Summary

When Mycroft Holmes lost his virginity at age sixteen to the groundskeeper’s rough-hewn daughter while home from Eton for the summer, it came as rather a surprise.

Thirty-two years in an unconventional romance.

Notes

This exists because Ainsley appeared for 500 words in Centuries of Nerve and promptly gave me headcanon.

Warnings: brief mentions of sex between a sixteen-year old and an eighteen year-old; reference to miscarriage.

Mycroft settles on the sofa in his home theatre, brandy in one hand, remote in the other. He has divested himself of his suit and lounges in nothing but a worn cotton T-shirt and pyjama bottoms. He turns his mobile to silent mode.

The picture is a bit grainy, and he’ll have to venture a foray into the lairs of the odd tech folk again because the audio’s not working. But no matter, for now. He’s earned this. Tonight, a spot of
indulgence.

He flips past a mugging in Peckham, a housebreaking in Notting Hill. He pauses, briefly, on the living room in 221b, where Sherlock is trying in vain to hold a toddler and play his violin at the same time. John enters the frame and presses his nose into Malcolm’s neck before tipping his face up to nuzzle tenderly at Sherlock’s cheek. Mycroft’s innards clench and he clicks away.

There.

A modestly-sized bedroom housing finely-made wooden furniture, polished, well-cared for. Decor in ecru, blue, green. Soft lighting, but enough for Mycroft to see. A shadow passes in the en suite. Mycroft shifts, leans forward. His prick begins to firm up.

Ainsley Norbury, broad and sturdy, passes in front of the camera shucking her clothes. She is down to her painfully sensible underthings when she lies back in her bed. She runs a hand over the ample mounds of her breasts, over the curve of her belly. She lets her legs fall open. Mycroft sees her expand and contract with a sigh. She pulls the left cup of her brassiere down to pluck roughly at a nipple.

Mycroft’s breath quickens. He’s fully hard now, straining at the fabric of his bottoms, but he doesn’t want to touch. Not yet. He wants this to last.

Ainsley reaches into her bedside table and removes a bottle of lubricant and a thick vibrator. She shimmies out of her panties and raises her knees, spreads them.

Her head lolls to one side as she clutches a breast with one hand and rubs between her thighs with the other. The tip of her tongue peeks out from between her lips. She opens her eyes and looks at the camera. She gives a slow, filthy grin. Winks.

Mycroft takes himself in hand.

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When Mycroft Holmes lost his virginity at age sixteen to the groundskeeper’s rough-hewn daughter while home from Eton for the summer, it came as rather a surprise.

Mycroft had always been a bit portly. Over the previous year, his skeleton had grown more quickly than the rest of him could keep up with, and he was, for the first time, not noticeably heavier than his peers. He ached, and he was newly clumsy because he didn’t quite know where his limbs ended and his centre of balance had been thrown off. He did not stop being the object of ridicule. He learned that if not his weight, the other boys would have found something else for which to mock him. The stretch marks he’d developed from the suddenness of his growth. His cracking voice. His spots, his mother, his odd mannerisms. They didn’t need a reason — they would find one, invent one, anything.

He came home for the summer to find Mummy had let Sherlock grow his hair far too long so that she could braid it. And Sherlock, the unearthly little thing, sat quietly at her feet in front of the sofa while she did it. Mycroft felt a lick of cold in his stomach. Sherlock was never still. Sherlock was never quiet.

“Oh hello, darling,” Mummy said when Mycroft came into the lounge. “I trust you had a good journey.” She barely looked at him. She was too busy watching her own willowy fingers arrange the tresses of Sherlock’s inky hair.

“It was fine, Mummy,” he said. He came and sat next to her. Sherlock’s eyes tracked his movement,
but he didn’t turn his head when Mycroft left his line of vision because it would disturb their mother.

Mummy began to hum.

“Mummy,” Mycroft said. He repeated it when she appeared not to have heard him. And again.

“What is it, dear?” she said at last.

“Perhaps you shouldn’t do that to him, lest he become accustomed to it. The boys at school…” He cleared his throat. “That is, children can be cruel to those they perceive as different.”

Mummy turned her eyes on him, hands going still on Sherlock’s head. They had lost all the softly-focused quality they’d had in recent years.

“Mycroft, my darling boy,” she said. “People are cruel. The universe is cruel. You must weather this, and so will Sherlock.”

She turned back to her task. Something at the base of Mycroft’s throat burned. There was a weight in his hand, and when he looked down, he found that Sherlock had detached his entire foot and put it into Mycroft’s open palm. He clenched his jaw, dropped the foot into Sherlock’s lap, and stormed from the room.

He was halfway to the easterly gardens when Ainsley, Mr. Norbury’s youngest child and only daughter, emerged from some shadow or another and bumped him with one solid shoulder. He staggered from the force of it and glared at her.

“Oi, toff,” she said. He rolled his eyes as he straightened to face her. She was in the uniform of the comprehensive school a few miles from the estate, but her tie was loose, her buttons undone to reveal the creamy tops of her large breasts, and her kilt-style skirt was rucked up too high. She wore lurid red lipstick that stained the filter of the cigarette she sucked at incessantly.

“Why don’t you run along back to your little punk friends?”

Her mouth twisted and her brown eyes glinted. She leaned in and Mycroft braced himself to eat dirt.

“Don’t think I can’t still take you, six foot and all. Skinny fuck.” She knocked something at the back of his right knee and he went down before her. He scowled up at her, but it was bright, and she was halloed by the sun. She smiled, a nasty sort of thing, and flicked the butt of the cigarette just to the side of him. “So how’d you do it, then?”

“Do what?” He tried to stand, but found her stopping his progress with a non-regulation combat boot planted in his thigh. He sighed; he’d need to get a new pair of trousers cut.

“Get to be such a skinny fuck?”

He shoved her foot away and stood, wiping off the dirt to no avail.

“I didn’t do anything, you imbecile.”

She scoffed. Her gaze trailed down his body, and suddenly it was like every bit of his skin was electrified. He swallowed and felt himself blush when her eyes came back to his face and she smirked.

“Figures,” she said. She reached out a hand and grasped his tie, tugged him forward with a gentleness he hadn’t known she was capable of. “Toff boys have all the luck.”
Mycroft’s heart was stuttering. True, he’d always admired the roundness in her hips and backside, the way her breasts strained her blouses, but he’d thought he’d been discreet. Like sneaking a glance at the sun, he’d peek and look away before he incurred irreparable damage.

“Ever got your prick sucked, toff?” she asked. Helplessly, said appendage perked to be mentioned and tented Mycroft’s ruined trousers.

“Loads,” Mycroft choked. It was a lie; by the way her eyes flicked up to meet his, amused, it was one they both saw through.

She pulled him along to the garden shed, and there she didn’t seem to notice the leftover skin Mycroft was carting about beneath his clothes, the jagged, broken map of stretch marks, the extra weight he still carried about the hips even as his chest was so thin as to be sunken. She was lush and soft all over. She let him kiss her — pulled back, taught him how. She let him push his way inside her and come helplessly into her impossible heat. He didn’t know it would be so tight.

Afterward, she shared her cigarettes and laughed when he coughed. She wiped her lipstick from his skin.

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Ainsley has her mobile in her hand.

“Bother,” Mycroft mutters, and fumbles to answer his own though his fingers are slick with lube.

“Hello, Toffty Crofty,” she says, and laughs her low, dark laugh.

“You’re killing me,” he says.

“The audio’s out again?” she asks, and he sees her shift enough to show the camera all her myriad charms.

“Mm, yes. I must speak with someone about that. How did you know?”

“Had a feeling.” She puts the mobile down. “Can you hear me?” Her voice is tinny, trademark speakerphone. He presses speakerphone on his and sets it beside him.

“Yes,” is all he can say. She smiles and lets out a low moan as she slides the vibrator inside herself and begins a swift thrusting. “Don’t turn it on yet.”

“You’re an arsehole, Mycroft Holmes,” she says, back arching. He spreads his legs further apart, cups his bollocks. “I hate you completely.”

“Yes,” he says. “I hate you too.”

—

Mycroft and Ainsley spent the summer finding every private nook on the estate in which to take their pleasure. Ainsley taught him the fine art of cunnilingus, and Mycroft taught her how to waltz without trampling his feet. She made him listen to the Cure and INXS and the Smiths. He made her listen to piano sonatas. She read to him from Marquez and Jean Rhys and Saramago and Wuthering Heights. For that last one, he flicked her ear and eased the sting with a kiss. They spent the next week calling each other Catherine and Heathcliff and fucking in the closest landscape to moors as they could find in Kent. He read to her from the ancient philosophers, and Machiavelli, and Marx, and Thatcher. For that last one, she punched him on the shoulder, then pressed her lips to the resultant redness, to his
neck, to his chest.

Sherlock sussed them out with his mean little eyes — pedestrian, an abrasion on Mycroft’s lip — but Mummy put a flower in his hair and told him to shush. Mycroft was mortified, waiting for a stern man-to-man from his father about birds and bees and not mixing with the help, but it never came. Father rarely left his study, anymore.

He liked it best late at night, when he could sneak Ainsley into his bedroom, and they could be resplendently nude, slotting together in lazy leisure. He memorised every bit of her — every freckle and mole, every curve and angle, every patch of faintly ginger fuzz, every soft pink vulnerability. She looked soft and lovely amid his sheets, smiling, reaching for him. When he sank into the tight heat of her, rested his cheek against the perfect pillow of her breasts, he felt an abiding peace.

He wanted to get closer, as close as it was possible to get. He wanted to fit inside her wholly, take up residence.

Once, as the summer waned, she bit him hard enough to make him shout, to make him shove her off of himself, to make him scowl and call her terrible things he regretted instantly.

“Fuck you,” she said, then knocked him over in bed and pinned him there. She leaned down and lapped at the livid mark she’d made. She stayed there, clinging, mouthing at his shoulder. She began to shake, and he put his arms around her to hold them both together.

She understood about wanting to crawl inside another person, and he didn’t even have to tell her.

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“Tell me,” Ainsley says as she rocks into her own thrusts.

“I hate the taste of you on my tongue,” Mycroft says, gripping himself tighter, faster. “I hate your tits, and your arse, and how they feel in my hands.”

“You filthy *fuck*…”

“I hate how you come again and again on my cock, in my mouth. I hate your lips. I hate your eyes.”

“Jesus fuck.”

“Do it now. Turn it on now.”

“Tell me.”

“I want you. I want you always, always, Ainsley.”

—

When uni started, he rarely returned to Kent and saw Ainsley only during the holidays. He had come to realise it was not the done thing, dallying with the daughter of the man his parents paid to garden. And it was made plain to him at Eton, at Cambridge, that proper women were not lewd nor crass nor prone to rugby tackling their men whenever it suited them. It was Christmas his second year when he told her their little indiscretion couldn’t go on.

She sneered at him and threw back Father’s 1974 Sassicaia as if she were down the pub during last orders.

“You certainly think a lot of yourself,” she said, wiping her mouth. “You think you’re the only one
I’m fucking? Please.”

He looked down at her, unimpressed.

“I know I’m the only one you’re fucking,” he said, and she glared up at him, pale but for two spots of red spreading across her cheeks. “You play the whore very well, Ms. Norbury, but you cannot fool me.”

She slapped him.

“I, however,” he went on, undeterred, “have found someone more… suitable.”

“Let me guess,” she said. “Her father’s got some peerage and she fits into a size 8 and hasn’t a thought in her pretty little head.”

Ainsley, for all her faults, was rarely wrong, much to Mycroft’s chagrin.

“This discussion is over. You should return to your father’s house.”

“You mother invited us, tosser.” Mummy was ever so inconveniently fond of Norbury after he’d presented her with a baby. “I’ll stay as long as I damn well please.”

And she did. She drank until she passed out, and Mummy told him to be a dear and install her in one of the guest rooms. Mr. Norbury watched him with eyes that missed nothing.

When Mycroft shared bed space with his new distraction, he found her sharp and unsatisfying, eyes not nearly dark enough, body incapable of pinning him to the mattress just how he liked. They parted ways before Easter term.

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Mycroft imagines how her clitoris would feel against his tongue, a rubbery, oblong little pearl. His mouth waters, his strokes pick up speed. Ainsley’s usual litany of curse words has started, and his prick is a Pavlovian beast, responding to every fricative with a twitch, the production of more pre-ejaculate.

“Ainsley,” he says, “next time I see you I’m going to make a feast of your pretty little cunt.”

“Oh, God, fuck fuck fuck, Mycroft, you fuck…”

“And I’m going to put my whole hand in you—”

“Fuck!”

“—make you soak the bed, you filthy girl.”

“Jesus fucking fuck!”

“You’ll need a new mattress, a new carpet, a new bloody flat…”

“God, God fuck!”

“You won’t open your eyes for a week.”

She slams the vibrator into herself with little finesse. She no longer has verbal skills. With her free hand she yanks at her nipples, and Mycroft leans forward, wishing he could smell, taste, feel it all.
When Ainsley showed up at his flat in London after he finished at Cambridge, Mycroft thought in retrospect that he should have expected it.

She dumped her bags and looked around with little interest.

“What, no wife? No picturesque children to parade in front of an appropriate audience?”

“I’m very busy.”

She turned and finally looked at him. He felt pinned, like an insect. She looked shockingly delicious, scrubbed of make up, hair shorn, breasts and arse full and ever-inviting.

“You don’t look busy,” she said, accusatory.

“Do you need something, Ms. Norbury?” He would not be able to contain his erection for much longer, and she would know; she always knew.

She let out a single, ugly laugh and dropped her gaze.

“We’ve all got vices, toff. Just so happens, yours and mine are complementary.”

Mycroft had learned over the final years of his education and during the tenure of his time at his current post that losing battles are not worth fighting. He led her to his bedroom, where urgency overtook him. It had been so long.

Afterward, they sprawled naked, sated and slick in the mess of the sheets. He lay with his head on her belly.

“You can’t stay here,” he told her as he stroked her nipple idly. She snorted and took a long drag of her cigarette. She tapped the ash and let it fall where it would, which happened to be on Mycroft’s bedclothes.

“Obviously,” she said. She pushed his head a bit, and he called it a battle won when he sealed his lips over her one more time.

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Ainsley is exuberant in orgasm — she thrashes and shudders and leaks and, if Mycroft is in the vicinity, yanks mindlessly at his hair. Sometimes she is silent, choking on air; other times, she keens; still others, she will shout, once, like the clap of thunder. Tonight she lets out a long, piercing cry.

“Keep going,” Mycroft tells her. “Don’t stop now.”

She complies, and it’s not long before she twists hard and comes, gasping, again.

Mycroft sets his own punishing rhythm. He can feel the tendrils of his own climax gathering at the base of his spine.

“Speak,” he says, panting.

She hums out a little laugh.

“I’m the only one who knows how filthy you are, Mycroft Holmes. I quite like that.”
“Ainsley…”

“What would you like tonight, hmm? Now that you’ve got my cunt a dripping mess, maybe it’s lost its charms.”

“No, no, no…”

“My mouth? Oh, no, that won’t do — you need to be in me properly, you miss me so.”

“Fuck you.”

She tuts at him, chastising. She’s up, facing the camera, muscles lax.

“That’s not how good boys beg,” she says.

Mycroft shudders out shaking breath, stammers a plea.

“Oh, I know,” Ainsley says, voice full of false wonder. “You think you might fancy a go at my arse.”

Mycroft groans, loud and long.

“Yes, that’s exactly it,” Ainsley continues. “You love it when I let you in. When I’m all clean and slick. You love plugging me up, filling me good, hurting me just that little bit. My tightest hole. You’re the only one who’s ever been, have I told you that?”

Mycroft comes, his senses blurring together helplessly.

—

Ainsley was thirty-four and Mycroft was thirty-two and they were sitting in a cafe that served poor coffee when she told him she was pregnant.

“What? How?”

She sneered. Her eyes looked bruised, as if she hadn’t slept for days.

“How do you think, smartboy? I thought you were supposed to be some kind of genius.”

“And I thought you were—” He caught himself and pitched his voice low. “—on something.”

“A ninety-eight percent effective something,” she said. Her mouth twisted into a humourless smile. “I suppose somebody’s got to be in the remaining two percent.”

Mycroft pinched his lips together.

“You are unbelievable.”

Her eyes flashed. In a different time, that might have heralded a triumph of dirt-eating on his part.

“Excuse me. I hadn’t realised I was the only guilty party while you were pumping spunk by the gallon into my cunt.”

Ainsley, ever indiscreet, had raised her voice and drawn a crowd. Mycroft stiffened and waited for their audience to dissipate.

“We’ll get it taken care of,” he said. “I know a place, very exclusive, very… comfortable. I’ll send
round a car tomorrow.”

“Fuck you,” Ainsley said. She stood and then she was gone.

She did not get into the car he sent the next day. She did not answer phone calls.

A month later, he gleaned from all the intelligence he had gathered that she’d miscarried, that she was utterly despondent, that she refused to leave her flat. Then, Sherlock got himself killed for the first time, and the whole business slipped from his mind like oil.

He would not see her again until her father’s funeral, almost ten years later.

—

“You should set up a camera in there, so I can see too.”

Mycroft makes a considering noise. Then, “No.”

“It’s not fair, you know. You can see all this—” She gestures down at the debauched expanse of her body. “—while I’m left with nothing but your voice, if you deign to give it to me.”

Mycroft chuckles a bit. He sets his head back and closes his eyes.

“I’m not much to look at,” he says. He has reconciled himself to this. He is not unhappy about it. He has other virtues.

He hears her snort.

“Yes, because I’ve been mad about a hideous beast of a man my entire life.”

“It happens to the best of us.”

“You’ve never accused me of being the best of anything.”

Mycroft pulls his head back up and blinks at the image on his screen. Ainsley is up and pulling on clothes — soft, inexpensive things she favours for sleeping.

“Ainsley.”

She looks up. He can’t ignore right now that they are, both of them, decidedly middle-aged. If one is being polite about the definition of middle-aged.

“I’m tired, Mycroft.”

“You’ve always been the best of me,” he says.

—

After the funeral, Mycroft let Sherlock and John go back to London without him.

“Now you’re just brooding,” came Ainsley’s voice from behind him. He was staring, unseeing, through the lathe that had wrought so much of his life.

He straightened and turned to face her. He looked at her, fully took her in, for the first time in nearly a decade. She leaned in the doorway to the workroom as if to give him his fill. She was older, a touch heavier, but somehow she had settled into her body and looked the very picture of sensuality.

...
She swilled her pint like fine wine.

He turned back to the lathe again, but he knew the truth of it: Ainsley had seen his inappropriately timed interest. Ainsley always saw.

“He was the only decent man I ever knew,” Mycroft said. He felt the warmth of her as she came up behind him. Carefully, she put her arms around him, and he sagged at the touch as if relieved of a great burden. She lay her cheek between his shoulder blades and squeezed him a shade too tightly, exactly as he liked.

“A rare breed,” she said, her words muffled.

He brought his hands up to cover hers on his chest.

“I’m sorry,” he said. He felt her nod. “What will you do with all this?”

“This house belongs to your family. To you, I suppose.”

“Ainsley, please. As if I would ever—”

“I’m not saying you would. I’m just saying my brothers and I would hardly separate it from the estate it’s meant to serve for, whatever, some kind of empty profit.”

Mycroft turned around. When Ainsley dislodged herself to move away, he pulled her back to him, folded his arms around her, set his forehead on hers. They closed their eyes.

“Stay,” she whispered. “Just for tonight. We’ll pretend.”

Mycroft answers her by nudging his mouth against hers and taking her breath into his own lungs.

—

Ainsley pushes her fringe out of her face and frowns at the camera.

“Someday I’m going to start respecting myself enough to stop this, Mycroft Holmes.”

“I wish you wouldn’t threaten me so.”

“I wish for a lot of things I can’t have.”

Mycroft imagines that this is what it feels like to have one’s lungs torn apart. He steadies his breathing and stands to pace.

“I’m coming over,” he says.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake.” He doesn’t have to look to know exactly what kind of expression she’s wearing: mouth pursed, mid eye-roll. “It’ll take an hour and a half. I have work in the morning.”

“I’ll give Barclay leave to speed. I can be there in under an hour.”

“Mycroft. Look at me.”

He stops to look at the image of her on his screen. She wears a sad smile.

“What are you even going to say that you can’t say like this?” she asks. “Things will always be the same. There’s you, and your job, and your suits, and your title, and your accent. And there’s me. We
are… ships in the night. Sometimes we make time to wave our flags at each other. That’s all."

Mycroft wonders if he’s about to say something frightfully soppy, if he won’t be able to contain it. He wonders too if he has wasted too much time worrying about being soppy to grasp at happiness.

“I hate my brother,” he says, and by God that didn’t turn out as planned. He swallows and Ainsley frowns, cocks her head. “He’s not even real and he gets to be deliriously, disgustingly happy. I can barely stand to look at him.”

Ainsley sighs. “He’s real. Always has been, if you’ll forgive the foray into amateur philosophising.”

“Don’t.”

“Mycroft.” She raises a hand in a quelling gesture. “The only reason you should come over tonight is if you have a ring and you intend to put it on my finger. Otherwise, same time next week.” She smiles one of her joyless smiles. “I’ll still be here.”

He says nothing. Looks down at his hand, at the signet ring he wears on it. It was his grandfather’s, and is not, he’s given to understand, what women want when they ask for such things.

A soft sigh passes through the speakerphone.

“Goodnight, toff. I trust you to change the channel now.”

She hangs up on him, and there is only silence. The screen goes dark as she turns off the lights.

Mycroft calls Barclay, his driver. He has a ring to buy and a journey to make.

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