to me, it does, if it benefits the person I’m arresting, maybe nudge them to change their ways, or benefits the person I’m arresting this one because of, since they didn’t deserve whatever was done to them. And… I believe in, I really do, keeping the village safe. I know these people, grew up with them and I care about them, their families and their lives. It’s a good area, but bad things do happen, people do need help and I think I’m a good person to step in and see that sorted.”
“Alright. That’s as good a reason as any and better than most. It’s not an easy job, though, you know. It can be hard on every level - physical, mental and emotional – so it’s not a good fit for someone who can’t stand up to those demands. What do you have to say about that?”

Another real interview question! Number one went fairly well, so fingers crossed for this one…

“I’d say I’ve thought about all of that, thought about it a lot, if I’m truthful. I’ve visited the station a few times and talked to people to get a better idea of the job and they’ve not held back about parts that make the work difficult, at times. Very difficult in some cases…”

What was the term Edwards used… Right!

“… but I’ve got a solid support system to help with that. People I can count on to listen when I need to talk, keep an eye on me when the hours are miserable or I’m just knackered from a brutal day… make certain I’m taking care of myself, from all aspects. I’m not alone in any of this and the people in my life are proud that this is what I want. They’re committed to helping me make a go of it and I’m committed to letting them help when I need it, even if I don’t immediately see the need myself.”

“Very professionally answered. Get a little help with that one?”

Honesty or… no, there wasn’t an or… not in this case.

“A bit. But, that’s what I mean. I had some time to work with someone, a couple of someone’s actually, who knew a little about this sort of thing… interviewing, I mean… and they gave me some ideas for how to approach questions. Not to fake an answer or tell you what you want to hear, but how to make what I want to say understandable. I always know what I feel, but, sometimes, I have a bit of trouble finding the right words so it makes sense, especially if I’m a little nervous. Which I am, I can’t lie about that.”

“That’s normal, so don’t worry about it. And it’s smart you practiced; it shows you’re not walking into this lightly. It also gave you time to think, again, if this was the right decision for you, I wager.”

“It did. Talked about pleasant things and… not so pleasant things and, yeah… it was good because, none of it changed my mind about what I want to do.”

“Good. Because there certainly are some unpleasant things that go with this job… take this one for example.”

Lestrade watched as the Inspector slid a folder over towards him and motioned him to open it. Then, it was all Lestrade could do not to throw it across the room.

“Oh god… that’s a kid.”

“Yes. Crossing the street when a couple of yobs decided that the posted speed limit and traffic signs didn’t actually apply to them.”

No matter how hard he tried, Lestrade couldn’t stop the tears rising in his eyes and the hot, thick lump that formed in his chest and throat. The child was Sherlock and John’s age…

“You have, though it seems strange to say, boys of your own, don’t you?”

All he could do was nod, because nothing was stopping the face in that picture switching between Sherlock’s and John’s and it was carving his insides to pieces.
“That’s the sort of thing we have to deal with, sometimes. In a village this size, you don’t hear of many violent crimes, but we do get the reckless ones. Things people do because they’re not thinking. Young lads who, in their minds, are just out having a lark, woman running late for work… traffic deaths do happen. Then, it’s the bloke who needs a little money and decides to burn his shed for the insurance. That one took two houses with it, along with an elderly woman who couldn’t get out of hers in time. We see a lot in this job, Greg, and, sometimes we forget when we stop some of our mates for a traffic violation or we hear about something going on with people we know that we can’t turn a blind eye. It’s our job to do what it takes to prevent things like what’s in that photograph from happening in the first place, even if it means turning a friend into an enemy.”

Lestrade tried so hard, but he felt the water roll down his cheeks at the thought of how people being stupid could cause… this. He’d done stupid things that could have ended this way, for fuck’s sake! And he’d never have been able to live with himself if he was the reason for this miserable, evil folder.

“From what I’ve heard, your… I suppose we could call them sons… are unique lads, but with good hearts. What we do keeps them safe. The same for all the other sons and daughters in this community. We are here to help, though how we do that isn’t appreciated all the time. That can be the hardest part… knowing what you do is for the best and you’re catching spit in the face for it. Now, hand me that folder, before you get it wet…”

Feeling his face burn with shame, Lestrade handed back the folder, hurting for so many reasons, not the least of which was humiliating himself in front of the person who certainly wouldn’t give him the job now.

“… the wife would skin me alive if her nephew’s big modeling job got dripped on.”

What?

“W… what?”

“The wife’s sister… her little boy posed for that. Oh, and was he ever a mischief, too. Acting like he was Sir Laurence Olivier doing a death scene in some Shakespeare play. Took about 50 snaps before I got one that actually looked real. Little bugger made me give him the other 49. I think he might be a bit vain.”

Having one’s heart and brain explode simultaneously wasn’t an experience Lestrade would recommend to anyone, not even for a bet.

“He’s… he’s not…”

“Dead? No. But, I have more folders than are decent of kids who are. Life doesn’t care how old you are when it visits you with trouble.”

“You…”

“If you’d had a wife, I’d have pulled out the photo of my oldest girl who’s just a little older than your age. She was nearly as bad as Eric for thinking she’d win a BAFTA. Every few years, we take a new set so I have something to spice up interviews because some legal bastard would probably have my guts for garters if I actually showed a photo from a real case to someone I didn’t turn about and hire.”

That kid wasn’t dead that kid wasn’t dead that kid wasn’t dead…

But he could have been.
“I… I see. S…suppose I cocked this up beyond repair, didn’t I?”

“Why would you say that?”

“I cried all over your folder!”

“Actually you missed the folder, but that’s beside the point. Every candidate is different, lad, and I have to think about what might be their weak points as well as what would disqualify them from the job. Young man like you… it’s maturity. Seriousness. And, frankly, caring. Look at Danny, for god’s sake! He was a few years behind me at school and, let me assure you, he was a proper prat that I wouldn’t let near this job. At your age, he would have looked at that photo and asked immediately if it was a joke, giggling while he asked. That doesn’t make him a bad person and I suspect that if I told him it wasn’t, he’d start to feel differently, but, we don’t always have the time for the explanation. A young man applying for this job… I need to know he’s affected by things like this, because I know he’ll immediately take the situation seriously and be on point from the very start. Nobody has to jolly him along to get him to see that this isn’t a joke.”

“Not much use if I’m bawling instead of looking for evidence or interviewing witnesses.”

“True, but I promise, though it’s a grim promise, that the sharpness will dull with time. And, it’s a grimmer part of my job that I have to keep watch for people who have dulled too much to be useful. Get cynical or complacent… get a bit unfeeling because why worry about this case when there will be more and more coming after. Then comes the little talk about finding a better fitting career and that’s never fun. You did well, Greg. And older man or a younger one just come out of the Army, I’d expect to be more stoic, but… you showed me what I hoped to see for someone your age, so don’t feel you’ve made a poor showing. You haven’t. My question to you is… are you still interested in the job?”

That was actually a good question. He’d known he’d see terrible things, have to deal with terrible things and, when he thought that photo was real, he’d felt like he’d been gutted! But… it was a good question for which he had an answer.

“Yes. Because it that was my Sherlock or my John, I know someone like me would see they got justice.”

The intensity in Lestrade’s eyes only cemented the confidence his soon-to-be superior had that the young man sitting in front of him would make an exceptional officer.

“An answer that says a lot, I believe. Well, I think that’s about all for today. You have your physical check scheduled?”

The interview was over? That was it? Was it foolish to be a touch hopeful? Probably so if he didn’t answer the fucking question.

“Yes, sir. Today, in fact.”

“Efficient. And you’ve got your exams tomorrow, which is also helpful. We are hoping to see someone in the job this week, so would that be a problem if you’re the one we chose?”

“No, sir, not at all.”

“Then, we’re done here. I’ll let you know one way or the other, Greg.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”
Lestrade rose, sniffed back the last of his emotion and extended his hand for a firm shake before he left the office. It was over! And he hadn’t... well, if the Inspector said he hadn’t muffed it, then he’d believe him, but... at least he hadn’t fainted or vomited all over the man’s uniform! Now, go home, give Mycroft a massive hug, give the boys a massive hug when they came home and hope the doctor didn’t find anything unexpected wrong with him. Part I was complete and, now, two more to go...

"Stop moving, mendicant! It is impeding my ability to monitor your heart rate."

One doctor and two nurses. How many people got this much attention for a simple health check.

"Your ears are dirty."

"Thank you, John. I’ll give them a wash as soon as we’re done."

"You’re going to have to dig deep. Almost like me getting soot out of my bum."

The doctor lifted the otoscope out of John’s hands and chose not to comment on the sooty bum, because (a) he’d known the Holmes family for a long time and (b) he had a grandson about John’s age and level of physical activity, so the comment didn’t really seem that strange.

"I believe I hear an arrhythmia. Fatcroft! I require an EKG machine to document this and study its progression, so I may have sufficient warning to order the embalming equipment to preserve the lackey’s corpse for extended study."

Sherlock now suffered the loss of his tool of choice, this time by Mycroft’s hands, mostly to keep them from around his brother’s neck.

"Gregory’s heart has already been pronounced strong and healthy, Sherlock, so I believe your diagnosis is flawed."

"Greg’s going to need a strong heart, lungs too, because he’s going to be doing a lot of running and it won’t be helpful to be chasing a burglar and have to stop and wheeze now and again."

Mycroft shared a look with his spouse that melted into the most tender of gazes since the strength, and softness, of his beloved’s heart had been the topic of a very tearful and difficult conversation when his spouse returned from his interview.

"No wheezing for me, you evil toddler. The exercise I get keeping you lot in line is more than enough to see me through a chase after a jewel thief."

"The peasant is delusional. Note should be made in his medical record. I will record it myself."

Lifting Lestrade’s chart away from Sherlock’s reach, the family physician then gave Mycroft the nod that now would be a good time to take little eyes away to find some other source of amusement.

"I am certain all relevant, and truthful, medical issues will be duly documented. Now, let us make a start on your schoolwork so that might be completed in time to inspect the cottage before dinner. My dear, we shall see you shortly."

"Intolerable! I have a score of tests I have yet to conduct!"

"And I didn’t get the chance to use the stethoscope!"
After another look was shared between doctor and husband-of-the-patient that set the standard agreement of what is broken is also purchased, Mycroft dropped the stethoscope into John’s eager hands.

“You shall have all the time you require to master it’s use, John, while we read your material for history class.”

Not happy with the attempted eviction, Sherlock and John vibrated in defiance against the three sets of older-male eyes until Lestrade, very likely weakened from his turbulent morning, felt his resolve crumble. A little.

“Go now and you can have that blood sample you want...”

Sherlock’s excited gasp nearly shook the room, but John’s irritation simply grew since he didn’t want any stupid blood!

“... and we can bring the football and kick it around a bit when we look at the cottage, because there’s a nice piece of land around it that would be great for a quick game.”

*John’s* excited gasp threatened the room once more and Mycroft used the opportunity to drag the two astonished boys out of the room so the rest of the medical check could continue. Then it would be Gregory’s suite of examinations before... the wait. Not that he had any experience waiting for a job announcement, but he could already predict the experience would be ferociously hard for his spouse to bear. Fortunately, the house was well-stocked with brandy...

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“This is a shack. The only person suited to live in such a hovel *is* your concubine, seacow.”

“Does it have a toilet?”

“Where are the telephone lines? I demand access to the shop boy whenever I require it!”

As Sherlock and John conducted their inspection of the cottage, Lestrade and Mycroft conducted theirs, noting that Mycroft’s mother’s assessment was correct. The bones were solid, but the skin needed a good bit of help to restore its beauty.

“Well, my dear?”

“I love it. It’s not too big that I can’t keep it clean and in good repair and... it feels right. Feels like I could be happy here. Sit outside with a good bottle of beer on a warm afternoon and... could I put up one of those bird feeders?”

“Greg’s old.”

“Thanks, John. And no, I just... my friend Ronnie’s mum has one in her yard and it’s actually fun to watch the little things flutter about, fussing at each other and twittering away with whatever they’re singing about.”

Mycroft wrapped his arms around Lestrade and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, before resting his chin on his partner’s shoulder. Without question, this was the correct decision for the man in his arms and it was his honor and privilege to make that decision come to life.

“You may have free reign to tailor the property to your satisfaction.”
“This mud hut is deplorable. Where are John and my bedrooms?”

“Feel that what you’re standing on, Sherlock? Say hello to your bed. Though… that does remind me…”

Mycroft squeezed his lover even more tightly to settle down the rising upset.

“We shall acquire furnishings once we are near completion of the rehabilitation work and you shall have final say on what is or is not appropriate for the space.”

“Mycroft…”

“You shall be renting a cottage, my dear, and I do believe those are often offered in a furnished state to prospective tenants. It is entirely normal and proper for this sort of rental agreement.”

Softly kissing Lestrade’s neck, Mycroft felt, rather than saw his lover’s pout and its death when Lestrade acknowledged the reason in the argument.

“You do have a point. Just the basics, though, right?”

“I would say the cottage should have all basic amenities provided by me, acting as Mummy’s agent, and the more personal, decorative touches would be at your discretion and funding.”

“Alright, that sounds fair.”

“Yay! Sherlock and I get our beds!”

“Not a chance, John. You stay here, you get blankets on the floor or a lie-down on the sofa. I’m not putting on an addition just so you two can have your own bedroom when each of your bedrooms are nearly the size of this whole cottage!”

“You don’t love us, Greg. Sad, but it’s true.”

Mycroft nuzzled Lestrade’s neck again and knew that if John fully understood the very depths of this man’s love for them, he would likely weep as heavily as Gregory did this very morning.

“Then you probably don’t want to play a little football with me, what with being unloved and all.”

“Football doesn’t care about love.”

“Sherlock, you done with your scowling and scorn.”

“I have a bounty more to bestow, but I can do that as effectively to the exterior of this epitome of squalor as the interior.”

“Love, you interested in a little ball kicking to work up an appetite for dinner?”

“A small measure of recreation sounds most delightful, thank you.”

And it would give his husband a chance to work off the new bout of emotion that he could feel creeping into this manly form. This was a tumultuous day for his Gregory and the addition of a small place in the world to claim for his very own was priming the emotional balloon to burst once again.

“Then let’s go. And, love… thank you. This is going to be amazing.”
Turning in Mycroft’s arms, Lestrade ignored the gagging sounds from the house mice behind him and kissed his lover soundly.

“You are most welcome, my dear. But, do not think this shall earn you my pity on the field of battle.”

“You and John against me and Sherlock?”

“I accept your terms.”

“Oh, this is going to be good…”

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And it was another visit to the cottage, this time an inaugural to-do list making trip, that followed Lestrade’s exams which, after his somewhat panicked preparation, seemed almost anticlimactic. The drilling Mycroft and Edwards put him through made everything else seem easy by comparison! But, now, it was the wait and it was already Thursday and…

“Gregory? You have been staring out of the window for nearly ten minutes and I must admit to a bit of worry.”

“Hmmm… oh, sorry love. I’m just… I know the Inspector said he’d call this week and the week’s not over yet, but…”

“You are becoming concerned.”

“I suppose. I know there were other people who applied and, even if Dad said I had a bit of an edge over the competition, that doesn’t mean someone else didn’t make a better showing, when everything was said and done. I did well on my exams, but I didn’t do perfectly and someone could have nudged me out of the lead with that or a better interview… it’s just hard, that’s all.”

“I understand fully and know, further, it has weighed on your mind every day since you were informed that your potential journey to your career began this week. I do have faith, though, Gregory. It would not be professional for the Inspector to fail to give full attention to each applicant, but all evidence does point to the most successful being you. Come, sit with me and…”

The ‘and’ was never realized as John ran into the room, looking like the devil was on his heels and, grabbing Lestrade by the hand, dragged the much larger boy out of the room, yelling for Mycroft to follow.

“Ah, the peasant has arrived. I will remember this refusal to disclose information and when I am established as the head of the scientific council that governs this ignorance-crippled nation, I will enact due retribution.”

Lestrade snatched the phone out of Sherlock’s hand and gave him the pointy finger of ‘you’re going to get it’ before taking a breath and adopting what he hoped was his most apologetic tone.

“Look, whoever this is, I’m really sorry for Sherlock. He’s…”

“A unique boy, as I said, but, I admit, I didn’t realize quite how unique. Good lord, but you have your hands full.”

His Inspector! Or, the Inspector, since this could be the call that closed the curtain on his dream.
“I’m so sorry, sir. Yes, he’s got his own way about him, but he stays mostly on this side of the arrestable line, so that’s one point in his favor.”

Please let that be an opening you’re willing to take, because I thought it was sort of clever and oh shite I’m babbling in my own mind!

“Well, that’s good to know, because, starting tomorrow, it’s you that’ll be arresting his little arse. In fact, I’m going to make that a standing duty. Well, we’re already into our second pint here at your dad’s pub, so come on and join us. Your mum says to bring the little buggers, too, because they might as well come to recognize the people that will giving them the bent eye from now on for their shenanigans.”

And, click, the call was over.

“Gregory? Is… is everything alright.”

“No, love. No, it’s not…”

The despondent feeling that swept the room was as dreary and cold as any harsh winter’s night and Mycroft steeled himself to be the man his lover needed to see him through this terrible time.

“First, the bastards started the party without us and, second, it sounds like a large one, so expect to live on porridge for awhile until your bank account recovers.”

While Sherlock and John shrieked in surprise, then began cheering, Mycroft took Lestrade in a hug that left his lover out of breath when it was over.

“Gregory Lestrade! You nearly gave me heart failure!”

“I just couldn’t resist. And there really is a party, which is sort of crap, in one way, since I start tomorrow, but, I won’t be the only one hungover, so that’s a comfort. I have a suspicion we’ll have a small crime wave, though, when the citizens see us shambling off to patrol, unshaven and wearing sunglasses.”

Two small boys latched onto Lestrade’s legs and gave them hugs, to accompany the kiss that Mycroft pressed to Lestrade’s lips, all three so full of pride, they needed a moment before they could do anything more than show Lestrade how happy they were for him.

“Then, let us be off! Oh, Gregory… this is… blast! Sherlock! John! To the car! We have a celebration to attend and you are free to eat chips until you can eat no more!”

Two squealing boys shot off towards the door, allowing for a more intimate kiss and a small moment for the lovers to take in the feel of the person they adored with the whole of their heart.

“I am deliriously happy for you, my dear.”

“I can scarcely believe it, but… I’m a policeman now, Mycroft. A real constable.”

“And no one is more deserving of the honor. I love you, PC Lestrade.”

“And I love you, Mycroft Holmes. Ready for a party?”

“I am most ready. And I shall monitor your behavior with supreme vigilance for any drunken antics that might impair your first day of work.”

“That’s probably a good idea. I have a feeling antics might occur.”
“I shall take Sherlock’s camera with us so Grandmama will have a record of the revelry.”

“You think she doesn’t already have them installed in the pub?”

“I… that is *not* an entirely impossible thing.”

“Then we’ll put on an especially fun show, just for her.”

“I am certain it will be appreciated.”

“And duly added to the family album.”

“I think tonight will merit one all to itself.”
Chapter 20

“Half the fucking village was here!”

Mycroft tucked his wildly grinning lover into the car, having first bundled the two near-sleeping boys into the rear and gave Lestrade’s cheek a peck before closing the door and moving around to get behind the wheel. It became very obvious, very quickly, that someone would need to keep a sober head for chauffeur duty, as well as to be responsible for seeing the new constable awake at the proper time to assure his first day of work started on a good foot. That was a duty Mycroft was honored to take, as his beloved was positively adorable when rousingly drunk, especially when surrounded by a legion of others of the same inebriated clan.

“Verily, that was the case. So many well-wishers, my dear… I could not be prouder of you and the clear respect you have gained from those whom you will now begin to serve.”

“It… fucking brilliant, it was!”

“Silence, peasant! I am attempting to sleep.”

“That’s Constable Peasant, you little bastard! PC Gregory Peasant, at your service! Ha! I am a lackey now – a real one! That’s fucking hysterical.”

Greg laughed and leaned his head over onto Mycroft’s shoulder as he continued with a soft chuckle, prompting Mycroft to pat said head gently while his lover continued to be amused at his own stage-worthy comedy.

“And we are all the safer for it. The lauds you received, Gregory… the testimonials and words of praise… I have never heard the like.”

“Did I… I cried there, a bit, didn’t I?”

Beautiful, drunken tears that were gladly shared by his friends and, very notably, Mother Lestrade, who needed a moment of Mycroft’s professional-quality there-there’ing to compose herself after a particularly emotional bout. That she had worried so terribly and for so long about failing as a mother, given their hardships, was a confession Mycroft would take to his grave.

“A tear or two, but they were unquestionably manly.”

“That’s a relief. Hate to be a weepy drunk.”

It would be a shameful pleasure to show his spouse the vast quantity of photographs that documented his weepy drunkenness and Mycroft looked extremely forward to seeing those particular rolls of film developed and processed.

“Regardless, I doubt anyone would view that to your discredit, given the veritable monsoon of tears that flowed through the evening and the immense joy of the occasion. And, I do believe you may lay aside your concern about the rise of the criminal element tomorrow morning, for I predict the most likely suspects shall not be in proper shape to perpetrate any mischief.”

“That’s true! Does that mean I can sleep in a bit?”

“No.”
“Just a little.”
“Nein.”
“Nine littles?”
“Nein as in German for ‘no.’”
“Oh… look at you getting intelligent and… lingual? Is that a word?”
“It is, actually, and correctly applied, in this case.”

Greg’s cheering was met with loud protests from the rear seat as the resident goblins registered their disapproval of any form of non-goblin merriment, as goblins are wont to do.

“I love you, Mycroft. I love you so much… I don’t have a word for it, so my lingual… ism? Icity? Fuck it… my linguality just failed me flat.”

“And I love you, Gregory, as well as your robust vocabulary.”

“Hurray! I’m robust!”

Mycroft again implemented head-patting protocols and turned the radio to a soft, soothing station, which quickly earned him three sleeping passengers. This was a stellar night, truly a stellar one… for all his own accomplishments, none approached the rewarding sensation in his breast from his Gregory realizing his dream. It would alter their family dynamic, that much was certain, however, he would not have the situation changed in any way.

Except, perhaps, a bit more wakefulness in his beloved spouse. Gregory was not light of weight and did not appear inclined to provide any assistance getting himself out of the car when they arrived home. Missing his first day of work because he had to see his doting, but not bred for heavy-lifting, partner to hospital with a broken back was likely not how his beloved wanted to begin his law enforcement career…

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“How many snaps are you going to take, Sherlock?”

“I must document your current condition thoroughly, so as to have proper comparative materials when you return in disheveled condition given the certainty of your downfall during your first day of employment. John, continue taking measurements.”

Fortunately, Lestrade was moving at a snail’s pace due to his well-remembered overindulgence at the pub, so John’s use of tape measure could proceed with precious little complication.

“Do you get your uniform today, Greg? Is it going to be hot? Today is supposed to be warm, so you might want to put on lots of deodorant so you don’t stink and make people upset they’re being arrested by a stinky constable.”

Mycroft simply stood back and watched Sherlock and John do what they could to make his spouse’s first day a successful one. And, in all likelihood, settle their own unease over the fact that their devoted guardian would no longer be in arm’s reach whenever they desired it.

“I’ll keep that in mind, John. Actually, I don’t know what’s exactly going to happen today. Probably filling out some papers, being shown where everything is and meeting those I haven’t
yet… I might not be out of the station at all, let alone have an opportunity to make an arrest.”

“That’s not good because Sherlock and I…”

John’s ‘oops’ face didn’t need to be seen, given Sherlock’s roar of frustrated rage.

“You are completely useless as a secret agent, John Watson!”

Mycroft and Lestrade shared a look that doubled as a negotiation as to who should start the investigation and who should go and find the headache tablets. Given, however, the bottle of paracetamol was currently in Lestrade’s pocket, the negotiation was an abbreviated one.

“John, would you care to enlighten Gregory and I as to the nature of what I am to assume is your secret mission?”

“Uh… no.”

“That was a shockingly wrong answer, so do try again and salvage what points you can from this quiz.”

“Ummmm… It’s … Sherlock knocked his head, you see, so you can’t believe anything he says right now, because he’s a bit mental. More than usual, that is.”

Sherlock’s began to mount his rather loud and polysyllabic response, then wavered since that would certainly spell doom for their operation. While he wavered back and forth mentally and his body vibrated to provide the necessary energy for the internal debate, Mycroft cleared this throat and turned his most pointed look at the boy whose mind was still mostly functional.

“I see. You would not, of course, be intending to make yourselves absent from school so as to perpetrate some form of chicanery in the village such that Gregory must clap you in irons.”

“Well…. noooooooo….“

“That is profoundly unconvincing ‘no,’ John.”

“It’s not completely a lie, though, Mycroft, because Sherlock was going to be clapped in irons and I was going to photograph all of it so he could show it to Mrs. Lestrade, if needed, as proof of child brutality so we could get those especially good biscuits she makes with the walnuts when she feels sorry for us.”

The level of surprise here was entirely naught.

“While I credit the creativity of your plan, I do believe your undeniable truancy would lose you what sympathy Sherlock’s incarcerated plight might engender.”

“Does that mean our plan won’t work?”

“It does.”

“Shite.”

JOHN WATSON!”

“Uh… I mean… drat.”

Apparently, a lecture needed to be delivered to the children, as well as several other parties, including
you, Gregory, current rough and manly laughter notwithstanding, about the proper use of language when tender ears were present.

“Much better. Now that you have taken physical inventory of Gregory’s measurements, kindly make yourselves ready for school and I will compose a note to the headmaster to fit you with a clichéd ball and chain to prevent any escapes.”

With Lestrade’s small bum swats as encouragement, the two highly-agrieved boys began trudging up the stairs and Mycroft took the moment of peace to, one final time, inspect his lover’s appearance and award him a kiss for his typically-exceptional presentation.

“I’ll talk to dad, love, about the language.”

“Only your father?”

Lestrade’s highly-exaggerated ‘who else?’ expression made Mycroft reach into his partner’s pocket and steal back the headache pills.

“You can’t mean me, Mycroft, I’m a paragon of… vocabulary!”

“You are a paragon on masculine beauty, however, we might remember the children are entering the age where they shall begin to assert more independence and further test the limits set by our rules and guidelines.”

Realizing the true and penetrating horror of what just said, Mycroft gladly accepted Lestrade’s comforting hug.

“I’m leaving.”

“Gregory! Do not abandon me in my darkest hour!”

“Turn on a lamp.”

“How shall you compassionately serve the public if you cannot spare a supportive thought for me?”

“I’ll fake it.”

“I am overcome with woe.”

“Save some for Sherlock, he’ll probably want to run tests on it. I’m off now, love, so enjoy your day. I suspect I’ll be home at a reasonable time since I won’t be out chasing criminals or writing reports on the criminals I’ve already chased. Mum will certainly want an account of the day, but after that, a nice dinner at home and some telly?”

“That strikes me as a wonderful plan, providing opportunity to relax and you shall have abundant time to share the stories of your adventures.”

“I’m hoping that doesn’t include arresting Sherlock and John. You know they’re going to try and I will be set on them when it happens. That’s already part of my job description.”

“I will impress upon them the necessity of making your first official day as a constable a successful and undistracted one.”

“Go with the ball and chain anyway. Their good intentions tend to vanish once they cross the threshold.”
Giving Mycroft one last kiss, Lestrade took a deep breath and stepped across said threshold to make a start on his future. Get all the this’s and that’s in order and be ready tomorrow to start working to make his community a safer place. This was bloody fantastic! The hangover couldn’t be described that way, but you paid prices for good fortune and that was a laughably small one…

This one wasn’t.

“Not one fucking day could you two wait?”

The two small boys in school uniforms standing by the roadside with signs saying ‘We are Murderers’ had drawn quite a police presence, but the honor of taking the heinous killers into custody had been left to the person summoned from the station with only a police car and hat to prove that he was actually empowered to haul the soon-to-be-convicts to jail. AND who was now being photographed as he bundled the two small bodies into the waiting police car for the full lights and sirens treatment back for interrogation, all of which could have been avoided except the other cops found it highly amusing and Sherlock demanded that a malefactor of his caliber be properly treated so the public would recognize and acknowledge his criminal potency.

“Why? You two are not five years old! How can you think this is something a sane person would do?”

Not that the two boys were paying attention as John was busy waving at all the police officers and other bystanders, while Sherlock hastily scribbled notes in his observation journal. Lestrade sighed loudly and looked for… yes, there was one of the lads from the local newspaper and their photographer. This qualified as big news for their happy little hamlet and was getting the coverage it duly deserved. Mycroft was going to be thrilled. Sherlock’s criminal potency quote would probably run as today’s headline.

“Lackey! Why are you not porting us to your house of horrors! This is John’s normal time to require a toilet break and I assume you would prefer it not occur in the rear seat of this donkey cart!”

Lestrade sighed again and was utterly delighted he’d been sent out alone with the car so that when he crashed it into a tree, none of his brethren would be killed along with him. No use blackening his name further with the fine constabulary… they’d certainly make sure his headstone had a rude saying on it and nobody wanted to enter the afterlife with that trailing behind them…

“This is disgraceful. That my tax dollars fund this coop for bedraggled chickens appalls me.”

The farm imagery was running rampant today, it seemed…

“You don’t pay taxes, you little bastard.”

“It is a philosophical point, menial, and one you are, obviously, too academically impaired to recognize.”

“I’m hungry, Greg. When are we going to eat?”

“No food for you, evil little criminal. At best, I’ll toss some stale bread into your cell and give you a cup of water from that pond near the church where all the ducks gather to have a chat and a crap.”
“Brutality! I knew it would scarcely be an hour before the talons of the baton-wavers dug into your flesh.”

“Lestrade, are these thugs giving you a problem?”

Of course his Inspector was there to greet them. Really, nothing else was possible.

“No, sir. No problem at all, sir.”

“I demand an apology! A thug is a common miscreant and that certainly does not describe me!”

“Sherlock really doesn’t like to be mistaken for common, Mr. Policeman. It gets him…”

John’s pantomime of a person losing their mind was difficult to differentiate from a person with a bat in their hair, but the Inspector got the point.

“I see… being uppity is something else we’ll add to his charge sheet. Remember what I showed you about processing an arrest, Lestrade?”

“I believe so, sir. If not, I’ll ask.”

“Good lad. Now, I’ll leave you to your suffering, I mean, your duty. Cell Two is the least comfortable of the lot, for your information, and I think there may be a rat living in there, too. Probably in the mattress, but rodents are clever buggers, so you never know where they might be hiding.”

John’s gasp was met by a solemn nod from the older man, who strolled away to continue having a laugh at his newest constable’s predicament. Oh, and couldn’t forget a phone call to Lestrade’s mum to tell her she just won ten quid from her scraggly ex-husband. Man actually thought the little buggers would give Greg one full day of peace, but, after meeting the hellions, it was just confirmation that Danny Lestrade was a stupid, stupid man. Lizzie would be happy to relieve him of his money to buy herself a little something special. Like ear plugs from when Sherlock and John stopped in for a visit…

“Just stand still!”

Apparently, a small camera was safe, but a larger one brought out John’s runway instincts and they were already into minute ten of trying to get one solid photo appropriate to give to Grandmama so she had something to hang next to the family portrait over her mantle. At least Sherlock’s venomous glare had matched well with the placard of numbers he’d had to hold, which was actually the telephone number of the petrol station a mile or so along.

“I want this to look good! People look through the photos to find criminals and I don’t want them seeing my picture and it’s an ugly one!”

“I don’t think attractiveness is important to criminal behavior, John.”

“It is if the magistrate thinks you look handsome and decides to be nice to you because of it.”

John had lit on a very important observation that would remain entirely unremarked upon at this young and tender stage of his life.

“That’s not the way it works. Come on, you bad lot. Fingerprints now.”
“Hurray!”

“Fingerprints can’t be handsome, John.”

“Bollocks!”

“Oh god…”

“You are incorrectly performing this procedure.”

“No, Sherlock, I’m not.”

“I beg to differ. You have squashed my fingers flat and distorted the image. You should gently roll my fingers to perform a proper fingerprinting.”

“That’s not how I was shown.”

“Then you have been instructed by a dunderhead.”

“I’m doing it right.”

“Pfft. Observe! Here, notice how clean and measurable are the papillary ridges when I use the proper technique, as opposed to the undecipherable mass of smudged ink you perpetrated upon this unsuspecting fingerprint card.”

“Yeah, yours does look better than mine.”

“I accept your recognition of my superiority and shall instruct you in correctly documenting my and John’s fingerprints. We shall then do our toe prints.”

“No.”

“I counter with yes.”

“I counter with I know how far you walked to get to your confession spot on the road and I don’t want to smell the impact on your feet because of it.”

“You believe that was not considered? You think me inefficient and sloppy of thought! Nay! John! Present your feet!”

John jumped into the chair at Greg’s new desk and held out a foot, which was quickly minus one shoe as Sherlock removed it and drew out a small insert that Lestrade knew wasn’t part of the original construction.

“This is my proprietary formulation for a foot-odor reducer. I infiltrated this piece of foam with my formula and voila! John’s feet are both fresh and lacking in repellent perspiration.”

“John’s feet are a touch minus some bits of sock and… are they fizzing?”

“What! Oh… yes. Perhaps there are some refinements to be made, but there is no odor! You cannot deny the wind-fresh fragrance wafting towards your nose.”

“It smells a bit like diesel, actually.”
“I… oh. That trounces John’s standard foot odor, so I claim success!”

“My feet are tingling.”

“Everyone off with their shoes!”

“I shall not tread the floor of this sty barefooted!”

“I’ll find you some socks, Sherlock”

“I shall only accept silk. Do not insult me with your coarse, policeman’s cotton. I suspect the makers of your uniform also provide garments for prisons and madhouses, since the quality of individual is really much the same.”

Was the pub open? Would Dad deliver? He would, wouldn’t he? Come right over with a fresh pint or six. That’s what dad’s were for…

I’m in agony!”

“Shut it, Sherlock.”

“You type as if nine of your fingers are paralyzed and the other is suffering an involuntary spasm.”

“Not true.”

“John! Demonstrate to the peasant the correct method of typing.”

“Right! See, Greg? Right finger and left finger. Use the right finger for the keys on the right and the left finger for the keys on the left. It’s easy!”

“Ugh… you are as slow and plodding, John Watson, as the dogcatcher you are purporting to teach. My agony is doubled.”

“if it makes you feel better, John typed ‘criminal genius’ for your arrest charge.”

“It does, actually.”

“Glad I could help.”

Lackey! John is priming to spew feces as a volcano would its lava!”
Just six eensy-weensy pints of lager… it wasn’t too much to ask…

“When is lunch?”

Greg closed the door on the cell and shared a glare with Sherlock before moving a few steps out of visual range and leaning back against the wall. Give them an hour with a few, occasional scratching-rat sounds and maybe, just maybe, they’d learn not to play silly buggers with the police. Especially this police. As in the person standing there with fingerprint ink on his clothes and two pairs of fizzing socks and shoes in the rubbish bin next to his desk. Probably should call Mycroft, but… no, let him continue to think all was peaceful and calm in the world and he could use his own lunch break to chauffeur the criminals home for their second round of finger wagging. Right now, it was time for a nice cup of whatever might be available and a quiet sit to leaf through the new set of manuals and regulations he’d been given to read. It would be lovely, even if, when he may have used John’s toilet break to phone Dad, the wicked bastard had said no, he wouldn’t bring beer. Didn’t love his son one tiny bit and having his own miserable hangover was not a proper excuse for this degree of neglect…

“Oh, do pardon me, young constable. I believe it is here I might collect the heinous murderers apprehended this morning by your valiant police force?”

“EDWARDS!”

“Oh, do you recognize me, sir? I admit it has been awhile since my days as a film star, but it is good that you have an appreciation for enduring beauty.”

“What… how are you here? Why are you here?”

“It seems Madam was telephoned by the prisoners and, as I was already en route to deliver certain documents to your pre-fiancé, I was dispatched to tend to the situation. Are the miscreants still in their cell or have they chiseled their way through the mortar with their teeth and affected an escape?”

“You… how did they get a phone?”

“Black magic?”

“That fucking wouldn’t surprise me! Wait here…”

Lestrade stormed back to the cell area where he caught the briefest glimpse of Sherlock’s curls quickly dropping from the level of the window in the cell door.

“How did you two make a phone call?”

“As you were sufficiently derelict in your duty to leave your desk for tea and a pointless conversation with another of your incompetent tribe of club draggers, John implemented the puppy-eye protocol on the feeble-minded sergeant that remained and we secured access to a telephone. Grandmama will surely, herself, be sharpening the axe blade and interviewing executioners for the one to most efficient and effective at severing your head from your neck.”

“You wanted to be arrested, remember!”
“I am now bored. You are of no further use to me.”

“AAAARRRGGGGHHHHH! Out! Out of there, both of you!”

Skipping like normal, happy children, Sherlock and John made their way out of their cell, though they came to a crashing stop seeing Edwards standing in wait for them.

“What is he doing here?”

“You tell me, Sherlock, you’re the one who called Grandmama.”

“I… she was supposed to order the leader of this mongrel pack to release us!”

“And just who would that be, young man?”

Sherlock gasped and whirled, looking surprisingly sheepish at being caught out by Greg’s Inspector.

“That is my business.”

Of course, the sheepishness didn’t last very long.

“Person’s entitled to privacy, that’s certainly the case. Now, do I hear someone’s come around to collect you hardened ne’er do wells?”

Edwards waving politely from Greg’s desk made Greg groan and the boys pout harder.

“That is untrue. That man is a paedophile come to inflict his perversion on John and myself.”

“Oh. I see. Better look into that…”

Greg’s groan grew louder as his Inspector walked towards Edwards who smiled as graciously as he always did.

“Good day to you, sir. That yappy one says you’re a paedophile. We take such things very seriously around here. Might I see your license for… paedophilery?”

Sherlock’s rage shook the windows and Lestrade reached over to steady a pencil box from having an unhappy drop to the floor.

“Dear me, I don’t have it on my person, but if you allow me a moment I can retrieve it from the boot of my automobile. Our constabulary prefers it be affixed to the burlap sacks with which we snatch our victims so they may more easily observe them and avoid the need to use what precious little time they have in their extremely busy day to inquire into the matter.”

“Very efficient of them. We might have to adopt that policy here. Lestrade, why don’t you escort these two outside and help our friend with his sacks. Check that license thoroughly, though, and let me know if it’s out of date. Relicensing fees are always welcome in our coffers and that’s another thing I can teach you today, after we’re done with the topics of extorting local merchants and holding elderly people’s pets hostage for a ransom. Always good additions to the police assistance fund.”

While Edwards nodded sagely, Lestrade grabbed two small collars and began marching the bailed felons to the waiting vehicle.

“Unhand me, barbarian!”
“Not until you’re in the car, in a sack, with the top closed by a few heavy chains.”

“Do we get to ride in the boot again? That was fun, actually, when we wore our disguises to take the train to London to visit you and Mycroft.”

“Sorry, John, but part of your sentence is that you don’t get any fun for the rest of the day or… a lot of days after this one.”

“And, I shall ensure that very thing is the case, Constable Lestrade, as they shall be in my custody until Sunday. I believe a bracing schedule of rock breaking and the treadwheel should do very nicely. Cook is also well practiced at preparing mealy bread and cholera-carrying water, so the culinary aspects of their visit shall not be neglected.”

Sherlock and John’s agitated shrieks were blessedly silenced as the car’s rear door closed with them on the other side of the glass from the older members of the party.

“You’re taking them to Grandmama’s?”

“Madam decided that, given their rather excitable turn of mind, that the remainder of the introductory period to your job should be experienced with somewhat less… fuss. However, you are on early hours for Sunday, so that allows time to come to collect the children and enjoy dinner with Madam before returning home.”

“Ah… and how do you know that?”

Edwards tapping the side of his nose provided both no information and all the information Lestrade needed before the man took a deep breath and opened the driver’s side door, which allowed the ritualistic goblin incantations to fill the street and a few others beyond that. As they drove away, Lestrade could only hope that Edwards had snacks and entertainment planned because Sherlock and John would happily spend the rest of the day in someone else’s jail if Sherlock’s boredom increased and they decided that jumping from a moving car, stealing their own vehicle and leading Edwards on the world’s most slow-moving chase was a brilliant way to liven up their day…

Swallowing down a mote of worry, Lestrade then returned inside the station, feeling no surprise when his Inspector was standing waiting for him.

“Felons properly disposed of, Lestrade?”

“Yes, sir. And… I just want to say I’m sorry, I’m very, very sorry for their foolishness. It wasted time and resources and that’s not acceptable, I know, so I’ll make very certain they won’t do that sort of thing again.”

“Hmmmmm…”

“That sounds bad…”

“Hmmmmm…”

“Or not?”

“Hmmmmm…”

“Can I have a clue?”

“Well……”
Not one thing about his supervisor’s expression changed, but Lestrade suddenly had a light come on in his head that leaned him slightly away from expecting an immediate sacking.

“You’re happy those little bastards were… bastards!”

“Let’s take a look at the situation. I was able to assess you handling a call out, interacting with suspects in public, following the procedure for an arrest, managing a pair of highly troublesome perpetrators and writing the relevant reports according to police guidelines. I’d say that unholy pair put you through a more grueling test than I could have mustered and on your very first day, too. Admittedly, they were your unholy pair, but not everyone would have that degree of patience and that’s absolutely required for this job. You’ll handle a lot of individuals who are as or more bothersome than those boys, and who hurl nastier and more physical abuse than your Sherlock, bless your soul for not having locked him in the cellar yet. So I would say I gathered a great deal of pertinent information pertaining to your continued employment.”

“Oh. Did I… pass?”

“I’d say you did. Always room for improvement, but for only having a quick overview that wasn’t really meant to do more than let you see how things generally run, you did an admirable job. Might want to practice the fingerprinting bit, though. Did you bring a change of shirt, by any chance?”

Lestrade sighed as he looked down at his fingerprint-decorated shirt and shook his head.

“Something I have now learned is important.”

“Very important. Always have a change of clothes on hand because all sorts of things happen on this job that send your lovely garments to the cleaners or the bin. And, I don’t remember you arriving without socks…”

“That’s a long story. Just don’t look in the bin or you’ll wish you hadn’t.”

“Noted. Now, I think it’s time for your lunch break and if you sneak off to tell your dad, and his ale, about your day so far, nobody will be the wiser.”

With an affable pat on Lestrade’s shoulder, the most senior officer of the station returned to his office and started laughing. There was no better test of an officer than trial by fire and that poor boy just walked through a little slice of hell. But, he made it through unsinged, so a fine addition to their ranks he would make. And these photos of Sherlock and John would make a fine addition to his own files. Always good to have tangible examples to show to young miscreants and prove that, yes, a terrible fate awaited you if you continued to steal sweets or break windows at school. Seeing those two ready for a life of hard labor might teach them to mend their ways and listen their mums…

Of course, though, he couldn’t show them to his own nephew. The lad would be livid that he had competition for the position of region’s top police model. Worse, he might explore these interlopers, which could create a truly satanic trio that would bring the plague of locusts and eruption of boils and sores on the ones the locusts hadn’t gotten around to eating yet. Children were simply a joy, which was why alcohol was invented, something Lestrade was coming to know very well, in all likelihood…

“Dear heavens, Gregory… please tell me you are still employed?”

His lover’s slightly-ravaged appearance honestly worried Mycroft, given the earful of details he had
already received concerning Lestrade’s day.

“Oh, no problems there. Inspector Gregson thought it was simply hilarious, I suspect, and he said it served as a test of my abilities. Apparently, I passed.”

Mycroft let a large, relieved breath exit his lungs and took his partner in a consolatory hug.

“I am sorry, though, you had to suffer the children’s nonsense on your inaugural day of work. I felt certain the lecture I delivered before they left for school, as well as confiscation of their rather substantial supply of tools and equipment for whatever havoc they were hoping to wreak, would quash any further machinations but I was, apparently, completely incorrect.”

“They certainly had a busy day, that’s for sure. Grandmama wasn’t upset, was she?”

“Oh no. Quite the opposite, actually. Her thinking was much along the lines of your superior and will be very happy to hear that you successfully evaded child-inspired career collapse.”

“Maybe she’ll give me a prize on Sunday. We are commanded for dinner, in case you weren’t informed.”

“I am well aware of our obligation and thoroughly unsurprised at the fact. However, you do know what exists in the meantime?”

“What?”

“A household where Sherlock and John are absent. Tonight, tomorrow night… whatever shall we do with such large expanses of vacant time?”

When his Mycroft was feeling lustful, there was no more beautiful sight in the world and Lestrade mentally straightened his shoulders in preparation for a highly eventful night.

“Spot of dinner, a nice fire, some, shall we say, preliminary exercises, then move onto something more naked and vocal?”

“Gregory, have you acquired telepathic powers?”

“Sometimes I can tune you in just like a radio. Like right now, you’re thinking you want me to kiss you and make your toes tingle while I do it.”

“My very thoughts! Shall we begin?”

“I’m all yours, love. Prepare for tingling.”

“Is bonus credit awarded if something else besides my toes begin to tingle?”

“I think that can be arranged. I’m nothing if not generous for tingle-based activities…”
Chapter 21

Police work was fucking hard! Admittedly, it was harder for him than the others because he was still learning and they made certain he had all the less-than-enjoyable calls, such as drunks who were almost guaranteed to vomit on you and domestic disturbances where both parties would rather yell at you than each other, but… it was fantastic! Yes, it was thankless at times and he’d already had one self-imposed smoke break to cool his temper after writing up one young arse for speeding and having to listen to his solicitor-father yell at him on the phone for half an hour because of it, but this had been the right choice for him. Between the headaches were the real victories, the people you helped, and that made everything worthwhile.

Of course, he was also learning how hard it was to have time for the ones he loved. Work had to be done when you needed to do it and where the hands were on the clock didn’t make a bit of difference for that. Staying a little late here or coming in early there was something he had to do, especially as the new face and sometimes the little was a lot, such as last night when he didn’t see home until nearly 1:00 am because of a break in a farmer’s fence that had sheep blocking every road to the north, as well as invading half the gardens in the village for a late-night snack. Mycroft made him take two showers to get rid of the smell before he was allowed in bed.

Now, it was Sunday and, as Edwards predicted, he had the early hours so it was dragging himself back to the station after what felt like twenty minutes of sleep for a, thankfully, quiet day before taking the wheel of car and starting it in the direction of Grandmama’s. Then turning around because he’d forgotten actually had to go back and collect his partner and change out of his uniform.

“My dear, are you certain you do not wish me to drive?”

“You’ve got all those papers to read and one thing I’ve learned very well during my long police career is that driving while distracted doesn’t end on a positive note.”

“I can set them aside with scarcely any trouble. Behold! The deed is already done!”

Mycroft pointed proudly to the folders he set down on the floor and beamed at his lover who shook his head at the expected nonsense.

“You said those had to be properly studied before you talked to Grandmama today, so put your beautiful nose back into them and I’ll handle the driving. If I truly get too tired to be safe, I promise I’ll tell you, alright?”

“Might we make a stop at the first available location for a strong coffee for you to drink?”

“I will stop for coffee.”

“Then I accept your terms.”

“And I’ll make certain they offer an acceptable cup of tea for you.”

“You are an angel descended from heaven to grace my life.”

“Angels don’t do what we did last night, though, I suspect.”

Mycroft’s naughty smile as he remembered the rather… acrobatic… sexual escapades that had celebrated their last child-free evening was a thing Lestrade was proud to behold. The additional lack of sleep for him was entirely worth the cost.
“Then I have no idea why they term the property ‘heaven.’ “

“Maybe the food is good. Now, back in your folders, you lazy thing.”

“My mind is rather turned away from work at the moment, I’m afraid.”

Oh, that was a lusty look. They didn’t have time for lusty looks!

“We don’t have time for me to stop the car, Mycroft.”

“Lunch is years away and Grandmama will not mind if we arrive only in time to lift our spoons.”

“Mycroft…”

“I shall not be able to sit quietly with my burning arousal, Gregory. I simply shall not. Do not tell me you shall be so cold, so callous as to permit my suffering, my dear. Your heart cannot be that black and hard.”

Pouting! Mycroft was adorable when he pouted. And did it lustily, too. That was too many instances of lust in one afternoon to ignore. Luckily there was a very lonely lane up ahead with some convenient shrubbery along the sides. Hopefully, any local constables would take pity on one of their brethren and his randy partner and simply leave them, and their randiness, in peace. There wasn’t anyone around to offend except trees and they were fairly good at keeping their opinions to themselves…

“Where have you been! John and I have already petitioned the Geneva Convention to address our prisoner of war status!”

Maybe Mycroft was a little psychic, because the tidy glow Lestrade was experiencing after their impromptu stop was nicely smoothing over Sherlock’s standard hysteria.

“Not sure how you’re claiming there’s a war going on, you little bastard, but if you hand-wrote the petition it won’t matter much since even those cryptographer chaps can’t decipher your scribbles.”

“Black and white, you incompetent flatfoot. We have been forced to view films presented in monochrome!”

Apparently they were some of those film noir types, too, because there was just a touch of fedora in Sherlock’s voice and John was glowering like a first-rate henchman.

“Black and white, Greg. You gotta bust us out of this joint.”

Edwards must enjoy torture. He was brilliant at it!

“After a little grub and a snootful of hooch, we’ll blow this dive and grab a few simoleons while we’re at it.”

Sherlock and John gasped while Mycroft politely applauded his partner’s patois and Greg took a little bow. While growing up, being home alone after school were made a lot happier with old films on the telly.

“Cheese it, Sherlock! This goon’s gone goofy!”
Two squealing boys ran back into the house and the non-squealing couple that remained steeled their shoulders for the day to come.

“They are most rambunctious today, it appears.”

“And you’re hoping Grandmama pulls you away right after lunch and doesn’t let you go until we’re ready to leave.”

“Moi?”

“I looked the mug over and felt my headache start to rise like the aftermath of a bad meal. He was ginger. Gingers are always trouble.”

“Come along, Gregory. We shall find for you something soothing to drink.

“I could use a snort of scotch.”

“Of course you could. And I could use three.”

Sherlock and John loudly protested Grandmama having their mug shots hung in the library, John on the basis that he wasn’t handsome enough in it and Sherlock on the basis that it was too small for the magnitude of his criminality, but hung they were and Mycroft marveled that the woman he’d grown up believing so dour actually had a scathing sense of humor and was delighted to perpetrate it on her family.

“Most excellent. Your shame on display for posterity. Christening Gregory’s first day as a policeman with such heinous acts… truly you are both of the thickest Holmes blood.”

“Mum’s already learning the bus routes to the prison so she can visit these two when they’re making their amends to the Crown.”

“Very efficient of her. Now, I shall have to borrow your partner for awhile, Gregory, but do make use of the house. There are games and films galore to enjoy with the convicts so do make merry as you choose.”

With a loud, in-stereo groan serenading her as she left, Grandmama motioned Mycroft to follow her and follow he did, only after a kiss to bid his lover goodbye. Then another because an afternoon of games and films with the restless boys could spell his Gregory’s doom and no man should meet his grave without a final taste of the one he loved.

“Well, you miserable goblins, what shall it be? Tiddlywinks? Conkers?”

“Ugh, you are as old and tedious as Edwards.”

“So, no?”

“We’ve already had to play quoits and skittles, Greg. We even had to play with a whip and top! Had to play or we didn’t have any chocolate! Not one piece until we played for at least an hour.”

“And you turned it into a gladiatorial battle, so don’t tell me you didn’t have fun.”

“John Watson is supremely incapable of using a spinning top as an effective method of devastation, but I handily mastered the task.”
“He kept sending my top crashing into things!”

“It is not my fault that your arms are too short for effective use of a whip and you have no knowledge of basic geometry to formulate a trajectory-based strategy as a countermeasure to my strikes.”

So, Victorian games and old films… that should keep those two criminals on the right side of the law from now on.

“Well, let’s see what else you have. Maybe there’s something from the 20\textsuperscript{th} century you can do find to keep you busy. There’s always your swords though…”

This squealing was as loud as the last and the running was in the direction of the trunk that housed the various replica weapons that would, most likely, occupy the rest of today’s recreational time. Luckily, the day was warm and lungs full of fresh air was just the thing to put some wind in his sails. Sleeping was now, officially, his favorite thing in the world and he would return to that happy state of being as soon as he possibly could. Maybe he’d ask Mycroft to drive home so he could have a little nap. Strap Sherlock and John to the top of the car and stretch out in the rear seat for a refreshing sleep. There was surely a length of rope on hand to do the strapping… he’d look for that at some point after lunch…

__________

“Oh.”

Mycroft smiled as apologetically as he could and began to rethink the specific hiring of a nanny for the two goats currently engaged in a head-butting contest with a pillow affixed to each of the heads in question.

“I am so sorry, my dear, but the situation is rather critical and a skilled eyes on matters is required.”

There was nothing about returning to London that Mycroft found gladdening and everything he found deadening, but there was really no choice in the matter. And then…

“I will also have to visit college for a short period to sort out a few details relevant to my end-of-term, arrange lodging for next term, discuss topics of study… no more than a few days, at most. If it is three, in fact, I shall be surprised.”

“Ok… ok, that’s what anyone would have to do when going away to school. Get all that managed early so you can start the new term prepared. It’s alright, love, it truly is. I… I was just surprised, that’s all. Sort of forgot that we’ve been on a very strange and chaotic holiday and all holidays have to come to an end.”

“I, also, have let the reality of my life slip my mind and do know that Grandmama was very aware of the, shall we say, bursting of our bubble. I do believe, most sincerely, that any assistance you require from her, for anything that may arise, she will provide unhesitatingly, so do ask. I know that is difficult for you, however…”

“However, my stubborn self has to learn to take help when it’s needed and I have to drag my head out of my arse and ask for it. Grandmama, Mum, even Dad, god help us all… I’ll have to be smart and ask for a spot of child minding or taking care of something that I can’t manage… I’ve got to learn that and now is a fantastic time to make a start.”
Mycroft took his partner in a warm hug and wished their lives could be simpler. However, wishing was not having, so he would need to rededicate himself to being aware of opportunities with his spouse upon which to capitalize and create those opportunities when he had been away too long from his lover’s arms.

“And I shall neither forget the lessons I have learned nor make the same mistakes that nearly tore us asunder. I shall remain here tonight and leave in the morning, however, I shall use some of that time to make various arrangements for the rehabilitation of the cottage. I will forward to you all information and contacts so you may oversee the work and tailor it to your expectations.”

“Just the major issues, right? The smaller repairs I can manage.”

“Though it is your privilege to decide the limit of the contracted work, do keep in mind, my dear, that you are not possessed of bountiful free time. Please do think carefully about taking on projects that shall serve only to overwhelm you.”

Lestrade scowled slightly, but he knew Mycroft had a point. It sounds like a simple thing, a bit of painting or plastering a hole in a wall, but that all took time and time was something that, now, was in very short supply.

“I’ll keep my smart hat on my head when I talk to the lads who’ll do the work. If it’s going to be too much of a burden, I’ll let them manage alone.”

“Excellent. And I do know you are hopeful for some time to instruct the children in basic home repair, so I am confident that you shall leave aside some delightful projects that will keep all parties busy and entertained.”

“I’ll have Sherlock find out if the cottage is radioactive or something while John and I do a spot of painting. And Sherlock can test if the soil in the garden is best for flowers or vegetables while I’ve got John loading rocks to help me repair the garden wall. I think there’s enough to keep them happy for awhile. Their term is over soon, anyway, and I can hand them a list of things to do while I’m working if they start to get bored.”

“Very prudent. The children will certainly want to plant their territorial flag on your small island of serenity and the sooner that is accomplished the happier they shall be.”

“True. Alright… say our goodbyes and we’ll see you again… sometime?”

“Sooner than later, is my earnest hope.”

“Mine, too. I’ll gather the hopefully-reformed criminals so we can get home before it’s too late. We all have an early morning ahead of us and I, for one, would like to see my bed a bit earlier than normal.”

“I shall impress upon the children, most seriously, the need for you to have a restful night’s sleep.”

“Wager on how well that impression is going to stick?”

“No, for we both know the likely outcome, but is good to keep up appearances.”

“And why not, pray tell?”
“Because, Sherlock, I’m fairly certain you need training or something to handle explosives and you’re probably too young to sit the course needed for your certificate of… explosive mastery.”

One child happily tucked into his bed and one child planning to cause mayhem with high explosives. A fairly normal night, all things considered.

“And you know this because?”

“I admit I don’t know that for a fact, but common sense is usually a good guide for things like this.”

“Then your point is a failed one for the menial class has not a whit of common sense, relying on the crudest of emotional responses and basest of wants to steer their behaviors and actions. To expect even the most rudimentary of applied logic or analysis and pattern recognition, is laughable. Which I shall now demonstrate.”

While Sherlock laughed his most scornful laugh, Lestrade took the distraction as an opportunity to daydream about a lovely kennel out behind the kitchen that housed a snarly, piss-on-your-leg puppy with shaggy dark hair and evil little eyes.

“Definitely time for bed, Mr. Funnyman. I’ll stay here tonight, but I’ll be leaving earlier than you and John. Can I trust that you’ll be dressed and ready for school without your driver having to tie a lead around your neck and drag you to the car?”

“The man is paid a wage. He should be tasked to earn it.”

“He’s tasked to drive, not drag.”

“Semantics.”

“If I have to explain to your headmaster why you’re late for school, don’t expect the explanation to be one that will save you from staying after class.”

“I find nothing unacceptable about that. The lock on the science laboratory door is exceedingly simple to circumvent. If you shall not purchase the nitroglycerine I require, then I shall formulate it myself.”

“I will be calling the headmaster tomorrow morning and putting him on alert that you’re especially loony right now and you need one of those bells like they put around a cat’s neck so people know what you’re getting up to during the day.”

And his notably high level of loony was likely because of Mycroft leaving for London. Neither Sherlock or John had taken the news especially well and the drive home had been rather quiet, which was the one time he actually wanted their noise, because anything to help him stay awake would have been welcomed with open arms. Fortunately, he’d found some loud, thrashy music on the radio or they might have spent the night on the side of the road so a fiery death wasn’t the end of their nice day in the country.

“I would simply insert something into the bell to immobilize the clapper. If you hope to thwart my machinations, kindly put actual thought into your obstruction.”

“Yeah, that was a little weak. What can I say? I’m tired and… I’m tired.”

The ‘and your brother’s gone again’ really didn’t need to be said since it was weighing on Sherlock’s mind, too.
“You mean you are feeble.”

“As a Weeble.”

“What?”

“Never played with a Weeble?”

“Has anyone? What a preposterous name.”

“I’m surprised, actually. It’s sciency… in a way. Never fall down, no matter what you do to them.”

“I find that difficult to believe.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if we could find you a few to experiment on, since you can’t have your demolition supplies. You and John are due a visit to the toy shop and we’ll see what we can find.”

“Hmmmm… I shall consider it.”

“Most agreeable of you. Now, bed.”

“I am not fatigued.”

“I am.”

“Then make yourself absent from my bedroom, curl into your basket in the kitchen, scratch your fleas and sleep.”

“Not until you’re in bed. My confidence level that you’ll actually do that on your own is… what’s lower than low?”

“Pfft… it is as if you believe I am a harbinger of doom.”

“That’s not a bad description of it, actually. Rather not see the dawn surrounded by roof timbers and bits of window glass around my bed.”

“I have no experiments that, currently, pose any danger to the structural integrity of the house.”

“Lovely. Go to bed, Sherlock. If you’re truly not tired, you can read awhile.”

“I have no books of interest.”

“Yes, you do. About three stacks of them that I can see without even turning my head.”

“I said of interest.”

“Get some paper, then, and you can make a list of what might interest you. Next time we visit your favorite bookseller, we’ll see if anything matches.”

“And purchase waddles.”

“Weebles.”

“Even more ridiculous. But… very well.”

Sherlock clambered into bed and waved for Lestrade to obtain his paper and pencil then, after a
moment, to several books that held absolutely no interest but might serve to keep his legs warm in the intolerable frigidity of his bedroom. With that child sorted, Lestrade finally dragged his depleted body to bed and wasn’t surprised that, when the alarm sounded, it felt as if he’d not lain there for more than a handful of seconds. But, the cook already had thick-as-pitch coffee ready and breakfast that was perfect for a hard-working man, so stepping out of the house actually saw him with some spring in his step.

Which was good because Monday mornings, apparently, were feisty ones. Someone got about last night and nicked a few bicycles, there was a touch of graffiti on the traffic signs that was especially rude in nature, a few of Saturday night’s sheep had been found wandering again and enjoying their own hearty breakfast on the vicarage lawn and then… disaster. Depending on your perspective.

“You have to be fucking with me, Greg!”

“Sorry, Mum. See that tree there? And that fence post? If you go between one and the other in less than three seconds you’re speeding. You did it in two. Lawbreaker.”

“That is not a pencil in your hand, Gregory Lestrade.”

A pencil with its point thoughtfully licked as I prepare to write up this grievous infraction of the traffic code.

“I believe it is, ma’am. Thank you for noticing.”

“I’ll box your ears, young man, don’t think I won’t.”

“Threatening an officer of the law is a very serious offense, Mrs. Lestrade. Comes with prison time, I believe.”

“Don’t you act official with me, Greg! You slid out of this body and I’ll stuff you back in if I have to!”

“Grievous, and disgusting, bodily harm. Oh, they’re going to go hard on you, ma’am. Know a good solicitor?”

“You write one thing on that pad of yours, Gregory, and see how quickly my phone fails to answer when you need someone to keep a watchful eye on those demon spawn you call children.”

“Making note that the perpetrator is now making… no, proffering, sounds more official… highly threatening threats. Not that I’m too worried because Dad will be happy to take extra child-minding duty. He adores having kids his mental age in the pub to play with.”

“And if I ask that farmer whose sheep you rescued for a few bushels of especially moist dung to fill your father’s flat with, he’ll have to live with you until the cleaning and de-scenting is complete. Which will be a LONG time.”

“More threats! One of those hardened criminals, I see… who’d have thought my own mum had gone so far to the bad. Tsk tsk tsk… Mycroft’s going to weep when he hears of this. Inconsolable, he’ll be, to say nothing of John. Such a sensitive boy… he’s going to suffer mightily that his gran has her own mug shot in Grandmama’s library.”

“Only because mine would look prettier than his.”

“That is true, the prisoner makes a valid point.”
“I’m driving off now, Greg. You get in that foolish police vehicle and chase after me again and you’ll regret it for the rest of your admittedly short life.”

“Are you going to continue with your scofflaw ways?”

“Did you just say scofflaw?”

“Proud of me?”

“Scofflaw and proffer in one day. Mycroft’s rubbing off on you.”

“No! No sexy talk about me and Mycroft. Not allowed.”

“What’s wrong, Greg? I think it’s a grand thing. The two of you are such a good couple, rubbing off on each other time and time again. Each of you getting your own thrill from something the other’s gone and rubbed into you. Bet you smile all day after a good rubbing.”

“Will you at least promise not to drive so fast on roads that I’m monitoring?”

“You mean this one?”

“Yes.”

“Fine. No speeding on this road. Today.”

“Move along, ma’am.”

“Thank you, officer.”

Lestrade watched his mother spray dirt and rocks as she peeled away and began to understand better and better how she ever hooked up with his father in the first place. One day they’d both probably be sharing a cell and wouldn’t that be a lovely family portrait to add to Grandmama’s growing collection…

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“Oh… look at my boy. So official and serious in his uniform. Throwing a pint down his throat like it was the last one on Earth doesn’t spoil the look one tiny bit, either.”

“Thanks, Dad. And, for your information, I am officially off duty and can have as many of these lovelies as I choose.”

“Got your car?”

“Why?”

“I’ve got two little chimps outside doing something or other with… something or other, and you can give them a ride home, provided you’re in fit condition. If not, you can have a sleep upstairs and the small, not-drunk ones can have a nice night in my bed. I’ve slept on enough sofas in my time that another night added to my score isn’t going to make any difference.”

Maybe not tonight, but having a bed to sleep in if he had a fun night with his mates, without his Mycroft as his driver, was a very good thing to keep in mind. It would be a tragedy to have to arrest himself for driving while intoxicated.

“And they’re here, why?”
“Your mum wasn’t home when they stopped in to steal biscuits, I mean, pay a visit, so they
decided to pedal here to see what trouble they could get into. It’s a blessing, Greg, a true and utter
blessing, seeing those cute little faces throw open the door and march in here like they’ve got crowns
on their heads.”

“And how much have they eaten already so the cook gives me the bent eye when they don’t
want any dinner?”

“John would have space in his stomach for dinner even if he’d just eaten a roasted ox.”

“That’s true. He’d eat Sherlock’s portion, too, so I suppose that’s one worry I don’t have.”

Something in Greg’s voice set his father’s admittedly sputtery and slightly miswired radar on alert
and he drew another pint for his son and set it down in front of him.

“Missing your fiancé already?”

“Yeah.”

“Sherlock and John said he went to London for a bit. How long is he going to be gone?”

“No idea. Could be a couple of days, could be a couple of weeks. Or more. That’s the problem
with the work Mycroft does. It’s not on a regular schedule and he can’t predict how long anything is
going to take. He’s going to get next term sorted out for Uni, too, so that’ll add another few days to
the tally.”

“What exactly does Mycroft do, anyway?”

“Important things. Things that affect lots of people. Not just here, either, but in other countries.
I don’t get details, too secret and sensitive, but now and again he can talk in a general way about
what he’s been doing and… it’s incredible.”

“That’s the vaguest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“I know! But, it’s the truth. I suppose that, with time and when we live in London, I’ll pick up
more bits and pieces to have a better picture of it all but, for now… that’s as good as it is.”

“That’s definitely what you’re planning – live in

Oops. Forgot that Dad didn’t know that. Forgot that it was highly desirable that Dad didn’t know
that.

“Uhhhh… yes?”

“Either you’re sure or you’re not, Greg.”

“I’m sure… Mycroft needed a place to stay when he was in London and a hotel just wasn’t…
Grandmama had a house that she gave to us so he’s got a private place to stay.”

“You actually own a house? And, if Rowena gave it to you, it has to be brilliant.”
And now he’s getting excited. The scheming will start in approximately 0.2 seconds.

“It’s a nice house. Mycroft and I are comfortable there.”

“How big?”

“Dad…”

“What! It’s perfectly normal for a father to be curious when he learns his son has a proper house in London.”

“Curious, yes. Plotting, no.”

“I’m not plotting.”

“You’re so obviously plotting.”

“Why would I be plotting? What could I possibly be plotting about?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Taking a trip to London for the free food and lodging while you wreak havoc on Mycroft’s local.”

“Greg… I’m hurt.”

“No you’re not.”

“Ok, I’m not, but I wouldn’t make myself a bother where I wasn’t wanted.”

“Those sad puppy eyes don’t work on me, you bastard. I’m immune to that after… John.”

“He’s a professional! Oh, he turns those sad little eyes on me and he’s got sweets money in his pocket and a new football to kick about.”

“Well, don’t expect either from me and don’t expect to pay a surprise visit to London and ask Mycroft’s where’s your room.”

“How many rooms you have?”

“DAD!”

“You think you’d be happy with the idea of your fiancé having a bit of company while he’s all alone in London.”

“No no no.”

“You’re a hard man, Greg. Which probably makes Mycroft very happy, if you know what I mean, but…”

“No sexy talk! Why do you and Mum insist on making my insides squirm?”

“We love you?”

“Bollocks.”

“We love bollocks? Well, Lizzie does, but I have to admit they’re not really my cup of tea.”

“You are hereby prohibited from talking to me for the rest of the day.”
“You’re off duty, so you don’t have any prohibiting powers. Drink your lager, son, and reflect on all this authority going to your head. Then we’ll talk more about my new holiday home and what my suite looks like. Hate to arrive and have my pyjamas clash with the drapes.”

Greg wept a wealth of fat, rolling tears into his fresh pint and wept even harder when Sherlock and John strode in from the door of the pub’s kitchen, wet and covered in what looked like mud and… hopefully more mud.

“We fell in the mud.”

Thank you, John. Any worry about being beset by hallucinations has now happily been laid to rest.

“That both fell in the mud.”

“Yeah. It just… sort of happened.”

The fact that Sherlock was suspiciously silent had Lestrade and his father sharing look, which doubled as negotiation as to who was going to take the piglets upstairs for a thorough washing. The need to keep Greg’s uniform clean finally won the day.

“Alright, you loony little chimps, upstairs with me and we’ll pop you into the bath to get that mud and… that doesn’t smell entirely like mud, lads… whatever you’ve found off of you while your dad minds the bar. Greg, get back here and start drawing pints like the good son you are. No special prices to your mates, either.”

That being said as Greg’s friends strolled through the doors and let out a laugh seeing their uniformed comrade with a death grip on his pint and the small muddy heads peeking up from the back of the bar.

“Wonderful. I get a free one, though, right?”

“One. You get one. Can’t feed these two little buggers and keep you in lager if I want to pay my rent.”

“You don’t pay rent, you own the entire building outright.”

“You’ve gone sour and cynical, son; the job’s already taking its toll. Better talk to your Mycroft about some comforting, and sexy, chatting on the phone while he’s away or you’re going to shrivel up like an old prune. Come on, muddy monkeys. Papa Danny will see you fit for polite society and, afterwards, if I can find you something to wear, maybe we can take a walk to Harry’s fish and chip shop. I could do with a bit of cod and since your dad has things covered here, we’re free for the evening. Wave goodbye to Greg, lads.”

As Sherlock and John smugly, and wetly, waved to Greg while they climbed the stairs to Danny’s flat, Greg marveled that he could now add serving drinks to his ever-expanding resume. Truly, he was a versatile and talented individual. For instance, he’d most likely be able to demonstrate his upset-tummy soothing skills later tonight as Sherlock and John tried to digest the aftermath of their meal. Harry was ever-so generous with his portions and, with those two little pleading faces, he’d give them enough to feed an army. Which John would just take as a challenge he was determined to win…

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“Owwwwww….”
“Just close your eyes, John, and relax a little.”

“Don’t rub my stomach so hard.”

“I’m not even touching you.”

“Oh. Then the fish is swimming!”

Sherlock’s contemptuous snort was countered by a groan as his own swollen belly chided him for his pooh-poohing John’s distress. The chips stuffing his innards were clearly allied with their piscine partners.

“Let that stomach medicine mum gave you work its magic and I wager you’ll feel better before you know it.”

Though he would long feel the sting of his mother’s laughter as he dragged her out to the car to see the dying children, who held out their arms piteously and demanded biscuits though one bite would explode them like a landmine.

“I know things pretty fast, Greg, and I’m not feeling better yet.”

“Think happy thoughts. And you might not want to pay a visit to Harry’s anytime soon, so your belly can have a rest.”

“Can’t. The fish was too good.”

Dad would pay for this. Leaving him managing the pub while he swanned off to play grandfather, then taking back the pub when the moaning and groaning reached operatic proportions. Though, he had to admit, it was actually a typical grandfather-y thing, so there had to be some concession that Dad was behaving like a normal person for a change.

“Maybe next time, then, not quite so much of it.”

“Too good.”

“You ate a whale, John. I honestly think Harry had a whale that he fried up specially for you. And had his son go to the fields to dig a farm lorry’s worth of potatoes for the chips.”

“Your haranguing is souring my disposition, plebian! You should, instead, be thanking us for providing a much-needed boost to this mud-hut village’s virtually nonexistent economy. I strongly suspect that John and my purchase this very night shall provide the year’s salaries for all of the disgracefully-inept policemen and sufficient alcohol for the standard level of destruction of their cirrhotic livers.”

Now was not the time, perhaps, to orate aloud about the quantity his police brethren could drink, especially when they thought the temporary pub manager might be coaxed into making their tabs vanish into thin air. Luckily, Dad returned in time to keep his non-rent payment safe for another month.

“Your suffering is appreciated by me and my liver. Now, you want to stay here tonight or do you want me to carry you each to your own beds?”

As if that question needed to be asked with the heavy eyes and leaden bodies of the two boys lying very comfortably in his and Mycroft’s bed. Couldn’t argue with the decision… for some reason, being in your parent’s, or parent substitute’s, bed made sickness and scares far more easy to bear.
“I am ensconced.”

“Which means what?”

“Dunderhead.”

“That, at least, I understood. John, your vote? Oh, you’re asleep already. Alright then, luckily you’ve left me half an inch on this side of the bed, so I’ll have the best rest of my life. Let me get my pyjamas and… I’m talking to myself.”

Two snoring boys, looking very much like the cherubs they weren’t, warmed Greg’s heart and he made sure they were comfortable settled before getting himself ready and joining them. He was up early again tomorrow, but then he had an off day before starting on nights. Maybe he could do something with the boys when they were done with school. Do the school run even, giving Driver a break, and take them for a little shopping and an adventure or two. Of course, he also had to start handling the repairs for the cottage, Mum’s car needed a few adjustments, not that you’d know it from her driving, he’d told his mates he’d try to join a match soon, there was laundry in his room nearly the height of a mountain… might be time to invest in one of those planning helpers that let you chart out your day and your week and your month… or just ask Sherlock to make one. He’d do a very thorough job of it and pre-fill in the slots he wanted for his and John’s looniness. That was efficiency even Mycroft would be proud of and, with this new life he was facing, efficiency was something he was going to have to learn very quickly.

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“I’m going to punch him!”

Lestrade grabbed onto John’s collar and held tight as John continued trying to march into battle.

“We don’t solve our problems with violence in this family, John.”

His own mates would take care of that when the arsehole was bailed and that was good enough.

“The bumpkin is correct. We shall devise a more cunning and fiendish plan to bring about the villain’s downfall.”

“No downfalling, either. Things happen on the job and the law has ways of handling it.”

Assaulting an officer, even if it was only a busted lip, was not looked upon favorably by the magistrate, let alone the other members of the police force.

“He punched you, Greg. Sorry, but that demands satisfaction.”

No more period films, of any form, for the boys. Ever.

“I’ve known that berk for a long time, John, and he’s been trouble since the beginning. Him and his mates have gotten in more than one dust up with me and mine, so why he got angry that I’d arrest him for stealing rather than let him go is something I’ll never understand. But, it’ll be handled properly, don’t worry about that.”

Because George would have the lads waiting when Jason, heretofore known as the target, made his likely way towards the pisshole he typically raised a pint in to have a little conversation about throwing a punch at one of our own, especially when that other person isn’t supposed to hit back unless the issue is ‘fully and demonstrably one of self-defense.’ Of course, the Inspector hinted that the self-defense portion might be a bit liberally interpreted, but pummeling a wanker after he’d tossed
one punch… that might have been dodged if the constable in question receiving the punch hadn’t been distracted by a bug landing on his neck, which was not a thing to add glory to the story…. no matter how large or ferocious the bug could be made out to be… and didn’t really qualify even under the Inspector’s rather generous guidelines.

I still don’t like it. I think we should phone Mycroft.”

And listen to his lover go completely round the twist? Somehow, that didn’t sound like the most winning of ideas.

“I agree with John Watson, though the confession pains me like taking a voulage in the abdomen. Fatcroft must be notified so he might have the blackguard flogged and pilloried for his vile conduct.”

Family love was the greatest thing in the world, even if it got a bit bloodthirsty at times.

“We can phone Mycroft tonight, but let’s not worry him about this. It happens, not often, but now and again, so we can’t get too upset and make more of this than it is. Besides, I’ve been bruised and banged countless times by my mates, and you two have added in plenty of your own, so think about that before getting all medieval and punch-happy.”

“Lying to the seacow… what a thing to tarnish the already dull and oxidized finish of your held together with floss and tape betrothal.”

“First, we’re not betrothed. Second, floss and tape aren’t metal so they can’t tarnish. You must be tired, Sherlock. John take Sherlock and see he has a good nap so he remembers his science.”

“How dare you insult my scientific proficiency, stall mucker!”

“I dare when you’ve muddled something a little primary school child should know.”

“I…”

“Was trying for something clever and it turned around to bite you?”

“I… perhaps.”

“It’s alright, Sherlock, that’s only one failure against the scads of successful convoluted and wordy insults you’ve hurled. I think we can say your record is still excellent.”

“Hmmm… I suppose you are correct. Statistics argues against a continued probability of 100% success with my witty and erudite invectives, and, though it is painful to accept, one cannot entirely discount the predictions of a thorough and properly applied mathematical analysis.”

“Very wise. How about, instead of a nap, you and John go off and do a little of that mathematical analysis or start a new experiment? I promised I’d stay through a little telly after dinner, so I suspect, by then, you could have something interesting to show me if you got started now.”

“I suppose there is work to be done on refining the release system for the missile deployment attachment on our gliders.”

“John, yours need missile work, too?”

“Actually, yes. Well, first I have to rebuild my glider, then I can work on the bomb dropping part.”

“Ok… why do you have to rebuild yours?”
“It didn’t drop its bomb.”

“And?”

“The bomb exploded.”

“What! You two aren’t… you’re supposed to be dropping rocks!”

“Rocks don’t explode, Greg, so you can’t load them into a bomb-dropping invention. It’s a… perversion of vocabulary.”

John’s bright smile at his cleverness just made Lestrade groan all the louder.

“Oh god… no bombs! I… I shouldn’t have to actually say that. No sane person should actually have to say that, but I’m saying it now and I hope I’m saying it loudly enough. NO BOMBS!”

“Sherlock, did Greg say something?”

“I heard naught but a nearly-indiscernible buzzing, much as an agitated fly might offer if it’s dung pile was wrest from its tiny grasp.”

“One, one single bomb… if I see one explosive of any form attached to anything in this house… no, anything in this region… neither of you is going to see a chip for the rest of your lives.”

“I think that would be hard, since you can find chips everywhere and you can’t be everywhere at once, Greg.”

“That’s very well-reasoned John. I’d be proud of you, if you weren’t such a little bastard.”

“Thanks! Doctors have to think a lot, so I’ve been practicing.”

“It shows. So, upstairs with the both of you and no bombs.”

“You anti-intellectualistic edicts are tiresome, lackey.”

“You thirst for chaos is tiresome, Sherlock.”

“John, make note of the lackey’s attempt at wit.”

“Note being made!”

“Score it appropriately.”

“Scoring it… a two!”

John’s notebook was quickly becoming the stuff of legends. Lestrade was actually surprised he hadn’t stabbed himself yet with the pencil he kept in his pocket at all times to record Sherlock’s prize-worthy feats of observation.

“A two, huh… what’s your scale, lad?”

“I… I don’t know. I just thought ‘two’ sounded good.”

“Sherlock, why don’t you teach John a little of that mathematical analysis while you’re upstairs so he can make a proper scale for rating things like humor and insults.”

“Yes, instruction is obviously required. Come, John. We will begin immediately with a cursory
overview of number theory, then move towards more complex concepts.”

“Yeah, have fun with that, John. You can use that little make-a-note pad of yours to write down all the important stuff. I’m sure Sherlock will check it over to make certain you’ve not left anything out, just in case.”

Greg met John’s glare with a little wave that continued as Sherlock began his lecture while dragging John upstairs towards the fairly sizeable blackboard in his laboratory. Yes, John, thinking is very important. For doctors and police both, something you’d best not forget… just like he couldn’t forget that the rest of this week was going to be bollocks. Late hours every day and not a bit of time for the these two, besides, if he was lucky, a chance to stop in at breakfast to say hello. Luckily, Mum had finally taken to giving each boy a key to her house and dad… well, dad’s door was always open, so there would be eyes on the boys, even if they weren’t his. Of course, one pair of those eyes had the potential to cause more trouble than the child-minding was worth…

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“Ugh… I need a pint.”

John climbed the stool and laid his forehead on the bar, with Sherlock repeating the action only a moment later.

“Hard day at school, lads?”

Four bottles of cold, sugary beverage were opened and poured into two pint glasses and placed next to the heavy heads, which each got a good ruffling of hair by the bar owner.

“Every day is hard, Papa Lestrade. It sums to a lot by the end of a week.”

Very much how adults looked at the work week, too, but Danny decided John was too young for that bit of disillusionment to add to his burden.

“John is correct. The sum of the drudgery and inanity becomes weighty by week’s end and your accursed progeny has completely shirked his duty to provide our deserved entertainment. There is naught but woe on the horizon and it is soul-sapping thing to behold.”

“Greg’s working, is he? Poor things… you could do some work on that cottage of his. I looked it over and there’s lots of little things you could do to make it nice, while some of my mates manage the larger problems.”

“Menial work? Are you, in an astonishing display of age-, low-IQ- and alcohol-inspired mental impairment suggesting I perform manual labor?”

“I suppose I am.”

“You are an imbecile.”

“Best-looking one in Britain, though. So, helping Greg get his house in order is off the list… what about a good film? I may have a few quid in my pocket for a ticket and then the other of you can sneak in through the fire door like we did when we were young.”

“Seen it. Greg took us last week and they haven’t changed films yet.”

“Oh… sorry to deepen your disappointment, John.”
“It’s alright… woe is me.”

“Both of you’ve got woe now? That’s a sad thing. I’d be a poor grandfather, wouldn’t I, if I let that stand. Let me check something…”

Each boy peeked one eye up from the bar top and then sat up smartly when they saw Danny consulting the mysteriously-scorched clipboard that held the work schedule for the pub.

“Let’s see… hmmm… let me make a phone call.”

As the two boys shared a grin of glee and guzzled their drinks, Danny had a quick conversation that ended with him grinning and rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

“Alright, Susan, that’s the tall lass that sneaks you sweets for me when your dads are watching, asked for some extra time to earn a bit for a few car repairs. Seems like I’m now free tonight, Saturday and at least the first half of Sunday. Fancy a trip to London?”

The pub denizens had quickly become accustomed to the variety antics from the new owner’s adopted grandsons and didn’t spill a drop when the pressure wave from their ear-splitting shrieks crushed the atoms in the air.

“LONDON!”

“Might as well, with you two being woeful and pathetic. As soon as we see us packed, we can be off.”

LON… wait. You do not have a vehicle. It is the HEIGHT of villainy to…”

“Calm down, Sherlock. How many cars you got in that garage of yours?”

Sherlock and John shared another grin and climbed down from their stools to dash upstairs and begin the packing process for one of their trio. Said member of the trio used the moment of peace to square up the accounts, write a quick cheque for a delivery scheduled to arrive in an hour, then chased after the two boys who had already dragged out his entire wardrobe and started tossing it in his single piece of luggage.

Oh, this was going to be brilliant… little trip with the chimps and a weekend in London in what had to be an amazing house with a son-in-law who could fund their fun with the loose change in his pocket. Really, life didn’t get better than this… best phone Lizzie, though, and let her know there wouldn’t be any gremlins peeking through the windows with their spy equipment, so she could have a few friends over, or one special friend which would be even better, and no worries about evidence of… anything… making it about the village. Really need to get onto finding a bloke for his Lizzie, though… another good reason to go to London! Lots of fellows there in need of a smart, independent woman in their lives. Maybe Mycroft knew a few. They could talk about it over dinner…
Chapter 22

“Driver!”

“Yes, Lord Chimperson?”

“John and I are parched. We require libations.”

Danny looked in the mirror and smiled at the two boys, stretched out on the enormous rear seat like Cleopatra reclining on a sofa, faces a myriad of colors due to the various snacks they’d been nibbling on the journey. And how fortunate was it that a petrol station loomed, since they’d likely have something wet to salve their lordships’ thirst and that of the big beauty he was driving, as well. Luckily, Sherlock had nicked a few, well, a lot of quid, from Mycroft’s safe, so keeping all the beauties fed, watered and petroled was proving an easy thing. Mycroft surely wouldn’t mind, either; it was his own brother, for pity’s sake! Can’t let your brother go hungry and thirsty. That was immoral, plainly and simply immoral…

“Of course, sir. Couple of cold bottles of libation will be yours very soon, sir.”

“And crisps! I’m hungry, too.”

“You want crisps, Lord Apesham? I’ll see what I can do. Spot of chocolate as well, sir?”

“Hurray! I like being a Lord!”

Something that had Sherlock’s nodding approval as he tossed a biscuit purchased at the last petrol stop into his mouth. This was how a scientific genius should be treated and, finally, he had found someone who properly understood that very simple fact.

“Alright, then. Lord Chimperson, some… what was that you called it, lad?”

“Specie!”

“Right! Some specie if you please, sir.”

Sherlock huffed and peeled a £50 note out off the top of the stack of wealth that sat on the floor of the car, along with assorted sweets wrappers, empty crisps and biscuits packets, various important scientific observations, as well as his and John’s shoes, and handed it to John to pass along to their manservant.

“Thank you, sir. I’ll see what this station has on offer that you gentlemen might like. Not too much, though, because we’re not far out of London and I’m certain you’ll want a good dinner once we’re there. Think Mycroft’s got food in the house?”

“Flabcroft is in residence, therefore there will be food in abundance. Unless he has eaten it all. Hmmmm… I had not considered that. Regardless, there is certainly some lackey available for grocery delivery and lackeys aplenty in the proximal environs to offer their appalling foodstuffs if payment is proffered.”

“Got lots of restaurants in the area, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Good! If there’s nothing to cook, then we’ll have a nice meal out and maybe Mycroft can join
“Then there shall be no food left for the rest of us.”

“Your brother’s not a hefty fellow, Sherlock. I know because I’ve seen him and even a fine suit can’t hide it when you’re portly. But, if you’re really worried, we’ll order extra starters so you can fill your face in case the rest of the meal fails to arrive.”

“That is acceptable.”

Danny made an ‘ok’ gesture and pulled the immaculately-maintained Bentley S1 into the petrol station, which caused something of a stir with the two employees who came out to have a look before tending to the needs of the thirsty and crisps-craving occupants, something which Sherlock took pains to make as regal as possible by only lowering the window of the rear seat far enough to retrieve his and John’s offerings and then closing it with a thunderous ‘this is barely adequate’ sniff of entitlement.

“Well, that’s done. You two ready to continue on or is a quick race to the loo needed?”

“I would immediately contract cholera, typhus and dengue fever if I but took one step out of the vehicle in this hygiene-forsaken area.”

“John? What about you?”

“I don’t want cholera! I’ve seen pictures of that and… no, I’m not even sure if I’d want to have that if I was a doctor and actually had medicine to treat myself.”

“Moving on, then! But, if I see a nice hedgerow, want me to pull over for a spot of map reading while you two avoid cholera and plague and the like?”

“Sherlock, can you get cholera from hedges?”

“It is highly doubtful.”

“Then, yeah… I could use a hedge soon.”

“Hedges it is! Then a straight, well, rather meandering, shot to London. You lads know how to get where we’re going once we’re there?”

Sherlock and John looked at each other with an expression on their faces that indicated an acknowledgement of the small weakness they had identified in their plan.

“No answer? Thought that might be the case. Next phone I see, I’ll give Rowena a ring. She’ll know and won’t spoil our little surprise for Mycroft.”

Sherlock popped a handful of crisps into his mouth and thought a moment.

“Yes, she will doubtless find the situation highly amusing. Grandmama’s sense of humor emerged from its centuries-old cocoon with a notably astringent tone.”

“That a bad thing?”

“I… I actually find I rather admire it.”

“I’ll tell her that; I’m sure she’ll appreciate it greatly.”
“Yes, I suspect she shall…”

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What a damnable day! Were there any individuals of intelligence remaining on the planet? If so, steps should be taken to protect them and their genetic line, for the nitwits currently wearing the various mantles of national and international authority were certainly not to be found among that hallowed group. All he wanted, now, was a large brandy, a hot bath and a protracted phone conversation with his spouse… oh and a soothing fire, which was kindly crackingly away merrily for him…

…in…
…the…
…hearth…

“Mycroft! There’s our government man!”

Daniel!

“Yeah! Mycroft can come with us for dinner!”

John?

“I demand to dine in the finest restaurant in London!”

Sherlock!

“What… what are you doing here?”

Mycroft’s valise dropped onto the floor as he stared at the three bodies in his sitting room, two on the floor with a variety of women’s fashion magazines in hand and one on the sofa, enjoying a glass of the… my brandy!

“Have a seat, Mycroft… we were just relaxing a bit before we went out to explore this lovely corner of London you’ve got. I have to say… this house is smashing. Exactly what I imagine when I think of a rich bloke’s home here in the city. Really, you couldn’t ask for better.”

“I… why are you here? How? How are you here?”

“John and I were being crushed by ennui.”

“Pitiful little things they were, too… you should have seen them, lad. Just sad and pathetic and overcome by en… that… and well, what was I supposed to do? Had to take steps, didn’t I? This was great steps, too, in my humble opinion. Lovely drive and…”

“You… you do not have a vehicle.”

“We rode in your big silver car!”

Thank you, John. The vintage and utterly pristine Bentley simply adored being conscripted for goblin transport. The interior… Driver was going to murder him…

“Oh… and… Gregory permitted this?”
The shared look of ‘uh…’ had Mycroft racing for the telephone.

“Gregory!”

“Mycroft! Fuck me, where have you… I left messages with… I have no idea but, they’re missing! I stopped in to see how school had gone and… Sherlock and John have scarpered off and nobody knows where the fuck they are… they’re never out this late on their own! I’ve checked everywhere! Oh god, they could be anywhere, anything could have happened…”

“Here! They are here, my beloved. Perhaps not long for the living world, but they, currently are safe and well.”

“Fuck… oh thank heavens… I was about to get the lads on the force out to look for them. How’d they get to London?”

“I shall allow you one guess and provide the hint that you must not have paid sufficient attention when you did your checks, for you failed to notice the conspicuous absence of the owner of their favorite post-school chips location.”

“DAD! I… I knew it! I knew those smiles on those fucking faces at the pub when I asked where he was meant something! Lying bastards… said he was off doing a deal for glassware. I’m going to kill him! Nobody will blame me either, not going to be convicted for that one, not a chance.”

“I shall see you fully protected from any legal prosecution, worry not about that. And I shall have a very stern word with the malefactors about this extremely serious situation.”

Said while glaring his most ferocious glare at the offending trio, which made even Sherlock gasp in surprise.

“Good. Just… give them a hug for me, will you? Not Dad, because fuck off to him, but Sherlock and John. I was so worried, love…”

As if the tidal wave of emotion in his husband’s voice was not sufficiently telling…

“I will, my dear. And I will ensure, absolutely ensure, that you have access to me for emergency communication in the future. Never again will you have to hope for a message to reach me should something worrying occur.”

“I’d… I’d really appreciate that. It was… well, it was frightening me, in a strange way, that something awful could happen and I couldn’t even let you know!”

“It shall be my first order of business tomorrow. Are you still on duty?”

“Yeah, actually. Fortunately, being on patrol means I can go about checking on matters, even if it’s two lost boys, and I’m still doing my job. But, I should probably get back to paying attention to things like burglars and traffic violations before someone begins to question why I’m earning a wage. Find out what’s going on for me will you? I’m off duty at 11:00 pm tonight and I know you’ll still be awake, so phone me and fill in the details?”

“I shall. Until later, Gregory.”

Grinning slightly at his spouse’s small promise of making their upcoming conversation worthwhile for more reason than an update on the family criminals, Mycroft then turned at renewed his glare at his guests and kept it in place as he stalked towards them, liberating the brandy from Danny’s hand
and downing it in a single gulp.

“I am extremely cross with all of you. Gregory was worried near to the point of incoherence and was poised to mobilize the police force to search for the missing children.”

“Why? We left a note. Didn’t we?”

Danny looked at Sherlock and John who pointedly failed to meet his eye, making Mycroft sigh heavily in frustration.

“You entrusted the leaving of a note, which in and of itself is supremely insufficient for notifying Gregory about your departure, to these two? Are you completely addled? And, as for you, Sherlock and John… failing to do as asked was absolutely irresponsible and, shall I say it, cruel. Gregory was… he was beside himself with worry! You know he loves you deeply and to find you missing? Have you any idea the fear he experienced? The pain? I am most disappointed. Truly and profoundly disappointed.”

At least the perpetrators appeared contrite. Simply marvelous… was it foolish to wonder if age would temper the behavior of the children? Yes, it was wildly foolish as the leader of the pack was nigh on forty and showed no signs of maturing into a competent adult at any point in the foreseeable future.

“We’re sorry, Mycroft. We… Sherlock and I didn’t think Greg would know we were gone until tomorrow because he wasn’t supposed to visit and works late hours tonight…”

“It’s not their fault, Mycroft. You’re right… I should have given Greg a ring and told him what was going on, even though he would have been a misery because he would have said ‘no’ and spoiled everything, but… Rowena thought it was a great idea so…”

“GRANDMAMA! Grandmama knew… I need more brandy.”

John shot off of the floor and filled a fresh glass with a measure of spirits that would be lethal for a man less provided with the fortitude of familial irritation and gave it to Mycroft with his biggest smile.

“Here you are. And we’ll even go for dinner to your favorite restaurant so you’ll have something you especially like to eat and…”

A quick look between the conspirators earned John a nod of agreement.

“…we’ll pay!”

Oh no.

“Might I ask… it’s my own money, isn’t it.”

“Uh….”

“Joyful.”

“We didn’t take it all, though. Just… some.”

“Your hording of lucre, like an over-fattened dragon, is disgraceful and I duly liberated as much of the imprisoned banknotes as I could, given the imminent arrival of the maid to pretend to dust your so-termed private office.”
“Thank you, Sherlock. That was most edifying.”

Two faces smiling ingratiatingly at him and… one Sherlock… started Mycroft’s head shaking despondently and he wondered if there was enough brandy in the house to erase all memory of this particular visit from his mind.

“And, would I be correct in assuming that you have full intention of staying the night?”

“We’re here until Sunday, my future son-in-law!”

The universe hated him.

“Of course you are. Why make the drive to London for a simple overnight visit?”

“Exactly! And don’t worry about entertaining us if you’re busy. There’s lots to do and the chimps already have a list a league long of things they want to shop for, so we’re sorted completely. Of course… we might need a few extra quid here and there for a thing or two…”

“Naturally. I would expect no less.”

However, given Sherlock and John had not taken independent transport here and were, marginally, supervised by a, if not responsible, then breathing adult… the situation was not entirely grim. And, if he were to look upon the bright side of things, it gave his dear Gregory some time without the burden of child management resting on his shoulders.

“Does that mean we can eat now?”

John’s devotion to food was nothing if not unwavering.

“I believe it does. And I further believe I know a suitable establishment that will fill our needs most successfully.”

And has the reputation of being the choice for family dining by numerous members of the government and economic ranks.

“Hurray! Can I wear a suit?”

“You will not inflict your vanity on London, John Watson.”

“I will and London will thank me for it, Sherlock Holmes.”

Swallowing more of his brandy, Mycroft noted his nemesis rubbing his hands together in anticipation and smiling indulgently at the two bickering boys, fulfilling his role as indulgent grandfather most handily. Oh well, one of Gregory’s suits would likely fit the villain and given Sherlock’s intolerance for lingering at table, dinner should be a somewhat abbreviated affair. The pain level for this excursion should rank only as moderate…

Agony… everything was a spiked and flaming wall of penetrating agony…

“That was great! I got to play football!”

With the sons of three ambassadors, using a bread roll as the ball and the high chair of the infant daughter of a rather influential duke as the goal. Fortunately, his son was on the winning side…
“Oh, what a thing that was! I didn’t think you posh types had such a grand time out for a bite, but it was worth every quid from your safe to enjoy ourselves like that. And wasn’t Sherlock brilliant to watch! He’s set for fine things in his future, there’s no doubt about that!”

“And I still maintain the fatuous toad was wrong! His mangling of basic science was inconceivable!”

“The man’s Nobel Prize argues otherwise, brother dear.”

“Pah! If that is the quality of individual to whom they bestow that award, I shall refuse it outright when it is offered to me! I will not be painted with the black brush of stupidity and on that point I shall not be moved!”

Food was eaten… there was some hazy and fragmented memory of actually consuming nourishment… so sending the children to bed at this time would not, in any manner, qualify as the punitive ‘bed without dinner’ action of a dictatorial head of household.

“I shall remember that for the future. Now, I believe it is easily yours and John’s bedtime, especially owing to the highly active day you have planned for tomorrow so…”

“I want to watch a film!”

“I demand it have intellectual value!”

“Looks like you’re outvoted, lad.”

No, I am not outvoted. I have the only vote of merit and that is the end of the subject.

“Pity. I was set to award to anyone making their way to bed the name of a particular chocolatier who might be persuaded to offer a tour to interested parties. And, of course, free samples of his wares.”

Two small figures shot up the stairs as if their trousers were on fire with Danny’s laughter trailing behind them. No, it was not particularly honorable to impose one’s vote through bribery, but one used the most efficient and effective approach to resolving matters whenever possible.

“Shrewd, Mycroft, my boy. Very, very shrewd. Little shavers are a bugger to get into bed, sometimes, and that’s as good a way as any to do it. Now, I believe I heard talk about your local, so if you’d kindly point the way…”

“NO! No, you are not inflicting yourself upon my preferred London pub.”

“Inflict’s a strong word.”

“That it is and aptly applied in this case.’

“Don’t worry about a thing, Mycroft, not a single thing. Just want to have a few pints, meet a few fresh faces… I promise not to get into a speck of trouble. Can’t now, can I, because it would reflect badly on my Greg and he wants to work here one day. Know who has long memories? Coppers, that’s who. Don’t want any mischief of mine coming back to haunt him later on. What kind of father would I be if I did that? Ok, maybe the sort I’m rather used to being, but that’s in the past! Far in the past. So… which way?”

Perhaps if he placed a call to the pub owner and promised to pay for any damages, that might forestall any involvement of police or subsequent legal action…
“Very well. Provided I have your most solemn oath.”

“You have it!”

“Two blocks east and a further two south.”

“Thanks! See you soon…”

Hopefully, not through the bars of a jail cell…

“Good heavens, Daniel! It is… it is four in the morning!”

“I… why’re you still awake, Mycroft? Boy like you needs his sleep, genius or not.”

“That is irrelevant and…”

“It’s highly relevant! You can’t be at the top of your game if you’re dragging about, yawning at everyone!”

“Where have you been?”

“I… out.”

“Insufficient.”

“Out… but not in jail.”

Thank heavens.

“That leaves a margin for mayhem wider than the Pacific!”

“Out… not in jail… but not alone.”

Oh dear lord…

“You were with a woman?”

“It’s impolite to boast about things like that, yes. And she was fucking amazing, let me tell you! Smart, classy and knew… well, I won’t talk about the tricks she knew beyond saying they made the evening something to long remember.”

“I… how…”

No, the ‘how’ was exceedingly easy to fathom. The ‘why’ was equally simple to understand.

“I have to say, too, I see why you like that pub. Very friendly and absolutely top notch. Bit pricey, but I suspect the rent and taxes are punishing for a location like that. Didn’t mind paying premium for my pints; got to support a fellow businessman, don’t I? Had a nice long chat with the owner, too. Shared a few stories…”

“And had your tab reduced in the process.”

“Nothing wrong with that! I’d do it for the bloke if he paid his respects at our fine establishment. Making connections is what that is and that’s important for a business like ours. Compare supplier prices, find out new brands and equipment on the market… that sort of thing is
very important, don’t you think?”

Do not make credible points while you are being censured, horrid man.

“I cannot find fault with that specifically, no.”

“There you have it! Ol’ Danny goes out, has a nice time, and does business things while he’s at it. Efficient, wouldn’t you say?”

No. I would not say that if my very life depended upon it.

“I would, instead, remind you that the children shall rise soon and you are not at all rested and prepared for their supervision.”

“Pfft. If you don’t think I’ve seen my share of happy, sleepless nights, then you’re loony. Shower, coffee, solid breakfast and I’m ready for a full day of their energy. You, though…”

“Sleepless nights are, also, for me a very old friend. Matters arose that required my attention so my attention they had.”

“Coffee for two, then! Come on, lad. I’ll see you sorted properly with something to put electricity in your veins and you’ll thank me for it.”

That is highly unlikely.

“I appreciate the offer, however…”

“None of that. Got to keep an eye on you when Greg’s not here to do it.”

Being pushed from behind towards his kitchen was not a new experience for Mycroft, but it was new in terms of the person doing the pushing. His Gregory was far more skilled at the act…

“There… you have a seat and I’ll get started. Oh, this is a sort of kitchen Greg would love. He does, too, I wager.”

“Gregory is most satisfied with our kitchen, yes.”

“Knew he would be. Little bugger loved to help Lizzie cook. This is going to be a brilliant place for you and Greg, just a brilliant place. How long is it going to be before you live here?”

Far, far too long…

“We would plan on relocating once I have finished university, I suppose.”

“How long will that take?”

“I… a few years.”

“That’s no good, then.”

“Pardon?”

“The little chimps! They won’t be out of school and ready to toddle along to their own college or job or whatever in a couple of years! Going to move them here with you in the meantime?”

That… that was another credible point. Daniel was nothing if not dastardly.
“I… we have not precisely mapped out the details of our strategy at this particular point in time.”

“Meaning you have no idea.”

“I would not say that.”

“No, because it would make you look a bit poor at all that mapping business.”

Mycroft scowled at the back of the man currently searching the refrigerator for the makings of a very early breakfast and wished he had a scathing rebuttal, however, none was leaping to mind. Time for impromptu obfuscation.

“As I stated, our plans are a touch nebulous at this time, given both my tenure at college and Gregory’s own career. It could very well be he desires an extra few years in our local constabulary to gain experience or, even, affect a promotion, one that might be easier in those ranks than in London’s.”

“Oh, you’re good with those answers when your back’s against the wall, aren’t you? Useful talent to have, especially for all that whatnot you do.”

Thank you. And do feel free to find needle and thread to sew closed your mouth for the remainder of your visit.

“Yes… quite… in any case…”

“But, if… you know… you do decide to move to London right after Uni… I wouldn’t mind having the little ones stay with me for those last few years. Or having a room in that manor of yours to keep an eye on them. Just a suggestion. Something to keep in mind, maybe.”

This look was one Mycroft was happy his guest didn’t see because the shock on his face would likely prompt a call for an ambulance. Sherlock and John… live with Daniel? The idea was ludicrous! Utter insanity!

Or not. It was not as if he would be entrusting Sherlock and John to someone who was unaware of their rambunctious and unique nature. Or to someone who lacked the children’s affection. The chaos, though. The havoc. It would border on Armageddon! Though he would not actually be there to experience it…

“It… the offer is a very thoughtful one and I am convinced it is offered with utmost sincerity. I shall discuss it with Gregory and, as the time grows near, we shall consider the situation further and make a decision, based on all available information at the time.”

“Great! Oh, really that’s great… and Lizzie! She’ll want in on that, too. It’d be best if you and Greg stayed in the area until the scamps are in a good place to either go off on their own or follow you here to make their own start on life, but if that won’t work out, don’t worry that you don’t have family to step up and help with things. And they’d be closer to Rowena, too, so I can take them on all the visits they want with their gran. Yeah, you don’t worry about a thing, Mycroft. Not a thing in the world.”

I can hear your smile, Daniel Lestrade. Hear it as clearly as the warning klaxon for the eruption of nuclear war, but… this will be discussed with my darling spouse and, I suspect, if it becomes necessary, the children will not be left in neglectful hands.

“Speaking of London… Sherlock wants to visit a morgue while we’re here. Know where any are?”
However, there are worse things in the world, perhaps, than neglect…

“Mycroft?”

“Gregory! It is a success!”

Lestrade looked at the small, squarish device in his hands and smiled because, yes, a success is exactly what it was.

“I suppose it is. This is one of those pager gadgets, right?”

“Most certainly. I debated the efficacy of one of the new mobile phones, but they are unbearably cumbersome…and gauche…and decided this was a far more suitable method of contact. Only the briefest of messages is permitted, however, that should suffice for our needs. Voila! The problem of emergency contact is solved.”

“This is super! I promise not to use it unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

“Oh, you need not be so frugal with your usage. A short greeting would not have me racing to a telephone, but would certainly brighten my day. However, ‘Sherlock hospital’ would absolutely have me racing and without the need for an aide to hand me a message, perhaps, hours after notification.”

“Perfect! Really, just a perfect idea. Have I told you that I love your mind? Your body, too, but can’t forget about that amazing brain of yours.”

“At some point in the distant past, I seem to recall, however…”

“I love your big brain, Mycroft Holmes. Love it passionately and sexily.”

“Ah, how quickly my memory is refreshed. Thank you, my dear, and I offer the same in return to you. How fares your day, Gregory? Hopefully, not as fraught with worry as yesterday.”

“It’s good, actually! I traded hours with my sergeant since he had to drive his wife to her sisters for a birthday or something, so I’m actually off duty now. Admittedly, I wasn’t so happy when I was awake at fuck o’clock in the morning, but it’s brilliant now. Mum’s off with her friends and I have the house to myself. It’s a treat, let me tell you. I suppose I have to thank Dad for that, but don’t tell him because he doesn’t deserve it.”

“Fear not, for I shall speak nary a word.”

“Very poetic of you.”

“Thank you. I do try.”

“But, since you don’t sound at wit’s end, I’m guessing Sherlock, John and Dad haven’t driven you completely mad yet.”

“It has been a very near thing, but I have weathered the storm to the best of my ability.”

“London still standing or has it burned to the ground?”

“There are a few smoldering boroughs, I believe, but wholesale fiery carnage is not yet in evidence. Despite a rather active dinner last night and your father’s defilement of sadly desperate
female, it has been, I feel, a successful visit.”

“Dad pulled already?”

“It is a talent, apparently.”

“Can’t fault him for that. You only live once, so you’re daft if you don’t enjoy it, though Dad enjoys it more than most. What are they chasing today?”

“In truth, I did not inquire as to the full itinerary, out of fear primarily, however, I do know shopping is involved and a visit to selected museums. John also saw advertised a tour of some football stadium or other and they may do that, as well.”

“They will. John will make his special eyes at Dad and, no matter how much Sherlock complains, they’ll be first in the queue. How much is that going to cost you?”

“Oh, a pittance, I am certain, as there is still remaining some funds in their personal travel account.”

“You mean Sherlock’s pocket.”

“It is truly as safe as a bank vault as you know my dear brother will savagely maul anyone who threatens his chips and chocolate fund.”

“True.”

“Additionally, I did mention a small concert that I thought they might enjoy and, it is my hope that we shall attend that together this evening, along with another family dinner. A string quartet of some note is giving a performance and I believe the selection of pieces to be played will appeal to Sherlock and John both.”

“And Dad will be excusing himself for a cigarette ten minutes in and hook up with the usherette before the interval.”

“Entertainment all around! Truly I had not anticipated the breadth of the success of my plan.”

Was it time? Well, he did promise to broach the issue with his spouse and now was likely as good a time as any.

“Speaking of your father, my dear, we had a most interesting conversation this morning.”

“Oh, about what?” Mycroft outlined the points of Danny’s offer and did his best to interpret the hmmm... that he heard on the other end of the line.

“Well, love, what do you think? I admit... I’d sort of forgotten about the timeline and how it didn’t apply only to you and me.”

“I would say it is not an offer we can discount out of hand. Surprisingly, your father has not demonstrated the worst possible conduct, in terms of child minding. For the severity of my exasperation, at times, I have never felt Sherlock and John were in a particularly unsafe situation.”

“You have a point. Being led down the path to wantonness, maybe, but it’d only be for a short while, really. And he’s right, Mum would have her thumb on all of it, even if she didn’t demand outright that they come and live with her. It’s certainly worth considering, hypothetically, at least.
That’s years from now, anyway, so we’ve got lots of time to see how things are and make some decisions. I mean… they could come and live with us here, I suppose, if we hired someone to look after them. Or, really, they’ll be old enough to look after themselves if we’re home late.”

“Sherlock and John with freedom of movement in London? As teenagers? Gregory, really…”

“I don’t know what I was thinking, love. Completely lost my head for a moment.”

“I concur. Regardless, as you say, it is a matter for another day, but I did want to inform you, as I have no doubt your father will raise the topic when they return.”

“Thanks. Has he sold your car yet?”

“Not that I am aware. I do suspect he would regret depriving Driver of such an exquisite trophy, so I have some confidence the Bentley shall remain in our possession.”

“Dad does have a tender spot for working men, that’s true. Also, if he sold, or wrecked, this car, he wouldn’t be able to drive any of your other lovelies and I can assure you, now that he’s had his hands on one, he will be borrowing the rest.”

“Delightful. But, I shall consider his automotive avarice insurance against any injudicious behavior while driving.”

“He’ll appreciate that. And the extra magnetism it’ll give him for the ladies.”

“Oh, most certainly…”

Looking at his watch, Mycroft sighed silently and declared this interlude at an end. It was brief, but it occurred, and that was the issue of note. Small bits of contact, offered frequently… he was learning and, from the tone of his Gregory’s voice, that learning was both noted and greatly welcomed…

“Unfortunately though, my dear, I must say goodbye as I am required in a meeting. I shall phone tomorrow, however, and give you my side of whatever stories the children tell as they orate the grand tales of their adventures.”

“Perfect. I love you, Mycroft. You off to Uni on Monday?”

“Most likely, but only a day or two, that is somewhat assured.”

“I’ll be waiting. Take care, love.”

“You as well, Gregory.”

Greg smiled at the phone in his hand and settled back on the sofa to continue his completely slothful afternoon. The house was still standing, Mycroft hadn’t lost his mind and if that didn’t change before tomorrow, this might be a strategy for letting Sherlock and John visit London when he couldn’t bring them himself. Mum was like him, a responsible wage earner who couldn’t toss work at a moment’s notice to go on holiday, but Dad was in a position where… he might actually be useful.

That would also alleviate his own guilt when he took himself to visit Mycroft when he had the right combination of an off day and bracketing work hours and he was feeling especially lonely. Alright, Dad, you win back some good graces from the sheer debacle of your little unannounced trip to London, but only some. There’s still a massive amount of ground to regain and… Dad’s not at the
pub. And, according to his birth certificate, he was the son of the absent pub owner. And partner of the… partner… in that pub’s ownership. Ah ha… Really, who would dare object if he strolled in and pulled a few free pints for himself. Or his mates. Who were probably aching for a good night out with alcohol and the village’s newly-minted PC. Ok, change of plan for the day. While the mice are away the cat will play and this cat had keys to the beer taps…
Three children successfully entertained, despite unabundant time to bestow, a visit to college that was not entirely as dreary as he had predicted and now… his hand upon the knob to open the portal to home.

“Take thy beak from out my heart!”

“I’ll beak you, you awful thing. Go upstairs, take off that dress and you’d best hope your staff can get the… what did you use to make that fake blood?”

“It is a proprietary formulation.”

“Well, if your formulation stains the fabric, or the floor, don’t expect to get another dress in… ever!”

“Intolerable! Not only are you a Visigoth intent on quashing my artistic expression, you are a penurious penny-pincher whose grasp on your coins is so tight the metal is beginning to liquefy!”

Ah, the familiar sounds of domestic harmony.

“Artistic expression, brother? Have you abandoned your scientific pursuits for something more theatrical?”

“Mycroft!”

John ran from his position as, apparently, camera operator, to give Mycroft a hug and a familiar pat-down for gifts.

“I see you are making good use of your newest purchase.”

Mycroft smiled at Lestrade who gave him a ‘this is your fault’ glare that had the older Holmes quickly packing away his smile and clearing his throat in chagrin.

“A video camera? Really, Mycroft? As if they didn’t have enough things to make my life a misery, you add this to their arsenal?”

“I… it was simply to be a device to assist with the documentation of experimental protocols and results.”

“Simply… when has anything in the fucking world involving these two been described as simply?”

“True… however, the argument put forth was a compelling one.”

“You mean the one that went along the lines of if you bought that for them, they wouldn’t do something that would make you loony?”

“That was not precisely how the discussion progressed…”

“What’s the problem, Greg? We did, actually record some real data today, so we weren’t lying.
Then we watched a scary film and Sherlock said he could be a better Bloody Bride than the lady in the film and we’re seeing if that’s right. We didn’t have a real wedding dress, but this one is white so it should show blood the same way.”

John, in typical John fashion, took Lestrade’s pained groan as a sign of approval and dashed back to his camera to prepare for the next scene.

“‘My dear… perhaps a small relaxation will benefit your mental framework. Come, let us enjoy a soothing moment’s conversation while the children enact… whatever it is their script demands.”

“Sherlock’s going to murder the person who murdered him! You see, the Bloody Bride was killed by her husband and then her ghost killed him, but I can’t hold the camera and be the husband, so Sherlock’s going to have to kill the teddy we found at a jumble sale. We were supposed to use it as the plague victim that the catapult we’re going to build would launch over the castle wall to kill everybody, but we can use something else for that, I suppose.”

The inevitable ghoulishness of the boys plans, at least, meant all things were as typical in the Lestrade-Holmes household and Mycroft found himself well pleased by the normalcy. Of course, his lover seemed to have other ideas and it was only now that Mycroft noticed that Lestrade was still in uniform and appeared… tired.

“An excellent plan, John. We will be in the library when you are done. Shall we expect to view your film this evening?”

John looked at Sherlock who made his standard dramatic show of giving the question some thought.

“Given we must first view the footage and record additional material, if required, the answer is… perhaps.”

“Very well, brother. Then Gregory and I shall look forward to seeing your efforts at some point in the near future.”

Before more of the fake blood could be spilled, potentially on the new suit he had taken delivery of in London, Mycroft hustled Lestrade out of the entranceway and into the library.

“They are most inspired this evening, my dear.”

Lestrade dropped on the sofa and nodded his head slowly.

“Oh yes. And, yesterday, I was using my lunch hour to have a chat with the headmaster about them sneaking out of class and going up to the roof because Sherlock wanted to do some falling objects experiments. They’d already hidden their selection of objects up there and they included a few things that made quite the impact on landing.”

“Aah… I see. They are still enrolled, are they not?”

“It was a touch undecided for awhile, but things settled in our favor once I paid for the breakage and they apologized to the teachers whose classrooms were in line with their experiment, since watching things like globes and preserved specimens from the biology room fall past the window is somewhat disruptive of the educational process. Oh, and they had to clear the carnage they created, which required no small amount of time since they also dropped some jars and bottles of chemicals and the dirt was starting to dissolve.”

“I am so sorry, Gregory, that you were required to manage that alone, especially during your lunch respite.”
Hoping a good brandy would calm his lover’s… well, it could not be said his Gregory seemed particularly distressed, simply resigned to the chaos, but a brandy would surely have some health benefit nonetheless.

“The end of term is near and that’s got them anxious to be rid of school, I think. I suspect they hoped their arses would be kicked out the door for the remainder of the term, because Sherlock actually made extremely certain to insult, in his very wordy and evil way, the leniency of the punishment.”

“Yes, that would fit Sherlock’s previous patterns of behavior most successfully. He does become more, shall we say, flamboyant in his school antics when summer holiday nears. Now, with a partner to assist with those antics, I would not be surprised if the hoped-for arse kicking manifests rather soon.”

“Only another couple of weeks to go, so I’ll have a talk with them about taking responsibilities seriously and that disrupting school just because they want an early holiday isn’t acceptable.”

“I shall counter with this: I shall speak with the children and you might use that bit of time for some rest. How exhausted are you, Gregory?”

Lestrade smiled and stretched in a way that brought very lovely thoughts to Mycroft’s mind, though they would, in no manner, contribute to his spouse’s relaxation.

“It’s not that bad. The few days with Dad and the boys away in London was just the thing I needed to put petrol in my tank, but we’ve had two lads out sick and we all have to do our part to see their time covered. I’ve been on duty since yesterday afternoon and, beyond a short nap in the locker area, that’s all the sleep I’ve seen. And, of course, this had to align with a tidy crime spree that’s had us running this way and that. Silly things, likely because the term is getting close to ending and the weather’s nice for stealing and getting into mischief, but it sums to a lot.”

“At what hour must you be at work again tomorrow?”

“I don’t! It’s my off day and mum has absolved me of housework and errands so I can actually enjoy all of it.”

“Shall I have a cage delivered so the children do not rend to pieces your hope for relaxation?”

“Actually…”

“I shall make the call immediately.”

“Funny. I was thinking, really, that they could come with me to the cottage for a little work. I know they should be in school, but a day away to burn off some of their energy might be a good thing for everyone.”

“An interesting proposal. I have no doubt Sherlock and John will heartily approve of a day out of school, but I am not certain how one of that pair will react to being put to work.”

“He can do some sciency things while John and I see about repairs.”

“That would suit both of them nicely. To make the situation a pleasant one for all involved, however, I shall instruct the kitchen staff to prepare a hamper for you and the children, so that you are not without refreshments during your day.”

“Aren’t you forgetting yourself?”
No, but I was rather hoping you were, my dear.

“Me?”

“I think a nice warm day of family fun is the perfect thing to celebrate your return. Which, I want to hear all about, despite my pathetic moaning. I promise, love, nothing too strenuous or apt to make you perspire beyond our already agreed-upon level. Maybe you even spend part of the day in a chair, under a tree, reading a book and chasing Sherlock when he races off to study a bug or something.”

There were worse ways to spend one’s day… and, if the perspiration limit was properly enforced…

“Such a delightful suggestion. I look forward to it with great anticipation.”

Lestrade leaned over to give his lover a kiss and adore how criminally Mycroft was lying. But, he would see his dear Holmes had a restful day and only partly because Mycroft’s talents certainly didn’t run towards the trades and he would surely crack his own skull with a hammer if left alone too long with one.

“Wonderful! Now, tell me everything about Uni. How much fun is it going to be?”

“More than I expected, it seems. Not that fun is the proper term, perhaps, but enlightening will do in its place. Whereas I prefer my studies be conducted in a rather solitary fashion, I cannot deny that debating perspectives has value, as does the opportunity to interact with individuals possessing histories and viewpoints that contrast with mine.”

“Give you a chance to get the goods on the people you’ll work with someday, too.”

“That is also a factor of note.”

“I wager you already have files prepared and waiting to be filled up with juicy bits of information.”

“I… may.”

“That’s my Mycroft, doesn’t let a good opportunity pass him by without pouncing on it. Very smart. I did mean to ask, are they going to make you live at school or are you going to have a flat?”

“Grandmama and I discussed that, in point of fact. It is highly encouraged that one begins their tenure as a student by living amongst one’s peers, though I find the concept abhorrent. However, the fraternization will serve to further expose me to the various personalities with whom I shall be involved these next years, so I shall forego maintaining my own residence and take rooms at college, at least at the onset. They shall, of course, be private.”

The image of his Mycroft living in any form of a communal environment with what Lestrade knew were people who continually would try his lover’s patience was simply… adorable. Mycroft would be loony in a week! Hopefully, there wasn’t a ban on alcohol where he’d be rooming because his partner was going to need a LOT of it.

“That sounds… great.”

“One must sometimes suffer when the benefit of doing so is sufficiently large.”

“THAT sounds like my Mycroft. But, I know how commanding you can be, so some useless yob tries to interrupt you when you’re trying to read or something, I have full faith he’ll quickly learn
the error of his ways.”

“I have already practiced summoning the guards and ordering executions.”

“You know how sexy I find your preparedness, love.”

“My seductive powers are formidable.”

“That they are. Oh, and look who’s here. The family filmmakers.”

With even more blood dripping from Sherlock’s dress and a bloody, maimed teddy tucked under John’s arm.

“We have finished for the evening. It is now mandatory that we be provided with cake as proper reward for our creative brilliance. The various national and international awards can wait for a later time, though if they do not arrive in due course, I have already set aside paper and pen to script my scornful opinion of their nomination process.”

“How about, Sherlock, you wash the blood off of you and we see about a touch of something more nourishing than cake.”

“No.”

“John, if you can get Sherlock washed and into clean clothes, I’ll buy you new Top Trumps cards.”

Sherlock’s lack of body mass made him an easy target for dragging, which was John’s method of starting his quest to acquire his prize.

“A delightful inciting of treachery, my dear. I am overcome with awe.”

“I have my moments. And, I’ll take this one to find new clothes for myself, too. I actually forget I’m wearing my uniform sometimes, then realize I’ve been watching telly with my hat still on my head! Care to help me… choose my wardrobe?”

“My dear, are you being suggestive?”

“I wager John will need some time to turn Sherlock into a living human again, so… maybe I am.”

“Is there a reward for reaching the bedroom first?”

Lestrade tossed out a suggestion that had Mycroft running at top speed up the stairs, which, of course, was the PC’s intention. Mycroft was the cleverest, most complex man he knew, but… there were levers to pull if you were privileged enough to know about them. Fortunately, the number of people so privileged equaled one…

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“It is acceptable, I suppose.”

Sherlock tried not to show his excitement at being tasked to run tests for lead content and other toxins in the various paints and stains currently on the cottage and in the small samples sitting in wait for Lestrade to try on a few areas as he narrowed his choices for the painters they’d hired to freshen the small structure.
“I still get to help fix things, don’t I, Greg?”

John, already proudly wearing a tool belt that threatened to drag his trousers to his ankles, stood at the ready with a spanner in one hand and a screwdriver in the other in anticipation of what promised to be an active day of both destruction and reconstruction.

“That you do, lad! Mycroft has the list of the things you and I can manage on our own and we’ll make a good start on it today. The bigger work will begin in a few days and, if you like, you can come after school and watch them on the job if you promise not to be a bother.”

“Really? I won’t bother them at all, I promise. I could learn a lot, I bet, watching them and… well, if they tell me I can help, then it has to be safe, right?”

With John’s conniving ways, Lestrade and Mycroft had no doubt that the small boy would be put to work doing something when the professionals arrived, even if it was stirring paint or carrying boards.

“I’ll leave that for them to decide. Love, you want to choose something for us to start with and then… be on hand if Sherlock needs help with his chemistry?”

“A laudable plan. On the off chance he does not require my assistance, I have brought a bracing history of Andorra to read to pass the time.”

“Then you shall read it board to board since my requiring your assistance is as likely as that of John being mistaken for a giant.”

John accidentally dropping his spanner on Sherlock’s toe signaled the official start of the separated portion of the day with Mycroft spinning Sherlock towards the boot of the car carrying his chemistry equipment and Lestrade spinning John towards the kitchen where a sink sat in wait of repair. It was the way most dads spent off days, right? Keeping house and home in one piece and spending time with the kids? Lestrade grinned that as wealthy as his Mycroft was, his partner easily adapted to a common off day with the family. True, half of that family was currently setting up a portable laboratory most schools would envy, but it was good to have multiple interests within the clan. Kept things lively…

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“I think my son is under that dirt somewhere, but I could be wrong.”

His mother screeching to a stop in a cloud of dust in front of the cottage, rolling down the window and saucily perching her sunglasses on top of her head made Lestrade wonder if she was enjoying a bit too much his impending leaving of the nest.

“Funny, mum. And you came out to Chez Lestrade because…”

“… because you don’t have a phone here yet and I wanted to tell you I’m going to Sheila’s after work, so don’t expect dinner from me because I have better things to do. Such as have my own lunch, which is where I’m going now.”

“I notice you didn’t offer to bring us anything, shameful mother that you are.”

“Your shameful mother isn’t inclined to fund lunch for four ravenous dogs and your Mycroft wouldn’t let you spend the day out here without easy access to enough food to host a party for a lorry filled with footballers.”

“Yeah, I can’t deny that.”
And the smug smile on his face told his mother that Lestrade was more that slightly proud of the fact.

“Good, because you’d shame yourself terribly if you tried and there’s enough shame in this family already. Speaking of… expect your useless father to slither this way at some point. Stupid man told his mates that he was going to help with getting this old girl in shape, which means he’ll render the cottage uninhabitable in under a minute, but that’s your problem.”

“He can help Sherlock with his mad scientist work.”

“And blow himself up in the process. Smart. How far along are you with the cottage?”

“Hardly started! I’m just doing to spot of plumbing work and started John scraping a few areas for the painters. I think the real renovation starts tomorrow, but I’ll lend a hand when I can. Learn a few things so I can manage the maintenance when something needs doing. Have time to take a look?”

“A few minutes, I suppose.”

Feeling oddly excited about showing his mother his new home, Greg chivalrously opened the car door and offered his mum his arm, laughing when she made certain to dust it off before she took it. Then it was the grand stroll to the cottage with a royal wave tossed in to Mycroft and Sherlock and a step through the door for the final verdict on the future palace of Crown Prince Greg Lestrade.

“What. A. Dump.”

“You’re not Bette Davis, mum.”

“Actually I was doing Liz Taylor’s version.”

“You’re not her either. Not nearly enough diamonds.”

“True.”

“So… honestly…”

Elizabeth looked around the small space and waved back at John who was waving furiously with his scraper, until he smacked his nose and had a firm word with the offending tool, reminding Lestrade he needed to have his own firm word with the boy about the benefit of polite language.

“It’s brilliant, Greg. Not now, of course, but I can see the potential. I’ll be perfect for you and, when you’re gone, it’ll rent easily, especially with the nice bit of land it’s got. Going to do something with the garden?”

“Maybe. I’ll have to talk to someone about what it needs, but that’s work I certainly can do and I’ll have at least one eager helper who loves getting his hands dirty.”

“I’ll give you some ideas.”

“You kill fake plants!”

“Just the one and it was your fault leaving a fag around to tempt me.”

“I didn’t make you hide it in the flammable victim when I came back looking for it, did I?”

“You’re a PC, not a solicitor, Greg. Anyway, if you won’t take my advice on plants, will you accept a few tablecloths and curtains?”
“You’re not going to make them, are you?”

“I… no. The idea may have flitted about my head for a moment or two, but I thought more about choosing a few things the next time I do a bit of shopping. You need dishes, too, unless you plan on behaving like a caveman, eating over the sink and drinking out of the toilet.”

“Cavemen didn’t have toilets. Probably wish they had, though.”

“Is that yes to a few bits of make this cottage livable?”

“As long as they’re cheap. I don’t want you spending a lot of money when I’ve got income of my own now.”

“I promise to find the cheapest, ghastliest things I can find. I’ll even bring along Sherlock and John and make that their mission. Whatever the village has, they’ll find it.”

They would, too. That was a serious threat.

“I trust your taste and commitment to frugality, mum.”

“Look at you, terrified at what those imps would hand you in a hideously-wrapped box.”

“Blame me?”

“Not at all. And it won’t spoil my afternoon of fun one little bit. All joshing aside, Greg… I think you’ll be happy here. It suits you.”

“Thanks, mum. I… I think you’re right, too. Our house is fine, Mycroft’s is fine, but… this feels like mine, even though it’ll only be leased.”

“And that’s important. No matter where you go in this life or who you go with, you need to have things that are yours, as well as space and time you can call your own. Too many people forget that and suffer for it. Don’t let that be you, alright?”

“I won’t, Mum. But… thanks. A reminder now and again is probably not the worst possible idea.”

“Then you’ll get it. Now, I’m losing time for my leisurely lunch and your sluggardly ways aren’t bringing this dear house to life. What hours are you on tomorrow?”

“I’ve actually got the human shift, for a change.”

“Fancy dinner with your mum? Bring the rest of the family and I’ll cook something that won’t kill Sherlock, even though he’ll claim it has. And loudly.”

“That sounds great, actually. I’ll check with Mycroft, just in case, though. If there’s a problem, I’ll phone.”

Admiring that her little boy was a very smart and successful partner, one pinch was given to his cheek to remind him about the ‘little boy’ part and a departing wave to John, who was now more paint dust and flecks than child, Elizabeth said farewell to her son’s new home and rubbed her mental hands in anticipation of her own home becoming single occupancy. Greg’s bedroom offered a lot of opportunities for a woman with a clever mind and a fair hand with paint and decoration.

Had to remember to find a couple of cots or something, though, for the two grandgoblins that would certainly continue to spend nights now and again with their youthful and still-attractive gran.
Between beds here, at Mycroft’s house, her house, the ferret pen her ex called a flat and the further-afield but palatially-appointed ones at Rowena’s and the house in London… the little buggers were invading Britain! But she wouldn’t have it any other way. Sherlock and John, the poor lambs, needed all the love and attention they could possibly find in this world, though, the more geographically-contained they could keep the support system, the better for the country as a whole, most likely…

If there was a single thing Mycroft would never have predicted he would enjoy, it was the sensation of awaiting the moment his lover walked through the door after a full day of work. It was that silly scene you saw presented in the films, where the pearl-wearing housewife twirled about when the time grew near, checking her hair and makeup so when her husband stepped into their home, she presented the loveliest image possible, as well as a relaxing libation to soothe away the trials of the day. Barring the pearls, that description fit him to a tee, at times.

“Look at this gorgeous man waiting for me…”

And his Gregory never failed to respond so very positively to his efforts.

“As ever, my love.

“And did my love do something with his day besides lounging about naked while eating chocolates?”

“No, not really.”

“Excellent! That’s what I like to hear.”

Lestrade grinned and took his Mycroft in a long kiss, knowing Mycroft probably did more today than half the village combined.

“I am most happy my wastrel lifestyle satisfies your expectations.”

“It does and I’m almost inclined not to suggest we have a night out, just the two of us, since that would interfere with your wastrelness.”

“A night out?”

“Dinner, definitely. A film if you’d like. We haven’t had a night out alone in a long time, even though we said we’d do more of that and I know for a fact that neither mum nor dad has anything on for the night, so childminding won’t be a problem. What do you think?”

Not that an answer was required given the size of Mycroft’s eyes and smile.

“I find that a delightful idea! You are not too fatigued for such thing, are you, my dear?”

“Are you?”

“Neither nudity nor chocolate is particularly energy sapping.”

“Alright then. The inn Dad stayed in when his spaceship landed has a very nice restaurant, actually, in terms of good food and romance, so will that do?”

“Again, I find the word ‘delightful’ leaping to mind.”
“Then there we have it. I’ll phone for a table and we’ll see the house mice sorted and delivered to one grandparent or another and then it’s a nice night for us. I’ll need a shower first so, why don’t you choose something proper for me to wear and then join me?”

His Gregory had something of a taste for intimacy in a watery environment and that was a highly agreeable thing from any point of view. Perhaps a nice holiday at some point where there was an abundance of crystal pools, waterfalls and uninterrupted privacy should feature in their future plans. The myriad of benefits was too tempting to ignore…

“And what is the appropriate attire? Jacket, trousers and tie?”

“Exactly.”

“I have the very thing in mind, then, so my choosing shall be swift.”

“Meaning more time in the shower?”

“Your ability to read my mind, Gregory… it is astounding.”

“Will that earn me something to heat things up so the water nearly boils on my skin?”

“Vaporization is assured.”

Running towards the stairs, Lestrade started undoing the buttons of his shirt and mentally dancing at the thought of the night ahead of him. The last few days he’d listened to the others in the station talk about having nights out with the special person in their lives and he’d actually caught some teasing because he didn’t have a story to boast about. It was good, really good, that they knew he was in love with a man and still teased him about normal relationship things, like they would any other bloke, but it did remind him that he needed to treat his lover to something without children and not involving the pub.

He could do the treating now, too, which was something in which to take pride. Not pizza and a film, but a proper meal at a very nice restaurant, with a bottle of wine. Plus shower sex to get things started. And bed sex once they were home. Yes, those made perfect bookends to their night as a couple and, well… this was what life was all about. His cottage was going to be ready in about a week, so they could do romantic evenings there, when the mood struck, as well. Cook something, light candles and have their own bit of a holiday cottage for the night. Once Mycroft was at Uni, these chances would be few and far between, so best make good use of them now. Good, soapy, sexy use…

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“Well, love?”

“Very pleasant. I suspected as much from the quality of their taproom and I am happy to see that my suspicion proved correct.”

Looking around the cozy space, with candlelight reflecting off the shapely wineglasses on the tables, Lestrade found himself agreeing completely. Just the thing he wanted for his Mycroft and he had to admit it made him feel very adult-like sitting at their table. Kids at mum’s, a wallet filled with enough funds to pay the bill without embarrassment (thanks Dad for phoning your mate and learning the likely price range for dinner and wine for two) and his lover looking gorgeous in the warm glow that surrounded them… a glow that was just for adults, thank heavens…

“Sherlock and John told me about their night in London and I can assure you there won’t be any
breadball being played while we enjoy our meal. Or near fistfights with internationally-acclaimed scientists.”

Mycroft laughed and had to admit that the ridiculous things in life did make for the best stories… and memories…

“Another joy to brighten my evening.”

“Always happy to help. And, I was thinking… maybe we could have a party or something when I move into the cottage. Just something to celebrate and let everyone see my new house. Invite family and friends… what do you think?”

“I think that is a very good idea and, if you permit me, I shall make the arrangements.”

“Simple, please. I would do it all myself, but…”

“You are working a demanding job that leaves you with precious little time to relax, let alone see a social event planned and executed. I promise to present you with something suitable that will not, in any manner, appear ostentatious or overindulgent, but offer your guests a pleasurable experience.”

“Perfect. Really, that sounds wonderful. I’ll stop in this week and do what I can for the garden. It is a bit sad-looking and, if the weather is good, we could have the party outdoors.”

“I shall include that option in my planning and keep a mindful eye on the forecast. Oh… our server has arrived. Gregory?”

“I always lose track of time talking to you, don’t I? But, I’ve got this covered.”

Taking a deep breath, Greg put in an order for wine, mentally thanking the owner for steering him towards a good bottle, that fit his budget, to accompany a range of dishes, and felt even more adult sending the gentleman away for a moment so he and Mycroft could actually look at their menus.

“Gregory… such a superlative choice of wine.”

“Like that? Nothing too good for my Mycroft.”

“I am forever agog at the lengths you go to pamper me, my dear. I shall script copious notes when I am at college concerning excellent restaurants and cafes, cultural opportunities and other recreation options that you may use to further your pampering, for I know it is exceedingly important to you that you maintain an absolutely stellar level of attention.”

Giggling at their silliness, Mycroft and Lestrade missed the ‘oh, young love’ look their server flashed as he delivered and poured the wine, having already been warned by the owner that the table would be surrounded by a cloud of adorable affection, but (a) the gratuity would certainly be worth weathering the besotted grins and (b) one of the party owned the largest home in the area and they were hoping to expand the catering wing of the business…

“It is! It really, really is. Ready to order?”

Mycroft and Lestrade placed their orders, complete with full compliments for the succulence of their personal choices that made the server have to puff the air in front of him slightly to let their words make it through the infatuated haze. But, since he and his girlfriend were likely as cute when they were out for an evening, the haze would be well tolerated.

“I do find this establishment to my tastes, Gregory. A quieter, warmer ambience… it is
something I have come to value highly.”

“Then you’ll certainly like the cottage. It’s got that feel to it, especially in the…”

“Gregory?”

Mycroft followed Lestrade’s eyes towards a couple leaving the restaurant and noticed two things about them. The man was clearly intoxicated and the woman seemed rather fearful about that fact.

“Give me a minute, alright love?”

Leaving the table, Lestrade didn’t notice Mycroft motioning the server over for a quick word then following after his partner who was closing the distance between himself and the couple, that being helped by the man’s fumbling with his keys in the car park.

“Excuse me, sir? Noticed you might be feeling a little under the weather, so let me call a cab for you, what say?”

Lestrade smiled genially, although the smile was not returned by his very drunk target, nor the woman who seemed torn between wanting Lestrade to step in and wanting him to simply leave them alone so matters didn’t get worse.

“Fuck off.”

Mycroft stayed behind his lover but took the moment to check for exposed sources of flame, owing to the pungency of the alcohol fumes from the man’s breath.

“We all have a day now and then we’re not at our best, sir, so why not have me get someone to do the driving home and you can simply relax and enjoy the night air.”

“I said fuck off!”

“No cab? Alright, how about your very lovely companion take a turn piloting your nice car. And it is a nice one, too. Hate to see it dinged because your concentration wavered a bit from feeling a tad poorly.”

“This cunt? She doesn’t so much as think about driving my car.”

The tensing of his husband’s body was all the sign Mycroft needed to know the gentleman in question had just made a tragic mistake and one for which he would certainly pay if Gregory had any opportunity to make it so.

“I’d appreciate a more respectful use of language, sir, and I’m certain the lady would, as well.”

“I don’t give a fuck what you’d appreciate. Who are you, anyway? Fuck it, I don’t care.”

Turning back to try and unlock his car, Lestrade sighed and moved forward, smiling as reassuringly as he could and nodding to the woman to back away from the scene.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I can’t let you drive.”

“Are you deaf? Fuck off!”

Anticipating the swing, Lestrade dodged the punch and moved back so another punch couldn’t land.

“Sir, it’s either a cab, your friend drives, you phone someone else to come collect you or we get
you a room here to sleep this off. Those are the choices.”

“I’m getting in my fucking car and driving home!”

“No, sir, you’re not.”

Mycroft waved the woman over towards him, somewhat unsure of why he was doing so besides it put both bystanders on the same proverbial bench to watch the oncoming battle.

“Who’s going to stop me? You?”

“If necessary, sir, yes. Though it would be better for all of us if you simply let me phone for a cab.”

“You don’t fucking tell me what to do!”

“Only giving you choices, sir, and you’re welcome to any of them. Driving your car, though, isn’t one I can allow.”

The next few minutes happened in what seemed like a few milliseconds, though Mycroft knew his mind would replay them over and over, in very slow motion, for some time to come. Once the moonlight glittered off the knife the drunken man pulled from his pocket the motion blurred as the fight began in earnest and gathered a small crowd as more restaurant patrons had noticed the commotion and come outside to have a look.

Finally, after an eternity of time Mycroft began to breathe again, seeing his lover pin his opponent, face first on the ground with the knife skittering away from his grasp, and get an arm pulled behind the man’s back so further motion would be both painful and damaging.

“L… love? Want to call the station and have a few of the lads out to run this one in? Jeff and Mark would probably like a chance to get out and about for awhile.”

“You’re a cop? How can you be a copper? You’re a fucking poof!”

“Not exactly, sir, and you would do well to keep a civil tongue in your head since you’re already in rather a lot of trouble. Love? Phone?”

Mycroft startled back to attention because he was, at the moment, bewitched by the calm, strong, confidence his lover was radiating like sunshine and excused himself to turn towards the nearest phone, something that was rendered moot when the sharp bark of a siren signaled the arrival of a police vehicle, housing two highly amused constables.

“Nicely done, Greg! Set up a little dinner show to impress your Mycroft? Mycroft! You didn’t fall for his playacting did you? He’s a tosser and don’t you think differently.”

Lestrade exchanged a series of faces with his brethren who took custody of the assailant and received Greg’s promise he’d be along soon to the station to fill out a report on the situation. Running his hands through his hair and stopping the constables a moment to pilfer the perpetrator’s pocket, Lestrade walked towards the woman on the scene and handed her the keys.

“I can phone for a cab if you prefer, ma’am, but…”

“No… no, I’m driving the car home, thank you.”

“Alright. Though, promise me I won’t be called out tomorrow to oversee a nice car being
dragged out of a lake.”

“Lake? No… I don’t think a lake is going to be involved.”

Smiling in precisely the way that made Greg’s sense of revenge sit up and wave hello, one very shapely and very purposeful woman sauntered to the car, which received a goodbye pat on its boot before she took the wheel and sped away.

“I’ll be writing a report on a burned out car, tomorrow, I have no doubt. No, I take that back. She seemed the type to be smart about this. I’ll stop in at George’s dad’s lot tomorrow and see if that lovely or it’s bits are suddenly up for quick sale.”

“Gregory…”

Realizing that his partner wasn’t smiling, but seemed, instead, on the verge of tears, Lestrade took Mycroft in a large hug and murmured soft words until the body in his arms stopped trembling.

“It’s alright, love. Just a little fight…”

“You are bleeding!”

“Am I? Actually, I’m not sure if that’s mine or not. It got a bit confusing there for a moment.”

“And bruised!”

“That is true, I do admit. Shoulder’s a little sore, too, but…”

Mycroft launched into a long kiss of his partner and drew back, once again having glistening eyes, which, in truth, Lestrade thought looked like beautiful jewels.

‘He could have killed you!”

“No, love… I’m good in a fight anyway, but I’ve gotten some training on how better to defend myself, while not doing much damage to a suspect, so I wasn’t in any real trouble.”

“A knife! He had a knife! He could have killed you, blinded you, mutilated you…”

“No, no, no… I’ve been shown some things to do in that situation, too. It’s alright, Mycroft… oh, love…”

Wiping the tear that rolled down Mycroft’s face, Lestrade marveled that this man, who had been stabbed and suffered horribly on his first real… mission… was so worried and upset over a small scuffle.

But that was his Mycroft… he could endure so much, but fretted miserably over what he met in his day. And savaged himself when he realized his own mistakes. Did his utmost to be a good dad, brother or whatever to Sherlock and John. Accepted Mum and Dad, despite them being having, combined, as much money as one of his suits probably cost. Not just accepted, either… enjoyed. His bastardy mates, too. Didn’t mind a night at the pub, too. Liked it as much as a night out at a fine restaurant, actually. Didn’t even care that people might be seeing him crying right now because he was scared for his lover. And he was the sexiest, smartest, funniest, most caring and loving man he knew.

“Mycroft…”

“Y… yes, Gregory?”
“Will you marry me?”

Time respectfully stopped so that Mycroft could overcome the shock that knocked the air out of his lungs.

“Gregory… do you… did you… mean that?”

“I did. Or I do. Whichever satisfies grammar law. I know we were going to wait a few more months and I know you probably had some elaborate scenario planned for asking me, but… right here in this car park, with a big moon shining down on us… I want to marry you, Mycroft Holmes, and, even though you know exactly what I have to offer, I hope it’s enough that you’re willing to say yes.”

This time, more than a single tear had to be wiped away and Lestrade smiled at the smudge left by his dirty fingers on his Mycroft’s face, which was breaking into the largest grin he’d ever seen Mycroft make.

“Yes! Oh dear, Gregory… yes, a hundred times. A thousand times, yes!”

“Sure about that? Last chance to change your mind.”

“Never! I, Mycroft Holmes, agree wholeheartedly to become your husband. To be by your side for all our lifetime… to love you, cherish you and desire you forever more. Oh Gregory…”

Mycroft fell into Lestrade’s arms and held him tightly, letting his tears flow, his heart race and his love for his official fiancé overflow his heart and fill every nook and cranny of his unworthy form. This glorious man had chosen him, despite his flaws and mistakes and was willing to make a life they both would share. This was the greatest night of his life… car park, notwithstanding.

“That’s my Mycroft… the man I love with all my heart. My… wait for it… gorgeous fiancé.”

Mycroft’s excited whine and tiny dance in his embrace, made Lestrade laugh and pull back just enough to give said fiancé a long kiss that settled a deep sense of permanence in his bones. This was his future husband. Not maybe, not perhaps… this was the man he was going to marry. And he couldn’t be happier if he tried. Well, the creeping ache also starting to settle into his bones was having its own scuffle with the permanence, but a few paracetamol would tip the war in the right direction.

“I am overcome, Gregory, positively overcome with joy.”

“Me too… I know this probably wasn’t quite the spectacle you wanted but…”

“Nonsense! This… this is what I wanted. You, me and our honest, unwavering commitment to see our lives joined. The frills and furbelows are irrelevant.”

“Good. I’m just happy you’re happy. Now, though… I don’t think I pass muster to continue our dinner and I do need to stop in at the station and give an account of things, but… how about I dart inside and do a deal for what’s left of our wine and something that can sit a bit and we can have a moonlit picnic after I do my duty as PC Greg Lestrade, handler of drunks and fiancé of the most magnificent man in the world?”

Kissing his fiancé another time, Mycroft hoped he could contain his happiness long enough to actually see their picnic, because an explosion of joy was not entirely out of the question at this point.

“An excellent idea. I shall wait for you in the car.”
And use the time to pull together the threads of my mental faculties so I do not dissolve into blissful incoherence before the night is done.

“Alright then, back in a moment.”

Quickly kissing his beloved a final time, Lestrade ran towards the restaurant door and felt no shame at the decided spring in his step. Or the flurry of questions about the fight. Or the subtler questions about the rather excited aftermath that the maître d’ recognized from his own proposal to his wife. He was getting married! And it… it felt right. Felt like he’d just been waiting for the words because he already knew he would be spending his life with Mycroft and the formalities simply needed to be met. He was in love, going to be married, had a family, job and house… in a week, that is… he had a life. And it was indescribable! He, Greg Lestrade, had what he had always dreamed of and it was even better than he ever imagined. And, with wine and pain pills, that dream was going to better still…

Chapter End Notes

I opened a twitter account (eventhorizon451) if folks want to stop by for Sherlock posts, the very serious ruminations on my writing process and dog pictures...
Chapter 24

Having a picnic with his fiancé. His fiancé. The man he was going to marry and who could be introduced publicly as Gregory Lestrade, my fiancé. Truly, this was a night to end all nights…

“Mycroft? You alright?”

“Hmm? Oh… oh, do pardon me, Gregory. I was…”

“Woolgathering?”

“That… that is actually most apt.”

“Thought so. When we first met, I remember thinking how adorable you were when your mind went off to gather wool. You’re still adorable when you do that, in case you were wondering.”

“I must admit to a modicum of relief that my adorableness remains status quo.”

“You know, though… we do have to tell people. I mean we aren’t mandated to, but it would seem strange to finally be able to admit to what the rest of the village believes and keep that truth from the few people who know the truth. At least, the truth up to tonight.”

“Yes, and I have given some thought to that. It is… I cannot believe that either Mother Lestrade or Grandmama would appreciate not being ‘first’ to hear the news. Mummy, as well, though I am not entirely certain if she believes us truly engaged or not. That was left in a somewhat nebulous state when she and I spoke.”

“So, family announcement. Which will confuse Dad, but he’s generally confused by the sun coming up in the morning because of his tiny brain, so that’s not a problem. Could we… we’re supposed to have a party for my cottage, but I can’t imagine Grandmama attending that. We could have a party or dinner at your house and make our announcement then. Do you think we could do that?”

“Easily, I suspect. If I dangled a sufficiently tantalizing tone in Grandmama’s ear, she would dash for our door to participate. Mother Lestrade and your father will likely be easy to schedule owing to their proximity, so their attendance is guaranteed. I can phone Mummy, but her attendance is not one I anticipate. For a number of reasons.”

“Then, that’s what we’ll do. A big announcement party, then… my cottage party, then… who knows? As many parties as we can manage before you’re off to Uni.”

“My educational path has never sounded so utterly dreary.”

“We could use someone like you in the police if you change your mind about school. That amazing brain of yours would make you the best detective we have, no offence to Sharon and Ronald.”

“Unfortunately, I would be too transfixed by your masculine glory to pay much heed to the cases to which I was assigned.”

“Forgot about that. Oh well, I’ll have to settle for Sherlock and John. Did I tell you those little bastards stop by the station now and then when they’re doing their royal bicycle tour? They say it’s to demand sweets money, but I catch them trying to get a look at what’s in the case folders for
something juicy.”

“Oh dear… they are hoping for another lost cat success.”

“With something larger than a cat. I suspect they’ve got grand designs on catching some suspect in a murder spree and going through the whole bit of giving testimony and watching the bastard hang.”

“How fortunate that hanging is no longer approved for the execution of criminals. Perhaps that will dampen their zeal.”

“We can hope. But… speaking of the goblin born… it’s probably time to go home. Our romantic dinner didn’t go quite to plan, but they won’t forgive us violating our couples-time contract.”

“No, and Sherlock ensured we each signed the document with our true names so as not to use a technicality to gain extra time for ourselves.”

“He’s an efficient lad.”

“One of his many stellar attributes.”

“So, finish our wine and go home?”

“I shall finish the wine, for you are driving, Gregory. It would be rather hypocritical to end our evening with your sharing a cell with the gentleman you deposited in it an hour or so ago.”

“I do hate being hypocritical. It’s not a good look for me. The wine is yours! I’ll just admire you drinking it.”

“I shall do so most handsomely so your efforts are not wasted.”

Watching Mycroft’s exaggerated enjoyment of his wine made Lestrade laugh, but handsome was the right word for it. Even if the wine was being enjoyed in a plastic cup, his Mycroft certainly made it a joy to behold…

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“You are late! John and I demand the forfeiture penalty!”

“Gregory and I are not late, brother, you have purposefully set the clock ahead to shamefully gain your spoils.”

“That is a lie! I would never stoop to such dishonorable tactics! My name has been tarnished by your slanderous accusations and I demand satisfaction!”

“I will not be engaging in a duel with you, Sherlock, despite the weaponry John is failing to hide behind his back.”

“Peppercorn! Why are you not… tall?”

John looked up and back to the blades of the replica swords rising notably high above his head.

“I don’t know. You’re supposed to be smart, so you tell me.”

“Deficient genetics, a lack of motivation to overcome said genetics and the weight of a planet in
food in your stomach preventing your body from gaining even a millimeter of height despite its most forceful growth efforts.”

“See? If you knew, why did you bother to ask?”

As Sherlock threw up his hands in frustration, Lestrade plucked the fake swords out of John’s grasp and rested the blades on his shoulders in what Mycroft thought a very cavalier… and entrancing… fashion.

“Put the clock back to the correct time, check that you’ve got your schoolwork completed and then you can have a game of chess before bedtime. One game, though… I know both of you have a busy day tomorrow and I’ll not be blamed for your yawning and dragging yourselves through it like a pair of worms.”

“Worms can’t yawn, Greg. They don’t have mouths.”

“That’s very scientific of you, John. I feel exceptionally informed.”

“Thanks! I actually had science questions to answer for school. They weren’t about worms, but that might have encouraged my brain.”

“Your brain is as useful to purposeful thought as a bowl of porridge, John Watson.”

“What’s wrong with porridge? It’s warm and it fills my stomach and your cook makes it just as thick as I like it. Porridge is a lovely thing, actually.”

“Your Ode to Porridge will not inspire the literary world, which, given their utter lack of sobriety or maturity, is a rather remarkable thing.”

John glared and slowly, with tremendous intent, removed a wrapped chocolate from his pocket and made an award-winning show of removing said wrapper and laying it upon his extended tongue to draw back into his mouth with a highly-satisfied slurp.

“Intolerable! I… your dastardliness does you discredit. Provide to me a chocolate and I might amend my judgement.”

“No. And I’ve got an entire pocket filled with them.”

“What! And I was not awarded my due share!”

“They’re good, too. Very, very good.”

“Where… where did you get them? I demand to know!”

“From Helen, who took Greg’s job at the shop. She gave them to me when I told her she looked pretty. You said she looked like the Whore of Babylon, because you’re evil, so you have nothing in your pocket, while I have sweets.”

John’s ability to charm the village’s and family’s women was becoming, along with his appetite, one of his defining features.

“The entirety of the nation’s cosmetic company revenue resided on her face. And she chose shades particularly offensive for her coloring!”

While the battle continued to rage, Mycroft and Lestrade crept away from ground zero and made their way to the library to have a seat and await the inevitable expansion of the war zone to that
placid space when the chess set was drawn into the conflict.

“When might be a good evening for our soiree, my dear?”

“Let me think… actually Friday is good choice. I work the early shift on Friday, but have the night hours on Saturday, so I can sleep late if we want, or need to.”

“I shall ring Grandmama this very evening and extend the invitation.”

“Good. Now, all we have to do is keep it a secret until then. Why do I suspect that’s easier said than done?”

“Because you are very wise. A source of excitement is always difficult to contain.”

“I’m going to contain this one, though. It didn’t feel that way at the time, but now, thinking back on when my school thought you proposed… there was a lot of excitement there. Pride, too, even with it not being true. I’d like that, again, but with it being real this time.”

“Oddly, I understand your point. There was an electricity in the act that, though it died a rather abrupt death, I am eager to re-experience.”

“Alright then, we’ll look towards Friday and the next weekend, perhaps for my cottage christening. I should be able to move in soon, Saturday even, so I’ll have a chance to put the finishing touches on it.”

“I believe that a most workable plan.”

“Fatcroft! John’s avarice requires chastisement. Sit upon his miniscule body and crush it to dust!”

How John was successfully balancing three chocolates on his head while smugly dancing at Sherlock’s fury was a mystery neither of the older pair dared to investigate.

“I offer instead that you attempt the crushing with your skill at chess. The victory, should it occur, will be more meaningful and satisfying to you.”

Sherlock launched himself at the chess board, while John followed at the most leisurely pace possible, plucking a chocolate off of his head and popping it into his mouth.

“The joys of family, love.”

“Our joys might be a tad camouflaged as mayhem at times, but they tighten the bonds, nonetheless.”

Watching Sherlock and John prepare for their battle to the death or, at least, the death of this set of cheap plastic pieces that were purchased in bulk for their more bloodthirsty moods, the engaged couple made themselves comfortable on the sofa and let the mayhem sink into their bones. Nights like this were meant to be savored, even if part of the savoring had to be held secret from tiny ears. At least for now…

“Gregory?”

“I know… don’t get too close.”
It had become seemingly the norm for Lestrade to call the Holmes house his home, until the cottage was ready, and that allowed a wealth of opportunity for Mycroft to see firsthand the rigors of police work. The muddy, muddy rigors.

“Was there… did you lose a wager?”

“Funny. No, we were called out for a ‘wild animal’ terrorizing this woman’s lawn. It was a bulldog puppy. A happy, frisky bulldog puppy that thought a game of chase was a wonderful way to spend a rainy afternoon. And, my sergeant thought a rainy afternoon of chase was a wonderful way to spend an hour or so reading in our warm, dry vehicle while I tried to catch the little bugger. Then walk door to door to find where he belonged. Then fix the damage I caused to the nutty bird’s garden while trying to capture Alphonse.”

“The dog’s name is Alphonse.”

“He’s a purebred. They call him Alfie, though.”

“That part, at least, is understandable.”

“He seemed happy to be home again, though, I suspect he’ll make a dash for freedom the next time it rains. Little thing seemed to like the mud. Guess I’ll have to learn to love it, too.”

“Your service to the community is unparalleled, my dear.”

“I need a shower. A long, long, long shower.”

“I shall have the staff tend to your uniform, as well. Then, if you feel sufficiently energetic, we are requested by your father to pay a visit.”

“Why? Does he need money?”

“I believe it is more the case that Daniel is relaying the request from the children who feel somewhat stranded at the pub, given they bicycled to the establishment and now fear the searing effects of a gentle British rain.”

“Of course. To be fair, it’s picked up a bit from gentle, so the ride home would probably be an uncomfortable one. Maybe even tricky, since I know the route they typically use and it can get a bit slick with a good rain.”

“Again, your protective eye does you credit. As does your doting concern for the children.”

That was a bit thick, even for Mycroft.

“You’re free with the compliments tonight. Want to tell me why?”

“Because… because you are a stalwart member of our police force and a superb guardian to Sherlock and John.”

“You mother is coming to our party, isn’t she?”

Damn Gregory and his arousing mind!

“I…”

“You said you were going to phone her as a courtesy. She took you up on that courtesy, didn’t she?”
“I… Mummy may… a scheduled brief return home nearly coincided with the date of our party, and she… yes, she will be attending.”

“Well, that ensures we’ll have an exciting time. In addition to the exciting time we were certain to have anyway, what with the rest of the family under a single roof.”

“I am viewing this from the point of view of efficiency. One announcement to serve for all.”

“How is that working for you?”

“Unsatisfactorily, I’m afraid.”

“Well, you’ve got a few days to work on it. I’m off for my shower, then we can collect the boys. Fortunately, I know from experience that their bicycles fit in the boot of my car.”

“Is there, perhaps, room for them, as well?”

“Actually there’s room for one. And, yes, I do know that for a fact.”

Mycroft nodded sagely and watched his fiancé start towards what would certainly be an extended time in the shower. Given the rather busy profile of the coming evening, he would resist the urge to join him and make use of the small amount of time alone in the house. And, of course… mud. That was something that could dampen even his rather fiery level of ardor…

“aren’t they adorable?”

Sherlock and John had, apparently, their own darts board, positioned a good distance below the pub’s standard one that allowed for two games to occur concurrently, with it being a dead heat as to which was best provided with emotive gestures, questionable language and cheating.

“Tell me there’s not gambling associated with that, Dad.”

“Why’s that a problem? It’s not illegal for little chimps to gamble.”

“That’s not what I mean and you know it. What are the odds?”

“Two and a half to one that John wins. I’ve got quite a bit of action going for this one, since Sherlock’s in a particularly testy mood and that spoils his aim.”

“Daniel, are you confessing to using the children for profit?”

“Certainly! They get a percentage of the take, so it’s all above board. Sherlock even set up one of his notebooks to keep track of their earnings, so they know how much to collect from me at the end of the week.”

It was a mark of their family that neither Mycroft nor Lestrade found anything surprising in this.

“Dad, I’m certain that is illegal.”

“Bollocks. Besides, who’s going to arrest me? Or them? Your Inspector won a fiver yesterday on the Great Chips competition. John’s a lock for that, usually, and the bet’s more on how much the lad can eat, but Sherlock had that look in his eye that said he wasn’t going down for this one and your boss correctly predicted he’d do something dodgy. Where he found a fake mouse I’ll never know, but it gave John quite the fright when he found it nestled in his chips pile.”
Again, there was a surprise level of naught, but the long-suffering sighs spoke to a bottomless well of resignation that every day would bring surprises, whether they were surprising or not.

“So, what can I get for you two?”

“Strychnine.”

“Funny, son. Two pints of quality lager, then. Mycroft, are you with us for a bit or off to London again soon?”

Deciding that ignoring the darts scandal was to everyone’s benefit, Mycroft took a stool and settled in to enjoy his ignorance.

“I am never certain when I might need to leave, however, I see nothing on the immediate horizon that might require my attention.”

“I’m sure this one’s happy about that. Not only does he have his fiancé nearby to do all those sexy things fiancés are good for, but you can keep an eye on the chimps while Greg’s at work. The term’s over soon and… well, I’ve seen how much fun they can have when they have full days available for it, so I can imagine summer is going to be a hectic time for you dads.”

The idea of a nanny once again flitted through Mycroft’s mind, however, given the likely sum he would have to pay for care owing to their subsequent physical and mental debilitation, he quickly pushed that thought back down.

“I have no doubt Gregory and I are both up to the task.”

Though, last summer, John was not a member of the household. That did… complicate… matters somewhat.

“Of course, of course… I’m just thinking more about you, since Greg’s going to have his own cottage and can lay about like the lazy thing he is while you race around trying to capture two nudists who don’t want a bath since they’ve painted their skin with who knows what and don’t want it removed.”

Of course you smile, Gregory… you are unrepentantly evil and I must accept that my troth is pledged to an unrepentant devil.

“I am certain that with some appropriate ground rules laid before the summer holiday begins, the time shall not be as chaotic as you appear to believe.”

Lestrade shook his head and motioned his father to pour out some of the good whisky they kept behind the bar.

“I have no doubt you’re right, love. No doubt at all.”

“Your tone is a most unconvincing one, Gregory.”

“I’ll try and fix that. But, speaking of summer and families and the like… we’re having the family together on Friday, Dad, and you can come if you promise not to embarrass me.”

“Really? I’d love to! What could be more fun than a party with the people who put the largest smiles on my face?”

“Mycroft is going to lock the champagne away where you can’t steal it, you ridiculous thief.”
“That’s harsh, son. Besides, I only like champagne when I’m… well, when a spot of romance is called for at the moment. I doubt that’s going to happen what with Lizzie being the only woman in the vicinity.”

“Grandmama is going to be there, too.”

“Oh… well then… Rowena has aged very beautifully, if I do say so myself.”

“Wrong. I mean right, but… no. Mycroft’s mum will be there, too, so if you’re not on your best behavior, I’ll say I overheard you making the comment about how women are too stupid and emotional to have the vote and they’ll tear your skin off for Sherlock to use as a rug in front of his bed.”

“Mycroft, are you hearing this? Are you certain this is what you want in your life?”

“There are times I question my choice, but Gregory is rather inexpensive to feed and simple to entertain, so the economy and ease of his long-term maintenance makes the deal a rather appealing one.”

“You’ve got good business sense, lad. Just the perfect partner for this little entrepren… entrepren…

“Entrepreneurial?”

“That’s it! Entrepreneurial venture.”

“You two deserve each other so I’m going over there. Do not follow me over there.”

Mycroft and Danny pretended offense as Greg moved to stand near the darts-based gambling empire and made a specific show of facing away from the bar.

“He loves you so much, Mycroft, it’s… it’s completely brilliant, is what it is.”

“And it is my honor to receive that love and offer it in return.”

“Listen to you, just as in love as he is. A perfect couple is what you are.”

“No… to my discredit, that is not the case. I have perpetrated a measure of neglect that will ever dog my heels and render the term ‘perfect’ entirely inapplicable. That Gregory has forgiven me is something I did not dare to hope, but hold fast to as the greatest gift I have ever received.”

“Neglect is a terrible thing, that’s true enough, but it’s not the worst, lad. And I highly doubt your version of neglect even remotely compares with mine. You told me before, though, that you learned from your mistakes. That’s what’s important. Don’t become… what’s the word when you take things for granted?”

“Complacency?”

“Yes! Don’t become complacent, but don’t savage yourself day in and day out, either. We all fuck up, some of us do it a lot, and all you can do is say you’re sorry, try to make amends and do your best not to do that again in the future. Sometimes it’s not enough, if you’ve fucked up truly badly or once too often, but… that’s not you, Mycroft. I’ve met loads of people in my life and I think I have a good feel for people in general, so I can say with confidence that that’s not you. Now, drink that whisky right down, then carry your pint over to Greg and whisper something in his ear that’ll make him want to race home immediately, chimps or not in the car.”
Deciding that wasn’t the worst idea in the world and not wanting to credit the worst husband history with another bit of good advice, Mycroft slammed his whisky back, gladly accepted Danny’s pats on the back as he coughed out the high-proof shock, then took his lager over to his lover where he used every bit of his erotic creativity to make Lestrade’s toes curl.

“How the FUCK did you think of that!”

“You… we’re doing that tonight, you do know that.”

“I await the moment with bated breath. For now, however… who is winning?”

“I’m not sure. They’re playing some combined game with my dad’s mates and there’s a sliding scale for chimp points versus adult points and… the bloke next to me tried to explain it and I think I’d need Sherlock’s maths brain to understand it all. Wouldn’t be surprised if the little bastard thought up the whole scheme in the first place.”

“Complexity of a contest does make wagering a more stimulating endeavor.”

“And more profitable.”

“But of course.”

“Which means that when the evil duo come begging for money for whatever loony thing they want to do, I can happily say not on your fucking life.”

“It is good to encourage financial independence, no matter the age, so I applaud your parenting skills, my dear.”

“Got to have them sharply honed before you set off for Uni. They are growing up, but… I don’t think I’ll ever feel ready to simply let them go off without keeping my eye on them somehow.”

“A suspicion I share about myself, as well. I recognize the time will come when they are of age for a variety of life’s benefits and challenges, however…”

“You’re going to spy on them like they’re Russian agents, aren’t you?”

“Am I that transparent?”

“For this? Absolutely. It’s a relief, too, because you know Grandmama is getting tired of doing all the family spying alone. When she comes on Friday, you two can begin sharing tips and strategies for making the whole business as efficient as you can. Add Mum in, while you’re at it, because her friends phone her all the time about where those two gamblers are and what they seem to be up to, especially when they seem to be up to something.”

“Yes, the network of mothers is a formidable one and I shall not forsake its assistance with this venture.”

“Smart man. So, want to lay a few quid on the game?”

“Gregory! Are you advocating encouraging this illegality?”

“If I win, yes. If I lose, I’ll give everyone here my most serious-faced don’t-break-the-law speech to distract them while you snatch everyone’s winnings and make off to the car with them.”
It was not possible to love this man more. There was simply no manner in which that could be the case.

“I believe I understand the conditions. Shall we choose the side to support so we might affect a plan to bring about the downfall of the opposing side?”

“That’s the logical next step. We might as well get comfortable, because I think this won’t be quick combat.”

Sharing a smile, the engaged couple quickly grabbed a small table being vacated by another smiling couple and settled in for a relaxing night of entertainment. This was the sort of thing married couples did, wasn’t it, and they were already professionals at the task. The strange and contorted path they’d taken to this point certainly hadn’t been typical, but it seemed to have ended in the right place.

“Ohhh…"

“Yes…”

“Probably should remind Sherlock that giving someone’s arm a knock when they’re throwing a sharply-pointed object isn’t really a good thing.”

“I shall go and purchase the gentleman another drink, shall I?”

“They’re our kids, so we’re responsible for dart-damaged drinks, I’d say.”

“Very well. One moment, my dear.”

Making a ‘one more pint on its way’ gesture to the man plucking a dart out of his glass and wiping splashed beer off of his hand, Mycroft darted toward the bar where Danny was already pulling another of his customer’s favorite. Never a dull moment in their little pub, but, luckily, those not-dull moments were the sorts that you laughed about when they were over. Of course, Sherlock and John were growing up… better factor in a touch of ‘let’s just forget this ever happened’ money starting with the next month’s budget…

“Mummy… you are a day early.”

Mycroft stared at the well-dressed woman standing at the door of his study and mentally ran through the status of his appearance to ensure it would pass muster. As it was, he now had an additional day of mother-scrutiny to endure and it was best not to start on a low note.

“This fit my schedule more successfully. I take it your brother is in school?”

“For a few days more, then the summer holiday begins.”

“Good. I shall be gone by that point. The unbridled chaos he and John are certain to commit does not bear contemplation. Now, let us see my cottage.”

Pardon?

“Excuse me, Mummy, but did I hear you say you wished to see the cottage?”

“That you did. You informed me it was ready for occupancy and I would see how it appears, given that is the case. Has Gregory taken residence yet?”

The End.
“No… he is slated to begin the moving process on Saturday.”

Provided he is not hung-over and has not been executed by either you or Mother Lestrade because of tomorrow’s announcement.

“Good. I would rather see it as it would someday be rented and not with his football posters, unwashed socks and breakfast dishes fermenting in the sink. Your staff will deal with my luggage, so we can leave now.”

Mycroft dashed after his mother who, in her usual style, assumed he would follow obediently and continued to dart to obtain a vehicle because even the shortish walk to the cottage would certainly not suit Mummy’s temperament.

“We still possess the Jaguar? I would have assumed you would have chosen something more family-friendly by this point.”

Trying not to choke, Mycroft hoped his gagging successfully passed as throat clearing and nodded as if somberly considering his mother’s words, as he darted behind the wheel to get their adventure started.

“Gregory and I have pooled our transportation so that his vehicle is used for the daily tasks and we use this one for other matters such as trips to Grandmama’s house. Daniel, of course, avoided both options by taking the Bentley when he chauffeured Sherlock and John to London for a visit.”

His mother’s laughter was something Mycroft so seldom heard that he actually checked the radio for the station to which they were listening.

“He drove the Bentley? I am rather surprised he was not arrested for having stolen the thing as he is precisely not the person one envisions driving such a vehicle.”

“I cannot vouch for police activity during their drive, but I am aware of the size of the bankroll Sherlock retrieved from my safe before departing, so I feel somewhat confident that any ‘misunderstandings’ could have been dealt with in a highly efficient manner. Not that I am saying a word against the honor of the nation’s police force, mind you.”

“Of course your brother grandly feathered his personal nest. I would expect no less. And, given what I have observed concerning his and John’s voracity, I suspect that bankroll was notably depleted by the time they arrived in London, concurrent with the nation’s supply of crisps and sweets marking a substantial dip in availability.”

“That… that was certainly the case, yes. I viewed the rear seat and… there are trash heaps less possessed of bulk than what I saw in the aftermath of their journey.”

“When you were… you could scarcely have been three and there was some nonsense on the village green that your father thought appropriate for one your age. Animal petting and games or other such ridiculousness. In any case, we stopped a moment to look at some of the truly uninspiring baked goods on sale for this charity or that and, when we looked back, you were gone.”

Mycroft turned to look at his mother, because, first, she rarely told stories of his youth and, second, she had actually done something… mother-like in his youth. Not that he remembered a whit of it…

“Needless to say we were frantic and had the constables out looking for you, as well as half the village itself… and then we found you. Directly under the baked goods table where we had been standing, hidden by the cloth draped over it. You’d found the main supply of cakes, tarts and biscuits and happily began eating. Fortunately, your chubby contentment quashed any anger on the
part of the charity women and your father’s wallet doused any remaining upset at finding their day’s fundraising supply reduced by a third. And still your father had to purchase candy floss for you before we returned home. I suspect, therefore, your brother’s taste for less-than nutritious fare has a significant genetic basis.”

Now it was Mycroft laughing as this was only the second real story of his childhood his mother had ever imparted and it, like the first, was actually… utterly normal. Not at all unlike those told by Mother Lestrade about his Gregory…

“I do admit to a powerful taste for candy floss.”

“I have no doubt your Gregory will see you handily supplied should you find yourself dragged to an event where it is on offer. Ah, there is my cottage. Still standing, which is a positive first impression.”

And looking very smart, in Mycroft’s opinion. Tidily painted, with the immediate grounds tamed to a welcoming appearance, roof properly mended and all windows washed to healthy shine… it would offer his Gregory a superlative home until another home, their home, became appropriate.

Opening his mother’s door, Mycroft stayed a step back as she looked around the exterior, then quickly opened the next door to let her inside.

“Hmmmm…”

Not entirely certain why he was standing still in the small sitting room, Mycroft waited while his mother looked through each of the rooms and took a few looks out the windows, as well.

“It appears comfortable.”

That was… good.

“I suspect it shall be. The furnishings were chosen for both sturdiness and comfort, as well as some degree of plainness to complement any decorating scheme.”

And because his beloved balked sharply at any of the more elaborate offerings at which they had looked.

“Excellent. When Gregory no longer has use of it, that shall be a positive point towards its renting.”

“Very much my thinking. The same with the paint colors. We have yet to make much headway with the garden, but that is our next area of focus.”

“Good, because if there is one point on which the various locals agree, in terms of importance, it is the status of their blasted gardens.”

So says the woman who inspects her roses every time she visits and, seeing one thing amiss, throws a tantrum for which Sherlock scrupulously scripts notes to enhance his future performances.

“Again, an area in which we have been most forward thinking. And, it will provide Gregory a touch of tranquility that will benefit him greatly, given his long days of work.”

“Yes, I am sure it will. And where is your brother and John supposed to sleep? I have no doubt they will invade this space with the incursive force of an army of ants.”
“We have purchased bed rolls for them.”

“Oh, they will simply adore that.”

“They have already lodged a plethora of complaints and objections, however, Gregory has remained solidly unmoved on the subject.”

“I am pleased to see he has acquired some ability to say ‘no’ to the children. You must monitor Gregory’s tendency to indulgence, Mycroft, and keep it well in check.”

Should he remark that the one proven to fall victim to Sherlock’s and John’s weeping and wailing was him and not his spouse? No… Mummy was behaving most agreeably and a lecture on childrearing would inevitably lead in a contentious direction and… why spoil today’s placidity with argument?

“Gregory’s parenting ability is something I do not question, but I am ever watchful, on both our parts, for evidence of inappropriate strategies as concern Sherlock and John.”

“Very well. We may leave now.”

“Of course, Mummy. I am certain you hope to rest a bit after…”

“There should not be too great a quantity of patrons at this hour, so we will visit your pub.”

Knowing that if he lifted his mother’s dress to check for evidence of one of the lizard people oft-mentioned by civilization’s rather off-kilter thinkers he would lose both his hand and the arm attached to it, Mycroft simply smiled in what he hoped wasn’t too suspicious a manner and motioned to the door.

“If you desire it, Mummy, I am certain my little investment would be happy to host you. We do stock several wines I believe will be to your liking, if you desire a small respite.”

“We shall see. Come along, Mycroft. We should likely be home before your brother arrives, lest he leave us with naught but smoldering rubble.”

“Oh… that might not be necessary…”

“Are you certain this has not been condemned by the health officials?”

“I am most certain, Mummy. The exterior is actually slated for its own bit of brightening, much as for Gregory’s cottage, however, I assure you the interior is maintained to a most acceptable level of cleanliness. The quality of patrons we attract are… solid citizens who work terribly hard for their living, however, they prize a clean and reputable establishment for their day’s bit of drink and conversation.”

Mycroft had no idea why he was behaving as an estate agent trying to promote the property to a prospective buyer but… well, there was nothing wrong with paving a path with stones of, if not gold, at least some useful metal. If Mummy was truly displeased, he would never hear the end of her scorn.

“Which is irrelevant to me, however, I do know many competent physicians to treat whatever diseases I might contract, so I suppose I do not face certain death entering your hovel.”
Rolling his eyes, Mycroft held open the door, but something caught his attention as his mother walked through. His mother walked through. Not his mother and her paramour. In fact, she had failed to mention him once, either during his previous phone conversation or during today’s discourse. Curious…

“Hmmmm…”

And, again, we begin.

“Yes, Mummy?”

“It is not quite as odious as I anticipated.”

“The history of the business is a sound one and I am confident that will continue. I predict it will generate a comfortable profit for both Daniel and myself through the years.”

“Speak of the devil…”

Ah yes… the man looking as if Raquel Welch had walked into his pub and was waiting for her seat to be drawn out for her.

“Emmie! Oh, this is a… Mycroft, you didn’t tell me your mum was visiting. Have a seat! Start at the bar so we can chat then take a table, if you’d like. You’d like the outdoor area a lot, too, I suspect. It’s especially nice this time of year, what with the flowers and ducks on the stream and whatnot.”

Leaping over the bar and only showing some sign of age in the slight limp for the first step or two after landing on the other side, Danny approached his new guests with a wide smile and a look in his eye that made Mycroft roll his eyes a second time.

“You haven’t lost your business in a game of cards yet, Daniel, so bravo.”

“Oh no… no wagering this lovely. Not ever, not for any reason. Got myself a proper business and a good flat to go with it, so I’m not doing a single thing to risk it. My stupid days are behind me… mostly… and besides, our Mycroft here has a vested interest in seeing this stay in the family, what with his percentage of the profits and the fact that if I’m having to live rough, I’ll be doing it in one of the hundred spare rooms you have in that massive house of yours.”

“Your son has a cottage and two bedrolls. I would say your emergency accommodations are already sorted. Now, I believe Mycroft mentioned a non-lethal selection of wine? I shall need one, I suspect, to ignore the… mendicant-attracting atmosphere of this locale.”

“Mycroft? Little help?”

“Mummy would enjoy a glass of wine to complement the coziness of our establishment.”

“Your mum talks like you do… it’s sort of sexy, actually. I bet Greg likes it when you use that mouth of yours to form all those elaborate, complex words.”

No, Mummy, do not smirk at that deplorable turn of phrase. It is most unseemly.

“Anyway, I’ve got the perfect thing. It’s what Mycroft likes when he’s not got a taste for a good pint in his hands. This way, my lady…”

At least Mummy had the decency not to take the offered arm… could this day go any further into
confusion? No, best not think that or it was certain to happen…

"AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!"

John’s little body hitting the floor as he fell dead from the shock of seeing Sherlock’s mother sitting at the bar with a glass of wine in her hand made a satisfying thump and a quick round of bets started as to how long he would be deceased before resurrecting.

“MUMMY! You are… why are you… you are in my pub and I demand to know the reason!”

Sherlock’s infuriated face, surrounded by a halo of disheveled curls and mounted on a body adorned with an as-disheveled school uniform made his mother wonder if, perhaps, her youngest had fallen down and gained a concussion, making his appearance in a pub a more likely thing.

“Sherlock, are you somehow confused as to your location?”

“This is Papa Lestrade’s ramshackle speakeasy and, as I am it’s most important and worthy patron, it is to be expected that I be found here. You, however, have no reason to be found… drinking and socializing among the rabble, which, I freely admit, I, by far, the least pleasant aspect of my patronage.”

“Mycroft, kindly explain why your brother is suffering the delusion that he and John, I presume the corpse is John, are customers of an alcohol-vending establishment?”

“That’s not all we sell here, Emmie! There’s juice and those fizzy drinks the kids adore. Not to mention we’ve got food, and let me tell you, a boy gains quite the appetite from a hard day of learning. I have the honor and pleasure of seeing those two little faces come through my door almost every afternoon and, it’s a blessing I tell you. A true blessing.”

Mycroft could feel the heat of his mother’s gaze on his face, or perhaps that simply his response to his mother’s gaze blooming on his face… either way, heat was involved.

“Your brother is a regular patron, Mycroft?”

“It… the pub is well-positioned as an after-school stop for the children to rest before continuing on with their day. They have, for most purposes, ceased using driver for their transportation to and from school as they have their bicycles and…”

“What! Sherlock Holmes, my Sherlock Holmes, rides a bicycle?”

“Do not impugn my mode of transport! Driver is as pedantic as Mycroft and refuses to obey even the simplest of my commands. Euclid does not proffer disobedience, though he does occasionally behave in a fractious manner, such as when the road roughens and he is careless with his footing.”

“You named your bicycle Euclid?”

“Is there nothing but criticism I must bear from your viperous lips? Shall I ever know love? Regard? The gentle affection of tender arms?”

Kneeling next to the dead body of his friend made Sherlock’s speech a particularly impassioned one and won a hearty round of applause from the pub crowd, who had to admit things in their pub had gotten agreeably entertaining since that prat Danny Lestrade took over the reins.
“Far too much work. What is your in-exchange cost for love, regard and affection?”

John reanimated enough to have a whispered conference on this potential source of profit, then expired once more.

“We demand chips! Enough for each of us to eat our fill. And Papa Lestrade’s special libations! He decrises their sugar content as perilous, but his intellectual prowess is matched only by that of a grain of sand, so his opinion on the issue counts for naught. And an additional £5 that will be spent at the lackey’s former shop on whatever we desire.”

Another quick revivification reminded Sherlock of a point that he cleared his throat to announce.

“And we will not be forced to do our schoolwork until… we choose. Papa Lestrade’s ridiculous rules shall be rescinded in their entirety. If you are required for perform an act of debauchery to secure his cooperation, that is not our concern. Only our suggestion, in the interests of efficiency.”

Mycroft waited for… well, for the first time in his life he could not predict his mother’s response, so he simply waited and took a large drink of his wine.

“Oh very well. Mycroft, pay your brother. John… your moldering will not gain you your spoils, so kindly return from beyond the grave. Daniel… what in heaven’s names are your ‘special’ libations?”

“Fairly every kind of juice and syrup I’ve got banging about with a large spoonful of pure sweetness tossed in to shake with the rest. It’s guaranteed to make those two swing from the rafters, so you’ll have a circus show to accompany what I’m sure will be another glass of my fine wine and pleasant conversation.”

“Joyful. And your ridiculous rules?”

“They’ve got to do a bit of schoolwork if they want chips. Don’t want Mycroft or Greg having me by the ear because these two are falling behind in their studies.”

“That is not… entirely ridiculous. I would have predicted something far more Sherlockian in drama and hysterics.”

“Insult! I demand satisfaction! And greater satisfaction than I ever receive when I demand such from Slugcroft and his concubine!”

“You have already demanded a health-killing repast and hard currency. That is more than enough in demands for one afternoon. I see bags to carry books, but no books in evidence. Affect a change in that and we shall begin meeting our side of the agreement.”

John’s ‘yeah food!’ rang out loudly and his ghost sprinted towards an open seat at the bar, climbed up and sat smiling in anticipation of his bounty.

“Thank you, Mrs. Holmes for being unloving and… unaffectioning.”

Mycroft would not swear he saw a slight twinkle in his mother’s eye, but he filed the information away as part of the portfolio of observations on his mother that had seen a large increase in size and interest of late.

“Sherlock, are you going to allow John to consume your portion, as well?”

Sherlock glared at his mother but, in defiance of basic physics, shot a quizzical look towards Mycroft.
at the very same time.

“John would not dare. He recognizes the proper social order of our association and that its violation warrants the severest of punishments.”

“Daniel, I believe there should be an award for the child who first begins their studies. Perhaps an extra spoon of sugar in their liquid concoction? Or, do you, perhaps, have some syrup-sodden fruit to add to make the potion truly unholy?”

“I do at that, Emmie! Heard that Lord Chimperson? Lord Apesham? First one with a solid start on his books get a drink that will turn your blood into jam.”

“That is patently unfair! John is a heretofore undocumented subgroup of the jam taxon and that affords him an unacceptable advantage!”

“Then you’ll have to make haste so his jamminess doesn’t win the day.”

Sherlock shot towards the stool next to John’s, throwing his bag onto the bar and dragging his schoolwork out as if he was extracting a rat from a grain bin, quickly, yet with grim determination.

While his mother watched the schoolwork battle begin and Danny put in the chips orders, Mycroft decided that the time had come to broach the question that had been puzzling him since they arrived.

“Mummy, will your gentleman friend be arriving today, as well?”

There. The in-the-eyes equivalent of a sigh… there was a story here and it was one he hoped he was properly predicting.

“Robert will not be attending your soiree. He… he and I have not been seeing as much of each other as we had previously. His business interests, you know… not enough hours in the day for running a successful business and taking time to enjoy the earnings of that business. After I leave here, I shall, I think, spend some time in Spain. Several of my friends are taking a lovely villa for an extended holiday and have asked me join them for a time. Robert, for instance, would never be able to enjoy such an experience as he would ever be called to the phone or the airport to tend to his various dealings.”

Grandmama likely already knew the situation and had enjoyed a congratulatory piece of chocolate for her prescience. One day, he would scale to her heights, but that day was very far down the road…

“I see, Mummy, and I fully understand your point. It is unkind to burden a person with activities and experiences that are not suited to their lifestyle.”

“Precisely. I do try and exhibit kindness whenever it is possible. And merited.”

Not certain if his mother’s teasing would stretch so far as to accept him guffawing at her words, Mycroft simply nodded in agreement, finished his wine and set the empty glass in a prominent location to signal a much-needed refill.

“And your Gregory… shall he be joining us?”

“I… actually, today and tomorrow he does not have the rather vampirish hours he sometimes shoulders, so yes, he could do that...”

Especially since it appears we are here for more than a glass of wine and a few sets of sums and
“… in fact, I shall send him a page to alert him to our location. I am confident a relaxing drink in a cameraderous atmosphere will do much to wash away the severities of his day.”

“Then I suppose it shall not be the death of me to endure here for a bit longer. At least you were truthful about the wine.”

“I have made scant few suggestions for the running of the pub, but the wine list, I felt, needed an addition or two to suit the tastes of the more discriminating palates. They have done quite well in sales, being somewhat a favorite of our female clientele and various… well, those with a degree of social aspiration.”

“Canny. Your father would be proud.”

“He… he would?”

“He admired strategic thinking, even for small things. And for taking risks in areas not normally one’s strength. Yes, he would be proud. Any parent would be.”

Quickly rising to judge the progress of the schoolwork contest to award the colorful prizes being held aloft by Danny, Emma left behind her son who waited until she as occupied to let the tiny smile creep out onto his lips. His father would be proud of him and… Mummy was proud of him. All his life he had secretly hoped that, someday, someone would look at him, see the person he was, and be proud of that person. Now, he had not a someone, but someones and… my, my, my… life certainly could change and in relatively short periods of time. Not all changes were for the good, but… if you were fortunate, the good could certainly outweigh the bad.

Tapping out a page to his fiancé to extend the invitation to join the gathering, Mycroft then lifted his magically-refilled wineglass and raised a quiet toast to all the people in his life who were giving him the life he had always wanted, but despaired of finding. With effort and a large measure of luck, he would continue to be worthy of their love and support.

“Sea cow! Mummy is blatantly cheating and setting a John-friendly scale to assess our progress. Lay aside your kelp and provide a second opinion which had best please me or you shall never see even a blade of sea lettuce again in your bloated, watery life!”

No matter in what form that love and support arrived…
Mycroft smiled widely, taking one further look at the table, which had been set with the very best the family owned, in terms of tableware, and appointed with a wealth of flowers to underscore the joyfulness of the evening. Not that the guests knew about the joyfulness at this point, but they would likely be pleased with the tableau anyway.

“Ooh… that’s beautiful, love.”

The soft kiss at the back of his neck gave Mycroft the most delicious shiver and he turned to gain a bit more kissing from the man now wrapping arms around his waist.

“I am happy you are pleased. The menu shall be equally enticing, so prepare for the most succulent of feasts.”

“I’m all for that! Had to chase down some little bastards who were of the opinion that knocking over flowerpots was a proper way to keep themselves entertained. Fortunately, I know a few tricks for getting places quickly in the village and they weren’t happy to find me popping out in front of them as they ran around the corner of the butcher’s. Feed me and keep up my strength, will you, my gorgeous fiance?”

Lestrade kissed Mycroft’s nose in delight at the smugly-pleased grin that crossed his lover’s lips every time a certain word was used. There was no telling what that smile would look like when Mycroft could actually say ‘husband,’ but it was certain to be majestic.

“Dinner is not scheduled for another hour and a half, however, I suspect a small interim repast would not spoil your appetite. Appetites do not seem to spoil easily in this household, regardless of the stomach that is begging to be filled.”

“That’s true. Is… your mum milling about?”

Mycroft smirked and adored that his mother in a ferocious mood brought out the fiercely protective side of his lover, but his mother in a marginally-affable mood terrified his lover, who seemed to believe she was laying a trap that waited patiently for his foot. Last night’s time at the pub had been especially amusing to observe…

“Mummy has accompanied Grandmama to see your cottage and, then, to certain locations of particular interest to Sherlock and John, who are also present. I suspect it shall be a most entertaining experience for all involved.”

“Especially since their favorite spots are the scrapheap, the pub and the shop. Oh, and that little place that has the cosmetics they like. They did say they were a touch low with their lipstick.”

“Have they been practicing their disguises again?”

“Yes, but remember when we watched that film where the killer wrote messages in lipstick on mirrors of the victims? Sherlock decided he needed to study the various lipsticks on sale in the area, so if that happened here, he’d be able to catch the criminal. They started with their own favorite brands and shades, so now they scarcely have enough to put a touch of color on their ladylike lips.”

“Ah, an educational endeavor. I strongly approve and make certain to congratulate them on their productive use of both time and resources. Now, let us see you fed, showered and ready to receive our guests. Your father… he phoned earlier and… I was most surprised, actually, but he was
concerned he might, at his late hour, have to decline our invitation due to his intended help at the pub suddenly being unavailable.”

“Dad being responsible? That is surprising. He still coming or…”

“Oh yes… Edwards shall be covering the bar for the evening.”

“What?”

Of course, in this family, the strange and unexpected was generally the norm, so Edwards knowing how to tend bar simply fit right into the standard pattern of Lestrade-Holmes dynamics and Greg’s show of surprise was mostly to keep the conversation going.

“Grandmama has certain matters in motion and required Edwards come with her in case those matters escalated in importance. I had hoped he would join us at table, but he seemed most content to step in to fill your father’s shoes for the night. I… I have no definitive proof he has gleaned the reason for our gathering, but his comment about wondering what one purchases for wedding gifts when a couple is a non-traditional one is rather telling, I believe.”

“Edwards is nothing if not observant. Which means Grandmama knows, too.”

“I feel that is the case, yes. She… gave me a look.”

“A look?”

“A knowing look.”

“Oh, one of those. She’s good at them, too.”

“Quite.”

“Alright, then. That’s two people who won’t be surprised by our announcement.”

“I believe they will happily keep the secret until we choose to reveal it, however. Grandmama has evinced a decidedly impish streak, though, and will certainly favor us with a bounty of knowing looks and nuanced comments during dinner to vex us with her particularly-subtle brand of torment.”

“Then I definitely need a quick bite before dinner! I can’t weather that on an empty stomach.”

His beloved spouse clutching his stomach in a truly Sherlockian display of theater warmed Mycroft’s heart and made that heart beat a little faster knowing that this simple joy was one of the countless things they were now set to enjoy forever more.

“To the kitchen we go! A rousing nibble to boost our strength so we might meet our dinner in a most fortified manner and confound grandmotherly vexation!”

Greg laughed at his lover’s finger-in-the-air proclamation and gave him another kiss as a reward.

“Got whisky, as well, my formidable Mycroft?”

“Rather a lot, actually. I am predicting a certain amount of spirited revelry, pardon the pun.”

“I’ll have a few mouthfuls of that, too. Or more than a few. I’ll see how it goes.”

“Gregory, you are not permitted to arrive at table intoxicated.”
“Just a little.”

“No, for I shall not be required to act as ringmaster for our persona circus without your assistance.”

“I can assist when I’m drunk. I’ll distract everyone with my jokes and falling out of my chair and that should keep their attention away from other forms of chaos.”

“There shall be quite enough of that with Sherlock and John present that we do not need to add another jester to the court.”

“Drat. Fine, then… only a few sips of good whisky so I’ll be somber and dull the whole night long.”

“Excellent. Of course, I suspect that will change once we make our announcement.”

Seeing his fiancé’s eyes light up like stars made Mycroft’s heart swell near to bursting.

“End of dinner, right?”

“I believe that is best. That will reduce the number of potential edible projectiles available with which to pelt us should our news not be received gladly.”

“One of the many things I love about you, Mycroft… always a nod towards potential food battles.”

“I try to remain as vigilant as possible.”

Not commenting on the light trembling each felt in the other’s body as the anticipation of their dinner began to grow, the newly-engaged couple darted off to raid the kitchen, the spirits supply and dress for dinner. It might not, in the span of their lives be the most important dinner they enjoyed, but it would certainly rank at the top. Fortunately, however, if things went very, very poorly, they could use Sherlock and John as shields against the ensuing organic conflict…

““This is the finest table I’ve ever seen, lads! Well done you or your maid or whoever set this up for you.”

“Thanks, Dad. Notice, though, we’ve got your place specially set with one plate, spoon, fork, knife and glass, so you don’t get woozy.”

‘You mean like yours, son?”

‘Exactly like mine. John’s, too. Mum’s picked up on the genteel side of dining, but me and John just can’t see the point.”

Mycroft smiled at the banter between the two Lestrade men and marveled at how not very long ago, their tone would have had an entirely different timber. His love still carried hurt for his difficult years as a child, but… things were mending and that pain was nowhere near the depth and breadth it had once been.

“Well, it’s a treat to have a night like this. I don’t think we can all squeeze into your new cottage, Greg, but we could do the outdoor dining thing when the weather’s nice. And, after last night, I’d say the pub’s a good place for a nice evening, too. That fellow Edwards said it was ‘a high-quality
and appropriately-atmospheric establishment’ so that’s a ringing endorsement if I ever heard one. I suspect we could even get Rowena in for a drink with a bit of convincing. Emmie enjoyed herself and her nose can be higher in the air than Rowena’s. By a long distance, too.”

Greg and Mycroft shared a look that confirmed a video recording would be made of any and all ventures by Grandmama to the pub. It would certainly set the older-gentlemen set aflutter when she walked through the door and it would probably be a race as to who could comb their hair and straighten their tweeds the fastest.

“Yes, we do have a plethora of venues for our little gatherings and between this house, Gregory’s cottage and our bustling business, I suspect we shall see those gatherings occur as often as is possible. Ah, I believe I hear Sherlock’s dulcet tones cracking the windows with their melody.”

Given that the dinner was at home and some latitude with formality was permissible, Mycroft and Greg had left the boys to dress themselves, with the stipulation that their attire be such that all the females would offer their approval. While this was greeted by John as a challenge, it sent Sherlock into a frothing maelstrom of complaint, which had not stopped when each boy was pushed into his bedroom to commence the preparations. At some point, thought, John had migrated into Sherlock’s room, evidenced by the escalation in histrionics and the evocation of a legion of scientists and primordial gods sufficient to create three new universes before lunchtime, so the joint decisions were now to be revealed.

“I am a laughingstock! This… my contributions to the scientific community will be entirely overshadowed by John’s stunted sense of fashion for this… fancy-dress costume… shall haunt me until my dying day!”

That Sherlock was garmented in a simple pair of gray trousers, a white shirt and slightly askew, but demur bowtie made the older men wonder if Sherlock had somehow consumed one of the many toxic plants he collected and the hallucinations were just getting underway.

“Brother, your attire is entirely appropriate for tonight’s dinner, so I have no idea… oh.”

Sherlock had dramatically lifted the leg of his trousers for Mycroft to see the blindingly red socks on his feet. John added in his, which were not so blindingly red, because red was likely the only color absent from the swirl of hues that decorated his own legwear.

“The harlot flag you wore to attract the shop boy’s carnal curiosity has now been exceeded as the most garish accessory ever to disgrace the halls of this house! And it is John’s fault!”

Mycroft and Lestrade shared a look from the fond memory of the harlot flag. Carnal curiosity had definitely been attracted and, when the opportunity arose, was satisfied most blissfully.

“I’ve known a few ladies who would object to that particular term, lad, as it’s not entirely complimentary to their line of business, but… actually, I’m not sure what you’re talking about, but I suspect it all comes down to you lost a wager to John, am I right?”

Sherlock huffed at Danny, who grinned in triumph and shared a thumb’s-up with John.

“Sherlock said I couldn’t hold him out of the window by his ankles for a whole minute and I did it!”

Danny’s grin of triumph wavered between pride and a ‘oh shite their window’s not on the ground floor’ grimace, but John was too aglow with his victory to notice.

“Now I am forced to join John in his ridiculous showcase of socks.”
“It’s not ridiculous! We bought these two weeks ago and haven’t worn them once. Now is a good opportunity since we can look nice in our clothes and wear fun socks at the same time! Which makes the clothes-wearing even funner!”

The one-footed scoot with his other foot stuck out to highlight his socks nearly ran John into one of his grandmothers, though, luckily for him, it was one of the two who would simply roll their eyes and stop to admire his stockings.

“Sorry, Mrs. Lestrade.”

“I’m used to young men dancing around without a care as to who they might crash into, John, so it’s alright. You should see what Greg can get up to when he gets his music on and forgets he’s not home alone.”

Having had that experience, Mycroft grinned at his partner who refused to turn red, but did so anyway in a rather fetching fashion.

“That’s only happened once or twice, Mum. Not like you singing to those old lady tunes and scaring the neighborhood dogs.”

“Once! Once that happened. And it was just Sprinkle, so she actually ran about thinking it was part of some game.”

“The hound of hell! My bottom still clenches in fear whenever I hear the yapping bark of a canine.”

Three sets of rolled eyes at Sherlock’s proclamation weren’t accompanied by two other pairs and John sidled closer to Danny as the other member of the ‘Sprinkle?’ club.

“Bottom clenches are supposedly good for pertness, grandson. I am gratified you have added one measure of exercise to your day.”

With renewed conviction that Grandmama would set foot in the pub and it would be recorded for posterity, Mycroft bowed slightly to his newly-arrived grandmother and mother, who knew some form of japery was in motion, but was more than happy to remain ignorant of its source.

“My bottom is naturally elastic and perfectly formed, unlike the hippopotamus, whose bottom requires its own post code.”

“Who’d send mail to a bum? You’re lucky you let me choose your socks, Sherlock, or you’d be down here with nothing on but pants on your head because you’re not very bright.”

Sensing the next rising of the antichrist, complete with red socks, Danny turned John towards the dining room and Mycroft took charge of Sherlock who was already plotting his revenge. The rest of the family hoped, however, it would be a quiet revenge as some of Sherlock’s plots were notably ear-shattering…

Picking the right moment for anything of consequence could be a tricky business and through the latter portion of the meal, Greg and Mycroft kept shooting each other looks, ignoring the looks being shot at them by Grandmama, dodging socks being hurled in fits of fashion meltdown and cruising through the meal on autopilot until the combined weight of procrastinating left them the choice of making their announcement or being crushed beneath their own hefty hesitation. A quick round of you-no you concluded with Mycroft taking a deep breath and standing, clearing his throat to gain the
attention of those at the table.

“If you would pardon me a moment…”

“No.”

“Thank you, Sherlock, your objection is duly noted. In any case… Gregory and I have an announcement and, in truth, it is the reason we gathered you all here to join us.”

Cutting eyes at Grandmama, Mycroft was left with no uncertainty whatsoever that she fully knew his next words and, more hearteningly, approved of them completely.

“If you are announcing your weight, I have already calculated it to the nearest microgram and it is fully in the healthy range for any pregnant Brontosaurus that may have walked the Earth in the distant and bloated past.”

John’s quickness with showing Sherlock his fist had improved to the point that you could almost hear the air screaming as his hand cut through it.

“You be quiet, Sherlock. This is important. People don’t stand up at dinner tables unless it’s something important that everyone needs to listen to. I’ve seen that on the telly enough times to know.”

Gratified John’s knowledge of social customs was progressing smoothly, Mycroft smiled at him, ignored the glowering Sherlock and continued on.

“As you know, Gregory and my relationship has suffered its share of joys and tribulations, as would any, and has been in somewhat a nebulous state since… well, since the events that very nearly caused our love to fracture. However, on my part, through unwavering commitment to being the person the man at my side deserves and, on Gregory’s part, a limitless ability to forgive and maintain faith… it is my joy, my utter joy and honor to announce that Gregory has asked me to marry him and I have accepted.”

Neither Mycroft nor Lestrade had any idea what reaction their announcement would bring, but John jumping onto the table yelling ‘Finally!’ hadn’t once crossed their minds. Neither did his little jig that had Danny on his feet shuffling along, albeit with those feet firmly on the ground. Then it was the rather tentative moment as the women of the family, and Sherlock, held a silent conference that ended with smiles, or what passed for smiles all around and Grandmama rose to beckon the engaged pair to her for hugs with a force they would not have guessed she could have mustered.

“Oh, my boys… my dearest grandsons… I will not ask if you have approached this soberly and with all due contemplation for I have been party to much of that and am very clear as to the degree of thinking and evaluation has gone into your decision. And I could not be happier, I could not in a thousand years be happier for you.”

Being released from one hug only left the couple vulnerable for another, this one just as rib-crushing as the first since Lestrade’s mother was also a woman with a wealth of muscular affection.

“Congratulations, you two. I knew it wouldn’t be long and I’m pleased and proud that… well, that you got you did the smart thing and waited until you knew, really knew, the time was right. I am so, so happy for the two of you. You’re going to make a wonderful couple, just a marvelous, wonderful couple.”

Swatting away her ex-husband who didn’t mind entering into group hugs, then relenting and letting him get one squeeze with her arms involved, Elizabeth blinked back her tears and let the old dog
have his own hug of his son and soon-to-be son-in-law. If she’d known that first day Mycroft drove Greg home and she saw him, prim, proper and nervous as a cat, that he’d be the one to capture her son’s heart… she probably wouldn’t have done anything differently. Any change in the path might have prevented her Greg from finding not only the love of his life, but the family he’d grown around him, which was… it was everything a mother could hope for.

“I’m not exactly sure why we’re celebrating your engagement, since you did that rather grandly already, but I’m not one to let that stand in my way of congratulating you two wonderful lads! Perfect pair you are and I am thrilled beyond belief that you two are going to be together forever and ever. I believe that, too! None of that divorce nonsense for the likes of you! Gonna be wrinkled old men with glasses and jumpers, arguing over the news in the papers and complaining about the shite they’re showing on the telly.”

Surprised that another hug didn’t reduce their internal organs to soup, Greg and Mycroft took a bracing breath and turned towards the final mother, and Sherlock, in the room, neither of which had moved from their seats and were scrutinizing the pair with laser-like intensity.

“Mummy? Are you… happy for us?”

Hating that his voice was quivering, since his mother’s approval ultimately would not change anything about his and his Gregory’s life, Mycroft still worried her slightly thawed attitude might not be sufficiently softened to be content with the change in his and his near-husband’s status.

“Five quid if you please, Sherlock.”

“That is completely unfair! It is not my fault the behemoth and the peasant could not control their connubial longings until August!”

“Yet you wagered that very thing. I, however, knew better. My money?”

Sherlock growled rather impressively and dug a crumpled note out of his pocket to present to his mother who straightened it with an audible snap before finally addressing the drop-jawed new fiancés. And smiling.

“I am happy, Mycroft. I admit I had little faith in this union early on, but… you have both exceeded my expectations and I predict you shall be a successful couple. Sherlock, go and hug your brother and brother-in-law.”

“No.”

“You may have your money back if you do.”

Sherlock dashed out of his chair and gave Mycroft and Greg a hug that could not, in any language, be described as perfunctory. And, though neither of the older boys would ever admit to ears other than theirs, they were both certain they heard a tiny sniffle as the very long hug continued.

“Th… there. I demand remuneration for potentially contracting plague. And fat.”

Holding the note up between two fingers, Emma waited for it to be snatched before rising, straightening her dress and beckoning Mycroft and Greg over for the sort of hug one expected from someone entirely unused to that sort of thing but was willing to try this one single time as long as it was never asked of them again, except at the wedding proper.

“I know you shall be very happy together and I approve of a wedding, as long as it is properly planned and executed. None of this… garden ceremony with a long-haired vicar and his cat
strumming a guitar as you braid a flower chain and recite Keats.”

Mycroft wasn’t certain who let a giggle escape, but it had a markedly feminine, and elderly, timbre.

“I believe we can assure you, Mummy, that will not be the event you shall be called to attend.”

“Good. Under no circumstances am I going to purchase sandals and cannabis just to see my son married.”

“I agree about the sandals, Emmie, but you know, a little relaxation after a busy day like that would be…”

Forever unspoken due to the five glares pointed Danny’s way, mixed with eyes cut towards the now hula-ing John and the money-stroking Sherlock.

“Oh yeah. Sorry. Though it is something think about for the party after the wedding.”

Strangely hoping, much to his dismay, that his father-in-law would ever be a colorful character, Mycroft also mentally thanked the man for reminding him about something most important.

“I cannot vouch for the future, Daniel, but I can admit to a lovely cake sitting in wait for us to supplement our celebration, as well as a truly splendid champagne. And… there is also this.”

Reaching into his jacket pocket, Mycroft extracted a small box that made Lestrade’s eyes widen in surprise.

“It is a difficult thing to contemplate, what token is appropriate for men who have become engaged, but I do believe some symbol should be worn, even if it only for the eyes of those to whom it has greatest meaning.”

Handing his fiancé, the box, Mycroft smiled then laughed when Lestrade cautiously opened the lid and barked out his own laugh of surprise.

“You got these in the same place, too, didn’t you?”

“That I did. And, I promise, as did you, that there shall be no greening of the skin from their wearing.”

Turning the box around for the family to see, Lestrade shook his head while Mycroft walked behind him to remove the chain Greg always wore, which bore the small pendant purchased when they were newly affirmed as a couple.

“I believe it will cause no furor to wear two small decorations around our necks, instead of our traditional one, my dear, a belief I do hope you share.”

Turning the box back to gaze on the small, silver medallions which sported their initials and the date of their engagement, which, if there was ever a demand of proof, could be satisfied the word ENGAGED clearly emblazoned above the day, month and year.

“Share it I do! Oh, these are brilliant, love. Simply brilliant. I’d wondered about something to wear, too, but didn’t have any ideas as good as this. Want me to do yours?”

Nodding happily, Mycroft waited, while the family looked on proudly, as he had his own pendant added to the existing one on the chain that never left contact with his skin and covetously fingered the two small bits of silver when they were placed back around his neck.
“Pfft. If this is supposed to distract John and I from the promise of cake, then your efforts have been wasted. Have the baked good brought for inspection now and expect our most discriminating assessment of the quality and quantity of our portions.”

With that reminder that the evening could not immediately turn towards growing thoughts of a libidinous nature, Mycroft and Lestrade sighed and reached out to give Sherlock personalized swats on his head.

“Assault! And deprivation of cake!”

“The former I shall claim proudly, brother dear, but the latter I shall remedy with great haste. Please, everyone, have a seat and we shall bring the latter portion of our refreshments to enjoy.”

Mycroft nearly pulled Lestrade’s arm out of its socket tugging him out of the dining room, so he could bestow the fiery kiss that was threatening to set his lips ablaze.

“Oh, Gregory… it is done.”

“And done well, too. We are officially-to-the-family engaged and they’re all glad for it. I think it’s been a tremendous success, especially with my new bauble around my neck.”

Reaching out to touch the pendants through Lestrade’s shirt, Mycroft purred in satisfaction that his lover wore another prominent mark of their love and devotion.

“I agree wholeheartedly. Now, shall we retrieve the rest of our celebration before Sherlock begins to chew the table?”

“That’s probably wise. I can’t see your mum being too happy about tooth marks in the fine wood and I don’t want anything to spoil her happy mood.”

“Yes, that is certainly something to consider.”

Running towards the kitchen, the two laughed at their silliness and, also, from the sheer joy of being, as John said, FINALLY on the path they’d known in their bones was the one they wanted for such a very long time. Neither believed it would be entirely sweetness and light or that they’d never meet problems and troubles as they moved through the years, but they’d shown they could work through those problems, learn from mistakes and keep moving forward, even if they stumbled along the way. It wasn’t going to be easy, but good things never were… and this was going to be a very good thing indeed…
And here we are at the final chapter. I can't describe how it feels to end this saga, which has been part of my life for so long, but I can say that I'm honored by the continued support and kind words from all those who have followed the boys' adventures through these three stories. It has been a tremendously rewarding experience and I thank you all for every comment and kudo you have left, as well as the encouragement you've given me from letting me know that the stories were doing what I most wanted - giving people a smile. Enjoy this finale and know that it was the motivation from all of you that made this saga possible...

Mycroft looked around at what had to be the entire village milling about his fiancé’s cottage, enjoying the abundant food and drink and doing a grand job of welcoming a newly independent member of society to the community. The day after the announcement party had been a flurry of activity, moving his love’s possessions into his new home and seeing him situated properly for his first night in his new home. It was frantic, tiring and there may have been tears, from more than a single person, but their family had become used to every region of the emotional spectrum being manifest and in the most expressive of ways.

“I think our party is a success, love. Excellent job getting this organized.”

Giving his lover a kiss of thanks, Lestrade remained amazed at how utterly talented was the man he loved, and in so many diverse areas.

“Perhaps that should be my career. Throw off the mantle of family responsibilities and become a party planner.”

“You could hire Edwards away from Grandmama to give you a hand with that. People are still asking when he’s doing another shift at the pub. Very popular our Edwards is… especially with the ladies.”

“Yes, though I am more of the mind that your father will steal him from Grandmama so they can both tend the pub. Given the profits they would see from such a combined effort, I suspect the pub would become one of those notations on the tourist brochures and we would see women’s groups flocking to our lovely village for a chance to be wooed and flattered by two men who are most professional at the task.”

“Oh god, you’re right. Mum and her friends would be regular customers, too. More than they already are, that is.”

Mother Lestrade had utterly lost her worry about being in the same space as her ex-husband and didn’t mind having a night in the pub with her friends, especially since she had special ‘family’ pricing for her drinks.

“Then we shall impress upon Grandmama the necessity of keeping a close watch on Edwards so that his is not tempted away towards another career.”
“Mycroft the party planner and Edwards the bartender. That would certainly be something to talk about at family dinners.”

“Given the eternal level of perturbation in our family, my dear, I anticipate that would be the smallest of blips on the radar.”

“That’s true. Well, more mingling?”

“Most certainly. It would not do for the hosts to keep to themselves and ignore their guests.”

“I think they’ve forgotten we’re here, actually.”

“Yes, the party does seem to have taken on a life of its own.”

“Does that mean we can have a quick bit of fun while nobody notices.”

“Unless you plan to have us climb a tree, my love, I would remind you that every available inch of space indoors and out is currently occupied by our guests.”

“Your house is empty.”

“We are not leaving the party for a sexual tryst.”

“Just a tiny one?”

“When have we ever constrained our trysts to anything remotely described as tiny?”

“Think of it as a challenge.”

Drat. Gregory knew he could not resist a challenge.

“I suppose… we could take the car and return with more refreshments and beverages.”

“Booze and food run? Absolutely. After the tryst.”

“Very well. First one to the car is on their knees.”

Waiting for his beloved husband cheat marvelously, which Lestrade accomplished by pushing Mycroft onto the small sofa and making a mad dash for the door, the abused Holmes then took a moment to simply savor the feeling of being in love and a part of something he had always dreamed about, as well as the growing arousal from the thought of his beloved kneeling and sucking his cock with the sensual abandon of the most talented incubus. Oh well, they would not be missed for some time so if their little tryst extended from tiny to… not as tiny… it could not be considered rude. Besides, one made allowances for those in love…

Staring at the car, packed with the last bits of his belongings, Mycroft felt a familiar surge of dread rise up as he faced leaving his family for college. It had been a magnificent summer… as magnificent as the last, when he first met the man with whom he was poised to share the remainder of his days. So very much could happen in a year and this would ever be the year of his life where… where his life truly began. These last weeks had unquestionably been the capstone of all of that. Though he had to make periodic trips to London, there was time aplenty to simply enjoy the mild days and the wealth of opportunities to spend time with his husband and the children, who were as content as expected to fill every moment with chaos and nonsense. However, given the presence of grandparents in the vicinity, that chaos and nonsense was shared in a most manageable fashion.
and the number of days and nights that he and Gregory had enjoyed alone were most sufficient to keep the ‘couple’ aspect of their union fully satisfied.

“Ready, love?”

What a simple question to address…

“No.”

Lestrade wrapped his arms around his lover and kissed him softly, knowing that his answer to that question was exactly the same.

“It’s not forever, you know. And you’re not that far that a truly lonely patch can’t be remedied by a weekend together, even if it leaves both of us exhausted because of the travel and… other things.”

Smiling as bravely as he could, Mycroft knew Lestrade’s words were true, but also knew that with his school obligations, his other obligations and his love’s career… those weekends would be few and far between, regardless of the degree of loneliness.

“And Christmas! The end of the term isn’t that terribly far off, if you think about it, so we’ll have that. It’ll be hard, Mycroft… but we’ve managed harder and come out alright.”

“I know and I see clearly that the situation is not an insurmountable one, however…”

“Yeah, I don’t want to you go either. Neither do they…”

Two boys were finally approaching the car, after refusing to acknowledge any of the morning’s proceedings and behaving as if they were the only humans in the house. Unfortunately, ignoring the other occupants didn’t change the outcome of those proceedings, and they knew if they didn’t say anything now, they’d regret it.

“Sherlock… John… I am very happy you came to wish me well.”

“I sort of hope you fail your courses so you have to come home, but that’s probably not very nice of me.”

No, but that very thought had flitted through Mycroft’s mind a time or two when he was feeling especially bleak.

“I shall take that, John, in the true spirit in which it is offered, which is that you are sorry to see me leave. It is a sorrow I share completely and will miss you and Sherlock terribly.”

John nodded sadly then threw his arms around Mycroft to give him a hug before running back into the house so nobody could see him cry. That left Sherlock standing alone, glaring at his brother, and deciding that John could use a tissue, Lestrade kissed his lover once more before going to find one, so the brothers could have a moment alone.

“Well, Sherlock… it shall be awhile before we see each other again.”

“I care not.”

“Of course. And I assume you also care not about the existence of telephones to maintain fertile lines of communication.”

“Naturally.”
“Then we understand each other. Would you… would you permit me, however, to state that I am overwhelmingly proud of you, brother, and that I love you dearly? That I shall miss you terribly and if you need me, I will be here, school be hanged?”

Sherlock’s carefully-maintained façade began to crack and the boy screwed up his face to hold back the emotion that threatened to break through.

“It… it is only right and proper.”

“I agree. Though, and I know it will be an enormous imposition, might you allow a single hug to comfort me for the trip?”

Now Sherlock’s control was near to breaking and Mycroft simply squatted and took his brother in a firm embrace that went on as long as Sherlock needed for the tears to flow so the upset and worry had a chance to loosen their crushing hold on Sherlock’s heart.

“You… that… that is all the contact I will allow.”

Pulling back and quickly wiping his reddened eyes, Sherlock scowled ferociously and pointed to the waiting car, watching as Mycroft wiped his own eyes and gave him one final smile before walking over, letting the driver close the door behind him and looking back out of the rear windscreen to give a wave as they drove away. When Sherlock made a gesture Mycroft was certain had been taught to him by John, a laugh finally burst through his lips and he felt for the very first time that… things would be alright. Hard, as his husband said, but certainly alright. How could they not? There was far too much support in their family for anything else to happen…

“Stop moving!”

“No.”

“Sherlock… it is I who should be nervous and you attending to the status of my tie, not the other way around.”

“Nervous? You have shaken off the shackles of college and are finally going through the tedious motions of marrying Lestrade. Tedium in no manner justifies nervousness. I, on the other hand, have to contend with the entirety of British society, and Lestrade’s mongrel pack, concentrated on Grandma’s lawn, awaiting their dancing-monkey show before being given the food and alcohol they were promised to ensure their attendance.”

“Oh, do you and John have a performance planned? If I had known I would have had the BBC in attendance to film the production for, perhaps, some Christmas broadcasting entertainment. They do let their hair down a bit at Christmas and that would most certainly entice their interest.”

Sherlock’s rude and wet noise fortunately missed Mycroft’s exquisite morning suit, which, if it was besmirched or mussed to any degree, the interval between the garment insult and the beheading would be miniscule indeed. Grandma had been most specific on that point and, with Edwards behind her back running a finger across his throat, the threat had more than its usual level of gravity.

“Given we have to suffer through the Queen’s yearly speech, something should enliven the holiday.”

“I am going to tell her you said that. She will be sitting in the front row, so the conversation will be an easy one.”
“You will not!”

“I will and between Her Majesty and Grandmama your life will not be worth a broken biscuit.”

“You… marriage has already ruined you, Fatcroft.”

“Woe is me. Luckily, Gregory enjoys a bit of ruin in his life.”

“Ugh… will my torture never end?”

“Not today, I’m afraid. I suspect we shall not see the last guest leave until dawn, so prepare for agony.”

“I have changed my mind. I will not be spending my summer holiday in London if I have to suffer your withered attempts at wit.”

“That is acceptable to me. Daniel made mention that he was in need of help at the pub for the inevitable upswing in tourists and the like, so you shall have both employment and his guiding hand for entertainment while Gregory and I escort John around London.”

“Ugh… the mere thought is horrifying. it is not enough that I have to suffer his and Mother Lestrade’s tyranny once school again begins?”

“If you had not used your last trip to London to terrorize the British Museum staff and Gregory had not been required to capitalize upon his camaraderie with his brethren in the city, you would likely still be incarcerated for the damage you did to the museum collection. Until we can be assured that our lives shall not be a continuous effort to keep you from the gallows, you will not be attending school in London.”

“Unfair!”

“We will revisit this discussion next school year, but for now, enjoy your rather enormous amount of freedom and facilities to use that freedom to best effect.”

And the village would hold its breath that Sherlock and John, under the watchful eyes of their grandparents, would contain their more riotous expressions of freedom to their own home.

“If possible, I will inspire a peasant uprising and lead the march to London to bring an end to your oppression.”

“Will they want tea?”

“Withered wit… I vow here and now that I shall never allow myself to become entangled in the tentacles of insipid besottedness.”

“Hmmm… I did mean to ask, has anyone at school yet caught John’s eye? He is a very handsome boy and the maturation process is well underway…”

Sherlock’s glare was so sharp that Mycroft felt his nose fall off of his face, which would certainly make for some intriguing wedding photos. Oh brother dear… if you only knew the size of the winnings currently available to the person who correctly predicts when you and John will finally do something about your own exceedingly obvious besottedness… well, you would probably be flattered and consider it your due. But, perhaps today shall serve as some inspiration to get, as they say, the ball moving. Weddings were known for that sort of thing…
“Lizzie, you want to hit him with your shoe? Lad keeps wriggling and I can’t get his fucking tie tied!”

“Greg, stop wriggling. You’re confusing your father.”

“Can’t. My pants itch.”

“Then give your bum a scratch!”

“Can’t. I’d wrinkle my suit.”

Elizabeth and Danny shared a ‘this is the culmination of our once-married lives – an itchy-bum son on his wedding day’ and John stepped in to solve the problem by shoving his hand down under the waistband of Greg’s trousers to give both cheeks a firm scratching that had Greg wriggling harder to make the most of the assistance.

“Thanks, John.”

“I’ve got to burn my hand now, you know. Burn it right off at the wrist.”

“Pour some whisky on it when you’re done and everything will be fine. It’ll wash the soot and leftover bits right off.”

“Thanks for that. I could be out there getting myself introduced to all sorts of people, but, instead, I’m in here with you, scratching your arse and suffering your nervous shaking making the room quake. I think I’m getting seasick from it.”

“Mum, shove a sandwich or something in John’s mouth to settle his stomach. And I don’t know what you’re complaining about, you miserable prick. You met the Queen! The Queen, John. Who else could you meet to compare to that?”

“Hey! You never know, do you? Besides, I know there’s a scad of military types out there and it wouldn’t hurt to have a few connections when the time comes.”

The three adults in the room shared a look over the 14-year old’s head that said this path of conversation would not be pursued, because every time John mentioned an interest in the military, as well as being a doctor, Sherlock erupted in a power-sulk so black that you could feel your soul being ripped from your body if you stood within ten feet of him. Fingers were tightly crossed that this recent interest in the Army was just a phase and one that would quickly pass…

“The Queen, John… sorry, but that’s the toppest Top Trumps card you’re going to win today.”

“That’s true, lad. Lizzie over there nearly fainted dead away and she wouldn’t do that for any old bird who turned up hoping for a slice of that enormous wedding cake.”

Danny smiled broadly at the rude gesture he received from his ex-wife, but felt his heart soar that they were both here today for the most important event of their son’s life. It was still like a dream, being part of his Greg’s life, but it was the best dream he could possibly have. His son was an incredible man, about to be married, and dad to the two most wonderful boys in the world. Boys that he and Lizzie were going to be in charge of for a few years while the two finished school and decided where they wanted to go from there. He’d fucked up his chance at being a father, but he hadn’t fucked up his chance at being a grandfather and…
“Son, your father’s crying again. Step away so it doesn’t get on your suit.”

Danny made an ‘I’m alright!’ wave that his ex-wife just huffed at, but she understood those tears completely, since she’d had more than one episode of waterworks herself today. Little Greg was all grown up, about to be married and, then, off to London to start his new life with his husband and a detective constable posting, since he’d passed his interview and tests to snatch the job he’d seen advertised three months ago. She’d not quite gotten confirmation from Rowena that the job even existed before it was posted, but she did get that Greg honestly earned the position and that was more than enough, in her book, to award her son all the pride in the world for winning such an amazing prize, one he’d wanted for so very long. It was going to hurt, hurt miserably to see him go, but… she’d never been happier in her life. This was what a mother hoped for and all her hopes had been realized a hundred times over. And… oh, look at the hour.

“Alright, gentlemen. Final touches and then… it’s time.”

“A…already?”

“Got cold feet, Greg? Want me to go out there and tell everybody you changed your mind and to bugger off home?”

John and Greg’s back and forth battle of rude gestures went on long enough for the older generation to decide that John’s skill for such things was improving to a truly frightening degree and a little more attention to manners might be necessary in the coming months. But, that was a worry for another day. Today, there were far more important things to think about…

“Mycroft!”

“Gregory!”

The two very drunk grooms fell into each other’s arms, more for support than for romance, though they took the opportunity for a little of that, too.

“My husband, Mycroft Lestrade-Holmes.”

“And, my husband, Gregory Lestrade-Holmes. I very much adore the sound of that.”

“Me too. You too. I mean, I adore you, too. I think I’ve had a lot to drink.”

“Only the smallest of amounts, as I remember. But… my memory is a bit hazy for the last few hours.”

“I remember your mum getting friendly with that Swiss fellow. That was fun to watch.”

“Yes… I do, as well. And, I suppose, he was not particularly odious.”

“Nope, couldn’t smell a thing.”

“Not odiferous, my beloved.”

“What’s that?”

“Oh look, more champagne!”

“Yes! What were we talking about?”
“I… I have no idea. What does it matter, my beloved spouse?”

“You can say that legally now and not just because you’re daydreaming.”

“That I can and I shall say it often.”

“Say what often?”

“I… I have no idea. What does it matter, my beloved spouse?”

“Doesn’t matter. Champagne does, though.”

“Look! There’s an entire tray of the beast.”

“Let’s go make it an empty tray.”

“Not too much, however. We must maintain some degree of decorum.”

“Yeah, not like Sherlock and John vomiting in the bushes.”

“Most juvenile.”

“Dad, at least, had a go at it in the loo.”

“He does demonstrate surprising forethought at times.”

“Our dad is growing up, Mycroft… I’m so proud.”

“As am I, and… Gregory! That man is moving towards our champagne!”

“Fucking bastard. Let’s go love… this is our wedding and we get first fists on those glasses!”

Watching the dash towards the unattended champagne and handing his employer a handkerchief to dab her eyes, Edwards smiled at the two grooms who radiated love and joy, as well as intoxication, so brightly they lit up the night for a mile around. The Holmes family had another marriage to its name and the family name would thrive in their capable hands. Today was certainly a day of days…

“Oh dear, Mycroft has tackled… oh well, he is naught but an earl.”

“And, if possible, more intoxicated than even Master Mycroft and Master Gregory.”

“Then, no matter. Given the spirit of things, I feel the need, myself, for a touch more champagne.”

“Madam… so hedonistic.”

“When in Rome, Edwards… besides, it will be at least fifteen years before Sherlock and John’s marriage and I believe I shall, as they say, have sobered up by then.”

“I am standing firm with eleven years.”

“You are incurably romantic, Edwards.”

“Guilty as charged. Champagne, now?”

“Yes. The good stuff, too. And lots of it… dawn is still hours away…”
Watching the scenery fly by the window of their car, Mycroft thought back over the years and sighed with contentment with the images that flooded his mind. Not all were good. John’s leaving for the Army had sent Sherlock into a tailspin that was impossible for him or Gregory to control and they ultimately, in the hardest decision of their lives, sent his brother from their London home where he and John had been living the previous two years, but which kept him close to the demons that plagued him near to death, to the care of Daniel, Mother Lestrade and Grandmama, who kept close watch on him, supported him and, finally, turned him away from the drugs and harmful behaviors that had gripped him and refused to let go. Then it was John’s return, wounded, but alive and Sherlock’s single-minded devotion to his care, culminating with a tearful confession of love that, to no one’s surprise, John returned just as tearfully.

Then, there were the normal troubles due to work, both his and Gregory’s, the typical family squabbles… the slights and hurts that no family or couple could avoid forever… but, nothing, no matter how great or small, had caused their family to fracture and, truly, all of the trials had only served to tighten their bonds into something stronger than iron.

And, of course, there were the joys… John’s achieving his dream of becoming a doctor and Sherlock’s carving out for himself a niche that kept him under both his and Gregory’s watchful eye. That he meandered his way into the self-created profession of consulting detective was another of the family’s non-surprises, but the degree of pride they felt in his achievements was incalculable. Now, he and John were happily ensconced in an utterly appropriate-for-them flat with a very suitable landlady and living a life that provided John the adventure his soul craved, in between work at the clinic, and Sherlock the endless stream of puzzles and challenges that both satisfied and excited his ever-active mind.

His own accomplishments were as expected and, for him, were simply par for the course, though his husband found them astounding, something for which he was forever grateful. And what to say of Gregory… a Detective Inspector who commanded great respect from his team and boasted a record and reputation that any in his profession would envy. He had watched his beloved work tirelessly at his job, meeting with both tremendous victories and punishing frustrations, slowly rising through the ranks due to his diligence, integrity and honest talent for the work that few others could boast. They both suffered long days and there were too many weeks where if they saw each other for more than a single breakfast, it was cause for rejoicing, but…

… they were happy. Gloriously and truly happy, despite the hardships, the arguments, the fatigue… there was more than enough love, contentment, devotion, humor and… nerve-searing sex… to continually replenish their souls when loneliness or distress began to grow. Now, though, things were set to change and they had no idea what that would mean, but they both knew the change was something they wanted and were prepared to accept regardless of the hurdles they might face.

“Looks like we’re here, love.”

My dear Gregory… your smile shining as brightly as the stunning silver strands beginning to thread through your hair…

“And, I believe, my dear, we are being met to ensure we do not change our minds.”

Looking towards the house, the pair saw the entire family assembled, with Grandmama at the front of the pack, looking as expectant and nervous as they had ever seen her.

“On we go…”
Leaping out and running around to open the door for his husband, Lestrade stood ramrod straight as Mycroft exited, then waved to everyone as they began to walk forward, the driver bringing their bags for their week’s visit.

“Grandmama… you look well.”

“Thank you, Mycroft, but I care not a whit about how I look. Follow me.”

Mycroft rolled his eyes at Lestrade’s laughter and followed after Grandmama, with the rest of the grinning family, as she slowly moved her way through the house to the library, where she sat in the rocking chair that had been brought in from the old nursery just for this occasion.

“Well… what are you waiting for, you silly boy?”

Mycroft sighed his most long-suffering sigh, only somewhat mollified by the backrub Lestrade gave him for support, and cleared his throat before speaking.

“Grandmama, may I present to you your great-grandson, James Alastair Daniel Lestrade-Holmes.”

As the week-old baby was laid in his grandmother’s arms, Mycroft felt his heart swell at the sight of two small tears rising in her eyes.

“Named for you father, your grandfather and father-in-law. Very appropriate, my grandsons. Oh… and he is beautiful, simply beautiful.”

Sherlock’s ‘he is a baby and looks like any of the horrid plastic dolls at a toy shop’ was met with John’s fist under his nose and the admonition that just because they chose not to name the baby Sherlock Aristotle Copernicus as Sherlock had suggested, there was no cause to be a bastard.

“Thank you, Grandmama.”

“And with his nose, there is no question as to who is the father, though… good heavens, Gregory, I suspect greatly that he will have your eyes. I have no idea how that was accomplished, though I highly approve.”

Mycroft and Lestrade shared a smile and congratulated themselves on their choice of surrogate for their son. The battle over who would be the father had been a ferocious one, as each had thought the other was best for the job, and it was finally decided by a coin toss that Greg won, meaning Mycroft’s sperm was used, a fresh sample not a previously frozen one, and the search for a surrogate with the Lestrade features ranged far and wide until the perfect candidate was found.

“That shall remain our secret for now, I believe.”

“Oh, you are not as inscrutable as you believe, Mycroft.”

Mycroft turned to glare at his mother, but stopped, seeing the clear look of joy and pride in her eyes. When they had first decided to have a child, it had been with some trepidation that they made the announcement to his mother, who would now be a grandmother, but Mummy had proven to be a staunch supporter of their decision and had already filled the baby’s room with outfits ‘appropriate for a grandchild of someone with my sense of taste and fashion.’ James would be the most stylish baby in London or Emma Holmes would know the reason why.

“You be as inscrutable as you want, lad. And, while you’re doing that, I’ll take my grandson out for a little stroll in the garden. Can’t start too early getting him used to the fresh air, so when he’s a
football star, he’s got good lung capacity for those really punishing matches when you need lots of oxygen to keep the legs going.”

Among the metric tons of fine clothing was another metric ton of toys and alternate garments, these appropriate for the most rugged and active of babies. Mr. and ex-Mrs. Lestrade had their own plans for their grandson and these involved lots of playing, running amok in the village on school holidays, stealing biscuits and paying visits to the pub for a sweet, fizzy soda and a mountain of hot, greasy chips.

And, of course, whatever the equivalent would be when each decided a weekend in London to visit their grandchild was necessary. They hadn’t at all been shy with visiting since half the family made their permanent home in the city and, it was a lucky thing that Mycroft and Lestrade’s house had sufficient rooms that Elizabeth, Danny, Grandmama and Edwards each had a room of their own when they visited, since a visit by one party often inspired a visit by others and the London house was a busy one, even if the homeowners had scarcely an hour to spend with their guests. In fact, the guests were more than happy to conduct their visit without any input from the younger set, so the situation was a very successful one for all involved parties.

“Daniel, you are not taking this baby from me and if you think otherwise, I am fully prepared to show you the error of your thinking in a most forceful fashion.”

Danny’s hands went up in an ‘I surrender’ gesture and he winked at Grandmama in promise of a few attempted steals as the day wore on. But, he was not going to succeed as Grandmama had full intention of sitting there, in the chair she rocked her son and grandsons, becoming acquainted with the newest member of the Holmes family. That did remind her, though…

“Mycroft, Gregory… when are you planning your second child?”

The room froze and looked at the new parents who shot glances between each other and smiled meekly at Grandmama, who must have forgotten how difficult and tiring it was to raise one baby, let alone two.

“We… that is Gregory and I do not… we have yet to assess the impact of young James on our lives and structure a plan that might include any additional offspring in the household.”

“Then you need to get on it! You and Sherlock are seven years apart and I will not have my great-grandchildren seeing such a difference in age. For one, I believe it will be more beneficial to their sibling relationship and, for another, I will not go to my grave having rocked only one of your children in this rocking chair, while denying the other. Now, Sherlock and John will be married in no more than two years…”

Sherlock’s ‘I am not marrying John!’ was countered by another of John’s fist under his nose, mostly because the idea of marriage wasn’t exactly something John disliked and if they did it on Grandmama’s timeline, she promised him half of the £5000 that currently rested in the ‘Sherlock and John Wedding Wager’ account, interest compounded annually, and he had more than a few ideas of what to do with that money.

“… as I was saying, you will need to plan accordingly so that neither event steals the thunder of the other. In fact, why don’t you begin now, while I spend time with my grandson.”

“Now, see here…”

Edwards cleared his throat and began to shoo the family out of the library, so the oldest and youngest members of the family could get to know each other. It was going to be a busy week, chasing baby
thieves about the property, but Madam promised him a bonus for keeping the baby within her sight for, at minimum, eighty-percent of the hours between rising and retiring for the evening. Given Daniel and he were considering investing in the pub he frequented in the nearby village, which would soon be going on the market and did a very bracing amount of business, that money would come in handy. A man had to think about his retirement and what better way to spend it than in his own pub, lifting a bracing gin and tonic on a warm summer’s day. Not that retirement would come anytime soon, of course. There was far too much to do keeping this family in line and he was having far too much fun doing it…

When the last person was gone and the room was quiet, Rowena began humming a little song and rocked her great-grandson for a few moments, marveling at each of his movements and the strong yawn he gave after awhile, showing himself ready for a nap.

“My little Jamie is tired, it seems… well, close your eyes and your grandmother will tell you a story to help you sleep. It is a story about a young prince who was very wealthy, but very lonely and the dashing young knight with a gleaming smile and boundless heart who arrived one day to sweep the prince off his feet. It is not a short story, I am afraid, but we have lots of time, you and I, for it to be told. And, aren’t you a lucky boy that there will always be a new chapter waiting for you, so you never have to worry about how it ends. And, the best stories, as you will come to learn, never truly end. They live on in our memory and they never fade as long as we love them. I promise you, my darling boy, with all my heart… this is a story you will forever love and one that will always love you in return. A story that will follow you for your lifetime and make that lifetime the most joyful one you can imagine. Now, where was I? Oh yes, there once was a handsome young prince and his strong, courageous knight…”

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