Summary

Something is following Greg. Haunting him. He's managed to keep it under wraps until now, but he is quickly reaching the end of his mental and physical limits. Then Mycroft Holmes shows up on his doorstep.

Notes

This was a story idea that I had a while back that I didn't know how to proceed with. And then I decided, hey, I'll just stick Greg and Mycroft into it and use them to flesh out the details surrounding the plot.

I hadn't planned on ever doing that much with it, but after posting my first story on the site, it pushed me to try and see if I could at least take the story to a first chapter kind of end. It feels a tad clunky in places, but overall I like the general feel of it.

See the end of the work for more notes.

“Good evening. I hope this isn’t a bad time, Detective Inspector.”

Greg froze, his hand tightening on the door handle. Finding Mycroft Holmes standing in the entrance of his flat was not something he’d been expecting tonight. Nor was he prepared for it. He swallowed
against the sudden dryness in his throat, and then shook his head.

“Course not,” Greg said. He moved aside so Mycroft could enter.

As if he didn’t have enough to deal with right now. He followed after Mycroft as they both reentered the flat, his eyes immediately darting to the darker corners of the room in search of movement.

“Kind of late for a social call,” Greg said, attempting to sound casual.

Mycroft turned, crinkling his nose as though Greg made a distasteful joke. “I assure you, my visit is not a social one.”

Damn it. He just wasn’t going to catch any breaks, was he? He now regretted being on his third glass of whiskey for the night. He was barely able to keep up pretenses when he was sober.

It also didn’t help that he suddenly heard something skittering near the ceiling.

“So what, this is about Sherlock then?” he asked stiffly.

”Indirectly,” Mycroft said. “It’s by his request that I’m here.”

That got Greg’s attention.

“Sorry?”

“He is concerned about you. At least to the extent he is capable.” Mycroft seemed on edge, his gaze shifting about the room with wary alertness. “I suspect Dr. Watson had some hand in convincing Sherlock to contact me. He told me these last few months you have become withdrawn. You are distracted during cases. Also, he says that your health appears to be on a slow decline.” Mycroft met Greg’s eyes. The corners of his mouth tightened. “It appears their concern was justified.”

Greg couldn’t help the cynical smile that crossed his face. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you were worried about me.”
“I am.”

Oh. Okay. Greg didn’t have any idea what to make of that, actually. He’d thought at this point that there wasn’t much that could rattle him, given his current circumstances. But he was surprisingly unnerved at the sight of Mycroft Holmes standing in his flat looking… troubled. Because of him. It didn’t suit Mycroft.

“Well, that’s considerate of you.”

Mycroft frowned, uncertainty flickering in his expression. He absently fiddled with the handle of his umbrella before speaking again. “Detective Inspector-“ He paused, closing his eyes for a moment. “Greg. I realize we don’t know each other very well. But if you would be willing to confide in me, then perhaps I could assist you with whatever is wrong.”

Greg cringed inwardly as he caught sight of what looked like black vapor drifting through his kitchen doorway. The other one was definitely interested in the conversation now. He almost hated Mycroft for the involuntary spark of hope that flared in his chest. Whatever the reason was, the man wanted to help. But if Greg cracked in front of Mycroft now, it was going to raise dozens of questions that he really didn’t want to answer.

And if, against all common sense, it actually was real? What then? Did Mycroft, with all those government resources and connections at his fingertips, also keep a Rolodex of priests or exorcists or whatever kind of demon expert handled this sort of thing?

Greg allowed a bitter chuckle at the thought, then two. Suddenly he couldn’t stop the mirthless laughter bubbling out of his throat. He was aware he really was coming off as crazy to Mycroft, and that just made him laugh harder.

It wasn’t a cleansing sort of laughter. If anything, he became more drained the longer it went on. His body felt like lead as he collected himself.

“Sorry,” Greg said, rubbing the heel of his palm against his eyes. “Bit stressed out. And tired.”
“I can imagine.”

“I doubt that.” He glared at Mycroft, not having anything left in him to attempt at civility. Stalking over to the coffee table, he grabbed his whiskey glass and downed the remainder in one gulp.

“You’re right,” he said, coughing against the burn in his throat. “We barely know each other. You can’t even be bothered to acknowledge my existence unless you need to me to play nanny to your arse-hole brother. That’s the real reason you’re here, isn’t it? Gotta make sure there’s someone to keep Sherlock in line, instead of actually making an effort to deal with him yourself.”

Something dark flashed in Mycroft’s eyes. His hand flexed and retightened around his umbrella handle, the knuckles whitening. Greg grinned at the sight. Finally scored a hit past that smug armor.

“That was unworthy of you, Greg,” Mycroft said quietly. His voice was like a deep frost settling in the room.

Greg slammed his glass down on the table. “I don’t hear you denying it,” he said, his words coming out in a snarl. A rasping breath reached his ears, the surrounding shadows in the room growing distorted and dense.

There was an immediate change in Mycroft’s posture. He drew himself up to his full height, his neck and shoulders tensing. The stance reminded Greg of a snake rearing up.

“I would ask you to keep your temper in check.”

Greg clenched his teeth together. In the back of his mind he recognized that there was no good reason to be taking his anger out on Mycroft, but fuck it. Anger was good with him. He could get behind anger.

He noticed the tendrils of indistinct, shifting darkness beginning to curl around Mycroft’s shoes. The thing’s shape was materializing more solidly as it sat huddled close to the ground behind Mycroft. The smoky form contorted and reformed simultaneously, rippling in and out of reality. If it had facial features, they were shrouded by the crawling, twitching blackness that made up its entire body. It let out a piercing hiss as it drew nearer to Mycroft. Greg could almost swear that it wanted to tear a chunk out of the man’s leg.
He’d never seen the thing react this way around someone else before. Mycroft’s mere presence seemed to be provoking it. Frankly, Greg could sympathize. He wished Mycroft would just do something, just give him one good reason to start punching those perfect teeth in one by one.

The creature crept out to hunch in the space between the two men. Greg watched as it turned its face towards him. The slivers of darkness trailed off its shape and glided over the floor. They slithered around Greg’s bare feet, heat starting to prickle up his legs and throughout his limbs.

Greg wasn’t sure whether or not the thing could physically hurt Mycroft. Not that it mattered. He was more than capable of doing it himself. A strange, malicious eagerness surfaced inside of him at the thought. He advanced a step forward, his irritation sharpening into a pounding aggression.

CLACK.

Greg flinched as Mycroft suddenly brought the tip of his umbrella down onto the floor with a sharp crack. An icy tremor clenched around his insides, switching off his fury so fast that he felt deflated by its absence. His head swam as he swayed on his feet for a second before catching himself. Bewildered, he glanced down and wondered why his hands were clenched into fists. Mycroft needed his skull pounded in, sure, but-

Wait, what? Where had that come from?

“Lestrade.”

Greg’s eyes snapped to Mycroft, confusion at war with a rising panic in his chest. Mycroft watched him, so still that it didn’t look like he was even breathing. His face was blank. But Greg could make out something eerily cold behind his gaze.

A small, self-preserving part of Greg told him that he was very, very stupid to underestimate Mycroft Holmes.

“Sorry.”

Mycroft’s brow furrowed, the only indication that he was surprised. Greg took a deep breath and
relaxed his hands. He thought he should say something more substantial, but nothing remotely articulate came to him. He gave up and shrugged.

“Sorry,” he said again.

Mycroft narrowed his eyes, but the coldness in them faded somewhat. The tension in his shoulders and neck eased as he inhaled his own slow, deliberate breath. Finally, he spoke again, his expression settling back into apathy.

“I will not feign ignorance of the fact that for all his barbs against your professional skills, you exercise a certain level of influence over Sherlock that I’ve come to rely on. But let me make this clear; I have under my employ any number of better-trained, more competent personnel I could send to ‘deal with’ my brother.”

Greg felt his temper flare to life again. Pompous, nosey, insufferable prat-?

“But I choose to use you because there is no one I trust more.”

Huh?

“You what?”

Mycroft raised an eyebrow, seeming put out that he had to explain further.

“You allow Sherlock access to your cases. You treat him with a respect he rarely deserves. You provide him mental stimulus to combat the disquiet of his own mind.”

Mycroft’s eyes shifted away.

“And yes, you repeatedly do a better job of looking out for him than I have. For that, you have my gratitude.”

Bewildered, Greg watched as Mycroft bent down, setting his umbrella against the armchair. Then, he
straightened and closed the distance between them. He hesitated before reaching out to rest a hand on Greg’s shoulder.

“You are a good man, Greg Lestrade. And for that, you have my respect.” His expression softened into something kinder than Greg would have thought the man was capable of. “Please. If you would but trust me as well, I swear I will do everything in my power to help you.”

Hope seared forth unbidden in Greg’s chest again, sharp and nearly painful in its intensity. He had to look away, unable to handle that gentleness in Mycroft’s eyes. “I don’t know how you can,” he said gruffly, his throat tight with an emotion he had no name for.

Mycroft gave Greg’s shoulder a gentle squeeze.

“I won’t ask you for blind optimism, but let’s not lose faith before we’ve even begun to try.”

Despite everything, Greg smiled, really smiled for the first time in what seemed like ages. It felt indescribably good to be able to do so.

“Jesus, this is mental,” he said, shaking his head. “You don’t even have any idea what you’re signing on for.”

“It’s a good thing I’m exceptionally resourceful, then.”

Greg nearly jumped to the ceiling as a sharp hiss shrieked out behind him. He spun around, finding the creature plastered to the far wall next to the window, its creaking growl filling the room. Greg’s frayed internal tether snapped.

“Fucking hell, SHUT YOUR GOB, YOU STUPID BASTARD!”

“Yes, do shut up. Your presence is disagreeable enough as it is.”

Mycroft’s curt addition to his outburst didn’t register with Greg at first. Then his brain caught up with him, and Greg stopped breathing for a few seconds. He slowly turned back and looked at Mycroft, numb shock pooling through his limbs.
“You heard that.”

Mycroft glanced at him, most of his focus still directed toward the window. His annoyance abruptly shifted into apprehension as he took in Greg’s expression.

“Greg, are you-?”

“Can you see it too?” Greg asked insistently, his own voice sounding tinny and distant against the blood pounding in his ears.

“Yes.”

Things suddenly went off balance, the world tilting under Greg’s feet as his vision went fuzzy. When his brain lurched back into lucidity, Greg found himself being supported against Mycroft’s side with an arm wrapped around his upper frame to keep him standing. Mycroft peered down into his face, actually seeming a bit startled.

Greg shakily reached up and clutched Mycroft’s shoulder for leverage, digging his fingers into the jacket. Mycroft had to do most of the work, but he managed to shuffle them both over to the armchair and deposit Greg into it. Mycroft knelt down in front of him, probably ruining the knees of his trousers in process but strangely enough not looking like he cared.

“Deep breaths, Greg. Forgive me, I should have shown more tact.”

Greg’s lungs automatically complied with Mycroft’s request, but proper breathing was low on his priority list.

“You really see it?” he asked, dread and desperation twisting in his stomach. He hadn’t known until this moment how psychologically ragged he was, weeks of fear and doubt weighing down on him. He needed this affirmative, needed it for the sake of his own sanity.

Mycroft, in his ever-present omniscience, recognized that.
“I see it, Greg.”

Greg wheezed out a strained laugh, dizzy from the relief flooding his system. He slumped forward, and his forehead bumped against Mycroft’s shoulder. Sluggishly he tried to sit upright again when he felt Mycroft press a hand against his upper back, holding him in place.

“I don’t mind,” he said, somehow able to read Greg’s thoughts. “Take a moment if you need to.”

Greg nodded weakly, not seeing a reason to argue the point. He could smell Mycroft’s cologne through his clothes, as well as trace amounts of cigarette smoke clinging to the fabric. The scent had an unexpected grounding effect on his nerves.

“So it’s real? I’m not just cracked?”

“It’s all very real, I promise you.”

Greg let out a woosh of air, mulling things over. “Okay. Okay, I can work with that.”

Mycroft’s chuckle vibrated in his throat. “I expected as much. However, I think you’ve concerned yourself with these matters enough for one night.”

“What?” Greg finally raised his head and looked at Mycroft in puzzlement. He started as Mycroft’s hand shifted to the back of his neck.

“Rest now, Greg.”

Greg was only momentarily aware of the peculiar chill that shot down his spine and swirled in his head. But by then, his mind was already fading into darkness.
Mycroft easily caught hold of Greg as he sagged forward. It was a telltale sign of how haggard he must have been that he had lost consciousness so fast. He settled Greg back into the armchair, studying the unkempt stubble on his chin and the dark circles under his eyes. Barely sleeping at home, most likely grabbing what little snippets of rest that he could during downtime at work and while riding on the Underground. Three to four hours a day at the most.

It was a bit unethical to sedate Greg like that, but more than anything, the man needed a solid night’s rest. Ten uninterrupted hours would be Mycroft’s starting recommendation. Afterwards, Mycroft was confident Greg would be recovered enough to handle more information about the situation he was caught up in.

He felt a keen sense of sympathy for Greg, but more than that, he was impressed. He’d known that the Detective Inspector had more to him than most of the goldfish bobbing around London, but he hadn’t had any idea how formidable Greg Lestrade really was until now. There weren’t many who could endure what he had for several months and still be of sound mind.

Mycroft was lucky in comparison.

He stood and pulled his cell phone out of his pocket, punching in a string of numbers and letters. Once he was connected to his protected line, he dialed again.

Anthea picked up after the first ring. “Status, sir?”

“Confirmed. It looks to be an aggro class.” Mycroft paced about the room, the aimless movement helping him gather his thoughts. “Thankfully, even after all this time it’s still in the penumbra phase. Lestrade’s resisted much longer than I would have expected someone to, but he’s close to the breaking point.”

“Are you safe, sir?”

Mycroft gave a humorless chuckle. “Quite safe, thank you. However, I would appreciate if you would have Bennett bring me an overnight bag, and tell him to remain on standby. A little extra insurance never hurt.”

“Shall I inform Baskerville?”
Mycroft’s hand unconsciously tightened around his cell. He drew in a measured breath. “No need. There’s no risk of an eclipsing as long as I’m here. Once Lestrade’s recouped, I shall inform him properly of his choices.”

“You realize that isn’t your job.”

“I’m well aware of that. But I am uniquely qualified.”

Anthea hummed in reluctant agreement. “Lucky for Lestrade you’re being so hands-on about this.”

“Don’t read into it.”

“I never do, sir. I’ll contact Bennett with instructions.”

“Have him deliver some food as well. I suspect Lestrade has been too preoccupied to keep his kitchen properly stocked.”

“Very well. ETA in about two hours.”

“Thank you, Anthea. Good night.”

Mycroft rang off and blankly stared at the cell screen, troubled by the flurry of distracting emotions clamoring inside him. A low, rumbling whisper curled against his ears, causing a familiar pressure behind his temples. He sighed and shook his head, making a dismissive gesture.

“It’s less than ideal, I know,” he said wearily. He glanced down, watching as his shadow convulsed and stretched along the wood paneling of the floor to form a figure much larger than his own. “Severance is still an option. If full containment is necessary, then so be it. But he’s not lost to us yet.”

A faint moan drew Mycroft’s attention back towards Greg. The DI was mumbling incoherently in his sleep, twitching as his features twisted in distress. Perched on the armrest of the chair, the thing loomed over Greg, the long gnarled hand clenched onto where his neck met his shoulder.
The room’s temperature abruptly plunged from moderate to frigid in a matter of milliseconds. In single fluid motion, Mycroft dropped to one knee and slammed his palm into the quivering shadow under his feet. After the initial struggle against the material resistance, he plunged past the darkness up to his elbow. With a grunt, he gave a hard mental push and the shadow reared up off the floor in response. It surged forward and engulfed the creature in the next instant, the entire mass collapsing and settling back into the ground. Once he made sure he had a solid grip, he wrenched his arm free, splattering the gunk on his jacket in the process. The creature screeched as it was partially pulled up with Mycroft’s fingers wrapped around its neck.

Mycroft gave the thing one good throttle before letting go, leaving it with only its head visible. “Tedious,” he growled under his breath. As the shrieks continued, he shook what he could of the ichor-like substance from his coat sleeve and spoke over the cacophony. “SILENCE.”

His shadow rippled before the creature abruptly sank further into its depths and the cries choked off as whatever constituted as its mouth was submerged under the surface.

“Better. I was content to leave you alone for remainder of the evening, but apparently that was a wasted courtesy. So I’m going to kennel you instead.”

Mycroft leaned in closer, planting the heel of his shoe on the creature’s head. “You barely had a small taste of what it’s like down there,” he said, his voice laced with a seething wrath. “Now imagine being in that nothingness for several hours, completely sensory deprived. Personally, I don’t consider it close to a fitting punishment for what you’ve made Lestrade suffer through. But it’s a start.”

Then he shoved down hard with all his weight until the thing had completely sunk into the blackness. His foot made contact with the floorboards as he closed off the void, his shadow settling back into something approximating normal.

Mycroft stood in silence for several minutes, his eyes fixed on the ground. The chill in the air slowly began dissipating. He only stirred when the indistinct, guttural murmur cut into his fury-induced haze. A full-body shudder ran through him all the way to his core.

“Oh. Yes, I heard you.”

A louder, more adamant string of rasping sounds followed.
“What? No, I’m… I was…” Mycroft’s lips compressed into an apprehensive frown. He was unable to account for the unexpected, self-righteous rage he’d just experienced. He trudged over to Greg’s couch and unsteadily plopped into it, his chest constricting to an uncomfortable degree.

“I apologize, but please, stop talking for now,” he said, pressing his face into his hands. “I need some time to think.”

Mycroft closed his eyes, heaving a grateful sigh as the pulsing in his head faded away. He focused on evening out his breathing and calming his thoughts. He’d miscalculated, allowed himself to connect personally to Lestrade’s circumstances. Perfectly understandable, but also a serious lapse in judgment.

When his anxiety had subsided to more manageable levels, he straightened up and shed his jacket. Even though it was beyond repair, he still neatly folded it anyway and placed it on the coffee table. Rolling up his shirtsleeves, he cast his eyes over to where Greg slept, relieved to see a much more peaceful expression on his face.

The man couldn’t stay in that armchair all night; it’d be stressful on his back in the morning. Mycroft would get him situated in his own bed, wait for Bennett to arrive with his belongings, and then plan out the conversation he’d be having come the next day.

There was no reason to worry. It was only a minor loss of composure, that’s all. He wouldn’t make the same mistake again. He just had to be careful and remain detached. Sentiment was a luxury he could not afford to indulge in.

For both his and Lestrade’s sakes.

End Notes

This evolved from what I started it as into something a little different, something that I actually am tempted to try and continue on with. But I have no plan where things are going, so for now, it's just a one shot.

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