Little by Little
by Fiendfyre

Summary

He realised that some officers were able to maintain reasonably healthy relationships and remain on the force, but he had tried that. He was too intense, too passionate, to balance his life to the satisfaction of a partner, and when given the choice between a partner and his job he had chosen his job. Every time.

Notes

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Karma Police

Being a police officer, a Detective Inspector at that, was not conducive to the maintenance of healthy long-term relationships. Gregory Lestrade had seen close to a dozen friends from the force destroy marriages and relationships with good, decent people in his first 10 years of policing. It's not that police officers made bad wives, husbands, boyfriends or girlfriends inherently, rather that a relationship requires a time commitment, routines and traditions that conflict with the rather unpredictable work of a police officer. In the end, it was a choice many of them had to make: take a desk job or resign themselves to a life spent, for the most part, alone. So, basically, it came down to what mattered the most to the individual: personal happiness or a sense of professional fulfilment.

Lestrade had chosen the latter, but it had taken him a while to stop looking for that one person who would understand his commitment to his work and love him anyway. The one person who was perfect for him. He was a little bit of a romantic, although he certainly wouldn't admit to that. The idea of creating a family was so tempting that it almost broke his resolve on many occasions, but it took less than a minute to remember how unfair it would be. Missed concerts and football games, forgotten birthdays and lonely nights waiting. As much as he craved the family connection he'd all but lost with the death of his mother, he could not justify making a family of his own. Not when he had made the choice to put his job as his number one priority.

Still, sat in his cold one-bedroom apartment in mid-winter with a broken heater and an empty fridge, it was easy to think 'what if' and daydream about the life he could have had. This self-destructive imagining never lasted long, he would get a call from work or hear the distant sirens of a police car and snap back to a reality in which he was, for the most part, happy with his choices.

He realised that some officers were able to maintain reasonably healthy relationships and remain on the force, but he had tried that. He was too intense, too passionate, to balance his life to the satisfaction of a partner, and when given the choice between a partner and his job he had chosen his job. Every time.

He had been 30 when he finally stopped looking for that illusive one and started the throw himself wholeheartedly into his work. He had made DI five years later.

Ten years on from there and he still sat, alone, in a cold one-bedroom apartment. He had gained six new scars, four broken bones and 1 ½ friends in that time. His hair was far more salt than pepper and his limbs protested more than they had before, but he was more certain than ever that he had made the right decision.

A series of rapes and one murder had been his case for over two weeks in early May and it had not been an easy one. When he had finally got a viable lead it was only to find the freak responsible strung up by his ankles with another sociopath standing next to him, armed with a gun. It was a situation that ranked fairly high up on Lestrade’s personal ‘What the Fuck’ scale, although not as high as one might think. The scale had expanded somewhat after he had met Sherlock Holmes. The resulting showdown had lasted no less than six hours and ended with one injured officer. Not exactly the best outcome, but at least they had arrested the culprit.

After that he cheerfully told his DCI that he would be taking his scheduled holiday, which really meant ‘Go fuck yourself I am NOT working just so you have to do less paperwork, you arse’. That should have made for a good latter half of May but, as usual, a spanner was thrown into the works. A spanner predictably branded as SHERLOCK HOLMES.
He’d arrived at Heathrow airport at 4am after a magical, relaxing week in Spain to a woman in a grey power suit holding a sign with LESTRADE painted on in big, bold lettering. While he’d never had the occasion to meet Sherlock’s illusive older brother, Mycroft, he recognised the distinctive signs of a Holmes kidnapping. The attractive woman, who he called Andrea even though he knew it wasn’t her name, was one he’d met several times, not being important enough for Mycroft’s personal attention. Once had been when he’d first begun utilising Sherlock as a consultant, another when he’d successfully rehabilitated the bastard, twice when he’d been ‘asked’ to take a case away from another detective and contact Sherlock, and one final time after he had met John Watson.

She relayed Mycroft’s messages and never anything else, but even so he rather liked her. While she never strayed from the letter of Mycroft’s instructions, she added facial expressions and sighs that clearly indicated whether or not she agreed with her esteemed boss’ opinions. She had a dry, sarcastic brand of humour that managed to endear her to him, despite their relative positions. He liked her, but he hated that she was there. John had been important enough to receive an actual talk with Mycroft, and Lestrade understood better than John why that was the case, but he was sure that, after more than five years, he was important enough for at least a phone call. Being ignored like that wounded his pride.

He approached, scowling and pulling his plain black suitcase behind him, and she smiled apologetically.

“Morning,” he muttered. While he might not have been happy with the situation, Andrea hardly deserved to be blamed for that and it wouldn’t do to shoot the messenger.

“Good morning, Detective Inspector Lestrade. Mr Holmes would be honoured if you would consent to taking one of his cars to your destination,” she said dryly, rolling her eyes at him.

He wanted to grin, he really did, but he couldn’t see the humour after a two-hour red-eye flight with a toddler sitting behind him kicking his arse, literally, for the entire trip. “And where, exactly, is my destination?” he asked as evenly as he could. He was 45. No matter how tempted he was, he would not throw a tantrum in the middle of the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport. He was four decades too old for that.

“We are to take you to Dartmoor. Baskerville, to be precise,” she replied in a soft voice. She felt sorry for him, he could tell.

“Ah, I see. I gather I am meeting my friends there?”

“Indeed. The younger Mr Holmes and Dr Watson have already arrived in the area.”

He sighed. “Alright, Andrea. I’ll go.”

This was the first time Mycroft Holmes had asked him to do anything beyond giving Sherlock specific cases and keeping an eye on him, so he was sure it was important. He was considerably less certain whether he would regret going or not, although he strongly suspected the former. Through Andrea, Mycroft had always been commanding and superior. In fact, the first thing she had said on Mycroft’s behalf was, “I do not know why my brother has chosen you, a supremely boring, ordinary and rather dense police officer.” Which was an especially auspicious beginning to a working relationship already doomed to be difficult, based solely on the fact that it revolved around Sherlock, the most difficult man in central London.

“Thank you, Detective Inspector Lestrade,” she said as she led him out to the black car that was idling, illegally, in a disabled spot outside the terminal. He scowled but said nothing.
He put his own bag in the boot of the car, ignoring the tall, attractive driver, and slid into the backseat. Andrea got in a minute later and the driver pulled away from the curb. There was a soundproof glass screen between the driver’s compartment and the backseat, presumably so Mycroft could conduct his business freely. After three encounters with Andrea, he knew that she would only speak if he asked the right questions, so he launched right into it.

“What has Sherlock done?”

“He has entered the Baskerville facility using Mr Holmes’ access pass. Anything inside that facility is highly classified and Mr Holmes is concerned that Sherlock may draw the attention of the authorities in Dartmoor.”

“So I am to be his babysitter?” he asked through gritted teeth, trying not to get mad at Andrea. “I am a Detective Inspector at New Scotland Yard, for Christ’s sake! I have better things to be doing!”

She looked sympathetic but said nothing, which was no less than what he had expected. He hadn’t been looking for a response; he only wanted to vent his frustrations to someone who understood. Andrea, as Mycroft’s personal assistant and probable bodyguard, would be one of the only people who would understand. He felt sorry for her; he imagined Mycroft Holmes was a rather demanding boss.

“Maybe I wouldn’t mind so much if Sherlock had more emotional intelligence than a five-year-old,” he bit out angrily. “Or perhaps if the supremely important Mycroft Holmes would deign to ask. Hell, I’d accept an order if he’d bother to deliver it himself. It’s been more than five years and I’ve never even seen the man. He kidnapped John personally after five hours.”

Her answering sigh clearly said ‘I tried,’ so he ran his hand through his hair and continued, “I know you’ve tried. God knows you have more to do than be Mycroft’s messenger. Feel free to get some proper work done, it’s a long drive.”

Her smile was grateful and she wasted no time whipping out her Blackberry. Lestrade pulled out his own phone and dug around in his carry-on for his headphones. The blue glow from the phone’s screen was the only thing illuminating the cab of the car, as it was still a few hours before daylight. He sorted through his musical selection and settled on Radiohead’s OK Computer. It was definitely turning out to be a Karma Police day. He often chose that particular song after a long day dealing with Sherlock, it pretty much perfectly reflected his professional relationship with him.

‘Karma Police, arrest this man
He talks in Maths
He buzzes like a fridge
He’s like a detuned radio’

Although in his head he usually replaced ‘He talks in Maths’ with ‘He talks too much’ because, while either was fitting, the latter was more annoying. Lestrade had often thought about arresting Sherlock, but ‘being a tactless arse’ was hardly reason enough. It stung that the only reason Sherlock ever spoke to him was to get something from him, but Lestrade had long ago swallowed his pride where Sherlock was concerned. Another line that rather resonated with him from that song reminded him of himself:

‘Karma Police
I’ve given all I can
It’s not enough
I've given all I can
But we're still on the payroll'

Having Sherlock as a consultant was detrimental for his ego because, no matter how hard he tried, he would never be as good as Sherlock. Or, in other words, he gave everything he could and it wasn’t enough. The only consolation was that he was always a cop, he always solved cases (or at least tried to) and never thought a murder was ‘too boring’ for his attention. If it was his lot in life to be Sherlock’s minder, then that’s what he would do; but only because that’s what he wanted, not because some posh arse had told him to.

OK Computer may have been a rather odd choice for comfort music, but it worked for him so he’d never tried too hard to change it. In fact, it was not especially… positive music at all. None of the songs were particularly happy. That wasn’t the point of finding them comforting; it had little to do with what the song was about and more to do with how he remembered hearing it. It was the last album his mum had ever given to him, and he’d listened to it on her old CD player while she puttered around and made him biscuits, happy memories of happy things and happy people. It helped that Radiohead was a good band, excellent even.

He lost count of how many times the album repeated, as he was in that vague, half-asleep state with his eyes staring blankly out the window at the moving landscape. He finally snapped back to attention in the middle of No Surprises and laughed at the irony. He was going to meet Sherlock Holmes, ‘no alarms and no surprises’ was a little too much to expect. He paused the music just before the next song began and removed the headphones, turning to Andrea just in time to catch her yawn. He rubbed his eyes and rolled his stiff shoulders when he saw a sign ‘Baskerville – 2 Miles’.

He was pretty sure he was going to want to murder Sherlock by the end of the day and wondered if he could make a case for justifiable homicide but dismissed the thought. If ‘being a colossal twat’ wasn’t a good enough reason for arrest, it certainly wasn’t a good enough reason for murder.

Sure enough, after less than a minute in Sherlock’s company he was ready to throttle him. The bastard didn’t even know his first name, which shouldn’t have been a surprise, but he found that it still hurt. He knew he wasn’t exactly Sherlock’s friend but he was pretty darn close. Frankly, he was getting rather sick of not being important enough for the attention of the Holmes brothers.
Electioneering

Chapter Summary

Lestrade complains a bit, buys some groceries and then yells some more.

Ending the case dosed with epic hallucinogenic fear gas certainly counted as a surprise. Sherlock’s surprises were never welcome ones. Not only did the gas make him hallucinate a giant hound, it gave him a headache the size of Russia and the strangest nightmares he’d ever experienced. When he woke up the next morning, John and Sherlock were already gone, presumably to catch the earliest train to London. After packing away his things, he went down to the lounge area to find Andrea sitting by the fire drinking tea. He sat next to her and accepted the second cup.

“You here to take me home?” He asked, although his throat was still dry from sleep so it ended up sounding more like a croak.

“Mr Holmes has requested I take you to your flat. He would like you to report on the situation here in Baskerville.”

“Hell no,” he growled, and gripped the delicate teacup tightly. “You can take me home but I don’t answer to Mycroft Holmes. I won’t be giving him any reports, so he’ll just have to beg his brother for information.”

“Mr Holmes informed me I should, and I quote, say ‘whatever I need to’ in order to convince you to report. I shall take that as explicit permission to speak freely.”

He actually smiled at her use of logic to get around the issue, but the smile quickly faded and morphed into anger. “If he wanted a messenger, he should have trained a parrot,” he muttered. “Waste of your time.”

She grinned and stood up, draining her cup in one swallow. “Come on, Lestrade,” she said briskly, “it’s a long drive.”

He stood up without complaint and, for once, let the driver deal with his bags. The case had been terrifying and very draining, he felt sort of like he’d been run over by a bulldozer. Everything ached and every movement hurt, his head throbbing behind his eyes and his mouth perpetually dry. He was very glad for the soft leather seats of the fancy black car and the small, refrigerated compartment that held ice-cold water.

“You look awful,” she commented as they got onto the freeway.

“Thanks,” he said sarcastically before leaning his head back and closing his eyes. “You’d look like this too if you’d had the month I’ve had. It was even worse than I expected.”

“Oh, really? How so?” she asked, the soft tapping sound of her texting stopping briefly as she glanced up from her phone.

“You’re just trying to con me into giving a verbal report. I’m onto your tricks,” he said, waving a chastising finger in her direction without opening his eyes. He was sort of joking but mostly he was serious, he wasn’t planning on reporting to Mycroft Holmes through her.
“Blast, foiled again!” she muttered, but didn’t look especially sorry that her ploy hadn’t worked. His answering chuckle was tired and weak because he couldn’t bring himself to use what little energy he had left to properly laugh.

“He’s going to keep sending me until you tell him what happened,” she commented apologetically.

“I know,” he said, his eyes still closed against the morning light that was making the throbbing worse.

“It might be easier to tell me now,” she ventured quietly.

“No!” he snapped, turning to look at her sharply but immediately feeling bad. “Shit, it’s not your fault.” He propped his elbows on his knees and put his head in his hands, taking a deep breath. After a moment, he looked up at her again. “You’ve got a recording device somewhere. Turn it on. I want him to get this message word for word, directly from me.”

She pressed a few buttons on her phone and handed it to him. There was a small scratch in the upper right hand corner but otherwise it was smooth and black and shiny. The scratch made him smile, probably because he liked to know that even she wasn’t perfect, and by extension Mycroft was less than perfect.

“Hello Mycroft,” he said, letting all the years of venom he’d saved for Sherlock leak into his words until he could barely recognise his own voice. “I know you are a busy man, but I’ve got something to say to you. If you want to hear my report, you can damn well ask me yourself. In person. You aren’t better than me, Mycroft Holmes. I don’t work for you. I’m not your lackey, I’m not your little brother’s babysitter. You’d better get your goddamned head out of your arse and come talk to me like a decent human being, because you aren’t getting a report any other way.”

Clicking the stop button made him feel oddly light, like the tension he’d been carrying for so long drained away during his outburst. He did feel better, happier, and he certainly respected himself a little more for actually standing up for himself, even if antagonising Mycroft Holmes wasn’t exactly the most intelligent thing he’d ever done. Andrea would get the message to Mycroft, Lestrade knew she would, but he wasn’t sure how Mycroft would react.

Andrea was looking a little shell-shocked, and after a moment she laughed loudly. “Oh god,” she gasped in between laughs. “I cannot wait to see his expression!”

“I do hope he’s not going to get me killed,” he muttered. “Or fired.”

Lestrade wasn’t sure it was possible, but she laughed even harder at that. “Unlikely.”

“Why do I get the impression you know something I don’t?” he asked suspiciously.

Her only reply was a slightly frightening knowing smirk. “Well, that explains that,” he muttered sarcastically.

They were silent for a moment as Lestrade’s mind tried to make the required connections. He just didn’t have enough information, or as Sherlock would say, he needed more data, so eventually he gave up his futile attempt to understand a man he had never met and turned to Andrea. Now that she was able to speak freely, Lestrade was curious about her.

“Do you have a boyfriend?” he asked, then realising how it might sound added, “That wasn’t me asking for a date, by the way. You are about 20 years too young.”
She looked at him sharply, an assessing gaze almost as uncomfortable as Sherlock’s, but after a moment the gaze softened. “No boyfriend at the moment,” she replied quietly. “I just broke up with my boyfriend of two years, actually. He couldn’t deal with my job.”

He nodded sympathetically, “I understand that. I chose my job over relationships a long time ago. I couldn’t find that illusive middle ground. I wouldn’t give up, Andrea, you’re young enough and smart enough to find a way to make it work.”

“I hope so,” she replied a little sadly.

That pretty much killed the conversation from then on. He was too tired to bother making small talk and he thought she rather appreciated the silence. He rested his pounding head on the cool tinted glass of the window and tried to keep his eyes open. The hallucinogen had made him see what everyone else had seen, but it was borne out of fear and while the Hound had been terrifying, that’s not what he saw when he closed his eyes. Every time he closed his eyes he saw a stack of photographs, which may seem like a strange thing to fear until you saw the captions.


These were the things that haunted him, the cases he’d never solved, and for each person he knew there was one more murderer he had failed to put behind bars. Since Sherlock started working with Lestrade, the stack of photographs had stopped growing so quickly, only three or four rather than 10 or 12 a year. With one glaring exception. The 12 people killed in the bombing by Moriarty were stacked neatly on the pile, haunting him and mocking him simultaneously. He looked away from the window and focused on his phone, sending emails to Donovan and his team and replying to a text from his landlord, anything to keep those photographs out of his mind’s eye.

When they finally got to his apartment he nearly fell over himself in his haste to get some proper rest. He did manage to thank Andrea before he left the car, but didn’t spare her a backward glance on his way inside. Throwing his keys into the bowl near the door and dumping his luggage on the supremely uncomfortable bed was all he bothered to do before he flopped down on his comfortable sofa and slept.

His phone roused him from sleep less than two hours later and he had to peel his face off the leather armrest he’d been using as a pillow before he answered.

“Lestrade.”

He listened for a moment to the voice on the other end of the line. “Where?” he demanded as he scrambled to grab a pen and a post-it note from the coffee table. He quickly jotted down the address. “I’ll be there.”

He got out of his travelling clothes and put on his usual work gear. With every layer he became less like Gregory Lestrade and more like Detective Inspector Lestrade. By the time he’d donned his coat, he was entirely behind his professional façade and ready as he would ever be to go back to work. There were only three days left of May and he wasn’t looking forward to what they might bring.

As cases go it was hardly difficult, but it still made him angry and a bit sad. Most crimes were crimes of passion. Money, revenge, power, anger… anything that caused an emotional response strong enough to result in a dead body. These crimes usually had plenty of accompanying evidence. This case was no different. It had been the brother, his motive clear-cut jealousy. He might as well have turned himself in with all the evidence he’d left at the crime scene. They had got a confession easily enough, so by 9pm he had finished the paperwork.
He got home after 10 and, as usual, slept on his couch. Although this time he managed to change into his pyjama trousers first. He was in the shower when his phone rang the next morning. He shut off the water and wrapped a towel around his waist before he answered because he could never answer the phone naked. It made him feel oddly exposed, even though the person on the other end of the call couldn’t tell he wasn’t wearing any pants.

“Lestrade,” he barked. Being interrupted on his day off, a Saturday at that, did not leave him in a particularly amicable mood.

“Care to explain why Mycroft is currently in my living room demanding answers about the Baskerville case? He’s being much louder than he usually is,” John asked in a rushed, quiet voice, like he didn’t want people to hear his conversation.

“He’s there because he wants to know what happened, obviously,” Lestrade answered testily, imitating Sherlock’s drawl for the last word, which was one of Sherlock’s favourites.

“Why the hell didn’t you tell him? He’s the one who sent you in the first place!”

“No. He sent his assistant, who then, under his orders, sent me,” Lestrade growled.

“What are you on about?” John asked, forgetting to be quiet.

“I’ve not met Mycroft Holmes. I am not ‘important’ enough for his majesty to give me orders in person, or even over the fucking phone, and I am DONE doing what he demands. I may be Sherlock’s sort-of-friend but I draw the line at being treated like a servant. If he wants a fucking report, he can fucking ask for it in person.”

“You aren’t missing out on much, to be fair,” John reasoned. “It’s actually quite rude that he’s not personally talked to you after all this time, but he’s a right twat, so I wouldn’t feel like you’re missing out.”

“Of course he’s a twat, he’s a Holmes,” he countered before taking a deep breath to continue. “Don’t report to him, if you don’t mind. I’ve things to say to him and I refuse to go running after him. He is going to have to come to me if he wants his stupid report.”

“He’s not a good man to make angry, Greg,” John said quietly.

“I won’t sacrifice the respect I have for myself. Not for him, not for anyone. I won’t bow to his intimidations just because he could get me fired, that’s not why I became a cop. I’m not a bloody footman and I’m not an appliance. Sherlock treats me like one often enough – ‘Lestrade, get me a case’, ‘Lestrade, stop bothering me with cases’ – like he can turn me on and off like a fucking toaster, but at least Sherlock helps. Mycroft doesn’t bloody well do anything for me, so I have no reason to go out of my way to help him.”

“I understand, I really do,” John said, “but Mycroft could just get one of the scientists at Baskerville to report.”

“He wants Sherlock’s side of the story, which he won’t get, so he’s trying for the next best thing. You’ve defied him often enough that he knows you won’t help unless Sherlock’s in danger, so he’s trying to pressure me.”

“I won’t report to him, Greg. No need to worry about that. I should probably get down there; I only left Sherlock alone with him because I’m mad at him. Spending 20 minutes alone with his older brother is the best punishment I could think of.”
Greg chucked. “Okay, you go save him. I haven’t been called in for a case and I was rather enjoying the time off, so I’d rather not have to deal with one of them killing the other. Not today.”

John laughed. “Okay, take care.”

Greg felt inexplicably like throwing his phone out the window, but instead placed it carefully on the coffee table and got dressed. It had been a while since he’d had time to get groceries, so he took the opportunity to stock up on the essentials. He couldn’t cook much beyond pasta, so he limited his purchases to frozen vegetables and jars of premade pasta sauce, stuff that wouldn’t go bad in a hurry. Some half decent beer, coffee for his drip machine at home and even a couple of blocks of chocolate made their way into his basket. He figured he was entitled to a little comfort food after getting shot at or seeing some poor sod’s dismembered corpse. With all his occupational hazards he deserved something more indulgent than chocolate but he couldn’t really think of anything.

The walk home from Tesco’s was longer when he was laden with shopping bags (the eco friendly ones of course), and it was past noon when he eventually arrived on his street. The aching of his shoulders was distracting enough that he actually ran into another pedestrian, knocking the taller man onto his arse. Lestrade immediately dropped his bags and offered his hand.

“Oh shit, I am so sorry,” he said quickly. “Are you okay?”

Lestrade surreptitiously checked out the man he’d knocked off his feet, literally. With a grin he thought ‘this day is getting a little better’ when he noticed how attractive the man was, but that thought was shut down as soon as he looked a little closer. The man’s aristocratic features, expensive three-piece suit and general demeanour screamed OLD MONEY louder than a pre-teen girl at a Justin Bieber concert. The dry-cleaning bill for that perfectly tailored masterpiece probably cost more than a week’s rent.

The man underneath the layers of expensive wool (and was that shirt silk?) was slim and toned, his face refined and serious but attractive all the same. He looked to be about Lestrade’s age, perhaps three or four years younger. He was jolted out of checking the man out when his hand was grasped reluctantly. He helped the posh pedestrian to his feet and smiled apologetically, trying to ignore the spark of attraction and the lovely warmth of the stranger’s hand in his.

“Are you okay?” he asked softly. “I really am sorry. I should have been looking where I was going.”

“It is of no consequence, I assure you,” the stranger answered, stiffly brushing dirt off his waistcoat.

Greg bent down to pick up a wooden-handled umbrella and handed it to the man sheepishly. “Here, you dropped this… Did I hurt you at all?”

“I am perfectly fine, Detective Inspector Lestrade,” he replied coldly.

Lestrade’s head snapped up so he could look directly into the stranger’s eyes. “I don’t know you, how do you know my name?” he demanded, shifting his stance so he could counter an attack if any came.

“I believe you work with my brother, on occasion,” he replied in a controlled, condescending voice that made Lestrade feel small and stupid, something Sherlock had only managed to do twice in the five years he’d known him.

Lestrade closed his eyes for a moment so he could convince himself that punching the man in broad daylight would be a really stupid idea, and only satisfying for a very brief moment. Not worth it.

“Mycroft Bloody Holmes,” he bit out, repeating the mantra not worth it over and over so he
wouldn’t punch him. He settled on some harsh words instead, “How nice of you to come down from the castle to visit the plebeians.”

It was a deliberately confrontational statement, and Lestrade was fully aware that Mycroft Holmes was not the safest person to confront, but he couldn’t help it. He was angry and frustrated and this man had already made him feel inferior for five years without even meeting him, so he couldn’t allow him to do the same in person.

“I was informed that my presence was requested,” he said with a slight scowl that clearly indicated he was NOT happy with the situation.

Lestrade resolved to delete the previous five minutes where he had thought him rather dishy and pretend it never happened. There was no way he could be attracted to this pretentious, self-entitled arse.

“Really,” he shot back. “Then, as you have so kindly acquiesced, we can have this conversation inside.”

“My car will take us to a more suitable location.”

“No,” he said angrily. “We are doing things my way for once. Get inside. Now.”

Mycroft’s eyebrows lifted minutely in surprise and he felt oddly smug about causing him to show any emotion at all.

“Very well,” he replied stiffly, and gestured for Lestrade to show him in.

Greg went inside and opened the door, going straight into the kitchen to put away the food. He could feel Mycroft’s eyes on his back and knew that he had probably learnt his entire life story from his groceries and the condition of his oven. Eventually, he turned around.

“Sit,” he ordered shortly.

“Really, Detective Inspector,” Mycroft began.

“I said sit,” he repeated louder.

Mycroft shut his mouth, hooked his umbrella on the back of the chair by the kitchen table and sat down.

“Good,” Lestrade said as he leaned on the doorjamb. He didn’t sit because he knew Mycroft was used to literally looking down on most people and didn’t want to give Mycroft the upper hand in any way. He wanted to show him that he wasn’t a pawn to push around a chessboard, he was a person who would not be ordered around without any explanation. He was a police officer. He knew all about rules and regulations and taking orders, he just chose to ignore the rules when he knew they were limiting him and allowing a murderer to go free. That’s why he allowed Sherlock to come in on his cases. If Mycroft explained his orders and Lestrade thought they made sense, he would follow them. Otherwise, he could shove his orders up his arse to keep the stick company.

“I am here,” Mycroft said, “in person, as requested. I would appreciate being given what I need. I hardly have time for this nonsense.”

“Make time,” Lestrade almost shouted. “You aren’t going to get what you want until I’m good and ready to give it to you.”
“Really, Detective Inspector, you are being unduly difficult.”

“Ask me,” he snarled in response.

“Pardon me?”

“I said ask me,” he repeated, crossing his arms over his chest so he wouldn’t be so tempted to strangle him.

“I’m afraid I do not know what you wish me to ask.”

“Ask for what you came for,” he snarled. “Politely.”

Mycroft’s blue eyes flashed angrily. “Is this really necessary, Detective Inspector?”

“Ask. Me.” he said. His voice was lower and angrier, a dangerous voice that clearly implied that Mycroft would not like what happened if he didn’t answer.

Mycroft glared at him, but said in a flat condescending voice, “Would you, please, give me a report regarding my brother’s case at Baskerville?”

Lestrade put a hand into his jacket pocket and pulled out a piece of paper folded neatly into quarters. He slapped it violently against Mycroft’s chest, who flinched but picked up the paper from his lap, looking strangely confused. Confusion was an expression Lestrade had never seen on a Holmes’ face before and it was certainly an entertaining sight, but not entertaining enough to stop Lestrade from being absolutely furious.

“You can get out. You have what you wanted.”

“Thank you, Detective Inspector,” he said emotionlessly, still staring at the paper in his hand.

“If you want anything else from me, Mycroft Holmes, you ask. I’ll take a blasted phone call.”

“Very well,” he answered stiffly. “Until next time, Detective Inspector Lestrade.”

Lestrade watched as Mycroft walked out of his flat and was disgusted when he couldn’t stop himself checking out the infuriating man’s arse. Although he did feel a little better when he noticed the dirt that had rubbed in to the perfectly tailored trousers from the fall.

It took Lestrade almost six hours to notice the umbrella that was still hooked around the top of his kitchen chair. He felt like throwing it out the open window but, for some reason, couldn’t bring himself to touch it, so he left it where it was and tried to ignore it for the rest of the night.
Chapter Summary

Lestrade wakes up early, drinks copious amounts of coffee and works on an interesting case.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is where the warning for Graphic Depictions of Violence becomes relevant. You have been warned. If anyone has any comments I promise I will read and reply to them all and the virtual cupcake is still on offer if someone guesses any of the songs I used to name the next 7 chapters. A huge thank you to everyone who is taking the time to read this, I had no idea there would be so many of you! Thank you, every single one of you.

When he woke up the umbrella was still there, directly in his line of sight, mocking him. He glared at it furiously for a moment before he turned away and walked to the kitchen to pour himself some coffee. It tasted absolutely awful. He never bought the nice blends because he couldn’t justify extra cost when both the cheap and expensive stuff gave him what he needed: caffeine. He didn’t really like the taste of coffee, if he was honest, but it was a necessary evil in his profession. Tea couldn’t quite cut it when he’d been awake for 34 hours. Besides, as a general rule Lestrade preferred to save his money. For what, he had no idea, but he felt better with that security blanket in place.

That was one reason he’d never moved to a better flat, and it was why he made do with his sofa rather than buying a better bed. It was also the reason he’d never cared overly much about his clothing. He had a suit for court appearances but otherwise he wore the same thing everyday, a uniform of sorts. A button-up shirt, black trousers, jumper and coat if it was cold enough, and maybe even gloves if it was freezing. Thinking about his propensity to save money made him glance back at the offending umbrella. It probably cost more than his best shoes, he thought blackly, which was another reason Mycroft Holmes was not at all attractive. Lestrade should probably count the bespoke suit as another point against the posh man but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. After all, from a purely objective standpoint of course, Mycroft looked rather eye-catching in a suit.

In no time at all he was getting ready to sleep, but for once wasn’t really looking forward to sleeping. He didn’t want to go into work the next morning, the second last day of May, because he wasn’t sure if it could get worse than what he’d already dealt with that month. With his head in his hands he closed his eyes and breathed deeply. He was so afraid that one more awful day would push him over the edge and he would go insane. He was so tired, exhausted even, and maybe it hadn’t just been the last month that started that feeling. He was wrung out, but he had started feeling like that a long time before May this year. Maybe it started when he met Sherlock, or maybe even before that, when he’d made DI.

He knew what his mother would have said. Her solution to every problem was the same: a cup of strong tea and a bone-crushing hug. Lestrade wouldn’t have said no to either option at that point.
God, he missed his mum.

He woke the next morning at 3:23 to a call from the yard which launched him into another case. London was a large city and finding a murderer, even if you knew who it was, was sometimes the hardest part. His day consisted of 12 hours at a computer screen, digging through leads and old associates, looking for phone numbers and addresses. That was the reality of police work, hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. He ended up pulling an all-nighter at the yard in an attempt to find the murderer, and for once his work paid off and he found the man.

In the morning he went with Donovan to make the arrest and completed the paperwork, along with the paperwork for the last couple of cases, with the rest of his time. It was less than 10 minutes before he would be off duty when he was called to a stabbing. This time it was just a kid, a 15-year-old who ran with the wrong crowd. Stabbed over an argument about drugs in a back alley behind a dumpster. Death was never pleasant, never dignified. Years of being a cop had taught Lestrade that much. However, it was always hard when it was a kid who’d bled out, alone and afraid, in a dark alley. Perhaps it was the loss of potential, or maybe it was the fact that these kids had only made one mistake and they hadn’t lived to learn from them like he had. Life was never fair. It was hard to believe otherwise when you were a cop, but sometimes it just plain sucked.

So he was stuck arresting a 16-year-old for murder after being awake for more than 36 hours. He only narrowly managed to avoid being knifed in the face while arresting the teenager, and that made him more sad than angry because the kid had just added another few years to his sentence for resisting arrest and assault with a deadly weapon. Another kid who made a mistake and would now pay for it, but he had killed someone so Lestrade couldn’t spare much sympathy for the kid. Murder was a freaking huge mistake to make, after all.

He clocked out without finishing the mound of paperwork that had somehow managed to make its way onto his desk in the four hours he had been out of the office and went straight to his flat. It was welcoming and familiar as he stripped down to his pants and pulled a blanket over himself, closing his eyes against the images that plagued his mind and slipping slowly into sleep.

The leather of the couch cushions stuck to his bare skin, so when he got up the next morning he had to peel himself off the leather, which had left interesting patterns of red creases on his chest and arms. He sat up on the seat and reflected on the worst May he’d ever had, realising that he wasn’t looking forward to the new month. If it got any worse, he wasn’t sure he could handle it. After a shower and a quick shave he dressed again for work.

He was neck-deep in paperwork and on his 5th cup of coffee when Sherlock waltzed in, without knocking, of course.

“I need a case, Lestrade,” he demanded petulantly, much like a 5-year-old demanding sweets.

“No,” Lestrade replied without looking up.

“I need a case,” he repeated, his voice getting louder with every word.

“And I told you no. We haven’t got anything for you.”

“Boring!”

“Oh for god’s sake, go bother John. You don’t actually like me, so there’s no reason to spend any more time in my presence,” he snapped.

“John,” Sherlock said with a sigh, “is acting like a child.”
“That’s rich, coming from you.”

“I did nothing wrong!” he argued. “It was only an experiment.”

“It was cruel, Sherlock,” he said bluntly. “You effectively put an ex-soldier with a history of PTSD through psychological trauma. You have no idea how that might have affected him. Nightmares, flashbacks, heck you could have brought back his limp! Have you no respect for him, none at all?”

“I… I needed more data!” he argued.

“No. You could have got it another way, any other way. Fuck, you could have just asked and John would have done it, he would have trusted you. You broke his trust, Sherlock. It won’t be easy to earn it back.”

“He is angry,” Sherlock said, looking a little confused. “Disappointed.”

“Yeah, he has a right to be.”

Sherlock deflated a little and murmured, “He forced me to converse with Mycroft.”

Sherlock’s tone of voice when saying his brother’s name made him laugh, it was almost like he was saying a swear word. “Yeah, I just met your esteemed brother. He’s an arse.”

“He is,” Sherlock agreed automatically before looking up sharply when he realised what Lestrade had said. “Wait, what do you mean ‘just’ met him?”

“Met him on Saturday. He never talked to me personally, not even a phone call, not for five years. He communicated through his assistant.”

“He didn’t… kidnap you?” Sherlock asked with a strange look in his eyes. It was the sort of contemplative look that meant Sherlock was going to be a twat to someone in the next few minutes, throwing about deductions and acting all superior. It was a disturbingly like Sherlock’s normal expression. Sometimes, Lestrade thought it was his default setting. Setting one: insensitive dick; setting two: superior arse; setting three: insensitive dick.

“His assistant did.”

“Anthea? Oh, that is interesting,” he mused, that look becoming more pronounced as he grinned, literally grinned. “Well, Lestrade. You have brought to my attention a very, very interesting case. Thank you.”

He turned and flounced out of the room. “Wait!” Lestrade called out after Sherlock’s swift, dramatic, coat-swirling exit, but he didn’t turn back or even call over his shoulder. With a sigh, Lestrade resumed his paperwork, too tired to think about what he’d said that had caught Sherlock’s attention. He had long ago stopped trying to understand the way the infuriating genius’ mind worked, it just wasn’t worth his time.

The rest of his day was boring and uneventful, which Lestrade actually didn’t mind. If the first of June was an indication of the rest of the month, he could deal with that. He’d take boredom over getting stabbed any day. There were no murders in his division, unless you were the sort of person who counted the tragic murder of all the trees sacrificed to the bureaucracy of triplicate paperwork. He was in more danger of a paper cut than getting shot, which made it a pretty good day in his book.

He checked out on time for once, even had time to cook himself dinner and watch three episodes of Doctor Who on telly before he went to bed (well, couch) at a fairly reasonable time.
Lestrade woke the next morning to the shrill ringing of his mobile phone. The screen was lit up blue with no number displayed, just the white letters ‘Private Number’.

“Lestrade,” he growled.

He heard the person on the other end of the line take a breath, like they were about to say something but no words came. “Hello?” he asked.

He was answered by the dial tone and he studied the display of his phone for a moment before shrugging it off as a wrong number. A little weird, but there had been no heavy, threatening breathing, so he wasn’t worried.

When he got out of his flat and stepped onto the street, the brisk summer weather made him feel more awake, more alive, than the three cups of coffee he’d already drank that morning. As he walked through London towards the Yard, he felt a little better about the rest of the month. It was hard to be pessimistic when the sun was shining and his mobile was silent, especially considering he was naturally inclined to be realistic. He walked past a shop front and had to double back in surprise. The shop girl was hanging up advertisements for the ‘summer range’. It must have crept up on him, because he was caught off guard. Summer was a strange time, the kids got out of school for the year and parents took holidays to the country, but crime didn’t stop. It didn’t even slow. It got worse. The worst part of summer was the increase in teen-related violence. It was sad that when Lestrade thought of summer, he didn’t think of the beach or the sun, he thought of a kid overdosed in a dark alley.

The shop girl smiled welcomingly at him and he managed a tight smile in response before he moved on. It usually took him a little less than 20 minutes to walk from his flat to New Scotland Yard, another reason he’d never bothered to find a nicer place to live.

He stopped off at the coffee shop, strategically placed less than a block away from the Yard. It’s name was a reflection of this strategic placement – “200 Yards” was definitely the best café within walking distance of NSY. The young barista greeted him warmly by name.

“Lestrade,” she said, smiling brightly. Amy had bright purple hair, multiple piercings and an 8-bit heart tattoo on her left wrist. She was a talented barista and was paying her way through university, getting a degree in criminal justice. Lestrade had been waylaid by her discussions about the police force more than once, and he was certain she’d make a great cop.

“Morning, Amy,” he replied with a smile. He was 25 years older than her and had begun to feel like an honorary uncle to the 20-year-old in the three years he had known her.

“Your usual?”

“Make it a triple,” he corrected with a grimace.

She winced sympathetically as she went though the motions on the espresso machine. “Bad week?”

“You could say that.”

“I thought you had some time off, weren’t you going someplace warm before the summer rush?”

“I went to Spain, which was nice, very nice. But then I had to use my other week on a… personal matter in Dartmoor.”

She quirked a purple eyebrow. “It’s that Holmes bastard, isn’t it?”
“Yeah, although officially speaking…”

“I know,” she cut him off. “He’s useful for the Met, I get that. He just rubs me the wrong way. He treats you pretty terribly when he should be thanking you for putting your job at risk and giving him the cases in the first place. His friend, John, comes in sometimes.”

“I didn’t know that,” he said, surprised.

“He meets a guy here. Some poncy Tory bloke. Wears a three-piece suit in the middle of summer. They argue a lot, but John’s a nice guy. The other one never even looks at the staff, never orders anything, either.”

Lestrade’s eyes hardened. “I know exactly who that is.”

“Really?” she asked excitedly. “I asked John but he wouldn’t tell me who he was.”

“His name is Mycroft,” he replied absently. His mind was focused on the fact that Mycroft Holmes met John Watson at his coffee shop. Well… the coffee shop frequented by Yarders.

“Mycroft?”

“Mycroft Holmes,” he clarified.

“Ah,” she said.

“He’s a right prat, only met him once and it did not go well.”

“I’ll make sure to give him some extra attitude for you.”

“Don’t,” he warned quickly. “He’s not a good man to piss off.”

She opened her mouth to reply but thought better of it and nodded. “Noted.”

The coffee was hot, strong and black, the roast nutty rather than fruity. Just how he liked it. He gave Amy a 10 pound tip because she wouldn’t take his money when he offered to help her with her Uni fees. She rolled her eyes at the extra money but took it anyway.

“I’ll see you, maybe tomorrow,” he said.

“Take care, Lestrade.”

“I will. Call me if you need any help with anything, Aims.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she said dismissively. “Go back to work, old man.”

It was just gone 8:00 when he sat down at his desk, which was much earlier than most people arrived, but as DI they expected him to be there when they arrived and stay back long after they left. He took the time to check the summer holiday requests, which his boss and HR approved.

Anderson, Dimmock and Gregson’s names stood out from the list. Having two of the serious crime DIs off for most of July pretty much guaranteed him that shift. He would most likely be on call for the entire month. Gregson was married and Dimmock had a long-term girlfriend, so he didn’t begrudge them the time with their families, and he was the most logical choice for that shift. Anderson was obviously spending some time with his wife, which meant Donovan would be his Sergeant, seeing as she had no family apart from a sister in Scotland and wasn’t too fond of holidays in general. He sighed and sent a quick email to HR volunteering himself for that shift and it was
At 8:23 his mobile rang. A school kid had found a dead guy strung up, naked, between the posts of the school football goals. His first thought was “That kid’s going to need some serious therapy,” followed closely by, “Sherlock might be good for this one.” But when he dialled a number, it wasn’t Sherlock’s, it was Donovan’s. He assembled his team and went directly to secure the scene.

It struck him hard when he saw the body. Even after 25 years on the force, some murders were just… too much. There was a pale-faced 15-year-old standing with his back to the body, talking to a constable. Even Lestrade felt queasy. He took a deep breath and studied the body closer. It was a man, late 40s, maybe early 50s, strung up inside the football goals like a macabre X-marks-the-spot. His chest was covered in stab wounds and gashes inflicted post-mortem with a knife that had been taped to his left hand. The same knife, Lestrade presumed, that had slit his throat.

There were no signs of a struggle, which was a little odd, but the most disturbing aspect of the crime was that the naked man was… well, to be blunt, the killer had cut of the poor bugger’s balls, before slitting his throat. Lestrade felt ill at the thought alone and had to take a deep breath to stop himself from gagging. He steeled himself and called Sherlock. After some borderline begging on his part and a few exasperated sighs, Sherlock agreed to come in, arriving less than a minute after Anderson and the forensic team. Forensics didn’t have a chance to begin working because upon seeing the body, every single male on the team went pale and wretched in synchrony. To be fair, the females were only moderately less affected by the experience. Of course, Sherlock just looked at the body in obvious fascination and ducked under the police tape with John following behind. John didn’t look overly affected, but he was a little pale.

“The marks on his chest,” Lestrade said when he reached them. “They’re morse code, right?”

“You spotted that?” Sherlock asked.

“Yes,” he replied testily.

“It says one of five,” John said after a moment.

“Oh FUCK,” Lestrade swore under his breath. He was NOT looking forward to attending any more crime scenes like that one. The… emasculation, coupled with the message, screamed ‘mentally unstable serial killer’. Not only that, the location of the body and it’s positioning clearly reflected the killer’s need for recognition, which was both dangerous and helpful in some ways. This pathological need for recognition certainly did not bode well for the remaining four possible victims. In situations such as these, Lestrade’s realism was just as soul-crushing as pessimism. There are many reasons why optimists don’t generally make good police officers, and situations such as these are a big part of that.

Lestrade mostly tuned out Sherlock’s deductions; he was fairly skilled at picking out only the vital information and translating it from ‘genius’ to ‘actual person’ speech.

Female killer
Military family
Between 30 and 40
Slight build
5 foot 3 inches (approximately)

“She’d be too small for active military service. Also, as a woman, she wouldn’t be on the front lines. Most likely she has a military father,” Sherlock continued.
“True,” John acknowledged. “But there are branches of the military who take other things into account that are more important than the physical alone. She could, in fact, be MI5 or MI6.”

“Ah,” Sherlock said. “Excellent deduction, John. That is indeed a possibility.”

John flushed at the compliment, which from Sherlock was a rare occurrence. Even rarer was Sherlock’s smile, the surprised ‘someone else said something brilliant’ smile that Lestrade had only ever seen twice. Once for Irene Adler and a second time for Moriarty.

“Alright, I’ll see what evidence I can find, although I doubt much will come up. This was staged meticulously, a killer like this one won’t have been stupid enough to leave behind physical evidence.”

“The victim is a military man, try their databases. He is far fitter than most men his age, not to mention…”

“Okay, thanks,” Lestrade said quickly, cutting him off.

Sherlock sent him an annoyed look and turned, coat swirling, stalking back behind the police line and around the corner. John had to jog to keep up with Sherlock’s long-legged stride. The less polite yarders sometimes referred to John as Sherlock’s Bitch, or Puppy if in polite company, but Lestrade felt entirely different on the matter. John was loyal, perhaps to a fault, but he did not blindly follow Sherlock’s lead. He had argued against, scolded and threatened one of the smartest, most dangerous men in the world without any fear. No, John Watson was certainly no shrinking violet, and underestimating him would be an incredibly stupid, possibly lethal mistake to make. Besides, Lestrade actually liked John, which was more than he could say for most of his colleagues.

He spent another hour at the scene, overseeing forensics and making notes, before the body was carted off for an autopsy and drug screening, enabling him to finally go back to the yard and start some real work. Due to the high possibility of a serial killer, the blood work and DNA for the John Doe was bumped up the very long line and he received the results within six hours.

Before the blood work came back he had tried the missing person’s database, which, predictably, yielded no results. He had also searched the databases for similar cases – body dumped in a public place, messages carved into skin – but found nothing. He did, however, find some indication of a killer that routinely slit the throats of unconnected victims, probably some sort of hit man, which didn’t fit with the highly personal nature of the killings he was investigating. The links between the woman he was looking for and the unsolved murders wasn’t strong enough for him to justify looking in that area with the evidence he did have, but he put a note in his personal files of the connection, limited though it was, including the case file numbers of the other open cases.

After the lab results came back identifying the man as Major Liam Davidson, he spent the next few hours explaining to a distraught wife that her husband had been murdered and no, she couldn’t see the body. It was hard enough under normal circumstances, when he did not have to deal with the threat of more deaths hanging over his head. He looked into the Major’s military files for any misconduct reports or reprimands and found no formal indications of bad behaviour, but he could read between the lines. The major liked the company of women who were not his wife, and in some cases consent was dubious, although nothing was ever proven. This certainly gave his wife motive for murder, but Lestrade was absolutely certain it wasn’t her. For one, she was far too tall to fit the profile Sherlock had given him, and two, she was genuinely upset about the major’s death.

After calling the man’s workmates, the picture began clearing and he found a lead. An older soldier remembered a rumour involving the major, a few of his friends and a particular young girl, and even remembered a few names. One was an officer and the other was an outside contractor working with
the IT department on base. He found the London address of the contractor and fetched Donovan so they could question him.

They were too late. He was strung up in an X position between the two banisters of his staircase, held up by his wrists and ankles as the middle of his body sagged, Roman Numerals carved onto the pallid skin of his stomach.

“Two of five,” Lestrade said aloud in a pained whisper as Donovan dry heaved behind him. “Fuck.”

He called it in and left Donovan to guard the front of the house while he went hunting for evidence or clues of some kind. In the bedroom, on the bedside table, was a photo of five men: the dead man downstairs, the army Major and three others. When he pulled the photo out of the frame with gloved fingers he noticed the inscription on the back. Names for all five men.

When Sherlock arrived, Lestrade was already gone, looking into the other three men for a connection that might, conceivably, get them killed in such a violent way. They had all worked at or near a military base but it wasn’t until he looked into the record of an ex-army captain that he saw the connection. They had all been involved in an ongoing conflict with one of the young girls in the nearby town, the daughter of a lawyer and a banker who had been 18 at the time, 20 years prior. Captain Jameson had received a slap on the wrist for being too “persistent” in his attentions to the young woman, which was a polite way of saying he was harassing her.

Jane Carson. As soon as her name was mentioned he looked her up. She had taken world politics at university and come out at the top of her class, but had dropped off the map halfway through her PhD only to reappear five years later in middle management of the British Agricultural Ministry, of all things. He couldn’t help the snort that slipped out when he read that. Couldn’t the secret service be a little more… secret?

By all accounts she was a normal, law-abiding citizen, but he had a bad feeling that these killings were a form of vigilante justice. The emasculation clearly pointed to one conclusion: sexual assault. The gang rape of an 18-year-old. In Lestrade’s opinion, that sent those bastards into the inner circle of hell…but that didn’t mean he could condone killing them. He was not looking forward to arresting her, if he could even FIND her.

Sherlock called to report – well, John called and Sherlock yelled his interruptions at him. They were checking out a lead on location, something about soil and sand and mould. He gave them a little of what he’d found out and let them get on with it. Glancing at the time, he noticed that it was already 9pm(?) so he cracked his back, gathered his coat and wallet, and got up. He wanted to get to 200 Yards before it closed, but before he could walk the short distance to the café, a black car pulled up in front of him. He swore loudly and an old lady in head-to-toe lavender glared at him as she scurried past, crossing the street to get away from him.

Anthea greeted him by shoving an extra large coffee into his hands.

“Hey,” he mumbled quickly before gulping down the deliciously hot caffeinated beverage, despite it’s scalding heat.

“Mr Holmes has something you may be interested in.”

“Oh?” he asked acerbically. “Is he going to explain that himself?”

“Actually, yes,” she said with a grin as she handed him a mobile phone. It wasn’t exactly like hers, being entirely touch screen, but it looked just as expensive and shiny.
“What the heck?” he murmured, unlocking the phone with a swipe of his finger and pressing the ‘play’ button that came up, lifting the phone to his ear carefully.

“Hello, Detective Inspector,” Mycroft’s posh, almost icy voice began emanating from the small, but excellent quality speakers so it sounded like he was sitting right next to Lestrade. He jumped a little in surprise but listened carefully as Mycroft continued speaking. “I believe you have stumbled across a rather difficult and unusual case. I can help. In fact, it is rather my responsibility to help. The woman you are looking for is both dangerous and highly motivated, a combination you are not trained to handle. Therefore, you have two options that I can see. Either you allow me to convince her to stop, or you let her finish what she has started. As much as I… respect your abilities as a police officer, this matter is rather out of your control. Accept my help and be assured she will be punished and given the aid that she needs.”

Lestrade was angry, then sad, then angry again before he settled on frustrated. The message finished and he stared at the device in his hands for a moment before taking a breath and pressing the record button.

“Mycroft,” he began, his voice tired. “Your help is appreciated.”

It almost hurt to admit that but, as always, the job came before his pride. “I have conditions,” he continued. “She is to be handed over to the Met with enough evidence to prosecute her for both deaths. The other three men are to be punished to the full extent of the law while she should plead insanity and be placed in a secure, but fucking nice, facility. She will get to see them being prosecuted, see their personal and professional lives disintegrate. I get to close my case, she gets closure, and no one else has to die. Those are my terms.” He paused. “By the way, Mycroft, I have a fucking phone. Just call me next time.”

When he turned back to Andrea he was surprised to see her expression. She looked… impressed. He handed the phone back to her and she slipped it back into her pocket.

“I’d better get going,” she said as her phone screen lit up.

“Go, go. I’ve got forensic reports to read. Thanks for the coffee.”

She nodded, smiled, and slid back into the front seat of the car next to the silent driver.

It was 4am when the woman turned herself in, admitted to the crime and was processed. She should have been a normal, well-adjusted woman, but those monsters had turned her into what she had become. A broken shell of a woman, just a fraction of what she could have been. He pitied her until it hurt.

Two days later, it was Lestrade’s day off, supposedly. He shrugged off his coat as he only just arrived home. It was light outside, but still early in the morning and he’d been up all night again. Something in the left hand pocket of his coat clunked against the wall when he hung it in the cupboard near the door. He found a smooth, metal and plastic object that was familiar, even though he’d seen it only once. It was embarrassing how much he’d thought about Mycroft’s message in the two days since he last heard from him.

He played the message without hesitation before he sat down on his couch.

“While I may not personally feel sentiment, in this case your empathy prevented three deaths and allowed a damaged woman some solace. You have not permitted your pride to prevent you from accepting my help, or my brother’s for that matter, and that, my dear Detective Inspector, makes you not only a good man but an intelligent one.”
Lestrade had to replay the message three times before Mycroft’s words fully seeped into his over-tired brain and he actually believed his ears. Mycroft Holmes had called him, Gregory Lestrade, intelligent. It should have been impossible. Eventually, he smiled. He decided he’d take the compliment and never forget it. As brilliant as Sherlock was, Greg had a nagging feeling that Mycroft was smarter – a thought that was terrifying, but made the compliment all the more complimentary. His smile slowly evolved into a grin. He would remember those words, in Mycroft’s voice, every single time Sherlock called him an idiot.

“I do have a mobile, Mycroft,” he began with a huff. “But drama, I suppose, is an inherited Holmesian trait. I wonder if it is a product of nature or nurture? I appreciate your help, as well as the compliment. Now we are even, from the Dartmoor thing. I’ll keep an eye on Sherlock. John is still unhappy with him, for good reason, and I don’t know what that will do to Sherlock. Take care, Mycroft. I’d still prefer a phone call, but this is better than before, so I’ll take what I can get.”

He still thought Mycroft was arrogant and overbearing but the compliment went a long way to soothe his battered ego, especially considering Mycroft had gone out of his way to deliver the message, even if it wasn’t in the form that Lestrade had been expecting. He still disliked the man, but that fierce white hot feeling of hate fuelled by hurt pride and uncertainty had stopped burning as soon as Mycroft had offered his help, free of charge.

He snooped around through the contacts of the phone and noted that there were only two numbers: Anthea, who he assumed was Andrea, and MH. He looked out the window and smiled when he noticed the black car idling out the front of his building. He brought up a text message to Anthea.

Message received, am keeping the phone for further communication - GL

Noted. Will inform MH - A

Thanks. Go home - GL

He waited until the car pulled away from the curb before he attached the audio file to a message and sent it to MH. After the message went through, he pulled up the security on the phone. It had a familiar system in place, like a PIN on an ATM, but with a lockdown and delete-all safeguard number. After the Irene Adler case, John had explained the particulars, which he must have gotten from either Sherlock or Mycroft, and Lestrade had been fiercely glad he’d never been dragged into that case. He smiled wryly, glad that someone had learnt something from that mess. He set the lockout number as his bankcard PIN and the open number as a random set of numbers that had no meaning. He was certainly smart enough to learn from other people’s mistakes.

He clicked the lock button on the top of the phone and placed it on the table next to his normal mobile phone. It wasn’t easy to get to sleep that night, his treacherous brain was bringing up images of Mycroft when he closed his eyes and he couldn’t get those coolly spoken words of encouragement out of his head.

“And that, my dear Detective Inspector, makes you not only a good man but an intelligent one.”

The words echoed over and over again in his over-tired brain, even though his eyes were heavy with exhaustion and his shoulders ached. Eventually, he managed to fall asleep, but he couldn’t escape Mycroft even then. His dreams were littered with his voice, his suits and his goddamned umbrella still hooked to the back of his dining room chair.
Chapter Summary

Lestrade has a heart-to-heart.

Chapter Notes

It has not been a good week. For me or for the world. In any case I hope you all enjoy the new chapter. All my thanks to my editor, any mistakes remaining are mine alone. If anyone is interested the music video for Radiohead's Just is probably the best ever, I'd recommend looking it up if you haven't seen it already.

He slept for a couple of hours to take the edge off his exhaustion but got up before noon to head to the shops. It took him less than three minutes to find the correct phone charger in the electronics store, which was good because he hadn’t eaten since breakfast the previous day. He could hear John’s voice chastising him in his head.

“You’re almost as bad as Sherlock!”

The food court had countless options, from greasy fast food to mostly authentic Thai and Indian. He bought a dish with noodles and vegetables to placate his head-John and sat down. He was about to eat the last of his noodles when a hand on his shoulder made him jump and spin around quickly to evaluate the threat.

“Greg? What are you doing here?”

It was John, and once Greg’s heart rate had slowed to normal levels he replied, “Damn it, John, you almost gave me a heart attack!”

“Sorry mate,” John chuckled. “You off work?”

“Supposedly,” he said with a wave of his hand. “I’m a DI, I’m not sure if I’m ever off duty. I was just doing some shopping.”

John smiled. “I’m just hanging out here until Mycroft leaves Baker Street.”

“Still mad at Sherlock then?” Greg asked softly before nodding resolutely. “Good. Well, personally I hope Mycroft trips over his own umbrella and Sherlock gets his coat caught in the door of a tube train.”

John laughed, but the sound was sort of hollow in the brightly lit food court. “Speaking of Mycroft’s umbrella, he had this one that he used to take everywhere, but then a few weeks ago he showed up to our meeting and he wasn’t carrying an umbrella at all. I told Sherlock, who smiled that smile, you know the one I mean, and then the next time he saw Mycroft he gave him another one. Since when does Sherlock give anyone a gift, let alone Mycroft?”
Greg blushed a little and looked down, but John wasn’t watching him, staring at a young family instead. For the first time, Lestrade noticed how tired he looked. Not just tired… sad. Like he’d lost something. “Anyway, that was an interesting outcome with that last case. Sherlock was disappointed.”

“Of course he was,” Lestrade muttered. “He didn’t get to take the credit.”

“So what happened?” John asked, still looking away.

“She was… She had a minor position at the Ministry of Agriculture,” he said slowly. John jerked in surprise and finally turned to face him. “So… Mycroft?”

Greg nodded, “Mycroft.”

“I didn’t think you were… on good terms,” John said eventually.

“I swallow my pride for the Holmes’.”

John grinned. “It’s either that or not deal with them at all. You see what it’s doing to Anderson and Donovan? I have no pride left when it comes to them. I know that I can either help them or be against them, and to be honest, I’d much rather be on the side that has Sherlock.”

Greg decided to ignore the obvious implications of that statement and go in a different direction. John had enough people teasing him about his unusual relationship with Sherlock and Greg wasn’t about to make one of his only true friends uncomfortable while he was obviously still working things out in his own mind. “Is that why you meet Mycroft regularly at 200 Yards, the coffee shop near Scotland Yard?”

John stopped smiling almost instantly. “How did you know that?”

“Detective, remember?”

“Ah… right… well, it’s not what you think. I don’t inform on Sherlock. I am Mycroft’s personal physician.”

“What?” Lestrade gaped. He didn’t know what to expect, but he certainly hadn’t even considered that.

“I think it’s partly because he knows I won’t take his money and Sherlock won’t take his charity, but he wants us to have some usable income,” John said with a shrug. “But really, it should be a full time job.”

“Is he… why does he need a personal physician?”

“Nothing bad,” John assured him quickly. “But I can’t say anything further. Doctor-Patient confidentiality.”

“So when you argue, you’re fighting about his health?”

“Yeah,” John said with a shrug. “Work less, eat more and stress less.”

“Ah. So high blood pressure, beginnings of a stomach ulcer and migraines?”

John gaped at him. “I’m used to that crap from Sherlock, but… you?”
Greg decided not to be offended by that and shrugged again. “I have a doctor of my own, John. That’s all stuff I’ve heard before. Although I do get the additional ‘lay off the caffeine for god’s sake’.”

John laughed. “You should fire him and see me instead. I’ll give you a discount.”

“You’re a great doctor, but I ain’t letting one of my best friends give me a prostate exam unless it’s not for medical purposes.”

John spluttered and coughed out a strangled, “Oh…”

“That was a joke,” Greg supplied quickly. “Not me propositioning you. You’re really not my type. No offense, but I don’t really go for blondes.”

“You…what?” John stared at him, looking like his brain had short-circuited, rebooted, then proceeded to shut down.

Greg was honestly surprised that Sherlock hadn’t somehow figured out his sexual orientation and shared it with John. “You didn’t… You didn’t know?”

“I mean… you never said anything. It’s not a problem… I just didn’t know.”

“I don’t date. Haven’t in years. It’s pretty much irrelevant at this point,” Greg explained softly, trying to sound prosaic about something that had taken him years to deal with.

“Why?”

“Why don’t I date?” he asked. John nodded. “I picked my career a long time ago. I realised that it wasn’t fair of me to expect a partner be okay playing second-fiddle to the Yard, so I picked the one that was the most important.”

“And you’re happy with that choice?” John asked, looking him directly in the eyes with a knowing look that rivalled Sherlock’s.

“Are you happy living with Sherlock?” he countered, immediately regretting it when he saw John’s face fall.

“Most of the time.” He said it so quietly that Greg could barely hear him.

“There’s your answer then,” he replied just as quietly. “Sometimes I get lonely, but come on, what bloke is going to put up with my hours? Cancelled dates, constant danger, 30 hour days?”

“It sounds like you’re describing my life,” John said a little louder. “Are you saying I should just stop looking?”

Greg paused and looked away. He had an answer to that question, but he wasn’t sure it was one John wanted to hear. Eventually, he decided it was about time he gave John his opinion on the matter. They were friends, after all. “Why keep looking when you’ve found someone who not only puts up with that, but *thrive* on it.”

“Sherlock and I aren’t together,” he said flatly.

“Not in the sexual sense of the word, no,” Lestrade agreed, still looking away. “But in everything else? You’re pretty much married.” He held a hand up to stop John’s protest before he could voice it. “I’m not saying you have to shag him. I’m saying that all those women aren’t going to be able to deal
with the relationship you have with him, and he’s not going to be able to deal with you having a relationship with anyone other than him.”

“All those women,” John scoffed. “You make me sound like some sort of man-whore. Besides, why should it bother him? He’s married to his work and doesn’t want a relationship.”

“A bit late for that,” Greg replied with a soft laugh. “Look, John. He’s your friend and he is… not particularly good at expressing or dealing with emotions. I’m not sure if he’s a sexual being at all, but I know that he fancies you more than he’s ever fancied anyone.”

“So, basically, you’re saying Sherlock-fucking-Holmes is in love with me, and may or may not want to shag me?”

“That is precisely what I’m saying.”

“You’re fucking insane, Greg,” he said incredulously.

“You made him look vulnerable,” Greg pointed out. “When you were mad at him after Baskerville – well, when you were obviously mad at him. I think you still are upset, with good reason, of course. But the thing is, John, I’ve seen Sherlock dying, but before you I had never seen him vulnerable.”

“We’re friends.”

“Yes. The only friend he’s ever admitted to having. He cares.”

“That doesn’t mean he LOVES,” John replied, voice breaking just a little at the end. It was a good thing that Lestrade was looking away, because the pain in John’s eyes was enough to make any seasoned officer tear up.

“Oh, John… of course it does.”

John clenched his fists at his sides and ground out, “We are not having this conversation anymore.”

“Oh, okay,” Lestrade agreed. He hadn’t been expecting the conversation to go well, but friends were supposed to ask the hard questions and push for answers when it was important enough. Lestrade had managed to avoid doing so previously, but he could see both of them self-destructing if they didn’t get their shit together in time. They balanced each other in a way that should have been impossible, but then again, some of the best things in life are the things that nobody can explain. “Want to go for a pint?” he asked eventually. If John wasn’t ready to face the facts, they might as well do the quintessentially British thing and drown any real emotional conversation in alcohol.

“Um… okay,” John said, looking understandably confused by Lestrade’s turn-around. Most people bugged John incessantly about his feelings for Sherlock, which only served to make John more defensive.

It wasn’t until after they had settled down with their beers that John asked a question that almost made beer come out of Lestrade’s nose.

“So if I’m not your type… is Sherlock?”

He coughed and spluttered, spraying the table top with a fine layer of beer. “No!” he gasped, as soon as he could breathe.

“Not one bit?” John asked incredulously.
“He… well, he is beautiful, there’s no denying that… But really, he’s beautifully untouchable, like a marble statue or a sunset. I never really saw him as sexually attractive, he’s just a force of nature made of sharp lines and angles with an even sharper tongue. When I met him… he was a mess. Skinnier than he is now, I could have counted his ribs. He was pale and jaunty and the third time I ever saw him he was lying in a pool of his own filth with a needle still stuck in his arm. I could never get that image out of my head after that.”

“Oh god,” John said, closing his eyes as if to ward off the mental picture Greg had created. “How did you meet?”

“He solved a case for me. He wouldn’t stop talking, so I checked and he was right,” Greg said simply. “He was clean then, had been for a couple of months, so I made an agreement with him: stay off the drugs and be in on my cases, touch them again and he wouldn’t get a second chance. I saw him once more on a kidnapping case… We caught the guy, but the little girl didn’t make it, and he couldn’t handle that. That is where the ‘will caring help me save them’ attitude comes from. I found him, and since he refused to go to rehab, I did it myself. I helped him through the detox period and talked to him about how to handle difficult cases. I don’t know if he actually listened to a word I said, but somehow it helped. Probably because I was willing to take the time to try when nobody had ever done that before, with the possible exception of Mycroft.”

“That’s… Not everyone would have done that. Given him a second chance.”

“He’s repaid whatever debt he owed me years ago. He’s an arse, but a great man. I’d even say he’s almost a good one, thanks to you.”

They both fell silent for a moment, John in embarrassment and Greg in respect for John because he knew that he needed time to think.

“So if not me, and not Sherlock, what is your type? Who’s the last guy that caught your attention?”

“Well, my last boyfriend was tall, pale and French. He had brown hair, blue eyes, slim. He was a wonderful guy. Jean was a teacher,” he said, trying not to feel the inevitable feeling of regret for what could have been. The past was past, and he couldn’t bring it back. He didn’t really want to, anyway.

“How does ‘tall, pale, brunette and slim with blue eyes’ not equal Sherlock?” John asked.

Greg blinked. “Jean wasn’t like Sherlock. For one, nobody is like Sherlock, and two, he wore black-framed glasses and band t-shirts. Jean smiled a lot.”

“What happened?”

“He moved back to Paris. He wanted me to come too, but… I couldn’t, not with my job. He’s married now, with an adopted kid.”

“How long ago was that?”

“More than 10 years.”

“Well that can’t have been the last man you fancied.”

Greg immediately thought of Mycroft and blushed involuntarily while trying desperately not to think of his amazing arse. John caught the look.

“Oooh, so who was it?” he asked leaning forward in his chair.
“Just some guy I bumped into on the street. I knocked him down, helped him up, exchanged a few words and got to ogle as he walked away.”

“Did you get a name?”

“He never said.” It was technically true, because Mycroft had not directly told Greg his name.

“Any other distinguishing features, aside from the amazing bum?” John asked, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

“You perve!” Lestrade exclaimed. “I didn’t get a chance to evaluate his other assets, but… he did have wonderful eyes. Blue. He was tall.”

“Too bad you didn’t get a name,” John said.

“Yeah,” he murmured into his pint. “What about you? Are you honestly telling me you aren’t attracted to Sherlock?”

“I… I’m not gay.”

“That wasn’t my question,” Lestrade said gently.

“But I’m not,” John insisted.

“Why do you have to give it a label?” Greg asked, gesturing a little angrier than he had planned. “Gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual, asexual… they’re just words. WE add meaning to those words; they don’t control us and place us in tight boxes of one or the other. You can be straight with an exception. Maybe that changes what category other people place you in, but you don’t have to identify with the label society gives you. What do labels matter?”

John looked down at his glass and traced lines in the condensation as he thought. “Maybe,” he conceded eventually. “You’re probably the best mate I have, apart from Sherlock, so if I can’t admit it to you, who can I admit it to?” He took a deep breath and Lestrade waited silently for him to get a hold of the words he wanted to say. “Yeah, I am attracted to Sherlock. Fuck, I’m not just attracted to him… I’m probably in love with him. That’s why it hurt so goddamned much when he… did what he did, at Baskerville.”

“Okay,” Lestrade said softly. “By the way, I don’t think you should forgive him for that if you don’t feel like forgiving him. He did something awful to you, and just because you feel like that towards him doesn’t mean you have to forgive him now.”

“That’s it?” he asked, finally looking up. “No ‘I told you so’? No ‘Oh my god I KNEW it’?”

“It’s not my job to tell you what you should and should not feel. I just thought either way, if you felt that or if you didn’t, you’d need someone to talk to.” Greg shrugged a shoulder and smiled gently.

“You…” John began, before he looked down at his glass again. “Thank you. I did need to tell someone. Someone who wouldn’t immediately shout ‘oh my GOD, so you ARE gay!’”

“Well, you aren’t. Not really. You’re in love, it doesn’t matter what they’ve got in their pants. I may be completely gay, but I do understand what you’re feeling. I can’t explain how I do understand, because I’m not sure myself. I just do.”

“Maybe I’m bisexual… but it’s not all men, or even some men. It’s just… one man. Heck, plenty of people think you’re fit, but you turn me on about as much as my sister does.”
Lestrade laughed. “Thanks, mate.”

“I didn’t mean…”

“I know what you meant. That’s my point. ONE man, he’s the only man.”

“You really do get it.”

“Yeah,” Greg said softly. “I get it.”

“Thanks.”

“I’ve got to be good for something, don’t I?”

John smiled, “I feel like the Holmes’ make everyone feel superfluous. If they teemed up, they could take over the world.”

“It’s part of their unique charm,” Lestrade replied dryly.

John huffed out a short laugh. “Imagine them as kids.”

“Oh GOD, their poor mother.”

The next few hours with John allowed some of the tension Greg had been feeling to seep away. He had needed to talk to a real friend just as much as John had, for different reasons, but with the same effect. They both left the pub feeling lighter, happier, and more than a little tipsy.
The following day Greg returned to another awful day of work. He had to attend two stabbings whilst running three investigations at once, with reduced staff because Dimmock and his team were dealing with a series of high profile murders. He was overworked, overtired, and just over everything when Sherlock flounced into his office, without knocking of course, to demand access to Dimmock’s cases.

“Take it up with him,” Lestrade replied flatly.

“He is letting his pride affect his judgement,” Sherlock said condescendingly.

“I can’t do anything about that,” he snapped. “We are of equal rank, so I can’t order him to do anything. It wasn’t my jurisdiction, so the case is his. I can’t take it away from him, even if I wanted to.”

“I can help.”

“I know that,” he replied, rubbing his eyes tiredly. “And I’ve told him that before. He’s even seen that for himself, but there isn’t anything else I can do.”

“You’re useless,” he exclaimed dramatically as he left the room.

Lestrade slammed his pen down on his desk and raked his hands roughly through his short grey hair. He abandoned the unfinished report and half-ran out of his office, slamming the door behind him. The walk to 200 Yards calmed him a little, but he was still angry when he pushed into the cosy shop and inhaled the scent of freshly ground coffee. He didn’t care for the taste, but the aroma of the roasted and ground beans smelt just enough like heaven to make the experience enjoyable.

“Hey Aims,” he said, suddenly feeling empty and tired as the anger slipped away.

“Triple?” she asked sympathetically.

“There is not enough coffee in the world,” he answered wearily.
“God. That bad?”

“Yeah, I’d say it’s that bad. How’s class going?” he said, trying to pull himself out of the rut because he really did want to know how she was doing.

“Good. Very good. I aced my last paper.”

“That’s great, kid.”

“Thanks,” she said as she handed him his coffee. “You want a donut or a pastry? You look like you could do with some comfort food.”


“Speaking of,” she said, inclining her head in the direction of the front window. “Your friend’s here with the posh dickhead.”

“He’s not… as bad as I thought he was,” he said softly. He put five pounds in her tip jar and moved away from the counter so she could serve the customer that had just arrived from the nearby office buildings. He turned to the direction she had indicated and saw John and Mycroft seated in the armchairs by the window. John was speaking animatedly while Mycroft sat, lips pursed, nodding occasionally. They were obviously arguing and it was equally obvious that John was losing.

Neither of them had seen him enter or noticed him at the counter yet so he pulled out the phone he’d commandeered from Mycroft and recorded a brief message. He could feel Amy’s curious eyes on him as she absentmindedly filled the large order, straining to hear what he was saying over the hiss of steam and whoosh of water.

“Listen to John. He is a doctor.”

He watched as Mycroft checked his phone, holding up a finger to John and saying a few words before putting the phone to his ear and listening to the message. As soon as the message played, he twisted in his chair and locked eyes with Greg, who raised his paper cup in a toast and grinned. Mycroft inclined his head and half-smiled before turning back to John. Greg was gone before John could turn in his seat to see what Mycroft had been looking at.

When he returned to his office, he was smiling.

Another week passed in much the same vein as every week that had come before. People died and Lestrade attempted to ascertain the why, how and who, the coffee was awful but necessary, and the couch was still more comfortable than the bed (not that he saw much of his couch in the average week).

As true summer drew closer, the morale at the Yard lifted to new heights only achievable when the weather grew warm. The encroaching summer holidays did not stop the work from flowing in. Sadly, being woken up at 2:27am on a Friday morning was not an unusual occurrence for Lestrade, although that didn’t stop him from groaning before he answered.

Another day, another crime scene. Sometimes it felt like he made no difference at all. For every criminal he caught, another 20 got away. For every victim he was able to get justice for, another 100 died alone, without anyone caring they’d gone, without any semblance of justice.

He arrived at the scene to find an exsanguinated, mostly naked body hanging from the ceiling with old-fashioned coloured glass bottles hanging at different heights from a wire that was nailed to the low ceiling. The bottles were half-filled with a thick, dark liquid that looked horrifyingly like blood.
The entire scene was backlit, so the empty half of the bottles reflected colours onto the plaster-white front wall of what had once been the living room of the abandoned house. It was incredibly unusual for Lestrade to have two such gruesome crimes in that many months. He wasn’t sure if the criminals were getting more sociopathic or just bored, but he liked it better without all the drama. He waited for the forensics to arrive before he turned to the full team.

“I’m bringing Sherlock in.”

“You can’t!” Donovan protested loudly. “You don’t know that we need any help on this one, the forensics haven’t even had a chance to look at the scene!”

“Look at this place!” he snapped, turning to address the entire team. "Everything is wiped clean, there are no footprints, no dust, no fibres, nothing! I looked at the wire suspending the bottles and there is nothing on them either, no skin or hair or blood. There isn’t a working surveillance system within two blocks of this dump and the media is going to be all over this! Give me another viable option that will result in the arrest of the guilty party, because I can’t think of one. If you can’t think of another option, I’m going to have to bring Sherlock in.”

Anderson and Donovan both looked murderous and the rest of the team only slightly less so, but they didn’t question Lestrade’s judgement call further. His phone pinged as he was waiting for Sherlock and he didn’t realise it was his second phone until he looked at the message. He played the audio file after walking a short distance from the front door of the house.

“It may interest you to know that there is a private security camera in the building at the corner of the street. With time, you will be able to acquire the tapes as evidence admissible in court, which sadly Sherlock cannot always provide. On a less important note: while I trust Dr Watson in medical matters, he is also my brother’s friend, and as such I am not required to trust him implicitly on matters that are outside his medical expertise. I do not listen to any personal advice he may see fit to give me.”

Lestrade laughed out loud, surprised and oddly pleased that Mycroft had added a personal note to the informative message, and remembered their previous communication.

“I was informed that it is ‘a bit not good’ to express amusement or delight at a gruesome crime scene,” Sherlock drawled from directly behind him. Lestrade locked his phone and slipped it into his jacket pocket before he turned to face a bright eyed, excited Sherlock and a bleary eyed, slightly annoyed John.

“I think you’ll find this one interesting,” he said lightly. “Imaginative.”

“I highly doubt that, Lestrade. Not much in this world surprises me. Especially not garden variety murders. How dull.”

When Sherlock saw the body he let out a short “huh,” and immediately began circling.

“Cause of death?” he asked John from the other side of the bottles so his face was a shadow and all they could see was a silhouette.

“Strangulation. Markings suggest male, large hands so most likely above average height. The body was bled post-mortem by severing the femoral artery. It seems like the blood was collected and then transferred to the bottles, but he wasn’t killed here.”

“Very good, John,” Sherlock said absentmindedly. He was so focused on his task that he failed to see John’s pleased flush and fond smile in his direction.
“Forgiven him?” Greg whispered.

“Almost,” John replied, not looking away from the enigmatic genius at work.

“The Victim is a US national travelling on a business trip. He has been married at least twice, maybe three times, but is currently engaged to a much younger woman. He works in sales and has a sibling who lives in the UK, probably London. You are looking for a man who is at least 5 foot 11 – he didn’t use a ladder to hang the bottles, but the ceiling is low enough for someone of that height or above to manage the task. He probably has a business connection to the victim and is smart enough to at least attempt to draw suspicion on someone else. Most likely the brother, who is an artist of some kind.”

After Sherlock’s explanation of his deductions, that Lestrade mostly tuned out, and John’s predictable exclamation of “amazing!”, he nodded.

“Thank you. You’ve been helpful, as always.”

Sherlock only scowled. “It was not as interesting as advertised. Just simple, professional jealousy. Nothing truly stimulating.”

“Fine, go take some strange case of your own and leave the boring stuff to the police,” he said in a tone that was more resigned than angry. He was used to Sherlock’s semi-elitist mentality and over-inflated ego. Lestrade didn’t even notice when Sherlock lifted his second phone from his pocket and waited until he and John were behind the police line before holding it up with a smirk.

“This is far too expensive for something you bought yourself. It is regularly charged, but not regularly used. It’s a gift, then. However, you are unattached, therefore it’s not from a girlfriend. So who is it from? There is only one person I can think of who might give you an expensive phone like this one, but that does not explain your reaction to whatever message you received.” Sherlock listed his deductions quickly, leaving Lestrade no time to contradict him. But, as usual, Sherlock was mostly right, and Lestrade wasn’t about to correct his assumptions when Sherlock was already in his ‘making deductions and being a twat’ mode.

“My conversations are none of your business, Sherlock,” he said mildly, holding out a hand expectantly. “I’d like my phone back now.”

“If you won’t tell me, it is easy enough for me to find out,” Sherlock said with his customary knowing smirk.

“I very much doubt that,” Lestrade replied seriously.

“You people are so average,” Sherlock continued mockingly. “You are so predictable.”

Sherlock looked Lestrade in the eyes and pressed three keys on the phone. “Your bank card PIN, Lestrade?” He smirked again, triumphantly, as he pressed the final number. “You are truly naïve enough to believe that number is in any way personal?”

The phone beeped flatly and the screen flashed red as a message popped up:

DELETING ALL DATA IN 3…2…1
DATA ERASED.

Sherlock stared at the screen in shock. The bewildered look on the genius’ face made Greg laugh so hard he could barely breathe, and John wasn’t even trying to hide his grin.
“I may be of ‘average’ intelligence,” Lestrade said, once his side stopped hurting from laughter. “But I learn from other people’s mistakes. It would have been nice to keep my saved files, but the look on your face was priceless.”

Sherlock stared, dumbstruck, at the phone in his hand for a second before he practically threw it at Lestrade and stalked off, coat swirling to complete his customary dramatic exit. John gave him a thumbs up as he followed behind the irate Sherlock and Lestrade smiled at him. The poor guy had his work cut out for him.

The phone pinged just as the dynamic duo slipped around the corner and Lestrade wasted no time checking it.

“As usual, Detective Inspector, you have managed to show remarkable intelligence. While the expression on my dear brother’s face was, as you say, ‘priceless’, I regret the loss of our previous communications. Be assured that I did not, and will not, place listening devices on your person or any of your possessions. However, I cannot say the same of Sherlock. My brother is, more often than not, a threat to national security and I deemed it prudent to be aware of his activities. I apologise that your proximity to Sherlock violates your privacy.”

“Smart move, Mycroft, he takes that coat everywhere,” Greg started with a soft chuckle. “And I’m going to pretend I didn’t hear you admitting to illegally tracking a civilian. I hope you don’t monitor him too carefully, John would not appreciate that. Speaking of John, he is probably the most normal person I know, so perhaps his non-medical advice will be of some use. Thank you for the tip, with that information we might get to go home before midnight tonight.”

Mycroft did not reply immediately, and Lestrade wasn’t expecting him to but he felt oddly disappointed, regardless. They had an unspoken understanding: they would message each other once, the other would reply and then the exchange would be over until there was another occasion for interaction. Although the pattern had had a little hiccup after Sherlock’s interference, with Mycroft messaging twice in a row without input from Greg. Lestrade was just glad that with both Sherlock and Mycroft’s help, he was able to find the murderer in less than half the time it would have taken him otherwise, although it was still 4am by the time he got home that night.

It was strange that Lestrade thought of those messages as conversations, because not much was actually said in each separate exchange. But there was so much in the tone of their voices and every word was thought out, like it was written in an email or a letter but read aloud. In a way, it was the best conversation Lestrade had been a part of in years, in spite of the rather rocky start. He was oddly looking forward to their next communication, and with that thought he wondered when Mycroft had stopped being the enemy and started looking startling like a friend. He wondered, while lying on his couch, attempting sleep with the bright summer sunrise coming in through a gap in his curtains, how many days or weeks it would take for them to find an excuse to talk again.
In fact, it took less time than expected for him to find a reasonable excuse to contact Mycroft, because his phone lit up less than two days later with Mycroft’s name. Lestrade froze when he read the caller ID. It was a phone call. A phone call and not a message, so he knew something must be wrong. He paused but answered the phone carefully, wondering what on earth could be the matter at four in the morning.

“Lestrade,” he said firmly. He didn’t want to sound like a stuttering teenager, even if he sort of felt like one.

“Hello Mr… Lestrade, was it? This is Constable Lane. Sorry to bother you, but you are the emergency contact number on a mobile phone found on a person brought in to the station 10 minutes ago. Would you be able to come in and identify him for us?”

“Where was he found, why are you holding him?” he barked out as he rolled off his couch and hunted for a pair of trousers.

“I’m afraid I will not be able to tell you until you come in and successfully identify him,” the constable said in a mild ‘apologetic professional’ tone that Lestrade had used often enough. He hadn’t expected the tone to be so frustrating on the receiving end.

“Fine, but is he okay?”

“The unidentified man in custody is currently conscious but not talking,” the constable said carefully. “He does not appear to be injured in any major way, Mr Lestrade.”

“It’s Detective Inspector Lestrade,” he snapped.

He could hear the constable swallow. ‘I’m sorry, sir, but you have to come in and identify him. You are the ICE number on a phone that may or may not belong to him, but we cannot unlock the phone
to retrieve any further information.”

“I’ll be there in 10 minutes.”

Lestrade pulled a shirt over his head and buttoned his jeans before he half-ran out the door, miraculously hailing a cab on the corner of his street. He fiddled with his warrant card and tried to remain calm, mind swirling with possibilities. Mycroft’s phone might have been stolen. That was the only explanation he could think of, because why would they take Mycroft Holmes into custody? But if it was Mycroft… If it was Mycroft, then Lestrade had no idea what to do.

When Lestrade was led into the station and finally got a look at the man they were holding, he stopped breathing. It was Mycroft like he’d never seen him, like he had never wanted to see him. His hair was wild and dirty, smudges of dirt and grime and god-knows-what all over his navy blue suit. He was sitting on the floor in a corner, trembling. Those capable hands were shaking and those wonderful eyes had pupils so large that only a thin band of icy blue colour was visible. He was high, that much was obvious, but he was too still, too motionless for it to be a normal high. Trust Mycroft Holmes to maintain control over his bodily functions, despite being as high as a kite. The man redefined the term ‘control freak’.

“I found him in central London, in the middle of the road, just…sitting there, after someone called in an anonymous tip,” the constable explained. “Cocaine. It looks like he left his wallet somewhere while high, or maybe another junky stole it. There was a second phone, very posh, on the ground near where I found him but it was wiped clean. Do you know him?”

“That is Mycroft Holmes, and he is not a junky,” Lestrade said firmly.

“I’m sorry Inspector, but he tested positive for drugs. We have to charge him.”

“No, you don’t,” Lestrade said, thinking quickly. “He’s one of my CIs in a drug case. This is a warning to me, a threat. If you charge him, they’ll find out exactly who he is, and that might kill him.”

The constable was wavering fairly obviously. “It’s protocol, but… I could make it a warning,” he said hesitantly.

“Or you could release him to me. I bet you haven’t done any of the paperwork yet, and this is my informant so he is under my protection. I need him, Constable.”

“All right,” he said eventually, but not before he studied Lestrade’s face carefully for signs of the truth. He must have approved of what he had found.

“Thank you, Constable Lane. I owe you a massive favour,” Lestrade said fervently.

“How about you put in a good word for me?” he asked hopefully. “I’m going for a position at New Scotland Yard.”

“You seem like a good cop, Lane. I’ll mention it to my DCI,” Lestrade agreed quickly.

They unlocked the door and Lestrade walked in carefully to avoid startling a drugged-up Mycroft. He flinched when Lestrade laid a hand on his arm, but allowed himself to be guided to his feet and out the door. Neither of them spoke a word until they had entered Lestrade’s apartment.

“Mycroft,” Lestrade murmured softly, looking into the other man’s eyes, relieved to note that the pupils were smaller now. “Can you tell me what happened?”
Mycroft opened his hand, which had been curled into a fist at his side, and wordlessly handed Lestrade a crumpled piece of paper. He unfurled it carefully but dropped it like it was white-hot after reading it. In flowing calligraphy in blood-red ink, it read:

*You made a mistake, Holmes, and now I will ruin you, and burn your brother. I will miss our little chats. Good luck helping him without your precious job.  
Love Moriarty xoxo*

The note fluttered to the ground and skidded across the floor. “Oh god,” Greg gasped, closing his eyes against the unwanted images flickering across his mind. The building, 12 people dead. All the death and destruction caused by one man. He couldn’t take his eyes off the note, the blood-red ink and a name. Just a name. One name, one man. A waking nightmare that had slipped effortlessly into his dreams.

Mycroft still had not said a word and was standing stock-still in the middle of the lounge room. Lestrade stepped forward, tearing his eyes away from the slip of paper and gently reaching up to take a hold of Mycroft’s shoulders, pushing him backwards until his knees hit the couch. He applied a little pressure and Mycroft sat. He didn’t take his hands away. He stood like that for a long time, watching as Mycroft’s eyes returned to normal and he stopped shaking. Lestrade couldn’t say precisely how long it had been before Mycroft finally spoke.

“I convinced my superiors to hold James Moriarty on suspicion of terrorist activity. We held him for months, but he never wavered and, eventually, my superiors made the decision to let him go. I am currently on probation, which he knows all too well. There are no second chances, and he just succeeded in his attempt to discredit me.” Mycroft’s voice was gravelly and rough. He almost sounded broken and Lestrade was suddenly furious. His fury drove away the lingering fear of the man, of Moriarty, and for a moment all he could feel was anger. Anger that Moriarty had reduced the most brilliant man he knew to this. This vulnerability that was absolutely unacceptable on Mycroft Holmes’ face.

“I think you’ll find,” Lestrade said, his voice dangerously quiet against his searing rage, “that he did not succeed.”

Mycroft looked up and Lestrade finally took his hands away. He had forgotten that they were even there.

“I convinced the constable not to file charges, not even a warning. Nobody knows you were there, or your identity, except for me and him. You did a good job of that, didn’t you? Erasing your phone, hiding your wallet? Even high as a kite, you’re smarter than anyone I’ve ever met.”

“How?” Mycroft croaked.

“You are my confidential informant on a very important drug case. I do actually have one of those at the moment, one I’ve been on for months. I lied to a fellow officer and I don’t even feel bad. I knew that something had gone wrong the moment your number came up on the caller ID.”

“What am I going to do?” he asked, that vulnerability still there, not so obvious but still there. His shoulders weren’t as straight, knuckles white as his hands gripped his knees. His eyes betrayed something Lestrade couldn’t quite define but, if pressed, would have said…well, he would have said it was hopelessness.

“I am going to call in to my friends and report a mugging. I will say that I was woken by a call from you, disorientated, without money for a cab because you had been mugged by a masked assailant while taking a walk because you couldn’t sleep. I will inform them that your wallet was taken and
they will ask you to come in and recall what you can about his features. We will go into the Yard tomorrow and give them that information, but you?” Lestrade shook his head. “You will go have a long shower. Is it safe to call Anthea and give her the fake story so she can bring you some clothes and we can fill her in?”

Mycroft blinked once, twice, and then nodded slowly, his back straightening and his hands relaxing, that awful, hopeless look leaving his eyes. “Thank you. As always, you are showing remarkable intelligence.”

Lestrade leaned forward and gripped Mycroft’s shoulder briefly before he stepped away and walked to the kitchen. He filled up a tall glass with water, added a few pieces of ice shaped like fish, and returned to the lounge.

“Here,” Lestrade murmured. “Drink it all.”

Mycroft studied the ice cubes for a moment but didn’t comment, and Lestrade could have sworn that he saw a small smile flicker briefly across his face before he drank.

“You never answered my question,” Lestrade said quietly. “Is it safe to call her?”

“Yes. Your story… it places no suspicion of inappropriate conduct on me. I could not have thought of a better explanation. As I am on probation, I am no longer entitled to a protective detail, something Moriarty used to his advantage. It also explains my being forced to erase my phone memory, which would have appeared on their databases the moment I did it. I am not… comfortable with deceiving my superiors in any way, however I see its necessity.”

“What are we going to do about Moriarty?”

“There is nothing I can do. I already tried to deal with him through the official channels that were open to me and I failed. He is a domestic terrorist, but he’s too smart to leave evidence behind.” The helpless look returned. “I can’t stop him. It’s not within my power to. He has a plan, he’s just orchestrated its first step and will not be happy when it does not succeed.”

“I wasn’t asking what you could do. I was asking what we were going to do. There’s a big difference, My.”

“What makes you think there’s anything you can do?” Mycroft snapped. “He is a genius madman who will kill you without second thought. He has hundreds of men at his disposal and an entire criminal network. He’s untouchable.”

“That’s his weakness,” Lestrade replied. “He thinks that he is invulnerable but he is just a man.”

“No, Lestrade,” Mycroft answered. “He’s a monster. And I let him go, I let him out.”

“STOP IT!” Lestrade yelled. “Just stop it! Stop with this self-doubt, this vulnerability. That isn’t you. You are Mycroft Holmes. Attack his finances, arrest his henchmen, go after his knees because if he doesn’t have a network, he has nothing to stand on. Stop trying to go for the head. Cops know that a body shot is much more likely to hit its mark. Bleed him dry. Stop playing his games with your mind and play them with your fists like the ruthless bastard I know you can be.”

“If I do that, he will go after Sherlock.”

“HE’S DOING THAT ANYWAY!” Lestrade shouted. “Make him desperate, Mycroft. Make him feel what you feel when he threatens Sherlock, because when he finally faces him, and you know it’s going to go down with just the two of them, it will be a man he is facing, not a network. Moriarty
wouldn’t have tried so hard to discredit you if he wasn’t afraid of what you could do.”

“It isn’t that simple!”

“Yes,” Lestrade said. “It is.”

“Don’t speak of things you don’t understand!”

“Don’t speak to me like I am a child, or an idiot. By your estimation, I am neither.”

“Maybe I was wrong,” Mycroft snarled.

Lestrade took a physical step back but fought against the feelings of inadequacy that Mycroft was pulling to the fore. “If you won’t do this, I’ll find someone who will,” he snarled back.

“And who are you going to get to help you?” Mycroft sneered. “Your little friend John and your idiotic colleagues? You are no match for Moriarty. This is my fight. Mine and Sherlock’s.”

Lestrade went quiet but his eyes hardened. Eventually, he went to the cupboard and pulled out a fresh towel, slapping it against Mycroft’s chest. “Take a shower. I’ll call her.”

Mycroft stared at the towel in his hands for a moment before standing on shaky legs, walking more confidently than should have been possible to the bathroom. Lestrade quickly went to his bedroom and pulled out a spare pair of sleep pants and a baggy t-shirt, handing them to Mycroft before walking back to the couch. The sound of the shower, the steady rain of water, calmed Lestrade and it was more difficult than he expected to forget that it was Mycroft in his shower, naked in his shower.

He shook himself and pulled out his work phone, spending the next half-hour on the phone with his friends in minor crime and organising it so the lie was believable.

He put away his work phone and dialled Andrea’s number just as the shower switched off.

“Anthea speaking,” she answered, her voice professional but obviously tired.

“Andrea, Anthea, whatever, it’s Lestrade,” he said quickly. “We’ve got a bit of a problem. Don’t interrupt. Mycroft was mugged, his wallet was taken and he had to erase the data on his phone. He’s pretty shaken up. Could you inform his superiors of that and come over with a change of clothes for him? We’re expected at the station tomorrow for a proper report.”

“O…kay,” she said slowly. “I’ll do that right now. Is he okay?”

“He isn’t injured, just worried about his things.”

“I’ll be over in a half-hour,” she said briskly.

“Thank you.”

Mycroft emerged from the bathroom before Anthea arrived, the sleeping pants hanging low on his hips, the t-shirt a touch too short. Greg couldn’t stop staring at the lightly freckled skin of Mycroft’s arms, realising suddenly that he had never seen Mycroft without the suits he wore like armour. His auburn hair was damp and there was an errant drop of water sliding down his pale neck. Lestrade tore his eyes away and blinked a few times to clear away the highly inappropriate fantasies running through his brain, trying to re-establish some semblance of professional detachment.

“Andrea is coming,” he said, still looking away.

“Lestrade…” Mycroft began.
Greg cut him off quickly; he didn’t want to hear excuses or apologies, however unlikely the latter was. “Not now. Just… Why don’t you lie down for a bit?”

“I am not tired.”

“I didn’t ask if you were tired,” he snapped. “Just lie down on the goddamn couch and shut up while I do some thinking.”

Mycroft looked at him searchingly but complied. After a moment, Greg heard an almost inaudible sigh that made something jump in his chest. Mycroft was more tired than he let on. Greg turned to see him, eyes closed, burrowing his head into the pillow and sighing ever so quietly again. Greg fought against the urge to stroke Mycroft’s hair soothingly and decided that he must have been more tired than he thought.

“You sleep on the couch,” Mycroft said after a few minutes, his deep, slightly rough voice penetrating the silence unexpectedly.

“Yeah, is that important?”

“Why?” Mycroft asked softly.

“My bed is about as comfortable as a slab of concrete,” he explained gruffly.

Mycroft opened his eyes and looked vaguely confused. “But you’ve lived in this flat for at least…” he paused and swept his eyes over the flat. “Seven years.”

“Nine,” Lestrade corrected.

“Why purchase a bed that is uncomfortable?”

“It came with the flat.”

Mycroft let out a soft, “oh,” and fell silent.

The knock came exactly 30 minutes after Lestrade had called Andrea. He opened the door quickly and ushered her inside. She looked tired, but was fully dressed in a sharp business suit and was carrying a garment back and a pair of shoes in one hand, phone in the other. She turned to Mycroft first, not even glancing at Lestrade. He didn’t mind, he understood that her priorities should be with him.

“I have informed your superiors of the incident, they expressed their concern for your wellbeing but did not imply there would be any repercussions. They are also reinstating your protective detail in light of the circumstances,” she said evenly before her voice changed and she was suddenly yelling. “Now tell me what the fuck actually happened.”

Lestrade flinched but Mycroft didn’t even blink. He didn’t seem inclined to move, so Greg bent to pick up the note and handed it to her.

“Fuck!” she exclaimed loudly as soon as she had read it. “Fuck.”

“If it were not for Detective Inspector Lestrade, I would no longer be in a position to oppose him. As it is, I am still, for all intents and purposes, suspended.”

“You still have enough power to do something, Mycroft,” Greg argued, not ready to back down from something he knew he was right about.
“No,” Mycroft said shortly, without looking away from Andrea.

Andrea looked between the two men and shook her head before she looked at Lestrade again. “Thank you.”

“No problem,” he replied softly. “We’re due at New Scotland Yard soon. It shouldn’t take long, considering how little information Mycroft will be able to give.”

“Won’t that make anyone who knows him suspicious?”

“Not really, he will tell them height, age, occupation, eye colour and sexual orientation, but even with that information, the police are highly unlikely to even arrest a suspect. It was dark and there was no evidence left behind.”

“Smart,” she said.

“Anthea?” Mycroft asked. “Have you begun replacing my bank cards and identification?”

“No, sir,” she said, her voice snapping back to professional. “I will get that done immediately, sir.”

“Thank you, I will be at the office after my appointment with the police.”

She nodded and left quickly, but not before she sent another thankful smile in Lestrade’s direction and rolled her eyes at Mycroft’s back. He grinned at she shut the front door behind her.

Their appointment with the small crime police, as expected, yielded no results but also no suspicion and Mycroft left the yard alone, with only a fleeting smile aimed at Lestrade in lieu of thanks.

Weeks went by with no news of Moriarty, not even a whisper, and Lestrade had just allowed some hope to shine through the dread when Sally came in to report a robbery.

“Not our division,” he said around his first donut in months.

Lestrade was stunned when Moriarty allowed himself to be arrested but ruthlessly stamped down on the small glimmer of hope, because this was Moriarty. The man had a trick up his expensive sleeve.

He watched the trial with adrenaline pumping in his veins, fingernails bitten to the quick, and when the verdict was at last read, he snapped a pencil in half.

Not guilty.

The words repeated again and again, over and over and over in his head in a loop that mocked everything he had ever believed about the justice system. At that moment, Lestrade knew that the only way this could end was in death, whose death he had no idea. Sherlock or Moriarty. He wasn’t sure if he trusted Sherlock to finish this, if he trusted that Moriarty would not be able to break him. He thought of Sherlock, he thought of John, and god help him, he thought of Mycroft. Then, there, in a courtroom devoid of hope, he decided.
You and Whose Army?

Chapter Summary

Lestrade calls in a few favours.

Chapter Notes

Welcome to Chapter 7. Thank you to every single person who is reading this story, and wow there are a lot of you! I never expected so many people to enjoy it, and give such wonderful feedback. Questions are encouraged, either in the comments or as asks on Tumblr (withfiendfyre.tumblr.com). As always all my thanks to my wonderful editor and any remaining mistakes are mine alone.

It took Lestrade three days to notice that he was being followed, something he was not at all proud of, but in his defence they were good. Once he had noticed his tail, he saw her everywhere. Sometimes she was a commuter, sometimes a street vendor, but always, she was watching. The woman was in her early thirties with short black hair and brown eyes. She was average looking, average height, but the one thing that distinguished her from others was the knife strapped to her ankle and the radio in her ear. It would have made sense for her to be one of Mycroft’s many minions, but she wasn’t. She definitely wasn’t.

He had not spoken to Mycroft since their disastrous argument over a month prior, and he would have been lying if he said it didn’t hurt. It hurt more than it should, but he wasn’t about to analyse that particular fact. Not speaking did not necessarily mean that Mycroft was not watching, but Lestrade had good street instincts. It was always good for a cop to know who was likely to shoot and who wasn’t. This was a shooter. She was more than a shooter, John was a shooter, heck, Lestrade himself was a shooter. She was... there was a light in her eyes, a smile that seemed wrong and a twitchy hand that strayed far too often near to her pocket where he was certain a second knife was hidden. She spoke to the small-time criminals, drug dealers, and petty thieves for information and clearly knew them, but they were afraid of her. Not ‘I don’t want to go to prison’ afraid, more like, ‘I don’t want to die a horrible painful death’ afraid. And that made all the difference.

So someone in Moriarty’s organisation was tailing him. She probably didn’t even know Moriarty’s name, but she reported to someone who reported to him. To be fair to Lestrade, he had not been idle those three days since the end of the trial. It was the end of summer and Gregson was off on leave, so he had double the workload. Not only that, he was making plans of a more... personal nature. In that courtroom, he had decided something. Something important. And he hadn’t made that decision lightly. Although, now that he had a follower he was going to have to be more careful about it.

His office was soundproofed, but he didn’t trust everyone in his building. Now was a good time to be paranoid but, in this case, it wasn’t important if they could hear. He pressed #4 on speed-dial – of his work phone, not his Mycroft phone – and waited patiently as it rang.

“Greg?” John asked, sounding stressed and worried and almost afraid. Lestrade’s grip on his phone
tightly, another strong person reduced to fear by one man. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah,” he said. “I just… It was fucked up. The verdict. Want to grab a pint?”

“I…” John started hesitantly, before his voice strengthened. “You know what? That sounds fucking

perfect. Tonight?”

“I should be free,” he replied. “But you know how it is. How about I call you when I’m done, we
can go to the pub halfway between Baker Street and the Yard.”

“Thanks Greg,” John replied quietly. “I should have called. After the verdict. I am just so angry. I’m
not even surprised, but… I had allowed myself to hope.”

“I know, mate, me too,” he answered. “But a couple of good pints will make us feel a lot better, at
least for a while.”

“Perfect,” John said with a sigh. “I’ll talk to you when you get off work.”

The next step was considerably harder to achieve. It required a certain level of ingenuity on Lestrade
part, but he was fairly sure he had found a rather Mycroftian way of going about it. And by
Mycroftian, he meant clever and overly dramatic. After lunch, at around 2pm, he stepped out of his
building and walked to 200 Yards, greeting Amy as per usual before he got close to the counter. The
lunch rush had just ended and the afternoon “oh god, it’s three o’clock, give me caffeine before I
murder someone” rush hadn’t yet started. The days Lestrade made it to the café, he usually did so at
this time. It was better for everyone that way, he could have a proper chat with Amy and she
wouldn’t be run off her feet. The door didn’t open again once he went inside, and the mirrored
surface of the espresso machine showed his shadow across the road trying to look like she was
waiting at the bus stop.

“Hey Lestrade,” Amy said with a sad smile.

“Hey,” he replied. “Don’t go looking at me like that. I’m a big boy, I can handle things not working
the way I want them too.”

“He was guilty,” she said firmly. “So fucking guilty.”

“I know,” he said. “I’m going to sit in today, and I think I deserve a fucking donut, if it’s okay by
you?”

“Sure thing, Lestrade, anything for my favourite DI. Gregson likes Double Chocolate Skim
Mochas.” She faked a gag. “Why does he take skim milk if he’s already putting in all those
unnecessary calories? It’s like getting a large Big Mac meal and a diet coke.”

He laughed and handed her a ten pound note with a small post-it attached, shaking his head almost
imperceptibly, and she smiled at him.

“Keep the change,” he said.

“I told you I don’t need your charity, old man.”

“Just keep it.”

She laughed. “Fine, but I’m giving you a triple.”

“Good.”
He sat in the chairs he’d seen John and Mycroft in. It was only a month ago, but it seemed like forever. He sank into the armchair that Mycroft had been sitting in and closed his eyes, remembering that small half-smile Mycroft had given him, then opening his eyes quickly because he really didn’t have time to think about that.

When Amy brought over his mug, there was a new post-it note stuck to the side, facing away from the window. He grinned at her and read it out of the corner of his eye while he took the first bite of his amazingly pink donut.

Texted the number you asked me to, said “Thanks for the coffee the other week, I think I scared that old lady, though. Still on for tonight at 7?” They replied, “I’m afraid you have the wrong number. This is Andrea”. I’m guessing this is a good sign, maybe someday you’ll explain it to me.

Lestrade may not have been cut out for espionage but he felt like he was doing an okay job, given the time he had to prepare and the resources he had available. He wasn’t James Bond, but he was a police officer of moderate to above average intelligence (depending on who you asked) and he sure as hell had incentives for not fucking up. The Decision had been made, and he was going to do whatever it took to get it done.

He removed the post-it note and ripped it into tiny pieces underneath the table before dumping them inside his empty cup. He could see the woman out of the corner of his eye, looking very bored and unaware of anything out of the ordinary. He smiled and waved at Amy on his way out, silently promising an explanation. His tail followed him back to the Yard and, when he was finally finished, to the pub as well. As per her pattern, she stayed outside of the building, almost definitely hiring some low-level criminal to watch the back door.

Lestrade had never been so glad for Moriarty’s hubris. His belief that only he could know all the details of a convoluted plan left his minions out of the loop, so this minion would not know who John was and, more importantly, would not recognise Andrea. It seemed like Sherlock was the only man Moriarty would ever dirty his hands for, in a twisted attempt to seek his attention. Mycroft, Sherlock and Moriarty all shared the same bias. Bias against ‘normal’ people, bias against anyone who wasn’t a genius. Lestrade didn’t have to be a genius; in fact, it was sort of a great thing that he wasn’t one. While Sherlock and Mycroft were overestimating Moriarty, and Moriarty was underestimating everyone, Lestrade was the one seeing things clearly.

Andrea arrived first. Dressed in a pair of jeans and a casual blouse, she looked like a different person. She sat down in front of him and wordlessly grabbed the phone that Greg had left on the table. She turned it off, and then turned her own off.

“You going to tell me what the fuck this is about, Lestrade?” she asked evenly, after the electronics were off.

“I know that Mycroft is doing something. I need to know what he’s doing and then I need your help.”

“Why?” she asked, narrowing her eyes.

“Moriarty is going to kill people. Mycroft can handle the organisation, but he’s blind as to how to deal with the man. He sees Sherlock in him, probably more than he would like, and that makes him think that Sherlock has to be the one to end it. He’s probably afraid that Sherlock would hate him if he intervened, but the facts are that neither of them are well-equipped to deal with Moriarty. It doesn’t take a genius to kill a genius, just one man with a gun who isn’t afraid of dying.”

She stared at him for a moment. “And that man would be?”
Lestrade grimaced. “I don’t want to do it. If I had another option, any other option, I would do it. He’s already proven he can poison the justice system, he will never go to prison, and you know what, Andrea? If it means keeping him – them – safe, I’ll do it.”

“Do you even have a plan?” she asked incredulously. “This isn’t just a petty criminal. He will kill you if he gets the chance.”

“I do have a plan. I’m not an idiot.”

“And what is this plan?”

“I need your help, and John’s,” he said quietly. “I can’t do this alone and I’m not afraid to admit that.”

“What do you need from me?”

“I need you to follow Moriarty. I know you can do it, and I know you can do it without getting caught. You are the only one of us who isn’t being followed. I need you to find out who he trusts and where he goes. He has to have at least one lieutenant who knows him by name, maybe two, and I need you to find out where they meet. They will meet alone, and the lieutenant will be armed and dangerous, but I can’t see any other option. If we don’t get them both out of the picture, the other will certainly be a problem. Find out where they meet and get a timetable, how long their meetings are, that sort of thing. John and I, if I can get him to agree, will slip past our followers and raid the meeting place. It won’t be a public place, and we’ll do what we have to do from there.”

“What am I supposed to do while you raid the place?” she asked indignantly. “I’m not a damsel in distress.”

“Obviously,” he said dryly. “I was going to ask you to find high ground and cover us with a sniper rifle, actually.”

Andrea grinned at him. “Sorry. I’m used to having to defend my gender.”

“No problem,” he replied. “Do you think the plan is at all feasible?”

“It depends on the location of the meeting place. If it’s a house or a flat, it will work great. If it’s a factory or an office block, less so. Luckily for you, I already know where they meet, and his lieutenant’s name. I wasn’t about to let the bastard get away, not after what he did the last time.”

“Does Mycroft know that you are looking into it?” he asked.

“Not officially,” she replied with a shrug of one shoulder. “But you wanted to know what Mycroft is doing to stop him?” Lestrade nodded. “He is taking out any and every facet of Moriarty’s organisation, starting at the bottom and working his way up. I get the feeling that this strategy wasn’t entirely his idea.”

“He thinks too much like a genius,” Lestrade replied with a fond sort of half-smile. “He can’t fathom something as simple as this stopping someone as clever as Moriarty.”

“I think you’re right,” she said softly. “Your strategy is a fucking good one, one that I’ve been advocating for. It’s going well, but Moriarty is getting angry.”

“That was always a risk. I know he’s going after Sherlock with a renewed fervour, but it was… there was no other way.”
“Are you going to involve Sherlock in this little plan of yours?”

“No,” he said firmly. “Sherlock is being watched far more closely than any of us. I would involve Mycroft if I could, but his protective detail makes that impossible. Not to mention the undeniable fact that someone on that detail is working for Moriarty.”

“How do you think I found the meeting place?” Andrea asked with a quirked eyebrow. “I know who the traitor is, and I followed him when he was making his report to his masters. He reports to Moriarty’s lieutenant, one Sebastian Moran. I then followed Moran for days and eventually was led to what I believe to be their meeting place. I need more time, though.”

“We have some time, but not much,” Lestrade said. “I don’t know how this is going to go down, I really don’t.”

“Give me a week, maybe two, to finalise a timetable for his whereabouts. How the heck are you going to slip away from your tail?”

“If John will agree to help me, I know a way.”

“If I agree to help you with what?” John’s voice came from behind Greg. “What is Anthea doing here?”

“Hey John,” Anthea said with a smile, “Lestrade has a plan.”

John sat down in the booth next to Anthea, across from Greg. “I really hope you aren’t talking about what I think you’re talking about,” he said seriously. “Because if you are, you are fucking insane.”

“Will you help me?” Greg asked, looking directly into John’s eyes. “Please?”

“Explain.”

“I’m going after Moriarty and his top lieutenant in an attempt to stop them. Andrea… Anthea has agreed to help me.”

“Do you have any idea how illegal this is?” John asked incredulously.

“Of course I know how fucking illegal it is. I don’t care,” Greg snapped. “He poisoned the system and got away with it when he shouldn’t have. We can’t charge him, we can’t do anything, and I won’t stand by idle as he kills more people. I can’t trust that Sherlock can finish this, we don’t know what they have planned. I need you to help me, John.”

“What do you need me to do?” John asked after a long pause.

“I need a gun. I know you can get me one, and I know you have one of your own. I can get you a bullet-proof vest and Andrea can get us the information we need.”

“And we are going to just… waltz on in there and kill Moriarty and his lieutenant? This isn’t going to work. We need more people.”

“We don’t have the time. We’re both being watched, don’t tell me you haven’t noticed a tail,” Greg said angrily. “I’m not going to ask about Afghanistan, but I know you were more than just a medic, John. I can shoot a gun, and if you aren’t willing to go after Moriarty yourself, I’ll do it. You can take down his henchman and I will kill him.”

“If you get caught, you will go to prison, lose your job, everything,” John said.
“I don’t care,” Greg said brokenly. “This is more important. So fucking important. He is a terrorist, a
criminal mastermind who is threatening my friends. Everyone I care about. He might be
underestimating us, John, but I am fully aware that I am more likely to die or get fired than to
succeed. I need to know that you are aware of the risk.”

Really, Greg should have realised the minute he chose to risk his career for Mycroft, and for John,
and for the person Sherlock could become, the moment he put someone else before his career. He
should have realised then how far he’d gone, and how far he was willing to go. And for what? Or,
rather, for whom?

John stared at him for a moment. “Why are you doing this? It can’t be for justice, or revenge or hate.
So why?”

“I don’t have many friends. The only true friends I have are sitting at this table,” Greg said quietly.
“And I know my plan puts you in danger, but if we don’t… if we don’t do this, I might as well kill
Sherlock myself. Don’t even try telling me that you would be okay. You wouldn’t be. Mycroft and
Sherlock can live without me, but I can’t let you live without Sherlock when I have the means to
prevent whatever is going to happen.”

“You can’t be serious, Greg,” John said, gaping, “You can’t tell me that you are doing this for me.”

“I’m not. I can’t explain why. Maybe it’s because Sherlock is well on his way to becoming a great
man. Maybe it’s because he has someone who would mourn his death, or because he has a brother
with an overactive sense of familial responsibility who would be shattered by his baby brother’s
death. I don’t know which,” Greg replied, looking away. “Just tell me if you are willing to help. You
could die.”

“If it means Moriarty is gone forever…” John paused and took a deep breath. “I’ve killed before and
I can do it again.”

“Moran, Moriarty’s man,” Anthea started, her tone suddenly all business, “is an ex-army colonel. He
was one of the snipers on the roof at the pool. No offense Lestrade, but there’s no way in hell you
can handle him. I don’t know if you are okay with this, John, but it’s looking like Greg’s going to
have to take care of Moriarty.”

John and Greg made eye contact and John studied him for a moment before nodding. “I can handle
Moran.”

“I’ll get surveillance photos of the building and see if I can dig up the planning records. It’s an
abandoned block of flats awaiting council approval for renovation or demolition.”

“What level do they meet on?”

“The first, it’s the only one that is structurally sound. But, again, I’ll need time.”

“How are you going to get the surveillance photos to us?” John asked.

“Drop them off at the coffee shop, 200 Yards, in a folder labelled “Aims”. She’ll know who to give
it to,” Greg said. “I’ll pass them onto John.”

“This is insane,” John muttered. “We aren’t fucking James Bond.”

“I am,” Anthea said with a grin. “This is my job, John. I’m good at it, and Lestrade’s not doing too
badly. A little dramatic, but not bad.”
“I figured when you eventually tell Mycroft about it, he’ll appreciate that,” Greg said with a grin. She laughed loudly. “He does love his drama. You should have been there for my job interview.”

“Did he have you try and follow Sherlock?” John asked.

She turned and stared at him. “Yeah, how did you know that?”

He shrugged. “It seemed like a suitably difficult job.”

“I passed,” she said with a smirk. “It took him almost a week to notice me.”

“Impressive. This is why you are the one following Moran, not me,” Greg said. “I would be spotted in a day.”

“Probably,” she said. “But seriously, Lestrade, you’re doing well. The plan is good, just let me figure out the rest. With you two on board, I can finally manage the operation.”

“You already had a plan?” John asked incredulously. “You were already going to do it?”

“Of course I was,” she said. “What kind of person do you take me for?”

Greg just grinned. “This is a lot simpler than I was expecting. I thought you’d tell me I was an idiot.”

“Make no mistake, Lestrade,” Anthea said seriously, “this is fucking insane.” Greg opened his mouth to reply but she cut him off. “But, you’re right. It’s the only way. You were smart enough to ask for my help, I wasn’t smart enough to think of asking you guys for help.”

“Well, you couldn’t have predicted we’d be interested in helping. It’s pretty dangerous,” John said reasonably.

“And neither of you are really trained for this,” she said, leaning forward and looking between the two men. “Are you sure?”

“I am,” Greg said firmly.

“Oh, I am so in,” John said fiercely. “We have a shot, a good shot.”

“Okay, give me two weeks,” she said, standing and sliding out of the booth. “And Lestrade?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

He nodded and she left. John turned to him and just watched him for a minute.

“What?” he asked, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. John had learnt Sherlock’s penetrating gaze fairly quickly and he was almost as good at it as Sherlock was.

“I’m just surprised,” John said softly. “You’ve never seemed… particularly flexible about the law.”

“Are you serious?” Greg asked, laughing. “I’ve known you’ve had an illegal weapon ever since you started hanging out with Sherlock. It’s not technically legal for me to consult Sherlock at all, not to mention my failure to arrest him on several occasions.”

“I never thought of it like that,” John said slowly. “I should probably thank you.”
“For?”

“Being crazy enough to do something about this shitty situation.”

“If I survive this, I think Sherlock might kill me,” Greg said with a short laugh. “Stealing his thunder and all that.”

“You don’t have to live with him.”

They stayed at the pub for another hour or so before they went their separate ways home. It took Lestrade a long time to get to sleep that night, and when he did, all he could see was Moriarty saying “not guilty” over and over again.

A week later, Amy slid him a folder along with his coffee with a quizzical look. He mouthed “later” and she nodded, satisfied for the moment. Although, she did shoot him a look that clearly said “you’d better be careful”. He studied the surveillance photos carefully, noting the entries and exits. There were three exits: the front door, the back door, and a fire escape. Along with the floor plan, there were pictures of Moriarty meeting with another man, tall, imposing, blonde with a military haircut and a gun on his hip. Shit. From the photographs, it was clear that Moriarty had arrived first, about 10 minutes before Moran, who spent a few minutes checking the building. From what he could see, their only option would be to have one person come in after Moriarty but before Moran, and the other wait by the back entrance to deal with Moran when he came to check the perimeter.

He wrote a few notes down on the back of the photographs and called John to organise a meeting. They met at the pub and it was all business, John’s normally jovial manner hardened to something that Lestrade found vaguely disturbing. He assumed it was a product of John’s army experience.

A week later, Anthea joined them at the pub with one final set of photographs and a concrete timeline. Moriarty and his lieutenant met every Thursday, just before midnight, because this was Moriarty and he had to be as dramatic as possible. It was decided that Anthea would be on the ground rather than as a sniper, so she could cover all exits. As the plan was finalised, Lestrade began to fully understand the possibilities. They could all die. He had to take several deep breaths to centre himself, but eventually he calmed down. It had to be done and they were the only people who were available to do it. John looked determined and Anthea looked hard and unrelenting… terrifying. Greg knew he had to be strong, he had to be clever and he had to be ruthless and he could do it, he would do it, for John and Sherlock and Mycroft. It was time to take a stand, a revolution of the underestimated. Whichever way it went, Lestrade had made peace with his choices. He was ready.
No Surprises

Chapter Summary

Lestrade does what he feels is right.

Chapter Notes

Does anyone actually read the authors notes? Any remaining mistakes are mine alone. Another reminder that my editor is the best person in the world and an amazing writer so you should go read his fics and give him some love.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next Thursday found Lestrade and John at the pub again, but this time John returned with Greg to his flat. They waited, tense and silent, for two hours before they slipped out of his bedroom window, down the fire escape, through the unalarmed fire door into the next apartment building where they walked straight out the front door. The weight of the gun tucked into Lestrade’s black jeans made him feel a bit twitchy and his hands were sweating in his leather gloves as they cut through back alleys towards the derelict complex. Anthea wordlessly handed them both earpieces.

“ETA ten minutes. You guys are cutting it a little fine, Moriarty is already inside. I saw him going in just after I arrived.”

Greg nodded. “I’m heading inside.”

“Be careful,” John and Anthea said at the same time.

He just nodded as he slipped inside through the fire escape and got his gun ready. One deep breath and a second of panic later, he was inside and just down the hall from the meeting place. The entire bottom level had been made into one room, with debris and remnants of the inner walls littering the floor. He heard voices andducked behind what was left of a wall to listen.

“I’ve tried. I can’t stop Mycroft Holmes from doing what he is doing, I can only stall him and make it harder. He’s too clever,” a man was saying, his voice quivering as he admitted to a failure that Lestrade was certain, at that moment, would get him killed.

“I do not accept excuses, Crowley. If you don’t stop him within the next three weeks, I will find you and make your blood into jam,” Moriarty said evenly.

“Two inside,” Lestrade breathed.

“Fuck!” Anthea said. “Can you take them both out?”

“I can try. Just keep John where he is.”

“Affirmative.”
From where he was hiding, Lestrade could hit one, but not both, of his targets. And he couldn’t get to Moriarty. As quietly as he could, he stepped around the debris to his left and ducked behind more fragments of wall, moving as quickly as he could. Then, suddenly, he heard a commotion from outside. Fuck. Moran had arrived earlier than expected, so John must have been trying to keep him quiet without firing his gun, but the sounds of the fight echoed around the near-empty ground floor.

“What the fuck are you waiting for?” Moriarty snarled at his companion. “Go help him.”

“You don’t want your fucktoy getting hurt?” Crowley sneered.

Lestrade heard a choking sound and a snarled, “know your place,” before the henchman started walking in John’s direction. Fuck. Lestrade had to keep them both in the room so John could have a fair fight against the slab of ex-army muscle.

“Nice place you got here,” he called out. Crowley froze, directly in his line of sight, and swirled around, looking for the origin of the voice. Mistake. Greg fired once, going for a headshot because he couldn’t see any other part of the man’s body. He quickly scrambled away from the body.

“I’m surprised… and a little disappointed,” Moriarty drawled from somewhere to his right. “I was hoping I would get the pleasure of putting down Sherlock’s puppy. It seems like Seb will get that pleasure. Pity.”

He had to keep him talking until he got a clear shot, so he grit his teeth and replied, “Sorry to disappoint.”

“And who may you be?” The voice was moving to his left. Lestrade darted around the cover available.

“Nobody of importance. Just a simple working man, Jimmy.”

“A simple working man? Oh this is rich.” Moriarty’s unwholesome laugh made Lestrade’s hair stand on end. “Detective Inspector Lestrade. It seems as though I’m going to put down two of the Holmes’ puppies in one night. How fortunate. Your little stunt cost me almost half my organisation and pushed my plan back weeks. It will be my pleasure to kill you slowly. For someone so dull, you are extremely irritating.”

“What stunt?” he asked as he moved around to the western wall.

“Only a police officer could have convinced them not to lay charges. Mycroft does love to make a nuisance of himself. I had hoped to get him out of the way quickly and move on to the more interesting brother. All this is getting very boring, and you know how I get when I get bored.”

“Sorry to disappoint you,” Lestrade called again.

“I am so glad you didn’t bring Sherlock into this little plan of yours, that would have been so inconvenient. As it is, killing you now does complicate my plan somewhat. Even in death, you are a pain. It really is too bad you are doing all this for men who don’t even care if you live or die. I could call Mycroft right now and he would tell me to go ahead and put a bullet in your brain. So much loyalty, and for what?” Moriarty scoffed. “Come on, Detective Inspector, come out of your fox hole and I’ll be as humane as I can be. That is to say, I will oblige when you beg for death.”

Lestrade lunged between two low walls and heard the distinctive sound of a bullet hitting the wall, just to the right of him. Mistake. Lestrade now knew exactly where Moriarty was. He peeked carefully out the side and saw Moriarty standing directly in the centre of the room, leaning against a broken wall. The arrogance was breathtaking.
In one movement, Lestrade stepped away from the wall protecting him and fired twice. He watched as they found their mark. One slammed into Moriarty’s chest, the other in his shoulder. Dimly, he heard another shot being fired from behind him. Then two more, three. Four. All in quick succession. Something hit his shoulder from behind and he was flung forward, landing awkwardly on his arm. He heard the snap but felt nothing. He pushed himself up and stumbled over to Moriarty, firing one final bullet execution-style into his forehead. He stood there for a moment, staring into the empty eyes of the monster, before he turned away.

There was a buzzing in his ears that felt like words, but he couldn’t understand what they were saying. He tripped and stumbled his way out of the building, almost falling over a body at the back door. His heart went to his throat when he saw the blond hair, but a second glance showed the man was far too tall to be John. He held his arm to his chest as he stumbled out into the warm autumn night. John was propped up against the wall of the building, bloody and bruised, but alive. He wasn’t putting pressure on his right leg and he was bleeding heavily from a gash above his left eye but, despite all this, when he saw Lestrade, he hugged him so tightly Lestrade could barely breathe.

“Is he dead?” he rasped.

“Yes,” Lestrade replied, his voice sounding foreign to his own ears. “He’s gone. There were two inside, I almost lost him.”

“You got shot. Moran shot you. I lost him for a second and he shot you.”

The confirmation brought forward the pain that adrenaline had been holding at bay, and Lestrade’s vision swam. “Fuck that hurts,” he gasped. “Is Anthea going to get this shit cleaned up?”

“She’s calling in a disturbance to the Secret Service now. If we leave the guns we have on the dead dudes, we can just about get away with this.”

Lestrade and John stumbled back inside, half pulling each other just to keep themselves upright, and they each planted their guns on one of the bodies. Lestrade gave his to Crowley and John planted his on Moriarty before they staggered back outside. Anthea was pouring vials of blood on the floor around the body of Moran, away from the actual fight scene, which was near the fire escape.

“Turf war,” she explained, holding her own gun to her side. “These are samples from one of Moriarty’s minor organisations involved in the drug trade. I have a crew cleaning the alley as we speak. The police will find no evidence that either of you were ever here.”

“Which one of us killed him?” John asked as he looked at Moran with an odd glint in his eyes. “I shot twice, so did you.”

“Does it matter?” she asked, giving him a level look.

“Not really,” he replied, but it looked like he was lying. He looked at Moran’s body, then back through the open door to the still form of Moriarty and smiled, teeth bloody and eyes wild. Lestrade was at once overwhelmingly glad that John was on his side.

“You both look like absolute shit,” Anthea said bluntly, “Come on, we’re done here. I’ll take you to the Secret Service A&E.”

Lestrade could barely remember the drive to the hospital. He was only half-conscious, and John was looking almost as bad, if not worse.

“Sherlock,” John groaned in between bouts of unconsciousness.
“I’ll call him,” Anthea said softly. “As soon as we’ve got you seen to, I promise. They’ll have to call him anyway, he’s your emergency contact.”

Lestrade swore under his breath as he tried to stay coherent. “Mine’s my boss. Need to make sure they don’t call him. Questions. Can’t answer.”

“It’s not your boss,” Anthea said. “I changed it last week. It’s me. I thought about making it Mycroft, but I’ll need to tell him about this whole mess in a more… tactful way.”

“Good. Should tell My, though,” he said, closing his eyes. “I still have his umbrella.”

He heard Anthea laughing, a laugh that was more than half panic, and he tried to reassure her that he was okay, that it was all done, but his tongue felt heavy and his eyes wouldn’t open. He slipped into the shadow of unconsciousness.

Chapter End Notes

I know it's an awful cliffhanger, but it's only 4 days until Chapter 9, less depending on when people are reading this. In a week it will be done, completely. Does anyone want to take a guess at what the next two chapters will be called? I'm interested to see if anyone will be able to guess them. Incidentally the song I used for Chapter 9 is my favourite radiohead song, extra points if you guess that one. I will answer asks on tumblr, I even take anonymous asks. I hope you liked this chapter, I was a little worried about that.
There There

Chapter Summary

Lestrade lives with the consequences.

Chapter Notes

Everyone should be thanking my amazing editor/beta reader for this chapter. For one it would never have been written without his help and two he edited it and gave it back to me on schedule despite being very ill. Not only is he an amazing person he is a very good writer, probably better than me, so if anyone has a spare hour or so he's on AO3 as refurinn. One last authors note, I know I ramble on a little but 'There There' is literally my favourite radiohead song and it might have influenced this chapter quite a lot, I'd recommend giving it a listen.

No matter how many times it happened to him, Lestrade could never get used to waking up to the bright, sterile lights of a hospital, and the steady beeping of machines. This time was worse than all the others combined. Not because he was more badly hurt. Not even because he had been shot. Rather, because when he turned his head he saw his friend, probably one of the only real friends he had, lying still on a hospital bed, bruised all over and covered in bandages. Lestrade hadn’t been out long. He could tell, because they had removed the bullet from his shoulder and set his broken wrist but his tongue didn’t feel like sandpaper and it was still dark outside.

He heard shouting in the corridor and tensed as he tried to move his heavy arms to look for a weapon of some kind. The door flew open and there was Sherlock, still dressed in his ridiculous pyjamas, but the look on his face made Lestrade freeze inside. He looked desperate, his eyes were wide and… fearful, and they were rimmed with red. The sound he made when he saw John lying there was the worst noise Lestrade had ever heard. It was a choked sob, half angry and half absolutely shattered.

“John,” he choked out as he reached to grab John’s unbandaged hand. “What did you do?”

Lestrade felt like an intruder, but there wasn’t exactly anything he could do about it. He didn’t have the strength to move his arms, let alone get up and let them have some privacy.

“Sherlock,” he rasped, coughing.

When Sherlock looked up, his eyes were still wild, but this time angry – no, furious. “You,” he snarled. “What did you do to him? He said you were just going to the pub. Tell me how the FUCK a trip to the pub results in... WHAT DID YOU DO?”

At the end it sounded more like a roar, anguished and raw and full of a pain that Lestrade couldn’t quite identify.

“He’d want to tell you what happened himself,” Lestrade said. “I’m not sure it’s my place to tell you.”
Sherlock crossed the room in two long strides and grabbed Lestrade by the neck. “What did you do to him?”

“Sherlock, please,” he wheezed. “Can’t breathe. Was my idea, I’m sorry.”

“What was your idea?” he asked, loosening his grip but not letting go.

“I… A few months ago, before the trial, Moriarty drugged your brother and tried to get him fired. I managed to get him out without charges being pressed and I begged Mycroft to bring down the organisation. He didn’t start until the trial began, but after the trial it was going to be too late. When Moriarty got off, I decided that the only way for this to end well, to end with your life, Mycroft’s and John’s in tact, was to go after Moriarty myself. John was in the army, and don’t tell me you think he was just a medic, and I desperately needed help. I asked Andrea and John to help me and they agreed.”

“You let John go after Moriarty by himself?” Sherlock snarled, his grip tightening again.

“No!” Greg gasped. “I asked him to deal with Moriarty’s top lieutenant, the only one who knew who Moriarty was. Sebastian Moran. I couldn’t do it myself, he was an ex-army Colonel. But it went a little wrong, there were two people inside for me to deal with and Moran arrived early.”

“You went after Moriarty? Alone?” Sherlock asked incredulously. “Are you insane? How are you even alive? Did you see where he went when he got away?”

“He didn’t.”

“Excuse me?”

“He’s dead,” Greg replied, coughing roughly as Sherlock released him in shock.

“Dead?”

“Totally, absolutely dead. A shot to the heart and a shot to the head, poetic.”

Sherlock stepped back and stared in shock, mouth comically open.

“I know he’s your arch enemy and all that shit, but I couldn’t sit back and watch while he destroyed you. While he hurt John. You may not see yourself as my friend, Sherlock, but you are, and John is the best friend I’ve ever had. I’m a police officer and I saw an opportunity for justice. Maybe it wasn’t right, it definitely wasn’t legal, but I don’t care. So you can send me to prison, get me fired… I don’t care anymore. I did what I thought was right. And John… John is going to be fine. He might never want to see me again, and you certainly won’t trust me anymore, but you are both safe, you and Mycroft, and that’s enough.”

“John,” Sherlock began, closing his eyes for a moment and taking a deep breath. “John will be okay?”

“I think so,” Greg replied softly. “He was okay when I found him after the fight. Broken ankle, fractured ribs, concussion, about a thousand bruises… but he’s going to be okay.”

“And you?”

Greg’s head snapped up. “Me?”

“You are in a hospital bed, Lestrade, or did that escape your notice?”
“Yes, well… I just… didn’t think you’d care,” Greg said, trying to sound like it didn’t hurt to admit that.

Sherlock shifted uncomfortably. “What are your injuries?”

“Shot in the left shoulder, broken right wrist, bit of blood loss, a couple of scrapes. Nothing serious.”

“You were shot? How?”

“I was distracting Moriarty to give John more time. I had already taken care of the other guy, and Moran slipped away from John and shot me just after I had shot Moriarty. John and Andrea took care of him.”


“You should ask your brother if he needs help shutting down the organisation, he’s been doing a great job so far, but two Holmes’ are better than one,” Greg said reasonably. “But you don’t have to worry about Moriarty anymore. It turns out it didn’t take a genius to stop him, just an insane, average police officer with a gun and possibly a death wish.”

“It shouldn’t have been possible. You should be dead.”

“I was fairly certain I was going to die, that’s why Andrea was there.”

“She’s fucking secret service, why couldn’t she take out Moriarty?”

“We needed her to cover the exits, and it was sort of personal with me and Moriarty.”

“Personal?” Sherlock said almost hysterically. “He covered John in Semtex and almost killed us. How was it more personal for you than it was for him?”

“I knew I couldn’t handle Moran. John understood that. I mean, you should have seen the guy. Not an ounce of fat on him, he would have killed me in a second. Besides, I owed him for what he did to Mycroft, and for those people in the block of flats, last time.”

“How the hell did you get Moriarty, in the end?”

“He shot at me when I was moving between cover and I figured out the direction and all that, took a peek and he was just standing there in the middle of the room, leaning against some rubble. Either he was stupidly arrogant or he wanted to die. Or both. Both works.”

“Why would he want to die? He was about to restart the game.”

“He was bored, and I’m not sure he had anything to live for beyond your destruction and killing as many people as possible.”

“What was his plan?”

“I didn’t ask. I saw a clean shot before I could distract him to the point of monologuing. I’m not sure I could have handled the cliché, otherwise. Although, he did say that killing me now would have ‘complicated his plan somewhat’, so he probably wanted to use your connection to the Yard somehow.”

“Or your connection to Mycroft.”

“We talk sometimes, that’s hardly a connection,” Greg muttered. “And besides, he hasn’t spoken to
me since before the trial.”

“Oh, I think he’ll want a report,” John coughed from beside them.

Greg grinned until it hurt. “You be sure to tell him that he can come collect it from me in person.”

John chuckled. “Oh, I will.”

Sherlock was frozen on the spot, staring at John’s open eyes. Eventually, he smiled – a full, real smile – and reached out with his right hand to press it lightly to John’s chest, as if he was making sure there was a heartbeat but was afraid John would break like spun glass if he put any pressure into the touch.

“John,” he breathed.

“Hey, Sherlock,” John said roughly. “I couldn’t think of anything else to get you for your birthday. Hope this is good enough.”

“You…” Sherlock spluttered angrily, clenching his hand into a fist at his side. “My god, John. You could have died. I am going to KILL Lestrade!”

Greg winced but John looked the raging Sherlock directly in the eyes and said, “I’m okay, Sherlock.”

“What were you THINKING?”

“I was thinking, ‘hey, here’s a chance to stop a genius madman who wants my best friend dead. I might die, but at least he’ll be okay. Greg knows what he’s doing and he isn’t even doing it for selfish reasons like I am. He has nothing to gain and everything to lose and you know what? The least I can do is try’. That is what I was thinking.”

“You make me sound like a fucking hero. I was being selfish. If he won, I would have lost all the things that had finally become more important than my fucking job. I wouldn’t have a life without you two and Mycroft. I spend all my time sitting at my desk at work and sleeping on my fucking couch. Who else is going to go to the pub with me and actually care about what I have to say? Who else is going to tell me I’m an idiot? Who else is going to leave me ridiculous voice messages instead of picking up the phone and calling like a normal person? I endangered your life, John. I don’t expect you to forgive me for that and I don’t expect Sherlock to trust me. I certainly don’t expect Mycroft to talk to me ever again, but all that is better than you guys being gone for good.”

“Your faith in my ability to handle Moriarty astounds me,” Sherlock drawled sarcastically.

“You’re too dramatic,” John said with a laugh. “All it takes is a bullet, not the Enigma machine.”

“You broke the law, Lestrade. You are aware that, yes?”

“Of course I bloody well am!” he snapped. “Why does everyone assume I’m not willing to bend the rules a little? I let you in on cases, I ignore the use of illegal guns, I haven’t arrested you for breaking and entering, tampering with evidence, contaminating a crime scene, withholding evidence, obstructing an investigation…”

“We get it,” John said quickly, cutting him off mid-rant. “How are you speaking so much while high on pain meds? My brain feels like jelly.”
“Pain meds make my word filter disintegrate, so if there’s anything you’d like to know about me, you might as well ask now because I’ll tell you,” Greg said. “Shit. I shouldn’t have told you that.”

“When was the last time you got laid?” Sherlock asked. John turned to Sherlock and poked him hard in the stomach.

“Oh fuck you, Sherlock, you little shit. Greg’s boyfriends are none of your business.”

Sherlock whirled around to look at him. “Boyfriends?”

“Yes, boyfriends,” Greg said with a smile. “How did you never figure that one out?”

“You haven’t been with anyone, not in the six years I’ve known you.”

“You really need to get laid, Greg,” John said from behind Sherlock. “That’s just ridiculous.”

“Well excuse me for having standards, three-continents-Watson,” Greg snapped. “It’s hardly my fault that the last person I was attracted to is a complete control freak who won’t even fucking call me. Having his assistant kidnap me is the closest he’s ever going to get to asking me on a date. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need more drugs, my fucking arm is fucking killing me.”

Sherlock wordlessly reached over and pressed the button near Greg’s hand that administered drugs. It must have included some sort of sedative because Greg felt his eyes getting heavier and his brain going a little fuzzy before he slipped quietly into a sleep-like state, but not before he saw the look John gave Sherlock. It was sort of stunned, and just before he fell asleep, Greg heard Sherlock mutter what sounded suspiciously like, “Mycroft? Seriously, Lestrade?”

In the next few days, Andrea/Anthea came by more than once with reports, although Lestrade thought it was more to do with making sure that he and John were okay than actually reporting. John was released two days after the Incident (as Lestrade had taken to calling it, to avoid Sherlock’s glares and mutters about “suicidal plans” and “temporary insanity”), but not before Lestrade noticed how closely Sherlock had watched John, how rarely he left John’s bedside and how tactile he had become. Sherlock had finally learned what true fear felt like. The fear that someone important, someone you loved, wouldn’t come home, and he finally understood what it might feel like to lose John. As the saying goes, you don’t know what you have until it’s gone. Of course Sherlock would come to this realisation after some dramatic hospital scene like an intense Oscar-winning film.

Lestrade didn’t realise his feelings in a grand reveal like Sherlock did, he didn’t have that heart stopping hospital scene where his feelings were discovered as his life flashed before his eyes. Admittedly, he was in hospital at the time, but it was hardly the same thing. He realised it little by little as resentment morphed into grudging respect, respect into admiration, and, finally, admiration into something that felt horrifyingly close to love. He wasn’t sure the point at which these changes occurred, and he might have properly articulated that seemingly inevitable end point earlier than he did if he had not been busy plotting to kill a mass murderer.

As it was, the thought became truly real while he was bored out of his mind, watching daytime television in a hospital bed, hoping to god that he would be released soon before he killed someone… Well, before he killed another person. Of all the auspicious beginnings. It became a voiced thought when he heard someone at the door and was painfully disappointed it wasn’t Mycroft, the kind of disappointment that burns and aches at the same time. The feeling of something missing, like forgetting to put socks on or leaving home without the weight of a phone in your pocket. The feeling that you are missing something, not vital, but something that makes life better,
more comfortable. Happier. Comparing that feeling to an electronic device is probably not the most romantic thing Greg had ever done, but the idea that someone couldn’t live without another person grated against his independent nature. He didn’t need Mycroft in order to live, not even in order to be happy, but with Mycroft he could be more than alive, more than plain, pedestrian happy.

How Greg could fall in love with a voice, with cryptic words and unfinished sentences and explosive arguments, was something he himself did not understand. But now that the thought that had been hovering at the back of his mind had come to the fore, he wasn’t about to go into the self-denial bullshit. As far as he was concerned, he was in love, and that was that.

This realisation was not a problem as such. His problem lay elsewhere. Basically, Lestrade’s problem was this: Just because he felt something, didn’t mean that something was mutual. Or, as the interminable Radiohead put it, “Just ’cause you feel it, doesn’t mean it’s there.” Mycroft hadn’t contacted him in over a month, and even when they had been talking, it was mostly business. Lestrade was certain that this thing he felt was entirely, pathetically unrequited.

All the evidence pointed to that one conclusion, the conclusion that Lestrade would rather not reach considering he just admitted to himself that he was in love with someone for the first time in over a decade. It might have been a while since he’d felt it, but the feeling of heartbreak was not something he was looking forward to. So Greg sat alone in his hospital room, staring blankly at the television, nursing a pathetic crush on the unobtainable and trying not to act like a teenaged girl because Mycroft hadn’t called.

“There There, Lestrade,” he thought to himself. “There There.”
Fitter Happier

Chapter Summary

Lestrade comes home and things change.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Lestrade got home from the hospital a week and a half after The Incident, something in his flat was different. He froze when he walked into his bedroom. There was a large, queen size bed, with is-this-really-necessary thread count sheets. Instead of what he really wanted to find when he looked on top of the bed – Mycroft with nothing but a bow around his waist – there was a small box tied with a red ribbon and a letter written on parchment paper. Of course. It should have bothered him more than it did that Mycroft had been in his apartment without his permission, or at least one of Mycroft’s people, but he supposed that Anthea had given him the key while he was in hospital. He awkwardly pulled the letter open with one hand in a cast and the other in a sling, letting out a short, somewhat broken laugh as he read it. It was two words.

Thank you.

He opened the box and started laughing. Inside was a journalist-style voice recorder, and when he pressed the play button, Mycroft’s voice emanated from the speakers.

“With your injuries, I could hardly, in good conscience, allow you to sleep on the couch. I am not always good with words, and even if I was, in this case words will never be sufficient to tell you how grateful I am. You saved my brother when I could not, you were brave when I was weak and you took upon yourself what should never have been your burden to bear. What you did cannot be repaid, not in favours, nor finance, nor friendship, but be assured that you have all three if you are ever in need of them.” He sounded cool and controlled, as he always had, but there was something in the undertone, some emotion Lestrade was hesitant to label in case he was hearing what he wanted to hear rather than what was. It could have been raw gratitude and relief, or it could have been something altogether less professional. Needless to say, Lestrade was hoping for the latter.

Mycroft didn’t visit. His umbrella was still hooked over the chair Lestrade hadn’t sat in for months, and he couldn’t bring himself to move it. Anthea texted regularly, but never mentioned Mycroft. He had a bit of a hard time alone in his flat with a broken wrist and a busted shoulder, but he managed. His days were full of boredom as he waited to be put back on active duty. He had no idea what Andrea had said to his boss, but it had obviously been believable because he was given medical leave, no questions asked, and he hadn’t been arrested yet. He took that as a good sign. His doctor from the A&E had told him to spend three weeks doing absolutely nothing apart from his PT exercises, and in that regard he was lucky that the bullet hadn’t shattered any bones on impact. They expected him to regain almost full mobility in six weeks. The morning of his third day home from hospital, he picked up the newspaper that had been delivered to his door and promptly dropped it again.

JAMES MORIARTY DEAD UNDER SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES.

‘Police have linked his death to an ongoing turf war between two gangs and have made several
arrests. A juror from the late James Moriarty’s trial, who did not wish to be named, claims, “He threatened my family if I did not vote him not guilty. He was a monster and now that he’s dead, I will sleep better at night.” This new testimony calls into question the dubious results of the trial that gripped the nation. However, police have declined to comment.’

Lestrade almost fell over himself as he pulled a shirt on and fumbled to button it up, grabbing his keys and half-running out of his flat. He needed to be somewhere else, anywhere else. He needed to see people so he wouldn’t see Moriarty’s cold dead eyes staring at him every time he closed his eyes. Even though he knew he had made the right decision, the dreams hadn’t been any less traumatic. He left his jacket hanging in the closet because it was still warm out and he didn’t need to look professional for work, so there was no reason to struggle into it. The walk to 200 Yards calmed him somewhat, but his mind was still reeling when he pushed his way into the café with his good shoulder.

Amy looked up at the sound of the bell and dropped the latte cup she was holding, the shattering sound louder than it should have been in the mostly empty shop. The other barista, Adam, noticed him too and said a few quiet words to Amy before taking over her orders. She came out from behind the counter like a hurricane and threw herself at him, hugging him so tightly he was afraid she’d pop his stitches.

“What the *fuck* happened to you?” she asked into his chest. “You were being all secretive and squirrely and then suddenly you disappeared for two weeks. I had to ask Gregson what happened to you and all he knew was that you were in hospital. You couldn’t have sent me a text to let me know you weren’t dead?”

She stepped back and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, looking over his injuries with a keen eye.

“I’m sorry.”

“That’s right you are!” she raged, lifting up her Doc Marten-clad foot and stamping down on his foot.

“Ouch!”

“You deserve worse. I was so worried!” she said, taking a hold of his cast and pulling him towards a booth by the window. “You are going to tell me *exactly* what happened! Spare no details, I helped you and I deserve some answers.”

“I…” he began hesitantly. “Hypothetically speaking, if I had done something… not entirely legal, would you have me arrested?”

She looked him directly in the eye and shook her head. “Not if you had a good reason.”

He let out a breath he didn’t know he had been holding. She was like a niece to him, and the idea of disappointing her was unbearable. “I made a decision.” He relayed the tale, sparing no detail – except his emotional realisation – until his voice was raw from overuse.

“You,” she said in a shaky voice, “are absolutely nuts. But… what you did. For what it’s worth, it was the right thing to do. It might not have been legal, but what you did saved lives. He was a monster, a parasite who manipulated the justice system. I don’t agree with vigilante justice, but you were protecting your friends and, in my opinion, that counts as self defence.”

“That,” he said, clearing his throat to stop his emotions taking over, “that means a lot.”
She reached over and patted his good shoulder. “I’m proud to call you my friend. Stop second-guessing yourself, you did the right thing.”

“I know that,” he said defensively. “That’s not what was bothering me.”

“I know. You were afraid I’d think of you differently.” She shook her head. “I don’t. Not in the way you’re afraid of.”

“Thank you…” He looked away as he tried to ignore the sudden wetness of his eyes. “I’d best let you get back to work. I have… I have other people I need to see today.”

“Okay,” she said softly. “You have a good day, you hear?”

“I’ll try. I’ll be back at work soon enough and dying for caffeine. As always, call me if you ever need anything.”

She nodded and walked back behind the counter. He smiled his thanks to Adam, who nodded, and left the shop feeling lighter. He hadn’t been lying when he said he had other people to talk to. He had been avoiding John and Sherlock since John’s release from hospital and that wasn’t fair, he had to give Sherlock the opportunity to rage at him some more. He still hadn’t replied to Mycroft’s message. He didn’t know what to say, and the one time he had tried to sleep on the bed had resulted in him going back to the couch. The bed felt empty and he kept rolling over, expecting to see someone else sleeping beside him, which was more depressing than his empty apartment. He was used to being alone on his couch. It was routine. The ache of loneliness had faded away over time, but on a bed large enough for two it seemed so pathetic that it was just him. It was a stupid thought, he knew it was, but he couldn’t help it.

Even though he knew he should call John, or go and visit them, he just couldn’t do it. He was a wreck. He had nightmares every night and he couldn’t even close his eyes to block out the sun without seeing Moriarty’s dead eyes, or John, battered and bruised covered in blood. As a police officer, he had seen plenty of things to add fuel to his nightmares. Some of those experiences faded or were replaced with newfound horrors, but this was something that he knew full well would never go away. Nothing could ever be worse than that, seeing his best friend injured and staring into the eyes of a man he’d killed. Police like him didn’t carry guns, he’d never killed anyone before Moriarty. Sure, he’d hit plenty of people with a baton and even tasered a couple of people, but he had never killed anyone. It didn’t matter that there had never been a person more deserving of death than James Moriarty. It made no difference that he was evil incarnate. Greg had still pulled a trigger, twice, and killed two people. He’d made the decision to end someone’s life outside the parameters of the law and that was something that he expected would haunt him forever.

It took him just over a month to finally make his way to John and Sherlock’s apartment. He thought about calling, but it felt like that was the coward’s way out. If Sherlock was going to rage at him, if John was going to blame him, then he should do them the courtesy of being there in person.

It was too far to walk to John and Sherlock’s flat, especially considering he was technically supposed to be doing as little as possible, so he hailed a cab. He didn’t bother knocking. If it was just Sherlock, he wouldn’t have answered, and John was still recovering. He managed to dodge their lovely, but nosy, landlady and ascended the stairs two at a time. When he walked into their living room, he stopped just inside the door. It looked like a bomb had gone off. There were clothes littering every surface and Lestrade swore he saw a pair of bright red pants on the coffee table. It certainly didn’t take a detective to figure out what had gone on in that room. He stood there, trying very hard not to touch anything and fervently wishing he could delete everything he’d seen.

“Sherlock?” John called, coming out of the bedroom. He was wearing a pair of jeans but no shirt,
and Lestrade could see purple and red marks that were definitely not from his fight with Moran. The bruises and cuts were healing well, most bruises already faded to a sickly yellow-brown colour, and his cast was off.

“Um, nope.” Greg coughed awkwardly. “Just me.”

John flushed and looked around the room. “Right… Hi?”

“I just wanted to see if you were feeling better… Obviously you’ve been cleared for… activity.” He coughed again. “Glad you’re feeling better.”

“I thought you were supposed to be on bed rest?”

“Yeah,” he muttered. “I got bored. I saw the paper and thought you might want to chat or something, now that we’re both better and my cast is off. But it’s fine, I’m sure you’re… busy with other things.”

“I saw the paper too. Good job, aye?” John said, running a hand through his hair and looking everywhere but at Greg.

“Okay, I’m just going to get right to it and address the giant elephant in the room, but only because I have to ask.”

“Greg…”

“No, just let me ask,” Greg interrupted, holding a hand up to stop John from speaking. “He knows it’s not just a one time, or a friends with benefits thing, doesn’t he?”

John coughed awkwardly. “Yeah, he does.”

“So you’re going to make a go of it?”

“It looks like it,” he said, a grin tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“I’m happy for you,” Greg said. “After everything you guys have been through, you deserve this. But if he hurts you… Well, I think he knows, now, what I am capable of.”

“Oh, I know,” Sherlock said from behind him. He was leaning against the doorjamb, wearing his trademark coat and a tight purple shirt, open at the throat, despite the red and purple love bite on his neck that he didn’t seem to be attempting to hide. “Should I be delivering you a similar speech promising bodily harm? I understand that it is my duty as next of kin.”

“Excuse me?”

“Mycroft is my brother.”

“And?” Greg asked before the realisation hit him. “Oh, fuck! We’re not… I haven’t even spoken to Mycroft in months. We aren’t like that.”

Sherlock quirked an eyebrow and John chuckled. “Come on, Greg. We’re your friends.”

“I know that, which is why I’m telling you this. Mycroft isn’t interested in me. He thanked me for my services and hasn’t contacted me since. As much as I might wish… I mean. He has given me no indication he’s interested.”

“But you are? Interested, that is?” John asked.
“That… is not the point,” Greg said, shifting uncomfortably.

“Oh, come off it, Greg. You analysed my feelings and asked the hard questions. That’s what friends are for, and you’re mad if you think I’m going to pass this opportunity up.”

“What difference does it make?” Greg asked, throwing his hand in the air and wincing as his shoulder pinched. He technically should have been wearing his sling, but he had stopped wearing it when they took the cast off his wrist.

“My brother has predictable patterns. He never strays from those pre-planned arrangements of encounters and conversations. He never kidnapped you, that was his first deviation from his pattern. Then, he made a personal effort to help you on cases when it was not required of him. Then, he let you see him in a moment of weakness and followed your advice. Then, he sat by his phone for hours, waiting to hear that you were out of surgery. Mycroft Holmes doesn’t wait, he doesn’t show weakness and he certainly doesn’t fail to personally evaluate all people I come into contact with on a daily basis. He kidnapped Mrs Hudson, Angelo from the restaurant, and the man I buy my newspaper from every morning, but he didn’t kidnap you. Didn’t you ever wonder why?”

“Well, that certainly makes me feel special. Thanks, Sherlock, for affirming what I already knew. I’m not important to Mycroft, I get that, you don’t have to rub it in!”

“That’s not what I said!” Sherlock snapped. “Mycroft didn’t kidnap you, because caring is not an advantage.”

“What?”

“He was afraid that he would become attached to you if he ever made the effort to talk to you personally. He read your file, saw surveillance photographs, and sent Anthea instead because he saw something in you that scared him and, believe me, I will tease him mercilessly about this for the next fifty years.”

“That doesn’t make any sense!” Lestrade yelled. “Why would he do that? You’re just making fun of me. I know you don’t think we’re friends, but seriously, this is low, even for you. You can’t play with people’s feelings like this, Sherlock. It’s not fair.”

“I’m not being manipulative or malicious,” Sherlock replied angrily. “I’m speaking the truth.”

“You can’t be. You deduced that I’m in love with your brother and you decided to torture me as payback. I know that John got hurt, and I know that it was my fault, but he’s okay, and this is just cruel.”

“Are you?” John asked, finally inputting into the conversation.

“Am I what?”

“In love with Mycroft.”

“Yes, fine. I am in love with Sherlock’s infuriating brother, a man with a mind-boggling amount of power and ridiculous taste in accessories, and I don’t need any more people to tell me that those feelings aren’t mutual. I figured that out for myself, thanks,” Lestrade shouted, visibly deflating by the end. “Are you happy, now? Am I sufficiently humiliated, or would you like more?”

“I think that’s enough,” Sherlock said quietly.

“Great, thanks,” he said brokenly. “I’ll just… go, now.”
He ignored John’s hand on his arm and ran down the stairs, bursting out into the busy London streets. He saw an available cab but ignored it and walked towards his apartment. He lost track of how much time he spent walking, equal parts too long and not long enough. He wanted to think but he didn’t want to feel. He was tired, frustrated, and more than a little broken. He was happy for John, he really was, but it couldn’t have come at a worse time from Lestrade’s perspective. He had managed to avoid the feeling of loneliness for a decade and now, just as he realised the pathetic truth, his best friend went and got himself into a relationship with his flatmate. That sort of love was only sickening for those who were bitter and alone and, at that moment, that was exactly what Lestrade was. Bitter and alone.

When he was close to his flat, he reached for his keys – something that was not as easy as it sounded, considering his hand wasn’t allowing him to grip properly without sending shooting pains from his shoulder. When he finally looked up from his task, he wanted to cry. There, on the street outside his apartment building, stood Mycroft Holmes, leaning against one of his fancy black cars and staring up at Lestrade’s window.

“I should have stayed in bed,” he muttered to himself. It seemed the universe was trying to make him as miserable as possible.

“Here for a report?” he asked as lightly as he could. Mycroft turned quickly to face him and, to Lestrade’s astonishment, smiled a full, real smile.

“You could say that,” he replied cryptically.

“Well, okay then,” Lestrade said with an almost inaudible sigh as he started to climb the stairs to his flat. “Come on up.”

“Thank you, Gregory.” Lestrade literally tripped up the stairs and only just managed to catch himself before doing further damage to his arm. “Be careful,” Mycroft admonished from directly behind him, much closer than Lestrade was expecting. “We can’t have you hurt again.”

He mumbled something unintelligible and walked down the short hallway to his flat, opening the door and gesturing Mycroft to come inside. He was fiercely glad that he’d had enough time on his hands to clean up his flat the day before. This conversation was going to be hard enough without him having to worry about a messy flat, too.

“I’m sorry, but I haven’t got a written report to give you,” he said with a wry smile. “I’m not stupid enough to write and sign incriminating statements, so I hope you’ll be satisfied with a verbal report.”

“I was going to save this argument for later,” Mycroft began, his voice going dangerously soft. “But now that you’ve brought it up, I have a couple of grievances to air.”

Lestrade winced but said, “If that’s what you want, go ahead.”

He watched in horror as Mycroft’s cool and collected mask crumbled in the face of pure, desperate, devastating anger. Mycroft looked so furious that Lestrade had to take a step back. “What were you thinking? I told you it wasn’t your concern. I TOLD you to let Sherlock and me deal with it, but no! The great Detective Inspector Lestrade had to go all secret service on one of the most dangerous men in the world! And for what? A misguided sense of responsibility, want for glory? Tell me that, tell me, because I’m at a loss to understand why.”

“Obviously you don’t know me at all,” Greg snarled in response as he let the pain and frustration of previous few months govern his emotions. “I didn’t risk my life and my career for glory, you absolute IDIOT. What do you think would have happened if I had let you take care of it? It was
taking too long, something big was about to happen and if we hadn’t stopped it, I really do think that someone would be dead right now, one of the good guys. I couldn’t let him take away the people I care about! He had already tried to get you fired. For all I knew, he would have tortured or killed you next. So don’t say to me I did it for glory when I risked everything to keep you safe.” He quickly amended it to, “You and your infuriating brother.”

Mycroft sat down heavily on the couch. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have lost my temper. You seem to have a unique and unnerving ability to get under my skin. I… what you did for Sherlock… I already thanked you.”

“Yeah.” Greg sighed. “It was too much, you know. Also a little creepy.”

Mycroft looked apologetic at that. “Ah… yes. Well, I have never been especially good at gauging the social acceptability of my actions, because I’ve never had to be. Sherlock is the same.”

“Speaking of Sherlock,” Greg said with a grimace, “he seems to have finally figured out a few things. I popped by their flat this morning.”

“Yes, I was aware,” Mycroft replied with a soft smile. “He never wastes much time, not when he knows what he wants.”

“I really hope you switched off the listening device you have in his coat while they were going at it,” Greg said, shuddering, and then, when he realised the implications of what he said, froze. “Actually, I hope you switched it off for the entire thing.”

“I can assure you, I have no interest whatsoever in my brother’s sexual exploits,” Mycroft replied with a delicate shudder, and Greg relaxed. “However, the device was switched back on this morning when Sherlock left Baker Street on an errand, and has been on ever since. In fact, my brother sent me a text message not 20 minutes ago.”

Greg tensed and swore in his head when he read the message on the phone Mycroft had handed to him.

*Check the recordings on the listening device hidden somewhere on my person, yes, I know about that. You owe me. –SH*

“Right,” Greg said quickly, his throat dry and his mind whirling as it braced for the seemingly inevitable rejection. “Tea? I could do with some tea, let me make you a cup.”

He quickly walked past the couch and went to the kitchen to boil the kettle with shaking hands. When he turned back around, Mycroft was standing by the kitchen table, running a finger lightly across the handle of the umbrella he’d left there all those months ago.

“You kept it?” he asked softly.

“I… I was waiting for a good time to give it back,” Greg said uneasily.

“I can tell that you are still sleeping on the couch,” Mycroft said suddenly. Greg blinked in confusion at the change in topic.

“Um…”

Mycroft stepped closer until he was less than two feet away from Greg. “I’ve never been good at expressing myself in social situations,” he said, like it was an explanation. “But I thought you knew. I was so sure that you knew.”
“Knew what?” Greg asked, confused.

Mycroft took one final step forward so he was well and truly in Greg’s personal space. “All those times I told you that you were intelligent, I meant it, but right now you’re being maddeningly dense,” he said matter-of-factly. “I know that it was my turn to be the brave one, but I thought that you never wanted to see me again. You didn’t reply to my message and you always used to reply to my messages. You made me laugh. It seems as though, now that I know how this is going to be received, I finally have enough courage to say it out loud.” He reached out and laid his hand on Greg’s neck, tracing his jawline with his thumb. “I love you.”

“I’m dead,” Greg blurted. Mycroft’s head snapped up and suddenly he was laughing.

“I stand corrected,” he chuckled. “As usual, Gregory, you have managed to surprise me.”

“I’m… not dead?”

“No,” he said softly. “No, you aren’t. But if you ever pull a stunt like the one with Moriarty again, I will kill you myself.” He moved his other hand to rest on Greg’s hip. “I don’t think I could handle getting that call again. I almost fired Anthea and came terrifyingly close to declaring war on Israel.”

“My… Would you like to go out sometime? On a date? With me?” Greg asked eventually, after his brain had rebooted to accommodate for the life-altering impossibilities that were no longer impossible. He winced internally at how lame it sounded, how tentative his voice was, and looked down to hide his red face, but when he looked up from his shoes, Mycroft was smiling.

Mycroft laughed again, the sound rich and happy as he leaned in and kissed him.

It could have been minutes or it could have been hours later when they finally broke apart and Greg asked, “Is that a yes?”

“Yes,” Mycroft replied with another wonderful laugh. “But… I work a lot.”

“So do I.”

“I’m condescending and superior.”

“I’m proud and judgmental,” Greg countered.

“…”

“No, stop.” Greg said, holding up his hand. “We both have issues, and I know for sure we’re going to fight a lot but, My, I love you, and we can make this work. I know we will find a way to make it work.”

“I rather enjoy fighting with you,” Mycroft admitted sheepishly.

Greg laughed and pulled Mycroft down for a quick kiss. “And I’ll enjoy fighting for you. Now that we’ve got the lovey-dovey shit out of the way, how about we check out the new bed you so generously bought for me?”

Mycroft’s laugh mingled with his as they made their way to their bedroom, and in that moment, in an old room full of hope and new beginnings, Greg decided. He decided that he would be happy to spend the rest of his life fighting with Mycroft, and listening to his wonderful, infuriating genius laugh.
For the first time in a very long while, Gregory Lestrade was looking forward to the future.

*End*

Chapter End Notes

AND WE'RE DONE! I hope everyone enjoyed the ending (and yes it is the very end). I have to thank my readers who have been here from the beginning, and all the people who came in at any point while I was posting, the comments, kudos and bookmarks were unexpected and very much appreciated. I will continue to answer any and all questions, here in the comments or on Tumblr (withfiendfyre.tumblr.com).

Now for the obligatory 'thank you' section.

First and formost I have to thank my talented editor refurinn, to whom this fic is dedicated to, who made it all possible in the first place. I would still be struggling with this fic if not for his encouragement, advise and editing expertise. I've said it many times and I will continue to say it as long as there are people who will listen, he is the best editor, beta and friend anyone could ask for and I have no idea where I'd be if I hadn't answered his call for an editor on Tumblr all those months ago. Give him some love, if you have a minute. Secondly I would like to thank my sister, who introduced me to my first Mystrade fic ever and encouraged me to give it a go. Lastly I'd like to thank all the artists, writers and fans who inspired me to give it a shot, I like to think I've done an okay job on my first voyage on the good ship Mystrade.

Thank you for reading Little by Little!

-Fiendfyre

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