Bees & Other Stories
by okapi

Summary

ACD ficlet collection. All chapters stand alone. Check summary for warnings & rating.


Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter Summary

Title: Bees
Rating: Teen
Length: 489
Content Notes & Warnings: Holmes/Watson, writing on the body, references to sex, retirementlock.
Summary: The words they leave on each other.
Author's Note: For the July prompt: bees.

*The lazy yawning drone.*

It is not every day that a man wakes to find Shakespeare scrawled on his inner thigh. This morning I am, as the black ink scratches suggest, lazy. One privilege of retirement is the lie-in. And I sleep more soundly here, in this little cottage on the southern slope of the downs, than I ever did in London. That’s why Watson is able to carve silly epitaphs upon my body with me none the wiser. He is aided by, and alluding to, the fact that last night, I was, indeed, the drone. And he the queen.

*The bee is an expert chemist.*

I, too, was once, to use the words of the Royal Beekeeper of Charles II, an expert chemist. My interest in chemistry has not waned, though my focus has narrowed. But yesterday it seemed like we were back at Baker Street with test tubes bubbling and foul smoke filling the rooms. The only difference was that in my haste to contain the disaster, I fell and hit my head, resulting in the good doctor placing me under his strict supervision for the remainder of the day and the night. I was not disappointed, however. I decided long ago that Watson’s tender care was worth any loss to science. Such care meant that I slept very well and woke to a message on my forearm.

*The fragrant work with diligence proceeds.*

It humbles me that I, who relied so heavily on my powers of observation, did not notice the line from Dryden’s Virgil spanning my belly until I set about dressing myself for the day. Beekeepers’ work is as arduous and never-ending as that of their charges. I fell instantly asleep last night, too spent to spare a single thought for the man who must have dressed me in night-clothes and tucked me into bed like a child and left behind these beautiful words to inspire me, like a gift under a pillow.

*Die müssen wohl beide / Für einander sein*

Goethe is referring to the bee and bell-flower, how they are made for one another: the bee perfectly suited to spread the flower’s pollen, thus, ensuring its propagation and, in turn, the flower perfectly suited to provide the nectar that the bee requires for nourishment, thus, ensuring the bee’s survival. Like flower and bee, Watson and I could not be more suited to each other. We ensure each other’s survival. Last night, I enjoyed playing the bell-flower. Watson must have enjoyed his role as well, to leave such a missive on the plump of my buttock.

*Go, then to the bee, poet, consider her ways, and be wise.*
I have left Shaw’s words across Watson’s chest, and when he wakes, I shall tell him, again: that I am
his, for now and for always, and no insect—no matter how clever or industrious or evolved—need
remind of the wisdom of my heart.
Salmon (Horror AU)

Chapter Summary

Title: Salmon
Rating: Teen
Length: 400
Content Notes and Warnings: Horror AU, Holmes & Watson, Turkish bath, tentacles, major character death (implied)
Summary: Curious Holmes accompanies Watson to the Turkish bath.
Author's Note: for the August monthly prompt: relaxation.

“I suppose there is something relaxing about being baked like a salmon fillet.”

Watson stretches on the bench like a lizard beneath the desert sun. He smiles.

Beads of sweat tickle as they roll off my body.

“Salmon may also be poached.”

Watson smiles again. The simple steam bath, however, is less pleasant than the dry variety.

I drip.

Watson drips.

We do not remain in the herbal steam bath. With one shared glance we arrive, by mute and mutual agreement, at the decision that I voice upon egress:

“Seasoned salmon can be overwhelming for the palate.”

We end our journey in the lowermost chambers by the stone-lined pools.

“Watson,” I say, studying an arched threshold to a darkened passageway.

“Where the salmon go to mate,” he mumbles, then promptly falls asleep.

I watch the water. Ripples, waves, troughs and peaks, bubbles, changes in colour and reflections of light.

My mind relaxes.

Or so I think until I arrived at the conclusion that there must be an empty chamber on the other side of the tank wall. Nothing else explains my observations.
“I’m going for a swim, Watson.”

He snores.

I wade into the water, moving hands along the wall.

And find what I seek.

I push.

The break in the wall reveals itself to be a door.

I cast a glance at Watson’s sleeping form, then proceed.

The door swings closed behind me.

I am reassured at the twin notch on this side of the wall.

I turn.

Ah.

A luminous, opalescent chamber surrounding cyan waters.

The centre of an oyster.

I immediately float on my back and imagine myself a pearl whose heart is a speck of grit.

Fanciful.

Watson will laugh when I tell him.

I float.

I am a mythical creature, half human, half fish. Singing sailors to their deaths.

I am a kraken. Rising from the depths. Breaking ships like nursery toys.

My mind floats.

My mind wakes.

My body stirs.

I am hungry.

How long have I been here?

Too long.
As I pass back through the hidden door, I itch and burn. My skin, my whole being feels constricting, confining.

Something inside me seeks release, freedom.

The tension ebbs as the tips of eight ribbon legs come into my field of vision.

They coil. Uncoil.

I am hungry.

And there, on the stones, I see it.

Dinner.

Delicately prepared.

Lightly seasoned.

Salmon.
Holmes lowered his violin.

“The remainder of the evening’s entertainment falls on you, Watson. I should like to hear the story of the seven bedrooms.”

“Holmes!”

“Watson!” he cried, mocking my surprise. “This morning you were stifling a grin at that point in my explanation.”

“I was remembering youth’s vigour.”

“Do tell.”

Wine became whiskey and I did.

“One night on my first visit to the Continent, I found myself at a house of pleasure with mates. I began in one bedroom—chamber is the better term—and six later I was on the street at dawn, spent and penniless, but smiling.”

“The first?”

“Was of the proprietress of the establishment.”

“Pick of the litter, were you?”

“Indeed. She was a large, robust woman.”

“Efficient, too, I’ll wager.”

I nodded. “She recognised my omnivorous nature, and when we finished introduced me to a young man only a few years my senior. Dark eyes, dark skin. He spoke like a poet, reasoned like a philosopher. We discovered a common interest in medicine, his of the East, mine of the West.”
“An exchange of knowledge?”

“And bodily fluids, but he had customers waiting so he handed me over to his sisters.”

Holmes raised an eyebrow.

“His countrywomen, at least. Equally beautiful, but more playful in nature, and by that time, I was in need of a wash.”

“So they obliged.”

I hummed. “The pleasure of being cradled between them, surrounded by heat and water.” I shook my head and sighed.

“Like your Turkish bath?”

I nodded. “Once restored, I asked after my mates and was ushered into a salon of sorts. One friend was well into his cups and cornered me with a whispered confession.”

“Were his feelings reciprocated?”

“No, but I was a bit muddled myself so…” I shrugged. “I’m told he’s doing quite well in America.”

“I’m sure he is.”

“Afterwards, we joined the others in the midst of an orgy. There were two rooms, one for watching, one for participating. It was madness but I confess some of the lessons learned have stayed with me still.”

“Indeed.”

“Seas of bodies, skin, mouths. Bird song mixed with sigh and grunts. A green-eye cat appeared at one point and gave my performance a very contemptuous look.”

Holmes chuckled. “Dogs are more forgiving. So what part of the adventure did you enjoy most?”

“The end, when my dark-eyed friend returned. We remained curled together in a hammock, pleasuring each other until the proprietress chased me into the street with her broom. For failure to pay. I had no money at that point.”

“Oh, Watson, you didn’t.”

I chuckled. “Of course, I gave him every last coin I had. Well, there you have it, the story of the seven bedrooms. What is it, Holmes?”

“It’s a pity that I have only one bedroom to offer you.”

I covered his hand with mine. “The man is not so different from the youth. Like a poet. Like a philosopher. And my treasure is yours.”
I weighed the glass vial in my hand.

It was heavier than it had seemed from across the room.

And more beautiful.

Here I could see the delicate etchings which intertwined with the gold; together they gave the appearance of fine embroidery work.

It had caught my eye soon after I’d entered the room and my gaze must have lingered a moment too long, for the old man had said, “My late wife liked pretty things, unusual things. She collected them. Lachrymosas. The top allows the tears to evaporate and thus, herald the end of the time of mourning. Here,” he rose and walked to the shelf, “if you like it, accept it as a token of my gratitude, Doctor.”

I refused.

“Please,” he insisted. “It shan’t remain.”

No, I could see his point there. Ours was a final consultation at his home. I was, in a few moments, to pronounce him fit enough to wed his bride and take her on a lengthy voyage abroad. One would hardly expect the new wife to cherish the baubles of the old.

I politely refused his offer once more and had thought that the end of it, but at a moment when my back was turned, the wily, stubborn old fellow must have snuck it into my Gladstone, wrapped in a handkerchief.

Lachrymosa.

Tear-catcher.

Beautiful, but wrong for me, for there had not been any tears.

Not for Holmes.

I had been too shocked and stricken, too numbed by heavy guilt and sudden grief, to cry for him. And
there was no grave, no memorial, no place where I could spend my tears, lay a flower or say a
prayer, save an address on a street that I purposefully avoided these days.

Perhaps more surprisingly, there had been no tears for Mary.

I had been too fatigued. It had been more than three hundred days of being nurse and doctor,
housemaid and priest, more than three hundred days of watching the woman I loved turn, moment by
moment, into the patient I tended. After the funeral, I slept. And when I woke, I screamed into the
silence of our home, which swallowed and echoed my rage like a Swiss waterfall.

No tears to catch. They were all inside me. I was the lachrymosa.

But my mourning would never end, not even if every unshed tear within me evaporated.

I hurled the vial against the wall, and it splintered into a cascade of weeping shards.
Hammam Bouquet

Chapter Summary

Title: Hammam Bouquet
Rating: Gen
Content Notes: Angst; Holmes/Watson (pinning); AU with regard to timeline, esp. Watson/Mary; Turkish bath; rum; tattoos; mention of morphine use; references to "A Scandal in Bohemia."
Summary: Watson contemplates a tattoo.
Author's Note: For the monthly prompt: spirit. Inspired by the sherlock60 discussion post of two weeks ago about fragrance and the 1_million_words prompt: "There was frost on the carpet."

“Doctor Watson?”

I grunted.

“There’s a cab for you, should you wish to return to your lodgings.”

“Is there? Prescient sod.”

The first utterance was directed at the soft-spoken attendant, the second at the pair of mint sprigs at the bottom of my glass.

Green stems as muddled as I was.

“Very well.”

I slowly got to my feet, weighed more by the memory of my own foolishness than by the spirit flowing through my veins.

“Doctor, you forgot this.”

“Did I?”

Certain of the irony lost in my reply, I shoved the small roll of parchment under my arm and tottered toward the exit.

“You’ve been unfaithful, Watson. To your whiskey and your bath.”

I grunted.

“The distinctive blend of scents known as Hammam Bouquet on your clothes can only mean you’ve eschewed the Turkish bath on Northumberland Avenue for the one on Jermyn Street. And I’d be a poor detective if I couldn’t detect rum on the breath of a man who is as spirit-filled as the one before me.”

I scowled not at Holmes’s words, but rather at his waistcoat, which peeked out from a dark blue
dressing gown.

If there was a waistcoat, there was a watch, and if there was a watch, there was a watch-chain, and if there was a watch-chain, there was a sovereign, and if there was a sovereign…

…well, there was a fool.

I hurled the parchment into the fire and growled, “Go to hell,” then shuffled off to bed.

Breakfast was coffee for two.

“I threw that in the fire,” I said, glancing at the parchment stretched upon canvas.

“An unsuccessful attempt. It’s a beautiful rendering and an interesting choice of subject. Dragon.”

“New patient, had the most fabulous tattoo, covered his back. Said he had it done on Jermyn Street. So I went to see the artist. We chatted a bit and he drew that.” I sighed. “Needle pierces skin, I squeal like a lamb at slaughter. Couldn’t go through with it. I was a soldier, damn it!”

My fist hit the table.

“Watson.”

The word was as soft as crushed rose petals, but as Holmes reached for my hand, I glimpsed the sovereign.

Like a hanged man.

“Must ready myself. I’m to propose marriage to Miss Morstan today.”

“Watson.”

“I am not the man that I think I am.” I glanced at the sketch of the dragon. “And I will never be…”

The rest of my words—clever, charming, loved in the way that I love—drowned in a sip of coffee.

Cup met saucer, but just as I rose, morning light struck the gold disc and danced across the room, creating the illusion of a cascade of sparkling snow flurries.

“Enjoy your guinea—that is, your breakfast,” I mumbled, fleeing a heated, hunting and hungry, grey-eyed stare.

When next I met those grey eyes, they were shrouded in an opiate veil.

“She said ‘yes.’”

He looked through me, nodding.

“Is that why there’s frost on the rug?”
Rare

Chapter Summary

Title: Rare
Rating: G
Length: 500
Content Notes: POV Holmes & POV Victor Trevor, wistful pining; References to "The Gloria Scott"; prose-poem
Summary: Of all ghosts the ghosts of our old lovers are the worst.
Author's Note: For the LJ Holmes_Minor October prompt: Spirit

Rare is the night—and it is always night—when Sherlock Holmes makes tea for himself.
When apparatus and instrument assigned to scientific inquiry are commandeered for personal use.
When richly-scented leaves are procured from a tin in a hiding place more guarded than that of a Moroccan case. Or a Turkish slipper. Or a photograph of a contralto.
The cup, too, is procured. It is his own. Not borne of the household cupboard. Not borrowed. Not casually appropriated. Not tested or tainted or tampered with.
Selected, purchased, cleaned, and reserved for the purpose.
The purpose of drinking tea grown on the terraced hills of Terai.
Rare is the night—and it is always night—when Sherlock Holmes devotes himself to the ritual.
Of drinking tea. Of smoking a quiet cigar. Of letting his thoughts wander across valley and plain and seas, dead and living. Of letting his mind curl up and down the frayed strands of a dice-throw of words uttered long ago.

Of all ghosts the ghosts of our old lovers are the worst.

It was truth then. It is truth now, though the speaker is a ghost himself, a ghost who, though kind and well-meaning, inspiring and munificent, still casts a long shadow over the day-walking.

Rare is the night—and it is always night—when Sherlock Holmes dances with the ghosts of yesterday and wonders what might have been.

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Rare is the morning—and it is always morning—when Victor Trevor makes tea for himself.
Before the day has dawned, before the dew has dried, before the dog, snoring, snuffling, flushing dream-pheasants in the dream-fens, has awakened.
The tea is not his. It has journeyed from here to there and back again. The tin says ‘breakfast blend,’ which means anything and, therefore, nothing.

But it tastes like him. Like before.

Cheap. Foul. Spartan.

Academic.

Rare is the morning—and it is always morning—when Victor Trevor wakes, not to plan, but to think.

Of a boy.

He thinks of a boy whilst standing in bare feet. He thinks of a boy whilst reading of a man by bare taper-light. He thinks of a boy whilst lifting and lowering pages of gummed clippings with bare fingertips. Pages —ink faded, ink sharp—of weeks-old, months-old, years-old news.

He sips and smiles and remembers.

Words, his own. Like ghosts they tap their coded pleas on window panes.

_I tell you, Holmes, I have had to keep a tight hold upon myself all this time; and now I am asking myself whether, if I had let myself go a little more, I might not have been a wiser man._

It was truth then. It is truth now, though villain’s wounds are hardened scars.

Rare is the morning—and it is always morning—when Victor Trevor, warm cup of warm memory in hand, asks himself why the sins of the father have such jagged calling cards.

And whether he might not have been,

_might just not have been_,

a wiser man.
BANG!

I rushed to open a window.

“Did you see that, Watson?!”

“I may not be the most observant man in the world—or the room,” I called behind me, “but even I could not miss an exploding star of blue flame!”

“Not the goal I had in mind, but still significant,” said Holmes.

“What?” I asked, coughing and waving at the smoke. “Good Lord, Holmes! Your eyebrows!”

“Casualties in the crusade for the truth, my dear Watson. But, no, my victory is for art, not science. My azure blood is singing!” The last was, indeed, sung.

I stifled a laugh. “Are you certain your blood isn’t singed?”

Ignoring my quip, he waltzed about the fog,

“Blue, Watson! Blue is rare. Strontium carbonate creates red; calcium chloride, orange; sodium nitrate, yellow; and barium chloride, green. All simple and straightforward. But, oh, that tricky copper chloride. Copper creates blue, and the temperature must be within a very narrow range. Too hot or too cool, nothing, but when the elements are just right—BOOM!”

He made a theatrical flourish.

“My dear man,” his face fell, “I hope that the explosion did not cause you any undo distress.”

“I’m quite all right,” I reassured him, touching my face and confirming that my own eyebrows were still attached.

“Good. Sometimes returned soldiers find such noises quite detrimental to their peace of mind.”

“Oh,” I breathed, realising the source of his concern. “It’s true that noises in the street can have an unsettling effect.” I considered the question further, then added, “But I think in those cases it is surprise that contributes to the distress. When I see you at work in your laboratory,” I gestured to the
apparatus strewn across tables and floor, “I know that such hazards are very likely, if not imminent, and therefore I suppose I am somewhat prepared for it.”

He smiled. “Good. I should not want to contribute to your nightmares.”

I laughed and retorted, “The way you contribute to my dreams.” I made to sit, shuffling newspapers, and it wasn’t until I was settle in my armchair, that I realised the full import of the words I had uttered.

Good Lord. I could not meet his eyes. I waved an arm and coughed. “This blue smoke, it’s quite thick, isn’t it? I feel a bit addled,” I said weakly, then shuffled more papers.

I caught a flash of plaid flannel dressing gown, and when I finally summon the courage to look up, Holmes was at the open window, his back to me.

“Indeed,” he said. “Perhaps it’s best if we remove ourselves from the rooms for the evening. Marcini’s for supper, then a concert?”

I exhaled. “It’d be a lovely way to celebrate your artistic achievement.”

He turned sharply and with a rueful expression, said,

“And mourn the loss of my eyebrows.”

Our eyes met, and we both burst into laughter.

“The illustrator will be very cross,” I added as we retreated to our respective bedrooms to change.
In the Mews

Chapter Summary

Title: In the Mews  
Rating: PG  
Length: 500  
Content Notes: Angst; Holmes/Watson (unresolved); homophobia; mention of suicide; 
    case is lifted from Agatha Christie's "Murder in the Mews," in which the suicide (made 
    to look like murder) occurs on Guy Fawkes Night.  
Summary: On Guy Fawkes Night, a case leads to revelations and disappointment.  
    Author's Note: I was going for something 'authentic' for the 5th of November and ended 
    up with...this not-happy fic.

The revelers were still at their merry-making when our hansom cab began its slow return to Baker 
Street.

"The tragedy of Miss Allen seems more horrid with all this gaiety about," I said. "But I think that’s 
the quickest you’ve wrapped one up yet, Holmes."

"The case possessed feature or two of interest. One, it was not murder made to look like suicide but 
rather suicide made to look like murder, and, two the gunshot was purposefully masked by the 
eruption of fireworks."

I nodded. “Miss Allen’s friend, Miss Plenderleith, is a very skilled photographer. I suppose you 
know a good deal about photography.”

There was a long pause; then Holmes replied,

“The only photograph I shall take of you, Watson, should circumstances allow it, will be of your 
corpse.”

I started at the coldness of his reply. Neither of us spoke for the remainder of the journey.

I confess that I did not realise how inflated my fantasy was until Holmes’s statement pricked it like a 
needle, and it burst. Though the case had been a sobering one, I had still clung to the notion that 
upon our return to Baker Street, I would propose that Holmes and I don masks and costumes and go 
out amidst the revelers. In disguise, and perhaps with a cup or two in us, we might feel at liberty to…

I shook my head. Holmes's words were even more sobering than a young lady blackmailed into 
suicide and another young lady so determined to bring the blackmailer to justice that she reframed the 
scene of her best friend’s death to look like murder.

I had been stupid: Holmes was not the type to indulge in…frivolity, even with me, and perhaps, and 
this hurt most of all, especially with me.

We were both ensconced in our armchairs before the fire when Holmes spoke,

“Miss Plenderleith was reckless to take those photographs. To keep them. Anyone with any 
imagination,” he stressed the word as only he could, “would see them for what they are.”
“Which is?”

“Declarations of love. She might be comfortable with such open expressions, but what of Miss Allen? Her fiancée, Mister Charles Laverton-West, might not look so kindly on it.”

“I don’t know,” I said dryly. “He strikes me as a singularly unimaginative type, but we can’t know precisely what Miss Allen thought, can we? Poor girl.”

“No. But I shall do everything possible to bring Major Eustace to justice for his other crimes. Blackmailers rarely stick to one class of violation.”

“Holmes…”

“Watson.” He cut me off with a raised hand. “You will marry a fine woman someday and grow old with children and grandchildren surrounding you.”

“And if I wish to dance in the streets with you beneath colourful explosions of light and sound?” I cringed at the whine in my voice. “Need one preclude the other?”

He rose.

“Good night, Watson.”

And for the third time that night, his words detonated in my chest.


**Title:** Blue Star Encore  
**Rating:** G  
**Length:** 500  
**Content Notes:** Holmes/Watson; fluff  
**Summary:** On Guy Fawkes Night, Holmes and Watson discuss fireworks.  
**Author's Note:** Sequel to Blue Star Confession (chapter 7 of this collection); for November LJ Holmes_Minor comm prompt: fireworks; mostly because I need some fluff.

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**BOOM!**

White light rained down upon the masked revelers in the street as they shouted and danced and twined their procession between us.

“That was the finale,” said Holmes. “What do you make of it, Watson?”

“Beautiful spectacle,” I said. “Would you care to walk home?”

“No doubt the most expedient method of transport on a night like tonight.”

We wove our way through the crowd of merrymakers.

“Thank you for sharing your mastery of disguise with me, Holmes. I don’t think even my own mother would recognise me like this.”

“As with so many things, there is method in my madness, Watson. No one will think anything of two clowns doing this.”

And with that, he grabbed my hand and began skipping, no, prancing, no, frolicking down the street. I laughed and hopped alongside him, to the cheers and laughter of those we passed.

Holmes only slowed when we found ourselves in a deserted side-street.

“What was your favourite part of the evening, Watson?”

“Apart from what we just did?!” I cried, still panting.

“Yes.”

“The fireworks, of course, especially the coloured ones. Let’s see if I remember my chemistry lesson, strontium carbonate…”

“For red, the colour of life, of blood,” said Holmes as we walked side-by-side.

“Calcium chloride,” I continued.

“For orange, the colour of healing, of scar tissue, of warm fires, of your art.”
“And yours, too. Sodium nitrate…”

“For yellow and sunlight.”

He stopped and turned and looked at me. His voice was soft and solemn, like a wedding vow.

“That one day we might walk together like this in daylight hours, not hiding ourselves in shadows and behind masks and amidst drunken crowds.”

And it was at that moment that I realised my hand was still in his. I smiled and squeezed his fingers and flung a silent prayer into the night sky that his words might one day come to fruition.

“And barium chloride,” I said when we resumed our walk and turned toward Baker Street.

“For green and Nature.”

“Mother’s?”

“And our own,” he added.

“But there was one colour that I did not see tonight, Holmes,” I said with a teasing grin.

“Ah-ha! Then you see them for the amateurs they are!” He laughed, then drew closer. “My dear Watson, what say we hurry back to our cosy rooms and remedy this oversight at once? Chemically-speaking, of course.”

I giggled like the clown that I was. “I shouldn’t like to risk your eyebrows again, Holmes, but…

“Yes?”

“I do find myself in the mood for some explosions of a certain colour.”

“And you shall have them, my beloved,” he replied with bow and a gallant kiss of my gloved hand. “Mrs. Hudson is visiting her sister, and we are at liberty to be…”

“I’ll race you!” I taunted as I released his grip and sped down the lane.

“…as loud and as explosive and as blue as we desire!” he cried and gave merry chase all the way back to Baker Street.
“…and once again, Mister Sherlock Holmes is free to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents.”

He hesitated, then continued in a softer voice.

“You are more than welcome to return to Baker Street, Watson, and share quarters once more.”

I noted a curl of that same grey mist which had swirled before my eyes in my Kensington study and, were I not already seated, might have tottered on my feet.

“There is my practice,” I murmured.

“Ah, yes, of course.” Holmes tapped his finger to his lips. “But were you to find a buyer?”

I remembered, earlier that evening, the thrill in my heart, which beat much faster than the *clop-clop* of the hooves of the hansom cab. I remembered being tucked aside Holmes in that same cab, with my revolver weighing heavily in my pocket, on our way to what might have been fancifully called an appointment with danger.

“Yes, were I to find a buyer,” I said.

“Yes, were I to find a buyer,” I said.

“Then it shall be like old times.”

Another ghostly presence rose before my eyes. “Not exactly,” I said and took a sip of whiskey.

The dead-white tinge in his face reappeared. “No, no, of course, not.” He drank from his own glass, then said, “But perhaps the night’s work has kept your sorrow at bay for a few hours, and there will be more such cases, of that you can be certain, my dear Watson. There will be cases, and cases require a chronicler.”

Sorrow was not the only dark sentiment kept at bay by the night’s adventures. My anger flared.

“Or games that require a pawn, Holmes? The scale of your Reichenbach ruse was much more grievous than that of Baskerville. You kept me in the dark for years! And relied on my grief, my genuine mourning for you, for your success. I can understand the logic of it, but I cannot relish such a role. Or but dread its encore.”
He opened his mouth; I raised my hand and continued,

“No false promises.”

He sank into his armchair. “I am sorry.”

I waved off the apology. “You understand that every transgression weakens the bond between us and that any more of this magnitude may break it beyond repair?”

“I understand.”

Our eyes met. I gave a nod, then raised my glass and said,

“To second chances, then.”

“To second chances,” said Holmes.

I settled myself into my armchair. “I say, Holmes, this one was a most shocking affair, was it not?”

He studied the contents of his own glass in the firelight. “Indeed. I don’t know that the reading public is quite ready for the entire truth regarding the Dutch steamship *Friesland*.”

I took up my drink. “Or how close you and I came to losing our lives. Cheers, by the way. To second chances.”

Our glasses touched.

The capture of Colonel Moran had been thrilling enough, but this case had put Holmes and I at the centre of a century-old mystery, whose features of interest included antique treasure and modern day pirates.

I was happy to be alive.

I was happy to be living at Baker Street, working aside my old friend.

I was *happy*.

Holmes read my thoughts. “Work *is* the best antidote to sorrow.”

“This is more than work. It is a life with meaning and joy. Thank you.”

A clock began to chime the midnight hour.

“I’m sorry, Watson,” said Holmes quickly.

“For what, my dear man?”

“I owe you one thousand apologies. I intend to pay in full. One each day for the next two years or so will suffice. Some days, of course, may put me ahead of the mark.”

I stared at him for a moment, then laughed. “Keeping a running tally, are you?”

He nodded.

“Well, that’s,” I struggled to find a proper word, “noble of you.”
It was then I decided to voice that question that I’d kept guarded since his return.

“Is there a second chance for all that was lost, Holmes?”

His face fell. “Now that you are a widower, you mean.”

The velvet tone softened the blow. I flinched nonetheless, then sat back in my chair and crossed my arms over my chest.

“Yes,” I said, matter-of-factly.

With a wave of the hand, Holmes bid me remain seated whilst he disappeared into his bedroom. He reappeared carrying something heavy and draped. He set the object on the table and removed its covering.

A bust. In wax. Of me.

I cried out in astonishment.

“Monsieur Oscar Meunier of Grenoble is an artist of the highest caliber,” said Holmes.

“But you did not use this in your trap for Moran,” I said, puzzled.

“No. I am lost without you, Watson. If you rejected my apology or if you did not wish to return to Baker Street or if you declined to accompany me on cases, that is to say, if you had no interest in renewing our association, then a facsimile would have to suffice.”

“Oh, Holmes.”

“And I shan’t rid myself of it.” He threw the drape back on the bust. “Just as I might, once more, ensnare you as unwitting participant in one of my plans, one day you may desert me, once more, for a wife.”

I opened my mouth, then closed it at his raised hand.

“No false promises.”

I gave a nod, then asked,

“So, how is this second chance to begin?”

“Slowly?”

It was more plea than question.

“As you wish,” I replied reassuringly.

“I am so unaccustomed to being touched. The mind welcomes it, but the body...”

“Has a mind of its own?” I suggested.

A smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

Then by mute agreement, we rearranged armchairs and tables and rugs until we might hold hands, my left in his right, and watch the fire and drain our glasses and regale each other with whispered tales of shipwrecks and treasure and pirates.
Holmes put his lips to my bare shoulder. “You could’ve beaten me.”

“What, tonight at cards? Perhaps, but queens are never as reliable as I imagine.”

His smile, pressed to my skin, disappeared.

“No, that day in Kensington. You could’ve struck me instead of fainting.”

“And received one of your cross-hits under the jaw?”

“I would not have fought back. I would have considered it a fair sentence for having used, aggrieved, and abandoned you.”

I drew him to me until his head rested on my chest, then stroked his hair. “My nerves may not be as shaken as they once were, Holmes, but I still detest rows.”

“You were angry.”

“But I am also a doctor, was a soldier. Professions not without their necessary violence. Neither is the task of being your companion, I might add. But why not employ force to lay low evil and to defend the downtrodden who appeal to you for aide?”

“Might make a better tale.”

“More sensational, perhaps. Though I can’t see how the story of a man failing to restrain his basest instinct and lashing out at those who love him is anything but tedious. Of course, the urge to throttle you does surface quite often.”

He smiled. “Are the peacemakers…”

“And those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,” I reminded him.

“…blessed.”
“I’ve made a decision for the New Year, Holmes, a resolution.”

“You’re not shaving your moustache?!”

“Goodness, no,” Watson touched his upper lip reassuringly, “I’m stopping smoking, all use of tobacco, in fact.”

“Good Lord.”

“The air of London is sufficiently polluting, I needn’t add my own foulness to it, and perhaps, in time, I shan’t wheeze like an octogenarian asthmatic in pursuit of the many blackguards we encounter. For heath, you see.”

Holmes harrumphed.

“There are benefits, Holmes, I commend to your attention a recent monograph—“

“No doubt. My skepticism isn’t of the validity of that claim but rather at your ability to maintain your resolve.”

“I have an iron will!”

“I have an iron will. You are a creature of habit.”

“Join me, then. Leave pipe and cigarettes behind.”

Holmes glanced nervously at the breakfast table, then said, “I might if I hadn’t already decided upon my own New Year’s resolution, one which will afford boons superior to those of yours.” He poked a kipper with a fork. “Henceforth, I shall be a vegetarian.”

“No!” Watson gasped. “Like the poet Shelly?”

Holmes huffed. “And many other wise persons around the world.”

“Yours is the much more difficult course, Holmes.”

“Naturally, my will is the stronger.”
“We’ll see.”

“Oh, Mrs. Hudson!” cried Bessie.

“I know, my dear.”

“Mister Holmes smoking like a chimney.”

“The curtains,” said Mrs. Hudson mournfully.

“Doctor Watson devouring every scrap of bird and beast he finds.”

“Mister Holmes and his poor vegetable marrows.”

“Doctor Watson, with tears in his eyes, giving away his pipe.”

“The chamber pots.”

They looked at each other and wrinkled their noses.

“I have a plan, my dear, if, well, things go—"

“I’M GOING TO MY CLUB! THIS AIR IS POISONOUS!”

“WONDERFUL, I AM OFF TO AN AFTERNOON CONCERT. A BIT OF REFINEMENT IS NEEDED AFTER BEARING WITNESS TO THAT BEASTLY DISPLAY!”

“I LIKE STEAK AND KIDNEY PIE! SAY HELLO TO THE POET SHELLEY IF YOU CAN SPARE THE BREATH!”

“OH, WAIT, YOU’VE A GREASE SPOT—EVERYWHERE!”

SLAM!

SLAM!

The ladies jumped. Then Bessie sniffed.

“Oh, Mrs. Hudson, smoke!”

Their eyes met.

“The curtains.”

As they ran for the stairs, Mrs. Hudson muttered, “The camel’s back is broken, my dear.”

Watson opened the door.

“Well, that’s a change,” he said as he entered. “No smoke.” His eyes widened when he saw Mrs. Hudson with the gun—his gun—and Bessie with the fire poker. Both weapons were aimed at Holmes, who was hunched in his armchair, looking much like a punished schoolboy.

“You and Mister Holmes are going directly on a week’s holiday,” announced Mrs. Hudson, waving the barrel of the gun at the two trunks stacked by the door, “to a lovely seaside inn run by cousin, and you’ll sort your differences and return as gentlemen or you’ll be finding another address.”
“Claimant to the most iron will is,” grumbled Holmes, “apparent, Watson.”

They both looked at Mrs. Hudson, who only smiled and said,

“Now on you go.”
“Watson!”

I started, then turned. “Holmes, how in heavens did you find me?”

“Sleuth-hound, remember?”

“How could I forget?” I replied as he passed by and launched into a thorough survey of the environs. “But even I don’t know where I am. I took a walk, happened upon a half-hidden gate and curiosity got the better of me. This might be the Garden of Eden, for all its lush seclusion.”

“The resemblance may well be intentional, my dear Watson. This is the private garden of one of the most senior and upstanding members of the college faculty. A clergyman, naturally.”

“Goodness! Am I trespassing?”

“Perhaps, but as its proprietor is, at the moment, engaged in the heated theological argument, he’s unlikely to become aware and even less likely to prosecute.”

“I apologise for abandoning you, but as I could not contribute to the discussion and was in danger of embarrassing us both by further yawning—”

He raised a halting hand behind him. “No apology necessary. Early English charters could hardly be expected to hold the attention of a layman, and this is a lovely spot.”

“Indeed, who could resist nature’s lure on such a fine spring day? No cares, no demands on my time, in a secret garden, of all places. A bit of childlike behavior might be excused, mightn’t it?”

I looked down at the blades of grass between my toes, then stepped forward, reveling in the softness beneath my feet. My jacket was draped on an iron bench, my shoes and socks sat beneath it.

“Perhaps.” His voice was odd.

“Are you all right, Holmes?”

I touched his shoulder. He jumped.

“Yes, I ought to return…”

He turned, eyes cast downward, and wobbled.

I slid a steadying arm around his waist. “Sit down. Have you eaten?”

“Of course, I have. You saw me,” he snapped, but meekly allowed himself to be led to the bench. “You’re overheated,” I said. Though the weather was very mild, his face bore a deep flush and his temples a sheen of perspiration.

“Watson.”

That odd voice again. Strained, strangled.

“Look at me, Holmes.”

I gasped. His grey eyes were full of unspoken anguish.

“My dear man,” I whispered.

“We’ve heard so many confessions in our day, haven’t we? And quite a few we have kept to ourselves, I mean to say, they have not been shared with the authorities or the reading public. Were I to give voice to mind here, in this,” he looked ‘round, “this quiet sanctuary, it might stay here, mightn’t it, amidst such beauty and tranquility?”


“No doubt, but my desire is that you yourself leave behind such knowledge if it disturbs you. Bury it here, and we shall never speak of it again. Are you able to do that for me, Watson?”

“Holmes,” I said, resting my firm hand atop his trembling one. “I shall do whatever you wish, but what is it that plagues you?”

He sighed.

“I adore you Watson, beyond logic and reason. I find whole of you aesthetically appealing but there is one aspect of your physique that is of particular fascination, twin parts, in fact, that are rarely on display.”

His gaze fell, mine followed.

“My feet?”

He nodded.

I wiggled my toes. “A bit small, I’ve always thought.”

“You thought wrongly, as you often do. They are perfectly formed.” He stood and began to pace. “Well, there you have it.”

“Holmes, it should be quite obvious to the most observant man in the world that I adore you, too.” He stopped. “Truly?”

I smiled. “Truly.”

“And the other?” He made a vague gesture toward the ground.
“I am a well-travelled man. Your fascination is not as unusual as you suspect. It does not repulse me. In fact,” I nodded, “join me beneath that willow and you can touch—and be touched—to your heart’s desire. Or is observation your only fancy?”

The great and eloquent Sherlock Holmes rendered speechless is a sight to behold.

I held out my hand. He took it, and we walked to the tree, ducking beneath its umbrella canopy.

I sat propped against the trunk. Divested of his jacket, Holmes settled himself at the end of my outstretched legs.

His touch was tentative and accompanied by frequent darting glances towards my face, which I kept purposefully open and placid.

When the press of his fingers became less exploratory and more manipulative, no pretense was required.

“Goodness, Holmes. Should early English charters and detective work both fail you, you might find yourself in high demand as a Turkish bath masseur.”

“The study of feet is not without its features of professional interest, but this is not work, this is worship.”

That much was evident by his rapturous expression.

Suddenly, he broke away.

“You’re affected,” I said, reaching to stop his flight. “Let me aide you in your relief.”

His mouth fell open. His eyes darkened.

“Watson.”

“I’m yours to be used.”

He shook his head. “No, you are mine to cherish.”

He knelt and freed his erection, which he then stroked with spit-slicked hands. When he gripped me by the ankles and nestled his cock between my feet, I urged him on.

“Yes, please.”

He guided my movements.

“Like that?” I asked.

“Like that. And that. And that,” he replied.

The call and response continued until he spent himself. Handkerchiefs were produced, but before even setting himself to rights, he collapsed beside me.

“This is like a dream, Watson.”

The dreadful moment had arrived.

“Not ‘like’ a dream, Holmes,” I said softly.
He read everything in my gaze.

“Ah, yes. This place. This understanding.” He looked overhead. “Even this tree. Far too magnificent to be anything other than reverie.”

“You’ll reach Paddington soon. There’s a case en route to Baker Street.”

“Work is the best antidote to, well, everything that is not work. Good-bye, Watson. Perhaps we’ll meet again.”

“As we always do. Now, wake up!”
“I observe that you are disappointed in my performance thus far, Watson.”

“No, Holmes, not disappointed at all! As I said, first times are always, well, a bit tricky.”

“I could not agree more. You also stated that your experience in these matters extended over many nations and three separate continents.”

“Yes, but when I made that statement you replied you were a magician in the bedroom.”

“So I am. Now, for once and for all, is this, the King of Hearts, your card?”

“By Jove, it is!”

“Wonderful, now let’s us proceed to your portion of the evening’s programme.”
“You see, but you do not observe.”

The words, made famous by own my hand, hung, quivering and unrecognisable, in the ether between us.

“How long? Since the beginning?” I asked, then choked on a draught of medicinal spirit. It burned my throat and palate.

“No,” he said. “It arose later. I set it aside in my attic. It gathered dust and, with time, the dust was more familiar than the article it covered.”

I searched his expression for subterfuge or hyperbole, but then remembered he’d just set fire to my points of reference.

I knew nothing about this man, now perched on the edge of his own armchair, nothing except that he loved me in ways that included, but also differed from, the extraordinary, brothers-in-arms friendship that I had considered the cornerstone of my life for twenty years.

“What now?” I daren’t contemplate, not yet, so I chose the easier question,

“Why now, today, Holmes, to lay yourself bare?”
I studied the documents.

“You’ve bought property. A house.”


I nodded.

He took a deep breath, then rose, stretching to his full height.

When I looked up, he was standing like a soldier, ram-rod straight, and when he spoke it was with a formality that I recognised from the few marriage proposals that I had witnessed, and uttered, over the years.

“Will you, John H. Watson, consider joining me in retirement?”

“I will consider it.” The rapidity of the reply was belied by the stress on the equivocating word. “You’ve had years to consider your position, Holmes. I’ve had,” I glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece, “three-quarters of a damn hour!”

I drained my glass of its contents and allowed the empty vessel to clatter onto the small table. I set the papers aside and continued,

“Surely you cannot expect,” the phrase ‘a man of my age’ died on my lips, “me to give you a proper answer to this question without some thought.”

His reply was as polite as it was perfunctory. “Of course.”

The rest went unspoken.

He took up the papers and filed them away. Then we both set about pantomiming our way through the day’s business.

I ended up living in rooms in Queen Anne Street for a period after that, although ‘living’ is an exaggeration as I’d left behind most of my belongings, and when I was not at my surgery or with Holmes on a case, I was staring at a blank wall, contemplating his confession of love and his proposal to retire together.

The distance, though metaphorical, was necessary, or so I thought, and something in Holmes recognised that necessity, for he acquiesced to it without so much as a raised eyebrow.

After a week of sleepless nights, I cut loose the past. What Holmes had said and done and my own blindness to whole bloody affair haunted me as did the suffering that some of my actions, though performed in ignorance, had surely caused him. Studying yesterday with today’s wisdom, however, was not only futile, it distracted from the business of tomorrow.

Sherlock Holmes was in love with me, he wanted me, and he wished to spend his dotage puttering about a villa, tending bees—and me.

One night, I woke with a start.

I had forgot where I was, but I knew where I wanted to be. I dressed at once and went ‘round to Baker Street and left a message for Holmes to join me the following afternoon at my bath.
As soon as the other bath-goers had abandoned the chamber, Holmes extended himself along the length of a bench with all the grace and self-satisfying pleasure of a basking lizard.

Sitting opposite, I watched drops of sweat form and flow down the side of him.

Then he turned his head and raised an inquiring eyebrow.

“Yes,” I said.

He sat up abruptly. “To?”

I grinned. “All of it.”

His eyes lit and he looked ready to launch himself at me when a new contagion of patrons entered, shuffling between us.

“Smoke?” I suggested.

In an isolated corner of the upstairs room, upon a pair of couches side by side, hidden by a painted screen, I brushed a hand along the side of his face.

He smiled a boyish smile, which reminded me of one of the things I was meant to say,

“I’m not a young man, Holmes.”

“You weren’t a young man when I met you, Watson.”

“But the last time that I was with a man, I had a spry back and brown moustache.”

“There is still a bit of brown left, and I’m told a lot can been accomplished with properly positioned cushions.”

“By whom?” I retorted, then flushed. Twenty minutes into the affair and I was already barking like a jealous lover. “I’m sorry, Holmes.”

“Don’t be.”

When the dog-cart crested the hill, I gasped.

“Holmes!”

“The view’s magnificent, isn’t it? The structure itself, of course, is wanting. It will be a year or more before it’s habitable. The fire gutted the interior.”

“I should like to return and see it in every season.”

He looked at me with an expression that I now recognised.

Love.

“As you wish,” he said and squeezed my hand.

We stepped gingerly through the charred remains of the old cottage.
“What do you suppose this was?” I asked, gesturing to an odd corner in what must have been the sitting room.

“The frigging nook.”

“The what?”

Holmes strode closer, crowding me, until my back was to the wall. “We have one at Baker Street. It’s only proper we should have one here,” he said huskily. “Shall we christen it now?”

I blushed, then nodded. “I’m a bit of a randy ol’ goat, aren’t I?”

“No more so than I,” he said, producing a small jar of unguent from his voluminous coat pocket.

Later, we stood side by side facing the sea.

“Thank you,” I said.

“For?”

“For not hiding it any longer. Now, I observe, Holmes, and I see. Us, here.” I stretched my arms wide, then leaned closer to kiss him.

“And the bees?” he asked.

I nodded.

“And the bees.”
Mrs. Hudson's Valentine

Chapter Summary

Title: Mrs. Hudson's Valentine
Rating: G
Length: 221B
Summary: Mrs. Hudson's Valentine's Day is everything she dreamed of.
Author's Note: Greenaway's Language of Flowers gives 'patience' as the meaning of the ox-eye, which is an American daisy, white with yellow centre. According to the label, One Night Cough Syrup contains morphine, cannabis, alcohol, and chloroform. So pretty good for a cough :) For the LJ Holmes Minor comm monthly prompt: card.

Mrs. Hudson coughed.

“I can’t rest, Doctor Watson. Bessie’s worse than I am. I had to send her home. There’s the washing-up from breakfast and lunch; there’s curtains to replace, and the fire brigade’s so wonderful but they do track in so much mud!”

“At least take some medicine.”

“I’ve no taste for brandy, sir.”

He held up a spoon and a bottle. “One Night Cough Syrup.”

The light trickling into Mrs. Hudson’s room was much brighter than morning-light.

She sat up.

“Goodness!”

A bouquet of white-and-yellow daisies and a card sat on the bedside table.

“‘For our most beloved on the day of love,’” she read. “‘No! That would mean I’ve missed a whole day!’” She jumped out of bed, threw on her dressing gown, and ran to the kitchen.

And gasped.

It was clean, every pot and pan, scrubbed and shining.

“SURPRISE! HAPPY VALENTINE’S DAY!”

“Gentlemen! Oh, heavens!”

Her skin warmed; she dropped her head, catching sight of the stairs.

The mud was gone.

“And the curtains are replaced as well,” said Doctor Watson.
“And once you dress, you and your sister will be escorted to Simpson’s for lunch,” said Mister Holmes.

“And we will be taking care of ourselves.”

“And not destroying anything for the rest of the day.”

She beamed. “And my cough is so much better!”
“Watson, our Venetian holiday has certainly taken a singular turn,” remarked Holmes as he emerged, hair flattened to his head. He stood, revealing a pallid, thin chest. The thinness and the pallor were, of course, part of what had brought us here.

A murky wave slapped my face like the rattle of an unruly infant. The water was that drab olive-brown colour that water always is when it exists in large quantities where it should not be. And in this case, it should definitely not have risen to the level of concealing my bare chest in the Piazza San Marco.

The water—and the air—were curiously warm. In England, such an overcast day would have had us layering wools, not stripping to our drawers and practicing our backstroke in ‘the drawing room of Europe.’

The grand basilica rose behind us, grey stone arch stacked within grey stone arch like nesting dolls. Above, bells tolled its grandeur while below, amongst us fishes, the intruding army of lapping water continued its occupation.

I cast aside my concerns about the effect that the turbid stream was having on my coiffure and simply enjoyed the surreal—and singular, as Holmes described it—experience. I suspected Holmes was far more keen that his head not be used as a perch for pigeons or sea birds.
“But the cards believe in you. Have a seat.”

She gestured to a makeshift stool beside an equally makeshift table. Light danced in her grey eyes, and I was reminded of the soft, rippling fur of a well-stroked feline.

“I’m sorry, I haven’t the time or money.”

“Half-truths, soldier,” she tut-tutted.

“How—?”

“Three cards. Play them as they lay. Pay what they’re worth.”

“You sound like a gambler.”

She replied by nodding towards the establishment behind me.

I shrugged. “Oh, why not? Let’s see what the cards say.”

“Excellent! Past, present, future. First, the three of swords.” She frowned. The eyes that met mine were dark now—like that well-stroked feline summarily dropped in the bath.


“Bit bleak, that,” I said with a tight smile. “But war is hell, past is past. Where am I now?”


“Work? For what work am I fit?” I looked down at my body, and not for the first time, cursed its weakened state. I sank, then found myself perched atop the stool, which in terms of weight-bearing integrity inspired all the confidence of a rotten tree trunk, which it might have been.

“It also refers to increasing knowledge, formally or less so. Pursuing greater understanding.”
“I suppose I’d like greater understanding, but I haven’t the strength to pursue anything. I’m adrift, like all my fellow loungers and idlers in this great cesspool. Let’s have the future.”

She turned over the third card.

“Dear God,” I breathed. The stool threatened to collapse with my trembling.

She put a hand on my sleeve and shook her head. “No.”

“What do you mean ‘no’?”

“No, the card does not mean what you think it means. No, you should not interpret it as a sign that you should take your own life tonight, or any other night.”

“How—?”

“‘The Hanged Man’ is about shrugging off the past. It is about up-ending the old order, pausing to reflect while waiting for the best opportunity. It is about sacrificing yourself to aid others and to become part of something larger. It is a powerful card for a powerful future. The card is reversed, suggesting delay, but, I think, not denial.”

Pinned by her gaze, I suddenly understood why ancient kings has their cats entombed alongside themselves. Who’d want to navigate this life—or the next—without them?

Finally, I nodded.

She exhaled and released her grip on my sleeve.

“Oh, and a word of caution: avoid that place tonight.”

I turned. “Why?”

“There’s to be a police raid.”

“Is there, by Jove?! Oh, well, let’s see that was remarkable and worth every—“

I fumbled at bit, and when I turned back with money in hand, she was gone.

All that remained was the card of my future with words hand-scrawled along the edges:

‘Your life is not your own. Keep your hands off it.’
“It can be a refuge.”

Holmes’s words were the first he’d spoken that day. After perfunctory nods, we’d drunk our morning tea, smoked our morning pipes, and perused our morning newspapers in silence. Then he’d set about an experiment and I’d feigned interest in a novel, expecting to doze. In those days, I was extremely lazy and slept fitfully most nights.

“Refuge?” I asked.

“Haven, asylum, sanctuary.”

“I know the word, Holmes, but ‘it’ refers to—“

“Music. Music can be a refuge.”

“Playing the violin aides your thoughts.” It was a hypothesis I’d formulated after watching him at the instrument for some weeks.

“Yes, but I am thinking of the restorative property, not the didactic one. I enjoy listening to music. When the performance is truly first-class, I can close my eyes and, for a time, be transported to a peaceful, halcyon place.”

“I don’t know that I’ve—oh, yes! When I was still lodging in the Strand I heard a violin floating from somewhere one afternoon. Lovely.”

“How did the tune go?”

“Dah-DAH-dah-dah-dah-dee. Something like that.”

“Oh, yes, this.”

He quickly took up his violin, and by Jove, if he didn’t pull the very notes from my memory.

“Yes! How—?!“

“Elementary,” he replied cryptically, then proceeded to spin the sweetest, most palliative melody with his fiddle and bow.
Forbidden Fruit

Chapter Summary

Title: Forbidden Fruit
Rating: Teen
Length: 500
Content Notes: Pining Holmes, inspired by the Bible
Summary: Holmes is distracted by an apple.
Author's Note: for the LJ Holmes minor monthly prompt: temptations

“But I am not a yeoman farmer!”

My cry was the oft repeated lament when clients compensated me with goods rather than currency.

Watson gripped the heavy sack of apples and headed downstairs with a chuckle and a mumbled jest which compared me, rather unfavourably, to a harvester’s ladder.

I returned to my attention to the experiment before me, and by the time the quest for truth released its grip on me once more, I was being serenaded by Watson’s snores. One of Clark Russell’s finest sea stories was about to plunge from his lap to the rug and one of the fruits—the choicest, going by its beauty—of my latest fee was tucked beside him in his armchair.

A loud snort produced a moment of breathlessness in my companion, which was sufficiently disturbing to wake him. He muttered to himself, then grunted happily at the apple’s discovery.

I fought the urge to smile as his teeth sliced into the fruit; its flavour was, apparently, as inviting as its appearance based on the grunts that followed.

I made a lengthy, absurd notation in my note-book and observed Watson out of the corner of my eye. Red skin became white flesh as he bit the fruit, and my thoughts wandered from the quest for truth to how, were Watson’s teeth to sink into my shoulder ridge, at, say a moment of crisis, they might well turn exposed pale flesh back to redness. And how might I welcome that return, there and other places...

No!

I shook my head as if to physically expel the wicked image, then quickly scratched at the page.

The noises that accompanied Watson’s enjoyment of the apple, however, continued to distract, more so the flutter of a white handkerchief ridding his mouth of its wet sweetness, its sweet wetness, its…

…oh, my mouth might be sweet, wet, too. He and I could sweeten, dampen each other in so many ways...

No!

I twisted abruptly in my chair, but, alas, throwing Watson’s armchair picnic out of my sight did not drive him from my thoughts.
What would he taste like? Hard, then yielding.

No!

The apple, then. What would the apple taste like?

It would taste like any apple, obviously, any ripe, handsome, eye-catching, swollen, plump, wholly-satisfying…

“Oh, for goodness sake!” I cried and sprang from my chair, closing the distance between us with one stride, then snatching the fruit from Watson’s hand.

I bit, then chewed.

Masticated, the fruit sat in my mouth like warm paste and the colour of my skin must certainly have approximated its rosy hue as I realised what I had done.

I stared at Watson, aghast.

He, however, laughed.

And laughed and laughed until he wheezed. Then nearly doubled-over, he pointed to the apple, a twin of the one in my hand, which was perched on the edge of the table whereupon my experiment lay.

He rose and thumped me on the back, saying,

“Forbidden fruit’s always sweeter, my good man!”
I was adjusting the flame of the burner beneath a bubbling flask of what Watson had called ‘witch’s brew’ when I heard it.

Singing.

It was faint, but I’ve built a career and reputation, have I not, on detecting the faint and the trace. I listened and immediately discerned the tune’s place of origin and its progenitor.

Now I am of the belief that a man’s bathing routine is his own. What I do to achieve the ‘cat-like cleanliness’ Watson attributes to me is a private matter as are the elements of Watson’s regimen. I know that he prefers a Turkish bath but as a man cannot be running down to Northumberland Avenue every time he requires a scrub behind the ears, he often makes use of the homemade article. I also know, based on complaints voiced by Mrs. Hudson, that Watson’s bathing displaces quite a bit more water than our long-suffering landlady believes is necessary to achieve any kind of cleanliness, save that of an animal the size of an elephant.

And now I knew one thing more: that Watson liked to sing in the bath.

I had never heard him do so before, but perhaps he was moved by the change of weather, as winter was showing the first signs of releasing its grip on the world.

The coming of spring made the birds sing, why not the Watsons?

My gaze travelled up as if to meet his voice descending on the stairs.

Watson in the bath. Warbling Watson in the warm, warm bath. The steam rising, enveloping. The water rippling, splashing, caressing his nude…

Oh, for goodness sake!

I snatched up my thin notebook and fixed my eyes upon its contents.

Science!

Truth!

“…love…”
Watson singing about love in the bath.

Well, of course, he’d sing about love! Most of the songs ever written, and thus ever sung, dealt with nothing else!

My mind conjured an image, a tempting image. I doubt that even King David could resist such an image, and I was no King David. But how did fantasy compare to reality? Well, the only way to know for certain would be to tiptoe to the door and peek through the…

Really!

I was not a schoolboy with loins aflame!

I sniffed.

And realised that loins were not my most burning problem.

My notes were on fire!

I cried out and waved the note-book, which sent a pair of embers flying: one lit upon my dressing down, setting me a-smolder, and the other landed in the witch’s brew, which turned out to have a remarkable flammability.

What followed brought Watson racing down the stairs.

“Dash it all, man, what were you thinking?”

So overwhelmed was I by the sight of him, clad in naught but a towel, with water dripping very wastsonly all over his Watson, that I could only speak truth.

“Of Bathsheba.”

He laughed. “Your Solomon-siring days are over, my good man, when Mrs. Hudson sees what you’ve done to the new rug!”
Title: A Cure for the Morbs
Rating: Gen
Length: 373
Author's Notes: Inspired by this anecdote about Jeremy Brett; for the ffc prompt: doppelgänger.
Summary: Holmes's melancholy is soothed by a letter from an admirer.

“A letter for Mister Sherlock Holmes,” I announced. “Should I stab it, burn it, or bury you with it?”

The lump on the sofa waved a soiled silken sleeve and groaned “Read it, Watson.”

“Dear Mister Holmes,

I would just like to say what a wonderful detective you are. Your crime-solving puts every other attempt in the shade. Alphonse Bertillon is not fit to clean your boots; and G. Lestrade, indeed every detective of the so-called official police force, should beg you to give them lessons. You’re much cleverer than all of them, for a start. There is only one word for your intellect—superior. Please send me a signed photograph. Yours,

Sherrinford H.

P.S. I’ve heard that you’re far more handsome, charming, witty, and kind than your rather slow chronicler describes.”

“Well!” I exclaimed. “The nerve!”

Holmes sat up. “He does make some excellent points, though, Watson.”

“How nice to see your face, Holmes. Might you consider a shave—or at least a wash and a comb?”

“I might. Might you trouble Mrs. Hudson for tea?”

“Heavens! It’s a miracle! I’ll ring at once.”

“But, Watson, before you do, read the letter again.”

“Really, oh, why not? ‘Dear Mister Holmes, I would’—Wait a minute, Holmes, this handwriting is familiar,” I turned the envelope over, “the postmark, too, and the writing paper and the ink and the,” I sniffed, “scent of that foul shag tobacco you’ve been at for days. Did you write this and send it to yourself?”

“Mister Sherrinford H. did you a disservice, Watson, when he called you ‘rather slow.’”

“You are Sherrinford H.!”

“Read it again, Watson, then ring for tea.”
“You’re mad, Holmes! Do you plan to send Mister Sherrinford H. a signed photograph of yourself?”

“Oh, of course not. That would cost a fortune, and Mister Sherrinford H. has not given me one indication that he would be supplementing that cost. And, really, Watson, one shouldn’t set a precedent by becoming a slave to one’s adoring public. I’m mad, but not barking mad. I suspect that after a dozen or so reads, I’ll feel wonderful.”

“Enough for a bath?”

“And a suit!”

I cleared my throat.

“Dear Mister Holmes, I would just like to say...”
“Hullo, hullo, hullo, what’s all this?”

“We have no need of distractions or assistance, Inspector,” I grumbled.

“How ever did you find us, Lestrade?”

“I am a detective, Doctor Watson, a professional sleuth-hound, so it was quite simple for me to follow the long trail of annoyed, inconvenienced, and irritated clerics you two are leaving in your wake.”

Oh, the nerve! Professional sleuth-hound. As if I don’t get compensated for my services! Sometimes, I get paid and very, very well, and Lestrade knows it.

“We are still searching for the cassock with the very distinctive stain,” I said coolly. “And if these men of the cloth were a bit more forthcoming with their vestments, the case might be resolved before luncheon.”

“Luncheon!” cried Watson. “Luncheon was hours ago, Holmes. We’ve been to every church and chapel and kneeling nook within considerable walking distance of the crime scene—without stopping for so much as a breath!”

“Time is of the essence, Watson. If that cassock finds its way to a laundress, all hope of discovering the guilty party is lost. There are forty addresses on the list. We’ve eliminated fifteen, and this establishment is number sixteen—“

There was a loud gurgling. Watson flushed and muttered, “I’m so hungry I’m going to eat the next candle I see, lit or not.”

“And that’s why I’m here,” said Lestrade. “Because, as you may or may not know, this quaint place of worship just happens to sit about forty paces from a pub that serves the best sausages in the city.”

He pointed towards the corner.
“Inspector, we have a murderer to catch, we can’t possibly pause for sausages!” I cried.

“Best sausages?” breathed Watson, with round eyes and pupils that were rapidly darkening.

Oh, no.


Who was this tempter, with his talk of bread and pints and sausages, luring my Watson from my side? The game was afoot! Sacrifices must be made! Including sausages, especially the thick, meaty, German sort!

“Absolutely not—“ I began.

“I’ll meet you at the next one, Holmes!” shouted Watson as he chased the devil-in-tweed down the street.

I stood, seething in silence. Then I hurled a scathing rebuke at their retreating figures. “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God!”

Suddenly, the heavy door behind me opened.

“Oh, you are correct, so very correct, sir! I’ve sinned. I’ve strayed from the Word of God.” He held out his robe, a dark red stain of three concentric circles clearly visible. “I want my punishment, oh, yes! Please take me!”

I grinned and called out, “Oh, Lestrade! My work is done, but yours has just begun! Hmm, how shall I celebrate a case closed? I know! Sausages with Watson!”
My Holmes' eyes are nothing like the moon.

Title: My Holmes' eyes are nothing like the moon.
Rating: Gen
Poetic Form: English sonnet (parody of Shakespeare's Sonnet 130)
Length: 100

My Holmes’ eyes are nothing like the moon;  
Quicksilver’s a less mercurial hue.  
His hair be white, and skin creased, wrinkled, hewn.  
His sockets sunk, his break quite pointy, too.  
I have seen eyebrows which don’t resemble  
a pair of bristly caterpillars,  
but his prompt hungry birds to assemble.  
His snore’s a reliable sound-sleep killer.  
A blanket thief, a soiled-dish neglecter,  
a cook of meals, all burnt-black or well-stewed,  
a torn and dirty laundry collector,  
my Holmes’ all when he’s in a rare mood.  
And yet, by Grace, I want him, no-one else,  
At silver-eyed glance, my moonstruck heart melts.
Here I am, slumped against the garden wall, sorrowful and very heavy. The cab for which I whistled has been sent away. I spare a glance for the house behind the wall behind me and an oath for the man inside that house.

‘Sleep on now, and take your rest.’

That my dear Watson may gather the reserves required for the arduous journey ahead of us. That he may be fresh for our rendezvous tomorrow and the many zigs and zags that will follow.

Damn!

I roll my face into the wall, then roll away, astonished to find the stone wet with tears.

I should not have asked him to accompany me!

In some, ‘the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,’ but here, by this garden wall, it is the reverse. The flesh has been subjugated quite nicely; it is the spirit that refuses to be tamed.

My spirit yielded to temptation. My spirit surrendered to the desire to have my stalwart companion at my side as I stride into battle, no matter that the desire, the yielding will surely drive that companion—the best of all who bear such a name—directly and unnecessarily into harm’s way.

Pick one’s battles? What jest! I am choosing Watson’s for him. Even this evening’s visit and the knowledge I’ve imparted may endanger him.

But the succour of true friendship is a heady wine. I could not resist it. I could not resist enjoying a few more days beside my faithful Boswell.

As foreseen, he readily agreed to the request. That is Watson’s beauty: unshakable loyalty.

But I should not have drawn him into this. He has a wife! And patients who rely on him for their well-being! How selfish am I!

But Moriarty will not cease his campaign. I can elude him for only so long, and then we must confront one another directly. O, that he was any other criminal, clever, but petty!

I press my temple to the stone once more.
‘O, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!’

But no. My enemy will not cease his pursuit until I am in my grave. Well, if so, then it will be two of us.

Two, but not three.

I shall not let Watson fall prey to this evil incarnate. I shall spare him that end, no matter the cost to me.

And his grief at my sacrifice? What of that cost?

He will be alive, that is all I vow. I would not enjoy a single breath free from anguish knowing I led him to an early death. And what of his anguish?

I shake my head.

Perhaps there is some route by which we might both survive together and Moriarty be felled?

For that, I, a stranger to prayer, will beg Providence.

I hear a cock crow and a voice deep inside me urging,

*Go! The hour is at hand! And why not continue your prayers as, say, a venerable Italian priest?*
The Alabaster Box

Chapter Summary

Title: The Alabaster Box
Rating: Mature
Length: 500
Content Notes/Warnings: Holmes/Watson; foot fetish; a bit of kink negotiation, non-con foot touching.
Summary: Holmes succumbs to temptation.
Author's Note: Last of the my temptation in the Bible fics for the LJ Holmes_Minor monthly prompt. From Luke 7: 37-50.

“I should like to see you dry them with your hair.”

“Well, you’ve anointed them,” I said, “kissed them, I doubt you washed them with your tears, but…”

“This is unforgivable, inexcusable, unpardonable.”

He made to rise. I stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

“What? Drawing me out on a lengthy, exhausting adventure which ended in my taking an unscheduled dip in the Thames?”

“No, you wouldn’t have allowed me to pursue the blackguard alone.”

“And much less pleasant than this,” I replied with a gentle smile. Then I looked down at my two features of interest peeking out from the mass of blankets.

“So, feet?”
He nodded. “They were dry and warm and I’ve not been able to observe them at such length before, I could not, no,” He curled away, “I chose not to resist the temptation. If you wish to leave, sever our partnership, I understand. I beg no scandal, but…”

“Holmes.”

Those grey eyes, will I ever tire of them?

“The Duchess gave you that scent.” I indicated the alabaster box beside him on the rug.

“You said you liked it.”

“I do, but it’s hardly worth—“

His expression garroted my statement.

“Finish.”

He stared at me, speechless, motionless.

“Whatsoever you’d like,” I said, wiggling my toes. “Do you only desire to touch me or shall I touch you as well?”

At this, his eyebrows rose higher than I believed was possible.

He took my heels in his hands. “I might perform some rudimentary grooming, massage, and then…” He brought my soles to the front of his trousers; I kneaded my toes against the hardening bulge.

He closed his eyes and moaned my name. Then his eyelids fluttered.

“And after…?” he asked expectantly.

“Well,” I said, looking down at my swaddled form, “we could retire for the evening and you could fuss about me in much the fashion of a proud rooster, or perhaps an arrogant cock?”

I met his gaze once more and felt one corner of my mouth rise in a half-smile.

His eyes lit. “We shall go in peace,” he said.

“Never forget, Holmes, that it is our faith in each other which will save us.”
Being as silent as the grave, a tomb is ideal for reflection. I consider the long and winding path that has led me to this moment, this place, and I am reminded that there is nothing new under the sun, that my path began, much like another’s, with a condemnation.

I. Holmes is Condemned to Death

‘It is inevitable destruction. You must stand clear, Mister Holmes, or be trodden underfoot.’

The words rang in my ears long after Professor Moriarty had disappeared. I had made his situation a near impossible one. He promised to make mine no less, and probably more so.

Yes, I was condemned to die. Soon and by unforgiving means.

Suddenly, the walls surrounding me were too close; the air that filled the ether between them insufficient. The silence—saving for the disquieting ticking of the mantelpiece clock—was also oppressive, so I fled, seeking the comfort and safety of a noisy crowd.

II. Holmes Takes Up His Cross

Victoria, that great West End terminus, I could hide here, if for a moment, among the arrivals and departures, hellos and farewells, and consider my position.

I could drop it, as Professor Moriarty had urged. Withdraw. Stand clear. Live to fight another day.

But then who would I be fighting? More than likely one of Moriarty’s agents, fighting with the knowledge that my efforts were akin to ripping out only the green, topside bits of the weed, leaving the root behind to regenerate elsewhere.

No, no matter the burden, this was my cross to carry and carry it, I would.

III. First Fall

I’d stumbled. It’d been folly to involve the police in the examination of the scene. My explanation for the falling brick that narrowly missed me would be no more convincing than that of the whizzing two-horse van which earlier had attempted the same. At best, it was a waste of precious time and energy; at worst, I might be playing into the hands of Professor Moriarty, giving unnecessary advantage and access to one of his many agents, who must be counted in all ranks of society, including the police force.
Yes, I’d stumbled. I needed sanctuary.

Baker Street? No.

Mycroft.

**IV. Holmes Remembers His Mother**

After offering a listening ear, a host of sage advice, and a pledge of unconditional support, Mycroft had abandoned me to my own contemplations. I paced his rooms until I noted a tome in the bookcase. Its wholly unremarkable exterior did not fool me.

I touched the first photograph, drawing a fingertip across her brow as if to dispel the sadness from her eyes. Courage, she never lacked though fortune was exceedingly unkind. I could do, be, no less.

Upon Mycroft’s return, I said, “Mrs. Hudson. There may be trouble at the rooms tonight.”

“Of course. I’ll see to her.”

**V. Watson Helps Holmes Carry His Cross**

I needed him. Not for the primary objective of my mission, in that regard he was a hindrance, a lone wolf being a more elusive than any pack, no matter the size or the superior marksmanship of one’s pack-mate.

No, I needed him to stave the madness of constant threat, constant pursuit, constant vigilance. I needed my North Star, my constancy.

I needed my Watson.

I regarded the danger that he would certainly disregard. I imagined the worst that might befall.

I shook my head.

I could not carry this burden alone.

I exhaled loudly, then strode into his consulting-room.

**VI. Mary Wipes Holmes’s Face**

Victoria Station was now witness to my escape, not my deliberation. As the porter huffed and glanced at the waiting train and the clock, I dropped my head. A fine cloth brushed my cheek.

“Don’t trouble yourself, Father.”

I covered the hand which grasped the handkerchief with mine.

“You are not on a visit,” I blurted in foolishly perfect English.

She smiled, but her eyes held a sadness that I recognised from an old photograph.

“Godspeed to you on your path.”

“And to you, my dearest child, on yours.”

I kissed the hand and tucked the handkerchief in my sleeve.
VII. Second Fall

“He has escaped!”

Another stumble, this one more grievous than the first: Professor Moriarty had given the London police the slip.

But I had put the game in their hands!

Of course, when I left the country, there was no one to cope with such villainy, but now he had no reason to return to London, and he’d be devoting all his resources to revenge. He’d be coming for me, swift and sure.

With no delay, I had to move—and keep moving.

Not we, I.

It was time for Watson to flee to safety, but how to convince him?

VIII. Holmes Remembers the Irregulars

Watson commented on the loveliness of the landscape, green spring below, white winter above, and his undisguised joy recalled that of my youngest associates when I had met with them for a final consultation—to bestow upon each a hearty pension.

Some were perceptive and good-hearted enough to understand it for the farewell it was, but when a few sorrowfully protested my departure, I urged them to not spare a single tear for me, but rather for each other. Evil thinks nothing of dispatching the small and invisible. They must care for one another just as Watson did of me.

IX. Third Fall

When the boulder roared into the lake, I raced up the ridge.

Nothing.

As expected.

From an artistic perspective, there was a kind of symmetry to my third stumbling be so close in nature to my first, but I vowed on that lofty pinnacle that it would be, above all, be my last. I had grown weary of being the hunted, even the balm of my Watson’s presence could not wholly assuage me. At the nearest opportunity, I would turn and face my pursuer.

I would make the air for all sweeter, even if it cost me my own breath.

X. Holmes is Stripped of His Watson

I gazed at the rush of waters and, in pure selfishness, allowed myself the luxury of single cold shiver.

It was better to be stripped naked, to be laid bare to the harshest taunts and jeers, than to be deprived my Watson. The letter from Meiringen was a hoax, of course, to draw away my surest defence outside my own abilities and clear the way for a direct assault.

How bleak my world seemed without Watson, how much darker those abysmal waters!

I shook off my shameful despair, then blessed my enemy.
Watson would be safe, whatever else transpired.

Good.

XI. Holmes is Nailed to the Cross

I see it when I close my eyes: his mad kicks, his mad clawing at air, his mad fall, his mad body striking the rock.

I hear the splash.

It is, of course, a mad splash followed by a mad scream that echoes in my waking dreams until the sequence begins anew.

My rational mind knows it was mere moments, and yet time sufficient to see the many possibilities before me and choose my fate.

My decision, hard as iron, pierced my flesh and bound me, bloody, bruised, and bowed, to a mad plank, set me on this mad path.

XII. Sherlock Holmes Dies

I stretched myself flat and observed the investigation below. The cascade spray mixed with my own grief and I was often forced to rub my face against the soft green moss to rid my vision of its watery blur. I saw it all: Watson shouting into the abyss, finding the cigarette case, speaking with the police, returning again and again to the fall, searching like a lost pup and breaking my heart just as surely.

And when Watson finally surrendered hope and allowed himself to be led away, I, too, surrendered my soul to the path that I had chosen.

XIII. Holmes Descends from the Cross

I hung by fingertips from the mossy ledge, with stones singing past me. To escape Professor Moriarty’s confederate above I had to reach the path below. I said a wordless prayer to She of the Sad Grey Eyes and I let go.

I was the water falling against the rocks, and the rocks cut me just as they cut through the torrent. My descent left me torn and bleeding, but upon the path. It was an answer to prayer heartening enough to wake a sleeping reserve of energy, which fed me as the path led me through the mountainous darkness.

XIV. Holmes Reflects in His Tomb

And now in this Tibetan cave, which resembles nothing so much as a tomb of a king, of a prophet, of a heretic, of a god, I am learning, through the patience and grace of my teacher, to still my mind and unify my desires, that my life force my flow like a single mighty river, instead of being diverted in a multitude of trickling streams. Yes, I am learning, to bend my body and mind in curious and surprising ways.

But I am also thinking of the path that led me here and the one I miss the most.

XIV. Resurrection

Victoria Station. Oh, what joy to drain into this swirling cesspool! The stone that has blocked the entrance of my tomb for three long years has been rolled away! As I reclaim my city, so shall I
reclaim my address, in my own clothes, with my own face and name, regardless of the violent hysterics provoked in dear Mrs. Hudson. I shall reclaim my Watson, too, and together we shall, with our Scotland Yard colleagues, vanquish the last of my persecutors.

And thus, be wholly reborn.

I exit the station, letting the April sun coax a smile from my lips.
“Where are you going, Holmes?”

“Library.”

“In disguise?”

“So shall you be, if you wish to accompany me. Please do if you’re available, a witness may prove useful.”

I studied the bundle of rubber, hair, and raiment thrust at my chest.

“I don’t need a false moustache, Holmes. I have a real one, if you hadn’t noticed.”

“That one is moustachier.”

I harrumphed.

I harrumphed for the hundredth time.

“You look perfect,” said Holmes.

“Perfectly foolish: fat cigar, wire spectacles, bushy eyebrows, even bushier moustache.”

We approached the desk.

“I’d like to renew this book,” said Holmes.

“But, sir, you just checked it out yesterday, it’s hardly in need of renewal just yet, but, oh, wait…”

The clerk retrieved a heavy ledger, dropped it upon the desk, and flipped to the final entry.

“And I regret to inform you that this book is no longer part of our lending collection and your membership in our establishment, Mister Sherrinford Holmes, had been terminated, effective immediately.”
“Oh, dear,” said Holmes.

“Good heavens, Holmes, what—Necronomicon for Children!” I cried in horror. “What kind of library is this?”

The clerk turned pink. “We receive a good number of donations, especially this time of year, there are quite a few bequests when members….” He waved a hand. “This book appears to be among a set accepted very recently without our usual careful examination and cataloguing. Such a subject matter is not appropriate for this establishment.”

“It was part of the estate of Major Palgrave, Colonel Hayter’s old warmate. Very well. See here, Watson. I’ve solved a very old, but very sinister case. The disappearance of no fewer than four children in Surrey countryside from 1851 to 1853 was blamed on supernatural forces, a fantastical cousin of the Dartmoor hound, but the notes in the margins of this book indicate a perhaps diabolically-inspired, but decidedly humanly-executed answer to the mystery. Thank goodness for the Crimean War and the head injury the Major suffered there or a larger number of innocents might have suffered under his macabre instruction.”

The clerk and I gasped. Then the clerk stammered.

“I cannot accept that book, sir. Or your membership.” He snatched a card from Holmes’s hand and tore it to pieces.

I chewed on my cigar and produced my library card with a flourish. “Splendid! I don’t want to belong to a club that would accept him as a member!”
“I would like to—.”

“Oh, I have wonderful news for you!”

“Really?”

The clerk bobbed behind the desk and reappeared with a thin tome. “The board of library governors have granted your petition for a third renewal of this title.”

“Excuse me?”

“Two renewals of any circulating item is the rule, but given your generous gift, they couldn’t help but be persuaded, Mister Holmes.”

“Ah, but I’m—“

The clerk returned the card. “We’re so delighted to have such a distinguished patron and benefactor. Excuse me for a moment.”

“By Jove,” I muttered under my moustache. “How did our library cards get switched? And what on earth could interest Holmes that much?” I lifted the plain red cover to glance at the title page. “Good Lord! *How to Seduce Your Biographer Without Really Trying!*”

“Would you like me to wrap it in brown paper as usual, Mister Holmes?”

I stared at the clerk, then somewhat inspired, huffed impatiently and replied, “Naturally.”

For the rest of the day, I shuffled from club to pub to park bench to pew with the brown paper parcel under my arm.

Nine weeks.

I did not know for how long Holmes had been thinking upon the subject prior to checking out the book, but he’d had the book itself for nine weeks.

And, as Holmes could never resist an experiment, in those nine weeks, he’d obviously been applying the suggested techniques, whatever they were.
I considered recent events in this startling new light: the time when Holmes’s experiment—gone awry—had singed my eyebrows, and he’d apologised; the time when Holmes’s case—gone awry—had sent me tumbling into the Thames, and he’d apologised; the time when I’d been in bed with an ague following my dip in the Thames and Holmes had shouted from downstairs, “For God’s sake, man, stop malingering! The game’s afoot!”

All part of some cleverly conceived but very poorly executed seduction!

Well, well, well.

What to do?

I could give Holmes the book and confront him. I could leave the book where Holmes would find it and confront him. I could return the book to the library and explain the misunderstanding. I could throw the book in the Thames and see if it drowned or simply came down with a nasty ague.

So many possibilities.

I decide upon the brave notion of watching our Baker Street rooms from afar and sneaking back to my bedroom as soon as I observed Holmes leaving. I would read the book myself, then I could seduce him without really trying!

Or at least understand what he truly meant when he said, ‘Your moustache looks and smells like an electrocuted weasel, Watson!’

I went upstairs and unwrapped the book.

Title page, yes.

Next page, blank.

Next, blank.

Blank.

The book was blank.

I flipped to the final page, where scrawled in a familiar hand, was the question:

*Is it working, Watson?*

I began to curse as the footsteps grew louder on the stairs.
“Woes?” I shifted in my armchair. “Well, I suppose—”

“There have been a few, Watson,” said Holmes, tapping out the ash of his pipe onto the cold hearth before settling back in his own armchair.

“But then again, too few to mention,” I added. “But let’s see:

An angry father bound to drink—”

“Brother following o’er t’ brink,” interjected Holmes. He whistled and made a diving motion with his hand.

I shot him a look.

He shrugged and gave his attention to refilling his pipe.

I turned back towards our visitor and began anew.

“Course in medicine was tough—”

“Demonic possession from cursed snuff?” suggested Holmes between puffs.

I shushed him, to no avail.

“Enteric, civil word for fever foul,” I said.

“Frostbite from snowy Christmas prowl,” he countered.

“Grief from losing loved ones dear.”

“Hypothermia from jump off pier.”

“Internal injury from brawl.”

“Jezail bullet wound, worst of all.”

“Kidnapped, once, twice, I can’t recall.”
“Lung disorder? Tobacco’s pall.”
“Madness, but spared the nutter’s bin.”
“Nightmares assuaged by violin.”
“Odd bit of gambling—.”
“—you couldn’t stop!” cried Holmes.
“Phobia rare—”
“—of balloons that pop,” muttered Holmes, rolling his eyes.
“Quite exhausted once, cause unknown.”
Holmes smirked. I continued,
“Rough spell of pneumonia, chills, cough;
Shot, stabbed—“
“—something almost snipped off!” exclaimed Holmes.
A shudder pass through the room.
“Threatened with animal noisome.”
“Ulcers from untraceable poison.”
“Vertigo; vomiting vexing.”
“Xanthic pallor most perplexing.”
I sighed. “Worrying, wondering where it all went wrong.”
“Yearning for where you most belong,” said Holmes softly.
Our eyes met.
“Zero regrets,” I said, placing my hand atop his, “a life full and long.”
“Well, that’s quite a list,” said the young man. “So, gentlemen, are you ready?”
We nodded and stood.
The young man unfurled a pair of heavy cloths and draped them over the armchairs. “These two will be waiting for you when you arrive. They’ll be the first things we unpack.”
“Thank you,” said Holmes. “We are quite sentimental about them.” He dropped his keys on the mantelpiece next to mine. “Shall we?”
“Let’s,” I said.
At the door, I paused and whispered to the empty room,
“Cases closed.”
Armchairs clothed.

Sussex

bound.”
“Martha!”

“How are you this fine morning, Marie?”

“I’m well, but you appear to have a pair of bookshelves strapped to your back.”

“I am not one to curse the darkness. Martha Hudson lights a candle.”

“Oh, yes, I’ve always thought so. In fact, I believe I’ve seen you light many candles, for example, when Mister Holmes fiddled with the gas that one time, but what particular darkness involves promenading half-disguised as furnishing?”

“I found the selection of books on certain subjects at the library to be wanting. When I complained, the administrator claimed a dearth of public interest in the areas that I mentioned. I have set out to prove him wrong. Would you care to peruse the offerings of the Martha Hudson Mobile Lending Library?”

“Oh, yes. Let’s see. How to Make Unruly Tenants Behave, yes, I can see that would be interesting. Fire-proof Your Drapery and Curtains the Easy Way, oh, yes, very informative, I’m sure. Rent Negotiations: What Every Landlady Should Know, I believe that would be quite useful. Unusual Stain Removal, well, now, who wouldn’t be keen to read that? The History of Gin. I must say you do have quite the selection, Martha. May I borrow The Landlady and Her Suitor, a Romance?”

“You may. Two renewals.”

“I do so love a good book!”
Watson sits.

His smile is as wide as the brim of a straw hat worn all summer long and as warm as the sun that beats down upon the gardener who wears it.

A proud smile, I know it well.

I wore it in the autumn when my hives’ first harvest graced our breakfast table. My offering was a single tiny jar of honey and a bit of comb, but I had not been more delighted in all my days of solving puzzles in London.

And the source of Watson’s pride is decidedly not tiny. They number six, plump red orbs divested of green caps. Their scent tickles my nose most agreeably as they rest cushioned between eggs and sausages and beans and toast on plates aside, yes, the best honey that the best bees in the land have every crafted.

"The full English seems somehow fuller, doesn’t it?" says Watson.

Indeed it does.

“How well they turned out,” he continues. “And to think I haven’t been near a garden since I was a child!”

His eyes drift to the bookcase and his expression darkens.

I put my hand over his.

“I have made a donation to the local lending library, Watson. You may keep *The Tomato Almanack* in perpetuity.”

He sighs. “Good. After seven renewals, I’d been painted a blackguard.”
“G’evening, Holmes.”

I glance up from my reading.

You’re drunk.

No, you’re not drunk.

Your bootlaces say you’ve been to the bath. But you don’t drink at the bath. Also, the hour’s far too early for you to be drunk, and yet your expression, the way you hold yourself suggest that you are, in fact, something.

Aroused.

By whom?!

I immediately quash a spark of feral jealousy and concern myself with the puzzle at hand.

A dalliance at the bath?

Perhaps, but the neatness of your clothing indicates otherwise.

Voyeur, then, to someone else’s dalliance?

Interesting, if true, but unlikely. Your respect for other’s privacy is a well-established part of your knight’s code.

Not looking, then.

Listening.

Ah, there’s the rub.

You’re a storyteller with a pronounced weakness for a ribald story in a sonorous voice.

I take aim and fire my best shot.

“Your young bootlacer had a fine tale to tell, I see.”
You bark a loud, raucous laugh. “Christ, you would’ve been burned at the stake a century ago!”

“It may still come to pass, save in the next.”

You snort. “Drink?”

“Please.”

Whisky and soda and a naughty story. Could be the makings of an interesting evening.

I set my reading aside.

“Cheers.”

“Cheers.”

You settle into your chair.

“But you’re wrong. Nothing to do with Abû Tabâh.”

Good.

You take a long swig, then sigh.

“You once said that art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms; well, that has never been a truer statement than tonight, Holmes. They’ve got a new fellow at the bath. A tattoo artist.” You shake your head. “A couple of sailors approached him. One knew the fellow already; the other was keen. While the second sailor spoke, the fellow sketched the most wondrous scene. Something out of a mad opium dream, but precise, detailed. A gifted artist, Holmes, no doubt about it. Technique matching imagination.”

Interesting. And surprising, which is, of course, interesting.

“Did you…?”

I wave a hand, knowing full well that you did not.

“Goodness, no. But the lads—“

Oh, lads, were they?

“—and the artist saw how interested I was and graciously allowed me to watch. Fascinating. Absolutely fascinating. The science and the art of it. And the other sailor, well, he showed me his inking.”

Ah, here we are.

“Shoulder?”

No.

“His entire back. Every inch of it covered.”

Oh, Watson.

You’re half-sunk into your cup, so I toss a mildly censorious glance your way.
You shrug. “I asked for leave to touch it, and he graciously agreed.”

I snort.

“Just the tattoo!” you protest.

“You needn’t defend yourself here, my good man. Your chivalrous ways are well-documented.”

More’s the pity.

“Dragon. The most extraordinary rendering in any artistic medium I’ve ever seen.”

My eyebrows rise.

Oh.

Watson.

“Indeed?” I say, taking a sip to fortify me for what may be to come.

“The fellow’s well known for them. The sailor I saw had a red wyvern flying over what might have been the Welsh countryside if Wales was a province of Coleridge’s Xanadu. The one that was in the artist’s chair was getting a sea serpent. Difficult to describe just how surreal the scene was. The main creature was fabulous, in all senses of the word, and then there were all these little tableaus in the background. Animals, fruit, fountains, musical instruments.”

Courage.

“Was there a very large strawberry or a boar wearing a nun’s habit?”

“Holmes!”

“Bosch. He’s alive. And in London. How remarkable.”

“You know him!”

“I met him in Spain a few years ago.”

I pronounce words carefully so both of us are spared the pain of the phrase ‘when I was dead.’

“I spent a few days at El Escorial, in return for some assistance with a small matter, I was permitted use of the library there. On one wall, there was an enormous painting. Three panels. Scenes much like the ones that you describe, but Biblical in nature, of course. I went back every day to look at it, even dreamt of it. I ran across your fellow in a pub. Said he was descendant from the man who had painted the triptych, so I told him my dream.”

You lean forward.


There’s a heavy silence, then you open your mouth to say something dismissive, or worse, to joke.

I interrupt.

“I missed you terribly, Watson.”
You stare.

“During that time, I so grieved the loss of you. It was quite painful to think of you during waking hours, so I often forced myself to forget and, perhaps, as a result, you often surfaced in my dreams, never more so than in that one.”

I shift my gaze to the fire.

“Tell me, Holmes.”

You are not the only one who appreciates a certain timbre of speech.

I melt.
And oblige.

“Ipse dixit, et facta sunt: ipse mandāvit, et creāta sunt. In the beginning, it is grey. The world is a sphere of rock and vegetation. Sun and sea and shadow. No more.”

“Then doors open, and I am in a garden. Stamford is there, dressed in robes. He holds your wrist with one hand and blesses our meeting with the other. You look down. I stare, spellbound, at you without sparing a single glance for the beauty around us.”

“At the centre of the garden is a fountain of pink glass. Flasks, bowls, test tubes, all manner of vessels for chemical researches. The fountain sits in a stream around which animals wander. There are creatures from other lands: giraffe, monkey, porcupine, lion, elephant. Cats and dogs, too. All manner of birds, great and small. And a swarm of bees.”

“There is a dark pool below us. Strange, spindly birds frolic at the inky water’s edge.”

“I want to stay. Alas, I don’t.”


“Good Lord!” you exclaim.

“Indeed. The only portion of the garden unoccupied is a dark pool at the lowermost edge. I do not want to stay. I want my Watson, not legion of Watsons.”

You smile.

“The next is no garden at all. It is a village on fire at night. And all the Watsons are in torment. Serpent creatures. Nails. Pins. Forks and swords and arrows. And a boar in a nun’s habit is forcing itself upon Watson.”

“Holmes!”

“I draw closer to the dark pool, but then I realise that the obsidian stones which line the bottom of the pool are not stones at all.”

“They are scales.”
“Dragon,” you breathe.

I nod. “A black dragon which takes to the sky, breathing fire, reducing Hell and then the garden of cavorting Watsons to ashes. I grab hold of its tail and it ferries me back to the quiet garden.

“To Eden.”

“And my Watson.”

“Holmes, that’s extraordinary.”

“It is, isn’t it?”

“I’m certain that Bosch thought so as well.”

“Perhaps, for he did not charge me a single coin for his work.”

I pause, letting the import of my words strike you.

“Holmes.”

I smile. “Bosch called it a Fenix dragon, for he said I would, one day, rise from my ashes and return to my Eden and my Watson. And so, I did. I suppose you want to see it?”

“Naturally, but only if you feel comfortable.”

“You’ll want to touch it, I presume.”

“Holmes, I would not—“

And here was the gamble. I speak the words then hold my breath.

“When I say ‘presume,’ I mean ‘hope.’”

Our eyes meet.

Yes, I mean what you think I mean.

“I should not be able to resist,” you say in that melting tone.

When my back is finally bare to you, you breathe,

“It’s magnificent.”

Your fingers trace the winged beast.


My heart beats as wildly as wings.

“Rising from the ashes, flying over the garden. Here’s the fruit. Strawberry. Blackberry. And the animals. Giraffe. Lion. Porcupine. What’s this?”

“Ocelot. And a sloth. And a ferret. And a mouse.”

“What a menagerie! And here’s your fountain. And your bees! But I am not there.”
“No. You are here.”

I feel your hands running up and down my back, then the press of your lips to the head of the dragon.

“You are magnificent, Holmes.”

Your hands caress my spine until you reach the top of my trousers.

“Ah, the tail curls a bit further down,” you say.

“I suppose you want to see it?”

I look over my shoulder.

You grin wickedly.

“I shall not be able to resist touching it.”

My prick stiffens.

“Watson.”

You kiss my shoulder. “What a work of art you are!” you whisper.

I reply, “And how dreams, sometimes, come true.”
Chapter Summary

Title: Untold Cases  
Rating: Gen  
Length: 1444  
Summary: 30 one-sentence stories about the untold cases of Sherlock Holmes canon.  
Holmes & Watson. Gen.  
Author's Note: for the LJ fffc com May Special challenge (the prompts are in bold) & the Holmes_Minor comm May prompt: flowers.

1. “If Mister Abernetty had not already been suffered the ill, lamentably fatal, effects of a carefully-place cushion over his nose and mouth, this cloying smell of lilies might have easily overwhelmed him to death,” muttered Holmes before blatantly, purposefully, and spitefully ignoring my reproving ‘for God’s sake, man, we’re at a funeral!’ glance.

2. “‘Custom does not stale her infinite variety,’” I mused as I placed my hand over my heart, imagining its beat thudding in the rapid, a-guinea-more-for-all-due-haste-sir rhythm of the hansom cab over stones; imagining the soft brush of the silk primrose which served as token and talisman; tasting, coppery like blood, salty like tears, the anticipation on my lips as Holmes and I hurtled through the fog towards a plague-spot on the East End and our next triumph over evil.

3. Holmes smiled at the yellow flower and said warily, “You’ve won, Watson, for I cannot resist the call of my childhood friend the willow catkin; this horrid case of Baron Maupertuis is concluded, so I shall submit to the recommended course of treatment for my nervous exhaustion and join you in a quiet country holiday.”

4. “There is no humiliation, Holmes, in having a successful hobby as well as a successful professional career; you will always be remembered as first as the vanquisher of the Camberwell Poisoner and second as the confectioner of the most delicate and delightful sugared violets in the land.”

5. “I would argue that I was being clever, bold, even, not optimistic when I bluffed Count Sylvius with this notebook, which does not, in fact, contain anything about old Mrs. Harold or Miss Minnne Warrender, but rather pressed narcissus blossoms, which, of course, yes, Watson, are quite appropriate for the bluffer and bluffed.”

6. Holmes enjoyed his little joke immensely; yes, I was surprised, to say the least, at viewing the tattoo of a pair of lotuses, one blue, one white, naturally, that he obtained in commemoration of the successful conclusion of the Case of the Two Coptic Patriarchs, but my alarm dissolved into amusement when Toby licked the ink from his forearm.

7. “Don’t reproach yourself, Watson, for one is easily misled; even I was confused initially, for, you see, she was given a branch of currants, which, of course, in the language of flowers means ‘thy frown will kill me,’ but it was a round, not a frown, from the newly-coined Mrs. Ricoletti’s shotgun that brought about her husband’s death.”

8. Work may be an antidote for sorrow for some, but on nights such as these, I empathise with the widower Tarleton and feel no balm, no sympathy and so find the work as comforting as an array of deep red carnations arranged for a woman who will never again sigh over them.

9. “The anger of Vittoria the circus belle was, I think, justified Holmes, as was her decision to unleash her faithful companion Uglee the hissing tarantula upon you, for you compared her
most unfavourably to the Cornish whin, yellow capped, showy, and with a long flowering
season!"

10. “You’ll grant that Morgan the poisoner couldn’t have chosen her victims much better than that,
a brute in a chute with her bridegroom’s hat; oh, pray don’t look at me like that, Watson, you
know how low I’ve sunk, from world’s greatest to London’s hated-est, horridest, sad
buttercup of a verse-spewing drunk.”

11. “That bogus laundry affair was really quite remarkable, Watson, not for its dramatic
conclusion, no, but for the fact it brought the big, powerful, energetic Aldridge across the path
of the Inspector Lestrade, and look there, the latter is tenderly tucking a peach blossom behind
the former’s ear.”

12. “So you see, Watson, Colonel Warburton’s true madness was that he was a man born before
his time; his dream of a hyper-loop, a pneumatic railway to the moon, which he oddly referred
to as his pretty little Hollyhock, may one day be realised, and, yes, before you interrupt, I do
realise the poison in the wallpaper played an important role as well.”

13. The Pope was quite pleased at Holmes’s quick and discrete resolution of the intrigue
surrounding the sudden death of Cardinal Tosca, save for that His Holiness’s own penchant
for his most intimate of clerical vestments be embroidered with sunflowers, the tall ones, not
the dwarf ones, mind you, became common knowledge in the Holy See.

14. The real tragedy of Woodman’s Lee, Holmes, was how horrifically the white lily on your hat
clashed with the plunging scarlet neckline of your dress bodice; I was thankful no other ladies
were present when we arrived.

15. The adventure of the Paradol Chamber is a caution, Watson, a child’s mischievous prank with
Guinea pepper, like a schoolyard taunt with a sprig of burning nettle, can have most serious
consequences, and, yes, you may guard my handkerchief as I doubt your sneezing will abate
until nightfall.

16. Like the blue iris to the bee, so that lovely bottle of Montrachet is to me, my dear Watson,
promising bliss; oh, I ought to be disturbed that the Sultan of Turkey knows my weakness so
well, but, for the moment, I am too athirst for my first sip of nectar to care.

17. “I am tired as I appear, Watson, and yet I shall not rest, for that tussie-mussie our client left
behind taunts me so; pansies, my dear man, pansies for thoughts, and I haven’t a single one as
to who or how Mr. Abergavenny was murdered.”

18. “These amaryllis were cut, Watson, not broken or crushed or torn, and so the elusive ‘Woman
at Margate with No Power on Her Nose’ had finally met her match in Sherlock Holmes!”

19. “The wreath of buckbean might have been appropriate for Henry Staunton’s grave as it was,
in fact, a bog where he sunk most of his victims, but the flower signifies ‘calm repose,’
Watson, and a blackguard like Staunton ought to see his fair share of torment in the next
world, don’t you agree?”

20. “Too much basil in the soup should have suggested to the lonely Mme. Montpensier’s an
unfortunate future; her stepdaughter’s heavy hand with that spice—which means ‘hatred,’ as
you know—was a most unequivocal portend, my dear Watson.”

21. “Yes, Watson, I am proud of the arrest of Huret, the Boulevard Assassin, and the recognition
that followed was some recompense for the many nights when I thought myself defeated,
but breathe in the heavy scent of the French honeysuckle, my dear man, and ask yourself if
Providence doesn’t fashion a far sweeter reward than man?”

22. “The remarkable case of the Gila, or venomous lizard, only demonstrates that some creatures
of cold blood walk on two feet, such as he who would not a spare a Michaelmas daisy for his
dead mother’s grave.”

23. “Yes, Watson, the case is closed, I should love for you to crown me with a spring of clematis
for my mental beauty, then allow me to treat you to feast at Simpson’s worthy of the Amateur
Mendicant Society and their luxurious club.”
24. I hope one day the truth of the barque Sophy Anderson will be known, just as I hope one day Sherlock Holmes might wear his prized petunia bonnet without attracting wasps, that is, the most loose-lipped and envious of the fashionable ladies of Central London.

25. I confess to a mild shock at the sight of Holmes bestowing a bouquet of white chrysanthemums upon Matthews, but I suppose ‘truth’ is the highest virtue to be esteemed in one’s dentist.

26. “Opals for tears, but Mrs. Farintosh wept with relief, Watson, crying into her lilac-scented handkerchief, when the tiara was recovered and her good name cleared of all suspicion.”

27. “Larkspur is for ‘levity,’ my dear Watson,” said Holmes as he tucked the dried flowers in amongst the papers, “but there are some in lofty circles who will be shedding tears of shame should matter of the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant come to light.”

28. When dismissive laughter and a ‘what care I for fame?’ was Holmes’s response to the bouquet of tulips sent from the Palace, I suspected that the knighthood was about to be refused.

29. I was pleased with Holmes’s resolution of the little affair of the Vatican Cameos, but I was absolutely thrilled with the pair of sweet Vatican camisoles, delicately-embroidered with bashful peonies, which he received as part of his recompense.

30. ‘No remorse, no regrets, my dear Watson, let us lay to rest all the cases, told and untold, and prepare to enjoy the ‘rustic happiness’ that these yellow violets promise.’
“You’ve journeyed for naught, Mister Holmes. No mystery here. Not a pleasant sight for a newcomer to our quiet corner, but I suppose you viewed bloodier in London.”

“Few such as this, Constable.”

“I didn’t do it,” says an elderly man in a suit jacket that looked a hundred years old. “She paid the errand boy to put fertilizer in my stew last spring. I almost died. And now this.” He sighed. “She’d have slit her throat if I hanged for it. And that’s just what she’s done.”

“Your wife?”

The man recoiled. “My wife’s a saint. She was only a neighbour. All our lives”

“Constable, this blood, though considerable, is old. And the body, too.”

“Two weeks. She kept herself to herself. No one ventures this far off the main road. Let’s go, Mister Anther. Your feud with the deceased was well-known, if never-spoken. Look at that. Running for the door, she was, but where was she going to run to?”

Where was she going to run to?

The garden.

Iris for message. Evening primroses for inconstancy.

And red columbine for—

I wake, heart pounding. I ease out of bed, careful not to disturb my snoring companion. Wrapped in a dressing gown, shod in slippers, I shuffle to the back door.

I peer into the darkness, ears straining, until a voice behind me says,

“Holmes.”
“Watson, do you remember the affair of The Copper Beeches? The scattered houses meant beauty to you, but to me, only isolation and impunity for crimes committed therein.”

“Nightmare?”

I nod.

You sigh. “My only consolation is that you must be somewhat rested. These first days we’ve been too busy and too fatigued with the unpacking for your anxiety to surface. And I’m certain that the story that the lady who runs the lending library told us yesterday contributed.”

I stare, shudder. “Is my dream trying to tell me something, Watson?”

You press yourself to my back, curling your arms around me, and kiss my cheek. “Perhaps a sliver of something.”

“But what shall we do?” I ask helplessly.

“We shall get to know our neighbours and our neighbourhood, such that it is. We shall keep ourselves as alert and our new home as guarded as is prudent.”

“Perhaps a dog?”

“Perhaps a dog.”

“And we shall rest safe in each other’s arms and wake to the simple joys that this rustic life of ours affords. We shall pursue our curious hobbies in leisure and peace. We shall nap.”

I close my eyes and slump against you, allowing in your warmth and calm seep into me and still my trembling.

“Oh, Watson.”

“I shall endeavor to keep your fears at bay.”

“As only you can. But this garden, Watson. Iris for message. Evening primrose for inconstancy—”

“I am ripping out the red columbine in the morning. Anxiety and trembling, no. How about an arbor of climbing roses, instead? I’ve seen a lovely specimen called ‘New Dawn.’”

I took his hand in mine and squeezed.
Chapter Summary

Title: Yo soy un hombre sincero  
Rating: G  
Notes: magic mirror AU  
Author’s Note: for the June prompt: travel & for the GYWO May Mirror, Mirror Challenge (one person looks in a mirror; a different person looks back) my prompt was ‘Havana, Cuba.’ The verse are from José Martí’s Versos Sencillos, which was the last of his poetry to be published before his death in battle in May 1895. Anachronistically (i.e., the song wouldn’t be written for fifty more years), Watson is humming Guantanamera, which is based on pieces of Martí’s verse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The water that splashed back into the basin was cool, bracing, and impossibly—or so I thought—briny.

I righted myself and looked in the mirror.

And gasped.

The man who looked back was not Doctor John Watson, formerly of the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers, currently of 221B Baker Street and most immediately, in dire need of a shave and a trim.

It was someone else.

A few years younger than myself, he was frail, but with a resolute expression. Only a few sparse hairs graced his round head, but upon his upper lip was the thickest, fullest, most magnificent moustache I’d ever seen.

Yo soy un hombre sincero

De donde crece la palma.

I did not hear the words as much as feel them, vibrating within me. Around him a city rose up, but apart from the moustache, what caught my eye most was the colour blue.

In the distance, cerulean sky met azure sea with a streak of cobalt.

A sea. A city.

An island.

Havana.
The word was a simple melody, one fit for humming whilst shaving, one as smooth and as thrilling as the curve of woman’s waist when she turns.

*Yo soy un hombre sincero*

*De donde crece la palma.*

*Y antes de morirme quiero*

*Echar mis versos del alma.*

“A man of words, eh? So am I, these days. A legacy, in its own way.”

*Cultivo una rosa blanca*

*En julio como en enero,*

*Para el amigo sincero*

*Que me da su mano franca.*

“I can hear it,” I said, “on the lips of schoolchildren and chanteuses alike for years to come. Mine won’t ever be sang, I’m afraid. But perhaps they’ll be read, by furtive candles or before cosy fires.”

*No me pongan en lo oscuro*

*A morir como un traidor;*

“Soldier’s words, but no, not quite. Revolution?”

The man nodded.

“Forgive me, but you don’t look exactly battle-ready. I was once on the other side, as it were, quite keen to serve Queen and country, etcetera. As an army surgeon, I’m no fighter, either. A bullet shattered my shoulder; the whole experience shattered the rest of me. Empires.” The last was a weary huff. “’Tis odd, though, to have the rest of your life coloured by such a blink of an eye.”

The man smiled, but had no more to say.

I set about shaving. He did, too.

We worked in silence, neither hobbled by the lack of his own reflection.

Water, lather, blade, water, lather, blade.

I hummed.

Maybe he did, too. Who could say with that moustache?

At last, I heard him.

*No me pongan en lo oscuro*

*A morir como un traidor;*

*Yo soy bueno, y como bueno*
Moriré de cara al Sol!

I shook my head slowly.

“Go on. Die with your face to the sun. Poets make the best martyrs. But it’ll be a shame, sir, for the world needs poets more than it needs soldiers, and it for damn sure needs a grand moustache such as yours.”

Chapter End Notes

I am a sincere man

From where the palm tree grows

And before I die I wish

To pour forth these verses from my soul

I grow a white rose

In July just as in January

For the sincere friend

Who gives me his frank hand.

Don’t let them put me in darkness

To die like a traitor

I am good, and so,

I shall die with my face to the sun!
Plagues

Chapter Summary

Title: Plagues
Rating: Gen
Length: 500
Summary: Mrs. Hudson describes events preceding her Egyptian holiday.
Author's Note: Based on Sherlock60 comm discussion. For the Holmes_Minor comm monthly prompt: travel.

“The Red Sea! How wondrous!” she sighed, then added, “And appropriate.”

“Excuse me, Madame, another postcard.”

“Oh, thank you.”

“Forgive me, Madame, but our guests usually send more postcards than they receive. Someone misses you terribly.”

By way of reply, she passed him the card.

“He is calling you back. A, how do you say, forlorn lover?”

“No, a contrite tenant.”

“Pardon?”

“He brought a plague on my house. No, not one. Ten.”

“C’est vrai?”

“The first was a shock. A singular herb of his found its way into my Ceylon black.”

“And?”

“When I poured, the tea was red as blood.”

“Mais non!”

“Then his curiosity shifted from botany to zoology, specifically the amphibious life cycle. Unbeknownst to me, the basin in his bedroom contained tadpoles, which, of course, became frogs and behaved in a most frog-like manner.”

“How unfortunate!”

“It was unfortunate. For the frogs had no tasted for lice, which arrived with the zebra-skin hearthrug
which he received as a gift from a grateful client, and they had all been disposed of by the time the rooms were beset with flies, a result of a collection of severed human thumbs, which were left out, unpreserved, by open windows, on a day which was unseasonably clement."

"Quelle horreur!"

"Of course, at that point, even Bessie would not stay. There wasn’t a girl in all of London who would agree to work. So, we, the gentleman in question, his fellow lodger, and I had to do for ourselves. And do you know the two of them managed to blacken, bend, chip and damage beyond repair every pot and pan?"

He shook his head.

"He offered to polish the silver, but afterwards I broke out in boils where I’d touched it! Thankfully, work took him out of the city, but he returned the same day. There was some question about weather conditions under which a crime had been committed."

"And?"

"And despite common thinking, it is possible to create a hailstorm indoors."

"Oh, Madame, please tell me such a fine lady as yourself did not suffer the sauterelles?"

"If that means ‘locusts’ I most certainly did. They woke when he pried open the lid of a crate of palimpsests. They swarmed. They feasted on the curtains."

"Oh no!"

"Oh, yes. Then, we were in darkness for three days. During a vigorous bartitsu practice, he punched a hole in the wall with a single-stick and burst a pipe most critical to the entire street’s supply. None of the nearby shopkeepers would sell us any candles, so furious were they with the slow repairs. And finally, the oddest, yet somehow the most maddening of them all."

"Yes?"

"The toast. The first piece was black. Always the first piece! Always black! Why?" She sighed. "And so, you see, I fled on extended holiday."

"Quite right, Madame, and the fellow lodger?"

"You’ve met him, Doctor Watson."

"Ah, the good doctor!"

"I wouldn’t recommend reading his postcards."

"No, indeed, Madame. May I refresh your drink?"
I was saddled in a train up a narrow track to London-town.  
When along came a Mister, who stepped in right ‘side my tweed ‘n’ browns.  
He chucked his case up on the rack and said, “Mister, shall we ride?”  
Then he settled his girth into his berth, his mirth a furlong wide.  
He asked if I’d ever seen a town with fog so thick and curled,  
And I said, “Listen, guv, I bet I’ve sniffed every dragon’s cough in this here world.”

I’ve been everywhere, man.  
I’ve been everywhere, man.  
No false beard or fake name spared, man.  
Herrs, Khmers, Pierres, man.  
Of mist, I’ve breathed my share, man.  
I’ve been everywhere.

Been to Tuscany, Sicily, Greek Isles, across the sea  
Cyprus, Damascus, on so many camels I could cuss,  
Bagdad, Islamabad, caravan to Afghanistan  
Himalayas, Katmandu, Dehlis, be they old or new  
Marrakesh, Uttar Pradesh, but the best east-meets-west?  
Was lotsa fun ‘n’ drama with a holy-rollin’ Lhasa llama!

I’ve been everywhere, man.  
Persia to Khartoum, man.  
Mecca to the Louvre, man.  
From Rome to King Tut’s tomb, man  
Without a log down a Reichen-flume, man.  
I’ve been everywhere.

Been to Greenland, Iceland, ‘n’ spots where they don’t play nice, man.  
Bengal Bay to Montpellier, Casablanca’s on the way.  
Bahrain, the south of Spain, from mountains peaked to this here train.  
Trincomalee, the Caspian Sea, Gibraltar’s cliffs to Tripoli  
Bangladesh to the baby Jesus’s creche.  
Jungles, deserts, pyraminds; just watch me parlez tar derivatives!
I’ve been everywhere, man.
I’ve been everywhere.
Art in the Vine.

Chapter Summary


Inspired by this tumblr post.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Damn you!”

Holmes heard the cry as he passed the open kitchen window, then felt something connect with his ankle.

He looked down and frowned at the empty tin of tomatoes. It had splashed red drops on his trousers; the red was a contrast to the rest of the stains on his trousers, which were shades of Sussex brown and green.

Holmes peered into the cottage. “Watson?”

“Those bloody tomato plants, not a single flower! Not one!”

Holmes ducked before a second tin could hit him square in the jaw. He stood between accuser and accused, which, stood proud, staked and tied but, admittedly, not in bloom.

“But, Watson, it’s barely—“

“But I’ve been tending them for weeks!”

“Patience, my dear man.”

“I’m a retired doctor! I have no patients! Or patience! Those plants mock me! You have honey! Why don’t I have tomatoes?”

“I commenced my work last year, my dear man, with several failed starts, you may recall, and no harvest until autumn. You’ve just begun.”

“I’m not meant to be a gardener,” Watson sighed.

“Nonsense. Take a stroll into town. See if there’s something at the library to inform your efforts.”

“Very well.” A third tin, the last in the house Holmes deduced with relief, bounced off his shoulder. “But those plants should know I mean business!”

Watson smiled at the faint strains of the violin wafting on the sweet breeze and quickened his pace, the battered copy of The Tomato Almanack tucked tightly under his arm. Even he knew the melody: Vivaldi’s La primavera.
But as he near the cottage, he frowned. Through the windows, he saw no sign of Holmes in the sitting room.

Where was he?

Watson followed the sonorous baritone, which replaced the violin. He halted abruptly behind a hedge and watched Holmes serenade the blossom-less stems.

_E quindi sul fiorito ameno prato_

_Al caro mormorio di fronde e piante_

_Dorme 'l Caprar col fido can' à lato._

He crooned, then resumed playing and as he played he waltzed toward the hedge, circling it to bestow an acknowledging nod and a playful smile upon Watson.

The concert concluded with a final chorus.

_Di pastoral Zampogna al suon festante_

_Danzan Ninfe e Pastor nel tetto amato_

_Di primavera all' apparir brillante._

When Holmes bowed, Watson clapped wildly and shouted “Bravo!” Then he case an inquiring glance at the empty seed packets impaled on dowels about the plants.

“IT is to inspire them as to what they should produce,” Holmes explained. “Art in the vine is liable to take the most delicious forms.”

“And who told you that?” Waston asked.

Holmes huffed with mock indignation. “The bees!”

Chapter End Notes

The song is part of _sonnets_ related to Vivaldi's Four Seasons.

On the flower-strewn meadow, with leafy branches rustling overhead, the goat-herd sleeps, his faithful dog beside him.

Led by the festive sound of rustic bagpipes, nymphs and shepherds lightly dance beneath the brilliant canopy of spring.
Pajamas

Chapter Summary

The 5 times Holmes exposed his pajamas to the gaze of the public and the 1 time he didn't. Humour. Crack. Holmes/Watson. Rating: Teen.

Inspired by this tumblr post.

“He should be in prison!”

“It’s not a crime, Holmes.”

“Oh, but it is, Watson!”

“More than saddling me with a moustache for the rest of my life?”

“Your moustache becomes you. Greatly. Now the public will see me in pajamas! Unpardonable!”

He hurled the copy of *The Strand* to the floor.

“What about the crime of pretending to be dead? Or pretending to be dying? You’ve done both, the latter when, according to he who may or may not swing for the crime of pencil-sketching, you were wearing pajamas.”

“I was never wearing *those* pajamas! I do not own a pair of white pajamas with a wide grey—“

“Might be light blue,” I interjected. “Difficult to say.”

“—stripe!”

“Holmes, ’No Englishman ever overlooks the opportunity to expose his pajamas to the gaze of the public.’”

“Not true! You’re quoting something! What?”

“One of your foreign newspapers. It is true, Holmes. I can count, let’s see, four times so far this year.”

Holmes huffed and lit a cigarette.

I took it for the challenge it was.

“Okay, if it please the court, one,” I said, counting on my fingers. “The time that you walked in your sleep. You were wearing the dark blue silk dressing gown with matching pajamas. You’d reached Regent’s Parks before I caught you.”

Holmes gave a grudging nod. “But before I woke, did I or did I not, speak the resolution of the Merridew case, he of, quite literally, abominable memory?”

“You did. You’d been at that old case for a week.”
“It haunted me like a Ghost of Christmas Future,” he said, then drew upon the cigarette.

“Number two was also an odd, lingering case. You were having a tray in bed, something occurred —"

“Woodhouse! Oh, he was a sly one, but no Brooks, of course.”

“—and you sprang into the street. You passed by me on your way out. I was, of course, breakfasting in the style of one who is not a savage invalid, that is to say, at a table, and followed with your coat and slippers. Per your instance, we went straight to Scotland Yard.”

“And Woodhouse finally hanged.”

“Yes, but not before all of the Yard got to see you in your camel-coloured wool dressing gown and dark mauve pajamas with the fleur-de-lis print. You looked regal.”

“I did, didn’t I?” He blew a smoke ring like the bounder he was.

“The police bested the fire brigade,” I continued, “because the latter only saw you in your serviceable plaid flannel dressing gown and your dark green pajamas.”

“That was not my fault, Watson. I am a detective, not a soothsayer. How was I to know that the mistress of Huret the Boulevard Assassin, upon hearing of his arrest, would set our rooms ablaze?”

I shrugged. “Nevertheless, and the fourth?”

Holmes looked uncharacteristically sheepish. “I suppose one shouldn’t attempt to craft one’s own fireworks at an early hour of the morning.” His eyes darted. “Again, but the copper chloride, Watson. It’s so temperamental.”

“So you say. Those were the slate-coloured pajamas. No time to collect a dressing gown. Or what was left of it.”

Holmes gave a defeated sigh. Then his gaze became heated and his voice fell to a purr. He let the sheet drop. “You win, but for the moment, I’m exposed to the only gaze that matters. And I’m not wearing pajamas. Or anything else.”

“Neither am I,” I replied with a wink. “Too much haste. Sleepwear never occurred, but a second round of having my wicked way with you is definitely crossing it now.” I curled towards him, then grimaced. “For heaven’s sake, Holmes! Clean your mouth or you’ll taste like ash!” I snatched the butt of the cigarette from his fingers and hurled it towards the wall.

“NO!” he cried.

I growled, then saw the cigarette roll towards a pile. “Oh, God! Are those your commonplace books?”

“No! That’s the remaining copper chloride!” He grasped my hand tightly in his. “RUN, WATSON!” he boomed, just before the room did.

Anyone unlucky enough to be on the pavement outside 221 Baker Street at that hour of the night would have been privy to a most incredible sight: the world’s greatest detective in nothing but a bearskin hearthrug.

I cowered just inside the door with a crocheted antimacassar positioned like Adam’s fig leaf, until
Mrs. Hudson grabbed both Holmes and I, boxed our ears, and threw us in the broom cupboard.

We found quite many ways to amuse ourselves until the fire bridge finished their business, including, but not limited to, of course, discussing how to pay for the inevitable increase in rent.

“Perhaps I should sell some of my pajamas,” Holmes said, just before I silenced our mutual giggling with a long kiss.
“Holmes?”

“Go away. I’m indisposed.”

“No, you’re on the sofa, looking soft-boiled.”

“Oh, it’s you, Watson. Oh, I’ve such a delicate constitution!”

“Holmes, what in heaven’s name are you doing?”

“Waxing lachrymose.”

“Oh, carry on. I’m waxing, too, melting, that is. It’s frightfully hot.”

“Might I die of consumption, Watson?”

“Hmm. Probability’s low, but speaking of, have you eaten today?”

“Shall I ring for tea? Or call for my smelling salts?”

“Tea? Much better to ring for ice and fans, but if you’d like tea, I can go downstairs and ask Mrs. Hudson nicely. Ringing’s unlikely to get you anything but your name cursed out of earshot. Smelling salts? No. How about a medicinal brandy?”

“Tighten my corset, Watson.”

“You’re not wearing one.”

“Is that why I’m unable to have fainting fits? Or heave my bosoms?”

“Uh, yes.”

“What shall I do, Watson? Crime-solving is too taxing. Shall I become a governess—“
“Woe to your pupils. Hurrah for those criminal classes which are not your pupils.”

“—or marry a wealthy man, those are my only options.”

“Oh, I don’t know. You could marry your cousin.”

“I’ve none.”

“Too bad. Let’s see. You could have an affair with an actress? Or yield to the seduction of a rake?”

“The latter sounds more promising.”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Shall I walk upon the moor and hear a strange sound in the night?”

“I believe we’ve already covered that. Listen, here, Holmes—wait, how many novels are under the sofa?”

“It’s hot, Watson.”

“How many did you read? Good Lord, Holmes!”

“Frightfully hot.”

“Some of these are too treacly, even for me. Well, I suppose there’s nothing for it. There’s only one remedy for this particular ailment.”

“Summer in Brighton?”

“Summer in Brighton. I’ll pack.”

“Oh, don’t forget all my parasols for dropping.”
Puppy kisses

Chapter Summary

Title: Puppy kisses
Rating: Teen (one kiss & some innuendo; a rattle of the cupboard doorknob, perhaps?)
Length: 221b
Notes: Retirementlock
Summary: Holmes gives Watson an anniversary gift.
Author’s Note: Yesterday was International Kissing Day. For the Holmes Minor July prompt: dog days.

“What are we celebrating tonight, my good man? Oh, no, don’t feign surprise. The Montrachet isn’t set out for just any supper, certainly not the cold veal and new potatoes I’ve in mind.”

“Forty years, Watson. Forty years ago, you walked into the laboratory at Barts.”

“Ah, it’s a lifetime, isn’t it? And then some.”"

“I could not have known how the man I met that day would change my life, and even if told at the time, I would not have believed our journey together, but every day, I am humbled by and grateful for the blessing of your companionship.”

“So am I, Holmes.”

“And I’ve a gift.”

“Oh, no, Holmes.”

“Oh, yes, something that I hope will appeal to our circumstances now as well as commemorate the past. When you first installed yourself in the Baker Street rooms, you brought something with you, something that did not remain for very long.”

“Let’s see, can’t be my maiden virtue, I lost that long before I met you.”

“Kiss me, rogue.”

“Gladly. Ah, still as lovely as the Montrachet, but why the non-sequitur, Holmes?”

“Quite relevant, my dear Watson, because I predict that your gift will ruin your mouth for human kissing for some time. Happy anniversary.”

“Oh, Holmes! Come here, my pup! Oh, he’s a friendly fellow, just like Bully!”
“I suppose one day there will be a machine that does this,” said Holmes.

“Does what?” I asked.

He waved at the turreted towers of note-books around him. “Collect information. Sort it. Store it in compartments. Perhaps there will even be a machine that does what I do.”

“Surely not.”

“If there is a machine that does what this does,” said Holmes, flipping the pages of a note-book, “then there might be one that could pluck bits,” he made the gesture with his fingers, tapping various newspaper clippings, “and weave the web that I weave.”

“Perhaps, though it sounds like something from the pen of Mister H. G. Wells.” I stood and closed the distance between us. “But people have been sitting around hearths for thousands of years, telling stories about wizards, sages, magicians. Who’s to say that they won’t be sitting around hearths a thousand years from now, telling stories about you?”

“If they are telling stories about me, Watson, then they will certainly be telling stories about you, for they’re your stories, and your cunning questions, your ejaculations of wonder which raise my simple art to prodigy.”

“Holmes!” I cried, grabbing the small note-book hidden beneath the one in his hand. “You’ve not been collecting or sorting! You’ve been drawing pictures of us, holding hands, as dear little bees!”
Dear Messers. Vigor & Co.:

I regret that I am unable to provide a public endorsement of your product, the Vigor's Horse-Action Saddler, at this time, but I have commended the device which was so graciously sent me for trial to Sir Henry Thompson, F.R.C.S., and I am encouraged by this distinguished surgeon’s preliminary wholly laudatory report that a testimonial from the professional world, which you quite naturally desire for inclusion in your newspaper advertisement, is forthcoming.

Let me say privately, however, that your product has my full support. Upon quick, efficient, and, tangentially, unobserved, installation in the lumber room of my residence, I used it for no less than hour a day for seven days and, and here I am quoting from the draft advertisement that accompanied the device, did ‘derive benefit from the stimulating action of the saddle’ and find that ‘the same muscles are brought into play as when riding.’ And thus, I must congratulate you on your truth in advertising that is so rare these days.

Thankfully, I do not suffer from many of the ailments for which use of the Horse-Action Saddler is said to provide relief. My appetite did increase, however, and my sleep became as sound and as lengthy as any child’s, but for an investigator of crime, these two are not desirable! What my digestion gains in the way of blood supply is lost to my brain, and I must be stirring—or at least be able to be stirred—at any hour when crime may be afoot. And thus, yes, Vigor’s Horse-Action Saddler does aid, but at what cost?

I had reached my conclusions by the seventh day of trial, when, by chance, my friend and fellow lodger, Doctor John Watson discovered me in mid-canter, so to speak. With his initial concerns quelled, he observed me on the device. I described the effects of the exercise and now I am under his personal care, following a physician prescribed and administered regimen that is, if not identical, quite similar in its stimulation of circulation and muscle use, but without drawbacks that would negatively impact my ability to meet the, notably unique, demands of my professional life.

And so I compliment you on creating a fine product that will no doubt be enjoyed by many. Thank you for enlightening me to the benefits, and yes, pleasures, of riding exercise at home and I am sorry to not be of further service. I wish you every success.

Sincerely,

S. Holmes.
Holmes laid the newspaper, neatly folded to display the screaming headline, on the breakfast table.

**HERO’S RESCUE!**

“Thank you for solving the case,” I said. “I hesitated in bringing the matter to your attention for fear that you might dismiss it as beneath you or simply not a sufficient challenge for your intellect.”

“’Beneath me’? I apologise if I’ve given you any foundation for such fear, Doctor Watson. I am no snob.”

“A lost dog is hardly a curious murder with sinister history.”

“True. The case did present one or two features of professional interest, but I took it largely out of sentiment.”

I stared.

“Oh, dear me!” he murmured. “I’m not a machine, either, Doctor. I can be swayed by the plea of one war hero, injured at the Battle of Maiwand, on behalf of another.”

“Though only the four-legged of us has been recognised by the Queen for distinguished conduct,” I said with a smile.

“Gross oversight,” replied Holmes. “And I may have located the missing veteran, but you snatched him from beneath the wheels of the hansom. Without both of us, he might not have been reunited with Lance-Sergeant Kelly.”

He raised his teacup.

“That he may frolic in the sunshine the rest of his many days.”

I smiled and brought my teacup to his. “Here’s to Bobbie.”
BANG! BANG!

“Oh, my dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Hudson. She gave a worried glance at the ceiling then rushed to Bessie’s side.

“I’m so sorry, Mrs. Hudson. I didn’t know—“

“My alarm was not for you, my dear. Your first day here I can hardly you expect to remember where all the pots and pans are—much less anticipate which ones make a dreadful racket when you pull them out in a certain order! Here, let me help you. No, my anxiety was for Doctor Watson, one of the new tenants. He’s a war veteran, you see. Injured in Afghanistan, then took seriously ill afterwards. He’s recovering but loud, sudden noises rattle his shaken nerves. I doubt he got any sleep last night. I heard him pacing at all hours, the poor dear. He’s going to have a rough time of it here, I fear.”

“I shall try to be quiet.”

“So shall I, but some noise is unavoidable. And this isn’t a quiet location, is it? Central London, right on the street. And then there’s his fellow lodger.”

“Mister Holmes?”

“I fear he will be a source of disquietude, also, but…”

“Yes?”

“I sense that he has already a grown a soft spot for the doctor. Though if pressed, I daresay he’d never admit it aloud.”

“Soft spot?”

“Well, take last night. The doctor, twisting and turning in the bed—it makes the floorboards creak, you see—then giving a horrid shout. Let’s see, what time? Why it must have been half two in the morning. And then the groaning, then the pacing, and then…”

“Yes?”
“I heard Mister Holmes playing his violin, really, the sweetest tune I’ve ever heard. It put me right to sleep; I hope it did the same for the doctor. Oh, here he comes.”

“Mrs. Hudson?”

“Yes, Mister Holmes? Oh, you needn’t have brought the breakfast tray yourself, I’ve got Bessie now.” Mrs. Hudson shook her head as she took the tray and passed it to Bessie. “The doctor’s appetite,” she lamented.

“Yes, and so I wonder,” he bent and clasped her hands in his and asked in a low, urgent whisper, “might we have a nice chop for dinner?”

Mrs. Hudson nodded and added, “And the best parsnips I can find.”

He returned her conspirator’s smile, gave a cordial nod to Bessie, and turned.

“A nice chop?” said Bessie when he’d disappeared back up the stairs. “Why doesn’t he ask for a diamond ring?”

Mrs. Hudson opened her hands.

Bessie looked over Mrs. Hudson’s shoulder, then gasped at the coins in her cupped palms.

“He’s sold something,” said Mrs. Hudson. “A book. An article of clothing. Perhaps something even more dear.” Her eyes travelled back to the ceiling. “We shan’t dishonor the sacrifice, shall we, Bessie?”

“No ‘am. Best parsnips in London. With butter?”

“With butter,” said Mrs. Hudson, dropping the coins into her pocket. “Now, my dear, the breakfast tray…”

“Mrs. Hudson?”

“Yes, my dear, help yourself to the good doctor’s portion. He’d insist. And so do I.”
“Ay, pobre Carlito! Qué vamos a hacer? Eso maldito nos matará a todos.”

The spaniel looked up at her with a doleful expression. Slowly, clumsily he got to his feet, then abandoned his basket in the corner.

Without stopping to lick her hand, he shuffled to a stack of newspapers and journals at the foot of the armchair opposite her.

“Carlito, no tengo tiempo para leer, mi amor;” she protested as he rooted about the pile. He bit the corner of one newspaper and dragged it to her.

“‘The Adventure of the Priory School’” she read. “You think we need a detective, mi cariño? No hay nada misterio aquí sino mal. Mal, mal, mal y no hay remedio.”

He barked twice, pawed at the newspaper, and collapsed to the floor with a whimper.

“Ya, ya,” she cooed and scooped him up into her lap. He snuggled close and licked at her chin. She held the newspaper to one side and resumed reading.

“John Watson? El amigo de este detective is un John Watson! Puede ser el mismo? Hay muchos John Watsons in este mundo, mi amor.”

Carlo woofed.

She nodded. “Quizás. Vale la pena de pedir.”

She deposited Carlito back in his basket and went to her writing table.

“Dear John,
I hope you have not forgot those nights in Barranco…”
Sussex apology.

Chapter Summary


Watson,
It’s appallingly
apparent
(even to me)
I’m still
a poor apprentice
a low apostle
(nowhere near
apex or apogee)
in the field of
apiology.
I applaud your aplomb
in the face of
(in your face, an)
apricotic apoplexy
at the aperture
made by an
apish aper-bee
who mistook your
appealing appendage
for an
apetalous April
bloom of an
apple tree.
(Forgive my operatic reaction
and apraxic inaction)
Apprehensive
of encore aplenty
I whole-heartedly approve
any measure that keeps you
from being
a canary
in the mine-shaft of this
Sussex apiary.
And I remain,
ever yours,
and ever two thousand times
apologetically,
Holmes
My Dear Holmes. Warning: Implied Major Character Death

Chapter Summary


My Dear Holmes,
I write these few lines through the courtesy of this pneumonia of mine. The rattling cough, the shortness of breath, the heavy weight on my chest have all abated long enough for me to gather my thoughts, a pen, and this sheet of paper.

I did not lie to you when I said that ‘a doctor knows.’ A doctor, at least one who has been at the business of doctoring for as many years as I have, does often know when death is drawing near for a patient that he has tended for a long time. And I have been tending this body for the longest of all.

Indeed, if I may make a full confession to you, I am quite convinced that my death is very, very near and thus I allowed you to depart for London to visit your brother and gift him some honey from your hives, to gather research on beekeeping from various libraries, to attend that ceremony at the Yard for Lestrade, with the full knowledge that it was the last time that we would see each other.

I framed that last image of you, smiling, eager, concerned, yes, but, thanks to my enthusiastic reassurances and rallied strength, not worried, and tucked it alongside all the other beautiful memories that I store in the battered tin dispatch-box of my mind. What a life I’ve led! Know that I leave this world without a single regret and wholly convinced that I am who I am for having known you.

I wanted very much that your last memory of me to be of me smiling, waving good-bye, then returning to my garden. Remember my warmth, not this coldness that grips me and will not let go. Remember my voice calling out, strong, not this horrid gurgling. Remember my colour, not my greyness.

I’ve made every other disposition. Those documents are in the pigeon-hole W.

You once wrote me a similar letter, and I confess I did not appreciate the agony it caused you until this very moment. You lied for your reasons, and they brought us both sorrow. I lied for my own and expect no less.

I am sorry.

I will place this missive on the bedside table, very much as you did yours so many years ago, beneath your silver cigarette-case.

Please believe me to be, my dear fellow, apologetically and very sincerely and evermore,

Yours,
John Watson
Dear Fate.

Chapter Summary

Hiatus Watson. Drabble. For the LJ Holmes Minor comm monthly activity 'Letters of Apology'

Dear Fate:

I’m sorry, but despite all your efforts to rob me of my will to live, I am still here, on this side of the veil, amongst the flowers, rather than the roots.

You’ve taken Holmes. You’ve taken Mary. And you’ve left me alone.

The worst that could has, in fact, happened.

But long ago, in a private hotel room in the Strand, when the states of my health and my finances were in tatters, I said the same.

I thought my existence meaningless then. I know now I was wrong.

I persist. I hope.

Unvanquished.

J. H. Watson
I wipe the sweat from my brow on my sleeve and, with clumsy movements and a groan, push myself to standing with garden soil still caked to the knees of my trousers. On my rising, I snatch the straw hat from where it fell and shove it back on my head, shading my eyes that I might, with undisguised curiosity and appreciation, watch Holmes move about his hives. He has traded his ‘pipe smoker,’ a device that gave more aesthetical pleasure than apiological utility, for a larger, two-handed instrument. He is masked and gloved and shrouded and I wonder on a day such as this, with the August sun beating down on us and no trace of a breeze to be had, how he can elect such voluntary mummification.

Holmes says the smoke soothes the bees. He says it also prompts them to eat—a last supper before forced exile—and, thus, are less likely to sting. He lulls them in order to go about his business—a bit of hive repair I believe is the objective of today’s foray—more freely.

I enjoy watching Holmes at work, for while gardening is mere hobby for me, I consider the hives as much my companion’s vocation as solving crimes was. He looks so at home, with his bees, his cone and bellow.

Is there anything more delightful than Watson’s smile when he is looking at me and has not the slightest notion that he is smiling? He cannot see me return his smile for the mask. Nevertheless, I do.

He’s been battling weeds all morning, on the attack with garden spade as his weapon.

The day is hot, so there is little doubt that he will…

Oh, yes.

He waves. I wave.

He removes his gloves.

And then he removes his shirt.

He kneels. Once more into the fray.

For all my fears of isolation in the remote countryside, there are equally compelling boons, one of which is the lack of prying eyes, save for the thousands-faceted compound lenses of my charges, who, at the moment, are humming in their collective smoked stupor. I observed Watson’s internal debate on the first warm day of the summer and seeing him shrug off his inhibition as he did the soft
cambric shirt was stirring, to say the least.

And, now, at this sight of his more delicate, less taut, but deliciously bronzed canvas, I find myself lulled, just like the bees, into slow movement and reverie.

Until now I’ve kept mum on my appreciation, but—and this is, without doubt, the smoke’s fault—find myself persuaded that a confession might very well lead to bliss.
Title: Cleopatra’s Gourd  
Rating: Mature  
Length: 221b  
Notes: Retirementlock, Horror/Nightmare, Object Insertion, Bodily Invasion of Insects, Incompetent Vicars; POV Watson; dialogue only  
Summary: Watson’s own fears of the countryside manifest in a nightmare.  
Author’s Note: Could be a companion piece to Red Columbine (chapter 35 of this collection). Based on a myth about the first vibrator. For the August Holmes Minor prompt: hand utensils.

“Beyond my wildest dreams?”

“The cosmopolitan pleasures of London pale in comparison to those of the bucolic, yet hedonistic, countryside, Watson.”

“I’m not a young man.”

“No acrobatics required, just an open mind, a willingness to take a risk, and a penchant for the extraordinary.”

“Well, I’ve got those in spades. All right.”

“Splendid! Let me tie this blindfold.”

“Oh, heighten the sensation?”

“Precisely. I’ll just be a moment.”

“Ready?”

“Yes. Oh!”

“Take a deep breath. Relax. There. How’s that?”

“Oh, yes, well, the vibrations are rather pleasant. It is a clockwork device?”

“No, this mechanism is older than even gears. It was first used by the Egyptian queen Cleopatra.”

“Really? Well, it can’t be magic. Oh, oh. That buzzing sounds just like…oh, but that’s impossible.”

“Just remember, Watson, when you’ve eliminated the impossible, whatever remains…”

“Holmes!”

“Don’t twist so, Watson, you’ll tear the neck of the…”
“AARGH!”

“HOLMES!”

“Nightmare, Watson?”

“Yes, this country life.”

“It will take time to accustom ourselves to it.”

“Holmes, would you be disturbed if I asked you to vow never to shove a squash full of angry bees up my arse?”

“No, but I will advise you to spend less time with the Vicar. His jokes are unsettling, his knowledge of history even more so. Oh, your raffle prize…”

“That hideous gourd?”

“…will be burned.”
Chapter Summary

221b. That first ‘oh! my heat suppressants have failed!’ scene in every Omegaverse fic.
H/C. Alpha Holmes & Omega Watson. Rating: Gen

Chapter Notes

I've been telling myself this little bedtime story for the past few nights. If you think you'd read more, drop me a comment, and I'll contemplate fleshing it out. I've not read a whole lot of ACD Omegaverse, so I'm not certain it should go beyond that bedtime story stage.

I do not remember the decision to inhale. I do, however, remember the earth abruptly halting in mid-pirouette while the hooves of the noble beasts of our hansom cab continued to make their music on the street.

“Holmes, I must return to Baker Street at once.”

“Driver!”

“No! I’ll alight here. You go on. The case.”

“The case must wait. I think, were our conditions reversed, you would advise me to not travel unaccompanied even so short a distance.”

“You sense it? The change?”

I nodded.

“I will be gone for some days, perhaps a week.”

“Gone?”

Yours was a grim, tight smile.

“I must be asylumed, Holmes. It is law.”

I heard shrieks, chains rattling, moans, then silence.

Dead silence.

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “No, Watson.”

“And have you considered—”

“Probably,” I snapped.
You scowled. “Have you considered that someone may have tampered with my heat powders purposefully to distract you from this case?”

“Yes. Perhaps the workman who fixed your bedroom window.”

You nodded. “Otherwise, there’s only Mrs. Hudson. And Essie.”

“Bessie.”

“It’s Essie, Holmes, remember?”

I didn’t. “Mrs. Hudson will help us prepare.”

You stared, then whispered, “What? Pass my heat in central London?”

“If you’ll have me.”

You inhaled. “For once, you smell more Alpha than tobacco, Holmes.”

“I shall not lose you to Bedlam.”
Another Overdose

Chapter Summary

Title: Another Overdose
Length: 325
Rating: Gen
Summary: Holmes overdoses on novels again, but Watson has the antidote. Crack.
Author’s Note: A sequel to Overdose. Inspired by the Victorian suggestions tumblr. Dialogue only. For Esbe.

“Holmes?”

“Go away. I’m indulging in the luxury of a headache.”

“Heavens, look at you!”

“Blessed angels, I’m having visions of the departed dead!”

“It’s a mirror, you lunatic.”

“You may well address me thusly for I am contemplating escaping this insane asylum and wandering the streets of London.”

“No small ambition seeing as how we’re in Brighton, but you shall have to go raving mad first.”

“Chronological sequence is very trying at times.”

“No need to convince me of that, my dear man. Sometimes I disregard it entirely.”

“Shall we go on a European tour instead?”

“Because our last one ended so fabulously?”

“Oh, Watson, I haven’t even declined a proposal of marriage today!”

“Holmes, will you marry me?”

“No.”

“Holmes, will you marry me?”

“No.”

“How’s that feel?”

“Oddly satisfying.”
“I see you’ve hidden all the novels in holiday buckets and buried them in shallow graves about you.”

“Shall we entertain our guests with engravings of Italian paintings?”

“Why not? The crabs might find them as appealing as I do and jump directly into the pot!”

“I’ve already written a clandestine letter to a woman below my social rank. Here. Have a look.”

“Mrs. Hudson is not, in fact, below your rank in any caste except boxing weight, Holmes, and a postcard declaring the weather to be exceedingly clement is hardly blackmail material.”

“Hmm. There’s nothing for it but to be courted by a ridiculous man.”

“Oh, give it try. I’ve enjoyed it for years.”

“Flirt giddily with a gentleman of consequence?”

“Much closer to the mark, but why don’t you contemplate suicide by drowning?”

“Oh, I don’t know—wait, the wealthy spinster, the swimming accident—oh, God, Watson, I have it, of course—if we leave now, we may just save the paid companion from being hanged for murder!”

“As predicted, the antidote for reading too many novels is being in the hero of one. Au revoir, Brighton and summer. Holmes, wait!”
Mellifex

Chapter Summary

Title: Mellifex
Fandom: Sherlock Holmes (ACD)
Length: 221b
Rating: Gen
Notes: Fluff, verse, Holmes/Watson
Summary: Holmes discovers Watson’s secret hobby: poetry.
Author’s Note: Watson’s quoting Ambrose Bierce’s “The Death of Halpim Frayser” (1893). For ffc. Sept. Challenge. Day 1. The prompt was 'It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for what you are not.'

“Do you deny it, Watson?”

“No. It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for what you are not.”

Holmes’s eyebrows rose. “How long have you been practising this dark art?”

“To use Mister Ambrose Bierce’s words, I’ve always been, among the Watsons, that black sheep who might at any moment to disgrace the flock by bleating in metre.”

“Indeed. May I?”

I returned the paper I’d snatched from him, the paper I’d left between pages 273 and 274 of The Wreck of the Grosvenor, where anyone could find it.

He read.

"Aligned on binded spines, like-minded tomes
belonging to a Mister Sherlock Holmes,
encovered and enclothed, devoted prose
for those in mellifex’s hexes, woes.
Dark arc of upright rays, green, brown, and blue,
they weight the shelf like freight cars, two by two.
One single flash, a splash of scarlet bold;
yet most do boast calligraphy of gold.
A pithy question answered, a culture bared,
a Times-ly Master’s skep-tic wisdom shared
My heart’s un-grooved, my mind’s most unimproved.
at word-hewn, tree-loomed treasure once-removed.

This library of Mister Sherlock Holmes,

of hiving, thriving queens and honeyed combs,

these manuals and guides and ABCs,

may only pronely indirectly please

the man who keeps the man who keeps the bees!"

He finished, then cried, “Boswell and bard!”
Puppy

Chapter Summary

Title: Puppy
Length: 600
Rating: Gen
Author's Note: For LJ ffc prompt: r.17.16: Puppy
Notes: H/C; nightmares; Holmes & Watson; early days at Baker Street.
Summary: The fate of Watson’s bull pup.

Heat like an oven.

Narrow gaps through walls of rock.

Sudden searing pain.

I reached down with the arm still in service and grabbed hold of my knife just as an army of angry ants crests the ridge.

A yip woke me.

London.

Not the hotel. Baker Street.

Hands shaking, I fumbled with match and candle.

There was another yip, then a whimper when lucifer-box and tapered spill onto the rug.

The weight and warmth at my right side had vanished.

“Bully!”

Whispered groan became chanted litany as shaking hands searched for, and finally found, shaking fur.

“I’m sorry, my lad. The dreams, they’re getting worse. Why are they getting worse? They should be getting better.”

He whined.

I brought him to my chest.

Our hearts beat in irregular staccatos.

“I’m sorry, my lad. So very sorry.”

He was frightened.

I was frightened.
I might have launched him against the wall. Or worse.

My trembling became full-bodied shudders as I wept.

He licked my tears, but his tiny form never ceased its quivering.

Mister Holmes’s expression registered no surprise at my arrival at the breakfast table from the door instead of the stairs. Nevertheless, an explanation sprang from my lips ere I settled in my chair.

“I wanted to catch an old friend, Colonel Hayter, before he left for Surrey. He’s a good man. Got a nice estate,” I said as my companion poured tea for us both.

“Plenty of space for a pup to ramble,” he said.

“Precisely,” I replied after a pause. “Run. Chase butterflies. Hayter will see to him. He promised—”

Men might flee breakfast tables, but they do not weep at them. I mumbled a trite phrase or two and headed for the stairs.

Laudanum.

I hated laudanum.

I never took it, preferring pain and worry to the false comfort of that bitter brew.

I took it now.

Not fit for soldiering. Not fit for doctoring.

Not fit for mastering a beautiful pup like my Bully.

Not fit for mastering myself.

Not fit.

Not fit.

Heat like an oven.

Narrow gaps through walls of rock.

Sudden searing pain.

I reached down with the arm still in service and grabbed hold of my knife just as an army of angry ants crests the ridge.

But it was not knife I gripped.


Bully!

I petted him, and sun-baked rocks became English meadow.
And then there was a song.

We played until the dream set and morning rose.

“You slept well,” Mister Holmes observed.

“Yes,” I agreed. “Exceedingly well.” I glanced at the papers. “Anything going on in the world today?”

I dreamt of Bully every night for a week and had no need for further laudanum dosing.

I still spent most of my waking hours reading, novels, newspapers, even, with Mister Holmes’s permission, maps I found in his eccentric and ever-expanding library, but now I elected to do most of my reading in an armchair before the sitting room hearth rather than in the quarantined privacy of my bedroom.

English meadow.

Happy sun.

Fragrant, buzzing field.

That song on the breeze.

I reached for Bully.

And woke.

Bully?

Bully was gone, but there was something in my hand.

Soft. Warm.

What in heavens—?

Hanks shaking, I fumbled for match and candle.

I patted it and patted it and touch by touch, its form became known.

Oh, Mister Holmes, you sly devil!

It was a hot water bottle encased in a fur muff.

The violin strains faded to silence, then a polite ‘Sleep well, Doctor’ wafted from downstairs.

“Good night, Mister Holmes,” I replied.
Of fish and bicycles

Chapter Summary

Title: Of fish and bicycles  
Rating: Gen  
Length: 150  
Notes: H/W slash; anachronistic quote & term  
Summary: Holmes is teaching Watson how to swim.  
Author's Note: for the September monthly prompt: learning something new and for the Day 5 fffc September challenge prompt: Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving. (Albert Einstein)

Hard thumps on my back sent a briny sea spilling from my lips onto the flat rock Holmes had selected as lifeboat.

“Y-y-you said it was like riding a bicycle.”

“My dear Watson, it is.”

“Then w-w-why, pray tell, after a successful first attempt, was my second one a failure? If s-s-swimming is like riding a b-b-bicycle, once you learn, you never f-f-forget.”

“Not an adage with which I’m familiar. The one I know is ‘Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance’—or keep afloat—’you must keep moving.’ Stop and you sink, as you so aptly demonstrated. Another go, sailor?”

“I was never a sailor.”

“Yes,” said Holmes dryly.

I forced my eyes open to glare at him.

“Or perhaps I should practise my Kiss of Life?”

My lips curled in a smile and I felt the tug of his dark grey eyes pull me under.
“Holmes!”

I stood in the doorway of the kitchen, or what I had called the kitchen when I’d left for the village in the morning, and gaped.

This room before me was unrecognisable: every surface from ceiling to floor was smudged, dusted, and splattered with some element of confectionery: flour, sugar, honey—a lot of honey, I noted with horror—butter, cream, and crumbed something.

“You said that you were going to be working on your book!” I exclaimed.

“I tired of that and thought I’d learn something new: baking!”

“Baking?”

“I’m surprised you didn’t see me in the village this morning. You know, for a provincial lending library, ours has a quite sophisticated selection of cookery books. I decided on a Russian honey cake to celebrate the first bountiful harvest from my hives.”

“But the mess, Holmes!”

I gestured to the enormous pile of soiled pans, dishes, bowls, and utensils—indeed, the entire contents of our cupboards, or so it seemed—lodged in the sink.

“My dear Watson, in life, you can’t make a Medovik tort without cracking a few eggs.”

“But you can clean up after you crack them, Holmes!”

I stepped forward, and as if on cue, heard a crunch then a squish beneath my shoe.

Holmes pretended not to hear me or the noises. “The tort has to sit for twelve hours, so it shan’t be ready until tomorrow, but it will be worth the wait.” His voice folded into a light, teasing, sweet tone. “It promises to be exquisite. Fifteen layers. With your favourite, walnuts.”

“Ah, so that’s what that is,” I said, looking down at the floor. “You are going to clean this, Holmes.”
“With your help,” he replied.

“And why should I help you?!”

I turned sharply, a movement made much less dramatic by the fact that the soles of my shoes had to be wrenched from sticky mire to complete the pivot.

“I’ll provide proper incentive,” said Holmes. His lips curled in a cat-like grin as he closed the short distance between us. Then he bent and pressed his lips to the side of my neck.

“Holmes,” I breathed.

“Watson,” he purred. “Baking is science as well as art. You may add it to the long list of similar janus-faced pastimes at which I excel.”

“Oh, yes, right after lock-picking.”

He hummed. I tenderly brushed the flour from his hair.

By the time the kitchen, and everything in it, had been thoroughly washed and set to rights, Holmes and I also required a thorough washing and setting to rights.

And by then, of course, a new day was dawning.

But the cake did, as prophesied, prove to be exquisite, a perfect medium for appreciating Holmes’s honey and the ideal complement to tea.

Breakfast tea, that is.

“For what is the point of retirement,” I declared, "and this bucolic isolation, if we do not learn new things and throw off the yolk of respectability.”

“Hear, hear,” said Holmes and fed me another bite.
A Country Bed.

Chapter Summary

Title: A Country Bed.
Length: 500
Rating: Explicit
Notes: Holmes/Watson. Sleep sex. POV Holmes.
Summary: Holmes and Watson share a bed in a country inn.
Author’s Notes: I am participating in KINKTOBER 2017. One of the three possible prompts for Day 1 is Sleepy Sex.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A country inn slumbers. A reverie begins.
An interloper lopes. Musts knead as Queen Mab spins.
Lover stands, contemplates. Lover abed awaits.
Key’s afore entrusted. Line ‘twixt thee, me ablates.
Country bed-springs squeak, groan. Now thee with me replete.
Hemistiches equal. Hemistiches complete.
Observed revels disturbed. Observer studies, spends.
Wrapped in dreamer, dreamt sleeps. A country night abates.
Caesura’s absolute. Lusts, once burst, deplete.

Watson and I feign consternation when the innkeeper apologises.
One room. One bed. What a bother!
But if there’s nothing for it…
We linger one celebratory pint too long with the local constabulary.
Last train to London gone. Tomorrow morning, then. What a bother!
But if there’s nothing for it…
Another night in a country bed. With no case to distract.
Once candles are snuffed, I am petted and groomed like a favourite gun dog.
Watson yawns. My turn.
I might demur. I might, were it not for Watson’s reaction to the memory of our first indulgence of this kind, but a quite oblique reference to the incident resulted the most fiendish coupling of what has been, all in all, a quite gentlemanly affair.

Thus, I decline to demur.

One might call it an investment in futures.

Or lust.

For as soon as Watson is asleep, I am surveying the plains and valleys of his body with my tongue, tasting and exploring.

He grunts and snuffles, and so charmed am I that I almost demur. Almost.

What is he dreaming of? Thus far, he hasn’t confessed.

But it is something wicked enough to inspire folding me over the arm of the Baker Street settee, sodding me to bleeding, then fellating me to screaming, yes, screaming, at two o’clock in the afternoon.

Thus, I decline to demur.

I lick, in overlapping swathes, from the cleft of Watson’s arse to the nape of his neck, following his spine as a boat follows a winding river.

Prepping him is science, taking him, art.

With my tongue on his skin, I tell him he is loved, treasured, valued above rubies. I cover him like the tide covers the shore, the length of me rolling against the length of him and filling him just as completely.

“O-o-oh.”

It is a soft, long sigh, drawn out to the rhythm of my pleasure’s cresting and by the time my air is expelled and my lips are, once more, pressed together as country-inn censor, I have spent myself inside him, further proof, if one was needed, that this is not just an indulgence of his.

This is a shared fancy. Impractical to the point of impossible in London, but ideal for a country bed.

I clean him and cover him anew, this time like a blanket.

I smile at his warmth and the probability of a slow, satisfying morning coupling.

And my last thought is:

Too many pints at the local, we’ll apologise. What a bother, these aching heads!

But there’s nothing for it…

but to have a lie-in and take the mid-day train.
The opening verse is called a trine, three rhymed couplets and a tercet, done in French heroic line or Alexandrine. And I was struck by (and thus included) the phrases in the definition of the latter: the hemistiches must be equal and complete and the caesura must be absolute.
Chapter Summary


For the Kinktober Day 3 prompt: Sthenolagnia (Strength/Muscles).

Chapter Notes

I've decided to put the ACD fills I do for Kinktober 2017 here rather than start a new post.

Holmes and I sat in darkness, waiting for the cause of Helen Stoker’s fear to appear.

The parish clock boomed twelve.

I could bear the tension no longer.

I closed the distance between us and, despite Holmes’s silent protest, did what I’d longed to do since the abrupt departure of Doctor Grimesby Roylott of Stoke Moran from our Baker Street rooms; since Holmes had said, “…I might have shown him that my grip was not much more feeble than his own”; since he had picked up the steel poker that Roylott had bent, and with a sudden effort straightened it out again.

I took one of Holmes’s hands in both of mine and rubbed the muscles of his fingers, thumbs, palm, and wrist, applying quick, firm overlapping strokes of my thumbs.

Latin phrases, the ghosts of medical school examinations long ago, rose from their graveyard.

*Opponens pollicis. Palmar interosseous. Flexor digitorum profundus.*

Holmes’s hands.

Beautiful, yes, graceful, yes, as precise and telling as the scientific instruments they manipulated, yes, but I’d forgot how strong until that rare display of pure grip!

And as I mapped muscles, tendons, ligaments, and bones, I vowed that my hands would tend his until the stiffness of age gnarled us both.

And when I was done, Holmes kissed my palms and shooed me off the bed.
Beg (Rating: Mature)

Chapter Summary


“Please, Watson.”

“Please let me touch you. Please let my hands roam where they may. Let them pet you, stroke you, caress you like the cherished companion that you are. Let my fingertips know your hair. They ache, you beast. They despair of knowing your soft and silken from your damp and matted from your wiry and coarse.”

“They long to tease and toy and send blood pooling and plumping and pinking your delicious flesh.”

“They want to burrow and tickle and tempt you to sweating, groaning, moaning, mewling. They want you to curse them and bless them in the same breath. They want to feel your lust building, straining against your own skin, fighting for release.”

“Please, Watson, let me paint those lips with these fingertips, which yearn to be suckled and bit. They want to explore you, map every sweet spot of your shivering, shuddering, slippery sex, and revisit those sites, over and over again.”

“Please, Watson, wet these fingers with pleasure. Let them brush that tender nub deep inside you—”

“Holmes!”

“See, my dear man? I will never again entertain any claim on your part that age has somehow deprived you of the thoroughly charming ability to come to crises without any touch, save that of my whispers to the shell of your ear.”

“Only when you beg.”
The cottage was quiet, at always, save for the mornings when old Mrs. Whitaker appeared to keep what little house there was. And today was not her day.

Holmes sat at the kitchen table, quietly drinking evening tea and not reading the card for a fourth time.

Watson was beyond the ken.

Holmes let the words sink into his heart, scraping, scourging, on their descent.

Watson’s last weekend visit to Sussex had been months ago. A warm letter of invitation for a return visit had been answered with a friendly, but vague reply. Another even warmer missive had resulted in a decidedly cooler response. And a third, and Holmes realised now, final, message had prompted this curt note in hand.

Watson. Beyond the ken.

Holmes should have predicted it. He did predict it, but, like an irritating client of old, he didn’t want to believe his own conclusion.

“No one listens anymore,” Watson had said over tea as they were waiting for the dogcart to take him to the station.

Holmes wondered just who it was in Watson’s life who wasn’t listening. And he felt the sting of being the ‘no one’ who clung to every word.

That was spring, this, autumn.

Now there was a box in the corner of the kitchen, a box that might never be opened.

Blue china.

Holmes had chanced upon the set in a shop in Bond Street when he’d gone to London to see the rheumatism specialist. It was the same pattern that Watson had described, in loving detail, as belonging to his grandmother.

Holmes had carried it on his lap all the way to Sussex.
Holmes finished his tea and then retrieved a single blue teacup from the box. He turned it in his hand, looking at it from all sides.

A *thump-thump-thumpa-thump* rose in his chest.

Well, there was nothing for it.

He smashed the cup on the floor.

As thumping grew louder, Holmes began to dance and sing.

*He been gone since April twenty*

*He took my love and left me empty*

SMASH! SMASH! SMASH!

*I’m breakin’ dishes up in here*

*I’ve had enough-s*

*I ain’t gonna stop until the Yarders bring the ‘cuffs!*

SMASH! SMASH! SMASH!

Holmes was sweating by the time he took up the first saucer. He began divesting himself of clothing as he hopped and spun.

And the following morning, old Mrs. Whitaker might have had a nervous attack at the sight of him in nothing but a union suit, prancing along a trail of bare floor in a sea of blue shards, had Holmes not pressed a fiver in her hand before dressing and flouncing out the cottage, singing,

*I ain’t your no-one, I ain’t your ho-hum*

*The bees’s telling me to seize upon a new comb.*

*I’m a find a man on a ma-a-an…*

Holmes found Stackhurst at home and frigged him raw, then, opting for a nude swim, headed for the beach, still swaying and humming,

*I’m breakin’ dishes up in here…*
“Mister Holmes has already left?”

“Yes, Doctor Watson. He said that he had an appointment at the circus.”

“Circus?”

“He said that he wished to consult with one performer in particular and acquire some of the performer’s specialised knowledge and skill.”

“Really? Wonder who? Snake charmer?”

Mrs. Hudson’s face turned to stone. “I certainly hope not. Enjoy your breakfast, Doctor.”

By my second cup of tea, I’d decided acrobat was the most likely candidate. After all, how many cases had Holmes investigated where the culprit’s physical prowess proved a vital clue? The skill required to scale a wall, for example.

Or Holmes might be interviewing a strong man. What kind of strength was required to deliver an especially savage blow, such as with a harpoon?

Or a contortionist. How long could someone remained unobserved in, say, a trunk?

Or maybe it was the lion tamer. Oh, the crack of the whip!

I knew myself to be alone, but I still cast a furtive look about the room. Naughty thoughts at the breakfast table about one’s friend and fellow lodger were unbecoming.

To say the least.

But that didn’t stop me, of course, from riding the train of thought to its destination.

If Holmes required a beast, I could serve. I could be tamed, naturally, by someone with specialised knowledge and skill. I could do a bit of taming, too, if it came to that.

Or maybe it was a sword swallower.

Oh, that was it!

I had a blade for Holmes, becoming sharper, steelier by the moment. Relax the throat. Swallow.
I wallowed in fantasy until Mrs. Hudson’s arrival. Her countenance and her muttering told me that she, too, was still contemplating of the possibility of Holmes’s acquisition of a new skill.

“Snake charmer, make-harm-er! He’ll be sleeping at a hotel if he brings his new admirers home!”

“Good evening, Watson!”

“How was your day at the circus, Holmes?”

He grinned. “Successful.”

“New skill acquired?”

“Indeed, and practiced until I achieved no little facility in it. My teacher called me the most apt student he’s ever instructed.”

“Congratulations, though I’m not surprised. Your teacher?”

“Max the Mouth.”

“Oh!”

“His stage name, naturally. Would you care for an intimate demonstration, Watson? I’m quite keen to show off what I’ve learned, and you, of course, are my preferred audience.”

“Oh, well.” I blushed. “If you insist.”

“Brace yourself, or perhaps ‘un-brace yourself’ is better advisement…”

“Oh, certainly.”

“…for this will shake you to your foundations. You shall feel my power, my heat.”

“As good as all that?”

“Let me prepare myself.” He contorted his lips into grimaces and smiles, stretching the muscles of his face.

“Oh, yes, well, I’ll just…”

I strode to the hearth, and with my back to Holmes and unbuttoned my trousers.

I heard rustling behind me.

“A moment, Watson. My equipment.”

“Mine’s ready,” I said.

And as I turned, there was the strike of a match and a cry,

“HOLMES, THE FIRE-BREATHING DRAGON!”

And another.

“ARGH!”
Rimming

Chapter Summary


Inspired by ancientreader’s lovely The Author of All My Joys and this funny tumblr post.

Concern fanned to alarm when I saw the blood on Holmes’s handkerchief.

“Good heavens! Sit down, my dear man.”

I flew to him, and he allowed me to remove his coat and settle him into his armchair by the fire.

I went for my bag, and in an instant, was by his side.

“It is a mere scratch,” he murmured, but his face was unusually pale and his expression vague.

My alarm intensified.

“Holmes, head wounds are not trifles.” I began to clean the area. “What happened?”

“You may scarce believe it.”

“I wrote a tale about a milk-drinking snake, Holmes.”

His mouth twitched. “They are tearing down Wych Street and Holywell Street. I passed too close to the demolition. A piece of debris caught me.”

Holmes’s slurring did nothing to ease my alarm.

“After I clean this, I’m going to assess your vision and motor faculties and then I’m going to call Oakenshott. You may have sustained a grievous injury, Holmes.”

Holmes put a hand on my wrist. “Just listen.”

“Very well.”

I resumed my cleaning.

“I fell and, as I was righting myself, noted a scrap of paper on the ground. I would not have thought anything of it, but it bore my name.”

My brows rose. “A newspaper?”

“No. Here. Read it, if you dare.”

He drew something out of his pocket and handed it to me.
I read. And held my breath.

Holmes continued. “Across the street, a pair of unsavory characters were putting crates of books and manuscripts in a wagon.”

“Where did you say you were?”

“Holywell Street. What is left of it.”

“Oh.”

Holmes looked up abruptly and winced.

“No sudden movements,” I admonished and returned the paper to him. Then I bandaged his wound.

“It appears to be one scene in a larger literary work, a scene where I am the recipient of a most intimate gesture. You are not surprised in the least. Did you know of the existence of such works?”

“Soldier. Doctor. Not a lot surprises me, Holmes.”

“And you aren’t disturbed by the nature of the act?”

“Soldier, doctor, remember? I am going to test your memory, too, Holmes.”

“My memory is fine! But the intimacy described is bestowed upon me by an unnamed man with a handsome moustache!”

“Facial hair on the masculine set is almost as popular as you are, Holmes,” I teased.

“Oh, Watson!” Holmes protested, rising out of his chair slightly, then collapsing back.

“Stay still. It’s a testament to your fame, Holmes, that people would create such stories. And that other people would buy them. Here, look at this light.”

“I shall not,” he replied petulantly and blew out the candle. “How much do you think the author was compensated for writing a lurid story about me?”

I chuckled.

Holmes turned his head very slowly and without wincing, and when he spoke, it was in a clear, crisp tone, that did everything to reassure me of his wellbeing.

“That very fine wool dressing gown that you gifted me for my birthday.”

“Shall I fetch it?”

“Forgive me for broaching a delicate subject, but at the time, I assumed you paid for it with gambling winnings. ‘Another set of vices when you’re well.’ Was I wrong?”

I said nothing, merely cleaned my supplies and bundled up the soiled linen.

“Watson,” Holmes breathed.

I shrugged. “Shall I test your vision?”

“I see quite clearly, thank you.” His voice fell to a whisper. “I suppose all artists are plagued with this question, but however do you get your inspiration?”
I met his gaze and smiled. “Imagination, mostly. A sliver or two of reality.”

“Reality?” he ejaculated.

My skin warmed. “If one’s true muse is unattainable, a serviceable imitation will do.”

His brows shot up—without wincing, I noted with relief—and then crashed into a single furrow above his eyes.

I closed my bag. Holmes stood and took me by the hand.

“Come, Watson, I understand that head wounds are not trifles; thus, I will place myself under doctor’s close care for the next two to four hours. And you, my dear man, should accept no substitutes.”

I smiled and let him lead me to the bedroom.
Over the ruined castle, the moon shone.

Within, a cry rang out.

“I’ve found it!”

Shook from lupine dreams, the black-furred mass lifted its head.

“I’ve found a re-agent which is precipitated by haemoglobin, and by nothing else! Come, Barabbas!”

The wolf padded to table and bidder. The corner of the hall was littered with bottles; the table bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and a Bunsen burner with its blue flickering flame.

“With this test, hundreds of men now walking the earth would long ago have paid the penalty of their crimes. You remember Samson of New Orleans?”

The wolf woofed his assent and watched the demonstration with eyes no less keen than those of the figure bent over the table.

“How shall we celebrate, Barabbas?”

The wolf whined.

The vampire proclaimed in a sonorous baritone,

“Re-agent fragrant, tell me if you will, is blood the ruddy culprit-stain? Or shall I deign to say, ‘Tomato sauce, this pall—!’”
The wolf rolled its eyes and returned to the fire at a slow lope.

“Oh, it is a sad century when a vampire cannot recite a Petrarchan sonnet of his own pen beneath the crumbling remains of his once-stately abode without the incurring the disdain of his cur-partner in undeath!”

The wolf barked.

“Oh, very well,” conceded the vampire. He extended a hand.

“On Walpurgisnacht
moon over ruined castle
in blood, on snow, rache

fiends abound unhallowed ground
minions pinion in delight

on Warburgis Night.”

“I know, it has one too many lines. And rhymes, but—”

The wolf licked the vampire’s upturned palm, and the vampire petted and scratched the wolf’s shaggy head. Then they strode ‘cross the hall, the black silk train of the vampire’s robe swishing behind them like a dragon tail.

The vampire took up his violin and played a haunting tune.

The wolf howled.

They paused at the thud without the castle.

“Another gargoyle felled,” sighed the vampire.

When the song had ended and even the fullest of moons had dimmed in melancholy, the vampire declared,

“Admirable.”

“Warpurgis Night, Barabbas, and if my nose doesn’t deceive me, the fiends shall soon have more than a bit of snow for their romping.”

The wolf whined.

The vampire glided to the open window and was immediately beset.

The wolf growled and lunged at the chattering swarm.

“Do your feasting elsewhere, you winged excrescence!” shouted the vampire. He swatted at the intruders and the voluminous sleeves of his robe mimicked their graceless flapping.

The bats clipped their feet to the iron chandelier and click-click-click-ed.

The vampire stood at the window until the snow was thick about the sill.

Later, he took the small book from the wolf’s mouth and read,

“J. Harker-Watson. As suspected. English. You know, I was English once, Barabbas.”

The wolf licked the vampire’s cheek. The vampire smiled.

And waited for the pack to arrive, well-burdened.
The Binds that Tie

Chapter Summary

Holmes & Watson exchange memories. Rating: Teen for Watson in a corset and tied up like a Christmas goose.

For the Kinktober Day 23 prompts: shibari & corsets.

Chapter Notes

The poem at the end is a terza rima. Thank you to the very kind Mafief who made my vision come true in the concrete form version.

Oh dear.

Had Holmes had noticed what had slipped from the pages of the old note-book?

“A man of the world such as yourself, Watson? Why I’d be surprised if you didn’t own a Parisian postcard.”

I retrieved the card from where it’d fallen and heard the proverbial creak of a coffin lid, the ghost of a memory seeking to sojourn amongst the living for a spell.

Holmes moved slowly, affording me every opportunity to inter memory and postcard anew.

I disturbed neither.

“Comely girl,” he observed as he loomed over the back of my armchair.

I looked up at him.

He shrugged charmingly and added, also charmingly, “I’m certain someone thinks so.”

“Would you believe the girl isn’t the reason I bought the card. Or kept it?”

“Yes. Mendacity is not amongst your many shortcomings, Watson.”

He held out a whiskey. Mine, of course. Holmes didn’t drink unless whiskey unless he was cheekily stealing a sip from my glass.

I took it with a nod of thanks. “It was…”

“…when I was traveling?”

Was that what he was calling it? Very well. Better than ‘when I was pretending to be dead.’

“Yes, after Mary’s death. Everyone recommended a change of scene. I wanted a change of idiom as
well. Got as far as Paris. Sought a bit of companionship, as they say. She wore that.” I pointed to the corset. “I liked it very much. She was, as you can see, amply proportioned; I asked her if I might sample the corset and for a small consideration—”

Holmes harrumphed.

“—also amply proportioned, she obliged. It was an interesting sensation.”

“Stirring?”

I brought the ghost of memory into sharper focus.

“I suppose.”

Holmes nodded thoughtfully.

I looked up. “You find it—”

“I find it,” he said in a tone that put an end to any nagging fear. He pointed. “That lacing. I saw a group of prisoners once. They were tied, each and together, in a manner that went far beyond containment. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest form. The guard was an artist, the rope his brush. It was…”

“Arresting?”

He smiled. And nodded.

Then I raised an eyebrow.

“There. How do you feel, Watson?”

“Like a sausage!” I gasped.

He took a step back, hand on his cheek. “Yes,” he agreed, sadly. “Anything stirring?”

“Hardly!” The front of my drawers confirmed this. “Get me out, Holmes!”

He obliged.

I exhaled and shook my head. “Well, that wasn’t what I remembered. And now what are we going to do with the corset?”

“Perhaps Mrs. Hudson is on very intimate terms with Father Christmas.”

“Your turn.”

“There.”

“How do I look?” I asked, studying the harness of ropes that crisscrossed my torso.

“Like a trussed Christmas goose.”

“Anything stirring?”

Holmes shook his head.
“Want to try? You could instruct me in the tying.”

“I’d rather have dinner.”

“Me, too! Let’s toast to fond memories, the binds that tie.”

“And the best of friends.”

---

_The Binds that Tie: a concrete Terza Rima [full text below]_
A cage of bone. A flesh contained, but just.
Held captive. Branded, bound, with knots of jute.

A sculpted waist. A figure trimmed. A bust.

Secured for transport. Chattel absolute.

Lace, timid, sweet, belies the violent wrench.

A queue of canvases for art most brute.

From maiden pure to filthy tavern wench.

Like the old dream of a fisherman’s wife.

All feel the pleasure, pain of the same cinch.

Exchange the chains of ordinary life

Head high, back straight, chin up, though breath is scant.

for ropes of beauty that arrest with strife.

As art arrests, breath turns from groan to pant;

As course is set, the binds that tie enchant.
Chapter Summary


The case reference is from Agatha Christie's *Murder is Easy*.

One of the kinks I didn't get to during Kinktober.

He uncorks the blacking.

The aroma tickles his nostrils and sings in his blood like a heralding trumpet. He inhales, ferrying the fragrance deep into his body, letting every fibre vibrate with anticipation.

Three bootlaces lay on a cloth to his right. Three brushes to his left. The boots are before him. Feet and legs, of chair and man, are behind the boots, but they are not his concern.

For the moment, there is only the boots.

Kneeling, he takes a boot in hand and, using a wooden knife, scrapes mud onto a cloth. Then he takes up the rough brush. His motions are smooth, steady, his thoughts, too, all of present in the back-and-forth scratching of bristles on leather.

And when the boots are clean, his mind, too, is unsullied by dross and irrelevance.

Now for shine.

He dabs blacking onto the soft brush using a stick with a sponge tied to one end.

The blacking is based on a receipt given to him by a gentleman’s gentleman, a hundred if he was a day, for whom he’d done a good turn. He’d improved upon it with his own chemistry, of course, but only slightly.

The scent is his, signifying to them who breathe it ritual, communion, supplication, benevolent tyranny.

He applies a small amount of blacking to the brush, then rubs it on the boot. Then he switches to the polishing brush.


Brush by brush, he works until the boots gleam like a mid-winter night’s sky and his conclusions sparkle like stars.

Brushes, blacking, and soiled linen are spirited away; hands washed; what little clothing he wears discarded.

He eases a boot onto its owner’s foot. Then he takes up a bootlace.

Back and forth. This, too, pleases, but does not calm him.
Tightening, tightening, tying. Repeat.

He spares a glance at his handiwork then bows, pressing his lips to the top of each boot.

Trousers fall like stage curtain. His hands are behind his back, bound by the third bootlace. He leans forward as trousers are unfastening.

And nuzzles a hardening bulge.

Too late, he realises his transgression.

WHACK!

The pain blinds him.

Cat o’ nine tails. Selected for brutal efficiency.

He opens his eyes and, without display of sentiment, takes the prickhead offered into his mouth.

He is but a brush to be used for polishing, he reminds himself. He is fed more. He sucks. He bobs. All without touching, save the prick to his lips, palate, and tongue.

Then the prick is gone. His hands are freed, then tied once more in front of him.

He stands, turns, bends. His thighs strain to burning.

The plug’s removed, replaced by warm, hard prick.

His lips form a silent O.

Three thrusts and he’s being filled.

Hands on his waist say he may sit. He collapses.

A gentle moustache kiss to his lashed spine.

“Solved. Victim drank hat dye thinking it cough syrup. Door locked from the outside with pinchers. Thank you, Watson.”
The Way We Were

Chapter Summary

Title: The Way We Were
Rating: Teen
Length: 500
Notes: references to former Holmes/Victor Trevor
Summary: While swapping stories with Watson, Holmes reveals more about his relationship with Victor Trevor.
Author’s Notes: Whenever I think about he Holmes Minor November prompt (the way we were/weren’t), I keep remembering a song by Barbara Streisand that used to play at the dentist. Here it is.

“…and I woke up next to a camel of the very same name!” I cried.

Holmes laughed, then fiddled with his pipe. “Watson, you poor dear.”

“I suppose everyone has an ignoble start.”

“Everyone? Dangerous to speculate before all the evidence is gathered.”

I stared at Holmes, quite certain I’d not drank enough port to misconstrue his words.

He was studying one of the mountains of paper that blighted the landscape of our rooms.

“You did not have an ignoble start, my dear man,” I said.

He shrugged.

A moment of silence, then curiosity won, and I probed further,

“Anything you’d like to recount?”

“I have recounted it, or rather you have, to the readers of The Strand. The Gloria Scott case.”

“I knew it!” I cried, slapping my thigh. “Victor Trevor!”

Holmes smiled.

“A bond of union. From the moment that we travelled up the lime-lined avenue leading up to his father’s place in Donnithorpe, we enjoyed ourselves, and each other.”

“Well, well,” I said, crossing my legs and toppling a tower of Holmes’s newspaper clippings, notebooks, and old maps that had been erected near my armchair.

“Indeed. We went duck-shooting in the fens. The ducks might have died of shock, but they were

“No, we also did a good deal of fishing, resorting to extremes at the end of the day to quickly procure an appropriate number of fish so that no one would be the wiser.”


“In a boat, in the water, along the bank. The woods around the house were lovely, dark, and deep—a detail that escaped your narrative, I believe. Trevor listened, truly listened, as no one had ever listened to me before. It was intoxicating. I was wholly, thoroughly smitten and behaved like a peacock, spreading my feathers and strutting before him. There in the library, I would look up and catch him staring…”

Holmes’s expression, his voice, his whole manner became achingly wistful.

And yet, wrong, somehow.

“Holmes, are you lying?”

He smiled a rueful smile. “You’ve heard too many of these kinds of tales, Watson, and told too many yourself to be taken in by false ones. No, the last bit about the library was true, but the rest was,” he shrugged, “fantasy. The second night of my visit, Trevor and I had the shocking conversation with his father and Trevor Senior’s unease fed my own. I was too distracted, and nervous, to make an overture.”

“And Trevor never did?”

Holmes shook his head. “The way we weren’t. Ah, well, Watson.” He rose. “I believe I’ll retire to nurse my nostalgia—.”

“Holmes.”

He stopped.

“No. No matter how many stories you tell, or persuade me to tell, you are still going to clean up this mess!”

“But, Watson! The misty water-coloured memories!”

“Now, Holmes!”
Sherlock Holmes is a pale man. What little exercise he takes is of the indoor variety, and the preponderance of overcast days in London means that he, along with the rest of the inhabitants of the metropolis, rarely has any natural opportunity to bronze himself.

Yes, Sherlock Holmes is a pale man, and his pallour is as intractable to his skin as his logic is to his mind. He does not blush. Not when strewn with flattery, which he enjoys. Nor when pelted with insults, be they overt or oblique, which he does not enjoy.

And Sherlock Holmes most assuredly does not blush when, for example, he discovers three items of silken ladies’ undergarments purchased by one Mister Cecil Etherege at a shop in Paris, a shop, which, by the way, specialises in fine, bespoke undergarments for all sexes, including the three pieces which relate to a cryptic scrap of paper found by Mrs. Cecil Etherege after the disappearance of her husband.

No, the colour of Holmes’s cheeks does not vary in the least, not even when, say, he discovers the trio of garments, alluring despite their minimalism, in the flesh, so to speak, that is, or rather, around the flesh of a woman who bears absolutely no resemblance to Mrs. Cecil Etherege—except in name.

Yes, the wan face of Sherlock Holmes does not change when Christmas Eve arrives, and an exchange of gifts is expected. My companion expects a tobacco pouch. He has deduced my wanderings to three high-end establishments, and he has narrowed down the possibilities of what might await him to, I suspect, a serviceable two or three.

When his gift, once bestowed, is of less quality than imagined, Holmes betrays himself with a moment’s frown, but not a trace of disappointment’s pink. He smiles and thanks me, and it is then that I give him his second gift.

Grey eyes widen. A mouth opens before closing.

Holmes lifts the lid of the box at once.

“Oh, Watson.”

I smile. “I have it on the authority of one Mister Cecil Etherege that it is a Continental custom to give such clothing to one’s most desired and best beloved.”

Holmes holds up the undershirt. A tiny bee is embroidered on the left side of the chest, above the
heart of the wearer.

“Oh, Watson,” he exclaims in breathy echo, then drops the shirt back in the box and glances at the drawers that lie within.

“There are four surplus buttons,” he observes, and, indeed the customary vertical row of fastenings is joined by two pairs in rows on either side.

“They are not surplus. I shall demonstrate, at a more appropriate hour, their utility.”

And at this, Holmes reddens like a ripening tomato and mutters,

“Perhaps we should strike while the iron is…”

And it is a short time later that I find myself reexamining an earlier maxim and finding it wanting in truth.

Sherlock Holmes is a pale man.

Except when he isn’t.
I had left school. I drained, as you did, Watson, to the cesspool of London. At the very first, I had no laboratory or library and would often find myself in train stations, observing people and contemplating my future.

One day, I found myself seated on a bench near a platform of an Edinburgh-bound train. Two well-dressed gentlemen joined me. I judged them to be medical men as the one had in hand a small fine leather portmanteau typical of that profession. The bag was just purchased it for it was empty and shined to gleaming.

Nothing extraordinary in that, no, it was the words the man with the bag was saying, his conversation with his colleague. It was my whole philosophy of reasoning phrased succinctly, eloquently, and, most remarkably, aloud.

Overwhelmed, I rudely interjected. “I could not agree more!”

The two men stared. The one with the bag, a man of forty, red-faced and with wild hair barely tamed, said,

“You are a student.” He studied me. “Or were, until recently.”

“I am an artist,” I replied with youth’s haughtiness, “a practitioner of the art of deduction.”

The men laughed.

“One of ours, Littlejohn,” said the man with the bag. “Care to give an improvised performance, young artist?”

“That man,” I said, indicating a short, muscular older man on the platform, “has a tiny blue D branded to the left side of his chest.”

Their eyes widened.

“I will confirm, and if correct, you shall be the new owner of this.” The man patted his bag.
“Bell!” exclaimed his companion.

The man waved a hand. “If this young man is what I suspect, then he should not be wasting his time, loitering in train stations. He needs to get on with his studies and make his mark, but first.”

He stood and walked over to the man I’d indicated. They spoke for a few minutes, at the end of which the man shook his head vehemently.

“Too bad,” said the man still seated on the bench.

But when his colleague returned, he grinned. “Give the boy the bag, Littlejohn.”

“What?” asked his colleague, but he passed it to me without hesitation.

“A look at his fingers, lips, a whiff of his breath told me he had probably been a bandsman in a Highland Regiment, but he swears that he’s been a shoemaker his whole life. If he’d deserted during the Crimean days or later, judging by his age, he’d had the D that the young man claims, but I shan’t strip a stranger in public to prove it. I’m won. Doctor Joseph Bell, at your service, and this is my colleague Doctor Henry Duncan Littlejohn.”

“Sherlock Holmes,” I said. “At yours.”

And so, my dear Watson, I have had a bag all these years with no use for it. But now I have a friend, a medical man keen to restart his practice, to whom I gift it willingly, eagerly, knowing it has found its rightful owner at last.
Mrs. Hudson peered into her glass, then cast her eyes above and said,

“Vermin.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Bessie. “The doctor’s charming, and that bonnet he gave me for Christmas is just about the smartest thing I’ve ever had on my head—or in it!”

“It is lovely, and the doctor does have his merits, including a keen eye for ladies’ fashion, but I was referring to smaller vermin. Mrs. Beeton was quite correct in beginning ‘As with the Commander of an Army,’” but the enemy, my dear, are the blackbeetles, fleas, crickets—”

“Mice, bedbugs, cockroaches.”

“—and you and I seem to be the whole of the fighting forces!”

The front door opened, then closed. Muddy boots pounded on stairs.

“They’ll want tea,” said Bessie wearily.

“And never know how it gets made,” said Mrs. Hudson. “I have an idea. Would you like to live upstairs for a day, Bessie?”

She laughed. “What would we do up there?”

“What do they do?”

“And who’d be down here? Them!” She snorted.
Mrs. Hudson looked thoughtful. “Doctor Watson is a gambling man.”

“But Mister Holmes?”

“Is a Watson-ing man. It’ll be an experiment.”

“Gosh, am I to set the curtains afire, ma’am?” asked Bessie as the bell rang.

“Holmes.”

“Watson.”

“The scouring, the scrubbing, the polishing.”

“The dust, the soot, the grime.”

“The war.”


“Did you know about scattering the damp tea leaves—?”

“I know nothing about anything, Watson, save that I am as tired and worn as if I had gone a day’s worth of rounds in the ring with ol’ McMurdo, and lost. A most edifying experience.”

“I shan’t ever say a cross word to our landlady or those dear girls again. Do you think Bessie would like some hair ribbons to match the bonnet?”

“I think I should like a drink.”

“There’s the gin.”

The front door opened, then closed. Muddy boots pounded on stairs.

“Oh, they’re not going to—” said Watson.

RING!

“At this hour!”

“Come on, Watson. As Mrs. Beeton says—”

“Oh, Mrs. Beeton can—”

“Those are our clothes!” cried Watson. “When did you—!”

“I quite like ‘em,” said Bessie, striding purposefully back and forth in trousers.

“Indeed,” said Mrs. Hudson as she removed her earflap hat and Inverness cloak. “Detective
Inspector Lestrade sends his regards.”

“Lestrade! You went to the Yard!”

“No, of course, not,” said Bessie.

“Of course not,” said Holmes.

“We went to the scene of the crime,” said Mrs. Hudson.

“And solved the case! Dressmaker did it. Strangled her with her tape-measure.” Bessie made a pulling motion.

“Said she hadn’t been there, but,” Mrs. Hudson looked at Bessie, “dressmaker’s pins were on the floor.”

“A pin ain’t just a pin, Mister Holmes,” said Bessie.

“You win, Mrs. Hudson,” said Holmes, humbly. “Now when may we—”

“After tea,” said Bessie, propping her feet up.

“And a smoke,” added Mrs. Hudson as she clamped the stem of the briar-root pipe between her teeth.
Sherlock Holmes had just informed me, for the first time in our long association, that he had nothing of importance planned for the evening.

“Holmes.”

He waved a dismissive hand. “Information gathering.” He turned his attention to the headlines of the day. An almost-smile tugged at his lips. “They finally hanged Old Baron Dawson.” Then he added wearily, “That sugar business is still on.”

“But while London is drinking their tea black, Mrs. Hudson is doing wonders with honey.”

“True,” admitted Holmes. “But honey, despite what the bees believe, does have its limitations.”

“Holmes, if you are doing something dangerous this evening, I would like to accompany you. Or at least be available for proper triage when you return.”

“If it were a question of justice, I’d would not hesitate in taking you into my confidence, my dear man, but this is a personal matter.”

His words pierced me like a blade. Personal matter. He was going to meet someone.

“I shan’t judge, Holmes,” I whispered, inwardly wincing at the plaintive note in my tone.

“That has never been my fear, Watson. I beg no further questions.”

The following morning, my friend was in a foul mood. Clearly, his assignation had not been a pleasant one. Or perhaps it hadn’t occurred? His first coherent words, after a litany of single-syllable grunts, confirmed this.

“I must go to the Continent, Watson.”

“Holmes!”

“I must.”

Sherlock Holmes chasing a lover!

“Is it logical, my dear man?”
He shook his head. “No. It isn’t.”

I would not beg his confidence. I would not.

I remained in a purgatorial state for two weeks, receiving regular coded telegrams from Holmes advising me of his wellbeing but nothing more.

But when he returned, oh, his face was of a conquering hero.

“Pack a bag, my dear man. Sussex.”

Holmes was maddeningly reticent for the whole journey.

Our destination was a lovely cottage on the southern slope of the downs.

“What is this, Holmes?!” I demanded.

“Ours.”

My eyebrows rose.

“I’ve trespassed enough on your goodwill, Watson. The facts.” He pulled a newspaper clipping from his pocket. It was an advertisement for a sweets confection, Mrs. Minnie Warrender’s Velveteen Violets.

“I am Mrs. Minnie Warrender,” he said.

I stared, then laughed.

He smiled. “I used my knowledge of chemistry for profit instead of problem-solving, but the recent sugar shortage put my business in jeopardy, just when I had almost realised enough profits to complete the purchase of this place. I hope you will join me here when we retire, Watson, and I hope you will forgive my subterfuge. I was looking for sugar amongst the most likely places in the East End. When I learned there was none to be found, I had to go abroad. I was successful. Business resumed. This cottage is ours, if you’ll have me. What say you?”

“I say I don’t know who I adore more, Holmes, the detective, the smuggler, or the baker!” I cried and closed the distance between us.
Old Wounds

Chapter Summary

Title: Old Wounds
Length: 221b
Rating: Gen
Notes: Warning for mention of blood and wounds; Angst-amin Angsty with a too large tam-o-angster (that means it's angsty)
Summary: Lost at sea during the Hiatus, Holmes's old wounds remerge.
Author's Notes: I saw something on Tumblr (which I can't find now) about collagen production and how wounds don't ever actually completely heal and that in cases of extreme scurvy, old wounds will reappear as if fresh. Also, for the Holmes Minor monthly prompt: the violet.

The man in the boat tried to count on his shaking fingers the things he had been.

A detective. A violinist.

A friend.

At this, he blinked tears that he didn’t not have.


A traveler. A peregrine.

A sailor. A mutineer. A marooned castaway. A sailor again, now, captain of his own vessel, which stretched the width of his arms and length of his body.

His body.

Baked. Salted. Smoked.

He looked down and watched the scar on his knee, a faint line he’d received as a child for a foolishness he couldn’t remember, grow darker until it began to bleed afresh, like a pharaoh’s ghost spring beneath a disturbed tomb.

Then his ankle began to transform as well. Holes the shape of a bull terrier’s incisors emerged. The skin and flesh fell apart like a strange flower in bloom, and it, too, began to bleed.

Then his chest began to throb. Then his ribs cracked of their own accord and spilt a vermillion anguish.

Of hurting Watson once. Of hurting him still.

Eyes fluttered closed, parched lips touched each other.

An orchard. A Watson, brown as a nut, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a smile. A cool glass of lemon squash with a pair of sugared violets floating…
…floating…

…like little boats.
I’m sorry,” I began as an army of Yarders invaded the warehouse, marching around us like ants at a picnic.

Holmes paused in cutting the bonds at my ankles to put a single finger to my lips. “Not a word until I advise it, Watson,” he said in a low, harsh voice.

He hardly spoke a word after that, and by the time we’d reached Baker Street, the weight of my own foolishness was so burdensome that I headed directly for my bedroom without a glance or a mumble of leave-taking for my companion.

A word from Holmes stopped me.

“Why?”

I turned to face him.

“That is the part that I do not fathom, Watson. Why did you get yourself involved in this ‘bogus laundry affair’? You are not a criminal, yet you entered their den, their enterprise, willingly, eagerly.”

“To be the romantic hero, but things didn’t turn out as I’d envisioned. I played the damsel in distress, instead,” I said bitterly. “I thought, well, damned what I thought.”

“Spare a bit of clay for my bricks, my dear man. Tell me what you thought. I know you’ve been unhappy of late. I feared that you were regretting your decision to declare your feeling for me or, even worse, regretting my declaration of reciprocation.”

“No, not regret. Just a bit of ‘what now?’ We shared a moment of supreme significance, sentiment, import, etcetera, and, well, I expected a fine romance to follow. But nothing’s happened! You’ve been working case after case, with no time for much more than a cordial nod. It’s like the song says, ‘True love should have the thrills that a healthy crime has,’ but ‘we don’t have half the thrills that ‘The March of Time’ has.’ I entered into a bit of healthy crime in the hopes that the thrills and the true love would result.”
Holmes’s brow was furrowed, his expression grave.

“You think I’m mad?” I asked.

“In your reliance upon literal interpretation of popular song as dictator of behaviour, yes, but not in your original expectation.” He strode to the bookcase and plucked an envelope from between a pair of thick tomes. “I’ve been working to earn fees to pay for this.”

I realised at once that the paper inside the envelope was an itinerary. For two.

“Oh, Holmes! Paris! Venice! Rome!”

“What say you to a romantic holiday far from the maddening crowd, my dear man?”

I melted, then looked at him through half-lidded eyes and replied in a husky baritone, “I say ‘I’d like to muss a crease in your blue serge pants.’”

He frowned. “Watson, I don’t know what that means, but I advise you to save it for the Continent—and the sleeper cars.”

“Oh, sorry, yes, of course. I say, ‘This is a fine romance!’”

“Indeed. Or, rather, it will be.”

“And if, on this glamourous journey of ours, there happens to be a cunningly executed murder on one of the trains?”

“So much the better.”
Ripe for the Pickin'. Fic. Prompts

Chapter Summary

A collection of fic prompts based on mash-up titles of at least two canon cases. For the LJ Holmes Minor comm March activity. If anyone happens to fill these, please let me know!

CASE FIC

“A Scandal in Pips.” Holmes & Watson solve the murder of the person who invented seedless oranges.

“The Adventure of the Dancing Cyclist.” A case leads Holmes & Watson to the circus and a re-enactment of the murder has Watson pedaling and soft-shoeing across a high-wire in a clown costume.

“A Case of Red Vampire.” After Holmes & Watson use the utmost discretion in solving the murder of a vineyard proprietor’s mistress, they are rewarded with twelve bottles of an unusual spirit, crafted for those who like their Bordeaux ‘blood-red.’

CRACK/AUs

“The Adventure of the Three Three-Quarter.” While the bodies pile up, Holmes, Watson, and Lestrade spend the whole case arguing whether the answer is nine quarters or fifteen quarters.

“The Adventure of the Blanched Mane.” Fed up with no one being able to tell Watson and him apart, Holmes storms into his hairdressers and asks for something ‘completely different.’

“The Problem of the Crooked Puzzle.” Holmes infuriates Watson when he completes the jigsaw puzzle with picture faced down.

“The Disappearance of the Second Stain.” Case solved by Mrs. Hudson with tonic water and gentle blotting.

“The Adventure of the Illustrious Vampire.” Vlad the Impaler stops by and splits hairs with Holmes over his ‘no ghost need apply’ theory.

“The Adventure of the Devil’s Detective.” Faust AU. Holmes sells his soul, and his deductive faculties, to the most exacting of clients.

“The Adventure of the Greek Ritual.” Historical/Mythological AU. Watson seeks advice from the cleverest, and handsomest, of the Oracles of Delphi. Or is it Apollo himself?

SUSSEX/RETIREMENT!LOCK

“His Last Cardboard Box.” Whilst packing for the Sussex move, Holmes isn’t keen to share, you see he’s saved that one for his ear collection.

“The Adventure of the Empty Builder.” The person hired to contrast the gazebo is found hollowed
out, apparently eaten alive by mysterious insects. [Horror]

“The Disappearance of the Black (Salt)Peter.” Who stole Watson’s rose fertilizer from the potting shed?

“The Adventure of the Sussex Gables.” Holmes and Watson disagree on the design of the new roof.

“The Adventure of the Dying Wisteria.” It turns out it did just need more water and a bit of pruning, thank you very much, Holmes.

“The Adventure of the Missing Pince-Nez.” In which a puppy is wrongfully accused. Watson for the defense.

**PORN**

“A Study in Veiled Scarlet.” Harem AU. Holmes is the sultan’s favourite concubine. Watson is a prisoner of war.

**ANGST**


“The Adventure of the Blue Detective.” Watson shaves his moustache.
“You were brilliant, Holmes.”

It was the second time I’d uttered those words in what was shaping up to be an interminable return journey to Baker Street. The hansom cab had slowed to stop again, this time as a result of road upheaval rather than an overturned brougham. Another detour and another delay seemed inevitable.

Fresh from the scene of crime solved, with a heady mixture of pride, awe, and schoolboy lust still throbbing in my veins, I was restless, to say the least. My body verily thrummed with the unspoken, the pent-up. I rubbed my hand down my thighs for the hundredth time, spreading my fingers then curling the tips downward, gripping the dark wool of my trousers with a cat-like clawing.

“Thank you, Watson.” Holmes’s voice was the firm, soothing tone of a competent nurse, but I was beyond remedy. “London traffic at noon-day would try the patience of a saint,” he added, presciently acknowledging the unstated mood of our tiny mobile compartment.

The cab lurched, then halted once more.

“I’m no saint!” I cried and bolted.

“Watson?” Now there was alarm in the tone and a furrow amongst the brows.

“It’ll do me good to walk,” I insisted. I had to do something to rid myself of this demonic energy, something that would not get Holmes and I publicly condemned, stoned, and arrested, in that order.

“It’ll take you the better part of an hour,” Holmes protested.

I grinned. “Then at the rate you’re going, I’ll probably beat you.”

The cabman was dutifully awaiting his orders. Holmes motioned for him to take a nearby side street.

“We’ll see about that,” were my companions last words, punctuated with a gentlemanly nod of the head, but a cad’s glint in the eye.

The exercise did nothing to ease my condition for in the hour that passed, I thought of little but Holmes’s profile in that dark grey tweed suit that I adored and his sonorous baritone he made his deductions, wrapping the whole baffling case up like a pretty Christmas gift in a shop window.
I bounded up the seventeen stairs, calling, “Holmes!”

As I crossed into the darkened sitting room, he stood and replied, “Mrs. Hudson is at her sister’s—”

I smashed my lips into his, then grabbed his head on both hands, steadying it so that I could drink my fill from those gorgeous lips.

“Those gorgeous lips,” I breathed when I found I could breathe, “from which spout such clever, clever cleverness.”

Holmes flushed, and it did everything to my lust to hear his ragged, panting reply.

“You might be a poet, Watson.”

“I’m too hard for poetry,” I growled and pressed my body to his, showing him that I was, in fact, a man of my words. I ground my stiff prick into him, practically rutting upright.

He’d divested himself of suit jacket and shirt collar and donned a light dressing gown, as if he was about to work on an exacting experiment or, perhaps, practice a bit of bartitsu. I licked and bit savagely down once side of his neck and noticed he’d drawn the curtains as well.

“Good boy,” I muttered as I began to maul the other side of his neck.

“Yes,” he replied. “I took the liberty of one additional preparation.”

That stopped me.

I pulled back and met his grey eyes, as dark with lust as mine must have been.

“Do you mean—?”

“That your impatience, my dear man, is, indeed, catchin’.”

I slammed both hands on his shoulder, and he dropped to his knees as if shot by a firing squad. I opened my trousers and in less than an instant, my aching prick was welcomed into his mouth, spreading his lips as if it were the most beautiful, most natural, most glorious thing in the world.

I growled my approval at beauty, at nature, at glory and petted his head, no less warmly, no less affectionately than a lord might pet his prized hound, his faithful companion, home from hunt. We were home from hunt, but, Christ, wasn’t the leash in the other hand now?

A few hard sucks, however, and I was yanking Holmes to his feet and throwing him face-first upon the very table at which we breakfasted every morning.

A familiar jar of unguent was there, on the table, standing like a forgotten sugar bowl, or rather, an answer to sodding prick’s prayer.

I shoved Holmes forward, tearing his trousers down and hoisting dressing gown and shirttails up; then I slicked myself and with prick in hand, found his sweet little hole. Without preamble, I began my assault.

He cried out as I sheathed the entire length of prick inside him with one merciless thrust. Upon bottoming out, I paused, slipping my hands beneath his shirttails and massage his lower back, allowing his body a moment, but just one, to adjust to the intrusion.

Then I gripped his hips and pounded his hole, breeching it again and again, swearing inelegantly
between clenched teeth, “Fuck, Holmes, fuck, fuck!”

Those long, elegant fingers about which I near-swoon in print were gripping the tablecloth, and Holmes whimpered my name, my Christian name, I might add, into well-ironed cotton.

My body tensed, but I mastered my animalistic urge and withdrew abruptly.

“No, Watson!” he pleaded, making to right himself.

I slapped the open jar of unguent, then wrapped my slicked fingers ‘round his prick.

“I’m a gentleman, ain’t I?” I croaked as I stroked him to swift release.

For the next few moments, Holmes might have been a corpse.

It was comically easy to shove him back onto the table, sink my prick back into his now much-abused hole, and resume my sodding.

I was close, so close, but I wanted to find that angle, that position, that force of thrust, which would drive him from insensate to stark mad, so with every forward push, every twist, I moved us further onto the table.

Then I climbed atop table and sleuth and finished the job. My prick finally found Holmes's sweet spot, the brushing of which sent him into struck-by-lightning spasms, and I finally bestowed my upmost admiration in the form of pissing streams of seed deep inside his stretched cavity.

I bent forward, praying that the legs of the table might bear the strain as well as Holmes had, and whispered in his ear,

“You were nothing less than magnificent, Holmes. You sent Lord What’s-his-name and half the Yard home with a whole flea circus in their ears, and you did it all without mussing a crease in that grey tweed makes me want to suck you off in Trafalgar Square. God, I love you.”

I kissed his sweat-damp temple, then eased myself very carefully out of him and off the table.

He followed my lead in removing himself from the table. I wanted to lend him a hand, but I also wanted to marvel at the mess I’d made of him. The devil was driving now, so I stood back and watched.

“Are you hungry, Watson?” he asked when he was upright.

A bubble of mirth escaped my lips at the non sequitur, then I gave it consideration.

“Yes,” I answered.

“I’m given to understand that the pub ‘round the corner offers a hearty ploughman’s lunch. Seems appropriate for sower and field.”

He was already setting himself to rights, but I, shameless cur, still had my spent prick out. I cupped his chin with one hand and kissed him. My body stirred the taste of my own sex on his lips, and I knew at once that lunch was to be intermission, not denouement.

“Yes, let’s have a bit of bread and cheese,” I said gruffly.

“And onion,” he quipped.
“And then I’m bringing you home and tying you to the bed and smoothing out all the rough I’ve just done you.” I kissed sweetly along his jaw. “Keeping you on edge for the rest of the afternoon, you gorgeous, brilliant, madness-inciting wraith, until I’ve wetted my parched tongue with your tears as you weep for release.”

“More poetry, Watson? Well, if that’s the burden of intellectual genius, sartorial sense, and superior taste in companionship, then so be it.”

He turned, but not before I caught a faint, body-length tremor momentarily wrinkling the dressing gown silk.

I smiled and found myself very much looking forward to lunch.
Ambsace

Chapter Summary

Holmes frets (and reveals a secret) while Watson convalesces. Hurt/comfort. Rating: Gen. Warning for references to suicidal thinking.

I learned the word 'ambsace' while reading Dorothy L. Sayer's Lord Peter Wimsey story "The Fascinating Story of Uncle Meleager's Will." It means a roll of two on dice, or the lowest roll; it can also mean something unlucky.

Holmes’s footsteps on the stairs roused me from a concentration of thought as deep as sleep. As I surfaced, I felt the weight of his gaze upon me, and from the corner of my eye, I saw his shadow obscured the doorway. I sensed, but did not observe, his wince as I looked up.

“The bruises are frightful, I know,” I said, setting my paper and pencil on the bed. “But you should see the other fellows.”

“They won’t hang for it,” he said with undisguised disappointment.

“No, I don’t expect they will.” I motioned to the chair, his chair it had become in very short order, and Holmes folded into it, his countenance as dark and drawn as mourning drapery.

“I do wish you’d convalesce downstairs, Watson,” he whinged.

“And turn your professional consulting room into a sickroom?”

“I’ve no cases on, and I shan’t take any until you’ve recovered.”

“Your laboratory, then—even worse!” I teased.

Holmes did not smile.

“I would have you near, at arm’s length, within sight, not tucked away up here,” he said and waved a hand.

I mimicked his quiet, concerned tone when I replied. “Holmes, we’ve escaped direr straits than this latest one, and with more grievous injuries to us both, I might add, but without such,” I bit back a variation on the word ‘mother-hen’ and selected the less insulting, “displays of anxiety.”

He picked at the bedclothing and shrugged. Then he cast a glance at my swaddled torso and said, “Your ribs.”

“Will mend. As will my head. With time.”

“Watson, please.”

Those grey eyes, that whispered baritone, both which said, no, screamed ‘distraught lover.’

I sighed the sigh of the defeated, but before I uttered my surrender, my eyes drifted to the folded page on the bed.
“Give me a seven-letter word meaning ‘two’ with an ‘s’ in the middle, and I’m yours,” I said.

His brow furrowed, and his head seemed to droop, but then, quite suddenly, he looked up at me with eyes lit by a razor-sharp glint. “Come downstairs,” he said with an urgency I did not understand, “and I shall tell you something I should have told you long ago.”

It was quite some time before I was ensconced comfortably on the sofa, which had been brought nearer to the roaring fire.

Holmes squatted before me, our eyes level.

And it was then that an astounding transformation occurred.

I have said in my public chronicles of our adventures that the stage lost a fine actor when Holmes took to crime-solving, but this wasn’t acting, not by half, this was magic!

For without change of costume or tincture of hair or face, the man I knew as Sherlock Holmes became another person entirely. And this person I knew, too. I recognised him readily enough though I’d only seen him briefly and but once in my life.

And the word, the single word, that the creature spoke took me back to another place, another time.

“Ambsace.”

Two dots. Two tiny black circles on two tiny white cubes.

And all was lost.

“Sorry, soldier,” mumbled the drunk on my left.

I nodded to everyone and no one and took my leave, sinking my hands in my coat and realising I had two coins left to my name, two coins as small and round and unhelpful in the world as the pair of unlucky eyes that had just taken the rest of their brethren from my pocket.

My comfortless, meaningless, lonely existence had just become more so, and I’d reached my limit. I would not return to the room that I could ill-afford on The Strand. I stepped out into the January night, shivering at the cold and thinking how much colder the Thames would feel.

Just beyond the gates of the casino, I looked up into the winter sky and fixed my eyes on two of the many twinkling stars in the firmament.

But I had no more wishes. And even the desire to wish for better had fled.

“Ambsace!” croaked a voice.

I turned and from the stone wall, a beggar crab-crawled towards me. He was nothing more than a grizzled bit of hair and bones and rags, skittering towards me in the dark.

“Ambsace, eh?” he ventured, offering the word in the sly, garbled accent of something ancient, like a curse or a ruin. “The ol’ snake eyes of the dice?”

When else should one be a poet, but the hour that he believes to be his last?

“I am ambsace, sir,” I proclaimed as if addressing an audience of hundreds. “I am the most
luckless of thing in all the world.” And before my mind had even full formed the thought, I was sinking my hand in my pocket and curling my fingers ’round my two coins, pressing them into my palm.

“Take them,” I said, extending the hand, opening it, offering the coins to him.

He did. And I was dizzy with the unmooring from the material.

“I’d give you a room, too, my dear man, if I thought they’d let you stay. I’m paid up through the week. Well, best to you.”

I turned and had not taken two paces, which I felt his tug.

“See the dawn, Sir Ambsace, see the dawn and you might want to see another,” he chittered.

I caught sight of his face in the moonlight, and he repeated his words.

“See the dawn, and you might want to see another.”

And then he was gone.

His words echoed in my thoughts for many streets, and then I realised that there were two coins in my pocket, not the two coins I’d given him, but rather two much finer coins.

I ran back, but I knew even before I reached the casino gate that I wouldn’t find him and were it not for the two pieces of gold weighing so heavily amongst wool and lining, I’d have thought him a creation of my imagination or of my despair.

“You saw the dawn,” said Holmes. “And how happy am I for it.”

“It was you!” I breathed. “The old beggar was you! I never guessed.” I shook my head, then regretted it as pain momentarily blinded me. I pinched my eyes shut to prevent the flow of tears.

“No sudden movements, Doctor,” said Holmes with more fear than censure in his tone. I leaned forward. He rubbed my back soothingly and brushed his lips to my temple.

“How did you know what I was about that night?” I asked when I found breath.

“It was a classic gesture, Watson, parting with one’s belongings for bidding this world adieu, and I was struck with a sudden urge help. The very reason I was there was to collect observations about the fraudulent management of that gaming establishment. You may well have lost badly that night because you were meant to lose badly. I hoped that you’d forgo your plan, and what a wonder it was when I saw that you had, the day that you walked into that laboratory at Barts.”

“Nothing changed that night, I simply decided to postpone the act until the money for the room was due. And then, on that day, I ran into Stamford.” I exhaled and fell back amongst the pillows. “We met before. How extraordinary! You know, Holmes, sometimes I have the fanciful feeling that we’ve met in thousands of ways in thousands of times throughout history.”

He smiled. “And will meet for thousands more, if Providence is kind.”

Our eyes met, and there was nothing but love in the shared gaze.

“You called me ‘Sir Ambsace,’” I sighed and let my eyes fall back upon my puzzle. “I should’ve remembered the word. Unusual, and it marked a night of such misfortune and such luck.”
A wave of fatigue-tinged wonder overwhelmed me, and my next sigh was more of a groan.

“Rest, Watson. Mrs. Hudson is away tonight, and I am at home to no one, no matter the crime nor the criminal.”

I closed my eyes and was kissed good night by the sweet strains of a violin.
Music to Frig By (Rating: Explicit)

Chapter Summary

Title: Music to Frig By
Rating: Explicit
Length: 500
Warning: Oral sex, implied masturbation.
Summary: Watson is convalescing on the sofa in the sitting room.
Notes: For the LJ Holmes Minor March prompt of The March of Time. Technically, a continuation of the previous chapter Ambsace, but can be read alone. If any of my gentle readers have suggestions of period appropriate classical music for these two to shag by, I'd love for you to leave them in the comments.

“Rest, Watson. Mrs. Hudson’s away, and I am at home to no one.”

Ensconced in a makeshift sickbed by the fire, I closed my eyes, but no sooner I was kissed good night by the sweet strains of a violin than I was jolted awake by a disarranging of my blankets and a mound, like that of a fantastic mole tunneling through soil, approaching me at rapid speed. And then a head nuzzled beneath my nightdress.

“Holmes!”

I saw only trouser hems and slipper feet peeking out from the far end of the sofa.

“You’re under strict doctor’s orders not to stir, Watson,” said a muffled voice. “Therefore, I beg you to relax your body, well, all save one part, which you may safely entrust to my tender care for the remainder of the song.”

“But how are you—?” I sputtered for the music was, indeed, still playing.

“These modern gramophones are remarkable inventions.”

I wrenched my gaze away from the sofa and discovered the instrument in question standing in the corner of the room.

“Good Lord.”

“Please, Watson.” He was kissing my inner thigh so sweetly, I could scarcely refuse.

“Very well.”

Holmes knew precisely how to bring me to full stand, and he swiftly cycled through every technique of licking and sucking and teasing, of heat and wet and want, to achieve that aim.

The melody blended with his ministrations and as my eyes closed once more, I could almost imagine that it was the music itself that was pleasuring me.

The song ended and so did I, spending myself into Holmes’s mouth with a lurch that did pain my bandaged ribs. Thankfully, I was too far gone to care.
Holmes emerged from his burrow deliciously disheveled.

“Bring yourself here,” I ordered.

“No.”

“Holmes!”

“I've considered the possibilities, and all will do you further damage.”

“I am convalescing, but I am not an invalid!” I roared, then winced at the throb, a hideous pressure behind the eye sockets, that assaulted me. “I am not a selfish lover,” I said plaintively, my tone thick with disappointment and disgust.

I tried to roll, to turn away from Holmes, but, of course, in my current state that was impossible. The pillows were too many, the sofa too narrow, and my body too uncompliant.

I heard Holmes move, then the squeak of his bedroom door. I chastised myself silently for my weakness and foolishness, and then he returned.

I didn’t look at him until he said,

“Watch.”

He set the phonograph playing again. Now he was in his dressing gown alone. He placed a jar of unguent on the small table beside him as he sat on a straight chair before me with legs spread.

“Oh, God, yes,” I said, readying myself for the performance. “Is there other music to frig by?”

He grinned. “We shall see.”

“I may need another visit from your filthy mole before the night’s over.”

He laughed. “The night is young, Watson. And there is music.”
Once more, I take up pen. Once more, I lay it down.

Part of me longs to write the whole tale and send it to my beloved Watson.

Part of me dares not.

He is already grieving the loss of his friend. Why add to his sorrow?

He would think it a trick. Or the work of a madman.

And he would not be wrong.

I am a madman, well, a specific kind of madman.

A lunatic.

How can I tell him that the confrontation between myself and Professor Moriarty took place the night before he, and now the rest of the world, believed it to have occurred?

There beneath the full moon, my adversary and I struggled. There I unbalanced him, pitching him into the chasm of Reichenbach, but not before he’d wrought his revenge in the form of his teeth clamped ‘round my arm. The mixing of his saliva and my blood sealed my fate.

The moon was still high in the firmament. I transformed at once and spent the rest of the night howling in despair.

I arranged the scene at Reichenbach.

And now I run.

I run towards the rising sun, searching for knowledge to undo the spell, searching for wisdom about who and what I am.

I run, trying, in vain, to outpace this wolf’s bane.
Assassin's Cabinet

Chapter Summary

Rating: Gen
Length 430
Notes: dialogue-only
Summary: A new addition to the 221b Baker Street library.
Author's Note: Inspired by this 16th c. cabinet on auction. And this pair of modified brass knuckles.

“Good evening, Watson.”

“Good evening, Holmes. What’s that? If it’s a new addition to the library, it’s a rather thick one. And an old one. One of your medieval texts, I suppose.”

“A bit more modern that those, but don’t worry, my dear Watson, it shall not displace your beloved Clark Russells. But it should serve a reminder to you that things are not always what they seem. And that you should never judge a book, well, you know...”

“Good Lord. It’s hollowed out! Oh my! Is that a pistol?”

“Yes, the smallest of its kind, I imagine. Only one shot, but sometimes that suffices. Now, what do you make of these?”

“Brass knuckles?”

“But with an added menace—”

“Good Lord, Holmes! Three blades!”

“Yes, with these, my left jab would not just knock a man down—it would remove his face from the jaw. And here we have a nice bit of garrotter’s wire and this.”

“Well, given the rest, I suppose it’s for strangling.”

“But, look. Exceedingly durable. And it’s a pocket.”

“Huh.”

“For filling with sand and bludgeoning behind the ear, like this.”

“Good Lord. Well, you don’t need to tell me what these tiny drawers contain.”

“Oh, good, you follow. The gem of the venoms is this one.”

“It doesn’t look like anything. A vial of colourless liquid.”
“Not just colourless, odorless, tasteless. It leaves no trace, no telltale sign of its presence on its victim, but make no mistake, Watson, it is as lethal as any phenomenon as any I have encountered.”

“Including my snoring?”

“Including your snoring.”

“Well, wherever did you come by this little…what is it called?”

“Assassin’s Cabinet.”

“Good Lord. Holmes, you should alert Scotland Yard as to its former owner at once—or is the cabinetmaker already in police custody?”

“I didn’t find it, Watson. I bought it at auction. I was there on other business, but the moment I saw it, I couldn’t resist. It’s an antique. And fascinating.”

“And macabre.”

“And macabre. But it was worth every penny, just for this little vial of seemingly nothing. The contents of a few of the other drawers may prove interesting too. A few are well-known to me, but there is a dark horse or two. You know, philosophically-speaking, my dear Watson, there is a fine line between medicine and poison, a substance that augments the senses and one that generates fatal insensibility, all a question of dosage, of course…but how remiss of me. It’s quite evident that you’ve had a long and tiring day. Tea?”

“Uh, no, I think I’ll go to the club.”
Chapter Summary

WW drabble prompt: haunt.

“Another case solved!”

“Indeed.” Holmes turned up Montague Street. “We shan’t be able to get a cab at this hour, Watson.”

“I’ll enjoy the walk, but pray tell, how you deduced the secret panel in the wall!”

“I fear it will lower your estimation of me. I didn’t deduce it, I remembered it.”

“Remembered?”

“Because I fashioned it myself. Quite clever of Matthews to have found it. That was my old address.”

“Really? Well, that explains the landlady’s face when we arrived.”

“Yes, Watson, of all our old haunts, the one from which we have been evicted are the worst.”
Chapter Summary

For the WW drabble prompt: stab

Fusion with *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie. Warning for mention of child kidnapping & murder.

Holmes grimaced.

“Bill?” I asked.

“A request for services from a wealthy businessman.” He held the letter flat and studied. “American. Of Italian ancestry. He thinks someone wants to kill him. He is right, of course. But when you kidnap and murder a child and escape from justice, you ought to expect that at any given moment there will be at least a dozen people around the world more than willing to stick a dagger into you.”

“Nolle prosequi?”

“Not at any price.” He threw the missive into the fire and watched it burn. “Some correspondence does not deserve stabbing.”
Chapter Summary

The WW drabble prompt: swim

“Holmes, have you ever thought of swimming with the tide?”

“With my unconventional gifts and disposition? No, Watson—”

“Yes, well, I suppose someone more conventional wouldn’t have blown a hole in the bottom of our boat and left us marooned on a sandbar.” My voice was the driest part of me.

“—but there is something in what you say. The Bard wrote that ‘There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.’”

“Forget fortune! I’d settled for terra firma! Oh, well, here goes!”

“Watson, what are you doing?!”

“Being conventional!”

*SPLASH!*
Evil

Chapter Summary

For the WW drabble prompt: evil

“That’s the last of the fire brigade. I’m going to retire.”

“Good night, Watson. I’ve a bit more on this experiment—”

“Holmes, go to bed! You’ve ruined dinner and my second—”

“Third.”

“—best suit!”

“But doesn’t your Bible say: ‘Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?’”

“Oh, you! My Bible also says, ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’ Go to bed!”

“The Bard says, ‘The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.’”

“A devil can also use Scripture for his own purpose,” I cried before lobbing the heavy tome towards his infernal noggin.
Weak

Chapter Summary

For the WW drabble prompt: weak

While Holmes paced the suite, I tucked into the foodstuffs as only a man who has risen early to catch a train can.

“A case must have merits, Watson, but a client with deep pockets is not always undesirable, especially when they are proprietors of one of the most luxurious hotels in Paris.”

My mouth full, I hummed my agreement.

“Magnificent suite, afternoon tea. What?”

“Nothing.”

“Don’t lie, Watson.”

“The sandwiches are lovely…”

“But?”

“The tea’s weak. But compared to Mrs. Hudson’s, anything—”

“Watson! You’ve solved the case!”

He flew out the door.

“Oh, well, I suppose I’ll be mother…”
For WW drabble prompt: clench.

“Apologies, Doctor, for my outburst.”

“Not to worry. Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.”

“Thank you. And speaking of understanding, please forgive my curiosity, at the time, I observed that you seemed keenly interested in my clenched hands. You gaze never wavered from them.”

My cheeks warmed. “I’m surprised you noticed anything the state you were in, not that I blame you.”

“I’ve noted your interest in my hands on other occasions, less wrathful ones, I wondered if—.”

“Excuse me, Mister Holmes.”

I fled like a coward and did not look at any part of my fellow lodger for a week.
Weary

Chapter Summary

For the WW drabble prompt: weary. Warning for pun!

“…ah, Watson, here we have some pottery from ancient Rome. At least that’s what the sign indicates, but someone has substituted a fake for the genuine article. You can tell it isn’t, well, you can’t, but, of course, I can tell because of these markings…”

I stifled a yawn. “Holmes, I bet you don’t know how Rome was divided.”

“You mean politically?”

“With a pair of Caesars!” I cried, making a cutting motion with my fingers.

He glared. “Is genius wearying, Watson?”

“At times,” I admitted.

“Perhaps there’s a cursed sarcophagus around here to which you can apply your wit.”
Chapter Summary

Holmes gets uppity with a Yarder.

For the WW drabble prompt: layman

“…you see, Mister Holmes, a layman like yourself will always be at a disadvantage compared to us professionals at the Yard.”

“Oh, I don’t know, Inspector. Let’s consider….” He began ticking items off on his fingers. “Acumen, no…interrogatory technique, no…scientific analysis, certainly not…sheer brawn,” and here he cast a look of a too familiar character in my direction, “only in excess of four assailants…ah, but yes, I will grant that the Yard has superior capacity in one area.”

The now crimson-faced inspector spat, “Oh, yeah? What’s that?”

“Incarceration. Mrs. Hudson does not approve of the inevitable stains on the carpet.”
“...it was an effective treatment, sir, that you chose to pour it into your ear instead of ingest is a deficiency on your part.”

“You are the worst doctor in London!” bellowed the man before he stormed out of the consulting room, pressing a woolly mass to the side of his head.

A tentative voice called from the makeshift waiting room.

“Doctor?”

“Yes, Violet, you may leave. I expect that was the last of the lot for the day.”

The bell on the door jangled once, then twice.

“Hello?”

“Doctor...Watson?”

“Yes, please come through. Oh. Well, what seems to be the trouble?”

“I’ve a cold in the chest.”

“Do come in. Have a seat. When did the symptoms commence?”

“Four days ago. I was traveling to London by private coach with my client, Lord St. Simon.”

“Client?”

“I am a professional problem-solver, not unlike yourself, Doctor. May I?”

“Yes, please, I’ll need to listen to your lungs.”

“Of course. Our coach was stopped along the road and beset by masked bandits.”

“Indeed! You were fortunate to have escaped with only a cold, Mister...”

“Holmes. Sherlock Holmes.”

“Breathe, please. Again. Again.”
“The gang was not violent, but they carried off everything of value, including our clothes.”

“Dear me!”

“Left us shivering in our drawers at the crossroads, in fact.”

“Goodness! What a wicked world! I would advise a liniment applied twice a day. Shall I do the first application here?”

“Most kind, Doctor. The leader of the gang caught my attention.”

“Oh, yes? How’s that?”

“Quite good, but a bit more vigour would not be unwelcome.”

“I shall have to roll up my sleeves, then.”

“As you wish. The leader of the gang was obviously a physician, an Army surgeon, to be precise, recently returned from service abroad. Doctor?”

“How on earth did you guess that?!”

“No guessing required. Despite his black silk mask, the way he held himself gave away his military training. The way he tied rope gave away his profession. His suntan gave away his former environs. His new clothes were from London, and his lip bore traces of an adhesive used in theatre circles for applying a false moustache, which I presumed he wore to disguise his identity when he wasn’t about his nefarious business. I can’t blame him. The dreary life of a small, unprofitable medical practice can’t hold a candle to the glamour of highway robbery.”

“A very generous attitude.”

“I understand what it is to take extreme measures to remedy the boredom of life. But he helped himself to my penknife, a gift from my grandmother which she’d once used to slit the throat of Barbary pirate, and I advised him in no uncertain terms that I would reclaim it one day.”

“Here ’tis. I should like to hear more about this grandmother.”

“Thank you very much. And so you shall. When a doctor goes wrong, he is the first of criminals, but I have a proposal for you to mend your ways.”

“I’m listening.”

“Shall I apply the lineament to your back as well, Mister Holmes?”

“Yes, please. Oh, Doctor.”

“Vigorous enough?”

“Quite. But the tension seems to be migrating southward.”

“Where exactly?”

“Here.”

“Hmm. That will require a slightly different treatment, but I have an unguent for it as well. After an
examination, of course.”

“Of course.”

“One moment. All right. Let’s see. Oh, my! A handsome specimen.”

“Thank you.”

“And getting more handsome by the moment. Let’s see if I can ease your tension.”

“I put myself in your hands, Doctor. Oh, back to my story. I cut up rough with the leader of the bandits.”

“That wasn’t very intelligent, Mister Holmes, and you seem to be a remarkably intelligent man.”

“I wanted some privacy. And to afford him the opportunity for him to bespoil me of my virtue as he had Lord St. Simon of his treasure.”

“And did he?”


“What precisely did you want the leader of the bandits to do to you, Mister Holmes?”

“I wanted him to open his trousers and bid me service him.”

“Bid? You were hardly in a position to refuse. May I?”

“You may, Doctor, and oh, yes, that, too. I have slept little since the affair, but when I do, my fantasies have consisted of little but sucking that masked bandit to hardness then turning and offering myself for his sodding.”

“You wanted him to plunder this hole, Mister Holmes? This one?”

“Yes, Doctor, I wanted him to slash my drawers with the penknife, mount me, and take me. Not caring if St. Simon, the driver, or his whole band of merry men heard us.”

“Rutting in the bushes like animals? With your stale breath fogging in the cool night air?”

“Yes, oh, yes.”

“But he might have hurt you. A fellow like that, well, he might be more than you, that is to say, anyone can take on the spur of the moment.”

“Oh, really? Oh, Doctor, now there is something to consider. He might be…long?”

“Thick. And he might like his pleasure, well, a bit rough. When he sees your handsome cleft on display and feels, oh, goodness, feels how hot and tight and sweet your hole is, he may, well, he may lose a bit of his professional demeanor. And become quite a beast, leave you somewhat mauled, bitten and scratched and squeezed and sodded to, perhaps, even quite shamefully, tearing.”

“Oh, oh, oh.”

“How are you feeling now, Mister Holmes?”

“Marvelous. I feel certain you are the best doctor in London.”
“Hardly. But thank you.”

“By the way, I am in need of someone with whom to share lodgings and aide me in my consulting business. I have also just recently discovered a need for a personal physician.”

“How personal?”

“Twice, thrice weekly treatments. More or less as the work fluctuates. My card is in my coat. I shall retrieve it when I’ve…”

“Take your time, Mister Holmes. You’re my last patient.”
Five Naughty Drabbles (Rating: Mature)

Chapter Summary

Title: Five Naughty Drabbles
Rating: Mature
Length: 100 x 5
Notes: Dialogue from 5 canon stories re-arranged in naughty scenarios. Holmes/Watson except for #3 which is Holmes/Watson/Hopkins with D/S tones and #4 which is Holmes/Watson/Lestrade. For WW drabble prompts.

1. Five Orange Pips

“I fear that I have brought some traces of the storm and rain into your snug chamber.”

Holmes groaned. “A few stray drops on my back ’tis all. You owe me no apology, Watson. After a day spent attending patients and battling the elements, I expected you to return as stirred as the equinoctial gales without.”

“Indeed?”

“I am in the presence of one of those great elemental forces—oh, goodness, Watson—like untamed beast in a cage.”

“You flatter me. Shall I have you sobbing like a child in the chimney before the night’s out?”

Holmes whimpered as I set in.

2. The Final Problem

“Shall I beg you so conventional, Watson? It’s not an airy nothing, you see.”

“On the contrary,” I agreed. “From what I perceive, it is solid enough for a man to break his hand over.”

Holmes cried out.

I watched as the stain in the silk grew from a single, dark pinpoint to something larger and more amorphous and tut-tutted, “It is a dangerous habit to finger loaded firearms through the pocket of one’s dressing gown, Holmes.”

“Yes, I have been using myself up rather too freely, but my compliments to your tailor, Watson, those trousers are rather flattering.”

3. The Golden Pince-Nez

“…and the winner is Watson!”
Holmes gave an ejaculation of impatience.

I smirked.

Hopkins strode back and forth before our crouched forms, bringing the birching rod to his palm with a slap.

“Now, now, Mister Holmes, you’ll get another chance. You lost the first round to uncontrolled enthusiasm; it won’t do to lose the second to pique. And I know that I didn’t leave my comfortable home on such a wild, tempestuous night to see my Baker Street lovelies misbehave. All right, the rules are the same: first one to let his golden pince-nez fall to the rug loses. Let’s begin.”

4. The Cardboard Box

“Inspector Lestrade…” I began.

“We have every hope of clearing the matter up, but we find a little difficulty in getting anything to work upon—”

“The ‘we’ is rather fine, Watson, is it not?” remarked Holmes dryly.

“Inspector Lestrade…” I repeated.

“Oh, very well, Doctor Watson,” said Lestrade, a bit defeated but relieved. “In truth, I should be very happy to see you out here.”

“What say you, Watson?” asked Holmes, turning his gaze toward the armchair. “Can you rise superior?”

“I was longing for something to do. Voyeur is not a role that has ever suited me for long.”

5. The Hound of the Baskervilles

“The detection of types is one of the most elementary branches of knowledge to the special expert in crime, Doctor.”

“Oh, so you’re an expert, Mister Holmes?”

“I know when a glance, though momentary, is sufficiently wicked to slay the most upright of recipients, and I am not at the moment, as even you might observe, upright.”

“Didn’t think I was obvious.”

“The world is full obvious things which nobody by any chance observes.”

“Well then, what’s my type, Mister Holmes?”

“Oh, don’t worry, the days when I confuse the Leeds Mercury with the Western Morning News are behind me.”
“I can scarcely believe it, Holmes!”

“But there is precedent, Watson. Is it not the prophet Isaiah who tells us that ‘a little child shall lead them’? And so it was with us.”

“But when the little one said that he’d seen a pair of coffins, I naturally thought we were too late.”

“As, I confess, did I, but the mind of the three-year old is a mystery that foils even the cleverest. Nevertheless, you cannot dispute that his assistance, though not what either of us imagined when first he approached us, still proved invaluable.”

“No, indeed, but they were two sets of footprints, not coffins.”

“Footprints that I daresay only a three-year old could’ve observed.”

“A three-year old or a sleuth much his senior who had no qualms about ruining a good suit crawling about in the mud.”

“As you say. One set of footprints could only have been made by a man with a club foot, our friend Ricoletti, and the other were most assuredly made by his abominable wife. Yes, today, a little child led us to the resolution of a most splendid puzzle.”

“And got a splendid pudding for it.”

“I tell you, Watson, that if he learns to tell footprints from coffins, I shall be following with interest the future crime-solving career of young Master Bunter.”
I bid the boy ‘good night’ and shifted a well-wrapped gooseberry crumble under my arm. Fatigue and rain made the short walk from dog-cart to cottage door a rather long affair. Best laid plans, or so the poet Burns tells us. The joy of bringing another life safely into the world overwhelmed the bother of being wrenched out of quiet retirement, but my disappointment was not wholly a consequence of the frantic rap on the door and the call without of “Doctor!”

I’d had other plans for this midsummer evening, plans washed away, perhaps literally, I would assess the damage in the morning, in a sudden, violent storm.

Damn.

Whilst Holmes was about his bees, I’d taken to the garden, flowers as well as vegetables. As an offshoot, I’d also begun to amuse myself by assembling bits of flora and debris into whimsical miniatures. Fairy carpentry Holmes called it when he chanced upon my hobby.

I’d spent weeks arranging for a fairy fête in the garden, my very own midsummer night’s dream, to be celebrated this very evening, the most auspicious of dates. I’d assembled a miniature banquet table with canopy and chandelier. I’d even carved a host of tiny candles to light the affair.

But the knock had come. And then storm. And now all was, more than likely, lost.

Ah well, just a hobby. But wise to not tell Holmes of my plan or else I’d soon be on the receiving end of no end of ribbing. Of late, Holmes had been so engrossed in his bees, it was doubtful he’d even noticed my preparations.

“What mortals these fools be!” I hailed as I crossed the threshold.

A reply issued from the bathroom.

“The course of a doctor’s true retirement never did run smooth!”

I stopped. I gasped. Rain dripped from my coat, and a fatal tumble threatened the crumble.

The fairy fête!

In the centre of the sitting room, surrounded by candles, large and small, was my enchanted scene.

I quickly deposited the dessert and shrugged out of my wet coat, calling Holmes’s name.
As I neared it, I realised that the whole thing had been reassembled with bits of wire and string; it was set atop a carpet of rose petals and leaves.

“Oh, Holmes.”

On the side table were plates and flutes, cut fruit in small bowls, and cakes and honey. A harem’s worth of cushions was piled on the floor. A grin split my face; my weariness evaporated like morning dew.

The rose petals tapered into a trail, which I dutifully followed.

Holmes met me at the bathroom door.

“How did you know—?”

Grey eyes shone. “Still astonished, after all these years, Watson? As if I’d let your bank of wild thyme, ox-lips and nodding violet perish! A wash,” behind him was a steaming bath scattered with rose petals, “and then a feast fit for fairies!”

“I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove,” I vowed.

Holmes grinned. “Such is my hope.”
Small Moment of Happiness

Chapter Summary

Title: Small Moment of Happiness
Length: 500
Rating: Gen
Summary: Holmes describes his favourite moment of a case.
Author's Note: for the Holmes Minor August prompt (small moment of happiness)

Shakespeare once wrote of tides and floods and fortune, and the Bard’s words are no less true when the affairs of men are their crimes, at least, those crimes which possess features of interest to the discerning connoisseur. The fortune to which the private crime resolver is led is quite often lucre plain, that is, fees gratefully and swiftly paid and the occasional valuable token of appreciation bestowed after a discrete interval of time, when the dust has settled, as they say.

The lucre is sometimes deferred, meaning success in one case leads to the arrival of other cases, the latter proving the more handsomely remunerative than the former. It is not as great a priority as it once was, thankfully, but with an eye towards a comfortable retirement, I still recognise the importance of the paying case.

Of course, there are less tangible rewards: the pride of seeing one’s name in print, of hearing one’s name shouted by the boys on the street corners and whispered in the politest of company, of reputation. I am not immune to such flatteries as Watson has, on more than one occasion, related in his narratives.

Far nobler is the private satisfaction of seeing justice served, suffering avenged, wrongs righted. Far pettier is seeing the doubters and the naysayers, though fewer in number these days, receive their comeuppance on silver serving dishes. And there is, finally, the very private, but also very simple, almost academic satisfaction of a puzzle solved, the last piece slotted into place, rendering a comprehensible whole from a multitude of seemingly incongruent parts.

But before all these, before the fortune, the prides, the satisfactions, there is a single moment of unadulterated happiness.

It has breath and sound and character.

“Holmes!”

Watson’s astonishment, manifested so vividly in his wide eyes and slack jaw and heard so clearly in his ejaculations of wonder, is that moment of happiness for me. The face itself has changed a bit over the years, but the expression, the reaction, is immutable. He is still flabbergasted, after all these years, after all the explanations, quotidian and fantastic, and, quite frankly, I’m still amazed that he’s still amazed, that he’s still capable of such genuine and countenance-consuming awe.

And he still believes, despite my frequent and logical argument against the view, that in terms of intellect applied, I stand alone in this great metropolis. Such belief is often expressed as a kind of a second act to his opening burst of unabashed surprise.
He is wrong, gorgeously, thoroughly, hopelessly wrong.

London is replete with unwept, unknown Agamemnons, but as Horace rightly points out: carent quia vate sacro. They are without a divine poet to chronicle their deeds.

I have divine poet.

I have faithful companion.

And, what’s more, I have spellbound audience for every performance, one whose wild applause forms the small moment of happiness which is the point of flood in the tide in the affairs of this lucky man which leads onto so much fortune.
“Good morning, Doctor Watson. Are you feeling yourself today?”

“Yes, Mrs. Hudson. Why do you ask?”

“Well, it’s just that yesterday you were rather distracted.”

“Oh, yes, well, yesterday was a day, wasn’t it? Holmes was in a singular mood, too.”

“Indeed, but he did not send a toasting fork to the family of the late Doctor Matthews and a wreath of chrysanthemums to Mister Smith and his lovely new bride.”

“Good heavens! Did I do that?”

“Yes, Mister Holmes discovered your error and rectified it before any harm was done, but he did have his fun in telling me the story afterwards.”

“I bet he did! Why I feel quite a fool!”

“Enjoy the small moments of happiness, Doctor, however distracting.”

“Now why do you say that, Mrs. Hudson?”

“Because, as you well know, the days between the toasting fork and wreath are few.”

And with that, she left.

And I was left with a singular reminder, not of the ephemeral nature of life, nor of the heady elixir that is newly-confessed love, but of the fact that the most observant person at 221 Baker Street was not its tenant, the world famous detective, but rather its noble proprietress.
A Friendship in Stitches

Chapter Summary

Title: A Friendship in Stitches
Rating: Gen
Length: 500
Summary: Mrs. Turner & Mrs. Hudson finish their quilt.
Author's Notes: For the Holmes Minor September prompt 'stitches' & for my Ladies Bingo square G-3 'Relationship Study.'

Marie cursed the omnibus driver. She didn’t want to be late.

There was a carefully-wrapped bottle in her lap. It was Thursday, the day that she and Martha would put the final stitches to their quilt.

It wasn’t really one quilt, of course, it was two, one for each of them, but they always called it the quilt.

It seemed like they’d been working on it since the very first day they met.

That couldn’t be right, of course, but it had been over that first cup of tea that Marie had mentioned her old blue one, and then the next day, Martha had told her about that sample sale, and they’d gone together. Martha had such a good eye for colour. She’d done most of the selecting.

And they’d decided on Thursday.

And that was that.

They’d planned. They’d cut. They’d stitched.

And they talked.

About the way the world was going. About the way the world had been, once upon a time. It was nice to talk about Sugg again; it made him seem like more than a faded photograph and a discarded surname. And Martha had the most extraordinary stories to tell about her tenants.

They talked about economy and frivolity. About when they were girls, for better and for worse. They sang the old songs and a few new ones. They laughed.

They almost always met at Marie’s because there was no telling what would be going on Martha’s, but once Martha had been so under the weather that Marie had gone with pots of soup and toddy and fussed over her friend in between stitches.

Marie’s hand was the neater one, and she liked embroidering. For Christmas, she’d given Martha a square with a bit of her favourite verse, Keats, of all things, the romantic dear, stitched in lavender thread. Marie had received, in turn, a length of glorious gossamer-wing lace that Martha said had
come to her through Mister Holmes, of all people, after his trip to Paris.

They complained, of course, about the prices of things and the dirt. And they drank. Gin, mostly.

Marie tucked the bottle under her arm and hurried up the stairs. She’d just had time to set herself to rights when she heard the door.

“I brought cake!” cried Martha, which they both agreed was the best way to say ‘hello.’

“Cheers.”

They eyed the quilt with no little satisfaction.

“It’s extraordinary, isn’t it?” said Marie. “Our story laid out right there.”

Martha hummed. “A friendship in stitches.”

The evenings when they’d been too distracted, laughing or crying or coughing, to do much. The evenings when they’d worked in silence like ants on the campaign. The talents of each and the histories. The lost loves and the perennial comforts. The crosses they bore and the joys that gave them wings.

“Oh, Martha, I don’t want it to be finished.”

Martha hummed. “We won’t be landladies forever. Something for the country?”

“Oh, a retirement trousseau?”

“Just so! I think…”
Absinthe makes the heart grow fonder

Chapter Summary

Title: Absinthe Makes the Heart Grow Fonder
Verse: ACD
Rating: Gen
Length: 1500
Notes/Warnings: Alternate First Meeting, Drinking
Summary: After Afghanistan, Watson winds up in Paris, writing bad poetry and drinking himself blind—until the Green Fairy starts talking back.
Author's Notes: for the Watson's Woes September prompt: absence

“I could’ve drained into that great English cesspool with all the other idlers and loungers of the Empire, and I did, for a few days, that is, but that hotel room on the Strand only reminded me of what I used to be and wasn’t anymore, what I once had but had lost somewhere along the way, and here, well, I don’t have to pretend to be anything but a total stranger, an aimless vagabond, a careless dabbler, an undistinguished drinker, an indifferent poet, and nerves? Phew! This whole city’s got nerves. You walk this city and you feel it, the very ground ‘neath your feet’s got nerves!”

The green fairy’s stoic, slightly bored, expression, remained impassive; its tiny chin was still cradled in its own hand, its wings still frozen mid-flutter.

“There are thousands of cafés in this city. I know, I’ve staggered ‘bout the whole place and counted. Seen ‘em all. Had a drink in most of ‘em. I picked this one because they only give me the second worst table. That lump of a fellow, just beyond my bad shoulder, yes, him, Methuselah’s rag-and-bone man, he gets the prize post, but I suppose he’s beyond caring about the view of anything but the pearly gates. And there’s lots to see even from here. The painters, the writers, the poets, the actors, the worn-out soldiers, the once-were’s, the never-were’s, the might-have-been’s. The crooks and the gamblers and the swindlers and the roughs. They say there’s even a fellow on the prowl who likes to jump up and garrote you when you’re just shuffle along, minding your own business. But I haven’t seen ‘im. Yes, there’s a lot to see. And then there’s you.”

The green fairy said nothing.

“L’heure verte. A thousand apologies. I know my butchering of the Gallic tongue is beyond reckoning. It’s criminal! Lock me up for my own good! Heh, heh. The green hour. Any hour’s green if you drink enough! But I like you. I like the way the water drips. I like the way the sugar melts. I like the louche. I’m a poet, don’t you know? Words, words, and more words. Not a painter or a sketcher or one of those fellows who chisels on stones, no. That kind of art takes more than eleven shillings a day, but a nub of a pencil and a thin note-book is manageable, even for a poor sod who washed up on Portsmouth jetty, pardon the language. Look here.”

I tapped on the open page of the note-book, blank, save for four scrawled words.

War is a bore.
“Good, eh? It rhymes.”

The green fairy said nothing.

“I know you’re only etched on glass, that you’re only green because the poison’s green, that is, until it’s cloudy and thick and ready for the imbibing. ‘Take mine with sugar!’ Of course, you do. So do I. I’m a doctor who can’t heal, a soldier who can’t fight, nothing for it, but to—”

The green fairy might have been about to yawn, at least it opened its minute mouth, but I heard the words in as clear a tongue as ever I heard.

“You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.”

“Hello? Hello? Not speaking today either, eh? I thought yesterday it was because of the change of table. I thought ol’ Methuselah finally got his ticket to ride, but, no, he’s back today. And you and I are back here, in our usual spot. I thought maybe you were cross ‘cause of the table. Or maybe you were jealous. I hear fairy folk get jealous. Maybe you were jealous of the painter who wanted to do a daub or two of me. He wanted to do a daub or two of you, too! Us, together. Of course, I couldn’t talk much myself while he was at it. Don’t want anyone to get the wrong idea about me. I know I’m talking to something that’s not there, that’s not real. I’m not mad, I’m just lonely. I didn’t bother to put on a mask for the fellow, I let the fellow paint me as I am, bored, lonely, and half in love with you.”

If the fairy was touched by the last bit of confession, it gave no indication.

“I don’t know how you knew about Afghanistan, but then there must be fairies all over. Jezail bullet shattered my shoulder. Enteric fever shattered the rest of me. Can’t sleep. Don’t want to eat. But you? You taste like medicine, and not the medicine that I am, that I was, that is, licensed to prescribe, but the kind that Mama used to simmer on the stove, not my Mama, of course, God rest her soul, but others, or so I’m told. I don’t know if I need a home remedy, but I do know I need a spot of the needful if I want to sleep somewhere other than the gutter tonight. I suppose getting my picture painted put ideas into my head. It also put a couple of coins in my palm. I went out last night and had a bit of a flutter. Put everything the painter-fellow gave me, plus everything the British government has seen fit to bestow on my poor broken carcass on red-22. Well, that went about as expected. There. That’s the last of my worldly possessions. And to the broker’s it goes, if I want to have another dance with you.” I opened the watch-case and laid it beside my glass.

The fairy sighed and shrugged.

“You father’s watch passed onto your brother, who was a man of untidy and careless habits, living mostly in poverty and taking to drink until his recent demise. Is that what you want for yourself, Doctor? Do you want to carry on the family legacy?”

“You are absolutely correct in every particular! How? Second sight, of course.”

“Nothing of the kind. Look at the lower part of the case, dented in two places, cuts and marked all over...”

Agog.
I sat, agog, at the fairy.

“You haven’t answered my question, Doctor.”

“What question? You know all the answers!”

“Is your brother’s legacy, that of a careless man who drinks himself to an early death, the one you want for yourself?”

Something in my very soul trembled. My vision blurred. I shook my head slowly.

“Will a glass of water sober you up?”

“It’s a start.”

One appeared.

“Why do you want me sober?” I asked between gulps of the coldest water I’d ever tasted.

“Because I want you to help me catch a killer!”

It was then that I realised: the voice was in my right ear.

I turned my head.

“You?!!”

“You didn’t really think you were speaking to a green fairy, did you, Doctor? That the creature etched into the side of your glass of spirits had suddenly come to life?”

That was, of course, precisely what I did think, so I wisely kept my own counsel on the matter.

“You’ve been throwing your voice!” I cried.

“And you’ve been catching it, my dear man. The world of ventriloquism, I must confess, lost a fine performer when I decided to take to crime-solving.”

“But you’re—”

“Methuselah’s rag-and-bone man?”

“Yes!”

“I was also your painter yesterday and your waiter the first three days you visited this café.”

I gasped.

“You’re not a very observant man, Doctor, but that’s all right. You don’t have to be to aide me in capturing Huret, the boulevard assassin. If you’ll forgive me for taking a grave liberty, an even graver one than making a drunk man believe he’s talking to a fairy, I think you’re a man of action, Doctor, not a man of drink, and not a man of letters, at least not,” he gave my note-book a pitying glance, “those particular ones. How ‘bout we swap introductions later, on the train home, after we’ve
got our man and made the streets of Paris a bit safer for saint and sinner alike?”

“Wait, train home?”

“London got a bit hot for me, what with one explosion at Barts laboratory and another at the rooms in Montague Street, both accidents, of course, but coming as they did in such close sequence, you can’t make people not put one and one together and come up with—BOOM!—but I’ve my eye on some rooms in Baker Street and if we come home heroes, letters of gratitude from the French president, maybe even the Order of the Legion of Honor, well…”

“Leave Paris?”

“Aren’t you ready? Doesn’t,” his lips twitched mischievously, “‘absinthe make the heart grow fonder’?”

“Do you like puns?” I blurted.

“Not as much as you do. You can compile a list of my limits on the train. For now…”

“Yes, yes,” I drained the glass of water, “I’m yours to command.”

“Excellent. On y va.”

And with that, I grabbed my watch and left the green fairy and its magic far behind me.
“…I think you’ll agree, Marie, that things have gone on far too long.”

“Oh, yes, Martha.”

As the ladies entered the kitchen, there was a slight flutter of the long cloth covering the kitchen table, its skirt reaching to the floor.

“It ruined my finest set of napkins, the one passed down to me by my great aunt,” said Marie.

“It made me serve tea infested with…vermin…to my tenants,” a stifled gasp emanated from somewhere beneath the kitchen table, but the ladies took no notice of it, “on an occasion when they did not merit it.”

“I lost my best housemaid to dust.”

“I lost mine to grime. Yes, I think it is time someone got their comeuppance. So, let’s begin. You’ve the bell?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve the candle. Fetch the book.”

Marie left the room, reappearing with a worn copy of Mrs. Beeton’s Guide to Household Management.

“‘First, catch your hare,’” she read, after opening the volume and setting it on the table.

Mrs. Hudson gestured to the meat impaled on roasting jack. “We’ve done so. Now, where’s the tin? Oh, there.”

Immediately, a biscuit tin began to push its way out from behind the long tablecloth.

Marie seized the tin, set on the table, and removed the lid. Mrs. Hudson began to recite in a loud, stentorian voice,

“The dust…”
Marie sprinkled a bit of dust in the tin.

“…the soot…”

Soot joined the dust.

“…the grease…”

A dollop of grease fat was scraped into the tin.

“…the pests…”

An assortment of insects was added, and then Mrs. Hudson began to chant with Mrs. Turner forming the chorus.

BOOM!

Suddenly, in the kitchen was the Devil himself, the white, horned figure glared at the two ladies, then sniffed.

“Rabbit!” he growled with a greedy smirk.

“Now, Martha!”

As the Devil gnawed the meat off the skewer, Mrs. Hudson began to chant again, with Mrs. Turner crying “Fiat, fiat, fiat!” as select intervals.

The Devil groaned and hissed and shrunk until he was nothing but smoke, smoke that funneled swiftly into the biscuit tin.

“Now, Marie!”

Mrs. Turner threw the lid upon the tin and herself upon the lid.

“I’ve the wax ready,” said Mrs. Hudson, reach for a small pot simmering on the stove.

When the tin was sealed, the ladies checked their coiffures and sighed contentedly.

“Mine for a victory celebration?” suggested Mrs. Turner.

“Lead on,” said Mrs. Hudson.

And with that, the ladies strode proudly out of the immaculately clean kitchen.

When the front door closed, there were a pair of groans.

“See, Watson? I told you there weren’t any biscuits in that tin,” said Holmes as he extricated himself from beneath the kitchen table.

“And I told you that I seriously doubted that rabbit was for us,” replied Watson. “No matter how good it smelled. Holmes, I think I’ve lost my appetite.”

“As have I. Perhaps, we should just have a quiet night in.”

“And for the Devil’s sake, let’s don’t track any mud on the stairs!”
Chapter Summary

Title: Mischief
Rating: Gen
Length: 500
Summary: Holmes & Watson play pranks on the elder Holmes.
A/N. For the Holmes Minor October prompt: mischief.

It was an evening in late October when, upon depositing my dinner before me, Berkshire, even more swiftly and silently than was his custom, removed himself, leaving me to my consternation.

A turnip carved in my likeness stared back at me aside the leg of lamb, spinach, and carrots.

I was annoyed, naturally.

But I was also heartened because it seemed like my brother’s youthful impishness, which the years had eroded, had been restored by his association with Doctor Watson.

I toasted to this development and ate my turnip, which was as expertly prepared as it was carved.

The next year, on the morning of the same day, upon crossing the threshold to my office, I was showered from above by an overturned basket of Michaelmas daises; the event caused a ripple of ribald amusement to surge along the professional corridors of the most stoic and recalcitrant of government accountants. The looks I received at the club were ones of relief and seemed to convey, one and all, ‘at least it wasn’t a turnip.’

The next year, on the evening I was met by a stranger who thrust upon my person a goodish sized salmon and when I entered my rooms, I found myself host to no fewer than seven felines of spirited constitutions and ravenous states.

But the fifth October found me under the weather and news of my illness reached my brother’s ears. We corresponded quite cordially, and he vowed there would be no mischief that year to aggravate my weakened state.

I rallied on the final day of the month and invited Sherlock and Doctor Watson to dine with me at the club. We ate early but feasted handsomely. It was very late when I finally bundled them into a hansom cab, fill to their hat brims of our cellar’s finest vintage port, and sent them on their way.

The cabman took them to 321 Baker Street and, after much argument that there were no residences at 221, left them there. They tottered the remaining distance on foot, but their fury and indignation turned to astonishment when they saw where once their residence had been, a piano store and a place of worship, from which a few devotees of a highly evangelical nature were issuing. Once they managed to disentangle themselves from a crusade to help them ‘see the light,’ they walked to the Savoy and took a room for the night. In the morning, they returned and found their residence as they
knew it to be. They received a warm greeting from their landlady.

I had a full account from that good woman much later. And, oh, how we cackled! The expense was great, of course, but well worth it.

I received this curt missive from my brother, a bit of Shakespeare’s *Othello*.

*To mourn a mischief that is past and gone / Is the next way to draw new mischief on.*

Impishness is learned at mother’s knee, and I have always been the more apt.
The Abernettys

Chapter Summary

Title: The Abernettys
Rating: Gen
Length: 221b
Summary: Holmes & Watson discuss the Abernetty case.
A/N: for the Holmes Minor November prompt: family.

Holmes lowered his morning newspaper and said, apropos of absolutely nothing,

“You know, Watson, I never quite understood your whole algorithm for which of our cases you selected to make public.”

“Take a number,” replied Watson curtly from behind his morning newspaper.

“Take, for instance,” continued Holmes, ignoring the quip, “that dreadful business of the Abernetty family. You chose to use it as an example of how something apparently trifling could be significant and of how a classic case might have a least promising commencement. Which is true and all very good. To be certain, “The Six Napoleons” was a great case, but the Abernetty case was also a great case and, yet, in the whole of your public chronicles it is never mentioned except that once.”

Watson grunted.

“Did you never once feel compelled to return to your notes and publish it?”

Watson hummed. ‘A bit macabre.”

“More macabre than the Cornish horror?”

“You know as well as I do, Holmes, that the Abernettys made the Borgias look like a picture of familial kindness, and if Abernetty Senior hadn’t paid everyone handsomely before he was helped to a swig from the ancestral distillery, they would certainly be just as famous for their ‘hospitality.’”

“Which is why I never understood—”

“Oh, hush, or I’ll sink some parsley in your butter.”
Victor Trevor returns, stumbles upon a murder, and asks for help from an old friend.

Written for my DW one-sentence mystery/crime 5x5 bingo card. The prompts are in bold. The whole card in the end note.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

1. With the omniscience of hindsight, Victor Trevor looked back on the day he arrived in England after a twenty-year absence, and wondered how he could have ever thought that losing his hat to a very cleverly trained monkey on the gangplank was going to be the most interesting thing to happen to him during his visit; he was wrong, of course, dead wrong, to employ a pun that, had he voiced it aloud, would have no doubt wrought a soft chuckle and a soft groan from Doctor Watson and Holmes, respectively.

2. The second surprise of the visit, after the hat-pilfering monkey, was that the Savoy didn’t suit Victor Trevor at all; after a cup of morning tea made more disappointing by the view, that being the sight of other tea-drinkers who seemed to have no qualms with overpriced swill in their cups, he left his trunks in a suite that threatened to give him hives and ended up taking a room for the night in lodgings closer to the docks than the high street, where everyone, like him, was from somewhere else, and no one, like him, minded the paper-thin walls through which one might, without strain, hear a lovesick termite cry for its mate.

3. If he’d said it aloud no one would ever believe him, but it was less the number of pints than Victor Trevor had imbibed earlier in the evening and more a problem of numbers that had plagued him his whole life that led to him being witness to a horrific crime; at its most abstemious, his brain often switched 2’s and 5’s, and so to end up on the fifth floor in room 552 instead of the second floor in room 225 was not, in fact, as improbable as it might seem.

4. One moment of surprise, one glance he could not un-see, one sound neither he nor anyone, except, perhaps, paid assassin and black widows, ever longed to hear, i.e., the rare but unmistakable gurgle of life exiting a human body, and Victor Trevor recognised that he had, quite accidentally, stumbled upon the last act of that age-old drama known as murder.

5. Victor Trevor instantly concluded, and the rest of his life would, thankfully, provide neither confirmation nor refutation of this opinion, that there was no more sobering noise than that of a dead body hitting the floor.

6. Victor Trevor backed out of the door, turned sharply, and hurried up the hall, his muddled mind singling out two of the myriads of thoughts that were rapidly crowding his brain: one, with a strangling there would be nothing telling like blood on the floor, and two, the murderer did not realise he’d been observed—at least not yet.

7. As he looked into the menacing eyes of the man he’d passed earlier on the lodging stairs, Victor Trevor knew that the knife he carried on his person and the skill with which he was able to manipulate it were about to come in, well, rather handy; he also knew that if he ever made it back to Terai alive, he’d bless Ram one thousand times over for giving him both.

8. Whether Victor Trevor had just thwarted his own murder or his own kidnapping, he wasn’t certain, but he was certain that it was past time to pay a call on the only person he still knew in
Like many when they first met Doctor John Watson in person, Victor Trevor was left with the distinct impression that the good doctor diminished his own powers of observation and deduction in his writings for public consumption; after Victor had burst into the unoccupied sitting room of 221B Baker Street unannounced and Doctor Watson had descended the stairs and asked him if he required a detective and received Victor’s reply that he required his friend Sherlock Holmes at once, Doctor Watson had given him a shrewd look, south to north and back again, and said, “You’ve recently arrived from Terai, I perceive.”

“Under no circumstances will you return to what may or may not be a crime scene, Trevor, and neither will you, Watson; any preliminary reconnaissance of the rooms of the Queen’s Oyster lodging house are best left to that East End familiar Captain Basil.”

The broken window, the shards of glass on the rug of 221B Baker Street, and the bullet lodged in the spine of Early Christian Sermons instead of Victor’s own were all testaments to Holmes’s, or rather Captain Basil’s, parting words: ‘they’re ruthless, Trevor, and they already know who you are, and, quite possibly, despite all your efforts to elude pursuit, they also know where you’ve come for help.’

After a pair of planned distractions were set in motion and a pair of doppelgangers dispatched to draw away remaining pursuers, Doctor Watson led Victor Trevor beneath a church to a labyrinth of tunnels which gave access to, according to Victor’s guide, one of the most secret of Holmes’s bolt holes.

In the bolt hole, Doctor Watson and Victor Trevor whiled away the time playing cards and swapping truths and lies, but each, or so Victor believed, was also keenly listening for any sound of approach, from friend or foe.

As the hours passed in the bolt hole, the table where Doctor Watson and Victor Trevor sat acquired more and more time-whiling debris: a second pack of playing cards; pencils and paper, the latter with wins and losses as well as crudely sketched maps of far-off lands; mountains of tobacco ash; a pair of drinking glasses and two empty bottles of tonic; and, most importantly, each man’s weapon of choice, sharpened, oiled, and never, ever out of reach.

Having just decided to not poison themselves any longer with strong tobacco, Victor Trevor and Doctor Watson were heartened by the sound of footsteps approaching the bolt hole, footsteps that they both recognised, regardless of disguise, as that of Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes apologised for the accommodations, but Victor Trevor assured his old friend that he’d rather be in a witness in a priest’s hole alive than a victim beneath a priest’s blessing dead and while the comforts might be rag and bone, the company, he added with a wink in the good doctor’s direction, was top shelf.

“The police might, or might not, have been baffled by it, but to the one who knows where and how to look,” said Holmes as he lit a cigarette, “the room at the Queen’s Oyster which yesterday you accidentally entered, Trevor, gives up many a clue to the nature of the murder that was committed there and the identities of both murderer and murdered.”

“The hue and cry will go up in a couple of hours, but the person that you saw murdered, Trevor, was almost certainly Fred Best, an investigative reporter for the Star.”

“Best was one of those reporters who like to ferret out intricate political conspiracies, but after quite a bit of digging and interrupting my brother’s postprandial nap in his club chair, I’m inclined to believe that it was something a bit more mundane and closer to home that cost the man his life.”

“I am, after much effort, in possession of part of a blackmail letter which threatened to expose Best’s clandestine relationship with a member, gentleman, that is, of the aristocracy if he did not cease his investigation into alleged corruption in the financial sector,” said Holmes, removing piece by piece of his disguise.

“It is not so much a question of who did it?” Watson, though, of course, the culprit hired to carry out the murder should be caught and dealt with, but ‘who is responsible?’ and I think
when we start along that path it shall lead into very high echelons, indeed, perhaps so high that
the origin of the whole affair shall never be fully known, and for that and all that it implies, I
am most concerned for your safety, Trevor.”

22. As Watson complains privately and lauds publicly, Holmes was right on all counts; in the end,
the case betrayed every motive (jealousy, fear, greed, and that most bitter of inspiration, love)
of the human condition, and only a few of the many and grievous transgressions were brought
home to their perpetrators.

23. Until the trial, Victor Trevor remained in seclusion, what prescient Americans might call a
‘witness-protection program’ at an estate of a friend of Doctor Watson’s in Surrey, but there
was no danger and it was no hardship as Holmes and Doctors Watson spent most of the
waiting period there, too, and with host and protector Colonel Hayter, they formed a very
merry band, indeed, but solved no mysteries save who was the best dartsman (Victor, of
course, despite all rogue counterclaims!).

24. “It was my fate,” said Victor on his last night in England, “to wander into a scene of horror
and almost lose my life, my fate to help root out corruption and bring about a modicum of
justice to the deserving, my fate to settle the sale of Bly-on-the-Fen by correspondence, just as
if I’d never left Terai, and my fate to enjoy the most glorious all-encompassing hospitality of
my existence and come to know a pair of English legends that I am proud to call the dearest of
friends.”

25. As the ship pulled away and the flickering lights of the mainland disappeared one by one,
Victor Trevor imagined that he could see, through the darkness, two figures waving farewell
to him, and it was then that he began to carry in his heart the hope that one day it might be
him, on a distant shore, waving a welcome to those two same figures and maybe, just maybe,
if they were very lucky, all three together might stumble upon a murder.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter Summary

To one who has grieved long for loss of friend
’Tis bliss to sit and look upon the cloud
Whose shape by rays of hidden sun is shroud
Gold in the joy of a Lazarus end.
The blades of meadow green between us mend
Between our fingertips they twine and crowd
The petals soft, sharp flecks of yellow proud
Do dance on rolling hills where shepherds tend.
Resting aside him whom I hold most dear
Basking in paschal warmth undeserved
Blessing all, and being blessed in turn, here
Like birdsong the heart sings unreserved
For ‘not dead, but sleept’ is ancient cheer
That shines through pastoral majesty.

Holmes’s eyes dance ‘cross the note-book page more than once, then darted toward me. His lower
lip quivered. Then his expression changed.

No, his expression fell.

I suppose it might have been likened an avalanche of rock or snow.

His stoic calm simply collapsed, slid down his chiseled features until it was seen no more.

And he began to weep.

He tipped towards me, shaking with sobs, until his temple touched my shoulder. The damp of his tears bled through my simple shirt.

I made noises of comfort, not to halt the flow, but rather to reassure him that I loved him, in spite of the tears and because of them.

I placed a hand on his head and began to stroke his hair and, in a while, he sniffed and raised himself to sitting.

I proffered a handkerchief and somewhere in the folds of the cambric, he ironed his countenance into its customary lines and planes.

He exhaled deeply as he surveyed the landscape. Then, with a quick glance at the note-book, which I’d placed on the grass between us, he said,

“You wrote it while I was napping.”

“You have to admit, my dear Holmes, it would be difficult not to wax poetic on this beautiful day in this beautiful place,” I made a wide gesture which encompassed the clouds and sun and green meadow and yellow flowers and rolling hills and what remained of our picnic lunch, “and I so very happy to be with you again.”

“I am happy, too.” He pressed his lips together, then spoke with a tremour of anxiety. “There are moments, however, my dear Watson, when I think myself unworthy of such happiness.”

“I thought similar about myself. But then I ask, ‘Wasn’t I unworthy of the misery, too?’ and banish notions of worth. I’d rather set my mind to deciding if that cloud there,” I pointed, “looks more like a sea creature or a spleen.”

“Horseshoe crab?”

“Yes!”

He smiled, then opened the note-book and tapped at my scratchings.

“May I keep it?”

“Of course. It is yours.”

He nodded, then searched for, and found, a penknife amongst his scattered belongings. I watched as he made a seasoned surgeon’s job of removing the page. Then he folded it neatly and tucked it into the pocket of his jacket.

“Thank you, Watson.”

“My pleasure, Holmes.”
The journey north gave me ample time to reflect on what a day had wrought.

“Pack your sturdiest boots, Watson,” Holmes ordered. “And your flimsiest notions of the natural world.”

Compliance was not difficult.

A soldier, no matter how removed from battle, never economises on footwear, and discovering that one’s dearest friend is not, in fact, among the departed certainly causes a fellow to question his senses.

‘And he that was dead came forth.’

Like Lazarus, Holmes was alive. And now he, and I, were on a train to Scotland.

“Sit down, and tell me how you came alive out of that dreadful chasm.”

“I will tell you all, Watson. And because you will not believe me, I will show you, that you may know for yourself the place where I have been all this time, but first, we’ve a hard and dangerous night’s work in the front of us.”

It was, indeed, a hard and dangerous night’s work, but by morning, the murderer of Sir Ronald Adair was captured, and the last remaining node of the late Professor Moriarty’s web felled.

Neither the the danger of the night nor the day’s journey ahead, however, did anything to diminish my curiosity.

Holmes and I spent the night in Edinburgh and resumed travel in the morning.
I posed no further questions, but Holmes often reached out and gave my hand a reassuring squeeze.

Finally, we reached the Isle of Skye.

We passed the night at a country inn.

“Tomorrow we will hike to the Fairy Pools, Watson. They are a series of waterfalls, but do not be anxious. They are, in all aspects but one, the very opposite of the Reichenbach abyss. The waters are sapphire and emerald, and the falls themselves are low and welcoming. They attract lovers of nature and bold bathers alike. If the beauty does not ease your fears, then my hand is yours whenever you require it. And because you are the most faithful of companions, I shall give you a clue.”

He handed me an odd pair of spectacles attached to a leather cap. The lenses were tinted green, and there were straps at the back to adjust the fit.

“Holmes!”

“You will know when it is time to don it.”

My curiosity became almost too much to bear. How I slept I shall never know!

The Fairy Pools were as beautiful as described. We were alone in our enjoyment of them.

Holmes led me along a slippery path to a curtain of turquoise-coloured water. Then he raised a hand and, as with a curtain, drew the water aside.

Agog, I followed as we passed into a dim cavern.

Holmes turned and drew the waterfall behind us.

In the meagre light, I saw the door, a russet brown affair with ironwork surrounded by ticking clocks and clockwork gears.

“Now, my dear Watson,” said Holmes, snapping on his own leather cap and setting the lenses in place. “it is a simple matter of opening a door.”
“Happy Christmas, Watson.”

I studied the jar and shot Holmes a look.

“You penchant hasn’t escaped my notice, my dear man. Everywhere we go, you inquire about jams, jellies, curds, and marmalades. You must have quite the collection by now, a veritable connoisseur of confiture. Captain Basil picked this one up for you on his latest excursion. Lingonberry.”

“Lingonberry! Why that’s wonderful, Holmes!”

I opened the jar and spread a thin layer on my toast.

“You needn’t be so stingy with it.”

“Excuse me, Holmes. I want to show Mrs. Hudson.”

I grabbed the jar and hurried downstairs.

“Mrs. Hudson!”

“Yes, Doctor?”

“We’ve got it. Holmes himself provided the final one. Look! Lingonberry!” I lifted the jar to her eyes.
She beamed and clasped her hands together.

“Oh, Doctor!”

Two weeks later, Holmes stepped back from his bench where he’d been toiling at some pungent alchemy all morning and stretched.

“What say you to an afternoon ramble, Watson?”

“After tea.”

He sighed good naturedly. “As you wish.”

“Mrs. Hudson’s calling.”

He frowned. “Really?”

I returned tray in hand.

“For you,” I said proudly, “and many returns of the day.”

He looked down at the dessert and smiled. “An epiphany tart! So that’s what you’ve been about all year! My dear man, you and Mrs. Hudson have out done yourself.”

“Happy birthday.”
Dawn broke golden on the horizon, and the glow, in two shades of yellow, seemed to push the night into the firmament, shaping it into thick, cottony balls of dark blue.

Marie paused a moment to admire the beauty of the advancing of day and the retreating of night, and the handsome background it made for the stately trees which stood in a line like veterans of her father’s war and greeted the day as if it were a wealthy widow. For the first time, Marie wished for some artistic bent that she might render the scene in paint. A mist covered the ground, sending up wispy grey tendrils which smudged the canvas.

But there was no time for reverie. Martha was hurrying ahead. Marie hurried after her.

Marie’s pack was the weightier, but Marie did not resent this. Martha had taken upon herself the burden of course-charter and decision-maker. Marie understood the gravity of their quest, but she also reveled in the freedom of trousers and the indefatigable boots which Martha had selected and which, at the time of purchase, Martha had thought outrageously expensive.

But they’d been worth every penny. Marie tromped across the boggy field with well-shod impunity.

Martha slowed her pace when they came within view of the cottage. It was small and thatch-roofed with a wooden railed porch in front. It seemed incongruous, a manmade structure in the midst of a seemingly endless stretch of nature, and it was placed incongruously as well, on a square pedestal of island only as wide as the structure itself. It was surrounded by a pond, which reflected the tips of the trees like a well-polished looking glass.

“There,” said Martha.

And if Martha said ‘there,’ it was there.

But how to get from here to there? The pond appeared too deep to wade across. As soon as they arrived at the edge where land met water, Martha began to give instructions, and together they assembled a kind of floating bridge, and as they worked, Martha muttered.

“Poor Mister Holmes. He thinks he can dabble in anything and the only consequence is a bit of singed rug or curtains. But when he inadvertently opened his mind’s eyes, well, there was, excuse my language, Marie, hell to pay, wasn’t there?”
“And I feel so bad for the poor doctor. He didn’t do anything, but he was caught in the same snare.”

“Doctor Watson wouldn’t have left his friend to suffer alone. And neither would you, Marie.”

Marie smiled and squeezed Martha’s hand.

When the raft was ready, they floated across the pond.

A smoking chimney jutted from at the rear corner of the cottage roof. The only window, which had been slightly open, was abruptly shuttered as they approached.

“Don’t worry, Marie,” advised Martha as they climbed the steps to the porch. “When the Devil closes a window, he opens a door. Now, let’s rescue my tenants.”

“Yes, let’s do!” cried Marie cheerily as Martha raised her fist to knock.
“Good afternoon, ladies. This way.”

“Oh, Martha, thank you so much for suggesting this. It’s been ages since I’ve been here. Or had a nice afternoon tea.”

“I’ve been feeling a bit, oh, I don’t know, Marie, restless? Unsatisfied? Sometimes I look around and wonder.”

“Oh, I know just what you mean. Sometimes I say to myself, ‘Am I awake or am I dreaming?’”

“Precisely. So, of course, I thought of this place.”

“How right you were, Martha.”

“Here we are, ladies. I believe, Madame, you requested ‘sturdy and unblemished.’”

“Very nice,” said Martha, surveying the two nude male figures positioned on all fours. Between the two figures was a table set for tea for two.

“And, you, Madame, requested ‘youthful and seasoned.’”

“Indeed,” cried Marie eagerly. She clasped her hands together and sighed at the pale-and-pink bottom with the crisscross pattern of welts.

“Please have a seat. Your tea will be served momentarily.”

Carefully but primly, Marie and Martha settled themselves upon the bare backs.

Tea and a tiered tray of sandwiches and pastries arrived. After the first sips and nibbles, Marie said, “This tea’s wonderful.”

“More wonderful because we didn’t prepare it ourselves.”

Marie giggled. “Or carry a blessed heavy tray upstairs.”

“And down.”
“I say, Martha, I do like your brawny throne.”

Martha set her teacup in its saucer on the table. Then she hummed as she ran a hand over muscled shoulders and another hand over firm buttocks.

“Quite handsome, isn’t it?” She squeezed, then she glanced across the table. “You always like yours young and rosy, Marie.”

“I do.” She pinched an abused buttock and a very faint, almost-stifled whimper was heard. “I like naughty little seats who’ve been disciplined a bit before I rest my laurels on them. It looks lithe and lithesome, but trust me, Martha, it’s as strong as an ox. Have you tried the curried chicken?”

“No, not yet.”

“Oh, do. I would ask for the recipe if there was any hope of getting it.”

“No, this place keeps its secrets, doesn’t it?”

“Rightly so.”

“Would you like to go next door afterwards?”

Marie chewed thoughtfully then rubbed her shoulder said, “No, I beat the rugs yesterday.”

“My new girl beat the rugs yesterday.”

“Martha, is that wise? Letting a new girl beat the rugs?”

“Oh, she loves it! And she’s brilliant at it! Better than I am, in fact. She got out all the bits from that fowl experiment Mister Holmes did the other day.”

“The chickens,” said Marie ruefully.

Martha sniffed. “Don’t remind me, Marie.”

“Of course not,” said Marie hastily.

“I’ll never tell her about this place.”

“You’d lose her jolly quick. So, does that mean you are going to take a turn next door?”

“Yes. Shall I meet you in the lounge in, say, quarter of hour?”

Marie eyed the pale-and-pink bottom, then gave it a gentle tap. “Oh, yes.”

“This watercress, Marie.” Martha made a noise of delight.

“I know! Where ever do they buy it?”

Martha found Marie ensconced in a large leather armchair with a high rounded back. She quickly took the matching vacant chair beside it, setting the small ‘reserved’ placard on the small table between them.

Marie’s gaze was soft. Martha looked down and saw the pale-and-pink bottom and soles of two feet sticking out from beneath the voluminous skirts.
“Young and rosy?” teased Martha.

Marie’s eyes widened. “Yes!” she breathed. “I’m on my fourth, Martha. It’s enough to make a clock melt!”

“Please don’t use that phrase in front of Mister Holmes, Marie. It may give him ideas.” Martha eyed the glass on the table. “Why you haven’t touched your port.”

“Oh, you drink it, Martha. I’ve got all the spirit I need. Oh, oh oh…”

Martha chuckled as she picked up the glass and drank.

There was a soft cough, then a baritone voice asked politely, “Would Madame like to put up her feet? Or perhaps a fine Havana cigar?”

Martha gave a contemplative hum, then said, “Yes and yes.”

Martha closed her eyes, opened her legs, and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

“If this is a dream, Marie, I’d rather not wake up.”

“I know just what you mean.”
Why is Holmes so nervous before Watson leaves for Dartmoor with Henry Baskerville?

As Holmes seemed to have an appetited for nothing save smoking and pacing and as I had a long train journey ahead of me, I helped myself to his plate of eggs and kippers after I’d finished my own. On the table, the morning papers sat neatly folded, untouched by either of us. Since our first salutations, Holmes had been lost in fog of unvoiced concerns and I was, therefore, lost in Holmes, trying to determine the cause of this acute and unusual presentation of nerves.

“How uneasy about this Baskerville business?” I probed.

As Holmes stopped his caged tiger routine and blushed. Blushed! I could scarcely believe it. My first thought was that he was ill. My second thought was that he was under the influence of cocaine. Thankfully, he quickly set my mind at ease on both of those counts.

“Yes, yes, of course,” he said with a dismissive wave of the hand. “But that isn’t what distracts me this morning. I’ve, well, I’ve done something, that is, I’m about to do something, and I’m not certain anymore about the decision. Not certain at all. It might, well, be poorly received, poorly received, indeed.”

Such display of uncharacteristic anxiety, not to mention lack of erudition, had me even more puzzled.

“Poorly received by me?” I asked.

He looked away and snapped. “Yes, of course. Who else matters?”

Once more, I searched my memory for probable causes and drew a blank. It was all still, well, a mystery.

“How the case?” I queried.

“The imminent separation is responsible for the timing but…” Holmes ran a hand absentmindedly through his hair, then he threw his cigarette into the fire. He contemplated his pipe for a few moments, then shook his head. “…I’ve been planning it for quite some time.”

Growing weary of the cryptic nature of Holmes’ comments and fearing he was about to resume his pacing and knowing I had a train to catch, I urged as gently as I could,

“Holmes, out with it, please. We haven’t the time.”

“Oh, yes. Very well.” Holmes made a show of taking a deep breath, then said, “You know that I have made two trips to Paris.”
“Yes, one a fortnight ago and another, let’s see, in the summer, related to the Huret trial.”

“Precisely. During the first visit, I commissioned the creation of certain articles, and a fortnight ago, I went to claim them in person, not trusting the post and wanting to keep the purchase as private as possible.”

My eyebrows rose. “What kind of articles?”

“Symbols,” Holmes swallowed, “of my, of our, that is,” he licked his lips, “partnership. Of regard, of fidelity, of atonement for past wrongs, I’m referring to one in particular, of course, of trust, of…”

“Holmes,” I said softly, reassuringly, affectionately, “I love you, too, but what are these symbols?”

“I am well aware that as a soldier, doctor, practical man of the world, you don’t favour personal ornamentation as a rule, and, naturally, there is a certain danger of their being observed and interpreted by outside parties, but…”

Holmes drew a small box from the bookshelf and opened it. When he held up the thin circle of gold, his hand was shaking.

“…since we’ll be apart, since you’ll be in, I anticipate, in some danger, since I am yours, since, well, a host of circumstances, both temporal and permanent, I am asking you to do me the honour of wearing this until you are safely home again.”

I reached out a hand, and he gave it to me without a word.

It was a simple gold affair, resembling nothing so much as a detective’ handcuff.

“Not ostentation in any respect, and I’ve made certain that it can be worn discretely beneath the sleeve,” Holmes was saying as I studied it, “The design of the catch is my own. It has, that is to say, there is a second one, a mate, if you will, which, if you agreed, that is, I would wear whilst we’re apart.”

I sprung the catch. Holmes was right. Secure and simple.

“Like a wedding ring?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

I looked up and nodded.

“My answer is yes.” I heard Holmes’s exhale of breath and saw relief soften his feature. “But I suppose it would be most proper if you did the honours, Holmes.”

I confess I became a little lightheaded as he did so. Then he quickly drew the mate to mine from the box.

“Watson?”

“Absolutely,” I said. “With this ring…”

And when it was done, I kissed him soundly, then drew back to say, “It’s time, Holmes.”

“Yes, yes, I shall accompany you to the station.”
I listened to Holmes’s parting injunctions and advice as we drove to Paddington. Then his voice fell to a whisper, and despite our proximity, I leaned in closer to hear over the din of the street.

“Listen, my dear man, but give no outward sign that I’m speaking. I would not even have our driver know what I’m to say, which is this: I shall follow you as soon as I am able but not as myself. I shall take up a role and be in the vicinity somewhere.”

“No, but you must make absolutely no mention of this to anyone.”

“And my reports?”

“Send them as I’ve indicated. There’ll be, at most, the delay of a day. And they will be helpful, regardless.”

“Very well.” Then a thought occurred. “I’m very glad you’ve seen fit to tell me, Holmes, rather than pop up unexpected. That would make me more than a bit cross. For you to wax poetic about trust, then use me, once again, keep me in the dark, once again, that would be…”

I shuddered, but then I felt fingertips caress my wrist.

“Not again, my dear man.”
Lomax might have been startled if the figure he discovered behind him hadn’t been standing hat in hand and wearing the reverent, closed-lidded expression of one listening to an especially poignant sermon. He got to his feet and greeted the interloper.

“Inspector Lestrade.”

“Mister Lomax. I apologise for interrupting. Your colleague said that I’d find you down here.”

“You are a very good detective to have done so. The trail is not an easy one. Welcome to the catacombs,” Lomax said with a smile and a wave of the hand at the dark and dusty shelves, “but don’t worry, all the bodies are accounted for.”

“Good to know. By the way, I was enjoying your recitation. That’s why I didn’t make my presence known sooner.”

“And I was enjoying it, too. That’s why I was foolish enough to be caught unawares by one of Scotland Yard’s finest.”

Lestrade’s cheeks flushed. “Wasn’t English, was it?”

“No, Spanish.”

“Ah. You read it well.”

“Spanish is my mother tongue.”

“That so?”

“Yes, Inspector.” Lomax met the searching glance with a click of his heels and a slight bow. “Francisco Lomax de Serrano, at your service. English father, Spanish mother.”
“G. Lestrade, at yours. And the G stands for G because my very English mother was very tired of many things, including my very English father, by the time I came along.” Lestrade coughed and glanced down at the note-book on the ground. “Poetry?”

“Yes, my own.”

“Lovely! Don’t understand a word, but lovely.”

“Thank you.” Lomax waited but when Lestrade simply returned his smile, he prompted, “Do you require assistance, Inspector?”

“Oh, heaven’s, yes! That’s why I came down here. But it’s not a professional matter. I found something. I like finding old things in unusual places. And I was wondering just how old it was.” He fished a handkerchief wrapped bundle out of his pocket and unfurled it before Lomax’s eyes.

It was a bowl.

Lomax bent to study it and nodded and when he spoke it was almost reverently,

“It might be very old, indeed, Inspector.”

Many weeks later, Lestrade slid an envelope across a luncheon table.

Lomax opened it. His eyebrows rose.

“Your half of the spoils.”

“Inspector!”

“Lestrade,’ please.”

“Lestrade!”

“I expect that’ll keep you in ink and nibs for a while.”

“And books,” added Lomax dreamily.

“Put my half on a little cottage for when I’m too old to catch crooks.”

“I’ve something for you, not as generous, but…”

Lomax pulled a small note-book from his satchel.

“Caballero, como los de antigüedad bien enterrados, disfrazado en piel del lobo, en pelaje llanoso buscando tesoro buscando belleza y historia con olfato salvaje, corazón noble, y roces tan delicados…”
When Lomax had finished, Lestrade wiped his eyes. “You’re wrong, Lomax. It’s just as generous.”

...at the edge of the pond on an wintery afternoon
counting the innumerable greys filling the canvas
and I am the little duck prancing along the line
where the frozen water kisses the waves...

Knight, like those of old well-buried,
disguised in wolf's clothing, in shaggy fur,
seeking treasure,
seeking beauty and history
with wild instinct, noble heart,
and very delicate touch...
“Je t’adore au-delà de la raison.”

It took me the length of time required to kiss from neck to shoulder to realise that Holmes had spoken and that what had been said was not in English.

I made an inquiring grunt. He answered with a dismissive one. I let the matter go.

My hands had been caressing Holmes’s torso in an appreciative manner. One of them now reached for the jar of slick on the bedside table.

Holmes shivered as I coated my palm, and when I wrapped my hand ‘round of the base of him and gave his shaft a maiden stroke, he groaned and leaned forward.

His breath tickled my ear.

“J’en ai rêvé depuis si longtemps et c'est tellement mieux que de rêver.”

One corner of my mouth lifted, but I kept my gaze fixed on my hand, the one that was frigging with the wisdom of age and three continents.

“Apologies, Watson.”

“Not at all. I’m charmed. A habit?” I asked casually, quite prepared for another grunt.

“I…”

The pause that followed was as pregnant as one can be between two confirmed Bohemian bachelors who are naked, in bed, and well into their first lovemaking.

I slowed my stroking of Holmes’s prick, looked up, cupped my free hand ‘round the back of his head, and brought his face to mine. It was a hard, bruising kiss. I tore my lips away abruptly and began to nuzzle at his neck.

Having felt I’d reassured him of my desire, I waited patiently for the revelation, confession, or whatever species of statement Holmes was anxious to make.

“To avoid any embarrassing slips of the tongue, I made a decision early in our acquaintance to mentally encode my softer sentiments in a foreign language.”
“Please don’t stifle yourself on my account.” I sank my teeth gently into his skin. “It’s incredibly arousing.”

“Mais oui?”

I laughed. “Look how hard I am for you, Holmes.”

I stroked him. He stroked me. We both found our release.

Holmes sighed as we cleaned ourselves.

“Je veux le faire souvent et partout.”

I slid behind him and curled my arms around his chest. I licked and nuzzled the nape of his neck.

From Holmes’s lips, a litany of endearments poured forth.

“Mon coeur.”

“Mon amour.”

“Mon trésor.”

Those words. That voice.

I pressed my body tighter to Holmes’s and began to kiss and bite his neck and shoulders in earnest. My fingers toyed with his nipples.

“Mon loup.”

“Mon ciel étoilé.”

My prick stirred.

“Mon chou.”

“Cabbage, Holmes?”

“No, a cream-filled pastry.”

I looked down at my erect prick and chuckled. “Apt. I’m filling as you speak.” Then I sniffed and added, “Holmes, I’m not usually ready again this soon, but…”

He looked over his shoulder and batted his eyelashes.

“Shall we blame it on the French?”

I laughed again. “By all means, let’s blame the French.”

Then he turned, lowered himself, and looked up.

“Shall I put this Gallic tongue to better use?”
A glass carafe of shells and stones and bits
—collected natural curiosities—
on an old, familiar table sits.
Each trove’s a gift bestowed by kindly seas.
Each represents a bold display of wits.
Or anecdote. Or joke. Or country wheeze.
Alone, I claim them for my humble horde
to amuse you lest the quiet turn to bored.

Watson’s bags were by the front door of the cottage. They were both standing, waiting for the dog cart to arrive. Holmes would not accompany Watson to the station.

Hands in pockets, Watson took a turn about the room, looked out the large window, and said,

“Quite a change from London.”

It was the way he said ‘change’ that struck Holmes; it held a meaning that Holmes could not immediately decipher, which was, in itself, a state so rare as to be gravely alarming to Holmes.

Watson’s fingertips brushed the rim of the empty glass jar which sat on the table beside Holmes’s armchair. The table had always been beside Holmes’s armchair, but the jar was a novelty. At Watson’s arrival, it had been filled with shells and stones and other detritus that Holmes had collected on his walks. Each item represented a story or an anecdote, a morsel of knowledge or wisdom, or even—and here Holmes was growing positively romantic in his dotage—a line or two of poetry. When companionable silence had been exhausted and talk seemed called for, Holmes had taken a piece out, shown it to Watson, and rekindled conversation.
Once a tale was told, however, the bit did not go back in the jar. Some were scattered about the
corners of the cottage, many were returned outdoors, and the gem of the lot—Watson had laughed
until he wept at the bawdy tale, which had, as Holmes anticipated, appealed to the his basest and
noblest selves simultaneously—was at that moment in Watson’s trouser pocket.

In Holmes’s own trouser pocket, there was a smooth stone, and he rubbed it with his thumb as he
considered the meaning of Watson’s ‘change.’

“It’s a change for the better, I think.” Holmes paused, then added softly, “You know, Watson, you’re
more than welcome to extend your visit. Or even, stay.”

Holmes felt the look of incredulity that clouded Watson’s features like a blow to the chest. He carried
on quickly, and a bit breathlessly.

“I have not been in the country so long as to dabble in the art polite insincerity, Watson, especially
with the one,” Holmes turned away, “who knows my ways so well.”

A heavy silence settled, then Watson spoke.

“I shall feel rather foolish unpacking what I have just packed, Holmes, and sending the cart away.”

The corners of Holmes’s mouth curled. “No more foolish than I feel at waiting until this ridiculous
moment to give voice to what has been in my thoughts for ages.” He turned back.

Watson caressed the rim of glass jar again and nodded to it. “Shall we fill it up?”

“Yes.”
Breakfasting with the one I love,
upon four prongs, a question begs
it’s a mystery, the why of
very peppery scrambled eggs.

Gave an aged tongue quite the shove.
Drained a chipped mug to drops and dregs
pondering the how, whence thereof
very peppery scrambled eggs.

Holmes approached the far bench at an unhurried pace and a manner the very opposite of stealth.

“My hands shook!” cried Watson. “That’s why there was too much pepper in the eggs this morning.” He held out the culprits, palms up, and added gloomily, “If you haven’t deduced it by now.”

Holmes made a noncommittal noise and sat himself beside Watson on the bench.

“I don’t like these changes, Holmes! My hands shouldn’t shake. I shouldn’t need spectacles all the time. There shouldn’t be more hair sprouting from my ears than on my head!”

Holmes tilted his head, more as if in contemplation of the fine Sunday morning laid out in front of them than Watson’s lament. “Your moustache is still as distinguished as ever,” he offered lightly. Then he took one of Watson’s hands in his and squeezed. “Changes are inevitable, Watson.”

“I know, but inside, I still feel like—”

“You are,” interrupted Holmes. “And when I look at you, that’s who I see: who you are, who you’ve always been, brave, loyal, stout-hearted, compassionate.”

Watson turned his head towards Holmes and said softly, “Sometimes, the changes frighten me, Holmes.”
Holmes’s reply was just as soft and confessional.

“I know. They frighten me, too, Watson. But we will face them together.”

“Not always,” said Watson with a stubborn snort. “We won’t always be together. I am older. I will ___”

Holmes silenced Watson with a kiss. Then he pulled away and laced his fingers in Watson’s. “Why don’t we return to the cottage and I’ll allow you give me a demonstration of just how steady your hands can be?”

Holmes’s lips curled in a grin.

Watson’s eyebrows rose; then, he, too, smiled, and as he got to his feet, he said,

“I am very sorry about the eggs, Holmes.”

“No apology is necessary. I confess I enjoyed them more than your usual ones. It’s curious, but I am finding that my tongue is not as sensitive as it once was. More spice is required to register the same sensation on my palate.”

“You liked them?”

Holmes nodded.

“Well, for the record, I think your tongue is just as sensitive as it ever was,” said Watson cheekily, as they made their return to the cottage hand-in-hand, “but, of course, more spice can be arranged.”

“Oh, Watson,” said Holmes with a chuckle, “there are still many wonderful days ahead of us.”
late April morning
stroll about cottage garden
pretty as primrose
lush Eden, full of promise
all things budding tenderly

once-sleeping wakens
late morning sun warms, coaxes
unfurling blossoms
cabbage butterfly flutters
once-buried exposed

“Watson?”

Watson turned. “It is time?”

“No,” said Holmes. “Our ride to the station has not yet arrived.”

“Oh, good. I’m sorry to disappear like that.”

Holmes waved towards a first-floor window. “I was keeping an eye on you.”

“Oh, that explains it. I thought I felt something, but then I chalked it up to atmosphere. Nevertheless, I suppose I should’ve mentioned that I was going for a stroll in the garden.”

“I deduced it,” said Holmes, dismissively, “from your keen glance out the window, but, well, I shouldn’t like to lose sight of you completely, just in case the cottage holds one last unsavory surprise.”

Watson nodded, then he let his gaze wander to the flower beds. “Say what you will about Lady Alice and Lady Maude—”

“—and I believe, at this very moment, Inspector Lestrade is saying quite a bit to them, including advising them of their right to a solicitor—”
“—they kept a fine garden. And I’m to understand that they maintained all of this with very little in the way of paid assistance in the form a gardener or even a lad. It’s magnificent, Holmes.”

As Holmes’s eyes surveyed the scene, he mused aloud, “What with rotating the corpses of two nieces, a second cousin, and a parlour maid in and out of the airing cupboard, one wonders where they found the time? But I agree, it is a fine specimen.”

Holmes turned his gaze from the flowers to Watson’s keen expression.

“You fancy a garden for yourself, Watson?”

Watson shrugged.

“What would you grow?” persisted Holmes.

The reply came sure and quick.

“Tomatoes and roses.”

Watson stared; his eyes were wide with surprise. Then he chuckled in a rather self-deprecating fashion and said, “I didn’t think I’d thought much about it, but apparently, I have. Yes, I’d like a garden of my own someday.”

“Bees,” said Holmes.

Watson raised an inquiring eyebrow.

“One day, I’d like to keep bees,” explained Holmes.

“Bees are good for flowers,” remarked Watson. Then he frowned. “Of tomatoes, I’m not certain.”

“Have you thought about where you’d like to have this garden?”

Watson shook his head. “I didn’t even realise until this moment that I’d been thinking about it at all.” He glanced over his shoulder. “I certainly wouldn’t want anything quite as—”

“Eldritch horror?” suggested Holmes.

“—ample as that.” He nodded to the cottage.

“A potentially suitable property in Sussex came to my attention via my brother. I had planned to embark on a reconnaissance mission before this case arose. Would you—?”

“My bag’s packed, Holmes. We needn’t even return to London. That is, if you are suggesting that we—”

“I am suggesting that my bees might pollinate your roses and tomatoes,” said Holmes bluntly.

He blushed. Watson blushed. They turned away from one another, each launching into an intense scrutiny of one of the garden’s many blossoming shrubs.
An uneasy silence settled between them.

“You know, it’s quite all right, Holmes,” said Watson finally.

“Is it?”

“Yes.”

“You mean—”

“Retiring together, planning to spend the rest of our lives together, all of it.”

“Well, that’s all right then, isn’t it?”

“Indeed.”

“Uh, Watson?”

“Hmm?”

“All of it?”

“All of it.”

Holmes looked at his pocket watch, then back towards the cottage. “Shall we take a turn ‘round the garden then?”

“By all means.” Watson smiled and added, “If we’ve time.”

“Plenty of time. Come, Watson.” Holmes marched off, whistling an off-key version of “Ode to Joy.”

Just then, a window opened, and an elderly voice cried out, “Stop that infernal racket, young man!”

Watson stifled a snort and muttered under his breath, “Best be careful, Holmes.”

“Or?”

"Or Lady Maude just might ask you to tea!"
“Look at this man, Holmes,” I said, giving the photograph a hard flick of my index finger. “Look at his expression, his posture. He has no idea what awaits him. He thinks that he has seen all there is to see of suffering in his medical training. He thinks that the horrors of war will not overwhelm him. He thinks that the worst that he will witness is violent death. He does not know, he cannot know, that there are changes more violent than dying and that he himself will experience that change. He cannot fathom what will befall him!”

As I shook my head, I felt Holmes move behind me.

“I see a familiar glint of pawkish humour. I see a strong jaw that speaks of courage and an easily furrowed brow that hints at compassion, both of which circumstance has not altered in the least.”

“You are kind.”

“I am also honest. And curious. There’s a change that interests me more than difference between John Watson in the photograph and the one before me. That battered dispatch case has been gathering dust in Mrs. Hudson’s lumber room for more than a year, since the very day you arrived, but today, you have not only opened it, but you have elected to share an item of its contents with me. Singular, indeed. You needn’t answer the question, but I must ask it. Why?”

I turned to face Holmes

“It’s Walpurgisnacht. Something of a feast day.”

“Will you be going out?”

I shook my head. “It’s just made me thoughtful.” I turned my attention back to the photograph. “You know, this man, for all his ignorance and naivete, can be photographed. I cannot.”

I returned the photograph to the dispatch case with a sigh.

“What is the customary way of celebrating of Walpurgisnacht among your kind?”

“You don’t want to know.”
Holmes huffed. “Watson, that it is patently impossible that I don’t want to know something, especially something about which I’ve just inquired.”

That made me laugh.

“Resting vampires rise. Risen vampires gorge themselves. Roguish vampires turn as many as might be turned before the cock crows. It’s noisy and bloody.”

“Exchange of gifts?”

That made me guffaw.

“Oh, yes,” I replied with good-natured mockery, “Father Christmas shows up and all the good little vampires get oranges and walnuts in their stockings! No, Holmes, we don’t exchange gifts. To be frank, we don’t really like each other that much.”

“Then perhaps a bit of innovation wouldn’t go amiss.”

Holmes strode to his desk and produced a portfolio.

I closed the distance between us and peered over his shoulder.

“Oh, Holmes!”

“You may not be able to be photographed, Watson, but you can certainly be sketched. And see? I’m right. The glint. The jaw. The brow. They are all still there.”

“Holmes, if I had tears…”

“May Walpurgisnacht be a happy feast, my dear Watson, and know that the addition of you is, by far, the best change in my life.”
Revenge of the Quilt. (Mrs. Hudson & Watson. Gen.)

Chapter Summary

Title: Revenge of the Quilt
Length: 100
Rating: Gen
Characters: Mrs. Hudson, Watson
Warning: Mention of off-screen minor character death.
For: 2019 DW Watson Woe's May Drabbles
Prompt: Late nights
Summary: Watson comforts Mrs. Hudson after a horrible shock.

In a rare diversion from custom, Watson eschewed the brandy and pushed a glass of gin across the table.

Mrs. Hudson drew quilt tighter ‘round her shoulders, then fingered a dark blue square of fabric.

“You know, we sewed this together, Marie and I. All those late nights…”

“Holmes will find who did this, Mrs. Hudson.”

Mrs. Hudson drank.

Watson shivered, not from the memory of the scene, or the night’s cold, but rather from the notion, fantastic though it was, that the blue squares of the quilt were glinting, well, rather <I>vengeful</I> in the dim light of the kitchen.
“Holmes, all of the doctors you consulted, including this one,” I tapped my chest, “say you require immediate rest to avoid serious damage to your health.”

“No!”

“You’re being a child. Let’s go on holiday.”

“Make me!”

“You don’t mean that.”

“Don’t I?”

“Very well.”

“What’s that, Watson?”

“I bought it off little Jacky Ferguson. He needed the money more than he needed a blow dart pipe. Don’t worry. It’s not curare. Now stand still.”

“The deuce I will!”

POOF!

“Got ‘im. All right, lads!”

“Ready, Doctor Watson?”

“Yes, please haul Mister Holmes and the trunks to the carriage downstairs.”
“Goodness, what’s all this?”

Holmes was a study in contrasts: dressed like one about to replant bulbs or trim hedges on a country estate yet carrying the breakfast tray and setting the items before me with all the deference of a seasoned housemaid.

“Mrs. Hudson saved me from a blunder and, as compensation, she demanded that I take Bessie’s place for the day.”

I stifled a laugh. “What blunder?”

“I’d planned to conduct a bit of surveillance at Yew Tree Lodge in the guise of the day gardener, but she wisely pointed out real gardeners don’t work on Whit Monday.”
“May I help you, sir?”

Holmes bristled at the young museum attendant’s insouciant mirth at his predicament, but he swallowed his pride and admitted, “I’ve lost a Watson.”

“A Watson?” echoed the attendant.

“Middle-sized, strongly built, square jaw, thick neck, moustache. We separated when, well, never mind when. The trail ends here, in the Egypt wing. Tell me, what’s the most sensational corner about?”

“The Sarcophagi Room. I’ll take you.”

---

“Come on, Holmes! Admit it, you didn’t expect that!”

Holmes huffed. “You jumping out of that replica of a tomb? No. You must’ve paid that lad well.”

“Worth every penny!”

“I have been mistreated,” I declared, glowering at Holmes, wishing to bore holes into his smug countenance.

And Holmes, the blackguard, had the nerve to tut-tut!

“Surely some good-natured ribbing from most and censorious looks from a few members of your club cannot be considered ‘mistreatment,’ Watson.”

“I shall never live it down!”

“Yet you invaded Afghanistan,” he said dryly, then added, “The crux was: would you notice the alteration in weight? The form I was certain I had reproduced adequately.”

“This,” I held up the offending object, “is not my pipe!”
“No, Captain Bubbly, I don’t suppose it is.”

“I expected more stealth, Watson. Frontal assault by,” Holmes stepped aside as a one-eared tabby plunged into the fray with its two score brothers and sisters, “feline was a bold choice. How on earth did you manage to get so many?”

“A goodish-sized salmon under your armchair.”

“Ah, yes, one can barely see—or smell—it. Hmm. And with the Minister on his way, too,” mused Holmes, “but that is not my worry.”

“Isn’t it?”

“It’s Mrs. Hudson’s afternoon at her gathering of landladies. When she returns to find those two cushions used to sharpen claws...”

“What? No, no, stop!”

I recognised him at once.

“You might fool me with a penny tart, but not with Mother Not-Very-Superior Sherlock Holmes!”

“Excuse me?” bellowed the figure in the habit, turning a shocked countenance towards me. “Tart?”

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry. No, see, you misunderstood—"

“Apologies for keeping you waiting, Reverend Mother,” said Holmes from the door.

“Another day, Mister Holmes. This man’s not in his right mind!”


Holmes followed the nun out, apologising.

I went to the window and looked down just in time to see Holmes giving the nun a guinea and me a wink.

I took a deep breath and strode towards the waiting carriage.

“Holmes!”

Holmes handed the driver a trunk then turned to me. “I’m glad to see you, Watson.”

“Me, too, Holmes. This prank business. I’m sorry. A truce, please?”

“Misbehavior has consequences, Watson—”

“Oh, Holmes.”

“—ours being temporary eviction. Mrs. Hudson has banned us from the premises for the summer,
effectively immediately. I’ve packed your things. You’ve saved me a trip to your club.”

“But all because we were misbehaving?”

“The cushions, Watson.”

“True. And curtains. And teapot.”

“And rugs!” called an angry voice from within. “Bon voyage!”
Title: Picnic
For: DW Watson's Woes May Drabbles
Length: 100
Rating: Gen
Prompt: A plan goes awry.
Characters: Holmes & Watson
Summary: It rains on Holmes & Watson's picnic.

“At least we finished eating,” said Watson.

“Fortunate, that,” murmured Holmes, aiding his companion in hasty packing of the hamper.

“I mean, who could’ve predicted this?” added Watson, the drops spattering the blanket as they folded it.

“Who, indeed?”

“I suppose if it hadn’t been rain, it would’ve been ants. Now, where shall we hie to?”

Perhaps that boathouse over there, there might be a box of croquet things atop the opening to a secret passage leading to yonder manor house.”

Watson halted. His gaze narrowed. “Did our picnic go awry or according to plan, Holmes?”

“Can’t it be both?”
Chapter Summary

Holmes spies something interesting at the museum, which opens the floodgates of memory for Watson. Double drabble. Holmes/Watson. Masturbation (non-graphic).

Both drabbles written for the 2019 DW Watson's Woes May Drabble fest. Last 100 words also written for the 2019 Merry Month of Masturbation.

“Oh, there you are, Holmes.”

“Watson, who is the sculptor of this work?”

Watson read the plaque. His eyebrows rose. He eyed the stone nude.

“An old friend.”

“Presumably.”

“I told you I suffered from a severe attack of hay fever when I was a youth.”

“And what has that to do with this very flattering likeness of you?”

“Something was most certainly in the air in Paris during the spring of that year.” He tapped the plaque. “I was not myself.”

“On the contrary, I would say you were even more yourself. Quite the work of art.”

Watson chuckled.

Watson couldn’t help but remember. The sculpture had opened the floodgates.

Holmes, bless him, had been thrown himself into an experiment the moment they returned from the museum.

Watson retired early.

He sighed into the darkness.

Paris!

Being a sculptor’s model had been the tip of the iceberg.

As Watson sank into silent reminiscing, his much older body joined his mind in revisiting its youth. He took himself in hand and brought himself to crisis with practised ease.
The next morning a postcard lay by his plate.

“Holmes!”

“An artist friend did a rendering. Don’t worry. I’ve my own copy.”

End Notes

Thank you for reading!

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