Summary

Sherlock returns after Reichenbach to discover that John has moved on and is adverse to having the detective back in his life. Mary seems to think otherwise and pushes to see the two friends reunited, a series of murders providing the perfect means for the men to reconnect. In the midst of their tedious reconciliation, a new mystery unfolds when the bodies they are investigating begin to show signs of inexplicable blood loss. Both Sherlock and John face unknown danger garnered from the international attention they have cultivated and events quickly spiral out of their control, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy, when a strange new tenant takes up residence at Baker Street.

Notes

Sherlock Universe: story begins in the middle of Season 3 Episode 1 "The Empty Hearse" after John is pulled from the bonfire. The train bomb plot does not occur in this fic.
Vampire Chronicles Universe: story begins after the events in "Merrick" and after the coven has broken apart.

Multi-story arc
Chapter 1

The immortal had passed through airport security with ease. His passport and credentials were found credible, raising little attention to himself, aside from the occasional lingering glances of people mesmerized by the impossibly beautiful depths of his emerald eyes and the ivory pallor of his unnaturally tough skin, but that was rather typical. Now he, like the rest of the unsuspecting mortals
that milled about the terminal, waited for his international flight.

Louis took a seat off to the side of his designated gate, staring through the large bay windows into the darkness outside. He brushed back a few straggling tendrils of raven-black hair which had escaped from his braid to curve under the turn of his jaw, all the while tracking the movements of luggage trains that taxied about on the tarmac and the pulsing of airplane lights on the runway beyond the thin barrier of glass. Looking away the immortal set his worn canvas messenger bag on the empty seat beside him and adjusted the loose fitting navy cable knit sweater to sit more comfortably against his frame. He crossed legs encased in worn button fly jeans and opened that day's copy of the New York Times.

Unlike others of his kind the vampire cared little for a frivolous lifestyle, where insurmountable amounts of money could buy one any luxury they desired. Money was not a problem it was just a barrier he chose not to cross. Louis desired more than anything to blend. To be seen and yet not seen amongst the mortals that surrounded him. So even though a private jet was within his financial realm the vampire would not take it. He would fly as he would have if he were still human, which of course he could never be again.

The only thing new that he owned was the Kindle in his messenger bag, such a wonderfully insightful tool for the avid reader, and a pair of green Converse runners—his other shoes had become too worn to pass unnoticed in public and these just so happened to conveniently present themselves. Despite the fact that the immortal couldn’t register any kind of variation in temperature he had a grey and white knit scarf, hiding his noticeably pale length of neck that seemed to make young women’s hearts skip a beat.

As he read people moved around him, never suspecting a damned creature sat in their midst, hidden like a wolf in sheep’s wool. He ignored the spinning heads of females that passed him by, as well as that of the odd man. Though the diversity of their thoughts at the sight of a creature as himself was rather difficult to filter and dismiss. To them he was more, though they would not be able to place quite how. Unexplainably beguiling, entrancing, eyes lingered longer then intended when they looked in his direction.

One woman’s steps had slowed as she neared, eyes traveling quickly over his form. A half moment of hesitation before she stopped and settled herself in the seat directly across from him, attempting to provocatively catch his attention through body language alone. Louis hadn’t the time to care, he fancied young women less than he fancied any relationship at all, and so he adjusted the newspaper to block her from his peripheral vision. The paper was interesting, at least to the immortal, who tried to keep up on what was happening in the world in order to keep himself grounded within it. A certain set of current events had prompted this bit of traveling—finally something that he was interested in seeing and experiencing for himself.

Louis had not spent much of his immortal life in Britain. He had passed through that land more than a century ago with others of his kind and it was now that he was finally going back. Europe was never the mysterious home to him that it was to many of the other vampires who remained. He was a child of the 'new world' and was reminded of it whenever it was annoyingly convenient for one of them to bring it up.

A tickling at the back of Louis’ neck caused him to close his eyes and draw in a long and resolute breath. It was enough to let him know that the game was up.

"Fancy meeting you here, Louis." The rich timber of Lestat’s voice was easily heard over the airport chatter and hollow announcements for final boardings.

"Hm. How exactly, is it fancy that you followed me here?" The dark-haired man replied as he shifted
in the faux-leather seat while Lestat, a stunningly attractive and pale skinned man smoothly lifted the messenger bag, replacing himself in the seat. The bag dropped to the carpet with a soft thud as Louis caught a glimpse of the other man's pale lips quirking into a painfully devious smile.

The shimmer of tightly curled golden hair and the hint of ice-blue eyes, hidden behind the yellow-toned low-tint Oakley shades, was just the beginning of the contrasts between the two men who now sat side by side in the terminal. Both men shared an unnatural pale and beautiful visage but while one was the very picture of a modest attempt to not draw attention to himself, the other seemed to have stepped off a L.A. runway or out of some exotic night club.

A dark navy t-shirt hugged the well-defined slender torso, swirling metallic designs in gold and white were sharply accented by the painfully expensive watch and gold rings that adorned the young man’s slender wrist and hands. One of those rings would have easily paid for the plane that was pulling up in the darkness outside the terminal window. Designer blue-jeans, purposefully made to look worn, white leather shoes that were spotless and free from the wear of one who spent much time actually walking in them.

The blond hair was loose and no attempt to tame it had been given. The gold-framed shades had been selected to try and reduce the almost frighteningly white shine of Lestat's eyes. It was his one attempt to blend in, easily causing hackles to rise on any who sensed that there was something off about their kind. It was usually easy enough to dismiss, a quick tinker in the poor little mortals mind and they would suddenly be thinking about how they should go to get a drink or go for a walk, but still it warranted an attempt to prevent.

When the pretty brunette shifted in her seat across from the blond, Lestat took the opportunity to lean forward just a bit and flash the girl a dazzling smile that bordered on predatory. Pink rose to the girl’s cheeks, heat flushing over her as she swallowed suddenly choking a little and bursting into a coughing fit as she quickly rose and excused herself past the others whom she had drawn attention from.

"Still got it." Lestat chuckled wickedly, pleased with himself, as he leaned casually back and slid an arm behind Louis, resting it on the back of the chair. "Now, why are we going to London, Louis?"

The dark haired man restrained himself from rolling his emerald eyes in agitation at his alluring creator. If Lestat was here with him now then there was no questioning the obvious fact that the blond already knew everything—or was as close as possible to it. The agitation was due to the other very accurate fact that his creator only wished to hear it verbally acknowledged, in order to assess the reaction on the face of his fledgling, and to then childishly point out that he had already know. It was just the sort of game that Louis avoided entertaining with the other vampire.

Lestat's fingers played absently with the braid that started at the base of the other's neck and hung over his opposite shoulder, a touch and action that Louis both desired and resented in that moment. The blond was using this soft playful acknowledgment as a means of coaxing his creation to play the game he was so adamantly refusing. Yet it wasn't as though the other wished him to stop. His maker's affections were hard to capture and hold, although there was also no escaping them when he willed it.

There wasn't much in this earthly realm that could hold the fiercely daring blond's attention for long and many of their kind would consider this his biggest crux. Louis found it impossibly vexing, for more often than not he also felt the repercussions of the blond's adventures because of the dynamics of their complicated relationship.

Therefore because Lestat was inclined to generally liken trouble and danger to the same mental and physical effects as ecstasy, his involvement in Louis' own personal affairs usually ended in two of the
same ways. Lestat could ruin a trip to the Louvre simply because just admiring the precision and complexity of the precious artworks was too dull to keep his mind entertained. It was why Louis had aspired to keep this trip to London a secret.

The quirk at the corner of his maker's lips reminded him cruelly that he had failed. Louis sighed and turned a wan smile which seemed to make the pleasantly enticed curve of the other's mouth grow wider. "I do believe it would be a waste of breath to spare you the words to explain." He admitted verbosely. "You already know."

"Ah," the blond sighed back, his fingers smoothly transitioning from his fledgling's hair to softly caress the desirable length of his neck, half obscured by the scarf. "I'm afraid then, mon amie, that you have already wasted twenty words of your precious breath. Of course I already know."

It didn't really matter how Louis responded, he realized, the game was already a foot and he was losing. Lestat was obviously intrigued by the news coming out of the United Kingdom about this genius consulting detective and the cases that he had solved for Scotland Yard—or more dangerously perhaps he simply had nothing else to do. Either way Louis was getting the distinct impression that the other was not about to withdraw his interest. He would see that akin to defeat.

"Needless to say, Louis, I'm honestly more hurt that you didn't come to me first. It baffles me beyond reason why you would even consider crossing an ocean by plane when you know full well I could get you there faster." It was a blatant attempt by his maker to point out and relish in his own strengths and vampirical prowess, an annoyingly common attribute of the blond that Louis had yet to find in any way endearing. Of course Lestat was right, as always. The powers of which he boasted far surpassed any human comprehension. Yet flying with Lestat, not in a private jet but with he himself, was less than desirable. Even though London would be beneath his feet far sooner and with less hassle—it would be another win for his maker.

Over the speakers droned the monotone boarding call for the large plane that had finished taxiing to Louis' gate and the vampire collected his bag from the floor where Lestat had rudely deposited it. He stood and turned to look down at the upturned face of the other man, who was immaturely frowning with disappointment as Louis explained, "I will have to decline--"

"You always decline." Lestat snapped in a peevish voice he was purposefully restraining to a hush. Sinister blue eyes caught his fledgling from overtop of the gold frames, dark with an almost theatrical contempt and hurt—that Louis could easily shrug off. In an attempt to dissuade his imminent rejection the man quickly volleyed back, "It doesn't seem to matter how I insist you can always find a means to decline."

Louis smiled at this, partially amused now in the full-lipped pout turned up at him. Gently he stroked back a curl from his intermittent lover's brow—and softly remarked, "Seeing as you already know everything, Lestat, then I suppose it would not be presumptuous of me to say, I'll see you there."

Clearly demonstrating his inability to brook a withdrawal from their competition, the blond tried a second attempt at persuading his partner to yield. "If you understand that much of me, chéri, then why won't you just appease me?"

Louis' smile widened almost to a grin. It was amusing to witness his maker's steely stubbornness and it brought even more pleasure for the fledgling to reply, "First class is far more comfort that you've ever brought me. See you in London."

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Los Angeles, New Orleans, Toronto, London, Paris. On a Friday night, they all had the same thing
in common; herds of bodies milling about darkened streets in various states of their best and behaving proportionally worse in conjunction to the consumption of intoxicants they had acquired. A man in a long coat sang jovially as he swayed with one arm raised above his head and the other wrapped tightly around the pretty woman at his side, cheeks ruddy from the crisp January air and the liquor that was obviously warming them.

She laughed aloud, pulling at her partners coat to keep him from swaying too far off balance and falling into the street. In her attempt to keep the man from certain peril she over-compensated, pulling far too hard, and lost her grip. Fumbling wildly back she slammed into the unsuspecting and distracted veteran who cursed in surprise, as the drunken women fell atop him.

“Come off it!” He growled, as the woman was snorting apologies through her laughter. Her counterpart had gallantly come to her rescue and pulled her quickly off the fallen man, cooing at her to ensure she was not harmed and offering to kiss it and so much more, better. Neither of the two offered assistance nor paid any mind to the fallen man who was rising stiffly from the sidewalk. He assessed his own state of being, all the while aggressively dusting off the grime and slush that was now soaking into his blue-jeans.

“Sorry chap!” The first man called back over his shoulder as he quickly stumbled away with his ‘handsy’ female companion into the London night.

“Damn, ‘Sorry Chap’… don’t even help the man up.” John Watson grumbled to himself, his lips tightening into a thin line of anger as he rubbed his sore elbow and discovered the rip in his coat. “Ah! Bloody new jacket, this was!” He shouted the last few words after the couple, who had already vanished from site into the other milling people on the street. Annoyed John, slapped the offending rip and then hissed at the little sting of pain that raced up from the elbow.

“Stupid!” He snapped at himself, expelling a long breath and closing his eyes for a moment. Taking in a deep breath he attempted to clear his frustrated mind and remembered that he had somewhere he was supposed to be.

John was already 26 minutes late arriving to 221B Baker Street when he was knocked, unceremoniously to the rough and dirty sidewalk. By the time he took his first step onto the landing of the flat, Sherlock had already solved the minor emergency that had prompted the summons. It was not that Sherlock actually required the ex-military doctor in order to come to the conclusion or solve the mystery, it was more so that there was no one about to exclaim how ‘bloody brilliant’ he was when the tumbling series of deductions was presented. There was a humanizing comfort in the way John always saw through the deductive capabilities of the dark-haired and brilliant man, who was now stepping away from the window after spotting the familiar silhouette fast-walking towards the flat.

Sherlock flared his nostrils, identifying that tea—Cream-Earl Grey—was reaching optimal steeping in the china pot that sat poised on the edge of the kitchen table. He glided through the precisely executed movements that ensured that just as he pressed the edge of the delicate gold-rimmed china cup to his lips, the newspaper strategically held by his other hand, as one leg crossing casually over the other, his body would appear the very picture of one whom had been relaxing for quite some time as the door of the flat opened and one, John H. Watson entered the residence. It was obvious that some event had transpired to put the doctor in a sour mood and judging by the darkened hue and debris on the back-left of his trousers, the muddy scuff on his shoes and the tear in the right elbow of his fairly-newly acquired jacket, a tumble of some sort had happened very recently, as the discoloration was obviously caused by the wetting of the denim material.

This must have occurred only within the last ten minutes, based off the drying time of the denim in
proportion to the moisture on both the pants and jacket arm, as well as John’s furrowed brow and agitated stance and so was not the original cause of the delay in his expected arrival time. That meant that some other delay had taken place initially and that… that he would need to discover and that, well that was what he lived for. Oh, well, that and also amusing himself by tormenting his one friend in the whole world.

“You’re late, John.” Sherlock stated, eyes never leaving the article he wasn’t reading to begin with. Teacup returning to his lips as he took another sip and placed the cup down on the small table to his right, “I’m afraid too late to be of any help and so I will have Mrs. Hudson post some condolences to the poor family.”

Of course, there was no poor grieving family to which Sherlock vaguely alluded to, whom had been so painfully and horribly wronged by the 27 minute delay of John arriving at the Baker Street flat but John did not yet know that and it was amusing to Sherlock how very guilty the veteran could become over people whom he had never even known of only moments before.

"Yes, well, I was postponed.” John explained, taking off the sodden jacket and tossing it over the back of one of the kitchen chairs, before he came to his chair—the one Sherlock had displaced and then quickly replaced once he was absolutely certain that the doctor would indeed come out now and then to play. He gave the ugly paisley covered chair a fond look, far fonder than the shocked spectacle the doctor had made at the restaurant when seeing an old friend. He sat down, his hands rubbing the fabric arms of the chair with familiarity, before he leaned back, crossed his ankles, and looked up at his friend, expectantly.

Sherlock looked away then—he wasn’t exactly sure just why—but he gave a cold and calculated remark, regarding the small but nevertheless-still-there smudge of pink-hued lipstick at the corner of his colleague’s mouth. "Caught at the door, I see, for a goodbye foray. She has mussed your hair, left her own on the collar of your shirt, among other far more obvious things." He willed himself to look back at his friend, even though his neck and head seemed to resist the movement. The doctor looked perturbed and to combat the sudden draw to his friend's features the detective gave a cheeky smile, even as he frankly added, "That's unlike you, John, when you are on a case."

It was easy to ascertain that the comment had not the intended effect on his partner. The drawn look tightened and it was easy to see the tension building on the doctors face by the line of his mouth, the clenching of his jaw, the flaring of his nostrils. He was holding back. Then he broke, the thin line of his mouth pursed and his brows knit over his marbled blue orbs, too dark and deep, mottled with that odd touch of brown around the pupil. His chin jutted forward, commanding, dominating, as he rebuked in a firm and steady voice, "Things aren't like they were before, Sherlock. Don't expect that to change."

The detective felt his own full lips pursing in response to the demand, the underlying threat in the words—betraying possibly a subtle fear?—defense mechanism...? His thoughts were getting him nowhere and John would soon leave if he didn't desist and move on, so the thin man planted his feet and rose from the chair. Spinning on his heel and heading away from the hackle-raised doctor, he discarded his cup and saucer on the cluttered desk that he came to and pointed absentley over his shoulder at his friend, as he indicated the tea pot still steeping on the kitchen table. "Have your tea, John."

The detective could hear the other man rising from the chair, socked feet moving into the kitchen, the tinkling sound of him serving himself some of Mrs. Hudson's tea, all as Sherlock tried to look busy at the desk. The problem had been trivial, not something really worthy of his prowess and undeniable skill, and of course he had finished long before John had arrived to witness the small but still viable success. Now his mind was calculating again. John was here. There was no case now. Would John
stay?—the fact that he was late stated very simply that Mary's company was more desirable... Did he want John to stay? If he did stay what would they do...? He could feel his eyes closing as his mind ran rampant with the endless possibilities of that one thought.

"So," hummed John's voice, breaking Sherlock's focus just as he had zeroed in on the more erotic end of the spectrum his mind had produced to explore, and the detective turned to see that the doctor was comfortably seated back in his chair, sipping from the china cup. After a swallow of the tea, which the other man could tell by the twitch at the corner of John's mouth was steeped to his liking, the doctor added, "you don't really have a case, do you?"

Sherlock was impressed and he allowed John to see the sly smile that curved the corners of his mouth as a deep satisfaction and pride welled in his chest—what was the colloquialism?—it the nail on the head. Even though it was a launch into the conversation he had been unsure how to start and was even more perplexed on how he desired to end, the detective waved a hand at his partner and then back to himself, as he explained, "Not anymore, John. I solved it whilst you were enjoying the many pleasures of courtship, both in your home and on your way here."

"Now how the hell did you know...nope. I don't care," John started, that disbelieving mist clouding his iris' quickly dispelled by his growing contempt. The eyes flashed on Sherlock, his mind likening the action to that of a sniper locking onto a target, and then he twisted away to place the tea cup and saucer down. He was rising as he finished, "Of course you did. Well then, no need for me to be here, now is there? I will thank Mrs. Hudson on the way out for the tea."

Sherlock felt his throat constricting, his loins twisting—he didn't want the other man to walk out—it had been days since they had last been together, years since they had bantered, chased down criminals, solved crimes...among other much less obvious things. Then he felt it, a vibrating in the pocket of his black dress pants, and he pulled the cell phone from his pocket to read the text message illuminated on the screen. John paused, hesitated, prolonged the amount of time it took to slip into the still damp jacket he had picked up from the back of the chair in the kitchen.

It was from Molly—a gift. A reason to keep John close that night.

"It's here." the dark haired detective said, unable to restrain the spread of smile across his mouth.

John looked quizzically at him, but there in the corner of his eyes was that spark of interest—that need to know that Sherlock had been counting on. "It's what?" the doctor was asking for clarification.

"Come, John." Sherlock said, as he whizzed past his comrade, snatching his coat up and slipping into it in one fluid motion. He pecked the screen of the phone and then deposited it unceremoniously into his coat pocket, as he wound the blue scarf about his neck and flipped up the collar his coat against the January chill in the air. He left through the open door and then stopped, returned to retrieve his still dumbfounded friend. Poking his head around the jam of the door at John, he added, "It awaits us at the morgue."

"T-the morgue...? Right, of course, the morgue." John sounded sour, but the detective did not hesitate to believe that the doctor's interest was piqued. As the other man's footsteps followed behind him Sherlock could hear him question, "What is 'it'?"

Colloquialism: hook, line, and sinker.
Art work is my own. Just a little fun to add to the fic. You can see more of my Sherlock artwork [here](#).
The thunderous pounding of feet running down the stairs caused the dear Mrs. Hudson to turn with a start. The door of the flat clicked shut behind her just as the tall figure of Sherlock came bounding down the stairs with the doctor fast on his heels.
“Oh Boys! It sounds like old times!” she gushed, delightedly.

A small part of John rebelled at this statement but before he had a chance to express his discontent, the long legged detective was already swinging the front door wide. Loping down the front steps, he sharply called over his shoulder, “Do save it, Mrs. Hudson. We haven’t the time to reminisce!”

John shot the elderly land lady a compunctious smile and followed after the other man, as Mrs. Hudson returned to the doorway and called after them. “You’ll be having a new flat mate, by-the-by! Do say hello sometimes.”

John's brain registered this new information and turned his head back to the woman, who was pointing in the opposite direction down the sidewalk, from where Sherlock was fast jogging towards a waiting taxi. The doctor saw the figure of a tall dark-haired man walking towards the flat in a mid-length coat, very close to the same style as his newly reanimated friend’s. The man gave a polite wave. He was ghastly pale but yet incredibly handsome and appeared to have been on his way in when he heard the commotion of Sherlock and John's exit, as well as the announcement by the landlady.

John paused for a second to return the gesture when the demanding voice of his rueful friend snapped at him, “Quickly, John!”

The tangle of dark curls over the furrowed brow disappeared into the back-seat of the waiting taxi as the door slammed shut and John was forced to dash down the sidewalk after the vehicle as it lurched forward. John cursed, slapping his hands forcefully on the window. The cab returned to a full stop so that the doctor could swing the door open and jump within the small back seat. The door slammed shut and the driver spared no time, puttering quickly down the London streets toward their requested destination.

Sherlock’s gaze was turned away, staring fixedly out into the crisp night, as they skirted along the busy streets. The press of John’s thigh against his own when the doctor slid along the worn leather seat into the taxi had caused a rush of familiar and unwanted sensations to wash over him. It was not something he could allow to distract him from his current focus, there was no point, things were different now. John had told him as much in words and actions, and yet, here he was. Peevishly fussing and mumbling about ‘lack of consideration’ and how he was required to be home at a ‘reasonable’ hour but still sitting at the detective’s side on the way to the Morgue, with no idea what awaited him.

The collar of Sherlock’s coat was turned up to hide the reflection of the small smile that he felt spread across his lips, he allowed it for only a moment before chastising himself once more for getting off track with his thoughts. He would see how far along John would follow before he was reminded of the dreadfully boring domestic life he was required to return to. The genius knew full well that he had already won a few small victories this evening. John had come to the flat and now to the Hospital, it was the next few steps that would reveal the dance they would come to undertake.

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The smell of decay was incredibly subtle in the crisp and sterilized morgue at St Bartholomew’s Hospital, the cooled bodies that lay on the stainless steel tables were shrouded in the black vinyl bags they had arrived in from the last legs of their mortal journeys. Molly was often the last person to see these poor souls before they were fired in the crematorium, shipped to the mortuary for family funerals, or whisked away to be dissected in the name of science. Sherlock was often a source of some of these later disposal processes, after all, the eyes in his microwave had to come from somewhere and grave digging was dreadfully hard on the back.
The young specialist registrar stood beside the black bagged body on the medical examination table, fingers knit together in front of her, the glitter of the diamond on her left hand visible, placed purposely on top of her dominant right to nevertheless display it. John gave the plain woman a friendly hello and a courteous wave, as Sherlock brushed past her to gain access to the body she had brought them down to see. She took a step back, her body tensed with his brusque movement, but she kept her thin lips closed. As the detective worked open the zipper from head to toe, his companion asked the young woman what they were looking at.

"It's a dead body, John," Sherlock answered curtly, cutting off Molly's response. The detective didn't have to turn to know that those dark blue orbs of his friend were rolling. He tried not to smile. Irritating John was such a familiar delight. He turned his intense gaze on the young registrar, startling her enough to see that she tensed again to keep from physically jumping. "Where and when?"

"He was brought in early this morning, found I think in a back alley the Inspector had said. I would have called you sooner but I didn't do the initial assessment. I picked up on some of your specific requests when I was going over the report." She explained, her hands fidgeting, spinning the ring on her finger like it made her feel awkward or it was irritating her pale skin. She licked the thin pink lips of her small mouth, which made the woman appear deceivingly younger than she actually was, and with a birdlike twitch of her head, that swished the tied back tail of her hair, she darted a look between the two men, adding, "The cause of death was determined by the official examiner to be exsanguination due to the laceration on the neck, which I do agree with."

Molly was wringing her hands, beginning to stumble over her words, and so Sherlock diverted his gaze back to the corpse, in order for the young woman to regain her concentration, finding the injury to be far more interesting. Molly managed to finish the explanation she had started rather quickly by adding, "It's just that the amount of blood-loss that the body exhibits is rather unusual."

Sherlock was parting the black bag, gingerly widening the gap to keep from disturbing his first view of the cleaned wound. As he examined the gaping laceration of the nearly decapitated individual inside, he could hear John beginning to question her finding. Sherlock had expected this, had asked specifically for this. The wound itself was a massive rent in the fabric of the flesh. The neck of what appeared to be a nineteen year old methamphetamine addicted male was visibly torn open, as though his murderer had grabbed the flesh with enough strength to puncture and then reefed the rest open. The windpipe and larynx was exposed above the butterfly shaped thyroid—under active thyroid, he corrected, judging by the slight scarring present from overactive white blood cells.

Dark curls fell over his brows as he changed his viewing angle multiple times, bobbing up and down and around to gain the desired 360 degree view of the man, and behind him he heard as Molly clarified for the other doctor, "You would know as well as I do, John, that even with the kind of trauma that the body has sustained it would not be this depleted. Cardiac arrest would cease the flow and then pooling would begin. There was additional blood-loss due to basic gravity when the body was moved but...just look at the feet."

At the mentioning of the man's extremities Sherlock darted to that end of the table, followed by John's measured pace. The detective pushed the black bag down to expose both of the man's abnormally long, thin feet, noticing that they had taken on a deep ashen hue since death. The length of the foot was exaggerated by the taut skin that was drawn over the tight musculature of the extremity. A small furrow creased Sherlock's forehead as he ran a finger along the flesh, in a precise line, from the center hollow between of the hallux and second metatarsal, then up the corpses shin to stop at the knee. Taking a graceful step back, the black irises dilated. Sky-blue and sea-green shades shrunk in the eclipse as calculations fluttered in his peripherals.

John saw this transformation, saw his decent into the vast expanses of hallways in what he pictured
was a library within the man’s self-labeled mind-palace. Full of information that he only needed to locate the index card for to further recall whatever he had deemed important about the subject. Even should the information be missing, the next course of action would be to obtain it through any variety of means at his disposal. The dull thud of his heart was suddenly resonating louder in his head as blue and green speckled eyes, dark with the shadow from the lamp overhead, met and locked on his own. There was the roar of silence in the room for a second, followed by the hot rush of ache—an ache for how good this all felt—flooded over him.

Molly cleared her throat with a mousy chirp and their eyes broke. “Is it what you were looking for?”

John took a step back from the table, he could feel the heat on his face as he turned to look away from the only two other living occupants in the room and pointlessly, through the tiny glass windows on the swinging steel doors that lead into the morgue.

“When call me as soon as the next one comes in.” Sherlock stated matter-of-factly. Reaching into his coat pocket he drew forth his mobile and the rapid sound of tapping consumed the quiet. Another moment passed before Molly began repositioning the body and bag before John recovered enough to turn and face the scene again.

“What do you notice here, John?” The concentration on Sherlock’s face was broken only when he glanced with an expectantly raised eyebrow, at the doctor.

“Um, well,” John licked his lips apprehensively, fighting from meeting the other man’s eyes as he stared instead fixedly at the body on the table. What do I notice, he self-questioned. Walking to the top of the gurney, he was trying to bide himself a few moments to gather his observations.

“Obviously,” the doctor paused to note the quirk that just as quickly vanished at the corners of Sherlock’s lips, “Well, obviously this was a Murder of some sorts.”

Sherlock sighed painfully, “Ob-viously, John.”

“From the discoloration in the feet and sunken look to him, I'd say some psychopath drained his blood and ripped out his throat...” As Johns eyes narrowed on the gaping space of torn viscera and muscle, he added slowly, “In that order too, by the looks of it.”

“Well done. Here I was worried you'd be horribly rusty and perhaps I'd have to consider replacing you.” The tone was a combination of quip with an unmistakable undercurrent of fondness—as close to fondness as the other man was capable.

The men both stepped back as John gave the inquisitive registrar a nod and the zipper whizzed the gaping black mouth shut to conceal the gruesome scene within. Sherlock was fixed on the white glow of his phone screen as he continued to tap away and scan the information that flashed before him.

The ping of a text message, the phone sliding back into the deep wool pocket then a tug on the bottom hem to straighten and John found himself, once again, trailing behind the lengthy gate of taller man. Taxi flagged, streets navigated and the doors slammed as the pair stepped onto the deserted and broken sidewalk in the shadow of an old brick building.

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It had been terribly easy to extract the information in the case file regarding the poor young man's death from Lestrade. The inspector was not happy to hear that Sherlock was interested but knew when to work with the consulting detective, especially when it involved one of his cases. The police
had assumed that the case was simple enough, a drug mule that had been let go—permanently. There was little at the crime scene which was in actuality a dump site, meaning there was little evidence to draw conclusions from. It was a debacle, as was most of the work Lestrade's men tackled.

The alley was dark and conveniently quiet, with no direct line of sight from the casual vehicle or person that might pass by on the nearest road. It was a downtrodden area of the large city, known for its share of derelict building, warehouses, and grungy pubs and peepers. Even as such the body had been reported rather quickly, long before the stiffness of rigor mortis had taken a foothold, which had even John wondering if the murderer had not reported the death. Obviously they had not stuck around to be questioned by police, which had significantly limited their search. With little to go on and no desire to dig any further Lestrade's men had left it to go cold. It wasn't worth their time—it was another drug runner off the streets.

The doctor followed the detective into the blackness of the alley, there were no street lamps that shone their warm glow here. John took his phone from his pocket and activated the flash light to illuminate the dead end. There was garbage as far as the eye could see, swelling around a large bin and heaped at the chain link fence that blocked that far end. One would think that a normal person would think twice before entering the dark crevice within the city, even in the middle of the day, and yet the body had been reported. Sherlock turned up the collar of his jacket against the cool air that nipped with the January cold and then hiked his trousers just above the knees to squat down. Black gloved hands reached down to gently run along the broken and cracked cement below their feet. His long fingers flicked papers, wrappers, and leaves from the spot, cleaning an area that was roughly the width and breadth of his squatting knees.

John leaned down over him, as the detectives brows came together over his intense eyes that calculatingly scanned the small section of alley-floor. The doctor searched as well and felt stupid beside his friend, as he leaned back none the wiser. He couldn't see anything. It was dark and the cement was just as black and dirty as everything else was in the alley. "Are you sure that's where the body was...?" he asked, only to be cut off with brusque wave of a black gloved hand, which called for silence.

The doctor swallowed a vile retort, as the dark curly head bobbed up, twitching to the right, as though he were dog, whose sensitive ears had caught the hint of a sound. John strained to listen to. What could they hear? On the wind came the sound of traffic from afar, the rustling of the garbage on the ground, a cat yowling threateningly, a plane in the distance. As John failed once more to join Sherlock's inquisition he grumbled and took a step back, reclining his shoulder blades against the chilled brick and mortar of the wall closest, eyes trained on the back of those dark curls, and he thought of Mary.

The doctor had left his fiancé for this? To follow Sherlock on one of his half-cocked adventures into the deepest, darkest, and dirtiest places of the damned city only to watch the other man enjoy himself and wonder why in the hell he wasn't at home in bed with Mary's heated form curled beside him? Not exactly what he had considered fun for a while now—for over a year now. Not since Mary. He hadn't thought much of Sherlock and their fun after he had met the blond. She was witty and assertive enough to push past his pining for what had been so painfully torn away and lost—only to be thrust back into his life now.

Sherlock was an arse. A prick. A giant dick. What man really thought that he could so selfishly consume another person and then just as ruthlessly disappear? John had been lost without him. Lost and terribly wounded. Sherlock had wanted so much of him, had given so much to him, and then had taken it all away, leaving the soldier more trauma than the war had sent him home to deal with. Mary had helped him find himself again, to forget about the consulting detective, and learn to breathe
again. Sherlock had ruined that too, hadn't he? By simply reappearing, like a magician in a damned show—poof! Well, John hadn't thought it was very magical, even if Mary had thought it was rather entertaining.

That was why when the detective had called on him, John had not wanted to go. You'd think that with the nose bleed John had given the damned consulting detective upon his less than courteous return to London that the man would have gotten that much through his thick walled cranium. The doctor was not about to put himself in the same position as before, where he had been drawn in, wounded, and abandoned. John had refused to even reply to the short text message, which simply demanded his assistance that evening. Mary had not agreed. So here he was, in a damp and treacherous alleyway, in the middle of a perfectly good evening, sorting through trash from a crime scene that did not seem to exist, with a man that he would have rather brushed off—would serve the arse right to be treated in kind for the way he had departed and returned from the dead.

John realized his wondering thoughts were mounting his frustration on their own and that the detective crouched before him had little to do with that progression. Sherlock had always been brusque, incapable of dealing with people on an acceptable civilized level, despite the genius brain he boasted and needed no proof of owning. It had made for an odd friendship, but in some ways it had been easier then for the recovering soldier. Normal people expected more, wanted conversation, wanted interest. Wanted. Sherlock demanded what he needed and when he had taken it, left him alone. John had found that...interesting but nevertheless easy. Then there was the fact that the damned man's boredom drove him to come up with some pretty creative ways of entertaining himself, which John had thoroughly enjoyed taking part in some of the time. It had been a thrill then, running, dodging, chasing, following the next clue.

Coming out tonight the doctor had hoped that it would be the same, but it just wasn't. He still felt that the sharp chisel of the man's high cheekbones dropping to that perfectly drawn cupid's bow mouth, always pursed in deep thought, was still alluring. The length of those thin fingers stroking still tempting. That icy gaze still captivating—and Mary! John stood abruptly, his spin cracking straight, with the fright of the thoughts that were now barreling through his mind, rampantly escalating his heart rate. Mary was at home. Why was he out here, pining again for what had been?

Driven by his sudden need to distance himself from the other man John shoved the phone into the pocket of his jeans and took an abrupt step away. A vice grip latched onto his wrist, those thin gloved fingers like the clamp of iron, holding him firm. The doctor gave an impatient grunt and insisted, "Sherlock—", only to be cut off again by the man's fiercely hissed, "Quiet, John!"

The doctor had to bite back another retort, his teeth deep in his bottom lip, the pain not nearly as real as the electrifying touch of the detective. There was silence again—nothing within it that seemed out of the ordinary for an evening in this part of London. John's mind was roiling. He was embarrassed, guilty, angry, resentful, and more—all of which made a swirling cacophony of noise that thundered between his temples right along with his accelerated pulse. The hairs on the back of his neck slowly stood and the raging storm within him quieted a little, as he realized that Sherlock was frozen—stock still, completely unmoving. The doctor closed his eyes and strained to listen, as his thoughts transitioned from being self-consumed to suddenly alarm. His own body was reacting as though they were threatened, as though danger surely loomed somewhere near within the shadows and the blackness that had swallowed them. It bothered the soldier even more that he felt blind to its stalking presence. Then—as suddenly as he had frozen—he jumped to his feet. It was a fluid motion of trained and limber limbs, as lithe as any athlete. That fierce pale gaze shot upwards, scanning the perimeter of the roof tops that reached for the hazy night sky, black brick meeting softly glowing clouds that hung low above the city lights. Again. Nothing. There was nothing.

The hand that gripped his wrist so ardently thrust him forward, his face nearly slamming into the
collar of Sherlock's coat, as a quick hissed question met his ear, "Did you feel it?" John obediently answered, shaking his head no, and slowly the other man pulled back, only enough for their eyes to meet. It was a calculating sweep of his face, John just didn't know what it was that the detective was looking for. Then a small turn quirked the corner of the man's full mouth and he was being pulled in another direction, with only the classic quick demand, "Come, John."

His heart pumping and his adrenaline now dramatically racing the doctor allowed the detective to pull him back to the street, back to the warm lamp light, the life of the city beyond the death within that hollow. With the magical touch that Sherlock always seemed to possess a cab was hailed and stopped immediately to pick them up. The detective pulled the doctor into the cab, demanded they were returned to Baker Street, and finally John wrestled his arm away from the other man. John put on his seat belt, pressing for an explanation, "What was all that?"

Sherlock's curls shifted about his brows as he turned his head back to his friend, those variscite eyes engaging, as the smile on the man's lips broke. "Lestrade was right, there is no crime scene. The body was obviously dumped, the murder was committed somewhere else, and the body was cleaned. Extremely well."

John sighed in an attempt to quell his rising agitation. The doctor rested his elbow against the ledge of the window on the door and propped his chin in his hand, as a yawn came out of him. Sherlock's brows creased in response and in a darker tone of nothing less than disgust the detective criticized him, "Has your banal lifestyle really left you so tired, John? We are on the brink of something..." There was a small hesitation then in the man's voice, which softly trailed off, only to harshly come back in an agonizingly enticing bite, as he whispered, "Something big."

The doctor's eyes rolled and he lifted his head from his hand, as he gestured a flat palm at the detective, in a querulous retort, "Then please would you care to enlighten me? I fail to follow this vague logic of yours. What happened back there in that alley?"

Sherlock smiled coyly at John, his hands wringing with delight, and he silently mouthed his last response, "Something big."

"Stop that!" John huffed, folding his arms and turning his body entirely away from his so-called friend. With his gaze watching the lamp posts and streets signs whiz by out the window of the cab, the doctor muttered in irritation, "I should be at home, with Mary."

"Then go home, John." Came the insidious remark, so casually purred from across the backseat of the vehicle. John was so incensed by the beguiling provocation that his head whipped back around, the deep blue of his mottled eyes dark and narrowed with suspicion and rage. The other man was reclined, one leg crossed neatly over the other, head tipped downward so that his bemused smirk was all that more aggravating and devious. Sherlock added insult-to-injury as he finished, "but you won't."

"I damn well should." the doctor tried to insist, realizing after the words had left his mouth that he was already submitting. An all-to-real feeling of dread welled in the pit of his stomach. Somehow he just couldn't say no to Sherlock.

There was a moment of silence that finally the consulting detective broke. He reached his gloved hand across the cab and his hand came to rest on the soldier's knee, just below the injury. There was a squeeze from his finger tips that John was sure the man intended to be reassuring. It was instead uncomfortable and so John unfolded his arms to swat the touch away, only making the detective's devious smirk grow more amused. "You know by now, surely, that there is more to this death than Scotland Yard has interest in."
"You wouldn't be interested to get involved if there wasn't." John succinctly reminded the other that he wasn't stupid.

Sherlock tipped his head in recognition and acceptance of the remark and the subtle nuance that had accompanied it. The man then explained, "The interest I am finding regarding it is only growing. The body that we saw earlier had its throat torn open, not cut, and it was very efficiently drained of blood, not fluids but the blood specifically. It is an odd occurrence if it only happened once but the man currently residing at the morgue at St. Bart’s is not the first. I have had Molly's help in monitoring for similar corpses but she is the only one—no one else within the city would cooperate."

John couldn't help himself. "And with your popularity? I am astonished."

The sarcasm had not gone unnoticed and Sherlock's gaze raked over his face. The smile faded to that particular purse of the lips which the doctor had been reminded of earlier—making the pit of his stomach pang with something else that both enticed and bothered John. "They don't like how I examine the bodies." Sherlock stated the obvious fact and then moved on, as though there had not been a hitch in his monologue. "The other was five days ago. A woman found washed up on the shores of the Thames. Suicide—her wrists were slashed and in the pocket of her jeans was her own note. Open and shut as far as Lestrade’s idiots are concerned."

"But you see more, I suppose." John curtly finished, his peevish remark only there to cover for the fact that his interest in the cases was gaining traction.

"Molly did in actuality and then she contacted me." Sherlock very selflessly admitted. He propelled forward, commandingly going into great length as to what the first body had displayed. Drained just the same as the man they had examined prior the middle-aged woman's corpse showed even less explanation for it. John could agree that it was indeed unusual. In the man's case he could have been hung to drain, given the extensive trauma to the neck, but still it would have taken a modest amount of time and the body should have displayed signs of post or pre-mortem binding. How else would you relieve one of their blood? He knew that embalmer's removed the blood to prepare a body after death by suctioning, but as Sherlock reiterated to him, they replaced it with a disinfecting fluid. No one wants to see their loved one as a shriveled body in a casket.

"So you think this is a serial thing? That someone's doing this to these bodies and is choosing convenient targets to not draw attention to themselves?" The last was more of a statement or summary of Sherlock's monologue but the detective did not seem to adamantly agree with it.

The other man had slowly nodded his head yes, yet there had been something distant about his averted gaze that hallmarked his escape into deep thought, as though he were still considering. What is it that had entwined the detective so? Curiosity had definitely caught this cat and John wasn't sure he knew exactly why. Sherlock wasn't one to traipse into an investigation without warrant—without the prospect of a puzzle and there did not seem to be something to puzzling about these two murders. The deaths themselves were simple enough. Although it all was fairly reminiscent of ‘The Lady in Pink’, as though this was a calling for attention. Perhaps another so called bored genius was calling on Sherlock to notice. Perhaps that was lure enough, even if John couldn't see it.

Yet what had happened in the alleyway? Sherlock had been skirting around his inquiries deftly, always choosing to redirect instead of answer. Surely that implied that he was hiding something. Sherlock groaned a heavy sigh, as he rubbed both his temples with his gloved hands, and rudely blustered at the doctor, "Out with it, John. Watching you think is dreadfully painful."

The urge to clock the man was almost too strong to resist. John still obeyed and through grit teeth he demanded to know, "What was it in the alley?"
Sherlock was quiet. Contemplative, gaze centered out the window, his hand rubbing his mouth now as he thought. Finally in a distracted tone he repeated. "Some thing."
The crunch of gravel, damp with the malodorous combination of rotting garbage and human refuse, seemed amplified against the bleak brick walls of the ally, as the dark figure stood with eyes intensely fixed on the large dumpster that occupied the space near where he had observed the two men investigating a few minutes earlier. The dankness of the location, the architecture, even the smells, if Louis silenced the humming of his amplified awareness he could almost imagine this was a street in any of the great American coastal cities, of which he normally haunted. The dumpster was smaller and the streets narrower, he thought as he straightened. Bobbing his head, he moved to see if there was anything else his unnaturally acute vision had missed. The pale creature instinctively raised a hand and brushed away the stray ebony strands that swept across his face. Another scan of the ally reveled nothing outside what the handsome and eager genius had already discovered for himself and so graciously shared with his conflicted partner.

Louis was intrigued. It was hard not to be when watching the two men interacting. That, on its own was rather entertaining but Louis also felt an uncomfortable familiarity in the way the two bantered and reacted to one another. That undertone of a complicated hurt and uncertainty which was undermined by a deeply rooted in a strange need for one another.

The vampire turned back towards the entrance of the ally, satisfied that he had observed all he could, and contemplated if he should hail a taxi back to the flat. He knew the two men were on route back to the detective’s beloved Baker Street via the quaint little cars and bustling streets that made up London, but he could take a faster route by utilizing his supernatural speed and agility. Long past feeling guilty about the gifts this immortal life gave him, he used them now and again, as required. He preferred to experience things in their entirety and at the pace the natural world moved. He rarely felt the desire to throw himself, as fast as possible, through the world with all the supernatural powers and god-like abilities, which only flourished with the passing of time. The consulting detective and his begrudging companion wasted little time searching out clues in this latest mystery, yet it was apparent that the doctor was getting ready to escape the night’s escapades when the two departed and the taxi was hailed.

“They are a delicious pair, Louis.” There was a satin tone in the voice of his maker, as Lestat stepped towards his raven-haired fledgling. The tone bore admiration and a hint of a predatory purr, of which Louis was not quite sure was directed at him or for the two young men.

The truth was a bit of both.

“Truly a surprise, once again, Lestat. Have you been following long or were you just happening by?” Louis question airily. He cast a quick glance at the blond, eyebrow arching appreciatively at the striking figure, before he turned and walked towards the street.
Lestat watched the younger vampire with a well-kept poker face before drawing in a breath and matching pace. The two men made their way out of the putrid London ally-way, back into the amber glow of the quiet street. The elder vampire had seen the look that flashed in those fathomless jade depths before, Louis approved of his change in fashion since the airport and that Louis had done his best not to show it, made it all the more endearing to Lestat. He knew he was a wicked and troublesome creature to love and there was no doubt that Louis felt that, and a great many other feelings, for him. He needed that love desperately, that much he knew now about himself. After endless escapades that had left him teetering on the brink of absolution and utter oblivion, it had been Louis who was always a voice in that darkness that drew him back from the abyss.

Lestat considered himself a simple creature. Challenge him with what could not be done and he would rise to the occasion, willing to burn down the world in order to prove otherwise. He loved with every fiber in his unnatural and marblesque being, and would do anything to protect and save, those few who were worthy of that love and unrelenting loyalty. There was a raging storm that screamed and fought and roared inside him, full of loss, hope, and a desperate and painful need, yet one touch from his Louis and for a little while, the storm would quiet. Louis was the lighthouse that guided him home, had stayed by and tended to him through these bouts of insanity. Once in a great while, Lestat knew that he served that same purpose in kind for his fledgling.

Louis' steps had halted halfway down the block from the ally. Intense eyes met his own, this time with a noticeable look of mild concern, “Lestat?”

“Hm?” There was a pause and suddenly the elder vampire realized he hadn't answered the question that had been posed minutes ago. He had been distracted, admiring Louis, and decided that no excuse was better than the truth, “I apologize, mon cher. I was lost in thoughts of you, I'm afraid. What was the question? Ah, it doesn't matter! Shall I whisk us away to my penthouse or are you looking to follow your little pets home?”

Louis was not pleased with the suggestion, but he was nevertheless amused that the blond never ceased trying to lavish him with his money and power. Normally he would outright refuse the offer, knowing that giving an inch to the other vampire usually meant that you lost a mile, however, on this occasion Louis was more than a little curious about the blonde’s intentions. Considering his options carefully the fledgling finally accepted his elder's proposal, on the condition that the other understood that he would return to his own humble accommodations on Baker Street before dawn.

The smile of Lestat's face was indescribable—like a child's lighting up with overwhelmed glee—far less predatory than Louis was accustomed to. The inch given, predictably Lestat took a foot, and swung an affectionate arm about his shoulders, drawing their two bodies close together, as they continued to saunter down the meagrely populated streets of London.

The close contact was both desirable and uncomfortable for the younger vampire. Louis was cautious with his maker, seeing the man had proved his voracious appetite for his company in the past and the dark haired vampire wished not to entice the other for more demonstration of this fact. Louis hoped to give the other enough attention to garner from his interactions what exactly his plans were here in the city. Lestat's boredom was the only thing that Louis had come to fear more than the man's tendency to devour his time, company, and belongings. The blond would go to great means to interfere with Louis' desires and arrangements if only to appease his own lust for entertainment and company. His own intentions in London regarding the detective from Baker Street was not something that Louis wished his maker to meddle with and he found it unusual to even consider that the world's first consulting detective would not intrigue the other.

With his maker’s arm about his shoulders and their steps paced in time with one another, they walked down the street, the whisking away to the penthouse somewhat forgotten now that they were
enjoying the proximity. Louis's eye were downcast, watching the contrast of leather with worn canvas converse runners on his own feet, the two of them together working as naturally as Lestat had always fancied they should.

There were times, Louis would admit, that it felt as though the two of them could not be without the other, as though they were working parts that made a whole, with a function and a purpose. There were other times, in far greater number, where the gears seemed to grind, whine, and hiss, leading to a breakdown that would put the two of them on hold, sometimes for decades. The gap between them recently had not been as long, but felt just as painfully raw and unhealed as any of the separations started out like.

It was hard for Louis to accept Lestat's forget-and-move-on strategy for it did not seem to oil the gears in the manner that his maker perceived. Not in his mind. Louis wanted that apology, wanted that verbal understanding that there had been wrong between them, and that there would be desire in the future to prevent such circumstances from reoccurring. Yet in his current predicament, he seen no alternative to allowing the other to slip back in, without the hesitation his own mind desired for that reconciliation. He wanted to know what Lestat was up to and it would only serve to push the other away if he created friction against his maker's wants and needs, which in turn could end disastrously for the detective on Baker Street.

"The penthouse this once couldn't hurt." Louis finally suggested, making the devilish grin on the blond's lips grow, the pinkish hue from the chapstick that was there to add some color to the pale mouth, glistened in the warm glow of the streets lamp light, as the arm about his neck became a degree tighter in appreciation.

"Seeing as you have relinquished this round of the game to me, then I shall do the noble thing and insist we run your errand first." Lestat's smile broadened at the mildly vexed look that was directed at him from beneath the slightly drawn brows.

The blond stopped them both, suddenly, in their casual journey down the London side-walk and raising a doe-skinned black-leather hand he gently grazed his fingers along the chiseled slope of Louis cheek, brushing a sweep of the ebony strands that had escaped the conservative tie of his lover hair. He felt the clench of the jaw beneath his gloved fingers and saw the uncertainty that clouded over those dark eyes, but he also knew that Louis would and had to eventually forgive their last bad 'break-up'. There was nothing he could do about what had been done, as always, hindsight was 20/20. Louis was here, had agreed to this simple whim of his and that, in itself, showed he was working his way back into the others good graces.

Lestat's arm wrapped perfectly around Louis' back as he pulled their bodies close together in a smooth motion, pressing his lips to the other vampires' in a kiss that was neither demanding or fleeting. It started as an abrupt apology, softening quickly to a confession, as their lips mingled together for that long moment. Louis' body was tense in his grip. Lestat wanted to disarm him and draw him in. The tang of his own blood rose in his mouth, deepening the kiss as he parted his lips in an intimate submission, offering his lover the very thing which forever bound them. He would give Louis the world. It was a far better distraction then pondering heaven and hell, dancing with Devils and witches, or toying with the Talamasca. It didn't matter really, not right now.

After a hard day breaching the laws of the mortal world, sometimes you just wanted to press your body against a lovers and know that in all the absolution of time, you weren't alone right now. Right in that moment. Someone was there... The tense muscles in Louis had relaxed a little as he pulled his scarlet-stained lips back and with the swipe of his tongue, a look of cat-like enjoyment spread across his face. Lestat knew the look of tentative surrender and knew the hand he must play if he wanted to continue in this seduction. His grip tightened on the slender body pressed against his and slipping a
hand up the lithe back beneath the leather jacket, he craned his head against the others throat and gently tugged at the ear of the other with a playful nip.

“Hold on.” Lestat’s lips touched the pale length of throat with the whispered command, as they were suddenly ascended with a soft snap, air rushing and clothing ruffled in the gusts of cold wind that circled around them. The chill would have been painful to any mortal but was little more than an annoyance to either of the two creatures that hovered in a slow rotation just above the rooftops of the nearby buildings and the ally from whence they had come. The movement made Louis think of jewelry box dancers and jewelry box dancers reminded him of things best left in the past.

“Lestat...” the words died on his lips with the rush and roar of wind howling in his ears as they were swept away by the will of his makers other-worldly powers.

“Shut up, Louis!” Lestat's voice hollered over the cascade of sound, adding with a rumbling chuckle, “I promise I'll behave, mon cher. I wouldn't want to do anything to change your mind!” There was a clench of strong fingers in a premeditated strike to a few of the spots so well charted by his lover over the course of years.

When the feet of the immortals touched down in a dark corner just off Baker Street. The Taxi with the flats primary occupants, was just skidding to a stop on the icy street in front of the black door. A small white car blared its horn at the Taxi's sudden attempt at breaking given the current road conditions, before skirting around and disappearing into the night. The back door of the Taxi nearest to the flat, swung open and the tall dark figure of the infamous consulting-detective emerged in a smooth motion. He straightened his coat in a very proper fashion and scanned the block around him, before turning back towards the car. The other occupant slid towards the open door only to grab the handle rather than step out.

“I can only assume you have changed your mind and are returning to your domestic bliss,” the doctor felt the precision scan of his friends calculating gaze and paused, awaiting the analysis. “By the look of resolution and mild anxiety on your face, anyhow. Oh don't worry, John.” Sherlock glanced down at his watch unnecessarily in an action intended to patronize the other man, as he finished, “You'll be back home before curfew.”

The brunet stepped back from the clearance of the door as the doctor tightened his grip and slammed it shut, earning him a reproachful grimace from the driver of the cab. “Excellent then, best be off.” The words were muffled by the door but Sherlock didn't need to be a genius to note the peevish and agitated body language of the other man. The slam of the door was the hard period at the end of their evening.

Sherlock had expected this, despite the disappointment that swelled up in him as a consequence. He turned around to face the flat, drawing up the collar of his coat with the shrug of his shoulders. The sweep of dark curls across his brow was stirred by the breeze as the Taxi whisked away and the glint of variscite eyes turned to look down the street a second time. He observed two men emerge from around the corner at the end of the block, joining a few others whom were out, bustling down the sidewalk. The streets were calmer now.

The same creeping feeling from the ally began to prickle at the back of his neck, descending over him, similar to how long-surviving prey animals could sense the predators that frequently stalked them. It was clearly not the first time Sherlock had felt watched by someone whom he was quite certain wished him harm in some fashion, but outside the ally, this was the only other time he had ever felt a particular unnerving uncertainty about it.

He turned his head to look down the opposite side of the street and was beginning to catalog each of the figures present, when the door of his flat swung open. The back of Inspector Lestrade’s head
appeared as he backed out of the door with the short but commanding form of Mrs. Hudson hot on his heels.

“Have ‘em ring me when he gets in then, please.” the inspector instructed.

Looking down at the step to be sure of his footing the man turned away. The elderly land lady pushed to close the gap after him, worried by the escaping heat from within, as she nodded her consent at the request, replying, “Of course, dear. He and John have gone out on a little jaunt. Might be a late one with them having things to talk about and all.” The implication in her tone caused the spectating Sherlock to clear his throat, having been distracted from his initial task. Lestrades face turned to look at the detectives with an equal blend of surprise and relief.

“No need, Mrs. Hudson.” Sherlock concluded, receiving a warm smile of understanding from the woman before she welcomed his return and bade both gentlemen good night.

The door to the flat closed and Lestrade leaned back against the wrought iron railing beside the buildings entrance. He hiked up the collar of his long wool jacket, to protect his neck from the chill on the slight breeze that blew caressingly from the north, and then reached into a pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He pulled one out for himself, sticking it between his lips before he directed the pack toward the other man. The detective’s cold gaze darted down to the half empty pack and then back up to the inspector, before his thin fingers reached out to pluck a stick of tobacco out for himself. Lestrade pocketed the pack and retrieved his lighter, cupping his hands about his mouth as he flicked it for a spark. His cheeks drew in with his breaths, as it lit, and he puffed out his first bit of smoke before passing it off. Sherlock lit his own smoke, drawing in a long drag that he let settle inside his lungs for a long moment, before releasing it.

The last of his addicting vices, the detective savored the flavor and aroma of the cheap tobacco, his mind picking out the subtle additives one by one, the spongy filter, and even the quality of the leaves as he did so. John had been a crucial aid in quitting the habit, which at the time had been both endearing and irascibly infuriating, especially in times when he needed the mental boost that the nicotine always provided. It was that stepping stone to a sharper intellect which had been so much more aggravating to deny himself, than it had been the addictive properties of the tobacco. The flavor wasn’t half bad either. It reminded him of filching smokes off of Mycroft when he was too young to be indulging in such activities.

Lestrade’s dark eyes were on him, watching, in a small way trying to assess, to read him—failing miserably but attempting nonetheless. His silvered crop was short and took on the warmer coloring of the street lamps that illuminated the street around them. Even though his face was cast with shadow, those eyes were still alert and the muscles around his mouth seemed tensed, even as he pulled on the cigarette. It wasn’t hard to assess the inspector—he was a simple man, a good man.

“Busy?” the inspector finally asked. The tone of his voice sounded casual, yet the detective knew that he was fishing. Sherlock, however, was not quite prepared for what the other man asked next. “John’s left ya’ again, huh? Run on home to the misses?”

The detective’s lips pressed into a thin line on instinct and to combat the sudden reflexive emotional reaction he shoved the cigarette back between them and took a long hard drag. The inspector’s eyes never left his face, still watching, and after he had released the deep inhalation of the smoke, Sherlock snapped back brusquely with a defensive spur. “Very astute deduction, Lestrade, your skills have improved considerably I see.”

“Molly Hooper told me you were out looking at that crime scene.” The man stated bluntly, the slander tossed at him deflected with ease, like the cigarette he flicked the ash from.
Sherlock rolled his eyes while he flicked the ash from his own smoke and sharply finished for the inspector, “And you want to know what I’ve found.” It was not a question. He took another drag on the smoke, narrowing his eyes at the other man across from him.

“You found something then?” the man’s use of the English language always grating and intolerable, Lestrade questioned, his eyes suddenly flashing with a spark that Sherlock thought might be something like hope or maybe just interest.

Sherlock’s brows drew together as he let out the smoke from his lungs. He loathed admitting openly that he had not, even if the circumstances that caused this were out of his realm of control, and so he irritably remarked, “You should know as well as I do, Inspector, that your bumbling idiots at Scotland Yard made sure that was an impossibility.” Lestrade’s shoulders sank with physical disappointment and he clucked his tongue against his cheek in a derisive manner that substituted a curse. Never one to allow another’s action to prevent honesty the detective added, “If there had been any evidence, their rummaging destroyed it, however, one thing was certainly clear. The crime was not committed in that alley.”

Those dark eyes seemed to relax with that confirmation. Still the man voiced the obvious opinion regardless. “So it was dumped then, was it?”

“I have already stated that fact, have I not?” Sherlock replied, coldly, earning him a sharp glare from the Inspector. Not one to dwell on social graces, the detective quickly moved on, informing the inspector, “Going by the police report and autopsy, which both confirm the time of death, the man was murdered somewhere within a 15-18 block radius of that alley. Someplace that could be sealed from outside intrusion. The body was well drained of blood, which would have taken time, a means of drainage, and a secluded environment to do it in. Aside from what your boys messed up on the recovery of the body the victim was significantly clean, even though the trauma was extensive. This leads me to believe that your perpetrator was not some kind of mob-mentality hitman, simply taking out a target or torturing a loose end. The wound was torn open but I think that you will find that Molly Hooper will agree with my assessment, and lean towards concluding that it was post-mortom. If it was post mortom then how was he killed, drained, and kept so clean?”

Lestrade’s silver brows had risen over his dark eyes as the information thrown out to him in rapid succession sunk in. “So, you’re sayin’ then that it wasn’t his own that did it…?”

“I’m saying that you need to find that crime scene.” Sherlock concluded for the inspector, frustrated with the man’s inability to think on his own and audibly.

Lestrade’s mouth quirked in a comical manner that Sherlock, quite honestly, could not interpret, before the smoke was brought to his mouth again. Deep breath in, long breath out, and then the dark eyes left the sidewalk and drifted back up to the detective’s face, where they lingered, again openly searching, attempting to assess. Failure of this tactic which the inspector insisted on employing was predictable and yet once more Sherlock was unable to expect the next question. “That’s why you’re sour then, isn’t it?” he suggested, fishing, much more direct than the first attempt earlier. “John had scuttled home instead of helping you to find—”

“This has nothing to do with John.” Sherlock had all but barked that last statement at the inspector, his brows knit and his eyes alight with obvious agitation. His full lips pressed into a thin line as he flicked the smoke to the cement and extinguished it underfoot, his eyes following it to the ground.

It never ceased to amaze the detective the lengths to which normal people would go to in order to delve into and understand all the frivolous aspects of another person. His relationship with John was of no concern to those around him, no one other than John himself—and quite possibly Mary, seeing the two of them meant to be married and John would never engage in that kind of commitment
unless he was content with full loyalty, disclosure, and trust from the individual in question. Yet many of the people he might consider to be more than a casual acquaintance seemed intent on accessing this personal information from the both of them, as though it was there’s for the taking, simply something that should be divulged without forethought. It was infuriating.

If the consulting-detective was perfectly honest with himself, he would admit that he himself was not perfectly crystal clear on all the idiosyncrasies of this new chapter to their relationship, let alone where John stood. John was generally an open book, a man that he could read in an instant, and if there interactions tonight were a testament to anything it was to the fact that this had changed between them. Sherlock couldn’t be sure of the exact reason for this either. All he knew was that when he had been ripping back the timbre and debris from that bonfire, smoke choking his lungs and fire scorching his hands and face, all he could think about was the man within it—a panic and a shock consuming him when he considered the removal of John from this world and from his life.

Why had John been targeted? To get to him. It had worked, terrifyingly so. In that moment at the fire he had not assessed, could draw no conclusions, for his sole focus had been pulling the doctor free from harm. It left him feeling vulnerable…and having others pry into what he had yet to conclude was monstrously irritating.

His response was defensive and peevish, a snarled retaliation of, “I do not need John to search for a crime scene. We agreed to part ways and I have returned to collect a few essentials.”

“You’re going out then? Tonight yet?” Lestrade asked with a ridiculous expression of astonishment on his face. Daftly he added, “Without John?”

“Oh, for God’s sake I can manage on my own, Lestrade! I have no need of a nursemaid.” Sherlock hissed at the inspector. All his vehemence rewarded with a chuckle.

“You’re nuts.” Lestrade stated with a shake of his head, the quirk at the corner of his mouth stretched just a little further, before he puckered to suck one last drag that finished his smoke off. “That part of London, on a Friday night?”

“I do not fear for my safety and if you do, Inspector, than you are welcome to accompany me.” The detective snapped contemptuously, narrowing his pale cold gaze on the other man that was openly scrutinizing him.

Lestrade shook his head again, pursed his lips, and chuckled, “Not a chance in hell, mate. I’m going home to sit in my pants and watch telly. Maybe have a brew too.”

“Get on with it then. I have work to do.” In a muted huff he strode past the ignorant inspector and into his flat beyond, slamming the door to 221B behind himself. It was a comforting barrier to have between the prying questions and his own jumbled thoughts and emotions.

As he marched up the steps to his flat he declined the stuttered offer of tea from Mrs. Hudson, whose face was flushed with the telltale signs of an eavesdropper. He came through the open doorway into the silent sitting room of his flat and promptly fell back onto the long worn leather couch, pushing the familiar union jack throw pillow under his head and wrapping his coat about himself. The blue scarf he favored was bundled about his chin and mouth, as he folded his arms over his chest. He kept his fingers knotted in fists, denying himself the steeple he used for deep thinking. He did not want to think, to dwell any longer on the thoughts raging uninhibited within his cranium.

Unaccustomed to this distracting engagement with his own thoughts and rampant emotions Sherlock laid there on the couch for a long time, staring at the window that over looked Baker Street beyond. Slowly he cleared his head, messy with tedious half-thoughts, wishes, fantasies, facts, and memories,
moving all of them into little packets, attempting to create a loose semblance of order.

He decided quickly that he was not going to think anymore of John, or John and Mary, or about the tension that seemed to linger between the two men—that was apparently palpable to those that knew them, as what he would consider marginally. He cleared that packet away, unsolved and still raw. The next to be put aside was the unfortunate man in St. Bart’s morgue and the older woman, whose deaths appeared to circumstantially be connected. Unsolved and still very intriguing. He focused instead on that smallest bundle, those thoughts that festered with the lingering sensation that had caused his brain to stop, brought his senses to full alertness, and left the hairs of the back of his neck raised.

There had been precisely eight times in Sherlock’s adult life, thus far, of which he had felt and experienced many of the physical responses to the fight-or-flight-reaction that fear stimulated. The elevated heart-rate, constriction of chest muscles causing shallow breathing, crispness of vision due to dilation of pupils and of course the pilomotor reflex of goose pimples, among other less-notable reactions. It was rare that the consulting detective was surprised and so much rarer that he landed himself in a scenario where he was likely to encounter that particular set of circumstances.

Closing his eyes tightly he began to assemble the components of the alley way piece by piece in a clarity that allowed him to review the scene with startlingly accuracy. The place where they found the body left nothing new to be discovered, it was the path the body took that he needed to determine.

He was in the ally, perched and running his gloved fingers along the cracked and dirty concrete.

The abnormal feeling began to wash over him and he turned with a flourish of coat and rose. Looking at the rooftops in the darkness of the ally, he saw only the warm glowing fog of the low cloud cover, and around him there was nothing but absolute stillness. Glancing over the scene of the ally constructed in his mind, there was nothing disturbed in the close radius that would hint to a path of travel outside of the primary entrance. Walking towards the dumpster he approached the still impression of John who had stood near the garbage container. He purposely whisked the figure away with a physical sweep of his hand in the empty flat and back in the ally he plunged forward, with his head down as he focused on the details he recalled from the container.

A well of frustration was bubbling up inside him as he stomped his foot, kicking the arm of the sofa roughly, as his body tense as he let out a deep breath. Sliding into a sitting position he tossed his head into his hands and ruffled them through his dark hair. Elbows came to rest on his knees as he drew in a breath through his teeth.

“Think, Sherlock, what are you missing?” He spoke allowed to himself in the room. Eyes that looked down at the unremarkable carpet closed and he brought the ally rushing back around him out of the blackness.

There were no discernible footprints after the police had carelessly trampled any possible trace of evidence, no blacked or scarlet-stained trail to follow, and the garbage in the small street had all been ransacked and disturbed by the foolish weapons search undertook by the attending beat cops. They did not stop to think that there might not have been a weapon to hide, complete conjecture, based on the wound itself. The more Sherlock thought about the damage done to the man’s throat, the more he was certain it had been done, literally, by hand.

He focused back on the location where the body was found and turned his attention to the side of the building closest. Six small windows appeared about twenty-feet down its side and in varying states of detail to his minds-eye. The closest and most likely, he suspected was unlikely to be opened and if it had been able to, it appeared to have not been disturbed recently. Not to mention, based on the age
and style of factory construction, there was probably no common or easy access. The other building
wouldn't have allowed for that angle of drop and the body didn't exhibit any of the physical crush
injuries of someone thrown from a window or roof when he had observed it earlier that night.

That left only the entrance from the ally that they had come through and there was nothing left of
what may have been evidence. After all, the only other possibility wasn't likely enough to pursue
based on the odds. It was not as if someone could have just placed the body there and then ascended
into the sky. Not dropped the body but actually placed it down and then just vanished. That was as
likely as the body just appearing of its own volition, which was ridiculous.

“Clothing.” The word left Sherlock’s lips as his eyes snapped open and he sprung up from the chair
then sat down immediately, tossing his head back and bumping it with a loud thud against the
jacquard printed wall behind him. “Body was too clean, what idiot would leave something on the
clothing.”

The wide lips pursed and brow knit as he slowly sank back into the blackness and back to standing
at the drop-site, looking towards the entrance to the ally. He turned his minds-eye back to the roofs of
the buildings as he thought on the unease that he had experienced. When he had felt it, it had come
over him quite suddenly, like a small dart shot directly into his amygdala and his immediate reaction
was to freeze. It was different, sharp, focused and it had produced a high-pitched squeal in his mind
like a bank-vault alarm being set off.

The detective had felt that alarm go off before but was recounting his previous moments of fear and
they relieved nothing. The closest moment of what he considered irrational fear was during his and
John’s adventure with the great 'Hound of Baskerville' and the drug induced horror the make-believe
demon dog produced.

This alarm though, was something else, like when he and John had gotten too heavy into the
bourbon one evening and questions about his past had began to come up. Questions with answers
and information he was not in the habit of sharing or interested in having others know. There was a
spark in the back of Sherlock’s mind, as he began to associate with the other times he had 'heard' that
alarm and recalled sharply the training he had self-administered to develop a resistance to sodium
pentothal and made the glaring miscalculation of asking Mrs.Hudson to ask him questions, leading to
many of the reasons why it was imperative the motherly land-lady never fall into the wrong hands.

“Who on earth could hack someone’s mind?!?” his hands ruffled his hair in a sudden check to ensure
that there were no unknown bumps or tender spots that would indicate any sort of physical tampering
with his person.

The soft and familiar creak of the steps leading up to his flat alerted Sherlock that Mrs. Hudson was
ascending, as a soft rap on his only partially closed door revealed the older lady in her conservative
evening wear.

“Still up, Mrs. Hudson?” Sherlock sat up a little straighter as the land lady smiled tiredly at him, two
cups of tea in her hands as she came in and took a seat on the sofa next to him. He took the teacup
without hesitation from her as she set hers down on the small coffee table in front of them for a
moment to run her hands down the front of her legs.

“Oh heavens, I got so used to it being dead quiet with you gone that I'd almost forgot how much I
missed hearing you racing around at night.” She chuckled with warmth in her tone, despite the
exhaustion in her voice. “Not that it's keeping me up.” She added quickly, picking up her cup.

“Just I could hear you arguing with yourself a bit and figured you'd like a cup of tea is all. I was up
to make myself a night cap anyhow.” A smile pursed the soft rose lips of the older woman as
Sherlock caught the whiff of scotch on the steam that wafted over from the land lady’s tea cap.

“Indeed.” Sherlock answered simply, taking up his own cup and taking a draw from the perfectly steeped liquid within. They sat there for a while in silence, sipping tea and Sherlock felt his calm returning as he pondered the obscene notion of someone hacking into his mind from a distance. Then he began to consider from where that dart of fear had emanated from.

“Well, off to bed then.” Mrs. Hudson stated suddenly as she rose from the sofa, gathering up her cup and offered to take Sherlock’s. Looking down to realize he must have been sipping his tea longer then he thought, he finished the last mouthful and handed the fine china cup to the delicate hands of Mrs. Hudson. He watching her disappear out the door and as she left she called back, “Have a good night, Sherlock.”

He gave her a slight smile in return as she closed the door behind her. It was an odd thing to have happened but he didn't waste much time contemplating the incident with such matters at hand.

The clock on his wall notified him that it was quarter past midnight. The only piece of evidence he had was the body on the cold slab at St. Bart's, he had a pulling need to return to the drop-site and scale the rooftop of the two buildings nearby, hoping to find them less ransacked then the ally had been. That was, if Scotland Yard had even bothered to check the roof-tops. Didn't seem likely without any obvious signs of the body having been dropped.

Mind made up and with the fresh rush of caffeine in his bloodstream, Sherlock snatched the gloves from the side table, stuffing them into his pocket, as he rushed around and snatched up a few other essential gadgets from the cluttered flat. He was down the stairs in less than a few minutes and walking briskly down the sidewalk to the cab that was just coming to a halt a few flats down from his own with a fair it was delivering.
The hand that gripped his wrist so ardently thrust him forward, his face nearly slamming into the collar of Sherlock's coat, as a quick hissed question met his ear, "Did you feel it?" John obediently answered, shaking his head no, and slowly the other man pulled back, only enough for their eyes to meet. It was a calculating sweep of his face, John just didn't know what it was that the detective was
John had gone about the next day half himself, puttering about the medical office in a slight daze, mechanically moving through his tasks, his patients, and his thoughts. Mary was kind enough to stop him around three o’clock and point this out. Her concern was quickly brushed off with an impatient, “Fine. I’m really just fine.”

When he had returned to his desk there was a hot mug of coffee waiting for him and a little note that read, Thought you needed a pick me up. The doctor let out a heavy sigh, sitting down in his chair behind the desk and wrapped his hands about the plain white mug, filled with the aromatic brew. That was Mary. Always looking out for him, always mindful, always there.

The cup was hot to the touch, the steam rising from the dark liquid inside evidence enough. The man pursed his lips and found that his teeth were clenched. He sighed again, took a cleansing breath, in-out, and sat back in his chair. He rested his right elbow on the padded arm, his palm caught his chin, and he sat there a moment, his first finger keeping time against his temple with the ticking of the clock on the wall. He tried to think of work.

The day had been uneventful—as usual. His patients were all fine—as usual. Yet he had been distracted, fumbling over his words, and plainly bored. One elderly lady had stopped to make this apparent to him, having been offended by his lack of interest in the varicose veins around her knees. His mind had been wanting to stray, to think back to that alleyway and to 221B Baker Street—which he didn’t like. Not in the least.

Why was that…?

Trying to focus only seemed to make the doctor more abstracted. It was like his mind was being pulled in two different directions, both of which the man himself was not content to allow. Now, he was just exhausted. He could feel it. His shoulders were heavy, the wound on his left aching. His temples throbbed, his jaw hurt, and his legs screamed for movement, action, something! His eyes drifted from the hands that seemed to defy time to the cup of coffee on his desk, with the little note from Mary. He didn’t need coffee. His mind was tired of running around in circles.

If he were honest with himself, John was pretty certain that he would have to admit that his brain had been running away to prevent an undesired epiphany. He did not want to think about Sherlock, or the alley, or 221B—because all of those things had brought back emotions, sensibilities, and sensations that he had long since managed to bury.

Well, now, there’s more than one thing that’s been unburied, isn’t there? The doctor felt his teeth gnash into the inside of his bottom lip, as he considered the thought that had fired in his brain like a loaded gun. The shot had hit its mark, alright, and he was none to pleased about it.

When Sherlock had jumped off that building the bloody idiot had thought, truly believed, that what he was doing had been the right thing and just maybe it was—for London, for the people Moriarty’s criminal web victimized—but it sure as hell had not been for John. There, he thought, it’s been said.
But admitting it to himself was not really the same as admitting it to his friend, now was it?

John sighed and deciding that just maybe he did need the pick-me-up he snatched the mug of coffee and took a long slurp. The bitter taste hit his palette and he grimaced. Tea would have been preferable.

“Told’cha you needed something.” Came the sweetly sassed remark from Mary. His eyes darted to the smiling face of the woman, who came into the small office, discreetly turning to close the door behind her.

“Mm-yes, thank you.” John responded, putting the cup back down on the desk. At least she had seen him try it, maybe he could get away without finishing the awful brew that the nurses insisted on concocting in the staff kitchen.

The blond woman slipped over to his desk and settled herself into one of the chairs on the opposite side from the man she was engaged to, as though she were one of his patients seeking a consultation. Her apple cheeks were pinked slightly, her parted lips glossed with something sparkly, and her large eyes framed in black were wide, intent, and searching John. Realizing he was about to get questioned the doctor felt his entire body tense, the throb between his temples instantly intensifying, much to his chagrin.

“Look, John, it isn’t like I’m the only one who noticed that you were less than ‘here’ today.” She started, none to gentle about plodding right damn into it with him. “But you can talk to me about it, if you want to. If you don’t, that’s fine.”

John felt a little confused, by this. “So…?”

“All I’m saying is, Sherlock being back has put you off. That’s fine. The man faked his own death and has now bounced back into your life—”

“Our life.” He suddenly blurted.

“Our lives.” The blond corrected, her apple cheeks pinking a little bit more as a generous and warm smile spread across her mouth. “It’s okay to be confused about it all. Take your time and allow yourself to adjust to it. And I’m here if you need me to listen.”

John sighed again, not realizing he’d been holding it in and clenching his molars again. He gave his face a cleansing rub with his palms as he sat straight up. “I’m fine, really. Just fine.”

“No,” she corrected him brusquely, much to his surprise. “You’re not, but you’ll get there.”

Fighting the sudden feeling of control he felt her blanketing him under, the doctor snapped, “Not now, Mary. Please…” he complained, “We can talk about it later tonight, okay? Not now.”

Bewilderingly she sat upright in her own chair and flashed him a marvellously comical grin that stretched to her ears and lit the sapphire color of her eyes, as she announced, “I won’t be home tonight. Janine and I have decided that it’s high time we go out again. Apparently, she has a new café she’s been dyeing to take me to that makes a damn good double chocolate cake.”

“You’re going out tonight?” John repeated, lamely.

Mary gave him a wink as she stood. She reached across the desk and patted his cheek lovingly, as she playfully sassed her fiancé, “It is allowed, dear.”

John pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes at her. He did not appreciate her teasing mood just then
and she was completely aware of it. The woman stepped back and as she turned to leave, she called to him over her shoulder, “You should go out again too. Last night didn’t seem to improve your mood any, another shot wouldn’t hurt.”

“I’m watching telly tonight.” John stubbornly shot back, resisting the strong urge to cross his arms over his chest, knowing she would consider it pouting.

Mary crinkled her nose and turned back, as she opened the door. “Telly is boring.” She commented, just louder than a whisper. “Go see what Sher—”

John didn’t let her utter the name. He cut her off with a derisive interjection, “I am not going out.”

Mary shifted her feet, thrusting a hip out that she planted a fist onto, as she looked down at him patronizingly. “Oh, John, please do.” She pleaded, “He’s been texting me all day.”

“Texting you? Sherlock? Why??”

The blonde’s large blue eyes rolled back and she stifled a chuckle, as she shook her head. With an adoring smile she rested the temple of her head against the side of the door she was standing half behind and replied, “Why do you think?” And then she left, saying simply, “I’ll see you later tonight, after chocolate cake.”

John reached into the pocket of his white lab coat and pulled out his phone. The screen illuminated as he awakened the device only to show him that he had missed no calls and had received no text messages. The doctor sat and brooded in his quiet office for a long time, until his coffee was cold and the ache in his cranium had joined up with the pain and heaviness of his shoulders. By then, he had finally decided that it was time to leave.

With his patients done and dealt with, he left his office to find that Mary had also left to meet her Janine and their mutual friend chocolate cake, so he pulled on his dark jacket and headed out to catch a cab. It was dark already, drizzling cloud cover blotting out the last of the sun as it set, and the air was crisp with a sharp chill, as the misting rain wet his skin and hair. The streets were busy and he was damp before he could hail a cabbie.

“221B Baker Street.” He said, as he climbed in and closed the door. The man behind the wheel just nodded and the black cab pulled away and into the melee of traffic without any effort. John had hoped that he would have time to sort through his jumbled thoughts before the familiar flat was before him, however, when he arrived he had hardly gotten started. He tipped the cabbie and stepped out into the rain, tucking his shoulders to keep the dampness in his hair from slipping down his neck, as he rushed to the black door of his old flat.

The doctor did not need to knock, the door was open, and he came into the building, taking a moment to shake as much of the wet rain from his person as was possible, wishing he’d had the forethought to bring an umbrella to the clinic that morning. Mrs. Hudson’s door was closed, the sound of her telly just barely audible from within her apartment. The door he had just come through re-opened and a tall dark haired man came inside.

The man’s ghostly pallor was accentuated by long straight locks of jet-black hair, which was swept back behind one ear, his features punctuated by glassy emerald-envying eyes that seemed to almost glow in the dim lighting of the foyer. Those eyes crinkled slightly at the corners, as the man smiled pleasantly at him in greeting, John suddenly realized that he was staring. Shaking his head, he offered a quick apology as the other man quietly approached him, and stuck out his hand. “I’m sorry, I don’t believe we’ve met. I’m John.”
A gloved hand enclosed his and after a brief shake, the other introduced himself as, Louis, the new tenant for 221 Baker Street. The other man was tall, and visibly lean, even in the worn navy cable-knit jumper. John couldn’t help but take note that he was some kind of un-real handsome, like the individual had just strolled out of a photo shoot or off a movie set. His skin was as white as ivory and so smooth—almost in startling contrast to all his medical training, this pallor seemed to make the man more attractive and John found it hard to look away.

“Are you here to see, Mr. Holmes?” the man asked, his voice oddly soft and purring.

John found his brain jumbled—not unlike before—and the words just didn’t seem to want to come out. Forcing himself to say something, he stuttered, “Sh-Sherlock, yes, I’m just here—’er…for a visit.”

The doctor was embarrassed at how lame it had sounded but Louis did not seem to notice. The man’s full mouth parted into a smile that allowed a glimpse at perfectly straight white teeth that gleamed between the pink lips. “It was a pleasure to meet you.” The silken voice purred and the man took a step past him, moving into the small foyer.

John felt a weight drop in his stomach, a sudden need to stop the other from leaving, and in a mess he found himself strangely blurting, “I-Is that…that an American accent…?” The doctor felt ashamedly stupid and yet couldn’t make his eyes leave the stranger before him.

The man stopped and turned back. He leaned an elbow on the bannister to the staircase that led up to Sherlock’s flat. The hair from behind his ear fell forward, like a shimmering black curtain swooping down, as those piercing eyes locked with his. It was odd, he thought, that he should find himself so irresistibly drawn to this person.

“It is.” Was all he said.

There was a loud clatter from overhead, the sound of something metal like tools falling to the floor, which jarred John’s military reflexes, making him jump. His gaze was suddenly on the roof, his mind wondering, What the bloody hell is he up too now? He began to make an apology to the other man for Sherlock’s odd hobbies, only to suddenly realize Louis had left. He heard the door shut at the end of the foyer and considered how weird it was that the other man had just up and vanished.

Shaking his head, he slowly stepped towards the staircase. Sherlock was obviously up to something.

As he came up the steps his nostrils became acutely aware of the mingled tang of blood and antiseptic that perfumed the flat. Rounding the doorway and coming into the kitchen he was assaulted with the reason why. Outstretched on the table was the mangled carcass of what John thought must have been a pig. The animal was on its back, hooved legs sticking straight up into the air, the large head dangling from the table’s edge, the fleshy neck torn open. Congealed blood was smeared on the floor like a jar full of grape jelly had shattered everywhere and Sherlock was covered in it, from head to toe. At least he had had the damned sense to wear an apron and some goggles.

“What the bloody hell…?” John hissed, shaking his head at the other man in disbelief and disgust. He waved his arms in a vague motion that attempted to encompass the entire scene before adding, “What is all this?”

“Ah, John, glad to see you. Molly has abandoned me for…what’s-his-face and I am in need of some assistance.” Sherlock announced, his nose and lips scrunching up and wiggling, as he brought his arms out of the flesh of the animal, dark with blood, and held them up like a mad scientist in a cheap horror flick.
John rolled his eyes and slipped his coat off, hanging it far away from the macabre in the kitchen. Then, rolling up the sleeves of his blue striped dress shirt, he came around the table to the detective’s side. There was a layer of poly tarp on the floor under the table that crinkled loudly under his feet—he had foregone the polite removal of his shoes and the soles squeaked on the blood ridden plastic with each step. He looked up at Sherlock with his hands on his hips and barked, “What is it?”

“Ugh, I have an itch.” Sherlock complained, his nose still wrinkling.

John gave a resigned sigh, stifling a chuckle, as he reached up and scratched the detective’s blood splattered nose. Sherlock gave a justifiable groan of appreciation and John stepped away, looking again at the kitchen table with the hog placed out upon it. “This is…” there really wasn’t the words to describe it.

“How’s your theory?” John queried, his eyes noting the rent in the pig’s skin and muscle to be extensive.

Sherlock’s hand went to the throat of the animal, his thin fingers digging deep into the mangled hide, skin, and muscle below, making a sickening squish, as he took hold of it and reefed back. Nothing much happened. “The man’s neck,” he began to explain, “was torn open. There were clear marks where, what I suspect must have been fingers, had torn into the flesh. The way the skin and muscle was ripped away from the neck was most certainly from a tearing motion.”

“Wait a minute. Are you saying someone actually tore that man’s throat open?” John clarified, incredulously.

The dark curled head gave a commanding nod, as Sherlock, explained, “It’s the only way to explain the wound entry and tearing.”

“Yet…” John looked from his friend back down to the pig his hands were deep within, and gave a satisfying smirk, “you were unable to prove it, weren’t you?”

The head nodded again, eyes narrowing in challenge, as the man gave a subtle, “So far.”

“It’s impossible, Sherlock.” The doctor began to explain, stepping up to the carcass. He reached a bare hand in, gently slipping his fingers over and between his friend’s knuckles. As he began to demonstrate, he happily lectured, “The skin would rip if you pulled on it hard enough but the muscle would not give way as easily. There are four different sets of muscles that form the front of the neck, attaching between the hyoid bone and the manubrium of the sternum. They overlap and weave over each other. The tendons would give long before the muscle fibres would rip apart horizontally. They had to have been lacerated by some means.”

Sherlock’s dark curls bounced about his forehead and the safety goggles, half splattered with red dots
of blood, as he confidently disagreed with John. “There was absolutely no indication of cutting. Those muscles here,” he said, grabbing the doctor’s fingers with his own and pressing them around the long muscle group that ran the length of the animal’s neck from jaw to chest, “were torn. I just have to figure out how.”

John pursed his lips into a thin line and shrugged his shoulders, as he tried to wrap his medical brain around what Sherlock was trying to test. He pulled his hand out of the pig and went to the sink to wash, mulling it over as he did. His training kept reminding him of what he had already stated, that the tendons would give first, but he himself could remember the trauma the man exhibited. He scrubbed at the congealed slimy black blood on his knuckles and around his fingernails and thought on it for a long time. The tendons had not been fully torn away, even though the muscle had appeared to be ripped through.

John shrugged his shoulders and turned to answer his friend, only to find that he was gone. The only one left in the kitchen within was the dead pig. “Sherlock…?”

“Perhaps if it weren’t a pig…” the doctor heard the detective thinking out loud from the bathroom. “No, you’re not ripping up some poor sod like that, Sherlock.” John snapped, as he slapped the tap off and rushed to the bathroom, reprimanding, “Not while I’m around.”

The doctor stopped in the open doorway to the bathroom, bewildered as to why he attempted to follow the other man inside, as he beheld Sherlock reclined in the tub, the water just started. He spun around to leave and the detective called after him sharply. “Come, John, talking out loud helps me think.”
It's for an--

That's irrelevant, John.

-experimental figure
As he came up the steps his nostrils became acutely aware of the mingled tang of blood and antiseptic that perfumed the flat. Rounding the doorway and coming into the kitchen he was assaulted with the reason why. Outstretched on the table was the mangled carcass of what John thought must have been a pig. The animal was on its back, hooved legs sticking straight up into the air, the large head dangling from the table’s edge, the fleshy neck torn open. Congealed blood was smeared on the floor like a jar full of grape jelly had shattered everywhere and Sherlock was covered in it, from head to toe. At least he had had the damned sense to wear an apron and some goggles. “What the bloody hell…?” John hissed, shaking his head at the other man in disbelief and disgust. He waved his arms in a vague motion that attempted to encompass the entire scene before adding, “What is all this?” “Ah, John, glad to see you. Molly has abandoned me for…what’s-his-face and I am in need of some assistance.” Sherlock announced, his nose and lips scrunching up and wiggling, as he brought his arms out of the flesh of the animal, dark with blood, and held them up like a mad scientist in a cheap horror flick.

Chapter 5:

The rich deep chime of Lestat’s laughter filled the cool night air around him, as the devilish immortal watched the charming scene unfold in the London flat. Ruddy lips, warm with his recent feed, spread into a seductive smile as he felt all of the embarrassment and arousal and then, immediate shame of the detectives faithful and conflicted companion as he happened upon his former lover in the tub.

“My, my, Louis. You have found something rather entertaining in these two.” He said aloud as he stood on the edge of the cold mortar of the rooftop across the narrow street overlooking 221B Baker Street. There was surely no one about to hear the vampire’s little exclamation of enjoyment as he watched the scene unfold through the low lit windows of the apartment the detective called home.

Sherlock was brilliant, there was no doubt about it. His mind was sharp and frustratingly secured against Lestat’s invasion. A rare quality in a mortal but given the particular character of this man, was not entirely unsurprising to the vampire who relished in the knowledge that he was one of the most powerful of their kind. There were others, of course but regardless, he suspected they would encounter the same should they try to enter into the mind of the closely guarded genius.

Now, his companion on the other hand... A far easier read. Lestat hadn’t even alerted the ex-military man when he had tuned so easily into the other man’s thoughts and partook of the stream of self-conscious emotions and feelings. Many of which were directed at the man who pulled him along on what seemed like an unreal adventure. After all, he had only recently discovered his former lover was not, after two years of grieving—actual grieving—dead. And who, was indeed here to slip so easily back into his life as if he had only gone out for a proverbial 'pack of smokes'.

Oh, the tension was delightful! The drama a close second, only to the ability of the detective to actually gather and link information from the simplest of clues at a crime scene. It was somewhat fascinating that this man used his incredible intellect and abilities to try to do good and even more so, mostly due to the direct correlation to his rational of morality through his relationship with the other man. At least, in John’s mind, the doctor seemed to imagine that this Sherlock character would be engaged in the mutilation of corpses at this exact moment if it wasn't for his interjection.
Right now the focus of the blond's interest was turned on the battle that raged inside the doctor's mind, as he tried to reason with himself all the pros and cons of being seated in such close proximity to the very naked and bathing form of the lithe man who was, not so long ago, someone whom he had and still did, love. Even as he loved his fiancé, dear Mary, whom he tried to flood his mind with now in order to combat the overflow of his memories of Sherlock’s same lean form in various states of ecstasy. In the very room where the sandy-blond was now, he recalled with a pang of guilt, that the same colored towels were hung on the rack as the last time they had Indulged in one another’s pleasurable company. To the doctor it felt like only a short time ago.

That yearning was something the immortal could understand and recognize in himself when he thought on the guilty pleasures of his former lovers. The crispness of those moments of passion were ones that always came back with the vivid colors of still wet paint. These were raw in the moment of recollection when in the presence of the ones that once had painted them so deftly, was at hand.

It would be interesting to see how the duo moved forward with their little mystery. He glanced down the street from his perch high atop the adjacent corner complex. The smell of baked bread from the sandwich shop next to the apartment where both the consulting detective and his own wayward lover now rented space, was still discernible from the rest of the scents in the area. He had always had a fondness for the smell of baking bread, regardless of his lack of desire or need to consume it. Louis would enjoy that scent too, he smiled absently to himself.

With the thought of Louis on his mind, Lestat leaped with feline grace from the rooftop and touched his feet upon the night-damp sidewalk, immediately stepping into the perfect stride of one whom had been casually heading down the street already. There were only a few bodies out at this time and none of whom were paying much mind to anything other than themselves and the paths that their feet were taking on the slick walkway.

The handsome figure of the blond strode confidently towards his destination. A long fingered hand sunk into the pocket of the wool coat, as he pulled the soft leather gloves out and slipped them over his long pale fingers and glass-like fingernails. Even with the blood coursing through him, the unnatural sheen of his fingernails was another of the small details that shed light on the unnatural qualities that their kind took on, once turned. Fueled with the most ancient bloods of their kind had hastened this process in Lestat. At times he felt that this next level of separation from the world he once had lived in as a man, and even a young vampire, was why so many of their kind chose to end their unnatural existence.

Even his beloved Louis had succumbed to this attempt but his motivations were far more self-deprecating. He had saved his beloved fledgling and now made special pains to keep an attentive mind for what the other was doing with the endless time they had. Thus he followed Louis to London and with his gracious desire to care for the other man he usually did manage to find some sort of entertainment for himself. Even if he had to stir some of it up on his own, just a gentle push along for the sake of not letting things get too boring.

Sherlock’s mind may have been a locked vault but John’s was a buffet. Lestat pondered if Louis, whom had never been as exceptional at reading mortal minds as he was at reading their fiction, would be gleaning from the doctors mind all of the lovely tidbits of information and angst that he was. For now, he needed to act the part of one who was surprised by the information he was going to pry from his ebony-haired companion. After all, he couldn't appear too interested, that would take all the fun out of his little game. He, himself, wasn't entirely sure what his next move would be and so that made it a little easier to entice and entangle his ever curious, ever cautious lover along. The emerald eyes would narrow at him, the pale pink lips would draw into the unconscious purse as he tried to analyze what devilment his maker was up to and how much of it he was the cause of in the scenario that was unfolding.
Sometimes he was genuinely surprised but when it did happen, Louis hardly ever believed it to be true.

The slender finger pointed out and pushed the dim-yellow lit buzzer for the lower unit the one he knew Louis was renting. Instead of the tall and regal figure of his lover, he was instead greeted by the kindly and very short older lady whom owned the flat. The woman had answered the door rather quickly, having heard the buzzer go and being close at hand, Lestat gathered.

“Oh!” She squeaked as she looked up into the cerulean eyes of the dazzlingly handsome man who stood on her front step. Smartly dressed in a navy coat with the collar turned up against the wind, a small gust rustled the lions mane of shimmering golden curls which were loosely drawn back into a pony-tail at the base of the slender man’s skull. Sharp and high cheekbones were perfectly cut into the angular face and the glossy pink lips curled seductively into a pleasant smile that caused the older ladies heart-rate to elevate and a flush of color to rise to her blush-applied cheeks.

“Mrs. Hudson, I presume?” Lestat greeted, extending his hand, every bit the gentlemen as he tipped his head, taking the woman’s hand in his own and giving the softest of kisses to the back of the warm and weathered flesh.

The English-woman was shocked for a moment at this gesture and Lestat delighted in her simultaneous mixture of enchantment, discomfort, and total bewilderment at this stunning man who had just regally kissed her hand.

_Must be some french-man_, came her rush of thoughts to Lestat's ears and he couldn't help but chuckle as he released the hand and smiled warmly at her.

“I apologize if I startled you,” He took a playful step back from the door and gave a quick bow, lying smoothly, “My name is Daniel. I’m a friend of Louis, whom I understand has rented the lower flat. He told me that he had the most delightful land lady and I cannot help but assume that it was you he was referring to. I had just come by to see how he was settling in and—,”

“Dan-iel?” Came the cool questioning tone from his immortal companion as Louis appeared in the entry way from the stairs that led to the lower flat. The scowl directed at Lestat melted immediately into a relaxed smile when Mrs. Hudson turned to look at her newest tenant.

_What luck to have so many good looking men for flat-mates_, they heard her muse to herself. She turned away from both of the gentlemen to hide her slight fluster and she quickly excused herself. “Well, I'll be off to my shows.” She waved a casual hand and bustled away without turning to look back, disappearing through the doorway to her own suite.

Even before the door was closed Louis’ scowl had returned, although softened now as he crossed his arms over his chest and raised an eyebrow at the smartly dressed immortal who stood in the entryway. “Daniel, now is it?” Louis questioned plainly, in a tone too low for anyone but its intended recipient to hear. “I doubt Daniel would take kindly to the damage you are bound to do to his name.”

“Your landlady fancies us, Louis.” Lestat chirped with amusement. “Believes she's dreadfully lucky to have so many good looking men about.” Lestat looked about the entry way at the slightly pealing wallpaper, the dust in the corners, too high to be easily reached. He ran a finger along the wall but when he inspected the gloved tipped he found no dust. He turned around with the grace of a dancer and continued to inspect the entry in an exaggerated fashion as he ignored Louis’ statement.

“Did you not tell her you're a monster, Louis?” Lestat’s tone dropped to a breathy whisper as he turned his sharp focus on Louis. Blue eyes shimmered in the darkness as they narrowed on Louis
and the taller vampire stepped dangerously close to the other man in a progressively aggressive series of movements. He flicked the loose raven-black hair back from the broad shoulder and exposed the length of pale flesh he so enjoyed. No man, living, dead or otherwise ever had such a beautiful expanse of throat as did his dear Louis.

The other immortal was all too familiar with this game and so he remained relaxed and still. If he moved away or pushed the other out of his personal space there would be a scuffle of some sorts, while if he just didn't react at all, Lestat would huff that he was no fun and then they could get on with the evening. The younger vampire didn't need to wait long before his makers impatience began to show, though it was difficult to be entirely focused when there was the flutter of warm kisses on his throat, Louis held fast to his reserves. He had already given too much of himself away again to this man who he was bound to waltz with until the end of time.

With the other immortal frozen in his grasp Lestat gently began to escalate the wayward adventures of his hands over the other’s still hard form. His gloved fingers trailed from the man’s throat, where his lips pressed lingering caresses and his teeth soft teasing nips, down the lean length of his torso, slipping under the hem of the dingy worm jumper. Lestat was not sure that it was possible for Louis to tense more within his ravishing clutches, yet there was a renewed tautness to all the muscles of his being. He could feel the clench of the other’s jaw, the bob of his adams apple, the grind of his molars, as his one arm entangled the ebony haired man’s waist and forcefully drew their two body’s together.

His lover did not resist the movement as much as Lestat had suspected, making the blond purr with satisfaction and arousal. They had not been this close for many years and the taste of his lover’s immortal skin was strikingly pleasing, as his mouth moved along the length of the graceful neck to the small dip of the man’s jugular notch, where his thin clavicle bones met the strength of his sternum. Louis shuddered then, the smallest of quivers that would have been imperceptible to any mortal and was almost certainly involuntary. Lestat’s purring growl changed to a triumphant splash of laughter and then he was silenced, by his lover’s silent and violent retaliation.

With the lightning quick speed that only an immortal was capable of, the blond felt the other move, the whisking brush of the collar from his neck, the sudden iron grip of Louis’s grasp forcing his neck bared, and heard the soft crunch of his skin as teeth sank into his pale throat. Lestat relented his own mouth’s pursuits in wake of his lover’s sudden play, yet even as Louis drew from his bloodstream he would not yield the grasp he held on the other’s hips, too enamored by this amorous change between them. It had been years since they had been close, touched, kissed, adventured, but it had been decades since Louis had willingly taken this of Lestat.

The drawing ended with another shudder from the ebony haired immortal, a soft gasp of ecstasy escaping his ruddy lips, and then Lestat was forced back, the other tearing them apart. The blond’s mouth quirked into a smirk, as he gracefully regained his footing and adjusted the collar of his shirt and the wool coat, bemused by the vehemence seething from the emerald eyed immortal before him. The back of Louis’ hand was to his mouth and his breaths were quickened, his face pinked from the one-sided exchange, his brows drawn somewhere between hatred, resentment, and guilt. Lestat took a step forward, arms raised in a peaceful invitation to his flushed and flustered fledgling, as he purred reassuringly, “That was wonderful, mon cher.”

The dark haired immortal stole a step backwards. Their eyes lingered in a gridlock, each unwilling and unable to relent to the other, vigorously calculating and assessing, frustrated that thoughts would not pass unspoken between their vampirical minds. Louis’ breathing soon normalized and slowly his calm passive façade returned. He turned and leaned his shoulders back against the railing that led up to the stairs to the other flat above, his eyes gazing toward the ceiling.
Lestat heard it then too. The verbal acquiescence of the doctor resignedly giving in to the demand of the consulting detective. Although the blond had thoroughly enjoyed their prior incident, and had indeed completely forgotten about the two men he had been watching earlier in the flat above, he welcomed this distraction for both him and his fledgling to commiserate over, if only to keep Louis from dwelling on the swirl of emotions which Lestat could see writhing within the glowing emerald depths of his eyes. The blond caught the eye of the other, a smirk and a raised eyebrow enough of an exchange for the other to understand and agree with his suggestion.

The amused curl to Louis’ full mouth was enough to entice a renewed arousal within the blond, as the two of them came together and silently scaled the staircase with ease, entering the flat completely undetected by the two mortals in the bathroom. Louis may have been satisfied with eavesdropping on the happenings of the skilled genius detective from the bleak dreary flat in the basement, but Lestat was less compromising. With the graceful agility gifted to the damned the two immortals padded past the gruesome spectacle in the kitchen, to take a seat on the two chairs pushed to the side from the pig splattered table. They each sat silently, interests piqued at the following conversation that filtered unhampered by the walls and insulation of the flat from the bathroom to their sensitive ears.

John had considered the other man’s uncouth demand long and hard. A part of him had wanted to run and another had wanted to charge into the awkward predicament at the remembrance of the prior foray’s the two of men had shared within the confines of that tiny bathroom, specifically that bath and shower. In the end both parts had left him frozen in the open doorway, with a pang in his gut that led to a swelling below that the doctor had not forgotten over their time apart.

Knowing that any further relationship with the man would involve no doubt many more of these strange incidents, in which he was made uncomfortable by the other’s inadvertent actions which were an unfortunate by-product of his oblivious and aloof nature towards social graces and interactions, John gave in. He settled himself on the closed lid of the toilet adjacent to the ceramic tub his friend was reclined within, accepting that conditioning himself to these events would serve best to protect him. Still he adjusted the crotch of his now tighter blue jeans as he sat himself down, before he leaned his elbows onto his knees and clasped his hands together, preparing himself to endure this moment of weakness he felt within the uncomfortable company of the naked detective. “So…” he said, attempting to continue a conversation that had been sufficiently ceased earlier. He hated the sound of his voice, so obviously awkward and strained. The doctor cleared his throat and decided not to talk.

The dark little wisps of curls hung over the lip of the chipped and peeling claw foot tub, that John knew was comfortably deep and curved so that it hugged one’s backside perfectly. Sherlock’s length was more than that of the tub, however, and the man slid deeper into the rising pool of water as he extended both feet out over the opposite edge, ankles crossed beside the brass taps that gushed hot water. Steam rose from the exposed pink digits that nearly reached the wall beside the tub and John’s eyes darted away from the pale sight of the man’s lean legs back to the dark head of curls that gazed absent, hands steepled before his face, thumbs pressed against his full lips, deep in thought.

John sighed and dropped his head, rubbing a frustrated hand over the back of his head and neck, as he felt that his jeans were even tighter than before. He considered the result of his previous thoughts on conditioning and weighed them against the disadvantages he was experiencing with the process, when Sherlock’s voice cut through his musings, “Why did you come tonight, John?”

“Mary.” He answered succinctly, the name happily blurted, as though it could form a barrier between them that could stop his blood from rushing south at the sight of his friend submerged in the hot bathwater.
“Mary?” Sherlock questioned, his nose crinkling and his eyebrows knitting, as he cocked his head just slightly back towards John.

The doctor was thankful that the toilet’s position beside the clawfoot tub prevented their eyes meeting, unless the man were to sit up and turn directly. He sighed and sat back on the lid, folding his arms over his chest. “Yes.” He said, “Don’t act all innocent. She said that you had been texting her all day.”

“She did, did she? Hmmm.” The dark haired detective answered, musingly, as his head returned to its previous position, hands still steepled in thought.

“It was either a date with the telly or I came out here.” John continued. He paused, with a huffed chuckle, and sarcastically he quipped, “Pretty sure you need no deductions to figure out which one I chose.”

“Easy decision, really, between telly and myself…” Sherlock remarked, barley moving from his repose. “Especially considering the pig in the kitchen.”

It was delightful, Sherlock thought, to hear John snort with laughter, overcome with the inability to keep it inside, as he allowed his own deeper chuckle to mingle. John’s face had been freed of the aging facial hair he had grown to protect himself from loving again—even though Mary had been able to bypass the whiskery wall—and now the grim face must be gone too. The detective knew that laugh, inside and out, understood that it was honest and true, and knew that John must be smiling too. The urge to look back at his former flatmate was intense and he willed himself to resist it. Having John in the bathroom was success enough. Facing the other man might ruin everything.

Sherlock languished in the water, allowing himself to be satisfied for the moment with the softly dyeing snickers that lingered still between them within the confines of that small space, trapped like an echo in a cave on the dated tilework and scuffed paint. With his hands in their steeple again before his mouth and nose, as though he were deep in prayer, he lavished in the weightlessness feeling that came with his submersion in the hot water and recalled the last time he and John had shared the space—pig and dead bodies aside, he allowed himself this moment to selfishly recall the heated form of his friend, the concern on his face as he tenderly and expertly dabbed at the gash in his own skull that seeped still hours after the impact with hot blood.

The yellow hand towels of dear Mrs. Hudson had been stained crimson, nearly black in places where the old dried blood had been cleaned away from the wound before John’s expert hands had taken to his skin with a needle and thread. The movement of the needle passing smoothly through his skin was dulled to an uncomfortable tingle thanks to John’s on hand medical supplies, freeing more than just the pain. Words and phrases came tumbling out, mostly tangled and incoherent, even though he still felt he was in complete control of his faculties as he did so. The concern on his friend’s face transitioned to that baffled smile, accompanied by a ruddy color that rose on the sandy blonde’s cheeks, which made a warmth bloom within the detective’s gut. The warmth had been addicting, a sensation that once experienced was consuming, which Sherlock hated to have dwindle and disappear. Yet this had not been as stimulating as it had been to feel his mouth pressing firmly against the doctor’s, as his arms entangled the man greedily, wrestling the other down into the hot water of the bath he had been cleansing in. Both soaked and cramped within the confines of the ceramic tub John had relented his struggles to Sherlock’s advancing touch, to the rapid aggression of his hands, mouth, and thrusts.

“What do you still ignore your skull, like this?” John asked, the humor dissipated from his voice, but still feasibly present, thrumming on the undercurrent of his words. “That is what my being in here with you…naked…is about, isn’t it? I am to be your skull.”
The doctor was searching, provoking, trying to justify his presence—meaning that he was uncomfortable, that their predicament in addition to their proximity was outside of the man’s sphere of friendship. It also meant that the other man had possibly considered Sherlock’s motives for demanding the doctor sit in on his bathing session. Nonchalantly Sherlock answered his friend, coolly commenting, “Unfortunately Mrs. Hudson has taken my skull so I am a little out of practice.” His feet had grown cold, raised up out of the water and the detective shifted in the bathwater, submerging them again. He brought his arms down too and dipping his hands into the water he splashed his shoulders, warming them with the water, trying to ignore John’s silence and the deductions that filled his thoughts because of it.

There was movement behind him and Sherlock fought the urge to twist around, to nervously lash out at the other’s departure. He froze, body half submerged in the water, and listened to the footsteps—not rushed with frustrated haste or the need to escape, but slow and sure. John’s standing form appeared in the periphery of his vision, blue jeans and dress shirt sleeves rolled up to the elbows. The man stopped beside the tub, his fingers trailing along the lip of the white ceramic, black blood from the pig outlining his fingernails.

Sherlock felt his breath hitch and his abdominals tense, as he resisted the need to look up into the eyes above him. He focused his energy on finding a reason, understanding this turn of events, motives, intentions, desires…and then the fingers caught his chin and forced his face upwards. His shocked wide eyes narrowed onto the dark blue saturnine depths of the doctor looming over him, startled, confused, fighting arousal, blushing, as the blooming warmth he remembered so well captured his insides and he realized the idiomatic expression, “butterflies in your stomach”, was a completely justifiable comparison at the moment to the anxiety that gripped his nervous system.

It was an emboldened maneuver, especially for John, which was both completely unpredictable and somehow abnormally visceral. Intrigued and unsure of this sudden shift in the doctor's mood the detective kept still and quiet, hoping to keep his own actions from interfering with the other's intended outcome. Although his nerves were on edge, waiting and forcing his own urges, desires, and needs to be suppressed, his mind was still sharp with curiosity, rolling through the rationalities that came to mind as he studied his friend.

John was loyal and strongly empathetic, almost to the point of weakness. Perhaps it was the interplay between these two redeeming qualities of the man's personality that was resulting in this betwixting scenario. The splash in the bath after his injury had not been the last of their shared sexual adventures together, it had been only a small part of the beginning. John had not expected nor had he been prepared for Sherlock to grapple him into that sudden change in their relationship, but the man was all heart. The satisfactory experience in the tub being one of the major factors for accepting the change that the detective had so blithely rushed into proposing, albeit from a loosened sense of himself due to the administered anesthetic, even if it was against what John had originally considered his sexual orientation.

Sherlock was more simplified than that. He didn't care what anyone else thought, what his family's opinions were, or what society accepted. In John he had found a partnership that not only completed him in every way, but also that promoted excellence from his strengths and aided his weaknesses. It was this completion that had been the desired goal of the ensued relationship, to extend that effectiveness to all areas of his life. He had only hesitated from encumbering the doctor immediately upon realization of this desire and need, due the knowledge that John would resist it, because of societal inclinations, family history and disposition, and the thoughts and opinions of peers and acquaintances. So in that sense the anesthetic's effects on his brain and on their relationship had proven to be anything but detrimental.

Moriarty had successfully put an end to all of that. The mad man had become too dangerous to be
allowed to play his games anymore. As the world's first consulting criminal he had become a government target, exposing his web of treachery to Sherlock in order to garner his respect and his intrigue, as well as his time. John's new involvement in the detective's life was the very reason why he had to appear to die that fateful day—to protect the doctor—even though he would never see it that way.

Molly Hooper had been right. The detective did feel sad when he thought that the doctor was not looking at him. Destroying Moriarty's established web of influences that criss-crossed the world over had been a formidable challenge, wrought with a plethora of twist, turns, and spiraling riddles that had kept Sherlock running, searching, dodging, destroying. Yet he had accomplished it all and more, knowing that when it was finished he could return to John. Finally.

Why else would he have so brusquely forgone a subtle reintroduction into the doctor's life? He couldn't wait for societal nuances and acclimations to be met. It would have torn him apart to be in London and not be with John. Mycroft, the idiot, had not failed to mention Mary Morstan, he had excluded her. He had known about the woman all along, as part of his agreement to keep tabs on John Watson while Sherlock was in his employment. His brother had sat there in Russia and watched him being beaten for the same reason why he had allowed Sherlock to be tackled by John in the restaurant, because he did not like to get his hands dirty. He did not want to get involved. He had no doubt suspected the outcome of that meeting and had no doubt watched in complete enjoyment as John nearly broke his nose with a well-aimed head bunt.

In the end it hurt even more to hand John over to someone else, to relinquish his desires for the man and allow another to love him. Yet John seemed blatantly satisfied to have another, after accepting that the detective was no longer an option, and Mary did seem capable, even if he wasn't quite clear on who she was or where she had come from just yet. The fact that his friend had implicitly believed that Sherlock had arranged for their meeting tonight by means of texting the woman was most curious, seeing he hadn't done so. One more thing for him to sort out. The queue was growing.

All of these thoughts had flashed through Sherlock's mind, taking only seconds to pass, as his pale gaze roamed the stall ward and set features of John's face above him. John's satisfaction with Mary seemed to be in question now and although it made the blooming warmth within the detective's gut burn, it seemed misplaced. The fingers under his chin moved, slipping along the length of his jaw to trail down over his jugular, past the bump of his collar bone and along the side of his chest, eventually dipping down in to the hot water. There the tips of the doctor's fingers found the numerous scars from several beatings he had endured over the past two years, some merely lingering and others more permanent, tracing over each line and imperfection in the skin, a gentle inquisition. It was a very methodical yet deeply arousing touch, made even more sensual by the way his hands knew where to find their targets without visibly searching for them. Indeed, John's eyes did not seem to stray from his own face.

The mapping traversed from one side to the other and when all the markings were found, there were more than he had even recalled, the hand came to his middle. There it lingered, drifting ever so slightly, as though the man were confused whether to head north or south from that point. This stall in the proceedings elicited Sherlock's body to respond in kind to the teasing gesture and as his blood was reallocated within him, his eyes searched John's almost absent dark sapphire gaze.

Those eyes were not just blue. No, they were almost navy in color, speckled and broken by striations of light brown that circled the small round opening of the pupil and trailed softly outward, as naturally beautiful as the veins within the cellular make up of an orange slice. His eyes were an effective window, not to his soul, but to his intentions, his motives, his desires, his thoughts. In that moment they were closed, a bleakness within them that failed to reveal anything. Something that bothered the detective more so than the intimate touch and closeness excited him.
Put off by this juxtaposition to their intimacy the man sat upright in the bath tub and turned his torso away from the hand that lingered temptingly around his midsection. He made to give John an explanation, a distraction of some kind, to deflect any accusation of offense, when two hands captured either side of his face and a hot commanding mouth was sealed against his own. The movement was so sudden that Sherlock flailed in the others grasp, water splashing and sloshing out of the ceramic tub, up onto the sleeves and front of John's blue striped dress shirt, as he fought the urge to relinquish control to the other man and allow the greedy tongue entrance. Latching onto the wrists of the strong forearms that grappled him in the embrace the detective managed with some effort to have himself released.

It was a short lived freedom. The doctor's exigent grasp took hold of him again with the same result, an eager pressing of mouth's that Sherlock found even harder to fight. John was giving him what he wanted, after all, and it was hard to deny himself that desire that had blossomed within him and that burned hotter and more demanding with each touch from the other man. His lips parted and he tasted the tongue of the other man as it came inside, lapping and tickling, as his lips caressed his own. John had him pressed against the wall of the claw foot bath, one hand gripping the back of his neck aggressively, the other braced against the tubs edge, even as his own grasp on the man's wrists yielded. Sherlock tried not to think. Tried only to enjoy what was his again, to take pleasure in that part of him that had been returned, renewed, and finally was completed once more.

But the man's eyes pestered at him, would not so easily be dismissed, even by the thrill of arousal. All he could think was why?

There was the sound of vibrations, rattling through fabric against the side of the tub. John's cell phone, a text message. The domination relaxed and retreated. Sherlock watched John sit back from his knees onto his haunches, that unclear darkness in his eyes vanishing with a few befuddled blinks of lazy eyelids, as the man's hands fumbled to retrieve the phone from his shirt pocket. Clicking a button and glancing down at the now illuminated screen a smile drew on the doctor's mouth, warm and pleased, as he chuckled quietly to himself, "Women and their cake."

Sherlock watched John, a little unsettled and disappointed by the break in their interlude, as the other man got to his feet and turned, walking out of the bathroom. It was an odd way to end what they had started and in deed the doctor was acting so casual that it led his friend to wonder if it was as though he were acting like nothing of that sort had occurred between them. Induced by his own hurt and anxiety, the detective called after the other only to be called back to from beyond in the flat.

"Don't you think we should clean this up or something? How in the hell did you even get the bloody thing up here by yourself?"

The detective considered the peculiar nature of the last comment, in balance with John's empathetic heart and the almost callous removal of himself from the room. Things seemed to come unaligned, facts shifting and grinding against one another, stalling any kind of real outcome. Sherlock blamed his own inability to think on the damned erection he sported and attempted then to shift his focus from the carnal, to the actions of his friend, hoping to glean some kind of answer for this bouncing of temperaments and moods. As these considerations began he suddenly became aware of the strange prickling sensation at the back of his mind—as though a deviant were picking the lock and attempting to gain entrance to his mind and thoughts.

This realization evoked action. The man gripped the sides of the tub, gained his footing and leaped out of the bath in one fluid motion. Running out of the bathroom he darted to one of the large windows at the front of the flat, John's incredulous balk following him. He pushed back the curtain and studied the street out front. There was nothing out of the ordinary. He rushed then to his bedroom, doing the same, experiencing the same result. He closed his eyes and pressed his fingers against his temples, thinking, searching, reasoning, how was it even possible to tamper with another's
"Sherlock...?" John's concerned voice quietly asked from the open doorway to his room. His eyes opened, took in the worried visage of the other man before him, as he ventured to inquire, "What are you doing?"

Unable to find a solution and not feeling the sensation any longer Sherlock cursed under his breath and gave an aggravated sigh that more closely resembled a growl. He stalked over to John, grabbed the man's shoulders, and drawing him close, whispered in his ear, "Did you feel it?"

John pulled back, an awkward and uncomfortable look contorting his features, as he shook his head and answered, "No, Sherlock, I don't know what you are talking about. I didn't feel anything...I saw you running about the bloody flat like a naked lunatic. What has you acting like this? It's like you're...paranoid or something."

Sherlock gave another exasperated growl and dropped his forehead down with a thunk onto the other man's shoulder. John's muscles seemed to tense under the grip he held on his shoulders and then a hand came up to pat his back, as John pleading requested, "Please, just put your pants on and I'll help you with the kitchen."

Sherlock resigned to the fact that this unearthly feeling of vulnerability had left and so had John's uncontrollable attraction to him, so the detective clothed himself, grabbing his flannel bottoms and a white cotton tee. Then the two of them set to cleaning the guest in the kitchen. The poly had saved much of the room from the mess and John couldn't stop talking about how glad he was for it.
“Perhaps if it weren’t a pig…” the doctor heard the detective thinking out loud from the bathroom.

“No, you’re not ripping up some poor sod like that, Sherlock.” John snapped, as he slapped the tap off and rushed to the bathroom, reprimanding, “Not while I’m around.”
The doctor stopped in the open doorway to the bathroom, bewildered as to why he attempted to follow the other man inside, as he beheld Sherlock reclined in the tub, the water just started. He spun around to leave and the detective called after him sharply. “Come, John, talking out loud helps me think.”

The brat prince had been particularly well behaved and it would have been nice for Louis to believe that his concern was, just this once unfounded but as the days passed he was more and more certain that Lestat had instigated the scene that took place in the flat above his own. It had been a long time since his brazen maker had taken this much interest in such mundane matters as playing match-maker with two mortals. After all, in comparison to his usual foray with ancient blood drinkers, demons, devils and witches, it just seemed bland and that was what had him uneasy. There was no doubt the genius detective was unique, he had to agree. It was what had prompted his own little journey and subsequently, his makers interest. The curiosity helped along by the recent shine he had taken to detective stories, notably Agatha Christie, discovered after a particularly rewarding trip to the local bookstore by the apartment he had recently rented in Vancouver.

With his stray hand he ran an finger absently down the right armrest of the plush micro-fiber chair, incredibly soft fibers slipping like silk on satin as the pale digit stoked the 'house warming gift' that had arrived without question or warning. There was no doubt that the other would take exception to anything other than gratitude. Louis folded the newspaper and placed it on the side table, listening as the door from the street opened and the obvious sound of Mrs. Hudson entered. The rustle and heavy foot fall of a woman burdened with grocery bags who was fighting to get the door closed behind her. This was emphasized by the soft curses under her breath, only audible through the walls that separated them because of the vampirical gifts he possessed.

Far above him the detective had been busy trying to discover new information on the two deaths that had piqued his interest. John had been absent since the night he had pulled at the face of the other man, dark curls wound tightly in his fingers as Louis witnessed the sudden lip-lock that had taken place in the bathroom. Then, just as oddly fast as it had happened it was over. He and Lestat had whisked outside the flat, silently closing the door and soundlessly descended the stairs while the two men, completely unaware of their recent visitors, cleaned up the mangled carcass of the swine. Lestat had worked diligently at distracting Louis after they reached the doorway and had been successful for a short time before Lestat was convinced to provide him with some peace and quiet—the penthouse forgotten.

Shortly after, John had again departed to return home to his fiancé and Sherlock had returned to brooding for the next few days, with only the occasional outing to the hospital morgue he frequented. One night the detective stopped and purchased a few papers from a stand in an off-beat area of town,
acquired fish and chips and returned to 221B.

The immortal rose from the admittedly comfortable chair and stretching, began to search out his outerwear as he glanced absently at the clock and noted the time. Past ten and although there was a chance that the consulting detective would venture out yet this evening, Louis needed to go regardless and wanted to explore some more of the city he was currently occupying.

Opening the heavy oak door that led to the street provided a calm and refreshing rush of air into the quiet entry. Warmer than it had been over the short time he had spent in the city thus far, it was a nice change to not have the wind whipping loose the silken hair he often left long. Though the thought to cut it short had crossed his mind, he had resisted for a few reasons. The least of which, was the knowledge that though it was easy enough to befuddle an average mortal, who may notice the difference from short to long if he should he not wish to continuing to cut it each night, Sherlock was not the average mortal. He was keenly aware of his surroundings and Louis was unable to get a read the man. When he had attempted to glance within the mind framed behind those mixed eyes of blue and green he had encountered the sensation of being shoved violently away.

Lestat had laughed at him when it had happened. His maker saw the small shock of pain that ran across the back of Louis eyes like a white hot flash. The sensation left a soft pounding in his right temple and though it had dissipated quickly, Lestat had caught the look on his face. Plainly calling the reaction for what it was. His maker didn't need to explain how he knew, it was simply offered up by way of a empathetic smile and effortless shrug of his shoulders. As the blond paced around the sparse room, sliding his socked feet over the carpet with the gentle swish of the shag fibers, he added that it made sense. “Control issues,” he explained coolly.

With the paper beside him and the sound of the land lady settling in her own flat, Louis acknowledged the hunger that dully pulled in his veins. He could have easily not fed if he chose but he was past the stage in his immortal life when he would starve himself out of self-administered penance. There was never a shortage of people whom either craved or deserved the mercy of the death he could provide them. For many it was a far kinder end then they would have found on their own.

The hot and flushed embraces of his lover had been spiked with the blood of recent kills whenever the mood over took them. He knew from the papers that there hadn't been an increase in the reporting of missing people or homicides in the nearby area that would lead on that Lestat was being sloppy about his activities—something that was not unfathomable given the blonds history. It could have been that his maker was entertaining himself by traveling to farther area's in order to hunt. Given the history Lestat carried with him in Europe, it was definitely within the realm of possibility.

After heading out from his small apartment, the sound of the soft pad of his hard rubber soles carried him down the well-lit streets as he walked. Heading in no particular direction, simply enjoying the difference in the taste of the air with the shift in barometric pressure and the kiss of a breeze that
stirred the tops of tree's as he continued along the sidewalk, passing by people who often paid him no
mind or quickly averted their gazes when his eyes met their own. Tuning his ears to the sounds of the
city, the dull roar of metropolitan life and all the glaring trumpets of technology that surged and
flourished all around them. There was the sudden, soft buzz that indicated a message had been
received on his cell phone. He slipped his hand within the coat folds into the pocket of the jeans and
retrieved the device, to see the illumination on the screen. Sliding his finger across the screen he
quickly traced the pattern for the passcode that secured it.

In London. Want to meet up? Hawksmoor Spitalfields, 11pm
-A

Louis didn't type a reply, it was rare that he did. He had time before the other vampire would be
expecting him at the requested location and it was enough to find what he desired before meeting the
other. Typing the name into the GPS, he then deposited the phone back in his pocked and re-tuned
his mind to the hum of thoughts and sounds around him. Sharpening, sorting and seeking out his
prey before he leaped upwards to the rooftops of the building surrounding and dashed unnaturally
fast and far in the direction of the busy downtown.

Several hundred feet away another immortal flexed his hands in the pockets of his wool coat and
watched as the figure of his fledgling quickly vanished into the night. Louis was grace when he
moved, whether while walking the stride of the mortals around them or on those times when he
would take advantage of the dark gifts given him. Dashing with bursts of speed through the world
around them. Long and lithe limbs were liquid in their movements and smooth like the steps of a big
cat. Sharp emerald eyes would take on deepening shaded of forest before the surge of power was
released, propelling the sculpted body of the man into the air and in defiance of all natural law.
Watching the other flex his powers, the powers he had been given and had been gifted by the ancient
blood that was shared through them, brought a thrill of arousal over the Lestat. It was as much pride
in the beautiful creature that Louis was—not to mention, the credit he took for eternally preserving
this man, it was also the covetous desire he withheld for the other and his affections.

Truth be told, as much as he longed for the closeness of the other immortal’s companionship there
was much about the time spent with Louis that his maker could think of better ways to enjoy
himself. Louis preferred a quieter lifestyle. The vampire loved to lose himself in books, to sit in
coffee shops with a fragrant latte in hand, observing the small and unremarkable lives of the people
who milled about them, so many blind to everything around them, to caught up in the little dramas of
their own universes to pay any real attention to the monster that sat in their midst, so close, drinking
in the scent of the lives he could so easily snuff out.

Lestat had tried it, of course. Attempted to enjoy his time as Louis did, for a while. An experiment
that he conducted with exactly the results he had expected. He was soon tampering with the people
that temporarily inhabited the small space by either tinkering with their thoughts or using his kinetic
powers to shift items and make them question themselves, reveling in the entertaining confusion he
created.
When the luster wore thin of these little amusements then Lestat would turn to the internet and all the joys of the endless online world to find some new adventure to undertake. Some exotic location to explore that he had not yet conquered that he would whisk himself away to, in order to look for something unusual or sensational. It delighted him to no end to read the horrid and often evocative fanfictions that had been written about himself and Louis, as well as the others, on various archives ran primarily by women. Their imaginations knew no bounds and they would take what he and Louis had penned and create entirely different scenarios and adventures that could be dramatic, hilarious, spectacular, or—his personal favorite—full of heart wrenching angst.

The vampire would read these out loud sometimes, to himself and once or twice in a cafe. One night he had earned great applause when he had interrupted a poetry reading at an evening bistro Louis had made the mistake of frequenting. Lestat had always had a desire to be seen and had drawn an especially captive audience in his provocative deliverance of the graphic sexual story that he had chosen. Louis had lasted about halfway through the lovemaking scene before he left in hopes that the other would pursue but instead, the troublemaking blond had reappeared later with excitement about his next performance.

It was tough being bored. Having experienced more then most could even dare to fathom in the supernatural world had left Lestat feeling, more then once, as if there may be nothing really left to experience. When these moods would descend he would consider again the long sleep. Overwhelmed by the sheer gravity of what had already come to pass or sometimes some other, greater mystery of the world would inevitably pull the vampire prince into it's gravity and hurl him through yet another cataclysmic exploration of his existence. His encounters with all the other great supernatural entities he had met thus far had proven one thing to him: the world was not done with him yet. Fate, God or whatever greater thing that pulled the threads of events would not allow him to perish and if he was to continue to exist until the world burned out, then he would have to find some way to pass the time.

Currently there was some rather stimulating activity going on that involved the strange consulting detective his dearest fledgling had discovered. There was quite a collection of interesting individuals that stayed near by and kept a close eye on Sherlock Holmes as well as the doctor who no longer resided at the Baker Street flat. Some of which were easier to read and more disposable then others. One such man was walking down the street currently, quietly speaking in Russian on his cell phone, though the thoughts that ran through his mind had little to do with the timber of the words he spoke allowed.

The man was young for one who had so much blood on his conscience. The mop of dark auburn curls and the soft rounded face reminded the vampire strikingly of another immortal, to which these distinguishing feature also helped disguise a more sinister creature. This young man has stalking the detective for quite a while but in the last two days he had, unknowingly become the prey and a decision had been made by the blond that he was a fitting piece to play next in the game he had set about concocting.
The Russian was watching the detective, relaying information back to a criminal organization, who would in all eventuality decide to take the man out. It would not do to have anyone interfering with his own little mystery, not to mention the enjoyment of watching Sherlock and John’s own angst-ridden adventures in trying to figure it all out. Lestat was developing quite the soft spot for the brilliant brunet who hungered for entertainment almost as perilously as he himself. What a wicked pair they could make, he pondered for a moment, before tossing the idea aside as the youth passed below him and ended the call he had been on with a tap on the glowing screen and a soft curse.

With no more sound then the soft rustle of curtains that stirred in the open windows of the apartments above, Lestat descended into the shadow of the man who smelt like peaches and cigar smoke. When the youth stopped suddenly, alerted to the predator that was so closely behind him, it was too late to escape. The cell phone clattered to the concrete below as the iron grip snaked around his torso, a hand clenched tightly over his lips to stifle a muffled and desperate cry. The two ascended swiftly as Lestat pressed the length of his body tightly to the other man’s backside, releasing his hand from the others lips and instead clenching a tight hand full of the perfect curls. Too high above the buildings below to be easily heard over the ambient noise of the city, the string of curses as well the violent struggle ceased suddenly. A soft gurgle replacing the thick accented language as Lestat bit hard and savagely into the exposed throat before him. The flesh tearing easily, like the thin skin of a grape, as the rush of hot and rich blood flooded into Lestat’s eager mouth.

The boy shuddered against the immortal as he greedily drained the life from the other, drinking in the savagery and desperation of the dyeing thoughts as he was drug along forcefully towards his own death. No effort was given to offer the reprieve of enjoying his embrace, instead, every grace that had been offered to the many victims he had wronged, was returned to him. The thunder of the others heart began to stutter and on the precipice of the great nothing, Lestat pulled back with a gasp of ecstasy as he broke the embrace. The hot flush was liquid fire in his veins and coursed through him, enriching the world around him, vision crisping with all other senses springing to life with a greater vibrancy. Holding the weak body in his arms, he listened to the shallow breathing and watched the other slipping in and out of consciousness. The youths mind was fevered and haunted by the faces of the people he had wronged and the violence of his childhood as much as the unknown creature that held him high above the London streets.

“How do you want to die?” He whispered with a purr into the boy’s ears and felt the twitch of resistance, the pitiful struggle of the dying mortal, fervently trying to convince himself that he had slipped into some horrible nightmare.

“I could drop you from here, hmmm? Oh and what a pretty little mess you’d make for my friend to figure out.” The vampire let the man slip from his grasp to plummet to the street below. Yet after only a moment of terrifying free fall his thin wrist was hastily snatched from the air. The sickening pop of the joint was heard before the shoulder gave way under the sudden strain of his weight and the force of the drop. A pitiful and painfully weakened cry parted the blue-tinged lips, as his victim dangled hopelessly. Tears began to streak down the pale cheeks. He was too weak to look up and the salty fluid pooled on his chin before slipping free and falling the long decent to the concrete below.
“I’d hate to spare you any undue pain but I do have other things to be getting to.” The steely cold grip let loose. The body fell and just before the moment of impact a woman’s scream was heard echoing up through the streets, followed instantaneously by the sickening crunch and squelch of flesh and bone coming to a sudden stop from the gravity fed speed of its decent.

The immortal stayed, starkly still and high above the scene unfolding on the street. Knowing full well that he was far too high for any mortal eyes to capture from the ground below and he patiently waited for the ant-like figure of the detective to emerge from the Baker street flat. When the detective figure had cast his gaze skyward, squinting desperately into the hazy night sky, searching for what, he didn’t know, the vampire let out a low and dangerous chuckle. Saluting to the man on the street from his lofty position, despite clearly knowing that the other couldn’t pinpoint his silhouette against the blackness and low hanging clouds of the London skyline, he said, “We are going to have such fun together, Sherlock Holmes. You…and I.”
Sherlock watched the doctor rub his hands over his face in a cleansing motion, the emotion and
exhaustion blatantly apparent on his features, as he pushed a heavy breath from his lungs. The detective did not blame his comrade for his bafflement. The body that had been inexplicably deposited on the door step to his Baker Street flat was quite the exquisite conundrum and the man was more than excited to have the lovely distraction along with the company of his former lover.

Of course he had heard the woman’s startled cry and then the more conspicuous splatter of the body colliding at great speed with the concrete outside his windows and John had been his first thought after his initial inspection—even before he called Lestrade. He wanted the doctor by his side when he inspected the poor sod’s remains and it delighted him so to have the man enticed out, even as late in the night as it was, with so very little effort on his part.

Yes, the young man was Russian. Wasn’t so hard to deduce. The rubles mixed in with the pounds in his wallet were very telling, as well as the fit and make of his clothing. There was not a whole lot else to go on, the body had been irreversibly broken by the fall, which implicated that his final decent had been within the near vicinity of four hundred and forty-five feet. This effectively ruled out Lestrade’s ridiculous initial suggestion of a fall from a helicopter, being that aircrafts were not allowed below five hundred feet within the city limits. How else might the body have come to fall then that it might replicate the splatter pattern and injuries of a four hundred and fifty odd foot decent? There were no buildings in the area high enough, especially not 221. Perhaps there was force applied to the body, propelling it downward at a greater speed than weight and gravity could cause alone.

John had ascertained that the skull was fractured, the frontal, parietal, and occipital bones separating almost completely from the trauma of impact. The man’s left side of the rib cage was crushed—first to impact—causing a whip-like motion that brought the head and limbs down at a greater velocity consequently. Many of the vertebrae were shattered, the pelvis crushed, left hip dislocated, its femur snapped, and the tibia exposed. The only thing containing the body now was the clothing, as the man’s fluids congealed on the cold cement underfoot.

Sherlock’s brain was working, calculating, speculating, as the auburn head of curls was concealed by the closure of the black plastic body bag. It had been long enough for the detective to also note that the man was an assassin, a well healed scar on his back the brand of his Russian owners, which also clearly identified who his target had been. Sherlock supposed he should feel grateful. Whoever had murdered the young death dealer had kept him safe. Yet he only felt disappointed that he had not been granted the opportunity to deal with the assassin on his own.

Smiling, he reminded himself that the death was more fun this way and it was most amusing to have John glaring at him from across the body bag, those dark blue depths warning him to cut the grin and be serious—this was a crime scene.

Lestrade looked lost and taken aback by the entirety of the scene. It had been rather gruesome, not just your run of the mill homicide. The inspector raked a hand back through his short silvered crop. Sherlock could sense that the man wished he had the butt of a cigarette between his lips, the smoke of its tobacco in his nostrils, and the calming effects of the nicotine in his bloodstream to help him think. Sherlock had to admit that he empathized with the other man, he too could use a drag, but not while John was present. Lestrade’s dark eyes, wide with the late hour and the mystery of the man’s death, asked what everyone else stupid enough to think wanted to know, “What do you make of this, Sherlock?”

Sally Donovan rolled her chestnut colored eyes, the muscles in her neck and jaw indicating that she was grinding her molars. When she seen his askance glance in her direction, those eyes narrowed sinisterly and she spun her back towards him, with a flip of her small black ringlets. She stormed away, pretending she had business to do with Anderson by the squad car that flashed its lights about
the crime scene like a beacon to curious onlookers in the night. The detective cast his glance with a dart of his pale gaze in the opposite direction to see that John was waiting, expectantly, the gears in his brain working to catch up to where Sherlock had ended but was still unwilling to announce his findings aloud.

The consulting detective put his own hands into the pockets of his dark trousers, assuming a much more casual stance, before he responded to the inspector’s question. “A man has taken his last leap, Inspector, and made a terrible mess in doing so.”

John cringed, the tension visible in his face and body, screaming the irritation that he was attempting to hide. Lestrade huffed his own frustration in more of a disapproving grunt and then ignorantly prodded, “That’s all you got, is it?”

“Of course not.” Sherlock snapped, unable to believe that the flippant comment had Lestrade antagonizing his skill to geode him into elaboration. In defense of his abilities, as he could not leave the remark un-accosted, the detective announced empirically, “It’s a Russian assassin, no doubt followed me home with the intentions of doing away with me to please his revenge seeking masters, and met with a far more sinister character than he himself. Fortunate for me, unfortunate for him it seems.”

“You got all that from…this?” the silver haired man queried, waving his hands about the left over brains and blood on the cement before them.

It was Sherlock’s turn to roll his eyes. Normal people were so simple. “I got all that from the wallet in the man’s pocket. Don’t be surprised if you are contacted soon by the British Secret Service, I am sure that they will be interested in the remains.”

Lestrade looked bamboozled by that last comment, as though his authority were being called into question. It had not been meant as an offense, it was simply what was inevitable considering the circumstances of the victim and his untimely death. Still the older man stupidly questioned him, “And I am just supposed to hand him over? Scotland Yard is—“

“Incapable of handling this, yes, I agree.” Sherlock finished, hoping the inspector would get the hint and drop it. “My suggestion would be that you cooperate. They do have their connections, don’t they? Now if you are quite finished abusing my time I shall take my leave, Inspector.” Sherlock nodded his head at the other man and tipped his hand towards him, mimicking a sarcastic ‘tip of a hat’, before he spun on his heel and headed back into 221B, with a casual farewell.

He took the steps up to his flat two at a time, not bounding up them by any means, and behind him he could hear the door being caught and another individual following him inside—John. Mrs. Hudson’s door opened and the two of them had a short exchange regarding the night’s awful events, yet there were little details to give the panicked elderly woman still startled by the occurrence and feeling somewhat responsible for the mess out front on their doorstep. He was sure John could pacify her, as only the doctor could, and instead he went straight for his leather chair. He tossed off his jacket and threw it on to the messy desk between the tall window, before he jumped up into the seat of his chair and squatted on his haunches. His elbows sat on his raised thighs, as he drew his hands to steeple them under his chin. Slowly he gathered all of his thoughts, all of his calculations, all of the clues, marshalling them into uniformed lines within his mind’s eye to begin sorting through them.

This one was unlike the previous two to come before it. The speed with which these little clues were being dropped before him, obvious bread crumbs leading to a dangerously sweetened trap, was increasing rapidly. It had not even been two weeks since the drug mule in the alleyway, yet it seemed somehow unintentional—as though the brain behind this scheme was no longer intensely
calculating his next move. This had all the hallmarks of an act of opportunity. Well, it certainly had piqued the detective’s interest.

John was standing before him, looking down at him with those intense blue orbs, searching his face, his being, looking for an explanation of some kind and not finding one. He enjoyed that the doctor had followed him into the privacy of 221B but at this particular time his staring was increasingly distracting. Sherlock lifted his chin from his steepled hands, “You have questions.” It was not a question in itself and it was not a demand.

“What…what was that, out front, there? A Russian assassin?” John was repeating what he already knew, insinuating that he was having trouble finding its validity.

“Don’t act so surprised, John.” The detective retaliated, trying and failing to clip the arrogance from his comment. “It is not as though it is the first time I have had watchers, waiting to pounce, and I can guarantee you that it won’t be the last, given my reputation for collecting them.”

His comments did little to appease the dark look looming on the doctor’s face. Those lines that Sherlock felt he had known so well, now deeper, etched with trauma and grief that the detective had yet to really acknowledge and own. John was worried—concerned for his friend’s well being, he had lost the man once and was unwilling to contemplate losing him again, and was distinctly angered that a situation which he felt was of great consequence the detective would so casually dismiss. It was as plain as almost everything was that registered on the man’s face. Almost everything, he corrected himself, as John’s stance and presence alone broke him of his train of thought, delving back hard and strong into the last incident that had occurred between them within the walls of the flat they had previously shared—that he now so visibly felt uneasy to frequent.

The brunet’s pale gaze roamed the other man’s person, darting up and down over the jeans hastily pulled on, the rumpled black jacket taken from the floor, and the simplest of twists in the long sleeved burnt-orange shirt—all suggesting that John had left his bed—had Mary been in it?—to come at his beck and call. This was a juxtaposition. A man that had clearly rushed to be with him and yet was clearly ill at ease within his company. It was hard not to blame the now infamous bathroom—not that it had been the walls, the tub, or the damned yellow bath towels that had caused the pleasure that had ensued or the awkward break of it. It was the unconventionality of it that disturbed the detective.

John’s inexplicable demands were questionable enough, yet his sudden and unemotional removal of them was stranger still. Whenever Sherlock considered this he saw red flags and heard alarm bells ringing in the recesses of his mind. Yet when he attempted to mull over the facts in consideration with these obvious warnings the detective found himself thwarted from the attempt every time—by his own arousal. The blasted reaction he had to even the memories of the time and incident prevented any kind of functional analysis. It was bloody inconvenient.

Sherlock had made great efforts to not allow himself this pleasure—the arousal of remembering all that he loved of John. It was, in succinct brevity, too painful. If he was to watch the doctor love and be loved by anyone other than himself this was an essential factor. A factor that was being thoroughly tested and aggravatingly proven true by his response to the man’s very presence now. He shifted in his seat and turned away slightly from John, casting his gaze into the kitchen beyond, dimly lit by the failing florescent lighting above the sink.

The doctor seemed to relax then, coming and sitting in his chair, which Sherlock had decided he could no longer keep exiled from the living room if John were to keep visiting. He rubbed the worn arms of his seat, with a nostalgic familiarity, before he sat back, crossing his ankles as he did so. He was settled, comfortably. The detective closed his eyes and tried to dispel the pang in his loins that
the memories had conjured, only to be defeated by another question. “Do you think that this bloke is related to the other two then?”

Sherlock nodded his head, not wanting to look at John yet.

“And then if he was sent here to kill you, who do you figure got him then? The one in the same, yeah?” John was piecing things together with an aptitude that Sherlock hadn’t expected—the doctor had spent an awful long time thinking about the previous murders. Perhaps his own interest in the cases had hastened the man’s speed to his aid. Then John confirmed what his astute observational skills had already noticed. “The fall was what killed him, but he still exhibited the same blood loss as the other two.”

Sherlock’s eyes flashed on his friend, a curve at the corner of his mouth, a visible display of the pleasure he took in hearing John slowly reverting back to their previous roles together. “And what else did you observe?” he purred, resting his chin on the point of his steepled fingers.

“A bite mark, on left side of the neck.” John answered, quickly. “If it was human it was one powerful jaw, most certainly pre-mortem. The poor bastard.”

“Someone is stringing us along, John, laying clues as it goes.” Sherlock commented, his lips pursing as he considered all the facts again. John’s interest in the clues helping to will away the power the amorous memories had over the detective’s mind and body.

“‘It?’” John asked curiously, his lips quirking as he moved to clarify, “Not sure if it’s a man or a woman?”

“The ‘it’ was of no consequence,” Sherlock dismissed the slip, with a flippant wave of his hand. “Whomever it is, is very clever, or sees themselves as being so, yet tonight I think was a bit of a slip-up, a break in his effectively planned plot.”

“A screw up?”

“Mmm-no. Bored.” Sherlock amended his friend’s guess. “I think he’s become bored with it all.”

“Now it’s a he?”

“Don’t get caught up in semantics, John.” Deflected the detective.

“And what does this all have to do with you?” the doctor took the deflection with ease and changed routs, his concern winning out over his desire to discover. “He wants to get caught, do you think? By you? That’s why this last one was left on your door step.”

“I do have an international reputation, John, for being very clever.” Sherlock gave his friend a cagy grin that earned him the delight of a chuckle out of John, before he elaborated, “He thinks he’s too intelligent to get caught…or too powerful. He’s sought the best and never been caught so now he’s come to tempt the greatest. I must be taking too long, that last one was sloppy.”

A blond brow raised skeptically over the dark blue eye of the doctor, as he tried and failed to stifle another chuckle, pointing out, “The victim was a mess alright.”

“And mixed in with his own auburn curls there was a blond strand that didn’t fit.” The detective explained, delighted indeed to be showing off again for the man that seemed to enjoy it just about as much as he himself did.

“Maybe he had a snog prior,” John suggested, with a contrary shrug of his shoulders. He was
challenging but with little effort.

“If she happened to end his life, by biting clean through his fleshy neck in her amorous need to satiate some carnal sexual desire, then, yes.” The detective jested, fantastically, before grinding back to the truth. “Perhaps that’s why I referred to the murder as a ‘he’ earlier. Biting for sexual arousal is somewhat out of my league of experience but I do rather think that a woman would have had a hard time leaving that deep of an impression—most men too I suspect—?” Sherlock’s last comment was stifled by John’s sudden movement towards him.

The doctor had risen to his feet, uncrossing his ankles and pushing himself up out of the red chair in a motion so fluid it seemed unnatural. The short distance between them was closed in two long commanding strides of the shorter man’s legs, as his gaze zeroed in on Sherlock with such intensity that the hairs on the back of his neck rose. He made to say the other’s name, to question his former lover’s intentions, when his steepled hands were brushed aside roughly and the other’s hand gripped the back of his head. A fist full of dark curls, John reefed his head back and slightly to the side. Sherlock hissed as the violent motion caught his breath in his constricting throat. His heart hammering in his chest, John bent between his perched legs and brought his mouth to the taut muscles of his neck and softly pressed kisses up and down the length. Words failed him, his eyes slid closed, and he grit his teeth to hold back a moan. All the pleasure he had been denying himself flooded his system and his gut ached with desire to hear John’s moan echoing his own, the sound thrilling the flesh of his neck with vibrations.

The detective could not remember the doctor’s tongue ever working such pleasure over his skin with such practiced skill, as his kisses moved to tickle the notch of delicate skin between the turn of his jaw and the lobe of his ear. Yet his arousal spoke for itself. John could surely feel it pressing so blatantly into his midsection that ground between his legs, as he held him prisoner beneath his mouth’s ministrations. Swept away in the undeniable pleasure of the other’s sudden and unwarranted actions, Sherlock didn’t care how or when the doctor had picked up such intimate practices. He didn’t even have a thought as for why. He was only consumed with his want and his need for more.

The blonde’s tongue played with the sensitive lobe of his ear, tracing the curved shell up and then back down before eliciting a gentle but feverishly erotic warning, “We are going to have so much fun, you and I, Sherlock Holmes.”

With the consulting detective’s mind completely overcome with desire, he let out a gasp of exclamation and then a scream of pain, as John’s mouth opened wide and his teeth sank into the tender skin of his neck. His mind recoiled, like the snapping of a whip, and impulse replaced desire. In a violent motion he shoved the doctor back from him. The hand let loose of his curls and John fell back onto his rump.

“Sherlock?!” John’s tone was filled with offense as the brows knit in confusion and the blue-green eyes assessed his position on the floor.

Sherlock’s hand had quickly clasp over the wound to assess the damage to his throat, finding it wet he drew his fingers back to reveal the scarlet stain of blood as the brunet fought the conflicting emotions running rampant through him. The arousal of that unexpected moment replaced by shock and confusion at the incident as much as the words that had passed those lips, still tinted red with the consulting detectives own blood, the tone and choice of words was almost removed from the man who had spoken them. The macrocosm that existed in the Baker Street flat was tilting on its axis at the perplexity of what had just transpired between the two men. John’s gaze was accusatory, no longer did the half-lidded glaze of undeniable lust shine in his eyes while he began to rise from the floor.
“What the bloody hell, Sherlock!?” John shouted, genuine outrage radiated off the doctor.

The hot burn of the wound caused the consulting detective’s indignation at the one sided accusation to bubble up as he rebutted, “You bit me, John!” Snapping his head to the side, fully exposing the wound as the warm wet trickle could be felt trailing down past the collar of his shirt. The blood on his fingers accenting his point, as he presented the wound. He wished he had taken more care to not twist his head so violently.

Critically the doctor eyed the wound, disbelief clear on his face, as if he had somehow expected another head to suddenly sprout up out of the curve of the others throat where the angry red bite-mark was freely weeping. “Not possible…” The color began to drain from the blondes face as the pink tongue snaked out to taste the copper twinge of blood on his lips. The consulting detective could see the bump of the others tongue pressing against cheeks and under lips as the other hastily assessed that no there was no indication of having bit his own lip or cheek as a viable excuse for the discovery.

As Sherlock considered the ominous implications of the other’s discovery John’s reaction was more immediate and predictable—flight. The doctor had no grounds to fight this conviction on, not with the taste of blood in his mouth now, and so he ran, his fear receptors within his brain gaining traction as his mind failed to explain what and why this had happened. In a flurry of limbs that Sherlock was unable to stop the other man was on his feet and through the door to the flat, bailing down the staircase two steps at a time and making a tremendous raucous as he did so. Then the final slam of the front door to 221B.

The consulting detective went to the window, pulling back the curtain with a long finger to glance at the doctor’s fleeing form on the dark silent sidewalk below. It was late but even still the man was racing away, too consumed by the confusion and his own surprise to even think of attempting to flag a cabby for the trip back to his other lover—his other home.

The detective stepped back from the window and began to pace the small space of the room. Revolving between the long sofa and the mantle of the fire place he tried to think, tried to put all the pieces of the puzzle together. A picture was forming, still indistinct, vague by any means of description, but slowly unveiling as each piece was fit into place. The woman, the man, the Russian…John. What could all these strange unexplainable incidents have in common? Why biting? Why blood-loss—no! Blood drinking…

His feet came to a sudden stop, as did the thoughts in his brain. These two words emblazoned in his minds eye, blown up, punctuated with an exclamation mark. “Not blood loss…no—Oh, that was tricky, that was so clever!”

“Sherlock…?” Mrs. Hudson’s distant call broke his mental epiphany and the consulting detective gave a loud agonizing groan, as he turned to find the elderly owner of the flats ascending the stairs to his own. He had his tongue coiled to strike the intruder with a deadly verbal whip-lash when the woman’s face suddenly contorted, a hand flew to her mouth, and she gasped. “You’re bleeding!”

As if the pain of the rent flesh wound had been somehow circumvented by his thought processes the landlady’s blatant reference back to it broke this and the pain returned double fold, radiating out with each pulse of his thrumming heart rate. He could hear his molars grind together, from both her inopportune intrusion and to fight the searing ache. He wanted both of them gone and so without a word he paced to the door, slamming it shut. Mrs. Hudson gave a grumble of complaint, muttering under her breath all her grievances, as he heard her turn and begin to make her way back down to her own flat. Then the dark haired man turned back around, his feet desiring to return to their pacing, when his eyes caught the edge of a shadow that was unfamiliar to him.
That acute variscite gaze thrust upwards to the window panes, his mind whispering, *hadn’t there been a flicker of light?* He was at the window in an instant searching the darkened street below. There was no one out, it was very late—early, in fact—and the sidewalks, the visible phone booth, the streets, were all void of movement, bare of people, and dreadfully still.
The blonde’s tongue played with the sensitive lobe of his ear, tracing the curved shell up and then back down before eliciting a gentle but feverishly erotic warning, “We are going to have so much fun, you and I, Sherlock Holmes.”
The club was high class, lavish and filled—but not stiflingly so—with beautiful mortals that would lend themselves well to assist in not drawing much attention to the two creatures who inhabited a booth with a full view of the establishment. Armand had been easy to spot when Louis had gained entry past the suited doorman. The waitress quickly arrived with the Irish Coffee that the other vampire had surely procured for him as he slid into the booth, absently turning his head before leaning back against the rich brown leather. Ensuring his pony-tail was free as long fingers wound around the hot glass cup, soaking in what little warmth possible as he took in the site of the eternal pouting cherub. This night the thick auburn curls had been cut short and styled with the sleek appearance of a young wolf in a well tailored suit, with expensive cufflinks to boot.

"Thank you for meeting me," Armand began, leaning forward he outstretched a hand across the table and clasped Louis own, "I always enjoy seeing you." Before the taller man had totally reacted to the touch, the other had withdrawn and resumed a casual recline in his seat.

"I am sure." Louis’ reply sounded peevish to his own ears but the other didn't seem to take notice or simply chose to ignore it.

"How are you enjoying your little stay in London? Do you plan to stay long or is this simply a... 'vacation'?" There was no denying the amusement that played across the pale pink curve of cupids bow lips.

"The city holds some interest for now but I had made no plans either way." Long deft fingers untangled gracefully and repositioned on the steaming cup. "What brings you to here? Or would it be simple coincidence that you knew I was in town and happened to be passing through?"

"It was not so great a secret to unravel." Armand began "Though, if you are thinking that I followed you here you must remember that I... am not Lestat. Unlike your maker I had business in this city outside of pursuing you." The last word was followed by a soft exhalation as long lashes slid to half mask the dark brown eyes flecked with amber. The gaze was sensual as a wet pink tongue darted out to moisten the younger mans lips. "Though, I must admit I have always enjoyed pursuing you, Louis."

The raven haired head dipped and his emerald eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly at the older vampire adjacent him in the round black leather booth. It was hard not to be skeptical of the little beast's presence after the encounters he had shared so far in the city with his own maker. These two men had accompanied him the most over the years which he had chosen to share of his immortal life with another—even though these were still few when considered—and it was these two men that warred eternally for over his attentions, jested and bickered over his affections. Always caught in the middle, it was hard now not to be skeptical of Armand’s true purpose in the ancient city.

Yet Louis had no doubt that Armand had shadowed his intentions with true business. The little cherub had properties, acquired here and there over the centuries which speckled the globe, and tendrils of connections throughout the business world that kept him forever wealthy. It was apparent tonight with his expensive, well-tailored, suit and cropped well combed hair that he had been at his business prior to this very meeting.

This deduction quirked the corners of the vampire’s lips and he thought of the consulting detective and his outrageous skills that had first piqued his interest and drawn him away from the North Carolina’s. Besides being incredibly gifted of mind the detective’s greatest skill was that of simple observation—the skill of seeing and translating. The vampire had just done the same thing, made a plausible conclusion based on a simple observation. His eyes scanned the cherub’s face again, taking in the small supple mouth, pouted with intrigue, as those liquid caramel orbs watched him.
Armand always wanted something and it was he himself that had admitted pursuit. Yet the other’s company was not intolerable. The other vampire had a far more content manner to the way he accompanied Louis, quietly pleased to simply make conversation, debate, and socialize. It was what drew them together now and then over the years, the pleasure of one another’s content company. Armand was right, he was unlike his own maker. Lestat was never content, even though he could now and then act as though he were. His mind was always moving, charging, running away with his sensibilities when life even slightly became trivial or mundane. So there was the crux that betwixt this meeting.

As the music thrummed around them, mingling with the faint beating of the mortals hearts that filled the place, Louis finally replied to the other, admitting, “I have come here for the time being, for as long as the ancient city amuses me. A change was needed.”

The corner of the other vampire’s mouth quirked up, the barest hint of an elongated fang visible through the part in the small lips, as his head tipped slight to his shoulder and he returned, “Ah, yes. I agree with your sentiment.” Then his nose crinkled, as the older vampire chided, “I see that Lestat has taken up residence here as well, in that awfully elaborate penthouse of his.”

Louis nodded his head, unable to keep the barest of smiles from his own mouth. Armand was right after all, his maker had followed him here and his residence of choice was resplendent with every pleasure imaginable—except those that Louis preferred. Perhaps that was the lure the cherub had chosen to dangle.

The thought plucked from his mind with little effort Armand made the offer, proffering his own more simple residence, whose confines were filled to the brim with books, of which Armand had collected conscious of Louis’ love for the written word. It was his vice. An offer which Louis could not ignore.

“Come with me, Louis,” Armand purred from across the table, that hand reaching out again to clasp his own, alluring as the tips stroked over the back to his wrist. “Surely Lestat can be without you for the evening.”

“Lestat has no sway on my plans.” Louis lied, as convincingly as he could. “I go where I please.”

Armand dipped his head, eyes pinning Louis with a seductive glance upwards, as the fingertips played against his skin temptingly. In a sickly sweet tone, he asked, “And do you please, Louis?”

“Tonight, I shall.” He agreed.

When the two exited the club an elegant black car with dark tinted windows waited for them. Armand dispatched the young valet and slipped into the drivers seat as his evenings company took the passengers seat. The casual inspection of the vehicles interior was part of an attempt to not show the unease that Armand could easily feel on the other. It was to be expected, he supposed.

They, like so many of their kind, did have a rather sorted and difficult history. Filled with past slights and peppered with rare but pleasant segments of time. It was those kinder times that would so often linger in the older vampire’s mind when he was feeling want to reminisce. Not an activity that was habit, as so very few times in his long past were not fraught with some form of turmoil and strife. It was one reason why he gravitated towards the raven-haired younger vampire, for after the scales were balanced he found more pleasure in this one man’s company than in many of the others whom he had known over the centuries.

The drive was quiet and uneventful, casual questions with casual answers. Armand knew the tactics
better than most, those that he would need to execute in order to better his chances at acquiring what he desired but it was what he desired that was still somewhat obscured. It was indeed coincidences that he had needed to come to London in order to transfer large sums of wealth from one holding to the other but the same could not be said about his knowledge of Lestat's presence and dealings. Armand had learned of Lestat's trip to London from the vampires own boasting and it was easy to learn of his motivations in following his fledgling.

With his affairs well managed and tended by his own maker, Marius, Armand was free to do as he wished. Quick calls were made, arrangements finalized and when he stepped into the entry of one of his preferred London properties it was as if he had only just stepped out for a night at the opera and was returning now. He was a man of means, after all, and those means meant that he would never again linger in dusty tombs when he could have oil lanterns lit for him and the plush comfort of well dusted libraries with leather chairs.

Arriving at the house with Louis in the luxury car at his side was a small thing that he knew would drive Lestat mad if he had seen it. It had taken a little more effort than he had anticipated to unravel Lestat's activities and it was even more interesting to see how many little flies he had unintentionally attracted to his web.

“I must admit, this is a far cry from a garish high-rise.” Louis's tone was genuine and more relaxed now as he admired the quiet street. The well kept brick home was situated in the shadow of an ancient oak tree that provided more privacy then the houses neighboring it on either side, otherwise it's equal in the style and construction.

A light chuckle was the reply that came as Armand unlocked the door and swung it wide with a tip of his head, emulating a bow as he offered entrance to the company he had brought to his humble abode. The two men stepped inside and with the smooth grace of their kind, coats were hung, a modest tour of the home completed, as well as it's many works of valuable art, and the ivory youth shed his suit jacket on the back of the carved cherry-wood desk in the space that had been dedicated as the library. Louis's fingers trailing feather-lite along the spines of old tomes in one shelf before they skirted the sleek and high-gloss spine of new volumes by many names he recognized and some he did not.

“It seems I've managed to lure you into my little trap far easier then I thought.” Armand gracefully sunk into his chair by the fireplace, as a whoosh of warmth and heat flooded the room, fire springing to life at the touch of a button on the remote that sat on his side table.

“Now that I have you here it is customary that I seduce you.” He went about pouring a rich amber colored liquor from the crystal decanter on his side table into the short glass that was obviously meant for no other purpose in it's placement.

“Of course, you must resist.” He paused and swirled the glass with well practiced elegance, the complicated scents filled the air. Of rich floral notes followed by smoke, rich barley, licorice and a wave of sea spray.

“I will be appropriately wounded but charmingly persistent always to bow to your desire and not cause unnecessary woes between us. So now that we have established the next bit of our evening, how would you care to spend the rest? I have a private box at the Symphony if you're so inclined one evening, in my company or not, it is yours to use if you should wish it.” His eyes didn't look up once to meet Louis', instead they watched the splash of the expensive scotch in it's crystal confines through dark lashes, lips parted slightly as he inhaled the scent of the liquor he himself, would never drink.

Overtop of the sparkling crystal glasses, his caramel orbs found his guest. Daniel wasn’t here now.
No. And Louis was far more interesting than the lost mind of his fledgling, which perpetually moved to build his miniature cities without thought for self or other. The raven head of his company was turned away, his body moving slowly along the length of the extensive shelving that surrounded them on all sides, his eyes no doubt scanning each individual spine and marker in turn, far too intrigued with the shelves inhabitants to care for his trivial bypass of the quite regular start to their interplay when together.

The auburn head tipped down, his nose smelling the delightful scents of the liquor, allowing the silence that had settled to remain—swallowing the subtle fact that so far this stage of the evening was becoming somewhat one sided. It was still comforting to have the other’s presence, to feel the wonder and enjoyment radiate from his companion, to simply watch the man deep within his own reverie.

Having just settled into taking stock of his own enjoyment in gloating and watching the other vampire, Louis answered him—long overdue and without turning to speak, he said calmly, “I am pleased, very pleased, Armand.” The voice held within it the smile that the older vampire could not see. “Both in your truly elaborate collection here—absolutely astonishing, as promised—but also,” the dark head paused in its slow movement, as a delicate hand reached out and chose its first selection from the shelves—A Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti by Marcus Rainsford—and he finished, adding, “in the way you so elegantly stepped over that little piece of our reunion. You have proven your wealth of knowledge regarding my intolerance for such trivialities as no other before you.”

Louis lifted the two hundred year old book, still remarkably intact, as if giving a toast, as he spun to face the cherub faced vampire, eternally young, and came to sink into the chair opposite him. Armand watched his guest lean back, cross his blue jean clad legs, and crack the book open, enamored by the small puff of dust that accompanied the turn of the first couple of pages. Without lifting his head, the other vampire said simply but earnestly, “Thank you,” as his eyes began to fly across the page with paranormal vigor.

They stayed that way for a long while, Louis reading through book after book, never once saying a word, as Armand silently watched.

When a couple of hours had passed in this fashion and the cover closed on the volume in hand, Louis absently set the book to rest with the others in the neat pile by the side of his chair. His gaze moved to the figure of the impossibly beautiful youth bathed in warm firelight in the seat adjacent him. His focus on the gas fueled fire that danced and flickered in the hearth was as intense as it was lost and for a moment his heart broke for the old man who was forever locked in the visage of a Botticelli angel. He had read Armand’s book too when it was released. He had thought he had known much about the immortal himself and the time they shared and still there had been much more that had not been revealed until the another had set pen to purpose and published his story, as a few of their kind had done after he himself had broken the silence of their kind only to have it all regarded as fiction by the mortals that read it.

"I appreciate your concern." Came the soft reply as lips parted and Armand closed his eyes, inhaling a long breath.

"Armand, I know you well enough to know you are troubled..." Louis gave pause at the dark chuckle that interrupted unbidden from his companion, "As we all are, I understand, and rightly so. You rarely have and so I do not expect it of you to freely unburden your mind by discussing such with me but know this—you have my ear should you wish it."

Armand’s eyes darkened as he turned in his seat, the squeak of leather rubbing as he gripped the arm
and leaned towards Louis, "And what if it is more than your 'ear’ that I want, Louis?"

Louis could feel a slight flush rise to his cold flesh at the intensity and lust in the eyes of the other, he knew this was always just below the surface of their interactions and yet still it caught him slightly off guard. In his moment of hesitance Armand took the next move and relaxed back in his chair with an exhausted sigh.

"As I suspected, beautiful one." Armand plucked back up the scotch and began to again swirl it to refresh its fragrance in the room. "You must be off, not because I wish it such but because you feel it time to depart and I would not keep you from your desires despite my own."

"Armand..." Louis began then stopped himself. He couldn't think of anything more to say. Armand was right, whether it had been gleaned from his mind unknowingly or that the other really did know him so well. He preferred to think it the latter and so he rose from the chair and replaced his errant pile of books back in the shelves from whence they had came. Slipping on his coat from the back of the chair he stopped before the other immortal who looked up into the fractured emerald eyes of the man before him.

Without words Louis bent down, a hand slipping along the soft curve of the others jaw, tilting his face upward so that eyes met for a moment before the soft ghosted kiss pressed between them. It was not an action born of lust, no hot fluster of desire over taking either of them in that moment. It was a touch of compassion, understanding, and genuine love for the creatures that they had been and had become, as well as those they could still yet be.

When the door had latched behind him and the slight plume of his breath was visible in the air, Louis let out a long breath he had not realized he was holding. He stood for a moment on the step of the house Armand was temporarily calling home and considered his position for a moment before shaking his head, an attempt to clear his mind of so many mixed thoughts and feelings. Deciding instead to make his way to his flat and be done, for now, with both of the men who plagued his mind. A text had registered in his pocket, curiously he glanced and saw it was the code for entrance into Armand’s property, nothing else. No message or invitation for further meetings, just the code. He knew that the other would been in London for two weeks according to his current plans and then, he had not yet decided his next destination but knowledge shared was as much an invitation as was needed.

Louis dropped the phone back into his pocket and began home. It would have been a long walk back to his flat but Louis took the opportunity to truly look at the city, enjoying the architecture and design of the old world and the new. When areas became more commercial or less friendly to pedestrians he would move with the speed granted to him and so that by the time he rounded the block to his flat on Baker Street no more then a half hour had passed.

When the breeze shifted he caught the sudden and undeniable smell of blood and bleach, causing his nose to crinkle as he took immediate notice of the caution taped section of roadway and sidewalk in front of 221. A van was parked near the tape with its back doors open wide, as a man in rubber boots swept a spray of pressurized water back and forth over a patch of ash-fault and concrete, pushing the water away into the nearest sewer grate.

The vampire slowly came to a stop on the sidewalk, watching the pressurized gush of the water try its best to remove the dark scarlet stain from the cement. The worker gave him nothing more than a questioning glance askance, his mind drumming out his perception on having a 'watcher' as he worked as clearly as a police car's siren wailed its presence. The immortal had the collar of his jacket turned up and his hands were in the pockets, as he tried to observe the scene. The smell of the blood was still thick in the air, despite the stinging tang of the bleaches vapors and the waters mist, easily
detected by his heightened immortal senses. Both the stench and the size of the bloody mar on the
cement hinted that the death had been gruesome. With the body cleared away already it was hard to
ascertain how the individual had died and he doubted he could deduce anything further from what he
already had perceived.

Louis' immediate thought was one he didn't want to entertain at the moment. Even with the bleach
and the water and the blood he thought he could also smell his maker, disquietingly somewhere in
the mix. Although Lestat had followed him across the ocean to the ancient city the other vampire
had been incredibly adept at entertaining himself, which always raised a certain degree of suspicion.
His maker was normally very skilled at cleaning up after himself. If this mess did indeed belong to
the other vampire, concluding an exact reason as to why he would choose this time to be so obvious
eluded Louis' thoughts. There simply did not appear to be a clear answer as to why Lestat would
engage in such activity, no matter what angle the other vampire considered.

Coming up empty handed the vampire tuned into the unbidden thoughts coming from the cleaner,
who still worked at his task, eyeing him contemptuously now and then through the clear safety
goggles over his muddy brown eyes. The human's thoughts were no help either, full of rambling
curses and derisive judgements, completely consumed by the fact that he was always hampered by
'watchers' in his profession. Louis had not the time to listen long enough that the man might by
chance recall what had happened to the individual whose blood provided his employment and the
vampire feared that a more direct approach would only garner more suspicion and less answers.

So his gaze turned then to the windows of the flat above the small hovel that he rented in the
basement of 221, as he wondered what the consulting detective had deduced from the scene. He had
no doubt in his mind that the brunet had been involved in full forced, with a gruesome murder
practically on his doorstep.

The keen emerald eyes met those starkly blue and green speckled orbs of the man himself, who
peered back down at him. Louis contemplated invading the man's protected mind and then quickly
dismissed it, not wanting the attention the action might provoke. He turned his gaze quickly away
and stepped around the taped off section of cement to come in through the doorway of the building.
He had taken his time, mentally forcing himself to slow his steps, so as not to seem rushed by the
mortal eyes that watched him. Before he could get through the hallway and down to his own flat
there was a thunderous descent from the flat above and the detective appeared like a flash, nearly
jumping over the last railing of the staircase to stop him in his tracks. Louis' hand had been on the
knob and there was the strong urge to disappear in a lightning quick movement that his immortal self
was capable of. Yet something cemented his feet to the floor at the sound of the detective's desperate
approach.

Without even turning to address the man that had cornered him at the end of the hallway outside his
door Louis was surprised to have his nostrils assaulted by another wave of the dreadfully tempting
smell of fresh blood. This was not mingled with bleach or water. The alluring smell beckoned to his
taste buds and palette, as potent as a pregnant woman's hormones induced insatiable cravings,
mingled provocatively with the sweet odor of sweat, saliva, and stress. If Louis had not fed recently
the desire to pounce on the almost seductive offering at his door may have been too much. Clenching
his teeth together the vampire straightened and setting his jaw he turned in a slow trained movement
to greet the tall thin detective.

In a sweeping gaze imperceptible to the mortal before him he took in the man's person. The dark
trousers, wrinkled from a day's wear, the dress shirt unbutton at the collar and folded up to the
elbows, the sheen of sweat glistening on the pale triangle of flesh revealed in that opening, and the
stain of fresh blood drying around a circular tooth marked wound from a bite on the lean length of
neck. His eyes were narrowed in scrutiny and his hair was disheveled, as though someone's hands
had roughly been through the curls. His mouth was an impassive bow, the man trying to stay in complete control of the emotions that obviously had propelled him down the steps.

Louis met those roiling eyes, which spoke so much more than his impenetrable mind, and in a calm, pleasant tone, the vampire gave the detective a brief neighborly salutation. "Good eve, Mr. Holmes."

"Yes, good eve and all that," the detective dipped his head as he rambled—a tactic to hide his own sweeping glance of his neighbors’ person—a delicate fingered hand flipping wildly as he brushed past the traditional introductions, and launched into questions, "a terrible business that is outside our flat. A young man it seems met his end after an unfortunate fall from inexplicable heights. Dreadful really—,"

The detective made to take a breath and the dark haired immortal cut him off, slightly perplexed and wary of what the man’s exact intentions were with his uncharacteristically forward friendliness and the freely divulged information. Unobtrusively he cut in with a quick and quiet question, deftly attempting to side track the detective’s train of thought. "Dreadful indeed. Not something I expected here in London but I suppose also not entirely out of the question. I suppose then, given your reputation as the world’s only consulting detective, that you are involved in the investigation?"

Those pale eyes narrowed a touch, a normal mortal may have missed it, but the vampire did not. The man calculated his response and was prepared to deliver a rebuttal in a flash of mortal time. This incredible ability was part of the lure this human’s reputation had cast. It was hard not to bite.

"Yes, of course. The fall having occurred so close in proximity to my own self I was unsurprisingly the first on the scene." Then with a very blatantly acted purse of his lips—those full perfectly sculpted lips—the man turned and brought a thin hand to his chin like some wizened professor stroking a beard that wasn’t there, and he added, "I take it then from your response that you are from America, New York or Los Angeles perhaps? Although you speak with a hint of a creole accent— New Orleans then. And I wonder, what brings you to London? You seem to have an affinity for old books and reading, a man that keeps to himself but his eyes on everything else.” There was more but it seemed that the man swallowed it. His mind gave a small tweet of the comment that had almost escape, squelched by his better judgment...hiding something.

The vampire nodded and attempted as best as he could to fain embarrassment, to force a flush to his cheeks to ward off the man’s keen observation of his unearthly pallor. He was made uneasy by the tidbit unintentionally released from the sealed recesses of the consulting detective’s fantastic mind. It was a warning to be cautious. Louis had no intention of provoking the attentions of the superior mortal. If he did he would be forced to vacate the area, to watch from a far and in hiding, and he wasn’t ready to give that up yet. “New Orleans, Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Chicago and many more. I frequent where I like in America, as I have the luxury to do so freely. Yet, as I am certain the great Sherlock Holmes has already deduced, one can grow bored and quite easily so. London is newer to me and I am here to experience it.” He explained, in most honesty. He gave a soft chuckle and rested his shoulder back against the door jamb of the entrance to his own flat, as he suavely amended, “I have to admit it was you yourself that persuaded me to do so. As you have said I do have an affinity for books and reading, but also for the mind. Your skills are most curious, Mr. Holmes.”

"Mmm,” the other man said, taking a step back from the other, as if they had shared the unsettling feeling with the shift of attention.

Louis took the opportunity to continue, giving a short but sweet anecdote, “I was bored and now I’m not. Much less so after tonight’s event.” He allowed his tone to slow as he had said the last word, his tongue clicking out the last ‘T’ with well-planned finality. Then he stood straight again and
opened the door to his flat below, issuing a quick good night to the detective. Just before ducking away, he put a hand theatrically to his mouth and whispered, “I suggest you take a look at your neck as well. I see that you are bleeding.”

Then the door was shut and silently the vampire went down into his own flat. Above he finally heard the steps retreat and his dark brows knit together. It had been more information than he had ever wanted to give the man regarding himself. There were many stories that his kind told to cover their true identity, their monstrous nature, but Louis refrained if at all possible. Daniel had been his only real exception and the consequences of that were all too apparent still on Armand’s troubled features that same evening. Giving Sherlock information was certainly dangerous and lying to the man was moot. He had no wish to entertain the man if he became interested—he would disappear, it was easier and less complicated for both of them.

Just not yet. He wasn’t ready to watch from afar. He enjoyed listening to the detective above him, and to his partner—his ex-lover and their beguiling love triangle. This was far more fun. It was more interest than he had taken in something for a very long time.
Lungs burning, his wounded leg searing with pain, John stumbled to a stop with open palms scraping against brick as he fought to catch his breath. He spat vehemently into the darkened alley. He had a vague idea of his location but it was of little pressing concern. He could still taste blood in his mouth and so he spat again, pushing away from the wall and registering the rough abrasions to his hands as he hissed. A flash of anguish laced up his thigh, as he rubbed the muscles rapidly in an attempt to calm the old wounds violent protest at his mad escape.

Escape? His mind paused at the thought, distracted for a moment as the world regained some balance and the pain became a throbbing ache. From Sherlock? Well yes! But… what the hell had happened?!
It didn’t make sense. There was something missing between the time he was discussing Russian-pancake-guy and when he found himself shoved to the floor with his friend’s blood hot on his lips. John squeezed his eyes shut and thrust his hands down at his side in a physical attempt to shake the world back into order and clear his mind. Adrenaline coursed through his veins, his heart rate was still racing, and God he needed a drink.

That thought suddenly became the grounding point of his focus, he knew there was a pub but a stones throw from where he was now. So with singular determination he took the first step out of the ally, marching with precision towards his new destination. There would be the customary grungy bathroom and there he could properly inspect his mouth for the wound that would explain the taste of blood on his palate. He could have a drink and think, and then get home to Mary. After all, it was late when he had run out. It would set her off if he burst back into their home in the wee hours of the morning with delusions of biting Sherlock Holmes.

No, there was no way. He just needed to have a drink and figure out what the hell game the mad genius was up to now.

He could feel the soles of his shoes sticking to the floor, as he entered the seedy pub. A man was asleep at the far end of the bar, in a darkened corner a couple of men sat talking quietly while stooped over pints, and a silver haired elderly woman, haggard and miserable looking, plucked away at the Video Lottery game off by the lone pool-table.

"Last call." the bartender announced as John slid into the empty seat closest the door and quickly ordered two gin and tonics, which earned him a weary and unimpressed glance.

Cash exchanged and first glass in hand, John downed it quickly. Wincing as the pleasantly bitter cocktail obliterated the last of the copper tang that had lingered on his palate. There was no burn of alcohol in a cut but that may have been because he had practically shot-gunned the drink. Leaving the other on the bar top he signaled with a nod to the barman that he would be right back, so he wouldn’t lose his drink, and then he quickly headed towards the washroom to conduct his examination. All the while he worked at keeping his mind focused only on the immediate tasks at hand. Once the results were in, he would have to deal with them. No sense letting his imagination run away on him quite yet, after all, it had been a rather stressful couple of weeks and he hadn’t been sleeping particularly well.

Whoa, John. First thing's first, he stopped himself mid-thought, pushing the equally sticky door open as it thunked against the back wall with no effort and John approached the mirror.

The small bathroom was dimly lit and the mirror itself was stained and dirty, like most everything else in the pub. The one light fixture in the dank room was set in the middle of the ceiling, behind him, making it terribly difficult to see inside his mouth, even with his face pressed as close to the mirror as he could manage with the sink in his gut. He examined the inside of his lips and along his gum line, holding each cheek out in turn, as he would on any of his patients. It was impossible to see anything, besides teeth and tongue. Stepping back and turning on the rusted taps to wash his hands, he continued the examination with his tongue, poking and prodding, probing each recess unseen in the dim lighting. The tangy taste of copper was gone and there was no visible wound, nor the twinge of pain to indicate one.

He finished washing and grabbed for paper towel from the dispenser close by, catching the reflection of his own haggard face in the mirror. He had examined his mouth but he hadn't noticed the weariness that seemed so cumulative now on his features. He was exhausted and looked every bit of it. There were darkened circles under his eyes, over extenuating the bags there, and his eyes were bloodshot slightly towards the nasal corners, red streaking through the dull white like a drunk on a
night of bingeing. It made him snort derisively at himself. He wasn't drunk, even though he wished he were. It certainly would be a clear cut explanation of what had happened back at the flat.

Abandoning the towel in the trash he turned the water back on and splashed his face. It smelled funny. The odor of organic decay coming from the pipes innards defeating the cool refreshing feel of the water against his hot skin. He grabbed more paper towel and wiped the rough paper against his face, hoping for and failing to reveal a more alert visage in the mirror that he could say convincingly that he recognized. Sadly, this tired man was the truth.

Unsatisfied and still confused, he left the mirror and returned to the bar to find that the bartender had cleared his drink away. Of course. Bloody hell! He stalked out of the pub and caught his bearings. It was not too far from home that it was out of the question to walk.

Mary wouldn't be too happy if he crawled into their bed in the wee hours of the morning, freezing cold and smelling slightly of booze. Tickling her around the ribs and hips with his icy fingers was no less than what the woman deserved. After all it had been her persistent coaxing that had pushed him out of the warm bed, into trousers, and out the door, after Sherlock's text had interrupted their lovemaking. And he would be bloody cold by the time he got back.

The night air bit at his nose and fingertips, the cold breeze that joined it hastening his pace, as he tucked his hands into the knit ends of his jacket and folded his arms about his chest. Head down, against the breeze he marched in his brisk fashion, hoping that the night air might clear his brain of the fog left after the alcohol and exercise had helped to slow his racing pulse. His head ached and being he was a damn good doctor he knew it bloody well wasn't from the gin. His brain felt exhausted, just plain over worked, like finishing finals at the end of term in med school, after hours of cramming.

The doctor was glad the streets were dead. It was dreadfully early in the morning. He loosened his folded arms and fished his cell out of his coat pocket to check the time—retardedly early. 3:27 A.M. His home screen showed nothing. Mary hadn't missed him yet. Good.

The silence of the empty streets was both comforting and unsettling. He wanted to be alone, didn't want any intruders to pry on his thoughts or to watch his harried escape—no, return. He wasn't running away. He was returning home. To his fiancé. Where he belonged. Yet at the same time the lack of others left his own mind unoccupied or distracted. It found its own thoughts and it left him wondering what he really didn't know he wanted to discover. What had happened at the flat? Had he really bit Sherlock? Why couldn't he remember anything? His head throbbed. He felt numb. It was cold.

It didn't matter how John tried he could not recall anything else between talking with Sherlock in the flat, as he sat perched in his chair like a contemplative bird of prey, and then the smack of his arse hitting the floor after the man's cry of pain and rough shove. Yet this wasn't the first odd black out he had experienced since being in the company of the detective.

There was the incident in the bathroom. He remembered sitting on the lou, trying not to look at the lithe form of the naked man languishing in the steaming bath water, and then he was walking out, cell phone in wet hands. How had that happened? What exactly had happened...? Sherlock hadn't divulged anything. With his hands wet and warm as proof of where they had been and Mary texting him with the delight of her own night out, John was rather glad the detective had not enlightened him. It was easier to just leave it unexplained. Well within the realm of denial.

Still it was true that this time Sherlock had not disclosed anything more than the obvious. The bite. A wound undeniably visceral and real. The blood would clot and the body would begin its work, the flesh would bruise in the coming hours around each puncture. He also had not given the other
man much chance to reveal anything. He had bolted, like a frightened rabbit, blood pumping fast enough to make his heart explode. It was the look in those pale orbs, those eyes he had come to trust, to love, to desire. The utter shock, the white-wide-eyed horror, mirroring his own sentiments perfectly, that had sent him flying out of the flat.

Now here he was. Walking the lonely streets of a dark and cold London, making his way back home to the woman he had promised to love, after the detective had fallen out of his life. As his breath misted as it hit the chilled air he couldn't help cursing the damnable man. He hadn't stopped loving Sherlock. He wasn't capable of it. The man had been taken from him, torn from his life, and Mary had helped patch him back together. She kept him moving, working, bearable. Made him human again.

But it was Sherlock that completed him.

"Ah, bloody hell." he chastised himself in a vehement hiss, folding his arms over his chest to ward off the invading chill from settling into his bones. He really was buggered. There was no simple or easy fix for this.

Sherlock was back and everything that had made him work, gotten him through, was no longer required. No! Not true! Not possible...no. Mary was everything he had.

The phrasing of that stubborn protestation hit John like a punch to the gut. Why had it sounded like he was thinking about the darling woman in the past-tense. Mary is everything I have. Everything I need. Screw Sherlock. Putting his head down again, he grit his teeth and quickened his pace. He needed to get home to the woman, put his arms around her, and press his face into her perfect bosom.

He needed to forget about the detective, forget about the black outs, and forever deny that he had ever sunk his teeth into that man's throat.

Like it was meant to be a car that approached from behind slowed its pace, coming to a stop just in front of him with its light on. A cabbie. He gratefully opened the door and climbed into the back seat. He gave the haggard hazel eyes in the rear-view mirror the address and settled back into the seat, exhausted, yet content. Soon. Soon he would be home and he could pretend none of this had happened. Then he could ignore Sherlock altogether. At least, for a while.

The trip home was a short one and the fair paid with ample tip, he couldn't be bothered to fuss with change. He wanted nothing more then the warmth of the bed he shared with the fiery woman he knew would soothe away the confusing thoughts and questions that threatened so persistently. Every fiber of his being was heavy with exhaustion and the trudge of his feet up the few small cement steps to their shared flat was overcome by thoughts of the release which sleep would bring. Gripping the cold steel of the hand rail he pulled himself towards the sanctuary with eyes downcast to ensure his foot cleared the vertical lift. Then he stopped suddenly and a chill, not caused by the cold of the air around him, ran up his spine, as he noticed the front door was ajar.

For the second time that night a surge of adrenaline began flooding his system, as his training took over and exhaustion was lost in thoughts of an intruder. Fear gripped him and he quickly channeled it. Breath held, he listened, hearing nothing the door was slowly pushed wider and he paused again for a second. Nothing still, he quickly slipped inside.

It was dark as when he had left. A mantra began to play in his mind, propelling him forward on auto-pilot as he moved as silently as possible. Mary. I have to get to Mary. Mary. I have to get to Mary.

John’s eyes scanned quickly to the rooms he could see as he moved to the stairs, nothing looked disturbed which made him all the more afraid. A creek from the level above him caused his pulse to quicken and suddenly he was running up the stairs to the sound of Mary’s anguished cry and the
crashing thunder of breaking glass.

“Mary!?” His voice sounded desperate in his ears as he vaulted up the stairs like a man in flight, snatching a vase from the half table at the top of the landing.

In two strides he was kicking open the door to their master bedroom. He plunged into blackness, illuminated only by the low ambient light behind him. He could see feathers strewn about the room. The bed was shifted several feet away from the wall. The dressing table was smashed in front of him with shards of mirror glinting precariously warning of the danger that lie within.

“Mary?! Answer me!”

There was a shiver to his right, as his eyes scanned, and he swung his arm out to deliver a quick and precise strike. The movement was deflected deftly and before he had a moment to react the last thing John felt was the rush of air leave him as his head jerked the opposite direction. White filled his vision and then the world was black.

Everything he knew dissolved. Including Mary.

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“That little shit is here, isn't he?” Lestat sneered, back turned towards his lover as he scratched a nail deep and effortlessly into the top of the well worn white-wood mantel above the fireplace.

The way Louis exhaled was enough to confirm that his suspicions were correct. The vampire could smell the other immortal all over his fledgling. Though there was no actual stench, aside from the faint hint of sandalwood that he knew the imp favored, there were too many other tells for it to be anything else. Louis’ demeanor had been different from the moment he had stepped into the small living room and spotted the blond absently flipping through channels on a wide screen TV that had not been there before he had left.

Lestat had caught the sudden hesitation in Louis’ step. He had turned to cast a radiant smile to his companion, ready to accept the gratitude for the gift that he had taken pains to have delivered and installed at such a late hour. Instead he could see the flush of surprise though not for the reason intended. If he could have delved into the mind of his fledgling, he would have instantaneously had the answer but instead he had to come to it through a series of questions and avoided answers before he was certain.

When Louis had even suggested they go to the opening of a lavish night-club, citing his own desire to see the Cirque du Soleil performers that were advertised to attend, Lestat knew well enough that the other man was trying to compensate. Although the emerald-eyed vampire did have a soft spot for the lithe and professional performers he also knew that Louis had already seen that particular performance theme the last time the troupe had been in Miami.

“You're being childish.” The way the words rolled off Louis tongue were scolding and demeaning.

Lestat felt the heat rise to the top of his ears. His fledgling really had no idea the true nature of the arrogant and manipulative young-framed vampire. He knew Louis had read the books, had heard the words from his own lips as well as others, had even lived through one or more such charades of innocence only to be scorched by the rarely pure intentions of Armand. It was not that he hated the imp, he hated the way that everyone saw him as the victimized boy who would be forever forgiven for all his malicious and self-serving manipulations, while he, himself, was scolded and berated for just trying to have some fun with the endless time granted him.
Armand was the ‘Botticelli Angel’, fallen to earth and cast to the damned. Lestat? He was just
dammed and damned selfish! It was ludicrous and outright infuriating!

Lestat knew exactly what would happen if he did as he wanted—which at that very moment was to
wrench the damn mantel from the wall and smash it into Louis’ bookcase. His temper would be his
downfall. Proving Armand’s cool headed composure in comparison to his own selfish destruction of
those things others cherished.

“L—Lestat?” Louis had his hands up in a defensive gesture, he was standing stark still and the look
on his face was genuinely fearful as smell of smoke registered to the blond.

It was only then Lestat realized that he had scorched a smoking burn line all the way up Louis'
sweater and with a gasp his eyes widened. He turned away from looking at the other, unable to look
at what he had done. His pulse was racing in his ears and he swallowed hard, tasting his own blood
in his mouth, unsatisfying and bitter.

“Mon du, Louis!” he spat the words turning to look at the other and trying to keep his tone from a
yell, as he fought to quell his unbridled rage. “You would drive me to madness! You—You coddle
that wicked little bastard as if he was the wounded child he looks to be and forgive so easily the devil
that has tried to see the ruin of me! And you as well, I might add.”

The words were fast and pointed, as he gained his composer, inhaling through is nose deeply as he
made the long few strides towards the raven-haired man whose face still registered some concern but
more so, sadness. No... pity.

“Don't you dare.” Lestat stopped a breath from the other. He could feel the air leave Louis’ lips
against his cheek. “Don't you dare look at me like that.”

“Lesta—,” The name was cut off by the sharp crack of flesh on flesh as Louis staggered and fell to
the ground from the impact of his maker’s hand, the print still hot on his cheek.

There was silence. Lestat stood over the form of his lover whom had caught himself yet still sat
somewhat on the floor, the emerald eyes turned away and a hand to the cheek that was so rudely
assaulted.

“I will not have you pity me through the manipulations of Armand.” The words were heavy and
pained leaving his lips. His hand stung and his chest ached. “You really never did want me here and
I will not suffer watching you be puppeted along, all the while tsking at how pathetic I am in being
an honest monster.”

“You are a monster.” Louis spit, a flit of crimson onto the carpet below, never turning to look at his
maker.

“I am.” Lestat replied acidly, walking away. "Something that you can trust, I will never forget."

The door was left open but Lestat was gone, leaving Louis to pull himself from the floor and assess
the damage done to his flat. His reading chair had been roughly knocked over when he was struck
and a leg had snapped. His side table had suffered a similar fate but thankfully was still intact. As he
gathered the scattered books and straightened the last of his furniture he could feel the sinking wave
of exhaustion hit him. The night had been long and although the force of Lestat's blow had cracked
his jaw, the wound had almost instantaneously healed. The deeper wounds Lestat had caused were
not new ones, simply the aggravation of old scars that flared up now and again.

Now there were only a few recourses of action that Lestat would take, given his history. He would
show up again the next night, apologize at his outrageous behavior saying that all was forgiven, yet still be plotting some wicked way to harm Armand. He might disappear for a few days and if he didn't find some new entertainment or entanglement he would return either with true remorse or with none at all. Lastly, and Louis hoped it was this latter guess, Lestat would disappear for a few decades. Regardless of how unlikely the last option was it was the best thing that could happen for not only himself and Armand but for the hapless mortals that were sure to be collateral damage in the fire storm that he could feel smoldering. Eyes cast down to the burnt sweater he was still wearing, a touch of true fear welled in the pit of his stomach, as he pulled the sweater off and tossed it on the back of the chair.

Lestat's powers were something, he was sure, not even Lestat could fully grasp. That creatures, such as they were, existed could shatter the reality of the man whom had drawn him to London in the first place. Knowing that his maker had been struggling lately with control over his extensive dark gifts in conjunction with his emotions was not something that could any longer be passed off as 'bad mood swings', as Armand had put it. Even so, there was nothing to be done about it until Lestat reappeared. Until then he would have some time to figure out exactly what it was that he could do.
It had taken the consulting detective only an hour after the incident with John in the flat to realize that he was allowing his emotional responses, both physical and mental, to supersede his own control over his thoughts and actions. In his mind, it was the epitome of failure on all fronts. He had paced about the flat like a worrisome teenager from those boring predictable telly shows, angst and superstition creeping into his mental vault, slowly coiling around the library within his mind palace. The surprisingly unhelpful bumbling attempt at learning more about his mysterious new neighbor had been a prime example of what Sherlock had worked his entire adult life to avoid. Emotions were destructive, distracting, and in no way aided his quest for understanding the strange new behaviors of his former flatmate. They only succeeded in giving him a thrumming headache. The pounding between his temples the knocking reminder that he could not explain any of it.

He was getting no where fast and although he wished more than ever to throw on a few nicotine patches and run to his mind palace, the headache had worn away the last of his energy. Like a marionette whose strings had been cut he had flopped into the rumpled blankets of his bed and allowed sleep to take him the instant he lay down.

Morning had come all too soon and he had rose to the unbearably silent flat, still cluttered with half
completed experiments and paperwork as it always had been. There was no one in the kitchen making tea or breakfast, no one sitting in the living room reading the paper or watching the news on the telly, and there certainly wasn’t anyone in the bathroom. Passing the open doorway to the bathroom, as he trudged in his wrinkled white shirt and dark trousers towards the kitchen, made the detective’s mind rouse the curious memory of the last time he and John had shared it. It was like the ping of text message on a mobile, the thought suddenly there, the visual in front of his mind’s eye of John’s fingers in the water, tracing up and down his bare sides.

With a disgruntled growl the dark haired detective squashed the thought, before the emotional response of its memory could gain a foothold within his mind. He grabbed the handle on the door and slammed it shut, before hurrying the rest of the way to the kitchen, bellowing for Mrs. Hudson to make him some tea.

Being the dear that she was Mrs. Hudson had heard the raucous calling and was soon toddling up the stairs with a freshly brewed cup. She was nattering away, something ridiculous about the break-in’s on the news, and she set the warm flowered mug down on the kitchen table beside his microscope without stopping to expect a response from him. Sherlock pretended to be intensely busy concentrating on the half readied slide shoved under the light at the sound of her approach and she in turn continued yammering in her melodic lilting way as she swept from room to room, tidying and straightening what he had left undone.

It wasn’t until approximately forty minutes later, when she was on her way out of the flat with a tray of dirty dishes, that her shuffling feet came to an abrupt stop and she all but dropped the tray on the table top. Her never ending menagerie of conversation ended with a gasp, as she drew up straight and taut as a bow, eyes fixated on her tenant. Sherlock swallowed his irritated growl with a quick gnashing of teeth, as he finally raised his eyes from the lenses of the microscope to address her distracting need for attention. “What is it?” he demanded, the words hissing through his clenched teeth, as his fingers balled into fists.

His restrained anger relaxed a smidge, as the elderly woman’s surprise moved quickly to a mild reproof, with a tsking click of her tongue. One hand landed on her hip as the other shook a finger at him, as she drew out the syllables of his name, “Sherr-lock, I am surprised that you haven’t cleaned that up yet. It looks dreadful.”

He waved flippant hand dismissively at her, spouting acridly, “It’s just a flesh wound, Mrs. Hudson, nothing more. I’m sure you’ve seen worse in your Florida days, hmmm?” Sherlock turned his eyes back to the microscope, focusing on the slide crookedly onto the stage.

Mrs. Hudson did not even flinch when hit with the rude comment that he had intended to push her away and the tension brewing between them in the air of the small kitchen was palpable. She was concocting more things to say, feeling she had not properly voiced her opinion, of which Sherlock was still unable to completely piece together. She crossed her arms, her faintly pink fingernails strikingly bright in contrast with the wool of her deep plum cardigan, the elbows slightly dusted with flour from her early morning visit to the baker’s kitchen next door. “You know, Frank liked to get a little eccentric sometimes with his affections. A lot of the other women he slept with said liked the sensation but I never stood for it when we made love. I’m surprised that John would…”

“Have no fear, Mrs. Hudson,” he barked loudly, to end the sentence she was speaking. He raised his eyes from the microscope and gave her a wide cheeky grin that quickly disappeared into a growling scowl, as he quickly informed the nosey woman, “I am entirely aware of its existence and of the circumstances under which it has occurred. I will deal with it when I deem it necessary. Thank you for the tea.” He delivered the last line loud and blunted, acridly turning the thanks into a demand for departure.
The older woman stood there a moment, as if frozen by his peevish explanation of the blatantly traumatic injury to his person, before finally reaching out a tender hand to touch his shoulder briefly, as she quietly offered some unneeded advice, “You know, dear, if you ever needed to talk to someone…”

“I do believe your shows are starting, Mrs. Hudson.” Sherlock snapped. The whip-like sting of his voice finally propelled her out the door and down the stairs, thankfully with the tray of dishes that had been collecting around the flat.

Irritated and fuming the detective pushed the microscope away roughly, simultaneously kicking the chair back from the table. Both let out an awful screech as they gave way to his force. He grabbed the tea that she had delivered and folded his arms over his chest as he sipped from it. It tasted inferior to John’s and so he stood and poured it down the drain. His eyes watched the brown liquid trickle down from shoulder height to noisily splatter into the sink below, before he haplessly let the cup drop into the metal basin.

Perhaps it was time to inspect the damage.

Not wanting to enter the bathroom the detective went to the mirror above the fireplace. His own reflection was startling. His hair was a tangled mess of dark unruly curls, with no shape and order. His eyes were narrowed and foreboding, made all the more sinister by the tinge of purple under them from lack of sleep. The collar of his shirt was spattered with dark crimson stains that had formed round circlets across the left collar of his shirt and slightly down the front, like the petals of dark poppies opening. It was certainly dreadful looking. The wound itself was mostly obscured by the shirt and when he reached up and pulled it back he was surprised to see the extent of the injury. His neck was bruised a dark purple around the ringlet of puncture marks that was John’s dentals. It was low on his neck, enough so that with his collar done up and his scarf about him it would probably go unnoticed.

The detective went then to his bedroom and undressed, tossing the ruined shirt into the waste basket. When he was dressed he went to the kitchen, still adamantly avoiding the bathroom, and soaked a dish towel in warm water, mopping at the dried blood around his collar bone and neck. When he was cleaned the wound sufficiently enough he threw on another dress shirt and did the collar straight up. Having all the buttons done up made him feel slightly squeezed about the neck, possible swelling of the muscles from the trauma. It didn’t matter. He threw on his coat and tied the scarf in place, before leaving the flat.

Working with a couple of Molly’s cadavers he spent that day bleeding corpses, attempting to replicate the same blood loss as in the prior two victims that he felt were connected. The mousy woman refused leave him be, poking her head in quietly through the doorway to check on him every couple of hours, meekly trying to steal a moment of his attention here and there. The day ended with her call that it was time for her to leave the hospital and it was then that she noticed the wound on his neck, making the same strangled gasping sound as Mrs. Hudson. He had forgotten about the blasted thing, hot from working, and had undone the stifling top button so he could breath. She gently offered an ear for him to speak to, asininely assuming the wound was some kind of self-affliction, before he coldly denied the need for such a thing and left his experiment and her behind.

The cab ride home had been chilly, the night air crisp with the threat of frost, and when he arrived back at 221B the flat proved to be cold too. Leaving his coat on he entered the flat and promptly flopped onto his back on the long couch by the door, resting his feet on the arm rest still clad in his leather shoes. From his pocket he pulled his mobile.

No messages. No phone calls. No word from John. He gnashed his teeth together and tossed the
useless piece of technology across the room. It clattered noisily across the floor and under a chair.

***

"Mrs. Hudson!"

The indignant barked summons from her eccentric but dear tenant in 221B was barely audible through the cacophony of noise that surrounded the elderly woman. Sherlock Holmes had always been an odd one but today he was certainly stretching thin that lean definition that she had learned to lend him. The sound of crashing, banging, tinging, splashing, and even beeping had been filtering down from the upstairs flat since late that morning and the raucous had only grown louder and more agitated as it had progressed.

Mrs. Hudson considered herself a woman capable of great patience, however, this afternoon her tenant was most certainly wearing her reserves on that particular virtue quite thin. She was used to his sometimes queer and most often peculiar experiments and temperaments, for the most part, and when the noise had begun she had simply gone about dealing with it in her usual manner. More noise of her own. She had turned the radio up at first, the sound of soft classical arrangements, perfected by practiced hands, dulling the din coming from above. Then after lunch she had switched to the telly, the volume of her soaps attempting to compete.

Still, this battle she would indeed have to concede defeat. Sherlock's piercing summons had broken through.

The older landlady had learned early on not to be slow to answer the petulant calls of the man above her. The possibility of consequence was inevitable, and one never knew the depth or breadth of which it would be. So she had cursed softly and let her feet down from the crocheted ottoman, her hip popping painfully as she leaned forward in her chair. Planting her hands on the arms she rocked back to create enough momentum to propel her forward, and launched herself, as much as an elderly woman could, on to her feet.

She had heard her name bellowed twice more before she had finally opened her door and made it to the bottom of the stairs, leading to the flat she had rented to the young detective. She called up to him but he did not answer her directly, only screamed her name, that wretched edict that brooked no argument. Slowly she climbed the stairs. The man was not likely in any kind of physical distress and she swore that if when she finally made it the irascible man asked for cup of tea she would clap his ears.

The older woman’s hip popped another groan of protestation as she made the last step, when her attention was suddenly seized by the strong aroma of strange chemicals of which her palate was unable to identify. Apart of her knew that she really did not need or want to know, the other part struggling to convince her, with the sheer levity of her own real fear for the floor boards of her upstairs flat, that she did. The smell was coming from the kitchen immediately to her left and she came into the room through the open doorway, finding the table there littered with a plethora of beakers, bottles, cans, plastic containers, and liquids of all colors and viscosities—the reason for all the offending odors that mingled in the air into one giant invisible cloud of fetor, which entered the nostrils with the cloying sting of bleach, sneaking up into the sinuses with ease, only to offensively linger.

Halfway through the doorway the woman was paralyzed by the effects of the pungent aromas in the
air, her eyes welling with tears, as she searched the room for the smell’s culprit. Sherlock was nowhere in sight. The chair on the other side of the table was pushed back and empty, a tea towel, stained every color of awful under the heavens, was draped over the orange back of it. The mess on the table had migrated all over the kitchen, inhabiting all the level surfaces available and in some places taking up residence on the floor tiles. She knew better than to check the state of the fridge. She wished she could open the window above the sink but the woman dared not enter further into the deluge of half-finished experiments.

Covering her mouth and nose with the sleeve of her rose colored jumper she backed out and into the parlor, where she found the younger man. A head of dark unkempt curls was pressed into the union jack clad throw cushion on the nearest end of the long couch to her right. Just the tip of a nose poked out between the dark mop of hair and the bunching of the blue house coat, where his shoulders were hunched forward. His long lean limbs were pulled into a comically childish fetal position, pink bare feet fidgeting over one another.

“Sherlock…” she had said his name in a motherly tone that was stuck indecisively between reproof and bewilderment, cloaked in thick draping of astonishment. What on earth was the man up to now? Half-finished experiments lay everywhere in the kitchen, cooking away, and here he lay as though half asleep on the couch in the next room.

At the sound of her voice his head twitched slightly and his feet stopped fidgeting but the man made no move to get up or even move from his position on the couch. His shoulders moved downward ever so slightly, revealing the sharp cupid’s bow of his upper lip, and softly he intoned, “My phone, Mrs. Hudson, I need it. Retrieve it for me.”

The woman almost fainted. She could feel her heart flutter with the temperature spike that the comment had sent through her system, setting her blood a boil. It took her a moment to recoup her senses and when she did, she tsked loudly. Spinning of her heel she turned away, her hands raised in frustration and almost as a plea to her ignorant tenant, as she scolded him and begged him in the same instance to quit with the racket and clean up the mess.

An hour later she finally heard him moving about the flat above her own and around supper she was certain it was the detective that let the door slam closed as her left the building.

***

What do two beautiful, powerful and immortal creatures do to entertain themselves?

The answer was simple in Armand’s mind—whatever they choose to do. His attention was focused on ensuring that not only did he enjoy himself, which he of course did, but it was done by securing the smile that was sweetly turned his way on the pale lips of his evenings companion. Tendrils of raven hair had been left long and gently flitted across sharded emerald eyes.

"You know," Louis said, quietly, a small pause breaking the sentence, "I love riding ferris wheels."

"I know. There is an odd magic about it." The older vampire replied.

"Hnm," Louis smiled, as he reached out a hand and pulled Armand to him, “Now, I do believe you were trying to lure me away to some exotic local?"

"Only if you consider Detroit an exotic local." Came a warm reply. "I have a few more stops before
I can truly offer to whisk you away. After all, you tease, as usual, and won’t come with me. Not now, no matter how alluring my offer."

Armand brought up a hand to stop Louis before he could retort, "All is well, dear one. Which is why I wanted to spend the next few evenings reminding you how enjoyable time with me can be. Then I'll leave, you'll miss me. Then, when I return, my chances of whisking you away will, hopefully... be considerably better."

"Hmn." It was all Louis could say before Armand’s lips were against his and the light frame of the smaller man was straddling his lap. The gentle rocking of the ferris wheel car was easily fading away the outside world, as bodies pressed and rolled with the rhythm.

Slender fingers grazed the sharp lines and taunt muscles beneath fine silk and linen. They pulled apart as the ride stopped and the boy operating the ride eyed them with a wide smirk and an appreciative eye.

"He wants us, you know." Armand stated casually.

"Did you use your dark gift to figure that out?" Louis' reply was said evenly, but the sarcasm was still apparent to the other.

"Do you want to share him, Louis?" The tone was predatory, as he turned to eye the boy again. Dark hair with brilliant teal streaks that were only seen when the tussled mop was tossed. He was handsome and young, two-day stubble graced his chin and the dark burgundy golf shirt, displaying the carnival name, rode up to reveal a plane of hard abs beneath.

"Why this one? Because he's pretty? It seems like such a waste." Louis’ answer came after a few moments of consideration while he too eyed up the boy who might die.

"Leave a beautiful corpse, Louis. Once in a while death should be beautiful."

Louis slipped his fingers between Armand’s and pulled him through the grounds and away from the ride while the follower reluctantly sighed.

When the fire works began and the fair grounds grew quiet, between the cheers that followed brilliant explosions of colored light, the two men stood amidst throngs of mortals with eyes up cast. Armand stood with his back against Louis’ side, the other vampire’s arm slung around him.

Louis’ grip tightened, his head dipped down breathing in the scent of apricots and cedar. It brought a happy noise to his throat as he inhaled deeply, this moment snapped in his mind. Captured and suddenly compared against so many others. The great temptation was that Armand had always found a way to put him at ease and drown you in the universe that was tussled auburn curls and burnt amber eyes.

Three evenings later Louis had arrived back at the Baker Street flat to find a huge bouquet in the entrance on a small side table. Mrs. Hudson had come out as soon as she heard the door to the flat open, exclaiming happily, "Oh! These Lovely flowers came for you today, Louis!"

"Thank you for signing for me. They are beautiful." It was true.

"Well you should get them down and enjoy the sight of them if you're in for the night." There was a mournful undercurrent to her tone that she worked well to hide.

"I believe they wouldn't get enough light in the lower flat. They do look lovely here in the entry and this way everyone can enjoy them." He replied, in a pleasant tone.
"Ohhh, if you insist." The tone started as if she was about to refuse before vanishing into a certain air of accomplishment that Louis could not help but find endearing.

He pulled out the keys to his flat when the landlady pipped up again, "There is a card as well."

The door unlocked and he turned with an eyebrow raised, as he was handed a white envelope with his name in beautiful crisp blank ink across the front. The older lady eyed him like a curious school girl waiting to hear the name signed on the bottom of a friend's love letter.

"Thank you." He turned and walked into his flat, there was a finality to the click of the latch catching behind him.

He opened the envelope and withdrew a single sheet of fiber paper, as well as two tickets to the opera for that evening, the note simply read:

    See you soon. Don’t be late.

    -A
Chapter 11:

It had been a remarkably frustrating three days wasted. The consulting detective had not managed to further his investigation into the mysterious trio of murders despite all of his efforts—and those themselves had been hindered by an inability to focus, remain on task, and to restrain his boredom. The experiments all seemed dull, unenlightening, and extensively unfruitful. Which was most irksome.

His mobile seemed to elude him as well, lost somewhere in the parlor’s eccentricities. He had left the flat just after dark, no longer able to allow himself to be confined within the stifling rooms of the Baker Street flat with his own disappointment and failed experiments.

The air was cold, as he had expected it would be, and with the blue scarf tightened around his neck and the collar of his wool jacket hiked, it became increasingly clear that he could no longer ignore the itching that besieged the wound on his neck. Stopping in the nearest café he used the washroom mirror to investigate the bite mark that he had attempted to disregard the past few days, which now it
seemed had been to his own detriment. The small punctures had closed with bubbled burgundy
scabs, dotting his neck like a perfect tattoo of the doctor’s teeth, and the skin around each was red,
sore, and warm to the touch—all signs that did not bode well. The bruising had spread but had not
depended in color, the outside frayed edges of the purplish markings glowing with a faint hint of
yellow and green.

As he examined the wound his mind could not help but long for the healing touch of his doctor. In
his mind’s-eye he could clearly remember the expert movements of John’s deftly agile fingers at
work whenever he had needed them. The thoughts brought more than he wanted to remember, the
memories of John’s hot hands frenziedly running the length of his back, his bottom, and his thighs—
electrifying his skin even now, as he stood staring at himself in the café’s bathroom mirror. The heat
of the hauntingly tempting recollections had risen up from his collar, his cheeks pink and hot.

The consuming and altogether uncontrollable reactions infuriated the detective. He grit his teeth and
rushed from the café out into the cold, relieved by the cold wind that forced him to hunch his
shoulders and bury his chin into the softness of the blue scarf.

He admonished himself as he worked his way through the streets to Bart’s Hospital. It angered him
that he could not explain John’s irrational behaviors and it aggravated him that he knew so little
about relationships as deep and particular as that which he shared with John to aid in his
understanding. All he knew was that he wanted John back, regardless of Mary, despite the time lost
and the circumstances that had forced his hand. It was a basic and primal need that drove his senses
and usurped control of his mind—and he was powerless to ignore it, no matter how that inability
infuriated him.

This was the very reason why he had strived to remove all emotional connections and reactions from
his life and had immersed himself in the study of everything and everyone else. This connection he
shared with John was a double edged sword, both capable of allowing him to excel with great
flourish and to hinder his mind and body entirely. It could only be seen now as a weakness, as a
detractor, as a hindrance to his overall being—because right now it felt like he was being torn in
two. A part of him was working out how easy it would be to make his way into the small flat that
the doctor shared with his fiancé, just to know where he was, what he was doing, and why, and the
other part of him was offended, hurt, and confused, willing to seek retribution. Either way his mind
was finding many very compelling reasons to seek out Mary Morstan’s residence.

The consulting detective steeled himself against the ardent temptation of doing any such thing. John
had yet to contact him since the incident and, being his own efforts to resurrect their former lifestyle
and relationship had thus far only proven ill-fated and destructive, sound logic would suggest that it
would be best if he left the next attempt up to the doctor—even if the wait was killing him. John did
have a lot to sort out.

Although the two years they had spent apart had been torturous in every sense of the word, the
detective had been prepared for it. It had been a sacrifice, but one that he had been prepared to take.
John’s grief was needed to solidify his efforts in the eye of Moriarty’s extensive crime ring and had
done so very effectively—at John’s expense. The man had done what many men would do—
attempt to move on—and when the lovely and mysterious Mary had so caringly offered to become a
part of that healing process, what normal man would resist?

John was indeed so blinded by his own tumultuous emotions over the past years that he did not even
truly see why he had been so attracted to the new blond in the office. Of course the consulting
detective had known after that first fateful meeting in the restaurant, could see the lies, the mystery,
the vague past, the danger that those eyes, those light wrinkles around mouth and eyes, that slight
arch to the left eyebrow had exuded. It was all there, John’s unconscious attractors that solidified so
easily the woman’s position in his life. John had simply filled the hole that Sherlock himself had created when he had so painfully extracted himself from the doctor’s life.

Before the man had realized it the hospital loomed before him and he had snuck in a side door into a quiet corridor. It was not hard to memorize Molly Hooper’s rotation at the morgue and as he knew where to find her he had happened upon the brunette within minutes of his arrival. She was excited and as always awkward with his company. Her large brown eyes seemed to sparkle up at him from under those straight brows, her thin mouth a quiver as she stumbled nervously over her words trying to make casual conversation when he was so obviously avoiding it.

Neverthelesss, they ended up in the morgue, discussing the drug mule and the road splatter, which had both inevitably come through Bart’s hospital. The drug mule had already been processed and had moved on, the road splatter was still accounted for but not within Molly’s care and so unable for Sherlock to see on such short notice.

*Irritating. Waste of time!*

Yet his visitation had proven to be somewhat useful. The young woman’s curiosity had driven the blighted conversation towards the itching scabs ever pestering him beneath the collar, the scarf, and the neck of his shirt, and he had conceded to allowing her the business of dealing with it.

Molly had seen the wound earlier but his agitation at her erroneous assumption of its origin had ended the discussion. Allowing her the chance to examine the wound up close reopened this bypassed conversation and the detective inevitably had to give the young woman a clipped account of the scenario that had led up to the incident. Of course he understood that she would naturally be drawn into discussing particular details about his relationship with his former flatmate, which Sherlock wished to avoid. So, he decided to beguile her into shocked silence, as he gave the account in short blunt points, whilst flashing her that small upward turn of his mouth that females seemed too find captivating on him.

The brunet was indeed silent, as she worked the buttons of his collar open, exposing the wound and its monstrous bruising. Her fingers quavered ever so slightly as she gently examined the area while he gave the account. Without a word she went about her task, listening as she worked at cleaning the wound with antiseptic. When he was done she continued in silence, redoing the buttons when she was finished. Her fingers were not shaking as much anymore.

Then those large hazelnut eyes flashed up at him, the emotion roiling beneath her features pinging as they registered in the man’s mind. “You should have cleaned it. You have the start of an infection. I’ve cleaned what I can but if the swelling and redness continues you will need to see a doctor.” She explained.

“I no longer have one.” He replied, his meaning fully registering on the brunette.

She did not say anything. Was she upset? Was she jealous? Mad at John and obviously frustrated with him, yet this she did not voice. He respected her restraint and thanked her for her help, making sure to make direct eye contact with the young woman as he did so. She gave him that pretty pinched smile of hers, as her attraction battled her anger and irritation.

They said their farewells and he left, leaving the hospital still no more satisfied than he had been when he had left Baker Street. Returning home was at this point not an option. There was nothing there to occupy his mind and he still had many unanswered questions. Hailing a cab he made his way back to east London and the derelict warehouse where the drug mule had met his end. It was a shot in the dark, but it was better than his alternatives at the moment. He hated being bored.
Armand watched the intense figure of the other immortal from the corner of his eye. The rapt attention Louis paid to the performers on the stage below the balcony they occupied was endearing and quirked a smile of satisfaction to the corner of his lips. With perfect pitch and undulation, the final note rang out from the robust Ulisse as the last act of *II Ritorno d’Ulisse in Patria*. With the vibration of its finality still reverberating in the opera house, both men rose and added their claps to the rising thunder of the hundreds who had shared in the evening’s performance.

“It was a striking portrayal.” Louis commented as the two men made their way slowly through the throngs of mortals that lingered, sipping wine and conversing about business and politics as much as the performance they had all just come from.

“Indeed,” Armand replied as they steered their way towards the coat check. “I’ve seen this particular Opera done a fair number of times by other groups but must admit this is my second time watching this performance. Roberto Alagna is by far my favorite tenor of this time, it is as if the man was made for no other purpose then to house that voice that brings chills.”

Passing the tickets to the pretty young woman behind the desk, Armand was pleasantly surprised by the warm press of Louis close against his back as a hand came to rest casually around his waist in a loose embrace. When the girl returned with their coats, Louis quickly extracted himself and took both jackets with a polite thanks, pulling his companion close to him as they moved towards the lobby, still too warm to don the jackets that neither truly required.

They chatted about performances they had each seen recently and in the long history of their immortal lives. Armand shared a story of a time when he had snuck away from the Coven of the Theatre des Vampires to see this opera for the first time and in exchange Louis told of a time he and David Talbot had abandoned Lestat on one of his ‘Disney Land Adventures’ to enjoy a performance of Luciano Pavarotti who happened to be in town.

Louis had to reach out to hold up the youthful vampire as he shook with laughter at Louis’ recounting of the temper tantrum pitched by the infamous blond when they, had at last, met up again. Soon both were cackling like devious school-children as the valet quickly jumped out of the drivers’ side. Walking around the sleek and expensive car, he accepted the neatly folded bill that Armand presented him. Without question or prompting the valet snatched the bill and just as smoothly opened the passenger door for the raven haired vampire as Armand took to the driver’s seat.

“Dear beauty, now I must admit I am out of great plans for the evening and so the next move is yours. Am I taking you back to that stingy little flat you’ve decided to rent below the brooding detective or did you have any other more enjoyable ideas in mind for the end of this evening?” There was no mistaking the intent of the statement from the moistened lips of the pale young man, yet Louis took a brief moment to ponder his own desires.

Armand was exceptionally lithe that evening, dressed sharply in a dark grey suit trimmed with black satin lapels that contrasted with the unearthly pallor of his immortal skin. Slightly shorter, those warm caramel orbs peered up at him from beneath a dark fan of auburn lashes, brimming with a predatory hunger. All of these waltzing courtships they had shared the last few nights had been delightful and satisfying. He could argue nothing more or less.

Seated in the fine leather of Armand’s Ferrari 458 Spider, Louis met those waiting eyes and smiled warmly. He reached across the rest between them and placed his hand over Armand’s. He felt the fingers beneath his own tense slightly around the gear shift. “Let us go to Regents Park and enjoy the moonlight through the trees. I would like nothing more than to smell the wet bark and soil after being inside for so long.”
Armand’s small mouth pulled into a cocky smirk. Louis did not need to read his thoughts to know that the other immortal was very pleased by this suggestion. “Very well then,” was all that was said, as Armand revved the engine of the sleek machine to life and they pulled out of the parking lane on to the wet roads.

As they drove in silence Louis watched the misting rain collect on the windshield and side windows of the car, streaking off and away as the car moved through the tightly knit London streets with fine-tuned skill and precision. Although the Ferrari was fast and powerful they could have traversed the distant in a mere blink of the mortal eye, had they wanted to. Louis preferred it this way. He felt less immortal to ride in the vehicle and he did admittedly relish the sensation of the engine shifting gears as they glided through the streets. The car came to a slow stop outside the Baker Street flat the dark haired vampire inhabited and they exited the vehicle, walking the short distance to the park at a mere canter.

The air was crisp and cool. Any mortal would have thought twice before braving the late night walk. The two immortals amongst the trees and shrubs felt nothing. They walked the paths, letting the light of the silvery moon dapple their skin through the branches of the naked trees, as conversation passed casually between them. Louis asked Armand again of his troubled mind and the older vampire did share briefly the woes and concerns he felt for his fledgling. The dark haired vampire had known of Daniel’s state of mind but it seemed to lift the well-hidden weight he had seen on the others figure.

Soon they were holding hands, retracing paths they had already taken, as Louis spoke of his quarrel with Lestat, which had ended in a singed sweater and broken jaw. Armand had scoffed at that and shaken his head, reminding his partner, “That I’m afraid, dear one, you should have seen coming.”

Louis’s lips pursed, as he considered these honest words for a moment. “I should and yet never have or ever do.” He admitted openly, with a heavy sigh. “I am blind when it comes to him. I neither hate him nor truly love him.”

“Lestat can be hard to love and is truthfully, easier to hate, for most that know him.” The older vampire said, without malice or judgement in his tone. “But you are of his blood and that changes everything.” He stopped then and turned to face Louis, taking his arms gently but steadily, as he explained, “I do believe that you have been that damned creature’s one redemption.”

Louis’ eyes rolled slightly back, as he tsked the other’s lofty opinion of himself. Quickly he moved to correct it, “I am but a happenstance and nothing more.”

Armand’s small mouth parted slightly in a soft smile that was teasingly alluring, as he tipped his head up, brushing the tip of his cherub nose against the others chin. In a satiny voice, he whispered, “I wish that you would agree to be my happenstance… for but a while.”

Louis moved unconsciously towards the affection of the other man in his arms. It was easy to follow this rhythm, the slow waltz of their mutual seduction. It wasn’t the forced, desperate, and starved feast or famine that his maker was so common to. Louis wanted Armand, a part of him always had and always would. He would find himself on occasion running a tongue over a sharp incisor at the thought of him. The tickle of light pain mixed with the taste of his own blood would only serve to give rise to more passionate memories of times they had shared.

“I love this dance…” Armand whispered, his lips ghosted against the other immortals, as they pressed softly against each other. The kiss was slow and searching, almost as if they were so wrapped up in each other that at times it was hard to tell where one ended and the other began—hesitant and sweet. It was as if each press of Armand’s lips against Louis own was a little question—*may I?*—and to each question the other responded softly back—*yes.*
The kisses continued, soft and inquisitive, as pink tongues were added and soon the slight frame of the auburn haired youth was pressing against Louis’ own body with each kiss. Louis’ back rested against the rough bark of a massive tree as he allowed himself to be interrogated by the lover in his midst. Deft fingers had found their way to undoing all the buttons of his shirt before he had realized it had happened and with impeccable skill the warm fingers had slid down from the cut of Louis’ jaw. Armand’s thumb followed the lean muscle that ran the length of Louis’ neck before fingers continued to the strong ridge of his collar bone, from there descending in teasing patterns lower and eliciting a low breathy moan from the ruddy lips of the captive man.

Targeted movements found the hard numb of Louis’ pert pink nipple pinched between those skilled fingers, rolling it softly and teasing it to erectness in time with the darting entrance of his attacker’s tongue between the parted lips that moaned his approval into the others mouth. His own hands were trailing without the eloquence of his assailant’s, the passion and precision of Armand’s actions were over-riding his own thoughts to execute a returned assault. His eyes slid open to see the smoldering embers of amber meet his own. Dark with desire, lips wet and pink from their kisses, his breath like his skin, was warm from recent kills and sweet with the smell of cinnamon and cedar.

The lusty cherub’s lips moved to speak and quickly realizing no sound followed, he paused with a long blink as he licked his lips. A sultry smile spreading across his face as again he met Louis’ eyes, all the while one devious hand continued to tease his nipple deftly before beginning to trail lower.

“Louis…” The slow roll of his name from Armand’s lips ran a shiver up his spine. “I would have you. And I would have you have me in all ways, here and now.”

There was the press of Armand’s lips again to emphasize the statement, this time there was not the soft hesitation of before. Instead it quickly escalated to the hot and fevered grappling of both men, as mouths and teeth clacked together, tongues warred against one another, and sleek-pale body’s tore, grinded, and undulated against each other. The cold of the night meant nothing to the two men who writhed beneath the great shadow of the parks massive and old trees.

There were few brave or stupid enough to travel through the darkened park at such an hour, let alone off the trails, such as they were and in such cool-dismal weather. The lack of light, rain and cold, nor the threat of potential discovery concerned either of the immortal men who continued to grapple at one another for dominance in their foreplay. Cloth was torn and flesh broke by the rake of nails and drag of teeth across the tortuous expanses of taunt muscles and pale skin. Greedy tongues lapped the hot tang of rich scarlet before the wounds quickly healed of their own volition with the power of the dark gifts granted them.

The moan of ecstasy that poured from Armand’s lips was sweet as any victory when Louis’ hot mouth wrapped around the ridged cock of the other man in a sudden show of domination. Pinning the other to the ground and forcing the bucking hips to hold steady as the raven-haired head bobbed up and down with an ever-changing pattern that kept the hapless immortal below him incoherently groaning his pleasure between gasps. When the pace slowed again, his mouth returned to the same teasing pace as their kisses had been only a short while before. The desperate struggles of the one below him softened and stilled to a slow rhythmic rise of hips to match the pace of Louis lapping tongue.

Armand was stunning, practically naked and spread before him on the wet grass, throbbing with sexual energy. The slender yet muscular body writhed with the feeling of the eyes appraising him, as much as the tongue and hands that worked at pleasing him. Louis desired Armand in a way he never had or truly dared to desire his maker. His mouth sunk to the hilt of the others shaft in an effort to rid his mind of any thought other than the immortal man-boy beneath him. His nose tickled by the impossibly-soft red curls, while the ample girth of the cock in his mouth rested against the back of his
throat. As Louis tongue began to move along the shaft, his breath held, he slowly worked his way back up, earning a low predatory growl from Armand until he let the dark purple head of the others cock finally free of his wet mouth.

“Christ…” Armand hissed, his head falling back, as his whole body suddenly went limp except the proud erection that remained wet and ready for more attention. Louis couldn’t hold back a triumphant chuckle at the spectacle of his lover. He wallowed in the feeling of power he possessed in their dynamic.

He trailed a finger along the pale thigh and to the dip of the others belly button, looking up to see the dark eyes watching him with a wicked smile. “Is it my turn then, Louis?”

Louis ministrations paused, as he considered for a moment. He could feel the tensing of the others body against his own, coiling like a spring in anticipation. A shiver run up his spin at the thoughts of surrendering to the other man and before he could get the words out only a low hum had escaped him which was all that was needed. Armand was on top of him, straddling his midsection while his hands gripped the back of Louis head and held him in a passionate kiss full of lust and desire. When the kiss broke Louis was dazed by the unnatural speed that Armand moved, his pants had been removed and Armand was suddenly taking Louis’ erection into his mouth. He worked the shaft with a skillful tongue while hands roamed freely and easily over the others body, down his thighs and reached under to raise Louis’ hips to meet his mouth. Swallowing effortlessly he kneaded Louis ass, fucking his own mouth with the others cock and earning gasping moans from the bruised lips of his lover.

Armand felt like he could listen to the velvet tones of Louis moan for all time. The low rumble in the beautiful man’s broad chest made his own erection twitch with excitement. The muscled and lean body was a feast for the eyes and the thick length of the shaft in his mouth was something that left him pleasantly surprised the first time they had an intimate encounter centuries ago. His skill had been learnt early in his sexual life, being able to bring another fully into his mouth, regardless of the impressive length Louis provided him. It was something he happily utilized when it came to the pleasures of his bedfellows.

His movements were smooth as he lowered Louis back to rest on the grass, while his hand replaced the workings of his mouth, sliding the throbbing shaft of the other immortal. Louis’ eyes were scrunched shut as fingers dug into the earth below him, chest heaving with the fast breaths. He gasped between low groans of pleasure. Armand was positioned between the spread legs, his own erection painful and weeping from desire.

Take me, the plea was clear in his mind as he looked up to meet the blacked emerald fire of Louis gaze.

Groaning, Armand closed his eyes tight, steeling himself against the urge to give into the others request. Instead his hand slowed its work and released his captive. When his eyes opened again they were met by a look of mild confusion and a slight pout on the puffy lips, which caused Armand to smile.

“No, Louis.” He managed to say, barely above a whisper, as if in the fury of their love-making he had forgotten quite how to speak. This statement deepened the pout as Armand rose and was suddenly standing over the other again. Quickly the look changed to understanding as Armand knelt down to straddle Louis’ midsection once more. The press of the hard cock against his bare backside caused a groan to rise unconsciously from his throat in anticipation, as he began to rock against the other man and resumed the kisses that had started all of their naughty interlude.

He could not get enough of Louis, his mouth, his moans, his body his being. Louis’ hands had come
up to grasp him, positioning him perfectly as he slowly pushed the smaller man down onto his weeping erection. Slipping the impressive girth deep into the others tight ass as both men groaned their mutual pleasure. Armand’s face buried in Louis neck, as he settled to the hilt and they stayed that way a long moment, chests heaving as they panted against one another with Louis’ hands kneading his backside. When Armand began to slowly move, it was he who set the initial pace until soon they were both lost in the sensation of their love making. His head tossed back, as he surrendered his body to Louis and Louis immediately reacted, slamming the other down hard. The loud smack of flesh on flesh ringing out into the night with Armand’s cry of surprise and ecstasy.

Louis took him. Owned him, pummeled the sweet cherub like a little whore until he cried out and then cooed sweetness into his ear. He rolled atop him, groaning as the slender legs wrapped around his back and pulled him closer. Armand wanted this, wanted Louis to take what he needed. Louis’ hips rocked slowly, his cock slipping almost the full way out before plunging back in, eliciting mutual moans of enjoyment. Fingers clawed at his back, causing him to shutter as Armand’s breathy request blew hot on his ear.

“Take me, Louis. I want you.” That had been enough when urging fingers dug wickedly into his back. Louis let out a sharp gasp before ravaging the pale length of exposed throat. Armand arched and bucked against him violently with a cry mixed with pain and ecstasy as teeth punctured perfect flesh.

The hot flood of copper filled his mouth as he swallowed greedily. Each hard thump of the other immortals heartbeat reverberated through his chest, sending another delicious wave of crimson gushing forth. The rush of the older vampire’s blood spread through his veins like fire as he hungrily took what was given. With each swallow the world grew impossibly darker behind his closed eyes as visions of Armand flooded his mind, passionate encounters from his mortal youth in Venice. Times spent with his maker, Marius. Then flashes of the Theatre des’ Vampires, Lestat, his first encounter with Louis and more.

All of this in the thrum of the powerful heart filling him with liquid fire, as he plunged himself deeply into the shuddering body of the beautiful creature below him. With a straggled cry he broke the embrace, crying out as he came, rocking against the other. Earning only a whimper from Armand whose arms had fallen to his sides limply, Louis collapsed suddenly upon him forcing out a great contented sigh from both men in the wake of their exhausting activities.

For a long while they remained that way until, Armand’s hands came up to trail lazy and soothing patterns across Louis broad shoulders. Finally, one of them moved. It was Louis. His head rose to look at the blissful form of Armand beneath him, eyes closed, breaths deep, with a satisfied smile upon his lips.

“You are…”

“Shut up, Louis.” Armand cut him off softly.

“... I was just…”

“Louis,” Armand raised a hand and cupped it softly over Louis’ mouth with a lazy smile, as long lashes fluttered to eye him ruefully. “How about we lay here a little longer before I have to go... and let us pretend, that I do not.”

***

It was late when Sherlock Holmes had finally returned to the flat, muddy, exhausted, and none the wiser. It was after four a.m., and the tang of the smoke still on his lungs was a dissipating pleasure
that left him hungering for more. As he entered 221B and came up the stairs he knew instantly that
his flat was entertaining a visitor. A very quiet visitor.

Cautiously he came through the door, fully prepared for anything or anyone that might greet him,
only to find a man reclining comfortably in John’s chair. Seeing another body occupying the
doctor’s favored seat made a billowing rage bloom within the detective’s chest—a sensation both
foreign and shocking, that was barely quelled without any visible physical manifestation of the
reaction on his person. The reeling mind of the quick-witted detective was refocused through
analysis. Dark raven hair was loose, hanging straight, framing a pale face with a straight nose and
striking emerald orbs that glistened an unearthly hue in contrast to the dark lashes and brows
surrounding them. It was his neighbor, the tenant of 221C. In the second that it took to observe the
man’s features, identity, and purpose, he had also evaluating much more from this strange visitor.

clasped, elbows planted on the arms of the chair. Serious. Professional. Business meeting. Grass
in his hair, on his sweater, and jeans—just left someone—male lover, in the park, adventurous. But
there were other things that he observed that he could not make sense of even as he approached the
guest, shed his coat, and took a seat opposite the man in his leather chair. Pale skin, white, hard,
pore-less—not possible. Fingers, thin, strong, nails manicured, glassy—not possible.

“I apologize for my intrusion.” The man said, his voice silken and cultured, even in his American
accent. Deliberately slowed speech, softened tone. “I have to admit, Mr. Holmes, your occupation
has an undeniably compelling attraction.”

“Ah,” Sherlock replied, steepling his hands before him as he crossed his legs and reclined in his own
chair, “and so you have come here to see more than what London’s droves of tourists seek. More
than the bland and boring historical sights and tourist traps. The view of the Thames from London’s
Eye not at all you’re interest, is it?”

His guest gave a congenial chuckle, the corner of his mouth stretching into a thin amused smile.
“Indeed.”

Sherlock narrowed his eyes on the man, searching those illuminous orbs for more answers. He
certainly was not bored now. “And so then why have you come?”

The man shifted ever so slightly in the chair, again the movement seeming deliberately slowed even
though his body moved in a perceptively normal manner. He rested his head in his hand, fingers lost
in the raven depths of his hair, his legs uncrossed so that his ankle was caught on his knee, a stance
that suggested comfort and yet somehow was threatening all the same. Why was that? “Surely
you’ve deduced that?”

Sherlock cocked his head slightly to the side. A test. “You’ve come for me.” He said confidently,
before shrugging and rephrasing, “Or rather you have come because of what you have heard of me
and what I do. You’re bored. And I am new, something you have yet to explore and tire of.”

The smile on the full lips drew ever so slightly wider and the head gave an almost imperceptible nod
of acknowledgement. “Very good.” The man almost purred the words, soft, low, and in a tone that
was both menacing and seductive. “Perhaps you know already then why I have come uninvited into
your flat tonight.” A statement. Another test? Or just a means of forwarding the conversation
without admitting it himself? Why would he detract from ownership of his own purpose for being
there?

“You’re here to warn me of something.” The detective deduced. The answer had come out in a
quickly delivered monotone blurb, which was received by the stranger as being eager. Sherlock was
eager—desperately in need of a distraction from his failed experiments, John’s bemusing episodes since his return from the grave, and his own incessant boredom—and it was even more alluring to know that this man had so easily read this from his own still continence.

“Yes.” The man admitted, the word drawn out a little, his lips drawn back to reveal perfectly aligned teeth—*white, hard, sharp, fangs—not probable—before returning to a thin line. “Have you met or do you know of a blond man named Lestat?”

Why the sudden introduction of another person? This was the warning. Interesting but not intriguing. Sherlock couldn’t help the disappointed tone, as he responded truthfully, “No.”

The eyes flashed on him, intense, and steadfast, exuding a renewed threat of danger. “Stay away from him.” It was a statement said with such finality that the ending of it was like the pounding of a court gavel. “His attraction for you and your craft is unnatural and certainly dangerous. He means you harm.”

“Understood.” The detective replied, with a nod of his own head. He sensed that the man knew this Lestat well, a friend or perhaps they were more. His statement was truthful. *Perhaps more interesting…*

The man then stood, not making a sound as he moved, an unnatural grace to the lithe action that Sherlock could not attribute to any physical means of possibility. The stranger moved to leave and did not turn back when Sherlock came to his own feet. Fearing the loss of the man’s intriguing presence the consulting detective procured an offer to keep his unexpected guest’s company, spilling the suggestion quickly and without much tact. “Stay. We could...have a game of chess.” Desperate. He didn’t have to see the man’s face to know what he had gauged from the hasty comment.

The man stopped and turned slightly back, his eyes lighting on the half hidden game board shoved off to the side of a bookshelf by the window. “I would love that very much…but I think it would be most unwise.” He admitted in that low, slow, satiny voice. “It is very late. Good evening, Mr. Holmes.”

And he was gone.
Louis hoped that the mortal might heed his warning and yet had little belief that the strong willed, insatiably curious, detective would. There was a commonality between both Lestat’s need for entertainment and that of the attractive human in 221B above him that the younger vampire found disturbingly volatile. Much to his own distaste his blonde maker was notorious for his unpredictability, many of his excuses registering near the same criteria that drove the brunet above to act—the sheer and elementary desire to fight off the bleakness of time and monotony. Neither could withstand the effects, both minds and bodies withering within the mere prospects of dealing with either notion. He feared that too much time together could draw to a dire conclusion.

Louis himself was a watcher. He loved to simply occupy his time and boredom with the watching of
others—an act which his maker firmly abhorred and often vehemently remonstrated. It was one of the many spikes that was constantly being driven between the mutual attraction that drew them together again and again. Lestat preferred action. Why watch when you could interfere? Although admittedly the man himself would not consider it interference. He would produce words more eloquent and obscure to describe his impingement. No poetry, however, could detract from the fact that a demonic creature was meddling with the helpless lives upon which it preyed, from whence it had come. It was not natural, not the way of the world, as Lestat liked to allude—not in Louis’ mind.

The mortals that they mingled amongst, that they had once been a very real part of before accepting the dark gift and been demonized, was something to be obliged. If it was not for the blood they took from their mortal victim’s a vampire could not thrive. It was not as simple as a feline playing with its meal before consumption. The mouse was always a mouse and the cat will always be a cat. The cat was never a mouse.

It was therefore very aggravating to Louis that his bored maker had followed him to London. It was an irritable distraction from his own motivation of coming—the watching of the great Sherlock Holmes, the world’s first consulting detective, at work, utilizing his most marvelous talents, honed over years of dedication, skill, and training. It was something Louis had come to deeply respect—the man was gifted amongst his mortal peers—and Louis regretted that his own interest may now warrant any danger towards the mortal. For the danger of the human world was a threat but the danger that Lestat’s interest brooked would be absolute.

The warning was warranted, might prevent disaster for the man, if only he would heed it. Unlike his maker Louis knew that the detective would at least consider the warning. It would have to be enough.

The vampire’s raven colored head dipped and his chin came to rest on the first two fingers of his hands, pressed as though in prayer. It was a simple gesture that he mirrored from the man in the flat above him. He closed his eyes and considered where his maker had gone after their incident. He felt the haunting heat streaking across his chest at the memory of the fire maker had unwittingly released on his fledgling in his fit of rage. Louis had been just as shocked as Lestat had been—yet nothing compared to unveiled horror in the icy blue luminescent depths of the immortal eyes of his maker.

It was exactly the reason why Louis had been compelled to warn Sherlock Holmes. His maker was not only irrevocably unpredictable and insatiably deviant, he also harnessed powers unimaginable to his peers, which he was not always in complete control of—and his tempestuous handle on his own emotions gaged his control of this. There was no saying, if given the chance, what Lestat might offer the detective. And Louis had driven the blonde off, in a rage, with his own involvement with the vampire Armand.

Armand and Lestat and Louis. The three of them in a constant dancing revolution always trading and moving and replacing. Louis loved them both deeply and yet had many reasons to hate both of them. It was a clandestine partnership no matter which front he chose to inhabit, which was why he strayed from committing completely to either. In a mortal’s lifetime this kind of relationship could be defined, expressed, preformed, and obliged. There was no context for describing such in an immortal’s limitless lifespan. There was really no sense to ascribe to any such mortal belief. Immortality was, granted, a very long time. His partners agreed and disagreed with that sentiment, only because they could not withstand the other and both were deeply competitive. Thus driving their dance.

Hours after leaving the man Louis’ thoughts were interrupted by a sudden shift in the mental happenings of the mortal man’s own mind, of which he had been half-heartedly tapped into since
leaving 221B. The sparse thoughts that seemed to revolve around the vampire’s sudden and unexpected appearance built in volume and clarity as they transitioned, like a radio station tuning out the static, and his immortal mind was captured.

If Louis tuned out everything else, the hum of the floor board heater, the tinkling of water moving through the pipes within the building, the thrum of the odd vehicle moving past, or the droning of conversations beyond the walls of the flat, he could create and almost clear image of the memories lazily moving through the detectives straying mind. Playing like a movie on an old time projection reel his immortal mind could capture the audio clearly, the odd part of a blurred image slipped through here and there, Louis’ own imagination completely capable of recreating what was lost, as the detective allowed his drowsy mind to leak.

Louis wanted to delve into the human’s opening mind but managed to refrain, knowing that the impressive mortal could just as quickly shut him out—with a painful sting he wished not to receive again. Instead he listened to what was being freely leaked as the man coasted along the edge of sleep, a fascinating glimpse into the detective’s mind that gripped his attention intensely.

Strong emotions of longing, desire, and lust wafted throughout the memories, all shrouded by the man’s own understanding and stubborn refusal to accept them for what they were, as Louis watched through the detective’s own eyes the doctor John Watson—watched the man as the detective would have watched him, silent little stolen moments when the doctor’s attentions were distracted elsewhere. Making tea in the kitchen, filling mugs amongst beakers of goop, human remains, and bleach. Sleeping with his head lolled back against a union jack clad pillow slumped into the well-worn burgundy chair, the telly still playing. Brushing his teeth at the sink in the bathroom. Shaving in preparation for a date. Typing at the paper cluttered desk beneath the bison skull, headphones on and head down, fingers racing as his tongue played circles over his bottom lip to help him concentrate. Those dark blue orbs looking up, finding, lingering, crinkling with the warmth of the smile that spread across his thin lips bellow.

When Louis heard the doctor say the detective’s name, it was muffled by the dreamscape that shaped it, low in tone and questioning. Sherlock reciprocated, his own darker timber rumbling the doctor’s name with a finality that was claiming. Louis could see the thin fingers tracing over the bare skin of the other man’s body, over the muscled arms, the shoulders, the scar—Afghanistan, bullet, injury, weakness, limp, cane, gone, because of me, mine, all mine—kisses on the raised pink scar tissue, gentle yet claiming. Mine! Hands trailing down over breast and abdominals, shifting with each shallow breath, as the detective spread the soldier’s legs and positioned himself between them. Mine…

Mine!

The vampire was disconnected. A sharp and sudden lashing, like the cracking of whip, searing across the back of his retinas. He winced and bore the pain, with his fangs clenched. The desire in the man’s exposed memories had transcended through the connection leaving the immortal consumed with an intense lust and a craving for blood. The urge to tear from his flat to the one above and consume the mortal was almost too much to restrain.

After a moment had passed he had pushed back the desire and released his grip on the arms of the chair, realizing the wood beneath the upholstered cover had splintered.

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It had been hard for the consulting detective to sleep after the enthralling discussion late that night with the strange and alluring new American tenant. Sherlock had failed to keep the man’s company and the loss had left him bored and irritated once more, however, the stranger had given him much to
ponder. He had applied a nicotine patch and then took up residence on the long couch along the wall by the door, closing his eyes and opening the doors to his mind palace. There he proceeded to organize, review, and file what he had been able to glean in their short interlude. The encounter with his neighbor had been strange given the general pedestrian context of normal people's interactions. This man definitely did not fit into that category and therefore warranted extra consideration on the detective's part.

At some point he had lapsed into sleep and there Sherlock had slept for a few hours before a stray beam of sunshine that had slipped between the curtains blinded him awake, with its warm and delightful presence. He had turned away in defiance, burying his still groggy head into the corner of the cushions. It was only another twenty three minutes before he was on his feet and in the bathroom—where he promptly remembered that he was avoiding the bathroom at all costs. This time he locked the door from the inside and slammed it shut, irritated by the flashes of memory that sparked in his mind upon the mere entrance into that room. He settled for washing up in the kitchen sink and finger combing his dark curls back from his forehead. They fell right back into place over his right eyebrow by the time he had shed his clothes and replaced them with crisp clean ones from the closet.

The flat was disheveled to say the least. It was a mess from one corner to the other, full of the refuse that he left behind in his distracted meanderings and unfocused meditations. There were several reasons that would justify sifting through the throng of half-finished experiments, open file folders, books, and cups of cold tea, for his phone and yet none compelling enough to override what he now could consciously admit was his own avoidance, mainly regarding the issue of checking to see if there was any response from John Watson. So instead he went about clearing his kitchen of as many of the old tests to make way for a new one, which would require a lot more room.

This did keep the detective distractedly busy for most of the day. As he worked his mind was plagued by bothersome remembrances of what he must have dreamt that night prior. Thoughts of the doctor, of what they had shared, how they had been together, and more disturbingly of something dark and fearsome stealing the man away. He tried to dispel the disconcerting thoughts that interrupted his preparations and drew his attention elsewhere with little success, proving only to annoy him further. He took little stock in such dreams, such rampant emotion tinged thoughts, and therefore was irked by the power he required to rid himself of their pestering nuisance. It had grown dark outside by the time he had completed his endeavor and everything was set.

The detective then retrieved his jacket from where he had shed it so haphazardly the night prior and it was then that he spotted his mobile, obscured by the rubbish bin and some discarded balls of paper that had missed their mark. He was both delighted and bothered to have found the thing. It sent his pulse racing, a reaction that he tried with all his might to stifle, as he clicked the black screen on. The phone refused to react. It was dead.

Sherlock grit his teeth and grumbled his protestation as he plugged the mobile in to charge. Then he left to grab some take away so as not to disturb his newly started experiment in the kitchen.

The phone was fully charged upon his return and the detective ate the Chinese take away reclined on the pillows of his bed. As he ate the lo mein dish, half cooled by the cold walk back to the flat—irritating—he clicked the phone on. It instantly began to vibrate, pinging with the new messages that were coming in. Apparently he had missed a couple of phone calls. He recognized one of the phone numbers instantly.

Dropping the dish of take away beside him on the bed he opened up his voice mail and listened to the solitary message. It was from Dr. Sarah Sawyer. "Uh, hello Sherlock, just Sarah ringing here. I am trying to track down John and Mary. They, uh, they haven’t been into the clinic for their shifts
this last two days. I didn’t want to alarm anyone, it’s just, not like them. Well, not like Mary. Anyway please ring me back as soon as you can if you know anything.” She proceeded to list the numbers at which he could reach her. He didn’t listen to them. He ended the call and was on his feet in one fluid motion.

Leaving the take away behind Sherlock grabbed his coat and scarf and rushed from the flat, slipping on both as he ran to hail a cab.

As the fat cabbie cranked the wheel and sped back into traffic the dark head of the detective dipped forward, his eyes closed tight, and his fingers were drawn to his chin. The eyes in the mirror that flicked between the red lights of the traffic he dodged around and the fare in his backseat probably thought he was deep in prayer. Even though the stakes were escalating it was not prayer that would calm his racing pulse and mind.

The detective drew in measured breaths through his nose and out through his mouth, as his mind began to sift through the clues that he had and that the message had added. The mobile in the pocket of his coat felt like a weight, terribly distracting. Why had he not found the phone earlier? He knew why and it was not a comfort.

As the vehicle swerved and sped through the blackness of the London streets the detective found no solace in his meditation. He was plagued by the thought of his own failure. There was something that he had missed. Something critical that he had failed to piece together.

The black cab came to a screeching halt outside the home of Mary Morstan. The windows were black, not a single light turned on, when others along the block were semi-lit with the activities of the people inside. He threw cash at the driver, who lit up in the front seat. Sherlock was out of the vehicle and up the steps to the front door without even bothering to close the vehicle door. It didn’t take him long to find the spare key under the frog shaped flower pot—blatantly obvious—and without caution he threw open the front door, calling out for John.

Blackness surrounded him. There was not a single light on in the flat. The only light came in from the street lamps outside.

The air inside the flat was infused with many different odors and each one was identified in his mind like the pinging in his mind like points from a database on a large hard drive, as he stood stock still and took them all in. There was no reason to rush, he already knew that no one was at home. John’s coat and casual shoes were missing. Even with the dark he could also tell that the entrance lacked any female accessories as well.

If they are not here, then where are they? His mind rushed to question and the detective forced it to stop. Slow down, take it in, all of it, every little detail.

The odors in the air ranged from menial to monumental—the strongest being the overall scent of ‘new’ and ‘clean’. The hairs on the back of his neck began to rise with the quickening of his heart and the sudden conclusions drawing together in his mind, which created a sharp wrenching sensation in his gut. He fought the urge to run, search, scream, find, and settled on slow, methodical, make it count. He drew in a deep breath and released it, taking his first step out of the entrance and into the rest of the flat. He came into the kitchen first, finding everything seemingly present and accounted for, as though he were in a picture perfect home ready for sale. Staged. Everything appeared staged, set, utterly perfect. Nothing out of place. Without life.

Sherlock moved past one of the barren cupboard tops, running his gloved hand over its surface. Just to be sure he removed the black leather and applied pressure across the surface of the arborite with the pad of his index finger. He sniffed at the finger, detecting the strong scent of disinfectant. It had
been cleaned. Cleaned well, of everything. He knew then that he should be wary. Someone worked very hard and diligently to remove any trace of the crime—no, not yet, not finished, not for certain—of the habitation of the home.

The detective moved from the kitchen towards the small stairwell in the hallway that led to the second floor. The fresh pungent tang of new varnish hit his palate as he also noted that the carpets on the steps were newly replaced. At the top of the stairs sat a small half circle side table made of fine mahogany. Plum stain, chipped, loved, used, bouquet in vase—new. The flowers were made up of a sloppy arrangement of daisies, babies breath, and red carnations. Mary preferred tulips—spring, new growth, fresh start—and the glass vase was also dated. There was the slight variation in the wooden table’s surface just visible around the circular base of the glass vase that was indicative of a water stain. He lifted the vase to assess the mark further, quickly noting that the stain did not match the circumference of the vase present.

“Sloppy.” He murmured to himself, as he gently handled the vase and flowers, ascertaining its weight. When he was through he placed it back down on the table askew, so the water stain was clearly visible, before continuing.

The hallway was typical for this period of build. The stairwell was narrow but open, a pony wall serving as a railing for more than half its length. There was a tiny bedroom immediately to the left of the stairs—office space—and the slightly larger master bedroom at the hallways end, sandwiching a small but efficient bathroom between them, a doorway allowing the main bathroom to also double as an ensuite to the master—better sales feature. Everything smelled of new construction. New paint, over new mud, over new drywall, where damages had been removed and covered.

The bedroom door was closed, it too had been replaced—knobs don’t match—and when he opened it his mind was inundated with information. The bed was before him, against the wall, nightstands on either side, white metal frame—repainted—and draped in a soft pink pin-tucked duvet—replaced. The carpet was new, the sectioning between the hallway and the master was uneven—hastily installed. The room was not very large, affording the most space at the entrance. Frames of mundane abstract art adorned the walls, covering the recent patches to the drywall, as an extra precaution.

There was a small boudoir immediately in front of the doorway, small but enough. As he approached he could already smell the disinfectant, whose residue still coated the cheap piece of IKEA furniture. He opened the doors. John’s shirts and trousers were hung in orderly rows—not John—and there was not a single piece of female clothing amongst them. There was the doctor’s black dress shoes—worn once, bought for Mary’s proposal—down at the bottom of the cupboard, alone. He closed the doors and opened the two drawers below—socks, pants, jeans—all John’s.

The detective moved next the small white dresser, matching piece, in the far corner by the door to the bathroom. The top was bare. No jewelry, no glasses, no hats, no scarves. He began opening the drawers—they were all bare. The dresser smelled of antiseptic cleaner and bore the signs of use. It was not new, it had not been replaced, it had been cleaned—like every other surface within the home.

Whoever had ordered the restoration had gone to a lot of effort and expense to conceal the truth and most certainly had the means and experience to do so. The yard would have been fooled, would have easily overlooked the most obvious signs. The home was staged to make it look like Mary Morstan had fled—willingly, of her own volition, in a trained manner of flight. A female had lived here, but had chosen to leave, without informing the man she had cohabited with.
The truth was that Mary Morstan was dead.

Sherlock fished his mobile out of his pocket, as his pulse raced and an intense heat flushed his face. Into the cell he typed:

Where is John?

-SH

And he hit send.
Chapter 13

The detective’s brother, being practically married to the government positions he held, had many office’s as to which he conducted his many different types of business. It was not hard for Sherlock to deduce which his brother held at the moment and he made his way to the secure location, much to Mycroft’s chagrin.

The text message Sherlock had hastily sent in his first unexpected moments of panic—which he passed rather quickly—had gone unheeded for some time. It was to be expected. His elder sibling may be the clearing house for the British government but he was not above getting his beauty sleep. Unlike the consulting detective, who slept only out of necessity and found the need even then to do so bothersome and disruptive, the older gentleman was known to indulge here and there. Mycroft believed wholly in a sound sleep to cultivate his mental faculties for the new day, the next new challenge, and Sherlock had never been above interrupting it. In the end Mycroft had begrudgingly agreed to meet with him, in the office that Sherlock had already garnered access to.

His brother had arrived in a suit, as though he had not just been about to hit the sack when the detective had called upon him. He strode into the room just as posh and snobbish as always, nose turned upwards, back ram rod straight, gate slow and deliberate, eyes scrutinizing, as he made his way around his seated younger sibling to sit in the brown leather of his expensive chair behind the modestly adorned desk. As he sat he adjusted his jacket, pressed and clean—straight out of the closet—and then leaned back in the chair, clasping his hands over his stomach, and crossing his legs.

Sherlock had known that Mycroft had been favoring his dungeon-esque office as of late and knew just by the arrangement of the pencils and pens in the holder on the plain desk’s top that he was heavily involved at the moment with the British Secret Service. The room was dark and narrow, the picture hung behind the desk on the wall was perfectly straight, spotted by the grated spots of light cast down upon the two of them. Judging by the wrinkles forming under his eyes and around his mouth the work had been taxing as of late. Intriguing. Normally this would be cause for a well thrust barb but Sherlock hadn’t the time now.

As his elder was waiting patiently for Sherlock to voice the concern he had so panic-strickenly typed into his phone a few hours earlier, the detective indulged him. In a slow measured tone, which spoke of his impatience for this sort of game play at a time like this between them, the younger brother asked the obvious, “Where is John, Mycroft?”

Hearing the question spoken aloud brought a satisfied crook to the corner of the thin lips, which wrinkled the corners of his eyes in return. Mycroft had a terrible habit of looking down his nose at him, especially when it came to favors. Sherlock did not see this as the same thing and the fact that his brother was treating it as such grated heavily on his already frayed nerves.

The Pietro Annigoni portrait of a young and beautiful Queen Elizabeth II seemed to mirror his brother, as though conveying his authority and influence in the stance and intense glance of the monarch’s imposing eyes. She was draped in a dark cloak, less grand than the scarlet hues of the portrait that adorned Mycroft’s spacious uptown office. There the Queen appeared reposed and pleasantly pleased, the shade of her lips matching the drapes that had been chosen to adorn the large windows, and also the red phone that occupied a corner of the larger desk. A red phone was close at hand here as well but it was over shadowed by the globe and fan also present, even though it obviously had seen more use.
“I am afraid that I am not privy to that situation…” Mycroft began to explain.

Sherlock was in no mood to perry the first thrust and so deflected, cutting his brother short with a sharp snapping retort, “Don’t underestimate my intelligence, Mycroft, it is unbecoming. I am not one of your single minded diplomats so cut the political jargon. By the use of ‘that situation’ you have already shown me your hand. You are indeed aware of ‘the’ situation and therefore you can understand as well that I am not going to leave until you have relinquished what you know.” Through grit teeth, he added in a threatening hiss, “Answer the question.”

“Political jargon or not, dear brother, the answer is the same, if you would care to give me the time to say it.” His brother’s tone was grating and nasally, dripping with restrained annoyance. He twitched his head back, his weak chin thrust out, as he swallowed and added in a measured tone, “I am aware of that situation and I have little information to give you above and beyond what you have already deduced for yourself.”

“Surely you know who was after Mary, who murdered her in her home, and staged it for John to find.” The detective hated the quick stricken sound of his own words as they left his lips. He was unaccustomed to be at the losing end of controlling his own emotions and the effect was increasingly irritating. He felt the irrational urge to leap across the desk top and wring the information from his elder brother’s strangling throat.

Mycroft was no idiot and a smirk danced across the corner of his mouth as he watched Sherlock’s fallacious mind running away with his control. There was a resounding mirth present in the pity he felt for his younger brother that made Sherlock’s skin crawl with animosity. The cold bleak eyes of his brother, pupils wide and fathomless in the half lit office, bore into his very being—he was searching, scrutinizing, calculating. Then the smirk shifted into the same thin line his lips normally bore, effecting the perfect calm of an encompassing state of apathy. “I tried to warn you, Sherlock, not to get involved. You’ve let your fool sentimentality run away with your common sense.”

“I am beyond your pity and your warnings, brother!” Sherlock snapped, his fingers balling into white knuckled fists on the arms of the chair he sat within. His dark brows came together over his blazing eyes, as the panic broke through his resolve and a thin layer of condensation gathered over the reddened scleras. “I am asking you. Please…I need your help.”

Mycroft averted his eyes, seemingly somewhat affected by the genuine display of his broken sibling opposite him. An annoyed hand came up and rubbed at his brow, combing back over his slowly receding hairline, as a heavy sigh wheezed through his grit teeth. “Your emotions are wreaking havoc on your skills, brother mine.” That bleak gaze snapped back, patronizing and sympathetic all the same. “You’ve over looked the simplest and yet most interesting piece of the puzzle.”

Sherlock was beyond playing any more. He gave his brother a weak perry, “Mary.”

“Mary Morstan, indeed.” Mycroft confirmed, with an advocating nod of his head.

“Who is Mary Morstan?” Sherlock whispered, as the exciting revelation of the curious mystery took root in his brain, blossoming into a flurry of deductions that whizzed through him like an electrical current through water. “Orphan, convenient. The skip code, practice and skill.”

“She was someone before she became Mary Morstan. That much is obvious.” Mycroft pointed out, wanting to say more as he was cut off.

“Someone she did not want to be any longer.”

“And an organization that could not let her go.” Mycroft surmised before his younger brother got that
satisfaction of doing so for himself. “She was a rogue agent on the run and had successfully remained elusive until now. She must have felt that she was safe if she was ready to agree to wed Dr. Watson. Probably why the attack had been successful. She had let her guard down.”

“And John had come home in the middle of it.” Sherlock added, his lips pursing as he considered all the ramifications of this new enlightenment. Little time was spent dwelling on the repugnant swell of guilt that rose inside of him, as he realized that he may have played his own part in driving John off after the strange bite, and instead it was diverted to reimagining the scene he had combed hours earlier.

All the evidence he had observed had pointed to the conclusion that a fourth unknown party had intervened on the tussle between John and the initial assailant, the illusive question remaining now was why. John’s life must have been in danger, motivation to interfere but sadly not an explanation. It was this fourth unknown party that Sherlock knew had taken his former flatmate.

Sherlock’s intense eyes moved askance to his brother and Mycroft raised his nose again, answering the look in a proprietary tone, “However much you would like to believe that I am in complete control of every facet of the British Government and every other agency the world round, little brother, I will remind you that there are still levels beyond which I am privy to. The organization that employed Miss Morstan is one of them. The fourth party is arbitrary, a complete unknown.

The consulting detective’s emotions shifted back to the organization and to his brother at this statement, focusing in on one single fact. “You knew this. You knew even before John became involved with her. Why did you allow this to proceed? For things to get this far?!”

Mycroft scoffed loudly, and leaned forward out of his chair. His cold eyes nailing his younger brother in the seat opposite his desk. Contempt and sarcasm dripped form his words, as he proffered an open palm dismissively, explaining, “This far? I assume you mean the engagement. That, little brother, is why I warned you not to get involved. Dr. Watson is a stubborn man. You should have known you could not keep him, you of all people. Who was I to intervene? And was I to do so for your sake? For your honor? I’m pretty sure I don’t have to verbalize how that would have turned out. Please remember, Sherlock, you have just recently returned from the dead.”

Sherlock’s teeth dug pensively into his lower lip, biting back any defense he may have been able to conjure. His fingers twitched, with the need to fidget. He brought them to his mouth, rubbing his upper lip. He could feel John’s mouth on his own, as real as if they had just kissed, a haunting spectre that teased and tormented. The wound below the blue scarf and the collar of his shirt burned and itched, a painful reminder of the strangeness that had last driven them apart, which now echoed his elder brother’s sentiments. John could never again be his.

Mycroft’s daring smirk returned, that awful curl to the corner of his mouth half hidden by knit fingers propped up by elbows braced on the arms of his leather chair. His eyes watched Sherlock, looking at him down that length of straight nose. Slowly he spoke. “Besides…it’s not as though we had tea every other week. I kept tabs on him and that is all that I was indebted to do for you.” It all sounded rather callous to Sherlock’s ears.

Of course Mycroft had known. The bloody man knew everything, regardless of how Sherlock tried to evade his ever watchful eyes. His relations with John were of no concern to his sibling. Mycroft considered all relationships moot. A begrudging reality of the world that they both lived in. An unfortunate necessity. Love was a distraction. A chemical reaction that hindered one’s own ability to find reason and logic, which in turn dulled the mind and senses.

John was different. John was special. The simple man that so seamlessly entered the consulting detective’s life had changed that theory—that long held, steadfast belief—and had proven it wrong.
John had made Sherlock better. Had brought focus and humanity like no other person before him. All others had always been a distraction, a hindrance, a waste of time. Yet the longer the consulting detective was with the doctor the more change occurred and the more Sherlock enjoyed it. It was something that Mycroft would not understand without experiencing it—just like Sherlock had scorned the ideals of love before John had gifted him that.

Sherlock had taken all of that for granted. He had blithely assumed that nothing would change, too consumed with deconstructing Moriarty’s extensive web of criminal influence that indeed stretched around the globe. And so had Mycroft.

“This is above me, Sherlock.” Mycroft’s soft voice broke his meandering thoughts, bringing him back to the disastrous reality that he was facing. John had indeed been taken, to where and for what purpose still unknown, by who still a mystery. Mycroft could not help, had done all that he could do. It was up to him.

“Thank you, dear brother, for your time. I will let you get back to your slice of cake that I so inadvertently had interrupted.” He stood in a flourish of wool coat, spinning on his heel, back erect, as he stalked from the office. He stopped at the door, hesitating only long enough to point at the barely visible smear of chocolate at the corner of his brother’s mouth. “It is still calling your name.”

Mycroft watched his brother go, his feather’s ruffled by the mention of the bloody cake he had left half eaten by his bedside table. The insult the verbal equivalent to a soldier’s camouflage, a distraction to cover the very real presence of fear, distress, and pain that his younger sibling refused to linger at his emotional surface. His hands came to his mouth again, rubbing at his thin bottom lip and chin. He prolonged the movement. Measured and calculated the time it would take for Sherlock to have removed himself from the secret government building, deep within the heart of London, safe under the confines of the sprawling cityscape above.

It had passed. Sherlock was far enough. The elder Holmes leaned forward in his chair, planting his elbows onto the top of his desk. He reached out a hand and waved his fingers in beckoning motion towards the dark recesses of the far corner, where his younger brother had left the door open. The hinges on the frame sorely groaned as the door slowly swung back and from behind it emerged a shadowy figure. A soft click was the only other sound in the room as a white hand on the knob closed his office door.

Mycroft watched as the tall figure moved forward. It took steps that seemed to make no audible sound, the figure gliding into the centre of the room, a seamless movement more graceful than the human frame was capable of creating. Soft blond curls fell around a pale angular face. Defined brows arching over piercing crystal sapphire eyes, that glowed with an eldritch illumination, reflective like a wild cats eyes caught in the headlamps. The mouth was androgynous, full lips any woman would kill to wield, pulled into a smile that threatened the man who beheld it.

“I am both impressed and flattered.” The creature said, stopping not far from where his brother had sat across from Mycroft. There he pulled a hand to his chest and gave a slight bow, the perfectly formed ringlets of hair falling forward over the shoulders of the leather jacket. When he straightened, it added the obvious in a silken tone of voice, “You knew that I was there.”

Mycroft reached out his hand and offered the creature the seat opposite him, politely replying, “No need to hide. Please, come and sit.” The man listened, moving to take a seat in the chair, the whole while never allowing his eyes to blink or break from Mycroft’s face. His head seemed to suddenly ache, a penetrating pull at his temples that almost brought him to wince. Fighting the sudden, strange discomfort the elder Holmes straightened his jacket and repositioned his hands diplomatically on the desktop, lacing his fingers together. “I presume you have business, Mr. de Lioncourt.”
The creature gave an inquisitive tilt of its head, the mouth curling in an enthused smirk. The hands quickly unzipped the jacket and the vampire leaned back into the chair, resting his arms on the rests of the chair—a movement that was far faster than any human could easily conduct. Mycroft understood the underlying display. “Now you have my attention, Mr. Holmes.” The pale man intoned, resting his chin in the fingers of his left hand. “Pray, enlighten me.”

Mycroft had to clear his throat before speaking, as the throbbing between his temples increased a notch. He gazed calmly across his desk at the deadly creature in his office. Confidently he answered simply the truth, “It is true that there are not a great many that know of your true identity. A closely guarded secret your kind is. However, your reputation precedes you.” Mycroft knew how to play this game well and he deftly countered the question with one of his own. “Pray, enlighten me as to what I owe this truly remarkable introduction.”

The blond head bowed forward, as a mirth-filled chuckle issued from between the softly pink lips of the alabaster creature. Those piercing blue eyes squinted playfully, the bridge of the straight nose crinkling, as the vampire replied, “Is it that obvious that I did not come here to keep you company?”

“Blatant.” Mycroft answered, with a soft cheeky smile.

The vampire’s eyes moved off of the man for the first time since they had landed on him, drifting to the desktop where his hand reached up and spun the globe in the corner. As the creature watched the small round sphere spin in its holder, Mycroft watched him. He was truly surprised to have been given an opportunity to meet the vampire. The beings’ kind were but a whisper that the truly gifted mind had only heard snippets of, deep within the catacombs of some of the most ancient of places and organizations beneath the surface of the British Government and Intelligence. Whispers were all Mycroft needed.

Still the encounter surely heralded dangerous consequences. It would be vital to ascertain for certain why the creature had graced his presence.

“Ah, London,” the vampire finally said. There was a longing in his tone, as his fingers slowed the globe to a stop, right over the country in question. “I’ve always loved the history of this place, the smell of the Thames, the bustle of the city, the taste of its people. Things had been modernized, that much goes without saying, but things haven’t really ever changed. Same people, same agendas, same boring distractions.” There was a hesitation in the sultry voice and Mycroft was pinned by that same intense luminescent blue gaze. A soft smile formed on the lips, wide enough to allow a glimpse of the dangers fangs within. “Your brother is different though.”

“I could not agree with you more.” Mycroft replied, his tone as casual as if he were speaking with an acquaintance out for tea. “Sherlock has always been challenging. Certainly not boring.”

The Vampire shifted in the chair so that he faced Mycroft. He moved his elbows to the desktop, mirroring the human’s image. “A challenge that I look forward to testing.”
Lestat paced the length of the balcony, bare feet on mosaic tile. This particular tile had been painstakingly placed by hand to replicate a few of the patterned sections of the Ravenna. Turning he suddenly snatched a large potted plant and flung it wildly out into the evening with a fierce snarl.

The subsequent smash of the terracotta colliding with distant bricks was a dull ripple in the still night air after his own unnatural echo faded into the buzz of the city. He turned and paused long enough to decide that he did feel a little better as he headed toward the crystal clear pool, sheading clothing behind him as he moved toward the water’s edge before he slipped beneath the warm salted water.

_Louis loved those stupid flowers_, he thought suddenly as he drifted beneath the blanket of stars. He smirked and then he sighed.

Entertainment had to come in some other fashion, he supposed. Louis could entertain the little imp all he wanted and while he was distracted that left Lestat to have a little fun with the detective that had drawn them to London in the first place. The great 'Sherlock Holmes' was quite a bit more engaging then he had initial anticipated. Though he should have suspected something when Louis was actually willing to move so readily, closer this peculiar mortal.

Problem was, he couldn’t quite decide which was more delicious. The former lover and crime solving companion John Watson or that this same former lover was now entangled in a romance with a runaway member of a secret society. To top it off, Sherlock had more of an idea of something amiss with the Orphan Mary then the man whom had just asked her to marry him. Not only was the scenario itself fascinating but the mortals themselves were lovely in their naivety to the attention they had attracted.

"Lestat?" like a bell came his name from soft and glossy lips, as the bare-chested girl padded out into the night air with a little shiver that left goosebumps over the flawless white breasts. The slightly darker toned nipples rose to hard peaks.

"Out here," his reply was inviting.

While the girl sent ripples through the pool that rocked him, Lestat considered the implications of tempting someone of Sherlock’s disposition with the dark gift. One who prided himself so highly on the perfection of his abilities which so many other could never hope to experience. The sweet and excited rythme of the girls heart began to resonate in his ears as he considered the thought more seriously. He had made mistakes in the past, after all and had learned to consider factors a little more seriously. Fledglings could be troubling.

He could easily scoop up the brunet one evening and get him drunk on his own immortal blood, seduce him with the intoxication of copper on his tongue and immortality. The cost was steep but could easily be paid in the blood of those who had committed graver sins then the mercy his grasp could deliver.

"Earth to--LE-EAHhhg..gg.g" The girls voice was straggled suddenly as Lestat's hand closed as fast and proficient as a cobra strike, around the tanned expanse of slender throat. Her fingers were clawing desperately as she kicked and splashed wildly. A sickly gurgling sound squeaked past puffing lips still slick with gloss, it was oddly beautiful in its tragic appearance.

"Mon Due, you're voice..." Lestat was upright and pulling her close, flexing his fingers only slightly
and causing a squeak with each pulse of muscles. "I can't stand it any more." He sighed after admiring her for a few moments more before he tore the head easily from the girl's body and tossed it behind him carelessly. Barely a pause and he continued to dismember the remaining limbs in a similar fashion. When it was done and the once crystal clear pool and white marble that surrounded it was well coated in the quickly congealing gore, Lestat calmly swam to the deep end of the pool, stepping out to wrap himself in an oversized housecoat.

He had worked up an appetite and was not done with his house guests. There was a vicious part of him that was satisfied at his lust for violence as of late. It could be easy to get carried away and subsequently he tried to learn valuable lessons from his previous adventures. Lately though, he had scorchched more then just Louis shirt, it was not the first time in the the recent past that his temper had caused items to smoke or catch flame. An occurrence that was unsettling at the best of times but was also becoming more and more frequent.

Right hand flexing unconsciously, he headed inside and towards the clothes he'd tossed haphazardly by the door. He thought of the hot emerald fire in the eyes of his fledgling as the heat in his hand rose in time with the hot pink flush of it's mark on the pale flesh of Louis cheek. It had been only a few days since he had left to Belgium but it hadn't taken long before he grew tired of the seclusion. He had arrived back on the London sidewalks through his own supernatural powers. Picked up the young pretty mortal on the street with a devonair smile and whispered promises of seduction unlike any she could imagine. He had delivered his end of the deal and her end, unknown to her, not that she had asked, was to be the next bit of bait in his little trap for the consulting detective.

Lestat's feet carried him down a hallway to the large oak door. Muffled cries and groans were barely audible to his own supernatural hearing as he smiled in satisfaction of his little nest. Door open he stepped to his little scene.

Four men were dead on the floor while a fifth was tied in quarters to a huge king sized bed that overlooked the wide skyline through a wall of glass. Lestat didn't waste time in draining the man and enjoying the shuttering fight of him as the hot thrum of his heart pumped eager mouthfuls for the immortal. Three dead and drained of blood should be enough to stir the pot. Two he had disposed of when taking over the penthouse from its drug cartel owners. Two others had died of gunshot wounds from the cross firing when the panic broke out at the disbelieving cry.

"It's a fucking VAMPIRE, DUDE!!?"

Blood was cooled in two merging puddles that covered a large section of the floor. There was no attempt to avoid trailing his footsteps through the macabre scene when he re-exited the penthouse and proceeded to rise directly up into the night before heading north. The papers, news and either men's blogs had been silent while he was gone. No new deaths, no new 'cases' implied and so it was time for Lestat to help things along a little.

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Sherlock was getting tired of waking up to the dreadful silence of being alone in the Baker Street flat. The feeling left what was starting to become an all too familiar weight in his gut—completely illogical but very real yet the same—made all the more dreadful by the levity that it brought with it, of his current unprecedented predicament. John was missing. Mary was murdered. He knew nothing. He could do…nothing.

Sherlock hated to feel useless. Mycroft had always made him feel useless, inferior, a waste of a sibling. He had used that to drive himself to become better and still, when his friend and former lover had needed him the most, he had needed his pretentious brother to further his investigation into what had happened to John.
It was all very consuming. A distraction that John could not afford him to entertain.

The truth was, he was disparaging—a truly useless emotion that only proved to serve oneself with the even more infuriating result of self-defeat. The detective emerged from the bedroom of the flat like a zombie. His bare feet shuffled across the floor boards, barely enough energy expended to lift them, as he made his way past the bathroom he was still ignoring to the kitchen beyond.

The kitchen was just as useless. Every surface was covered in the refuse of the experiments that no longer mattered. His eyes moved past all the goop, fuzzy molds, broken beakers and test tubes, tea cups and plates, to the table. It too was covered in half-finished things, now discarded, but all he could see was his doctor. Sherlock reached his hand down, the pads of his fingers slowly running along the length of the tables edge as he remembered the way John had stood in front of him, so willingly inserting his hand into the neck of the dead swine to correct his own erroneous theory about the drug mule’s murder. The detective’s mind dwelled on the feeling of heat that had emanated from the doctor’s shoulders against his own chest, as they had stood in close proximity, fingers intertwined together in the muscle and congealed blood of the hog, of the musky scent of his person, and the comforting feeling that accompanied the familiar smell of the woolen jumpers the other man so preferred. All these things that Sherlock had worked very hard to ignore that night, now seemed to be what he remembered the most.

An ache resonated within the confines of his chest, pulsing with each mechanical thrum of his beating heart. Was it not strangely ironic that the very organ that pumped the life giving oxygen to every recess of your body would also be the one that was synonymously connected to the strongest physical emotion one could have. Due to the feeling clawing away at his insides this morning he could rationally agree with the ridiculous sentiment.

Sherlock walked away from the table, his trailing fingers grasping the corner of a stack of papers and file folders. He flung the mass with a sharp violent thrust of his arm and the papers noisily flapped to the floor behind him as he left the kitchen. His limbs lazily carried him into the parlor, like a skiff drifting from its moorings in an ever growing sea of chaos. He found himself at the desk, his eyes cast down at the closed lid of his laptop. There was a stack of papers here too, another of the coffee table by the couch, more tacked to the wall above it. All of them were useless. Proffered him no gain.

In a sudden lashing action he sent the pile on the desk flying, papers strewn in a furious blizzard of white, as he tore across the room to the coffee table. He kicked at the low table with his bare foot, sending it over onto its side with a crash, before he leaped up onto the couch. His fingers clawed at the wall, ripping and tearing at the clippings, print outs, and photos which he had gathered there over the last several days.

It was all useless! All a waste! A waste of John’s time!

When all that was left was the damask relief of the wallpaper Sherlock found himself in a ball on the couch. His knees had failed him and like any broken creature he had gathered himself together, protecting his vulnerable chest, where the ache only beat louder within his vessel. He hated this. All of it. John was his compass. The one that kept him straight, focused, sure. He was failing, not only himself but also John Watson.

It was then with great surprise that the detective felt the hot sting of tears moisten his lashes and as they slipped down his cheeks his covered his face with the union jack pillow to hide his shame for openly weeping them. This is what Mycroft had meant, had warned him would happen, was the reason he wanted Sherlock to save himself from. How had he known, the Ice Man? Sherlock was damn sure his elder had never loved another, was not capable of anything of the sort…Yet, before
John, would he have not thought the same thing of himself? Did not others still?

And here he was, the Great Sherlock Holmes, the world’s first consulting detective, a bloody wrecked mess.

The detective had not slept much, possibly a few hours scattered here and there, that left him floating through most of the days, unsure exactly what time it ever was. He had lived and breathed Mary Morstan these last seventy eight hours. He had exhausted all his resources, called in every favor he had left owed him, and still...nothing.

All he had gathered was from her new life, from the woman she had become to escape who she had been. Orphan had been all too convenient, he should have seen it sooner. She had taken her new name from a still born child’s tomb stone in Chiswick Cemetery five years ago, assuming an identity that could hide her among the bland normal masses of busy London. It was an old enough technique, known to the kinds of people that could recognise a skip code on sight. Whomever she had worked for had been powerfully secret, an organization above any worldly government as Mycroft had confirmed, for there was no evidence of her past employer to be found, not a shred, not a whisper.

Yet even if he could identify the organization that had previous owned John’s Mary Morstan there was still the fourth arbitrary unknown. It was this unknown that had taken John.

Sherlock ruffled his hands through his knotted dark curls, scratching his nails gratingly against his scalp, as he muttered angrily, “Agh, who is it?” He pushed himself up into a sitting position on the couch, his dazed gaze surveying the disaster and chaos that was his flat. The papers were everywhere, a thick deluge covering the floor.

The sound of footsteps on the stairs to the flat warned the detective of the inspector’s approach before the man ever became visible through the open doorway. The dark brown eyes roamed the mess Sherlock had just created before the two of them eyed each other, both calculating what Lestrade would say about it. The Irishman decided to keep it simple, greeting the other man with a simple, “Good mornin’ then.”

The detective let his eyes roll back dramatically, scoffing loudly, as he corrected the detective, “‘Good afternoon then’. It is in fact an hour and twelve minutes after noon, inspector.”

“Oh, so I see you do know what time it is.” Lestrade fired back, gesturing at the man before him still clad in his dressing gown and bare feet. “Dare I ask what you’ve been up to these last few days?”

“Nop.” Came the succinct reply, as the detective spun on his bare heel and walked to the far corner of the parlor.

Sherlock was not in the mood to entertain an uninvited guest. Picking up his violin he began to make himself busy, first adjusting the pegs, before bringing the instrument to his chin. He drew the bow across the strings in a few quick strokes, testing the pitch, and adjusting where necessary.

Lestrade was not deterred. The man crossed the room and planted himself in plain view. Then he cleared his throat in an authoritative manner, jutting his chin ever so slightly, as he dug his hands into the pockets of his trousers. Sherlock drew his bow across the strings, playing a long slow A.

Lestrade simply talked over the note, loudly and clearly emphasising, “I know you’ve been ignoring my texts and my calls. I know you take your notions as to when and where you like to get involved in the cases I’d like ya’ to help with, but when were you going to bloody well tell me about John and Mary?”
Sherlock’s bow skittered its last length along the strings, making an awful screeching sound, as he pointed the tip of it in Lestrade’s face. “There was nothing to tell,” he snapped, as he turned his back on the other man and ran up and down a scale on his violin.

The irritation was evident in the inspector’s disgruntled voice, as he angrily rebuttal the dismissive remark, “John and Mary are missin’, Sherlock, and it’s obvious they didn’a just skip town to see the Sussex countryside. Dr. Sawyer called me personally, sayin’ that she had tried you and had gotten no answer. Don’t tell me that you haven’t been through that flat, I know ya’ have. Just tell me that ya know somethin’. That you found some clue…”

Sherlock ignored the little tirade and launched from the end of another scale straight into the striking dramatic notes of Bach’s ‘Chaconne’, the muscles in his neck and face taught with frustration, impatience, and welling anger. He played the notes, forcing each out of the instrument with increased agitation. The rumble of the violin pinned between his shoulder and his chin was satisfying as he stroked the strings with each long terribly mournful note. If he played long enough perhaps the inspector would take the hint and leave. The last thing Sherlock wanted to do was discuss his inability to procure any information on John Watson’s whereabouts.

Lestrade was not so easily dissuade. Perhaps he had grown accustomed to the detective’s moody tricks. In a louder voice the inspector went on, voicing how he had found the flat, which he had managed to come to the conclusion that John had been taken and the flat had been cleaned and staged. Frankly Sherlock was impressed that the inspector’s skill had come so far since he had been away. It was certainly a marked improvement. All the while Lestrade talked the detective played through the movement, the notes transitioning from doleful into a smooth patterned melody and then suddenly into the quick and light notes which his trained fingers paced expertly up and down the finger board. Soon the inspector grew quiet and the only sound in the flat was the quick movements of his bow being drawn over the strings in rapid succession as the classic sped to a racing crescendo of notes—that just as suddenly stopped.

Sherlock let the bow fall at his side, tapping the tip against his legs, as he released his grip on the chin rest and casually rocked the body on his shoulder. His eyes were cast out the window, the sheer curtains obscuring his view of the busy street below. Even though he did not want to think about it, John was out there. Somewhere.

“John missin’ ain’t the only thing rockin’ the Yard right now either.” Came Lestrade’s quiet voice, full of his own palpable frustration and despair. “There’s been a beastly penthouse massacre. Most of the boys sent up lost their lunches tryin’ to sift through the parts. Morgue is have’n a hell of a time putting the poor bastards back together. An’ worse yet I’ve got the damned press chompin’ at the bit to get a peek. Bloody mess is what it is. Not fit for people to be readin’ about in the damn papers.”

“Sounds like you have your hands full, inspector.” Sherlock commented coolly. He turned and glanced back at the other man. It was easy to see that the man was here to ask for help, needed that critical eye that the detective could bring to the scene that his men and even he were unable to utilize. There were bags under his eyes and deepened creases around his mouth and between his silver brows.

“John is my priority but I can’t spare the man power to do anythin’ about it. Not with a mass murder on my hands.” Greg pointed out. It was as close to asking as the inspector might come.

“John Watson is my priority, inspector, and I will do everything within my power to find the doctor.” Sherlock hissed through clenched molars.

The tension suddenly in the room was electric. Lestrade had not come to antagonize or point blame, he had come for comradery, for support, had come to know that the detective was on the case.
Sherlock wasn’t ready for that. His point made he raised his bow and turned back to the window. The taught hairs of the bow graced the strings once more, picking up on the final long forlorn chords.

The inspector shook his head, jaw muscles clenching with restrained anger, as he tried one last time to implore Sherlock to help him. His words were disregarded, as the man drew the bow back and forth with a fervent vent of emotion, the music pouring from his instrument the words he could not speak. Lestrade flipped an ignorant hand in the direction of his bullheaded friend and left the flat, muttering curses as he went. Sherlock was not perturbed. The sooner the inspector was gone the sooner he could return to his internet search. There had to be information on Ms. Morstan in some dark corner of the net.

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Louis awoke with the thirst annoyingly gnawing at him. With Armand out of town, Lestat only God knew where, and the flats above his own deathly silent, he decided to alleviate his condition in one of the less savory areas of the city where another missing person wouldn’t really be missed. Once satisfied he wasn’t really sure what to do with himself at first and his thoughts turned to finding out what the consulting detective had managed to discover thus far.

He had taken the car Armand had left him on his outing, the sheen of the perfectly contoured body of the Ferrari in comparison to the derelict surroundings of the run down wharf was a sharp contrast. It had been an excellent and accidental bait for his evenings hunt. Roaring the engine to life he felt a somewhat giddy and wicked satisfaction in the sound of gravel kicking up under the powerful torsion of spinning tires as he sped back towards the Baker Street Flat.

Louis spotted the figure of the elderly land lady, arms heavy with the burden of bags as he pulled up to the front of the flat. As soon as she had saw the expensive car roll to a stop in front of the flat, almost as if on que the bottom of a bag let loose and sent a cascade of oranges rolling down the step as she let out a string of curses and tried to rescue the remainder of her items while fighting with the house keys. Louis was out of the car and had gathered up most of the fallen fruit while the woman’s back was turned and as she dropped the rest of the bags in the entrance with a disgusted huff, she turned to collect her fallen groceries. She let out a startled yelp at the smiling man on the ste, arms full of oranges.

“Oh, Louis!” Her voice changed quickly from surprise, to anger to gratitude in moments, “You scared me! Thank you for gathering those up, my you are a fast one, hmm? Wish I had that much energy.”

“It was no problem, Mrs. Hudson. Simply good timing.” Louis smiled at his landlady, her eyes turning away suddenly as she blushed a little and scooped back up her bags.

“Well thank you, now would you be so kind as to help me take the rest in? I’m afraid I’ll drop the eggs next and they won’t do near as well as the damned oranges.” Though her tone was trying to stay cheerful, it was easy to hear her frustration.

Once her parcels were secured Louis politely attempted to excuse himself but the landlady paused in her bustling only long enough to insist she repay his kindness with a hot cup of tea. After a few moments of trying to decline her offer he soon realized she was not about to be denied. She had even refused to let him out of her flat, calling his bluff on the excuse that he just wanted to get something from his own flat and would return.

“I’m not a fool, Louis. I’ve heard it all, you must remember who lives upstairs.” She stated bluntly as she set teacups on the table and went about setting all the other traditional additives of sugar, cream and honey. “Now sit down! You’re making me nervous.”
The immortal for all his strength and power found himself doing exactly as the elderly woman beckoned, finding that being sat at the tiny table inside the small kitchen quite endearing. The woman talked busily all the while she went about boiling the water and prepping the teapot. The vampire’s acute smell caught the distinct aroma of the Earl Grey mix that Mrs. Hudson added to the pot before she announced what she had chosen and set the china pot between them on the table top.

Louis’ fingers grasped the tiny china cup, needing an object to fidget with. It wasn’t that he was nervous, he was the exact opposite in fact. He found the elderly woman’s attentions and mannerisms oddly calming and familiar, as though his dream of mingling perfectly amongst the mortals were a distinct reality here within the confines of this woman’s kitchen. He fiddled with the cup out of habit, as all immortals learned to do to blend in. They certainly could not drink the contents within the cups but most mortals never noticed.

“I haven’t seen that blond fellow that was over not long ago to see you,” the ever nosey Mrs. Hudson said, as she prepared his cup with cream and sugar, not bothering to ask how he liked his tea. “Has he gone back to America then?”

“Mmm, it is quite possible. Lestat goes where and when he wishes.” Louis answered her.

“Oh, well, I suppose I may need to schedule that check for my hearing,” the elderly woman admitted with a hearty chuckle, placing a hand to her brow and shaking her head. “It is a dreadful thing, this gettin’ older. I had it in my head that his name was Daniel. But—Lestat, was it?” she paused only briefly, glancing at him as though looking for his confirmation and then continuing on without giving the immortal the time to voice it, “I say, that is a different name, now isn’t it? You’d think one could keep that straight. But I suppose I will have the chance now. He was a very smartly dressed gentleman, not unlike yourself. What is it that you do again, Louis?”

“Real estate mostly, with a portfolio that webs the stock market. It is not as lavish a career as one might think.” He answered her, careful to not say too much, as always.

“Lavish enough I see. Why, I haven’t seen a car like that grace Baker Street before. It does look rather grand outside the flat, doesn’t it?” she rambled, picking up the pot and pouring the warm liquid in over the condiments properly proportioned in their cups. “I bet it rides like a dream. I rode in a convertible once, in America, with my husband Frank. It was red, with a white top,” she looked a little dreamy, as the memory passed quickly through her mind. The immortal could not ignore its flash. In his mind’s eye, Louis watched the thought, seeing a young vibrant, blonde decked out in stunning black and white polka dotted swim dress. Laughing and sipping a beer, perched up on the head rest of the front, she looks fondly down at dark haired man, wearing large sunglasses. “I loved the feel of the air rushing over you, like a bird might feel I thought. It was one of the best experiences I had in Florida, riding in that car.”

The conversation continued on casually with the sweet land lady recounting her youth and time spent in America, asking the odd question about how things may have changed and Louis answered where he could. Eventually her questions turned more towards Louis, himself and the immortal did his best to instead steer conversation towards questions about London, the Baker Street flat, and the crime solving detective who occupied one.

“Normally it’s a lovely place, I mean, we have all sorts but this latest business with the grizzly murders and such is just awful. I imagine Sherlock is working on it though.” Mrs. Hudson reassured herself, rising from the chair to attend the squealing kettle as Louis took the opportunity to dump the contents of his cup into a near-by potted plant.

“Yes, I can imagine he must be. After all, that man being killed just in front of the flat…” Louis was cut off as the teapot was refilled and the woman waved her free hand at him dismissively.
“Oh yes! That as well but I mean it’s all over the news, this latest one.” Mrs.Hudson took her seat and slid the folded newspaper towards her guest, continuing on as she refilled first his then her own cup. “Just gruesome business, I can’t imagine what sort of monster could do such a thing.”

As Louis unfolded the newspaper he noted the photo of an officer with back turned to the camera, hunched over, appearing to be ill as medical staff were loading black body bags into waiting vehicles. The headline read: “MONSTER STALKS LONDON! 5 Dead in brutal slaying, bodies torn apart; more on page 3.” Louis head swam as he considered the implications of what he was discovering.

“Just awful isn’t it?” Mrs. Hudson’ hand patted the back of his, reassuringly, “I didn’t really think it was possible but you look even more pale than usual. Are you ok, Louis? You needn’t worry, I’m sure Sherlock will…”

The sentence was cut off as the main entrance to the flat was heard banging against the wall and was shortly followed by the sudden intrusion of the infamous consulting detective, swinging wide the door of 221A with a holler, “Mrs.Hudson!”

As soon as Sherlock stepped clear into the kitchen and spotted the two at the kitchen table with teacups steaming he stopped dead in his tracks.

“Sherlock! Don’t be slamming my doors or I’ll be increasing your rent!” Mrs. Hudson snipped in annoyance, while Louis did his best to relax. “What were you looking for, Sherlock?”

The consulting detective continued to eye the scene for a moment, scrutinizing Louis with an intense glare of dissatisfaction before he looked directly at the elderly woman and exclaimed pointedly, “A more hospitable rental agreement!” at which point he turned and, with a flare of his coat, exited the flat just as suddenly as he had entered. The door slammed behind him before the ruckus of his footsteps scaling the stairs towards 221B could be heard.

Louis felt the anger and frustration rolling off Mrs. Hudson and quickly returned the gentle pat to the back of her hand that he had just received. Sympathetically he stated with a soft smile towards her, “Reminds me of my ex.”

“Oh, just don’t fall for the same mess again!” She huffed, instantly calming as she returned the smile and prepared another cup of tea for herself. “After all, that one’s taken. There’s a lady in the middle but she’s no good for John.”

Louis couldn’t help but chuckle at the astuteness of the elderly woman that was conveyed in that one simple statement. “Why would you say that?” he asked, curiously.

“Well, you can tell she’s got a secret, that one. Secrets are no good in a relationship.” The last statement was filled with a reminiscent and sad air.

“That is true. You are very wise, Mrs. Hudson.” Louis wrapped his cool hands around the hot cup to leech more of the heat from its contents.

“Oh goodness, Louis. Call me, Martha.” The smile was genuine and warm. The woman was a magnificent creature and the immortal quickly was coming to understand how well she complimented the strange renter that inhabited the upstairs flat.

“I will do my best.” He returned politely.

“Besides,” she added, finishing her previous remark, “John makes Sherlock laugh and that is a rare thing, indeed.”
Chapter 15

John was in a tizzy. He moved from one corner of the kitchen, pushing containers and test tubes full of green and orange slimy experiments aside to slip toast down in the toaster, before crossing to the fridge to grab the small container of milk from beside the bag of thumbs in the door of the fridge. He went to pour some of the milk into a cup and stopped, realizing the container was a beaker full of brown sludge. “Oops, that wouldn’t have been good.” He mused, as he knocked the glass beaker back on the cluttered counter top and poured milk into the cup he had set out. He downed the drink in a gulp and was summoned back to the other corner of the kitchen by the pop of his toast. He set the container of milk down amongst the half-finished experiments to grab his breakfast when he realized that it was black and burned.

“Bloody hell,” he cursed, giving an irate shake of his head. Everything in this kitchen was tampered with. *Never a bloody moment’s peace to have a cup of coffee or one’s breakfast without something going terribly awry.* Frustrated to have a kink in his morning ritual—well, the ritual he would have liked to keep for his mornings, which was in truth always interrupted by something—he stalked into the living room, where the meddling consulting detective was still stretched out on the couch against the far wall. He peevishly snapped, “The toaster, Sherlock, really?! Couldn’t you have at least left me the use of the bloody toaster!”

The man’s hands were drawn together, the tips of his fingers pressed against his lips, still lost within his damnable mind palace. The sleeves of his purple dress shirt were drawn up on his forearms, their length peppered with three—no, four—nicotine patches! His flat mate was a mad man in the constant pursuit of knowledge and he was bloody well going to kill himself trying.

Seeing the detective had not stirred at the sound of his shout the doctor stalked the rest of the way over to the couch, grabbed a corner of a patch, and ripped. The calm face, reposed as if in death the man’s skin was so pale, suddenly changed, coming to life. His eyebrows knit over his angry eyes as the doctor was nailed with a perfectly annoyed grimace, as the cupid’s bow of his serene lips curled back over grit teeth, and the man answered the question John had thought had gone unheard and ignored, “It was for an experiment.”

John was not hampered by his flat mate’s annoyance. The sound of that adhesive tearing free accompanied by the resounding yelp of pain had been terribly satisfying. The doctor tried not to let it show, Sherlock would most certainly already know, and instead reverted back to his initial mission. He shook the floppy beige patch at the consulting detective, scolding his friend, “Four patches, Sherlock?! I thought we had discussed this? We agreed no more patches, not bloody four of ‘em!”

The man gave a derisive sigh and brought thin fingers up to rub at his eyes, explaining tersely, “It was a necessary amelioration of the agreed upon terms of use.”

“You agreed that there would be no remediating of the set rules without joint consent.” John reminded his flat mate, making his point as he grabbed the corner of another patch and unceremoniously removed it. Another rip, another very satisfying yelp.

Sherlock pulled the offended appendage close to his chest, rubbing the reddened circles on his forearm, as he pushed himself up and off of the couch. He brushed roughly past the doctor, growling as he tramped away, “I made an executive decision due to your unavailability.”

“I was sleeping, Sherlock,” John patronizingly called after the obtuse man, following him around the corner into the kitchen, “like normal people do.”
“Normal is boring, John,” the consulting detective quipped, marching through the kitchen to the bathroom. “It’s a waste of time.” Then he escaped into the room, closing the door behind him.

There was no way the doctor was going to leave this argument where it was. He went after the detective, yelling back, “Sleeping is a waste of time? It’s a necessary function of living, Sherlock! Unlike nicotine patches!” His hand gripped the knob, as he heard the click of the lock. John rattled the door knob uselessly. It was locked.

“Damn him!” the doctor cursed, feeling his cheeks grow hot with rage. This was not over. Sherlock could run from this no longer! He marched around into the detective’s room, as he heard the man countering in his smug—I’ve won this round—tone of voice, “That is an opinion based purely one conjecture and perspective, of which I care little.”

John tore open the ensuite door that opened into the same bathroom and stepped inside the small room, slamming it behind him. “Yes, that may bloody well be, you massive wanker! But I care greatly and you will damn well learn to consider that!”

It had not been uncommon for them to argue. They had grown quite accustomed to it. John was used to losing. Sherlock had many ways to deviate around his defenses and strike an exacting blow at what he would have considered a solid ground. This time was different. John didn’t base his legitimacy on scientific fact, he very truthfully played on the emotional field, of which the consulting detective had very little knowledge or experience to stand on.

Sherlock stood there, his butt resting against the counter of the sink, frozen, his eyes trained on John. The doctor took in the scene. Here he had barged in, invaded what the detective had attempted to use as a sanctuary, safe from the consequences of his own selfish destructive decisions. The taller man was undressed. His dress shirt lay in a discarded heap on the floor near the base of the toilet, his trousers undone, ready to join the pile. John had always been in awe of the detective’s body, at times even envious. The man was tall and thin, but his form remained very lean. His skin was perfect, unblemished and a soft pale pink, adding definition to the toned abdominals along the length of his torso. The doctor shook off the effect it had on him now, seeing his flat mate exposed before him as he was, and instead remained steadfast to his mission.

The detective watched his flat mate close the distance between them and allowed the other man to take his other forearm in hand. The remaining patches were ripped free and tossed in the garbage. There was a wince but no yelp. There was little space between them and it was closed as the detective dipped his head, their foreheads pressing together. The flat mates eyes locked, their noses brushing, Sherlock admitted, “Y-you’re absolutely right. I apologize, John. That was callous of me.”

The deep timber of his friend’s voice made the doctor weak in the knees and he knew that his face was no longer flushed with rage. The feeling of warmth, which the apology had made blossom inside his chest, grew and spread of its own volition. The sensation made the man give a soft chuckle, as he felt the others thin fingers taking up position on his hips, drawing his body in closer. Pressed together against the counter, John tipped his chin up and their mouths pressed together in a quick kiss. “Damn right.” He replied, amending in a soft but authoritative tone, “If we are going to make this work…you and me, I mean…you have to promise me just one thing, Sherlock. One thing.”

“Anything.” The detective emphatically responded, laying another gentle press of his lips against John’s mouth.

The doctor brought up a hand to separate them, laying his index finger against the detective’s cupids bow. “Promise me, Sherlock,” he said, “no more dying. I lost you once…I can’t do it again. That
means the little things and the big things. I am a part of you and you have become a part of me. What you do to yourself you are doing to me.”

“It is done.” The detective whispered against his mouth, pushing past the finger to kiss John again, deeper and more sensual, his need becoming apparent between them.

John could feel himself responding in kind to Sherlock, but pushed the man away again, looking him right in the eye. “No,” he said, “that’s not good enough. I want to hear you say it.”

That full mouth pulled into a soft smile, dimpling at the sides, as those remarkable eyes starred ravenously back at him. The more he pulled away the stronger the detective’s grip about his hips became. There was a moment of hesitation, a soft chuckle, and then the answer, “I promise, John Watson, never again,” before they melted together, mouths claimed, limbs intertwined.

John wrapped his arms up and around the bare shoulders, burying his fingers into the man’s ruffle of dark curls, pressing him closer. He opened his mouth, allowed the darting, teasing, tongue access, indulging in the taste of the detective. He felt the others hands on his body move down to paw greedily at his arse, before sliding back upwards, pulling the tails of his striped dress shirt from the belt of his trousers. Hot fingers were on his skin, slipping up under the clothes, caressing, as their hips began to slowly rock against each other.

The detective’s breath had quickened and John’s hitched in his throat, as those thin fingers flitted around to his front and down to his trousers, deftly working them open. Sherlock’s hand stroked his clothed erection, once, twice, before slipping under the band of his pants to take him out. He was wholly in his lover’s hand, hard and needy, as the detective kissed his mouth gently one last time. His dark head descended as Sherlock spun him round, trading places with the doctor against the counter of the sink, coming to kneel before him. That perfect hot mouth pressed warm and wet against the tip of him, lapping three times before opening to take him inside.

John released a ragged breath, as the sensation of the detective’s mouth over took his thoughts and senses. His hands balled into fists at the back of the other man’s head, following the movement as his mouth worked up and down the length of his cock. The doctor was hardly breathing, lost in the pleasure of the detective’s ministrations. He let his head fall back, feeling himself mutter his name through a strangled moan. Sherlock gripped him around the base, beginning to move his hand in rhythm with his mouth, drawing John ever closer to a climax. When the air was rent by a muffled ringtone.

John attempted to pull back, finding that Sherlock resisted letting him go, as his mobile vibrated in the pocket of his trousers, down around his knees. “Sherlock… I…” he attempted to protest, barely able to string more than two words together. The detective picked up the pace and John could hold back no longer. His form crumpled forward as the throes of his orgasm…

John awoke to blackness, his head thrumming. He pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes and rubbed, moaning. The pain was intense and nauseating. He could feel his stomach twisting into knots as the throbbing reverberated through his cranium. He winced and laid his head back down, feeling the softness of a pillow below him and the twisting of blankets around his body. He moaned again and gave a grating sigh. When he pulled his hands away and opened his eyes it was only to confirm what he had initially assessed. Blackness. Utter and complete.

Somewhere behind the pain at the back of his mind he wondered what time it was. The ache in his skull prevented any notion of checking a clock. He just opted for lying there, massaging his temples in slow rhythmic circles with the tips of fingers. With moving completely out of the question his thoughts moved past the pain, onto the strange dream that he woke from and the resulting erection that lingered. He could feel the heat and throb of his lust and longing still hard in his pants and his
thoughts repeated the dream in his mind, remembering the sensation of Sherlock’s mouth over his own, claiming and loving in the same kisses.

John seemed to be prone to nightmares, reliving the things he could leave behind during the daytime when he was most vulnerable. The ghoulish grim memories of war and bloodshed replaced by the equally terrible remembrance of Sherlock’s caresses, of times when they had shared and enjoyed one another. It was blasted annoying. Just about as much as the sudden headache that had claimed his person. Even more alarming than the kissing and touching within the dream was the idea that he would so freely forgive the man for leaving, for committing suicide on purpose in front of him. He did not feel that he could ever do that. That he could let Sherlock back in.

John rolled over onto his side, cradling his head on the pillow, hoping that if he pressed its softness against his temples that it might in some way dull the splitting pain. As his body moved over the sheets, his mind slowly registered the slippery soft feeling of the silken sheets that wrapped him, the plushness of the duvet that he had cocooned himself within. This wasn’t his bed.

The thought spurred him to open his eyes again. Same. Blackness encompassed him. He closed them again. Where the hell was he? The doctor tried to remember laying down and failed miserably. Surely one would remember putting themselves to bed, yet no matter how he tried he couldn’t find it. When he considered what he could remember, the throbbing in his head only seemed to increase, as if in defiance of his mental command. He could remember Sherlock. He could remember his dark wool coat, lapels raised about his impossibly sharp high cheekbones, shoulders hunched to keep the cold back. He could also remember being with the detective in 221B after investigating the splattered remains of the Russian on the sidewalk out front. He could see the detective standing in the darkened dingy alleyway, standing over the mutilated corpse of the drug mule. He could remember smashing his fist into the other man’s face when he had suddenly reappeared out of nowhere, just up and inserting himself unceremoniously back into the doctor’s life. He could see that tall dark form on the ledge of the Bart’s, hear his deep quavering voice in his ear over the mobile—“This is what people do, don’t they. Leave a note.”—then…the fall. His own strangled yell, “Sherlock!!”

The timeline that he could remember seemed clipped, like someone had gone in and edited what was there. It only made his head hurt more. Wherever he was, he did not seem to be in immediate danger and he wasn’t apt to help himself any with this splitting headache anyway. The doctor lay there a long while, drifting in and out of sleep.

It was sometime later when he finally rolled over and attempted to open his bleary eyes again. There was a slight improvement noted in regard to the throbbing pain. He was still surrounded by darkness but this time, as he sat up in the bed, he was able to denote some form to the room around him. The room itself seemed expansive, certainly no where the doctor had ever slept before. To his right there were two doors, one of which looked likely to lead to a bathroom and the other to a closet. On his left was a large bank of floor to ceiling windows that over looked the city beyond. He rubbed his eyes again, taking a second look through the impressive windows. The sky was dark outside and a great stretch of it was visible through the wall of windows. Wherever he was, it was very high up.

The doctor glanced over to find a night stand with a clock, the green digital characters reading the time as 1:17 a.m. He wished to investigate the view more, make sure it was London below him, but the call of nature was stronger. His bladder felt like he hadn’t pissed in days. He rolled to the right and slipped out from under the warmth of the silken blankets. The bed was massive, must be a king size, and was a trifle wider than he had expected. He had to scooch the rest of the way to the edge of the mattress before he could let his bare feet down to touch the warmed hard wood of underfloor heating. Boy, they spared no expense at this place. Accustomed to darting over cold floor boards to a bathroom John let his feet linger, wiggling his toes in appreciation of the luxury. Then he finally
pushed himself up off of the bed.

The blankets fell away and he realized only then that he was naked. No pants, no socks, nothing. The doctor shrugged and made his way to the door he felt most likely was a bathroom. There was nothing he could do about it now. His clothes were probably close by. At least he hoped they were. He would look straight away, after he relieved himself. The door did open to an ensuite and the warm lights clicked on as he entered, unveiling the largest bathroom he had ever seen.

Everything was made of blue veined marble, accented by silver fixtures, and rich hard woods. There was a large triple headed shower encased in glass in one corner, flanked by a jacuzzi large enough for a pool party, and a toilet with what he thought must be a bidet. John swallowed his awe and moved past a double sink vanity to the toilet.

The man relieved himself quickly and washed at the sink, taking the time to splash his face with cold water. None of this seemed real. Yet the water was real enough. The cool splash sent goosebumps up and down his bare flesh. He dried his face with a plush stark white towel, realizing as he did so that his face was clean shaven. That thought sent a subtle chill through the doctor.

Looking back up at the expansive stretch of mirror the man inspected his face again, with a quick sweep of his hand from side to side. His skin was as smooth as if he had just shaved, not a single nick or hair missed. He rubbed at his entire face and his eyes as he attempted to wrap his mind around the idea of someone else having done the tedious job for him. His hands moved back through his hair and over a sore spot that made him wince with a hiss.

Turning his head he pulled back the shell of his ear to investigate. Seeing the slightly swollen goose egg damn near centred between his ear and the base of his skull he could see why he had a splitting headache earlier. The rough touch had flared that ache back up but it was dull in comparison to what he had felt earlier. Upon a more thorough inspection he could see that it was obvious blunt force trauma, someone had whacked him a good one with something, and it must have been a few days ago—maybe even close to a week. The swelling present now for such an injury was nominal and he could see that the skin had been broken and was already beginning to mend. Whoever it was that had brought him to this place knew a thing or two about cleaning and care. They had done a right good job of it.

More curious than before he returned to the dark bedroom. The two rooms combined were larger than the whole of 221B. The room itself could have held four king sized beds with room to spare. The one he had slept in looked small against the wall, with its simple black frame. There was a flat screen mounted on the opposite wall and in the corner by the bay of large windows there was a lounge chair, a coffee table, and a large well stocked bookshelf. Finding the door to the room, John flicked the light switch, illuminating a large three tiered chandelier that hung from the fourteen foot ceiling, circled by intricate crown moulding that decorated its expanse.

“Certainly not Baker Street,” John mumbled, as he took it all in.

Under the flat screen he spotted a divan that sported what looked like a change of clothes. He investigated the bundle of folded garments, finding name brand jeans, a half sleeve button down shirt, and black pants, all in his size. As he pulled the clothes on he wondered what had happened to his own clothes. He certainly didn’t wear expensive jeans like these. It alarmed him just a little that they all fit perfectly. Below the divan he found a pair of black socks and loafers.

Dressed he decided to investigate the rest of the flat, finding that he was not in one. He was in a massive completely outfitted penthouse suite. He was in fact locked inside. He had found an entrance that was fully locked down. The door was metal and didn’t even have a knob. The only other exit was a set of retracting patio doors in a wall of glass that opened up to a large stone patio.
As he walked out into the cool evening air he recognized his city below him. London stretched out far below him in every direction, the street lights joining into one massive warm glow above the endless stretch of buildings and roads.

John leaned his elbows down against the metal railing, taking in the sheer drop to the ground below. Cars moved like black ants, people mere specks. Directly below the balcony was a four storey wall of concrete before glass took over. If he had to guess he would say he was at least some sixty storeys high, in the penthouse suite of some crazy new luxury high rise attempting to break the through the cityscape. The view was intense. Like nothing the doctor had ever seen, an incredible eagle-eyed view of London.

A single question ghosted from the man’s lips, in utter disbelief, “Where in the hell…am I?”
Chapter 16

A vampire sauntered at a slow pace over the roof tops of the old buildings scrunched into rows aside the length of the still blackness of Regent Park. The soles of his leather shoes made no noise above the thrum of the ever active metropolis that London was and had been for centuries. No one could see his immortal prowess here, so high and removed from the mortal world that was continuously moving blithely onward without any notion that a predator stalked within the shadows. Lestat was hungry and bored, an irritable combination.

Movement in his periphery caught the immortal’s attention and drew his heightened gaze to the figures that were parting ways in the early evening of the ever romantic setting of the park. A tall dark skinned man kissed the cheek of his pale lover, playfully grasping her backside one last time before they left one another for their respective homes. They thought nothing of it, walking the trails away from one another alone in the darkness of the green space. Lestat bent at the knees and leapt from the building top, over the high fence and into the park. He landed with grace and ease on the ground mere steps behind the dark haired female, making no sound as to alarm her.

Like a giant cat stalking a lithe gazelle the vampire took up a pace behind her. He could smell the life of her, feel the constant thump of her beating heart within the confines of her petite chest, and could easily see the thoughts playing through her mind, as she hummed a gentle tune to herself. The dark skinned man was close to capturing what he wanted from her, but the woman was not yet ready to give it up to him—perhaps when they next met—she was on her way home now to the plain accountant who had faithfully courted her thus far and whom she planned to wed in the summer. These thoughts stolen from her mind made the vampire smile. What lust could woo one to do, what power it could hold over an individual.

The woman was nearing the end of the park and as her thoughts moved to her guest list and the wedding meal, the vampire took her. His hand darted out, much too fast for her to either see nor anticipate, and his mouth was over the pulsing jugular in her neck, when she finally gasped in surprise. Her scream was garbled as his teeth broke through the skin and the warm gush of her life giving blood rushed into his greedy mouth.

Her purse hit the ground with a thud as her petite body went limp in his arms and Lestat too sank to his knees as the ecstasy of the blood-taking consumed and enthralled him. She made one last wheezing breath, as her heart slowed to a dull thump, and finally stopped. Throwing his head back with a loud gasp the vampire, let the dead body roll from his arms and the woman flopped face down into the wet grass. He brought a hand up and wiped at his mouth. At least that part of him would be satiated for a while.

Lestat cared not to hide the body in the usual fashion of the immortal blood drinkers, he wasn’t in the mood. Instead he grabbed the woman’s lifeless form and tossed it into the nearest bush, leaving her for her wayward lover to find perhaps. Someone undoubtedly would, at any rate, and so he left her and carried on his route, at the same leisurely pace.

In truth, the vampire was still bored. The detective was having difficulty picking up on his little rouse and he was growing restless with waiting for time to take its natural course. The natural course was always so boring. So, he found himself on his way to Baker Street to perhaps speed things along. His shoes left the cool damp grass and were once more on the cement of civilization, as he made his way to the flat. They stopped suddenly, however, when his immortal eyes graced the sleek black Ferrari parked out front from over a block away. They narrowed to sinister blue lit slits.

The detective had no need for a car and could care less for something as flashy as the sleek profile of
the high speed sports car. It did not take much for the vampire to deduce who the Ferrari belonged to and it did little to calm his increased agitation. He came up to the expensive vehicle, running a finger along the glossy paint of the side panel. He caught the scent of the electrical impulse racing to the horn from the alarm system within. There was a spark of heat, a soft pop, and then the faint aroma of smoke. The alarm made no sound. A wicked grinned graced the full pale lips of the immortal. “So, my dear one,” he whispered, peering through the black glass of the tinted windows at the leather bound steering wheel with in, the impeccably clean tan interior, and cedar accents, “you are still here, entertained by your consulting detective...and I see you are receiving the attentions of another.”

Lestat let his finger trace lazily over the headlamp and the front fender, as he mused aloud, “What a pretty gift.” He rounded the second headlamp and with a loud screeching sound, dug the tip of his steely fingernail into the perfect black paint. The other fingers joined the massacre and with three strokes of his arm sparks and paint chips were flying through the air. He stepped back and admired his handiwork and then hit the back wheel well and fender as well, shattering the rear light casing.

The vampire smiled again, stroking his chin like a pensive artist looking over an unfinished masterpiece. “Now, that’s better, isn’t it?” he chuckled to himself, “A pretty broken thing, just like its owner. Far more appropriate, really.”

More than a little satisfied with himself he turned his attention back towards the Baker Street flat and noted the darkened upstairs windows that denoted the fact that the consulting detective was not in attendance. The small window in 221C also remained black while through the main level there was the multicolored flicker and quiet roar of canned laughter that was indicative of the television’s hypnotic cable shows. Lestat sneered in dissatisfaction.

Briefly he entertained the idea of making a meal out of the sweet and unsuspecting land lady whom foolishly believed she was safe and sound with in her little flat but the thought was quickly dismissed for the time being. Having just recently fed there was no real motivation behind it besides to purposely cause strife to both of the men who occupied the other suites. As amusing as that might be, it was more likely to foul up his game.

Instead he inspected his improvements to the Ferrari Spider one last time before turning his thoughts to where else his entertainment might be prowling this evening. He decided with little wasted time that he would head towards the morgue Sherlock Holmes was known to frequent.

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Sherlock stood outside the back doors of Bart’s hospital and blew out a stream of smoke through his lips. Beside him the mousy woman waved the smoke that drifted her way from her face with a desperate swatting motion, coughing in irritation to the cigarette’s pungent aroma. It was cold outside and she had not grabbed her jacket before stepping out the small back exit with the detective for a break from their joint work. She had her tiny arms wrapped tightly about herself, her hands tightly clenched in fists. The detective groaned derisively wrapped tightly about herself, her hands tightly clenched in fists. The detective groaned derisively and shed his long wool jacket, hating the social law that bade him to offer it to her more than the actual act of giving it up. He wasn’t cold. Far from it.

The cold air of the evening was a welcome reprieve to his heated body. His skin and head felt like they were burning. It wasn’t sickness that caused it, although he may have welcomed that at the moment. It was the agitation of mounting failure.

Molly had texted him shortly after he had returned to Baker Street to find Mrs. Hudson entertaining the strange tenant from 221C. He had been curious about the dark haired pale specter that haunted the lower flat, especially after his intriguing warning that seemed to bare no fruit, but finding the man there with his land lady had unnerved the detective considerably. He had wanted to protest and
expel the stranger from her presence but it was obvious from the look of annoyance painted on Mrs. Hudson’s face that he had been the intruder. So, the message from the specialist registrar had been a welcomed distraction.

Molly had come to gain knowledge of Lestrade’s brutal massacre in the pent house suit that the detective had to admit was interesting. Miss Hooper did not have access to the pile of body parts but had been consulted by a colleague to help reassemble the dead and so had been given the intensive files regarding the find. It had not taken her long to note that although the parts were separated that many of them demonstrated the same curious blood loss that the former murders had and that was why she had contacted her beloved detective.

They had spent the last two hours poring over the reports. Sherlock had insisted that she garner him access to the bodies at least once every twenty minutes and had been shot down profusely by the small woman each time. He had tried to charm her, as best he could at the moment, but she was beyond falling for his acting tricks now and he lacked the lustre with John missing to try harder. Yet the reports had proved fruitful. It was enough to connect all the cases to one perpetrator and after his blustered meeting with the American tenant having tea with Mrs. Hudson, the detective couldn’t help but align the two for comparison. It was simple to ascertain that perhaps the dark haired man’s warning of the blond Lestat was connected to the string of murders being deposited for him to find.

Now it all seemed a little blasé when he wished to spend his time looking for his doctor. He had no time for these simple puzzles and hated that the man, Lestat, would drop them before him like bread crumbs on a trail. He hated following a trail, it was too easy, too boring.

The cigarette was drawn back to his lips as the mousy woman rejected the jacket with an appreciative blush and smile. Feeling awkward to have his gentlemanly gesture snubbed, he slowly maneuvered back into it, leaving the front undone and open to invite the chilled air within. Molly was grateful, but she must not have intended to stay with him long.

“You shouldn’t do that.” She said, tipping her head towards the cigarette between his fingers, as she reprimanded him for smoking. “John, wouldn’t approve,” she added, as if to make her point.

His eyes snapped to her, beyond the veil of his narrowed dark lashes, nailing her with his own reproof. He blew the smoke into her face and callously reminded her, “John, is not my keeper and he is not here to polish my actions to tailor me properly for the satisfaction of others.”

Coughing and waving the smoke away she glared up at him in angry bafflement. Her small mouth drawn into an angry purse of lips. “How…can you talk of him that way?” she remanded, pointedly, “John and Mary are missing! Do you care so little for your friends?” She looked as though she regretted that last remark, but at least the detective was certain it was how she truly felt. That he did not care a piss about John because of Mary—and blithely was assuming that was the reason why he was failing to find the good doctor.

"Please explain how my 'caring' will increase the likelihood of finding them. Caring is an emotional disadvantage that harbors only weakness in those stupid enough to cling to it." His retort was short and stinging. Pushing away from the wall he had been leaning against, he threw the butt of his cigarette on the ground and squashed it under the toe of his shoe with a twist.

Molly stammered a second, anger flushing her narrow face, as she groped for a response, "Well... I-I don't-"

"Exactly Miss Hooper." Sherlock cut her off, his tone acrid, as he snapped his collar up. He strode past her and the door they had come from. "You should stick to corpses. They seem to be more apt to find validity when it comes to your advice."
His remark was purposely hurtful but Molly had earned the biting remark with her pitiful attempt to elicit some sort of emotional response from him. That the woman should even consider he was not attempting to find John in spite of his displeasure with the man’s new romance was beyond ignorance. Her general stupidity he was usually able to overlook as she did often play a beneficial role in his ability to access hospital resources, but he had learnt all he was going to from this evenings interaction.

"That's not what I meant..." Her voice never reached his ears as he strode away from the cold concrete walls of Bart’s.

With the added buzz of the nicotine in his veins the long strides carried Sherlock several blocks before he began to register there was something else nagging at him. The prickle of hairs on the back of his neck, his body’s way of reacting to a potential threat. He stopped suddenly and narrowed his eyes to scrutinize the few individuals he could see ahead of him or through his peripherals.

A man brushed against him from behind, shoving him hard enough to cause the consulting detective to compensate with a stuttered step forward. No one should have been able to get that close without him detecting the footsteps. A pale man with shock blond hair had stopped and was making a show of looking contrite, as he fixed his clearly unrumpled coat.

"My apologies." The man offered. His tone was confusing, somehow seductive and not the least bit sincere.

Already annoyed he was even more so to have this peculiar man sneak up on him and be so utterly blatant about his intentions to introduce himself to Sherlock. There was something very dangerous about this man that was also brazenly evident to the consulting detective and he was in no position to defend himself should the situation escalate so he consciously hid his analysis of the stranger and instead put on the air of a man with no time to waste.

"Yes well I shouldn't have stopped quite so suddenly. Good night." He resumed his previous pace despite his instincts glaring alarm to not turn his back on the blond stranger.

"You're the infamous Sherlock Holmes, are you not?" The other was at his side, easily keeping pace despite his slightly shorter stride. Sherlock had to work at resisting the urge to shove away from the man and gave no response before the other continued unfazed and cheerful sounding.

"My name is Daniel." A gloved hand was extended toward him as they walked.

Sherlock came to a stop, glancing askance at the man and answered, "No it's not." It was easy to tell that name was a lie, the stranger obviously knew someone by that name but the inclination by which he said it was not the way someone carried their own name.

"Oh, very good Mr. Holmes! Why don't you tell me what it is then?" There was a predatory slyness in the grin that was spreading across the pale man’s narrow face.

"I don't have time for parlor tricks." Sherlock knew he wasn't going to lose this man by simply out pacing him. Instead he raised his arm, stopping at the edge of the side walk and hailed the distant taxi coming his direction.

"You don't even want to try? I'm offended!" The mockery in his words was clear.

"Get used to it. Most who encounter me are." Sherlock replied waspishly.

The blond seemed unaffected by the offensive retort. His icy blue gaze seemed to be distracted, cast slightly over his shoulder, at the approaching cab. The mouth was drawn into a sinister looking
smile, both mocking and predatory.

Sherlock turned to expect the vehicle that would carry him swiftly away from the threatening man, but the cabbie seemed to have other intentions in mind. The detective watched as the black car swung into the lane closest, slowing down to a mere crawl as it approached, yet it did not stop. As the cabbie passed he also noted that the man inside was slowly and very methodically licking the steering wheel. Wide blank eyes rose to meet his own, the mouth slightly gaping, chin wet with the saliva of his previous workings at the wheel, before he picked up to normal speeds and pulled away into the thrum of traffic on the busy street.

Sherlock’s eyes darted back to the blond suspiciously. The man’s face transformed from the malicious smile to the perfect face of concern, as he pointed a finger at the cab that had darted back into traffic, and whispered, “I don’t think that you want that cab.”

The detective’s mind was in over drive, spiraling a million miles a minute, as he tried to piece together everything that he was picking up from this strange and precarious introduction. Normally this would have been a fairly simple task, arranging and coordinating the facts that he could observe from the person’s appearance, mannerisms, and speech, however, like the peculiar new tenant at the Baker Street flat these facts did not seem to align and actually fought order. 78.932% of the facts that he was able to perceive defied reason, as his entire frame fought the very tangible flight response that was electrifying his nervous system. As their eyes locked, he was suddenly overcome with the understanding that his notion of flight was impossible. Even though he could not explain how or why, the detective knew without a doubt that could not flee this assailant.

“Lestat,” he blurted confidently, lifting his head a little higher so as too appear aloof to what he was gleaning from their every interaction. Giving the man what he wanted was really his only option left.

The other’s face lit up like an actor’s might, displaying a truly comical cross between genuine and mocking delight. His smile was wide and his glowing eyes narrowed, as he drew his hands together before his mouth, as though in prayer—mocking the detective’s own contemplative pose, perhaps—as he responded, “Oh, good, we are going to play.”

“And what exactly are we going to play?”

The hands flew apart, the arms swinging wide, as the man cheerfully replied, “Why, a game, of course!” Then he took the light standard that was close by into his hand and stepping up onto it’s base, swung a lazy circle around it. When he came back round he stopped himself, dipping his head to appear more menacing, as he added, in a malicious tone, “Why don’t you tell me who the Monster of London is?”

The detective scoffed in disappointment, retorting in a more conversational tone, “Why? So I can tell you more about yourself?”

That line only made the smile deepen, two perfect dimples registering in the hollows of his cheeks. He chuckled, as he made another lazy circle around the light standard, and replied succinctly, “Why, of course.”

Sherlock inhaled deeply and then began regurgitation his analysis for the man that seemed fit to make him dance. “Most certainly a psychopath, extremely narcissistic, with a pension for violence and utter cruelty. A desperate desire to capture and hold attention from others, with the continual inability to garner it from those whom you feel you deserve it from the most. Trouble establishing and maintaining relationships, unaided by poor self-control and extreme impulsiveness. Obviously highly intelligent—“
“Obviously…” the man interrupted. He finished the word with a flash of his perfectly white teeth.

The detective squared his shoulders and crossed his arms, continuing, “That’s why you have come to London, is it not? To challenge me, because you are, and always have been,” he waffled his hand from side to side, as he finished that thought, “probably always will be…bored.”

“Very good, Mr. Holmes!” Lestat trumpeted loudly, as he jumped from the light standard back down onto the sidewalk. He pointed a finger at the detective as he added in a whisper, “But have you solved the most intriguing part of the puzzle yet?”

Sherlock’s eyes narrowed to mere slits, as he replied, “And what is that exactly, Lestat?”

Lestat’s eyes grew wide with dramatized surprise, before he rolled them back. In a mocking voice that tinkled over the syllables like one might speak to a child, he answered, “Just how am I getting all that delightful blood out of those worthless mortals?” The man paused, raking his top teeth over his bottom lip, before adding, “And what do you think I am doing with all of it?”

The detective shrugged. “Filling your bath tub, for all I know.”

The man smiled, raising his chin, as he drew a hand to display his face to the other, saying, “Well, I do have a remarkable complexion, don’t I? But I am no Elizabeth Báthory.”

“You’re not the generous type, so it’s not being donated to the blood bank.” Sherlock continued, standing his ground under the intense efforts of the other to intimidate him. “You must ingest it then, or at least a good portion of it, for your own self-preservation. You said mortals so you must honestly believe that it will somehow bring you immortality, when you are in truth more apt to receive a nasty bout of indigestion and more likely iron poisoning.”

“Oh, Mr. Holmes!” the man bellowed, with a guffaw laughter, “You have hit the nail right on the head!” The triumphant demeanor melted away to reveal a dramatically saddened visage, as he whispered, “But still I fear you do not believe me.” He paused and his lips moved from a pouting frown into wan smile. “And it is far more entertaining to watch that little brain of yours whirl about trying to concoct a logical explanation. I will give you a small piece of advice. Forget the logical and use your gut, hmm.”

Sherlock’s teeth ground together. “It is obvious, Lestat, that you have been trying to garner my attention for a while now, so pray let us move past all of this nonsense, despite what I believe.” Meeting those icy eyes straight on, he asked, “Where is John Watson?”

“John Watson?” the man questioned, pretending to be unawares. When enlightenment hit, the man waved a hand at the detective and arrogantly replied, “Oh, you mean that puppy that follows you around everywhere you go?” Laughter interrupted him before he could finish, “You mean, you’ve lost him?”

Sherlock could contain himself no more. It was now evident who had the doctor, who the fourth arbitrary party during the altercation at Mary Morstan’s had been, and he lunged at the man, hands groping to grasp onto the imp that had stolen John. His hands met with thin air and then concrete, as his body crashed to the ground with the gnashing of flesh on cement. When he looked up the man was gone, nowhere to be seen, the echo of his haunting laughter fading in his ear drum.

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With a startled gasp of breath the elderly woman was woken from a sound slumber, a loud booming echoing throughout her small flat. As her brain slowly began to process the emotions that were
flooding her now conscious mind, filtering out what had been dreamt and what was real, her rapid breathing slowed. The banging was a fist pummeling the door to her flat with such ferocity that she was unsure if the building were on fire or a menacing intruder intended to gain access to her home.

When she had finally got up the nerve to open the door her visitor proved to be neither. Wrapped in her housecoat and with an anger rushing over her senses, she attempted to scold the ignorant man that had so uncaringly scared the living daylights out of her, when she was forcefully snatched up by her tenant. The detective had her by the arms. His eyes were intense, the pale speckling of his iris' brilliant and wild, as he feverishly demanded, “Where has he gone, Mrs. Hudson?”

Captured by his arms and his eyes, it took her a moment to come to terms with the question pressed upon her. She could feel her anger receding, as she soaked in something else close to panic from the man that bound her still. With a stutter, she managed only, “W-what? Where has who gone—Sherlock, what’s the matter with you? You’re frighten—?”

“Louis, Mrs. Hudson! The tenant downstairs! He was just here! I saw him come in!” his voice was strained and extreme, pervaded with urgency. He gave only a moment’s hesitation, a quick dart of his tongue across his lower lip, before he amended in a slow measured tone, deep in timbre, “It is of the utmost priority, Mrs. Hudson, that I find that man.”

The elderly woman was shaken and confused by this bewildering encounter and her mind was jumbled as a consequence. She blinked a few times, her mouth moving but not a sound coming out as she tried to put everything together. Of course her downstairs tenant had been with her earlier that evening. He had been so kindly—why was Sherlock so depraved over the matter? His outburst and intensity was frightening, all the more so because she could not make a lick of sense out of it. She knew the answer, the man had told her himself where and why he was leaving, and finally she came to terms with the fact that it probably didn’t matter a toss to the detective that his behaviour made her question his sanity. “Why, Louis is gone, dear, back to America.” She spit out, as she tried to wriggle from his grip.

His fingers tightened their hold on her upper arms, almost painfully. “That’s impossible. I just saw him, outside, as I was returning.”

“No,” she said, shaking her head, and wishing he let her go. “He came back after we had finished the tea and dropped off the next few month’s rent. Said that he would be away for a while on business.”

“It’s a lie. Has to be.” The detective sneered, his hands finally releasing her.

Mrs. Hudson rubbed her arms, watching the man turn away from her. “What on earth has come over you? You’ve always been a little strange, deary, but lately it’s been getting plain scary. Have you spoken with John lately? He’s always been a good help—?”

Her nose was almost caught, as the door was slammed in her face so forcefully that the picture frames on the wall rattled in its wake. She gave a gasp and then a fuming snarl, before she cursed the damned stubborn man. “If you wreck my doors with your temper, it is coming out of your rent young man!” she yelled, watching his shadow disappear from the frosted window of her door. There was no response, not that she had expected one. The older woman returned to bed, so angry that it took her another hour to fall back asleep.

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Louis listened as he sat on the cold ledge of the Baker Street flat's roof top, to which he had been forced to abandon for the time being. The detective was getting closer indeed—even the clever man
that he was. Louis had made arrangements to leave and still the man had caught sight of him as he made his last preparations. It was not hard to evade the rushed approach of the desperate detective, leaping unseen through the darkness out of the way, but still it seemed to fuel the man's urgency.

He was scouring 221C this very moment, not at all believing the cover story the vampire had fed to the affable and extremely gullible landlady. The skilled man had no need for the key, the lock was a trivial piece to pick, and like the expert he was the detective was working his craft on the meager contents left in the flat. There was little there for him to find that would produce any solid connections to the owners immortally gifted prowess and therefore Louis had no worry about allowing the detective all the time that he desired.

The flat screen that Lestat had managed to sneak in while he was out still hung broken on the wall above the fire place. The chair that had kept him comfortable all the time he enjoyed eavesdropping on 221B above was clean of any remnant of his being, not even a stray hair clung to its patterned fabric. Then there was the bookshelf, gaining fullness as his ever needy desire to read forced the vampire to return each night with at least a few fresh paperbacks. The small flat boasted little else for the detective to draw from and he would soon return to his own residence, in begrudging frustration.

Louis was sad to leave the flat and his fun. Truthfully he should give up the residence altogether and keep to the rooftops where he would always be safely away from the man's acute scrutiny. The vampire loathed sulking in the shadows, even more than he detested his maker's need to flaunt his immortality. In the darkness of the alleys and rooftops he felt even more like the damned creature he had become and that he hated. So he would hold onto the downstairs flat, as damp and drafty as it was, until things had calmed and he may be able to return without warranting the threat of harm to the man he watched. For now, however, leaving was the best option.

The vampire had no doubt in his mind that his maker had returned to the old city. It was no coincidence that the Ferrari that Armand had loaned him was vandalized, even in this neighborhood. Lestat had raked the marks along the side of the pristine vehicle—the scathing wrath of his jealousy on display. Louis saw alright and was all the more bitter for it. It was this action after all that had warranted his decision to leave Baker Street and the last place he would go would be to the side of his maker. The vampire had better things to do.
Chapter 17

There was no gleeful white illumination of the walking man nor its counterpart, the more angry orange flashing hand to advise the pedestrians when their time was drawing to an end to safely cross the busy London streets. It was a casual observation made with ever keen ice-blue eyes from behind the veil of yellow tinted sunglasses. The look earned him the occasional raised eyebrow or roll of eyes but it was a mortal whom he had stolen the idea from in the first place, the glasses too.

The bounce in the immortal’s step was a clear indication of his cheerful mood as he meandered amidst the throngs of pedestrians with all the snide self-pleasure of being a wolf in sheep clothes. One whom had yet to invest much thought towards if he would be ending a life this night or not, though he had no particular adventure set in mind for the evening he was occupied with thoughts of his recent interaction with London’s infamous consulting detective. He couldn’t help the predatory lick of his lips at the thought of indulging in drinking from the guarded mortal, in the elixir of his rich blood and the locked vault of his mind, when a sudden thumping against the large picture window of the shop beside him provided the vampire with the rare pleasure of being startled.

Casually reclined in a chocolate-toned leather chair sat the handsome figure of David. Forever locked in the Anglo-Indian body that had given him a new lease on life, a mortal life cut drastically short and replaced with immortality from Lestat. David was torn between amusement and annoyance at the elation his maker displayed in shouting his name through the glass that divided him from the warm aromatic coffee house and the chilled London street. Sighing deeply, he motioned for the energetic blond to come in and take the vacant seat across from him. Lestat made his way into the coffee shop and David rose to greet his maker with a warm embrace.

“Tell me, are you enjoying London?” the darker skinned vampire began, knowing he was best to lead the conversation, as the two of them took their seats.

“Twice as much now that I see you are here as well.” Lestat’s smile was genuine despite the roguish twinkle behind the yellow tinted glasses he wore.

“Flattered as I am, I’m afraid that this isn’t a social call.” David’s reply caused the smile on his companion to sink a little.

“Always working, David!” Lestat complained, sinking back into his chair with a dramatic sigh and role of his eyes. “You do realize that you are retired now, don’t you?”

“I appreciate your concern, Lestat, but all joking aside, what exactly are you doing here?” The dark haired vampire was thankful for the relative privacy the window seat offered from the rest of the late night coffee shop patrons. Despite Lestat’s inclination for drawing attention to himself, his primary audience aside from David were the few mortals still up and bustling about outside, too busy and too cold to care about the young man with his back turned to them.

“Oh, I don’t know. I suppose I’m just ridding myself of some more ennui.” Came the sarcastic drawling reply, that earned him a deep chuckle from his highly educated modern fledgling.

“Do you even know what that word means, Lestat?” The remark earned him a sharp glare from the blond.

“Don’t insult me, David.” Lestat replied peevishly, an almost comical and unintentional pout on his lips.
David’s reply was calculated and forthright. “One expects that someone who acts like a child also has the incapability to comprehend the repercussions of their poor choices…like a child.”

The remark hung in the air for a few stale moments as Lestat digested it, then leaning forward he narrowed his eyes at David. “…and so… you’re saying I can’t read?” Lestat’s face remained perfectly serious in a blend of confusion and indignation until David couldn’t help but smile and soon both immortals were chuckling fondly.

“I wish it were that simple.” The dark coffee eyes met the ice blue of his makers.

“It could be, you know. If we are going to play this game of ‘why are you here’ let us say I came for a spot of fancy tea with, Louis.” Though the tone had been lightened, the blond was still annoyed at the roundabout tactics that were being deployed on him.

“Yet, Louis seems strangely absent.” An unnecessary gesture was made to emphasize the empty space beside them before David turned a more serious look at his maker. “Oh, that’s right. He’s enjoying himself with, Armand.”

Lestat’s scoff was somewhere between a hiss and a spit, as he sneered his displeasure at the statement and cast an indignant glare away from his fledgling. "Yes, well apparently I make vampires with a weakness for red-headed imps." The last word was snapped as Lestat’s eyes met David’s again with an accusatory narrowing.

"Apparently." David replied, completely unfazed by the outburst as he continued, "And so you find yourself in my company, for which I am grateful, as always.”

"Now I am sure you want something.” Lestat’s eyes remained narrowed but the fire had subsided.

"We all want something, Lestat. What exactly is it that you want?” David’s calm demeanor was beginning to annoy his maker.

"Why all the questions, David? They are bothersome. I feel interrogated! Answer mine first. Why are you here?” Despite having an idea, the elder vampire was genuinely curious what had brought his fledgling to London. He could see the consideration behind the dark brown eyes as David weighed his answer before replying.

"I was contacted by an old friend of mine and I thought it warranted a visit. Fancy that it had to do with you.” There was obvious displeasure in his tone.

"Oh, get to the point, David. What has Louis asked you to do this time? Has he asked you to distract me or, more likely, he has come crying that I am ruining everything for him? I am simply keeping myself entertained.” There was a mocking remorse in the blond’s tone.

"You do have a record for not playing well in the sandbox.” his fledgling pointed out, eyebrow raised in aver.

"There is no sandbox here, David.” Lestat replied caustically.

"No, Lestat, just a city full of mortals that you play with like toys.” There was a smoldering behind the long dark lashes and it was easy to feel the displeasure building in the immortal man across from him. Despite this, Lestat wasn’t about to answer to his own fledgling simply because Louis wanted ‘alone time’ with Armand.

The blond rose from his chair and jabbed his finger in David’s chest, earning a look of great surprise and subdued rage. "Was it that Louis and that little shit Armand want, that called you on me?"
"Nothing," David slapped the hand from his chest, knowing better then to rise and further escalate the already tense encounter. "Someone entirely different has called upon my, surprisingly. Which is the reason why I am here because if either of them had called me, frankly, I wouldn't have bothered. The problem is... this game that you are playing has bigger pieces than you know."

The answer took Lestat off guard and in his annoyance he strode past David entirely and paused, as his fledgling watched him blatantly snatch a hot beverage from a nearby table where a couple sat cooing at one another. The immortal’s movement was so fast that neither had a chance to notice.

"I haven't time for riddles, David. When you have something worth-while to say then you know how to reach me. Until then, welcome home."

Lestat was out the door with the tinkling of the chimes hung above when the girl noticed her latte missing and David was left seething, as he blocked out the sound of the diligent boyfriend offering to replace her beverage.

The fledgling’s relationship with his maker had always been a complicated affair and this incident was just another poignant testament to that very tangible fact. The blond had always been a man of his own, rebellious by nature, and untrusting of advice and authority. He was his own worst enemy, heedless of the insurmountable detriment that could follow his fool-hearty choices, and those that tried to help him were always callously brushed aside. It had been the ruin of more than one of the vampire’s closest relationships. David would be damned if he would let his maker brush him off.

Finding resolve, the dark skinned mortal vanished from the all night café in a flash that the mortal eyes around him were unable to see. Lestat had not gotten far, before he was grappled by the arm and twisted back around by his fledgling. “You will hear me out,” David warned the other, as they retreated from the sidewalk into the shadows of a darkened alleyway, “I did not come here to stop you.”

The icy gaze narrowed, as Lestat challenged the young vampire he had made, “You couldn’t even if you tried.”

“Exactly, my point.” Came the more light hearted response.

“Perhaps my elder in mortal years, my sweet David, but please do not parent me.” The blond vampire reminded his companion, as he brought a hand up to clap the sleek dark skinned cheek of the other. “Many more feel it is their privilege. I will not accept it from you.”

David brought his hand up to take his maker’s hand from his face. “I mean to only warn you. This is a dangerous game you are setting up to play. The board is bigger and far more complicated than you know. There are many that could stop you, who are watching.”

“What? The consulting detective and his muse?” Lestat scoffed, devaluing the warning.

“The people involved are but a piece to the puzzle.” David answered quickly, “It is also your reckless means of bait that you’ve chosen to use as enticement and your final intentions for the mortals that has raised hackles. Each in part is trivial but when you add them together it equals an infringement that the Sisters, among others, are not likely to excuse.”

“And what are they going to do, David?” the other sneered, sending his friend a wicked grin, “Put me in a time out?”

The brown eyes hardened as he moved to quietly remind the other, “Akasha is no longer here to protect you, Lestat. The Sisters are our judge and jury and they will do as they see fit.” His
moistened his lips as he reassured his maker, “I am only here to warn you, as your friend, that you
are drawing unwanted attention to yourself, both in the mortal world and our own, that could end
badly for you.”

Lestat was quiet for a moment, his eye intensely studying his fledgling’s face, as he considered what
had been said. Of course, he did not need reminding that there were those more powerful than
himself who could end his fun with the internationally famous detective. This fact always seemed to
be dangled over his head when it came to another attempting to reign him in. He hated to have it
come from David—his David.

“Who called you?” the blond demanded, succinctly.

David gave a resigned sigh which wheezed out of his tall dark frame. The young body that his old
soul now inhabited still a truly beautiful gift to his maker, but the soul inside was the same, aged and
wise with the many years of mortal living. Lestat could not deny that his David was both a pleasure
to behold and entertain but also a voice to be heard. The man knew many still in the mortal realm
from which they had both come and he had been easily accepted into the immortal one he had
entered not long ago, gifted with a cordial disposition that drew a general acceptance from others
without any effort of his own, which his maker had always benefited from. Yet now the other man
was hesitant. It was obvious that he did not trust giving his maker certain information and the blond
was irritated that for all his vampirical gifts and powers that he could not just pluck what he wanted
to know from his fledgling’s mind.

“I’ve already said, Lestat,” the dark skinned man finally admitted, quickly amending, “it was an
acquaintance from my past.”

“Talamasca?”

The word hung between them, unwanted and yet said. David’s silence was very telling. The man
had been a part of the organization for years, had even held a position of power within its multitude
of levels and members, and it was true that if not for this powerful groups influence the two may
never have met. Lestat owed them that much. Still David had little patience left for the organization
that had turned to retaliate against him after Lestat had given him the Dark Gift. Their authority and
power stretched without restraint from traditional governments and was undeniably still a force to be
reckoned with, which David resented.

“Yes,” David finally said, the word forced from him as though wrung out of his very being. He
followed the admission with well-known fact, “They have an invested interest in your affairs and are
always watching.”

“We both know that I am worth the attention, my sweet.” Lestat replied, nonchalant in the face of his
fledgling’s obvious concern. He folded his arms over his chest and plodded forward, needing to
know, “And the consulting detective? Are they watching him as well?”

David shook his head. “They are more concerned with your involvement. You must remember that
above all else they work to keep our kind and others under the mortal radar. That’s why your little
game has drawn so much of their attention.” David sighed again and admonished his maker, “I am
not stupid, Lestat. I came because it is obvious that you are going to reveal yourself to this detective,
if you haven’t already.”

“Are you jealous?” came the snob response.

“Hardly,” David snapped, with a grimace.
“Well, thank you for your concern, David, even if it is unwanted.” Lestat quipped, as he spun on the heel of his boot and began walking away from the other man. David let him go and the blond was glad for it.

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The spoon moved slow gentle circles through the dark brewed coffee, fresh from the press John had found in the cupboard beside the sink. The penthouse was fully equipped with everything that the doctor could think to use. Everything that was except for those crucial few things that could aid an escape from the luxurious prison he was being kept in.

He sighed, a long whoosh of air forced from his lungs, as he tapped the spoon and dropped in noisily into the sink. It clattered and bounced, the noise loud in the immense empty space of the open flat. It was all very tedious. The doctor wasn’t sure why he was there or how he had gotten there. He did not even have the slightest inclination as to who had put him there. So, as he tried to wrap his mind around this strange predicament he found himself in, he made himself a coffee. Lord only knew, the caffeine might help him think.

He took the cup and tasted it cautiously. The brew was a rich dark roast, aromatic, and blissfully calming. The doctor decided that he liked the French-press. It gave the coffee a powerful punch of flavor over the regular drip pot. Taking another sip, he gave a short moan of enjoyment, and then made his way around the granite topped island to the patio door. The far wall of the penthouse was a solid wall of floor to ceiling glass, just like in the bedroom, and the feature created a beautiful back drop out of the city that stretched out below in all directions. He walked out onto the patio, his person chilled by the brisk crisp breeze. London was still cold, even with the sun's afternoon heat to bask in.

John moved to the glass and metal railing that ran the perimeter of the large patio. He braced his elbows and leaned on its edge, taking it all in, the dizzying height, the noise of the busy city streets below, and the gloom of the grey sky that threatened the populous with yet more rain. It wasn't his first time on the sky high balcony, he had explored the entirety of the suite much earlier, but this was the first time that he enjoyed it. It really was beautiful, the view, the stone work, and just knowing that he was probably as high over London as one could possibly enjoy. He sipped at the coffee, slowly wondering for the hundredth time, 'why'?

As far as the soldier in him could tell, he was by all rights being held as a prisoner. No one had visited the flat, not a soul. There was no phone, no computer, no buzzer to allow guests into the building—absolutely no means what so ever to contact the outside world. There was no way that he could see to access the high tech security system that barred the steel door and the fire alarms were present but useless. All of it was for show—just to torment him. It was both infuriating and ironic, that one could be so close to all those beyond that flat and yet have no way of reaching them. There was also no sign of the penthouse owner, no documents, no bills, no personal items that might lead to his captor’s identity. And of course there seemed no reason whatsoever to motivate his imprisonment.

John had moved through several reactions to his current predicament that would be considered normal he supposed if his captor were watching—which he was most certain the culprit was. He had gone from quietly perturbed, to desperate, to panicked, to enraged, and to finally where he sat now, somewhere on the precipice of acceptance. He was where he was and there was no way out but down—a long way down. His desperate stage had not been that precarious. What quieted him now and allowed the man to enjoy the view and the cup of coffee was knowing that his captor would eventually turn up. There was no way someone imprisons someone in a bloody penthouse suite in the tallest, most expensive building in all of London without having the ego to go with it.
With a last deep cleansing breath the doctor turned his attention back to his penthouse prison. Down feathers from torn cushions were strewn about on broken furniture that littered the spacious flat. There was the crunch of broken glass under his feet as he walked towards the bedroom he had awoken in, all the while casually sipping at the rich brew that wafted up from his cup. He had an awkward sense of pride at the level of destruction he had wrought to the expensive furnishings of his captor. Only the bed he had awoken in was spared the viscous onslaught when John had finally snapped, the very same bed he now sought out.

Despite the caffeine ended glow provided from the still warm cup in his hand the man was exhausted. Mentally from all that had been happening, much of which he was still having difficulty putting together but also physically from his active forms of stress relief. With the coffee set on the side table, John sat.

Suddenly his body was collapsing backwards, the exhalation descending into a groan as he tossed an arm over his face and began to dive into the murk of his recent memories.

Where was Mary? Why was he here? Why the bloody bad luck and why hadn't Sherlock damn well figured out where he was yet?

Worst yet, why didn't he remember what had happened? When the idea crossed his mind to consider it there was a sharp flash of white, the roar of clashing cymbals ringing in his head, as pain radiated from behind his jaw and into the back of his eyes.

Somehow there was this tickling thought in the back of John's darkening mind. The recent murders seemed tied some how, there were too many factors at play, the blood-drained victims, the mysterious Americans at the Baker Street flat, people falling out of the sky, and what was the point of his capture?

Again the flash of pain and the decision was made to rest a few minutes, clear his head and try again but soon exhaustion overtook as the doctors breathing became deep and even.
Sherlock hunched his shoulders as he walked down the cold London streets, the mizzle from the afternoon now a full on drizzle that had wet his hair and the shoulders of his jacket. The detective had stepped out of the flat to stretch his legs and take a distracting but necessary bathroom break—he still refused to enter the bathroom in the Baker Street flat, the memories of his last few encounters with John there too powerfully disabling to chance. His feet moved over the cement below him at a swift pace, pushed to return home to the dry confines of his parlor, even though the man was sure he would only find more disappointment upon his return.

The detective had spent the last eleven hours scouring the internet for any and all information pertaining to anyone named Lestat de Lioncourt. The search had proved most dissatisfying. Like the lovely and cunning Mary Morstan, who even in death evaded his probing, this new stranger had as well. He had found a great deal of information, of which took him hours to sift through, but all of it in the end was linked with a fictional character from a multitude of different books, most seeming to be penned by a different name. It was all very frustrating.

The renter in 221C had also disappeared, utterly convenient that he should return to America on business at such a critical time in his investigation. Louis after all had been the one to warn him of the dangers this stranger brought. He was terribly curious to note that one of the books this fictional character with the same name appeared in was also linked to a book penned by a man with the same name as his mysterious neighbor. Oddly suspicious but completely ungrounded. Louis was still a young man, no older than twenty five, and his equally enigmatic counterpart was even younger, therefore they were too young to have actually written the volumes of which the characters appear and the only conclusion Sherlock could come to was that the duo was skillfully masquerading, working in tandem to entertain themselves and distract the detective from his query.

Sherlock was certain that the two men knew of John Watson’s whereabouts and were involved in his disappearance.

The sloshing of the rain accumulated on the street drew his attention to the sudden stop of a black limousine beside him. The window rolled down and inside he could see the nose of his brother poke out, as Mycroft demanded sharply, “Get in, little brother.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes dramatically and gave a loud gusty sighed. He popped the collar of his coat a little higher and bade waspishly to his irritating sibling, “I don’t have time for your cloak and dagger mysteries.”

Mycroft returned the eye roll with gusto and grunted, “Spare me the drama and get inside the car.”

The detective’s brother opened the door and Sherlock resignedly stepped around it to climb inside the spacious interior of the back seat, only to find that they were not alone. Mycroft shifted to the other side of the leather bench at the back of the vehicle, as Sherlock seated himself and closed the door. On the bench opposite them sat a young man, whose large dark eyes and skin glistened with an enviable golden sheen. Sherlock glanced askance at his brother to his side and snapped, “Who’s your new friend?”

The sleek black car moved back into traffic, as Mycroft bypassed the question entirely, cutting directly to the chase, with a quick order, “You need to leave London, little brother.” The command brooked no argument. It was odd for his boisterous sibling to cut his terms so simply.

Sherlock was not one of his brother’s underlings, however, and he quickly moved to dissent his
“If I didn’t know that was powdered donut on your lapel, Mycroft, I would swear that you’ve been snorting cocaine.” The rude comment made his brother, who was normally so reposed, bristle with shocked contempt—which brought a small curl to the corner of the detective’s mouth that vanished just as quickly as it had appeared. “You know I can’t leave.”

Mycroft’s thin lips pulled back over his perfectly aligned teeth, pristinely white from constant diligence and care, as he countered the comment deftly, “John’s disappearance is precisely why you must leave, Sherlock.”

His brother produced a plane ticket from the inner pocket of his suit jacket and offered it to him. The ticket was for a red eye in a few hours that would take him across the ocean to Newfoundland. The detective refused to take it and instead reached across to wipe his finger at the small trace of white powdered sugar on his brother’s expensive grey suit. Mycroft lost all composure in the face of such ignorant torment and slapped his hand away with a disgusted bluster. “Ugh—grow up! Please realize…”, he paused only to straighten his jacket and attempt to quell his heightened rage at the blatant slight sustained, as Sherlock added insult to injury and made a show of licking the sugar from his finger, “that I am trying to help you.”

“If you wish to aid me, Mycroft, then find John.” Sherlock snipped, succinctly, as he grabbed the handle of the car door, “Until then save your breath and stop wasting both of our time.”

Mycroft’s hand gripped his wrist, restraining him. He glanced back at his brother, unimpressed and slightly desperate, as the other man tried again to convince him. “Enough Sherlock, this is serious. There are forces at play here bigger than anything that you are capable of understanding,” Sherlock’s eyes darted across the back of the limousine to the other man sitting quietly on the other bench, “And if you think that things will return to normal after you do find your doctor then you are sorely mistaken. For his sake and your own, take the ticket.”

The car pulled up to the curb outside the Baker Street flat and came to a stop. Sherlock did not want to take the ticket but he found his fingers curling around it regardless. He snatched it from his brother and then turned to exit the vehicle. As he was about to slam the door a soft smooth voice called to him, “Mr. Holmes?”

It was the quiet young man inside the car with his brother. Sherlock bowed enough to see the man who had sat forward in the reverse facing seat of the limousine. Those golden brown eyes met his own and with earnest the man added to his brother’s reasoning, “If you care about John then you need to remove yourself from London and forget about the man named Lestat.”

It was said with a certain finality, like one might speak the times tables, as exact truth, but it was far from where Sherlock wished to leave it. He moved to speak but the man grabbed the door and forced it shut, leaving Sherlock sputtering on the sidewalk, as the car pulled away and back into traffic.

Once again the detective was left with more questions than answers. He left the rain and ducked inside, irritable and agitated. Mrs. Hudson was sweeping the foyer and looked up from her work as he entered. She made a comment about his sopping wet appearance that he dismissed and he offered her the ticket Mycroft had given him. “You won a sweepstakes, Mrs. Hudson.” He said, as he left her to ogle the expensive first class ticket to Canada and ascended the steps to his own flat.

To his dismay a voice filled the empty rooms of his home, skillfully singing a moving rendition of some kind of pop music, which filtered out from the locked bathroom.

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Out of the blackness of sleep there came the whining buzz akin to the annoying summons of an alarm clock. The doctor sucked in a displeased breath, having been launched from a dead sleep and was about to mutter for Mary to shut the bloody thing off when his sluggish brain cells fired up, reminding John of his surroundings. Strong hands gripped the side of the mattress as he sat bolt upright and lunged out of the bed. His feet hit the floor running.

"Where the hell is the bloody phone?!" The doctor stopped, narrowly avoiding a tumble, as he came skidding to a stop on white marble floors in front of the coffee-table. The fragrance of the huge bouquet displayed in the center took him a little off guard as he snatched the vibrating mobile and answered the unknown number.

"Who is this?!" He shouted into the phone. There was silence. "You do realize you can't keep me penned up in here forever!"

Johns pacing lead him to anxiously stride toward the kitchen, a strange feeling beginning to overtake him beyond his tension. It was pricking the hairs on the back of his neck and he was having to work at keeping cool.

"I do apologize." The male voice was velvet, syllables perfectly measured like a short perfect rhythm, only lending to the doctor’s agitation.

John could tell that the man had more to say but he couldn’t keep his rage from boiling out of him and angrily he ranted into the phone at his unknown captor, “Don’t apologize, let me out! Why are you doing this? Why me?” It was a tumbling ramble of words that John himself was not even sure was entirely coherent.

The aloof voice on the other end of the receiver replied all the same, answering each of his questions in a diplomatic fashion that remained firmly ambiguous. “I assure you, Dr. Watson, it is only for your protection. I had hoped that it would not come to this and still I fear that even these extreme measures may not be enough.”

“What are you on about?!?” John exploded, twisting on his heel and pacing the other direction around the island in the kitchen. His free hand raked back through his mussed hair, nearly pulling it out, as he tried to piece some kind of believable reality together. “You know this is kidnapping, yeah?” it sounded lame, idle, and the doctor could feel his mouth grow dry, as he attempted to threaten the man on the other end, “This won’t last. There will be people looking for me.”

“You will not be harmed, doctor,” the voice answered the threat, as cool and collected as everything else had been delivered to him, “and when you are no longer in danger then I shall release you.”

John felt a crushing weight overcome his shoulders and chest, as though the life were being squeezed out of him. This was not an answer—not the one he fucking wanted—and still he was at a loss to find the right words to protest. All that came out, was a wheeze, soft and terribly confused, “I seriously have no idea what you are talking about.” His breaths were coming now in short rasps, as panic set in, consuming his brain with a veracious ache, as the blood began rocketing about his system.

“I’m afraid I am bereft of a fitting explanation for now.” The voice replied. “Please, try to remain calm. A solution is being crafted, as we speak. I am sure that you have found that the suite has been stocked with everything that you need in the meantime to make your stay a little bit more comfortable. Please take advantage of it—.”

“Fuck you!” John bellowed, losing complete control of his tenuous emotions. Ridiculous as the outburst had been it was better than the panic choking him. “Let me bloody well outta’ here!”
There was a brief silence and then a swift response. “I’m afraid I am unable to oblige this request.”

“And why the hell not??!”

Succinctly, the voice repeated, “It’s not safe.”

“I will start throwing things over the balcony!” John raged, pointing at the elaborate glass doors that led outside.

“No, you won’t.”

“I could.” It was empty. Hollow.

“You’re a doctor. You won’t.” came the reply, firm and steadfast in his resolve.

John felt defeated and terribly deflated. His head was aching, his blood was pumping, and he was beginning to feel exhaustion’s pull once more. Was it the concussion or was he really just giving up? He couldn’t think, couldn’t make any more words come out.

“I have said too much already, doctor.” The voice spoke, with finality, “I shall call again.”

“No, wait—?!”

The call was closed and the phone went black just before it was hurdled across the room. It made a loud clatter as it smacked the wall and fell the tiled floor of the kitchen. John cursed and grabbed his head with one hand, closing his eyes. His agitation was through the roof, along with his pulse, and the throbbing that rocked his cranium was almost too much. His one chance to reach the outside world and he had buggered it up.

The doctor turned away from the phone on the floor and with his eyes open a crack he surveyed the suite. There was a large beautiful bouquet of freshly cut flowers in a crystal vase on the coffee table by the couch and along with it all the destruction he had wrought earlier was gone, like it had all been a dream. The suite was immaculate. Everything was in its place, cleaned until shimmering with luster, and ready to go. Even his experiments with the coffee and the French press had been cleaned and put away. It all meant that somehow, someone had been in the penthouse with him.

Of course he had seen the flowers when he had burst out of the bedroom in search of the bloody phone, but he had not really seen them. His gaze focused in on them, as he took the few steps he needed to reach the table on which they sat in their pretty vase, perfectly arranged. The bouquet was quite elaborate, filled to the brim with many different blossoms and lush greenery. There were many large silken tulips. He reached out a shaking hand, poking past something that looked like eucalyptus, and his fingers stroked the soft outer shell of the dark purple tulip closest—Mary loved tulips.

In a single violent swing he flung the crystal vase of flowers from the table. It hit the floor with a tinkling crash and a spray of glass and water, skidding out into a blossoming pattern of destruction. For good measure he kicked the table over before turning to walk away. His teeth grit and his hands holding his head he made his way to the balcony—every fiber in his body was screaming for air—just breath!

It was cold and wet outside. The city lights illuminated the low hanging clouds, making it appear as though London was glowing, warm and brilliant. He was anything but. John cursed loudly and wrapped his arms about himself to keep the chill from setting in. Heat from his body rose as a mist about him, his rapid breaths freezing as they hit the frigid air, as he mulled the phone conversation over in his head. The doctor cursed his own stupidity—his natural need to selfishly only think of
himself in his panic. His captor had made contact, had somehow been in the suite, left him a damn phone, and he had learned nothing. He didn’t know who had him, why he was being held, when he would be released, and worse yet...he had not asked about Mary.

The man’s gaze scanned the bright city lights that stretched out around him like a tangled web of electricity. Why had he not asked about her? Where was Mary? Was she okay? Was she searching for him? Then he thought of someone else. It had been as natural a progression for his thoughts as it had been to consider his fiancé’s well-being and yet the after effect it had on him made him cringe.

It had disturbed him to wake to this crazy reality through the amorous dream he had had of the detective. In truth, they had once been like that. Flat mates, friends, lovers. They had laughed, bantered, argued and fought, wrestled, and had explored one another’s body and mind. It had been what John thought a honey moon might be like—fun, exhilarating, passionate, thrilling, dangerous. Moriarty had gotten in the way of all of it. Had changed everything. That wasn’t the reason for the cringe though, just a part of it. It was not Sherlock’s resurrection either. It was the feeling of having him back, being with him again, talking with him again, investigating again. It had been so alluring, so dangerous. And Mary who he had wanted to remain behind had encouraged it. That was the cringe.

Why had it been so easy to be at Baker Street again? Why had it felt so good to be with him again? Why did he have that dream…

“Fuck it.” He whispered, with a sad shake of his throbbing head. He couldn’t think anymore. Every thought hurt both physically and emotionally. Self-diagnosis was never something that the doctor subscribed to, but he did believe it was the concussion more than anything that made his head ache. It would be best if he just went back to bed. Perhaps morning would see him feeling better and thinking clearly.
Chapter 19

Sherlock could tell by the tune of the song being sung that it was new and popular, something he recognized from the local radio stations, playing in shops, but had deleted. There was no room for such trivial nonsense within his mind palace. His guest was surely not leaving, his intention was clearly to engage, so Sherlock took the time to strip his wool jacket, which was damp and heavy from the rain. He tossed it haphazardly onto the couch by the door and sent his scarf to join it. Running his hands back through his wet curls to move them back from his face, the detective took a deep preparatory breath.

*Just like a moth drawn to a flame,*

*Oh, you lured me in, I couldn’t sense the pain*

*Your bitter heart cold to the touch*

The voice that sang in his bathroom was without a doubt trained and experienced, someone used to using their voice for the entertainment of others. It was smooth and silken, hitting each note pitch perfect, without strain or trouble. The voice did not waiver or falter in address to his presence inside the flat, so Sherlock marched up to the door and tried the knob. It was his flat after all and the intruder was purposely waiting for him, yet the door knob was locked.

The detective was surprised. It didn’t happen often. It made him uncomfortable. Of course he had locked the knob—absurd as it had been to lock the last memories he had of John’s body, mouth, and kisses from his mind’s eye—but he had deduced that the intruder would have left the doors open. Making a disgruntled grunt, he knocked on his own bathroom door and waited.

*Now I’m gonna reap what I sow,*

*I’m left seeing red on my own,*

The knob wiggled and moved, unlatching, and then eerily the door slowly pulled away from the jamb. At a snail’s pace—typically over dramatic—the door swung open, to reveal the mysterious blond man languishing in a tub full of white sudsy bubbles. The detectives mind instantly went into overdrive, assessing the scene beheld before him—*Bubbles-Mrs. Hudson’s, Lestat-naked, washing, threat, white skin, partial albinoism, lithe, dangerous, predatory, rubber duck-mocking, playing innocent, distraction, self-victimisation.*

*You watch me bleed until I can’t breath,*

*Shaking, falling onto my knees,*

*And now that I’m without your kisses,*

*I’ll be needing stitches,*

The lyrics were working, they were distracting. Sherlock could feel the hairs at the nape of his neck rise, as he tried to ward off the prickling sensation that struck the lower quadrant of his frontal lobe, behind his eyes. It was that feeling again and it drove an icy stake of panic through his thought process and deductive reasoning, the distinct sensation that someone was prying, a burglar with a crow bar at the hinges of his mind palace, with a very real chance of getting inside.

*Tripping over myself,*
Aching, begging you to come help

The voice cut out and the detective’s gaze instantly met the narrowed icy orbs that were cast his direction. The man’s eyes were as ethereal as ever, unbelievably intense in color, the navy colored ring around the circumference of his iris making the lighter azure speculation pattern within seem to glow. It was not a phenomenon that Sherlock could pinpoint a name for but its effect on his person was obvious—it created a strange animalistic like quality that was more than threatening, akin to being caught in the gaze of large wild cat. His analysis was interrupted by the man’s address.

“You stare is flattering, Mr. Holmes,” the silken voice purred. There was a satisfactory curl to the corner of his mouth that was anything but modest. The man lavished in the attention of others and certainly more from their alarm and unease—which he was neither. He had expected the intruder’s identity the instant he realized he had a visitor. It had taken no deduction. The man’s idle fingers fidgeted with the yellow rubber duck floating on the surface of the sudsy water, as he continued, “I got tired of waiting for you, so I thought I would spoil myself.”

Sherlock tipped his head at the man, a courteous smile plastered on his features like any good host might display, and happily replied, “Why, by all means, make yourself comfortable.”

Lestat’s thin fingers, with their manicured glassy nails, picked up the duck. His eyes inspected it intently, as he gave it a squeeze and no sound came out. Those eyes moved from the toy back to the detective in a flash, his mouth turning down at the corners, and with a disenchanted tone the man criticized, “I find your lack of squeaker very disappointing.”

“What are you doing here?” the detective grumbled, with a roll of his eyes. He pointed a flat palm at the man in his tub, hating to have to resort to redirecting the conversation to have the man get to the point, “You’re obviously not here to bathe.”

The man ignored his attempt. His eyebrows knit in confusion, as he disapprovingly continued, “What possible reason would you have for removing such an entertaining novelty?” He released a grating sigh, and groaned, “I am sure whatever it was that it’s convoluted and dreadfully boring.”

“I found it distracting.” Sherlock retaliated, his teeth gnashing together with a snap. His agitation was increasing as the man toyed with the damn duck some more, spurred by the increasingly painful tension in his brain. He pinched the bridge of his nose briefly, the pain behind his eyes receding, just a little, as he sighed. He opened them again, reposed, and replied more tactfully, “Now, I have answered your question, perhaps you will return the favor. Tit for tat, hmm?”

Without turning his head the pale sapphire gaze was upon him through the long-lashed half lids, bereft of amusement from the direct approach Sherlock was taking with him. The blond released the rubber toy as it splashed into the soapy water and sent the white suds flying haphazardly. Most trailed down the pale sculpted flesh of the bathing man while others began darkening the detectives clothing with seeping moisture of popping bubbles. The sideways glance was appraising him and measuring his response and so he gave none. Instead he remained as still and casual as possible, refusing to acknowledge the further attempt to distract from the original question he had posed.

The silence hung in the air for a few more long moments, the blond held out as long as he could, before puffing out an exasperated breath, snatching the duck back from from it’s bobbing position in front of him.

"You're making this horribly painful," The irritation was obvious and blended with tones of disappointment, as Lestat proceeded to hold the toy at eye level in front of him, drawing the detectives gaze to follow his actions. "I've already told you."
With as much effort as it would take one to pluck a petal from a flower the slender fingers tore the head clean off the thick rubber body of the bath toy before the eyes narrowed and focused on the consulting detective. Completely without warning the severed head of the duck struck him hard in the right sinus. Sherlock had to prevent himself from being totally staggered at the force of the impact. He was entirely incapable of reasoning how he could have been taken off his guard so suddenly, his mind was reeling worse than his face hurt from the blow and he quickly corrected his stance and rubbed at the wet welt below his left eye.

"Well that seemed hardly necessary." The consulting detective scowled. "Perhaps I should rephrase the question. Why are you pursuing me? It's obvious you have John Watson so what exactly do you want from me then?"

The pale lips parted in a laugh as the body of the decapitated toy was tossed carelessly over his shoulder and the pale man raised a satirical eyebrow at him. "I have already answered that too. You know, for a detective with world renowned reputation, you are awfully dim. Do try harder."

The urge to punch out the obnoxious intruder was quickly bubbling up. "You obviously want me to entertain you in some fashion but won't get around to the point. Should juggling suffice?"

"Oh would you?!") The slender man's face lit with a glee that Sherlock wasn't entirely convinced was contrived, which only served to confuse him more and subsequent to that confusion came the growing rage.

"Don't be ridiculous! Get out of my tub and tell me where John is!" With fists clenched, he began to seriously analyze his probability of success in the small space, when the other gripped the sides of the tub. The detective found himself frozen in place with a wicked grin.

"I will make you a deal and before you refuse me, listen." The movements were graceful as any dancer as the alabaster flesh rose from the suds and exposed even more ridged muscle and perfectly toned flesh. "You play my little game and I... I will help you find you're lost puppy—er—doctor."

Sherlock's mind was racing, roaring like the charge of a hurricane's winds, working to analyze this strange deranged man that plagued him. He wished to strip the man of his motive, his intentions, his reasoning, in order to garner what he really was up against. Yet his mind refused to focus, distracted by the game, by the threads his deductive skills could find running in every direction, by the naked form revealed before him. To refocus his wayward mind, Sherlock slipped his hands into his pockets and proceeded to inquire, "And then what are the rules to this game and what is it exactly that you expect to win?"

"Towel." It was a quick order, not a request. Sherlock clenched his teeth and grabbed for the nearest hook, where a yellow towel was hung.

"Not that one." Another demand, which was followed by an action that defied all logic and reason. As if on cue the cupboard door under the sink slowly pulled back, revealing a stack of folded towels within. Sherlock closed the distance in one easy stride and grabbed out the towel on top, handing it to his unwanted guest, trying to hide his surprise and intrigue.

Lestat took the towel with a grateful nod of his head, the wet tendrils of blond curls dipping with the motion. He gave the detective a cheeky grin and, motioning at the stack of towels in the cupboard, the vampire suggested, "Looks like you could use one yourself."

Sherlock ignored the comment. He was wet, drenched by the drizzle that still fell outside and by the suds his intruder had splashed at him. He could care less. He was still trying to piece everything together. Lestat dried himself, obviously unperturbed to have an audience—rather enjoying it,
actually—working the towel over every inch of his rock hard body, as he playfully hummed the tune, *In the Air Tonight*, by Phil Collins. When he had finished his body and was working at the wet ends of his long dangling curls with fist-fulls of towel, the man finally answered his question, “The game is, I want you to give yourself to me, willingly.”

Sherlock was slightly confused by the casually stated response, which had multiple avenues of possible intentions. “But, to what end?” he redirected.

“Well, you see, I have a remarkable gift.” The man explained, hanging his towel, “But it comes at a cost, the benefits of which I believe outweighs the somewhat questionable moral sacrifices.”

“Get to the point.” Sherlock growled through clenched teeth.

“What if I told you that you could escape from all of this…”

“Escape? What London?” the detective quipped shortly, “I’m not interested. I fairly prefer London. Besides, I’ve already had an offer to fly the coop, which I gave away. Sorry, you will have to try harder.”

“Oh, I don’t mean London, Mr. Holmes.” Came the soft alluring purr of Lestat’s voice, the sound capable of piercing even the strongest of mental armor. His sensual mouth moved into a coy grin, as those preternatural eyes leveled on his through the lashes. “You are thinking too small.” He admonished. “What if I told you there was a world beyond what you know.”

“Yes,” the detective scoffed, noisily, “It’s called opium. No thank you, I am taking a break.”

The room was suddenly filled with Lestat’s laughter, the pitch was sharp and startled the detective, who bit his lip, making him all the more angry for being startled by something so benign. The blond dropped the towel carelessly to the floor and cast a dazzling smile of amusement at the brunet.

“I like your style, Mr. Holmes.” The complement was entirely sincere as the alabaster skinned man stood displayed before him in all his naked glory before he continued, “You are completely on edge and yet still sharp as any razor with that perfect wit of yours. I am quite enjoying myself. Now let’s move this along. What have you discovered about me, Sherlock? I know that you haven’t been wasting your time.”

“Well you are a B-list failed musician who likes to pass himself off as a vampire and has most certainly taken to killing. I estimate that you have been an active serial killer for quite some time.” The information he had gathered had been annoying to sift through, mostly due to the lack of any real evidence. He never guessed—never liked to resort to such drastic measures at any rate—but of this he was quite certain and all he had to do to make it concrete was to say it as though it were absolute.

"B-list?" Lestat scowled, looking offended. "So harsh Mr. Holmes but I know you well enough to guess that my music is not within your realm of taste, so I shall let that one slide.” He smiled with the right side of his mouth, the long dangerous tooth peeking through the pink cover of his full lips, as he raised his eyebrows at the stone cold detective riding out his storm with an impressing air of disinterest. It was a challenge, an unequivocal invitation, as he added, slyly, “Now, what if I was to tell you that immortality is real?” His tone becoming inquisitive and playfully he drew a finger to tap his chin, his entire naked stance changing from challenging to act like a studious professor testing a haughty student. "What would you find the most unrealistic part of that?"

"Obviously, that you think you are a vampire who can live forever by drinking blood." There was more fantasy then reality when it came to what he was able to dig up regarding the man who was
called Lestat. What he had been able to confirm from all the sources he had found was how infuriating and arrogant the man was.

"But it is true. I would be happy to show you..." Before Sherlock had a chance to finish the breath he was inhaling there was a sudden rush of air. His world shifted rapidly as he felt the lighting fast touch of a gentle press and the whoosh of motion that stirred his hair and clothes. Within the micro-second it took for the consulting detective to register what was happening the man’s body was inches from his own and before he had time to shove the other away the blond was suddenly out of the bathroom and leaning casually in the door frame off the bathroom, eyeing him hungrily. Spinning deductions screeched and grinded against one another, sparks flying, as their probability was eliminated.

The detective could feel his brow pinch painfully with his attempts to make sense of the last few moments, when the other smirked and turned his back on him, walking towards the bedroom. Sherlock’s brain was no longer feeling bombarded like before, there was a shift in his mental focuses as his mind transitioned from keeping a lock down on his mind palace to completely filtering and analyzing all of the strange and intriguing interactions currently taking place with his guest. He followed through the ensuite door. There was nothing in the bathroom that would provide anything that the man himself could not better.

His question came out strained through grit teeth and he hated it. "How did you do that?"

"You tell me, detective." The last word was said nonchalant and superciliously.

"So this is your game then?" Sherlock stopped, fragments of his scattered observations began highlighting themselves, as he sifted through the settlement in the screen that he used to view the world around him. "You're going to perform parlor tricks and then have me try to deduce how you've accomplished them?" It was disdainful, thick with resentment and offense. The detective was beyond this kind of distraction and irritation—even if he couldn't explain what or how these phenomenal feats were performed. His narrowed saturnine gaze nailed the man across the room from him, who was casually straightening the clothing he had laid out on the detective’s bed. It wounded his pride to ask, but Sherlock forced it out, "Is this a means for me to earn information on where you're keeping, John?"

"Parlor tricks? You're wit is beginning to wan. It's much more complicated than that." It did not take the immortals superior senses to feel the pregnant tension in the room.

"Then show me." Sherlock was past asking nicely, the words were as much a command as they were a challenge. There was obvious distraction in every movement and action the man took, the words he chose, his nudity, overt sexuality in his body language, disillusioned romanticization of the concept of killing and blood consumption. Dangerous, absolutely. He knew without a doubt that this man was a psychopath, whom he was caught up in a perilous game against. John, yet again, was in the collateral blast zone.

The expression melted in slow motion off of the face of the pale killer who stood across the small space from him. With the transition came the sinking chasm of fear that was opening up in the detective’s gut, threatening to swallow him up without any logical thoughts as to his own suddenly very real, mortal danger. A wet pink tongue exposed itself and moistened the pale lips of the man as they curled up into a grin and the ice-blue eyes darkened with a hunger Sherlock had observed as being something akin to lust in others.

"Gladly." The word had only just registered in his ears before he was wrapped in the iron embrace of the other man, the syllables hot on his throat as the snap of the world breaking over-took him.

Excruciating pain. He felt as if he must be crying out but the sound was drowned by the rush in his
ears. He felt his body become weightless, the ground was a blur beneath his person. Before he realized it he had been hurled across the room, had hit the wall with enough force to crack the dry wall, and was now sprawled on his own cold hardwood flooring, gasping for a precious breath. His mind reeled, consumed by fear of the unknown—how was it possible?—by the crushing pain of the impact that wracked his back, his ribs, and his lungs, by the need to just breath that left his head back, mouth open and gasping. It was hard to think beyond the essential, as his vision adjusted to being flat on his back on the floor, and he could see his assailant still on the other side of the room, grinning wickedly.

Just as he tried to break loose, to spin one desperate theory, his vision was filled with the white hard body of Lestat, who had skidded to the floor boards in a relaxed reclined pose beside him. His head was propped by an elbow on the floor and his glowing blue gaze sparkled with mirth and enjoyment, as he chuckled, light and mocking. “Oh, Sherlock,” he said, drawing out the last syllable of his name—like Mrs. Hudson would when she was overwhelmed with compassion for his cold and strange ways. His tongue licked his lips again, this time slow and sensual, purposed. “I do love it when you gasp.”

He was weightless again, the ground somewhere below him, his body propelled into the air with such force that he was unsure if he was spinning or vertigo shook his vision. He was suspended, over the bed for a moment, his vision barely able to catch a solid quick glimpse of Lestat standing now, hands in fists on his hips. Then he was moving again, there was a loud thwack, and pain blossomed across his chest—ribs cracked, three, possibly four, impact trauma.

Sherlock was pinned to the opposite wall now, like a saint nailed to a wooden crucifix about to be torched. Searing heat raced from his feet up the length of his shins to his knees, then his thighs, and his hips—he thought he could smell smoke, scorched fabric and his own burning flesh—as hands were suddenly on him and Lestat’s face was before him. The press of the killer’s body brought the sudden realization that he wasn’t really burning—even though the pain had been real enough. Those eyes looked up at him, the man’s chin resting against the middle of his sternum, as his hands—surprisingly crisp and cold—were under his deep plum dress shirt, roaming slowly up his torso. He couldn’t move, could barely turn his head. Gasping did nothing, seemed to bring not a single breath to his lungs, making them ache, crying out for air.

He felt no tension as the buttons of his shirt were torn open. He could somehow hear each of them ping a surface over the roar of the aching that wracked his entire frame. He felt the greedy pressure of the roaming hands glided downward, over his belt and the front of his pants, as a soft pink tongue wet the indent of his exposed navel. The pressure on his chest relaxed a fraction and he suddenly sucked in a large volume of air, which only made his lungs burn more. The blond head bobbed back a touch from his stomach and those pink lips slowly moved, a gentle and hushed voice spoke to him, “Just remember,” it said, “you asked for this…for what I’m showing you.”

Sherlock wanted nothing more than to retaliate, but every fibre in his being resisted, their sole focus at this point life, living, somehow surviving. He felt his body slide down the wall, the blond head coming to his neck, as the wound where John had bitten him was torn wide. There was a torturous burning in his veins like molten fire, slowly ebbing into a throb that rode the thin line which bordered pain and ecstasy with each thunderous beat of his heart. It wasn’t just his heart pounding in his ears, he could feel the draw of the mouth that now suckled at his jugular.

Amidst the tempest of pain and confusion the deep feeling of fear began to mingle with desire, amplified by the press of the body against his own. His mind was reeling, the door to his guarded mind had been blasted open and like oil in water, memories of the last time he had felt John’s body against his own rose to the surface. The pain melted away until there was only the pressure of building pleasure.
John was with him. Their need for one another was great and growing, all consuming, driving their bodies together, their hands through one another’s clothing and hair, and their mouths to work together as though one. John was stronger than Sherlock had anticipated, more experienced and educated too. Their love making he may have started, lit the flame that sparked the fire, but it was John who had accomplished it. Sherlock had thought himself to be the aggressor, the hunter, the dominate lover, until John had shown his true colors, his true feelings. He had usurped control the instant that Sherlock had initiated the slip from friendship to something more. He had been eager and full of folly in light of John’s conviction to the cause. John was solid and steadfast. John had shown Sherlock things he had only observed between others—had once even considered irrelevant to his own life. The press of another’s body for comfort, the closeness of another’s presence in a room, the sharing of oneself, and the receivership of another’s.

With each fractured memory that came to his mind’s eye it felt as if they too were being consumed by the creature that held him captive. Never had the detective experienced what this man was doing to him. No drug nor intoxicant had ever given him such euphoria as that which rolled through his senses now. The nagging alarm was a quiet annoyance in the back corner of his perception. He was with John now. The memory was as real as living flesh in that moment.

The scene changed, John was gone and he heard his own pathetic whimper. It was echoing, as though it did not resonate from within the confines of his own body, but someone else’s. The lids of his eyes felt heavy, drooping open and closed against his will. What he could see was half blurred, plagued by bothersome black blotches that flickered in and out of his periphery. The blond stranger was there, younger, scared but somehow still invincible, covered in blood and surrounded by the bodies of several wolves, with his hot breath pluming into the cold air of the snow-covered forest around them.

Before the cold set in they were somewhere else, in a swamp, with stone crosses and angels. A cemetery. There was another man, dark raven hair—Louis—and his eyes were green flares, blazing and angry. His teeth were bared, he was screaming, but no words left his mouth. Sherlock could see the long length of his eye teeth, bone white and ominous like the teeth of a large carnivore, as they sank into the flesh of his neck.

There was no pain. He felt weightless again and completely exhausted. The head pulled back from his neck, the mouth wet with his own red blood, as John’s deep blue eyes bore into him, hungry and greedy. He tried to say his name, couldn’t hear the sound, and John gave him that small knowing smile. His hands held him upright by the front of his shirt but Sherlock couldn’t stand, he was too tired. He felt his body being lowered to the floor, onto something subtly plush and flat—the area rug in the parlor—John’s eyes never left his own, steady, firm. His own eyes blinked lazily, he had never felt the draw to slumber like he did now. He felt cold.

The detective tried to call John’s name again. Still there was no sound. John gave him a left sided smile. He was over top of him—or was he on top of him?—and in a soft whisper he asked Sherlock, “Do you accept my gift?”

The detective wanted to say ‘yes’. He wanted to affirm this, without a doubt, but there was something—nagging—at the back of his mind that made him swallow the words. Instead he heard himself answer emphatically, “No.” Was it him, had he done it, or was it just instinct, some kind of mental autopilot that had taken control of his mind and body?

John’s thick brows crossed and his eyes glowed brilliantly. His face melted to reveal the pale killer above him instead of his lover. The detective could feel the blond tendrils of curls, still damp, trail lazily over his cheeks, as the vampire, replied simply, “As you wish.”
Then there was nothing but darkness and the cold and finally sleep.
Chapter 20

Heavy white snowflakes fell all around and blanketing the city, adding a new crisp brightness to the dark London streets. The grime from the roadways and vehicles turned the slush to an ugly brown that had begun to push up and puddle against the edges of the side walk, mingling with the snow shoveled diligently by shop owners who were not used to shoveling. It was not often that it snowed in London, so the soft whisping flakes seemed extra special those whom knew enough to appreciate them. Louis’ sneakers were no match and so he headed out at the start of the evening to acquire new footwear more suited to the wet London winter and in his first stop had settled on a pair dark brown leather Faulkner tops.

He had been staying at Armand’s while the other immortal was out of town, seeing that he had to abandon the Baker Street flat due to his own dangerous influence. He was going to make his way to check-in on the consulting detective shortly but needed to make a few other stops first.

As if on cue, the familiar jingle that was set to announce his auburn haired lover was calling began to sound from inside the pocket of his jacket. Unconsiously he smiled as he pulled forth the phone and paused in his wondering to duck under the awning of a nearby business and out of the way of the other bodies traversing the busy sidewalk.

"Did you know I was thinking about you?" the vampire asked his lover warmly, bypassing a traditional salutation.

"Always, Louis. There are little alarms that go off whenever I cross your mind. It's quite annoying actually with how frequent it is and all. I wasn't going to say anything but now that you mention it..." The voice was comically apologetic towards the end of the jab.

"How awful for you. You're calling so I am assuming you're either back in London or will be soon?" The rich emerald eyes scanned the street and took note of the few homeless beggars competing for the meager riches that they could acquire from the more fortunate that hurried by in the sopping wet mucky streets. It didn't matter where he went in the world, it was the same scene with a different setting played out.

"Cutting to the chase, aren't we? Well you are half right, I will be back soon, tomorrow night in fact and I would like to inquire if you would care to meet me?" Armand’s tone became a little less playful but lost none of its sultry delivery.

"That sounds wonderful," Louis felt a whoosh of relief go through him as he exhaled a breath he hadn't really been aware of holding. "I must admit, I missed you."

"Louis? Is everything alright? You sound stressed." There was a short pause, "It's Lestat again I am sure. What new hell has he stirred up?"

“I fear that Lestat’s interest in the detective and his doctor has only escalated.” Louis replied honestly, with regret, stepping back out from under the shops awning as canoodling couple invaded to take shelter.

The vampire was headed back down the street to his destination, as there came a long suffering sigh from the other end of the receiver. “Louis, you really should not involve yourself in his affairs.” The other vampire said, both sympathetic and patronizing, “You do not have to follow him around
cleaning up his messes.”

“I really did not want to entangle you in this problematic situation,” Louis said, pulling the collar of his coat a little higher to keep the wet from running down his neck, “and I would understand if you wished to keep your distance.” He waited a moment, trying to calculate the proper response. It made little sense to mince words with a vampire as keen and cunning as Armand. “But the truth is, I need your help.”

“Ah, yes, isn’t it inauspicious to not be able to read the thoughts and mind of one’s maker?” the other vampire’s voice was serrated. Louis knew that the edge was not meant to cut him, although he understood to pain the other was feeling well. “You are insufferable, Louis,” the voice on the other end added, it was only slightly gentler than the last comment, “and I am a fool because of it. Of course. When and where?”

“Tomorrow.” Louis replied quickly, “I will text you the address when I have things prepared and your assistance is required.”

Armand had given Louis a reply but the vampire was distracted and missed half of what the other had said. Something damp and unpleasant had fallen with the sleet from the sky, plastering itself to top of his head. He grabbed at it, pulling it down to see that it was no less disgusting than he had assumed—a sopping wet and torn piece of toilet paper.

“Louis?” his lover’s voice questioned.

The vampire inspected the discarded strip of toilet paper, noting something written on it with a permanent marker. Bringing his attention back to the mobile at his ear still, he quickly ended the call, “I’m sorry, Armand. I have to go. Thank you for your offer. I look forward to seeing you again tomorrow.”

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John’s face, hair and shoulders were wet from the flakes that fell from the sky. He didn’t care. He was standing out on the patio, watching a pillow case disappear into the darkness of London far below him. It was one of many messages he had sent over the railing, an idea that had come to him after he had happened upon a Sharpie in a desk drawer. He had started out with toilet paper, thinking he could write many messages that someone out there below him might find, and then the wet snow had started. He had stripped the pillows in the bedroom and wrote all over them things like, ‘Help! Kidnapped! In highrise penthouse! Get Sherlock Holmes!’.

“Take that you, bastard,” he growled to himself, as he threw another S.O.S tea towel over the railing.

He turned and headed back in, the automated glass doors retracting as he approached to allow him back into the warmth of the suite. This was something at least, as crude as it was. It was an attempt to escape. He was going squirrely. The phone call from his mysterious captor the other night had only made things worse. It was like an itch that you couldn’t scratch.

The doctor sure as hell did not feel like waiting around any longer for the wanker to call. He had done that most of the day and it had been exhausting. The phone had never left his side. It was in his pocket. John had not wanted to put it down even for a second. What if he missed the call? He’d be happy if the bastard even sent him a text, for crying out loud! He had played with the mobile, tried to see what he could access on it or through it, but of course it had been properly disabled. He could not make outside calls and he wasn’t even sure how he could receive them. He couldn’t text, he couldn’t surf, he couldn’t even win a damn came of Angry Birds. It was clean and locked, like one might have expected.
But this, perhaps was a real chance. If someone managed to get one of the messages to Sherlock he could get the hell out of this damned prison, find Mary, and sort this mess.

John was still unsure how he felt about the detective and the ‘incident’. What does one make of something like that? What had possessed him to bite the damned fool? He couldn’t even remember how it had happened, just being shoved off and the taste of the blood in his mouth. When he thought about it, the pang of iron on his taste buds resounded throughout his tongue and cheeks. It was strange, even more so than Sherlock’s nude sprint through the flat after the pig and his bath. God, that had been torturous.

John had tried not to think about what that man had expected him to sit through but now it was fresh and real and tangible, something to occupy his mind. He allowed the thoughts to come and for the first time he tried to rationalize his own actions. Why had he sat in there with him? He could have turned around and walked out, back to Mary, back to his sanity. Instead he had tried to resist temptation. Awful, excruciating, painful temptation. Sherlock knew how to set the scene. The damned evil genius had chosen to languish in the bath tub on purpose, knowing that John would have a hard time refusing a gander at that white marblesque form of his, all long and lithe, sprawled in the claw foot tub that he had no hope of fitting. The doctor had tried to stare at anything and everything that was not Sherlock Holmes. He had failed miserably.

His eyes had selfishly roamed the man from the top of his curly head to the tip of his out stretched legs, toes pink from the hot bath water. He had noticed things that he hadn’t wanted to—the new things that were there on the man whose body he had once known like the back of his own hand, whom he had mapped many times with his own hands.

The shame that normally thwarted such thoughts was late washing over him and the force with which it normally drenched him had waned. That did not sit well with John.

The doctor soldiered up, straightening his back and jutted his chin, in a physical attempt to allay the control the thoughts had over his person. He marched over to the island, where the black sharpie lay. He picked it up and spun it between his first to fingers, before he set off to find more soft, nonlife threatening, messengers to send over the balcony into the dirty streets of London below.

There was a chiming like sound then that rang throughout the penthouse, playing a soft pretty melody, similar to a door bell.

A door bell?!

John ran to the large slab of metal that was the door. It was flat and cold and for all purposes seemed to be impenetrable, but it was the only door in the entire place that could possibly have a bell. He banged on it and shouted, “Help! Help me! I’m trapped! I’m a prisoner! Get me outta’ here!”

The only sound that replied to his pleas for help was a clicking and sliding that evolved into a fizzle and a creek, as the metal slab suddenly pulled back, retracting into the wall like some kind of Star Trek door. Revealed behind it was a proper door, with silver trimming. The handle was large and elaborate and the tongue on the top moved, as the person on the other side opened it.

John laughed hysterically. He even raised his fists in the air and whooped, until his saviour stepped inside and closed the door. The doctor was confused. It was certainly wasn’t Sherlock or Lestrade.

“Y-you?” the words stuttered from his mouth, as he looked up into the pale face of Mrs. Hudson’s new renter. What the hell was his name… “L-louis?!”

The dark head gave a nod of agreement.
The metal slab began to retract back into place and John panicked. He attempted to lunge for the door, past the man, but a strong forearm held him sufficiently at bay until he was once again imprisoned. Then the reality sank in and the doctor thrashed his way back from his captor. Panic transitioned quickly to rage and John thrust a finger up at the man who held a good five—maybe six?—inches on him, bellowing, “What the hell is your game? Was this your plan since moving in?!”

“I apologize for the deception, Dr. Watson, but it really was a necessity.” The man said. His voice was soft and silken, calm and assuring. His eyes were earnest and, hell, were they ever one crazy shade of green. They damn near glowed, rimmed with the dark soft lashes and finely arched brows as they were. With a sigh, one brow arched a little higher and then he moved, he drew up his hands in a peaceful diplomatic gesture and John realized he’d been staring. The man continued, in his oddly calm manner of speech, “Nevertheless, I must ask that you refrain from casting any more items off the roof top before you do hurt someone or worse, attract any unwanted attention.”

“Unwanted attention, are you daft?! I want attention!! I want the hell out of here!” John roared, yelling as loud as he possibly could to affront the man’s insensibly quiet tone.

The man’s mouth was a thin line. The lips were pale, almost white, and full, but set so placidly. “That has been the plan all along and trust me that it is in the works. If all goes accordingly you shall be accompanying me tomorrow evening.”

John hated this. Hated him. Was the man honestly trying to make him assurances after having kept him locked up for days on end? The question he desperately needed to have answered came next, quick, without thought, just yammered. “And Mary? Where’s Mary? Why can’t I remember what happened?”

The diplomatic voice gave an equally non-partial answer. “You suffered quite a bad head injury, as I am sure you are aware, and…”the voice paused, tried to take the time to calculate, what was to be said next, “as for Mary, unfortunately…”

“Where the hell is she, what have you done with her?!“ John roared, yelling as loud as he possibly could to affront the man’s insensibly quiet tone.

“She’s dead, John.”

John felt the wind crushed out of him, as though those few words had gripped him and squeezed all the air out of him. He knew that it was because a part of him didn’t want to believe what he had heard and worse yet, he knew it was because another part of him did. He felt his body stagger back a few steps, felt a sudden ache overcome his brain, as if it were swelling in reaction to the crushing squeeze that still crippled him. His eyes were on the floor, sightless, as in his mind’s eye thousands of images flashed of Mary, his Mary, sweet Mary. Smiling, crying, laughing, joking, mocking, angry, sad, and more, as though a projector was skipping slides too fast for the human eye, creating an ever changing animation of the photos of her.

Then they stopped. Something changed, kicked in, a wall came down, and he refused the other part that believed. “That’s a lie.” He said, stubbornly, his hands balling into fists at his sides, as his back went ramrod straight.

Those impossibly emerald eyes flickered. The unbelievably smooth planes of the man’s face shifted, gave way, to register sympathy. He shook his head and softly admitted, “I arrived in time to save you but I was too late to help her.” A pink tongue darted out to moisten the white lips. Then, “I am sorry.”

John didn’t really remember swinging, but his arm was moving, hurled by his body with his fist aimed at the stranger’s too perfect face. There was a flash, a blur of motion, and then he sailed past
the man, as though he had misaimed all along. It didn’t make sense—missing him. Punching
seemed like the only rational thing left to do, so he swung again to the same affect. A blur,
movement, miss. John felt like he was drunk. He certainly wasn’t used to missing. How was this
guy able to move so fast? Why was his movement so disorientating?

“Calm down, John,” the man pleaded—no more diplomacy—this was an earnest plea for reason.
His hands were raised in surrender, showing good intention. “It would be wise for you to stop
resisting and heed what I have to say.”

John wanted none of this. “Ha! Why don’t you stop lying and say something worth listening to?”
He had wanted to sound threatening, but he was all breathy. He felt winded still and the punching
hadn’t helped improve his dominance.

Louis sighed. It was frustrated and pained. “I promise you, doctor, that I am not lying. Ask me
anything and I will give you the honest truth. But please, don’t bother asking what you already
know.”

John gave the man a wary look. “Then why am I really here…” he asked, then quickly gestured at
the ground with both hands, amending, “actually here!?”

“I told you, to keep you safe.”

“That’s not a real answer.” He snapped, with a dramatic roll of his eyes, “Safe from what?”

The head cocked ever so slightly, the straight black hair hanging like a curtain along the sides of his
angular face. Those eyes captured him, as the voice answered him, “A man has taken an unnatural
interest in both you and Sherlock Holmes, who has the means to cause you both great harm.”

John gave a short guffaw of laughter that burst out of him like a bark, as he flung his arms out
stretched and mockingly bellowed back, “Welcome to every other day of my life.” The man was not
startled by the outburst. John narrowed his gaze at the other and in a darker, deeper tone, challenged,
“Tell me why this guy is any different than any of the other psychopathic evil genius’ out there with
a hard on for bringing Sherlock Holmes down?”

“Because,” the man lifted his chin and replied, simply, “he is like nothing that you have ever known.
Nothing even close to normal.”

John snapped his fingers impatiently and scolded, “Quit pussy footing around this and spit it out.
Sherlock is not normal, okay! Why is this one so dangerous?”

“Because, John,” there was the briefest moment of hesitation in his quiet voice, before he finished,
“he is a vampire.”

John’s eyes went wide and glaring. He blinked a few times and tried to stifle the laughter, as
mockingly he pointed at Louis, and chided, “You’re a fucking loon, that’s what you are.”

Diplomacy was definitely out the window—as the other man’s brows folded down over top of those
blazing eyes and he snarled back, “This is why I did not want you to know the truth, the gravity of
the situation is beyond your realm of understanding!” The bite in the sudden rise in Louis’ volume
hurt his ear drums and the doctor winced. Then the brows lifted a touch and the man added, “But I
gave you my word and I will honor it.” Earnest again, the voice seemed to plead once more for John
to listen, to understand, to heed. “He is what I have said he is. An immortal, with the key interest of
manipulating you and Sherlock as a means of entertainment. He means the both of you harm and is
more than capable of accomplishing it.”
“I can’t believe this.” The doctor giggled, with a bouncing shrug of his shoulders, “I’ve been trapped in here for days and this is what you have to say? That Sherlock has dug up a vampire who thinks he’s bloody fascinatin’?"

“I know it sounds fantastical John.”

“Fantastical—seriously fan-tastical? You expect me to believe this?” John yelled, throwing his hands up in the air. “I have put up with Sherlock on an opium bender and even he has never come up with something this outrageous! I don’t know where the hell it is that you have come from or what it is you expect to accomplish but I refuse to be a part of it.” He made an ‘x’ing motion with his hands. “I’m not going anywhere with you. Not until you bring me Mary.” He turned then on his heel, heading away from the doorway, walking past the kitchen into the living room, as he added in a softer tone, “Now if you excuse me, I have some cushions to toss off the balcony.”

John felt a sharp shove from his right and was knocked clean off of his feet. He fell hard back against the couch, the plush pillows breaking what otherwise would have been a painful fall. He whipped his head back up to find Louis there, in front of him. “What the—how the hell did you do that?!” he stammered, trying to get back on his feet.

To his immediate vision John did not see what or how he was knocked back down. There was a slight blur again and he his backside hit the couch. Louis did not even really appear to have moved, but he had to be responsible. He loomed before John now, feet above him, standing like some ominous demon over a hapless child. What the fucking hell is this?! How is this happening?! They were useless thoughts that did little to quell the questions and the rage that was growing inside of him.

He made to sling another punch. His hand was deflected and before he could rationalize what had happened his throat was being crushed and he was now looking down at the other man. With lightning quick movements that the doctor could neither explain nor understand he had been hoisted up off of the couch by the hand that gripped his neck. The hold was tight but not strangling, enough to balance his skull without crushing his windpipe—calculated and performed with skill—the arm that held him did not shiver with strain. His feet dangling John tried haplessly to release the fingers that held him captive, all the while staring down into those glowing eyes.

The hand drew him closer, a feat of strength that was truly not of this world, and John felt the cool press of the others cheek to his own, as a snarling voice whispered into his ear, “Now, you will listen and you will come with me tomorrow night. Whether you choose to believe it or not Mary is dead and I am your only chance of making it out of here alive. Do you understand?”

Johns hands stilled when Louis grip loosened, allowing his nod before he was released and coughing he rubbed at his throat, staggering back a few steps to grip the near by settee for balance. The scene was surreal and that was saying something coming from the last 5 years of his life but still, the man in front of him, the story he was being told, Mary. John felt like the line of reality was slipping from his grip and fighting it he tossed his head down, eyes clenched tight as he gave his head a violent shake, in hopes to clear it and only immediately regret his decision.

"That was an unwise decision.” The voice sounded like it was underwater as his head spun and he lost his balance. A strong arm gripped his own just long enough to steady him before it let go and again the pale tall man stood in the same place he had just been, as if he had never moved at all.

"Dammit..." John sputtered the curse, trying to reason his concussion as an excuse for the seemingly paranormal insanity he was experiencing.

"Do you see now how easy it would be for me to end your life? Yet I choose not to. It was too late
for me to help her, it is not yet too late for me to help you and Sherlock." The tone was matter of fact.

"If Mary is dead, then where is Sherlock? Why isn’t he here?" The question had sprung from John’s lips quickly.

"In chess you never keep two pieces on the same square. You will see him tomorrow night, the plan is to take both of you out of London for a time, until things settle." There was an uncomfortable open ended tone to the words, as Louis shoulders relaxed a little and his eyes glanced about the penthouse.

"How bloody long is that supposed to take and then what?!" John felt the frustration instantly boiling back up and had to slowly inhale to lower his hear-rate.

"Then both of you will be free to do as you please." the answer was simple enough and delivered in such a fashion that clearly sounded, as if it was a guarantee to the finality of their interactions.

Watching the other man slowly make his way about the lavish penthouse, John began to follow him as the long strides carried the creature towards the glass wall that lead to the balcony. He paused a moment to frown at the naked frame of the once plush armchair as he passed it.

"So... let me get this straight. If I follow you right, a vampire killed Mary?" It sounded just as ludicrous coming out of his mouth as it did in his head. "Why?" he finished up the first question with another.

Louis didn’t turn back to give his reply, he simply made his way around the suite and cast an appraising look at the state of things. "Actually, for once Lestat had nothing to do with this one, simply poor timing and odd coincidence. It was Mary's past that caught up to her."

"Wait a second. I don't follow.‘ John did not see that coming, and in line with the rest of his night, logic was striking out.

"The attack on your home was a separate incident. Not to say that those individuals do not still pose a threat to you but they are not a concern presently. The most pressing matter at hand is getting you and Sherlock out of London." Louis had made his way back down the hallway from the bedroom and stopped at the top of the landing that best overlooked the large open concept living and dinning spaces.

After a few long moments John asked, "So now what?"

"Now you must wait and I must leave. I will be back early tomorrow evening." Louis had turned towards the door and John’s heart-rate escalated.

"Wait! You're just going to leave?!" baffled and feeling as if his one chance at freedom was about to slip away he moved to block the man from the doorway.

"Yes, John and I need you to promise that you are not going to throw anything else over the balcony." to compound the tension in Johns muscles came the scolding tone in the rich timbers of his deep voice.

"W-Why shouldn't I?" It was a pathetic retort and came out with all a degree of petulance he wasn't aware of possessing.

"Don't be stupid, Dr. Watson. I just explained it to you. The wrong people find you, everyone loses." the slender fingers reached within the coat pockets and drew out a pair of dark gloves in preparation for the exterior weather yet Louis did not advance towards the door that John obstructed.
Nothing about what the other was doing, his actions, manner or motive made sense.

"What do you stand to gain by your so-called-protection of Sherlock and I?" There had to be a hitch. Why was this man working so hard at trying to convince him of the legitimacy of his kidnapping?

There was a curl at the corner of the full lipped mouth that seemed rather satirical on the creature’s face. He shrugged, it looked heavy. “Perhaps redemption,” Louis said. His voice sounded forlorn and melancholy, as though this was a conversation that the creature must have had with himself many times, without resolve. Those ethereal eyes caught his, and he added, “or possibly forgiveness.”

John did not feel sympathy for whatever this thing was—a vampire—and callously he snorted, “Pfft!” and sneered, “well you certainly aren’t going to get anything like that from me. As far as I am concerned, you might as well just go and fuck yourself.” It was blithe, without feeling, and had come out of the doctor with little remorse. He was past playing mind games—any games—with this thing that held him prisoner.

Louis’ gaze was frigid then and it was easy to see that he was perturbed by his captive’s ignorant refusal to cooperate. In a rigid tone, blanketed with palpable frustration, the creature tried a new tactic. “Look, John,” it said, raising a placating hand, “what will it take for you to cooperate with me tomorrow night?”

John rose up on his toes, pointing a finger right in the creature’s chest, as he challenged, “I will tell you this! It will take a hell of a lot more than Hollywood theatrics and a good grip!”

The creature’s lips pressed into a thin white line, bridled and still fierce. John didn’t second guess himself. The outburst was fueled by rage, fear, and despair. Mary wasn’t dead—she couldn’t be! He couldn’t remember what had happened so why was he just supposed to believe this thing that he was telling the truth. He could tell John whatever he wanted, he was still his prisoner. No, he would not accept this manipulation, this deceit! He would fight it.

Louis sighed, long and grating, and then he offered the doctor something even more ridiculous than tales of Sherlock and vampires or Mary having a troubled past. “What if I could show you what happened to your sweet Mary?” He said. It made the man even more irate to hear the utter confidence in the reality of doing such an impossible feat—even more impossible than lightning speed, incredible strength, and glowing emerald eyes? He scrubbed the thought, as the creature continued, “What if I could show you what you cannot remember?”

John bristled and waspishly snapped back to the other, “And what are you going to do? Draw me a bloody picture?”

“Of sorts.” The response was cool and again delivered with an inexplicable mettle. “You know now what I am…”—John was not so sure anymore that he did—“…and I have the means.” The creature tipped his head slightly to the side, that wall of black hair, so sleek and so shiny, slipping over his woolen jumper as though it were leather. “But you would have to agree, John, to allowing me to proceed to do so.”

The doctor wasn’t sure what that was supposed to mean—allow him to do what? Show him Mary’s death, how was that even possible? Then he remembered the speed the creature possessed, the strength, and could feel once more that hand tightened around his throat without even a hint that the man had moved. What did he know? Maybe it was possible.

“Fine then. Yes, I agree.” John whispered. He had wanted to bark the comment, to show resistance
once more, but that’s not how it had come out. He really did want to know, he really was curious. “Show me. Whatever it is, just do it.”

Louis walked past without a word uttered and the doctor followed. They came back to the couches in the open living space by the wall of glass that led to the patio and the creature gestured for the man to take a seat. John pursed his lips but was too curious to object—in the end what choice did he really have? He either could allow this thing to do what it said it could do or he could refuse. The end result would be the same. If Louis returned, as he said he would tomorrow evening with Sherlock, they would go with him, wherever that would be, because it would be better than here, better than this luxury prison. Here he could do nothing. There, he didn’t know what opportunities could await. Perhaps escape, perhaps Mary, perhaps anything. He wouldn’t know until he got there.

So he sat down as directed and the vampire sat down beside him. Not too close, but close enough for John to feel uncomfortable. For one, he was not sure what was going to happen, and two Louis was threatening, despite how the soldier in him fought that acceptance. The creature reached out, the movement was slow and deliberate, similar to the type of movement he would make with a patient. His fingers came to the back of his neck—they were icy cold—and his palm slid into place, applying gentle pressure to draw John’s upper half closer to him. They came eye to eye and John noticed that his gaze danced between each sparkling emerald orb but Louis’ did not. It was steadfast and intense.

In a low whisper, Louis explained very gently, “I am going to bite you now, John. Through the transfer of your blood into my body I will be able to link to your mind and through that link I will show you what I know of Mary’s death.”

John felt his adam’s apple bob in his throat as he swallowed reflexively. Maybe this was real. Maybe he really was a vampire. When those words left his mouth the doctor truly believed them.

“Do you still wish for me to continue?” the creature asked.

This was insane! This was Ludacris! This wasn’t normal. It was far from it. A deep interest swelled within John and there was no turning back. “Yes.” He said, locking eyes with that steadfast gaze that did not waver.
Chapter 21

The doctor’s blood was comforting within his mouth, on his tongue, and his lips, almost sweet and incredibly alluring. John’s body had relaxed into his grip, as Louis drank his first little bit, and the vampire had arched over the slump of the mortal now beneath him on the plush cushions of the couch. It was hard to focus, hard to resist the urge to indulge in the delicious liquid hot on his tongue, especially as the man let out a gasp that was more moan than breath. Louis felt his body respond in kind to the mortal man’s own reaction to the bite and as he took just that little bit more to weaken John’s apt ability to rebel, he positioned himself fully over top of the man, spreading his legs to kneel on either side of the man’s hips, as his mouth worked the gentle connection they shared.

John could feel this shift in position but was barely aware of it cognitively. Normally he would have resisted any such closeness, any other man’s hands on him in the intimate way that this creature had cradled him, but never had this happened to him before. The mouth and tongue against his neck had started something that he could never find the words to explain. It was powerfully addicting and he found himself unable to resist or even find the desire to fight it. He felt the cool press of the rock hard body over him and did not mind being straddled, if it meant this would not end. His eyelids felt heavy, they bobbed open and closed, before finally falling. His breathing was slow and rhythmic but light and breathy.

Then, there was Mary—his sweet dear Mary. He could see her standing in the warm twilight glow of the restaurant, in her lilac dress, golden hair framing her angelic face. She was radiant, her smile demure and full, eyes only for him, as he sat at that table with a ring box before him. There she was, the woman that had saved him, the one that had picked up the broken pieces and put a man back together, when he had thought he would never be whole again. He never could—not quite—but she had made it easier, better by ten fold, even though there was that one stubborn piece that was still missing. She was beautiful. She was his.

Then he seen the dark exterior of the home they had shared, movement so fast and unnatural, slipping in through the upstairs window—as though he was seeing through another’s own eyes. There was Mary again, in a defensive pose, intense and angry. She was bleeding. There was blood all over her, staining her camisole and her flannel bottoms, thick in her hair and darkening her shoulder. Yet she fought back, swung a trained punch and then a kick that was deflected by an intruder in all black—a lithe man nearly twice her own size. Then she was struck hard to the gut. John tried to cry out her name and only heard himself whimper, faint and distant. Her eyes were wide, her mouth gasping, choking, and then the man pulled his hand back and John could see the blade, slick with bright red blood, as Mary—his Mary, sweet Mary—slumped to her knees and then the floor, hands dripping the blood she tried to hold back.

Then he heard his own voice, loud and clear, a ferocious bellow, as the assailant was badgered with a vase. The crystal broke upon impact, shattering against the intruders raised forearms into a million glittering pieces, and there he was—he could see himself enter the scene, attacking the man. The murderer was well trained and well equipped, he slashed a few threatening swipes towards John and he saw himself jump back, calculating how to proceed. It all happened really quick then. John attacked, the intruder dodged and kicked, catching John in the knee, his bad knee, sending him to the floor. As he grabbed at the appendage, the man snatched the lamp from the bedside table and swung it like he was hitting a home run at Yankee Stadium. John watched himself slump to the floor, as the view of the scene was suddenly moving. The assailant wailed and then there was blood and John
didn’t any longer recognize what he was witnessing.

There were feelings that overtook him in that moment, feelings of greed, lust, orgasm, and fulfillment, that did not seem to fit the blood and the neck that was being drank from, but still was captivating and tempting. He felt his own mouth salivate in response, just before the vision changed and he watched the body fall away to the floor and through the vampire’s eyes he could see himself. He could see his own body—it was surreal and unnerving—he was face down on the floor, the wound to the back of his head traumatic and dark from bleeding. White hands reached out, inspected thoroughly, before turning his body over. John could see his own placid face, he was unconscious, and the white fingers gently traced from his temple to his check, to under his jaw, the thumb slipping lightly over his bottom lip, before checking for a pulse.

Then the vision moved, stood up, walked to Mary’s slumped form. The white hands took her and her body was pliable in his grip, her head flopping lifelessly back, mouth open, eyes wide and blank with death. The fingers checked for a pulse, then settled her back down, and returned to John’s own limp form.

Then the images stopped. His mind was blank, black, for a long silent moment, filled only with a lingering sense of trepidation. Then his eyes opened to the warm light of the penthouse suite and Louis was there just above him, body still pressed against his, and on his lips John could see a soft smear of red, before the red tongue darted out and wiped it away.

“I must go now,” The vampire whispered.

“No. Please,” John found himself croak, he tried to reach for the creature, but his body was slow to respond to his command, his hand lifting only weakly. “I want more.”

Louis grabbed his fingers and pressed the hand down against his chest, the corner of his mouth curled ever so slightly. “No, John,” he pressed, with a gentle shake of his head, “it isn’t safe. You need to rest now.”

The doctor was barely aware that he had been lifted, suddenly finding himself in the silken sheets of the king sized bed, head against the soft bare pillows, and sleeps pull stronger than ever. Louis stood over him and the last thing he remembered, was the words, “I will return tomorrow.”

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Louis stared at the illuminated screen of the mobile in his hand and stood another long minute, tapping errantly when needed to prevent the phone from locking, while he procrastinated activating the call he needed to make. Regardless of how much time passed and how tenuous his connections to the mortal world felt as their preternatural powers increased, the most basic feelings and emotions unique to humans remained. Nervousness, regret, annoyance, frustration and all the churning tightness in his belly and chest that accompanied those emotions. While there came strange detachment with the world of which he was no longer a part, in its place was growing the ever deepening experience of his own feelings, almost as if one compensated for the other in a fashion. At times, he had sat for hours and contemplated his reactions to situations, as if he would be able to pluck out the exact trigger for a feeling and knowing it, could then master it. Yet when the moment was upon him again, all that he had dwelled on was absent from his mind and so all his pondering was for not.

Long dark lashes closed out the light that assaulted the fractured emerald orbs beneath. The soft ping of a text message registered over the slow sweet rolls of Tchaikovsky’s *Canzonetta* playing through the surround sound of his borrowed home. It was ever convenient that Armand had left him the access code.
Anticipation. The slow stirring in the base of his gut that rose and settled at the bottom of his chest, tickling his pulse a sliver faster. He knew without looking who it was, it felt impossible not to know and it was one of the things that drew both of them together. The connection they experienced and the depth of it, when they were in good graces to one another, was unmistakable. It was exactly the out that Louis had been yearning for, a reason to not be the one whom initiated the conversation. As he looked at the notice on the screen he became keenly aware that he must have been projecting this desire, thus prompting its reality. Parting soft blush lips, he sucked in a slow even breath before opening his eyes to read the message that was patiently awaiting him.

**I get the feeling you need to talk but don't wish to, is everything alright?**

-A

Louis sighed and contemplated his reply, before he opted instead to call. Hitting the call button there was one ring before the voice on the other end answered.

"I love that you've been thinking of me, Louis but I'm fairly certain that it's not in the fashion I would like to imagine." There was a gentle humor in the words.

"My apologies. Though there is nothing dire, I must confess I may have a bit of a mess to sort out here and wanted to make you aware before you arrived back in London." Louis contemplated recounting the entire story of his abduction of the good doctor and his growing certainty that Lestat was preparing some sort of new catastrophe, but it seemed unnecessary. It wasn't in the nature of their relationship to often require nor expect explanations of their actions or activities.

"Hm, it should come as no surprise that I had a suspicion there would be trouble that required my assistance. You know, Louis, that I already agreed to help in any way that I can. Is there something specifically that you need from me or is this merely a courtesy call?" Armand's tone was compassionate and it set Louis' mind a little more at ease.

"I need to temporarily relocate John Watson and Sherlock Holmes, preferably somewhere far from London." There was no point in not making Armand entirely aware of the plan.

"You mean, far from Lestat." Armand voice had dipped into annoyance with the utterance of the blonde's name.

"Yes." There was a quiet moment where either spoke.

"You know as well as I do, Louis, that if Lestat really has intentions to wreak havoc with these mortals, you have little hope in stopping him. In truth, unless you already have them trussed up and ready to be shipped off somewhere 'safe' Lestat could already have executed whatever nonsensical plan he's managed to put together to entertain himself." Though his intent wasn't to scold, Louis heard the adamant truth in his tone.

"I am aware, Armand. Regardless of what might be, my plans are arranged and I will be taking Dr. Watson with me to gather Sherlock as soon as I am able to tomorrow evening. You had mentioned you're return so I am letting you know that when you arrive I am uncertain of where I shall be because of all this. If you would contact me when you arrive I would like you to meet me before executing any part of the plan." Louis held his ground and reminded himself that he had been detailing his rescue plan for several evenings now and was feeling fairly confident in it.

"Alright, Louis." Tired acceptance was in the tone. "Let us hope all your plans are not shattered like glass by Lestat's carelessness. I think that Sherlock may just have the stamina for immortality but his
little friend not so much and it is clear that they are quite fond of one another."

"It won't come to that, Armand. What I need from you is you're trust and your patience." Louis felt a pit in his stomach at the reality of Armand’s statement.

"Of course, Louis. You know I can hardly deny you anything. Send me the address of your first stop tomorrow night and if I arrive after you have left then I will call you. Is that acceptable, lovely one?" the endearment was exactly what Louis needed to hear at that moment, when he was feeling as if he was slowly slipping off a ledge of guilt for the mortals he was now desperate to protect.

"Thank you, Armand." 'I love you', was in those words as they left Louis lips.

"And I you, Louis. I will see you on the morrow." Armand had ended the call and Louis slipped the small device from beside his ear as the screen went black. Taking another deep inhale he steeled himself to make the last of the arrangements needed for his plan.

***

“Oh, thank goodness you’re here, Inspector,” the elderly woman’s voice cracked and sputtered, beyond the thin hands that she wrung together under her chin. Her eyes were red and glassy from crying. She quit her hand wringing only to swipe at her sniffling nose and to open the door wide for Lestrade to step inside the foyer of 221B Baker Street.

“Came as soon as I could, Mrs. Hudson.” He said. It was an automated response that years of Scotland Yard had trained him to regurgitate at the sight of tears and the sound of sniffling.

He had gotten word that a woman had called for him from Donovan—it wasn’t like her to deliver messages about the office, especially regarding Sherlock, but she did seem to still have a soft spot for his land lady. Perhaps she sympathized. When Lestrade returned the phone call the woman was insistent that he come to the flat personally. He had not lied. He had come as quickly as he could, although he really hadn’t wanted too.

“He’s upstairs—oh, please, go straight away, and check on him will you?” She managed to get out between restrained sobs, as he dabbed at the red tip of her nose with a handkerchief she had produced from a sleeve end.

Lestrade gave her a nod and a quick, whispered, “a’ight,” before he started slowly up the steps to the upper flat of her only remaining resident. She explained as he went that she thought the detective was laying across the door. That was why she had called. She could not open it and felt for sure the man had done himself in or something of that nature, for he had failed to rouse.

The inspector highly doubted it—at least he hoped Sherlock wouldn’t lower himself to such despicable measures—he was supposed to be finding John Watson.

The Yard hadn’t found shit. Nothing on Mary or John, and they had absolutely no idea who had targeted the couple. It did look a lot like Mary had planned to leave. All of her stuff was gone and nothing of John’s was touched. Donovan was certain that Sherlock had caused some massive marital feud that had ended in the dramatic disappearance of sweet Mary and that John had simply taken off to catch up with her. It was romantic woman bullshit. Lestrade didn’t quite buy it but in all honesty, it was the best explanation he’d heard yet.
The Yard had also closed his penthouse case. Open and closed, obvious mass murder gang war crap. It didn’t sit well with him.

As he came to the top of the landing he could see that the door was slightly ajar, as Mrs. Hudson had explained she had left it. The light from the window filtered in through the frosted glass beside it. The elderly landlady called to him from the stairs below, “Is he—oh, inspector—the suspense! I’m old—gah, I can’t take this! I’m going inside.” She scuttled away. He could hear her sobbing all the way to her own flat door.

Greg rolled his eyes and cursed the detective. Sherlock was a brilliant man. He shouldn’t have to show up here and make sure he wasn’t high. Grinding his molars, he gave the door a tentative push. It resisted. It wasn’t a solid resistance, so he pushed harder. Whatever it was it gave a little—an inch. He braced his shoulder against the door and gave a shove. The door pushed open a little more, as something rolled over with a flop on the other side. Now through the ten inch crack in the door way he could see a leather shoe, foot, and ankle—“Dammit, Sherlock!” he cursed, as he squeezed through the doorway to find the detective sprawled on the floor behind the door.

The man was prone, belly on the floor, his head turned at an awkward angle. The inspector considered that he must have rolled him over as he opened the door. He bent down and grabbed the other man’s far shoulder, to pull him onto his back. The body flopped rather lifelessly and Greg was concerned to note that his skin had a rather ashen hue—paler than usual. He grabbed the man’s face between his hands and slapped one cheek and then the other, yelling, “Wakey, wakey, Sherlock! Up and at ‘em, yeah!”

The detective roused, slowly, begrudgingly, snorting to life like any strung out junkie charging back into the here and now of reality. His eyes fluttered open and then squinted shut, as he shielded them with a weakly raised forearm. Lestrade sat back on his haunches, biting back an acrid comment, as he watched the genius pull himself up into a half seated position, back against the far edge of the couch, looking just as bewildered, disgruntled, and disheveled as the inspector had ever seen him. What a sorry wreck.

The flat was just as terrible. Everything was in a disarray. There were papers pinned to the wall above the couch, chaotic and rumpled, papers spread across the floor, tossed haphazardly in every direction, and papers spread across the table beside the laptop below the giant bison skull. Tea cups and beakers were nestled in amongst the clutter. Clothing here and there as well. It was a general disaster.

Greg turned back to the detective, who rumbled a low groan of displeasure, as his hands held his head. “You look like shit, Sherlock.” He stated bluntly.

Sherlock seemed to be aware of the edge in his voice but was aloof as ever. “Thank you, Lestrade, for once again…stating the obvious.”

The detective pulled his head back, letting it flop back against the arm of the couch, exposing the pale length of his throat and the torn front of his shirt. “Jesus, Sherlock!” he cursed, as he realized the front of the man’s shirt was covered in dark speckles of blood. He reached out a hand and flicked the front over, noting considerable bruising towards his left flank and more spatters of dried black blood. There were more bruises and scrapes on his chin and the right side of his jawline—all of it was more than Lestrade could handle. “What the bloody hell have you been up to?”

Sherlock jerkily got to his feet and teetered slightly before catching his balance. The man marched straight over to the mirror mounted above the fireplace on the opposite side of the room, stomping over the piles of paper refuse and knocking clutter out of his way as he went. The inspector watched him check himself over, his hands moving in quick checks over his hairline, his face, his neck, and
chest. Most of the concern seemed to be centered around his throat. He watched curiously as the other pawed his throat three or four times, as though he were looking for something that wasn’t there.

“Where are the drugs, Sherlock?” Lestrade demanded, standing up out of his crouch and pushing his hands into his pockets. When the question went unanswered, he added, “What have you been taking?”

The detective whirled around, eyes wild and face stern. “I haven’t taken anything, Lestrade. You know I’m on a break.” He snapped, stalking back towards the front towards his friend and colleague.

“Then what the hell do you call of this?” the inspector rebuked, pointedly gesturing at the state of the other man from head to toe.

Sherlock sniffed loudly, holding his head high, as he planted his hands in an imposing manner on his hips. “I was eating hotdogs.” He answered succinctly, as calm and as placid as though it were a simple explanation.

Lestrade felt his brows push together, as he tried to jump the hurdle. He fell on his face. “W-what?” was all he managed in his bewilderment.

“Hot dogs, Lestrade, you know the kind made of questionable meat but too simple and too easy to be bad for you.” Sherlock quipped acridly. “It was for an experiment, well, and a contest. I lost and am very sore for it.”

Lestrade’s eyes, face, and body, moved from confused to angry, as he raised his voice and volleyed back, “Hot dogs my arse, Sherlock! You’re supposed to be looking for John, remember? Whatever happened to that?”

With a speed that defied to detective’s obvious state of fatigue and dishevelment, he had snatched Lestrade’s elbow and had propelled him the short distance out of the door. It was all he could do to reel back around and wedge a toe in the jamb so the door wouldn’t close. He could hear the detective give an exasperate grunt of complaint. The inspector peered back at the man through the gap and repeated his last sentiment through clenched teeth. “Find John.”

Sherlock groaned and then hissed. “Why do you think I was eating the damned hot dogs?!” before he kicked the foot free from his door and slammed it shut. The lock quickly followed.

“I will bring Anderson back to bust you, Sherlock!” Greg tried a last attempt at reasoning with the detective. Through threatening him.

“I’m on a break!”

“I’m serious!”

Sherlock groaned, long and hard again. There was silence for a moment. Lestrade wondered if the man had walked away from the door, even though he hadn’t heard footsteps. Then softly he heard the question, “What time is it?”

“Ugh,” the inspector pulled the sleeve of his jacket and stripped shirt back to check his watch, “it’s half past five.”

Silence again. Then a mumble, something that sounded close to, “it will be night soon.” Lestrade was trying to decide if he really did want to return with Anderson or not. It was late in the day and he could really use a beer. The last thing he wanted to do was admit that Sherlock had gotten him
with that damned old bate and switch maneuver and then head back here for a drugs bust at Baker Street.

Then Sherlock ordered him away. “Stop wasting your time, Inspector,” as though he knew what Lestrade had been thinking—didn’t he always?—“and tell Mrs. Hudson I’m not dead so she will stop her infernal wailing.”

The inspector turned on his heel at that point and left down the stairs. A beer really did sound good right about then. As he walked out of the flat’s main door, he was stopped by a young girl, who held a crumpled Starbucks cup out to him. He tossed her the few loose coins he had in his trousers and left Baker Street.

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Lestat was excited and bursting with intrigue as the sun finally disappeared and he returned to Baker Street. What fun this trip had turned out to be. It was even more fun to watch that silly detective try to weave his scientific fact around the supernatural events that Lestat had shown him. It made him laugh just thinking about it, but seeing him in the parlor checking his neck, his head, his entire person over trying to find the wound, the bite, that had left him so weak and so confused, was priceless.

The detective would not find it. That one little thing, out of all the damage he had inflicted on the mortal man, the vampire had taken care of, if only for the simple reason that he knew it would drive the detective nuts trying to figure out how. It was easy enough to heal the wound, a little of his own blood over the bite had healed the skin and left no evidence that he had drank so much of the man. The rest he had left, a couple of broken ribs, scrapes and bruising that should have left him limping.

It was even sweeter to see that the infamous detective was a hell of a lot more resilient than even the immortal had given him credit for. He was up and about within the flat like a mad man, only a slight crimp to his movements to show the effects of their encounter the night before.

That seemed to only fuel the desire growing within Lestat for this mortal man.

Lestat had not bothered to clean anything up when he had last left the flat. The drywall in the man’s bedroom was a little battered in spots and the tub was still full of the water he had bathed in. It was very entertaining to watch the detective investigate these things, standing in the respective rooms assessing and deducting and trying to explain it all.

It was more intriguing to see him stop. Like he had somehow shut off the need to know, Sherlock was in his room, undressing, pulling out freshly pressed clothes from the closet. He redressed, ran wet hands over his face and through his hair, before slipping into his iconic wool jacket and headed out. He brusquely bypassed his concerned land lady and left the flat, stopping outside to light a cigarette and talk with a young girl, huddled in a nearby alcove of the building next door.

It was easy for Lestat with his immortal powers to tap into the conversation. The detective’s mind was locked against him once more but the girl was an open book, he simply spread the pages of her mind, and listened. They were discussing in code, something about money for a cup of tea or a bite to eat. It was obvious that this was not a random encounter, they had met before in passing, and she had obviously waited to bring him something. The money was a part of this exchange, he gave her a bill, and then she in turn gave him a piece of toilet paper.

The paper had been wet and she had painstakingly worked to dry it without mangling the fragile message penned upon it. Then he seen it, clear as day in her mind, her thin cigarette stained fingers working with the message over a fire in a crude barrel somewhere out of the wet snow. The message on the paper was even more interesting than Sherlock’s meeting with this dirty little street urchin.
Help, penthouse prisoner, it read.

Lestat’s hands rubbed together in delight as the young woman confirmed what he suspected. John had gotten a message out and Lestat knew exactly where he was.

“Oh, Louis,” he said to himself, with a deep dark chuckle, “you really have been busy.”

Sherlock took off like a flash, he was in the street, flagging a taxi.
John had woken from more dreams of the detective in compromising positions. With familiar moans of ecstasy and pleasure ringing in his ear drums, the doctor rolled over to check the time. He was almost as disgruntled to find that it was mid-afternoon than he had been about the plaguing dreams of long ago nights spent at Baker Street. His head thumped mildly in comparison to some of his previous poundings while in residence at the luxurious penthouse flat. Still, it was irritating, aggravated by the day light that lit the room.

He rolled back over and contemplated staying longer between the silken sheets. The pillow, even without the case, was soft and inviting. He tucked a hand under his head and another between his knees, as he tucked them closer. The bed was warm and his mind was groggy, as he began to work through several of the arduous thoughts sticking to the walls on his brain like day old porridge.

John only slightly remembered everything that transpired yesterday during the visit from his captor, the American neighbor Mrs. Hudson had rented 221C out to. That in itself had come as a shock and then had transitioned into something more like should-have-known. Then there was the entire vampire thing, including the inexplicable strength, speed, and agility that the beautiful man had demonstrated—there was no other way for the soldier to look at it, the guy was incredibly beautiful, unexplainably pretty, like he was as perfect a creation as was wholly possible. John did not like to make a habit out of categorically sizing up men but this one definitely scored a 10. And last but not least, there was the part about Mary.

There, John drew a blank.

It was like someone had hit the delete key and erased everything. Like the computer had for no apparent reason whatsoever simply shut down. The power went out. His mind was black and empty.

It bothered him that his dreams were filled with Sherlock and not her. The fact that it made him ill at ease made his stomach twist into a knot and then it gave a long loud groan. His hand moved from between his knees to rub his abdomen. There was a dull ache in his lower half that made him wonder when and what he had last ate. He wasn’t sure.

He tried to think more about Mary and failed. His mind seemed to want anything else, latching onto weird abstract thoughts, like how the hell Louis got his finger nails to shine like glass, or why Sherlock kept a copy of *Ghostbusters* on his bookshelves but did not seem to ever watch it, and worse, what was in the fridge and would the toaster be too light or too dark. The doctor brought his hands up and gave his face a cleansing scrub. His mind was scattered, to say the least.

John stretched out in the bed. He laid like that for another twenty minutes, mostly spent finding patterns in the two-toned scraped stucco texturing on the ceiling that looked like animals or constellations and other random crap, before he finally sat up. It took a lot more effort than he was expecting, his muscles complaining and fatigued. The answer popped into his brain like a text message alert: blood loss.

He could see Mary then. The lights came back on and he could see her in his mind. But it wasn’t how he wanted to remember her—the lifeless grey eyes wide and blank—and he wished the power would go out again so he didn’t have too.

He pushed up off of the bed, trying not to mentally register how much work it was and how exhausted he still felt. He slowly made his way to the ensuite, unbuttoning his shirt as he went. He
shed his clothes along the way, one after the other, kicking his pants off last, near the door. The lights came on as he entered, illuminating the magnificent stone and woodwork in a warm glow. He took one look at himself in the mirror and instantly wished he hadn’t. It was certainly not a pretty reflection.

The doctor showered, lingering in the hot steaming water that surged against his body from every bloody direction imaginable, allowing it to scald the hide right off of him, before he scrubbed the rest away. More thoughts of Mary came, some warm, some cold, some wanted, some not, and he cried then. He couldn’t help it, the tears just came, and he let them roll away with the hot water.

He finished and towed off, coming out to notice that there was another fresh set of clothes laid out for him on the divan, just as there had been every other day. They looked just as expensive, but they always fit well and were comfortable. He dressed and went into the kitchen to find some food, passing a mirror hung by the entranceway. He looked only slightly better. Skin pink, hair brighter, eyes puffy, and nose red.

The fridge was full of food and always had been, John just couldn’t recall how much he had eaten over the last couple of days. Now, he was fairly ravenous. He found the fixings for an omelette and got a little creative, seeing there was fresh spinach, tomatoes, peppers, and mushrooms in the crisper. There was bacon too, but he had never been much of a cook and it turned out more like scrambled eggs in the end because he couldn’t flip the damn thing. Mary had always cooked and she had been much better at it. Sherlock had even made him eggs once—and they had been perfect—like damn near everything else the man did.

He ate the eggs in the living room at the coffee table, with a big glass of milk, sitting on the floor like a five year old while he watched the a late afternoon talk show. He tried not to think and it worked for a while. The show was interesting enough, in that zombie-fied kind of way that late day telly could be, as he filled his belly. When he went to the kitchen to find something else to munch on he saw the mobile and his nerves kicked in.

John just stood there like an idiot for a long time, staring at it. He wondered when the vampire—that still seemed ridiculous to admit—would return and where he intended to go with him. Then he finally got up the balls to grab the thing and turn it on. There was nothing new. No text or calls that he had missed. He sighed, fairly disappointed.

He slipped it into his back pocket and then made himself a coffee with the French press, which he enjoyed out on the patio. The sun was already low in the sky but for once there was a break in the dreadful grey that had entombed London for the last couple of weeks and he basked in the light, even though the air was still crisp. The city below was just as oblivious to his presence as it had been the days prior, and yet he felt calmer there than he ever had before. Perhaps it was knowing what he knew now. Knowing that Mary was gone, that she wasn’t out there somewhere, scared, worried, or in danger. Knowing that he would see Sherlock again, soon, and knowing that he would be free of at least this luxurious hell. Maybe he wouldn’t be free-free, but wherever it was it would be new and that was enough for now.

He stayed there and finished off another cup of coffee as the sun set. Then the mobile vibrated in his pocket. Twice: text message. He fished it out in time to read the message on the illuminated screen. It read: Be there soon. There was no question who it was from and he found his stomach flip at the prospect of seeing the vampire again—still weird.

John came back in from the patio to the warmth of the penthouse and wondered why he was so anxious—or was it truly excitement? Either way, it was unsettling. He still had no real reason to trust the American and he wasn’t even really sure what was to happen to him after tonight. Louis
had said that they were leaving, going somewhere safe, and that Sherlock would be included in that plan. That part wasn’t as exciting.

A much as John longed for the detective to find him it was more perpetuated by his own selfish desire to be free than it was to be with the man.

What would they do while they were with this American, waiting for things to die down so it would be safe? Sherlock would go batty, especially if they were to be locked up somewhere else. John hated watching that man when he got squirrely and unfortunately it didn’t take much make him start to twitch. Who was this other vampire anyway and how the hell had the detective dug him up? Was that really the right term to use, dug up? Didn’t seem right.

Louis probably wouldn’t explain anything. He seemed to avoid conversation.

The reality remained that he had no idea where they would be going or what they would do once they got there. The only thing for certain was that they were in a level of danger, of which John was still attempting to comprehend and that this creature—vampire, whatever he was—was legitimately trying to help.

John couldn't help but recall the feeling of guilt that came over him when Louis had bit him and shown him everything that had happened. He had experienced it as if he had been the other man, he felt all of it and despite his natural resistance to however impossible everything seemed there was a part of him that knew without a shadow of a doubt that Louis was somewhat desperate to ensure that no harm came to himself or Sherlock. That certainty brought him a lot of calm, especially now while he glanced out toward the long stretch of glass walls and saw the darkening sky.

His contemplation was stopped with the knock at the front door, scaring him more than it should have, or maybe exactly as much as it should have and he scrambled from his place to answer it. With a deep breath he heard the locks release and he gripped the handle, giving it a turn and opening it.

"You weren't kidding when you—?" The words stopped as he registered the pale man in front of him was not whom he had expected.

"Hello, John." The man was slenderer, shorter, with a more angular cut to his cheeks. The long straight black hair that he had expected was shockingly contrasted by perfect ringlets of blond that framed similarly pale perfect skin and settled around his shoulders. The eyes that looked at him were made up of mesmerizing icy blue shards, dappled with cobalt, and the look in them immediately had John backing away, as the very real terror of the predator in the doorway set in.

"Shit." The word slipped out as his peripherals started to frantically scan the entry for anything that could be used as a weapon against the intruder.

"Now, now, no need for such language," tsked the man as he stepped inside the suite, leaving the door ajar behind him, John noticed. The creature drew a hand to his chest and gave a quick delicate bow, "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Lestat and although I'm sure you've heard all sorts of things about me, I am here to inform you that they are likely, hardly the truth."

John could feel his eyebrows knit together skeptically. Nothing about the man casually pursuing him denoted anything but a predatory intention. "Le-stat? Interesting name, I have heard of you. Forgive me if I'm not much on introductions but where's Louis?"

"Oh Louis is on his way. I suspect he should be here very shortly, with Sherlock as well." Lestat paused when he felt the twinkle of hope from the mortal doctor and smiled. "See the thing is John, I, like your dear detective I am so very often misunderstood and like Sherlock I have an insatiable
desire for entertainment. Sometimes it does get me into trouble and I would be lying to say that people don't often get hurt as a result of my desires but I generally have the best of intentions."

"What are you here for then?" John was getting anxious. A part of him instantly regretted being so direct, realizing it would have been in his best interest to stall the psychopath in front of him as long as possible, until Louis arrived. Unfortunately, it was far too late now.

"Direct. I appreciate that, all this cat and mouse does wear thin after a while." Lestat shook his head and gently smirked in amusement. Then his eyes narrowed and in an earnest voice he addressed the doctor once more, "The truth is, John Watson, I'm here to give you the choice I never had."

"And... exactly what choice is that?" John felt the hairs on his body rising as he saw the flash of fang behind thin pale-rose colored lips.

"You know what I am. Louis has shown you as much. I'm offering you immortality. Become what we are and I will grant Sherlock the same. An eternity to solve crimes, powers beyond your pathetic mortal reasoning. You will stay as you are now, without ever being touched by sickness or death." Lestat's words were strong, implicitly genuine, as if he were a god offering ascension into heaven.

John had stopped backing away when he had reached the first stair of the landing, as did Lestat, just a few feet away from him. He swallowed hard to make sure his voice didn't crack as he answered. He didn't need to sound as scared as he felt but there was no doubt in his answer. "No thanks. Not interested."

Lestat's smile became a pout, bottom lip sticking out slightly, as his shoulders slumped. "Are you sure?" he asked, dejectedly. Then quickly he scrunched his nose and smiled wickedly, as he suggested, "I think we should ask Sherlock."

"Well, you said he's on his way. You can ask him yourself." John stood a little straighter, feeling as if he was sure now to have enough time for Louis to arrive. He couldn't believe he was putting so much faith in the other creature to be his and Sherlock's savior.

"Oh no, I'm incredibly impatient. Let's give him a call shall we?" Lestat pulled out the mobile from his pocket and extended it to John who eyed it like it had offended him. "Oh come on, John. Just take it and give him a call."

John hesitated another moment and then plucked the phone from the pale slender fingers of the hand extended to him. He swiped the screen and brought up the call menu then tapped in the digits of the consulting detective's mobile. The doctor gave the blond one last look and the other threw up his hands in a defensive gesture, chuckling, "It's not going to bite you, John."

The dark blue eyes narrowed at the word choice, as his thumb hit the send button and he brought the phone to his ear, hearing it ring once. Lestat smiled at him, dazzling white teeth with sharp incisors exposed as the second ring registered though the small speaker. John's heart rate began to rise. He heard the third ring and the tell-tale sound of the phone call being answered.

"Sherlock—?!" The name just finished passing the doctor's lips when he was turned dizzily by a sudden maelstrom and the cold steely grip of the vampire held him immobile from behind.

John heard his own cry echo throughout the penthouse, as a wretching tearing pain ripped into the flesh. With a sickening pang he realized that the vampire's teeth were deep in his neck and he was helpless to stop them. The creature had a hold of his left arm, stretching it out to expose the thick trapezious muscle that stretched from the middle of his throat to the top of shoulder. It was turned at enough of an angle that any movement or resistance on his own part might dislocate his own
shoulder. The other hand held his right forearm, the phone was still in his hand, the screen illuminated and facing him.

To John’s horror the call had been switched to face-time.

Sherlock desperately screamed his name, the sound from the phone’s speakers drowned out by the vampire’s baleful cackle. “He is in no position to help you, doctor. He had his chance. Now…” he explained, in a slow even tone, as his tongue traced circles around the raw wound his teeth had just inflicted. “Now, it is up to you.”

“I’m coming, John!” Sherlock cried out.

“No, don’t!” John snapped, earning a sharp tug on his arm from the fiend that held him captive in his tight embrace. The doctor could feel the warmth of blood spreading down his front and back from the trauma, soaking into the fabric of his button front shirt. The pain was excruciating, worse than a bullet, but still he warned his friend, “Stay away, Sherlock.”

“Oh, he won’t listen to you. He never has.” The vampire replied, in a maliciously dark timbre. His mouth kissed the doctor’s throat, then again just below the curve of his jaw, before he felt teeth piercing the lobe of his ear. Sherlock cried out his name again and then something else—he was talking to the vampire, negotiating, but John had trouble following it. The mouth let go and then he felt the chuckle rumbling from the chest pressed against his back, before the vampire issued him an ultimatum.

“It’s really quite simple, John.” The silken voice said, “Either you live forever or…Sherlock dies.”

“What?” John heard himself question.

Sherlock screamed, “No, John!”

The mouth kissed the outer shell of his damaged ear, whispering, “Take my offer. You can save him.”

“John…” Sherlock cried once more. The wounded sound of his voice was just as excruciating as the grip still held on his arm and the ragged hole in his neck. Then it was frantic and pleading and acrimonious, “Don’t do it, John! Don’t! Wait for me! I’m almost there!”

He felt the hot press of the mouth again, the lick of the reddened tongue against the painful tender trauma of the bite, and then the words, “Last chance or he dies.”

“Yes,”

“No, John!”

The mobile flew from his hand as John was bodily spun in the terrifyingly strong arms of this vile creature. There was a hand at the back of his head and one against the small of his back, as he felt the stinging clench of the teeth once more deep within the muscle of his neck. He let out a startled gasp and winced, as a burning pull laced the vein-work of his upper half, and he realized his blood was being greedily drank.

It happened so suddenly. The burning soon transitioned to a frigid sting. His knees gave way. His energy waned and he felt the heat leaving his body. There was none of the pleasure in this bite that he had experienced the previous night when Louis had drank from him. This was agony, physical pain and no dreamy visions to distract from the trauma of what was happening to him. He could feel the muscles of his heart begin to painfully ache with each struggled beat, the sound of each pulse
deafening, resounding in his ear drums and between his temples. He gave a gasping breath, as the body that held him slowly moved to lay him on the cold ceramic stone of the floor in the entry. His vision swam at the edges, like a radial lens blur on a movie screen.

He could hear his own rasping breaths, short, frantic, panicked and rushed by adrenaline, fear, and shock. Yet he could no longer feel them, could no longer feel he was in control of his own lungs. His eyes closed, if nothing else to stop the swimming of the ceiling above him. There was a warm patter of something against his lips and his tongue naturally darted out to swipe them clean. The shock of the iron taste assaulting his taste buds made his eye lids flutter open. In his vision he could see those crystal blue eyes, as hands fervidly grasped either side of his face, and an ardent mouth was pressed over his own. More of the offending liquid rushed into his mouth, consuming his palate, as his brain sluggishly registered what it must be—and then quickly deleted it—answering only with a sudden gripping need for more.

John could feel his mouth fill and then his throat swallow. The greed only grew and in response he groaned into the mouth sealed against his own, swallowing again. His tongue pushed forward into the cavity above, tangling with another, as he sucked again, and again, each draught fed a frantic desire overtaking him. The more he drank the more he wanted—it was insatiable—and suddenly his arms found the strength to raise, to grope, to pull at the body over him, to return the embrace and take it over in his need for more. Their mouths parted, a ragged breath escaping as Lestat moved to pull back when John’s hands tangled in the blond curls and smashed the stained lips back down to his own once more.

He kissed and he swallowed and he drank. With each swallow a hot pleasurable warmth filled him, consumed him, until suddenly and violently he was thrust away, reaching and grasping like a child for a mother.

Something changed then. A switch flipped and need turned sharply to agony. His teeth grit to bare the sudden wracking pain that infused his torso, like liquid fire tracing its way from his esophagus to his intestines. He doubled over, hands clutching his abdomen. It felt like he was being ripped apart, like his insides wished to be violently outside of the encasement of his skin. The frigid coolness that had overcome him earlier was now a burning that made his skin dampen with droplets of sweat, as if a fever were suddenly upon him. He let out a torturous bellow, his hands gripping round himself, his forehead pressing painfully into the cool stones of the floor and from somewhere near by he could hear the panting voice of the vampire.

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Sherlock cursed the speed of the elevator. His skin itched to stand still in that metal box as it climbed towards the top floor of the impressive high rise. His eyes ticked with the numbers on the digital screen, as they transitioned in order with the floors they passed.

Several minutes had passed since the call from John had been so abruptly ended. Time in which anything could have happened. For once in his life he tried not to ascertain the numerous different probable outcomes that could have transpired. He did not want to know.

The elevator gave a beep and Sherlock couldn’t get the doors open fast enough, pulling at their edges with his fingers before bursting through. The elevator opened onto a small hallway made of silver and white marble, an elaborate entrance for a private residence—the penthouse suite. There was a large door before him and it was wide open. He did not hesitate entering and immediately noticed the dark stain of blood on the white tile. There was a smear leading away and arrant spatters around the point of struggle. Sherlock’s brain wasn’t given time to pick apart the scene as he took a long stride in the direction of bloodstains.
“Ah, finally, Mr. Holmes.” Lestat spoke. His voice was slower and slightly winded, not at all the regular jovial mock of their past encounters as he swaggered into view.

“Where’s John?!” he demanded harshly.

“He’s fine. Better than ever in fact.” Lestat replied, chuckling, as he waved a hand gesturing to the massive open suite. The trail he had been following lead toward the side of a large white sofa that wrapped the space in a large segmented 'U' shape; the back of the closest sofa was towards him.

The detective rushed inside, ignoring the blond beast who was making a show of dabbing his lips with a cloth, as he rushed within. Keeping the blond in his peripheries the long legs carried him swiftly into the space and rounding the back of the settee, he saw a man was laying prone. John’s eyes were closed and his face rather tranquil despite the glaring contrast of his bloody torn shirt. It was obvious that he was breathing easily and it was confounding to witness the doctor so reposed, as though in sleep, without the slightest sign of trauma or harm despite all visual evidence to the contrary.

Lestat gave a subdued chuckle, from behind him, coming around to sit on the couch opposite the two of them as Sherlock knelt and gently slapped at his cheek uttering, "Come on, John," before immediately checking his pulse. His heart sank as he felt the cool flesh, noting not just how pale the man had gone but how smooth the pours of his skin had become.

The blond was seeming to lack his normal luster, as he flopped down onto the leather couch, outstretching his arms over the back, drawing a foot up onto his other knee, perfectly reclined. Casually he tossed the cloth onto the coffee table and smiled dazzlingly at Sherlock with a cock of his head.

The detective narrowed his scrutinizing gaze at the other, meaning to demand what had been done, when Lestat responded tauntingly, “You’re a detective, figure it out. Though I don't suspect you'll need to...” the timber of his cheerful foreboding was unmistakable.

Sherlock felt his forehead pinch together when there was movement at his side, a savage hand gripped the collar of his coat and another painfully snatched the wrist that had touched John’s throat. Turning he caught the bright shine off the dark blue eyes.

"Sherlock," the name was croaked out, a plea, the tranquil expression replaced with a horrific grimace of pain.

"John, hold it together." was all he could think to say, knowing he had to find a way to get both of them out now.

"Sher--l-- I... I can't..." There were scarlet tears welling up and clouding the mixed reflection of colors in John’s eyes as he grabbed at the detective’s lapels. One in each hand, he was suddenly and strongly reeled toward the gaping mouth of his lover. John’s cheek aggressively knocked against his own, shoving his head to the side as the eyes were locked not to his lips but to his exposed collar. Sherlock felt the swift rough rent in the flesh of his throat, as sharp incisors tore through him.

Instinct drove him to fight back, to fend of the feral creature that attacked him. He brought his arms up and between them, pushing back to no avail. No matter how he struggled John did not give an inch. The mouth he knew so well clamped onto his throat, to the wound generated, and he cried out as he was hauled bodily up into the couch. The arms that held him moved to take his about the shoulders and back, fingernails digging through the thick wool of his jacket into his flesh, as the tongue and lips worked blood from him. The sensation was the same as he remembered, the stinging pull of the suction on his arteries and veins, the hapless awareness of his own weakening form being
crushed against the other. Yet this was tenfold more painful. The teeth gnashed at his broken flesh, ripping and licking and inexperienced, the greed driving the doctor to consume more.

The detective could hear his own heartbeat pounding in his ear drums, but also another beating out of sync, both were loud and resonate, drowning out all else. His dark head lolled forward, as his struggling waned and he gave in to the gnawing mouth that pulled on his blood. He could feel his fingers and toes growing cold, all of the heat seeming to collect about his chest, like it was gathering for one final stand off against the invading scourge.

Then there was a roaring thunder clap and a flashing of movement that made him dizzy. Sherlock was suddenly separated from John, his body slumped forward on the sofa and it was all he could do to prop himself upright. He was unsure where John had been taken, for he was certain the doctor had not been removed of his own volition. There was lots of unnatural growls and snarls that filled his ear drums and echoed throughout the penthouse and when his eyes finally beheld the source he realized that most of the noise was yelling.

Lestat was standing, on one side of the room and John was with Louis on the other. They were arguing in a deafening tone that Sherlock was unable to fully comprehend. Louis was holding John back. The detective’s eyes were frozen on his friend. It was John, but it wasn’t.

The doctor was as porcelain white as the other two, his short cropped hair was an unreal golden luster, and his eyes were crisp and bright, the shift between the dark slate and the caramel brown centers was intensely lit, as though somehow illuminated from behind. His face was a twisted snarl, intermittently covered by shameful hands that otherwise clawed at the vampire that held him back. His face was smeared with crimson. It stained his tongue and teeth, his lips and his chin, but it also seemed to be under his eyes, falling as though tears.

It hit him then. This was his fault. This was all because of him. “John…” he heard his own voice rasp.

Those ethereal eyes of his lover found him then and narrowed sinisterly. The other two were still arguing, volleying slur and condemnation, as though they weren’t there, as though they were not a part of what had happened and what was happening. Sherlock’s breath caught in his throat. Those eyes. They were not John. Then the grimace that twisted his features lifted, his brows raised and knit, his eyes opened wide and in one last guttural snarl, John savagely demanded, “Get me out of here, Louis! Now! I can’t control this!”

There was nothing else said. Louis took John and in a blur of movement the two of them were gone.

The quiet that settled in the room was a hard contrast to the sharp yells and the pace that everything had happened moments before. Coupled with the blood loss he was experiencing, Sherlock’s head swam dizzily and he closed his eyes against the swirl of the room.

"You have lost none of your characteristic ability to abolish any sliver of joy Louis might find." The voice came from another in the room that the detective was not even aware had been present. His eyes opened to blurrily focus on the figure who stood near the entrance of the suite.

"Oh shut up! You're just cross that now Louis' attention has been pulled away from whatever ridiculous scheme you were undertaking. Besides, he will be angry now but in time he will thank me for the gift I have granted him." Lestat’s tone was confident and snide as he approached the other man in the room, only slightly shorter then himself with shining auburn curls to rival the blonde’s.

"I may look the picture of youth but you are the child, Lestat, and always will be. It is a fine mess you've created here with these mortals and I'm less surprised than I am disgusted at how proud you
are of yourself." Armand’s words were pointed, edged with a wisdom and experience far beyond the appearance of the years the body showed.

"You're adorable when you're angry, Armand. Have I ever told you I think I fancy you best like this?" The ridicule in the words didn't have the intended reaction as the other shook his head in disappointment.

"I have no interest in playing this game with you, Lestat. Do what you will but know that you're sure to face consequences beyond your narrow scope. Yet again and yet again, you will bring suffering to anyone stupid enough to stand to close to you. That is why you will always be alone." There was sadness in the timber of the words as Sherlock pushed himself to sit more upright when the youth turned toward him and began to approach.

The pale young man knelt before him, non-threatening and with an angelic look of sorrow on the perfect cherub face. Sherlock twitched when he slowly raised a hand toward him and the other paused as a strange calm overtook him and he watched as well as felt the cool smooth flesh of the others slender fingers brush a sweaty bang from his forehead.

"I am so very sorry for you to have been caught up in all of this. Good luck, Sherlock Holmes." Sherlock felt the tickle in his mind that this immortal was just as dangerous as Lestat but that he would look out for John because John was valuable to Louis and he cared deeply for the raven haired immortal.

Sherlock watched the other rise and walk away without another word and soon it was only he and the blond vampire left in the penthouse. The calm feeling had faded with the departure of the young vampire and his brain sluggishly began to try to analyze the situation he was in. John had been transformed into a blood drinker by the creature he was trapped in this room with. He had been bitten, much of his blood drank by his former lover and was too weak to even rise from his slumped position.

"Well now, Sherlock." The blond was standing over him, looking triumphant and self-satisfied. "You still have a choice."

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