When We Were Very Young

by Rehfan

Summary

Sherlock never wanted to be a father. Until his opportunity to be one was threatened.

Notes

PLEASE NOTE: I am an American writing all of this stuff. As far as child custody in the UK goes, I have NO idea how it all works. Please forgive me and enjoy the fluffy angst anyway.

Also Note: The story title is from the title of a book by Winnie the Pooh creator A.A. Milne. I own nothing of this franchise.

For the Chinese translation go here: http://221dnet.211.30i.cn/bbs/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=3128&highlight=

MANY THANKS to Rosemarry102 for the translation!

And some AMAZING fanart for this fic can be found HERE: http://hayamiyuu.tumblr.com/post/36346857343/when-we-were-very-young-by-hayamiyuu-idea-from

MANY MANY thanks to the talented hayamiyuu!! Love it!!
Tell me about your childhood. - JW

What for? - SH

To keep you occupied. - JW

It won't help. - SH

Humor me. - JW

Several seconds of silence passed and John could see Sherlock huffing, putting on a show of being disgusted with such a pedestrian and pointless line of questioning from his best friend. In truth, Sherlock was probably trying to recall a good story to tell John so that John could be impressed. Knowing Sherlock, it would probably be the story of his very first deduction at age five or something.

John grinned at the idea of Child Sherlock. He was probably hyperactive, intent on getting himself filthy while investigating how Santa could possibly come down the chimney, being so fat. As a child, John had often wondered about the tooth fairy. I mean, receiving money for a tooth is great when you're the kid, but what did she do with all those damn teeth? It was just a very weird fairy tale.

Well? - JW

I'm endeavoring to think of something novel. - SH

It doesn't have to be a good story, Sherlock. Any one will do. - JW

I've practically deleted my childhood, John. - SH

John looked at his phone with a trace of horror. How could anyone just 'delete' their childhood? Unless it was particularly unhappy, that is. But by all indications Sherlock's childhood was fairly normal, for a posh git. He may not have had many friends and his brother may be a bit... stodgy, but it couldn't have been that bad.

What didn't you delete? - JW

Not much. - SH

I can't tell you how depressing that is, Sherlock. - JW

There was silence at that. John estimated that until that moment, Sherlock thought that deleting his childhood would be something that everyone did eventually.

There was one thing I do remember. But it's boring. - SH

Go on then. - JW

I remember when my father died. - SH

That's not boring, Sherlock. That's depressing. - JW
You didn't say that you wanted a HAPPY story, John. - SH

Fair enough. Go on. - JW

That's it. My father died. - SH

You are crap at telling stories, Sherlock. - JW

That's why I have you, blogger. - SH

Oh fuck off. - JW

You're the one who wanted to waste time telling pointless stories. - SH

Because I was fool enough to believe that you had a childhood that you'd want to remember. I had no idea that you'd delete the whole damn thing! - JW

It's all useless information, John - SH

No it's not! - JW

Again there was silence.

Sherlock, your childhood is an important time; those are the years where you learn about the world. Surely you remember your first deduction? Something that you find useful today that you draw upon without even realizing it? - JW

I remember bees. – SH

Bees? – JW

Yes. I had a fascination with them. It was silly. Childish, really. But then, I was a child. – SH

Bees. Like the kind that make honey? Seriously? Why bees? – JW

Yes, the kind that make honey. As to why bees, I have no ruddy clue. I was a child. They were interesting to me. – SH

I can’t imagine you as a child. – JW

There was a pause at this. John thought he may have said something wrong. He was typing an apology when his phone buzzed again:

I liked pirates too. – SH

I know. Mycroft told me. – JW

He what? Why would he do such a thing? – SH

Maybe because he loves you and has fond memories of his little brother? – JW

No. He said that to embarrass me. Toss. – SH

I didn’t think you got embarrassed, Sherlock. – JW

That picture on your blog of me and THAT HAT are embarrassing, John. I’ve been meaning to harass you about taking it down. – SH
Not a chance. – JW

Oh for God’s sake, why not? – SH

Because people like the hat. They think it’s cute. Funny. I think it gives you a bit more humanity. – JW

I know it beggars belief, but I am actually human, John. – SH

Pull the other one. – JW

Fuck off. – SH

John smiled and lay his head back against the sofa. John thought to himself: ‘Just imagine if he had followed his dream of becoming a pirate who kept bees.’ Two hours later, Sherlock walked in the door.

“How did it go, captain?” teased John.

“What?” said Sherlock, distracted by the case files in his hands. His bothering Lestrade must have resulted in more cold cases for Sherlock. That was good. A Not Bored Sherlock was always a good thing. John watched Captain Sherlock, scourge of Scotland Yard, place his booty on the kitchen table.

“Nothing,” said John, hiding his smile behind a cup of tea.

“Is that a reference to my telling you about pirates?” asked Sherlock. “Why are you still harping on my childhood, John?”

“As if there was something to actually harp on!” countered John, “If you had actually told me anything about your childhood that wasn’t a vague impression of something you thought might have happened, we both might be having a laugh about now.”

“Just because you remember every runny nose you had doesn’t mean that the rest of humanity wants to hear about it,” said Sherlock.

“Sherlock,” said John, “I don’t remember every runny nose… that’s just a ridiculous statement. And it’s not my fault that you think your childhood so damned unimportant.”

Sherlock’s phone buzzed. He looked at the text in utter confusion.


“Yes,” said Sherlock, “and no.”

~080~

As Sherlock and John entered Lestrade’s office, he pointed through the glass into the conference room next door and said, “This is not my division.”

Sherlock and John turned, each man having a mix of confusion on his face. They tilted their heads simultaneously in their curiosity.
John spoke first: “What exactly is going on here? Is he lost?”

“No,” said Lestrade, “He’s unclaimed.”

A boy of about four was coloring with a female officer at the conference room table. He had wide verdigris eyes under a mass of black curls. His skin was a shade darker than Sherlock’s, but all it took was a glance and you could tell that this child was part of the Holmes family.

“Sherlock,” said John, “did you…” He left the question hanging in the air.

“I…,” said Sherlock, staring at the boy as if he were the most horrifying thing he’d ever seen.

“Let me guess,” said John, disgusted, “You deleted it.”

“Certainly not, John,” said Sherlock, “I would have remembered if I had fathered a child. Although…”

“You donated sperm,” said Lestrade.

“A donation made years ago,” said Sherlock. “I wasn’t even sure if they’d keep it as I was extremely high at the time.”

“You made a donation to a sperm bank while high?” said John.

“Excuse me,” said a small voice. All three men looked over at the doorway of Lestrade’s office. “May I go home now, please?” The officer was trying quietly to get the boy to come back and color, but he was a Holmes. He was stubborn.

John’s heart broke. Judging by the look on Lestrade’s face he was feeling the same way. Sherlock looked confused as if he wasn’t expecting the child to possess the power of speech.

John walked to the boy and knelt down. “My name’s John Watson. I’m a doctor. What’s your name?”

The boy looked from John to Lestrade, to Sherlock, and back to John. “Michael,” he said in a very small voice, “Michael Weaver.” John could see that he was terrified out of his mind. John held out one of his hands and after a moment Michael took it. It was so small and fragile next to John’s; it only broke John’s heart more.

“It’s alright, Michael,” said John softly. “We’re going to figure this out. OK, mate? And then we’ll get you home.” Michael gave him a tight smile, the joy of which never made it to his eyes, but he was satisfied enough to allow himself to be taken back to the conference room. John stood and turned to Lestrade, his brow furrowed.

Lestrade explained: “The aunt who was caring for Michael is unable to. Her sister passed away in childbirth, the father scarpered. The aunt did a bit of research – she actually works at the sperm bank in question – and found out who the biological father was.” Lestrade pointed at Sherlock. “She heard about you in the papers and from John’s blog and since we work so closely together and I’m a police officer… well, she just dropped him by. And left.”

John asked, “She just left him here?”

“She gave him a note for the detectives downstairs,” said Lestrade. “I guess she couldn’t bear the idea of saying goodbye.”
“That’s abandonment,” said Sherlock. “You should arrest her.”

“Oh we did,” said Lestrade. “But that still leaves the kid. He’s got no other family.”

“There are orphanages—” started Sherlock.

“Sherlock!” shouted John, horrified.

“Technically,” said Lestrade, “as the biological father, you have first parental rights. If you choose to give up those rights, Michael will be sent off to a foster home.”

Sherlock opened his mouth to answer and John cut him off: “We’ll take him.” Sherlock looked at John, shocked.

“Oh shut up,” said John. “Even you aren’t that heartless.”
Michael comes to stay at 221B.

Unfortunately Michael’s not the only child in the house.

Michael gripped John’s hand tighter as they went up the seventeen steps to get to 221B. His little verdigris eyes took in everything about the place: the fireplace, the mantle with the skull, the bigger skull with headphones on. He went to the sofa and sat quietly watching the two men with careful eyes. He looked scared, lost, and confused. John thought his eyes carried a bit of recognition that he had been abandoned by his aunt. He knelt beside Michael and smiled.

“Do you fancy some milk and a biscuit?” he said softly.

“Yes, please,” said Michael, his voice very small.

John got up and went to the kitchen. “Quite a polite little chap,” he said to Sherlock sotto voce. “Perhaps you should go say hello.”

“What for?” said Sherlock.

John could have hit him. “Because he’s your son, you prat!” he whispered as loudly as he could.

Sherlock sniffed. “I think I’ll wait for the empirical proof on that, John,” he said. John stared at Sherlock. Sherlock stared back, eyes wide, pretending there wasn’t a four-year-old right behind him watching Sherlock act like a four-year-old.


Sherlock rolled his eyes and turned to face the boy with that fake grin he uses in such cases where he has to ‘play nice’. Michael had taken the union jack pillow in his arms and was cuddling it in lieu of a teddy. “Hello,” said Sherlock.

Michael didn’t say anything. He just stared up at the dark man.

“So,” said Sherlock awkwardly, “Michael…” Sherlock looked at the boy a bit more closely. His clothes and shoes had seen better days, probably second-hand and definitely well-worn. His hair wanted cutting. Grime behind his ear and on his wrist indicated that he hadn’t been properly bathed in some time, but he looked the proper weight, so proper nutrition wasn’t an issue. Sherlock wanted to see his teeth to be sure, but he wasn’t exactly certain as to how to get the child to open his mouth. And John would probably stop him.

“May I see my auntie?” said Michael. He was clearly frightened of Sherlock. The dark man wasn’t like the nice man. The nice man got him biscuits and milk and spoke nice things to him. The dark man didn’t like him. Michael knew it. He also knew that he mustn’t pee on the dark man’s sofa. The dark man probably spanked bad little boys who wet sofas.

“Your aunt is in jail,” said Sherlock, plainly.
“Sherlock!” said John as he came with the plate of biscuits and a cup full of milk. “You can’t say that!”

“Why ever not?” said Sherlock. “It’s the truth.”

Michael began to cry. He didn’t know what to do. He needed to pee. He didn’t want to be here. He didn’t want to be scared of the dark man. He just wanted to go home. But if auntie was in jail, who was going to take care of him?

“Shhh…” said John, giving Sherlock a quick dirty look. “Michael, Michael, listen to me. Shhh…” John rubbed Michael’s back soothingly. But Michael couldn’t stop. He was too overwhelmed. First mommy goes to heaven and then auntie is in jail… now the dark man is getting angry and he’s going to wet… oh… no…

John smelled the urine before he saw it. He flung the cushion aside, picked up Michael, and whisked him off to the toilet as quickly as he could, leaving no trace of urine on the sofa. He helped him toilet himself with the boy crying and screaming and calling for his mother. It was awful. Sherlock stood in the doorway of the bathroom with a look of shock on his face.

“Why did he do that?” said Sherlock.

John gave him an irritated look. “Obviously he had to go and didn’t tell us.”

“Isn’t he… trained?” said Sherlock.

“Yes,” said John with the utmost patience, “he is toilet trained. He’s four. He’s just terrified and confused. And you telling him terrible things wasn’t exactly helping. Now do us both a favor and just go p—” John cut himself off. No cursing in front of the child, John, “play your violin in your room, okay? And close the door.”

“John, I—“ began Sherlock.

“Go!” said John. “I’ll handle him tonight. Go on!”

Sherlock looked mildly disgusted and went to his room without his violin.

~080~

John took one look at Michael’s socks and realized how dirty the boy was. “Michael, I think you need a bath. One with lots of bubbles. Do you think that’d be okay? Hmm? A warm bath before bed?”

“I’m going to stay here?” said Michael.

“Yes, Michael,” said John. “You’re going to live with me and Sherlock for a bit. We’re going to take care of you.”

Michael seemed to think about this for a bit. He really did like the nice man. Michael whispered shyly: “Can I have lots of bubbles?”

John smiled. “Of course, mate. Let’s get you sorted, eh?”
After filling the tub with some warm water and bath soap an old girlfriend had left behind, the boy was practically covered in suds. He couldn’t have been happier. John gave him a perfunctory scrubbing head-to-toe, letting him play and splash a bit before rinsing him off and wrapping him in a huge fluffy towel.

John was so grateful that Michael trusted him. It warmed his heart to know that he was relied upon in this way; it was almost completely natural to be able to care for this boy, even though they had just met that day.

John gave a cursory look through what few things Michael’s auntie had packed in his duffle bag and thanked the maker that there were pants, trousers, shirts, and socks for at least three days. He also spotted some pyjamas. Excellent. He promptly put Michael in a fresh pair of pants and his pyjamas. Both articles of clothing were well worn and the pyjamas were even a bit short on him, but until John and Sherlock could buy better, they would have to do.

John made proper toast and jam for himself while he saw that Michael had a bit of chicken and some raw carrots with his milk. John gave him two biscuits for afters. He could tell from Michael’s grateful reaction that he was rarely treated to sweets.

Later as the sun was setting over the late summer sky, he sat on the sofa, his legs stretched along it with Michael cradled in his lap, his black curls resting on his chest, and answered all the boy’s questions:

Yes, auntie was arrested, but only because she left you alone. What she did was against the law. But she thought she was doing what was best for you. She loves you very much.

Why? Because Sherlock – the man in the other room? – yes… he’s your father. Not the man who your mommy was married to, the man that your genes belong to.

What are genes? Well… let me see… it’s the stuff that makes you, you. It’s all the little bits and pieces that come together and give you your hair color, your eye color…

That’s right, Michael. You have Sherlock’s genes. He’s your biological father. It’s a big word, ‘biological’… but that’s what it means: that you have his genes. You are his son. He is your father.

Who am I? I’m your father’s friend. I live here with him.

Why? Well… because your father needs someone. He gets lonely.

I know. He can be scary. He doesn’t mean to be. You have to give him a little time, I think. He’ll come around.

I don’t know if he loves you. But I think he can. You just have to give him time. You’re his son. He has to love you sometime. It’s inevitable.

What’s ‘inevitable”? Well… it’s a word that means… it’s going to happen – no matter what. Just you wait and see.

~080~
John put Michael to bed in his bedroom upstairs and after the boy was safely asleep, he came back down to the kitchen to do the washing up. Sherlock came out of his room.

“'I heard you talking to the boy,” said Sherlock.

“Michael,” said John, “The boy has a name: it’s Michael.”

“Fine, Michael,” said Sherlock. “I heard you telling him about our biological connection.”

“Yes?” said John, wondering where this was going.

“He seemed to grasp the concept very well for a child,” said Sherlock, a bit excitedly, “don’t you think, John?”

John looked at Sherlock with amazement. “Don’t tell me that you’re actually embracing the thought that Michael could actually be your son. And more to the point: that he might actually be… just like… you!” John grinned up at the detective.

“Oh, come now, John,” said Sherlock, scoffing, “let’s not go right round the bend. He may be a Holmes – biologically speaking – but he’s not my son. And I’m no one’s father. Hell, I’m barely a friend. Wouldn’t you agree?” John didn’t have a clear response to this. “See!” Sherlock continued. “I should have nothing more to do with the child. I wouldn’t want to encourage a bond between us as there are other relatives on his mother’s side that may want custody. Lestrade is helping search for others. No… we are merely a weigh-station in this boy’s life, a train stop, a layover. Besides, his presence here is all your fault. I should think that you continuing to care for him would be part of the deal.”

“Me!? said John incredulously. “You must be joking! This is a joint effort, Sherlock Holmes.”

“Like hell it is,” said Sherlock dryly.

“Why are you so resistant to this idea?” asked John. “What is so horrible about being a parent to a child?”


John saw red. He stormed off to Sherlock’s room, grabbed a pillow and a blanket off his bed and proceeded to march back to the sitting room where a confused Sherlock waited. John threw the pillow at Sherlock’s head and the blanket over his legs. “You bastard,” said John, “You can sleep here tonight and think about that poor little innocent boy upstairs. He’s got no one but us. How dare you pawn him off on the nearest stranger! Your parents may not have been perfect, your childhood not the most ideal, but then that was YOU. Michael deserves everything you never got, you posh git, and that includes a place where he can feel safe and loved. If we can’t do that – just that, Sherlock Holmes – we aren’t just bad parents. We’re bad people. And I, for one, will NEVER do that to this child -- to ANY child – so long as I live.”

John looked like thunder. He glared at Sherlock until the detective broke eye contact. John then turned away and walked off to Sherlock’s room, intent on getting a good night’s sleep. After all, he had a child to care for now – two, counting Sherlock.
Chapter Summary

Sherlock is to parenting as a stone is to cuddly.

But he gets better.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After two weeks, John felt as though he was turning into the au pair. Sherlock would have little to nothing to do with Michael, even though John was insisting that the boy was a responsibility that Sherlock had to take up. Sherlock would respond to these admonishments by rustling his paper, staring deeper into his microscope, or leaving the flat entirely.

As a result, Michael became more and more attached to John. They would spend whole days together, coloring, watching educational children’s films and telly, and taking walks in the park. One day, John and Michael were coming home from a walk in Regent’s Park. As Michael raced up the stairs, John shouted after him: “Be sure to put your jacket in your room, Mikey. And hang it up. Don’t let me find it on the floor, right?”

“Oh, Daddy,” Mikey shouted back.

John froze.

This is a bit not good.


“Everyone’s fine, Mrs. Hudson,” said John. “I need a bit of help though. Do you know if Sherlock’s home?”

She glanced up in the direction of the stairs and looked back at John, confused. “Can’t you just go up and see for yourself?”

“I just want to know if you’re available to mind Mikey for a bit. I have to talk to Sherlock and I’d rather he not be around to hear much, if it’s possible.”

“Bit of a domestic?” she asked.

“Something like that,” said John glumly.

“Well, as far as I know he’s up there. I’ll be happy to mind him, love,” she said. “Has he had his lunch?”

“Not yet,” said John. “You’re an angel, Mrs. H.” John gave her a peck on the cheek and headed upstairs.
Mikey had gone straight up to his room and deposited his coat on his bed. It’s not his fault that it fell to the floor after that, right? He came back downstairs to the kitchen and spotted Sherlock sitting in his chair. Mikey was still scared of Sherlock. He thought of him as Father, but could never really bring himself to say any name when it came down to it. He usually referred to Sherlock in conversations as ‘him’ or ‘he’.

Mikey swallowed hard and walked to the fridge. He put his hand on the handle to open it.

“Michael! No!” shouted Sherlock. Mikey pulled back his hand as though it was burned and stared at Sherlock with a startled expression. Sherlock rushed to Mikey and the boy instantly cowered. John walked into the kitchen.

“I’m sorry,” begged Mikey, holding his arms up in front of his face,” I didn’t mean to do it. I’m sorry. I just wanted some milk. I’m sorry.” The boy began to cry.

“What the hell just happened?” asked John.

“I didn’t want him to open the fridge,” said Sherlock. “I didn’t realize that’s what he intended to do until he reached for the handle. I’m afraid I… shouted a bit.”

“Oh for God’s sake, Sherlock. What’s in the fridge?” asked John as he picked up the sniveling boy, cradling his head and rocking him gently.

Sherlock paused for a moment, searching for the right word. “Male genitalia,” he said, finally.

“Oh Christ, Sherlock!” said John. “Really? You have a child in this house. What the hell were you thinking?”

“I was thinking of doing an experiment or two, John,” said Sherlock, his voice loud and irritated. “You remember that I do experiments from time to time between cases? I was hoping to – I don’t know—live my damn life. Silly me, I should have known better. Ever since that… “ here he made a general gesture at Mikey, “came into the house—“


Mikey picked up his head from John’s shoulder, covered his ears with his hands, shut hit little eyes tight, and shouted: “Stop it. Stop it! STOP IT!” Both men froze. “You shout and shout all the time and I don’t like it.” Mikey pointed at Sherlock, “You’re mean! You’re rude and mean! And you’re always shouting at Daddy. I hate you! Stop it!” Mikey threw his arms around John’s neck and cried into his shoulder.

John looked at Sherlock meaningfully as he rubbed Mikey’s back and spoke soft soothing words into his small ear. Sherlock was stunned to speechlessness. “Why don’t we go downstairs and see what Mrs. Hudson has made you for lunch, eh Mikey?” said John softly. He held the boy gently and walked downstairs.
“So,” began Sherlock once John had returned, “It’s ‘Daddy’ now, is it?”

“No, Sherlock,” said John, “Actually it’s not. He’s just started calling me that today. It’s a bit worrying.”

“He’s grown fond of you,” said Sherlock. “It’s only natural.”

“But I’m not actually his dad, Sherlock, YOU are,” countered John. “And no other relative has come forward to claim him, so it looks like we’ll be raising him from here on out.”

“It does seem that way, John,” Sherlock conceded.

“So,” said John, “if you wouldn’t mind pulling some weight around here, that would be fantastic.”

“What do you mean?” asked Sherlock, rearing up warily.

“I mean start participating in caring for the boy,” said John wearily. This argument was getting old.

“I stopped him from opening the fridge just now,” offered Sherlock.

“True, Sherlock,” said John, “but it’s because of you that the fridge couldn’t safely be opened by a four-year-old boy who only wanted some milk.”

Sherlock sulked. Why couldn’t the child just bugger off to a relative’s? Why was he stuck with a child he didn’t want? Why was this happening to him?

“I need your help, Sherlock,” said John.

“Mrs. Hudson is helping you out,” said Sherlock.

John sighed. “As you know… because she has told us time and time and time again… she’s not our babysitter, Sherlock. In two weeks time, she’s minded Mikey a half-dozen times – most of them legitimate because of a case or two getting in the way – but when I pop out to do the shopping I shouldn’t have to leave him with her especially when you’re HOME.”

Sherlock grumbled under his breath.

“What? What is it?” said John.

“He doesn’t like me,” said Sherlock defiantly. “You heard him just now: he hates me. Why would he want to stay with me? Why would I want him to stay? He hates me.”

“He doesn’t hate you,” said John, his heart breaking a bit for Sherlock, “He doesn’t even know you. You’re his father and yet, he doesn’t even call you by your name – or by any name, come to think of it. You’re a scary stranger he’s learned to avoid. If you participated – even just a bit – he might have something to build a bit of trust on. Give him something to go on, Sherlock.”

“Like what?” said Sherlock, not sure any of John’s suggestions will actually work. If a child hates you – especially a Holmes – you can expect that grudge to run deep.

“I don’t know,” said John, grasping for ideas, “Try coloring with him.”
“Boring.”

“Alright, what about making him lunch sometime.”

“He probably wouldn’t eat it.”

“How about taking him for a walk?”

“And then what? I have no idea what to talk to him about. And it sounds boring too.”

“Jesus, Sherlock!” said John, exasperated, “You’re a ruddy genius! Think of something! Before the end of today, I want you to think of how you are going to participate in your son’s life. Got it?”

“Or what?” asked Sherlock.

“Or I’ll call Mycroft,” said John.

Sherlock’s eyes widened. “You wouldn’t dare!”

“Try me,” said John, looking practically predatory. Mycroft Holmes would have Sherlock sorted inside of three minutes, or he would arrange to take custody of the boy himself, John was sure of it. Even if Mikey grew up around a real au pair, nanny, ‘manny’, or whatever… he would at least be guaranteed supervision and protection. It made John sick to think of the lack of love, but then, John could always visit whenever he wanted. Mikey would still feel wanted by John, and that was the most important thing to John.

“Fine,” said Sherlock. “I’ll try to… participate.”

“Thank you, Sherlock,” said John. He was surprised at the flood of relief that swept over him.

~080~

John came down stairs from tucking in Mikey. Just as his foot hit the landing, he heard Mikey call for him. “Daddy, could I have some water?”

“Sure thing, mate,” John called back up the stairs, “I won’t be a moment. And then sleep, yeah?” He turned and went into the kitchen to find a clean glass. Sherlock sat at his microscope and held out a clean glass of water to John. John looked surprised and took the glass slowly, a question in his eyes.

“You asked me to participate more, John,” said Sherlock. “I noticed that his usual fluid intake was a bit short today and what with the stress and excitement earlier, I knew he would be a bit dehydrated. So…”

“That’s very observant of you, Sherlock,” said John. “And more than a little attentive. Thank you for paying attention.” He turned away from the detective and paused. “Why don’t you go bring it to him?”

“What?” said Sherlock, clearly thinking that pouring the glass would count for something by way of actual care-giving.

“Go and bring this glass to him,” said John. He came around the table and pushed Sherlock out of
his stool. “Go. He’s waiting. Just follow your instincts. It’ll be fine.”

Sherlock took the glass without a word and looked at John stupidly.

“Go!” John whispered loudly. Slowly Sherlock made his way out of the kitchen and up the stairs. He opened the door carefully and peeked inside. Mikey was laying in the bed awake, his head on the pillow. As soon as he realized that it wasn’t Daddy bringing him his water, his body visibly stiffened and his hands clenched the sheets.

“I’m not going to shout,” said Sherlock softly, praying that the child wouldn’t burst into sudden tears. “You wanted water. Here.”

Mikey sat up slowly, his bright eyes never leaving Sherlock. He took the glass carefully and drank from it, staring at Sherlock. Sherlock stared back.

After a moment of regarding the boy, Sherlock asked softly, hopefully: “We do look remarkably alike, don’t we?” Much to Sherlock’s chagrin, Mikey didn’t say anything.

“You called John ‘daddy’ today,” Sherlock said. “Is that how you see him?” Again, Mikey just stared at the detective.

Sherlock cleared his throat. “I won’t be angry at you for calling him that, you know,” he said. “It’s fitting. He’s more of a father to you than I am; than I am capable of being.”

John had told Sherlock to follow his instincts. Sherlock’s instincts were of two minds about all this. One side of him had said to run from the room and let John deal with it all. The other side told him to sit at the foot of the boy’s bed and attempt to touch him in a soothing way. The first side of him was louder, but the second was more insistent. Sherlock was unused to equivocation and absolutely detested it in others. Now it was happening in his own head and it was frustratingly annoying. Sherlock had to make a decision. So, he made the only one he knew John would approve of: he sat at the boy’s feet and reached out a tentative hand toward his knee.

Sherlock’s huge hands dwarfed the boy’s body. Sherlock watched the boy’s reaction carefully as he tentatively pat at the boy’s knee. “I’m sorry, Michael.” Sherlock said the words without thinking about them. “I’m sorry I have been shout-y and that I frightened you today. I’m also sorry for not being a very good father to you. You see, my own father… well… he was…”

Michael stared at Sherlock. This was the most interaction he’d had with Sherlock in the two weeks he’d been living under the same roof. He wasn’t sure what to make of Dark Man now. His hand was huge on his knee, but gentle. That was unexpected. Somewhere inside Michael something softly changed; he became brave. He finished his water as Dark Man was telling about his daddy, put down his glass on the bedside table and crawled toward Sherlock, wrapping his little arms around the detective’s chest. Saying you’re sorry means that you hug after, right? And Dark Man said sorry… so that’s what you do.

“It’s okay… D—“ No… that wasn’t Daddy. Daddy was downstairs. ‘Father’ wasn’t quite right either: too… strict. Dark Man was trying to be nice. He wasn’t really a good daddy, but he was trying now. Mikey looked up at Sherlock and said: “It’s okay… Poppa. It’s alright.” Mikey tucked his head down on Sherlock’s chest and waited. He waited for Sherlock to shout again. He could hear Sherlock’s heartbeat and then, much to Mikey’s relief, he felt that huge hand rub his back soothingly, gently. Mikey smiled into Sherlock’s shirt.

Sherlock guided Michael up and helped him lay back down under the duvet, tucking him in as his instincts told him to. It was easier now, somehow. Sherlock grinned inwardly at this realization. There was very little thought involved here. It was… different. Without consulting his massive intellect, he was still somehow able to do the right thing to care for this child. It was astounding.

By the time Sherlock realized that he had kissed the boy’s forehead, he was pulling away from him, the kiss sealed on Michael’s brow. Sherlock stared in amazement. It was all falling into place. And then… he remembered something he thought he had deleted. He looked at Michael suddenly and said: “Wait here.”

Sherlock raced down the stairs, past a very confused John, into his bedroom, searched for something in the depths of a disused trunk in the corner of his room, found what he was searching for and, with a shout of victory, raced back up the stairs with his treasure.

Michael was still unused to seeing Sherlock in this state and brought the duvet up over his nose as his huge eyes watched the man enter his room, position himself at the foot of his bed once more, and regard him with wide almond-shaped eyes that danced with excitement. Sherlock had a book in his hands. He opened it and began to read:

“Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17—and go back to the time when my father kept the Admiral Benbow inn and the brown old seaman with the sabre cut first took up his lodging under our roof….”

John stood unseen on the other side of Mikey’s door, a hand clapped over his mouth, and wept silently as he heard his best friend take his first steps into fatherhood by reading ‘Treasure Island’ to his son.

Chapter End Notes

The snippet of "Treasure Island" used in this chapter is (I believe) public domain. I am using it without formal permission from anyone, but in case you want to know:
Nightmares: Waking and Sleeping

Chapter Summary

Michael has his first nightmare at 221B.

And so do Sherlock and John.

Sherlock closed the book as he saw Michael’s eyes flutter closed. It had been almost a week since he started reading to him at night. Sherlock was pleased that they had something so simple to share between them. He paused as he placed the book gently on the nightstand. Something to share… with his son… strange.

Sherlock never gave much thought to parenting, always thinking he’d be absolute crap at it. He hated tenderness and sentiment. But with this boy it was somehow all different. Sherlock shook the thought from his head. Sentimental rubbish. He was only reading to the boy to please John and to prevent the child – no… Michael – from crying every time Sherlock approached him. It was a means to an end, nothing more.

He turned to go when he heard Michael stir. “Poppa?”

Something inside of Sherlock squirmed in an unusually pleasant way. He turned to the boy. “Yes, Michael?”

“You forgot,” he said, touching a finger to his forehead. Sherlock blinked at him for a moment, stunned. He leaned over and placed a small gentle kiss on the boy’s forehead. Michael smiled at him, eyes closed.

“Poppa?” asked the boy, eyes still shut.

“Yes, Michael?”

“Am I going to live with you and Daddy forever?” Michael asked. His voice was slowly being taken over by sleep.

Again, Sherlock paused. “It seems that way,” Sherlock replied simply, no trace of disgust in the statement. “Now go to sleep.”

“Okay, Poppa,” said Michael as he rolled over away from Sherlock. “Love you,” he said.

Sherlock didn’t reply. He didn’t scoop him up into a hug and tell him that he loved him too. He didn’t do anything; he was stopped in his tracks. He just stood in the boy’s room listening to him breathe. He didn’t know how long he was there, but by the time he stirred himself and went back downstairs, John was fast asleep on the sofa.

John had taken up residence on the sofa the very night Sherlock started reading to Michael and every night since. Sherlock supposed that John saw it as some sort of a reward to Sherlock for making an effort to participate in Michael’s life more. It was a bit foolish. After all, Sherlock hardly ever slept, especially when a case was ongoing. It was stupid for John to give up a perfectly decent bed when Sherlock’s was going to be vacant for the most part.
Sherlock sighed and, in a moment of uncharacteristic altruism, secured John’s blanket better over his sleeping frame. For a split second, he almost kissed John’s forehead like he did Michael’s. Sherlock hovered over John for a moment, pondering why his instincts just told him to kiss John. He came to the conclusion that his senses were dulled from reading about pirates. He went to his room to read up about fungi instead. Yes, that would be much more productive.

~080~

Michael awoke with a start. It was dark in the room and for a moment, he couldn’t recall where he was. Then he did: he was with Daddy and Poppa. He looked about the room. The shadows cast by the lights outside and that shone through the window were frightening. He lay there in the darkness with the duvet up to his nose and listened to himself breathe. He could swear that something was under the bed. He knew it. And as soon as he moved or did anything, it would come out and snatch him up. Maybe it was a pirate.

Michael shivered. He was so alone in that room. And the room was so big. It wasn’t fun. He was tired but too afraid of the pirate under the bed. It was a bad pirate. Not a good one like Jim Hawkins. He couldn’t let the pirate get him. Suppose he came up from underneath? What would Michael do? He had to find Daddy. Daddy would help him.

Michael needed to pee too. Could he use Poppa’s toilet? He couldn’t use his own. The pirate would get him. But how do you get out?

He had to make a run for it.

He got up carefully, moving the duvet aside as quietly as he could. He risked a look over the edge of the bed. Nothing. Blackness. It was somehow worse than seeing an angry pirate face. Michael swallowed hard and placed his feet at the edge of the mattress. He had to jump where the pirate couldn’t reach.

Now.

No…

Now!

No…

NOW!

He jumped. It was a good jump, but Michael didn’t check to see if the pirate was there. He just ran out of his room and down the stairs as fast as his legs could carry him.

He got to the sitting room where the only light came from the kitchen stove hood. He saw Daddy on the sofa and watched him sleep for a bit. Michael had never seen John sleeping before. He had a blanket over him. John was so big, there wasn’t any room left for him. Besides, Michael didn’t want to wake Daddy; he looked so peaceful.

The boy looked about and decided that Poppa could help. Poppa was awfully clever. He knew about pirates. He knew lots of things. Poppa could save him.
Michael walked to the door of Sherlock’s bedroom. There was light coming from under the door and Michael got on the floor to peek. He wanted to see if Poppa was awake. He was afraid to wake Poppa if he was sleeping. He didn’t want to make Poppa angry.

A shadow moved on the other side of the door. Before he could get up, Sherlock stood before him in the doorway. He was wearing some loose sweatpants and a t-shirt under his blue robe. His feet were bare.

Michael jumped in spite of himself. Even dressed down Poppa was still scary sometimes.

“What are you doing out of bed?” said Sherlock.

“There’s a pirate…” began Michael.

“A pirate?” said Sherlock. “Like in the book? Don’t be silly. There are no pirates like that anymore – unless you count the ones off of the South African coastline…” Sherlock looked at his son. The boy was wide-eyed and terrified. Oh no… Sherlock had said something wrong. Again.

Right. What would John do?

Sherlock got down on one knee and held out his arms. Michael walked into them easily and wrapped his arms tightly around Sherlock’s neck. Sherlock patted the boy’s back awkwardly. A thought occurred to him. He said to Michael: “Did you have an unpleasant dream? A nightmare?” Michael pulled away from him and nodded. “Ah, I see,” said Sherlock, not seeing anything at all. How does one comfort a child who’s had a nightmare? He should wake John. But no, this should be simple.

Following his instincts, he pushed Michael’s head back down against his chest and held the boy a bit more firmly. “Do you think you can go back to sleep now?” said Sherlock after a few moments had passed.

“Can I sleep with you?” asked Michael softly. His voice could get so small and quiet when he thought he was saying something he oughtn’t.

Sherlock was taken aback by the question, but replied honestly: “I wasn’t sleeping. But you may as well stay in my bed – just so long as you promise to actually sleep.”

“Oh, I promise, Poppa,” said Michael. His big blue eyes were earnest.

Sherlock brought him into his room and closed the door. He threw the duvet aside and settled the boy in, not forgetting to tuck him in and kiss his forehead. Sherlock turned all but his goose-neck lamplight off so that Michael could sleep. Sherlock sat back down at the small desk in his room and read by lamp light.

“What are you reading?” asked Michael.

“Go to sleep,” said Sherlock.

“Yes, Poppa,” his voice was very small and sounded injured.

After a moment, Michael asked: “Are you going to sleep, Poppa?”

“Not until you do, Michael,” replied Sherlock, his eyes never leaving the pages of his book. “Now go to sleep.”
“Okay,” said Michael, “only…”

Sherlock sighed and closed his book. “What is it, Michael?”

“Are you angry, Poppa?”

“Annoyed, Michael.”

“Oh…”

“What is it, Michael?”

“Poppa, do you know how to use a cutlass or a sword?”

“Of course. All Holmes learn fencing at an early age -- almost your age, come to think of it.”

“Oh…”

“Is there anything else?”

“Um…”

“What is it, Michael?” Sherlock was getting really annoyed now.

“I… I have to pee.”

Sherlock sighed and got the boy up. Sherlock sat on the bed watching Michael leave. Michael stopped in the doorway. “Aren’t you coming?”

“John – erm… Daddy says you’re toilet trained. Why do you need me?” asked Sherlock.

“It’s dark,” Michael replied as if that explained everything.

“So?” said Sherlock.

“Please, Poppa,” begged Michael.

Sherlock sighed and rolled his eyes. “Oh, alright.”


“I can’t reach, Poppa,” said Michael. “Daddy always helps me.”

Sherlock stepped into the bathroom and lifted the boy up to reach the taps. They washed his hands thoroughly and Sherlock set him down, handing him a towel to dry himself.

“Now, Michael,” said Sherlock, clearly exasperated. “Will there be anything else? Or will you be going to sleep now?”

“No, Poppa,” said Michael, “I’ll go to sleep now.”

Sherlock got Michael settled in again and kissed him on the forehead. Michael leaned up and kissed him back, catching the edge of his mouth. “Goodnight, Poppa.”

Sherlock paused in stunned silence for the fourth time that evening. “Goodnight, Michael,” he said.
“Now, if you please… sleep.”

Twenty minutes later, Michael whimpered. Sherlock looked up from his book and watched the boy carefully. He marked his page and set the tome down without taking his eyes off his son. Slowly, noiselessly, he came closer to Michael, his acute verdigris eyes picking up on every nuance of the boy’s behavior. Michael whimpered again and said, “No… no… please…”

Sherlock wondered if he should wake him. Instinct told him not to; it was funny how his instincts were so useful around the boy. Sherlock made a mental note to thank John in the morning for his advice. Sherlock’s instincts were telling him something else now, but they couldn’t be right. Could they? Well… it’ll be an experiment then.

Sherlock went around the other side of the bed, got in behind the sleeping figure, and cuddled with the boy. Michael immediately turned in his sleep toward Sherlock and snuggled into his chest. Sherlock rubbed Michael’s back soothingly and the whimpering stopped. He felt the boy fall into a deeper stage of sleep, his worried face going slack once more. Amazing.

The soothing stroking motions coupled with the boy’s body heat and soft breathing were enough to cause Sherlock’s eyes to drift closed. He arranged a pillow under his head and attempted to allow sleep to take him. It just felt… right. It felt as it should be.

Is this what fatherhood is? If so, it was better than he had expected it to be. This overwhelming calm was worth all the last-minute trips to the toilet and all the nightmares in the world. To think that this small human trusted and loved him after only knowing him for a week, really… it was unfathomable.

Sherlock felt exceedingly happy and content and, at the same time, overwhelmingly sad. What had he done to deserve this trust and love? He read the boy a book. It seemed too easy. It was too simple. There had to be more to familial love than this. Sherlock went to his mind palace to find out. Surely he hadn’t deleted absolutely everything. Perhaps he’d stored away a few precious… ah… there it was…

~080~

“Father,” said Sherlock, “I had a bad dream. Mother’s sleeping. Please may I stay with you?”

“Sherlock,” said Siger Holmes, standing in the doorway of his bedroom. He was obviously perturbed at being woken by his youngest child in the middle of the night for something as uninteresting and silly as a bad dream. “You are six now and should be able to sleep past nightmares. You’re no longer a child.”

“But…” began Sherlock, unsure as to what he was going to say to this.

“Goodnight, Sherlock,” said Siger and closed his door.

Sherlock gripped his teddy tighter and walked to Mycroft’s room. He didn’t get a chance to knock. The door opened for him. “Come in, Sherlock,” said Mycroft.

Cool sheets touched his skin as he climbed into Mycroft’s huge four-poster bed. It was plenty big for both of them and Sherlock remembered being grateful for the shelter and companionship of his big brother.
“Now go to sleep, Sherlock,” said Mycroft. “And don’t kick me.”

“’kay, Mycroft,” said Sherlock. Sleep took him in seconds. Sherlock vaguely recalled waking in his own rooms the next morning.

Mycroft. How could he have forgotten – no, not forgotten. Filed away. That was before Mycroft left him alone with father and mother. Before Mycroft went to London to work for the government and… changed. And then father died… and it all went to hell.

Sherlock shook his head gently and opened his eyes to glance down at Michael. He was sleeping soundly in Sherlock’s long arms. Sherlock reached underneath him to cradle him further, holding him close. Michael squirmed a bit, but settled into him and they both fell comfortably asleep, father and son.

~080~

Lestrade walked into 221B with the air of a man who had the world on his shoulders. “Whatever is wrong with you?” asked Sherlock as he rosined his bow from his chair in the sitting room, “Has Anderson screwed up again?”

“No, Sherlock,” said Lestrade. The next words he spoke were bittersweet. “I’m here because your prayers have been answered.” John looked up from the kitchen table where Michael and he were eating breakfast. “Sorry, John,” said Lestrade to him, “but we had a relative come forward last night.”

“What?” said John.

“You mean,” said Sherlock and pointed in the general direction of Michael.

“Yes, chaps, I’m afraid so,” said Lestrade. His gut was twisting for the both of them. John had filled him in on Sherlock’s progress at fatherhood and he couldn’t have been less pleased to tell them both all this.

“Why didn’t you tell us yesterday?” asked Sherlock.

“Because I thought you deserved at least one last night,” said Lestrade, “you know… with him.”

“Who is the relative?” asked John.

“A cousin,” said Lestrade, “from the mother’s side. Wife to a solicitor, so if you want to argue custody, you may have your hands full.”

Sherlock and John looked at each other. Then all three men looked at Michael who was currently taking the biggest bite out of a jam-smeared slice of toast, managing to get more jam on his face than in his mouth. Michael looked back at them, his eyes wide and innocent.

This was a bit not good.

“But if I assert my right as the biological father,” said Sherlock, “she can’t argue with that.”

“Perhaps not,” said Lestrade, “but look at your life, Sherlock. You live dangerously. You keep experiments in the fridge. You were an addict. You frequently scarper off at all times of night and
day. Besides, you were a sperm donor and not an actual legal guardian of this child. And…” Lestrade looked uncomfortable.

“And?” said John. His heart was in his throat. He felt sick.

“And…” continued Lestrade, wincing, “the cousin has done a bit of research on you, Sherlock. She seems to think that your… living arrangements… are… well… unorthodox.”

“She thinks I’m in a gay relationship,” said Sherlock.

“Well…” said Lestrade, throwing John an apologetic look, “yes.”

“But I’m not actually gay,” said John.

“But you do love me,” countered Sherlock, “and you live here under the same roof with me. And you’re helping to raise my son…”

“I love you?” said John, his eyebrows raised. “What the hell are you—“

“Ah!” said Sherlock with a glance at Michael, “Language, John! And yes, you do love me. Why else would you help me in my investigations?”

“Oh I don’t know,” said John sardonically. “Perhaps I like it! Or perhaps it’s because you need someone to save you from yourself.”

“You mean watch over me -- like a boyfriend would?” said Sherlock.

“What?” said John, “No! Like a mate wou-- a friend! Like a FRIEND would…. Jesus…”

“Listen,” said Lestrade, trying to get past the domestic squabble, “all I know is, the woman has a clever husband and you’d be hard-pressed to find a chink in her armor. She’s a mother herself. She’s got a good home, a steady double income, good schools nearby, all the rest. You two had better be ready. If you choose to battle her, I’m in your corner, but this is not going to be pretty.”

“That’s curious,” said Sherlock. “Why are you in our corner? Last I checked, you were fairly skeptical of the whole idea of me being a father.”

“Well,” said Lestrade, “first of all, you’re not alone. You’ve got John. And second… look at the two of you: three weeks as parents and you’re settling in nicely, doing everything proper. Sherlock, you’ve got the story-time thing down.”

“And he’s managed to conquer the sudden middle-of-the-night-bogeymen problem too,” said John proudly. Sherlock rolled his eyes.

“Oh?” said Lestrade looking at Sherlock with a goofy grin.

“Yes, yes…” said Sherlock with a dismissive gesture. After a moment’s cogitation spent staring at Michael he added: “I think I should fight for him. Michael’s rightful place is with me. He is a Holmes, after all.”

“Just like that, eh?” said Lestrade. “Three weeks ago you were treating him like a foreign object. Today, he’s your son. That’s quite a turn-around, Sherlock.”

“I realize that it may come as a shock to you two,” said Sherlock dryly as he stood up to his full height, “but I am capable of some familial bonding. There is such a thing as family pride.” He put his bow and violin in the chair behind him.
Lestrade looked at John with a sarcastic face that said: ‘Well, pardon the hell out of me!’ John returned the expression and smiled at Lestrade.

“Oh piss off, the both of you,” said Sherlock and he walked off to his bedroom.

“Oi! Language!” John and Lestrade called after him.

“Yeah, language!” echoed Michael.
Birthdays, Bonding, Bees, and Bullies

Chapter Summary

Sherlock and Michael spend some quality time together.

Chapter Notes

For reference:


A week later, five candles burned atop a cake Mrs. Hudson made with her own two hands. Lestrade, John, and Mrs. Hudson all sang happy birthday to Michael as Sherlock played the tune jauntily on the violin. Michael was all smiles.

“Blow out your candles, Michael,” encouraged Mrs. Hudson.

“But be sure to make a wish first,” said John.

Michael shut his eyes tightly and took a moment before gathering up a huge breath and blowing all five candles out in one go. A loud cheer arose from the crowd around the kitchen table at 221B. John thought that it had never felt more like family until that very moment.

The assembled company turned when they heard the rap at the door frame. John’s eyes lit up and he quirked a half-smile of pleasant surprise. Sherlock looked surprised as well, but nonplussed at the same time. Lestrade gave a curious glance at the stranger. Mrs. Hudson was delighted.

Mycroft Holmes stood in the doorway, umbrella in hand. “Congratulations on your fifth birthday, nephew,” he said cordially to Michael. Michael gave the stranger a quiet smile, but said nothing.

John explained: “Michael, this is your Uncle Mycroft. He’s Poppa’s brother.”

"You have a brother?" asked Lestrade.

“I cannot stay long,” said Mycroft, “I just came by to give Michael my present and I’ll be off.”

“Thank God for small favors,” muttered Sherlock. He got an elbow to the ribs from John for his trouble.

“Michael,” said Mycroft with the air of a king bestowing a knighthood, “now that you are five, I would like to give you a gift that the Holmes family have passed to their boys for generations.” He placed a well-wrapped box on the table beside the cake. It was a few inches wide, but more than three feet long and easily six inches high.

“Mycrof…” began Sherlock.
Mycroft held up a hand. “I know you want to teach the boy. It is your prerogative. However, I wanted to be the one to give him his first foil.”

“French grip?” asked Sherlock.

“Certainly not!” said Mycroft. “Italian.” Sherlock nodded his approval.

“What did you just give him?” asked John nervously.

“He gave him a foil, John,” said Sherlock.

“Yes. He said that. But what is it… exactly?” said John warily.

“A fencing foil,” said Sherlock.


“It’s a Holmes family tradition that the boys learn fencing at the age of five,” explained Mycroft. “I did it. Sherlock did it. Our father did it. It’s only right that my brother’s son have his time.”

John placed a hand on his forehead and sighed in exasperation.

Sherlock smiled at Michael warmly. “You can open it when everyone is gone. I don’t want you swinging it about and hitting anyone, alright?”

Michael was a bit sad at this, but he didn’t want to hurt anyone either. “Alright, Poppa.”

“Well,” broke in Mrs. Hudson, “I suppose someone has to cut the cake. Mycroft, did you want a piece?”


The day wore on as birthdays do and Michael was swimming in a sea of wrapping paper and bows by the end. He had not forgotten the sword, however and when he couldn’t find it, he asked his fathers: “Daddy, Poppa, where is it?”

John looked at him and answered honestly: “I’ve put it up for safe-keeping, Michael. We’re going to be having supper soon. You can play with it tomorrow.”

Before the boy could argue or cry, Sherlock interjected: “I will give you your first official lesson tomorrow morning before you go off to school. Don’t worry.”

Michael cried anyway. John looked at Sherlock who looked at John. “He’s had a long day, Sherlock,” said John, “He’s obviously in need of a lie-down.”

“Naps are for babies,” said Michael petulantly and continued to cry.

Sherlock picked him up and went upstairs with him, leaving John to finish making supper. Once upstairs, Sherlock sat on Michael’s bed (it had stopped being John’s bed a long time ago) and read the last of Treasure Island to him. It mollified the boy to hear his father’s soothing voice and to get to hear the last bit about what happens to Jim. He drifted off almost immediately.
Sherlock wrapped him in the duvet and went back downstairs. “You really should have just let him see and hold it, John,” he said.

“It’s a sword, Sherlock,” said John. “He could hurt himself.”

“You can’t protect him from everything forever,” said Sherlock. “He’s going to be a teenager before you know it.”

“Which is why I want to keep him safe,” said John. “while I can still protect him.”

“You realize, of course, that makes no sense, John.”

“Oh shut up and set the table.”

~080~

Sherlock gently put the foil away as Michael strapped on his backpack for his first day at school.

“All set?” asked John nervously. He had had a knot in his stomach all day long. He really hoped the school that Sherlock and he had chosen for Michael was going to agree with the boy. He didn’t want Michael to be frightened, but he couldn’t help but be frightened for him.

“Off to school already,” said Mrs. Hudson. She couldn’t help but be present for the occasion. She smiled at Michael. “You look so smart in your new clothes. The other children are going to love you and you’ll make lots of new friends.” Michael smiled back at her.

“Just remember what we talked about,” warned John, “There will be no swordfighting in school. A stick in the playground is a stick in the playground, NOT a sword. Right?”

“Yes, Daddy,” said Michael, rolling his eyes in a very Sherlockian manner, “I know I know.”

John sighed and looked at Sherlock. Sherlock smirked.

The four of them made their way to the school and each one got a hug from Michael as he was dropped off at his classroom. Michael didn’t cry or make a scene. The three grown-ups couldn’t be more proud of him. They remarked on it all the way back to 221.

Pretty soon they were all about their own routines: Mrs. Hudson popped out to do some shopping, Sherlock sat before his microscope, and John read the paper.

After about three minutes, John and Sherlock agreed that it was too fucking quiet in the building. The remaining hours that went by were torturous. Finally, mercifully, it was time to pick up Michael.

It was the middle of the afternoon and John offered him a snack of milk and biscuits. Michael ate them like he hadn’t eaten for a week. John was curious: “Didn’t they give you lunch at school, Mikey? You inhaled those biscuits.”

“Yes, Daddy,” said Michael. There was a strange note to his voice.

“Is everything alright?” asked John. “You said you had a good day and made friends. Is that true?” Michael didn’t say anything. He just finished his milk and said he was tired. He wanted a lie-down.
John excused him and watched as he walked up the stairs to his room.

Sherlock had been watching this exchange from his position leaning on the back of John’s chair. John looked at Sherlock knowing that the detective had been deducing something the entire time. “Well?” asked John.

“I’m not certain,” said Sherlock, “but I believe Michael may have encountered a bully.”

~080~

The next week passed with Michael coming home starving. John started to make small meals for him by week’s end. Each time he ate, he would go up to his room and play alone. One day, Sherlock listened at his door. John waited on the landing below, trusting in Sherlock’s abilities to discern exactly what was amiss with Michael as the boy would clam up the moment either of them questioned him about anything. The last time Sherlock asked outright, Michael burst into tears and wouldn’t eat his dinner. Something was definitely wrong.

“It is most certainly a bully,” said Sherlock. “One by the name of Simon.”


“I think you had better,” said Sherlock, “I shudder to think of what good cousin Emily would do if she found out that Michael was being bullied while in our care.” He began to pace the living room.

“Jesus, Sherlock,” said John watching his best friend fret. John’s stomach began to twist. He had almost put that woman out of his mind. “We really can’t slip up anywhere, can we?”

“You call Mrs. Winthrop first thing Monday morning,” advised Sherlock, “and be sure you call the headmistress, Mrs. Powell as well. I want them both to be aware of the situation. And I want to be the one to talk to both of them on the Parent/Teacher conference day next month. We’ll get this Simon mess sorted.”

“Do you really think cousin Emily is going to wait an entire month to gain custody of Michael?” said John.

“Trust me,” said Sherlock, “Mycroft is doing what he can for us as well. We have friends.” John raised his eyebrows at this information. “He pulled me aside at Michael’s birthday party,” explained Sherlock as he continued to pace. “He knew about the custody battle. He wanted to help. I thought if he could stall, we might have more of a chance to prove that we’re good parents for Michael.”

“I see,” said John, “Give us time to prove ourselves; to have enough evidence to bring in front of a judge. Jesus, Sherlock. You really are a ruddy genius.” Sherlock stopped, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. He gave John a warm smile.

“Just let me know when dinner’s ready,” said Sherlock and he gave John a passing kiss on the cheek on his way to his bedroom.

John was still frozen to the spot as the door to Sherlock’s bedroom closed.
Saturday morning brought more stress. All Mrs. Hudson did was mention to Michael that he’d be going back to school on Monday and wasn’t it wonderful that he’d get to see all his new friends?

Michael burst into sudden and inconsolable tears.

Mrs. Hudson looked helplessly at the boys and John pulled her aside and explained the situation. Sherlock knelt before his son, his quick mind now working in concert with his instincts. “Would you like another fencing lesson, Michael?” he asked. Michael nodded through his tears. “Wonderful. I have an idea. Let me talk to Daddy and I’ll make all the arrangements. Just give me a moment.”

Sherlock stood and walked over to where John and Mrs. Hudson were speaking in low tones. Michael sat on the sofa and watched them. Daddy looked surprised at what Poppa had asked him. Missus Hudsin looked happy. Daddy looked at Michael then back at Poppa. Daddy looked worried and asked Poppa something. Poppa shook his head and put his hand on Daddy's shoulder. Daddy thought about something. Missus Hudsin talked to Daddy and smiled at Poppa. Daddy smiled funny at Poppa and nodded. Poppa turned around and looked at Michael smiling.

“It’s all set, Michael,” said Sherlock. “Let’s pack a bag for you. We’re leaving London for the weekend. Just you and me. How does that sound?”

“Where are we going, Poppa?” asked Michael.

“To an old family home in Surrey,” said Sherlock. “One that I used to visit when I was a boy. I think you’ll like it. Lots of room for fencing. And if I recall correctly, the housekeeper and her husband kept a few bee hives as well. You might find that interesting.”

“Can Daddy come?” asked Michael.

John spoke up: “Not this time, Mikey. I have to work this weekend. You were going to spend the weekend with Poppa anyway, so this’ll be nicer, yeah?”

Michael didn’t like not being with Daddy too, but if he had to work… well… “Okay,” said Michael and ran up to his room to pack. John followed him.

“I’m really going to miss him,” said John from the foot of the stairs. “This weekend will be like torture.”

“Yes,” said Sherlock with an impish grin, “but will you miss me as well?”

“Oh piss off, you twat,” John grinned.

~080~

Sherlock opened his bag to discover that John had been messing about. A fresh copy of “Robinson Crusoe” lay on top of his clothing. Sherlock pulled the book out and smiled to himself. Sentiment.
Sherlock shook his head, tossed the book on the bed and went to see how Michael was settling in.

Their rooms were right across the corridor from one another on the second floor of the cottage and it was quiet, but when they first arrived, things had gotten off to a rough start. As they got out of the car, Sherlock pointed at the stone structure and asked Michael how old he thought the building was. Michael screwed up his face and said: “Five years?”

Sherlock looked at Michael with a mixture of profound confusion and disbelief. “Is that a joke?”

“No,” said Michael.

“Michael,” said Sherlock with a sigh, “you see but do not observe.” He knelt down beside the boy and pointed to the ivy that scaled the walls of the structure. It was practically covered in the stuff. “Do you see the plant that is growing up the side of the walls all around?” Michael nodded. “Good. It’s called English Ivy. Now…know this: that plant grows at a rate of nine feet per annum… erm… that is to say, nine feet a year. Now, if I am six feet tall, and this building is thirty-six feet tall, to include its thatched roof, how many years has that ivy plant been growing?”

Michael was confused and more than a little scared. What was Poppa asking him? What would happen if he got it wrong? He felt his heart beat a bit faster. He didn’t know the answer. Michael looked from the house to his father and then back at the house. What was he supposed to say? Daddy always said that Poppa loves the truth. So…

“I don’t know, Poppa,” said Michael. “I’m just a little boy.”

Sherlock raised his eyebrows at this. True… Michael was just a child. It was a complex word problem for a child of five who could almost do simple maths: two plus two and so on. Sherlock sighed and stood up. He held his hand out to Michael. His son took it wordlessly, hoping that he hadn’t made his father angry. Michael searched Sherlocks face for a sign of upset. Sherlocks face held an expression that Michael was unfamiliar with, but it wasn’t anger, so that was good.

Later that day, as Sherlock popped his head in Michael’s room to see how he liked his rooms, Sherlock got the shock of his life as he saw his son hanging half out the window. “What the devil are you doing?” he said, reaching for the boy’s waist.

As he pulled Michael in, the boy replied: “I’m observing, Poppa, like you said.”

“Observing what?” said Sherlock, maddeningly confused.

“The plant,” said Michael.

“The ivy?” asked Sherlock. He paused and asked cautiously: “What did you observe?”

“It’s all twisty,” said Michael.

“Twisty?”

“Yes, Poppa. It doesn’t grow in a straight line. See… it’s all twisty and bendy and tangled up.”

“So what about it?”

“So if it grows at nine feet then someone has to straighten it all out first to find out how long it’s been growing, right?” Michael looked at Sherlock with such hope in his eyes, it was heartbreaking.

“And so?”
“So I can’t straighten it all out. But if it’s nine feet… then the plant is old old old.”

“Older than five years, do you think?”

Michael nodded.

Sherlock was stunned. “That’s… that’s… a correct deduction, Michael.” Pride swelled in Sherlock’s heart and his voice caught in his throat when he said, “Very good, my boy. That’s very well done indeed.”

“Besides,” said Michael, walking toward the small wooden rocking horse in the room, “you said you came here when you were little, so it’s got to be older than you.” Michael smiled at Sherlock saying, “And you’re not five. I am!”

Sherlock couldn’t help himself. He held open his arms and Michael ran into them. He hugged the boy tighter than any hug he had given him before. He pulled him away, kissed his cheek, and held him tightly again. Sherlock felt tears well up in his eyes. His boy, his son, his Michael… and his first deduction at age five. It was tremendous, overwhelming, exhilarating. Sherlock desperately wished John could have been there to witness the event.

~080~

Box Hill was picturesque and nearby. Sherlock packed the foil, something to eat, the Crusoe book and some blankets. A bit of early fall sunshine in warm coats with soup in a thermos would be a wonderful way to celebrate his son’s first deduction. Sherlock moved around the kitchen as though he were walking on air.

Practically with the rapidity of thought, they found themselves full and happy, the fencing lesson taught. Settling down on the blanket and wrapped up in another to keep off any stray chill, Sherlock opened the Crusoe book to page one and began to read.

Sherlock read the book for so long, the sun began to set. The red-gold of the field that surrounded them echoed the color of the skies as the sun sank lower. Michael pointed at the first star he could see. They both made a wish and for once, Sherlock didn’t care if what he was doing was foolish. If it was important to Michael, it was important to Sherlock.

“Poppa,” said Michael, “do you want to know what I wished for?”

“I believe it is unlucky to tell your wish,” said Sherlock. “Therefore, if you believe in your wish, you really shouldn’t say it aloud if you want it to come true.”

“Oh,” said Michael. After a moment’s thought he said, “I think it’ll be okay to tell, Poppa.”

“Alright,” said Sherlock, cradling his son closely in his lap, “but perhaps it’s safer if you whisper it, hm? Perhaps that will help the wish keep longer.”

Michael leaned up and Sherlock bent down. Michael told him his wish. Sherlock smiled.

“I don’t think that will be a difficult wish to grant, Michael,” said Sherlock.

“But what about the Emily lady?” asked Michael.
Sherlock rubbed Michael’s back soothingly. “I really don’t think she has much of a leg to stand on, Michael. You needn’t worry.”

“So it’s in-evable?” asked Michael.

“You mean ‘inevitable’?” asked Sherlock. Michael nodded. Sherlock smiled with a wide grin, amused at the boy’s mispronunciation. “Yes, Michael. I do believe it’s inevitable.”

~080~

“Bees!” shouted Michael the next day as they approached the hives at a safe distance. If Sherlock brought Michael home with even one bee sting, he’d never be trusted on his own with him again. Mr. Charles, the housekeeper’s husband was tending to them, smoking around the hives to calm them down. Sherlock explained all to Michael as the boy kept his attention on the man in the white uniform.

“Does he get bit?” asked Michael.

“Bees don’t bite, they sting,” explained Sherlock, “and yes, occasionally Mr. Charles does get stung.”

“And it hurts, right?”

“Of course. But he’s been stung so many times, it’s probably nothing more than a nuisance to him.”

A black and yellow exoskeleton passed close by on humming wings. The insect landed on a late-blooming wildflower a few feet from Sherlock and Michael. Michael bent carefully to watch it. Sherlock squatted beside him and told him of the pollen and the hive, the honey comb and the queen.

Mr. Charles pulled out a comb from the hive and held it up so Michael could see at a distance. It was crawling with bees. Michael and Sherlock had a wonderful conversation about beeswax and why the honey didn’t just drip out.

They went back to the house to have some toast and honey with their tea.

“Pooh didn’t have a hive like that in the story,” said Michael.

“Pooh?” asked Sherlock. The boy said the most confoundingly confusing things at the strangest times. Sherlock desperately hoped the boy wasn’t talking about defecation.

“Winnie the Pooh, Poppa,” said Michael. “Don’t you know about Winnie the Pooh?”

Sherlock had a vague recollection of that being the title of one of Michael’s videos back at the flat. Michael proceeded to tell his father all about Pooh and his love of honey: from the tale of Pooh getting his head stuck in the honey jar, to Pooh eating all of Rabbit’s honey, to Pooh dreaming of Heffalumps and Woozles, and even the story of the hive in the tree and how Pooh tied a balloon to himself and pretended to be a friendly raincloud so he could get at the honey without disturbing the bees.
“Do you like honey, Poppa?” asked Michael.

“Yes,” said Sherlock.

“Then I’m going to call you Poppa Pooh!” said Michael, laughing.

“Oh please don’t, Michael,” said Sherlock, a grin playing on his face in spite of himself. He shook his head and laughed at the sheer stupidity of it all. Michael laughed even harder.

~080~

They came home with tales of castaways, fencing, wishes on stars, and honeybees which John listened to with great attention and delight. He was so glad to have his family home. Michael was fairly lit from within from his trip with ‘Poppa Pooh’; a moniker that Sherlock knew John would tease him with from now until eternity.

Sherlock had found a stuffed plushie bee in a local shop on the way home and had purchased it for Michael. He carried it up to bed with him as John followed him to tuck him in. It was only fair that John have a moment to spend with Michael after having an overly-quiet flat to himself for two days. Despite having to work for some of that time, it didn’t make things any easier. He didn’t say anything to Sherlock, but John had slept in Michael’s bed Saturday night. John was fairly certain that Sherlock had deduced as much already.

Sherlock stood in the doorway just before John left Michael’s bedside. “I have to ask you again, Michael,” said Sherlock, “What happened in school that has you so upset?”

Michael’s smile faded immediately. “I don’t want to talk about it,” he said.

John and Sherlock gave each other a knowing glance. John came around to the other side of the bed and both men sat on either side of their boy.

“Michael,” began John softly, “you know we love you very much, don’t you?” Michael nodded.

“And you know that we want to help you with any problem you may have,” asked Sherlock. Again, Michael nodded.

“So why don’t you tell us what’s been going on?” said John.

“Simon hates me,” said Michael.

John and Sherlock gave each other a quick glance. “Who’s Simon?” asked John.

“A boy in my class,” said Michael. His voice was very small.

“Does he take your food?” asked Sherlock. Michael nodded.

“He says that if I don’t give him my lunch that he’ll punch me,” said Michael. John’s heart broke. Sherlock got angry, but held it in.

“Did you tell your teacher?” asked John.

“He said if I did,” said Michael, “that he’d punch me harder. I don’t like him, Daddy. Poppa, don’t
make me go to school tomorrow. Please.” Michael began to softly cry.

John lay down next to Michael on his side and Sherlock emulated John. They both wrapped one arm around the boy and held him, pressing their faces to the boy’s from either side.

“Everything is going to be alright, Michael,” said John. “When Poppa and I drop you off, we’ll have a chat with your teacher and the headmistress. I promise.”

“What will that be sufficient?” asked Sherlock. “It should work to have the teacher aware that you are being bullied. She will be able to prevent it.”

“I suppose, Poppa,” said Michael.

“Well then,” said Sherlock, “that’s sorted. We’ll drop you at school tomorrow and speak to them. You have nothing more to fear.” Sherlock kissed Michael’s temple.

John kissed the other side of his head and added: “Poppa Pooh and I will help you. Won’t we, Poppa Pooh?”


“Poppa Pooh to the rescue!” said John, thrusting a fist in the air.

“Oh do shut up, John,” said Sherlock.

It took Michael the better part of three minutes to stop laughing at his fathers before he could settle down enough for sleep to take him. That night Michael dreamt of Simon in a bee costume and Daddy and Poppa Pooh in pirate outfits drawing their swords and scaring the honey out of Simon the Bee.
A month went by, and near the end of that month, Michael wasn’t coming home hungry any more. He was coming home bruised. And he was bruised in places that a teacher may not notice. Simon was a clever sadist, to be sure. And Sherlock and John were angrier than an entire hive of bees.

Michael’s teacher, Mrs. Winthrop, had arranged to meet with John and Sherlock as well as the Howells after the formal conferences were over with to discuss the situation. At the time of the arrangement of this meeting, Mrs. Winthrop had mentioned that she had made a decision about the Michael/Simon issue and they both wanted to know what that decision was.

The evening for the parent/teacher conferences arrived and John and Michael were both sick with flu. As it is with most families, the new-term-at-school-induced cold had invaded 221B. Sherlock and Mrs. Hudson were heretofore unaffected, but they both knew that their time would come. John wanted desperately to know what was going to happen to his son’s tormentor and, despite his illness and his 37.6 degree temperature, John wanted first crack at Simon’s parents.

“Where do you think you’re going?” asked Sherlock as he watched John stumble into his jumper.

“I’ve told you, Sherlock,” said John, “I’m coming with you tonight. I want to see the parents of that… spawn of Satan.”

“No, John,” said Sherlock. “I can handle this.”

“I know you can handle it,” said John, “but I have to look these people in the eye and tell them what a fucking sadist their son is. I want to know how parents can go about their daily lives and NOT see that their child is a fucking bully.” Here, John went into a coughing fit that lasted more than a few seconds. Sherlock watched him with a pitying look.

“John,” said Sherlock quietly and placed a gentle hand on John’s shoulder, “let me go. You’re ill. You won’t do anyone any favors by confronting these people hopped up on cough medicines.” Sherlock looked deep into John’s feverish eyes and said softly: “Please.”

John looked back into Sherlock’s pleading crystalline eyes and fought back a serious impulse to kiss him. Jesus… must be the medicine. John shook the last of the impulse away and conceded
defeat. “Jesus, Sherlock,” he said miserably, “I really wanted to be there.”

“Be here,” said Sherlock, “with Michael. He needs his Daddy tonight. He needs his doctor. Mrs. Hudson will bring you up some soup. I’ll be back in two hour’s time. I’ll tell you everything.”


Sherlock gave him a satisfied grin and held him closely. John was getting used to the added physical demonstrations of affection that Sherlock had been throwing his way. Somewhere deep inside John he was flattered. Sherlock would hug him in joy or in comfort a lot. It was nice and very sweet of him, really. Michael’s presence in Sherlock’s life was softening him around the edges. It was miraculous. John stood in the doorway of 221B and gave Sherlock a final wave as he descended the stairs to the front door. This was going be the longest two hour wait of his life.

~080~

Sherlock sat in Michael’s classroom with Mrs. Winthrop and Mr. and Mrs. Howell. The waves of anger that came off of Sherlock toward the couple could practically be felt as his piercing blue eyes bored holes in them, taking in every detail of their lives.

Father: plumber, limited education, up from the middle classes to middle-middle class, works two jobs, had an abusive father – possible alcoholic, smoker, insomniac.

Mother: homemaker, limited education, house proud, abused – verbal and emotional mostly with some physical abuse, wanted more children, very religious, terrified of her husband.

“Mr. Holmes,” said Mrs. Winthrop, “we understand that for the past few weeks you claim that Simon Howell has been bullying your Michael. We have done our level best to separate the boys for the past month. Simon does have a tendency to pick on children whom he perceives as weaker than himself. Now instead of harassing Michael, he’s begun pushing the other children around. I myself have witnessed Simon’s behavior and the administration of this school and I have made a decision regarding Simon and what should be done.”

“My son is a good boy,” said Mr. Howell, “a little high strung, maybe, but a good kid.”

“Mrs. Winthrop,” began Sherlock confidently, “your active separation of Michael and Simon has been a help, but unfortunately, it hasn’t been one hundred percent effective. Michael came home with his first bruise nine days ago. He’s gotten a new one every day. In a different place, but the same size and shape of a boy’s fist,” said Sherlock as though he were giving evidence in court.

“I beg your pardon?” said Mr. Howell.

“Your Simon has been striking my Michael every day for the past seven school days,” said Sherlock, barely containing his anger. “Please explain where your child learned such behavior.”

Mr. Howell stood up and Sherlock noticed Mrs. Howell visibly flinch. Sherlock smiled quietly. “How dare you accuse my son! Simon’s a clever lad and a bit athletic and outgoing. Friendly too. Perhaps your boy said something smart? Perhaps your boy did something to Simon to set him off? I don’t see why we have to sit here and take --’’
“Now, Mr. Howell,” said Mrs. Winthrop, “this is supposed to be an adult discussion about parental concerns. I’m sure if Mr. Holmes and you were to chat about this quietly, you might come to—”

“How long has he been abusing you?” Sherlock asked Mrs. Howell. He had totally lost interest in the blustering moron that was her husband and the nattering teacher.

“What?” she replied quietly, looking nervously from Sherlock to her husband to Mrs. Winthrop and then back to Sherlock.

“It’s obvious that you’re covering up bruises,” said Sherlock, “I can see at your collarbone where the neckline of your jumper has worn away your make-up. There’s a bruise just showing.” Sherlock pointed on himself, Mrs. Howell’s hand shot to her neck and she turned a deep red. Mr. Howell was turning red too, but for an entirely different reason.

“You listen to me, you posh git – “ began Mr. Howell, his anger rising.

“Or what?” replied Sherlock, “you’ll slap me about too?”

“I wouldn’t hesitate, mate,” said Mr. Howell.

“That’s enough!” said Mrs. Winthrop, rising from her seat. “Obviously the two of you can’t carry on a civil conversation; therefore I will end this by telling you what’s going to happen. Simon will be removed from my classroom and sent to a different class. If his ill behavior continues – and I have seen the shades of it, Mr. Howell, make no mistake – then he will be asked to leave this school. And that’s an end to it.”

“I’ll take this slander up with the headmistress—“ began Howell.

“I encourage you to seek out whatever avenues would satisfy you, Mr. Howell,” said Mrs. Winthrop, “but I assure you, both the headmistress and the chief administrator of this school are in complete agreement with me.”

“We’ll see about that,” said Mr. Howell. He grabbed up his coat and left the room in a rage. Mrs. Howell followed him quietly out. On the way, she offered: “My Simon is a good boy, really. He’s just… like his father.” She turned to Sherlock specifically and said: “I’m sorry for your boy. I’m… just so… sorry.” She quickly left the room.

Mrs. Winthrop sighed. “I wish to God that things were different for both boys… and Mrs. Howell,” she said, her voice weary.

“Indeed, madam,” said Sherlock, staring after the forlorn woman.

“Do you really think Mrs. Howell…” asked Mrs. Winthrop.

“Oh most certainly,” said Sherlock, “She could have him locked up for life for the things he does to her.” Sherlock didn’t see the shocked look on the teacher’s face as he left the room, but he knew it was there all the same. “Thank you for all your help, Mrs. Winthrop. Good evening.”

~080~

“Hey! Posh git!” said a voice in the car park. Sherlock rolled his eyes. What was this buffoon
trying to prove? The detective turned around to see a very cocky Robert Howell rolling up his shirtsleeves. His wife was behind him holding his coat and gently begging him not to do anything foolish. He turned to her and threw a ‘shut up’ in her direction. April Howell looked sick and closed her mouth.


“Shut up, you fuck,” said Robert, “and take back what you said about my boy.”

“I can hardly do both,” said Sherlock.


“You told me to shut up and then asked me to talk all in the same sentence,” explained Sherlock. “Which is it to be, then?”

“You posh sons of bitches,” said Robert. “What the fuck do you care about a man killing himself to give his child all the advantages? You’ve never had to work a day in your life.” Sherlock wasn’t sure what this had to do with Simon’s misbehavior in class, but he let Robert drone on anyway. It gave him time to figure out exactly how Howell intended to attack him. If he smacks his wife about, he certainly would attempt to hit a ‘frail posh’. Robert didn’t see Sherlock as a challenge. Stupid.

Robert stepped closer and closer to Sherlock as he continued to rant: “I work two different jobs just to get the scratch together for this place. Two good jobs that pay well for one man. You on the other hand… what do you do all day? Do you do anything that matters?”

“I put criminals in jail,” said Sherlock.

“Oh dear lord,” said April, “Rob, he’s a police officer. Stop this, please.”

“He’s no cop,” said Robert, “He’s too…”

“Posh?” Sherlock offered and placed his hands in his pockets.

“Fuck you,” said Robert and took a swing at Sherlock’s head. Sherlock ducked, easily avoiding the blow. Robert followed the right up with a jab of his left. Again, Sherlock tilted his head back and avoided the blow. Sherlock took a step back and Robert followed him. As the detective cleverly avoided all blows that Robert swung at him by ducking, bobbing, and weaving, he continued to back up until he was against the side of the building. Robert made one last swing – a right-handed haymaker – and crashed his fist into the concrete foundation when Sherlock was suddenly not there anymore.

Robert cried out in rage and pain as blood flowed freely from his injured hand. Sherlock could see at least three of the long bones of his hand were poking through the skin. April ran to her husband and attempted to wrap his hand up with his jacket. Robert screamed bloody murder at her touch and grabbed the jacket from her, preferring to wrap it up himself. During this aftermath, Sherlock had quietly removed himself from the scene and hopped into a taxi, heading home to Baker Street. During the cab ride home, he couldn’t help but think: at least Mrs. Howell would get a reprieve from her beatings for a bit.
After a weekend of nursing colds and pushing fluids, Michael and John both seemed on the mend. John was jealous of Sherlock’s immune system. He was still as healthy as a horse, lucky sod. The three of them were around the breakfast table, each man with his nose in a newspaper, Michael with his nose in a picture book about bees.

“Messenger dropped this off for you, boys,” said Mrs. Hudson, coming up the stairs, “Looks important.” She handed Sherlock an envelope. A pang of dread fell over John. Sherlock gave him a meaningful glance to inform him that he felt the same. Sherlock opened the letter, scanned its contents in a moment’s time, and handed it to John.

Sherlock smiled up at Mrs. Hudson and said, “Did you ever get in those new coloring books for Michael?”

“Why I just bought some yesterday,” said Mrs. Hudson, surprised, “but how did you…? Oh you!” Sherlock smiled.

“Why don’t you show them to Michael, please?” asked Sherlock. “I think Daddy and I have to have a talk.” He looked up at Mrs. Hudson meaningfully. She looked between the two men and nodded knowingly.

“Come on, Mikey,” said Mrs. Hudson, “I even got more crayons for you as well. Come see.” Michael hopped off his chair and grabbed Mrs. Hudson’s hand, eager to play with his new toys. As soon as he was gone, John threw the letter down on the table with a huff.

“Fantastic,” said John. “Monday. Jesus… Monday. Sherlock… We have two days to prepare for this. Do we even have a solicitor?”

“No,” said Sherlock, “but we do have character witnesses and plenty of friends in high places.”

“I wouldn’t be so confident if I were you,” said John. He began ticking off the facts on his fingers: “Her husband’s a solicitor. They’re already parents. They live in a nice neighborhood. Her and her husband’s jobs won’t bring on bodily injury at a moment’s notice. And they are relations, albeit distant.” John sat back in his chair and ran a hand through his hair. “This is not going to be easy, Sherlock. You can’t just steamroll over this. And you can’t have Mycroft pull a string or two either. He may be a Holmes, but he’s not a piece of furniture. He’s a little boy. There are laws in place to protect children for a reason.”

Sherlock sighed. John was right, of course. Cousin Emily Porter was about to come into their lives like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse rolled up into one person and there wasn’t anything they could do. She had them out-parented the whole way along. John was on the verge of despair; Sherlock could see it.

They had Lestrade and Mrs. Hudson to rely on and of course Mycroft. But what then? They had no experience in raising a child other than the opportunity Lestrade had provided them over the past two months or so. John’s job as a doctor was decent, but Sherlock’s was downright dangerous and most of the time John was with him. If they both managed to get themselves killed… All they could do was the best they could.

Sherlock knew it wouldn’t be enough.
Judge Marion Stewart presided over the custody hearing. She sat at the head of the conference table, the file of Michael Weaver splayed out before her. To her left sat Mr. Sherlock Holmes, biological father and his (partner?) Doctor John Watson. To her right were the Porters, Emily and Justin. Judge Stewart knew Porter to be a solicitor, but he had never stood before her until now. He looked cocky. Judge Stewart hated cocky solicitors.

“I understand that as the biological father of this child, you wish to exercise your parental rights and claim this boy as your own, do you not, Mr. Holmes?” asked the judge.

“Yes, your honor,” said Sherlock. John was grateful that he was keeping things simple.

“And who is to your left, Mr. Holmes?” asked the judge.

“This is my colleague, Doctor Watson,” said Sherlock.

“Partner, actually,” said John suddenly. Sherlock looked at him, amazed. John grinned at Sherlock shyly and placed his hand on Sherlock’s in full view of everyone. In John’s mind, it would look better if they just told everyone that they were a couple. A loving couple would have a much better chance at gaining custody of a child, as opposed to two blokes who just live together, right?

“Oh God,” groaned Emily under her breath. Her husband shot her a warning glance. She raised her eyebrows at him.

“Did you want to say something, Mrs. Porter?” asked the judge.

“All I know is, your honor,” said Emily, “Michael should have a… well-rounded house to grow up in.” Her face held barely concealed disgust.

If looks could have killed, Emily would have been stone dead right then. John said, “A well-rounded house where my son can become a bigot. Oh, that’s just great.”

“Now then, Doctor Watson,” said Judge Stewart, “let’s all keep our tempers. Both parties want what’s best for Michael, yes?” She looked around the conference table at all the nodding heads. “Excellent,” she said. “Let’s just crack on then, shall we?”

Judge Stewart outlined the various and sundry details of the Porter’s and Sherlock and John’s lives to the room, to include their household daily activities, Michael’s schooling, their respective experience as parents, their respective occupations, and anything else that had to do with the welfare of taking care of a child.

“There is one more thing we wanted to make you aware of, your honor,” said Emily, a sly grin of triumph crossing her face.

“This was posted to YouTube earlier this weekend,” said Justin, “It’s only by sheer luck that we stumbled across it. You can see for yourself if you like.” Justin held out his smartphone for the judge.

It was a CCTV video of Sherlock’s fight with Mr. Howell in the car park.

“And that fight took place just outside of the school Michael attends -- under their so-called care,” said Emily. She intended her words to have the effect of a final nail in the coffin on this custody
battle. John wanted to throttle the bitch. Sherlock felt sick.

Judge Stewart replayed the video for Sherlock and John to see. Sherlock watched impassively, stamping down his rising panic. John was now sick to his stomach and glanced at Sherlock at the end of it. Sherlock gazed at John, praying that his calm exterior would calm John as well. Sherlock could see it barely had any effect. John swallowed hard and looked at the judge.

Judge Stewart sighed. The video was a bit of a hiccup. She paused in thought a moment and then said: “In light of this new evidence, I will need more time to make a determination of custody as the circumstances surrounding this video need to be investigated.

“Until I make a decision, I have to go with what’s best for Michael. Therefore… I grant temporary custody to the Porters with a proviso for visitation on the weekends for Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson. I will make my final determination in two month’s time. The Holmes-Watson household has had him for roughly two months. It’s only fair that the Porters have the same amount of time with the boy.

“At the time of my final determination, I will want to speak with Michael himself. You will do what you can to present him to me to be interviewed privately and in the presence of a Child Services Representative. If I find that any manipulation has taken place with this boy, I will do what I can to keep him out of both of your hands, so don’t play games with me. This is not about you. This is about Michael and what’s best for him.” Judge Stewart went into more detail about actual visitation times and rules for visitation. She divvied up the holidays with the Holmes-Watson household getting Christmas Eve and Day and the Porters getting New Year’s Eve and Day.

“Well, that’s all then. I’ll see everyone here again in two months. Good afternoon,” said the judge.

Sherlock and John were devastated.

~080~

The explanation of what was to happen to Michael was like burying the boy alive.

“I don’t want this!” said Michael, crying uncontrollably.

“We know, mate,” said John, holding him close. They each sat on either side of the distraught boy on his bed. “We don’t want it either. But the judge said we have to do this. You have to go live with them. But – it’s only for two months and – we will see each other on the weekends.”

“Yes, Michael,” said Sherlock softly, reaching out to rub the boy’s back, “we will only be separated by distance. And at the week’s end, we will be together again. I promise.”

Michael shook his head. He was so confused. Why was this Emily lady ruining everything? He was happy with Poppa Pooh and Daddy. Why did she have to come? Michael made up his mind that he was going to hate Emily. “I don’t want to go…” his sobbing became staccato, affecting his speech: “I- I- w-want t-to s-stay h-here. Sh-sh-she c-can’t m-make me go! Sh-she’ll k-keep m-me… She’ll KEEP m-me-e-e-e!” Michael leaned the other way and collapsed into Sherlock’s chest.

“No chance, mate,” said John, reassuringly. “We are going to fight her tooth and nail. Promise.”
“Absolutely,” agreed Sherlock, wrapping his long arms around the bawling child. “You are our top priority. You are our son and we will always fight for you.”

“But I don’t want to go!” Michael screamed into Sherlock’s shirt.

John and Sherlock exchanged a helpless glance.

~080~

Emily Porter was all sweetness and light when she and Justin came to get Michael the next day. Michael’s new suitcases contained most of his clothing and toys. John and Sherlock gave instructions for Michael to be a good boy and to mind his cousin, that she loves him very much and wants what’s best for him.

“Ok then,” said Emily, a tad too cheerily, “time to go!”

“No!” said Michael, spinning around and giving her his best angry look.

“Oh but Michael,” said Justin, “we have other children there. Our boy Gregory is going to be so happy to meet you! You’ll share a room with him. He’s only a few years older than you. It’ll be lovely.”

“I don’t care,” said Michael.

“Michael,” said John in a warning voice, “what did Poppa and I just finish telling you? You must be a good boy. On your best behavior.”

“Please, Michael,” said Sherlock softly. At the sound of Sherlock’s voice, Michael looked up at him.

“Poppa,” pleaded the boy quietly, “please don’t let them take me away. Please, Poppa Pooh.”

Sherlock blinked and a tear ran down his face. “I have no choice, Michael,” said Sherlock, “I am so sorry, my son.” He knelt and hugged him, inhaling his scent for what felt like the last time.

Emily came up and took one of Michael’s hands, pulling him out of the hug. Michael was so numb from everything happening that he allowed himself to be dragged along, his eyes locked on his fathers. At the top of the stairs Michael attempted to wrench himself free from Emily and run back to John and Sherlock – and he would have succeeded -- if Justin hadn’t scooped him up and carried him bodily down the stairs.

“Poppa! Daddy! Please! PLEASE!” Michael screamed over Justin’s shoulder, his stuffed bee dangling from his hand, his voice becoming more and more desperate with the increase in distance, “PLEASE! DO SOMETHING! POPPA! DADDY! DO SOMETHING! HELP ME! PLEASE!” He flailed in Justin’s grip and reached his hands out toward his fathers. “I’LL BE A GOOD BOY, JUST PLEASE HELP ME! PLEASE! DADDY! POPPA! PLEASE!”

The sound of the front door of 221 closing was like a stab to the heart.

John turned to Sherlock and buried his face in the detective’s neck. He began to sob loudly. Sherlock, unable to contain his grief any longer, joined him, bowing his head and shaking with
sobs. They clung to one another, their hands making fists in the other’s clothing.

221B Baker Street had never felt so empty.
The Judge's Decision

Chapter Summary

Judge Marion Stewart presides over the custody case. She’s got a lot of evidence to weigh. And a little boy to talk to.

Sherlock and John spent the next two months in a haze of grief. Lestrade attempted to distract them as best he could, but that would be the two months where London was the quietest it had been in ages. Cold case files would only go so far.

One day, about two days into their new arrangement, John came home after an extremely long day at work to find Sherlock re-reading “Treasure Island”. John put up his coat and walked slowly to the sofa. He placed a bookmark in the book and took the book out of the detective’s hands. He wasn’t really reading anyway.

The quiet in 221B was tangible. It permeated the walls, floors, and ceilings. They both knew that Michael would be there again come the weekend, but they couldn’t help but feel that they were on the losing end of this battle. Outclassed, outgunned, they felt that they weren’t going to be able to convince any jury in any land that they were good parents.

John sat beside Sherlock and turned to him, holding out his arms. Instinctively, Sherlock leaned into John’s embrace; his head was heavy with the thoughts racing around it. John carded his hand through his curls as their body heat mingled, warming the chilly flat. John felt the coldness of Sherlock’s hands through his jumper. The doctor rubbed down Sherlock’s back in an attempt to warm him.

“Have you eaten today?” asked John.

‘Mnnnngh…” moaned Sherlock. Obviously, he couldn’t be arsed. And if John was honest, his appetite wasn’t what it should have been either.

“Yeah,” said John. Gently he kissed the top of Sherlock’s head. He did it without thinking, really. He just wanted to soothe the man, ease his pain. All his life he’d been raling against letting anyone close to him emotionally; now here he was, aching to be with the only small part of himself that was out there in the world. John felt his eyes well up. His breath hitched and Sherlock looked up at him concerned.

John smiled bravely at Sherlock. The doctor knew that only one of them could afford to break down at a time here. One of them had to be strong. Now he had to be strong for Sherlock. But the more he thought about Michael and Sherlock’s feelings for the boy, the more he grieved himself. This wasn’t just about his loss – which was significant – this was about Sherlock’s loss as well. John felt for them both.

Somehow during the small amount of time he had to experience it, Sherlock’s instincts took on a mind of their own. Sherlock knew that kissing John wasn’t something that the doctor would necessarily want. John was adamant about his heterosexuality, but Sherlock knew that John loved him, if only in his own special way. It was a profound love, however. Sherlock knew it existed based on the times that John had saved his life, showing up and coming through sometimes when
even Sherlock least expected it. John was a delightful surprise occasionally. Taken all together, John couldn’t object to one small comforting kiss, could he?

Sherlock leaned up and pressed his lips to John’s.

John had never been kissed with such tenderness. It contained comfort for his grief, support for his insecurity, everything he needed just at that moment. Sherlock’s instincts coupled with his intellect were a formidable combination.

It was a chaste kiss, lasting only a moment, but it meant so much. Something inside of John broke in two. He wasn’t gay, but this touch was so welcome. He cupped Sherlock’s face in his hand and bent down. As their lips met again, John felt a thrill inside of him and it was clear that Sherlock felt it too as the pressure of the kiss increased slightly. Sherlock was kissing him back.

They remained like that for several minutes, letting the kiss stretch out into several kisses, each one softer and more tender than the last. It was cathartic. They had both amassed so much love in their hearts for Michael and had nowhere to put it except toward each other.

John leaned back and lay down on the sofa taking Sherlock with him. They rearranged their bodies until they were comfortable, never losing the touch of their mouths. John reveled in the feel of Sherlock slightly on top of him, the taste of his mouth, the heat of his body. Sherlock too was enthralled with the softness of John’s touch on his neck and face, the doctor’s hand travelling on occasion through his hair and back again.

Losing themselves in the sensation of it all, Sherlock licked at John’s lips. There was a pause. Their locked eyes. John closed his and tilted his head, opening his mouth for Sherlock. Sherlock’s tongue gently lapped at the inside of John’s mouth, not daring to plunge in for fear of startling the man. Sherlock didn’t want to ruin this with roughshod treatment. He knew that what was being granted him was precious, sacred.

Softly their tongues touched for the first time and John felt his cock twitch at the sensation. Good lord… what the hell was that? It didn’t feel as though his body was betraying him, and yet, he knew he wasn’t homosexual. Although… Kinsey did have a scale for sexuality. Perhaps he wasn’t the Kinsey Zero he thought he was. After all, this whole thing felt so… needed. And it felt right. He did love Sherlock. He cared deeply for him. And now John was granted a medium to express that love. Suddenly, he needed Sherlock in bed. Right then and there.

John let out a low moan and broke the kiss. He wiggled off the couch and stood up, holding out a hand to Sherlock. The detective took it with a question on his features. John smiled gently and led Sherlock to the bedroom.

~080~

“John, are you sure?” asked Sherlock.

“More certain than I’ve been about anything,” said John, adding quickly: “I just think we both need some comforting, Sherlock. I’m not ready for… THAT… just… please.” John nuzzled into Sherlock’s neck, “I need this.”

They stood in Sherlock’s bedroom their hands clasped together. John leaned up and in for another soft kiss. Sherlock’s mouth touched his and the feel of it was all-consuming. Every fiber of John’s
being wanted to hold this man. John slid his hands up Sherlock’s arms and the detective wrapped his arms around John’s waist. The kiss deepened. Sherlock became bolder and felt John respond in kind as their tongues slid and flicked against one another. Sherlock walked John backward toward the bed.

“Oh John,” said Sherlock mournfully as the doctor’s mouth traveled down his neck, leaving a trail of warm, wet kisses in his wake.

“I know,” John murmured against Sherlock’s collarbone, “I miss him too.” John lifted his head away to look into Sherlock’s eyes. “And you were right,” said John. “I do love you.”

“Oh obviously, John,” smiled Sherlock. It was the first time he had smiled since before Monday, the day Michael was taken from them. John was glad to see some of the detective’s good humor returning. Sherlock hadn’t much by way of cheerfulness, in general. His laughter was usually provoked around a well-performed prank or trick, or a snarky comment to the right person at the right time – like now. John would take snarkiness any day over abject listlessness or depression. John kissed Sherlock quickly and knelt on the bed, backing up to make room for Sherlock.

Sherlock crawled on the bed and lay with his head on the pillow, staring up at John. The doctor had the softest look in his eyes. It warmed Sherlock’s heart. John reached out a hand and stroked Sherlock’s left thigh tentatively from the knee to mid-thigh. He didn’t want to get aroused, nor did he want Sherlock aroused. This wasn’t about sex. This was about comfort.

Sherlock held out his left arm toward John and the doctor lay on Sherlock’s chest, his head on his heart. They held each other without a word for some minutes, John and Sherlock each disrupting the position by placing small kisses against the other man at odd intervals, whenever their hearts chose to. It was pure bliss.

“Stay here tonight, John,” said Sherlock. “The sofa has seen enough of your slumber and I won’t have you torturing yourself by sleeping in Michael’s room. I can barely look up the stairs without collapsing into tears.”

“Grief,” said John, “It’s a fucking nightmare, isn’t it?”

“This whole thing is a nightmare,” said Sherlock. “I can’t think straight to work it all out. My mind’s gone all fuzzy. I hate it.

“Are you going to blame it all on me?” said John. Sherlock tilted his head up to look at him. John glanced up at those blue eyes for a split second before lowering his head and nuzzling into Sherlock’s chest. He said: “It’s all my fault that Michael came to live with us. It was my idea that you get to know him better, even though you said you shouldn’t. I expect you’d blame me for the resulting grieving at the loss of the little tyke.” John felt a lump develop in his throat. “It’s alright if you do, mind. I blame myself as well.”

Sherlock tilted John’s face up to meet his and kissed him soundly. “I will not blame you for any of this. You were very right. You often are when it comes to matters of the human condition. Stop this. It’s useless and pointless self-destructive behavior and I won’t have it.” He cradled John’s head against his chest.

After a long moment, John thought aloud: “I wonder…”

“Hmmmm?” said Sherlock. He was completely relaxed into the comfort of holding John.

John too was falling into a light doze when the thought occurred to him. He didn’t even open his
eyes. “I wonder how they found it?” asked John softly.

“Found what?” asked Sherlock, his voice heavy with sleep.

“The video of you,” said John. “I can search for days for something on YouTube and not come up with something as specific as that. I wonder how they stumbled across it. They don’t seem like the YouTube type.”

Sherlock’s eyes flew open wide.

~080~

Judge Marion Stewart sighed as she waited in her chambers. She had just finished hearing the formal testimonies of both parties in the custody case of Michael Weaver and she had a headache. She swallowed two paracetamol tablets and washed it down with a ginger ale. It was all she could do not to spit nails, she was so angry.

The morning started straight-forward enough: coffee, case review, answering emails, etc. And the Holmes-Watson-Porter case was scheduled at seven-thirty. But then the Porters couldn’t make it then as their other children had to be gotten to school, so it was postponed until ten. This muddled Judge Stewart’s schedule something terrible, but something in the back of the judge’s brain knew that this boy had to be sorted.

There was something off about the Porters. Perhaps it was the smarmy way they carried themselves: entitled, as though the world owed them a living. Sickening, really. Or perhaps it was the rapidity to which she was presented with the video evidence of a car park fight and the gleam in Mrs. Porter’s eye when the phone was handed over.

That video was not as damning as all that. Judge Stewart asked for the official full footage from beginning to end instead of the snippet the Porter’s showed her. In the edited version she was originally shown, it only detailed the middle of the fight. It showed nothing of how it all began or who the victor was. After she had seen the full length of the recording, she knew there was something rotten in Denmark. She viewed the whole thing several times, just to be sure of everything. It was actually quite impressive watching Mr. Holmes dodge and duck all those blows until finally his attacker crashed his hand into the wall. On the third time through, Marion allowed herself a discreet cheer of victory for Mr. Holmes.

She went to that school the next day, seeking out Michael’s old teacher, Mrs. Winthrop. She was a kind old woman of around sixty with swept-back auburn hair, a ruddy complexion, and a cheerful nature. She was one of those women who, even though they were pushing retirement, seemed to have endless energy. When the class was let out to play in the schoolyard for recess, she spoke with Winthrop about Michael and Mr. Holmes.

Mrs. Winthrop was a font of helpful information. She told her of the parent-teacher conference and the meeting held afterward. She told her about the Howells and Simon. She told her about how cool and collected Mr. Holmes was and how dreadful Mr. Howell was. Mrs. Winthrop didn’t know about the fight afterward.

Two weeks after meeting with Mrs. Winthrop, Marion visited Michael’s new school and his teacher there, Mr. Foster. Mr. Foster had great things to say about Michael: good socialization
skills, shares well with others, speaks when spoken to, polite. But, he added, the boy was always a bit sad at the end of the day. Marion asked Mr. Foster whether or not he had a chance to speak to Michael about his mood. Mr. Foster, regretfully, had not.

Two months was a long time to weigh the options. But it was also time for Michael to settle into his new routines. Two days before the second hearing, Judge Stewart came back to Mr. Foster to see how Michael was getting on.

“How is his sadness level now, Mr. Foster?” asked Marion over her tea.

Mr. Foster blew across the liquid in his cup. “Profound,” he said.

“Oh?” said Marion. “Why’s that do you think?”

“I think he loves it here at school,” began Mr. Foster, “I just think that he really doesn’t like the thought of going home. One day, I noticed he was acting strangely. I put my hand to his forehead and sure enough: he had a fever. I called the nurse right away and they sent him home, but I found out from Nurse Wilson later on that he went out of the school crying something awful. He just doesn’t like going home.”

“They sent him to school with a fever?” asked Marion, shocked.

“No, that’s just it,” said Mr. Foster, “Michael didn’t care that he was sick. He really didn’t want anyone to alert the Porters of his condition. Kept asking for ‘Daddy’, whoever that is. Said this ‘Daddy’ was a doctor.” Mr. Foster shook his head. “It was almost as if…,” he paused, giving Marion a sideways glance, “It was almost as if he didn’t want to bother the Porters with his illness. Not that Mrs. Porter was angry when she picked him up. She was all cuddles and ‘oohs’ and ‘ahhs’ and ‘there nows’. It was a bit strange.”

“Have you mentioned this sadness to the Porters?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Foster, “As a matter of fact, they were here just a few days ago to talk about Michael and his progress. When I told him that he was a wonderful student, they seemed satisfied with that. They didn’t seem to want to hear about my concerns about his home life. They sort of brushed it all aside as though it were just a phase he was going through and that he would settle in eventually. It was really strange.”

“The Porters have older children in this school,” said Marion, “Did you consult with their teachers to see if they perceived the same reaction from them at the end of a school day?”

“I did speak with the two of them, yes,” conceded Mr. Foster, “They didn’t notice anything amiss. They seem like well-adjusted boys. That’s why it’s so bloody strange about Michael. He’s such a sweet kid. I can’t imagine him having a hard time of it with anyone. He’s a people-pleaser, if you will; a kid who really tries to make others happy. It’s just odd.”

Marion thanked him for his time and the tea. Something was wrong here, but could it just be a phase? Could Michael just need a bit more than two months to adjust? Placing him with the Porters made sense on paper. They were the more stable parents… and yet.

Something was still niggling at the back of the judge’s brain when the Porters called her secretary to reschedule the hearing. These people were… wrong somehow. But without proof…

The time had arrived for the hearing to take place and everyone was present: the Porters were on her right; the Holmes-Watson party on her left. She thought it a ‘party’ more than anything else as the Holmes-Watsons seemed to bring an entourage of character witnesses with them, including
Mrs. Winthrop who gave her a surreptitious wave as she glanced at her. The Porters only brought themselves and Michael who was in another room coloring and watching videos with a representative from Child Services.

The Holmes-Watsons spoke first, pleading their case backed up by testimony from a Mrs. Hudson, their landlady, a Detective Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard, co-worker and friend, the aforementioned Mrs. Winthrop, a Mr. Mycroft Holmes, Mr. Holmes’ brother, and a woman that looked vaguely familiar to Marion, but she couldn’t place her until she stepped forward.

“Your name for the record?” asked Judge Stewart politely. The woman was mousey. She had on a thick, oversized cardigan over a plain black dress that went down to her ankles. There was no flash about her. She was very ordinary and a little beaten down by life. But her eyes held fire. Marion knew right away that whatever came from this woman’s mouth was going to be the God’s honest truth.

“April Howell, your honor.”

“Ms. Howell,” asked Judge Stewart. “I understand that you are the spouse of the man who had an altercation with Mr. Holmes a few months back, is that correct?”

April looked surprised, as did everyone else in the room – except Mrs. Winthrop and Sherlock Holmes. “Y-yes, your honor, I am,” she said. “At least… I was.”

“You were?”

“My husband passed away a few weeks ago,” said April.

“You have my deepest sympathies, my dear,” said Marion.

“Oh, thank you, your honor. But honestly, he was a terrible man. He was angry all the time at everything and everyone. A really terrible man.” She looked around the room suddenly wide-eyed and added quickly: “Not that I mean to speak ill of the dead, mind you. But he was… just cruel, really.”

“I see,” said Marion, “And why are you here today?”

“I came to tell you, your honor, that this man,” here she pointed at Sherlock, “did right by me and my boy by getting us both some attention and help. And he took the steam out of my Rob, he did, that night. His hand was never right since. Doctor said it were an embolism that got him in the end. He never saw to his hand properly, you see. It weren’t Mr. Holmes’ fault. It were Rob’s. He never liked doctors. Never trusted ‘em. So it were his neglect of his own self that got him killed. And Mrs. Winthrop did the rest, sweet dear. It were her that got my Simon and me set up with a chat line I could call night or day. Local number too, so it wouldn’t be seen on the bill. I found friends, help, people I could talk to. It were a great comfort. And now that Rob’s gone, we can do as we like, Simon and me. I got him a counselor and he’s doing much better in school now. He doesn’t bother anyone anymore and his marks have gone up. It’s a bloody miracle. And it’s all thanks to Mr. Holmes here.”

Everyone on the Homes-Watson team looked at Sherlock with a mixture of happiness and surprise. John’s pride could have busted his buttons. The Porters wore sullen and bored expressions. For his part, Sherlock looked at his shoes.

Then it was the Porter’s turn, but they could offer little more than what was on their CV. They had the video evidence, but the edit on it damned them more than it helped, so Justin Porter left that bit
out. Judge Stewart asked them about Michael’s home life: was he happy? Did he get on well with their other children? The Porters were all smiles and affirmations. Michael was adjusting perfectly.

Judge Marion Stewart stood before the company and announced that she would now like to speak to Michael himself. She motioned for the court officer to arrange for the boy to meet her in her chambers. Until that interview was finished, everyone could consider the hearing in recess and they would be called back in when she was ready to make her determination for placement.

~080~

Back in her solicitor days, Marion Stewart had been formidable. She was clever and quick, but never deceitful. It was one thing to uphold the law, but through that you were supposed to honor it. Marion had always tried to uphold and honor the law. But Justin Porter had managed to make her sick to her stomach. His deceit was unfathomable. To use his position for personal advantage was an insult to everything Marion held dear in the judiciary system of the United Kingdom.

Just before her gavel fell and she left the room, Mr. Holmes asked her to consider who posted the video in the first place. One call down to the IT department was all it took and she had her answer inside of five minutes. Another phone call later, and she had corroborating evidence that Justin himself had asked for the tape. The only question was, how did he know it was there? How did he know the fight even took place?

Oh yes… of course… Mr. Howell. He had wanted to press charges, hadn’t he? He’d need the video for evidence. And he needed a solicitor, didn’t he? One without too many scruples. Marion’s headache just got worse.

The door to her office opened softly and a little boy with curly black hair and shocking verdigris eyes stepped in the room holding the hand of the child services rep. My God… if he wasn’t the spitting image of his father.

Marion came around her desk to greet her visitor. She bent over at the waist and said, “Hello! You must be Michael Weaver. How do you do? My name’s Marion.” She held out her hand and he shook it politely. He held tightly onto a stuffed bee. “And what’s his name?” she asked, pointing to the toy.

“Bumble,” said Michael softly.

“Well, hello, Bumble,” Marion said smiling. “So glad you’re both here. Shall we sit in the sunshine for a bit?” Marion motioned toward a table and four chairs that sat in front of a high window. Light streamed through and Marion drew the light white curtain a bit so they wouldn’t be blinded.

“Are my daddies here?” Michael asked.

Marion turned at the question. “Why yes, dear,” she said.

“Can I go home with them?” said Michael. He looked like he was going to cry.

Marion sat down and turned her chair so that she could look right at the boy. “Your daddies are in another room right now. As are the Porters. I want to talk to you about all of them. Do you know who I am?” Michael shook his head. “I am a judge. I am the one who decides who you will get to
live with.” Michael perked up at this news. “Before I can say who you get to go home with, I have to ask you a few questions first. Is that alright?” Michael nodded. “Okay, Michael. Now, you must be honest with me. That means you MUST tell me the truth, alright?” Michael nodded. “Do you know what a lie is?”

“It’s when you make up stories,” said Michael. “It’s when you… lie.”

Marion smiled. “It is the intentional telling of an untruth, a falsehood. It’s when you look someone in the eye and say things that never happened and words that were never spoken. Do you understand?” Michael nodded.

“Only bad people lie,” said Michael.

“Are you a bad person?” asked Marion. Michael shook his head.

“Wonderful,” said Marion. “Now then: Tell me about what happens when you’re with your daddies. What do you do?”

Michael brightened up immediately. “I get to cuddle with Daddy when he reads the paper to me. I get to look through Poppa Pooh’s microscope and he always reads me stories at night. I get to read books and look at birds and feed ducks in the park. I get to have tea with Missus Hudsin and hear her stories. I get to ride piggy back with Uncle Greg. And sometimes daddies and me go out to the old old house and see the bees and eat lots of honey like Winnie the Pooh!”

“That sounds lovely!” said Marion. “Who’s Uncle Greg?”

“He’s a peace-man that Poppa Pooh works with,” explained Michael, “He comes in and tells Poppa that he’s got a case and he needs Poppa to help.”

“And when Poppa leaves, whom do you stay with?” asked Marion.

“Sometimes I stay home with Daddy,” said Michael, “Sometimes Daddy has to go too. And then I get to stay with Missus Hudsin and watch telly and eat biscuits. But don’t tell Daddy about the biscuits part. I don’t want to get Missus Hudsin in trouble, okay?” Michael looked at her with wide expectant eyes.

“I promise,” said Marion, crossing her heart for effect. “And what about the Porters? Any piggy-back rides from them?”

Michael’s attitude changed for the worse. He bowed his head a bit and hugged Bumble tight. “No,” he said quietly.

“What do you do at the Porters that’s fun?” she asked.

“Nothing,” said Michael glumly.

“Well,” said Marion, “surely it’s not nothing at all. Tell me how a typical day goes. You get up in the morning… and then what?”

Michael regarded her for a moment. Marion wasn’t too sure what to make of his expression. He answered her slowly: “I get up. I eat breakfast. Even if it’s stuff I don’t like. They don’t let me have jam. Cousin Emily says it’s too much sugar.”

“Ok,” said Marion, “then what?”
“Then I go to school,” said Michael.

“And then?” said Marion.

“Then I go back there,” said Michael.

“’Back there’. Do you mean that you go back to the Porter’s house?”

Michael nodded.

“Do you play with the other children?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“They’re too rough. They like to wrestle.”

“And you don’t wrestle?”

Michael shook his head and said: “I fence. Daddy says not to play with swords around other kids because I’m still learning. I don’t want to hurt anyone. Cousin Emily says swords are dangerous and that I shouldn’t be having lessons. But Uncle Mycroft bought me my sword and Poppa Pooh teaches me. He’s a good teacher.” Michael looked at Marion with pleading eyes. “May I PLEASE go home with Daddy and Poppa now? PLEASE?”

Marion watched him for a moment and said, “Michael, you have been a very good boy so far. But I do have one or two more questions for you before I can say who you get to go home with. Will you answer them?” Michael nodded, his eyes welling up with tears.

“The Porters: what kind of people are they?” Michael cocked his head to one side, confused. Marion attempted to clarify without leading her witness: “Are they good people? Bad people? Funny people? Sad people? What kind of people are they?”

“They are angry sometimes,” said Michael. His voice had gotten very small.

“Do they spank you?”

“Only when I pee the bed,” said Michael. Marion raised her eyebrows at this. Michael added quickly: “I know it’s bad to pee the bed. I don’t mean to do it. It just… happens. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” He began to sob, large tears falling from his eyes. Marion held open her arms and he got up and stood to be hugged. He cried for a while and when he was done, she wiped his face with a tissue and helped him blow his nose.

“Do the Porters read stories to you?” she asked gently. She already knew the answer, but it was nice to see by the shake of Michael’s head that she had been correct in her assumption.

“Okay, Michael,” said Marion. “I think I’m ready to say who gets to take you home forever.”
A Real Family

Chapter Summary

Judge Marion Stewart hands down her decision.

John recalled his childhood clearly. A few bright moments stood out, just as a few horrible moments did. All in all, it was an average life. In the end, all John knew for certain was that he was loved and happy.

He never foresaw his life where it was however: sharing a flat with a mad genius, falling in love with said genius, going on mad adventures together, and raising his son together as well -- which turned out to be the maddest adventure of all. And John could reflect upon all that and still be able to say: I am happy. I am loved. He only wanted Michael to look back on his childhood -- hell, his whole life -- and be able to say the same.

There was an ache in John’s chest. He knew he was capable of loving Michael more than he loved himself, just as he was sure that he loved Sherlock more than his own life. Hadn’t he proved his love for Sherlock on more than one occasion? Today he hoped that Judge Stewart would allow him to prove his love to Michael. But what if they lost custody? True, the Porters were sneaky with the video plant and all, but on paper they were the better parents.

There was only one silver lining to this whole mess: if the Porters got Michael, Sherlock could petition for parental visitation rights. He was the biological father, after all. It was only fair. But God knows how many people Justin Porter, solicitor, knew in the legal system of London. Could he pull enough strings to keep Sherlock away forever? And then what? Pray that when Michael became old enough that he would seek them out?

If Sherlock were even alive to see that day.

John knew Sherlock had a self-destructive side. If they lost Michael forever, who’s to say that Sherlock wouldn’t go leaping off of every height he could climb? John questioned his ability to keep up with Sherlock on ordinary cases. What could he do if Sherlock were bound and determined to harm himself? The agony of this moment was enough to crush John.

John regarded Sherlock who seemed lost in his own thoughts. He wondered what the detective was mulling over. No use questioning it. Sherlock would eventually look up at John with a disgusted expression and tell him that he was thinking too loudly and to knock it off. After a few minutes, no such admonishment came from the detective and John’s heart ached even more.

~080~

Sherlock went to his mind palace while he waited for Judge Stewart’s return. He wanted to find something else about himself: another memory that he had hidden behind some old steamer trunks full of other information, covered in dust and awaiting a swipe of a clean cloth to expose it to the
forefront of his mind.

There was nothing.

Sherlock half-opened his eyes and sensed John thinking beside him. Ordinarily, he would be annoyed. Today, he was comforted. He remained quite still and awaited the news. He daren’t deduce anything here. He didn’t want to be right about the Porters. He didn’t want to be wrong about John and himself.

He looked at his hands. They were huge, with tapering fingers. He saw Michael’s tiny hand in his as they stood and looked at the bees being smoked. He saw them as they brushed back Michael’s curly fringe just before planting a goodnight kiss on his forehead. He saw them around his boy’s waist as he held him steady in his lap so that Michael could peer at a blood sample through the microscope.

How useless they seemed now.

How useless his intellect seemed too. This situation was too painful and predictable to bother with. It was clear that the Porters still had the advantage. And two gay men raising a child together… well. It wasn’t unheard of, but it wasn’t the popular choice for the courts to make, was it? Not when people like the Porters were around.

It was profoundly depressing. Sherlock hated every second that ticked by. And with every second his hate existed, it devolved into anger. Sherlock clenched his hands into fists. He wanted his son. He wanted to raise him and love him. Michael was his, God damn it.

Sherlock closed his eyes and shook with the anger inside of him.

Michael was his… and he was going to be taken away.

~080~

“I have spoken to Michael and have come to the conclusion that you are, in fact, terrible parents.”

There was a general stunned silence in the room.

“You have no capacity for mercy, compassion or fair dealings and you haven’t any sense when it comes to psychological issues in children.”

The faces before the speaker were frozen in shock. One mouth gaped open to protest but quickly rethought its decision and snapped shut again.

“The child is confused and emotionally neglected by you.”

Again, there was no argument, just astonishment.

“You take no heed as to his wishes or hopes. You pay no attention to the fact that he detests living in your household, nor do you take steps to remedy his feelings. You expect him to ‘snap out of it’ as though his depression were a phase and that he wouldn’t feel like a piece of furniture being carted about from place to place. You have made no attempt – NONE – to create not just a household for this boy to live in, but a HOME for him to feel welcome. There are no stories, no
hugs, no laughter; in short, there is no love in your house for Michael Weaver. I am ashamed of you both.

“If you wish for a specific example of your folly and general wrong-headedness, I give you this: bed wetting is not something you can discipline out of a child. A simple spanking will not keep sheets or mattress dry. It is a physical condition with which you must be patient. The child’s bladder simply doesn’t grow as fast as the rest of their—” Here Marion stopped, overcome with her anger and the futility of explaining the basics of child-rearing to parents who should know better by now, God damn them! She took a moment to gather her thoughts and said aloud, albeit in a softer voice than before: “Oh God… When Michael told me about this, it was all I could do not to….” She pressed her mouth into a firm line and shook her head sadly.

John and Sherlock exchanged a quick glance and glared at the Porters angrily. For their part, the Porters looked stupidly at the judge, clearly not understanding the concept of bladder growth in children.

Judge Marion Stewart lowered her head and pinched the bridge of her nose. She regarded the Porters with a mixture of pity and disgust. “You are simply terrible to the boy,” she said. Emily Porter opened her mouth to protest and Judge Stewart held up a hand. “Don’t bother, Mrs. Porter. Your actions have been well researched by me and I have found both you and your husband wanting. You act as though Michael were a fully-adjusted child, capable of living the life you’ve set before him! It’s ridiculous!”

She pointed a finger at Justin Porter. “And you should lose your position for the underhanded and, quite frankly, ham-fisted way you attempted to manipulate this court – planting evidence that you edited for effect! You’re lucky to wear that wig, Mr. Porter. Count the days in the future carefully, as I will do everything in my power to see that every case you handle from here on out is gone over with a fine toothed comb. Put another foot wrong, and I’ll have you stripped and thrown out of our courts – permanently. You, sir, have no honor. And as far as I’m concerned, you have NO place in this judicial system -- so just watch it.”

Justin and Emily went white.

Marion turned to Sherlock and John. She smiled at them and took a cleansing breath. “And so it is with profound relief that I award full custody of Michael Weaver to his biological father Sherlock Holmes. Yours may not be a conventional or traditional family,” and here Marion glared dangerously at Emily just waiting for her to roll her eyes. She didn’t. “But it is more of a family unit than I have seen in quite some time.”

She added, smiling playfully: “Congratulations, it’s a boy.”

~080~

“Avast ye lubbers!” called Michael. The sun was shining on that beautiful spring afternoon in Surrey. He waved a foam sword toward the two figures on the blanket beneath a copse of trees. “Tell me where you’ve buried my treasure or I’ll make ye walk the plank!”

John and Sherlock grinned stupidly. “Shall we tell him?” asked John to Sherlock.

“Never!” said Sherlock.
“Then that’s it! You’ve got to walk the plank,” said Michael, very matter-of-fact.

Sherlock narrowed his eyes. "You’ve got to make me do it, pirate!” he said, the last word in a menacing tone. Michael crept nearer the two men, his sword in front of him. Sherlock bided his time. He was motionless, except for the odd glint in his eye. His face held a small crafty smile. As Michael got within arm’s reach, Sherlock lunged for him suddenly, causing the boy to squeal in surprise and delight. Sherlock wrestled Michael gently to the blanket, holding him close in an all-encompassing embrace.

Michael giggled and laughed. “That’s not how it’s supposed to go, Poppa!”

“Oh no?” asked Sherlock.

“No! You’re supposed to be a-scared of pirates!” said Michael.


“I know that, Daddy,” said Michael, “but he can pretend.”

“Alright,” said John in a tone that broke up the fun of the moment a bit, “He’ll pretend in a minute. Do us a favor and show Poppa your parry and thrusts, alright?”

“Alright,” said Michael. He was proud of the progress he was making with his fencing. Daddy liked it better when he used the foam sword and not the real one too, so that was good. Michael got up from Sherlock’s arms, giving his father a kiss as he did so, and stood away from the blanket to demonstrate his stance and positioning.

“Why did you do that, John,” asked Sherlock after a minute’s coaching.

“Because I want to ask you something,” said John.

“What?” said Sherlock, his eyes on Michael.

“I wanted to know how you’d feel if I adopted Michael as my son too,” said John.

Sherlock’s focus shifted immediately to John’s face. “Really?” he asked.

“Yes,” said John. “It’s dual-purpose, really.”

“Oh?” asked Sherlock.

“Yeah,” said John, “firstly, if anything were to happen to you… you know.” John looked sheepishly at Sherlock. Sherlock merely smiled knowingly and nodded. “And also… well… I’ve always felt him to be mine too… in a way.”

“I couldn’t be happier, John,” said Sherlock and he smiled his most genuine and rare smile at his best friend. Their relationship had bloomed from mere friendship to that of a loving and stable partnership. He trusted this man with his son as much as he did with his own life. For the first time in a long time, Sherlock felt more secure in his surroundings. He never doubted Michael’s love for him, and now he knew that Michael could never doubt John’s love.

“Oh yeah,” said John, “there’s one more thing…”

“What’s that?” asked Sherlock grinning.
John leaned in and kissed Sherlock on the mouth. “Marry me,” he said.

Sherlock’s eyes flew open. “John—“ There was a question in the detective's eyes.

“I’m sure, I’m sure,” John laughed. “I just want this to be so permanent that nothing like that custody battle ever happens again.” John paused and added: “And… I really don’t care who knows that I love you. I want the whole world to know. Marry me, Sherlock Holmes. Let’s have a proper family. What do you say?”

Michael plopped himself down between the two men. “Can I get married too?”

Both men laughed. “Of course you can, Michael,” said Sherlock. “We’ll get married, John and I.” Sherlock winked at John. John kissed him quickly and beamed, realizing that his proposal had been accepted. “And you’ll be our son – officially and forever. Does that sound alright?”

“Yes… but,” said Michael.

“What’s wrong?” asked John.

“I want a different name,” said Michael.

“What do you mean?” said Sherlock. “I quite like the name Michael.”

“No, I mean my last name,” said Michael. “I want to be Michael Holmes. Not Weaver.”

“I see,” said John, his eyebrows raised. “And what put that thought into your clever little head?”

“There’s this girl in my class,” began Michael, “Her mommy got married and changed her name and then Sarah changed hers as well. I want to change mine.”

“I see,” said Sherlock. “Well, that’s easily arranged. Right. From now on, you’ll be Michael Holmes.”


Michael’s pleading verdigris eyes were too much for John to resist. He swept the boy up in his arms and placed a series of loving kisses all over his face. “You can do that, alright,” said John, his eyes welling up with tears.

“Hooray! Now we can be a real family and we can all… walk the plank!” shouted Michael, as he raised his sword in triumph. He wiggled his way out of John’s arms and ran off into the distance to mingle in the late afternoon air with the pollen, the bees, and the sunshine.

Works inspired by this one: [Cover for When We Were Very Young](https://archiveofourown.org/work/2154357) by [moonblossom graphics](https://archiveofourown.org/users/moonblossom)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](https://archiveofourown.org/users/moonblossom) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!