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**The Sexual Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson**

by EthicalHedonism

**Summary**

I'm a MASSIVE Conan Doyle Sherlock Holmes fan since I was a wee poppet. I'm also very queer. I have seen every cinematic visualization of Sherlock Holmes. I have always shipped Johnlock, especially in BBC series. But, I also hate queerbaiting.
You are about to read a pornographic romance NOVEL between two loving adult MEN. The sexual activities are varied, explicit, highly detailed and extremely graphic.

Author is a QUEER MALE-BODIED PERSON. So it's NOT the sex some women fanfic'ers write about where it's forced, cruel anal, or 'china cup' or brutal first time. Nor is it that weird anatomically inaccurate shite.

Imagine this premise: This is two men having sex how men actually have sex when they start as friends, respect one another, behave ethically and are not heterosexual. I wrote this for my spouse.

If you're looking for rape stuff this will not appeal to you. Writer's pledge to the queer community: No Fetishisation! (Thank you @Kiri) This is not that. I love these characters from the BOOKS. Honestly, you probably won't like this. Believe me. Please don't read this if you're expecting the usual cliches.

Notes

***WARNING 0.) Work In Progress, Unfinished: Constantly editing for grammar, spelling & punctuation so minor changes happen daily. New chapters published within 12-48 hrs of previous chapter.

***WARNING 1.) Explicit descriptions of self harm via proxy. Here it means paying a person to inflict bodily harm on you, NOT SEXUAL, but a genuine form of self harm due to emotional health issues.

***WARNING 2.) TWO ADULT MEN enjoying explicit, frequent, highly descriptive and varied sexual activities.

***Author is an Adult Queer Male-bodied Person. This is NOT going to contain any of that evil anal rape shite that some put in their fanfics because they Fetishize M/M and don't know we're HUMANS. Look elsewhere! I am a humanist so I don't find rape sexy!

***Takes place after Hound of Baskerville but before R'bach Falls

***read this article and you might understand this writer's perspective:
http://www.themarysue.com/fetishizing-slash/
Or this article:

My spouse wishes me to say: Writer is an Arsehole, a massive Bastard. There! I've admitted it openly: I'm a proper arsehole!

For My Rebel Bird: my Home, my Privilege, my Conscience.
ELEVEN

Eyes blazing, lips parted, breath ragged- Sherlock had begun to crave the sight of John this way. He was becoming addicted to this serious, almost dangerous expression. Literally addicted.

Having subjected his system to years of chemical abuse, Sherlock was intimately familiar with all effects of stimulant drugs. The effects of Dr. John Watson were definitively superior to any concentration of cocaine Sherlock had ever enjoyed. Osculation algorithm development was rapidly becoming another focal discipline for the consulting detective.

Sherlock had learned through careful attention -and if he was honest no small amount of fumbling humiliation in the past 11 days- how to efficiently bring John to this state. This was Sherlock's favorite part: John looking fire eyed, lips wet, expression almost stern. The tall, awkward detective relished the exquisite pleasure of John's now familiar expression here in the kitchen tonight.

This was nothing like Mycroft had implied. (Sherlock made a mental note to correct his brother when next they met) Personal integrations with another human being- with John, his John- were light years beyond masturbation. Sherlock could never have deduced in all his days the sheer, unadulterated pleasure that was to be found in kissing John.

To his surprised delight, the activity seemed permissible at all hours, at all times with John. Never denied to him. Variations seemingly endless, but always the outcome was this powerful other-worldly high. A high so indescribably profound that Sherlock sought it at every conceivable opportunity. The high kept him energized for days. As it turned out, it was permissible to interrupt anything and everything John had going in favor of a kiss. A renewable, seemingly endless supply of narcotic that kept him hooked with, as yet, no ill effect.

Sherlock had learned to distinguish all types of John kisses and could translate their various meanings. Some were free standing punctuation, others longer, more romantic paragraphs of affection. The best were like this one- near frantic, scalding monologues of need that would not end for hours. Each type potent, each set his skin buzzing. But these long marathon kisses were Sherlock's favorites.

Five days ago, 847 GMT, John had referred to this type of kissing as 'snogging.' Sherlock had filed it away. Replay- John: "...shift it Sherlock, (playful shake of head, lovely smile) some of us have steady jobs; can't hang around snogging you all day [pause] unfortunately. (wicked grin)"

The tall man liked the sound of it very much. Such a colorful phrase. He felt a sense of pride that day. He'd lain back on the sofa to await John's return and thought to himself "I've been snogging." A self-satisfied grin stealing his lean features. Throughout that whole day the word returned to his mind. When John had come home, the first thing Sherlock had said was "Snog me, John." And to his astonished satisfaction it had worked.

Later Sherlock learned it was superfluous to verbally request such behavior. As it turned out, (to Sherlock's relief,) the language of John's kissing had preexisting cues for when a kiss would become a night-long snog. Sherlock was grateful to learn this. Eight days ago, Sherlock began diagraming duration and anatomical location of lip contact as related to duration and escalation of kissing. A brush of John's lips against his forehead was a salutation- probability of hours long snog: less than 2%. Same for Lip/hand contact, unless the contact lasted beyond 5.25 seconds then the probability fell between 47-63%. Thus classifying this gesture as a prelude. Lips on neck region
>0.5 seconds seemed to convey imminent snogging with percentages in the high 90s unless interruption invaded, nullifying the contact, dropping the rate to 0% chance. (Thank you, Mrs. Hudson for providing ample data to support those later findings. Mental note: Kill Mrs. Hudson.) Lip/lip contact required further data because of myriad other contributory factors beyond contact duration, such as pulse or respiratory rate, physical proximity, time of day, etc. The universal application of these deduced translations was unknown. But Sherlock had no interest in gathering data from sources other than John. He would compile and upload osculation data on only John.

Presently John was backed against the kitchen sink breathing lustily into Sherlock's greedy mouth. Sherlock discovered he enjoyed brief (very brief) pauses during snogging to mentally upload more data to his mind palace. Sherlock felt he possessed sufficient data to predict that tonight's kiss would last all evening. A Proper Snog. Beginning here in the kitchen, then continuing on the sofa until-

was it Tuesday or Friday?

John's voice interjected softly with a light cough, "Friday.

Clearly been speaking aloud again. Mental note: mustn't do that. It was the high of John's skillful kiss. Concentrate! Ah yes...Friday. So: kitchen then sofa until approximately 2/3 am? And it was currently...2 past 10 now. So 4+ hours until John went up to bed. That would do nicely.

Sherlock felt his confidence surge now, having deduced the most likely outcome based on his data of the past 11 days.

Solved! Back to kissing John.

Another brisk throat clear "Or...you know...perhaps..." John's words trailed off and he scratched at his watch band, suddenly fascinated by it. Quick as lightening Sherlock's head snapped towards John's face. Mental note: still speaking aloud. Well, doesn't matter.

Laser eyes scrutinized John's every micro expression.

Data: Serious face still but not the same serious expression as John's snog me face. Bit of a smile there. Eyes a bit sad now. Face expressing a-bit-not-good. Expression now conveying minor disappointment. Solved it and wanted to resume kissing but John said Or. John said Or. Or?

Or what? Sherlock's chest tightened. His mind raced faster. The tall logician pressed his bony fingers to his temples.


Hrm still speaking aloud. A side effect of the high. Ignore it. Focus! What did 'or' mean?

Was this it then? A handful of blissful days then nothing? John seemed to have recovered from last night's paperwork incident. Replay: John looking lovely in the kitchen doing the washing up, coming up beside John, kissing ensues, hands misbehaving, John making that amazing face, brief pause to determine a probable event trajectory until bed time- apparently deducing incorrectly- John now looking put out and declining with an Or. Where? Where have I offended?

John was mute, eyes shut, fingers pinching the bridge of his nose.

Or: a conjunction used to connect alternatives.
Kissing or _______. Or what? What was the alternative? Logically: kissing OR not kissing. Why not kissing? It was Friday. Friday meant no locum hours tomorrow. That meant late bedtime. Friday last contained kissing until sun up.

OR.

The two letters swirled in Sherlocks mind. His knee began to bounce manically.

Kissing...OR, you know...perhaps...calling it an early night? Kissing...OR, you know...perhaps getting a moments peace from the awkward git?

Two nights ago there had been lovely kissing on the stairs until half 2. There had been 17 kisses within the past 24 hours, one lasting 137min. 'Or...you know...perhaps..' Or!

Or Not Kissing. Why not kissing? Logically: because it was over. 'Kissing Sherlock OR, you know...perhaps...coming to my senses and getting on with my life.' 11 days, 2 hours and 46 min. That's all it took for John to amass sufficient data to be done with it. Done with me. Thus with all highs- an eventual end.

Sherlock saw black pooling behind his eyes. All his teeth ached. He felt the phantom ice of gritty cement against his soles.

Was there a John rehab? Mycroft would know. Chest feeling tighter. And oh how The British Government would relish the I-Told-You-So this time! Mycroft's greatest joy is reveling in little brother's painful withdrawals. Could hear it now "Should have known better, oh brother mine" "all lives end, all hearts are broken, caring is not an advantage, Sherlock." Mycroft had said as much only yesterday. Sentiment is the defect of the losing side.

Sherlock heard John sigh warily, hand to brow.

Ah and here comes the dull speech. Probably a facsimile of Its-Not-You-Its-Me. Sponsored by crap telly. £5 says he invokes that odd little prayer of his: 'I'm not gay.' Let the throat clearing and sputtering begin!

"Sherlock!"
Sherlock shot up a palm like a crossing guard. John ignored the gesture and carried on.

"Sherlock, you are aware you are speaking aloud, yes?" John's voice came out in a tense whisper. The doctor took a tentative step forward. He tried to touch the warning hand, but Sherlock flung him off.

"Aware? Yes. Thank you, John. So sorry, John." Sherlock turned on his heels and retreated to the sofa, snatching up his violin along the way. He squeezed his eyes shut.

"Sherlock-" John began again, shaking his head slowly. "Sherlock, I-

But the staccato string plucking had begun. Sherlock was sulking in a dark mood. "Well here we bloody go again," John thought, "My poor, clueless Madman."

John strode to within inches of Sherlock's face. Bent forward over the stoney sullen mask and yelled. "Sherlock! You are a bleeding fool!"

Icy eyes ignored him.

"Nope! We are having none of that, Sherlock. You are going to listen to me." John was breathing
thickly through his nostrils. His fists clenching and unclenching. No man- no single human being in all of God's creation- could so vex a person like the interminable Sherlock Holmes! The world's only consulting babbling madman. John pinched the bridge of his nose between finger and thumb. Sherlock would be the fucking death of him!

Still...quite a lot of adorable things had been said about him just then. "Never really considered myself 'lovely,'" John thought. He ran his hand over his head reflexively and licked his lower lip. His mouth tingled. His lips were a bit swollen from Sherlock's aggressive passion. His brain flashed an image of twinkling lightening bugs glittering around the tall man's hair in the woods last night. Had it really only been eleven days worth of kissing? Monday before last felt like ages ago. Like another bloody planet.

Dr. John Watson had been to war, he was acutely aware of the trick of time. Five minutes of enemy gun fire could feel like five days. Two months returned from war could feel like two minutes. A mere 11 days. The fusilier rubbed his jaw. In the good doctor's mind he'd been mentally showering the madman with kisses for over a year. In John's mind it started a few months after he and Sherlock first met.

In actuality it had all started like this: a rainy Tuesday night eleven days ago. No wait, it actually began on Monday, early evening. Well the actual kiss had not transpired until the next night. But it had been conceived on Monday to be certain.
Day Zero John's Perspective

Chapter Summary

Here we go...cue the anxiety now!

ZERO

The doctor had been completely knackered. His entire body ached with fatigue. The whole of the weekend spent chasing through London. The post adrenaline crash always made him weary. Monday at surgery had been hell. He felt decades older than his years. Monday was loathsome!

When John had entered the flat, Sherlock had given him the strangest, most accusatory glare. Which was a fair change from the way Sherlock sometimes ignored his presence altogether. John arched an eyebrow at the raven haired man. "Evening, John," Sherlock had said suspiciously.

"Evening, Sherlock," John had replied on his way into the kitchen. John was beyond acclimated to Sherlock's mercurial moods. Truth told, he had grown to expect it. Never a dull moment with Sherlock.

John prepared and ate a light supper, all while Sherlock's intense green/blue eyes trailed him like twin hungry sharks. It couldn't be boredom already. They'd only just come off the case Sunday. John was accustomed to Sherlock's visual scrutiny. Had been for a long time. But in general, Sherlock only paid attention to John when he had little else to occupy his brilliant mind.

John had not expected this level of attention, certainly not on a Monday. What John had expected was a usual evening- perhaps a brief exchange about John's last patient of the day having gall stones. John would say something like "And just how do you know that, Sherlock?" And the brilliant raconteur would perform for a few minutes. John would reward his dearest friend with a bit of praise about his wonderful observational skills and then they would share a warm, comfortable silence. Then Sherlock's attention would inevitably return to whatever it was he'd been doing prior to John's arrival. John would do a bit of washing up, tidying up, shower, blog a bit, then watch rubbish telly. Then perhaps a brandy, then up to bed.

But this was not a usual night. Sherlock was still eyeing John, without a word. On his way to the sink, John hazarded a quick glance at his stoic flat mate. Right. Sherlock was still scanning him. As the sink filled, John shuffled his jumper and uncuffed his shirtsleeves. As was his custom, he removed his watch and rolled his sleeves to the elbows. He felt Sherlock's pastel turquoise eyes follow his every movement. That gorgeous sculpted mouth resting lightly against steepled hands. Brow furrowed in immense concentration. Mop of soft umber curls contrasting alabaster geometric features. Beautiful! John met Sherlock's eyes, shrinking the distance between the two rooms. John gave a warm, unreturned smile before refocusing on the task before him.

Later, John climbed the stairs to change into post-shower pajamas. Sherlock's inquisitive eyes followed him upstairs. In his room, John contemplated Sherlock's behavior. Maybe call it an early night? John checked his watch as he pulled a vest over his torso. No best not. He had only been off work two hours. What was Sherlock doing down there? Felt nice to be watched, though. Rather sensual, a bit pervy. John felt a twitch in his groin. He cleared his throat. He decided to follow through with his plan to indulge in a bit of crap telly.
As he came back downstairs, he saw Sherlock was still observing him. John sank into the sofa, taking the opposite end from Sherlock. The weary doctor settled in, propped his feet upon the coffee table. He stretched and tucked his right arm comfortably behind his head. Unexpectedly, the glowering detective had turned his whole body to fully face the doctor.

Sherlock curled his long legs beneath him and continued to stare. Elbows on knees, steepled hands to chin, pale face flickering blue in the light from the telly. Cheekbones almost emaciated by the contrast. He really was such a beautiful man! John sighed. That milky skin combined with those sharp angular features reminded John of a marble bust. Especially in the dim light where the blue cast made his head seem to float above steepled fingertips. The flicker of electronic light made his glacier blue eyes glow. Haunted by the ghost of Sherlock Holmes. Beautiful! John licked his lips but didn't turn his attention back to the screen just yet.

When their eyes met, John gave an affectionate smile. Casually, the fair haired man draped his free arm along the spine of the couch. John watched Sherlock's eye contemplate the extended arm. But the detective soon refocused on John's face. The corner of John's mouth twitched up in another smile. Then he turned back to the television.

*If he has something to say, he'll say it.*

Hours passed in this way. Sherlock openly staring at John's profile. John was relaxed and permissive. The doctor had never known his enigmatic friend to pay attention to anything that was not of great importance to that massive intellect of his. To be gazed upon for hours meant, in John's mind, that Sherlock was conveying, in his own way, that he cared deeply for John. The flaxen haired man felt the warmth spread through his entire body. Yes, there was definitely something a bit pervy about it all. John approved.

John knew Sherlock. Sherlock was averse to intimate touch. Perhaps Aspergers? Sherlock called it high functioning sociopathy, but he had to be dramatic and egotistical about everything. The doctor once wondered if perhaps Sherlock had suffered a sexual trauma in the past. It made sense that a frequent drugs user could have been interfered with during an unconscious episode. At St. Bart's, the doctor had personally ministered to intoxicated rape victims. It was horrible. John didn't want to consider such violations befalling his detective. He preferred to hope it was all down to virginal inexperience. Or better still, the chosen self discipline of an abstinent monk. Who knew? Didn't matter.

When John first realized he was in love with his friend, he had quickly decided against altering their dynamic. John owned his feelings proudly but saw no need to make a fuss. Instead, the soldier chose to carry on as usual. By the time the doctor realized he was so deeply in love with his best friend, he figured he was probably the last to know. He assumed Sherlock had probably already deduced it long before John. So, what was there to do about it? It was an obvious fact. He felt secure in acknowledging his heart. *Nothing wrong with a platonic arrangement.* After all, John wasn't gay. He knew he would spend the rest of his life with Sherlock Holmes but solving cases was enough. His feelings were his own.

John accepted all of his chosen partner's being. Sherlock was married to his work. Yet, Sherlock chose to include John in that work. More than this, the solitary detective chose to include John in his daily life. It was theirs to share. It was their work. Their life. He believed Sherlock gave him absolutely all that he was capable of giving. If tonight Sherlock was suddenly choosing to dedicate hours to gazing at him, John would happily accept this as a unique form of intimate touch. To John this was more than sufficient. After all, John had two hands and a healthy imagination. A man's sexual needs were his responsibility. No good could come from trying to make another (unwilling?) person take responsibility for his needs. Whatever Sherlock could offer was sufficient.
The soldier smiled through a yawn. It was so gratifying to be basking in this visual Sherlock embrace with sleep settling around. This is what Sherlock could offer, so John gladly accepted. John snuggled his sandy hair against his palm, softly petting himself with the arm supporting his head. If he let his eyes half shut, it was almost as if he were drifting asleep against Sherlock. He turned his face to look at Sherlock again. He let his sleepy smile radiate towards the other man's presence. He let his eyes openly convey all his love. John tried to return Sherlock's intense gaze as kindly and lovingly as he could. "Thank you for holding me tonight, sweet ghost of a madman," John thought. He wanted to sleep right here, just like this.

The pale specter leaned slightly towards him. "John? John? John, do you ever...think of me?"


So, this was what the marathon scanning had been about? John wanted to shake Sherlock round the neck and scream in his face. All. The. Time! Took you long enough! Who's the idiot now?!? You bloody love me and we know it!

Best to let the puzzle solver unravel this mystery himself, though. John had learned that the most effective way for Sherlock to learn something was to allow the man to discover it for himself. John smiled. The Confirmed Bachelor SideKick knew something important before The Great Mr. Holmes! An unusual Monday indeed. Now, how to play this game? How to get Sherlock to tell Sherlock?

John turned his body to almost mirror Sherlock. He folded one foot under himself, but kept the other flat on the floor. He gripped the spine of the sofa with one arm, but rested his right arm against his thigh. He reached forward and lazily spun the remote control on the empty seat between them. Sherlock watched the black rectangle flop in little arrhythmic circles. John waited. He did not look at his friend, he did not clear his throat. He would wait all night for his opponent's next move if he had to. Oh Sherlock, what must it be like in that brain of yours?
Day Zero, Sherlock’s Perspective

Chapter Summary

Buckets of angst!

ZERO

It had started twelve days ago like this: a crisp Monday, fresh off the case. Sherlock was not one for banal sentimentality, lingering embraces or dewy undisciplined feelings. However, while John had been at work that day, Sherlock had gone for a long thinking walk. The lanky man needed to delete all the remaining chaff from the case they had solved last night. He needed to purge the residual clutter from his mind palace. Sherlock prided himself for maintaining the spartan discipline to hold onto only the most useful of facts.

As he hurried along Brompton Rd, a sartorial window display derailed his thoughts. The detective was drawn to a bromine colored jumper in the window. Sherlock’s first instinct was to rush in and purchase it for John. The flaxen military doctor favored pullovers analogous to his hair, but did own a few in richer hues. Sherlock quickly began referencing each woolen jumper John already owned, ordering the list from most to least favoured.

The Welsh purveyor approached with a cordial "Good morning, sir!"
Sherlock stood perfectly still, he felt suddenly ill, nauseated. He fled the shop at a near run, knocking into people. His long legs carried him along the asphalt faster and faster. He could not stop. He pressed himself further and faster despite the burning onset of anaerobic processes. His thighs churned lactic acid into his tissues, but he would not stop. London fused into a blur of honking horns and pounding heartbeats.

When at last his body refused to transport him further, he stopped, grateful to find himself in Portman Square. He steadied a long arm against a tree that was nearly as thin as he. His body bowed, he fought to calm his laboured breathing. Woolen jumpers! In his mind palace? Woolen jumpers?

Sherlock felt acrid bile rising in his throat. His panic flared. He ran north. His long legs pumping frantically, each foot fall: woolen jumpers, woolen jumpers, woolen jumpers all the way home.

He took the stairs up to their rooms two at a time. He crashed through their door, and fell to his knees. He dove under the long grey sofa, ripping and clawing. Where?! "MRS HUDSON!" He pounded a fist against the floor slats. "MRS. HUDSON! WHERE ARE THEY?! NOW! QUICKLY! WHERE ARE THEY?!" He rapped on the floor harder. He flopped onto his back, gasping and wedged himself fully under the sofa. WHERE?! His ears were ringing. Damn your ears, THINK MAN! Yes!

Banging his forehead, he managed to extricate himself from under the sofa in much the way a fish maneuvers on a dock. He crawled to John's chair. In one maneuver he upended the thing. At Last! His trembling hands fumbled with the gaffer tape. At Last! He lay on his back on the rug and smoked.

Three deep inhales later, Mrs. Hudson appeared in the open doorway. "Oh Sherlock no! Must you
do that in the house!"

Sherlock ignored her, greedily sucking in more smoke. He tried to replace all his lost oxygen with high tar.

Mrs. Hudson continued to chastise, her voice like an excited turtle dove. She stepped around him to quickly open the windows. Sherlock sat bolt upright, ash falling down his shirtfront like snow. "Say that again!"

Mrs. Hudson was wringing her hands. She looked down at him, her mouth making that tsking sound of which she was so fond.

"I said I've put them on the sofa arm, Sherlock!" Mrs Hudson indicated the stack of fluffy folded jerseys beside the door. "I'll remind you, I'm your landlady not your housekeeper. Next time you want a jumper, you can get it yourself, dear. There's really no need to shout the house down! Or better still you can something something something something..."

Sherlock misplaced the sound of her voice. The ringing in his ears had returned ten fold. He gawked at the neatly stacked garments on the sofa edge. Time elongated. There was a distinct possibility that he had been running through London screaming "woolen jumpers" all the way home. Sherlock felt his mind shift sideways into a pocket of thought.

When Sherlock came back to himself, there was a crystal ashtray in his palm. From the evidence in the ashtray, he had been pondering a twelve-cigarette problem. Judging by the quality of light in the room, it was nearly 4pm. John. John would be home soon. Sherlock set about putting the apartment right. Then he sorted himself out with a shower and nicotine patch.

Sherlock perched in his chair and proceeded to grind his options to powder. 1.) Murder was out of the question. He'd sooner off himself than kill John. 2.) Off Himself? True, he was known to dabble in the many arts and sciences of self harm, but Sherlock didn't actually want to die. And not just because it meant Mycroft was wrong about something. 3.) Eviction seemed overly dramatic, even by Sherlock's standards. This was John's home. 4.) Telling John was an obvious solution, albeit a repellant one. Sherlock could not endure the humiliation. Monologues about personal feelings seemed to only exist on crap telly. Ordinary humans rarely told others exactly what they were thinking or feeling. Besides what was there to be said? "John, please move your troublesome trivia out of my mind palace."
"John, mundane details of your ordinary life are interfering with my ability to maintain a tidy inner sanctum."
"John, why must I be responsible for recalling your favourite everything in alphabetical order? Please stop cluttering my thoughts with your banal trifles."
"John, you must immediately begin an autobiographical blog so that I don't have to carry around all your ephemera."
Or most dangerous of all "John, I seem to be having great difficulty deleting extraneous information regarding your life. Please explain."

5.) Doing nothing seemed ideal, but Sherlock was never the sort to be still for long. Drama had a curious way of finding him. 6.) The most interesting option would be to gather more data. If Sherlock had sufficient data, he would be able to better decide what facts about John were worth keeping. Yes. This was the best option- amass enough data then sort it all into useful and useless. If that failed to work, option one could re enter the equation...there was arsenic somewhere in this clutter.

Sherlock scoured his face with a dry palm. He had a satisfactory course of action, but still could not determine the WHY of the matter. 1) Why had he devoted an entire room in his mind palace to
John? 2) Why had he done this reflexively? After a thorough assessment of this Watson Room, Sherlock realized that his brain had been retaining and cataloging vast subcategories of his flatmate's life. What troubled Sherlock most was that all this information resides within him without his active participation. He had never consciously decided that he needed to know the length and quantity John's blonde lashes. 3) Why couldn't Sherlock bring himself to delete this clearly irrelevant data? 4) Why was he so overwhelmingly panicked about it all? 5) Why was John doing this to him?

When John came through the door, Sherlock's cyan eyes locked onto him. Data! He needed data! It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. He began scanning thoroughly. The other man did not seem bothered. Why should a mind -palace-usurper care that he was slowly driving his flatmate insane? Damned John!

John. Reliable, intelligent, strong, patient, accepting, humorous, tolerant, moral, professional, kind, a skilled doctor, an adrenaline junky, a truth seeker, a superlative companion, a justice bringer, a crack shot, a willing participant in all manner of weird and dangerous tasks, an all round ideal human being, well proportioned, fit, thin mouth, expressive brow, broad shoulders, stout and rug-

John stood before the kitchen sink, smiled amiably at Sherlock, then turned on the taps. He took hold of the ribbed hem of his jumper and scrunched the wheat-colored wool up his torso. Sherlock went still. John's right hand snaked under the front of the garment. First the left arm disappeared, sleeve loose and empty. Then the right arm swept up gracefully and rotated over the head. The empty crew neck slid off the right hand and puddled into a waiting chair. Thick fingers smoothed the shirt beneath, running along compact pectorals and down muscular obliques. Trained hands undid cuffs. Strong, broad fingers manipulated fabric to reveal naked forearms by centimeters. John stroked the bare flesh of his forearms, massaging tired muscles. Then he deftly flicked his thumb and index finger over his left wrist, pulling away his watch. I suppose you expect me to upload that little show into my brain too? John seemed to read Sherlock's thoughts. He turned from the sink and locked eyes with the detective. The shorter man smiled again, good humour in his azure eyes. Then he turned his back and commenced to wash.

The taller man felt an overwhelming compulsion to stand. To go into their kitchen. He leapt up abruptly. But once on his feet he felt suddenly foolish. He clenched his fists and padded quickly to the sofa. His face felt warm. Why should a man be embarrassed to stand up in his own flat?

Sherlock pressed himself into the far left side of the sofa and resumed his thinker's posture. John did not speak, though he seemed very happy. The man seemed completely oblivious to Sherlock's scrutiny. You've invaded my mind palace you know! When at last the doctor went upstairs, Sherlock felt his whole body relax. He had not realized how tense he was. Thank goodness that was over!

Sherlock settled down along the length of the sofa to review all the data he had acquired. Suddenly he heard John descending again. He snapped himself back into his previous sitting position. John padded over to the far end of the sofa without turning on the lamp at his elbow.

Ah it was crap telly time! Hours of interminable commercials for useless gadgets, punctuated briefly by boring dialogue about meaningless human interactions. Lycra pajamas disguised as jeans; coiffed forensic detectives that could sequence DNA in 2 minute montages; knives for cutting soda cans; gun-totting renegades walking slowly away from explosions; crowds of furry things migrating from cold to warm and back again; blissful silver haired men sustaining erections through chemical ingestion; nonsensical morons using radar equipment to locate GranGran's
spirit in a dark house; a hammock that fitted in a purse; sport. Dusk gave way to night and still John said nothing. I decided not to kill you today, you know!

Sherlock brushed his chin with steepled hands. In the blue light of the television, John looked almost like a corpse awaiting an experiment. The doctor's features were soft and open. His whole body seemed relaxed and comfortable.

Sherlock contemplated the pattern of shadows along the sinewy arm extended along the back of the sofa. Every so often, the idle fingers would trace slow shapes into the upholstery. A backward D, a sloppy treble clef or perhaps an ampersand, a cursive e, a lazy figure 8, a rhombus, morse code M, a doubled O. The fingers moved like soft, sleepy ice skaters. Sherlock felt a fleeting desire to feel them trace their strange codes into his skin. The detective imagined a proper code that he might trace onto John's arm now. He envisioned his fingers ghosting ego te protagam in binary along the line of the ulna. 01100101; 01100111; 0110111...

Sherlock tore his eyes away and refocused on John's face. I will not remember your meaningless code, John. Don't you understand that I need my brain space for important things? Why are you trying to infiltrate my mind palace with such rubbish?

What was it called when a person in your life filled your thoughts but wasn't a case? A person who subjected you to annoying, frustrating, humiliating things but you didn't want to kill them. Someone loyal that you could trust but you didn't pay them. A person who knew you and still chose to associate with you. Someone that didn't seem to mind your personality. A man that didn't just tolerate you because he needed your expertise, but really seemed to accept you though you had little to offer. A non-consenting poison test subject who forgave you. A person to live with and never become bored. A man you could count on. Someone that you looked forward to interacting with everyday.

When the person was listening, it was easier to explain things. When the person heard you, you felt important. Someone who appreciated your observations, respected your process, made you tea. A nonjudgmental interpreter of bizarre social rituals who tried to help you navigate ordinary people's expectations. A handsome, courageous man who smiled at you constantly in a cryptic way that made you feel so utterly foreign in your own skin that you contemplated homicidal rampages—but resisted.

What is it called when you are terrified of the eventuality that this person will justifiably leave because you are the kind of monstrous machine who does not have friends, who cannot and never will have friends? He knows he is your only friend but does not use that as leverage against you. You know who you are but you wish you were the version of yourself that deserved his friendship? You need to find a way to say 'let me alone' but you fear he will heed your warning and are more terrified he won't.

A man who nagged, threatened, pestered and mothered you to no end but somehow that didn't bring out your murderous intentions. An honorable man whose broken, tortured shouts in the night could interrupt your best thinking yet this was not cause for eviction. Rather you felt compelled to hunt down every person who had ever appeared in those nightmares and dismantle their circulatory systems with a grapefruit spoon. Because he saved your life over and over again in so many remarkable ways. A man you wanted so fiercely to protect from all who might bring him harm, especially you. A person far better than yourself who never let on that he knew. Every time that you had time to think, you thought of him, even when you ought to be thinking of more important things.

There should be a word for that. Sherlock didn't think there was a word for that. Perhaps he would
invent a word and publicize it as a generous gift to the masses. Doubtful the commonwealth needed such a word. One word to mean—confusion, loyalty, anger, security, despair, respect, nausea, hope, commitment, panic, with a touch of rage, waves of adrenaline, insurmountable barricades of fear— but underscoring all that was obstinate gratitude. Sherlock didn't believe anyone would understand what he felt. It was probably an odd Sherlock thing. 'I don't want to murder you even though you have changed my entire life without my permission, it's not entirely bad though and also I am afraid. I can't stop thinking of you, only you, and I don't know what to do or why. Help me.'

The doctor was nearly asleep. Slowly, John turned towards him with a sleepy smile. They watched each other. The drowsy man transfixed Sherlock with an enigmatic look. What was the insufferable blogger playing at? Sherlock's ears burned, his throat was dry as if he'd been screaming himself hoarse for days. John's eyelids dropped and he started to nod off.

Suddenly the nervous detective's mouth was moving of its own accord. "John? John? John, do you ever...think...of me?"

No! No! Why! Such a terribly obvious question! Sherlock was on the verge of fleeing out the door into the night. Option One! The arsenic was most under the lamp in his bedroom.

John snapped awake with a start, looking around. He didn't appear to have registered Sherlock's humiliating question. The doctor seemed confused and a bit angry. The detective should have known not to startle a sleeping man with post-traumatic stress. Sherlock felt shame gnawing his stomach to pulp. The world's foremost thoughtless, selfish prick!

Thankfully John seemed to be settling back down. He slowly silenced the television, discarding the remote onto the sofa beside him. He didn't seem to even realize Sherlock was still there.

Sherlock breathed a relieved sigh. It's ok. He will return to sleep and you'll not disturb him again. Would be so nice to observe while John sleeps. To watch his peaceful face and be near his slack body. To learn the cadence of his slumber. To follow the rise and fall of his chest. To absorb the dignity that seeps from him when he's sleeping. Perhaps be here to keep him company if a bad memory should pillage his dreams?

But John did not return to sleep. The former soldier precisely arranged himself across from Sherlock. His azure eyes were bright and accusatory. His body moved like liquid nitrogen—a roiling, slow, dense haze stealing all the air from the room as it crept over the furniture towards the frightened man. When thick fingers reached forward, Sherlock almost cried out. The detective watched as John leaned in to nudge the remote around in slow circles in the space between their laps. What was he doing? Is he upset I've disturbed his sleep?

When Sherlock dared check his face, John was staring into his eyes. The blue pools bore through the detective's skull. John arched an eyebrow. Sherlock felt his whole body shiver with goose flesh. He could hear his heart trying to escape through his sternum. He wanted to look away. His steepled fingers were all that tethered his head from floating off.

The pair remained deadlocked in an unyielding gaze for several minutes. The noiseless flat was a tomb. At last the taller man could resist the compulsion no longer. "John?" His voice was shakier and softer than he intended.

"Yes." It was not a question, but a declaration spoken clearly, without hesitation. John nodded his head. "Yes," he said again. The doctor's voice felt too strong for the hushed space.

"J-John?" Sherlock's mouth was so dry his tongue was plastered to his upper palate. He kept his
eyes focused on the remote control near his ankles. He croaked a tiny exhalation. "John, I-" He twitched and began again, still whispering. "John, do you ever...e-ever..." He swallowed hard, the sound deafening. He ground his elbows into his thighs. The slight pain set his arms trembling anew and dislodged his words. "John, do you ever think of me?" The words tumbled out in a mad rush.
"Yes. As much as you think of me, I'd imagine." John's words were even and smooth. He enunciated them with confidence. When he heard himself say them, he was inwardly shocked by how casual and matter of fact he sounded. Of course he'd had plenty of time to prepare while he'd been waiting ages for Sherlock to gather courage.

Inside, John thought he would fly apart into a billion miniature fires. He felt so proud of his brave detective. Twice the doctor had almost intervened to help the quivering, intimidated man. But thank God his Sherlock was a stubborn one!

The doctor was not prepared for Sherlock's follow up question, however. He heard the other man suck in a gasp, then quickly ask "W-why would you...imagine that, John?" Sherlock's eyes were pleading.

John was stunned. He thought his last answer would be the end of it. A part of him hoped for a kiss. But he should have known better. The world's only consulting detective required proof, especially when the charge was so personal. John did not want to talk it all to death, round and round like a theory up for interpretation. The only way to convince Sherlock was to allow the detective to convince himself. The heuristic approach.

"Please God let this work!" John breathed a silent prayer.

The good doctor divided his weight between his right leg and his left arm. The determined man willed himself to move as slowly as possible. He eased himself off his folded left leg and planted himself back down just centimetres from Sherlock's crossed legs. His movements were precisely controlled. He advanced as slowly as dusk through north facing windows.

With the patient determination of an under-fed panther, John reached out with both hands. He moved by millimetres. He telegraphed his intentions by concentrating his eyes on Sherlock's wrists. The detective flinched but did not pull away when at last the soldier's strong warm hands brushed his wrists.

Insidious as a ivy creeping over mortar, John's thick fingers encircled the bony wrists. The pressure of John's touch grew until he held the thin pale wrists fully in his clasp. He simultaneously rubbed each wrist gently with his thumbs. He stroked the backs of the slender steepled hands. His thumbs mapping the terrain of carpals and metacarpals just beneath the surface. It was Braille in the darkness. Sherlock's breath came in shaky waves through his nostrils.

John pressed his thumbs between the palms, surveyed the furrows with the thoroughness of a chiromancer. He continued to softly trace and knead the creases of both warm palms with his thumbs. He tried to soothe away the tremor of Sherlock's hands.

With time, Sherlock seemed to acclimate to the new sensation. Twice, John saw his detective close his eyes and lick his lips. Sherlock parted his palms ever so slightly- a capitulatory invitation to explore. There's my brave man!

John took resolute hold of both slender wrists again. Ever so gently he angled them away from the sculpted chin. He tried to coax the steepled fingers toward his own face as slowly and carefully as he had moved before. But Sherlock resisted, becoming tense, twitching.

John made his breathing steady and deep. He forced his face into a serene gentle smile. He
tightened his grip, did not yield. John focused on the fearful man's eyes. He tried to telepathically beg *Please, Sherlock. Please be brave just a little longer, my darling.* He clenched the wrists firmly for half a second, then slackened his hold. He repeated the squeeze and relax rhythm a dozen times. He matched his breathing with each clutch. He silently begged with each compression. *Please* <exhale> *please* <exhale> *please* <exhale> *please* <exhale> *please* <exhale>. He repeated the pattern another dozen times.

Soon both men were breathing in unison. The steepled hands began to obey their guide. John lead the wrists towards his face. Sherlock's lips parted.

The flaxen haired doctor brought his chin up and moved his head towards the steepled hands. He perched his chin ever so lightly on the fingertips. The detective's breathing faltered. Sherlock began to tremble again. His deep voice interjected in an anxious whisper, "John?"

John instructed in a soft voice but with the gravity and clarity of a soldier's order. "Do shut up, Sherlock." The detective froze. He blinked. His groin tightened. He opened his mouth to protest.

"Shut up, Sherlock," John repeated in the same tone. The military doctor fixed his man with a serious glare. Sherlock began to quake in earnest, but buttoned his mouth tightly. His eyes widened to see his thought steeple beneath someone else's chin. Panic smeared through his rib cage, but he did not pull away.

John closed his eyes. He let the slender finger tips graze his stubbled chin. He tried to appear as Sherlock did when utilizing the mind palace. *Solemn, mysterious, regal.*

John spoke only when the other man had calmed. His voice was barely audible, full of awe and reverence. "Hmmm. It's brilliant! Vast." He lowered his chin a centimetre and continued in his most sincere voice. "Yes. Just magnificent." The detective felt warm puffs of breath on his icy fingertips. John smiled in earnest. "Just as I imagined. Thank you, Sherlock. Thank you. This is, well, it's perfect."

Suddenly Sherlock was shaking his head emphatically. John opened his eyes. Seeing the genuine terror on his friend's face, he pulled the steeple away from his chin, down near Sherlock's crossed ankles. He pressed his hands over either side of Sherlock's, closing the palms together like a book. He brought both sets of hands up to his lips. He brushed a quick light kiss against the inner set of quivering hands.

Then he relaxed his hold and let the other man slip away.
Chapter 5

Sherlock leapt to his feet. He paused. He did not look down at his flatmate. The tall man sounded like a small, lost child. "Good night, John." And he was gone. John heard the bedroom door close, followed by the metallic snick of the lock being snapped into place.

John didn't move for a long time. He switched off the screen and sat in the dark. He knew he'd pushed it too far. But the truth was it hadn't been far enough compared to everything he wanted. He had tried to be gentle and soft and considerate. He resisted the urge to set his exploring hands free on Sherlock's entire body.

He shouldn't have touched his friend at all. He'd opened a pit in himself that hungered too intensely for the other man. He had broached a flood gate and desire threatened to drown him.

He had a feral ache to grab, to rip clothing, to taste skin, hear the depraved wet sound of flesh pumping into flesh in every conceivable combination. He wanted to fill his greedy mouth with Sherlock until he choked. He wanted to feel his own body tighten around the width of his man until they both cried out. He craved handfuls of dark curls in his fists, earfuls of deviant, ragged moans, mouthfuls of taut flesh. He wanted Sherlock spread and writhing against the length of him. Their bodies slick with sweat. Every muscles burning from exertion. Sherlock babbling unending strings of profanity into his waiting mouth. He ached to posses the other man entirely. He ached to make Sherlock know beyond all doubt that John was the first and the last man to have him. John WANTED everything. It was difficult to breath.

John sighed. Sadly, it seemed Sherlock was not so eager for all that. The fledgling erection faded. John did not doubt Sherlock knew now they were more than friends. But the aversion to touch had been clearly evident. The doctor had crossed line.

John felt ashamed. Not just of his aggressive inner thoughts. But more so because his physical contact had clearly distressed his delicate friend. He wanted to apologize. Sherlock had fled the room so quickly. I've got to put this right. Shame shredded John's viscera. He was loath to consider that until tonight, he had not know Sherlock's bedroom door had a lock. Guilt would haunt his fitful dreams tonight.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Implied/ Referenced Use of Illegal Controlled Substances.

Sherlock further barricaded the locked door with a wooden chair slipped under the handle. He swiftly collected the necessary items and scrambled through his window. The cool night air drew the fire from his skin. He let the breeze lick his burning palms.

Thank goodness for all of Mycroft's past drugs raids. Everywhere Sherlock lived, his first order had always been to preplan an exit strategy. When meddlesome brother tried to force sobriety, Sherlock always needed a quick way to circumvent withdrawal.

At the all night druggist, Sherlock bought the necessary supplies. He checked the time. Bit early yet. As he walked, he ripped the nicotine patch from his forearm. It disappeared into a coat pocket. He dug to the bottom of the polythene and withdrew the packet. He opened the cello with his teeth then crumpled it into the pocket with the patch. He smoked. Where to go?

Remembering he had just executed his anti-Mycroft escape plan made him contemplate a visit under St Pancras. The detective's lengthy strides could transport him there and back in about an hour. Plenty of time. Would pair nicely with his plan. Perhaps.

But tonight Sherlock resisted the compulsion to use. He chose instead to wait out his time with a smoking walk around the outer circle of The Regents Park. He also chose to consider the 'closing hours' as a suggestion. How could the out of doors close? Nonsensical! One dog-end after another joined the patch in his pocket. His lungs protested. He could smoke no more.

From another pocket, Sherlock withdrew The Woman's inert mobile. He crushed the flat black plastic into his palm. But even this could not dissipate the burning of his hands. John.

He started to tremble again. He took a few breaths. There is no such thing as clairvoyance! John had only been winding him up. But it felt so intimate. Too intimate. John being inside his head. John inside him...his brain felt too full. He smoked another.

Sherlock checked the time. Nearly there. He hurried to Angelo's, slipping in the door just after the last diners left. He sat in the banquette near the door and watched the junior staff file out into the night. Angelo finally came through from the kitchen. Sherlock stood. The large ex-thief frowned at the sight of him. He sighed and shook his head but said, "Ok, Sherlock. Lemme check." Sherlock nodded. The lanky detective pointed to the door and arched an eyebrow. Angelo nodded. "Yeah, cheers. Gimme 10, ok?"

Sherlock locked the doors, closed all the light switches and set about upending chairs onto tabletops. He was nearly done when Angelo emerged from the back. The portly restauranteur beckoned him back with a meaty hand.

Sherlock came through the kitchen. He acknowledged Tony with a brief wave. The young manager half stood from counting the night's till and the two men shook hands. "Alright, Mr. Holmes?" Sherlock passed two £100 notes into the grip. Tony put them onto one of the stacks on the desk.
He jotted quickly into a pad, speared one copy with other receipts and inclined the other copy towards the detective. Sherlock buried it into his pocket with the rest of the rubbish.

Sherlock followed Angelo down to the walk in. "He says 15. It was a good service tonight so, you know..." Angelo's voice trailed off. The big man clamped a giant paw into Sherlock's bony shoulder and turned him.

Sherlock wanted this part done with, but it was Angelo's establishment so he endured the familiar rambling speech in silence. "Listen, Sherlock, you sure you don't wanna just go home? We both know what I owe you, but I say this outta all the respect in my heart, as a friend-" Angelo demonstrated by placing his wide hands over his heart. "Sherlock, you gotta stop this, mate. Maybe let this be the last time, but hey, I'm never one to tell another man his business. And you know I'm never one to tell another man's business to a single soul. But maybe you oughtta take up the drink instead?" Angelo gave the bony shoulder a quick squeeze and waited.

By way of answer, Sherlock shrugged off his coat and held it out. Angelo shook his head and grumbled but draped the long fabric over his arm. Sherlock dispensed with his scarf, shoes, and socks. The cold concrete floor sent ice up his legs. He swapped out everything in the polythene for everything in his pockets, then added his socks and shoes on top of the lot. Finally he removed his shirt, draping it over Angelo's arm while offering the bag. "Good night, Sherlock," Angelo said, taking the lot.

"Thank you again, Angelo. And Good night."

Sherlock wound the long scarf above his hips and tucked it down into the elastic band of his pants to ensure it would remain secure. As he removed his belt, he began to pace to keep his toes from hurting. Just then, Linus arrived.
"Alright, Mr Holmes?"
Sherlock nodded and passed the young man the doubled belt. They shook hands. "Sorry for
keeping you waiting, Mr. Holmes. Service was mad tonight! Gimme two shakes, yeah? Loo."

When Linus returned, he'd lost his stained chef coat and white skull cap. He filled the small space
with the smell of roasted garlic and singed rosemary. Linus was akin to a Rottweiler in both size
and demeanor. The tattooed man scratched the wide stripe of buzzed ginger hair atop his shorn
skull as he talked. "So? Like that first time or more like last time?"

"Exactly like last time, thank you, Linus," Sherlock gave a feeble smile. "I've, uh, brought
something, though." Sherlock reached down and retrieved two of the purchases from the druggist.

The young chef's eyes went wide. He took a step back. "Barmy bastard! Mr. Holmes, it's only just
that...well, Tony's old man reckons I oughtta, you know, go easy on you tonight, yeah?" He rubbed
at the new tattoo on his defined left bicep.

"And what do you reckon?"

Linus grinned wolfishly, showcasing his missing canine. "Well, it's your dosh, innit, though? So,
I'm all in for anything but that fucking aerial again, yeah?"

"Thank you, Linus," Sherlock began to unwrap the soap. It was the blocky green bar John used.
The scent of laurels, citrus and coriander flooded over them. Linus had already taken a sports sock
from the multi pack and held it open. Sherlock dropped in the bar. He stood clear, giving Linus
room to take a few practice swings and adjust his grip. Sherlock felt his body tense. Adrenaline
flooded his mouth.

The young man's pocket began a metallic drumming. The spinning weapon dropped down to the
chef's thigh. He rolled his eyes.

"It's alright. Go ahead," the detective said.
To Sherlock: "Cheers, mate."
Into the phone: "Miss me?"
Linus turned his back and listened for a few seconds. Cupping the phone, he turned back to

Sherlock was very confused. "What's the 14th?"
Linus cackled madly. "Well it's only bleeding Valentine's Day, innit!"
Sherlock shrugged.

To phone: "He's undecided, luv." Listening.
To Sherlock: "Tony says it'll be crowded but Angelo's told him if you want he'll set you up after
hours, yeah?" He held the phone out in Sherlock's direction for a reply.
"Alright. Yes, thanks. Thank you, Tony."
Linus gave him a thumbs up and turned his back again, listening. "Yeah, promise. <pause> Yes, luv. I have done and he's already agreed, yeah.<pause> Promise. <long pause> I said I already have done, luv. <pause> I will, I will. Ok! <pause> Love you too. Bye."

Linus pocketed the phone, "Sorry, sorry! Jesus! I swear to Almighty Fuck, Mr. Holmes. That one will drive you nutty!"

"He wants you to 'go easy' on me, I presume?"
Nod.
"And you've told him you will?"
Nod.
"And if I give you another 100?"
"Robert's your auntie's husband. But you gotta do summfing for me, yeah."
"Thank you, Linus. What is it?"
"You gotta clout me one to sell it to Tony, yeah?" Linus smiled.
"So he'll believe I overpowered you?"
"Nah, so he'll forget I lied just now." Linus grinned wider and wiggled his eyebrows.
Sherlock didn't understand.
"Well he's a romantic, innit he? I come home with a proper shiner and Him Indoors will be gaggin for it, won't he? Poor Linus got an ouchie! S'always the proper romantics that need to see a bit of blood before they give us a cutch, yeah?"
Sherlock considered this. "But what about the lie? I don't want Tony angry with you on my behalf."
Linus waved the comment away. "Well it's for 'Queen and Country,' innit? I'm doing my bit, yeah? Helping The Great Sherlock Holmes catch a shambolic slasher. You've made me a real hero to Him Indoors! He'll be buying me one of them minging deer stalkers soon and then you and me will be the sodding bumber twins!"

Linus gave a wink and the two men laughed. They laughed so hard the detective had to lean against the cement wall. They began to settle, but Linus pinched his index and thumb fingers on the brims of an invisible cap and placed it on his head, jutting his pinkies out for full effect. They laughed even harder until Sherlock was crouched in the corner, sides aching. Linus was holding his tattooed abdomen, gasping.

The weighted sock clattered from his grip and rattled on the concrete. Linus made his eyes wide as saucers and pointed dramatically. Still chuckling, Sherlock looked. The two began howling anew. Both men in fits for several minutes. Finally they settled after three more attempts. Linus lifted the hem of his vest to his eyes and wiped moisture from the corners.

The younger man extended a tattooed hand and hauled the tall man up to his full height. Still smiling, Sherlock said, "Shall we, then?"

The chef looked disappointed, his smile fading away. He nodded solemnly. Then he began bouncing on the balls of his feet. He shook out his arms like a boxer. He swooshed air out of his lungs in rapid sets of three. Linus windmilled his arms, swiveled his shoulders, then wagged his thick neck from side to side. He bared his teeth like a rabid hyena. Finally he turned both hands up and motioned 'come here' to Sherlock.

"Ok, Mr. Holmes. Give us a proper kiss, yeah?" He offered his face forward, inclining the left side.

Sherlock nodded. He thought of The Woman. His face hardened to stone. His fist connected just above Linus' left eye. "FUCK!" Linus hopped about the room. The man touched a few fingers to the side of his rapidly swelling brow and nodded. "Fuckin hell! Nice one! Now underline it, yeah?"

Sherlock put too much momentum behind the second punch. The younger man was unable to
recover his balance and toppled to the concrete. He lay there cackling and swearing. He slapped his hands against the floor. He got up energetically in one kinetic bounce. "How's it look, then?" He grinned and touched the spot lightly.

Sherlock looked down at the blood on his bony knuckles. He wiped the thumb of his left hand over the red smear. *John, John's thumb on this hand*. Tonight.

Sherlock checked Linus' face. "Good. Yes. Exactly as you described Tony would want."
"Cheers!" Linus beamed.

Sherlock thought about John smiling at him in the blue light. "Linus, I would like one as well." He considered leaning his head down but chose to kneel instead, given their difference of heights. He rocked back on his haunches, tilted his face up and waited. Linus shook his head emphatically.
"No, no, no! That's A and B the C of D, Squire! No. Utterly anti-clockwise!" He rubbed his hand over his shorn head.

Sherlock swallowed and put up both hands. "Linus, it's for my- He's- I too know a romantic."
The younger man considered this and smiled menacingly. "How romantic is he?"
"Very. Twice as romantic as Tony, I'd estimate."
"How do you figure?"
"He...puts up with me."
A very sad look crossed Linus' face, yet he nodded. He drew his phone out of his pocket. Sherlock closed his eyes when he saw Linus fitting in his ear buds.

The first punch felt like a train derailing against his left eye socket. John. Sherlock fell sideways, reflexively putting both hands up to shield his face. His shoulder hit the concrete at speed. He lay there feeling the cool gritty surface. After a handful of shallow breaths, he was back into his previous position. He could feel the skin tightening over his eye as the swelling began. He closed his eyes.

The second punch was slightly above the first. The sound of it like momentary thunder. John. Again the tall man's body toppled over. His skull bounced off the concrete. It took him longer this time, but Sherlock struggled back into position.

A brutal backhand surprised the left side of Sherlock's mouth. Then another quickly followed in the same location. His neck whipped sideways. He put up a hand for a short reprieve but was too late. Another forceful punch overtook his cheekbone on the right side just below the previous two. John!

Linus acknowledged the upheld palm and stepped well back, shaking out his hands. Sherlock put his fingertips to each area. Assessment: bottom lip slightly split, a bit of blood at the high end of his right cheek. He nodded, getting to his feet. Sherlock wanted Linus' opinion on the success of the overall look but didn't ask. They never spoke during The Ordeals.

Sherlock stumble to his feet. He stretched his body and moved against the far wall. He bent slightly at the waist, each palm flush with the cold surface, legs shoulder-width apart, head bowed. He waited for the process to begin in earnest.

Soon the small room was filled with the desperate, terrifying shouts of a madman punctuated only by the dull rhythm of violence forged in flesh. Sherlock could only hear the sounds dimly, as if he were upstairs out on the street.

The scent of the green soap swirled around him. John. The soap felt like a swarm of angry fists against his back. The bite of the new leather belt was far worse than last time. It lay ridged welts overtop of deep soap bruises. Linus wielded both tools skillfully, one in each hand. He painted the detective's back, shoulders, arms and sides into a strange abstraction of deep red ochre.

Per usual, Sherlock was babbling throughout the procedure. His cruel mouth would soon replace all the air in the space with a noxious slurry of hate-filled declarations. He always made the worst truths worse by first feeding them his hope. Sherlock intended to drown himself in a tide of his own merciless venom.

The Woman had opened Sherlock's mind to the idea that sexuality could be a source of power, not a subjugator. Sherlock had always believed overcoming his sexuality was the best way to nullify
ruinous animal instinct. She had owned her sexuality proudly. Sherlock saw through her eyes that acknowledging one's sexual nature could bring confidence, self assurance and power. Sherlock had never considered that embracing one's sexuality and integrating it shamelessly into one's identity could be a positive force. *John peeling the jumper over his head.*

The Woman's life had also given Sherlock tangible proof that some people sought out physical pain. It was like living on a deserted island for years then discovering a whole metropolis actually existed on the other side of the beach. The Woman made a living selling access to physical pain. People sought her out because they wanted pain. He was not alone in his desire to harm himself and have harm done to him, though he didn't understand how anyone could combine such need with sex. When the case of The Woman was explained to John and him, Mycroft had said it was to do with sex. Sherlock could not understand how anyone could have an erection during an ordeal such as he experienced tonight. His ordeals were truly horrific. But he needed the pain. *John co opting my thought steeple.*

The cruelest but also the best thing Sherlock had learned from meeting The Woman was that he was someone that another person might possibly find desirable. He deduced she was attempting to manipulate him through overt sexual displays and mind games. But when he checked her pulse, he was shocked to see she had fallen for her own charade! This therefore meant that it was statistically possible that at some point in his life there may exist another human being who would desire him in earnest- not just as an unfortunate side effect of an elaborate con. He had done nothing to provoke her advances, in fact he'd ignored her attempts, and yet she had unintentionally grown to have feelings for him. It was conceivable that another person might one day feel the same. *John.*

Sherlock's observations began to slant when Linus turned the belt around. The first time the metal buckle landed, it wrapped up over his left shoulder and bit his collar bone. *John!* He fought for purchase on the wall but could not stay upright. He threw his hands up. The room plunged into silence. *John.* As he got his breathing under control, he could hear Linus pacing behind him. It took two attempts and several punches into the concrete wall, but Sherlock was eventually back in position.

The first strikes after a rest are the most brutal. The body pathetically hopes the worst is over. The mind is once again present in the experience. He was acutely aware he was screaming each time the metal buckle found a welt-covered soap bruise. It was difficult to will the mind to drift again. *Not long now.*

The Woman's undoing had been absolute. The lessons to learn had been so obvious. 1.) Shame: The shame of having antisocial desires left people vulnerable to blackmail, to chaos, to loss. 2.) Emotions: Emotional attachment was still the disadvantage Sherlock always believed it to be.

Somewhere far away was the dull metallic thud of solid steel on flesh. Someone was screaming. *Highly annoying.* It was difficult to think. He was vaguely aware of the concrete floor rising up to crash into his hands and knees. The thwack/crunch sound came again. His right deltoid went numb then burst into flame. A whoosh/snick sound followed. A line of fire cut down his spine like a cautery pen. His pulse was throbbing loudly in his left eye. There was a dull womp/thud over his teres major. Somewhere an animal was roaring. *Difficult to think. John.* Sherlock pressed his forehead to the floor and wrapped his arms over his head.

3.) Differences: The only difference between The Woman's sociopathy and Sherlock's was that the detective had Dr. John Watson to keep him right. If The Woman had an influence like John in her life, the detective doubted she would have ever attempted to join Moriarty's scheme.

The steel truncheon dove into his left trapezius. "John!" Black orbs floated behind eyelids. The
stench of garlic and soap and metallic blood brought bile into Sherlock's mouth. So difficult to think. John.

Every sociopath should have a Dr. John Watson. Yet only one Watson existed in the world. And the only one chose Baker Street as home. Moriarty, and even Mycroft, thought the doctor was his pet. But really John was like having a conscience on the outside of your body.

Arm!
Sherlock was a true monster to subject such a great man to his sociopathy. I am a destroyer. I am a Moriarty. John must get well away of me. Shoulder!
The only redeeming quality about Sherlock Holmes was Dr. John Watson.

Rib!

"Vatican Cameos!"

Sherlock was sucked back into his body abruptly. His ears were ringing and he could not breathe. He needed to inhale but there was something in his mouth. He clawed at his open mouth with both hands and realized he was wailing. He desperately pounded his fists into the floor. He forced himself to settle. He began to cough and sputter but at last he breathed. His face was a mess of blood, mucus and tears. His left eye was nearly swollen shut now. He slumped over on his side, but abruptly leapt up. His breath was shallow. He pawed at his side. Rib! There was a sharp pain.

Sherlock doubled over. He sank back on the floor on his hands and knees. In time, the sobbing stopped. With slow effort, he sat down, tucking his knees up to his chest and winding his arms beneath his thighs. He rested the left side of his head on knees. His glassy eyes were far away.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Implied/Referenced Use of Illegal Controlled Substances, Referenced Suicide, Referenced Self Harm, The Beast Inside.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A pre-lit B&H moved into the detective's peripheral vision. He accepted it and inhaled lightly. Then a glass of water floated towards his face. It took a few tries but he managed to hold it eventually. The first sip was awful- washing the filthy taste of his mouth down his throat. He slowly alternated water and high tar until only the dog-end remained.

First his black socks, then his black shoes. He shook his head at the shirt and ended up in an unfamiliar hoodie. Linus extended a hand to ease Sherlock up. The younger man moved in slow circles around the still detective, unwinding the scarf at his waist. The weight of his coat was awful, but Sherlock bore it. He gripped the plastic bag of his belongings.

As he followed Linus out of the room, he suddenly remembered. His voice was hoarse yet he spoke. "Thank you, Linus. I have your £100 note as agreed."

Linus stopped walking and turned on him. "Keep it, Mr. Holmes."
"Please, Linus, I insist."
"Mr. Holmes, you keep it, but you're gonna listen to me, yeah?"
Sherlock nodded.
"You gotta tell him. You can't keep doin this, Mr. Holmes. It's you listening to me now, yeah?" He waited.
Sherlock nodded briskly.
"The likes of you and me, we don't know what to do with love, do we?"
Sherlock stood mute.
"Every last man on this earth has the Beast inside, doesn't he? But pricks like us, we feed the fucker, yeah? We feed him drugs, danger, hatred, pills, powders, jabs, and this:"
Linus pressed his right hand along the inside of his left forearm. Sherlock's eyes traveled over the healed needle marks and along the length of the wide puckered scar from elbow to wrist. The young man caught Sherlock's eyes.

"Mr. Holmes, I'm not bovvered if coming down here is what it takes to not use. It's horses of course, as grandad tells it. Tony says this thing: all of us in this life only accept the love we think we deserve, yeah? But that's just it, innit it? Mad bastards like us never deserve any, do we? Clever blokes like us, we know. We know."

Linus gestured emphatically. "But you still feed the Beast, Mr. Holmes. So you take a Butcher's here <he indicated the deep long scar on his left arm again> and you see how it ends if you feed the Beast, yeah? This is what the dodgy Beast wants, innit?"

Linus thrust an accusatory finger at Sherlock. "You feed him and you feed him and you feed him til there's only the Beast wearing you as a fucking meat suit, right. You can turn the meat suit into the dog's dinner but you and I know- the beast lives inside. There's sweet fuck all breaking the meat suit will do, yeah. Because he's here." Linus slapped the heel of his hand against his chest. "The
Beast wants to put pay to us all, Mr. Holmes!"

Sherlock understood. "Thank you, Linus."
They stood in grave silence. Then Linus nodded once and turned.

Sherlock kept one hand pressed over his sternum all the way home. His mind was mercifully blank now. He let his body run on autopilot- home, water, shower, sofa, sleep.

Chapter End Notes

The Beast is a Metaphor not an actual character. That little voice in all of us that says "who you are is not good enough." Hope that clears it up.
Day One

Chapter Summary

Aftermath of self harm by proxy.

ONE

When John arrived home from work, he found Sherlock seated at the kitchen table peering intently into his microscope. John desperately wanted to apologize for last night, but resisted. *He's busy, best not interrupt.*

"Top most of the left stack near the window, John." Sherlock did not move from his work, but his right hand was held up expectantly.

The doctor didn't ask. This was a Sherlock thing: the detective probably didn't even realize the two men had not seen one another since last night. Business as usual. John could have been on Mars for a year and he suspected Sherlock would continue a conversation without him. Still, this was normal. Perhaps Sherlock is going to pretend last night's incident never happened. Clean slate. Forgiven. *Definitely easier and more dignified than an emotional apology.* Sherlock was a good friend to let the transgression pass. *I'm a fucking coward.* John sighed and went to fetch whatever he was meant to retrieve. He had to guess. He passed a slim volume into the waiting palm.

When Sherlock looked up to confirm the book title, John gasped. "Sherlock! What's happened?"

Sherlock looked at him with confusion. "The cellular structure seem-"

"Your face!" John rushed over, his heart racing. "Sherlock! Look at me! What's happened?"

Sherlock looked up into the other man's face blankly, then seemed to recall. "I'd think it's self-evident." He touched his cheek absentmindedly. John noted the torn red skin of the hand's knuckles. Sherlock began leafing through the book. Fury erupted in the doctor's heart.

"Sherlock! What. Has. Happened?!" His medical instinct was to hold the chin and assess the condition of the injuries.

"A Fight. I would think that's fairly obvious, even to you, John," Sherlock stated it as casually as informing a passing stranger of the time. He turned back to the microscope.

John raced up stairs and returned quickly, black bag in hand. He began buzzing about, in full doctor mode. Once he had arranged his kit on the counter to his satisfaction, he stepped close. Sherlock inhaled the scent of him. *Green soap.* John reached for the other man's shoulder to turn him fully for inspection.

Sherlock cried out and flinched away from the contact. His shoulder flared with pain. John fought back panic. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have startled you. I'm sorry I touched you. I only meant to look at your eye. I won't touch. Please let me help. Please, Sherlock." The doctor's hands were up, petting the air between them slowly. The movement reminded the detective of a police approaching a cornered, knife-wielding drunkard. The eyes showed great fear and concern.
Sherlock was confused. He thinks I'll hurt him? I would never hurt him. "I'm not going to hurt you, John."

Now it was John's turn to be confused. Hurt me? John calmed himself. Life with Sherlock was full of so many misunderstandings. John took a breath and began to explain in slow, calm words. "Sherlock, I didn't mean- I should not have touched. I know you won't hurt me. You would never hurt me, even when I cross line into your personal space. I wasn't thinking. I see you injured and my only thought is to help. With your permission, I'd like to, please, look at your eye and lip to see what needs doing. I'm sorry about last night. I promise I'll not do that again. You have my word as your friend. I swear it to you, Sherlock, I only want to help. May I approach and assess your injuries in a strictly medical capacity as a doctor and as your friend?"

Sherlock put the book down. He turned fully towards John and planted his feet on the floor. He laced his hands together in his lap. He didn't know what to say. His mind screamed: No! This is not at all what Linus had intimated would occur. He thinks I'm averse to his touch? Sherlock heard the Beast rumble a soft laugh within him. Well how would John know any different?!? You fed your truth to the the Beast, clever man. That was your best idea yet! What will we think of next?

Sherlock swallowed sadness. Shame prevented him from looking John in the eyes. He moved his head slightly forward, a tentative agreement.

John nodded and moved in, pen torch clicking on. Sherlock sat still, watching the other man work. The patient moved his eyes, neck and jaw as instructed. John adopted a professional manner. The doctor narrated his every movement in a soft tone. "I'm going to swab this with antiseptic. It will sting a bit and feel cold, but this needs cleaning. Is that ok?" Sherlock nodded. The stench of alcohol flooded the kitchen. John worked carefully from area to area. He whispered his findings and asked permission before each action. The injuries were mild but John's heart tightened to see them. The knuckles were a bit worse. He was loathe to know what Sherlock had been through.

"There's tiny debris in some these cuts. Can we try to wash it out?" Sherlock nodded and stood. They moved to the sink. John checked the temperature of the water and made several adjustments before offering it to his friend. The doctor considered how to proceed. He made a loose fist with his left hand and perched the other man's damaged hands atop it, one then the other. With his right, he carefully lathered antibacterial cleanser over the torn skin. The only sound was the hollow echo of lukewarm water splashing against the cast iron basin.
Chapter 11

Sherlock watched the gentle caring touches intently. Before he could change his mind, he worked his hand against the other until the loose fist was flat. He spread the thick wet fingers and laced his own between them. The water ran between their palms. His thumb twitched against the side of the doctor's hand.

John froze. He watched transfixed as the long fingers wove through his own. He looked up into the taller man's cyan eyes. Sherlock brought his face nearer, squeezing the hand tighter. Their eyes searched one another for a long moment. John felt all the sound fade from the room. Sherlock moved forward first. Their lips met softly and briefly, just a bare brush of contact. Eyes searched again. Sherlock licked his dry lips. He pulled on the hand; its owner followed. Their lips tried again. Eyes open, noses and foreheads nuzzling gently. They brought their mouths together once more, lips parted, meeting longer. They found confirmation in each other's eyes. John tested the sculpted upper lip with a light flick of his tongue. The pauses between attempts grew shorter with each successive venture. Eyes open. Each mouth sought to drink more and more from the other. Soon it was all wet, wordless exploration. The tempo increased by degrees until John swallowed a single exquisite sound from Sherlock's lips.

The taste of Sherlock's sound ignited a spark within John's core. He pressed their torso's closer. His head was tilted back, gripped in narrow wet hands. He gave Sherlock a taste of his own sound, groaning into the taller man's open mouth. The kiss became fervent, insistent. Everything tasted of delicious moans flavored slightly of iron from Sherlock's unhealed lower lip. John's arms were pinned between their bodies, palms kneading at the chest beneath. Sherlock's dexterous hands began to smooth water through sandy hair. John pressed Sherlock slightly back, without breaking their kiss. The doctor extricated his arms. He roughly pulled their hips together, waiting to experience each man's need pressed in tandem. He hugged his man to him in a tight embrace.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

References to violence from earlier chapters

Sherlock screamed! He shoved John away, gasping. The tall man crumbled to his knees. He held up a warning hand. His body quivered. A shaky whimper scraped the air.

Apologies flew from John's tingling lips. He got down on the floor as well. "Sherlock, I'm sorry. We can go slower. Sherlock? What can I do?"

Pain! Sherlock's rib controlled his entire being. His body folded into itself. He could hear John whispering near him. The Beast drank his pain and began to laugh again. John! Sherlock banged his fist on the lino. The Beast roared with dark laughter. John! The injured man heard John's voice pleading "What can I do?"

Sherlock opened his eyes. The pain was too great. He had no alternative left. He began to speak. The detective explained quietly, only facts, only what was absolutely necessary for John to help. He began with, "I think- Ngh-I know. I know I have been injured. In a fight. Last night." He spoke the facts, punctuated by pained sounds: of where, and how. He told of the objects involved, the pain, the locations of the worst symptoms. He spoke of all he feared: the Beast, The Woman, Moriarty, desire, drugs. He admitted his panic, his doubt. He explained about his mind palace, the woolen jumpers, the locked bedroom door. He did not stop until he had confessed it all, in as few words as possible.

John listened.

He ended with "I don't know what to do. Will you help me, John? Please?"

John stood without a word. He extended his hand and brought Sherlock up slowly. He set the tall man back on the kitchen stool. Night had engulfed the space fully. The only illuminations were the single overhead kitchen light and the microscope tray.

The doctor was unable to look into his patient's eyes. Three words galloped through his mind: expandable steel truncheon. Sherlock was like a lifeless marionette. He stood obediently while his shirt was untucked. He sat when instructed so the buttons could be undone. He moved his arms to the sides on cue.

When at last the shirt was removed, John found himself unable to walk behind and survey the damage. Expandable. Steel. Truncheon. Sherlock must have sensed this because the mute marionette swiveled around slowly. Revealing the horror by centimeters, like the phases of a technicolor moon on its axis.

"Christ, No!" John's heart broke all at once. The sight before his eyes brought him instantly back to the foreign battlefields of his past life. Expandable. Steel. Truncheon. It was difficult to register the contrast from chest to back. He could not breath. Too many colors here to be human. Too many colors. Expandable. Steel. Truncheon. His mind rebelled. His body moved quickly away down the hall.
John brought his leg up and violently kicked a panel of Sherlock's bedroom door into its frame. He punched the door twice, then a third time. He wanted to scream and throw things. To get his British Army Browning L9a1 and pull the trigger until the chamber clicked. Then reload. Scream curses while the muzzle barked. Then reload again and again and again until the only smell was burnt powder. Until he was knee deep in spent casings. *Expandable. Steel. Truncheon.*

John barely had time to reach the WC before sick poured from him. *Expandable. Steel. Truncheon.* More sick. He wretched until he feared his viscera would appear. The doctor sat on the edge of the tub for at least an hour.

At last, John forced himself to move. He opened a window, cleaned up the bathroom, opened the shower taps, stripped down. He padded naked into the kitchen. He stepped past Sherlock. He retrieved the bottle from the cupboard and downed a long pull. He let the alcohol burn his empty stomach. He lifted the bottle for another swig when Sherlock's voice interjected.

"I'm sorry, John. Please forgi-"

The half full bottle flew over Sherlock's head and shattered against the refrigerator. Sherlock flinched. The naked soldier approached the seated man. His words whispered out surprisingly calm, "Come have a shower before bed." The doctor walked out of the kitchen.

Sherlock stood obediently. He removed most of his clothing. But when he got to his pants, he hesitated. He had never seen John so angry. The words had been calm but his eyes burned deep cobalt fire. Sherlock stood for nearly a minute with his fingers on his waistband.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

More anxiety...because that's what I like.

The shower was barely above body temperature. John was tender and gentle. He took great care as he examined and cleaned Sherlock's back, upper arms and sides. His touch was nearly undetectable. They did not speak, each man washing his own body quickly. When it was John's turn under the water, Sherlock washed his back for him. John turned and brought both of the violinist's hands to his lips. He kissed each ragged knuckle lightly.

John stood with a waiting towel open for Sherlock. Each man dried himself and brushed his teeth in total silence. They were each alone on islands of private thought.

John took Sherlock's hand and lead his man up the stairs. The detective became acutely self-conscious of their nudity when John shut the door behind them. He had the urge to cover himself. Sherlock could not stop staring at the bed. "John?"
"You will probably be most comfortable on your front," the doctor said without looking at him. He pulled back the covers and held the sheet open.

Sherlock sat on the edge of the bed. He kept his eyes on the floor. He rolled over on his least injured side then lay on his stomach. He winced as he found the least painful way to position himself. He hid his face. "John...will you...will you be slow?" Sherlock said it into the pillow.

John pulled the sheet and cover over the other man. He walked around the bed and knelt down to look at Sherlock's bruised face. He reached out and stroked the damp curls. "You'll have to buy me dinner first." He smiled but it did not reach his eyes. "Now get some rest." He punctuated it with a kiss to the temple. "I'll be back soon. I should <throat clear> tidy up before Mrs. Hudson returns in the morning."

The entire kitchen stank of liquor. Splinters of wood littered Sherlock's bedroom floor. Glass shards everywhere. The entire time John worked, he knew what he would actually do afterwards. He reached up and under the shattered slat of door to unlock the bedroom. He gathered linens and pillow shams. He remade the bed. He scrubbed, swept, hoovered. Internally he was a violent cauldron of barely containable rage.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Volatile Rage, confrontation

Sleet peppered John's hair as he passed through the night streets. The cold did not register on his skin. In the restaurant, he threw the bloodied hoodie into Angelo's shocked face. He thrust his shaking finger out accusingly and stared the large man down as he stalked closer. His other hand slid back reflexively to grip the butt of the gun he had purposely left in the flat. The fusilier was vaguely aware of diners' stares. Tony ran from the back, hands up, stepping between his father and the doctor. "Ok, ok. Easy now. Easy. Let's go outside."

"You. Touch. Him. Again. And I. WILL! I swear to GOD ABOVE I WILL! KILL. every, last man involved. Yes? Alright?!!" John's voice started as a terse whisper but ended pealing off the brick in angry echoes.

Angelo stepped forward, hands up. "Understood, Dr. Watson. Duly noted. To be fair, we have already told him it should be the last time."

"Last time? The last time?!? How many times has this happened?" John began to seriously wish he'd brought the gun. His thoughts swirled.

"Four." The voice came from behind them. John turned to see a young, tan-skinned man in chef's whites. Linus approached and the two veterans stared one another down. "It's me that does it for him, yeah. So let's you and me talk while my misses and his father get back to business, right?" Linus extended a tattooed hand towards the young manager without taking his eyes off John. Tony reached for the hand and stepped quickly behind the chef like a frightened yearling. Linus affixed John with an unwavering dead-eyed stare, but he gently brought the back of Tony's shaking hand to his lips for a tender kiss- never taking his eyes off John.

John gaped for a moment, then recovered with a brisk cough. "Right. Yes right." He backed away from the door allowing the tall thin manager to scurry inside. Restaurant sounds flooded the silent alley. Angelo followed, but turned back with his hand on the knob, "You know what he's like, Doctor. I owe him, don't I? And I figured it's better than the drugs, you know? I hope once Linus and you have it all sorted, that you'll understand, too." John fixed Angelo with his coldest stare and nodded slowly. Why had he left the gun?

Once the two men were alone, they surveyed one another for a long time in the silent alley. The chef lit up and offered the pack towards John. John shook his head. "I served in Kandahar. You?" John indicated the tattoo on the smoking hand.

"Same, yeah. Edgware Road my whole life, then hot, rocky fucking aggro hell for damn near a year. Never thought I'd see my Tony again." He raised his white coat and vest up to show evidence of a gut shot. Then he patted the back of his calf. "Fucking hell over there, innit?"
"Yes, it was." John patted his left shoulder, indicating where he'd been shot as well.

The two men stood in silence, watching the sleet fall through cones of street lamp light. "So you're his John, yeah? Heard loads about you, Dr. Watson."

John coughed. "Well, I've only learned of you today." It came out harsher and more bitter than John had planned. The doctor felt his jaw clench remembering Sherlock's bruised flesh in the shower. His nails dug into the meat of his palms. Long pause. "Did he do that to your face?"

Linus beamed. "Yeah. We made a deal before his...uh, ordeal, right. We traded souvenirs for our boys back home, yeah." The chef winked and touched the blue-black area of his eye. "He said you were a proper romantic. And here you are, yeah. Defense of his honor, innit?" John glared at the darker man. He wanted to knock the grin off his face.

"You've got him arse over tit. I can't fucking believe he's finally told you, yeah. I'm so chuffed! Fucking chuffed! It was the shiner, wuzinit? Did you have him? Him Indoors did for me. You romantics love your blood, yeah. Love it!" Linus laughed loudly. His eyes were alight with good humor.

John turned on the younger veteran. "You think it's funny, what you did to him?!? You think I liked what I saw?!? Are you out of your mind?" John was screaming.

Linus sobered, his eyes grave. He flicked his unfinished smoke away. His words were quiet, full of disbelief. "He showed all of it this time, then?"

"Yes. He did. You should be begging me not to have you detained at Her Majesty's pleasure for what you did to him, you Reckless. Moronic. Psychopath!" John was breathing hard. He dared not move for fear he would snap the man's neck right there in the alley.

"Whoa there, Dr. Watson. I'm easy. No need to knock up the neighbors, yeah. It's not me deserves giving what for, right. It's your mate whose off his trolley. It's him that wants those horrible things, innit? Yours is a mad bastard that won't yield until he's felt the worst, Dr. Watson."

Of course John knew the younger veteran was right. He was loath to admit it but he had heard as much from Sherlock earlier. John waited and let the chef continue. Linus spoke honestly and openly about his arrangement with the detective. The escalation from first helping gather trauma data for a case, to providing a drugs-free outlet for emotional difficulties. The escalation from belt, to lit cigarettes and an aerial, to truncheon, to soap. Linus told the doctor of his genuine fear that there was no end to Sherlock's desire for self harm. The chef spoke of the past drug abuse both men shared. He was open about his own post war struggles. The chef was sincere about his desire to see Sherlock choose healthier solutions. He told John some of the issues he had overheard the detective talk about during the beatings: Moriarty, Moriarty's enormous web of evil, how to defeat Moriarty, surmounting pressure from Mycroft, Mycroft's untrustworthiness, fear of failure, some manipulative woman, John's misplaced jealousy of that woman, John's wardrobe, John's unwavering reliability, not deserving John, fear of not protecting John, John risking his life for Sherlock, Sherlock's self-hatred, John's smile, the boundaries of their friendship, fear of losing John, resisting drugs, needing sleep, needing a respite from being The Great Sherlock Holmes.

John absorbed it all with difficulty. He doubted his heart would ever mend.

Linus finished with, "Honestly, hand to God, Dr. Watson, I thought I was helping the man. We all have the Beast inside, yeah? Beneath the good and the kind and the stupid and the cruel: the Beast is a fire just waiting for fuel. And I only thought I was helping him fight the Beast so he could get a bit of peace, right. Nothing wrong with a good fight. What every man needs from time to time,
innit? Safe as houses. But he's feeding the fucking Beast, Dr. Watson. Petrol to flame. Soon as I realized, I told him to get help, didn't I? And now you're here, yeah. So I figure he's sorted. He's chosen you over the Beast. So yeah, I'm chuffed!"

They watched sleet coming harder. John shivered. He spoke slowly, trying to keep the anger out of his voice, "Thank you, Linus. I think I understand."

The two men shook hands, sincerely. They exchanged contact details. The chef agreed to ring John if Sherlock ever came back. John scrubbed a hand over his features and sighed.

"I don't know whether to kill him or help him."

Linus grinned knowingly. He gave a slow, sage nod.

"'Love is not love', et cetera, et cetera, et cetera," the tattooed man winked and lit up another. He inhaled smoke and continued, "If he's shown you, I figure he's wanting me to tell you. Considering all I've heard about you from him, you're the best man for the job. This'll be sweet fuck all compared to a face full of plastic explosive. You're gonna starve the Beast and save Sherlock Holmes! This is likely his sodding plan, innit?"
"He's exactly right, John." Both men turned in amazement when the familiar baritone voice echoed up the alley. Sherlock's tall silhouette strode towards them. The detective shook hands with Linus before taking John's hand in his own. "Thank you, Linus. Please forgive me for the trouble I've brought down upon your house. He hasn't hurt you, has he?"

Linus laughed. "It was a bit touch and go, Mr. Holmes. I'm pleased you've told him. That's a good thing, innit? But he only threatened to kill my Tony, didn't he? Well, then again, I hurt his man. So I figure we understand one another, now, yeah?"

Sherlock quirked an eyebrow at John. The doctor's ice-bitten features colored rosy pink. He cleared his throat. "Yes, well...uh, yes, we...<cough>have come to an understanding. Please tell Tony I'm sorry." He squeezed the violinist's warm hand tighter. "And Angelo." Both men thanked Linus again, then Sherlock led John to the waiting cab. Behind them, Linus' voice called out, "It fucking bears it out even to the sodding edge of doom!" His laughter whipped around them with the growing wind.

Back within 221B Baker's Street, the pair sat on the couch, continuing to hold hands. The doctor tried to think of what to say when suddenly the detective's voice broke into his thoughts. "John, do you know what Linus meant, at the end?" The doctor smiled wearily, shaking his head. He began to chuckle and continued to shake his head more emphatically. "Really? Am I to think you don't know? Or is this one of your games?"

John studied the other man's face. "No. No I'm not- Sherlock, you can't get me to-It's been a long day."

He plucked the appropriate volume from the shelf and eventually found the applicable page. He thrust the book down into Sherlock's hands, thumping a finger at a paragraph of text.

Sonnet 116
William Shakespeare
Let me not to the marriage of true minds...

Sherlock read the sonnet three times. He looked up at John. "Well, yes, thank you for sparing us both that embarrassment, John." The two men began to laugh. John felt so nice to release all the negativity pent up inside. But Sherlock was wincing. The book tumbled to the floor as the seated man clutched at his side. He whimpered pitiably. Sherlock sat motionless for a long time, willing the pain in his rib to abate so he could breath. "John. I-I think it's broken," he hissed.

John knelt before his man, "No, my dear, it's only bruised." The doctor's jaw flexed. "Badly bruised. You are, thankfully, 'Bloody but unbowed,' as it goes." The flaxen-haired man looked sad as he leaned in and kissed the dark curls. John helped the injured man to his feet as carefully as he was able.

In Sherlock's room, John changed the detective into pajamas with great care. Sherlock's pain subsided and he asked, "Was that also Shakespeare? 'Bloody but unbowed'"
John smiled. He sat Sherlock on the edge of the bed. "That one I can recite, but only if you promise me you'll not do this ever again, yes?"
Sherlock nodded. "It was becoming boring anyways." They read one another's eyes. The doctor breathed a sigh of relief. "Right. In you go and I'll tell it to you."
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Fluff....and references to poetry because that's what I like.

Sherlock lay on his stomach. John tucked him in and brought a chair along side the bed. He held one thin hand between both of his own. He rubbed the red knuckles. Sherlock wished John were laying in bed with him, but he didn't feel he deserved to make any requests. The detective wanted the reassuring weight of John beside him. He watched the strong hands caress his and wished he were brave enough to beg forgiveness. Brave enough to beg please stay with me tonight. Sherlock tried not to think of how delicious it had been to feel John pressed against him in the kitchen. That warm mouth against his. Very good. His cock twitched beneath him when he remembered John's firm soapy buttocks in the shower. His battered body resisted when Sherlock willed himself to climb into John's lap. He hurt everywhere. Unable to actualize his desires.

John began, "It's called Invictus by William Ernest Henley. I doubt there's a military man alive who does not know it."

John's recitation transfixed Sherlock. The man didn't just retell the poem, but emphasized certain words and phrases as he spoke. To Sherlock, it seemed as if John were recounting an actual life story. At the last two lines, John's posture straightened. He propelled the words into the room full of commanding enthusiasm. John had a wonderful smooth voice. His words were like percussion in the air. The detective was in awe. The poem was a bit sentimental, but it obviously meant something powerful to John.

"Thank you, John. That was very good. Tell me once more so I can remember." Sherlock wanted to keep him near, swaddle that voice around his pained body like a cloak of security.

John swelled with pride. He sat up straighter. He began again. This time he spoke slower, enunciating each word clearly. He paused at the end of the first stanza. "Now you." Sherlock recited it back. They continued in this way until the end, their voices volleying back and forth between them. Then Sherlock repeated the whole poem back to John, trying to use the same cadence. He tried to emphasize the last two lines as John had done.

John leapt from the chair and ran upstairs. The doctor had gone so abruptly that Sherlock sat up in bed. "John?" The detective was considering getting out of bed when John reappeared. The handsome doctor lingered in the doorway. He cleared his throat and stepped into the room.

"Sherlock, I'd like to...well...here. When I was shot and awoke in army hospital, Invictus got me through. Being shot was very bad. It was...the worst pain I could imagine. Until tonight. Seeing you like this," he paused, blew out a breath, then continued, "Seeing you like this feels worse. Much worse. Not good." John put up a hand to stop Sherlock interrupting. "I want you to have these. To help, uh, with the Beast."

John came near and held his dog tags between his hands. Sherlock looked at the flat metal rectangles dangling from the chain. He bent his head forward. The cold aluminum was surprisingly weighty against his neck. He clasped both hands over the identity plaques, testing their sound and feel. He rubbed one embossed rectangle against his lower lip, feeling the Braille beneath on his mouth. He tucked them into his pajama shirt, as he knew they were meant to be worn. His body
heat quickly turned the tags from a foreign coldness to an incorporated familiarity. Sherlock opened his mouth to speak, but John kissed him quickly. They both seem surprised.

"Right, time to sleep. Doctor's orders." John waited for Sherlock to slowly ease back into repose. The detective pressed his head up into the comforting kiss against his hair and closed his eyes. John stepped away, turning off the lights.

"Thank you, John."

"Good night, my dear friend."

Sherlock snuggled down pressing the dog tags between his aching body and the mattress. John. Behind his eyelids he watched the bravest man he'd ever known recite the powerful words to him again and again and again until he fell asleep.
References to sexual intimacy between two men. Incidental mention of murder as a case. Fluff. Humor.

TWO

John rarely worked on Wednesdays. The doctor was having his best dream yet. He lay in bed oscillating between sleep and fantasy thinking of Sherlock's voice whispering "please, John, be slow"...wet hands raking through his sandy hair...the shower...frantic kitchen kisses...miles of pale muscle...he imagined greedy, soapy hands...two slick erections gliding together...tight untouched flesh enveloping the drooling head of his cock, accepting him deeper...he heard himself moan. John began sliding his hand down his chest towards his growing erection.
"Come, Watson, come!"
"Mmmmm. Yes." His fingers snaked under his waistband.
"The game is afoot. Not a word! Into your clothes and come!"
John sat up abruptly!
Sherlock stood fully dressed in the doorway of John's room.
"Rrrgh!" John crashed his head back against his pillow, his teeth clenched in frustration.
A pile of laundry flew atop his chest and head.
"Hurry!"
"Rrrrhh!"
The retreating steps on the stairs pounded swiftly with excitement. The detective's voice called up
"Quickly, Doctor, not a moment to lose!"

In the cab, Sherlock pressed a napkin of dry toast into John's hand. "Sherlock, how are you, I mean physically?" The detective disregarded the question with "Fine. Ask my doctor." He explained all he knew about the case as he opened a thermos and handed it to John. The tea was vile: simultaneously bitter, lukewarm, weak and sugary. But John gulped it down none the less, to rid his pallet of the burnt toast.

The case turned out to be a huge disappointment. Nothing to do with Moriarty's web of crime. Bizarre to MPS and John but thoroughly boring to Sherlock. John had never seen a Margay. Sherlock was unimpressed. He solved the accident in three minutes and walked out of the scene of crime in a deep sulk.

The detective chastised the inspector for waking them before first light. "Not even a murder, Lestrade! Kindly take a few moments to pool your collective brain power for just one second before knocking us up next time! I know it will be difficult, but among you there must be enough grey matter to distinguish Accident from Homicide. I'm not your funeral director! I don't need to review every fresh corpse in London! Come, John," Sherlock gripped his man's hand and stalked off into the coming dawn.

All the way to the main road he muttered furiously. "So obvious! An accident! Clearly an accident! They see a bit of paper in a dead man's mouth and suddenly it's a deep mystery! Locked doors, top floor, blunt trauma, better ring Baker's Street. Never mind the cat in the appliance! So obvious!
Does the man not think we have better things to do with our time?"

"And do we?"
Sherlock stopped walking. He wheeled on John, scrutinizing his face. The doctor's handsome features bloomed into a cryptic grin. John arched an eyebrow. Sherlock felt his loins tighten. He opened his mouth several times but could not make words. John laughed to see a pretty crimson blush color his detective's alabaster face in the grey pre-dawn light.
The instant the front door closed at 221B Baker Street, Sherlock's eager mouth was on John's. The taller man had his doctor pressed against the black door, kissing him passionately. John shoved him away and darted towards the stairs. He had mounted only two steps before he was spun round. The tall man loved having to incline his neck to reach up for John's mouth above him. The novelty of being shorter than the fair-haired man made his cock throb. Pale thin fingers brushed the front of John's trousers and both men gasped in unison. John grabbed the wrist, half dragging its owner up the remaining stairs into their flat. The doctor's mind swirled with one word: NOW. But Sherlock cried out in pain when his shoulder was overextended in its socket. Both men froze. The detective looked ashamed, but recovered quickly, rising up to his full height. He smoothed his hands over his suit, brushing away invisible lint. John took a step back. "Ignore it, John. I'm fine." John took another step backward.

Sherlock closed the gap between them. He brought John's hand up against the metal beneath his shirt. He arranged the other hand against his cheek. The pair nuzzled their foreheads together gently. "Please." They began to kiss again. This time slowly, gently. The tempo was leisurely but the need was just as acute as moments before. Eventually, both men surfaced for air, panting in unison. Neither man would be able to remain upstanding much longer.

It took several hours and three earnest attempts to find a comfortable way for both men to sit and embrace. Each time they seemed to arrive at a solution, Sherlock's injured rib or damaged skin would force them to rearrange themselves. They would revert to standing again until neither man had knees. They tried several failed scenarios in vain. It was awkward and frustrating.

At last Sherlock became too overwhelmed by the vexation of failure. Think! John stood beside him. "It's ok, Sherlock, we can try again when you feel better." Think! He roughly shoved John into his square black chair. He straddled the waiting lap and pressed both strong hands against his arse decisively. "God!" John squeezed. The detective fed the waiting mouth a long moan. John kneaded his man's haunches as they intensified their endeavors. Each time the doctor grasped a handful of flesh, he was rewarded with a wriggle in his lap. Soon Sherlock was slowly grinding his hips instinctively against John's hardness. They explored throats, leaving sloppy trails of saliva over red prickling skin. The doctor pressed his skull back into the black leather, his fingers gripping a fistful of raven hair. He willed the hot wet mouth at his clavicle to give him teeth. He dug the fingers of his other hand into a muscular thigh, gripping hard. He was rewarded with a sudden bite. Both voices groaned.

Sherlock was nearly there. His stinging lips sought the other again. He felt drunk. John's skillful tongue opening Sherlock's mouth and flicking strange animalistic sounds into the air. John. The detective was overcome with a powerful need for the other man filling his mouth. He kissed more urgently. He wanted to swallow John whole. Sherlock gasped- Realization! Cock in mouth. Yes! I really am a genius! He heard John gasp and say "God Yes; you really are."

Sherlock fumbled at the evil belt buckle that seemed far more complex than any belt he'd ever
seen. John's hand tried to help but now there were too many scrambling fingers. Also his erection was furious that the grinding had stopped. **Difficult to think!** He needed to tell his groping man to be still one damned second. When Sherlock saw John's face, he forgot every thought. Swollen lips, ragged breath, eyes blazing deep indigo blue, desperate wanton desire reflecting his same need. **Perfection!** Sherlock crushed his mouth over John's.
"Oh my! So Sorry! Sorry!"

Sherlock startled at the sound of Mrs. Hudson's voice. He crashed backward into the hard wooden floor, his back erupting in pain and his vision went white.

John leapt to his feet. "Mrs. Hudson! Good morning!" The demure landlady sputtered. The heavily laden serving tray began shaking in her arms. She took a half step forward into the open doorway, then danced back towards the stairs, unsure what to do with the tray. "So sorry, boys!"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Hudson." John quickly unburdened her of the breakfast tray, stashing it on the table. He coughed. "Uh, thank you."

"The d-door- The door was open-" She colored red. She began fretting her hands. She chirped apologies and ratted on nervously in an endless string of non sequiturs.
"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Hudson," John said again.
She noticed the man writhing on the floor. "Is he- is he alright?"
"Die, Mrs. Hudson!" Sherlock rasped.
"Yes! Yes, he's <cough> fine. Just one of his experiments gone wrong. <cough> We're, we're fine. Everything's...fine. <throat clear> How...how are you? Your sister? Pleasant visit?"

John sat awkwardly at the table, trying to look casual.
Mrs. Hudson winced. "I'm so sorry, boys. I'll just leave you to your...experiments." She hurried from the room making sure to shut the door behind her. The sound of her giggling could be heard all the way down the stairs.
"Yes. Thank you for the-" John shut up when the door swung closed. He got down on the floor and crawled towards Sherlock. "Are you alright?" The doctor tried to sound concerned, but a laugh sputtered from his lips. He tried to hide it in a cough.
Sherlock sat up with great effort. He looked at John's barely contained laughter. "How embarrassing for you, John!" They both laughed. Sherlock gripped his side, "Don't. Please." But neither man could stifle the laughter.
"Embarrassing for me?" John hauled the wincing, giggling man to his feet. Sherlock tried to hold in his chuckles, but failed. He sagged into the wooden chair near the table, laughing, "Well you've only been insisting to the poor woman that you're not gay for over a year now!"

They laughed. Sherlock winced but couldn't help himself.

John snagged a slice of toast. He said, through giggles, "Well I'm not you know!"

Sherlock's smile caught on his tingling lips. "What?"

"I'm not." John slathered the toasted triangle in golden marmalade. He devoured it in two bites.

Sherlock gaped at him, thoroughly confused. The doctor put a slice of dry toast in the open mouth. "I'm not."

The tabletop became a choreographed pattern of activity. "John?"

"Hm?" John munched beans and tomato.

"John!"

Skillful hands poured more tea. At last the soldier swallowed and addressed the confused detective. "Sherlock, you are the only man I've ever...anything. I've never uh, any of that with a, um <cough> man. I did share an, um, emotional...connection with a commander, once upon a time, but the strict structure of military hierarchy made any, um, activity impossible. We did hug once, briefly, but that was all." He gestured with his fork, "To be honest, I don't think I wanted more. It was fine. I am not ashamed of my...uh, close, um, friendship- and attachment <throat clear> to you. But I can't deny my history of attraction to women. I am who I am. It's fine. It's all fine. Pass the mustard, please."

Sherlock absorbed this information. He set the little pot of mustard in front of John's plate. He considered the words while dry toast moved between his teeth. "So one day, maybe, you will...find a woman?"

"I didn't say that. Eat your breakfast."

"This is- I'm- You'd prefer...a woman, John?"

John sighed. His was a stubborn one. He put his fork down. He spoke slowly, enunciating each word so there could be no misunderstanding.

"I prefer you, Sherlock." There, that wasn't so difficult. Why was this so difficult?

"Until?"

Such a stubborn man!


"For how long?"

"Until you're full. At least finish the beans. You need the iron."

"For how long, John?"

The doctor was rubbish at talking about feelings. He resisted the urge to stand and stalk out of the flat. He wiped his mouth with his napkin.

"What do you deduce?"

Sherlock sat still as a statue. John could tell the brilliant mind was racing through every possible scrap of data. John gave an enervated sigh. The doctor finished his meal in peace.
Have you ever seen that video of the baby panda sneeze? This is the literary equivalent. Be forewarned.

The shorter man cleared the table and prepared to wash up. The statue barely blinked. John felt cruel in his inability to put words to all that was in his heart. He was just not the sort of man who could easily vocalize such intricate situations. What does he want? A bloody sonnet? The doctor opened a window. He offered the pack of Benson & Hedges into Sherlock's hands with matches. Their eyes met, but the genius was far away, deep within an ocean of briny facts.

At long last, Sherlock returned to himself. He knew! He scanned the flat for John. The detective put down the ashtray and came up behind his man. John was in yellow latex gloves, elbow deep in the crisper with a sudsy sponge. The handsome doctor stood and turned towards his tall friend, a questioning look searching the other's face.
Sherlock nodded.
"So in fact-
"Yes."
"-you mean I'm your-"
"Yes, of course you are."
"Right." A pause. They studied one another "Good."
"Yes. And I'm yours." John cleared his throat and looked away.
"Right."
"Right. Brilliant deduction."
"Yes. Glad that's sorted. Nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person, John." They looked at one another. Then both men giggled like nervous school boys. The detective bent near and placed a kiss on John's smiling mouth. He waited. It was ok.

There was an electronic trill from Sherlock's pocket. He swore. He read his mobile. He hurried to the door for his coat, paused, came back. "That's Mandy Hooper. The mass spectrometer is finally unoccupied!"
"Molly."
"Hm?"
"Molly Hooper."
"Yes. Exactly. Molly. Dr. Hooper." Sherlock gathered up several folders and books into a bag. "I'll be all night." Sherlock left.
A few seconds later Sherlock was back. He set the bag down on the table and took John's face firmly in both his hands. He ran his thumb over the lower lip. He gazed intently into the azure eyes. He brought his mouth near John's but held the other man away. Their warm breaths mingled in the expectant millimetre between lips.

The detective hovered there for ages, keeping John back. Then the tip of his tongue crept forward and flicked against John's upper lip. The doctor exhaled a quick gasp. Sherlock kissed his forehead, his temples, each cheek, the tip of his nose, even his chin. "I forgot to say good night, John," he mumbled against the doctor's ear. He grinned into the shorter man's neck before roughly sucking the flesh into his mouth. John moaned. Sherlock felt him swallow hard. "I'll see you tomorrow, John," he growled. Sherlock began slowly rubbing the length of his body up and down against his groaning man. He crushed both John's wrists down to his sides. He pinned the other man into the refrigerator door, pelvis grinding pelvis. John wrapped a leg up around Sherlock's hip for leverage. The detective grunted into the doctor's ear. "It's a good thing you're not gay, O flatmate mine, or this would be so very awkward, yes?" His baritone was filthy, lurid and predatory as he nibbled the earlobe in his teeth. John struggled against him, trying to seek the dirty mouth with his own. Suddenly Sherlock was heading for the door with his books. "Good night, John," he called back over his shoulder as the door slammed behind him. "Cock tease!" John swore. He pressed the heel of his gloved hand against his aching hardness.
Day Three; The Lab

Chapter Summary

Humour. Lab. Fluff. A bit not good. Dr. Molly Hooper has feels.

THREE

Sherlock did not return home that day. After work, John found his man still in the lab with Molly Hooper. "Hello, Doctor." He shook hands with Molly. She returned the greeting. Sherlock didn't register John's arrival. His eyes were glued to a microscope.

"Has he eaten?"
The pathologist shook her head, "Well, coffee. About 90 cups. I left around 8 last night and came back at 9 a.m. I'm not sure."
John smiled at her. "Right."
To Sherlock: "Come here, I've brought dinner."
"Hnn."
John began setting table at the far corner of the lab near the window. Molly informed him about this trace evidence from the nomadic Chinese circus's arrow tripod.

"He thinks he'll be able to predict their current location based on all the particulate evidence of their past shows. It's tedious work, but if anyone has patience enough for it, it's him. Requires hours with several dedicated machines so that's probably why he feels the need to work quickly- between dead bodies." Molly gave a weak smile and looked at her watch.
"Have you eaten? You're very welcome. More than enough lamb curry."
Molly looked ill. "No thanks. I've had my dinner just minutes ago. But thank you."

John tried again to compel his man, "Sherlock, come here."
"Mmhmm."
Molly watched John step close to the intense chemist. John dropped his voice to the barest whisper near Sherlock's ear, "I've brought something for your mouth, O flatmate mine."

Molly didn't hear the words but watched Sherlock's surprised reaction. She assumed John had threatened him, based on how quickly the odd man obeyed. Sherlock stood immediately and followed John to the table. "Sit. Eat."

"Thank you for the visit, John, but I'm really not hungry. Molly and I are very busy. While I do so much enjoy your company, the work must come first. Now is really not the best time to be dropping in. Thank you and good bye."

"Oh yes, Dr. Hooper's told me all about your work." John winked at Molly when Sherlock wasn't looking. He tore a piece of flat bread and placed it in Sherlock's hand. "It's something to do with making gold, yes?"

Sherlock's head snapped in John's direction, "What? No!" Sherlock bit the bread angrily.
"Uhhuh. She's told me all about it. Don't be modest. I'm really quite impressed. It's brilliant."

"Don't be an idiot, John."
John and Molly shared a conspiratorial smile.
"I've heard of the science before...Thaumaturgy? No wait, Tele...Telekinesis? Oh it's on the tip of my tongue- Alchemy?" John snapped his fingers. "Yes, Alchemy! Is that it, Dr. Hooper?"

Molly nodded seriously. "Yes, that's right, Dr. Watson. Alchemy is the word for-

Sherlock looked flustered! "What? No! Not Alchemy! Alchemy? Are you- You are a scientist, Molly, don't let his idiocy become conta-

"Yes, I'm fairly certain Molly and I are right, Sherlock. That's the word for creating gold. I've read it online." John shared another smile with Molly. She hid hers behind a sleeve, nodding.

Sherlock sighed. He regarded both doctors with that detestable haughty glare. He sipped tea and smirked at them both. "First of all, Thaumaturgy is..."

He began to lecture them both on the definitions, origins and falsehood of all three terms in question as he ate. John interrupted him often, to repeat some mundane detail as if he could not quite understand. ("So you really can't just remove an election or two and make gold?") Sherlock would chew quickly to provide himself more time to mock John's stupidity.

"So, there's really no scientific basis for using mental energy to move objects? Really? Molly, surely you've heard about this topic?"

Each time Sherlock turned towards Molly, John shoveled more rice and curry onto his plate, placed more flat bread into his hand, or topped off his tea cup.

Sherlock seemed unaware he was being manipulated into eating. John seemed perfectly content to be ridiculed and insulted so long as adequate caloric intake transpired.

When the food was all gone, John grinned in satisfaction. "Well, Sherlock, I'm glad you've explained it all! None of that was even close to what you are doing. I don't know how I could have been so wrong. Thank you."

"Yes, well, it can be confusing. Especially when one substitutes the Internet for education."

"How right you are." John handed his man a napkin.

Molly stifled a giggle.

John undid Sherlock's cuff. The supercilious chemist began eagerly rolling both sleeves back when he saw the patch in the doctor's hand. John applied it to the forearm and started to pull the sleeve down. But Sherlock tapped his arm again. John sighed. Sherlock tapped his other forearm. "No," John shook his head. Molly watched Sherlock tap his arms again like a petulant child.

"Why would you bring four patches if you were only going to give me one, John? Must we play this game?"

John shook his head. Molly wanted to ask how Sherlock knew the quantity of nicotine patches in John's pocket, but she guessed that must have been the bribe John whispered about to lure the strange recluse to the table. It appeared to be accurate because John didn't seem the least bit surprised by Sherlock's question.

"I brought four because I foolishly assumed you had enough self-control to save them for later."

The detective scoffed, "You know my methods, John."

Molly saw their smiles, but their eyes seemed to be playing another game. The medical examiner felt sympathy for the doctor. Must be difficult to have such an obstinate patient. He was doubtless a first rate physician, but Sherlock seemed to treat him as a butler. Molly pitied Dr. Watson's
employment as a live in P.A. and health care provider to such a stubborn, difficult man. John sighed wearily. The doctor peeled open another patch and slapped it against the bare forearm begrudgingly. Sherlock seemed to accept this.

John passed fresh contact lenses, and a small dopp kit into Sherlock's hand. "A moment, please," Sherlock stood and sauntered out of the lab like a vainglorious king on the night of a victory feast.

Molly helped John tidy up. "You're so good with him," she said, after several moments of thoughtful silence. The two chuckled.

"Thank you for helping me. The trick is resisting the urge to throttle his stubborn arse!"
Molly looked stricken. "W-What's happened to his face?"

"No, no. Molly, that wasn't me this time. It was," John sighed sadly, "It was one of his, uh, his cases, well, his...experiments, really."
"Experiments?" Molly looked horrified.
"Yes. Well he was try-"

"Nothing!" Sherlock silenced John with a look. "It was nothing, Molly. Just a misunderstanding. Rest assured it was not our good doctor here. Don't you have things to do at home, John? Or anywhere else? Cluedo with Mrs. Hudson or perhaps your drunk sister needs minding again?"

Sherlock handed over the small leather bag and a wet toothbrush. Molly didn't quite understand the look that passed between the two, but she felt uneasy.

"Right," John's jaw flexed as Sherlock sat back before the microscope again. "Thank you, Molly." John shook the doctor's hand and the two exchanged cordial goodbyes. "Good night, Sherlock. See you at home." He left hastily with clenched fists.

Molly turned to say something to Sherlock, but the man was on his feet again. He grabbed his coat and ran out. Molly watched through the window as the chemist's long legs easily caught up to the shorter man. He grabbed John's arm. The two men seemed to argue heatedly under a street light. She watched their argument build then fade down below her window.

The medical examiner put her hand to her mouth when she saw Sherlock lean in and press his mouth against John's. She felt her throat tighten. It was the type of smooth steady kiss that only happens between two people who are already very used to such practices. She quickly looked away.

When Sherlock returned to the lab, Dr. Molly Hooper had already gone home for the night.
Sherlock attempted to make John an apology breakfast but neither the hob nor the cooker would not cooperate. He succeeded in scorching two pots, burning a tea towel, setting off the alarm which of course summoned Mrs. Hudson and roused a grumpy John. Both made him swear to never ever touch the range again. They went on and on. As if attempting a fry up was actually the worst thing Sherlock had done in that flat! Naturally, he went to sulk in his chair with his violin. He was great with a Bunsen burner. In theory the cooker should behave the same way.

John was late to work that day because of Sherlock's passionate form of apology. The more his body healed, the more physically the detective expressed himself.

Again John met Sherlock for dinner at the lab that evening. Molly studied their interactions with a new understanding. The shorter man doted on his chemist with the care of a dutiful, long-suffering husband. Molly saw how much of the detective's behavior could be interpreted as flirting, definitely he sought John's constant attention. Molly turned away when Sherlock nicked John's last bite of gravlax rye bread right out of his hand. Definitely flirting.

John tried to include the pathologist in his discussion of the Murderous Margay, but she found mirth elusive. She felt awkward around them now. She barely spoke as John discussed his latest blog entry...Until Sherlock didn't understand why it was so funny that the animal was named Tom Jones. "Is he a famous Brazilian?"

The doctor roared with laughter. Molly smiled. John began to sing a bit of "What's New Pussycat?" The doctor beckoned Molly to join along, drawing her out of her mood. Soon the pathologist was laughing wholeheartedly with John, the two singing at the top of their voices "Whooaa oho oh!" Their joy became contagious to the serious detective and soon he begrudgingly crooned with them, filling the lab with silliness and light.

Sherlock had such a deep musical laugh that ended with a high breathy sighing sound. Dr Hooper realized then that she had never really experienced his genuine laugh. It was John's doing. When John was with him, the recluse became almost a regular bloke. It wasn't so bad to be around the couple.

John reached into Sherlock's breast pocket when the chemist's phone interrupted. He showed the screen to Sherlock before continuing to slice apple into the waiting hand. Minutes later, John's phone chimed. "He's calling me now, pussycat."

Sherlock ignored this, revisiting his earlier explanation of the conversion of amygdalin in the apple's seeds into cyanide once in contact with the human digestive processes. "I'm not trying to poison you, Sherlock. It wouldn't be satisfying enough. But if you like, I'll sign you up for classes to defend yourself against attacks from people armed with fresh fruit."

"I'm talking about practical applications for apple seeds as a poison delivery system. And you are once again speaking nonsense, John." The detective punctuated the statement by removing an apple seed from his mouth and placing it in John's shirt front pocket. The doctor put a thin slice of apple in the sculpted mouth.

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away, Sherlock."
Molly watched Sherlock look from the bitten apple slice to John and put it down. It was almost cute.
"Now, what does your brother want?"
"You know what he wants." Sherlock hummed the Whooaa oho oh part of the Tom Jone's song. "To talk to you about something. A case?"

Molly walked away when she saw their heads dip close to whisper. She knew whatever the issue was, it was not meant for her ears. Probably national secrets. She busied herself preparing slides at the far side of the lab. She smiled and hummed the song softly to herself.

Suddenly John's voice boomed "No! It's not! It's NOT ok! You sort him, Sherlock. You sort him because I can't be responsible for myself if it's down to me!" He stalked out.

Again Molly watched Sherlock chase after him. Again her chest tightened to see their intimate interaction. Again Dr. Hooper fled her lab before Sherlock returned.

Sherlock worked all night. He was eager to finish this evidence so he could move on to any trace evidence from Moriarty's bomb vests. He tried to concentrate but his mind kept turning back to John's anger over learning of Mycroft's surveillance of their flat. Sherlock was used to his meddling brother's prying but John seemed deeply violated, calling it 'a total lack of propriety.' The detective didn't understand why John cared about a few cameras. Was he ashamed that anyone should discover their friendship now involved a physical component? Did it have something to do with John not being gay? Were these also reasons that kisses never progressed into sex?

Sherlock lacked experience in how exactly to convert snogging into sex. But he was quite sure John knew. The detective assumed they went off to separate beds because of timing: work schedules, odd hours, interruptions. But could it be John was not interested in progressing beyond kissing? The questions compounded in Sherlock's mind. And to top it all off was that blasted pop song! It was all very distracting. He gave up and went home.

FIVE-SEVEN

John had not masturbated this much since Uni. He loved kissing Sherlock, but he feared he would die of blue balls. The beautiful man was a fast learner: eager, invigorating and teasing. The pair had established a pattern of bringing one another to the very precipice of desire before reluctantly separating. The delayed gratification was exquisite torture. It was almost better than sex- almost.

John knew he wanted to have sex with Sherlock and he was very aware this meant he wanted sex with a man. Not some nebulous fantasy conjured up alone in the dark as an occasional curiosity to satisfy a hasty wank. It was imminent. A tangible probability that he was actually going to have sex with his best friend. As the eventuality became less of a contingency and more of a reality, John was forced to consider the circumstance in its entirety- the implications, the outcomes, the trajectory.

John knew, as an immovable fact, he and Sherlock would know one another for the rest of their lives. He knew it was true as surely as he knew his middle name was Hamish. They would always be in one another's lives.

He knew, as another solid fact, that he and Sherlock were ideally suited to one another. Not in the way each Tupperware has a specific lid, nor each sock has a mate, nor a hand in a glove, nor two eyes on a face. They were made for one another as two complete human beings meant to find one another and live life together.

John thanked God for this. It was the doing of the same God who had answered his fearful prayer when he had been shot. The soldiers' aphorism states 'there are no atheists in foxholes.' John had begged, "Please, God, let me live." And he could have died over there, far from his homeland, with excruciating pain and all-consuming fear as the last sensations he would ever feel on earth. For the longest time he felt guilt that he had survived the war while so many men and women (more deserving than he) had perished. He didn't know why he had lived. But, he had not died. He was still here. And if that was not miracle enough, he had met the only person on the planet ideally suited for him.

And that person was a man. Ok. Fine. It was a bit of an adjustment, to be certain, because he was unprepared...and obstinate. Yet, what was he to do? Thanks for saving my life when I begged, and for creating my ideal life companion, but for my third and final wish, O Magic Djinn, does this come in a female model because I have personal issues I'm too refractory to think about?

John also knew, as obvious fact, that neither he nor Sherlock were perfect people. Far from it, but they were perfect for each other. Murderers and suicides, both. Adrenaline and drink versus cocaine and heroin. Fighters and manipulators, the pair of them. Liars and Sociopaths, each. Two people who were their own worst enemies, but together they saved one another. This was their privilege. Sherlock had deduced "I am your-" and John had interrupted with "Yes and I am yours."
John knew the word that neither dare say: privilege. Sherlock was his privilege. And John was his.

That first kiss at the sink had been the pivotal moment for John. It was confirmation but it was much more dear. It was all things. The kissing was unlike any experience that came before. In the doctor's experience, women kissed him like they were having a conversation. But Sherlock kissed John like he was adamantly searching for something, something already known, something that already belonged to him but that had been misplaced somewhere within the doctor. John felt he had been opened, like a junk drawer containing something desperately sought and sorely needed, somewhere just beyond where the seeker could find. Sherlock's kiss was invasive and dangerous in a highly addictive way.

At first, John told himself it was his business what they did in private, but a part of him despised this answer. He wanted to not care who knew or what they knew or how it came to be known. But it was all still a bit of a challenge. He wanted to be ok about it all 100%, which he figured was a decent start. He genuinely wanted to get over it and just enjoy what they had. It would take time. But he would get there, because he would rise to this challenge.

It was easier to feel carefree when Sherlock was with him. He would look to his friend and not feel self-conscious of anything that transpired when they were together no matter where they were. But on his own, he found he still wondered if strangers could tell he fancied a man just by looking at him. There was a compulsion to ensure everyone knew he was not gay. It was foolish and he would tell himself so when he had those moments.

It was just easier to step away from the self-consciousness when John was with his detective. Because Sherlock made him feel secure in who he was. It was Sherlock who made him feel bolder, unashamed, even proud. It was Sherlock who gave him courage. This was unlike anything he had ever experienced. This was the first time in John's whole life that he had ever really experience someone who knew him completely and accepted all of it. He didn't feel the need to pretend to be some better version of himself as with other relationships.

It was odd because that's actually how he felt most of the time they had known one another: the best person he had ever been. Braver, stronger, more dauntless, utilitarian, valuable and worthy— even deserving— of the life he had survived. For that he was so grateful.

John tried to be a patient gentleman, respecting Sherlock's inexperience. As a doctor, he remained conscious of his madman's healing injuries. As a colleague, John tried to be understanding of Sherlock's marriage to his work. The stakes were too high to ignore Moriarty's tangled web.

But as a frustrated man with a seemingly unending erection, John was on the verge of going mad. He rubbed himself raw at night and it was still not enough to satisfy his need for Sherlock. His fantasies became wilder. Fellating the chemist under the work bench at the lab; awaking the detective with his urgent cock thrust into the sleeping man's mouth; surprising the tall man in the shower; bending the violinist over the sofa; kneeling before his man at scene of crime; dragging Sherlock into an alley and having him up against any brick wall in London; straddling his cock in the back of a cab and riding his friend all the way home; offering himself to the detective over the exam table in surgery.

The doctor had begun exploring his body in new ways. The first time he fingered himself, he felt very self-conscious about probing his arse. He'd never considered this possibility. It was difficult to find a comfortable position. He worried Sherlock would barge in. It felt humiliatingly desperate to touch himself inside.

However, when he pretended it was Sherlock's hand opening him, he began to enjoy it. At first it was difficult to accept the feeling of more than a single digit inside, but with daily practice, he
found himself almost eager for the sensation. He even began to crave the sore feeling the next morning. Two fingers could now easily become three twisting his hole open, with little discomfort. The only time he tried four it hurt quite a lot, but not so horrible if he worked his cock at the same time. He didn’t try that again. One night he boldly pressed three fingers a bit farther and discovered the full joy of prostate nerves. Three slick fingers became a wonderful fullness, stretching him perfectly, preparing him for his man. He hoped the detective was doing the same. He always came shouting Sherlock's name into his pillow.

John ceased to care how or where they would eventually have sex, as long as their naked bodies would soon be interconnected. At the very least, John wanted them to finally get off together. Even if it was fully clothed. He felt confident Sherlock would let him know when he was ready to experience more than snogging. *Please God, let it be soon!* He didn't know how much more frustration he could take.
Day Eight Sherlock's Perspective

Chapter Summary

Sherlock's perspective. Feels, thoughts, masterbation, The Plan

EIGHT

Tuesday night was wonderful because John didn't work Wednesdays. Sherlock had a plan that he hoped would lead to The Sex. The tall scientist had never wanted to have sex with another person. He felt so nervous, his stomach fluttered.

The detective deduced that John was prematurely stopping their kissing sessions out of some honorable notion of gentlemanly virtue. Quite admirable if Sherlock were a maiden fair, but quite frustrating for a red-blooded man. The detective knew John's motivation was loving care. It felt amazing that someone could guard his wellbeing so fiercely. And certainly, the energetic high of near constant arousal did improve his thought process. Yet his over-teased cock hated John with a vengeance each time the doctor would gently push him back, each time the doctor would say good night, each time Sherlock was left alone with an aching unsatisfied erection.

John's kiss was beyond what the detective could have ever envisioned. Gentle but with aggressive undertones. Highly addictive. Sherlock was surprised that John did not seem to resist. The detective spent the initial phase of their embraces always trying to discern any objection or hesitation. People were often put off by his nature. He knew he was universally disliked. But with John, there was no disgust, no resistance, not even when they kissed. Sherlock tried in vain to locate any of the familiar signs of objection within his man but was met only with acceptance and desire when they kissed.

It was a reaction unlike anything he had ever experienced from another person. John seemed to not just tolerate but truly accept Sherlock. Beyond that, John seemed to like him, desire him. Sherlock had never been wanted. Needed? Of course; he possessed a unique skill set that was highly necessary. But wanted? No, never like this. And why?

John had prompted Sherlock to deduce the answer. The detective had done so. "I am your-" Then John had quickly confirmed. It must have already been obvious to the experienced doctor because he had affirmed the detective so hastily. The word was home. I am your home, John. Where you belong. John had said, "Yes. And I'm yours." Sherlock was so grateful the issue was settled at last. He felt a bit foolish that it had taken him half a day to arrive at a conclusion that was clearly already quite apparent to John. But then again, John was the wisest man Sherlock knew when it came to people. Sherlock was certain this wisdom would extend to The Sex.

The detective was highly efficient at masterbation. It was a biological necessity of life which he took care of in the shower. Yet, this week, he found himself taking his time with his body in his bed. He used his mind palace to revisit every sound and sight of John while he stroked himself. Sherlock touched himself as if it were John's cock in his hands. When he climaxed, he always smeared his cum on his lips as if it had been his man's hot wet reward for a job well done. Tonight he had a plan to make this fantasy a reality.

When John arrived home from work, Sherlock was in his best dress, complete with rose
boutonnière. He had his note cards organized and his invitation in his breast pocket. He had his plan. *I am a genius!*
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Did I mention I enjoy the 4A's: Angst, Awkwardness; Anxiety; and Analingus.

Probably not work safe. (Although I really don't know where you work, so sorry if I'm judging you.)

The pair greeted one another with a long kiss. John stepped back to survey the manicured, regal man stood before him. His breath caught in his chest. "You are quite beautiful in that bespoke dress tonight. Very handsome. Very handsome indeed." He licked his lips. "Where are you off to, then? Big plans?"

"Into battle," Sherlock replied with a slight smile.

"Ah, well, there will be many a heart broken tonight at the sight of you so suited." Sherlock's smile broadened and he blushed at the word- beautiful.

John noted the clear anxiety in Sherlock's nervous movements that evening. The tall man could not seem to be still for more than a few seconds at a time. He was constantly peeking out the window, pacing, checking his watch. He would not eat with John. He didn't speak, save a few remarks on the time. The doctor began to fear his man expected something terrible to transpire that evening.

John had been through a long day. He craved sleep. Sherlock's frenetic pacing was making him dizzy. After his shower, he decided to go up to bed. "Sherlock, is there, uh, anything I can do? You are clearly anxious about...something. Is there anything at all I can do?"

Sherlock did not reply, only peeked out the curtain again. As John climbed the stairs to his room, the baritone voice sounded behind him, a mad rush of frightened speech, "John! John, you must stay in my room tonight!"

The doctor's heart was racing. "Yes. Right. Whatever you need." He ran for his gun and sprang towards the window. The dark street was empty, but Sherlock was clearly afraid of something. John quickly shut off all the lights,ghosting from room to room to sneak a look through each window he encountered. He crept through the darkened house with his back pressed flat against every wall, his gun held up beside his ear. He secured all windows and doors, then came back to Sherlock in the sitting room. He gripped his gun tightly and whispered, "You feel certain it will be tonight? In your room? Is that why you've sent Mrs. Hudson away until Monday? Have you rung Lestrade?"

Sherlock was mute, stunned.

"Sherlock!" John hissed his name in a panicked whisper. "Sherlock is it Moriarty's doing? Sherlock! Have you rung Lestrade?" John nudged his man in the dark.

Finally the detective was jolted into speech. "No. Lestrade? No." Why are we whispering? "Right." Suddenly John was on the phone. Sherlock heard him urgently requesting full presence at their address. "No sirens, Greg. We don't want to warn them away. <pause> He's too agitated to speak at present, but that must mean it's eminent. <pause> I'm to pretend to be him when they arrive in his room....Right, 5, ok."
"Ok, Sherlock. He's on his way now. It'll be ok. I'll take up position in your room."
"John-"
"Right, you need to go? It'll be ok. Greg is on his way. They will cover your exit. Five minutes. We will have them by your return. Be careful." John crept back down the hall into Sherlock's room. The detective frowned, but followed.
"John-"
"Shhh! It'll be ok." John was gripping the gun tightly, eyes scanning in the dark. He kept Sherlock well behind him. Sherlock turned on the bedroom light. "John!"
The doctor flung himself at the light switch, again plunging the room into near darkness. He pulled his man onto the floor beside the bed. "Are you mad, Sherlock? We can't draw them out until Lestrade arrives. Stay low!" The light from the street cut through the window revealing John's face as a stoic mask of readiness. He leapt to his feet. Blue eyes scanning every corner for danger. He was in full soldier mode.

Sherlock didn't know what to do! This was the worst possible outcome. He fumbled in his pocket for his invitation and pressed it into John's hand. The soldier observed the unopened paper, sealed with aubergine wax. The palace? No. They use red not purple.

Sherlock passed him a tiny pen torch from his nightstand. John pressed into a corner of the room with the light. He felt Sherlock crawl close to him, press note cards into his hand. John broke the seal and read, expecting to find some villainous taunt from Moriarty.

The invitation said: On The Occasion of The Deflowering of His Abstinence, Consulting Detective. William Sherlock Scott Holmes invites Doctor John Hamish Watson, Captain 5th Northumberland Fusiliers, to be present at 221B Baker Street...

John quickly scanned the note cards "John, you are the bravest, kindest, wisest man [next card, next, next, next] However I'm fairly certain you will know what to do [next, next, last] Please will you do me the honor of becoming the first and last man to make love with me...."

Oh Fuck No!

John scrambled for his mobile. He looked up to say something, anything to Sherlock. The sight that met his eyes, made him instantly, painfully hard. The phone clattered to the floor along with the notes. Sherlock was kneeling over the edge of the bed, bare arse facing John, pants and trousers down to his ankles, face buried in his hands. All the blood left John's brain. He was on his knees to worship the vision before him.

He nearly shot himself in the thigh before he remembered the gun! He engaged the safety, then tossed it into the pillow. He planted his hands roughly on each buttocks, with a light slap. Sherlock's head flew up, his back arching, mouth moaning. Then the detective settled with an enticing wiggle, spreading his legs further. John kneaded the smooth globes, gripped firmly, and spread his hands slightly. Both men grunted. His tongue gave one long lick from sac to tailbone. Sherlock tensed with a gasp, then melted in a loud moan against the mattress.

Without hesitation, John buried his tongue greedily in the pink hole, forcing it to open for him. He hummed his approval. Sherlock bucked his hips back, drawing the wetness deeper, wider. John reached to find his man's cock dribbling precum, already as hard as his own. The doctor's last conscious thought was how lovely the puckered fuzzy hole looked when blue lights reflected over the wet saliva from his hungry mouth. Blue lights bouncing through the window onto a luscious pale arse...blue lights? Blue Lights!

Oh fuck!
"Lestrade!"
Sherlock whirled, "What?"

John knew in that moment, beyond all doubt, that he would absolutely go to Heaven for his next action. He swallowed hard. He gripped Sherlock's pants and brought them up over the delicious bottom. *I am a saint!* He ran out of the flat and down the stairs to hold back the crushing tide of Metropolitan Police Services descending on 221B Baker' Street.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Laugh with me, won't you?

A mere four hours later, the entire humiliating incident was thoroughly explained to MPS' satisfaction. Sherlock was a superlative liar. John had to bite his lip to keep from interjecting. The detective certainly knew the best way to convince Inspector Lestrade's superiors to accept the false alarm. Sherlock became a verbal tap dancer, selling a fantastic story of compelling untruths. He invoked the name of Mycroft Holmes, hinted at national secrets, implied unimaginable danger. John was amazed by how cleverly Sherlock used silence to allow each listener to fill in the blanks with terrors of his or her own design.

The detective dramatically disrobed to the waist, displaying his healing injuries to all. "My esteemed colleague, Dr. John Watson can attest to the exact nature of how I came to bear these marks. One week ago, I was taken to a cellar and savagely beaten by unknown persons for several hours, but it has not stopped me from pursuing James Moriarty- to the very depths of hell if need be- to ensure our commonwealth is once again safe for every man, woman and child!"

Spontaneous applause erupted amongst the officials. It was so brilliant! John wanted to shout, "I'm the jammy bastard who's shagging him!" Well, almost shagging him.

Then Mycroft arrived and the two hoodwinked everyone in turns. Mycroft whole heartedly verifying everything Sherlock had (not) said. "The physical attack this man endured has not deterred him from dismantling Moriarty's elaborate network of crime." John could tell how thoroughly the brothers enjoyed dancing circles around all involved. They became dueling ringmasters, each Holmes trying to outshine his brother's spotlight. Finally, the two concluded their game. It ended with MPS promising that any of their resources was at Sherlock's disposal.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Mycroft Holmes adds creepy to awkward.

On the street, Anthea stood beside the open door of the armored black limousine. She ducked into the front passenger's seat as Mycroft neared. "We'll take mine back to yours, gentlemen." The British Government offered the open car to John and Sherlock.
"We'll hail a cab."
"Get in, Sherlock, Doctor. Did you forget the helicopters over Baker Street this evening? We have much to discuss."

Once the car was in motion, Mycroft withdrew a small tin from his pocket and offered it towards the doctor.
"Mint, John?" he smirked.
"Piss off!"
John turned to Sherlock, "You said you would take care of his bloody spy cameras!"
Sherlock glared at his smirking brother sat opposite them, but spoke to John, "I did."
"No you didn't," John said.
"I mean yes I did tell you that, John."
"Right. Well, that's quite helpful."

"What do you want, Mycroft?"
"What I always want- to help you see reason, O brother mine."
"What do you want, Mycroft?"
"To protect you, as any decent big brother would for his naive, impressionable sibling. Just as I helped you mere moments ago."
Sherlock sat perfectly motionless but his eyes were feral talons of hatred, scratching his brother's eyes out with a cruel look.

"How long do you estimate this sentimental..." the older Holmes grasped air in a pantomime gesture of finding a word, "...'experiment' will continue before your, ehm, 'esteemed colleague's' neurotransmitters attenuate his temporarily heightened levels of adrenaline, dopamine and serotonin? Before or after he consummates your...'flat-share'?"

"Right. Stop the car. I'm getting out here. Pull off!" John banged on bulletproof tinted windows.
"Stop the fucking car!"

Sherlock quieted John with a hand on his knee. "That's none of your concern, Mycroft."
"That's all of my concern, dear brother! Or do you imagine a different outcome? Who was it that sorted out your last drug fueled misadventure? Or the drugs binge before that? Or-"
"I am a bloody army doctor! That means I can break every damn bone in your entire body while naming them! Now Fuck Off, Mycroft!" John was nearly standing in the confines of the car, his finger thrust in the other man's face. Sherlock turned in his seat and restrained the shouting man with a hand over his heart. The dark-haired man rubbed the thumping heart into submission. John's nostrils flared. Sherlock lightly bumped their foreheads together. He tried to explain with his eyes that an emotional outburst was exactly what Mycroft wanted. John understood and nodded. He
breathed deeply and wrapped his shaky fists around Sherlock's hand.

"It's a fair question," Mycroft stated casually as he looked out the window. "I only need to be aware of your timeframe, Doctor, so I'll know when to arrest his truncheon-wielding associate and book his next rehab. I know I make these things look effortless, but there really is so very much planning involved in ruining little brother's suicide attempts. He was never one for failure, you know." Mycroft looked sad, his eyes visiting somewhere far away for the briefest of moments.

They arrived at Baker Street and John sprang out of the car, dragging Sherlock with him. The shorter man fumed under his breath. He was pacing the pavement, fists clenched, knuckles white. "Such a complete and utter arse."
"Am I to take that as flirtation coming from you, John?"

It took both Sherlock and the bodyguard/driver to restrain John from throttling the smirking man right there on the street. John only ceased struggling when his hand accidentally connected with Sherlock's rib. Mycroft shooed the burly driver away when it was clear all the fight had gone out of John.

The British Government looked directly at John and asked, "How long do you intend to play house with my damaged brother, Dr. Watson?"
"Until he's bored with me!" When John heard his voice shout the answer through the street, the
declaration became suddenly very true. His exclamation echoed up off the pavement and bounced
off the houses, fading high above them. His accusing finger dropped, his breathing calmed.
Sherlock turned to him in surprise, mouth open. John looked up at his man. He gave a small smile
and asked softly, "Alright?"
"Alright." Sherlock's mouth twitched up.
"A moment, please, Mycroft."
The taller Holmes nodded his consent and waited in the car, door open.

Sherlock steepled his hands and offered them out to John, who tucked them under his chin. They
beamed at one another. The doctor closed his eyes and sighed contentedly. John knew.
"I'm not playing house." John continued to rub the long fingers beneath his chin.
"Let's kill Mycroft," Sherlock answered.
"Later." John rubbed the dexterous hands with his own. The two men spoke with their eyes for a
long moment. They nuzzled their noses and cheeks together.
"I can tell you think you still have things to discuss with your brother."

Nod.
"Without me."
"I'm sorry. Yes. I'll be gone quite a while I'm afraid."
"What things?" John kissed fingertips as he asked.
"Urgent business. A solution to a problem."
John sighed.
"Moriarty? The web?"
"The East Wind."
"Right. How's your rib?"
"I'm fine, John. Ask my doctor. I'll hurry back as soon as I can."
"Text me if you need me." John kissed the tips of the slender fingers in his grasp once more.
"Why would I need you?" Sherlock's blue-green sparkled mischievously.
"No reason at all," John said licking his lips.
Sherlock stole a quick kiss. John stole it back. They built a slow kiss into a yearning blaze of love,
gratitude and desire.

"Are you quite fini-" Sherlock's long leg reached back and kicked the door closed on Mycroft's
interruption. Soon they were immodestly groping and sighing against the front door of 221B like
two teenagers after a first date. "Find and remove all his cameras, John," Sherlock whispered while
nibbling an ear.
"Yes," John understood the snogging was cover now, a disguise against Mycroft. Somehow that
made it hotter. He felt light headed.
"Details in your pocket." John felt a rough squeeze against his bottom.
"Anything else you want to put back there?" He was rewarded with another very hard squeeze.
"There's an address as well." Another rough grab.
"Address of a hotel to deflower detectives uninterrupted? I hope." John's brain was melting away.
Teeth on his trachea.

"Do be careful."
"I'll try."
"Goodnight, John."
"Goodnight, Sherlock."
Worst/Best! Date! Ever!
Up in their rooms, John stood with a foolish grin on his face, one hand to his prickling lips. He dug the receipt from his back pocket, noting the slight soreness of his rump where Sherlock had handled him roughly. Though he knew better, he still allowed himself to wonder if it would leave a mark. A Sherlock-sized crimson hand print embossed on his bottom. *Mmmmm.* It felt so naughty to press his hand against the warmth on his back cheek. He became self-conscious. Cameras! *Fucking Mycroft!*

He read the crudely scribbled note: "John, very good. Did not know that was something that is done. Very very good. SH" Ah, the thing he'd seen Sherlock write in the police conference room. *Very very good.* His tongue rubbed his teeth.

The other paper was a bespoke black-on-black business card for N. Abd Al-Rashid Zolutioneering. More madman scribbled on the back: "JW ring at once SH"

John dialed the number. It was engaged. No sooner had he ended the call than the phone rang in his hand with a blocked incoming number. He answered in the middle of the first ring. "Good evening, sir. We are ready." The voice was female- professional, smoky but youthful and friendly. British with a lovely foreign hint.

"Yes, good evening, My name is-"
"We are ready, Doctor Watson."
"Yes. Uh Right. I'm sorry, for what?"

The voice rattled off a 10 digit combination of letters and numbers. She began describing locations in the flat. "That one is along the northwest wall, sir, Doctor. A pen knife will help." She seemed to be waiting. John looked about, then understood- She was meant to help him find hard wired cameras and disable them by somehow messing with a few tiny wires inside the cables. John would locate a camouflaged lens then confirm the tiny 10 digit code along the cable. The voice was very patient. She was also very thorough in her instructions. They repeated the process until soon they had six cameras sorted. There were no cameras in John's room. *Mycroft may yet live.* Finally the helpful voice said, "We are finished, Doctor. Confirmation has been sent. Please bring the laptop with you."

"Sorry. What?" But the line was dead.

John stood immobile in the kitchen. He reasoned it out. He gathered his jacket, his laptop and hand gun. He was surprised to find a cab waiting for him when he stepped out into the night. After a long journey, the cab stopped at a large wrought iron gate. Two enormous suited men with great big automatic rifles stood expectantly along either side of the cab. The blonde driver turned to John. "Thank you, sir. Good night."

"What?" The door was opened by one hulking armed man. "Good evening, Doctor." The olive-toned man looked like a carved rock from the beach at Easter Island come to life. The cab backed away, it's headlights fading into the darkness. John was frisked by meaty paws, his gun taken and laptop handed to the other living rock.

The interior of the estate house was surprisingly modern and minimalist, spacious in a Scandinavian way. John barely had time to look around the cavernous foyer when a tiny elderly woman appeared. She was perhaps seventy, even eighty. Her head partially hidden beneath an ornate scarf of deepest navy blue. She wore dark shapeless silk robes and a floor-length tunic decorated in swirling gold filigree at the cuffs and hems. Her hands were also hidden inside dainty embroidered gloves of matching blue. Her face was weathered, deeply tanned but smiling kindly.
She was so thin and tiny, John seemed a giant by comparison. He extended his hand in greeting but she only bowed a slow nod.

John offered her the black business card. She only smiled politely. "Good evening, madam. My name is Dr. John Watson."

Faster than John could imagine, a gloved hand came up. The fingers made a quick beckoning gesture. "Yes ok," John startled back. The little woman began to climb the right side of the double staircase. She moved swiftly, gracefully, upward. She turned to ensure John followed.

The upstairs was all dark silent hallways and closed doors. John tried to remember the many turns and pathways that would lead him back to the front door, but he had to trot to keep up with the elderly woman. They eventually wound their way up the time-weathered stone steps of an ancient circular stairway. The higher they climbed, the more narrow and steep the treads became until John's boots were barely on tiptoe on the ledges of stone. Congratulations, Sherlock Holmes, you have outdone yourself in the drama department! Was Dracula a former client?

The tower area at the top of the stairs opened up into a huge circular stone room full of decal-coated computer equipment in tidy rows, most bearing layers of bumper stickers. "Hello, Doctor!" John whirled in every direction, but could not find the owner of the voice.

He turned back to the door, but the shrouded woman was gone.

From behind a gigantic television, came a round young man in pajamas. He was barely twenty, greasy haired, pockmarked and roughly 25 stone of pillowy fat. "I am a huge fan! Read your blog constantly, Doctor!"

John found himself shaking a baby soft hand. "Thank you, that's very kind. I'm sorry, who are you?"

"Oh. Yes. Sorry. I'm Daoud. Zolutioneering." He put out his hand towards the laptop under John's arm. He had an Arabic flavor to his English. "Uh, Yes Right. I spoke to one of your colleagues tonight. You're a friend of Sherlock's?"

"I wish! Never met him. Well not in person. But I owe him. If not for him, I would be very dead! You spoke to Nadia. She runs my Malaysian offices." The pudgy boy grunted and wheezed as he got to his knees connecting the laptop to various cables in front of the massive telly.

"Right."

"Does he really not know the planets, Doctor Watson?"

"It's true. Please, call me John."

"My people invented astronomy. I have a great-uncle who is an astronaut back home."

"Home?"

"The Kingdom, KSA." When Daoud stood, the doctor could see his faded t-shirt depicted a comic book drawing of Batman kissing Robin with the word "Kapow!" in big red letters behind them. The chubby boy grinned sheepishly when he saw John notice. "Grandmother hates this one almost as much as my Spock/Kirk one," his olive toned skin blushed, "That is how I came to be exiled you could say. Not for the shirt, I mean. Do you like comics? Well, you practically are a superhero, I suppose."

John smiled. "I'm just an army doctor. Sherlock's the big brain. I just...blog about it. You could say I'm more like...Jimmy Olsen."

"Oh I am a very huge Superman fanboy, Doctor John!"

The entire time Daoud explained about comics, Star Trek and various other fandoms, he moved about doing computery things at various terminals in the room. He peppered the doctor with questions about Sherlock. He was very witty, welcoming and sincere. He spoke rapidly like a man too used to spending too much time alone. John was happy to let the youth carry on. He seemed to be a good natured admirer of Sherlock and a highly skilled expert in technology. It was also clear
the young man was starved for company. "I apologize. I am being very rude. I do not get much, uh, human interaction...obviously. Please, make yourself at home. Have a kip if you like. I must go to the servers in the cellar. This will take a long time. There are many snacks in the refrigerator, Doctor John."

"Thank you, Daoud."

John didn't know how much time had passed when he woke on the leather couch. His neck was stiff. The young nerd was saying, "All finished! My best work yet! Confirmation has been sent. Oh and this, Doctor John." He offered the laptop then added a rectangle on top. It was a black plastic case with hinges bearing a 'Fair Use Has A Posse' bumper sticker.

John balanced the laptop on the arm of the sofa. He opened the little case to find a large bore hypodermic needle syringe and a vial. "What am I to do with this?"

"The top of the thigh maybe? Or under the arm? Or the upper back, but I cannot help with that. I am...not good with needles. He said you are a doctor and could implant yourself. I have readied it."

"Implant myself with what?"
"The tracker. GPS. The dedicated satellite. Good for 10 years. What I just finished, Doctor John. It is ready now."
"What?"
"Global Positioning System -"
"Yes. I understand GPS, Daoud. But am I- you mean I'm- He told you I'm supposed to inject myself with a, a, this tracker?"
"Exactly!"
"Why would I do that?"

Daoud looked confused and a bit disappointed. "I do not have the answers. I am sorry. As they say, I did not expect the Spanish Inquisition."
"Well, no one ever does."
Daoud smiled at the joke but still seemed a bit disappointed.
"Yes. Ok. Please convey my humble thanks to Mr. Holmes. I am very grateful to be of service. Any more cameras or satellites or anything. He can contact me when it is more convenient to activate your trackers."
"He has a tracker?"
"Yes. He has the other. Only two. It was delivered this afternoon. But it is also not yet implanted, because he said you..."
"Right. Because I'm the doctor." And the award for most mysterious man in the universe goes to: Sherlock Sodding Holmes.

The old woman appeared out of nowhere and John startled back. Daoud laughed. "She is like a cat. Not a Margay, but just as deadly if provoked." Daoud turned to the tiny woman and the two exchanged rapid fire Arabic.

"On behalf of myself and my grandmother, I thank you for the great honor of your visit, Doctor Watson. My grandmother has prepared a light supper for Mr. Holmes. I am very grateful to be of service. She wishes you please send him our blessings for peace and our deepest gratitude. God willing, we will meet again." Daoud bowed formally. It was an odd sight on a man in pajamas. "ToSbeho ‘ala khair, Doctor Watson!" John smiled. He had a sudden thought, "Hawwamti mumti‘ah bi‘anqalaysun, Daoud." He bowed deeply. The two men laughed. At the sight of the grandmother's shocked and confused face, they laughed harder. "I love Monty Python very much! You are a funny man, Doctor John!"

"I apologize. I am being very rude. I do not get much, uh, human interaction...obviously. Please, make yourself at home. Have a kip if you like. I must go to the servers in the cellar. This will take a long time. There are many snacks in the refrigerator, Doctor John."

"Thank you, Daoud."

John didn't know how much time had passed when he woke on the leather couch. His neck was stiff. The young nerd was saying, "All finished! My best work yet! Confirmation has been sent. Oh and this, Doctor John." He offered the laptop then added a rectangle on top. It was a black plastic case with hinges bearing a 'Fair Use Has A Posse' bumper sticker.

John balanced the laptop on the arm of the sofa. He opened the little case to find a large bore hypodermic needle syringe and a vial. "What am I to do with this?"

"The top of the thigh maybe? Or under the arm? Or the upper back, but I cannot help with that. I am...not good with needles. He said you are a doctor and could implant yourself. I have readied it."

"Implant myself with what?"
"The tracker. GPS. The dedicated satellite. Good for 10 years. What I just finished, Doctor John. It is ready now."
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"And you are a very skilled computer wizard! It is I who am grateful for your invaluable help. You are a most welcome guest at Baker Street any time! Ma'a as-salamah, sir!"
Daoud beamed with pride. The men shook hands.

John came home to an empty flat. He stripped naked and snuggled into Sherlock’s bed. The scent of expensive exotic soap surrounded him. *Never a dull moment with Sherlock Holmes.* He set the black 'Fair Use Has A Posse' case on the nightstand. John picked up the ridiculous invitation and pressed it to his lips. He held it close to his chest and fell asleep smiling.
The evening of Day Nine

Chapter Summary

Tenderness, a bit of a row, a touch of sadness, fluff, The East Wind, Ani Difranco
reference "weary as water" (credit where due)

NINE

John awoke with a start to hear movement downstairs. Sherlock was hanging his coat near the door. It was past midnight. John had not seen his man since the night before when Sherlock left with his brother. It seemed the detective had not slept in years. There was a terrible heaviness in the tall man's face that extended to his posture and even his hair.

"Everything alright?"
Sherlock did not reply. He only climbed a few stairs and began to kiss the doctor very slowly. John pulled him away, studying the sad face. "What's happened?"
Sherlock only shook his head. "Please." That was all he said. Not a whisper, not a question, but an earnest request for comfort.

John pressed his lips tenderly to every part of Sherlock's face, neck, head and hands. He petted gently, soothed calmly, kissed lovingly. The doctor gave every kiss he had within him. John's hands and mouth did not build a great fire of lust, but rather burrowed deep under the skin into the marrow, suffusing Sherlock's entire being with comfort and love. After a time, the detective lay his head on John's chest. He allowed the doctor to sway him gently. They sat on the stairs like that in silence for hours, softly kissing off and on. The exhausted detective submitting to compassionate petting and cuddling.

John whispered into Sherlock's hair, "My beautiful man, my dear friend, my clever madman."
"Madman?" Sherlock kissed the palm of John's hand.
"Yes. Madman," John stroked the umber curls softly. "That's what we doctor's call a man who wants to put a chip in someone like a pet." John said it quietly, with a touch of mirth.

"You're not my pet!" The detective jumped up, offended.
"It's ok. It's ok. I know. I didn't mean it like that. I just don't understand why."
"Isn't that what people do, John? Exchange sentimental items to signify commitment. This is just more...more...practical. Our work is dangerous, John. Do you not see?" The weary detective was nearly shouting,
"Hey, I'm not Mycroft. You've obviously been arguing all day and night. You don't need to be defensive with me. Ok? Are you hungry? There's goat and rice in." John was calm.
"I'm not hungry. And I'm not defensive. You're not my pet. And I'll not get bored of you."
"Ok. Right. But trackers? Even for you it's a bit dramatic. Besides, where are you going that I can't follow? We always go together, always find one another in time. We work as a team, yes? Watch each other's backs. Also, Sherlock, did you consider what if they were hacked by Moriarty or another like him?"

Sherlock shifted his weight to one foot like a great crane. His mouth opened to speak, but closed tight again. Clearly he had not considered that his idea could be turned against them. His face
flashed with anger, then he plastered it over with blank politeness. "Right. Forget it, John. Stupid idea."
"Come here. We can talk. Normal talk. People do that. It doesn't have to be..." John sighed. He began again, making his words as distinct as possible, "Look, we are the same two people we have always been, ok? And we can continue on as such in perpetuity. This," he gestured a hand back and forth between their bodies, "This does not have to change our...situation at all. You can still be you. I can still be me. Same people. Working together. Yes?"
"Yes. You're right. Good night, John." Sherlock stalked back down the stairs without another word. Soon the flat was full of Mozart's Lacrimosa.

In perpetuity! The same two people! I'm not the same, I'm completely different! He thinks I'll tire of him, get bored. I've played the violin since infancy, that's a lifetime commitment. No trackers. How does one show significant attachment? How does one arm against the future? Can he not feel The East Wind coming? The poisoning cabbie, The Chinese smugglers, The Woman, the Golem- all connected to the flirtatious bomber: The Napoleon of Crime.

Sherlock felt the danger, like some shadow at the corner of the eye just as you drift off to sleep. Like that unmarked vial full of solution right next to that thing you'd just been reaching for. Mycroft talked circles around the question of what information was known about the bomber. Something in brother's eyes showed fear of Moriarty, or was it a misstep? Mycroft tried to divert with silly questions about involvement with John designed to embarrass, but there had been something transitive in their discussion- as if brother needed to know the depth and breadth of John's loyalty to Sherlock. Why? What had Mycroft done? What did Mycroft know about Moriarty?

Sherlock shivered against the phantom howl of The East Wind. Slender dexterous fingers pressed thin wire strings into callouses more rapidly. The violin sobbed a pitious rendition of Prokofiev's Dance of the Knights. There was no way to tell John of the coming storm.
Day Ten

Chapter Summary

A violent domestic! It is my opinion that The character of Watson has a huge well of rage inside that he must struggle to keep in check most of the time. In Conan Doyle, Watson paints himself as patient with his companion...but he is prone to violence. I find that dead sexy! I give it a slightly humour treatment here but be warned it gets sad and a bit dark near the end.

TEN

A thorough and proper domestic! Flying papers, crumbling glassware, overturned furniture, exploding vases. Where had all the feathers come from? Sherlock was not even angry, he was in fact having a wonderful time. If only Orphee aux enfers: Can-Can was playing in the air and not just in his mind, then it would have been a truly perfect moment. He thoroughly enjoyed a spirited debate and this was by far the most spirited John had ever been. Entertaining, amusing, and messy. Was it Christmas?

Sherlock ducked in time for yet another of Mycroft's knickknacks to sail over his head and kiss the wall. The tall man stepped through the splintered wreckage of one of brother's favorite dining chairs. He ran to the far side of the long banquet table, keeping John always on the opposite side from himself. It was all fun until the soldier actually got hands on him. Mustn't let that happen...yet.

Anything John said was answered with a childish quip. Anything John threw was evaded. Anything John did was absolutely adorably cute. Sherlock was breathless from being chased round the great table. John had such stamina, truly remarkable! But then again, the man's advantage was that he ate properly and slept regularly. Plus he didn't smoke. A B&H would be so nice right now, but parents were across the hall, so best not.

"Lucky?!? I should feel lucky that you told me? Lucky that I didn't just wake up one day to 'Oh by the way, we're secretly married. I've forged your signature because I'm a psychotic lunatic. Cup of tea, dear?' Madman!"

Another candlestick took flight, denting the wall. How many candelabra did Mycroft own? Did he play host to the Phantom of the Opera on occasion? "I don't sound like that, John."
"Not. The. Point!"
"And the point is?"
A chair smashed over another chair, turning them both to kindling. John was so strong. It was actually a bit sexy. Maybe Sherlock should throw things back? Mycroft did own so many breakables. Sherlock faked left and ran right. Again they were on opposite sides of the long table.
"The point is this is NOT what normal people do, Sherlock!"
"Normal is boring!"
"You should have that fucking tattooed somewhere! <decorative plate> So the tracker is vetoed and you escalate to this?" Another framed picture dove from its hook. Sherlock vaulted the narrow side of the table and slid over its glossed surface. He landed near the window, rolling to avoid another vase. He leapt to his feet, sprinting to keep the table between them.
"No GPS chip means, to you, get our families and try to trick me into signing a marriage license! I can read you know! 'Sign here, John. Slice of cake?' Lunatic!"
Sherlock twisted away from a replica Celtic sword as it clattered against the door.
"That's like trying to borrow a fiver, getting turned down and robbing B of E!"
"Spontaneity counts for nil?"

Another framed picture- the little one of Mycroft and Father. At least the objects were getting smaller. That was a good sign. Maybe?
"You wanna be spontaneous? Buy flowers! Ask me on a sodding date!"
"We go on loads of dates! All the time, John."
John stopped mid-throw. "What?" He put down a crystal figurine of two doves. Mental note: Mycroft had the decorating taste of an old granny. A blind granny.
"What about all the dinners?"
"I fetch it to you at your lab like a bloody singing waiter!"
"Well, I just took you to the country side for a lovely sporting holiday last month."
"Dartmoor? That was a damned case!" The crystal doves became jagged gravel when they met the bookcase.
"And you tried to poison me."
"Well you leave little bits of hair all over the basin in the mornings. Neither of us is perfect, John."

An art nouveau lamp met its sudden end over the side board. John looked so amazing- that same delicious snog face: fiery eyes, ragged breath, wild hair, serious mouth, flushed skin. This was a far less efficient way to see that passionate face. Snogging was quicker. But this was almost as fun.
"People do NOT have secret husbands, Sherlock!"
"So you've said, John. Repeatedly. And Loudly."
"You didn't even give me a moment to consider!"
"It's been ages." Another figurine.
"Why? Why now? Why like this?"
"I've said."
"No! No you bloody well have not!"
"It's fairly straightforward: a bit of paper to-" Sherlock hurdled a decimated chair and dove under the table. He scrambled up to his full height and flung himself behind an armchair. The steel Armet bounced off the upholstery and clattered to the floor, visor askew.
Not a replica. Sherlock ran back around the long dining table again. "A bit of paper to ease any legal concerns in the event of my death. No, wait!"

The matching left articulated gauntlet nearly dented the detective's skull. "That suit of armor is 15th century, you know! Your aim is too good to mess about with that!"
"I'm not messing about, Sherlock! WHY?!
"I've said. Maybe less smashing, more listening!"
"Why do you think you're going to die?"
"Everyone dies, John. You're a medical doctor, you've been to war. I'd think you knew-" Another knickknack. Did Mycroft rob a street fair?" Why now? Why do you think you'll die now?"
"Because you're aiming for my skull, perhaps?"
"WHY NOW?" A marble obelisk came within centimeters of the detective's right ear.
"You'll get my entire estate if you sign and I die. Think it through, John."
"I don't want your belongings, you idiot! Answer me- WHY NOW!" Another chair met its fate.

"I'm not clairvoyant, John!"
"Well at least there's still some humility left in you."
"Is that what you want? Humility? You want me to beg?"
"Or just **ASK** like a *normal* person! You could **ASK**!" A tiny hinged copper box set sail. "I felt a proposal was redundant."

"Oh because of all the million times you've already never asked? Was I home for *any* of them?"

John stalked him round the table.

"Don't be an idiot, John." Sherlock regretted it the moment the sentence left his mouth. The second Celtic replica sword came crashing across the oak table, marring the surface with a deep gouge. *Try to surprise a man with a secret wedding and this was the thanks you got! And he says I'm the drama queen.*

"Clearly I was mistaken in my deduction. Do you want me to ask?"

"I want you to **THINK!** **Think** about someone else for **ONCE** in your life!"

"I did! I AM! I got Harry here, didn't I?"

"By telling her I was *dying!*"

"Which proves how much she loves you!"

"You know! You **KNOW** I'm not good with this sort of thing. Did you ever think what this would mean- to *me*?" John was nearly hyperventilating.

"I don't understand."

John sank to the floor. He whispered, "Did you ever think I might need a bit of time to consider it? To consider *this*?"

"I don't understand. To consider *me*?"

John was breathing hard, leaning back on his haunches, staring up at Sherlock from across the destroyed room. Something in his azure eyes was pleading for mercy. His whisper was hoarse from shouting.

"I never thought- I never imagined...my future...as, as, married to a, a...a---" His hand was gesturing up and down towards Sherlock.

"A sociopath?" John's hand dropped limply into his lap before gesturing at himself. "A *man,*" he said in a barely audible whisper.

Sherlock whispered back, "That's why I said secret."

John looked very sad. His eyes moistened. The detective knew this was not good.

"Sherlock, you know I'm not- I never- I just never imagined myself with a...a husband. I need time. A bit of time, yes? *For me.*" John pinched the bridge of his nose and shut his eyes.

Sherlock said nothing. This was no longer amusing. He blinked dumbly. He put his hands in his pockets, rocked on his heels. He crossed his arms, uncrossed them, put them back in his pockets, dropped them to his sides. Then he nodded to himself.

Sherlock inhaled sharply and stood straight. He crossed the large dining hall in a few easy strides. He extended his hand. "Come on then. We're going."

"Where?" John took the offered hand. Sherlock checked his watch and smiled, "A proper date!"

"What? What about-"

"Ah, Mycroft will take care of it." Sherlock began brushing splinters from John's clothes, righting his collar, smoothing his hair into place. "He's accustomed to clearing up my messes. I dare say he enjoys it- playing the martyr."

"And our families?"

"Apologizing for me is Mycroft's second favorite pastime. He'll know how to fix it." Sherlock punctuated his statement with a tentative kiss to John's flushed cheek. "Now let's go!" He winked.

The two surveyed the annihilated room for their coats. Sherlock's was under an overturned wingback chair. John's was between a destroyed oil painting and some kindling that was formerly a
dining chair or perhaps a side table. Sherlock took a dozen photos. "Really?" John said as he flaked feathers out of his cuffs. "For the next time I'm accused of being The Madman, of course." They both began to giggle. "Shhh!"

John headed for the door. Sherlock grabbed his arm and brought him to the far wall. He drew back a thick damask curtain to reveal a tiny iron ring set in the wall. With his usual flourish, he pulled the ring to reveal a secret door. John followed him through narrow tunnels that were surprisingly clean. *Mysteriousness: a Holmes family tradition.*

Soon the pair were out into the cool night, hurrying down the green slope of manicured lawn. When they reached a breech in the wall, John stopped to look back at the manor house. He felt a pang of guilt. "Sherlock, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. You're not...Are you...cross with me?"

The detective pulled his Doctor into a tight embrace, enfolding John securely in the long fronts of his Belfast Ulster coat. The tall man kissed the flaxen hair. He squeezed with all his might. Then he stood John back, hands on shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "Why would I be angry? You need more data, happens to the best of us, John. Additionally, you didn't say no. Therefore the premise is still quite sound. So now we are only negotiating the terms!" He laughed loudly. "Madman!"
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Fluffiest non-wedding reception ever. Extrapolated from Downey/Law gypsy scene.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock's idea of a date was as lively as any case they had worked. "I thought this would be a great place to celebrate afterwards. But no matter, we can still celebrate."
"What do we celebrate now?"
"The ruin of Mycroft's favorite breakables, of course!"
"Oh, well, I'm sorry about that," John tried to look ashamed of what he'd done but the two began laughing instead.

When the driver stopped, Sherlock ran round to the boot and knocked. The cabbie popped the latch from inside the front seat. Sherlock began removing his shoes and socks. John hurried to do the same. The forest ground felt cool against his feet. He wiggled his toes. Sherlock put their shoes and socks in the boot. Then added their wallets. Then he extracted his violin case. He patted a large cardboard box, "Will you, John?" John hefted the box with some effort. Sherlock extracted a heavy cloth sack that had been behind the box. The tall detective leaned into the cab, saying, "Thank you, Maurice. See you at one, yes?"

When the car was gone, John looked around. There was firelight over a hill through the trees. And the distinct sound of a Cimbalom. Sherlock leaned in close to John and dropped his voice low. "Just so you know, it could get a bit dangerous. Try to be polite. Additionally, whatever you do, avoid fighting anyone here at all costs. Oh, and don't drink from the same cup as anyone here, except me. And, don't dance with anyone here- except me. Above all, don't get drunk, yes?"

"Who are we meeting?"
"Jozef and Ooana Farkas are nomadic Romani tradespeople whom I had the good fortune of meeting six years ago. Long story. Wonderful people. Great family. Exceptional musicians and dancers. A few know Mummy. Do try not to fight anyone."

In a clearing over the hill sat seven brightly painted vardos arranged in semi-circle. There was a bonfire in the center and nearly thirty people of varying ages. Upon seeing Sherlock, the whole group began to clap and whistle boisterously. The detective leaned his violin case against a pine and began greeting individuals by name. He occasionally brought something out of the cloth sack to offer to a person. A fifty-something, svelte, bearded man embraced Sherlock and spun the lanky man up in a kinetic hug. They laughed and shook hands enthusiastically. "Jozef! So good to see you, sir!" The bearded man kissed Sherlock on each cheek and clamped him on the shoulders. "Sherlock! Congratulations, sir! It has been too long!"

Sherlock handed the cloth sack to his robust friend and offered a hand towards the heavy box in John's arms. "For your family, Jozef. With our gratitude." Sherlock bowed.

A smiling, buxom woman appeared at Jozef's side and took the box from John. She hoisted it as if it weighed little and set it on the step of the nearest vardo. She quickly opened the box and
withdraw one of twelve bottles. She held it high for all onlookers to see. Applause burst forth and echoed through the night woods. The woman snaked an arm around Sherlock and hugged him. Sherlock beamed at her and kissed her cheeks, "Ooana, so good to see you."

She smacked his rump saying, "You have been dearly missed this year!" Ooana turned to look at John. "So? This is he?"

The clearing quieted and the group edged closer, all seemed to take great interest in Sherlock's reply. Sherlock cleared his throat. "May I present Dr. John Watson!" The detective grabbed John's hand and raised it high as if celebrating a victorious prize fighter.

Suddenly everyone was cheering, clapping, pressing close to embrace John. The doctor was nearly dizzy from being spun this way and that into scores of arms for hugs and kisses. Someone slapped his rump, a thin flower wreath ended up on his head, too many hands were shaking his own, his face was pinched and squeezed. When at last he was released and the group settled, John had a drink in his hand and a braided cloth garland on each wrist. He looked for Sherlock, who was changing into a shirt and open waist coat similar to most men present. The cloth bag was being passed around.

Jozef's voice boomed over all, "Let us celebrate!" People cheered again. Ooana took John's arm and led him to a prime seat on a felled tree that had a woolen blanket folded over the bark for comfort. The smiling woman put Sherlock's violin case in John's lap and kissed him again, then hurried away. Several people greeted John and sat along side him. Someone refilled his cup.

Without warning, Jozef struck up a chord on his viola and the ten-piece band was at once in full swing. Five women and five men bowed before the fire. Sherlock and Ooana were among them. They danced some sort of folk dance. But each person wore large numbers pinned to chest and back. Sherlock was a 9. In the next dances, he was a 7, then a 5, then again a 9.

John had no idea what was going on. But he could not stop smiling and laughing. He watched his man twist and leap barefoot before the fire, grinning like an idiot. Sherlock was a very good dancer. He moved with a fair amount of grace. Anything he lacked in technical proficiency, he more than made up for with boisterous enthusiasm. John had never seen his man so joyful. The firelight made the pale man glow bronze and gold. The detective spun and stomped, his heels kicking up, his arms waving in the air. At the end of each dance, John would stand and applaud. It was brilliant!

There came a portion of the dancing where only the women were involved for a couple of songs. Sherlock came to John and kissed him deeply. "Having fun?" John hugged him tight in answer. Then Sherlock took his violin from its case and joined Jozef. Sherlock and John kept stealing glances at one another as the detective played.

John stamped a dirty foot in time with the rhythm. The young man who was #7 in the first dance came to refill John's cup. He pointed at Sherlock and gave John a thumbs up. Then he pointed at a curvy tan brunette who was currently dancing as #3 and poked his finger proudly at his chest. The music was too loud to talk so John pointed at #3 and gave a thumbs up back. The fellow pointed to a small poppet of about five years brandishing a fiery stick with some other children. John nodded. The two men smiled and shook hands. John turned and smiled at Sherlock.

Next there were a few dances for only the men. Sherlock played through the first one and donned a #6 for the second dance. John relished the sight of his tall violinist moving to the music. Ooana appeared at John's side and linked arms with him. She leaned in and shouted, "Your husband saved our son's life four years ago. He is a great man!" She smiled at John, her cheeks like shiny apples. John nodded. She beckoned a brown-eyed woman near to refill John's cup. Ooana bumped her hip
against John's in time with the music, trying to entice him to dance. She pointed to her bare feet and
tried to show him a few steps. John managed to step forward and back beside her, almost on beat.
They laughed at his effort.

Everyone began clapping at the end of the song. The band members traded places and fresh
participants began slower tunes. Suddenly Sherlock was standing in front of John. Ooana hugged
the detective and went to sing. A chubby teen girl with pink and yellow hair took John's cup.
Sherlock lead his man before the fire. Other pairs were moving together in time with Ooana's
haunting song. John let Sherlock arrange him properly. They danced. "You are a horrific
dancer, John," said the smiling detective when the doctor stepped on his toes. They laughed. Eventually,
they ended up in a hug, just swaying side to side to the music.

At some point, the music switched to recorded pop tunes and the young people seemed finally
satisfied to dance. Sherlock and John mingled among the adults. Jozef clapped the tall violinist on
the back.
"A légpárnásom tele van angolnákkal, Sherlock!" He made a gesture, dragging pinched fingers
along his other palm. He winked. Jozef swayed a bit drunkenly. He repeated himself and chuckled.
"What did he say?" John asked Sherlock.

Sherlock shrugged and dug out his matches, passing them into the bearded musician's meaty palm.
"He says it to me every time I see him. He wants matches but it must be obscure Hungarian slang.
Something to do with eels. No idea, John."

John laughed loudly. He watched Jozef patting his pockets for a smoke. John quickly fumbled in
Sherlock's coat and held his man's cigarettes towards Jozef. He smiled at Josef and offered, "You
will not buy this tobacconist, it is scratched?"

Jozef took the pack and grabbed John up in a big hug. He lifted him off the ground and spun him.
The fiddler shook with deep booming laughter. "Finally! Six years of the genius! And Finally! Oh
Sherlock, I love him! I love him!"

Others who had heard Jozef's booming laughter gathered near. In Hungarian, Jozef seemed to
recount the event. He pointed to John prompting in English, "...and he said..." They all looked at
John. John stood tall and repeated himself. People cheered. Several men shouted, "Yandelvayasna
grildenwi stravenka!" Everyone laughed and clapped. John laughed so hard, he fell down. Which
made everyone laugh even harder. Someone passed a bottle into John's hand and the doctor took a
triumphant gulp. Sherlock didn't seem to understand, which made it all the sillier. Jozef pulled John
to his feet, embracing him once more, ruffling his sandy hair like a dog.

The pop tunes stopped and percussion rhythms began among the teens. They banged drums and
makeshift instruments as everyone began to form a circle and clap along. There was a great cry
from Jozef, who tore off his top. Like two giant bears, Jozef and a heftier oboe player began to
grapple. They huffed and shouted, each man trying to bring the other down. Eventually the older
man ended up with his face pressed to the earth and an arm twisted behind his back. Jozef slapped
the ground and the hold was broken. The oboe player shook his hand, spitting a bit of blood into
the fire. Everyone clapped. Ooana kissed Jozef and offered him a drink.

Next two stout women entered the circle and did the same. They were more elegant in their game,
each evading her opponent with fluid movements. They were like alligators underwater. The fairer
woman yielded when her leg was nearly folded over the back of her head, pressing her into the
earth. Everyone cheered when the pair shook hands. The thinner woman brushed dirt from her
companion and kissed her lovingly.

John became enthralled by the vibration of drums in his chest. A tidy looking fellow in a larch
green velvet suit coat approached the doctor. He removed his glasses and pointed from John to the circling teen boys currently within the group. Three young women were harmonizing a capella as the two youths grappled. Their voices and the percussion rhythm compelled John to nod at his challenger.

The military doctor began removing his striped jumper without a thought. The challenger smiled and the two clinked cups. They began stripping off their tops. What had formerly been a tailored looking, bespectacled accountant with a number pinned to his starched shirt, now became a highly sculpted, dense mass of solid muscle robed in delicate tattooed flowers. John's courage wavered for one second. The challenger's face showed a moment of similar hesitation at the sight of John's torso. John shrugged. They smiled.

Soon the little arena was theirs. The doctor felt his heart pumping with feral glee. The taller challenger danced forward and tested John with a shove. John evaded half the contact and swiped a foot to send his opponent onto his back. Voices shouted approval all around. The non-accountant was quickly upstanding again. The pair locked forearms, each man trying to throw the other to the ground. John took a hard elbow to the jaw and leapt back. The doctor gave a primal wail and surged at the flower-painted man, encircling his waist and flipping up and over as his thighs pressed him to his tiptoes. The man landed on his back behind John with a great thud. But a vice on the doctor's ankle brought him down, face first into the cool ground. He clawed at the earth in futility. He rolled sideways, coming again to his feet some distance from his attacker. The men circled one another. John spat dirt. He was smiling so wide his cheeks hurt. They continued on for some time longer. Eventually, the non-accountant was slapping the earth to end their game. John released him from the headlock. Everyone cheered. The doctor dragged his opponent up and shook his hand zealously. "Thank you so much! Well done!" John said it again and again.

The doctor followed the man out of the circle so others could take their place. A pale tall woman came near. She was strikingly beautiful with long dark curls and grey eyes so light they were like fire smoke. She kissed the challenger and began to towel the dirt from his chest. Another gorgeous woman arrived who looked nearly identical, but more curvaceous through the hips, perhaps a younger sister. She smiled at John and began to bush dirt from his shoulder with a faded orange towel. She carefully removed the garland from his head and began to whisk dirt from his fair hair. John bent forward to keep it from his eyelashes as it sprinkled to the ground. She offered a cup towards him with an inviting, sensual grin. Her grey eyes were very suggestive. John smiled at her.

Suddenly Sherlock was there pressing a different cup into John's out reached hand. The violinist took the orange fabric from the pretty woman's hand and nodded at her. She shrugged and moved off back to the fire. The detective fetched John a cautioning, possessive glare. John drank greedily, wine dribbling from his chin down his neck to his chest. Sherlock cleaned him off with dexterous hands. At last the detective seemed satisfied with his efforts. He redressed his man. Then he carefully arranged the flower wreath back on the flaxen head, nimble fingers fussing with it until it was acceptable once more. John smiled and kissed his hand. The grappling appeared to have ended and the band was playing again. The doctor swung their clasped hands in time to the music.

John's challenger came and shook Sherlock's hand. He still wore a dance number on his now-rumpled shirt, but it was upside-down. He carried a half-sleeping little girl of about seven in one arm. The man exclaimed to John, "You are two great men! Your husband and his whole family, too! I was fortunate enough to hear his mother guest lecture years ago. Her influence is represented in our sorting algorithms dances this evening. She is the one who gifted me with my obsession: the traveling sales man problem! One day, my Scarlet will be as smart at Mrs. Holmes, God willing. And hopefully as great as you both!"

The little girl opened her big grey eyes and smiled at John. She reached towards his head. Scarlet's
father pressed the child into John's arms as he continued his exchange with Sherlock. John stared at her pretty little face. Dark curls and pale skin like her mother and aunt. She was a reassuring heaviness in his arms. They smiled at one another.

"Congratulations, Doctor Holmes!" She beamed at him. Her precious smile was missing two teeth. "I like your crown."

"Thank you, Scarlet," John fumbled the thin wreath off his head and helped the little poppet wear it. She turned to her father, interrupting his discussion with Sherlock. "Look, Papa! Doctor Holmes gave it to me!"
"Scarlet-
John interjected, "I believe it looks better on Scarlet." The child hugged his neck. "Do you want to dance?"
"Thank you, Scarlet. Yes please."

The doctor placed the child on the ground and let her guide him towards the fire. John followed her lead and shook his arms about, hopping up and down.

"I'm going to be a doctor too one day."
"Really? That's great! What kind?"
"Like your mum. A combustion math doctor like Mrs. Doctor Holmes and my Papa. I love fireworks! And math."
"Mrs. Holmes is very smart. I like fireworks too."
"What kind of doctor are you?"
"I'm a regular sick people healing doctor." Scarlet seemed a bit disappointed. John twirled her in a circle, then spun himself around. "I also solve crimes."

The little face perked up. She flapped her arms and John mirrored her. "I know that! My mum loves your blog! Your crimes are cool!" John mirrored her again and they waggled their bums at the fire.

John began to twirl her again, but a teen girl with similar grey eyes and a shorn head appeared. "Scarlet, mum says bed." John watched the sister's argue about the lack of fairness involved. Scarlet made a valid point about older sisters being know-it-alls. Quite cogent. They lapsed into Hungarian. At last the older girl seemed to win. "I like your blog. Good night, Doctor. Congratulations." John thanked big sister.

As Scarlet was dragged off she called, "Congratulations, Doctor Holmes!" She waved her arm frantically. "Thank you, Doctor Scarlet!" John smiled at her toothless grin, waving back until she was out of sight behind the door of a blue vardo.

Sherlock came and tugged John's hand. The dark-haired man seemed a bit sad. He lead John away into darkness behind a thick tree. The music was softer. Lightening bugs winked around them. Sherlock smiled down at him. John began to giggle, suddenly very shy, that made Sherlock laugh.

John was a bit more tipsy than he had assumed. "You have the most beautiful laugh. And smile. You are beautiful in the laugh and in the smile. Both. Handsome. With your mysterious friends and your cheekbones and your archenemies and your laugh and your smile." John was maybe drunk. Maybe a tiny bit.

"It's your influence."
"Me? No, no. I'm a daft sad alone break things not-gay boring sick people doctor. You are the
laughing one. The ashtray thief, *Welcome to London*, thinky brain, round and round the garden like a teddy bear, smiley one. So beautiful!"

"I confess I rarely laughed before we met, John. But you and I are always smiling. Always laughing. And fighting. You are fun, John. And also very beautiful. And perhaps drunk?"

John clung to him. "We are fun! We should do this everyday!"

Sherlock kissed him then. He backed John against the tree and held his hands over his head so the inebriated man would not accidentally touch his back to roughly. John gripped his hands around Sherlock's and opened his mouth wider to accept more tongue. The detective's free hand at last found skin under the jumper, shirt and vest. He inched up the layers exposing dirt-streaked belly to the cool night air. He reached higher up and rubbed along fuzzy chest, toying with nipples. John tasted like palinka. He felt John's powerful leg encircle his waist, bringing their hips together.

"Now," John urged. He squirmed to free a hand.

"Not here?" Sherlock tightened his grip.
John tried to shrug. "I don't mind."

"You are perhaps very drunk, John."

"Brilliant deduction! You are so clever, so mysterious, so brilliant!"

Sherlock continued to kiss and fondle a few minutes longer. Then he straightened John's clothes and led them back to the group.

As they returned, John noticed other couples sneaking off into the woods or sneaking back. "I know what they're doing!" John was maybe a tiny bit more intoxicated than he'd previously guessed. Maybe drunk. He let Sherlock guide him to mingle more. John listened to people's stories about Sherlock. The doctor would never become accustomed to hearing people speak about how the detective's relentless pursuit of the truth had saved them.

All over the United Kingdom were grateful former clients whom his detective had helped. John felt so proud when they expressed their gratitude for Sherlock's tenacious nature. John had gratitude too. He counted himself among those who had been saved through Sherlock's influence. John felt so grateful to be involved in such essential work. So privileged to have met this amazing man. Someone passed another drink into the doctor's hand. The rest of the evening was a blur of music, food, people and Sherlock's beautiful smile.

John recognized his own bed rising up to meet him. His last coherent thought was that he fucking loved Sherlock Holmes! Best Non Wedding Reception Ever!

*Madman!*

Chapter End Notes

Subscribe to AlgoRythmics and mega overrun on YouTube to witness sorting algorithms dances with your own eyes. Special Thanks to Sapientia University and Marcos. Cheers!
Pornographic explicit sexual situations between two adult men. Not work safe.

ELEVEN CONTINUED

Or: a conjunction used to connect alternatives.

Kissing or _______. Or what?

Sherlock continued to plink his fingers over violin strings. He tried to drown out John's shouts for him to stop. The sullen violinist didn't want to hear the Let's-Be-Friends speech. He'd seen John dance with little Scarlet last night. Sherlock understood the reluctance to marry a man if one could have the option of a wife...and children. Kitchen kissing was nice, but not a future. Sherlock knew, but he didn't want to hear it now. His heart hurt so much. He wanted the cellar. Soon John would tire and go to bed. Soon Sherlock would feed his idiotic marriage certificate plan, his humiliating invitation plan and his moronic happiness plan to the Beast. Alone is what I have. Alone protects me. Sherlock looked up with icy eyes to see if John was still in the living room.

"No, please, carry on with your composing. OR...YOU KNOW...PERHAPS..."John said loudly. The doctor began throwing his clothes in a heap near the kitchen. Sherlock sat up straight, nearly dropping the violin to the floor. The detective fumbled the wooden instrument as he watched his man strip. When John was down to his vest and pants, he slowed. Sherlock set the violin in John's chair and sat back down hastily so as not to miss the show.

John began rubbing his body beneath his remaining top garment before peeling it off slowly. Finally, he cupped a hand over the weight within his red and white pants. He massaged his bare chest, his torso, his neck. He looked casually bored as the other hand worked against his fly. He breathed deeply, hefting his balls in his palm through his pants. He hummed a low satisfied sound and slowly worked his prick to full attention through his pants. Sherlock's lips parted as he observed the wet spot of precum darkening the front of the now tight red pants.

John turned towards the other room as if he'd heard a sound in the kitchen. His hand disappeared down the back of his pants. He rubbed his muscular round arse. Sherlock watched the white waist band creep down a few inches, revealing an inch of cleft and pronounced dimples on either side of the tail bone. John hooked his thumbs up under the sides of the fabric at the top of each furry thigh in the front. He turned in profile and gave a little tug, showing more skin beneath his navel.

The detective instantly uploaded the sight of defined pelvic V muscles arrowing down to unrevealed hardness. John rubbed the wooly hair above his pelvic bone absentmindedly. He turned slowly until he was fully facing front again. He pinched the white trim of waistband and thigh together on each side of his red pants. Then he drew them down below his muscular rump, exposing his bare behind to the empty kitchen. In the front they were caught on his erection, hiding it from his detective. John stopped. Sherlock sat forward in his chair. Then, in one fluid motion, the doctor quickly brought the red garment down to his ankles, crouching his body low. When he stood up, he flicked the pants behind him into the kitchen with the tip of his toe.
"John." The detective put his hand to his mouth in awe. He had never seen John's naked erection. It was thick, with alluring veins embossed along the shaft like swirling mystic sigils, some were contrasting bluish. The weight of John's cock curved gracefully to Sherlock's left, ever so slightly. The brown hair was trimmed neatly but quite thick and a few shades darker than John's other hair. It was so aesthetically pleasing, as if chiseled from Himalayan salt stone. The tip flared dramatically, a soft delicate pink like John's lips. Sherlock stared. He held the end of his tongue in his teeth.

"William Sherlock Scott Holmes, you are cordially invited to stop dramatically sulking and down your pants post haste."
"What?"
"Do as you're told!"

Sherlock swallowed. He hesitated for a moment, then his body began to move of its own accord. His trousers and pants bunched at his ankles. He looked around stupidly for a moment, as if he could not remember where he was. He watched John's hand moving slowly over obliques. John inclined an eyebrow and gave a wicked grin. Sherlock looked from John's body to his own, confirming their equaled arousal. He sat back down, then stood again abruptly. His doctor looked on with an amused smirk. Sherlock began to remove his top, looking to John to confirm. John nodded and moved his hand along the trail of hair below his navel. The detective laid their aluminum tags with his violin. John watched his man turn in another frantic circle like a dog shocked by the existence of his own tail. Sherlock shuffled around, nearly falling as he became caught up in his bunched up trousers, pants and belt. He looked to the chair, to his man and back again repeatedly.

Sherlock didn't know what to do. He blushed a deep rouge that painted his ear cartilage bright fushia. His heart raced. He placed his hand on his chair and began to bend over the arm. Sherlock was too embarrassed to look at John to see if this is what he was meant to do. He sank his elbows into the black seat cushion, blushing so deeply his shoulders colored.

The detective felt his pulse throbbing in his temples. _Ok it was happening_. The lean man knew he was trembling. He tried to focus on breathing deeply. Sherlock knew some pain was to be expected. He tried to force himself to relax. _It will be ok. John is experienced and he will know what to do._ Sherlock's brain answered with an imagine of John's thick cock. He swallowed again and thought of other things. _That thing with the tongue had been very good. So very good._ Sherlock's hands began to sweat. His adam's apple bobbed again and he pressed his damp palms into the armrest. He bowed his forehead between his shaking hands.

Breath. He gripped the armrest harder. Sherlock heard John approaching beside him. The detective braced his knees against the other armrest.

John hummed a low rumbling at the sight. The doctor ran his hands over his man's spine and ribs. Both men sighed at the touch. John caressed muscular shoulders, sculpted hips, taut thighs. He pressed his warm palms along pectorals, rewarded with groans and sighs. This beautiful man submitting to his eager touch so brave. He brought a hand up along the length of Sherlock's spine and massaged the nape of his neck, reveling in the contrast between smooth skin and short hair behind the ears. He petted the long umber curls, kneading his fingertips against the scalp. The doctor's other hand reached back and cupped the upturned arse. Sherlock gasped. John added his mouth, starting at the reddened ear. He whispered "or...you know...perhaps..."

Sherlock began to rock his entire form into each touch. _So many hands._ John's mouth was blistering hot against his skin. He arched his body into the wet mouth as it sucked and bit his hip. His skin tingled at the feel of humid breath lingering over his body. A strong hand snuck up the inside of his thigh. Sherlock heard his voice whispering John's name. He ached to feel that mouth and those hands against his leaking cock, or that tongue thing again. _Please, John?_
Hearing the whispered plea almost made John cum right then. Both his hands flew to his cock. He tugged his sack away from his body and gripped tightly at the base of his shaft. Not yet. Not. Yet. The doctor squeezed his eyes shut, dug his heels into the floor, clamped his pelvic muscles tight and breathed deeply. In his mind, John began to name every creepy experiment he'd seen in their refrigerator while singing *Rule Britannia* inside his head. He exhaled sharply. He switched to *Jerusalem*. The bits about arrows of desire and sword in hand were not quite helping. When he opened his eyes, his partner was staring with a wet, lusty mouth.

Sherlock began to climb down from the chair. He felt himself being drawn to his doctor's broad erection. His mouth watered at the sight of glossy fluid beading at the pink tip. *Need.*

John put up a hand. "Stay!" Sherlock abruptly put himself back in position. He brought a hand towards his own leaking cock as he continued to watch John. The detective slid his hand along his quivering stomach. "No!" John barked the order.

Sherlock quickly put his hand back beside the other on the arm of the chair. Neither man moved for a long time. Soon Sherlock could bear it no longer. He was painfully, achingly hard. His hand began to travel towards his cock again. "No!" John's hand shot forward and gripped his wrist roughly.

The doctor slammed his man's disobedient hand back onto the armrest. The two locked eyes for a long time. Sherlock's mouth twisted into a cruel sneer. He shook off the hand at his wrist and again tried to touch himself. But the military man was faster and stronger. Sherlock groaned and struggled as his hand was again forced back against the armrest. He inclined an eyebrow and glared at his soldier with a challenging look.

John drew back his hand and left it hovering in the air as he and Sherlock stared at one another for several heartbeats. Suddenly there was a loud clap of thunder and the thin detective nearly spilled head first over the arm of the chair. He grunted, stopping his forward momentum by throwing his hand against the floor. Sherlock's other hand pressed against the growing warmth on his bottom. He turned towards his partner, mouth open, eyes wide with surprise. John smiled at him and cocked an eyebrow. The detective licked his lips and withdrew his hand. He slowly settled himself back into position. He thrust his pale arse a bit further out. This was very interesting and unexpected.

The doctor watched his man's face bloom from surprise to lusty hunger. John's palm tingled with echoes of the impact. He began caressing and massaging the ivory flesh again. The sandy haired fusilier pressed his palm along the inside of Sherlock's knee and nudged his legs further apart. He focused his hungry mouth and greedy hands on the arse before him.

Both men groaned when, again John's tongue tested the puckered flesh between cheeks as he had done days ago. John's hands smoothed over lightly hairy thighs. He hummed against the pink hole at his mouth, sending the vibration along Sherlock's spine. He rubbed the pad of this thumb near the wet hole, increasing the pressure against the perineum before gently taking the furry sac into his warm hand. In long strokes he brought the full surface of his tongue over Sherlock's entire scrotum again and again. One hand felt along the length of the shaft as the other pressed circles around his man's arsehole. John felt his man's hand close over his own and they worked the hard shaft together for several slow twisting strokes. The doctor returned his mouth to the delicate skin between buttocks. Sherlock arched his back into the contact and mewled a long wordless sound against the black leather. The detective pumped back against the slick tongue, needing more inside him. His hand worked faster against his cock. So close.

Abruptly John ceased all touch. He inhaled sharply to see his man working himself. *Perfection!*
But wait, not yet. He brought his hand down as hard as he could. Sherlock cried out, but his hand kept moving. John struck him again. Then again. Sherlock moved his hand away from himself. Then a fourth time John's hand cracked against flesh in the same spot just above where thigh met arse. Sherlock gritted his teeth and snarled like a furious animal. His eyes became pale green gems of fury. The detective gripped the armrest so tightly his knuckles glowed bright white. He growled again, but thrust his burning backside further. He tried to spread his legs more, but his bunched trousers made him flop against the chair. He kicked out wildly until the fabric was flung away. He steadied his gaze on John, eyes wild with fury.

The doctor kneaded haunches roughly. Then without hesitation the tight tasty hole was again clenching around his tongue. He swiveled his head giving more as deeply as he possibly could. He brought a hand along tense ribs and over sparse chest hair, up to caress his man's throat. Sherlock dipped his neck low and licked the tip of an offered finger. His tongue moved in a mirror version of the tongue within him. The wet hand retreated, brushing the tip of his prick as it snaked down his body and along his inner thigh. He gasped John's name.

Sherlock was panting. Every thought was gone from his mind. All he knew and could remember was happening right now. It was bliss. Nothing but the moment. Only nerve endings and noise and pulse and guttural sounds and skillful mouth and so many hands and John. John!

The wet mouth withdrew. John put his damp fingers into his mouth, coating them heavily with saliva. The thumb of his other hand traced circles over the crinkled arsehole skin. He felt the hole clench and relax as he increased pressure. He rubbed the soft wooly skin of taint, applying increased pressure. He caressed his partners balls, loving the weight in his hand. I wonder...John took his wet fingers from his lips. He brought his entire mouth around the sac, sucking in the all of the delicate weight. He rummled a groan around the flesh stretching his lips. He hummed a long low note again, drool dripping from the corner of his mouth onto his partner's leg. He worked his tongue over the fullness, dividing the pair, his nose rubbing the hole above them. John released them from his mouth and refocused on Sherlock's furry manhole. He was invited deeper very quickly. It was exquisite. He brought one slick finger alongside his tongue. Then moved his head to rest against a cheek as he watched his middle finger explore his man.

Sherlock tensed when he recognized a thick finger trying his hole. His brain warned him of the threat of pain. He tried to breath but his anxious body clenched shut to feel the thick wet finger circling and pressing against him. He knew what was about to happen- he would be opened for John's cock. The image of the thick erection filled his mind. His body shouted warning of impending pain. He reached for his cock as security.

John stepped back when he saw Sherlock tense up and began stroking himself again. He slapped his man's arse firmly twice, then paused before administering a third harder hit. "Stop!" Sherlock wailed, he was so close. But John struck him again. The detective growled furiously between gritted teeth. He was actually angry. "Stop it John!" The strong arm drew up into the air and waited. John looked directly into the indignant pastel turquoise eyes. He shook his head slowly. Sherlock let go of his aching cock and again gripped the armrest. His eyes blazed with rage but he nodded. His body tensed for the strike. When it landed, a small fraction of the blow struck the tender flesh of his damp sac. His vision blurred for a full heartbeat. He cried out John's name. He pounded the armrest, snarling curses. He wanted to press a hand to the burning skin, but he balled up his fists instead. John struck him again across both cheeks. Then one more hard blow to the middle of each buttocks. Sherlock heard John's name in his voice each time. It fucking hurt! But his hard cock dribbled precum. He was drenched in sweat all along his spine. His dark hair hung damp in his eyes. He bit his lip and tensed for another strike.

Instead the probing tongue skillfully worked back inside him. He fucked back against it wanting
more. John stopped. Sherlock's mind whirled. He opened his eyes and checked his hands immediately. They were still firmly clutching the arm of the black chair. He dug his nails into the leather and tensed for more hard slaps to his bottom. But suddenly John's lips were against his ear, "Open your mouth."

Sherlock complied, parting his lips. Then he opened his mouth as wide as he could. The men locked eyes. John caressed his back, shoulders, neck and sides with one hand as the other hand met the open mouth. Sherlock held John's eyes as he sucked the doctor's offered fingers into his mouth. He bobbed his head up and down over two then three thick fingers. John moaned to feel the tongue swirling against his fingertips. The detective let his drool drench the palm, seeing a thin line flow down the wrist. John withdrew the hand and brought it back around behind his man. He rubbed the wetness up and down between Sherlock's fuzzy cheeks. Again he rested the side of his head against one warm red cheek. The tall man felt panting breath against his thigh. With one hand, John parted flesh so he could better see his other hand stroke over puckered skin.

For a long time, the doctor just pressed and rubbed between hairy buttocks. His other hand occasionally stroked his own cock or his partner's. At last the slick hole relaxed. Only then did the tip of his middle finger begin to press inside. John did not stop pressing into the warm tightness until his entire finger was inside. Then he held still and waited.

Sherlock felt strange. To his surprise, it didn't hurt. It was similar to the tongue only deeper. But unlike the tongue, the finger felt a bit...foreign inside his body. It rotated slowly, first left then right. There was a pause then it twisted again. The detective gasped when it twitched inside. Rotate, swirl, twitch, press. Again. Then again. He moved with the pattern inside him a few times. Then one last time. As it slowly withdrew, his body clenched around it. That hurt a bit and his heart raced. The finger stopped. He felt John kiss his bruised bottom. A hand rubbed the head of his prick. Sherlock exhaled slowly and pushed his pelvic muscles to help the thick finger leave his body.

When John withdrew, he watched in awe as the pink bud folded closed in his absence. He moved back to Sherlock's ear and whispered lusty praises. "So good. You felt so good. Oh my beautiful man you felt so good." John reached out a hand under Sherlock's chin and kissed his mouth deeply. The detective rubbed his man's forearm and drank from his lips. He pulled his head back and surveyed John's eyes.

"Do it more?"
"Oh God yes!"
They kissed more. Then John straightened to his full height. "Would you like to continue in the bed?" Sherlock nodded. He tried to stand, but his knees locked. John caught him in strong arms. The detective sank against him. When their erections collided, they tightened their embrace and began to kiss urgently.

They somehow ended up back in the chair with John sitting sideways in Sherlock's lap. John's upper thighs were tightly pressing his man's cock between. The doctor rocked his legs to slowly stimulate his man's shaft as their mouths fought to swallow one another. Sherlock grabbed a fistful of short hair and fed his mouth stubble at his soldier's throat. The detective closed his dexterous fingers around the wide base of lovely firm flesh. He worked John in his grip, pulling long, twisting strokes upward again and again. He loved how John felt in his hand. He made his hand synchronize with the movement of his partner's thighs around his cock. Each time his fist slid over John's cockhead, he twisted his hand. "O!" John's mouth was open to the ceiling. Sherlock felt the moan vibrate through his lips on his partner's throat.

John pushed his man back and leapt up. He fell to his knees in front of his detective. Without
hesitation he sucked Sherlock into his mouth. He looked up into his partners blue/green eyes, watching every reaction. Sherlock held onto each armrest tightly, eyes wide. John gripped the base of the cock in hand and worked the shaft as he stretched his mouth over all he could. His other hand grabbed the underside of a lean thigh and he shoved it up over the armrest, spreading the detective. John popped the cock out of his mouth. Sherlock watched a glistening string of saliva connect the tip of his cock to his partner's mouth. *Amazing!* John paused only long enough to spit into his hand then worked his finger back inside the tight hole. He knew he was a bit too rough, too hurried in his entry but Sherlock only sank lower in the chair, hanging his arse over the edge. John flitted his tongue expeditiously against the cock slit, then flicked the cock hole the same. He did it again with the underside of his tongue. He pounded his hand up and down rapidly, letting the cockhead tap against his tongue. Then he filled his mouth again. He focussed on his man's eyes the entire time. Sherlock's eyes were half closed now, eyelids fluttering. The lean detective ground his hips into John's hands. Together hey worked his body in synchronized rhythm. Then the doctor bent forward and bobbed his head up and down as quickly as he could. He was breathing hard through his nose. The rapid effort made him lightheaded. He crooked his finger inside, swirling, rubbing and pressing. He thrust inside more swiftly, pumping his forearm. Sherlock's body offered very little resistance now. Somewhere far away he heard his name chanted again and again, louder and louder. Then hot creamy juice was coating the roof of his mouth. John choked on the cum and it began to run down his chin. He quickly sealed his lips around the cock and swallows twice. He groaned loudly around the cock in his mouth, turning the noise into a muffled nonsensical sound. He licked cum from his fist, then lapped every milky drop from the shaft and pubic hair before taking the cock back in his mouth. He swirled his tongue over the head until it ceased twitching. Even then he did not spit the flesh out. He pressed his finger harder against Sherlock's prostate and was rewarded with a bit more delicious cum and a few more spasms of cock against his tongue. He swallowed again, moaning. At last he withdrew his mouth. Then he extracted his finger slowly. Sherlock pulled his hips up and back to help. The detective sighed at the loss. John was panting hard against his thigh.

Sherlock reached out and wiped his fluid from John's bottom lip and chin. He smeared it over his own mouth, licking his lips. He sank down and they were both kneeling. They began kissing in front of the chair, tasting cum from John's mouth. Sherlock brought his hand down between them. They both looked down at the same time, their foreheads together. Sherlock looked at John in surprise. John's abdomen and thigh were slick with his own cum and his erection had subsided. John shrugged and they both began to laugh, hugging and sprinkling one another with giddy kisses. They rolled onto the floor giggling like lunatics, breathing hard. "Oh my God!"
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Post-First-Experience Shower Conversation. Fluff over dinner.

Two hours later Sherlock awoke with a stiff neck. He found he and John were sprawled in a tangled naked heap on the hard wooden floor. He was very uncomfortable. The lanky man tried to quietly extricate his long limbs from the twisted pile but saw no way to maneuver without waking John. He nudged his partner. "John, John, we need to get up." John tried to sit up and the two cracked skulls together painfully. "Ow!" Sherlock was more awake so he choreographed their untangling.

"I'm too old to sleep on wooden floors," the doctor complained, rubbing his forehead. "Agreed."

John rubbed a hand through Sherlock's hair and checked his skull. He got to his knees and added a sleepy kiss to the area. They looked at one another. Naked and sticky with wild hair. They began to laugh. Sherlock crawled towards The Chair and hauled himself up. He reached down for John, bringing the doctor to his feet. They stood yawning and holding hands.

"I'm hungry."

John nearly fainted. He had never heard that from Sherlock before. "Really?"

"Very! But perhaps showers are in order first? You said Daoud's Gran made goat and rice? Any left?"

John followed Sherlock to have a wash. He opened the taps and checked before climbing in. Sherlock took John's hand and stepped in along side him.

"That tiny woman made 10 kilo of food. Enough for an army. Every side dish you could imagine. If I didn't know better, I'd say she was sweet on you. Anything I should know about?" The doctor began soaping a flannel.

"If I could be so lucky! Miriam was the best knife thrower I know. And highly skilled with a bullwhip. Especially on horseback!"

"Really?"

"She used to be, though I still wouldn't test her today. Even at her age, she must retain much of the skill from her youth. Muscle memory, that thing."

"That's fantastic!" John began to wash his man.

"Speaking of muscle memory," Sherlock stretched his nude form to full height and reached for the ceiling. He offered his side to the soapy flannel.

"Muscle memory?"

"Yes. I feel this odd, phantom...sensation, um inside. Like something is still...in there." He blushed.

"Oh. Right." John stopped washing. "Pain?"

"No."

Sherlock took the flannel and began to wash his man.
John coughed. "Like a, um, transient quiver perhaps?"
"Yes."

John cleared his throat again. "Uh. Yes, well, in my experience- personal experience- that is normal. A sort of spasm that comes and goes after...activity." He turned, accepting a wash of his back.

"Did any of your exes say how long the feeling lasts?"


Sherlock crossed his arms. "Do go on, Doctor."

"Well...probably same as you. When a man- when I- sometimes...In my experience, sometimes it can feel nice to...explore while <cough> masturbating. Natural. Perfectly natural." He began to lather his hair.

Sherlock felt himself getting aroused again. "You do? I've never 'explored' there."
"Never?"
"Just now."
They washed in silence, water cascading over their bodies.
"And?"
"And what?"
"And it's ok? You ok?"
"Yep."
"No pain?"
"No, John."
"And, um...you, um, it was ok?"
"I like it."
"Me too."
"Obviously, as evidenced by your hands-free climax. You are very experienced. That was impressive. I've only attained that four times in my life."

"I never have...until now." They traded places so the taller man could rinse his thick hair. "Very Impressive. Conditioner, please, John."

John looked around. "This?"
"No that's face cleanser."
"This?"
"No that's foot pumice mask."
"This?"
"No! Don't touch that! That's a concentrated emulsion of Colchicum autumnale and grapeseed oil. Highly toxic. Remarkable how many pretty garden flowers can kill, especially in concentrated solution. You see, the hot steam of the shower opens the pours allowing the poison to more quickly overtake the body. The addition of oil prolongs contact thus increasing effectiveness. I'd forgotten that experiment! Just set it out of the bath. Conditioner, John, focus."

"Nope. Not asking. Madman!"
"The brown bottle that says Shine in Hindi."
"This?"
"Yes! So, that was...was it...ok for you?"
John waited at the far edge of the bath. He absorbed the sight of his detective in full ritual. So many bottles. So many applications. It was delightful to see Sherlock rubbing himself under the water.

"What? Oh...Uh, No. No, that was better than ok, Sherlock. That. Was. Lovely."
"Agreed. Kissing then off to bed OR doing that. That was superlative, John. We can do things your way from now on."

Sherlock closed the taps. He held a towel for John. They dried and brushed teeth. John watched Sherlock bend and towel his hair. His man looked like a classic Renaissance painting of a bather. John noticed the red bruises on one cheek and purple ones on the other.

"Sherlock, I've hurt you. Oh God."

The lean form turned to see behind him. He shrugged. "I like it. Feels nice. Unexpected at the time but really...thrilling. As a Madman, I can tell you it will heal, John. I've experienced far worse, you know." He touched the slight yellow/green tinge around his eye that had been a massive blue/black swell a week ago. John looked unsure, but Sherlock's candor eased his guilt. "I like it."

They tucked into six different types of homemade cuisine. Sherlock went to get seconds. He also made John a brandy. He turned from the counter mid-pour. "John, do you like this? I mean do you want this, as well?" He gestured at his bruised flank.

"No. Not really up my street. But I think I would like maybe...grappling about with you. The fridge and the tree. Last night. If you like?" John felt overly warm.

"I'd like that. What else?"
"Anything you want, my dear friend."
"Can I use my mouth on you as you did for me?"
"Anything you like." The doctor smiled and accepted his drink.

Sherlock ate his seconds. "What does that mean?"
"Anything. As you will."
"Such as how you did with me sitting in The Chair?"
John nodded.
"Inside you?"

"Yes." John ate a sugared date stuffed with almond paste. It paired nicely with brandy. And, it took his mind off his surmounting arousal.

"Really? With my finger and mouth?"
"To start."

Sherlock choked on water, sputtering. His eyes went wide. He blinked. "John."
"You've not considered that?"
"I assumed you would want activity analogous to...as you have sex with women, but only you're having me instead."

John set down his glass. He took a pale hand between both of his. He brought it to his mouth and pressed a kiss into the palm. He rubbed the hand firmly. "Listen closely, my dear man. You are not a substitute for women, Sherlock. We are the same two strange people we have always been: two solitary men who share everything and nobody likes us nearly as much as we think they do. I am your closest and dearest friend- bearing in mind I live with you and know you well, which speaks volumes as a fact of who I am. I care for you because of you. Not loneliness, not boredom, not experiment, not celebrity, not substitute. You are unequal to any other on the planet, a substitute for no one. You are my privilege and I am yours. Just me. Just you. Yes?"

They tidied up. Well, John tidied and Sherlock smoked. Sherlock explained the correlation between the Csango and the bubble-sort algorithm last night. He spoke of each sorting algorithm and the corresponding folk dance. Then he lapsed into a lengthy music theory of defining themes and characteristics of ciganyzene.
John rubbed the smoker's shoulder. "Would you like to go to bed with me, Sherlock? Will you sleep with me?"

John yawned and kissed his head then padded off into Sherlock's room. The detective gulped down his water and rose to follow. He ran back and stamped out the cigarette. Then he hurried down the hall. He turned and ran back and began shutting off lights. He went towards his room. He stopped again and ran back to shut the windows. At last he went into his room.

John's naked body was already between the sheets. Sherlock stood in the doorway. He took a tentative step towards the bed. He felt a phantom spasm inside. "Uh, John?"
"Yes?"
"Do you...will you...I don't know, uh, this part...I assume you will help me know what to do?"
John sat up on his elbow and drew back the sheet. He patted the spot beside him. "It's very straight forward."
"I mean, whose doing what?"
John gave Sherlock the 'we both know what's going on' face and smiled. "Get the light, my dear."
Sherlock closed the light.

John lowered his voice. "You come here, ok? We are going do this together."
Sherlock took a half step closer. "Together? Is that possible? John, I have a theoretical understanding, naturally, but I mean, you know, uh...what are we doing?"
"In you go, my dear. You'll be great at this, I know it."
Sherlock sat down. "Just outline the basic overview for me, John."

John smiled at his persistent man's back in the dark. "Come here and I'll explain it, doctor's orders."
"Do we have...supplies?"
"Unnecessary. Now put your head next to mine. Right here."
John patted his shoulder.
Sherlock tried to steady his racing pulse. He crawled forward and did as instructed. He was fairly certain he should be facing away. He hoped he was right. The doctor tugged his shoulder and turned his man to face him. "Like this?"

John nodded and kissed him on the forehead. The doctor wriggled a bit, arranging their bodies so he was half under his pale partner, their chests overlapping. "Perfect. Now put your arm over my chest. Good. Now bend your leg over mine. Bit Further. Further. Until you're comfortable. Good?"
"Am I crushing you?"
"No."
"I'm not too heavy on you side?"
"No, it's good."
"Because I feel like I'm crushing your side, John."
"No. You feel very nice against me. You good?"
Sherlock nodded against John's chest. "Now what?"
"Are you comfortable, my dear?"
"Yes."
"Good."
"I think we've left the cooker on, John."
"No, it's off."
"Maybe I should go check."
John wrapped both arms around his man and held him fast against his side. He rubbed his man's neck. "It's off; I'm certain. Ok?"
"Are you sure we don't need supplies?"
"Yes."
"It's only that, well, you are...an above average example of...male physiology and I-"

John's laughter stopped the babbling chemist. "You say the most romantic things, Sherlock! I like your big cock too, O flatmate mine." The soldier kissed his hair and hugged him closer.
"So, you do have um, necessary provisions somewhere, then?"
"Shut up, Sherlock."
"Ok. Yes. What now?"
"Now we breath and you rub my chest and I rub your back until we are very very calm." Sherlock petted his partner in the same way he felt the hand doing to his back and side. They did this for a long time. Sherlock felt very relaxed. "Ok what next, John? How do we start?"
"We already have. Halfway there."
"But we're not doing anything, John."
John's chest rose and fell in a steady rhythm against Sherlock's ear. He smoothed the detective's hair and sighed contentedly. "Yes we are, my dear."
"What are we doing?"
"Well, you have taken me to bed and you are now sleeping with me. And, you are really really skilled at it so far. I can't wait for the best part." John kissed the top of his head and hugged him tighter. Sherlock seemed to consider this. The swoosh-swish of coronary pulsations against his ear swathed the inside of his skull in warm echoes. The detective kissed the fuzzy chest beneath his lips and resumed petting.
"What's the best part, John?"
"You'll see. It happens at the end after we talk ourselves to sleep. I don't want to spoil it for you though, my dear man."
"I don't care for riddles."
"I promise you will see at the end, Sherlock."
"What do we talk about?"
"243 types of tobacco ash?"
"You can read that on my blog." Sherlock kissed John's chest again.
"You could explain it again?"
"Or, you could explain what eels have to do with matches. I don't understand the slang but clearly you did. Was it funny to them because you seemed to understand Hungarian, or because you said a bunch of drunken nonsense?"
John smiled into umber tresses. "It's Monty Python The Flying Circus, Sherlock."
"A pop band, I presume? So, song lyrics then?"
"No. Well, currently they have a musical theater play but before that it was a long running silly television broadcast. Very funny program. I loved it!"
"Similar to that show you like where the two small men make a bad jewelry purchase and have to take it up a mountain to smelt it?"
John erupted with sudden laughter! His core shook beneath his detective. Sherlock liked being bounced around by John's contagious laughter. "What?"
"Ok. Ok. I'll explain it all to you, O flatmate mine!"
And he did, until they fell asleep.
Day Twelve

TWELVE

Sherlock opened his eyes at first light and discovered the best part John had spoken of last night. One strong arm secured his waists and another was his pillow. He felt John's chest like a warm tide lapping against his back. Soft humid breath puffed against the nape of his neck. Their bodies fitted together in a perfect warmth. Nothing prepared him for how truly amazing it was. Sherlock eased his hand from John's grip and slowly rolled over. He watched as eyelids fluttered and revealed azure eyes. Sherlock's heart stopped.

"Good morning, Sherlock."
"Good morning, John."

From then on, John only slept in their room. Sherlock only slept in John's arms. A week later, the upper room was rearranged to contain the overflowing paper of the sitting room. A sort of home office, but sex happened there too on occasion. Very good sex. Most of which Sherlock learned on this day.

Both men seemed acutely aware of the significance of today being a Saturday and Mrs. Hudson being away until Monday. They ate breakfast quickly in silence. They went to have a wash.
Sherlock said, "With regards to last night's discussion, I would like to return to the bed now, John."
"We talked about sketch comedy and great fiction?"
"Don't be an idiot, John."
John swatted his bum. Sherlock gasped and held the spot.
"Oh. Sorry. Does it hurt any less today?" John rubbed the bruised red spot gently. He kissed the tall man's shoulder.
"Unfortunately yes, but I trust you will soon restore the sensation."
John looked up at him. "Oh you are a bad man!"
"Me? I could have you brought up on charges for what you've done!" Sherlock pressed his doctor's hand into the bruise.
"Let me ring 999 now, shall I? I'd love to see you explain it to them in detail. Make sure to portray it as a hate crime."
"Do, John. Uniformed men on a Saturday! All the nice girls like a soldier. Hopefully there will be one with a strong arm." He winked.
"There's one right here. Who may well throttle you for that last remark."

Sherlock strutted into the sitting room and draped himself over The Chair shamelessly. He thrust out his bruised backside. "Sherlock, you do know that can be done in the bedroom, right?"
John sprinted up the stairs. "Where are you going?"
"To requisition the appropriate provisions!"
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

no judgements but it's not work safe- also pornographic explicit...blah blah blah. Let's enjoy John inside, shall we?

When John returned, he found his strange man in the bedroom, sitting in The Chair. He dropped the items on the nightstand and laughed. "I meant in the bed."

Sherlock's face colored pink. "Oh. You were not specific."

"Let me specify: we can enjoy one another anywhere you like. Where ever you feel comfortable is fine with me. You like this chair, that's fine. But you may well like the bed too if we give it a go."

"You mean any location within our flat," Sherlock corrected.

"Any location, Sherlock. Where ever you like. The flat...<cough>the woods, wherever. It's all fine."

Sherlock considered this. They read each other's eyes for several moments. The detective seemed surprised by the implication.

"What about 'people will talk,' though?"
"The wisest man I know once told me 'People will do little else,'" John replied. "He sounds quite handsome!"
"He is. And very self-effacing."

Sherlock put out his hand and offered the dog tags towards John. He gave his partner his best smile and bowed his head forward. John replaced them round the detective's neck, patting them into his bare chest.

Sherlock stood. He began running his hands behind John's ears. Then he massaged the scalp with his fingertips, tracing long, curving furrows through the short hair. The doctor closed his eyes, letting the sensation drain into his skull. His lips parted slightly. The violinist's fingers moved against the grain of his hair slowly. The pressure over his scalp became hypnotic, swaying his head ever so gently. He balanced himself with a palm against the other man's hip.

One light kiss landed on John' bottom lip. The doctor opened his eyes. Sherlock walked him backward, guiding his partner into their bed. The room was flooded with crisp white early light, making everything bright and highly defined. Sherlock was emboldened by the dazzling morning effusing their room with clarity. John scooted back over the bed, forcing Sherlock to pursue his lips for another kiss. John drew Sherlock over him, settling between the detective's arms and knees. The pale man's nude body pressed along the length of the other as they kissed. The rocked together, building the rhythm.

Sherlock stopped and quickly withdrew to kneel near the foot of the mattress. He held up a hand, gasping for breath, doubled over. John crawled over to him. "Tell me, my dear."
"Very intense." Sherlock was breathing hard.
"Too much?"
"A moment, John, please."

John withdrew and sat cross legged against the headboard. He had a thought. He grabbed up the flat sheet and wrapped it around Sherlock. Then he resumed his post against the headboard to wait. The detective wrapped the sheet around himself.

"Thank you, John." The sheet was secured tighter over shoulders. "It's very...different to be kissing in bed, naked and laying down. So much surface area. Too many nerve endings."

"We can get dressed," John said hastily. "We can try adding each element gradually: kissing then bed, then lying down, then nudity. Would you prefer that?" John stood.

Sherlock shook his head. "It's a problem of endurance. It's very good. Very...stimulating. Seeing everything. And feeling you getting...becoming...both getting harder, together."
"Ah, right." John waited. Then he whispered, "Can I see?"

The man in the sheet watched the naked doctor. John's mouth crooked up in a mischievous grin. "Show me," he challenged.

The detective felt emboldened. He opened the sheet to display himself. "Show me," John repeated. He brought his tongue over his mouth slowly and chewed his bottom lip. The azure eyes darkened to indigo embers and focused on the erection.

Sherlock became very eager to fulfill his partner's request. He brought himself closer and sat cross legged with his knees touching John's own. He arranged the sheet to offer the best view. The two men watched his hands reach for his cock. He took hold of himself, one bottom fist facing towards himself, the upper fist upside-down, wrist facing John. He twisted slowly, brining his fists apart and together as he worked his way up towards his glans. Once he reached his cock head, he cupped the top hand over and circulated his wrist. He let go, putting both hands on his knees. He looked at John.

The doctor stared into his partners eyes and said, "Let me try it." He took the masterful hands in his own and brought them onto his knees. He set his hands into the mattress and waited. Sherlock hesitated, then looked down. They watched the violinist apply the same skillful slow maneuvers to John's cock. When he cupped his hand over the head, it was slick in his palm. Sherlock breathed deeply. Then he stopped and reluctantly moved his hands back.

John stretched to the nightstand and picked up the item from upstairs. He unclipped the side mechanism. The doctor offered the bottle to the chemist, indicating the ingredients. Sherlock read them. "I was unaware of silicone as a variation. This would seems to be a very effective unguent."
"It is. Are you allergic to any of it?"
"No."
"Put out your hand."

Sherlock smeared the lubricant into both hands, enjoying the sensation. He watched the clear substance fall onto the head of the thick cock below. He touched the lubricated flesh. John moaned. Sherlock began working the shaft as he'd done before. The new slickness was amazing. He stopped and offered out his hand for more.

The detective tried the lubricant on his own erection. It was lovely. "Can I try?" Sherlock nodded and withdrew his hands. John attempted to arrange both hands around the slick skin as Sherlock had done. "Like this?" The doctor twisted slowly upwards. The detective moaned in answer. John did it again, watching his partner's face. He stopped. They sat across from one another breathing and gazing.
"Do you always use both hands?"

Sherlock nodded.

"Do you?"

John shook his head.

"I use one, up and down." He licked his lips and continued, "That, uh, twisting thing feels great though. I like it."

"Will you do it your way?"

John angled back, moving his hips to the edge of Sherlock's crossed knees. He pressed his palms into the detective's slick palms and came away with lubricant coating his hands. They both watched the doctor's left hand settle against his sternum. His right hand gripped the base of his cock and pumped long strokes up the shaft. At the tip, he sort of pinched the head in a ring of index and thumb, then popped the ring up and over the head. He pressed the ring wider back down over the tip, again pausing to tighten at the flared collar of glans before using his full fist down the shaft. He did it again. He stopped and looked at Sherlock.

"Want to try it?"

They reached for one another at the same time, each misunderstanding the question. The detective withdrew his hand, but his partner snatched it back and placed it against himself. John grinned.

"Together, yes?"

They tried John's one-handed approach on each other. Then once more they synchronized the movement on their partners. They stopped and rested their gooey hands on one another's thighs. They breathed in unison and waited.

"Good?"

"Yes. But I don't think it would work for me if I were alone. I'm accustomed to two hands."

"Me too, but...not both on here."

Sherlock puzzled. John watched his clever man sort it out. The detective's mouth opened in recognition. He swallowed. "Show me?"

John nodded. "Shift back a bit."

They reorganized until the doctor was propped on pillows, reclining against the headboard. He bent his knees up and planted his feet on either of his partner's crossed thighs. He offered out his upturned palm. Sherlock frantically patted the mattress around them until he found the lube.

John rubbed the clear liquid between both hands. They locked eyes and the doctor took a deep breath. He stroked himself a few times, enjoying his partner's enraptured gaze. Then he slowly brought his left hand around his thigh and under the leg. He wiggled his hips to best position himself. Then he closed his eyes and felt between his wooly cheeks. He used Sherlock's lap for leverage and push his hips up off the mattress. As one hand worked the tip of his prick, the middle finger of the other hand began to enter him. He brought his hips back down slowly, pressing himself over his finger. Then he tickled it back and forth inside to make his hole accept deeper penetration. With his hips and arm working together, he rocked slowly against his hands. He fucked himself slowly a few times then opened his eyes to watch his partner watching him. The turquoise eyes were deep cerulean lakes, pupils dilated to nearly fill the whole eye. The detective looked almost possessed.

Sherlock's hand shot forward and grabbed his partner's wrist. "Me. John. Yes?" His big eyes were pleading.
"Yes."
The detective exhaled in relief. He watched John withdraw from himself and give a small shudder. Sherlock hesitated. He felt John squeeze toes into his thighs; it set him in motion. He pressed the bottle into John's hand and was given more lubricant. He rubbed it into all his fingertips as he'd seen his man do. He looked into John's eyes and offered his slick hand towards his partner's. He let his man guide him between. The doctor showed the pale hand where. He manipulated the skillful fingers until only the index was pointing. The strong hand taught the dexterous finger the proper angle and led it in tight circles over puckered skin. Then the thin hand was left alone to continue.

Sherlock pressed ever so slightly, expecting resistance. Instead he watched the pink hole open around his finger and draw him in. He advanced all at once and heard John grunt. "Ok?"
"Fuck me."
He moved in and out in pace with the hips. There was no resistance, and it was easy to turn up on the outstroke then twist down on the instroke. John was warm inside and his body clenched and released around the finger in a very appealing way. John stopped moving his hips. He tapped the wrist. Sherlock stopped. "Is it ok?"
"More."

The detective nodded. He wasn't exactly sure how so he withdrew slowly. John snatched one pillow from behind his head and began to place his arse into his partner's lap. He put his feet on either side of sheet-covered hips and wriggled. Then he brought his legs up onto sheet-covered shoulders. He crossed and uncrossed his big toes behind his man's neck, fidgeting in anticipation. Sherlock brought up a hand to squeeze one foot. He stroked the hand down the hairy shin and pressed his cheek into the muscle. This was very good.

John tested his man's shoulders for leverage. He heard a low moan admitting how spectacular the position was. The doctor squeezed a kneecap. Then he held the back of his thighs and bent his legs towards his abdomen.

From this position, the dark haired man could see everything. He served himself more lube and slicked both hands again. He rubbed both hands between the spread buttocks. John groaned. Sherlock positioned the same finger in the exact way he'd learned and entered the puckered hole again. They both grunted. Ankles dug into his clavicles. With his other slick hand he rubbed the hole surrounding his finger. He was rewarded with an enthusiastic curse. He aligned the other index finger along side it's twin and pressed in. John's breath came fast and shallow.

Gradually both fingers were able to share the tight space. Sherlock began pressing one lean finger in while drawing the other out. He waited. Heels dug into his scapulae. He increased the pace: forward with the right, backward with the left, now vice versa, then both in and wait, now deeper then wait, now repeat. John swore like a deranged street urchin, working his hips in tandem. They opened him together. Soon the fingers could glide against one another more easily. Sherlock tried a variation on the pattern: he began to press the pair apart as he withdrew. At first it was very difficult to separate his index fingers, but as he tried it again on each successive outward phase, the hole resisted less. This gave him proper room to turn the fingers sideways and crook them against the side walls. The first time the explorer added this rubbing maneuver to the pattern John said, "FUCK AH JESUS!" But the next time the maneuver came up in the pattern, he said "FUCK AH YES!"

Sherlock became extremely eager to make the pattern increasingly more complex. He changed the orientation by 90 degrees so east-west was now north-south. The first time he crooked his fingers out to rub the side walls from this position, John lapsed into a long string of profanity that ended with "...FOREVER!" Sherlock uploaded dozens of images of his hands working his handsome doctor open. They continued the pattern for a long time until John's hips were slamming into his man's hands so zealously that Sherlock feared his collar bone would break.
The explorer withdrew both fingers slowly and John shot up off the pillow. His knees were on the outside of Sherlock's crossed lap. John grabbed the back of his neck with both hands and worked his tongue down the other man's throat. Sherlock had his best idea. It was still possible to touch his man inside like this, only with just one hand. So he used his index and middle to reenter. John tensed, then sank back down. Sherlock was rewarded with a mouth full of colorful phrases poured down his throat.

John babbled a thousand very obvious questions. But the detective was still able to concentrate on adding a third finger because the answers to the questions were only: "Yes," "Me," and "You." When the little finger first joined the other three, John went very still. He said, "No!" But quickly added, "Ok. Ok."

Sherlock pressed up into him steadily. It was difficult to get all the way in. He needed to feel the tight ring of muscle clench above his knuckles. He needed it very badly. John reached back with a hand to hold one cheek apart. The doctor's mouth was making little sounds into the detective's collar bone. Sherlock twisted slowly. His need overtook him and he grabbed his man's shoulder. He slowly pushed John down as he firmly pressed upward. John shouted, "Ah! Ah!" Sherlock felt the muscle tighten and he became dizzy. His hand began to numb from the tight space. His fingers cramped from being held so unnaturally close in a forced conical gesture. He just held John there, feeling the ring of muscle clamp over his fingers an inch above the widest part of his hand. He made minute, rapid circles with his middle finger. His forearm burned from the effort. John changed from, "Ah! Ah! Ah!" To "Oh! Fuck! Oh!"

Sherlock began to move in and out a bit. John began to mumble rhetorical questions again. The faster they worked, the more loudly and quickly the questions flowed. Sherlock loved feeling his fingers in the vice of flesh as their cocks glided together between them. Then John began the improbable threats of harm against his person if he ever stopped. The threats became more adamant, punctuated with kisses, curses and rough hands.
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Let's further explore John inside, hrnm? Explicit descriptions of two adult blah blah blah. You know what you're reading.

Sherlock feared his hair would be torn from his scalp. He withdrew and pressed his handsome partner back against the pillow. The detective unwrapped his body from the sheet, flinging it to the end of their bed. He drew John's hands up and secured both wrists with all his might. But the soldier was quite strong. John rolled sideways, evading the hold. Sherlock used his momentum against him rolling him completely onto his front. He pressed each knee into the back of John's and used a hand to again secure both wrists to the mattress. He plunged his fingers back in to resumed thrusting. "Ah!" At first, John was too tight again and the detective regretted beginning anew with three. He slowed, withdrew to two.

John gripped the top edge of the mattress, holding fast. Sherlock was able use both hands again. He tried left index and middle with right index. He was slow and methodical, working his partner's insides, returning him to a receptive elastic state. John was very quite, only breathing. Suddenly the bottle came back towards the detective, landing near his thigh. He withdrew the right finger. He spread the other two until he saw a tiny gap, then let replenishing lubricant drip down between the gap and disappear inside. He knew what he wanted to feel. He loved the tightness around his fingers. He tried the right pointer again. Very smooth entry now. He worked this combination for a long time then tried both pointers and middles. John tensed when the other middle finger tried to join. He was still very quiet. He breathed slower, deeper. Sherlock used that rhythm to guide him. Gradually, two fingers of each hand were inside. The detective tried the previous pattern of maneuvers. John's only movement was to breath steadily. Sherlock withdrew back down to three fingers from his right hand. "Ok?"

A muffled growl. Hips rocked up to meet his hand so he continued. Gradually their rhythm increased to a slightly faster pace. But Sherlock didn't like the position. He tried to suck John's neck and ear to regain his earlier sense of total togetherness. It was not the same. He didn't know if it was going well. He stopped and slowly withdrew. He knelt between his man's thighs. John looked back over his shoulder to see what was wrong. In that instant Sherlock understood what he wanted. He was surprised at his breathlessness when he spoke. "I don't like it this way."
"Ok. It's ok. We don't have to. What do you want? Do you want to stop? Tell me." John was speaking rapidly, anxiously. He began petting Sherlock's shoulder apologetically. He kissed Sherlock's cheek and whispered, "It's alright, my dear man. Whatever you want. Anything you want. You liked last night. I can do that instead if you don't like this."
"No, I like it. But the other way round, John."
"Me too."

John scrambled around and rapidly had their situation corrected. He wrapped his thighs around Sherlock's narrow waist and placed a hand over the clinking dog tags at his chest. "Like this?"
"Yes."
They resumed kissing, touching and grinding. Sherlock sucked John's fingers when John would arch his head back into the pillow. Soon they were both fully aroused again.
"John, inside again? Please?" The detective put up his hand and wiggled his fingers. His words were gone.

John's answer was to stretch to the nightstand. He pressed a condom into his partner's hand. The detective fumbled it in surprise. John scooped it up off his chest. "Can we try?"

The detective blinked mutely for several heartbeats. "But..."

"It's ok. We don't have to." John squeezed his thighs to hug his man. The doctor quickly threw the foil packet out of sight.

Sherlock sighed. He bowed his head against his man's taut stomach. "John, I- It's only...I really didn't like it the other way."

John got up on on elbows and kissed Sherlock's head. He petted the sweaty hair and ran his hand down his man's long spine. "Look at me."

"I'm sorry. I'm spoiling it." Their erections wavered and faded. They were silent a long time.

Sherlock squeezed his eyes tight. His gut clenched into a fist.

John's brain came back to him and he thought he understood what his partner was saying. He almost laughed.

"Look at me, sweetheart. Please."

The detective felt a hand draw his chin up.

"It's possible like this, my dear man."

"Like this?"

"Yes."

They watched one another and began to smile as Sherlock figured it out.

"I didn't know."

"That's because you're a clever idiot."

They shared a slow delicate kiss.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm only a bloody doctor."

They laughed. John pinched along his ribs until he was squealing and laughing and battling the hand away.

"Stop!"

"Never!" They became playful friends, laughing and kissing. Sherlock pouted at his handsome man in mock indignation.

"I meant are you sure, that you want-"

"Absolutely."

"And you will tell me if it's wrong?"

"If it goes half as well as with um, your fingers, then it will be fine."

"I like that."

"Me too."

"A moment, John." That was all the warning the doctor received, because what he felt next was his man's entire mouth around his cock. The detective wanted them both completely aroused before he attempted entry. The explorer was already fairly erect from discussing the idea, but he needed John to be the same.

At first, all Sherlock could taste was thick silicone goo. But the feel of the cock was phenomenal in his mouth. Heavy fullness that pulsed and throbbed. Not like fingers in his mouth. Very soft skin with a dense core. The texture reminded him of an ear. Pliable delicate softness over flexible cartilage. He liked how the cock would twitch then grow more dense incrementally each time he brought his tongue against it. He looked up to see if he was doing it correctly. John's face seemed surprised, almost stunned. The detective wished he'd payed more attention to what John's mouth did to him last night. He inhaled deeply, his nose tickling on pubic hair. The look of surprise on his partner's face turned to concern. Maybe this wasn't how it was done. He reluctantly released the semi-erect cock from his mouth.
"Not good?"

John put a hand on the back of his head. He was gasping for air, his abs becoming a flag in the wind. He tried to speak, in fact he thought he was speaking, but no words came from his mouth. The doctor thought he was telling Sherlock, "Oh dear God above, are you certain you were not trained in an Amsterdam brothel, how can you breath, it's not necessary to ingest the whole entire package, please don't asphyxiate, though I'd happily serve a life sentence for your murder if you please don't stop, you amazing beautiful man!"

What Sherlock heard was a high, thin, reedy warble like a dying man's last breath. The detective didn't move. He began to panic. He knew not to use his teeth; he knew to create suction; to make his mouth a tight O; he remembered to use all of his tongue, especially the underside against the tip. Perhaps he was going too slowly or applying too much pressure? Had he hurt his man? That sound had been odd. He tried to think how to be better.

Suddenly there was a hand pressing the back of his head back down. The detective looked at the cock to see it had grown to its full, thick erect state. He felt a bit disappointed that he was not able to experience that transition within his mouth. But, he must have done alright for a first attempt if that lovely cock was ready. The hand moved to the back of his neck and forced him forward more insistently.

Sherlock took a deep breath and continued. John's voice shouted "Nnnngod!" as the mouth enveloped him. It was more difficult for the dark-haired man to consume the cock now that it was fully aroused. He struggled midway down but soon recovered. His mouth stretched wide around the thickness. He began to swallow until he felt the wooly hair creep into his nostrils. Each time he swallowed he heard a grunt. The hand at the back of neck disappeared. He swallowed again, loving the feeling of soft/dense John down his throat. The detective liked constricting his throat around the flesh. The feeling was very interesting. Each time he did, the tissue would compress like a rubber ball, then throb, then slide deeper. He hoped he was doing better.

Sherlock had a thought of John showing how he touched himself with one hand. He knew how to improve his poor performance: he began to slowly draw his partner out of his throat, making sure to compress the tip tightly before swallowing it back down again. He added his fingers to the fuzzy sac, plying the pair gently apart and rubbing them back together. He slipped a finger back inside his man. His reward was more throbbing in his mouth. He groaned around the lovely fullness. John said his name. The detective froze, then spat out the prick.
"What? Ok? Still not good?" The confused man looked to his partner for help. John was mute. His chest heaved in big breaths. The strong man had torn loose the corner of the fitted sheet and it was stretched over his face, his fists clutched it so tightly, he had torn the edge.
"John?"
At last the shrouded face murmured something.
Sherlock's heart began to race. Was his man crying under there?
"John."
The soldier fought the tangled fabric until he was free. He brought his head forward slowly, he was glassy eyed, enthralled. He moved like a man underwater. Sherlock recognized the look instantly: opium high. The detective crawled up the length of his man and began to kiss him lightly, slowly. As a habitual heroin user, the lanky man knew the high would last longest if he moved as slowly as possible. He relished the sight of John floating in this semi-lucid state. It was time.

Sherlock massaged the back of John's muscular thighs, gradually pressing them to bend towards his chest. He helped lock the feet behind his waist. John gripped his man's thighs and tried to pull them closer. Sherlock saw it was indeed possible like this. It was so obvious. He caressed his doctor's handsome face before steadying the hand behind a shoulder. He petted skin everywhere
with long, steady strokes. Then he smeared a huge handful of silicone goo over himself. He took hold of his slick cockhead, bringing it near the entry.

With a finger he tested the hole while still gripping his cockhead. John sucked the finger inside perfectly. Sherlock made lazy circles inside. Then he withdrew and watched John's face. They gazed at one another while synchronizing their breathing. John nodded once. The doctor took a big breath and let it out slowly. He patted the thigh in his left hand.

Sherlock guided his cock to the hole and waited. He didn't move for six breaths. Then he rolled his hips forward ever so slowly. John's hand grabbed his thigh. The doctor's mouth opened soundlessly. Another slow press forward, the head sank in. Sherlock gasped. John cried out, "Ah!" His hand pressed back on the thigh. Sherlock began to pull out. But his man squeezed his thighs around pale hips. John pressed the heel of a foot into the bruised backside, making Sherlock groan. The doctor looked into turquoise eyes and nodded. He used the heel of a foot the press his man forward once more. The doctor cried out again, "Ah!" He sucked in air, thrust his head back and gritted his teeth.

The detective felt the warm tightness grab him. It was indescribable. He gently caressed every inch of skin he could. He wanted to apologize for how much he loved it. Terror seized him when his body urged him to rush in all at once as deeply as possible and begin thrusting inside. He fought the compulsion with all his resolve and remained still.

John must have read the depraved look in Sherlock's face because his erection faltered slightly between them. That made the taller man go a bit soft. He retreated. They looked at one another. They kissed. Sherlock asked, "Am I hurting badly? Am I too much? We don't have to, John." "You hurt but I think it'll get better. I want you to. Perhaps I'll enjoy it more if you do it more." Sherlock was not convinced. "Perhaps we do something else, John. I can take you in my mouth again. Or touch each other together?"
"No. You hurt but I sort of like it."
"Me too."
"Just stay slow, my dear."
"A moment, John."
Sherlock worked his fist over himself until he was erect again. "Right."
John wriggle his hips until he was as open for reception as he could be. He stroked his partner's thigh. They waited for his anus to suck the cock back inside. Sherlock was perfectly still as John crept his hips up onto the tip. John bit his lip as he felt himself being penetrated.

Once again they experienced Sherlock's glans within John's entry. They spoke with their eyes, coordinating each millimeter deeper. Sherlock's mind began to twinkle like fairy lights. His whole being focused on the space where their bodies coexisted. He willed himself to become fog for his partner, slow beyond recognition. He fell into azure eyes and became lost in the sea. He felt himself drowning deeper and deeper with each breath they shared.

John's mouth was open. Each incremental advance of Sherlock within him, stretched him tighter. He tried to accept the stretching by opening his mouth wider each time he drew his hips up. It helped more than clenching his teeth. Behind the overwhelming tightness was a fluttering, evasive pleasure. It was not like fingers. Much deeper, too deep, too full, too tight, too wide, too intense Sherlock's face revealed how good the doctor was making his man feel. The flutter of pleasure became a rising tide, slowly pouring from green/blue eyes into his whole being. He was gradually suffused with pleasure as they worked Sherlock deeper.

When their bodies were fully united, they began kissing. The detective tested their hips. "Ah!"
Wait!" John felt sharp pain when the cock went deeper still. He whimpered. Then he recovered, saying, "Wait. Just wait. Ok. Ok," John took a few deep breaths and said, "Ok. But slow." Sherlock pulled his hips up an inch and settled back down, rolling his hips over his man. "I like it, John."
"Me too," replied a weak voice into his shoulder. Sherlock checked his man. "You're not liking this at all, John."
"Not really."
For some reason they started tittering. It was a ridiculous situation. But laughing made the doctor tighten up. "Ah!" Sherlock froze. He began speaking quickly, apologetically, "I can take it out. Give me a moment. I'll do it slowly."
John grabbed the back of both Sherlock's thighs. He fixed his eyes on his man. "You pull it out and I'll fucking kill you, O flatmate mine!"
Sherlock kissed his sweaty forehead. His soldier was a brave one!

Each slow, tiny thrust was punctuated with a pained exhalation from John, but he began rolling his hips with his man. They were barely moving at all. Sherlock loved it so much. John tried to accept the overwhelming feeling. He focused on the clinking metal tags between their chests. He began to get hard from his man's belly rubbing against him. Thankfully, the detective began to chant his man's name in soft whispers against his lips. *Almost over.* The pain subsided a bit, the hardness stretching inside the doctor's body became more tolerable. The flutter of pleasure returned, dulling the sharp edge. The raven-haired man began to shudder. He felt his sac drawing towards his body. "Do I- John, Can I-"
"Yes."
The fair-haired man cried out in pain as his partner buried himself too deeply. "Ah!"
"Ungh, JOHN!" Sherlock became a paper leaf on the winter wind, flying away, crumbling to naught. John pulled his hips back to extract his man. It took several heartbeats for the detective to rally enough to help. He flopped over one of John's legs and continued to quake. He sucked on the bullet scar on the muscular left shoulder, babbling against it, out of breath. He mumbled, "I am yours, John, I am yours, forever. I am yours always. Always. I am yours, I am yours..." The strong arms enfolded him, caressed his back, petted his trembling body.
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

Explicit, awkward, then amazing, cock sucking porn. Are you still reading this? Don't you have work to do?

It was an odd sensation, warm fluid leaking from one's backside and down between one's buttocks. "My dear, I will be right back." John tried to get up, tried to stand. A murderous sheet snared his ankle and whipped him to the ground. He ended up on the floor beside the bed. Sherlock sobered quickly at the sudden crash. He dove over the side of the bed to his partner. "John? Are you hurt?" John looked at him and they both started laughing. Sherlock's velvety baritone laughter washed over John, stealing his humiliation, suffusing him with joy. They embraced rolling along the floor until Sherlock came to rest along his man's side. He knelt beside the doctor, his mirth turned serious, lusty. "Can I use my mouth on you again, John?"
"I am yours."
Sherlock blushed at the warmth spreading through his chest. He hid his smile in John's ribs and quipped, "I know." The explorer tried his mouth everywhere he found skin. The musky, salty sweat of exerted man was delicious. He tried to osmose his gratitude into John's every pore.

The tall explorer massaged shins then over the dorsal surface of the right foot. He put a kiss into the instep. He liked the reward of his partner's pleasure sounds when his thumbs kneaded muscles properly or his tongue flicked correctly. He worked the planter aspect of first one then the other foot with his hands then mouth, turning rough skin into wet silk. John scooted down until he was laying flat, his chest and abdomen rolling like a wave with each touch. He put his arms behind his head and watched the enthusiastic scientist explore the length of him.

Sherlock could not decide on a favorite area to touch. He liked tracing the V of pelvic muscles down from the hip to the groin. John seemed to like slick lips working each nipple. The lowest moans could be elicited through deep massage of inner thigh. The softest sighs came from sucking the pulse inside the forearms near the elbows. Rubbing the skin between testes and spreading the pair slightly apart won Sherlock the loudest moans and curses. He loved watching his partner's face as the doctor's mouth became a perfect O, then the brow creased and the chin inclined to the ceiling and eyes went wide. The violinist catalogued the tone of each note, trying multiple combinations.

Sherlock stroked and kissed the defined calves. They were not at all hairy, though the shins were very fuzzy. The backs of the knees were fascinating. He flipped onto his back and drew a leg over his head to better explore. John would flinch and shiver if they were pressed just right. Sherlock tried the bend of right knee with his mouth. He sucked and flicked his tongue. The toes curled. Sherlock worked his thumb into the instep of the right foot and applied his mouth to the inside of the right knee again. John gave him a wordless sound that started flat and low but ended sharp and half an octave higher. Fascinating.

The scientist tried for repeat outcomes on the left knee and foot. Similar result. The absolute best sound came from sucking the inside of the right thigh while pinching the right nipple. He wanted to explore more noises but he worried he would not be able to feel the semi-erect cock grow in his mouth if he continued. He knew instinctively that he really needed to experience that. He needed it
very badly.

Sherlock bowed his head over John and took his entire package into his greedy mouth. In his haste, his hand roughly bumped against the sensitive, wet hole. "Ah!" John inhaled sharply, his lips pressed together in a thin line. Sherlock leapt back, apologies flying from his mouth. "I'm sorry I'm sorry I wasn't trying to do that. I'm so sorry. Forgive me, John. I'm sorry."

John got to his knees. "Stay where you are, my dear friend." The doctor came close and they watched each other, kneeling. He brought their foreheads together and took a firm grip of the back of Sherlock's neck. "Here's what we are going to do, my sweet, wonderful man: we are not going to apologize for making one another feel good. It felt good. Just very sensitive. We are going to do what we like and if we don't like it...well, thank God we both speak the Queen's English and have working ears! If anybody says 'No,' we stop. If anybody says 'Wait,' we stop. If anybody says 'Oh Sherlock, you've such a gorgeous mouth,' we observe common decency and share the gifts God gave us. Yes?"

Sherlock kissed him. He flung both arms around his man's neck and kissed him as enthusiastically as he was able. "You are a superlative human being, John."
"I know." They beamed at one another.
"I liked how that felt just then. Dead sexy! But gently ok? Would you rub around the outside lightly while you use your mouth?"
"I'm told it's common decency. I must oblige."

They giggled and kissed and hugged until it all turned into fiery snogging. John lay back against a pillow of balled up sheet, pulling Sherlock by the back of the head. The detective sucked in John's whole cock and began swallowing it down quickly. They communicated in punctuated sounds. Sherlock rubbed his thumb lightly and gently over the wet hole, marveling in the texture. He inhaled the scent of sweaty, gamey man and loved it. He bobbed his head up in long slow strokes then swallowed the thick cock back down quickly. He worked harder until his nose was crashing into his partner's pubic bone. He made wet, sloppy sounds around the cock. He pumped his neck faster, swallowing and clenching his throat harder. He wagged his tongue back and forth against underside of the shaft. The detective's mind was screaming to taste cum. He tried twisting his head side to side but that made him choke and gag.

A hand on his wrist warned he was massaging the delicate pink hole too roughly. He took the hand in his own and laced his fingers into John's grip. Another hand was caressing his hair. He snaked his hand up and tweaked a nipple. He made low vibrations around the fullness down his throat. He swallowed as rapidly as his body would allow. Pressing his nose sideways into thick fuzz. He worked his shoulders, neck and head forcefully. He tightened his lips until the corners of his mouth ached. He heard his name, like an order, like a command.

Suddenly, John's body thrust up off the floor and at last fetched Sherlock his prize all at once. The scientist sucked until he saw multicolored specks floating across his eyes. He began to feel very dizzy, but he could not stop swirling his tongue, trying to ingest all the the juicy fluid that was his. He fought against the heel of John's hand pressing his forehead away. He tried to say 'stop, it's mine' but his voice became liquified around the spasming flesh. His vision shimmered black and blurred at the edges, he found he could not swallow when he wanted. He tried again. How odd. The hand at his forehead became two and he felt his mouth drawn away from his claim. All sound rushed into a vacuum. He fell back against the floor, plunging into an abyss.

When Sherlock came back to his body, the detective found his face being swatted in a most annoying fashion. "Stop that!"
John sighed in relief. "Oh God, thank God! I thought I'd be done for your murder! Oh thank God."
"John."
"Madman! Absolute Madman!"
"Not good?"
"Not human!"
Sherlock began to laugh but he coughed instead. He rolled to the side and a great blob of saliva and semen retched from his mouth, splattering to the floor. He wiped his lip daintily, trying for some dignity.
John scrubbed the crumpled sheet over it, dismissing the incident.
"Are you alright?"
"I'm fine, John. Bit rusty in my technique is all."
"Technique? Suffocating is a technique?"
"Natural, I refer to sword swallowing, taught to me by a former Sufi mendicant turned side-show magician extraordinaire." The detective snorted some of the fluid from his nasal passages and spat it onto the sheet before continuing.
"At the time, I was fascinated by the great Egyptian Magician, Hadji Ali, who had been world-renowned for his controlled regurgitation magic. I was specifically interested-" He gagged and expelled more fluid from his sinus cavities.
"Ugh-in the live goldfish trick."
Sherlock spat out more fluid onto the sheet. "A bit rusty. I'm fine."
"You are a very bizarre man, Sherlock Holmes!"
"I was twelve, John. It is my understanding most youths enjoy magic...and goldfish."
"It is a very clever trick, if you survive it, Houdini."
"Tastier than chucking up dead goldfish, to be certain."
"Madman!"
"You weren't nearly so critical when it was your sword, John."
"Shut up, Sherlock."
In the shower, the silicone lubricant proved immovable. John had to fetch the dish detergent to finally reclaim their skins from its hold. They found it extremely funny.

Sherlock ate heartily, with an appetite John had never witnessed. He even helped remake their bed. It was only midday but they snuggled down for a nap* anyways. They shared a brandy and a water, trading back and forth until the glasses were empty. Sherlock asked, "Are you alright, John?" 
"Bit sore. I'll recover in a few days." John relished the dexterous hand swirling over his scalp. 
"Was it ok?"
"It will be next time, I'm sure. Not too bad, really. We were very good."
"Can we try that with me later?"
"Whatever you like, my dear man." John brought a hand to his mouth and pressed his lips into Sherlock's palm. "Anything you like. Whatever you want. You only need say the word."
"You are a very good man, John Watson. A very decent, very kind man and I am glad to know you."
"You are my privilege, Sherlock."
"And I am yours."

When Sherlock awoke, their room was swathed in billowing heraldic flags of orange, pink and purple light. The setting sun shone like liquid amber over the snoring man at his side. He studied the pattern of rippling coral and mauve light with the care of a vexillologist. Melon colored light shimmered over eyelashes and chest hair. Oxblood red shadows pooled in the conclaves of navel, throat and inner ears. The pattern of window sashes and rails imprinted the sleeper in geometric brands. The peaks of nose, thighs, and shoulders glowed like chalcedony. He uploaded the vision of his solar man, then tucked the sheets and covers back around the sleeping form.

In their sitting room, the violinist played Bagatella No. 25 in A Minor: Fur Elise as softly as possible. He thought about all he and John had done until his brain was too preoccupied to find the notes. He ordered a Chinese, ensuring several entrees contained pork or prawn for John. He didn't know why he was so restless. He discarded his nicotine patch and smoked in the windowsill. A thought made him smile and he set up delivery of a case of superglue to Mycroft.

The detective turned their mobile's back on to see two missed calls from the Mater, one linked to a 2'36" voicemail; three missed calls from brother and a text that said 'Fifteen Thousand, Four Hundred Ninety-Four and Twenty-One British Pounds Sterlings At Your Earliest Convenience; and there was a 23" voicemail from Mrs. Hudson. John had three missed calls from Mycroft; two voicemails from Harry-each over 3'; six texts from Harry; and a missed call from Mrs. Hudson.

Sherlock listened to Mrs. Hudson's message to learn her arrival details for Monday. He programmed the information into John's mobile with reminder alarms 1 hour and half an hour prior. He started to listen to Mummy's message but deleted it around the twenty second mark when it became clear neither she nor Father were in eminent danger. Something about how normal people express their feelings. He deducted the full cost of the superglue from the 15,494.21 and transferred the funds to Mycroft to cover the damages. He had a boring fern delivered to his parents with a card that said "XO, SH." The detective purchased the complete Monty Python for John's laptop. Then he thought it over and had a case of that silicone lubricant delivered to Baker
Street. Then placed an order for six sets of sheets from his linens man. He smoked and paced. He felt too tight in his skin, but didn't know what to do.

Sherlock unearthed two files and set them out for later. He made a quick trip downstairs for more smokes, biscuits, milk and cash. They were used to seeing him in pajamas. He wondered if the shopkeepers could discern anything different about him.

He smoked and began sorting paperwork and books until the food arrived. His mind began to flash echoes of John's pleasure sounds and he gave up organizing. He paced and smoked until the delivery man arrived. He laid the table but waited to eat. He played 'L'Amour est une ouiseau rebelle' from Act 1 of Carmen but reverted to pizzicato for the chorus parts, so as not to wake John.

John. I've been having sex. With John. Outstanding sex. He saw his own reflection in the looking glass above their fireplace- he was smiling. He was stricken with a sudden dread: would it be ok? Would it be awkward? When John awoke, would he want to talk about never making that mistake again? The post ejaculation high had caused Sherlock to say some fairly uncharacteristic things. He had been too intimate perhaps? What would happen now?

Chapter End Notes

I know my dear one: it's a lie down not a nap, but I think "take a nap" is a cuter.
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Aftermath fluff The Not Gay First Timer and the Abstinent First Timer.

Next few days involve:
Two friends who complicate the fuck out of their friendship with sex. Oh the insuing complication! You know those other fanfics where the blokes kiss or shag and its roses from there? This isn't that! This is the realistic idea that the sex makes more problems until they work it all out. You've been cautioned!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

John awoke alone to the sound of Carmen's Habanera drifting softly through the dark. "Love is a rebel bird." He rolled over and tasted Sherlock's pillow with his grin. His violinist was sentimental in his own dramatic way.

John lay on his back, letting the music caress him. He felt exhausted. He sighed and chuckled to himself, Well, I've just taken it up the arse. That just happened. He whispered a laugh into his forearm. He clenched his pelvic muscles to test his soreness. His cock stirred. Yep. I've been thoroughly buggered. He smiled to himself and stifled another mad fit of giggles. He thought of every rude euphemism for anal sex that he could.

He could not control the juvenile thrill it gave him, like when he was a lad viewing a crumpled porno mag that a classmate had nicked from an older brother's secret mattress collection. He felt brazen and sneaky, as though he'd just got away with something very very naughty. He stretched his body, relishing the ache of every over-worked part. Mmmmm. All in all, it had been a hell of a brilliant first time. The doctor was certain of three things: next time would certainly be better; he definitely wanted there to be a next time; he definitely wanted to try Sherlock the same! O my rebel bird, what have you done?

Chapter End Notes

Keep in mind, John has a PLAN
"I've just had the strangest dream," John said raking his hair and chuckling to himself. He scratched his insignia tattoo and smiled broadly. The cold white kitchen light cast his athletic body in high contrast. The soldiers strapping form became Da Vinci's Vitruvian sketch when John stretched his scarred shoulder tissue.

Sherlock's violin erupted with George Frideric Handel's Messiah HWV 56:42 *Hallelujah Chorus* at the sight of the nude man in the kitchen. The restless feeling disappeared when John yawned and kissed his hair saying, "Is that dinner? I'm starved."
"Me too."

John hugged the violinist tight and smacked his bottom. The sleepy man buried his handsome face between the bathrobe and shirt front, inhaling deeply. Stale tobacco smoke, vanilla and sandalwood, reams of fresh paper, bitter waxy rosin, earthy silk of bathrobe: Sherlock. The soldier exhaled in satisfaction. *Mmmm*

"What have you been up to, rebel bird?" The naked doctor was beaming at him. Strong warm hands massaged the spine under the shirt, then dipped into the pajamas to caress haunches. The detective relished the lascivious, possessive hands beneath his clothes.

"Good evening, John." Sherlock set his violin aside and kissed his man. The detective was so relieved to see John was happy, too.
Chapter 45

They ate with their bare feet touching under the table. Every time they looked at one another, they effervesced laughter. Sherlock didn't know what was so funny, but he could not contain his joy. He was talking so rapidly about the super glue delivery that he had to consciously remind himself he had not had any cocaine. John laughed heartily, slapping his palm against the table. "You are a bad man, Sherlock Holmes!"

"I hadn't seen his text until after I'd done it."

"I should feel ashamed of laughing. But I'm not. I'm really not." John put his laugh behind a broad hand. "The oxytocin has me firmly."

Sherlock stopped laughing. "Of course! John you are a genius! I could not determine why I felt so strangely."

"It happens to us all after sex. Nice isn't it?" They tittered like drunks.

"Yes. Very. Now I understand why you had an unending string of conquests parading through your room," Sherlock said chuckling, wiping a tear from his eye.


Sherlock shifted in his seat, his sculpted mouth crooked up. He retrieved the file he had lain aside earlier. John's cold foot tapped under the table in lonely bereavement until its friend returned. Sherlock sat back down and pushed the folder towards his man. John's restless foot nudged along floor boards until it once again found security beneath its warm mate.

"What's this? Have we got a case?"

"No. For your edification."

John opened the folder and scanned the first page. Then bent closer and read again in earnest. The physician noted dates as he flipped through the medical reports. His finger oscillated between the cleft of his upper lip and the print on the page as he absorbed the reports carefully.

"Ok. Right. Clean bill of health. Very good...All seems in order."

John angled his temple and jaw into the L of index and thumb and sat back. He rubbed his knuckle over the edge of his mouth and waited.

Sherlock blushed and kept his eyes fixed on the folder, but he explained anyways, "Because we didn't use the, um, supplies- condoms-when we...were...together." His hands were grasping circles into the table top.

"Right. Ok...Thank you. That's very considerate, Sherlock." John pushed the file away, took a small sip from his glass. "Very considerate. I can have my papers for you tomorrow." He rubbed his chin, then added hastily, "I'm not-I'm. I will have my paperwork for you tomorrow. It's at surgery. I'm sorry about that, Sherlock."

John reached out and anchored a narrow hand between both of his. "I've never had any, uh...sexually transmitted diseases either, just so you know. I will show you. I'm very sorry about the condoms. I knew I was safe and you've never had anyone so..." He patted the hand kindly.

"I'm an intravenous drugs user, John. You are meant to be a doctor. Think it through. I am just as risky as a serial womanizer."

John brought his elbows down on the table and leveled Sherlock with an glare. A flash of anger smeared over his handsome features then settled into calm professionalism. "Ok. You are correct. I neglected our wellbeing. I am a doctor and I am sorry about the lack of consideration I showed." He put up a hand. "But we are both healthy and I can show you."

Sherlock reached past John and offered another folder towards him. "I know."
The physician read the beginning of the reports and stopped. "This is my medical file. My *complete* medical file, Sherlock."
"We don't have spiders, John."
"What?"
"Pages 34-35." Sherlock looked away, suddenly fascinated by the yellow smiley face decorating their ornate wall paper.

The doctor scanned quickly then looked up in disbelief. "You had my blood tested when I first moved in, *and* one month later?"
"Yes... we... *don't* have spiders."
"Where did you get samples of my bl-" John paused, he rubbed his eyes into his cupped hands. The doctor sighed. He nodded to himself. He spoke slowly into his lap, "We *don't* have spiders." He sighed and whispered to himself, "You clever bastard."

Sherlock nodded and gave a weak smile. He put up a defensive hand and spoke rapidly. "Precautionary. But I learned you were a *very* responsible doctor and that you run your panels every other month in order to donate blood. Naturally I stopped pretending to wait for pest control once I realized you are proactive about your health. You always use protection with all your girlfriends and get tested regularly so, aside from slightly elevated sodium levels, you are an *ideal* blood donor. As I said: I *am* the danger, John. I didn't want you to worry once you remembered what I am and that we had forgone protections, *twice*."

"Presently, Sherlock, I *am* the danger. I *am* the danger, you complete and utter grrrggghh! You *stole* my medical file. You *stole* my blood (presumably after drugging me, yes?) and then you had me believing I'd been nipped by a spider- *twice!* Anything else you'd like to confess before I *murder* you, my dear?" John sat upright in his chair, leaning in with his last question.

"Not drugged! You were passed out. You have a...genetic predisposition to...overindulge on occasion. Such as when a date goes poorly in terms of...your...sexual expectations."
"Worse. Making it worse."
"I only optimized those lapses in your consciousness. Why would a spider bite only the dorsal surface of your right foot with only one fang, *twice*?"
"You *said* spiders! I said I'd been bitten and you said there's *spiders* in the flat!"
"I did stop doing that once I-"
"Once you nicked my file." John pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm *literally* unable to be shocked by your behavior anymore. *Nothing* you do can surprise me in the least, Sherlock." John rubbed his hands up and down his thighs, grounding the electricity of his frustration through his legs into the floor.

"Well I was concerned about sharing a flat with a man who was constantly...engaging a new lover every week."
"Even worse! Those will be your last words on this earth, Sherlock. Lestrade will solve your murder. Let's call me a slut once more, and see you *die* by my hand tonight. And it *won't* be cock suffocation."

John's hands clenched but the look on his face was calm, calculating seriousness.

Sherlock swallowed adrenaline. He hastily said, "I also lied about knowing a Sufi mendicant turned carnival magician extraordinaire."
"What?"
Sherlock stood, then sat again abruptly. "I only read a biography of Hadji Ali."
"Why would you tell me that?"
Sherlock spoke quickly with the honesty of a marked man in the crosshairs. "To impress you.
That's what I do, John. I overstep your private boundaries and I show off to impress you. Trust the evidence of your own eyes: Turning my collar up, pretending to be more mysterious and dangerous than I am, introducing you to only the people who are grateful for my expertise, exposing every detail of every deduction. What one does in this world is a matter of no consequence. The question is what can you make people believe you have done. Do you not see, John? You fascinate me endlessly. I will never be bored with you. I endeavor to hold your interest."

"I know what you're doing. Being nice to make up for being so wrong. But, really? Learning to deep throat cock from a carny when you were twelve?" John's anger left him as the last sentence registered in his ears. The oxytocin could be blamed for his slight amusement. He shook his head. "That's not what I said, John, I said Magic and Goldfish." Sherlock attempted a momentary smile. "I don't need to know what your imaginary pederast boyfriend made you call his meat and veg. Sherlock," John was smirking, on the verge of yielding to the ridiculousness of the situation. Sherlock tried a slight smile, too.

"You said it was not human so I tried to pretend I knew what I was doing. Although, I really did swallow a goldfish when I was twelve." The detective broadened his smile.

John sighed in exasperation. He shook his head. He bit his lip to suppress his laughter. "You are without a doubt the strangest man I have ever met! Never a dull moment with Sherlock Holmes."
"I'm sorry. I apologize, John."
"Madman!"

The couple sat in silence for a moment. John continued to shake his head slowly. But the anger had drained through them, though John's disappointment still hung about them like fading cigarette smoke in the air. The military man began to work his left shoulder with his right hand, easing the scar tissue. Sherlock was acquainted with this process. Generally, his fusilier awoke with stiffness in the old war wound. The detective focused on his partner's hand.
Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

Read until • then skip down until • if you are disinterested in a feminist/humanist debate. The story will still make sense, I promise. Between the • is a exploration of misogynist, feminist and humanist themes within Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fiction with source material quotes. Something my mates and I oft discuss in our favorite work of fiction. It's quite dry and boring so no offense taken if skip the middle bit between the •. No Porn Here. You've been cautioned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The nude doctor winced, he attempted to rotate the joint in its socket. After two unsuccessful attempts, he reverted to kneading the scarred area again. Sherlock stood tentatively and approached. They studied one another. The standing man took hold of the shoulder and offered his dexterous fingers to the effort. John's posture relaxed into the touch. He breathed deeply. The soldier permitted his violinist to assist in the process.

As the old bullet wound yielded to skillful coaxing, the doctor further relaxed. Sherlock stepped back, knowing his veteran would now test range of motion. Satisfied, John now continued his daily ritual with the offending scar tissue. He stood and extended his arm along the wall, gently leaning into the pressure to further restore motion. He turned round to apply counter pressure on the opposite plane. Sherlock intercepted the process, offering himself in place of the wall. John tensed, took a half step away.

The tall man whispered, "I really am sorry, John. I wasn't calling you...what you said. I don't think you're...promiscuous."
"You do. But that's down to your lack of understanding about human interactions. And your insecurities about emotions. I know you. I know myself." The doctor shrugged dismissively, his back was towards his man.

Sherlock hazarded a step closer. He spoke to his friend's back. "Yes. You know me. And I know you: you are a gentleman, John. Your relationships faltered because of our work and my constant interference, not because of your unethical treatment of women. I apologise."

"Damned your million apologies, sweetheart." But the doctor said it softly and backed his injured shoulder into Sherlock's chest.

It was a small concession, but to the detective it was invaluable. Never in his whole life, never. This patient and understanding man. John was rugged and heroic, a formidable force not only in his body but in his capacity for genuine humanity. The socially-inept loner was allowed the privilege of bestowing comfort to ease the pain he had caused. John's capacity for forgiveness was so affirming, so natural. It was as natural as an avalanche crashing down the alpine range. Sherlock was overtaken by the weight of it, losing himself beyond all hope of recovery. He drew his arms around his handsome friend and rocked him side to side as he petted the shoulder. John's brawny arms enveloped the detective's, rubbing their hands into his downy sternum. The doctor pressed his left shoulder back, continuing his exercises. Sherlock offered the appropriate counter pressure to
the warm treasure in within his arms.

They continued the familiar physical therapy routine in silence. Occasionally, Sherlock would add a tender kiss into the shiny, jagged outline of the repaired skin. John seemed to be moving on auto pilot, his body well acquainted with the daily process. As the military man rotated his shoulder through the final phases, he surfaced from his inner thoughts.

"I respect women, Sherlock. Very much. But I gave up dating after the last one. After I chose our...friendship above my relationship with her."
Sherlock nodded. "The one who came to Christmas."
"Yes. She said- she said I was a great boyfriend. To you. That I'd do anything for you. That I was wrong to make her compete with you." John sighed. "She was right of course. And that's when I decided to forgo dating. It was unfair, unkind to date when I was...unavailable."

Sherlock brought the blue yoga mat from under the sofa and unfurled it where The Chair had been. The detective waited in John's chair. He was accustomed to his man's routine, though he'd never witnessed it in the nude. "She said that? Not really the Spirit of Christmas, was she."

John continued his morning ritual and their conversation. "Yes, she did. And she was right. That's why I stopped dating. It was disrespectful of me...and as you said, unethical." His body moved of its own accord, the paces ingrained in this muscles long ago. The soldier did slow press ups to further build his injured shoulder.

Sherlock said, "I respect women too. I refrain from personal interactions with them because of the systematic subjugation wrought upon the whole of their sex by our society. The way women are indoctrinated into subordinate roles within our culture causes me to distrust them as autonomous persons. The motives of women are so inscrutable... How can you build on such a quicksand? Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hairpin or a curling iron."

John stopped and fetched his man a humbling glower. "Misogyny does not suit you, Sherlock. You started so well and ended up as yourself by the end." John resumed his exertions. Sherlock tried to recover.

"Consider Mummy. My mother, for example is among the most intelligent persons in the whole empire, yet our society's gender hierarchy had her choosing between family or her career. No man is ever made to choose between the two. So little is required to be deemed a 'good father' by our society, while conversely so much less is required for a woman to be labeled a 'bad mother' who does not 'love her children enough.' That is our unearned benefit as men."

John considered this, "It was your mother's choice to retire and start a family, as I understand it. You think she was sentimental to prioritize her children, but love is sacrifice, Sherlock." Sherlock moved to hold his partner's ankles for the sit ups. The doctor allowed this, his mind fully concentrating on their debate.

"Consider The Woman, John- Our dominatrix client was born with shrewdness and intelligence to rival my own mental faculties. And yet, due to the randomness of her birth, our society's ingrained systematic oppression of women had her deriving earnings from her physical looks and sexuality. The message to women is: foremost be aesthetically pleasing, as a decoration above all else. It is systemic, John. Gender oppression rewards misogynistic standards of beauty above intelligence in the female sex. A dominatrix earns more than a mathematician ever could. What is the logical deduction, my dear man? Our society says to half our population: Your primary value lies in your
physical form rather than your brain. It's explicit!"

"And so you dislike and distrust the whole sex?"

"I abstain from further becoming oppressor to the systematically subjugated. I think highly of women, John. Consider Dr. Hooper- she is a superlative pathologist. Extremely skilled, highly intelligent, head of her department. Yet she seeks my affections. Can you imagine how horrible a man like me would be for a woman as capable as she? Why does she feel in need of a man? Society! This pervasive message that a woman is incomplete without the love of a man, John. Sentimental rubbish!" Sherlock shook out the blue mat, neatly returning it to the underside of the sofa.

John began his stretches, allowing Sherlock to provide isometric resistance where appropriate. The doctor asked, "How can you judge her motivations in her personal life? The need for companionship is a natural human characteristic, it encompasses all genders. A hierarchy pigeonholes everyone into rigid boxes. As a capable woman it is for Molly to decide what is in her best interest. You comprehend so little in terms of human emotions, my dear man." John shook out his limbs.

"As I well know. Which is why you are the best weapon in my Arsenal, my friend. My speciality is in solving the crime, but it is you, John, who takes responsibility for the person. Perhaps I do not understand Molly's motivations, but I am loath to consider if she ever denied her career for children one day. It would be a great loss to London criminology. Our society does not expect men to sacrifice in this way. You will agree, though: women who breed the future generations get the short end of the stick in a sexist society. It is oppressive." Sherlock followed his partner to the bath.

The logician leaned against the door frame as the conversed.

"Do I understand that you would enforce separatism upon the whole of woman kind to save them from oppression? What of your mother? Women are people, Sherlock. They've ever right to make their own choices in society as they see fit." John accepted the towel offered by his man.

Sherlock passed John his toothbrush, having pre-pasted it already. "You misunderstand me entirely, my friend. I am overwhelmingly conscious that I am a man and therefore have no say what so ever in any lifestyle a woman chooses as she navigates the liminal maze of our thorny society. I only say I distrust if any woman's choices are indeed truly her own within the framework of a sexist hierarchy."

Sherlock offered shave cream into John's hand and watched his man caress it into his stubble. The logician imagined his doctor with a snowy Father Christmas beard when they were old men.

"As for Mummy, I know my father does not actively seek to oppress her, quite the opposite. And there in turn lies the diabolical beauty of systematic oppression! Through centuries of insidious legal and religious gender regulation, no individual benefactor of the hierarchical system needs personally, nor actively, oppress the subjugated person. She has instead been carefully indoctrinated from birth to compliantly self-regulate her subjugation. Reflexively. It's really quite ingenious! The subjugated people actively contribute to furthering their continued subjugation. Do you not concede my point, John?" The doctor patted aftershave into his neck, gesturing for Sherlock to continue.

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Sherlock placed the damp towel on the hook, following John upstairs to dress. He continued, "I understand the ingenuity of such a hierarchical system: control the means of reproduction and perpetuate the system for the continued benefit of the top hierarchal tier of people, generation upon generation, ad infinitum, yes?"
The detective rifflles through the drawer, tossing socks at John. The doctor donned clothing asking, "So you are attracted to women but avoid them because you don't wish to contribute to their oppression? You think they can't truly decide for themselves what they want because they are not men?"

"No to the first, and No again, John. I limit contact with the whole of society because I have no idea how to correct such a pervasive societal problem. A system that affords someone like me so many unearned benefits based solely on the randomness of the race, sex, apparent gender, and class statuses assigned to me at birth. It's ludicrous!" The tall man held open the neck of a navy jumper and fitted it over John's head. They smoothed the sandy hair back into place together.

"I don't believe you. Remaining above the fray is not your style. I know you too well." John began rolling on his socks. The movement brought their lack of condom use to the forefront of his mind. His jaw flexed. He felt resentment threatening his mood.

"You know how we operate, John: It is of the first importance not to allow our judgements to be biased by personal qualities. A client is to me a mere unit—a factor in a problem. The emotional qualities are antagonistic to clear reasoning. I assure you that the most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance money, and the most repellent man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor. You know our policy, John: we interact with all clients on an equal basis. That is our contribution to society. Beyond our work, I abstain from interactions with women." Sherlock corrected the tilt of John's collar in the back.

"So I am a womanizer and an oppressor for perusing my natural interest in women, then?" John shooed the fussing hand away from his neck.

"Don't be an-"
"Sherlock, you are strongly cautioned against completing that sentence. I have not been awake long enough to be a womanizer, an oppressor and an idiot. Though if you care to attempt the trifecta, I doubt your next flatmate will prove to be as enthusiastic a lover as me. Think it through." John searched for his other his brown wingtip shoes within his closet. The doctor calmed himself and yielded to patience. He signaled his man an continue. Sherlock sighed.

"I will never have another flatmate. I was only explaining why, unlike you, I have never been intimate with any woman, John. I do not know how to interact with them in a personal sense."

"I will never have another flatmate. I was only explaining why, unlike you, I have never been intimate with any woman, John. I do not know how to interact with them in a personal sense."

"Yes. So, all things being equal, you may allow for the possibility you are attracted to women, then?" John sat and put on his shoes. Sherlock laced one while the doctor laced the other.

"No. I am thirty-four and have encountered but one individual to whom I have a sexual attraction. Intellectual attractions and interests, yes: I have been drawn to other people in my life, though very rarely. But a combination of that interest and physical desire? No. Only you, John. We are free to oppress and subjugate one another to our heart's content in private, without concern of politically or ethically violating one another's basic human rights. Because we are men in this society." Sherlock kissed his trousered shin and stood. The pair headed to the kitchen. John started the kettle while Sherlock located a red apple. He brought the milk from the fridge and passed the thermos into John's hand in anticipation of the doctor's movements.

The soldier said, "I see your perspectives but remain skeptical of your opinions on the basis that it is the 21st century, Sherlock, and women have fought and won back many of their rights within society. As have other oppressed groups. It's getting better. Perhaps not quickly enough for your rocket brain, but when we consider the centuries involved in perpetuating the system, the
dismantling of that system by women and other marginalized persons really is happening rather rapidly by comparison. They are not victims. I said I respect women and that is precisely why."

John paused to see his watch being fitted back upon his wrist. He checked the time and began doubling his pace.

"You did, John, but nonetheless you must come round to my view, because otherwise I will keep on piling fact upon fact on you until your reason breaks down under them and acknowledges me to be right." Sherlock passed a spoon into John's hand. The doctor finished his morning ritual. He glanced at his watch again. He frowned.

John moved hastily towards the door, snatching up his bag along the way. He allowed his man to help him into his black jacket. Sherlock tucked the red apple into his pocket with a kiss to the cheek. John smiled. "Ok, Sherlock. We must continue this discussion later I'm afraid. Or I'm sure you will carry on without me. Text me if you need me." Again the doctor checked his watch. He opened the door, and without a second's hesitation, leaned in for a brisk kiss saying, "Love you, bye." The detective returned the quick farewell.

Sherlock shut the door. He heard the doctor's galloping footfalls racing down the stairs. He watched his man hurry off down the street below, checking his watch. The detective began putting away their dinner, stacking dishes in the sink. He was counting down the seconds in his head. He laughed to himself, barely containing his glee as he said, "...3...2...1."

Chapter End Notes

Hardcore Conan Doyle fans will know most of this dialogue is directly quoted from The Second Stain, Scandal in Bohemia, etc. Was 1890s Sherlock Holmes a misogynist? Is BBC Sherlock sexist? I don't know but I like to ponder it.
Chapter 47

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning: kitchen spanking.

Probably not work safe, unless you work as a kitchen stool manufacturer and you're in need of a new marketing campaign.

 Explicit description of sexualized bottom slapping.

The front door slammed and the familiar footfalls clattered back up the stairs. The detective kept his eyes on the sink, not wanting to ruin the punchline too soon. John's voice accused, "8:15 PM! Saturday! PM!"

Sherlock sank against the countertop laughing into the sink. He howled and flooded the room with deep raucous laughter. He heard John throw down his bag then coat. The military man was laughing a bit, too. "You cock! You bastard! You couldn't resist not saying a word."

John closed the space between peeling the indigo silk robe away by the back of the collar. The doctor brought them closer, tossing the garment onto the floor beside their refrigerator. John pressed them together and grabbed his laughing madman by the hips. Sherlock struggled, trying to turn round for a kiss.

Instead, John pulled him backwards into his lap as the doctor sat on the kitchen stool. Sturdy arms flexed around him, ensnaring the trickster. Sherlock was groped roughly over every surface of his clothing within John's fiery reach. The detective sought to extricate himself. They struggled, causing the fighter's arse to wriggle into the lap beneath. Playfulness became another game as they noted John's increased arousal.

Without warning, the dark haired man found himself roughly repositioned on his front, suddenly staring at the kitchen floor. His tall body was folded over his man's lap, an elbow pressing into the small of his back. Even through the pajama bottoms, the first sudden blow was overwhelmingly intense, echoing over their flat. "John!"

Sherlock leapt up, hand against the inflamed spot, backing away against the countertop. His mouth rearranged into a twisted, wordless exclamation as he gripped his bottom. John wore a carnivorous grin, eyes like dark sapphires. He patted his thigh once, as a person calls a pet. He nodded slowly and focused his rapacious blue eyes below the drawstring of the pajamas. He dragged a thumbnail slowly across the outline of his lower lip.

The detective's mouth hung open as he followed the predatory gaze down the front of himself. Growing fully and completely erect by the second within his pajamas. Sherlock was breathing heavily. His pulse like a steam train. He took a step forward and reached to his partner's lap, licking his lips. John gave the needy hand a brutish shove. He locked eyes with his logician stealing strength from the taller man's knees. Sherlock tried for a kiss and was again roughly dismissed, a hand gripping over his mouth and turning him away. The detective tried to step back with the momentum but his shirt front and underlying dog tags were suddenly yanked forward. His face was brought down within inches of the glowering man perched atop the kitchen stool.
John shook his head. He shoved back against mouth and chest with both hands, tipping Sherlock off center for a moment. John tasted his wolfish grin with his tongue and again gave a light pat of his thigh. The seated man's eye contact did not waiver. His dire gaze stripped the air from Sherlock's lungs like a rock through plate glass. A tiny sound escaped from core the detective's being, nearly identical to the tone of an empty cup to a saucer. John's features showed his approval of the sound.

Sherlock surged forward, roughly snatching two handfuls of short hair. He inclined John's neck completely back, forcing his man to look up at him. The doctor gripped both wrists and pressed his fingernails into the throbbing pulse. They groaned. Then Sherlock fitted his hungry mouth down over the other. His hands clutched either side of John's face as he desperately satiated his thirst for his soldier. He worked himself over the inseam of tight trousers several times. When he had extracted one threatening curse from John's mouth, he pushed himself well back towards the sink. Both men gasped air greedily, eyeing one another.

Sherlock stepped forward. He broke their eye contact and draped his sculpted form over the lap. He gripped the metal foot rail with both fists. He leveraged his cock against the other man twice then waited. John did nothing until he heard the pitiful little sound rise up to his ear again. He smiled. He slowly and firmly anchored his forearm across the waistline of pajama bottoms, his strong arm gripping into the opposite hip.

The walls reverberated the sharp claps of hand to cloth-covered skin. Through gritted teeth, there came the low grunts of desire and need. Arhythmic dense thunder threatened to bring the building to its foundation from the inside out. Between the percussion of strikes were the moans of defined hunger. When Sherlock's hand at last began to reach back as a shield, John's mind was too blurred to care. He gripped the intruding arm by the wrist and continued his work.

The doctor's singular aspiration was as yet unrealized. He remained undeterred in his pursuit of his need. John was urged forward by the friction against his lap and the drum beat slamming the air against his ears. He brought a powerful leg over the writhing man, pinning his partner resolutely into place. The onslaught continued beyond when assailing hand tingled numbly. Beyond when flexors and tendons churned acid through his arm. Beyond when the submitter began to twist and struggle away. Beyond when either man had any doubt in their mission. Beyond their physical plane of existence.

Until at last, the doctor found his pleasure beneath the writhing form in his lap. He heard his name in an unending chorus, bubbling up from the floor, echoing through his chest, pealing through his skull like a clarion call for salvation, a desperate prayer to the bringer of redemption. They found deliverance together, shuddering and melting into a unified puddle of satiated lust. The pair clung to one another, passing a single breath back and forth on the floor of their silent kitchen.
Chapter 48

Chapter Summary

All hail the Pirate King!

John looked around as he caught his breath. The underside of the kitchen cupboards were distant clouds far away. His inflamed right palm radiated heat into Sherlock's mouth. His man's arms hugged around his bicep, dexterous fingers occasionally wicking the heat of his palm further up his arteries. He could feel the fire feeding into his aorta, slowly washing his insides with flames. John's left palm rested against a scalding orb of flesh within pajamas, lightly polishing warmth out into the chilly air. Each time his cool hand faintly burnished hot skin, a contented murmur was deposited into his stinging hand. The reassuring weight over his body was sharp contrast to the cold hard lino beneath his back. The ebb and flow of his breaths floated his buoyant paragon into his cool hand like a life raft nudging the shore.

The wispy breath against his palm moved away. "Hm?" John felt the vibration of his man's sound resonate through his chest. It took his misplaced mind several seconds to realize it was a question. "What?" The doctor's lethargic whisper broke on his lips.

Sherlock attempted to stir, but only one leg gave a bare twitch. He managed to vaguely fumble a dry fingertip against the side of John's cheek. He tapped his fingerprint onto the corner of John's mouth and received a tiny kiss against his finger. The doctor's wistful voice brushed over him. "We should paint. The ceiling."

Sherlock drunkenly turned his head, he glanced up then snuggled his ear back against the heartbeat. "Mentos geyser." The detective's voice burned his dry throat. The cool hand down his pajamas twitched. Sherlock whispered a little secret into the palm. "Hmm?" John asked.

Sherlock rubbed a long leg over the thigh beneath him. He drifted on the endless tide of John's breath, never to see land again. He decided he would live as a pirate king aboard his manraft, surviving on inflamed hand and the scent of green soap. He would never return, just drift aimlessly until his chin was a snarled beard and his clothes were faded briny rags. He closed his eyes, letting the rolling waves of John draw him further out to sea. As pirate king he would, of course, be ruthless. His sluggish fingers pressed the opening notes of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Major-General" into his new violin of sinewy forearm.

He planned his life as pirate king while he played his new violin. He would navigate by the stars and piss into the wind and visit Darwin's Galapagos Isles. He would curse at Selkies and make them cry just to pass the time. He would stalk white whales with his trusty harpoon. He would become infamous ruler of the whole linoleum ocean, feared in every port. He would swear like a sailor all day and night, even if he was not cross in the slightest- because it would be his right. A cool hand brush over his sore backside and he mumbled a secret order into the heated palm. Then he remember that he was Pirate King and he made his order known below decks. "Fuck me, John."

There was a sharp inhalation and Sherlock's raft capsized, tossing him overboard into the floor.
below. He floundered about and swam to his knees, coming eye to eye with two wide pools of azure tide. Sherlock crashed his mouth into John's before a wave of fear could pull him under. His mouth was flooded with a lusty groan confirming his order would be carried out.
Chapter Summary

Warning sexualized smoking and face fucking. Graphic and explicit. (Don't smoke it's addictive, ok.)

The two men knelt together, reading one another's eyes, breathing, waiting, watching. All at once, they reached for each other again, tangling together in a passionate embrace. The detective straddled the lap beneath him and found eager readiness clad in trousers. He pumped his hips against his partner, making his willingness expressly known. Two hands grasped his arse and he flung his mouth towards the ceiling, shouting the name of his provocative assailant.

Sherlock stood, quickly drawing his man up beside him. But the shorter man began suddenly walking away. John crossed to their dining table beneath the window with purposeful strides. Sherlock began to follow but stopped to watch in disbelief.

The doctor turned again towards the kitchen and placed a thin white cylinder between his lips. He bent forward slightly, bringing the end near his hands. The interior furrows and hills of his cupped palms burst suddenly orange when the match struck. Broad hands cradled the dancing flame. Sulfur crept through the air.

John inhaled once, coaxing red to the end. He straightens, advanced towards the staring man on the threshold between rooms. Azure eyes looked up into cyan curiosity. Over the side of the paper cylinder, a stream of smoke was directed into the tall man's face. With two fingers and thumb, the military man pinched the filter out of his mouth and made a puckered o of his lips, forcing all the remaining smoke inside him up onto the angular face.

"Open your mouth."
Sherlock parted his lips. The cigarette filter touched his lower lip then slowly slid into place.
"Close."
John waited, eyes fixed on his man's. Sherlock inhaled a full breath, the red glow sputtering a little sizzle. The doctor gripped narrow hips and pressed closer, inclining his chin, lips parted. He waited, expectation in his eyes. A grey cloud drew a smearing path against shorter man's lips, spreading upward over nostrils, curling tendrils over eyes, caressing forehead then whispering away beyond flaxen hair. The grip against hips tightened as a deep hum rumbled through the soldier's chest.

John kept his eyes focused on the inquisitive blue/greens as he melted down to his knees. Then the smoker watched as the doctor closed his eyes. John nuzzled the front of pajamas into his face, using both hands to bring further contact of groin to his features. He moaned into the fabric, letting the warmth of his breath seep beneath the weave and excite the underlying flesh. The doctor prodded hefty scrotum with the bridge of his nose. He nudged his brow ridge along the underside of shaft. He lavished the smell of still damp ejaculation soaked into the pajamas. He rubbed the dampness into his cheek, his temple, his forehead. With a tighter grip on pelvic bones he bounced damp fabric back and forth against his entire countenance, letting the hardness beneath ricochet off his nose and forehead. He sent another warm groan through the thin pajama fabric. He bounced the
hips once more and this time their owner worked with the strong hands, thrusting against John's nose. The doctor sent another hot, humid moan beneath the fabric.

John opened his eyes and looked all the way up into cyan waters. He waited, anticipation clear. His handsome features were again anointed with a rich blanket of smoke. He groaned. The doctor's thumbs kneaded transvers abdominal muscles all the way down to the waistband of pajamas, then back up again. Over and over as the smoker watched his eyes. John's broad hands rose again like flames to burn trails down the arcuate line. The smooth sensation prickled his overstimulated palm. Sherlock watched a deft thumb circle his navel, mere inches from from his cockhead.

Ashes fell like stars against the navy jumper. Cirrostratus clouds of nicotine swirled down through sandy hair and over robust shoulders like an encroaching storm front rolling down off a mountain top. The detective inhaled again as thumbs disappeared into his elastic band. He watched his coarse, dark hair appear by millimeters, unearthed slowly and deliberately. His erection was caught on the waistband, bent slowly towards the kneeling man. Sherlock's view was temporarily obscured by another thick pour of smoke drenching his partner and flowing into his pajamas.

Both voices groaned in unison when at last Sherlock's arousal sprang free. The mauve-hued tip was welcomed into the night air by a halo of grey whispers. John licked his lips, drawing ghostly tendrils into his mouth. His lover's erection still retained the slight sheen from its previous expenditure. John waited, looking up. A flurry of ash snowed along his eyebrows and lashes. More velvety smoke caressed his face.

"Open your mouth, John."

The whispered baritone phrase violently seized the kneeling man's cock and threatened to pull him through the inseam of his trousers. His heart beat double time and all his senses were slammed inside his pants. But he remained resolute in this venture. He barely acquiesced to the order with a tiny flick of tongue to slick his lips. Then narrowly parted his mouth. He squeezed the hips, allowing his broad hands to give the barest hint with a tiny tug forward. More smoke fell upon him like a hillside fire telegraphing danger over the distant lowland prairies.

He watched the vapor settle over the erection before his face. One lean index finger firmly inclined the doctor's chin, drawing his gaze back up the burning mountain. John felt his smoker's covetous blue/green eyes slice through the haze and pierce his brain stem. A thumb dipped into his barely parted lips and forced his lower jaw further down. His mouth was parted slightly more. He moistened the thumb with his tongue. He felt his hardness become painful against the inside of his pants and trousers, but he kept both hands anchored on the muscular hips. More cumulus tobacco was poured down into his mouth. John drew it into his lungs and pushed the phantom cloud back up to the owner with a challenging look.

The doctor's challenge was accepted. The nimble fingers pressed down against the deep fascia muscles at the base of the smoker's erection. The cock was slowly tipped down like a drawbridge lowered to connect the returning Conquerer to his Keep. Swirling grey apparitions curled translucent fingers down the doctor's esophagus. But John closed his mouth again and begged with his eyes. Make me, use me, undo me, I need to be yours, I need you this way, please.

At last, the slick cockhead pressed forward against John's lips. The tip rubbed over the doctor's mouth then advanced, spreading his lips to accommodate the flared collar of glans. Sherlock watched his erection stretching the lips slowly, finding wetness at a glacial pace. The smoker exhaled at the same pace. His white breath painting the scene below in filmy gauze. The mulberry circle of the detective's flared corona protruded from the tight lips enforcing a perfect O on John's mouth. Within the wetness, a skilled flutter worked circles against the unseen cockhole. Both voices celebrated the connection. More smoke drained into azure eyes.
Athletic hips buried half the length of creamy flesh within wetness. John rocked back on his heels, revealing all but the tip again. A dexterous hand took firm hold of the back of his fair head and kept him in place. The doctor's mouth was slowly filled again, but deeper. He tried to rock back but was made to wait as the back of his mouth became acquainted with Sherlock's demand. Their eyes watched the effect of the trial, reading fulfillment. The kneeling man coughed around the intruder, struggling to accept the depth. Moisture swam over his blue eyes, but he did not yield, only clutched the hips tighter. Hips withdrew the fullness back to the very tip. The pattern was established.

Hips fed engorged flesh in and out. Moans and Smoke. Firmer and deeper thrusts into John's mouth. Each time the doctor would gag. Each time he was made to endure longer meetings between the very back of this mouth and his man's insistent cock. Each time the smoker rewarded their combined effort with delicate storm clouds.

Sherlock shoved his hips forward, relishing the shuddering struggle, the wet strangled moans and the absolute determination in his lover's fiery stare. It was a sloppy symphony of grunting toads and the croaking old pipes of an ancient boiler-room. When the smoker would withdraw completely there was an exquisite popping sound like breaking the seal on a new jar of marmalade. John would gasp as great globs of slobber cascaded down his chin, darkening the navy jumper to near blackness. It was fascinating.

John pulled the hips towards his face again and again, never wanting it to end. The earthy, salty, smoked creaminess of recent cum was his advanced reward for this endeavor. Sherlock fucked his mouth with such resolve in those turquoise eyes that the doctor knew they would both get off from this. Not. Yet.

The low lying clouds of haze began to thin beneath John's nostrils and he looked to the cigarette. It was a single red ember against the filter, all but spent. John pushed the hips back and sucked shallowly around the mauve tip. He watched Sherlock fighting the urge to force him back deeper. A dexterous hand clawed at sandy hair impatiently and his toes dug into the floor. John wiped a handful of saliva from his chin and offered the upturned palm above his head as a beggar beseeches a nobleman. The burning dog-end was deposited into his waiting hand. They heard it sizzle once, then watched a single grey thread unspool from the dying filter, tangling upward against the ceiling.

John crushed his palm closed and pushed the hips away from their toils. A final wet popping sound snapped in the air between them as the doctor released suction. Sherlock made an anguished, needy cry like an aluminum can crushing underfoot. John held him back with a palm against his quivering abdomen. The doctor caught his breath, retching and heaving. He pounded the wet fist into the lino and coughed.

John stood. His eyes were red-rimmed and his mouth raw, overused. He smiled broadly watching his drool drip down Sherlock's unfulfilled hardness. The doctor looked up at his man and said, "Well, good night, my dear." John turned towards the sink, stepping away. He wiped his chin and neck with woollen sleeve, unknowingly streaking his jugular with ashes. He cleared his throat to hide a laugh.

Sherlock gaped at his man's back. He looked down at himself then up at the navy jumper heading towards to sink. He watched one forceful downward chop of John's arm fling the slimy cigarette butt into the rubbish bin. The doctor scrubbed his hands, humming "Rule Britannia" softly to himself. The detective's frustration doubled with his overwhelming confusion. Perhaps John had climaxed and Sherlock had not noticed. He was very experienced with that hands-free technique. The aching man ground the heel of his smoky hand against his pubic bone. He gave a little chirp.
"John?"
John turned, a mischievous smile lighting his eyes. He wanted to hear the filthy request again from his man's own lips, face to face. He needed it very badly. John folded his arms over his chest and looked into icy green eyes. "Ask me."
Chapter 50

Chapter Summary

It's time to love Sherlock's insides! Romantic! Song: Lover Lay Down by Dave Matthews Band.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So that's what this little game was all about, Sherlock thought. Long strides closed the distance between them in two steps. The detective deposited a quick peck on his man's cheek. The taller man looked down into azure eyes, with sincerity and hope. He pressed his hand flat against the inseam of John's trousers, firmly cupping and palming the sac within. He followed the inseam back, feeling gluteal muscles squeeze beneath his palm as he pressed his naked, wet cock against John's zipper. He pulled his man closer, the trouser fabric too rough against his sensitive areas. Sherlock swallowed, breathed one deep breath. John's scent was masked in layers of smoke. The abstainer's eyes expressed all his certainty. "I want-" He stopped and tried again with the most accurate truth, "We need you inside me tonight," he added, "Please, O flatmate mine?" Sherlock nodded once, then stepped back. There. Now let's go.

John's mouth flopped open and he stood frozen a moment. Then all at once he rushed at Sherlock, ducking low and snaring his waist tightly with both arms. He pressed his right shoulder into the tall man's stomach and flexed both powerful thighs down into the floor. John lifted the logician up over his shoulder and carried his prize down the hall into the bedroom just as he'd done when Irene Adler had drugged his man. He interlocked his left hand into the one holding onto his hip.

Sherlock watched the floor change from linoleum, to worn wood, to dark polished oak. "Finally!" He thought. The detective had a vague sense of déjà vu as though he'd dreamt this exact circumstance before...however he didn't recall being erect in that dream.

The lovers undressed one another for the first time. It was a gracefully smooth ballet of synchronized hands as though they'd done this a thousand times before. John was wet to his skin, even his vest, from their earlier explorations. He was soaked through his pants as well from the even earlier events. He stood naked before their bed, drawing Sherlock out of his two items of clothing: wet pajamas and sweaty tshirt. They caressed one another, each man smiling proudly.

Sherlock had much better understanding and mastery of his own body than John ever imagined. The experienced man had feared a devastating first attempt with a horrific outcome. His primary goal was to ensure he only ever brought pleasure to his partner; he worried penetrating his man would be counter to this goal. He always had a certain amount of trepidation when he fantasized how it would be to first enter his dear friend. He felt certain it would go very wrong. John had not prepared to enjoy one of the most beautiful nights in his whole life.

They kissed very slowly very tenderly. The astute detective read or perhaps felt John's fear about the events yet to transpire. Sherlock soothe him with light kisses over his hairline and ears, stroking his face and body. The abstainer kissed his man's cheek, nuzzled his collar bone, patted his chest.
The turquoise eyes beseeched the doctor to relax. Sherlock straddled his man's crossed lap and held John's ear against his heart, swaying him gently. The taller man pressed kisses down through the top of his sandy smoky head. John's face was held between long narrow hands and love was poured into his eyes, filling his ribcage with moonlight. The detective kissed his dear friend lightly then petted the tension out of his neck in long, firm strokes down his spine.

Their foreheads nuzzled together, one man's reassurance osmosing into the other's brain. The tall man spoken with his eyes, explaining *I am yours, please be brave, please let me love you.* In this way, Sherlock brought his man's hands up to the chain on his neck. The abstainer guided John's hands as they brought the aluminum tags over dark curls and down on to John's neck. Sherlock did it slowly and deliberately while gazing into his doctor's eyes. John felt the familiar metal patted into his chest. Sherlock smiled at him, then nodded. It was the doctor who felt as a virgin in that moment, totally unprepared and in awe.

The detective served their palms lubricant and they used one another's hands to coat their partner's fingers thoroughly. John watched between their torsos as his man worked both their erections a few times. Sherlock rubbed thumbs in circles against each man's sensitive cockslit. Then he brought the cockheads slowly together, making their frenulums kiss. It was so lovely. He looked up and smiled at John while they enjoyed his nimble hands. They found a breathing pattern to share while their cocks glided in the violinist's skillful grip.

John spent the half hour marveling at his man's inventiveness and creativity. The detective was free from any preconception of what defined sex. John felt an internal longing to have been so clever when he had first taken Sherlock within his own body. John's partner was so innovative and instinctual. The logician accepted only what he liked, only what he needed, exactly how he wanted it. Unlike John, he did not tolerate discomfort or try to endure unpleasantness. John's past sexual encounters left him with a specific framework that defined sex, in his mind, as inserting a penis and withdrawing after ejaculation. And so he had soldiered on through pain when he had been penetrated, somehow believing he ought not expect the first experience to be completely pleasant.

But his man, *his clever man*, seemed to have no preconceptions such as that. Sherlock made the doctor beyond certain that his man knew what he wanted and was quite capable of expressing his desires. Sherlock would seek and find his personal threshold for pleasure or pain then continue or withdraw as his instinct informed. It was beautiful to witness such freedom. The night was as unique and graceful as the clever man who orchestrated it. To John it was a great blessing.

When at last Sherlock parted their erections, John felt absolutely ready to continue. John sat in wonderment and watched Sherlock gently take the doctor's left hand and turn it into a fist. The scientist looked into his eyes and squeezed the fist tight. Then one dexterous finger of his right hand began circling the top of the soldier's fist. Sherlock looked at John again and waited. He smiled and inclined an eyebrow. The doctor tried to move his fist over his man's erection, but it was slowly put back in place atop Sherlock's right thigh. The detective looked into his eyes again then squeezed his hand around the strong fist once more. They watched together as Sherlock's middle finger tickled around the top of the doctor's fist, then nudged slightly down into the palm. Sherlock looked back into his eyes and rocked his hips once. They read one another's faces as the finger repeated the gesture onto the fist again and again very deliberately. His eyes were full of anticipation.

At last, John understood! He gasped at the realization. Brilliant, beautiful, *genius*! It was the most clever idea he had ever experienced. No person in the entire world could *ever* have created such a practical form of communication. Such an pragmatic, rational and logical brain! John kissed him. Relief and gratitude wash over the doctor so strongly that his eyes welled up with tears. He pressed his forehead to Sherlock's chest and hugged him tightly. He thanked God for this intelligent man in
his arms.

John made his left hand back into a tight fist and put it back where his partner wanted. He offered out his right hand to receive more lubricant. The detective replaced his middle finger onto the fist and circled the top. John reached behind his man and mirrored the gesture lightly between buttocks. They moaned together. John looked at him. Sherlock held the doctor's face in both slick hands and kissed him. Yes! It was a perfect system.

They did not need to speak because the detective instructed his lover with his eyes, sounds and hands more clearly than any words could explain. John only needed to make his right hand mirror whatever his partner illustrated into his left fist. This left the couple free to kiss and gaze at one another. Sherlock would use his left hand to explore as his right hand telegraphed his needs to his lover. The only sounds John heard from Sherlock were beautiful expressions of pleasure and lust as they opened his body together. It was ingenious!

Sherlock began to slowly withdraw his finger from John's fist, John did the same inside his man. The detective lay back against the mattress and raked his hand through his dark hair again and again. He was breathless. He pulled John over him and they grinded their bodies together for a while. John helped stroke the damp umber tresses and sucked his man's salty throat while they moved against one another for a while. John caressed his warm backside, rewarded with tightening legs around his hips. Then Sherlock gently pushed him back. They held hands side by side resting, calming, trying to prolong.

John rolled towards him, a narrow hand pressed his dog tags into his heaving chest. The logician wrapped a long leg over his man's hips and reached for the fist again.

More, very good, so very good, more, John.

The doctor felt like a god! He translated the sensual hand code to give exactly what his man desired- not a centimetre deeper or a second longer than was wanted. He rubbed and pressed circles over the outside of Sherlock's puckered arsehole. He gave one finger, he gave two. He gave twists, swirls, stretches and presses. He gave cycles of depth and shallowness. He spread his fingers into the tight warmth, thrilling in the tension and spasming of taut slick muscle. His gave exactly as instructed. He watched Sherlock's features shimmer with pleasure. He drank gratified tones until his marrow oozed the abstainer's satisfaction.

Then the doctor learned their hand code was a two way connection. He accidentally tightened his fist around his partner's fingers when he shifted to take weight off his shoulder. He felt Sherlock's body clench around him. John tested with three successive squeezes of his fist; he felt the same from within his lover. They shared an urgent lusty sound, like a tree felled by lightning. The partners became more desperate, sensing their nearness to the edge. They drove their bodies together faster, harder.

Sherlock strangled a wild moan and flung his doctor away. He held out a hand. They waited breathlessly, like ravenous caged wolves, each fighting back the inevitable. The abstainer pressed his hand against his arsehole. His mind reeled with information as he began calculating. John had wide hands and thick knuckles. But wider and thicker still was his cock. Sherlock's fingers were approximately 15% slimmer than John's. The explorer felt inside his entry very gently. Their combined efforts seemed effective. He had never been inside his arse and began to explore a bit more. He felt identical to John inside: warm, pulsing, spongy, slick. The logician considered data as he caught his breath. He could not last much longer. Suddenly there was a hot insistent mouth sucking one of his furry testes. The detective moaned, grinding his hips into their mattress. Sherlock's sphincter tightened and spasmed around his own fingers. He decided.
John was arranged on his back, watching his man crawl up the length of him. The doctor made his left fist accessible as Sherlock came to his lips for a deep kiss. Instead, John watched as nimble hands bathed his hardness in layers of lubricant. The doctor began to sit up on elbows, his heart racing. But a slick hand pressed him back down, gently but firmly. Before he could clear his mind enough to speak, his dog tags were rubbed into his breastbone. Sherlock's eyes soothed him. *Courage. Be brave. We will be alright.*

The detective and the doctor each took hold of John. The navigator angling the head as ground control kept the base in position. Sherlock tested himself again with a finger. Then they both took a deep breath. Sherlock again conveyed *We will be alright, my brave man.* The detective guided his man against his entry. They paused and watched one another. John saw his man's pupils dilate to full black orbs rimmed in thin blue halos. The doctor pressed his heels into the mattress, feeling Sherlock's toes curl into his calves. They gasped together as their bodies began to interlock slowly, gently. The detective brought both hands behind broad shoulders and squeezed. He nodded against John's lips.

John understood. He nodded back, confirmed with a quick kiss. They uncoupled very slowly. Sherlock reached back to rub his hand against his hole. He pressed his sweaty forehead into John's collarbone, breathing deeply. The doctor pressed kisses into his ear and rubbed his neck. Sherlock looked into his man's eyes. He ran his tongue over John's lips. They began again.

Synchronized breathing became their guide for reentry. Again the navigator angled the tip to his anus. But this time, he pressed out with his pelvic muscles. John was accepted into the sensitive warmth smoothly. He groaned into Sherlock's mouth. With the grace of a liquid dancer, the abstainer gyrated his hips in fluid circles. He accepted an inch more of John. Their sounds echoed together. A bit more. Sherlock arched his back and found where John felt best. He clenched and released, keeping contact right there, just inside. It was phenomenal. The logician knew he did not require more.

John began to slip away from the confines of gravity. He propelled a fist between their torsos to mirror the squeezing he experienced. He compressed his thumb into Sherlock's frenulum each time his own glans was gripped. The dancer swiveled and rocked his pale hips shallowly around his man. He knew his lover was close to floating away.

He followed John, letting his partner lead them up and away into the vastness of the universe. Sherlock clench only half a dozen times, rolling his hips in between. Time elongated and they seemed to move together for eons. The detective perceived their singular form tense. Then suddenly, Sherlock felt John feed a splattering of starlight into the rich dark fabric of space and time within him and he surrendered himself to the celestial light, letting the texture of the cosmos pour from his own body. Their voices were lost to the vacuum of space.

When they returned to Earth it was Monday.

Chapter End Notes

My spouse and I abhor the fanfic cliche that Sherlock is a virgin girl. He's over thirty and highly intelligent NOT a fourteen year old child bride. Sometimes, I'm so put off by Johnlock fanfic because the activity is so clearly not authentic to the Male/Male homosexual experience. I understand different ideas are sexy to different people so I don't leave my opinion in their comments. I mean no offense to non queer women who
eroticize our community, but you cannot imagine how frustrating it is to read fanfic that is so far from how our community actually has sex. This is my opinion as an adult male-bodied person who enjoys sex with my male-bodied spouse. Just saying what I feel.

More of this porn to come.
Day Fourteen

Chapter Summary

Sir ACD's books are narrated by Dr Watson, so little is known about the detective's actual escapades beyond what he reveals to Watson later. It is my opinion that the recluse probably enjoys 'the witching hours' around London, networking with night owls and enjoying the emptiness of his city. I'm biased by insomnia and dislike for people.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

FOURTEEN

1:16 am, Sherlock shed the familiarity of sleep as an adder discards his skin, sluggishly and with great regret. He was unsure how to safely rouse John. To his amusement, pressing his lips into his doctor's temple or jaw elicited illogical murmurs. "Pint, bitter." Then "Five more minutes." Then "Madman." Then a grumble and a clumsy, sleepy hand shoved the offender's kisses away. John rolled over, cocooning the cover around his head. The snoring resumed.

Undeterred, the stealthy logician carefully lured his man out of their warm bed with a series of gentle caresses and whispered promises. John stumbled along beside him, allowing himself to be led by the wrist. Sherlock held his sleepy man upright in the shower and cleaned them both as efficiently as he was able, focusing mainly on the silicone-coated bits. The detective toweled their bodies as best he could with John yawning and leaning against him the whole time. The doctor seemed slightly more conscious but quite unhappy, like when Redbeard was bribed awake with a rash of bacon. The furry old gentleman used to indicate, "I'd rather be sleeping but I will tolerate this interruption," as his scratchy tongue would tickle residual salt from between fingers.

Sherlock's thoughts turned to Redbeard when he had become an arthritic ancient man. Near the end, the stubborn old boy slept all day. But there were times Sherlock remembered him hobbling into the tub unbidden, sitting under the tap huffing protestation at his friend the entire time because water splashed into his rheumy eyes. He was so slow when he would attempt to lick sudsy run-off at the drain. Redbeard would lean against the young man's knobby knee and yawn as his thick fur turned from rich bromine to wet dark cinnamon. Redbeard would have loved John, the detective was certain. They were very similar men.

The doctor was vaguely aware of his surroundings, but it seemed a dream to him. He fumbled his hand along the wall back to bed, yawning "Five more minutes, I promise." Certain words pierced through his groggy haze and he complied, flopping and rolling until he was properly back between the sheet and covers. Sleep submerged him like thick tar.

The detective smiled at his lover's exhausted compliance. He could not resist and snuck his head under the blanket to quickly steal an extravagance. He brought his sleeper off efficiently, less than ninety seconds. John mumbled, "Oh God I love you" when he came and began snoring six seconds later. The detective brought himself off ten seconds after that. He cleaned his hand with his mouth. He smiled into John's chest and arranged his man's limp arms around himself. The sleeper suddenly gripped him tight and muttered 'lumberjack' into his hair. An hour later, Sherlock was
Sherlock awoke again around 4am, his empty stomach loudly characterizing him as an abuser. He snuck out of bed, had a wash, and dressed in under six minutes. From the doorway of their room, he ensured his god was sleeping peacefully.

The detective headed west on Crawford Street as he composed a message to brother. "M-Half case, earliest convenience. -S" [send] He grinned. It was a white, crisp February morning, and the snow of the day before still lay deep upon the ground, shimmering brightly in the wintry predawn street lights. Too early for brother just yet. Along Porchester Place, the detective procured every relevant newspaper.

Celeste was elbows deep in an enormous mixing bowl when Sherlock ducked through the open alley door. Evony was hustling baguettes into the uppermost wall oven. "Bonsoir, Madame." The sturdy woman glanced up with a smile, she tapped her empty wrist, "Bonjour, Monsieur Sherlock." Sherlock quickly wedged his lean form between the steel countertop and refrigerator as an employee wheeled in great boxes of perishables.

Mycroft's response text read "The era of procrastination, of HALF-measures...of delays is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of CONSEQUENCES."

Someone's a sore loser this morning. Sherlock used Churchill to refute Churchill "M-'...it is the courage to continue...'-S"

Chef Pâtissier Evony Niang spoke only Sub-Saharan French though she was clearly fluent in English (though she chose not to converse outside of her native tongue.) Her Wolof heritage was readily identifiable in her high cheekbones, attentive almond eyes, broad low nose. Per usual, her brightly patterned head fabric was like a starched, angular origami sculpture atop her coarse grey curls. She wiped her sweaty brow and shooed the tall man back outside to the far end of the alley as she patted layers of finely ground wheat from her breasts.

Sherlock obeyed and waited near a skip, smoking. He relished the scent of burnt flour and steaming bread. His phone buzzed in his hand: "S-'...the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to...'-M" Then a second text followed swiftly: "Matthew 26.41?"

Sherlock clenched his jaw at the insult and thumbed back: "Romam uno die non fuisse conditam."

Another jab from Mycroft: "EH's Farewell to Arms?"

Sherlock sighed, he corrected his brother's misconception: "PROPER RITES. Ch. 21. -A de StE"

Evony sent Celeste to wave Sherlock back into the kitchen. Another message from Mycroft read: "...pain is the root of knowledge. -SW" And there it was, the real truth of Mycroft's beliefs.

The contrast of chilly early morning and tropical heat within the busy kitchen made the tall man regret his scarf and coat. Evony chastised him harshly for his recent latency, but her warm smile belied her outrage. The detective bore her good natured chiding with a smile. When the little general turned to order her troops, he thumbed a response to his brother: "The TRUE sign of intelligence...-AE"

As Sherlock stepped past Evony, to follow Celeste, the formidable baker slipped a beschemel and leek croissant into his hand. It was still warm. His empty stomach rejoiced in the delicate layers of lard and wheat. His palate savored another bite as he read Mycroft's new text: "Anyone who lives
Evony's skill was beyond genius. Sherlock turned back to thank her and was rewarded with a second rich treat slapped into his palm before she hurried to dump batter into sixteen ready trays. She motioned for two young apprentices to stash the honey cakes in the far oven. Watching Evony's precise command of her obedient squadron brought Sun Tzu to the detective's mind. Sherlock responded to his brother: "The greatest victory is that which requires NO battle."

Evony's back was towards Sherlock as she prompted, "Maurice nous dit que vous êtes dans l'amour?" The detective hid his smile with another delicious bite of the flaky creamy pastry. He said, "I cannot dispute Maurice's deduction." Evony eyed him suspiciously, as she directed traffic within her kinetic realm.

Mycroft refuted with more from The Art of War: "One may know how to conquer without being ABLE to do it."

Sherlock frowned at his phone and looked to Evony. Her warm smile broadened to full white pearls set in smooth ebony. "Il se comporter respectueusement à l'égard de votre cœur ne?"

Sherlock nodded confidently. "Yes. Far better than I will deserve, Madame." His smile returned. Evony's thick forearms slapped air from spelt dough.

"Votre joie est une bénéédiction de Dieu. Nous sommes si heureux pour vous deux!" If only she could command brother to share her view.

"Merci pour vos mots gentil et ce délicieux petit déjeuner, Madame." Sherlock saluted her with the second savory pastry and took a big bite.

"Toujours! Vous êtes les bienvenus en tout temps...et votre médecin aussi." She winked. The pale man felt his face color at the mention of "his doctor." The baker chuckled to see his reaction. She wagged a floury finger at him then reached for the wooden peel.

"Thank you, Madame Evony." He turned again to follow after the Chef's eldest. Behind him, the laughing general menaced, "Vous ne pouvez pas cacher de la me, Sherlock!"

Celeste's austere nature was polarity to Evony's bright patterned wrappings and boisterous personality. The front area of the empty cafe was a tomb compared to the hive of frantic activity in the back. Celeste hid a yawn and washed her hands.

Sherlock took the opportunity to insult his ignorant brother in return: "You are Edison's 85%, brother mine."

Mycroft snapped back: "Oh let there be light, Great Wizard of Menlo Park!"

Sherlock had enough. The brothers could do this all day, round in circles, neither willing to concede. The scientist circumvented their tedious game with the facts: "80/210mm L x 60mm d"

He sheathed his phone within his pocket and interacted with the demure Celeste. At the sound of an engine idling, they both turned to see the familiar patrol car through the shop window. "Right on time, as expected," Sherlock thought. Celeste patted her dark hair into place and smoothed her calloused hands over her pinafore and apron. The introverted baker hastily came round the counter to unlock the door for her bobby. They embraced, Janine's shoulder radio squawking enigmatic static into the silent cafe.
The athletic police noticed the detective saying, "Up to no good, are we?"
"Good morning, Constable Pfeiffer." They shook hands amicably. Sherlock wished everyone in the
universe would display their rank, title and name on their clothing. He could easily recall all
manner of faces but often had great difficulty with minor, unimportant details such as how people
wished to be addressed. Unfortunately, this seemed to be the foremost reason for people's enmity
towards him. He liked police very much because they openly provided him with such details.

Janine's acknowledgment of the detective, stirred Celeste into action. She scurried back behind
the counter to finish preparing his requests. The sight of the patrol car made his mouth water and he
amended his order to include two croissants with their homemade jam. Per usual, Celeste waved
his money away. As always, he redirected his aim towards the tip jar. But this time, Janine said,
"Let him pay. It'll do him good to live honestly for a change."

Celeste beseeched her partner, "You know we're not open until noon. We never have a till before
11." But she complied, taking the detective's notes. When she turned to stash the money behind the
counter, he hastily fed more currency into the tip jar. Janine saw him and nodded her approval. He
thanked Celeste, took his parcel and let himself out.

Sherlock waited beside the idling car, smoking, watching the empty street. Behind him he heard
Janine and Celeste exchange loving goodbyes. The Constable came near him "Need a ride, 'Tec?"
Her voice was thick with pastry.
"Thank you, yes."

The patrol car was warm and Janine was in good spirits. The detective had first made her
acquaintance when she had attempted to bust him for house breaking. It had of course been for a
case. That had been Constable Pfeiffer's first overnight shift. He had it all sorted in a matter of
minutes before her back-up arrived. Sherlock laughterd inwardly remembering how shaken she had
been, then how quickly she had comprehended his logic and trusted his assertions.

The detective now let her lead their chit chat until the conversation turned naturally to her son,
Wilson.
"How is Wilson getting on at Barbican?"
"Happy as Larry! Oh he does us proud. You should go see him some time, 'Tec." Her features
softened and for a few minutes she ceased to be the hardened east end PC, becoming a sweet mum
beaming with the universal pride of any mother. Sherlock made his request with all the politeness
he knew. Janine said, "Of course! Yes! Absolutely! Where would Celeste and I be if not for your
attempted burglary? I never would have met her if you hadn't known the bakery is staffed at 4am!
Wilson'll be so pleased!" She engaged the line.

As Sherlock exited the patrol car, his phone began to trill with an incoming call from ArchEnemy
#1. He silenced it, thanking PC Pfeiffer again for her assistance. The phone trilled again as the car
pulled away. Sherlock was not in the mood to continue his discussion with brother, but he
answered anyway saying, "Half case or not, brother mine?"

The detective was not prepared for the diplomatic seriousness of Mycroft's tone "Sherlock...where
are you, presently?" Older brother sounded genuinely concerned. It was very strange.
"Securing apology breakfast and newspapers."

In the long pause that followed, Sherlock could hear Mycroft dismounting his treadmill. "What? I
know that pause, Mycroft. What?"

Speaker phone disengaged and Sherlock knew his brother was now sitting, making that face. His
tone was grave and overwhelming polite. "Sherlock...I am compelled to ask you something of great
import and you must promise to answer me honestly, yes?"
"What do you want, Mycroft?"
"Honestly, yes?"
"Agreed. What?"
"Are you...well, my brother?"
"Quite."
"Sherlock...does he...behave kindly?"
"He is John, Mycroft."

Long pause.
Sherlock stated, "I am in top form. In fact, I expect to lay claim to the other half case within the week. John is not your Frenchman."
"And you are quite certain you are in satisfactory health?" Mycroft asked. Brother's voice was so sincerely concerned. Sherlock gritted his teeth and spat out more Churchill, "I am easily satisfied with the very best!" He abruptly closed the line.

Thirty seconds later Mycroft texted: "ETA 7:30pm." Finally!

Chapter End Notes

*Police Patrol cars are oft called 'jam sandwiches' in common slang because they are white with red/orange stripe down side. (The newer livery are "battenburg")
FOURTEEN (JOHN'S PERSPECTIVE)

6:15 am, John awoke with the sudden purpose of a narwhal breaching the arctic ice in search of air. A thin sheen of sleep rippled down over his body and pooled in the mattress beneath. His knuckles scrubbed into the corners of his azure eyes. The doctor's senses searched out and echoed around their still flat, informing him he was alone. Mondays were loathsome.

In their kitchen, a little green index card informed him the foil-wrapped parcel on the countertop was intended for "Mrs. Hudson." He opened the tap and bent his head into the sink to drink directly from the cool stream. He straightened, belched and massaged the water into his countenance. The doctor saw another green index card claiming "J-Food, with apologies -Yours." John traced his wet thumb over the last word and tasted the ghost behind the ink. The nude man smiled and itched his ribs.

Many months ago, the flatmates had agreed John could annex one crisper drawer, one refrigerator door ledge and one basket within the freezer. All the rest was a horrid nightmare of the scientist's experimental putrefaction. Nothing could wake a person more than the initial odor of their opened refrigerator. But John was accustomed to the process- he held his breath before breaking the seal. He hastily opened the crisper bin to claim his parcels.

An inventory of the contents revealed: Green index card taped to a foil parcel with more Madman scribble stating "Lunch." Then a thin box designated "Breakfast." Within the box were two croissants, one jam, one onion and cheese. John unwrapped Mrs. Hudson's parcel first. He sliced a thick hunk of the dense buttery lemon loaf and devoured it. He took the green index card and slung it under the refrigerator as he picked crumbs from his chest. "Note? What note? Must've blown away in the wind." He tasted citrus in his mischievous grin. He helped his greedy stomach to a second massive slice before securing the foil again.

At Clinic, it was a typically exhausting start to the week. For General Practitioners, Monday mornings were an endless parade of spotty youths faking minor illness to avoid neglected weekend school work. Monday afternoons brought droves of irritably impatient pensioners needing refills before their favorite programs began. After lunchtime, Mondays generally featured a handful of worried career singles needing solutions to poor choices made throughout the weekend. Monday's work always ended late because herds of office staffers arrived thirty minutes prior to close (usually after working all day with nasty contagions.) Mondays!

The only bright spot was a quick lunch conversation with Harry. John preferred to speak with her in the day time. Harry was akin to a liquor vampire- sunset brought out the alcoholic Beast in his sister. She asked about her brother's partner and John was vague but honest: "He's Sherlock." He ate his last bite of apple adding, "We're good. Very good." She heard the genuine smile in his voice. "Yeah?" 
"Yes." They laughed like when they'd been teenagers sneaking rum punch at Great Auntie's Christmas.

Harry ate and mused about the probability of a 'gay gene' based on ex-Clara and her cousins, the
Holmes brothers and the Watson siblings, but John declined to speculate. "I don't know, Harry. For me, this is...a choice. A choice to be honest...and happy." Harry asserted her belief, pondering further. John shook his head and smiled, "What I do know, my dear, is that I could not be honest and happy if I hadn't had such a brave and lovely sister to show me the way, first."

"Aww. I've such a lovely jubbly brother! Drinks tonight?" Harry giggled. Over the line, John heard her crunching a big bite of something dry and crumbly. A biscuit? Toast? He tried to be diplomatic.

"Maybe...try the meetings again?" Harry's abrupt pause in chewing told the doctor what he already knew. But still, he always had to try. At last he heard her finish her mouthful.

"I hate the meetings. Talk soon. Gotta go." Harry's tone was now professional, crisp. He had struck a nerve. He sighed, balling up his empty foil within his futile fist. But he did not apologize for caring about his sister.

"We'll get dinner soon. Promise, Hare. Love to you." Another pause. He finished his tea. "Soon, yes," She said it absently. But in a warmer tone she added a concession, "Love to you too...and your madman." John exhaled a relieved breath. "Thank you, my dear. Bye for now." "Bye for now."

At Paddington station, the Monday crowd was a steady stream. John was about to ring, but then he caught sight of his tall man, instantly recognizable above the crowd. Sherlock was striding gracefully toward him, slipping effortlessly against the flow of the masses, eyes affixed to his phone screen. People continuously stepped out of his path, as he plunged ahead, making no concession to the existence of any other person around him.

The doctor felt a flutter in his stomach. Instantly he was overcome with a vivid physical recollection of their breathtaking weekend: Sherlock and I building the sacred spaces we reserve for only one another. The ragged baritone, "Do I- John? Can I-"

Suddenly the detective was at his elbow, smiling shyly at him. John felt the warmth spread through his core when their eyes met. He saw Sherlock remembering too. They flushed and stood awkwardly for a few seconds. John cleared his throat, "Hello, my dear," he glanced around, then added, "Thanks for-" he held up his mobile. Both men suddenly became very preoccupied with the crowd around them. They understood the full sentence "Thanks for the reminder to fetch Mrs. Hudson. The invitation to share your company. The shared discovery of what it means to be yours."

Sherlock felt crimson creep across the bridge of his nose. His pale fingers danced over the back of his hairline. John's skillful and indulgent hands. He swallowed. "Hello, John." The detective tucked his own phone into his breast pocket. A rapid series of sixty high definition images flooded his mind in quick succession. John. He loosened his scarf. The sound of his pulse sloshed against his temples. The station pitched fifteen degrees into starboard, threatening to keel for half a second. He wrapped both narrow hands around his book and steadied his feet into the floor. He stole a glance at his man. They looked away, biting back smiles.

"Thanks for lunch," John said. He chewed the inside of his lower lip then cleared his throat. Sherlock nodded. His fingers tingled. He watched a suitcase wheel past. "Yes. It was...good, then?" "Yes," John glanced around then hastily and told Sherlock's black shoes, "Very good."
The detective studied the bit of brown corduroy jacket edging out of John's coat sleeve. He offered, "Glad you liked it."
"I liked it very much."
"Me too."

Their eyes met again and each man felt the replay of their entire weekend from start to finish rush over them on the wind of an incoming train. Sherlock knew he must compel himself to turn and move away. He began to hurry towards the platforms, letting a long arm reach behind towards his partner. John pinched a corner of offered coat sleeve, taking great care to avoid the dangerous contact of skin to skin. The tall man cleared their path, guiding them effortlessly to the first class lounge. It was vacant and hushed compared to the echoing chaos of the station.

Sherlock checked his watch. He thought, "2 hours until brother delivers." He told his partner, "22 minutes." John nodded. They sat. The doctor dipped into a pocket and extended an empty little jar towards Sherlock without looking. The detective quickly hid it inside his coat. He felt a phantom spasm inside and he clenched to prolong the sensation. He pretended to read his book, asking, "Alright?"
John said casually, "Yes. Good." His fingers drummed his knee.
"You had it tested?"
John nodded. "First thing."
"And?"
"Uh, very...nice." His ears bloomed pink.

Sherlock hazarded a glance. John looked at the carpet down between his knees with a sly smile saying, "I think I will always prefer...[intangible mumbling cough] but...still good." Sherlock surveyed his doctor. The detective's eyes widened in realization. His cock stirred. He shifted in his chair. John flashed a little grin then changed the subject. "What are you reading, my dear?"

"It's a history book."

John pinched the bridge of his nose and wished his blush of embarrassment would make him invisible. Sherlock reached a lean hand into John's grip, but the thick fingers disappeared into a pocket with the panic of a burrowing hare. The detective immediately stowed the book in his leather satchel. Sherlock made his empty hands vanish beneath his thighs. John winced. The flaxen-haired man snatched the satchel into his lap and hastily retrieved the red volume. He placed it back onto his scientist's lap, patting the cover. "I am a daft old man," he said by way of apology. John gave a rueful smile. He gripped a thin wrist and coaxed his man's hand up from between the arm rest and the thigh. He filled the empty palm with a kiss. "Your dear friend can be a very stupid old man sometimes, please forgive him, my dear," the handsome soldier explained into the hand. The hand cupped his chin.

Sherlock's phone buzzed before he could speak. The detective scanned the screen. He looked at John, and said, "Lestrade. Hrm. Might have a decent theft case for us." Cyan eyes blazed with kinetic enthusiasm and all else was forgotten. He began reading more incoming texts. John interrupted, "What's been stolen?"
"Some old painting of a waterfall. Immaterial." Sherlock's full attention was focused on the phone as it buzzed continuously with a swarm of information from Lestrade. John dug through the satchel for a newspaper.
John had no way to know those buzzing messages signaled the end of Sherlock's life. Neither man knew that 96 days from now, one man would witness his dear friend take flight. For the rest of his life, John would remember how his hand pulled away into a pocket. It was the first, last and only time he would ever refuse a public touch. But for 20 months after Sherlock's death, the brief incident would haunt his mind like an echoing death knell, growing beyond its original reality into a twisted monstrous tumor; a malignant omen of the end.

Many times, John would see the pale hand reach for him and he would falsely remember pushing it away, then jumping up shouting, "You Machine!" And he would always hear that sickening wet crunching sound of bone and brain meeting the sidewalk. Other times, John's mind would show him the dexterous hand bathed in red and he would incorrectly recall hiding his own hand into a squishy coat pocket overflowing with blood. Often, he would falsely recollect grabbing the wrist to find it pulseless and limp. A few times the incident became a fraudulent memory of Sherlock flinging himself in front of a train, with only the pale thin hand reaching out from below while that song played. Sometimes his nightmares counterfeited the circumstance into John pulling away from the touch then drawing a truncheon from his coat pocket and breaking his man's skull- that thick wet crunching sound echoing through an empty station. He knew those misremembered lies were bastardized forgeries born from his guilt and pain. But for nearly two years of his life, he could not avoid the twisted false recollection he called the Paddington Rejection.

If John had known the search for the painting would turn the sandglass, he would have stomped Sherlock's mobile right then. He would have climbed onto Sherlock's lap and had him right there in Paddington Station. He would have given notice, bought his man a boat and never returned to London again. He would have said I love you, Sherlock. I have always and will always love you.

But neither man knew The East Wind followed on the heels of those incoming phone messages. So they sat, and read and waited for Mrs. Hudson and Mrs. Turner to return from Amsterdam. Both men thoroughly oblivious to ninety-six days worth of sand counting down over their heads.

Chapter End Notes

B. R. Burg is the real author of that very real history book, second edition published 1995. A bit dry in places, a bit speculative at times, but still a well-researched, thoroughly interesting history text. Worth a read if you like maritime history, anthropological exploration of obscure sub cultures and...sodomy.
Chapter 53

Chapter Summary

Marijuana use by two mature women. "it's for my hip" I've no judgement of such activity, but be warned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock's internal clock told him it was time to make their way to Brunel's statue. Mrs. Turner appeared first, rolling her eyes at the squabbling woman behind her. Then Mrs. Hudson emerged, clearly put out by whatever petty slight she imagined her friend had committed during the return journey. The detective looked up to the arched lattice ceiling, begging for patience. Sherlock knew the reality of their little tiff was actually lack of marijuana in transit, after four days binging in the land of the free.

The detective began passing their luggage to his man, but suddenly stepped aside to focus on his buzzing phone. As usual, it was down to John to handle practical logistics. The doctor interrupted Mrs. Turner's cheeky retort to her pal. "Hello. Pleasant holiday, girls?" Both women began speaking at once, all happy excited chirps and flapping hand gestures. He received their luggage, their bundles, their duty free, their hugs. Ten minutes later, out on Praed street, Sherlock reappeared to open their cab door.

In Mrs. Hudson's flat, Sherlock quickly moved to the ornate pink and teal Limoges box on the mantel and began rolling skinny joints. He handed the first to Mrs. Turner. Sherlock disdained their incessant prattling banter immensely. The confines of the cab had nearly dismantled his mind. At last the relentless landladies ceased nattering and mellowed into peaceful house cats. The women began to speak slowly and chronologically about their excursion. John fetched the nibbles and they had a little party for about an hour.

The amusing thing about Mrs. Hudson was that when she was medicated, she would always offer the little cigarettes to either Sherlock or John. Regardless of how many times and how many ways John repeatedly denied her generosity, she seemed to continuously forget. Mrs. Turner never offered. John preferred to sit near her when she was visiting. She consumed slice upon slice of lemon loaf as she and her friend traded off recounting their Amsterdam adventures.

Mrs. Hudson said of the cake, "Ooh I just love Cocomaya! What a nice treat, boys! I'm glad you went there and not to Chatterjee. Lying married bastard! As bad as Frank, that one!" The women giggled.

"We showed him, though, didn't we Martha! Plenty of fish in the Markermeer," said Mrs. Turner, wagging her finger. The pair laughed joyously, batting at one another's hands. The 'herbal soother' was extended towards Sherlock.

Long ago Sherlock had learned not to reason with high persons. Each time Mrs. Hudson offered the smelly joint to him, he simply passed it over to Mrs. Turner. On days when it was only Mrs.
Hudson, he would simply accept the smoldering cylinder, hold it for a few seconds, then hand it back. She never seemed to notice. Sherlock thought that was the funniest thing about his landlady.

The most amusing influence of the smoke on Mrs. Turner was that sometimes she would sing. The American Expat had a wonderful voice, akin to Patty LaBelle, though she actually looked very much like Aretha Franklin. The violinist loved music when it was on key and Mrs. Turner rarely missed a note. She favoured Jazz, Blues, Musicals and Motown when she was medicated. She knew all the old standards. Her best renditions were "Son of a Preacher Man" by Roberta Flack and "Strange Fruit" by Billie Holiday. When she had alcohol and marijuana in her system, she always sang gospel and commercial advertisements. Sherlock's favourite was when she sang Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel." Sometimes he sang it with her.

The most wonderful part about the landladies was that they would sometimes dance with him when they were stoned. It was rare, but Sherlock relished the opportunities. The pains of Mrs. Hudson's hip and Mrs. Turner's arthritic knees would sometimes abate and they would reveal their past lives as club dancers. Mrs. Hudson was the better dancer, but could not carry a tune (unfortunately she still attempted to sing.) Her best dance was the slow foxtrot but she preferred latin numbers; the tango, the rumba. Sherlock once spent a summery Wednesday afternoon dancing with them and singing along to old recordings. He secretly hoped tonight would be like that Wednesday afternoon so he could show off for John.

Unfortunately, Sherlock could deduce their long journey home had exhausted the landladies thoroughly. There would be no singing nor dancing tonight. The women began to nod off after the cake and tea were gone. John helped Mrs. Turner into the spare room, while Sherlock guided Mrs. Hudson into her own bed. The men showed themselves out.

Instead of heading upstairs to their rooms, Sherlock checked his watch and pulled John out the front door onto the street. The doctor was glad to let the stench of marijuana drift away from his clothes and lungs. The shorter man fanned his coat and paced. Sherlock smoked, surveying the street and checking his watch again.

At 7:32pm, an overdressed man pressed a wooden crate into Sherlock's grip saying, "Sign here please." Sherlock headed inside with the box, leaving John to accommodate the delivery man.

Chapter End Notes

Cocomaya is located at 12 Connaught Street, their actual hours are 8a-4p/5p. NOT open at 4a! I've fabricated everything about the place except the lemon loaf- rather decent. I've no association with them, I just like saying the name.
Chapter 54

Chapter Summary

The Punch Line

Upstairs, John called out, "Sherlock? What's this about?" No answer. The doctor saw a square of thick, cream-colored, cotton cardstock was affixed to the top of the wooden crate. The script was tidy, elegant black fountain pen:

"210mm L x 60mm d

What a piece of work is a man!
How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty!
In form and moving how express and admirable!
In action how like an Angel!
In apprehension how like a god!
The beauty of the world!
THE PARAGON OF ANIMALS!"

Sherlock emerged from the bedroom wielding a prybar. He tossed it to his partner, who caught it effortlessly, spinning it like a majorette's baton. The tall man said, "Open it, John. It's for you." "What is it?"
"It's for you," Sherlock said again, assembling himself on their sofa. John studied the mirth in the sculpted features. He set to work on the crate.

"Gordon Bennett!" John whispered in awe. The metal prybar clattered to the ground and the wooden lid fell from his shaking hand. "Thirty year Macallan! Sherlock! It's- Oh my God! This is- Oh my God!" The disbelieving man cradled the gleaming bottle in the crook of his arm like a newborn babe. He kept running a finger over the glass, tenderly caressing away the crinkled, beige filler paper.

Sherlock came and stood beside John. Thin long fingers carded short hair. "Do you like it, flatmate mine?"

John whispered, "I've never had it. Not the 30. Oh my God!" He continued to trace a strong hand over the glass.

"Try some now then. Open it, John. I'm told it's good."

John clutched his new baby to his breast, shielding it. He was hurriedly stepping back. His blue eyes were horror struck, wild and accusing. It was as if King Solomon had bid him cleave his infant in twain.

"No! No, Sherlock, no! No, we can't drink it! This is Macallan 30. This is special. This is what a man saves his whole life. For when there is an end to all wars or a cure for all disease! No! People don't drink Macallan 30 on a random Monday night just to- to- taste it!" He began to soothe the bottle again as if it had overheard Sherlock plotting to murder it. The doctor rocked it in his sinewy arms.

Sherlock began digging through the crate saying, "I'm fairly certain there are five other bottles in
here. You can save those if you must and open this one now. Just to see if you like it."

"Five more?" John's knees turned to aspic jelly and he plopped down heavily on the floor watching paper crinkles litter the hardwood. He gazed at his prize as if it would vanish when not in his sight.

"No...I was mistaken. That's odd. There are... eleven more! How strange. He only owed me half a case. Hrm. Well, you can certainly open one now, John!"

John turned white, his stomach flipped. The physician rocketed to his feet again. He gazed into the crate as if seeing the face of God. His tongue grew too large for his mouth. His throat went dry. He swooned. Sherlock steadied his enraptured man. The detective lead his gobsmacked doctor to the sofa. The dark-haired man fetched items for their kitchen and returned quickly.

John was muttering like a feverish convalescent. He repeated the name of his Highland baby with piety and awe. His voice was a reverent whisper. "Macallan 30? Who? Who would owe you a bottle of Macallan 30? Oh my God! Who would owe anyone a half case of Macallan 30? Oh my God! Who would give you a whole case of thirty year old Macallan? Macallan..." A strong hand clawed through sandy hair repeatedly as if seeking to rescue the answer from the mangled wreckage that was formerly his mind.

Sherlock ripped the cream note from the wooden lid and passed it to the disbeliever. "Mycroft."
"Mycroft owes you Macallan 30? Why? What have you done, Sherlock? What have you done? You rarely drink. Why would Mycroft give you a whole case of Macallan 30?"

John's face turned deadly serious. "Sherlock, are you dying?"
"No. It's for you."
John swallowed, he looked at his precious bundle. "Oh God! Am I dying?" His azure eyes misted over.
"No! He lost a bet, John."

"What did he bet? What- what could be worth-" John stroked his glass baby.
Sherlock's answer was to set down two lowball glasses and a bottle of flat water. "Let's try it and see what it tastes like."

John shook his head emphatically. He began to hyperventilate. His crew neck jumper began to slowly strangle him. Sherlock rolled his eyes and hauled the wooden crate over to his foolish man's brown wingtip. He pressed John's shaky hand along the top of each bottle counting to eleven. They did it once more. The doctor calmed. He began to rock his bundle again.

The detective sighed in exasperation. He plucked a different bottle from the case, ripped off the foil and opening it unceremoniously. He splashed a few millilitres into each glass.

Ten minutes later, the military man lay back against the sofa with the ethereal flush of someone who has just had a marathon thirty-way orgy of oaky, spicy orgasms. The entire interior surface of his mouth shimmered with a supernova of rich heavenly flavours. John's brain mushed into boggy peat turf. He absentmindedly hummed The Lumberjack Song. He snuggled his unopened treasure to his cheek and cooed, "O, What a piece of work is man...I love you, Macallan. Oh my precious baby! Papa loves you so much. My dear sweet precious darling, Macallan. I love you. Yes I do. Yes I do!"

John was laughing and kissing the smooth contour where the sculpted bottle angled from neck to sides. He hugged it the to his broad chest. He hummed his little song.
Suddenly John was untucking his shirt. He snuggled the cool glass vessel up under his layers and pressed it to his downy sternum. He kissed the cap, nuzzling his bottom lip against it, whispering, "Oh my beautiful precious. Oh I loves you. Do you love Papa? Because Papa loves you, Macallan. Yes I do. Yes I do." John hugged both arms around himself and sighed contentedly. Then he began laughing all over again.

Sherlock sat on their coffee table with white-hot fury burning his heart to ash. His angular jaw flexed, grinding his teeth to sand. The detective had never been jealous of a beverage in his whole life. But he had a sudden, all-consuming need to pitch the entire crate out the window. Damn you lumberjack and damn you Macallan! He wanted to hear John cry buckets for such blasphemy. I am in possession of 850 milligrams of inorganic arsenic, you know!

The scorned detective said, "It's very dry. It tastes like marmalade mixed with an old attic floor. Maybe Mycroft will take the rest and trade me for something else. I have been wanting a new microscope."

John waggled his empty glass at Sherlock as if summoning a manservant. The doctor whispered to his baby, "It's ok my sweet, Macallan. Papa won't ever let you go. Mustn't listen to him, my precious. You're a yummy baby! Yes you are! And Daddy loves you too. He just can't bear to admit he's not the only perfect beauty anymore. But Daddy loves you too. Yes he does, Macallan! Yes he does. Mean old Daddy loves marmalade...and wooden floors. That's how his knees got all knobby. Yes it is! Yes it is! We love you, Macallan! Yes we do!" John closed his eyes and put out his empty hand for his refill saying, "Tell Macallan you love him, Sherlock."

The detective spat out his words begrudgingly, "I concede." Damn you, Macallan. Sherlock took another tiny sip, loath to confirm the fact of how artfully magnificent the scotch truly was. It tasted like Time. He mumbled into his glass, "Yes. It will be worth it."

John stirred from his reverie, he sat up on an elbow. "Sherlock, my dear friend, what extraordinary feat merits this nectar of the gods?"
"Mycroft lost a bet."

John stuffed his nose completely into his glass as he rolled the amber dram round the Waterford. The physician breathed steadily, letting volatile particles glitter into his olfactory nerves. He opened his mouth over the lowball and inhaled the plush vapors over his tongue and deep into his lungs. He closed his eyes reverently. John was transported to a primeval forest where overripe fruits squished into the damp earth beneath his bare feet and ancient weathered boulders reached for the sun. Wistfully, he asked, "What, uh, What was the wager?"

Sherlock watched John's graceful, sensual foreplay with the splash of scotch. The detective stood. He plucked the bottle from within John's shirt and set it back in the wooden crate with perhaps slightly more force than was absolutely necessary. He pushed the reaching hand away from the crate. The lean man quickly pressed his long form over John and claimed his rightful place against the broad chest. He snuggled his cheek into the slow, steady heartbeat and snaked his right arm under the layers to replace the bottle. Sherlock said, "Mycroft was wrong."

John continued to explore his drink, but his free hand soothed over his real treasure. He asked again, "About what, my dear?"

Sherlock's answer was to put his phone into John's hand. The doctor set his glass onto their coffee table and read the texted transcript of the brothers' conversation. He read it a second time, then a third. "I don't understand."

The detective handed John the note from the crate again, pointing to the coordinates in the first
"I...still don't understand."
"Mycroft. Was. Wrong."
"Yes, you've said that. Explain." John swirled water into his mouth to pull residual flavor around his palate.

Sherlock sighed and sat up properly on the sofa. He put John's legs over his lap. "After the helicopter situation, when you overreacted-"
"When you misspoke," John corrected, sipping more water.
"Immaterial," dismissed the storyteller. He continued, "I conversed with Mycroft about Moriarty. Well, I attempted for nearly 26 hours. But he evaded my inquiries and kept turning our conversation back to you and me. He expressed his doubts that we could..."

"Have sex? Well, the same to him with brass knobs on, thank you very much, wassock!" John raised his glass in a mock toast to Mycroft. He took a sip of the liquid art and chuckled, "Yeah, Harry knows too now. I sort of told her today, just so you know. But the best we'll get out of her is dinner."

The handsome doctor laughed, "I had my doubts too. But we are so beautiful together. So perfect. Especially Sunday! You insatiable Olympian! You were breathing out your ears from sunup to sundown. God my feet never saw the floor! I'm fairly certain we forgot food." John laughed again. He began climbing into Sherlock's lap, his hand pawing at shirt buttons. He pushed the rim of his glass against the sculpted lips and inclined the Waterford. Sherlock took a tiny sip. John tasted it off his lips. He whispered, "Missed you all day, O flatmate mine." John began slowly rocking his hips.

"Mrs. Hudson is downstairs, John."

Sherlock made a half hearted attempt to move his Adam's apple away from the urgent mouth. John was mumbling in a low wet voice.

"What? You want me to go fetch her up here so she can watch? Bit kinky for a Monday but, I'll not deny your pleasures, my dear." John guided a narrow hand back under his shirt layers, pressing it over his navel. His mouth found a maroon lovebite beneath the collar and set to darkening it.

"I meant-"
"You meant I make you feel so fucking good you can't help shouting the house down? You meant you don't want anyone to hear you begging for your man to suck you harder and faster? No one must ever hear you say 'I don't think I'll like it' and then scream my name into my fuckhole and cum buckets on my leg just half a damn second after your tongue went up my arse. You don't want anyone to hear you crying for your John to 'please don't please don't please don't oh god John John John' when he chews your nipple raw?"

Sherlock's hand flew to his bruised right nipple. He pinched his sore flesh through his top. His mouth made a shy twitch at the corner. He pressed the pads of his fingers back against the taut abdomen saying, "I don't sound like that."
"Yes you fucking do, my virgin boy."

That word. John never used that word. When he was very aroused, Sherlock's partner often narrated a litany of perverse things. The soldier meant these expressions to be proud boasts of their sexual prowess. He did not mean to derogate, quite the opposite.

But Sherlock remembered the sting of The Woman lashing that word against his skin. Moriarty chose that vile nickname. As if Sherlock were less than a man for belonging to himself. As if he were an ignorant child rather than a conscientious objector. As if his value as a person resided in his body rather than his mind.
Sherlock felt shame gnaw his liver. The word still applied. 'Half measures,' Mycroft had said. Half Virgin. Half A Man. Fully A Failure. Sherlock felt a chill shake his muscles.

"Well the lack of endurance regarding the tongue attempt was partially your fault. I did not expect you to...tighten so forcefully." John did not see the regret and disgrace in Sherlock's teal eyes because he was too busy tasting collar bone.

"I will clamp your sweet pink tongue right off, my dear, and let it swim around inside me forever. Now, let's you and me have a little rematch, yes?"

Sherlock made an earnest effort to gently push John back. He corrected his shirt, covering his exposed flesh. The doctor surveyed the cyan eyes.
"Not tonight?"
Nod.
John kissed his man's cheek and offered, "I'm an excellent cuddle. Full marks in school. Wanna try it?"
Sherlock said, "I'm glad you like the Macallan, John."

John settled back down along the length of their sofa and brought his legs back over Sherlock's lap. He assumed his friend needed a respite from all the intense sensations they had shared this weekend. Sometimes his beautiful man suffered from bouts of overstimulation. His detective petted his knee cap. John smiled and reached for the water again. "I'm glad Mycroft was wrong. I like that you placed your wager on the winning side. Thank you for the vote of confidence, my dear. So that was the bet, yes?"

"In a way..." The violinist's nimble fingers untied and retied a wingtip. He worried the lacing until the end frayed.
"Out with it."
"He doubted I would be able to...find satisfaction...in the specific activity of Saturday night."

John choked on his mouthful of water. He sat bolt upright. He stared at his man. "You've told your brother specifics?" He began to sweat profusely. The backs of his knees were like rain-soaked gutters. Oh God!

"I told him he was wrong. I found you very satisfying inside, John." Sherlock rearranged himself so the men sat cross legged on opposite ends of their sofa.

"Oh God! Why! Oh. My. God." John winced painfully. His heart raced. He peeled off his jumper and flung it all the way to their hearth. The armpits of his shirt were rapidly saturating with flop sweat.

"I like it, John. I like you that way. You felt...very good. Well...what little of you I was able to...accomplish," Sherlock looked away, his cyan eyes showing deep shame. He hastened to add, "But, I can improve. It is my intention that we will complete an earnest effort within the week. I am confident I can accept you properly, John." The detective reached forward and patted a kneecap.

"Oh my God." John took a tiny sip of his drink. *Macallan helps. I will never be able to have an erection again until Mycroft is dead. Another minuscule sip. Macallan definitely helps.*

"Mycroft said I would hate being penetrated by you. But he was wrong! So I told him he owed me half the wager because I nearly got half way. And...I liked it. He was wrong, John."

John took another delicate swallow. *He's told Mycroft specifics. Macallan helps. He's wagered my cock...with his brother. Stay calm. Macallan helps. Oh God! Help me, Macallan.*
"By my estimation, we would claim the whole case of Macallan by Friday if you alternated daily between width trials with your hand and depth with your penis. By my own effort, I was unable to accept you properly. But you must believe me, John: I know I was selfish and I sincerely wish to amend my prevarication by acquiescing to your supervision and guidance of our future efforts. That's why I rang my brother to claim half the wager. As an apology."

"Oh my God, no. Apology? It's 12 bottles. Selfish? Oh dear God. Properly? Mycroft expects- Your brother expects you- us- to...to...by Friday? This is the wager?"

"No! John, No! He said I would not like your penis in my rectum. He said I would find you very unpleasant. You didn't hurt. You were very kind to me, John. I know that's not the proper way it's done but you have my gratitude for being...for being John. Mycroft was wrong. And therefore he had to pay...Although, to be honest, I do not know why he gave me the full balance of the wager in advance. Probably your dimensions and the fact that the superglue has yet to be delivered." Sherlock tapped the note again.

"What?" Mycroft wrote the size of my erect cock. Macallan helps. Sherlock told his brother the size of my erection. Macallan helps.

Sherlock tapped the numbers along the top of the note again. "This is of course an estimation of your physiology. We can make accurate measurements later, John. But, I agree with the Act II, Scene 2 quote from Hamlet. The average male erection is 150mm in length and 40mm in diameter; roughly the size of a £50 note folded lengthwise. I am 203mm in length from base to meatus and range from 56mm in diameter at the very base to 44mm in diameter at my glans. I estimate you are possibly 3-4% longer. But 5-7% wider as your corpus spongiosum is far more pronounced on the ventral side than mine. I deduce from Mycroft's Hamlet reference that he is impressed by the facts of your anatomy. You are a godlike paragon, John! Worthy of a river of Macallan 300!"

John blinked dumbly for several seconds. He rubbed sweat out of his palms. Goodbye future erections, I will miss you so much. His ears were full of flies and radio static.

"Right. Three things: First, I will never be able to have an erection again, so it's good he sent the whole case in advance. Second, There is no such thing as Macallan 300." John wiped sweat out of his eyebrows with a sleeve. He smeared his palm down over his open mouth. The heavenly scotch came to his lips again. Macallan was not helping as it should.

"And Third?"
"Hm?"
"You said three things, John."

"Right. Yes. Uh Third thing is..." John steadied himself with a few deep breaths. He tried to think of the most direct way to clearly say what must be said.
"Success is not Final. Failure is not Fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts."
(Sir Churchill never actually said this, but several newspapers claimed he did because it was a great story. I love a great story.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

John pressed his palms into his eye sockets and thought for a long while: This is between Sherlock and his treacherous, meddlesome brother. It's nothing to do with me. Sibling bloody rivalry. No person could fragment Sherlock to doubt, except his damned brother! 'Mycroft is The Smart One. He is The British Government. His specialty is everything.' Fucking Hell! How can I repair years of that brainwashing nonsense?

How could Sherlock not see it's all down to Mycroft's jealousy? Envy of Sherlock's lack of affiliation, Sherlock's ownership of and allegiance to himself, Sherlock's freedom. You are a unique creature like no other, my darling. World's Only.

Against all odds, this brilliant man has carved a place for himself with his own two hands. He's found a way to live as he chooses, convention be damned. He does as he likes, takes what he wants, lives by the power of his own mind. This man! This clever man who lives in a world absolutely counter to his very existence has found a way to be himself- not just survive, but prevail. He's clawed and fought for his right to exist in this life. Grabbed it by the throat with both hands and wrung every last drop from it.

In another time, Sherlock would have been jailed for heresy like Galileo. Or burned at the stake like Joan of Arc. Or shamed into suicide like Alan Turing. Because that's what the world did to the outliers, the geniuses, the inventors. Society seeks to kill what it cannot understand.

John's dearest friend had been christened William, one of hundred million other Williams in existence. But the solitary man chose instead to claim Sherlock, embracing his queerness. Proudly identifying himself with the badge of Otherness. The man had invented his own career. Forged his own history. Won his own right to absolutely be himself. No concessions, no apologies, no compromises.

Mycroft had once confided to John that the youngest Holmes had wanted to be a pirate. Mycroft had said it with amusement and a bit of disdain. But John knew what the older Holmes could not see: Sherlock had never abandoned his boyhood aspiration. Sherlock stood resolutely steadfast before the helm of his own life. Navigating the uncharted world in search of hidden treasures buried within crimes and secrets.

You are a fucking pirate, my dear man!

And you honor me by including me in your bold escapades. I am yours. Yours forever. I will let no one shame you for your avant garde originality. The privilege to fight and die by your side is the greatest fucking adventure of my life! It’s me and you against the fucking world if needs must! My
Rebel Bird, my Outlaw, my Mutineer, my Teumessian Fox!

John wanted to shout at his man:

_He's not the bloody Kraken, Sherlock! Mycroft is only a very lonely civil servant in a baggy suit with a weird thing for umbrellas and abduction! He is a myth, my love. If your brother's ignorant words are your Beast, I will grind your mobile between my teeth and swallow it down with Macallan. I will eat your fears for dinner, my King!_

John's words came slowly, but with a touch of mirth, "$Third thing,- and I mean this with all the affection in my heart- sometimes, you are such a Madman that it actually loops all the way back round, full circle, to Cute, my dear." The physician unfolded the unsigned 'receipt' from the overdressed 'delivery man' and dropped it into his partner's lap. "$I can still read, Sherlock."

John shook his head and smiled. He squeezed his man's shoulder. The doctor added, "$Nice try, though. You're getting more creative. I half expect to wake up in a bathtub full of ice next- my surname mysteriously removed and a green index card taped to my chest that says 'Just Married.'" The physician sighed, continuing to shake his head.

The detective looked at the unsigned registration office document in his lap. He felt a brisk kissed pressed into the top of his head as his partner stood. The lean man kept his view down. His pastel eyes focused on the paper. He ironed the ceases with the fingertips of a hand, smoothing the folds flat. He looked up to see his Czardas hovering before his face. John traded it onto the lap, sliding away the license, before turning again towards the table.

Sherlock began to pluck the strings with both hands as he watched his man open the tabletop gun safe. John emptied the thirteen 9mm jacketed rounds from the double magazine cartridge into his broad hand. Then he shucked the fourteenth from the chamber with a practiced flourish, catching it mid air. The military man left the ammunition on the table in a little heap. Without looking, he took a step forward and offered the grip of his inert British Army Browning towards Sherlock. The detective reached forward and palmed the cleared pistol. The soldier picked up his red metal tackle box and made his way back to the sofa.

John thought, "$I will prove to you what we already know, my dear. Just you watch me." The soldier smiled mischievously at his bereft violinist.

In one sweep, John's strong arm cleared their coffee table completely, scattering a flurry of papers and books to the floor beneath the window. With military precision, he carefully layered newsprint then topped it with the stained chamois cloth. The soldier rolled his sleeves and donned a pair of gloves. Sherlock began quickly field stripping the L9a1 into its main components, passing each part into a waiting gloved hand.

The violinist's dexterous fingers hurried through the take down of John's Browning. Sherlock engaged the safety into the second position bent, then pushed up the slide release. He popped the metal out and passed it to John.

The soldier had a specific configuration of how he preferred to arrange each disassembled component on the chamois cloth. Sherlock was as intimately familiar with the procedure as his partner. They worked together in silence, creating the sequential pattern of subcomponents on their coffee table.

Within seconds, the detective had broken the weapon down into slide release, recoil spring, barrel, empty slide and frame. He checked the extractor, making it click like a biro so they both could
judge the quality of the sound. John received each part. Then Sherlock resumed plucking violin strings as John continued the detailed strip of the slide. At last, the doctor spoke calmly as his skilled hands used the screwdriver to remove the grip panels over the magazine hollow.

"We've got a painting theft case on, so...<sweeping a hand over the gun parts on the chamois cloth> But, we won't discuss that case until tomorrow, yes?" John said as he further dismantled the slide into its six tiny subcomponents.

Sherlock nodded. The detective traded the head on the screwdriver for a smaller size then passed it back to his man. He resumed plinking his fingers into the violin strings.

John spoke to the coffee table as he worked. He made his tone casual, leisurely and conversational. *Just two regular blokes having a very calm chat.*

"The thing about Bess*, if you really think it over, is that she does all the difficult work. When you get down to basics, she's a specialized instrument of big bits and small bits of metal. I do my part keeping the bits in working order so she can do her job when the time comes."

Sherlock felt like a dissected amphibian destined for the rubbish bin. He rubbed his breastbone. He studied John's back, noting the tension in the broad shoulders. The Macallan burned back up his throat. The violin slipped from his knee to the empty seat between them on the sofa. "Don't patronize me, John. I know what you're doing."

John was working within the frame, checking the action assembly. He paused from his diagnostics, picked up the violin with a clean, lint-free cloth and carefully put it back on Sherlock's lap, saying, "Of course you know. You are the most brilliant madman I've ever met, Sherlock. Which means the answers to everything you think we need to row about are already in your clever brain somewhere. So, I'll leave you to it then. You'll sort it all out by the time Bess is made ready." *Just think it through! Please! We know who we are.*

Thick fingers were pivoting the trigger then testing the sear. John thumbed the action in time with the violin *click-a-click-a-click, click-a-click.* Sherlock saw his man squint and frown thoughtfully as he levered the hammer back, inclining the frame to the light. The Czardas quieted momentarily as a lean hand offered the punch tool for removing the sear pin.

When the sear pin was out, John offered the frame towards his violinist. Sherlock placed his thumb over John's so the soldier could let go without releasing pressure behind the hammer. The nimble fingers took less than a minute to extract the sear, spring, ambidextrous safety, then finally hammer and strut. He passed the tiny parts to the gloved hand, one by one. With practiced hands, the soldier placed each component in an orderly line beside the barrel. *We work so well together. Please understand, my madman.*

John leaned his head near and the couple assessed the strut together. Azure eyes briefly questioned turquoise, both already knowing. Sherlock gave the answer: he passed the narrow pliers to undo the screw cap at the end of the strut. *We agree, the strut must be disassembled and readjusted this time.* John offered a small smile, then turned back to the table.

The string plucking resumed as a seemingly random generation of tones. It was Sherlock's solo violin version of *Bent Cogs Loose Screws*, composed by Helen Papioannou.

Sherlock watched the skilled hands twist the screwdriver into the magazine release. He stopped his haphazard tune to pass the tiniest punch tool to John in anticipation of the trigger disassembly. John said, "Thank you," but did not look up until the trigger assembly was a tidy queue of seven separate pieces.
As he dirtied a cotton bud along the inside frame of his pistol, the soldier said, "When I was first issued Bess, she kept biting my hand on the recoil. Every time. That bloody Browning bite! I had to wear a big plaster here <pinching the meaty webbing between thumb and index> to keep the hammer from chewing my thumb clean off. But eventually, I figured out how to hold her comfortably and still maintain the target. Took a hell of a lot of trial and error, loads of plasters and a bit of time, but...well, you know my accuracy."

Sherlock rolled his eyes and said, "Obvious. 'Failure is not Fatal,' Winston Churchill, 13 December 1940.* As I told Mycroft." His fingers reverberated the strings faster. Trial and Error. He's talking to me like I'm an idiot. That's how rubbish I am at The Sex. I'm his erroneous virgin who just can't get it right. He's the patient, unsatisfied, experienced man waiting for the floundering idiot to finally succeed after eons of trial and error.

"I was not a failure, my dear friend. I was a beginner. And I was extremely successful at being a beginner. I'm sure it was the same for you when you had your first violin lesson, yes?" John glanced at his man, then returned to his pistol. Please understand!

"I've never had lessons."

"Never?"

"Father put a violin in my lap when I was seven because I wasn't talking. And The Mater was carrying on, wringing her hands, saying she couldn't go nine days without knowing what was happening 'on the inside.' It was a great bore. They can be very meddlesome and tedious, John. But when the violin played, they seemed satisfied to piss off because they apparently used the sound to know emotions 'on the inside.' I've never had lessons."

"Ok. Well. Course not," Why am I not surprised? Ok, Fine. At least I've got him talking. That's something. John asked, "Why were you not talking for nine days?"

"I don't remember," Sherlock lied. His mind quickly flashed an image of the oldest Holmes sibling-the one about whom all conversation was expressly prohibited. The one whom all were forbidden from mentioning, even as the barest allusion. The one who was gone forever. The logician saw The Ring, which now lived on Mycroft's finger. Sherlock stamped the unbidden, contraband image out of his mind.

John saw the sorrow then the anger like summer lightening on a cloudless afternoon. The expressions vanished behind the cold mask so hastily that John almost doubted he'd seen them at all. The violinist was snatching harsh notes from the strings so rapidly and forcefully that the sound was almost unbearable.

John sighed. The soldier tried to remain focused on thoroughly cleaning his Browning Hi Power, but his thoughts were too skewed. He set down the stained cloth and peeled his humid hands from his gloves. He tried to think.

John shook his head. His fists clenched. The doctor made a sound like a loose window on a stormy night. Mycroft! This was Mycroft's doing! The most beautiful night of my entire life: ruined by a lifelong brotherly feud. He took off his shoes and socks. John thought best in bare feet. The doctor rubbed a heel over the top of his foot and had a proper think for a very long time.

Sherlock came and knelt on the opposite side of their coffee table. He slipped on gloves. The violinist cleaned tiny components with great care.

•(See notes)
Suddenly, Sherlock's voice broke upon John's thoughts.

"You are right, John," the detective said to his companion. "'In Arduis Fidelis', that is a simple summation of you as a man. In addition, you are right that it is absurd to attempt to settle a dispute with Mycroft in this way."

"Quite absurd!" John exclaimed, and then suddenly realized how Sherlock had echoed the innermost thoughts of his soul. The doctor sat up straight and stared at his man in blank amazement.

"What- How- Sherlock, That's brilliant! You knew exactly what I was thinking just now! How did you do that?"

"You told me, John." Sherlock stripped off the gloves and added hastily, "Not in words, my dear man, but with your face. Especially your eyebrows. When I saw you throw down your cleaning cloth and go into your mind, I was so relieved to have that opportunity to read your train of thought and then prove that I have rapport with you, John."

John nodded but his clever man could tell he was not fully convinced. John brushed a finger over his blonde eyebrow and said, "But I was ...just sitting here quietly. What clues did I give you?"

"You were doing a face, John. Facial features are given to humankind as the way to express emotions. It's the Cooperative Eye Hypothesis that theorizes human eyes evolved distinct white sclera and dark pupils so others can follow that target to know what a member of the tribe is indicating. I find this hypothesis useful."

The detective's lean fingers extended towards his his man's cheek but he stopped himself, withdrawing his hands beneath the table. "You don't know how intricate your face is, John. Your features are very expressive. Especially your eyes. Because I have spent so much time in your company, I have a decent understanding of your most common expressions. Although...many of your expressions this past fortnight are fairly unfamiliar to me. But I note each new expression and catalogue it when I see it return."

John came around the coffee table to kneel beside his man. He bent low from his core and pressed his forehead into the edge of his man's thigh. He breathed a silent prayer of gratitude. "Tell me."

They began reassembling the Browning together. John passing each component into his man's quick fingers.

The dark haired man said, "After throwing down your cloth- that was the action which made me come near and pay closer attention- you sat for half a minute with a vacant expression. Then your eyes looked at the cardstock down beside your foot. The note written by Mycroft. I saw your face pinch tight in anger and that started your train of thought. But, it did not lead very far. Your eyes flashed across to the unfolded paper which you put on the stack of your medical journals. You then glanced over your shoulder up at the wall, and of course your meaning was obvious. You were thinking that if we had a real certified copy of our Entry of Marriage, it would be framed, and it would just cover that bare space above the yellow smiley. That made you smile a bit, your bright eyes crinkling at the corners, thinking how they would go together."

John nuzzled his head into Sherlock's shoulder. He rubbed his lips lightly against the aubergine fabric, "Brilliant! That's exactly what I was thinking. You followed me brilliantly."

"So far, I could hardly have missed. So obvious, John. But now your thoughts went back to
Mycroft, and you studied his handwriting, grinding the card into the floor under your heel.”

Sherlock used the screwdriver to point at each location he mentioned. When Sherlock would pause from reassembling the High Power, John would take over until his hands were shooed away. The detective continued,

"Then you looked across the room. Your eyes recognizing my small plaster bust of Goethe.* Then your eyes stopped smiling, but you continued to look across, and your face was thoughtful. You were recalling Goethe's most famous tragedy. I was well aware that you could not do this without thinking of the bet Dr. Faust made with the Devil. That's all anyone ever remembers of Goethe. I am partial his treaties on botany and colour. But Faust is what most people know him for; I assume that was your idea as well because you glanced from the statuette to Mycroft’s note under your foot several times. No doubt comparing Faust & the Devil to me and my brother. When a moment later I saw your eyes wander away from the bust to your gun, I suspected that your mind had now turned back to our Macallan wager. And when I observed that your lips set, your eyes blazed, and your hands clenched, I was positive that you were indeed thinking of the best way to murder Mycroft. But then, again, your face grew sadder; you shook your head. You were dwelling on the sadness and horror and useless waste of life. Your hand crept towards your own old wound and a smile quivered on your lips, which showed me that the ridiculous side of this method of settling questions had forced itself into your mind."

Sherlock's features turned very sad. He swallowed. He linked his blackened pinky over John's sooty thumb and squeezed briefly. Then he exhaled and continued to quickly reassemble the L9a1 with his man. Sherlock spoke slower, quieter than before.

"You watched your gun becoming whole. Your eyes were very sad. Your brow deeply creased. Your hand touched your identity plaques under your shirt. Which I believe lead you to remember the night you shared Invictus with me. Telling me we are the masters of our fate. And that made you remember Angelo's cellar. Your jaw and hands clenched in anger again. But I saw the anger quickly dissipate. You forced it away and decided you could not be angry with me because you are worried I'll go to Linus if you do not act a certain way." The detective met John's eyes and gave a solemn look. His lean hand smeared copper filings against the back of the broad fist, soothing it.

"John, I told you I will not do that again. You made me promise before you shared Invictus. You have my word. I know you worry because you know who I am. We are the very best of friends and so you can say what you like. I do. All the time. You needn't treat me with kid gloves. You thought I'd go to Linus, but I never will again." John nodded appreciatively. (Sherlock had wholeheartedly meant what he said, when he said it just then, but he had no way to know he was lying at that time. Twenty eight months from this night, he would spend nearly every weekend in that concrete basement...until Linus never spoke to him again and he found the viaduct. But the detective was sincere in his intention tonight.)

"You decided to try a different approach. That's when you looked to your RAMC coffee mug resting beside the kitchen sink. Then you looked briefly at me. Clearly you considered fetching the mug to show me the insignia. "Faithful in Adversity." You wanted me to see that you are, as always, on my side, especially when I am at odds with my brother. At this point I agreed with you about your constant reliability as a superlative human being and I agreed it was preposterous that I should drag you into a childish, obscene bet with Mycroft about what constitutes proper loss of virginity. And I was glad to interrupt your thoughts to learn that all my deductions about watching you have been correct. How'd I do?"

Sherlock snapped the slide back along the frame of the Browning with a flourish, handing the grip to John for final inspection. John held the pistol, but his mind was reeling. He has no earthly idea
how truly exceptional he really is. No idea how far outta my league he is. He could have anyone on the planet, but he's chosen me. This clever idiot! I'll spend my whole life making sure he never figures out that he could do loads better than me.

John beamed proudly at his partner and said, "Amazing! Absolutely right!" He kissed Sherlock's shoulder, adding, "After you explain your process to me, I am always so much more impressed! You see every little detail, my dear! It's always so much more amazing to me after I know how quickly your brilliant brain processes all those tiny details to get to the truth."

Sherlock smiled. He turned his head to his future husband and felt the warmth radiating into his eyes. He Shrugged and said quietly, "Superficial, John. I shouldn't have intruded into your thoughts. But I wanted you to know that I do know you. You are very familiar to me now. That's why I can...be with you. That's why I like...us...together."

John said, "Me too." He looked at Sherlock for a long moment. The doctor tried several times to force himself to say the words that were in his eyes. He was so rubbish at talking about feelings. But thank God his man understood! John asked, "Will you kiss me? Just a little one, Sherlock. Please?"

Despite the gun oil and powder on his filthy hands, Sherlock lead John's wrists up towards his face. The detective closed the strong hands over his pale cheekbones and rubbed his own blackened fingers along the backs of each broad hand. He tilted his head slightly to his left. He waited.

John came to his partner's mouth as a moth to a lighted window pane. He hovered, then tried several light, tentative little kisses against different areas. His lips touched down on the right corner, then ducked back. He fluttered his lower lip along the deep sculpted cleft in the middle of Sherlock's upper lip. He rested lightly on the left side of the mouth then withdrew. John caressed his thumbs over the angle of bone on either side of Sherlock's face.

Chapter End Notes

0- This is basically an aftermath discussion between a Not Gay & a Conscientious Objector after a weekend-long lovefest. You know how after having sausage holiday for days, you feel like the regular world is strange? Why are we in clothing? What's real? What am I meant to be doing just now? What year is it? Sort of knocks my pegs loose the next day. It's a bit like time travel innit?

1- The original weapon of the Northumberland Fusiliers was the Brown Bess Musket. (On the BBC show, Sherlock is aiming a Sig Sauer at Moriarty in the pool scene, but they just call it an L9a1.)

2- The Cardboard Box. I repurposed the dialogue after the • from that Sir ACD story. That's why the blokes are always gazing at one another in BBC program. Sherlock Holmes reads eyes and expressions like the deaf read lips.

3- In the BBC program, Sherlock really does have a little bust of Goethe. I think Goethe was a criminal because he was open about being a pedophile. He said it was Natural since the dawn of time and should not be against the law. YUCK! But no doubt Mark & Vincent can overlook those treaties and focus on the man's other works.
Chapter 56

Chapter Summary

The Master Manipulator & The Willing Enabler have a steamy shower scene. Graphic Explicit Highly Descriptive SMUT.

Sherlock remembered. This was how they first began in the kitchen. *The Kiss*. The raven-haired man's skin shivered along his spine remembering the water running over their hands in the silence. Sherlock had leaned in quickly and barely brushed his lips against his dear friend's mouth that day. John had stared in shock with an incredulous look affixed to his upturned brow. Blind panic seized the tall man and Sherlock had worried. *For godsakes let this be appropriate!* John had stood mute for such a long time that their interlaced fingertips began to texture into water immersion wrinkles.

Then, John had brought the corner of his lips up against the corner of Sherlock's mouth. The detective had thought that kiss to be bittersweet. It was partially John's mouth on his mouth, but it also was the exact way John greeted his sister. The exact way Sherlock greeted Mummy. The way Mrs. Hudson greeted Mrs. Turner. The men had watched one another's eyes until the taps ran cold over their hands. Sherlock remembered the water echoing through their kitchen. He remembered John's azure eyes asking *Friends? Is this friends?*


Then suddenly there had been only one silent question traded between their urgent wet mouths. *More? Yes. Yes. Yes, please. More? More, John! More? So very good, John, MORE!* Sherlock had felt The Need bring his blood splashing into his groin. The Need had melted all his pain away. The need for that curry crisps flavored mouth. The need to know what it was to belong with this loyal man. The need that would never go away.

Here and now, with oily, gritty, blackened hands, The Need found them. John offered the tentative opening notes from their first kiss. But Sherlock responded with the irrefutable answer from their Saturday morning kiss. *Have me now, John. Become naked, sweaty and cursing. Dance your burning skin over top mine until my nerve endings are raw. Make my brain crumble to naught. Make me quake. Make me say your name until my voice is thin as waxed parchment. Make me earn the case of Macallan ten times over. Make me certain, John. Make me yours.*

Sherlock used his mouth as John had taught him week before last. He sucked and nipped John's lower lip. He fellated the length John's tongue as if it were his lover's cockhead. He carded his hands through flaxen hair and nuzzled down to his man's jugular for tasting. Sherlock made soft growling sounds against John's throat. He traced the tip of his tongue around the helix of John's ear. Sherlock scrubbed his hands over the short hair at the base of John's skull, drawing his doctor closer. When John kissed his mouth, Sherlock exaggerated his loud moans. He sighed, "Oh, John."
The detective's hands scraped at the top button against John's neck as they kissed. The soldier put both broad hands over Sherlock's and in one desperate tug, together they ripped the fronts of the shirt apart. Tiny plastics flew around like kinetic electrons orbiting an atomic nucleus. The couple heard buttons ricochet off the hard wood, the table, the window. John moaned into his lover's mouth.

Each kneeling man tried to climb the other. They interlocked their thighs, grinding their growing flesh on one another's knees and thighs. Sherlock tried to reclaim the aluminum identity plaques. The soldier stopped his man's hands. John pressed his dog tags into his own chest. He rubbed Sherlock's jaw as they kissed.

John breathed, "I can," into his lover's mouth as he began clawing his vest up over his head.

Sherlock stopped, pulled John's head back by the hair, surveyed his eyes. "Can?"

The doctor's hands kept moving. He jerked his neck to free his hair. The thin lips returned to their sculpted partners. John clarified, in a loud, exigent growl, "Me." He flung his vest to their sofa. He grabbed Sherlock's wrist and forced a pale hand between his trousered buttocks. He looked into sparkling emerald eyes and said again, "I can." John began pressing his arse backward into the hand as he opened his belt. His button-flies unbolted with a series of muffled pops. The sound of each button made Sherlock's cock throb. John gripped the thin wrist and shoved the hand down the back of his orange Y fronts. He arched his back, bringing his bare chest against the purple shirt as he attempted to force Sherlock's hand between his arse.

The detective cupped one firm cheek, kneading the fuzzy flesh roughly. Their kiss grew more desperate. But when John tried to urge the dexterous hand to his hole, Sherlock shook off his grip. The taller man pushed their bodies apart in one hard shove. He put up both hands to illustrate until his breathing was under control. He gasped, "Nitro, ngh, powder!"

John tried to grab him again. The soldier snarled, eyes feral, as he pulled his lover nearer. But Sherlock pushed him back repeatedly and waved his palms frantically into his man's face. "Napier Bore Solvent!" He grabbed John's groping hands and squeezed painfully hard, trying to bring his man's brain back to the present. "John!"

The doctor looked at their hands. He stopped struggling. He blinked. Copper foulings, gunpowder, Ballistol and oil. He looked down at his wooly chest then up at Sherlock's whole face and began to titter. The pale angular features were streaked with black shadows. With half a brain he managed, "Panda bear."

Sherlock touched his own cheek. They surveyed the evidence of what their filthy hands had done to one another. Sherlock smiled broadly seeing his hand prints over his man's right pectoral, shoulder, ear and hair. "War paint."

John stood abruptly, his denim sliding to the floor. He turned, bringing his round arse to Sherlock's eye level. He twisted his torso and they watched behind him as he revealed another black handprint on his right flank beneath the orange pants. Sherlock reached up and jerked the orange fabric all the way down. He leaned in and sucked the crimson lovebite behind the right knee. John shuddered, his knees buckling. He groaned, grabbing a fistful of dark curls. He hurriedly took two steps and threw himself on all fours atop the coffee table. John thrust his arse out, tucking his toes under fabric at his left heel until he was completely disrobed.

Sherlock quickly shuffled closer on knees. John groaned and bucked as two lean, sooty hands spread him. The logician sucked and licked his soldier's sacrum, his coccyx, his inner thighs. He lapped at the dense wooly sac like a kitten at a saucer. John swayed into the mouth, letting half his
sensitive flesh be drawn into Sherlock's insistent wetness. They groaned. John swore, "Oh My Fuck!" John's neck flopped forward and his shoulders sagged low over his elbows. His aluminum chain rattled against the table. He cursed again in a whispered breath. His strong hands gripped the edge of the table until the wood creaked. His knee nudged the Browning aside. He positioned his knees as far apart as he could. John looked upside down between his legs to watch Sherlock's tongue searching desperately under him for his cockhead like a snake tasting humidity in the desert air. John backed his hips further to get what they needed. They locked eyes upside down as Sherlock's warm wetness found their requirement.

Sherlock's mouth was a frenzied machine. His skull bumped the table as he frantically sucked his man. He quickly brought John to full arousal, then let the thick cock bounce out of his mouth and smack up against his lover's belly like a helium balloon escaping gravity. The doctor swore loudly when the mouth left his swollen cock. John called Sherlock "my beautiful fucking cocksucker."

Sherlock's heart surged with pride. He thought, *So, it seems you can still have an erection ever again, Dr. Overly Dramatic!* He licked his lips and considered bringing John off right now to prove his point. Precum always made his greedy mouth anxious for semen. John gave him a knowing upside down grin. Sherlock hid the onset of a blush with a bite into the wiry hair inside John's upper thigh before retreating.

The hot, insistent mouth found John's puckered hairy anus. Sherlock dug his fingertips into John's gluteals as he pressed several kisses against the hole. John looked over his shoulder into his partner's pastel green eyes and said, "More." Sherlock nodded. His shadow painted face was a warrior's mask. *Into battle!*

The detective gave one more little kiss to his man's tight hole. Then flattened his tongue up the left inner surface of John's arse. He repeated the long upward tongue stroke to the right side. His sooty hands spread his man wider. He blew a light puff of air over the wet skin. John breathed like a pressure cooker on the boil. He chanted, "Now, Fuck, Now," into their coffee table. Sherlock held back and watched John squeeze his entry tight in sets of three, in time with his begging. The doctor swiveled his hips, searching for the greedy mouth. The wooden edge of the coffee table creaked loudly beneath John's grip. Sherlock massaged his man's firm arse and watched precum drip onto the chamois cloth. This was John coming unhinged. This was Sherlock's definition of perfection.

When the detective's tongue flicked the pink hole, they both grunted. John thrust back, panting, "Have it, sweetheart. Come on, darling. Come on." He wiggled his hips, making his engorged cock wag. He pressed his forehead down into the back of his hand. Sherlock mumbled something unintelligible against his wooly tensed thigh then nipped the area until John flinched. John gritted his teeth. The naked man was barely able to control his desire to reach back and grab Sherlock by the hair and drag his face into his arsehole. He held fast to the table with both blackened hands until his knees trembled. His toes clenched like fists. John's mind was screaming obscenities and threats, *"Fucking eat me or die you bastard! For fucks sake NOW or I swear to fuck I'll kill you, Madman. I will tongue fuck your corpse if you don't wet my fuckhole right now. Make haste!"*

Aloud, John whispered one word, "Please."

The taller man roughly tightened his grip of muscular haunches and dove in. He buried his tongue all at once and began forcefully pressing it up then down inside John's tight warmth. The recipient inhaled a sharp breath then named his lover. The ring of muscle yielded with a delicious spasm. Sherlock withdrew, spat on the pink hole, then buried his tongue deeper. John's knuckles went white as eggs. He cursed enthusiastically.

Suddenly the air was torn by a loud creaking SNAP!
Sherlock startled back. He instantly looked down at his cock thinking "Oh god no not again!" John began to laugh hysterically seeing his madman's train of thought. The doctor rearranged and sat on the edge of the coffee table, his whole body shaking with loud laughter to see Sherlock looking down at himself in horror. Between gasps and giggles, "Oh, my dear man. No. It's only-" John held up the broken edge of the low table. His ribs tensed with laughter and his tummy quivered. He waved the splintered board like a scepter.

Sherlock looked from the bulge in this trousers to the fragment of table and exhaled in relief. He began to laugh too. He pressed his forehead to John's knee and they laughed together. Through chuckles, John goaded, "Really, my dear? Is that really the sound you imagine when you unload?"

Sherlock pinched John's foot but continued to laugh. The detective shook his head against John's knee. The doctor patted his man's thigh with his foot. John giggled, "So, your cock is Bruce Lee, is he?" Sherlock pinched the foot again. It kicked his hand.

Sherlock looked up and tried to quip back, but only shook his head again. John reached down to caress his man's face. His tone suddenly a reverent, lusty hush. "Look at you. Look at you, with your war paint." He hummed a low sound of approval as his thumb smudged soot down the long line of Sherlock's nose.

The top of John's foot pressed up between Sherlock's trousered thighs. In a lurid, dark voice the doctor accused, "Look what you've done." John turned Sherlock's chin so the detective was looking at the broken edge of the table. John's foot rubbed back along his man's inseam, then his toes pointed up. Sherlock dragged himself over the contact. His scrotum rode his man's ankle. In a low threatening whisper, John instructed, "Tidy your mess, o flatmate mine." John's foot began to pull him forward until the detective's zipper was rubbing John's shin. John's other foot snared the back of his man's thigh. He rubbed his calf up and down Sherlock's trousered arse. The doctor slung the splintered wood towards their door. He cupped both hands around Sherlock's ears and guided his man's face to his leaking erection. "Look what you've done, my warrior."

Sherlock watched John's eyes. He licked the flat surface of his tongue up the underside of his soldier's shaft. He reached for his man's wide slick flesh, but the contrast of black to pink abruptly stayed his grubby hands. Sherlock offered a brisk, minuscule kiss to John's meatus, then licked the glossy fluid from his lips. He smiled. The warrior said, "Quick wash, John?"

John smiled back mischievously. The doctor gripped his ears more securely and took what they needed. "There we go. That's better," he soothed in the calm professional tone he used at surgery. His strong hands guided his lover's head up and down. "That's it. Good man." Sherlock interlaced his gritty fingers behind his torso and continued. He moaned around the fullness in his throat. His nose caught on his lover's navel and he groaned louder at the scent of green soap hiding there. He worked harder, swallowing faster. John breathed like a steam train.

The detective had a sudden thought and evicted John from his mouth. He shook his head loose from the strong grip. Sherlock rocked back on his heels and looked up to question his serious coal miner. The detective was breathless, "Together? Last night again? John, last night? Ok?" Sherlock pointed a sooty finger down the hall.

John sat on his hands to keep from reclaiming his partner's mouth. He tried to think. So many activities happened on Sunday that he could not readily recall. It was all a delicious blur of friction, sounds and sweat. He watched the urgent blackened finger, following its trajectory.

The deep baritone was muttering breathlessly against his knee, "For godsakes, agree! Need. John."
Need. Get that placid brain working, Doctor! Need. Hurts! Stop messing about! Need. John. Hurts. Say yes. Say yes! Need. Need..." John chuckled and his rigid flesh bounced. The whispering detective had no idea his internal monologue was fully audible. John looked down at the grubby hand, pawing black claw marks into his thighs. The low, piteous mumbling was relentlessly exquisite. He said, "Yes, Madman."

The shower ran over their bodies stealing the grit of nitro powder swirling down the drain. Sherlock put his feet on the bath taps and pulled John back towards his face. To the detective this was a very interesting and unique activity. Sherlock did not realize John was not the inventor of this practice, nor did he realize this activity could be done on literally any horizontal surface they encountered. (A week later, when his man would inform him of such facts during breakfast, the detective would be rather disappointed, truth told.)

Sherlock preferred the empty bath. He liked the contrast of cool hard tub against his back and John's slick wet body warming the front of him. He liked John's pelvis shielding him from the warm rain falling in his face. He liked the scent of green soap clinging to the steam all around them. He liked when John's knees would scrabble in the puddles as he struggled for purchase on the curved, glassy surface. He like the echo of their sounds ricocheting off the tiles. He even liked when John would thrust down into his mouth so hard that his wet skull would bang loudly against the porcelain. But Sherlock's absolute favorite part was that John's mouth was having him in the exact same way, at the exact same time. It made Sherlock recall the Greek Ouroboros. He thought, *This is John and me becoming infinity.* It was pure bliss!

Seven seconds before the pipes lost hot water, John's arsehole clenched around Sherlock's finger and his seed cascaded down the detective's gullet in hot waves. That always made Sherlock cum. He leveraged his feet on the faucet and canted his hips up as he unloaded into John's mouth. Their torsos trembled together. The detective winced as John withdrew from inside him. *Mental note: water is not an effective unguent when your man has broad hands. Put a bottle in tub when case arrives.*

Suddenly, the rain turned to ice and John yelped, spitting him out. Sherlock flung his man away as the freezing water turned his hardness into a frightened snail. "Out!" They rapidly bailed overboard. John reached back and closed the offensive tap.

They sat on the bath mat, holding hands, breathing hard. After several minutes, Sherlock curled up in John's lap and shivered. The doctor fumbled a towel over their nudity. He petted the cloth over the goose flesh of his man's back. By the quarter hour mark, oxytocin fed sufficient chemical courage into his bloodstream. John whispered slowly into his man's damp mop of curls, "You make me very happy." He sighed contentedly and squeezed a toweled shoulder. "So very happy, my beautiful friend." Sherlock looked up, he raked his dark fringe of curls out of his eyes. John helped him. They gazed at one another. Sherlock smiled. "Me too."

The lovers shared a long slow kiss that brought warmth to their wet skins. Sherlock decided, with 88-93% accuracy (+/- 3% margin of error) that his doctor had most certainly forgotten about the wager with Mycroft.

John decided, with 100% certainty that they would live this way forever. He rolled Sherlock onto the bathmat, intending to sign that form in their sitting room.

The wicker hamper began ringing.
Chapter 57

The detective pawed around until he extracted his ringing mobile from his rumpled trousers. He meant to silence the device but accidentally accepted. John heard Greg hollering something. He tossed Sherlock's trousers back beside the hamper. He began to methodically towel icy water from his man's cold skin. After several long moments, Sherlock snapped, "Wrong." But he continued to listen. Then he repeated himself more assertively.

Sherlock traded the mobile to his opposite hand and extended his free arm to the towel. The detective rolled his eyes and said, "For godsakes! Every time you decide to quit smoking, your IQ drops fifteen points." He stood and began riffling through their medicine cabinet. John followed with the towel.

The couple watched one another from the mirror as John toweled water from Sherlock's body. They smiled. John mimed vulgar hand charades: point at Sherlock, point at self, hand like an empty cylinder moving forward and reverse beside mouth while tongue presses inside of cheek in tandem.

In the mirror, Sherlock smiled at his strange friend.

John tried a second rude pantomime: point at self, point at Sherlock, left hand empty cylinder again, three fingers of right hand slamming into cylinder forcefully. Then four, then thumb too, twisting into cylinder. Then sliding cylinder over wrist like a bracelet. Withdraw hand from cylinder slowly, hold up invisible beating heart. Take a bite. Dab corner of mouth with towel. Sherlock turned. He leaned in and took a fake bite too. Not bad. John sprinkled spice with a dainty flourish. They bit the emptiness in his palm again. Rather decent. John read the label on the air held between his index and thumb. His azure eyes went wide and he showed his chemist the 'label.' Sherlock watched his man's face contort and twist. John clutched both hands around his neck and lolled his tongue out. He pointed an accusing finger at the tall man. He stumbled back, lay on the bathmat. John shut his eyes and crossed his arms over his broad chest. He let his tongue hang out to the side of his slack mouth. He flailed once then went still.

Sherlock's deep baritone laughter bounced off the tiles. He sagged against the sink watching the naked corpse smile up at him. The nattering voice in the phone shouted loudly. Sherlock said hastily, "I assumed you were joking, Lestrade. That's the only way this long tale of ineptitude is conceivable to me. You are attempting to use humour, I presume? [pause] Oh, well, continue if you must."

Sherlock knelt beside the corpse and kissed its smile. The azure eyes fluttered open and John was beaming at him. Sherlock dried the flaxen hair gently.

Sherlock sighed in exasperation and shouted at Lestrade, "Wrong again!" Sherlock snatched the towel from John's shoulder and scrubbed his dark hair forcefully as if trying to dislodge the Inspector's stupidity from his mind. John began massaging the almond oil into miles of alabaster skin. He liked the taste very much. He began to explore with his mouth as they stood.

Sherlock snapped, "Then, send your idle minions to drop it by Dr. Hooper's lab, if they are so bewildered." The detective scraped the comb through his wild hair while he stood on one foot so John could oil his heel. He hopped a bit to maintain his balance, but John held him steady. Sherlock said firmly, "Tomorrow."
The detective struggled to remain attentive to the Inspector's information. However it became increasingly more difficult when John decided to oil his sensitive underarm. Sherlock grabbed the top of the door frame and twisted into the touch. His skin trembled, he swayed. The doctor sucked along his obliques and rubbed his testicles with the other hand. Then John's thumb rubbed oil into the bruised flesh of his right pectoral. Electric current overloaded the tall man's nervous system. *John!*

The phone clattered to the floor and Sherlock bit the inside of his bicep to keep from crying out. He reached for the door frame with both hands and rocked on his tip toes. John grabbed his hips and nestled his growing arousal into the warm cleft of Sherlock's gluteals. The doctor held his man's cheeks tightly together to sandwich his shaft. They began to slowly grind their flesh together. John's sac bumped the detective's backside as they thrust more forcefully.

The first time John did this to him on Sunday, Sherlock had feared John was attempting to go inside again. The detective had struggled to get away. He knew he was not able so soon. But John had flipped him over and showed his azure eyes. John had said, "Try it, my dear." He had put Sherlock between his arse and rode up and down. Sherlock understood. It felt as good as being worked in hand- better if one factored in the highly suggestive placement and movement. John showed him fourteen positions for that dance. This current standing variation was new. It was good. *Very very good.*

Suddenly Sherlock's tight hole wasn't being stimulated anymore. He turned. John was sitting on the edge of the bath saying, "Hello? Greg? Is that you, Greg?" There was bothersome tinny yelling from the black plastic. John casually licked his thumb and reached over to trace circles against Sherlock's cockhole. The detective leaned into the skillful touch. He watched himself twitch and thicken in John's hand. He put his lean hand behind to continue to rub his sensitive anus. Traces of John's silky fluid were there.


John set the mobile on the bathmat. "Scotland Yard's enlisted me to make you cum." He lead his man closer, opening his mouth.

Sherlock shielded his cock, "What?"

John chuckled, "Greg's convened a meeting at six tomorrow at that Pub he likes. I'm to fetch you round after work. He said 'Try to get him to come.' And I intend to obey our local copper."

Sherlock backed away. He held out his hand for his mobile. "A moment, John. I need to inform Molly to expect delivery." Sherlock became fixated on the glowing screen. His dexterous thumbs moved rapidly.

John left the bath. He returned Bess to the safe and stowed the red toolbox. He looked at the wooden crate and had his best idea.

Twelve minutes later: "Molly won't be there tomorrow night. Apparently she has a date wi—" Sherlock froze in the doorway.
Chapter 58

Chapter Summary

BSL (see end notes), Doctor Sarah Sawyer from BBC Show, bit of John's past, Sweet Fluffy Fluff that is tastier than your Gran's Flummery.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Sherlock found his man, John was standing beside The Chair backed by every lamp in their flat. The room was bright as a decontamination chamber, midsummer, high noon, in the center of a halogen bulb, four inches from the sun. The handsome soldier stood out in high relief, glowing in a nuclear halo of exploded stars. He had a knee on the armrest. He was slowly working his cockhead with a silicone-coated hand while his other hand moved behind him. John released his cock and gestured to The Chair and smiled. He turned so Sherlock could watch him finger himself.

Sherlock took a step into their bright room. He watched John with a mouth-gaping stare. He felt as if made of iron and concrete. John stopped. He smiled sweetly and came to the taller man. The doctor rose upon tiptoes and kissed the lolling mouth. "Let me show you something, o flatmate mine." Sherlock swallowed and nodded.

John hugged him and rubbed his spine. "Come here, Beautiful." Sherlock felt John against him. The soldier was hard as salt stone, sticky and smiling. John tapped his man's foot with his own and tried to lead Sherlock forward. He knocked his fibula against Sherlock's. Still the frozen man did not budge. John slapped his arse and that did the trick.

"Come on, my dear. Sit right here. Center stage." Sherlock clung to his sinewy forearms as he sat down. Josh kissed him gently until he began to relax. Then the doctor wrapped his man's long arms around his hips and straddled his lap.

John used both hands to make his scientist's brain mush into Eton Mess. "That's what we like," John cooed into his mouth. One third request for explicit consent, two-thirds shamelessly begging for a filthy retort. The seated man barely managed to feed the doctor his name.

"Just like that," John said in a low hush as Sherlock began to rock into the strong hands. John dug the bottle out from between the cushion and the armrest and applied more silicone to his hand. "Want me?" Sherlock nodded, but he put his hand over his lover's. The detective's voice was a hoarse whisper, "Only this though, John, ok?"

John shook his head. He grinned. His handful of goo vanished behind him. His slick fingers lead a lean wrist there. John said, "I can." He punctuated his assertion with a long kiss. Sherlock withdrew his hand. He shook his head and his damp raven hair wobbled like old vines in a high wind. The detective put his hand around John's cock instead. He began to slide up and down quickly. John stopped him. The doctor kissed his ear and whispered, "It's ok. It's ok."

Sherlock mumbled into his collar bone and continued to shake his head slowly. It sounded like "Human lacking" or "Humid traffic" or perhaps "Hugo lightening." John's strong, slick hand inclined his chin and studied his forlorn cerulean eyes. "Yes I do." John kissed his forehead and
petted his vertebrae. The fair-haired man added, "And you do too. It's ok. We like it."


John put a kiss on the frantic mouth. He sucked the sculpted lower lip. Then he sat back on Sherlock's boney knees. His blonde eyebrow quirked up, "Dancing?"

The bridge of Sherlock's nose bloomed pink. The narrow hands became fists. Why! So stupid! Such an amateur! The embarrassed logician told John's knee, "Uh, yes...dancing. When...two people...embrace and...move together." Sherlock pressed his palm flat under John's and ironed his hand back and forth. Then he flipped their hands and repeated the movement.

John wove their fingers together and gave his lips to Sherlock's shy frown. The doctor squeezed their sticky grip and brought a pale fingernail to his lips for a kiss. "Brilliant, that is. Just brilliant." He compressed his thighs on the outside of his man's lap. The romantic wrapped a brawny arm around his partner's shoulders and kissed their interlaced hands again. He buried his face behind Sherlock's earlobe.

John's eyes misted over and he thought, Never! Never in my life could I be worthy of this bounty of riches! He breathed the exotic scent of marzipan and rich woody incense deep into his lungs. "Thank you, so much, so very much, you brilliant man, for teaching me to dance." He curled his lips into his teeth and pressed his mouth shut to keep from begging, "Please be my dance partner until I die."

John steadied his nerves. He swiped a knuckle over his eyelashes. The doctor clenched his eyes tight until he was certain he would behave. John kissed the creamy almond skin. He stole one more kiss from his beautiful genius. Then the romantic sat back. He cleared his throat and asked, "And what is 'dueling', my dear?"

Sherlock assessed John's features, discovering genuine awe and pride in the shining twin lagoons. Doctor John Watson: A superlative human being, beyond compare. The logician illustrated again. He swept his hand through the air between their bodies and floated both long pointer fingers side by side. He gave an awkward smile, that manifested more like a grimace.

John understood the meaning. But as the physician watched his clever man's gesture, he realized it was nearly identical to the British Sign Language phrase 'We Belong Together.'* As with most general practitioners, John served a few hearing impaired and deaf patients. His grasp of BSL was fairly rudimentary but like many physicians, he could adequately converse with his regular signers.

The doctor's hands spoke a reply: John tucked his thumb into his horizontal fist and hinged his wrist up and down as he nodded his head (Yes.) His pointer fingers spoke Sherlock's sign. Then John's fist said yes again. He poked Sherlock's chest. Then his fist pulled down from his chin as though smoothing a pharaoh's beard (Man.) He hammered his fist into his sternum possessively (My.) The doctor's thumbnail flicked a salute across the top corner of his forehead and diagonally out (Intelligent.) [Yes! We belong together. Yes. You are my clever man!] He signed, "We Belong Together" again.

The logician's lips parted in a moment of astonishment. He blinked. Then his sculpted mouth twitched a tiny smile. He had meant to illustrate that 'dueling swords' was his sophomoric phrase for when they made their erections kiss and glide together. Such a stupid thing to say! But John
had interpreted something far more amazing from the childish illustration. He liked that John's portrayal of him always made him out to be far more clever than he truly was. Sherlock tried to never let on that he knew John was actually the smart one. In truth, John was always right. Sherlock's hands flew rapidly like graceful birds as he relayed his gratitude for this obvious fact.

John's thin lips turned down and he shook his head in confusion. *Too fast, my dear.* He wagged out a V sideways (Again/ Repeat.) John concentrated on the dexterous hands intently.

The violinist forced himself say it again, despite his trepidation. *Sentimental oxytocin!* He flattened his fingertips against his sculpted chin and flapped the hand down in an arch. He tapped his pulse with his first two fingers. A flash of timidity made him pause. He did not look up as he continued: one hand on each pectoral clawing out and off his chest as they closed into emphatic fists. Then he traced a J in his palm from his middle finger to thumb. He paused to see his handsome man still following. Sherlock repeated the flattened fingertips arching away from his chin. He put his hand in his own hand as if greeting himself with a handshake. But he quickly amended his word by wrestling the flat surfaces of his fists with thumbs out. He knocked the heel of a fist to his breastbone. With his left hand, he made a thumbs up facing John and flicked the thumbprint of his right fist up over the back of the other thumbnail emphatically. The back of his index finger sliced down disappearing behind the screen of his other flattened sideways palm. The violinist's dexterous hands repeated "We belong together." He decided to further include a more accurate phase this time: the horizontal lengths of his lean index fingers tumbled graceful spiraling summersaults over one another. He indicated himself then he held up the heel of a fist towards John's chest. Sherlock at last glanced up at John with very hopeful, self-conscious eyes.

John made a questioning face at the windmilling index fingers. He was accustomed to exaggerated facial expressions and mouthed syllables accompanying a signer's hand movements. John cleared his throat. He tumbled his fingers and said aloud to the stoic mask, "I, uh, I don't know that one."

Sherlock pursed his lips and took a deep breath through his nose. He said, "Uh, that's...that one...it means 'Forever', John."

John considered the three sentences. His eyes closed in a grateful reverie. He was too overwhelmed to move. He tried to focus on something, *anything*, that would not make him blubber like a sentimental old fool. *Steady, steady now! Stay cool! Man up!*

John knew that in many deaf cultures, people were oft known by personal nicknames rather than their legal names among their associates and families. It was faster than spelling out entire names letter by letter. Apparently, Sherlock had gifted John with a such a name.

During a rotation at St. Bart's, the physician and Mike Stamford had an athletic radiologist colleague whose mates had addressed him as *Fast B*, due to his football skills. When John and Mike had encountered the radiologist and his girlfriend at the pub one night, John remembered Bertram calling his date *Thief*. (It had never been made clear to John if the moniker was a remark on *Thief* being a transplant surgeon or the sexy black Maserati Shamal she had liberated from her messy divorce.)

Among the surgery's regular patients, there was a lovely deaf couple in their early seventies who called one another *Soft Hair* and *Fishing*. A month after John secured the job, Doctor Sarah had sacked a discourteous temp for ignorantly telling Professor Stowe's partner that only blood relatives were allowed in exam room together. Professor Stowe had stomped her cane and grunted at the impertinent young man. Mrs. Fisher had made similar signs as Sherlock's illustration of 'sword fighting'. Her pale crepe paper hands had repeatedly shouted at the young temp, "WE
BELONG TOGETHER!" The stupid young man had raised his voice at the women as if his ignorant shouting could compensate for deafness.

The commotion had sent both Doctor Sarah and John running to assist. The shorter woman had stood trembling in fury, clinging to her partner as they backed away from the pointing, bellowing idiot. As Mrs. Fisher's brow had furrowed in anger, her mouth lost sync with the syllables, but she had continued to assert their rights. John remembered being so livid he wanted to strangle the temp with his identification lanyard. But he'd forced the feckless bastard to apologize then walked the little shite right out to the car park. The stupid lad had actually had the gall to try to return for his mobile charger! John had literally growled at the wanker, making the idiot flinch and run off.

After many minutes, and a thousand apologies, Dr. Sarah had finally calmed the pair, as well as the other waiting patients. When John had returned with cups of cool water, he'd watched the thin woman sign 'Thank you, Fishing. Good, Fishing.' And her silver-haired partner had pressed kisses into her snowy white afro, telling her repeatedly, "I am here, Soft Hair. My Soft Hair."

That was the night Doctor Sarah had taken John in for a bottle of wine and conversation when he'd texted. She had kindly agreed to allow him to kip on her sofa after he'd skived off a row with his insulting flatmate. However, as the Merlot supplanted her professionalism, she had begun to flirt heavily, likening John to a 'gallant gentleman of yore' and saying the surgery needed more RAMC 'attack dogs.' John had savored the way her compact breasts jiggled when he made her laugh with a joke about how all clarinet-trained men were secretly gallant dogs.

John remembered wanting so badly to run his hands through the astute doctor's long auburn strands and taste the red tannin stain on the cusp of her lower lip. He thought of her sighing and stretching her arms way up, as she had combed her hair towards the ceiling. Sarah had yawned into her upper arm, catching his eye coquettishly. She'd leaned against her refrigerator, casually asking, "So you'll be alright on the sofa, then?" John had said yes and politely thanked her again for her hospitality.

Sarah had given an opportunity when she'd stepped down out of her heels. She had lightly steadied her balance with a hand on his shoulder rather than the granite countertop. He had made her laugh again, bemoaning the lack of fairness in a world that permitted women to blatantly fake their heights while he was made to suffer through a life of honest shortness. She'd quipped back that he may borrow her heels anytime. He'd declined, saying gallant dogs were prone to chew up nice things. Sarah had flipped her hair over her shoulder, wondering aloud what she could have read, or how she could have heard, that the best way to break a dog of such habits was to rub his nose in it. John had remarked, "Lucky dog." He had watched her hazel eyes sparkle. Then he'd noted her flushed cheeks and red nose. The ethical doctor had gulped his wine and moved away to hurriedly tidy their dishes.

Sarah had given him yet another opportunity when she swayed down her hallway to her waiting bed. She had turned to smile at him over her shoulder, long brown silk curtaining one eye. Then she'd said his name and mentioned where he might locate towels. She had added, in a matter of fact tone, that he need'n't worry about the sound of the running water disturbing her, if he wished to make use of her shower that night. Then she'd disappeared into her room, leaving her door slightly ajar. Dead sexy!

John had stood alone at her sink, up to his wrists in sudsy hot water, tracing his wide thumb along the ruby imprint of her lips at the edge of her glass. But his mind had suddenly shown him a tall pale man curled on the sofa in a deep sulk. A man who smelled of mysterious spices and old book leather. A man who insulted and pouted and turned away in a billowing wave of indigo silk dressing gown.
The physician had tried to supplant the unbidden portraits with an image of Dr Sarah padding down her hall in stocking feet. Had he glimpsed a tattoo on her left ankle? *Think!* But his sloshy mind would not cooperate. Instead, he saw icy cyan eyes and a sculpted, argumentative mouth that so clearly needed a good, strong kissing. That was the night John's Merlot-soaked brain informed him that he *might* possibly, perhaps *maybe*, be in a tiny spot of trouble. He'd scrubbed the glass and stalked to the lumpy sofa.

Doctor Sarah Sawyer and John were only on professional, friendly terms now; ever since John had run out without a word that next morning. The soldier remembered seeing the news of the gas leak (explosion) on Baker Street. He remembered how his heart ceased to circulate his blood at thought of Sherlock possibly being home.

As he had run for a cab, the guilt overwhelmed him. The guilt of not being in their flat to fulfill his duty of protecting the raven-haired man. The guilt of abandoning his post. John had promised his God that if Sherlock yet lived, he would never NEVER EVER AGAIN fail to defend the genius.

After the bombings, the heavily laden vest, and the swarming pinpoints of red death lights, John had vaguely considered if he should text Sarah. She must have thought him a great cad for his behavior. But even he knew the surreal explanation of his ordeal was too unbelievable to be credulous- and he'd been there.

That night he'd curled his body into a tight fist around Bess and focused on the narrow gap beneath his door. He'd concentrated on the pattern of light and shadow emanating from that sliver between wood and board. He watched as soundless graceful feet paced on the other side. John had eventually been lulled to sleep by the unending choreography of his faithful sentry stalking back and forth, like a roving barricade between the soldier and come-what-may.

Chapter End Notes

British Sign Language used in Abominable Bride has a tumblr theory that when Holmes tells Wilder that John is his guest, he's actually saying *We Belong Together.* In truth, he's signing "This guy is with me," but I LOVE the tumblr theory (it makes for a better story, yes?)

Also, in BSL sentence structure, the Topic is said first, then the information regarding that topic follows. Example: "Home, far, blue" is an indication of residing in that blue house way down the road.

On Livejournal, Wellingtonoose explains John's CV. Many thanks to Wellingtonoose for the Meta. Also on AO3, Trishkafibble has actually posted John's CV!

http://wellingtongoose.livejournal.com/24542.html
Chapter 59

Chapter Summary

Penetrated Man Pride! Go, John!

The song that might accompany this chapter is "The Greatest Man That Ever Lived (Variations on a Shaker Hymn") by Weezer.

Presently, John was terrifying that faithful man. The doctor empathized with his lover's concern. The not-gay man knew he must have looked this exact same way when Sherlock had wanted to try him. A face like a crumpled blank page.

Twenty years ago, if a little birdie had whispered in John's ear that, two decades later he would be rapaciously craving penetrative homosexual sex, he would have probably ground that messenger into a feathery pulp. There was a time in the rugger's youth where he had been adamantly constrained by the heterocentric, misogynistic fallacy that being the receptive partner of anal sex made a man effeminate and weak. Nancy boys took in up the arse. Benders wanted to be 'the girl.'

But having experienced his future husband so deeply filling his body, John now knew it was the ultimate Power. Amazing! Better than sucking dick. Anal sex was his magic superpower: owning Sherlock's fat cock. It made John feel like the manliest, sexiest, most macho hero on the planet. Every single time Sherlock was erect, John wanted to be able to have him inside. Fuck fast motors, fuck billion Euro bank accounts, fuck platinum album sales, fuck marrying a supermodel- stuff a giant cock up your arse instead! That's what truly separates the men from the boys!

So powerful! The way Sherlock had gasped at his tightness. The way his man had been unable to last more than a hundred seconds because John was that good. The way his scientist had unraveled into a mindless, grunting, sweaty mess. And afterwards, the tender way his partner had pledged his everlasting devotion. Pure Pride! John had thought: I own you now, my king. That's how I love you! My love's made you a sentimental wreck. I've absolutely ruined you for another until the end of time.

If he'd had a flag, John would have jumped up and spiked it firmly through their mattress right down into the floorboards, with hot semen trailing down his leg. Hear ye hear ye, Doctor John Watson has at long last conquered Sherlock Holmes! I did it! I claim this land in the name of Britannia, long may She reign! John would have sung God Save the Queen. At lunch today, John had almost purchased a rainbow Union Jack for the next occasion. He sort of wished he had it now, to drape round his beautiful man when Sherlock had said, "You don't like it."

Do I like anal sex with my man? Absofuckinglutely yes. Do I desire it? In moderation...only every single time he touches me. Was it pleasurable? Well...It was...a bit like running.

The blindside-flanker remembered the early days of training with his rugby team. First three times he thought he'd die. He remembered chucking up buckets of sick after only 5 kilometers. He remembered the way his body protested. The torturous stitch in his side like a bayonet between his ribs. The clawing talons in his lungs. The evil tshirt sanding his nipples like a cheese grater. The horrific rash of his pubic hair chaffing his sensitive skin into a red baboon arse. Hell!
But, then one day the short man looked back and realized he was leading the pack. That had been one of the most euphoric moments of his life. He remembered shouting, "Eat Watson's dust you long legged bastards!" as sweat stung his eyes and his calves churned caustic acid. He could have run another 20 kilometers fueled by the endorphins alone.

The doctor's miscalculation of anal intercourse had been to start first with the 20 kilometer run rather than build up to it. Top rate adrenaline junky. True to form. Naturally, his genius had been clever enough to begin at a more reasonable pace when he had his go. Far more logical. After all, they had their whole lives to get to it. No pressure. Mustn't push. Be reasonable, man!

The soldier's mind whirled with the sentences of Sherlock's silent hand speech. The detective had just told him, "Thank you, Doctor Brave J. Thank you, my best, only friend Partner. We belong together. I am yours forever."

Forever!

Sherlock Holmes: the unearned surprise of a lifetime! John liked that Sherlock always characterized his actions as courageous rather than poorly-planned, adrenaline-fueled, mad recklessness. Doctor Brave. Mycroft had once lectured John that Bravery was only a kinder word for Stupidity. Reluctantly, the fusilier had to admit that the older Holmes was quite accurate in his assertion.

John decided to prove Mycroft right: he opened his eyes, unashamed to reveal the sparkle of saline in the rims. John looked directly at Sherlock and covered his own left pectoral with palm over palm. He grabbed Sherlock's hands and stacked them under his own. He pressed them into his chest until he was certain his galloping heart could be felt.

Sherlock startled forward as if he'd heard a fire alarm. He sat up straighter, nearly jostling his romantic to the floor. Then suddenly, Sherlock snatched himself out of John's hands. The seated man said, "Up! One moment, John." He was hastily jumping up before his partner was fully out from the lap saying, "Stay. A moment, John. Stay there!"
Chapter 60

Chapter Summary

He's not mental, it's only nicotine withdrawal!

Let's find out what those naughty boys did on Sunday during The Fuckfest.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The detective ran for their bookshelves in the sitting room and began hastily pawing behind volumes, searching out his quarry. Where? His blood pounded, Find it find it find it, between his ears. A sheaf of half finished musical compositions dove to the rug.

The logician could not concentrate over the infernal full volume pounding within his skull. John. That phrase? Undeterred, Sherlock moved frantically down the shelves. The detective raked a shaky hand through his hair. He snatched book leather, unconcerned by the clatter of several larger tomes hurdling to the floor. Find it find it find it...

The visceral image of strong hands pressed to broad chest: the BSL I Love You backed by a fervid heartbeat.

Five times in Sherlock's life, there had been men and women who had sought to have sex with him using that platitude. In the detective's experience, saying I love you meant: I am attempting to emotionally manipulate you into acquiescing to my will.

Each time Sherlock had heard the phrase, it had been a pathetic justification for violating his personal boundaries. As if the phrase was some sort of mystical key that would suddenly and magically transform the ascetic into a swooning Lothario.

Normals to Sherlock: I've said I love you so it's ok to repeatedly attempt to touch you after you've denied my advances. I've said I love you so you owe me physical contact. I've said I love you so anything I do is now valid under the nebulous umbrella of Love.

Sherlock to Normals: Gosh, you've said you love me? Oh lucky me! That's precisely what I've been waiting for. Please, do feel free to now invade my personage with your biological contaminants, your disgusting odors and your wretched stupidity! Shall I bat my eyes now? Shall we mince about sprinkling rose petals over the sheets? Shall we hurdle towards one another in slow motion, arms outstretched, knee-deep in a field of daffodils as the orchestra reaches a bloody crescendo? Ugh! Vapid idiot!

These were the exact words thrown at Victor nearly 15 years ago. Sherlock spitting blood onto the concrete of the portico. Victor screaming threats while those damned Bichon Frise yipped and growled behind the fence. The cloying scent of night blooming jasmine in the humid August air clashing with the toxic vapors of their overturned narcotic boil like a cheap back alley cologne from hell.
Completely lacking in surprise to the point of tedium. In one's life, by the third time such an outcome occurs after an I love you, it's more or less an established mundane pattern.

The Mundane Pattern File:

I love you.
-No thank you.

But I really love you.
-Not cogent to this discussion.

Just let me. (Generally phrased "How do you know if you've not tried it?" By that erroneous logic everyone on the planet would have a shark bite scar!)
-No again.

<Cue: unwanted physical contact> (Usually a sloppy kiss or a gropey octopus hug.)

<Cue: Fight> (Verbal or physical or both)

What the hell is wrong with you, Sherlock?!
-Apparently, knowing you.

<Cue: Gone Forever> OR <Cue: Fight, then Gone Forever> (Mostly the second fight was particular to men.)

Fuck every I love you ever vocalized! It was absolute nonsense! Never in the Holmes household did anyone utter "I Love You."

Father and Mummy illustrated their loving devotion to their family through the daily actions of Work. Oh they were great believers in Work, especially Proper Work!

Life is Action, Love is a Verb: The family axiom taught to him since infancy.

Work: vital proof of one's dedication, Father oft declared.

Work: one's contribution to recompense being alive in the world, as Mummy proclaimed.

Work's reward was Exhaustion. That was the only way to know if one had succeeded. Exhaustion was a privilege that one earned by Working Properly!

At the end of the day when The Parents snuggled the covers to their youngest's chin, Mummy would always smile and sigh, "Such a long day. Such a hard working boy!" And Father would always agree and add, "We are thoroughly exhausted!" They would anoint his head with their kisses, making the whirring machine in his skull quiet and shutdown until morning.

All Sherlock comprehended of lifelong partnership came from those two strange people. Saying "I Love You" was outlawed in Holmes Land. If one had successfully Worked to the point of Exhaustion, it was superfluous to say any words at all. Those you loved would either know through your actions or you were unsuccessful. That phrase had been decreed "nesh laziness" belonging to corporate advertisement, banal pop songs, crap telly, and heedless normals who were too negligent to actively demonstrate their commitments through Work.

John had said "I love you" to Macallan 30 tonight. But John had shouted, "Run, Sherlock!" after
he'd clamped a vice-like stranglehold on The Spider. The logician remembered John's command multiplying off the tiles like a chorus of battle cries. The stench of chemical waters. The buzzing of red spots threatening to fling platelets into the thick chlorinated air. The absolute conviction in those brave azure eyes.

John had said "I love you" to his first payday statement from surgery. But John recited, "Out of the night that covers me..." like a verbal life raft thrown to this drowning man. The pain of every swollen muscle: an iron anchor. The steady voice pulling him up from the depths of self hatred. The sincerity in those sorrowful blue eyes.

John had laughed at his favorite program until he broke into coughing fits and gasped, "God bless you, Non-Baron John Marwood Cleese! From one John to another, I love you, mate!" But John had spat, "Fuck off, Mycroft!" to the most powerful man in the Empire. The unmistakable scent of Barkley's Liquorice Mints flooding the confines of the limousine. Brother's umbrella tipping slightly forward like a parrying foil. The soldier's fist clenched into iron flails. Thighs tensed with adrenaline overload like a viper poised to strike.

John said, "Ooh I love you," to saucy picture messages pinging from his phone after successful dates. But John had said, "Pull it out and I'll kill you," in their bed. Strong hands digging into lean haunches. Hips creeping up to make them one. Eyes like cobalt Bunsen burner flames. The most amazing morning of Sherlock's life!

_Find it find it find it!_ While rapidly searching through boxes of data charts regarding toxicity thresholds in common hygiene products, Sherlock's mind palace fed him three more instances of John's verbal I Love Yous.

1- John singing "I love you baby and if it's quite all right/ I need you baby to warm the lonely nights..." Full volume. Shower. The Inn. Dartmoor.

That was the morning that Sherlock let his doctor accuse him of being wrong. While John had tucked into greasy potatoes and runny eggs, Sherlock remembered being overcome with an odd yearning to smooth the back of his pale hand up John's left jawline. One bulb had been burnt out over the bath mirror in their shared room and John's shave was uneven due to the poor quality of light. The soldier was normally very fastidious in his grooming habits. The inexactitude that morning had fascinated Sherlock. He had wanted to reach, to touch, to feel, but he had busied his curious hands in the sauce packets instead. Side effect of the H.O.U.N.D. gas, perhaps?

2- John saying "Right well, I fucking love you too," to the robot in the phone whose artificial politeness informed him that his voice prompt could not be understood. Beige jumper. Kitchen. The Thursday after they finished the case John named The Speckled Blonde. Tiny carnotite-colored stain on left earlobe and left thumbnail. Was it mustard or iodine? Sherlock had wanted to put the flesh on his tongue to find out. He'd turned to the snowy window instead.

3- John shouting, "Because I love you and we're the only family we've got left!" Extolling the merits of sobriety group to hungover sister. Turning to exit cab at scene of crime. Inch of red pants visible at sacrum from gap in denim where shirt rode up in back. Sherlock had been momentarily overcome by a fleeting urge to tug the ribbed jumper hem down but he'd scurried to Lestrade instead.

How long has Sherlock dismissed such urges as mere curiosity? How long had he inwardly yearned for more than John's physical proximity? When had the interest shifted from observing his flatmate eat, read, move, laugh? It was difficult to think. The logician's thoughts would not coalesce into a linear structure.
John had infiltrated the detective's life with the insidious action of water becoming whiskey. Doctor John Hamish Watson was more than any Holmes. Meticulous Action. Proper Work. Fearless to the point of Exhaustion. The assiduously reliable man was more than Sherlock could ever deserve.

*Find it find it find it!* Ah! While digging through the shelves of the small bookcase at the end of the sofa, Sherlock came across the little brown bag that held a 'purchase' perhaps far more useful. *But where was the other? Think!*

Sherlock held the brown bag and tried in vain to remember where in this mess he'd stowed his main quarry. *The brick behind the fireplace perhaps?* Locating today's 'purchase' made him begin to obsess once more over how selfish he had been on The Saturday, taking pleasure despite John's obvious lack of full arousal. His fist clenched around the course brown paper. His brain fed him 11 images of John's pained features. He replayed the terrifying sound of John whimpering. Then he recalled the weak voice saying, "Me too," under his shoulder.

Later that day, when the abstainer had tried John the same, he understood. Sherlock had been unable to fully accept the feeling. Far more intense than he'd ever imagined. His body could not yield as he knew he should. Too intense. So he'd done only what felt good to him.

A million razor-sharp scissors snipped his stomach lining as he tormented himself with how very selfish he'd been both times. He took pleasure. He was a taker. A user. *A selfish bastard.* Now that the sociopath understood the way anal intercourse felt, he had resolutely decided never to do that to John again. He had spent all day and night on The Sunday trying to make it up to John with every conciliatory activity available. Still he did not think it was enough when he considered how very much he had enjoyed all of it. How could anyone possibly think they were in love with such a self-centered barbarian?

A part of Sherlock wanted to scream, *I forbid you to forgive me, to accept my inconsiderate actions, to request another attempt. You mustn't be in love with me, please!* The reclusive man almost hoped John would leave him alone and go off with some nice businesswoman from Surrey to have loads of fulfilling, procreative sex that didn't hurt him and that gave him dozens of fat round babies bearing half his chromosomes.

Sherlock felt the sting of hot saline threaten his tear ducts. He squinched his eyes shut. His fingernails carved deep half moons into the meat of his empty palm.

John wanted more data. His doctor's intentions had been quite clear. The detective had tried to maneuver his way out of it, offering every alternative he knew John truly enjoyed. Sherlock crawled under the sofa and began scanning. The manipulator considered every Sunday activity he might yet offer as substitute.

Sunday, bed, forty minutes after orgasms, 1420 GMT: "Well, it's certainly not going to suck itself, my dear." (Discovering it was possible to simply lay there and let John ride his way down into the throat. *Very lovely!* Required so little effort, yet received such high praise from John. The doctor did not seem aware that he had supplied nearly all the labor. Second best position for fellatio.

Best being: neck and head hanging over edge of mattress, sort of upside down approach. Wearing John's thighs as earmuffs with John alternately rubbing broad hands along thyroid cartilage at larynx or over peart nipples. *Superlative!*

Third best position: kneeling at side of bed. John on tip toes straddling shoulders, broad hands leveraged off mattress. *Outstanding! The doctor was certainly well up on maximizing depth!*

Sunday, over the back of their bed, after John just climaxed, 1430 GMT: "Anywhere you like. God
yes! That's it. Bend me in half and mess that load on my fuckhole! You've earned it, sweetheart!"
(First time watching semen drip down John's perineum and scrotum. Equal parts aesthetically
hypnotic and heartbreakingly extravagant. Such a devastatingly lovely waste of flavor. Informed
John that would never be 'earned' ever again! John soothed and cuddled then sang "Every Sperm is
Sacred" as a soft romantic ballad. Sarcastic villain!)

Bed after exercising John's shoulder, 1715 GMT: "Thank you, sweetheart. Now...where do we
want my mouth this time, hrn?" (Thus the bruised right nipple. Painful to the point it brought tears
to the eyes, but too pleasurable to let go of John's hair. Erection tightly secured between John's
strong thighs. Hips thrusting faster than seemed humanly possible. Drifting to sleep wondering if it
was Christmas.)

Floor, whispered after they awoke in a heap of covers and sheets, 2045 GMT: "Let's pin me down
and try'n shove that fat cock down my throat, yes? Let's be a sport and work me til I pass out, my
dear man. Kiss for luck." (No one had lost consciousness despite their genuine effort. John was
established as The Reigning Madman...for now.)

Bed, 2215 GMT: "I'll lick your hairy 'barse' til I'm bent as a nine bob note, now say it, Sherlock!"
(First time ordering John to quit messing about and fellate properly. First time telling John he
mustn't swallow so they could share. Afterwards, first, last, and only time inquiring if any of this
was part of John's normal routine. John shrugged and grinned, "Normal. Is. Boring. You're not
bored now, are you!" 100% certainty of never being bored ever again.)

Sherlock began to feel his flesh engorge again just thinking about it. He temporarily misplaced his
objective and stood lost in a tasty fog. John seemed to possess an unending arsenal of the coolest,
most amusing euphemisms. Each so colorful and exhilarating that anyone within earshot would
instantly climax: cocksucker, fingerfuck, barse, cumcatcher, tongue bang, arse eater, bum
muncher...and best of all: fuckhole.

Sherlock whispered that word to himself as he traced a hand over his navel. Fuckhole... Highly
illustrative slang! The implication clear: a space where one receives penetrative sex. Not John's
mouth. John called that his 'cumcatcher.' As in: "My cumcatcher is lonely."(Thus, Ouroboros in
tub) And "My my my, is that a gift for my cumcatcher? How thoughtful, my dear man!" (After
failed first attempt at analingus.)

Fuckhole...mmmmmm. John's warm, pulsing, delicious, spasming, fuzzy, beautiful fuckhole. When
Sherlock had first moved his fingers inside his partner, one of John's lurid rhetorical questions had
been "You like making me a fuckhole, don't you?" Obviously the answer was yes. John had
followed with, "This is gonna be your fuckhole. You need it, don't you?" Another obvious yes.
Then, "Who's it for?" Answer: "Me." John had praised, "That's right. Good man. All you. Only
you." And when Sherlock sought to experience more fingers within, John's breathless whisper had
been, "Nnng, needed you so long. God, you've no idea. O! We need it, don't we?" Obviously yes.

Why can't I be that sexy? He's like a kinetic tornado of stimulating arousal. There is more erection-
inducing power in his elbow's shadow than I will learn in a lifetime. A mere whisper of a facsimile
of a copy of a transcript of John's bawdy talk was enough to stiffen every penis in the Empire. He's
a god!

But I am, as always, a walking billboard of flaccidity, blurring out the anorak's encyclopedia of
shriveled limpness! "Can I use my mouth?" Ugh! "Sword Fighting" Bleh! And most juvenile and
boring of all: "I like this, John." For godsakes! I'll give up and admit I'm too immature for his
league. I'll change my legal age to 'this many' and call myself Billy! Such an idiot!

Little Billy and the Sex God! Sherlock greatly appreciated his god's constant feedback. The
anxious, inexperienced man needed to know it was going well. John cleared him from self doubt with all that boisterous enthusiasm. That freed Sherlock to relax and fully enjoy their endeavors. The loud-mouthed soldier gave him the security and self confidence he needed.

Except...during intercourse. Both times John had been very quiet. They breathed together, they made a few sounds. However, the unrestrained bounty of John's beautiful salacious poetry was noticeably absent. John's eyes were focused and his face quite stern both times. Sherlock felt fairly certain that his not-gay man was perhaps not nearly as interested in the anal intercourse as he was in their other activities.

However John was too much a gentleman to say otherwise. The doctor was not the sort to deny his man any type of lovemaking. John was openly permissive and extremely indulgent. For example, the military man had plainly expressed his lack of interest in being hit, but Sherlock was certain that if, for some reason, he said he'd like to try it, John would allow it. That's how John was.

John had the eager willingness of an enthusiastic sportsman. The precise anatomical comprehension of a skilled surgeon. The acute mission-focus of a top rate marksman. The endless stamina of a professional rugby player. The zealous creativity of a poet laureate. The practiced teamwork of a trained soldier. The understanding forbearance of a good doctor. And the gentle kindness of a benevolent friend.

Additionally, John seemed to possess near-clairvoyant expertise when trying activities they would enjoy. The detective still could not deduce how John had decided Sherlock would enjoy being hit, bitten, and roughing around. Sherlock liked that very much. It stilled the machine within faster and longer than opioids. However if, years ago, someone had asked him what sort of sexual activity he expected would appeal to him, Sherlock would have probably said oral sex (WITH condom, maybe even two or three!) and holding hands. Then again, the ascetic had always believed he disliked kissing. And sweating. And showering with another person. And definitely sharing a bed.

Yet John was very familiar to him, almost like an extra limb. About a century ago, in parts of the world, courtship and marriage worked exactly this way. Two people were introduced, then quickly committed to life together, then spent months getting acquainted prior to consummating their union. The logician romanticized that bygone era. It made a great deal of sense to Sherlock. He wondered if he might have taken a lover sooner if he'd ever been given the opportunity to make a year-long study of a potential partner in his natural habitat. But in these modern times, people did not allow such slow, methodical courtships.

People met at noisy pubs or lied in online profiles. They made decisions fueled by alcohol and lust. Then had quick sexual encounters that may or may not lead to another. Then they decided to either get to know their lover or move on to the next one. Sherlock was unwilling to behave in this way. It did not appeal to him to face that sort of repeated rejection. In truth it scared the hell out of him.

Then one day there was John. The greatest thing Mike Stamford had ever done in his whole sad little mundane life was deliver living proof of the Almighty to a jaded lonely agnostic. (Mental note: send Mike Stamford a gift. Perhaps an Iberico ham or a silver haired transsexual prostitute with long nails. The professor seemed to consume both in equal quantities.) Stamford had brought John into Hooper's lab with a self-satisfied grin as if it were Monday and he'd just eaten his weight in Spanish pork at weekend. How had the big man known what John would mean to Sherlock's life?

From the very first, it seemed everyone around them knew the two men were ideally suited. It was the most common assumption they encountered: you two are a couple. Simple as that.

Seemed perfectly natural to John as well now. John made love with Sherlock just as he kissed: the
raw power of a hydroelectric dam. The not-gay man gave his all, held nothing back, completely without shame in their shared desire. Perfectly natural.

Sherlock's partner was generous to a fault. John always seemed very keen for Sherlock to cum first. The handsome doctor appeared to take great pride in his man's satisfaction. He was always quick to praise and compliment. He was gracious in verbalizing his appreciation. He was relentless in pursuit of Sherlock's satiation.

For all this kindness, what did Sherlock provide in return? Refusal to give what John requested tonight. A proper sociopath! True to form. One tiny little request for more data. One brief, honest moment of I love you (not even vocalized, mind you) and here was the idiot running scared!

Sherlock considered all the lamps blazing back in their room. The white hot, crisp light. There'd been nowhere to hide. The master of disguise could not camouflage the truth. This was not two blokes trying each other on as an experiment to pass the time. This was The Proper Work of building the future upon the solid foundation of their genuine friendship. Terrifying! A bit insane, really. Yet...not so scary when one had John as a building partner.

Suddenly there was a slippery hand slowly tracing upward along the length of Sherlock's spine. The tall man startled with a yelp and spun round.

"Alright?" John butted his head into his partner's chest and continued to knead vertebrae with his thumbs. Endlessly roving hands moved lower and he repeated his inquiry into Sherlock's racing heartbeat.

"Yes. Fine, John."
"What, uh, what have we been looking for?"

"A moment, please, John," replied the raven-haired man as he stepped back.

"We'll find it in the morning. Come be with me."
John stepped forward, snared his man tighter. He smiled up at his partner. Sherlock looked away abruptly, feeling overexposed. The tall man's arms hung limp at his sides and he focused on the headphones worn by his cattle skull. The sandy-haired man laid a kiss into the erratic heart. He gently prompted, "Tell me."

"I'm not sulking."
"Ok."
"I'm only thinking, John."
"Yes. Right."
"Five minutes more."
"Yes. Fine...Violin?"
"No."
"Tea?"
"No, John."

Sherlock was left alone. A chill rushed over his lanky form in the absence of his considerate man. He shook off the cold air and scanned from wall to wall slowly. Too many thoughts swarmed in his racing mind. It was like fishing in a rapid Spring current with only one futile hand.

All of a sudden, something warm and wet gripped the inside of his left elbow. Sherlock instantly tried to snatch his arm away from the vice. He looked down to see John kneeling at his side. Like a blonde lamprey on a lake trout, the physician worked his mouth over the sinewy brachioradialis
muscle until the flesh was swollen red. The detective watched his doctor carefully wipe the moisture from his skin then smooth an adhesive patch gently in place. *Genius!* Sherlock offered out his other forearm and received the same treatment twice more. John stood, crumpling the empty wrappers. The shorter man nodded once like a little salute. Then he turned to leave his theorist alone again.

Sherlock held out his arms to marvel at his three new thinking badges. His racing mind began to calm. *Oh sweet nicotine like ambrosia from heaven!* Yes! The dilated capillaries near the surface greedily pumped the toxin into his blood. The addict shut his eyes and let the symphony in his adulterated pulse carry him back to sanity.

Sherlock gasped! He immediately realized that half of what he sought (the secret paper) was in his other 'sitting room' across town. He bemoaned his stupidity! He'd stopped there before Paddington. *Of course!* No matter, he'd retrieve it tomorrow. He snatched up his little paper parcel.

Three things became conspicuously evident as the patches organized brain fluid:

1- John was indeed an exceptional man. With regard to lovemaking, he was as much a genius as Sherlock was with the science of deduction.

2- John was well grown, had much experience. It was foolish to trust this man to save one's life yet not trust him to know his own desires. Highly Illogical!

3- We genuinely love one another. Like Father and Mummy. So obvious! (Although John overtly knew this truth, if asked, Sherlock would repeatedly claim he had know since day one. No sense letting on that there was more than one genius residing within 221B.)

Sherlock's heart thrilled with feral glee! *John!* Flaxen head bent under the tap, water trickling over downy chest, puddling on the linoleum. The soldier smiled sheepishly to be caught in the act. He wiped a broad hand under his chin. John's handsome smile suddenly widened as he realized his clever man now knew what was self evident.

The tall man ran, jumped and hoisted himself onto John's back. They spun dizzying circles and laughed like madmen.

"Make haste, John! The game is afoot!"

Chapter End Notes

"Every Sperm is Sacred" Greatest wedding song ever written. Brings a tear to me eyes!
Chapter 61

Chapter Summary

The case of the brown paper bag: DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME!

Laughing riotously, John galloped round and round their rooms. Occasionally, the soldier would 'accidentally' tip to the side, knocking his rider against the walls, the furniture, the doorways. He spun in circles and jostled Sherlock about like a deranged bronco in a rodeo. The detective could not contain his joy! He flung his head back and shouted, "Faster Silver Blaze! Go!" He clung tightly to John's chest and spurred his heels into his man's thighs. John yelled over his shoulder, "Madman!" The fusilier pranced back and bumped his man's arse into the wall.

"Ow! John!" Sherlock bonked his mount with the brown bag and laughed, "Knackery for you, old gelding!"

"Oi! Slaughterhouse for you, young piggy! To market, to market to sell my fat pig!" The cackling soldier spun a wild circle on the hearth rug. He pinched his rider's rump.

"I'm not fat!"

"Only in a certain 'above average example of male physiology,' my dear man!" John chortled and jolted his partner again. He pretended to lose his grip. He trotted a zig zag path around the furniture, threatening to spill his dear friend to the floor.

"Ah! John! Don't drop me!" Sherlock wrapped his long muscular legs tighter around his man's core. He kissed John's ear and threatened "It'll be the riding crop for you, Silver Blaze!"

John raced them down the hall and laughed menacingly. "Liar! You'd never, little piggy!"

(Of course, five years from now there would be that rainy Wednesday morning when they finally had an entire child-free day alone. Sherlock would indeed smuggle his riding crop into their marriage bed. John would indulgently tolerate his husband for nearly twenty lashes before snapping the damned rod over his knee and flinging the halves out the window. Sherlock would find himself roughly dragged over John's lap to be taught yet another wonderful lesson. That would be either the fifth or sixth time in their partnership that Sherlock would find himself unable to sit down for more than 24 hours. So honestly, all it ever really taught the madman was how to get exactly what he wanted. That was back when John was still pretending he had no idea who controlled that game.

The next year, John did stop pretending, but not out of malice only desperate pragmatism. That precious two hour window between work and crèche where they could shout their voices raw. "Can't we just skip all this and get on with your spanking so I can get well ploughed, my dear?" Sherlock would look so disappointed by John's complete lack of pretense that his lip would quiver. His heart would break a bit that day, as if the magician had just revealed all the secret hidden compartments. He would douse the fire he'd only just started on their new drapes and put away his blowtorch with a sorrowful little pout. Where was the Foreplay? The Romance? As he would settle himself over John's knees and scrunch down his pants, he'd sigh that day and say, "I suppose. If we must, husband mine.")
In their bright room, Sherlock dismounted with a flourish and pulled John into his arms. The couple wore great smiles as they sighed out the last of their breathless laughter. The detective garnished his friend's wide grin with a delicate kiss. He presented the crumpled parcel to John. "For me?"

The little brown paper sack was fairly light. Strong hands assessed a smooth cylindrical shape within. John looked up at his man to see hope sparkling in those cyan eyes. Sherlock seemed well pleased with himself. The doctor began tearing the layers of paper away as Sherlock spoke rapidly.

"For us, John. My original intent was to use this for myself. But, your need is foremost this evening. I was unaware this existed for sale, but upon seeing it, I immediately comprehended the potential..."

_Sex Toy? Oh God! Is this a sex toy? Did my dear sweet pervert buy us a naughty little sex toy?_ John's hands moved faster. His pulse raced at the idea! He fumbled the parcel in anticipation. His grin broadened to see Sherlock's expression. The logician had that puffed up 'I am a genius' look. The multitude of lumens in their room made his eyes shimmer like faceted beryl jewels set in carved ivory.

At last John had the four layers of paper removed. He held the little bottle up. His scientist was lecturing proudly about diethylglycinamide. The plastic bottle's label proclaimed "Desensitizing Punch Me In The Face Maximum Punch Me In The Face Lubricant, 100mL."

John's delighted smile froze on his lips as Sherlock's deep baritone pounded his ossicles. The madman was saying, "...to aid in the acquisition of the other half case of Macallan, obviously. However, I offer you first use, my dear man. I can always procure more. You see, John, a five percent solution of lidocaine is an effective Punch Me In The Face. As a medical man, you are naturally aware of the absorption rates of the..."

John's smile became painfully caught in place. He began to strangle the bottle. As he squeezed and twisted, the plastic cap unscrewed. The bright spotlights over his shoulder bounced a hot beam of light off the shiny foil seal, blinding his eyes. His fat thumbnail began scraping the barrier away. He picked at the foil in futility as his heart became a battering ram within him.

"...obviously, if five percent proves ineffectual, I can, of course, compound a more concentrated Punch Me In The Face, John..."

John's vision went red at the immovable seal evading his clumsy thumb. Within his skull, the rage klaxon screamed like a submarine's alarm as an imminent torpedo threatened to breach the hull. He clawed harder and faster against the foil as his man's condescending voice bludgeoned his head.

"...thereby mitigating the overwhelming intensity of— Here, allow me, my dear man—of our unified bodies. John, Punch Me In The Face is my sincerest hope."

John went still. It was in that one action that Sherlock Holmes unknowingly quieted the seething wrath of his beloved friend. John felt his skin cool. His violinist's pale hands plucked the bottle from his clutches, deftly peeled away the foil and passed the little container back. John's hands ceased to tremble. The bitter taste of adrenaline swept off his tongue. He stood quietly marveling at Sherlock's power to transform him. Graceful and effortless assistance given with precise timing, as always. That one brief gesture.
John regarded the open vessel, then the dexterous hands that had just saved him from his violent
to the forefront of his mind and burst into technicolor
sparks: EMPATHY!

Disregarding most of the spoken words, John heard his future husband communicating what he did
not always know how to express. This was loving empathy from a man who regarded himself as a
sociopath. The vow encoded in the foil removal: All I have is ours to share. I will always put your
well being foremost. I will always seek to protect you.

John let the code wash over him. He looked up at his king with great respect and pride. His
genuine smile returned and he nodded slowly. He came upon tiptoes and rewarded his considerate
partner with a kiss. "Thank you, Sherlock." I love you, too.

Sherlock exhaled a relieved sigh. He exchanged his man's kiss for one of his own. Thank
goodness! Sherlock returned to the seat his partner had prepared for him. He offered out his
upturned palm. John held it.

The soldier inclined the bottle upward and looked at it. He looked at Sherlock. He squeezed his
man's hand. The soldier made his next action speak a code back to his beloved: He stood tall. He
tilted his head all the way back. John poured every drop of the clear liquid into his waiting mouth.

Sherlock's cyan eyes went wide! "Wait! John!"
The doctor stifled the reflex to retch, propelling fluid up his sinuses. His mouth instantly tingled
and his tongue started to inflate. John gave his most clueless, innocent smile and said, "Guh?" He
swallowed, tried again. "What?"

"That's not-
"Delicious!" John belched a long loud roar. He slapped his chest. He backwashed some saliva into
the container and shook it. He sucked every last millilitre until the plastic crinkled inward. The vile
slime clung to his esophagus making his throat feel swollen. His tongue died like a bloated whale
on a sunbaked beach. His entire mouth prickled.

"Far cry from Macallan 30!

"John! That's all I bought!" scolded the frustrated logician, with an exasperated sigh. For a man
who 'could still read you know,' John could be so very stupid sometimes! It only said ANAL in big
blue letters right on the damned label! Now he'd have to go all the way back and risk buying more.

(In truth, Sherlock had not purchased the lidocaine lubricant at all. He'd gone to the apothecary that
afternoon intending to buy more syringes— no not for that— for administering nutrients to the plants
in his fifth bolthole/ hydroponic laboratory where he cultivated myriad poisonous specimens...and
one or two cannabis plants for a certain motherly landlady. The scientist had glimpsed a display
shelf among the 'family planning' items as he made his way towards the till. While the pharmacist
compared homeopathic sleep aids with a weary fry cook two aisles away, Sherlock seized the
opportunity to pinch a bottle. He left £20 on the counter and scurried off to his abandoned
warehouse.)

"Theth no mo in th flat thunwher?"

"No."

"Weh, than Gah fo tha!" John turned and slung the empty bottle down the hall before closing the
bedroom door. The doctor sank to the floor. He placed Sherlock's palm atop his sandy hair and
wuzzled his head beneath to enforce petting. He smiled sweetly and kissed Sherlock's knee. His
chemical-coated lips tried another little kiss. He was not dismissed. He hazarded a tiny kiss slightly closer. Sherlock patted his head three times.

John reached behind his shoulder to snatch the shielding vertical pillow away from atop the Macallan crate. The crisp light immediately doubled in the newly revealed pane.

Sherlock stared! The seated man was suddenly watching their oblique reflections, angled upward from the mirror of John's bedroom wall. The kneeling man glanced back to confirm his magic trick had been properly staged against the foot of their bed. He looked up at the dazzling, stunned visage glowing above him.

John laid his warm cheek on the kneecap and offered up his most pitiful coy little smile. He lightly traced his index finger up and down the dark hair of a shin. He nuzzled his mandible against the athletic thigh.

Sherlock's hand tightened into the flaxen hair. He was captivated by the cascading white light bouncing off John's muscular back. The punctuation of symmetrical dimples framing a quotation of the fifth lumbar vertebra. The defined obtuse triangle between shoulder blades. The interplay of flexing muscles and straining tendons as the cervical spine swiveled side to side. The mirror revealed a broad hand caressing the round cusp of flesh where buttocks met sinewy, fuzzy thigh.

Sherlock's fingertips skated over the curvature of his man's skull. John marched a slow line of lingering kisses from knee to groin. His humid breath advanced over the soft flesh before his eyes. He waited. Sherlock's cock twitched once. John smiled into his lover's tensed gracilis muscle and sucked the skin.

The seated man exhaled slowly. His thighs parted further and his body sank into The Chair. John polished long steady strokes along a thigh. He slowly wedged his broad chest between his lover's knees until Sherlock allowed space for him. He leaned in and grazed the gorgeous trail of dark curls leading down from the navel.

John's azure eyes questioned upward. Sherlock looked from the badge taped to his forearm to the man kneeling before him. The corner of his sculpted mouth crooked up into the barest smile. Cyan eyes expressed 'I forgive you for thwarting my plan, sneaky cur.'

John offered the inside of his tingling mouth. Sherlock's thumb traced a line across blonde eyebrow down temple to jaw. My strange, handsome villain. I suppose you are forgiven for loving me as well. He slowly worked a hand over himself a few times. John's eyes followed the action up and down in anticipation. Then Sherlock fed his erect cock into John's waiting mouth.

John's senses were blind. He was amazed the cock fit over his distended tongue. It was difficult to gauge spatial relation with a chemical-infused mouth. He knew his slack lower lip was drooling heavily and tried not to make an enormous mess of it all. John swallowed. Tasteless. Odorless. Like a big mouthful of old chewing gum after a dentist appointment. He hoped not to bite his tongue—nor his partner!

Sherlock's focus returned to the lower third of the looking glass. Two thick fingers began to disappear, millimeter by millimeter, into slick tightness. The detective championed their slow twisting dance upwards. John heard the deep, low sound of amazement that told he held his captive audience's complete attention. He gave a better view by spreading himself with his other hand. Sherlock groaned.

About two minutes in, John's nose began to itch on wiry hair. He cautiously felt with a hand and startled! Oh my God, I'm doing it! I think I'm actually doing it! Well, maybe this horrid gunk has a
purpose after all!

About two minutes in, Sherlock looked down at John's head buried in his lap. He watched a hand squirm to fit between mouth and groin, finding no available space. *Oh god, he's done it! I think...yes...he's done it! Wait...has he done it? Oh No! For godsakes, NO!

"VATICAN CAMEOS!"

John stopped abruptly. The doctor began extracting his lover from his throat. It seemed to take ages, like hoisting a heavy bucket up from the very bottom of a mile-deep well. He braced his hands against his man's thighs. Sherlock pulled his hips away to help hasten the process. The frantic detective pressed his man's forehead with the heel of his hand.

"Chemical transference! Across mucous membranes!" Sherlock's expression of absolute horror said it all: his erection was thoroughly numb!

"John, I dislike this immensely!"

*Well thank God for that! "Muh hoooo!"

"Oh god why! Why! Why on Earth would *that* be manufactured? Why would anyone want *that*?"

"Aa ung o." John shrugged, but he was smirking. *Because you're a clever idiot.*

John crawled up into his man's lap. The doctor sat back on bony knees and began his inspection. He prodded and poked, his brow upturning in questions between each area surveyed. He stroked the rigid flesh several times. At last, he kissed Sherlock's cheek and gave a grave, somber shake of his head. John put both hands on Sherlock's shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "Eeze Deh."

"What?!! No! Are you even a real doctor at all?"

John softly patted a shoulder in condolence. He exaggerated his expression of sympathy. The doctor nodded solemnly and enunciated his diagnosis slowly, "Dehd."

Sherlock flung off the hand. "Sarcastic villain!"

They tussled and struggled as Sherlock tried to throw his laughing physician to the floor. John pinned his pale wrists into the armrests and ground his hips down. The soldier pressed closer, thrusting his hardness into his man's core. Over John's shoulder, the detective caught a flash of his smiling face. He tried to snake his lean form down between John's thighs. His lover's chest forced him back again. Electric sparks sang out from the detective's bruised chest. The couple struggled more urgently.

Sherlock freed his arms and grabbed his partner's arse in both hands. John groaned into his neck. The soldier rocked up on his knees and swiveled his pelvis against his man's chest. Sherlock shoved John's torso to one side. The soldier dug his hands into the black leather over Sherlock's left shoulder. The mirror showed the violinist his skillful hands kneading vicious claw marks into the meaty tissue. John urged him on with sharp gasps. The detective told his partner's tense ribs, "You are a terrible doctor."

"Uh huh."

Sherlock held tighter. John began to breath harder and grind his engorged cock more insistently.
His back arched out in a graceful concave slope. The mirror played a wonder film of two nimble hands slowly spreading open muscular gluteals. They groaned together as cool night air rushed over slippery skin. By use of one teasing thumbprint, Sherlock was able to witness the shimmer of pleasure over puckered skin. His thumb traced a circuitous pattern in the sticky brown hair.

"Show me, John."
Chapter 62

Chapter Summary

SMUT. Explicit use of mirror by two enthusiastic, creative men. Nothing says I Love You like edging!

The magician performed a riveting display of his precise sphincter control for the mirror. Excruciatingly tight, then slowly winking his puckered bud in a hypnotic rhythm. He pressed his pelvic muscles out to briefly allude to fullness. He showed Sherlock his very best trick: John clenched as tightly as he could for as long as he could until Sherlock witnessed the ring involuntarily spasmed into relaxation. The detective was spellbound. The audience was unknowingly rocking his hips in time with the televised show. He ached to be there, moving within the place offered by the looking glass.

John reached back and danced the tip of his middle finger in and out until Sherlock could stand it no longer. The seated man pressed his index finger firmly over the teasing middle finger to send it deeper. John clenched tight to impede his lover's effort. He was rewarded with a growl of frustration along his carotid artery. Sherlock pressed more insistently, but John drew his hand away. John sat back and gazed into his partner's eyes. The mute man's display had produced the intended effect.

Sherlock saw only sincerity in those azure eyes. The bright lights made them sparkle, casting flecks of love over his whole body like twin mirror balls. His pale skin pricked. This brief, narrow distance between their bodies seemed unbearably far. The detective took a deep breath and conceded, in a diminutive whisper, "You may have me."

John shook his head. He feathered his hand over Sherlock's cheekbone and waited for a more honest answer. His stubborn detective whispered, "You have made your point, John." Sherlock tried to pull his man closer. The Need boiled his blood to steam.

John continued to wait. His left hand again worked slowly within him, but his smiling face hid the image from his obstinate lover. He moved his hips over his fingers in maddening circles that made his thick cock sway. Every muscle in the seated man's body began to tremble. John had him on the very verge of sanity.

The hypnotist tapped his right thumb on the corner of the stubborn mouth, trying to draw the truth into the space between them. Then he took hold of their sopping glans in his strong right fist and stroked them together only twice. Sherlock squirmed. He could barely feel it, but his brain registered the glorious image of John and him united. Far louder than necessary, the detective cried out, "Please! You are correct, damn you! We like it! We need you. John, please."

John latched his brawny arms around his companion's neck and rewarded Sherlock's brazen honesty with a strong hug. He plied sloppy kisses into the skin. Sherlock held his face between his pale hands and secured a long kiss into his lopsided grin. The men shared their powerful gaze as their hands worked quickly to get what they needed. Silicone. Alignment. Kiss for luck. Go!

John took half of Sherlock in one slow fluid movement of his hips. He paused then drew all the way up and off. He tilted to the side, looked back, then looked at his partner again. Do you see
me? Sherlock nodded vigorously. He kneaded his hands up and down John's spine. The doctor checked the mirror again and they watched together as Sherlock's cock disappeared within the warmth.

John clung to the back edge of the black chair as he pumped smooth long strokes. Sherlock fist ed his lover's hard shaft to the tempo. The soldier suddenly dismounted. Sherlock hollered, "No wait!" His doctor gave him a quick kiss.

John planted both feet on either side of Sherlock's thighs. He squatted back down with a long moan as his body was filled again. They traded a chant of grunted vowels as the rider piston ed against his mount. John's hands dug into the leather. Sherlock's hands dug into the orbs of his arse. The doctor rode faster and harder until he heard the sound he desperately sought. His sac clapped rhythmic percussion into Sherlock's dense cushion of dark hair. His thick wet cock volleyed between their taut cores, flinging droplets of precum back and forth. His heartbeat slapped his pulse into his eardrums. The wild look in Sherlock's beautiful cyan eyes. John thrust faster still.

When at last the rider's thighs began to lose power, Sherlock locked the backs of John's knees into the inside of his elbows. He grabbed a tight hold up around each kneecap and pressed his heels into the floor. He canted his hips upward as hard and fast as his lover's sounds compelled. The sound of his own balls slapping black leather added to their pleasure symphony. Sherlock pumped until John's glowing face began to blur into a white oval of light under a curtain of sweat-drenched curls. He thrust until the acid in his thighs made him grit his teeth. John's sounds urged him onward faster and faster. He propelled his hips upward until John's name rattled off the windows, the door, the ceiling. Then one final time he shot up from The Chair.

John pressed his damp forehead into Sherlock's for several heartbeats. Then he twisted his torso over his man's left shoulder. They watched the mirror together. John pulled off slowly. He hovered his puckered hole over his lover's shiny cockhead. In the illuminated glass, they watched John wink open three times. Each momentary sigh of his arsehole trickled a glittering rivulet of cum onto the mulberry tip below. The couple held their breath for a dozen heartbeats. They were mesmerized by the sensual flow of Sherlock's fluid inscribing long cursive lines down his shaft.

John reached back and used Sherlock's cockhead to scoop the cum back within his delicate bud. He reverted to straddling his man's lap on his knees. John carefully tucked his lover's gooey cockhead back within him. As they watched Sherlock's extremely sensitive flesh vanish within John's warmth again, the spent man swore a long low string of profanity into his man's collarbone. John nodded.

The detective rearranged his lover so they were again sharing one another's dilated pupils. They saw their own reflection in one another's wide eyes. Sherlock fist ed John's cock with one skillful hand and held his partner's handsome face in the other. The doctor gave long strokes of his hips that ended with powerful, grinding thrusts downward. His breathless, gasping grunts sounded like a train overtaking a steep uphill climb. John rode Sherlock's throbbing, spasming cock until it was completely dissipated. The seated man shouted as the twin rings of muscle at last gripped him tightly. The doctor's hole convulsed in unending waves of pleasure. John added his voice to Sherlock's as he came.

The men held fast to one another, trying to find air for their lungs. A dexterous hand ladled hot creamy nectar up from their heaving abdomens. Sherlock started to shovel his prize into his greedy
mouth but stopped. He offered his milky hand to his beloved instead. John smiled. They drank

They felt Sherlock's spent erection begin to fade. John moved again so they could watch the replay
of their new favorite programme. Sherlock's sticky hand idly played over John's glans as they
focused on the majestic waterfall in the glass.

At the end of the enthralling show, Sherlock cradled his arms securely under John's arse and stood.
The tall man delivered them into their bed in four easy strides. He flopped onto his back and pulled
John's hand over his galloping heart while they echoed their ragged breaths off the ceiling.

After a time, John began sniggering into Sherlock's shoulder.

"What?"
Chapter 63

At last, the tittering doctor found sensation had fully returned to his mouth. He crawled nearer to his dear companion's side on shaky knees. John buried his sweaty ear against a shoulder and chuckled into Sherlock's armpit. He snuggled in close. The couple gulped air. John groped two sticky fingers against his questioner's sculpted lips and traced the line of the satisfied smile. "I think...God. Sherlock...?"

"Hm?"

"I think I might...might have just...maybe...gone a bit...gay."

"Perhaps."

The men sniggered together. Sherlock pulled John's damp skin over his long form. He flatted his long fingers back against the grain of John's hair, spraying a fine mist of sweat into the air. Each minuscule droplet glittered in the brilliant light like a momentary halo of sunrise fog. John poured random little kisses into the clammy skin under his mouth while nimble fingers scrubbed lightly over his scalp. They sighed contentedly.

After ten minutes: "John?"

"Hm?"

"I forbid you from letting me buy that ever again."

The soldier chuckled. He shook his head. "As if anyone can prohibit The Great Sherlock Holmes. Haven't you heard? He's unstoppable."

"Yes...well...you've managed it somehow. Once or twice." Sherlock's finger mapped the jagged cartography where the bullet had exited John's scapula. As he traced the border of the scar, the phrase 'war-torn country' swam suddenly to the surface of the detective's brain. He held his heroic captain tighter and tasted the salt of his golden hair.

"Are you alright, John?"

"Five percent lidocaine doesn't last that long. I've got the feeling back in my face now. I'm fine. You?"

"Yes. Fine. I meant...Are you well, John?"

John clutched Sherlock's rib tighter and began boasting excitedly about his oral sex triumph. He proudly detailed his recent feat, play by play, as if Sherlock had not been there. He rapidly extolled the positive effect of lidocaine on his technique, vowing they would certainly buy more.

John sat up, cross-legged, at his man's side, his hands gesturing emphatically. The doctor's favorable testimonial ended, "Think about this: If you wore condom, yes, and if I avoided applying it to my tongue as much as possible, right, and if you cued me when to do each swallowing, ok, then I could do it just like you and you could enjoy it as well! See? We only need to use condom and it'd be perfect, wouldn't it?"

"Your hypothesis seems sound. However...I do not like condoms. Additionally, that is not what I asked."
The doctor looked shocked, "How do you know you don't like condoms?"

"Experiment. Bored. Nine years back. Highly Unpleasant! Like masturbating into a bin bag! Nearly as desensitizing as that lidocaine if I recall correctly. Not pleasurable, John."

John shrugged. "Nobody likes them. Takes a bit of getting used to. But the strangeness is easily overcome when you're in the thick of it with a partner. It is a bit like that lube, though, makes it last longer."

Sherlock sat up and steepled his long fingers beneath his chin. He looked at their knees for a moment then smiled absently to himself. At last the detective muttered, "Yes...I did note that as well. Until now, when you have applied directly stimulation through various means of physical contact, I've only been able to sustain for very brief intervals. Half a minute at the low end and nearly two minutes at the absolute longest. But...after chemical transference, I'd estimate my endurance was 400-450% longer. Is that, in your experience, comparable to condom?"

John lay his head on his scientist's knee and dangled his legs over the edge of their bed. He idly considered the math. He drew a dexterous hand to his chest and tapped it to make it pet him. "Umm, yes. It's about like that."

They were silent as the detective pondered further. After a long while, he asked softly, "John, was I...did I take too long? Are you—Was I too—"

John smiled up at his beginner. He tisked. "Look at you shamelessly wangling for compliments. Could you be more vain?" He wagged a finger up, "You know what you did! Wumph!" Noisy little kisses hopped from the flaxen-haired man's lips and skipped over Sherlock's palm. John wiggled his eyebrows.

"Yes, all sarcasm aside, it is my understanding that it is proper etiquette for the...the penetrating partner to behave kindly and finish in a timely manner so as not to...uh...wear out his welcome, so to speak."

John stood abruptly. The detective turned, looking up into azure eyes. They held hands while the standing man tried to organize his words.

"Right. Well..." John rocked on his heels. He didn't exactly know what to say. The soldier was great at bawdy talk, jokes, and flippant quips. He was very good at sterile, technical medical speak as well. Physically, he could express his love with ease. But he lacked the vocabulary to adequately vocalize the indescribable, awe-inspiring experience they had shared.

"You know...uh, Sherlock, my dear, <throat clear> when the um, the King, well...when the King returns to his...kingdom, he is...<throat clear>always...welcome."
Chapter Summary

It's good to be King.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The men stared at one another's hands. John continued, his voice steady, "When the King is away, he is missed so dearly, even if it's just for one day. Because he is such a brave, wise and kind King. The need for his return is so great that it's almost unbearable, my dear man. And when the King returns, the hope in the kingdom is that he will stay...as long as he likes. Because that is his birthright as King. It is his absolute right, given by God. And it's so very beautiful, such a privilege, to know the King is sat where he belongs. He is welcomed gladly. Very welcome. Always."

For several minutes, the men were still. The only movement between them was when one or the other would tighten his grip. The warmth spread between them and made their bodies glow brighter than any lumens mankind could create.

The detective sat transfixed by his man's bold speech. His face bore the pensive expression that so often accompanied his long journeys into deep thought.

The genius spent four minutes considering information:

He had only three days experience with partnered sex. The experience was so novel to him that the customary self-confidence, that was ever present in his many areas of considerable expertise, had yet to be established.

The chemist knew from his research that testosterone drove their insatiable lust for one another. The kissing gave them the powerful cocktail of adrenaline, dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin: the exact process of a cocaine high. Post-climax, they rode oxytocin for hours, making them snuggle close and say gushy, rose-tinted things. Last of all, there was the vasopressin which trickled into their blood for days until it would reach its peak. The vasopressin gave them the feeling of devotion that deepened their bond.

Scientifically, Sherlock knew that within three weeks these chemicals would climb to their peak, then plateau, then return to normal levels. This was partially why John did not have relationships that lasted beyond 22 days. Once the hormone crash brought these men back to their original states, it would all be over. That was only biology. One could not deny the patterns of the natural world.

Generally, Sherlock found great comfort in facts. The knowing of a thing always made him feel better than the anxiety of not knowing. But in this instance, the knowing made it all the worse. He had wasted the first eleven days. Now he had precious little time left; about eight days or less, by his estimation.

Obviously his bachelor doctor knew these facts too. John probably knew them more thoroughly,
considering how many times he had been dumped after a few days or weeks. The stubborn ascetic knew resolutely he would not be counted among those who had broken things off with John. When the time came, it would be John who called it all off. It would have to be that way.

Sherlock's plan was to hopefully persuade his dearest friend to remain within their flat after the hormones had run their course. John had been raised Catholic and so the 'eternally binding, sacred union' of marriage was the simplest route to force him to stay. That was the best plan.

If that plan could not be actualized within the next eight days, the back up plan was grave illness. John was a dedicated doctor and would never leave a deeply ill patient...but that would only last until the ruse was discovered or the patient recovered. The master of disguise could probably draw out an illness for two, possibly three, years at most. Something chronic—without any definitive test that could conclusively prove his lie...also possibly foreign because it would most likely be very boring to fake a domestic disease. He was leaning toward Morgellons disease, but he had a few days yet to decide.

Two lesser plans existed, but Sherlock acknowledged both to be ineffective. Years ago the crime-loving detective had seen a wonderfully sensational American film that depicted a highly creative woman keeping the object of her obsession from walking away by use of a skillfully applied sledgehammer. Sherlock did not wish to break both John's legs, but these were desperate times. Unfortunately, the veteran was quite strong-willed and there would inevitably arise some opportunity for John to make an escape. Additionally, the logician did not envision any conceivably scenario in which the escapee would willingly return after such a plan. There was also probably some law thing that prohibited such behavior.

The last and worst plan was pretending John had signed some sort of legally-binding, decades-long flatshare agreement. That would involve coercion of their landlady. Easily done. However Mrs. Hudson was atrocious at sustaining long term fictions. He needed a better plan than that.

Sherlock did not begrudge John their inevitable falling out. It would be understandable. Passion such as this was clearly unsustainable. Entropy was the law of the natural world, after all. It was only the uncertainty of returning to their comfortable status quo friendship that plagued Sherlock's anxious mind.

He hoped they would end up like Mummy and Father when the chemicals dissipated. Two affectionate, loving best friends who chose each day to remain committed to one another. Despite the many tragic hardships that sought to rend their union asunder, The Parents remained steadfastly loyal to one another. Decade upon decade their devotion endured and grew.

Sherlock had once had the grave misfortune, during the onset of puberty, to endure one of Mummy's private chats about sexuality and partnership. Mummy shared her personal experience that committed couples did not always have sexual intercourse on a daily basis, but if the foundation of friendship and mutual respect was strong enough, lovers could still strengthen their partnership through intimate bonding opportunities. He had thankfully been able to purge most that lecture from his mind, yet nauseating echoes of "tantric hot oil massage," "tandem bicycle excursions," and "square dancing" rattled around inside his brain all these years later. What was the statute of limitation on child abuse?

The best personal strategy Father ever shared with the youngest Holmes was to find someone far better than oneself and figure out how to keep her. (Father's second best personal strategy was to always wear a scarf when it was parky: kept the neck warm and could double as a garrote if needs must. Practical advice on both accounts.) Sherlock had known since the poison 'suicides' that he had at last stumbled upon such a companion as Father advised. The question foremost in Sherlock's
mind was now how to keep his man. How?

The balance of probably weighed heavily toward John regretting every sentimental promise shared during this hormone-infused time of passion. They genuinely loved one another and were, even as only two people, a complete family unto themselves. When the end of this phase arrived, perhaps there was a way to overcome the inevitable regret, salvage their fraternal bond and gracefully return to platonic life. There had to be a way. Even if twenty two days was all the physical intimacy they would ever share, Sherlock would be forever grateful for this time. So very grateful.

The detective looked down at their sticky clasped hands and realized he could not, with his limited experience, arrive at a suitable solution on his own. There was but one whetstone for his mind. When solving a particularly vexing case, the most useful thing was to talk it all over with his best friend. So that's what he decided to do.

Sherlock opened his mouth and began slowly. Foremost, he humbly expressed his deep appreciation. He shared his hopes for their long and amicable future. He spoke openly about his immense enjoyment of all John's physical affection. He described, in meticulous detail, sixteen activities that piqued his curiosity. He even admitted his wish to learn the vivid language of salacious narration.

Sherlock added information about his Endocrinology research to frame their discussion in an obliging context. He agreed to behave maturely when the time came to break from this phase. He admitted he was contemplating four plans that might maintain their flatshare, though none were any good. The logician declared his recognition of their caring familial bond and the happiness this brought to his solitary existence. He ended by conveying his need to discuss all this with his very best friend. "...and so, what do you make of all this, my dearest man?"

John listened to every word. Sherlock had a very logical way of presenting his thoughts when he was calm. When on the case, great bursts of energy would flood the detective making him ramble like a methamphetamine addict. After sex, John's man always seemed in good spirits and his thoughts were generally organized, especially if they were cuddling and if he had adequate nicotine in his blood.

John had known this day would come. The time when he would have to stop speaking in poetic metaphor, innuendo and vague truth. This was the challenge he had been mentally training for. The bachelor resisted the urge to wince at the words "phase," "sledgehammer," and "platonic." There was only one person in the world who talked with him in this fashion, so he listened attentively to every word. Challenge accepted.

John replied as calmly and honestly as Sherlock had spoken to him. They had an intimate and frank discussion that went surprisingly well!*

John started by thanking Sherlock for confiding in him. He empathized with how genuinely anxiety-inducing the whole situation could be. He humbly accepted the honour of being called upon in a time of need. He expressed his sincere hope that he could assist but admitted that he was as new to all this as Sherlock was.

John said he was willing, if Sherlock so desired, to consult an actual professional, a book, or Dr. Ella, perhaps. Then he strongly hinted that, while both men were proud to have openly homosexual siblings, perhaps neither sibling was an appropriate choice of adviser. He likened that to asking podiatrists to give orthodontists advice on jaw occlusions.

John immediately agreed that they definitely would try nine of the jaw-dropping suggested activities, he politely asked for further clarification on four more and declined the others as not his
cuppa– rather than immediately judging those remaining three to be beyond mental– and perhaps quite dangerous.

John spoke in precise detail about his plans for their long and happy future as best friends and partners. He reiterated his belief that they needed time to acclimate to their new relationship and correlated the length of time currently needed to the length of time it had taken for them to develop their solid friendship. He then made several requests of his own. John's fourth request was immediately granted and he smiled when Sherlock repeated his first sentence.

Six hours before John was meant to be at surgery, the two men had brokered an accord that consisted of seven parts:

1- There would be absolutely no sledgehammering of extremities. It was indeed illegal.

2- Nine days from now, they would revisit this discussion to find out who would be proved correct and who would be compelled to clear out the bin of ink-covered ears festering on the top shelf of the refrigerator.

3- Although it might be physically possible for two adult men to both fit in the boot of a car together, John truly did not wish to give it a go. No not even if their 'abductor' could be conclusively proven loyal enough to keep his mouth shut afterwards. No it was not one of those not-gay things.

4- The upstairs room should be converted into a study.

5- All the sexual activities were very very good. It was ok to have differing preferences because they were two distinct people. It was ok to need a think before, during or after. It was acceptable and encouraged to change one's mind in the very midst of any act if one was not enjoying oneself.

6- They could both be King. Dyarchy seemed very very good.

7- It would be perfectly fine for both parties to pretend to have unknowingly signed a legally-binding, decades-long, flatshare agreement. Yes of course it was understood that each man must pretend to be oblivious, as that made it hotter.

Chapter End Notes

(You KNOW these two madmen didn't really have 'an intimate and frank discussion that went surprisingly well,' right? Have you met these two? Yeah...remember how SH told the wedding reception he replied to JW asking him to be best man? Yep. That's exactly how they spoke together. That's just what we call humour on this side of the pond.)
Chapter Summary

What Made You Like This?

Countdown: Day +FIFTEEN, -96

"John...John...? John...Good Morning...John..."

Floating within the vagary of sleep, John thought he was nestled in that wonderful, familiar dream. This little hallucination had played over his drowsy brain so many times that he knew the heavenly sequence by heart. He was alone, upstairs in his bed. By some unknown act of providence, the man of his dreams rested beneath his nude body. Every inch of his form rejoiced in the miracle of warm skin on skin. Then came the sanctuary of that hand at long last making contact with his scalp.

The dreamer kept his eyes closed, willing himself not to wake. The bitter anguish of waking alone would come all too soon, but by the grace of God, it might yet be forestalled some precious few seconds longer. Just a few more brief moments of comfort and joy.

His prayer was answered. The hand breezed over his head like late summer wind through ripe fields of wheat. John let his sigh glide away over that gentle current of air. He thanked God for the gift of this dream that was his one solace from all the many terrors that lay siege to his sleep.

This time the dream was so vivid, John thought he could actually taste tobacco. The visceral sensations grew: soft breath against his forehead like a warm sunbeam; gentle rhythm in his ear like a cool ford; balsam scent of woody vetiver grazing his nostrils like newly tilled earth; masculine security enfolding him like a lush meadow. The hand overflowed peace into his heart, restoring his soul. The dream seemed eternal.

"John...John..."

The soldier's reality slowly filtered into the narrow slit of one eyelid. He was not alone on a cold mattress in a spartan room upstairs! John praised God's mercy. He wrapped his arms tightly around the warm torso beneath his chest and squeezed with all his might. He growled a loud exclamation into the tensed diaphragm.

"John! Wait! It's only me!"

The detective winced at his man's powerful hold constricting his ribs. He reached to put a reassuring hand on John, but abruptly held back. He could barely breath through the brawny vice. Sherlock willed himself to sound calm when he croaked out a response.

"John...It's Sherlock. Sherlock *Holmes.*"

The lean man exhaled in relief when the hold slackened. John's drowsy yawn sank into his navel. It was followed by more humid breath from a dreamy mutter into his belly.
"Oh <yawn> Holmes...right. It's that Sherlock. Thought it was one of the other <mighty yawn> dozen Sherlocks I know."

"I'm sorry I startled you. Are you alright? Were you...was it..." The detective whispered, "...the remembering?"

John crawled up his man's side so they were face to face. He showed his broad smile and let his man scan his joyful azure eyes. "It's you. You're here! You've stayed!"

"You requested that I try."

"Mmmmm. Good morning, Sherlock Holmes." They greeted one another with a tender kiss. "Good morning, John."

John rested his fist under his ear and yawned again. His other arm hugged gently and he said, "Thank you for staying, my dear. Sorry I got a bit...<yawn> dramatic." Sherlock tugged his pillow over so they could share. He kissed his soldier softly. His fingertips wrote curlicues over downy skin.

"You were reciting poetry in your sleep again."
"Mm."
"Psalm 23 of the Jerusalem bible I think?"
"Yeah."
"The part where a herdsman makes his guest camp at the bottom of his garden."

A sleepy smile spread over John's handsome face. When he tasted stale tobacco in Sherlock's palm, he chuckled, "You snuck off I think."

"Perhaps," the raven-haired man changed subjects and asked about the 'poem,' though he knew all too well.

So many nights, the floor boards overhead reverberated with the harsh violent sounds of a skip being tipped at a landfill site. Then, after many breathless minutes, one could here the desperate recitation of that poem. An anguished plea, endlessly chanted into the desolate predawn dark. The bone-chilling entreaty beseeched a disdainful Omnipotent to deliver the sufferer to a place of pastoral serenity.

Innumerable nights, Sherlock had stood in the stairwell, chin tucked to his chest, long hands clasped behind his back, counting the treads, watching the floor. His own silent lips moving in sync with his flatmate's recitations. The inconsolable words spilling down the banister, crashing at his feet.

At first the detective would simply vacate their flat to give privacy. But after several months he felt compelled, for some reason, to stay. He knew proper etiquette demanded they never acknowledge these weekly occurrences. A man must never be pitied, never emasculated— especially not in his own home. Yet the compulsion to be on guard for his valiant fusilier was too great to feign indifference.

Sometimes Sherlock played Howard Goodall's instrumental hymn as accompaniment to John's pleas. Some nights, the violinist felt acutely useful when the song lulled the fitful man upstairs into a peaceful sleep. Other nights, the violinist felt unbearably cruel when the tune only seemed to propel the sleeper back into the same torturous remembering. Never in his life had the pragmatist felt his hands to be so hopelessly, futilely empty as on those nights.

In their bed, John shook off sleep and sat up on his elbow. He knew what Sherlock was asking.
The soldier tried to reassure, "I'm fine. It was a dream not a memory. A very good dream about a very good man." John smoothed his hand over his partner's tangled umber curls. He remembered their sixth and most dangerous agreement from last night. He decided to trade: a truth for a truth.

"My mother..." John blew out a breath. He found the security he needed in those pastel eyes. "Right. Well...Mum insisted on us saying our prayers before bed. She...was a bit of a stickler. It was always The Lord is My Shephard."

Both men knew Sherlock had researched absolutely every biographical fact about his flatmate. John's parents were dead. John's mother was born in Moss Side, Manchester, late spring, 1958. Her young parents met at the Royal Brewery, where they worked until their deaths in 1985 and 1992. When she met John's father in 1974, the newlyweds lived in his hometown of Blackheath on the Lewisham side. After her death in 1985, John's father moved his two children to the Greenwich side. The few images of her that existed revealed she had looked very much like her daughter Harriet, so much so that it was exceedingly difficult to distinguish photographs of one woman from the other without consulting the dates on the backs. John never ever spoke of her.

The doctor's bravery was rewarded with a very nice cuddle that made him feel a bit bolder. As the men had discussed only hours ago, one possible explanation for John's lack of relationship longevity might be related to what Dr. Ella termed 'trust issues.'

(John had informed his man, "Probably very true. But for the record, not all them ended after 22 days or less, thank you very much, condescending madman!" They had agreed then moved on to planning their accord.)

Dr. Ella's assessment of her patient was not just 'probably very true' but actually extremely accurate.

John was excellent at pulling. He could be quite a charmer: witty, confident, romantic, and always letting his quarries feel they were in charge. He was excellent at sexual satisfaction, as well: attentive, creative, enthusiastic, generous... of course, being well-endowed was a nice bonus. Additionally, he knew damned well he was a great catch: doctor, decorated war hero, no divorces, no children, shamelessly monogamous and not too hard on the eyes. However, he had this very cunning habit of playing the role of 'good listener' or 'supportive boyfriend.'

At first, his lovers relished his nurturing 'strong-silent-gentleman' behavior. However, as time went on (or as Sherlock put it 'as mating hormone levels attenuated') many lovers began to ask him questions of a personal nature, especially as he got older. With each relationship, there always came a tipping point where the novelty waned and lovers became very keen to know exactly who their new boyfriend was, especially as they got older and craved committed partners to settle down with.

And that's how it always fell apart for John. The end usually started with gentle prodding hints:

-You're so mysterious! Let's both say what we're thinking at the same time! One...two...three...<evade with a compliment>

-I was talking with my friend and it occurred to me that I've never met your family. You've met my kin, I'd love to meet yours. <evade with vague promise>

-You've never been married and you're X years old, how did such a nice man like you avoid tying the knot for this long? <evade with great sex>
-You poor thing! I can't even imagine what you must have been through! You know I'm here for you if you ever need to talk about your nightmares. <EVADE!>

Near the end, the hints always morphed into tearful, shouted lamentation:

-Why won't you let me in?
-Where is this going?
-Don't you trust anyone?
-Why are you even with me?
-How can I be with a man I know nothing about?
-What's the worst that could happen if you talk to me?

Generally, this was the safest place to bow out and make a hasty exit. But there were times John desperately held on until the bitter end because he was simply not strong enough to endure the loneliness of his own company. Sometimes he could forestall the inevitable with grand romantic gestures: holidays to New Zealand or Dublin, agreeing to walk her dog, begging. He knew from the glares, the tears and the disappointed looks that the breaking had begun in earnest. He knew he ought try to connect, try to engage, try to be better. But his stubborn mouth never conceded a single word. He stayed mute, relying on the heuristic method, and soon they answered their own questions.

When he was finally given his P45, the laments always became full-volume accusations brimming with profound honesty:

-You're never going to say anything remotely real!
-I don't know a damned thing about you!
-I'll never be the person you confide in!
-I thought we had something special but this is going nowhere!
-You're afraid to let anyone in!
-Lying bastard!

Endless cycle. Most of John's adult life.

John snuggled closer to his man. He thought of remarking on the time, perhaps claiming he wanted to get an early start at surgery. He considered promising to explain after they met Lestrade tonight. He tried to come up with a dirty joke involving sheep herders and the word 'camp.' Sherlock touched his chin. His dear friend gave him an out, "Are you due in today?"

John tilted his lips down to the fingertips. He replied, "I don't really remember much about my mum. Thirty years ago...long time. But some things are so easy to remember because she did them so often. She had a nice sunny voice, or at least that's how I remember her. Slow, clear, never shrill. She had this thing about mumbling not being class. She was very Roman Catholic. Had it all memorized, chapter and verse. She was proud of that. She could recite it all. But not like a robot, very...personal. I used to think she was telling about people she knew; things that happened when she was my age. I remember thinking how amazing it must have been to have seen real camels!"

John laughed at the memory. His eyes sparkled a deep cobalt blue. "I was only little! All adults seemed so old." He sighed wistfully. "I used to think the minder was probably old enough to have met Moses! But now that I think back, she was probably only between our ages."

Sherlock smiled and agreed with the storyteller, "Yes, I thought Father was related to Winston Churchill until I was six! He quotes the man constantly. 'The Right Honourable, Sir Winston
Leonard Spencer-Churchill. 'Absolute Tedium! Father is not at all a Conservative but Grandfather was. Very much so. Father adored Grandfather. And Grandfather idealized Churchill. So it all goes round in sentimental circles of admiration until one's children are extremely confused about history! I've tried to delete it but it's as you said: so habitual that the memory is readily recalled!"

They laughed together at the absurdity of being young, of getting old. Sherlock asked, "What did your mother say about knowing camels?"

"I don't remember. I'm not sure I asked her, actually. I sort of decided it was a fact and probably never asked. But before you go saying I was an idiot, you should know she was very good at reciting. Very good. She...had this lovely way...of quoting that made it all seem so...so real, so true. I felt certain there truly was a nice green pasture somewhere just as she said. A gorgeous, comfy place to relax, have a lie down in the sun. I remember how she told it at bedtime...made you feel...good: safe and happy. Good dreams. Very nice." He sighed.

John was on his back, staring far away, beyond the ceiling. A thin smile played on his lips. Sherlock crept his hand along his dearest's fuzzy chest and bumped the top his lean fingers against John's fingernail. John hinged his palm up off his chest to make a space for his man's hand beneath his own. Sherlock wedged his long arm fully under John's. He gave a light pull. John rolled back to face his man. Sherlock brushed his doctors hair and smiled back. He courageously asked, "A trade for a trade?"

John curled himself down into his gentle partners arms and was held securely. He nuzzled the top of his head beneath the angular chin. "This is my trade. I'm good."

The doctor was abruptly thrown aside. Sherlock knelt near his man's ribs and flattened his palms into John's sternum as if attempting cardiopulmonary resuscitation. He pressed his forehead over the backs of his hands and spoke, "No, John. A trade for a trade. As agreed: Not the 1919 Act. Roman consuls! A trade for a trade." The tall man's tenor voice was straining, almost pleading.

John laid a hand on his detective's head. He asked, "I'm vetoed, then?"

The detective looked a bit repentant to be issuing a veto so soon. He made his tone more accommodating when he replied. "Yes. I...I veto. Trade, John," he hastily added, "Please. A fair trade, as agreed." Sherlock sat back on his knees and declared, "The king may know anything he likes. What is your trade, King mine?"
Chapter Summary

Why are you so alone?

Obviously it's Study in Scarlet bc I could not resist.

John hesitated. Cold doubt began to supersede the warmth where Sherlock had lain against his skin only moments ago. The five word question flew to the forefront of his thoughts. One question, three permutations. The one Question that weighed like a great boulder at the bottom of a very steep hill.

The doctor had wanted to know from the very beginning. Since their first introduction at Dr. Molly's lab. The way Mike had cautiously hedged on their walk over, saying "You mustn't blame me if you don't get on with him, John," he had added, "I only know him from when he shows up at the lab. Just remember you proposed I bring you round, so you must not hold me responsible."

The way Sally warned the veteran off from associating with his new potential flatmate. The way Mycroft scoffed at the idea of Sherlock having friends. The way Greg had confessed that he and Sherlock had worked together for five years, yet still the detective was almost entirely unknown to him. The way Sherlock's youthful face wore those cold, brooding eyes.

Once the flatmates had settled into cohabitation, John had become more and more curious with each passing day. The doctor had tried to break through one facet of the great mystery during their first dinner at Angelo's. John had lain awake for hours that night pondering over their short conversation. He had endeavored to draw his own deductions from that fledgling chat. John's conclusion had been that Sherlock perhaps enjoyed 'one night stands' or maybe casual 'arrangements' with men.

Sherlock certainly wasn't going to share personal information outright. That was plainly obvious from the reticence which Sherlock showed on all topics that concerned himself.

Initially, John guessed his flatmate kept silent simply because Sherlock might presume others possessed some of his innate ability to read people. Maybe Sherlock thought that people could learn what they needed from scanning him as he did to them.

So many times, during their first months together, John had tried to employ the detective's own methods against him. Yet the soldier had been, for the most part, fairly unsuccessful in deducing his flatmate. John had enumerated in his own mind all the various points where Sherlock was exceptionally well-informed. He had even gone so far as to carry a little notebook to jot down what he observed. Each night, the lonely veteran would lay in his bed upstairs and look over his notes. For some reason, he could not help smiling at the document when he had completed it.

It ran in this way --

SHERLOCK HOLMES -- SmartArse.

1. Literature. -- Only the death stuff.
2. Philosophy. -- Death stuff.
3. Astronomy. -- Can distinguish sun from moon. Knows this is planet Earth. Might be an alien from another galaxy.
4. Politics. -- Feeble.
5. Botany. -- Variable. Well up in belladonna, coca plants, opium poppies, and loads of other drugs/poisons generally. Dislikes nature programmes and killed my therapy houseplant 'as an experiment.'
6. Geology. -- Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils. After walks has shown me muck on his trouser hems, and told me by colour and consistence what part of London he's been splashing about. Collects geodes, gems and mineral rocks. Referred to diamonds as 'useless apart from their industrial purposes.'
7. Chemistry. -- Profound.
9. Sensational Media. -- Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in history. Loves horror/suspense genre. Especially loves spoiling the endings of films for others by deducing the killer after only minutes. Loves gruesome news stories. Swears he knows identity of Jack the Ripper. Wishes Frankenstein's creature was real. Believes in archenemies.
10. Arts--Loves posh music. Plays the violin beautifully. Attends opera, ballet, LSO, musical theater, West End often. Disdains most popular music and insists I wear headphones to listen to my music. Loves posh art, especially live theatrical oddities and museums after hours. Deceptive arts: drama queen, con artist, impersonator, and grifter.
11. Fighter--Fencing & Judo certified (since Uni.) Agile, strong, perfect right cross, great in a scrap. Attends Boxing, Martial Arts bouts.
12. Has decent practical knowledge of British criminal law, not tort law.
13. Food--Variable. Cooking nil. Knows great restaurants. Decent at food shopping, but generally too lazy to go, pretends to forget list to avoid being asked to go, must text him list each time.

When John had got so far in his list, he threw it into the fire in despair. "It's all true, but it has fuck all to do with the man's private life. When I put all these bits together, all I know is that he's highly intelligent; is accustomed to servants, a spouse or a caregiver maybe; massive work ethic in his unpaid job as consulting detective; recreational drug user and public school madman. What social life encompasses all those interests?" John had thought to himself, "I may as well give up the attempt at once."

In the early time of their cohabitation, the lonely, unemployed veteran often played a scenario in his mind of how he might gain insight about his new flatmate. He would maybe come down to their kitchen one morning to find some stranger half-dressed in Sherlock's clothes. Always in John's mind the man would be a casual sex partner, never a life partner. Always John envisioned the stranger to be in that dark purple top. No matter how the imaginary guy manifested in John's little scenario, the bloke was always rife with characteristics that reflected private details about Sherlock.

Maybe the guy would wear a wedding ring. The provided deduction being Sherlock liked 'no strings' affairs. Maybe the fellow would show signs of recent drug use. Deduction: Sherlock liked getting high with one-nighters to blow off steam. Maybe the fuckbuddy would be a regal foreign diplomat or a massive international celebrity. Deduction: Sherlock had an ongoing undercover arrangement that was too juicy for the press. John must have conjured up hundreds of different men and thousands of different potential deductions.

But no stranger ever appeared.

The soldier was not a busybody, he just didn't have a life back then. Because of his post-war...
struggles, he'd shoved everyone he knew away. John's funds were so low he didn't dare waste a penny going out. His moods were so bleak he didn't dare subject others to his foul company. He'd built up a wall with repeated requests to be given his 'space.' So his mobile never rang and his schedule was always bare. His sister and his mates knew better than to come round. How else could John break the monotony he had imposed on his daily existence? In those days, his secretive flatmate was really his only other source of amusement besides telly.

After a couple of months, John was on the point of asking Sherlock what his private life might be like, but again something in the other man's eyes cautioned that the great question would be an extremely unwelcome invasion. It was clear that when there was no case, both men were equally alone. John knew why his own life was so empty. He knew why he chose to be alone. But why was his flatmate's life the same? The isolated blogger was so keen to learn the details. Yet how would John have felt if Sherlock suddenly began pestering him about his own situation? God no! Not good. So the doctor had kept his mouth tightly shut and respected their stalemate.

Again one month later, John had an opportunity of asking Sherlock a point blank question, and again his delicacy prevented him from forcing another man to confide in him. What was the history between Sherlock and the pompous banker Sebastian? There was something there beyond old school chums taking the piss outta one another. Something vicious in their past. It was evident from Sherlock's contemptuous interaction with the snide tycoon. The doctor could tell that the shrewd detective was aware John wanted to learn that history. John imagined at the time that Sherlock had some strong reason for not alluding to it. Maybe a national secret? Maybe something darker? John had again decided it was best not to ask.

By then John had secured a position. He had more money coming in, so he could socialize in expensive London once more. His health was improved; self-esteem elevated. He was dating again, hanging out with his mates again, reaching out to his sister again. He even made new friends, went on holidays, had wild adventures, gained fans and clients on his blog. The damned inbox was always full. The bloody phone never stopped chiming. His calendar was so engaged he sometimes had actual scheduling conflicts. John suddenly had a life again! A life so rich and complex and full to the point of bursting.

Who was to thank for this great teeming bounty of life? The friend who had shown him how to shake off that limp. There was a worthless aluminum crutch in the back of his closet upstairs that testified to the true life-changing power of the man he loved! That was the instant John decided he and Sherlock Holmes would work cases together forever. A man could spend his whole life trying to repay a blessing like that. And that's precisely what John intended to do! He could shoot one thousand poisoners and face down one billion kilos of C4 and still never come halfway near succeeding in repayment of his debt to the man who gave him the means to live his life once more.

Now they were lovers and to John it was beyond good. He finally had the opportunity to demonstrate how much he loved Sherlock. John had felt this way for so long that he'd had plenty of time to adjust. He thought he was being very obvious about his feelings. Additionally, John had hoped that perhaps Sherlock could just sort of do that scanning thing on him and know in an instant.

Several times in the past fortnight, John had thought his man had done just that. There were moments where the great man's eyes would catch fire and he'd smile sagely as if he knew it all. But it was becoming more apparent that Sherlock was really only getting glimpses.

As the men had discussed last night, the detective was not a mind reader! Sherlock's observational skills didn't work very well on a man who had spent most of his life honing his powers of evasion. The way John and Harry had grown up after Mum died had made them both extremely good liars,
manipulators and pretenders. So, if John wanted his partner to genuinely know him, he would have to actively speak words like a big boy. Even for a dyed-in-the-wool Adrenaline Junky, that was terrifying!

On this morning, in their bed, Sherlock was actually offering to honor the accord they had negotiated after hours of frank discussion. The recluse seemed to genuinely want to trade a truth for a truth. But the great truth John wanted was clearly too large to equal the revelation he had just shared. Too large to fit the hour and a half before he was due in to surgery. There was a nagging whisper in the pit of John's stomach that warned he was better off not knowing. Warned he might not like the bald truth. Or worse still: he might ask and Sherlock might not answer. Their tentative agreement might fall apart on the spot, leaving them to the mercy their own stubborn egos until the hormones dispensed with the rest.

John fought the cowardly, devious What Ifs. He focused his mind on the reality of what had actually occurred. It had felt so wonderful to speak openly about his mother's memory. He never did that. Ever.

The roof had not caved in. No one had pitied him. His secret truth had been accepted, not just understood but celebrated. Sherlock should have the same opportunity to experience that powerful joy! John would not deny his man that opportunity.

There must be a way to parcel out the great question into more manageable bites. The world's only consulting detective had once explained, of a case, "When the facts slowly evolve before your own eyes and the mystery clears gradually away, each new discovery furnishes a step which leads on to the complete truth." Yes! Such a clever man! They had a lifetime to chip away at the intimidating boulder and carry it uphill together as mere pocketfuls of gravel.

John put his hand under Sherlock's angular chin. The doctor used his other hand to strip his identity chain from his neck. He lassoed it over Sherlock's long neck. They shared a smile. John asked casually, "Where did you sneak off to while I was sleeping?" His partner smiled broadly and kissed him.

Sherlock licked his lower lip. His happy grin became mischievous. "Easily answered. You may even be a bit dispirited when you see, John."

Still grinning, the mysterious logician lead his partner from their bed. He opened the bedroom door and swept his long arm out into the hallway.

"After you."
Chapter 67

Chapter Summary

Two Men In Love. The King is Fed, Long Live the King!

The table in the sitting room was set for two, laid out like an editorial spread for an *Olive* magazine photo shoot. The mouthwatering aroma of fatty smoked meat made John's empty stomach rumble. As if faced with an impossible mirage, the doctor hazarded a tentative poke at the table linen. Still disbelieving, he pinched a buttery yellow petal, sending two more cascading gracefully onto the edge of a plate below. He brought one pleated delicate petal beneath his nose to slowly trace his upper lip.

The raven haired man stepped behind his spellbound partner and wound his arms around his waist. Sherlock rested his chin on John's shoulder and swayed them gently as they surveyed the breakfast setting together. The doctor turned his head to express how beautifully the setting was laid. Sherlock kissed him. John secured his hand up and behind his partner's head to extend their kiss.

The doctor turned fully into his lover's arms. John searched Sherlock's eyes for a long time.

He cautiously asked, "Apology?"
Sherlock shook his head. He smiled, "Sit. Eat while it's still hot."

John sat when his detective held out a wooden chair. His thick thumb traced the bowl of a fine silver spoon in slow circles as if he could smudge the reflected light dancing in the hollow. "I've never had breakfast by candlelight," he confided softly to the cutlery. He looked up to tell his man. The standing man's eyes swirled with golden light like midday sun winking through afternoon clouds. All John's breath rushed out of his lungs. He was glad to be sitting or the floor would have found him in that instant.

A saucer moved into his broad right hand. Then Sherlock gently tugged his left wrist down, saying, "Don't hide it, John. I like your smile."

John blushed into his plate. He nudged his knuckles over the large yellow petals like wrinkled crepe tissue on the edge of his plate. Their delicate soft texture felt like Sherlock's sleeping eyelids. John's gaze floated back up to the cloud skies and he said, "I like your *everything*."

They ate breakfast with the tall man fitted into John's right side, perched on one of his knees. One worked the fork while the other aided with the knife. It was the most delicious coronation breakfast the new king had ever tasted: grilled bone marrow, ripe berries, trotter baked beans, marmalade *earlobe*, roasted tomatoes, prickly *jaw stubble*, strong coffee, broiled flat mushrooms the size of his palms, clotted cream *fingertips*, black pudding, short rib bubble n squeak, tea flavored *lips*, fried eggs, porridge with fat juicy sultans, smoked bacon chops, mouthfuls of toasty exchanges that began "I like your..."
John sat on the toilet lid, looking up to the ceiling while the blade skated up over his chin in long masterful glides. Sherlock squinted thoughtfully, deep in concentration as his dexterous hand swiveled his man's skull on its axis. John watched the light play off the sharp edge and reflect white slashes against the pale stern face. The single razor moved like a painter's palette knife as it subtracted layers of thick froth from cheeks, throat, jaw, neck. The artist scrutinized his work and made a funny face. John mirrored his partner's mouth, wrapping his lips over his teeth. The blade slide down his philtrum like a glancing whisper. While the warm damp flannel dispensed with the last traces of lather, Sherlock asked, "So, have you thought of your trade?"

John had forgotten. He surveyed his smooth face as the aftershave stung his skin like a subzero wind. They smiled at one another in the mirror. Each man looked away at the same time when it became instantly clear how much the pair desperately wanted to turn the moment into last night's mirror show. The air in the little room crackled with dense static that made their arm hairs raise on end. Sherlock cleaned shaving soap from boar bristles. John turned to the tub.

"Well, Right...Have I...ever seen you high?" The doctor quickly made his question as specific as possible to avoid lies of omission centered around the definition of 'seen.' "Have you ever been on recreational drugs while we have shared this flat?"

"No."
"Never?"

Sherlock grabbed John's shoulders and whirled him quickly round with such sudden force that the soldier tipped sideways as he turned. The logician steadied them. His long fingers dug into his man's biceps. "I am clean!"

Reflexive. An instantaneous assertion, shouted hundreds of times. Sometimes quite true, more often not.

Sherlock halted abruptly. He let go, stepped well back. His molars worried the tip of his tongue. *Truth for a truth.* "Um, I- You should know, John, that I am...aware of my mercurial moods and how that might look to another person. The fits of energy; the silence for days on end. I was in the...habit of...self medicating and experimenting but I've stopped all that for some time now." He leaned back against the basin, crossed ankle over ankle and folded his hands. In a softer, slower voice he repeated, "I am clean, John."

"Good."

John stepped closer. With great care, he arranged Sherlock's hands back against his biceps. The doctor settled his palms onto his man's thighs and pressed forward. The strength in each man's upper body tensed as they provided increasing counter-pressure to the other's force. John rocked slowly back, easing the strain. Then again he pressed slowly forward, rocking slightly up on the pads of his feet, building their resistance. He repeated his languid exercise, flexing and relaxing the cushion of air between them in slow, deliberate waves. They became two magnets electrifying smooth cycles of attraction and repulsion, as their eyes tethered them together.

On a backward pull, John said, "You should tell me if that ever ceases to be the case." As he pushed forward, Sherlock told him, "Yes."

The pair continued their strange exercise a few repetitions more. John said, in his most nonchalant
tone, "...Or you could tell me before."
"Yes.
"Because I don't want another flatmate."
"Yes."

"You're clean." John confirmed the statement with a smile. He articulated the fact proudly, understanding the significance of the achievement.
Sherlock smiled back. He confirmed, with equaled pride, "I'm clean."

On John's next press forward, Sherlock gripped his upper arms tighter. The muscles flexed as the arms tried to push away again. The detective pulled until his own forearms strained and John's hands were digging through to his femurs. Sherlock uncrossed his ankles and planted his feet on the outsides of John's.

"Thank you for asking." For understanding. For caring. For being John. Sherlock scooted back, resting more of his weight on the cold edge. He tipped up on the ball of one foot and rubbed his other knee up and down the outside of his man's fuzzy thigh.

John said, "Thank you, my dear." The standing man allowed himself be drawn nearer. They bowed their heads together, pressing close to conspire again as they'd done before bed hours ago. John confided, "I like you clean. It suits you."

"Yes. Me too." And the natural-born liar was surprised to find he meant the statement, wholeheartedly. The truth emboldened him. Sherlock further confessed, "Although, to answer your first question, you have seen me high many times, you know."

John understood. His body began to stir like the dawn growing through the window. "Yes, I know. Me too, my dear man. Many times. Every time. Always."

Sherlock smooth his fingers over the newly soft velvet of his lover's handsome face. He closed his eyes, uploading every contour through his fingerprints and the bridge of his nose. Down the hall, their empty bed beckoned with the whispered rustle of air through leafless woodlands. The long pale leg wrapped tighter around the downy thigh. A strong hand found pliable skin along the nape. One or both men made the sigh of storm clouds at the edge of a distant blizzard.

The barometric pressure dropped, compressing their ears drums. John inhaled the scent of toasted grain from behind his man's teeth. He inched his mouth nearer, tilting his head to the left. He swallowed another breath of sugared coffee that mingled with the black currant flavor clinging to his tastebuds. Sherlock exchanged another deep fragrant breath with him and men became dizzy together. The encroaching storm threatened lightening behind the whites of their eyes.

John gorged himself on every succulent flavor he could extract from the sculpted mouth. Sherlock's own gluttonous appetite was barely satiated by his partner's fatty, cured taste. He wound his arms and legs tighter as they built their kiss. Beyond the doorway, the fibers of the hearth rug forecasted like reeds and rushes, murmuring the replay of 2am where time had collapsed into a loop of kinetic exertion.

John scooped the lean form up into his hungry hands. The indentation of the washbasin had carved its wide smile line across the taught haunches in his grip. The tile extended the couple's shared sonar. The traveller became temporarily confused by their overlapping sound waves like the howl of winter winds bouncing over a whiteout valley. He trudged left, then right, then the wall suddenly shifted out of nowhere to prolong his starvation. The Need announced itself like a heap of icy snow hurdling from a rooftop into the greedy pavement far below.
Simultaneously they turned to listen to their silent flat susurrate with the innumerable secret pleasures of flesh with flesh. From every corner, seam, and bolt, spilled the muffled echoes of previous love memories. The breakfast table whispered tidings that its surface was sufficiently well built. The hollow expanse of the tub invited the couple to once again trust its sturdiness. The door jamb vowed the same assistance. The bathmat bristled its proven reliability. The sofa coils hissed with yearning to shelter them from the pending storm. Even the untested mattress upstairs pledged to assist them. Of all the loyal contenders vying to abet the lovers, the trill of a meddlesome wristwatch won out in the end.

John fetched his man an accusatory glare as if Sherlock had preplanned the intrusion. The detective clawed at the nosy device, flinging it into the hall and away from John's ear. "Wait! Please!" The doctor's mind cleared and he began to chuckle. He tapped the back his skull against the wall. He sighed and loosed his grip.

John shoved Sherlock's chest, half playful, half frustration. "Well done you."

The detective shoved his man back. John grabbed his hand and held it against his lips while he looked to his own wrist. The doctor shook his head with a little smile. "Thirty minutes."

Sherlock's shoulders fell, he turned to leave the bath so his punctual soldier could finish his morning routine. He was abruptly seized by the nape and brought down to his knees. His mouth watered as he watched John's thumb tap over his cockhole. He hastily intercepted, flicking his tongue between to snap the viscous thread of clear fluid connecting the two. He cleaned John's thumb then claimed his cockhead. He teased shallowly until John's smile turned severe.

Sherlock wanted to earn his title as resident cocksucker in less than three minutes. He laced his long fingers through the hand in his dark tresses and secured his other arm around John's hips. He kept his cyan eyes focused upward. The standing man bent from his core and struggled to remain upstanding, bracing himself against the kneeler's shoulder. He pumped his hips forcefully. Sherlock grabbed a handful of his man's flexing gluteal muscles. They worked his throat together. Almost there.

"Cum with me, sweetheart. Let me have it." Under surmounting pressure, Sherlock gave up on including his man's sac in the process. The faster he stroked his own cock, the louder John begged until suddenly his whispered plea morphed into a one word command. "Cum!" His hips thrust forward off the wall and they obeyed his order together.

It was the first time Sherlock had taken John's cum in his mouth. He was unprepared for the sudden force. Much more difficult than down his throat. His sinuses burned when it sloshed up into his nasal cavity. Sherlock tried to keep his mouth tight despite his inflated cheeks. Yet the hot fluid slopped out of his lips. Don't bite down. He began to panic. But when he brought his hand up to
help seal his lips, his own handful of cum only served to further complicate his predicament. He succeeded in smearing more over his nostrils. He started to choke. *Think!* He clutched at the hand in his hair to steady himself. The logician stubbornly fought his addled mind's suggestion that he spit it all out. *Never!*

John's voice said, "Swallow." *Oh. Obviously.*

John was face to face with him in an instant. He patted Sherlock's back to help. "Oh God! Are you alright? What's happened, my dear man?" He pushed a flannel into the pale hand.

Sherlock tried to reassure but he suddenly sneezed a great volume of semen into his partner's face. John flinched. His face exploded into total shock.

John gently plucked the cloth back and dabbed at his blonde eyelashes. When John opened his eyes, Sherlock looked like a hyperextended umbrella shredded by a high wind. The doctor bit his lip. He cleared his throat. In one long lick, John lapped cum off his man's throat all the way to his right nostril. Without a word, he reached back and opened the shower taps.

John mopped soap over Sherlock's chest as he smiled up at him. The doctor asked cautiously, "If anyone were to laugh, would your straight razor find them in their sleep, my dear?"

"Perhaps."
Chapter 68

Chapter Summary

Hollow man, Case of identity, in the event of a Fire...BBC John locumming, Stella from John's blog...yep the 'Stella & Ted' one.

(By the by, I do realize white doctor overcoats are now outlawed by NHS since '09 but this is fiction, old sport. Dinner?)

John did not laugh until he was at surgery, well away from the barber of Baker Street. Suddenly, Dr. Stella poked her fluffy head around his door and said, "What's so funny then? Did you see Graham, too?"

The locum doctor swiveled his chair from the window. He scrubbed his smile. He tried to look interested in the brunette gossip's latest tale. His fingers could not stop smoothing his shave. "Uh, no. Haven't seen him yet. What is it today?"

In a frantic conspiratorial hiss, the thin woman relayed their elder colleague's latest fashion faux pas, "Lime green mini, fishnets." Her hands made dramatic chopping gestures with each hissed syllable. Big green eyes full of absolute glee. She stepped into his room and perched on the edge of John's desk. She continued her strained whisper. "Sarah and Shiro said he's got his belly piercing peeking out again!" She gave a brisk little squeal, tisked and shook her head.

Tuesdays were nearly as slow as Wednesdays. Barely two patients an hour, if they were lucky. For the insatiable OK! mag addict, it was hell. Dr. Stella had an obnoxious need to sleuth great mysteries such as:

-who nicked her yoghurt cup from the communal fridge (no one)
-who was happier than her and Ted (everyone)
-who drank the last cup of coffee without brewing more (varied)
-who'd been gossiping about her (literally no one because she was just that dull!)

The wiry doctor's hobbies were: waxing poetic about her darling husband Ted, doing hours of cardio, and judging other people's private lives.

When John and Sarah had been an item, it had been as if they'd decided to date just to provide Stella with entertainment. John vaguely suspected Stella as the culprit behind that vicious rumor that he and Sarah had been having a tawdry affair behind his live-in boyfriend's back. Sarah had thankfully proclaimed that to be wildly untrue. Bless her for that! Dr. Stella was an exceptional physician but she was a dreadfully dull human being.

Suddenly three more employees appeared through John's door, sneaking in with snickering giggles. The pudgy head nurse spoke to Dr. Stella then he looked at John, "Did you tell him, Stel?"

Dr. Sarah leaned back against the closed door and crossed her arms. All four were looking at John in anticipation. The newest doctor immediately put up both broad hands. He shook his head emphatically, "No. No I can't."
Dr. Vijay stepped forward and, in a low hush, urged, "Come now, Doctor, you must! Tis a task for you alone, it is. You've rapport with him, man! Soldiers, both. Come man, do you not hear duty call to you?"

Dr. Stella and Nurse Shiro began whispering urgently to John at the same time. "You simply must!" They exchanged a look and Dr. Stella continued, "Doctor, we all concur. You've been chosen. We followed your first plan. To no avail, I might add! In he comes, fresh off holiday, same rude state. It's not proper. Not in the least! You're the only one, darling. We've all tried. Pardon my frank assertion, but this is no time to mince words: There will never be a white smock long enough to hide today's mess!"

John wheeled his chair back from his desk and continued to shake his head. He crossed his arms over his chest and set his azure eyes to the back of the pack, to the only one of them he actually sort of trusted. He looked directly at Dr. Sarah and asked, "Your assessment, Doctor?"

Dr. Sarah stepped up to the very edge of John's desk. She combed her long auburn hair down one shoulder and smoothed the ends against her white coat. It was clear she was trying not to smile. She looked at John's coffee mug and slowly relayed the feelings of the entire staff. "As you know, Doctor, before you began locumming here, we each had a run at Dr. Graham- physicians and nurses all- first, one on one chats, then as a group. But, as you know, he dismisses every conversation as ignorant bullying. An NHS surgery is not the appropriate setting for—"

"'Fuck Me Boots!' That's what they're called! On a Tuesday, no less! Like a disco tart," Dr. Stella interrupted.

Dr. Sarah and Nurse Shiro each quickly put a hand on the gossip to shut her up. "Well they are!"

Four voices went "Shhhhh!" all at once. John set his elbows on the surface and glared at the loudmouth.

Dr. Stella quickly stepped behind Nurse Shiro and pressed her hands together tightly to keep her lips buttoned. She squeezed her eyes shut and nodded at the floor.

Dr. Vijay hid his laugh by biting his fist. He pressed his roster to his chest and pretended to read the anatomy chart on the left wall. Curiously, Nurse Shiro found the chart just as intriguing, despite the fact that every room in the building had the exact same illustrations.

Dr. Sarah cleared her throat with a petite squeak. She planted her heels shoulder length apart and opened her white coat. She began cataloging her outfit to illustrate. "John, you know all that we want is sensible attire that befits the work setting. We are meant to be doctor's, John: people the public can view as trustworthy professionals. Plain, collared tops, minimal jewelry and paints, standard hygiene, conservative frocks and reasonable footwear. Off hours, no one gives a toss. You know that. But when on duty, we must hold ourselves to a higher standard." She let her coat fronts hang down. The three faces around her were all nodding at John.

John cradled the side of his head in the L of index and thumb for a long moment while he considered. Privately, Sarah had explained Graham's recent wardrobe changes several times. They both knew her little speech was meant to set example for the others on how to frame the discussion appropriately and professionally. She was really the best choice to sit down with their senior colleague. Which she had done two months after John's arrival. As she told it, the chat had been 'Unsuccessful, Full Stop.'

John surveyed his own dress, then noted the others in his room. Sarah was correct: conservative.
Dark denim? Of course, but no holes. Bright colors? Yes, but midriffs and thighs covered. He and the Scotsman wore jumpers with regularity. Nurse Shiro and the two female doctors sometimes wore touches of eyeliner or blousy tops. The women nearly always wore beauty paints in neutral tones, applied with a light hand.

Of the five people in his room, John counted three earrings, the little ones that didn't dangle. Two pair clean trainers, one pair white clogs, one pair low heels, one pair brown wingtips with a frayed lace tip. One solid colored tshirt, three button tops, one floral shift. Trousers, jeans, trousers, navy tights, tan tights, pencil skirt slightly above knees. Two suit jackets, two wool cardigans—one that might possibly have a smudge of Sherlock's semen crusted on the underside of the left cuff, or was it a milk splash? Mustn't taste it now.

Sherlock...there was a person who dressed appropriately, despite not having a paid job. Well-tailored trousers that hid long, creamy athletic muscle. He looked so regal in charcoal grey. Especially that pair with the pinstripes that made his strong legs seem to go on for miles. Or those greenie-grey trousers he wore last summer that made his fit bottom look like Michelangelo's David clad in linen blend. Would have followed that right off a cliff. Or those black wool/cashmere ones from last night. The buttery weave had that very subtle sheen that really showed the outline of his thick erection so beautifully. Could eat that cock right outta the fabric. Tear through that zip teeth-first and see to it he's well loved. Within his trousers, always jet black, finely knitted silk pants that made his dark springy, manicured hair seem almost brown by comparison. The pants of royalty! The earthy way the silk tasted when dampened with his delicious seeping precum. And beneath those pants...God! The tightest, tastiest little...

"...John? Doctor?"

"Hrm? Right. <throat clear> Yes. Inappropriate. Yes. Quite right. <mighty cough> The...that..The gift card? Christmas certificate?" Jesus! Keep it together, man! Wonder what he's doing now...FOCUS!

"...something, something, lime green minis and body glitter when you're meant to be in charge of...something..."

"Truly, his wife's a refined one...blah, blah, blah...but he's in massive hoop earrings?...blah, blah,blah...garish electric pink lippie..."

"...natter, natter, natter, there's naught wrong with bustiers but, buzz, buzz, buzz..."

"...whisper, whisper, whisper, because we're not at all phobic of different lifestyles. You all know Ted and I are absolutely mad for leather! But at seventy-four, it's high time he find a nice, long frock when...yammer, yammer, yammer..."

"I like your birthmark even though it doesn't actually taste like raspberry jam as it really ought, o flatmate mine. Still, tastes good though. Very good. More porridge?"

"What?"

Dr. Sarah gave John that annoyed little grimace she used to give him when his mobile would ring with Sherlock's number while they were meant to be at dinner. Shite! Her brow furrowed deeper. "John are you alright with this?"

They all seemed a bit confused, but also slightly relieved. Yet no one was heading for the door. *Damn!* The others turned to look at Sarah, whom they had apparently elected as their liaison while John had sailed off to Alabaster Island. Dr. Sarah sighed and wiggled her ankle while she massaged her elbow. *Oh shite!* Same look she'd given John at Heathrow after New Zealand.

John cautiously asked, "Something more?"

"Just to be absolutely clear, John, you're saying you'll do it? Take a run at Graham?"

"*Today,* darling!" Dr. Stella's shrill whisper butting in again. *How had that woman ever managed to get married? Was Ted deaf? Or a masochist?*

Sherlock had whispered last night that he might possibly be a bit of a masochist, or perhaps he just possessed different tolerance levels or nerve responses to intense stimuli. *Wired differently.* He said he liked how John set Fire to his insides, but disliked the depth because it made him nauseated like when pure calcium metal ate all the oxygen in a flask of distilled water.

Exact opposite of John's experience. John loved the part where it felt like Sherlock was pumping his aorta. First time he thought he was going through coronary ischemia. Then last night Sherlock's depth felt like security, keeping him alive. The depth was *beautiful.*

The initial burn, however, was very difficult. John hated the Fire. *Hated it!* Apparently for the exact same reasons Sherlock liked it: felt like being burned alive from the inside out. The threat of becoming nothing.

How could anyone want the Fire? John had admitted it scared him; that he quickly tried to escape it, move past it. It threatened to consume his heart and lungs, hollow him to fine ash. Even now John felt the lingering smolder of the Fire Sherlock had given him last night. The spasming traces of excruciating Fire that made John feel panicked when they would echo through his internal vacancy afterwards. Cruel traces that mocked him days later. His constant reminder that the place their love had built for Sherlock was Empty and would remain so for several more days. Nothing for it but wretched waiting.

John had never known what it was to walk around, trying to be normal while your body sang out mournful dirges of physical emptiness. The lingering spasms of Fire would not let him forget his hollowness. John hoped one day, with practice, his man would make him receptive enough that he could get away from the hated Fire.

But Sherlock had said he wished John would give him Fire forever. *Definitely a masochist.* He had stated how he liked holding the Fire right inside where the flames were greatest. He said it felt like John's kisses only much hotter temperatures. He liked surrendering to it, feeling his ribs char, tasting his burning scalp in the air around them, hearing the creak and sizzle of steam cracking molten fissures in his synarthrodial joints as his brain boiled. He liked knowing it was John who was slowly vaporizing him into gaseous compounds. Sherlock had said it was bliss, that's what he called it *Fiery Bliss:* John making him disappear into volatile particles and sub particles that could never be reassembled.

Sherlock had a theory of how they might prolong the blaze for him. The doctor was terrified to give his sweet man that experience. The scientist had suggested something with John's resistance band for yoga stretches and...that's the part where John had pretended to hear "*Let's buy matching pajamas.*" Yet the gleaming look in his teal eyes while he carefully explained his desire...John almost wanted to share that discovery. Sherlock said he *needed* John to build him a greater Fire. Definitely a masochist! Terrifying! Absolutely mental! Was it? *Well...it might be ok...if there was a way somehow to ensure the madman clearly understood...*
"John?"

"I'm not a sadist."

"What?"

Eight eyes staring directly at him. Wide, surprised, confused, maybe horrified, eyes. Dr. Vijay put a hand on his shoulder. John evaded the touch with a wide sidestep. The Scotsman smoothed a hand over his silver hair and gave John more space. His voice was cautious, almost ashamed, "Doctor, we...no one, not a soul among us, wants to hurt or humiliate Graham. I didn't- No, no, no. Not a one of us thinks you'll do it from cruelty. Or, or...No, man! Not at all!"

Nurse Shiro added softly, "We're only asking you because of how good you are with the diplomatic approach. Like with those punky little rude boys last week. That was well done." He seemed so apologetic. He fiddled with his biro and kept his shame-filled eyes on his clogs.

Dr. Stella worried her wedding ring and danced from foot to foot like she needed a wee. She tried to sound cheerful, "He's the best doctor. Top rate! We love Graham. Like Shir said, you've such a gorgeous way with people, John, darling. Ted's always saying that about you, too! So understanding. Especially how lovely you are with your partner. You're so great with that sort. You really have a firm handle on him."

"I'm not-" John coughed loudly into his fist. He looked up again and caught a glimpse of Sarah giving him a very hard, sad frown. She knew all too well the phrase he'd very nearly shouted. She noticed the others looking at her and her face blinked into genteel professionalism.

John tried to recover, "No. I'm not, uh, accusing anyone of thinking I'm cruel. But I'm not all that great at diplomacy either. The thing with those kids last week was just a bit of dumb luck. Truly flueky. We all respect Dr. Graham. I didn't mean to suggest- What I meant was...well, Is it our place to judge him since he's only just...opened up to us, his colleagues...uh, about transvestism? That's gotta be...I mean...don't you imagine that's...a bit...of an adjustment, yes?"

Dr. Stella began flapping on and on in profuse agreement that went well beyond the point of necessary. She seemed to be overcompensating for her authentic feelings about Dr. Graham's self expression. John thought the way she kept alluding to some sort of fetish lifestyle with her husband Ted was equally strange, especially when she seemed to compare whatever leather thing she was into with Dr. Graham's sartorial tastes.

John genuinely didn't understand why his coworkers wanted to involve themselves in the older man's wardrobe choices. He turned to Dr. Sarah and asked, "Why do we need me to talk to him?" She scowled at him. Then she sighed and looked at Dr. Vijay. The gentleman started to reiterate what John had apparently missed. But Dr. Stella piped up yet again. They all silenced her once more.

Dr. Sarah took over, further clarifying, "You're better with people than you allow, John. As Stel says, we've all seen your blog and know a bit of your business partner. You're very patient and understanding. We tried gently hinting and politely suggesting. We all pitched in and got that gift card to L&T's- your idea. Didn't work. He thinks we're being nasty about cross dress. However, what would you say if tomorrow, I waltzed in wearing fishnets, leather bustier, mini, body glitter and Fuck Me Boots? That's what they're called, Stel, you're right. You would all think I'd quite lost my mind, yeah?"

This time, John actually listened. Well he'd listened right up until that last bit. Then the dirty boy inside perked up his ears and conjured an image of Sarah standing on his desk in that exact
ensemble. What would I say to Fuck Me Boots? I’d...hope you had gone round the bend just long enough to let me get a leg over! Shut it! God, I've either had too much sex...or perhaps...not enough? Sherlock would know. Let's give him a ring! Brilliant idea!

John spoke hastily, "Yes. Exactly. I know him, just leave it to me. Makes perfect sense. In fact...I've an appointment with him just before lunch." The papers in his hand began fanning arcs in the general direction of the door.

"So, you understand? You'll try'n sort it, John?" Get out! He smiled at each person one by one.


They all smiled and nodded with him. Thankfully they began shuffling back from whence they came. Excellent! The door clicked shut. John whirled on his heel and practically sprinted for his jacket pocket.

"John?" Bollocks!

John turned back. Sarah. Her face seemed very concerned. She spoke softly. "I didn't want to say in front of the others...but....is everything alright, John?"

"Yes. Fine."

"You needn't speak to Graham if it's too..."

"I've said I will and I will. It's fine. I'm fine to do it." Please leave.

Mercifully she stepped to the door. But only one step. "Is it...do you have a case or something?" Her hand pointed to his jacket, where he'd been headed. She had a worried little stitch in her brow. "Is it dangerous? You seem...very preoccupied."


John stood there like a school boy caught telling porkies. He tapped his papers into his palm, impatiently. Sarah's tongue pressed into one lower molar. She nodded slowly as if considering saying that she'd diagnosed his half truth. She smirked, hands in coat pockets. John grinned and shrugged.

"Well. Ok. I'll leave you to your consulting, Doctor. Do let us know how it goes with Graham." Sarah left, closing the door behind her.

Thank God!
Chapter 69

Chapter Summary

Case of identity, The Personal is Political! Sherlock at work.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sherlock’s tall body was stretched prone on the stack of old cardboard, upper body almost entirely over the edge of the roof. The wind sliced at the detective's jawline and licked up his angular face. His icy gloveless hand made adjustments to the focus dial. *John will warm my hands and lick my face warm.* Not too far off to the Northeast, Sherlock suddenly spied the wink of reflected morning light he'd been hoping to see! *Gotcha!*

The bulky field glasses yanked the back of his collar, threatening to haul him over the edge. That's when he saw the torn ruffle of shiny orange. *Ah yes! Got you now you little cretin!* He reached out. *Almost. 2.5 inches.* He scrunched forward like a worm. An annoying chorus erupted behind him. *Shut up, John.* He stretched his long arm as far as he could. The evasive orange kissed his fingertips then fluttered back. *Damn!* He inched a bit further out. His stomach was too full against the cardboard. Too much breakfast. But how could one decline when being spoon fed by a handsome, smiling king?

Six stories below, gravity began to insist on owning the field glasses. *Not today!* He shucked them off and flung the weight behind him. His long pale fingers reached again. Sherlock winced with the strain on his shoulder. Orange tickled his fingernail. Two millimetres further. Hands secured his ankles. *Oh, thank you, John. Come here you infernal bastard!*

*Finally!*

Sherlock snatched the fabric from the rusty nailhead and rolled back. He stood triumphant! The torn orange triangle disappeared in his breast pocket. He wiped his Ulster as he sauntered past the nattering little assemblage. The tall man ran for the far side of the roof. He vaulted up and over the low concrete edge and shimmied down the drainpipe. He landed in the alley with a kinetic bounce and extended his arms.

*Voila!*

No one clapped. *Fine.* Sherlock straightened his scarf and flipped his collar up. He didn't exactly need to be told, but was it really too much trouble? *I am awesome!* John told him to quit showing off and get on with it. *Fine.*

Sherlock stalked Northeast to claim the missing treasure and close the case. He was carefully sifting through knee high snow banks when his mobile trilled. Most likely Molly saying it was time to dig into Lestrade's samples. His cold fingers crunched through the icy crust of a new mound of snow.

"Reply with these words, exactly: 'M, one hour, black two sugars, don't start without me. SH.' Oh, and add something nice about her hair. But not too nice."
Nothing happened.

Sherlock stood and surveyed the area. *Worst assistant ever! I'm only out here freezing to death and he's where? Probably eating second breakfast somewhere in that dingy block of flats! Sitting at some grubby kitchen table, chatting up some perky divorcee in a dressing gown and slippers. Making her laugh with one of his stupid witty remarks while she serves him a fry up! I'll kill him. That man and his insatiable appetites!*

The phone screen said "Answer your mobile. It'll be me. JW" The detective frowned. The device rang in his hand with an incoming call from Home.

"Did you do that thing where you tell me to answer your phone?"
"No."
"Liar."
"I prefer text. Why are you ringing me?" Sherlock put his hand back into the snow and fished around slowly.

"Because your sidekick isn't there to text me back. Why did you answer?"

"Because my assistant has wandered off again. What do you want?"

There was a long pause. The detective put down his pokey stick and waited for John to construct some story about gathering information (*pretty women*) or conducting interviews (*making plans to meet pretty women for drinks.*) Although, while he was schmoozing, perhaps he could borrow a hair dryer. Or a blowtorch.

"You do know I'm at surgery, right?"
"I know that."
"You thought I was with you, didn't you?"
"No. I know you're at work. Across town. Doctoring. You have a job. You're at work. Because it's Thursday. Why did you ring me?"

"It's Tuesday. What have we been talking about, madman?"

"I'm actually very busy at present. Is this meant to be one of those gooey conversations where we spew sentimental blathering nonsense and make kissy noises through the line? Because I'd really rather not."

*I'd much prefer to do that in person. With your wide fingerprints scooping my prostate. Stealing my mind, making me a Neanderthal. You telling me I'm a beautiful man when you spark our erections together. Telling me I'm a strong man whose going to break your phalanges. Drinking my smile, feeding me your sweat. Shut up, idiot! It's only been ninety-four minutes.*

"No, Sherlock. Me neither."

"I know." *Call me sweetheart.*

"What are you wearing?"

"John, if—"

"I know. I know. Very very busy! Didn't mean it like that." *Yes you did. My hands are cold and I*
**miss you.**

Sherlock shifted his mobile to his other ear and lowered his voice, "I was about to say, if this is one of those chats, do speak slowly and enunciate, please, o flatmate mine."

*That laugh.* The detective wanted to crawl through the phone and taste it right now. He reached under his scarf and rubbed the warm metal into his chest. *Call me sweetheart.*

John said, "Not that type either. I've got a...situation here that I'd like to run by you."

"A case?"

"No. Sort of staff thing. I'm meant to talk to my boss. Minor. But...delicate."

"Tell me."

John began with, "There's this man at surgery. Top doctor. Well respected. And he's only being himself. But...people, my colleagues, are...finding him...well they think his recent changes are not befitting a respectable member of the medical community. *Their* words, not mine. I don't care. It's fine. Whatever choices. Honestly can't be arsed. It's all fine. There have been hints made to him by the staff that he ought keep it outta the offices. Save it for home. Private life. Not be himself so much. And...Right. Well, what I want to know is this: How do you—Tell me how to do that thing where you tell clients the direct truth but you don't feel cruel. *Delicate.*"

Sherlock was very intrigued. "Is this man hurting people- your coworkers or the patients? Angel of Mercy? Blackmarket Organ Farming? Freaky experimentation to build a Super Human Hybrid Clone Army? Is he dangerous?"

"No. He's a very nice man."

"Is it illegal? International Baby Selling Ring? Drug dealing? Cooking the books?"

"No."

*I'm hanging up!* *Call me sweetheart or I'm ending this pointless conversation.*

"Is this even a crime at all, John?"

"No! Not anymore. In fact...I'm fairly certain the laws have changed to the point where it might very well be illegal to *dissuade* him from being himself at work. I think."

"Oh. Well, why do you care, then?"

"I don't. Not really. It's only that, if I don't find the right thing to say, it could get a bit dicey here. Unwelcoming. It's delicate. *Sensitive.* That thing we talked about where the Personal is Political sometimes."

The tall man stood there in the snow and thought it all through. *Very interesting.* "Well. Generally, I find with delicate matters, people already know the facts. The difficulty is that they don't like hearing them stated aloud. It's apparently quite rude. That's why people much prefer discussing the *weather.* My method is to state the facts quickly, then either brace for a fight or leave. It's easy if you don't care about the aftermath."

"I work here. So no scrapping. No leaving...I hope."

"Ah! Like with heads of state and such. Right. *That* sort of delicacy. Um, Well: stand up tall and
use long words. Don't take notes. Act like you out rank everyone and they are blessed to hear your comments. Make it clear you really don't care about the outcome. It's not a conversation. You're delivering information. They always want to explain. And that gets very awkward. Ignore their why, focus on your facts. Their why doesn't matter. Only the what. Completely disinterested. I like to fiddle with their trinkets and rearrange their photographs. Don't touch your mobile– makes them fret about secret recordings, especially politicians. The rich and powerful feel so much better if later they can act like your strategy was their idea. Decline all offers for refreshment or a chair until the fourth time they ask, then it's like you're doing them a great favour despite the fact that you clearly haven't the time. When you've finished, behave as if you've no clue who they are. That makes important people feel less self conscious. We'll practice that power move where I mix in meaningless questions. I'll show you how to time the rhythm with checking your watch and crossing your legs. You've got to get the bored expressions just right or it can seem like nervous fidgeting. I'll show you tonight."

"I've got the meeting with Dr. Graham today. Just before lunch. I'm doing it then. But thank you. I think I know what I'll say now. Hopefully."

Call me sweetheart. Say you're mine. And then say sweetheart.

"Good. Need a bit more? Battle plan?"

"No. I've got it. That was very helpful, Sherlock. Very. You're brilliant. Such a clever man. Thank you."

"Say sweetheart." No! Idiot! Where is that pokey stick?


Sherlock closed the line when John started making stupid immature kissy sounds through the phone. It was either hang up or beg him to meet at home for a nooner. The detective adjusted the lay of his trousers and went back to work.

In Mr. Sutherland's flat, the detective flapped the bit of orange fabric in the culprit's face saying, "You're a cold-blooded scoundrel, Ya'aqov Kosminski-Windibank! Did you really think you'd get away with this? Pinning your deeds on some ridiculous 'Hawk Angel' character? It was you the whole time and here is the proof! Your silly disguise fools no one, little man! As you say, the law cannot touch you but there never was a person who deserved punishment more!"

Sherlock turned his back on the monstrous smirking scoundrel. He passed the ice cold wedding ring back into the older fellow's hand and warned, "This little person will rise from crime to crime until he does something very very bad one day and ends up on the gallows. At which point, my rates double, incidentally. I suggest you keep a closer eye on your grandson, sir. The roof is no place for a six year old."

The tall man finished the last of his hot cocoa, collected his 'fee' and slammed the door behind him.
Kosminski is of course the last name of the first person arrested on suspicion of being Jack The Ripper.
Chapter 70

Chapter Summary

Case of identity

Back within 221B, Mrs. Hudson was hoovering the hearthrug. She shut off the machine when Sherlock came through the door in an irritated state. The flat smelled pleasantly of ozone. He flopped down into John's chair and offered out the parcel.

"Well! You found it then?"

"Absolute last time I assist one of your gambling cronies!"

Mrs. Hudson peeked under the lid. "Oooh, Banoffee pie! Marius really does the best out of all the Whist group." Licking her finger, she started for the kitchen, then hastily headed for the door. "I'll just run it down to my icebox to save it for you, shall I?"

The petite landlady returned. Evidentially having sampled a spoonful (or two) of the pie. "That'll be a fine tea later." She beckoned the brooding man to stand and helped him from his wet coat. As she placed it on the peg, she asked, "So, what was it then?"

"Roof. Sling shot. Snow bank across the street. Little liar." Sherlock's hand made the half hearted gesture of a missile projection. He needed sleep.

"Well I know Marius's glad to have have Jemma's ring back. Hard being a widower. Poor man. Not easy chasing that Ya'aqov all day while mummies are at work, either. Was such a sweet baby. And now...," Mrs. Hudson tisked and clutched her neckline. She sighed, her hands flapping up in exasperation 'what's to be done!' Then she carried on nattering about human infants, their developmental stages, and their many supposed redeeming qualities as she fannied about touching his belongings with a microfiber cloth.

Sherlock almost smiled about the little masked cretin. "The case was, in some respects, not entirely devoid of interest." The logician steepled his hands and watched his friend wind the cord back into the cleaner. "Perhaps I should get a cape. Though, not orange."

Mrs. Hudson wrinkled her nose and shook her head.

"True. Too easily snagged on nails and such. I've a scarf. Adequate enough. Doubles as a garrote." Sherlock yawned. If he angled sideways, the faded wingback upholstery smelled like John's hair. Almost like sitting in John's lap. He draped his long legs over an armrest and decided to pretend for a bit. Just until Molly rang.

Would John eat Banoffee pie? Unknown. He itched the rug burns on his knobby knees. Would John look good in a cape? Need data. John already had a cape. An insignia tattoo. Under all those layers and layers was his secret identity as...

John!

The detective rocketed to his feet. He grabbed his coat and shook Mrs. Hudson's shoulders.
"Quickly! John needs us! I'll explain on the way."
Chapter 71

Chapter Summary

Happy family, strange family. Dancing man greeting.

At fifteen past, John stepped into the hall shaking hands with a smiling blonde woman in paint-splattered coveralls and thick-soled boots. He waved the veteran down to the east side double doors as she continued to thank him.

Past her, the doctor saw the unmistakable height of his paragon. John blinked. Sherlock briefly flashed a hand. The men stared at one another for several seconds. The shorter man's heart leapt and he trotted quickly down the corridor. For some reason, he broke into a jog. The distance was not sufficiently long enough to accommodate such speed.

John tried to halt, too abruptly, too late. He crashed into his man then sprang back like a mountain goat. The tall man rattled into the glass door with an exclamation of surprise. He rolled left, sidestepped. He shoved his man, ducked back.

They circled one another in a strange, energetic sparring waltz of shoving, feigning, evading, tittering, and sidestepping round and round. John smiled, "Hi!" He darted back from a shove to his shoulder. Sherlock grinned, "Hello, John!" He spun away from a fake jab to his midline. The judo trained man eventually made a lazy chop and at last let his soldier catch him by the hand. John said again, "Hello!" And Sherlock replied the same.

From the opposite corner, Mrs. Hudson giggled at their foolish sporting. She shooed her boys with her flapping hands saying, "Bad as kangaroos, you two! You'd think there'd been a murder the way you boys are carrying on."

John smiled over at their friend while he rubbed warmth into the icy hands. "Where are his gloves?"
"God only knows!"
"Traded them to one of my network for valuable information."
"Ah. Want mine?"
"No."
"Well this is a nice surprise. What are you two up to? Gloves shopping? Early lunch?"

Sherlock became deadly serious. He looked down at his man and nodded gravely. He and Mrs. Hudson put a hand on each of John's shoulders. Their landlady squeezed briefly then let go with a little pat. She looked up at Sherlock. The detective exhaled and stated sagely, "We support you." He clutched his partner into his arms, wrapping their bodies tightly within his Belfast Ulster. John hugged him back. His sandy hair got a nice kiss.

Sherlock backed him into the corner saying, "It'll be alright, my dear man. Don't worry." He hugged his man again, this time John felt the familiar frame of Bess being secured into his trouser waist. He startled! The fusilier began frantically scanning around the corridor.

Mrs. Hudson stepped close and offered out her open handbag with the nonchalant stealth of someone formerly married to a drugs peddler. John hastily dumped his illegal firearm on top of her
vinyl rain bonnet. He realized from its weight, Bess didn't have the magazine intact. His eyes darted between his friends. Mrs. Hudson smiled sweetly, still keeping her purple handbag on offer. "We thought you might need your dummy. For comfort, dear."

John pressed her bag down out of sight. He shook his head and gaped at the pair. *Nutters!*

"It's not made ready." Sherlock gave his man a wide grin and double thumbs up. He tapped his breast pocket and winked.

John stood well back, looking at each. "Uh, why are you here?"

The detective glanced at Mrs. Hudson's smiling face. He'd said it just as she'd advised. Perhaps if he spoke very slowly. Sometimes John wasn't too quick. The man constantly needed to have the simplest concepts explained to him in painstaking detail. Maybe add hand gestures.

Sherlock tried again, "Weee <indicate self then housekeeper> suppooort <arm encircling like holding a barrel> yooou <pointing repeatedly at bewildered assistant> Yeeesss?" Sherlock nodded up and down trying to get the slow man to nod with him. Mrs. Hudson patted both their arms.

"Uh What?"


"You're not my boyfriend."

"I know."

John looked at Mrs. Hudson. She had her handkerchief pressed to her lips. He looked at Sherlock who continued to grin and pat his shoulder. The physician didn't have time just now for...whatever this was. Such a strange man!

John made goofy pantomime gestures and spoke back just as condescendingly, "John <karate chops> Time <peel banana> Go Meeting <slurping soup from bowl> Madman <jazz hands> Wait Here <fly fishing>"

He turned to Mrs. Hudson, "Thank You <tip hat> Brekkie <hula dance> Nice Lady <bow>"

Mrs. Hudson laughed and clutched her chest. She looked a bit weepy as if watching an *EastEnders* marathon. Then she grabbed his head for a kiss to the temple. "You! We'll be right here! Right here. Good Luck!" She patted her handbag to reassure him.

John saluted them both, turned and walked to Dr. Graham's exam room. He shook his head and sniggered into his fist as he turned the corner.

*Absolute bedlam!*
Chapter 72

Chapter Summary

Let's spy on John's doctors appointment. He's not a busybody but I most certainly am!

"And now for something completely different..."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"There he is! Good day, old sport!"

Every description of Chappie's dress had been exactly correct.

The doctors greeted one another amicably. As they went through the rudimentary doctor/patient procedures, they exchanged the congenial pleasantries about work, weather and holiday news that are so customary to English social ritual. They briefly personalized their chummy relationship with exchanges about loved ones, hobbies, and life.

Dr. G. A. Chapman* was among the top hundred general physicians in NHS. He was, in fact, John's primary doctor. A quiet man who loved to discuss his hobby of antique clock repair. Many considered him to be a very dull conversationalist, actually. But John found him quite agreeable. The only thing remotely remarkable about Dr. Graham was that he was seventy-four and dressed like a thirteen year old club girl from the late 1990s.

John liked Chappie because the man was highly knowledgeable and passionate about preventative medicine. John enjoyed their discussions about philosophical and political approaches regarding the recent upward trend in cardiovascular diseases and the link to the country's ever-increasing obesity epidemic. Also his wife, Dr. Muriel, made a gorgeous chicken masala. They'd had John round to theirs twice already. Fantastic food!

Was the elder gentleman's personal style unprofessional? Well...admittedly, holographic body glitter and green fishnets were not the norm for head of surgery. But, as Mrs. Hudson oft said, "Live and let live, dear!" Although, she had once encountered Dr. Graham that time she came to bring John a clean shirt last October. When the doctor had come home, he recalled his landlady saying, "What sort of wife would let her husband out in that colour? He's clearly an Autumn not a Summer! I'd never allow it. Lilac! On that sallow skin? I mean really." Then she'd tisked, vehemently declared she was not his housekeeper, and served him a nice hot meal.

As Dr. Graham prepared the blood collection bag, John debated what to say to his comrade. The locum doctor rolled up his sleeve and cleared his throat. "Uh, Cha- <another throat clear> Colonel—"

"Now, really, old sport! Do call me Chappie! All my friends do, you know. I really must insist, John!" The older gentleman pointed a stern latex-clad finger at his patient and shook his head like a chiding Headmaster. His large hoop earrings shimmied like wind chimes. Dr. Graham patted the empty chair and smiled.
"Yes, thank you, sir, uh, Chappie. I, um...well the thing is..."

"Out with it, old boy!" The older veteran wheeled the sterile tray nearer and sat at John's right side. He glanced up from securing the rubber tubing around John's arm. With a wise nod he lowered his voice, "Oh, right, I see..." Dr. Chapman gave a knowing wink. "I say...this is about your man then, is it? Well, let's have it, old sport."

After the silver-haired veteran wiped the forearm with alcohol, he indicated the tray. John slid the collection needle into his vein. The Colonel placed the squash ball into his broad fist. John untied the rubber tube. They spoke as his donation entered the line. "No, sir--Chappie. Not about him."

Dr. Graham seemed incredulous, but he wasn't the sort to accuse. He tactfully tried again, in his typical jovial manner. His gravelly voice remained low and confidential. "Nothing to discuss? All quiet on the Homefront, is it? No issues of a personal nature, doctor?" He kept his eyes affixed to his task of unkinking the line. In his characteristically conversational tone, he asked, "Any complications? Physical or otherwise?"

That was the wonderful thing about Chappie. He was the nurturing, fatherly type of doctor John aspired to become. The well bred veteran was exemplary and warm. He was thorough, and always made John feel at ease. There was never a doubt that Dr. Graham would violate the sanctity of the doctor/patient relationship. Chappie peel out of his latex gloves. The fusilier decided not to say anything about the man's attire. Why should he betray such a trustworthy gentleman? John pumped the squash ball to help his blood flow.

"It's been going very well. Thanks again for all the gen. We're getting the hang of it, I think. For the most part, the, um, Homefront is alright, Chappie."

Dr. Graham chuckled. He patted the younger man's knee saying, "Capital! Simply smashing! Glad to hear it, old horse! That's the Can Do spirit!" He kept his delighted smile as he read the quantity line. He reported, "70 mL. Well done so far. Now...when you say 'for the most part,' what are we addressing, doctor? Bit of a sore botty? Or something needs a look, does it?"

"No looks! I'm fine!" John shouted. He realized he was clenching all his muscles at once. He reddened. His doctor carried on as if nothing whatsoever had happened. With his same convivial cheer, the older man retrieved the squash ball and handed it back. John thanked him and apologized. The fusilier steadied himself. "I'm fine, Chappie. No complications. We've followed your advise to the letter. No problems."

Still smiling, the Colonel continued, "Well done, old chap! That's what we like to hear! How's the Afghani souvenir holding up, then? Any issues there, doctor?"

John shrugged his left shoulder around in the socket. "The usual complaints, well know to us both. It's fine."

The former Royal Marine tapped his own right side and nodded in agreement. "Too true, Captain! This weeks winter's damp keeps the old Dhofar scratch frightfully stiff. Plenty of physiotherapy, wot! That's the prescription for us, old boy! Are you maintaining?" He scratched his neatly trimmed, white goatee and gave John a serious look over the top of his horn-rim spectacles.

"I've...well, I've been...um, a bit lax in my regular habits of late. Been <cough> busy."

The silver-haired man tapped a finger to the side of his nose and chuckled again. "Oh ho! Cracking! However...regular physiotherapy is fundamental, man. I simply must insist, John. Can't spend all our days in the thicket. Regrettably! Let's get you back on course, hm? This week! It'll
only degrade as you get older, you know. Prevention! That's the key. What say you, doctor?"

John promised to renew his health regimen. He swore he'd resume his usual routine at once.

"Capital! 120 mL. Now...repeat prescriptions. Let's see...How are we set for tablets, then? Issues? Week before last we were down to five remaining Sildenafil and had discontinued the Melatonin the week prior. Sleeping well and such, doctor?"

"I've gone off both now, Chappie. No need. I'm very well with sleep...<throat clear> and such. We're-- I'm...I've still got the last five tablets." John realized he was smiling stupidly and petting his smooth face. He felt as youthful and jaunty as the Colonel's wardrobe.

"Oh. Oh I see...Keeping the old ship in the dockyard til the timing's right. Slow and steady, is it? That's a sound approach. Test the waters. Gauge the winds. Wait to set the jib, eh?" Dr. Graham winked, tapped his nose again, nodding.

"Uh, no. The, um...jib has been set, and...sometimes I don't, um <smile> douse canvas for hours. Chappie, the um...ship's been moored in the...the...<nod> harbour twice now. Smooth sailing! I've really no need for the tablets it seems." The handsome younger man's smile bloomed behind his left fist.

His doctor slapped him on the knee once more. They shared a chuckle. "Outstanding! Good Show! I say, Doctor, you must be well relieved! I should jolly well think so! Smooth sailing, indeed, wot! Capital! And...in our journeys...have we called upon the other port as well? As I recall, we had many questions regarding strategy there, old boy."

John lost his smile. He sat looking at the blood bag very quietly. They listened to the ticking of two dozen repaired clocks for a while. John took a deep breath and sought advise for the question Sherlock had put to him last night. "Chappie...what do you know about amyl nitrate, butyl nitrate, glyceryl trinitrate and all that?"

The little room went deadly silent. The entire clock collection seemed to die all at once. The veterans surveyed one another. For a moment, the kind marine looked every year his age. His grey brows furrowed down along with his smile, suddenly becoming a wrinkled, worn out grimace of sorrow. To anyone who saw the Colonel in that moment, he would be instantly recognizable as the septuagenarian who had lived too long and too often within the machine of war; had learned too much of man's cruelty to man; had nearly drowned himself and his marriage with half a decade in drink; lost his oldest child to the gnashing teeth of another pointless war and regretted surviving to tell of it all. He kept his hazel eyes downcast as his gnarled fingers distressed his knuckles. His hushed, gravelly voice went hoarse and he forgot all his refined English manners when he made his slow reply.

"Doctor Watson, I would have thought you a more ethical man than that, sir. I expect such nonsense from the reckless youths. But a seasoned member of the medical community? To ply a celibate with drugs so you might more quickly accomplish your ends. Poor form, sir," said the old man, with a sad slow shake of his head.

"No! No, Dr. Chapman, I didn't mean--I--Sir, no! He's a skilled laboratory chemist and he's got an idea to try it. I know the literature, sir. I've dealt with the same type of patient injuries as you have, Colonel. I'd never--I have never engaged an inebriated person and I've no intention of starting now. I abide your advise to the letter. I seek your council on how to decline, sir. I would never. Please, sir!" John's voice rose loudly, certain words bouncing off the walls like gun fire.

The older doctor seemed highly ashamed of his own judgmental lack of propriety with a patient.
The younger doctor was extremely anxious. Dr. Graham adjusted his velvet skirt and fiddled with an earring. He smoothed his thin mustached out and sighed.

"280 mL," he said quietly, struggling to regain his professional conviviality. A smile failed on his glossy pink lips. Chappie sighed again and straightened his spine. "Sorry, old boy—John. I quite forgot myself there. Beastly business, those so-called 'party' drugs. As you know, when some misguided child comes to us talking a load of codswallop, it's generally not for a bit of fun. Damned rubbish! I find the ones who seek to use such drugs during intercourse are generally inexperienced and hoping to impress some pushy lover with their ability to provide the sort of sexual satisfaction they're being pressured to endure. Bad show! Ghastly business!"

The fusilier wholeheartedly concurred. He was well aware his colleague had doctored through the dark days of the 1980s. He knew Chappie spearheaded a campaign to impose a blanket ban on the production, import and distribution of all poppers. The locum physician decided to speak candidly.

For the remainder of John's blood donation, the two doctors had a forthright discussion of the beginner's recent adventures. Chappie regained his friendly nature quickly. Using the unambiguous technical language of their profession, the comrades were able to precisely address John's latest experiences. The fusilier felt deeply reassured by all his older friend's expertise and support.

The blood bag reached the 470mL NHS limit. Chappie rang for a nurse. He helped his younger friend secure the compression bandage, saying, "By the by, old sport, Muriel's ever so grateful for that Lord and Taylor's card! We surmised it was your idea. In all my years here, I've never got so much as a Christmas cracker prior to your coming on board, John. Chuffed to bits!"

His voice dipped low and his eyes brightened like fresh toffee. "She wore a fetching little swim costume when we visited her sister in Valletta last week. Saucy sort of pinkie-red thing with sprinkles. A right dish, old boy! Capital! Really can't thank you enough, John." Chappie was nudging his elbow into his chum's side as they chuckled like dirty dogs. The older man snapped his fingers, adding, "I say, fancy coming round for a nosh next week? I really must insist!"

Before John could agree, Nurse Shiro entered to take the blood bag. When he saw the two veterans laughing all chummy, he gave John a hard, accusatory glare. The flaxen-haired man knew beyond any doubt: busybody Stella would certainly hear of this!

The nurse spoke to Chappie, "Sir, there's a highly irritated man from Scotland Yard seeking admittance. D. I. Le'something. Says its urgent police business for Dr. Watson, sir. Very agitated young man, sir."

John began to stand but Chappie wouldn't allow it so soon after donation. The Colonel stood, saying, "Battle stations! Let's have it then, Nurse! Chivvy along, stow that bag forthwith! Hop to! John, I'll leave you the room for conf–"

As Nurse Shiro exited, the door crashed open. Sherlock raced in with such cyclonic momentum the door slammed shut on its own. "This man has done nothing wrong, sir! You cannot allow his resignation or dismissal! I have been reliably informed Buggery is no longer—"

It was in that moment, that Sherlock realized how very, painfully, terribly, horribly mistaken he was. The raven-haired man stood there before the desk, mouth hinging open like a fish gasping for air in a crate of ice chips. His cyan eyes rapidly read every scrap of information in the room. There was a slight, very minute, chance he had perhaps, possibly, misunderstood something. Not wrong, mistaken! John had a tedious habit of speaking in metaphor. That could hardly be the detective's fault! He was not wrong! Sherlock blinked stupidly.
It was in that same moment, John realized why Bess and Mrs. Hudson had come.

"I know who you are!" Chappie stuck out his hand with a huge smile, "Doctor Graham Chapman. Pleasure to meet you at last, young man!" The older gentleman reached down and took Sherlock's limp hand. He pumped the arm forcefully and patted the elbow. "Good day to you, Mr. Holmes! Lovely to make your acquaintance." Chappie indicated the wide-eyed man sitting behind Sherlock. He patted the stool where he had sat on John's right side, offering it to the gobsmacked detective.

From the wall-mounted display, Chappie plucked up two pamphlets and casually placed them into Sherlock's hand. "Now then, chaps...it's nearly time for my lunch. That's me off home then."

As the older gentleman donned his coat, scarf and driving cap, he instructed, "You know the rules, doctor." He emphatically poked downward and tapped the face of a clock on the bookshelf near the door. He gave John a stern, warning eye over the top of his glasses. To Sherlock: "Do be a sport and fetch him his packed lunch. We need to stop him feeling dicky. Mustn't have him honking all over my room. I'll sack him myself for that crime, hoho!" Chappie stopped mid chuckle. A sudden thought made him turn back to the pair.

The older gentlemen came in close to looked at Sherlock. He poked his finger at the top most pamphlet. "I may not be your doctor, good sir, but I prescribe more Postillionage for you. We'll have no more of this chemical interference business. Too silly! More Postillionage! That's the key. Oh, and do come round with John next week. Muriel would find it quite a treat to dine in the company of Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

To both men: "Best of British, chaps!"

Chapter End Notes

The real Graham Arthur Chapman was of course a Monty Python. Fun facts about the beloved gay rights activist: He attended Bart's (no really!) and his surviving life partner is named David Sherlock (no seriously!) Also he is most famous for playing 'The Colonel' in Monty Python sketches.

I've fabricated the transvestism part. Why? I love my father! God rest him! As Eddie Izzard famously said, 'most transvestites fancy girls, you know.' If not for Eddie Izzard my father would never have had the courage to proudly leave the house as himself. He was a very dull man but he was exceedingly kind. The way John and Chappie discuss sex here is exactly how my father and I had our little chats. There is such a need for more physicians to be that understanding with their LGBTQ patients.

About poppers: I personally don't judge using party drugs in moderation. They're legal and comparable to being really drunk for only two minutes. Not my cuppa, though I see the appeal. But I really really judge combining inebriation and sex. Sober sex = safe sex!

About Blood donation: My friends, it is such a privilege to give the gift of life to your community! You cannot imagine how many people (loads of them wee babes) need your blood. It's not painful and it really is the most humane thing you can do for your neighbors.
Chapter 73

Chapter Summary

The Naval Treaty, BBC John's past, bit of Tell-Tale Heart because BBC Sherlock fancies E.A. Poe.

From 1955 Series 1, Ep.29: The Case of the Imposter Mystery (Watson dresses up as the Maharajah of Gandoor and Holmes is his servant/translator! I love the old Ronald Howard/ H Marion Crawford series! Such chemistry, such cuteness! Who can resist!?)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a banner day for John Watson! He'd been fed breakfast by his strange beautiful man and now he took his lunch the same. Perhaps tea, dinner, supper and brandy would all go this way. Perhaps he'd never have to hold so much as a grape with his own hands ever again for the rest of his life.

John tried to remain engaged in their conversation but his thoughts drifted.

Oh to be king! To have the man you love kiss you, feed you, shower you, shave you, dress you, hold you, fuck you and love you. It was worth a bit of embarrassment from time to time. The minor humiliations kept him humble. Otherwise John would have most certainly purchased a little gold chain to tether Sherlock by his thin ankle and keep the strange man right by his side forever. He would have become the haughty Maharajah of Gandoor*, demanding the most succulent fruits, headiest drafts and most expensive crisps. His sexy concubine would, of course, be naked and oiled at all times, naturally. Maybe he'd be permitted to don that indigo silk dressing gown from time to time. But nothing more! The great Maharajah preferred his man nude. And if his harem-of-one ever failed to meet his demands...

"Well, between the coughing, and sputtering, and innuendo, it's only my fault you're not understood, I suppose." Sherlock scraped the last of the sauce from the little jar with a carrot stick and fed it his doctor.

The Great Maharajah smiled at his man sweetly. He had the dreamy lightheadedness customary to loosing a pint of blood. He slowly rubbed his man's shoulder and hushed, "You do realize I'm having you over my knee when I get home, yes?"

Sherlock kissed his smooth flushed cheek, but said, "I decline." He held John's left palm against his lips with both his lean hands. He massaged the hand, wrist and forearm with his nimble fingers. "You've twice the power with your right arm. I should think you'd much prefer tomorrow."

The men didn't dare look at one another. All the many clocks ticked "Take. Him. Take. Him. Take. Him."

The detective arranged his man's hand so thumb and little finger were down against the palm. He closed his eyes and slyly told the remaining thick fingers, "Although...I do have that new prescription that needs administering..." He gave each fingertip a lingering wet kiss. "I suppose we
can make do with the left, if we must, o flatmate mine." Sherlock folded the palm against his lips once more. He confessed, "Makes me...so much more...<low rumble> agreeable. I know that's why you do it, John."

John rubbed his thumb over his man's lower lip. He whispered back with just the same low tone. "I do it because that's what you like, my dear man. You, ripping your pants down, always putting your gorgeous, bare bum in the air. I know what that's about."

John thought he knew 'what that's about' from a wonderful personal experience he'd had with two former schoolmates.

When John Watson read medicine at King's College, the young man had the peculiar fortune of falling into an intimate association with Persephone Phelps and her girlfriend Antonia Harrison. With their beguiling siren songs, the free-spirited vixens had quickly drawn him into their unorthodox games.

John had first met Percie and Annie during the week-long festivities surrounding the freshers' procession. Some drunken meatheads were threatening to smash Percie's shins with a wicket. The pack's hate-filled, derogatory slurs sent John sprinting over. He and the tall, scrawny woman had driven the arseholes away.

The couple bought him a few rounds at pub while he told them of his gay sister. Percie laughed. Annie said, "We're not gay, silly boy!" It was through Annie's aggressive flirtation that John found himself mixed up with the pair for the next eight days and nine nights.

The twenty-year-old man became their enthusiastic 'helper.' Of the two, John became deeply smitten with Annie. She was a striking-looking woman, a bit short and thick for symmetry, but with a beautiful olive complexion, large, dark brown Italian eyes, and a wealth of deep black hair. She always smelled like citrus peel and roses. To John, she looked very much like Raphael's La Fornarina come to life. Annie's rich tints made the white face of her quiet companion seem worn and haggard by the contrast.

The androgynous Percie was more bookish and somber than sultry, bubbly Annie. But to John's surprise, Percie turned out to be the wilder of the pair in terms of fucking. Annie had joked that, sexually, her girlfriend was 'like if Joan Jett slung one up the ghost of Sid Vicious!' Quite an accurate description of the way Annie's very pale and worn girlfriend liked to dress- and fuck.

The women preferred to take turns as the center of attention with John 'helping' from whichever end remained available. They owned dozens of accessories for wearing, inserting, and using. Things John had never seen before. Most of which, he'd never seen since. The arrangement was such that John functioned as one of their accessories, going wherever he was asked- never the centerpiece of activity.

The first few times Percie bent her pale narrow arse in the air, John assumed she wanted oral sex. It was Annie who corrected his misunderstanding. She'd giggled at him saying, "No silly boy, this is what she's after!" Then she'd illustrated with a hard slap to her companion's bony backside.

John had swatted lightly. At first, he'd been fearful, guilt-ridden, ashamed. The tall academic had stood, then shrugged. She'd moved behind him and Annie had taken her place over the edge of their desk. Percie's flat, quiet voice had instructed, "Don't be such a cock about it. Use your shoulder, follow through, give it hard. You're a man. Like this, John." Percie had roughly pulled his arse and back close into her narrow hips and small breasts. With one hand, she'd soothed his
chest. She'd drawn his arm up, then together, they'd pantomimed a few practice swings. She'd bitten his ear while grinding her moist hair into his sacrum and said, "Go." John had complied.

He and Percie traded blows until Annie was writhing, her flesh warm and glowing cerise. Her bouncy buttocks matched her slick labia. Then Percie took her turn, with Annie crouched under the knee-well to catch her lover's rocking hips each time his arm shoved her forward into the wet, waiting mouth. Percie would not let him stop until her thighs, bottom and fanny were plum.

Afterwards, Annie had praised him as she'd kissed his burning hand. Percie had put him in a head lock and roughly scrubbed her knuckles into the top of his head saying, "Who's a good boy? Who's a good boy?" From then on John understood: offering a bare arse face-down meant 'spank me.'

John thought he would be their helper forever. It was the first and last time he'd ever been with more than one person. The first and last time he'd struck a woman. He thought of himself as a peripheral boyfriend to their gorgeous relationship. John naively assumed they thought of him the same. He should have known better, but he was only twenty.

On the ninth afternoon, John called upon their flat to find Annie and Joe pleasuring Percie. Joseph Harrison was Annie's stepbrother returned home from the Navy. He was not biologically related to either woman and had only been Annie's legal relation for six years at the time, most of which he'd spent at sea. The three lovers had beckoned John to join them in play but...it had all been a bit too much for him. He tried not to judge, but the whole situation made the young man feel rather uneasy. He'd slammed the door and run home, never to return again.

Through her uncle, the Conservative politician Lord Holdhurst, Persephone Phelps-Harrison now had a good appointment at the Foreign Office. Via random Christmas greetings, John vaguely kept in touch with them every few years or so. Six children, two cats, a dog, nice home in Woking; to wit, a happy, normal family.

Twenty years on, the couple had passed completely out of John's mind until Sherlock had bent his bare arse over his chair. John looked at his man and smiled proudly. "Yeah, I know what you were after, my dear man. And I'm more than happy to help each and every time you roll on your front."

"I assumed that way would be your preference, John," said the detective with an expression of confusion.

"Hm?...you assumed what would be my preference? You thought I wanted that or you knew you wanted a spanking, my dear?"

"Don't call it that! Must you—ugkh!" Sherlock startled, wheeling the exam stool several feet away from his partner.

John made a feeble grab for the edge of the Belfast Ulster, but that only sent the austere man on the stool scurrying further back to the wall. The doctor put up his hands in surrender.

"Ok. Ok. What do we call it?"

Sherlock shrugged. His dark brows furrowed down deeper over his narrowed eyes. "You make it sound...I dislike that. Call it something else. Don't you have some vulgar euphemism for it?"

"No. Maybe 'warm buns'? Or 'slap n tickle'? 'Oven gloves'? 'Nettle tea with lemon'? 'Dong Lung Gong Temple'?" quipped the haughty Maharajah with a lick of his lips.

"Clever," Sherlock said with a scowl. "Never mind. In answer to your question, I assumed neither."
"I don't understand, my dear."

"I don't care to discuss it now. It's unimportant. My original assumption was proved incorrect. I've been incorrect too many times in the past 24 hours and it's only eight 'til. I need sleep. Come home."

"Nothing from Molly, then?" John added, "What did you mean by my preference? Tell me."

"No word yet. There's nothing to tell. A miscalculation on my part. Now, come home, John. I'll buy you beer. You're permitted to drink it while you 'nettle-tea-with-lemon' me."

"I've gone off beer, at present. I've upgraded to Macallan 30, as befits a king. Tell me the miscalculation and I'll consider oven-gloving you."

"I'll attend your colleague's little dinner party and preform dazzling feats of deduction for his wife's amusement as if I'm your damned trained bear in a Moscow circus. Come home. I need sleep. That's one of those medical emergency things, is it not?"

"Tell me what you meant and I'll come home."

The sleepy grouch sighed. He adjusted his cashmere scarf, smoothed his right eyebrow. "Yes. Well...I, um, I assumed you might prefer not to see male...anatomy while you were... attempting...<flat hand gesture> Might impede your ability to...perform and...<upturned eyebrows> A miscalculation, John."

"What?!"

"As a not-gay person. Initial encounter with a man. You might have difficulty maintaining arousal if...if <hand sweeping over his lap.>"

Before his doctor could interrupt, Sherlock continued in his bored, dry tone, "Additionally, my research indicated that bending the knees and hips creates adequate parameters for easier reception. I've told you already I assumed that would be your preference for sex: Me receiving you. Which I do now realize is but one aspect encompassed within your many preferences. I failed to realize bent knees and hips can be translated into several analogous positions. You taught me how to make that conversion, John. So, as I said, a miscalculation. I was...incorrect."

Sherlock left off that this information came via discussion with his brother. He also left off his personal decision to present himself to John facedown because he feared the experience would be extremely painful. He did not want John to see his weakness. Mycroft had intimated that if a man cried, winced, or struggled too much during intercourse, the other man (if he had any decency at all, as John did) would not be able to sustain an erection. Which would make the act go on far longer. Thus perpetuating the pain he would endure far longer. He had wanted to remain as quiet and still as possible for John so his man could efficiently find proper satisfaction within him.

Sherlock had masturbated enough to know the importance of speed and force to maximize pleasurable penile stimulation. He had initially assumed that was how his body would be used by his partner. Which is precisely why Mycroft warned he would find the experience highly unpleasant. "...as though besieged by a battering ram, brother mine."

What Sherlock knew and Mycroft did not was that John was not the sort of man to actively force himself onto another person. His partner was far more sentimental than Mycroft could ever comprehend. If Sherlock had misbehaved, he knew John would have stopped and most probably never attempt again. Thankfully brother had been wrong.
In addition to Sherlock's warnings from his brother, there had been six instances that provided information to suggest John might not want visual reminders he was having intercourse with a man. Some nights when they kissed on the sofa, John would draw Sherlock's body over his own. They would inevitably begin to grind their trousered hips together. Less than 40 seconds later, John would gently push their bodies apart and sit. Each time he would yield, apologize, and hastily move away. Sometimes he'd go stand in the kitchen for a bit, then return to resume their embrace in a seated position. Half the time, he would not return at all. He'd quickly say goodnight then go up to bed.

After he became familiar with the pattern, Sherlock had tried (god how he'd tried!) to keep his arousal from manifesting while they kissed. But the feeling of their testicles rubbing together beneath their trousers was too wonderful. The glory of their bulging zips grinding in tandem was mind-meltingly exquisite. At a certain point, Sherlock would ignore any internal worry about the embarrassment of cumming all over himself. John would suck on his jugular and he would ache to just let go and apologize after. But John never allowed that to occur.

These are the facts Sherlock relayed to John, omitting all of the discussion with brother. Upon hearing this John looked very shocked. He said, "You have no idea, do you? Sweetheart! You say 'Please Don't' all the time. You say it like you mean it. Quite adamantly. Sometimes you sort of whimper it, sometimes you damn near scream it in my face. We would kiss and you would wiggle all over me and say 'Stop, John. Stop it. John, please don't.' So I’d only listen to you."

"I most certainly did not."

John shook his head but he was smiling. He put his hand out and Sherlock cautiously wheeled closer. John beckoned his partner nearer, but the tall man remained a foot away.

"Oh yes, madman. You do it frequently. Almost all the time, my dear! Like I'm forcing myself on you. All the bloody time." John wore a filthy little grin that made it difficult to deduce his truthfulness.

"No."
"Yes."
"Really?"
"Yeah. Um...last night? The sitting room?"

Sherlock winced. There was a realization in the back of the detective's mind that he had perhaps trained himself too rigorously to deny the physical advances of other people. He loved everything John did with him. But perhaps he had a few minor internalized glitches that might need adjustment.

"It's fine, my dear. I figured it out, eventually. At first, I thought you meant it. Then, I thought it was a game that you learned somewhere. But, now it's fine, sweetheart. And...I... sort of like it."

"Yes well, you swear like a soldier."
"Sailor. It's 'like a sailor.' And, I know."
"I like it."
"I know."
"Does my behaviour interfere with your <lap area>?" Sherlock wheeled a bit closer and put his knee under John's reaching hand.

"Not anymore. That's you. That's you and I love- <mighty throat clear; forceful head shake> I like
how you are when we're together. Very much, my dear man. I like how you are."

"Me too."

"I like your beautiful face. I like your FACE as much as you like mine, my dear man."

"Me, too. I like how you kiss with your eyes open. I've only watched people do that with their eyes closed. But you don't. And I like that very much. You look at me. Even when you make your very ridiculous <mocking John's orgasm expression> face. Very lovely. I like eyes open."

"Me, too." Sherlock finally wheeled closer. He slid gracefully into John's lap and they silently forgave one another for being sleep-deprived, stubborn bastards. The bridge of John's nose told Sherlock's right earlobe what no one but the clocks dared say. Dexterous fingertips traced the unspoken words down the back of John's collar.

"Why do people close their eyes? I see them on the street, the train, in the airport and they close their eyes. Is it from their damned televisions?"

"I don't know. Personal preferences or cultural thing maybe. Or something older in the DNA. I don't know, my dear. I used to date a girl in sixth form who kept her eyes open and it freaked me out a bit. She said that's how her mum and dad kissed."

"I have thankfully deleted any knowledge of my parents' embracing."

"My parents used to slow dance to the wireless. They used to let me dance between them, standing on the tops of their feet."

"That sounds highly amusing."

"It really was."

Both men read the time and felt satisfied they could linger. They snuggled close as if they were at home. John petted his man's back. Sherlock traced the lines in his partner's right hand.

"I can feel your fire."
"Can I have yours?"

Every one of the twenty-seven clocks sang out exuberance. Yet neither man heard a sound, save the soft jubilation of lips meeting lips.

Chapter End Notes

I always wondered why fanfic'ers put the boys doggie-style. A friend who IDs as Hetero Cis Woman said its bc most straights don't know men can make love face to face bc PORN films don't get good footage that way. That's an awfully sad view to have. I wish there was a tag that authors used to indicate to readers that they are eroticizing a community about which they know little to nothing and don't care to research. Like how 'lesbian' porn is made for straight male viewers.

Oh forgot say about nettle tea: when you add a slice of lemon it turns bright fuchsia! Really pretty. And tasty, when fresh. Supposedly good for prostate health too btw.
Chapter 74

Chapter Summary

The thing that happened at 2am ish.

If you need a song, "We both reached for the gun" from the musical Chicago! Yep, I'm that sort of queer.

Also, a bit of the The Triplets of Belleville.

John was an arsehole! An absolute arsehole. Sneaky, deceptive and intolerably cruel! If a man agrees he'll come home after you tell him what he demands to know, then one would expect said man to honour his word and come home. Especially after you reveal to him a very embarrassing illustration of how thoroughly he can screw with your logic processes and cause you to sometimes appear to be mistaken. One would not expect said man to behave like an audacious brute. If he were any sort of gentleman at all, said man would not send you home alone citing technicalities such as 'We never agreed to a specific time. I said I'll come home. And I will. At end of day. Now go home and get some sleep.' One would not expect to be expelled from a national building with a cruel little wink and a banal 'Text me if you need me. Love you, bye.'

If I need you? If I need you?!? The man never listened! How much more clearly could a person say "Come home. I need sleep." Even embossed invitations didn't work on that thick-skulled, placid-brained, big-cocked, nice-smelling arsehole. With his smiling and his kissing and his ten million hands! Thrown right out into the street like some self righteous Oxfam marathoner trolling for pledges! Touché, John Watson! Good luck finding someone else to fill your little lunch jar!

The spurned detective threw down his coat and scarf in a heap on Dr. Hooper's floor. "Simultaneous natural death of octogenarian triplets is not a good enough excuse for delaying my soil analysis!" he declared to the circumstantially empty room.

Evidently, the pathologist had gone out to lunch with her new spontaneous 'nice guy,' Whatshisname Who cares, III. Apparently the situation was 'so terribly sad' that one couldn't be bothered to assist a man who had actual police business that needed attending.

Sister A had died in her bed in the middle of the night (coronary.) Sister B had found her the next morning and died on the floor at the bedside (coronary resulting from the shock.) Sister C: repeat of sister B. Everyone involved kept saying 'What are the chances!' and found the circumstances 'Too unbelievable to be natural causes.' Sherlock didn't understand why. They'd not been murdered. Eighty-six seemed to be a more than reasonable time to die. Wasn't the common wish of normal people to live a long life then die at home surrounded by family? They were only always remarking such at funerals and wakes. Yet Molly had been tasked with making absolutely sure no foul play had occurred. Hours and hours of unnecessary time wasted making absolutely sure. Sometimes normal people were so strange Sherlock could not fathom the scope of their bizarreness.

While Molly and W. W. III were out foreplaying before their dinner date, the weary scientist worked on Lestrade's nine samples of dirt. W. W. III certainly knew how to capitalize on an
opportunity for a 'Vita Incerta, Mors Certissima ergo Carpe Diem' fuck. Well played, sir, well played!

Someone had to sort out the actual crimes taking place in the city. Sherlock commenced diluting and separating.

For some strange reason, Sherlock could not help thinking how he'd much prefer to die before John. It would most likely be very inconvenient to live without his man. John had devised a very insidious scheme to render himself indispensable. It was really quite eloquent. Sherlock idly tasted the milk splash on the cuff at his left forearm to again confirm it was his own fluid while he contemplated known variables. Factoring John's heath issues and genetics in with his fifty-eight-month age advance meant there was a higher probability of the doctor dying before the detective. Selfish bastard! Sherlock resolved to smoke more in order to level the odds.

The whirling dervish of the centrifuge lulled the sleepy man back into the tornado of 2a.m. John really was a diabolical foe! Sherlock smiled to himself as he absently itched his scabby kneecaps. Who owed him enough of a favor that he might barter for a hand-knotted silk Persian hearthrug?

**Last Night, 0036 GMT, 221B Baker Street.**

Around 1:30 a.m. in the shower, after much discussion, John had made the very rational suggestion that they perhaps should take a few weeks off from sex until they had all the 'emotional stuff' sorted. He 'really really really' did not want his legs to meet a sledgehammer! The logician had wholeheartedly agreed, praising John's remarkable ability to devise such a logical course of action. They even shook on it and smiled amicably. Sherlock had said, "Yes! Of course, John! That is the most pragmatic and reasonable solution. So obvious!"

And the instant the words left his sculpted mouth, John's tongue was in it. Despite being a Judo-trained martial artist, Sherlock had been unable to stop John. The tall man had fought tooth and nail. But the military man was stronger and faster. Sherlock had first tried to push John away by pinning his soldier to the bathmat and slowly dancing their hips together as he looked deeply into his lover's eyes, saying, "You're so right. Two weeks. It's for the best. Two weeks. I like your mirror, John." But it was no use, John would not stop.

Again, Sherlock had tried to push John away by wrapping his long legs around his man's torso as they danced against the wall in the hallway. John had said, "Two weeks. You're doing really well, don't give up now. Two weeks. Be strong. God I miss you." Sherlock just couldn't stop him.

Sherlock had tried to push John away by repeatedly grinding his arse into his lover's hungry mouth. He tried to caution John to be a gentleman and abide by their treaty, but somehow the warning came out all mashed together into a breathless command of "Don't stop don't stop don't stop." The words flew from his lips until they were replaced with John's cock. The doctor was completely unstoppable.

Sherlock had tried every Judo maneuver his hazy brain could remember: the ear nibble, the nipple lick, the thigh lock, the jugular suck, the ball caress, the nose nuzzle, the primal groan, the arse grab, the lunge and parry, the pelvic thrust...perhaps that last maneuver was actually Fencing...or Rocky Horror maybe? Immaterial.

Three minutes after that, John was greedily filling his mouth with the soft chanted sigh of his own name, whispering back, "I'm yours. Oh sweetheart I'm yours forever." Both men tried so
heroically, with all their might, to shove the other's body away but somehow they ended up halfway under John's chair in a curiously sticky heap.

Sherlock confided, "That was the worst two weeks of my entire life. What were you thinking?" And John held him close and soothed, "I know, sweetheart. I know. I'm so sorry I suggested it. I'm an idiot. We'll never do that again. You were so brave and you held out so long. Such a good man. Such willpower. Never again. I promise. I promise. I promise."

A few minutes after 2a.m. sitting in their bed, the strange pair had huddled their foreheads close to strategize. Sherlock pulled the sheet over their heads and John held the pen torch so they could create their battle plan. Each educated man spoke professionally and maturely during their conference. Within thirty minutes the wise men had brokered their seven part accord. Which was professionally and maturely sealed with a kiss and a flood of giggles...businesslike giggles, not the schoolboy kind, the manly adult kind befitting nudity in Buckingham Palace.

As they'd settled into sleep Sherlock had confessed, "I wasn't really going to buy a sledgehammer, John."

John had kissed the back of his neck and said, "Course not, my dear. You'd pinch one and blame it on me."

That was the night Sherlock realized no one would ever understand him more than John.
Chapter 75

Chapter Summary

Dreamy fluff and sleepy smut. The case of the Lemon Loaf Thief! (Not a real Sir ACD case, obviously.) Also John becomes a hedgehog for a bit there.

"The usefulness of a pot comes from its emptiness." LaoTzu (The Tao Te Ching)

"God will not look you over for medals, diplomas, or degrees – but for scars." -Elbert G. Hubbard (An American Anarchist, great human being)

"Sherlock Holmes you are so very loved by me. So loved, my beautiful man. I am in love with you. Not forever, just until the day after the Sun dies. Just until after Mars collides with the Earth and every last moon of Jupiter smashes to asteroid dust. Then I'll stop. The very next day. I give you my word. I'll stop and you'll be rid of me, my dear," John promised.

The love-struck doctor sagged back against the doorjamb of his former bedroom and sighed.

John had arrived home at four to find the green index card had mysteriously regrown on the kitchen table. At the edge, red marking pen encircled smudged black powder fingerprints. Big red letters bore the date and initials of his accuser. Their rooms held not a trace of the beautiful breakfast that morning.

Laundry; shower; munch; sip of Macallan 30 while he fondled the green rectangle with a smile.

The accused decided to ring his detective to denounce the insinuation. John heard the digitized trill of Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" from atop the chest of drawers in their empty bedroom. The soldier bolted up the stairs with such haste he nearly bashed his chin on the wooden treads as his stocking feet lost traction several times. John went motionless mid-stride on the threshold.

Sherlock! One fist under his sculpted chin. Blanket kicked down to the foot of the bed like a crumpled birdnest smashed by his ever-thrashing feet. Still in John's wool cardi. Simultaneously too big and too small so the white shirt beneath bunched and rumpled. Within the sheet, lean body tensed with kinetic dreams of no doubt chasing baddies through the night streets. Get em darling, get em all. Thick dark eyelashes fluttering in time with Mozart's "Rondo alla Turca" coming from John's speaker dock on the nightstand. Piano keys racing too furiously through the sleeper's thoughts.

The music changed to the next track and suddenly there was the sight John never could have imagined. Not in a million years of fantasizing his dear friend might one day appear in his bed. The dancer swam out of the sheet as he rolled to his opposite side. He nuzzled down with a soft little snort. Long arms and bare knee hugging around a newly revealed headless effigy made from John's pillow. As Satie's "Gymnopédie No. 1" played, John slowly recognized the sound of his own recorded voice snoring beneath the notes.

The entire scene so heartbreakingly beautiful, the man in the doorway could not move. At first he'd
softly called out to his man. The dreamer did not wake, only pouted into the soft form in his arms. Sherlock undulated his hips slowly, drawing his bare, sinewy thighs tighter. Fit bottom clad in John's yellow Y-fronts with the blue trim! His long arm snaked under the layers worn by the imposter. The doctor heard his name breathed out with a delicate snore.

That's when John said it. That's when he let the door frame catch him. That's when he told his man about the demise of the solar system. Not as a whisper. Loud enough to compensate for the music and his own recorded snores. Loud enough to pierce through to the stubborn dreamer and hopefully register somewhere deep within.

John crept to the foot of his bed and said the first part again. He added, "You're not my boyfriend. We're not brothers. I'm not your colleague. Which is fine, by the way. I won't trap you. You won't leave me. We're going to be alright, madman. I'll be nice to you and you'll be nice to me. Not forever, just everyday. Just everyday until there's no days left. Then we'll stop."

John slowly crawled in on the opposite side from his temporary replacement. He nuzzled his mouth up the back of his partner's neck and buried his nose in the dark curls. "I know you know it, clever man. You know that I know. And it's fine. It's going to be alright." He heard his name again, but his lover curled closer around the pillow instead. John snuggled nearer. "I'm over here. This is me. Your John is here."

The music changed again: Massenet's "Thaïs, Act II", still with the underlying track of John's snoring. The sleeper rolled towards his real man. Breathing softly into his face, Sherlock draped an arm down over his ear for a moment. The dreamer began to slowly gyrate his hips against John's thigh. John tried for a kiss, but his man kicked and abruptly rolled back to his headless construct. "Let me love you, Sherlock. It will be alright if you do."

John nudged his partner's shoulder. He almost hoped Sherlock would mutter a reply. Maybe the stubborn sleeper would accidentally say it back. John jostled him a bit more. He pressed his nose into his wool cardi. Maybe Sherlock would sigh out "I love you too, John." Or at the very least he might say "Tell me, if you must."

The dreamer backed his warm bum into John's crotch with an enticing wriggle. It took the detective a while to wake. He fought the strong hand jostling his shoulder.

*Two John's! So it was that dream again, was it? Yes please. Bit rougher than how they normally started.*

Usually they did special things to each other first so the observer could study what they liked (in the name of *science*, naturally.) Usually they took turns explaining exactly what aspects of their researcher aroused them the most. JohnA usually liked his cheekbones. John1, his fluency in polymaths. Then they would almost always need to wrestle each other to determine the bravest, strongest John. Usually it was a draw. Then they would both wrestle their scientist so he might make the final assessment.

JohnA usually ended up beneath and John1 over the back. John1 would enter him, pressing him down into JohnA's inviting warmth at the same time. Simultaneously the pair would praise him as he opened, move their plentiful hands all over his salty skin, rebound his body between their hips as they found depth.

Always in these dreams, the fullness was too much, the depth too far, and he would tell them so. But the pair would say, "We know. It's ok. It's ok." He would always disagree, sometimes struggle embarrassingly, sometimes misbehave quite thoroughly. There had been more than one variation of this dream where he behaved in a most shameful and unmanly way. He wailed, "I'm afraid. I can't.
Too much. I'm weak. No more." But they would always know better, help him learn how, help him to appreciate this subset of their love. Those times, JohnA said, "You're not a coward. You're strong, Sherlock. You're so strong and brave." John1 reminded him, "You can. You already are. It's not enough. Not nearly enough. You need more." They were always right. They always knew.

He needed them to make him soft. He never had to explain. They always knew what he meant because they were John. They would always make him so very soft. Softer than he could ever imagine. Soft like Kevlar weave so no bullet could ever get him. Soft like Sarin gas so he could vanquish his foes without ever making his presence known. Soft like PE7 putty so all obstacles detonated at his will. Soft like water so he could cut mountains into canyons and carve the land to his liking. Softer than their wooly skins.

He always needed them that way. Even when he knew the exact way the dream went every single time. Deeper. Fuller. Always the same frightening suffocating feeling. He would look down at JohnA and shake his head, only to be told, "Yes. Open your mouth, sweetheart: let it happen." John1 would usually say, "Yes. You know how. You're ready." Sometimes they would have to help him with their million fingers because the fear would sew his jaws together, or meld his lips shut. Other times he would open his mouth on his own.

And that's when it would happen the same way every time: John1 expanding deep into the very depths within him. So full there was no room for anything else. Always his heart would be pushed from his mouth, pouring out past his teeth, sloshing off the end of his tongue. JohnA always smiled so sweetly right before devouring it in two bites.

And there would be nothing left inside.

Always he would die in their strong arms right then. Always he would feel the peace of existing nowhere. Always he would tell them "You've killed me, John." And they would say, "That's brilliant. You've solved it. Scientific breakthrough."

Sometimes they would hold his ear to JohnA's downy chest. Sometimes he'd rest his head there on his own. Always he could hear both heartbeats. The stronger beat carrying the rhythm of their unending hips. The weaker beat like the erratic flutter of their panting breaths. That's always when he'd unravel deep inside his man. That's when they would unravel too. First JohnA, washing his belly in a hot torrent. Then John1 overflowing his insides into a seismic ocean. He always told them the same thing every time. Sometimes they smiled and promised. Sometimes they changed to new positions and loved him all over again from the very beginning. Sometimes they vanished and he woke up alone.

Sherlock's thick, sleepy rasp mumbled, "I can't, John. Too much." He undulated his hips between his men. They always helped him when he asked. Because they were John.

But this time, John1's warm security vanished from Sherlock's back, replaced by cold, indifferent air. The detective woke a bit more. His limbs all made of wet felted wool. The lean man willed himself to open his eyes. John was snoring loudly in his arms.

Then John mumbled, "Pint bitter." Sherlock heard himself laugh and reply, "Pub's closing. Come, John, we're off home."

A grumpy snort, "Five more minutes."

"No. We're going now. We'll have more sex."

John growled, "Madman," precisely when he normally did, but this time he also said, "When was this?" at the exact same time as he was roaring out his loud, wall-rattling snore.

The recording went silent for eight minutes. Sherlock sank back into dense twilight sleep. John returned and his strong men sandwiched him tightly. The music ended, but the recorded voices continued.

John: "...[indistinct grumbling]...bed..."
Sherlock: "No. This way. You live here now. We sleep here."
John: "......[too quietly]...with me?"
John: "[maybe something about Viceroy's or velociraptors]"
Sherlock: "John, I'm—"

The lean hand instantly shot out and flung the device off the dock, sending it and his papers crashing to the floor. He sat up too abruptly. His head pounded thunder and he crashed back down. The real John carded his hair.

"Hello, John."
"Are you alright? I didn't mean to scare you."

Embarrassed, Sherlock rolled and snuggled his back against his man, "What's the hour? Are we meeting Lestrade now?"

"He's had to postpone til 8. It's fifteen of 5."

The detective reached back to draw a brawny arm over his middle. He judged the silence and the tension in the wrist. "Recorded Sunday night. Well no. More accurately Monday morning. The audio is...It's research."

"Research...Are we...How much of Sunday?" John's strong hand patted his ribs. Sherlock moved further back and put the hand against the trail of soft dark hair between navel and waistband. John kissed his ear. The doctor moved his hand slowly up and down.

"67 minutes. Research: How best to help you awaken. Then us sleeping. Useful in the event I would be forcibly evicted from surgery and someone would welsh on an agreement made in good faith." Rewarded with a lingering nuzzle behind his earlobe.

"There are privacy laws against sleeping under a doctor's desk. No one chucked you out. You stalked off without so much as a goodbye. And I have come home, as you see. Did Mrs. Hudson buy you new gloves? Have you made other recordings?"

"It's not even your desk. She did. And no."

"When I locum there it is." With a light chuckle into his man's nape, John said, "Streaky bacon and beer! For a bit there I thought you'd done something to me like 'we don't have spiders.' Because...I mean...you haven't ever done that before."

"Your implication: Have I ever drugged you and done things to your unconscious body? Perhaps things of a sexual nature? No. But if you wish <yawn> we can try it. I have several viable compounds that would suit that purpose."

"No. No need." Sherlock rolled into John's arms. He buried another yawn down through the layers over his man's broad chest.
Sherlock snuggled closer into his man's jumper and began lecturing John's shirt collar on naturally derived and synthetically designed sleeping drafts. John interrupted, "Are those, by chance, my dirty pants from the laundry bin?"

"Perhaps." After a long silence, "Not good?" From the throat clearing that followed, the detective decided against explaining they smelled the freshest of the four pairs he'd considered from the overflowing wicker hamper in their bath. He'd wanted the red ones but could not find them and was too tired to dig further down into recesses of the deep laundry bin.

"May I... take a photo? For research?"

"Only one?"

John proceeded to help himself to three dozen photographs which progressed from mildly artistic to extremely suggestive. After final review, Sherlock handed the phone back to his man. He said, "I've deleted the five where my glasses were visible. Plus seven where my lack of recent um, trimming and grooming is too noticeable. And eleven more that showed evidence of scarification. Not attractive! Send me the rest. Especially the last six." He folded his eyeglasses and placed them beside the lamp.

John stuffed his erection back into his trousers and did up his zip. He fished his hand into his rear pocket as he said, "I already know you know. But I'll feel better if I just say." He pressed closer, handed his partner the green index card. He continued, "Sherlock, I sampled the lemon loaf. I should've said."

"Sampled? Is that the word for it? You mean pilfered nearly all, John." Sherlock tucked his hard cock back through the opening of the yellow pants, adjusted himself.

"I had a breakfast slice." They smiled at one another, held hands side by side, sharing the effigy as a pillow.

"Nearly half, John."
"One third at most. Maybe two slices."
"Half."
"They might have been healthy slices."
"The platter was barely crumbs when it came downstairs."

The cake thief pulled his man into his arms. They rubbed their toes together.

"Sherlock, there's something I need to tell you about me. I know you already know...or at least you've suspected. I should've told you from the start. I've meant to say always but there was never a right time." John smiled into the raven tresses. "Right. Well...You know I'm not the sort of man who goes in for desserts. Not one for puddings or sweets. But, well...the thing is...Sherlock, when it comes to lemon loaf, I've no self control."

"You have a biscuit or two with tea. And marmalade toast."
"On occasion."
"I have noted your food preferences tend towards the savory end of the epicurean spectrum."
"It's true. I think of myself as a not-sweets type, for the most part."
"Except for lemon loaf?"

Sherlock held John's little finger between his teeth lightly. He swiveled his neck to slowly play the knuckle against his incisors.

"Exactly. The truth is, I had no intention of eating it...well, not really. At first, I only wanted to see
what it was. I knew I shouldn't touch it. But I got...curious. I only meant to take a quick look."
"Half does not constitute a quick look."
"Well...I saw what it was. Then I knew. I just knew I had to have it. I couldn't stop myself. It was
lemon loaf and that's the best there is. There's nothing better than lemon loaf."

Sherlock inclined his head and received a kiss between his dark eyebrows. John rubbed it into the
skin with a light brush of his thumb. The detective settled against his man's clavicle with a smile.
He pressed his hardness against the outside seam of his man's leg.

"Some people find it too acidic."
"No. Lemons are meant to be tart. It's perfect. The best."
"Some people think it's better with double cream or berries."

"No. People get all sorts of mad ideas that they should add glazes or dust it with icing sugar or tart
it up with a sprig of mint or candied violets or drown it in hot custard. No. It's perfect as is.
Perfect."

"Some people prefer Banoffee pie."

"No. Too sweet, too rich. You would never even consider that as breakfast. But lemon loaf is
perfect anytime. Perfect texture for morning."

"Angel cake has good texture."
"No. That's just sugar and air. Like a stonking great slice of fairy floss! No substance. Lemon loaf
makes a filling tea."

"Cheesecake?"
"No. Can't have that on a summer camping holiday. But lemon loaf is perfect no matter the season.
No refrigeration needed."

"Bakewell tart?"
"No. Too high maintenance. Now you'd need a fork."

"Parkin?"
"You can't serve it at a wake or at a birthday, though, can you? No. Too specific for that. But
lemon loaf does well at any occasion."

"Some people would say lemon loaf is...too plain for a birthday."
"Well they would be very wrong. It doesn't need decorations. Lemon loaf doesn't try to hide what
it is. It's lemon loaf and that's it. What you see is what you get. Simple and beautiful."

"Some would say it's perhaps...too simple for special occasions. You couldn't have it as a wedding
cake."
"Of course you very well could. I would! I'm telling you, Sherlock: lemon loaf is perfect just as it is.
I could have it all day. Every day. When there's lemon loaf, I lose all control and I have to have it.
Day or night. I love lemon loaf, Sherlock. For me, nothing else will do. That's just the sort of
man I am and you need to accept it."

John kissed his man's umber curls noisily. They lay in peaceful silence. Each man idly playing his
knee against the other's. John put up his hand and splayed out his fingers. Sherlock tapped his
fingertips against the pads of John's thick fingers to play a little song. The detective rolled back to
his side. John held him tightly. The soldier kissed the little crescent under Sherlock's earlobe
(grazed by bowie knife, '03.) Then the mottle of old chemical burns on the back of the pale hand
(years of gloveless experiments.)
"Do you really love lemon loaf, John?"
"With all my heart. First thing I think about in the morning. Last thing I think about at night. I even dream I'm having it. I love lemon loaf." He outlined the deep gouge at the side of the thin wrist with his thumb (exploded beaker, '94.)

"Me too."
"I know."

Sherlock reached behind and opened John's zip. John tucked his erect cock up under the blue trim at the back of the yellow pants once more. He nestling between. Sherlock shifted his hips and reached a hand down the back of the yellow pants to help the cock lay flat up his tailbone. John held his man's hand and sighed into his shoulder blade.

John moved slowly until his partner turned flat into the mattress. He reached over and turned on the lamp. Then the soldier rolled his hips with slightly more force. He slid his palms up under the layers to reveal his man's athletic back. John bent forward and kissed scars along the spine, up the ribs, down the sides. Years of fighting, training, punishing. He tasted them all, massaging his kisses into the history with his strong hands. The doctor interlaced their fingers on either side of Sherlock's head. They moved together for a while, their combined strength building friction within the yellow pants.

Sherlock unlaced his fingers from their grasp. He began to scrunch down the pants but John stayed his wrists. "Leave em." The flaxen haired man sat back on his heels. He grabbed his partner's hips, pulling him up on knees.

John dusted kisses over the long chain of raised islands that punctured the back and side of his man's sinewy right thigh (miscalculation of number of Rottweilers on premises and height of wrought iron fence, age 19.)

His mouth found the tiny v behind the left knee (spear tip, learning olamayio, age 23).

The doctor fluttered his lips over the multitude of thin parallel lines on the left hip (triple concertina wire, age 30.)

He firmly pressed kisses into the hard callouses on the outside edges of each foot (lifetime of Judo training.)

He licked a close grouping of four short, raised claw marks on the pale lower right calf (surprised evil siamese cat, 10 weeks ago.)

John kneaded his palms in circles over the gorgeous arse. Through the fabric, he sucked his partner's sac until Sherlock was groaning loudly. He stretched the right leg hole off to one side and lapped harder, sucked tighter, moaning vibrations into the skin. He hugged both arms up over his man's narrow hips and exhaled warm air between his covered buttocks. He nudged up the blue trim at the back of the left thigh and worked his mouth and tongue against the purple his own hand had made on Saturday. Sherlock called out into the mattress. John sat back gasping. His soft, ragged whisper said, "Come here."

Sherlock's mouth was on his in an instant. They held one another tightly and spoke with their languid kisses. John pushed his man's chest back. He reached to the nightstand again. He unfolded the frames and carefully fit them over his man's ears. The nimble fingers corrected their tilt. John grinned proudly, then lay back against his bed. Dexterous fingers fought his belt open, yanked his
trousers and red pants to his knees in one pull. John kicked until he was free.

The fusilier sat up again, they undressed his torso together. John touched his index finger to the side of his downy left forearm. Sherlock kissed his long knife scar. John indicated the semi-circle indented in his hairline and leaned close. The spot where a rugby boot stud had squished his head got a kiss. He tapped raised marks along his chest, his arms, his sides, his belly. Love was administered to every scape and scratch. At last, the soldier offered his left shoulder to his lover's mouth.

Sherlock mirrored his man's sweet smile. He caressed his partner's handsome face. Then he straddled his man's hips and bowed his head into the bullet scar. He fitted dozens of kisses into the area while they pistoned together.

John sank back, pulling his partner with him. He thrust his hips upward. Sherlock used both hands to still his man's forceful hips against the mattress. He knelt over his man's fuzzy thighs, running his hands over the taut abdomen, making John shiver and clench his toes. Sherlock tasted the long upside down h on the outer side of John's left hip where Harry had pushed him out of an alder, age 11.

Then the pale man leaned way back. His mulberry tip was peeking out over the blue waistband, shiny with viscous fluid. He ran his fingers over his cockhead, tasted himself. He did it again, but this time he let John lick his finger.

He opened the wool cardi, button by button, while circling his hips down over his man. The violinist worked his nimble fingers quickly along the shirt buttons while his partner fumbled with the lowest buttons. They stirred their hips to rub their sacs together more firmly.

When John saw one of his vests on the lean torso he groaned, thrust more urgently. Sherlock's nimble fingers reached out through the Y of the yellow pants and beckoned John's thick cock to join his. The man on his back slid his erect cock up along side his lover's until both glans were poking out the waistband, secured tight against Sherlock's abdomen. John grabbed a handful of vest and yanked his man over him. He sucked collar bone. They moved faster, grinding their erections between their heaving torsos. John slid his hand down along his man's vertebrae until he found the tight, fuzzy hole with his fingertips. His ear filled with gasping ragged moans. He pressed his fingers over Sherlock's spasming entry and felt his man's heat radiating out from his warm insides.

The soldier flipped their bodies and began propelling their hips downward with determined momentum. They grunted together with each thrust. He paused long enough to add a handful of saliva to the underside of his shaft. Then he wrapped Sherlock's long legs around him and strengthened their effort.

"Nightstand. Ungh."
"Me too, sweetheart. Me too."
"O! Nightstand."

John stopped moving and looked down at his man's panicked face. Sherlock said it again. He kept patting John's chest rapidly and begging "Nightstand, now!" John quickly pulled the chain to close the lamp. He shoved his cock back into the yellow pants and resumed undulating. John drove their hips down harder. He growled, "Move with me, sweetheart." He was so close. Sherlock's hand pressed up urgently against his man's pubic bone. His narrow hand was gently moved away, held firmly by the wrist. He said something into his man's mouth. John soothed, "I've got you. It's ok, my dear. It's good. Move with me. It's ok." Sherlock made a terrible sound like a chair scraped over a waxed floor. He struggled. Finally shoved his man away.
"For godsakes, John!" The light came back on. From the drawer, the panting man threw a new bottle of silicone lubricant at John's chest. The drawer slammed. Sherlock grabbed John's face in both hands and kissed him hard. Then he flung his long body down in front of his man's lap, pushed his pants to the cusp of his firm cheeks and spread himself wide with both hands. Sherlock turned his head to look at his lover and shouted, "Now!"

John died.

Right then. Just like that. One minute he was having a wonderful time gazing into his partner's cyan eyes and grinding hard cocks together. Next instant, quivering tight hole gazing at him. He couldn't help it. His vision went white. A thin G chord escaped his lungs. Then he flopped over to one side like a felled tree. He lay there with his eyes squinched shut, clinging to the bottle like a life preserver that would save him from drowning in Rule Britannia.

"John, have you, perhaps gone a bit gay again?"

John could not be seen if his eyes were closed. Totally sound scientific reasoning. He clenched into a tight ball.

Blend in! When Britain Fiiiiirst! Don't move! The Aaaaazure Main! Not Yet!
Chapter 76

Chapter Summary

How to start a Fire.

Additionally, The embarrassment of almost premature ejaculation. I personally don't think it's embarrassing at all. I take it as a compliment. Like I'm a cock wizard. But I think John would find it very embarrassing since he took the piss outta his man for cumming prematurely on Sunday.

What's the thing that lives under the woollens?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was not an effective strategy. John could apparently still be seen quite clearly, and also nibbled, licked and tasted.

Eventually, with enough kisses, the invisible man opened his azure eyes. The scientist smiled and said, "Hello. The advantage of releasing now lies in the refractory period: a longer opportunity to prepare my receptiveness unencumbered by the urgency of pending orgasm. You would be able take your time with me, if you let go now. Your physiological history suggests between 18 and 34 minutes. Plenty of time to...assist me." He took the bottle, then put the empty hand on his long neck. John started to say something, but he ended up muttering more lyrics to Rule Britannia.

Sherlock kissed him deeply. In a patient hush into his forehead, "If you prefer, you can let go now and I will go with you. If you need to wait a bit, I'll wait with you. What is your preference?"

"I love your glasses!"

John rolled away and decided it was best to fall off the bed and inspect the sisal rug for hints of where his brain had got off to. He planted his handsome face into the course fibers and tried not to think about what an absolute twelve year old he was. Maggie Cho's beach barbeque all over again! For several minutes he seriously considered crawling under his bed and waiting there until Sherlock forgot he existed. He mumbled into the weave.

"What?"

"I lied."

"Yes. Yellow crumbs on your collar at Paddington. Lemony breath. Your online transaction statement confirmed it but...I traded my gloves to an eyewitness for further proof that you were seen entering these premises on the day in question at four pm carrying a foil parcel of the approximate size and shape of a two bricks. The fingerprints were incidental, John. Not 'two healthy slices' but a loaf and a half! You didn't lie. You were right: I knew. Consulting. Detective. World's Only. Now, is that enough foreplay or shall you fetch me my revolver, my dear man?"

Sherlock slipped elegantly down to the floor, leaned back against the edge of the bed and began snaking the yellow pants off his hips. He left them around his knees for a moment as he waved a
hand over his exposed package. "Shall we?"

No response.

John decided to make a detailed study of the herringbone weave pattern with his nose. He put both arms over his head and tried to stuff his elbows in his ears.

Sherlock steepled his long fingers and rubbed the tips into the tiny scar at the far right corner of lower lip. He felt secure in the knowledge his man would either A) renew their efforts or B) orgasm right there. Of course, either outcome would be lovely, but he ardently hoped for more the former.

Although...there was one known course of action that could perhaps stifle John's self-consciousness and, with luck, summon Sethlans to bless their bodies. Yes...it might just yield the desired reaction. Very delicate business.

*Please John let this work!*

The logician crawled forward. He nipped and sucked between ribs until John began to gasp and reach back for a handful of his hair. The detective pinned the arm down. Sherlock closed his jaws several times while he increased suction over skin. The fusilier snapped his knees together and hinged his heels up to his arse. His broad chest bowed into the scratchy rug and his chin shot up, mouth open, eyes wide. John banged his fist into the floor, stuttered a loud vowel sound.

Sherlock spat the red skin out of his mouth. He flattened a palm down over the heat. He watched John's flushed features ripple for nearly a half second with the underlying motivator. *Yes...Almost found it.* Lean hands moved the bent legs back down with great care. He swept long, firm strokes from fuzzy buttocks to hard heels. First left, then right.

He anchored his heavy scrotum in the dipping convex of L3 vertebra. Up the hill of thoracic curve, he forged heat into the bones with his lips and dexterous hands. He bowed his mouth to the flesh between C7 & T1 and let his humid breath flood warmth into the subcutaneous tissue. The tall man rocked his hips so John could know the security of his strength and hear the reassurance of their identity tags chiming into his skin. The searcher nudged his umber tangles into his man's nape to prompt his lover to tilt his chin down.

Sherlock telegraphed his intentions with a few gentle kisses to spot. Suddenly both broad hands shot back and clamped over the bones at the base of the neck. Sculpted lips fluttered light kisses. Then he grazed the back of the hands with his teeth. He pushed with the tip of his nose. One hand slid away. The other welded more resolutely over the area. The seeker tried more tiny kisses outlining the hand, but John dug his fingers deeper into his skin.

Sherlock lay his entire body flat over John's back. He pressed his athletic form down until his cheekbone rested on the back of the obstinate hand. He let John feel the power of all his weight. He kissed the wrist. Opened his jaws over it and flicked his tongue into the light hairs in time with his lover's breathing.

*Please John you know what we need.*

More soft kisses, warm breaths and steady caresses eventually lured the reticent hand away. Sherlock settled once again in his original stance. Let John feel his need against his spine. He began as he had with John's ribs. Building heat from his wet mouth into deeper suction. His jaws hinged as he chewed at the underlying bone until John wrapped both arms around his head and growled out low sounds into the rug between clenched teeth. The prone man began to twist beneath
him. Sherlock held both arms with one hand. His teeth and suction brought capillaries to the surface. John bucked.

Still the searcher pursued.

John's heels clattered up against Sherlock's backside. His broad hands became fists raking leaves of flax, gold, silver, grey then finally umber. The back of his skull kissed Sherlock's forehead and the soldier became a war horn: resounding the clarion call to bring their quarry.

Sherlock stopped.

John flailed, went still.

At last! He's here!

Sherlock dismounted soundlessly, gliding a foot away. He crouched low on fingertips and the balls of his feet.

Sherlock could faintly taste the woodsmoke in his lungs. His red lips prickled. All his skin tingled in anticipation. He's here! Minute sparks randomly leapt from his motionless man's cranium like the pollen cast off from steel edges honed on a grinding wheel.

John moved like linden honey* over the edge of an ice cube. He turned slowly. His eyes buzzed like huge oily panes of glass. Thin lips set like a nocked arrow slathered in curare.

This was the real John! The man who existed somewhere far beyond the jumpers and ever-joking mask. The man Sherlock simply called More. Because the real John was more elusive than unbonded oxygen atoms. More lived in the space between electrons.

He spoke only sweat, moved like synapses, tasted exactly like the reason half-full bottles of brandy were murdered by refrigerator doors. He killed fear and only fear, breathed only cyan eyes, drank only distilled pleasure noises that had been aged and reserved for over thirty years.

Sherlock crept back with the casual steadiness of the tiger through tall grasses, but it was too late. More called him by name. With barely a motion of one strong hand, Sherlock was flowing upward, gliding backward in time, against the side of the bed, then over it.


Chapter End Notes

Linden honey: the tree with the heart-shaped leaves and yellow cluster blossoms. I think Americans call them lime blossoms? Anyways, the honey is sort of sedative narcotic as a sleeping draft. Not strong or illegal. Quite delicious!
Chapter 77

Chapter Summary

Explicit Beautiful Love Making From Sherlock's View.

Song: Stavinsky's ballet The Firebird.
(Brings me to tears in the last 3 min. If you close your eyes you can see the bird rise from its ashes. A bold celebration of the interminably courageous human spirit. Breathtaking!)

"Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire." (Robert Frost, 1920, Excerpt Fire and Ice)

"God help you if you are a Phoenix
And you dare to rise up from the ash
A Thousand Eyes will smolder with jealousy
as you are flying past" (Ani DiFranco, Not a Pretty Girl)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The fire began immediately.

John knelt at the far edge of his man, dressed in skin tanned from thunderbolt hides. He pressed the head of his leaking cock against Sherlock's entry and grew like tree rings in ancient yew. The tension of John's hardness against his unprepared tightness drew smoldering embers. The scientist felt himself expanding ever so slightly. Sparks singed the soles of his feet, curling his toes into John's downy pectorals. The tall man held his sinewy ankles and swayed his hips so his body could taste more heat.

Then nothing. The fire died abruptly.

Sherlock sat up on his elbows. Fog enveloped him. His long fingers stirred the air. Glasses flew off his nose; blurred geometry; glasses perched over his ears again; crisp focus. John wearing a smile made of ignited ethanol.

John touched each instep to his white hot lips and Sherlock's pastel eyes went wide as one single glowing particle winked against the underside of his foot. It fizzled then suddenly burst orange, skittering around the arch of his foot when John exhaled.

A slick broad hand scrubbed the sparse hair of his chest, rattling tags until he lay back down. John grabbed his hips and slid him forward, up over the ramp of the pillow. The fire seeker planted each sole against the chest again. John firmly stamped them higher up and further apart near the outer edges of his clavicles. Thick thumbs traced the heat from arches up over the bridges then pressed it under the skin to scald his tali.
Together the lovers passed one deep breath from lungs to lungs like a call and response hymn to summon Fire. Sherlock brushed his fingers over his lover's knees to sound the strings in his mind.

Again, slick tip of flesh pressed him, begged his ring of muscle to spark into flames. *John.* Fire itched his splayed fingertips, trickled up his veins, kissed his temples. His scabby kneecaps crackled; their heat cascading to his chest. Ever so slightly, his insides began to fizz with sparking embers. He could feel it, lapping just outside his body. His hole shimmered. He prayed his god's name aloud, "*More.*" The glow of twin azure flames flared. Light whiffs of fresh smoke signaled his prayer might be answered soon.

Then nothing. A cold blob of silicone extinguished him. Frost numbed his toes and he clawed at John's forearm with his sizzling hands. He shook from his core. Tried to fold in on himself like a dehydrated leaf in a slush puddle. *No...*

But John was over him in one heartbeat, pressing close chest to chest. The taste of woodsmoke from John's mouth reassured his faith. There would be fire. They would find it. John would bring it to him.

The fire giver knelt back as before, arranged limbs like kindling again. He patted his searing palm into his man's shin.

"*More.*" John took the fiery invocation in his mouth and spread the hot flavor into his tastebuds before it could wisp away on the air. Sherlock gasped as the golden hair burst alight with flames, spilling from his man's temples, then dripping down over his pale shins.

The flames nibbled his entry. John's deep breaths flooded Sherlock's lungs until the lean man's chest heaved like double-action accordion bellows. His lover's cock began to expand him again. He looked up into John's eyes flickering so far away at the edge of his existence. "*More.*" His outer sphincter bloomed in a ring of gorgeous fire and he groaned. *John.*

The flames receded briefly and he quivered. John pressed his cockhead forward and then receded in slow, deliberate cycles that stretched fire then quelled it. The shimmering tension of his clenching hole delighted in the blaze each time the pink tip kissed him wider. *John.*

The roof of Sherlock's mouth crackled. All his molars began to hiss with escaping steam. His chest rumbled.

*He's almost within me. He will. He will make me Fire.*

John lead his thin wrist down. The fire bringer's lips were moving as the flames dribbled out of his mouth, "...hide it. Your smile is beautiful. I...

Sherlock realized that he was softly giggling to himself. He tried to speak but only glittering sparks escaped. His god still heard his entreaty.

The inferno built when John sank his glans past Sherlock's first ring of muscle. It was bliss. His vision wavered in heat trails. John held there, did not let his ignited entry suck the cockhead any deeper.

Sherlock burned.

He began to rock his hips, leveraging up off the pillow. John slid the flared edge of glans slightly deeper, past slick hole and Sherlock laughed loudly, spitting flames into the air. *I'm his width of flames.* He sputtered out another fit of laughter. His ribs cracked in the blaze and he traced their
aching lines with his lit fingertips. John. He moved upward drawing his man a tiny bit deeper. His quaking abdomen turned to wildfire under John's stroking knuckles. He threw his head back and moaned until the wall began to smoke. Everything tingled brightly.

The heel of John's hand pressed down behind Sherlock's sac and he felt like the sun was rising inside him. With his toes behind his lover's ears, the burning man could hear the sun speaking to him in flares within his bones: strange half-audible riddled about being in love. He cackled like a madman. Fire lapped his entry until he smelled his flesh charring.

Sherlock watched little slivers of ash flow his skin to dust. Each time they exhaled, he saw little weightless particles of his flesh twinkle and swirl away. His long fingers reached out to catch a dancing flake mid-air. A strong hand grabbed his fingers and clung tightly, spilling the blaze from arm to arm. He hissed out a smoldering giggle. He grabbed the back of his knee when it shuddered searing flames. He will feed my insides inferno. He will.

"More."

The azure flames became pinpoints of amber light. John nodded once. He squeezed the scorched fingers. Then he drew back, out, away. He quickly fed back in again. Their teeth glowed white. Tipping out, then dipping back in. Sherlock wailed agony when the fire abated, moaned symphonies when reentered. They worked John's tip together. Pumping his cockhead back and forth over the threshold between fire and air.

Sherlock's baritone plea set the walls on fire. "More!" Popping John's corona of glans through seared vices of muscle, diving back into the blaze. Each time he returned, Sherlock opened to him like a gateway to the underworld. John darted in and out like searing flames chewing through red coals. The fire seeker exhaled sharp, quick gasps that set the ceiling alight.

The roiling blaze overhead crowned his man's blazing body as it sloshed down from above. John. A gasp hitched in Sherlock's throat to see him. The Fire King had arrived!

Make me burn! "Please."

John nodded again. Sherlock crumbled his strong hand to ash. The Fire King delved further beyond the smoldering twin rings. Forged an inch, retreated. Again. Sliding an inch deeper. Recede. Pumping flames up his internal flue to crisp his brain. John reached into him at the same level of depth again and again. Hammer to molten alloy. Showers of red embers.

Thrust Inferno Thrust Inferno Thrust Inferno

There! Wide cockhead dragging back and forth over blazing nerve bundle...sizzling something... Fire and something...

Fire and... Fire and... The scientist could taste it. Smell it like his singed hair. It was on the tip of his tongue...Fire and...

Fire and...

Sherlock felt the sheets ignite. He moved like shadow abstracts dancing over the wall. Their efforts cast sparks. John rained fire down in bolts. He held Sherlock's knees and roused higher flames, stuffing them inside again and again. Propelling them, willing them, to advance over every combustible bit of tissue where he dared not delve. Orange and amber billowed from his nostrils as he churned his partner to a blazing bonfire.
Fire and...fire and...fire and...**BLISS!**

Sherlock incinerated all at once.

He dug his toes into deltoids and cried out the name of his Fire King.

Chapter End Notes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has a running theme of Fire throughout his Sherlock Holmes stories. Sometimes the fire reveals, other times it destroys evidence, it solves cases a few times, it serves as a weapon, and a tool. I wish I could ask him about it. Massive fan!
Chapter 78

Chapter Summary

The sadness of Greg Lestrade's marriage. The darkness of how it ends. It's only his perspective, so obviously we'll never know the other side of things.

D. I. Gregory Lestrade sat with a wire chair carving grid marks in his bum, listening to Sheila berate him. She always bought the least comfortable furnishings imaginable. This rubbish fucking orange tin arse-scaper was part of a sodding set that had replaced the wooden dining set his mum and dad gave them as a wedding gift 8 years ago. Eight years ago Sheila liked the wooden set. Said she loved how sturdy and timeless it was.

Now it was Eurochic. Everything in his home was now Eurochic. All hard angles, loud obnoxious colors, plenty of empty space.

She was carrying on and on, pacing, her great fluffy heel boot things clomping the slick blonde wood like a bloody Clydesdale over cobbles.

He looked down at his hand twisting his wedding ring round his finger until the gold edges cut grooves.

The double edged sword she wielded: Too many hours of overtime.

His fault.

She wanted the money to buy the lifestyle she needed to win the never-ending competition with her sisters and impress all the highbrow friends he couldn't stand. But she resented the long hours he had to leave home to get it. Time vs money. Her loneliness.

His fault.

Sheila didn't have to quote the therapist, recap their failed renewal holiday, open every barely healed festering wound. She didn't even have to invoke the name of her latest man: Bryson. Phys Ed, state grammar school.

*Oh yes! You've brought a stranger into our midst, into our marriage, into our fucking bed. I'm the thing who lives on the sofa in the back room in my own sodding home.*

His fault.

Let's be mature adults about this, Gregory.
See it from my side, Gregory.
It's for the best, Gregory.
There'll always be another victim who needs you more than me, Gregory.
I'm second fiddle to your job, Gregory.
I've become your housekeeper, Gregory.
We live like flatmates, Gregory.
Face facts: it's been over for years now, Gregory.
See the positives: at least we don't have children, Gregory.

His fault.

Eight years!

Greg stood. Walked past the stranger inhabiting his wife's body. Dragged the orange scrap metal torture device to the balcony. It leapt from his hands out into the night air and escaped the hollow of their home to seek a new life sleeping rough on the roadway far below. He bid it a cordial farewell with a loud, anguished wail into the thin London night air.

Eight years!

Couldn't stay at mum's again. Her newest husband disgusted him.

Too late to go to his brother's. It was his week to have his girls anyways.

Couldn't ask Sarge. Anderson's wife was out of town again so she probably had him over at hers already.

Greg donned his coat and cap. Strangled his tie up around his chin. Righted his collar. Detective Inspector Lestrade didn't look back at the yowling, hollering stranger as he quietly shut the door behind him for the last time.
Chapter 79

Chapter Summary

the fundamental personality differences between Mr. Heart and Mr. Mind. Shakespearian misunderstandings.

'Make a joyful noise unto the lord.'

John thinks back to when he was new to sex. HETEROsexual sexual references. Not too explicit but definitely mature content.

"How did we do?"

"Hm? Oh, um...yeah ten minutes early probably. Maybe fifteen. We'll make it."

"John, how did we do?"

They searched one another's eyes in the darkened confines of the cab. John tugged on the cashmere scarf, leading the wearer to his mouth. He put his hand up under to feel the blood dancing through Sherlock's carotid artery. The doctor smiled proudly. Thyroid cartilage bobbed under his thumb. He pulled slightly forward until they were barely a millimetre apart. "Perfect. We were perfect," he breathed.

In the flickering lights of oncoming traffic, John watched the glowing eyes flash like pale opals as they kissed. He wanted to send the cab right back the opposite direction. Get back in bed and eat more of those amazing laughs.

Never had he experienced someone laughing so joyfully when he moved within them. The beautiful mouth calling for more, giggling like a madman. Then bursting into a wild fit of sparkling, gasping laughter right after he came. His man's body pulsing and quaking around his cockhead while he laughed and sighed out John's name. It was the most beautiful thing the flaxen-haired man had ever had the privilege to witness.

John thought Sherlock's plan to achieve Fiery Bliss would be cruel. But they were very different people. John never could have done that! Penetration without manual preparation seemed so horribly painful to the doctor. The idea of taking Sherlock's cock when he was at his tightest made him feel physically ill. But, his man was a firebird. Overflowing with pure ecstasy to have John the way he wanted. Sherlock's glorious smile, as if he were solving a thousand elegant cases simultaneously. Such a beautiful firebird.

They had swayed lazily into sleep, still laughing together, clinging to one another like two drunks stumbling home from a New Year's pub. Even when they stirred from dozing an hour and a half later, they were still giggling and groping. Sherlock couldn't keep his pinching, playful hands to himself when they showered. The tall man kept stealing kisses and tickling while John dressed him. Very challenging to wrestle pants onto someone who was dancing! The joy effervesced out of their smiling mouths like bubbles in champagne. John had kept imploring, "Hurry up, get your socks on, madman. We'll be late." But Sherlock had pinned him fast against the wall with a menacing grin. He'd only replied, "Kiss me, John. Just one more little one if you don't want to be
late." Yet the lanky man kept darting his head away, scolding, "It's as if you deliberately want to be
late. Does punctuality mean nothing to you, Captain? Really now, John, stop messing about."

As a last resort, John had asked about the stolen painting to settle them down or they never would
have left their rooms. Relaying the known case details and standing in the brisk night air had
sobered Sherlock back into the chilly guise of calculating logician once more. They rode most of
the journey to the meet-up in silence while the detective's gears churned. His knuckles under his
chin. Ever-scanning cyan eyes watching their frenetic hive of a city whirl past his window.

John had felt a slight pang of childish lonesomeness. Secretly missing the giddy naked man he'd
been chasing around and towel snapping only minutes before. He tried to remind himself they were
at work now by touching Bess under his jacket. Schoolyard times were over for the time being.
Serious. The whole colleagues bit for a while.


I miss you, sweetheart, and you're a foot away.

Then his darling slid a knee over, took his hand, ate the distance away. They continued to look out
opposite windows while the logician further coalesced his thoughts. Then Sherlock squeezed his
hand, turned to him for a moment and winked. Such a small thing. But to John, it was so dear.
Then Sherlock had asked the window pane, "How'd we do?" Apparently not wondering if they
were on schedule.

John assumed his man's current question was maybe a return to their playful flirting. Maybe
wanting more compliments about his virility. Wanting John to tell him once more how wonderful
their lovemaking was. Or Perhaps wanting John to again admit Sherlock had been right to assert
his preference for Fiery Bliss.

Or was it a touch of beginners's angst rearing up again instead? John remembered his First with
fondness. So many years ago! Back when 40 seemed like decrepit old age!

Three years older, a 'mature' college woman hailing from the land of 'real world' grownup
experienced coolness— with a butterfly shoulder tattoo to prove it! Home on summer holiday.
Schooling an awkward sixteen-year-old boy in the ways of the flesh. To think back, three years
was nothing. They'd only been kids! But to the young man she'd seemed like a goddess sent down
from Sex Heaven to answer every wet dream he'd ever had and own his virginity. Months of sun-
drenched exploration and discovery.

John would always treasure those memories as The Summer I Became A Man. Such a silly thing.
He smiled into his fist remembering how often he'd asked stupid shite like "Was it good for you?"
"Was I ok?" "How was it this time?" "Am I doing this right?"

Audrey! God bless her wherever she may be! First time she slid down around him, he came in a
nanosecond, despite the condom. Might not have even been a third of the way in! But she hadn't
been the least bit vexed. She'd smiled slyly and taught him how to return the favor between her
fragrant thighs. Best thing he'd ever tasted until Sherlock Holmes! Lord how John Watson loved
oral sex! Made him feel like a bloody rockstar. Oh sweet Audrey!

Next woman he'd been with had been overwhelmed by his enthusiasm. Said she'd never had oral
before. Her selfish ex-boyfriends never reciprocated despite all the blowjobs she'd provided. John
had dropped to his knees right there in her hallway, snatched her polka dot scanties down with his
teeth. He'd looked up from under her navy pinafore and said, "I'm not them, Donna. Ride my face."
She'd cum wiggling down into his muzzle, clawing his blonde hair out, making the cutest little
sounds like the start of a sneeze, her thighs trying to decapitate him.

Thank you for teaching me the way, sweet Audrey, goddess of clitoris, blessed be thy name! John remembered her endless kindness, despite all his pestering, insecure questions. She never belittled him. She taught him everything she knew. She told him that the differences between masturbation and partnered sex were time, listening and generosity. She taught him to be shameless, fearless, respectful of every person who chose to share their body with him. The patience of a saint, that girl!

Sherlock pressed back from their kiss and arched an eyebrow. The we-both-know-what-I'm-asking-about face. His pale hands flashed a brief sort of accordion gesture. John's sweet beginner did that face again.

"John."

"I don't understand, my dear."

Sherlock rolled his eyes in frustration. John's top five dullest, most repetitive catch-phrases:

1. I don't understand.
2. I still don't understand.
4. It's fine. It's all fine.
5. Get milk.

"Progress. Were we able to accomplish...further access this time? How'd we do?"

Don't make me say it, John. For godsakes please get that placid brain working, my dear man. Nope! Still the vacant stare with lower lip flopping down. Try again.

"More than last time. Quantitatively. Better?"

And cue the sputtering, choking coughs. Oh god...He's going to make me say it outright.

Sherlock sighed. Accordion gesture again. No response. Sherlock made a fist of John's hand in the hidden dark recess of the seat between them. He began burrowing his long finger down into the space within John's palm. The scientist lowered his voice and spoke into the fold of John's knit beanie.

"John? Was I better? Was I...more accommodating than our...previous attempt?

Ah! There he is! He's got it now. And...he's located his angry scowl. Oh what a surprise.

John moved his hands into his own lap, shifted tightly against his door handle as if he was seriously going to roll out onto the roadway at speed. His quiet, faux-calm, I'm-caging-the-beast voice spoke to his window.

"Don't know. Wasn't paying attention to that."

Liar.

His azure eyes flashed that you-are-strongly-cautioned glare before he turned back to the window.
The soldier's fists clenched into his thighs and his tense flexing jaw stood out in high relief with each passing car's lights. Beneath the sounds of the engine, his gnashing teeth could almost be heard.

*I've offended his puritanically delicate sense of boundaries or privacy or something of that ilk. When would this tedious appropriateness ever end? You'll slather yourself in my semen in every room of our flat but I'm never meant to mention it out in public. Well, You've chosen the wrong companion for that rubbish, o flatmate mine!*

"An estimation. *Data.* More or less than last attempt, John?"

"Veto." John said it so casually that anyone who didn't know him would think he was not bothered in the slightest.

The doctor felt chillingly cold and so horribly small. Like one of Sherlock's dabs of mystery sludge smeared on a microscope slide. There were times the logician could be so icy and unfeeling that John worried he could not endure the detachment. His partner had this terrifyingly efficient ability to shred tenderness. Just when the doctor would hope they'd surpassed all that, his scientist's need to dehumanize would strike up like a deadly viper.

"John, quantitatively: *more or less?*" Sherlock said in a slow, deliberately patronizing sneer.

"Please stop talking." John looked at his man with pleading sapphire eyes. Same look when he'd knelt at the side of his upstairs bed and said, "You'll have to buy me dinner first." First time Sherlock had ever been in his man's bed. The reason he'd chosen to sleep up there today. Perhaps this was nothing to do with shame or privacy. *What was it?* Furrowed brow, thin set lips, clenching hands. There was most certainly anger but also an element of that look he had when he was hurrying round to his sister's after a slurring, belligerent phone message.

Sherlock slid all the way over until they were pressed side by side. Softly, by way of apology, he offered, "I was only *wondering,* my dearest, kindest John... *Feels* like it was...much more this time...that's all."

John snapped his head round to face him. Eyes wide.

"Did we hurt? Sherlock, are you hurt?" John's face was full of anxious concern. He was suddenly gripping his man's thin hand much too tightly. "Have we hurt you?"

"No."

"What do you mean 'feels like more'?" John turned his body as much as possible. His heart was threatening a massive cardiac event. He whispered urgently, "Sherlock, have we *hurt* you? Full truth, sweetheart, tell me. Tell me honestly. Was there...Sherlock, was there *blood*?"

"No! John! *God no!* Well...technically yes, I suppose. We need new rugs. I'm fine." Sherlock scrunched up his trouser hem to reveal his kneecap. The sisal weave had exacerbated his rug burns to huge angry red patches. The shower had softened the scabs, leaving the scrapes a bit sticky now.


"Thank you, John."

"Better?"
"Quite. Thank you, doctor mine." They smiled. Sherlock chanced putting his arm around his man's shoulder. John settled into his side, patted his thigh. They let the warm silence soothe them for a mile.

"John...will you consider...possibly...retracting your veto? At a later time. A more convenient time?"

"I'll try. For you, I'll always try."

"I know."

"I know you know."
The Turn

Chapter Summary

The Turn: A Message to the Reader

Cutter: Every great magic trick consists of three parts or acts. The first part is called "The Pledge". The magician shows you something ordinary: a deck of cards, a bird or a man. He shows you this object. Perhaps he asks you to inspect it to see if it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But of course... it probably isn't. The second act is called "The Turn". The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now you're looking for the secret... but you won't find it, because of course you're not really looking. You don't really want to know. You want to be fooled. But you wouldn't clap yet. Because making something disappear isn't enough; you have to bring it back. That's why every magic trick has a third act, the hardest part, the part we call "The Prestige".

Excerpt from the 2006 Film: "The Prestige" Written & Directed by Christopher Nolan

Of note: One of the main themes displayed in The Prestige is Plutarch's thought experiment concept known as the The SHIP of Theseus. The paradox was initially put into writing by Plutarch in his work Life of Theseus. This paradox was later explored by 17th century philosopher John Locke in his work An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. As a youngster this paradox was told to me as Lajos Kossuth's famous knife. (I think we all know what I'm getting at here...you've been strongly cautioned! It's about to get very very dark!)

God Bless the kind few who actually read this rubbish.

Yours in Queer Solidarity,

-J

Simon/e I love you!
Hare psychopathy checklist

Chapter Summary

This is the actual Hare Psychopathy Checklist to warn what is ahead.

The twenty traits assessed by the PCL-R score are:

- glib and superficial charm
- grandiose (exaggeratedly high) estimation of self
- need for stimulation
- pathological lying
- cunning and manipulativeness
- lack of remorse or guilt
- shallow affect (superficial emotional responsiveness)
- callousness and lack of empathy
- parasitic lifestyle
- poor behavioral controls
- sexual promiscuity
- early behavior problems
- lack of realistic long-term goals
- impulsivity
- irresponsibility
- failure to accept responsibility for own actions
- many short-term marital relationships
- juvenile delinquency
- revocation of conditional release
- criminal versatility

What follows in the next few chapters requires the strongest trigger warning. Moriarty is the classic definition of a true psychopath. The actions and behaviours describes are the twelve most common real actions perpetrated by known serial killers. If anyone reading this recognizes these symptoms in some individual within your community- say something!
"I've never felt this way about anyone Nini! Look what he's done to me; look what he's DONE!"

The curvy, dark haired Irish woman set her gloves and handbag down on the low oak table. She looked up to her crying, anguished babe sitting atop the chest of drawers. Her dark eyes ached with pain to see her little brother making such a hames of his flesh once more. He'd engraved red ribbons into his thighs again during the few hours whilst she'd been off to the mainland. His noble blood trickling down his lap, thinned by his bucketing of bitter tears. She watched a single watery, pink droplet waver on the underside of his big toe before gravity flicked it down to the grey marble.

First time he'd gone this far, the sharp edge had whittled C.P. into his thin skin. The time after that, it had been Da's initials. This past year, it was always- and too frequently- S. H. Layer over layer. Shiny embossed white lines where he'd repeatedly mapped his obsession into the meat of this thighs. Intersected now by fresh angry crimson overlay: S. H. S. H. S. H.

She sighed. Raked her red nails through her long black tresses. Her heart aching dully as if squeezed in the slow vice of her dear one's anguish. Poor little lamb; he was such a sensitive, misunderstood divil. Far more sensitive than their brother! She stepped out of her matte black Jimmy Choos and wiggled her sweaty, cramped toes into the cool marble tile.

Her little lamb bleated out a soul-rending flood of sobs. The makeshift blade of sharpened porcelain teacup shard dangled limply between his futile, reddened fingertips. His groomed chestnut brows wracked with deep despair. His shoulders shivering with torturous bereavement. His chest heaving with jagged, wet, mewling cries of frustration and loneliness. Poor sweet babby.

Unlike his previous two obsessions, this latest was not one they could simply and swiftly resolve. They couldn't just stop this one laughing. They had to stick by the plan. Be patient. She wanted to clout his quivering lip and shout, "Love takes time! Jaysus! You know that! Now stop foosterin' an' pull yer socks up, Eejit!"

But she had to be wide just now. Nini dared not transgress him in this delicate, vulnerable state. He'd shot her for far less insubordination eight years back. She'd been very shocked, to tell the truth. So unexpected! But then again, he always repaid his debts. And she had stabbed him in the top of the deltoid the summer before that, so, she really should have seen it coming. A hollowpoint bullet that he'd literally carved her name into before serving it to the top of her foot one sunny August morn. Repaid her one year to the day exactly. He'd cackled raucously at her wide eyes and spun the revolver round the tip of his index finger, saying, "Look at you! I shall always cherish the complete look of surprise on your face, my darlin' gal! Thank you for that! Bless you! Bless you,
my dear! Cheeky little munkey!

She smiled kindly at him now. Cautiously crept her hand to the volume control and turned the sappy music way down until it couldn't be heard. Tried to wait for the babbling brook of angry tears to fade as well before she dared approach him.

Her dear one shook with another torrent of all-consuming sobs. He smeared his brick red fingers over his tired eyes with a sluggish hand, then reached for the bottle. She figured the slosh of Connemara single malt dribbling down his chin meant he was truly serious this time. They had known this part of the plan would be difficult to endure. Yet she could not fathom the depth to which it affected him.

He screamed at the ceiling. Her knees locked. His scored thighs trembled as another wave of agonized crying overtook him. She rushed to him, trying her most empathetic and tender smile.

"Oh my poor babby! Oh my poor poor sweet darlin. Look what he's done to ya! Nini's here, luv. Nini's here now. I'll stop 'im hurtin you. We'll stop 'im hurtin you soon enough, me darlin chancer."

Weeping miserably, he toppled from the chest of drawers. He slipped through her arms, dashed to the floor below the window in an uncoordinated heap of paralytic limbs. Knees failing and skidding in the thin slick of his blood, tears and dribbled whiskey.

"Do you mean it, Nini? Do you even mean it? Oh Nini he hurts so badly! Look what he's done to me!"

Her little lamb began bleating again. Clutching his quaking gut, scuffing his blood-crusted fingernails into his dark hair. The sharpened white triangle nudged into the space between his ribs as he hugged tighter round his aching core.

"Gimme the blade, Jamie, luv. Give it to Nini now. That's it, my luv. I know. Yer man in the city is a wretched one an' 'e'll pay soon enough. Now sit you down an' give that nasty thing to Nini. That's it, give it me. Give it, Jamie. Soon enough, luv. We'll stop 'im soon enough," she cooed.

"Oh Nini! Nini he's ruined me! He's done this."

"I know. I know. Oh my sweet Jamie. I hate to see you suffer so. Give it me, luv. Gimme that vile feckin blade, me darlin dote. Ta. There we are! Good man!"

She held fast to his slippery red hand and lead him to their bed, bracing his jellied weight against her. He flooded over the edge, his carved thighs sticking to the ivory duvet. He wailed into the satin brocade, fistfuls of fabric. The older sister righted him, cradled his throbbing brunette head in her lap. She let her little babe cry it all out until naught remained but his ragged hiccuping breath. She lightly traced a tanned finger over his puffy eye socket. With time, he fumbled her fingers over his clammy bare bicep. She patted his skin as she shushed him softly.

"Nini?"

"Yes, my sweet divil?"

"Nini, I don't know if I can go on without 'im. It's been too long. I'm not strong enough, Nini. It'll never happen."

"Hush now. Just you hush, Jamie. None of that, my luv. Nini's here, dear one. Nini's gonna make it all better."
"I need 'im so! Why? Why can he not SEE? We're made for each other!"

"'Cause 'e's an ordinary man. A stupid little gobshite of an ordinary fella. Hush now, my darlin babby. Hush up now. We'll spill ev'ry drop of 'is blood before we spill one more of your sweet tears. I'll not see you cry for him one second more, my darlin babby. We must be strong now. You'll 'ave 'im soon enough, my luv. Soon enough."

He seemed to subdue a bit. His breathing slowed. The shaking of his muscles calmed to periodic rippling. The clenched hands on her black frock hem went limp. She almost thought he'd gone to sleep.

"Nini?"
"Yes, luv?"
"Will we really get 'im?"
"What does your heart tell ya?"
"I- I think so..."

Her chest ached to hear him so doubtful, so pathetically resigned. She had to draw him back to himself before he did something unspeakably horrible.

"Jamie...Be honest, me sweet divil. Tell Nini: what does your heart say?"

He upturned his head to search her face, red rimmed eyes like overflowing cisterns. Poor little lamb. Then he slowly mirrored her mischievous little grin. He wiped a bogey from beneath his nose, smearing it down his lip with the back of his knuckles as he lazily batted his tinted eyelashes at her. Sweet babby. Her little finger gently swiped his slime away. She tasted the excess salt in his syrpy mucus. His eyes glittered and his smile broadened. He snorted more mucus onto her frock to clear his nose, rubbing the thick sheen of it into her thigh.

"My heart...says...YES!"

"Good man! That's right! We'll get 'im for you, dear one. If we have to lave the whole of this corrupt empire in innocent blood, we'll get 'im."

"THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS INNOCENT BLOOD!" he snapped, sitting up abruptly. Eyes smoldering his contemptuous hatred.

Oh thank Christ! There he was!

"That's my sweet babby! Now, give it me all from the very first. An don't skip the good bits!" She scooted close to his side and tucked her tanned legs beneath her. Her bright smile showed him her eagerness to hear his gorgeous fairytale again.

"I can't. I'm too tired," he pouted querulously. He turned his head away and waited for her to beg him. He exaggerated a deep sniffle and wiped the back of his shaky hand under his swollen nostrils again. He stuttered out a long hiccuping sigh. Cheeky little shitehawk!

"Jamie...Mama's 'ad enough now. Stop actin the maggot and tell me. Go on. Let me have it, luv. Come now. What's step one, my motherless darlin? Come now. Step one is..."

Her naked, polluted man leapt to his feet.

"Burn THE HEART out of him!"

He swayed, lurched, reached out for her. His sticky, crusted nails dug into her shoulder pads. She
gentle held his tense hips. They locked eyes, the excitement building between them.

"That's it! That's it! Oh me sleeveen asp! That's it! Now...what's step two? Tell it me, dear one. What's two?"

"Step two: Make him FALL!"

"Yes! Yes, my luv! Well done! An three?"

"Step three: Steal him away from the side of the angels!"

"YES! Give us a kiss, you loon! Mmmmm. Genius! Now...tell us the final solution, yeah?"

But he only pouted. She began to coax him, as he needed. Her fingers prodding his pelvic sockets with increasing force.

"You know you want to...I know what kind of man you are, dear one. You love throwin shapes! Come now...I'm the only one who really knows what you're like, remember? You can tell Nini your shenanigans. You know you need to...You'll feel better if you say. Come on. Off you go...come on..."

"Final solution: Stayin alive. In the end it's always Him and Me. Together. We have to be together! Just him and me!"

"That's right! That's exactly right, my luv. You and 'im. Together. Forever. That's how it's meant to be, dear one. That's how it started so that's how it ends. We're gonna get 'im for you, Jamie. Soon enough. We're gonna get 'im!"

"We're gonna get him!"

"'Cause e's yours."

"'Cause he's MINE! He belongs TO ME! From the very first. That arrogant, self-righteous, ordinary, boring little virgin boy. He's mine and I OWE him a fall! He's mine and I'll make him see. We're perfect for each other! He's MINE, Nini! All mine forever!"

"That's right! Yes he is!"

His hand caressing the back of her neck began gathering a tight fistful of black strands. He closed around a snarled ponytail of her long hair and forced her head back sharply.

"He's mine and I'll make him KNOW it. Down in his bones, he'll know it. I'll carve it into his skeleton while he dances for me! Oh, Nini, how I love watching him dance! Soon enough he'll know his proper place. He's not meant to be in my way but by my side."

"Under your thumb."

"Under my heel."

"Under your rule, my sweet darlin King!"

"Shut up an finish me!"

And just like that, James was back in proper form. Her darlin wolf had at last shed his fleece of self pity. Thrusting his prick violently into her clenched fist, biting her ear, snarling the name of his ordinary little jester with his whiskey breath. She dug her red fingernails into the fresh slices on his
oozing thigh until at last he screamed for the one who would soon replace her.

When he’d finished with her, James sagged down before her lap, burying his face in the mix of his snot and cum on the black fabric over her thighs. She patted his thick brown hair, christening the crown of his head with his own splatter. He breathed hard and caressed the back of his shoulder where her serrated dagger had chewed through his muscle right down against his bone.

"Nini?"

"Yes, my dear one?"

"Don't ever say you'll spill his blood again. And know that if you ever do, my dear gal, I'll make you into shoes."

They chuckled.

"You don't 'ave to look so scared. I was only messin! Oh my cute hoor, you know how I jus love twistin hay! Only messin." She ruffled his hair and pinched his cheek. They giggled.

His darlin sister got up and padded off to the kitchen. At the doorway, Nini paused thoughtfully. Then she headed back to the far wall of the enormous bedroom. She threw open the heavy black velvet curtains to reveal his huge inspirational collage wall. Over her shoulder she smiled beguilingly. Then she left for the bog.

Chapter End Notes

Making a Hames= making a mess
Be wide= be careful
Foostering = fannying about (aimlessly wasting time)
Motherless= Very drunk (implies that to be that drunk you must not have a mother to have raised you right)
Chancer= person who is up to no good
Acting the maggot= playing daft
Throwing shapes= making up tall tales
Chapter 83

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning Moriarty. Not so much funny as it is bone chillingly disturbing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nini really was the most adorable of all ordinary people. No man could ask for a more supportive older sibling. Far more supportive than the other one! James smeared his fluids from his forehead with a smile and wiped his hand on this thigh. He stood before his collage wall and considered his incipient plan.

It was all there, his roadmap to happiness, carefully laid out before his eyes like a magical yellow brick road to the promise land. *Me and my boyfriend! Perfect soulmates! It was happening just as he’d dreamed!*

He dragged a sanguine fingernail over his daily motivational mantra. "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." *So true Mahatma!*

*This world's certainly not going to throw itself into chaos and ruin without people like me working our arses off to bring about that change each and every day.*

He whispered the quote to himself while holding his gaze in the silver-framed baroque mirror Nini had nailed above his mantra. His confidence surged and he proclaimed it louder. "*Be* the change, Jem. Be it!" He blew a kiss to himself and smiled.

His hand swayed dreamily over the big glitter-coated wooden letters above his head: LIVE, LAUGH, LOVE. Wonderful Nini! World's greatest life coach! She’d decorated the whole wall with inspirational fortifiers from floor to ceiling. His spirit animal: The Otter. To remind himself that he had to play more. Life was too short to be so dull and serious. He had to find the craic in all the little things to keep the boredom at bay.

Pink strings connecting each of his plans into a unified goal. Three easy steps, each with three subsidiaries beneath. "Dream Big!" Massive, neon orange letters right at the center of his plan. Followed by: "Jamie + Billy = [heart with infinity symbol inside]" Nini must have added that bit while he’d gotten himself detained last month. Such a supportive sister! Maybe it was the Connemara, but Jamie was so overcome with joy he wanted to cry buckets and buckets. And ’twas ok if he did that. The books said so. *It's ok to feel, Jem. Let love guide you!*

Nini had found him all the best daily affirmations and self improvement books. She was perfect at buying motivational publications, *The Secret, The Power of Positive Thinking, The Happiness Project, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Eat Pray Love,* and *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*. He brushed his hands along their cracked spines, then fluttered his fingertips over the many crimson flags poking from the tops where he’d bookmarked all the most important passages so he could re read them each day. He’d really missed reading his books while he’d been letting the brutes at MI6 work him over.
The books were right. He had to stop doubting himself. He had to stop using himself as his own punching bag! *Trust your instincts, Jem.* He had to channel his emotions into achieving his desires. He had to spend every day devoting the maximum amount of his time, resources and energy to obtaining his personal life goals. He had to put himself first for a change.

He had an unapologetic right to expect happiness and fulfillment. He was lovable just as he was. If other people had a problem with his true self, then they were the ones who needed to change, not him. Who he was, was not just good enough, but absolutely just who he was meant to be. *Believe it, Jem!* *Believe in yourself!* He had to BELIEVE he was worthy of the love he DESERVED.

The books were such a great help! He wasn't calling himself a doofus every day, so that was progress. And he wasn't going to beat himself up about this recent backslide with the sharpened porcelain, either. He was only human and needed to allow himself to feel his emotions. It was unhealthy to bottle em all up. Oprah magazine said so!

James took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and found his center. "Forgive yourself and move on, Jimbo. Don't dwell on negativity. Hone in on the positive. Harness the power of self acceptance. Be the change. Live, Laugh, Love. I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and goddamn it, I like me!"

"Goddamn right! And I feckin like you too, darlin. Don't forget."

James opened his eyes and took the offered spoon from his sweet, supportive sister. They shared a smile.

"Pictures night, my darlin divil?" Nini pressed the ice cream into his arms. She fiddled with remote buttons to bring down the projector screen, dim the lights, and call up his viewing list. She immediately began rattling off her preferences, letting on like she didn't already know what he wanted to watch.

They pulled the covers to their bare chests and snuggled close to the frozen carton. The siblings shared a knowing smile. Nini kissed him right between the eyes and his sweet smile grew.

"I love ya t' bits, dear one."
"I love you more, my darlin gal."

They tapped spoons together and dug in. Häagen-Dazs Yuzu Citrus & Cream. Nini had started buying it after he'd mentioned how often the dopey live-in one got it for The Virgin and the old woman. The first creamy spoonful melted into the tip of his tongue and he closed his eyes with a sigh. Cold, pale and acidic, just like his crush. No. He really had to stop doing that. *Don't belittle your love, Jem. He's not your crush. He's your soulmate. Don't cheapen the beautiful love you share. Believe in it, Jem. It's real. It'll happen soon enough.*

As the opening credits played over the huge screen, James turned to his sister, his mood faltering and darkening. "Nini?"

"Yes, my darlin?"

"I don't wanna watch this one just now."

"Citizen Kane's your favorite, luv." She scratched her red nails along his ribcage until his smile returned.

"True. But...I'm sooo changeable! You know it's a weakness with me, darlin gal! But to be fair to myself, it is my only weakness." He jounced her shoulder with his sharp elbow. Nini bopped her
icy spoon off his nose and grinned.

The books were doing him good. He was finally understanding that he wasn't an unlovable, mile long list of weaknesses and failures. Finally! He might just be alright after she was gone. She kissed his frosty citrus lips again.

"Ok, Mr. Sex. What'll it be then? Pride n Prejudice?"
"Nah..."
"Dirty Dancin?"
Big pouty lip, head shake.
"Mean Girls? You love that one."
Jamie loudly buzzed his finger into the tip of his sister's nose and blared out the sound heard on a quiz show.
"The Notebook."
"Ta! That's perfect!" she said with a broad smile.

By the time Gosling was declaring, "Still isn't over!" and pulling McAdams in for a rain soaked kiss, both Nini and Jamie were crying. They squeezed their hands together and let their tears fall like the lashing rain on the screen. 'Twas so beautiful! Working class, determined and resourceful Noah with his pure, enduring love for that posh, prim, cheating Allie. But it all worked out in the end because he repeatedly told her their glorious fairytale so she'd not be able to forget their love. Jamie watched the rest of the film with his head cradled in Nini's lap. Her hand tracing through his manky hair. Their mouths moving in sync with the actors' dialogue.

Nini passed a wistful smile down to the warm ball curled against her crossed legs. Yet within her, the dread built. What if she hadn't returned in time? What if he hadn't listened to her this time? She shivered, flexing her crooked toes under her knees.

The dark-haired, tanned woman's fearful doubts multiplied exponentially, flooding over her mind like gall winds. She shut her eyes and tried not to think about it. They had to trust the careful plan her genius brother had elaborately set in motion. The Final Solution would fix everything. The plan would finally allow Jamie to be the big brother for once. He'd finally be happy. The plan would buy her freedom. She would finally be allowed to return to their Da. She'd finally be at peace with her soulmate.

As the end credits cycled up the screen, she wondered if her blagguard was at last resting his eyes. No such luck.

"Nini?"
"Yes, my luv?"
"Stall it to the kennels with me?"
"Grand."

Chapter End Notes

Stall it to XX with me= accompany me to XX (stall it to the shops w me, etc)

Grand= ok/ fine. Tis an appropriate response to any question. Does not mean good/great. Sorta like "uh huh" really.
Nini paused from finding her brother clean clothes while he showered. She changed the soiled bed linens quickly, then ran to hide the Connemara in the kitchen in the way back of the press. She wiped up the pool of filth below the chest of drawers. Wadded her sullied frock tightly round the sharp porcelain. Flung it down the rubbish chute. Ran back on tiptoes and hastily unearthed his burgundy suede chaps.

Jamie emerged through the steam, toweling his armpit. He looked at the Tshirt she'd picked with a smile. "Be the Indian."
"Ask me hoop," she sassed back, defiantly.
"You gotta be the Indian, my darlin gal," he whined.
"I will in me ring."
"BE THE INDIAN!!"

She startled, nearly dropping his stack of clothes. Goose flesh prickled up her spine. Immediately she plastered a sunny smile over her fear. "Course, luv. I was only messin." Before she passed him his outfit, she made sure her hands were steady.

**Chapter End Notes**

I will in me ring/hoop/arse= means I will NOT. Same as 'Ask me hoop/arse/ring.' Same as 'Yeah sure I will.' Same as 'I'll do it right away in ten minutes.' It all means DECLINE. Don't know why, but Irish are like that. We love to keep em guessing, I suppose.

I was only messing/ Just messing= A passive aggressive way to say just kidding. We generally say this after insulting someone deeply. (Your face looks like a moldy cabbage. Only messin!) Tis very Irish.
The cavernous sub basement was icy cold. The great stones held in the frosty humidity, the nauseating fumes of dog excrement, and the foul stench of death. The high yipping whines of the filthy yellow Labradors shattered off the vast earth and rock room, multiplying into a hundred thousand starving echoes.

James inhaled deeply and bared his teeth in a wide leer. He rubbed his Westwood 'two cowboys' tshirt into his chest and yawned. "Which John tonight?"

The room went still as a tomb when his thick heeled boots stomped down the last stone step. The four remaining mutts cowered silently in the shadowed dark at the far wall. Nini stayed mute as well. Her cold hands swiftly gained custody of the heavy feather headdress as it threatened to slip sideways. She corrected it's leftward tilt and hastily knotted the chin string tighter before her brother turned back round. She shivered, making the turquoise and silver anklets jangle.

"Knick. Knack. Paddy. Whack..." Jamie bumped the ten inch carbon steel machete blade along the iron bars of each cage as he made his way down the line. On his reverse journey, he sang out again, slowly emphasizing each syllable with a clink of flat black steel on cold rusty iron. "Knick. Knack. Paddy. Whack. Give a John a bone...Which old man's not going home?"

He began to laugh softly as he stalked from cell to cell, eyes bright with fury. The rubber handle of the knife worried the corner his lower lip as he considered the last two trembling animal. He pirouetted on his snake skin boots to deferred to Nini's judgement.

James upturned a manicured brown eyebrow at his sister. He stuck the back of a wrist into his side, jutting his hip out. "This John?" The long curved edge in his hand pointed from his sister to the cage. "Or this John?" In a sudden fit of excitement, Jamie rushed to the second enclosure. He began rattling the bars of the door violently with his fist. "THIS ONE??" The feculent creature cowered. Its dirty, matted fur bristling with fear but it whispered a low growl nonetheless. James jerked violently at the rails with his fist, squealing in delight as the unfed Labrador flinched each time iron clanged off iron.

"Look at you! Bad John!" Suddenly the brunette was barking and growling at the cage. The mongrel huddled down, tried to meld into the giant grey stonework. Jamie climbed the bars and barked louder. His sudden, wild howling laughter ricocheted off the frozen masonry. In boisterous delight, he ran back to his sister at the bottom stair. "Me thinks we have a winner, Tiger Lilly!"

Nini faked a wide, beaming smile. Her brother squeezed her cheeks, making her mouth twist into a fat pucker. He held her lower jaw firmly in one hand and pulled her in for a barbaric kiss. The crusted red moon slices under his nails dug into her face savagely. He did not let go of her until she mangled her tongue against his. In one deep shuddering inhale, he drank in her distress and his pupils dilated to full black voids.
Nini watched the low stone ceiling. She heard the rusted iron door creak open slowly and clatter shut with a loud bang behind her brother. She clutched the machete handle flush between her bare breasts until her knuckles ached painfully white. Her eyes stayed fixed on the wide crack in one great rock overhead.

Just as their Da had instructed when she was twelve, she stayed focused on the ceiling until it was all over. The high sharp cries, the pained whimpers, the terrifying yips, the snapping creak of breaking bone, the thick dull sounds of violence brought to a confused, frightened creature. Out of nowhere, she heard Da's heavy breath stirring in her ear on the echoing edges of her little brother's ructions. "Focus on the ceiling, me gal. Don't look to me, darlin. That's it. Ya know ya luv me. Ya know ya do, me gal. Ya luv me to bits."

And Nini had dutifully obeyed their widower father. Day in and day out. Until one night, three years on, it was suddenly true. She loved Da to bits and bits. Right there in the midnight woods. First with a heavy tree limb. And then a muddy flat rock from the river bank. She loved him to bits and bits and BITS. Until her thin arms were too weak to bring the stone down anymore. Until the gurgling of his red breath faded into the rushing sound of the water behind them.

The complete look of total acceptance on his gruesome face proved how much he understood her sentiment. No daughter had ever loved her father more than Nini had loved their Da on that night. Right through the damp earth and beyond. Sent him off to their mother whom he'd taken from them four years back. She'd loved Da til there was not one scrap of love left within her to ever give to another. She loved him til he could never love ever again. Then she set down the stone and lay beside him. When he'd slowly turned his head to look at her, she'd pressed her slick wet hand to the side of his jowl so his head faced back up to the inky sky. They'd watched the ceiling of stars together. Until his hand at last went cold in her grip.

Nini would never, could never love anyone else ever again. She'd given all she could give on that night. With Jamie cheering her on the whole time. Boasting how he'd expertly poisoned the old man's swill for her so now she owed him. Taking credit for her handiwork. She owed him a lifetime of unpayable debt because of his selfless intervention.

What they both knew was that her brother had really only done it from jealousy and self-centered loneliness. He got all the lumps and she got all the love. What she actually got was only the leftovers in their Ma's stead. But any love- even secondhand love -was still a grievous transgression in Jamie's eyes.

Because that's how love worked: it was a finite resource like fossil fuel. There was only so much of
it to go round. And 'twas so difficult to get at it without much toil and strife. One only had to see the state of the world to know such truth.

The black rubber machete handle dug into the tanned woman's chest. Its razor sharp edge flirted with her shivering belly. She didn't register its interest in her skin until she felt a nagging itch. She looked down, puzzled at the thin sideways smile of shallow red. Nini quickly dropped the weight down to her side; let the black carbon steel slumber against the fringed buckskin flap over her right thigh.

The bright red cowboy hat bounced against her brother's shoulders as he drove his fist down into dingy fur. Nini did not even realize she was stepping towards the cage, gripping the machete tightly in her extended arm. She should have kept her focus on the ceiling. She shouldn't have looked to him. She did not realize her feet were oscillating on the frigid paving stones, two-stepping forward and back like the start of a line dance. All she could hear was that night. Jamie swearing she'd never be able to repay his help. Which, of course, proved to be more true than her little brother would ever realize.

Her bare left foot planted forward. The right followed. Again. The iron bars of the door within arms length. The embroidered curlicues on the tanned leather between her brother's flexing shoulder blades became an ever fixed mark. Her heart bursting a staccato rhythm of love. The machete started to drift weightlessly upward, against the flow of gravity.

The gun barked once. Nini startled, snapped out of her fugue. In the absence of animalistic cries, the basement became suffocatingly small as the silence pressed up against her tanned skin. The machete clattered to the stones. It knew what Nini somehow always forgot: James never played any game he could not win. She had not even seen him bring his revolver.

The brunette cowboy turned to his frozen Indian. He laughed, fine mist of castoff and deep shadows making his face a horrid mask. "Well, this bad John seems to have gone for his tea!"

Chapter End Notes

He's gone for his tea= Dead. (Irish call tea 'Cha' so I believe we say Tea in this phrase as an allusion to The Troubles.)
Chapter 87

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning Moriarty

At the far edge of the side lawn, the frigid salty wind was cruel to Nini's bare. She tried not to let it show. Jamie's triumph in the basement had built his mood into overflowing, manic hyperactivity. The burning rubbish pile grew mile high flames each time the cackling man sloshed more petrol upon the heap. He hooted and whooped, literally skipping circles around the massive blaze. Their brother always said violent tantrums helped warm little Jamie's moods. Nini stepped closer to keep from freezing her skin off.

"Yippie Ki-yay, mutherfucker!" The cowboy hollered into the bonfire. He did not see his sister flinch each time he split the night air with a random gunshot. "Wooooo!"

Suddenly he holstered his smoking revolver and turned to her. Jamie itched a red stained hand between the blood splattered cowboys drawn on his tshirt. His maniacal grin contorted his mouth as he inhaled the thick smoke of burning fur and roasting carcass. "I'm hungry, Tiger Lilly."

With an equaled show of white teeth, she asked, "Protein shake?"
"Burger!"
Nini's stomach inverted as the merciless wind shifted the acrid black smoke against her face in a wave of nausea. She maintained her sweetest smile, "Grand!"
Chapter 88

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning Moriarty's Plan

"Want catsup or mustard, luv?" Nini had to shout repeatedly to be heard over top of the full volume Nancy Sinatra "These Boots are Made for Walkin" that crushed the air. She gave up and returned to the kitchen to flip the vegetarian burger in the skillet. She fought hard against the rising bile, swallowing and turning away from the sizzling patty.

Jamie had settled down some after his second shower. He silenced Nancy Sinatra and switched to opera for his nightly beauty ritual. Rossini's "La Gazza Ladra" caressed the air. All in all, it had been a fairly fun day. James yawned.

As he dabbed anti-aging cream beneath his eyes, he smiled at his reflection. "Hey, Sexy," he said to himself. The brunette in the mirror blew him a kiss and reassured, "Don't worry, honey, we'll get cameras back in there soon enough. That bad old dog won't stop us keeping an eye on our boy!"

Jamie replied by snapping his fingers at his reflection.

He ran to his dry erase board and wrote: REESTABLISH COMMUNICATION in purple, then underlined it in red. All the books said keeping the lines of communication open was essential to maintaining a long term relationship. He had to get surveillance back inside 221B. It wasn't enough to watch the exterior. This portion of the plan relied on knowing his boyfriend's thoughts. Whilst Jamie had been on 'interrogation' holiday, that stupid old man had fucked with all his hard wired cameras. Suddenly, the marking pen snapped in his grip, splintering into plastic shards. Jamie sighed. "Let go of the negativity, Jem. Hone in on the positives. Stay focused!"

The positives:
1.) There was eight days of recorded visual footage showing Sherlock's new physical relationship. For some reason the sound had gone out on the first night, but the images were still fairly clear. You go away to MI6 'secret' holding for four weeks and suddenly everything starts to break down in your absence! Murphy's fucking law! Wait, stay positive, Jem. We just gotta get in there, set it right and restore audio. Plus, there's plenty to be learned from studying the existing soundless footage. (Which he was doing. Repeatedly. Every day.)

Sherlock was definitely learning how to love from the old man. So that was good. This time last year, they had all been so worried baby brother was incapable. The Ice Man had told him, "I really don't think he can love. As far as I know, he's deeply and thoroughly asexual. Has been his whole life. Never shown even the slightest interest in another human being. To him, Watson is more or less a replacement for that skull. Just another toy in his toy box. A favourite toy, if you must. Completely asexual, I'm afraid."

Seemed true when Jamie had tried to flirt on his boy's blog too. At the pool showdown, little Billy seemed totally fine to blow up his loyal pet if it meant Jem died too. That was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, four for you, Sherlock! You go, Glen Coco! You've got a psycho side in there...
somewhere. And you’re willing to kill for what you believe in. Sexy! That psycho side would need to become the whole thing, of course. But at least there was hope. Win!

His bad dog's earpiece had picked up the end conversation that showed Sherlock really wasn't too interested in the old man's attempted sacrifice. Your mutt gets all dramatic and tries to 'Bruno Mars a grenade for ya' but all you say is "That's a good dog. Are you alright?" No hugs? No kisses? Ugh! Maybe Mycroft was right that baby bro couldn't love. Who wants to date a passionless, unloving psycho? That simply would not do!

That double-crossing dead woman, Adler, had been sent in to get tangible confirmation while on assignment breaking the Ice Man's pathetically attempted 'Bond Air' maneuver. Her initial report: "Oh yes, he's definitely a clueless virgin as you said. Thoroughly oblivious to anything even remotely resembling love- and proud of it! Oh, and you were definitely right about the toy soldier-he's got it bad but is far too ashamed to ever say a word."

Ugh! You can't burn the heart out of somebody that doesn't have one. That's basic arithmetic. Well fine! First they had to grow him a heart. Then they'd burn it out. Such a high maintenance boyfriend!

2.) When James had finished being slapped around by MI6, he'd reviewed the tapes frame by frame for hours. It was so obvious what was going on: Sherlock was growing a heart and (BONUS!) Watson couldn't get it up!

Win fucking Win!

The Ice Man had given his research, "Watson is not gay. He's nearly forty. He's horribly damaged by the war. In fact, from his therapy file and my personal assessment of the man, Watson is deeply, traumatically, haunted by the war. Barely sleeps. Full of rage. Requires Viagra to be physical with women. Inches away from total meltdown. Might even have a bit of brain trauma from the war. Not even intelligent enough to trade good money for information. Yes, I have confirmed, he never got physical with that Major fellow. Two years of secret, sexless romantic idling between them. 100% certainty they were both far too ashamed to actualize their emotional romance. The man is no threat. A pathetic, flaccid romantic really. An ideal choice to convert my brother without...sullying your prize."

The video had confirmed. The broken toy soldier was highly loyal but couldn't get his horn up. They'd hopped into the shower and nothing! Most of the footage showed the flatmates kissing so slowly that Jamie had to fast forward to even try to make it interesting. And then there were the hours and hours of boring nothing! Two adult men literally touching one another's faces and just staring at one another! Literally sitting, rubbing foreheads, and staring! Not even picking one another's noses. Sitting and fucking staring! HOURS!!! The old man didn't even try to undress the boy. Kissing that was slower than paint drying, moony eyes, fully clothed, separate beds. Days and days of the most boring shite! The stupid old man ignoring the desperate look in the boy's eyes night after night.

As the eight days dragged on, it was overwhelmingly clear Sherlock was realizing he was super gay. Win! The dopey dog was always sitting and reading the paper. The paper! Hello granda, there's an app for that now! Sherlock always had to initiate, it seemed. There was elderly Dr. Boring sat reading his paper, then gayer-by-the-day virgin boy practically flinging himself into the old man's arms. Gagging for it! Watson never initiated contact.

The Ice Man must be right: "If Watson ever does attempt physical contact, his history strongly suggests it will be as a passing tourist. Balance of probability, he will try it out for a short time to
perhaps...tick it off his bucket list. Maybe want to confirm he is not sexually attracted to men. Dutifully, he will tolerate whatever my brother wants because he would be homeless otherwise. He's a very loyal friend and clearly has deep love for my brother. But I highly doubt he could ever actually... consummate their friendship. Inevitably he will break my brother's heart for you. So there will most likely be no need to exterminate him."

Best part of the footage was in last few hours. It was in the dark but once it had been enhanced it was fucking hilarious! Sherlock literally putting his cherry arse out there for the reaming. And the old man only licked his butthole a few times. It was so clear: Watson couldn't get it up even if there were a Sig Saur at his grey temple! Flaccid, decrepit, old romantic and virgin gayboy who was now totally down to fuck!

Win fucking Win!

Of course, the dopey dog would have to burn. There would definitely be a need to exterminate. (When was there not?) Primarily to ensure that Jamie's boy didn't hold a candle for his pet. But also because the dumb dog had fucked with the cameras. Bad John! The footage ended with that broken toy soldier messing about with each camera while talking on the phone to someone. Research from Ice Man showed the incoming phone call was from a pub around the corner from where drunken lesbo sister lived.

Basically, it seemed the old man had just happened to see light reflect off one and then sniffed out all of the others like the bad mutt he was. Jamie knew he shouldn't have co opted Ice Man's surveillance!

Lazy rookie move. Doofus! What would their brother say? If you want cameras hidden right, do it yourself, Jem! Cutting corners like a fucking amateur!

No. Stay positive. Don't beat yourself up. Stay positive!

OMG! Wouldn't it be great if Little Billy could just burn his own heart out?

Now, Jem, you know that's just wishful thinking. He'd never kill his own pet...Wait! Never say never, Jem! Dream Big! If the boy ever moved that far from the side of the angels, it would be sooo amazing to see him go psycho on his stupid granda!

James shivered just imagining it. He wrote the idea on a blank heart-shaped sticky note. "Burns own heart out" The brunet added it to the section of wall where he stored all his far fetched pipe dreams. He pressed the sticky note in the center of a cluster to his right. "Kills his old lady." "Kills Ice Man." "We start a duet singing act (Sonny & Cher)" The egomaniacal brunette had dozens of these fanciful big aspirations that he hoped might one day become reality.

As a calculating problem solver, he knew the sticky notes were mostly unrealistic fantasies, but his heart still yearned. Never say never, Jem! Stay positive! After all, he wasn't telepathic. Who could predict what Sherlock would be like once he and Jamie had finished the final solution? At the end of the plan, the tall man would be heartless, have fallen so deeply for Jamie, and not be an angel anymore. That's when they would live happily ever after as soulmates! So, it was absolutely possible to dream that one day, perhaps all the heart-shaped sticky notes would be actualized. That's right, Jem, stay positive, honey! Dreams really do come true!

Nini padded up behind her brother carrying the tray. "Suppers on."
Chapter 89

Chapter Summary

Moriarty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

While she watched her little divil eat, Nini's eyes kept glancing over the inspirational collage wall. She started to relay the extent of her efforts today. "Yer man in the papers sends 'is love..." she began.

Her hand reflexively cupped over her sore left eye. Anger pulsed within her aqueous humor like waves against the breakwaters of her brothers' island stronghold. That banjaxed media gobdaw would be all arseways from the neck up when this was over! He was owed. That foolish blackmailing eejit had bought his affiliation with her brother on the never never and didn't even realize. But he'd learn soon enough! Mark me words, Charlie! Soon enough I'll be standing over yer lifelss meat, spitting golliers right down the feckin tunnel where yer left eye used to dwell. You've no bloody idea what awaits ya in the tall grasses! Soon enough, Charlie! Nini mollified her eyelid lightly with her fingertip.

With a huge mouthful of burger: "Nini...is this vegetarian?"
"Ta. 'Tis yer favorite: Linda McCartney Peri Peri patty."
Jamie made a disapproving face at his dinner plate. "...And gluten-free?"
"Yes. Tater flour roll. Just as you like."
"Hm."
"Vegan cheddar, as well."

He wrinkled his nose. Then he slowly peeled the plasticized orange slice off the patty and flung it. "Whoops!" He laughed loudly when the catsup-coated square clung to the wall beside the bed. Jamie smeared the corner of the blanket down over the surface his tongue. His eyes narrowed.
"Don't buy that again."
"Grand."
"Is this organic catsup?"
"Well...They were out in the shops. 'Tis Heinz."
The whole plate hurdled to the floor. "Ugh! I knew it!"

The action was so sudden, Nini didn't have time to brace against the inevitable flinching shudder she displayed. Her brother gave a predatory grin to see it. "What am I gonna do with you, me darlin gal?" He scolded with a low threatening laugh.
"Protein smoothie."
"Back in a jiff!"

Nini smiled. She tickled her nails over his knee until he slapped her hand away. As the tanned woman scurried for the door, the brunette called out behind her, "Vanilla!"

When Nini returned, Jamie had his mobile in hand as he stood again before his motivational collage wall. The short man was petting his fingers over his favourite poster. "Hang in there!"
Brown stripey kitten clinging to a tree limb. Fluffy as an Easter chick! Nini had gone over the letters on the poster with silver glitter glue while he'd been away having his little chat with the Ice Man in MI6's basement.

Without looking to her, he extended his hand for the smoothie. They traded his phone for the white jug of Poitín. Jamie drowned a heavy flood of liquor over his dinner and shoved the nearly-empty jug into her chest. "Get more."

Her brother needn't have instructed her. She'd known since yesterday. Poitín was a family tradition. One of the few constants of their clan. From her large black handbag, she withdrew another and set it down at his feet. Her hand assuaged the tension between his shoulder blades. Nini perched on the edge of their bed and waited while her brother suckled the drinking straw and thought.

Chapter End Notes

Poitín is an illegal Irish distilled beverage. Similar to American 'moonshine' but not really the same thing. Tis not legal. You mustn't seek it out!

Yer man in/with...= Irish can have an entire conversation and never mention any actual names. We don't mean yer man as in YOUR man. We allude to a person and you know what we mean. (Yer man in the chipper was out of mustard. Means the employee at the French Fries shop was out of mustard.) Also said as 'yer wan' (Yer wan in the guard is rude. Means that police officer was rude.) Tis very Irish to never mention names.
Chapter 90

Chapter Summary

Last Moriarty chapter until The Fall. I promise. That psychotic monster gives me the fuckin creeps!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After ten minutes: "Is Danish ready?"
"Ta."
"You're sure?"
"He's ready."
"Reporter?"
Nini went for her mobile and quickly messaged the naked man the list their media shark had compiled. When Jamie's phone chimed, he immediately began researching which journalist would best suit his needs. As he calculated, he remarked, "He's a strange jam danish, huh! You think he likes me?"
"What's not to like, me sweet divil?"

Jamie turned and stalked over to her. He pressed his lips into her smoky black hair. His sister smelled exquisite! Like death and petrol and fun! Yummy! He was almost tempted...but...no. He had to stay focused. Jamie released his barbarous grip of her long dark strands and went back to scheming.
"The new dance is set with the Ice Man?"
"Gave it 'im last morn."
"Good girl! This'll be a fun one!"

Jamie had wasted more than thirty million quid on courting his boyfriend so far. Nini didn't know how much more it was going to take by the time this was all over. She stared at the pink strings. She tried to mentally swat the swarming gnat cloud of trepidation darkening the bubble around her head and invading her airways to slowly suffocate her lungs. They had to trust the plan. Soon enough she'd be home with Da. Soon enough.

"Jamie, me luv?"
"Hrm?"
"You decided on mechanics yet?" Nini quickly added, "Cause I can sort it in the morn from work, if ya only say who." She hoped she hadn't sounded like she was naggin him.

From his mobile screen, Jamie began considering. "Morrison, Two Finger, and..."
"Morrison's dead, luv."
"Really? When?"
"That poxy yoke with his misses three summers back, remember?"

Jamie seemed genuinely puzzled.

"You sent the Catalanian, 'member luv?"
Slowly the reality came to him. Oh, right...Silly man! Temper temper, Jem! Being boss was such a headache some days. Employees were constantly disrespecting his authority. Maybe because he was young. Sometimes he did get a wee bit rash in the heat of the moment. If only people would just listen to him and do as he said, he wouldn't have to get so insistent. If Morrison hadn't gotten his knickers in a twist over his precious wife, he'd still be employed today.

How was it Jamie's fault the clumsy cow had walked into the blade he'd sent...thirty-something times? But Morrison had to go getting all self righteous about it. Mr. High n Mighty refused any monetary compensation and actually let it be known among their colleagues that he was having his revenge. Fucking Amateur! Too much goddamned James Fucking Bond. You don't go blabbing that you're intending to kill a guy. You just kill a guy! Fuck! It was sooo dreadfully dull living in a world of ordinary boring people! How could he ever survive it?

No. Hang in there! Stay positive, Jem! You were right. Morrison was owed.

And in the end, if that self-righteous mechanic learnt one thing, it was how to properly kill a guy when he least expected it. Of course, Morrison had grasped that concept too late to do him any good. But, perhaps, at the very least it sent a message to the rest of the staff. And it had been great fun. Bless him for that!

Nobody ever expects a bomb inside their own Armalite barrel! Especially not when they're sighting down that blundering Catalan across a rooftop. Hullo, it's called a fucking distraction, Morrison! Jamie had almost been disappointed by how easy it had been. Ordinary people! Ugh! But that's why some people were sheep and other people were butchers!

"Pity. Morrison really was good for distance."
"Yeah."
"Is The Goose out yet?"
"...You said she stays in til 2018. But we can pull her, luv."

Jamie sighed. Yet another waste of talent. But she'd been such a bad girl in Tervuren. Though...unlike Morrison, she was willing to take her medicine and repent. That was the wonderful thing about female employees: they knew their proper place. Women's intuition, perhaps? Maybe he'd spring her for this...no, what sort of message would that send? 'Daddy says time out—unless he needs you?' No. He couldn't look like he needed anyone. Everyone had to know their place. Every employee had to know they were disposable. Interchangeable cogs in his machine. No essentials.

"I'll decide later. I've got a couple of months left, yet. Stop pester ing me, Nini!" he whined.

"Course, my sweet chancer. Only wanted to help."

Suddenly Jamie threw this empty glass into the marble tile. "FIND ADDLER THEN! If you wanna help so badly, find that double-crossing bitch! I owe her, Nini. I never leave a debt unpaid. And I owe her!"

"CAM's lookin! We're lookin high n low!"

"Look faster! Look lower! I want that hide for shoes. I gave her my WORD! I owe her, Nini."

"You'll get 'er. We'll get that treacherous slapper fer ya, me luv. Wha'does yer man with the brella say?"

"Americans. U. S. Marshals. New name. But apparently his meany CIA pals are givin him the
cold shoulder off that silly 'Flight of the Dead' debacle he orchestrated to try and outplay me. So...no name yet. Ugh!"

Nini nodded. Jamie was smiling as though amused by the Englishman's sly maneuver, but Nini knew him for real. When this was all said and done, The Ice Man might wake up one fine morn to find he'd passed on in the night from botulinum toxin in his foot cream. Or some sort of Semtex in his umbrella. Jaysus, how her darlin chancer loved his explosives! Though, to be fair, having come of age amidst Na Trioblóidí (The Troubles,) there was probably naught an Armalite-and-ballot-box kinsman in the green land who could resist a good ole fashioned detonation in the face of a British government geebag.

She put her empty hands on her knees and waited for her darlin brother to give orders. He ignored her as he worked his phone. *Snobby Weather!* The misanthropic brunette itched his side over his decades-old tattoo: that laughing swimmer's white, navy and tan runners dipping into a teacup full of aquamarine waves. On the white teacup, in elegant script, the name of Jamie's childhood hero: Graham Frederick Young. Decorating the saucer and cup rim was a border drawn from the stylized repetition of Ti81. Beautiful ink work.

Nini's hand absentmindedly touched her right ribcage where her own commemorative tattoo resided: a short list of initials of each family member and their life dates. The last line at the bottom of the list was of course her baby brother. The blank space after his date of birth felt raw from how often her oblivious fingernails had scrawbed the empty space anxiously awaiting his expiry date.

After half an hour, Jamie yawned loudly. "Set me up for my eyelashes. They need re-tinting."
"Ta. Friday?"
He raked a hand through his damp hair. "Yeah. But only if it's the blonde one. I don't want that *fat* one touching me." He puffed out his cheeks as if his jowls were full of food. With a vacant, stupid expression, he clumsily waddled around with his hand pressed into his spine to mimic the other stylist's pregnancy. Nini giggled at his display. Jamie turned to her and made retching noises. He wrinkled his nose in disgust. "Ugh! I don't want her sausage fingers near my face!"

"Ugh!" Nini replied in agreement, as she began working her mobile. Self-continually, she crossed her svelt thighs and wrapped the blanket over curvaceous nudity. The dark-haired Irish woman knew from previous discussions with Jamie that she was plump. That she had been letting herself go since turning thirty. She struggled to maintain a lean body, but her form would not cooperate, despite all the dieting. She'd never have measurements like Addler, no matter how she tried. Nini knew this was the reason she was not allowed in her brother's company in public. The man who would soon replace her would reflect much better on Jamie's image.

When another loud yawn escaped the drunken man's lungs. Nini stood and began preparing to go home. She'd do more from work tomorrow. They had time yet.

*Plenty of time.*

Chapter End Notes

Mechanic = wet works = freelance assassin for hire. Illegal, obviously.

Yoke = thing. (Pass me that yoke over there.)

The Troubles= Irish/ Anglo history. Any of us who lived through last few decades
know it well. Dark times.

Snobby Weather! = that’s what you say to somebody whose ignoring you. Don’t know why. We just say it. Like how we call the grocery cupboard the press. And the house the gaff. We also call groceries messages. (Go in the gaff an stow the messages in the press before ya go out to play.)
Agent S. Mycroft Holmes needed John Watson. For the lanky auburn compatibilist's youngest brother to ever survive this dangerous imbroglio, John Watson was essential. Holmes had done everything within his considerable power to ensure the seasoned fusilier remained steadfastly at his brother's side.

As he thought, the depleted agent drummed his long fingers over the manila folio he was meant to deliver tonight. Acrid guilt corroded his fingertips where they made contact with the paper. The excruciating corrosion boiled up his veins and withered his internal organs like coal dust in a miner's lungs. Each case he was made to deliver: a furthering forfeiture of his own life and a deeper betrayal of his brother. Each case always resulted in teetering his brother on the very precipice of death.

His fault.

No end in sight.

Futile to attempt any more counter-maneuvers to evade or overtake his opponent. There was, as yet, nothing the great strategist could do for the foreseeable future.

Doctor John Hamish Watson, née Captain. Not simply another one of curious little brother's goldfish. The government agent could not allow this one to go belly up in the bowl. The chronically underestimated military doctor was their optimal and exclusive panacea.

Holmes had verified Watson's utility from the very first:
- Averse to espionage in exchange for monetary compensation.
- Impervious to coercion, intimidation, nor goading.
- Intransigent in his personal moral governance.
- Maintains control of volatile emotions under pressure.
- Dauntless in the face of power.

An ideal candidate. If there was any benevolence within the God in this universe at all, then Watson would prove to be the unassailable answer to every desperate prayer.

Mycroft sighed at the foolishness of his counterfactual conditional. His lean ring finger worried his thinning hair. If-this, then-that. Fatuous, to say the least! Perhaps little brother was correct: the older man was slipping. Factual not counterfactual! Not if-this-then-that. Rather this-is-this. Only Facts.

Method Loci File #W57 (R):

**Dr. John Hamish Watson**, PhD, MD, RAMC, KCL:
04/76, 38 years, 10mo.
1.74 metres
62.5 kilogram

**Occupations:**
Current: Locum GP, 03/10- Present
Registered Physician with GMC since 06/06.

Previous: Royal Army Doctor, Captain, 5th Northumberland Fusiliers. (31.62° N, 65.73° E) 07/06-12/09. Honourable medical discharge due to 7.62x 39mm round through left shoulder, 10/09
Awards: 2
- The Operational Service Medal for Afghanistan, Operation Herrick, 10/09
- The Conspicuous Gallantry Cross (Helmand Province) 10/09

**Relevant Prior:** Blackheath F. C. Rugby Union Club. #6 Blind-side Flanker, 09/94-06/99
Honours: 7
- Best Newcomer 94/95 season
- Unsung Hero 94/95 season
- Heathens Player 95/96 season
- Squad Man 96/97 season
- Supporters Player 97/98 season
- Players' Player 97/98 season
- Clubman of the Season 98/99 season

**Family:**
M: D. Watson, 05/58 (Manchester)-12/85 (Chelmsford)
E: H. Watson, 08/55 (Blackheath)- 12/01 (Chelmsford)
S: H. D. Watson, 09/78 [See File #W57 Appendix C]

**Arrest Record:** 2
- 03/10, ASBO Charge vandalism/ criminal damage/ graffiti, state buildings via aerosol paint (London.) Summary conviction resulting in Level 3 fine. [Linked to File #H116 Appendix I]
- 12/95, The Hare & Billet Pub, Charges: wounding, possessing an offensive weapon and affray (Blackheath.) Summary conviction resulting in Level 5 fine.

**Pertinent Skill Set:**
1.) NHS Physician
2.) Royal Army
- Marksman Profeciency, Score 57/65.
- Right handed shooter: BA Browning Hi Power, model L9a1, no modifications, illegally obtained 12/09 (London.) Details Unknown.

[Illegally used in the unsolved murder of cab driver, Jeffery Hope 02/10. Illegally used to commandeer (hostage) tour bus 05/10 Illegally concealed on roof in SoHo 06/10 Illegally concealed at residence of Dr. Roylott 06/10 Illegally concealed at the Hickman Gallery 12/10 Balance of probability: the firearm is illegally concealed at all times when Watson is out of the flat with brother.]
Salient Medical History:
Suicide attempts: 1.5 (12/95, 12/09)
Allergies:
- amoxicillin (Non-Anaphylaxis)
- seasonal allergic rhinitis (mild)
Chronic Alcohol Misuse
Chronic Insomnia
Chronic Depression
Intermittent tremor left hand (psychosomatic and physiological, began 11/09)
Acute erectile dysfunction
Antalgic gait, right leg (psychosomatic, ceased 02/10)
6 Surgical repairs of Ballistic Trauma (GSW):
- Fractures of the left glenoid articular surface
- Displaced left glenohumeral joint
- Fractures of the left clavicle

Most Crucial Details of Psychological Profile:
- trust issues
- deeply suspicious of motives of others
- unable to permit self to be vulnerable
- highly acclimatized to violence
- gambles with own life
- anger issues
- gains pleasure from putting self in risky situations
- most calm when under duress, in danger
- empathetic
- reliable
- tendency towards social isolation
- intelligent
- mild self loathing, devaluation of self
- independent
- private
- strong morals
- need for control
- accepts responsibility
- protective

Most Important Private Details:
Dependents: 0
Marriages: 0

Engagement: 1
Relationship, 08/02-06/04
Dr. C. Nyambura Mwangi, PhD, MD, KCL 03/74
Currently: Cardiovascular Surgeon, The Nairobi Hospital (Nairobi)

Relationship, 10/06-??/08
Major J. Sholto VC 01/65
Currently: Retired. (Level 2 Classified, UK.)

Friendship, intermittent, 09/99-Present
Dr. Michael Stamford, PhD, MD, MAcadMEd, KCL 03/75
Currently: Professor, Barts Health NHS Trust (Smithfield.)

Friendship, intermittent, ??/05-Present
Cpt. William Murray, DNP, RAMC, RCN 11/77
Currently: DNP, The Royal London Hospital (Whitechapel.)

Chapter End Notes

All uses of JW's revolver are from the blog. That tour bus thing was SH, obviously.
Chapter 92

Chapter Summary

Results of Data Analysis Mycroft's Perspective

Analysis of Objective Vital Data:

1.) John Watson was an ideal replacement for Mycroft Holmes. The government agent estimated he had two years, eleven months before The East Wind lay siege to him. His ultimate solution necessitated securing an irrevocable replacement more formidable, more relentless, more loyal than himself.

2.) Holmes’ initial prognostication for Watson and brother had, at last, come to pass with better results than could ever be forecast. Brother showed signs that he was as of yet having great emotional difficulty handling the situation. However, Watson could be relied upon to ameliorate brother's comprehension and supplant his doubts, fears, and internal turmoil. With time, brother would reconcile his skepticism and accept that he was deserving of the love he received. He would yield to the superior impetus of Watson as spring yields to summer: naturally and completely.

3.) Although caring was not an advantage for an overly emotional, psychologically damaged, recovering drugs abuser, Watson's caring for brother would prove to be their greatest advantage over the psychopath Agent Holmes had inadvertently brought into their midst. The weakness of psychopathy lay in the inability to comprehend selfless love. Watson's arduous upbringing and challenging adult life had uniquely prepared him to value those under his protection above himself. The fusilier would extend this function to brother.

4.) Balance of probability: there was indeed a benevolent God in this universe. Watson was the unassailable answer.
The Greek Interpretation

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Agent Holmes stood from his concrete and marble desk. The mathematical inductionist tightened the double Windsor knot of his maroon silk necktie. His long fingers carefully exacted the equidistant lay of the knot between his collar leaves' spread points. The sharp beveled edges of the rectangular mirror momentarily split his reflection into an incongruous juxtaposition of gaunt visages. Double abstracts. The most disconsolate, haunting eyes he'd ever seen since midwinter, 1991. The auburn haired man looked away. He hadn't the time for such Delphic introspection this evening.

And yet, the worn, cleaved faces in the looking glass provoked an all-consuming hypnotic strain. In such moments, when constrained sentimentality refused to quell, Mycroft had learned it was better for him to temporarily capitulate to some alternate avenue of sentiment in order to dissipate the surmounting pressure. As industrial manufacturers must periodically open the safety relief valve of equipment or vessels in order to prevent back pressure buildup and optimize future efficiency. Necessary- lest control become a hindrance, rather than a practiced advantage.

With a devitalized sigh, the strategist sat back in his chair. He knew he must encourage the path of least resistance now, in order to regain total composure at the next hour's meeting. He must, for a few moments, surrender to an alternate memory. Brass key in hand, Mycroft began unlocking the confines of his desk. He fastidiously prepared his ritual.

As was the Englishman's custom, he placed his hands flat along the cold surface of the desk as he allowed this pilgrimage back in time to the Autumn of his seventeenth year. Always this particular journey required Gustave Mahler's *Symphony № 5*. Because, for Mycroft, that was how it all began. No matter how accurately he knew the facts of the truth, that was how it always began.

21 September, 1990:

North London rain tickling the leaded glass panes of the quiet older man's house. Rich, dense smoke of East India Trading Company's *East India Rogue* cigars softly curling from those full, dour lips. Translucent jade of hand-lathed chess pieces so reassuringly weighty and refreshingly cool in the young man's perplexingly sweaty hands. The invigoration of complete silence: the true game they covertly maneuvered between them. And enveloping it all- every Friday evening- the C sharp minor of the first movement's funeral march. That fifth symphony.

The handsome econometrics professor casually flicked the greyed tip of his cigar into the green glass ashtray with the barest tap of his stout index finger against the golden label band. Then the
long fragrant cylinder again tightly clenched between his gleaming incisors as he considered the board. Meaty hands lightly tracing the furrows of burgundy corduroy over his thighs as he contemplated his opening move for their first game of the afternoon. Exaggeration of pensive dark brows. Upon adjudicating where to begin, he always rolled the chunky cigar between thumb and first two fingers of his ample right hand as if recording the decision into the veins of the tobacco leaves.

The ginger seventeen-year-old could never help himself from blatantly staring at his opponent's now-familiar smoking gesture. Those thickset, tan hands with fingers as long and solid as his *East India Rogue* cigars. Meticulously manicured nails, the exact shade of the mushroom bisque of their late lunch. Sparse wisps of chocolate-colored hair on the backs of the stocky hands. Slightly less on the dominant right. Though, to the young graduate student's eyes, the left held more interest. Highly polished simple band of gold. It's curved surface always winking in the lamp lights each time the wine glass upturned to full, russet lips. The slight sheen of an embossed scar like a lopsided parabola disappearing into the unknown recesses beyond buttoned cuff. The scar was thicker in the apex of the curve, but barely a hair's width on the one visible edge that terminated below the side of his left little finger.

For highly personal reasons, Mycroft had drawn that curve many times. Usually on Thursday or Saturday evenings, sitting alone at the rickety folding table that served as both his dining surface and his study desk. Two weekend's each month, that marred, felted surface hosted the card games that earned the young man's rent for the dank sublevel concrete and plaster room he called a residence. But for hours on end, especially on Thursday nights, Mycroft sat and wasted reams of graph paper obsessively charting the part of that captivating parabola that was visible to him. The graceful curve almost expressed gravity's effect on a projectile launched at an angle of elevation of 65°. *Enthralling.*

Long into the nights, and several times through to the dawn, since the start of September, Mycroft thought of that parabolic scar against his thin lips. Just once. Just one time would he like to feel the raised line against the cusp of his thin lower lip.

That precarious thought inevitably lead down many other dead end corridors of reverie. None of which were available to him. Because the solid left hand that bore that intriguing calligraphy was, of course, adorned with a highly visible wedding ring. It's thinner gold twin resided on the dainty left hand of a petite, thirty-year-old archival restorationist. The enviable Mrs. Altamont. Rather, Doctor Deirdre Folly. Deedee to her friends. Of which she had so very many. Because she was so horrifically warm, despicably friendly, heartbreakingly charming and diabolically courteous. Independent, cheerful, intelligent, hardworking, sincere, endlessly busy being a well-respected leader in her field.

Physically, she was a vision of grace: delicately small and remarkably pretty. Rosy skin, misted with a celestial bounty of minuscule ginger freckles. Fat, bouncy ringlets of thick, soft strawberry blonde curls that animated when she spoke in her lovely Dublin accent. Glistening hazel eyes with twinkling flecks of jade green and honey gold radiating out from her pupils. Her laugh, which she freely shared, like a crystal chandelier in a gentle summer breeze. Deedee sparkled.

Additionally, the gracious woman possessed a discerning eye for interior decor. Somehow the devoted historical restorationist found the time to make their house welcoming. The couple clearly had money based on the size and neighbourhood of their residence, as well as the quality of furnishings within. However, there was not a shred of flashy boastfulness nor conspicuous vulgarity within their house. Their comfortable home was a tasteful balance of equal pride in both their heritages and beloved professions. If ever the young country lad had wealth enough to own a
home such as this, he knew he would strive for the same level of discretion and taste in personal
decor. Though Mycroft doubted he'd ever have such a lifestyle.

The couple's entire residence was refined and inviting. Harmoniously displayed historical artifacts
from their countries of childhood. A few touches of Ireland and Myanmar intertwined so
effortlessly and naturally. Surrounded by abundant photographs of the couple with their many
loved ones. Most photographs featured her nestled close under his brawny arm like a dainty dove in
a sturdy Htanaung tree.

Displayed in every room of their cozy home: one of their wedding photographs. Matching silver
frames showed the exuberant bride proudly embracing her new husband's culture of origin. In all
fourteen wedding photographs, the bride had decorated her face just like her now-deceased mother-
in-law, with joyful swirling circles of thanaka cream. Even her bridesmaids' faces and her own
mother's were beautifully painted the same. Each woman as equally pretty as Deedee in simple
coral gowns that exactly matched the ecstatic bride's smiling lips.

The silver frame on the wall leading to the downstairs guest bath was among Mycroft's least
favourite. It hung in the center of a trio. Left wooden oval frame was Deedee's passion: making
time to read classic English fiction to visually impaired elderly persons. Right ceramic frame was
Deedee's speciality: examples of non-acidic archival inks from the late nineteenth century. Silver
frame in the center was young Mycroft's despair: Professor Altamont's stoic face pressed close to
his bride's painted cheek. One of her stray blonde ringlets swept over his brow. His petite mother
beaming; her painted cheek pressed to the other side of his face. Both women so rightfully happy
that Mycroft wanted to burn their lovely home to the ground every time he thought of it. Fortunate
Dr. Sunshine. Absolutely deserving of her handsome, brilliant husband in every conceivable way.

Damn her to hell! She was perfect!

Maybe there had been September nights where the gawky, lonely graduate school student had
huddled at the corner of the LSE Library Roof and let the bitter London wind slap the saline from
his gaunt cheeks. Maybe there had been an entire weekend of shame-laden humiliation gnawing
his innards for despising the nicest woman in London. Maybe there had been evenings Mycroft had
cursed his asinine absurdity for going to play chess with the handsome econometrics professor in
the first place.

Being seventeen while reading for MSc statistics programme made the auburn youth a loner. Being
impecunious, with the habits natural to a man from the countryside, made Mycroft strange to the
posh, well-bred attendants of LSE. Being lightyears above the intelligence levels of his slightly
older fellows made him an absolute social pariah. Thoroughly alone in an overflowing sea of
goldfish called metropolitan London.

Then on his first day, he'd had the amazing fortune to discover one of his professors was the steely
Dr. Altamont. So engrossing and challenging was that first lecture on *Advanced Probability Theory*
that the young student had immediately returned for *Econometric Analysis*. With a fair amount of
Holmesian finesse, the MSc programme director had permitted the youngest student to rearrange
his choices to accommodate both courses. Much to the outcast genius's surprise, his austere
professor had actually aided him with the programme director!

Three session's in, the lone youth had received a paper with a comment written on the last page.
"5:15" followed by the suite number to the professor's office rooms. The briefest meeting in
Mycroft's entire life.

"Good evening."
"Good evening, sir."
"Do you play chess?"
"Yes, sir."
"Please characterize your skill level."
Thoroughly unsure as to the nature of the discussion, Mycroft answered carefully with the one word that had been written in the margins of his first three papers.
"Acceptable, sir."

There had been a long pause. Yet the lean man did not feel uneasy. Though Mycroft did not know why, it did not occur to him that, across the spartan desk, they were both obviously staring at one another. His long hands dangled over the armrests of the wooden chair as though he were studying in his basement flat. It felt...relaxing, familiar. Which should have been odd to a young man who had never done such a thing as that ever before. The forty year old professor's warm brown eyes stayed fixed on his for nearly four minutes. Then, at last, the handsome man took up his pen and carefully wrote his residential address in tidy block letters.

As he handed the slip of paper across the desk, he stated, "Any Friday after one."
Mycroft did not look down at the paper, for he had already read it as it was being written. He did not ask for a telephone number, to phone ahead, just in case. He did not ask if tomorrow's Friday would be convenient. He did not ask if any of his fellows would be in attendance as well. He only said, "Thank you, sir." And then they both stood.

In such close proximity, Mycroft realized he had to incline his neck slightly to look up another two inches. At 6'1" this was a rare occurrence in his life. With polite smiles, they seemed to both, somehow, acknowledge his thought.

"Good evening, Mr. Holmes."
"Good evening, sir."

All the way across campus to the library, Mycroft considered the six minute exchange. With only thirty-two words uttered, somehow he felt confident he had made a friend. Somehow he knew that he and the older man shared innumerable attributes.

His thoughts coalesced on how that smooth tenor voice spoke his family name: enunciating the H and giving the L it's due. So many in London incorrectly said his last name as if it were a silly line in an errant nursery rhyme about garden gnomes: 'Omes.' Somehow hearing the proper pronunciation meant a great deal to the seventeen year old.

That first Friday, 7 September, Mycroft had deduced everything he needed to know in the two hours he had called upon his professor. Eighty three words between them. Peaceful silence. Chess.

By contrast, in the fifteen minutes he'd met Dr. Folly, she'd spoken 291 hospitable words. With sincerity she added, "Do please take the remaining chicken back to yours. Young men and their mates require nutritious home cooked meals. Chips and beer do not a scholar make." Then she'd pecked her husband on the cheek and headed for the foyer. She paused to secure a gorgeous periwinkle silk scarf over curls then whisked up her handbag. With her keys in hand, she turned. "Lovely to make your acquaintance, Mycroft. Hope to see you next Friday. Goodnight, my love!"

The flinty man sat across from Mycroft only replied with a slight nod of his handsome head. Once the front door closed, Dr. Altamont's blocky hand rotated the board on its revolving table tray and indicated that his guest should make first move. Then he nudged the green glass ashtray further toward his student's right arm.
Mycroft opened Pawn d4. Immediately his professor answered Knight f6. The auburn-haired man's eyes went wide! He flung a momentary look of surprise into the adamantine mocha eyes. Could it be? A minuscule smile of amusement betrayed the serious handsome face. Long pale fingers hastened Pawn c4, to test his theory. Response: Pawn g6. Without a second's hesitation, Mycroft tucked his own Knight behind his c Pawn. Barely had the long thin fingers let go of the piece when the black d Pawn slid right in front of his own, begging for the obvious capture. So the theory was sound!

That was the moment it became abundantly clear that the opponents were not playing against one another. They were reenacting the 1988 match 'The Beli of the Beast.' Mycroft was Beliaovsky. His handsome professor was Kasparov. Although the young man knew he would lose in the 29th round of attack, his heart surged with joy. The lonely student looked to his host.

That was the very first ribcage flutter Mycroft had ever known. Gifted to him so warmly on a glorious broad smile of the whitest, most beautiful teeth in the universe!

For no logical reason whatsoever, Mycroft surged to his feet in that moment as if a rocket had launched within him. He didn't have time to feel stupid because Dr. Altamont suddenly shot to his feet, as well. Smiles so wide their cheeks ached, hands darting onto the board as quickly as duelling piano players. The zeal of professional athletes. The overflowing joy of two solitary people who had, at long last, met their intellectual kindred mind. They rapidly played the remaining moves standing across from one another in this way.

After many matches and two hours of wholehearted entertainment, Dr. Folly returned home. Although a sincere dinner invitation was kindly extended to the young man, Mycroft politely declined. Even though his professor had nodded at him from behind his wife, Mycroft courteously declined again. Inwardly, he felt so guilty to be in Deedee's home. As if he were a plague rat snuck aboard a majestic sailing ship. The massive foil parcel of roast chicken made him feel worse.

That night, in his dank cavern of a flat on Shaftesbury Street, the tall man lay on his mattress on the floor and stared at the empty overhead light socket until morning. As the first rays of Saturday morning filtered into the narrow basement widow, Mycroft had decided on a strategy. He would return next Friday. He would not sacrifice the first friend of his life. To forfeit the friendship of his only equal- perhaps even his superior- would be a grievous error. He would choose to actively and fully suppress his attraction. Their friendship was the greatest honour anyone had ever conferred upon him. He would be mature. He resolved to focus all his attention on learning everything he could from his professor. Mycroft resolved to be the very best friend he possibly could be to the greatest man he'd ever met. And that was final!

The penniless young man stood tall. Work to be done! He laundered and pressed his few clothes, swept his concrete den and prepared for his weekend work. Mycroft assessed his remaining loose shag tobacco, counted his neatly organised coins and notes, inventoried his cupboard and double checked his amenities.

October budget:
Current Funds: £43.90+

Rents: £212-

Other Expenditures:
Shag: £3.20/ 50g
Photocopies: 0.05/ pg
Beans, Eggs, Crelm, Laundry powder, Tea, Soap, two 18mm black buttons, pen, light bulb, floppy disk, haircut, razors, bottle of red wine.
The young man knew he must earn enough during this weekend's games to cover his rents, those photocopies plus that damned floppy disk. All the rest, he knew he could forgo if needs must. Well...he desperately wanted the haircut as well. And eagerly hoped to somehow afford a bottle of wine. As a gift to his kind host. To be polite. As a normal social custom of appreciation for offered hospitality. Nothing more!

Since arriving in expensive London this summer, Mycroft had been overwhelmed by the prices. Thankfully he had been raised with the Holmesian ingenuity and work ethic- so often lacking of the youth of his generation. Up with the sun. Forge your own path. Make your mark. Nothing handed to you. Responsible for yourself. Use your talents to better your situation. Work to the point of absolute Exhaustion! And be proud of it!

Which is where the illegal gambling came into play. Unlike his creative baby brother, Mycroft lacked the imaginative nature to barter effectively. It was too abstract for him. The youngest, however, was a natural. Summer before last, Mycroft had once observed as cunning William convince the vicar to trade two dozen candles for information on which parishioners' children were affixing their chewing gum to the undersides of the pews. His brother had been eight at the time. Eight! The price of two dozen candles was not worth information the vicar could have easily learned for himself if only he had observed. To Mycroft this was a terribly devious trade in which William profited and the vicar lost out.

Although, afterwards, the precocious little boy had claimed to be disappointed, sighting the vicar's overzealous appreciation for the list of culprits as proof he might have been willing to trade three dozen candles instead. Baby brother now said he would no longer bartered fees up front. He claimed grateful people always decided to pay more after they'd got their result. Which is where all those damned Smurfs came from. God only knew what little brother's obsession was with those strange things!

Mycroft had no need for valueless trinkets. He was an adult. He needed money. However, unlike their oldest brother, the gawky redhead lacked- shall we say- the inclination for manual labour. The oldest Holmes was a natural at trading chore work for money. The rugged, burly man enjoyed physical exertion. He was proficient in all of Father's skills: painting, carpentry, landscaping, complex mechanical repairs, knife sharpening, clearing brush, shearing sheep, building fences, etc. He was abundantly gifted with the graceful strength and endless physical endurance of a draught horse. The government was quite fortunate to now have him in their employ.

For the middle brother, there was no available option to earn money other than via his powerful mental talents. Seventeen was 'too young' to be entrusted with analysis of corporate systems. If he had well-to-do family contacts, perhaps he might have acquired a decent-paying, entry-level position, shuffling papers in an office somewhere. But how could he focus on his MSc?

And thus the illegal card games:

Four nights per month, enduring the company of distasteful men. Impersonating a regular bloke happy to be socializing in a room full of beer-swilling goldfish. Pretending to lose just enough to appear as though he were only slightly better at the game than anyone else at the table. Faking the existence of luck just enough to keep them returning. It was tedious. But now that Mycroft had a chess friend, he felt certain he could tolerate his 'job' better.

Suddenly the label on his professor's bottle of red wine materialized in the young man's mind. The price was 62% of his current monetary reserve. 13% of his monthly rents. Perhaps he was being fatuous?

Mycroft's long hands angrily snapped the pub coaster in half and shimmed the rickety table leg. He
must earn enough or find a way around his meager budget! He had to! 'Make due and mend,' as Father oft said. The young man could make the sliver of soap last another week. He could roll skinnier cigarettes. He could eat only one boiled egg per day and downgrade to half tins of beans. In fact...he perceived he was gaining weight again anyways.

Chapter End Notes

Altamont and Folly are parts of Sir ACD's parent's names.

Oh goodness, I should explicitly state that in England, legal age of consent is 16. Sixteen alright? Mustn't have any misunderstandings about that! No underage pedo shite here ok! (Now for the sake of homophobic historical accuracy, The Sexual Offenses Act of 1967 was still in effect in England until 2003. That rubbish law said that MALE homosexual sex age of consent was 21. But Hetero age of consent was 16. Yeah. Law said that taking a cock was for mature men only! And yet, most of us back then went w 16 as age of consent bc fuck 21. Now in Ireland, that shite was fixed in 1980. Fuck u Anglo Imperialist Homophobic Bastards!)
14 September, 1990:

That second Friday, Mycroft again called upon his friend at precisely fifteen past one. Before he could ring the bell, the front door burst opened. Dr. Folly rushed out suddenly, knocking into him.

"Oh, no! Oh God! Oh I'm ever so sorry!"

The sound of breaking glass and his wife's little exclamation of surprise brought Dr. Altamont to the front door. Drowning on their welcome mat, in a million little pieces was all Mycroft's hope. The student could not move.

Deedee's pretty face was as forlorn as the young guest's as they surveyed the burgundy puddle at their feet. She solemnly apologized a thousand times and profusely characterized herself a clumsy, bumbling, oafish simpleton. The seventeen year old quickly hid his soul-crushing despondency. He immediately begged her forgiveness. He professed it was not at all the slightest issue and insisted she name him the party at fault: for startling her, for making her late, for staining her suede boots and her lovely porch.

"If I'd not been here, then this would never have happened. I apologize, Dr. Folly."

"No, Mycroft, please. If I'd not been in such a hurry—"

The serious older man looked up at them from the dust pan and hand broom. He said, "Counterfactual conditionals." Then he stooped lower and efficiently collected all the green glass shards with a few more wet sweeps. He rose to his full height, pinching one corner of the heavily soaked mat between finger and thumb. Its coir fibre dribbled aromatic wine as he easily flicked it to the narrow strip of their side lawn.

Two words had said it all. Dr. Altamont was, of course, correct. There was no need for counterfactual conditionals. What was done was done. It was pointless to waste time attempting to recharacterize events with futile speculation. What was important was to focus on the actual situation at hand. To actively converge one's efforts on doing what was actually obtainable. The despondent student inwardly chastised himself for behaving so uselessly in front of his friend. He apologized once more. Then stepped down from their porch to go back home.

The handsome man's intelligent wife immediately understood her husband as well. She looked from Dr. Altamont to their young guest and called out, "Wait, Mycroft! Your trousers must be laundered immediately or they will be forever stained. Please, Mycroft, do come inside."

The lachrymose youth's left hand cautioned that he preferred to leave. To turn away, retreat, and never return. With luck, to be swallowed whole by a fissure in the pavement on his way back to his dingy flat and never be seen again. The mass of stone in his throat warned he must immediately hurry away to the windswept rooftop of LSE's Library.

Dr. Altamont stepped to the edge of the porch and said, "Stay." His giant hand swept from his student to the open door of his welcoming home. Their eyes met for several seconds. Then the professor spoke one word more than was necessary, "Please," Gentle, minute smile.
Ribcage flutter.

Twenty minutes later, in russet wool trousers slightly too long and a size too large, Mycroft and Deedee conversed in the kitchen about the most effective methods to remove red wine from fabric. As she extended the crestfallen ginger lad milk for his tea, Deedee changed the subject. Beginning in a soft, sympathetic tone, the warmhearted hostess took the sad young man into her confidence.

"When I first met Naw Altamont, I was so nervous, I upturned an entire tureen of gazpacho into her lap. Two litres of ice cold, chunky soup. Right down her front. In her own home, no less! With my family sat right there. Ruined her best yellow frock. Oh God! Was it ever dreadful, Mycroft!"

The restorationist's dainty little hands reached out to the dining table in the other room and her greeny gold eyes went wide as if she were seeing the horrible nightmare unfold all over again in slow motion. Big curls bouncing, she shook her head and softly laughed at herself. She buried her blushing face in her hands. From behind her fingers, she bemoaned, "God! I felt certain he'd never speak to me again!" Her delicate fingers tapped the young man's forearm and she said, "Come on. I'll show you."

Like the rest of their home, the dining room was soothing taupe with touches of verdant green and silver. The petite woman gave an embarrassed little wincing smile as she pointed down to the beige filigree rug beneath the table. She wrapped her lips around her teeth and waited for her guest to survey her private horror. With concentrated effort, one could faintly see the slight orangish hint of a massive stain. She drew the chair out from the head of the table so Mycroft could better witness her faux pas. With her bare toe, she outlined the area. Again she chuckled at her blundering foolishness, "I'd wanted to be so clever. Make a good impression. Show off my international flair by bringing an 'authentic foreign dish.' (I was quite entrenched in an Andalusian cooking phase then.) God! Sloshed ice cold tomato right over her whole front. Dumped the whole kit-tureen, ladle and all- right in her lap! Just whoosh! Oh God! I thought I'd die, Mycroft!"

Deedee laughed awkwardly behind her hand. Her fair brows knitted in a deeply pained grimace. She prompted the tall youth with a few nudges of her elbow. They chuckled together. She smiled up at him with such warmth and kindness. Then she patted his arm, satisfied to see she'd somewhat lightened her guest's somber mood.

They moved to the window, both watching the towering, robust man work. Deedee smiled wistfully. "He's not so cold as people like to think. He's only quiet...Perhaps more so since we lost Naw Altamont summer last. He's actually quite good and kind, you know..."

Mycroft nodded sincerely at the sheer lace curtain. The auburn man was very engrossed by the fastidious way his older friend was carefully removing his shoes and socks. How precisely the man positioned them on the walk. So meticulous it might have been something Mycroft would do. The lanky observer was very tempted to move the gauzy curtain aside when his professor again reached for the garden hose. The young man hoped to glimpse the other end of that enthralling scar now that the man had his sleeves neatly rolled. Mycroft was so focused, he did not notice the way the diminutive woman was assessing him just then, as if on the verge of revealing something more. Deedee sighed like a peaceful sleeper's dreamy murmur.

"Know what he did when I baptized his dear mother in a red sea of cold stew?"

She looked up at the tall youth, directly in his eyes. Then she pointed out the window. "He did that. Tidied it all up without a word. Wrapped his mother in a towel and carried her up to the bath in one arm. Came back. Served my parents, sibs and I drinks in the sitting room. When Naw Altamont came back down in fresh clothes, we all sat and ate our lunch. Somehow he made it all disappear. Spotless. Like it never even happened. He's a good man, Mycroft," she said with an affectionate
smile. Linking her arm into his, they silently watched the handsome man outside, her blonde curls on his lean upper arm. Every so often, the friendly restorationist gave a gentle pat or a compassionate little squeeze to the young man's relaxed wrist.

Mycroft thought how wonderfully humane the hostess was. So hospitable. So very kind. That was the moment, in his heart, that he gave her to Dr. Altamont. The great professor out in the side garden deserved this amazing woman as much as she deserved him. They were a perfect pair of the most spectacular people on the planet. As he watched his friend wind the hose back into place, so too in that moment did Mycroft coil his personal feelings tightly and neatly away. He would honour his friendship with both, and loyally use every opportunity to celebrate the couple's beautiful love for one another. And that was final!

(Now, if Deedee hadn't been so very sweet just then, and if young Mycroft hadn't been still inwardly struggling with so many self-conscious embarrassments, then he might have realized that Dr. Folly's conversation about her husband was a rather odd thing for a wife to share about her marriage. But of course, that realization would become absolutely, blatantly obvious in mid October. Just then, the only peculiarity he noted was that Dr. Folly addressed her elfin mother-in-law by the ethnic S'gaw Karen people's word for 'misses'.)

Chapter End Notes

The Karen (pronounced Kah 'ren) are several ethnicities of Myanmar people. Their chief distinction is that they are NOT the Myanmar people who wear many brass rings to extend neck length. The Karen are of the cultures who wear red, farm, live in the east side by the Thailand border and are mainly Protestant. During British rule, Karen Christians were given special rights because they were already same religion as colonisers. Ah the British! Screwing w other countries since 12th century!
Chapter 95

Chapter Summary

It's not chance, it's chess.

Five minutes later, Dr. Altamont entered via the back garden door, shoes in his ample hand. Deedee passed him his indoor slippers. She tucked her tiny feet into her chunky backless clogs while leaning on her husband's offered arm for balance. She hugged him. Though it was barely a quick squeeze round his middle, young Mycroft turned away.

Brushing an errant ringlet from her forehead, Dr. Folly passed a little smile between the tall men across the rooms. She hastened to the front door. Then she telescoped the handle on her grey trolley case and wheeled it out. Before closing the door behind her, the archivist blew a cute air kiss and proclaimed, "Back soon, my love!"

The whole house exhaled sudden, all-pervasive silence. Like rolling up an open car window when racing down the motor way. Eardrums popping at the sudden burst of change in the very fabric of air around them. In Dr. Folly's absence, everything was so still the men could hear the washing machine filling with water way off in a back room somewhere.

Wordlessly, the professor's mocha eyes took in the sight of his student wearing his trousers. Scanning slowly as plant leaves tracking the arch of the sun through the heavens. For no logical reason, Mycroft's lean body began a slow half turn. First left then right. He pretended to observe the wall decor. Arms folded over his narrow chest, then cupping his chin as if truly giving consideration to the light sconces. Childishly wondering, Do you think me strange in your clothes, sir? I've worn my brother's hand-me-downs on occasion. Do I betray I find this far more comforting, sir?

The robust tan man's giant strides were soundless in his slippered feet. He abruptly turned away to the kitchen sink, swiping up Mycroft's used mug in a meaty hand. His broad back hid his doing, yet from the sounds one could easily narrate his actions. Tepid tea splashed down the drain, water on, water off, cleaned mug clinking as it downturned into the drying rack, cupboard hinging open, cupboard closed. Then the large form swiftly disappeared through a door off the left side of the kitchen.

The gawky ginger man felt certain he should make his retreat. Now was his chance. His canvas boating shoes were thoroughly soaked by the garden hose. His socks were in the wash with his only decent khaki trousers. The thought of squishing home in cold wet shoes seemed a fitting end to this humiliating day.

Mycroft already had one arm through his jacket sleeve when his host returned. Their eyes met from far across the rooms. Upturned corner of full russet lips.

Ribcage flutter.

The jacket floated back onto the coat tree. Meaty hand upturned and open, offered out smoothly. The young ginger man followed its trajectory towards the board waiting on the table in the study to his left. Maybe stay for one match. It would be frightfully rude not to.
When his professor came to join him, the lanky man had already arranged the jade pieces on the board. Dr. Altamont held out the green bottle in his right hand, label up. It was the exact same! Same as last week. Same as the failed disaster on the porch!

With deliberate movements, the handsome older man set one wine glass directly in front of Mycroft. The terminal edge making a muffled clinking sound against the tabletop. The other glass, still in his wide left hand. He poured a half glass for his guest. Same for himself. Deposited the green bottle on the right side of the table equidistant from both. The older man watched Mycroft's delft blue eyes as his thick tan fingers slowly rotated the neck until the label fully faced the thin pale man.

In those days, the seventeen year old almost never imbibed. His dear misunderstood Uncle Rudy drank enough for them all. During last week's visit, Mycroft had only watched as his older friend sipped wine.

They studied one another's eyes as the young man and his professor took their first taste of the red wine at the same time. 1974, Ruffino Chianti Classico, Reserva Dulcale. Dry, tart velvety blend of Sangiovese grapes reminiscent of pie cherries smoothly laminated between tobacco leaves and fresh cedar shavings; the flick of white pepper; the jab of anise; the plunge of sweet. When the glossy tannins washed beyond the back of the tongue, there was the astonishing spark of flint as they swallowed in unison. The men slowly lowered their glasses at the same time. No one said it, but there was something in the very particular way their eyes prioritized on one another's mouths. *The inside of your mouth tastes the same as mine now.* Mycroft pressed his tongue flat against the ridges of his upper palate. He steadied his itching hand on the cool circular base of the stemware. They locked eyes and did it again. Methodical. Long sip. Big swallow.

As Mycroft set his glass back down, he reached out for Pawn e4 without looking away. He tasted his lips. The Chianti in his tastebuds reassured him that he knew what he was doing. He knew where he was going in that one move. All eleven games of the 1963 U. S. Championship. Bobby Fischer. Only perfect score in history. Youngest Grandmaster in the world. The lanky student kept his long fingers tightly pinched on his pawn as he focused his eyes deliberately on his opponent's e pawn, willing his professor to become Mednis. *Come with me, sir.* The moment he let go of his piece, Dr. Altamont attacked. Response: Black Pawn e5. Then ample hand hovering green bottle over Mycroft's glass. Adding more to fill his wine to the brim. Then filling the other glass til it nearly overflowed into the tabletop.

They danced their Knights. Waltzed their bishops. Wet their silent throats. Then, in the fourth round of attack, the handsome older man's stern gaze turned to the little wooden box. Rouge cigar. Rich smoke drifted from his full lips and stole away down his left side. He nudged the green glass ashtray closer to his guest. Massive caramel hand engaged the butane lighter, it's offered blue flame so delicately small near his large thumb. Mycroft pushed the ashtray away, shook his head at the waiting lighter.

The young man had no cigarettes. He'd smoked the last crumbs of his loose shag two days ago. His Saturday and Sunday job had gone well. He'd worked so hard, taken calculated risks and played slightly larger bets than normal. Enough to cover his rents. Enough left over for his floppy disk and a haircut. He knew damned well he should have spent the rest at Tesco but that bottle of Ruffino somehow intervened. He'd carefully rationed the roast chicken so it somehow lasted a miraculous four days. Then he'd boiled the bones with an onion to drink broth with his fruit or beans the remainder of that week. In his cupboard, he still had four tins of beans and one of sardines left for the whole of next week.
Chapter 96

Chapter Summary

Night in the Garden: Mycroft meets God. No really. Gay Pride!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

However, ingenious Mycroft knew how to acquire more free fruit. Unbeknownst to the snooty unobservant LSE crowd, there were public apple trees on the western side of Inner Temple Gardens! Curiously, the young country lad and an aging Greek gentleman were seemingly the only two men in London to take advantage of that natural autumnal bounty.

The first evening Mycroft had noticed the kindly old man watching him, the embarrassed ginger youth had hastily secreted the little green apple into his pocket and tried to scurry away. But the fellow had called out after him in a raspy stage whisper, "Boy! Psst! I say, boy! Hey-o! Boy!"

Being well mannered, and entirely too curious, Mycroft had turned back mid-stride to cock his head at the little man. The strange gentleman had smiled as if they knew one another. "Good evening! Hello there!" His plump hand waved emphatically. He was a short, stout man whose olive face and coal black hair proclaimed his Southern origin, though his raspy speech was that of an educated Englishman. Slowly recognition came to the student. It was the old man who lived on the floor above him.

Impatiently stirring an anxious arm and twitching his moustached upper lip, the gentleman lured him near. In a wildly exaggerated whisper, he beckoned, "You are tall! Come on, help me!" Then his sparkling dark eyes darted furtively all around the nearly empty garden grounds. Again his zealous whisper implored, "Come on!" He removed his cap and jabbed it upward at the branch above their heads. The old man's bushy eyebrows danced up and down like bucking broncos trying to escape his round balding pate. "Come on! Come on!" He stuffed his cap down over his head and held open a stripy, bag style pillow cover, shaking it emphatically towards the lanky student.

Mycroft stretched way up and drew the branch within his neighbour's reach. "Yes! Good, good, good!" The elderly gentleman plucked the tree limb clean with the swiftness of a digging badger. A second empty pillow cover materialised from somewhere on his person. He rubbed his hands together mischievously as he scanned the branches overhead. Three-quarters of the way round the trunk, the portly little man began excitedly poking his cap upward again. Slightly annoyed, Mycroft obliged.

"Ho ho! Well done, tall man! Well done!"
"Uh...yes. Not a problem, sir. Good evening."
"Wait!"

Mycroft turned back again. He was barely facing his neighbour when the old man foist the bulging bag of apples into his lean arms. Then the man wrapped his walking stick against the other sack down by his foot. Before the ginger lad could protest being forced into service as a beast of burden, the Greek said, "Kratides. Dr. Milo Sofronio Kratides, Professor Emeritus. Cambridge, Linguistics." He jutted out his wrinkled hand. Rearranging the heavy pillow cover, the young man shook the offered hand. "Mycroft Holmes. LSE, postgraduate. Statistics."
The auburn student began lugging the apple bags southwest towards the Temple underground station. He assumed they were toting the bails back to their flats on Shaftesbury St. But the odd Greek linguist snagged his arm. "Pears. There's pears in Euston Square Gardens. Come on, boy. Pears!" Yet another empty pillow cover materialised from nowhere. For a seemingly small elderly man with a cane, Dr. Kratides stalked north at a rather brisk pace.

When they got to Strand A4, the fearless little man practically flung himself in front of a cab. "Euston Square Gardens! Come on, girl!" he asserted to the driver, who was in fact a woman of about fifty years in age. Inwardly, Mycroft dreaded his new taskmaster would mistakenly think he had money for the cab fare. But upon arriving at their destination, the spry man pressed exact change into the cabbie's hand saying, "Good evening! Safe night!"

Pear trees proved more difficult. At the cane-wielding man's insistence, Mycroft found himself up in the tree, tossing down fruit! Until that point in the student's life, he'd carefully avoided all manner of legwork. He much preferred to allow his brothers the honour of such tedious manual exertions. From below, like a deranged conductor, the Greek fiercely stabbed the night air with his walking stick to indicate precisely which fruits he must have. When the final flowery cotton sack could bear no more weight, he clapped his hands and proclaimed job well done. He sighed heavily as though thoroughly exhausted from standing on the ground rasping orders.

In the cab on the way to their residences, Dr. Kratides confessed, "Autumn last, I barely had any pears. But, we've made proper use of your great stature tonight. I shall feast upon pears for weeks! As surely as God made little green apples, I shall feast for weeks! Well done, boy! Well done."

The linguist's two-room flat was twin to that of his new manservant in both dimension and layout, but with full windows and a wooden floor. Mycroft was quite surprised to find the space comfortably furnished and rather accommodating. Not at all the sort of living quarters expected of a man who bundled fruit from public trees. Certainly the space was overflowing with haphazard stacks of papers and books, yet it was neither depressing nor dreary. In fact, it seemed the Greek had made himself a cozy home, despite the peeling damp plaster and exposed pipes of their decrepit block of flats.

"Just give a moment to clear some of this away. There. The table if you please."

With effort, the young man hoisted the four straining bags onto the small kitchen table as his strange new acquaintance shuffled the papers away. Mycroft went and stood by the door, extremely eager to conclude the oddest Tuesday night of his young life thus far. But the man carried on talking as he fanned about under the kitchen sink, in search of something.

"Pears for weeks! I can't thank you enough—Ah hah, there it is! Now, are you more of an apple man, or a pear fellow, boy? Do you eat Heinz beans? I've about a half dozen tins in need of a good home."

Mycroft was rather offended! To the young man it seemed as if the ageing linguist were suggesting he was too impoverished and lacking in resourcefulness to adequately provide for himself. He tried to keep his prideful indignation out of his voice when he replied. "That's quite generous, sir. But you really don't—"

"No, no! You did the brunt of the work, so you must reap the fruits of that labour. I'm a true Lefty! As surely as God made little green apples! Besides, I've developed allergy to all incarnations of tomato, even stewed into sauce. Thoroughly intolerant. Now, come on, boy: Do. You. Like. Heinz?" Without waiting for a reply, the stout man was up on a portable step, snatching down tins.
Mycroft's ire subsided. He looked down at his thin hands, ashamed to have foolishly mistaken a genuine show of appreciation for pity. This was a normal barter as he'd been raised to respect. Why should it seem anathema to him to meet someone in capitalist London who valued work? Just then the student's stomach rumbled as if challenging him to decline. The thin broth was not sufficient on its own. Which is why he'd gone to Inner Temple Gardens in the first.

"Thank you, yes. I quite like Heinz, sir." It was a lie. Mycroft preferred home cooked. He'd grown up fat and happy on hearty country meals. But the graduate student had neither the time nor resources to prepare homemade dishes as he had enjoyed back in his quaint village of Starkholmes. Tinned beans, eggs and free apples constituted the staples of his postgraduate diet.

"Good! We understand one another, then. I've sardines in tomato as well...Somewhere in this...Oh — do help yourself, please!"

In a Labour Party mug on the overflowing desk beside the door, Mycroft was looking at a bouquet of political biros. At first, the young man was only thinking to himself how he needed an ink pen. He'd meant to buy one but he was saving the last of his coins for this week's photocopies. Perhaps he'd luck-out and find one in the library somewhere. That's how he'd got his last propelling pencil and vial of graphite. Just abandoned on a shelf waiting there next to an empty sweets wrapper, a used tissue full of gum and a crumpled petrol receipt with some "Becca's" phone number. If he didn't find a biro in the library, he could always snap one off its tether at the bank. He really hated doing that. Too many public hands touched those so he had to take them all apart and sanitise them at least three times. Additionally they never had much ink left in them. At least abandoned Library writing utensils only required two thorough scrubbings.

As he considered the statistical probability of finding a non-chewed Library pen, his pale blue eyes registered the words on the biros in Dr. Kratides' Pro-Union mug. Particularly the neon pink pens stamped "NO TO CLAUSE 28!"

"Here, boy. I have many more. Each of us must show these intolerant bigots the true nature of so called 'intentional promoting.' Such undemocratic nonsense. Cruelty for cruelty's sake! Want badges as well?"

Before Mycroft could speak, the old man had already imposed two pink biros on his narrow hand. The spry linguist hurried over near the radiator and began rifling through a repurposed candies dish. He began monologuing about the Commonwealth's dire state of affairs as his fingers flew through the bowl. "We must get the word out. Damned Thatcher! As if the Winter of Discontent were not hard enough to bear without her anti-Union, Atlantist, war-mongering, classist, Poll-taxing, anti-gay poison. She's trying to divide this great nation. That's what's going on! Faction against faction. Fine strategy that is! Hoping we'll scapegoat one another for the devastating unemployment. Economy's in the bogs and she's ratcheting up the taxes every fortnight while trying to get each citizen to turn on his brother. Section 28! Does anyone truly believe hearing about us could 'make' a person 'turn gay'? As if it's a choice we got talked into by some flashy advertisement in the papers!"

Us? We? That's when the realisation dawned on Mycroft that he had never met another homosexual man besides his brother. He blinked rapidly for several seconds. He should have seen the posters and pens for what they clearly were: the personal belongings of a political gay activist. Why had he assumed otherwise? What did he think? That gay men never grew old? Or that all seniors were heterosexual conservatives like his ignorant grandfather?

Mycroft took a good long look around. He smiled. Something thrilling about meeting another of your kind at long last. It was a bit like discovering Father Christmas in your sitting room fire grate
in the dead of night on a magical winter's eve. Another one like me!

"...but we stick together, don't we? Yes yes yes! Labour Unions, Green Party, lesbians and gay men all allies these days. All working together. We gays must stand up, now more than ever—Oh, sorry! Or bi men. Bisexuals."

Mycroft flinched. The ginger student had never been mistaken for a bisexual man. No one had ever thought he had even the slightest interest in women! In fact, he'd never had to clarify anything regarding his sexuality. In his hometown, it seemed accepted since birth. Everyone knew everyone. That's how sleepy little country villages were.

Everyone knew the Holmes family. The girls were intelligent enough not to waste their charms on the Holmes boys. The eligible women didn't seem bothered, in fact they were quite friendly, as were most people. The adults came calling for assistance from time to time. Wanting Mummy to help with calculating rates. Needing brother or father to repair something. Seeking Mycroft to explain legal documents in understandable language. Asking the little one to kindly stop his damned red dog from sporting their geese. Everyone in the village helped one another.

The Holmes family were known as the very clever folks who lived in the red brick cottage at the end of the lane and avoided social functions. Mycroft had never overheard comments about his family that went beyond the usual quibbling gossip of a small town.

'The youngest didn't talk much; the middle one was rather picky about tidiness; the oldest had a temper; Mummy had a peculiar obsession with American culture, Father was a dreadful shot who couldn't hit a cow's arse with a banjo*.'

More than once little brother had burst into the Sunday service fifteen minutes late AND wet from head toe for no damned reason WITH his equally waterlogged dog. That had set the townsfolk chin wagging down in the White Lion!

Mycroft had been a bit- shall we say- pudgy prior to puberty and most knew he was averse to physical chores. Sometimes he was classified as 'lazy.' He'd overheard that on occasion. Didn't bother him much because they still sought his help with obtuse legal paperwork all the time. Ever since he was twelve. He had a skill to trade, so his utility was respected.

In fact, the graduate had thought he wanted to become a barrister for a while. But...going to the trouble of proving he was right in a court of law seemed like so much bother. (Although a white wig secretly appealed to him.)

As he grew older and the nation's recession deepened, Mycroft became more and more sure he wanted to study economic maths. LSE's normal entry requirement was an upper second class honours degree, or equivalent, with a significant mathematical content. However young Mycroft had been accepted among a rare few well-qualified applicants who did not meet this requirement. He'd earned his position being considered on merit.

It was a rather big deal in Starkholmes. One of their own off to Londontown to make something of himself. When he'd left for LSE, Mycroft recalled a few folks in town suggesting he'd enjoy the posh metropolitan life. Some villagers proudly speculated his big brain would make him filthy stinking rich despite the nation's economic depression. People remarked London would 'suit' him; 'more his speed.' He overheard people say that's where he belonged. Big city Academia. Honestly his townspeople really knew nothing of London beyond an occasional holiday weekend spent gawking. Additionally 'filthy stinking rich' in his quaint village really only meant middle class. So there was no valid reason to trust their boastful conjecture. People gossiped. That's what village life was about.
But nothing to do with sexuality. People knew him and said nothing about it. At least...not that he'd ever heard.

Mycroft had never had to 'come out' to his family either. Nor could he recall his brother ever needing to. Father only said, "It's in the veins. From your grandmother. Art in the blood is liable to take many unique forms." Whatever that meant!

When Dr. Kratides had tried to be inclusive and show he was not making biphobic assumptions, that was the very first time anyone had acknowledged Mycroft's sexuality by name. The young man knew who he was. He'd always just known. There had never been a need to discuss it back home.

Although, for no logical reason, The Mater felt the disturbing compulsion to natter on about condom use and AIDS/HIV prevention just prior to his setting out for London. Thankfully, Father had rescued him from that horrifying little chat right when she was getting to the excruciating details of how to apply one. That woman! Perhaps she should take a long look in the mirror to learn precisely what had convinced her oldest sons to maintain their complete aversions to women! Art in the blood or vomit in their shoes?!? Thank you, mother mine, for literally speaking the haunting language of life long celibacy. Child abuser!

Mycroft shuddered. The young man hastily interjected to assure that his neighbour's earliest assumption was correct. "Gay."

The linguist looked up, dark eyes full of confusion that his Leftist monologue had been interrupted. "Sorry, what?" He scratched his stubby fingers through his coal black side fringes until his remaining hair was sticking out at wildly odd angles. The elderly Greek cupped a hand behind his ear. "What, boy?"

Mycroft thought he'd spoken aloud, but he'd really only muttered under his breath. A bit like a light cough, actually. He took a step away from the door and lay his hand against his chest. "Gay. I'm gay, Dr. Kratides."

"Milo," replied the elderly man pointing at his own chest. "Milo is easier to pronounce correctly." He smiled and went back to digging through the sweets bowl. "Ah ha! Here you go. One of each." He opened his pudgy olive hand to reveal five badges: APTU; SECTION 28 with a red X over the words; Don't Register, Don't Pay, Don't Collect; OutRage!; and one that was only a pink triangle on a background of white. He dumped the badges into Mycroft's thin hand.

"There. Wear them with pride, boy!"

"Thank you, sir."

"You're most welcome. Now, tea?"

Mycroft tried not to let his undernourishment show when he tucked into juicy sliced pears, toasted ham sandwiches and the biggest creme bun he'd ever seen whilst his neighbour went on and on about his life. The ginger man dutifully tolerated his new acquaintance's unabated narrations for nearly two hours. Although the lad much preferred silence, there was something rather fascinating about the opinionated Greek.

Milo hailed from Athens. He was divorced and had a daughter called Sophy. His daughter was
married to an English bigot called Harold. She had three children that Harold didn't allow Sophie to ever introduce to her father. The linguist sighed at the Christmas photographs on his refrigerator. He said his oldest grandson was nearly Mycroft's age. "But my little girl is only permitted to send yearly Christmas letter. Her husband is thoroughly intolerant of what he calls 'immoral criminals.' In Greece, no less! The Empire that first indited the historiography of Lesbians and Gay Men!"

Mycroft knew all about the lyric poet Sappho from the Isle of Lesbos. And he'd read about the Warren Cup and studied black and white photographs in a book. That was quite eye opening! He knew about Roman Emperor Nero's two marriages to men back in the first century, as well. It all contributed to an inner sense of intrinsic pride. The glory of definitively knowing that gay men had been prominent historical leaders and had been able to have husbands. Long ago there had been a place in time where the love between Kings was publicly known and openly celebrated. Mycroft knew that.

However, he hadn't known gay men could father children. Milo was the first real live gay man Mycroft had ever met. And he was a father. The ginger youth really wanted to ask how that worked. Obviously it would have been extremely rude to make inquiries of such a personal nature. Mycroft wondered if he could ever have sex with a woman. Could make his life perhaps easier to be like everyone else and have a wife instead. Maybe there was a special mental tactic; something he could possibly learn to overcome within himself? Perhaps he could ask that. The graduate looked to the narrator.

The elderly gentleman's round olive face was like the caved empty ground of a pulled tree stump. The monumental heartbreak of any parent who is segregated from his child. Milo's shame-filled dark irises wavered under a thin layer of damp that told he blamed himself that his nature meant forfeiture of his loved one. So forlorn in that moment that young Mycroft felt compelled to quickly inquire about more pleasant topics. He softly ask what the emeritus professor did in London.

Milo twitched his moustache and cleared the lump from his throat. "Ah, yes. Sorry. Where was I..." They pretended he had only misplaced his train of thought down a frivolous tangent. Milo regained his lecturer's tone and continued his narrative. The Greek was fluent in fourteen languages. In his retirement, he maintained his utility by providing translation services to foreign embassies. Sometimes various London universities asked him to teach special seminars and guest lecture on occasion. He filled the remainder of his time with political gatherings. The linguist was just like Mummy and Father: he loathed the Conservative prime minister but was deeply patriotic regarding England.

Milo dug out a faded sign that read "Due to Clause 28, Cambridge LGB Club now disbanded until further notice." His olive hands turned to trembling fists for a moment, then he sighed and said, "Same at your Uni, too, now. A very many clubs ended after that rubbish hateful law. Intolerant. Thorough intolerant!"

Mycroft looked at the wrinkled lavender sign. He had actually wondered what had become of the LGB student union on his campus. Several things made more sense to him now as he thought about it. Perhaps it was not his age nor his lack of funds that kept him friendless. Not that he ever really went in for friends. Boys his age were obnoxious goldfish. But, it could have been interesting to...perhaps...go on a date or two. Just to see what it was like. Secretly, he'd hoped Uni would be 'a time of discovery' for him. That was a thing. He'd read about that: young people venture off to get an education and they wind up meeting their spouse. Not that he was interested in that sort of antiquated romantic notion. Yet, kissing...held a certain appeal...just to see if he liked it. Not that any particular set of full russet lips came to mind.

The lanky man sipped his mint tea and pondered. He'd never considered that people might dislike
him merely because he was homosexual. He wasn't stupid. This was not the first century. He knew a great many people, including his parents, believed it was not appropriate for men to be overtly physically demonstrative with other men in public. They said it was rude and might be dangerous. Somehow, to Mycroft that seemed to be an unquestionably fair assertion.

Everyone knew the aging Librarian in neighbouring Matlock Bath was lesbian. She wore a little badge on her lapel that said so. "Lesbian and Proud." She shared a home with a retired school teacher from Derby. It didn't seem like an issue, though. People's dislike of the Librarian seemed to stem from her vexing habit of constantly closing the Library an hour early. And she shushed people all the time. Plus she reeked of far too much perfume. She purposefully banged her damned book trolley into people's shins and never apologized. Her little lapel badge should have said "Meany and Proud." It was not uncommon to hear people call her a right old bitch. Because she was! But did people say that because she was homosexual? Mycroft hoped not. Yet he really didn't know now.

Perhaps people disliked him because he was gay as well.

Suddenly the young man remembered his brother stomping through the front door with a swollen red eye socket and a split lip growling, "Sod these ignorant small town arseholes!" Then slamming out the back door as Mummy snapped, "Language, Reddy!"

Brother could be fairly dramatic, however. He was quite often in a fight. Generally it was surprising when he didn't have a massive black eye. He had spent far more time interacting with villagers because he found sports amusing for some such reason. The boys were six years apart in age, so Mycroft had been too young to get the gist of exactly what Father spoke with him about in the back garden that night.

Mycroft vaguely recalled it was perhaps something to do with his football mates up the way in Matlock. At ten, Mycroft only recalled hearing Father's patient whisper imploring, "Mustn't wake Billy, Red. Mother shall turn absolutely monstrous if we do, my boy. Now, let's have a look at that eye." Then brother kicking over an empty pail, snarling, "I can't wait to get out of this fucking place!" Mycroft remembered Father pulling his oldest into his arms and quoting, "It is the courage to continue that counts, Shef. Courage, my boy, courage."

Holmes' didn't really go in for cuddling. They weren't exactly that sort. They were handshake types, for the most part. But on that night, whatever had occurred in Matlock had warranted a hug from Father. There was a sense that the incident was to do this brother's best mate. A spotty, sturdy football enthusiast who had attended regular school. Ian? Owen? Something like that. Used to come round for supper all the time. Brother called him "Tuffy" and he called brother "Reddy."

Mycroft remembered how the two spent hours in the garden discussing The Smiths and pouncing a ball back and forth off their knees. They were always jumping all over one another, trying to drown each another in the River Lathkill. Headlocks, tripping, shoving, chasing around and other foolish nonsense.

Mycroft had seen them kissing. Loads of times. They were really keen on doing that lying in the field almost as much as they liked the ruddy Smiths. Not that he spied on them or anything like that. It looked interesting, that was all.

Then, the older boy went away to Derby for sixth form and that's when brother started getting into fights nearly every day. Brother had stopped playing football that night, doubled his focus on boxing instead, spent much more time round the house, and took up smoking. That's when he'd begun cursing their sleepy little village for being 'too small.' Whatever that meant!

Mycroft had never considered that series of events as having to do with anti-gay. Not in his village!
Growing up in his family made him perhaps more naive about certain aspects of social life than he'd ever truly know. That was the problem with leading a sheltered existence: the scope of what lay beyond one's garden gate was so unknowable.

It was just then at Dr. Kratides' kitchen table in September of 1990 that seventeen year old Mycroft made the best decision of his entire life.

The ginger student put down his sandwich and turned to his host. He chose to ask, "Sir, how does one know when people are anti-gay?"

Milo went silent. Bit of pear flopping off his thick greying moustache as he swiped his napkin over his mouth. Slowly he pushed his plate away and began to nod his shiny round head. "Well...I- I don't really know, boy. Sometimes you can tell. Sometimes you can't. But, on the whole, I'd say people are mostly prone to minding their own business and adhering to proper etiquette so you mustn't go about thinking you're constantly under attack or some such notion. No commies popping out of shrubbery, lurking round every corner, laying in wait or some such thing. No, they're generally quite subtle about it. Why? Do your, uh, mates make jokes in poor taste or some such?"

"I haven't any mates, sir."

"What of those weekend dos you host? Those boys who come round. Are they not your mates?" The older gentleman seemed a bit sheepish admitting he'd nosed out the window like a busybody.

"Uh...no, sir. Classmates. Study group."

Milo didn't quite seem to find this plausible, but he didn't push the lie. "Hrm. And they're decent chaps? They must be if they come calling every other week."

"Just to study. We keep focused on schoolwork."

"Hrm. Well...Try inviting them out to the disco or the local, then you'll know whether or not they feel comfortable being your friends in public. That's how I used to do it, back when I still gave a damn what people thought of me."

Mycroft looked down at his unfinished meal while he thought of the least pathetic way to explain there was no way in hell those boys would ever be seen with him in public. Until tonight, he'd marked it down to his being bookish or living in a hovel. But...if he really thought about it, it was more to do with what people in his village called "aloof; picky about tidiness." The young man was fairly certain now that they'd meant "obviously gay." He knew it was quite easy for people to decern that about him at a glance. He'd never met another boy with such regal posture and precise mannerisms. Father said he displayed the 'stately dignity' of a monarch. Mummy once called him a 'persnickety peacock.'

Mycroft knew damned well those were not descriptives that made other seventeen year old boys queue up to become his friend. Especially not regular beer drinking, card playing goldfish. Not that he even remotely wanted to be their peer. Perish the thought!

"Ah. I see. Not mates, then. That's all right. True friends who accept us are very difficult to find sometimes. That's why LGB clubs were so dear. However, we'll get our clubs back, Mycroft. Then you'll have a better chance of making accepting friends. Til then, try milling about campus more. Men like us tend to stick out like sore thumbs, don't we? Well, that's a good thing. No, I mean it. Sincerely! As surely as God made little green apples, boy! Used to work for me all the time. Truly it did. Men always could tell with me so they'd approach me if I just put myself out there. And that's rather good: You know from the first they'll accept you. Easier than thinking you've made
friends only to find out later they don't accept you for being you, right? Right?"

"I suppose..."

"Now see here, boy, it's true. That's still how I meet most people. Just keep being yourself. Those who know a thing or two will notice. You won't even have to do anything. He'll see you and come up and make an introduction on his own. You'll have friends in no time! See...it's quite advantageous to be men like us sometimes. It's good."

Down in his basement flat that night, the gawky young man awoke with a sudden start at three o'clock. The elderly Greek had been correct! Mycroft had already made an accepting friend. Dr. Altamont had obviously assessed his student's nature. Nonetheless, Mycroft had been invited to play chess. Laying on his back in the dark, the student realised his good fortune. He had been himself, someone had noticed, made an introduction and sought his friendship with acceptance! Mycroft felt certain that his friend knew he was gay. He also felt certain his professor was not concerned about this in the slightest. Their comfortable friendship was about the chess and the compatibility of a kindred intellect. As surely as God made little green apples!

For a completely unrelated reason, the ginger man had an interesting dream of living in the first century and modelling for the Warren Cup. The dreamer's hands clutched tightly into the twist of blanket hem as his resting mind conjured images from that beautiful silver chalice. He saw himself reaching up and holding fast to a bronze ring as he slid fluidly down onto his throne made of strapping, caramelised lap. Toga fabrics billowing around his long torso. Massive tan hands caressing him in highly sensitive areas that throbbed with longing. Piercing mocha eyes reading all the pleasure written in his pale skin.

Chapter End Notes

Do u remember the first time u met another homosexual man? God! I was chuffed to bits!

The Warren Cup currently resides in Room 7 of The British Museum. Beautiful!

Thatcher was so detrimental to LGB people! Tis true that many Labour groups worked together with LGB people to fight Conservative Party. S4 of BBC Sherlock will heavily feature Thatcher's legacy, so this is a bit of history about that time to help explain. Clause 28 was abominable. (Back then we were not LGBTQ.)

I deduce Holmes family came from Derbyshire county in East Midlands bc the surnames 'Sherlock' and 'Mycroft' are still found there.

These are actual London locations of free public fruit. Help ur self! No really!

BTW: a banjo is a shovel.

In Greek, the word for apple (μήλο) is pronounced mee 'lo.
Thanks to those public fruit trees, Deedee's hospitable chicken, and a pertinacious neighbour, Mycroft was able to survive his extravagant Chianti purchase. He might not have tobacco...but he'd been meaning to quit anyways.

When his professor had offered him the ashtray and lighter, Mycroft inwardly wished he'd had the self control to reserve one cigarette for that moment. A handsome man leaning in with a light as though his guest were a dapper gentleman from the silent films era. Offering Mycroft an opportunity to bend in close, perhaps casually palm the back of a smooth ample hand, then sip that blue flame from thick fingers. God that would have been cool! Week after next, the graduate was determined to have at least one cigarette!

Dr. Altamont looked from the refused ashtray to his rejected flame. With a definitive snap of his wrist, he closed his lighter and withdrew his large hand. But he did not lean back against his chair. The opponents sat perched on the edges of their wooden seats, staring at one another. Narrowed chocolatey eyes rapidly licked every microexpression of his guest's youthful features. The professor sharply affirmed his chin downward once, as if Mycroft were fully confessing the whole situation to him in those few seconds. He inhaled a long pull of his cigar as he replayed Mednis' next move on the board between them. Dr. Altamont continued to concentrate on his opponent's face, tipping his head slightly to the side and nodding as if he were listening to Mycroft speak to him. They decided to swallow more wine together, while the invisible conversation flowed from delft blue eyes.

The host reached for his East India box and offered it out towards the tall man. With his own cigar clenched in his sculptural pearly teeth, he uphinged the wooden lid and waited. The ginger man pressed both pale hands firmly into russet wool on his thighs. Mycroft's face said it all. The student was weary to try one. One faux pas was quite enough for this Friday, without further compounding his awkwardness by coughing on a lung full of cigar smoke.

With authoritative movements, the older man stood, flipping the box lid closed with a resounding bang. He shut it away, out of sight behind a little cupboard door of the polished walnut writing desk on the far side of his study. He returned. Sat slowly as Mycroft shuffled another chess piece over the jade surface. More fragrant chianti slipping from the bottle, refilling each glass to within millimetres of the edge. The econometrics professor held his student's gaze as he empathically stamped the bottle back down against the table.

In one slow, methodically conclusive press, Dr. Altamont again slid the green glass ashtray toward his opponent with deliberate, controlled force. He filled his mouth with cigar smoke, then pursed his full lips. A series of three wobbly O o o's haloed his wine glass. Then he inclined the unlit end of his cigar towards his guest's lengthy right hand. The move entirely categorical.

Inviting smile.

Ribcage flutter.

Mycroft reached for it. Let their fingers touch as he claimed the smouldering cigar. He put it to his thin lips and sipped lightly. It was exactly like his cigarettes, only richer and much more flavourful. He did it again, rolling the brown cylinder between his long fingers as he considered how he
looked exhaling. His next taste of aromatic, velvety smoke was larger. He shut his eyes as it thrilled his blood. With his chin tilted up, he blew a huge cloud over the ceiling. The fourth lungful made his brain slosh. Two days without was far too long. God it was good. That perfect dizzy humming feeling like the first cigarette of the day. Exquisite. He wrapped his lips over the cigar again and sucked in a great mass of luscious smoke. Suddenly his aching tastebuds needed to learn how Rouge married with Ruffino. Flooding mouthful of dry Chianti caressing his palate all the way down. The young man steadied his hand against the table and gave himself to the alcohol and nicotine. Match made in heaven! Long drags of full bodied smoke. Unending delectable red red red. He could not stretch the heady feeling far enough. It could never reach far enough to satisfy the unnamed hunger it represented. Something needy uncoiling somewhere within. This feeling.

A soft tone escaped his overloaded mouth. The sound unambiguous. Too intimate. Mycroft startled. Immediately clapped his fingers over his betraying mouth. Opened his blue eyes and quickly flung out the cigar towards the ashtray. Too much.

Dr. Altamont had melted way back against his chair. Face like creamed vanilla caramel sauce. Thick ring finger repeatedly outlining his lower lip in slow light passes. Mycroft didn't know the wine was causing his cheeks to flush gorgeous incarnadine all the way up into his ginger temples. Tannin stained lips, hazy slate blue eyes, lingering tendril of smoke threading from his long nose, hand clutching the table edge for support. Prominent angle of his adam's apple jutting out from his long pale neck with each swallow he'd taken. Perfect roundness of his thin mouth each time he'd brought the thick tan cylinder to his crimson lips. The young man didn't realise how handsome he was in that moment. All he knew was that this night would never be long enough to express every longing.

Mycroft reached for his professor's next move and made Mednis's attack for the other man. Then he made Fischer's. He refilled their wine. Only then did be reach for the cigar again. One more long drag. He kept the sound inside this time. He made quite sure. Then he held it out for his host to reclaim. They paused in the exchange of the cigar: Our mouths taste the same.

That's how the pair played all eleven of Fischer's championship matches. Attacking and counterattacking their wine glasses against their lips. Never permitting the level of burgundy liquid to dip below half. Exchanging the delicious cigar every third or fourth move.

Too many unequivocal smiles to count. Mycroft nearly clutched his chest. Why the hell must you be so good looking? Stop it at once, sir! Or...please never stop looking at me this way.

Mycroft served them each the last of the Ruffino. Patiently he waited as the empty bottle dripped its remaining minute droplet into his glass. When the student attempted to set it back down, a large hand cupped the side to gently steer it onto the table properly. The auburn man wasn't quite sure how much time had passed since Bobby Fischer finally won the eleventh game. At some point, the men had played the final victorious checkmate. Yet the remaining cigar stub continued to ebb and flow in languid cycles between their lingering fingers.

Mycroft pushed back from the game table and stood. His lanky form immediately swayed left, then backward. He plopped down. Undeterred, he smoothed a hand over the russet wool on his unsteady thighs. In one gulp, he upturned the last swallow from his glass while he watched his friend carefully grind their cigar down into the well of green glass. Everything smelled like burnt grapes. Anomalous fuzzy clouds circumvented the auburn student's peripheral vision.

Where had we been going?

Ah yes, another visit to the powder room. Right. No, toilet. It's called toilet when one is a man. Only decrepit grannies use euphemisms such as 'powder room.' Men are meant to 'have a slash' in


Why are hand towels invariably so frilly? Those typical satin borders. Embroidery. Is that truly necessary? Why? Perhaps that's one of those...ontological inquiries only meant to be answered when one gets to heaven...Is there a heaven? If one believes in such a place, does that necessitate a belief in hell as well? I'm definitely going to hell. Because I most certainly covet another man's wife. No, strike that, other way round. I covet Dr. Sunshine's Dr. Handsome. Covetous little cretin. That's me.


Oh god is that what I look like? Face red as a post box! Makes my massive bulbous beak look even more like a turnip! Garish red smiley wide whisker things on the edges of my mouth like a child whose sipped too much juice from a big boy cup. Or a kiddie whose played in mother's lippie. Saints preserve us, I'm in a right state! Saints preserve us? God I'm such a grannie!

Men are meant to swear. Say fuck. F u c k! Good. Yes. That's better. Say it again: Fuck! I look like fucking shit! Fuckin hell, I am a fucking mess! Yes that's much better. Say fuck. Fuck! Fuck me, I'm a horrible fucking state! Good. Fuck, I'm fucking wasted...fuck me. Fuck me...s i r? Fucking fuck me, sir. Fucking fuck me up my fucking arse with your fucking cock, sir. Until you fucking ejaculate. Inside me. Fucking fuck me with your massive fucking cock until you fucking cum buckets up my tight fucking arse...sir. Trolley case. What? Two day trolley case. Grey trolley case? Yes. Grey. She wheeled it out the door. “Back soon, my love.”

...What's the hour? How did it become half ten? That explains the second empty bottle on his writing desk...and the cold sandwiches. She's...two day trolley case...

Fuck! God, shut the water off already! Condoms. What? You haven't any. Why would you? For doing sex. For sexy s e x i n g. For getting fucked. Proper fucked. Lubricant. L u b e. Jimmies and lube. For getting fucked. Fucked up the fucking arse. And in the mouth. Mustn't forget the mouth! Quite right. Fucking fuck my fucking mouth with your thick fucking cock, sir.

...Are condoms required for oral sex as well? Not lube, obviously. That's obvious. But, for taking him in my mouth? On my knees. On my knees with his fucking cock in my mouth. Sucking him off. B l o w j o b. Such a stupid euphemism. Very very stupid. Even I know you don't blow on it. You're meant to suck it...Fucking Cock sucker. May I be your fucking cock sucker, sir? But...could he still feel it if I'm meant to put condom on his—SHUT UP! Oh god! Do shut up at once! Kindly change the subject!

Holy fuck where did that carpet runner slither in from? Was that always there?


He aught to look like maths geeks were meant to look. Old and lumpy and drab waist coats and baldy and shrivelled as walnut meats and white polar bear fringes sprouting out his nose and liver spots on his bluey hands and creamed asparagus breath and sour milk face and cologne made from burnt toenail trimmings and humourless frowns and where the fuck is my jacket? Wall. Hold fast. I'm fine. Perfectly fine.

Oh god! He's right here. Holding out my jacket. Ok. Yes, sir. I'm meant to be leaving.

Ribcage flutter ribcage flutter ribcage flutter.


Oh!


He smells of Rogue...and something chypre. O a k m o s s? Yes. Definitely Oakmoss. And something fougère as well...coumarin? Yes. Most certainly. Just a bit closer. Hold that rich masculine aroma in the lungs until I'm drowning on dry land. Don't sigh so loud! Yawn! That's it. Yes...I'm only tired...from all the sitting and chess.

W a i t...Kindly unhand my collar, sir. Leave it crooked! Let it alone. So tall! Eyes like dark chocolate sprinkled in edible gold foil dust. The longest curliest blackest lashes. Thin pencil lines that go crinkling out from the corners like veins in a tobacco leaf. Smooth cheeks like roundy tan curves of polished chestnut. Russet lips. Full of wine and smoke and irrefutable smiles.

Ribcage flutter ribcage flutter ribcage flutter.

Door handle. Front door. Good. Yes. I'm leaving, sir. Out I go. Give him a nod. No! Why did we add the little salute? How'd that look? All jelly wrist and rubber arm! Thought we'd reached an agreement about trembly arms down at sides! No! Don't wave at him! Arms. At. Sides. NOW!
Saints preserve us, let's don't go overboard with the gauche pouf gestures. What shall we try next? A maladroit toodle-loo finger twinkle perhaps? Locate the interior of your trouser pockets this instant! His trouser pockets. The trouser pockets. There we go. Well done, persnickety peacock!

God, he's following me out? Why?

"Address?"
"Shapsbully— uh, Shaftsbury. Uh, sir."

As in, hello, I'm a ginger homosexual and I reside at shafts bury. Bury your shaft. Is that not clever, sir? Might we expect a laugh? As if my overly relaxed lower extremities were not allusion enough to my innate proclivities. But you don't seem to mind that I'm...this way...Gay. You're a good friend, sir. You only care about the chess. Treat me like a regular bloke. No. Like an intelligent man. Acceptable. You're not bothered about me- about my...sexuality. And that's so wonderful. That I'm so obviously this sort yet you simply don't fault me for it. Decent man. Good man. Good friend.

I don't live this direction. This is actually the opposite direction of where I reside, sir. Another left turn. Mind the steps. Easy peasy lemon squeezy. Handrail. Hold fast. Got it. I'm fine. Perfectly fine. I go up left, he goes up right. The iron rail's quite cold on the skin. Hold tight. Fluctuations in stair tread. Unpredictable. His gold ring goes clink each time he bumps his wide palm over it. Clink clink clink. It echoes like a ceramic bell because we're the only ones out in this Friday night. We've got the whole evening's silence all to ourselves. We. Clink clink clink. Married married married.

When had it got so dark? What's he looking at? Oh! That's rather nice, isn't it! Enthralling.

"The P l o u g h, sir."
"Mm. Cloudless."

Mycroft swayed on a thin exhale of momentary wind twirling down from the crisp white stars and animating brittle oak leaves into lazy red/orange dervishes over the grass. The sky was so close! Every pinpoint of winking light, inches from the top of his precarious head. He could feel the overwhelming density of the heavens bearing down on him, tethering him to the earth, helping him remain upright. A little cyclonic breeze cooled the swaying man's red flushed face before it skittered away to chase debris behind a bench. Suddenly an ample hand lightly brushed the left side of his head and gently plucked a handful of his auburn hair away. The younger man immediately put his hand to his head in thorough confusion, expecting his lean fingers to find a massive bald patch. His haste made him list sideways. He got it under control. Looked up at his friend. Dr. Altamont held up a rusty torn bit of brittle paper pinched between his thick tan fingers. Mycroft continued to rub the side of his perplexingly swirly head. He watched the terracotta underside of the dry scrap flip over and over in a light gust of wind as it drifted out of his professor's grip. They studied its lilting summersault downward. Watched it skitter away from one loafer to...a dark green velvet slipper?

What's he done? Oh...

"Oak leaf."

"Y e s, s i r."

Ribcage flutter ribcage flutter ribcage flutter.
More lefts and rights. Darkened storefront windows of sleeping shops periodically reflecting images of two towering men strolling through empty streets. Eventually heading in the general direction of Mycroft's flat. The Chianti gave the lanky man a warm glow in his belly as he shuffled along in slightly too short green house slippers.

Suddenly the plastic bag of his neatly folded khaki trousers and nested socks became too tight in his right hand. The young man wanted to trade it for the other bag containing his wet plimsoles. His long legs halted, but the clothing bag yanked him forward one more step. He faltered slightly and lurched forward another half-step. The auburn man puzzled, looked over at his out-reaching right arm that was pulling away from his body.

Mycroft startled. Jerked his long hand away as if stung by a million nasty paper cuts. His slate blue eyes inspected the palm of his empty hand in the cone of yellow streetlight overhead. He slipped sideways into the funnel of light and peered into his hand, bringing it within an inch of his nose. Then the student squinted out beyond the circle of light to question the mountainous shadow figure to his right.

When had that happened?

Dr. Altamont's silhouette turned abruptly and kept walking. Wide shoulders hunched, chin down as if walking against a biting winter wind. Mycroft stood within the streetlight's cage a few moments longer. Neither of his curiously empty hands contained his belongings. The young man's bereft right hand began to itch. Like a honing beacon it lead him forward over pavement towards its warm, ample remedy.

Mycroft fell into step beside his friend. They easily matched: long stride for stride. Smooth leisurely gait. Dr. Altamont's strong left hand tucked out of sight within his coat pocket.

How do I...?


Yes. We're nearing the vicinity of my block of flats now. This is going quite well. Oh, he's a hand squeezer. Didn't expect that. Give a squeeze back. Mustn't be rude. Can't be seen as one of those ignorant Anglos who doesn't respect other cultures. Perish the thought! Give a return squeeze. A proper squeeze. Come on, like a firm business handshake. Not like a mushy limp fish! Come on, butch it up a bit! Yes. There we go. Nicely done. That's the way!

Oh he's a finger rubbing type as well! That's quite nice. Didn't realise that's a Myanmar custom. But, then again, his father was an Englishman...some sort of Admiral...Rear? Vice? ...Can't recall the photograph exactly. Judging from that picture, the Altamonts left Myanmar when he was, what? Elevendy? Twelvers? Who can tell? He was so tall even then. Same stern steely glare as all the other photos, though. Same long lashes. Thin as a rail in that photo. How old when he developed all this rugged muscle? How old is he now? 30? 40? Age is a tricky thing to estimate when considering other races, isn't it? Difficult to discern with all this fitness as well. This wrist is like a flexing boa constrictor! SHUT UP!

Return the gesture! Be polite. Don't over do it like you're trying to play kissy with his fingerprints. Keep it friendly. I respect your cultural customs! I'm not an ignorant Anglo, sir. Mutual respect of one another. Yes. International manly friendship. Nice and light just as he's doing. Yes. Oh. This is going very well. Gentle light sweeps. He's quite good at this. Soothing soft petting. This is rather
nice. Well done! Exactly right. Just like he's doing.

Wait...no, must've overdone it. Evicted from warm pocket.

"Here?"
"...Yes...? No. Next. Next, sir."

*How is he this inexplicably warm? Are my hands sweaty? No. Good. That's good. He's very...calming. Steady rhythmic finger rubbing. S e r e n e. That's the word. Yes. Quiet and relaxing and hospitable and very friendly. He has the most peaceful, soothing brown eyes when he focuses on me—*

"Here?"
"Smoking."
"Mm."

Ribcage flutter ribcage flutter ribcage flutter.

Mycroft found himself suddenly holding both bags of his belongings. *Too heavy!* He shuffled over to the top stair leading down to his rooms. The bags were gracelessly deposited there in a heap as they slipped through his jelly arms. When he looked up, Dr. Altamont was offering out an open silver smoking case. Something about that case full of cigarettes produced a faint little ringing tone behind the student's hazy blue eyes. *Something...* It was a dull silver. Polished but not to a high shine. Not tarnished. Just, matte. Classic. A lit cigarette hovered near his lean hand.

*What a gentleman! Dr. Manners.*

The men stood above Mycroft's stairwell and watched one another inhale the slowest cigarettes in the history of tobacco. Dr. Altamont did not smoke his cigarette in the same manner as he did cigars. The professor used his thumb and index for his cigarette, keeping the lit end sheltered under his meaty hand so the night air of Autumn could not disturb his habit. Mycroft smoked like a starlet from the silver screen. Index and middle upheld to the crisp air. Swaying wrist tilted out like that saucy redheaded minx Rita Haywood in the film *Gilda*.

Absentmindedly the auburn man fished his key from his inner jacket pocket. Cigarette finished. His bags were again handed to him.

"Good evening, Mr. Holmes."
The econometrics professor held out his warm hand.
"Goodnight, Dr. Altamont."

For no logical reason, the handshake lasted two full minutes. Well, not so much a handshake as two men standing on the pavement clutching hands. Then three hands. Then four. Then more of that slow, international manly friendship cultural custom of hand and wrist fondling. Accompanied by soothing, mutually respectful gazing. Acceptable.

"Goodnight, Mr. Holmes."
"Goodnight, Dr. Altamont."

Observing the European traditions of friendship, Mycroft leaned in and added a cheek-pressing air kiss to the left side of his professor's face. Just to illustrate his appreciation of all global valedictory customs. His friend returned the cheek-pressing air kiss to the other sides of their faces, but apparently didn't quite understand, and so ended up tapping his lower lip against the other man's earlobe. Not so much tapping as more or less lingering. And breathing lightly into Mycroft's ear as
they continued their four-handed international friendship handshake between their chests.

"Good evening, Mr. Holmes."
"Good evening, Dr. Altamont."

Mycroft was unfortunately far too English to attempt the trans-Atlantic American cultural farewell custom of grab-and-bearhug when his friend at last took a step back.

The instant the student was down in his bleak hovel, he realized he'd left his key in the lock. Perhaps he was *slightly* intoxicated. As he stowed the key in his inner jacket pocket, he gave a little gasp of alarm. Mycroft hurried up the steps, dragging himself by the handrail. He was just in time to see his tall friend climbing into a cab.

*A cab. Of course! Why did that not occur to me? Was only just wondering if I should walk him home to ensure he found his way back safely. That would have been a polite thing to do. But...then how would I get back here again? Well, balance of probability: he's so well-mannered, he'd walk me home again. Hrm...that might get a bit fatuous. Spending all night walking one another back and forth. The cab was a much more pragmatic solution. He's so intelligent! Dr. Genius. Oh! Right! Don't just stand here smoking!*

The tipsy student upheld the open cigarette case that had somehow inexplicably ended up inside his jacket. But his professor only shut the cab door with a little wave of his large hand and another unassailable smile.

*Ribcage flutter ribcage flutter ribcage flutter.*

The look that passed between them: 'Yes I did indeed have cigarettes the entire time.' As the cab pulled away into the night, Mycroft again stared down at the open silver case in his lonely hand.

He snapped it closed, thinking: *Check Mate.*

**Chapter End Notes**

Oh, seems I need to explain: The Plough is that constellation Americans call The Big Dipper.

And: yes, Myanmar is one those countries, like Brasil, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Loas, Vietnam, India, etc where people of the same sex oft hold hands in public. There are many different subcultures round the world where hand holding bears no relation to sexual orientation. Now...Is that really what Dr. Altamont is on about...or is that what drunken Mycroft needs to believe...hrm...?
Chapter 98

Chapter Summary

Bit of Dr. Altamont's perspective

Having spent the week intently conversing with their friendly glances during classes, the men seemed much more amicable towards one another. For each of their three days together during lectures, problem classes and computation workshops that week, Mycroft had chosen to arrive ten minutes early so as to find a strategically remote perch way off to the left-most corner of his professor's field of vision. It was a prime location to maximise accumulation of gifted ribcage flutters. Acceptable!

On Thursday, Mycroft decided to surrender to the compulsion to call during Dr. Altamont's office hours. However, when he came round the corner, a twenty-something woman from Advanced Probability Theory was knocking on his professor's office door. The brunette student had her paper in her hand and was loudly giggling and hair tossing on the threshold of Dr. Altamont's office. Her grating voice said, "I'm entirely baffled about these stochastic processes, ya know! Can we speak about probabilistic counterpart— Whoops! Oh goodness! Clumsy me! Tee hee hee!"

The tarty little jezebel flung her pages all about the corridor and then proceeded to bend her arse towards Dr. Altamont's view as she made a big show of retrieving them. Black thong knickers highly visible over one of those grotesquely trendy acid wash denim skirts. Cropped boxy, one shoulder sweatshirt. Pastel lippie- why on earth was that currently fashionable! And a garish floppy bucket hat with massive fake sunflowers affixed to the brim. The bright red "Guess" logo on her backside was superfluous, to say the least.

How dare she waggle her underpants in a professor's face! There was no need to "guess" what she was on about. Even the blind could see her shameless manoeuvre was the basest form of undignified sexual harassment. For a start, the great Dr. Altamont was a highly respected, upstanding member of the academic community. The wise man had no time for humiliating little tarts seeking to besmirch his fine character with their blatant displays. Additionally, wonderful Dr. Altamont was too honourable a man to be lured by some immature, flirtatious trollop in leg warmers and neon pink Keds! It was absolutely disgusting to witness that pathetic hussy giggling and undulating in the corridor for all to see. "No please, do stay right there, Doctor. I can get it. Tee hee."

You can get what, Suzy Strumpet? My chess friend is a happily married man! Is modest, ladylike stooping not a custom in Floozy-shire? Might we expect an end to this horror show any time soon? He's nearly old enough to be your father...I think...Well he's most certainly married! Can you not see that massive gold band?

Mycroft felt his face flush hot with internal fury. The angry man stalked towards the bum-waggling giggler and began hastily scooping her pages from the tile. Within seconds, he'd made a tidy stack of the flirter's subpar, low mark paper. Mycroft stood and thrust her flimsy excuse towards her torso. He was opening his mouth to politely inform her that she must have forgotten that she was a postgraduate at a world renowned institution of economics and politics and that if her mind could not recall the simple rules of proper conduct, she was most welcome to kindly fuck
"Mr. Holmes, our meeting began six minutes ago. Punctuality. <assertive tap of wristwatch> Ms. Latimer, my research fellows host remedial discussion every Saturday. Avail yourself of their collective knowledge at nine o'clock to improve your comprehension of last week's concepts. Mr. Holmes, await me within."

"Yes, sir...Apologies for my dilatoriness, sir."

"Hm."

With a severe glare of annoyance, Dr. Altamont watched his friend hurriedly duck past him into the office. The econometrics professor turned back to his other student as he firmly pulled his door shut behind Mycroft. The ginger man could hear his stern professor's authoritative tenor voice providing details of the remedial study group to Ms. Latimer. He concluded tersely, "All marks are final. My research fellows will know to expect you. Promptly at nine. Good day, Ms. Latimer. I have a meeting."

The door slammed. Dr. Altamont shook his head disapprovingly. He snapped the door lock into place. Then, with a note of disgust, he lowered his voice and said-- almost to himself-- "Every year. Unacceptable."

The taller man turned, a desolate shadow in his weary mocha eyes. He looked down at his friend and inexplicably stepped closer. In his same quiet tone, he said, "My apologies for exploiting you. For making you my alibi, Mr. Holmes."

"I've no objection, Dr. Altamont." None whatsoever, sir. If anyone's remotely interested, I 'await you within' on a near-constant basis...sir.

"You have my gratitude."

"Gratitude is only the expectation of further favours...sir." Not that any particular favours spring readily to mind, sir.

"Quite true, Mr. Holmes." As if on cue, an expectant, ample hand upturned towards the ginger man. Unaltered by alcohol, Mycroft realised how delicate his long hand looked in the other. Additionally, the student became keenly aware of the mildly sensual quality of his friend's firm rhythmic squeezes. The warmest, softest hands on the planet.

His professor's beautiful russet mouth began a slow little smile. Mycroft flattened his fingers over his breastbone in forbearance of the tremor of all his internal organs. Dr. Altamont gently patted the back of the lean wrist. The handsome older man cleared his throat and swallowed. For some reason, in unison, the men's heads turned to briefly notice the black two seat sofa against the eastern wall. Abruptly the pair ended their handshake and simultaneously decided to inspect the small office for other features of interest. What a fascinating metal filing cabinet. Is that hue more ecru or muslin?

The handsome older man deftly repositioned the wooden chair to the left side of his work desk. He offered the place to his student. Then sat behind his desk. He withdrew a thermos and served two cups of tea. With deliberate care, the older man slid his ink blotter, lamp, Filofax and telephone away from the left side to make space for Mycroft. They sat and watched one another sip tea.

There was an unidentifiable quality to the air surrounding them. Perhaps the hot beverages caused the overly warm, aculeate feeling. Nibbling biscuits did nothing to change the intensity of the climate. Nor did staring help. Curiously neither did pretending to ignore one another and focus on
marking papers or writing papers. That became a strange sort of hours long tournament that involved feigning obliviousness while simulating concentration on reading. Head down towards the printed text while entirely conscious of the other man watching one read. Then pose. Then shift in one's seat. Now switch reader/observer. The goal was never to overtly lock eyes. Furtive glances only. The pretence of being lost in deep important thought was essential to the process. Despite both men abiding by the tournament rules, the air in the office never seemed to cool.

Nearing the third hour, Mycroft decided he aught be polite and contribute an apple from his work bag. Foolish idea without a knife. Although burying his flushed face within his satchel had some merit. Dr. Altamont held out his hand. He fastidiously inspected the green fruit. Such a careful man. To the graduate's complete surprise, his professor tightly gripped the apple in both hands. His large thumbs worked down into the stem area as he began slowly prying the apple apart with measured force. A loud crisp sound tore the air between them. Astonishing! Neatly cleaved in two perfect halves. Mycroft felt his groin tighten.

"Impressive, sir."
"Hm."
"I mean- uh, Thank you, sir."
The professor nodded and offered out both halves in his massive palm for Mycroft to choose. Dr. Altamont took a big bite. They chewed in silence. The atmosphere around them compressed in an undeniably conspicuous way when Mycroft decided to lick sweet juice from the crisp succulent Reinette flesh. His older opponent upturned an approving eyebrow.
"Good."

They worked their mouths over their juicy snacks. The silence became nearly unbearable in its intensity. Small talk might dissipate the static and pressure in the scalding air. Perhaps the men should pretend to enjoy uncontroverisal banalities.

"Reinette; Inner Temple Gardens, sir."
"Concert?"
"Not that night, sir."
"Hm."
"I heard Brahms's fourth there in August, sir." It was technically an accurate statement. While liberating apples, Mycroft had sat in the garden and listened to the performance spilling out from within the Temple. No need to qualify his attendance. The music had been so lovely and had made the homesick loner feel welcome in London for the first time since his arrival.
"Hm. We attended a Mormon tabernacle choir winter last. Acceptable."

At the mention of 'we,' Mycroft puzzled for nearly ten seconds, thinking "No we didn't. I wasn't even in London winter last. Oh... Very. Very. Stupid! We.' Dr. Folly. We as in 'My wife and I.' How pathetic can a schoolboy crush get?"

Dr. Altamont suddenly reached over and plucked the neon pink biro from his friend's hand. He studied the words. The wise man cast a sincere gaze into Mycroft's blue eyes and enunciated clearly. "Clause 28: Unacceptable." He affirmed his chin down sharply. Then he gently slid the ink pen back between his friend's lean fingers.

"Yes, sir. Unacceptable."
"Quite true... my friend."

Mycroft stood at once. He began haphazardly stuffing all his belongings back into his satchel. There would never exist enough silence within the universe to accurately justify his reasons. The justifications were superfluous. No matter how it was said or unsaid, Mycroft had to leave.
And he did.

Well he made an earnest effort. But the door was locked and his uncooperative hands shook and he was drowning inside. Starving for air in a suffocatingly small office on a third floor. From too much goddamned confusion and joy and heartbeat and loneliness and longing. That sort of agonisingly empty hunger that hurts so completely that one will certainly die from the pain long before the actual starvation. He clawed at the doorknob until it was rattling widely in his futile hands.

A large palm bore down into the flesh of his shoulder so tightly he exhaled a sudden yelp. But nonetheless, the escaping man went still. He unhandled the door knob yet could not bring himself to turn round.

"I need to go...sir."
"No."

The meaty hand near his neck squeezed again, then slid over the leather strap of his satchel. The weight of his bag was lifted away. Mycroft's betraying arm drifted out to allow his bag to be stolen more easily. Still the auburn man could not turn around. He addressed the bottom third of the office door.

"I'm due at study group, sir," Mycroft lied.
"No."
"I have other plans."
"No."
"I'm meeting my mates at pub."
"No."
"Goodnight, sir." Mycroft slowly slid the lock open.
"No."
"Dr. Altamont, I can't stay. I need to work. In the Library."
"Mr. Holmes, we will continue to work here."
"I—"
"No, my friend. No."

The handsome older man stepped back behind his desk. He carefully unpacked Mycroft's books, notes, calculator, and charts. His wide hands exactly positioned the corners of each textbook so they were perfectly aligned. Within the bag, he found Mycroft's most recent paper from their Econometric Analysis course. The professor deliberately placed the pink pen beneath his own handwritten comment at the very top of the cover page: "Acceptable Mr. Holmes."

Dr. Altamont raised the window, letting the muffled sounds of the campus drift up on the night breezes. Cool air flooded the office and sent a visible little shiver along his student's spine. The older man perched on the window sill with his black plastic ashtray in hand. "Smoke."

The office door's lock reengaged quietly. Mycroft came and leaned against the opposite side of the widow frame. He jabbed his professor's silver cigarette case towards a waiting ample hand. While Dr. Altamont fiddled with a match, the ginger man narrowed his eyes at him contemptuously. He crossed his arms over his chest, then rubbed his shoulder as it were broken. In indignation Mycroft warned, "I find that sort of behaviour to be quite rude, Dr. Altamont."

"Politeness is the poison of collaboration, Mr. Holmes."

"Is that what you tell all your other collaborator's, sir?"

That was the first, last and only time in all their many years together that Mycroft would ever be
frightened of his man. The sharp, angry look in those mocha eyes was so hateful that the invisible force of it pushed the younger man back against the ecru filing cabinet. The stoic professor could never say, in that moment nor anytime in the future, how deeply Mycroft's insult hurt him that night.

At first, the older man thoroughly misunderstood the situation. He thought he'd upset Mycroft by commenting on the political pen. Initially, it seemed as if his student were flustered to have been acknowledged as homosexual. Dr. Altamont had meant to demonstrate how proud he was to associate with a man as shamelessly open and amazingly honest as Mycroft.

At forty, the professor had come to accept that he would never meet an intellectual equal. Two decades ago, he had resigned himself to a solitary, friendless bachelor's life. He thought he'd live out his days quietly with his mother.

Three weeks ago, the econometrics professor read the most elegant data analysis he'd ever seen. Then another remarkable paper. And another. Mathematical proofs so creative and breathtakingly original that Dr. Altamont had been thoroughly overwhelmed. The author seemed preternaturally able to coalesce many seemingly unrelated data sets into a unified, cohesive whole. Such elegant articulations! And from a man so young.

Mycroft was so completely fluent in mathematics that it was almost as if he'd been born with the language in his veins. Which, as it turned out, he had been. The Statistics Programme Director had confided that Mr. Holmes' mother was none other than the well know author of *The Dynamics of Combustion*. Dr. Holmes' significant contributions to fluid dynamics and solid mechanics were legendary among mathematicians, far beyond Great Britain.

Decades spent educating the entitled offspring of the rich had eroded Dr. Altamont's faith in the young. Year after year of wealthy students who frequently made certain he knew exactly which MP, patrician or big shot their father was. Boasting of their lineage in attempts to influence his assessments of their coursework.

Yet, there was reserved Mycroft, humbly attempting to stand on his own merit. Never acknowledging his legendary mother in the slightest. Expecting no special treatments. Demanding nothing. Legitimately a mathematical genius, yet compulsively discreet about it. At less than twenty years of age, Mycroft undeniably possessed the well-rounded comprehension of a man with three times his years.

The man was brilliant! It was such an honour to meet someone like him. The way his mind worked! He was so captivating. Even inebriated, he could easily reenact every move from entire eras of chess history. Everything about Mycroft seemed effortless. To the professor, his friend was a mystical phenomenon. Mycroft spoke, wrote and even moved like a gentleman from the 1920s. Confident, polished, urbane and rather dignified, with an innate delicacy about him that did something to Dr. Altamont's thought processes. There was something quite...old-fashioned and elegant about him. Classic.

The older man felt such shame about allowing their Friday to become so irresponsibility alcoholic. As the host, there was no denying how vulgar he had been to bring forth the second bottle of Ruffino from the cellar. True they had enjoyed themselves, but Dr. Altamont could not stop himself feeling great shame to have behaved as he did. There was no excuse to justify overstepping their friendship.

Mycroft had been so breathtaking. So regal and yet so charming at the same time. The challenging look in his slate blue eyes. Assertive! The way it felt to stand together for nearly an hour under the precise mathematical constants called stars. Out there in the open, under the night, with Mycroft
swaying gracefully, pointing up over their heads from time to time. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, he'd suddenly scooped up both Dr. Altamont's hands and exclaimed, "Look, sir!" Naming every celestial geometry of the heavens as if he lived there. Such cold hands. Such a strong grip. Such a bold man. Completely unashamed to walk through London hand in hand despite the Friday pub crowds. Almost as if he took no notice of anyone else's existence. Dr. Altamont had never know anyone like Mycroft.

Saturday, the solitary man had cursed his foolishness. He'd woken hours before dawn, unable to sleep, haunted by his own weaknesses. *If only* he'd been strong enough to hold out for another two years and 122 days *then* he'd still be single right now.

Such a reprehensible and injudicious counterfactual conditional!

The older man's disillusionment about his life and his absolute weakness had conspired with his strong loyalty to his sainted mother to wed him to Dr. Folly. The prim, compassionate woman had never requested anything from her son. Except that he say yes to Dr. Folly's sound proposal. That day, his dear mother had explained how reasonable and polite it would be to marry the patient Irishwoman who had become his companion of the past two years. Mother had said it would be her greatest pride to have a daughter at last. She expressed her absolute love for Deirdre and remind her son that a superlative woman like that wouldn't hang around forever without a proper commitment.

Dr. Folly was, indeed, an amazing woman. Especially in her loyalty and love to his mother. They had been the dearest of friends. At long last, each woman found the mother/daughter she had only dreamt of knowing. The gentle way Mother sang whilst she brushed her daughter's strawberry blonde hair. The glorious way they laughed at their own private jokes. The beauty of coming home to find Deirdre reading *The King James* to his mother. The way the enthusiastic young woman filled his mother's remaining days with such joy.

Dr. Altamont was so grateful for Dr. Folly's treatment of his mother. He was equally grateful that a woman who had never had a mother could find such happiness with his. Each woman was a beautiful gift to the other. Dr. Folly's own step-mother had not come along until well after the restorationist had earned her doctorate.

Sadly the two women in Dr. Altamont's life had only a bit over three years together in total. But on the morning she passed, his mother had clutched Deirdre's hand and thanked her for becoming her daughter. She said it made her feel secure to know her son had such a wonderful wife.

Dr. Altamont felt humble to have been able to contribute to his mother's happiness. She had lived such a difficult life. Though the pious woman would never have allowed her son to characterise it that way. She was such a remarkable woman. Quiet and strong in her religious faith. He owed her everything. Particularly for the day she saved his life when the Admiral had gifted him the series of long scars up his left arm and back. The tiny woman had rushed to intercede. She had sworn, whole heartedly, that her son was not to blame. That he was only a little boy and had no idea the other child he'd been caught kissing was not a girl. She had blamed his isolation from other Myanmar children for his misunderstanding of the differences between English and native customs for hair length and dress. She had sworn on her life it was her fault for not teaching him. She had begged. She had promised. She had prayed. That day she had done everything a mother could do to save her child's life. And by the grace of God, she had been successful. Until the very morning she died, his devout mother thanked her God each night for sparing her son and asked for God's continued mercy regarding his sin. Dr. Altamont owed his mother everything.

He owed Dr. Folly, as well. Not only for how she honoured his brave, wonderful mother, but also
for her endless kindness towards him. Words could not describe the depth of his shame at being unable to physically fulfill his husbandly duties. He knew he was a complete failure as a husband. However, Dr. Folly patiently asserted, time and again, that she was a modern woman and that she genuinely preferred oral orgasm above anything else. She said it was natural for a man his age to have such a medical issue. Many times she told him that he was a superior lover. Many times she proclaimed that he made her feel like a feminist goddess. She once told him that all her friends would be so jealous if they only knew how completely her husband satisfied her.

And yet, Dr. Altamont knew he was failing her. He did his absolute best with regard to all other aspects of their marriage. The intelligent Irishwoman was such a fiercely independent person. Every time her perfect restorations received accolades, he felt proud that such a talented person had chosen him. He was blessed to know her. In every other way he could, he prioritised her happiness.

Dr. Folly's happiness perhaps had more to do with her frequent nights and weekends spent away than anything to do with her husband. If ever his mind ventured to speculate about her private life, Dr. Altamont would quickly remind himself that he had absolutely no right to ask her about such things.

There had been times after his mother's passing, that Dr. Altamont considered divorce. Dr. Folly's love for his mother might have been the main reason she wanted to join his family. And now, the young woman aught have her freedom restored to her. She might have opportunity to find a better marriage. With a real man. Dr. Folly deserved so much more than the cold, uncommunicative stone she'd married.

Six months after his mother's passing, Dr. Folly had transferred Dr. Altamont and his belongings to the bedroom down the hall. He'd offered her a divorce and said he'd ask their solicitor to call. Dr. Folly had hugged him tightly. She'd said, "I am your family for as long as we both shall live. We love each other, Al. Happily ever after, my love." Periodically, she still asked him to visit her bed before he went to his room. Sometimes she even came and sleep beside him. That made him feel more constructive. Dr. Folly was such a benevolent and patient woman. Dr. Altamont didn't understand why she wished to remain in their marriage, but he accepted her choice for as long as she wished to stay.

After all, until three weeks ago, the econometrics professor had not had any personal motivation to be unattached. He felt so foolish for even contemplating what he meant by those thoughts of being 'available.' Available for whom? If he'd been strong enough to resist marrying for what? For a handsome man half his age? He was a ridiculous, lecherous old man, fixated on a student. The sort of duplicitous pervert who exploited a guest's inebriation. He knew full well he'd taken advantage. He'd hoped his friend might have been too drunk to remember. How he'd taken such liberties: groped the handsome student's hands; smelled his neck; nuzzled his cheek.

However, Mycroft was much too astute to be so easily mislead. He'd said as much moments ago with his conspicuous accusation. It was clear what he thought of Dr. Altamont. The student obviously felt his professor was like so many other stereotypical faculty members: lustily seeking discrete affairs with an unending parade of various students. Brokering unscrupulous transactions between sex and academic performance. It was an open secret on university campuses the world over. Quid pro quo.

Dignified Mycroft had every right to make such assumptions. Here sat a proper roué. Possessively keeping his student caged in his office and away from socialising with his peers. Misbehaving like the worst possible brute. Frightening the delicate man for identifying him as the lech he was. How could he remedy this egregious transgression?
Dr. Altamont stood. He began neatly repacking the books into the leather bag. The auburn man
took hold of the other side of his satchel. His pale hand quickly extracted one text and set in back
on the desk.
"No."
"I apologise, Mr. Holmes."
"Yes, Dr. Altamont."
"I was rude."
"Yes."
The handsome older man relinquished his grip on the satchel and moved to unlock the door.
"No."
"Go?"
"No."

Mycroft looked down at the carefully presented display of his pink biro beneath his professor's
handwriting. He touched his hand to his chest and stood mute for several long moments.
"I...apologise for my rudeness as well...my friend."

The ginger man dropped his satchel into his chair. He offered out his hand. When his professor
took a step back, Mycroft advanced. He reached down against the surface of the door and drew the
warm hand into his. He cradled it tightly between both his own and patted the back of the wrist. He
gave a squeeze and waited. Mycroft did it again, then looked up into those forlorn mocha eyes. He
squeezed harder and did not relent until his man added his other massive hand and squeezed him
back.
"Acceptable, sir?"
"Acceptable."
"Smoke?"
"Yes, Mr. Holmes."

They shared cigarettes, one after another. Passing them back and forth across the desk as they
continued to work in peaceful silence. Mycroft strategically outstretched his long leg against the
side of his professor's chair. Periodically, a meaty hand would tap against the turned up denim hem
of his ankle to call his attention to the offered cigarette. For some reason, the lanky man required
constant reminding when it was his go. The handsome professor seemed to require similar
reminders. Patting his elbow seemed to worked.

Inwardly the ginger man was regretting his insinuation that his only friend was a predator with
many 'other collaborators.' It was a baseless allegation stemming from the young man's internal
conflicts and the horribly insecure way he felt when he and the married man looked at one another.
Objectively, Mycroft knew they were equally friendless. That they needed one another's
companionship. It was the reality of being highly intelligent: to be forever alone.

Truthfully, both men were separately thinking the same thoughts. Inwardly fearing they were each
on the verge of annihilating their friendship with the only kindred mind they'd every known. For
two people who had spent the majority of their lives believing they preferred solitude and silence,
they were secretly quite desperate to know what it meant to be understood. However they had both
foolishly chosen politeness over collaboration. So there was nothing to be done about it except
what they had rigorously trained themselves to do: work, suppress, ignore, inhale poison and
slowly starve.
Fortunately for both obstinate men, the subconscious exists to help the sleeping mind realise great epiphanies too profound and compelling for the waking mind to process.

Although Mycroft's dreams continued to be historically interesting, his Thursday night dream was particularly noteworthy. The history replayed in that dream was in fact the very recent details of his own life. He awoke at two o'clock with the absolute certainty that there had never existed an international, four-handed, ten minute, 'mildly' sensual, caressing handshake tradition in Myanmar or any other part of the known world.

Additionally, the clever man realised that at no point in his acquaintance with his professor had either man any desire for friendship. They were NOT friends. In fact, Mycroft knew with absolute certainty that they would never be friends. There was no amended definition of friendship that included mutual contemplation of an office sofa's utility. Friendship did not involve visual inspections of one another's bodies to determine their favour aspects. The proper word was foreplay. Blatant, groin tingling, overtly sexual foreplay. Between two extremely consenting men.

How to reconcile these facts? There were two choices. He removed his pyjama pants and decided to resolve his conflicting feelings with a hasty wank. To clear his thoughts and help him return to sleep. Easier than a sissy cry-fest on a cold rooftop.

To say Mycroft found that masturbatory session satisfying would have been a lie. He found it extremely unpleasant to resort to unpartnered sex when he knew damn well that across town there was a strong, rugged man urgently keen to pry his buttocks apart like a goddamned apple. That pearly white, wolfish grin testing his crisp flesh. Full russet lips inhaling his every moan from the very depths of his lungs. Rhythmic squeezes of his needy cock in a deathgrip of international friendship until he demanded, "Fuck me, sir!" That's what he needed: a manly handshake. Just once. Just to see if he liked it.

Mycroft's subsequent masturbatory session was far more satisfying. As was the third, which ended with a cum-slathered finger up his clenching arsehole and his mouth screaming "Yes, sir! Oh yes sir!" into his mattress. The ginger man's fourth attempt to coalescing facts took place in his tiny shower and involved personal conjecture surrounding various scenarios concerning the phrases "await me within;" "I've no objection, sir;" and "acceptable."

Despite his best efforts to think it all through, Mycroft was somehow still perplexingly unsatisfied regarding his data analysis. Perhaps he aught call upon his professor right then to discern the other man's interpretation of these facts. Obviously with his pyjama pants back on. Just pay a little visit. "Good morning, sir. May I interest you in a manly handshake? What's that, sir? Too early for a handshake? Quite true, sir. You'd much prefer fellatio on your front porch? Oh I see, sir. Please, stay right there. Allow me." Obviously he wouldn't resort to any fatuous ruses entailing borrowing a cup of sugar or some such nonsense. Perhaps a visit was in order. "I simply happened to be in the area at three in the morning and was hoping you might kindly fuck me at home— WALK me home. You might kindly walk me home, sir." Just until the sun comes up and the cock crows. Just to see if I like it.

As he placed his damp towel over the nail in the bath, Mycroft was suddenly struck by the most factual realisation of all: he lived in a ramshackle hole in the ground. There was no conceivable scenario in which sophisticated Dr. Handsome would enjoy setting one foot in this dingy basement. The ginger student angrily snatched the blanket over his head and tried to return to sleep. He curled his lanky body into a tight fist on his thin mattress on the floor. He kept his spartan burrow fastidiously clean, but that did absolutely nothing to disguise the cold facts.

Mycroft sighed. He was not poor. He'd chosen to expend all his resources in obtaining the best
education in the world. That was not poverty; that was a sound investment. And he was quite privileged to afford the opportunity. He was not ashamed of his frugality. That was a sign of his great intelligence. Proud of it!

Certainly if the current unemployment levels were improved, he'd have been able to secure a legitimate position on his own. However, work was scare, the economy was rubbish and he had no influential connections to help him finesse his way into a decent job. He did what he had to do to make ends meet. Practicality over creature comforts. So be it.

Mycroft's concern was that he could not entertain his professor in his hovel. It was difficult enough for the young man to sustain an erection in this dreary concrete tomb. How could he reasonably expect anyone else to overlook the depressing lack of ambiance? It simply wouldn't do.

What were the viable options for a man seeking to have an affair? Hotel. Yes. That's why they were euphemistically referred to as 'one night stands' in the first place. Of course, Mycroft resolved to earn enough this weekend to be able to afford a moderately priced room the following weekend. As he recalled, there were many decent options among the Northumberland Avenue hotels. Obviously, for legal reasons regarding anti-gay legislation, he and Dr. Altamont would need to coordinate inconspicuous, separate arrival times and be extremely discreet to avoid prosecution. Mycroft was certain they were both intelligent enough to mitigate the risks.

Satisfied with his plan, the ginger man fell asleep with an optimistic smile. He dreamed of winning every round of Red Dog and every hand of Poker. Then spending stacks of notes on an opulent hotel. He saw himself in a tuxedo. Holmes, Mycroft Holmes. Covertly slipping in the side entrance and racing up the stairwell. Sneaking past the lift operators. Giving a secret knock on the last door down the corridor. Being quickly ushered into a decadent room where he'd spend the entire weekend learning precisely how to please his coconspirator in every possible way. Under the expert tutelage of his man, he'd gain all the sexual knowledge he so desperately required. Hours of exhausting work until he was a grandmaster of every style of attack. Then ghosting away before dawn. Striding home with his black bow tie unraveled and his hair like wildfire. Casually draping his suit jacket over his shoulder, coolly smoking a postcoital cigarette with a relaxed little grin. Prowling down the vacant sunrise streets like a dapper tiger. Humming Frank Sinatra to convey to the entire world that he was indeed a suave man who'd never kiss and tell about all the manly things he'd just done. Secret agent man. Cool. As. Ice.

Sleeping Mycroft had no way of knowing that at precisely that same time, alone in a quiet house across town, a handsome man was passionately calling out to him, "Oh Mycroft, oh my dear Mycroft! You feel so good. So good, Mycroft!" Somewhere in a big comfortable bed on Greek street, a meaty hand was impersonating Mycroft's tightness in a nearly satisfying way. Someone was gasping and writhing and telepathically urging Mycroft to cum. In a south-facing room on the upper floor of a beige house, there was a muscular man with quaking thighs considering if he aught pay a call to a sublevel flat on Shaftesbury. Breathing hard and futilely contemplating believable excuses to map every ginger freckle with his tongue. "Good morning, Mr. Holmes. I was in the neighbourhood and just happened to come round with the expectation of further favours. May I come inside? Shall we smoke one another's cigars in the most mutually respectful and beneficial way? Would you care to chart the trajectory of my ejaculation across your torso? Is now a convenient time to compare penile lengths? Oh it is? Quite acceptable!"
Chapter 99

Chapter Summary

It starts with a kiss.

"Silence is the language of God, all else is poor translation." -Jalaluddin Rumi, poet

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

21 September, 1990 Continued:

Punctiliously correct, as always, Mycroft called upon his professor that third Friday at precisely 1:15 pm. Well, in truth, the enthusiastic visitor's brisk strides had hastened him to his friend's residence fourteen minutes early. However, to be respectful to his host, the keen graduate loitered behind a full yellow Japanese judas tree in the far left corner of his professor's tiny front lawn. With all the genteel patience of a holiday-season house burglar, Mycroft paced and smoked until the time was right. His hands itched.

It was a dreary autumnal Friday afternoon with that typical London mist that's not so much fog as suspended rain. An atmosphere of levitating damp cotton wool. The soggy clouds simply gave up and decided it was easier to laze on the ground rather than exert the energy to throw their water all the way down from above. The sort of cool thick air that's indicative of proper rain's later arrival. The dense London humidity permitted only shallow breaths and defeated the smoking young man's best attempts to don crisply ironed apparel. He knew his shirt collars and pocket square must certainly be limp sodden frump by now. What could be done?

Mycroft had given his best effort to look reasonably presentable. His only three piece suit: charcoal grey. Oxblood balmorals: nicely shined. His best white shirt: heavily starched (to no avail.) For texture, his favourite inky deep marine wool necktie: one of the one's Father had knit for his Christmas. Quite vogue at present. Large red pocket silk with thin double borders that exactly matched his necktie's rich hue: starched and blocked to within an inch of its life. And for un soupçon of whimsy: bold red socks. Why not? He'd already forfeited the overly-dramatic Cagney Fold for his pocket square and talked himself out of conking his ginger waves with pomade. So the bright socks were really Mycroft's only concession. He needed them. To feel a bit...special. Because he was in a puckish mood of late...due to...how well he was performing in his coursework. The exuberance of academic excellence! That was all.

Dr. Altamont opened the front door to his guest just seconds before Mycroft rang the bell. In the sitting room, the smiling professor immediately reached to shake hands in their new friendship custom. Mycroft quickly pulled away from the contact. The visitor looked all around. If Dr. Altamont had not abruptly turned away in defeat, he would have understood that his mindful student anticipated Dr. Folly to be in. The econometrician thought his guest's rejection was a reminder to respect the boundaries of their friendship. The host was being too forward yet again.

Dr. Altamont was overcome by how handsome Mycroft looked in such professional dress. For a quarter hour, he'd spied through the sheer curtain lace. Studying the smoking man marching behind the yellowed leaves of the tree in front of his home. The pacing man was a vision of autumnal
The thought suddenly occurred that the visitor must be so well-suited because he obviously had another engagement later that evening. A date? With a man nearer his own age? Would Mycroft be...enjoying the affections of his beau during the course of this date? Permitting some entitled big shot's rude son to fondle him and grope him and flop around on top of him in the back seat of a goddamned late model Fiat on some secluded sunset overview up the hill in Greenwich Park while trifling pop songs oozed from the car radio as the windows slowly hazed with the steam of his lusty moans?!? Oh god.

Dr. Altamont strode to his kitchen and removed the boiling pot from the heat. Mycroft stood for several minutes watching his host's tensed back as he shut off gas flames and hastily clattered cooking utensils into the sink. The thick steam smelled so spicy it made his mouth water. A lidless pan of something reddish was simmering over its brim and splattering burnt sizzles onto the hot range beneath. A meaty hand quickly relocated the pan.

Mycroft receded behind the island countertop and waited for Deedee to materialise and regain control of the chaos of whatever she was in the midst of preparing. Where was she? Loo? Phone? The sound of her husband bashing cookware around must surely bring the petite hostess running in at any moment.

It did not.

That's when Mycroft took a step back and absorbed the entire scene. Knife on right side of cutting board; one glass of red wine atop refrigerator with no lipstick imprint; portable step collapsed and stowed beside pantry door; black apron abandoned over handle to cellar; no meat; impeccable silence stretching from foyer to sitting room.

Mycroft neatly folded his suit jacket over a kitchen stool, rolled his sleeves, secured his necktie into his waistcoat and donned the black apron. He scrubbed his hands and proceeded to finish chopping the onions. Dr. Altamont stood beside him and oversaw his precise work for a few moments. Mycroft smiled at him. The host's gruff face relaxed. He asked, "Do you eat chilis?"

Mycroft did not want to offend with a reply that he was quite keen on hot spicy curry. That would sound ignorant, as if he presumed all Asians ate the same foods. He knew Myanmar cuisine differed greatly from Indian cookery. He answered cautiously with, "I sometimes enjoy piquant flavours."

"Hm. It's shahi paneer."

Mycroft felt like a complete idiot! Of course it was curry. What Englishman did not enjoy a good curry? Every neighbourhood featured at least one Indian take-away shop. God he really was a bit of an ignorant Anglo! The lanky man started to chuckle. He rested the santoku down against the board and laughed heartily at his foolishness. His face coloured redder than the tomato-cashew gravy. In response to the handsome older man's puzzled face, Mycroft said, "I love a nice curry. Particularly on dreary days. I was only just thinking such on my way here."

"Hm. Fifteen minutes. Mushroom bisque. Lime sorbet."

Amused little smile.

Ribcage flutter.

The lanky graduate balanced against the countertop and watched the maestro strike up his chaotic
orchestra of cookery. Aromatic pinches of spices, handfuls of pungent onions, precisely timed stirring and careful micromanagement of the height of blue flames. For such a colossal man, he moved with such graceful speed.

Dr. Altamont had no idea how handsome he was in that moment. Tea towel draped over his burly shoulder, fragrant steam caressing his angular features. His burgundy corduroys accentuating his powerful haunches. The way he puckered his full lips to cool the tasting spoon before offering it out to his enraptured guest's mouth. His adorable fussiness about Mycroft's clothes.

The conductor kept holding up his giant palm to keep the ginger man well back from the cacophony of burping pots and sputtering pans. Mycroft sought to strategically position himself beside the older man to ensure his host would have to reach across his body to retrieve things. Eventually, Dr. Altamont had enough of warning his well-dressed audience away. Mycroft was banished to lay the dining table.

Two mouths electrified with prickling capsaicin, casting little grins back and forth through the familiar silence. Vicarious cutlery. Surrogate tobacco. Mirrored speech patterns. Echoed smiles. The actions were all trial runs. The science of substitution: Kissing without kissing.

The rain began pattering by the time they'd finished the washing up. That had been thoroughly entertaining. Inventing progressively more elaborate pretexts for brushing soapy fingers. Mycroft was much better at that illicit little exercise. Or perhaps the true mark of a good host was allowing the guest to believe such.

While Dr. Altamont brewed coffee, Mycroft arranged the chess board. Something about the day kept nudging the visitor's thoughts. It was almost like...a...date. Except they were in house. A house so extremely familiar to Mycroft that he never even thought about how natural he felt being there. Every time he'd want something, it would be exactly where his hand expected to find it. Fresh herbs, kitchen towels, citrus zester, rubbish bin, dish liquid, compost, ribcage flutters, mocha glances, light touches, bright flavours. All in the precise locations he would assume. As if the entire home had been prearranged to Mycroft's liking. Especially the perfect silence. Right there in the parlour where he'd expected. So comfortable and secure. Felt as though it had been engineered to fit him exactly. Like it belonged to him already.

From the doorway, Dr. Altamont offered out further security along with the warm mug, "Archivist conference. Trinity College Library."

Mycroft snuggled into their silence and sipped his strong brew. The auburn man had resolved to stay well away from any alcohol. No ambiguity this afternoon! A supremely heightened sense of scrutiny was required today.

Mycroft needed a sign.

One did not flagrantly offer an affair without a sign.

The intelligent mathematical inductionist watched their tournament unfurl on the board between them. He burnished his thoughts with every minute detail he could divulge from his handsome opponent's spoken and unspoken communiqués. He labelled every constant and variable his professor displayed, storing each for processing. Mycroft was determined to extract a sign by the end of the evening's tourney.

Mycroft's logic ran in this way: What was the relationship between the know constant Blatant Foreplay ($F^*$) and the unknown variable Sex ($\lambda$)? Were the men meant to openly entice and arouse on another, then have the sex separately when they were alone ($\lambda_1$)? If yes, that was perfectly
acceptable. Mycroft was doing that anyway already and it was nearly satisfying enough. He could continue on as such forever ($\lambda \infty$). And if he needed to privately work through that with forests of graphing paper, or on a Library rooftop from time to time, that was Mycroft's own damned business how he chose to handle his situation.

Yet, perhaps- just maybe- his professor had the knack to join in the sex that followed the foreplay ($\lambda_2$).

The know constant of the wedding ring was perhaps an unknown variable of his professor's Marriage Status (R). Mycroft was intelligent enough to realise that the unknowable variable of Dr. Altamont's desires and personal feelings (D) was a distinct variable from (R). The possible correlations between (D) and (R) were: interdependent, direct, derivative, inverse, or none of Mycroft's fucking business whatsoever. Ignoring the last option, Mycroft hoped for a sign of an inverse relationship between (D) & (R). The probability was quite low. Though Mycroft could work with a derivative correlation as well, of course. As the man upstairs had suggested, there was such a thing as bisexuality. Mustn't neglect signs regarding that possibility.

The older opponent was a wealth of information. Every minute gesture of Dr. Altamont's thick cigar fingers, a monologue of implicit speech. Every lingering scrutiny of his intense chocolate irises, an intimate soliloquy. Fully known to them both without ever a syllable passing his full russet lips. (D) The professor enjoyed turning Mycroft on. Not nearly as much as his ginger opponent enjoyed returning the favour.

Pawn E4. Reaching- momentarily overtaking a bit of the distance between their bodies- as his ample right hand extended to the edge of the table to depress the timer. Then he passed the cigar into the pale waiting hand (F$\ddagger$).

His eyes instructed: *Make your mouth twin to mine. Taste me.*

Delft blue eyes expressed: *Yes, sir. With pleasure.*

With a half minute's pretense of consideration, Mycroft's pawn responded C5. They glanced at one another. Synchronised coffee (F$\ddagger$). Already knowing tonight's entire match from start to finish in those two initial attacks.

It was never about the chess ($\lambda$.)

The board set between them on Fridays was always a series of replays of some other duo's famous past duet. Tonight they would apparently begin by traveling to 1594 to pay homage to Giulio Cesare Polerio. Long pale fingers reached to brush the timer so their reenactment might proceed in earnest now. Within seconds, the handsome man proved his Friday guest correct. Tonight would indeed be Open Sicilian Defense. As he reset the timer, his full lips twitched that tiny smile that always fluttered Mycroft's ribcage (M$\ddagger$). It was never about the chess.

Friday afternoons were about the exquisite silence. The best, most anticipated hours of Mycroft's whole week were stored here in his professor's house. Never in the young man's life had he met anyone who came remotely close to his level of intelligence. But in this smoky parlour, he found his kindred silence. Despite the twenty-three year age difference, in mind they were equally matched in intellect. Highly Comparable. From the time he arrived promptly and always at fifteen past one, to the time he left, no more than 400 words ever passed between them. The words were thoroughly unnecessary.

Truth told, more words would have been extremely unwelcome by both. Trying idle small talk last
evening had been their worst experiment. These discerning men were better equipped for hearty political discourse regarding factual news. Every twenty minutes or so, as the rain intermingled with Gustave Mahler's Symphony № 5, one man or the other would utter a truncated statement that economized their language, yet told everything. Then the other would respond, just as sparingly, yet just as fully understood. Never had Mycroft encountered a person like this brilliant man.

Around twenty to four, during their ninth chess reenactment, there came a remark from the homeowner. His exquisite voice like his face: buttery, supple leather the shade of smooth cognac. "Sir Peter Terry survived." Four words. But to one who understood as Mycroft did, it was an enormous tsunami wave of information. Not only about his friend's assessment of the IRA shooting attempt on the 18th, but also the older man's astute prediction of future outcomes in their nation's upcoming elections two months away. Dr. Genius! The handsome man had this highly arousing way of coalescing seemingly disparate and oblique facts into an amalgamated whole. The enthralling way his mind worked! Rather sexy (λ.) Mycroft followed his train of thought precisely then quickly gave two word of concurrence. "Agreed, sir."

All their chess colloquies were exactly like this. The amusement came from pondering more abstract deductions with which to impress one another, to challenge one another, to build the rarified language that was only known to those two laconic intellectuals. It was never about the flat plane of translucent jade squares between them. Their greatest entertainment lay in the geometry of their silence. Enveloped within the elegant nothing of what they never said, lay the greatest comfort in Mycroft's life thus far. The silence contained everything (▽).

For Dr. Altamont, their current affairs discussions were the older man's favourite way to experience his friend's gorgeous comprehension. Mycroft, though undeniably a maths genius, seemed to have significant interest in an enormous range of subjects. Beneath those fiery waves of fine red hair, lay an elegant mind that specialised in everything.

Dr. Altamont's deep pleasure was to attempt to derail his handsome opponent mid-attack with some seemingly discordant remark. That thin hand would hover over a carved piece and those haunting delft blue irises would flash chrome. As if the frozen thinker were momentarily somewhere else entirely. Several times, he'd witnessed Mycroft's peculiar and fascinating expression of...well, it was almost a mixture of...teleportation and...reading. On rare occasion, the younger man's internal energies had been so focused, that his mask of formal etiquette slipped entirely away. Only for a mere heartbeat or two. But the professor had observed it: The weary ancient who lived within. Travelling far away, eyes reading something unseen filed inside the steel trap of his exceptional mind. If Mycroft had confessed he were a primordial being who aged backward against the Arrow of Time, Dr. Altamont would've not only believed his arcane friend's disclosure, but required no additional proof to know it as certain truth.

O! How esoteric Mycroft made his bones hunger!

Dr. Altamont needed a sign. He needed assurance that this singular, dear creature understood. A man does not blatantly offer a life commitment without a sign that the other man thoroughly comprehends the risks and circumstances involved. A significant motivation behind their discourse was to illustrate to Mycroft that they were the same man. The same. What it appeared to be was exactly what it was. They were one another's fate. Forever. Dr. Altamont could bear to be separated from this man no longer. To live another day as such was as if to live without himself. Paradoxically impossible. They were the same man and therefore must be together. There was no alternative.

For the older man, the laws, penalties, university policies and consequence were clear. They lived at a time in history where less than five percent of the total population of citizens were legally
conscripted into rigorous self-censorship. Over 95% of citizens were able to live their own identities from age sixteen onward. Yet if a citizen were a man who loved a man, the law entirely criminalised certain forms of lovemaking and forbade all other forms of contact until twenty one years of age. Special laws that only applied to homosexual men like Dr. Altamont and his beloved Mycroft. For the older man, getting caught meant imprisonment, registration as a child sexual abuser, termination from the career he adored and myriad other unpleasant nightmare scenarios. For Mycroft, it would mean imprisonment, or incarceration in a psychiatric facility and certain dismal from his promising academic career with little hope of admittance to another university.

Dr. Altamont was willing to accept the risks. For Mycroft, he was strong enough to accept anything. However he could not ask his delicate friend to submit to the same consequences. If they chose to make a life together now, this meant the next year(s?) of their lives must be carefully guarded. How old was Mycroft? Nineteen? Twenty? They could endure. Not too long. Simply close their curtains at night and rigorously maintain their privacy. Fabricate a tenant rental agreement for one room in their house, just in case.

That morning, Dr. Altamont had, for the very first and last time, phoned the University of Dublin using the conference handbill Dr. Folly had affixed to the refrigerator. He did not wish to be one of those suspicious cheaters who pretends to justify his own unfaithfulness by thinking "well, she's probably doing the same." Probably was not good enough. It was one thing to desire in his heart and quite another to violate his marriage contract on a probable basis. Wouldn't do. Unacceptable.

At the time, the highly intelligent professor didn't know why the polite receptionist's confirmation bothered him. However, he could not stop obsessing over that brief phone call. From his office, he'd been reconnected to the Trinity College Library with the assistance of his Programme Director's secretary. Different phone number than from the refrigerator door. The instant a Librarian answered, Dr. Altamont knew. No acoustics in the first phone conversation. TCL was a large Library with high vaulted ceilings and many patrons. The background sounds were entirely different. Additionally, there was no conference, no meeting nor event of any sort at the Trinity College Library that week. The man asked if Dr. Altamont wished to speak with their onsite restorationist or their Head Archivist. The professor ended the exchange.

Dr. Folly was away until Monday evening. Six days. The first voice was most likely one of her many friends kindly providing an alibi and serving as contact in case of emergency. The handbill was most likely of Deirdre's own making to spare her husband's feelings. She was a very kind and extremely independent woman. So courteous and empathic to even consider his feelings regarding her private life. As if she owed him anything at all.

Dr. Altamont firmly hoped the wonderful young Irishwoman was having a satisfying time with whomever she had met. It explained why she was out of town three weekends per month. It also explained why she had not requested he visit her bed in five months. Honestly, after the second month, he had been extremely grateful for the reprieve. He felt much better knowing her private life involved six-day social excursions, wherever she was. Her train tickets were for Dublin. So that much must be factual. Which was a perfect way to encapsulate a lie: with a bit of legitimate truth.

If anyone should know that, it was her husband: the greater liar of their household. The homosexual man with the undisclosed cottage in Bootle, Millom. Where he spent every weekend she was away. Where, after he completed his alternate business, he would head out with his axe. Furiously chopping entire hectares of wood until his body was limp. It was the only way he knew to live his lie without going insane. The only way he could survive.

The past two weekends and most likely tomorrow as well, he would be in Lake District National
Park. Axe in hand. Punishing his body until he could not recall which of Mycroft's eyes was the slightly greyer one. Until he could not remember what the hope of requited love even meant. Until it was only breath and wood and cigar smoke and finally peace. The endorphins would scald his mind and spirit him away to the place where he could be himself for a few hours. Then he'd bundle wood, collect mushrooms and arrive home just numb enough to endure presenting his suffocating mask to the world- and Dr. Folly- for five more days.

At just that second, Mycroft glanced at his opponent and smiled that thin grin of his. He put out his long hand for the cigar box. The right: every overcast London morning wore the handsome man's right eye. His right was the slightly greyer one. Same side as that intriguing raised beauty mark. Opposite of his one comma dimple. The handsome ginger man never showed his teeth. Never smiled too wide. As if he'd been taught it was rude.

Even that initial day of chess where they'd first realised their shared passion for the game. The young man had actually eclipsed his open mouth behind his fingers. And in the kitchen, hours ago, his wide, low nose all scrunched up like wanting to laugh whole heartedly. But only permitting himself to yield by half. Again behind his narrow palm. He even did that when intoxicated. Reflexive. Something about the graduate that inwardly warned him against too much happiness. As if he'd been taught that displaying joy was indecent. So many times, Dr. Altamont desperately wanted to slide that hand aside. Witness the full smile hidden beneath it. Know the sight of his radiant Mycroft and memorise every microscopic detail so he might learn to bring his delicate friend happiness.

Dr. Altamont only needed one sign. One sign to let him know Mycroft might be willing to consider his affections. One sign to give him opportunity to avow the situation in its entirety. Dr. Altamont knew the words he would use to broach the proposal. "My dearest Mr. Holmes, if you would consent to have me, I should greatly appreciate the honour to share your company, your friendship, your happiness all the remainder of our lives. Could you envision the possibility that you might one day grow to care for me as I care for you?"

The professor was not a man of romantic words. But for Mycroft, he could do anything. Dr. Altamont did not want to possess, nor control, nor subjugate his friend. He only wanted the permission to- at the very least- move that hand and experience that smile. If he should sense one sign tonight, he knew he could marshal the courage to request, "May I be your companion for as long as you would allow?"

The statistical probability was low. Mycroft was attractive, much younger, and extremely intelligent. Why should he even consider the companionship of a dour man old enough to be his father? It was evident they both found one another physically attractive. Sexuality was a gift from God. Completely natural. Yet, Dr. Altamont did not want a night of fiery lust that would invariably cool in the cold light of day. However, it was selfish to ask a twenty year old to make a lifetime commitment. Therefore, the most reasonable, acceptable, middle ground was to offer his friend companionship for as long as the younger man wished to stay.

Gift me a sign you understand, my transcendent Mr. Holmes.

At the top of the hour, the dueling opponents' game travelled to 1934 for Grandmaster Canal's Peruvian Immortal game. Their fingers slowly waltzed the Boden's Mate. Neither needed to focus on this reenactment. They were contentedly staring at one another again. Two consummate art lovers, meditating on their most beloved works of art. Both drew out the fourteen moves beyond reasonable time. They had danced this famous match six times since that first Friday. It was their favourite game. Such elegant economy, only fourteen decisive moves to check mate.
As his bishop slid diagonally toward the LSE professor's left hand, Mycroft stated, "Pegasus has gone bankrupt." That won him a slight nod. Followed by another flutter-inducing little smile. The nod had informed him that his statement about the well known British travel operator was properly describing an entire litany of national economic turmoil yet to transpire. Many in the nation could not see it yet; only sensed the barest edge of it. But these two well-studied men knew their nation was precariously lurching into the worst manufacturing downturn since 1982. For the pair, the writing had been on the wall for years.

"Thatcher will deny...Mr. Holmes." The addition of two unnecessary words praised the ginger graduate's astuteness and showed him how thoroughly he'd been understood. At the unexpected emphasis of his own name in that rich tenor voice, from those full russet lips, Mycroft could not help but exclaim, "Precisely, sir!" His right hand emphasized wildly. It shot out on its own accord.

It was not a handshake.

It was a decisive slow sliding of one long left hand into the palm of one warm ample right hand. The gradual closing of right, securing the left. They watched Mycroft's thumb trace up along the bisque coloured nails.

That's when the desperately hopeful ginger man received the sign he'd been praying for! His man's mocha eyes bound their minds together. Dr. Altamont gradually bent forward over the table and pressed his lips firmly against the back of Mycroft's second to last finger. Full lips parted to add warm moisture to the precise area a certain type of ring should be worn. The gold flecks in his gentle chocolatey eyes sparkled like candle flames. The light humidity of his breath, steamed up over the slope of thin downturned wrist. Russet lips pressed harder into the flat plane of his lean ring finger. They held fast to one another. Mycroft watched his man's mocha eyes squeeze tightly shut. Then Dr. Altamont withdrew from the contact and flowed back against his chair like a man in a trance. His thick tan fingertips held his lips as if his mouth would drift away. The handsome professor was breathing deeply through his nose, eyes pinched so tightly he seemed to be scowling in excruciation.

When the older man at last opened his eyes, he was slumped back against his chair alone in his parlour.

In the powder room, Mycroft was burrowing down through his leather satchel like a man possessed. He kept getting distracted by his smiling face in the mirror with such frequency that he had to hiss to himself, "Concentrate!" That helped enough that the strategist was able to swiftly complete his hygiene ritual.

He wasted several more minutes rehearsing. Stand tall facing where Dr. Altamont is sat. Lean back against the game table. Heels of hands on the surface. Relaxed posture. Long legs out and ankles crossed. Casual. Mycroft practiced against the wash basin. Yes. Perfect posture. Like an advert for charcoal suits. Excellent. Look into his gentle eyes. A bit of 'come hither.' Then say, "Dr. Altamont, I should very much like to meet you at hotel next weekend. One o'clock for you, fifteen past for me. I should like that very much. Thank you for considering my offer." Well said. Plainly stated. Direct.

Mycroft practiced his most sultry bedroom eyes in the mirror. A seamless impersonation of fiery redhead Maureen O'Hara ensnaring John Wayne in the film The Quiet Man. Perfect. In fact, just as in that film, they had the rain as well! Might Mycroft expect a rain-soaked kiss tonight? No, too
cliche. No one did such things in real life. This is not a basement fantasy! This is not a drill! "The
time draws nigh," as Whitman would say.

Mycroft caressed his itching left hand. Perhaps, if his man proffered an answer tonight, they might
seal their agreement with a kiss. The younger man was already aware that he must be the one to
initiate, so as not to make his man feel he were taking advantage. Easily done. Mycroft practiced
pushing up off of the wash basin and standing to his full height. Tilt head to left. Lead forward. Put
hands against barrel chest. Look up into his eyes. Don't smile! Where would he put his kiss if he's
being grinned at? Try once more. Utilise the mirror. No, too pouty. Not duck lips!

Radiate an alluring aura: Very serious, very mysterious, very imperious. Yes. It's not a shy
schoolboy request to be kissed. Demand it! Yes! Well done. Who could resist this beguiling
youthful face?

One last rehearsal: Perch against table: casual, relaxed, open posture. Speech: eye contact,
enunciate, bedroom eyes. Kiss: stand tall, palms on chest, demanding gaze. Excellent. Showtime!

Mycroft marched out of the bath minty fresh and ready to attack!

The parlour was vacant.

Dr. Altamont, as a man far too familiar with apologising for unsatisfactory sexual attempts, stood
beside his front door holding out Mycroft's suit jacket. The professor was hoping to articulate his
apology for yet again taking too many liberties with his delicate friend. Mycroft's confused,
disappointed expression said it all: 'why must you continue to push our friendship too far?' As his
ample hands smoothed the grey shoulder wool into place, he inhaled the scent of icy toothpaste.
Mycroft was ready for his date.

Dr. Altamont began his amends with, "We can take my car."
Pursed thin lips warned he would hear something unkind.
"Thank you, no. I'll wait it out, sir."
Clearly too upset to trust confinement in a vehicle with a groping lech, despite the howling wind
and sideways deluge.

The front door rattled under the lion of savage gale, roaring against the threshold.
"I will drive you."
"It will pass."
"A cab."
Dr. Altamont presented his umbrella towards the tall man surveying the robust night storm.
Mycroft took the offered cover and resolutely deposited it back into the metal canister beside the
door.
"I believe it's abating, sir."
Lightening punched the tree across the way and thundered the entire street like a mortar shell.
Bright white lit up the garden revealing a severed branch sprawled in the road.
"I will walk you."
"No sense in us both getting wet."
Dr. Altamont once again took up his umbrella and pressed the knobby curved bamboo handle
beneath his assiduous friend's hand.

The clawing wind snatched hedges bald, kicked over rubbish bins, backhanded windows, strangled
trees.
"My rain slicker. Please excuse me. Down in a moment."
Dr. Altamont began ascending the stairs.
"May I join you, sir?"

The older man froze mid-step. His full weight creaked into the tread like a long groan. He did not turn. Clutching the banister with such force, Mycroft could see the wooden railing lean out into empty air.

"Aleister. I am called Aleister in my own home, Mycroft."

The lightening sparked the silent seconds between them. Mycroft felt the shockwave of amplified thunder in each step as his man continued upward. The handsome professor paused on the landing to watch his darling climbing up to meet him. At the very top of the staircase, the older man's ample hands shot out and clutched up his man in a firm, swift embrace!

Mycroft gave a sudden exclamation of surprise. He was tipped back into strong arms, momentarily disoriented from the sudden grab and twist of his long body. Hinged backward by a forceful gust of wind.

Aleister kissed him.

Hard and deep and strong and warm and succulent and moaning like the savage storm! All Mycroft's limbs went limp as rain. All puddles. He thought he'd fainted but he could still definitely see his man's handsome face above him. A wide thumb strumming sighs from his lower lip.

"Again, Aleister."

Mycroft was much more prepared for the second kiss. It sparked his body back to life. Lightening jolting his wiring. Thunder rumbling his veins. He found his arms and clung tightly around his man's wide shoulders, his fingertips anchored behind the neck. He gulped air when he remembered. Kept his feet on the floor, despite the urge in his trembling knees to claim his man's hips. He reminded his long legs not to climb. That resolution lasted a shocking two full minutes.

Chapter End Notes

The Quiet Man is an excellent classic film. My conjecture is that a man who owns a large red silk handkerchief in Sir ACD's 'The Greek Interpreter,' and is a dramatic abductor in BBC Sherlock probably loves those classic old romance films starring sultry redheaded starlets. Back in the day, films didn't depict us so we often co-opted hetero movies. There used to be a definite 'girl/boy' 'butch/femme' dynamic among some in our community back then. Not as gender preference but as an internalised hetero-normative concept. Women fan-ficers still write M/M that way. They don't realise what they r doing. Only trying to arouse themselves when they steal our voices. But yeah. It used to be very common problem in gay community that a person felt he had to emulate hetero dynamics.
Mycroft was as passionate as a man could be with a suit jacket restricting his full range of motion. Aleister was a hurricane. Raw natural power summoned in from the coastline to devour anything in his path. Like a mighty east wind he bound all Mycroft's clothing tight against the skin. And skin bound against skeleton. And skeleton bound against all nerve endings. Every synapse galvanised at once.

Mycroft heard himself wailing lustily like a man howling defiance into the will of the wind. The perverse pleasure of obstinate resistance made his constricting apparel adhere more resolutely against his lanky form. Aleister was a whirling fury of pulsations, corpus striatum and deep rumbling growls like thunder.

The further Mycroft’s stringent mouth pushed him, the more demanding his counterattacks became. With a firm hand he held his paramour's jaw and introduced tongue to minty tongue. First one darting lick. Barest microsecond of contact. Yet it was more than enough pry the younger man's starving mouth open. Then one firm long scoop behind Mycroft's upper teeth. Followed quickly by encircling the tip of the minty tongue with his own smoky flavour. Slinging gasps into his waiting tastebuds. Wide thumb pushed the thin lower lip further open. Aleister searched the very back of Mycroft's mouth for the deepest, longest moans within. An unending downpour of wintergreen tones lobbed out into the ever-expanding storm.

The house shook. The roof tore away. Hurtling into the cold vacuum of infinity. They could taste the insulation, brick dust and snarling live cores in the vaporising night air. A funnel cloud threatened to cast them from the face off the earth and fling them into the raging dark.

The men clung to one another. Fingers sublimating solitude into interwoven fibres. Without warning, shoved sideways by an onerous updraft. The plasma bolts of lightening shocked down through the crown of Mycroft's head and his auburn hair stood on end. His lips numbed and turned to frostbitten flesh. Aleister buried his man's head against his burly shoulder and shielded his ginger hair with both his massive hands. They huddled close, quaked with the squall. Worked their irradiated mouths and breaths together so the winterised rain could not drown them.

It nearly did.

When at last the pair surfaced for a gasping mouthful of air, the men opened their eyes and stared at one another. Windburnt flush. Pins and needles. Aleister was breathing hard, gulping big breaths, patting his man's lean chest. "Good." Thick dark hair ablaqueated all to the left, upended
like the rich soil roots of a formerly potted plant. Mycroft sucked in the electrified atmosphere and looked around in amazement. He tried to gently comb Aleister's hair into some semblance of normalcy. His fingers were stiff ice.

Trembling together on the verge of simultaneous electrostatic discharge.

The younger man was fairly bewildered. He thought they'd been moving down the hall. Perhaps travelling to a bedroom. It felt as though they were progressing rapidly away from the staircase. Yet here he was, astride his handsome man's lap, piled in the corner on the landing, between floors. Aleister continued to breathe steadily like a man treading subzero frozen pond water. His russet lips kept jolting Mycroft's chin, ear, jaw. Tiny little sighing kissing as he exhaled. Both mouths creaked and groaned like perilous lake ice giving way.

When their eyes would meet, the older man would draw a lazy J on Mycroft's cheek with the back of his knuckles. Aleister was rather serene: a man who accepted they would drown just a few more minutes from now. The peace of knowing his fate would soon come to pass. He seemed completely aware he was only within the Pause before the Plunge. His composure kept Mycroft calm. Aleister's other enormous hand seemed resolved to iron woolly static out of the length of Mycroft's shivering thigh.

The lanky man staggered to his feet, bracing a gelid hand against the wall. He hastily shucked his suit jacket. Eager for more voluptuary contact. He heaved Aleister up through the invisible layer of ice.

Aleister plucked the grey wool from his long frosty fingers. He blanketed Mycroft's shoulders beneath his arm and lead him down the darkened corridor to the last room on the left. As he opened the door, sudden lightening illuminated every flat surface. Rectangle at centre of the younger man's view, the phrontistery he so ardently needed:

Bed.

Baying gale abraded the house like a pack of feral dogs threatening to breach every window. The snarl of too near thunder. Unresponsive light switch. Flash and arc of retaliatory storm light. Full pearly teeth glowed momentary incandescent white.

A flutter smile was indeed kissable. From corner to corner. Carefully Mycroft plied kisses into every nuance of the russet curve. His man tasted of the universal language of anguish: Desire. The younger man's tingling fingers- too frozen to pinch open the tiny uppermost shirt button at his adam's apple. Needles and pins. He tilted his head back as both his iced hands drew Aleister's right up over his neck. He must escape the confines of his suffocating clothing before his bones shattered. Mycroft pressed the meaty palm to his throat. Stole the warmth. He felt soaked to his skin. Delft blue eyes pleading for help.


Mycroft surrendered to the flat plane of the low chest of drawers behind him. Aleister seemed to
fully comprehend the struggle against overburdened weight. Full strength buttressed the fatigued man against the wall in one firm push of his hips over the glossy polished wood. The tall man's long legs dangled. His floppy neck hinged the base of his swollen skull against the wallpaper. Aleister's hand braced his man's chest until they were certain Mycroft would not topple sideways. They carefully pried his frosty fingers away from Aleister's neck so the younger man could prop a hand against the wood. He rested. Caught his breath. Tried to will his skull to deflate.

Somewhere in the dark near his left knee a drawer slid open. Unknown mechanical sounds. With a little click, thin yellow light haloed a weak sphere. Aleister set the small lantern beside his paramour's hip.

"Failing batteries." Breathless, dreamy musing.
"Mm."

Enough light to see the russet kiss floating towards him in the near-dark. Ample hands palmed his face, caressed his neck until he was mewling again. Mycroft's right hand wandered its way up under the fairisle knit waistcoat. Flanneled cotton button top. Soft, velvety. Strong heartbeat. Warmth encapsulating...some sort of dense concrete masonry...cinderblock? Best check it out. One button, two, three. String vest. The diagonal spaces between adequate for provisional fingertips to meander. A curve...levelling off into a smooth plateau...sloping down into a series of vertical deflections...yes, definitely brick. A brick wall sheathed in warm, buttery supple...growling? Bricks on the back of knuckles. Bricks at fingertips, bricks under palm. Definitely low rumbling growling bricks. That can't be right. Shifting, flexing, living masonry beneath my hand. Merits further exploration.

"Off?"
"No!" Mycroft immediately pulled back from their kiss. He clutched up the small lantern in both hands. The younger man could not bear the thought! "Aleister. No." I need to see us.

His man smiled. Mouth full of irradiated white lightening. Aleister pinched the middle of his rust/green/navy waistcoat and repeated his question. He illustrated the concept by slightly loosening Mycroft's marine blue knit necktie. "Yes?" Will you be naked with me?


No one had to say why these two meticulous men were folding clothes, neatly rolling neckties, putting items on hangers. The great care they took with one another's apparel was a natural extension of the great care these men would take with the nude bodies beneath the layers.

Chests pressed close in the dark. Mycroft's starving mouth sought caramel neck skin whilst Aleister made a fastidious coil of each belt. The younger man arranged grey wool then burgundy corduroy trousers on the wooden valet stand, perfecting the central creases on both pairs. Ample hands and russet lips explored his pale back beneath his cotton vest. The moist kisses cooled on his skin, leaving a trail of bristling raindrops from shoulder to nape. When Mycroft completed his task, he turned back in time to witness the evaporation of his white vest. Sudden up and over like an umbrella blown inside out in a high wind. The taller man deposited it in his long hands. Mycroft folded it into a perfect square.

Rather complicated undertaking when Aleister began tapping his fingers along freckles. Meaty palms ground a slow Y from shoulders to navel. Reverse journey. Low throat hum as he polished the pale terrain. Travelling back down over the slope of shoulders, Aleister paused. He patted
Mycroft's pectorals. An unknown signal in his hungry mocha eyes was lost in translation in the
dark. Symmetrical rolling pinches of wide thumbs and indexes on left and right side. Lightening.
Mycroft shoved the hands away. He covered his chest, eyes wide, blue questions.

*Why would you do that? I'm not a girl. Male nipples are an evolutionary redundancy!*

The younger man's face blushed incarnadine. Beneath his clamped hands, his tight tips of flesh felt
warm. Not unpleasant...but certainly a rather queer action to attempt on a man!
Too...unconventional. Quite peculiar.

Aleister stroked his lover's shoulders. He lead the hands to his own chest, helped them pet a long Y
over his flanneled shirt. Mycroft understood. The pair wordlessly discussed the inquiry:

•You would like that done to you?
  -Yes.
•I should attempt to touch you chest in that way?
  -Yes.
•You are bizarre and kinky.
  -You are prim and sweet as sugar.

•Oh my goodness, Aleister! Cease that perverse look at once! You're plotting to attempt that same
  crude action again later.
  -Yes. I. Am.
•You most certainly will not!
  -Yes?
•Do change the subject at once!
  -Yes?
•Not. Likely.
  -Yes?
•...maybe...
  -Prim and sweet!
•Handsome and strange.

-Touch me.

Mycroft instantly memorised that last expression: melted caramel sauce. He reached to free
Aleister's torso to the night as well.

Mycroft's mind rebelled!

The light source was rather dim. Yet the periodic lightening brought glaring high resolution every
minute or so. The lanky man looked down at his own narrow body. Then at the man stood before
him. Rapid-fire triple, quadruple, quintuple take!

*Vegetables?!? That's the body of a man who eats vegetables?!? Oh God! All that beefy, solid
muscle is sponsored by vegetarianism?*

The inside of Mycroft's short pants rumbled. His testicles reverberated. Pins and needles down his
calves. His long hands became rimy fists into the cotton weave of his shorts hem. Mycroft
swallowed hard. His brain continued to scream until his eardrums were whistling in a savage wind
tunnel. His right eye began to twitch. Aleister's steady breathing made his smooth chestnut wall of
living bricks ripple.

Really? Is he doing that on purpose? Vegetables?!? How is this possible? We're meant to be maths nerds. Oh God! Jacked and the Bean Pole. Bastard! Bronzed statue of Zeus augured by his own entourage of thunderbolts and lightening! How nice for you. No please do go right ahead and smile, you bastard! The proud smirk of a sly man who did not disclose that he secretly models all twelve damned months of the Vegetarian Maths Hunk calendar! Where's my top? Quite rude, you rugged, chiseled, devious, caramel giant! I'm going home this instant.

The man tried to mentally compel himself to walk out. Mycroft could only gawk. His mouth watered. His blue eyes dehydrated as if staring directly into a solar eclipse. His knees locked. Itching hands begin to whine: we want to go to there. His straining erection overrode his intentions to escape.

Aleister's expression taunted him: What did you expect? I'm only 40, not 140. Touch. Me.

The smirking professor advanced. With gentle care he pressed the back of his fingers beneath Mycroft's chin to close the floppy lower jaw. He patted Mycroft's fluttering chest. Plucked the vest from the long fingers and refolded it. Amusement danced in his chocolatey eyes: It's alright. No need for histrionics.

Aleister arched a dark brow. He made his defined pecs do a bouncing, teasing dance. You like this? Well just you wait til you see the rest. Not to worry, my dear Mr. Holmes, I'll catch you if you faint. Sweet, delicate man!

The escapee's vest was again restored to the low chest of drawers. Perhaps with a bit of overly emphatic bicep and forearm flexing. Or maybe that was just the way he normally set things down.

Aleister's wide fingers began tracing lightly along the waistband of Mycroft's shorts. "Yes?" Can we become naked for one another?

The ginger man stepped away from the suggestion. The worst possible strategy to camouflage a physical flaw is to shield one's hands over the area. Illogically, the student wrapped his long arms round his paltry lower torso. Produced the opposite effect he intended. Instantly called attention to what the younger man sought to hide.

There was a possibility Mycroft had been a touch more corpulent in his youth than he liked to remember. Perhaps, prior to a much needed growth spurt, he'd been a roly-poly bowling ball of frizzy red fluff and asthmatic wheezing who loathed physical exertion with as great a passion as he loved home-cooked canned plums. There was a possibility that his adult body bore the shiny variegations of stretch marks like an albino tiger who had once been a waddling malingerer. His sides, backs of knees, under arms, even his inner elbows: all striated in highly unsexy souvenirs from the ginger man's slothful childhood. In its entirety, Mycroft's lanky body testified to his complete lack of exercise...unless turning pages counted as lifting weights. Maybe the lantern aught be closed. Yes. That was probably the best strategy to handle his physical disadvantage in this current situation.

Aleister grabbed for the small light so swiftly, Mycroft barely had time to move out of his man's path. The professor set it far out of his lover's reach. Ample hands tried in vain to unfold lean arms hugged round the thin middle. Several unsuccessful attempts. The last ended with a furious little shake of the demure man's auburn head. Mycroft hastily scrambled back into his vest, turning his back and hunching to do so. He wished his shirt were within reach, rather than hanging in the closet. His meager form could not compete with such a perfect physique.
The older man pursed his full lips in a small frown. They stood several feet apart. "I should like my top, please." A small quiet voice, but with all the assertion of a command. Staring at his man's enthralling torso. Arms continuing to shield his lean waist. Perhaps they aught go back downstairs. Perhaps wait until someone's scraggily, patchy, orangey, pastiness was not such a pathetic contrast. Long fingers dug into cotton vest hem until the fabric twisted mercilessly.

Aleister was undeterred. He straightened. Then stripped off his own shorts. Revealed what he thought of Mycroft's body. Let his growing arousal speak honestly to his shy lover. *You are the cause of this reaction. This is what the sight of you does to me.*

"For you, Mycroft. *You.*"

He held out both palms and waited patiently to receive the demeaning hands that sought to shame his gorgeous man. Aleister meant to punish them for trying to insult the man he love. When the long hands at last rested within his, he set to severely rebuking them at once for their cruelty in humiliating his cherished Mycroft.

The gentle man kissed them firmly, finger by finger, one knuckle at a time. Not one square inch of pale surface area was spared his relentless onslaught. All the love in his russet lips beat back the callous way those hands had dared to degrade Mycroft's magnificent body. Again and again the older man chastised the long pair for their cruelty. He kissed every inch of skin from fingernail to wrist to palm until neither the right nor the left would ever venture to besmirch his dearest's perfection ever again. By his punitive lesson, those hands never shamed the man Aleister loved from that night forth.

It was a difficult lesson to learn, but the student was thankfully a quick study. Encouraged by such strict retribution, Mycroft repaid his instructor with a amorous kiss. The younger man took up the lantern and lead Aleister through the door across the room into the ensuite. The mirror amplified the light in the small space.

In the shower, Mycroft was able to fully study his loving man's outstanding erection. The most formal penis he had ever had the good fortune to witness! Any man could have presented the usual, run of the mill penis. But Aleister had the rare type. Uncut! Beautiful cowl with amaranth fluted edge. Like a ruffled tuxedo shirt. Such a sophisticated man to bring such a luxurious delicacy. So well dressed. So regal. *How very thoughtful!* He was simply gorgeous. Classic. The thickness and density reminiscent of a stout Burmese Python that had inexplicably swallowed a can of fizzy drink. Not too long, but with exquisite chestnut girth equalled to Mycroft's wrist. Most certainly would be a treat for the mouth!

Mycroft knew the power outage meant they only had the limited hot water stored in the tank. He did his best to wash them efficiently. Tried not to tarry too long with lingering kisses and wandering hands. Obviously one could never over-clean a penis that spectacular. Perhaps it received a bit too much consideration...if there was such a thing. Attention to hygiene could never be underestimated. It was only courtesy to trace a thumb or two under that supple foreskin to ensure no residual soap remained around the flared glans edge. That was the only decent thing to do for such a hospitable host. Those cinnamon-toned veins clearly required retracing as well. As did his lover's weighty scrotum. And every defined muscle of his nearly-hairless colossal form.

In truth, the perfectionist's hands focused mainly on the penis. Would certainly have been quite rude not to. Mycroft was so enthusiastic in his etiquette that he could feel Aleister literally throbbing in his long hands. Completely and thoroughly erect, the cock's ornamental cowl slowly
crept back to reveal the glans. It retracted tightly below the corona curve almost like an amaranth watch band. Mycroft was instantly and deeply in love! Fancy dress and he does his own sexy strip tease! What a man! Several retests confirmed that every time the foreskin was stretch up over the tip, it would uncloak to show off that bulbous cockhead again and again. A continual surprise party held in Mycroft's honour. He devoted himself to really cleaning properly. Within ten minutes, the professor had the undisputed cleanest erection in all of London. Mycroft was nothing if not thoroughly tidy. He was certain his man appreciated his attention to detail. The gasping flood of deep rumbling growls into Mycroft's collar bone seemed to suggest such.

Aleister was, in fact, so overcome with appreciation that he suddenly turned his lover to the tile wall, kicked his knees apart. Rubbed his massive sudsy hand down between Mycroft's cheeks. The ginger man planted his palms firmly into the slick wall and groaned.
"Yes?"
"Ô!"

Aleister scrubbed more firmly against the sensitive pucker. Lathered his man's sac. He held the base of Mycroft's neck with one hand and stroked down his spine to his balls again and again and again. Giving his orange wiry hair much attention. He was midway through the procedure of slurping Mycroft's entire left earlobe off, when the overhead light blinded them both in a sudden surge of returning power. Mycroft spun round to get a proper look at that exquisite erection in the full light. Aleister had paused to close the unnecessary lantern on the window sill.

That's when Mycroft saw the one appalling feature he would always wish could be undone from his beloved's otherwise flawless body. Mycroft was an extremely intelligent man. In a mere glance, he instantly comprehended both the vicious weapon and the evil action. The genius didn't so much understand as he was suddenly overtaken by the nauseating sound and the savage momentum in one visceral image within his mind. Mycroft saw it as if a film firing inside his eyes. Unknown when, why and who. Yet overwhelmed by absolutely knowing what, where, and how.

Twenty-two intersecting parabolae. Each gouge between six and eight inches in length. Wider in the apex of each curve, thinned to pencil lines at the terminal edges. Overlapping rainbow arches along the entire left side, back, arm. A right handed perpetrator. At least two feet taller than the marked man. Two feet taller than 6'4 was impossible. Therefore...

Aleister turned with a beaming smile, ready to celebrate the return of light and the prolonged shower time. He at first mistook Mycroft's visible show of horror and lost erection as fearful reaction to his unexpected girth.

Having lived within his own body so long, Aleister was naturally quite used to his appearance. It took him a second to process the actual cause for such a reaction.
"Only skin. Long ago."

He elucidated by roughing the flannel over his left arm. "Mycroft. Only skin. Yes?" Please do not spurn me. Be not afraid. Aleister forced the torpefied man's hand to wash the forearm. They scrubbed as forcefully as Aleister could compel. Please do not fear me. He squeezed his strong hand into Mycroft's bicep. "Mycroft. Only skin."

"W-why?" An uncontrollable, dazed whimper rather than an actual question.

"Long ago."

Mycroft watched his paralysed hand being sawed over the incised upper arm. Internally, the motion
of the scouring flannel sounded like *why!*-*why!*-*why!* harshly abraded into the tissue.

There is a certain inescapable response to violence that is entirely natural in its duality. There is the overwhelming instinctual Empathy that is inborn in every human soul. And there is, of course, empathy's counterpart: Vengeance.

Aleister had over thirty years to process and accept what was now as commonplace to him as Mycroft's configuration of freckles were to his own eyes. The stoic professor abruptly ceased trying to force a swift disconnect from the facts. He dropped Mycroft's hand. The only logical course of action was to stand still and permit the observer time to acclimate to new information. The younger man was astute enough, if allowed a few moments consideration, to make reconciliation in a rational way.

Aleister turned towards the shower head and waited in silence. Mycroft was so grateful to be granted a few minutes of amnesty. He was becoming rather queasy from seeing his own hand associated with the abominable vandalism. He simply required a minute or two of respite.

Fully subscribing to the philosophy that all human emotions are choices of the owner, Mycroft was deciding which emotional response he would choose in this situation. He was a Holmes, and therefore, wholly accountable for his own choices.

Initial impressions were of course centered around Pity. Highly insulting. Therefore dismissed. Next, Repulsion. As with Pity, completely understandable. Human nature revolts against the suffering of a fellow being. Not a bit reprehensible. Yet, not productive. Therefore dismissed. There was obviously much Guilt for having spent so much time romanticising the one visible parabolic edge on Aleister's left hand. Guilt was a factionless, debased knight perpetually astride the lame gelding Shame. Not only counterproductive, but wildly self-centred to reframe the situation around his own experience. Guilt and Shame were summarily dismissed.

Mycroft then examined his Anger. Nearly overwhelming in its abundance. Anger was the barren desert wasteland of scorching nothingness where all madmen were destined to abandon their hope in exchange for their hollow bleached bones. Again, entirely comprehensible. A valid response. However there was no tangible culprit at whom to direct such strong feeling. So, dismissed as well. (For nearly five years, the younger man would need to repeatedly dismiss this desolate response to his partner's left side. The indelible demand for Vengeance was forever etched in his right ventricle until the very day Mycroft died.)

Like his wise lover, Mycroft was a man quite proud of his superior ability to take responsibility for his own emotions. That was the great privilege of being a sentient, conscious being. As he saw it, he had three options: compartmentalisation, overreaction or acceptance. The solution was obvious.

Mycroft encircled Aleister's waist. Not simply 'only skin.' Warm, supple, sculptural skin. *His.* Aleister had said it was meant for him. And thus Mycroft claimed it. All the creamy caramel skin he could. He started with the back of the left hand. The silent men intermingled their thoughts with their steady eye contact. Long fingers anchored the ample left hand against pale breastbone. Mycroft began twisting the metal circle. With opposing directional rotations, the pair worked the gold band off Aleister's left hand together. Thin lips brushed the depigmented line of vacancy.

With great care, the younger man took up the soap bar and flannel. Methodic cleansing. All the useless emotions were discarded down the drain. All that remained was the couple's love and acceptance for one another: the most powerful Revenge on the planet.
Mycroft stated the obvious, "Bed."
His partner's vexing reply, "There is no obligation."

The ginger man was fairly incensed! Only a preposterous moron or an absolute idiot would dare to
insinuate that there was even the slightest possibility that Mycroft was offering a pity-fuck!
Aleister was neither stupid nor daft. 'We don't have to' was the gist of the message from his
delicious mouth. Courteousness utterly belied by his perpetually seeping rock hard cock.

Both men noted the juxtaposition between words and flesh. Then quickly made the comparison of
throbbing chestnut/amaranth to full almond/fairy floss. Shared a silent agreement to forget
Aleister's sly pretence. Punctuated it with a tentative little kiss. Embraced. Teetering slow dance.
"Yes?" Are you certain?
"I quite like your snood, sir." I quite like your snood, sir!

Mycroft stated the fact cheerfully with all his genuine enthusiasm. The tip of his tongue captured
between his smile. He gave one demonstrative tug up the length of his new best friend then patted
the tip to emphasise how much he really loved that formally-attired thick erection. One definitive
kiss to his partner's amused smile, then he scurried beneath the sheets to await Aleister.

In the bathroom, the older man was brushing his teeth and inwardly howling with laughter. Snood!
What year had his darling Mycroft materialised from? Who said such things? Snood! Such a prim
and esoteric man. Aleister glanced down at his foreskin with new eyes. Snood. An extremely
accurate visual resemblance. What a perfect descriptive. Especially in relation to the crinkled edge
like a knit hem.

His ample hand jounced his scrotum a few times, estimating how much longer he could endure his
gorgeous little tiger's intensive touch before he ejaculated.

Chapter End Notes

In answer to somebody's inquiry (hi!): yes they r mirrors for JW & SH in a way. That's
why I decided to include Mycroft in this story. You'll see.

Yes, the starvation metaphor is the Greek Interpreter repurposed. I've taken all the
main concepts of Sir ACD's story and reinterpreted them for Mycroft. (oh, how clever)
(Psst...isn't uncircumcised penis the best? Convince everyone u know to end genital
mutilation. Tis 2016. Let's stop slicing up little girls and boys!)
Chapter 101

Chapter Summary

Graphic explicit Mycroft sexy times. Superlative wankability! NSFW (or ya know whatevs)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At first, Mycroft's main concern was where to rest his damp hair. He failed a sexy pose of head resting on pedestaled bent arm. Aleister was picking through his medicine cabinet so he thankfully was not subjected to the world's worst compendium of sexy nerd vogueing in the history of copulation. The dear professor escaped witnessing an entire montage of outlandish strangeness: on all fours; bent over edge of bed; half a second of some silly derivation of Spread Eagle; sitting back against headboard with covers tucked to chin like a frightened grannie; some sort of peppy sideways cheer squad leg lift; and worst of all, a shelf of interlaced fingers beneath chin with cutesy smile and batting lashes.

Mycroft's goal was to find a pose that wholly conveyed his lusty triad:

- I want you;
- I'm very close to orgasm so please let's do commence with the sex;
- I've no interest in legwork so you are expected to see to all that.

It wasn't that the ginger man was intending to be a lazy lover. He was well aware that would be disrespectful. He was planning to help a bit; be a good sport about it...but not so helpful that he would be expected to contribute equal exertion in the future. Perish the thought! Mustn't set that precedent! Not because he was selfish. Indolence was simply his nature. He disliked any exercise above a brisk walking pace. That's just the sort of man he was and he needed Aleister to accept that about him. Mycroft reasoned that just this once, he'd try to be kinetic...whilst still establishing from the onset it was not going to be his normal modus operandi. Aleister mustn't get the wrong impression. Mycroft wanted to honestly exhibit his slacker predisposition. Yet not be so lethargic that his man would feel insulted by a perceived lack of enthusiasm. The ginger strategist sought balance. A pose that patently articulated 'Languid & Proud.'

Being the sovereign leader of a superhuman race of erotically enhanced Handsome Vegetarians, Aleister's sexy pose was apparently to stand at the edge of his bed and snatch all the covers down to the end. Well, certainly no mixed messages there!

The older man slid beneath the open wing of sheet held out by his lover. He drank in the sight of Mycroft's long nudity relaxed beside him. They bumped their big toes together like a covert high-five. Little kiss. As if they did this all the time. Climbing into bed at the end of the day for years. Aleister focused on Mycroft's distant hand as it darted a quick furtive check of fuzzy apricot sac before dashing away. Gauging time, as if glancing at a wristwatch. Aleister wet his full lips. "Good."

With sudden force, the handsome professor snatched Mycroft behind the left knee and neck. He haulied his ginger lover's lean body astride his own. Sat up. With one thrust of his powerful hips, he had his man perfectly straddled over his crossed lap. Into Aleister's mouth, Mycroft exclaimed
loudly at the spark of cock against cock. Their combined erections pressed against his core. Slick fluid licked his lower abdomen. His lover's rich espresso waves washed through his lean fingers.

Aleister squeezed his meaty hand over fairy floss pink until molten sugar blobbed over his thumb. He traced the precum-coated thick thumb in tight circles over Mycroft's left nipple. Light pinch and rub, testing the quality of the moans against his wide jawline. He watched delft blue irises thin to sparkling haloes. Soft complacent sigh of warm air between his dark eyebrows. Seemed acceptable. He tried the right nipple. Then both. Then his starving mouth. Suckling one little french fancy cake, rolling the other with increased pressure of his giant fingertips. The experience tuned Mycroft's pelvis to a new frequency. Those narrow hips could not resist the vibration within, signalling him to mash their thicknesses together.

Mycroft kept a wary hand over whichever of Aleister's hands was lightly tugging at his chest. Just in case the kinky bastard became too enthusiastic in his play. Astonishingly, the longer the nipple-enthusiast pursued his avocation, the more pleasurable it became for the prim receiver. After alternating a dozen exchanges from left to right side, Mycroft's cockhead was juicy as a ripe pear. There was an unquestionably delightful aspect to the slight tenderness that warranted continued exploration.

The younger man arched his chest into the symmetrical contact and close his fingers over Aleister's left hand to gain intensity. Too much! Mycroft yowled and pushed away, holding his right pectoral. The ample left hand slid down over the long creamy almond erection. Firm, rhythmic squeezes at the base. Aleister stroked up to his man's cockhead and repeated the squeeze squeeze squeeze until syrup was oozing out between his fingers. He cued Mycroft to unhand his soreness, then rubbed the precum all over the inflamed area like a soothing balm. The professor immediately began lapping the nectar in long firm passes of his tongue. Muttering "Shh...Shh..." every few licks as he gently fondled Mycroft's left testicle.

It would have been quite tender and caring, if not for the younger man's internal puzzling. "This is the strangest, most depraved propensity imaginable! I didn't think he'd be a pervert!" As the auburn-haired man mused, his right hand was, for some reason, tweaking the hard nib of sensitive carob flesh on Aleister's burly left pec. It would have been rude not to demonstrate acceptance of the handsome man's unorthodox preferences. Additionally, the low stuttering hums felt rather nice against Mycroft's prickling skin. If he clamped down with greater force, the hums turned to deep snarls that reverberated through his lungs. Combining chest pinches with cock squeezes turned the bed into a coin operated VibrioMattrex.

Mycroft's new best friend oozed milky sap. Warm viscosity trailing right down the puckered centre seam of Aleister's ballsac. There was, surprisingly, nothing remotely perverse about tasting his lover's gooey precum. That seemed perfectly natural...wholesome even. So rich! So silky between his fingers. Trailing long threads of dripping dew from Mycroft's lower lip. The extravagant delicacy tingled his mouth. A sort of narcotic glucose. Instant addict.

The younger man had endured enough! He could wait no longer. Too much saliva, vibration and flavour. His knees and underused thighs ached from too much participation. By Mycroft's estimation, he'd graciously contributed a sufficiently sporting effort. If Aleister didn't get to doing the intercourse soon, he'd disintegrate!

Mycroft began snaking the meaty hand at his throat down to his backside. He knelt forward up on his knees and bucked his hips. His drooling cock jabbed into his man's abdominals. Do get on with it!

"Do you—"
"Yes. All the time. It's my favourite," Mycroft gasped out his sandwiched lie into his man's throbbing carotid artery. The younger man hadn't the time for slow motion negotiations.

Aleister kissed his ear. He cradled his beloved's ginger head in the warm hollow of his broad tan shoulder, held the nape of his neck securely. Fat fingertip tried him. Perhaps the massive hand needed a better angle. The pair wriggled a bit, tried again. Maybe a bit of slick precum to ease the way. Try again with a big glob of spit.

To occupy the higher functions of Aleister's intelligent mind, it was best to divert his thoughts by constantly reminding his regal penis that it wanted tight warmth. Mycroft's fist deliberately bypassed all Aleister's rational thoughts about virginity by employing relentlessly tight strokes. It was a flawlessly executed strategy. The promise of deep thrusts within Mycroft's body tapered Aleister's focus to a singular goal: gaining entry in a timely manner.

The frustrated seeker groped blindly within his nightstand. Tore the box open with pearly fangs. Slathered a heaping fistful of gel into his palm. It was rather adorable how his breathless growl asked permission at the exact same time as his wide finger was already struggling against Mycroft's hole again. More lubricant. Exasperated snarl. Swifter, tighter diversions of chestnut shaft. Yet another flood of water-based futility.

Aleister pushed Mycroft off his lap. Flipped the lanky man to his stomach. "O!") Finally! No more legwork!" The emphatic swirl of pads of fingers over tightly knotted anus was indescribable good. Better than in the shower. So slippery. Highly committed effort. The ginger man sobbed out vowels in loud gasping breaths when his lover combined firm swirling pressure with taunting sac squeezes. Still no luck. Long hands braced against the low curve of footboard. Greater force against his clenched hole combined with strong external massage to prostate with the heel of large left hand against Mycroft's perineum. The lean man's rectum quaked with the need to be filled that instant. His cockslit thrilled against the mattress. He was crying out polysyllabic gibberish. Exquisite tension! His strong man grunted the guttural consonant sounds forming the gerunds of verbs through gritted teeth. Aleister's thumb and index strained the pink bud apart from the outer edges while his right thumb ground against the unyielding pucker. He was a robust man yet Mycroft's infuriating tightness defied all logic!

Aleister sat back on his heels for a moment. Wiped the back of a hand over his forehead. Breathing hard like a man who'd been toiling in a lumberyard for twelve hours nonstop. His right hand kept ploughing long passes between the orange cleft of his beloved's freckled arsecheeks. Each furrowing pass through sensitive trough harvested breathless groaning pleas from both men. Equalled in their exhaustion and both lightheaded from exertion. The poor old man was soaked in sweat, positively snookered, on the verge of giving up altogether. He could not go on! Mycroft's defiant arsehole would shatter his hand bones before allowing him ingress. The struggle was outstandingly hot! It was almost as if...

"Mycroft...?"

Oh don't you dare stop! Not a chance! The master strategist would field not one irksome question about his past sexual history (or lack there of) tonight! Mycroft rapidly scrambled out of the bed, and padded off to the staircase. He promptly returned with his leather satchel from the landing. Mycroft stole the inquiries from Aleister's russet lips with a long kiss. Without further ado, the frustrated man opened his one ounce tin of petrolatum and began liberally greasing his hole. Vaseline jelly was precisely what Mycroft utilised at home when he wanted two fingers inside. That water based gunk felt alright, but it dried so quickly! Then it was only tacky adhesive that was presently pasting his buttocks together and causing a rather unpleasant sensation of matted hair,
somewhat akin to hook and loop closures.

His perennial pal Vaseline never dried! Uninterrupted creaminess from start to finish. Didn't drip all down his damned leg either. Additionally it was great for a long day of endless Saturday masturbation. Made his bits silky soft as well. Superlative wankability! For some reason, the adverts never mentioned that.

Mycroft rationalised that Aleister would simply have to tolerate a bit of masturbation in his presence. The ginger man knew it would be rather dull for his professor to idle a few minutes whilst he was opening himself, but needs must. High probability his lover would droop a bit from the tedium and delay. Mycroft would reinflate him. It would be fine.

On elbows and knees, as was his solo custom, Mycroft reached up behind his sac with a buttered finger. Aleister had been endearingly cautious because he was a most considerate and loving partner. However the lanky man was quite used to a bit of initial discomfort, even by himself. He needed to demonstrate to his man that it was alright. Their eyes met and Mycroft's slate blue eyes expressed 'Let me show you how it's done, handsome man.'

In the beginning, no matter how frequently Mycroft fucked himself, there was always difficulty getting in. His regular tactic was The Sticking Plaster Approach: swiftly cram up inside then wait to acclimate. Which was always a bit unpleasant for a few moments. The initial soreness generally passed after a minute or two of waiting. Then he'd shove a bit more petrolatum within and smear it all around. Fast hard thrusting usually converted any residual tenderness to a tolerable ache. That always got him properly adjusted. After that, he was usually alright. For a second finger, he simply had to wait out the unpleasantness again. Typically for twice the duration, regardless of the quantity of jelly he used.

Perhaps it was knowing that he was making Aleister sit through boring masturbatory exercises, or maybe it was subconscious guilt for being a liar, but Mycroft was having more trouble than usual gaining entry to himself. He was, as he liked to think of himself, an internally slender man. A normal physiological divergence akin to cock size variations. In Mycroft's mind, he simply had a narrow tunnel. Just one of those guys who has a naturally 'slim build'...in the rectum. That was a thing, right?

The masturbator balanced on his left ear, and wedged is arse higher up into the air. Bit more jelly. His whole body shuddered around the length of his right index finger. He made his usual sound- an elongated hiccup of surprise.

Mycroft went still and waited. The entire bedroom was a soundless vigil. He listened to the soft rain against the window, let their comfortable silence soothe the twinge inside. After half a minute of stillness, the ginger man realised he couldn't hear his partner. Perhaps Aleister was nodding off from boredom, or simply averting his gaze to give privacy during this solo activity.

The initial discomfort waned after a while. Mycroft knew he needed to give himself several minutes of continual zealous ramming so he could take another finger, but he disallowed the idea. He pestered himself to hurry up and not waste too much time being boring. The younger man resolved to bulldoze a second finger inside and get it over with. Damned the torpedoes; Full speed ahead! He covertly corked the back of his left fist into his betraying mouth. Bit down securely like a roast pig at a luau feast. Eased partially out of his hole. Aligned his second finger. He was midway through counting down five deep breaths out of his nose, when Aleister saved him from his stupidity.

A lusty wet kiss sucking the back of the lanky man's dominant hand. Deep hum of gratification. Two massive fingers troweled a thick dollop of petrolatum outlining Mycroft's anus. Rubbing

*Most interesting! Not so much a solo excursion after all!*

He toyed with his opening, teasing shallowly three times. A whispered supple slur of affirmations. Aleister's fingers nestled alongside Mycroft's, polishing the jelly into his puckered ring. Then digging in directly on either side. Slow firm prying, stretching him taut from the outside edge.

"˳◦ rnd ◯ O!"

"Mm?"

"Unh'm."

More Vaseline. Then the ample hand took a firm hold over his lean hand and plunged his finger all the way back within. Pressed his index as deep as it would go inside. Mycroft's slim tunnel spasmed. The men could barely pause long enough to draw air into their lungs. Aleister kneaded Mycroft's buttocks together to sandwich the long hand tightly between. The humidity of his grunting breath scalded his lover's tailbone. Relentless grinding of arse meat around probing finger until Mycroft's wrist went numb.

Aleister parted the orbs of flesh and began firmly prying that clenching pucker taut again. East ↔ West. His beloved sang out the cry of their mutual satisfaction. He held the lean wrist in his strong right hand, kept the side to side tension firmly with his left thumb and index. He felt Mycroft's right hand go loose and limp in anticipation of their next undertaking. Aleister gripped more resolutely on the wrist, signalled with a squeeze. His man bucked once in reply.

Aleister began thrusting Mycroft's finger into his tightness. Rapid fire piston. Strong as they could. Their voices found each other. Harder. Working the shiny buttered pinkness with efficient speed. Stronger. The way his man's entry looked sucking that greased finger was superlative! Harder still. Mycroft rocked back to meet the force in the last inch every time. Strong as humanly possible!

The younger man urgently knocked his left ankle against his man's knee for a brief reprieve, lest he cum right then. Aleister anticipated his lover's next desire. He dabbed silky jelly on the long middle finger while his russet lips sucked Mycroft's left hipbone. He watched the inserted index finger squirming around shallowly within. He got distracted by the feel of those shimmery tiger stripes on the underside of his tongue. Became further diverted by the underside length of his cock nudging against Mycroft's left thigh. A hand patted his thick dark waves to demand he immediately return from his detour and get back to work.

The professor apologised for delaying his darling man's pleasure by stroking the solid almond biscotti erection angled towards Mycroft's navel. His apologising hand was roughly pushed away when it became abundantly clear he was employing a pathetic ruse to help himself to more mouthfuls of sugary syrup.

"Aleister!"

Half severe warning to cease fiddling with that glossy fairy floss tip, half whimper of impending orgasm. The thief got a scolding hand slap.

Unfortunately for dear Mycroft, that was the day the younger man learned Aleister would always get precum exactly when and how he wanted. Those massive hands bested every attempt to deny him sweet juice. Wolffish flutter smiles of dazzling white blinded the younger man against proper evasion. Meaty right hand suddenly grabbed over Mycroft's working hand again and pressed it back into the warm depths. Left hand secured the ginger head down against the mattress.

Struggling only sent his index finger deeper inside. Loud lusty battle cry! The lanky man struggled
furiously...mostly by slamming his hips back against their hands. Additionally his protest included tactical clenching of his sphincters. A perfectly valid strategy. Eventually, too much exertion left him panting and fatigued. Nuzzling his head beneath his captor's robust warm palm. Curling his toes so strenuously his calves cramped. Pins and needles prickling the soles of his feet. From the angle at which Mycroft was restrained, he had a lovely view of the fat tan cock twitching and jerking.

The obvious solution had clearly not occurred to Aleister. Though the angle was difficult, Mycroft marshalled a courageous counterattack. He thoroughly bested his lover's hold with an inverse stroke along rigid chestnut girth. Milky sap spun viscous ropey threads down his twisted, straining wrist.

Aleister crumpled like brown paper packaging. Deep groans. The merciless stroking rendered his upper body completely lax. He sagged against his snowy tiger and began suckling Mycroft's coccyx between breathless gasps. His lethargic right hand barely helped pump the long index finger in and out in hypnotically slow cycles that matched the tight fist working his shaft. His meaty left hand caressed long strips of writhing spine and pale side flesh.

Mycroft's potent threat was explicit: *if you even so much as think about stimulating my aching cock again, I will make you cum right now! Don't think I won't do it, because I will, sir!*

A dozen more strokes made the professor docile as any man who'd been too long starving for intimate touch. Five more perfect strokes and the professor wholly capitulated. He would do absolutely anything his Mycroft desired.

Once the younger man was convinced his bronze hulk was sufficiently compliant, he surrendered his hold of the shaft. Aleister watched as Mycroft lapped between pale sticky fingers. Content to characterise himself the victor. The vanquished man's kind mocha eyes crinkled at the edges to see such a breathtaking sight. An auburn eyebrow quirked up, discrediting the poker player's innocent little smile. Mycroft's sweet smirk suggested *What did you expect? You attempt to steal from me, I shall find a way to steal from you. I am not a kitten stuck in a tree somewhere, sir!*' Those playful, captivating blue eyes were Aleister's veritable undoing. He traced lightly over shiny thin lips with his left hand. A most hungry look swept over the professor's handsome face. Mycroft understood. The thrill clenched him tight around his finger. He stabilised his knees. Rested his collarbone on his left forearm. Offered his arse way up and waited for the insistent wide fingers to strain his slim hole apart again. Aleister began as before: measured force and unwavering pressure. At the same time, Mycroft began taking a second finger. He braced to shove completely in, as was his norm. But once again the pair acquiesced to Aleister's guiding hand.

Mycroft's greased entry filled so slowly he barely registered the width of his dual knuckles stretching him open. Aleister's leisurely method was a much easier way to overtake the slender tunnel. No pauses, just gradual, continual ingress that did not stop until they reached as far as his fingers could go. Once Mycroft was all the way in, he tried to begin thrusting at once but Aleister stilled him. The guide needed to watch the beautiful pink quivering, just a few moments.

Massive thumbs encircled the taut ring gripping Mycroft's fingers. Then the same East ↔ ↔ West. The methodical man attempted a ninety degree shift in directional prying but they quickly abandoned that uncomfortable trial. However ample hands kneading arse flesh up and down felt incredible. As did squeezing cheeks into a hand sandwich. Particularly when Mycroft dug the heel of his working hand into his perineum and rocked into his man's grip. The electricity made his his lungs shrivel. It was too good.

It got even better.
Aleister was overcome by the new diameter of Mycroft's shiny anus. His beloved looked absolutely spectacular with his pink ring quivering with tension. The rugged professor shuffled to his right so he was no longer straddling Mycroft's left calf, rather kneeling between his lover's knees. While tracing his fat thumb around the stretched bud, he scooted forward. He surreptitiously wedged his amaranth glands between Mycroft's perineum and hand.

Each time the younger man clamped the heel of his hand down, he ground Aleister's oozing cockhead into fleshy barse meat. Again and again the older man jabbed his gooey tip into supple skin. His jolting thrusts stimulated externally precisely where Mycroft was pressing internally. The younger man was gasping exuberant approval. They made him feel so full. Narrow hips rocked into the force harder and faster. Each outside push/inside press squirted viscous beads of gloss through his pastel pink cockhole.

Aleister worked the tight anus with four fingers, tugging apart, encircling, tilling pink tautness into pliant malleability. So close! He needed his Mycroft to let him in soon. He had to. His vision was blurring at the edges. His dissolving mind played tricks on him. The rain trailing down window glass converted to sugar syrup, bathing his whole house in Mycroft's slick sweet juice. So ripe he would drown. Even now he dared not look at the puddle dribbling into the mattress. Thin shimmery wisps of spun spider silk ensnaring his coherence. The heel of Mycroft's hand squeezed Aleister's glans so tight, neither could last much longer. Inside/outside layering tingled prostrate nerves with maximum pressure. Aleister's strong left hand thrust his man's lean fingers in and out with increasing speed. Mycroft shoved his hips against cock head with force that bowed Aleister's fat erection like a flexing beam. They increased to full power. Worked together in earnest. Nearly there.

Mycroft tapped out again. Yanked his fingers from his hole too quickly. He scrunched away from the ramrod cock. Hugged his knees. He couldn't cum just yet. Not without his man inside. He couldn't. He wouldn't! Mycroft stuffed a fistful of covers down his throat so would not shatter his gritted teeth. He howled. Clawed at his skin. He couldn't cum yet. And that was final!

Aleister had to cum. He had to. How could he hold out with his little tiger fucking himself so zealously? It was the most erotic thing he'd ever witnessed! Such an assertive and confident man! He tried to think of other things; suppress the furious thunder in his scrotum. He shut his eyes the moment Mycroft reentered himself. Tried not to watch those long fingers slowly slipping out to the nailbeds and then quickly slamming back in to the needy warmth with jaw dropping force. His lover's delicate whispering gasp kept sobbing out a tiny, "O, sir!" or "Yes, sir!" each time he thrust his hips back onto himself. Indescribable! He had not expected Mycroft to be so kinky!

Being older, Aleister's had much more experience sustaining blood flow to both his brain and his prick. They could cum now. The best thing about erections is that they are an endlessly renewable resource. He had to tender his resignation from this fight. He had to make his beloved understand: there was no option left to them but surrender. The only pleading word his obliterated brain could whisper, "Yes?"

Mycroft splayed his palms flat into the cotton. He closed his eyes and focused all his senses on their proceedings. He wanted to commit every last millisecond to memory. The strong index and thumb again plying his hole from the outer edges. Beautiful tension! The other warm flat palm smoothing over his haunches. A light pat to his hip. Then width: glorious slow width. Gradually.
Steadily. Each man creeping towards the other's body. Barest breath commingling with soft rain. Then stillness. Mycroft felt so full. Perfection. He eased forward an inch, then back. So amazingly good.

His body needed faster. He waited for Aleister's hands to guide his hips. Without his man to guide them, he knew he was too slim to attempt the long thrusting strokes his so desperately craved. Might bend his new best friend. He had to be patient. Mycroft pressed the side of his face into the sheets and tried to be still. Took all his considerable discipline to remain patient until his good man felt accepted enough to work their united flesh.

They were perfect together. Snug fit. Everything he ever hoped they would be. So full! Mycroft couldn't believe how natural and satisfying they felt. He'd done it- he was doing it! Owning Aleister's mega cock like a fucking champ! Sublime. Almost effortless in how easily they'd accomplished this. Indicative of their great love and care for one another.

His trembling tunnel was beyond ready for fast and hard, as they'd done with his fingers. The ginger man had been as patient as any anal enthusiast could be. His body would be still no longer. One word repeated its urgent howl within his muscles: celebration. Mycroft's entire being sought to praise how perfectly they'd united. Seamless. So deliciously full! Every sparking neurone advised him to thrust for all he was worth. Full participation! This instant!

At that exact moment, Mycroft felt the twist and press within.

He froze!

Aleister outlined the buttery taut hole. Slow rotation within. Anticlockwise \( \varnothing \) then \( \varnothing \) Reverse. Muttering; his lusty tenor whispering an exaltation, "sogoodsogoodsogood..."

With a shaky hand, the ginger man gently hazarded an exploratory grope behind him. Oh no! He had the logical truth, yet still his fingertips strained to reach further, wriggling up through the narrow gap of air in the space between them. Mycroft really shouldn't have done that.

Aleister shuffled as close as he could get to that delicate fluttering hand. So sweet. His dear man searching for his cock like a needy beggar seeking alms. He took pity on the long wiggling fingers. Tipped his erection down to offer his leaking caramel girth. Aleister twisted his thick middle finger as he pressed and held deep into tight warmth. That made Mycroft's fuzzy apricots momentarily twitch over the topside of his chestnut cock. He snuggled still closer. Settled the base of himself beneath that orangey sac. Slowly sliding the top surface of his hardness along the underside length of his man's shaft. He tapped a staccato beat down inside to make his lover's cock bounce against his own. Aleister was telepathically screaming for his man to stoke their erections together while they worked his tight arsehole. Mycroft only wriggled his narrow hips, just once. The pensive look on the younger man's face suggested he was contemplating the acceptability of their action...thinking through something.

While a warm ample hand lotioned firm hypnotic circles around his opening, Mycroft was indeed trying to think. The bronze width at his fingertips was deeply troubling. As was the fullness within him. For the first time, genuine panic broke through his confidence. One finger. One massive goddamned sausage finger had him filled to capacity. The tip of a second enormous alien digit was vying for position. Impossible. He couldn't.

Aleister began the thrusting as a slow train leaving a station. Building momentum against the slimness within. Periodically pulling nearly all the way out to try that damned second tree trunk finger. By Mycroft's estimations, they would need somewhere between three to eighteen of
Aleister's fingers to have any hope of accommodating even the tip of that fat python cock. Improbable. *Fucking sausage hands on a vegetarian!*

The middle finger relinquished its strong attempt. Mycroft had not realised he was holding his breath until suddenly his bronchi burned. He sucked air in a hiss through gritted teeth. A shiver stole through his thighs.

Mycroft was empty. Sloshed onto his back suddenly. Inner ears sizzling from the speed. Aleister stared him down. Eye to eye. Inches apart. Accusation, confusion, traces of hurt. By turns replacing and blending his features. The wise man nodded. He said nothing.

"It's...um...been a while," the liar heard himself say, looking away, wearing the inside of his bent elbow as a visor. Technically...that was not an outright falsehood. By 'been a while' Mycroft could have been referencing the lovely time he'd had with himself hours before calling upon his man. By saying 'it' he could perhaps be characterised as being intentionally misleading...or he could choose to justify his stupidity by choosing to fault Aleister for misunderstanding and making assumptions. However, Mycroft's partner was well versed in the art of duplicitous untruths. Additionally, nobody on the planet was foolish enough to misunderstand why his lover did not yet know how to loosen his sphincter and control his pelvic floor muscles. Nobody was that dumb! Especially not a kind and loving man as dear Aleister.

"Hrm," that was all Aleister replied. Then thin pencil line crinkles drew tobacco leaf veins at the outer edges of his mocha eyes. A flutter smile is perfect for serving kisses. Almost more flavourful than a serious mouth. Ample hands bent his skinny legs up and propped his knees apart. Aleister slowly prowled up the length of his tall man and settled between the space he'd made for himself. He searched his sweet little liars face until Mycroft had no alternative but to meet his gentle mocha eyes. The young strategist tried a sheepish grin, partially acknowledging his completely absurd bluff. Aleister worked the embarrassed grin into a groan of acceptance.

They rode their slick frictioning flesh as rain in a river. Long, grinding thrusts cascaded from powerful hips and flowed over snowy sinew. Mycroft had spent weeks strategising this exact scenario. Was all either man thought of lately: getting Mycroft underneath his man. Felt so right. Exactly as they aught have done from the start. Lean calves and bony ankles woven round Aleister's own lower legs. Long fingers washing thick dark waves, powerful shoulders, heaving obliques. They pulled the younger man's arse up from the mattress to give him a thick finger to hold onto again. He took it so well, exclaiming his appreciation. Full once more.

They rode furiously, cock to cock. Sacs kneading their mutual ache into a flood of prelude juices. An ample hand slamming lean pelvis up again and again, secured from deep inside. Strong arm wrapped his hips and drove him up!, up!, up! Each pistoning of their haunches stretched Mycroft's full arse every single time Aleister pulled him upward. The tension. He dug both hands into smooth caramel gluteal to feel them flex on each powerful downward pump. The breath in his ear liquified his brain. Eardrum melting like thawing ice under a searing flame of grunted inflections. Aleister narrating a non-sequential torrent of his favourite things. "Good. I. Tight. Love. Yes. You. Mycroft. Cum."

With that, the lover's plummeted over the precipice of the rapids. One sudden unified gasp for breath. Wide eyed. Falling. Then the swift plunge into deep churning waters.

Chapter End Notes
"Yes. All the time. Tis my favourite." Now who could've said that to me once upon a time...

▼ Readers, wonderful & rare,
If you've been enjoying any portion of this long strange story, please consider donating to AO3 this Oct 2016. We need servers. We are still in beta. If you've an extra dollar somewhere, kindly donate utilising the link in the header. Think of this as a sort of overdue books fine from the Library of AO3...a library where u can take off ur pants and jacket...;-p
An Honest Reply to The American Hater in Wisconsin

Chapter Summary

An Honest Reply to the American Woman from Wisconsin who Continues to Send Me Hate Mail

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

S.T.O.P.!

Chapter End Notes

Legitimately, I apologise to the few readers who enjoy masturbating to this strange tale. I'm ever so sorry you had to witness me raising my voice just then.

As we all know, I'm a proud Queer Black Irishman. Tis perfectly fine if you are not. We cannot all be awesome. I tolerate diversity!

I am fully sympathetic to all American heterosexual women and their continued oppression. Specifically, I cannot imagine what it must be like to have married a lying misogynistic closeted homosexual man. While I do have compassion for any human who's marriage is not as loving and beautiful as mine, I cannot tolerate being a substitute for misdirected hostilities.

From my perspective, tis about time an actual gay man wrote fanfic. I am aware the realm of fanfic seems to belong to affluent Anglo teen virgin girls and bitter lonely divorced Anglo women. Unfortunately, the crushing yoke of sexist oppression makes such female writers completely unable to comprehend how sex occurs when neither participant is an oppressed female person. I understand that from the heteronormative mindset, sex is defined as a dominant person penetrating a submissive person. IMO, that does not reflect the normal sexual experience of queer men. I find it offensive to reframe M/M experiences within the oppressive M/F dynamic.

Try seeing this from my perspective: the voices of queer men are appropriated by people who are NOT us and cannot begin to imagine love, partnership and sex between equals. So they steal our voices without knowing our culture. They r desperate to escape the heterocentric sexual dynamic, which I wholeheartedly support! I cannot imagine how Aweful it must be to be a subjugated person sleeping with her oppressor. Seems natural to me such a person would turn to M/M fantasy as a way to survive heterosexuality by finding a few hours respite. However, they write horrific shite where the penetrating partner behaves like a fucking thoughtless criminal rapist and the penetrated partner just takes that anal abuse like a mindless, meek child who does not know any sense of ownership of her own body. Yes her. Not his. How does reframing the heterosexual bullshite into gay love help one escape? Copying the
Power/powerless, Strong/Weak, Human/receptacle for semen, Man/Object dynamics into M/M context cannot possibly help anyone escape heteronormativity!!!

Oh, and I write about semen bc I love semen. Tis not my enemy bc I'm not heterosexual and can never get pregnant. I understand why heterosexuals are raised to vilify sperm as the cause of unwanted pregnancies. But, for most queer men, semen is a celebrated prize.

Best of Luck, Anonymous Woman in Wisconsin.

By the by...if u hate me so much, why have u read over 100 chapters of graphic, explicit wank filth? Just sayin....

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