The Shop Boy

by EventHorizon

Summary

Sometimes, taking care of Sherlock had its benefits...

Notes

Little piece I originally uploaded to tumblr to explore the joy of love at first sight...
“Why in the world are you taking me to this ramshackle establishment?”

Sherlock was simply adorable when he was being petulant. That, however, would stay Mycroft’s secret until he needed a truly powerful piece of ammunition for a future engagement.

“Because your newfound taste for chocolate is going to bankrupt the family, for one. A single box of Mummy’s truffles costs more than a week’s, perhaps a month’s, wages for those who work in this, as you called it, ramshackle establishment. Also, Mummy is not going to be pleased when she reaches for one and finds her fingers sliding across the bottom of an empty box since she no longer has a single piece of chocolate with which to indulge herself. We are going to find something more appropriate for you to weather this addiction until you find another option to occupy your attention.”

“It is not fair. Why should I have to suffer subpar chocolate just because Mummy lacks the forethought to order two boxes?”

“Life is not fair, Sherlock. That is a lesson you had best learn now, for it is one of the few that will never change. And what… Sherlock Holmes, what is on your face?”

A Holmes out in public with a brown smudge on his cheek. Simply disgraceful, so of course Sherlock had to stretch his tongue out to try and find the offending mark. How this cacophonous genetic combination was in any way related to him was a mystery he had not a hope of comprehending.

“Chocolate.”

“Chocolate? I told you to wash your face before we left.”

“I did. But you did not tell me to wash my hands.”

And, of course, the two hands he held out had chocolate smeared on the pads of the fingers.

“I would have thought that was self-evident.”

“I am not responsible for your imprecision of language.”

On the street, soiling a handkerchief with chocolate. This was exactly the manner in which Mycroft had hoped to spend the morning. At least Sherlock wasn’t fighting him… probably because he too distracted with his delight in Mycroft’s discomfort.

“There. Now, I suggest we come to the understanding that the act of washing one’s face should be complementary to, not separate from, washing one’s hands.”

“Boring.”

“Regardless, personal hygiene is a key factor used to assess the worth and character of an individual. Forget that at your peril. Now, let us see what we can find…”

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Oh. That is to say…
Well…

“Are you having a stroke? You are not allowed to have a stroke if it means I shall have to take public transportation home.”

“You would call our driver, Sherlock and, likely, fail to inform the poor man that my corpse was sullying the floor of a local business. And I am not having a stroke, I’m simply…”

Oh heavens…

“… surveying the premises to affect the most expedient shopping experience.”

Men were not permitted to be beautiful. It was simply not done…

“There is chocolate directly in front of you, Mycroft. There is little more expedient that a straight line.”

When that line ended in a rapturous vision of beauty, a straight line became a difficult thing to navigate, nonetheless.

“Then why have you not hurled yourself headlong into the colorfully-wrapped confectionery, since it is beckoning you so invitingly?”

“You have my money.”

“Ah… well, go and choose something you feel you might enjoy and I shall proffer payment when you are done.”

“And are you just going to continue to stand here like an unattractive, but fortunately clothed, version of Michelangelo’s David?”

There would be liver for dinner tonight. Sherlock despised liver.

“I shall mill about until you are done. Do not hurry on my account.”

“I shall hurry if it amuses me to do so.”

But Sherlock's eyes were already gleaming at the thought of investigating the sweets display. He would soon have one of each item laid out and would be sniffing, feeling, rumpling wrappings and, in other manner he could conceive, investigating each one to come to some conclusion as to their quality. It would not occur to Sherlock until later to simply buy one of each and eat them to gather his data.

“As you wish. I shall be close by when you are finished.”

Not that the option of being at distance was on offer. The shop was small and the clutter of items for sale reduced the space even further. Which also meant that Mycroft could not be significantly separated from the wingless angel standing behind the counter. Shaggy, dark hair, eyes warm enough to melt away the thickest ice of winter, broad shoulders with a lean, but fit, body and his smile… poets would fill pages of script if they could but catch a glimpse of his smile. And he was now walking directly this way… the situation had gone critical.

“Hi! Haven’t seen you in here before. Can I help you?”

That question should not likely be given the answer Mycroft truly wanted to supply.
“I am not certain. My brother is in need of chocolate of adequate quality to consume in quantity without severely impacting the balance of his weekly allowance.”

Mycroft decided that he sound like precisely like David Niven’s grandfather.

“Good, cheap chocolate, eh? I think we have just the thing. Follow me.”

And, as the entranced Mycroft happily noticed, the aft of this magnificent creature was just as lovely as the stern.

“If he doesn’t mind choc-in-a-box, this is a good deal. Lots of blokes come in to pick up one for their ladies. Price is good, too, for how much you get. Better than what he’s rummaging through now. At least I’m guessing he’s yours, you both have that air about you.”

Was that a compliment? If so, Mycroft would gladly appropriate Sherlock’s share and feel not the slightest bit guilty. It was a kindness, really, for Sherlock would not appreciate it properly.

“Really? That is kind of you to say.”

Mycroft was actually astonished the proprietor wasted money on electrical lighting when he could simply have this gorgeous individual smile and illuminate the space for free.

“How polite to offer his hand to shake. His very strong, titillatingly-rough hand…

“Mycroft…”

David Niven’s grandfather was probably named Mycroft, too, which put the older Holmes squarely on the side of hating his parents.

“…I know it is rather a silly name, but…”

“No! I like it. Unique, not something I’d forget. Not that you’re forgettable. Quite the opposite, I think.”

“Oh… well, thank you.”

Killing a man with a piece of goose down was a technique Mycroft had long ago mastered, but he could not muster a witty or flirtatious reply when prompted to do so. His priorities for education needed to be immediately reexamined.

“You’re welcome. So tell me, Mycroft…”

“I have made my decision. You must now pay this lackey so we may leave.”

Perhaps the goose down assassination technique was a useful thing to have learned.

“Cute little tyke, isn’t he?”

If cute had suddenly become synonymous with satanic, then yes.

“I do apologize for Sherlock. He has been quite successful in feigning cases of communicable illness whenever it is time for his lessons in manners and etiquette.”

“Smart kid. I’ve put a thermometer under a hot tap more than once to avoid going to school.
So, what do you want me to ring up?"

Himself. Mycroft would contact the family solicitor to pay whatever was the cost and contract a suitable replacement to take Gregory’s shop position before day’s end.

“Since this is, in some ways, an experiment, we shall take the lot. Once Sherlock has fixated upon a particular type, we shall return for more.”

“I look forward to it. Come on, then and I’ll get you two out of here.”

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“Ugh. What an incredibly common shop.”

“Perhaps, Sherlock, but the appearance was not relevant to its value in securing your sweets.”

“I am not hopeful to return, anyway. It is likely soon to be shuttered if the best they can hire is that shabby shop boy. OW!”

“Oh dear, was that your foot? My apologies.”

“Do not tell me you did not find him horrid. His hair was uncombed…”

It was wild and natural.

“… his clothes were either second-hand or older than me…”

They were the perfect clothes for someone who knows their body is so magnificent that they could wear a newspaper and still be the most attractive person in the room.

“… he was dirty. Did you see his fingernails? And the smudge on his face? You just lectured me on hygiene…”

Hygiene was to help those lacking feral virility feel better about themselves.

“Yes, Sherlock and you are quite correct. However, considering he was currently engaged in his work, which obviously involves a degree of manual labor, none of that should be surprising. Observations are important, but take care that you collect all pertinent information before you voice your evaluations.”

“Fine. Then we must return to the shop. I require more data.”

Oh, the burdensome hardship…

“When you have consumed this portion of chocolate, we shall visit again.”

“That will be sometime after lunch.”

“I think not.”

That would appear far too eager.
“You will sign it, Sherlock, else I will not consider leaving.”

“You refuse to take my word? This is unacceptable.”

“However, it should not be unexpected. You have demanded to return to the shop four times since yesterday and each time I have located a hidden supply of unconsumed chocolate. I would say that your word is not something in which I should place any substantial trust. At least in matters involving sweets.”

“Fine! I will sign your ridiculous affidavit! Wait… what is this part about my chemistry equipment?”

“Ah, that is the penalty for default. If I search the house and still find chocolate secreted in one of your sadly obvious hiding spots, you will lose the use of your chemistry equipment for a period of one week.”

“That is… a whole week?”

“Seven consecutive time intervals of twenty-four hours.”

“I… I have changed my mind. I wish instead to practice my violin.”

“As you like… and Sherlock? You should not store meltable bars in your violin case. I am certain your instrument will not benefit from being chocolate glazed.”

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“I mneed to wreturn to hthe shup.”

Mycroft was quite certain Sherlock believed he spoke with unrivaled nonchalance and clarity.

“Good heavens, brother dear! Have you injected yourself with Novocain?”

“Tknot ftoday.”

An artistic spray of chocolate globules was always a welcome addition to a new bespoke waistcoat.

“Well, there’s that, at least. I take it you have finally depleted your war chest.”

This time, Sherlock simply nodded his response, sparing Mycroft’s trousers and jacket.

“Very well. I shall even forgo your written commitment to the truth in favor of securing myself a measure of peace. We may depart after I don a new waistcoat.”

“Wshtcsts ‘r shtupind.”

“They complete a tidy ensemble.”

“Sbporing.”

“Swallow, Sherlock. How many pieces did you insert into your mouth? No! Fingers, please.”
There was little surprise in the fact that Sherlock required both hands to demonstrate the appropriate quantity.

“The choices of your life may not require you to wear a waistcoat, however, mine shall. I have previously agreed that Mummy will not be allowed to dress us in matching suits, so I would appreciate some gratuity for that service. We may start today with allowing my next choice of waistcoat to remain pristine. We are to be seen in public, you know.”

“Only by the ignorant and unobservant.”

“That is immaterial and not necessarily wholly correct.”

“And you plan only on interacting with the rabble boy operating my sweet shop. His opinion is entirely immaterial.”

Rabble boy? Sherlock would fully understand the meaning of that phrase when he was forced to present himself back at school with his head shaved, his eyebrows dyed green and a horrifying case of chemically-induced hives decorating his body from head to toe.

“You shall find that if you investigate with sufficient vigor, you will discover something about every person that is valuable and useful, so refrain from making such debasing remarks about Gregory.”

For example, one might find the absolute Platonic ideal of masculinity. With eyes that you dream about and hands that…

“Well! Why are you standing there like a fencepost? Replace your idiotic waistcoat so we may leave! If the shop is not open when we arrive, I shall be very cross and things will not go well for you!”

Mycroft searched his mind for a time when Sherlock was not some degree of cross and found himself empty of memories. Perhaps his brother should reconsider his baseline attitude if he wished to use ‘cross’ as a realistic threat.

“A moment, then. And you should use the time to properly brush your teeth.”

“That is inane.”

“Come here. Now, look into the mirror and smile. Or, in your case, grimace.”

In the next moment, a small, dark-haired goblin was racing towards his sink. As little concern as Sherlock had for appearance, not even he could bear being seen by mere mortals with runny brown teeth.

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“We should be there by now. If you had not decided to completely refit your clothing I would already be in the process of obtaining my sweets and collecting further observations on the barbarian.”

And barbarians ravage… how utterly delightful… Mycroft hoped dearly he wasn’t purring aloud.

“It is socially appropriate to use his actual name in address, Sherlock. Not lackey or barbarian.”
“Tiresome. That will require I actually remember his name.”

“Nevertheless. Consider it a strategy. If you offend him, he may bar you from the shop and then you will lose access to your chocolate.”

“Can he do that?”

“I cannot see a reason to prohibit the action. And he is larger than you, Sherlock. I feel certain he could bodily remove you from the premises if you did not choose to honor a verbal banishment.”

“Very well. But I shall use a scornful tone.”

“Oh, I expect no less.”

The sight of Gregory behind the counter boded well, as it was obviously not his day of rest. That the Lilliputian shop was rife with individuals obscuring Mycroft’s continued view of Gregory did not. He thought it very poor manners for these individuals to impede his efforts at flirtation.

“I cannot reach my chocolate!”

“It is rather busy, shall we return another day?”

“No. And this is your fault. We could have been here much earlier, long before these people were released from their tedious jobs and took roost in my shop!”

“It is not your shop, Sherlock, and I would imagine that the individual who does hold the deed is quite pleased with the robustness of sales.”

“This is unimaginably horrid.”

“Then let us leave. I will extend to you a promise to return in the morning, when there will be fewer patrons for us to evade.”

“But…”

“Is your lip quivering?”

“No! I’ve just… I’ve waited to subject the peasant…”

“Sherlock!”

“…him to further analysis and I cannot and I… I brought my notebook this time to record my findings…”

And so he had. Sherlock had hidden away his little field notebook in a pocket of his coat so he could continue his investigation of the wondrous Gregory. Mycroft had a very difficult time hiding his proud smile; Sherlock would make a formidable scientist in the years to come.

“Why, that is simply marvelous.”

“It is?”

“Such dedication to your project. However, it will not be negatively affected by another day’s
wait. In fact, such a postponement might be beneficial owing to the circumstances. How can you construct a proper set of deductions with so many confounding factors?"

“I can observe his reaction to stress.”

That he could, thought Mycroft, though Gregory did not appear in the least stressed. In fact, he seemed to be enjoying himself. But, of course! A work of art such as he deserves and appreciates adoration…

“That would be valid if he was experiencing stress, but that does not appear to be the case.”

Mycroft felt quite fortunate that Sherlock did not land on any passersby’s toes as he jumped upwards a few times to catch a glimpse of the counter. The family truly did not need another lawsuit at this point. A quick bending down and he hoisted his brother upwards so that he could take a longer look at the subject of his experiment. Once returned to the ground, Sherlock scribbled furiously in his notebook before announcing his decision.

“You are correct. He appears content to be surrounded by these people and further appears to be interested in engaging in coitus with the female in the blue jumper.”

WHAT! Oh, how the cold hit of betrayal can freeze the blood.

“Explain!”

“He is smiling at her and she has been standing next to the counter, though she is not offering up any items for purchase.”

The sigh of relief that Mycroft breathed was nearly audible, but a lingering distaste lingered on his tongue. Why shouldn’t Gregory have a romantic interest? He was an earthbound divinity who could secure the attentions of any manner of individual for any purpose, be it tawdry or noble. Mycroft had hoped for a pleasing combination of both, but it was entirely possible that he was being overly hopeful.

“Sherlock… overlooking for the moment that you should have no understanding of nor have opportunity to use any descriptive term for sexual intercourse, that is painfully insubstantial evidence to offer for romantic attraction.”

“Provide examples of better.”

Being visited by death and whisked away to the deep circles of hell to spend his eternity, Mycroft predicted, would surely be a less painful torture than this conversation.

“Is there contact? Casual brushes to demonstrate affection and a desire for greater physical familiarity? Is there any evidence of special treatment or changes in body language and facial expressions to indicate a fondness? Though you cannot gather evidence for pulse increase or pupil dilation, those would clearly indicate physical attraction.”

Sherlock set himself jumping again, resembling nothing less than a frantic hoptoad in his attempt to gather more data. Mycroft felt fortunate that he was used to the various range of unpleasant looks associated with the act of escorting Sherlock into the public domain because he was receiving more than a few at this point.

“He has hugged her!”

Intolerable!
“Oh, I do apologize madam… yes, it was rather improper of me to jump in a crowded shop. Just a bit of japery with my brother, you see… Sherlock, provide a report.”

“He placed his left arm around her shoulder and pulled her to him. She giggled. I believe that should count as pre-coital evidence.”

“Sherlock! Oh… again, my apologies, madam. Yes… I know, but he is rather precocious… yes, we shall be moving along now… oh, thank you for your advice, I shall take it under advisement… Sherlock, come along, we are leaving.”

“NO! I am collecting data!”

“We shall return tomorrow, I have given you my word, now please… before that helpful woman makes good on her own promise to call the child welfare workers and have me investigated.”

“Oh, I would very much enjoy watching that.”

“Naturally, but perhaps another time.”

For a child who nearly became invisible when he turned sideways, Sherlock was surprisingly heavy to drag.

“Hey, hold up! Mycroft! Hold on a second…”

Further proof of Gregory’s divinity was in how the heat from his hand penetrated Mycroft’s jacket, waistcoat and shirt to bathe his skin in a slow slide of sensual warmth.

“Oh! Gregory… I trust I find you well?’

That was as stiff as an over-starched shirt and quite nearly as comfortable.

“Me? Oh, fine… yeah, doing fine. I didn’t see you come in, sorry about that.”

Mycroft felt blessed to have a life mate that was so courteous and thoughtful.

“Truly the fault was mine, for I chose to remain behind the throng of your admirers and simply enjoy the ambiance.”

What an enchanting laugh… Mycroft knew that he could spend hours simply listening to the sound of Gregory’s laughter. That is, if the jumpered female would only release her tenterhooks.

“It’s always like this before closing, though it would do a chap’s ego a nice turn to think they were here for him, wouldn’t it?”

At least one person was here for simply for him and he would be more than willing to demonstrate the depth of his commitment to pampering Gregory’s ego until the end of time.

“Sometimes all you need is the right admirer to fully fuel the fires of ego.”

There had to be an off-switch to Mycroft’s mouth, but it apparently was in need of repair.

“Well, that’s something we agree on perfectly. You’re not leaving, are you?”

There was an eagerness to the question that made Mycroft’s toes curl slightly and knead the silk of his socks, as he forgot his previous feeling of awkwardness.
“Sherlock does not do well in crowds…”

“That is a lie!”

“… and it would be best if we returned at a quieter time.”

“Do not use me as an excuse for your cowardly retreat!”

“You should listen to the lad, Mycroft. But, yeah… he does seem a bit agitated. Listen, do you have anything else you need to do this evening? I’m closing in about half an hour and you could come back then to let your brother shop in peace while we… talk. You know, get to know each other better.”

Mycroft had used up his admittedly small reservoir of flirtatious confidence, but was able to at least respond without the accompaniment of an awkward stutter.

“I would hate to hold you to your work after hours.”

“I can’t think of a better reason to be held, actually.”

Oh, Gregory was good at flirting. Mycroft resolved to engage in a course of study immediately using Mummy’s romance novels that she did not realize he knew about.

“Well, then I cannot refuse. We shall return soon.”

“Looking forward to it.”

And with a grin that weakened Mycroft’s knees, the anthropomorphism of beauty dove back through the press of bodies to return to his till.

“Are you finished wasting time with…”

“Manners…”

“The shop boy?”

“Sherlock, you can do better, so please try. And wasn’t it agreeable of him to allow us to return when you shall have unfettered access to your chocolate selection?”

“It is to be expected. We are obviously more wealthy than the current assembly and he is hopeful of emptying our pockets into his accounts.”

“My, the bitter taste of cynicism… it will spoil your treat if you do not allow it to fade.”

“You will take me to the bookshop and I shall consider your position.”

“The bookshop it is… but no anatomy texts, this time.”

“You are placing reasonable restrictions on my reading material.”

“Perhaps, but I would rather not see another maid quit because you cut out pictures of dissected corpses and pasted them on your wall as a collage.”

“It is not my fault she had no sense of art.”

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Thirty minutes in the bookstore was too brief a time for Sherlock to cause too much of a fuss and Mycroft was happy that he had, for once, not engaged in a nonverbal conversation with the owner on the subject of Sherlock’s immediate removal from the premises. But, as they approached their destination, Mycroft was deflated by the sight of the extinguished lights and the closed sign on the door. Perhaps Gregory had forgotten…

“Mycroft! Sherlock! Hey, just stepped out for a smoke. Come on in.”

“You are too kind… Sherlock! What are you doing?”

“Collecting the ash from… *his* cigarette. I want to compare it with ash from a quality tobacco to determine any differences in texture, color, or density. You shall provide the high-quality sample when we return home. I am well aware of the supply you keep hidden in the hem of the valence of your leftmost window.”

However, he seemed unknowing of the ‘gentleman’s magazine’ that was hidden in the *rightmost* valence, else he would have mentioned it, just to engage in his favorite hobby of sowing discord.

“You smoke, Mycroft? I’d offer you one, but you probably don’t indulge in front of the little man.”

“I do not appreciate the term little! I am of an acceptable height and am shortly to experience my period of accelerated growth!”

“Ah, isn’t he cute, all anxious for his growth spurt.”

“And I am not cute!”

“Whatsoever you say, cutie-pie.”

“AAAAHHHH!!! Unlock the shop you simpleton and let me get my chocolate!”

With a smirk, Greg unlocked the shop door and held it open while Sherlock marched past him, leaving a fuming Mycroft in his wake.

“Sherlock! What did I say about using his name and not an insult?”

“It’s ok, Mycroft… he’s just a tyke.”

Greg locked the door behind them and switched on the lights to facilitate Sherlock’s mauling of the sweets display.

“Do not let his age deceive you… he is evil far beyond his years.”

“And I do not approve of the name Greg. It is common and boring.”

“Sherlock, you are being difficult. Refer to him as Gregory, then, if you abhor the diminutive.”

“Actually, the only two people who call me Gregory are my Gran and you.”

“Oh dear, I do apologize…”

“You shouldn’t… I like the way you say my name. Something about your voice makes it sound special.”

“Ah… Then, I am delighted to please you.”
Mycroft felt his cheeks heat and knew that Gregory saw his blush because his brilliant smile grew wide and very purposeful.

“Well… that’s something to keep in mind, isn’t it?”

“I…”

Mycroft could now claim knowledge of the feeling of strangulation as Sherlock yanked downwards on his tie and fixed his gaze with his own piercing eyes.

“DILATION!”

“Mycroft! You ok? And why’s he… rolling around on the ground making retching noises.”

“Asking why Sherlock does anything is a poor use of mental energy.”

Especially since Sherlock would not be alive much longer for the question to even be meaningful.

“You’re probably right. Little shavers live in their own worlds, don’t they?”

“I am not little, lackey!”

“Sherlock!”

“I’ve got an idea if you’ll stop pretending to die on my floor long enough to hear it.”

Sherlock’s death throes halted and he cocked an inquisitive glance upwards in Lestrade's direction.

“I’m listening.”

“You don’t like Greg and, except for your brother, I’m not fond of Gregory. The owner calls me Lestrade, so you could use that, if you want.”

“Why does he call you that?”

“Because it’s my name. Just like… what is your surname anyway?”

Greg shifted his eyes to Mycroft who wondered if they could be used to define the term luscious. He did have connections to the OED editorial staff…

“Holmes.”

“Ok. I’m a Lestrade just like you’re a Holmes. How does that sound.”

“I am not averse to using that particular designation.”

“Good. Then that’s settled. Now why don’t you lay off using your bum to sweep my floor and get your fingers in the sweets? I’ll keep your brother out of your hair while you shop.”

“I accept your terms, Lestrade.”

And Sherlock’s attention was fully back on his objective with Mycroft left wondering if his and Gregory’s little ‘mood’ had been broken.

“Now where were we? Oh yeah… tell me, Mr. Holmes, is the only time you get out and about is when you have to satisfy your brother’s sweet tooth?”
Mycroft knew an opening when he saw one, but there was a matter to tend to first.

“I come and go with a high degree of freedom, but I have many calls upon my time and choose carefully how I exercise that freedom.”

“I guess I need to make your choice easy for you, then.”

“Are you sure your young lady would appreciate your flirtations, Gregory?”

Mycroft had long studied facial expressions and there was no mistaking the confusion in Lestrade's features.

“Young lady? You’ve got me muddled with that one.”

“The young woman earlier with whom you appeared quite companionable.”

“Who… oh. Oh! You mean Jenny. Don’t be jealous of her, Mycroft… she’s my cousin.”

“I am not jealous. I was simply… concerned for her honor.”

“Her honor? Hah! She lost that quite a ways back. Love her to death, though. Her father is the one that owns this shop. Don’t worry… I’m quite unattached at the moment. No honor to fret about except mine.”

So, the doorway had been opened a little wider… unattached and happy to announce the fact.

“Then we have that particular condition in common.”

“Yeah? I would have assumed that someone like you would have a juicy prospect on deck every night of the week.”

How flattering that his future partner thought it possible he would be that desirable.

“Heavens no… I find myself far too busy for that degree of engagement.”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Mycroft wanted to kick himself because some of the light bled out of Gregory’s smile. This must be remedied immediately.

“However, I do prioritize my time and actions… and people I find interesting and worthwhile are always placed at the top of the scale.”

Mycroft had never liked his smile, he thought it looked alternately predatory and contemptuous, however he did his best to give Greg one that he hoped looked playful and enticing. He must have been somewhat successful, since Greg took a step closer and met that grin with one of his own.

“So, just what makes a person interesting and worthwhile enough to find a place on your priority list?”

Damnation! Mycrof had no idea how he was supposed to synthesize all of Gregory’s splendor into the form of a sterile bulleted list. But he had to try, because it was rare that he held the interest of a creature of his stature. In fact, this was a painfully unique event.

“They must be…”

“Mycroft! Give me my money! Lack… Lestrade, I am ready to give you payment for my sweets. Return to your till and tally my bill so that I may pay and make myself absent from this
place."

There was a jest, Mycroft had heard, that involved a certain laxative and chocolate… it *had* been a long time since he had teased his brother in any meaningful way…

“Sure thing, Sherlock. Mycroft, I’ll just be a moment.”

Such a tender intended. Mycroft felt himself a very lucky man to someday exchange wedding rings with the lovely man patiently attending to the tiny tyrant that was Sherlock, who made a grand show of counting his change before stalking back to his brother.

“I am ready. We shall depart.”

“In a moment, Sherlock. Why don’t you wait for me outside and have a piece of your chocolate? I shall be out in a trice.”

“I will not wait long for you and Mummy shall be most distressed if I choose to ask strangers for a ride home and end up the victim of a vicious serial killer.”

“Mummy is young enough to reproduce again, so her distress will not be as debilitating as you would like to think.”

Sherlock snorted loudly enough for the French to hear his annoyance and stomped out the door to stand in front of the shop window.

“Gregory… shall I simply offer one apology and beg you revisit it every time you are in Sherlock’s vicinity? I have a similar agreement with our house staff, his tailor, barber, schoolmaster…”

Though he had never considered himself a humorous person, Mycroft was heartened by the ease with which he made his future partner laugh.

“Really, Mycroft… it’s alright. He’s just a kid and still learning.”

“That is my hope, however… with Sherlock, one can never tell what he is willing to learn.”

“He’ll be fine… but you know… there’s no reason you can’t stop by on your own sometime. I’m here all day during school holidays and afternoons other times.”

That was a blatant invitation that made Mycroft’s breath hitch. He had never… no one had ever made such an offer to him before. It was a bold move and should be met accordingly lest Mycroft be thought a simpering fool. Well, that is what Mycroft would think of himself, anyway.

“I… I do believe that can be arranged. I would hate to forsake a chance for such pleasant company when it is being willingly offered.”

Another wicked smile was his reward for avoiding the gaping pit of fools.

“And I will definitely try to make it as pleasant as possible.”

“How…”

Sherlock’s banging threatened to break the window glass and streaked it with smudges of chocolate.

“Your master calls.”
“Please do not encourage him.”

“So… I’ll see you soon?”

“Yes… I do believe you will.”

“Great. I look forward to it. I’ll walk you out.”

Mycroft reflected on what a gentleman was his dear Gregory and what a joy it would be to finally get a chance to spend time with him alone, without the gibbering gibbon forever interrupting their time together. And the feel of a large hand at the small of his back as he was escorted to the door cemented Mycroft’s resolve that he would visit again sooner rather than later.

“I have been out here for hours!”

“You have been out of doors for less than five minutes, so do try to deescalate your petulance to a more appropriate level. Gregory, thank you for allowing us this opportunity. Sherlock, what do you say?”

“You are to inform me immediately when you stock any new brands of chocolate that I need to sample for my experiment.”

Mycroft’s exasperated sigh blended cleanly with Greg’s amused chuckle and vigorous ruffling of Sherlock’s curls.

“You, lad, are a special one. I’ll see you soon.”

“That you shall, Gregory. Goodnight.”

__________

Mycroft watched his intended paramour return inside the shop and extinguish the lights.

“You desire him in a carnal fashion!”

When Mycroft found out from whom Sherlock had learned about such things, heads would roll.

“I desire Gregory as a companion. There are few with whom I find conversation an easy task for matters beyond selected practiced topics. In that, we have always been alike, dear brother.”

“You are delusional. I charted your reactions to him against your own set of criteria and you hope to have him for coitus.”

“I hope to have him as someone with whom I can share pleasant company.”

“You must purchase condoms for you currently do not have any.”

“And how would you know if I possessed any prophylactics?”

“I needed them for an experiment. Fortunately, the groomsman had a copious supply.”

The one comfort that Mycroft had was that as he spent eternity in hell, Sherlock would be suffering along with him.

“Yes, well… put that out of your mind. I have only just met Gregory and any predictions for the future are supremely speculative.”
Though delightful to contemplate.

“Very well. But if he becomes your sexual partner, I shall expect a discount for my chocolate.”

“Always finding the personal benefit in any situation, aren’t you Sherlock?”

“Of course. Aren’t you?”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your encouragement, comments and kudos!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“AH! What is that?”

Mycroft eyed the finger pointed at him and was, at least, pleased it was clean.

“Are you referring to my torso?”

“No. And do not be flippant. I refer to that monstrosity surrounding your torso.”

“I believe the proper term is *shirt*."

“Did you steal it from a charity store? Have you been murdering the homeless and absconding with their clothing?”

“Your histrionics are tiresome. It is a shirt. A simple garment like the thousands of others which you have seen prior to this moment in time.”

“Not on you. That is not the shirt you wear. That is a shirt Cook might use to clean a spill from the floor.”

“It a perfectly acceptable shirt, Sherlock.”

“It is the type of shirt that the classless masses wear to ensure anonymity among a crowd of their imbecilic peers.”

Which was, though not to such an insulting intent, Mycroft’s intention. He had spent hours searching for the components for a proper outfit to wear for his first solo meeting with Gregory. Items that would blend in with Gregory’s own attire, though retaining his own special nod to decorum. No advertising or logo for a musical group. Simply a plain green shirt, unfaded because he was *not* a member of the classless masses, and an as-plain pair of khaki trousers. Brown shoes without laces because… laces were not sufficiently casual. At least that was the assurance of the salesman when he assisted with Mycroft’s shopping, which now occupied a closet in one of the lesser-used guest bedrooms. A handy assortment of garments for the outings and in-home evenings he and his Gregory were destined to enjoy.

“And it makes you look fat.”

A handy assortment of garments that would now be donated to charity.

“I believe you are exaggerating.”

“Your abdomen is distending the fabric.”

Mycroft looked down to see the slight paunch that his relaxed posture had exposed. Well, the
charity would be most pleased with the donation.

“It is no matter. I simply desired a minor, shall we say, change of pace for the day. It does not do to become too entrenched in a routine and fall slave to habit.”

“You have worn a suit since you were born.”

“That, again, is an exaggeration. I was not graced with my first suit until I reached the age of three.”

“To hide your baby fat, I assume.”

Sherlock was born whip-thin and would endure that way, Mycroft had no doubt. Another little burden his brother would never have to bear, along with wearing suits and taking responsibility for his own life.

“And why do you have keys to a car? If you are escaping this prison, you shall take me with you or I will engage in activities that will distress Mummy greatly and she will rightfully blame you for your negligence and then you shall be imprisoned here with me forever!”

Perhaps the stage would be a better career for his brother…

“I have business to attend to and that business is not something for which you are either welcome or suited.”

“I want to come.”

“Wanting is, most certainly, not the same as having.”

“You must let me come with you!”

“And your reason?”

“I am bored.”

“You have a wealth of activities in which you may engage to stave off boredom, you are simply choosing to ignore that fact.”

“Bored.”

“If I could muster a modicum of sympathy for your plight, I would gladly do so. However, I must…”

“BORED!”

“The volume of your argument does not correlate with its substance or lack thereof.”

“ARRRGHHH! You are no brother of mine!”

“Unfortunately, I have studied the documents carefully and there really is no doubt that I am.”

“I shall be in my room!”

And a dramatic stalking away in the manner only an imperious princeling could manage. Leaving Mycroft standing with his obviously failed attempt at modifying his appearance hanging off of his shoulders. However, to produce a change would require returning to his new dressing room, which
would alert Sherlock to his actions and that would begin… oh, he did not even want to contemplate what *that* would begin. It could not be helped, he would have to make do with his current attire and hope that Gregory was sufficiently distracted by the depth and passion of their growing adoration that he would ignore any minor flaws of figure.

__________

There was no one in the shop. Unless Mycroft made a move towards it, that is, when suddenly a flock of intrusions would push inside and leave him standing in his hiding… reconnaissance… spot waiting for them to leave. In another few minutes the owner of the café across the street would surely phone the authorities and report him for vagrancy if the looks he had been receiving were any indication of intent, so he could not for much longer hover behind this accommodating advertising placard. The time had come to summon his fortitude and present himself to his intended for their first meeting without his brother in attendance. The wonderful thing about the progress of their relationship was that Gregory had already encountered the most chaotic aspect of Mycroft’s life and now… really, everything was, as they say, downhill after Sherlock. Yes… he should no longer hover but embrace this opportunity fully. As soon as...

“Mycroft?”

It was a manly scream, of that Mycroft was certain.

“Good heavens… Gregory? I…”

“Sorry I startled you. Where’s your little shadow?”

“Oh… Sherlock is at home, likely testing the patience of every human within shrieking distance.”

“So that means… you’re out and about by yourself.”

Was that a hopeful note to Gregory’s voice?

“Yes, I am. I was looking to…”

The immediate crafting of a believable cover story was necessary. Fortunately, this was one of Mycroft’s notable strengths.

“…purchase some condoms.”

WHAT WAS WRONG WITH HIS BRAIN!

“That… that is to say… Sherlock requires them for an experiment and he is not in a position to shop for them himself.”

How could an angel such as Gregory appear positively devilish when he angled his grin in just that particular manner.

“And big brother Mycroft steps in to save the day. Got a favorite brand or do you prefer a little variety?”

How in the hell would Mycroft know if he had a favorite brand since he had never purchased any! Or had occasion to use them…

“Oh… perhaps that shall stay my little secret. After all, you haven’t even bought me a drink.”
Now that was an example of suave and sophisticated. Perhaps being imaginarily-related to David Niven had its benefits. And it brought such a *magical* laugh to his Gregory’s lips. His perfectly-shaped lips that begged sultrily for one of Mycroft’s kisses…

“Well, that can be arranged. Fancy a pint or is too early for you?”

Mycroft honestly had no idea what was the etiquette for alcohol consumption, but opted for the response that would keep him near his beloved.

“I would enjoy that. Do you have a location in mind?”

“Sure do, follow me. Oh and… you look nice, by the way. Thought I’d never see you in anything but a suit.”

Gregory found his attire appealing. From this point forward, he would have to establish some form of monitoring system so that he could replay snippets such as this to put the tiny goblin in his place.

“I admit that it is rare I choose alternate apparel, but…”

Cover story!

“… practicing the alteration of my appearance to deceive my pursuers is a rather vital part of my training.”

Oh death, where is thy sting…

“HAH! That’s what I like about you, Mycroft… you’re sense of humor is tops! First round’s on me.”

Ah, perhaps the sting of death could bypass Mycroft for another day.

__________

And this was a pub. How… quaint. And they apparently did not quite care what was the age of their patrons.

“So, what can I get you?”

Mycroft had no idea beyond the grace of his Gregory’s smile.

“I shall enjoy whatever you choose for yourself.”

“Having what I’m having? Smart. I’ve tasted everything this pub has to offer and I’ll steer you right.”

Oh… how intoxicatingly wonderful. Mycroft gave himself a little pat on the back for that bon mot as he watched his, it *was* appropriate to say date, place an order and turn back and fix him with those mesmerizing eyes.

“So, the little man wants to experiment on condoms. He’s a unique one, isn’t he?”

That question could form the basis of an academic dissertation.

“Quite. Sherlock is intellectually advanced, yet retains a childish streak that does add a dimension of… color… to his behavior.”
“Well, he’ll grow out of that. How about you? Got a childish streak I should know about?”

Should he say yes? No? Mycroft had no basis for forming even the inkling of a calculation! Obfuscate!

“When appropriate, I find that I can mine the depths of my more whimsical side, though it may be expressed in a more witty and urbane fashion than that offered by the example of, say, slapstick.”

“So you’re more William Powell than the Three Stooges?”

This was the stuff of which true love was surely crafted.

“Precisely. And yourself?”

“Gotta go with Cary Grant.”

“Ah. A perfectly balanced combination of the sophistication, jest and ribaldry. It suits you.”

Yes… a monitoring system would need to be established immediately. Mycroft would have traded all of his family’s wealth for a photograph of Gregory’s cheeks pinked with a blush. And how wonderfully it deepened when the server brought their drinks and smirked at his rosy glow.

“Thanks. That’s… well, that’s nice of you to say.”

And was that a bit of shyness peering meekly around Gregory’s normal cloud of confidence and savior-faire. Mycroft was not sure just how deeply one could fall for another individual, but apparently Gregory was determined to allow him to find out.

“It is simply the truth. Now, why are you not at your work today? Is it your off-day?”

“Nah, but my Mum needed me to run some errands this morning and… that’s the good thing about working for family. Your Mum can call and get you a day off, no questions asked. What about you? Do you have yourself a job?”

Mycroft took a sip of the lager that had been placed in front of him and pronounced it pleasant. Of course, his Gregory would have delightful taste in everything…

“Not as such. What time I have outside of lessons and other… lessons… is conscripted for the oversight of a rather hellacious goblin that runs amok on the estate.”

Mycroft barely had the breath to utter his last word as his Gregory took a long sip of his lager and gained a small line of foam on his upper lip that his tongue obligingly and slowly erased.

“Estate, huh? Well, I did figure you for posh. Can I ask how posh?”

“If I respond rather, shall that be sufficient.”

“Yeah, that’s pretty clear. One of…oh, that massive place east of here. That’s what I bet. Do I win?”

“Your choice of prize.”

Mycroft felt offensive tendrils of worry slide through his spine. He had not given thought to the idea that class-difference might taint their love, but it was not impossible, in fact it was perhaps to be… was it normal to feel one’s body turn to liquid from the simple touch of one’s other half?
Mycroft felt his exemplar of perfection’s hand slide over his own and position itself comfortably in a warm embrace.

“I’ll hold onto that for awhile if you don’t mind. Use it later.”

Bold. It was time for bold!

“Of course, my dear. Use it at your will.”

And spoils go to the bold, if the fire that lit in Mycroft’s future husband’s eyes was any indication.

“I will. Now… tell me more about yourself, Mycroft Holmes. Especially the things you don’t like people knowing about…”

And why did that not sound like a terrible idea?

__________

Mycroft decided he liked lager. And ale. Both were nice. Especially when his Gregory continued to tongue-away the foam on his lips. Supremely especially when his shining light caught him staring and gave him a show that was likely illegal in several of the more conservative countries. And incalculably supremely especially when, in addition to being seduced so blatantly by a talented tongue, he had spent a prolonged period of time having a conversation that he enjoyed more than… more than any he could remember. Intelligent, amusing, insightful… how the time had flown with his soulmate sitting across from him engaging both his heart and his mind with equal fervor.

“So, Mycroft… what’s the rest of your day look like? Anything you have to, you know… do?”

No, nothing at all. Not one little thing… oh god.

“Unfortunately, yes. Sherlock has an appointment with his violin instructor and if I am not there… you cannot imagine the carnage if I am not present.”

“Little man plays the violin? That’s amazing. Really… and yeah, I can see where you might need to play peacekeeper if Sherlock is told he’s not holding his bow right or something.”

That argument ended with a rather large cash payment to prevent a lawsuit for assault by music stand.

“The price one pays for being first born. Was there… were you…”

Courage! For the Crown!

“Might you have had another option?”

Mycroft wanted to press his lips against those luscious, reddening cheeks to determine if they felt as hot as they appeared.

“Well, I just thought that maybe if you didn’t have anything else to do… we could… I don’t know… do something together.”

Mycroft drained the last of his… whatever their last round had been… and hoped that extra weight would keep him from bouncing in his chair. His husband wanted a date!

“I apologize that I cannot offer tonight as an option; however… my calendar is empty for
tomorrow and I would delight in having it filled.”

And, from what he had learned from his well-hidden magazine, that was a fine example of innuendo. And the very tiny cut of Gregory’s shiny eyes towards him, along with the soft nip he gave his lower lip said Mycroft had properly applied lessons learned.

“Tomorrow works for me. Can I… can I call you?”

“I would be delighted. Here… here is my number. Would it be too forward to ask for yours in exchange?”

“No! Only fair, right? Give me your pen… there. Sorry it’s on a napkin, but…”

It was the perfect romantic gesture that would be pressed carefully between the pages of one of Mycroft’s economics books then carefully hidden away from prying eyes and chocolaty fingers.

“This is most acceptable. Oh… I regret that I must take my leave. May I… May I offer you a ride anywhere? I do not know your schedule, however…”

“That’d be great! Yeah, I could use a run home if that’s not a problem.”

“No at all. Shall we?”

“I think we shall.”

Mycroft basked in his beloved’s praise of his choice of vehicle and bestowed the reward of allowing his darling Gregory the right to alter the station on his radio. Unsurprisingly, the man’s perfection of taste extended to his musical selections, as well, and Mycroft had to fight becoming lost in a daydream about dancing with the vision of delight sitting next to him. Far too soon, however, they arrived in front of a small house at the end of a very plain street that seemed, nonetheless, bustling with activity from yards filled with children and adults cooperatively monitoring the chaos.

“Well, this is me. Thanks for the ride. It’s not a bad walk, but why walk when you can ride? And in style.”

Says the man who defined style and could walk down a dry, desolate road and appear as an oasis of beauty among the swirls of dust…

“It was my pleasure. I… I am… I am anxiously anticipating our next meeting.”

“Really? I mean… I am, too. I’ll call you tomorrow and we can figure things out. So… yeah.”

“That is more than acceptable.”

“Good… that’s good.”

“I would agree.”

“Me, too…”

Each looked at the other and Mycroft had no idea who moved first, but suddenly there was no space left between them and he felt the lips he had been worshipping all afternoon brush against his
“GREGORY LESTRADE! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?”

Two heads snapped back and peered out to see a very angry woman standing outside of Mycroft’s car.

“Uh… Hi Mum! I was just… oh! This is Mycroft. We stopped in at the… café and I sort of lost track of time.”

Mycroft smiled as politely as he could at the woman glaring at him as if he was a sex offender.

“Lost track of time… well, I suppose I can overlook it this time once all the dishes have been done tonight. And I cooked for freezing, so I hope you like pruny fingers.”

“Mum…”

“Don’t you Mum me. Now get inside and leave your friend here to go… wherever it is he’s going. Nice to meet you, Mycroft. Maybe I’ll see you again, sometime.”

Mycroft tried to stammer out a response, but his intended was already being led away by his collar. However, if his ears didn’t deceive him, and they never did, Mycroft caught ‘he looks like a nice boy’ somewhere on the wind…

“WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN!”

Visiting heaven.

“I informed you that I had business to which to attend. Did you believe instead I had changed my mind and joined a circus troupe?”

“My lesson is soon to begin and he is already here annoying me!”

“Yes, yes… how unfortunate for you.”

Everyone in the world was unfortunate if Mycroft used himself as a standard since no one else in the world had spent as pleasant an afternoon…

“You…”

Sherlock scurried forward and sniffed at his brother, jumping back with a thunderous look clouding his small face.

“You smell of ethanol!”

Also known as the nectar of love.

“I shared a small respite with a companion.”

And received what Mycroft would tentatively claim as his first kiss.

“You have no companions and you…”

Sherlock scurried forward again, sniffing wildly much like a convict-tracking hound.
“…and you do not drink cheap ale! You do not drink ale at all! It is common and rough and not proper in the least!”

“And you missed the lager, Sherlock. Sloppy of you. Perhaps, however, your nose is congested? Shall I find you a tissue? And how do you have knowledge of the smell of ale, cheap or otherwise?”

“From playing cards with our driver and the gardener. Cook sometimes plays, too, and the man who brings the milk.”

“Of course.”

And Mycroft was sure Sherlock handily supplemented his allowance in the process.

“Will you… are you going to tell Mummy?”

No. It is a good thing that you socialize with others and, I would suspect, you utilize the opportunity to exercise your observational skills.”

“Naturally. I have acquired a large body of data for analysis.”

“I would expect no less. Now, shall we begin your lesson?”

“If I must.”

“You must. And afterwards, you can demonstrate for me you skill at cards.”

“For money?”

“For biscuits.”

“That will do.”

Other little bits of mental mania can be found on my tumblr:

eventhorizon451.tumblr.com
Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone for all the kind words, kudos and encouragement... I appreciate it greatly!

“What?”

“Oh... is Mycroft there?”

“No one uses my brother’s personal number, therefore you must be somehow deficient in the proper skills to successfully operate a telephone and input the correct dialing information. It would behoove you to find a tutor to remediate your disability.”

“Hi, Sherlock! It’s me, Gr... Lestrade.”

“No. The shop boy. How did you get this number? When I desire more chocolate I shall inform you; attempting to solicit sales is degrading even for one such as yourself.”

“Sorry, little man. Not calling about your chocolate obsession. Mycroft gave me his number so I could reach him today. Is he around?”

“He is ‘round,’ if that is sufficient.”

“Sherlock, be nice to your brother.”

“Let me think... no.”

“Then just hand him the phone, will you?”

“I doubt that would be wise since he is currently washing the barnacles off of his barge-like body.”

“Sherlock, your brother is not fat. He’s not even plump.”

“I notice you did not say he wasn’t obese. You would have had you seen him in the riff-raff costume he was wearing yesterday. His bloated stomach was stretching the fabric until it screamed. He appeared as if he was carrying an elephant’s baby...”

“I did see him yesterday. He looked perfectly fine to me.”

“What? You saw him? He did not report this to me!”

“Are you his mother? Oh, stop with the retching, you little bastard.”

“I cannot. It is an involuntary response.”

“Put your brother on the phone, Sherlock.”

“Truly, he is hosing himself down like the circus does to the elephant that impregnated him.”
“SHERLOCK!”

“I believe he has arrived. I shall avert my eyes from his hideous nakedness and hand him the phone.”

“Good heavens, I am so sorry… Mycroft Holmes, at your service.”

“Well, I doubt the hideous part, but is the rest of that true?”

“What! Gregory? Oh dear… what did he… and… are you asking if I am naked?”

“Seemed like a good question under the circumstances. So… are you?”

Mycroft was nearly exhaustingly relieved that his intended was not present to witness the bright red flush that bloomed over his chest, neck and face.

“I am enrobed by a towel that surrounds my waist.”

“Is it a tiny towel that barely covers what it’s supposed to cover?”

Flirtation! How lovely that his partner strived to keep the spark alive in their relationship.

“Actually, a tiny towel would do a sadly inefficient job of providing coverage.”

Laughter… their home would be forever filled with sparking laughter.

“Well, that’s a pretty mental picture! So, are we still on for tonight?”

“Indisputably. I am very much looking forward to our evening out. Have you a plan for our time?”

“I was thinking the classic dinner and a movie combination. There’s a new film out that looks good and I know the best place ever for cheap eats. Nothing fancy, but I think it’ll be a fun time. That sound good to you?”

Mycroft had absolutely no idea how it was supposed to sound, since his experience with dating was currently anticipating its first data point, but any outing with his dear Gregory could be nothing if not delectable.

“I believe that will be quite suitable. Shall I meet you…”

“Got my Mum’s car for the night. I’ll pick you up. After all… I did ask you out, in a way, so I should be doing the chauffeuring. You don’t mind, do you?”

Having himself escorted out for an evening and taken care of by the one he would retire with in later life? How could he possibly mind?

“Absolutely not. At what time shall I expect you?”

“Seven? The film starts a little before nine, so that should give us time to eat and have a nice chat before the picture starts.”

“Seven will be most agreeable. Now, I simply must swath myself in clothing. Sherlock has acquired an expression that generally manifests in some plan of highly nefarious nature and I am rather too vulnerable at the moment for comfort.”
Such genuine and melodious laughter. How appropriate that only his beloved found Mycroft amusing, when the rest of his acquaintances found him dour at best.

“Use the lethal towel-whip maneuver! Give that little tyke a good sting on his bum if he tries anything shady.”

Mycroft had no idea what that was, but was not about to attempt to remediate his lack of knowledge with Sherlock standing and listening to every word.

“I shall not disappoint you, Gregory.”

“That’s my man! Ok, so I’ll see you at seven.”

“I look forward to it. Good day, Gregory.”

“See ya, Mycroft.”

Mycroft set aside the phone, lingering his hand on the device, as if he could feel the pleasure of their conversation lingering on the plastic.

“You will explain yourself!”

The native language of the goblins was a shrill and foul-sounding tongue.

“This mechanical instrument is a telephone. One uses it to communicate with those who are not within shouting distance.”

“That was the insipid shop boy. You spoke to him in an overly-familiar manner and he stated that you and he met yesterday.”

“Oh! Did he say anything about me?”

“He said that you were not entirely nauseating in appearance, but he is proven a dullard, so his opinion is meaningless.”

The confirmed success of his choice of wardrobe was as a powerful fuel for Mycroft’s self-confidence and he approached the consideration of his attire for the evening with increased assurance.

“I would say that Gregory is a man of admirable insight and taste.”

“And I would say he is not only dull but visually-impaired if he can look upon your acreage and not become violently ill.”

“That is enough, Sherlock, else I begin a treatise on your rather spindly appendages and rodent’s nest of hair.”

“And you cannot tell me that I misunderstood that you are planning an… an assignation with the peasant!”

“You misunderstood nothing. Gregory and I shall share an evening together and take enjoyment from each other’s company. MUST you retch as if you have swallowed a… swallow!”

“Mummy will not be pleased.”

“Mummy will not know.”
“Are you so certain?”

“I am quite certain. For if Mummy learns of my outing with Gregory, she shall also learn the actual fate of her best evening gown.”

“You wouldn’t dare!”

“I would and you know it.”

“Very well. I see we are at an impasse. I will take my leave, but rest assured we are not done with this!

“You and I are rarely done with anything, Sherlock.”

“This is intolerable! Have you become possessed?”

“Sherlock, if you are to become so perturbed by alterations of routine and perceptions, you shall render yourself useless for any form of scientific career.”

“You reek!”

“A touch of cologne is to be expected when…”

“You are redolent of expectations of carnal behavior. I must open a window.”

“I am redolent of nothing but the expectation of a blissful and stimulating encounter.”

“Encounter for what?”

“A pleasant meal and a night at the cinema.”

“Boring.”

“Then isn’t it wonderful that you shall not be participating.”

“I should be included to protect you honor.”

“I do not think my honor requires protecting.”

“You may not think so, but if you allow that oafish shop boy to compromise your virtue, you shall be disgracing the Holmes name!”

“Sherlock, you do not care in the least about the family name. What is your true source of distress?”

Mycroft watched his brother worry his lip and crinkle his nose in the most endearing fashion before forming his response.

“How long shall you be engaged in your… dalliance?”

“Given the commencement hour and probable duration of the film… though I cannot predict the length of time we shall spend afterwards in discussions of the cinematic experience or… indulging in cheap ale… I am sorry, Sherlock. I cannot provide you with a definitive timeframe for my evening. I do anticipate returning before sunrise, if that provides the succor you require.”
“But why do you have to go? He is a useless shop boy…”

Mycroft bent down and clasped Sherlock’s shoulders gently, but firmly.

“You will use his name, Sherlock. And he is not useless... he is intelligent, witty, engaging… tolerant of you for heaven’s sake!... and I find him companionable. Is it so wrong for me to wish for companionship with someone of my own age?”

“But you will not be here!”

Mycroft released Sherlock’s shoulders and stroked his hands down his brother’s thin arms, taking note of Sherlock’s poor attempt to camouflage his distress.

“Not for this evening, that is true. But I will never leave you, Sherlock. I will always be accessible to you… whenever you need me, you simply have to ask and I will be there for you.”

The moment lasted only a brief instant, but Mycroft committed every bit of it to memory… sweet memoires of his brother were extraordinarily rare and precious.

“It... that is immaterial! I just... I shall be incalculably bored and…”

“If you like, I will wake you when I return and we may sit for awhile and talk. You can dissect every aspect of my evening, perhaps even make some notes to compare to future evenings I spend with Gregory.”

“You plan to continue your association with him?”

“I would like that, however, he also has a say in our relationship.”

“You have yet to have a single date with sh... Lestrade, I believe the term ‘relationship’ is not properly applied in this case.”

Their impending nuptials indicated otherwise.

“One could argue that our respite at the pub yesterday moves us further into the ground covered by the description.”

“He was the ‘companion’ that got you drunk!”

“I was not inebriated, Sherlock, and yes. I spent the afternoon with Gregory.”

“At a pub.”

“At, as you say, a pub.”

“You are becoming a wastrel.”

“I highly doubt that.”

“Wanton.”

“I disagree.”

“Licensious.”

“Really, Sherlock.”
“Hyper-sexualized and alcohol dependent!”

“No to both. Any more?”

“Scads! I have an extremely well-developed vocabulary.”

“Perhaps you can use the time that I am absent to make a list to which to compare with my assignation when I return.”

“Perhaps I shall, if only to highlight in concrete terms the foolhardiness of this involvement.”

“Excellent. That should keep you quite amused. Now, if you will excuse me, I do have make myself ready for my evening.”

“I am going to retrieve my notebook. I must document this. The grooming habits of the oversized, sexually-maniacal… OW!”

Ah… so the ‘lethal towel-whip’ maneuver was exactly as it sounded…

__________

“Atrocious.”

“Horrendous.”

“Malignant.”

“I am now blind!”

Mycroft threw his latest shirt choice onto his bed and wondered why he was paying the least bit of attention to his brother. Goblins routinely dressed in the skin of carrion they found abandoned by higher predators…

“Why do you not simply wear one of your suits? They are to you as a security blanket is to an infant, so your interminable twitching might be alleviated and Lestrade might not think you palsied.”

“A casual encounter such as we will undertake is not properly matched to a suit.”

Mycroft made a mental note, however, to contact his tailor in the morning and direct the man to begin selecting fabrics for his wedding suit. It would not do well to leave that detail until the last minute!

“Then simply wrap this sheet around yourself! It will also serve as a makeshift groundcover for your debauchery.”

“I highly doubt that we shall be inclined to demonstrate our physical affection in public at an eatery or the cinema.”

“Perhaps he has plans to spirit you away to a secluded area where no one can hear you scream as he violates you repeatedly.”

Mycroft knew for certain he was not that lucky.

“That is a highly unlikely scenario. Here… comment on this one.”
The plum-colored shirt Mycroft held aloft apparently was toxic to goblins, as Sherlock fell dramatically onto the floor and began shaking and pointing to the drool that was starting to form at the corners of his mouth.

“Sherlock, plum is an exquisite color.”

“On me, perhaps! If you are content with appearing like an aubergine with some form of reddish fungus growing at your stem, then by all means choose that shirt.”

Mycroft hurled his selection directly onto his brother and did have to admit it favored Sherlock’s coloring quite well.

“Then make a suggestion.”

Sherlock hopped up and rummaged around Mycroft’s wardrobe selections, drawing out a deep blue shirt with very pale blue stripes.

“And that is more acceptable than plum?”

“There are no blue vegetables for you to resemble.”

True. And the buttons would facilitate access for his repeated violations.

“Very well. I accept your choice. Now, all I require are trousers, socks, shoes…”

“I think I may die.”

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For the hundredth time, Mycroft checked his reflection, then his watch, then his reflection again. Another peek out the window and back to drumming his fingers on his knee. Was it too soon to dispatch a search party? It was… now, it was exactly 6:54 pm and Gregory was not present. The roads may have become treacherous and his future lover could be lying injured after being thrown from his vehicle following the collision with a mighty oak tree.

“Your agitation is irritating.”

How could Mycroft not be agitated! He was soon to be a widower!

“Your irritation is irritating.”

“That’s the…”

Sherlock’s sentence was rudely interrupted as he was bowled over by a sprinting Mycroft who was headed towards the front door after spying headlamps approaching the house. The wait until the knock was precisely, he was sure, three and one-half hours.

“Ah, Gregory. Do come in. I hope you had no issue locating the house.”

“I just looked for the biggest one in Britain and here you are.”

“You flatter me, Gregory.”

“No he’s not. That’s just his way of saying you’re fat because you need a MASSIVE house for your…”
“Hey, Sherlock. Look what I have here.”

Mycroft watched his Gregory extract a sizeable bar of chocolate from his jacket pocket and toss it into the goblin’s claws.

“Your offering is spare but sufficient.”

“Figured you were owed something since I’m taking your brother for the evening.”

“Take him forever, if you desire. It would be little effort to demolish the adjoining wall to our rooms and create for myself a suite.”

“Good to know you’re thinking ahead. Ready, Mycroft? Your chariot awaits.”

“Of course. Ah… one moment.”

Hours of preparation and Mycroft nearly forgets his wallet. A quick dash up to his room and a quick dash back down, stopping before he fully made himself visible in the entrance so he could sample the conversation Sherlock was having with his future brother-in-law.

“Your vehicle appeared barely road-worthy.”

“She’s old, but she runs. Never left Mum stranded yet.”

“I presume that is adequate. Marginally. Sh… Lestrade, you should be aware that I have already warned Mycroft of your potential inclination towards molestation and that both he and I are well-versed in the use of hand-to-hand combat if we are attacked. Or desirous of revenge.”

“Is this your version of the ‘you hurt him and I’ll hurt you’ speech?”

“I leave you to decide that for yourself.”

Mycroft wondered if he would ever be able to accurately predict his brother’s behavior…

“Ah, here we are. I am now prepared to leave. Sherlock, please do not give Mummy cause to take to bed early.”

“If she becomes disturbed by my experiment, that is not my fault.”

“Got yourself a little project going on?”

“I shall be investigating the effect of voltage level on electrical burns to muscle tissue.”

“Good god! Not on yourself, I hope!”

“Of course not. I have procured a slab of beef on which to work.”

“Well then, fry it enough and you’ve got your dinner.”

“Hmmm… palatability. It could be a useful test parameter in the event of a devolution into cannibalism due to overpopulation.”

“There you go, glad I could help.”

“Begone.”

“And that’s our cue, Mycroft.”
“Yes, it is at that. Have a good evening, Sherlock.”

“I will have my notebook waiting!”

“I am giddy with glee.”

“You’re lucky, Mycroft. Sherlock’s a little bastard, but he’s got a good heart underneath his bastardo.”

“Do not permit him to hear you say that or he shall become either highly indignant or insufferably smug, neither of which I can tolerate without copious quantities of headache tablets.”

“HAH! Guess I know what’s your Christmas gift, don’t I?”

How thoughtful that the future Mr. Gregory Holmes was already planning his Christmas purchases. And practical ones at that, to Mycroft’s hearty approval.

“Well, here she is… not as nice as yours, but it’ll get us there and back.”

Mycroft thought it appropriate that his adorable partner escort him out in an adorable little car. Hopefully, there was sufficient leg room hiding amongst the adorableness.

“It is quite suitable, Gregory. And it will permit us a quite a close proximity, will it not?”

And, yes… Mycroft could now confirm that his Gregory’s smile could illuminate the darkness.

“You are a clever man, Mycroft Holmes. Your thinking is very, very clever.”

How easily the compliments rolled off this lovely man’s tongue. Mycroft had to wonder what other combinations of his Gregory’s tongue and rolling could be possible.

“I do try; however, my cleverness is directly correlated to my mental stimuli.”

“And am I stimulating enough for you?”

What a splendidly wicked man...

“More than you can possibly realize, my dear Gregory.”

What was it about eyes that when they met, they could ensnare one’s soul so completely?

“I like the sound of that.”

Mycroft hoped that his partner didn’t feel the shiver that ran through him as a large, warm hand slid lightly past his waist as it reached for the latch for the passenger’s side door.

“I very much like the sound of that… shall we get the evening started?”

“I rather thought we had.”

“Oh… this is definitely going to be fun.”
Continued and sincere thanks for all of the support and wonderful comments!

It was a very good thing to have proximity when riding with Gregory Lestrade. It allowed Mycroft many opportunities to have his leg or hand brushed as Gregory shifted and it also gave Mycroft an arm to grab for support, since his dearest apparently believed he was involved in some form of automobile race and was very determined to win.

“Gregory, you do realize that there exist laws to regulate the speed of motor vehicles that travel the roads of this country, correct?”

“Yeah, but no one’s around but us. And Mum doesn’t let me take her car out very often, so I’ve gotta enjoy this while I can.”

That was a very delightful development, from Mycroft’s perspective. If his Gregory had irregular access to the car, it also meant that he could not often escort out any pretenders to Mycroft’s rightful position as Gregory’s other half. However, those halves soon could be united in a very violent meld if his future partner continued to drive like a maniac.

“If I offer you a promise that you may bring your valiant vehicle and drive at any speed through the roads on our estate, will you forsake this particular opportunity for the chance at a better one?”

“Bribery, is it? You’ll have to sweeten the pot a bit, Mycroft. I really like driving fast…”

Mycroft’s heart skipped several beats. His beloved wanted to negotiate… was there truly any better man in this world to bring to the altar?

“I can add access to a selection of other vehicles that might, shall we say, tickle your fancy.”

The way the colorful lights of the gauges danced in his intended’s eyes made Mycroft believe his soon-to-be lover had mythical creatures in his bloodline.

“Hmmm… and you’ll race me?”

Competition? Mycroft was sure he was visibly trembling from the excitement.

“If you believe you have the mettle to challenge me. I have quite a lot of practice in my family’s vehicles.”

“Oh, I’ll pull my mettle out and measure it against any other bloke’s. And believe me… I’ll win.”

It was completely inappropriate to feel the stirrings of something in… certain places when on an innocent date with one’s paramour; however, Mycroft was certain his ardor would go unnoticed.

“Got a bit of pink on your cheeks, Mycroft. Thinking about things that might be a little
naughty?”

Must provide impressive response!

“I believe you insinuated that the term ‘little’ was inappropriate.”

No one in the history of humanity had teeth as perfectly white as Gregory Lestrade-Holmes. Or Holmes-Lestrade… Mycroft would have to give the issue further thought. Their stationary would depend upon it.

“I believe you understood correctly. Damn, Mycroft… what is it about you that just so…”

And the longest pause of Mycroft Holmes’s life.

“…amazing.”

He should never have doubted for a second. His beloved would ever be kind and adoring.

“I believe the company is what makes the difference.”

“Then I guess I’ll just have to keep keeping you company.”

“I see no flaw in that reasoning.”

Mycroft wondered if his lovely Gregory knew how stunning he was when he ran his tongue over his lips. Perhaps for their tenth anniversary, Mycroft would show his husband the many pages of his journal that were devoted to the topic of his tongue.

“Good. I…umm… I mean that. Good.”

“Then we are in agreement. I did mean to comment, as well… you look very nice this evening.”

Nice was actually a polite word for appearing like a sexual fantasy taken from the most tawdry erotic novel ever written and made into flesh and blood. Mycroft had no idea how his Gregory had fit himself into trousers that tight, but he very much applauded the effort.

“Yeah? Thanks. You do to. You always do, actually. Got a sense of style, I like that. You should take me shopping sometime and give me some tips.”

Mycroft wondered how long he could survive without oxygen because the thought of bringing his soon-to-be partner on an excursion to clothe his exquisite body in wealth of fine garments was nearly paralyzing. It would be a glorious experience…

“I would be delighted. And may I add that to my bid to keep us alive until we reach our destination?”

“Oh, you’re good at this.”

“I am trained to be.”

“You say things like that and I’m not sure if you’re serious or not.”

“Quite serious, I assure you. I have responsibilities that await me and I must uptake them fully capable of conducting myself flawlessly.”
“That sounds… fucking miserable if you ask me.”

A thought that had entered Mycroft many times in his life, not that his opinion was of much importance in the matter. How felicitous that his darling shared his qualms.

“And it is, on occasion. However, I do not dwell upon what I cannot change. So… is my package sufficient to secure closure of our deal?”

Oh, now that was an pleasurably unfortunate turn of phrase because if Mycroft’s beloved’s eyes did not return back to the road and away from Mycroft’s groin, there were sure to be hazards met on several fronts.

“Yeah… more than sufficient from what I can tell.”

“You were speaking about ‘naughty things’ a moment ago, my dear?”

“Can’t help it. You’re in the car.”

Ribald banter… Mycroft hopes for repeated violations were rising.

“Then I shall strive to remain as ‘in your car’ as I am able.”

“You know you are going to be the death of me.”

There was no time in his life that Mycroft had felt especially special. Not until he was sitting in a tiny automobile with an angel that had dared to touch him with a bit of his grace.

“That would be most unfortunate, for I am very much looking forward to our evening and I doubt your corpse would be nearly as scintillating as your very live… very warm… form.”

Oh yes, perhaps Mycroft would try his hand at poetry tonight to properly honor his husband’s tongue. It did love to make itself known in such delightful ways. Hopefully, some of those delightful ways would soon involve caressing his lips…

“Evening… you make that sound so… one-off.”

Could it be? Was Mycroft’s greatest love already proposing a second date? A real date that began after the sun sets for best romantic effect? With a companionable meal and mutually-enjoyable recreation of the chaste and proper type. And perhaps for the improper type, also. Another tremendous value of his partner… the practice Mycroft was getting for restraining his emotions would serve him very well in the future. For now, he must be cool, collected…

“Mycroft? Is everything… look, I’m sorry. I’m being stupid aren’t I? Damn it! I told myself to play it cool and now I’m being a big eye-gropey git and ruining everything…”

Alarms at nuclear reactors couldn’t have sounded as loud as the bells going off in Mycroft’s head. He had distressed his spouse!

“Gregory! You have not… there is nothing amiss. I was merely daydreaming a moment on the subject of your… may I call it a proposition? I believe there was an offer couched in your phrasing and… I very much found it appealing.”

“Oh… you mean that? I’m… I don’t want to be too pushy, you know? Too creepy or anything. It’s just… I like you, Mycroft. And I don’t want to be a complete nutter and scare you away.”
One’s object of adoration should like you, but that was by no means a certainty. Mycroft considered himself extremely fortunate to know that he was liked and rededicated himself to making sure there was never any uncertainty in his Gregory’s mind as to his own devotion.

“I…”

Mycroft contemplated his predicament but could find no reason that three little words could be so difficult to vocalize. However, no Holmes was ever bewitched by words.

“I like you, too, Gregory. And I am quite content with our interactions. If I were not, I would let you know. Until I do, assume that your behavior is gratifying.”

However, words should not be couched in terms that Alec Guinness would endorse. Mycroft made a mental note to check the date on his birth certificate to ensure he was not born before 1920.

“Oh… ok! Good… really, that’s good… yeah… so we’re good… great!

Mycroft adored how his imminent spouse eschewed the frippery of polysyllabic nonsense and employed clean and concise language to convey his message.

“And hey… we’re here. Hope you’re hungry!”

That was Mycroft’s normal state of being. Mummy did not approve of a ‘softer’ child and it was always best to keep her happy whenever possible. But should he be honest? Gregory did find his form attractive and that was not the form he would have should he…

“Mycroft! Are you daydreaming again?”

So attuned to his moods, Mycroft added this to his list of proof that they were matched by the fates or gods or heavens or whomever safeguarded the paths of soulmates.

“A bit… you put me in a very relaxed frame of mind, Gregory and I gladly use your words as prompts for the most delightful dances in my mind.”

That lovely rose that bloomed so fully on his Gregory’s cheeks would be forever Mycroft’s favorite color.

“That… no one’s ever told me that. It’s nice. Good… I don’t take people here, but, yeah… you need to be taken here. Come on.”

Mycroft watched his Gregory jump out of the car, race around the front as if his trousers were on fire, and fling open Mycroft’s door. Mycroft unfolded his legs, hoping they wouldn’t be overly wobbly, and took his place at his partner’s side.

“This is my favorite place and… well, I normally just come here by myself, but… I think you’ll like it.”

It was a ridiculous exercise to assume someone as wondrous as Gregory had not dallied before, but knowing that he reserved his special establishment for their first date was… Mycroft had never felt so treasured.

“I am certain I will and I look forward to our meal with great anticipation.”

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Cheese. Bread. Meat. More cheese. There might be something from the botanical kingdom
present amongst the cheese, but Mycroft was very happy he had no wager on the issue.

“They make the best pizza anywhere! Really, the owner’s from Italy and his wife’s from Greece and it makes for perfection! Mycroft… you’re looking at it like it’s going to attack you.”

“No… I am… I have never actually indulged in this culinary experience and am unsure how to proceed.”

“You’ve never had pizza?”

“I have had such in Italy, but it was not as… robust as this. A bit of assistance?”

“Well this is a nice surprise. Me knowing something you don’t. I wasn’t sure that was possible.”

Mycroft felt a worry flare that he had presented as too competent. It was artifice, for the most part, but he was very good at presenting his artifice as reality. It would not do, it would never do, to allow his husband to feel he was less than a fully equal partner in their relationship.

“Pish and tosh, Gregory. If I have learned one thing from our brief association is that you offer me fresh perspectives and experiences such as no other has done or I have been able to muster for myself. Now, instruct.”

That beautiful smile… Mycroft drank in the beauty of his Gregory’s smile and the feel of skin-upon-skin as his consort reached out to stroke his fingers across the back of Mycroft’s hand.

“As you wish. Grab a piece… go for that one, it looks super! Just the right amount of cheese, meat with every bite, a little olive and onion to make things interesting. Might there be a mushroom or pepper? Who knows and who doesn’t like surprises… take a big bite and… blimey…”

The heaven of Mycroft’s imagination involved his husband and endless vistas of the loveliness he was allowing to tantalize his mouth in nearly sexual ways.

“You like that, don’t you?”

“I would say ‘like’ is an understatement.”

“Would you get upset if I said you looked really hot right now?

He looked ‘hot?’ Mycroft was well aware of the term and never believed it could, in any way be applied to him. Even by the man who would shortly wear his ring.

“I would not. In fact, I would hope that you would join me so that I might experience the same view.”

Not that he had ever explored the topic, but Mycroft was aware of the concept of ‘food porn’ and his beloved was a master of it. He could star in any number of videos and garner awards.

“Oh god… they really did themselves proud didn’t they… crap this is good… can I be naughty for just one minute?”

For one lifetime, if Mycroft was the arbiter.

“I would welcome it.”
The piece that Mycroft was eating was removed from his hand and he watched as his intended picked a few bits from other pieces and added him to his absconded one, then presented it back for consumption frowning as Mycroft reached out to take it.

“I got this. Just take a bite.”

Was that a moan? How… well, Mycroft was going to think vulgar or inappropriate, but neither felt right. Decadent was better… Debauched sounded perfect… apparently he had a food kink, which was not surprising, but that his someday-lover shared it was blissful.

“That’s my boy… I knew you were gorgeous, but damn, Mycroft…”

Gorgeous? Was it proper to want to ask his kink-sharer to consider taking their meal as take-away and continuing their dinner somewhere more private?

“It is very pleasing to be so tended to, my dear.”

“Hmmm… I won’t forget you said that.”

“I’m rather counting on it.”

“Christ, Mycoft… you are a wicked one, aren’t you?”

Was his dearest squirming in his seat? Adjusting possibly? Something that Mycroft desperately wanted to do, but avoided since that would destroy the moment.

“And is that agreeable to you?”

“Agreeable? Ok… it’s probably illegal what I’m thinking so… yeah. Agreeable, it is.”

Mycroft was extremely glad that what was and wasn’t legal was soon to be his choice and whatever his love chose to appreciate would most assuredly be on the correct side of the law.

“Excellent. Then shall we continue? We have quite a bit to finish and it shall be difficult enough as it is to make our film, what with the time it will also take to fully enjoy our conversation. And I do plan to fully enjoy it…”

There was a smoking jacket in Mycroft’s future. And a library with a fire. Whatever a man so debonair as he should enjoy with his partner in life.

“Me too. In fact, I already am. I’m really happy you agreed to come out with me, Mycroft. I just want you to know that. I was… I was a little worried that if I asked, you’d politely say no and that would be that. I mean… you’ve gotta have lots of blokes chasing after you like hounds after a fox and I’m sure they’ve got a lot more going on than me.”

Lots? Mycroft was quite adept at mathematics and knew well that zero could not be equated to lots no matter the complexity of the matrices one used for the analyses. But, his dearest believed him to be someone who would attract copious attention and that was stupendously flattering. However, that he also believed he would not be classed with Mycroft’s phantom admirers could not stand unaddressed.

“My social schedule is not as hectic as you might believe, Gregory. I believe the term undisturbed is an apt descriptor. And I cannot imagine a more congenial companion than the one at whom I am currently looking. I assure you, I am most satisfied.”
Satisfied was such a flaccid word for what Mycroft was truly feeling, however the more accurate terms were not suitable for polite conversation in a public space, though he did try to convey his full message with his eyes. Truthfully, he wasn’t sure he would be using them correctly, anyway. There was only so much one could glean from reading material pilfered from the unattended rooms of certain members of the male staff.

“Ok… that’s… that’s…”

“Gregory, you are going to worry your cuffs to threads. Here, have a sip of your lovely… beverage… and then, yes… nicely done. Now, take a large bite of your food and let your anxieties fade as the flavors waltz upon your tongue. There… isn’t that better?”

Mycroft could fluster the most confident, sordidly-skilled man in the universe. No one had to know the little tapping of his fingers against the table was his outlet for the overwhelming need to engage in a small victory celebration for his accomplishment. Such a tantalizing man to have as his consort.

“Yeah… sorry. Just… guess I was a little more worried… you know, forget it. Just forget it because it doesn’t matter, does it. HAH! You’re definitely tops, Mycroft. And you should be eating, too. I want something nice to watch while I chew.”

And that brilliant smile… apparently he could both fluster and bolster his love in a single swing of his sword. That would be a valuable tool as they moved through the years, joined hand in hand.

The remainder of their meal was relaxed, but Mycroft had added a note to his mental files that he should stay vigilant to ensure that his Gregory’s self-esteem never wavered because of their discrepant means. Whereas he had wealth, Gregory had worth and Mycroft was all too aware that individuals of worth were terribly rare and precious.

“Ready to go? If we leave now, we can get good seats, even after stopping for snacks.”

“Snacks?”

“Oh hell yeah. You have to have snacks when you watch a film.”

“Gregory, you just consumed a substantial quantity of pizza, how can you possibly have room for additional input?”

“It’s popcorn! You chew it up and poof!, all gets squashed down to little tiny pieces. Plenty of room for that! And don’t say you’re going to pass on popcorn, because I’m not going to let you get anything less than the full cinema experience.”

“Very well, I shall not argue with your spatial-relations assessment and simply trust in your architectural analysis of your insides. And yes, I am ready. This was most excellent, Gregory. Truly, I am very much enamored of your choice of restaurants.”

“Good place to take your brother, too. They love having kids in here, so long as they behave themselves.”

“That handily eliminates Sherlock. With a fresh audience, his behavior will no doubt be more theatrical than usual.”

“He does love to be the center of attention, doesn’t he?”
"The privilege of the youngest."

"And what’s the privilege of the oldest?"

"To provide the attention."

"And who does that for you?"

Mycroft opened his mouth to reply and realized he had no candidate to put forward.

"Hey, don’t worry. I’ll be happy to give you all the attention you want."

"All?"

"I expect you to be creative in what you want, too."

"Oh, another challenge… you are truly enticing, Gregory."

"It’s my middle name. Let’s go, and I promise not to break the traffic laws on the way."

"I am pacified by your promise. I would hate to end our time together this evening in handcuffs."

"Sure about that?"

Apparently Mycroft’s intended shared his taste in magazines.

"I shall rethink my position as we drive."

"Position?"

"Good heavens, Gregory! Into the car!"

The aroma was strange, his feet stuck slightly to the floor and Mycroft honestly hoped that he would never know just what was embedded in the fabric of the seats in which they were sitting. And it was the best location he had ever encountered. Dark, a single armrest to share, seats so closely spaced that it was nearly impossible for their legs not to contact each other and it really didn’t matter what was the film on offer since they would all look the same reflected in his Gregory’s eyes and that was where Mycroft’s gaze lingered far more often than the large screen he was facing.

"It’s pretty good, huh?"

Mycroft had no idea if his partner was speaking of the film, the atmosphere or the heavily salted and grease-wetted material sitting in a tub on his lap, but the answer would be the same, regardless.

"It’s very good."

"Told you, not matter what, there’s always room for popcorn."

Ship of conversation now righted.

"I’d say we could get you your own bucket, but I kinda like sharing."

A sentiment Mycroft heartily supported, especially since their hands had touched many times as
they simultaneously reached into tub. And it was not wholly his imagination that his life companion seemed to make that happen more often that statistically coincidental.

“I prefer to share, as well. Far more efficient, and collegial, that way.”

Said with the tiniest trace of his finger up one of his date’s as they again found both of their hands in the popcorn container. Let it never be said that Mycroft Holmes lacked the courage to engage boldly in any form of contest.

“Then we’ll always share. I’ve got no problem with that. And on that note, want a sip? Your throat must be dry from all that yummy salt.”

Vixen! The only word to describe his husband, with his roguish waggling of his soda. With the straw. That his lips had suckled.

“Yes, please.”

It had to be the most nutritionally bankrupt material Mycroft had ever let slide down his throat, but it was as the sweetest juice of the fruit of love since he was, by-proxy kissing his husband, and said husband was watching him with that shy grin that Mycroft felt all the way to his toes.

“Refreshing.”

“Yeah, it is…”

And of course, that shy smile had to wrap its own lips over the straw, just where Mycroft’s had been when the soda was returned.

“… very refreshing and perfect for sharing.”

“Quite. And I must, again, thank you, Gregory. This is a lovely experience. I am greatly enjoying myself.”

“Yes! I mean… that’s good. Yeah, really good. Me too, uh… too.”

And how especially lovely it was for Mycroft to watch his other half wriggle down in his seat and stretch out his legs, so that they just happened to lean more fully against Mycroft’s own. What was good for the goose was good for the gander, so Mycroft swallowed all of his instruction in posture and decorum and slid down, also, which allowed just the smallest bit of extra contact at that very lucky spot just above his knee, where his hand could easily rest tonight while lying in bed, slightly curled around his pillow, remembering this first date with his first, and only, love.

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The film ended with Mycroft not fully able to remember it all, but sufficiently informed to hold his own in a discussion of its merits with his companion, as they strolled to the car.

“Yeah, he’s pretty good. I like his films. I mean… they’re not anything classic or going to win any awards, but they’re fun. Ummm… do you have to be back early or do you want to do something else…”

Mycroft knew his wishes very well, but also his obligations. And he had an early morning for which to look forward and a brother who would take at least another hour of his night.

“I would very much like to share another activity, however, I have an appointment quite early
tomorrow morning for which I really should be well rested.”

“Oh… well, I understand that. Can’t let obligations slide, leads to bad habits. Don’t want to be blamed for giving Mycroft Holmes bad habits. Might get banned from the property.”

“Since I am generally the one responsible for any banning, I can assure you the hand of welcome shall always be extended. Along that line…”

Was it too soon? Would he appear overeager? Did he care? Mycroft decided the answer to the last question was the one of importance and that was a resounding no.

“I shall be unavailable for an outing until Friday, though I shall be reachable by phone and of course you may contact me at any time, but on Friday, which should be a pleasant day if the meterologists have read the weather trends properly…”

BABBLING! Why had David Niven forsaken him!

“… in any case… might you have time to, and desire to, of course, favor me with a visit? I believe I have a selection of films you might enjoy…”

Or would by the time Friday arrived.

“… and we could take an early walk, so that I may show you around and we could, perhaps, plan the course of our racing competition… naturally, if you are already committed to another activity…”

“No! I’ve got nothing planned and that sounds great! You sure your parents won’t mind?”

“I doubt your presence will be noticed by anyone except the staff and…”

Oh, dear lord.

“…Sherlock, of course. I had rather forgotten about him. Perhaps we should rethink this.”

“Oh, come on, Mycroft. It’ll be fine. Kid probably goes to bed early anyway.”

“Unfortunately, Sherlock is rather impervious to the siren song of sleep. And he will make his presence known most forcefully, I can assure you.”

“I’m sure he will, but he’ll get bored of us sitting around not playing with him and go off to… electrocute a condom or something.”

“Well, that’s a cheery thought. But, it is certainly not beyond the realm of possibility. So, does this mean you still wish to visit?”

“I’d love to. I think it’ll be a grand time.”

“Good. Then we shall meet again on Friday. I shall phone you with details?”

“Yeah, you’ve still my number, right?”

In a safe place where it could be touched each night as part of Mycroft’s new before-bed ritual.

“Of course. Now, shall we depart? I do hate to bring an end to our time, but…”

“No, I get it. Don’t worry. Anyway, we’ve had enough fun for one night, wouldn’t you say?”
Though it was very polite of his mate to be so accommodating, Mycroft knew it was simply not possible to have too much fun in one night with his darling Gregory.

“It has been an evening of great delight. And I am convinced the pattern will continue just as delightfully.”

“Yeah, I’ve got that feeling, too.”

It was quite unfair that no act of nature prevented their travel and the trip home passed far too quickly for Mycroft’s taste though his thoughtful spouse did his level best to maintain a speed at least only marginally above the posted legal limit. At least, when the car’s engine was finally cut, and Mycroft looked towards a particular bedroom window, it was blessedly dark.

“Here we are. I… I guess I’ve said this before, but I had a really nice time tonight, Mycroft. I can’t remember having as nice a night in… oh hell, I can’t even remember that far back.”

Mycroft turned in his seat to face his intended, who quickly matched his position and faced him in return.

“I second that perception. I have been absolutely enchanted by our time together. I greatly look forward to our next meeting.”

“Me too. Yeah… me too. It’s going to be amazing, I’m sure.”

“Oh quite. Quite. Yes…”

“Amazing…”

“Enthralling…”

This time there was no doubt who moved first as Mycroft found his arms held gently and his Gregory’s warm lips press against his. Not a brush, but a true press, one that Mycroft instinctively propelled him to reciprocate, much to his partner’s delight if the little sigh he heard could be believed. And, of course, the hands that ran down his arms and back up again that Mycroft could not allow to go unanswered, following quickly with his own hands draping lightly on his partner’s shoulders. With a small wriggle, said partner moved more fully into Mycroft’s embrace and increased the intensity of their kiss. Then, it was Mycroft’s turn to make small noises when a slight flick of his husband’s tongue touched his lips and he hesitated only slightly before taking his own small taste of his Gregory’s skin. Suddenly, pizza was not the best thing Mycroft had tasted that night. Or ever. And he wanted more. Since a Holmes did not shy away from taking what they wanted, Mycroft took an internal deep breath, parted his lips slightly and it wasn’t a small noise that accompanied his intended’s tongue accepting his invitation and sliding into his welcoming mouth.

And it was everything he’d hoped it would be. No, that wasn’t right. Mycroft could never have predicted how perfect it would be, how magnificent it would be to kiss his one true love. And feel his back stroked by strong and skilled hands. And use his own hands to touch his intended’s face and neck, reveling at the stubble on his chin. And it all felt so good! Not just physically, either, though that was incomparable, but… there was more. Something else that he couldn’t quite place, but all of him, inside and out, physical and not, felt happily locked in a beautiful and colorful bubble of joy. It had to be magic, because no earthly power in existence could possibly make him think such ridiculously sappy thoughts.
And the first thing that should have been tended to by the magical spell was to render him needless of oxygen, because it was painful to draw back slightly to catch a breath. The reward was the sight of his Gregory’s eyes, fiery and focused on him as if he were the most wonderful thing in the world and the next kiss drew on that fire to make Mycroft’s skin feel red hot and peppered with tingles and tremors that he committed faithfully to memory. Though it was ridiculous to believe he could ever forget one second of his Gregory’s touch. Or of the meticulous and dedicated exploration he was making of Mycroft’s mouth.

The next break for a breath nearly broke Mycroft’s spirit, as he watched his husband pull back entirely and hold him at arm’s length.

“Gregory? Did I… wasn’t I… it… good?”

“Wrong way around. You’re too good. If I don’t stop… God, Mycroft… is there anything you aren’t brilliant at?”

“I don’t understand? If you were enjoying it…”

“I’m not going to push you, Mycroft. I promised myself that. Take things too fast and make a rotten mess out of everything. And I could, too! I really, really could because I really, really don’t want to stop kissing you…”

“Then don’t.”

“Problem is, I’m not sure I’ll be able to stop there and I’m not going to treat my boyfriend like that.”

As soon as the words left his beloved’s lips two pairs of eyes flared wide and then it was Mycroft’s turn to let loose a wide and wicked grin.

“Do you mean that?”

“Yeah… I guess I do. Does that bother you?”

“It would only have bothered me had you taken back your words.”

“So… you and me. And you’re really ok with that?”

“Gregory, are you insinuating that I do not know my own mind?”

“No, but you’re a polite bastard.”

“Aren’t the two terms mutually exclusive?”

“That mouth of yours…”

“Something you want to do with it?”

“Don’t tempt me, Mycroft.”

“But it’s what bastards do.”

“Just a little one.”

“That will suffice.”
One day, Mycroft would be the one to take a kiss from his soon-to-be spouse’s lips, but he was in no hurry. Being the one taken was exquisitely sweet, especially for kisses that were achingly soft and tender as was this one.

“There. Now you need to get inside. You said you had a…”

The first projectile hit the car with a heavy thud and the view from Mycroft’s window went out of focus, shaking with the force of…

“Water balloons! That crazy kid’s firing…”

Another heavy thud and a large splash water covered the windshield.

“I am going to terminate his short, yet far-too-lengthy life…”

A third hit the roof with a loud splash and Mycroft quickly rolled down his window to yell at the dastardly hobgoblin who he now saw was sitting in his darkened window with a large basket at his side.

“Sherlock! How dare…”

…sploosh…

“Holy hell, he got you good didn’t he?”

“Sherlock’s aim is impeccable. Unusual for his kind since the weedy arms of goblins rarely muster anything approaching accuracy.”

“I’ll handle this.”

“Gregory, do not place yourself in the line of fire for me.”

“It’s my job. You just hang on.”

Another window rolled down, but only a hand extended outwards, confusing the young troll, who wasted precious ammunition on very unsatisfying fingers.

“Sherlock, you little prick! Stop that right now or you won’t get to help us out on Friday and so help me I mean that!”

“Gregory?”

“Hush, love. I know what I’m doing.”

Whether he did or didn’t mattered not a whit to Mycroft, who was far too busy preening at his new pet name.

“Explain yourself, molester!”

Mycroft ignored his husband’s ‘I told you so’ nod and contented himself with contemplating the design of a shipping container that would successfully contain his brother during his transport to Antarctica.

“Mycroft and me are going to do some exploring on Friday. Plot out a race course. Lots of… measuring and calculating and things. You let one more fucking water balloon fly and you won’t be allowed to come along.”
“Will there be construction?”

“Could be. Ramps or obstacles and stuff.”

“I do not do manual labor. I shall provide the design plans and you do as your kind do best. Follow orders.”

“And if you keep mouthing off like that, I’ll have you trussed up like a Christmas goose and you’ll dangle out that window until the bats make meal of you.”

“You would not dare!”

“Wanna bet? My kind take a more practical approach to making little brats behave.”

Mycroft could hear his brother’s irritation rending the night sky apart, but apparently his intended was immune to Sherlock’s ire and incantations.

“Very well. But I shall still expect that you will properly respect and execute any plans that I provide to you. And bats do not eat people! So my acquiescence is in no fashion based on your spurious threat.”

“Whatever you say, Sherlock. Now, we’re coming out and I swear that if you try something, you won’t be able to run fast enough to escape your trussing!”

“A Holmes does not break their word! At least not for something as boring and common as this. You may exit.”

“See, Mycroft… just have to speak his language.”

“You do know that he is simply going to plan a different assault for our next encounter.”

“Oh yeah, but if he launches his attack on Friday, he won’t have us pinned down like this. I know I can count on you to handle strategy for our team, right?”

It absolutely was unseemly to preen to this extent, but Mycroft felt the indulgence was warranted. His boyfriend, which was simply a spousal precursor, recognized his tactical forte.

“Without question.”

“Why aren’t you exiting!”

“Shall we, my dear.”

“After you.”

“Do I hear a bit of trepidation in your voice?”

“Hey, you’re already wet.”

“Logical. I heartily approve.”

__________

No further water bombs were hurled and Sherlock had disappeared into his bedroom by the time two figures, one wet and one dry, stood outside of Mycroft’s front entrance.
“So, Friday then.”

“Indeed. An early start, perhaps. I shall notify you in a most timely fashion so that you may organize your day.”

“That’s nice of you. But that’s going to be the most important part of my day, so everything else can go to hell.”

“You flatter me.”

“And you like it.”

“That I do. Well, I presume this is the point of the evening when I bid you goodnight.”

“Yeah, it is. Goodnight, Mycroft.”

“Goodnight, Gregory. Would it be an imposition to ask… just one more?”

“Well, since I won’t see you again until Friday, I guess one more is fine.”

And it was actually more than fine. Mycroft now had two data points to compare for the optimum situation for kissing. For example, standing with one’s partner allowed for fuller body contact and that was… a very good thing.

“There. Feel better?”

“Much. And I presume that I shall receive a suitable greeting when we meet on Friday?”

“You are insatiable, Mr. Holmes.”

“You are difficult to resist, Mr. Lestrade.”

“God, I’ve got to go. Sherlock catches me pinning you to the door, I’ll get more than a water balloon on my head.”

“Likely, though he would be retching with such vigor you would likely have time to make a successful escape.”

“Your right, good thinking. See ya, Friday, Mycroft.”

“Yes you will. Have a safe drive home. Please.”

“Yes, Mum.”

“Try that again as if you still want me to kiss you at any point in the future.”

“Yes, love.”

“Much better.”

__________

And, of course, Sherlock was waiting as soon as Mycroft opened the door and stepped inside the house.

“You allowed him to ravish you.”
“There was, perhaps, a small quantity of ravishment.”

“You are rumpled. And… oh, everything about you has been negatively compromised.”

“Not everything. Well, not yet.”

“I am not unaware of the meaning of that statement.”

“Much to my misfortune and lingering horror.”

“You are not as clever as you believe yourself to be.”

“Gregory appreciates my wit.”

“He appreciates your wantonness and accessibility as an outlet for his carnal lust.”

“And aren’t I lucky for it?”

“You are impossible!”

“No, that would be you. I am merely honest. My boyfriend finds me attractive, witty, interesting and desirable… I would say that makes me lucky.”

“Boyfriend? You have undertaken a commitment?”

“I have. We are newly… pre-engaged.”

“You fabricated that term.”

“It is, however, apt.”

“At least you are unable breed with him. There aren’t enough shops around to accommodate your litters of future employees.”

“And on that joyful note, I am away to bed.”

“No! You promised!”

Yes, he had.

“I stand corrected. To your bed, then. I presume you have your notebook ready.”

“I do. I have started a new section that will be dedicated to my research concerning your rather disgustingly amorous union with the shop boy.”

“Will you ever simply use his name?”

“Perhaps. But not tonight. Come along, it will take quite awhile to scribe all relevant details, I am certain.”

“Likely… and we can begin with pizza.”

“You consumed pizza?”

“I did and I shall be happy to tell you all, well, almost all about it.”
Apologies for the delay in updating and for the shortness of the chapter... many irons in many fires means a lot of burnt fingers...

But, as always, enduring gratitude for all the kind comments and kudos. I appreciate each one greatly!

“Oh no, not again.”

“Sherlock, I must dress myself every day, so your surprise is rather unfounded.”

“You dress yourself by plucking out the suit that is most close to your hand and that is the sum of your thought to attire.”

“Untrue, it is quite the work of a morning to choose the correct tie to make the proper statements and impressions that will be required of me for that particular day. I have not your luxury of trailing about the house wrapped in a bedsheet until it so suits you to adorn yourself with whatever garments take your fancy and are not unduly contaminated by your previous day’s experiments.”

“That does remind me... I require trousers. You will provide them immediately.”

“Shall I snap my fingers like some form of witch and command they appear?”

“You will contact that horrid man with the pins and tape and demand he arrive this afternoon for my fitting.”

“Did I perhaps miss your coronation, Your Highness?”

“I require trousers!”

“Are you entirely bereft of lower-body coverings? I think not for I see a pair hanging tenuously from your hips as we speak.”

“That is the problem. It is unacceptable that I must hold fast to my waistband in order to walk across the floor without becoming entangled in wayward cloth!”

Sherlock ate chocolate by the pound, lay about for days immersed in a book and the weight melted off of him like warmed butter. Mycroft wondered if it was possible to schedule an appointment with the Almighty to discuss his notion of fairness...

“I shall alert the tailor that you require his services and we may take tomorrow, if you wish, for your fitting and to choose your fabrics.”

“Today.”

“That is not possible.”
“You have a phone. The tailor is not deceased. Today.”

“My day is already scheduled, Sherlock, as you well know. Gregory is arriving today for our second assignation and there is no time for your tailoring in addition to my planned activities. Tomorrow will be more than acceptable.”

“I shall lose my pants in front of the shop boy!”

“Oh, are they overly loose also?”

“…yes.”

And he did look particularly distressed, which confused Mycroft terribly for goblins were not known for their modesty. At least, this one was not.

“Tomorrow, Sherlock. And I assure you that if you look carefully, you will find pants and trousers that will not pool around your ankles. If you are truly concerned, simply stay within your room today. You have a wealth of entertainment in which to indulge and…”

“No. You must be chaperoned.”

“That is quite unnecessary.”

And quite undesired. However would Mycroft and his consort be able to give into their longing passions with a shrieking mandrake tailing their heels?

“I believe it is. He is rough and lustful and your virginity cannot fall victim to his uncontrollable urges.”

Oh, but it could fall victim to both of their uncontrollable urges if Mycroft had any say in the matter.

“I can assure you that Gregory’s intentions towards me are decidedly honorable.”

Unfortunately.

“You are a fool. The lower class exist solely for procreation and he will attempt to exercise his primal instincts whether he can get you with child or not!”

“I do believe your hyperbole is increasing exponentially as you age. I fear for us all when you reach your majority.”

“As you should, for I will no longer be held hostage to your standards of propriety or grasp on my pursestrings.”

“We all have our captors, Sherlock… be happy that those are your only ones.”

Sherlock’s snort of disgust was becoming quite memorable. With a bit more practice it would be truly impressive.

“You will still be chaperoned. And I will let the peasant know in no uncertain terms that he will be continuously under surveillance, whether he is aware of it or not!”

How sweet that Sherlock did not conceive that Mycroft had already taken steps towards that end. It would not do for his husband to be caught unawares by a miscreant or over-arduous admirer and be without help at the ready. And the photographs he had acquired would be wonderfully candid.
additions to their wedding album.

“Gregory seems kindly disposed to you, so I would not imagine that he would object to your scrutiny, even if you scribed his behaviors in your observational journal.”

“And I shall! There must be some form of evidence for the prosecution when we find your raped and pillaged cadaver in the shallow grave he pre-dug in anticipation of your downfall.”

“And you are quite sure I cannot interest you in a career as a novelist?”

“Writing is for those who choose not to experience life. They are of the weakest water and I shall have nothing to do with them.”

“Then may your life be free from the attentions of the scribes. Now, if you would kindly excuse me, I do have a persona to affect and I believe that I require a shave.”

“The only thing you have to shave is your axillary region, which has become almost shrub-like, when compared to the infantile smoothness of both your face and nether regions. If you hope to impress shop boy with your masculinity you shall meet with defeat, unless he is a paedophile, in which case I shall take to arming myself because I am far more sensually pleasing than you and I assure you my virginity will remain inviolate!”

Mycroft tried not to sneak a look under his arms and gauge the veracity of Sherlock’s claims, more for fear that the sight of a raging ginger bush would dishearten him into needing bed rest.

“Gregory has no interest in your virtue, Sherlock and since I have achieved my sixteenth birthday and the age of consent, unremarked by you which I most appreciate, you shall not slander his interest in me with your insulting terminology. Now, please run along and find some other diversion to occupy your attention.”

“No. This is, by far, more entertaining than any other options I might possess. And you are now becoming flushed, which is nicely highlighting your axillary hair into resembling finely shredded carrot. Shop boy will surely swoon from desire; provided he has lagomorph genes.”

Mycroft could not stop the image of a rabbit version of his intended leaping into his head and decided that his Gregory’s costume for their first fancy-dress ball was already decided.

“Sherlock, if I offer to pay you, will you simply leave me alone to dress?”

“You do like to hear me say ‘no,’ don’t you? I must approve your attire for proper modesty. And attempt to forestall your humiliation at the hands on your own sadly lacking sense of color, style or ability to drape your clothes properly from your bloated body.”

“Then judge silently, if you please.”

Mycroft stared at the wealth of clothing he had accumulated and found not one thing that he felt confident wearing for his day with his beloved. And it had to be perfect. Their first date as a pre-wed couple was such that the songwriters would forever commemorate it with ballads of nearly spiritual grandeur and he could not allow this second one to diminish their momentum. And it was all the more important since this would be of his planning. He must do his duty to his husband properly or his shame would be catastrophic and he would stare in agony as his groom walked away in disgust, never to agree to share his touch again. And now he was facing a bounty of garments all of which mocked him as surely as the goblin changeling that was currently reveling in his ineptitude.
“Silence is to mask the stupidity of the pathetic, so I shall not comply. But, I shall assist for it amuses me to do so. I will return.”

The look in Sherlock’s eyes did not fill Mycroft with anything but dread, but at least those eyes were no longer glaring at him in disappointment. Now… oh yes, back to the mockery of fashion…

“Yeah, it’s Greg.”

“Ugh… such a lackluster name.”

“Sherlock! How’s it going little man? Keeping your brother on his toes?”

“His toes would snap like dried twigs if they were forced to bear his mammoth-like weight.”

“We’ve talked about this, Sherlock.”

“You talked about it and I ignored you.”

“Is there something you wanted?”

“The mammoth, which had reddish hair so the comparison is fully appropriate, is having difficulty dressing himself and becoming distracted by the flamingly-bright hair that is consuming the skin beneath his arms much like a flesh-eating virus. You must arrive now and put me out of my misery.”

“Since none of that makes any sense I’ll assume you’re just talking to hear the sound of your own voice and have me pay attention to you.”

“I have discussed the subject of your attention with Mycroft and, while he does assure me you are not a paedophile, I warn you now that I shall not relax my guard for an instant.”

“Good to know you’re taking precautions. Now, really… is there something you wanted?”

“I made myself quite clear. Mycroft has been dithering for an hour in front of the horde of clothing he has purchased for his indecorous escapades with you and, while I find his plight highly amusing, the floorboards are beginning to sag and he shall soon find himself crashing through the ceiling of the library, which will render it useless until the debris, and his corpse, are removed. That could take days, with the concomitant repairs… It is unacceptable!”

“He got new clothes because of me?”

“An entire wardrobe devoted to your dalliance.”

“Wow… that’s…”

“Nauseating.”

“I was going to say flattering.”

“Because you lack intelligent perspective.”

“You’re going to lack the ability to sit for a day or two if you don’t keep a civil tongue in your head.”
“Spanking me would only enhance your reputation as a paedophile, so it is a poorly-conceived strategy.”

“Sherlock, why don’t you go out and play or something?”

“Because I must observe every moment of his inevitable disaster and record it for posterity.”

“Look, Mycroft said to show up at one and that’s what I’m going to do.”

“He only told you that because he wanted to visit his food trough before you arrived and did not want you to witness the feeding frenzy.”

“That does it. You are forever banned from the shop and the chocolate that I was going to bring by today is going straight to my neighbors’ kids.”

“NO!”

“Then you apologize for saying rude things about your brother.”

“Ummmmm….”

“Sherlock…”

“I’m calculating!”

“Three…two…one…”

“FINE! I apologize for saying things that, while entirely truthful, could be considered rude by some of the diminished strata of society, such as that which you occupy.”

“That was pitiful.”

“Yet it satisfied your criteria. You did not request a sincere apology.”

“I’ll remember that for next time. Look, you go and just help Mycroft get dressed. Be a good boy for once and give your brother a hand. I’m sure he’d appreciate it if you actually were nice to him for a change.”

“He would ask if I had been abducted and replaced by a doppelganger.”

“Yeah, that’s probably true. Ok, then just go and not make things worse. I’ll be there right on time.”

“With my chocolate?”

“Unless you call and be a little brat again.”

“What if I call and am not, as you say, a brat?”

“Then it’s yes for chocolate.”

“I believe I understand your rules.”

“Good job. Now go, I have to get ready, too.”

“I don’t know why. The mamm…Mycroft would be just as happy if you showed up nude.”
Lestrade was more than happy to have that little image in his head. Especially if Mycroft showed up just as naked to answer the door when he got there.

“Yeah, but you’d start retching and I’m already worried about you getting dehydrated, as it is.”

“Hmmm…. you are likely correct. Then please arrived clothed. And I shall be chaperoning, so your clothes will remain on your body.”

Of course. Well, probably. Mostly, at least. Can’t fault a bloke if it’s hot and he has to take off his shirt to stay cool…

“It’s a deal. Now will you please go and help Mycroft?”

“Oh very well. You shall not be tardy, correct? It would be very bad form to arrive tardy to an assignation.”

“Aww… are you anxious to see me?”

“Perish the thought. If you are late, I shall have to endure the heartbroken mooing of a great ginger cow and I have no earplugs.”

“Bye, Sherlock.”

“I have already deleted you from my mind.”

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“The peasant will not be convinced to arrive early and put an end to your indecision. I did try, but my logic flew well above his ability to comprehend.”

Mycroft dropped the eighteenth shirt he had tried on, only to remove, and stared at his brother in horror.

“What did you do?”

“I called your defiler and attempted to persuade him to forego your instructions and make himself present immediately, but he refused. Not even the knowledge that you were waffling like a confused terrier over your outfit could force him to accede.”

Mycroft dropped heavily on the bed next to his personal demon and laid his head in his hands.

“Yes, you should be upset. He is a bounder if he will not relieve your distress over your grotesque appearance.”

“I am going to kill you. I am going to evict your soul from your body. Your flesh shall be feasted upon by the hounds of hell and I shall deliver it in silver bowls to their lair personally!”

“Drama does not become you. If it helps restore your spirits, we did discuss your freakishly tangerine body hair and he did not immediately vomit.”

Sherlock was launched several inches into the air as Mycroft threw himself backwards onto the bed to stare despairingly at the ceiling.

“He is going to divorce me.”

“Likely, but it shall not be today. He was adamant that he would arrive at the appointed time,
so his opportunity to flee for his safety was forfeited.”

He was most certainly arriving to return the wedding ring that Mycroft had hoped to soon bestow unto him.

“Why, Sherlock… why would you do this to me?”

“Test the strength of his commitment to you? I would think it would be obvious.”

“You hate me.”

“Quite the contrary. You are very useful to me and if he dissolves your ability to function because of some cruelty or slight, I shall be highly inconvenienced.”

Mycroft cut his eyes over to look at his brother, whose own eyes were fixed firmly to stare straight ahead. Only Sherlock could say that he cared and make it sound dismissive and insulting. And Mycroft was not sure he would ever want that to change.

“Thank you for your commitment to your own comfort.”

“It is my pleasure. Now, please clothe yourself in some fashion so my eyes are not permanently corrupted. Shop boy will be here soon and you must not look more ragged than will he.”

Ragged… silly Sherlock, confusing that term with ‘rugged.’

“I shall endeavor to do my best. Why don’t you begin to return my discards to their former position in the line and I shall draw out a few more choices to consider. Offer your opinion for each.”

“Did you think I would not do so anyway?”

“No, but this way I feel as if you are doing my bidding, and that is a very gladdening thing.”

“No.”

“You appear ill.”

“Do you have a joint disease?”

“AAAAHHH!!!”

Apparently, Mycroft’s efforts to affect a nonchalant pose were not very effective.

“I do not think we have been bred for casualness.”

“No, that would be the peasant’s bailiwick.”

“Sherlock…”

“No, that would be Lestrade’s bailiwick.”

“Better. Now…”

Two Holmes males jumped with the knock at the door but only one shrieked. Each would forever
“Ah, Gregory. Exactly on time… how admirable.”

“Waiting behind the door long?”

The laughter of goblins could rend the fabric of space and time.

“I meant you, Sherlock.”

Goblin apoplexy should be filmed for entertainment purposes.

“Here you go, this should help.”

Two large bars of chocolate were dangled before the glowing eyes and pointed teeth of the creature from hell who snatched them away with supernatural speed.

“And this is for you, love.”

Mycroft’s toes curled delectably as his most adored leaned in and pressed a warm kiss to his lips, then another to his cheek before he pulled back and flashed a very wide and very pleased smile.

“Been waiting to do that.”

His husband had obviously been distraught at their separation. Mycroft made a mental note to contact their solicitor and direct him to contract a reputable agent to start the search for his and his beloved’s first home. Something small to start, perhaps… no more than four or five bedrooms…

“And I have been waiting to receive it. I am very glad you are here, Gregory. Do come in and I will show you our humble home.”

“How precious that his love’s reservoir of poise was not quite as deep as his own, because Mycroft would forever have the pleasure of seeing that shy blush spread across his Gregory’s cheeks. Though it would not be appropriate for their wedding portrait, a private portrait perhaps would be commissioned for his own study of his Gregory wearing his beautiful, bashful blush.

“Absolutely.”

“I shall be watching for any instance of theft, pea… Lestrade.”

“Well, that’ll keep you busy won’t it? I’ll see if I can nick an ashtray or something without you catching me.”

“Pfft… your pilfery will not go unremarked.”

“We’ll see. Mycroft? What’s first?”
Mycroft wondered if was appropriate to hold his soulmate’s hand as they explored his home and decided that it was very appropriate. It would do for the staff to fully understand the nature of their relationship since some of them might be hired away to the employ of the newlywed couple.

“My lab!”

“Sherlock, we are not…”

“Come on, Mycroft. Let’s check out the little man’s playroom.”

“It is not a ‘playroom’ you insipid cretin. It is my laboratory, where I conduct important research.”

“I’m sure the world will thank you.”

“Doubtful. Humanity is an ungrateful beast.”

“Price of genius, I guess.”

“That is the first intelligent thing you’ve ever said.”

“Had to happen sometime.”

Hand-in-hand was truly the way to promenade, as Mycroft quickly learned. Feeling the heat of his husband’s palm against his, the regular squeeze of his fingers as a reward for a witty turn of phrase or a particularly effective use of romantic language… the ease with which he could be drawn into a quick and furtive kiss when Sherlock’s attention was otherwise occupied.

“And this is my microscope. Do not touch it.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Sherlock, Gregory and I are going to view the rest of the house and grounds now. Why don’t you stay here and examine the pollen samples you had the gardener collect for you?”

“Because you would be unsupervised and it would be more than your hand that would be covered in his flesh.”

In a perfect world… yes.

“Then do try to be seen and not heard.”

“I am not a vase of flowers.”

“No, for they at least are pleasing to the eye. Gregory, the library, I think, shall be next.”

“Sorry, little man. Gotta do what my boyfriend says.”

“I can see who shall dominate in your relationship. Perhaps I shall get Mycroft a leash and collar to fit you with.”

“Sherlock!”

“Woof woof.”
Eyebrows should not be arousing, but trust his Gregory to have the skill to waggle them in a seductive manner.

“Oh Gregory, how silly. Your neck is far too attractive to cover.”

“Not even with love bites?”

“Well, that is definitely a matter of negotiation.”

Which Mycroft would gladly and quickly lose. In fact, it was not with a small amount of eagerness that the idea took hold in his mind… a visible mark of claim on his Gregory’s beckoning neck… delicious.

“Oh, there he goes. You should get the lad a bucket to carry around, Mycroft, for all the retching he does.”

“I’m sure it’s good for his constitution somehow. Bolstering his immune system, possibly. Shall we?”

The time passed almost without notice as Mycroft escorted his intended through the house and around the grounds, stopping finally at the garage. The very large garage.

“Oh, are we where I think we are?”

“You shall be pleased, I hope.”

“I’m already pleased, Mycroft. Anything else is just a bonus.”

Said with another squeeze to his hand that made Mycroft’s knees weak. Rather than spoil the moment, he simply pulled open the garage door and walked his wide-eyed consort inside.

“Oh god… is that a…”

“Most certainly.”

“And that’s…”

“Quite. There is another a little further down, if you notice.”

“Ah… no, that’s not…”

“But it is. Rather difficult to drive on the estate roads… a bit too low to the ground.”

“Oh crap… you’ve got a…”

“Yes, I do. And it is a marvelous creature. Would you like to drive it?”

“Do you mean it?”

“I say nothing I do not mean, my dear.”

“Oh man… this could be a very good or a very bad thing.”

“At least we shall find out together.”
“You’ll really trust me with the keys?”

“I trust you with everything, Gregory. A automobile is a paltry test of faith.”

“And I shall be observing!”

“No, Sherlock. You will be staying here.”

“Unacceptable! I must not let him out of my sight!”

“I think Sherlock’s got a crush on me.”

The death scene in any theatrical performance ever given could not have compared to Sherlock’s version of a despairing departure from the mortal coil.

“Quick, before he reincarnates.”

“We shall not be long, Sherlock. Then we will return for a slower promenade around the property. On that one, you may attend.”

“Very well. I shall use my time organizing my notes of today. I am already discerning very troubling patterns.”

“Of course you are. Gregory, are you ready for our jaunt?”

“Ready, willing and able.”

“Oh, I do very much like the sound of that.”

“And it’s not limited to cars either.”

“I told you. Very troubling patterns.”
If Mycroft had any illusions about his Gregory being addicted to speed, it was quickly laid to rest on their little jaunt in a very expensive vehicle with a very large engine. However he did have to admit to an exhilaration at being able to experience an approach to light speed without having to actually enlist for astronaut training. Fortunately, his soon-to-be spouse was an excellent driver and made not a single misstep as they covered the distance between the estate and the North Pole in the half-hour they tore through the estate roads, when the car was finally slowed and brought to a stop near a very large tree that watched over an open field with small flowers and tall grasses. As before, Mycroft watched amusedly as his mate flew out of the driver’s side door and raced around the front of the car to open Mycroft’s door and escort him out of the car.

“Have you grown weary, my dear? I admit to being quite attracted to your level of focus and purpose while piloting our vehicle, but that expenditure of energy must have been draining.”

“Nah, just wanted to stretch my legs and get a little time alone with you. Couldn’t really talk much while I was driving and couldn’t let that last for long. Want to sit for awhile? Maybe under the tree?”

A romantic interlude? There was no way under the heavens that Mycroft was going to refuse the offer. A respite under the oak… it was the perfect title for the novel he would one day write about their epic romance…

“I would be delighted. And you chose an excellent spot for our moment to refresh.”

Mycroft followed his Gregory’s smile towards the sprawling tree and was quite proud of himself that he did not betray any hesitation about taking a seat in what amounted to the bare bones of nature. Dirt and he were not really on speaking terms…

“Wow… that’s really all I can say. No, that’s not true, I could say something really inappropriate, but I’m not sure it would say what I feel better than wow.”

Though Mycroft would dearly love to hear whatever inappropriate thing his intended ever wanted to say.

“I am glad you are enjoying yourself, Gregory. I am very glad, indeed.”

“Enjoying myself… seriously, the only thing that’s gotten me harder than that car is… well, he was riding in the car with me. Oh god, that was a forward thing to say, wasn’t it? Oops. Sorry, Mycroft.”

Sorry? For the most heart-penetrating thing anyone had ever said to him. For the perfect words to lay to rest his self-doubts. For the most arousesing comment one spouse could make to another? Their marriage would ever be blessed with a bounty of both emotional and physical love and the adoring words to describe each and every act of affection.
“I believe I can forgive your boldness if you demonstrate, a bit, the extent of your passion.”

“Oh… I think I can agree to that.”

What was it about his Gregory’s kisses that could simultaneously invigorate and relax? Arouse and soothe? A stunning set of contradictions that Mycroft knew he could spend a lifetime analyzing, never to come to a firm understanding of the complexities of his lifemate. And sitting here, under the tree, he was so free to move, to intensify their embrace and feel his Gregory’s eager response. It was with a blissful sigh that Mycroft allowed himself to be shifted so he could he nudged downward to lay on the ground with his consort’s body lying beside and slightly astride him and… well, Gregory had not been exaggerating about certain things, had he?

And, in no manner could heaven be as pleasant as the feel of his beloved trailing his kisses downward to grace his throat, the tiniest flickers of tongue stroking and tasting the skin and Mycroft was keenly aware that his body was rapidly achieving the same state of excitement as his fiancé. He had never before contemplated a tryst under a ceiling of nothing but sky, but now he could not imagine a more beautiful place to share his love with his Gregory. And how easy it was to run his hands across a broad and muscular back that was his now… which reminded him…

With a slight heave, Mycroft turned the tables and had his love in the position he had occupied so that he could finally take kisses and… oh, this was a heavily stimulating experience. This was *addictively* enjoyable… especially with the small, whimpering noises his husband was making in response. Gregory was so lean, muscular and purely masculine… to have him this way was positively sinful. And there was no stopping Mycroft’s body shuddering down to his toes when his intended’s fingers found their way beneath his shirt to stroke a patch of bare skin near the base of his spine. The less be said of the growl he made, though, the better, though it did nicely complement the attack he made on his beloved’s throat seeking the perfect spot to place his territorial mark.

“N…not visible.”

Unacceptable!

“But that is rather the point, my dearest. You are *mine* and the world must see and recognize that fact.”

“Mum will… she’ll b…be angry.”

Mycroft let his tongue simply caress a moment while he thought. If his mother-in-law became angry, she could withhold his fiancé’s presence until their wedding day and that was something he could not bear. She might also wear a hideous dress to their nuptials and spoil the photographs to take petty revenge… as always, his mate’s cautions were well founded. A quick tug of his Gregory’s collar exposed a very acceptable expanse of flesh at the base of his shoulder where it joined his love’s neck and Mycroft set about branding a vibrant and beautiful mark into the skin.

And was it a joy to give that luscious skin a nip when the body it sheathed writhed under his attentions? It was. It very much was. And his Gregory’s soft moaning of his name verified that he found it a joy, also.

When his mark was well and truly placed and glowing brightly, Mycroft turned his attention back to his lover’s… could he say lover, now? He *had* left a love mark and there was no questioning his boundless love for the man laying beneath him, surrounded by cool green grass and freckles of sunlight that had slipped between the leaves of the overhanging limbs, but some might quibble the semantics… regardless, he turned his attention back to his Gregory’s lips and climbed further on top of the firm, warm body, nearly gasping at the heat that flooded through him from the more
intimate position. So very easy now to take his kisses and make more of his Gregory available for worship...

“S…slow down… slow down, Mycroft… please…”

It was the ‘please’ that cut through Mycroft’s brain like a saber and he pulled back slightly, only then realizing that he was not partially on top of his spouse, but had the man pinned beneath him. And, though his subconscious was rather smug that there may have been a certain amount of rather lustful grinding occurring, he felt a new heat rise up, this one not as pleasurable as the one he had been enjoying...

“Oh Gregory… I am so sorry… I apologize profusely… I…”

“Hey, it’s ok. Really… it’s ok. And see? I haven’t let you go, so I’m not wanting you to stop or get off or anything… just a little slower. I don’t want you to think I don’t like you, Mycroft, because I do. I do a lot. And that’s why… it’s like I said the other day… I don’t want to push you or go too fast with this. I’ve seen it all the time. Jump in, its zero to sex right away and… this is going to sound funny coming from me, but it’s like driving a car really fast. You make the tiniest mistake, do the littlest thing wrong and it’s a fucking crash and burn. But, you go slower and if something happens, you can still hold on. Keep the wheels on the road, even if it’s bumpy for awhile. Building a relationship, you know? That’s what I want and I don’t want to do anything to cock that up or show you anything but the respect you deserve.”

Mycroft wanted to weep. His intended was the most articulate, noble and romantic man in the universe. He understood perfectly, too, when put in those terms. Allies and confidantes were groomed slowly, and his marriage was far more important than any of those trivial connections. And his Gregory was correct… he had yet to be released to pushed away.

“I believe I fully comprehend your point of view, my dear.”

Reassurance. His spouse would be comforted with some token that demonstrated his words would be taken seriously and wishes would be honored. It was the duty of a husband to always provide his mate with a sense of well-being and contentment.

“And I shall acquiesce to whatever timetable you feel is appropriate for our courtship. I…”

Forthrightness! It has yet to fail you!

“I have no experience in this particular area of life and gladly rely on your guidance and foresight to steer true our relationship.”

So delicious was the groan that slid from between his Gregory’s lips that Mycroft was almost too caught up in the sound to notice the tightening of the arms around him and the dip of eight fingers ever-so-slightly beneath the waistband of his trousers. Almost.

“Oh god, Mycroft… are you telling me I’m your first?”

“Are you pleased with the admission?”

“That’s not the right word. Ecstatic… mind-blown…”

“You enjoy the knowledge that your kisses are the first I’ve known…”

“That’s…”
“That your hands are the first on my skin…”

“Mycroft…”

“Your heat is the first to warm me… urk.”

Mycroft found himself flipped and staring up into deep brown eyes that burned with an intense inner glow.

“You’ll go my pace?”

“Of course…”

“You’ll let me do this right?”

“I will…”

“You’ll tell me anytime you feel uncomfortable or pressured or anything like that?”

“Instantly…”

Those glowing eyes were suddenly very close to his and Mycroft felt just the faintest brush of lips against his own.

“Then I’ll be your first in everything. First to let you know what it feels like when someone else jerks you off. First to suck you down and taste you. Every drop of you. First to take you as far as you want to go and first to give you a body to try all of that out on for yourself. When the time is right, I’ll give you all the firsts you want.”

Mycroft’s mind had never turned off before. Never blanked to the point where thought just didn’t exist. All he knew was blissful adoration of the man with whom he would spend his life and who was turning his body inside out with the sweetest, most loving kiss in the history of kisses. Then…

…he was flipped back to lie on top of his precious spouse who was grinning up at him and replacing his arms around Mycroft’s waist.

“Now, where were we? You know, I’ve got two sides to my neck…”

And, again, there was that blessedly empty brain that acted from its primal center to set about marking his mate… below the collar line. No mention would be made of that fact that there was some chance that more than one mark was laid. And there would be no admission of his own pleasure at receiving his own set of marks… at least not in words that a linguist could decipher…

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“WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?”

Sherlock raced over to the car as soon as the engine was cut and stood glaring at the disheveled pair that poured themselves out of their seats, large, red-lipped and slightly sheepish smiles plastered across their faces.

“Exactly where I told you we would be, Sherlock.”

“You were fornicating!”

Mycroft ignored his intended’s cough to focus completely on his blazingly agitated brother.
“No, that was not part of our outing.”

Sherlock stalked a circle around his targets much like a lion encircling a pair of dazed gazelles.

“Then explain your debauched state! And that… ruffian! He drips with traces of his sexual abandon.”

“I believe you are pointing to a piece of grass.”

“On his back!”

“I daresay I carry evidence of our commune with nature, also. Oh look, here’s some dirt on my trouser leg for you to examine.”

“Do not make light of this! You have been days satisfying your lustful desires and I have been bored! It is inexcusable!”

“We have been out of your sight for… oh, dear, one and one half hours, most of which had found you taking advantage of my absence to rummage through my bedroom and begin to take apart the engine of the Bugatti.”

“Inmaterial. I had to occupy my abandonment in some form lest I become insane from an atrophying mind.”

“Come on, Sherlock. We said we’d be back soon and we are. Can’t begrudge us a little time together, can you? When you get someone of your own, we promise to repay the favor. Oh god, he’s on the ground again. Really, do you think he’s got a tumor or something?”

“Doubtful, but he does need to cultivate new performances to demonstrate his hysteria.”

“Yeah, getting a little stale. Losing the impact.”

“You two are insufferable! And are not paying due attention to my plight!”

Mycroft caught his dearest’s eye and they shared a smile before giving in to Sherlock’s mania.

“Alright, Sherlock. How about this? You were kind enough to let Mycroft and me have some private time and now it’ll be the Three Musketeers for the rest of the day. How does that sound?”

“Alexandre Dumas’s storytelling is clichéd and trite.”

“Ok then, you’re on your own.”

“WAIT! I did not say that the foundational tale completely lacked merit. I shall, of course, accompany you. I allowed you to bypass my surveillance once and the results were disastrous. Were Mycroft not male, he would already be an unwed mother. Of a simpleton’s child. I shall not make that mistake again.”

“You give a lot of thought to our love life, little man.”

“I must, for neither of you seem capable of properly evaluating the consequences of your poor decisions. What if you did marry?”

Mycroft wondered why the goblin prince would dare to use the term ‘if’ for his soon-to-be taking of Gregory’s hand in marriage.
“Sherlock…”

“If you marry, Mycroft will be forced to follow you to your hut according to your tribe’s traditions and I shall be left here alone! He shall be grubbing for roots and tubers in a loincloth, your deficient child bound to his back with lengths of crude, hand-woven cloth, while you scrape a meager living from the shells and coconuts you collect. And I shall have no chocolate!”

The idea of owning their own island, purely for holiday purposes, suddenly seemed quite appealing to Mycroft, who scripted a mental reminder to direct their solicitor to make appropriate inquiries. It would not be amiss to purchase both their first home and their first recreational property with a single transaction. He would simply have to be vigilant that Sherlock did not start to purchase books on boat building…

“Look, Sherlock… I’ll make you a deal. You stop obsessing over Mycroft and my relationship and I’ll do my best not to satisfy my lust for him when you’re watching.”

Sherlock began to launch into a violent round of retching, then felt an uncharacteristic bout of self-consciousness with the pair of eyes watching him, choosing instead to wrap his hands around his throat to choke himself into a state of, he felt, very realistic death.

“I believe that is his stamp of agreement, my dear. Sherlock, when you resurrect, we shall take a more leisurely drive for which you are invited to accompany us. Do you have your notebook?”

Sherlock shot off of the ground as if it had been electrified.

“No! I do not. You will wait for me or the consequences will be dire.”

One waifish creature from the center of Hell raced off as fast as bat-like wings could carry him and Mycroft leaned back into the chest of the man who had come up behind and wrapped him in two powerful arms.

“When he hits puberty, it’s going to be like an atom bomb exploding.”

“I shall show you our emergency shelter, if it would amuse you.”

“Is that for locking him in or out?”

Mycroft was proud that he was able to laugh and purr simultaneously as his husband took their moment of solitude to return his lips to Mycroft’s cheek and neck.

“He’s a good kid, though. You’ve done a great job with him, love.”

Praise from his cherished one was as sunshine and water for a flower. If this was all the nourishment he would receive in this life, he would thrive…

“Thank you, Gregory. Sherlock deserves so much and… I do try.”

“And succeed. He’ll be a fine man because of you. Now, any ideas where we’re going to be exploring?”

And Mycroft could only pray that was the truth. Sherlock was such a special child and there was no one, really… no one but him… to help his brother come to terms with his uniqueness and help him find ways to work it to his advantage.

“I do, actually. If you are still sufficiently addled to choose to challenge me to a test of driving
ability, I have some very good ideas about where to lay our competitive ground. And I believe I hear our note-taker ready to rejoin us and scribe our plans.”

One last kiss was taken from Mycroft’s skin before Sherlock loudly announced his return to the garage, then hissed his annoyance at the sight of his brother resting in the arms of his personal chocolate provider. The retrieval of his notebook had given Sherlock time to think, however, and he had used the time well. The peasant was not an altogether loathsome creature. Unlike so many, he was not cruel or cutting. He had yet to call Sherlock a name out of spite or to hurt. The shop boy did not avoid him or push away his company. It had, therefore, been decided. If Mycroft chose to marry the simian, Sherlock would move with them to their new home. Mycroft could go about his tedious business and Lestrade would be left free to act as a manservant for the needs of the other Holmes to whom their residence would belong. It would be a mutually-beneficial relationship. The shopkeeper would continue to be productive to society, well…at least to one member of society… and, in turn, he would receive the largesse that only his social superiors could provide. The fact that Lestrade was not an unpleasant individual with whom to associate was not at all relevant to Sherlock’s analysis.

“I am prepared! There will be no touching of any body part while I am presiding over your behavior!”

“Poorly negotiated, Sherlock. You must seek a compromise for you know well that we will not agree to such a draconian edict.”

“Very well. I will not object to the holding of hands. It is relatively inoffensive and, beyond Mycroft’s inevitable clammy perspiration, no body fluids can be exchanged.”

“I believe we can offer agreement, at least for the remainder of the afternoon. However, once the sun sets, our negotiations will begin again.”

“That is acceptable. By then I shall probably be sufficiently bored by your presence that I shall spend the evening seeking a knife of proper quality to open my veins to bleed out unto death onto your bed.”

“Mycroft, you got extra sheets?”

“A number of sets, so I believe we are quite happy with your decision, Sherlock.”

“Buffoons… I am surrounded by buffoons.”

“But we’re buffoons with car keys, so you want to get in the car or what?”

“If I must. I shall ride in the back so I may observe unnoticed.”

“Does that mean you’re going to keep quiet?”

“Of course not, but I shall be less obtrusive, which is necessary for an objective study.”

“There you have it. Learn something new every day. That’s what I like about you, Sherlock… always got something new to teach me. Mycroft, ready to go?”

Mycroft looked at his intended and thought that perhaps he was not the only one who could help Sherlock grow into a fine man.

“I am, my dear. We shall take the Jaguar, I believe. Spacious enough for our passenger and less inclined to reach the supersonic speeds its driver prefers.”
“You know you love it.”

Mycroft knew well what he loved, and it was any car at any speed as long as he rode with his Gregory at his side.

“As with everything you do. Onwards, then… we have a great deal of daylight left and much planning to do.”

“That I shall direct!”

“Of course, Sherlock… we could not do this without you.”
Thank you all so much for your support and encouragement! I am very grateful for all of the wonderful comments and kudos with which I have been blessed...

“Are your eyes on the road? We nearly adopted a tangential path during that curve and I for one am not pleased by the idea of becoming closely acquainted with a tree, fence or wayward sheep!”

“Didn’t even skid, Sherlock, so settle back down with your little doodle pad…”

“My observation journal!”

“Yeah, yeah… so what have you observed?”

“Beyond the fact that you should not be allowed to drive anything more complicated than a bicycle with two flat tires? I have observed that Mycroft cannot keep his hands to himself and has been writing ‘Mycroft Loves Gregory’ on your knee over and over again…”

“SHERLOCK!”

“He asked! I could not lie, that would be dishonorable!”

“Gregory… I…”

“At least I did not tell him about the hearts you were drawing or how you were practicing signing your married name. And it should be Lestrade-Holmes! We are much higher in status, so our surname should take the second position.”

“Aw, Mycroft… here I was thinking you were just giving me a little feel-up.”

“Pay no attention to Sherlock. He is simply seeding discord to observe the results.”

“That would compromise my experiment!”

“Which you would happily do if it brought either your amusement or my humiliation.”

“Those often go hand and hand.”

“Truly. Now, kindly return to your observing and remain silent while we enjoy this pleasant drive. We are nearly at our destination, in any case.”

“And does the driver get to know our destination?”

“Surprises are the spice of a relationship, Gregory. However, I believe your curiosity shall soon be rewarded. Ah… here we are. Look ahead and tell me what you see.”

“Holy… is that what I think it is?”
“Why was I not informed about this!”

Mycroft basked in the success of his little surprise and the fact that his most beloved grasped his hand tightly and pressed the accelerator to the floor, speeding the vehicle down the tarmac.

“An airstrip! How in the hell do you own an airstrip? Why in the hell do you own an airstrip?”

“AND WHY WAS I NOT INFORMED!”

“It is rarely used, though kept maintained for the few instances where it does provide service. And, in truth, I do not own it, per se. This land is not part of the estate proper, but rather belongs to a, shall we say, conglomerate, with interests in the area.”

“And who might own this conglomerate? Might they be named Holmes?”

“Oh… if one would take the time to trace back through a veritable warehouse of titles and documents, that name may appear at some point.”

“But only may.”

“I do adore your razor-like intellect.”

“WHY. WAS. I. NOT. INFORMED?”

“For the very reason that you are now demonstrating. It is sufficiently difficult to keep you safely on the property at the best of times, let alone giving you access to a landing strip. I have no doubt you are already crafting a series of schemes to secure an aircraft and crew for a variety of experiments and escapes to foreign lands.”

“Perhaps there is some truth to your words, however, this still shall stand as a black mark against you.”

“I shall file it with the others. Well, Gregory… do you believe this shall suffice for our competition. There is quite sufficient room for a variety of maneuvers and I can assure you that we shall not meet with any unexpected landings to interfere with our contest.”

“I hope not! Rather not have up close and personal with private jet or something.”

“We do receive the occasional helicopter, as well.”

“You must provide me with access! I have a large number of investigations that require a helicopter for proper data collection!”

“When you are older, we shall take up the discussion. For now, why don’t you begin to take measurements? I am trusting your schematics to provide accurate representations of our possible challenges and obstacles.”

Sherlock’s eyes narrowed for a long moment before he flung himself out of the car and began pulling pencils, a measuring tape, a protractor, a calculator and other instruments from the pockets of his jacket.

“He really didn’t know?”

“Not at all. I am not exaggerating what outcomes could occur from his knowledge of this place, however, I am hopeful that I can forestall any of his attempts to wreak havoc in the skies.”
“Good luck with that. I guess we should be out there with him. Make sure he’s not already planning his getaway.”

“Sherlock will already have scripted a number of scenarios for just that purpose. However, without access to communication or funds, they will not come to fruition. But I agree, he should not be left unattended. He could easily be fashioning weapons out of stones and blades of grass.”

“Handy skill, if you think about it.”

“Of course. Which is why I instructed him in the technique.”

Sherlock stalked over every inch of the airfield while Mycroft and his intended sat in the shade of the car and dutifully listened to every new idea that Sherlock brought forth, examined every sketch he presented and evaluated every calculation that he sat and performed with such intense concentration that Mycroft was able to steal kisses from his spouse without a bit of notice.

“I am finished. Based on the angle of the proposed ramp and launch speed, I have determined the maximum height and range of the trajectory so that the peasant can build a suitable ring that I may set aflame and a landing platform. I shall place this with my other diagrams that you must follow to the letter! And number! One mistake may prove fatal and I for one shall not be responsible for directing the clearing away of the carnage. It would be unendurably boring and I refuse to suffer that level of tedium on my holiday.”

“And we’d be maimed or dead, don’t forget about that, you chocolate troll.”

“Inmaterial. I can always locate another shop for my chocolate and Mummy would purchase me a replacement for Mycroft. It would likely be an overweight and slow-moving hound of some form, but so long as it is cringingly ginger, I do not think I would notice the difference.”

“I believe you would know in short order the first time you required an escort to purchase books or a liaison with the tailor or your headmaster, brother dear.”

“If the shop boy survives the devastation he can perform those functions in your stead. It would be a simple matter to clothe him appropriately and declare him to be a cousin or some form of servant attached to safeguard my person. It is doubtful anyone would complain about the lack of further association with you.”

“How glad I am to know that you consider me disposable.”

“As yesterday’s newspapers.”

“Sherlock, be nice to your brother. I doubt they’d let me into your fancy school, even with a new suit on my back, so you need him.”

“Gregory, for heaven’s sake.”

“You are likely correct. Mycroft, I shall scrupulously inspect your dalliance’s handiwork before I permit you to engage in any form of recreational contest so that I shall not have to suffer the embarrassment of seeing him removed from places of culture and learning.”

Mycroft hoped his indignant scowl would curdle his brother’s mental faculties to the point where he would be rendered mute for life, but doubted he would meet with success greater this time than any other time he had tried this tactic. He then looked up from his demon sibling to his beloved
Gregory to offer a silent apology and was greatly relieved to find his intended wearing a playful grin and a twinkle in his eye, which lifted a great weight from his shoulders. The years rearing young Beelzebub would be greatly facilitated by his loving spouse standing staunchly at his side. A spouse that somehow always managed to stay his hand and not execute the demon prince with some form of sacred blade as heroic characters of his mettle were so want to do.

“I believe that any institution of culture and learning would be honored to have Gregory stride through their doors.”

“If he carried a mop, perhaps.”

“Hey Sherlock... what say you take me on the strip and show me what you’re thinking in, uh, real space. Help me visualize what you’re thinking and how big you’re going to want things. I do better if I’ve got something in my head besides stuff on paper. Mycroft, you coming?”

Oh, was that a wicked grin on his spouse’s face. The delight of a playful and accommodating partner…

“Naturally. I would never refuse a chance to see a master at his work.”

“You have already seen me. That is enough.”

“Thank you, Sherlock. I did not need a reminder.”

Mycroft hated to see his love toil so under the harsh sun, but he was also highly reluctant to raise objection to the heart-warming domestic scene that confronted him. Sherlock imperiously directing the activities and his husband indulgently seeking rocks, twigs, handfuls of dirt or other debris to mark out Sherlock’s plans on the air strip. Mycroft had to admit, Sherlock had done quite the job of concocting a course that a professional driver would find pleasantly difficult. But modifications to satisfy reality could come at a later time. Especially since…. was it possible? One did not grasp the bottom of one’s shirt in that fashion unless… his husband was unclothed! Ungarmented! Unarguably the most desirable and beautiful creature on the face of the Earth but… no! No buts! His Gregory’s glory was too blinding to be kept hidden. Let the world see what Mycroft Holmes had won! See his prize and his precious love! See…

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH”

See Sherlock mimic quite well a man catching a cannonball in the chest.

“You ok, little man? Hurt your bum when you fell?”

“You are naked!”

“Uh…no.”

“Partially naked!”

“Fair enough. It’s hot being out here doing all your manual labor, though. Man needs a little cool-down.”

“And…”

Sherlock jumped up from his death position and stood nearly toe-to-toe with Lestrade scrutinizing
him with a ferocity that was both amusing and unsettling.

“Are you diseased?”

“Not that I know of. Had a bit of a cold last week, but that passed me by without a problem.”

“You are covered with blotches of the most plague-like nature!”

Which was why Mycroft had yet to step in and curtail Sherlock’s inspections. He was currently unable to break away his gaze from his spouse’s skin, alive with marks that he himself had placed. Anyone laying eyes on his beloved would know immediately that he was not only spoken for, but spoken for by someone who was very territorial and would take quite unkindly to any intruders crossing his borders. It was taking every iota of his control not to leap upon the man of his dreams and place additional marks on skin that had been denied him earlier. Skin simply begging to be tasted… and touched… and…

“Good heavens, Sherlock! What are you doing?”

“It is contagious! You have been infected by the peasant”

And he also had a stretched-out collar to ruin his carefully-crafted appearance.

“Not infected, Sherlock. Simply… shall we say, like-minded?”

“I do not understand. Your skin is hemorrhaging. This is some form of pestilence. I told you that consorting with the lower-classes would be your ruin! You shall be taken away to a plague ship, sent into the harbor and set afire to protect the innocent. Like me!”

“Come here, Sherlock. Now, lift up your arm… there you go. Right there below the elbow, start sucking. Come on, put some force to it… now you’re getting it…”

“I have contracted the plague!”

“You’ve given yourself a hickey. Congratulations!”

“I… wait. You cannot position your mouth so that the marks of death that adorn your body are self-inflicted.”

“You are a sharp one today, aren’t you?”

“Oh… I feel unwell. Mycroft! Have you my will in order?”

“I believe it is up to date, yes.”

“Good.”

Sherlock lay himself on the tarmac and began to cough quietly, laying his hands his chest and shuffling around so his death was as comfortable as possible.

“Look at the poor lad. Anything we can do to ease your passing, Sherlock?”

“…water…”

“Mycroft, we got any water? The corpse is feeling a bit dry.”

“There is a little in the car, I believe; however, I would hate to in any way disrupt the process of
dessication. Sherlock will make a truly splendid mummy to place in the library.”

“Ah, take pity on him. Dying and all’s got to be tough. And anyway, he doesn’t mummify up nicely, you can always boil away the flesh and have his skeleton on display instead.”

“What a marvelous idea… I do adore your creativity, my dear.”

What was not adorable was Gregory replacing his shirt and hiding his majestic chest from Mycroft’s eyes. Hopefully, there would be another opportunity to see it removed in the very near future.

“Would that really work?”

“Corpses cannot speak, Sherlock.”

“Perhaps the shop boy is a medium.”

“Gregory, do you have the ability to commune with the dead?”

“Didn’t think so, but we can check. Oh great spirit of that little tosser Sherlock Holmes, is there a message that you wish to send us from beyond the grave?”

“I shall haunt you both most vigorously!”

“Guess I do have mystical powers. Think I can make money off it?”

“Doubtful. The number of patrons willing to part with funds to listen to Sherlock’s ghostly imprecations would be mercifully few.”

“Shame, might have gotten myself to Uni that way.”

“They… they do not accept laborers.”

“Mycroft, get me a shovel. This laborer has a grave to dig. Doesn’t need to be too deep… skinny little thing. Put him down shallow and let the worms get a nice lunch.”

“I… I believe I am revivifying…”

“Oh christ, we’ve got a bloody vampire on our hands. Grab me a stake to go with that shovel, will you love?”

“Of course, long or short?”

“Go for long, don’t want to have to bend over much to stake the bloodsucking fiend. I’ve already worked too hard today.”

“I refuse to admit any connection to such overwrought and dramatic creatures!”

Mycroft and Lestrade shared a look and silently agreed not to break into peals of laughter.

“Then get up you lazy thing and we’ll…”

“Excuse me, Mr. Holmes?”

Lestrade jumped in front of Sherlock, Mycroft jumped in front of Lestrade and Sherlock peered out around Lestrade’s legs ready to launch a low-to-the-ground assault on the attacker. Who was their
“Your mother sent me to collect you. You have forgotten an appointment this afternoon, it seems.”

Mycroft shook his head, trying to dislodge both the protective fire that had surged up through him and any memory of an appointment. Of which there was zero.

“I have no appointment today. She must be mistaken.”

“Of course, sir. Let me phrase it more properly. I am to collect you for the appointment about which you were not informed, but failed, despite the lack of information, to anticipate properly.”

One of those forgotten appointments. One that rose without warning and his presence was deemed necessary whatever else his schedule might indicate. And refusal was not an option that bore contemplating.

“Ah. I see. Gregory… my dear, I must offer my most sincere apologies. My attendance at some discussion is apparently desired and I have little choice but to agree. Perhaps we can continue this some other day… we can…”

A small cough interrupted Mycroft’s train of thought and he turned to stare at his driver.

“If I may, sir. I do not anticipate this business to be a protracted one, if the bits of conversation I shared with some of the other drivers is to be believed. Perhaps your guest could simply enjoy the amenities of the house for the duration and then you can return to your entertainments.”

The man would see his salary doubled in his next cheque.

“Gregory? Would it distress you to wait until I am again free? I assure you that there is much to be found among the house and grounds that would keep you occupied…”

“I shall placate your diseased boyfriend in the interim, Mycroft. Begone so we may continue fine-tuning my plans.”

“Gregory?”

“I guess that’s alright. I can keep Sherlock company easy enough. You’ll owe me, though.”

Could anyone wink as sordidly as his Gregory? No, it was simply not possible.

“Then I shall leave you to it. The car, of course, is yours to use as you wish. I will endeavor to make this as brief an interruption as possible.”

“No problem. See ya, Mycroft.”

Mycroft followed his driver to the waiting vehicle to be returned home and Lestrade was almost positive he heard ‘he appears to be a nice young man’ somewhere on the wind…

“…”

“That happen often?”

“Very. His indoctrination into the secret society of pompus political penguins began at an early age.”
“So… what’s it all about?”

“Everything. And all of it is ridiculously boring. I am very relieved that my egg was not at the head of the line when Mummy began to procreate.”

“Oh, being groomed for great things, I take it.”

“If by great, you mean tedious, meddlesome, busybodying, holier-than-thouing…”

“No, I meant big things. Make a difference things.”

“Perhaps by some perceptions. An overflowing sewer could also be described as ‘making a difference,’ which is not far from what happens when Mummy is away and Mycroft can indulge his lust for large dinners.”

Lestrade let the insult slide, primarily because he didn’t really register the words. He knew Mycroft was rich, incredibly rich, but never really tied that with important. Someone who’d be powerful someday. Someone who would need a common lad in his life as much as he’d need an anchor around his neck.

“You are perplexed.”

“No, not really. Just thinking that’s all. And no cracks about me being able to think.”

Sherlock pursed his lips because he’d had a highly amusing rejoinder ready to pronounce, but squashed it seeing the shadows taking position in Lestrade’s eyes.

“It does not matter to him, if that is what concerns you.”

“What are you going on about?”

“That you are a pitiful commoner with nothing to offer him and who will, in no way, fit in with the hopelessly stuffy members of his social circle. That does not matter to him in the least.”

“Wow, make me feel better why don’t you?”

“I am trying to!”

Which actually seemed to startle Sherlock as much as it did Lestrade.

“I have no idea why he has attached himself to you in this manner, but he does not spend as much time dressing to meet one of the innumerable dignitaries that parade through our halls as he does for one of your meetings. It is numbing having to sit through the endless ensembles that he models. It is rather like watching an orangutan choosing an outfit with which to begin his career as a circus clown. My nightmares are the stuff of novels.”

Oddly, Sherlock’s prattle was making Lestrade feel better. One thing he thought he understood about Mycroft Holmes was that he really didn’t do anything he didn’t want to do, his Mum’s orders being the exception as it was for orders by any Mum. His free time was limited and if he spent some of it with him, then he must really want to spend time with him. And it was nice to know that the time he spent trying to fix his stupid hair was being matched by equal effort on his boyfriend’s part. Boyfriend… Lestrade wasn’t any stranger to dating, but never really had a boyfriend before. Or girlfriend for that matter. But he’d been thinking about Mycroft like that since the first moment they’d sat at the pub getting to know each other. It was so strange, but they seemed to fit together like pieces to a puzzle. And Mycroft was such a brilliant person! Even without all the money and
family and whatever… anyone would be lucky to have him. And he did. If those marks on Mycroft’s neck said anything, it said that his boyfriend didn’t mind admitting that his rich and powerful self belonged to a poor and common chap who’d be lucky to get a job as a copper or something later on.

“Well? Have I allowed you sufficient time to process my words or does your feeble brain require additional assistance with, perhaps, the use of drawings and an interpretive dance.”

“No, think I got it. And, since the source was unimpeachable, I guess I have to take it like the gospel.”

“Finally you understand your place in our relationship.”

Little bastard. But, behind all of the insults and drama and all-around ridiculousness, he was a good boy at heart. Probably not many people got to know him well enough to find out, but Lestrade was glad he’d had the opportunity to do it and maybe… just maybe… give the baby brat a little thrill for having that well-hidden caring side.

“Want to drive?”

“Really?”

“If your feet can reach the pedals, you can drive us around the air strip. Get a feel for your race course.”

“That would be extremely useful data.”

“Thought you’d like the idea.”

“And it would vex Mycroft mightily.”

“Always looking on the bright side of life. Good kid.”
Sherlock bristled under the realization that starting a car and simply putting it into first gear was frustrating his abilities and that the shop boy had no problem laughing at his failure, though the peasant did perform the ridiculous and unsanitary ritual of ruffling his hair while he brayed. Eventually, Sherlock had the car moving, which meant contending with steering and braking and then starting again when he stalled the car… it was infuriating! When he was able to purchase his own vehicle it would not be so stupidly difficult to operate. Or, perhaps he would forego the operation altogether and purchase a driver in addition to the vehicle.

“You’re doing great, Sherlock. I know it may not seem that way, but you’re really doing a good job. And you’re not grinding any gears, which is very important. Can’t bring this old girl back to her stable with a transmission that’s shot to hell.”

The shop boy was complimenting his driving skills. Perhaps they would be useful, if only to impress the lesser creatures that had not their own fine and expertly-driven vehicle. Not that he would admit that now…

“Mycroft will pay for any repairs. That is his purpose.”

“That’s a load of crap. And you have to respect your car. Treat it right and it’ll treat you right.”

“You do not have a vehicle, so your statement is without foundation. Kindly do not speak to me unless you have documented and verifiable information to divulge.”

“Well, this isn’t my car and I’m still worried about you tearing her up. Anyway, my point was that you weren’t tearing her up, so just take the pat on the head in good grace, you little twit.”

“Very well. I shall sit here like a puppy and permit you to pat my head. Shall I wag my tail for your pleasure, also?”

“No, that is Mycroft’s purpose.”

“I need a carsickness receptacle.”

“Just keep your mouth closed and swallow when it burbles up. You’ll be fine. Now, you got enough data or do you want to putter around a little more?”

Enough data implied an end to his driving experience and that was not acceptable. He was not yet expertly qualified!

“I have enough information for this particular project…”

“I feel a ‘but’ coming on.”
“I do not see a reason that I return the operation of this vehicle to you or to put an end to my exploration of this particular activity.”

“You want to drive some more.”

“There could be a situation in my future that would require me to pilot a vehicle on my own and I should be as familiar as possible with the relevant steps in the procedure.”

“Ok, just keep it slow and we can take her on the road back to your house.”

“How shall I become an expert driver if you throttle my attempts to confront new challenges such as velocity?”

“You’ll be confronting a tree if you give her too much speed.”

“That is rather hypocritical. I thought the lower classes prided themselves on tiresome honesty, but I see that either I am incorrect, unlikely, or you are simply lacking in even the paucity of character attributable to your ilk. Mycroft says you are an excessively hasty driver. He fears for his life when you chauffer him in the entirely unsafe sardine tin you are resigned by poverty to drive.”

Information to record later – the shop boy becomes distressed when he labors under the impression that he has distressed the whale.

“He really said that? Fuck. I thought he was just joking… Ah wonderful. Probably thinks I’m one of those stupid punks who just cares about fast cars and football.”

“And coitus.”

“Oh god…”

Observation – the shop boy was easy to distress. It would make manipulation much simpler. Though… corollary – the shop boy’s distress was not as pleasant to experience as its lack.

“However, I stand by assertion that Mycroft, despite your base and primitive nature, highly values your companionship. I have already recommended him for psychological evaluation and expect him to be committed to an appropriate institution in the very near future based on this very fact.”

Sherlock was quite proud of his ability to manipulate his driving instructor. A few expertly-chosen words and Lestrade was again sporting his pathetically besotted grin.

“Well, I guess I could use a lighter foot when I take him out. No need to give him a heart attack if we’re only out for a Sunday drive. Good advice, little man.”

“Professionals charge for their advice and I expect to be duly compensated.”

“One bar.”

“Five.”

“You’re loony! One and some of those jelly worms.”

“Disgusting. Four bars and a selection of caramels.”

“Wrong. Two bars. Period.”
“Insulting. Four bars.”

“You’ll get a runny bum eating all of that. Two and a couple of caramels tossed in.”

“You underestimate my crassly-termed bum. Three and nougat.”

“Nougat? That stuff’s crap.”

“By a philistine’s standards, perhaps. Do you accept my offer?”

“Hell no! Where was I? Ok, how about this… two bars and some of that crap nougat.”

“And caramel.”

“Ok, one or two.”

“Five.”

“Bastard.”

Sherlock persuaded Lestrade to approve a velocity upgrade from crawling to toddling, with the occasional shaky putter on straighter parts of the road, and was feeling that mastery of the automobile was completed by the time he stopped the car in front of the garage.

“I am fully capable of replacing the Jaguar in its assigned location!”

“Parking is something you have to practice and I’m not going to be responsible for that lesson. Not in a garage full of cars that cost more than my house.”

“If you lived in something other than a hovel, would it still be an issue?”

“Elitist prick. And yes. Look, I’ll make you a deal. We can take my Mum’s car for a parking lesson. Give you more time to drive around, too. It’s a smaller car, so you’ll be able to maneuver it a lot more easily than this one. Something to think about for next time, ok?”

“If I must. But I shall not forget! I shall expect a thorough lesson so that I may complete my training for vehicle operation.”

“Two lessons don’t make you road-ready, Sherlock.”

“Nonsense. For the advanced mind a single lesson should be sufficient, however, you are placing obstacles in the path of my advancement. You are envious of my prowess.”

“In what?”

“In all things. You drip with jealousy over my exceptional mind.”

“Jealousy’s a liquid? Got a gland somewhere it comes out of?”

“You are inexcusably vile.”

“Nah, I’m excusably vile. Isn’t that the way us common folk are supposed to be?”

“That is a surprisingly valid point. I concede the argument. Let it never be said that I demand a person behave against their nature, repugnant as that may be.”
“Kind of you. Now, let me put the car away and we can get something cold to drink and maybe hunt up a sandwich or two.”

“Sandwiches? Do I resemble a member of the working class?”

“I’d say your brother is posher than you are and he happily wrapped his fingers around big greasy slices of pizza and loved every minute of it.”

“Mycroft is an indiscriminate glutton who would eat tree bark if you served it with a cream sauce.”

“Well sure. Everything’s good with cream sauce.”

“You two deserve each other.”

“Glad you think so. Now get your skinny arse out of the car so I can put her to bed. Then, we’ll get a snack and you can write in your journal or experiment on something.”

“You?”

“Not in a million years.”

Observation - Cook is very enamored of laborers. A request for a simple sandwich to placate the peasant escalated into an architectural monument of bread-bound food products, a tureen of soup and a wedge of cake the size of which even the ginger hippopotamus would require two bites to consume. Further, she smiles at him and has yet to trounce him with a ladle, which was blatantly unfair since he was trounced for the merest kitchen infraction. As if it was his fault that she was too dull-witted to understand the necessity of confiscating the copper pans to investigate the corrosive properties of human urine.

Observation – The shop boy has atrocious taste in the area of entertainment. The minutes his intellect was crippled by the numbing effects of the lackey’s choice of televised programming would take months to repair. And he refused to leave it on one channel! Not even the sordid scripted dramas, which were in no manner engaging, but provided some insight into the minds of the feeble-witted masses who consumed this offal. And he would now never know if it was the mechanic or the grocer who fathered that simpering trollop’s offspring!

Mycroft felt as if he had plumbed the true depths of boredom and found nothing at the bottom of the abyss but more boredom. And now there would be an additional helping of his now-familiar boredom. Two weeks of pure, unadulterated tedium as he supposedly played a small role in a small matter that had a small influence on a small number of individuals… if there was a devil to whom to sell his soul he would do so gladly to be relieved of the obligation of tidying the messes of persons who dreadfully needed a change of career. And he would not have access to his spouse! No access at all…not a visit, chaste or otherwise… not one of their prolonged phone conversations where they shared passion-laden endearments and dedications of devotion… it was a sacrifice of nearly unheard of severity. Before, he had accepted his lot gracefully, although begrudgingly at times, but now… their first true separation. Mycroft was not at all sure he would survive the experience. At best, he would wither like a late-autumn rose and it was a very real possibility he would fall lifeless to the ground shriveled and bereft of his former vibrant hue.

A prowl through the house in search of his glorious mate uncovered a scene of such exquisite
tenderness that Mycroft was now certain that if tragedy befell their home, he and his husband could adopt Sherlock and rear him as their own son. On the large sofa in the library, his beloved was patiently listening to Sherlock explain something from one his innumerable science textbooks, Sherlock focused and enthusiastic and his spouse sporting a beautifully indulgent smile as he pointed to things about which Sherlock could demonstrate his knowledge. Such a wonderful parent for such a horrendous child…

“Mycroft? You going to hang out around the corner or just come over and join us?”

And a cunning adversary in the game of espionage.

“I was caught in a moment of reflection, my dear, and completely lost track of my movements.”

“You are lying and doing an abominably bad job of it. You are always spying! You watch and spy and peek and peep… truly. Mummy will be completely disgraced when you are finally taken before the hand of the law as a stalker of the most ignoble perversity.”

“Mycroft? You a peeper?”

“Not at the moment. But I cannot answer with certainty once you have returned to your home and retired for the night.”

“Filthy.”

“That’s what I’m hoping for, Sherlock, my boy. So, how’d your appointment or whatnot go?”

Was it the right moment to announce the temporary dissolution of their marital bond? No… Gregory was enjoying himself and Sherlock was behaving as pleasantly as he was able. This was not the opportune moment to break the earth-shatteringly terrible news.

“As expected. A great deal of air was pushed about the room, which failed to form anything more substantive than a warm and slightly musty breeze.”

“Bunch of hot air… got it.”

“Quite. It is not uncommon for my presence to be requested at such meetings and I am not in a position to easily refuse. I do sincerely apologize for my absence, however.”

“Not a problem. We had a good time. Not a boring moment.”

“And I am now a qualified driver, so I expect my own set of keys to the vehicles.”

Mycroft took a seat on the couch next to his love and did it quickly before his knees went out from under him.

“What in the world are you talking about, Sherlock?”

“The pea…Lestrade provided an uninspired, yet mostly acceptable description of the process of operating a vehicle and I thoroughly mastered the techniques this afternoon while you consorted with the others of your alien colony.”

“Gregory, can you provide a more soothing explanation for Sherlock’s hallucinations?”

“Well, I can’t say he’s a master yet, which I already told you, you little twit, but he did himself proud for a first lesson.”
Mycroft wondered if somehow Sherlock had made good on a previous promise to test his proposed mind-control serum on a human subject.

“You allowed Sherlock to drive?”

“Sure! Just getting the car started, taking it around the airstrip where he couldn’t hit anything. Lad did a good job! So good, in fact, that he got to drive us back here, which took awhile in second gear, but not a single problem. Parking lesson will be next and we’ll use Mum’s car for that. It’s already got a couple of dings in the fender, so no harm done when he kills a rubbish bin. By the time Sherlock’s old enough, he’ll have no problem getting his license.”

“I do not understand the necessity of a third-party’s permission to operate a vehicle. If I decide that I am qualified, who are they to disagree? There is no question my opinion is more valid than theirs. They are so slow-witted they must toil in civil service! Like Mycroft!”

“Unless you plan on showing your command of a car forever at a speed my Gran would find laughingly slow, you’ll just be patient and get a few more lessons under your belt before you ask for that crown to sit on your head.”

“I have a crown. It is uncomfortable and garish. And insultingly small.”

“Really?”

“It belonged to a minor 16th-century noble. Sherlock saw it in an auction catalog and made the lives of everyone remotely associated with the household miserable until I agreed to allow our representative to bid for it.”

“And of course you won.”

“Naturally. Holmes’s do not lose, especially when the prize is very desirable.”

Mycroft hoped that his facial expressions correctly supported his deeper layer of meaning, but rubbed his husband’s thigh lightly in case his abilities were dulled by the afternoon’s drain on his energies.

“You’re a possessive one, aren’t you?”

The grin on his intended’s face did not speak to a displeasure with that concept.

“Only slightly. Which is why I am not forbidding you to ever set foot in a vehicle for which Sherlock has been charged to operate. I care profoundly for your welfare, my dear, but I trust that you will have the good sense to leap through the window when his inevitable plummet off of the cliff occurs.”

“I shall never do something so foolish! How can I collect the relevant data and perform the analysis if I accompany the vehicle on its descent?”

“Yeah, Mycroft. How’s the kid supposed to do his science project if he’s part of the twisted wreckage?”

“Exactly. Shop boy will be the sacrifice. His meager life is an insignificant price to pay for my experiment.”

“That’s a fine thank you. See if I take you driving again.”
“You are not permitted to withdraw your offer! Our pact has been cemented!”

“Don’t remember signing anything. Mean’s I can back out if I want to, right love?”

Oh, how his little pet endearment warmed Mycroft’s spirits… his precious one was such a delightful romantic.

“Without question. I am sorry, Sherlock, but you failed to take proper precautions and Gregory may certainly abrogate your tenuous-at-best agreement. Of course, if you state for the record before witnesses that you will not use Gregory as part of any form of physically or mentally damaging experiment, then I might be able to negotiate future lessons under his tutelage.”

“That is unacceptably restrictive! My research is of paramount importance and the harm to my future investigations could be irreparable with my acceptance of your extortion.”

“Then you must weigh the value of independence through transportation versus the indiscriminate use of Gregory’s person.”

Though only one person would ever be allowed such indiscriminate use and he, as had been established previously, was somewhat possessive, even when kin were involved.

“Fine. I suppose that the ability to move freely and at will has a value that exceeds the lackey’s…Lestrade’s value as a flesh-formed experimental dummy. I will agree in view of witnesses, but if he dies in a manner that leaves his body at least 80% intact, I must be allowed to take possession of his remains. You have steadfastly refused to obtain a cadaver for my use, therefore, I must make this a part of my acceptance of your proposal.”

“Forty percent intact. In a better condition, his relations may opt for an open-casket viewing and you will not be able to hide the absconding of his corpse.”

“Are you really haggling over my dead body?”

“Fear not, my dear. I will obtain exceptional terms. It is, as they say, my job.”

“One which you perform painfully poorly! I shall own his flesh, my own vehicle and his servitude in perpetuity!”

“Mycrof…”

“Hush, Gregory. Relax and watch.”

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Greg absolutely did not want to admit that Mycroft’s ferocity as a negotiator was a major turn-on, but if he didn’t he’d be lying. And this was against little punk Sherlock! What Mycroft must look like when this was for real… luckily, he wasn’t the focus of attention and could cross his legs until his brain had a talk with other parts that had decided to have a mind of their own.

“It is settled. You may take possession of Gregory’s body in the event he is 65% intact, though one limb may be missing without penalty, you will receive your own vehicle upon receipt of a legally-obtained driving license, one I must approve in advance for safety and durability, Gregory’s servitude will be limited to continuing your driving lessons and shall not extend to any ancillary services such as vehicle maintenance, repair or cleaning. In addition, you not permitted to request he wear any sort of uniform or call you Mr. Holmes, though you, in turn, will adhere strictly to the use of the previously-agreed ‘Lestrade,’ when referring to him in any situation
whether he is physically present or not. You shall be allowed two missteps per visit, a visit to be defined as an encounter lasting one hour or more, and for each five consecutive visits where there is no violation of the naming strictures, you shall receive an unrestricted 75 seconds in Gregory’s shop to obtain as much chocolate as you wish, for which I will provide reimbursement. You may not, however, build any form of device or robotic assistant to aide your gathering, nor carry your spoils in anything but your hands. I believe those are the points on which we concur.”

Nope. Leg crossing was a terrible idea when it further squeezed on something your trousers were already strangling. Mycroft was blisteringly hot like this…

“I did not notice an omission or insertion. Must I place a bloodied handprint on a tanned goat hide or will my word be sufficient?”

“I would prefer a pact of blood, however, I shall trust that our brotherly bond will meet the required sealing by bodily fluids.”

“Very well. And I have recorded this verbatim in my journal so do not attempt to renege or it shall be a dark day for both you and your concubine!”

“Excellent. Now, I promised my concubine an evening’s entertainment and I intend to fulfill that promise. Will you be joining us or do you have other matters to attend to?”

“My data for today requires analysis and I have several experiments that are in need of observation. That is far more important and interesting than your libidinous gropings.”

“Very well. Do you have, perhaps, something to say to Gregory before you depart for his efforts with you today?”

“Do not feed Mycroft after midnight or he shall become flatulent.”

“You’re welcome, you bastard. Give me a call when you want your next go in a car.”

Sherlock snorted and attempted to march imperiously out of the room, but both Mycroft and Greg caught the glimpse of the eager grin that lit up Sherlock’s thin face.

“Gregory Lestrade, I cannot believe you allowed my brother to pilot the Jaguar.”

“It made the tyke happy and he really did do a good job. A lot better than the first time I got behind the wheel. For all of his bluster, he listened to what I said and controlled his temper well enough that the car’s in as good a shape as you left it.”

“Then I must congratulate you not only on your teaching skills, but your bravery. You are truly a grand prize, my dear.”

“And a prize that is incredibly hot and bothered right now. Do you know how sexy you are when you do you deal like that?”

No, but he did now and wasn’t it a pretty shade of lust in which his husband’s eyes were painted?

“I trust you will enlighten me?”

“You are the hottest thing walking, Mycroft. And… ok, now I’ve got a fantasy of you in one of those suits and I get to watch you skewer some dumb bastard over the negotiating table before you do nasty to things to me while still wearing that gorgeous suit on your gorgeous body.”
It was everything Mycroft could do not to embarrass himself in front of his husband. How could he and Gregory be so perfectly matched? He had chosen the specimen he would wear for his first suited ravishment of his very naked and nubile spouse fully a week ago.

“How conveniently our tastes mesh, my dear. I look forward with great anticipation to enacting our little fantasy in whatever manner you desire.”

“Hmmm… how about a little taste now?”

“A taste you shall have. And feel free to savor it as long as you like.”

For the theory that time was fluid, Mycroft had to offer his support. It stood completely still every time his Gregory was locked in his embrace and their lips expressed the depth of their love and commitment for each other. And his husband was feeling particularly enthused this evening, allowing his hands to roam slightly across the bare skin under the hem of his now-untucked shirt.

“You are most impassioned this night, my dear Gregory.”

“It’s hard not to be. I’ve got the sexiest man alive on my lap, after all. And I told Mum that I might be late, so we’ve got plenty of time to give this sofa a thorough work out. How’s that sound?”

Like the greatest possible idea in the history of human thought, however… truly the most scorching sacrifice a man could be asked to make.

“Like my most joyful dream come true. Unfortunately…”

“Ahh, crap.”

“Quite. I had postponed conveying this news so that we might enjoy our time together, but I must leave tonight for a period of two weeks. Hopefully, only two weeks…”

“Part of that appointment you had to sit through?”

“Very perceptive. I was most fortunate in that I was able to resolve certain issues without having to take myself to the location of interest and, therefore, reduced the duration of my conscription to likely two weeks as opposed to four. You must know, Gregory, that I do not wish for this. It is the least desirable of all possible actions for me, to be parted from you for so long.”

“Do you have to? I mean, can they make you if you don’t want to go?”

“In truth, no. However, my assistance will greatly facilitate certain initiatives and it would be remiss of me not to offer my sword to the fight.”

“I guess I understand. No, scratch that… I don’t understand any of it, but that’s not important. Man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do, right? And it’s not like you’ll be on the moon or something where they don’t have phones.”

“Unfortunately…”

“Ah double crap!”

“I concur heartily. I am very, very sorry, Gregory, but contact will not be easy and, therefore, I cannot guarantee that I shall be able to embrace the sound of your voice again until I return.”
“Couple of weeks, huh? Well, I guess that’s not really that long when you think about it.”

Which Mycroft was trying his very best not to do for it did unpleasant things to his insides.

“It is but a sliver of time in our long lives.”

Together went without saying.

“So, you’re out of here tonight… I take it I should probably head home, then. Give you time to get packed and ready.”

That was being tended to, however, Mycroft reasoned it was better to bring their evening to a close and make a clean separation with his beloved. The fewer tears the tears that were shed, the more quickly his heart would rebound from the fracturing.

“That may be wise. I do have some matters that demand my personal attention, though I wish it were not so. I do not want to end our evening, my dear. I very much want to continue on as we have been this evening, but I hope that you will do me the honor of returning to this very situation upon my return. A romantic evening to share? I will happily secure Sherlock in his room so that we are uninterrupted…”

“And that will work?”

“Not for long, but it is the thought that counts, yes?”

“Yeah, yeah it does. And he’ll have fun getting around whatever traps you set out for him. He’s ummm… he won’t be upset with you leaving like that will he?”

“It is difficult to know for certain. He may be overjoyed by the absence of who he sees as his captor, but he may also… it is difficult to be sure.”

“I think he’ll miss you. A lot, actually. You go off like this often?”

“Not in the past, but I fear that this is simply the beginning of a pattern.”

“That’s not comforting. But… yeah, I do think he’ll miss you. So make sure to talk to him before you go. And… you can remind him that I’m on the other side of a phone call. Kid like him could probably get lonely in a big house like this all alone.”

“That is a clear statement of the truth. He is lonely, even with my presence and pitiful attempts to keep him engaged and entertained.”

“I think you do a great job of it, love. Even if he doesn’t always show it, I’m sure he appreciates it.”

An issue about which Mycroft had great doubts, but if his intended had faith, it would not be amiss to share it.

“I shall trust in your judgment. Now, I believe that I can spare a further five minutes. Perhaps ten. How would you like to spend this surplus of time?”

Apparently, by drawing his soon-to-be-absent husband down to lie against his chest and kissing away any lingering troubles that might be clouding his very tired and very regretful mind…
Thank you all so very much for all of the kind words, kudos, encouragement and support... it really means a lot!

“Greg!  Greg, get your arse out here!  Someone’s on the phone for you!”

Lestrade cracked open his eyes and pulled his watch off of the nightstand to read the stupid numbers it seemed to insist on taunting him with. That 3:00 had to be 3:00 am because it was still dark outside and Mum would never let him lay around in bed like a prince until afternoon. It was the work of a moment to cover his worn-thin boxers and race out of his bedroom to take the phone from the extremely irritated woman glaring at him as he approached and who had to be up for work in… two hours. Oh, he was so dead. And so was whichever of his stupid mates who thought it would be funny to call him when they were pissed out of their minds. He waited for his Mum to go back to her own bedroom before tearing into his idiotic caller.

“What the fuck!  You had better not be wanting a ride home from some…”

“I am home, you dolt.  I have no independent means of transport since you are not a sufficiently competent an instructor to have provided me a full opportunity to achieve command of all relevant driving skills and this backwards nation refuses to allow exceptions to their pedantic licensing codes to accommodate individuals with my exceptional level of both intellect and performance!”

“Sherlock… what the hell are you doing calling me at 3:00 am?”

“Bored.”

“What?  Are you mad?”

“No, bored.  Under normal circumstances I would demand that Mycroft entertain me, but he has forsaken his brotherly responsibility and now I must make do with the poor shadow of a substitute he has left behind.”

“What the… why would you even wake up Mycroft at 3 o’fucking clock just to do a dance for you?”

“For your information, he is usually awake at this time, so your statement is ridiculous, the stomach-churning image of Mycroft engaging in any form of dance, notwithstanding.

“Wait… Mycroft’s usually awake at this hour?”

“Regularly.  He requires a great many hours to accomplish his daily objectives because he is living proof that firstborns are severely impaired compared to subsequent siblings.”

“That’s… that really awful is what that is.  And you don’t make it easier for him do you?”

“For what purpose?  His life will be a continuous stream of challenges with which he must
contend. I am simply providing practice so he may hone his skills.”

Not for the first time, Lestrade felt a sharp twinge of regret for what Mycroft had to live through and would, apparently, continue to live through as the years went by. And then there was the sharp twinge of annoyance purely for Sherlock and his sense of entitlement. And timing. Couldn’t he be bored at a more reasonable hour?

“Just try not to be a prick to him all the time, ok? Give him a break now and again.”

“I will consider it, however, I do not think I will be able to comply with your request. Now, entertain me.”

“Sherlock… it’s 3:00 am. You woke up my Mum to answer the phone, so I am already in a world of trouble, and you want me to do what? Sing you a song?”

“Given your grating speaking voice, I cannot believe that your vocal performance of a song would in any way be entertaining. You likely have the timbre of a corncrake, which is fitting since you are exactly as intelligent as one.”

“Don’t you have an experiment to do or something?”

“Not at the moment.”

“Book to read?”

“None of any great interest. The lumbering gourd has not taken me to purchase anything new in years.”

“Doesn’t it give you a headache lying so much?”

“Not at all. In fact, it is a spectacularly simple thing to accomplish and requires little mental effort. It could actually be considered restful.”

“Good to know. How about this… I have to work just in the morning tomorrow, so I can swing by and take you to get something new to read when I get off.”

“Five something new.”

“Sherlock… I am too tired to negotiate with you and I don’t have Mycroft’s skill anyway, so it won’t be a lot of fun for you to beat me to a pulp. Let’s just go and see what you can find and take it from there.”

“Oh very well. I shall drive.”

“Funny boy. It’s going to be tough enough getting Mum to let me drop her off at work and take the car for the day after this mess, so I am not going to have her friends asking why a kid was the one they saw behind the wheel.”

“The gossip of the busybodies is of no concern to me.”

“Yeah, well it is to me. And if Mum gets angry enough, she’ll make sure the only place I can go for the next month is to work and straight back home and then where will you be?”

“My life cannot be scheduled according to the whims of the mindless serfs!”

“Well, this mindless serf has to do what his Mum says, so there won’t be any driving around on
the streets where the rest of us lowly peasants can watch. Maybe we can do a little parking somewhere quiet and private if we get a chance, though. How’s that for an idea?”

“Barely adequate… but acceptable.”

“Good. Now, can I go back to bed?”

“But I am not tired.”

“I didn’t say you had to go to bed.”

“You are pathetically slow, aren’t you? I am not tired and I am still bored. You see the problem.”

Yes, and his name was Sherlock Holmes.

“I bet if you just lay down for awhile, you’ll drop right off.”

“Do you think I am a swaddled infant?”

“Based on amount of hair or behavior?”

“You and Mycroft covet my hair. It is both obvious and odious.”

“You’ve got girl’s hair, so no… no coveting here.”

The offended squawk was like a trophy for Lestrade to place on the mantle.

“That verges on slander.”

“Yeah well… sue me. Won’t get much.”

“I am foiled by your indigence!”

“Sometimes being skint has its advantages. Now, please go to bed.”

“Very well. It is clear that your standing as a lesser specimen of humanity requires that you succumb to the weakness of sleep and if you do not satisfy your weakness you will be useless to me tomorrow.”

“That’s one way of looking at it. I’ll be by in the early afternoon, so there’ll be plenty of time for you to get some books to keep you busy until Mycroft gets back.”

“Doubtful, but I am used to disappointment.”

“Then tomorrow should be a fine day, no matter what. Goodnight, Sherlock.”

“Already?”

“Sorry, little man. I need my beauty sleep.”

“Then I prescribe an extended coma.”

“See you tomorrow.”

Lestrade had to laugh, despite everything, because Sherlock was nothing if not consistent. With a big yawn he turned to head back to bed and found himself staring at his Mum, hands on her hips
and her robe cinched tightly around her waist.

“Uh…hi?”

“Anything I should know about?”

“No… I mean, not really. That was just Sherlock.”

“Your friend’s brother?”

“Yeah… he, um… couldn’t sleep.”

“So he calls you?”

“I sort of told him he could while Mycroft’s away. Little kid’s all alone in that massive house with nothing but servants and I didn’t think he’d call so late…”

“It’s ok, Greg. I think I understand.”

“You do?”

“Just remind him that other people have work in the morning. And I’ll catch a ride to work tomorrow, so you can have the car all day. Sounds like you have a busy afternoon.”

“Oh… ok.”

“Now get to bed. This does not mean you get to go to work late no matter how tired you’ll be.”

“I know. Goodnight, or morning…”

Lestrade edged around his Mum and hoped she wasn’t planning a sneak Mum-attack while his back was turned. He could be forgiven for the squeak that snuck out when she called his name.

“You’re a good boy, son. Have fun tomorrow.”

‘k. Thanks.”

This time, Lestrade made it to his bed without any further motherly embarrassment and lay there with he thought of tomorrow’s excursion rolling around in his mind. Mycroft had been gone three days, well four now, and he was missing him terribly, which was stupid because it was only a few days and he’d been staying busy. Working extra hours to put something in his wallet besides lint, spending some time with his mates… and all of it was lacking something because he couldn’t pick up the phone and tell Mycroft about the pain-in-the-arse customers he’d dealt with or the gossip he picked up over a few pints and listen to him laugh with each story. It still amazed Lestrade that he could make someone as smart and cultured as Mycroft Holmes laugh… he’d even missed the goblin. As infuriating as Sherlock could be, he was actually also pretty fun to be around. And there was still so much more time to wait! Two weeks, Mycroft had said. That meant ten more days. Ten more days of wishing Mycroft was here… ten more days of no kisses or touches… ok, not the time for the mind to go in that direction because he’d already relieved his loneliness twice today and… what the hell, it was new day, wasn’t it?

“You are late.”

“I didn’t give you an exact time, so I can’t be late.”
“Do not attempt to use logic against me. You are not suited to a battle of wits and will simply embarrass yourself.”

“Yeah, well… just get in the car.”

He hoped that Sherlock didn’t notice his little smile. Lad had been waiting outside for him to arrive, a satchel around his neck like the one he probably used at school, wearing what had to be his best attempt at nonchalance in both expression and wardrobe. Just a little eager, apparently, for their trip. Once Sherlock was properly situated, Lestrade set the car in motion towards their day of shopping.

“This car is revolting.”

“Cars can stage uprisings?”

“Was that an attempt at humor?”

“That’s my little secret.”

“I shall be studying you. That is your only warning.”

“Fair. That why you got your handbag with you? Keep your fingers free to take notes when you’ve got your books?”

Sherlock cut a pair of eyes that Lestrade was more than a bit certain could burn through metal and extracted his observation notebook from the satchel in question.

“That is the only worthy deduction you have ever made.”

“I’m just happy you weren’t planning on me carrying everything.”

“That was my original thought, however, you are rather fumble-footed and I will not permit my books to be strewn across the road because you have tripped on a pebble.”

“Yet, you agree to ride in a car with a clumsy bastard like me?”

“Ah. Unfortunately, one must sometimes take risks to reap the desired rewards.”

“Brave.”

“Quite. Also, you are also purchasing me chocolate and you cannot carry both without my books becoming soiled by brown fingerprints.”

“I’m not buying you a sugar rush when I’ve got to look out for you all day.”

“You are buying me my chocolate because you owe me. We negotiated and I will have my two chocolate bars, nougat and three caramels.”

“Ah, crap. You’re right. Forgot about that. Ok, so we make a sweets run, too.”

“I also require bell wire, calcium carbonate, mossy zinc, phenolphthalein and chips.”

“For your science kit?”

“Of course.”
“Why are you experimenting on chips?”

“Fool. They are to eat.”

“You want some chips? You want chips?”

“I have a page in my notebook ready to record my data.”

“I take it you haven’t had them before.”

“No. Cook will not make them for us because over half of Mycroft’s body weight is already made of grease and at school…”

Lestrade took his eyes off the road a moment to look over at the small boy who had suddenly gone quiet.

“School food’s rubbish, huh?”

“It is adequate. Though not everyone feels that way.”

Lestrade had no idea what going to a posh school was like, but some things couldn’t be that much different.

“They do a runner at lunch, hit some local place instead, and load up on good junk like chips?”

The little nod let Lestrade know that Sherlock only knew this second hand. Somehow he doubted that this wasn’t the only clique that wouldn’t take Sherlock in as a member.

“Well, those are the punks that’ll be doing runners anytime they don’t like something, so you’re well off staying out of their nonsense. And I know a great place for chips. We’ll get your books and chocolate… I have no idea what we’ll do about the rest, but we can look around… and then we’ll get a bite, ok? I’ll be ready for a pint anyway.”

“I will have one, also. I shall prepare another page in my notebook for that experiment.”

“It’ll sit empty for long time, then, because you’re not getting any alcohol on my watch.”

“I shall order my own.”

“That’ll be funny to see. May need a page in your notebook for that, too.”

“Is this another of those oppressive legal things?”

“Yeah, and it’s one people take seriously.”

“Bother. I shall have Mycroft amend that immediately.”

“Mycroft’s not going to let you start drinking either and I doubt that he can snap his fingers anyway and just have a law changed.”

“About the former, you may be right. About the latter… I would not discount the possibility.”

“Really?”

“Perhaps not at this moment, but in due time he will be able to change many of these ridiculous laws according to my wishes.”
“I’m sure he’s looking forward to that.”

“Immaterial. I am the rider and he is my horse. He goes where I lead.”

“You do know I’ve met the both of you before, right?”

“Unfortunately, yes. Which is why I would appreciate it if you do not acknowledge that fact when we are in public. Simply linger closely so that I may beckon you when you are needed.”

“Anything else, m’lord?”

“For the moment, no. Wait! Actually…. I misspoke. I require…”

“Yeah.”

“A respite.”

“You want a nap?”

“No, barbarian. An interlude.”

“What are you going on about?”

“I require refreshing.”

“Didn’t help. Sounds like you need a wipe down and you know I’m not doing that.”

“I m’st ‘r’nate.”

“I know you can speak English. A lot of English.”

“I MUST URINATE!”

“Oh, piss break. Why didn’t you just say? We’ll swing by my house. Here’s a tip, always go before you get in the car.”

“I am not mentally defective! If you were not tardy, I would not have an enlarged bladder.”

Which meant he’d been standing outside quite awhile waiting for their day to start. Lestrade felt his heart break a little at the thought and made himself a promise that (1) he’d set a firm schedule next time so the poor tyke wasn’t left waiting and (2) he’d try as best he could to at least call Sherlock now and then while Mycroft was away to keep him from being so lonely. Maybe they could catch a film or something or just hang out for an afternoon, too. Just wasn’t right the poor little thing was all by himself.

“I will be noting for the record that if contract a urinary tract disability, you are the one responsible!”

But maybe being by himself was actually the best thing for the rest of the world.

________

“You actually live here?”

“And you’d better watch what you say or it’s my foot up your bum.”

“It’s… it’s smaller than my bedroom!”
“Well, not all of us live in a castle.”

“But this… the gardener’s shed surpasses this in size!”

“Sherlock…”

“And there are…. people… everywhere!”

“Yeah, busy neighborhood.”

“A fecund neighborhood, you mean.”

“Maybe. Not really sure what you mean.”

“There are…. nine squalling beasts between those three houses alone!”

“Well, two are from down the way a bit, but yeah… we’ve got lots of kiddies around here.”

“Repugnant.”

“Well, no one’s asking you to go roll around with them. Though it might do you some good.”

“If I want impetigo.”

“That got to do with worms?”

“No, but that is an additional concern. Escort me to your facilities immediately so that we may be away from this cesspit of infection.”

“One loo coming up.”

Lestrade was very glad his Mum wasn’t home because he was sure that once Sherlock got a full view of his life…

“Did you obtain your furnishings from a scrapheap?”

“They’re old, but they work.”

“And who did you free from the lunatic asylum to paint your walls?”

“Ok, the wallpaper’s a little… yeah, it’s pretty ugly.”

“Do you at least have indoor plumbing?”

“Don’t worry, we knocked down the outhouse two years ago.”

“You are jesting, but it would not surprise me in the least if you were actually sincere.”

“You gonna go or not?”

“I shall need boiling water to wash my hands when I exit your chamber of horrors.”

“Just hurry up so we can get going. We’ve got a lot to do.”

Sherlock huffed off, but Lestrade knew his eyes were everywhere, cataloging each item on every shelf, each crack in every wall and would take his ‘respite’ time to come up with something caustic and educated to toss out the second he came back.
“I have evacuated.”

“You want a medal?”

“If it matches my crown.”

“I’ll keep my eye out. Ready to go.”

“No.”

“Now what?”

“I require a beverage.”

“You just poured out a beverage.”

“You know nothing of physiology, do you?”

“Not even how to spell it. What do you want to drink?”

“Whatsoever is typical for the riff-raff.”

“Water it is.”

“Boring.”

“But cheap.”

“You have made your point.”

Sherlock followed Lestrade into the kitchen and, again, took in every detail while he waited for his needs to be met.

“This tastes like despair.”

“I’ll tell Mum. She’ll be thrilled.”

“And this glass is upsetting the aesthetic balance of the universe.”

“Glad to know we’re making a difference.”

“I have finished. Please monitor me closely for my inevitable collapse due the pacification drugs the government is likely adding to the water to control the lower strata of the population.”

“I’ll do that. Ready?”

“No.”

“Now what?”

“I have yet to see your personal living space.”

“You want to see my room?”

“How am I to conduct a full investigation if I do not have access to the area most pertinent to
“Fine. Quick look at my room and we’re off.”

With Sherlock close behind, Lestrade took a deep breath and strode towards his room, pausing only slightly before opening the door and letting the boy in to roam around.

“A space this size cannot host enough oxygen to maintain life.”

“That’s what windows are for.”

“At least they have some use for you. The view has to be disheartening to the point to inducing suicide.”

“Yeah, there’s that.”

Lestrade watched Sherlock move through every corner of the small room, rifle through the closet and each drawer, search under the bed which was, luckily, free from porn since he’d already stashed it back behind the headboard owing to his Mum’s recent cleaning binges, and pick up every personal possession and inspect it with a scrutiny usually only associated with a scientist analyzing some new microbe.

“You done?”

“Yes. We must now leave so I can scribe my notes while my observations are still fresh.”

“Finally. Come on.”

Out of the house and with only one stop for Sherlock to run quickly to peek behind the house for who knows what reason, they were back in the car. On the drive to finally start their shopping, Sherlock furiously scribbled in his notebook, pausing now and then to stare at Lestrade before diving back in to record a further page or so of notes. Even with the car parked, it took another few minutes before Sherlock was finished and ready to leave the car.

“Take it you got some good data.”

“Yes. It will be critical for my analysis.”

“And just what is it you’re analyzing again.”

“I cannot tell you. It would bias my results.”

“Fair enough. Just so you know though, you’re not getting any blood samples from me.”

“No? That is unfortunate. I shall have to make do with skin or semen, then.”

“You are a disturbing character sometimes.”

“Only to the intellectually bankrupt.”

“Then this is the one time I’m glad to be poor.”

The book shopping trip took over two hours, but there were chairs provided for weary chauffeurs to sit in and read a decent adventure tale while their masters climbed the shelves looking for books
that had information on rates of decay of snake venom, electrochemistry, insect behavior, the history of firearms, analytical methods for water quality analysis and catapult design. The only reason Lestrade knew this was that every volume deemed purchasable was placed at his feet with a strongly-worded order to safeguard them from thieves anxious to trade them for drugs.

“I am ready to leave.”

“Oh? Sure you don’t need something on types of earwax?”

“That is ridiculous. There are only two types, wet and dry, and though there is some interest in the topic owing to the genetic and regional connection, it is not relevant to my studies at this point.”

“My mistake. How much is this going to run, then?”

Lestrade picked up one book and checked the price that was noted in pencil on the top of the first page.

“Christ, Sherlock! Do you know how much these cost?”

“It does not matter.”

“It sure as hell does because I can’t afford ten pages of any one of these.”

“You? Oh… oh…”

Lestrade watched Sherlock’s face move through a series of expressions, all of which could be labeled ‘confused.’

“You ok?”

“I am perfectly fine. I had not realized that… it is nothing. Rather like the cost of these barely-acceptable books. Mycroft has an account here and I shall charge them to that.”

“Did you ask him first?”

“That is not necessary. The account is primarily for my use, as his choice of reading material is so dull and dismal that they do not expose it to the general public for fear of causing an epidemic of fatal boredom.”

“What a nice lad you are. But, I’ll trust that if you say it’s ok, then it’s ok.”

“As well you should. Now, bring my purchases to the front. We still have a number of things to obtain before I consider this trip a success.”

“Sure you don’t want to whip me a few times to get me moving?”

“Mycroft confiscated my whip and I may not have it back for a further month.”

“What’d you do?”

“The details are not important. But I have learned that Mycroft has a rather unhealthy attachment to his eiderdown pillows.”

“Yeah, don’t mess with a man’s bedding.”

“Such was my conclusion, also.”
The remainder of Sherlock’s list took a great deal of footwork to find, each step of which was accompanied by a complaint of some form from the little manor-born, until Lestrade turned his attention to the people they passed and challenged him to tell one thing he could deduce about the person. That made the rest of the shopping far more interesting and kept the rest of the complaining to a minimum. Lestrade could only hope that Sherlock’s better behavior would hold as they made the last stop to pick up Sherlock’s chocolate.

“Lestrade! What are you doing back here?”

Trying to keep a pre-pubescent boy from attacking the kindly shop owner for his chocolate supply.

“Just picking up a few things for the boy. This is Sherlock and he’s got a bit of a sweet tooth.”

“Right… that’s your boyfriend’s little brother.”

“Yeah… Ah christ, Sherlock… I thought you’d given up the retching you miserable prick.”

“Leave him. He’ll clean the floor up nicely rolling around like that.”

“C…child labor is illegal, ruffian.”

“And to think I was going to toss in a couple of surprises because you’re this one’s friend.”

Sherlock was off the floor faster than a bullet could leave a gun and stood staring at the shop owner with a very obvious ‘I’m waiting’ scowl on his face.

“He’s an intense one, isn’t he?”

“You have no idea. And a crack negotiator. I owe him two bars of chocolate, some of that awful nougat we can’t ever move and three good caramels.”

“Good skill to have. People will always try to take advantage of you so always get as much as you can out of every deal. Smart lad. Why don’t you pack up what he wants and toss in a handful of those nut clusters and maybe one or two of the… you like marzipan, lad?”

“It is not nauseating.”

“Ok then, a few bits of that, too. Out of your salary, Lestrade?”

“Yeah. Got cash, though, if you want it.”

“This is fine. Just fine. Not often we get such an illustrious visitor to our little shop.”

Lestrade dropped Sherlock’s sugar explosion into a sack and had to smile at the bit of puffing up the boy did at the compliment.

“Alright, Sherlock. Got your booty. Ready for your chips?”

“Chips? His Mum’s going to have you by the ear. Sweets and chips in one afternoon?”

Again, a little pall fell over the small boy and Lestrade wished he didn’t have a good idea as to the reason why.

“It’s his big day out. Chance to get a tad spoiled since his brother’s away for a bit. He gets to
be king for the day and I’m his lackey.”

“Well, I know you’re good at that job. Be off with you, then and have fun. Sherlock, it was good to see you.”

“Of course it was…”

Lestrade could muster his own steel-cutting stare when he had cause.

“…it was nice to see you, as well.”

“Polite. Good to see in the younger generation.”

Lestrade hustled Sherlock out of the shop before he could drive a knife through the heart of his well-behaved performance.

“Chocolate. Now.”

“Chocolate. No. We’ll get you some real food to eat and then you can have something sweet afterwards.”

“Must we have a discussion about the inapplicability of society’s conventions to someone of my mental quality?”

“No, we mustn’t. My car, my rules.”

“Does this mean that when I have my own vehicle, I may set the rules of engagement?”

“Sure, we go shopping in your car and you can flip-flop the order of dinner and chocolate anytime you want.”

“I shall write that down so you cannot claim ignorance at a later date.”

“I’ll even sign it if you want.”

“I do. I also want my chips, so why am I not currently eating them?”

“Bastard.”

Lestrade did allow Sherlock one sip of his lager and wasn’t completely surprised by the grimace the boy made or the refusal of the offer of a second sip.

“Are you sure the taps at the bar are not connected to the urinal drains?”

“Pretty sure, but I’d have to ask.”

“And where is my food? The wench took my order hours ago.”

“You may not know this, Mr. Poshy-Toshy, but food has to be prepared. It doesn’t fall like manna from heaven onto your plate the moment you blow Gabriel’s horn.”

“That was a jaw-dropping mangling of Judeo-Christian religious myths.”

“No argument here. Never paid much attention at church. While we’re waiting, why don’t you make some notes? I’d think you’d want to jot down a few things about where the common
folk go to unwind for bit.”

“You could be correct, as painful as that is for me to admit. You will remain silent so I can concentrate.”

“What if I catch on fire?”

“I will smell the smoke.”

Sherlock pulled out his notebook and began taking another round of notes, turning this way and that in his seat to see everyone in the pub and all of the lack-of-glamour the establishment had to offer. After a few minutes, he put his notebook down and fixed Lestrade with a sharp look.

“The artificially blonde girl at the table by the door desires to copulate with you.”

“What? Who? Oh… no, no worries there.”

“I am certain that she wishes to bear your offspring.”

“Let me put it this way, she may desire to do whatever she wants with me, but that boat sailed and isn’t returning to port.”

“I do not understand.”

“We dated a year or so back. She’s with some, actually I forgot who, but I think he fixes appliances or something.”

“So you did engage in relations with her.”

“No, no I didn’t. Fooled around a little and that was all. Just not the right person for me.”

“So you do not discriminate between males and females as sexual partners.”

“Can’t say I do. Dated both and had good and bad times with both.”

“I suppose for someone like you, lacking in prestige, wealth or capacity to forge a successful future, the widening of the mate pool is a wise strategy.”

“Well done me, then.”

“When you have fallen victim completely to Mycroft’s manipulation, shall you keep a female consort at the ready to slake your lust for her alternate reproductive structures?”

“No! That’s not how it works, Sherlock.”

“I do not know the specifics about your lusts, so I must ask questions!”

This was not a conversation any rational person would have with a kid, but when the kid was Sherlock…

“Look, I don’t miss one when I have the other, ok. No harm in looking, but I don’t cheat. Got that?”

“You were not speaking ancient Greek.”

“Thought you’d probably be fluent.”
“I have yet to commence that study, but rest assured I will master the tongue quickly and with exemplary proficiency.”

“I feel very assured. Hey, here’s the food. And a fresh pint for me. Dig in while it’s hot.”

Sherlock was a stick and the platter of food that landed in front of him probably equaled him in body weight. The boy’s eyes widened and he carefully reached out to take one hot and greasy chip off of his plate, nibbling the end first before shoving the whole thing in his mouth along with four others he grabbed from his pile.

“Slow down, Sherlock. Foods not going anywhere. And you better eat some of that sandwich or no chocolate.”

“N’t p’rt o’ th’ d’l”

“Yes, it was part of the deal. You get real food in you, then chocolate. Chips alone aren’t real food.”

“‘tupid.”

“Maybe, but do it anyway.”

“I can’t eat all of this!”

“I’ll finish it off, but do your best.”

Sherlock picked up his sandwich and opened his mouth wide, trying his best to shove it past his gums.

“I c’nt get my mouf ‘round dis!”

“You don’t have to cram the entire thing into your face at once. Small bites… no, smaller… there you go. Just work your way through with small bites and toss a chip in now and then.”

“This is altogether too complex for the mundane act of acquiring nutrition.”

“Oh, and all that business with fish forks and twelve types of glasses on the table isn’t complex?”

“It is, and also as pointless.”

“Do they give you a map, at least, when you get seated?”

“No, it is part of the birthing process that such knowledge is imprinted on your brain.”

“That must hurt.”

“Not as much as dancing lessons.”

“You have my condolences.”

“Thank you.”

Lestrade was actually proud of Sherlock for eating a good third of his sandwich. Naturally all of
the chips vanished, but for a kid his size, he’d done a good job. Now was the hard part.

“No.”

“Non-negotiable.”

“Absolutely not.”

“What part of non-negotiable don’t you understand?”

“I will not go in there.”

“I promise it’s not haunted.”

“Haunted? I’m worried about hygiene!”

“Go wash your hands you messy little troll!”

“No!”

“You’re not getting grease all over Mum’s car!”

“How would even know? The fabric has already been well-provided with stains of what, I assume, are a highly-dubious nature.”

“Just go wash up before we leave. It won’t kill you to run your hands under the tap.”

“It might. Shall I remind you again of the term hygiene and this establishment’s obvious lack of said property?”

“Now.”

“Oh fine! But if I am brought low by the amount of poor-person’s water with which I have had to interact today, I am blaming you!”

“I’ll add that to the list.”

Someday that snort would really be world class. Lestrade waved the server over and paid the check then leaned back in his chair to wait on His Majesty. Who had left his notebook on the table. Lestrade had never asked about what the boy wrote when he was filling pages with scratches, so he pulled the book over to take a quick, and only slightly guilty, peek. There was a lot of information packed in there, but a couple of snippets especially caught his attention.

_The hut is miniscule, but not entirely lacking in interest. The space is fully used and evidence of familial activities is plentiful and diverse. It cannot be called unclean and is not obviously in a state of disrepair, indicating an attachment to the structure and its appointments. There are numerous photographs in prominent positions, chosen for maximum visibility. Many of the photographs are of Lestrade at various stages of development. Lestrade’s personal space reminiscent of his personality – uncomplicated, but only partially predictable. Limited possessions, but choices prudent for level of income. No frivolous expenditures of significance, in keeping with quality of remainder of shack._

Lestrade was surprised to find that his house passed some degree of muster. And that he was actually referred to by name.

_Second recreational day with Lestrade can be considered agreeable. Activities were acceptable_
and Lestrade is not uncompanionable or completely incapable of following conversation, provided it is leveled appropriately. He is willing to compromise, though does negotiate well for his degree of naiveté. Based on sum total of interactions, I will not object to further outings.

And wasn’t that the sweetest thing Sherlock could possibly say. Lestrade pushed the notebook back into position and reflected on Sherlock’s notes. He’d not been put off, really, by the ‘hut.’ Actually he’d seemed to focus heavily on the lived-in quality of their place, which made an odd, but sad sort of sense. Sherlock and Mycroft’s home was anything but lived-in. And, now that he thought about it, there weren’t photos anywhere. Portraits, yes… but none of the stupid photos his Mum had all around. It was quiet, too. The few people he saw milling around were quiet as stones as they went about their business, unlike his house which always had people going in and out, staying to eat or watch telly or just sit and chat for an evening. And it was interesting to have some of that data the kid was always going on about for the fact that Sherlock didn’t consider him a total wreck. Good to have a little fuel for his own growing soft spot for the lad.

“I have contracted cholera!”

That soft spot seemed to actually be in his skull, however.

“Take a vitamin.”

“That does not ward against the ravages of pestilence!”

“How’d you get cholera anyway just by washing your hands?”

“The… the sinks were high. There was an unavoidable amount of splashing involved.”

Oh… poor little tyke. Poor little fussy, overly-dramatic tyke.

“Well, I’m already on health-watch for you, so I’ll keep my eyes open for this, too. You ready?”

“I am exceedingly ready.”

Sherlock gathered his satchel and notebook and took a final look around the pub before leading the way outside.

“We may visit here again.”

“Oh, good to know. Another thing to put on my list”

“Efficient. Now, carry my satchel.”

“Your arms fallen off?”

“It is heavy.”

“It’s been heavy.”

“It is now especially heavy. I believe it absorbed the thick alcoholic fumes and body odor of your so-called pub and is now more massive than before.”

“Oh fine, give it here.”

Sherlock pulled the strap over his head and reached inside before dropping the strap into Lestrade’s hand.
“Oh, see you lightened it for me.”

“I am not an ogre. I shall carry the sweets bag to ease your burden.”

“And eat the sweets to ease your own.”

“I see that a protracted amount of time in my presence is increasing your reasoning abilities.”

“Guess I’ll have to make sure that I get lots of opportunities to boost my brain, then.”

“That would be incredibly wise.”

Said with a haughty sniff that did nothing to conceal the tiny, pleased smirk on Sherlock’s lips.

“Ok, delivered right to your door. Got everything?”

“It would be difficult to lose anything in a vehicle the size of a box of matches.”

“Just one more benefit for the old girl.”

“And I did not get my parking lesson.”

“Yeah, sorry about that. Next time, ok? I’ll make sure you get plenty of practice, I promise.”

“I presume that will suffice. As long as it is soon. I do not want a significant time lag between my lessons to impact the continuity of my instruction.”

“No problem. I can get Mum’s car again in a couple of days and we’ll be all set.”

“And I can have chips?”

“That can be arranged.”

“Very well. I find nothing objectionable about your offer. I…”

Sherlock sat there fidgeting with the latches on his satchel and Lestrade waited for him to pull his thoughts together.

“Today was not completely horrid.”

“Ok… nice to hear.”

“There were portions that were not entirely unpleasant.”

“Glad to be of service.”

“I do not feel an overwhelming urge to vomit.”

“I had a good time, too”

“You did? I mean, of course you did. That is why, due to my magnanimous nature, I will make myself available to you for further afternoons. Or mornings. The time of day is not relevant.”

Lestrade ruffled Sherlock’s curls and gave him a wide and bright smile.
“I’d like that. Let’s see what my week looks like and we’ll have your parking lesson and see what other trouble we can get into. How’s that sound?”

“If that is the best you can offer, then I suppose it will have to do.”

Sherlock was at his cutest when he was trying to hide his actual feelings.

“Well, thank you for your acceptance. Now get going, I’ve got to help out around the house tonight and Mum will skin me if I’m late.”

The little boy in the passenger seat opened the door and hopped out, dragging his satchel out after him.

“Goodbye, Sherlock. I really did have fun today. You take care of yourself, ok?”

Sherlock nodded and trudged towards the enormous doors that opened when he approached and waited while he turned and looked back at Lestrade who waved before watching Sherlock walk inside and the doors close behind him. What he couldn’t shrug off was the sense of unfairness that he was headed home to a house where there was a lot of life and love, though it was tiny, and Sherlock in that palace was probably going to sit alone in his room with his new books and not entirely by choice. Definitely a parking lesson later this week. Chips, too. And he might even have enough cash to fund a trip to the movies if he put in an extra few hours at the shop. Yeah, he could do that. And any hours he spent at work were hours he wasn’t spending thinking about someone who couldn’t be here right now to share these bits of time with him and Sherlock…”
Thank you all for your patience and encouragement for this story! I greatly appreciate all of the support!

“Greg! Call for you! I think it’s your little friend, Sherlock.”

Lestrade hopped off the sofa and picked up the phone, thankful that it was only 6:00 pm and not well past sleep o’clock, like last time. And he had planned on calling Sherlock later tonight anyway, to prevent just such an occurrence, so this was a nice piece of luck.

“What’s up? Bored again?”

“I am always bored. Surrounded by individuals of limited intellectual capacity, this is little other way to be.”

“Well, Mycroft will be back soon and you and he can have all the chats in the world.”

“He is also an imbecile. The quantity of adipose tissue in his brain prohibits the successful transmission of neural impulses.”

“And that’s a bad thing?”

“It is the reason for his imbecility.”

“Well, that’s cleared up. Now, I know you’ve got a stack of books to read, so that’s something to do.”

“I have already read them.”

“We got them two days ago!”

“You point being?”

“Ok… I guess that’s not really surprising, given it’s you, but wow… maybe the library next time.”

“Ridiculous. I may have need to reference these volumes at a later date and cannot traipe to some seedy fiction-purveying bastion of peasant illiteracy on a whim to obtain the information I require!”

“So, book buying it is. We can do something… tomorrow’s out because I have to work all day, then stay after to do some cleaning and reorganizing. But, day after’s good for me.”

“We can go this evening. The owner will keep the shop open on my account.”

“Not going to happen. You’re not the manor lord commanding the lowly to do your bidding, so don’t you dare bother him. I’ve seen your house, Sherlock, you’ve got enough books in your own library to outfit a school and what happened to all of the science stuff we bought? You can’t have
used it up already. Go do something with that.”

“I can have used it; it just so happens that I have not, of yet. However, that experiment requires three full days of incubation to complete and, therefore, it is not interesting at the current time.”

“Then start another one.”

“My next experiment is designed around the results of this one, therefore, I cannot proceed.”

“Worked yourself into a corner, huh? Well, then go outside. Run around, climb a tree…”

“Whereas you might wish me to emulate a monkey to better fit in with your troop, I do not find that an acceptable way to spend my time. Besides, it is getting dark.”

“Get a little nervous in the dark? That’s ok.. lots of kids…”

“I have no fear of the dark, lackey! It is more an issue of visibility. Why would I engage in activities when I am unable to observe my surroundings and gather data?”

“Just go out and have fun, you brat. Get some air in your lungs then whoop it back out.”

“Precisely what is the order of steps used to accomplish a whoop?”

“Kids your age need time outside running and yelling and just having fun. You don’t have to be collecting data all the time.”

“Data is vital. Whooping is not.”

“You don’t know for sure if you don’t try.”

“Do not attempt to sway me with the invocation of scientific methodology!”

“Gotta use the weapons I have, don’t I?”

“It is true that one must do their best with what one has and, in your case, that is very little. I am, however, remaining steadfast on my refusal to enter the outdoors to frolic among the beasts of the field.”

“I think we should forget the book trip and take you to a friendly farm instead. You’d get to pet all those nice sheep and maybe take a ride on a goat or something.”

“It would be fitting since when Mycroft returns you will be taking a ride on a cow.”

“Hey! You’re not even supposed to know what ‘taking a ride’ means you little bastard. From now on, I’m checking your room for things toddlers aren’t supposed to have!”

“Then you should bring with you a large disposal unit, for I am provided with many things inappropriate for toddlers due to my highly advanced intellect and level of maturity. Do not mistake age for awareness, plebian. Besides, I highly doubt that you could find anything I wanted to remain hidden no matter the degree of effort you put into your search. I can anticipate already the clichéd hiding spots you would check and plant false evidence in those locations to throw you off of the scent of your true quarry.”

“Well, now you’ve just told me you do have something to hide.”

“I did not! I gave no confession!”
“Too late. Gave yourself right up. Must be tough toting around that guilty conscience. Make your little legs all wobbly?”

“You are insufferable. It is completely unsurprising that Mycroft finds you agreeable.”

“Yeah, well who wouldn’t. Easy on the eyes, if I do say so myself.”

“You have an unflattering amount of vanity for someone who wears garments previously owned by a transient begging money on a train platform to purchase industrial-grade alcohol with which to wash away the memory of his pointless existence.”

“Sometimes I wonder if you write all that ahead of time and practice your delivery in a mirror so you’re ready when you get an opportunity to be a nuisance.”

“My witty repartee is a natural talent. I have no need for rehearsal.”

“I guess if you don’t become a scientist, you can be one of those comedians that gets up on stage to do a show. I’d pay for a ticket to see that. And bring a bag of rotten vegetables with me.”

“I shall give the management a photograph and prohibit your admission as part of my performing contract.”

“I’ll wear a fake moustache.”

“Unfortunately, that might work. The management would likely be of your dullard class and could be fooled by something so cartoonish.”

“I’ll go out and buy one, then… just in case. Pick it up when we get your books. Now, go play or practice your violin or watch the telly or something. I’ll call you tomorrow night and we can set up a time for me to pick you up for our next trip out.”

“I do not play, as that is for the empty-headed progeny of lesser creatures. And I am quite put off my violin as my tutor was sufficiently idiotic as to arrive today and announce that he was no longer going to provide my lessons. While that does not perturb me unduly, it does mean that Mycroft will have to engage another tutor and that is an overwhelmingly tedious process.”

“How long into your lesson did he quit?”

“Ten minutes, but that is irrelevant. He was bereft of either musical or instructional talent and should have never been allowed to inflict his asinine opinion on anyone!”

“Guess Mycroft was right about him needing to be there for armed combat not to break out. Anyway, I’m sure he’ll find you a good replacement. In the meantime, you should still be practicing. Keep those fingers nimble. Tell you what, learn something new and play it for me sometime. You can give me a little concert.”

“I do not give concerts. They are for those who are whores for approval and I do not need the accolades of the uncultured masses to buoy my sense of self.”

“Oh, I wholeheartedly agree. You’re a one-man party when it comes to ego. Now, go off and do something for real because my program’s starting and I don’t want to miss it.”

“Another mindless drone captivated by the uninspired storytelling of what passes for modern entertainment.”
“Come on, cop shows are the best!”

“Ugh…is there anything in the world more pedestrian than a policeman?”

“Well, I might be finding that out. Got my eye on joining the force someday. Maybe. All depends, really, but it’s an idea.”

“I know that you have few options in this world beyond that of manual labor and becoming a very inexpensive gigolo, however, I would hope that you set some goal for yourself beyond that of disbursing parking violations and finger-wagging those who commit vandalism and petty thefts.”

“I do have goals! Move myself up the ranks and get to work some good stuff like jewel thefts and kidnappings and murders and things. Go to London, maybe… that’s where all the big cases are.”

“Is it difficult to live in such a quagmirish delusional state?”

“Piss off you little demon.”

“Those who speak the truth are usually derided by those who cannot bear the righteousness of their judgments.”

“That’s it. You’re free to stay on the phone, but I’m now going to recite a love poem dedicated to your brother and…”

And Lestrade could hear Sherlock’s dramatic disgust in the click that ended their conversation. That kid would go far one day, provided someone was on hand 24/7 to keep hold of his leash.

Lestrade loved dreaming, especially now, since it was the only way he could see Mycroft. And feel his hands running over his skin and through his hair… though why he was tapping him on the leg was a complete mystery…

“Lestrade! Surely you cannot be so stuporous that you cannot be wakened! Are you intoxicated! It would not surprise me in the least, though you do not reek of the cheap and abysmally low-quality ethanol that you prefer.”

Why did the nightmare Sherlock have to chase away his gorgeous Mycroft, with his warm lips and that tongue that would feel amazing on his…

“Wake up you cretin! I am stifling in this environment and absolutely refuse to have my dead body found in such squalor!”

“Sherlock? SHERLOCK! What the FUCK are you doing in my bedroom?”

And sitting on the edge of his bed.

“Trying not to inhale the stink of your poverty.”

“You could do that by not being here! And how… tell me you didn’t walk here.”

“Are you insane? I had our driver bring me. He is currently guarding the car from the thieves and villains that live in this slum.”

“Ok… at least I don’t have to drive you home. But how the hell did you get in?”
“The latch on your window is a ridiculously simple mechanism to circumvent.”

“He’s a burglar. Mycroft leaves and in less than a week you’ve gone criminal. I’m so dead.”

“Cease your moaning. I mastered the picking of locks and unfastening of latches when I was six.”

“Lovely. Couldn’t have just played with your teddies like a normal kid.”

“Certainly not. Why would I waste my time with a stuffed ursine when I could, instead, learn a useful skill?”

“Know what? I have no idea why you wouldn’t. But I would like an idea of why you are in my bedroom at… bollocks! It’s after two!”

“Inconsequential. If you must know, I have been taking notes since a little after 1:00 am.”

“You’ve been spying on me while I was sleeping?”

“Spying is not the term I would choose. I was simply observing you and collecting data.”

“Well, I bet it was very interesting. Greg snores, twitches, farts, rolls around…”

“Groans my brother’s name…”

“You can tear that page right out.”

“One does not excise data, no matter how repulsive it may be.”

“Look you little…”

“Anyway, you are now awake and my study is concluded. For now. I am leaving.”

“You came all the way out here to watch me sleep?”

“I was bored. And you do seem to be a rich source of unique information. It would be foolish to fail to take advantage of any situation to obtain more evidence for my research.”

“Fancy way of saying you don’t find me repellant.”

“That was not at all fancy. I chose small words so that you might follow my train of thought. And I do find you repellant, however, marginally less so than the rest of humanity.”

“Well good for me. You gonna be ok going home? You’re not lying about your driver, are you?”

“Of course not. He did not wish to bring me, however, I know that he has taken our cars on his assignations with members of the opposite sex.”

“Tell me you didn’t blackmail the man.”

“I did not! There is no need for blackmail since Mycroft has given him permission. However, he will have no means to impress his potential coitus partners if he cannot find any of the automobile keys.”

“That, at least, is age-appropriate. Goodnight, Sherlock. I’ll still call tomorrow night, no…
tonight, to give you a pick-up time.”

“As you wish. It is not as if I structure my days around your comings and goings.”

Said the boy who stood outside anxiously awaiting their last adventure.

“Sounds good. Now… goodnight.”

“Very well. I shall leave you to your noisy and malodorous slumber.”

Lestrade watched as Sherlock packed away his notebook and pencil into a very familiar satchel, hop down from the bed and move towards the window.

“I will answer your phone call tomorrow if I am not otherwise occupied.”

“Goodnight again, Sherlock.”

The young boy remained in place for a moment, then reached into his satchel and took out something that he placed on Lestrade’s nightstand before rushing out of the room through the window. Lestrade reached over and was surprised to find a cassette tape. Since he was more than a little awake, he popped it into the player he’d bought with his birthday cash and laid back, grinning widely as the sound of a violin began to fill his ears…

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“What?”

“It’s just me. I can pick you up at one, if that works.”

“Be aware that I shall not abide your tardiness a second time.”

“I am now aware. So, what are you up to?”

“Documenting the properties of wounds inflicted by various types of knife blades.”

“Got yourself another slab of beef?”

“Yes. Cook took offense at my taking it without first notifying her, as if it were her funds that purchased the meat, but allowed my use of it since it will not be unsuitable for a stew that she will be preparing.”

“Stabbed-meat stew… sounds tasty.”

“It will be barely palatable, at best, however, she has agreed to leave my knife marks visible in the portions of meat so I may analyze the effects of the cooking process on the wounds.”

“Right nice of her. Look Sherlock… I also wanted to thank you for the tape you left. It was… it was brilliant. I’ve never heard anything like it.”

Lestrade wondered if Sherlock had gotten distracted by his experiment and wandered off because there was nothing but silence on the line for quite awhile.”

“Sherlock…”

“You liked it?”
“Yeah, I did. It was amazing. You’ve got a lot of talent.”

“My technique is unexcelled.”

“Technique’s only part of it. You’ve got heart, too. And passion. You can tell when someone loves their music… really, it shows. Makes it something special to hear. I can keep it, right? The tape, I mean.”

“You… you wish to listen again?”

“Sure! I always replay the good stuff.”

“I… I felt certain that the composition would be beyond your ability to grasp.”

“Nah, not a stranger to classical, thank you very much.”

“Oh. Good, then my efforts were not squandered on the likes of you.”

“No squandering. I appreciated it. You can make me as many tapes as you want.”

“My time is supremely valuable.”

“That’s what’ll make them especially special.”

“I shall take your request under consideration.”

“You do that. So, I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“I shall be waiting at the appointed hour. And I expect my parking lesson, as well.”

“We can do that. And stop at the pub.”

“Oh, if we must.”

“Well, we don’t have to. In fact, I guess we can give it a pass if you’re not too enthused.”

“No! I mean… no. It is not an entirely soul destroying an experience.”

“And they have chips.”

“That may factor into the safety of my soul.”

“See you tomorrow, Sherlock.”

“Do not be late, Lestrade.”

Sherlock shopped for books, ate chips and spent an hour maneuvering Lestrade’s car to a successful parking position adjacent to the curb of a quiet street and using the street as another air strip to practice steering. Then, after much begging, which was most certainly not begging, Sherlock convinced Lestrade to return to his home to see the results of his newest experiments on blood coagulation rates. And then watch a film, which would have been two if Lestrade didn’t have to work the next day.

And Lestrade was proud that he kept his promise to himself to just be there for Sherlock. Giving him a quick call to check in now and then, letting him practice his driving on the estate roads,
taking him shopping for supplies for his experiments and laughing at Sherlock’s antics when he took the tyke into a shop he wanted to visit. His mates thought he was daft paying attention to a little kid, but Sherlock needed someone to pay attention to him and... and it helped the days pass more quickly. For both of them. Though Lestrade had no idea when Mycroft would actually return, both he and Sherlock began to get anxious as the two-week mark approached.

And then passed. Neither Sherlock nor Lestrade would admit why they spent the entire fourteenth day of Mycroft’s absence together at Sherlock’s house, but there was a heaviess to the atmosphere when Lestrade finally left late that evening. Two days later, or rather two nights later, Sherlock paid another late night/early morning visit and Lestrade simply went outside and told the driver to pick up Sherlock later at the shop. The rest of the night was spent playing cards, which Sherlock was very annoyed to find Lestrade had a talent for, and listening to the music for which Sherlock had mimed heart failure watching Lestrade purchase during one of their shopping trips. And, it was only a small white lie to Lestrade’s mother that Sherlock had come by early for a day of following Lestrade around at the shop so she didn’t ask too many questions of the small boy sitting and glaring at her from their sofa. Fortunately, Sherlock did not argue with the cover story, nor behave atrociously when he was sat down at the kitchen table and forced to have breakfast by a woman who declared him in need of a good feeding and packed a bag of snacks for Sherlock to take with him on his job-shadowing. Lestrade got the car keys for his off-to-work prize and he and Sherlock were out of the house before his mother started adding words to the affectionate look she was giving her son.

“Your mother is food-obsessed.”

“That’s the way mum’s are.”

“Then she should love Mycroft. He is forever seeking to fill his enormous stomach and your mother seems like she would be happy to comply.”

“For the last time, your brother is not fat.”

“Compared to a pregnant sow, perhaps not.”

“You’ll be lucky one day if he doesn’t up and give you a spanking you won’t forget.”

“No, that will be your lucky day if I am correct about the nature of your fetishes.”

“I am not talking to you for the rest of the day.”

“The truth may hurt, but you should embrace it nonetheless.”

It had been nearly three weeks and Lestrade was struggling with an unhealthy combination of loneliness and raging lust and already his Mum had cocked an eyebrow at him for putting lotion on her shopping list twice. But it wasn’t his fault that every time he thought of Mycroft, more than his brain got excited... Even Sherlock was getting harder to entertain than usual and Lestrade was worried about how deeply the boy’s mood would plummet if Mycroft remained gone for much longer. At least tonight he had the house to himself. His mum was staying with her sister who just got out of hospital and, beyond watching telly on the sofa with Sherlock last night, he was having a nice stretch of alone time to sit around with a beer, turn his music up a little and not be so worried about being caught smoking. Luckily, he had no intentions of letting his mates anywhere near his house to complete the cliché with a big party that landed him in jail.
He was on his second bottle of slightly better than normal lager, when there was a knock at the door and Lestrade seriously considered playing deaf and letting whichever neighbor it might be just go fuck off and find someone else to help them move some furniture or babysit or whatever. Then, he felt terribly guilty for thinking that and got up, smelling his breath to check he didn’t reek to the point his mum would be notified.

“Yeah, what do you… want?”

“If I have to provide an actual answer to that question, then I have been gone too long.”

“Mycroft?”

“Have I changed that much?”

The slightly healing black eye was a change and Lestrade couldn’t stop his hand rising up to caress the injured skin.

“Ah… a misunderstanding that was quickly rectified. Nothing about which to concern yourself.”

“I certainly am going to concern myself! Get in here you bastard.”

Lestrade pulled Mycroft into the house, closed the door, then slammed Mycroft’s body against it, taking him into a nearly bruising kiss that left both of them gasping for air, but unwilling to move more than a few inches from each other.

“Where have you been?”

“I am afraid I cannot divulge that information, but I can say that I regretted profoundly every day I was not available to you.”

“We were going nuts worrying!”

“We?”

“Sherlock and me. Little tyke’s been beside himself all alone, with only me for company!”

Mycroft felt an even deeper love for his husband twine itself through his bones and knew that as they moved through the years, it would be as a family. And nothing in the world could ever please him more.

“Then my apologies shall be double so you both may have a full share. But I am here now, if you still find that a pleasing thing.”

“You… damn it…"

Lestrade pulled Mycroft in for another kiss, sliding his tongue between those smirking lips and yanking a corner of Mycroft’s shirt out of his trousers so he could slide his hand underneath to stroke the pale skin underneath. The shudder that when through Mycroft’s body battered at Lestrade’s self-control and he found his mouth moving down to Mycroft’s long and lovely throat to taste the skin and pull the most delicious sounds from Mycroft’s lips.

“You have no idea how I have missed this, Gregory. How much I longed for your touch. Do not think for a moment that you were not ever in my thoughts.”

“I couldn’t get you out of my mind, either. At work, with Sherlock, lying in bed at night… you
don’t want to know what I’d do lying there in the dark thinking about you.”

“I rather think I would.”

“It was filthy.”

“I can imagine many filthy things, my dear. Tell me how your hands roamed your body and how you wished they were mine. How you touched yourself and fantasized that it was me giving you pleasure. Did you do that, Gregory? Make your body sing and pretend that I was there to hear your song?”

The straw cleanly snapped the camel’s back and this time Lestrade pulled Mycroft after him to his bedroom flinging the both of them onto his narrow bed, where he rolled them so he could straddle the gorgeous man in his life and begin unbuttoning his shirt. Mycroft shifted slightly so Lestrade could pull the shirt completely from his body and watched as his fiancé removed his own, audibly gulping as Lestrade began running his hands over his own chest, gently playing with his nipples which tightened quickly from the attention.

“You want to know what I did, well, this was part of it. I’d think about your hands playing with my chest and then…”

Lestrade made a show of licking his fingers and letting them trail over his hardened nipples, sighing from the extra sensation from the wetness.

“…I’d get myself good and hot, so I’d get good and hard before I went any further. Now, it’s your turn… give me something nice to watch…”

Mycroft groaned as Lestrade shifted his hips a little, putting pressure on Mycroft’s growing erection and it was all he could do to mimic what his husband was doing, letting his mate show him how to make his body respond in ways he would never have predicted. Feeling both his hands and his lover’s eyes on his skin was a phenomenal aphrodisiac.

“That’s… fucking spectacular. You are the most gorgeous man I’ve ever seen and it was a nightmare not getting to see you or talk to you…”

One of Lestrade’s hands ran downward and caressed his firm belly, while the other reached outward and traced Mycroft’s lips with two fingers, gently pushing between them and moaning softly when Mycroft began sucking and playing with them with his tongue.

“Your mouth drives me wild… the things you say with it, the things you do with it… before you leave tonight, I want that beautiful mouth putting your mark back on me. You want that don’t you, Mycroft?”

As if any answer was needed what with the surge of lust that shot through Mycroft’s body that had him arching upwards between Lestrade’s thighs and the total blackness in his eyes that erased every bit of color they once had.

“Yeah, you want that… and so do I.”

Lestrade pulled his fingers out of Mycroft’s mouth and teasingly ran them down Mycroft’s chin and neck before taking them in his own mouth and making a show of licking them clean, which earned him another press of Mycroft’s body upwards against his.

“My Mycroft likes watching me play…”
The newly-wet fingers trailed down Lestrade’s body and teased his navel just for a moment before moving further downward to dip beneath the waistband of his trousers.

“And I like watching you play, too. Seeing your hands move over your skin, touching yourself like you want me to touch you.”

Mycroft was absolutely intoxicated by his husband. Gregory was perfect... sensual, confident, playful and breathtakingly handsome. No, handsome was a poor descriptor for the being that was so fully captivating Mycroft’s heart, body and mind. The being that was looking at Mycroft as if he demonstrated that degree of physical perfection. The being that had popped open his trouser button and was dragging down the zipper, holding a very wicked grin on his face as he drank in Mycroft’s little moan of anticipation.

“Had to give myself a little breathing room. You get me so hard it almost hurts and I’ve had to take care of that little problem a lot lately. Now, at least you can see what you do to me and what I have to do to take care of myself.”

Mycroft was sure he was misinterpreting his spouse’s words, but that certainty faded as Lestrade drew down the front of his pants and brought out his very ample erection.

“That’s what you do to me, Mycroft. My blood goes straight to boiling the second I start thinking about you and I’m trying to be so good, be a proper boyfriend but it’s so fucking hard when you’re that sexy and amazing.”

Mycroft knew the little whimpering sounds he heard were coming from him and he honestly didn’t care. How could he when his husband was declaring his love so profoundly and… stroking himself slowly, hips moving gently to meet his lightly closed fist.

“This is what I do at night, love. Sometimes more than once. And sometimes I do more with a little something I keep well hidden. Well, it’s not exactly little, if I’m honest…”

The motion of his intended’s hips was driving Mycroft insane as it rubbed against his own aching flesh and he could not say he remembered unfastening his own trousers until he heard the whispered ‘yes’ fall from his Gregory’s lips.

“Knew you’d be perfect. Every bit of you… perfect. That’s it, Mycroft… let we see what you like. What you want me to do to you. What makes you leak... what would make you beg to come if I just brought you to the edge and kept you there…”

Mycroft rarely pleasured himself at home because of the ever-present fear of Sherlock interrupting no matter the hour, but the few occasions when he had indulged… they had never approached anything like this. Every inch of his body was furiously hot and there were shocks racing through his nerves started and ended between his thighs, sending loops of arousal through him that were coiling more and more tightly in his lower belly.

“You’re getting close, aren’t you, love? God, you are so beautiful like this. Better than any fantasy I ever had in my head. I need you to come for me, Mycroft. I want to see your face when you let go.”

Not that Mycroft could possibly stop himself at this point. His lover’s eyes focused only on him and enjoying what they were seeing… he had never felt so wanted, so desired and so very much in love. It wasn’t but a few moments more before his Gregory got his wish, as Mycroft’s body was rocked by the most intense sensation he had ever experienced and he felt no shame crying out his husband’s name as his seed pumped out over his fingers and stomach.
“You’re… you’re… words can’t describe you, Mycroft. Not any. You are the most fantastic… oh god… most wonderful… yeah, so close… watch me, Mycroft… love it when you’re watching…”

And Mycroft was watching. He had no choice because he had no control over his response to his husband’s voice. Or body. He was positively enraptured by his spouse’s performance and heard himself whispering his Gregory’s name over and over as if he was offering a prayer to the person he absolutely worshipped. And his prayers were soon rewarded as his lover’s body stiffened and Mycroft heard his own name ring out through the room before feeling warm splashes of wetness hit his skin, which sent an unexpected surge of desire through him and nothing could stop him running his fingers across his belly, mixing together his and his husband’s semen as if he were performing some ancient rite of joining to bind them together forever.

Mycroft continued to watch his beloved breathe heavily with his head thrown back and eyes closed and wished he could capture that image in a photograph. Fortunately, his mind would do that for him and he committed each detail to memory, so as to savor this moment over and over again at will.

“You appear well satisfied, my dear.”

“I think my brain’s melted.”

“Then aren’t you glad I adore you only for your body?”

His spouse’s smile could light up any room and Mycroft returned the smile when deep brown eyes finally turned back to meet his.

“And I could say the same thing, minus the word only.”

Lestrade leaned over and took Mycroft’s mouth in another kiss, this one so long and tender, Mycroft felt he almost wanted to weep from the waves of emotion he had been experiencing.

“And you, love? Satisfied?”

“That is a staggeringly poor description of what I feel. However, I can think of nothing more appropriate, since I have never before achieved this state of bliss.”

“Then hold that thought a moment.”

Feeling his beloved pull away and move off of the bed was galling, but it was only a matter of a minute or two before his Gregory was back with a towel, wet on one end, that he used to clean and dry them both. The towel was tossed across the room, trousers were buttoned and then Lestrade was lying next to Mycroft, taking him into his arms and launching a round of gentle kisses and whispered endearments that moved gradually into Mycroft lying on top of his dear spouse and fixing a large and brilliantly-red mark on at the base of his neck. With his mission accomplished, Mycroft allowed himself the luxury of simply laying quietly with his head on his lover’s shoulders, enjoying the feel of his Gregory’s strong arms wrapped around his back.

“You can stay. Mum’s gone for the night and… you can stay. Sleep here with me.”

“I would love nothing more, my dear. In fact, my body is more than content to take your suggestion to heart and drift off to sleep right now. But, I have yet to actually make an appearance at home and I am expected.”

“You came here first?”
“I had missed you far too painfully to allow another minute to pass without your company.”

“I’m glad you did. I missed you, too. I missed you terribly, Mycroft. Are you… this going to happen again?”

Not the question Mycroft hoped would arise, but he should have expected it. His dearest was nothing if not perceptive.

“Yes. It is quite likely, actually. But not soon. Not in the immediate future. And, you know that I will always return to you, regardless of the length of my absence.”

“Promise?”

“Of course. My heart is here, Gregory, and I cannot survive for long without it, now can I?”

“How is it you always know just the right thing to say to make me want to kiss you senseless?”

“I have no idea. But I shall endeavor to continue to do so for eternity.”

It was only the small knock on the front door that finally pulled Mycroft and Lestrade out of bed, Mycroft explaining quickly that it was only his driver reminding him of his responsibilities.

“Another time, maybe? I’m… I’m not sure when I can get the house to myself again, if ever, but maybe we can work something out.”

“Another time, most certainly. If my arrival was not anticipated, I would not be setting foot away from you for any reason. Is it… is it inappropriate to say thank you? For this night, I mean.”

“Only if I can’t say it back. Thanks, Mycroft. I’ve never… that was something I’ve never experienced. It was the most… it was mind-blowing and I can’t tell you how special it was for me. And, to think… we’ve got a lot more ahead of us.”

Mycroft didn’t need to think. He had imagined a wealth of scenarios involving sexual relations with his spouse and he fully intended to enact each and every one of those scenarios in due time.

“It is I who is thankful, Gregory. You know well who you are to me in these matters and I can say, without question, that I had no concept of what one could feel… of how powerful could be such an encounter. And yes… we do have much lying in wait for us. In a few days, perhaps? I shall require a day or two to reestablish myself at home and pacify Sherlock’s petulance. May I call you and offer a date and time?”

“I’ll be waiting for it.”

“Excellent. Goodnight, my dear. For the little time you have remaining, rest well.”

“Goodnight, Mycroft. I’ve glad you’re back.”

“As am I. More than you can possibly imagine.”

Mycroft sat in the back of the very large automobile and wrapped his arms around his body, trying to recapture some of the delicious warmth and sensation of being held by his spouse. Was there a man more spectacular? He could now claim to have had his first sexual encounter, introductory as
it was, and it was beyond anything he could have predicted. Gregory was exactly as tender and wanton and loving and aggressive as Mycroft could have hoped and he had never felt such an intimate connection with another person. A connection where he was completely exposed and vulnerable, yet felt perfectly safe and secure. He knew his Gregory would keep to his plan to move slowly in the physical aspects of their relationship, but if even this was all he could have until their wedding night, Mycroft would be content. Though he was very anxious to participate in an evening that involved Gregory’s ‘little something I keep well hidden.’ Or at least have his husband describe what he did with his *something*. Describe in detail. Vivid detail.

Mycroft sat in the back of the very large automobile and stared out of the window thinking of his lovely Gregory, missing him again, and hoping that someone in the heavens took pity on him and struck down his freshly raging erection before he arrived home and had to contend with the prince of the goblins…
I apologize for both the wait and shortness of this chapter... events in nearby Boston have had me quite distracted...

“Mycroft! You are inexcusably overdue!”

There was a comforting familiarity to the shrill screeching of the enraged creature lurching its way across the floor.

“I will concede the point, owing to the fact that any excuses I could offer I cannot offer, so it amounts much to the same outcome.”

“And you did not provide ANY communication whatsoever, which is egregiously negligent!”

“I did warn you that the possibility was significant I would not be able to send you any messages.”

“Or take any! What if I had been compromised in some fashion! Lying on my deathbed, breathing my last, and you would let me expire without proclaiming in my presence the value of my tragically-shortened life to your own!”

“Yes, that would be my first concern… however, I am certain that if there was a true and grievous danger to your welfare, I would be informed.”

“Insufficient. You are placing the judgment of that criteria in the hands of cretins, be they your own suited and stuffy ilk or the poorly-trained medical staff assigned to my care and that is not something in which I take comfort. You must simply maintain communications with me at all times. There is no other acceptable possibility. I am the only one qualified to render a verdict on the status of my imminent demise.”

“And if you lack consciousness?”

“Point taken. I demand a subdermal implant that relays my vital signs directly to you!”

“That is a conversation we may broach at a later time, though I shall make inquiries as to the feasibility of that scenario. Now, why don’t you inform me as to your activities during my absence? I shall be happy to sit awhile and listen to you recount your adventures. In your room, perhaps?”

Mycroft smiled and Sherlock scowled his way up the stairs to his bedroom, where he flung himself on his bed, Mycroft taking a seat on the edge.

“I had no adventures. The time was stultifyingly boring and mentally atrophying.”

“How terrible for you. With a personal laboratory, library and extensive property to explore, you spent your time simply lying in wait for your brain to regress to its basic functions so that you live the remainder of your life as a blank slate.”
“It was a close thing!”

“And at no time did you seek companionship, say, with a mutual acquaintance of ours?”

“No.”

“I find that the rapidity of your stated ‘no’ indicates that the true meaning is its opposite.”

“Ugh…fine. I sought companionship with no one; however…. I did make use of the shop boy to further my needs and interests.”

“Really? Do tell.”

“He may have been useful for acquiring new books and supplies for my experiments.”

“On my account, I assume.”

“For the books, yes. The other materials we gathered from many sources and the lackey funded those purchases from the tarnished coins in his begging cup.”

“Then I shall replenish his coffers at the earliest opportunity. Is that all?”

“I did demand my parking lesson and he, of course, was forced to comply.”

“Oh, of course. And I assume you have completely mastered the skill.”

“Would you doubt it? I can now drive and park, although the fool refused to allow me to even approach the posted speed so my practice with a realistic driving experience has been shamefully lacking.”

“I have feel quite certain that with more evidence of your readiness for an additional challenge, Gregory will permit an increase in your rate of travel.”

“I also want to change vehicles. His car is woefully simplistic to pilot. Henceforth, I want my lessons in a better vehicle. The Bentley would suffice.”

“I believe the prudent course would be to take your practices in stages. First, become proficient with greater speeds and maneuvering, then you may proceed towards larger-sized vehicles. If Gregory’s mother’s automobile is not available to you, then you may have use of one of our smaller vehicles for practice. But we shall cross that bridge when we arrive at it. It does appear, however, that you spent a great deal of time with Gregory in my absence, between your shopping and driving.”

“He was useful for transportation and making purchases. Also, I believe I would not have been allowed in the pub if he were not present.”

“He took you to the pub?”

“It was for an experiment!”

“Concerning?”

“…ips.”

“Come again?”
Mycroft’s heart was overflowing with love for his dear husband and the tender care he took of the small hellspawn that was his brother. Perhaps, someday, when he was more entrenched in his position, they could consider rearing a family of their own. Mycroft made a mental note to have portfolios made of females who most closely matched himself and his Gregory in appearance and personality type to be filed away as potential surrogates for their offspring.

“And did your experiment involve the consumption of said chips?”

“It was an artifact of the experimental procedure. And we had to repeat the investigation, of course, to ensure my conclusions were correct.”

“Naturally. So in the time that I was away, you were able to freely conduct your shopping, and, I assume, the experiments for which you purchased supplies, practice your driving, visit the pub for a relaxing and tasty experiment… anything else?”

“No.”

“No?”

“You have enough information to properly assess my degree of boredom. I was confined to this prison with none but the shop boy to speak with!”

“Oh, so you did engage in conversation and not simply use him as a mode of transport and your private bank.”

“I did not say that! Any visitations, whether they were here or at his cave, were for experimental purposes only!”

It had not crossed Mycroft’s mind that his brother would reach out for company while he was away, though he knew Sherlock would be very unmoored by his departure. That he would act on his growing affection for his incipient brother-in-law was a step he, also, would not have believed Sherlock would be capable of taking. This was one time that Mycroft was more than pleased to find himself sadly mistaken in his assumptions.

“I would not think otherwise. And I would also expect that Gregory found the time as productive as did you.”

Mycroft did not miss the tiny grin that quickly flashed across Sherlock’s face at the thought that his company had been valued. It was so precious a sight that memories of other such events were saddeningly absent from Mycroft’s mind.

“There is no question about that. His intelligence quotient must have risen appreciably by proximity to one as intelligent as myself.”

“Heavens, I had no idea that intelligence could be transported by diffusion.”

“If the concentration gradient is sufficiently high, yes. Given that he is a dullard and I am a genius, one would expect some degree of passive absorption of my mental capabilities.”

“Strange, I did not notice any change in his capacity when I visited him this evening.”

Mycroft chose not to make mention that when Sherlock jumped up, landed on all fours and fixed him with an intense, scrutinizing gaze, he very much resembled a dog that had been presented with
a well-prepared and juicy steak.

“You visited the peasant?”

“I paid my respects, yes.”

In no way was the launching of his brother a predictable event and Mycroft found himself on the floor with his shirt being wrenched hither and yon as Sherlock searched for marks of scandalous behavior, which he discovered very quickly.

“You are found out!”

“If you have not deduced by now that my relationship with Gregory is romantic in nature, then your previous statements about mental capabilities are nullified.”

“I am simply surprised that he allowed you to sample his favors after you abandoned him for such a prolonged period of time. His kind is not known for protracted fidelity under the best of circumstances and being forsaken most certainly cannot be described in auspicious terms.”

Mycroft suddenly felt an unreasonable vein of worry blossom in his bones. His Gregory had been very clear that his presence was indeed missed, but his return was also very welcome. However, Mycroft was so terribly new to the intricacies of a pre-marital relationship…

“Did he… did he say anything?”

“No, but in my observational journal you will note several occasions where his attention was sought by members both of the same and opposite gender. I have also concluded that the presence of a genius is conducive to romantic attention for those in my company because approaches by these hopeful fornicators were made first to compliment me on my appearance and, secondarily, to note the lackey’s efforts to serve me in an appropriate manner. I have therefore concluded I am, in truth, a powerful aphrodisiac. In fact, it was likely me that drew Lestrade to you in the first place and, for that, you are eternally in my debt. In addition, my continued presence likely reminded him of your existence so that he did not act on his invitations for feverish coupling, therefore, your debt load has doubled. I shall begin collecting immediately.”

“That my fiancé is both gloriously masculine and honorable had no bearing on the situation?”

“None at all, for both are delusions of your lust-infected mind. A brain scan would likely already show the pockets of damage being wrought by his wiles.”

“Be that as it may, did you at least offer your gratitude to Gregory for acting in my stead during my absence?”

“Why should I? It shall be his role in our household to tend to my whims and, for that, he shall receive, in compensation, his room, board and, regrettably, his lusts satisfied by you. No gratitude is necessary.”

Our household. Apparently his marital bedroom would now have to be soundproofed. And, also apparently, Sherlock had recognized his and Gregory’s eternal bond and was planning accordingly.

“His role in our household shall be to act as my partner in all things, not serve as an employee.”

“Boring. You are boring, therefore he will, also, be boring and that does not serve my purposes.”
“But it will serve mine, nicely. If you promise to treat him properly according to his station, then I suppose we could set aside a bedroom for your use in our home.”

“And a laboratory.”

“That would leave us with but one guest room and I envision times when I must, by necessity, offer accommodations to more than one individual as part of my duties.”

“Then you must purchase a larger home! I must have my laboratory!”

“It shall already be provided with four bedrooms, Sherlock. That is far large enough for newlyweds.”

“Not if it lacks a laboratory!”

“Oh, very well. I shall instruct my agent to find a residence that includes space for your laboratory.”

“And you should have a spare room for your concubine for nights when you actually require rest. He is extremely active in his sleep.”

There was a headache at the end of this path, but Mycroft saw no side road to take as a detour.

“And you know this how?”

“I observed him for over an hour while he slept. He also emits toxic fumes, but so do you and in greater volume, so that factor should not promote discord.”

“You shall not observe us while we sleep, Sherlock, let me make that perfectly clear now.”

“You would not know if I did as my ability for stealth is unparalleled. Also, I am quite aware of your propensity for spying and find your hypocrisy extremely off-putting.”

“I do not spy and the sanctity of my marriage bed will not be violated by your prying eyes and scribbling pencil.”

“I also plan to take pictures and record audio, so you might wish to practice harmonizing your primal moaning.”

“Sherlock Holmes, if you wish to have any hope of being welcome in the Lestrade-Holmes residence, you shall put all such thoughts out of your mind!”

“I shall be a resident of the Lestrade-Holmes household and you shall be privileged to have me!”

“Not if you interfere with my marriage!”

“The salient feature of spying is its non-interference!”

“I will speak to my husband about this!”

“He will side with me! I have spent more time with him at his point than you and our bond, therefore, is stronger. You have disabled yourself in this, Mycroft, with your neglectful behavior. The shop boy is mine!”

“NEVER!”
Sherlock leapt off of his brother and began running at the sound of Mycroft’s roar. The next several minutes were spent with the Holmes brothers charging through the house, dodging servants and yelling insults at each other until Sherlock was a moment too slow attempting an escape through the library window and was dragged back inside by a red-faced and panting older brother.

“Do NOT believe that you will hijack the attentions of my beloved you… diminutive pirate!”

“It is a fait accompli!”

“Our love shall not be ripped apart by your meddlesome jealousy!”

“I cannot be jealous for I have already bound him to my side! Perhaps if I am generous I shall permit you to gaze upon him from afar as he stands in wait for my commands!”

“I shall send you to boarding school!”

“Then you shall find me in the newspapers! Every week! For nefariousness!”

The battle would have raged well into morning if the phone in Mycroft’s bedroom hadn’t sounded to draw away his attention away from the anal mite currently wriggling in his grasp.

“We shall recommence this discussion when I return. Do not attempt to escape or I shall set the staff on you, each one armed and awaiting the bounteous reward I shall set upon your head.”

“As if they could catch me! You are far too lax with the help and they have grown globular and lazy.”

An in-unison hiss preceded Mycroft releasing his brother and racing off to what had best be a very important reason to disturb him this soon after returning home. For Sherlock’s part, it was a mad dash to his own room and telephone to dial the only number he actually knew by heart.

“If this is you, Sherlock, you better be dead or damn near close to be calling me this late.”

“HE HAS TAKEN LEAVE OF HIS SENSES!”

“Who? Mycroft?”

“My death is imminent! Humanity will not survive the tragedy! You must take action to save me or I cannot guarantee a safe future for coming generations!”

“What did you do?”

“Nothing. He crossed our threshold and became a rabid beast bent on my destruction!”

“Mycroft doesn’t lose his cool unless he has good reason and you know that. So, tell me what you did and I’ll try and help sort it out.”

“Truly there was nothing! If he cannot face the simple fact that he has permanently crippled your relationship through gross mistreatment of your affections, then I cannot be visited with blame!”

“And who gave him the idea that he’d done something like that?”

“I have no idea. Perhaps he suffered a brain trauma; he did have evidence of a blow to the face, which unfortunately did not improve his appearance as I might have predicted it would.”
“Sherlock… why do you have to torment Mycroft like that?”

“I was not the one that thrashed him! Though he is planning such a fate for me, I am quite certain.”

“You know what I mean you little bastard. You have got to stop being a complete prick! He tries his best to keep you happy and you just kick him in the arse every chance you get. What’s he doing now, anyway?”

“Taking a phone call. And contemplating my painful and protracted demise!”

Lestrade heard a short squeak and a fracas on the line, then a very familiar and very irritated voice took up the conversation.

“Gregory, my dear, I apologize most sincerely for Sherlock disturbing you at this ungodly hour. He has become quite unhinged and seems determined to touch as many as he can with his lunacy.”

“I am not a lunatic! Mummy has papers to attest to that!”

“You alright, love?”

And with that, Mycroft’s tension bled away and he could breathe with much greater ease

“I am now.”

“Sherlock gave you a proper homecoming, did he?”

“I believe his talents for chaos are, unfortunately, surging forward at an accelerated rate.”

“Well, you have to figure that little genius boy would do everything at an accelerated rate. Just let him put on his little show, clap when it’s over and move along.”

“You are, of course, correct. I am simply a bit fatigued to think objectively about the situation, though for what reason I cannot possibly fathom.”

An attentive spouse should always acknowledge and show appreciation for acts of love and affection. His husband’s delightful laugh reassured Mycroft that his efforts were not wasted.

“No suggestions here, I’m afraid. Though I pretty much fell right asleep tonight after a visit by a handsome gent, so I understand what you’re going through.”

“How coincidental. My weariness is also directly related to an extraordinarily handsome gentleman and… Good heavens, Sherlock! If you wish to strangle yourself to death, please take yourself off of the rug first! The stain of your passing will be nearly impossible to remove.”

“Now that sounds like what I’m used to hearing over there. Little man was fairly riled up when he called, so if he’s killing himself now, things must have cooled down.”

And it had. Mycroft marveled at the peacemaking skills his husband naturally demonstrated, skills that would be absolutely crucial if they brought Sherlock into their nest. There would no avoiding the great drama that was undoubtedly looming in terms of composition of their wedding portrait, however, as Sherlock would surely demand inclusion as part of their new family. Mycroft made note to contact the artist he had commissioned for the work and alert him that there would likely be two portraits to be completed subsequent to the wedding.
“I do believe that domestic tranquility has been restored by your calm levelheadedness.”

“Happy to be of service. And speaking of service… any idea when I can see you again?”

This instant, if Mycroft could receive his fondest wish. He had not accurately predicted the impact of physical intimacy on their growing love, but could not argue that he already craved his spouse’s touch as dearly as his lungs craved air and his mind craved challenge.

“I do not… well, if you are amenable, you could join me for a small function tomorrow evening. It will not last long and then we will have the remainder of the evening free to do with as we wish.”

“Function? Like a party or something?”

“Nothing so festive. Merely a small gathering here at my home. It is not really a social event, however, it will masquerade as one. Again, it will be of short duration, then we may enjoy the rest of our time according to our own desires.”

“Um… is it going to be something I’ve got to dress for, because you know what I’ve got to wear and I can’t really afford to get something new and posh.”

An item that had slithered past Mycroft’s calculations, however, it was highly unlikely that anyone present would dare to make comment about his husband’s attire. Most likely, they would be so concerned with hiding their admiration and arousal when his Gregory stepped into the room that what he wore would not even register in their minds.

“It is immaterial, my dear. Whatever you choose to wear shall be appropriate. So you will come?”

The silence on the other end of the line lasted only a tiny moment, but it was enough to alert Mycroft that measures would need to be implemented to ensure the comfort of his beloved.

“Sure, sounds great. What time do you want me there?”

“Six will do nicely, if that is possible.”

“I can… yeah, I can do six. Take off a few minutes early from work to give myself a quick clean up first and then I’ll be ready to go. Sounds like we’ve got a date, but I guess that means I’d better try and get some sleep or I’ll show up looking like some kind of zombie and scare off all your chums.”

Unlikely, for a sleepy Gregory Lestrade was a sight that Mycroft had already decided could bring the most hardened man to his knees in tears.

“You shall delight the assembled no matter your level of energy, my dear, but I do agree that the hour is late and you need your rest. I should also at least try to convince Sherlock to find his bed and suffer a few hours of sleep himself. His mood does improve substantially when he acquires at least a few hours of slumber per night.”

“Just don’t tie the tyke to his bed to make that happen. Hate to have to take him to the dentist to get rope fibers dug out from between his teeth.”

“You know him so well. Until tomorrow night, then. I am sure it is quite the bit of nonsense to say, but I miss you, my dear.”
“It’s not nonsense. Not at all. And I miss you, too. Goodnight, Mycroft. I’ll be by at six.”

“I look forward to it.”

Mycroft knew that Sherlock had been trying to set his brain on fire by thought alone for the past several minutes, but made him try a bit harder as he ignored his brother while turning down Sherlock’s bedding and fluffing his pillow.

“A gathering? I was NOT informed!”

“That is because it was arranged only a few minutes ago. And it is not, as I communicated to Gregory, a true social event. We are simply providing a location for a discussion to be held under the auspices of drinks and appetizers.”

“And do you plan for the lackey to pass trays and clear glasses?”

“I plan for him to stand at my side as my betrothed.”

“Then I shall also be present to document the inevitable debacle that will occur.”

“You are not invited.”

“You are not stopping me. Besides, your sex slave will need someone with whom to converse as you cackle and bleat amongst the other livestock.”

“Since I cannot preclude your attendance, barring the use of sedatives or physical restraints, you may sit on the periphery and observe, but nothing more.”

“I shall do as I please, however, I have no interest in interacting with anyone you see fit to bring into our home, so a distal vantage point will be sufficient.”

“Excellent. Now, kindly don your pyjamas and go to bed.”

“I am not tired.”

“You are tired and if you are rested tomorrow, we can perhaps find something entertaining to do together before our guests arrive.”

“I do need to gather water samples to document microfauna levels before I begin my underwater decomposition experiments.”

“Then I shall have my boots at the ready.”

“Good. Though this shall relieve not even a fraction of the debt you owe me for attracting your impoverished suitor.”

“But you do agree to hand him back to me fully in terms of focus of attention, correct?”

No matter how hard he might try, when Sherlock pouted he never quite looked as distressed as he hoped. He was simply too adorable…

“If I must. However, this does not mean that I will not make use of his natural submissiveness to further my own ends.”

“I am quite certain Gregory will always be willing to help you, Sherlock, so long as you remember that he does so because he cares, not because he feels obligated to do so.”
Sherlock’s pout deepened and he turned away to rummage through his drawer, missing entirely Mycroft’s fond smile.

“I am paying no attention to your mindless prattle and would appreciate it if you removed your bulk from my mattress. Already I shall be in danger of rolling onto the floor in my sleep due to your gargantuan frame destroying the springs and creating a permanent incline.”

Mycroft only rolled his eyes at his brother’s deflection and rose to take his leave.

“Until tomorrow, Sherlock. I wish you good dreams.”

“If you do not leave for me some breakfast in the morning, I shall complain to Cook!”

“And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”

“Sausages!”
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Sincere apologies for the delay and continued gratitude for the kind words and insightful comments!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What demon has possessed you?”

“I find it rather ironic that you ask that of me.”

“You are wrongly attired.”

“Have you rescinded your judgment on my wearing of more casual clothing, so that my suits are now considered anathema?”

“No, you appear as a pustulous slug in either option. I am referring to that.”

Mycroft followed Sherlock’s imperiously-pointing finger to the space below his neck.

“My tie?”

“That is not a tie. It is a harlot flag!”

“Do they have flags? I would be most interested to see what would be the crest they would use as their proverbial national symbol.”

“Your tie is eye-searingly red, much as the painted lips of a lesser-quality example of a woman of ill-repute!”

“It is simply a tie, Sherlock… kindle reduce your histrionics to a more suitable level.”

That research has documented the effect of the color red on one’s perceived sexual desirability would not become part of their discussion. That was a topic of conversation relevant only to him and his husband-to-be.

“You have never worn a tie so crass. And your suit is obviously cut from a pattern intended for a seedy and unscrupulous gigolo.”

“Then it matches well with my tie.”

As he was reassured by his tailor, who kindly did not protest when Mycroft sought his advice before making a hasty purchase at one of the local shops.

“You appear much as a ringmaster for a pathetic circus that pitches their tent in the dismal muds surrounding even more pathetic collections of rural huts and firepits. It is no wonder you have attached yourself to one of their local tribesmen.”

“Since my primary function this evening shall quite closely resemble that of a ringmaster, I am heartened that my garb will make me unmistakable in function.”
And, hopefully, ignite the fires of passion in his husband to a level that will make the post-function time pleasurable in the extreme.

“At least you are wearing a suit. The lackey will likely arrive in stained dungarees and a shirt he stole from the bins behind a madhouse.”

“Sherlock…”

“And I shall not make any predictions about the quality of his hygiene beyond it will be abysmal and assault each of my senses most heinously.”

“I would not make such remarks so casually, as you have yet to cleanse yourself after our morning of gathering your water samples and your aroma is decidedly similar to that of the algal mats floating at the surface of the pond we investigated.”

Mycroft found it quite entertaining to watch Sherlock attempt to smell himself without noticeably moving a muscle anywhere on his body.

“I believe your wretched breath has contaminated the air to such a degree that I must wash the effluvia off of my skin. I shall return.”

Mycroft wondered if he should consider simply building a small house on the grounds of his marital residence to ensconce his brother. It might be the most peaceful solution for all concerned…

__________

“Sherlock! What are you… an explanation, if you please?”

“I am wearing a disguise.”

Mycroft looked over his brother who was wearing a lavender summer dress, with a matching ribbon in his hair and low-heeled white shoes.

“For what possible reason?”

“I have observed that many individuals curtail free conversation when I am in the vicinity. I have also observed that males, of whom I am certain comprise the bulk if not the entirety of tonight’s guest list, consider females vacant vessels of little intelligence. Therefore, they will not censor their conversation, thinking I am too dimwitted to understand a word of their discourse and I may better observe their behavior in its unfiltered form.”

“How skilled of you to insult both halves of the world’s population in a single declaration.”

“I am nothing if not efficient.”

“Truly. Now, will I become agitated if I ask from where you obtained your frock?”

“I have an extensive collection of garments to use for disguise purposes. This is simply the first time I have employed any in your presence.”

“And cosmetics, as well, I notice. I must compliment you on your tasteful choice of shades.”

“The upstairs maid obtained a selection for me at the shops.”

“And instructed you on their use?”
“She is a far better teacher than your lecherous lover! I mastered the art of make up in a single session, unlike the eternity it is taking him to properly teach me to drive!”

“And did you threaten to terminate her employment if she failed to provide you a lesson?”

“Of course. And it was not a threat, it was a promise. One which my accelerated ability for acquiring skills and knowledge has prevented you from having to make good on.”

And yet another little bonus to a staff member forced to interact closely with young Sherlock.

“I, however, styled my hair myself.”

“And it is simply lovely. Very coquettish. However…”

Mycroft never got to finish his however, because his feet took charge to set him running, hearing the chime at the door.

“Gregory! Oh, my dear, you look…”

“Ridiculous?”


“Yeah, well… the only suits me or my mates have are the ones we wear to weddings or funerals and they’d look crap compared to yours. I asked my uncle and he helped me with this. You sure it’s ok?”

Mycroft still stood gaping at his husband’s choice of attire. Dark brown slacks, an even darker green button-up shirt and a very classically-cut tweed jacket that, with his love’s rich brown eyes made him the ideal picture of warm and comforting manliness. Mycroft suddenly had to hope that he could restrain his body’s reactions well enough not to embarrass himself in front of his other guests, though the hope be slim and tenuous.

“I don’t look too much like an old codger, do I?”

“You… you are positively stunning, Gregory. You put me in mind of a revered academician awaiting a gathering of like minds in the study of his fire-lit and book-lined study.”

An academician that blushed so beautifully it should be outlawed for causing grievous distraction.

“Ah, you’re just being nice, but I like nice, so I’ll say thank you and get on to my own proclaiming. Wow! You really look sharp! And who wouldn’t love a man in a sultry red tie… brains, poise and style. That’s my Mycroft!”

Now it was Mycroft’s turn to blush and he did so unashamedly. His spouse was the only person in existence who ever made his efforts at appearance seem worthwhile. And later, when he could lose his suit and tie, he would be most diligent in showing his gratitude.

“It is you who are committing gross flattery, my dear. But now, you must devote attention to Sherlock’s ensemble. He put an admirable amount of effort into it and I am certain he will welcome your opinion.”

Lestrade followed Mycroft into the library and found himself frozen at the door seeing Sherlock sitting on a sofa, clutching his observation journal and adjusting his stockings.

“Mycroft, you didn’t tell me you had a sister.”
“Isn’t that delightful, Sherlock? Your disguise is a success.”

“Of course it is! However this is not a true test, for the shop boy is possessed of only the rudiments of mental function and could mistake me for a chair if I did not speak!”

“Disguise, huh? Well, come over here, let’s see it.”

Sherlock huffed grandly, but dragged himself off of the sofa and walked, surprisingly well, in his little shoes to stand where Lestrade could see the entirety of his outfit.

‘Spin.”

Mycroft was very surprised Sherlock complied then mentally scolded himself for forgetting Sherlock’s enormous capacity for attention.

“I gotta say, you make a pretty girl, Sherlock. Good color for you, too; really brings out your eyes. You’ll have all the boys wanting to dance with you. Steal kisses, too, so you’d better watch out.”

“I have already taken precautions. There are no fewer than three close-combat weapons on my person and I am highly skilled in the use of each.”

“Where? That dress doesn’t leave a lot to the imagination.”

“That is none of your concern.”

“Speaking of… what you got under that skirt?”

“Again, that is not a matter for your knowledge.”

“Lacy? Silky? Little cotton ones with kittens and flowers all over them?”

“My pants are not a topic of conversation!”

“Knickers, Sherlock. You’re a girl now, remember? Can’t have slips like that and keep up your disguise.”

Sherlock scowled at the mistake and fidgeted with the hem of his skirt.

“You may have a point. Of course, it was only a mistake someone familiar with women’s undergarments would catch. I should be fortunate, I suppose, that you have coupled with numerous females prior to your attempts to infiltrate my family’s bank accounts. In addition, of course, to the legion of males with whom you have had relations.”

Mycroft knew that his fiancé was nothing if not faithful, but the stab of jealousy he felt was like the thorn of a fiery rose driven straight into his heart.

“Sherlock… stop trying to make Mycroft jealous.”

One long, muscular arm wrapped around Mycroft’s waist and a soft kiss was pressed against his cheek, serving nicely to stem the tide of insecurity that was threatening to rise.

“I’ve never met anyone as wonderful and there’s no one that could possibly make me happier.”

It would be unseemly to weep openly at his spouse’s continued declarations of devotion, but Mycroft had no doubt tonight’s journal entry would be illegibly tear-stained.
“Given your proven low standards, I can express no surprise at your words. A gigolo fit only for a home for the desperate and aged and a pauper who obviously went hat-in-hand to the local clergy for clothing… you should be offering me your thanks for associating with you.”

“I’ll offer you a trip straight to your room and then you won’t be able to… whatever it is you’re planning on doing in your pinafore.”

“Reconnaissance! I must collect data!”

“This isn’t more of your paedophile fixation, is it?”

“Buffoon! You have no concept of investigative work! I shall write a most-strongly worded letter to the proper administration to quash any application you might make to a training program for law enforcement.”

“Well, if they want to make me wear a dress on the job, I might rethink my career choices.”

“Are you quite certain, my dear? I do believe you would be a vision in a lovely gown and jewels.”

“Kinky bastard, aren’t you? Luckily, I have to say I like that. Hey, you silly tart! Gonna wrinkle yourself if you keep trying to rip you heart out like that!”

Mycroft quickly moved to fix himself and his love a small sip of brandy, which nicely served to hide the current ill-fittingness of his trousers. His Gregory’s body swathed in silk, thin straps sliding slowly off of his broad shoulders…

“That for me?”

Feeling the softness of the fabric caress his naked body as they gave in to their passions…

“Mycroft?”

“What? Oh… oh! Yes, I thought a small measure of spirits would be amenable for the start of our evening. There will be other options available later, however, I must regretfully inform you, there is no beer.”

“I think I can manage to survive. Especially… especially with stuff as good as this.”

“The quality of the libations at our gathering will not be nearly as fine, though I do believe you will find them acceptable.”

“And me? Where is my refreshment?”

“A lady does not share alcohol with gentlemen. I shall have a tisane prepared for you, if you like.”

“Spare me your cups of boiled grass!”

“Hey, forgot to ask. What’s your name tonight, anyway?”

Mycroft savored the shocked look on his brother’s face.

“Looks like you forgot about it, too. Not a lot of birds named ‘Sherlock,’ so you better get to thinking.”
“May I suggest Calpurnia? We did have a great-aunt by that name. Oh dear… the air must be quite thick in here for it to choke you that way, brother dear.”

“Nah, I say we go with Shirley. Little Shirley with his hair all curly…”

“Oh, what an excellent suggestion. Don’t you agree, Shirley?”

“You are attempting to make a jest at my expense, but I shall thwart you intentions by approving your concubine’s idea. It will reduce the possibility of my failing to answer appropriately if I am approached for conversation.”

“Or molestation.”

“You desire to be a policeman – defend my honor!”

“What happened to your personal arsenal?”

“Why make the effort myself if I can simply command you to do your duty and preserve my virtue.”

“Well, put a little whistle in with your weaponry and give it a blow if someone gives you trouble.”

“I shall, if only to see you race to my side like the loyal canine you are.”

“Sorry, Sherlock, but the only bed I’m sleeping at the foot of is Mycroft’s.”

“Enjoy the odor of his freakishly-large feet.”

“Oh, there’s lots of things I bet I’d enjoy about his feet.”

“And shall we be able to discuss those later, Gregory?”

“In as much detail as you’d like.”

“I do adore your thoroughness.”

Sherlock watched his brother greet the soberly-dressed men who arrived at their home and took copious notes on each, along with their reaction to the peasant, which was quite interesting. The gamut of facial expressions ranged from incredulous to condescending to lustful to fearful of being contaminated by his peasantry. However, no one would dare offend his brother and, by extension, the rest of the family, so all opinions remained unvoiced. Not that his brother likely noticed, so besotted was he by the lumbering ape. But, he noticed and… Sherlock mentally proclaimed that he would not spare a thought for how he felt about his observations. Not at least until he understood it.

After the perfunctory handshakes and pouring of drinks, he watched his brother become slowly immersed in the groaningly dull conversations, which were easily transcribed because, as he had predicted, his disguise worked flawlessly. Beyond a few irritating comments on his dress or a pat on his head, his presence was ignored and data was freely available for collection. After awhile, however, it became clear that the proceedings were centered on cripplingly boring economic matters and Sherlock broke away from the group, settling on a chair near the window to review his notes.
“Hey, Shirley… having a good time.”

“From your inflection and stance, I would say that my enjoyment of the time has found its equal in your own.”

“Yeah, it’s all over my head. But look at him… isn’t he amazing? Fits right in with all those posh types. I think I recognize a couple of them, too, from the telly.”

“Place a row of empty suits in a room and my brother would be supremely camouflaged.”

“It’s not just that, princess. He’s… smart. I didn’t understand much of what they were talking about, but I did pick up on the fact that he didn’t have any trouble outwitting anybody here. And he’s… commanding. He really rules the room.”

“All Mycroft rules is the Kingdom of Cakes and the quantity of sacrifices he demands to ensure a benevolent rule can be estimated by the circumference of his waistline.”

“I’ve seen his waistline, Shirley, and it’s slim, trim and prefect for my hands to wrap around.”

“I have no interest your clumsy gropings.”

“Good, because I’m saving all my gropings for your brother.”

“Ugh… you are disgusting, however, I do not believe I shall have to witness any undue displays for quite some time. I do not predict that the evening shall end as early as Mycroft has anticipated.”

Lestrade looked around the room and saw that the men were settling into what looked like a serious discussion, with Mycroft right in the middle of it.

“You might be right. Well, I’ve made my appearance, what say we have our own little party? We can have a film or… you’d make a lovely date for a quick trip for some ice cream.”

“I do present marvelously as a female.”

“That you do, and I’d be honored to have you on my arm.”

“Oh very well… I shall accept you as my escort, then we may return for you to continue to entertain me.”

“As you wish, my lady.”

“I first need to fix my lipstick.”

“Don’t worry… that’s what rearview mirrors are for. Do you have a purse?”

“I did not consider adding a handbag to my ensemble.”

“Do that next time. Be a good place to hide your guns and knives.”

“Once in a very great while, you do demonstrate a flash of insight.”

“I’ll try to keep them to a minimum.”

“That is probably for the best.”
Mycroft saw each of his inexcusably long-winded guests to their waiting vehicles and only then allowed himself to acknowledge the cold finger of worry that had been stroking his spine since he noticed that his beloved was absent. That Sherlock was also absent was promoted both further worry and great relief in equal measures. This evening had not gone according to agreement! The true negotiations were not to have begun until next week and it was incredibly poor manners to abrogate that agreement and intrude on his time with his spouse! And poor Gregory… to be closeted with such plodding dullards who spoke of nothing of any interest to a man so full of life. Amends would have to be made and he would take steps to see that those who had trod upon his goodwill paid a steep price for their transgressions.

A stroll through the house finally located his family, his brother sprawled out on the rug in Mycroft’s bedroom and his husband was sitting on the bed listening to the budding scientist recite the results of some experiment he had been performing on fungal growth and sheep’s eyes. It was the most heartwarming of domestic scenes and Mycroft removed from consideration the thought of placing Sherlock in separate quarters on their future property. He wanted to be able to witness this scene freely and often in their home, however, with himself present as a full participant, unlike this evening.

“Ah, there you are my dear. And Sherlock… you have forsaken your femininity.”

“It is not proper to lay on the floor in a dress. Besides, the lackey refused to stop trying to peek and see my knickers.”

“He got a lot of use out of his disguise, though. Kid doling out the ice cream contracted a good case of young love over your brother and Sherlock got the largest scoop of ice cream I’ve ever seen. Had to eat half of it myself just so it wouldn’t go to waste. I’m sort of proud, actually. Little Shirley’s already using her womanly wiles in vixeny ways.”

“I am successful in every endeavor I attempt, so you should have no surprise over the fact that I am an incredible woman.”

“Well, I’ll take you shopping for a new dress if you decide to go out for more ice cream. Wouldn’t do to have your boyfriend see you in the same thing twice so soon in the relationship.”

Mycroft settled next to his lover and continued to listen to the ridiculous conversation, letting the comfort of his husband’s voice wash away the last of his annoyance at the throng of insensitive politicians he had been forced to indulge.

“Unlike the females of your herd, I do not toy with the affections of others and, since I did not find him appealing, I will not inspire in the ice cream purveyor any unfounded hope for a dalliance.”

“Mighty good of you. Shows lots of integrity.”

“Naturally. I am possessed of impeccable character.”

The feel of his spouse’s arm wrapping itself around him relaxed Mycroft’s body into a nearly gelatinous state and it was only then that he made note of the fatigue he had won playing liaison and intermediary for the majority of the night. So blissfully was his body succumbing to his husband’s embrace that the small press of his Gregory’s lips to his temple was nearly startling.

“You look tired.”
“I will gladly admit to that. And, also as gladly, offer my apology for abandoning you in such a shameful manner.”

“It’s ok, love. I could tell what you were doing was important. And you looked really sexy doing it, too. Good thing the little man wanted to show off his new clothes to his admirers or I may not have been able to resist dragging you out of there by your sex tie and having my wicked way with you, even if all those suits followed us and just stood around and watched.”

The idea of being watched had never crossed Mycroft’s mind, but apparently his body very much enjoyed the idea and the chuckle in his ear informed him that his lover had noticed his response, also.

“Sherlock? Why don’t you take to your own room and prepare yourself for tomorrow’s trip back to the pond? You did wish to collect more water samples, did you not?”

“Why don’t you simply say you want me to leave so that you and the shop boy can engage in sex?”

“As you wish. Sherlock, why don’t you take to your room so that Gregory and I can run our hands over each other’s bodies, then…”

“I have been deafened! My ears are bleeding! You shall pay for both the assault and my infirmity, Mycroft!”

“I do prefer when multiple services are rendered on a single bill. Now, if you wish to retain even a modicum of your hearing, you should hasten away for I believe I feel inspired to begin making sounds of a lewd nature.”

Sherlock sped out of the room so quickly that Mycroft had to reconsider if it was possible for a human to break the sound barrier without aviation assistance.

“Well, that did it. You’ve burst his tender little ears. Didn’t even have his ribbon around to try and stop the bleeding.”

“The achievement of any objective may result in a certain amount of collateral damage. However, you are free to express your displeasure at your leisure.”

What was it about his intended’s smile that made Mycroft’s blood temperature climb to unheard of heights? Which was a dangerous thing, because his kisses stoked further the fires of his desire and made him burn all the hotter. It was barely a moment before Mycroft was laying back on his bed, drinking in the affection his fiancé was eagerly bestowing him.

“I’m glad we’re at least getting a little bit of private time. It was murder watching you in that suit, stalking around the room like a tiger. Christ, but you’re magnificent…”

“That honor belongs to you, my dear. Did you not notice the lecherous glances you were garnering? I was quite worried that it would not be Sherlock whose honor would be challenged, but your own.”

“Nah, they were trying to figure out why a kingly figure such as yourself was associating with a commoner like me. Of course, they don’t know what us commoners can get up to behind closed doors, do they?”

That, apparently, was stroking their spouse’s naked stomach, while using the other hand to pin said spouse’s hands to the mattress.
“You know I’ve gotta leave soon, right? Still have to work in the morning and Mum’s coming back tomorrow, so she can’t find me just lolling around the house.”

Mycroft cut a quick eye towards his clock and felt his heart sink. It was very late and he would never ask his Gregory to forego a night’s rest before a full day at his job.

“But, you seem to be pretty tired, too, so it’s probably for the best. Do you… would you like a little help getting to sleep?”

Help? Implying assistance by another party, of which there was only one in the room? And asked in his Gregory’s roughly-aroused tones?

“I would like nothing better.”

That was definitely what was literarily termed a wolfish smile and Mycroft’s body gladly embraced his husband’s animal nature. Fortunately the hands that worked the buttons of his trousers were not possessed of claws, because they quickly were running over very bare and very sensitive skin, sending wild and ancient sounds out of Mycroft’s mouth as those hands began to stroke and tease.

“Already rock hard… that’s a compliment I appreciate. Ah ah ah… you leave those hands where they are. Just lay there and feel, just let me touch you. You’ve got such an amazing body, Mycroft. Every part of you is just amazing… especially this one. Nice and long, so much to play with. One day we’ll have more time and you’ll let me play for as long as I want right? Let me worship that beautiful body of yours for hours until I finally let you come. They make nice little bands that wrap tight around right… there… that’ll keep you waiting for me and I can get hold of one any time I want. Maybe I will, too… wrap you up good and snug and make you hold your hands over your head just like you are now so that I can play and play and play… oh… someone’s getting close…. very tight and very close… just go ahead, love. Come for me and let me watch…”

And Mycroft’s body obeyed immediately riding the crest of his orgasm and panting through the aftershocks that his lover prolonged with gentle touches until his body could take no more.

“You are gorgeous, Mycroft Holmes. Perfectly and genuinely gorgeous. And about to fall asleep…”

It was all the older Holmes could do to open one eye a tiny crack to see his husband’s tender and loving gaze.

“Ummm….”

“That’s a yes. You just lay there and I’ll take care of everything.”

Later, Mycroft would have no memory of being cleaned, stripped, tucked between his sheets and put to bed. What he would remember was the overwhelming rush of pleasure from his fiancé’s attentions and how purely right it felt to receive his touch. By the time the sun woke him, Sherlock had already risen and was glaring at him from the other side of the bed.

“It is past eight. This exceeds your normally sluggish behavior by an unacceptable length.”

Length… it would not do for Sherlock to deduce why that word made him smile, so Mycroft stowed away the expression, though it did take pushing it into a mental trunk and sitting on the lid to keep it securely contained.

“My day was long, Sherlock and a body does benefit from a prolonged sleep now and again.”
“The serf made me promise to tell you that he enjoyed the evening and hopes to see you again before long.”

“And how much chocolate did that promise cost him?”

“Three bars. And more caramels.”

“You must have been exhausted for him to obtain such a bargain.”

“I was distracted by the clear signs of promiscuity on his person.”

“There may have been a small amount of affectionate behavior on our parts, I must admit.”

“You were again defiled and still fail to show any remorse for the fact.”

Remorse for having his body played as masterfully as Sherlock played his violin? What a ridiculous notion.

“I have no remorse over the love for me that my fiancé freely demonstrates.”

“I suppose if he marries you, it would spare some other, potentially worthwhile, person the torture. It could be considered his civil duty, I suppose.”

“Very patriotic of you. Now if you will excuse me, I need to prepare for the day.”

“I have no intention of stopping you; we are already behind the schedule I prepared for my fieldwork.”

“I require a measure of privacy, if you don’t mind.”

“I do mind. I have, to my eternal regret, seen you in your pyjamas many times.”

“That is most certainly the case, however… I am not currently wearing pyjamas.”

This time it was very evident that no technology was needed for propel a horrified goblin to nearly light speed. All that was required was incentive…

Chapter End Notes

For more on Sherlock and Lestrade’s ice cream outing:

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Continued and sincere gratitude for all of you kind comments and supportive words! They are very valuable to me and I cherish them greatly...

Mycroft lay in bed after Sherlock had fled screaming and reflected on the previous evening. Gregory had gone to such trouble to bolster his appearance and all for him. He had not complained about the severity of the dullness or the lack of attention he was given. And then… entertaining Sherlock, which handily curtailed any inclination his brother may have had for interference. Was there anyone, anyone, with such an attentive spouse? How greatly eased would be his burdens with his beloved Gregory at his side… And he would not fail to reciprocate. The love of his life would want for nothing. Whatever he prized, whatever he desired, whatever he wished to do, wherever he yearned to visit… all would be laid at his feet. Mycroft found his toes curling with the feeling of satisfaction knowing he could so nicely provide for his fiancé.

Not that his Gregory needed wealth for happiness or fulfillment, but it did make one’s living more comfortable and offered a broader diversity of opportunities for enrichment. They would soon begin to discuss his requirements for education and career path and Mycroft vowed to implement actions quickly and fully to make his beloved’s goals a reality. Oh, and perhaps there should be a new home for his mother-in-law. Something a bit larger for entertaining, with a small staff for support. It was not entirely unlikely that she would be called upon to watch Sherlock at points, so an ample residence would be a must. That Sherlock had even mentioned his Gregory’s mother during yesterday’s water sampling placed her in a highly select group and they would need a child minder now and then for romantic evenings out alone as a couple.

And… oh, this was more than slightly toe-curling… his husband had touched him. Laid his gentle hands on a place no other had touched since Mycroft was a small child and could tend to certain matters himself. And no amount of calculation or analysis could have foretold how… paradigm-shifting it felt. A hand is a hand, so there should be no difference between his own and his spouse’s, but the experiences could not be compared. How would other activities feel? Things he could not or had not mimicked on his own? Mycroft immediately placed such thoughts on hold since it was highly probably that Sherlock’s fluster would abate and he would stalk back in… ah, very close to now. With a blindfold and an umbrella employed as a makeshift cane.

“Mycroft! Are you still present? I believe I hear your breathing, but it could easily be the labored wheezing of a corpulent Basset hound struggling to trudge towards its food bowl.”

“It is delightful to start my day with your little jests and games, Sherlock. I do so look forward them.”

“I look forward to beginning my research and that is not being accomplished! Remove yourself from your bed!”

“And how would you know that I am still abed when your vision is obstructed?”

“If you were standing, I would hear your voice from an angle upwards from my ears. However, your voice is lower in position, so unless the shop boy has infiltrated again your
bedroom and you are on hands and knees…”

“SHERLOCK!”

“Do not interrupt my thought processes!”

“Do not speak of personal matters about which you should have no knowledge!”

“I shall not be censored!”

“You shall behave more decorously!”

“This is intolerable! I am leaving!”

“I offer no objection.”

“I am relocating to the lackey’s hovel. Send my belongings no later than noon.”

The level of marital strife this could prompt was incalculable! His spouse was not sufficiently inured to Sherlock’s hysteria to withstand alone the slings and arrows of the diminutive and frothing tormentor until their wedding day! He knew not the spells and potions necessary to cage and deflect the poison darts of agitated goblins!

“Absolutely not. You cannot take up residence in the Lestrade household, for not only are you not part of their family as of yet, there is no bedroom for you.”

“There is. The laborer’s. He shall sleep on the floor and I shall have his bed, narrow and uncomfortable though it may be. The sacrifice is laughable compared to remaining here, where I lack intellectual freedom.”

“And you would live as a common child? Attend school with those you scorn, wear the garments of the masses? I do not think that is part of your nature, Sherlock.”

“I… I can endure!”

“But can you endure without your laboratory? Or access to the grounds? Gregory is very devoted to you, however, his means alone cannot supply you with the diversions to which you are accustomed.”

Unlike him, Sherlock would not be capable of living on love alone.

“The situation is impossible! I am caught between Scylla and Charybdis!”

The raging frustration of goblin younglings was well-provided with fist wavings and howlings to their sun god.

“Then we shall work a compromise. You shall have unrestricted freedom of thought, however, you must consider well what you vocalize if it may be deemed socially inappropriate for one your age. You are free, at any time, to pursue with me serious lines of inquiry about development and sexuality to further your understanding of the natural maturation process, but you will not offer commentary or speculation about the intimate life of myself and my husband. Is this something on which we may agree?”

“I feel the bindings tightening around my neck!”

“Then I would suggest you offer a response before your air supply is constricted to the point
where you are unable to speak.”

“Fine! It is an unduly harsh and precipitously imbalanced compromise, but I refuse to expend more of my valuable time and energy arguing with your naked bulk. Make yourself ready and prepare for science.”

“As you wish, Professor Holmes.”

“I do not wish to be a professor. They are forced into the drudgery of instructing unworthy minds and wear the atrocious costume that the shop boy was affecting last night. I shall do research. You may call me Doctor Holmes, if necessary, or simply do not speak to me directly and allow us both a cordial day.”

Atrocious costume? How completely ludicrous. Gregory appeared luscious enough to lick off of his fingers, accompanied by passion-laden moans of abandon. Mycroft’s mind drifted a moment, listening to Sherlock tap his umbrella-cane on the floor to emphasize his leaving, and let his thoughts flow through the innumerable options available to clothe his beloved. In suits he would nearly illegal. His look last evening would be replicated many times in their future wardrobe closet. In soft linens for lounging in the summertime… Mycroft made a mental note to start his tailor crafting items for his intended’s trousseau. Once their life together began, he wanted his Gregory to have the most divine clothing available to marry with his current alluringly-rugged selections. Oh, and in formal wear… Mycroft hurled himself out of bed quickly because the vision of his love in formal dress was prompting responses that he would rather take his time and enjoy… and that would have to wait until later…

Do you have sufficient water samples for your experiments?”

“For now. Though I shall need further reference volumes to properly identify the organisms I encounter.”

“We may visit the bookshop if you desire, however, I am doubtful that they will have such specialized texts.”

“Then you will have them ordered! I shall not have vials of preserved specimens simply sitting in wait for identification in the manner of a faceless corpse dredged from a river!”

“If you like, we can research with the proprietor suitable books for your purposes and have him order those we choose. Will that be sufficient?”

“I suppose. But have them sent by the swiftest post! It is already an indignity that I must postpone my analysis due to insufficient materials!”

“I shall discuss your concerns with your book purveyor. Now, tidy yourself before we depart. I would rather not have pond water staining the car’s upholstery.”

“You are far more soiled than am I!”

“Likely, because I did perform the actual collection, while you directed from the shallows. And I also plan to freshen my appearance before we take our leave.”

Not that it was in any way related to the proximity of the bookshop to the heaven on Earth where his husband valiantly toiled to earn an honorable wage.
“And I want chocolate! And chips!”

“You may have one or the other. Not both.”

“The lackey allows me both. He allows me whatever I desire.”

Already the parental roles were being established and Sherlock’s attempts at manipulation were both amusing and comforting. Their household would run far smoother now that Sherlock was falling into recognizable and predictable patterns.

“Gregory bestowed on you an extra measure of indulgence due to my absence and his desire to buoy your spirits. However, rest assured that he shall not spoil you, Sherlock. He is far too practical a person to impair your development in such a manner.”

“You are trying to assuage your despair over the fact that I prefer his attentions and that he delights in pampering me.”

It was becoming more and more difficult to hold back his laughter, but Mycroft held firm, if only to spare Sherlock the savage sting of embarrassment.

“Yes, that does prey on my mind terribly. Now, shall we. You may consider your options for a treat and make your decision when we reach our destination.”

“And I shall drive!”

“Perhaps when we return.”

“You lack confidence in me.”

“I lack confidence in others who might cross your path. Their reflexes most certainly do not rival yours and we do not wish to have our afternoon marred by a traffic collision, do we?”

“That is true. That might prevent me from ordering my texts today and that is not acceptable. You shall drive. I expect to leave before the turn of the hour.”

One day, though not today, Sherlock would learn just who was the master manipulator in the family…

“...”

“And they will arrive soon?”

“The proprietor assured me we will see them delivered within the week. You surely have many alternate things you can do for your research until your reference books arrive.”

Sherlock heaved a very large and dramatic sigh, accompanied by a pronounced rolled his eyes.

“I can find something to do to fill my time, I suppose, though it will not be as important. Nor as interesting.”

“We all have our little burdens. Now, what shall we do?”

“I need chocolate. The lackey owes me a debt and you have yet to purchase me any to fill my coffers.”

“Very well. We shall visit your preferred shop and you may have a reasonable amount of
chocolate.”

“Reasonable as defined by whom?”

“By me, Sherlock. Or by Gregory, if you feel you shall do better with the limits he imposes.”

“He will allow me his entire stock and port it to my room on his back if I ask it.”

“Then won’t you be a lucky boy today?”

Mycroft rarely felt uncomfortable in any situation, however, he was suddenly without a bearing as he and Sherlock walked into his Gregory’s workplace. The shop was filled with boisterous young males, his beloved in the center of the chaos seemingly oblivious to the cacophony.

“The rabble has invaded!”

“Hush, Sherlock. Do not rile them. We are significantly outnumbered.”

“And the louts are blocking my chocolate! This is… I am taking action!”

And forward went Sherlock applying pinches, pokes, stomps, kicks, blissfully forsaking biting, until he was near his chocolate and the counter, which he banged on sharply with the flat of his palm to attract Lestrade’s attention.

“Sherlock! Here to collect from me?”

“I am! And the potential hazard to my person in this location should warrant a doubling of your payment!”

“Oh, the lads are just having a bit of fun. Is your brother… there he is. Mycroft! Don’t stand all the way over there, love… come here!”

Mycroft was greatly gladdened by his dearest’s enthusiastic beckoning, but less gladdened by having to navigate through the press of jostling bodies… which, now that he thought about it, were quite comely. And muscular.

“Are you, perhaps, hosting a function of your own, my dear?”

“Nah, these are just some of my mates. Had a little match going on and decided to drop by and bother me when it was over. And steal things if I don’t keep an eye on them.”

“And your employment prevented you from joining them in their athletic event?”

“Yeah, hazard of having a job. Of course, they’re all jealous when I can treat my boyfriend to a film and a meal and they’re getting a knock to the head by their birds because they can’t.”

Mycroft wasn’t sure why he was surprised that his husband had announced their love to his peers, but it made his heart soar that his own openly-expressed pride in their union was fully shared by his intended.

“But, I’m off in a couple of days and I said I’d join up with them for some fun. Hey! Why don’t you come? You can be on my team, if you want. Or take the opposition and try to grind me into the dirt.”
The suggestion quickly vaulted Mycroft’s uncomfortable feeling to one of pure panic. Engage in athletic play? Could anything be more horrifying?"

“I…while that sounds intriguing…”

“You’ve never played football in your life, have you?”

“It is an Olympic achievement if he walks to the kitchen for his own breakfast rather than having it delivered to his room.”

“Sherlock! However, I do admit that I have not been in a position to engage in such an activity.”

“Well, that’s no problem. I can teach you.”

Deflect!

“Gregory, you are far too busy to worry about such a frivolous matter.”

“Spending time with you is not frivolous.”

Now what could he do? Any further deflection would sully the purity of the sentiment.

“How’s this sound? We’ll leave the competition for our race, and you can be on my team. I’ve got to help Mum tomorrow, but the next day I can come by after work and give you some practice. It’s all for fun, Mycroft; we mostly just run around and beat on each other until we go to the pub, where these thieves PUT THAT BACK! are going next. I’d say the little man could muck in, too, but we do play pretty rough and I don’t want him to get hurt.”

“I believe your worry would best be placed with your colleagues, for Sherlock is nothing if not dedicated to winning regardless the cost to life, limb, eyesight, mental faculty or emotional stability of his opponent.”

Even with the laughter filling the shop from the bountiful cluster of the rambunctious males, his beloved’s magical sound rose above it all and gently descended into Mycroft’s ears.

“You’re probably right. I mean, look at him... I swear he’s snarling at anyone who gets within arm’s reach of his precious chocolate.”

“We are quite fortunate he agreed to leave his personal protective devices at home.”

“So you’ll do it? I promise they’re all decent lads and we get new people stepping up for a game all the time.”

Mycroft gazed into his spouse’s eyes and witnessed such hope and enthusiasm that he could not begin to contemplate a refusal. No matter the extreme appeal of that option.

“I would not dare say no to such a fascinating offer. You have described such a very pleasant engagement…”

“You’re not fooling me, Mycroft, but that’s ok. I’ll make you a deal that if it’s not something you like, we can call it an early afternoon and you can be my cheering squad for any future matches. How’s that sound?”

Like a supremely accommodating compromise, especially since he had not offered any exit strategy for last night’s gathering, leaving his family to make their own entertainment in his
absence.

“You are a very skilled negotiator, my dear.”

“That’s bollocks and you know it. Sherlock’s going to rot his teeth from the amount of sugar he bargains out of me.”

“You are quite mistaken, Gregory. That Sherlock does not currently own this shop and your flesh is a testament to your talents.”

“No one owns my flesh but a sexy-posh gent who’s got a body like an angel and kisses like a devil.”

Mycroft refused to swoon in the presence of his Gregory’s friends to forestall any embarrassing stories that might circulate at their wedding.

“You are a wicked man, Gregory Lestrade.”

“Next time I get you alone, I’ll give you another peek at my wickedness.”

The swooning was getting harder to avoid.

“I shall expect you to make good on that statement.”

“Here, I’ll give you a taste of what to expect.”

And Mycroft found himself drawn into long kiss that ended only because Sherlock’s shrill ‘they are robbing you blind, you lazy peon!’ cut through the air like a bullet.

“Put that back you fucking bastards! Sherlock, you bring me what you want and I’ll settle it up for you. And toss in some of that nougat you like.”

“I told you, Mycroft. He is in my thrall.”

“You’re not as cute without your dress, Shirley, so don’t think I won’t give you some in-your-room time.”

“Mycroft! My thrall has turned on me!”

“Such is the fate of all overly-harsh taskmasters. You must endure the revolution, I’m afraid.”

“You shall both pay for this treachery.”

“After we pay for you chocolate, of course.”

“Of course! There is a natural order to things that must not be ignored.”

“Verily. My dear, will you please sum the bill for me so I may take Sherlock home and protect him from the torches and pitchforks of the rioters.”

“I got this, love. I owe him.”

“Gregory…”

“You can pay me in trade later.”

“Oh.”
“With interest.”

“At an exorbitant rate, I assume?”

“Criminal.”

“Delightful.”

Football. Foot. Ball. Foot plus ball. You use your foot to move a ball. What could be simpler?

Mycroft exhausted every resource he could find on the rules of the sport, the techniques, matters of etiquette and penalty… and it made absolutely no sense. Apparently the point of the exercise was to deposit your ball into the opponent’s goal, but you won nothing more than a point. At least in fencing you would be assured of injuring your opponent, would current laws allow the sport to be enjoyed properly. And why was the use of hands precluded? Disabling one’s self in such a way was nonsensical! And so much running. Which would promote sweating. And more sweating. But he would drain his body dry of liquid if it would please his husband. At some point they would have to engage in a discussion about personal pursuits so Mycroft could choose the best residence in which to begin their lives. If grounds tailored for sports or a swimming pool was required, it was best to know now for planning purposes. Already the portfolio of possibilities was growing fat and soon the wheat would need to be separated from the chaff.

“I require a camera.”

“I believe we have several.”

“A movie camera.”

“For what purpose?”

“I need to record your devirginization.”

“We discussed this, Sherlock.”

“For sports! You have never entered into any sporting competition and I must record your abject failure for posterity!”

“I do not believe I shall disgrace myself as fully as you appear to believe.”

“You shall disgrace the entirely of our family back to the primordial amoeba from which our DNA first sprung!”

Not that Mycroft had any fear of that occurring. No fear at all. Not a bit of fear. Beyond that which was right and proper and totally appropriate because he was going to make a fool of himself in front of his husband and his husband’s friends prompting Gregory to call off the wedding and he would be force to live out the remainder of his years as a sad and lonely bachelor with no one to love except, perhaps, the pigeons that he fed during his lunch hour.

“It would behoove you to tell Lestrade that you are temporarily crippled and cannot indulge in this folly.”

“I shall not lie to my spouse, Sherlock. It sets a bad precedent. Now, he should arrive soon. Find somewhere to be where we are not.”
“Unlikely. I am going to take notes and remark upon salient landmarks of this endeavor. When you first pass out from the exertion. When those abominably tiny trousers split due to your grotesquely distended buttocks. When you first collapse into a bout of weeping, no longer able to bear your shame. I have prepared a chart in anticipation.”

The first kick of this ball would be aimed directly at the sneering face of the ambassador from the goblin kingdom and declaration of war be damned.

“How efficient of you. However, are you quite sure…”

The sound of the door chime prompted an exultant ‘yes!’ from Sherlock and a minor heart event for Mycroft.

“The vehicle of your humiliation has arrived!”

Sherlock raced downstairs towards the door, Mycroft close on his heels to minimize his brother’s inevitable sabotage of his afternoon. Fortunately, Sherlock had not even the time to squawk out a single insult as Mycroft bumped him to the side as they reached the door and flung it open to admit his lifemate.

“Gregory! Once again, you take my breath away.”

In a slightly oversized shirt and loose pants that hung just above the knee so that the muscles of his arms and calves were tantalizingly displayed, Mycroft found himself truly overwhelmed by this vision of manly strength and sexual potency.

“You’re going to give me an inflated ego, Mycroft. Well, something will get inflated, at least…”

Oh, that smile warranted its own portrait. A small one, easy to hold in one hand, leaving the other free for other… activities.

“Such a tease… and I do adore a good teasing. Now, are we ready to commence?”

“Got the ball in the car and all we need is some nice clear space to get this going. Hey, Sherlock! You coming to cheer us on? If you’d like, go change into something you can dirty up and you can practice, too.”

“I shall let that repugnant suggestion pass without comment. I will be joining you, however, for this, no doubt, shall be well-supplied with opportunities for data-rich observations.”

“Got your notebook ready?”

“With a prepared chart.”

“Good lad. Alright, Mycroft, let’s get your first lesson underway.”

“I don’t suppose I could tempt your mind away from this objective with a quality ale?”

“Nope.”

“A salacious embrace?”

“I’m getting that later anyway.”

“You know me too well. Then I am ready. Do be gentle with me, my dear.”
“That’s one thing you never have to worry about.”
“Mycroft, you have to kick the ball back to me.”

“When I have sufficiently assessed the proper manner of kicking.”

“Just drag your foot back then push it forward, hopefully hitting the ball.”

“I would disagree. From my observations, I believe you have used three primary methods of kicking, each with its own suite of variations.”

“Really?”

“Without doubt. I am attempting to glean a pattern between the behavior of the ball, the method of kicking, the situation associated with using each discrete method…”

“Wow… that’s amazing… you could make a lot of money doing that for the professionals.”

“He is dissembling! The tortoise is simply afraid to betray his humiliatingly-feeble physical skills to his intended reproductive partner. He fears that natural selection will act upon him and his genes will follow him lonely to the grave!”

“I don’t think that’s the case, Sherlock. Last time I checked I didn’t have ovaries to worry about Mycroft’s genes.”

“So far as you know. If the government wished to bolster the population of the illiterate workforce, they would gladly insert feminizing chemicals into the water supply. Or, for more rapid perfusion into the masses, the beer supply. You could be fertile this very moment!”

“Sherlock, while I would gladly have Gregory as the mother of my offspring, I believe we may conclude that such a possibility does not exist at this time. I would surely know and would have taken appropriate measures accordingly.”

“While I do not object to the addition of further members of our household, I shall not allow a screeching infant to take as his nursery my laboratory space! The crib shall reside in your bedroom.”

“Our child will have a full nursery with adjacent quarters for the wet nurse and, later, nanny. I will notify my agent to include that as part of the requirements and not compromise my promise to allow you your laboratory.”

“And do not expect me to share a dinner table with the creature. Have you seen what they drag away after a meal is concluded? A slime-covered half-wit that must be both washed and sanitized before it is safe to place in contact with individuals of societal worth!”

“You will be courteous to your niece or nephew or we shall have words!”
“And how many impregnations do you intend to perpetrate!”

“That is between…”

“Have you both lost your minds?”

Two Holmes males furiously hoped that the other looked more mortified than them, while secretly knowing it was not likely the case.

“I do apologize, my dear… it is simply a bit of jest carrying over from a conversation begun this morning. Pay us no attention, Sherlock, doubly so.”

“I am not the one who stupidly announced my intentions in front of…”

“Hey! Now that’s how to kick! Knocked the little man right over like a fencepost.”

“I shall take legal action!”

“You shall remain silent and observe or you shall instead find yourself tossed into the pond, with a lead mass tied around your ankle and only a slender piece of bamboo for a breathing tube!”

“Come on, Sherlock, dust off your bum and kick back the ball. Oh… not bad for a tyke. Mycroft just go walk that off for a bit and you’ll be fine. Sherlock, sure you don’t want to practice with us?”

“I would as soon swallow mulled wine infused with ground glass.”

“Well, enjoy that then. Now, Mycroft, you ok? Let’s do that again, but this time, try not to kill your brother.”

“Do I have to tie your hands down?”

“Is that something you would enjoy?”

“I… well… no time for thinking about that now! You can’t use your hands in football.”

“You have been launching projectiles at my head, my dear. How did you expect I would respond?”

“Come on, get aggressive! Ball comes at your head, use your head to attack the ball. Show it what Mycroft Holmes has under the bonnet.”

Aggression… that was a concept that Mycroft knew quite well. Not the overt, distasteful manner of aggression that marked those of limited intelligence, and he dealt with many of that kind among the politicos through whom he moved regularly, but the subtle, manipulative aggression that casually nudged matters in the directions he chose to have them go. It would not be difficult to channel that force into something slightly more tangible for the purposes of this single exercise. And, it was entirely proper that he demonstrate his physical fortitude to his intended as part of their courtship. There was evolutionary precedent, despite Sherlock’s hysterical interpretation of basic biological concepts. He had to prove his was both able to provide for and protect his mate and…”

“I have been concussed!”

“No you haven’t, love. I even tossed the ball instead of kicking it. Wool-gathering again?”
An inexcusable lapse in focus. Already his mission to prove his protective worth was faltering.

“Not entirely. I was simply ruminating on the potential methods for implementing a greater degree of aggression into my style of play.”

“Well, don’t ruminante too long when you’re in a match or you’ve find yourself buried under a stack of bodies. Or, well you have to look for Jeff anyway, but he’ll likely bare-arse you right in the middle of things and then I’d have to kill him, which would leave us a man down.”

“If he removes the hippopotamus’s trousers during gameplay, the other side will be turned to stone much like the Greeks viewing the hideous features of Medusa. It will cement victory for your compatriots and subject Mycroft to the torment of publically-displaying his impossible-to-overtstate unattractiveness. This is most exceptional!”

Mycroft decided that when the nursery was installed for his and his husband’s first child, it would be positioned directly adjacent to Sherlock’s bedroom. And the dividing wall would be thin as tissue paper.

“Sherlock, shut it. Ok, love, try to knock this one with your head…. oh. Well, your face is technically part of your head, but go with some of the bonier parts this next time, right?”

Mycroft rubbed his cheek and hoped his still-marred eye had not acquired a twin. How grandly he was shaming himself in front of his spouse! Sherlock was correct… and had probably already checked off a column in his infernal observation chart!

“Look, watch me. See how I’m bashing it with my skull? Ball comes high, just go at it, but keep your face out of the way if you can. If you can’t, dodge. This is just for fun after all and you don’t need a broken nose over that. So here, I’ll toss you one and give it a hit.”

This time, Mycroft managed to forge a more successful connection between ball and bone and the ball at least rebounded with some degree of accuracy back towards its origin.

“Great! Much better. We’ll have a few more of those, I think, then start working on some more footwork. You’re doing well, Mycroft. Another couple of hours and I bet you’ll be aces.”

Hours? How dishearteningly plural. And there was already the formation of non-sexually-associated perspiration forming on his body. Perhaps gleeful encouragement was a better role for him in this endeavor…

“Fantastic! You’ve really come a long way today, Mycroft. Couldn’t have asked for better.”

If there was a single thing Mycroft could be allowed as he moved from this world to the next, it would be that Sherlock was not the one tasked to write his obituary. A simple statement of his love for his spouse and that he died trying to bring him happiness would be sufficient.

“Fancy a quick jog to cool down a little, love?”

Could torture by foreign interests be any more debilitating?

“I feel very cool and refreshed, thank you.”

“You resemble a heat-stroked muskmelon ready to burst and spew your boiled tissues across our grounds.”
“Thank you, Sherlock, your assessment was not solicited.”

“If you perish, do not expect me to attend your funeral. I find it a very idiotic ritual and will not be forced to participate.”

“Mycroft isn’t dying, you lazy thing. He’s in fine shape.”

At least Mycroft would cross the final boundary with his love’s compliment lingering in his ears.

“Fine shape for a hypertensive goose.”

“Fine shape for a sexy beast who did himself proud during his first football lesson.”

That would be a verbatim entry into Mycroft’s journal this evening, if he survived long enough to scribe it. If only he had something as eloquent to offer his husband to carry with him as a reminder of their undying devotion as he gazed at the coffin being lowered into the ground.

“Thank you, Gregory. You are too kind.”

“He has no choice. He has seen the benefits of cleaving to someone of our wealth. He shall debase himself in whatever manner is required to cling to the possibility of leaving behind his poverty, even if it means living as your shackled, sexual plaything.”

“Someone I know just lost his chance to get behind the wheel of my car today and take it up past second gear.”

“That is illogical! My mastery of the automobile has no tangible link to your life of subservience and, therefore, a statement, true and measureable, about one should not impact the other!”

“But, according to you, I’m too thick to follow logic anyway, so I don’t have to worry about that when I punish you for being an evil little bastard.”

“Mycroft! Restrain your concubine!”

A few more seconds of familial bickering would have been helpful for Mycroft to regain more of his breath, but he could not for a moment shirk his responsibility as Sherlock’s second surrogate parent.

“Gregory’s reasoning is sound, Sherlock, and his actions are quite understandable. However, I predict that a sincere apology would restore your privileges. Gregory is nothing if not a compassionate and forgiving individual.”

As was the base nature of all angels, be they bound to Earth in human form or flying free in the heavens.

“The truth does not require forgiveness!”

“And you do not require your driving lesson. It seems the scales are balanced quite nicely. My dear, may I offer you something to drink? I noticed that Cook has laid in a supply of the soda beverage that you prefer.”

“I could use a drink, thanks. Bye, Sherlock. Have fun staring at the car.”

Mycroft counted the seconds as he strolled away with his intended and it did not surprise him that they did not reach the double-digit mark before Sherlock’s will shattered.
“WAIT!”

It was also no surprise that the single word took nearly ten seconds to fully and pathetically shriek into the air.

“You cannot subject me to this inhumane treatment. I am not an insect to be pinned to the board for your cruel amusement.”

“But you see nothing wrong with finding your own amusement at my… at Gregory’s expense.”

“I…you must offer me an alternative!”

“I cannot, I’m afraid. There are times when a single solution is the only one to present itself and the choice is simple. Take it or do not.”

“Ah Mycroft… maybe we…”

“Stand firm, my dear. Do not allow your tender affections to sway your resolve.”

Though Mycroft’s heart filled with warmth as tender as were his husband’s feelings for Sherlock. No one, besides him, seemed capable of seeing so far behind Sherlock’s wall of bristling antagonism and arrogance and finding, embracing even, the lonely child beneath.

“You shall provide no other path?”

“There exists no other to present.”

Sherlock nearly vibrated with reluctance and the mental struggle to turn the situation to his advantage, but ultimately found himself without recourse.

“Fine. ‘m ‘ry.”

“That was as far from our mother tongue as the language of the rocks.”

“I. Am. Sorry. Was that sufficiently enunciated for your liking?”

“It is not my liking that is relevant. Gregory, are you satisfied with Sherlock’s curt and transparently-artificial state of apology?”

“Well… it’s hard to know for sure, since the both of you can run circles around me with words. I’ll tell you what… you get us those drinks and Sherlock will show me how sorry he is by agreeing to play a little ball with me.”

There was no love so deep as that shared between enamored spouses and their child. Mycroft felt another commissioned painting looming in their future, even though he would have to research an even larger residence to provide sufficient wall space to present all of the treasured images.

“I am not a murderer! I do not deserve such degradation!”

“Come on, Sherlock. Think of it as one of your experiments. You have to anticipate what I’ll do and calculate just what to do in return to counter. You like to calculate, right? I bet there’s lots with forces and angles and spins and stuff to make it fun. So let’s get started.”

Mycroft hurried away before Sherlock could release another piercing wail. And took his time returning, after wiping himself down with a wet towel and changing to pants that weren’t wet with sweat. His greatest love, of course, showed no such signs of impending cardiac failure, because he
was the epitome of physical and athletic perfection; however, it was quite appropriate that only one member of a married pair carry those traits. And enjoy imbibing brown sugar water, though even he had to admit that it was restorative after his near-death experience. A case would need to be held at the ready for the end of the upcoming match.

And it was, of course, only natural that Mycroft would pause awhile and watch his husband and Sherlock engage in their games. Despite his virulent reaction to his penance, Sherlock was now intensely engaged in the task, pausing a moment here or there to rush to his notebook and scribble down some observation before returning to the fray. It was good to see his brother like this. Doing what boys his age should do and enjoying it, even if the reasons were not the norm. And no mention would ever be made of the fact that his brother more than once let down his guard and laughed with actual pleasure and happiness from his play. If only that could last for more than a fleeting moment…

“You’re doing great, Sherlock! Now… Mycroft! Just in time, I was about to call a break. Did you see? Sherlock’s a natural, got great command of the ball and he’s a fearless little thing. Just charges right at you like a pro.”

Mycroft wasn’t sure who was beaming more brightly of the three of them, but he thought Sherlock might have the edge by just a hair.

“I did observe and was quite impressed by Sherlock’s performance. My brother appears to be possessed of many hidden talents and strengths.”

“Naturally! It is ridiculous to believe that moving my challenges to a physical arena would result in anything less than spectacular results!”

Again, no mention would be made of the wide and unselfconscious grin that lit up his brother’s face with his statement and the ruffling of his hair by his also-grinning playmate.

“Then I am certain Gregory will be more than happy to add sports lessons to the other subjects of his tutelage.”

Sherlock’s grand snort hid very little of his eagerness to add another item to his list of topics mastered and it was only after some persuading that he settled down to drink his beverage and take a rest.

“You know, love… I’m not the only one that can kick the ball around with the lad.”

“No, but you are, by far, the most qualified and Sherlock would settle for nothing less. I shall happily spearhead his studies for science and music and associated topics and leave you free reign for the things you enjoy teaching him. He looks to both of us now for guidance and there is no need to duplicate our efforts.”

“Plus football is messy and sweaty and without a clear enemy to devastate, you have a hard time seeing the point.”

“There is no one who draws breath who understands me as you do, my dear.”

“Hope you don’t care that I like it that way.”

“Not all. In that we are of very like mind.”
Mycroft had hoped that after his lesson, the Apocalypse would arrive and obviate his need to publically demonstrate his skills, but his prayers and sacrifices were for naught and the phone call from his beloved to announce the commencement of his trip to pick up both he and Sherlock for the afternoon’s battle arrived directly on schedule. They had taken an additional measure of practice during his afternoon lesson, before allowing Sherlock his own practice shifting and maneuvering a vehicle at slightly faster than walking speeds, but Mycroft still felt very unprepared for the day’s activities. Upon further perusal of reference material, he had crafted a more suitable outfit for rougher play and had tucked the phone number for his private physician into his shoe in case he was incapacitated beyond the power of speech, but neither quelled the dread that was rising in his blood.

“If you wish, I will poison you so that you have a believable excuse to avoid this foolishness and not lie to the lackey.”

“Your offer is most kind, however, I shall decline. This is a jovial afternoon amongst comrades of my dearest love and I must show willing to join in with their fun. Besides, some of these individuals may be tasked to take places in the wedding party and I should have their measure sooner rather than later.

“They will see your glacially-slow and cumbersome form and advise the peasant against further association with you. The weakest member of any pack is always culled to benefit the remainder. You should prepare for a mauling before the sun sets.”

Which of course was nonsense. It was not as if Mycroft had given any thought to embarrassing himself in front of his Gregory’s companions and spurring them to take actions, verbal or otherwise, to safeguard the welfare and reputation of their comrade. It had not, in any manner, kept him awake the previous night, nor impacted his ability to put a bite of Cook’s lovely breakfast into his mouth.

“Again, Sherlock… jovial. Gregory assures me that, often, the keeping of an accurate score is not even a prime consideration during their contest.”

“That they are too stupid to count very much goes without saying, however, I am quite certain that if you are the cause of your team’s downfall it will not go well for you. And the shop boy will be painted darkly by your failure, suffering guilt by association.”

My, wasn’t that a pleasant and painfully terrifying thought.

“Whether I succeed or fail on the field of battle will not reflect on Gregory in the slightest. His mettle has already been proven.”

“Not his mettle for securing a quality mate, however. They may cull him for his attempts to dilute the genetics of their tribe with your watery alleles.”

“I am well aware that you are knowledgeable of human procreation, therefore, your insistence on dwelling upon an impossible scenario is baffling.”

(Of course it baffles you. It is humorous and you were born with a deficiency in that area.)

“Gregory finds me very pleasantly witty.”

“Must we tread again over the ground of his limited cognitive ability?”

“Must I remind you again to be civil and treat my fiancé with respect?”
“That is quite likely.”

Mycroft’s weary response was cut short by the sound of the door chime, which reminded him far too much of church bells sounding for a funeral.

“Come along, Mycroft. Your doom awaits.”

Mycroft could only steel his shoulders and agree.

Which in no way explained his current situation. After a brief introductory period, peppered by Sherlock’s volunteered opinions of the assembled players, the match began and… it did not go poorly. Mycroft had to admit that if he approached the engagement as a tactical exercise, he could at least temper his lesser physical skills with his greater strategic capabilities and not shame himself in front of his spouse or his spouse’s friends. And with the regular eruption of arguments and altercations, that he quickly learned to stay well out of for safety’s sake, there were numerous occasions to have a quick rest and rejuvenate his body. Further, and very thankfully, Sherlock was somewhat unintrusive, content to bask in the attention accorded by the small legion of females in attendance to watch their male admirers play or to attract the attention of a male admirer to call their own. Apparently, they were also quite fond of goblin young when such creatures chose to wear human camouflage to walk safely through the mortal world.

“How you doing, love?”

And, of course, his concerned spouse never neglected to spare a moment to vouchsafe his well-being.

“Well, thank you. And, I am confident that our number will emerge victorious.”

“With your brains, it’s looking like it! I’ve never been able to manage this lot into anything resembling a functional team but you’ve done it your first try!”

Mycroft might agree that he had taken a somewhat administrative role in the proceedings, but only for the good of their objective.

“And you’re really stepping up as a player, Mycroft. I’m not joking; you’re doing a great job. Not one of the lads has said a bad thing yet, and believe me, they would and not think twice about it.”

It was terribly bad manners to preen over encouraging words, but Mycroft allowed his mental image of himself to do freely.

“I do appreciate that, my dear. I was most concerned that I would disappoint you.”

A concern which escalated to dizzying heights on their arrival, watching his spouse jump quickly into his athletic persona and showcase his natural and nearly feral physical capabilities. Mycroft did not feel a tremendous amount of pride over taking a quick kiss from his love’s cheek to visibly mark his territory in front of the assembled masses, but the predatory and lustful looks from the females, and several males, as his Gregory’s alpha traits were displayed made the action prudent.

“There’s no way you could do that, Mycroft. Oh, looks like that brawl’s over. Told you we just pretty much act like idiots instead of concentrating on winning. You ready to keep going?”

“Without doubt. We are ahead, according to the score you are reluctant to acknowledge and I
intend to keep it that way.”

Mycroft did his own measure of basking in the glow of his spouse’s wicked smile before both rejoined the game. In truth, Mycroft was starting to feel fatigued but watching his consort quickly engage a member of the opposition pushed his energy back to a suitable level. How masterful was his Gregory, how bold and daring, how quickly he vanished under a phalanx of bodies after becoming entangled with one of the enemy. This time, though, some instinct reared up in the elder Holmes and he was not the only one as, in a blink, Sherlock was at his side running towards the pile, which was slowly dissolving figure by figure until only two remained, one sitting up shaking his head and the other…

Mycroft knew the face of someone in pain and quickly slid next to his beloved, eyes roaming across his body to find the source. Sherlock was not so gentle, poking and tapping, but his worry was clearly written across his scowling features. It took only a moment to find the rapidly swelling ankle and for Mycroft’s protective instincts to click fully into place.

“Gregory, are there any other injuries about which I should know before I move you?”

“What? It’s just a little turned ankle…”

“Is your vision clear? Can you feel your extremities?”

“Turned ankle.”

“Do you have an allergies to medications about which the medical personnel should be aware?”

“Ankle. Turned.”

“Be silent, lackey! Your knowledge of medicine is equaled only by your knowledge of quantum physics. You are suffering tissue damage as we speak. This may require amputation!”

“Leave my foot on my leg, Sherlock.”

“I did not say I would perform it, but it is an intriguing idea…”

“Foot stays on leg. Period.”

“You are insufferably boring!”

“Now, I’m insufferably getting off my arse. If you’ll excuse me…”

Not that Lestrade made it an inch off the ground with Mycroft’s hand pressing down on his chest.

“Allow me a small inspection first, my dear, if only to assuage my own concerns.”

How alike his husband and their ward were becoming… that snort was astonishingly like Sherlock’s at his most discontent. However, the snort turned to a yelp when Mycroft began to turn down the sock and shift the position of his fiancé’s foot.

“I do not believe the term ‘turned’ has medical value, Gregory, however I can safely attest that if it did, this would not be the picture it presented. We must find you medical attention.”

“I do not need…”

Whatever his husband did not need was drowned out by the voices of his comrades, who agreed fully with Mycroft’s evaluation and had his Gregory hoisted up and supported to the car, uncaring
of the string of very colorful vocabulary flowing from their burden. Lestrade was deposited in the rear, at Mycroft’s insistence, and he gave himself no small mental kick that they had not taken a larger and more appropriate car to transport an injured man. It was an inexcusable lack of forethought on his part and one he would not make again. The importance of a sizeable rear seat became most obvious as Sherlock forsook the passenger’s seat and scrambled into the rear, nestling down on the floorboard, glaring at Lestrade as if daring him to try and escape. Fortunately, it was not a vast distance to the estate…

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“Are you purposely seeking to find every hole in these ill-maintained roads? The peasant shall not survive your sub-par driving skills!”

Of course, they could have been traveling the length of a field and it would have been too far with Sherlock in the vehicle, however, it made Mycroft proud that his brother would take such a vocal and protective interest in his brother-in-law. And Mycroft could not argue his point, for the roads were deplorable and even he could see the pain they caused his love when he checked in the rear-view mirror. Yes, transportation in large, comfortable vehicles was now a priority issue.

Both Holmes’s were greatly relieved when their home loomed in the distance and Mycroft chose to pull the small car up to a rear door so that his spouse could be brought inside without having to mount any stairs. He then sent Sherlock inside to bring assistance and was pleased that his brother made no objection, obeying quickly and returning just as quickly with a member of the staff who helped him guide his injured mate up to Mycroft’s bedroom and prop him in the bed. Sherlock, surprisingly, was the one to call their physician and Mycroft had to chuckle at the long diatribe of commands, threats and insults that his brother pushed through the telephone lines to hasten the arrival of the doctor.

“Mycroft, this is ridiculous.”

“No, this is necessary. Already your ankle is discoloring and the swelling is most troubling. I shall apply what aid I am able, but attention by a medical professional is required for the possibility of deeper damage. Now, Sherlock if you would…”

“I am leaving to acquire ice! You must also elevate his foot to prevent further swelling. Must I do everything you incompetent… politician!”

Sherlock imperiously pointed at Lestrade’s leg and Mycroft obliged him by gently lifting the leg for Sherlock to place a pillow beneath the ankle before he raced out of the room to retrieve an ice pack.

“You should be honored, my dear. I have never before seen Sherlock use his rather frantic abilities for the betterment of another individual.”

“Little man’s got a huge heart, he just has a hard time showing it. Now, how about you just let me hobble downstairs and we can watch the telly or something…”

“I shall have this room provided with one, if that will make you more comfortable, however, you are not leaving this bed until you have been medically evaluated and I will hear no further argument on the matter.”

His husband’s laugh was weary and unhappily strained, but Mycroft relished the sound anyway.

“And here I was thinking I could impress you with my great football skills… that didn’t work,
“You greatly impressed me, my dear. There was none so vital and vigorous as you among your peers and your ability was extremely admirable.”

“Yeah... right.”

“Gregory Lestrade, I shall not hear that tone from you again. It is one of defeat and it stings my ears like a nest of angry wasps. I am worried now that...”

Mycroft took in the slumped shoulders and darkness in his love’s eyes that had nothing to do with physical pain.

“Gregory... did you feel that you had to impress me? Did you think... please tell me you did not believe that my opinion of you was anything but of the highest order.”

That his husband did not meet his eye, nor offer a response made Mycroft’s heart feel like it had been crushed under the heel of a boot.

“Gregory... please discuss this with me.”

This time, his beloved spouse’s eyes dragged up and met Mycroft’s, still filled with a dark and heavy emotion that hurt to see.

“I... you have no idea how you looked the other night, Mycroft. You were... amazing. Perfect. Flawless. So in control... so fucking in charge, even though everyone there was an old fart compared to you. I can’t do that. I cannot ever do that and... it was ok, as long as I had my own things to be good at, but... my things really aren’t worth much, are they? And, apparently, I’m not very good at them anyway.”

Mycroft very gently sat down next to his Gregory and for once had very little idea what to say. It was simply ludicrous that his fiancé felt such terrible things about himself, but every man was his own harshest critic. And every man needed the support of his loved ones when his own perceptions went staggeringly awry.

“If you were fully aware of how much time I spend contemplating your strengths, and my inability to match them, you might not think as you do. You are not me, my dear, and I am forever grateful for that. My own abilities are valuable, I shall not deny that fact, however, yours are just as precious. Where I flag, you excel and I truly believe it is a sign that our relationship is one that is simply meant to be. I cannot do what you do, Gregory. I cannot, as you say, ever do that, but I know that you can and that is enough. And what we are able do together is... we are brilliantly synergistic. You have only to look at Sherlock to witness that we are force with which to be reckoned. You performed very valiantly today, my dear. It was mere happenstance that you were injured. An unforeseeable accident. I have had many such a misstep in my own works, so I know well the blow one’s ego receives in response. But if you think, for a moment, my regard for you has faltered, then you are the idiot Sherlock is so fond of naming you.”

Slowly, in tiny increments, Mycroft watched his love’s mood lift and by the very end of his florid speech, he was finally able to see the smile that seemed solely responsible, of late, for making his heart beat.

“I do love it when you seduce me with your pretty words.”

“I shall gift you every day with them if you but ask.”
“See, just like that and I get all tingly.”

“And my ego receives not a blow, but a stroke. Thank you, my dear.”

“Nah, that’s my line. Thank you, Mycroft. I guess I did get a little stupid there for a minute.”

“Not stupid, Gregory. You are in pain and fatigued; that combination does not promote the clearest of thinking.”

“Clear thinking is not his strong suit, so do not set for him a challenge that he cannot possibly meet, especially in his crippled state. When the surgery has been completed and he is permanently disfigured by the loss of his foot, you shall be most ashamed of your taunts and barbs.”

Sherlock crawled onto the bed as slowly as a sloth and softly placed the ice pack on Lestrade’s ankle. Mycroft wished he could show Sherlock how proud he was for his willingness to show his affection, but knew well that the moment he did, it would again be hidden away. It would have to be enough to simply be able to hold this memory in his thoughts and share it with his beloved from time to time throughout the years.

“Hey Sherlock, you want my foot if they hack it off?”

The gasp of eagerness nearly blew Sherlock off of the bed and his eyes shined with a naked greed that made both Mycroft and Lestrade laugh.

“I shall not forget your word on this should the situation arise.”

“I won’t either, and Mycroft’s a witness.”

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“The man is an incompetent! Have his license revoked! He is not fit to work on farm animals!”

“That he refused your request for amputation or a marrow sample does not make him unfit for his job.”

“Sorry, Sherlock. Maybe another time.”

“How can science progress with the roadblocks placed it its path by the narrow minded and visionless? I am appalled by that so-called doctor’s lack of commitment to medical research.”

“That so-called doctor brought you into this world, dear brother, so he must have some appreciable skill, for you fought your birth as fiercely as you fight being denied your body parts. Now, I am very sure that Gregory would benefit from a light meal. He is supposed to take his medication with a bit of food, so would be so kind as to ask Cook to prepare something suitable? We shall be dining in here this evening, I believe.”

“If I must. But I shall chaperone you! I do not trust that your raging lusts have been dampened by the peasant’s incapacitation and I will not have you further impairing his health and his usefulness to me with your clumsy attempts at fornication.”

Sherlock crawled off of the bed as slowly as he had crawled on and left the room with a final warning scowl at Mycroft that was harsh enough to blister the paint on the walls.
“What’d I tell you? Just turned it.”

“Gregory, I was present during your examination, if you remember. You have sprained your ankle and that is not something to be taken lightly. Now, if you will wait for one moment, I do have one small task to perform before we may become comfortable for the evening.”

“Doing something important to keep the country running, I suppose.”

“Communicating with your mother and informing her that you shall sleep here tonight so that you may be properly monitored.”

“HAH! Good luck with that! She’ll have you putting me in the car and getting me home before you can say Greg’s gone gimpy.”

“We shall see.”

“I do hope you are content with that side of the bed, my dear, because it shall be yours for the night.”

Mycroft hoped Sherlock was not present with a camera to catch the unflattering image of his spouse with his look of shocked disbelief.

“No. No way did Mum say I could stay over.”

“I assure you she did. I informed her of your injury, that it had been attended to, that you were supposed to rest and take your pain medication and that… my mother was present to chaperone our ‘sleep over’ as she termed it.”

“Oh… is that really true? I’ve never actually seen your mum around… ever.”

“It was a semblance of the truth. My mother is not physically present at this time, however, one could argue that the staff represent an extension of her will on the house and act, by proxy, in her stead.”

“Even though you call all the shots.”

“Your mother and I did not indulge in that level of detail in our discussion. Actually, she seemed quite agreeable to having you remain with me for the evening. From what clues I could gather… I have never asked, Gregory, but I would conclude she might have seen this as an opportunity. Of the romantic kind…”

Mycroft prayed this was not a misstep, but he was not comfortable keeping his observations from his husband.

“Really? Well… I knew she fancied some bloke she worked with but, I didn’t know if it had gone anywhere.”

“And… your father?”

“Not around anymore.”

And Mycroft felt certain that did not mean that his mother-in-law was a widow.

“So good for Mum!”
“Are you being perfectly honest, my dear?”

“Actually, I am. Why shouldn’t she find someone nice to have a bit of fun with? And, I have to admit, it makes me feel a lot better about staying here, if I know she won’t be just sitting at home worrying.”

“I can assure you she was duly worried about your condition, but wisely agreed that your welfare was being well-served in my care.”

“Careful, she’ll want to adopt you.”

How silly. One does not adopt one’s son-in-law. It would be redundant.

“Well, we shall cross that bridge when we come to it. For the time being you shall simply enjoy your evening, as best as you are able, and see what tomorrow brings.”

“So, I’m really staying here. In your bed. With you.”

Something Mycroft had been desperately trying to keep from the forefront of his mind. There could be no evidence of arousal during their meal with Sherlock.

“It would reassure me considerably to be close during the night should you require any assistance.”

Oh, that wolfish grin… it was not helping with his resolve to remain composed.

“Any assistance?”

“I regret to inform you that there shall be no misbehavior on either of our parts. You require rest and calm and shall be medicated for your pain. I will not compromise you in that condition.”

“Even if I beg?”

What a glorious partner he had found…

“Even then, my dearest. Your well-being is the most important thing right now and no sacrifice is too large to ensure that. However, I shall not be so cruel as to forbid any contact while we rest.”

“Oh, a bit of cuddling, then?”

“I may go so far as to use the colloquial term, snuggling.”

“I can do snuggling. In fact, I’d like to do snuggling.”

“It shall be innocent.”

“Not with us involved. Most we can say is that we’ll keep it in our pants.”

“I find myself unable to offer a rebuttal.”

“But we will talk about this some more tomorrow.”

“As you wish, Gregory. Though, you should know that I cannot exclude Sherlock from entering into this room at his will. He has circumvented every lock I have placed on that door.”
“Bet seeing you buried bollocks-deep in my mouth would keep him out forever.”

“Oh… then we certainly will be talking about this again tomorrow. And I anticipate a very stimulating discussion.”

“Great minds do think alike, don’t they?”

“Oh yes, yes they do…”
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Very sincere thanks for all of the kudos and comments - they never fail to make me smile!

“Get out!”

“No!”

“Immediately!”

“NO!”

“Sherlock Holmes! You will get out of our bed this instant!”

“I decline most forcefully!”

“Can you two take the argument somewhere else?”

“You have disturbed my hus… Gregory!”

“I disturbed the shop boy? It is you who are clinging to him as an infant sloth clutches at its mother! As you bleat and bellow your enormous belly bulges and bumps against his broken frame, further destroying what little heath he currently maintains! If he seeks legal recourse for your belly-bullying, we shall be cast into the life of tent-inhabiting panhandlers, seeking nuts and roots to fill our hungry mouths and I have not a reference book to find items that shall not immediately strike us down with their bitter toxins!”

Mycroft had fallen to sleep absolutely certain that he had somehow passed through the gates of heaven, because there was no word to describe his situation but paradise. His darling spouse resting in his arms, sharing slow and tender kisses, before the pain medicine took its toll and Mycroft was blessed with the extraordinary gift of watching his Gregory fall gently to sleep, cradled in his loving embrace. And now a member of the most virulent subtype of the goblin species was attempting to insert itself into his personal Garden of Eden.

“It was not I that slithered much like the biblical serpent into our bed to attempt to rend us asunder!”

“I have notified you on numerous occasions that I would be acting as chaperone. It is to my regret that I became distracted by an experiment and have only now arrived. You will now make room for me. I shall lie in the middle to forestall any conscious or unconscious attempts at wanton behavior.”

“Sherlock, Mycroft is being a complete gentleman and I was dead asleep before you decided to stage your invasion. Now, why don’t you just go to your own room and…”

“No. You are pharmaceutically addled and cannot give an informed opinion on this matter.”
“I believe we have previously discoursed on this particular topic, Sherlock.”

“I have no idea of what you are speaking.”

“You are not to taint the sanctity of my mari…”

Mycroft bit his tongue to hold back the rest of his words and nearly bit through it watching Sherlock’s face twist into a demonic and gleeful grin.

“Yes, Mycroft? Do go on.”

Satan spawn! He could not divulge the details of his nuptial strategy at this delicate stage of his and his love’s romantic negotiations. It would spoil the beauty of his plans!

“Leave your brother alo…”

The last bit of Lestrade’s sentence was swallowed by a large yawn and, as Mycroft stared transfixed at the exquisite sight of his love wearing such a candid expression, Sherlock wriggled between the two reclining figures and continued to wriggle until he had shoved Mycroft far enough away that he had room to be comfortable.

“You are now appropriately chaperoned. Return to sleep and do not mistake me for an object of your sexual longings in your sordid dreams or I shall be forced to defend myself most vigorously!”

If his intended had not been laughing, Mycroft would have taken the opportunity to demonstrate to his brother the exact meaning of the term vigorously, as he evicted him from the bed. However, a disturbance on that grand a scale would sure bring his beloved pain and that was unacceptable for any reason. Already Sherlock was lying flat on his back, arms crossed across his chest and scowling as fiercely as a pirate captain preparing to repel borders. Apparently, his first night together with his fiancé in their pre-engaged state was now to be a family function.

“Rest assured that your virtue will remain unspoiled, however, if you perpetrate any undue limb flailing, excessive snoring or soil the sheets with spittle or any other fluid, consider yourself marked for termination and do not attempt to protest my decision. Gregory requires rest and I shall not have you denying him what he needs because of your selectively-prurient values and failure to control your bodily functions.”

“It’s alright, love. Little tyke just doesn’t want to feel left out. Don’t suppose I can convince you to take one side or the other, though, can I Sherlock?”

“Absolutely not. The perversions you could perpetrate, shielded from my vigilance, are too corrupting to permit.”

“I actually enjoy a little corrupting now and again.”

“That is precisely why you require a chaperone! Mycroft is far too eager to allow your tendency towards debauchery to sway him towards inutterably filthy acts.”

“If I’m lucky.”

“Evidence!”

“Gregory, do not incite him to further heights of hysteria. As it stands, we shall suffer a crowded repose and Sherlock has been frequently known to wake with his head at the foot of the
bed, though that not be where it began.”

“Lad’s a wiggler, huh? Can’t say I’m surprised, so I guess we’ll have to make do. However, Shirley my lass, you will give Mycroft and me time alone in the morning. I know you hate to hear it, but we do have a part of our relationship we enjoy that’s not really something we want to have observers for.”

“The mere thought of witnessing your animalistic performance creates disconnections in my brain that I shall never again reestablish.”

“Well we understand each other. Now, goodnight Sherlock. Do you need a kiss?”

“Back you priapic satyr!”

“Gregory, do behave.”

“I have no idea what I’m being accused of, but I’d like to know if I can make money off of it.”

“Actually, my dear…”

“Enough! There shall be no sexually-infiltrated tangents of conversation while I am chaperone.”

“Fine, we’ll wait until you’re off duty. Can I finally go back to sleep?”

“Had you and the planet-sized popinjay simply allowed me my way without objection, you would already be asleep. In the future, please refrain from casting blame in directions other than towards yourself when you simply fail to properly apply rational thinking to a problem.”

“Or just let you do what you want.”

“Exactly.”

“Can’t say I misunderstood that one.”

“Now, learn to accept and obey.”

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Mycroft was not convinced that he experienced more than a few snatched moments of rest with Sherlock’s rather energetic method of sleeping, but found he did not mind overmuch as it gave him time to study his husband and commit his face further to memory. And what a delightful opportunity it truly was, since his beloved’s face contorted into the most enchanting expressions, while his conscious brain was no longer filtering his reactions. Even more interesting was the manner in which his brother and his Gregory seemed to fall into a duo of action-reaction forces so that each moved cleanly in response to the other, like dancers on the stage. Dancers that only paused when Sherlock reached out and, for the occasional brief moment, curled against the larger body for warmth or comfort. He was still so young, in many ways… younger than his physical years would lead one to believe. Younger and older at the same time, it was not difficult to understand why his brother found it nearly impossible to find individuals who could accept his nature and welcome him into their lives.

And he very carefully packed away, in their own special box, the memories of his brother reaching out and nestling against him during the night, much as he did when he was very small and fell asleep as Mycroft read to him tales of great adventure and intrigue…
“I am NEVER sleeping in here again! The stench makes a pig sty a veritable perfumery by comparison!”

Said while his nose was consuming air from beneath the blankets and between two sets of large, unwashed feet. The burrowing mass made its way upwards from the bottom of the bed and one very harassed and tousled head emerged from its cottony cocoon.

“Consider that payback for at least one punch to the ribs that I felt last night you little stoat.”

“And had you maintained a suitable sleeping position, or spent the night tucked soundly in your own bed, exposure to trapped gases would not be of significant concern. Truly you have only yourself to blame, Sherlock.”

“It is only through my continued efforts that you are not paraded through the streets in disgrace to have horse droppings thrown into your face by the jubilant members of the lackey’s cohort.”

“In honesty, I must admit that you have demonstrated due diligence in performing your task however, since I have passed another night in safety, both of body and reputation, and you did promise Gregory that you would allow us time this morning for ourselves, perhaps it is the correct moment for you to make yourself ready for the day and find your breakfast.”

“I am not hungry.”

“Looks like it’s lesson time, Mycroft. Today’s schoolwork – kissing. Come on, love, let’s give him a proper demonstration.”

Sherlock quickly scrambled off of the bed, though, as Mycroft noticed, carefully avoiding his Gregory’s injured foot, and sped his small, pajama-clad body out of the door.

“You do still have the apology I asked you retain for times like these, don’t you, my dear?”

“Ah, don’t worry about it. I just think he got shook up yesterday and needed not to be alone. But now… if you’ve got a spare toothbrush, we can get to that kissing lesson and you can teach me a thing or two.”

Mycroft almost offered up a protest for the postponement, but felt the condition of his tongue and teeth as he began to form words. Once again, his husband proved himself to be a man of great wisdom.

“Perhaps attending to certain matters would increase the enjoyment of our morning. I shall bring you a basin…”

“Mycroft, it’s just a dodgy ankle. I can hobble my way to the bathroom, thank you very much.”

Pride… he must not injure his spouse’s pride. But, he must also safeguard his welfare. Such critical responsibilities, yet ones he embraced gladly.

“The doctor was most firm that you must avoid using your foot to support any appreciable weight. If you will permit it, I will offer you my shoulder as an aide for your motion.”

“Give me a boost to the loo? I can agree to that. Though it’s not really… bollocks!”
Mycroft flew off the bed and around to the other side where his husband had foolishly tried to swing his legs over the side and found that his pain medication had long worn off.

“Have a care, my dear! Why you persist in holding fast to a belief that is not supported by the facts perplexes me to no end.”

Kneeling down, Mycroft checked that the ankle was still securely wrapped and stopped a moment to lay a kiss on the side of his mate’s thigh.

“Now, we shall attend to matters of hygiene and then return you to bed; breakfast will be delivered when I ring for it. Take your time rising, Gregory, and hold my arm as you do so. I do not wish you to become unsteady on your feet.”

And it was with great relief that Mycroft watched his husband follow his advice, though it created a great ache in his heart to see the pain etched on his love’s face as they began to slowly move forward. It was a fortunate thing, too, that their relationship had progressed to the point where supporting his husband while he attended to certain personal business was not a source of embarrassment. Nor, very surprisingly for Mycroft, was it for him, having to do the same with another person in the room. A quick round of brushing teeth followed and Mycroft was ready to return to bed when he caught a displeased expression flash across his Gregory’s face. Something that was simply not permissible.

“What is troubling you, my dear?”

“Caught a whiff of myself and realized I owe Sherlock an apology. I reek. Forgot I didn’t get a shower yesterday.”

Which reminded Mycroft that he also did not take time to cleanse himself after his exertions. They were both even in the same pants they had been wearing the previous day. A very surreptitious check proved that he also, should make amends to his brother.

“Oh, I believe I understand. However… I am not confident that you could properly support yourself in the shower and I fear that assisting you, though it would be an act of great pleasure for me, would prove perilous for both of us with the slickness of the floor.”

“That’s probably true and I also am starting to think you’re right about my ankle. It’s not going to hold me up by itself.”

“I am gratified that you are beginning to see reason. And I do believe I can offer a suitable alternative.”

Mycroft steered his spouse towards a door on the other side of the room and was rewarded with a shocked gasp when he pushed it open.

“That is the biggest fucking tub I have ever seen!”

Though it was miniscule compared to the one Mycroft had now decided would grace the master suite in their new home. His spouse’s eyes were positively glowing…

“If I correctly estimate the dimensions, there is more than sufficient room for two bodies to comfortably bathe together.”

“Oh… you have no idea how good that sounds.”

Actually, Mycroft did. Every piece and part of him was quite clear on the issue.
“Then have a seat here on the bench while I make preparations.”

And try to bring himself under control. It had honestly not occurred to Mycroft when the idea sprung to mind that he would be sharing a bathing tub with his completely unclothed fiancé. And there would be touching. Possibly caressing. Caressing in the most naked fashion. While surrounded by warm water and the soft stream of sunshine through the windows…

It was the work of only a few minutes to fill the tub with water, gather towels and take a few deep breaths before turning back to his husband and offering a large and hopefully not-to-eager smile.

“I believe we are ready, my dear. Let me assist you with your…”

Oh, apparently his spouse required no assistance slipping out of his pants and tossing them aside with a very saucy flick of his fingers. And it was already obvious that his dear Gregory also found the idea of sharing a bath more than platonic. With an inner prayer for strength, Mycroft slid his own undergarments down his legs and gave them a small nudge with his foot so they landed near his husband’s own.

“That’s my Mycroft, always the most gorgeous man in the room.”

And one who hoped the vibrant red blush he was feeling wasn’t as prominent as he feared.

“Come here, love. Give me a hand up?”

Mycroft suddenly felt very shy about getting closer to his spouse, but no Holmes ever allowed such silliness to control their actions. Mimicking a confidence he truly did not feel, Mycroft strode towards his mate, helped him rise to his feet and, pressing himself against the full length of his Gregory’s body, guided him forward and very carefully assisted him into the tub. It was more than a small surprise that, with his injured foot propped on the tub’s edge, his love slid slightly forward and nodded his head back, indicating that Mycroft should take position behind him. Where his spouse could lay against his chest. Between his thighs…

Very, very carefully Mycroft maneuvered himself into his assigned spot and settled his legs on either side of his fiancé’s body, hoping the slight moan he released when his Gregory leaned back and rested against him was not audible.

“I’m not going to lie, love… this is heaven. You’re an angel and this is heaven. Wouldn’t this be a grand thing to be able to look forward to after a long, hard day…”

Perhaps a fireplace should be added to their bath, as well. A cozy fire and a warm bath on cold night… Mycroft was very aware what his life’s work would demand of him and knowing his day would end with him and his husband enjoying such comfort… it was a heavenly vision. Mycroft wrapped his arms around his intended’s chest and pressed a kiss to his shoulder.

“It would be very grand. I admit that I rarely indulge, however, with company so pleasant, I might reconsider the frequency of my bathing experiences.”

The grin didn’t need to be visible for Mycroft to feel its brilliant shine and he was content to simply lay there, holding his beloved, and allowing him to relax and enjoy their bit of luxury. Before long, however, the lure of his Gregory’s bare skin could no longer be ignored and Mycroft began to lay kisses across his dearest’s neck and shoulder. If anything, the flavor was even more exciting, rich with proof that his husband was an active and virile man, supremely athletic, powerful… and bold… Mycroft felt his Gregory’s hand cover one of his own and guide it slowly over his chest, inviting Mycroft to extend his play over a broader field. And Mycroft was more
than happy to accept that invitation.

Slowly, the rest of the world began to fade away and the only focus for Mycroft’s attention was the body of his darling Gregory and how it felt to his hands. Nothing in his life could begin to compare to the feel of his lover’s skin and he felt almost drunk from the sensation, as well as the little pleasured sounds he was eliciting from his attentions. Needless to say, he had to test just how many sounds he could draw from his spouse and Mycroft slowly began to work his hands lower, gliding over the muscles that firmed his love’s stomach and playing with the slight trail of hair that guided his fingers even lower until his Gregory’s sounds became almost too beautiful to bear.

Mycroft wondered if he should ask permission before continuing on, but a gentle upward press of his husband’s hips told him permission was already given. And attention was expected. Mycroft found himself praying once more for strength as ran his fingers along very hard and anxious flesh and the soft ‘yes’ sent a shiver down his spine. It was a very heady thing, to be able to give pleasure to such a phenomenal creature. To make them moan and writhe and strain to get more from your touch because they wanted it. They wanted you and what you made them feel. So, Mycroft gave his lover what he wanted, learning the right pace and grip and pressure. Finding the most sensitive areas so he could teasingly torture his Gregory until he was practically begging for his release. And each bead of sweat he licked from his intended’s skin was rich with the spicy flavor of arousal, urging him to take more until he could no longer deny himself and with a sharp bite at the base of his love’s neck, Mycroft felt his Gregory’s body stiffen and his own name echo off the marble walls of the bath. The moment was so glorious, Mycroft felt tears welling up in his eyes.

“You… fuck, I can’t even think.”

To Mycroft Holmes, there was no greater compliment.

“Then do not. Thinking is unnecessary at the moment. Simply rest and allow me to enjoy the feel of your body while you do so.”

And Lestrade was content to comply. Mycroft shifted a little until he could gently hold the nearly-boneless body and allow his spouse to lay his head back against his chest. Yes… this would be a regular feature of their future lives together…

“Gregory… do you remain awake?”

“I’m not sure… I could be sleeping and this is the best dream I’ve ever had.”

“Or you could be awake and this is your reality. One I am very happy to help you revisit as often as you wish.”

“I like that answer better.”

“And I must agree. But I fear that the water is cooling and you shall catch a chill if we remain for much longer.”

“Did we even actually wash?”

Ah yes… that was the true purpose of taking a bath wasn’t it?

“Not as such, but I am confident the solvent properties of the water has dissolved a sufficient quantity of particulates to declare this a successful bathing period.”
“I love it when you phrase things in a way no one can possibly argue with unless they want to look stupid.”

How greatly Mycroft craved that his husband use the word ‘love’ in a slightly more intimate manner, but knew that that the tortoise’s pace was certainly more prudent than the hare’s for that particular aspect of their union. Even he was not so naïve to think that the open declaration of true love was a thing to be rushed. It would cheapen the sentiment.

“Yet you debate me regularly with ferocity and cunning. Which I both adore and enjoy. Now, let us remove you to a fresh set of warm clothes and I shall have breakfast delivered, so you may take your medication.”

Mycroft gave his Gregory a final kiss, directly on the lovely mark he had laid low on his husband’s neck and exited the bath tub to retrieve the towels he had set out, but was stopped when his husband’s hand reached out to lay against his hip.

“Not so fast, love. Someone I know needs his own bit of attention.”

That darkly wicked gleam shining behind his husband’s eyes stoked the fire in Mycroft’s blood again and a great deal of that blood began to run towards a very specific location.

“That is not necessary…”

“I think it is. Now, come closer and let me have a taste.”

That was certainly not a manly whimper, but Mycroft found he didn’t actually care. He retraced his steps back towards the tub and watched his Gregory shift, turn slightly and take a long lick of the rapidly lengthening morsel he was being offered. One of very tasty goodness that demanded to be gently taken just a tiny distance into his husband’s mouth, then softly sucked and petted by a nimble and delightfully creative tongue. Mycroft ran his fingers through his spouse’s hair, most certainly not pressing his Gregory’s head forward and…

“IF THERE HAS BEEN A DROWNING, I DEMAND A SAMPLE OF THE LUNG WATER!”

Mycroft flew backwards at the goblin’s war cry and quickly positioned himself between his brother and his greatest love to protect his spouse’s modesty. Which was apparently not in jeopardy since his brother was wearing a pillow case over his head.

“SHERLOCK! It is appropriate to knock when one enters a bath!”

“I did. You did not answer.”

“It is not sufficient if you knock as silently as a spider’s whisper.”

“My hand contacted the door, meeting the standard for the concept of knocking. You must vacate this room immediately and make yourself ready. I have called the doctor and demanded that he perform another examination on the lackey’s foot. He should arrive shortly.”

Mycroft bit his lip and tried to hold back the scream of frustration that threatened to break free and destroy every bit of glass in their home. It was only the sympathetic smile from his Gregory that kept their property in one piece.

“Good of you, lad. Nice you’re thinking about me.”
“I am not. I am hoping that he will be more agreeable today to procure for me the bone marrow that I desire. Cook will be sending breakfast to you in a few minutes and if you greet the serving girl with your flabby flaccidity, we shall be paying for her confinement to an institution for the blind for the rest of her life. I shall now obtain suitable clothing for your gigolo and expect that you will suitably clothe yourself without requiring my usual assistance. Be in your bedroom when I return.”

Sherlock felt his way back out of the bath and Mycroft could do nothing but stare daggers into his brother’s back.

“Calm down, love. Or, if you prefer, come back here and let me calm you down.”

“Unfortunately, my dearest Gregory, I anticipate we lack the time to enjoy ourselves as we might fully wish.”

“I suppose you’re right. We can pick up with this later. You know, Mycroft… you’re absolutely delicious and I have no willpower when it comes to things that tasty.”

And, of course, he had to lick his lips in a completely lewd and suggestive fashion. The depths of Mycroft love increased yet again.

“I give you my most solemn word. Now, let us get you vertical and dry. I am very anxious, actually, to see what garments Sherlock procures for your use.”

“Do you keep servant uniforms around here?”

“Oh good lord… let us at least hope it is not a maid’s dress.”

“Are you sure about that?”

His Gregory in a short and snug dress, a tiny apron draped invitingly at his waist...

“I presume one should be open to alternative fashion.”

“Especially when one can help me slip out of my alternative fashion.”

“Most especially then…”
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

As always, I am eternally grateful for all of the very kind support...

Sherlock’s choice of clothing was unusually demure for his high-strung sensibilities and Lestrade found himself clad in a simple pair of dark trousers and a blue shirt, both of which were a bit short for him, but worked well enough given the situation.

“I apologize that you must adorn yourself in Mycroft’s sadly-mistaken version of casual clothing, but sacrifices must be made if I am not to watch you further parade in front of me in a bed sheet.”

“They’re fine, Sherlock. Mycroft’s got great taste.”

“I think you mean Mycroft’s gaping maw likes to taste, which is another matter entirely.”

“It’s my foot that’s hurt, not my smacking hand.”

“As if you could catch me in your malfunctioning state.”

“I’ve got my business partner and he’s got two good legs.”

“That support the weight of small continent. I shall lecture you on Newton’s First and Second Law of Motion if you are unfamiliar with inertia and acceleration.”

“Mycroft, if you please.”

Sherlock’s attention had been drawn away from his brother, who found it very easy to position himself behind the young evildoer, snatch him off the ground and toss him onto the bed for his husband to begin smothering their burden to death with a pillow. Or pummel him to death… Mycroft was actually quite impressed with the variety of deadly blows his lover was striking the goblin-born and took careful mental notes.

“You shl nt dft me!”

“I believe your defeat is already at hand, brother dear. It would be prudent to display your white flag post haste lest your adversary instigate more rigorous methods of securing your downfall.”

“Nvr!”

“Gregory, his fate has been accepted. Please end matters quickly so that we may breakfast.”

“Yes sir, right away sir.”

And, to Mycroft’s great interest, the pillow torment was supplemented by other actions that made his brother shriek with both laughter and pleas for amnesty.

“Little man’s pretty ticklish.”
“To be honest, I was unaware of the fact; however it is not something I am now likely to forget. You are bereft of choices, Sherlock. Surrender or perish.”

“Srndr!”

“I do believe I hear the lamentations of the downtrodden, Gregory, my dear.”

“Guess if I have to, I have to, but you two never let me have any fun.”

Lestrade collapsed onto the bed, pinning a loudly protesting Sherlock beneath him.

“Remove your carcass from my person, you ill-born farm horse!”

“Be thankful I don’t smell like one anymore. You know, you make a comfortable pillow, Sherlock. Bony, but comfortable. This feels so good, I think I’ll take a nap.”

Mycroft had to laugh as his brother vibrated with annoyance and began the torturous process of wiggling himself free from beneath his captor.

“Hey! My pillow’s moving. Must have some rats among the feathers.”

Sherlock finally liberated himself and let out a great huff before glaring his most ferocious glare at the older boys.

“You have rats nesting where your brain material should reside, lackey.”

“That’s sort of weak, Sherlock. Lost some oxygen while doing pillow duty?”

“If my brain is permanently compromised, it shall go harshly for you! The world will suffer grossly due to my impairment!”

A small knock on the door forestalled any further conversation on the subject, until breakfast had been delivered and Mycroft had his fiancé suitably set up in his bed with a tray across his lap. Sherlock immediately confiscated the chocolate-drizzled pastry from the tray and snarled as his brother tried to snatch it back.

“Gregory needs sustenance.”

“I require tribute.”

“Let him have his little treat, love.”

“Gregory…”

“The sooner he gets his, the sooner you get yours.”

“I… oh. Yes. Sherlock do enjoy your pastry and then do not feel obliged to remain to remark on its quality.”

“I am not leaving the two of you unsupervised. Were it not for my highly-developed sense of self-preservation and the permanent damage I would suffer from one look at the naked twinings of your vile forms, I would not have allowed you to remain separated from me in the bath! As is stands, I am very certain that sexual interactions of some form were occurring. I shall not again let down my guard.”

“Oh come on, Sherlock. How about I promise you a whole tray of my mum’s special biscuits
if you give me and Mycroft a little more time alone this morning. We’ve got… things to finish up.”

“The ridiculousness of your request insults me. However, it is a moot point, because the medical incompetent will arrive soon and I cannot imagine you would wish him to be witness to your depravity. Or perhaps you would… your lewdness may desire an audience to be properly and disgustedly satisfied.”

“Not an exhibitionist, little man. Besides, I don’t want anyone but me getting a look at your brother’s amazing body.”

The bout of retching that admission prompted required a very firm steadying of the bed tray and Lestrade’s wounded ankle. And that was a struggle for Mycroft because his mind was cleanly and completely occupied by the joy of his husband’s public statement of happiness with his appearance. That a luscious and highly-prized exemplar of the masculine form found him acceptable was nearly incomprehensible, but, nonetheless, Mycroft happily fed on the nectar of the sentiment.

“You shall carry the guilt of my demise to your own pauper’s grave.”

“No, now, Sherlock. You claim to prize truth and candor, therefore you cannot take exception when it is spoken by another.”

“You keep him slave to your will with your libidinous fondlings and temptations of a material nature. Truth and candor cannot be ascribed to any of the peasant’s proclamations concerning you.”

“Sherlock, I don’t care if Mycroft was as poor as me and said we couldn’t so much as hold hands until the wedding… I’d still think he was the best thing going. Because he is. Mycroft… you ok? Sherlock, help your brother up.”

No, Sherlock should just let him lie here, because Mycroft was absolutely unsure his legs would support his love-heavy heart. His husband used the “W” word. Used it. Used it freely and gladly and proudly… uttering such devoted and nearly-reverent words… the tears must not fall for Sherlock would surely not understand how they spoke of his adoration for his mate and instigate a hearty salvo of mockery.

“I refuse to soil my fingers with his putty-like flesh.”

“No biscuits for you. Ever.”

“Your mother finds me both precious and precocious. She is an astute woman. I shall have my fill of biscuits despite your efforts to the contrary.”

And his mother-in-law was already immunized to goblin antigens. Today he would inquire about the availability of St. Peter’s Basilica for the ceremony. Surely they could not be overly sticky on the subject of adherence to their particular faith…

“Yeah, you could be right. She does think you’re pretty cute, which makes me wonder if she’s ready for one of those retirement homes.”

“If the time unfortunately arrives, my dear, she shall be installed in the very best this nation or any can provide. Or receive private care. We shall discuss the matter further, at need.”

“See? My Mycroft’s the best.”
My. Was there any possessive pronoun so devastatingly delightful?

“It’d be better if he got his arse off the floor, though.”

Ah. There was that.

“I do beg your pardon, Gregory. I was… distracted by level of cleanliness, or lack thereof, under my bed. I shall have to have a stern word with the housekeeping staff.”

“Well, here. Have a nibble and you’ll feel better.”

“Do not hand him food! He becomes unhinged when presented with consumables and will consider your arm part of the rations tossed into his cage!”

“Feel free to shove off anytime, you little bastard.”

How wonderfully sweet of his intended to defend his honor, knowing that Mycroft was still too overcome with emotion to craft a suitable reply.

“If I did not currently hear a tread upon the stairs, I would take my leave for I am becoming notably ill from the miasma of sex hormones in the air.”

And the tread became the presence of the doctor who looked as displeased to be there as Mycroft did for having his bubble of romance burst by the cold reminder of his spouse’s infirmity. Fortunately, it did halt Sherlock’s diatribe most swiftly, as attention was turned to pressing the poor physician to procure samples of blood, urine, hair, mucus, vitreous and spinal fluid, marrow and semen from the injured man in the bed, though his brother was in no way hesitant to note loudly that the last item on that list he could procure himself from the soiled linens of their boudoir, if provided with a hazardous materials suit. It was a welcome thing that Sherlock’s personality was well known by the health-care provider, who ignored his histrionics and took his leave after proclaiming Mycroft’s fiancé on the pathway to recovery and leaving behind additional ankle bandages and milder pain medication to begin in a day or two.

“The man in useless! He should not be allowed to administer plasters to stuffed rabbits! I have not one sample to test. My day is ruined!”

“You want some spit? I can give you spit.”

“Of course not! Wait… that is not as entirely unappealing an offer as I first thought. I can assess the compounds present in that fluid and compare it to samples of other fluids taken when I have the opportunity. I accept. You may use your spoon.”

“Sure that’s enough?”

“For now. I am exceptionally proficient in microchemistry. If I require additional material, I will make my wishes known.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you will.”

Mycroft wondered if all children had a guardian so caring and indulgent as his Gregory, not that Sherlock appreciated his good fortune in any appreciable way. One spoonful of saliva was quickly dashed off to the hellion’s laboratory without so much as a ounce of gratitude.

“What’s wrong, love? You look like you’re ready to pummel the little man into liquid.”
How considerate of his husband to accompany his concern with a strong hand running up his back.

“Nothing that is not the norm for Sherlock and myself. I do wish he would integrate at least a few of the social niceties into his personality. I ask little; a ‘please’ or ‘thank you’ on occasion would be sufficient…”

“I don’t think he sees the point. Maybe he never will. Doesn’t mean he doesn’t feel thankful, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“It is indeed. Discerning his true mind on matters can be troublingly difficult at times.”

“Lad does have his own way of thinking, that’s no lie. But it’s not a bad way of thinking, once you get to know it.”

“True. I simply wish he treated you with more kindness, my dear. You are very good to him and for him, yet he offers you so little in return.”

“He offers every bit that he can, he just doesn’t want anyone to see him do it. He’s fine, Mycroft.”

“But will others consider him fine, my dear? Those that do not have the benefit of your patience and insight?”

Mycroft felt warm hands on his shoulders as he was pulled back to lay with his head on a pillow.

“Maybe not, but that can’t be helped. All we can do is show him he’s got people who care for him, even when he’s being a complete twit, and hope if he runs across any idiots, he’ll come to talk about it so we can at least give him some cheering up.”

Mycroft turned his head and stared up into the rich brown eyes of his partner in life and knew that if he drowned in that chocolaty sea, he would die a very happy man. And happiness was a powerful motivator…

“He is quite young, Gregory… a hope such as that speaks of commitment to his future.”

“Yeah, it does. If you don’t mind, that is.”

“Mind? My dear, I welcome it. And you.”

How nicely his spouse’s hand fit into his and wasn’t it a portent of true love that only a small tug was necessary for his love to know his intentions and lean over to make himself accessible for a kiss. And to deliver a few more himself. Across Mycroft’s chin and throat and no… he didn’t need to maintain the buttoned condition of his shirt. So much nicer without its barrier between his skin and his lover’s lips. Lips that appeared to be eager to grace his body with lazy kisses and explore his navel with languid licks of warm, wet tongue.

“Sherlock’s gonna be awhile, right?”

“I… that is… he should…”

“Good. Don’t care to have my dessert interrupted.”

“Dessert? I… oh!”

“Uh huh, so you just lie back and relax. Let ol’ Greg take care of you.”
“I g… gladly place myself in your hands.”

“Hands aren’t something you’ll need to worry about, love. At least not this morning…”

All he had, all he was he would give to this man who was so perfect in every possibly way.

“Someone’s finally shut off his brain.”

And he had…nothing at all mattered but a small island of bliss, an island just large enough for two. His Gregory’s attentions had been… there could not exist in the world any sensation more pleasurable than that of his spouse’s mouth stimulating him in ways he could not have dreamed, even with his vast imagination and intellect called to study the problem. And to have, even a minor product of himself, be taken in and assimilated into his beloved’s tissues and bones… to speak of a wedding and to give such staggering gift… could even their wedding night be more glorious than this morning?

“That is a very accurate assessment, my dear Gregory. But I can truly think of no issue that has greater call upon my attention on any occasion than your presence.”

“Flatterer.”

This could be his new favorite daydream, Mycroft thought. His soulmate curled against him, head resting on his chest, leg draped over his so their bodies could press closely together… how wonderful it would be to play as a movie in his head while having both his ears and his intelligence insulted during long and purposeless meetings…

“I’ll be honest, though. I’d love nothing more than to lay like this all day. Think we could get Sherlock to bring us water so we don’t die of thirst?”

“If you don’t mind the possibility that it would contain some form of nerve toxin.”

“Taking my chances with thirst, then. At least if I die, it won’t be in some hospital bed. I’ll be right here where I want to be.”

Mycroft stroked his hand up and down his fiancé’s arm and wondered if he should eschew the trappings of a standard wedding and simply find the quickest route possible for their union. In his mind, he knew that his dearest love would have to return to his own home at some point today and the thought was nearly unbearable. That he would sleep tonight alone, without the warmth and comfort of his intended was too disheartening to dwell upon. He needed their bed, their permanent spousal bed in which to spend his nights with his husband asleep by his side. In fact, Mycroft was positive that he would not sleep soundly again until that was the reality of his life.

“And this is where I desire you to be, as well. Perhaps…”

Courage!

“Perhaps we can make such proximity a more regular feature of our association.”

“You won’t get any objection from me. Definitely not going to complain about getting to do this as often as I can.”

Wanted… he had never understood how a person could long so terribly to feel wanted until someone finally and honesty wanted him.
“Would you include in your desire… additional nights shared in a common bed?”

Was it too soon? Too blatant and needful? His adored one was disquietingly silent and if he had stepped over the proverbial line…

“You mean all night?”

“That was my meaning, yes.”

“So… not just sex.”

Confound his confusion! There was nothing for it but honesty and hope that his response was pacifying.

“I enjoy greatly the physical intimacy we share, Gregory, but I also enjoy greatly moments such as these where we take pleasure only from the nearness of each other and the comfort, safety even, that the closeness engenders.”

Mycroft lay still, hearing nothing from his husband, but gaining hope from the way his love’s hand began to stroke his skin.

“That’s… I like that. I’d like to do that. It’s good… I like knowing that.”

The words soared in Mycroft’s ears, but the bit of hesitation gave him pause.

“You do not sound entirely certain, my dear.”

“I’m actually very certain. It’s just… this is all new for me.”

“New? Gregory, I have labored under the impression, loathsome that it is, that you are well experienced in such matters.”

The body of his fiancé curled in more tightly and Mycroft instinctively wrapped his arm around his mate’s shoulders.

“Going out with someone? Sure. That physical intimacy? Yeah. But no one… no one’s really just been happy doing this. As loony as it was with His Majesty present, I really liked sleeping with you last night and even if we’d just gotten up, put on some clothes and got me home today, it would still have been a fantastic night. I guess it’s just a little hard to believe I can actually have something like this. Especially with someone who wants it too.”

How could anyone… anyone… not desire to simply share a quiet night with his Gregory? Was the number of mental defectives in this world truly that substantial? Reassurance, it was time to deliver most emphatically the necessary calming reassurance to his spouse.

“Then be very aware that I have cherished these hours and am exceedingly hopeful that we are able to repeat our experience on many an occasion. I am greatly desire to have you in my arms as you rest, my dear. To feel your breath on my skin, your body warm against mine. All night, every night if I could have it. My bed is yours, whenever it pleases you, my dearest. And myself along with it.”

It was not the formal declaration he would make when he asked for his Gregory’s hand in marriage, but it was a serious and committing statement nonetheless. So, it was not without a bit of worry that he drew back his arm as his love crawled further up the bed so that he could stare into Mycroft’s eyes.
“Maybe… maybe one day we can have that. You and me waking up together as a normal thing.”

Why hadn’t he planned properly! If he but had a token of their engagement the waiting would be over!

“Nothing would gladden me more.”

There were no words to further express his emotions, so leaning in to kiss his husband was the only proper action. As well as relaxing into the returned gesture, enjoying the play of lips and tongue, the tangling of his feet with his lover’s uninjured one… Mycroft had never, despite his brother’s occasional accusations, suffered a god complex, but he now fully knew the meaning of being worshipped. And of offering his own adulations, in return. And they each continued their devotions until the slamming on the bedroom door nearly rocked the ancient portal off of its hinges.

“I DEMAND ADMITTANCE!”

“Thought you said he could walk in anytime.”

“He can. Apparently, he is learning.”

“Our little boy’s growing up.”

“And though I am thankful for it, I find myself hoping it does not occur too rapidly.”

“Yeah, little man’s good for now.”

“CEASE YOUR COITAL PROBINGS AND LET ME ENTER!”

“What were you saying about little, my dear?”

“Nothing. I haven’t said a word all day.”

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Though he would happily have his spouse’s belongings delivered today to this residence and declare their lives together officially started, Mycroft knew he had no option but to return his love to his mother-in-law’s home in order to preserve familial peace. It hurt, though. There was a heavy ache in his chest as he directed Sherlock to have the Jaguar brought around and he helped his husband slowly navigate the stairs to the ground floor. Fortunately, Sherlock’s behavior leaned more towards helpful than hindering and he assisted in settling his soon-to-be brother-in-law into the car with a minimum of fuss, though he refused to remain at home, not matter how logical Mycroft’s argument.

“I refuse. I do not trust that you shall not spirit the lackey off to some secluded area and take advantage of his weakened condition.”

“It was not so long ago that you feared that to be my fate, and Gregory the perpetrator of my violation.”

“They are truly one and the same for the end results are equally disturbing.”

“Might as well let him come, Mycroft, or he’ll grab some keys and try to chase us in his own car.”
“And I would succeed! If I was not shackled by your unreasonable restrictions, I would be able to properly demonstrate my command of a vehicle!”

“See? Come on Sherlock, hop in. Mum’ll be glad to see you.”

“Of course she would. Who would not enjoy the benefit of my company?”

Mycroft and his loving spouse shared a look over their ward’s head and silently pledged to hold off their laughter until a more private moment. When his lover and his brother were comfortably situated, Mycroft began the drive and congratulated himself for the choice of vehicle, as it weathered the imperfections in the road with almost no discernible effect. And he would gladly offer his services as driver for his Gregory’s needs until such time as he was able to successfully again pilot a car on his own. It was the least he could do to fulfill his husbandly duties.

With the comfort of this journey spectacular compared to their last, Sherlock was blessedly silent, though Mycroft noticed he kept a fixed eye on Lestrade, as if on alert for any Valkyries that might swoop down and harvest the valiant warrior. It was almost a disappointment to reach his lover’s for-the-moment residence and spoil the blessed peace and quiet of the ride.

“Come along, my dear. Let us get you installed in a comfortable place in your home.”

“In front of the telly, if you please. Mum’ll want me where she can keep an eye on me.”

“A properly doting point of view. Sherlock, you may wait here.”

“You amuse me with your attempts at domination.”

Sherlock exited the vehicle stood glaring, waiting for Mycroft to begin the process of extracting his husband.

“I hate to be a bother, love, but Mum’s going to need her car for work tomorrow.”

Blast! Mycroft had completely forgotten about the extra vehicle residing in their garage.

“I shall have it delivered tonight. Or, if you wish, I shall leave this vehicle for her use and have our driver collect Sherlock and myself. It would likely be a better option for you own comfort and well-being if you be taken about your daily business in an automobile with a smoother ride. Of course, I shall chauffer you, if you do not choose to take the Jaguar in the interim.”

“Mum would be terrified to drive this beauty, so I think she’d prefer to get her own car back. And you are not going to be my chauffer. You’ve got better things to do with your time. If I need anything in the next day or two, Mum’ll take me for it.”

“You are an imbecile. Every jostle of your extremity further compromises its structural integrity.”

“Thought that would make you happy. Bump, bump, foot falls off.”

“You know nothing. By the time I could retrieve your foot, the amount of decay it might have undergone could render it useless for my purposes. I require a fresh specimen.”

“I’ll carry around a big bag of ice with me if Mum takes me to the shops or for a checkup.”

“That is actually an acceptable suggestion.”

“Points for me, then. Mycroft… you ready?”
No. Not at all. Not for any reason did he want to hand over his fiancé, even to his fiancé’s mother. They should be enjoying a measure of entertainment, a lovely meal and then a return to their bed for a long night’s rest, sans Sherlock on this occasion. But, that future was growing closer…

“I am prepared. Slowly, though, my dear. The path is most uneven.”

Sherlock walked in front, kicking away stray stones and blades of grass, until they were at the door, where he banged as loudly as possible on the wood, much to Mycroft’s chagrin. Fortunately, his mother-in-law did not seem offended by the surly boy’s actions, instead pulling him inside and pushing him into the kitchen while Mycroft seated his love on the sofa, with a pillow to elevate his leg.

“You know where I’d rather be, don’t you, love?”

Weeping could further endear him to his mother-in-law or cause her to think him feeble. Best err on the side of caution and withhold his tears for the time being.

“Where I would most want you to be. However, I am certain your mother will be greatly reassured having you near her during your hour of need.”

“Yeah, she worries. We were lucky we got last night at all.”

“Then let us hope we find such luck again, soon.”

Mycroft held his husband’s hand as he placed a gentle kiss on his lips, accompanied by the sound of gagging from a few steps behind him.

“Ah, Sherlock. Do tidy the crumbs you have sprayed onto the floor, if you would be so kind.”

“Looks like Mum’s been baking.”

“I’ve got to offer something so you’ll come home now and then, you awful boy. Mycroft, you staying for dinner?”

Dinner with the family… if he were alone, he would gladly accept, but there was really no predicting when Sherlock’s behavior would take a turn for the disastrous.

“I am, unfortunately, forced to decline. Matters at home require my attention, you understand. Another time, perhaps.”

“I’m going to hold you to that. Sherlock, go run that plate I fixed for you to your car. Mycroft will be out in a moment.”

Divide and conquer – a formidable strategy.

“I shall comply on receipt of five more biscuits.”

The disastrous turn had arrived.

“There’s more than five on that plate. When you eat them is your business. Now go.”

Sherlock snorted loudly, but marched off to the kitchen, exiting and continuing to march out of the front door with a plate held tightly in his hands.

“He’s such a sweet little thing. Once you get past his silliness. Mycroft, why don’t you help
me get another plate ready for you to take home? That one will have his cleaned by the time he gets to the car.”

Mycroft’s cut widened eyes to his spouse, who just shrugged and gave him a ‘be brave’ smile.

“Of course, how very kind of you.”

Marching to the gallows was undoubtedly a more soothing experience, though this death march at least terminated in a room with biscuits cooling on trays.

“I want to thank you for looking out for Greg. Those idiots have more fun bashing each other over the head than they do trying to score a goal. He was bound to get hurt one day and at least you and your brother were there to help him out.”

So far, the claws had not been extended, but Mycroft was not so naïve as to reduce his vigilance.

“It was my pleasure to be of assistance.”

“You seem like a good boy, Mycroft. And I think you do right by my son. Greg’s… he’s a decent lad. Good-hearted, kind, likes to make people happy and take care of things… it’s easy for people to take advantage of someone like that. But, I don’t think that’s your plan. I don’t see you as the type to think of him as someone you can use. I’m not wrong about that, am I?”

It suddenly struck Mycroft how true were her words. Gregory was a magnificent individual, but one that an unscrupulous person could use to his spouse’s disadvantage. Gregory would not see the ruin; he wanted to see the good in people, even if that good was no more than a wishful thought. He had faith in humanity, a faith that could, if he were not careful and despite his sparkling intelligence, cloud his vision as to what was real and what was subterfuge if the villain were suitably skilled in deceit.

“You are not wrong. It is in no way my intention to be anything but respectful to Gregory. I value his companionship highly and would never disparage him in any fashion.”

“Then we understand each other. I’m not senile, Mycroft. I know what boys get up to when their mum’s backs are turned and I’m not saying I disapprove. I’m just saying to take care of him properly. He deserves that. Now, take this with you and make sure that I get my plates back the next time you see my son. And, that has to be Sherlock making all that noise.”

Oh, did she mean the car horn that had started sounding over and over like an alarm at a bank?

“Yes, I had best return him home, for the sake of your neighbor’s hearing.”

“Well, stop by again soon. I can’t offer you a palace to roam around, but you don’t need that to sit and have a visit. I would see you out, but I’m sure you’d like to get in a bit more snogging time with Greg before you go and that’s something a mother doesn’t need to see.”

Yes, family time would not be the burden that it had so often been in the past. How utterly novel that would be. Mycroft gave a small bow to his second matriarch and took advantage of her returning to baking to take long and deep kisses from his husband before leaving the house to strangle his brother.

“I have been here for decades! I have sprouted a beard in the time it has taken you to pry your sinful hands from the shop boy’s unmentionable regions.”

“As if Mother would allow such behavior in her sitting room.”
“But she did provide additional biscuits, which I shall now confiscate as payment for my boredom.”

“I believe you have consumed your fill for the moment. We shall retain these for a later time.”

“It is of no importance. I have but to ask and I shall happily be provided with more.”

“Do not impose upon her good will, Sherlock. I suspect Gregory has inherited his sensibilities from her and she will see through your manipulations, forever closing the gate on your biscuit supply. However, you do always have Cook’s to rely upon.”

“Mother Lestrade’s are more pleasing. She understands the proper ratio of dough to enmeshables.”

“If that means she uses a heavy hand with the chocolate pieces and nuts, then I believe you are correct.”

“I will need to sample additional items to ascribe a proper magnitude to the percentages of ingredients.”

“You may have one additional biscuit, but that is all.”

“A scientist demands replicates!”

“Do not the dozen you have already consumed suit that purpose?”

“No, for my attention was not directed towards the scientific aspect of their consumption.”

“Two then, but you must offer me your word that you will not sound the vehicle’s horn again unless you are experiencing an emergency. And no… lack of biscuits or boredom do not qualify as emergencies.”

“Very well, but the price is three.”

“You shall suffer digestive upset.”

“I have yet to do so, but if it occurs, I will duly document the symptoms.”

“I take great pride in your devotion to science.”

“There is no higher calling.”
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait... let's call this The Week of Meetings. My normal and absolutely-sincere gratitude for the support and encouragement for this story. I am very glad that it is making people smile...

“Now.”

“That is not possible, I’m afraid.”

“I do not believe you heard me properly. I want the lackey now.”

“I have told you that I will gladly take you for your driving lesson, so I do not understand your insistence on troubling Gregory during his period of physical recuperation.”

“He allows me a greater level of independence that you during my lesson.”

“Yet you proclaim most loudly that he curtails your development as a driver, owing to the limitations he places on your actions.”

“He still allows me more than freedom than do you.”

“I allow you an identical set of freedoms, so your argument is without merit.”

“He… I prefer his choices for musical selections while we practice.”

“You may set the radio to whichever station pleases you best.”

“He does not offer complaint if I ask him to scribe notes in my journal when my hands are occupied with the operations of the car.”

“I do not offer objection to taking a secretarial function during your experience, if it is necessary.”

Mycroft watched his brother angrily attempt to find another excuse for placing a phone call to or physically going to collect his wounded spouse and Mycroft was thoroughly prepared to thwart his every attempt. The older Holmes did not want a repeat of yesterday morning when Sherlock had phoned his brother-in-law only to receive no answer. It was the work of some tense minutes and a substantial donation to the widows and orphans charity to pacify the local police force, to whom Sherlock had given notification that a murder had been committed at the Lestrade residence. Mother Lestrade, fortunately, found the incident amusing and enjoyed the attention she received from her neighbors as they watched every law enforcement officer and emergency vehicle in the area descend on her home just as she was returning from shopping for groceries, with her son riding in the passenger’s seat.

“I WANT THE SHOP BOY!”

“We have had discussions about the volume of your arguments, Sherlock. I am sorry, but
loudness still does not equate with validity. Now, might you instead compose yourself and reflect upon the true nature of your distress. I think that if you analyze your thought processes you will find a more honest reason to offer.”

It had been three days since they had deposited the future Mr. Lestrade-Holmes at the home of his mother and Sherlock had not taken the enforced separation with grace. Whether the ‘separation’ or ‘enforced’ aspect was the more upsetting, Mycroft was not certain, but it had been a herculean effort to limit Sherlock to two phone communications per day and prevent him from inveigling their driver to chauffeur him for an in-person visit.

“I have no idea to what you are referring. You have obviously developed some form of early-onset dementia, but I shall take the noble stand of seeing you at least provided with a moderately-skilled nurse to see to your needs. The lackey shall assume your role in the household and, with my direction, we shall carry on as usual, surpassing even your admittedly-low standards of performance, so do not fret for my future.”

Despite the expected degree of insulting repartee, Mycroft thought he gleaned the thread through Sherlock’s thinking. A thread at which he had distinctly forbidden himself from tugging up to this point.

“Sherlock… are you attempting to ensure the solidity of your relationship with Gregory before… before the start of the new school term?”

“That is ridiculous. Why should the impending term in any way influence my behavior? That is even more preposterous than usual for you.”

“Because I will not be as available as I am currently.”

“That is inconsequential, immaterial and irrelevant.”

“Three i’s in sequence. Very indicative of a need for discussion.”

“No. You are stupid and discussion with you is nothing less than lethally boring.”

Mycroft knew that expression on his brother’s face. The cold and hard expression he wore when he was adamant that his true feelings would not be visible for even his brother to see. And, in an instant, he saw the future through his brother’s eyes. And his past… during the school term Mycroft’s studies, in addition to his other responsibilities left him with a reduced amount of free time to devote to his brother. They occasionally crossed paths when there was a specific need, such as Sherlock’s music lesson, however, there was little more besides such pedestrian pursuits. And holidays were not appreciably better, with each seeing to their own objectives, even if, at the end of the day, they were strangely unfulfilling. That had been their lives for as long as Mycroft could remember and now… now they had both seen a better life. A good life. One where they were not insular. Solitary. Connected only by a short list of duties to be performed at specific and discrete times. This had been, beyond compare, the most wondrous holiday either had experienced, tearing down the curtain hiding their loneliness and giving them something real and special to actually build… a family upon. A family that was more than a nearly out-of-control child and a depleted and frustrated guardian. One where his brother actually, though in a very camouflaged fashion, enjoyed his company. And one that would soon suffer strain. It was something he had been consciously avoiding in his own thoughts, but Sherlock had obviously not. At least not since one of his caretakers was unavailable due to injury.

“Honesty is for those too imbicilic to craft a believable falsehood.”
“I agree that can often be the case, however, it can also stimulate productive communication. If one is not fully aware of the particulars of a situation, one cannot take appropriate steps to resolve said situation.”

“There is nothing to resolve.”

“You worry about my return to school.”

“I worry about nothing concerning you since your impact on my life is miniscule.”

“I would like to hear your thoughts on this matter, Sherlock, even if they are not flattering to me.”

“My thoughts are never flattering to you, so any topic we discuss would generate the same end product.”

“Come with me.”

Mycroft placed his hand on his brother’s shoulder and gently guided him to Sherlock’s bedroom, experiencing no surprise when his brother flung himself face-down on his unmade bed, where Mycroft took a seat along the edge.

“We have never talked, you and I, about how you might feel when I am again not as accessible for your needs. I had assumed you would be relieved to be further removed from my presence.”

“I am. You are horrid and miserable. Why would I want your attention?”

Because, of late, he had been able to provide a greater measure of attention, which was far more enjoyable than in the past, and they both had benefitted greatly from the experience.

“Perhaps for the same reason that I desire yours?”

Sherlock’s head turned slightly towards Mycroft and one very fierce eye peered out from between a nest of dark curls.

“Explain yourself.”

“It has been an agreeable time of late, has it not? We have had common matters of interest and have been able to communicate on issues other than the few and sterile choices that are our norm. Personally, I have found the interaction very enjoyable and have cherished this time greatly. The notion that other priorities will soon hold sway is troubling, to put it mildly.”

“It… it is?”

“Most assuredly. I would far rather spend the entirety of my time in more pleasurable endeavors, such as we have actively enjoyed recently. Since that is not possible, it is, at least, my hope that we can set aside time each day to participate in an entertaining activity, even if it is simply a bit of conversation about something either of us finds enjoyable.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I would very much hope to continue our more casual interactions for I am gaining a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from spending such time with you.

The ferocious one-eyed glare softened and Sherlock turned to more fully face his brother, some of the lines of distress erased from his young face.
“And Lestrade?”

“I would hope that he could be included in our shared enjoyments.”

And that was a very fervent hope. Having to kill himself at such a young age would be tragedy, but it would be the only response to any impairment of his conjugal time with his husband.

“But… the lackey is not our intellectual equal and will undoubtedly require a greater percentage of his day devoted to securing, at minimum, passing marks in his studies.”

The more worrying issue was that his beloved would take the later hours at his shop, curtailing evening pleasures and… well, Mycroft refused to consider that he did not attend the same school as his husband and could not, therefore, guard his spouse against intrusive advances by individuals desperate for the touch of a deity.

“Firstly, Gregory is not unintelligent and I am quite confident that his marks do not languish in the abyssal plane of the grading curve. Secondly, if he finds difficulty with a subject, I am quite certain that between our collective efforts we can provide the necessary tutelage, just as he has provided for us in areas not formerly counted amongst our strengths.”

“You will, at least, insist that he step away from his menial labors to more fully attend us, am I correct?”

Nothing would be give Mycroft greater joy, however, even he knew that would not be a well-considered action.

“Gregory enjoys his work. He takes pride in his efforts and experiences fulfillment from his accomplishments. I would not ask that he abandon an endeavor he finds rewarding.”

“But… but he has stated that his hours of employment during the school term are horrendous! When shall I be given my driving lessons or trips to procure supplies for my experiments or be taken to Mother Lestrade’s kitchen for biscuits? I have even been promised pie! I shall not be denied pie!”

Not that Mycroft believed for one moment those points were the true basis of his brother’s upset, for he could provide each of those services equally as well as his intended.

“I have full confidence that Gregory will make time to satisfy your wishes.”

“What if he has not the time to make? He has his shop and his studies and his… friends. When shall there be time for us… I mean, me?”

Mycroft knew that physically consoling his brother would not be well-received, so he had to hope that simple proximity and a single touch to his thin arm would suffice. It was unnervingly difficult to witness Sherlock in real emotional pain; however, it was a hopeful thing, as well. If he had not grown to care and care greatly, he would not suffer like this. But, it was the job of the eldest to take away the source of his sibling’s pain, so Mycroft knew what must be done.

“Would you care to visit Gregory and discuss this more fully? I can ascertain first whether he is available and deliver us to his residence and if that is acceptable to him.”

“NO! I mean, it is idiotic to impinge upon his healing with such petty concerns.”

“I do not believe he will find them petty. I believe he will take them quite seriously and will welcome the opportunity for the conversation. I think… it will enliven him to understand how
important is his presence in our, I mean your, life.”

“Do not overstate his importance, he is but my chocolate-purveyor.”

Said with a pout, but one that was a far cry from his best bit of acting.

“Then you may inform him of that instead.”

Mycroft walked over to the telephone and tried not to appear overly excited at the chance to hear his lover’s voice.

“Hello?”

“Ah, Gregory… how dulcet are your tones on his fine afternoon.”

“Mycroft! Christ, you have no idea how good it is to hear from you. I am going crazy over here with no one to talk to and I’m going even crazier with no one to snog. Care to help me with either of those?”

Both. In no particular order, though a kiss should be the first item on their agenda.

“I shall be happy to assist you in satisfying both of those desires, and could do so in short order if you agree to a visit. Do be aware, however, that Sherlock would be attending.”

“Little man wants to come see his old Uncle Greg, huh? Sure, bring him along. He can watch telly or something while we make good use of our time. Mum won’t be home until pretty late, so we can get up to a lot of really awful things…”

Oh, and if asked, Mycroft could present an extensive list of the awful activities in which he would gleefully engage, however, a certain matter needed to be laid to rest first. And it was a matter he needed settling as much as Sherlock.

“That sounds most delightful, although, there is a purpose behind our visit. You would welcome us, I take it?”

“Definitely. You coming soon?”

“If your skills have not atrophied in my absence, my dear.”

“You are a very filthy person, Mycroft Holmes, and I don’t think I could be happier.”

It was a small thing to be able to successfully tease his treasured spouse, but the amount of pride he felt could scarcely be measured.

“Then we are matched in contentment. We shall arrive shortly. And Gregory… I am very much looking forward to seeing you.”

“I can’t wait either, love.”

Mycroft cradled the handset for a few moments and hoped the humming in his head was not actually being produced by his mouth.

“Are we going to visit the peasant’s hovel?”

“Can I trust that your behavior will not instigate your forcible removal from the, as you so shamefully phrase it, hovel?”
“I am not so inclined at the moment, but my mind may shift on the subject.”

“Fickle is the least of all possible phrases that describe you, dear brother.”

“And perfection is the greatest.”

“I am a blessed man.”

“Finally you demonstrate some perception of the truth.”

“Sherlock? What is that?”

“Lager. And not the putrid variety that you reek of when you return from a drunken binge with the alcoholic.”

“And why are you in possession of a number of bottles of lager of at least moderate quality.”

“You have grown even fatter since you last saw the peasant and he shall require the soporific balm of a drunken stupor to be able to touch you and not experience emesis.”

“Are you now saying that you approve of physical contact between Gregory and myself?”

“It is better than enduring the odor of vomit.”

“Hand them to me. I expect the local law enforcement personnel would frown on someone your age porting alcoholic beverages.”

“I doubt they would mind, so long as I shared them.”

“Let us not test your hypothesis, shall we?”

“You are why science sometimes crawls towards its objective.”

“The tortoise need not move so swift as the hare to finish the race.”

“You may discuss that with your reptilian relatives during the next reunion gathering.”

“And we shall welcome you, little skink, to the family party. Come along, and try not to trip over your tail.”

The Lestrade residence was undeniably modest, though it filled Mycroft’s eyes with an image of home as comforting as his own abode. Perhaps even more so as his spouse was currently inside awaiting his arrival.

“I am certain that the entry in the OED for ‘slum’ would be illustrated with a photograph of this street.”

“Be polite, Sherlock. Not everyone has been as fortunate as we in the material aspects of life.”

“Nor in intelligence or, in my case, appearance and wit.”

“You truly make the world a better place by your existence.”
“Undoubtedly. Now, bring the alcohol and keep your legs tightly closed. I am hoping for a relaxing afternoon and not one where my chaperoning abilities are required every moment.”

Sherlock marched towards the door, leaving Mycroft to follow bearing his potable gift.

“The stupid fool has left the door unlocked! He is incapable of defending himself from attackers! His raped and beaten carcass is probably lying in a pool of coagulated blood as we speak!”

“Or I left it unlocked in case I was in the loo when you got here since it takes me an arse-load of years to hobble to the door from there.”

“The corpse speaks! Voodoo is running amok!”

Mycroft pushed open the door further and shoved his brother through, ignoring the sign of the cross Sherlock insisted making with his fingers once he crossed the threshold.

“My dearest, why are you still on your feet?”

“Better to get a proper kiss if we’re lined up like this.”

And a proper kiss it was, one that Mycroft felt down to the very tips of his toes.

“Your taste has improved, Gregory, much as it is with a fine wine.”

“Means you’ll always want to kiss me, right?”

“Never a day shall go by that I shall not desire a sample of your sweetness. Heavens, Sherlock… that did sound painful. Shall I assist you to your feet?”

“I shall indulge in my demise for awhile longer.”

“Excellent, that will allow Gregory and I an extended period to continue demonstrating our devotion.”

“I suddenly feel the tendrils of vitality threading through my veins.”

“That must be quite tingly. Are you enjoying it?”

“It is not completely abhorrent.”

“Lovely. Now, since you are experiencing a reincarnation, shall we adjourn to the sitting room? We do have a matter to discuss, correct?”

Sherlock’s displeased moue never achieved its intended goal, since he was far too adorable when he evinced the expression.

“Mycroft? Is something wrong?”

“Not exactly, my dear. But there an issue that is troubling young Sherlock…”

“AND YOU!”

“…and myself about which we would appreciate your input. Nothing more.”

Mycroft wanted to carve out his heart at the worry he had put in his husband’s eyes, but hoped that
he would soon see that this was to soothe young Sherlock’s unsteady feelings. His own would endure no matter the direction of the conversation. He was groomed to endure. He would do it. It would be a simple matter. Oh… his husband was leaving…

“Well, let’s go. Get going on whatever this is. Sherlock, Mycroft’ll drag you if you don’t get on your feet.”

“In our home, being dragged would be acceptable, however, in his cesspit, the dirting of my garments would require they be subsequently burned.”

“Then save your posh clothes and follow along on your feet.”

Mycroft hesitated assisting his spouse, not wishing to appear condescending, however, found the pull was too strong and had to, as a barely-adequate gesture, offer his arm for support which, to his profound relief, his intended willingly accepted.

“Can I ask why you’ve got beer in your other hand?”

“Because you are a drunkard and it was the most appropriate payment he could proffer to acquire your sexual services.”

“Thank you, Sherlock, especially since it was your idea to bring a gift today that would make Gregory happy.”

“Little man thought to bring by some beer? That’s nice of you, Sherlock. We’ll just have to make sure Mum doesn’t find out.”

“Ah… blackmail material. My plan has worked better than I predicted.”

“See, this is why I needed you lot to stop by. Already, I’m a hell of a lot more entertained than having to watch the crap they put on the telly.”

Mycroft settled his fiancé onto the sofa and took the spot next to him. Sherlock chose to sit on the table in front of said sofa so his glares could be delivered in full-frontal fashion.

“Ok, now I’m crippled and surrounded, I’m beginning to wonder if I’m the lame sheep among the wolves.”

“Nonsense, my dear. Though you would be a joy to consume.”

“And you know how high my Mycroft’s joy ranks on my priority list.”

“Hmmmm… perhaps later we can…”

“Silence! Debauchery of the verbal kind is disallowed.”

“So sayeth our chaperone?”

“Indeed. Besides…”

Here Sherlock’s imperious demeanor cracked ever so slightly and Mycroft noticed that his husband was not incognizant of the fact.

“…Mycroft wants to ask a question.”

“Ok… Mycroft, looks like you’re on.”
“Quite. The issue at hand concerns the disposition of your time owing to the impending shift in responsibilities concomitant with the commencement of the new scholastic calendar.”

“You tried to make that a large bowl of soup, didn’t you?”

“No, such was not my intention, though I will accept that I did a remarkable job by happy accident. To pare down my verbosity, I shall state our concern thusly… shall we, that is, will there be… to put it simply…”

“That would be helpful, you blubbering behemoth! At this rate the shop boy will be ecstatic to part ways with you when school begins!”

It must have been the ghosts of his ancestors holding back his hands to keep from throttling his brother, because it was surely not his husband who appeared to be frozen in place at Sherlock’s declaration.

“You… you’re worried about the start of school?”

“Your intelligence is as low as your bank balance and it will likely require great inputs of your time to compensate so that you are not sent to wither away in a poorhouse! Where shall that leave us?”

The last bit was nearly a wail, as was to be expected for an overly-dramatic child, but it obviously distressed those that cared for the small thespian, who quickly pulled him onto the sofa to sit between them.

“Hey, little man… it’s ok. I promise you that it’s all ok. If you want the truth, I’ve thought about that myself.”

Sherlock’s eyes widened and looked to his brother, from whom he’d heard something similar earlier in the day.

“Are you being truthful?”

“I think you’d know if I wasn’t.”
“This is true. It is easy to discern your honesty and intentions from the most basic set of observations.”

“Then you know I have been giving this some thought, but… well, I guess from the other way round. I’ve been wondering how much time you two will have for me when you’re back at the books. I know how smart you both are and how much learning things means to you and… why would you want to spend time with me when you can use it for something important like that. And that’s not bad, really, because you two are headed for big things and…”

Sherlock had only ever punched his brother before, but found the basic technique to work even on non-pachyderms. For his part, Mycroft ran his hand over his love’s chest to soothe the ache produced by the small-fisted projectile.

“You are as slow-witted as Mycroft! I cannot believe I am forced to associate with two such worthless mortals! My laughably-termed lessons are insultingly rudimentary and I can complete any of their learning assignments in a trice! Then I have the entire night ahead of me and Mycroft just works on his ridiculous papers or reads his boring books and… I require a biscuit!”

Sherlock jumped up from the sofa and stormed off towards the kitchen, his guardians both heaving large sighs of understanding.

“He give you a hard time today?”

“To some extent. But, I am glad for it, actually. It is extremely rare that Sherlock allows anyone to see his true feelings, let alone the depths to which they reach. His distress at being bereft of your companionship was quite significant. That was my impetus for requesting this visit.”

“Sounds like he’s not thrilled about you being caught up in other things, too.”

“There is that… and it is something I had not realized previously. His normal presentation can be so… hostile… that it is difficult to know if he is simply trying to interact with me or if he is actually hopeful that I am to take my leave so that he may enjoy his solitude.”

“I’d vote for interact.”

“I see that now, more so than I did. I have always tried for him, but I have never been completely certain if any of my efforts were effective. Or appreciated.”

“He appreciates you, Mycroft. You have no idea how much he missed you when you were gone those three weeks. If he didn’t, he wouldn’t have been turning to me as a temporary replacement.”

“I do not believe he sees you in a temporary manner, my dear. Not, at least, anymore.”

“And you know I don’t see him like that, either. And I don’t want to be your replacement. Do the job together, right? That’s sort of what we agreed?”

And STILL he had no traditional offering for his fiancé! At this rate the wedding would never arrive!

“It is, my dear. And I wholeheartedly endorse that agreement.”

“You called me something different before. I didn’t mind, just so you know…”
“I beg your pardon?”

Mycroft knew he had missed something important when his beloved gave him a smile that was tinged with the barest traces of disappointment. Quickly he replayed their entire conversation in his head, then did it again and a third time before his brain crashed to a screeching halt. Oh heavens… how had he failed to notice such a monumental slip of his tongue?

“Oh Gregory, I do…”

Apologize? His husband had stated that he was not unhappy with his faux pas. *He didn’t mind…*

“You do not take offense at my presumption?”

“It’d be a little foolish given what I call you.”

“An oft-used phrase, not necessarily indicating…”

“Can though.”

Mycroft desperately tried not to choke and felt like he was choking himself while doing it, an irony which was not lost on him.

“I’m not saying this is the time for that talk, Mycroft but… yeah, I’ve been thinking about things. Right now it’s all good and putting in effort for school’s not really going to change things much. I mean, I won’t have quite as much time since… yeah, it can take me a bit to get my lessons done and I’ve still got work, but I hadn’t thought about it really being a problem. Maybe we could study together and things like that. Got extra time on the weekends. Then what, though?”

His head was reeling and Mycroft wasn’t entirely sure the spots in front of his eyes were a good thing, but he was not going to let that question pass without pouncing on it like a hungry fox.

“Are you asking about our future?”

“I guess so, but not seriously. But sort of. I mean, you’re headed to Uni aren’t you? Probably the best one in the country if not the world. No matter where that is, it won’t be where I am, will it?”

Being hit with reality felt much the same, Mycroft felt certain, as catching a high-speed train in his chest. He had given no thought to that matter. *He would leave for his degree and he would be attending the best institution that this country offered. And that would not be a location where he would be returning home in the evenings for time with his husband and brother.*

“N…No. No, it will not. Though it could be. Yes, there is no reason you could come with me for your own academic pursuits…”

“Yeah, yeah there is. *Are* reasons, actually. I’ve not got the scores or the money for where you’d go. Even if Mum could afford it, it’d be a waste of her cash for me to founder around trying to keep up with the rest of you lot. Besides, I’m still thinking about police work and I don’t need a really fancy degree for that. I’d be good at that, I think. And it’d be fun. Rewarding, too. Would you… could you be ok with that? A copper as the, ummm… the man in your life?”

Mycroft’s brain was very capable of following multiple trains of thought simultaneously, but it was, apparently, content to nap through this most critical conversation and he had to rely on his most rudimentary reasoning abilities.
“The last is a non-issue, my dearest Gregory. Your choice of career, no matter the field, will please me so long as it brings you happiness. Every contribution to society can be deemed a noble one if it is done to the best of one’s abilities and with good intent in the heart. However, my assumption would be that your donning of a badge and baton would not be for some years, as would be the acquiring of my degree or degrees. Is it your intention to remain… unavailable to others… while I go away for my studies? It shall not be as long as one might expect, that much I can assure you.”

“Because my Mycroft’s so damned smart.”

“And because he could not bear to be away from his love.”

“I like the sound of that.”

“I find it repugnant! But I am coming to understand that is the baseline for the supposed communication between the two of you.”

Sherlock stood in the doorway, fists clutching stacks of biscuits, at least two of which were currently in his mouth, though pushed against his cheeks so he could speak in a somewhat articulate fashion. In the next moment, he had wedged himself between Mycroft and his even-closer-to-fiancé and was using his foot to attempt to use the remote to turn on the telly.

“How you doing, little man?”

“Perfectly well, as if I could be otherwise.”

“Anything you want to talk about with me and your brother?”

“That is never the case, however, any small concern I might have had has been rendered invalid.”

“Oh, Mum’s biscuits so good that they wash away your worries?”

“No, I was conducting surveillance as part of my chaperoning duties and obtained certain information that satisfied my curiosity.”

“Eavesdropping paid off, you mean?”

“Quite.”

“You are agreeable to the situation as it now stands and the likely future trajectory?”

“The acquisition of slaves is a time-honored act of the materially- and intellectually-graced. To have but two of you shall be a source of shame for me, however, I will make do as best as possible.”

“And you shall rejoice in keeping your slaves close to vest to tend to your needs.”

“That is why they are slaves. To be at my beck and call regardless of their personal situation.”

“And you do not mind if your slaves deepen their relationship while servicing your wants?”

“Falling victim to their wanton natures is to be expected, as it is for all members of the rubbish class. However, if they at least confine their lust-slaking to each other and do not broaden the number of participants in their perversities, then I shall have little choice but to endure their coupling.”
“Gregory, my dear, is that agreeable to you? Your shackles not chafing, are they?”

“I think I can handle it. Know someone who’ll be happy to rub on the skin cream if things get a bit too itchy.”

“Enough with your juvenile mooning! I wish to view a program!”

“There’s a replay of last night’s match starting about now.”

“Ruffian! I do not need to have my eyes assaulted by the senseless carnage of ball kicking.”

“Here then. Have fun.”

Mycroft watched his husband lean over and remove the remote from under Sherlock’s foot and drop it, instead in his lap. He then watched his husband’s arm reach out to wrap around his own shoulders to draw them closer together, Sherlock nestled soundly in the space between. Mycroft drew two bottles of beer from their package resting on the arm of the sofa, impressed himself by opening them with a minimum of grunting, passed one to his lover and settled in to wait for whatever else the afternoon or his family chose to do to surprise him…
Mycroft Holmes considered himself a man of fortitude. A man bred and groomed to face adversity and hardship head on without flinching. Laying down the telephone, he felt his heartbeat slow to a glacial pace, each beat as thunderous as the fall of a boulder upon the ground below. And it was with his heavy heart that he made a gallows walk back to where his brother and his husband were engaged in a game of cards.

“I AM NOT AN OLD MAID!”

“Sorry, little man, but it looks that way to me.”

“This game is for fools and simpletons!”

“And you lost.”

“Because it is far too rudimentary for my advanced mind.”

“Then you’re going to have it rough in life, since you think everyone is a fool or simpleton and if that gives them a leg up on your advanced mind…”

“It is pointless to argue with you. You have not the capacity to comprehend the intricate details of my position.”

“I think your position is that you’re the loser at Old Maid.”

“A Holmes never loses!”

“Then we better try looking for your adoption papers. Again.”

“I am afraid that will have to wait.”

Mycroft knew his sepulchral tone concerned his devoted husband and he greatly wished the concern was without basis.

“Mycroft? What’s wrong, love? You look… like you’ve been given a month to live.”

“It is nearly so dire. We have… we have been summoned.”

Lestrade jumped in his chair hearing Sherlock’s piercing wail and took a seat near the obviously distraught child, ignoring the twinge in his healing ankle.

“But it is not even Christmas! How could you allow this! You are undeniably weak as water, Mycroft!”

“As if my wishes have any weight in this matter. I am sorry, Sherlock. The die is cast.”
“Truly? We have no recourse?”

“None whatsoever. Grandmama will expect us on Saturday.”

Lestrade looked between the two rapidly dissolving brothers and wondered how in the world they could be so brilliant and so ridiculous as the same time.

“All this drama about visiting your Gran? What’s wrong with the pair of you?”

“You know not of what you speak, Gregory.”

“Mycroft, it’s your Gran! Not the Queen!”

“Not again! She won’t be there, will she, Mycroft?”

“We, at least, shall not have that to worry about, Sherlock. Thank heavens for small favors, I believe is the expression?”

“What? You two have met… you know, I have no idea why I’m surprised.”

“I shall NOT wear my suit!”

“Sherlock Holmes, you will wear your suit and do nothing to besmirch its integrity while it is on your person. We shall not have a repeat of the maraschino incident.”

“Little man in a suit? Oh, I have to see this. I’ll make sure to stop by before you go to take it all in.”

“Oh, that shall most certainly be the case since, my dearest Gregory, you have been commanded to attend, as well.”

“HAH! The shop boy is called to the guillotine! I may now not entirely despise the day!”

“Ok, no… no, that’s not going to happen. First, I have to work on Saturday and second… just plain and simple no.”

“Were you not a moment ago chiding Sherlock and me for our reluctance to visit Grandmama? It is a tad hypocritical for you now to be trepidatious and that is quite unlike you, my dear Gregory.”

“First off, it’s your Gran. She loves you and probably thinks you’re the most wonderful things in the world, making you tea and… why are you two laughing?”

“Grandmama could not find her kitchen if you provided her with a survey map.”

“Untrue, Sherlock. You surely remember her stories of becoming separated from the rest of her party in Kenya? I do believe there was a map involved in the tale at some point.”

“Kenya! Your Gran’s been to Africa!”

“It was the thing to do in her youth, I believe. Of course, it was not what one would call roughing it.”

“Who cares about that? My Gran never left England after her honeymoon in Spain.”

Mycroft took a deep breath and settled himself in an empty chair.
“And how would you describe your grandmother, my dear?”

“Gran? She was super! A great baker, taught my Mum everything she knows. She made me hats and scarves, which were awful to look at but warm as anything. Liked a good beer, too. When I was little, she and I would sneak out sometimes when Mum wasn’t looking and she’d have a smoke and a beer and let me have a little sip. And you never got opposite her in a card game! She’d take your shirt! After… well, after my Dad left, Mum had it hard trying to keep us in the house, so Gran would take care of me while Mum worked a second job and she’d take me places and let me go run around at the park… yeah, she was great.”

Mycroft looked at his brother and they shook their heads in unison.

“You shall find the experience quite different when you meet Grandmama. And you will meet her, my dear. If you have been summoned, refusal is an extremely unwise choice. I doubt she would hesitate to have the local magistrate secure both your removal from your shop and your transportation to her estate.”

“And he must wear a suit! If I must be so adorned, the peasant must, as well!”

“Gregory will be a suitably attired wearing the same ensemble as he did for my little gathering.”

“It is unfair! Not only do the lower classes suck on the teat of our largesse for their livelihood, they now are exempt from basic requirements of dress? Intolerable! Why should their lives be so lackadaisical while mine is completely onerous?”

“I am quite certain that if you choose to abandon your comforts and join the legions of the masses you so disparage, no one shall offer any objection.”

“You are a poor excuse for a brother! You should clasp me to your enormous bosom and pray I do not abandon you for a life of begging and poverty! Is it not enough that Lestrade toils with the shackles of penury around his wrists that you would condemn your flesh and blood to the same fate!”

“I would never insult you, Sherlock, by removing from you the ability to follow the choices of your life. Grandmama, however, would not hesitate, so you will wear your suit, you will not behave in a disagreeable fashion and we will provide the perfect picture of a happy family… a united family… and give Grandmama nothing on which to base a criticism.”

“This will, of course, obviate our Christmas visit.”

“How young and naive you are, little brother. Consider this an additional treat for our year.”

And a solid test for his husband’s love and commitment. To brave the dragon in its lair… it was not something he would have wished upon his love without a substantial amount of prior preparation, but Mycroft had no doubt his fiancé would comport himself admirably. He had less hope he would not end the day a divorcee.

“Come on, you two… it can’t be that bad. You go…”

“We go, lackey.”

“We go, have a spot of tea, talk about your summer and make the old lady happy. How miserable could that be?”
“He shall be like a lamb at the slaughter!”

“Really, Sherlock… not that you are not correct, but do try and be constructive.”

“Hey! I’m great with the old birds. They love a nice, polite lad like me.”

“Grandmama does appreciate politeness and manners. I am quite sure she will be enamored of you, my dear. In her own way, of course.”

“She shall eat him like a chocolate!”

“Constructive, Sherlock… we are all in this together…”

“My discomfort is without bounds!”

“Your suit fits perfectly, Sherlock, therefore your comfort is not an issue.”

“My breathing is constricted! I am seeing spots!”

“Your collar is not tight, I checked myself.”

“My toes are assuming the shape of gnarled tree roots!”

“Your shoes are the proper size for your feet.”

“My head feels as if it is being pressed in a vice! My brain shall suffer irreparable damage!”

“Are you hallucinating that you are wearing a hat?”

“Proof that I am decaying from confinement in this vile prison of cloth!”

“But it is a handsome prison, nonetheless. Grey suits you well.”

“All colors suit me well. I have exceptional skin color and tone.”

“Something in which Grandmama takes enormous pride. You favor her greatly.”

“It is not my fault that you inherited Grandpapa’s clownish features and garish hair, while I inherited Grandmama’s refined and elegant appearance.”

Something that had always been a sore point until Mycroft had met his spouse. Now, he was feeling a great deal more confident about his physical presentation and it was easier to gaze into the mirror in the morning and not wish he looked a different way.

“And as Grandmama loved him, so does Gregory love me and I am content.”

“We shall see how strong is the oaf’s affections after our tea with Grandmama.”

“The bond of Gregory’s love is unbreakable; I do not fear that particular outcome of our visit.”

How fortunate that Sherlock was not quite as practiced in reading faces as he believed himself to be or Mycroft would have the fears he refused to admit held up for ridicule all through this accursed day.

“He is rather like a stupid hound in that respect.”
“You should watch your tongue, Sherlock, for you are also a recipient of Gregory’s loyalty and affection and I do not think you are unappreciative of that fact.”

“It matters not to me, however, it would not do to distress the peasant today and have him embarrass us in front of Grandmama. She could make us all pay for his disgrace.”

“My Gregory is the perfect gentleman. Grandmama will be very pleased.”

“Your concubine is a pauper. Grandmama will be appalled.”

Which was not something Mycroft deigned to spare one iota of thought. Grandmama’s approval was not required for his marriage, therefore her opinion of his intended spouse was immaterial. It would be convenient if it were positive, however…

“One’s character is of more importance than one’s bank balance.”

“In your fantasy realm, perhaps, but the real world feels differently.”

“And what would you know of the real world, Sherlock, you spend so little time in it.”

“Fraternization with the lackey has broadened my knowledge base. You shall suffer Grandmama’s wrath and if you do not meet with a lashing, I shall be very surprised.”

“I would take a hundred lashes, a thousand even for Gregory’s honor.”

“It would take a thousand to make any headway through the yards of lard that surround your vital organs.”

“Yet I have a loving spouse who finds me desirable. How does that fit in with your perceptions?”

“He is stupid. You are delusional. What could be simpler?”

“I think you could do with a straightening of your tie. Please come closer so that I might help you.”

“There shall be no strangulation today! Grandmama would be quite cross if you ruined her tea with my death.”

And the unsanitary, though impeccably-suited, goblin would survive yet one more day. And anyway, with the sound of the door chime, Mycroft knew he would not have sufficient time to kill the troll and enjoy the experience properly. With a stern look at his brother and a telepathic reminder to be on his best behavior, Mycroft ran downstairs to greet his fiancé. Who was a vision of perfection, as always.

“This ok? You said to wear the same thing as I did before.”

“You are exquisite, my love. Genteel, virile, respectable… I could never ask for better, for such does not exist.”

Mycroft took his lover into arms and kissed him soundly, but quickly before Sherlock could interrupt and spoil their moment.

“And you look like a king’s ransom. My Mycroft could make a paper bag look sexy, but in a suit… think we have time for a little…”
“You will maintain distance! Already Grandmama will have to place a scented handkerchief in front of her nose to filter out the stench of your poverty, do not add the sickening aroma of your lust to the affront to her senses!”

“Sherlock! You look amazing! Very nice, really... very, very nice.”

And the compliment set the peacock proudly displaying its plumage at the expense of its song. Mycroft took the opportunity the lull provided to make one final check of his brother’s outfit and his own appearance before taking his husband’s arm and saying a silent prayer as he escorted him to the car that the day would end on a high note.

Lestrade didn’t think a house could be larger than the one Mycroft lived in, but this one put the Holmes house to shame. And the servants looked like servants, with uniforms and all the hovering... and here he was in his borrowed clothes being stared at by a fierce-looking, elderly woman wearing jewelry that probably cost as much as his whole street and who reminded him far too much of a bird of prey for his own liking. Especially since he was feeling very much like a field mouse at the moment.

“And this is?”

“Gregory Lestrade, Grandmama. You invited him to visit with Sherlock and me.”

“Ah, the young man with whom you have been associating. At least he dresses appropriately, unlike Sherlock.”

“You purchased me this suit!”

“I did not purchase for you a suit with brown pockets.”

Mycroft looked down to see what looked like brown fingerprints on the pockets of Sherlock’s jacket.

“Sherlock Holmes, what have you done to your suit?”

“I...”

“Looks like the little man snuck a bit of chocolate on the way over. Let’s see your hands.”

Sherlock held out his hands and Mycroft felt himself crumple witnessing the evidence of his brother’s likely-intentional downfall.

“Here, good thing I put a handkerchief in my pocket. No, do a better job than that! Don’t want your Gran having to stare at your grubby fingers while she’s having her tea.”

Lestrade suddenly froze realizing how common and stupid he must have sounded and shot a very panicked took to Mycroft who smiled as reassuringly as he could towards the man about to receive the executioner’s axe. That smile faded when he noticed Grandmama fixing him with a look that could pierce steel.

“It is good to see that one of you is prepared. Sherlock is notorious for abusing his clothing.”

Sherlock’s whispered ‘only clothing I despise’ was answered quickly by Lestrade’s whispered ‘then go run around naked, you bastard.’
“Sherlock is perfectly free to promenade through the house nude, if he so chooses. Of course, I shall not dismiss the servants and all rooms are well-provided with surveillance cameras. Now come along, we have wasted enough time.”

Lestrade reminded himself that old didn’t mean deaf and he threw an apologetic grin to Mycroft who was just recovering from taking a grandmotherly glare to the chest. Reaching out and taking his husband’s hand for a quick squeeze, the senior Holmes sibling nodded to his intended to walk with him and Sherlock scuttled around behind them as if using the older boys as a human shield. However, his clothing did remain on his body, much to Mycroft’s eternal relief.

Lestrade adored Mycroft’s library. It was the best room in the house, as far as he was concerned, if you didn’t count the bedroom and he really loved to picture himself spending evenings in there in the winter, with a big fire and a great book… Mycroft leaning against him as they read. This looked like a real library… one you had to be quiet in or you’d get bounced out on your arse. There had to be thousands of books in here…

“I see you appreciate a fine library, Gregory. Good. It would not do for this room play host to an individual who lacks appreciation of the written word.”

“Oh! Yeah, I enjoy a good book. Visit the library all the time and walk out with a big stack to read. Borrowed some of Mycroft’s, too. He’s got great taste in books.”

“As do I! Yet you fail to borrow anything from me!”

“Books about autopsies aren’t really my thing, Sherlock.”

“They should be! If you are to debase yourself by becoming a lowly policeman, then you should at least try to be a successful one! Forensics is critical for police work!”

“They hire people to do that. Tell you what, I get a juicy murder come my way, I’ll give you a call and you can come with all your books and see what you can make of it.”

“I shall! If you are any indication, the members of the police force will undoubtedly require my assistance if any justice is to be served!”

“Then we’ve got a deal, now how about you analyze the biscuits so you can report back to Mum? She’s always looking for new ideas.”

“That is not a detestable suggestion. Mother Lestrade will do for me anything that I ask and the crisp chocolate biscuits are not entirely revolting. Nor are ones that taste like honey. I would not mind having further access to them.”

“Good lad, on you go.”

Mycroft knew that holding his head in his hands would simply make his position more untenable, so he affected as casual an air as possible and hoped that when Grandmama erupted in her cold and precise manner, he might remain alive long enough to write an appropriate apology to his mother-in-law for her son’s untimely demise.

“Your mother seems fond of Sherlock. Is she a well woman?”

Apparently, he was already dead because Grandmama had no sense of humor and this had to be a post-mortem dream.
“Hah! She adores him. Stuff those little cheeks of his with treats every time she sees him. And you should see him march when she gives him the order, little man knows who not to cross if he wants his sugar.”

“A sound strategy. Control the desires and you control the man.”

“No one controls me! I allow Mother Lestrade the illusion that her wishes have any importance to me. It is only through the boundless goodness of my heart that I suffer her obsessive need for control. And her insistence on using a plate!”

“Good heavens, Sherlock. Do you not remember how difficult it was for you to remove the butter from her rug?”

“That was her fault!”

“Her fault that you took a warm scone into her sitting room and failed to predict that the butter would melt and escape the confines of the pastry?”

“She should have predicted that I would abscond with the scone! She has some knowledge of me, after all.”

“So it’s Mum’s fault that she didn’t treat you like the little bastard you actually are and trusted that you wouldn’t get butter all over her rug?”

“Without question! And I still chafe from the injustice of my punishment.”

“You are quite fortunate that she did not ask more from you than to scrub a small section of rug. Had it been me, I would have set a far more harrowing punishment.”

“Lestrade! Mycroft threatens me!”

“What? What’d you say? Can’t hear you for all the shrieking going on. Someone must have let a tone-deaf parrot in there somewhere.”

“And you know I do not threaten, Sherlock. That would allow you time to escape my actions and that is a very silly thing to think I would do.”

“Gregory… walk with me.”

The three males in the room felt their spines compress at the weight of the pronouncement and Mycroft clasped his husband’s hand for a final caress before he knelt by his graveside.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Sherlock’s whispered ‘he shall return without his skin’ earned him a firm punch on his arm from his brother who could not bear the insult to his late husband. At least Grandmama walked slowly, so his lover would not suffer unduly from his game ankle while his life was being drained from his body…

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Stupid! Being a big stupid… peasant… in front of Mycroft’s Gran. It would be a miracle if Mycroft ever spoke to him again. If he’d be allowed to speak to him again… Why couldn’t he act just a little more proper? Here was his one chance to…

“Do you know what is the normal pattern of Sherlock and Mycroft’s visits, Gregory?”
“Nice and proper, I expect. Look, I’m really sorry…”

“Quiet. Bordering on deathly. Mycroft speaks to me, in gross generalities, of his studies and matters of his training. Sherlock broods quietly, speaking only when directly spoken to. On the rare occasions my grandsons can be compelled to visit me, we spend the day wasting the time, failing to enjoy anything about it. Then today, I find them animated and interactive, completely unlike their normal selves."

“Ok…”

“Neither Sherlock nor Mycroft are the easiest personalities to embrace, yet you seem to have done so both naturally and successfully and drawn from them sides of themselves that I despaired of ever seeing, though I knew they existed. The signs were there, of course, but apparently it takes a very special eye to actually see them.”

“Thank you?”

“Never question a compliment.”

“No, ma’am. I’ll remember that.”

“See that you do. I understand you wish to become a policeman. How did you come by that decision?”

“Honestly… it sounds like fun. Hard work, but interesting. And you get to help out, you know? Make a difference. I think I’d be good at it, too.”

“Quite. You are aware, I presume, that Mycroft is slated for a life of great importance. Does it bother you?”

“I’m not sure I understand, ma’am.”

“My grandson’s time shall often be in short supply. He will make decisions that will impact many and not always for the good. In addition he regularly will suffer immense stress and Mycroft becomes very irritable when he is under stress. Do you understand this?”

“Oh! Yeah, I know Mycroft’s set for big things and… I’m proud of him for that. He’ll be brilliant at it, too. He already walks into a room and BOOM! he owns it. My Mycroft could rule the world and he’d just be amazing, truly amazing. I’m happy for him, I really am.”

The young man would have no way to know the meaning of the twitch of the elderly woman’s nose, but it would have eased a great many of his worries if he did.

“It would be of great assistance to him to have in his life someone to provide support during his darker times. To balance him so he maintains perspective. And to serve as a moral compass when his is beginning to stray from North. Is this a task for which you feel suited?”

“I… if you’re asking if I think I could be good for Mycroft… I’m going to say yes. I think he and I do well together. We fit, if you get my meaning.”

“I believe I am able to follow your line of thought.”

The pair strolled slowly through the most beautiful garden Lestrade had ever seen and he was certain that more than once he saw two anxious faces pressed against a window. After a further fifteen minutes of examining particular specimens of flowers and plants, Lestrade found himself
being handed a card with precise, formal script on its front.

“I trust that I shall not have to wait a further six months until I receive a visit, shall I?”

“Well, I’m not sure how Mycroft’s…”

“Shall I, Gregory?”

“No, ma’am.”

“On that card is my telephone number. You will remind Mycroft and Sherlock of its existence?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I expect it to be used regularly. Do not disappoint me.”

“No, ma’am. I won’t.”

“Excellent. Then we have an understanding. Now, come along. I grow weary of being spied upon by amateurs. As if I am unable to notice a curtain shifting back and forth…”

“Yeah, they’re not very subtle.”

“I shall see Mycroft works on this particular skill. For Sherlock, I fear, there is little hope.”

“Does he really need subtlety, though?”

“You are perceptive, aren’t you, Gregory. You shall make a formidable police officer. Once you learn better posture, of course.”

“Yes, ma’am. Thank you, ma’am. I’ll get right on that.”

“See that you do.”

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“He does not look like an empty husk.”

“Hush, Sherlock. Grandmama, did you enjoy your walk?”

“If I hadn’t, I would have returned much sooner. Though if I had, there might be some form of refreshment left to me. Sherlock, turn out your pockets.”

“Why do you assume I have taken the biscuits and cakes?”

“It is either that or you are smuggling weasels in your pockets and I do not own weasels.”

First rule of hiding food, spread it out so your pockets don’t bulge and sag. A skill Mycroft learned quite young, however one Sherlock had yet to properly master.

“I could have trapped the weasels! The construction of a snare is a simple thing.”

“Mycroft, in the intervening moments when you and Sherlock were not keeping me under surveillance, did you witness your brother constructing a snare for the purpose of trapping weasels on my property? Or, as an extension, leaving the room to use said snare for its intended purpose?”
“No, Grandmama… Sherlock is simply being dramatic.”

“Traitor!”

“However, I believe the current condition of his pilfered goods is such that their return is not a thing you truly desire.”

“You are likely correct. Sherlock, take yourself to the kitchen and have salvageable elements of your pocket contents placed in a suitable container for transport. You may also ask the staff to add sufficient items so that Gregory and Mycroft will have a fair share. Further, leave your jacket so that it may be properly cleaned; it shall be returned to you during your next visit.”

“I…”

“If you are attempting to argue, please remember that I may no longer have the strength to provide a suitable spanking, but I employ a legion of staff more than capable of doing the deed. Now, go.”

Sherlock’s horrified face was visible for only a brief moment since he raced off as fast as his legs could carry him towards the kitchen and Mycroft very much wished that he was in possession of one of his husband’s precious bottles of lager, because his own nerves could use some soothing. Grandmama was certainly full of life today…

“Now, you shall both follow me. We will take a tour of the house, I believe. I am certain, Gregory, that you will find it interesting. And Mycroft has likely forgotten the floorplan in any case and could use some refreshing. It would be a terrible shame if he became lost while looking for a toilet.”

Mycroft had now fully lost the thread of the visit and his husband’s wide and unreserved grin at Grandmama’s suggestion was the only focus that remained. A grin that let a peek of tongue show through when Grandmama turned away to begin their walk.

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An un-jacketed Sherlock caught up with the rest of the party and, surprisingly, remained human while they walked through the halls of the great house, going to places Mycroft realized he hadn’t seen in many years. And how delighted was his fiancé. Not about the wealth that surrounded him, but about the artistry. Such a perfect man in all ways and, as yet, he had not been swallowed whole by the reigning matriarch of the family. Something she was both perfectly capable and perfectly willing to do when there was cause. Her disposition towards those who displeased her was legendary.

It was with a surprising amount of regret that the tour came to an end and a servant arrived to hand a note to the lady of the house, who read it and nodded.

“Our visit has, unfortunately, come to an end. Gregory, it has been good to meet you and I trust that I will not have to remind you as to the particulars of our earlier conversation?”

“No ma’am. And it was very nice to meet you, too.”

“How polite. Mycroft, Sherlock… we shall speak again soon. Now come here. All three of you.”

Sherlock was pushed to the front of the line to receive his kiss on the cheek, Lestrade was flummoxed that he was included in the family goodbye and Mycroft chose to keep secret
Grandmama’s whispered ‘if you lose him, I will gut you’ secret for now. Then the three males were left to their own devices to return to the car, collecting Sherlock’s near suitcase full of cartons of baked goods along the way.

“Now, can one of you tell me why you were so terrified of visiting your Gran? She’s a nice old bird!”

“That was not Grandmama! Grandmama has obviously been taken by nefarious forces and this doppelganger left in her place!”

“While I will admit that her normally dour countenance and sedate behavior was somewhat modified today, I can assure you, brother, that we did meet with our dearest Grandmama.”

“And you’re going to be doing it a lot more, too. And that comes from the top, so you’d better get used to your suit, Sherlock.”

Sherlock and Mycroft shared a puzzled look and Mycroft was now more than ever desperate to know the specifics of his husband’s out-of-earshot conversation.

“My dear, are you party to information that we lack?”

“Only that you’ve got to visit more and, oh yeah, she gave me her number and said I have to remind you to call more often. I think you two have been sort of bad about that so now you need to do right by her. I mean, she’s your Gran after all!”

Lestrade pulled out the card and showed it to Mycroft and Sherlock who both failed to hold back their gasps.

“Grandmama provided you with her private telephone number?”

“Sure. Said to remind you two to get off your arses and actually use it now and then. Not in those words, of course.”

“Mycroft! You are betrothed!”

It was surely now the case. The blessing had been given…

“What’s wrong with him now?”

Must deflect! Nothing could spoil the moment when he finally took to his knee and asked for his husband’s hand!

“I truly have no idea. Sugar poisoning, perhaps?”

“I am not poisoned! Grandmama has given the peasant her personal phone number! Mummy only received that when…”

One advantage to being older was being larger, with a hand that could fit completely over the mouth of a smaller sibling.

“Sherlock is simply referring to the rarity of receiving such a token. There have been Prime Ministers to whom she has refused to provide a method of contact beyond her personal secretary.”

“Really? Oh crap, you better take this then. I’m not carrying around some national secret in my wallet!”
“The keepers of national secrets do not even have Grandmama’s personal phone number! Well, except Bloatcroft, but he counts for naught and, anyway, as your…”

Mycroft did hate to punch his brother again, however, hate was an emotion he felt he should learn to live with in this circumstance.

“…associated he would have it anyway. And… HAH! You must now use it! Grandmama will expect you to phone her. You are a rabbit in the clutches of the gryphon!”

“Then we’re all for dinner because you’re supposed to call, too! And visit! Regularly. And… I guess I said I’d make sure it would happen. God help me.”

“God cannot help you now! Grandmama has decided!”

Mycroft had to turn away from the bickering and give himself time to become composed. In her typically unpredictable manner, Grandmama had brought his beloved, treasured Gregory into the family fold. Set him concretely as a Holmes spouse and, further, as another trusted caretaker of Sherlock, something she once said would be the greatest challenge of her and Mycroft’s existence. The supreme joy of it all… no matter the opposition he might encounter to his union in any social or political arena, it would quickly hasten to a dark corner to wither and die for Grandmama has decided.

“Mycroft, you ok? You look a little…”

“He appears poised to blubber like an infant! A very corpulent and odiferous infant!”

“Simply a touch of fatigue, my… my love. Only that.”

“You sure? Come here…”

Mycroft leaned obediently into his husband’s embrace and melted into the warmth of his strong body.

“I’m starting to think there was more to this visit than I picked up on. Want to fill me in?”

“It is… it is rare that Grandmama allows anyone to be present at a family visit, except, perhaps to test their mettle.”

“And I passed?”

“You excelled, my dear Gregory. And, apparently, have been elevated to the status equal to that of Sherlock and myself. I could… I could not…”

“Ah hell, you are getting a little blubbery, aren’t you? Sherlock hand me my handkerchief. Here love, just dab or you’ll get chocolate on your face. Though that’s not much of a problem, really. I could use a little chocolate nibble right about now…”

Mycroft smiled what he knew was a shamefully-weak smile and accepted the square of cloth gratefully. How disgraceful to lose control of his emotions so completely… though the comfort of his spouse’s arms and tender kiss to his temple soothed at least part of his humiliation. And what was that his love was muttering?

“…thought I might have made a good show. Does this mean we have to figure out what to do about Christmas, now? Who to visit when and all that?”
Just as any devoted couple would need to do. All the minutiae… the beautiful, beautiful minutiae…

“And Easter, I’m afraid. Grandmama is forever trying to secure our presence for Easter.”

“Birthdays?”

“Without question. As she has apparently appointed you the arbiter of our familial calendar, I believe you shall have, as they say, your work cut out for you.”

“Family, huh? You being serious?”

“Little associated with Grandmama can be considered anything but serious. Your feelings on the matter, my dear?”

Please be good ones. Please, please, please, please… a hundred times please…

“I think you know, love.”

And another kiss to his temple nearly necessitated again the use of the chocolate-soiled handkerchief.

“I shall not call him Mummy!”

“Thank god for that! My kid would be better behaved than you, you little troll.”

“Mycroft’s sperm was frozen the moment his sexual preferences were deduced so that a suitable broodmare could be impregnated in the future to continue the family line.”

And Sherlock dredges up yet another unsuitable bit of information to tinge the tender moment with Mycroft’s pink flush of embarrassment.

“Really, Mycroft?”

“I would rather not speak of it.”

“Oh, come on! There could be little Mycrofts running around someday? Tiny ginger tots with their dad’s brains and good looks?”

Was that hint of eagerness in his spouse’s voice? Gregory was a stellar parent to Sherlock, but to their own children… oh, where was the blasted handkerchief…

“It is a matter for the future, I believe; shall we postpone discussion until that time?”

“If you want to. I guess out day’s been full enough already, but don’t think I’ll forget. The idea is really just too brilliant.”

And perhaps they could include his husband’s own contribution in that discussion, for Mycroft realized he would very much want tiny dark-haired children with glorious smiles and bottomless hearts racing through the halls of their home with their ginger brethren.

“Oh Linnaeus… he’s getting blubbery again. How are you to assume the duties which Grandmama has entrusted to you if you cannot hold control of yourself? Feeble! And do not expect me to step in as your second. I would as soon swallow an extract of scorpion venom as assume the boring and pathetic life to which you, for your sins, are slated to suffer.”
“Shut it, you twit. Everyone needs a person they can get a little emotional in front of. You’ll find that out someday and you’d better hope you’ve got yours right in arms reach when you need them.”

“Imbecilic! I have not now nor will I ever have any need to humiliate myself by boo-hooing on some lackey’s shirtsleeve. I am now officially ignoring you both. Do not penetrate my sphere of contemplative serenity until we are home.”

Sherlock leaned back, closed his eyes, only peeking once or twice to check that his edict was being carried out, and began to withdraw small morsels of pound cake from his storehouse on the seat next to him, each one vanishing into his mouth as quickly as its predecessor.

“You know, your Gran asked me if I minded being your shirtsleeve to wipe your nose on.”

“However, not in those words.”

“Nah, but I got the meaning. Told her I was fine with it. Sometimes, you’ll have to do the same for me, I’m sure. Especially if I do go and join up with the police. They see a lot of terrible things and I’ll probably need someone to help me keep my head right ways around on my shoulders.”

“It would be my honor to occupy that position in your life, my dear.”

“Then it’s settled. We’ll be each other’s shirtsleeves and have a happy, soggy future together.”

*Future together.* The thrill of hearing those words was nearly sexual in nature and if Sherlock was not present in the car, Mycroft would be showing his husband just what else was in store for their future together.

“Let us hope that the soggy aspect can be kept to a minimum.”

“Ok, we’ll concentrate on the happy, instead.”

“I would be happy if you two restrained your overwrought sentimentality and allowed me to think! Shall you be writing poetry next?”

“There once was a lad from Westminster…”

‘Driver! Make haste! I require a bucket to contain my uprising bile!”

“I believe you have nearly emptied one of your food containers. You may make use of that and spare Driver both a traffic citation and an afternoon cleaning the interior.”

“You are devoid of sympathy, Mycroft! One day you shall look upon my decimated body and drown in guilt over the times you showed me not the slightest bit of kindness during my hours of need!”

“And take photos. You’ll take lots of photos, won’t you, love? In case I’m not there for the decimation?”

“Of course, Gregory. I would never deprive you of such a pleasantry.”

“Mother Lestrade and Grandmama will hear of this!”

“We are quivering in our shoes, brother dear.”
“Actually, *I* sort of am.”

Mycroft patted his spouse on the knee and smiled reassuringly. What a splendid way to cover his own shoe-quaking. Mother Lestrade *and* Grandmama… the universe would collapse upon itself…
Chapter Notes

I know it gets repetitive, but I truly do appreciate all of the comments, kudos, support and encouragement!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“This is unforgivably unfair!”

“And such a strain on your constitution. Poor neglected waif having to wait in the car for the few moments it takes me to escort Gregory to his door. Do try and hold on to life as long as possible.”

“That shall be a nanosecond!”

“Then I say my goodbyes to you now. Gregory? Any parting words for Sherlock?”

“Try not to die on the seat. Hate for my Mycroft to have to sit on your leaky corpse all the way home.”

“You are both despicable.”

“Then you should be glad for our absence. I shall return momentarily.”

Sherlock scowled grandly and huffed royally and Mycroft wished he had a camera installed in the car to record his brother’s performance. It would be something wonderful to excavate from his archives on holidays and watch, completely to his brother’s carefully-hidden chagrin.

“You do know I can walk to my door myself, right?”

“But why be lonely when you can have companionship?”

“You make a good point, Mycroft Holmes. But then, you always do. Arguing with you is going to be a losing proposition, isn’t it?”

For the rest of humanity, yes, but his husband had shown a nearly supernatural ability to confound his carefully weighed and measured arguments.

“I do not think that I shall find myself on the winning side of our debates as often as you give me credit, my dear. I find that I am often blockaded by the clear and purposeful counters that you make during our discussions.”

“That’s good to know. I’d hate to find my back against the wall every time we disagree on something.”

“I would much rather save pressing you against a wall for far more pleasurable pursuits than argument, Gregory dear.”

“If Mum wasn’t home right now, I’d ask you to show me what you meant. I’m feeling a bit
thick at the moment and could really use a demonstration. Maybe two.”

“And if Sherlock was not waiting, I would accommodate your need for instruction in my car. Alas, our lessons shall have to wait for another time.”

“But not too long a wait, right?”

“Perish the thought. A moment from you is like an eternity and I have not the patience to endure a mountain of eternities until we again meet.”

“Yeah, I’ll miss you too. I’ve got to work extra for taking today off, so I probably can’t do anything for a few days. But call me, ok? Let me know how things are going?”

Every second away from his husband burned like a brand laid against his skin, but Holmes men were made of very stern stuff.

“I will and I expect reciprocity. Now, perhaps something to help and ease the sting of our parting?”

“You bet. Let’s give the neighbors a show they’ll never forget.”

“I adore your sense of drama, my dear.”

And his unhesitating desire to showcase their love to world. Mycroft sank into his spouse’s kiss and let the universe melt away for a few moments, until a very determined clearing of the throat broke the spell.

“Oh… hi, Mum.”

“Good day, Mrs. Lestrade.”

“Mycroft, you look very nice. Did you two have a good time?”

“I believe it was an enjoyable visit for all involved. Grandmama was very pleased to meet Gregory and he is now expected to return again to take tea with her before long.”

“Apparently, it’s sort of a big deal, so I think I did all right making an impression.”

“You made a marvelous impression, my dear. Truly, Grandmama’s approval is legendarily difficult to obtain and you secured it handily. It is a rousing testament to your character.”

“See, Mum! And she’s really a nice old lady once you get past the fact she has royalty visit and lives in a… you should have seen her house! Makes me want to get some architecture books from the library so I can appreciate it better.”

“I have books specifically about her residence if you would care to study them, Gregory.”

“Really! That would be super! How about I come over and…”

“And get out of those clothes and strip your bed so I can do the washing. Tell Mycroft goodbye. You can call him later.”

“Looks like I’ll have to wait for those books, love. But we’ll talk, ok?”

One of the authors of those volumes was still alive, albeit quite elderly. Perhaps he would enjoy chronicling the story of the newest Holmes residence. Mycroft really saw no reason he could not
have a home built, rather than purchase one outright and wouldn’t the tale of its construction and loving habitation be such that each new generation would feel blessed to read and reread it as an example of what life could bring if you found yourself in luck’s path?

“I am already anxious with anticipation. Goodbye, my dear. Mrs. Lestrade, I hope you have a pleasant day.”

“You too, Mycroft. And tell Sherlock I said hello. Poor thing looks like he’s about ready to chew his way through your car door.”

And that, Mycroft had to admit, was not an entirely farcical idea. With a final, surreptitious touch to his fiancé’s hand, the elder Holmes brother returned to the waiting car and struggled to staunch the bleeding of his heart before it was his lifeless corpse strewn across the seat. It was getting to be torturous to leave his Gregory behind.

“Why did you not return with biscuits? I am wasting away from hunger!”

“You have consumed already your body weight in sweets and cakes today. Further, you have a full bakery worth of products still waiting for your attention on the seat next to you.”

“They are not Mother Lestrade’s!”

“Something we can perhaps remedy when next Gregory and I are united.”

“How typical of your substandard brain to equate a future event with a current need. I am returning to my introspection. Do not disturb my calm.”

There was nothing in the world Mycroft would ever do to disturb his brother’s calm. One did nothing to such a rare event other than stand and observe in awe.

“So, you had a nice time?”

“Oh, yeah. Mycroft and Sherlock were worried that it’d be awful, but it was actually a lot of fun. Got to tour the house and garden and you should have seen what they laid out for tea! Sherlock, the little pisser, tried to stow the whole lot in his pockets! But, he still likes yours best, Mum, so don’t feel bad.”

Said with a very cheeky smile that faltered a little since his Mum wasn’t smiling back.

“Mum? I really did have a nice time, I’m not lying or anything…”

“I know you’re not, Greg. Come and sit with me for a minute.”

Lestrade swallowed hard and followed his mum into the kitchen, taking a seat at the table and watching his mother follow suit.

“Mum, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong, son. I just… I just want to make sure you know what you’re doing.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I think that’s what I’m worried about. You and Mycroft, and I like him, don’t think I don’t… I think he’s a very nice boy and a good match for you but… you seem to be getting rather serious
and… you’re still so young, Greg… I don’t want you doing something stupid like I did and wind up… well, like I did.”

Of all the things Lestrade thought his mother was going to say, this had to be at the bottom of the list. Actually, it wasn’t on the list at all.

“Mum, I…”

“It’s just that he’s probably going away after this year and then… who knows? I don’t want you sitting around waiting for someone who’s building a life and not leaving a place for you in it. And the same for you… how’s it going to be when you’re here alone, watching your mates find someone to make them happy? Are you going to be able to sit home by yourself night after night? You’re young, Greg, and I don’t want you… I just want you to be happy, son. And not make decisions that you’ll regret because you made them too quickly.”

Lestrade wanted to tell his mother she was being silly, but… she wasn’t. She’d taken up with his Dad when she was young and now she was single, had a grown kid and worked a crap job to put food on the table. Her worries weren’t silly, but they weren’t worries he shared, either. Not with his Mycroft.

“We’re not making any decisions, Mum. Well… not any real ones. No formal ones, at least. And we talked about that, him going away, I mean. It’s not like we’re not talking about things and… we know it’s not going to be easy. We aren’t fooling ourselves about that, but we both want to try and make it work out. Sherlock’ll still be around, too, and between the shop and him and Mycroft calling and coming home when he can… it won’t be too bad. It’ll be good when he’s done and goes to London, too, because that’s where I want to be if I go into police work. And he doesn’t care that I’m… me… if you know what I’m talking about. He’ll be rich and powerful and important and he doesn’t care that I’ll just be a poor lad working for a living. His Gran didn’t either and I really thought she was going to what with the castle she lives in and knowing the Queen and all.”

“She knows the Queen?”

“I think she knows everyone! And the phone number she gave me is a big national secret that not even the PM gets if she doesn’t want to give it! It’s not going be easy for awhile with Mycroft and me… maybe it’ll never be easy what with how busy he’s going to be, but we want to make it work and I think we can. We’ve started… god, it sounds sort of drippy when I say it, but we’ve started to make sort of a family and it feels good. When I’m with Mycroft all the pieces fall into place, even if his pieces and mine don’t look that much alike, for all the sense that makes. We’re not rushing into anything, if that’s what you’re worried about, Mum. Finding a place together next week and setting up house; that’s not going to happen. We’re doing it the right way, getting stuff in order and making sure about things before… well, before anything else.”

Lestrade kept his eyes firmly on the table during his speech with the fervent childhood hope that if he couldn’t see his Mum, she couldn’t see him. Unfortunately, he could feel her eyes boring into his head, anyway.

“You have been thinking about this, haven’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“A lot, too.”

“Yeah.”
“You know how much I love one-word answers, Gregory Lestrade.”

“Yes, I’ve been thinking about it a lot. Ever since I met Mycroft, I guess. I knew he was special the first time I saw him and… he is special. Being with him’s not like being with anyone else. I told his Gran that we fit and that’s the best way I can think of to describe it. I don’t know what else you want to hear.”

“Only that you’re happy.”

“That’s easy – I’ve never been happier. I know we’re young, Mum, and I understand why you’d worry, but I’m really very happy with Mycroft and can see being happy with him for a long time.”

“Even with the little dictator following along?”

Finally, his eyes could be lifted from the table cover and Lestrade hoped the small smile he heard in his mum’s voice was actually on her face, breathing a sigh of relief when it was.

“Even with Sherlock. I don’t know why, but he fits, too. It’s like having my own little brother to deal with and I actually like that, even when he’s being a complete bastard.”

“Language, please.”

“Being a complete twit.”

“Better. And I have to admit that he might be my only chance to have a grandson.”

“Not really, because Mycroft’s had his sperm frozen so the family can hire someone to have his kids later on.”

Ok, so maybe some things shouldn’t be shared with other people, even mums.

“Why couldn’t they just get it fresh?”

Shouldn’t be shared for any reason, especially with mums.

“I don’t know! Maybe because he’ll be busy.”

“Too busy to donate?”

“Don’t use that word!”

“You might want to rethink this, Greg. If he can’t find time to make a little cupful in a doctor’s office, how’s he going to find time to give you a nice cuddle at night?”

“I’m leaving now.”

“This is important stuff, son. I knew I should have given you the talk and not let your uncle do it. He’s crap for everything!”

“See, I am absolutely leaving and my hands are over my ears.”

“Seriously, come back here and let me fill you in on a few things.”

“La la la la la… can’t hear the crazy woman trying to talk about things she shouldn’t talk about with me in the room.”
“Well, if you change your mind, I did make you, you know, so I know a thing or two about cuddling.”

“Don’t talk to me ever again.”

“I assume you will now instruct your agent to purchase our new home. I expect to be moved in and my laboratory properly equipped before school commences.”

“As felicitous as that would be, Sherlock, I do not consider it proper for Gregory and I to cohabitate until we are legally joined.”

“Propriety is for the weak-willed! I desire my new laboratory!”

“And I desire my marriage; however, there are conventions to be satisfied.”

“Pfft! You are not suited for marriage if you are not willing to seize your chattel and claim him as your property!”

“Sherlock… as much as I would want, as much as I fantasize, about taking Gregory officially as my husband, I cannot at this specific point in time. Though we have much, I have nothing of my own to offer him. How can I stand and present myself as a candidate for his hand if I cannot demonstrate that I, on my own, can provide for his comfort?”

“Superfluous. Our means can support someone of his appallingly low expectations for a near eternity. If you but give him a crust of bread and a shard of cheese, he shall be content for days! Marry him now and give me my laboratory!”

“Your current laboratory is quite sufficient for your needs and I shall not jeopardize my union with Gregory to satisfy your whims. As it stands…”

But Mycroft honestly did not know exactly where things stood. When should he broach the topic of their marriage with his husband? Though his heart ached painfully and his mind was blissfully happy to craft wonderful tales of marital joy, now was not a proper time to take his Gregory’s hand. As foolish as it was, there would likely be some opposition to their nuptials if they occurred now. Even Grandmama might question the haste when a prolonged engagement offered so many opportunities for celebration and strengthening of ties between the families. And to publicize their betrothal to make clear to all corners of government just who would stand at his side as his spouse. No… he would have to wait, at least, for the ceremony. As for the engagement… it would be a balm to Mycroft’s soul to formalize their engagement before he left to continue his studies. So, at the end of this school year he should be prepared to make his declaration and offer his love and life to his dearest Gregory. Prior to that… Mycroft’s mind and body were very discontent at the thought of his spouse walking the corridors of his school and tending the patrons of his shop with no tangible connection to his other half. Perhaps there was…

“Has your brain ceased to function? If so, I shall acquire a knife and remove it for study. I am sure that a close examination will detail exactly the reason you are both lesser in intelligence and greater in girth than am I.”

… a plastic goblin screeching like a pinched rooster suddenly polluting the air with its ear-splitting call.

“My apologies. As I was saying, as it stands, you have a very appropriate laboratory for your work, but if you wish, we might add a few items to enhance, shall we say, your opportunities for
“Yeah, it’s Greg.”

“Gregory, my dear. How are you enjoying your evening?”

“Mycroft! More now than I was before. I’ve been recovering from a trauma, actually.”

TRAUMA! Mycroft began running towards the first available car and was nearly out the door when his brain actually began to register his surroundings again and recognized that his spouse was laughing.

“Mum and I had a little chat and, well, let’s just say I think I’m scarred for life. But, she’s understands us a little better now and that’ll keep her from worrying, so I can’t complain too loudly.”

“Un…understand us?”

“Don’t worry about it, love. Really, it’s not important. So, how’s your evening been?”

Quiet until his heart began to seize.

“Most satisfactory. A few matters of business conducted, one goblin price pacified with the promise of a new case of beakers, a digital balance and a centrifuge and presently, for myself, a book outlining 17th-century naval history.”

“I’ve got a match on the telly and a spy adventure to read.”

“Then we of like mind for our choice of entertainment. Now, all we require is a common sofa and a fire in the hearth.”

“You know, that’s one of my daydreams. Stretching out with a good book, a good fire and a good man. Lucky I can get my hands on all three now and then.”
And always when their lives could officially coalesce into one.

“We shall that see your then comes soon, I hope. Perhaps when you are again available, we can enjoy a quiet evening together. I shall provide Sherlock with an engaging problem to occupy himself so we may relax undisturbed.”

“That sounds like my idea of heaven. Me and you and a little quiet. Or me and you and a little noise. Who am I kidding… me and you anything is fine. It’ll be a couple of days though, ok? Maybe Wednesday? I’ve got Thursday morning off to go round to get my ankle checked, so I can stay a little late Wednesday night. Wish it could be all night, but… maybe some night before we jump back into school, yeah?”

That was Mycroft’s idea of heaven. A pure, perfect heaven only large enough for two.

“My bed is yours, my dear, you have only to secure the necessary permission to remain in my arms and I shall make you welcome.”

“God, that sounds wonderful… I’ll see what I can do to make that happen. But Wednesday’s ok, right? You’re not busy or anything?”

Mycroft would be very busy on Wednesday, but since Gregory would be intimately involved it would not be an issue.

“My availability is assured and I look very forward to our assignation. Now… ah. I’m afraid I shall have to postpone my comments due to the presence of a troglodyte currently skulking towards me.”

Sherlock’s indignant response was not fully muffled by the phone and Lestrade had to admire how colorfully Sherlock denied his lack of humanity.

“My dear, will you be terrible aggrieved if I cut short our conversation. Sherlock requires my attention at the moment lest the Earth shift off its axis and bounce its way through the cosmos to the death of us all.”

“Well, I don’t want that responsibility on my shoulders! I’ll talk to you later, love.”

“Goodbye, Gregory. I shall ring you again tomorrow.”

“Looking forward to it.”

Mycroft replaced the phone and scowled at his brother, who was currently wearing only a pair of pants beneath the layers of plastic wrap that encased his torso and limbs.

“Explain yourself, Sherlock.”

“I am testing the waterproofing effect of simple household materials! You must time me in the bath and scribe the notes that I dictate!”

“Notes concerning what, may I ask? The rate at which your bottom becomes sodden?”

“Puerile. But… yes.”

“Gregory shall be spending the evening with me on Wednesday. If I do this for you now, may I receive some undisturbed time with him then in recompense?”

“You both must spend at least two hours with me first, engaged in an activity of my choice.”
“You may have half an hour of our undivided attention.”

“Ninety minutes. And you must entertain me.”

“One hour and that is my final offer.”

“Insulting!”

“But the terminus of my willingness to negotiate. It is one hour or nothing. Make your choice.”

“Because I am beginning to perspire, which will compromise my experiment, I am forced to agree to your unreasonable terms.”

“Then it is settled. Come along and we shall get you into the bath. Your notebook and stopwatch are ready, I presume?”

“Of course! I am nothing if not prepared!”

“And did your preparations involve relieving yourself before beginning your redressing? If this becomes an extended-duration investigation, I fear the large glass of juice you consumed after dinner might cause you some discomfort.”

“I… I am perfectly content.”

“Good. Very good. Then do not for one moment dwell on the idea. Let not the subtle feel of pressure in your lower abdomen distract you from your observations. Mind over matter, isn’t that what they say? I do hope, though, that you have already filled the bathtub. I have heard that the sight and sound of running water can be detrimental to one’s ability to stifle the urges of an overfull bladder.”

“You are fiendish, but shall not prevail.”

“Drip, drip, drip.”

“The peasant will not be pleased that you torture me for your amusement!”

“Gregory would ask that I take photographs so that he might share in your torment.”

“I now demand a separate wing in our home! It is obvious that neither of you can be trusted to treat me in the manner I deserve!”

“Oh, I think that is one thing that you can be assured of, dear brother. We shall always give you exactly what you deserve. Now, let us get you to your bath. I am quite sure Gregory will be most interested in hearing the results of your experiment when he arrives on Wednesday.”

“You shall inform him during your next phone call. I will have conducted many experiments by Wednesday, far too many to summarize in one evening.”

“I shall make a note to remember, then.”

“See that you do. Now, assist me up the stairs. My knees do not bend.”

To be excessively busy was both a curse and a blessing. It was a curse because Mycroft, though he
relished the challenge the work presented, found he was left with little time for his own sleep, let alone relaxation. It was a blessing because it occupied his attention so his mind did not dwell upon the fact that his fiancé was not in his vision, his voice was not in his ears, his body was not in his arms… Someday, perhaps the unceasing heat of his ardor would temper to the point where it burned as a gentler flame, but that day was not soon to come. However, the extra hours spent completing tasks and anticipating new ones which could be disposed of quickly ensured that Mycroft’s Wednesday evening was free from calls upon his time.

“When shall the lackey arrive? I am ready to begin my tests!”

Through a fierce round of negotiation, Mycroft had consented to permit some basic motor skills tests be performed on himself and his spouse during Sherlock’s pre-agreed hour of time.

“Gregory shall be here shortly. He is likely driving more carefully than normal due to his injury.”

At least Mycroft hoped he was. However, knowing his beloved as he did, it could be a situation where he had rocketed past the property since his eyes were not swift enough to detect the turn and was now nearly to the ocean.

“Doubtful. He only seems to drive at less than a comet’s velocity is when chauffeuring me for my errands.”

Something for which Mycroft was truly grateful.

“And that is solely because I do not tolerate his recklessness. You should use a firmer hand with him, Mycroft. You are his betrothed, after all, and he shall require forcefully-applied discipline if he is to integrate into our lives in any fashion that spares us utter and annihilating public embarrassment.”

“I shall take that under consideration.”

Especially since his love might enjoy a small measure of forcefully-applied discipline. It would be a matter they could explore when they could be assured of some extended degree of privacy.

“It would be wise if you did. The dullard’s lack of manners and understanding of social protocols shall not be the undoing of this family!”

“Unlike your lack of manners and understanding of or adherence to social protocols.”

“You again attempt humor knowing it will bring you nothing but humiliation. Are you entirely incapable of learning from experience?”

He was eminently capable of learning from experience, which was why Mycroft greatly appreciated being the subject of his spouse’s demonstrations. A spouse who had arrived for their evening, if the door chime was to be believed.

“Finally, the lout manifests himself. I shall ready my measurement tools and you will present yourselves in my laboratory immediately. Do not waste my allotted time with your grotesque gropings and sharing of buccal secretions.”

“I am sorry, brother dear, but I must make a proper show of affection to my intended. Social protocols and all that, you understand.”

“Insipid and virulently stomach-churning. You will make your copulation-via-tongue a brief
event. I shall be very angry if my precious time is wasted at the expense of your need for sexual satisfaction.”

Sherlock stalked off and Mycroft decided that a little extra groping and secretion-sharing would be his reward for not interfering with his parents own groping and secretion-sharing that resulted in Sherlock’s unholy birth. A quick run down the stairs and Mycroft was pulling his spouse through the door, into the kiss he’d been waiting to bestow for years.

“Oh this is worth the wait. Hello, love. Hope you missed me as much as I missed you.”

“I have missed you as a drowning man misses the air he so clearly and hopelessly remembers, but shall never again taste.”

“That’s my Mycroft. If words were sex, I’d already have to change my pants.”

“There exists no person as supremely perfect to stand as the other half of my soul as you, my dear.”

“Ok, now there’s really a laundry danger happening. You better give me another kiss to take my mind off of… other places.”

“It would be my pleasure.”

“And my horror! The searing shame of your lack of sexual technique shall burn through my eyes and render me blind!”

“There’s the little yappy dog, himself. How’s it going, Sherlock?”

“The canine species would be honored to claim me as a member! I would swiftly lead them to victory in an uprising against their oppressive human owners.”

“The Dogpocalypse. Nice job, one more big mess for Mycroft to clean up.”

“I shall add that to my agenda for tomorrow, my dear. I should have time between preventing the sun from going nova and brunch.”

“When my pack is feasting upon your intestines, do not expect me to show you favor with a merciful beheading.”

“More than fair. Now, I believe you have some experiments to conduct? Or are Gregory and I now released from our obligations?”

“Our obligations?”

“If we are to have an evening to ourselves, we must first give of ourselves to Sherlock’s scientific pursuits. Nothing invasive or painful, I assure you.”

“I did NOT agree to noninvasive!”

“Shall I bring out the test subject disclosure form that I had you sign?”

“Science should not be throttled by the arbitrary strictures of the law or considerations of comfort and dignity!”

“Nevertheless, whatever probings you were planning are heretofore disallowed. Fear not, my Gregory… I have taken all necessary steps to protect your body and honor from Sherlock’s lack of
“Well thank heavens for that. I didn’t come all this way to get probed by anyone but you.”

That *EEP* did not, in any way come from Mycroft. He had far more self-control than that. And the non-EEP had absolutely nothing to do with the additional… research… he had been conducting that may have discussed and/or portrayed various examples of behavior that could tentatively described as probing. Which looked very pleasant, indeed.

“You shall not disgust me into foregoing my experiments! Come along and place yourselves at my disposal. I have a full hour and plan to make use of every second.

“You sure you agreed to this, Mycroft?”

“There is nothing to fear, my dear. I shall protect you.”

“That will be difficult once the ropes have been secured.”

“Sherlock…”

“I did not even choose hemp to reduce the likelihood of chafing. Let no one say I am not a benevolent god to my laboratory rats.”

“Mycroft…”

“With my life, Gregory. I shall protect you with my life.”

“Not after Test #4, you won’t.”

“Rest easy, my dear. At the very least, I have left instructions that we be buried together.”

“With space for Sherlock at our feet?”

“How brilliantly your mind works, Gregory. I shall append that to my will immediately.”

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Mycroft was surprised how few times he actually had to invoke his power of veto during his tenure as a test subject and the hour passed with a minimum of fuss. And… though, it was not entirely proper to dwell upon watching his husband’s performance in the flexibility portion of Sherlock’s investigation, those observations would be filed in his mind alongside the *probing* folder for further contemplation when he was alone in the shower.

“You sure you’ve got all your data, Sherlock? Don’t need any more measurements or samples of the gunk from under my toenails?”

“Not today, peasant, but I shall give you several vials to take with you home to your hut to begin to collect samples of bodily residue.”

“There’s just no chance that’s getting any from me but a *no fucking way,*”

“When I am accepting my Nobel Prize, do not expect to be acknowledged!”

“You wouldn’t acknowledge me even if I gave you my head!”

“You are probably correct, but you *will* fill my vials or I shall tell Mother Lestrade that you and
Mycroft behaved in a most impure manner in my presence.”

“She’ll just ask if you took notes.”

“I am foiled by my known dedication to science!”

“Sherlock, your hour is completed, so Gregory and I now shall retire to the library. I trust you will enjoy your data analysis.”

“What if I observe gaps in my data sets? I shall have to close them immediately!”

“Not this evening, I’m afraid. We agreed that this would be time that Gregory and I could devote to each other.”

“But…”

“How’s this, little man? Mycroft told me he’s been really busy all week and I bet he’ll be busy again over the next few days, at least. How about you and me have an afternoon one day Mycroft’s got other things he’s got to do. We can… check the shops for more science supplies and you can even do a little driving. That sound good to you?”

Neither of the older boys would comment on the quick flash of a smile on Sherlock’s face or the very adorable imitation of a steely glare that took its place after it was gone.

“It is clear you are in need of my company. That is quite understandable and I suppose it would not be overly troublesome to show you some slight attention. You shall call upon me at my earliest convenience and I will allow you to bask in my intelligence and wit for an afternoon.”

“Wow, I don’t know if I can stand all that basking. Mycroft, you think I can hold up to Sherlock’s bask potential?”

“I could be a near thing, my dear. Perhaps a pair of sunglasses to ameliorate the intensity?”

“Good idea. You give me a call and we’ll set something up. I’ll stop by up here and say goodbye before I go, ok?”

“If it serves to cleanse your mind of Mycroft’s repugnance, they I shall allow it.”

“Always good to talk to you, Sherlock.”

“Naturally. That is the majority opinion.”

One fire blazing in the very large fireplace. One long and very comfortable sofa. One long and very comfortable man sitting crossways next to him, legs draped over his lap and back against the arm of the sofa. In this position, Mycroft could rest his own arm on the sofa’s and hold his husband at the same time. One book and a glass of very good brandy apiece and time had flowed comfortably, with such smoothness that Mycroft would have thought it had come to a standstill. This was glorious. Flawlessly and unquestionably glorious. His heart had never known it had wanted this, but now Mycroft knew it would no longer beat without the promise of nights such as this with his spouse in his arms.

“Are you content, my dear?”

“You have no idea how much. Really, I’ve been wanting to do something like this for so long.
I don’t know why, but I just knew it would be the most amazing thing… and I was right.”

The glow of the fire playing against his spouse’s face and one bright and brilliant smile… every room of their home would have a fireplace and if he had to assign a staff member to ensure that a fire burned in each all day, every day, so he could watch his beloved glow in this fashion, he would do it without a second thought.

“I wholeheartedly concur. I cannot envision a more relaxing or rewarding way to spend my evenings. And there shall be so many days when an evening spent in this manner may be the only reason my sanity remains intact.”

Mycroft felt his beloved run a hand up and down his leg, but the look upon his face was something other than blissful.

“My dear? Are you alright? Did I… did I say something amiss?”

“No. Not at all. It’s just… I’ve got something to talk to you about and I guess now would be as good a time as any. It kind of jumps off from what you just said.”

That his husband swung his legs off of Mycroft’s lap and then sat upright and rather stiffly on the couch set every alarm in Mycroft’s head blaring at full volume.

“Ok. It’s like this. Mum and me had a talk and… it helped, actually. Helped me get my brain all the way around things I’ve been thinking and feeling. About you and me, I mean. And where we are and where we’re going… or where I think we’re going. Where we want to go, if you follow.”

No, there was no following anything at this point, but Mycroft was terribly afraid to say anything and disrupt his beloved’s train of thought.

“Ok, maybe I’m a little worried about you going back to school and being around people who are going to look at you and try and chat you up and I can’t be there to tell them to piss off, even though I know you’ll do it for me, but I wish I was there to do it… if anyone asks you if you’ve got someone, you can say you’ve got a boyfriend, but no one really pays any attention to that unless you’ve got something to back it up, so I thought… here. If you hate it, just tell me and I won’t get mad or anything.”

Lestrade shoved his hand into his pocket and pushed the contents into Mycroft’s own hand, mentally crossing his fingers that his boyfriend didn’t laugh him out of the house. For his part, Mycroft slowly opened his fingers and looked at the little circle of metal on the thin silver chain that lay in his palm.

“The picture on the front’s supposed to be a police whistle, but I admit it doesn’t look much like one, and on the back… see?… there’s our initials. There’s a little shop not far from where we pick up Sherlock’s electrical wire and adhesives that sells cheap… inexpensive… jewelry and they do engraving, so I had them make that so maybe you could, you know, wear it and if someone was being too forward, you could show them and that’d be better than just saying fuck off, not that you’d say that because you’ve got manners, but anyway, you could even just maybe feel it under your shirt and think about me and oh! I’ve got one too… see?… with a crown on the front and there’s our initials again on the back, but I know it’s sort of ugly and really cheap so if you don’t want it you can give it back, in fact, you know this was a stupid idea so why don’t you just hand it back and I’ll…”

Apparently the only thing that was going to pull the off lever was giving his husband’s mouth
something else to do and a kiss seemed to be the best option. And it kept his own mouth from overturning all of his carefully thought-out plans and timelines and proclaiming his lover’s gift the formal token of engagement that they would eventually wear anyway. Perfect! No one in the world could ever be so blessed as he to have such a perfect spouse…

“You will not, not for one instant, take back this from me, Gregory. It is… I am in awe that you would bestow this and… here, affix it around my neck.”

Lestrade quickly loosened the top two buttons of Mycroft’s shirt and placed the small piece of jewelry around his neck. It was very plain, but that’s what he wanted. Lots of blokes work simple things around their necks and this wouldn’t seem strange or raise any eyebrows if someone caught a look at it. And… at least Mycroft didn’t throw it back in his face.

“This… I have never received a token of affection, Gregory. It is… I have no words. You have rendered me incapable of providing a description for my feelings. It is the most valuable thing now in my possession. I have hoped… I have hoped that one day we could have such an item to declare that we exist as two halves of a whole and now… you have brought my dreams into my reality. I cannot express how deeply this pleases me, Gregory. I simply cannot.”

And he couldn’t. His dearest love was the only person to ever be able to see into his mind and draw out his most secret thoughts and desires. A tiny object to adorn his neck, but a powerful talisman to proclaim their love to any who lay eyes upon it. And his spouse… his spouse felt him worthy of romantic attentions from others. He was worried… jealous, even. Mycroft knew he should not approve of such thinking, but he did. He very much approved of it. And his husband’s bold action of setting a territorial mark moved them one step closer to the simple bands they would one day wear on a certain finger.

“So… you’re really ok with it? It’s fine if you’re not, because I know it’s not posh and nice like what you’d probably prefer, but it’s actually silver so it won’t rust or leave a green mark on your skin or anything. I checked to make sure of that and…”

“Gregory! Calm yourself and be assured that I am extremely happy with both the nature of the gift and the meaning behind it. A thousand jewels would not render this more valuable in my eyes. I shall wear it constantly as a memento of our love… affection, and proudly display it to any might require a reminder of who lays claim to both my flesh and my soul. That you shall do the same… I, again, have no words.”

And there was the bliss finally returned to his spouse’s eyes. Mycroft could not lay any fault of his love’s nervousness because he was well aware what his own would be like when he held out his heart and asked that his love accept it in front of their friends and family. And wasn’t a blissful Gregory Lestrade a magnificent Gregory Lestrade? Such magnificence simply begs to be touched and Mycroft could in no fashion stop his hands from running up underneath his husband’s shirt to touch the small piece of metal that was the mate to his own. And then the muscles of his husband’s chest, which supported the very sensitive nipples that were starting to pebble beneath the balls of his thumbs.

“You keep doing that, love, and I am going to be a very messy boy.”

“And that is problematic how again?”

“Sticky pants aren’t a lot of fun… but… Sherlock’s promised not to bother us?”

“I have it in writing, which usually inhibits his violation of our agreements.”
“Then come here.”

Mycroft let himself be guided down onto the rug between the sofa and the fire and lay for a few minutes in his officially pre-engaged husband’s arms, savoring deep kisses that were fiery with their passion. And the blaze in the fireplace could not come close to matching the flames in his heart as his dear spouse made short work of the fastenings of their trousers and slid his hands around to provide their arousal room to breathe. And grow.

“And you do not fear, my love, the untidiness of this course of action?”

Such wickedness in that smile. The devil himself could not wear such a look upon his face.

“That’s not going to be a problem. You wait right here, ok.”

“I… Gregory, where are you going? Why are your turning yourself around? And why… oh, this is expedient.”

“Good thing?”

“In this case, yes. I had not considered the benefits of, shall we say, a diametrically-opposed configuration of bodies.”

“Always wanted to try this, but never… I never felt close enough to anyone to even think about giving it a go. Just make sure I’m not in your mouth if you come first… jaw clench and all that.”

“Oh, excellent advice. You are a treasure, my dearest Gregory. And… oh my… you are a delicious treasure, as well.”

“Feel free to have a taste whenever you want.”

“My gratitude for that. And never again shall I think about a diet.”

“You better not… not if I can help it. I mean, what’s life without a little tasty indulgence?”

“Hellacious, my dear. Simply hellacious. And I far prefer heavenly…”

Chapter End Notes

Small fics for Mystrade, Johnlock, Skipthur on my tumblr:

http://eventhorizon451.tumblr.com/short_works

Stop by for little pieces of nonsense…
Chapter Notes

As you may have noticed, next chapter is going to be the close of this tale... but one door closes and another opens... more on that later...

“Hoodwinks, Sherlock?”

“You are naked. I must protect both my sight and my sanity.”

“I am not unclothed. I am simply not wearing a shirt at the moment.”

“You have not been wearing a shirt all morning. Already the reflection of the sun off of your ghostly white flab has started the paint peeling on the walls. Or perhaps the offending reflection is off of that hideous and tawdry trinket that is dangling off the bottommost of your chins.”

“Oh, do you mean my pendant? My bestowed-by-my-husband pendant? As a token of his love and regard? A promise of our enduring wedded bliss? Would that be the pendant to which you are referring?”

“I am referring to that evidentiary object that demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that the shop boy’s depleted bank account is closely matched by his equally depleted sense of taste. If it cost tuppence, I would be greatly surprised.”

“Well, Mr. Cratchett, you shall learn if ever you are blessed by a visit from dear Aphrodite that the cost of a gift lovingly given is immaterial.”

“I would say the cost of the gift indicates the degree of the gifter’s affection, which in this case hovers so close to zero that you could not slip a piece of tissue paper within the gap.”

Ah, but if Sherlock had knowledge of how the gift was celebrated, he would not be so quick to inflict his intentionally obtuse opinion on the world.

“And I think he purchased it at the filthy shop run by the man who dresses even more like a pauper than does the peasant. And has a glass eye. I also strongly suspect he dabbles in the receipt of stolen property. That abomination around your neck could have been misappropriated from the nine year-old daughter of the local village idiot.”

“What a beautiful shade of green your envy tinges your complexion.”

“I am NOT envious! You have an ornament not even the most negligent dog owner would place around their beast’s neck!”

“And my darling Gregory wears the matching tag. With a crown… he embraces my responsibilities, accepts the limitations they shall impose on my time, takes pride in the knowledge that I will…

“Win an international competition for the eating of cake.”
“Will ensure that you are able to lead a free and rewarding life. And it is not I that am obsessed with the consumption of cake and cake-related products, brother dear. I am more than a little surprised that there exists a bag of sugar left in England what with your demands on Cook and Mother Lestrade for platters of their sweet-tasting hard work.”

“Piffle. They are delighted to please me with their offerings. It is the lot of middle-aged females to crave the approval of pleasant and pleasant-looking youth such as myself. I am supremely qualified to satisfy their maternal needs and every biscuit and toffee with which I am presented is a tribute to that fact.”

“I am certain that if you present your argument to them in precisely that manner you shall receive an even more fitting tribute. You might, however, wish to protect your buttocks with several layers of heavy cloth before you begin the discussion.”

“Observe my visage. This is not the face of someone who finds your feeble jests amusing.”

“I cannot agree or disagree with that statement since you could be laughing with your eyes and that is not a part of your visage that is visible at the moment.”

“Are you still naked?”

“I am still divested of shirt, yes.”

“Then my response shall remain a mystery until you have remedied that distressing fact.”

A mystery that would linger a very long time because Mycroft had no intention of donning any form of clothing that might prevent him from catching sight of his jewelry in each and every available reflective surface.

“It is unfortunate, but I shall carry on as best I can. Now, if you will excuse me…”

“Are you presenting yourself to your closet door and prostrating yourself before it to beg grace and that it spit out onto you a less than soul-shaming garment?”

“It is a warm day and I see no reason to enrobe myself in a piece of fashion that will only intensify my perspiration.”

“You are not thinking to trudge through the house like a sadly-maintained parade float, spilling your pounds of flesh over the edges of the dais so that they drag along the marble to smear with your body grease, prompting an emergency cleaning by the staff?”

“I have no plans for today but to relax and enjoy a good book or a long stroll through the grounds.”

Where, perhaps, a bit of sun would contact his skin and promote some movement away from Sherlock’s unfortunately-correct ghostly white condition. His spouse was so gloriously swarthy… Mycroft felt a tad like a jug of milk in comparison.

“In that, you are incorrect.”

“In that, I am absolutely correct. Gregory is occupied for the day, you have stated previously that your pigeon-bone experiment is at a critical juncture and cannot be left unattended… I see no reason why I cannot… is there something wrong? You are squirming as if a tarantula was dropped into your pants.”
“Tarantulas are very interesting creatures and I would gladly accept one for study! However… I have a quandary.”

“Is it painful?”

“That remains to be seen. I am in possession of a piece of information that I now must decide whether or not to share and I cannot easily see which would be the more satisfying choice.”

“In general, I have found with you that the choice that brings you the most satisfactions is most likely not the correct one from a more general point of view.”

“There is some merit to that analysis. While I would very much like for the American ambassador to come across you naked as a native, he would likely run screaming from the house, precluding the long and tedious afternoon that I so heartily wish upon you. I therefore choose to notify you that said American ambassador will be here within the hour and I overheard Mummy tell her secretary that your presence would be required. Now fit yourself with one of your stodgy suits and make ready for a day of such boredom that the concomitant gloom might eclipse the sun.”

No… no no no no no… not today. Not when he wanted to do nothing but revel in his officially-sanctioned status as Gregory’s paramour. Using the vernacular of the insipid Americans, they were now ‘going steady’ and could he not have one day, one day, to have only that as the focus of his thoughts?

“It was good that you informed me, Sherlock. Though your amusement might have been great, these are not situations for which I can tolerate mischief. That he is coming here… I had best begin dressing.”

Something in his brother’s voice prompted Sherlock to remove his hoodwinks and make observations of his brother’s demeanor. Observations that were unsettling, and he hoped very much it did not show too clearly on his face.

“Shall you be leaving again?”

Mycroft would cut out his tongue before remarking on the tiny tremor in his brother’s voice and tried, instead, to sport a confident smile.

“I have no idea if that is to be the case, however, I am sure that if my presence is needed abroad, it shall not be for a protracted duration.”

“You do think you shall be leaving. That false smile is more telling than all of your over-inflated words.”

And now the pout that was as patently false as his own smile. It both broke and lightened Mycroft’s heart. His brother actually, visibly cared that he was leaving…

“Very well, we shall have honesty. I think, in all likelihood, that I shall have to be absent from home for a period of time, but I cannot, in any way, predict the timeframe. I have no evidence to support either a short- or long-term absence.”

“Lestrade will not be pleased!”

Not a thing about which Mycroft was daring to spend a moment’s thought. If he did, he might easily dissolve into a large puddle of distraught tears and he could not put forth the image of the wounded lover to his guest.
“No, I daresay he will not. However, he realizes fully that our lives shall not be as pedestrian and predictable as for a more average couple. He will not be pleased, but he will understand.”

“And what of the start of the term? How am I to prepare myself if you are not present?”

And Sherlock did require a rather large amount of preparation. His schedule must be sorted out, his teachers interviewed and suitable adjustments made in the case of conflicts, expectations on both sides outlined and agreed upon… it could be this year marked the beginning of a new routine and he could only offer up a prayer that it was an acceptable one.

“Gregory will be happy to ensure that you first day of the new term is a productive one.”

Already Mycroft’s mind was racing through the list of instructions he would need to pen, the forms to submit to have his husband listed as Sherlock’s second guardian, the accesses granted so that Gregory could secure funds to tend to Sherlock’s needs… so many additional details now that he was a married man. A family man…

“He shall be reduced to ash gazing on the opulence of a school so far out of his reach. Not that it is a particularly good school. The doltishness is oppressive, but at least it lacks the aroma of dole-queuers and drugs peddlers as does the institution that the lackey attends.”

“Gregory has never complained unduly about his scholastic environment, so I am certain he is receiving a proper education.”

If not, then it would be a small matter to have a new staff hired and a new facility constructed, if it proved necessary.

“He cannot spell his name, let alone interact with more complex curricular content. And you would have him spearhead the planning of my school year?”

“Gregory is nothing if not devoted to you, Sherlock, as well as being extraordinarily clear-headed and practical. He is fully aware of your special circumstances and will take the appropriate steps to provide you with the most successful learning experience. Now, I really must ready myself to greet our visitor. Would you care to come with me and assist with the choosing of a tie?”

“Of course! You have proven, of late, that your ability to clothe yourself is dwindling as rapidly as your waistline is expanding. I shall choose and you shall accept it.”

“I would not dream of disagreeing.”

“You are wise.”

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DAMNATION! How could Mummy… no, it was ridiculous to even ask such a pointless question. A month! A month in America, away from his spouse… and it would easily have been three times that if had had not affected a panicked phone call to Grandmama who agreed that it was inappropriate and, further, a matter the Americans should really be sorting out for themselves. It was a phone call Mummy would very likely make him pay dearly for, but there was no penalty too severe to suffer for his Gregory.

“And?”

Ah, the first person to whom he must break the news…
“I am afraid the word is not good, Sherlock. I shall be leaving and for… far too long a time.”

“How long?”

“A month. Give or take.”

“A MONTH! And your last estimate for leaving was woefully inadequate. You shall not return until the shop boy has found another family with whom to live!”

He would not think of that. That thought would not take root in his mind and slowly drive him dribblingly insane.

“Gregory’s faithfulness is beyond question; I have no concerns on that subject. And he would not leave you without his loving protection. Even in the event of my untimely demise, I have no doubt he will stand beside you and steward you to adulthood.”

“But I do not want you to go! I have… there are many things for which your presence is necessary and, therefore, you simply cannot leave. My needs are infinitely more important than that of any idiotic political scenario.”

When this laborious month was over, Mycroft vowed to remove Sherlock from school for a day or two and simply spend time with him, doing whatever ludicrous things his brother took it into his head to do. And he was going to make it a point to do that whenever he was forced to remove himself from their home, be it this one or the one he would share with his Gregory. Gregory…

“I would be far more content to remain here with you, Sherlock, but we are both very aware it shall not come to pass. However, it is not forever and I shall not have to remain as isolated as I did for my previous endeavor. We shall talk as often as I am able and I shall be delighted to hear the details of your days during my absence. They were quite full when last I departed and I am convinced that you shall revisit those busy times while I am away.”

“I shall languish in boredom! Unrelenting and unremitting boredom.”

“You will survive the experience. Now, I must begin to make preparations.”

“What? When are you leaving?”

“In two hours. It was completely unexpected and, despite my best efforts, unchangeable.”

“I AM CALLING LESTRADE!”

Such frustrated fury… and all Mycroft could do was kneel and give his brother a very, very rare hug.

“That is a very good idea. I would likely embarrass myself if I attempted to notify him. If he is available, perhaps he could visit and be present when I depart. And I think this will interest you very much… I shall travel via helicopter first to… well, to another point of departure and they shall land on the airstrip. If you would like it, I can have the pilot arrive early so that you have time to examine the vehicle.”

A pair of small and slightly skeptical eyes turned towards Mycroft and the elder Holmes breathed a mental sigh of relief. Sherlock’s attention had been, for now, diverted.

“A helicopter?”
“Yes. Quite a nice one, I suspect.”

“And I shall have unrestricted access?”

“Within the bounds that you do not compromise its function.”

“It is a small consolation… but if I am to undergo a month of dreary and pointless days, then I shall take what consolation I can. I am now going to summon the lackey. You shall notify me immediately when the helicopter lands.”

The traditional storming off was in one direction, while Mycroft’s movements were quickly in the other to begin making arrangements for his absence and his husband’s authority in his stead. Another of the bountiful blessings of his marriage, his Gregory was nothing if not competent and quick-witted. Leaving him in charge of Sherlock at this most inconvenient time would not be, at least, one of Mycroft’s many worries. But… a month. Mycroft pressed his hand against his chest and felt his most treasured possession through his shirt. A month without the feel of his fiancé’s skin beneath his hands, without his kisses on his lips… Upon his return, he also would ask his mate if he would agree to a few days away from his studies so that they could barricade themselves in Mycroft’s bedroom and reacquaint themselves with each other’s bodies and reaffirm the deep and undying love they shared. A month… and in the future, it could be far longer…

“Have you provided me with signatory privileges on the bank accounts?”

“Since I would like those accounts to actually retain their specie, I think it an imprudent move on my part to do so. However, I have given access to Gregory, as well instructed our solicitor to list him as a designated guardian for you in case of emergency. He shall be able to intercede for your school issues, but kindly do your best to keep those to a minimum. He has his own matters to attend to and it would be a considerate thing not to add to his burdens unless absolutely necessary.”

“The shop boy is not burdened by my wants. He feels honored to be chosen to do my bidding.”

“That is highly debatable, but if you have needs for your studies or require materials or books for your experiments, he can provide them for you. Within reason, of course.”

“I am always reasonable! If I have need for something, it is because its presence is required for very important work that the human race shall forever mourn if it is not completed in a timely fashion.”

“Yes, there is always that. Sherlock… how did… what was the timbre of Gregory’s voice when you spoke with him?”

It must have been very troubled because Sherlock hesitated noticeably before responding.

“He… he was not rendered jubilant over the news, if that is what you want to know.”

“But he did agree to say his goodbyes, did he not?”

“I have already told you that. Are you already becoming deaf as well as senile?”

“Pardon me if my senses are slightly muddied due to my impending separation from my husband. We should have been contentedly spending these final few weeks together, reveling in our bond… our newly-reinforced bond. It is not my desire to be toiling half a world away while my heart aches uncontrollably and I weep into my pillow each night as I take to my bed alone.”
“Your prose is worse than the books the upstairs maid reads in the pantry!”

“You have never loved, so you cannot understand.”

“Then I pray I never love! I will not be reduced to a blubbering, quivering mass of corpulent worthlessness! I shall keep my mind sharp and never let something as foolish as besottedness cloud my focus.”

“Time will tell, brother dear. And, though you will not believe me, I hope that you do become hopelessly besotted someday. For though it is distracting, it is also, strangely, clarifying. It is an incongruity that should not be the case, yet… it exists nonetheless. Let us wait downstairs, shall we? I would prefer not to force Gregory to have to wait once he arrives.”

“Then we shall go to the airstrip?”

“Yes. My transport should already be waiting. Driver has taken my luggage to be loaded and they are simply waiting for my arrival.”

“I have constructed a magnetometer and shall affix it to the interior of the craft. You will monitor it closely and scribe your observations. I have prepared a data chart and placed it in your briefcase.”

There was no fault to be found in Sherlock’s initiative. Or his dedication to his research.

“I shall do my best. Now, I… ah yes, there is Gregory’s vehicle. Come along, and let us meet him with brave smiles.”

“I despise smiling.”

“Then grimace convincingly.”

No… Oh heavens, no. He had done this to his husband…

“You look like you have risen from your grave!”

So drawn… and unsettlingly pale. He had done this…

“Shut it, you bastard. My ankle’s killing me, I nearly broke a world record running to my car and then getting over here.”

Oh. Oh!

“My beloved! Sit! Please rest yourself… I had not intended to cause you such pain, my dearest one.”

Sherlock’s dropped jaw was the visual cue to trigger Mycroft’s mind to replay the footage in his head and… Sherlock was correct. His mental faculties were entirely unpredictable when his husband was nearby.

“That’s my Mycroft… always trying to make me feel better and doing an amazing job of it.”

One day, Mycroft would learn the name of the specific god who had singled him out for favor and erect the most elegant and dignified temple the world had ever seen for their worship. Until then, he supported his spouse as he led him to a small sofa, waiting until full comfort was assured before
settling next to him and taking a large and much-needed kiss from his Gregory’s lips.

“That is a goal I shall never abandon, Gregory. Though… though you might doubt my sincerity at this most stressful of times.”

“I can’t say I’m happy, Mycroft. Not one bit. But, you’ve never lied to me about any of this. Never tried to play down what you and me were going to have to deal with and that’s actually made things better. It’s miserable, but not a complete surprise.”

He was the most saintly…

“You are a poor excuse for a promised man! Have you not the desire to rail against his neglect? Mycroft’s culinary hedonism could at any moment take a carnal turn and he shall be filling the house with his prostitutes and concubines unless you take a firm stand and chide him for his behavior!”

“Love, can you make sure the prostitutes don’t mind three-ways? Once my ankle’s 100% and I’ve got all my flexibility back…”

“There are tender ears present!”

“Your ears aren’t tender, Sherlock, unless Mycroft’s given one the good pinch you’ve been begging for since you got pulled off the bottle.”

“I was breast-fed. That is why my immune system is of the highest caliber.”

“Then why are you so worried about germs and pestilence and all that?”

“Just because an engine can be driven into the red zone, does not mean it should.”

“At least that I can understand.”

All Mycroft cared about understanding was the working of his spouse’s fingers beneath his shirt and the stroking of the strip of bare skin above the waistband of his trousers. He would never deserve a life-partner such as Gregory, but he would rejoice and sing praises for him, regardless.

“So, love, Sherlock really right about it being a whole month? It’s not just one of his exaggerations?”

“I am afraid not. This arose suddenly, my dear. I had no forewarning and no opportunity to turn the situation to a different conclusion. But we do have Grandmama to thank that is a month and not an open-ended situation, as was originally presented.”

“I knew she liked me.”

“I do think that was a factor in her reasoning. She understands the delicacy of new relationships and is very invested in the success of ours.”

“She doesn’t want you to lose a catch as good as me, huh?”

Said with a smile that made Mycroft’s trousers fit a bit more tightly than they were a moment ago.

“That has been made very clear to me, yes.”

Oh, the licking of one’s lips in such a manner should be illegal.
“Then aren’t you lucky that I’m not planning on going anywhere.”

“There is no one so lucky as me, Gregory, for I have you in my life.”

“Oh god, he hasn’t done that in ages. I think he really might be retching this time.”

Mycroft prodded his brother’s convulsing form and nodded at the returned kick.

“I believe we are victims of a hoax, dear. And I should warn you that he will most likely attempt to perpetrate them regularly, especially after his return to school.”

“And you actually put me down as a contact for him?”

“A guardian, with full legal rights to make decisions for his welfare. Oh, and I have written down the name and number of the solicitor and bank manager with whom you might have dealings depending upon the nature of Sherlock’s moods and access to flammable materials.”

“I have no intention of becoming a pyromaniac! The lout shall use the available funds to support my wishes and they do not include boring pursuits such as mindless firestarting. I have already planned our next trip to the shops. It will be a small outing, I anticipate the cost shall not exceed £1000, though I shall budget £1500 to accommodate a reasonable margin of error in my estimates.”

“Mycroft, please tell me I can’t spend any of your money.”

“You must act in my place, Gregory, and there may be necessary expenditures, especially with Sherlock’s return to school. Simply sign for any purchases you must make or, if cash is required, you can obtain it directly from the bank. There is no limit, so do not fret if Sherlock perpetrates some atrocity for which a transfer of notes is necessary to eliminate any legal unpleasantness.”

“I don’t like being able to handle your money, love. It’s too much responsibility…”

“Nonsense. If there is a person living who I trust more to correctly manage my brother and the means to tend to his care, then I have never met them. Please allow me this, Gregory. It would distress me greatly to know that you are using your very hard-earned monies for matters beyond your doting indulgences.”

Once they were formally wed, their funds would be joined in a common pool, but for now, his dearest should not be obligated to pay for Sherlock’s necessary or unexpected expenses.

“I’ll make you a deal. I decide what I can and can’t pay for and you trust me to make the right decision.”

This would undoubtedly mean his love would spend far too much of his own meager savings, but pride… he must always remember to safeguard his husband’s pride.

“It is a very acceptable deal. Now, I hate more than you can ever know to say this, but it is time we leave. Sherlock wishes to explore my transport and my departure time is not as fluid as I would like it to be.”

“You really get to go up in a helicopter?”

“For the first portion of my journey. There will be others with whom I will travel to the States and we must collect them. I am actually quite excited; I had never before used this means of travel.”
“Well, I’m completely jealous. That sounds brilliant and I hope you have a great time.”

“On my return, we can perhaps go for a small ride ourselves, if you find the idea pleasing."

“And you will take me!”

“How quickly my brother reignites his life’s spark when he so chooses.”

“My ability to quicken is irrelevant. If you are to take the lackey in the helicopter, you shall also take me. I shall not be denied my chance to collect data!”

Mycroft would miss this. As nonsensical as it was, he would miss these little interludes.

“We may discuss the matter further when I return. Or when we speak on the telephone.”

“That’s going to make this much easier. You’ll call a lot, too, right? Even if it’s middle of the night here, I want you to call.”

“I shall telephone at every opportunity, though in truth, I cannot state exactly what will be the frequency. It will be at every opportunity, though.

“That’s good enough for me.”

“But not for me! I would prefer a fixed schedule so I am not called away during a sensitive and important experiment to hear you drone on about your boring day.”

“Have a member of the staff answer the phone and if you are otherwise occupied, I shall save my stories of boring business for another time.”

“It is only marginally palatable as a compromise, but I am in a generous mood.”

“Mycroft, love, you can give me twice the calls if this little twig doesn’t want his share.”

“That was not my debate platform! You are sufficiently stupid that your brain cell weeps for its very solitary existence!”

It would be a very long month.

__________

Sherlock leaped from the car and hurled himself into the waiting helicopter, while Mycroft nodded to the pilot, hoping the man understood how closely an eye he needed to keep on the curious goblin who could and would have the rotor dissembled in five minutes if it took his fancy.

“You know, we never got our race.”

“I do know… it was something I anticipated for our last unencumbered week of our holiday.”

“And… we never got our night.”

The knowledge of which had plagued Mycroft every second since learning of his new initiative.

“Do not use such a tone of finality, Gregory. We will have our night. We will have many nights, though they will not begin quite as soon as we had both hoped. However… you are quite the capable teller of tales when you so choose and we shall have access to means for communication…”
Being wrapped in his husband’s arms was the way Mycroft both wanted to live and die.

“My Mycroft wants a little long-distance activity?”

“As much as you are willing to provide.”

“I’m willing to provide quite a lot, actually. Better keep some lotion handy.”

Or the best quality lubricant available without traveling to London for a shopping trip.

“Already packed and waiting patiently.”

“Good. Well, it looks like that pilot’s giving you the let’s-get-going face. I’m going to miss you, love. I’m going to miss you so much it already hurts.”

This distress had nothing to do with his spouse’s ankle and Mycroft took a moment to kiss away the worst of the pain.

“And I shall miss you, my dearest. But, my trial is made much easier to bear knowing I shall return to you and again find myself in your warm embrace.”

“So good with words… you know how much I care about you, right? I’m not going to hide it, Mycroft… please stay safe and come back as soon as you can.”

The declaration of love! It mattered not that the word itself was not used, because the sentiment and intent were blindingly clear. He was loved. Loved as he loved his spouse. Their life, their future was so bright, so filled with possibilities…

“You shall fall out of the sky to a fiery death in this Cold War castoff! If it has been maintained at all, it was by a green grocer!”

With their precious child a part of their familial embrace.

“Then it is a lucky thing that Gregory is well situated to carry on as your protector after my funeral. It is, however, a situation I consider most unlikely. Ah, I am being summoned by the discrete tapping of our aviator’s watch. Gregory, my dear, I will remain safe and return the second that I am able.”

At least Sherlock gave them the gift of simply snorting like an angry gorilla when Mycroft took one last kiss from his spouse, a spouse whose eyes glistened slightly with the tears Mycroft himself refused to show. Then it was a brief moment to squeeze his brother’s shoulder and give him a smile that seemed to cost Mycroft his soul to produce. The next minute found him climbing into the helicopter and watching as his Gregory guided Sherlock away from the aircraft and into the car before the pilot started the engine and, finally, took the helicopter into the air.

From the ground, Sherlock and Lestrade saw the helicopter get farther and farther away and only drove off when it was no longer in sight.

“Looks like it’s just you and me again, Sherlock.”

“Do not remind me of that brain-numbing fact, you freakish oaf.”

“Yeah, I’m upset, too. Want to come over and have dinner with us? Mum’s got chicken on the menu and there may be pie involved, too.”

Lestrade listened to Sherlock’s silence and watched him, out of the corner of his eye, fiddle with
the sleeve of his shirt.

“I would not be averse to pie.”

“After your chicken. And every green thing on your plate.”

“Vegetables are not a required precursor to pie.”

“They are with Mum. One clean plate and then you get your reward. Might even be some whipped cream for the top.”

“You will inform her first of my smallish appetite.”

“Your appetite’s only small when real food’s involved, apparently. Bet you’d have the whole pie and a bowl of ice cream down by the time I tried to even cut myself a piece!”

“If your movements are so pitifully lethargic that you cannot successfully hunt prey as slow-moving as a pie, then I pity Mycroft your lackluster sexual encounters.”

“And if you mention sex in front of Mum, you won’t live to regret it.”

“Threats… how common.”

“But sincere.”

“Oh very well. I shall subjugate myself to your silly rules for this one evening. However, this will cost you dearly.”

“Two bars.”

“Seven.”

“Seven! You’ve got rocks in your head.”

“Rocks that shall very much enjoy their chocolate.”

“Three bars and that’s it.”

“Six and truffles.”

“What? Now who’s silly? Four. And maybe one truffle.”

“Five and I shall have seven truffles. One for each day of the week.”

“Four and two truffles. And we’ll see what we’ve got for nougat.”

“And I may choose the quantity?”

“Within reason. Moving that nasty stuff always makes my day.”

“I accept. Though if your mother serves peas, the negotiations will again commence.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll show you how to hide them.”

“Really?”

“Been doing it for years.”
Chapter Notes

And here we are at the finish line. My gratitude for all of the wonderful support this story has received cannot be fully expressed so I'll just say thank you and hope that, if nothing else, the story brought a smile to your face...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Mycroft!”

Luckily for Lestrade, once his mum learned about Mycroft leaving, she’d called his uncle and had him come by to do some wiring to put a phone in his bedroom. Now, all he needed was his own number so his mum couldn’t listen in on his and Mycroft’s personal conversations.

“How insulting. Apparently, even you now devalue my existence.”

“Oh, hi Sherlock. And no, I don’t devalue you. I just took you for a film tonight, didn’t I?”

“And my intelligence has still not recovered.”

“You loved it. Don’t try and lie.”

“I most certainly did not.”

“Then why were you cheering for the space marines to kill all those aliens?”

“I think you have suffered some form of head trauma or reduced blood flow to the brain fostered by overconsumption of grease and salt.”

“Then you’re heading for brain trauma, too, because you ate your fair share of pizza and popcorn.”

Which, as he lay in the bed, watching the clock blink 3:00 am at him, brought a huge grin to Lestrade’s face. Watching Sherlock eat pizza was almost as fun as watching Mycroft. After the standard hours of complaining, Sherlock finally took a bite and nearly crammed the rest of the piece into his mouth before he could even take another breath. If Lestrade was collecting data, this would be another piece of evidence that not only did Sherlock have a taste for sugar, greasy junky things like chips and pizza also ranked high on his list. For as much as he liked fancy himself the world’s smartest and most capable person, Sherlock really was just a kid in a lot of ways.

“The pizza had some nutritional value, at least. Your insistence on then layering my stomach with a stratum of useless fiber was ridiculous.”

“Nope, helps push out the pizza. You’ll thank me tomorrow…this… morning.”

“How utterly disgusting. Every day you find new and creative ways to appall me.”

“I bet you got a lot of good notes in your journal, though. You were scribbling like a fiend all the way through our date.”
“It is unpleasant to feel the gorge rise in my throat, so never use the term ‘date’ in association with any of our interactions. However, if forced to, I will admit that the experience provided additional and somewhat valuable information for my research. I... I was going to share my observations with Mycroft…”

“Yeah, I thought he might call tonight, too. It’s been three days, but I guess he’s got to get settled and figure out what he’s doing. Lots of meetings and all that. It’s not a holiday for him, you know.”

“Oh, he is very much in his element with all of the chicanery, manipulation and duplicity.”

“Little bastard. Mycroft can do anything, but it doesn’t mean he always has to like it.”

“I would not be surprised that if for every lie he tells he experiences a stirring in his loins.”

“NO! No, you will not talk about Mycroft’s loins around me.”

“Lower-class prudery is tedious.”

“One minute I’m a lust-crazed dog and the next I’ve got on petticoats and a chastity belt. Can you possibly make up your mind?”

“When it is no longer amusing to baffle your tiny brain, then I shall perhaps settle on a particular caricature. However, that time is not now.”

“Well, do your best. Can I go back to sleep?”

“No. We must discuss the disposition of my time for these last days before school.”

“We can do that when the sun’s actually in the sky.”

“You are already awake, so there is no reason to postpone this to a later time.”

“Well, if Mycroft does try to call, he won’t get through will he, if we’re here talking about how I’m going to entertain you.”

“Hmmm… you make one of your very rare valid points.”

“I tell you what, can you get that chauffer of yours to drop you by tomorrow? I’m working until close, but Mum’s working even later, so we can do something nice like cook dinner so she doesn’t have to. And then watch a little telly or something. How does that sound?”

“You want me to engage in menial labor?”

“I want you help me cook for Mum, since she’ll already have worked an extra-long day.”

“Ugh… I can feel myself swallowing my tongue in an attempt to avoid even thinking about the experience.”

“Figures. You don’t know how to cook, do you?”

“Of course I can cook! I am… I am extraordinarily skilled in food preparation.”

“Yeah? What can you do?”

“Anything. My skill level far surpasses that of the shuffling cretins that toil in their cramped
and ill-equipped kitchens.”

“So, nothing. Ok, I can work with that. I’ll show you how to chop and mix things up so they taste good. It’s chemistry, right? You’re good at chemistry, so I’m sure you’ll do a great job.”

“I never do not do a great job.”

“Then we should have a brilliant dinner tomorrow night. I mean tonight. Fuck me, but if I don’t get some sleep I’m not going to be good for anything at all. I’ll see you later, Sherlock. Stay out of trouble.”

“It is not my fault if I am presented with situations of interest that I am compelled to explore.”

“No, not at all.”

“Sherlock? I just hung up from you!”

“Oh dear, he is already giving you sleepless nights.”

“Mycroft! Oh christ, it’s so good to hear your voice. We’ve been worried.”

“Ah, and I cannot offer an apology of sufficient weight to salve my conscience or do you justice. It has been an unexpectedly trying arrival and I have, myself, had no more than the scattered nap as a restorative.”

“You promised me you’d take care of yourself, love.”

“And I would not break that promise; my constitution is very capable of weathering these demands and I am in no manner near the point of concern. Now, I am very eager to hear of your activities these past few days. I take it Sherlock has already proven himself an ungracious responsibility.”

“Nah, he just got lonely and probably a bit scared since we hadn’t heard from you. Poor tyke had his little notebook all ready and waiting to read his notes about his great film adventure.”

“Oh, and was it as enjoyable as ours?”

“Nearly a carbon copy, but without the sexual tension and trying to steal touches in the popcorn tub.”

“Then I am certain he had many new experiences about which to scribe. Thank you for that, Gregory… I am not even always aware of what new things he might enjoy, yet you find them so easily. Truly it is an incomparable talent.”

“All kids like pizza, films, popcorn and really sugary soda. And he got more driving practice…he’s getting good! I’m going to give him the green light to go for third gear next time and see what he does. Don’t worry, it’ll be in Mum’s car. He wants to take some of yours out, but I’m not that stupid.”

“I do deplore that your poor mother’s car is being manhandled by a diminutive maniac. Perhaps you should take some time and find a suitable vehicle to purchase for Sherlock. I know you will find something safe and appropriate for him to use.”

“Not buying the lad a car, Mycroft.”
“And why not? It would spare your mother’s vehicle untold cumulative damage.”

“He’s too young and already a little spoiled prick.”

“But Gregory, should he not become accustomed to the vehicle that he shall operate once he has secured his driving license?”

“Cars aren’t that different and he can make do with Mum’s for now. It’s only once in awhile he gets to drive anyway.”

“It is really a small matter, my love…”

“You can stop right there, Mycroft Holmes. I’m not letting you spoil him any further and that’s that. And if some Mercedes shows up at your place with his name on the gift tag, I will let him rig it for remote driving and pilot it off a cliff.”

Mycroft wondered if it was normal to become quite so aroused during an argument with one’s spouse, but, reflecting on the various films he had watched for romantic research, it did not seem entirely unique.

“Such drama… my brother has been unduly influencing you. Should I be jealous?”

Was that the correct pitch? The proper inflection?

“Nah, the only one that’s rubbing off on me is you, love. But he’s still not getting a new car.”

An erotic parry and then a firm and final word on the subject. Why could he not be there to begin ravishing his husband in a most indecent fashion!

“As you wish, Gregory. As Sherlock approaches the age to obtain his license, we can take up the discussion again, I assume?”

“Yeah, we can do that. Don’t think we could get him to put in a few days at the shop during holidays to earn a little money towards buying it himself, do you?”

“That is likely the most humorous statement I have ever heard you make.”

“It was worth a shot. Words are free.”

“And I highly doubt you would want Sherlock in a position to offer customer service in any case.”

“Oh god… yeah, you’re right. I just made funniest joke of my life. Now, if you were only here so we could celebrate…”

How is it that while he had to wonder if his tone was properly enticing, his husband accomplished the deed with neither hesitation nor forethought?

“Would it trouble you, my dear, to know that I have celebrated on occasion these past three days when I found myself enjoying a measure of privacy?”

Oh, now that was reason for Lestrade to lay back and get very comfortable.

“Really? Would it trouble you to know that I’ve been doing the same thing? A lot of the same thing… not that I couldn’t do with a little more.”
“Now now, my dear… I still must telephone Sherlock and I do not have unlimited time.”

But he might have some time alone later to pursue the thread of their conversation more fully.

“Fair enough… or I could race you.”

Pardon?

“Pardon? Are you suggesting we… compete?”

“First one that gets off wins.”

“And the prize?”

“Getting to lay there and make the other one wait until they’ve got permission before they can let go. And tell them what to do, too.”

There was really no possibility of refusing, was there? Win or lose… other couples might become routine in their lovemaking, but that would certainly never be their fate. His husband was so deliciously creative…

“I do believe that will fit my schedule nicely.”

“I do believe you fit me nicely. And, someday, I really hope to find out just how well you fit.”

Deliciously creative… a man to make one’s heart flutter…

“Someday, I shall let you find out.”

Lestrade had to wonder if he was catching some of Sherlock’s craziness. He’d actually sat down and calculated the average time between Mycroft’s phone calls. 2.2 days. It’d been nine days and he’d called four times, which was good. Really, it was. Mycroft was off doing something that he couldn’t really talk about, but he still managed to call at least often enough that Lestrade hadn’t had nearly as rough a go as last time and… well, the phone calls were especially nice when they came late at night after his mum had gone to bed. Even thousands of miles away, Mycroft could turn him on like a light; just hearing that voice was enough to get his blood running hot. And they could talk. Really talk about subjects that were interesting and important and they could teach each other new things and… he felt so empty when Mycroft was gone. Not like the idiots that moaned and groaned at the top of their lungs about their boyfriends or girlfriends going away for the weekend so that everyone on the block ran over to pay attention to them, but… more like there was a cold, quiet space in his chest that only warmed up when he could talk to his Mycroft.

And it had never happened before. Not with any other person. Nothing close… not anything remotely close. Was this what it was like when… it felt dumb to even think about it. Didn’t it take years to fall in love with someone? Get to know them, let them get under your skin and wait for your heart to grow around them? Was it supposed to be this easy? Just see someone and want them, talk to them and need them, be with them and… never want anyone else? Meet someone and they slide right into the vacant space you never realized you had inside? Wasn’t love supposed to be hard to find and tough to hold onto? Not that he thought being with Mycroft would ever be easy, but… if felt like it would be. Hard or easy, fun or miserable, they’d be and keep going from the hard to the easy and from the miserable to the fun and keep doing it again and again and build a real life that meant something and was worth every sacrifice they’d have to make. Ok, that was a little over the top, but it’s what it really felt like.
So… yeah. Maybe he was in love with Mycroft Holmes. That was probably the reason for the little smile Mycroft’s Gran kept giving him when he went with Sherlock to visit her on Sunday. Probably saw it written all over him in big dancing red letters with hearts floating around his head like a cartoon halo. And Mycroft and Sherlock must think he was really stupid if they didn’t think he noticed the little slips here and there, but… he’d already sort of figured out how Mycroft felt. That’s why he couldn’t get upset with Mycroft’s Gran because he’d seen the same thing written all over Mycroft with hearts and flowers and dancing letters, too. No one had ever looked at him that way. Looked at him like he was special, different… like there wasn’t anyone else in the room. Didn’t see the crappy little house or the beat up car or the old clothes, but looked at him like he was valuable. And… he felt valuable when Mycroft looked at him.

Ok, then. This changed… nothing. Mycroft loved him and he was nearly almost positively sure he loved Mycroft, but he was going to leave a small margin of doubt because Sherlock had given him a glass of water yesterday that tasted a little funny and that was not something to ignore with someone like Sherlock. He and Mycroft had a great time together and that wouldn’t change. They were a pretty good team dealing with the little brat and that wouldn’t change. Neither of them had any illusions about what their relationship would be like and that wouldn’t change. All that changed was… well, someday they’d have to have a real talk about things. Using all the words and start thinking about plans and decisions and stuff he wasn’t ready to think about right now. Mum was right about that much… too young. At least too young to do anything about it. But they would have to talk when Mycroft got back. Get things out in the open so Mycroft could stop gagging when he said something he really didn’t mean to say to give away his game. So… a talk. A real talk. When Mycroft got back. Yeah, he could do this. No problem at all. Just tell Mycroft ‘I love you’ and done.

Oh god, this was going to be hard.

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“And why not?”

“Because little bastards like you do not get chips after calling the policeman an illiterate heathen.”

“He misspelled the name of the street!”

“So, he made a mistake. And if you hadn’t been evil to him I might have gotten him to toss the citation away and that would have been that!”

“Mycroft will pay it. Though he will not be pleased you received a traffic citation while I was in the vehicle.”

“It wasn’t for speeding, so he’ll be ok. Not that he’s going to pay it and not that you’re going to say anything about it, either. I ran the stop sign, which was completely hidden by that van just to remind you, and I’ll pay the fine. Actually you should pay it because I’d almost talked the cop out of citing me when you had to steal his pad and begin critiquing his writing!”

“Someone has to uphold literacy standards and if the responsibility is laid upon my shoulders, I will carry it gladly!”

“Well, I hope responsibility tastes as good as chips because that’s all you’re getting for lunch.”

“I shall have a word with your instructors. You do not take knowledge sufficiently seriously.”
“You do that. And no chocolate today, either.”

“Why not simply bind my wrists, tie me to your bumper and make me walk behind the car in shame?”

“Don’t have any rope.”

“And another failing! You are never adequately prepared!”

“Really. You just had to call your headmaster an alcoholic?”

“He reeked of ethanol of an even cheaper variety than that which you favor, so it is likely approved only for industrial use.”

“You do realize he is the one who’s going to have your skinny arse under a microscope for the rest of the year, right?”

“I did not notice any evidence of paedophilic tendencies on his part, but I shall now remain on high alert for any nefarious behavior.”

“If you kick him or anything…”

“Then you will have to handle matters as you have been hired to do.”

“I’m not your employee, Sherlock.”

“No, you are Mycroft’s chattel and, as such, you must do as you have been commanded, which is make my life as pleasant as possible.”

“Maybe I should march right back in there and have them put back that sports block in your schedule. I think you should have it anyway, so it won’t be hard for me to change my mind and get that extra laboratory time tossed out in favor of getting some fresh air in your lungs.”

“I am always exempted from sports! It is an entirely pointless use of my time. And Mycroft would be very upset if he had to nursemaid my pained and exhausted body every evening when he should be tending to his own studies.”

“Then promise not to call the headmaster an alcoholic, a paedophile, do him any physical harm, talk about his marriage going bad…”

“His marriage is troubled?”

“Oh, you didn’t notice that he’s got a white line on his ring finger and that he’s got photos of his kids in his office, but none of his wife?”

“You distracted me with your petty academic concerns! I was not able to properly observe!”

“Now you have to admit that I’m a pretty good detective. And say it with feeling.”

“I shall say nothing of the sort.”

“Then maybe I don’t have to let you drive around your estate today. In third gear.”

“What! You cannot deny me a privilege I did not know was on offer! That is dastardly!”
“Say it.”

“Never!”

“Say. It.”

“I would take an asp to the chest first!”

“Gone once.”

“Make a salad of foxglove and larkspur and die with the flowers still in my mouth!”

“Going twice.”

“Fine! You resemble at times a detective of marginal talent and barely-adequate intellect.”

“Pathetic as usual, but I wasn’t expecting anything better. As soon as we’re back, you can take the wheel.”

“Third gear?”

“As long as it’s safe, yeah.”

“Always you lay on restrictions.”

“When you’re a dad, you’ll understand.”

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“Well, tomorrow’s the big day. You ready?”

Lestrade stood in Sherlock’s bedroom and looked around at the new satchel, the multiple copies of his textbooks that Sherlock could annotate and destroy to his heart’s content, several pairs of safety goggles and lab aprons, a new calculator, fresh lab journal dedicated to his work at school and a host of other odds and ends that Sherlock deemed necessary. The last few days had mostly centered around making the local merchants very happy. And to amusing Mycroft with the stories of the feeding and watering of the wild Sherlock.

“I believe so. If not, you will obtain whatever items I find I lack.”

“Not your slave, Sherlock. But we can do a shopping trip if you really need something. Just remember though... I’m going back, too, and I’ll be working after school, so we won’t be able to go at the drop of a hat.”

“I am quite aware of the unacceptable circumstances. Why you simply do not abandon your foolish job and mandate that Mycroft pay your keep is quite beyond me.”

“Because that’s just crazy?”

“You are simply incapable of capitalizing on any opportunity aren’t you? Why labor at a fruitless job when you could use your time in a far more productive manner? Such as ensuring my happiness.”

“Because I like to pay my way. Earn what I have, not have it given to me.”

“Would you like a soapbox to stand upon while you pontificate your manifesto?”
“Would you like to be locked in a closet with a housecat after your body’s been smeared with fish?”

“A stalemate… how unsatisfying. If you…”

Fortunately, Sherlock’s musings were cut short by the ringing of the phone which caused the boy to leap across his bedroom and snatch it off the cradle. Mycroft had promised to call tonight and Lestrade was happy to settle back on Sherlock’s bed and let the brothers talk, though he must have started nodding off because it was only Sherlock tapping on his head with the telephone that got his attention.

“Hi, love. Well, I think we’ve got Sherlock ready for tomorrow.”

“So he says… though not in a very obvious manner. I believe he is most happy with the preparations and that will make the day go far more smoothly for him. And you.”

“I aim to please. Told him I’d be here tomorrow when he got home so we could talk about his day. I’m going to drop him off in the morning, too.”

Lestrade felt Mycroft’s laugh all the way to his toes.

“Gregory, my dear, he has attended school before, you realize.”

“I know, but I don’t mind and it’ll be good to check out the other brats that he’ll have to deal with. There’s a lot you can tell from the first few minutes when you get to school.”

“The police force will be lucky to have you.”

“We’ll see. I am thinking more and more about it, though. They make us talk about career plans at school, so I’ll see what information I can get about going that route.”

“Whatever you choose, Gregory, I will support you fully in the decision. Unfortunately, that discussion cannot occur now, for I must cut short this conversation. I am already late for a meeting, but I have a far more intimidating glare than the buffoon who called the assembly, so I am not unduly worried about the outcome.”

“That’s my Mycroft! Taking over the world, one glare at a time.”

“Slow and steady wins the race, is that not the phrase? Goodbye, Gregory. I shall try and phone again tomorrow and hear the epic tales Sherlock will surely have in large supply.”

“I bet he will. Goodbye, love. Take care of yourself.”

“For you, my dear… anything.”

Lestrade handed the phone back to Sherlock who interrupted his inspection of his newest packages of latex gloves to replace it on his dresser.

“Mycroft’s going to try and phone tomorrow. He’s really trying hard to stay in touch.”

“He is putting forth more effort that I had expected, but I shall not set my future expectations to this level.”

“No, that’s probably smart. But no matter what, he comes back to us, right?”

“The glee with which you say that is stomach-churning.”
“I’ll get you a pail.”

Lestrade was glad that the staff at Mycroft’s house were used to him because hanging around alone would have been even more uncomfortable if they’d been watching him the whole time. As it was, he felt very weird being alone, so to speak, in that massive place and got an even deeper insight into how lonely Sherlock must be when he was here all by himself. So, when the goblin princeling finally arrived home, it was with some relief that Lestrade followed him upstairs, even though Sherlock’s stormy face told him that the boy’s day hadn’t been all wine and roses.

“I AM NOT RETURNING!”

“What happened?”

“That school has completely lost its grip on academic ethics and social structure!”

“Ok… want to tell me why?”

Sherlock threw his satchel onto a chair and kicked off his shoes with such a vengeance that they nearly dented the wall with which they collided.

“They have allowed riff-raff onto the premises!”

“Can you define riff-raff in a more useful way?”

“Riff-raff… peasants… lackeys… takers of public transportation… users of national health care…”

“Ok, so normal people. So, they let some common lads in, I thought schools like yours always had a few scholarship boys running around?”

“They do, however, they remain in the remedial wing and have no ability to soil my educational experience.”

“But today was different.”

“Yes, in a most atrocious fashion.”

Now Lestrade’s amusement at Sherlock’s hysterics was rapidly dwindling and worry was replacing it measure for measure.

“Sherlock, listen to me… if any of those kids bullied you. Hurt you or called you names, you will tell me and I’ll take care of it. I’m not going to let anyone bother you at school so just…”

“If I was not so put out I would be asphyxiating with laughter. I was not bullied; he is built much like a pygmy marmoset and has the personality of a bag of tea.”

“He?”

“They forced me to… escort… one of your tribe to his classes! Me! My vital research had to be postponed because I had to ensure the brainless indigent did not lose himself on his way to urinate!”

“They… ok, let me make sure I understand you… they had you show around the new kid?”
“Exactly! What were they thinking?”

“That’s actually a very good question.”

“My time is immensely valuable and wasting it on a simian is both foolish and… criminal!”

“Was this the headmaster’s idea?”

“Ah… good, you also suspect a conspiracy. This was a calculated move to break my will, but it did not succeed!”

Now it was time to laugh again. If this was the worst thing that happened in Sherlock’s day, then it must have gone pretty well.

“That’s my boy. Now, do you have to do this again; be the tour guide for your new little friend?”

“He is not my friend. He is an unthinking lump of clay that is adhering my mental feet to the floor.”

“So that’s a yes.”

“I must perform this task for an entire week! And… oh, this is too terrible to remark upon…”

“Just say it. You’ll feel better.”

“I must take lunch with him. And he talks while he has lunch.”

“So do you.”

“Not to my betters… not that any exist, but I stand by my premise.”

“So you’ve got someone to talk to between classes, someone to have lunch with… yeah, you’ve got yourself a nice new friend, Sherlock. Congratulations.”

Sherlock’s highly-agitated snarl was the most precious thing Lestrade had ever seen.

“If there is one thing you can be certain of, peasant, it is that John Watson will never be my friend.”

Chapter End Notes

And on we go... The School Boy is on the horizon, so subscribe to the Ages of Man series to be notified when the first chapter goes up. Again, thank you all for making this a great experience!

And don't forget the 'out for ice cream' outtake if you missed it:

Works inspired by this: [Podfic] The Shop Boy by EventHorizon by AxeMeAboutAxinomancy

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