The School Boy

As Mycroft and Lestrade pursue their own relationship, Sherlock learns the meaning of friendship with the new boy in his school, John Watson.
“Stop braying at me you phlegmatic mule!”

“I… I do apologize, Sherlock, however, your hysteria is a welcome change of pace from my rather tedious day.”

“I am not a hysteric! The perturbations this… homunculus… has caused in my life are of monumental consequence to my mental serenity and I will not have them continue!”

“I would not have thought the mere presence of another human being in your sphere of sensory awareness would cause you such distress. Is there, perhaps, something notable about this particular specimen that makes him the exception?”

“Notable! He is as notable as a vanilla custard on a cream-colored table. His intellect is that of a discarded shovel and, though he believes himself possessed of a sense of humor, his attempts at wit are flat as a hat that you have sat upon. Notable… I choke on the term when applied to him.”

Mycroft leaned back against the headboard of his bed and let the warm wash of contentment flow over him like a delicious turn in the shower. To call home… such a soul-soothing thing to do. To hear his brother’s fantastical stories and his dearest love’s laughter in the background… he had to pity anyone who had not this in their lives.

“My, my… you have given a great deal of thought to his banality.”

“Proof that my mind is infected by forced proximity to this bumpkin. My association with the lackey is sufficiently debilitating that the addition of another of his primitive tribe in my day shall render me unfit for more than the most rudimentary of thought processes. I have a foot on the path of drooling insentience and I must take the second step tomorrow! It is intolerable!”

“Besides the ravages to your mind from your enforced escort duty, was the first day of your studies a successful one?”

“I can scarcely remember it so horrifying was the experience of John Watson.”

Not a single complaint about an instructor or his classes or any particular individual beyond this one boy… it had been a spectacularly successful day for his brother. And, Mycroft was convinced, in no small part to the tender and attentive ministrations of his husband. If absence was to be a more regular, though abhorrent, feature of his life, it was a tremendous source of relief that his Gregory would stand by his brother and provide the attention and support he required.

“Since the initial cut is always the most painful, I am confident tomorrow will cause you far less upset. Perhaps you might even find something enjoyable about this young man.”

Not that it was terribly likely. Sherlock was notorious for his inability to make friends, the fault lying both with himself and the other children whom he met. Sherlock refused to extend his hand in friendship and the others refused to offer him the time and understanding he needed to be sufficiently comfortable to extend that hand. That Gregory had done so was a miracle Mycroft still gave thanks for every day, but his love was unique in that action.

“There is little enjoyable about a lump of clay.”

“I can think of many an artist who would debate that point.”
“That you attempt to use artists to make your case is indicative of its limitations.”

“One can successfully argue that musicians are artists, so where does that leave your feeble rebuttal?”

“At least I do not play the day away with pencils and bits of chalk.”

“This is quite true, but perhaps we can remedy that with a slight alteration of your course schedule…”

“You would not dare! It was difficult enough to make the shop boy hold fast to your orders that I be exempted from sports! I shall not suffer a weedy paedophile attempting to seduce me into expressing my inner sexuality in watercolors!”

“Sherlock, the art instructor is not a paedophile…”

“I beg to differ! Have you seen how the so-called artists choose to represent male genitalia? I believe my position is proven.”

A discussion of art history would have to wait for another day. Perhaps another year or decade even.

“As arguing the inarguable is a foolish use of time, I shall concede the point so far as to say you are safe from art instruction this term.”

“It is wise that you see reason. My life is already upheaved to a degree that I cannot even find enjoyment trouncing you in a competition of wits.”

Mycroft was certain now that Sherlock’s attention had been tickled by the new boy. What a very intriguing development…

“I do hope that you are making notes of your interactions with young Mr. Watson. I would think he would be a rich source of data, if only for your own perceptions of his effects on you.”

“What! I… that is not entirely lacking in intelligence, which is surprising, given that you were the progenitor of the suggestion.”

“Good… you have a new project on which to work. May I now speak with Gregory?”

“I have not completed describing the full mental toxicity associated with the presence of John Watson.”

“I believe I have a very clear picture, so kindly hand the phone to Gregory…”

“I do not believe you do, else you would be scarcely able to speak for the crippling nausea and feeling of knife blades being inserted into your eyeballs.”

“With age comes more substantial personal fortifications. Now, you will allow me to speak with my husband…”

“And if I do not?”

“You do realize that the size of your laboratory in our new home is solely at my discretion, don’t you?”

“You bounder! You would not impede my intellectual development!”
“As is the inventory of your equipment. But you can do much with a pair of scissors, a plastic cup and a soup spoon, I’m sure.”

“When I am possessed of my share of our fortune, you will rue the day you dangled coins in front of me and bid me dance!”

“I have no doubt you have many items on your list for which you will exact your timely revenge, so I am not overly bothered by the addition of one more. Now, phone to Gregory, please, and I give you fair warning that our conversation may touch on subjects that will trouble you more than your new companion.”

“There is nothing that troubles me more than John Watson, however, I do not feel compelled to remain and have my ears brutalized by your treacly version of erotic prose.”

Mycroft listened to the muffled negotiations marking the transition between his brother and his spouse as phone partners and smiled broadly hearing his intended’s voice finally come on the line.

“Little bastard’s been completely off his nut tonight. I think he’s got himself a new friend to play with.”

“The ardor with which Sherlock is orating against this new boy is most telling. I do not believe I have heard him so much as mention any of his other classmates by name in all the time he has attended school.”

“I think it’s got something to do with the fact that this John kid actually talked to him all day, even though Sherlock was probably being… well, Sherlock.”

“I concur. In fact, it is entirely likely that Sherlock was on his worst behavior given the situation. Did the boy truly attempt conversation with Sherlock for the entire day?”

“Yeah, from what Sherlock has been shrieking to the four winds, I’d say the lad enjoyed his time with his escort. Even told Sherlock he was looking forward to seeing him again tomorrow.”

“Good heavens! I am now somewhat concerned that there is something wrong with the poor child.”

“Nah, sounds like a normal one to me. Could be that he’s the new boy and really didn’t have anyone else to talk to or…”

“That was a very pregnant pause, Gregory.”

“Well, I was thinking that maybe this John Watson actually liked Sherlock.”

“I find that a bit difficult to believe.”

“Oh come on… Sherlock’s a little tosser, but that doesn’t mean he couldn’t find someone who he connected with. What was it your Gran said… personality that was difficult to embrace. Difficult doesn’t mean impossible, though.”

“That is an apt description of Sherlock’s demeanor…”

“She also included you in that.”

“Oh, well then, I am grieved to know I must now make suitable convalescent plans for my sadly senile Grandmama.”
“I think she was a little off on that, too, but I knew what she meant. Sometimes you need the right person to see just how wonderful someone is. Maybe John can see through Sherlock’s lunacy and likes what he sees.”

As much as Mycroft would like to believe that, it was not as easy idea to support. However, just because it had never happened before did not mean it was, as his spouse stated, an impossible thing...

“I shall bow to your greater skill for interpersonal relations, my dear, and maintain an optimistic attitude. You shall, I assume, monitor the situation and provide Sherlock with any guidance he may require if this does prove to be more than a new child taking as his anchor the first person to whom he is introduced.”

“Yes, I’m on that. Gonna drop Sherlock off again tomorrow and try to get a look at this kid, maybe see if I can chat him up a little. Don’t worry your pretty head, love. I’ll take care of things on this end, you just bother yourself with whatever it is you’re doing. How’s that going anyway?”

As he protected the outside world, his Gregory protected their own inner world. How perfectly they complemented each other...

“As well as can be expected. My presence is to help remediate the incompetence of others and I do wonder if that incompetence is growing the longer we pursue this particular course of action. It is tiring, but rewarding, in the end, when my thinking prevails and we do demonstrate tangible progress.”

“That’s my Mycroft, smartest man in the room and savior of them all. God I wish I could be there... you being all commanding makes me so hot we’d be at each other all night long.”

A thought that ricocheted through Mycroft’s mind like a stray bullet. He could not express how much he missed his spouse. Every day he found small things that he would love nothing more than to discuss with his Gregory, tiny items of nonsense over which to share a smile... of the nights alone in his bed with pillows piled next to him so he could pretend that it was his spouse’s body he curled against as he fell asleep. Just one night... what he would not give for a single night with his Gregory, alone in each other’s arms... but it was not to be. Not for a distressingly long amount of time. And he would not, absolutely would not, dwell on the magnitude of his loneliness when he left to pursue his degree. That was not something he could touch upon in his mind without a cold black fist grasping his heart and squeezing until he could feel the muscle crushed into dust. It was only the knowledge that his Gregory would wait patiently and lovingly and, when the ordeal was over, they would be together at long last that helped keep him from dissolving into a puddle of heavy, bitter tears. Someday they would be united as a married couple with their new life stretching out ahead of them... but it would be a brutal wait until that time finally arrived.

“And so we would... all the night and into the day, if I was to predict. And such is the nature of my dreams.”

“Me too. And my fantasies... had to stuff a shirt in my mouth last night because I knew I’d be screaming your name by the time I got done showing myself a nice time and thinking about you and me doing a whole host of very, very dirty things that would melt my tongue if I said them aloud.”

Perfection. So caring and considerate one moment, so primal and lustful the next... how one man could so seamlessly move through such a range of personas was something Mycroft would never be able to comprehend and would never care to try anyway. The mystery was but another layer of his spouse’s wonder.
“But would you not take the risk for me, my dear? I have been so very lonely without you…”

“Well… you got a little privacy?”

“I am confident I shall not be disturbed for quite some time.”

“Then let’s see if I can make you feel a little less lonely. Get comfortable, love… I plan on taking my time with you tonight.”

Oh, and wouldn’t that be the bright spot to Mycroft’s day… fortunately, his next meeting was not for some time to come…

“I do not require a bodyguard to deliver me to school!”

“I just thought you might like another bit of the personal touch.”

“If it were from anyone but you, perhaps. However, it will take me at least an hour to find the appropriate disinfecting soap and scrub your poverty off of my body.”

“Wouldn’t you have to wash your clothes, too? That’d get contaminated first.”

“Already my day has been ruined by one of you gibbering riff-raff! And look! There! There stands another of your ilk ready to further compromise my educational advancement!”

Lestrade squinted and saw a small figure standing on the steps to the main entrance of the school. Sherlock slithered down in the seat and did his best to wave Lestrade to drive past the building, only to have his flailing hands swatted away and get a ride directly to the base of the steps, rather than dropped off a less-embarrassing distance away. This way, Lestrade could get a good look at the boy who was Sherlock’s current nemesis. And, he had to say he liked what he saw… small boy, but he didn’t look meek or shy. Sandy blonde hair and a friendly, easy smile that brightened when he caught sight of the riot of curls peeking up from the figure trying to hide on the floorboard.

“Get your skinny arse off the floor and go say hello to your friend.”

“Is there anything besides a mallet that can imprint into your skull the very simple truth that John Watson is not my friend?”

“He’s waving at you, so no.”

“Ugh… how completely infantile.”

“I’d say it’s completely FRIENDly.”

“You are correct; I was mistaken. YOU are completely infantile, which further cements my understanding of your relationship with my brother.”

“Get out of the car, you little coward. Your mate’s waiting for you.”

“I shall anoint myself with a bottle of the gardener’s ale and inform Mother Lestrade personally that you sought to get me intoxicated for the purposes of defilement.”

“Ah, that’s nice of you. Mum loves a good laugh.”

“I am being confounded at every turn by the rabble class!”
“If I have to shove you out of here, you’ll look the right idiot in front of your little friend, so GET OUT!”

“Fine! May I at least borrow a blindfold and earplugs so that my senses are not assaulted by his inanity?”

“One.”

“Perhaps some form of spray deodorant to mask the stink of his dull-wittedness?”

“Two.”

“Just a single sliver of cloth with which to gag…”

“Three.”

Lestrade reached across and popped the door latch with one hand, using the other one to drag Sherlock’s skinny body out of its hiding place.

“Wait! Unhand me you lout! If I am disheveled, I shall place the blame on you!”

“Since when do you care if you’re wrinkled?”

“Since I must demonstrate most forcefully how superior I am in every way to John Watson.”

“Or, if you’re honest, you want to look nice for your new friend.”

“I would hate you, but that would require an emotional connection between us and that thought is more than slightly laughable.”

With a haughty humph, Sherlock got out of the car and, clutching his satchel as if it was a shield, stalked up the stairs to where the smaller boy was waiting. Lestrade pushed down the very strong urge to roll down the window and yell something that would make Sherlock scream with rage, but decided to leave things be… for the moment. Instead he watched Sherlock try to walk past John without paying him any notice and John, instead, turning and running after him with a growing smile on his face. Oh yes, Sherlock had a friend. Now, he just had to make sure Sherlock didn’t push that new friend away…

—

“Hi Sherlock!”

“What do you want?”

“Nothing. Just saying hi. It’s going to be a great day, I can already tell.”

“Oh, and on what empirical evidence do you base that assessment?”

“Had toast for breakfast. With jam. Lots of jam. And an egg just the way I like it. It’s got to be a good day when you get it started with your favorite breakfast.”

“I would point out how erroneous is that conclusion, however, you would not comprehend the breadth of my argument.”

“Well, compare that to the way your day would go if you started it with a breakfast you hated. If someone made you eat liver for breakfast, for instance, how do think you’re day would go?”
The logic was still highly flawed, but Sherlock had to grudgingly admit that if his day began with a serving of liver, there would be little that could improve his subsequent mood.

“I will go so far as to agree that liver is not an appropriate breakfast food.”

“I’m not sure it’s an appropriate food ever. Do you know what a liver does? It’s pretty gross.”

“I know the function of the liver, as well as its macro- and microscopic structure and embryological development.”

“That’s amazing! I don’t know all of that yet, but I will. I’m going to be a doctor, so I have to know what all my insides do.”

“Please inform me if you are able to beg your way through medical school and receive your work assignment so that I may avoid you at all costs in the event of a health emergency.”

“I don’t know why you’d say that – I’ll be a great doctor! I’m going to study real hard and learn all there is to learn to be the best there is. And I’m going to do everything I can to be nice and helpful to my patients because I know how important that is. So you’d be lucky to have me as your doctor. In fact, you could be my first patient! I’ll remember that, too. As soon as I have a job, I’ll call you and you can come over for an examination and be my very first patient.”

“We have a private physician.”

“So? Doesn’t mean you can’t come and let me give you a check-up.”

“The operative word is not can’t, it is won’t.”

“Well, it’ll be your loss. So, I’ll see you for lunch, right?”

“My sentence has not been commuted, so yes, I am forced to join you for lunch.”

“Hey, don’t make it sound like it’s awful or something!”

“Awful is the tamest world for the experience. Soul-destroying is far more fitting.”

“Just for that, see if I share my cake with you!”

Sherlock froze in his tracks and John had to swerve to avoid bowling over his new companion.

“Cake?”

“Yep. I already checked and there’s cake for lunch. I was even going to ask for a big piece so I could share, since you brought your lunch yesterday and it didn’t have any cake in it, but if you’re going to be mean then I’m not going to. I may not even be able to eat all of it it’s going to be so big, so too bad for you being so rude.”

Intolerable! Cook did not provide him cake when he requested a packed lunch! If anyone should be given cake it was him! Not this tiny flea of a beggar! If there was cake to be had then he, Sherlock Holmes, would take all necessary actions to acquire his proper share, even if it meant… conversing further with the gnome.

“I am not attempting to be mean, I am simply stating the facts and facts, by nature, are objective and not subject to emotional judgment.”

There. That was a very proper demonstration of his position as being in no way, as was stated,
mean.

“That’s awful! That right there was a very mean thing to say!”

It was?

“It was?”

“You just told me it was a fact that you don’t like me!”

“No, you misunderstood. I said it was a fact that being in your company was similar to what must be the feel of a horde of swarming, soul-eating locusts descending on my naked and staked down body. That does not speak in any way to whether I did or did not like you.”

“Yes it does! It speaks to it very loudly, if you ask me. Now, say something nice or I won’t sit with you at lunch at all!”

How devastating was the pain of quandary! If he simply said nothing he could be rid of John Watson forever, but with John Watson would go John Watson’s cake! And cake today was at least a possible indicator of future cake and how could he allow such an opportunity to pass him by. But John Watson was chained to the cake like an illegitimate child to an unwed mother… why could he not have a choice! Cake or John Watson… there should be no ‘and’ substituted for the choice-based comparative ‘or.’ It should be that he sat down for lunch and was handed a piece of cake by the stupid boy as tribute for allowing him to sit and drink in the perfume of the lofty qualities of his betters. But, if some remark was not made, the cake would be lost and… this was the shop boy’s fault. This entire conversation could have been avoided if he had simply driven around to another door and facilitated the avoidance of the pea-sized purveyor of head pain that was standing there tapping his foot. Annoyingly.

“Well? Doesn’t that big brain of yours work anymore?”

The impertinence!

“My mind continues to work and at a level that far exceeds any other in this building.”

“But you can’t come up with one nice thing to say.”

“I…”

This was farcical! Of course he could fabricate a nicety when it was necessary. For instance… well, there was… of course, he could say… HANG IT ALL!

“I object most strongly to being strong armed in such a fashion. It is unkind of you to place me in such a position and I now have no intention of even attempting to concoct a pleasant phrase to buffer your overly-sensitive feelings.”

“That’s dumb. It’s easy – Sherlock Holmes is very smart. See? Easy.

“That is simply stating the obvious; there is nothing nice about it. Hence the thrust of my discussion about facts that overheated your substandard brain tissue.”

“You can be funny sometimes.”

What?

“What?”
“Remember yesterday when you were talking about my history textbook? You said it was as useful as a toothbrush to a worm. *That* was funny.”

It was?

“It was?”

“Sure! And it was true, too. It barely talks about any good battles or wars or interesting things like that. Oh, Battle of Whatsit in 1249, now moving on… what’s the fun in that? Where’s the good stuff about the fights and the plans and the heroes and villains and… the good stuff! So, you said something funny and it was true, which made it even more funny.”

Oh. Well, that was something Sherlock had not actually considered. *He* knew he had a marvelous sense of humor, but that was not an opinion others shared. It was hardly surprising since other people were lummoxes, but… it *was* disappointing, at times. The only other person who appreciated his humor, besides the mastodon, was the lackey and neither of them could be considered objective observers since their main role in life was to make his life as content and agreeable as possible. The liliputian actually found him amusing?

“So how about something for me? Come on, Sherlock… one little nice thing. If you can’t do it, then I have to say you’re not as smart as you keep barking about.”

How dare the little finger puppet! Well, Sherlock Holmes never backed down from a challenge…

“Very well… John Watson properly recognizes my greatness.”

“That was terrible. Say something nice about me that isn’t actually you just complimenting yourself.”

How was that in any way useful?

“If you did not impose restrictions on my…”

“Just say something nice!”

“Fine! You…”

Have cake?

“You…”

Are short enough to see over so ignoring you is made easier?

“You are…”

Not obviously diseased?

“I find you…”

Marginally less appallingly groomed than the other peon with whom I am acquainted?

“Sherlock!”

“You are… tenacious.”

“Ok… ok, that’s not bad.”
The cake was saved!

“We’ll have to work on you being nice, though. But we’ve got lots of time, so I’m not worried.”

Work on… DAMNATION! How much was he to suffer? Why had the gods forsaken him? He… the most worthy of all humans…

“Oh, we’d better hurry or we’ll be late. I’ll find you for lunch, though. Come on!”

And why did John Watson insist on running… grabbing him and running… as if it would matter if they were tardy. The class was a meaningless void until he arrived anyway…

Lestrade debated for about two minutes before stopping by Mycroft’s and telling the driver that he’d pick up Sherlock from school. He simply had to see how Sherlock fared with his new little friend and, hopefully, get a chance to find out more about the boy. For anyone else, this would be ridiculous, but for Sherlock… Mycroft was right. Someone had to keep an eye on this and make sure that Sherlock wasn’t doing anything insane to the poor lad and that… well, that Sherlock didn’t get hurt. The worst possible thing would be for Sherlock to start to open up a little, only to find out it was too late and he’d driven too big a wedge between himself and this new lad.

Getting there a little early, Lestrade pulled the car over to a shady spot, got out to have a smoke before anyone came out and caught him, then waited for the stream of uniformed bodies to come flowing down the steps. It took a few moments once the lemming rush began to pick out Sherlock moving among the others and… yes!… John was right on his heels. Lestrade decided to really put a bug up Sherlock’s arse and began to sound the horn to draw attention. A very large +1 went into his win column seeing Sherlock’s enraged snarl. A small guided missile shot towards Lestrade and in a few seconds Sherlock was standing toe to toe with the older boy, glaring upwards with lethal intent.

“Have you taken leave of your already woefully-lacking senses?”

“Just making sure you saw me. Hate to have you roaming around looking for your driver… I know how much you hate to waste your time like that.”

A small face peered around from behind Sherlock and Lestrade turned his most disarming grin at the curious child.

“Hi, I’m Greg.”

“Do not speak to John Watson. You will only encourage his continued presence.”

“Can’t you just call him John, you pompous git?”

“I am attempting to depersonalize him.”

“Pay no attention to him, John. He just likes hearing himself talk. When there’s no one around, he still goes on and on and on…”

“Talking to myself is the only way I can be assured of intelligent conversation!”

“See what I mean? I could go off for a pint, come back and he’d still be going on.”

Lestrade smile widened as John began to giggle. Apparently, despite Sherlock’s acidity, the boy hadn’t quite been scared off, yet.
“Are you… are you Sherlock’s brother?”

Sherlock was halfway to the ground to begin dying, then rethought his options given the presence of his tethered haunting.

“He is the debauched gigolo who suffers my brother’s clumsy sexual gropings in exchange for the chance to dip his fingers in my family’s financial holdings.”

“He means, in his bastardy way, that I’m his brother’s boyfriend.”

“Oh… that’s nice. I mean, you seem very nice.”

“Why are you still here, John Watson?”

“Shut it, Sherlock, or your bum won’t be warming the driver’s seat at all today.”

“He gets to… you get to drive? That’s… I don’t know anyone who gets to drive yet! You must be super at it!”

Sherlock had to admit that John Watson’s… John’s… very vociferous adulation was somewhat agreeable.

“I am a masterful driver. It is only the unnecessary restrictions placed on my actions by the shop boy that prevent me from successfully obtaining my driving license.”

“That and a bunch of years of life.”

“Peasants speak only when spoken to.”

“Well, this peasant is now waiting until after he drops you at home before going to the pub.”

“What? You shall not enter that den of public drunkenness without me!”

“You… you get to go to pubs, too? That’s… you get to have so much fun! You’re really lucky, Sherlock…”

Lucky? To be condemned to have his life disrupted by Mycroft and his concubine? It was they who were lucky to be able to support and entertain someone so brilliant and scintillating. Though… if he was forced to admit it, they did do a passable job of supporting and entertaining…

“You’re welcome to come along, if you want, John. Chips are my treat.”

“What! Thrust home the dagger deeper into my heart, why don’t you!

“Oh… I… I wish I could, but I have so much work to do for my classes and getting things together and…”

“It’s ok, lad, I’ll leave the invitation open. How about a ride home?”

“Actually… I live here.”

“John Watson…”

“Try again.”

“Fine, Gregory. John is a boarder.”
“I like the way you spit that out, like most of the lads here aren’t away from home.”

“It is not my fault that my family chose to erect this school so that males of my bloodline did not have to go away from home during our formative years.”

Both John and Lestrade stood staring a moment, but the older boy shook off the surprise far more quickly. Nothing should really surprise him when it came to Mycroft’s family.

“This… this is your school?”

“Don’t worry, John. Sherlock doesn’t own it or things would be run a lot differently.”

“As they should! If I was allowed to institute the appropriate changes, then this offense to mental enrichment would actually perform its designated function and I would not have to conduct most of my education myself! I believe it is time I had a discussion with Grandmama on the subject.”

“You’re not bothering your Gran over your maths classes.”

“I shall! And if she withholds the endowment, this ostentatious stack of bricks will crumble and I shall be free from its clutches!”

“Not happening. But if it did, then what? I don’t think you’d be happier where I went to school at your age.”

“There is not enough water on Earth to provide me with a sufficient number of showers to wash the pall of penury off of my flesh should that occur. I would pursue my own studies and you would assist me.”

“Again, not happening. Look, John, since you’re stuck here, if you need anything you call me, ok? Got a pen? Good… ok, here’s my phone number. And maybe you can come out with us after your lessons one afternoon. That sound ok?”

“Really? You mean that?”

“No.”

“Shut it, Sherlock. Yes, I mean it. This one can use the company and the more the merrier, I always say. So, when you’re settled in a bit, we’ll go off and have ourselves a nice afternoon.”

“Thanks! I’d like that… I bet it’d be a lot of fun!”

“If having an ignited road flare inserted into your mouth can be considered fun, then I concur.”

“See! I said you were funny, Sherlock, and that’s funny!”

Lestrade held back laughing at Sherlock’s astonished face and chose, instead, to pluck Sherlock’s satchel from off of his shoulder and motion the boy to get into the car.

“He is a funny little thing, isn’t he? Ok then, we’ll see you later, John. Try not to study too hard.”

“I’ll try! Bye, Sherlock! I’ll see you tomorrow!”

“Then I shall pray to die in my sleep.”

“Bye, John. And remember to call if you need anything.”
“I will, Greg. Thanks!”

Lestrade swung into the car and drove as sedately as he was capable away from the school and the little boy who stood watching them until they were out of sight.

“So, how was your day?”

“How could you provide him with a means of communication to you?”

“Jealous?”

Sherlock’s mouth dropped open and Lestrade looked around for something small to toss into it.

“Worried I’ll find myself a new favorite?”

“How… that is the most nonsensical thing I have ever heard!”

But there was a tiny mote of doubt in Sherlock’s voice that told Lestrade maybe he’d not been too far off the mark.

“I can promise you one thing, Sherlock, you’ll always be my favorite little brat. I just feel sorry for John, being all alone, especially if he’s a common boy like me and doesn’t really fit in with you posh types.”

Sherlock’s nearly invisible grin said that he gained some reassurance from Lestrade’s words and the older boy vowed to remember in the future just how insecure Sherlock actually could be under that layer of ear-splitting bluster.

“Well, it is his own fault for choosing to mix with those so far his superior. It is the height of foolishness to waste his time here, where he shall languish at the bottom of the social hierarchy, only return to his thatched-roof shack and live out his days in menial pursuits such as street sweeping or muck raking.”

“Or maybe, he gets a leg up on the other menials and makes himself a promising future.”

“Because your cognitive abilities are nearly nonexistent, I shall forgive you, this once, the disabling flaws in your thinking.”

“Doesn’t matter what the future might be like, right now he’s a lonely kid and there’s nothing wrong with being a little nicer to him…”

“Nice! What is it so important to be nice? I had to suffer his petulant foot-stamping on that very issue and it nearly cost me cake!”

“Cake?”

“Do not fear. The cake, ultimately, was mine.”

“Yeah, don’t really care about cake, but what was that about being nice?”

“The puny ruffian outrageously took offence at what he perceived was a lack of ‘niceness’ on my part.”

“Good for him. Seems like the two of you worked it out, though. Could it be you actually said you were sorry?”
Sherlock erupted in a very loud and very fake laugh, which halted abruptly after a few seconds with a fixed and fierce glare at the driver.

“Do not be absurd.”

“Then what’d you do?”

“I… I cannot divulge my shame.”

“Divulge away or you’re going to have to eat a big plate of soggy boiled carrots before you get your chips.”

“That is blisteringly unfair! I am not a rabbit!”


“I may… in my pursuit for my rightful share of John’s luncheon cake, I was… I was forced to say something nice.”

Lestrade had to give an inner thumbs-up to John for figuring out on Day 2 how to make Sherlock more agreeable to civilized behavior.

“What’d you come up with?”

“I said… he was tenacious.”

Lackluster, but better than most people would have gotten out of the goblin.

“Ok, that’s good. Tenacious is something to be proud of. He say something nice about you?”

“Of course, for that is so simple even a lobotomized hamster such as John could excel. He said I am both smart and funny, which, of course, is painfully obvious, but pleasing to hear nonetheless.”

So, John did see something in Sherlock… at liked it well enough to want to try and be Sherlock’s friend. This was going to be a very interesting thing to watch…

“Sherlock Watson-Holmes. I like the sound of that.”

“What! You will retract that statement immediately!”

“Nope. You got yourself a nice friend and I’m going to make sure I enjoy every minute of it.”

“John Watson is not my friend!”

Still shrill and overly-emotive, but not quite as feverish as it had been before. Lestrade gave the car a little more zip because he definitely deserved a celebratory pint. Somewhere, deep inside Sherlock’s skull, his brain was at least gently poking with a very long stick the idea of having a friend and if anything deserved celebrating, that was it.

“Well, you better hope he is because I’m making sure he gets a little looking-in on now and then.”

“That is a pathetic use of your time, when it should be devoted in its entirety to me.”

“Poor little bugger’s going to be lonely, Sherlock. I think we can understand how he feels, right?”
Sherlock cut narrowed eyes at Lestrade, but didn’t reply. He didn’t need to, though because the older boy had learned to read Sherlock’s expressions to, at least, a minimal degree and he could tell the gears were turning in the child’s head. Sherlock would never admit to being lonely, never in a thousand years, but that was fine. He’d been brave enough to let Lestrade know and that would always be enough.

“If you choose to fritter away your leisure time with the tiny wind-up toy, then please feel free. It matters not to me.”

“Fritter away my leisure with John and you, you mean. Not going to leave you out, you brat, no matter how hard you struggle.”

Another barely-there smile, then a hearty snort and a stern crossing of his arms across his chest before Sherlock announced that the struggle would be to the death.

“Yours or mine?”

“That is something you will learn when the time comes.”
Thank you all for the great reception this story has gotten - I very much appreciate it!

And, for those following more than this story... I do have spies on the brain lately...

“Your family owns a school?”

Mycroft could no more have avoided calling his Gregory today than he could have made a sandwich out of his own fingers and enjoyed it with a bit of pickle. Given Sherlock’s furious foolishness of the previous day, a full report was necessary on his current status because... well, because this was far too amusing not to follow in detail.

“Own is perhaps not the exact position of our association with that particular institution.”

“Ok, I’ll try this. Your family, through a thousand pieces of paper and fifty businesses, fake or real, that have changed their names fourteen times apiece, own the school, sort of like you own the airstrip.”

Sexual attractiveness was certainly not purely a function of one’s appearance… Mycroft found his spouse's mind absolutely as arousing as his body.

“That is a very astute analysis, my dear. Though Grandmama remains listed as a member of the governing board.”

“Are there any other members on that board?”

“Well…”

“Besides you.”

“Ah, then you find me bereft of options.”

“And you don’t find it weird that you actually go to the school you own?”

“I strive to use an easy hand in the rule of my dominion.”

“Meaning it’s just not important enough for you to really concern yourself with.”

Fantastically-arousing mind…

“That and the headmaster is not exactly aware of the boundaries of my responsibilities.”

“That makes you sort of like a spy, which is pretty funny, if you think about it.”

Sort of like... how charming. And how narrow in scope…

“I shall begin my search for a trenchcoat in the morning.”
“Yes! God, you’d be gorgeous in that.”

A selection of vintage models would be delivered to his home before week’s end to await his homecoming.

“You flatter me, my dear. But I must know, how did Sherlock fare today? Does he continue to make progress with his new acquaintance?”

Lestrade lay back on his bed and started smiling even wider than before. Sherlock’s loudly professed pain diminished substantially by the time he’d eaten his impromptu snack and taken the car through some very empty roads that had some unexpected twists and turns. Lestrade was going to owe his uncle a lot of hours for taking the past two afternoons off, but it was worth it to get a ringside seat to Sherlock’s burgeoning friendship.

“Oh, it was something to see. John was waiting for him to get to school. I did the afternoon pickup again and there was John running right behind him out to the car. Plus… hope you’re sitting down for this… he got Sherlock to say something nice.”

Mycroft would not admit to touching the arm of his chair for reassurance that he was sitting.

“Nice?”

“Can you believe it? Little tyke actually found the right levers to pull to get Sherlock to force something other than nastiness out of his face.”

Well, that was an extremely unexpected development. Not that Mycroft was disturbed by it; on the contrary, he was very satisfied by the turn of events. It went without saying that it would take a special person to attach to his brother in any form of friendship and, apparently, that special person had been found. Now, the mission would be to keep Sherlock from immolating the poor boy and destroying his chance to find someone besides himself and his husband to be his companion.

“I am taken aback by surprise. His technique?”

“Used cake. Shot the arrow straight into Sherlock’s chest right off the starting mark.”

“Oh… excellent. The child obviously has a strong streak of cunning.”

“Well, I don’t know about that, he’s the sweetest little thing. Real polite, too, but he does have to have some steel in his spine to take on the Prince of Evil and come out on top. And… don’t let him know I said this… I’m fairly sure that Sherlock is at least thinking about the kid being not being the end of his life.”

“I am very intrigued by this, Gregory, I shall not lie. What do you know of this John?”

“Almost nothing. He’s a boarder at school. He’s the new kid. Friendly and fairly outgoing. Small thing, but you can tell he’s not a pushover. Probably kick you in the bollocks good and hard if you try anything dumb. Can’t tell if he’s happy to be away from home or not, but he definitely brightened up when I gave him my number as a contact…”

So heartwarmingly paternal. An isolated child and his beloved Gregory pulls him under a wing like an abandoned chick. Two children now under his spouse’s indulgent gaze. It must be a mote of dust in his eye causing the slight mist that was beginning to obscure his vision.

“That was very kind of you, Gregory. It must be difficult to be not only a new child among an established cohort, but to have no ready base of support such as your family might provide.”
“I can imagine. So, I’ll check in now and then to make sure he’s ok and no one besides Sherlock is bothering him. Also said he could come out with us one afternoon for a little fun. Give him and Sherlock a little time to get to know each other away from school. Of course, I had to take a few minutes to bandage Sherlock’s feelings after that little offer. He got a little worried that he was being replaced or at least dragged down from the top spot on my list.”

Something that had not even occurred to Mycroft. Sherlock would react poorly to an intrusion on his established relationship, especially one so doting and loving as that provided by his Gregory.

“But he has been appeased?”

“Yeah, it was just a tiny bump in the road. It helped that he understands what it means to be lonely. He misses you, love.”

And Mycroft missed his fang-toothed, shrill-tongued goblin of a brother. He had never really given thought to how much he would miss Sherlock until their separation began to span long tracts of time. As outlandish was his brother’s behavior and as pervasive was his brother’s insanity in his own life, Mycroft would not wish any further divorce from his sibling.

“That is heartening to know. And I miss him greatly, also. The quiet is becoming discomfiting.”

“I know that’s true. It’s the same for me… I’ll be sitting at my desk during my own classes and wonder why nobody is yelling at me or calling me a peasant.”

“How quickly a noxious substance permeates even the hardest tissues.”

“Well, I’ll have a chance to purge a little out of my blood. I won’t be able to get over to see Sherlock for a bit to make up for the past couple of afternoons I’ve taken off, but I’ll call him every night to see how he’s doing.”

“You are so accommodating, Gregory. And Sherlock thrives in your capable hands. In the meantime, I shall have information gathered on young John Watson to craft a better portrait of the child.”

“What?”

“A minor matter, my dear. Merely a formality in these cases.”

The silence on the other end of the phone line dragged on to the point where Mycroft was certain he could hear the clichéd crickets chirping to fill the void.

“Gregory?”

“Do that a lot, do you?”

“Whenever someone is to be involved in family matters. It is a simple thing, really, but can yield very useful information. And the most powerful tool of all will forever be information.”

“Oh. Ok. I think I get it. Look, I gotta go. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Gregory? Is something wrong?”

But very little of that sentence was passed on as Mycroft heard the decided click of disconnection midway through. What could possibly be amiss? Could… could something have happened to Mother Lestrade? Did his lover hear sounds indicating a problem with his dear mother? Unlikely…
Mycroft heard nothing and there would have been some form of exclamation in his speech if something so worrying had occurred. Could Gregory himself be ill? Again, there would have been some preface. Mycroft stared at the phone for a long minute running thoughts through his head until a small tapping on the inside of his skull caught his attention. Following the mental sound, Mycroft scrolled through his memories and found the one that was politely asking for attention.

No.

Oh no.

Oh no no no…

That was not a thing to say to one’s fiancé. But he had not done such a thing for Gregory! Why had he not done such a thing for Gregory? Because Gregory was divine and one did not pry into the affairs of gods! How deeply he had dived into the ocean of love with his first glance at his husband… in that one glimpse he achieved perfect synchronicity and knew all that he would ever need to know about the one who would be the other half of his soul until the universe finally succumbed to the paralyzing grasp of bleak entropy. But now his spouse believed that he had been investigated. Spied upon. Doubted… oh heavens… manipulated, even. This was sufficiently severe that he might be served with divorce papers! The only bright spot was that he would have taken his own life long before Grandmama made good on her threat and fed her dogs sausages made from his flesh and intestines.

Mycroft quickly dialed Lestrade’s phone and listened to it ring over and over and over. His beloved was forsaking him. Lying, most likely, in a growing pool of tears as his heart slowly ceased to beat. Gregory would die thinking himself betrayed in a most heartless fashion. He had to make contact! Had to reach his dearest before it was too late! Another attempt to phone his spouse was as futile as the first and Mycroft knew that a call to the authorities to plead his case would not be appreciated in the slightest. There was nothing for it… he would have to enlist Sherlock.

“Why are you disturbing me? I have far better things to do with my time than speak with you, such as count my pores or watch an oak tree grow.”

“Sherlock, you will close your mouth and it will remain closed for the next several minutes until I finish my discourse. This shall be sufficiently difficult without your continuous interruptions.”

“It is wildly amusing that you believe I shall obey your pathetic attempt at delivering orders. It is like a pustulous kumquat-colored slug trying to command an army of cougars.”

“I have no time for your consonance, Sherlock. You must listen to me. This is a matter of grave seriousness.”

“Has America run out of food?”

“This concerns Gregory.”

“Pfft. What offense have you perpetrated? Did you attempt to describe the salient features of your sexual fetishes, thus sending him to the hospital with acute abdominal cramping?”

“Notice that there is no levity in my voice.”

“How could I notice that? There is never any levity in your voice. You speak in a sonorous monotone that could lull a hyperactive horsefly to sleep.”
“Curtail your infantile insults! I have lost my husband!”

“Lost? As in mistaking him for a baked chicken and swallowing him whole?”

“Lost as in our relationship is most likely terminated. And I am entirely truthful in this.”

The line was silent for a moment and Mycroft swore he could hear his brother’s mind processing the information. A severed marriage would impact both of them and both would suffer the wounds of lethally-broken hearts.


“In truth… nothing. However, in the course of our conversation I made mention of a matter that, I believe, displeased him significantly. So great was his disappointment, his indignation, his… heartbeat… that he terminated our discussion with no preamble and is now refusing to answer my attempts to reestablish communication.”

“You imbecile! What could you have possibly said to discombobulate someone as bovinely placid as the lackey?”

“It was a foolish thing, ultimately. I mentioned that I would direct a simple gathering of information on your new acquaintance and…”

“What! Are you even more brain-rotted than I formerly thought? I would not have believed it was even possible! Why in the name of whatever god you whale-people pray to would you order the preparation of a dossier on John Watson?”

“For the same reason I direct such an action for your instructors, your tutors, the house staff… merely as a mechanism to enhance security and…”

“Oh, do not stop there. We have yet to arrive at the truly shameful admission, have we?”

“Shameful… I presume some might consider it thus. With sufficient information, especially if one collects the keystone pieces… a person’s actions can be predicted and… motivated, shall we say.”

“You… I cannot even think of a suitable descriptor so repugnant are you to me right now!”

“Sherlock…”

“Why do you insist on meddling! You are an incalculably intolerable busybody and you have cost us… what in Lavosier’s name did you hope to find with John! That he is a Soviet agent reduced to egg-cup size by a secret shrink ray!”

“He is now within your personal sphere and I will not allow someone in that position who has not been properly vetted!”

“How much can you vet for a toddler!”

“He has family, does he not? I will not take chances with your safety.”

“Oh, that is rich. No, let me rephrase… oh, that is destitute, because it is surely what you will find if you wade through the weepingly pitiful life of John Watson. Based on his serf-class pattern of speech, his embarrassingly poor level of academic progress and his failure in any way to demonstrate one iota of conduct appropriate to one raised in even a merchant-caliber home, I can conclude that
the greatest danger from John’s firepit-huddling relations is that I contract lice!”

“I will not apologize for taking all steps to ensure your life is never placed in danger.”

“And you revealed to the shop boy that you perpetrated an excruciatingly-inappropriate invasion of his privacy. Oh and I forget… used that illicitly-gained knowledge to maneuver him like a marionette into your flabby, fish-fleshed arms for the purposes of his sexual enslavement. Puft. I spit on you at distance.”

“I did no such thing! I… I did not even perform a check on Gregory when I mated my heart to his. I knew his being, inner and outer, in the blink of an eye and any further information would have been superfluous minutiae.”

“So you would offer disrespect to my friends, but leave your own with their honor intact? Puft. Again I defile you with my bodily fluids.”

So dumbstruck was Mycroft at Sherlock’s use of the word “friends” that he completely forgot to worry about the potentially spittle-stained floor.

“And now you are a member of the tribe of milquetoasts who were too feeble to retain their grip on their concubines. Hah! If I was not in the position of potentially suffering an extreme upheaval in my carefully arranged plan for the peasant’s subservience, I would laugh at you a second time!”

“But, as you screech, you are also to suffer if Gregory cannot be persuaded to return to the bosom of our family, then… our family shall have no bosom.”

“Every day you grow more detached from your faculties. However, your basic premise is sound and since you are completely incapable of repairing the destruction you have wrought, I shall have to take it upon myself to do so. However… it will cost you dearly.”

Of course.

“What is your price?”

“Oh no… not just yet. I have not been given nearly enough time to give the matter proper thought. We shall leave it as ‘a favor for a favor’ and I will collect at a time and place of my choosing.”

“Is there a reason you have canted the timbre of your voice to match that of a villain in a particularly clichéd version of a film noir presentation?”

“Enough! You have lost the right to criticize my emoting!”

“I shall agree for the evening to refrain from making commentary on your performance. Now, I presume you shall visit Gregory immediately?”

“I shall try. However, if he has already fled his palm-frond-thatched lean-to to seek comfort in the arms of a previous conquest, then I shall not roam the streets calling for him like a runaway dog.”

It was fortuitous that his day had ended early because Mycroft was not all convinced he could successfully control his trembling now with the thought that he had been the vehicle of his own cuckoldng.

“Then why are you still there? Find the driver and make your way to Gregory’s home this instant!”
“I will! I must first wash off the leaf paste.”

No, this was not an area into which Mycroft would venture.

“Then be at it! I shall attempt contact again with Gregory before the time he normally retires for the evening and I pray you have been successful.”

“That you doubt me highlights why you are a sadly unsuccessful paramour for the lackey. You obviously lack the mental acumen to properly observe and make correct deductions about his needs for a rewarding relationship. I would hurl at you more of my saliva, however… the leaves are beginning to make my skin itch. Try not to further erode your wedding vows with your horrendous marital skills for I have not the patience for this again.”

The line went dead in a very loud manner and Mycroft set aside the phone, giving him both hands in which to hold his head. He was placing the future of his sacred bond in the hands of Sherlock. Truly, he had never been in a situation so desperate…

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Fucking Mycroft. Who the hell did he think he was going rooting around in his life? It wasn’t like he had anything to hide, but the idea of someone prying up his floorboards and looking for skeletons was sickening. Especially someone… well, he was going to have to do some rethinking about things. And that ‘information is the most important tool’ business… how do you trust someone like that? What if all they’d built had been part of some scripted play Mycroft put together based on whatever his snooping had taught him. What if he’d fallen in love with someone who plotted to make that happen? Fucking Mycroft. Well, he wasn’t going to sit around and have his life played with like he was some kind of doll. Fucking… fucking… Mycroft.

Lestrade lay there staring at his ceiling, happy that his mum wasn’t home because he really didn’t want anyone around right now. Everything had been going so well… he’d seen a real future out there and that vision was fading faster than…

“What the fuck?”

“Help me!”

Lestrade sprang off his bed, following the noise and looked out his window to see Sherlock running in a circle through their tiny yard, the two-doors-down neighbor’s dog hot on his heels. If the crazy little troll would just do some of that observing he claimed he was so good at, he’d notice that the dog was having a wonderful time because it was the friendliest dog in England. Little thing that was white with tons of small black spots and the best with kids, as it was proving by showing Sherlock a grand time.

“Why?”

“I am going to be mauled!”

“By Sprinkle?”

“I shall be killed by the dripping maw of the canine with the most ridiculous name in the world! This is intolerable!”

“Just stop running and watch what happens.”

“My throat shall be ripped out!”
The dog would have to jump to reach your bum. I think your throat’s safe.”

“If this rabid creature bites me in any compromising locations, my ghost shall bind itself to you and I shall make your life an unrelenting misery.”

“Oh, so you mean like normal. I can handle that. Just stop running.”

Another two laps passed before Sherlock finally stopped, more out of exhaustion than the desire to follow Lestrade’s advice, and suddenly he was attacked by a leaping, ferocious… perhaps not ferocious… aggressive… that might be a tad out of bounds… energetic canine. Who ran around him barking when not leaping up and laying dirty paws on his trousers.

“See? She’s a sweet thing and loves to play. Why don’t you get down there and roll around with her. Have yourself a little fun.”

“Surely you jest. Actually, I am certain that you are attempting humor because even you are not so lacking in intelligence to consider that a possibility.”

“Yeah, big dumb me for thinking a boy would want to have a chance to play with a dog.”

“It is continuing to soil me!”

“Fine, you troll. Sprinkle! Go home, girl. Go on… that’s a girl… there. You happy?”

“I am covered in filth and dog effluvia and you ask me if I am happy. At what age did the massive head trauma occur that rendered your brain into porridge?”

“Let’s see… when did I meet you?”

“I think I would rather face that pestiferous hound than your cringingly-embarrassing attempts at wit.”

“Want me to call her back?”

“NO! Move away, I am now going to enter your home.”

“There’s a little something someone invented called a door. Want me to demonstrate how to use it for you?”

“Idiot. This is the parsimonious route.”

“Fine, then get your parsnips in here and… why the hell are you here anyway?”

Sherlock climbed in through the open window, waiting until he was in Lestrade’s bedroom to brush away the remnants of his life-threatening encounter.

“I am here because a flatulent wildebeest is seeking to prevent its well-deserved march to extinction.”

Mycroft. It had been pretty stupid to think that when he didn’t answer his phone, Mycroft would just let the matter lie. But Lestrade had not bargained on him enlisting Sherlock’s help.

“Yeah, well… good luck. I’m not really in the mood to talk about your brother.”

“I am not in the mood to set aside my vital research to perform this tiresome service, so please do not attempt to equate your mood with my far more thunderous one.”
“Look, Sherlock. This isn’t something you need to get involved in.”

“I agree; however, I have weighed the agony of spending the rest of my life listening to my brother weep and rend his garments against the agony of having to participate in this amateurish bodice-ripper of a serialized drama and the latter is the lesser of the two affronts to my dignity. Now, you will agree to answer your telephone when next Mycroft calls and allow him to speak with you.”

“No, I’m not. At least not today. Give me some time to think and…”

“I do not believe you understand. I did not offer you a choice. If you do not take steps to repair the damage Cakecroft has perpetrated, then my life shall be completely disorganized and that is not something I can permit. With the coming battle that is John Watson, I refuse to fight a war on two fronts.”

Lestrade sat on the edge of his bed, then patted it to indicate to Sherlock to join him. There was no surprise when the Sprinkle-traumatized child hurled himself onto the bed and claimed every bit of available space as his personal dominion.

“It’s good that you’re willing to help your brother, Sherlock, but this is between him and me and I need some time to figure out if I even want there to be a him and me anymore. I mean, you don’t know what he…”

“I know everything. His Corpulence confessed in a most detailed fashion.”

“He did? Maybe you don’t understand…”

“There is nothing I do not understand, especially in matters as insipid as this. Mycroft’s obsessive busybodying is vile in the extreme, however, there is a piece of information you lack. He did not, in complete violation of his own nosy nature, prepare a file on you.”

He didn’t?

“He didn’t?”

“No. I shall not go into the maudlin rambling he provided as a reason, however, that particular step was never taken against you. You should consider yourself unique, since no person has prompted as many shifts in the behavior of the quivering blancmange as you.”

“Oh… ok. Ok. That’s… that’s interesting.”

“No, it is sickening because one’s behavior should not be shaped by anything other than other than one’s own desires, but he has obviously shed reason like a snake sheds its epidermis. Please restrict your use of the term ‘interesting’ to matters for which it is properly applied, such as anything to do with me.”

“Yeah, I’ll try to remember that. So he really didn’t go out digging up all my dirt and pull together some plan to…”

“Enslave you?”

“Stop interrupting me, you bastard! But, yeah.”

“It would be entirely expected that he would, given that it is Mycroft; however, he did not. Whatever enslavement you have contracted was of your own doing.”
So Mycroft hadn’t done anything wrong. Lestrade still was not happy with the idea that Mycroft did that to other people, but he couldn’t stay angry at his boyfriend for something he actually hadn’t done to him. Well, now he felt stupid. Thinking about throwing away the best thing in his life because of something that wasn’t even true. And he hadn’t exactly been willing to give Mycroft the chance to tell his side of things… It was official. Sherlock wasn’t the hysterich. He was.

“You said Mycroft’s going to call tonight?”

“Yes, therefore, you must do everything within your power to eliminate his internal discord so that he ceases to bother me with your petty relationship concerns.”

“I’ll do my best. Wow… made a right mess of things, didn’t I?”

“I am happy to lay the blame at the lumbering warthog’s feet, since it was only his besottedness that spared you his meddling. As it is, I shall have to berate him a further time about his turning his grasping claws towards John Watson.”

Now that was something to take notice of.

“You worried about John?”

“Do not be ridiculous. I simply do not want him to be given any acknowledgement of any kind by anyone.”

Wanted to keep his little friend all to himself. Well, well, well…

“That part of your depersonalizing strategy?”

“It is a critical feature and Mycroft shall not interfere with my plans.”

“I’ll pass that along. Look, Sherlock… thanks for debasing yourself enough to help out me and your brother.”

“I accept your gratitude.”

“And will expect payment for your efforts.”

“Of course. I shall present you with an invoice at my earliest convenience.”

“I’ll start saving up. Now, how about we see what Mum’s got in the kitchen? If I’m not mistaken, there might be something chocolatey hiding in there…”

“Hmmm… I find that acceptable. I shall, however, have the largest portion.”

“Part of your payment?”

“Part of my natural rights as your superior.”

“Oh yeah, forgot about that.”

Stuffed full with two large slices of cake, Sherlock announced that he was returning home to continue his interrupted experiments.

“Shall you be collecting me tomorrow afternoon?”
“Wish I could, but I’ve got to work. Probably can’t make it out to see you for at least a few days since I’ve got some hours to make up and get my own schoolwork done on top of it all. But I’ll call tomorrow night and you know you can call or come by anytime. We’ll look at doing something fun when I’ve got the time off. Want to do a film again?”

“Mill amongst the masses? My revulsion is beginning to choke me.”

“Oh, film it is. And I’ll take you shopping soon, too. I’m sure you’re about ready to top off your science supplies.”

“That is a correct assumption. Already I am having to ration my limewater.”

“Right, that’ll be a priority. We can visit the bookstore, too. I’m sure you’ve got a list you want ordering. So, thanks again, Sherlock. You really were a big help.”

“Of course I was. And I shall expect a phone call tomorrow so that I may describe to you how far my spirits have fallen due to association with John Watson.”

“I won’t forget. See you, later.”

Lestrade walked Sherlock out to the car where the driver was patiently waiting with a book and saw the boy safely off to return home. Ok, first domestic dispute and his better half wasn’t even in the country. A domestic dispute that Sherlock had to mediate. This was the dumbest thing ever, but at least it was fixable.

Once back inside, Lestrade took a quick shower, mostly to wash away some of the emotions of the day, settled himself in front of the telly and, again, silently thanked his Mum for picking tonight to step out with some of her girlfriends so he had the house to himself. When the phone finally rang, Greg felt ready to eat his share of crow and fix things like he’d promised himself.

“Greg here.”

“Oh blessed heaven, thank you, my dear. Thank you from the very bottom of my unworthy heart for agreeing to speak with me.”

“Mycroft… you don’t have an unworthy heart. I jumped off the cliff all on my own and Sherlock told me that the cliff was something I imagined anyway. I’m the one that’s sorry. It was wrong of me to make assumptions… I should have trusted you more. I just got… I was surprised. Then angry. Then, well, sort of ashamed that you thought I needed checking out, not that you did… but that’s where my brain went. I’m the one that needs to apologize and I do. I’m more sorry than you can imagine.”

Mycroft began to uncurl slightly from the fetal ball he’d been contorted into for the past hour as the anxiety began to reduce his mental age to the single digits. He had expected many things from his husband, all of them painful or heart-shattering, but certainly not an apology. He did not deserve an apology… it was only happenstance that he was not guilty of the very thing that had distressed his spouse.

“It is I who must offer apology, my love. I gave no thought to my words and their implications and you were aggrieved as a result. Your conclusions were perfectly sound given the evidence and I cannot in any way fault you for your reasoning, knowing as you do that my life and habits are not the norm. It is true that, given the circumstances of my existence, I must demonstrate due caution both for myself and for Sherlock, but be assured that not once… never for a single moment… did I consider having you investigated. The thought did not even enter my mind, though it rose readily for
Sherlock’s young friend, as well as for all others who are given access to our lives. But not you. Never you. And… I can only imagine your mind on learning my philosophy on information. It is a true philosophy, one that has served and will serve me well, but I see clearly how that portion of our discussion would have been monstrously troubling. If it is a balm, let me offer that I did not mean those words in any way for the arena of personal relationships. For things I must do as I conduct matters of business, yes… but not for those who I hold in my heart. I grossly miscommunicated and you suffered dearly because of it. For that I am profoundly sorry.”

Lestrade felt the knot in his stomach loosen. Mycroft wasn’t angry at how stupid he’d been and… it had been nice to hear from the source that he’d never been under suspicion. So, life back on track and he and his… well, boyfriend was still the best word though Lestrade honestly felt they’d grown beyond that… could get back to the business of making their personal little world a very nice place to live in.

“Sounds like we both stepped in a little crap, but that’s another reason I know we’re good for each other. We do something dumb, stand up and be a man to apologize and accept those apologies because they’re real and… well because not doing it is pretty fucking petty. That’s why we’ll work, and keep working… because we do what it takes to make things work and I don’t think that’s going to change.”

Mycroft grabbed the pillow off of his bed and bit sharply into it to keep from releasing the exultant shout that was rapidly bubbling up in his throat. His husband not only forgave but freely proclaimed his commitment to their future together. So confident, so mature of perspective, so… why could he not be there to fully demonstrate how thoroughly his fiancé’s words affected him! He would light his lover’s body bright as a Christmas tree with marks of his own devotion to their marriage.

“I completely concur. Few have the strength of character necessary to create and maintain a relationship as strong and successful as ours is now and as it will continue to be.”

And the offering of his own pledge of commitment. Their marriage vows would be staunchly supported by the bricks and mortar they laid down with these continued words and actions. Truly… they were blessed.

“And when you’re back we can, you know… start doing some more talking about things.”

“Things?”

“You know… things. I’ve been doing some thinking while you’ve been gone and… yeah, just things. You still wearing your pendant?”

That… the only thing keeping Mycroft from commandeering an aircraft and having the pilot spirit him home was the knowledge that he would have to return and clean up the chaos left in his wake.

“It never leaves my body, my dear. Always it lays against my skin so that I may draw strength from its symbolism.”

“Good. I don’t take mine off either. So when you get back, maybe we can have a night to ourselves so we can… talk.”

Mycroft was practiced enough in reading his husband’s voice that the smile behind the words was as visible in his mind as it would be were his loving spouse with him in the room.

“Is that all you wish to do, my dear? Talk?”

“That’s the first thing on my list, but there’s room on the paper to add other things.”
“I look very forward to learning what you have concocted.”

“I'll give it my best effort.”

“Oh, I expect nothing less.”
Chapter 3

“Sherlock! Sherlock! Sherlock!”

John was aware that he wasn’t deaf so Sherlock was not confident his ruse of obliviousness would last very long.

“Sherlock! Hi!”

Driver was more accommodating than the shop boy and had deposited him away from the main entrance, however, John apparently had dog genes in his DNA and tracked Sherlock down within five minutes of his entering the building. Now he stood there with a manic grin as if his poorly-developed brain was watching an imaginary comedy program concerning cartoon produce and animated canines.

“Is there a reason you must shout my name through the halls as if you were announcing a fire?”

“Well, you don’t listen most of the time, so I figured I’d just say it a lot and one might get through into your head.”

Perhaps a fire was the correct course of action. Burn everything to the ground, forcing John Watson to return to his slum and leave him to be home-instructed in peace. However, since the lackey previously refused to participate in his education, not unexpected given Lestrade’s complete lack of higher-order thinking skills and bountiful laziness, that would leave Mycroft and… no. That option did not bear contemplation. His mind would quickly turn into night soil if he had suffer his brother’s unending and unnecessarily verbose droning. Why Mycroft could not express himself in a precise and concise fashion, as he did, was completely baffling.

“Have you perhaps considered that I fail to listen for the reason that you vocalize nothing I have any interest in hearing?”

“Nope. Because it’s not true. You’re just playing at being all mysterious and… what’s that word that means you stand away from other people and not in a nice way?”

“Kingly.”

“Not what I was going for.”

“Regal.”

“That’s the same thing.”

“No, it is far more generic. Superior?”

“Almost. Starts with an A I think.”

“Almighty.”

“You’re no good at this, at all.”

“I disagree. At least I can produce options to proffer, you cannot hand me a single one in return.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter. We’ll leave it at mysterious and some other word that starts with A. So,
did you and Greg have a good time yesterday? Did you really get to drive and go to a pub? Do you get to do that a lot?”

Sherlock made a mental note to have Mycroft order the erection of a bunker within the school walls in which he could spend his before-school time so as to avoid the buzzing fly that was John. How could he suitably fortify his mental walls for the upcoming hours of endless boredom with this degree of distraction. And why did the pebble care how the afternoon had been spent?

“Why do you care how my afternoon was spent?”

“Because it sounded like you were going to have fun and I just… I just hope you did, that’s all.”

John wasn’t smiling anymore and Sherlock wasn’t sure why he was experiencing some bother over the fact. Perhaps it was because John’s face looked wrong when it wasn’t wearing his typical village-idiot’s grin. Yes, that was the explanation. John’s normally grotesque features were even more disabled by the downturned mouth and eyes and he, of course, was troubled by having this homely visage greet him at the start of his day. It was highly inconsiderate of the pixie to be the source of turmoil, however, he would take the more noble path and simply remove said turmoil before it spread to innocent bystanders. Not that anyone in this school, besides him, could be called innocent.

“Very well. On my command, the peasant chauffeured me to the pub for a refreshment and then I commandeered the vehicle for a leisurely meander through the western roads. So long as I ignored his presence, it was an acceptable afternoon.”

“You’re so lucky! All I did was clean my room and study. I have to catch up a little to the rest of you, but that’s ok. I like to study and learn new things. You’re very smart, so I’m sure you don’t have to spend lots of time studying, which is great because you get to just hang around and do fun stuff instead. Is your brother fun like Greg is?”

“My experiments are very important and occupy the whole of my mental energies unless the lackey begs for my attention and I am forced to set aside my work and throw him a stick to fetch.”

“Research?”

“My experiments are very important and occupy the whole of my mental energies unless the lackey begs for my attention and I am forced to set aside my work and throw him a stick to fetch.”

“That’s amazing! What do you experiment on?”

“Everything. At least, everything of interest for which I have sufficient equipment. Mycroft refuses to outfit my laboratory properly and I must make do until such time as I have access to our
accounts and can throw off his yoke of tightfistedness. However, I do have detailed plans for my new laboratory and I can manipulate his concubine into making Mycroft carry out those plans to the letter.”

“What’s a concubine?”

“A companion taken for sexual service without the benefit of marriage. Though, to my unending distress, that will be rectified at some point and our family will have to endure the diminishment concomitant with the addition of the impoverished laborer to our ranks. I shall not in the least be surprised if Mycroft is assassinated because of his insult to the Holmes heritage.”

“I… they have sex?”

“Good. You sound as appalled as the situation merits.”

“No… it’s just… really?”

“There, unfortunately, is little doubt. However, if Mycroft remains sated, then he will go forward with his plan to move us into our new home, where my laboratory shall occupy the lion’s share of the architectural footprint. I must, therefore, suffer their lustful looks and nauseating mouth meanderings until such time as I have acquired my property and can begin my campaign to restore their platonic association. It is simply a matter of timing and tactics.”

“Wow. You’ve got an exciting life! Are you actually going to get a real lab?”

“I have one now and I shall gain a larger and better equipped facility when Mycroft enters into his marriage contract. My laboratory shall rival those at the best research institutions in the world, which is only fitting since my research shall stand head and shoulders above their pathetic attempts at scientific investigation.”

“Can I see it?”

“The experiments I conduct can be classed as secret, so you may not observe my work.”

“Ok… but can I just see your lab? You can… you can see my room! It’ll be like a trade!”

“Your sterile cell weighed against my professional laboratory… I think the trade would not exactly be an equitable one.”

“You can’t say that until you actually see my room, though. I could have all sorts of interesting stuff.”

“I doubt you could afford anything that would offer me an iota of interest.”

“But you don’t know, do you? Could have made something or found something… I could have a diamond the size of your head in my sock drawer.”

“Diamond is simply an allotrope of carbon. There is nothing interesting in that.”

“Ok… maybe I have a death ray.”

“There exists no such device as a death ray. I would know.”

“No you wouldn’t. What if… what if my grandfather found it in a secret Nazi bunker during the war?”
“That is ridiculous. The intense study of the documents pertaining to that conflict would surely have uncovered its existence.”

“Not if it was a huge super secret! And I could have it right now.”

Intolerable! If anyone had a death ray, it should be him, not the bacterium!

“I want to see the death ray.”

“If I have a death ray, it’d be in my room, so you’d have to go there to see it.”

“Fine. I shall visit your convict quarters after class has let out for the day.”

“Great! Oh, we’d better go. I’ll see you at lunch, Sherlock.”

The agony…

“As I must. Shall… shall there be cake?”

“I don’t know, I didn’t ask.”

Dereliction of duty. Already the pipsqueak was primed for a court martial. Hopefully to end in a hanging, which would provide him with his first human cadaver. Perhaps John Watson would be of use, after all.

“Lax. But, I expect little else.”

“Oh then, bye!”

Sherlock watched the smaller boy race away towards his first lesson and began planning the experiments he could do with a death ray. First off… Mycroft…

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“Why are you here?”

“We’re going to my room! I have to show you were it is, don’t I?”
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Ah, there was that.

“I did not require assistance. Locating your cardboard box behind the bins would not have proven difficult.”

“Hey! I have a real room, just so you know. Well, come on. It’s this way.”

John pulled Sherlock along until they were finally at his assigned room. Sherlock looked around and was not at all pleased. The amount of money Grandmama was wasting on appointing these barracks was scandalous. Especially those set aside for charity cases such as John. Windows… why would someone spend money on windows when the room’s occupant was too short to even peer through them…

“Isn’t this great! And I’ve got shelves and the bed is… watch!”

John leaped onto the mattress and bounced.

“Try it! If you really jump hard you can bounce almost to the ceiling.”
“I did not come here to bounce.”

However, Sherlock was experiencing an urge to begin a series of experiments focused on human projectiles. Someone as compact as John would make a fine projectile for a trebuchet or canon.

“So what? Just because you go for a swim doesn’t mean you can’t play in the sand, too.”

“Since I do neither, your point is irrelevant. Now, present the death ray.”

“That? Oh, I don’t have one of those.”

WHAT!

“What!”

“I said ‘if.’ If I had a death ray… but I don’t. It would be amazing if I did, though. Maybe you can make one! You could work on it in your lab and I could help. You be the mad scientist and I’ll be your Igor.”

John had no idea why John was suddenly shambling across the room like a member of the undead, but it was actually somewhat unnerving.

“Stop emulating a zombie!”

“Igor wasn’t a zombie, was he? I’m not sure he was actually ever dead in the first place.”

“I could not care less about the mortality status of this Igor person, however, I do care about your use of trickery to draw me into your lair.”

“Oh, I’m sorry about that, but I just thought it’d be fun if we could see my room and know where it is, so if you wanted to come by after school to do something, you’d be able to.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

“Because… well, we could have fun. I think we could have fun, at least.”

“At the risk of sounding repetitive – why?”

“Because we’re friends! And friends do things together.”

Friends? Why did everyone assume he and John were friends despite the wealth of evidence to the contrary?

“I have no concept of how your mind has extracted the details of our interactions and reached that conclusion, but given the likelihood of mental damage due to fetal-alcohol syndrome due to your indigent mother’s need to soothe the pains of her pathetic life with copious quantities of cheap alcohol…”

John’s slight frown from the morning had bothered Sherlock, but seeing the boy near tears actually shook him. He had no idea why, but not even he could deny he was feeling emotion. Another blight from the puny locust that was staring at him with moist eyes.

“My mum wasn’t a drunk.”

Then why was the tamarind so distressed?
“Then I am confused as to your current state of emotional breakdown.”

John sat on his bed, without, Sherlock noticed, the abundance of energy that marked his last encounter with that particular piece of furniture.

“My mum was wonderful. The best! She was always there when I got home from school and hugged me and when I was little she’d tell me stories before I went to bed and she… she always smiled! Always…”

Was… one did not discuss humans in the past tense unless… oh.

“Your mother is deceased.”

John wiped his eyes, but didn’t lift his gaze from the floor.

“Yeah. She got sick and died a couple of years ago.”

That explained much, but gave Sherlock no firm idea how to reduce his own unease at John’s condition. Perhaps commiseration was in order. It was a proven technique for gaining trust and reducing tension in one’s opponent.

“My father is also deceased. He suffered cardiac arrest and died when I was five.”

“I’m… I’m sorry.”

“I am supposed to say thank you, according to society’s inane guidelines, but it seems pointless since you were not responsible for his death. That was purely the fault of genetics. His own father died at a moderate age because of heart issues.”

“I mean I’m sorry that you had to have your dad die.”

“Oh… then I offer you my own regrets for the passing of your mother.”

There. A prime example of socially-appropriate behavior. Now, he could make his final inquiries about any possibility of the promised death ray and…

“Thanks. And she wasn’t a drunk. That’s my dad.”

Where was the lackey when he was needed! This level of personal interaction was not something Sherlock was comfortable navigating. It was far better left to another of John’s tribe, who had knowledge of these things and skills for their management.

“Your father is alcohol-dependent.”

“That’s a nice way of saying it. After mum died it… it got really bad and… Harry just left…”

“Your brother?”

“Sister – Harriet. She left and then it was just me and… I live with my aunt now. Well, when I’m not here. But she’s nice, so I guess it’s ok.”

Sherlock disliked in the extreme being in the position of having absolutely no idea what to do. John appeared no longer to be in danger of weeping, but his posture was certainly not at his marginally-acceptable baseline. And it, again, seemed wrong. John was a field mouse; however, he was not an entirely pestilent one and there was something notably amiss about a despondent field mouse.
“If it matters, I shall also offer you my regrets for the living members of your family and their dishonorable behavior. If you like, I can direct Mycroft to have them deported.”

“Like that could happen.”

“It would depend on which country owed him a favor at the moment, but I assure you he could place them on a pig farm adjacent to waste-treatment facility before week’s end if he so chose.”

Why had not thought to bring his notebook! He should be documenting the effectiveness of his abilities in steering the moods and behaviors of John Watson. Now the cake crumb was smiling! Valuable data had been lost due to his shortsightedness. Mycroft, as skin-blistering as it was to admit, had been correct – John Watson could be a research subject of some interest.

“Thanks, Sherlock! And that’s how I know we’re friends – friends cheer each other up!”

They do?

“They do?”

“Sure. But I guess if you don’t want to, you don’t have to stay. I mean, I’m sure you’ve things to work on with our lab and everything. I won’t mind, I promise.”

Unfortunately, until the lackey took him to the shops, he lacked the supplies to continue his current projects. And said lackey would not be available to function as his servant today due to the chain around his ankle, staking him to his till. Therefore, there would be little to keep him occupied if he returned home at this point. Though he lacked his field notebook, if he remained, he could continue his study of John Watson in this semblance of his native habitat.

“I have no pressing commitments, therefore I can remain for a brief while. Go and inform Driver to wait.”

“Why me?”

“You seem to enjoy running, therefore, if you perform the task it will be accomplished more quickly.”

“Oh… ok that makes sense. Back in a minute.”

John, as predicted, ran at full tilt out of the room and Sherlock used the time to search his room. Nothing remotely approaching a death ray, however, he could grant John some credit for his selection of reading material, which was decidedly above the tawdry trash of the other rabble with whom he had acquaintance. He then took out John’s school notebooks and began to look through John’s work. Again, as predicted, not up to par. However, it was closer to par than he had imagined.

“Hey! What are you doing with my stuff?”

“Correcting your notes for your history essay. You are in desperate need of focused instruction on grammar and word choice. And is this truly as far as you have gotten? I have already completed my composition and it is exceeds all of the assignment parameters. If it is not read aloud as a condemnation of other submissions, I shall be gravely insulted.”

“Yeah… I know. I like to write, actually, but I’m just sort of slow about it and I don’t think my teachers at my other school were as strict about some things as these are.”
“Naturally. You attended an institution designed to train workers to toil at the direction of government in cabbage fields and shoe factories. However, I shall make the necessary corrections and you will rewrite accordingly.”

“You’re going to help me with my essay?”

“You have been seen with me, therefore, if your illiteracy is broadcast throughout the school, your shame will reflect upon me.”

“And then you’d have me deported to some smelly sheep farm.”

“Don’t be absurd. That is Mycroft’s job.”

Lestrade set aside the magazine he was reading and smiled widely at the thunderous look on Sherlock’s face. He had a very strong suspicion they would be talking about John within five minutes.

“Be silent, lackey. I have endured a long and tedious day and have no patience for your tomfoolery. Simply supply me with your finest product, lackluster as it is, until I command you to stop.”

“You trying out your comedy act? I think you might need a little more practice.”

“Fool. I was forced to associate for a prolonged period with the pea and I find myself drained from the experience. You will refresh me.”

“Got a hose out back if you need a cool down. Can’t guarantee it’s not full of cholera or whatever else you think is in poor people’s water.”

“It becomes clearer each day why Mycroft clings to your flesh like a hungry tick. Only you are sufficiently crippled in wit to match him in humorlessness.”

“Good, then I won’t be having any competition for my sexy man. Oh, catching an arrow in the chest now, are we? Smart plan varying up your painful deaths now and then. Keeps things fresh.”

“Chocolate. Now. Lest I run from the shop shrieking that it is infested with plague-infested rats.”

“Yeah, yeah… but hang on… prolonged? Why would you have a long day? Please don’t tell me you had to stay after and get a talking to already.”

“Of course not. The instructors have long ago learned the uselessness of such an action since they cannot speak at a sufficient level to properly convince me of their point. If you must know… the blame rests solely with John Watson.”

Lestrade mentally punched the air in victory.

“Oh? You two hanging about with each other after school now?”

“There was no other possible option. His progress on his essay was embarrassing. If someone did not take him in hand and spoon-feed him instruction on how to form letters and use punctuation, his work would be as impenetrable as a tablet from the lost Atlantean civilization. And that is
without making mention of his complete inability to compose a sentence, paragraph or understand in any meaningful way the material on which his essay is centered.”

Two hearty mental air punches and bit of a jig. Helpful Sherlock was a very rare subspecies of the breed and a sighting was definitely worth a little treat.

“Here, hop up on the stool and talk to me. You can start your chocolate binge with these new chocolatey-orangey things.”

“Your product knowledge is pathetic. Were it not for nepotism, you would have been discharged ages ago.”

“Shut it and start chewing. And talking. You helped John with his essay and what else?”

“What do you mean what else?”

“Like getting to know each other or playing some games or…”

“I am not a child!”

“Yeah, ok… or go exploring…”

“Was this the nature of your formative years? If so, then many issues have now been explained perfectly.”

“Get going… I want a report. Pretend it’s one of your science thingies and give me the whole story.”

“Thingies… is there no bottom to the chasm of your incompetence?”

“Guess not. So start at the beginning.”

“Ugh… very well. Through chicanery and variations of sleight-of-hand, John tricked me into visiting his room and from there the trap was sprung.”

“Oh, you should have liked that. He good at making traps? Were they rope ones or did the lad learn to weld?”

“Be silent! If you wish to hear of my drawn-and-quartering, you will not molest my ears any further with your insipidity.”

“Fine, I’ll keep my insipidness to myself.”

“I will hold you to that promise with substantial force, if required.”

“Now I’m worried. Those little matchstick arms battering at me…. hate to have to try and glue them back together after you’ve snapped them both. Mycroft would have my guts for garters if he had to go and hire some arm specialist to put you right again.”

Sherlock’s glare might have lost some of its effectiveness due to chocolate-smudging, but it was still ferocious enough to make Lestrade think he was cute as a kid could be.

“Are you quite finished?”

“For now. Maybe.”
“AS I was saying, John’s craven dishonesty about the death ray lured me…”

“Death ray?”

“It is of no importance.”

“I’d think death rays were very important, actually.”

“One cannot assign importance to something that does not exist.”

“Hence that craven rigmarole.”

“Quite. You see now the danger of the turbulence he creates.”

This time Lestrade pictured himself dancing a celebratory waltz with his Mycroft in his arms… that John kid wasn’t anybody’s fool. Death ray… like dragging a mouse behind you if you wanted to catch a cat.

“Turbulence, got it. So you hung around with him anyway and you two did your schoolwork together…”

“I did his schoolwork. It is impossible that he could assist me with mine as it far too complex for his rudimentary thought processes to grasp.”

“Tell me you didn’t actually write his paper for him?”

“I did not. I merely pointed each of his numerous errors and directed him to correct them in my presence.”

“I’m sure he liked that.”

“He was appropriately grateful, though he did not provide me compensation for my instruction.”

“That’s because friends don’t pay friends for help.”

“Friends! That word is like acid dripping into my ear. I can taste its putrescence.”

Touched a nerve there. Sherlock was still sensitive about the subject, which meant he hadn’t written it off completely yet.

“Here. Have another chocolately-orangey and clear out your tongue.”

Sherlock shoved the entire chocolate into his mouth and made a grand show of swirling the softened mass around to purge the toxins.

“You know, I have to wonder… what’s so bad about having a friend?”

“They are unnecessary. And bothersome.”

“Hmmm… shame, because I think, if you wanted to, of course, you could actually be a really good friend to someone.”

Now, would the bait be taken?

“Of course I could! Why would you even doubt that I would be less than exemplary in any endeavor? If I so chose, I could stand as the model for the heights to which friendship could rise!”
One large fish was down on the hook. Time to tug on the line.

“Well, I don’t know about *that*…”

“You would consider me hyperbolic? Cretin! Just today, I proved my talents!”

And start to reel him in.

“Nah… now you’re just pushing around hot air.”

“Untrue! John became distressed and I successfully bolstered his spirits!”

Lestrade had hoped to prod Sherlock into a little more information about his afternoon with John, but this was not really what he had wanted to hear.

“John got upset?”

“I… it was not *entirely* my fault.”

Sherlock’s dramatics fell away and Lestrade’s heart ached seeing the slightly guilty look on the boy’s face. He handed over another piece of chocolate and, since the shop was empty, drew up another stool and took a seat at Sherlock’s side.

“Why don’t you tell me about it? Couldn’t have been too bad if you got him sorted out afterwards.”

Sherlock ate his new piece of chocolate and Lestrade waited patiently while the gears and cogs whirled in Sherlock’s mind.

“I said something in jest and…”

“John didn’t take it that way.”

“Not exactly. It was more that the nature of my witticism touched upon an unpleasant reality of his life and, therefore, he became upset.”

Crap… those always were the worst.

“Put your foot in your mouth, you mean. It happens, Sherlock. To everyone, at some point. Can you tell me what you said and why it hurt John?”

“I used the supposed drunkenness of his mother to explain away his feeble mind and…”

Perfect. Not only a joke, but one of Sherlock’s *special* jokes.

“… his mother is deceased.”

Ouch.

“And his father *is* a drunkard. So much so that John no longer lives with him.”

Kick in the stomach-level ouch. Poor lad… and that went for both of them. But *Sherlock* actually seemed upset he’d hurt his new mate and that was still a reason to celebrate, odd as it seemed.

“That’s awful. Not what you said… but what John went through. I know what it’s like to have a shite dad, but at least mine had the decency to pick up and leave. And losing your mum… I don’t
know what would have happened to me if I’d lost mum when I was as young as John.”

Lestrade caught a look of surprise on Sherlock’s face and tried to remember if he’d ever told Sherlock about his father. Even Mycroft didn’t know much, but there wasn’t really a lot to tell besides he had a temper, liked to fuck whatever was wearing a skirt and couldn’t hold a job if his life depended on it. One day he and Mycroft would share war stories about their parents, but his tales weren’t something Sherlock needed to hear. Kids shouldn’t have to worry about things like that. And they definitely shouldn’t have to live through them… he’d be checking in on John a lot sooner than he’d planned. And more often, too.

“John was very disturbed when recounting his story.”

“I’m sure he was. That’s purely a horrible thing for a little tyke to go through, but you couldn’t have known, Sherlock, so don’t punish yourself for it. And you made him feel better, right?”

“It is the case that I further used my skills in jocularity to improve his mood.”

“All those words mean you tried to make him feel better and it worked, right?”

“Yes and yes, if that is simple enough for you to comprehend.”

“Right on target. And that’s what you’re supposed to do, so congratulations. When you make someone feel bad, you say… did you say you were sorry?”

“I… yes, in a manner of speaking.”

Better than nothing.

“Ok, good. Then you’ve done everything right. Said you were sorry and tried to pull him out of his mood. Top marks for you!”

Lestrade was now an expert at catching Sherlock’s tiny smiles, so this one didn’t escape his notice.

“John said as much himself. He pronounced me an excellent friend.”

Said with a touch of pride that Lestrade was positive the boy was not aware he added to what was supposed to be a simple statement of fact.

“What was that? Something that started with an F? Frog, frilly, frostbite…”

“If you are trying to make a point, you should raise your hand and feel along the crown of your head. There is already one present that you can use at your leisure.”

“Friend! That’s it… and he’s right. You did what a good friend does, whether you meant to or not. Nicely done, Sherlock. And then stuck around to visit… so tell me, you get any boils or sores or have to pick up your melted brain off the floor?”

“Are you having a dementia-related event?”

“No, just trying to make you see that spending time with John wasn’t as poisonous as you like to believe. Any chance you might voluntarily spend some time with him again?”

“I was coerced into giving my word that we would work on maths tomorrow in his room. John’s skill for mathematics is as deficient as his language abilities.”

So, another homework session. Which involved talking and getting comfortable with each other…
and plenty of chances for the Prince of Pain-in-the-Arse to show off. Smart move on John’s part.

“That’s nice of you to help him out like that. Maybe sometime you two can do your science work over at your place. Let him see your lab and all your experiments.”

“John was very impressed by my description of my work.”

“Then there you go; I bet he’d be even more impressed seeing you in action.”

“Hmmm… you could be correct. He does seem to appreciate concrete examples of my greatness.”

“So do well all. Now, you gotten enough sugar?”

“No.”

“Well, I’m sure your driver’s sick of waiting out there for you, but I guess he won’t find if you stay a little longer.”

“I doubt he is giving it any consideration, since I dismissed him when I arrived. You shall chauffer me home.”

“You do realize I don’t close for another hour and a half?”

“Immaterial. You shall be entertaining me in the interim and feeding me chocolate, so it shall not be an entirely disagreeable way to pass the time. You may begin with your clownish antics and pantomimes as soon as you provide me with a plate of nougat.”

“Not gonna happen, you’ll spoil your dinner.”

“Then I must know what you are purchasing me for dinner. If it is of sufficient interest, I will agree to forego my nougat.”

“Your cook already gets paid, so I don’t have to pay her for putting food in your mouth.”

“Cook is making rabbit stew and I do not like rabbit stew.”

Lestrade had to admit it wasn’t one of his favorites either.

“Tell you what. How about you come back with me and we’ll see what mum’s got ready. I’m not sure, but I think it might be lamb.”

“I am not opposed to lamb.”

“Ok then, we’ll have dinner at my house and then I’ll bring you home.”

“I also desire a film.”

“I’m not taking you out to a film, Sherlock, you’ve got school in the morning. I’ve got school in the morning.”

“I have a large assortment of films at my residence and we shall watch what I choose.”

“If it’s a short one, I’ll think about it. I have my own schoolwork to do tonight, too.”

“Do it now. I shall observe you and grade your efforts.”
“I've got to work.”

“Oh, are you peddling sweets to specters?”

Lestrade had to admit it was a pretty slow evening. And he had toyed with the idea of getting a little something done while he had the time…

“Ok, I’ll see what I can do and if I get enough finished we can watch something after dinner.”

“If you simply give me your assignments, I will complete them in a fraction of the time it would take your John-sized brain to accomplish the task.”

“And that helps me learn how?”

“Learning is inconsequential for you. How much learning is required for you to assume your new career as satisfier of Mycroft’s obscene urges? Even you should be able to follow along if pictures are provided with your training manual.”

“I hear rabbit stew and kale calling your name.”

“I shall not eat weeds! I would occupy the same niche as the rabbit and I refuse to be classed as an herbivore and find myself at the mercy of the stew pot!”

“Then keep a civil tongue in your head. Now go over there and grab my books. I’ll see what we’ve got in the back for you to drink.”

“I shall be satisfied with wine.”

“Oh sure, we’ve got casks of that in the back.”

“Then I shall have a nice red. It goes best with chocolate.”

“Know what else goes good with chocolate? A nice glass of juice.”

“I can already feel my tastebuds fleeing down my throat in terror.”

“Think of it this way… they took poor, innocent fruit, ripped off the flesh, ground the guts to a pulp and put it in a container just so you could drink the remains of their cold, tortuous death.”

“That does make it more appealing.”

“You know, when you’re in the papers as a serial killer, I’ll be so proud to say that I knew you when you were a lad.”

“As you should be, for I will be masterful! A shining example for all that would follow me.”

“Great. I’ll get the scrapbook ready.”
Sherlock shook his head and glared at the boy sitting next to him.

“Do you understand, at least, the difference between numbers and letters?”

“Hey! Of course I do… I just have a little trouble when they’re all mixed together like that in a problem.”

“This is algebra. A codfish can manage algebra, yet you have obviously not the talent for even a piscine-level of mastery of the subject.”

“You know, when you go on like that I just pretend that you’re a big parrot squawking and frumpling your feathers.”

“There is no such word as frumpling, you illiterate pygmy. And I am not a parrot! If I were a bird, I would perhaps be a harpy eagle.”

“Do they talk?”

“Certainly not! Their ferocity and cunning precludes the need for pointless conversation.”

“Sort of boring, if you ask me. Can’t really see ferocity and cunning when they’re perched in a tree. Are they at least colorful?”

“Their plumage is a handsome gray and they are provided with vivid markings on the underside of their wings. They also have a crown of feathers, which is further evidence why, I believe, it is a proper species to liken to me.”

“Well, that’s something, at least.”

“They also possess talons to rival those of bears and are active hunters of animals.”

“Ok, now you’ve convinced me. I want to be a harpy eagle, too.”

“I have already claimed dominion over them. You may have… a budgie.”

“No. Try again.”

“A starling?”

“You’re pathetic.”

“Oh very well… perhaps a falcon of some form.”

‘Ok, that’s better. Small, maneuverable, good in a fight and very nice looking. Yep, that’s me.”
“Your ego is boundless. I find your arrogance utterly repellant.”

“You’re just jealous because I got the nicer bird.”

“A falcon is not nicer than a harpy eagle!”

“If this was a game of Top Trumps, you’d lose Sherlock.”

Sherlock blinked and raced through his mind for way to continue the argument and annihilate his opponent, but he was meeting with failure at every turn.

“I… I have no reference to make a rebuttal.”

“You’ve never played Top Trumps?”

If John had any chivalry, he would not sound so gleeful. Was not humility a vaunted trait of the dirt-grubbers?

“The act of ‘playing’ in any form is a purposeless use of time that could be better utilized for furthering one’s mind.”

“Well that explains a lot, actually. But, I guess you have to spend a lot of time studying and doing your science work and all of that, so it doesn’t leave you much left over for other things.”

“My brain requires little in the way of study for I master new material almost instantaneously. It is my research that fills my hours.”

“I guess you wouldn’t do it if you didn’t enjoy it, so that’s a good thing. Is there anything else you do for fun, since you don’t play?”

Sherlock put down his pencil and glared again at John to give himself a moment to think.

“Actually… it could be said that I do ‘play.’ I am a virtuoso on the violin.”

“Really? That’s amazing! I have to hear you play! I like music a lot and I was actually thinking about taking some music classes now that I can.”

“I despair for the entirely of musical history if that were to occur.”

John made a face Sherlock had never seen before and certainly would not practice in the mirror when he was alone.

“You’re a poor excuse for a friend, Sherlock Holmes.”

“I would actually have to be your friend to in order to fail at the task.”

“Weak, Sherlock. As weak as your harpy eagle that my falcon is going to rip apart.”

“I shall not let that go unchallenged!”

“Birds at dawn, then?”

“I am not entirely certain if those particular groups are crepuscular.”

“I am so going to win this…”

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Lestrade lay in his bed and tried to figure out the poem he had to read for tomorrow. Beyond the fact that it was a nauseating bit of verse filled with overdone romantic imagery that failed to inspire anything in him but the urge to lose his dinner, he had other things clamoring for his attention. Top of that list was a great sense of missing someone extremely important to him and if Mycroft didn’t call soon he’d go insane! It was completely ridiculous but he was going crazy wanting to talk to Mycroft, to spend a little time telling him about all things that happened in his day, share his stories about Sherlock and his situation with John… just tonight, he’d been on the phone with Sherlock for an hour while he rambled on about eagles and falcons and why eagles were better and every other word was ‘John’ or some insult he used in place of John. And tomorrow was, apparently, another afterschool session, which made Lestrade’s heart leap when he heard about it. He should be sitting up talking to Mycroft, listening to his laugh… not laying here reading some dumb poem that probably wasn’t even popular when it was written a million centuries ago.

But, at least when Mycroft went away to school there wouldn’t be this communications problem. He was so incredibly proud that Mycroft was valued and respected and talented and was doing important things that made a difference, but it was miserable not being able to just pick up the phone for a quick hello. Not that his mum wouldn’t kick his arse when she got the bill for all of those hellos, but he could help pay for that. He’d probably be working a real job anyway by then. Or not. Christ, he really had to get some plans together for his life. Mycroft was already out there saving the fucking world or something and he couldn’t even go stop by the police station to talk to someone about the job to see if it really was a good fit for him. And if it wasn’t, what then? Here he was facing the next big piece of his life and had no clue what that piece looked like. The only thing he did know was that it wouldn’t look like this stupid poem.

Lestrade tossed his book onto his nightstand and checked the clock. Yeah, it was nearly time for bed and he might as well get an early start on it. Sherlock hadn’t been making any late-night calls or visits, but who knows when that might change, though as a potential preventative, he’d told Sherlock he’d take him out tomorrow after his homework session for a bit of shopping. And he hoped that Sherlock would bring along a companion with him, even if he gave some stupid reason like he had to have a slave to carry the bags.

Lestrade liked school, he really did. He enjoyed learning new things, having the time to talk to his friends, getting to unwind a little when PE class rolled around… all in all, he couldn’t complain. Well, sometimes he could complain, like when he was listening to one of his mates read his report on Copernicus, which the idiot was pronouncing so wrong that it was like having nails driven into his ears. When there was a knock on the classroom door, he nearly laughed that his wasn’t the only relieved sigh in the room.

Everyone turned to watch the school secretary walk in and, after a moment of surveying the faces, continue to walk over to Lestrade to hand him a small slip of paper that he really, really didn’t want to open. No one got a note during class unless something terrible had happened. With a roomful of eyes on him, Lestrade unfolded the paper and felt a fierce rush of worry fly through him. He’d really hoped being Sherlock’s emergency contact would never actually mean he’d have to be the emergency contact.

“YOU DID WHAT?”

“I have no hearing impediment, so there is no need to increase the volume of you utterances.”

“Sherlock, what the fuck did you do? John’s over there wheezing like a bagpipe!”
“It is not my fault that he lacks any appreciable lung capacity or that he refused to obey my orders to leave when I told him to.”

“From what I hear, he pulled you out so you weren’t the one wheezing and went back for your stupid notebook after you pitched a fit about it being left in the lab!”

“My research notes were in there!”

“Research on what! WHAT DID YOU DO?”

“I… I was demonstrating to John the use of flame tests for identifying materials and… I may have decided to further my knowledge on substances on which I have not previously experimented and… I now have data on a particular combination of compounds that is excellently suited for the production of copious amounts of smoke. The applications are legion!”

“You made a bloody smoke bomb!”

“This is far more effective than a sputtering, juvenile smoke bomb! And longer lasting!”

Lestrade rubbed his head, though he had no idea why since that never made a Sherlock-sized headache go away. Needing a moment away from the now triumphantly-grinning maniac, Lestrade moved to the small bed in the nurse’s office, where John was propped up, his breathing mostly back to normal and his skin slowly losing its stressed-red color.

“How you doing, John?”

“I’m fine. Sherlock just told me to keep coughing and wheezing because it would make people more sympathetic so we’d be less likely to get in trouble. He tried, too, but it was too hard for him to cough and talk and you know how much Sherlock likes to talk…”

Oh good, now he had a John-sized head pain to contend with, too.

“And you listened to him?”

“Didn’t want to get in trouble, so yeah. And you should have seen it! Poof! The whole room filled up and it sort of smelled like dog breath, but it was amazing!”

“See! Why the headmaster fails to acknowledge this very simple fact is further proof of his incompetency and lack of vision. He should not be placed in charge of shepherding a herd of anoles, let alone the marginally-human inhabitants of this painfully-inadequate institution! He should be thankful that I deign to grace these uninspiring halls with my presence. My praises should be sung, at the very least, for raising the average intelligence quotient to something other than a ridicule-worthy.”

“I think he’s a little more concerned about you destroying the science lab than writing you a fucking ballad!”

“For that I am thankful. I have grave doubts about his abilities as a composer so sterile and soulless is his enfeebled being. And I did not destroy the lab! It will require, at most, a cleaning with… some agent capable of dissolving aerosolized petroleum distillates.”

“And you’ll be the one doing the cleaning, you little bastard!”

“I shall not! I do not possess a hazardous materials garment!”
“Oh god…”

“Mycroft will make the necessary arrangements.”

“Mycroft’s not here, remember? He’s off being some… secret agent save the world super spy or whatever.”

“Your brother’s a spy! That is best thing ever! You are SO lucky, Sherlock!”

“Mycroft is not a spy. At least not that I am allowed to admit.”

As John began to fire off a thousand questions about spies, Lestrade just stood there a moment to let his brain stop spinning. Ok, first step, keep Sherlock from getting tossed out of school. Second step, figure out what to do get the mess cleaned up. Third step, enjoy the fact that Sherlock and John were in this together and seemed perfectly content with that fact. Fourth step, have a pint or eight.

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The first step on Lestrade’s mental list involved a lot of arm waving and heated words, but the headmaster agreed to keep Sherlock enrolled in school on the condition that the science lab was cleaned and certain new pieces of equipment were added to the school’s inventory. This led to the second step on his list, which, though he never thought he’d have to do it, was to call Mycroft’s solicitor, who assured him he would make the necessary arrangements and then to Mycroft’s bank manager, who assured him there would be funds available to pay for those arrangements. Then, he returned to the nurse’s office to find headache tablets and took the opportunity to ponder item three. Insane little monkey wanted to show off and got a face full of toxic fumes for him and his accomplice as a reward. But, he was showing off and it was John who he was showing off to. The same John who stuck by him when a lot of other kids would just have started crying and swearing off Sherlock’s company. But, from the way they were still talking, while Sherlock dragged everything out of the nurse’s cupboards, pocketing what he thought looked useful or interesting, Lestrade knew that John was still solidly in Sherlock’s camp. And happy about it.

“Oh, the serf has returned. Did you acceptably perform your contracted duties?”

“If you’re trying in your own evil-minded way to ask if you’re still on the school roster, the answer is yes. It’s going to cost though and don’t think you’re walking away from this without doing something to pay Mycroft back.”

“Pfft… you forget that what is his is also mine. The fact that I cannot yet sign a cheque does not mean…”

“Nope… try all you want, but it’s not going to get you anything but a longer sentence, you rotten criminal.”

“I am not a criminal!”

“Destruction of public property…”

“This is not public – it is mine!”

“And good luck proving it!”

“He does have a point Greg. If his family owns the school, doesn’t that mean he can do what he wants? I mean, as long as it doesn’t hurt anybody or anything.”
Oh ho… coming to the defense of his friend. Good boy, John…

“No, it doesn’t. And he could have hurt someone, since he had no idea what was going to happen with his little experiment. But good for you, sticking up for him and, for that, you get a sponge of your own.”

“What?”

“What!”

“Let’s go, you two. You may not be able to clean the lab, but you can clean Mum’s car. I had to go and get it from her to drive out here and noticed it could use a good wash. Come on, you might as well get started.”

“Me too?”

“HIM!”

“Both of you! Sherlock for being a stupid little berk and you, John, for not stopping him being a stupid little berk. Anyway, I told the headmaster he wouldn’t have to look at either of you for the rest of the day, so come on. You’ve got work to do.”

Lestrade plucked John out of the bed and set him on the floor, keeping one hand in his while he used the other one to grab Sherlock’s collar before pulling the two squirming boys out of the office.

“Unhand me ruffian!”

“Shut it, I’m convincing everyone that things are going to go hard for you. I also told you headmaster that you were going to catch it when you got home.”

“Must your subterfuge involve stretching out my clothing?”

“Want me to stretch out your head, instead?”

“That it not possible beyond the infant stage, when the skull is softer and more malleable.”

“Well, since you act like an infant, I’m willing to give it a try.”

Lestrade drove the two boys to his mum’s house and found them some of his old clothes to change into that, with a little cinching, rolling and turning-up made fine car-washing attire. One bucket of soapy water, one hose, one magazine for himself, and the older boy settled back to direct the car cleaning.

“This is child endangerment!”

“You are child endangerment, so calm down and get your job done.”

“Come on, Sherlock – it’s fun! See!”

Sherlock caught John’s sponge directly in the face, but before he could retaliaite, John had darted forward, retrieved his sponge, then ran to the other side of the car, hunkering down so only his eyes could be seen peeking out above the hood.

“That was an act of war, John Watson.”
“You’re all talk and no action, so I’m not scared.”

“Lackey! You will make note that this conflict began at the instigation of John Watson and his commission of personal insult.”

“Yeah, I’ll write that down.”

For the next short eternity, World War Car raged on Lestrade’s tiny front lawn with the two combatants using a variety of techniques to secure the submission of their adversary, the culmination of which was two very wet boys each pleading their case of victory to Lestrade, who wondered exactly when he’d become one of the other twenty mothers on the street.

“I should be declared the winner! I scored far more strikes with my sponge!”

“But they were all little baby hits! I could barely feel them! Every time I got you, you nearly fell over!”

“The operative word is ‘nearly.’ I never suffered a fatal blow.”

“Neither did I!”

“The effect is cumulative. Any moment now you will collapse into a quivering heap of defeat.”

As the argument continued to rage, Lestrade stubbed out his cigarette, put down his magazine, retrieved the hose and turned it on the combatants, who shrieked and ran behind the car to hide from the new assault.

“I’m declaring me the winner. Both of you get inside, towel off and change. I’ll see what we’ve got in the kitchen to feed you.”

“You are dishonorable! Your victory is spoiled by your cowardice and deceit!”

“You were outplayed by better tactics and bigger weapons. You’re lucky I’m not making you bow down at my feet like the beaten little pipsqueak you are.”

“I am not a pipsqueak! That is John!”

“Hey!”

“Get inside you buggers or it’s no lunch for you!”

Lestrade waited while the heated debate took place between the two hiding boys, most of which was a combination of the agony of admitting defeat and being quite wet and hungry. Finally, a loud ‘wait!’ erupted and Sherlock emerged from behind the car, waving John’s borrowed white shirt as a flag of surrender. The shirtless John followed behind pouting at the loss of his clothes.

“John’s un-warriorlike physique and stamina mandates that we accept your offer of rations.”

“It was your stomach that was rumbling, Sherlock.”

“Nonsense. You are having auditory hallucinations.”

“Inside!”

Sherlock marched slowly inside as if he was a prisoner of war being led to the firing squad and John fell in step behind him. With the boys out of sight, Lestrade was finally free to let his grin escape.
Overlooking the chaos at Sherlock’s school, he couldn’t have wished for a better day for the two of them. At least for a little while, Sherlock actually behaved like a kid and he just wished… wished more than anything that Mycroft could have been here to see it.

Two mostly-dry boys sat at Lestrade’s kitchen table eating sandwiches as fast as they could because Sherlock had already checked and found that there was half of a pie on the counter and claimed it as reparations for Lestrade’s war crimes. When they had crammed the entirety of their lunch into their mouths, making their cheeks bulge like they were hoarding nuts for winter, Lestrade simply dropped the pie on the table, uncovered it, handed each boy a fork and went to call Mycroft’s representative to see how things were going.

“I don’t think Greg’s mad at us anymore.”

“The peasant’s opinion of me is entirely unimportant.”

“Well, I’m glad he’s not mad at me anymore. I like him, he made us lunch.”

“If that is all that is required to gain your adoration, I would advise you not to wear fur lest you be mistaken for a homeless dog.”

“If it means I get pie, that’s fine with me.”

“Mother Lestrade’s pies are palatable, though I am unhappy with the lack of a contrasting texture and temperature.”

“What?”

“Ice cream.”

“Oh. Do you think he has any?”

“I shall investigate. It is the duty of all prisoners of war to take from their captors as much as they can for their own comfort and survival.”

“Will we need bowls?”

“Do you plan on leaving any uneaten?”

“I’ll just get spoons, then.”

Lestrade returned from his conversations to find two groaning children, an empty pie dish and a cleaned-out ice cream carton. If he hadn’t stopped to call his mum to fill her in as she’d asked, he might have at least saved some of the ice cream for his own after-dinner treat.

“You two look and sound like stuffed geese.”

“A stuffed goose would not be able to speak, cretin. If you are to verbalize an insult, please ensure it has proper grounding in logic and rationality.”

“I sort of do feel like a stuffed goose, Sherlock, so he’s got that part right.”

“Ah, poor little tyke. Belly all stretched out with stolen food. That’s two crimes I’ve got you
villains for in a single day. It’s going to kill me to tell Mycroft his brother’s gone to the bad and dragged a partner down with him.”

“I dragged no one. John was a willing participant in his downfall.”

“Yep. I willingly ate ice cream until I was sick. But I didn’t ask you to blow up the school.”

“If I had chosen to explode the school, it would now be but a smoldering pile of rubble. I am a master of creating explosives and it would be a simple matter to raze a building of that size and construction.”

“Don’t get any ideas, you bastard. And John, don’t give him any ideas. In fact, no ideas for either of you for the rest of the day. Now, it looks like things are under control and the science lab will be back in order in a day or two. Just do me a favor and don’t do something like this again. Not unless I’m on holiday somewhere and can’t get dragged into it.”

“That would leave Mother Lestrade to demonstrate to my detractors the errors in their thinking and I am certain you would suffer greatly for that intrusion on her time.”

Score one point for Sherlock.

“Just stay out of trouble, you little troll! You want to go to the shops this week, you give some thought to keeping yourself and John on my good side.”

“Oh, you can get some Top Trumps, Sherlock, so we can play!”

“I decline.”

“Be a lemon, then. John, you can come with us and pick out the ones you want.”

“Really? I can go shopping with you?”

“Sure. We were going to go today, but since I’d have to roll you two around, I think we’ll wait.”

“You should be glad for a chance to practice your rolling since you shall have to do that to Mycroft every time he loses his will and commits a raid on the local bakeries.”

“Want me to poke you in the stomach?”

“Ugh… no.”

“Then keep your mouth shut about your brother’s waistline. His slim, trim…”

Lickable.

“…waistline. And Sherlock will let you know what day we’ll go, John, so have your list ready.”

“I will! This is going to be great! I haven’t gotten to see much around here, so it’ll be an adventure. Thanks, Greg!”

Lestrade saw Sherlock priming for something to pop John’s balloon of enthusiasm and decided it was time to move things along.

“You’re welcome. Why don’t you two go watch the telly and I’ll clean up in here?”

“Because the programming at this time of day is insipid and you have no films of note to view.”
“John, kindly drag His Poncy Highness out of here and find him something to watch that won’t make his eyeballs blister and his mind wilt.”

“Yes sir!”

Lestrade laughed as John saluted and began to drag Sherlock out of his chair, before shoving the taller boy out of the kitchen while chanting march, march, march… A quick clean-up got the kitchen back to normal and he sat down for a moment and enjoyed the relative quiet. Well, he’d done it. Actually handled a crisis without even calling his mum for help. It felt good, too, to handle the problem himself and fix things. Keep the peace… that’s what cops did, right? And punish the wrongdoers, though getting to run around all afternoon and eat pie wasn’t exactly punishment… but they had at least washed a little of the car during their battle. Maybe he’d stop by and have a chat with the boys at the police station tomorrow or the day after. It was definitely time for a little more information.

Both Sherlock and John complained when Lestrade announced it was time for them to return to their respective homes and it was only the promise that their shopping trip would occur sooner than later that quieted them down enough for Lestrade to shove them into the car. His mum had gotten him the afternoon off from the shop to deal with the emergency, but he could still stop by and put in a few hours of after-closing work. And if he did the same tomorrow and promised to do the painting his uncle had been saying they needed, he could get some time off of make that shopping trip happen. And he’d have to find time to get his schoolwork done. And take care of his share of the chores. Deep in his future fantasy chest was a tiny little one about him and Mycroft and an adopted kid or two. How much nicer that fantasy would be with the addition of a nanny…

“Here you go, John. You gonna be ok?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. I’ll see you tomorrow, Sherlock. I had fun today, even if we did nearly die a horrible, choking death. Bye, Greg! Thanks for everything!”

John hopped out of the car and Sherlock slid over to take the rest of the seat they’d been sharing. Greg waved back at the little boy as he ran and, after a smack on the arm, Sherlock gave a weak-wristed wave that still managed to make John’s smile brighten even further.

“Finally. Now I may enjoy a little peace.”

“You are overflowing with lies today, Sherlock. Just overflowing with them…. you had a good time today, why not just admit it?”

“Because it would be an utter falsehood and I would not add to the grand overflow you seem to take joy in ascribing to me.”

“Well, I think you enjoyed your day, death and destruction notwithstanding. It’s ok to enjoy yourself, you know? Everything doesn’t have to be school and your experiments. Maybe after our shopping trip, we can see if there’s a good film playing, how’s that sound?”

Sherlock steepled his fingers made a great show of thinking very seriously about the question.

“Does the offer of a film include our normal repast?”

“Pizza or the pub, your choice.”

“And if I am not satisfied at that point?”
“Popcorn while we watch the film.”

“And…”

“I can sneak in something from the shop.”

“Many somethings.”

“Some somethings.”

“We shall negotiate the actual number while we shop.”

“Oh, too tired now?”

“I am never too tired to negotiate! I am…”

“Unwilling to waste time negotiating with a peon when you have other, more important, things on your mind?”

“YES! I mean… yes. For once you have properly assessed the situation. I would feel pride if my normal level of disappointment in you was not so unknowingly deep to obscure the tiny spark completely.”

“It’s ok. I understand. It’s enough that you tried.”

“True. I am nothing if not magnanimous.”

After dropping off Sherlock, Lestrade put in his few hours of work at the shop then finally returned home, sharing his day with his mum, who nearly laughed herself silly and wrangled a promise from him to bring John for a meal very soon.

“I will. He’s a nice kid and he’s had it rough, so I want to help him if I can.”

“Good boy, Greg. I’m proud of you for taking an interest in him. It’ll be helpful for the lad to have someone to talk to who knows… well, who has an idea about what he’s been through. With his father, at least.”

“Thanks, Mum. And he’ll need someone normal around to help balance out Sherlock’s crazy.”

“Oh, I think Sherlock’s crazy won’t be a problem for him, do you?”

“Actually, no… John seems to have an immunity to it.”

“That’s what happens when you meet someone that’s a good fit for you. I mean, Mycroft handles your crazy pretty well, doesn’t he?”

“I absolutely have no crazy to speak of.”

“Oh, pardon me. We’ll see what your boyfriend says when I show him those pictures of you with the purple-streaked hair and the fake tattoos.”

“What! You told me you got rid of those.”

“Must have been thinking of something else. Sorry. They’re still safe and sound in my album.”
“You will not show those to Mycroft.”

“Of course not. Well, not now, at least. I’m saving them for a really good blackmail opportunity.”

“I am not related to you!”

“Do you want me to explain how I know that’s not true?”

“I’m leaving now. Don’t follow me or talk to me or even remember you know me for the rest of the night.”

“Maybe you aren’t related to me. I actually have a sense of humor.”

Ok, he’d missed having to actually do anything with this stupid poem at school today, but he’d have to pick up whatever assignment they’d been given and finish it, so one more attempt at reading it wouldn’t be the worst use of his time. And if it put him to sleep, that was ok, too. As the latter situation started to look like the contender, Lestrade was shocked off his bed by the ringing phone and fumbled with the handset to answer it.

“Greg here.”

“And my heart’s fractures heal just from the dulcet sound of your voice.”

Mycroft!

“Oh god, love… I’m glad to hear yours, too. More glad than you can imagine.”

Mycroft settled into his chair and pictured his beloved stretched out on his bed with a brilliant smile illuminating his handsome face.

“I have missed you, Gregory. I suffer each day without you near and as the days accumulate, my suffering increases.”

“I understand that because I feel it, too. Any idea when you’re going to be able to put us out of our suffering?”

A large sigh told Lestrade it wasn’t going to be anytime soon.

“I do not see an early end to my absence, my dear. But, if it is gladdening, I can say that I also do not see my absence extending beyond our original expectations.”

That was something, at least. Waiting for Mycroft to return last time and having him miss his deadline had been a brutal kick to the heart.

“I know you’d be back early if you could, Mycroft. Really, I understand and hey, it’s practice for us, right? Get some practice now, so we’re used to it later?”

How Mycroft adored hearing his spouse speak of their future. So confident and accepting that they would share their years and those years would be happy. He looked at the tissue box he had taken to keeping near his bed, for a variety of reasons, but decided his blissful tears would hold back for the moment.

“That is not an inappropriate way of viewing our situation, though I am devoted to giving to you
every minute of my time that I am physically able. Now, my dear, do tell me about your day. Mine has been crushingly boring and I am looking to you to provide me with stories so that I may live vicariously through your experiences.”

“Oh, well you picked a good day to call if you want stories. I’ve got plenty for you.”

Whether that was a good or bad thing, Mycroft was suddenly afraid to find out.

“Then I wait with great anticipation.”

“Ok, I’ll start at the beginning with the toxic smoke bomb.”

“Oh, this involves Sherlock, I assume.”

“You could say that.”

Lestrade never considered himself the best storyteller, but there was something about Mycroft’s enthusiasm that energized him and it wasn’t long before he had his boyfriend chuckling nonstop at his younger brother’s actions.

“Would it salve your upset to know that this is not the first atrocity he has perpetrated against his school?”

“It would, actually! I couldn’t believe he would get up to something like that.”

“What Sherlock can ‘get up to’ is nearly unimaginable, however, you handled the situation as successfully as would I, and I have had a great deal more practice. Very well done, my dear. I stand in awe of your skills. You so easily handle Sherlock’s special nature and, truly, I feel blessed that he has you to stand with him as I enter this new phase of life.”

“Well, that’s a relief. And you’re not mad that I had to… well, that you’re buying the school some new equipment, too?”

“Not at all! In fact, I am very pleased at how cheaply your victory was won. I simply wish I could have been present to witness your debate. I imagine you were spectacular in your vigor.”

This was why he needed his Mycroft… no one else ever thought about him that way. And it felt very, very good…

“As long as you’re happy, then I’m happy. Now, are you ready for the best part?”

“Oh, there is more?”

“You’ll love this…”

Lestrade spun the tale of Sherlock and John’s post-apocalypse activities and, this time, Mycroft was actually laughing loud enough to worry about being heard outside of his room.

“I must find some manner by which to keep him under continuous surveillance so I do not miss these moments. He played, Gregory? Sherlock actually played with another child?”

“Can you believe it? I tell you, John knows just how to spark his engine. And Sherlock’s been staying after class and doing his schoolwork with John. He complains like a professional, of course, but he does it. And not really a protest about John coming out with us sometime this week. I’m telling you, love… he’s definitely got a friend.”
Mycroft felt his body relax and a warm, enveloping feeling of something – relief, contentment, joy – washed over him. Sherlock had a friend. He could not have brokered their friendship as easily as his husband, but that was an area of his beloved’s strength. Under his tender tutelage, Sherlock had actually gained his first friend and it seemed that the feeling was shared fully by this young John. The anxiousness to meet the child and observe his and Sherlock’s interactions was nearly overwhelming!

“Better news I could not hear from you, Gregory. I have despaired so often that he would never find anyone to appreciate him and now he has acquired a loving guardian and his very first friend. You were most correct; today is a stellar day for stories.”

Maybe it was silly to be so happy just because Mycroft was happy, but Lestrade realized he really didn’t have a problem feeling silly.

“You got any you can share with me?”

“Unfortunately, no. At least, none that can remotely rival your exceedingly entertaining ones.”

“Well, that’s ok. You can make something up instead.”

“I am afraid my imagination does not lend itself to the creation of fiction.”

“Here, I’ll give you some inspiration… hear that?”

“I did; however, I am unclear as to what I heard.”

“That was a squish.”

“I am now educated. Thank you, my dear.”

“It was a particular squish.”

“They are categorized?”

“Yes. That’s the squish you hear when I squeeze out some lotion into my hand.”

“Lotion? Oh…. oh, Gregory.”

“Feeling inspired?”

“More so than I was before.”

“Listen again.”

“That is a sound I do recognize. Onomatopoeia does apply reasonably well for ‘zipper’, I have found.”

“Got a story for me yet?”

“I believe I am gathering a few threads of plot.”

“Well, you start weaving and I’ll let you know if I like what I hear.”

“With detailed descriptions?”

“Graphic.”
“Then, let me begin…”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your words of encouragement for this story!

“My supply of limewater, disinfectant and reducing agents are now in critical shortage. This must be rectified.”

Lestrade set aside his textbook and felt only the tiniest bit of disappointment that the voice on the phone was Sherlock and not Mycroft. Unlike most of his mates, he didn’t need to hear Mycroft’s voice every day to feel confident in their relationship, though it would be brilliant when Mycroft was back and they could actually get to spend time together. He didn’t think it was possible to die of loneliness, or horniness, for that matter, but why put it to the test?

“I think someone is saying they need to go shopping.”

“If, by someone, you are referring to me, then you would be correct. Present yourself tomorrow to chauffer me to my vendors. You will then provide nourishment and entertainment. Try not to embarrass me with either your appearance or behavior. I suffer that sufficiently with John Watson.”

The person with whom Sherlock had been spending his afternoons under the guise of critiquing John’s schoolwork. Fortunately, there had been no further disasters Lestrade had been called to manage, though it had been a tough convincing Sherlock that he wasn’t allowed to test John’s resistance to cold by locking him in the school freezer with a thermometer in his mouth.

“You’ll get what you get from me and if you don’t like it then you can write me a letter of complaint and I’ll file it with the others. I’m assuming you want to go tomorrow?”

“I would prefer tonight, but you will not do your duty and wake the serfs to tend to my wishes.”

“We serfs stick together on things like that. I should be able to borrow the car tomorrow and get you after school, so we’ll plan for that.”

“I fail to see why you do not simply borrow one of my vehicles. They are far more comfortable and appropriate for my status.”

“Because you’ll probably want me to wear a chauffeur hat and that’s not going to happen.”

“Do not attempt to practice your gauche roleplay games with me while Mycroft is absent. I shall respond in a vigorously negative manner.”

Chauffer and posh bloke in the back seat… ok, that had possibilities…

“I think you’re safe. Anyway, it’s easier to park my car than one of your yachts and I’m not going to carry you from the car to your shops because you’re complaining the walk is too far.”

“I do not see why not. It would be a simple matter to have a saddle constructed to your measurements, so that I might ride in comfort.”
“You know, Sherlock, some people do that for the roleplay stuff you were barking about earlier.”

“I am sorry, I believe you attempted to say something, however, a wash of intense nausea prevented my receiving your message. Since I am entirely certain that your words held either no meaning or were detrimental to the welfare of anyone whose brain cells number more than two, I shall not ask you to repeat yourself.”

“Yes, hate to have your little brain cells go sit in a corner and cry for the rest of the night. I’ll be by after school and we’ll do your errands.”

“And nourishment.”

“And entertainment.”

“Don’t have classes the next day, so a film’s not a problem.”

“I also have a series of experiments to perform and I require an assistant.”

“No.”

“Refusal is not an option. I am incapable of taking notes when my hands are covered with cow’s blood.”

“Why would anyone’s hands be covered with cow’s blood?”

“To test the rate at which flies deposit eggs on a blood-drenched corpse. It is vital information!”

“That you’ll have to forget about gathering because the refusal stands. Don’t you have anything non-bloody to work on?”

“There is my experiment on the effect of stomach acid on a swallowed key. I have a selection of standard keys available for consumption.”

“You do realize what you’ll have to do to actually retrieve those keys don’t you? Got some thick gloves handy?”

“Rooting through sewage is the role of the assistant, not the master.”

“Then I’m very glad I’m not your assistant. Look, I have to finish reading this and…”

“If it is more than a single, simply-worded sentence it will take you the remainder of the night in any case, so you may continue to provide amusement for me until my hooves have finished soaking.”

“Do I want to know… no… I’ll answer that one myself. Tomorrow, Sherlock. I’ll pick you up and we’ll make a day of it. And Mum said if you want, you can come by for dinner one day soon and she’ll make some of that fish you said didn’t taste like it was plucked out of the drains of a vomitorium.”

“It was not entirely lethal, though I shall not endure the mass of greenery she insists on placing on my plate. I should not have to hack through the jungle with my machete to find a lackluster piece of overcooked fish as my sole prize.”

“Sorry, Mum’ll make you eat your greens if you want any chance of your sugary surprise to
chase the fish down into your belly.”

“I demand chocolate!”

“Now there’s a surprise. I think my shoes flew off with excitement.”

“Sarcasm… how small-minded of you.”

“And my small mind is getting back to work. But I will put in a word with Mum to lay in some of that cooking chocolate that nearly made you cry when you tried to eat it.”

“Those were not tears! My body was attempting to expel the toxic chemicals in whatever manner possible, include excreting the water-soluble compounds in my bodily fluids.”

“Yeah, ok. See you tomorrow, Sherlock.”

“You are fortunate I have better things to do and do not have the time available to enumerate the legion of reasons why your insistence on pursuing an education is completely unnecessary given your inevitable failure to secure any employment beyond fining citizens for their dog’s impoliteness on their neighbor’s lawn.”

“It gives me something to do during the day. Goodbye, Sherlock.”

“Do not be tardy tomorrow or it will not go well for you.”

“And sweet dreams to you, too.”

Lestrade waited outside the school for the great lemming rush and wished he had the other Holmes brother with him to pass the time. Lovely weather for a bit of perfectly innocent groping before the rampaging marauders showed up for their big day. Lestrade hoped, at least, it would be marauders, as opposed to marauder… he’d forgotten to remind Sherlock to invite John for their day out and it was more than slightly possible that Sherlock would leap at the opportunity to leave his shadow behind, despite their continued close association. However, when the wave of bodies began racing from the building, it was two that approached his car and not one.

“John refuses to obey my orders to remain in his room. Do something, lackey.”

“Good to see you in such a fine mood, Sherlock. Hi, John.”

“Hi, Greg! Thanks for letting me come along.”

“Glad to have you. Anything to keep His Lordship occupied so I get a bit of peace and quiet for a change. Got anything specific you need to look for?”

“Ummm… I could use some new socks. Sherlock stole mine.”

“I stole nothing! You volunteered them for my work!”

“You asked to ‘see’ them for a moment. I didn’t think that meant set them on fire!”

“Your narrow interpretation of my statement is not my fault. And the results were extremely important. I now know that those who toil in slack-jawed poverty have socks that burn more slowly than those possessed by their societal superiors.”
John made a rude noise that Lestrade highly approved of.

“Who cares?”

“I am certain the greatest scientists in history have been asked that question to the eventual and crippling embarrassment of their inquisitor.”

“Socks! It’s socks, Sherlock! And those were my warm ones, too.”

“Don’t worry, John. We’ll get you some new socks.”

“You shall not allow this frivolous purchase to, in any manner, diminish my browsing time for my far-more-crucial supplies.”

“We’ve got time for everybody’s crucial purchases. You two ready to go?”

Lestrade took time to stretch, scratch and could have had a cigarette waiting for the two younger boys to argue about seating position and get themselves situated in the car. And the arguing didn’t stop until Sherlock had his bags of supplies, John had his socks and four sets of Top Trumps that John was thrilled and surprised Lestrade paid for.

“Just how poor are you?”

“I’m not poor, Sherlock. I get an allowance.”

“Apparently it is barely sufficient to purchase a pencil.”

“It’s enough. I don’t need much, really. It was nice of Greg to pay for my socks and cards, though. Now I have money if we come out again!”

“Another clinging vine sending its larcenous tendrils into my pockets…”

“You don’t pay me, you little bastard. Don’t listen to him, John. If he actually had any money, I’d have made him pay for your socks, but he’s as poor as the rest of us when you get right down to it. Sherlock’s just lucky he has a brother who dotes on him and does have a lot of money.”

“That’s a good thing. Not that he has money, I mean, but that he likes Sherlock.”

Lestrade caught the tone in John’s voice, but almost missed the tiny flash of displeasure on Sherlock’s face. Almost.

“You got a brother, John?”

“No. I have a sister. I don’t… she doesn’t visit or write or call or anything, though.”

Poor little tyke. Lestrade rededicated himself to at least being available for the boy so he had someone close by to talk to when he needed it.

“You are fortunate. Mycroft makes my life unbearably horrible. The heights to which I might have already risen are doubtless much higher than I currently occupy due to his stagnating and stultifying effects on my development.”

“I think you’re lucky. Even though he’s off doing something secret, he still calls you and that means he loves you. So you’ve got him and Greg to do things with.”

“Lestrade! You must port me to my meal! I am suddenly far too ill to walk.”
“We had the saddle talk already and the answer is still no. And John’s right, Mycroft does love you. It’s the only explanation I can think of why he puts up with your evil. Alright, let’s get this stuff stowed away and then you can eat. Pizza or pub?”

“Pizza!”

“Pub!”

“Uh oh… looks like you two are going to have to fight it out.”

Sherlock swerved and stared John directly in the eyes.

“We shall duel! I am a master swordsman and there is no possibility that I shall not emerge victorious.”

“You know how to swordfight! That’s amazing! You have to teach me!”

And then Sherlock felt his combative fire dwindle. It was very difficult to want to trounce the pebble when he was so… complimentary.

“I might consider it… if we have our meal in the pub.”

“But I really wanted pizza.”

“It is, of course, your choice, but I believe I have the upper hand in this negotiation. Swords or pizza… decide.”

Lestrade had to admit that was a pretty tough choice.

“If we… if I get to come out with you again, can we have pizza?”

“If I am feeling benevolent.”

“Then ok, but I still get my swordfighting lesson, right?”

“When Mycroft returns we may again take up the discussion. He has the natural suspicion of a hippopotamus whose supply of water plant delicacies is being encroached upon by a rival and refuses to provide me the combination to the weapons room.”

“Yes! And I’m going to win, just like I did with the sponges.”

“You won nothing but my scorn.”

If the two boys didn’t end up inseparable friends, Lestrade was going to be very surprised.

“________

“This is amazing! And the food’s good, too.”

John was motoring through everything on his plate, as well as finishing the other non-chip bits that Sherlock snuck onto it when he thought Lestrade wasn’t looking.

“Glad you’re having a nice time. And good you’re willing to help out a chum by eating all his food so he has more room for sweets when we get to the movie. Very nice of you.”

“Sweets! We get sweets! Sherlock you eat your own food – I want room for sweets, too.”
“Yeah, you little goblin. Eat more than your chips. Your brain can’t run on grease alone.”

“Brains primarily use glucose as a fuel source and the starch in the potato will be sufficient to provide the glucose my brain requires. I have no need for any other foodstuffs to maintain my cognitive function.”

“Ok, then. No chocolate during the film.”

“If you force me, I shall list every relevant trace mineral and brain-nurturing compound in chocolate to demonstrate why you should be eager to provide me with every morsel I desire.”

“Nope, I get enough lectures in school. You can have your chocolate, but eat your damned food and stop giving it to John.”

I don’t mind, Greg. What’s there to mind about free food? Especially if there’s free chocolate coming after it.”

“And popcorn. The peasant was quite clear on the subject.”

“This is the best day ever!”

“I wouldn’t have dreamed you’d be so good with kids, Greg.”

Three heads turned to find the source of the feminine voice and one was especially displeased to find it standing next to the table.

“Oh, Diane… ummm… I wouldn’t say I’m good, actually, just able to take a lot of abuse.”

“Give yourself some credit, love. You seem to do a great job every time I see you with that one.”

“Ok, thanks, for that.”

“Aren’t you going to ask me to sit down?”

“We were getting ready to leave actually…”

The young woman wriggled her way next to Lestrade in the booth, forcing him to move over to give her room to sit.

“But, I’ve barely seen you around anymore. I don’t think you’ve been to any of the parties and everyone’s wondering where you’ve gotten off to.”

And by everyone, she meant her because Lestrade had been having a good time with his friends, enjoying the occasional night out and getting in a quick match when he wasn’t working or keeping Sherlock company.

“Guess you haven’t been looking in the right places. Now, sorry but we really have to…”

John leaned over to Sherlock and in his best child’s foghorn whisper asked who was their visitor.

“She is a formal coital partner of the shop boy, hoping to sink her obviously scheming claws once again into his private regions. I have observed her lustful glances previously and they have increased in both their intensity and frequency.”

“Sherlock! Watch your mouth.”
“Do not attempt to censor me, club-dragger! Even you are sufficiently provided with reasoning abilities to discern her motives! She is not even taking pains to hide them with her pitiful attempts at seduction. The peacock is more subtle in its attempts to invite copulation!”

John’s giggling simply bolstered Sherlock’s self-satisfaction and he prepared to launch into another speech, but was foiled by Lestrade pulling a piece of chocolate out of his pocket and shoving it into the boy’s mouth. A second one was tossed to John who cheered and joined Sherlock in eating.

“Well, he’s certainly a strange one, isn’t he?”

And there went Lestrade’s supply of patience.

“He’s not strange, he’s unique. There’s a big difference. Now, if you don’t mind we’ve got places to be.”

“You know, word is you’re seeing a bloke… is that true? I wouldn’t have taken you for one of those.”

“One of those?”

“You know, the kind to like boys. Personally, I think you’ve just gotten confused without a woman in your life.”

Patience was fully in the deficit range now.

“Look, why don’t you just shove off and…”

“We were good together, if you remember. Nothing says we couldn’t be again.”

“Oh, lots says that, actually. And you know I’ve dated men before.”

“Never anything serious… people are saying you’re taking this very seriously. He’s got money, too, I hear. Is that what’s making the difference?”

“Lackey! Are you going to let this harlot speak to you in this fashion?”

“No, no I’m not. Diane, you were a bitch when we dated and nothing seems to have changed about that. So feel free to fuck off anytime and crawl back into your… Sherlock do snakes have caves or holes or something?”

“They may occupy empty holes and burrows left by other animals.”

“Thanks. So feel free to fuck off anytime and crawl back into your hole, you friggin’ snake. For your information, if Mycroft didn’t have anything I’d still love him more than anyone and want to be with him as long as he’d have me. Now sod off and go bother someone else.”

One very angry girl stormed off from the table and two young boys stared at Lestrade with open mouths and very wide eyes.

“What?”

“You have declared yourself.”

“What are you talking about, Sherlock?”

“Wow! I knew you and Sherlock’s brother were boyfriends, but I didn’t know you were…”
getting married or something! That’s great!”

“What are you…”

Lestrade’s brain politely raised its hand and asked to be called on to report. Which it did in an admirable amount of detail.

“Oh.”

“Yes.”

“Oh no.”

“You do realize the repercussions of this?”

“Don’t you dare, Sherlock.”

“I shall not. At least, not as long as my demands are met. Fully and regularly.”

“You try and blackmail me and you’ll find yourself with a sore bum and no more shopping trips. Ever.”

“What’s he trying to blackmail you over, Greg?”

“The victim has foolishly allowed a highly sensitive piece of information to escape. I shall capitalize on it to the fullest.”

“I’m confused.”

“The shop boy has declared his affections for Mycroft, though he has yet to inform Mycroft of his feelings or intentions. This has been a very advantageous turn of events. For me, that is.”

“Stop rubbing your hands together like some cartoon bad guy, you little bastard! And you will not tell Mycroft what I said. I’m… I was going to tell him when he got back.”

“Wait… you haven’t told Mycroft that you love him? Sherlock you can’t say anything! That’s not something you mess up for someone. It’s special!”

“I agree. This is the most special thing that has happened to me in quite some time and I fully plan to enjoy every moment of it.”

“No. You’re not going to be your big blah blah blah self over this and ruin things for Greg. He probably has big plans for a nice dinner and candles and presents and dancing and kissing and…”

“Then he should be happy that I am sparing him the effort and expense.”

“Oh, you’re horrid!”

“Thank you, John, for championing my romance. And you, you fucking little monster. You will not say one word to Mycroft about this. Not one. Do you understand?”

“Je ne parle pas anglais.”

“I hate you.”

“But you love my brother, hence your current predicament.”
“Don’t worry, Greg. I’ll punch him if he tells. And maybe I’ll do it before he tells just so he knows how much they hurt.”

“Peasant! Protect my person!”

“Pfft… protect yourself.”

“I mean it, Sherlock. One huge punch if you say anything. And I won’t swordfight with you, either.”

“I shall not be party to violence! Restrain yourself, John Watson!”

“Don’t forget or wham! One big, hard punch.”

“You shall not sit next to me during the film.”

“Oh yes I will… in case you need a punch.”

“Stop threatening me!”

“Then don’t be evil!”

Lestrade listened to the back and forth and, if he wasn’t terrified Sherlock would gleefully spill his secret, he would be enjoying it immensely. Good job, Greg… just blurt out you love Mycroft right in front of the one person you should never blurt out anything in front of. Beautiful. Perfect. Hands-down prize-winning stupidity that was, no doubt about it. Looks like he might have to make his move earlier than expected…

“Alright you two, let’s go. The film starts soon and…”

“I gotta pee.”

“Ok, after a piss break for John.”

“I must also urinate.”

“And one for Sherlock.”

“And I expect my own tray of snacks during the film. I refuse to share with this… blackguard.”

“Then I’ll order all the popcorn so you have to share with me or you don’t get any.”

“The peanut is attempting to starve me!”

“Maybe I’ll let you wipe my fingers and you can sniff the napkin.”

“Our duel shall be to the death, John Watson.”

“That’s a shame. I don’t have the right clothes to wear to your funeral.”

Lestrade grinned and decided that just maybe the terrified worrying could wait a little while longer…

The film had gone exactly as Lestrade had expected. Lots of whispered chaos, several threats of physical violence, one handful of popcorn down a shirt, one pair of trousers covered in chocolatey fingerprints and two exhausted and stuffed children when the final credits rolled. Both boys were
quiet as they drove back to the school and Lestrade off dropped a very sleepy John at his room, after apologizing to the dormitory attendant for keeping him out so late. It was amazing how quickly the man’s irritation had cooled when John introduced him as ‘Greg, Mycroft’s boyfriend.’ Apparently his lover’s role in school politics was not as minimal as he had described.

“Thanks, Greg. This has been the best.”

“You’re welcome, John. Anytime. Maybe next time you can go to Sherlock’s house and you two can have an afternoon there. Lots of stuff to do and I’m sure he’d love to have you over.”

“Really? Sometimes I get the idea…”

“Yeah, I can imagine. He’s a tough one to get to know, but once you do, he’s a good kid. And he likes you, even though he might not be ready to really show it yet. Just give it time. I can tell you this much… according to Mycroft, he hasn’t really had any friends, so you’re already tops in Sherlock’s book.”

John’s big smile drew out Greg’s own and he tousled the boy’s hair before starting back to the car where Sherlock was waiting.

“I thought you had abandoned me. Actually, I misspoke. I hoped you had abandoned me.”

“Oh stop whining. If I’d abandoned you, you’d have to drive home and you know we passed the police on our way here. Not much fun sitting in a cell waiting for someone to come and get you, I suspect.”

“Hrumph. I take it the Lilliputian has been securely locked in his cell?”

“Yes, turned the key myself.”

“Excellent, I am now safe from his tendency towards pummeling.”

“You loved the attention and you know it. And he’s anxious to get out to your house, so you get the chance to impress him with all your science stuff. And I’ll chaperone.”

“I do not require a chaperone.”

“Oh yes you do. I’m not letting you two get up to things without being properly chaperoned.”

“Balderdash…”

“Not going to let you and John elope or something. Mycroft would kill me if he had to put out the money for you two to have your own house before you’re even old enough to drive.”

“You are obviously overly-tired and the neurotransmitters in your brain are drying up, leaving your synapses functionless and atrophied.”

“Yeah, it’s been a long day. Think you might actually go to bed tonight?”

“After I take notes on the experiment I began this morning.”

“Do I want to know what it’s about?”

“Do you appreciate the depilatory action of calcium thioglycolate on deer hide?”

“Can’t say I do.”
“Then we have nothing about which to speak.”

“That’s the greatest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

Lestrade shared his adventures with his mother before barricading himself in his room to think. Actually he’d only shared most of his adventures, but not all, and it was the not all that still had him worried. That little lunatic could still leak things to Mycroft, even if it wasn’t intentional. Sherlock had no filter when his mouth began to run and it was a risk Lestrade was not willing to take. Luckily, Mycroft habitually phoned him before he phoned Sherlock so he got the real story for any of Sherlock’s shenanigans before hearing his brother’s side, meaning he’d have the chance to strike first on this. Just be a man and say what he had to say. He already knew Mycroft felt the same way so it shouldn’t be a big deal, just…”

Lestrade would not call what he did shrieking when the phone rang, because men didn’t shriek. It was a manly startled exclamation… But no… no no no no! Not tonight! However, no one called this late but Mycroft, so it had to be Mycroft and he really wasn’t ready to talk to Mycroft, but he had to talk to Mycroft before Sherlock talked to Mycroft and…”

“Gregory Lestrade, answer the phone!”

Why was everyone conspiring against him! At least the phone didn’t give him a shock when he picked it up.

“Um… hello?”

“Gregory, my dear. Already my tensions are soothed and my spirits are lifted. How are you?”

“Oh… fine. Very fine. Really… just super.”

Ok, that was casual. No way Mycroft would notice anything.

“You will tell me what has troubled you and I will see it immediately corrected.”

Fuck!

“Uh… nothing. Just a long day. Took Sherlock and John out after school and I just got back a few minutes ago.”

“I see… and Sherlock’s behavior was not agreeable. I suppose he would have an off day with his new companion at some point and…”

“No! I mean… no, he was great. Well, as great as he can be. Complained the whole time and threw around insults like they were confetti. Pretty normal, but he had fun. We did some shopping, ate at the pub, then caught a film.”

“That does sound encouraging. And his interactions with John? Are they still hopeful?”

“Oh yeah… they had a lot of fun together and when Sherlock acted up, John put him right back in his place. Honestly, it could almost have been any two kids having a day out, except one uses words I don’t understand.”

Mycroft settled deeper into his chair and tried to imagine the scene in his mind. His brother interacting with another child while not reducing that child to tears… and his beloved spouse
minding them so lovingly. It was a heavenly vision… perhaps they should start their own family sooner than later. How thrilling it would be to enjoy their own offspring while they were both young and could actively participate in their little games and entertainments. He would ring his solicitor tomorrow and instruct him to begin the interviews for appropriate surrogates.

“I shall, then, count the encounter as another success. Your ability to nurture astounds me, my dear. Truly I could have no one better to stand with me and in my stead for Sherlock’s rearing than you. And now another child benefits from your great heart and caring guidance. As in all things, you are the apex of hush…humanity and I bow to your talents.”

ARGH! There he went again! Not ready not ready not ready…

“Now, Gregory, I must hear your news. You were to attend a gathering with your friends, I believe? Was it enjoyable?”

“What? Oh! Yeah, we all crowded into Georgie’s house and watched the match. Had a few too many beers, but I walked, so it wasn’t a problem. We had a great time and my side won, which always makes things better.”

“Delightful. I am very pleased Sherlock is not monopolizing your time to such an extent that your own social affairs suffer. But do not hesitate to call for my car, should it be required. The staff has already been informed that your desires are equal to mine and they will respond accordingly to your requests.”

“Mycroft, you don’t have to do things like that.”

“Indeed I do. Your stamp must be placed firmly on the household if you are to be assured of the necessary assistance for whatever activities fill your days. At the very least, I must be confident of full and unhesitating cooperation for your orders in matters involving Sherlock.”

“Well, for Sherlock, fine but… I don’t think I’d feel right ordering anybody about. I’d wind up apologizing a hundred times and feeling like a twat for bothering them.”

“My staff is compensated quite generously for their services, Gregory; they do not slave for fear of my whip. They are employed, not indentured… it is no different a situation than your own service-based employment.”

“Huh… hadn’t thought about it that way. Guess I’ve been watching too much telly.”

“Indeed. Though, if it comforts you, I shall instruct my driver to lecture you most sternly if he is called to collect your inebriated self from a house of debauchery.”

“It’s a deal! Between that and what Mum would put me through, I’d be put right back on the straight and narrow.”

“I am always gratified when we so quickly reach a compromise. It bodes well for our future discussions and negotiations.”

Future… future future future… gotta think about the future and need to have the chance to have the first say in how it goes. At least have a say before the Prince of Pissers got a word in. Ok… he could do this…

“Yeah, about that…”

“About what, my dear?”
“That… future… thing…”

“Gregory, are you suffering a verbalization problem. Sherlock did not have you drink anything mauve did he?”

“What? No… lesson learned with the stuff that turned my urine blue. I just… well, I’ve been thinking about the future, that’s all.”

Now Mycroft was at the edge of his seat and trying desperately to calm the tremors racking his body. The lack of jubilation in his love’s voice was frightening.

“Gregory, I am most concerned by the tone of your voice. Have I… have I disappointed you in some way?”

“No! No… that’s not it. Not it, at all. It’s just… there’s something I have to tell you and I sort of had another plan, a better plan, but that’s gone to shite and now here I am and it’s not like I wanted it and… John had it right! Well, sort of… maybe not presents since I’m sort of tapped to get anything nice right now and…”

Mycroft listened as his spouse descended further and further into incoherence, but heard nothing that yet raised too severely his level of his alarm at being the ex-Mr. Lestrade-Holmes.

“Gregory, dearest… calm yourself. I have lost the thread of your intentions and hold out little hope of refinding it if you continue on.”

“Oh, yeah… that was probably all bollocks.”

“In my experience, if one has a story to tell, it is best to begin solidly at the beginning. There is, then, only one direction for one’s thoughts to travel and it expedites the delivery of the message.”

“I’m not sure if this’ll sound good if I actually start at the beginning.”

“I highly doubt it could sound worse.”

“You’re probably right. Ok… I had to kick this stupid bird out of our booth…”

“Oh, I do apologize… the beginning was most certainly not the gladdest spot to begin this conversation.”

“Nothing to worry about… she tried to… look, it’s not important and we can talk about it later. You’d have been proud of Sherlock, though. Gave her a great big piece of his mind. Anyway… while I was kicking her out, I let something slip and… well, Sherlock was there and he latched onto it like one of his pieces of chocolate and if I don’t talk about it first, then he’s going to and that’s not the way I want this to go. It’s too important and I need to do this myself.”

“I am still completely at a loss for that elusive thread, Gregory.”

“I know… this isn’t easy, ok. It really, really isn’t, even though it should be…”

“Gregory, you once asked me a question that I shall now ask of you – are you preparing to dissolve our relationship?”

The words fell like large hunks of rotting meat out of Mycroft’s mouth but he couldn’t, not for one heartbreaking moment longer, stand the suspense of waiting for his husband to make his announcement.
“NO! God no… absolutely, positively no… but I sort of sound like it, don’t I? Here it is… I’ve been doing a lot of thinking and feeling, and I mean a LOT. What all that thinking and feeling and thinking some more and feeling a lot more has done is… I do want that future with you, Mycroft.”

“What… which future?”

“Any of them. ALL of them. I don’t care what it is or if we’re flush or dirt poor or where we live or how we live… so long as it’s with you, I want it. I want you, Mycroft. You’re the most wonderful person in the world and I can’t look into the future and be happy if I don’t see you there with me. I love you, Mycroft Holmes and this is not the way I wanted to tell you, but Sherlock would ruin things if he got to tell you first, so… there. I love you. No one’s ever made me feel the way you do and I don’t ever want to live a day without that feeling. You make me happy, Mycroft. I just hope… I just hope you feel the same way.”

Lestrade held his breath waiting for a reply. That wasn’t coming. All he heard was a wet, wheezy sound over the phone line and hoped to hell Mycroft hadn’t had some form of stroke.

“What… which future?”

“Any of them. ALL of them. I don’t care what it is or if we’re flush or dirt poor or where we live or how we live… so long as it’s with you, I want it. I want you, Mycroft. You’re the most wonderful person in the world and I can’t look into the future and be happy if I don’t see you there with me. I love you, Mycroft Holmes and this is not the way I wanted to tell you, but Sherlock would ruin things if he got to tell you first, so… there. I love you. No one’s ever made me feel the way you do and I don’t ever want to live a day without that feeling. You make me happy, Mycroft. I just hope… I just hope you feel the same way.”

Lestrade held his breath waiting for a reply. That wasn’t coming. All he heard was a wet, wheezy sound over the phone line and hoped to hell Mycroft hadn’t had some form of stroke.

“What… which future?”

“Mycroft? I mean… I thought maybe you felt that way, too, but if I was wrong, it’s ok. Really, it is, it’s not a problem at all and I can…”

“v u.”

“What?”

Mycroft was so deep in tearful euphoria that human sounds were scarcely possible. But he must try! He must reassure his spouse that his love was fully returned. Love! His husband loved him! Loved him! And wanted to extend that love through the decades of blissful togetherness. He was loved… oh blessed day…

“I… oh, my dear, I love you, as well. I have held you fast in my heart since near first we met and I have prayed, truly prayed, that someday you might return my affections. I love you, Gregory. How perfect the words sound in my ears and feel on my tongue. I love you and adore you and am giddy with the thought that your heart beats in time with mine. Oh my love, my dearest, dearest love… how I have longed for this day…”

A move from the chair to the bed was most certainly in order and Mycroft curled around his pillow which already was very used to being the substitute for his precious, but absent, spouse.

“I’m… ok, now I feel better. I really didn’t know how you’d react. I mean you choke off calling me your husband and stuff like that, but it doesn’t mean you really intended…”

Mycroft nearly did choke off something at that moment. Fortunately his spouse stand-in lacked an airway to constrict.

“You were aware?”

“You’re not subtle about some things, love.”

“But… you did not say anything.”

“No… like I said, lots of thinking and feeling. I knew how you felt, but I had to figure out how I felt. If it was real, if was something that would last… I didn’t want to jump into things and find out it wasn’t right. Wasn’t meant to be. I couldn’t do that to you… or to me, for that matter.”

So perfectly practical. Where he had plunged headlong into the soft joy of his emotions, his Gregory
had properly showed restraint. From the onset, he had been cautious and reflective and now... now there was no possible uncertainty. There was no one... not a single individual... who could be a more complementary spouse. Two halves of one whole. Two sides of one soul. Blessed... yes, that was the most certainly the operative word. No... perhaps that was not the operative word. Had his spouse said intended...

"Only with you do my faculties become so addled. I stand in the glow of my love for you and am unable to properly use any portion of my mind and must beg your indulgence for my inanity. But, Gregory... I must ask again... you did not forestall my use of a certain term. Is it... is it possible that you do not object to it, either?"

"Ummm... I hadn't really thought about it, I guess. I promised Mum, though, that we're not stupid and aren't going to rush anything. I want to do this right and not just jump into things before we're really ready. I mean... we've got some hard times ahead of us, Mycroft. I don't want other stuff maybe making it even harder. If that makes any sense at all. I love you and want to be with you, but I'm not ready to be someone's husband just yet. I don't have a real job or know where we'd live or..."

Mycroft's ears closed at the phrase just yet, though they had been only partially listening for some time. His Gregory would accept his ring. Not now, however, and that was, again, right and proper. It was too soon to acceptably arrange their married life, but... he would consent to a marriage. When the time was right, when they could set up their household and freely make their choices, he would agree to marriage. The sting of tears could be such a treasured pain when the tears carried pure and unadulterated joy.

"Of course... you and I are of like mind. But, I... I would like, if possible, to uptake again this conversation before I leave for my degree. I would... I would be comforted for there, perhaps, to be some agreement between us. Some accord..."

Lestrade rubbed his face and let Mycroft's words sink in. They weren't surprising, but they were still on the verge of being overwhelming. But, not quite. They should be, but they weren't. He already knew he wanted his future to be with Mycroft so thinking... along those lines... really wasn't that strange. Just not now. Mum was right about that. However, talking about it later, that was ok. They should talk about it and talk about it a lot. And... he liked the idea of having something more formal between him and Mycroft before Mycroft went off for a few years. He'd wanted something between them just for going back to school this year and Mycroft wore his pendant proudly. Yeah, it'd be good to talk about this later.

"I'd like that. We'll have lots of things to talk about before you leave, anyway and... I have to admit it'd be nice to know that we still want the same things before you go. So sure... we'll talk about this, specifically this, later on."

It was supremely inappropriate to rut against his Gregory substitute in such an unbridled manner, but... oh, who cared. He was OFFICIALLY pre-engaged.

"Then it shall be so. You have no inkling of the happiness I feel, Gregory. If I could but have you here, we would not leave our bed for days. I miss you profoundly, my love. And now... it shall be so difficult to be without you in my arms."

"That's part of why I wanted to wait until you got back, but... stupid me had to open my mouth in front of Sherlock."

Mycroft had actually forgotten that part of the conversation. And, as his official pre-fiancé had made no mention of Sherlock's enraged rantings and sacrifices to the goblin pantheon of gods for his
guardian’s downfall, his brother’s reaction must have been favorable. Or at least not apocalyptic.

“Sherlock did not spoil your nice outing with his ravings, I hope. You were being truthful about having an enjoyable time, were you not?”

“No ravings. Went straight to blackmail.”

Ah, now that was perfectly Holmesian. Now and then, Sherlock did display the traits of their family.

“And thus our conversation. I believe all is now clear.”

“I actually think John turned his thinking around, though. Kid’s a big supporter of all things romantic, I suspect. But… I couldn’t risk him telling you before I did, even if it just accidentally slipped out while you two were talking. As it is, the whole town is going to have the story and when Mum finds out, we’ll have to have another of her special chats…”

“You were not exaggerating… you did publically declare your affections?”

“Guess so. And to one of the biggest gossips around. I don’t regret it, though, if that’s what you’re worrying about. Don’t regret it at all, beyond Sherlock hearing. I don’t hide our relationship, Mycroft. I’m proud of it and don’t ever make it a secret.”

Truly the thought had not occurred to Mycroft for quite some time, however, it was still very rewarding to hear it stated so honestly from his husband’s lips.

“Nor do I, though the subject rarely arises in my situation. I shall tell you, though, if you are concerned that I share your pride in our union and that Grandmama has already given approval for our relationship. As far as we care to take it, she has given her blessing. For the circumstances of my future work, our love shall never be called into question.”

“I had a feeling your Gran had something up her sleeve. When Sherlock and I visited her last time, she just kept grinning at me like she already had our futures planned out down to the minute.”

“Grandmama is very pleased with you, my dear. Very pleased, indeed. I am fearful that if we were to part ways, I would find myself living amongst the rabbits while you were installed as my replacement in the family.”

“Told you… the older ladies love me.”

“That they do… as do I.”

When the knock sounded on his door, Mycroft was surprised it was only the pillow he threw at the wood and not the lamp.

“Sounds like you have to go.”

“A meeting that requires my attendance. It had slipped my mind, though I assume I do not have to explain why.”

“Then you go and show them how great you are. We can talk more when you call next time.”

“That we shall. I am most distressed, though, to leave our discussion… it is unquestionably the most significant one of my experience.”

Lestrade hoped his face wouldn’t hurt tomorrow from all the smiling he’d been doing. He’d said it and… it was wonderful. A huge weight had been lifted off of his chest and now he knew for certain
that he and Mycroft felt the same way. Wanted the same things. Why did Mycroft have to be so fucking far away? What he really wanted to do now was celebrate… nakedly and loudly celebrate…

“That’s how I feel, too. But I’ll talk to you soon and we can pick up where we left off. Have fun at your meeting.”

“I shall do my best. Goodbye, Gregory. I love you.”

“I love you, too. Take care of yourself, Mycroft.”

Lestrade hung up the phone and stared at the ceiling. It was starting. That’s what couples did – said ‘I love you’ when they finished on the phone. Or left for work. Or came home from work. And it felt good. It felt very, very good. They were already a great couple, a strong couple but now they were a real couple. The kind that made decisions together and thought about things from two perspectives and tackled problems together and… well, everything they’d already been doing, now that he thought about it. He had someone he loved and who loved him and they were already better at being a real, solid couple than anyone he knew and that included a lot of people who were already married. It wouldn’t be easy and it wouldn’t always be fun, but they’d both work hard at keeping themselves a couple and that’s why they would make it when a lot of others failed.

Now he just had to hope that Mycroft’s Gran didn’t catch wind of his little admission or there’d be more than smiling at their next tea. The last thing he wanted to do was spend the whole time looking at pictures of cakes and tuxedos and listening to Sherlock laugh…
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Sincere apologies for the lateness of this update! I despise making people wait and offer even greater thanks for the continued support this story has received!

Mycroft Holmes was the ultimate master of composure. Of command. With a single twitch of an eyebrow, he could bring a senior government official near to tears, even when said government official was not employed by his own government. Composure, command… all hiding the giddy giggling that was fluttering his heart with every beat. He had always been a man in love, but now he was a man who was loved… not that he had ever doubted, but to hear it, from his spouse’s own perfect lips… There was a great pang of loss, however, for the manner in which Gregory’s confession had to be made, but it was enough to know that his husband had been prepared to make this profession of undying love a momentous and special occasion, and would have succeeded if he was not foiled by Sherlock’s childhood binding to the dark forces of the netherworld. But still it chafed… it ached and he yearned to gaze into his dearest’s eyes as they shared the poetry of their affection…

After his meeting and the one that followed and the emergency one that arose because his very carefully-organized plan from the first meeting was apparently implemented by a chimpanzee with a taste for chaos, Mycroft was finally able to return to his room and, after a look at the clock, decided he should phone one of the people he knew very well would be awake at this dreadfully early hour on his home shores…

“Mycroft, my boy. How strange to hear from you. I quite believed you had forgotten me in your attempts to manage the sack of cats that is the Americans.”

“Hello, Grandmama. And I could not forget you with the quantity of documents I have been collating bearing the very distinct signs of your subtle influence.”

“Pish and tosh… and if I did choose to, as they say, grease the wheels, it is my right to spoil my grandsons now and then.”

“Well, please do not extend such courtesy to Sherlock for the interim. He has caused me considerable upset and does not merit your bounties.”

“Really, Mycroft… how could Sherlock perturb you from across the ocean? Not even his abilities for discord are that impressive, though he did create quite a fuss when last he visited, lecturing my dogs on the subject of mauling or forcing him to run in any manner, most especially in a circular pattern. Fortunately, Gregory is quite capable of absorbing your brother’s particular version of childhood behavior and responding appropriately and constructively.”

Because his Gregory was a parent of unparalleled skill and devotion. Whereas he had been considering two children, perhaps they should, instead, fill their house with a larger family. The quality of offspring they would produce combined with his husband’s attentive nurturing would make for truly astounding individuals to send into the world to help shape its future. Yes, four bedrooms would be far too small an initial residence… oh well, his agent would happily commence a new search with the new requirements or he would take his business elsewhere.
“Sherlock has sullied the most significant moment of my life with the very nature of his existence and... I am now suffering greatly because of it. Suffering *direly* because of it. My very cells ache... the mitochondria are failing to deliver proper energy and I am quite unsure if I shall be able to drag myself even to obtain a cup of the abysmally subpar tea that is on offer in this wretched bunker of building.”

“My my, how very Sarah Bernhardt of you. Shall you now attempt your hand-wringing in a more mature fashion or shall it be necessary instead to purchase tickets to your next theatrical performance?”

Mycroft gritted his teeth and resolved that the next words out of his mouth would not invite a response that would in any way liken him to Sherlock’s overwrought dramatics.

“I apologize, Grandmama, however, you see the extent of my internal distress.”

“Mycroft, tell me plainly what is the purpose of this very welcome, yet highly confusing phone conversation.”

“Grandmama…”

Oh, how difficult it was to speak when one was overcome with emotion.

“Grandmama…”

The force of true love was so powerful it was nearly paralyzing.

“Grandmama…”

“I am well aware of my title, Mycroft.”

“Yes... quite. Grandmama…”

“Do not say that again lest our next meeting involve my gardener, his belt and your bottom.”

“I am far too old for a spanking.”

“I believe the magazines that I know a boy your age has likely read at this point prove otherwise.”

Grandmothers should have absolutely no knowledge of magazines a boy his age enjoyed. It was a violation of the fundamental principles of nature.

“I shall not continue this thread of discussion.”

“And I have my confirmation. Well done, now if you will kindly return to the actual point of his conversation, I would be most pleased.”

Yes, the point... for there *was* a point... a point of extreme importance... a point that was as necessary as the blood in his veins... a point...

“If you have toddled off for a biscuit, I would have appreciated a notification.”

“Oh... I do apologize. I am... I am very... you witness my complete dissolution!”

“Mycroft... I am now both convinced and concerned that you have experienced something of significance. However, if you do not share the details, I cannot offer any advice or take steps to
assist you.”

“Of course. I quite understand. It is… my life… my life has been giving the greatest possible gift and… I must come home, Grandmama. This one occasion, I must set aside my duties and take something for myself.”

The short silence on the other end spoke volumes about the startle he had given his grandmother and Mycroft hoped it would not produce deleterious health effects. Especially those that prevented her from allowing him to return to be with his husband.

“Mycroft… continue with your explanation and know that if it is a frivolous request, the gardener’s belt shall be the very least of your worries.”

“Yes, I am well aware of the significance of my request, however… Grandmama… Gregory has professed his love for me. Officially. And I am… I am not there. I am here and my own heart is filled with both love and pain and I cannot suffer it a moment longer!”

“Hmmm… I must say I am quite disappointed with Gregory if he feels such an admission is made acceptably over a telephone.”

This was a crisis! Not a single ill thought could be allowed to rise about his husband because of Sherlock’s naturally-disastrous personality!

“NO! You do not have the details! Gregory… this was his only choice if he was to avoid an even more impersonal declaration. He did what was required, Grandmama, you must understand this!”

“Then provide an explanation. And kindly lower the tone of your voice. My hearing has not suffered through the years.”

“Of course, that was quite inappropriate of me. Gregory… was forced to defend our relationship in public when a detractor presented herself. And he did so valiantly! He proclaimed in public that I owned the entirety of his affection and… part of that public was Sherlock.”

“Ah… you were required to provide help controlling Sherlock’s resulting hysteria.”

“Actually, Sherlock comported himself admirably. He immediately threatened to blackmail Gregory with the information.”

“Oh, well good for Sherlock. That was remarkably well played by someone so young. I shall ensure there is an extra measure of chocolate-based refreshments when next he visits for tea.”

“Yes, I also was quite proud of him for that, but do you see the dilemma? Though young John did, apparently, reduce the extortionist flame in Sherlock’s mind, Gregory could not take the risk that his first declaration to me be made by any other lips than his. He did not wish this, Grandmama… he had plans for my return to profess his love, but they were dismantled the moment he stood tall and announced, to all assembled, his pride in our union. And now… now I am here and my love is there and… I am completely undone…”

It had been many, many years since she had been young, however, that did not mean those years had been erased by those that followed. To be young and in love… a first love, at that. And that most special first love that was also your only love. The one that completed you and walked with you the rest of your life until… until you were alone again with only your memories for company. And some of those memories involved spending hundreds of pounds of Father’s money on expensive paper to write love notes and affecting a very severe case of feminine troubles to avoid a family
holiday in Switzerland, which conflicted with the first anniversary of meeting her beloved husband, so the two of them could sneak away for a romantic day together taking a drive in the country. Mycroft understood duty, he knew his responsibilities and took them very seriously… but he was also young and deserved, now and then, to actually be young.

“Where are you in terms of your current assignment?”

“In hell! If there is a functional brain to be found it is divided between a dozen people and no two of them are in the same room at the same time! I carefully craft and script proposals, only to find them pillaged as an enemy village. Then, then, they have the audacity to scurry back and beg my grace to pull them out of the hole their incompetence has deepened! We could be finished with this situation if they would simply conduct themselves appropriately and follow my instruction to the letter.”

“Interesting… I shall make inquiries. I will phone you tomorrow. Make yourself available to take my call.”

“Of… of course, Grandmama. Does this mean…”

“Cart before horse is never a good strategy, Mycroft. I shall speak with you tomorrow. Now, you should be sleeping. Commence your preparations.”

“Yes… I will. Thank you, Grandmama?”

“Perhaps. We shall see. Goodnight, Mycroft. And dear… I am extremely happy for you.”

Luckily, the phone call was terminated before Mycroft could answer because he would have found it difficult to do so. Grandmama had not denied his request outright, as he had feared. It was not seemly for a Holmes to debase themselves by crossing their fingers and toes for luck, but if he had to cripple himself with the motions, he would accept it gladly. Now… he had to wait…

Well, it was going about as he expected. Greg liked that he was fairly well-known at school and fairly well-liked, to boot, but that also meant that once his news hit the building it found lots of interested ears and today had already been like being in a goldfish in a tank at the fish store. But… nothing unexpected. His mates were his mates and they already knew and liked Mycroft. The people he knew were going to be bastards were bastards, but no one was brave enough to actually try and start something because they’d walk away with something broken and they knew that. Only a few people surprised him. Ones who must not have a problem with a man dating other men now and then, so long as there were women sprinkled in to balance it out, but saying you loved one was taking a step over the line. So he got to be the celebrity of the day, for good or ill, and when he got home there’d be… oh christ, there’d be Mum, who would already have gotten some wind of all of this. Stupid small community. Fine thing that everyone looked out for everyone else, but everyone also talked about everyone else… this day was just lovely.

And it got lovelier when the school secretary popped into class and handed him another note. At least she had the decency to look apologetic about it. Greg collected his books and refused to acknowledge his mates’ cheeky thumbs-up signals while he stalked out the door heading for what he expected to be Mycroft’s driver since the message said he was required for a meeting. Seeing the very large and very vintage vehicle waiting at the foot of the stairs of his school, he had an inkling of just who he was going to meet.
“Ah, Gregory. How good of you to come. Please do have a seat.”

Lestrade stopped himself from smoothing his hair and fixing his jacket before he took a seat in one of the chairs that likely was as old as Westminster Abbey and cost twice as much and hoped his smile didn’t look too much like one a hopeful bunny gave to the fox that was staring at it and licking its lips.

“Hello ma’am. It’s… it’s nice to see you.”

“How pleasant of you. Do you know why you are here, Gregory?”

“Well, since you didn’t call me in earlier, it can’t be about Sherlock destroying the science lab so… this is about me and Mycroft isn’t it?”

“Oh, Sherlock has been a busy boy, hasn’t he? And that this particular incident was not reported to me indicates it was completely and successfully handled so that my attention was not required. Bravo, young man. Another hurdle you have cleared without, I suspect, significantly elevating your heart rate. It is quite the feather in your cap and I am certain Mycroft was exceedingly proudly of you.”

“Well… he did seem happy that it got sorted. I think it was a weight off his head that if he’s not around Sherlock’s not going to get sent off to the bad kids’ school.”

“I think it was more that you were able, without any specific instruction, to handle a surprising, complex and tenuous situation and emerged victorious. That is valuable, Gregory, very valuable.”

“Ok… thanks for that. But… look, why am I here? I’m thinking it’s for something specific and I think I know what that specific thing is, even though you’re all the way out here, but that doesn’t really seem to matter with you lot and, christ, that sounded peasanty didn’t it, ok let me start again and…”

“Gregory, be silent. Press your lips together and have them remain that way until I point in your direction to indicate that you may again speak. I applaud your assessment of the situation, however, I have endured quite enough hysterical babble for the day and feel the need to impose a bit of order. Now, it is my understanding that your relationship with my grandson has taken a step forward is that correct? Gregory? Oh my, you are good aren’t you? I am now pointing at you, so you may respond and do take it as a codicil to my previous edict that you may respond freely to any questions posed directly to you.”

“I’ll try and remember. And yes, I guess you could say that.”

“Oh, I shall. And I would ask therefore, from you, your intentions.”

“Intentions?”

“You are, I assume, familiar with the term?”

“Sure! And, oh… you mean it that way, don’t you.”

“My meaning encompasses all possible interpretations of the term. You may choose the one you prefer around which to frame your dissertation, however, I believe you are cognizant of the fact that some interpretations are more relevant to the current situation than others. I am pointing. Begin.”

“No, I mean yeah, I got that. Ummm… well, Mycroft and I… we… well, it’s like this… we love each other and we just finally decided to say that. It’s not like… well, it’s not like we haven’t
felt that way, but we just never said it and… well, there you have it.”

“That is an inordinate number of well’s to restate information I already possess. For your next attempt, please delight me with fresh facts about the future trajectory of your association with my grandson. I shall not lie to you, Gregory, both Mycroft and I take such a declaration very seriously and if your intentions do not match the significance we assign to the circumstances, then the nature of our discussion will need to shift.”

“They are! Do! Yeah, that’s the right one. They do! Just… oh shit, I mean crap! Which isn’t any better, someone shoot me now.”

“That truly isn’t a wise statement in this house, Gregory, for there are a number of individuals within earshot who might consider it some form of veiled threat and acquiesce to your request.”

“What? Oh god, Mycroft would hate me if I got killed when he was all the way in America! And Mum would have my head! She can’t afford a funeral right now – the car needs new tires!”

“Gregory… do calm yourself and if, by chance, a profanity slips your lips, rest assured that I have heard far worse and in far more sensitive situations. Now, gather your thoughts and continue.”

Which Lestrade took a few moments to do. Why did everyone want to talk about this? Well, he knew why, but that didn’t make it any more comfortable…

“Yes… ok. Thanks for that. I… I do have intentions towards Mycroft. I can’t picture it any other way, actually. I mean, he doesn’t have any experience with this sort of thing and sometimes he gets all cake and rings and doves flying and one day… one day… well, that could be us one day. But we’re not there, yet. Mycroft’s going off and that’ll be years we won’t be together, physically together, and, yeah, I know that he’s going to be flying off like he is now even after he’s got his degree and we’ve got a place that’s ours, and all that’s ok… but we’ve got to get to that point before I’m thinking any further ahead. We’re too young for anything more right now and… well, I’m not ready to be a husband. I’ve got to be sure, really sure, that I can take care of him before I think about getting married and it’s going to take time for me to get there. Yeah, I know that he’s got tons of money and doesn’t need me to take care of him, but I have to be able to, anyway. You never know, do you? It’s like you see on the telly where the posh family is all money and more money one day and then something happens and the next day they’re moving into a one-room flat above the pub and the little ones are out selling matchsticks! I’ve got to be able to keep us going while he gets his feet back under him and then there’ll be Sherlock’s school fees because there’s no way I’m tossing him into a school like mine! They can’t give him the education he deserves and what if he blows up that lab, too and…”

“Gregory! Good heavens… you do have a talent for self-agitation, don’t you? However, Mycroft does as well, so you are quite well-matched in this. Now, listen to me closely, for I do not care to repeat myself. I am very proud of you. Mycroft, as you correctly stated, is quite new to the concept of personal relationships and can be… over-eager… in his designs. You are providing the balance he requires in this and have a very firm, albeit Dickensian, view of reality and your responsibilities towards him. Whereas a financial catastrophe is virtually impossible, barring the destruction of the Earth by the space aliens that your younger generation is so keen to postulate, he will face other hardships and difficulties and you are quite correct in assuming the role of caring for him during these times shall fall to you. And neither of you is properly positioned to take vows at this point, in any case. I would much rather your wedding photographs be taken when you both more resemble responsible adults than members of a children’s choir. However, I do require your word that you will continually provide Mycroft with the reassurance he needs that you are faithfully committed to him regardless of the circumstances of your lives. This will be the one area of his life
where his confidence shall flag and he will need you to be his rock.”

Mycroft did have a little insecurity about them being together, that much Lestrade already knew, and he couldn’t deny he had his own share that he wrestled with from time to time.

“I can give you my word on that and do it easily. I… it probably sounds terrible for me to say, but I get a lot of offers, if you know what I mean, and… they just don’t appeal to me. They used to, but now… none of them are Mycroft. It’s like he rewired my brain and now the only person I can even think about wanting is him.”

Lestrade always felt a little better when the very proper woman in front of him gave him twitched her nose in that little way she did. It seemed to mean that he’d done something right.

“And that is as good a description of love as I could ask for. It will be difficult for you at times, Gregory, but I can promise you that he will reward you with a greater and deeper affection than you can possibly imagine. When days pass with both of you in the same home, yet you have not shared a word because his mind and attention are entirely focused on some matter of extreme crisis, you can take comfort in knowing that his devotion is absolute and unwavering. If you, however, do develop doubts, speak to him of it. Do not allow resentments to grow and poison you. Even if he does not wish to broach the subject, force him to listen to your concerns. I, on occasion, was required to snip the phone wires, send the servants on holiday and lock the doors behind them when it became necessary to gain my husband’s attention when he had too long neglected my affections and I had begun to harbor doubts about our union. When Mycroft manages a matter of importance, stand fast in quiet support, then when it is concluded, demand your due as his partner. It is absolutely your right and he will not fail you if he is made aware of the situation. Do you understand?”

Yes, he did and it was a good thing to hear, actually. Nice to know that he wasn’t the only one to have to go through this and that it could be successful if you just put your back into it. Mycroft had often said his Gran’s marriage had been a very strong one.

“Yes. I think I get it and I don’t have a problem giving him a bash to the head if he’s being an arse.”

“Good. With every conversation your stock rises, Gregory. Now, shall we enjoy a light refreshment? I believe I have disturbed your lunch hour.”

“Sure, that would be great. I’m never going to turn down a good meal.”

“A sound philosophy. And we can use the time to discuss other matters. How do you stand on the subject of architecture?”

“I’m… for it?”

“Excellent. I have some plans for you to review.”

“Oh… ok.”

“Do you ride, Gregory?”

“Ummm… no?”

“Then we shall skip those with stables, for now. Do not fret, there are many others for us to peruse and they can always be altered before we begin construction, in any event.”
Lestrade’s neighbors were used to seeing an expensive car parked in front of his house, but seeing him dropped off in a vehicle that looked like something the Queen rode in to go to a royal ball was a new one for them. Well, they could let their heads spin because he could use the company. After a very nice lunch and a long look at mini-mansions in blueprint, ending with a discussion of portrait poses, he felt like a wind-up toy that had been wound up past its spring’s maximum. Not that… Grandmama… was pushing him, because he actually had to admit she wasn’t, but it was still a lot to take in. Three little words… luckily, he’d said them to the person for whom they were 100% true. Now, all he wanted was a hot shower, a long hour in front of the telly and a good night’s sleep.

“Greg… I think we need to talk.”

And an uncomfortable conversation with his mother. Couldn’t forget about that.

“Can we just say we did and let it go at that?”

“Being flippant is not really the way to go right now.”

“Fine. Can I at least…”

“No. Kitchen, now.”

Greg fought the urge to roll his eyes like a little brat and led the way to the kitchen where he dropped into a chair and waited for the axe to fall. Which took its first whack in the form of a bottle of soda dropped in front of him before his mum took her own seat at the table.

“Anything you want to tell me, son?”

“I guess it depends on what you’ve already heard.”

“Well, I admit I was a little surprised to pop out for lunch and have two people congratulate me on my son’s engagement. So, you might say I’ve heard rather a lot.”

“Well, you heard wrong. Mycroft and I aren’t engaged. Nowhere near it. I just… it’s a long story, but I told him I loved him and he said he loved me.”

“Then why is the whole area hoping for an invitation to the reception because the food’s got to be good with a family that rich?”

“Because… because I sort of made that same announcement in front of Diane and you remember what she’s like.”

Lestrade took a long sip of his soda as his mother gave him a weary laugh.

“Not one of your better decisions, I must admit. You told her you loved Mycroft. Is that your story?”

“It’s true! She was trying to worm her way back into my life and I had to set her straight. Next thing I know, it’s all over school and, apparently, all over town and now it’s got me getting married when Mycroft and I already talked about that and neither one of us wants that right now. Not at all, though… it’s not off the table for the future. The far future. The very far future after we’ve got our careers started and we can do things right. I haven’t changed my mind, Mum. What I told you before… that’s still the case. It’s not my fault if people got a piece of gossip and decided to decorate it up a bit.”

Lestrade hoped that if he just kept avoiding his mother’s eye he wouldn’t have to worry about being
turned to stone by an evil look.

“So, you and Mycroft shared the magic words.”

“Yes.”

“And you meant them.”

“Yes.”

“Any chance you want to take them back?”

“No. Not at all. They’re the truth. I do love him. I spent a lot of time thinking about it and that’s how I feel. I know lots of people say ‘I love you’ and it’s sort of… they don’t really mean it as a forever thing, but, he’s part of me now and I don’t mean that in a weird clingy way, but just a comfortable, this-is-the-way-it-is way. It’s like he’s got a little space inside me and, even though he’s not here, he is and I know he feels the same way. Please don’t make me talk about this because I feel stupid doing it since I don’t know how to describe it properly and I sound like an idiot when I try.”

Lestrade’s mother watched her son squirm and almost felt sorry for him. Almost. It was hard to feel sorry for someone who had found something as special as a true connection with another person. She’d thought she’d had it with his father, but even then… even then she knew there was something not quite right. Not quite whole or complete. And she couldn’t say the boy on the other side of the table was behaving like a boy. No ridiculous ideas or expectations, no turning his whole life upside down for another person, no forgetting about his own friends or interests, no sitting and pining because his boyfriend wasn’t here… no one could say he’d shirked his responsibilities for either work or school because he’d been beating himself to a pulp working extra hours to make up for those he lost from trying to be a surrogate brother to Sherlock and, now, John. Her little boy was very much a man and a man in love, on top of it.

“Ok, we don’t have to talk about that just as long as I know you’re still following the right plan. I trust you, Greg, but if you start to think a different way, I want you to come and talk to me about it, alright. Can you promise me not to do anything hasty without talking to me first?”

“Yeah, I can do that. It won’t happen, but I can promise you, anyway. I want… I want this to work, Mum. Mycroft and me… I want this to work, so I’m going to do it properly. Give it the time it needs. I love him and I’m not going to make a mess out of everything.”

Lestrade lifted his eyes a crack and was relieved that his mother was at least nodding and not glaring.

“Well, then I can stop worrying about this, I guess.”

Lestrade’s mother reached over and retrieved an envelope from the counter.

“What’s that?”

“Oh, just a note on paper that costs more than my car apologizing for taking you out of school today and inviting me for tea.”

“Mycroft’s Gran?”

“I was concerned that I was getting summoned to start the wedding planning.”

“Nah, she’s actually happy with our decisions. Even if she does already have a whole table-full
of architectural plans for houses for us to decide on. I told her we’d probably want to live in London, but, we’ll talk about it more when Mycroft comes home. We’ve got years to make any plans, but if it makes her happy to do some daydreaming, I’m not going to tell her she can’t.”

It was wrong to be happy her son found someone who was financially well-off, but Lestrade’s mother couldn’t deny it helped her worry less about his future. The last thing she wanted was for him to have to scrape by like she was but, if he didn’t love Mycroft for who he was and not for what he had in the bank, she’d be kicking him in the arse for putting money ahead of what was really important.

“Well, just make sure you have a room for me so I can visit no matter where you end up. And you’ll give me some tips on how to survive having tea with the posh set, right? Don’t want to make a fool out of myself and have them change their mind about wanting you near their flesh and blood.”

“Don’t worry, Grandmama adores me so I’m safe.”

“Grandmama?”

“I’m sort of under orders.”

“Well, good that you still realize that it’s us old ladies that give the orders.”

“I don’t think either of you would let me forget that.”

“And you’d be right.”

This was intolerable! Utterly intolerable… He’d not been able to sleep after his conversation with Grandmama and this day was yet another in the endless stream of incompetence that had been plaguing him since he arrived. Moreover, he had little confidence that there would be any appreciable change in the future. With that particular headache threatening to explode his skull, the additional tension of waiting for the hour of his phone call was pushing him to the very edge of his limits. So now, here he lay. And just lay. He’d tried countless times to read a book and found his eyes forever wandering to the telephone on his nightstand, so he finally set it aside and resigned himself to a quiet and reflective wait. And by reflective, he meant letting his mind wander through his memories of his beloved spouse that became dreams of his spouse as he finally relaxed and the exhaustion consumed him. When the phone rang, it was with no shame that he scrambled towards it like the last life raft on the sinking ship, recovering his poise at the last moment in case this was a matter of business.

“Hello? Mycroft Holmes.”

“I do know your name, grandson, but I admire the imposing tone of your voice, nonetheless.”

My apologies, Grandmama. My schedule is not a regular one, as you are quite aware, and I must not assume I know the identity of my caller.”

“Of course. Now tell me, was today a better day for you?”

“No! It was a horrendous march of inattention to detail and presumption of ‘knowing better’ that led directly into a gaping pit of failure.”

“Such cheery news, however, it does support the information from my own inquiries. I was quite clear with the Americans that if they obstructed your efforts, then they would not benefit from
your efforts. Please gather your things, Mycroft. There will be a car to collect you in half an hour.”

“C…collect me? I am coming home?”

“Had your presence been valued and the initiative making the predicted rate of progress I would leave you installed to complete your assignment, however, I do not approve of the criminal waste of resources being perpetrated for this endeavor. Those that come begging at our door need to learn that our assistance is not to be taken for granted. There is transportation waiting at the airport. I will see you soon, Mycroft. Have a safe flight.”

And before he could pour out the tears of his thanks, Mycroft was listening to a dead line. But that was immaterial. Home… home. He was going home. The trite cliché that home is where the heart is suddenly made sense. Be it a castle or an abandoned appliance crate, wherever his Gregory was would be home. A welcoming, loving home.

Mycroft shoved every personal item into his luggage, completely without regard for condition, which would make the house staff quite cross when they saw the wrinkles they would be tasked to remove and carried his cases through the halls, ignoring every hail and plea for attention he encountered along the way to the door. Fortunately the car arrived earlier than anticipated because the train of hang-wringers that followed him outside to plea for his continued presence was souring his bliss. Once in the vehicle with his weeks of torment fading in the rearview mirror, Mycroft could finally release both a deep, cleansing breath and the smile he’d been holding out of sight of the undeserving. He was going home! The flight would be long and… Grandmama said she would see him soon and she did not use words imprecisely and he would likely have to meet with her before he could finally find the arms of his fiancé and the comfort they offered. If he was lucky, though, perhaps they could have some time together directly upon his return to his residence such as another drive through the estate that ended in a romantic interlude under a spreading oak. This time, his husband would offer no objection to his more amorous attentions. Mental note… keep blankets in the boot of the cars for spontaneous eruptions of lust under the trees.

Lestrade wasn’t surprised he had to field a hundred questions after yesterday’s disappearance from school, but it seemed the more things happened, the more his explanations just got an ‘oh’ as a response. And the sharpest edge of the gossip had dulled, leaving only a lingering anticipation for fresh news and another sighting of Mycroft, who was gaining something of a reputation as the ‘mysterious’ lover even though his mates laughed when people asked if he was really real. Luckily, he’d been upfront and honest with his friends about some of the peculiarities of his and Mycroft’s relationship so they weren’t making him feel like he was stupid for sitting around waiting when he was still getting notes passed to him in class feeling him out for a little after-school rendezvous. Those he not only tossed out, but destroyed since he did not want to be responsible for any hopeful suitor getting mysteriously deported because Mycroft was in a bad mood when he found an offending note.

And he had the afternoon off from the shop! That would have been better if he had Friday-night plans, but, this was one of the hardships about seeing Mycroft he was going to have to get used to. While the others were going out or just spending time with their girlfriends or boyfriends, he was the odd-man out, but it didn’t bother him. Much. It was actually a welcome chance to relax since he had a full day at the shop tomorrow and he had promised to do some work around the house on Sunday, so a whole afternoon/evening today would be just the ticket to… oh no.

In front of Lestrade’s house was Mycroft’s familiar car with their driver waiting in the front seat. Lestrade breathed a big sigh and tapped on the glass only to receive a smile and a finger pointing
towards his own door. So, what was the most likely scenario… Sherlock got out of school early and decided to invade his house to cause whatever mischief was catching his fancy at the moment. That sounded about right. Except… why was his mum’s car here? She wasn’t supposed to get off work for a few hours yet. Ok, this was now, officially, an emergency situation and Lestrade could only hope that whatever evil Sherlock had unleashed, his mum had contained well enough so that there wasn’t an army of solicitors in his kitchen waiting for him.

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“Where have you been! I have been maliciously restrained and demand that you enact whatever measures are necessary to secure my freedom!”

“If you just ate your lunch you could leave the table, Sherlock. Mrs. Lestrade said so.”

“There are chains upon me and I demand they be removed!”

“Sherlock, finish your vegetables then you and John can go and play. Greg, glad you’re home. You’ve got some packing to do.”

Lestrade wondered if he’d actually gotten hit by a car on the walk home and was now in a coma experiencing hallucinations that were, unfortunately, neither filthy nor funny.

“I’m not even sure what I want to ask about first, so I’ll go from least to most upsetting. Why are you home? Why are Sherlock and John here? Why am I packing? Are there any angry solicitors hiding in my bedroom? And stop trying to shove your food down your shirt when Mum’s not looking, you little bastard!”

“I am being maligned!”

“It’s only a few bites, you weakling.”

“You rescind that remark, John Watson, or you shall feel the full fury of my wrath.”

“How much wrath can you have if you can’t even eat a few forkfuls of peas?”

“The ways of the dark forces come in many sizes, forms and pasty green lumps.”

“Mum…”

“I’m home early to watch these two so you didn’t have to come home early and miss more school. And before you ask, apparently I’ve got the whole weekend off as an extra bonus courtesy of a Mr. Edwards.”

“Do I want to know?”

“Edwards is an officious menial who serves as Grandmama’s personal slave. He is, if possible, more meddlesome and bothersome than Mycroft, though his waistline does not approximate the circumference of the Earth.”

“Ok… that’s good. Not the fat crack, though, you evil thing. Mum, are you… you can’t be babysitting these two…”

“God no. That’s your job. You get to escort Sherlock and John to Sherlock’s grandmother’s house for the weekend. Apparently, there’s something going on and she wants you there.”

“Even me! I get to spend a whole weekend in a palace!”
“Grandmama’s residence is not a palace. They officially removed that designation from the name ages ago to reduce the number of unwashed sightseers seeking a tour.”

Lestrade felt his headache beginning to blossom and his mother’s large grin wasn’t helping one bit.

“Aren’t you at least upset you got rousted from work to tend to this pack of hyenas?”

“Son, I’ve got all of tonight and the whole weekend free. Alone… at least for awhile. Get my meaning?”

There would be no meaning getting on this issue whatsoever.

“So, I’ve got to go be a chaperone…”

“I do not need a chaperone!”

“… go be something exactly like a chaperone just with a different name for these two for the weekend? I’m supposed to work tomorrow!”

“Already taken care of. Just go and have a nice time, Greg. A fun weekend in the country isn’t something to scoff at, you know. And maybe there’s a party going on and you’ll get to meet some new people…”

“Anyone at Grandmama’s events is either ancient or dead and one cannot always be sure of the exact ratio without drawing blood samples.”

“Great, a geezer party!”

“Gregory Lestrade! You are being asked to bring a kindly old woman’s grandson and his friend for a visit and you should be glad to do something to make her happy. And me, too. Believe me, I am more than ready for a little happiness. You don’t want me to explain that, do you?”

“I do.”

“Shut it, Sherlock. John, eat his peas so you two can go and… be somewhere else.”

“Sorry, son, but you don’t have time for that. These two are already packed and you need to get yourself ready because you’re going to run late if you don’t. And I’ve got company coming, so I have to get ready, too. A little dancing, a few drinks and then we’ll see what the night brings.”

“Fornication. I sincerely hope you are well-provided with contraceptives because this hovel cannot support another dependent.”

“Oh look… a nice big scoopful of peas left in the pot. I’ll just add them to your plate and give John this piece of cake for being such a good lad and eating all of his lunch. You want cake, you eat every pea and think about your conversation and where it took a wrong turn.”

“Abuse! Torturous abuse and no one races to my aid! I am besieged by derision on all sides. I am France.”

“Too bad, Mr. France, because this cake is great! Thank you, Mrs. Lestrade.”

“You’re welcome, John.”

“Be not fooled by his obsequiousness! John Watson is a fiend of the most scabrous nature!”
"I don’t have any scabs! I picked the last one off my knee yesterday for you to experiment on!"

Lestrade massaged his temples and decided that it wasn’t worth getting bothered over; he just wished Grandmama would have said something about it yesterday. Oh well… it was supposed to be decent weather so it wouldn’t be hard getting the two terrors outside to do things to run off their energy. And it would be a great thing for John to get more time to work on drawing Sherlock into his web, though that seemed to be going pretty well already. Further… he’d be a complete bastard if he shirked child duty and cost his mum a nice weekend of her own. It was very thoughtful of Grandmama to give his mum something for her inconvenience and he’d feel terrible not letting her get to enjoy the unexpected free time. So, leaving the War of Scabs behind him, Lestrade stalked to his bedroom to throw a few things together, saying a small prayer that he didn’t need anything upscale to wear. But, he had a suspicion that if he needed a suit or something, there’d be one that perfectly fit waiting for him.

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“This is incalculably boring!”

“We’ve been in the car five minutes, you pest.”

“And it’s not boring anyway, Sherlock. It’s fun! We’ve got room to spread out and we can play car games or I brought my Top Trumps, even though you argue with everything they say…”

“Their ratings and point assignments do not pass scientific scrutiny!”

“You only complain when you lose.”

“Ridiculous! I complain regardless of my gain or loss of victory.”

Lestrade slipped off his shoes and stretched his legs as best he could, which in Mycroft’s, car was pretty stretched. Maybe he should feel strange spending his Friday night and weekend tending to kids, but he didn’t. The only thing that he wasn’t happy about was that he wouldn’t get any time to just relax and let his head stop spinning. He was tired. Tired and ragged and he’d be even more tired and ragged by the time they got back on Sunday. Maybe he’d get lucky and he could get the hellions to do something quietly so he had a few hours to read or take a long walk.

All of this… it was making him miss Mycroft even more fiercely than normal. And it was starting to send tendrils through his brain that he didn’t like. It wasn’t going to be a lot of fun if he was the one who had to do all of the keeping the home fires burning and then do his own job on top of it. This was going to be hard… this was really going to be hard and he really, really needed Mycroft to talk to right now. Grandmama was right, if he bottled things up he was just going to blow and that wouldn’t help anybody. Already he was feeling pressured – what would it be like after he’d been through years of this!

And… fuck. He wasn’t going to be home if Mycroft called this weekend. Maybe his mum would answer and tell him to call his Gran’s, but it sounded like answering the phone wasn’t going to be at the top of her list. Wonderful. A non-stop weekend of Sherlock and John, who he adored but who could wear him out without even trying, a brain full of thoughts flapping around like agitated chickens and no chance to even talk to his boyfriend to help with it all. Maybe he could take a nap. Get some rest while they rode and refill his tanks for the rest of the day. No telling what was planned for tonight and if he had to play dad to these two over what was probably a 12-fork dinner and provide their entertainment, he could use the extra energy. Just a quick nap. One quiet, quick nap…
“You can’t make up your own rules!”

“I am inarguably more intelligent than the rock-headed cretins who created this game; therefore my rules are far superior and should take precedence!”

“You are such a cheat, Sherlock Holmes!”

“You are a decidedly poor loser, John Watson!”

Or look out of the window… looking out of the window was nice, too.

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“AAAAHHHH! It is a palace!”

“Now I am deafened! Lackey, fashion a muzzle for the Chihuahua immediately!”

“Fine. It’ll be a match for yours. It is a pretty grand place, isn’t it, John? Sort of thing you see in the films and the inside is just as nice.”

“I… I don’t know what to do in a place like that.”

“Behave as one of the servants might. In fact, you might take direction from them and learn your future trade while you have the opportunity.”

“Sherlock, I’m really not in the mood to deal with your nastiness, so just shut it or peas won’t be the worst thing in your nightmares tonight.”

“Your threats are not even piffle-worthy, till-minder.”

“Sleep! I bet the beds here are super! Am I getting my own room or are Sherlock and I sharing?”

“I am not suffering your nocturnal mutterings and flatulence!”

“I don’t know, John. I can’t imagine they’re short of bedrooms, but you two might get put together so they only have to rig one door with explosives to prevent escape instead of two.”

“As if I am not fully capable of defusing an explosive device. Do not insult me with your ignorance, peasant.”

And, yes, he was already ready for a good beer, a good book and a good bed. With his luck, he’d get milk, whatever film the toddlers wanted and then bedcheck duty. Lestrade shook his head to try and dislodge the sour mood that kept sinking in its claws into his brain and gave Sherlock a smile instead of responding.

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“Wow… this is amazing.”

Lestrade had to laugh, seeing John’s wide, shining eyes. That’s probably what he looked like the first time he visited. Actually, he was pretty sure he still looked like that.

“It is completely disagreeable. There is no space set aside for my experiments!”

“You’ve visited once a decade from what I understand you little troll, so what the fuck do you
“A commitment to science! There is no reason I should not have a fully-equipped laboratory ready for my use.”

“Except you’d probably blow the house up and then where would your Gran be?”

Lestrade felt a tug on his shirt and was surprised it was John, looking a little worried.

“What’s wrong, John?”

“Is she… is she nice? Not that I don’t think she is but…”

John quickly cut his eyes over to Sherlock, who was currently poking at a large statue as if he was trying to gauge how much force it would take to topple the thing, and then returned them to Lestrade who got the message.

“She’s very nice, don’t worry, and I’m sure she’ll like you a lot. She likes me and I’m a lot rougher around the edges than you are, so you’ll be fine.”

John’s relief was visible and he brightened back to his usual eager self, which returned a little pep to Lestrade’s step. Yeah, he was tired. Yeah, he was ragged, but it was worth it to make two good kids happy.

“Grandmama tolerates you because you are easily directable and there is no chance that your appallingly subpar genetic material can be introduced into our bloodline.”

Ok, so one good kid and one goblin spawn. Maybe if he asked nicely he could find someone to give him a pity beer…

“Ah, Gregory. How good of you to agree to my invitation. Sherlock, you appear surprisingly tidy; I am quite pleased. Now, kindly introduce your friend.”

“That is John.”

“Utterly unacceptable. You may have another chance and do not make the mistake of squandering it if you hope to pass the remainder of the day in any form of an agreeable fashion.”

“Ugh… Grandmama, this is John Watson. John Watson, this is Grandmama. For the duration of our imprisonment, John Watson, look to me for examples of appropriate behavior if you find them lacking in your own personal repertoire, which I already assume is the case.”

John showed Sherlock his fist, which made the taller boy sputter, then turned and gave a little bow to the lady in the room.

“I’m very happy to meet you, ma’am.”

“Excellent. A boy with manners. Sherlock, take a few moments this evening and scribe some notes on your colleague’s comportment. Now, there are beverages waiting the library; John would you care to escort me?”

And, like a perfect gentleman, John walked forward and offered his arm, to Sherlock’s enormous snort and escorted his hostess who made no comment that the boy had to hold his arm nearly to the top of his head for her to lay her hand on it. Lestrade kicked Sherlock into following and wondered
how in heaven did Sherlock and Mycroft ever think the old bird didn’t have a sense of humor?

“This is really good, thank you.”

“It is the juice of a fruit. You are as easily pleased as a beggar child and maintain a similar level of hygiene. Already the leavings of your gulping dangles at the corner of your mouth, pronouncing you unclean.”

“What!”

“Calm down, John. Sherlock’s just kidding.”

“Do you deny the dangle? If so, plebian, you require visual enhancements!”

“Did I get it? I wiped twice!”

“You’re fine, John. Don’t let Sherlock’s teasing get to you.”

“How is the pimple supposed to learn to conduct himself in public if his offenses are never corrected?”

“I’m not a pimple! That’s just gross.”

“You are a pimple and if you are wise you will forsake a bath tonight as the warm water might encourage you to pop.”

And, of course, Sherlock had to pluck a cream-filled bun off a tray and give it a little squeeze to emphasize his point, the results of which he slurped up loudly with his tongue.

“That’s it! No more talk about anything that you know I’ll want to give you a swat for.”

“Child batterment! Grandmama, you are a witness to the peon’s cruelty.”

“I do believe my hearing is fading in my dotage. Did you say something, Sherlock?”

“I am an island of sanity in this house of madness!”

“Must be a pretty small island. One of those that’s only got one palm tree and a couple of coconuts.”

“My island is not paltry, you raisin! It is a vast swath of paradise in the sea of stupidity populated by speck-sized fish that look suspiciously like you.”

“Good heavens, Grandmama! I would swear that Sherlock was here from the cacophony… oh my.”

Mycroft froze in place and Lestrade was very lucky he had already set down his glass because he had suddenly lost the ability to think, let alone control his muscles.

“Mycroft, do discontinue your impersonation of a fish. It is by no means flattering. Did I, by chance, forget to mention that I invited the remainder of your familial circle to visit for the weekend? I do apologize, how terribly forgetful of me.”

“M…Mycroft?”
“Oh no, the whale is back.”

“You said your brother was fat. You’re dumb.”

Lestrade thought he heard other voices, but couldn’t be sure as the room now seemed to only hold two people. Himself and the one he was propelling himself towards.

“Come, boys. Let us take a walk in the garden while Mycroft and Gregory reacquaint themselves.”

“You would well-advised to place plastic sheeting down on any stainable surface before OW!”

“Do you know, John, that the house boasts a very well-appointed gymnasium? I am certain Sherlock would greatly enjoy a lesson in the manly art of boxing.”

“That sounds great!”

“Grandmama, be aware that I am notifying the authorities that my welfare is being threatened!”

“As you wish, but do remember to telephone the human authorities and not the animal welfare workers. I would hate for you to be placed in the adoption system as it would be quite difficult for the shelter employees to properly describe your breed and… well, you are a troublesome little puppy. I fear your tenure in your cage would be quite protracted.”

At some point, they were left alone. At some point he’d touched the person standing in front of him and felt electricity flow through his fingertips. At some point arms wrapped themselves around his waist and he felt the warmth of another body press against him and everything in his world, once again, felt complete. Finally, at some deliriously joyful point he felt his mouth being taken in a kiss so sweet it was as if he could taste the essence of his husband’s love on his lips and tongue.

“Gregory… oh my beloved, Gregory. I had thought it would still be days before we could be reunited.”

“You’re back… why didn’t you tell me you were coming back?”

“I did not know until half an hour before my departure. Grandmama… Grandmama listened to my pleas and allowed me to return home to you.”

“You talked to her?”

“I had to, my dear. I had to plead my case! I could not… I could not remain parted from you a moment longer.”

“Well, that explains why I got called out here yesterday. Looks like she was making sure of things before she gave you the ok.”

Lestrade ran his hands across Mycroft’s back as he pulled him even tighter to his chest and almost moaned feeling the tremble of Mycroft’s chuckle against his body.

“Grandmama always makes certain of her decisions before she pronounces them.”

“Just like you?”

“Exactly like me.”
“Alright then… pronounce.”

How in the world Mycroft’s smile could be both shy and wicked, Lestrade would never know, but he liked it. A lot.

“How well. I love you, Gregory.”

“And I love you, Mycroft. God, that feels so much better saying in person.”

And even better when you could cement your words with another long, slow kiss you felt down to your toes.

“You home for good or are you headed right back?”

“My assignment has been declared finished and I have no other of which I am aware at the moment, so I am home, as you say, for good.”

Lestrade dropped his head onto Mycroft’s shoulder and breathed in his boyfriend’s scent while he let his emotions quiet themselves. He had not been prepared for the rush of seeing Mycroft again and the kick to the heart had been nearly painful. But it was worth it. It was so very worth it…

“If it could be so, my love, I would never leave your side. Please know this and do not allow yourself to doubt.”

“I’ll try, but I am going to, sometimes. Grandmama and I already had a talk about that, but I know to just talk about it rather than sit there and hope I start to feel better. And hey… it could go the other way. Maybe I’m a detective and have to work long hours for a case and you start to feel neglected. You’ll say something, right? Get my attention and tell me you’re starting to worry so we can work it out right away and not let things just build up, blow up and bye bye us?”

Mycroft pressed a kiss to his love’s soft hair and thanked his stars yet again that he had found a man both blessedly romantic and perfectly practical.

“I shall readily voice my concerns. As easily as I tell you I love you, I shall tell you my worries and heartaches. Nothing lasts that is not maintained, my beloved and I shall take every step to maintain and keep whole… keep strong… the bonds of our love. Does this reassure you?”

Lestrade snuggled deeper into the crook of Mycroft’s neck and gave himself a moment of enjoying the warmth both of Mycroft’s body and his words. This was why they would work. Neither of them believed the stupid fairy tale about relationships magically lasting just because you wanted them to.

“Yes, it does. So does this.”

Mycroft’s confusion lasted only as long as it took for Lestrade to flick his tongue out to taste his lover’s skin, then begin to lay small kisses up his neck.

“Ah… yes, quite reassuring.”

And quite arousing. It had been far too long…

“Ummm… I’d say so. You know… we really are here for the weekend. Mum’s got her own romantic holiday planned and… who says we can’t have one of our own?”

“I had wondered why Grandmama stated I would be in residence for several days. I rather think she expects us to take advantage of the opportunity. I have come to believe that Grandmama has a
romantic streak of her own that she has been waiting to utilize.”

“She likes to see you happy, love.”

“She enjoys when we are both happy, Gregory. And I intend to capitalize on our time together this weekend to make you very happy.”

“Oh, I like the sound of that.”

“And what you like, I desire to grant. Now, I believe we should rejoin Grandmama and her charges. I suspect she would welcome the assistance and if I remain in your arms a moment longer, Sherlock’s concern for the upholstery might not be quite so unfounded.”

Especially with his Gregory rubbing something hard and eager against a part of him that matched it point for point.

“Yeah, you might be right. Later? After the 12-fork and 7-glass dinner?”

“I suspect we shall have a casual meal, actually. You do not wish to witness the havoc Sherlock can wreak when presented with an overabundance of utensils. The last time he was present at a formal dinner, he somehow removed his braces and used them to create a sling to launch silverware at me from eight seats away. It was quite impressive, really, though the German ambassador was not happy when a teaspoon landed in his soup.”

“Well, then casual it’ll need to be because I can tell you that this time, he’d have John passing him fresh ammo and helping him sight the target.”

Mycroft lifted his spouse’s head and gave him a final kiss before stepping back to try and rearrange his dignity.

“I am very happy Grandmama widened the invitation to include young John. I am exceedingly eager to observe their interactions.

“Oh, you’re going to love it. And, I think he’s already made a fan of your Gran. Nice, polite boy who punches Sherlock when he starts pissing on everyone’s parade.”

“Very efficient and Grandmama does appreciate efficiency. I suspect this shall be a spectacular weekend and one on which we must make a start. Shall we, my dear?”

“Yeah, I think we shall.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

As ever, my very sincere gratitude for all of your kind words and kudos!

Note: I had a special request that I posted today that really reads as an outtake from this story. Feel free to check it out:

The Harvest - it's a good time for harvesting late-season berries and with our boys at hand, you know it's not going to be a particularly smooth process...

“This is amazing!”

“It is a horse – there is little amazing about a horse, John Watson. They are stupid, smelly beasts... ah. I see the attraction. If one shrank the creature to the size of a dust mote, it would be unmistakable from you.”

“You’re just afraid that I’ll ride better that you do, Sherlock.”

“I scoff at your delusions.”

“Scoff all you want, but I bet you can’t even sit on a horse without falling off.”

“How dare you, pepper speck!

“Well, you’re sort of flimsy. If the horse even breathes, it’ll knock you off.”

“Flimsy? The impudence! We shall settle this matter on the field of battle!”

“We can combine that with our sword fight!”

“Hmmm... that is not an entirely disagreeable idea. However, we might consider mutating our competition into a joust.”

“Joust! That sounds great! When can we start?”

“Whensoever the dirigible presents me with access to our weapons collection.”

“Do you mean your brother?”

“There is no other person in this vicinity who approaches the weight limit for traveling across a suspension bridge.”

“Shut it, you little bastard! We can hear you, you know. Your brother’s not fat.”

“The wind seems to be unusually loud, John. Let us stand on the other side of your doppelgänger so we shall not be disturbed again.”

Sherlock dragged John away, leveling a glare at the two older boys that made each of them grin and wave in response.
“Gregory, I cannot stress too highly how delighted I am with this. How synergistically they work together! Sherlock has never taken to another person so readily and he has taken to young John. I can assure you that he has formed an attachment, whether he desired that outcome or not. And how wonderfully his new friend has managed to insinuate himself into Sherlock’s heavily-guarded personal sphere. Truly, I am very, very pleased.”

“John’s a good kid, too. Might teach Sherlock a thing or two about being less of a troll. Actually, I know he will, because he’s already started. He’s got Sherlock noticing when he does something stupid. Maybe not always, but now and then, and that’s a big change.”

“Yes, he absolutely appears to be a child of character. Already Grandmama has taken a liking to him and I am nearly in shock at how readily he has won her approval. He has nearly approached your own rapidity of acceptance.”

“She does seem to adore him, not that I expected anything different. She’s got a soft streak, I think, for good, solid boys who can keep up with you lot. And not to take anything away from John, but I think part of it is that she’s thrilled that someone actually likes Sherlock. And John does. He does like your brother, though god knows why because Sherlock hasn’t made it easy for him. But since the very first day John’s been hanging on to Sherlock and not letting your brother’s lunacy break that hold not matter how hard the bugger tried.”

“It is a difficult thing to find someone with whom you can make a connection, but especially when that someone is actively attempting to keep you at bay because of their own fears and uncertainties. He is a formidable adversary, much like you, my dear.”

“But you didn’t try to keep me at arm’s length, did you? All octopus limbs dragging me in for hot, wet kisses and cuddles in the bath. Can’t say I’m not hoping for a little more octopus fun a bit later on, if you know what I mean.”

Mycroft very much approved when his intended punctuated his sentences with physical contact and with Sherlock and John committing some random act of mischief out of sight, that contact could be carried a little further into a long kiss that was all the more sweet because of the familiarity of his spouse’s lips. There was little in the world more comforting than the warm and welcome feel of his Gregory’s kisses, especially when paired with the knowledge that he could have them anytime he desired them now. Blissful kisses that could stretch for hours for no other reason than they both desired the affection.

“I shall endeavor to be as cephalopod-like as I am able.”

“That is impossible for you are already a member of the whale family and it is an affront to nature to defile two groups of the animal kingdom with your membership. There shall be some form of retribution for this and if it does not come as a great chasm opening under your feet to drag you to the bowels of the Earth I shall be sorely disappointed.”

“Ah, Sherlock, how good it is to hear your lovely voice. I have missed it greatly. Now that I have had my fill, I shall be content for at least the remainder of the year.”

“Do you now understand the misery of my life, John? I have no idea how my brain has not disintegrated into a biochemical goop that my skull can scarcely contain due to its Mycroft-inspired putrescence.”

“You know, if you’re trying to get him to give you the swords, it’s probably stupid to say mean things where he can hear you.”
“Excellent, John. You have mastered something for which Sherlock cannot even claim a novice-level of competence.”

Greg stifled a laugh at John’s smug satisfaction and Sherlock’s nearly volcanic fury. No use adding petrol to the fire.

“There is nothing for which I can be called a novice! For the rare occasion where I am introduced to a new experience, my intellect assures that I achieve advanced status in a matter of microseconds. Hence my agitation at the peasant’s incompetence in dispensing information on driving.”

“Yes, Gregory’s instruction must proceed at a cripplingly-slow pace for someone such as you, dear brother. Oh, but I seem to remember a slight altercation between Mother Lestrade’s vehicle and a rubbish bin while you were taking your turn at the helm.”

“Slander! The bin was purely at fault!”

“How is a bin at fault for your traffic collision?”

“It behaved in a willfully deceitful manner.”

“Oh, did it wear some form of disguise and come upon you suddenly like an apparition at a séance?”

“Nearly so! One moment the rear of the car was backing into naught but air and then the foul and vicious thing leapt behind me like a puma hurling itself onto a stray child of the native hut-dwelling indigenous population!”

Lestrade felt a small tug on his shirt and shared a commiserative look with young John. Having a Holmes in your life had its benefits, but sometimes you just had to step back a bit and let them get the Holmes out before you could jump back into the conversation.

“Heavens, I shall alert the authorities immediately as to the sudden invasion of feral rubbish bins and their aggressive behavior towards unsuspecting vehicles.”

“Your sarcasm is both unappreciated and poorly executed.”

“As always, I shall take your criticism with the appropriate measure of seriousness.”

“You should! If you have any care about your social-emotional development you should be scripting a bounty of notes!”

“All right, you two… separate corners. John, why don’t you drag Sherlock back to whatever you were up to and I’ll keep my one over here for our own bit of whatevering.”

“Ugh… Mycroft returns and your intellectual capacity descends further into the dark pit of stupidity. I did not think that was possible, however, once again you prove that you can achieve great things provided those things are of an impoverished and imbecilic nature.”

“Come on, Sherlock… I want to look at more of the horses! Your Gran said we could ride if we wanted to and I do, so pick your horse and get your bum up there so we can get started.”

“That’s a good idea, John. You and Sherlock pick out your favorites and Mycroft and me will catch up with you.”
With a rousing cheer, John pulled a loudly protesting Sherlock back towards the stables and Lestrade had his own moment of smug satisfaction seeing the adoring gaze of his Mycroft hot on his skin.

“You handle the children masterfully, Gregory. I cannot begin to describe my awe at your inestimable talents.”

“Oh, just gotta use the old common sense and apply the firm hand when it’s needed. And I’m very much betting you’re masterful yourself when it comes to applying the firm hand.”

Heart palpitations never felt so non-threatening as when they were cause by the excitement of love.

“Gregory, are you attempting to entice me into an afternoon debauchment?”

“Oh no, not me! Don’t need to be in the middle of a good debauching when two little tykes park their arses next to us and start asking why Tab A’s going into Slot B.”

Never had monosyllabic words sounded so erotically titillating.

“Would I be the Slot or the Tab, my dear?”

“We can flip a coin for it. Heads for Slot and Tails for Tab. Then, we switch things around for debauchment number 2.”

“How utterly agreeable a situation. Your diplomacy skills are unexcelled, as usual. I must ask, however, you do not intend our diplomatic arrangement to include an afternoon on horseback, do you?”

“Well, I hadn’t planned on galloping naked across the fields with you across my lap, if that’s what you meant.”

Well, it hadn’t been, however, his spouse made a compelling case for changing his mind.

“If that were a likely thing, you would have my eager assent, however…”

“Not one for horses?”

“Not terribly, I’m afraid. It is a class obligation that I have forever failed to fulfill. Sherlock’s view is quite similar, though I suspect young John will have him astride a mount by the time we arrive for inspection.”

“I don’t doubt it. He’s probably already got Sherlock riled up over some silliness and His Highness is orating on how he could have all sorts of medals and ribbons if only you’d let him ditch his lessons and go to the competitions.”

“Surely. It is a good thing, is it not, Gregory? Not John’s presence in Sherlock’s life, but the eagerness with which he encourages Sherlock’s rather ludicrous notions. John appears to be very agreeable to fueling the fires of Sherlock’s ego and I am not entirely certain that is…”

Lestrade took his boyfriend back into his arms and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

“It’s fine, Mycroft. John’s good for him. Yeah, the little bastard gets his ego stroked a bit more than normal, but it’s not a bad thing, really. He doesn’t get much positive attention beyond what you and I give him and it helps him, I’m sure, that he’s got John to show him that he’s got what it takes to be someone’s friend. I’m not sure he’s ever believed that about himself, even with all his bluster about friends being stupid and pointless. And John’s no weak-willed follower, either. He gives
Sherlock a piece of his mind when he needs to and you know how well he can manipulate Sherlock to get something he wants. It’s a very good thing, love.”

Mycroft gazed into his lover’s deep brown eyes and drew Lestrade closer to him, hoping his beloved husband couldn’t feel the trembling in his limbs. He could hold his spouse. He could be held, in return. There were kisses to take and long hours of conversation at his fingertips. How desperately he had missed this. The scent of his Gregory… when he next had to leave, he would take something with him that was absolutely redolent with his lover’s scent because nothing was as steadying and reassuring as the spicy musk of his spouse’s skin.

“You are correct, of course. I have spent such an inordinate amount of time worrying about the escalation of Sherlock’s behaviors that I scarcely gave thought to the fact that that said escalation could be directed in a positive manner. Young John does seem to have a very powerful talent for such a thing.”

“Don’t let him fool you, though. Little bastard can be just as insane as Sherlock when there’s fun to be had. Which is also a good thing, even if it drives me crazy sometimes.”

“I cannot describe to you, my dear, how much I wished to be part of the birth of their friendship. Your tales of their adventures made me greatly jealous of the time you could spend with the boys. I fear… I fear that I shall often be in this situation and I find it very much not to my liking, though there is little I can do to change things.”

Lestrade hated the sadness in his Mycroft’s eyes, but he couldn’t deny that what he said was true.

“Then we just have to make the most of the time you do have. I’ve talked to Grandmama about things and I’ve got a firm idea about what’s coming… it’s good... very good… to hear that you’re not thrilled you’ll be off doing your important work and leaving me and Sherlock behind. I mean, I guess it’ll just be me a lot of the time trying to hold things together on this end and… well, that’s sort of overwhelming to think about, actually. It helps to know you actually want to spend more time at home so we could do it together.”

Home… how sweet the term sounded when his husband lips formed the word. But Mycroft refused to lose himself in his bliss because he had to imprint his Gregory’s words deeply into his mind. He had not considered that particular viewpoint of their future lives and it was entirely valid, if upsetting. Even if he was not away for business, his career would require that he devote much of his attention away from his loved ones and it would fall to Gregory to sustain their home and family, while, simultaneously, he worked to build his own successful and rewarding career. Of course that thought was overwhelming… for him it would be incapacitating, but he had only a fraction of his lover’s inner strength. And it would also fall to Gregory to sustain his faith in their love during the absent times and periods when Mycroft knew his own moods would be anything but pleasant…

“Want? I more than want, Gregory. I desire. I crave. I wish with every fiber of my being. And I will never let you lose faith in that need, my love. It is something far too important for me to ever let you doubt or distrust. We shall speak of this matter often so I may reassure you that I never take for granted what is asked of you in our relationship. I love you, my dearest, and that love shall never come at the price of your suffering. Yes, we shall speak of this regularly. Discuss our lives and what is necessary to keep our bond strong and vigorous. We know our home shall be an unusual one, but it is one we both hold fast to in our dreams and I shall do everything in my power to make that dream an enduring reality.”

Perhaps it was silly to still worry that he was too stilted, too pompous or too uselessly verbose to soothe his Gregory’s uncertainties, but Mycroft had a very strong suspicion he would never lose that particular fear. It was far too critical a thing for him to ever become complacent.
“And I love you, Mycroft. I’m… look, don’t worry… this is just me being a little off-footed. It’s been a hard few days and I let things get to me that normally don’t. Its stuff that’s hard to talk about, too, and I feel strange saying anything to Mum or my mates, so it turned a little sour on me and… yeah, it’s been a hard few days. But you’re here now and that makes a difference. A world of difference, really…”

And this was more than a hug… it was the urge to cement their pact in the feel of their bodies molding together as perfectly as they remembered. Never, not ever, could Mycroft fall into the habit of neglecting this man. It would be possible, very possible actually, because his love was forgiving and patient and would undoubtedly remain quiet about his needs until he was at the breaking point and that was not something Mycroft would allow. Talking… they would forever find time to talk.

“I believe I understand. And, again, with our special circumstances, I can comprehend how difficult it might be to communicate with others who might not have a full picture of the issues we face. But, as you say, I am here now and we shall explore this off-footedness as deeply as you wish. For now, however, shall we rejoin Sherlock and John? I am certain…”

Whatever Mycroft was certain about suddenly didn’t matter as the sound of yelling boys and horses’ hooves erupted from the stables and quickly started to grow softer with distance.

“Oh dear.”

“Does Sherlock actually know how to ride?”

“In theory, yes.”

“In practice?”

“No.”

“And John’s a wildcard. I don’t particularly like those odds, love.”

“Neither do I. Let us obtain a vehicle.”

“Better make it a big one… might have to serve as an ambulance. Welcome home, Mycroft.”

“Thank you, my dear. I have never been happier.”

“OW! You are finding every imperfection in the road to add to my discomfort!”

“I assure you, Sherlock, that both the quality of the vehicle and the condition of the roads is impeccable. It is simply the overtaxed condition of your bottom that is the cause of your distress.”

“Maybe Sherlock and I should just walk back. This really isn’t very comfortable.”

“And, dear John, do you believe that your legs would stalwartly support you for the return voyage? You were experiencing difficulty standing when Gregory retrieved you from your mount.”

“I was just a little wobbly for a moment. It would have passed.”

“This is what he does, John… meddles in things that are not his business and does not allow a situation to find its natural fruition. We would have been safely home with our steeds by now if not for Roundcroft and his harem boy.”
Mycroft gave what he hoped was his most chastising look to the boys sitting in the back of the large Mercedes sedan then returned his eyes to the road where he could let his expression lighten. It had taken them well over half an hour to track down the horses, who seemed to enjoy being let out for an extended run, and the two boys that were holding on for dear life. If it hadn’t been for the swollen stream that offered clean, cold water for thirsty horses, the boys might have made it to Scotland before Greg and Mycroft successfully found them and pulled their aching little bodies off of the horses’ backs. However, it was a blessed sight to witness a ‘wobbly’ Sherlock and John cling to each other for support as they stumbled to the car and crawled into the rear. Gregory was absolutely correct… John was his own small handful, but it was worth every bit of extra nuisance to see how wonderfully he complemented Sherlock’s temperament.

“I don’t know about that. My horse really didn’t seem to care what I wanted it to do and it seemed quite happy being out in the fresh air. I think we’d have had to make camp for the night or something if Greg and Mycroft hadn’t found us.”

Something Mycroft would pay a great deal of money to observe from a concealed location.

“Piffle. I had complete control of my horse and, when I had my fill of the outdoors, I would have turned our journey back towards Grandmama’s residence.”

“You were screaming “Stop you stupid beast” and I didn’t notice it listening to you.”

“You misheard.”

“Oh and promising it pails of oats and a pretty lady horse if it just stopped must have been my imagination, too.”

“Your hysterical mind is not my concern.”

“At least it’s only my mind that’s hysterical, unlike someone I know.”

“I am no longer speaking to you.”

“Looks like my luck’s changing.”

“For the worse.”

“Got that backwards, mate.”

Mycroft settled back and simply let the back and forth go on with interruption. Yes, he keenly regretted that he had not seen the earliest days of this, but he was here now and would seek out these little moments because they were truly wonderful.

“No, yours is the stinky bum and I bet it’s got bruises, too, so it’s a stinky, bruisy bum and no one is going to want to touch that.”

“I don’t want anyone touching my bum, you ridiculous bumpkin!”

“Oh, then wait until you’re asleep, because I’m going to touch it all over just to make you loony.”

“I shall prepare a deterrent! One twitch of my blankets and your hand will be severed from your body!”

“Really? How would you do that?”
“It would involve some form of spring-based trigger and a cleaver of some sort.”

“Cleavers are heavy, so it’d have to be a pretty large spring. I could probably see it beforehand and then your trap would be spoiled.”

“Hmmm… that is true. A smaller blade, then. We shall investigate the kitchen’s inventory when we arrive.”

“There’s got to be somewhere they keep things for maintenance, so we can look for springs, too.”

“Most probably. Mycroft! Why are we not yet at Grandmama’s?”

All in all… still quite wonderful…

“And it was not our fault in the slightest! Your horses are ill-trained and completely unsuitable for transportation. They are fit only for pet food or a taxidermist!”

“John, do you have anything coherent to add to Sherlock’s story?”

“No ma’am. Only that we’re sorry it got a bit out of hand. We were just going to take a quiet, little ride and…”

“That is a complete distortion of the truth, John Watson! You challenged me to a contest of horsemanship!”

“Oh well, thanks for that, Sherlock. It’s especially helpful coming from a big cheat like you.”

“Cheat? Cheat! How dare you, you grubby little rice grain!”

“Let’s see… ‘ok, Sherlock. We’ll go on three… one, two… come back here you big cheater!’ Any of that sound familiar?”

“Not at all. You are clearly deluded.”

Mycroft watched his grandmother wait for the brushfire to burn out and hoped her patience would last longer than the flames. However, the tiny crinkle of skin above her nose said it wasn’t really a pressing worry. When the argument was at the point of huffs and snorts, Mycroft found himself in the spotlight of the interrogation.

“And my horses? Where are they now?”

“Gregory is escorting them back to the stables.”

“Oh. I was of a mind that he did not ride.”

“It was him or me.”

“Ah. Yes, I see. Gregory is likely the proper candidate from that pool to choose for the task.”

“Quite. Though he may opt to walk the creatures back instead. We decided that the children should be returned sooner than later so they could wash themselves and perhaps sit in a warm bath to ease their muscle aches, so I returned them here in the car rather than having them accompany him.”
“Do not refer to me as a child! I am far too advanced for that designation.”

“You are quite fortunate that Mycroft did not pronounce you an infant, Sherlock, for the volume of your wailing. Now, present yourself to Edwards and he will show you to your room and the bath. I expect both of you to be cleaned and presentable by the time they ring for dinner. Your luggage has already been delivered, however, there are clothes available for you to wear to the table. Edwards will show them to you. Be aware that I have examined them closely and if you arrive to dinner with garments in any condition other than that clearly inscribed in my memory, you shall not be pleased with you discover on your dinner plate. Now, go.”

Sherlock opened his mouth, but John was faster getting his hand over it than Sherlock could get out any words. The smaller boy then marched the glowering Holmes towards the gentleman waiting by the door, who smiled kindly and ushered the boys out of the room.

“I do like that young man, Mycroft. He seems to have Sherlock well in hand, however, he does not attempt to stifle your brother’s natural talents and attributes. That is admirable; very admirable.”

“I, also, am quite taken with young John. As, clearly, is Sherlock. I would not have thought it possible, but he has a friend, Grandmama. A true and faithful friend, if I am any judge.”

“I agree. They are a very acceptable match and I hope you have full intentions of nurturing their association.”

“I do. Gregory and I are very committed to tending to them and facilitating their friendship as best we can.”

When his grandmother tapped her lower lip, it was wise to prepare for a discussion of some importance, even if the meaning was completely unclear to you and remained that way for years.

“He is good with children, your Gregory.”

“Yes, he is. Sherlock’s emotional development has been significantly assisted by Gregory’s tender care and his adoption of John is testament to his loving heart and natural paternal instincts.”

“May I assume, therefore, that I shall one day welcome my great-grandchild into the family?”

It was not actually possible to freeze into a block of ice, but Mycroft was certain he’d come closer than any human, to date.

“I… well… that is to say…”

“So far you have said little. Let me be clear, Mycroft Holmes. I refuse to go to my grave without having first rocked my great-grandchild in the same chair in which I held both your father and yourself. And I do not intend to see my years extend well into the triple digits. Therefore, consider yourself informed.”

“Oh. I shall. But, Grandmama… Gregory and I are of like mind on the timeframe of our courtship and offspring are on the distal end of our schedule.”

“Of that I am well aware and heartily approve. However, I have also placed a block on the public records to disallow any form of registry entry for a union bearing your names. Just a precaution mind you, but youth can be impetuous at times and requires a watchful eye.”

Of course. Never let it be said that Grandmama was anything other than watchful.
“How considerate of you.”

“A minor thing. Now, I must ask… you are still fully committed to your choice of Gregory as your partner in this life?”

Such a silly question. To lose Gregory would be the same as losing his own blood or breath.

“There is no doubt.”

“Very well. Then, you might consider altering your education schedule. It would be a simple matter to install you in your college for the next term or even now, if you are prepared to leave quickly. It would bring you a year closer to your endgame and provide you an early start on your work.”

No… he had been entirely wrong. This was the closest anyone had come to freezing into an ice block. Begin his degree now… it would be a ridiculously easy to catch up on the few weeks of the term he had missed. In fact he was likely so far advanced that it would be the others catching up to him. He could begin now… the sooner he began, the sooner he would be finished and could look towards settling himself more permanently into his life with his fiancé. He could begin his work and Gregory could…

And Mycroft drew up short. No… it would not do. The moment he left, it would fall on his husband’s shoulders to raise Sherlock and, now, young John. He could not do that to his love, not at this time. Gregory had his own schooling to complete and could not forsake his job at the shop to devote his free time fully to minding the two boys. No, that was not true… he could and most certainly would. As his exhaustion and frustrations grew, he would have to let something go and it would not be the boys. He would set aside his job, which he enjoyed and earned him much-needed funds, or further erode the time he spent with his own friends and that was not acceptable. This past absence was, from the start, known to be of short duration, but to be away for months, at this point… with no plans in place… no alternatives or assistances decided upon… no. It was not fair, even if it brought their joy that much closer to their grasp.

“Mycroft? Are you still conscious?”

“I do apologize, Grandmama. I was simply giving your suggestion my most intense consideration.”

“And your thoughts?”

“That it is not wise.”

“For what reason?”

“Though it would bring me a year closer to the future I desire, both for my work and with my Gregory, it would place an undue burden on him and I cannot permit that. Gregory would be left alone to stand as guardian in Sherlock’s life and I cannot allow him to assume that responsibility without my help. He is at a critical stage of his own education and, with John now a factor of significance in Sherlock’s life… with our own love so new…”

“Do you worry he will not retain his regard for you?”

“NO! That is not even the smallest consideration. It is a matter of equity, Grandmama. I cannot traipse off for my education, leaving him to struggle with his own responsibilities, in addition to the ones Sherlock and John will impose. He needs my support as much as I need his. Gregory is wrestling with his career plans, is dedicated to the job he performs and needs the money he earns
from it for he will not accept a cent from me. Further, he helps to maintain his own home, since Mother Lestrade also works long and difficult hours and that is a home which Sherlock has taken to invading on a regular basis… I cannot simply leave him to carry such a weight without help. He is a loving and devoted man who would see his life stressed unimaginably by the extra burdens that we have placed on him and I cannot leave him to carry on alone. It is not honorable and certainly not caring.”

Mycroft knew he should be meeting his grandmother’s eyes, but found that he didn’t quite have the fortitude.

“Mycroft… Sherlock does have a mother.”

“Really? And where might she be now?”

“Paris, for the moment. However… given the situation, she might surprise you. Step up to her obligations.”

“Since I have no evidence on which to even base a probability for that likelihood, I shall not waste my efforts. Sherlock has endured with only me for his care and I gladly admit that I have done a deplorable job of raising him.”

Mycroft felt his grandmother’s gaze boring into his skull and he hoped that she did not pursue the issue any further.

“Gregory, I suspect, would not agree.”

And, of course, she would, but he could not be upset by the fact. It was not something in which he took any pride, his faulty and failed attempts to be a good parent to Sherlock, but it was something he should likely admit to and take whatever recriminations he deserved.

“He does not; but I cannot ignore that I could have been more effective with Sherlock’s rearing and I did not invest the requisite time, nor, I feel, do I have the necessary skills. Sherlock has not suffered too horribly, I think, from my ineptitude; however, he has thrived under Gregory’s care. Bloomed, really. Where I falter, Gregory excels, but it tires him… it has to. He already has suffered some moments of overwhelm and that is in no way acceptable to me. Now, there are two children to tend and I cannot leave him without his own care and support. He gives freely of his love to Sherlock and John, but I refuse to allow him, not for a moment, to want for his own measure of affection in return. He must feel appreciated… loved… and it is my privilege to serve him in this manner. No… I shall not leave him now.”

“You have always done a good job with Sherlock, Mycroft. You were tasked far too young to step into your father’s shoes, but you have excelled in the task. Sherlock loves you, though he may never be comfortable showing it beyond a few fleeting moments of tenderness. He does care and he does appreciate and for that, you should feel proud of yourself. You have been a good parent to him, Mycroft, and in very difficult circumstances; please do not again doubt yourself. I would rather we not revisit this conversation because you were too foolish to believe what I have told you. Now, as for your Gregory… you realize that the day will come when you must take your leave of him. It is unavoidable and you are only delaying matters a year if you choose to remain on your current course of studies.”

Mycroft was glad he was still closely examining his shoes because he did not want his grandmother to see the moisture sparkling in his eyes. He did doubt, he always had, but now… now, maybe he could start to let go of some of the guilt. Grandmama did not tell comforting lies, even to her own blood. But, on the matter of his husband, she was quite on the wrong track.
“Thank you, Grandmama. I have tried for Sherlock, and I will continue to do so no matter his age or situation. But I must stand firm on my decision for my education. At the end of this year, Gregory will have finished school. He will have coalesced his ideas for his career. He will have brought Sherlock and John forward in their development so, perhaps, their behaviors will be slightly more mature and require a smaller amount of his attention. We will have made plans, set goals… there will be less uncertainty as to the course of our relationship. In a year, we will be far better prepared for a very prolonged separation. You have not… you have not already prepared my enrollment, have you?”

It was not, at all, a ludicrous question. It would be exactly along Grandmama’s normal course of action.

“Heavens no! It was merely a passing thought.”

Hmmm… or a test. Also exactly along Grandmama’s normal course of action.

“And did I pass?”

“Oh, very good. Very good, indeed. And yes, you did. However, there is one more item to score…”

Mycroft suffered the pregnant pause and his grandmother’s expectant glare until the pieces fell into place.

“Needless to say, I will discuss the issue with Gregory and gain his opinion on the matter.”

“Top of the class. You shall make a splendid husband, Mycroft. Nearly the caliber of your grandfather.”

There was really no greater compliment in the elderly woman’s arsenal.

“Thank you, Grandmama. I shall do my best.”

“Of course you will. You are a Holmes. Now, we are expecting guests this evening and your presence will be required for a period of time after dinner. Do make sure to spend time with Gregory beforehand, as I suspect Sherlock and John will be ready to enjoy a full evening and will be quite the pair of miscreants to manage.”

And so it begins… fortunately, Mycroft knew, he was not shaming himself with his choices and actions. Grandmama approved, so he was not likely, yet, to fail his spouse completely.

“Then that is what I shall do. Perhaps a small walk or… do you feel you can keep Sherlock and John out of the library for a period of time. Gregory greatly enjoys a quiet bit of reading and it is something we very much enjoy sharing.”

Grandmama did not smile, per se. She never did. However, Mycroft knew well enough the slight rearrangement of her features that meant, as truly as a full grin, his plan was one she endorsed.

“I believe they shall find many things to do that will not involve books. Or a fire. Or a small amount of brandy that I most certainly do not know about.”

Mycroft hoped that the heat on his face was not visible. Just the image of his Gregory, lost in a book, warm and pliant from a snifter of good brandy and resting gently in his lap was as delicious as any explicit sexual fantasy he’d every spun in his very creative mind.
“Thank you, Grandmama. And I take it we are dressing for dinner?”

“To a degree. I have something suitable waiting for both you and Gregory. Your own garments are rather abominably distressed.”

Packing a suitcase in less than thirty seconds tended to have that effect on clothing.

“I am anxious to see what you have chosen.”

“You are anxious to see your Gregory in a nice suit.”

“Do you blame me?”

“Oh no… not in the least.”
Chapter 8

“Good heavens! Gregory, are you quite well?”

Mycroft had been growing worried at the length of time his fiancé had been absent and that worry skyrocketed seeing the completely disheveled and sweat-drenched state of his soulmate.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I’ve got to hand it to Sherlock and John, though… those horses are born troublemakers! They’d break away from me and play ‘catch me if you can’ like we were kids in a schoolyard… I think it’s only because they were hungry or something that I got them back when I did. Almost worse than wrangling Sherlock and John when they’ve gone insane, but not by much. Doesn’t your Gran… Grandmama… have people who do this for her?”

A number, actually, but Mycroft hadn’t thought of sending them out to assist. It was an issue of family, their family, and he and his husband were responsible to see it sorted. Of course, that meant he should have supervised the bathing and dressing of the children, however, that thought was too horrifying to contemplate and he would have to endure the shame to spare his beloved the burden of knowing his disgrace.

“I believe they were otherwise occupied, my dear. But, somehow, I do not entirely believe you failed to enjoy your adventure.”

And there was the confirmation. That dazzling smile said his spouse most certainly enjoyed his time out with the horses.

“You got me. I’m still not sure I want to learn to ride and do the horse thing like you posh lot, but it was fun being out, doing something physical. Taking care of things… I like that. Especially when I get to run around like a kid and get the sweat going. Too bad you weren’t out there with me… we could have had fun getting sweaty together, even if we were still in our clothes.”

What a lewd grin… Gregory was the master of escalating him from a placid state to that of a stag in rut and doing it so naturally it was difficult to fight his instinctive urge to act on his excitement. The degree of grime on his beloved was, however, helping temper his behavior.

“I do apologize for leaving you to summon your sweat in such a solitary fashion, but I rather lost myself in the business of reconnecting with my various interests here at home and time escaped me. Now, we must see you cleaned and into something less…”

“Smelly?”

“It is not an inappropriate term. We have a bit of time before dinner and I thought we might spend that time in the library. I have been assured that we shall find the experience uninterrupted by those both younger and shorter ourselves.”

“Lads already causing a new spot of trouble?”

“I am blessedly unaware. Grandmama has taken quite the interest in their association and I believe she is personally supervising their activities. Of course, this does not mean that they have not engaged in very nefarious goings-on. At this point, I would fully believe Grandmama would encourage their shenanigans in her own subtle way and we might be called any moment to fetch a ladder to extract Sherlock and John from the ballroom chandelier.”

“Ha! I almost wish they’d do that so I could toss apples or something at them. But, yeah… I do
need a shower. Or bath. Or whatever I can get. And what’s up for dinner? Anything for me to worry about?”

“Like the sudden coming of a locust plague?”

“No, like guests or royalty or twenty other tykes that Grandmama thinks could use a good meal and a run on her horses?”

“Ah. Nothing so dreadful, I’m afraid. We might play host to a few visitors, however, I suspect they will primarily be engaged in conversation with Grandmama and we shall have little cause for interaction.”

“Why do I think that by ‘we’ you mean ‘me,’ because you’re going to be part of whatever it is they’re talking about?”

Intelligence and manly beauty… there was no more attractive a combination…

“There is a slight possibility for that eventuality, I do admit. I shall be engaged in some manner of business after dinner, but I shall not be unavailable until then and I intend to devote every minute until that point to you. So, let us make a start, shall we? I think you shall be quite pleased with your accommodations and the facilities it offers.”

“Do they include you?”

“You shall see.”

Lestrade looked wide-eyed at the enormous room to which Mycroft had brought him and gave Mycroft’s hand a firm squeeze.

“Now, this is a bedroom!”

“It is a comfortable suite, isn’t it?”

“I can’t believe I get to sleep here. Is yours as nice?”

Mycroft smiled and crooked his finger for Lestrade to follow, chuckling at his spouse’s growing confusion as they approached a wall bearing a large tapestry.

“Ok, it’s nice. Lovely, really, but is there a reason we’re staring at it now?”

Another chuckle sounded and Mycroft pushed the tapestry aside.

“A hidden door!”

“And to what do you think it leads?”

“Your room?”

“Very good. It would not do for an unmarried couple to share a bedroom.”

“So, they get two rooms with a door in between. Cagey old lady, your Gran.”

“She is quite enjoying playing the gardener to our blossoming affection.”
“You know, she asked Mum to come to tea. I’m almost scared to think what they’ll get up to if they join forces.”

“Oh, that is an intriguing thought. Grandmama does appreciate a practical turn of mind and your mother is nothing if not practical.”

“Well, I’m not going to be within continent’s distance of that party. Gotta have a good head start if they get start to scheme. Mum strikes like a viper when she’s got a notion about something and I don’t want my bum anywhere near her fangs. You’ll protect me won’t you, love?”

“I shall guard your bottom with my last dying breath.”

“That’s my Mycroft. Now, how about you show me the shower and you can get a good look at that bottom. Get your hands on it, too.”

It was unconscionable how his intended used his masculine wiles to ensnare and flummox. One day, he would surely receive a very appropriate punishment. From his lover’s renewed lewd grin, Mycroft felt certain they would both enjoy the experience.

“You are a rascal, Gregory, but I do love you for it, so I shall not complain.”

“And you’re planning something naughty, Mycroft, but I do love you for it, so I shall not complain.”

Matched as perfectly as paired horses for a king’s carriage.

“I am caught, as they say, red handed. Now, follow me.”

“I’m going to like this, aren’t I?”

“Would I allow any less?”

“I’m going to say no.”

“And you would be right. Come along.”

“AAAAHHHHHHH!”

“I believe my dearest love has abandoned me for a few tons of marble and a modicum of plumbing.”

“It’s as big as my house!”

“Hardly, Gregory. However, I do admit that one could live quite cozily in here if an oven was provided. Now, shall you indulge in the shower or the bath?”

“Shower. The bathtub’s big as a swimming pool! I’m worried I’ll drown.”

“Never. I shall provide you with a suitable life preserver and, as a last resort, I shall insult my tailor and dive in to achieve your rescue.”

Lestrade pressed his chest to Mycroft’s back and wrapped his arms around his... there had to be some better word for what they were than boyfriend... before slowly beginning to kiss Mycroft’s long and gorgeously pale neck.
“You sound like you’re not joining me.”

“We have little time for a romantic indulgence, if you would like to relax before dinner.”

“Relaxing can wait.”

“It certainly cannot. I have waited far too long to indulge in a quiet moment with you and I shall not be denied.”

“And you haven’t been waiting too long for a bit of filthy fun with your poor, lonely… oh, what the hell do we call ourselves, Mycroft?”

“Oh…”

Now that was a conundrum. He could not call his husband husband in public for they had no rings to verify their union. And they were not, strictly speaking, bound in a legal fashion at this precise time. But boyfriend… such a juvenile term and woefully inadequate for their status. Unfortunately, there appeared to be no suitable intermediate. He would, of course, gladly continue thinking, so long as his dearest kept paying such studious and loving attention to his throat.

“It is quite the question. Have you a suggestion?”

“Ummmm… not really. We should think of something, though, because I feel strange since we’re sort of in some in-between zone and nothing seems to fit.”

“Our situation is a singular one, so it should be expected that we find difficulty bestowing upon it an accurate descriptor. We shall, I’m afraid, have to muddle through as best we can until our circumstances change.”

Which could not come fast enough, really. Especially since it would win them unlimited opportunities to indulge themselves in each other’s arms as they were now doing. Mycroft eased back into Lestrade’s embrace and focused on the warmth and strength of the man who was holding him.

“That’s too long to wait.”

Precisely.

“How about partner? I know men use it sometimes and it really does describe who we are, even if we’re not fully together or anything.”

Oh, how interesting. It was used and if anyone were true partners in life, it was him and his spouse. A very interesting suggestion…

“I think that might be quite appropriate. I, again, stand in awe of your intellect and problem-solving abilities, my dear. Now, do brush me off and make yourself presentable for civilized company.”

“Are you sure brush you off was really what you wanted to say?”

“I am partnered in this life with an incubus.”

“You love it.”

“I do. I would be foolish to lie.”
Lestrade tipped his partner’s face slightly so he could catch Mycroft’s lips.

“I love it, too. Ok, I don’t seem to have dirtied you up any, so give me a minute and I’ll get cleaned and shined. You’re staying, right? I’m sure you want to inspect when I’m finished to make sure I’ve done a proper job.”

Sexual sorcerer… a dripping wet, sparkling clean vision of perfection standing in wait for him to run hands over every inch of skin, perhaps licking off the remaining droplets of water and tasting… Gregory was truly fiendish!

“We shall see.”

One firm swat on his husband’s even firmer posterior, that earned him a very thrilling ‘yes!’ , and Mycroft sent said husband moving towards the shower. And, of course, he was remaining to view, even if it was through the frosted glass doors of the surprisingly-modern shower installed against the far wall of the cavernous bathing chamber. How fortunate a small bench was provided specifically for his viewing comfort.

What was not fortunate was how slowly and tantalizingly his spouse removed his clothing. Each piece was given prolonged and thorough attention and if his love did not return his tongue to his mouth and cease running it enticingly over his lips, Mycroft would not be responsible for his actions.

“Must you do a striptease for me, Gregory? You know my will is pitifully weak in matters concerning you.”

“This isn’t a striptease. I’ll wait until I’m wearing something a lot nicer and I’ll really take my time. Maybe a little music to dance by, while I’m at it. Even when I’ve got all the clothes off I can still dance for you and you’ll just get to lay back and watch.”

Fiend! The blackest, most evil fiend in the pantheon of seducer-demons. Blackest, most evil and now extremely naked fiend. However, no one in the world was so lucky to have as Adonis-like a man in their lives, so he would bestow a small measure of forgiveness… and scribe a note to send to his tailor to allow slightly more room in his trousers to help camouflage what was certainly going to be a lifetime of frequent and impromptu erections. Which, at least, he was not alone in sporting. Fiend.

“Gregory Lestrade, you have the span of my next heartbeat to move your person to the shower or I…”

“Or you’ll what?”

Do not lick your lips again, villain! Nor cock your hip in such a saucy manner.

“I shall take myself away to the drawing room and enjoy a nice cup of tea while I wait for you to present yourself.”

“Liar. You’re not going to leave. Especially not if I do this…”

Remove hand from aforementioned erection, despoiler!

“It matters not.”

“It matters lots. At least that’s what your eyes are telling me. And bits a good deal larger than your eyes.”
Foiled by his own involuntary responses!

“If I beg your pity, will that move your lustful heart and body into the shower?”

“I do like the idea of begging.”

“Then I beseech thee, my most dearest of loves, to spare my weak and foolish flesh the pain of denial and… no, please do not groan while I am making a speech.”

“Can’t help it, you beg so prettily and it’s really making me hot.”

And *hot* was accompanied by a greater degree of hip thrusting, which was having some very pleasurable, yet unapproved, effects on his legs who suddenly craved to leap across the distance to kneel in front of his god and begin worshipping him with hands, mouth and tongue. The white flag must be waved.

“I shall not win this, shall I?”

“Nope, but I’ll tell you what. I’ll take my shower and if I need a little longer than normal, well that’s just the way it’s going to go. Be out in a minute.”

That was *not* reassuring. Nor was the smirk he received as his spouse stepped into the stall and turned on the water. The beautiful sigh echoing in the room was surely the byproduct of the experience of hot water on tired and dirty skin and… well, the frost of the glass truly did nothing to impair the silhouette of the person behind it, did it? Silhouettes should not be achingly arousing, however, few silhouettes could claim the addition of an ample signal of desire such as his husband possessed. And his love should not hum. Not with his leonine purr of a voice which so exquisitely matched the feline movements of his muscles as he ran large and roughened hands over heat-flushed skin. Absolutely not allowed. And no…. no no no, one does not need to spend such an extended time washing one’s bottom. Caressing the firm muscles and… no mental images shall be processed for what his love’s fingers were obviously and lecherously now doing and why it was making his humming sound more like lustful moaning. And he had *two* hands. Of course. One to continue the deep, perhaps penetrating, caresses of his fingers and the other to tease flesh that, if anything, was plumper than before. This was intolerable…

Mycroft nearly tore the buttons off his trousers getting them unfastened and gave in to his body’s demands, matching his pace to his husband’s, eyes never leaving his Gregory’s performance and when his softly-sighed name floated through the air as his husband climaxed, he was not a second behind, marveling at how simply being near his love made his orgasm incalculably more powerful. And untidy. While the figure in the shower stall took its own moment to clean, Mycroft quickly rinsed his fingers. And wiped the floor. And his shoes. He had just completed re-establishing his appearance when the water was shut off and a still-smirking seducer exited the shower and began to dry his body and hair.

“Well, that was… *refreshing.*”

“You are incalculably wicked, Gregory Lestrade.”

“And you missed a spot, Mycroft Holmes. Might want to change your trousers if you don’t want Sherlock investigating that little damp bit on your leg.”

He would never meet a more formidable adversary.

“Touche. However, I will expect to be rewarded for your cruelly-salacious behavior when we retire for the evening.”
“In the same bed?”

“Most certainly.”

“Then it’s me who’s going to be rewarded. I’ve been dreaming of that.”

Lestrade walked forward and took Mycroft in a full and long hug.

“Really, it’s been in my dreams. You and me, with a bed of our own. Then I wake up and it’s just me laying there and that’s been a shit way to start the day, let me tell you. I can’t wait for us to actually have a chance to make that real. Any chance we can just skip dinner and go straight to the retiring part?”

If it was solely his choice, Mycroft would already have his naked and willing spouse in the very large, soft bed in his room and be embarking on the second of their countless rounds of lovemaking for their reunion night. Alas, it was not solely his choice…

“I would embrace such an opportunity gladly, but we are required to put in an appearance and I must be party to Grandmama’s post-dinner matters, if we are to stay in her good graces. But then, my love… then we shall have all the time we desire. And I highly doubt the staff will expect us to rise early.”

Now the hug was a kiss and Mycroft let his fingers remind themselves of the feel of his spouse’s hair, made all the more entrancing by the wetness that clung to the strands.

“Good. I’d love a long morning with you, too. Never got to do morning cuddles before. Never had morning sex before, either. Nice chance to kill two birds with one stone.”

Waking up next to this man, being able to reach over and draw him close, kissing away the sleep… yes, he had dreamed of it, too.

“Then tomorrow shall be an eventful day for us both, before we even leave our bed. Now, if you desire a chance to relax, perhaps with a good book and something warming to drink, we should get you into some clothes. Grandmama has chosen the garments for the evening, but something simpler will suffice for now.”

“We’re dressing up for dinner?”

“Not as fully as we might on occasion, but suits shall be the fashion of choice.”

“I guessed that I’d find a suit waiting her for me if there was something going on.”

“And one for me, as well. I suspect that Sherlock and young John will also be gifted with a little surprise.”

“There’s going to be pictures, too, won’t there?”

The thought had not occurred to him, but oh yes… Grandmama would not let the occasion go unremarked. A visual record would surely be made and a copy would most certainly be forwarded to Mother Lestrade. And… it would be their first photographs as a couple. Hundreds. Grandmama must have hundreds of photographs taken. Perhaps video footage of the event. This was a seminal moment in their lives together, their first official family dinner, and it must be accorded the highest importance. Their appearance must be flawless…

“If my prayers are to be answered, then yes. I suspect Grandmama will be quite eager to capture
us for posterity. Especially given the circumstances.”

“Then I’d better make sure to look as pretty as I can.”

As if that would be difficult to accomplish.

“I have full faith we shall make an attractive tableau. Now, onwards to clothing.”

“Alright… I guess a little time to relax does sound good.”

“There is already a fire prepared for our enjoyment.”

“Better…”

“And a very comfortable sofa to share.”

“Still better…”

“And Grandmama’s brandy is renowned for its quality.”

“Ok, I’m convinced. Lead the way?”

“It would be my pleasure.”

Fending off his husband’s tentacle-like extremities while changing his trousers was a Herculean task, but Mycroft accomplished it handily. Or as handily as a pants-clad, love-sick gentleman could accomplish. Once they were both properly attired for an hour or so of lounging, the invasion of the library began and already Mycroft realized he would have to take great pains to choose a future home that would provide them with this indulgence. It was simply too perfect to forsake in their future.

Upon their arrival, his spouse had quickly situated himself and was now reclining on the sofa, motioning him to take the other end, which Mycroft did with a delightful tangling of their legs as a consequence. Perfect…

“You know, it could be fun to do this naked, what with feet in easy reach of interesting body parts.”

Oh… and now more than perfect. What a very entertaining idea.

“You are a creative man, my dear Gregory and I am blessed to have you. If you were currently unshod, I would demonstrate my adoration by gleefully thanking your feet for such potential pleasure.”

“Might there be sucking?”

“In abundance.”

“Licking?”

“Without doubt.”

“Then that idea goes into my mental pocket for safe keeping. I do like the thought of you doing to my toes what you’re so good at doing in other areas.”

How exactly does one’s relationship grow stale? How could it be possible, with such a world of
opportunities to explore? Especially with someone so utterly exhilarating and adventurous.

“I shall gladly fellate your feet anytime you desire it. Simply ask and I shall prostrate myself to satisfy your whims.”

One large, woefully-covered foot ran a gentle line up and down Mycroft’s outer thigh.

“Have I told you how glad I am you’re back, love?”

“Yes, but I shall happily hear it again.”

Mycroft and Lestrade read quietly, sipping the best alcohol Lestrade had ever tasted and it wasn’t until he felt his leg being tapped that he even remembered the world existed beyond himself and his partner.

“Gregory, are my eyes deceiving me, or are we being spied upon?”

Lestrade turned his head slightly towards the window Mycroft was very subtly indicating with a twitch of his lips and caught sight of a shock of blonde hair quickly dropping out of sight.

“I think we are. The funny part is that window is higher off the ground than John’s height.”

“Quite. And I did not see a corresponding dark-haired head peering through.”

“I’m surprised Sherlock let him on his shoulders. Being soiled by a common lad and all that.”

“It is most interesting. Oh, and there we are again. He seems… ah. He is reporting his observations. I do hope Sherlock is not attempting to scribe any notes while John… oh dear me.”

“Fell over?”

“It appears so. With quite a telling wobble beforehand.”

“They’re not very good spies, are they?”

“No. I shall have to instruct them in slightly more clandestine methods for obtaining information. And… yes. The lovely tones of Sherlock’s indignant shrieking. Is there a rooster in England with a more pleasant crow than a ruffled Sherlock Holmes?”

“If there is, I haven’t met it. Hold on.”

Lestrade set down his book and swung himself off the sofa, quickly moving to the window.

“Yep. They’re arguing and from the hand signals, I think John’s accusing Sherlock of having spindly legs.”

A little crack of the window gave Lestrade audio as well as video and Mycroft moved to join his spouse for their own measure of spying.

“Oh, so John’s lack of intelligence has increased his body mass beyond that of a standard human. What a masterful use of inanity.”

“Sherlock’s nothing if not masterful with his little insults.”
“He does try. Fortunately, John seems properly immunized to the virulence.”

“He still has a rough moment, now and then, I think. I’ve caught him a little uncertain a few times and I’m sure he gets worried that, sometimes, Sherlock actually means what he’s saying. Or, at least, isn’t caring if he hurts John’s feelings.”

“It can be difficult to weather continued scorn, if one is not assured of the sentiment such scorn is hoping to conceal.”

“Luckily, John’s made of strong stuff from what I can tell. I think, if it came to it, he’d at least tell Sherlock right to his face if he got hurt or spitting mad. Then it would be on Sherlock’s shoulders to decide to apologize or not.”

“And, with that, we shall help him.”

“I think we’ll have to, but maybe not so much as we might expect. He seems sensitive to John’s moods and didn’t at all like it when he really upset the lad. Crap, but calling him ‘the runt of a particularly stupid litter of piglets’ won’t help matters.”

“However, note that he is losing his momentum, my dear. That was not nearly his most erudite slander. I think their discussion will soon be at an end.”

“You’re right… look at the little bastard seethe. Didn’t think being called a ‘big quacking duck’ would take the air out of him, but I guess John knows best.”

“He is skilled at handing my brother. Natural talent is such a wonderful discovery and I very much look forward to his future visits.”

“He still hasn’t seen Sherlock’s lab yet, you know. Haven’t had time to bring him to your house, what with everything going on. That’ll be a thing to see when it happens, though.”

“Then that shall be our first order of business when we return. An afternoon of recreation for the children would be most splendid to host.”

“Sounds good. Just make sure they can’t get to any horses.”

“The property shall be equine-free, I assure you.”

“Thank heavens for that. I am certain that Gregory has had quite enough of acting the proverbial cowboy for the moment.”

Mycroft and Lestrade nearly snapped to attention hearing the very authoritative voice coming from behind them. For an older woman, Grandmama moved like a cat.

“Dear me, Grandmama. You startled me.”

“A lesson to learn, Mycroft. Do not devote the entirety of your attention to a situation when your back is exposed.”

“Yes. Point taken. Is it time to prepare?”

“It is. Our guests will be arriving soon and I expect you and Gregory to prepare the younger boys for the evening. Edwards will mind them for the cocktail hour, but I expect you to keep a watchful eye on them at table.”

“We will, ma’am. Or, I will, I guess. Mycroft will have to chat people up, I suspect.”
Mycroft didn’t understand the look in his grandmother’s eyes, but it reminded him far too much of memory and regret for his liking.

“Yes, that may be the case. And I will need you to take charge of them after dinner as Mycroft and I have business to conduct.”

“That won’t be a problem. I’ll keep them occupied. After today, I bet they’ll want to go to bed early anyway, so I won’t be surprised if it’s just me reading and listening to the snoring for most of the night.”

Mycroft wasn’t so foolish as to believe the brilliance of his lifemate’s smile was 100% genuine. A few hard days, his Gregory had said. And with no relief. When they were back at home, he would personally keep Sherlock and John from disrupting matters so that his partner could gain some much-needed rest.

“Thank you, Gregory. Now, make haste. I shall be calling for you soon.”

Neither boy said a word until they were again alone in the room and that first word was a simple sigh of relief.

“I guess the show’s starting, love. Let’s get the two miscreants and see what they’ve got to wear. I’m hoping for a little sailor boy’s outfit or the old-fashioned dress suit they made the little one’s wear with the breeches and ruffles.”

“Sherlock would fasten a noose out of the nearest available cloth and hang himself from the arm of an oak.”

“Probably. Hey, what’s those things filled with sweets you bash with a stick?”

“Ah. A piñata.”

“I’ll bet you John would use him like a piñata because Sherlock would have worked the knot so he just hung there and didn’t die. And couldn’t get down, either.”

“Oh, very good. That would be terribly amusing to watch. I am altogether certain there are cricket bats on the premises and I shall set aside a few for such an eventuality.”

“A few? You want to join in, don’t you?”

“No comment. But, yes.”

“This is a violation of my human rights! The aging, long-haired marijuana-smokers will hear of my abuse and you shall have a protest staged on the lawn before sunrise!”

“Shut it, you! It’s a handsome little suit. Not a frill or bow or sailor’s hat anywhere to be seen.”

“Have you lost your final surviving brain cell? It was already existing in a chronically-depressed state due to its crippling loneliness, so I am not entirely surprised by its demise. I had thought the event would occur with some fanfare, such as your boneless collapse into a gelatinous heap, but I see that it had long ago given up even providing you the rudimentary command functions and you have been operating as a zombie for the duration of our acquaintance. Much is now explained.”

“Well, good for me then, ending your pesky confusion. Go comb your hair.”
“I refuse.”

“Funny, I thought I heard you say you refuse. Must be going hard of hearing. I say that because if you actually refused to comb your hair, I’d have to do it and I don’t really have the time or patience for being gentle on those knots and tangles.”

“A threat. The typical response of those who pry the bark from rotting trees in search of termites to consume for their morning meal.”

“What are you complaining about, Sherlock? These suits are great! I think I look very smart.”

Lestrade grinned as John posed in front of the mirror, checking himself out from all angles.

“Any piglet would look smart if attired in a £1000 suit.”

John’s modeling came crashing to a halt and he held his arms away from his body as if suddenly fearful of actually allowing himself to touch the fabric.

“What!”

“Calm down, John. He’s exaggerating.”

Lestrade hoped. He did not want to be responsible for two rambunctious boys wearing suits that cost more than his Mum’s car was worth.

“Perhaps I am. It is far more likely that Grandmama chose to spare her pockets and directed the local undertaker to denude the corpse of a midget and provide John Watson with his burial suit.”

“I’m in a death suit? I’m going to be sick.”

“John, no dead person wore your suit. Sherlock, quit being such a little bastard. Come here, John. I’ll fix your tie while His Pissiness deals with that nest of snakes he calls hair.”

“Medusa was female, ignorant serf!”

“Comparison still holds, Shirley. I’ve seen you in a dress, remember?”

“Sherlock wore a dress? And I missed it! That’s not fair!”

“Don’t worry, lad. I’m sure he’ll want to go out in disguise again and you can be his date this time instead of me. Or, we’ll find you a pretty frock to wear, too, and I can step out with two lovely birds on my arm.”

“John Watson in a dress is an image they should display to prisoners of war as part of the standard torture regimen. They will divulge their information far more quickly with that ghastliness presented before their eyes.”

“Says you, snake head. I bet I’d make a very pretty girl. And I’m blonde, which is the best, anyway.”

“Ridiculous! Blondes are stereotypically bereft of any intelligence, which is more than fitting considering we are discussing you, and stereotypes do not evolve without a foundation of truth.”

“Yeah? Well, blondes also get all the rich men and jewels and nice cars and invitations to the big parties, while you lot sit at home and read magazines or something.”
“Preposterous! If anyone shall be provided an opulent lifestyle it is someone deserving of it and that someone is me!”

“Just you watch! We’ll go out in our dresses and I’ll get all the winks and whistles.”

“Intolerable! Lackey! You shall take yourself to the nearest village and purchase two dresses! We shall commence this contest immediately!”

“Nope. We’re not giving your Gran a headache tonight. You do her dinner in your nice suits and we’ll get dresses for an evening out when we get home.”

“I demand we return to the ice cream shop.”

“That’s only because your boyfriend’s there and you’re hoping that’ll give you an advantage over John, you troll. Stop trying to cheat and win or lose this fair and square.”

“Very well. I shall, however, not instruct John Watson in the use of cosmetics or share my accessories.”

“We’ll work the details out later. Now…”

“The details of what or will I be most aggrieved to know the answer to that question?”

Lestrade turned at the voice and it was a good thing John chimed in with an answer because he was struck dumb by the vision standing in the doorway.

“We have to find out who’s the prettier girl, Sherlock or me, so we’re going to get dresses and go out with Greg sometime when we get back. I’m going to win because I’m blonde, but Sherlock refuses to admit it.”

“Oh. Well, that is quite the spirited competition, I must admit. They do say blondes have more fun, so I shall be very interested in learning the results of your test.”

“I am betrayed by my own blood! Sever my wrists now, peasant, so I may complete my death before I am forced to suffer through this unendurable dinner, which returns me to my argument concerning the gross violation of my human rights! I have created a feedback loop and that cannot be ignored!”

Sherlock had to be screeching something, because his arms were waving, but Lestrade didn’t hear a word of it. His Mycroft… his Mycroft was the most handsome, sophisticated man he could even try to imagine. Dressed in a dark charcoal suit with a rich blue tie, he looked like the man who owned the world. And his lovely hair combed into a sexy professional style that made you want to shove aside a set of papers and be shagged senseless on the huge desk in his office like in a film. It wasn’t fair for a man to look that good. Not fair at all. How was he going to pay attention to the goblin babies when he had that next to him all night? One thing was for certain… if Mycroft didn’t do something nasty to him tonight, while wearing that suit, there would be hell to pay.

“Gregory? Gregory… are you alright?”

“His unseemly lust has hypnotized him and he is like a dog watching a string of sausages being twirled.”

“Why Sherlock, what a compliment you pay me. Very surprising for you, dear brother, but you have my gratitude nonetheless.”
“What! I did no such thing!”

“Yeah, you did. You said Mycroft looked nice and that’s a compliment. A true one, too. You look very nice, Mycroft. Just like me.”

And John returned to practicing his runway poses, while Sherlock simmered and Mycroft chuckled at the boy’s antics.

“Thank you, John. You are, as ever, too kind. But you have yet to comment, my dear. Does my appearance please you?”

Mycroft hoped his grin looked teasing and not queasy, but found the answer quickly as he was nearly pounced upon by his husband, who pressed his lips to his ear and began to whisper.

“Please me? That’s exactly what I want you to do right now. I want you to throw the boys out and order me to strip. I want you to make me lie down on the edge of that bed and stroke myself while you unzip. Then I want you lifting my thighs so I have to plant my feet on the bed and you can slide two wet fingers right inside me to stretch me out a little before you start to drive into me, still wearing that suit. I want it to burn and I want it to rage and I want to scream and remember you fucking me in that suit for the rest of my life. So yeah, I guess you could say it pleased me.”

Lestrade strode off to get himself dressed, after taking care of the second painful erection he’d had that day, and smirked that the love of his life now had to take his turn watching the kids. That’d teach him to wear a suit like that after being gone so long.

“Mycroft? Are you ok? You’re gone very red.”

“I am… I am quite well, John. Thank you. Now, shall we finish getting you ready? I believe shoes shall be required for this function.”

There would be a furious episode of journaling this evening before they took themselves to bed and if Gregory had to repeat that speech word for word so that he could scribe it properly… well, there was nothing at all wrong with that…

“He is carnally awakened! Stand back, John… we cannot be sure his libido will differentiate between the peasant and other nearby victims.”

“He’ll go for me first. I’m blonde.”

“I shall not let that remark go unaddressed!”

“Address all you want, I’m still first in line for differ… what you said.”

“Let me list for you all the reasons you are mistaken.”

“Go ahead, I have to find my shoes anyway.”

How lucky the children were able to entertain themselves… it would not do stand too close until his pheromones were dissipated and his physical inconvenience allowed him again to actually walk properly. If one thing in his life was certain it was that the entirety of his love belonged to a complete scoundrel. And wasn’t that a positively marvelous thing to know…
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

As always, thank you all for your very kind support of this story!

His beloved had the patience of a saint. Truly, if one could be beatified without being Catholic or deceased, his Gregory would already have devotees offering up their prayers. How he could manage two boys through the dressing process was something Mycroft could not fathom. All he was required to accomplish was joining shoes to two sets of feet, complete the hair-combing initiative and perform one final check of the details of the presentation and already he felt he required a very large measure of something alcoholically-lethal.

Not that Sherlock was being his usual difficult-to-groom self, however. In truth, he was being surprisingly amenable to making himself ready for their dinner. Well, in full truth, he was being sufficiently distracted by his endless interaction with John to spare the mental energy to refuse requests for action in his typical belligerent fashion. It was almost as if the two boys lived in a world of their own and had little time to spare for the rest of their surroundings and Mycroft could not be more pleased. For all of his continuous verbal abuse, Sherlock was obviously fond of young John and John was nicely deflecting his younger brother’s vitriol, but in a way that did not hurt. That was the key for Sherlock… it was easy for people to want to hurt him, because they were hurt by his words or actions and that was something Sherlock did not yet fully understand or recognize. Mycroft felt certain his brother had no intentions to actually cause another person pain, yet he was most disabled in his ability to recognize when it was occurring or predict when his actions might lead down that road.

“I do believe we are ready to present you to Grandmama. How nice you both look.”

“Rest assured, you overly-plump pustule, that I shall burn this prison of cloth as soon as I can find a source of open flame.”

“Why? You look very nice in your suit.”

Another thing Mycroft had to admire about John… he was not hesitant about bestowing praise, which Sherlock consumed as readily as his precious chocolate. But his spouse had been correct in that the praise was not over-feeding Sherlock’s already inflated ego, because it was also punctuated by honest criticism and the balance was crucial.

“Of course I do. My appearance is magnificent in any garment I choose to wear, but if no one raises arms against the oppression of the suit, how long shall its grip rest upon us? The resistance requires firm and decisive leadership and I am the best qualified to provide it! I shall strike the first blow for freedom and you shall follow me with your own blazing torch!”

“Nope. I like my suit. I look very posh in it and how often do I get to do that? I wonder if your Gran will let me keep it or if I have to send it back when I’m finished with dinner. I guess I have to be careful eating, too, so I don’t get food all over it.”

“Grandmama will likely foresee your slovenliness and will have a large plastic bib available for your use. Along with a riser on your chair so you may actually be able to see the tabletop.”
“At least I probably won’t have a cage around my chair like you will so you can’t do anything stupid and embarrassing. Nice little monkey with the curly hair in its cage. I’ll give you bananas, so don’t worry about starving or anything. And I still look better in my suit that you do, so I’m funny and look sharp, but you’re sour and look sort of sharp. And you’re a monkey. I win again!”

Sherlock’s roar shook the foundations of the house and Mycroft was very careful his brother caught not a whisper of his amusement. How splendidly they complemented each other and already his instincts said that John would not easily be shaken off by Sherlock’s dramatics, though he would remain highly vigilant. His husband had remarked that there were the sporadic periods of uncertainty and those could not be allowed to flower. Nipped in the bud the moment they arose, that was the battle plan as of this moment, though it appeared that Gregory had already taken that route. Provided the gentle, yet confident, reassurance to soothe the young John’s worries. Such an exemplary parent. Truly, he was as skilled and devoted a father as any child could hope to have. If it were not unmanly to write a sonnet to his spouse’s child-rearing skills, he would begin scripting one immediately. Oh, hang the manliness… if he had the proper utensils he would script a sonnet! On the finest paper and with the most indelible ink! It would stand the test of time and could be read each year as they celebrated their anniversary. They would…

“Has the weight of your corpulent carcass finally generated a black hole and drawn your last remaining intellect beyond its event horizon? We must depart! Grandmama must declare who is the more princely, John or myself, and this shilly-shallying is not helping to achieve that objective and my inevitable victory!”

“I do apologize, Sherlock. I was simply contemplating how many bananas I need to have delivered to provide you a fulfilling dinner. I am not entirely certain of the mass ratio of banana to monkey flesh to adequately fuel your evening. I shall, however, have it investigated immediately, so do not concern yourself.”

John’s chortling was both for Mycroft’s riposte and Sherlock’s rude noise and on that note the elder Holmes directed the boys out of their room and to what he hoped was Edwards waiting to take charge of their care. His Gregory had suffered hard days and it was a simple thing to see why. Child care was taxing! One child was sufficiently draining, but two? Now, however, they were a team and he would take his due share of the responsibilities. Except when he could not. Such as at and after dinner this evening… the pattern of their lives continues in full and unvarnished truth and he would not let Gregory go to sleep tonight without having his efforts full and plentifully rewarded. He must keep this always in his mind. For every instance of neglect, of not being able to carry his share of the familial burden, he would repay his husband handsomely.

As hoped, once they had made their way out of the family wing, Mycroft found Edwards waiting to supervise some non-vigorous entertainment for the boys, while the rest of the family enjoyed, as much as possible, cocktails with their guests. A small nod indicated the direction Mycroft should take to find his spouse and Mycroft was not at all surprised that his Gregory was waiting for him in the library. In both his home and this one, it seemed to be their room of choice and the library he would have constructed in their newlywed home would be something at which any serious academic would marvel. And it would have a fireplace to bathe his beloved in warm glow that would, as it was doing now, take his breath away.

His loving husband, standing at the window, gazing outward in a manner so contemplative, his presence was not noticed as he entered the library. Which was good. Which was very good because it allowed him to simply gaze at the beauty of the man who had pledged him his future. Such a strong and vibrant creature, handsome to a point it was nearly unbelievable and Grandmama had truly outdone herself in choice of his spouse’s attire. A lighter grey with a near-imaginary hint of green that warmed the shade to complement his love’s coloring spectacularly and cut to emphasize
his narrow hips and broad chest and shoulders. He was a vision. A model worthy of the finest artist to ever touch brush to canvas. And his… fully and devotedly his…

“You going to stand there all day or are you going to come check this out?”

Never one to underestimate. Could there be any genetic combination capable of producing a more arousing human being? No, it was a thought riddled by madness.

“I was simply admiring the man I love in his finery. You look rapturous, my dear.”

Lestrade turned and gave Mycroft a large smile. He’d felt a little strange changing into something so… well, like something you saw in the magazines, but it was worth it to see the look on Mycroft’s face.

“Not as good looking as you. The whole room lit up when you walked in, that’s how I knew you were here.”

That and Mycroft’s reflection in the window, but that could stay his secret.

“You flatter me shamefully, Gregory, and how dearly I treasure it. Now, what is it you wanted me to observe?”

“Come here and take a look.”

Mycroft crossed the room, noting that, though it could not be possible, his husband grew more handsome with each step he took.

“See? Tell me that’s not limousines with little American flags on them.”

Ah, so that was the identity of their guests. It should not be surprising, however, it was most irritating. Even if the purpose of the evening was to secure their abject apology for his gross mistreatment, it would not compensate for the loss of time and attention towards his family.

“And those blokes… if I bet they’ve got some kind of gun on them, will I be wrong?”

“Hmmm… it is highly likely, however, they shall remain outdoors. Grandmama would not permit anyone to enter if they were armed.”

“Worried about someone getting shot?”

“Quite. Sherlock would most certainly abscond with one of the weapons and it the havoc he could wreak is nearly incomprehensible.”

“And don’t forget John. He’d provide the distraction so Sherlock could make his getaway. And Sherlock would probably steal two just so John could have his own for some stupid contest they’d come up with.”

“Verily, I believe you are correct.”

“You’re so sexy when you use words like ‘verily.’ “

“Then I shall endeavor to expand my vocabulary.”

“Only the sexy words, ok? I already have trouble following you with… you know, no matter what you say it’s sexy, so go ahead and expand away. But… tonight’s not going to be a… tonight’s probably important, right? Not just important, but *important*?”
Mycroft looked again out of the window and released a small sigh. He would be somewhat surprised if it wasn’t the American Secretary of State currently being poured something of substantially lower quality than Grandmama’s best libations. At very least it was high-ranking members of their intelligence community and Cabinet. This was not going to be an enjoyable evening and it was only the warm hand resting on the back of his neck and thumb stroking his skin that was keeping his spirits from souring entirely.

“It will touch on matters of some consequence, yes. I suspect that… there will be many discussions about my exiting my assignment before the appointed date.”

“Shit… I’m sorry, love. I’m really, really sorry. I didn’t mean to…”

“Hush, my dear. It is in no way your fault. Or mine, for that matter. When I begged Grandmama for a severance of my duties, she did not simply take me at my word that my assistance was not being properly used or recognized. She conducted her own inquiry and determined that my time and efforts were being scandalously wasted. If that were not the case, I can assure you, I would still be on American soil. Grandmama is very desirous of our union, Gregory, but she would not compromise matters of international importance to ease the aching of our hearts.”

“Whew… that’s a relief. I don’t ever want to get in the way of your work, Mycroft. Never. I know it’s important and affects a lot of people.”

And the most important person it would impact was still massaging his neck and providing the strength he needed to turn attention away from this moment and take up arms to slay a horde of dragons from the infernal colonies.

“Do not concern yourself with such things, Gregory. You are a spectacular partner and shall never do anything but shame me with your stalwart and loving support. It is to my disgrace that I shall forever fall short of your example. Now, I believe we must join the others. If your boredom becomes too great, do not hesitate to seek out the children and meet us later for our meal.”

“And leave you alone with the bloody Americans! Are you mad? You’re too sophisticated to punch them in the nose, but I’m not. One nasty word about you and I’ll be up all night scrubbing blood out of Grandmama’s nice rugs.”

Apparently, his body found a more aggressive Gregory to be a tremendous source of erotic pleasure because actions were being taken in his nether regions for which his mind certainly did not provide its stamp of approval.

“I am eternally grateful for your valiant defense. And…”

Mycroft turned and allowed himself to press against his spouse as he took his lips in a deep and forceful kiss.

“I believe you can judge for yourself how thrilling I find your protection.”

“I’ll always do that, you know. You’re the most wonderful man in the world, Mycroft, and I’m going to do everything I possibly can to make sure nothing bad ever happens to you.”

Mycroft looked into his intended’s eyes and wished they could simply make their excuses and spend the remainder of the night in the privacy of their bed. Soon enough, though. Soon, they would lie together and it would only be the first of the nights they would share in their lives. Perhaps… somehow he would find some way to bring them more nights before the bonds of their marriage were set. Mother Lestrade was not unknowing of their relationship and might be willing to turn a
blind eye to the specific nature of their future nights dedicated to supervising Sherlock and John while they enjoyed each other’s overnight company.

“I know that well, my dear. And never forget that the sentiment is one I also share.”

One final kiss and a quick check for appearance, then the pre-engaged couple set out in search of their guests. One day, Mycroft knew, he would be conducting business in their home and his Gregory would stand with him as a supremely gracious host. And the faint sounds of Sherlock and John’s war cries would not be wafting through the halls…

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Ok, he’d seen that man over there on the news, no question about it. And that other one getting his drink refilled, too. The tall gent talking to Grandmama was one of theirs, at least, but he was on the news regularly, too. Oh god… best plan – keep mouth shut. Don’t say a single fucking word because people like this didn’t need to listen to his… peasant… way of talking. And there was no way in heaven he was going to make Mycroft look bad. Make people wonder what the fuck was going on with Mycroft Holmes that he’d hook up with someone who sounded like the man who parked their car for them.

“Gregory?”

“Hmm…”

“Gregory?”

“Mht?”

“Pardon?”

“m’ok”

“I believe I deciphered that portion and I am afraid I must contest your assertion.”

“Mht?”

“Will you please enunciate?”

“Mno.”

“Gregory Lestrade, love of my life, if I am forced to pry your lips apart to gain clear access to your words, I shall not hesitate to do so.”

“Shhh… I’m trying not to draw attention to myself, so don’t you start fussing and doing it for me!”

“Why on Earth are you attempting to camouflage yourself?”

“Do you have any idea who these people are?”

Mycroft hoped his pointedly raised eyebrow would serve as a response and his husband’s sheepish grimace spoke to his success.

“Ok, that was dumb. This isn’t like your last party, love. These people are people!”

“Good heavens, Gregory. I shall obtain for you something soothing to drink. A moment, if you
Mycroft bit his lip and tried to smother the smile that was threatening to spread across his face. It was utterly inappropriate that he was feeling amusement over his husband’s discomfort, but it was absolutely adorable. Such a protective and courageous spouse, but still so very capable of wonder.

"Gregory, I assure you that no one in this room is anything but a mere mortal. And with a twitch of her fingers, Grandmama can have any evicted in a most entertaining fashion. Since she adores you utterly, and we can be certain you would never suffer such a fate, one could justifiably claim that your status is far higher than any of the individuals to whom we are playing host. You are bound most tightly to an extremely... people-ish... person, my love and I assure you that you could barter that tie in ways you can scarcely imagine. And that is supplemental to your own natural abilities and incalculably worthy qualities. Now, I shall obtain for you a soothing drink, but, if it makes you happier, you may accompany me."

"You’re not leaving me standing here to get pounced on. Lead on."

This time Mycroft did chuckle and openly laughed when Lestrade flicked his nose after checking that no one was watching.

"I love you, Gregory. I can never tell you that often enough."

"And I love you, Mycroft. But I’ll do more than flick you if I get caught in a cluster of politicians without some kind of lifeline."

"Such a bold threat. It could be worth depositing you in the proverbial shark tank, just to discover the nature of my punishment."

Now, at long last, his love’s mood began to shift and some light returned to his luscious brown eyes.

"You’re a bad man, Mycroft Holmes. Lucky I’ve got a soft spot for bad men."

"Then I shall endeavor to be as evil as possible. Come now, the evening has just begun."

As Mycroft expected, as a little more time passed, his husband relaxed and lost the worry that had erupted when he took in fully the cohort with whom they would be socializing. It was easy to forget that his love did not have his experience with a certain section of the population and was not cognizant of the fact that there was no more and no less about them than any other person. But, he would soon see the truth and understand that strength of character, such as his husband possessed, was more valuable than any amount of exposure by the media. And, blessedly, the cocktail hour held to an hour, so the vacuous small talk was kept to a minimum, so his love’s mind did not have to atrophy from the banality of these infernal social obligations.

"Was that so terribly painful, my dear?"

"No, I suppose not. Just a shock there at first. I guess... I guess I’d better go and get Sherlock and John, right?"

Mycroft looked over to his grandmother, who had most certainly heard their exchange and received a small nod of agreement.
“If you would not mind.”

“Nah. It’ll give me a chance to make sure they haven’t turned their clothes to rags or cut each other’s hair.”

“Then I shall see you in a moment.”

A small peck on the cheek preceded Lestrade’s departure and Mycroft watched him leave, pausing a moment to reflect yet again on his good fortune before following the others to dinner. For his part, Lestrade took a deep breath once he had left the group and crossed his fingers that Sherlock and John were still in presentable shape. Not that he doubted Edwards, but the boys had an almost supernatural talent for getting into trouble. Luckily, it was easy to find the children by letting his ears lead the way.

“I do not accept defeat!”

“Accept or not but you lost, Sherlock. And now you owe me two million pieces of chocolate.”

“I shall not pay you a lick of my chocolate. This is a puerile game and I am far too advanced in intellect to pay attention to its ridiculous rules.”

“It’s checkers, Sherlock. And I won. You can make all the excuses you want but I’m the Chocolate King now and I want my payment.”

“Never!”

“Master Sherlock…”

“Be silent, menial!”

“Shut it, you little bastard!”

“Oh no, the other menial has arrived. My night is well and truly corrupted.”

Greg shook his head and made what he hoped was an apologetic smile at Edwards who returned it and quietly left Lestrade in charge of the situation.

“Look, you two. It’s time to eat, so try and pretend you’ve got manners and don’t embarrass Mycroft or Grandmama.”

“Don’t worry, Greg. We’ll be good.”

“You are inappropriately plural, John Watson. Kindly police your pronouns.”

“I’ll make sure he behaves himself, Greg.”

“Thanks, John. Ok, boys… ready to eat?”

“If dinner is not palatable, rest assured we shall have words.”

“Oh good, more words from you. I’ll add that to the Mt. Everest of words I already have from you. I’m going to have to buy some of that mountain-climbing equipment just to get up to the top to see over it. Look, just be polite and I’ll finish anything you don’t like, ok?”

“Then you may simply consume my plate at the onset. The likelihood of my finding the offerings acceptable is equivalent to the likelihood that you shall comport yourself appropriately at
Lestrade felt a familiar tug on his clothing and made sure to have his most reassuring smile on before looking down at John.

“Are there going to be a lot of people at dinner, Greg?”

“Not too many. And they’ll spend most of their time talking to each other so we can sit back and eat in peace.”

“Ok. Good. I wasn’t… well…”

“Elves are insufficiently interesting to garner any attention, so you should expect to find yourself considered next to invisible, which is a boon to all involved.”

“I’m not an elf! Though having little pointy ears would be sort of interesting. I’d have to keep my hair cut short so people could see them, though…”

“You are a vain little pebble.”

“Who is the Chocolate King of Checkers, don’t forget.”

“I have already purged my mind of any association with you this evening, with or without the confounding effects of black and red game pieces.”

“It stings, doesn’t it, Sherlock. Stings like a bee.”

“Lackey! Take action against the elf!”

“Soon as his ears grow in, I’ll give him a grab he won’t soon forget.”

“I am surrounded by indigent wastrels! Not a word shall either of you speak to me until I have been duly provided with appropriate recompense for your enforced company.”

“I’ll read you a bedtime story.”

“I may vomit. Which, since you are used to a life of servitude, you will be honored to clean.”

Lestrade counted to ten and hoped his smile didn’t look too serial-killerish.

“That’s just dumb. If you do it before we eat your whole dinner will taste like vomit.”

“That, John Watson, shall likely be an improvement.”

Lestrade walked forward, straightened the boys’ ties, moved behind them, then shoved them both forwards with firm swats to the bum.

“Paedophile!”

“I got the better swat. Because I’m blonde.”
While Sherlock sputtered like an overheated engine, Lestrade continued to push the boys out of the room and towards the dinner table. He could only hope that there was something besides liver on offer, otherwise, the goblin uprising would arrive quickly and with a more than a little fanfare. Pitchforks would be a likely thing…

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John’s little gasp was something Lestrade shared completely seeing the extremely formal dining room and the glittering table laid out for their dinner. This was going to be rough. Sherlock was right… he was the servant given a present of sitting at the table once before they sent him out to pasture. At least his suit helped make it not so obvious. But, he wasn’t surprised that John reached up to hold his hand as they walked towards the table, especially since their arrival garnered the attention of everyone in the room.

“Ah, Gregory. Thank you. Your seats are next to Mycroft.”

At least Grandmama was… well, she didn’t actually ever smile, but she did a sort of thing with her face that looked almost like her normal face, but you just knew it was a smile. And there were three empty seats next to his partner, which prompted a lot of thinking before he sent John to sit next to Mycroft, Sherlock to sit next to John and he took the last seat. It wasn’t great to be so far from the person who could reassure him he wasn’t acting like the serf Sherlock always said he was, but this would keep the boys flanked and Sherlock away from his brother. Mycroft was going to have to actually talk to people and John, at least, wouldn’t go out of his way to make that difficult. And between John and him, Sherlock should be controllable. Somewhat. There shouldn’t be any projectile food, at least. If they were very lucky.

Mycroft felt his heart race seeing his spouse and their charges stride into the room and wanted nothing more at that moment than to simply spirit them away for a quiet meal in the kitchen where they could talk and laugh and simply enjoy the feeling of being family. Not that he wouldn’t spend that entire meal mesmerized by his husband’s splendor. As it was, he would simply have to pass this boring function, using his immense pride in his family to keep his spirits high and his attentions focused on matters at hand. It was for them, ultimately, that he did what he did. No matter the effort or the time required, they would be protected and kept comfortable at all costs.

And how delightful it was to assist John into the large chair and get him situated with some bread to snack on before the first course arrived. His dearest Gregory, how masterfully he arranged the seating. John would require only small assistances and would not spend the evening attempting to paint pictures on his jacket with a finger dipped in sauce or saw through the leg of his chair with his butter knife.

“Hi, Mycroft.”

“Hello, John. You continue to look very smart in your suit.”

Excellent. His parental skills were improving, if John’s large smile was any indication.

“Thanks! You look smart, too. And don’t worry, I told Greg we’d be good and if Sherlock tries anything dumb, I’ll give him a punch under the table to make him behave.”

Really, was there a more perfect child to serve as Sherlock’s companion? Best friend…that was the correct term, was it not? Perhaps it was in appropriate since Sherlock had no other friends to make the comparative ‘best’ a valid descriptor, but now was not the time to fret over the vagaries of language.
“For that you have my gratitude.”

A few more moments of seeing John provided his napkin, then a small discussion concerning lack of need to worry about the assortment of tableware laid out in front of him and Mycroft felt confident the young boy would successfully and confidently navigate dinner. And how splendid a feeling it was for him, as well. Was this truly what being a parent was like? It was difficult and time-consuming and, in truth, unceasing as his love had learned quickly, however, it all seemed insignificant compared to the wide grin and sincere ‘thank you’ he received for his efforts.

“Fuck you, you little bastard! You are going to stay in your chair!”

“It is unbearably uncomfortable and I shall not be confined to it! It is torture and that is prohibited by a number of laws and treaties that you cannot overrule! Find a cushion for me or I shall leave this instant!”

“You’re not going anywhere! There’s nothing wrong with your chair and you are going to sit there until dinner is over or hell freezes into an ice cube, whichever comes first. Now here… eat this and settle down.”

“I refuse.”

“Refuse all you want. I’ll eat the bread and you can sit there with your stomach rumbling. Wow, isn’t that a better option.”

“There is no butter on the bread. It is bread and bread alone is homeless food. I am not homeless, therefore, unbuttered bread is entirely unsuitable for me. Either provide me with butter or take the homeless bread away from my presence.”

“You know, if I kill you now, your body will slide right down under the table and no one will even notice you’re dead.”

“It amuses me that you believe my demise would not immediately send alarms of the most urgent nature throughout the nation. Grandmama would suffer heart palpitations and the wildebeest is not yet ready to fully take up the yoke of his servitude to the state, since they have yet to stockpile sufficient wildebeest rations for his continued labor. You will have crippled Great Britain with the cowardly stroke of your blade and it will not be a fortnight before your beheading!”

Lestrade shoved the roll into his mouth and grabbed another for Sherlock, layering it thumb-thick with butter, before dropping it on the boy’s plate.

“Bread does not belong there. It belongs on the bread plate. Your ignorance of the strictures of polite society is shameful. If Mycroft does not take his own life by the end of this meal, I shall be most surprised, so great must be his embarrassment at having a barely-washed and ill-mannered mendicant presented to his guests as his courtesan. It is most likely you shall find yourself hurled out of the house at the end of the evening to return to the rubbish bin you claim as your primary residence.”

Lestrade slowly picked up Sherlock’s roll and placed it on the small plate apparently designed for it. Sherlock was right. He had no idea what to do with all of this! And there was his partner, smiling and graceful and tending to John… oh yeah, putting bread on the right plate… just like he was born to this, which he was. At least the servant refilled his water without being asked because he had zero idea if he was allowed to ask them for things or not. And he was certain there’d be soup, just so he
could slurp it and bring the conversation to a crashing halt so everyone could stare at the raised-by-wolves boy that had somehow crawled to the table. Maybe he should just let Sherlock kill him and be done with it. Mycroft could be whatever was a widower for their situation and that would be good, right? Everyone treated a widower well and no one would be evil enough to make comments about his pitiful choice of a partner. Then, Grandmama could get him someone more appropriate who knew why there were so many fucking glasses in front of them! One – what was wrong with one glass!

“You shall dissociate into your primordial components before the main course is served and I shall document every stage of your downfall!”

Sherlock pulled a tiny version of his field notebook and the stub of a pencil from his jacket pocket, which he had somehow grabbed without Lestrade noticing, and posed himself very much like a journalist waiting for their big story to break.

“I’m not dissolving, little man. I’m just… I’m not doing anything!”

“I shall summon a servant to bring a sponge and a pail to remove the remnants of your devastation.”

“Sherlock… just be good, ok? No trying to start trouble or have fun at other people’s expense.”

“Why not? It is likely the only way I shall enjoy this collection of zombies and their endless droning. And kindly remove that bread from my vision. It is distressing me.”

“You wanted bread with butter. That’s what you got.”

“There is too much butter. The only human being who can stomach that much grease is currently playing the trained monkey with Grandmama’s leash latched to his collar. Actually he is the only human being who has a stomach large enough to hold that much grease. Rectify this immediately!”

“Here.”

Lestrade snatched the buttered roll of the plate, opened it and ladled on a large spoonful of sugar before closing it and handing it to the glaring boy who looked at it as if he was being handed a bag of snakes. No that’s not true, the goblin prince would love a bag of snakes…

“Eat.”

“I refuse.”

“Eat the damned bread. You’ll like it, I promise.”

“And if I find that promise violated?”

“You can spend the rest of the evening telling me how shit I am.”

“I shall do that in any case, so I do not understand how that serves as a prize.”

“Just eat the bread.”

Sherlock rolled his eyes so sharply Lestrade was surprised they didn’t pop out of his head and add to the chaos at their end of the table, but he finally leaned over and took a large and very contemptuous bite of the bread, which was still in Lestrade’s fingers.
“It is…”

“Well?”

“It is tongue-defiling…”

“You didn’t put any effort at all into that lie. I’m insulted, actually.”

Sherlock snarled, but took another bite of the bread Lestrade was holding before laying down his note-taking tools and using his hands to assist his gobbling of the buttery and sugary mass. Lestrade reached out for more water and found a gently smiling woman pouring wine into one of the other glasses near his plate. And, it was filled quite a bit more than any of the other glasses at the table he noticed. With an honestly appreciative smile in return, Lestrade took a long sip and settled back to try and relax while the feasting goblin tore through his snack. Just get through dinner. Truthfully, Sherlock was acting about as expected and, when Mycroft’s attention was back towards the guests, John would be a helpful distraction for Sherlock’s nonsense. Just get through dinner, that’s all he had to do. And, as predicted, no one seemed to be paying him much mind, so he wouldn’t have to worry about having to carry on conversation about things he knew absolutely nothing about. Eat a tasty meal, have more of this really good wine and watch Mycroft do his thing.

Which was a completely amazing thing. Mycroft was so much at ease… not a speck of anything but pure sexy confidence and he really could just sit here all night and watch his partner manage the crowd. This was exactly where Mycroft belonged, right in the thick of it all. Right in the middle of the really important people and holding his own. No, more than holding his own, being the friggin’ leader of it all. Behind Grandmama, of course, but she was actually taking a back seat, it seemed. Letting her grandson sit in the driver’s seat this time and control the show. This was why he needed to just shut up in his head and stop complaining about a nice meal and kids he watched all the time anyway. Mycroft was over there doing the really hard work… and doing it gorgeously.

Ok, now he was back to wondering how he was going to make it through the night. First it had been the dreaded soup, but slurping was the least of his worries since he had two boys he had to watch like hawks so they actually ate a little of the soup they were making up stories about (pureed tree bark and wallpaper paste was Sherlock’s contribution) and keep said soup off of their clothes. He got two spoonsful into his mouth before it was taken away and replaced by a piece of what looked like sole, which, again, set the boys arguing because it was a fairly small piece of fish and whether the fish was a normal fish or a genetically-mutated dwarf fish was the subject of hot debate. Between refereeing the argument and lifting hands to mouths so fish actually was consumed, Lestrade barely got to smell his own portion before it, too, was taken away and the main course was set down.

This was a very welcome bit of good red meat and hearty vegetables, which caused Sherlock apoplexy, and was promptly taken out on John, who was subsequently convinced that the Brussels sprouts were baby cabbages and with extreme evil intent, Sherlock maneuvered John into a very unhappy state over innocent babies being stabbed by forks and torn apart by sharp teeth. Despite his usual ability to deflect Sherlock’s drama, the conversation had a disastrous effect on the young boy and Lestrade finally excused himself from the table, when it became clear John was highly distressed and doing his very best not to let it show. It took only a few minutes to reassure the child that Sherlock was teasing and get him smiling again, but then it was a trip to wash John’s face before they returned to the table where he received an understanding nod from Grandmama and a sympathetic, but slightly confused one from Mycroft. In penance, Sherlock had to eat both servings of Brussels sprouts and between directing each sprout into the little bastard’s mouth, cutting meat,
wiping faces, which was insane for kids who were *not* examples of babies, cabbages or not, Lestrade again had only a few stolen moments to get food into his own mouth before it vanished from in front of him.

Then it was a salad, which, since it was green and he was still reeling from his defeat at the hands of Brussels sprouts, wound up Sherlock tighter than a watch spring and there was a long round of negotiation between John and the little nutter as to who had to eat what. By the time Lestrade had the salads reorganized and distributed according to their agreement, he scarcely had a chance to wolf down half of his own before the plate was whisked away like it’s brethren before it. When the slice of chocolate tart with freshly whipped cream arrived, Lestrade didn’t even bother, instead slicing his portion in two and placing half on each of Sherlock and John’s plates because, as expected, it was a battle of each boy trying to steal, bargain, threaten or cajole the other’s portion of the dessert and keeping the battle from spilling out and drawing in innocent bystanders was no mean feat. As it was, John was able to sneak a bite off of Mycroft’s plate while the elder Holmes was otherwise engaged, which sent Sherlock nearly screaming in fury. It was only a quick press of a bit of crust into his mouth by Lestrade’s finger that kept the screaming to a muffled grunt.

As the remains of dinner were cleared away, Lestrade felt eyes on him and looked up to catch Grandmama’s gaze and understood her message. At least she looked sorry that he was being dismissed for the night and sent to play nursemaid to the boys for whom her eyes softened noticeably as she watched them trying to build a small tent out of the knives and napkin Sherlock had refused to relinquish to the staff clearing the table. Lestrade picked up their construction efforts and set them out of reach before motioning Sherlock and John stand up so they could leave.

“Already? I was having fun!”

“I shall not leave until I have another portion of tart. Mine was unforgivably miniscule.”

“You had half of mine, too, you bastard and that’s plenty for now. Let’s go and see what else we can find to do. Maybe there’s some films to watch or games to play. We’ll sort it out, ok.”

“Ok.”

John hopped off his chair and tugged on Mycroft’s sleeve to get the older Holmes’s attention.

“Come on, Mycroft. We’re going to go and find something to do.”

“Alas, John, I am unable to join your merriment, but I am certain Gregory will provide you with many entertaining diversions.”

“Oh, well that’s no fun for you. Sorry.”

It was a sweet sentiment, but no one was sorrier for the situation that Mycroft. Seeing his family prepare to depart was squeezing the veritable life’s blood out of his heart, even though he knew in advance this was to be the outcome of the evening. He had simply not anticipated how he would ache watching his spouse, who had brilliantly stewarded the boys through a lengthy and uneventful dinner, leave his side having shared no more than a few words all evening. It had been a sound plan, but in the future, perhaps Sherlock would require less intense supervision and his love could take a closer seat so they could more fully share the evening together. A small cut of his eyes towards Grandmama verified that she shared his pride at Gregory’s handling of the two energetic boys and his regret that circumstances could not have been different for their first dinner as a family.

“We shall have another opportunity to share a quiet evening, John, I make you that promise. Now, you will keep a watchful eye on Sherlock, will you not? He can become most disagreeable in
the later hours of the day.”

“I’ll make sure he doesn’t do anything dumb. And Greg’s going to be there to, and he doesn’t stand for any dumbness.”

Mycroft smiled at the younger boy and looked up with the same smile as a large hand rested on John’s shoulder and turned him away to start walking to catch up with Sherlock.

“Gregory, my beloved… I cannot express my admiration of your abilities. Thank you, my dear, for making this meal a rousing success.”

“I’ll say you’re welcome, but it’s really you making this work, love. You’ve got everyone in the palm of your hand. We’ll see you later?”

“I look forward to it. And Gregory, I love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Mycroft reached out and squeezed his lover’s hand, wishing he could cling to that hand the rest of the night. He still felt too sharply the pain of their separation… however, as was their custom, his spouse showed the greater emotional strength and broke the hold, quickly following after the boys, who were no longer in sight. A few eyes followed his betrothed as he left and Mycroft was very certain they had many questions about the beautiful man they were watching; questions which would receive no answers. His family was his business and, with these individuals, his business was not something he was willing to share.

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Luckily, Sherlock and John were easily found and hadn’t broken anything, so Lestrade allowed himself to start breathing again. He’d done an ok job at dinner, but Grandmama wouldn’t be pleased if a Rembrandt or something showed up with a big target drawn on its forehead and a bunch of darts were sticking out of the canvas.

“This suit must be removed from my body immediately! I feel my life force being removed from my body by its sub-par tailoring and appalling color. I am heartily surprised it is not polyester for the resistance it provides to air flow and the shudder-inducing feel of its so-called fabric. It is better suited for automobile upholstery or draperies at a facility for the criminally insane.”

“Yeah, I have to agree with Sherlock. Not about how nice the suit is because I like my suit a lot, but I’m sort of tired of having to worry about keeping it clean.”

Lestrade would have preferred to keep his suit on so Mycroft had something with lots of pieces to rip from his body when the meeting was over, but that might be awhile and something less expensive would be smart to wear in the meantime, especially since he had no idea what trouble his charges were going to get into before they went to bed.

“Sounds good to me. Back to your room and we’ll get you into something more comfortable. I’m guessing an early night for you two, right? You’ve had a pretty rough day…”

“Nonsense. I eschew sleep at the best of times and this certainly cannot be described in that manner. Further I must share a room with John and that can, in no possible way, be restful. His sniveling alone would keep me in a wakeful state. I have no intention of sleeping, so you may set aside your newly reborn paedophilic tendencies, as you shall not find satisfaction from this quarter!”

“I’m not sleeping either! How often do I get to be in a palace? I’m going to stay awake every
second I’m here so I can see everything!”

Oh good. Two boys who were making plans for a siege. Definitely going to have to lose the suit. Lestrade wondered if there was any way to get some warm milk sent to the two little trolls who were glaring up at him with arms crossed across their chests. Or some tranquilizers.

“We can talk about that later. Let’s go, time to lose the suits.”

To Sherlock’s loudly proclaimed victory, Lestrade marched the boys towards their room where, fortunately, their clothes had been unpacked so it was an easy matter to exchange their more formal attire for their typical clothes. And Lestrade made very sure he carefully hung each suit exactly as he had found it, setting their shoes close by so they could all be scooped up and taken to wherever little boy suits went to live when they weren’t being worn. Then, after Sherlock and John obtained their full share of possible items to occupy their time, they followed Lestrade to his room where he also changed into something easier to wear and, after a prolonged argument that Lestrade sat back and watched with great patience, it was decided that they would stay where they were and engage in a contest of wits, to which John’s many decks of Top Trumps and standard playing cards factored highly. Lestrade got the boys situated on the tall bed and was about to join them when there was a knock at the door, which, when opened, exposed a young man carrying a tray in both hands.

“Mr. Lestrade? For you, sir. Mrs. Holmes felt it might be necessary.”

On the tray was a hefty sandwich, a sizeable piece of the tart that had been served at dinner and a bottle of beer. Real, honest beer that nearly brought tears to Lestrade’s eyes. Taking the tray with a very sincere ‘thank you,’ the older boy sat on the bed and, after fighting off the creeping terrors hellbent on securing a portion of his bounty for themselves, settled back to enjoy his actual dinner while a cutthroat card game erupted next to him. This was the part he liked. Get the job done right and have a little reward afterwards. And he was only having to swat small thieving hands ever minute or so, so it was actually an almost-relaxing reward, too.

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All of this foolishness. It was clear that the Americans were attempting to again secure aid for one of their crippled initiatives and, after the disaster of his recent assignment, they realized it was going to be extremely hard won. All night they had been feeling their way through strategies to direct the discussions to their favor, but doing it in such a gross and unsubtle way that it gave him a headache from the attempt to restrain his blistering derision. And the inconsiderateness of it all! It was only when the clock struck three that the assembled finally became aware of the time and Grandmama had to offer her hospitality for the night so that they could uptake their negotiations in the morning.

It was unfair. Unfair and reprehensible and now he would enjoy only a scant few hours with his husband in what would serve as their temporary marriage bed. This should have been a joyful night, rich with pleasures of the flesh, heart and mind and now… how delicious Gregory had looked in his suit. How positively stunning and how little time he would have to sample that delight, though his spouse would have long since rid himself of his bespoke garments. But a few hours they would have and he planned on making…

the…

most…

of the time.

Mycroft had hoped to steal a secret glimpse of his slumbering spouse before gentling him awake, but
he had not expected that glimpse to be of three bodies sprawled out on his husband’s bed, looking for all the world like they had been cut down by a firing squad. His precious spouse lay on his back, stretched out and pinned to the mattress by John, who somehow was sleeping soundly while reclining face down across his Gregory’s shins. Sherlock had adopted a skewed position, lying as a human hypotenuse to the triangle completed by his husband’s torso and John’s legs. One of his Gregory’s hands rested among Sherlock’s wild curls, as the boy’s head pressed against his side and all three were creating a symphony of various sleep-promoted variations of breathing. It was the most… why did he not have a camera! For all he wished to spend these few hours engaged in the most lustful activities with the man whose body, even now, was stirring his passions in every pleasurable ways, this tableau was far too special to disturb. It would not be too many years before the young bodies were their own offspring, yes! of both of them, resting with his beloved. Fair and dark mixed on the bed, clinging to their father for comfort and protection as they slept. It was… it was nearly too beautiful an image to contemplate and he vowed a second sonnet to that very event! Nay a compendium of sonnets! He would write… hire someone to write… a volume of appropriate pieces to celebrate their love and family. It would be done. The die was cast.

Tip toeing into the room, Mycroft removed his shoes and prepared to take a seat in the large armchair near the bed so that he could simply gaze at this most perfect vision, when part of that vision altered and one tiny eye cracked open and caught him staring.

“Hi, Mycroft? What time is it?”

“It is quite late, John. Or early, depending upon one’s perspective. Please, do not rouse yourself on my account.”

“I have to pee.”

“Well then, rouse yourself immediately. Here, I shall help you down.”

John rolled off of Lestrade’s legs and accepted Mycroft’s steadying hand as he climbed down the elevated bed.

“Where is it?”

“Ah. Beyond yon door.”

“I like the way you talk. You and Sherlock are fun to listen to, even if I don’t always understand what you’re going on about.”

John dashed off, leaving Mycroft quietly laughing, which he was still doing when the small boy returned and needed a boost back onto the mattress.

“Are you coming to bed?”

“I daresay the bed is sufficiently populated already.”

“Nope. There’s room for more. Watch.”

John moved over to the side where Sherlock was still sleeping had pushed his friend into a more space-friendly position.

“See! I’ll stay over here and that whole side next to Greg is empty.”

And the elongation of his husband’s name, along with the sing-song quality of John’s voice reminded Mycroft that the boy was a staunch supporter of romance.
“How very kind of you. I shall make myself ready.”

John smiled widely and before Mycroft was even out of his suit, John was fast asleep again, with Sherlock’s palm positioned flat on his chest in a very interesting, if unconscious, act of possessiveness. With a smile on his lips, Mycroft quickly changed into clothes appropriate for a communal sleep and carefully lay down next to his lover, who stirred feeling the bed shift with a new weight.

“Ummmm... Mycroft?”

“Yes, my dear. Return to sleep. You have had a tremendously busy day.”

It was only now that Mycroft was remembering just how busy it had been. The only moment of rest his spouse had received was the quiet hour they spent reading in the library. And the less said about his romp with the horses, the better.

“Fine, as long as you come closer.”

Which was a happy command to obey and Mycroft quickly curled around his fiancé and took a moment to simply breathe in his scent and let his muscles relax from the comforting smell.

“Is that acceptable, my dear?”

“It’s perfect. Why don’t…”

The large yawn made Mycroft smile again and he stroked his hand a few times across Lestrade’s stomach.

“Tomorrow, Gregory. We will speak tomorrow. Return to your rest.”

“Ok. Breakfast?”

It was likely that he would be required to take breakfast with their guests, but... but he would spare time to enjoy at least part of the morning meal with only his spouse and their charges in attendance.

“I believe my attendance can be guaranteed.”

“Good. I love you, Mycroft. Sleep well.”

“And I love you, Gregory. More than you can possibly imagine.”

A strong arm wrapped around Mycroft, holding him gently and in a few moments, the rhythmic breathing told Mycroft his spouse had again fallen asleep. It was not the night he had planned. It was not the night they had desired. But it was their night, nonetheless, and it was special in its own right. There would be more, many more, a lifetime more... and each would be special, because he would spend them with this man at his side.
“AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

It was a testament to their family dynamics that no one did more than crack open an eye upon hearing Sherlock’s ear-splitting shriek. Actually, Mycroft had cracked his eye long before that moment and had kept it fixed on this brother and John. Sherlock had nestled himself against Lestrade’s side, with John laying against/on him. One long and muscular arm tucked both boys tightly against the equally muscular body to which it was connected and the scene was so adorable, he had simply lain there and admired it. However, anticipating Sherlock’s hysterical reaction to finding himself sandwiched was a delight all its own.

“I am compromised!”

“Stop wiggling… you’re waking me up.”

“The fact that you are vocalizing documents your already-achieved wakeful state, John Watson. Is it possible you are even more stupid this morning than last night? And you will CEASE clinging to me!”

“Nah… warm.”

And an almost half-awake John simply curled more tightly around his infuriated teddy bear who was rendered speechless by the presumption of the action. Of course, as Mycroft carefully noted, his brother simply vibrated with indignation, rather than tossing his bedmate onto the floor. Oh, but he would attempt to push Gregory to create a better escape route. So very interesting.

“Stop pushing me, you misery. It’s bad enough I had that hard head of yours denting me all night long, I don’t need any more bruises from your teeny little fists.”

“You must reposition to permit me egress, plebian.”

“You’re so groggy you can’t even talk properly. Go back to sleep.”

“It is not my fault that your command of the English language is on par with the aglet of a discarded shoelace. I must disembark this ship of fools!”

“Sorry, but Mycroft needs sleep and I’m not disturbing him for your bit of foot-stamping. Now just relax and have another hour or so of rest. I’m sure we’ve got a busy day ahead of us and I know I can use the sleep.”

“Pfft. As if being cemented to your laborer’s torso with my face in proximity to the wafting redolence of your axilla could possibly promote a peaceful rest.”

“S’ht up f’r I pnch u. Tr’yn to slp.”

“You shall not lay a hand upon me John Watson if you value your life. Though why you would do that is quite beyond me for your life is absolutely valueless by any scale of measure.”

Lestrade pulled the boys more tightly to him, which earned him a happy sigh from a desperately-trying-to-sleep John and a squawk of irritation from a desperately-trying-to-escape Sherlock.

“Go to bed. Sleep or think or count sheep or whatever the fuck you want to do, but do it
“You shall not silence me, lackey!”

The small hand that flopped over his mouth could, though and Sherlock pouted while John quickly fell back into a sound sleep and Lestrade counted the moments until Sherlock was lightly snoring through John’s fingers.

“It’s alright, love. The evil little boy won’t bother you now.”

“You are a superb protector, my dear. I could not ask for better.”

“Aww… now go to bed.”

“Gregory, I am quite sufficiently rested…”

“Number one, that’s not true because it’s only been… chirst, it’s only been a couple of hours… and number two, I could use a little longer with my eyes closed and it’s so much better when they’re closed and you’re right here with me.”

Well, there was no arguing with that, in Mycroft’s opinion, and he took a page from his brother’s book, nestling snugly against his spouse’s side, receiving a muscular arm around wrapping around body for his very own.

“Love you, Mycroft. And I’ll tell you again when I can actually say it without fighting back a yawn.”

“And I love you, my dear. And I shall tell you every moment I am physically capable.”

His Gregory’s sleepy smiles were now solidly among his favorites. So gentle and content. And it was he that put the smile on his husband’s face. All the power he would someday wield and this is what made him feel like the most important man in the world. Hopefully, there would be time today to actually put more smiles on his love’s lips. Smiles and kisses and… well, if Gregory chose, of his own volition to do something else with his lips, then no opposition would be coming from his quarter.

Mycroft cracked a fresh eye and raised his head slightly when he heard the small rattle of a doorknob being turned and was entirely unsure how to react seeing Grandmama enter, followed by a young woman bearing a tray laden with the makings of a good morning’s cup of tea.

“I wondered why each assigned bedroom I checked was empty, though not a single sound of youthful revelry could be heard in the house. Or Sherlock’s complaining.”

Though her tone was arch, albeit hushed, Mycroft had no trouble discerning the extreme delight the older woman felt for what she was seeing. As was right and proper. A wholesome family scene such had not been under this roof for years. And it was not at all diminished by Sherlock’s head resting among his surrogate father’s feet and John using Sherlock’s own foot as a smaller version of his former full-body teddy.

“Gregory and the children were fatigued after their long day and succumbed to sleep during their after-dinner relaxation.”

“And you decided to join them.”
“Of course. As head of…”

No, that was not right. How could he claim to be head of their household when (a) they had no house and (b) he was, by far, the minor contributor to their family life when compared to his beloved spouse? Silly thought, such a very silly thought…

“I mean to say, as a member of our makeshift family unit, it was my honor and privilege to join my partner and our charges for what small amount of sleep I could gain, given the lateness of my retiring.”

A partner and charges who were now becoming aware there was noise in the room and starting to drag their minds awake. The wriggling, yawning, snorting, scratching, stretching and host of other small actions signaled the unofficial start of the morning. The official start came when three in-unison gasps announced that the female presence in the room had been noticed and that the female presence owned the bed they were overloading.

“Oh… Grandmama. Hi… I mean, good morning. We just got a little tired and… STOP sniffing my feet you little bastard!”

“I believe the peculiarity of your natural pedal aroma indicates an overabundance of testosterone, which explains many things about your behavior and inclinations. I did not perform that particular test when I assayed your saliva, so you must provide me with another sample and Mycroft provide me with the appropriate testing equipment and supplies. I shall prepare a list of my needs and they shall be waiting when we arrive home or I shall be most aggrieved!”

Lestrade gripped Sherlock’s ankle and dragged the boy towards the head of the bed.

“Well, isn’t that a nice attitude to start the morning. And your Gran was kind enough to bring you some tea. John, make sure you wear socks around this one or your feet are going to be part of one of his science projects.”

“They already were! He’s got a little vial filled with the stuff from under my toenails and some toenail pieces, too, which is really gross if you think about it. Maybe he just likes feet.”

“I am not a foot fetishist! You term me a podophile and I shall not allow that bit of character assassination to stand. I demand satisfaction for your slander!”

“Did Mycroft give you permission to let us use the swords yet?”

“Beluga! I demand you release unto me the key to our weapons room!”

Mycroft leaned over to give his spouse a kiss on the cheek, then swung his feet over the side of the bed to stand and prepare himself to serve the tea the already-dismissed servant had delivered.

“I’m afraid that it shall stay under my own lock and key for the time being. I would rather not have to retrieve you and John from the police station because you have gone on a pillaging rampage through the area surrounding our home.”

“As if anyone would have a bounty sufficient to warrant my pillaging efforts. Surrounding our home is little but a tent-living civilization teetering on the brink of collapse into a feral state. Do you think I want their gnawed bones and jewelry made from seeds and rocks that have caught their fancy? Nay! I say nay!”

Mycroft dropped a napkin over the finger Sherlock was emphatically pointing in the air and passed a cup of tea to his spouse, who had shuffled to rest his back against the headboard of the bed.
“For you, my dear. John, there is a lovely pot of chocolate provided. Shall I pour some for you?”

Sherlock leapt up as if he had been stung by a scorpion and nearly fell off the bed as he leaned over trying to snatch the chocolate from the tray, which had been scooted well out of his reach by a forward-thinking older brother.

“It is mine!”

“There is enough for two, Sherlock. And if you cannot control your avarice and evince a more pleasant attitude, there shall be no swords for you today.”

Four sets of eyes settled on the family matriarch, two horrified and two gleeful.

“Grandmama… you cannot be implying…”

“I can and I am. Gregory, please prepare the boys for the day. There is a meal being readied for you, Sherlock and John in the garden. It is a lovely morning, actually, and I hope you find it a pleasant experience. Mycroft… your attendance is required at breakfast with our guests.”

There was a finality to the tone that addressed any objections Mycroft might have had to the directive.

“Of course, Grandmama.”

Mycroft turned his gaze to his husband, who suddenly looked tired and, though he tried to hide it, disappointed.

“And the swords? Why has there been no further discussion on the only topic of relevance?”

“After breakfast, Edwards shall collect you for that initiative. I shall expect you in short order, Mycroft. Gregory… do take every advantage the house and grounds offer to enjoy your day. Simply ask Edwards for anything you might require.”

It was with a sympathetic nod that the elderly woman left the boys alone and Sherlock took the lull in activity to hop off the bed and steal the cup of chocolate Mycroft had poured for John.

“Gregory… I know I promised… but I cannot fail to heed that request.”

“Yeah. Don’t worry about it. And do not pour yourself the rest of that, Sherlock! John hop down and get your share before Sherlock finishes it all. Then we’ll get ready for breakfast. You better get going, Mycroft. I have a feeling ‘shortly’ means ‘now.’”

There should be some criminal penalty for him to suffer for extinguishing the light in his spouse’s eyes. This was not fair, especially for someone who had already toiled too long alone for the good of their love and family. Their growing family.

“I shall do my utmost to make an end to this business early so we might enjoy some of this day together. Perhaps we can find some activity for Sherlock and John to enjoy this evening and we may spend the time alone. You found our time in the library relaxing, did you not? We can have a repeat of that entertainment, perhaps. My strongest effort, Gregory… I give you my word.”

“That sounds good…. like a great plan, actually. Now, go on and get ready before they start without you.”
Lestrade gulped his cooling tea and got up to tap Sherlock on the back of the head since he was trying to drink the dregs from the chocolate pot. A few prods and the two younger boys were marching towards their room for cleaning and clothes, leaving Lestrade to smile at his partner as he followed after them to make sure Sherlock and John actually made it out of their room in better condition than they entered it. For his part, Mycroft stared at the departing trio and cast a despairing glance to the little hidden door to his own room. Gregory was correct, he did need to make ready, but that did not stop him from taking to their bed one last time and breathing in the scent from the pillow which had been blessed to cradle his husband’s head as he slept. Sherlock, as usual, spoke nonsense. Gregory’s aroma was of comfort and love and kindness… fortitude and dedication… it was the most potent perfume one could imagine and if he could but have it in a cut crystal bottle, he would carry it with him always for those times, like this, when he needed that scent to fill his own waning stock of confidence and strength. A good husband… he must be a good husband to his Gregory and being an absentee spouse and father was not accomplishing that goal.

With a final drawing in of the air of their slumber, Mycroft quickly dashed to his room to make himself presentable and mentally prepared himself for what would likely be another disagreeable round of discussions. His day would be burdensome, but he had hope that his dearest fiancé and their charges would enjoy something far more pleasurable. Surely Grandmama would ensure that much recompense for his Gregory’s suffering…

“Eggs are for eating not for throwing, you crazy goblin!”

“How am I to test the projectile capabilities of a gelatinous solid without conducting the appropriate tests!”

“If you don’t like them just give them to me or John. You do NOT throw them and try to pass it off as one of your experiments.”

Sherlock huffed and made a dramatic showing of shoveling his eggs onto John’s plate, which pleased the smaller boy to no end.

“This is great! Lots of good food and only one plate and glass to worry about. And it really is a nice day. I bet there’s lots we can do today, even if we don’t get our swords. There should be lots of places to explore and I’m sure we can find all kinds things to have fun with. We can climb trees, have races, set up targets and throw rocks…”

“Do all of your suggestions for entertainment involve tedious physical activity?”

“No, but why stay inside when we can be outside and we have places to play as far as we can even see!”

“Grandmama’s lands extend beyond your visual range, since you can scarcely see above the tabletop. However, that is not sufficient reason to violate it with your juvenile scampering. I am certain I can find at least the rudiments of necessary equipment to conduct my research and there are experiments I can conduct that will be vital to science, regardless of the crude methods I was forced to use to obtain my results.”

John’s rude noise was almost as impressive as Sherlock’s traditional snort and Lestrade used the distraction to put another piece of toast on Sherlock’s plate, along with a few sections of fruit. The last thing he needed was Sherlock passing out from low blood sugar while he was participating in whatever compromise activity he and John concocted.
“Well, as soon as you two finish, you can get started on your adventures. Anyway, Grandmama seemed to have some ideas so maybe you should hear those out before you make a decision.”

“Ugh… Edwards will likely attempt to force another tiresome board game upon me or insist we sit and listen to a recording of some radio broadcast from his youth when King George sat on the throne.”

“You do realize he’s probably about forty, right? This thing doesn’t work out between Mum and her bloke, I’m thinking about introducing her to good old Edwards when she comes to tea. He’s not wearing a ring, so I assume he’s available for the right person.”

Lestrade simply shook his head no as John started to help Sherlock who had hurled himself off his chair and onto the ground and smiled as the boy only shrugged and stole Sherlock’s unattended toast and fruit.

“I shall not permit Mother Lestrade to become ensnared in his clammy and effete clutches! He is nearly of Mycroft’s rank on the scale of unsuitability for romantic entanglements and procreation!”

Well, it was good that the tousle-headed terror was looking out for his Mum, even if he was being a bastard about it. Sherlock did have a good heart, if you were willing to shovel out a coal car’s worth of insanity to get to it.

“And the agreeable woman whom I am escorting to dinner tonight might take offense at being so cruelly abused by my philandering.”

The three boys startled at the new voice and the older man simply smiled at Lestrade, who gave him an enthusiastic grin in return, and laughed as Edwards stepped over Sherlock’s body to move closer to the table.

“How are you ready to begin our morning’s activities, Master Watson? I have Mrs. Holmes’s instructions well in hand and when you choose, we may make a start.”

“NOW! I’m ready now! Well, as soon as I finish…”

John shoved the remainder of the food on his plate into his mouth and added one plump berry from Lestrade’s own plate as a final punctuation.

“… my food.”

“Excellent. Mr. Lestrade, I apologize that I shall not be able to take charge of the children this morning…”

“I am not a child! My mental advancement vaults me far beyond that infantile description!”

“Say that again when you’re not lying on the ground and someone might believe you, you bloody baby!”

“Edwards! Trounce the peasant!”

“And my apologies to you, Master Sherlock and I am quite certain the trouncing that would bring you satisfaction would take more time than I currently have available. If you will follow me?”

Lestrade grabbed the last of the toast and nodded to John to get up, which the young boy did, hopping over Sherlock as he followed after Edwards and the future Holmes spouse.
“You shall not leave me to the insects and ravages of the elements!”

“Fear not, Master Sherlock. I shall order a scouting party for your retrieval if the sun sets and we have yet to reacquaint.”

“I shall have you sacked, Edwards!”

“Not from the dirt you shall not, Master Sherlock.”

Sherlock’s frustration was the stuff of which earthquakes are born and the trio he trailed was certain they felt the ground shake as Sherlock stomped after them, an award-winning pout firmly planted on his lips. It was definitely shaping up to be a wonderful day.

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Lestrade was not even going to attempt to figure out where the very realistic toy swords came from, let alone the trunks of clothes and accessories, but from their apparent age, he had to believe that they’d been in the house a long time and made a mental note to ask Mycroft if he’d played with them when he was a kid. Or maybe his dad.

“Why won’t you die!”

“You haven’t hit anything vital yet! You’ve got terrible aim, Sherlock.”

“My aim is unimpeachable. It is the fact you keep wriggling and refusing to remain still while I lunge!”

“The enemy isn’t supposed to stand still! They’re supposed to try and avoid being killed!”

“Their lack of manners should not factor into my being victorious! Shop boy! Defend my position!”

“I think it’s actually part of being the enemy to have bad manners. I’ll have to ask Mycroft; that’s more his area.”

“You are useless. I’m surprised your employer has not terminated your work contract since there are rodents that are more trainable that you and have more innate intelligence and body of general knowledge.”

John took the opportunity to strike a killing blow to Sherlock’s chest, which started a fresh round of bickering that Lestrade sat back and watched, wishing he had a cigarette to help pass the time. But, since that wasn’t happening in Grandmama’s nice house, he’d settle for picking up one of the myriad of weapons available for mayhem and joining in the fray, mowing down his opponents, who quickly revived and launched a cooperative retaliatory strike that escalated the conflict to full-scale war that expanded through the house and onto the grounds, which offered many vantage points to hide or stage fresh assaults. And the morning was just beginning…

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Mycroft was firmly convinced that he was allergic to idiocy. All morning his skin had itched and his head had ached and the longer the idiocy lasted the longer Mycroft feared it would last. That was his greatest dread… that this would drag into the wee hours again and this morning’s promise to Gregory would suffer an unhappy fate, which was intolerable. As intolerable as…

No one asked why Mycroft had taken to standing near the windows and he was happy they did not.
He had absolutely no desire to share his reason. Share what he could see and hear faintly from the outside. Currently, John was clinging to the branch of a tree with one arm and swinging what he prayed was not a real sword with the other, repelling an onslaught by ground forces consisting of Sherlock and his beloved Gregory, Sherlock finally forcing his spouse to stoop so he could take to his shoulders and continue the fight on more even grounds. And he was here... listening to endless walls of words crafted without either logic or common sense. Here he was holding court with a legion of buffoons when he could be out there with his family. Out there enjoying the unseasonably warm day and the opportunities it offered. Out there being part of something special...

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If there was a limit to the energy of Sherlock and John, Lestrade despaired of ever finding it. They had played all morning, had a very active lunch where projectile food again made an appearance, but this time it was as part of a contest of skills involving tosses and open mouths. This segued into a further contest of aim that had him setting up targets at which the boys threw stones, which had to be documented with measurements so Sherlock could make calculations that filled pages of his observational journal. This became an afternoon of constructing and testing various slings and catapult devices that Lestrade had to constantly keep a watch on so the boys didn’t destroy anything, something to which they didn’t seem to be giving a lot of cautious consideration.

But it was good to see them working together. Planning and arguing, with Sherlock not winning every battle and not exploding because of it... and Sherlock clearly enjoying himself. As much as John was having fun, Sherlock was perhaps having more because this was still new to him. It was new to have someone who liked him and with whom he fit. New to be seen as someone fun and rewarding to be with and Lestrade decided he was a terrible person to hope that something awful happened so John couldn’t go home for Christmas or summer holiday and leave Sherlock alone. As much as he was going to ache when Mycroft was gone away to school, he had his mates and his Mum for company. Even Sherlock and John were going to make the time pass more quickly. But for Sherlock... there was him and Mycroft that was about it. Well, Mum would have to count, too, but Sherlock didn’t have any other mates and at this rate... at this rate, Mycroft might not even be someone he could count on to be there regularly. Sherlock was actually getting to be a kid with John, have some normal fun in addition to his science fun and... summer was going to be fucking long if John wasn’t here.

One afternoon snack that got a bit messy since there was sauce involved and the boys decided to feel artistic and the older boy realized that taking time to get them to clean themselves was pointless since their sauce masterpieces spurred Sherlock’s curiosity about extracting pigments from plant material and the afternoon became a rainbow of hours filled with whatever household solvents they could lay hands on, pots, spoons, sieves, a mortar and pestle the cook wasn’t happy to have returned stained vaguely green and smelling of paint thinner, two destroyed sets of both clothes and skin stained a variety of colors. Thankfully, none of those lovely hues made it as far as the two angelic faces that were delighted with the results of their research endeavors, which filled several bottles that formerly held the condiments currently buried in a shallow grave beneath a hedge.

“When I am returned to my laboratory, I shall continue this experiment with my much-higher-quality equipment and materials.”

“Yellow. We need more yellow. Maybe we can get some big yellow flowers for that. Or banana skins. We should go and ask the people in the kitchen for bananas.”

“That is simply an excuse for you to shove more food into your gaping maw. I did not believe Mycroft could be rivaled as a receptacle for edibles, but you could be a viable pretender to his throne.”
“Just because you don’t like good things to eat, don’t blame other people because they do. When the big meteor hits the planet and only a few people survive, you’re going to be in trouble since all you’ll want to eat is chocolate and chips and that’s going to run out fast. And since you’re so skinny, you’ll starve fast and then you’ll be dead and I’ll have the last laugh because I’ve got my banana trees and carrots.”

“If a meteor struck the Earth, all life would be extinguished, including your ridiculous bananas and tubers. Unless you believe you shall be able to anticipate such an event and build an appropriate protective bunker, we shall share a common grave in the aftermath. Well, not me, because I have a protective bunker designed to withstand a nuclear conflict.”

“Can I use it?”

“What do you offer me for admission?”

“Hmmm…. I’ll let you win next time we play checkers.”

“Insufficient! Survival of a cosmic disaster demands greater payment than victory in an insipid board game.”

“Fine. I’ll also carry your books all of next week at school. It must hurt your little no-muscle body to carry them around all day.”

“That is a lie! My body lacks useless adipose tissue, but is well-provided with lean muscle. One month.”

“A month! You’re loony! A week and a half.”

“Paltry to the point of criminal insult! Twenty-five days.”

This was going to take awhile. And what a lovely image… the four of them shoved into a bunker waiting for the radiation cloud to disperse. Well, hopefully it would be four. Who the hell knew where Mycroft would be when the aliens were invading. Probably in Whitehall spearheading the global defense efforts. Where Mycroft should be. Where Mycroft belonged. Yeah… had to keep thinking that way. It didn’t do to think about how tired he was. Or how today had been great fun, but also horribly lonely. Or how he’d hoped that maybe he’d see a long and lean figure stride out of the big doors and into the garden, eager to take part in the goings-on. Or how, just maybe, he’d hoped this weekend would be a little about him and Mycroft and not him and the kids. It was selfish and petty and stupid, but… well, surely the Americans would be gone soon and they could have a nice dinner together without a non-family audience or finally get some time to just focus on themselves. Selfish, petty and stupid… big breath and get all of that out. Let it just get blown away so it had no chance to intrude on things when he was warm under the blankets tonight with a beautiful body next to him.

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“I do not want to bathe!”

“Oh god… you’re not a baby, Sherlock. Just take a quick shower so you don’t get whatever the fuck is all over you onto any furniture.”

“It is not my fault that the gardener doesn’t properly label his chemicals!”

“But it is your fault that you decided to go rummaging around when my back was turned! Now, get that off of you before you get poisoned or something and I’ll toss John in the shower in my
“Oh, you mean you are not going to remain to verify the success of my cleaning regimen?”

“Is that another way of calling me a paedophile?”

“Yes.”

“Getting old, Sherlock. Come on, John. Sherlock, try to leave the plumbing intact.”

Lestrade pushed John along to his room and booted him into the bath to get clean, while he ran into Mycroft’s room to take his own shower while he had a child-free moment. In half an hour, there were two clean, though slightly-stained boys in fresh clothes being herded into the library for some quiet time, which stayed quiet for about five minutes before the arguments started over every picture they saw or passage they read in the books the boys dragged off the shelves. Lestrade calculated he could read about a page and a half of his own book in between having to intervene in Sherlock and John’s debates and really wished it was appropriate to just pour himself a large brandy to take the edge off. When Edwards peeked in, Lestrade nearly jumped at the chance to pass the boys off for half an hour or so to have that brandy and maybe take a brief walk to clear his head.

“Ah, Mr. Lestrade. I’ll be leaving for the evening now, but I did want to check that you and the children had everything you needed.”

Well, there went that hope down the drain.

“I think we’re ok. Thanks for asking, though. Any idea… I mean any word on what’s on with the big meeting?”

“Nothing I can discuss, I’m afraid, beyond the fact that Mr. Holmes sends his word that, should you be sufficiently gracious to wait for him, he shall be available to share a late meal. The children’s dinner will be set up in here, if that suffices, but Mr. Holmes would be happy if he could take his own with you after the boys have gone to bed.”

“Oh… meetings going to run late again?”

“Undoubtedly, but such is often the case. May I pass along your agreement or shall you dine with Masters Sherlock and John?”

“I’ll wait. Of course I’ll wait! What could be better than a nice romantic dinner after a long day? Thanks Edwards… that’ll be super.”

With a knowing smile, the older man stepped back out of the library and Lestrade wasn’t surprised that, when he looked, Sherlock was miming swallowing poison and John was smiling widely.

“Are you and Mycroft going to have candles and wine and all that stuff?”

John Watson was going to make someone very happy someday.

“Well, I don’t know about that, but as long as Mycroft’s there, it’ll be the most romantic dinner in the world.”

And not even Sherlock changing his mime act to stabbing himself repeatedly in the heart was going to change that.
Sherlock and John’s dinner went exactly how Lestrade knew it would. Luckily, though, the kitchen had planned well and provided child-friendly fare that not even Sherlock could complain about and after their meal, each boy finally seemed to lose some steam and were content to sprawl on the rug in front of the fire, with Sherlock actually showing immense restraint in verbal abuse as he began to teach John how to play chess. Now, Lestrade could get close to a chapter of his book under his belt before having to stamp out a brushfire.

“Greg, are you sure we have to go back tomorrow? I mean, we could just stay here from now on. The house is so big, no one would even know we were here, so we wouldn’t be a bother.”

“Ugh… this mausoleum is even more disheartening than my own residence. If it were not for my laboratory, it would be indistinguishable from something described by Walpole.”

“Didn’t think you read fiction, Sherlock.”

“I was promised murders. They were abysmally boring. He is now on my list for the inevitable burning of books that will accompany the final dissolution of intelligent society.”

“Fair enough. And sorry, John, but you’ve got to get back to school and so does His Majesty. But, I’m one-hundred percent certain that Grandmama will have you back soon. Probably will insist that you come every time we’re summoned for a visit. In fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if there are more weekends on the horizon.”

“Yes! Because this is the best weekend ever. Don’t you agree, Sherlock?”

“If I am forced, upon pain of death, to make an assessment, I would state that it has not been quite as disastrous as others I have suffered.”

“It would kill you dead to just say you’re having fun, wouldn’t it?”

“Fun is not a word I associate with you, John Watson, as opposed to weasel-like.”

“That’s two words.”

“It is hyphenated, so it counts as one.”

“Who says?”

“The arbiters of the English language.”

“Who are?”

“Am I supposed to recite their names?”

“If you want me to believe you, then yes.”

“Lackey, take John Watson outside and horsewhip him for his impertinence.”

“No whipping on a full stomach. It’s bad for his digestion.”

“How does that discomfort compare to being whipped?”

“You want whipping, fine, but you’re the one sleeping in the same room as him and his dodgy belly.”

“Ah… you make a valid point. The whipping shall be postponed until morning.”
“We’ll see how things go. John, I may not be able to find a horsewhip around here, so be ready to yell as I make some whip-crack noises so it looks like you’re getting a good beating, ok?”

“No problem. Now, are we going to finish this game, Sherlock or are you afraid I’ll win on my very first try?”

“You shall regret those words, John Watson.”

“Won’t know until we’re done, so it’s your move.”

Sherlock and John’s attention went fully back on their game and Lestrade could only chuckle at how they could shift so quickly between thing and another, doing it like a well-rehearsed team every time. At least they’d be in their own beds tonight but he had a feeling that there wouldn’t be much in the way of sleep going on. It would probably be a good idea to put a bell on their door so their inevitable escape would be noticed.

After a second chess game, for which Sherlock had to admit John showed significant improvement, it was time to get the two boys ready for and into their beds. Of course, this involved a tremendous amount of negotiation as to who got which bed, why this blanket or that pillow was insufficient for a good night’s sleep, should the windows be open or closed and a hundred other little things that the boys found terrifyingly important, but finally all matters were settled and blankets were pulled up to chins and a round of more (John) and less (Sherlock) sincere goodnights were made before Lestrade crossed his fingers and pulled their door closed behind him.

Now it was time for him to do a little getting ready, himself. Racing back to the library, Lestrade finally poured himself the brandy he’d been waiting for, toed off his shoes and relaxed back on the sofa to wait for Mycroft. A good book, a warm fire and a lover soon to arrive… this would be brilliant in the years to come. Sometimes it would be him waiting and sometimes it would be Mycroft, but they’d be coming home to each other and that was all that mattered.

After a few hours, and a good stoking of the fire, Lestrade poured another brandy, then cursed himself because another drink on an empty stomach, especially this late at night, was an idiotic move. But, pouring it back was something a truly mannerless peasant would do, so it would be a slow sip and Mycroft could finish it when he arrived. He’d probably be ready for his own bit of relaxing, while they waited for their meal.

Another hour or so later, Lestrade was fighting falling asleep, but energized immediately when he heard the door to the library open. All of the energy bled away immediately when he watched one of the staff walk in with a tray. Set for one. And behind her was Grandmama.

“He’s not coming, is he?”

Why did he even bother to ask? Of course, Mycroft wasn’t coming. Glad he waited when he could have actually been getting a good night’s sleep instead. The tray was laid on the sofa table and Lestrade hoped nobody would be offended if he didn’t eat any of it because, suddenly, he really didn’t have much of an appetite.

“I am sorry, Gregory. This is taking far longer than even I anticipated and the issues are both serious and substantial.”
“Yeah, well… I expect they are. Mycroft doesn’t do fun or frivolous, does he?”

God that sounded awful. It was awful. And he was awful for saying it. Being a complete brat about things… no wonder Grandmama looked unhappy.

“Ok, that sort of came out wrong, so I’ll…”

“Rescind your statement?”

“I guess. Mycroft can be a lot of fun. Likes to do fun things and I know that. I’m just… it’s been a long day. A long several days and I’m just tired.”

“If it is any consolation, the staff keeps me updated on household matters and I have been very impressed by the reports of your handling the children. You tend to the boys as competently as any successful father, yet are nearly too young to actually have children of your own. It is a highly valuable talent.”

“Yeah, well good to know I have some use.”

That sounded worse than awful! What was wrong with him? New rule… no brandy when you haven’t eaten since lunch. Brand new rule in big gold letters and fancy script. Now Grandmama really looked upset. Might as well go and get packed.

“You are worried that your value is not in who you are, but in what you do.”

“I didn’t say that. Ma’am.”

“No… but I believe you have learned by now that saying a thing is not always required in this family.”

Well, there was no arguing with that.

“However, I cannot deny that your reunion has been little but a chance for you to exercise your domestic skills. I will not say it does not give me ease that you are able to give to Mycroft a loving home that has the potential for children, but if I have given the impression that your worth is as a servant in that home, then I offer you my deepest apologies.”

Lestrade felt so ashamed of his behavior that it nearly choked him to have the elderly woman take a seat next to him on the sofa.

“No… it’s me that’s sorry. I’m being a big selfish tw… brat and… like I said, I’m just tired.”

“It is not an easy thing, minding such energetic boys, is it?”

“No, it’s not. I don’t mind, really I don’t but… it’s just hard on top of everything else like work and school and I guess I hoped that when I saw Mycroft was back that… it doesn’t matter.”

“I think it matters rather a lot, actually. You hoped for time to reconnect with him.”

“I guess so. It would have been nice, at least. Tomorrow I’m back home and back to school and who knows what he’s back to or if he’s even coming back with us. I just got my hopes up when I shouldn’t have. Won’t make that mistake again.”

“Gregory…”

“No… not gonna make the situation what it’s not. This is what our life is going to be like and I
have to accept that. I haven’t forgotten what you told me and Mycroft’s never lied about who he is. I just wish…”

“What do you wish, grandson?”

She just had to say that, didn’t she? Lestrade fought the watering of his eyes and he felt even sillier than before for wanting to cry when Grandmama was sitting right there watching him. And for wanting to say what was bursting to come out.

“I wish he wouldn’t promise. I’ve gotten three promises this weekend and all of them were broken. It’s silly and petty, but I wish he wouldn’t promise so I do get my hopes up and then wind up sitting here angry at him for breaking his word and me for being hurt by it. That’s the hardest part of it all… I want what he promises, even if it’s just breakfast in the morning, and it hurts when… I know I sound like one of those silly birds that think everything’s all about them and that makes me pretty fuc… damned embarrassed if you want to know, but… look, I think I better just go to bed.”

Lestrade’s got up from the sofa as quickly as he could, but his exit was spoiled by a surprisingly strong grip on his wrist.

“Sit back down.”

He certainly did not command his legs to bend and drop him back on the sofa cushions, but the traitors seemed to have defected to the other camp.

“There is nothing more difficult to bear than when a promise is broken. We are taught that giving one’s word is the mark of one’s character and to have that compromised… it is easy to believe so many terrible things, often about one’s self. That one is not viewed as being worth the keeping of a promise or that one’s forgiveness is so guaranteed that it matters not if a promise is or is not kept. Hopes do rise when we hold someone’s word and the fall is great when we find ourselves betrayed. If I may, I shall tell you a story.”

Lestrade nodded at the woman gazing at him and was beginning to feel less like he was going to be hurled out the door for being a disgrace to the household.

“Good. Now, my husband and I met young, though not quite as young as you, and we had a good number of years as a couple before our situation was similar to yours and Mycroft’s. However… it was difficult, at first, and for much the same reasons. Promises made and then broken… always the apology afterwards, which was nothing but perfectly sincere. But broken promises hurt and, perhaps, leave wounds that never quite heal. When I was expecting with Mycroft’s father… it was a busy time in the world and often I was left alone waiting for a husband who promised to telephone or to return home at an appointed time, only to find myself waiting in vain. When my son was soon to arrive I extracted the most adamant promise from my husband that he would not leave me alone while our child came into this world. He would be there, so much as men were allowed at the time, and I would not have to welcome our child into our family without his father present to offer a similar greeting.”

There was never any definable emotion on Grandmama’s face, but Lestrade was learning to read the tiny signs and, from what he could see, he already felt uneasy as to where the story was leading.

“Two weeks before my due date, my husband was called away for matters of state and I again extracted from him his most solemn oath that if the time came, he would be present. When the doctor was hailed ten days later, my maid sent word immediately to my husband. And I waited. I actually was happy the labor was a long one, because it would easily give my dearest sufficient time to return home. Which he did not do. Our son entered the world without a father to greet him or name him or
“Hold him.”

“How... how long did you have to wait?”

“Three days more. I was in our bedroom when I was informed my husband had finally returned home and I gave word that I had no intention of seeing him. If he had no desire to be a part of our family, then I would happily honor that desire. I was so angry, Gregory. Angry, filled with a hurt that had grown stronger every day. The most significant day of our lives together and he had broken his sworn oath to share it with me. And... it was more significant than expected since... due to complications with the birth, I could bear no more children. After my son’s birth and all the days thereafter, I had lain in bed wondering if this was a life I could continue to lead. If the joyful times could possibly outweigh the painful ones. And still I did not have an answer to that question.”

Lestrade did feel his eyes water then and tried to camouflage wiping them by brushing aside his hair and scratching his nose.

“Later, I walked to the nursery to check on the baby and found my husband in the room. He was sitting on the floor with his back against the crib and he was weeping so harshly... I could hear his agony in each breath he struggled to draw in and the terrible, terrible keening whine that never stopped, even after I took him in my arms and held him while he cried. It hurts to have a promise broken, Gregory... but do not think for a moment that, for men like Mycroft and his grandfather, it hurts any less to break that promise. Now, eat your dinner, then try to sleep. You will feel better after some rest.”

A small pat on his hand, then Lestrade was left alone staring at the fire and feeling, surprisingly, a little more settled. Things might get bad but... he just had to hold on. This was... it was just a lot all at once. Mycroft being gone, Sherlock and John and their nonsense, getting a little hopeful, getting that hope smashed... just a lot at once and he’d let it get to him. He’d gotten tired and a bit overworked this last week or so and it had to come to a head sometime. Another rule... don’t let that happen, if he could at all avoid it. Start managing things better, give himself time to recharge. Enjoy every minute he could with Mycroft and trust that when they had to go through this, it upset his partner as much as it upset him. Actually, he knew it did. He’d heard it in Mycroft’s voice every time they’d talked while Mycroft was away. So yeah... sleep. That sounded like the best prescription right now. A quick bite then some actual, uninterrupted sleep. It wasn’t likely he’d be joined at any point, so he’d take it as a gift that he was getting a full night’s sleep to start that recharging. Fresh day tomorrow and things would look brighter. They’d be brighter. No question about it.

If he didn’t commit suicide in the next five minutes, he would be completely surprised. This... this was beyond inane. How could it be this difficult to get a group of supposedly educated men to understand the basics of a not-terribly-complex series of initiatives? And Gregory... it was brutally unfair that he was receiving no recreation of his own or relaxation on his weekend off. It was wrong and it was his fault and his love would dine alone and sleep alone and if he chose to leave here and remain alone, it could not be considered an unwise act.

Mycroft interrupted the current speaker and called a break when he caught sight of Grandmama returning to the room and no one objected to the chance for a moment to refresh. As the guests scattered to partake of the provided food and beverages, Mycroft took the opportunity to gather his own much-needed intelligence.

“Did you speak with Gregory? Is he angry with me? He had a horribly busy day with the children and I had sent word that...”
“Mycroft… you would be well served if you recognized that if you desire a question be answered, you must actually allow time for the answer to be given.”

“Of course… I do apologize. I am simply… I have not done well by him, Grandmama and this, of all times, he deserves to treated as well as I am able.”

Mycroft allowed himself to be led across the room where a cup of tea was placed in his hand.

“Drink that and allow yourself to relax. Now, to answer your questions, Gregory is as tired as one would expect given his responsibilities and as disappointed as one would predict given his expectations for his day and evening. This is not easy for him, Mycroft. He, like you, is having to learn too young and too quickly what it means to be a Holmes and that does not occur without, unfortunately, some difficult experiences and realizations. If I were to give advice, it would be to be realistic and honest with him at all times and do not offer promises, even for small matters, unless you are very certain you can fulfill them. There is no worse feeling than waiting and hoping in vain, Mycroft… you would be wise to remember that.”

And he would. Grandmama was absolutely correct. He had his own experiences with such a thing, having sat and waited expectantly time and time again for something Mummy had promised, only to meet with nothing but his own disappointment.

“I shall. But, I must know… is he… he is not…”

“Good heavens, boy, he is not leaving you, if that is your worry.”

That was precisely his worry, or, at least, it was. Not that he thought Gregory would actually leave him, but the worry could easily exist, even if one never truly thought the event would ever come to pass. That was the stuff of nightmares and those particular nightmares were not unfamiliar to him.

“I do not believe Gregory would ever take such an action without first exhausting every line of communication we possess and allowing me sufficient opportunity to remedy my slights and neglect.”

“In that, you would be correct. However, do not take it for granted, or you will find yourself in a very unhappy and lonely place.”

Ah, meaning his life before Gregory. That was not something that bore consideration.

“I would not pay him that disrespect. I simply… wish I could do more for him right now. I know it is only the span of little more than a day, but… we have waited so long for a window of time to open…”

“Unfortunately, this is something to which you will have to become accustomed. However, I agree that this, due to a series of confounding factors, is an unusually stressful period. Let us do our best to see the backsides of these Americans by the time the sun rises, shall we, so you can enjoy tomorrow, at least, and reassure your Gregory that you grieved for the moments you missed with him today.”

Well, that sounded like a very agreeable plan. And from the twinkle in Grandmama’s eye, he was about to receive a lesson on the fine points of truly aggressive negotiation. This was going to be a lesson he was going to enjoy supremely…
Chapter 11

Grandmama was old. She was notably and remarkably old. And she was also indefatigable, razor sharp, calculating, brutal and relentless. Mycroft realized how much more he had to learn watching the matriarch hold the Americans by the throats and refuse to let go until they were on their knees begging her for any scrap she was willing to toss their way.

But he was not idle during the proceedings. The behaviors he observed in Grandmama, he internalized and adopted as his own, turning his new weapons on his opponents with, not to be arrogant, admirable success. But, even with their ceaseless and forceful efforts, there was so much to work though... so much to conquer and as the time moved long past sunrise Mycroft began to lose hope that this weekend would not be completely associated with matters of state...

“Lackey! Waken and entertain me!”

Lestrade pulled the blanket over his head and wriggled more towards the center of the bed so that poking fingers couldn’t easily reach his sleeping skin.

“LACKEY! I desire breakfast and amusement!”

“Sherlock, we can go to the kitchen ourselves and…”

“It is this slugabed’s role, as Mycroft’s concubine, to be obedient to our wishes, John. He is failing and I am growing increasingly displeased.”

“Well, I’m hungry, so why don’t we just go and get some breakfast.”

“PEASANT! Arise and conduct your duties!”

“Shut it, you little bastard! What time is it? Oh god… do you know how little sleep…”

“That is of no concern to me. If you choose to use your time ineffectively and trade your allotted rest period for sexual escapades with the lard pail, then you must suffer the consequences. Where is His Enormity, anyway?”

“How the hell should I know? He’s probably still doing whatever it is he’s been doing. Now, why don’t you take John’s suggestion and just go have the kitchen staff make you something to eat. Give me another few hours…”

“Unacceptable. You do not dictate my actions! You labor, I direct. It is a clear hierarchical line of authority and that line shall not stand for your attempted blurring. Now cease your laziness and make yourself ready to serve me. I shall choose your attire. John, assist me.”

Sherlock stormed off, leaving John to fiddle with his fingers and face the single eye that had emerged from the blankets to stare at him.

“Sorry, Greg. He’s been awake an hour already and I couldn’t keep him in our room any longer. He said he got enough rest for the weekend when we all slept in here, but honestly, I think he wants you awake because he likes it when you play with us, if that helps.”

John dashed off after a piercing ‘Attend me, peppercorn!’ sliced through the air and left a bone-
weary Lestrade in his wake. Just a little sleep… was it really too much to ask? After he’d been left alone in the library, Lestrade had felt better and, with a little food in his stomach, he felt better still. Good enough actually to continue reading for awhile to enjoy the time without goblinspawn shrieking in his ears. By the time he finally went to bed it was very late and… sleep didn’t come quickly. Why was it that no matter how good you felt otherwise, lying alone in bed, in the dark, was the signal for all your demons to come racing out of the shadows and lay siege to your brain?

And he’d had a small hope that maybe, just maybe, someone would crawl into bed with him at some point and take a broadsword to those demons, but that didn’t happen. And, apparently, it wasn’t going to happen this morning, either. So, no sleep, no Mycroft and he was already being summoned by the Dark Prince for another day of playing Dad or Big Brother or whatever the fuck he was. Child minder, nanny, nursemaid… Grandmama said he wasn’t an employee, but this morning… stupid sodding demons…

At least it wasn’t cold when Lestrade threw back the blankets and he also said a small thank-you to his brain for deciding that he would sleep, at least, in pyjama bottoms so the younger generation didn’t get an eyeful when he walked to the toilet to get the day started. Or when he emerged to find two little trolls, one scowling and one smiling waiting for him with clothes in their hands.

“I have specifically chosen these garments to match our day’s itinerary. You shall not alter my selections if you value a somewhat comfortable servitude. Now, make yourself ready.”

“Sherlock, you could be nicer to Greg…”

“Pffttt… I would laugh at your naiveté, however, that might confuse the peasant and slow his attempts at rudimentary grooming. As it is, he requires periodic refocusing as he becomes distracted by his own reflection in the mirror, thinking it is a competitor for the roots and berries he has set aside for his breakfast.”

“Oh, wow… more insults. How completely surprising. You really want to shock me, maybe one day actually say something decent you little shit. Just one decent thing. Now get the fuck out of here while I get dressed and I’ll meet you in your room for whatever bloody chaos you’ve got planned for today.”

Lestrade found he was actually snarling by the end of his speech and Sherlock’s wide eyes and open mouth screamed loudly how utterly stunned he was by the outburst. Before Lestrade could collect himself and apologize, John grabbed Sherlock’s arm and dragged him out of the room, shooting an alarmed look back at Lestrade who was sinking quickly into another round of shame. Sherlock was just a kid, doing what kids did… trying to get under your skin. Maybe he did it a lot more elaborately, but it wasn’t his fault he didn’t understand some things about basic communication with other people. There was no cause, none at all, to take his own bad mood out on Sherlock for behaving exactly as Sherlock always behaved.

Lestrade dropped down on the bed and took a deep breath. They’d have to leave sometime this afternoon and this was the boys’ last chance to have a little fun together before they were back at school. Wasn’t he just the monster for starting that out on a bad foot… Ok, get some clothes on and apologize, then bring them for breakfast and start on whatever insanity they were planning. There’d be time to mope once he got home tonight; right now he had people who were counting on him.

Just as Lestrade finished buttoning his shirt, he heard the bedroom door open and tuned to look, feeling more than a little surprise to find Sherlock standing there, looking very uncomfortable and uncertain.

“Sherlock… look, I’m…”
“John says I have to apologize for being, in his primitive tongue, an evil git. He says I should be… nicer… owing to your efforts to facilitate our well-deserved entertainment.”

“It’s ok, Sherlock… I…”

“He further says you are likely, again his term, sad that you have not been able to spend time with the pompous porcine and that I should not conduct myself in a fashion to add to your love-addled agony.”

“That’s good of you, lad, but…”

Sherlock marched over to the bed and hurled himself upward, landing on the mattress, glaring up at Lestrade with less than his usual intensity until the older boy took a seat next to him.

“What’s wrong, Sherlock?”

Lestrade watched Sherlock’s expression change to one that was almost tormented and he felt a pang in his heart seeing the boy suffer.

“John indicated that, on occasion, my words can be interpreted as hurtful and mean-spirited.”

Oh, so John hadn’t pulled any punches while they were out of earshot.

“Anything else John said?”

“Only that if you were sufficiently displeased, you might withhold your attentions and presence, because no one enjoys being hurt or treated unkindly.”

Not pulling any punches at all.

“And what do you think about that?”

Sherlock squirmed on the bed and didn’t meet Lestrade’s eye as he answered.

“There have been times when things were said to me that I did not enjoy. Things that were said intentionally to hurt and… as I said, I did not enjoy them.”

Something of which Lestrade had little doubt. It would be easy for other children to want to lash out at Sherlock, considering some of the things he said and did and each lash would cut Sherlock to the quick, even though he would take great pains to hide the fact.

“And to forestall further occurrences, I removed myself from the environment.”

“Would you be upset if I did that?”

Sherlock’s squirming increased and his scowl deepened and it was obvious he did not want to answer. But with the lingering silence, the young boy finally nodded yes and began to twist the hem of his shirt.

“Well, that’s good to know. Because I do wonder sometimes. John does, too.”

Sherlock’s gasp was loud and Lestrade was surprised he hadn’t propelled himself off the bed. There wasn’t any more proof needed, in the older boy’s opinion, that Sherlock greatly valued John’s friendship.

“It can get hard to only hear bad things about yourself, especially when you like the person
who’s saying them. They make you upset and wonder if the person means them and doesn’t like you in return. You aren’t sure if they’re trying to hurt your feelings or it’s just their way of trying to communicate with you and you shouldn’t take it seriously. But a few nice things, even just once in awhile, can make all the difference. Like the tape you left me. You didn’t have to say a thing, but you made me happy. Let me know that you cared. And I do know you care, Sherlock. I do and so does John, but once in awhile a little thing… a word or action… it helps us remember that especially when we’re tired or frustrated. And I am tired, Sherlock; I wasn’t lying to you earlier. I’m tired and… well, tired and I acted in a way that wasn’t right. I didn’t mean to be nasty with you and I want to say I’m sorry for that. I’m very, very sorry I took things out on you and if you’ll forgive me, we can go and get breakfast. Get fueled up for the day. How’s that sound?”

Sherlock’s face had lost a great deal of its upset, but a small amount remained, so Lestrade sat quietly waiting for the boy to work through his feelings.

“So… John was right about this?”

“I’d say he was, yes. John’s not stupid, you know. He smart about lots of things and that’s what good about having friends. They’re smart about things that maybe you’re not so great with and you’re good with areas they’re weak in, too. John asks you questions about science and maths and things like that and you can ask him questions about… being nice to people now and then. You help each other; that’s what friends do.”

Sherlock nodded again and seemed lost in thought, so Lestrade started to rise to finish dressing, but was stopped when Sherlock had another question.

“Was he right about everything?”

“What do you mean?”

“Are you distressed that Mycroft has been absent, even though he is no longer abroad?”

Oh… everything. Not really a topic the older boy wanted to discuss with Sherlock, but he had been honest so far and it wasn’t really fair to stop now.

“Yes. Maybe I was hoping that I’d get to see more of Mycroft this weekend, but… well, that’s just the way it is. He’s doing important things and that comes first.”

“What… what if you never come first?”

The question punched Lestrade in the chest with the force of a runaway train and he found it difficult to choke out an answer.

“I don’t know. Make the best of it, I guess. It’s not that he doesn’t want to be with me, it’s just… you know what he’s being brought up to do. Stuff that impacts a lot of people. And I’m proud of him for that. Extremely proud.”

“But pride does not keep you company. Or… or help you when you, perhaps, might require it.”

Something, Lestrade wondered, if Sherlock was beginning to realize now that John was in his life.

“No, I guess it doesn’t. But love does and I do love him, Sherlock. Don’t think for a moment that I do not love Mycroft with all my heart.”

“It is worth loving someone if you have no opportunity to show them that emotion? Or have them demonstrate theirs?”
What the hell… oh yeah, Sherlock was a genius. A troll-like little genius, so of course, he would have to ask the most difficult and most penetrating questions.

“It’s always worth it to love someone, Sherlock. But you’re right, loving a person isn’t always enough to make a relationship work. But I’m not worried about that. It’s… it’s going to be fine. Like I said, I’m just tired. So, how about breakfast? Give me a minute to tame my hair?”

Sherlock scrutinized Lestrade for a long moment before hopping off the bed and folding his arms in his most telling ‘I’m waiting’ pose. For his part, Lestrade was happy the boy seemed to have gone back mostly to normal. There was still a lingering bit of shadow in the corners of his eyes, but with a little food in his belly and time with John would chase the last of that darkness away, Lestrade was certain.

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John was attempting to be very nonchalant idling in the hall studying a vase on a table next to Lestrade’s bedroom door and Sherlock’s massive snort made Lestrade laugh for the first time that morning.

“You are a pathetic spy, John Watson. If we had employed you during the Cold War, our native tongue would be the language of Mother Russia.”

“Wrong. I’d be in a tuxedo with a great car that had lots of amazing gadgets. I’d get called by the Queen herself to help battle evil and keep us speaking English.”

“You are delusional. They do not make tuxedos with such stunted legs.”

“I’ll have it made specially. And you can make all my gadgets! You can use your lab equipment to make all my spy tools and maybe even come on a few missions with me.”

“Hmmm… that is almost an admirable plan, save for one thing. I shall be leading the missions.”

“You can’t! You’re my science man!”

“There is no legal doctrine that places an intelligence quotient limit on field work. Just because my mind’s capabilities far exceed yours, that does not mean my sole usefulness is in the laboratory. I shall also be a stupendous secret agent.”

“Well, we can both be super secret agents and I can lead the missions sometimes. You might get distracted if we have to infiltrate an enemy base and they have a really nice lab because you’ll want to fiddle with all the equipment and read their notes and that’s no help if you’re in command!”

Sherlock opened his mouth to strike down John’s argument, then closed it tightly. First, there was merit to the concept and second… he had not forgotten the conversation in which he had just engaged with Lestrade.

“Very well… if it is surmised that our mission will involve any form of research facility, you shall be placed in the lead role.”

“Really?”

“I believe it is a prudent compromise.”

“Yes! This is great! We’ll make a brilliant spy team!”
Lestrade remained silent through the boy’s conversation, leaning against the wall and found he had yet to stop smiling. Talking to Sherlock had hurt, on both their parts, but it looked it had actually done some good. Something to remember… growing pains were so-named for a reason…

Eating in a kitchen was Lestrade’s favorite way of grabbing a meal since it was always warm, there was more food in arm’s reach if the goblin army was dissatisfied with what was presented on their plates and Sherlock was less inclined to make the meal another of his examples of performance art when there was a non-family audience. When the boys had cleared their plates, once for Sherlock and twice for John, it was time for starting to mark things off of the boys’ agenda, which was substantial. Apparently, they were to continue with their ballistics work from the previous day, obtain a vehicle to continue Sherlock’s driving lessons and provide John his introduction to piloting a car, attempt swordplay on horseback and then there was a continuing list of activities that would likely have to be set aside until their next visit, which it was clear each boy expected as the phrase ‘the next time we’re here’ was becoming a fixture of their conversations.

Armed with a large basket of potatoes and apples, the further testing of their projectile-hurling devices commenced and Lestrade suffered more than one potato to the back as he reset their targets. Each incident of friendly-fire prompted a chase that had two small boys scrambling to evade their larger and longer-legged pursuer, who climbed a mean tree if he had reason, such as dragging a tiny blonde criminal to the time-out zone of justice for a well-deserved 5-minute sentence with his cellmate. Once Sherlock had gathered all of his data and pronounced their devices as technologically-advanced as they could make them for the time being, it was decided to move onto the next initiative which involved driving, so Lestrade went off to find Edwards to get permission to use a car after first extracting a promise from Sherlock and John not to do anything they could get arrested for. As soon as the older boy was out of sight, Sherlock grabbed John’s arm and started running towards another wing of the house.

“Sherlock! What are you doing! We’re supposed to be staying out of trouble.”

“Silence, pea! We are embarking on a covert mission and your cowardly hesitancy is not going to bring us the evidence we require.”

“A mission? Already?”

“Information does not wait for you, John Watson. You must strike while the opportunity arises.”

“What are we trying to find out?”

“Whether the ginger glob of greasy garrulousness is experiencing a degree of distress equal to that of the peasant’s.”

“You mean whether Mycroft misses Greg as much as Greg misses him?”

“In the language of the nearly –illiterate, yes.”

“But why? You told me Mycroft was, what was it… stupidly enamored… with Greg.”

“True, but his current behavior could indicate a change of disposition. We must learn all we can so that we may begin to make contingency plans.”

“For what?”

“If Mycroft’s affections have waned, that is one matter, but if shop boy subsequently elects to
divorce himself from all interactions with those in the mammoth’s sphere, I shall suffer mightily!”

“I don’t think Greg would actually do that.”

“It is not a chance I am willing to take. He is disgustingly emotionally-driven and is, therefore, prone to fits of illogic and hysteria. My comfort cannot be endangered!”

John just rolled his eyes and allowed himself to be propelled from window to window until Sherlock’s ‘ah ha!’ signaled they had reached their target. With a little effort, the boys could pull themselves up to look through the window and brace their feet on a slight protrusion in the exterior wall of the house for stability.

“There he is.”

John looked to where Sherlock was nodding and saw Mycroft, sitting calmly in chair with a look of smug satisfaction on his face.

“He doesn’t look very upset, does he?”

“No and that is vital evidence towards our end-game.”

“But Greg really didn’t look that upset, either, Sherlock. Well… after we got to breakfast, at least. Maybe Mycroft’s just distracted and…”

“Do not make excuses for the lummox, John Watson. If you were more observant, you would have noticed that Lestrade’s facial expressions were a full 18% less enthusiastic than normal and it was only through concentrated effort that he could hold them to that pitiful level of buoyancy. Mycroft is genuinely pleased at the moment and that shall be scored as a discredit. We must have a final answer on this situation, so we may begin, if necessary, interviewing potential replacements as suitor in the menial’s life. If he is kept satisfactorily-occupied by another’s sexual enticements, he may not find reason to completely bolt from the vicinity in a fit of foolishly-dramatic heartbreak. Come, I have a plan.”

“Is this the kind of plan that violates Greg’s ‘don’t get into trouble’ order?”

“We have no time for your nonsensical militaristic obeisance! In the throes of a mission, the situation dictates action, not some off-hand directive by an absent superior! Not that the sackcloth-wearing bin-grubber is, in any way, my superior, but the principle stands!”

“Oh, but if we get spanked, I’m going to punch you.”

“You do adore your little threats, don’t you?”

John kicked out and loosened Sherlock’s foot from its support so the dark-haired boy lost his balance and dropped to the ground, where his bottom broke his fall.

“Not threats, Sherlock. Actions. That’s what makes a spy a spy.”

Lestrade returned with the vehicle set aside for daily staff use and Sherlock graciously agreed to model his exemplary driving skills for John, who rapely watched as Sherlock meandered through the roads on the Holmes property and then eagerly took the wheel for his lesson on how to get them back to the house. Lessons which were greatly aided by the large bundle of towels Lestrade had gathered so the small boy could see over the steering wheel.
“You’re doing great, John! Really wonderful. Just a little gear grinding, but a hell of a lot less than most people when they start driving. What do you say, Sherlock?”

“I demonstrated perfect technique, if you recall. However, John’s performance is not without merit.”

“See? Even his Lordship approves.”

John’s grin was brighter than the sun and Lestrade ruffled the boy’s hair before giving him the go ahead to wander around a little with the car, gradually letting him graduate to second gear, which got them back to the house just in time for lunch. Sherlock nudged John as they approached the table and John looked at Lestrade who was quickly packing away his disappointment that there was no one special waiting to join them. A short nod between the boys and the pact was sealed.

After a quick washing up and only a few shouts to get Sherlock and John to come to the table, Lestrade sat down and took a deep breath. Fun… the boys were having lots of fun and that was the only thing that was important. They’d have a great weekend, something to brag about to the other kids at school, and have a basis on which to plan their future outings when they came to visit, something the older boy wouldn’t be surprised to find happening sooner rather than later. That is, if they lived to see it…

“What… why are you two shoveling in your food like you’re about to be sent to the gallows?”

‘ngry.”

“I, as well, am most famished.”

“Ok, but slow down. No use making yourself sick or you’ll miss out on all the other things you’ve got there on your list.”

Sherlock emitted an evil cackle and Lestrade cut him a pair of very suspicious eyes, which got turned to John, who copied Sherlock’s cackle, much to Sherlock’s surprise.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Um… I don’t know?”

“How do you feel?”

“Fine.”

“Drink more water.”

“I’m not thirsty. Anyway, I’d rather have my milk.”

“Drink your water. It’s good for your digestion.”

John rolled his eyes and reached for a glass, taking a small sip.

“Satisfied?”

Sherlock’s eyes widened, then widened more as Lestrade reached over and took his own long drink from a second glass on the table.
“That was not your water, John Watson.”

“Huh? Oh, I must have grabbed Greg’s glass by mistake. Sorry, Greg.”

“No problem, I just took yours. Not that I think you have germs, but I’m sure Sherlock would have said something and that definitely would have affected your digestion.”

John grinned and continued with his lunch, not noticing Sherlock squirming in his seat, until, as they were being served very appetizing-looking slices of cake, Sherlock actually pushed back from the table and began to back away from his companions.

“Sherlock, where are you going?”

“Uh… just a moment, John.”

Sherlock ran out of the kitchen, just as Lestrade started to touch his cheek because he was starting to feel strangely warm. By the time Sherlock returned with a small rubbish can, Lestrade was yanking the makeshift pail out of his hands and hurling his lunch into it.

“Greg! Sherlock… what did you do?”

“Now is not the time, John. We must get him… lackey! Control yourself!”

Lestrade’s answer was a loud groan that had the stunned-frozen kitchen staff running to his aid and under Sherlock’s ear-shattering direction, nearly carried the rapidly-deteriorating Lestrade to his bedroom where he ran the rest of the way to the toilet slamming the door behind him.

“Sherlock! Did you do something to him?”

“Well… I…”

John had never seen Sherlock look so off-footed, but decided now was not the time for niceness.

“Tell me! Did you poison Greg?”

“I did not intend to! The compound was meant for you and…”

“You tried to poison ME!”

“It is not poison! Well, not in small doses and I have observed that you only sip your water, unlike other beverages which you guzzle like a parched farmhorse. A tiny sip would only have made you slightly nauseated… perhaps there would have been one or two instances of emesis… but that would have been all! However, it would have been an excuse to get Fatcroft out of his meeting and work with the peasant for your betterment, so we could observe if still truly cared. Now… how much water do you think the indigent drank?”

“Nearly the whole glass!”

“That’s not good.”

“I think we need a doctor.”

“That might…”

The increasingly noisy sound of Lestrade’s downfall sent the boys running, bowling over any household staff too slow to get out of the path of the small guided missiles.
The entire assemblage currently arguing over the intelligence infrastructure of certain non-allied nations jumped in their chairs as the door to the room flung open and a shrill duet of ‘MYCROFT!’ split the air like a thunderclap. For his part, Mycroft did not even wait for a nod of permission from Grandmama before vaulting out of his chair and racing towards the obviously-distressed boys, mostly for the fact that the one who normally tended their distress was not present with them.

Pulling the boys out of the room, Mycroft knelt down and tried to hide the extreme worry that was quickly blanking his mind of anything but concern for his spouse.

“Sherlock… John… what is the matter? Please do not tell me it is…”

“It’s Greg! He needs a doctor and fast!”

“Or at least a stomach pump.”

Mycroft knew the expression about having one’s blood run cold was simply mental imagery, so he never expected to actually experience it as viscerally as he was currently enduring.

“What… what has happened?”

“Sher… we’re not sure, but he got very sick at lunch and now… oh, just come on!”

John grabbed Mycroft’s hand and, after seeing Sherlock’s extreme discomfort, grabbed his too and began running for Lestrade’s bedroom.

Mycroft quickly outpaced the smaller boys and burst into Lestrade’s room, looking around confusedly at the empty space until he heard the forceful retching and launched himself across the room to burst through the second door to get to his distressed husband.

“Gregory! My dearest, Gregory… what has happened?”

Mycroft moved forward to take his shaking and red-faced lover in his arms but said lover held out his hand in the universally-recognized signal to stop.

“Stand back, Mycroft. Your suit won’t thank you.”

“Bugger my suit!”

Mycroft continued forward and crouched down to take his sickened mate in a gentle embrace.

“My Gregory… what has befallen you?”

“Got me… we were eating lunch, just chatting about our day and… oh shit…”

Mycroft released Lestrade enough for him to endure another bout of what was quickly becoming dry heaves as his stomach had already given everything it could to this endeavor. For only a moment did Mycroft release him fully and that was only to secure a cool, damp cloth to wipe his mate’s face.

“I’ll be alright, love. You go back to your meeting and…”

“Absolutely not! You need me far more than do those willfully ignorant handwringers. Already they have tried my and Grandmama’s patience to the limit and if she is not now throwing them out
on their ears, I shall be immensely surprised. My beloved, Gregory… how I have failed you this weekend and I shall not compound that failure with further neglect. Give me a moment and I shall have a physician summoned if that has yet to be done. Just a small moment, my love, and I shall return.”

Mycroft felt a harsh pain walking away from Lestrade, but there was nothing for it and, at minimum, he could offer comfort to the two small figures hovering near the bed, looking for all the world like they feared news of Lestrade’s untimely death.

“Is he ok, Mycroft?”

“Gregory is very ill, John, and I believe we require a doctor post haste. Please go and find Edwards to summon Grandmama’s personal physician, if you would be so kind.”

“Sure! I’ll be right back.”

John ran off as fast as his legs could carry him, leaving a very discomfited Sherlock behind to face his brother alone.

“Do you… will he be alright?”

Mycroft vacillated between worry for his spouse and delight at Sherlock’s obvious concern and hoped his expression camouflaged any conflicting emotions from the younger boy.

“I cannot say at this time, unfortunately. He is both strong-willed and strong-bodied, so I am hopeful that whatever is this trouble, he shall be able to endure its wrath successfully and make a quick and complete recovery. Now, I must return to him… shall you be alright, Sherlock?”

It was a little worrying that his brother only nodded and kept his eyes averted, but another horrifying round of noises pushed that worry out Mycroft’s mind as surely as it pushed his body back towards Lestrade, who was slowly beginning to look like death had taken him and simply forgotten to tell his body that it could go ahead and stop vomiting.

“Oh, my dear, dear love…”

Mycroft returned to the floor and stroked Lestrade’s sweat-dampened hair, placing a small kiss on the back of his neck.

“A doctor is on their way, Gregory. Let us see if we can make you more comfortable in the meantime.”

“No, I’d better stay here. Right here next to my new best friend.”

“I shall provide you with a basin with whom you may become acquainted, but you should be in bed and we can freshen your attire on the way. Come now, can you stand?”

Lestrade honestly had no answer to that question, but agreed anyway so he didn’t look like a baby and did what he could to get himself vertical, a feat that was mostly accomplished by Mycroft’s vigorous upward pulling. Then, it was a slow stagger into the bedroom where Sherlock was surprisingly directable, obtaining new clothes for Lestrade and even helping him shed his old ones, which had become plastered to the older boy’s skin from perspiration and a liberal sprinkling of whatever was currently plaguing him. Mycroft made a mental note of his pride that Sherlock was not impeding the proceedings with constant demands for samples of his future brother-in-law’s illness and cursed himself yet again that Sherlock’s very encouraging growth was something happening out of his sight.
“Excellent. Is that not better, my dear? Sherlock, could you obtain a glass of cool water for Gregory? Also… I believe it is advised to try and place a little something in one’s stomach, so perhaps a few plain biscuits or slices of toast?”

Sherlock ran off as fast as had John and nearly collided with his friend as John returned to the room to announce a doctor was coming. Close on John’s heels was the head on the household, who sported as concerned an expression as Mycroft had ever seen.

“How is he?”

“I’m fine, Grandmama.”

Of course, that was undercut but a flailing of hands that had Mycroft jumping off the bed to grab the antique wash basin from its stand and hold it out for Lestrade to attempt to fill.

“Mycroft? A report, please.”

“I do not know, Grandmama. He became ill at lunch, yet both boys are quite hearty. Perhaps a virus of some form?”

“It is possible, I presume. Though he was reported in very good health as of this morning. Regardless, the doctor will be here shortly, so do what you can to make him as comfortable as possible until then. John, if you would accompany me for a moment?”

Not that he was given a choice, as a firm grip latched onto his shoulder and ushered him out of the bedroom.

“Now, young man… begin telling me what is debilitating Gregory.”

“What! I… well, why should I… I don’t know?”

The upward lilt on the last word said very distinctly that John did have information and the boy suddenly knew what mice felt like when a hawk caught sight of them.

“Somehow I doubt that is entirely true, John.”

“Ummm… well, I really don’t know…”

Which was technically true since John did not know what Sherlock had chosen to use for his scheme.

“… you see, we were eating and then Greg got sick, oh! not that I think there’s anything wrong with the food though, because it’s actually very good and I’ve eaten lots and haven’t gotten sick, so no… it can’t be the food, so I’m not sure what would make someone sick like that because it could be anything, well not anything because something like, oh, I don’t know, potatoes don’t make you sick, but one day I’ll know all about what does and doesn’t make you sick because I’m going to be a doctor and doctors have to know all about that or they aren’t very good doctors now are they? Ha! No, they’d be terrible and no one has any use for a terrible doctor do they? Well, maybe the very, very poor might take a terrible doctor over no doctor at all but…”

“Stop your babbling, John Watson. I am prepared to accept my fate, though I am touched by your stalwart defense. Grandmama… do as you must.”

Sherlock had encroached on the conversation and, after setting aside Lestrade’s water and toast, stood silently with his head bowed as if willingly accepting the avalanche he simply knew was
about to bury him in a rocky grave. For her part, the most senior of the Holmes clan glared down at the boy, taking in the very, very rare sight of a truly contrite Sherlock and further, the absolutely unique sight of one who was not only contrite, but direly pained by his actions.

‘What I must is solicit an explanation. Begin.’

Sherlock looked over at John, who gave his best brave smile to encourage his friend.

“I… Lestrade was suffering upset at being without Mycroft’s companionship and I sought a means to bring them together. It seemed especially necessary since…”

Sherlock looked again at John who made little ‘keep going’ motions with his hands.

“…since Mycroft did not seem to share the lack… Lestrade’s upset. I… we… I needed data! What was the true status of Bloat… Mycroft’s affections? He has given little kindness to Lestrade since his return and if he has let his emotional connection wither… if no action was taken to secure the true map of his intentions, I am convinced the day would have ended… poorly and… it was not supposed to happen this way! John takes tiny sips and there would have been little impact to him but the peasant had to quaff the water like one of his vile lagers and now… have I… is this repairable?”

There was a tiny sheen of moisture growing in Sherlock’s eyes and one elderly heart beat just a little stronger seeing the child so affected by his deeds. Gregory had done wonders with Sherlock and, apparently, she wasn’t the only one who viewed their newest family member as both special and dear. Such an ardent concern for another’s welfare… though they would have to work on teaching him less invasive ways of acting on that concern.

“And how did you accomplish your villainy, pray tell?”

Sherlock reached into his pocket and withdrew a bottle, handing it over with slightly trembling fingers.

“Ah, I believe I recognize the substance. You perpetrated a raid of the first aid supplies we keep on hand, didn’t you?”

“They were easily accessible.”

“As they should be. Do you know the possible effects of overconsumption of this emetic?”

“No…”

“Heart issues, for one. This is a very dangerous thing you did, Sherlock and we can only hope Gregory does not suffer permanently because of it.”

It was very wrong at a time like this to want to smile, but seeing Sherlock and John reach simultaneously to grab each other’s hand made it very difficult for Grandmama to keep a stern expression on her face.

“However, I am hopeful that we have caught the situation in time and the only outcome shall be an exhausted and weakened victim.”

“I… I shall apologize at my first opportunity.”

“Oh, you shall; however, I believe the timing can wait for a more suitable hour. Perhaps in a week or two, your secret might slip and fall on more forgiving ears than it would now. Ah… the doctor has arrived. I shall conference with him to keep our little secret and provide him with the
cause of Gregory’s condition. Why don’t you and John find a way to amuse yourselves for several hours? And you should prepare to continue your visit through tomorrow; I doubt Gregory shall be in a state to return to his studies and could use both rest and solicitous care during his recuperation. Neither of you shall interfere with that, will you?”

Sherlock opened his mouth, then closed it and only nodded sharply.

“No ma’am, we won’t bother Greg except to say hello and see how he’s feeling. And thank you… for everything. Come on, Sherlock. Let’s go play cards in our room. We’ll check on Greg later.”

“Excellent. And Sherlock? Do you believe you have your answer about Mycroft’s regard for Gregory?”

“He seemed… very perturbed by the situation. And he acted with more haste than I have seen him muster for anything else. Well, for anything else that does not involve the pea… Lestrade.”

“Mycroft cares deeply for Gregory, grandson. That is not something you should ever doubt, though I congratulate you on your willingness to safeguard Gregory’s heart with such fervor. They shall endure much in their relationship and that cannot be changed; however, I do not think we shall have to fear that their affections shall wane because of it. Now, ring for anything you might require and I will stop in later to speak further with you if you still have questions.”

Giving the elderly woman his best ‘we won’t cause any more trouble, we promise’ smile John tugged Sherlock’s sleeve and Grandmama watched the boys walk towards their room, far more somberly than their usual frantic pace. What a noble effort, but what a terribly foolish plan. The foibles of youth… but it was the product of a good heart and that was worthy of a little consideration, especially since the self-punishment was already significant. And, of course, their scheme did actually accomplish its goal, so a bit of favor was deserved for that, also.

With a twitch of her nose, Grandmama greeted the doctor who was waiting to be acknowledged and ushered him into Lestrade’s bedroom. Perhaps one additional day of rest for her charges would be sufficient, but, if two was required, that would not exactly be a hardship on the household, now would it?
In his life, not once had Mycroft ever been this frightened. His Gregory looked so terribly ill. Pale, sweating, still trying to heave the contents of his stomach into his basin and quickly was becoming unresponsive to external stimuli, so overcome was he by the severity of his sickness. This was his fault. Entirely his fault. Gregory had labored long and lonely this weekend, with no assistance, no one to keep an eye on his health and welfare. This was to be a joyful time for them. A time of blessed reunion and nothing of that joy and bliss had manifested. How he had robbed his spouse, stolen from him first his smile, then his welfare and he was the blackest of villains because of it.

It was only through extreme effort that Mycroft kept himself from leaping on the doctor when he entered the room and dragging the man towards the bed. And it was only through an act of even greater will that he accepted being motioned away from his husband’s side so the doctor could give his intended an examination, which Mycroft observed carefully for any hint of negligence or impropriety.

“Good heavens, Mycroft. He is not seeking to determine Gregory’s’s suitability for organ donation.”

“He is my beloved, Grandmama, and I shall not be anything less than vigilant with his well-being. We are now witness to the outcome when that vigilance flags and I shall not allow this to happen again.”

“Mycroft... it is unseemly to take blame that is not properly yours to own. You cannot stand as guard against all of the possible harms the world has in store for him, as it has for all of us.”

“But I can do better. You cannot deny I could do better.”

“Oh? And what initiatives would you take to do so?”

“I... I could make better use of our shared time. It was wise, in terms of child management, to place him so far from me at dinner, but it was poor for our ability to share even a pleasant word. I scarcely spoke to him, Grandmama. He wrestled with Sherlock and John the entire evening and I spared not a word of praise or thanks or even affection for him. Only when they were leaving did I have a chance to express myself and that was nothing less than deplorable. I joined my Gregory in sleep and, again, took from him far more than I gave for he still was charged with stewarding the boys while I had the luxury of focusing only on indulging in his strength and comfort. I could have taken breaks, Grandmama... small respite and simply spent a few minutes here and there with him, reminding him that he was always in my thoughts and that my love was strong and ongoing. I could have done so much, yet I did nothing. Nothing at all...”

And there was the proof that Mycroft was learning and learning quickly. Not always could you devote days of time to your spouse, but in little ways you could keep your bonds strong. Take many and frequent small steps so minute frays and strains of that bond could be mended before they tore the whole of the relationship to pieces. It took devotion, dedication and commitment, but Grandmama was convinced that both her grandsons would rise to the occasion nicely.

“And he would have appreciated those efforts. Gregory has suffered, Mycroft, about that I will not lie, but he is also learning skills to assist his situation and in which areas he must, perhaps, view the environment with different eyes so he better understands and judges with a richer body of evidence. And as you both learn and grow, you enhance your ability to adapt to and cope with new challenges that arise. It is a process, Mycroft, and you are only at the very beginning of it. I do wish
your timeline for navigating this process was not so abbreviated, but that cannot be helped, so we accept and go forward. Moreover, self-flagellation is not going to further your goals, so kindly cease and concentrate instead on learning from your actions and revising your behaviors accordingly.”

That was something Mycroft would most certainly do. He had learned much, though little to his benefit, but would take steps based on that learning. And the first step was to devote his attention entirely to his mate in his hour of need. That was non-negotiable. Even if there was still a meeting awaiting his attendance, it would not draw him away from his Gregory’s side. This was the most important consideration, the most critical use of his time and nothing would change that fact.

“I shall. But... but what if I do not have the chance, Grandmama? Gregory... he is so very ill and it came on so suddenly....”

“I assure you he is not dying, Mycroft. An ambulance would have already been summoned if that were the case.”

“But...”

“He is not dying; on that you have my word. He shall take a day or so to recover, likely, and I shall not allow him away from your continued attention until he is fully well, but do not have any long-term worry for his health for it is unwarranted.”

Mycroft had yet to take his eyes off of his beloved and was finding it very difficult to believe that was true. But, the doctor was not calling for an ambulance and appeared quite calm, as he performed a variety of tests and, finally, gave his Gregory an injection, monitoring his pulse and checking his eyes after he did so.

“Doctor Williams, will you kindly reassure my grandson that Gregory will not end this day in a coffin and his burial suit?”

Mycroft watched anxiously as the doctor gathered his materials and pulled the blanket up to Lestrade’s chest, patting the young man on the arm before walking over to the address Mycroft’s concerns.

“Mr. Lestrade is going to be fine, Mr. Holmes. He shall be weak for a day or so and will have a tender stomach, but he’ll be good as new once his strength is back.”

“But what was the cause? How do I assure he will not suffer this again?”

Mycroft didn’t understand the look between Grandmama and the doctor, but it was irrelevant at the time. The only important thing was what would keep this from happening once more.

“Most likely it was something he ate or drank. It could even have been something he got on his hands that was transferred to his mouth. But, there is no indication his condition is worsening and if it was a bacteria or virus, there would most likely have been some prior indication. My most confident guess is that it was some toxin that he ingested, which prompted an acute reaction that is currently ebbing. I’ve given him something for the nausea and it is going to make him sleepy, so try and have him take in some fluids before he rests. Call me if anything changes, but I don’t expect they well. Just let him rest and that should close the door on this issue.”

“Does that satisfy you, Mycroft?”

No, it did not. Not at all. ‘Something’ was ridiculously nebulous and it did not satisfy him in the slightest, but apparently he was not going to receive better and pointless interrogation would serve only to further erode the time he should be spending directly with his husband.
“To an extent. Now, if you would be so kind as to leave me with Gregory so I might tend his needs?”

“Of course, grandson. Do send word if you require anything. Doctor, I shall escort you out.”

Mycroft had the distinct feeling he was being laughed at, but, again, that was not relevant. The only matter of concern was that his beloved spouse’s body was calming and there was a wisp of relief growing on his exquisite features.

“Gregory? My love? Are you feeling better?”

“A little. Whatever it was that he gave me seems to be working. Or I just think it’s working, which is fine with me, too.”

“Good, that is very good. So long as you are not so ill. You were so ill, Gregory…”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“Oh… yes, of course you do. How foolish of me. Can I… you are supposed to have water, but perhaps tea, instead? I have no idea if the kitchen has anything else you would enjoy, but I shall request they bring to you all they have and…”

“Mycroft… it’s ok. A little water is good.”

Mycroft nearly tripped over his feet getting a cup of water filled and back to Lestrade to drink.

“Here, my dearest. You must let me know immediately if it is too warm or too cool.”

“It’s fine, love. Really. Here, why don’t you crawl up here with me and…”

“No, you need your rest and I shall not disturb you. I am quite content to sit…”

“Get up here now.”

“Oh! Yes, of course, whatever you desire, my dear.”

Mycroft sat on the bed, so close to the edge Lestrade was curious to see if he breathed hard enough would the ripple send his partner onto the floor.

“You can come closer, you know.”

“This is sufficient, my beloved. You must be as comfortable as possible and…”

“And what could be more comfortable than you?”

“Ah… but…”

“No buts. Get over here.”

Slowly toeing off his shoes, Mycroft wriggled over to where Lestrade was patting the mattress and nearly burst into tears when his intended repositioned to curl around him, much as Mycroft had done with his pillow when he had only to that to love instead of his spouse. As it was, he was very happy his spouse could not see the well of emotion growing in his eyes from the sheer enormity of the response to his husband’s affection, especially in light of his dismal behavior this weekend.

“Ok, now I’m comfortable. A little queasy and I feel like someone’s been taking a cricket bat to
my stomach, but comfortable.”

“Do… do not worry, Gregory. I shall determine exactly what befell you and ensure that it never happens again.”

“Oh, that’s easy. Sherlock poisoned me.”

And suddenly Mycroft knew the worst had happened. His dearest, beloved Gregory had died that day and, by taking his own life in grief, he was doomed to an eternity in hell where his worst fears were to be realized over and over and over again…

“Mycroft… you’re very quiet…”

“I am simply attempting to process your declaration, my dear. Are you saying Sherlock was responsible?”

“If suspicious behavior is a clue, then he’s dripping in clues. No idea what he was playing at, probably some experiment of his, but I’ll talk to him about it later and…”

That would not be possible unless his Gregory was a spirit communicator because his brother was only moments away from entering the Great Beyond.

“Gregory… my precious, precious Gregory…why did you not reveal this information!”

“I didn’t really think about it until you started acting strange and that reminded me that Sherlock was acting strange and… you don’t run and get a person a bin to vomit in before they actually vomit unless you know it’s coming.”

Sherlock… family concerns would mandate a respectable headstone and spot in the family cemetery, but his name would be misspelled in the inscription and he would be interred with a slice of raw liver in his mouth to take with him to the afterlife.

“I shall tend to it, my dear. Do not give the matter a second thought. And I was not behaving strangely… I was simply unsure as to how much disturbance your poor body could withstand in its weakened state.”

“No, you were acting strange because you were feeling guilty and didn’t want to do anything wrong to make that guilt larger.”

There were, perhaps, some benefits to having a dull-witted spouse, such as your motives were not so completely transparent. Mycroft released a very large and very heavy sigh and hugged his lifemate closer to his body.

“I concede your analyses. I am well-provided with guilt and, no… I do not think I could bear an additional portion.”

“Want to talk about it?”

Mycroft opened his mouth to say yes, then looked into his lover’s very sleepy eyes and changed his mind.

“I do. I do very much, but the doctor said your medication would assist you in resting, which, I suspect, you are already fighting. When you are rested, instead? I think we would both prefer to engage in this discussion when we may equally participate.”
“Yeah… you’re probably right. I am starting to fade, which I can’t say is a bad thing since I haven’t gotten any decent sleep since I got here.”

“Then by all means allow sleep to take you and we shall talk later. Grandmama has indicated that we shall remain until you feel stronger, so there is no reason to rush. Rest, Gregory, and we shall have abundant time to talk on any variety of subjects later.”

“Ok, that sounds good. And Mycroft… I love you.”

Now a tear did make it down Mycroft’s cheek because there was still a traitorous piece inside him that despaired of hearing those words again.

“And I love you, Gregory. With all my heart and for all my years.”

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Lestrade quickly succumbed to the combined effects of sleep deprivation, physical brutalization and powerful medication and Mycroft held him quietly for a time after he fell asleep just to reassure himself that the man he adored was safe and here and still held fast to their love despite the injustices he had endured. Gregory was so much more than he deserved. Such a stellar example of a man and this man was worthy of all he could give, which he would begin now by giving his protection. Protection for his heart and protection for his body, the latter of which would be accomplished by turning his brother into a greasy smear on Grandmama’s floor.

Mycroft slowly disentangled himself from Lestrade’s limbs and made sure his spouse was comfortable and warm before gritting his teeth and stalking towards Sherlock and John’s room. This was inexcusable. Entirely inexcusable and the price he would extract would be criminally high. Sherlock had no regard for anyone but himself and this nearly cost his beloved… no, he could not think that way or it would strip away the last vestiges of his already tenuous control.

Opting for a surprise attack, Mycroft turned the handle to Sherlock and John’s bedroom door, then kicked the door open and launched into the room, hurtling at the frozen-in-shock boys with a final leap towards Sherlock, who evaded being pinned to the mattress only by a very last-second roll off the bed which ended in a loud thump as he hit the floor.

“Come here you murderer!”

Mycroft pushed himself forward to drop on Sherlock, who quickly twisted and got to his feet, running towards the door. If Mycroft’s arms had been shorter, Sherlock might have made his escape, but a long-fingered hand wrapping around his ankle thwarted the boy’s break for freedom and plunged him onto the floor again. With his prey in sight, Mycroft dragged the now shrieking boy towards him and pinned Sherlock’s limbs with his own.

“How dare you imperil my husband’s health you self-absorbed blackguard! I am going to…”

Sherlock never heard what Mycroft was going to do, since John propelled himself onto Mycroft’s back and knocked him off the younger Holmes, who made another dash for the door, only to be taken down again by a swing of Mycroft’s legs.

“Accomplice! You shall share in his destruction John Watson!”

“Flee John! He cannot contain us both!”

“I won’t leave you, Sherlock!”
The next few minutes were a flurry of flying arms and legs, grunts and squawks as one infuriated Mycroft tried to immobilize two strong, albeit small, boys and it was only the pointed clearing of a throat that stopped all the chaos in its tracks.

“Is there need for me to be concerned?”

Three quivery no’s served for the answer and, after a very skeptical glare at the three completely disheveled boys, Grandmama simply stepped back out of the room, closing the door behind her.

“Now cease your ridiculous attempts to thwart justice! You brought harm to Gregory and if you do not think I will avenge him, you are sadly mistaken!”

“Sherlock didn’t mean to hurt him!”

“Then you admit the crime, foul fiend!”

“You already knew! And it’s not fair because Mrs. Holmes said she wasn’t going to tell and…”

“What! Grandmama knew the vehicle of Gregory’s downfall and said NOTHING!”

John backed away from a nearly volcanic Mycroft and huddled with Sherlock around the corner of the bed.

“Grandmama advised forestalling the making of my apology until you and the peasant were more inclined to accept it.”

“You do NOT call him peasant, Sherlock Holmes or I WILL make you regret the words. Do you have ANY idea how dire was his condition? How greatly he suffered? For what? Another of your pointless experiments that have no importance or value to anyone but yourself?”

“Don’t be mean to Sherlock! He was trying to help Greg!”

“By poisoning him!”

“By seeing if you still loved him!”

Something in Mycroft’s brain cleanly snapped in two and he felt a thick paralysis begin to envelope his body, slowly pushing away his raw fury and leaving behind something far worse in its wake.

“What?”

Sherlock and John cautiously peered around the edge of the bed hearing the shift in Mycroft’s tone and had their own self-righteous indignation ebb away seeing the absolutely devastated expression on Mycroft’s face.

“Greg was unhappy, Sherlock could really tell, and we spied…checked…on you and you didn’t seem unhappy at all. You were smiling and looking like you were having a good time. And you didn’t do anything fun with him all weekend, so… Sherlock decided to see if you didn’t care anymore and it wasn’t supposed to be Greg that was poisoned, it was supposed to be me and only just a tiny bit, which I’m not mad about anymore because it was for a good reason… I was supposed to get a little sick and you’d have to come and see and Sherlock could watch how you acted and… it’s just things went wrong and… well, you know the rest. Maybe, since you’d been away so long, you didn’t love Greg anymore and we didn’t want him to stay sad when he could find someone else who made him happy again.”
Mycroft tried to fight the emotions battering at him and only now realized how silent Sherlock had been. A quick glance specifically at his brother revealed the answer. Sherlock was highly distressed and not all of it was because of their altercation. There was remorse in his features, worry, shame, anxiety… little of which others might notice as clearly as him, but it was there nonetheless. Black emotions for his actions and more for his genuine concern for the heart of the person who had labored willingly to bring Sherlock happiness.

With a large sigh, Mycroft sat on the bed and held his head in his hands. Even the children had sensed the disharmony in their home. Disharmony entirely of his own creation. And his beloved spouse would have done his utmost to hide his pain from the boys; that he did not succeed spoke to the magnitude of his Gregory’s heartache. And they had tried to help. In the most idiotic way possible, perhaps, but they had taken steps to assist and… for that he could not find fault.

“Sherlock… John… my love for Gregory is immutable and inerasable. I could no more lose my affection for him than I could lose my breath and continue to survive.”

Sherlock and John exchanged looks and scrambled onto the bed, one boy on each side of Mycroft.

“That fact was not evident.”

“Yes, Sherlock… I am aware.”

“And it shall never be evident if it is not manifested in a tangible way. Even the peas… Lestrade admitted that simply loving someone is not enough for a relationship to be fulfilling or successful.”

Mycroft hoped his squawk of shock was not as audible as he feared.

“You spoke to him of this?”

“I asked him if loving someone was sufficient if that love was never demonstrated and that was his response.”

Now Mycroft was the one who felt in need of a pail, but he could not deny any of Sherlock’s words. A sterile and uncelebrated love was cold comfort…

“And he is correct. To love is one thing, and it is a beautiful thing, but it does not provide solely the foundation of a good marriage.”

Mycroft didn’t comment on John’s delighted gasp, but it cut a tiny hole in the darkness veiling his eyes.

“I have not treated Gregory in a manner I consider proper or honorable this weekend, especially owing to our prolonged separation, but I will tell you that I regretted profoundly every moment I spent apart from him. And the two of you. I could see you all, enjoying the lovely weather, entertaining yourselves and creating memories of which I shall not be a part. Your lives moving on without me… Do not think I have been happy or content this weekend, for I have not. What fleeting joy I have felt was at the particularly well-placed strike in a negotiation or the ill-placed one of a rival. I have suffered for my absence, not only in Gregory’s life but in yours, though my suffering was by, for lack of a better word, choice.”

Mycroft was startled by John patting him on the hand, but it let a little more light into his soul.

“Are you going to get to spend time with Greg now?”

“Yes, John… I shall assist Gregory with his recuperation and spend with him, hopefully, a
quantity of time reforging our ties. I suspect we shall be in residence a further two days and I shall devote it entirely to him.”

“If it helps, Sherlock and I promise to stay out of trouble the whole time, too, so you don’t have to worry about us. Well, we’ll try our very best, at least.”

Sherlock looked somewhat aghast, but John just glared at him and the goblin prince remained silent. Mycroft felt more of his ache lift and marveled again how young John was exactly what his younger brother needed.

“I appreciate that, John, I truly do. And Gregory will, as well. He mentioned that he has lacked sleep during his supposed holiday and I hope to see that rectified, as well as providing him time to relax and gain back his strength. Any assistance you can provide shall greatly benefit him.”

“Ok… so… are you still mad at us?”

As keenly as he would wish it, Mycroft could no longer dredge any appreciable anger from his depths. As was not uncommon, Sherlock’s best laid plans had taken a woefully unpredicted turn that delivered a healthy portion of mayhem to the household and it was not direct intent that brought his beloved to his dreadful state.

“No, I think the fires of that particular issue have died down; however, I must exact from you both a very solemn oath that you will not perpetrate this manner of insult again. Though your motives were noble, the outcome was very debilitating to Gregory and if the circumstances were different, such as he was without immediate assistance, the consequences could have been unthinkable. Do I have your word on this?”

Two heads bobbed up and down so forcefully, Mycroft wondered if they were going to pop off and go rolling across the floor.

“Very well. But if you have concerns in the future, do not hesitate to discuss them with me. Though Gregory and my relationship is our own to manage, you two are impacted significantly by our dynamics and I respect that you are entitled to broach any problems you observe as they do have significance for your own lives.”

“And I shall! I shall not allow any negligent behavior on your part to interfere with the orderly procession of my daily schedule!”

“I admire the constancy of your self-absorption, Sherlock.”

Though every signal made clear that this was simply bluster on his brother’s part. Sherlock had been powerfully affected by the day and it was a glorious thing to witness.

“Now, Gregory shall rest for a goodly time, I suspect, but he would likely enjoy a visit after he wakens. Perhaps we may enjoy our dinner together in our room if he is feeling better. I shall alert the staff to collect you if that is the case. Before I leave, however, is there anything further you would know from me?”

“When are you and Greg getting married?”

John’s wide smile and falsely-innocent eyes made Mycroft laugh for the first time since today’s disaster had begun.

“At the time of our choosing and not a moment sooner. However, you may consider yourself invited, regardless of the announced date.”
“Yes! I’ve never been to a wedding! And I bet I can borrow my suit to wear so I look nice, too.”

“You shall look as a child’s toy adorned in doll’s clothes, John Watson.”

“And everyone loves a good-looking doll! You’re going to look like a big sour witch puppet.”

“I am not a puppet! Nor a witch!”

“Notice you didn’t say you weren’t sour.”

“You did not allow me sufficient time to complete my response.”

“Weak, Sherlock. Weak.”

“I shall show you weak, John Watson. I challenge you to a contest of strength.”

“Ok, that sounds fun. How are we going to do it?”

“First, we must decide on the rules…”

Since his presence was no longer necessary, let alone noticed, Mycroft quietly left the boys to whatever chaos they could concoct and, throwing a look towards the door behind which his beloved rested, turned instead in a different direction and stalked through the halls, with a fresh wash of anger building inside him. After a few false starts, Mycroft finally had his target in sight to let that anger flow.

“You knew the truth of Gregory’s condition!”

Grandmama Holmes set her pen down on her ornate antique desk and gazed calmly at her vibrantly-angry grandson.

“I did.”

“And you did not reveal it to me!”

“I did not.”

“How could you… how could you conceal such information? Gregory could have perished!”

“I informed the doctor of the specifics as I learned them from Sherlock and, regardless, Gregory would not have perished from the material that Sherlock used to produce the symptoms.”

“Gregory is my husband and you have no right to withhold vital information about his condition from me!”

Mycroft had never seen Grandmama so close to actually laughing than he did at that moment.

“Are we getting a tad ahead of ourselves, Mycroft?”

“Do not quibble with me on minutiae! Gregory is the other half of my soul and you denied me the truth about his circumstances!”

“It seemed prudent at the time.”

“WHAT! There was nothing prudent about leaving me in ignorance about Gregory’s welfare.”
“The outcome of the incident was already decided, however, the overall impact could be lessened by a small and inconsequential deception.”

“That is inane! Gregory’s suffering should be given its proper due and Sherlock’s role in it should have been honestly revealed!”

“To what end? In your current frame of mind, your response would have been… well, I believe we clearly saw the severity of your response, didn’t we? However, a small amount of time between discovery and revelation would have allowed your temper to be better held in check. Sherlock was quite disturbed by his actions, Mycroft, and that was sufficient punishment for the time being.”

“That was for ME to decide! It was MY beloved that was harmed and it was I who had the responsibility of meting out Sherlock’s punishment!”

“There is a distinct difference between punishment and revenge.”

“I know that well, but it was still my duty to handle the situation and you should not have interfered.”

Mycroft would never know that he was nicely satisfying Grandmama’s hopes for his behavior and another tic was checked on his scorecard, which was filling up very, very agreeably.

“It is a matter of debate, however, I will concede that for Gregory’s health, you are entirely within your rights to become angered over any perceived improprieties.”

“That is a paltry concession.”

“Be that as it may, if I, given my greater years of experience, decide to withhold information for the greater good, then withhold it I shall. And Sherlock was to tell you himself, given the sufficient passing of time to make your and Gregory’s ears more accommodating to his apology. I am very surprised he has already made his confession.”

“He did not. Gregory deduced the truth from aberrant elements of Sherlock’s behavior.”

And didn’t that please the elderly woman to no end.

“Oh, very good. Very good, indeed. Even in his compromised state, he has a keen mind.”

“Gregory’s mind is exceptional as are his physical and emotional skills. I consider myself highly blessed.”

“As you should. And, again, I caution you not to take that for granted. Remind him of his value to you sincerely and often.”

“Such is my intent, but, Grandmama… I am still most aggrieved by your conduct.”

“Which is right and proper, although I hope you do not have a fate in store for me such as you had for Sherlock. This is a new dress.”

“As if I would any chance of winning the engagement. I have not forgotten the incident with that particular Earl who became both intoxicated and… frisky at your New Year’s ball.”

“Ah yes… well, a lady must be prepared to defend her honor no matter her age.”

“Quite.”
“Are you now somewhat pacified, grandson?”

“To only the most minor degree.”

“That is sufficient. In truth, Mycroft, I only sought to add no further distress to Sherlock’s already lifetime-high level.”

“He was unhappy with his behavior… that much was evident.”

“And so marvelously encouraging.”

“I must agree. John’s defense of Sherlock was very vigorous, also. I believe I shall carry bruises of his intercession in our engagement.”

“He very much impressed me, too, with his assistance in Sherlock’s cause. Do what it takes to facilitate their friendship, Mycroft. It is something of supreme value.”

“I plan to. I had despised of Sherlock ever finding someone who could call him ‘friend’ and I surely never envisioned a relationship as complementary as this one. This shall be an item of great priority for me, as I know it is for Gregory. He has already proven that he shall work tirelessly for their benefit and I will not allow him to be the only one involved in that work.”

“See that you do not. Have you… had opportunity to speak with Gregory? There are matters you should discuss with him.”

“Not yet. He became too fatigued after his injection to properly enter into any discussion of significance and we agreed to table such a conversation until a later time.”

“That was wise. He loves you fiercely, Mycroft, and knows you love him. Do not fear that is not the case.”

“I do not, but as Sherlock reminded me, an undemonstrated love is not something to highly value.”

“Sherlock?”

“Well, he simply… it is irrelevant. Let us just say it is a lesson I take to heart.”

“It is excellent advice, no matter the source. I have also committed, perhaps, some injustices with respect to Gregory and I must remind myself to remember more fully what it is like to be in his situation. Those are memories I have not visited in a very long time and it is certainly time they again saw the light. Now, why don’t you return to him and make sure that when his eyes open that you are the first thing he sees.”

There was no flaw in that plan that Mycroft could find. In fact, his body was already aching to return to his spouse’s side. It was very difficult to think of his love alone and vulnerable in his weakened condition.

“Very well. But remember that he is my love, Grandmama… expect that I shall not take kindly to any further actions that inhibit me from being fully informed about his condition and fully capable of safeguarding his well-being, regardless of the intent of those actions.”

“I shall give your words all the consideration they are due.”

Mycroft glared his most steely glare, knowing it paled in comparison to even Grandmama’s weakest
effort.

“I shall remember that.”

“I am flattered.”

Mycroft turned on his heel and marched out of the room before he devalued his stock any further. Of course, from Grandmama’s perspective, his stock had risen to a very agreeable new height. Mycroft was becoming an exemplary husband and if his Grandpapa were alive, he would be overcome with pride in the young man. Actually, Grandmama thought, he would be insufferably arrogant that his grandson was following so closely his own example and it would be the work of a week to bring his ego back to a manageable level. But it would have been a very, very delicious week and that was another memory that could use a little turn in the sunlight.

Staring down at the most beautiful man in the world, Mycroft had no idea how such luck had fallen into his lap. And this luck was absolutely adorable when he was fast asleep and dreaming something pleasant so a small smile stayed on his lips as he wriggled slightly and snuggled deeper under the blanket. After a few moments of consideration, Mycroft sloughed off his jacket and removed his shoes, then untucked his shirt and slowly drew back a corner of the blanket to slide into the bed next to his Gregory. It was the joy of his life that, even in sleep, his spouse sought him out and curled against him as he had before. This was what he had had lay in bed fantasizing about each night during his absence. Such a simple thing, yet he had felt so lessened without it.

As he comforted himself in his husband's warmth, Mycroft thought ahead about their future life together. It would be a comfortable one, financially, but a rich one in terms of the affection that would permeate their home. They would entertain guests gladly and warmly welcome friends, enjoy relaxing nights within their own residence or step out for the evening to sample what London could offer them. And it would likely be London where they made their home. It would greatly facilitate his work and offer Gregory opportunities for any career choice he settled upon. He did rather hope it would be law enforcement, though. His husband would make a stellar policeman and it would provide him with a bounty of challenges and avenues for advancement, but if that was ultimately not Gregory's decision, he would support whatever direction his love opted to follow.

But all of this was laying in wait and it would be a long time before they could realize it. And that time would not be easy. They would have to endure much, but he would not forget the lessons he was learning. Frequent communication, affection given eagerly when they were together, time spent with only each other despite Sherlock's wishes to the contrary... and when he was away he would have to keep eyes and ears on his love that he was not becoming overwhelmed with the demands of the children. Although he was hopeful that Sherlock and John would gain sufficient independence by the time he departed for his degree that they would not be so needy of his fiancée's care, it was a highly uncertain thing. But, perhaps, 'needy' was not the correct word to use here. It was obvious that the boys delighted in their time with Gregory. John, who had such a poor experience with his father and Sherlock, who lacked one... it was not surprising that they gravitated to a strong male figure who was open with his love and demonstrated his affection generously. That was not something he had been able to do. Though he dearly loved his brother, he had not the tools to do what his love did so naturally but, through observation, those were more lessons he was learning. Already his interactions with Sherlock were becoming more positive, today notwithstanding. And it was indescribable. Such an interesting remodeling of their existing dynamic... they would always carry with them certain behaviors and biases, but new understandings were developing and that was making an incalculable difference.
Feeling more at peace than he had all day and relaxing quickly from the comfort and warmth of their shared bed, Mycroft felt the pull of sleep and allowed himself to succumb to it, only waking what seemed like hours later when he felt fingers tracing patterns on his skin underneath his shirt.

“Gregory, I sincerely hope the delight I am experiencing is actually at your hands.”

“Nope. I’m still asleep.”

“Well then, I am beset by phantoms. Somehow I have fallen into a torrid Gothic horror novel and… I cannot call it an unpleasant occurrence.”

“Fucking phantoms. Always stealing what’s not theirs. I’d teach them a lesson if I wasn’t so comfortable.”

Which meant lying with his full body pressed against Mycroft, his head resting against his partner’s chest.

“Then I gladly accept otherworldly defilement to preserve your comfort.”

“That’s my Mycroft. Always looking out for me.”

“And that is an unequivocal truth, Gregory. You do trust in that, do you not?”

Mycroft had not planned on initiating their discussion at this point and surely hated the slightly hesitant and fearful tone in his voice as he asked the question, but apparently his mind had decided to capitalize on the quiet and intimacy to broach their troubles.

“Already, Mycroft? You want to talk now?”

“It seems I do, though I did not intend to at this point.”

“Just popped out?”

“Quite.”

“Fine then… yes, I do know that. Even if we broke up someday, I have a feeling you’d always have some eye on me making sure nothing bad happened.”

Even after his death he would ensure eyes remained on his beloved, but that was not a direction of thinking Mycroft wished to pursue.

“I shall always do my utmost to ensure your welfare, my dear. If it takes my fortune, my life even, I would give it gladly.”

“Well, let’s hope it never comes to that. And, I have to say yes, I do know you’re always looking out for me.”

“Good. That is good. Truly, that is a very good thing. A good, no, a grand thing. Very good and very grand. Yes, verily it is both.”

Babbling was not selling him as a quality spouse, so Mycroft forced his tongue into silence and hoped his Gregory wasn’t repulsed by his sudden lack of verbal skill.

“Nervous?”

“I confess that I am.”
“Don’t be, Mycroft. Really… this is all out of proportion and most of it’s just me. I got tired out the past few days… you always laugh at how women go on about how hard it is to watch kids until you have to do it, on top of everything else you have to do, then you find out it’s true! It wears you down and I let things get to me. I got worn down, my temper got short, I lost sight of what things are going to be like for us and I got resentful and disappointed when I probably shouldn’t have. I overreacted… a lot. I even snapped at Sherlock and nearly scared the poor thing to death. It was just a lot this weekend on top of everything else and… ok, yes, when I saw you were back, I thought that was the reason Grandmama had me come out here and when I realized that wasn’t happening… it was hard.”

“If… if it is any consolation, this weekend has not gone according to expectation. I believe strongly that Grandmama did have this planned as a weekend that would be for our enjoyment; it simply became something else due to necessity. But not intent, Gregory; in no manner was that the intent.”

“Yeah, I guess…”

“Can you confess further, my dear? Please, tell me your mind on this.”

Lestrade heaved a sigh and rolled onto his back, which pleased Mycroft not in the slightest.

“I guess I got worried that this is my life now. Greg – go get the kids dressed. Greg – go get the kids fed. Greg – play with them, get them cleaned up, take them shopping, make sure they don’t eat lead paint… then it’ll be Greg – clean this place up. Greg – get the laundry done. Greg – why isn’t there any fucking milk in this house? Greg – did you pick up my cleaning? Greg – come over here for a shag, thanks, now I’ve got things to do so bugger off… oh, did I say we were going out tonight, well sorry but I’m saving Sweden from the Martians… that’s sort of been what I’ve been worrying about these past couple of days and I’m not saying all of that is bad, because it’s not, but… it’s not what I want my whole life to be. I want my own life, too and I want to feel like I’m actually a partner in our relationship. That I’m more than someone to order around and keep things tidy so that no one else has to deal with it. That I’m… well, Grandmama said I wasn’t a servant, but it’s started to feel like that and that’s not what I want to be. I don’t want our relationship to be about me being nothing more than the one that takes care of the household things and sucks you off when you’ve got the urge. I don’t want to look back on my life and see nothing but me still waiting for a chance for some real place in our relationship, wearing a long string of broken promises tied around my waist.”

Well, he had asked for a confession and he’d gotten one. Mycroft vowed never again to ask for something unless he was entirely sure he wanted it.

“But, like I said, I know this is me overreacting. It’s just all hitting me wrong and I’m reacting poorly and I’m sorry for that. But I also can’t say it hasn’t been eating at me a little and… well, there you have it. I want a life with you, Mycroft, but I want a life that I’ll be happy with, too.”

Mycroft was finding lack of contact with his spouse nearly sickening right now and, reaching over to thread his fingers through his lover’s, letting out his own heavy sigh when Lestrade curled their fingers together and squeezed lightly. Now it was on him to destroy his partner’s doubts and allay his fears. Which, based on experience to date, and much to his shame, were fully understandable.

“I do not think you are overreacting, Gregory. Were that the situation that lay in wait for you, you would be completely justified in feeling disregarded and disenfranchised. And it is easy to comprehend where from come your worries. I think on what little time we have spent together and find no instance where I have behaved in a way that did not feed those worries… did not validate them completely. I admit that I did not even consider how you might feel beyond the continued pang
of separation, instead concentrating only on my own loneliness and feeling of loss.”

“Loss?”

“You, Sherlock and John… you appear so happy when you spend time together. I watched you and the boys this weekend and felt that I was losing so very much. Actually, I have felt that way for some time now. Sherlock has grown substantially since he met you and now, he has John… and I have missed it, Gregory. I have missed the wonderful times you have all shared and it is my own fear that I shall continue to miss these times. That I will never know the joy and even the hardships that my family will experience. Whereas, perhaps, I should feel jealousy that you have accomplished what I have not been able to with Sherlock’s emotional upbringing. I instead feel ecstatic with his progress, but it is the ecstasy of the outsider looking through the window at the marvel going on beyond the glass. Always knowing it is there, yet never able to share in it. I look at you and the children building memories of which I shall not be a part, building a life which carries on gladly without me and fear that each time I depart your side, it will affect you less and less until my absence no longer makes any difference in your or Sherlock’s life. I absolutely dread the moment when my presence or absence is inconsequential, because I have become insignificant. Meaningless.”

This time, Lestrade’s roll was towards his partner and Mycroft’s emotions surged seeing the clear distress on his dear husband’s face.

“You could never be meaningless to me, Mycroft.”

“Just as you could never be a servant to me. Yet they are the fears that plague our minds, are they not? The ones that creep out in the dark and the quiet as you lie in bed and whisper in our ears.”

“Yeah… they do. It’s worst when it’s just me lying here and I can’t see you ever being here with me. Those whispers just turn to screaming in my head.”

“As it was for me while I was away. Envisioning myself in room after room across the globe, all lacking your presence to silence that screaming. I think my colleagues must think it a nervous behavior that I clutch my chest at times, but they do not know I am touching the only piece of you I have with me so that I might pretend, at least for a moment, that I am still connected to you and you are only a layer of cloth from my fingers. Though I have taken satisfaction from my work this weekend, as I did from my labors during my absence, I felt always the hole inside me that you were not there to fill.”

“And you told me, love. You told me every time we talked. Don’t think I’ve forgotten any of that.”

“And you spoke to me also of your own longing, which was balm to my heavy heart. There will be times, though I wish it were not so, when we shall not have even that degree of communication, when our interactions shall be such as they were during my first absence. And it could be for a far longer duration. I would change that if I could, I would not hesitate for a second, but I cannot.”

“Yes, I know. I don’t like it, but I know.”

Such a terrible resignation in his love’s voice, but it was not a truth either of them could deny.

“And it shall not matter whether it spans Christmas, a birthday… an anniversary.”

“Just keep driving that knife in deeper, why don’t you.”

“And it drives into me, as well. Every time I reflect on this basic fact, I feel sharply the pain of
“I know you do, Mycroft, and I feel stupid I didn’t think about what it would be like for you being out there by yourself. Sherlock and John are a handful, but I can’t say I don’t enjoy my time with them. It’s rewarding and actually fun, most of the time, even though it drains me dry by the end of the day. I do have a lot of good memories with them, even the ones that aren’t so good are good in their own way, if that makes any sense. And Mum adores the two of them, Grandmama, too, and it’s good times when we’re together with them. I never specifically thought about the fact that we’ve been doing all the things you’d expect a family to do and haven’t been able to be a part of it. Mum even has lot of pictures of me and Sherlock and now some with John, too… only me, Sherlock and John, though. I’m sorry, love… I never really thought about how that piece of it.”

“And I never considered how you might perceive your situation and its implications for our future.”

“But we do know now, so what are we going to do?”

“The best we are able. I believe we are both quite talented in rising to any challenge presented and, armed with critical information, we shall overcome any obstacle.”

“I love it when you talk romantic like that.”

“I shall script a rigorous agenda for enriching my skill set according to established exemplars and data-driven theory.”

“Now you’re making me hot.”

And from the manner in which her husband was repositioning himself on Mycroft’s body, that fact was more than evident. Apparently his spouse was developing somewhat of a kink for language.

“Then I shall endeavor to quench your ardor in the most energetic of fashions.”

Wrapping his arms around his intended, Mycroft drew him forward and startled when Lestrade pulled back sharply.

“Mycroft, what’s been in my mouth, you don’t want in yours.”

“Oh… yes. I had forgotten. You seem well, though… you are feeling better?”

“Yes, surprisingly. I actually wasn’t sure I’d ever feel better when I was worshipping Grandmama’s toilet, at least until I finally just fell over dead. I’ll be interested to hear what the little Doctor Frankenstein has to say about this when I talk to him.”

“I have already received that particular tale and I believe it shall interest you greatly.”

“Oh. Ok then, share.”

Mycroft told Lestrade what he had learned from Sherlock and did his best to enliven his tale of battle as heroically as he could. From his beloved’s laughter, he decided his ability for storytelling was improving.

“Well done you, fighting off that little troll army. They’re vicious when you get them wound up, especially if they have swords.”

“Fortunately, our combat was unarmed.”
“And Sherlock and John were really just trying to give me some love-life help?”

“In their own chaotic and wildly inappropriate way, yes.”

“I’m not sure I can actually be mad at them for that.”

“Good heavens, Gregory. Do not allow them knowledge of that or it shall be more difficult than ever to rein in their terror.”

“I’ll wag my finger at them and frown as hard as I can.”

“Thank you, my dear. I trust they shall tremble in contrition.”

“It’s nice to think about at least.”

“Fantasies are sometimes all we have.”

“And speaking of… we can get back to ours if I grab a toothbrush and maybe a shower.”

“I am reminded of the terrible incident with your ankle, Gregory. We know well how that progressed.”

“You worried that I’ll do filthy and unspeakable things to you in the shower?”

“Worry is not, perhaps, the correct term. Anticipate is closer to the mark.”

“Then what are we waiting for?”

Lestrade crawled off of Mycroft’s body and steadied himself as he stood up at the side of the bed.

“Are you alright, my dear?”

“Yeah, just a little lightheaded. My big, strong, troll-fighting lover might be want to give me a hand so I don’t end up face down on the shower floor.

Mycroft nearly fell off the bed rushing to Lestrade’s side, wrapping his arm around his partner’s waist and escorting him manfully towards the waiting sink and shower. While his spouse cleaned the lingering remnants of his sickness from his mouth, Mycroft gathered the largest and softest towels he could find and started the water running, so it was deliciously hot by the time his lover was ready to partake.

“You are joining me this time, right Mycroft?”

“I take my duties for your welfare very seriously.”

“Is that a yes?”

“It is.”

And to cement his point, Mycroft began unbuttoning his shirt, enjoying greatly that his spouse watched every button being unfastened and nearly moaning when large hands ran across his bare skin.

“Do you have any idea how gorgeous you are, Mycroft? I’ve never seen a body that’s lit my fire as fast and as hot as yours. It’s so perfect.”
As his husband leaned in and pushed the shirt off of his shoulders, Mycroft marveled yet again that such a god on Earth could take such pleasure from his own imperfect form. And marveled more at how that imperfect form could feel when it was being caressed and kissed by the person it loved. Especially when the kisses spread themselves over his shoulders and hands roamed freely across his back, dipping now and then between his skin and his trousers in such a way that if those trousers didn’t vanish soon, he would be looking for a knife to cut them off of his lower half to permit free access to wherever his Gregory wanted his talented hands to roam.

“You are most overdressed, my dear. Do I not receive the same opportunity to indulge in my vision of beauty?”

“I think I can accommodate you.”

With as much flare as he had done their first evening here, Lestrade began to pull off his clothes and Mycroft had no choice but to shed his trousers or else they might strangle the life out of him. Or out of a part of him, which was worrying enough. When he was again taken in his husband’s arms, nothing but skin in contact with skin, he felt his world completely still until only the two of them existed.

“Mycroft, Is it weird that I don’t ever want to move from this spot?”

“No… I find myself desiring the same thing and I do not consider myself weird.”

“Any way we can keep the kids out of the bedroom tonight and we can do this all night long?”

“I believe that can be arranged. First, however, let us get ourselves clean and see if you can eat something before that time. You will let me know if you feel in any way unsteady or ill.”

Mycroft reluctantly pulled away from his partner and stepped into the shower holding out his arm for Lestrade to grab for support as he stepped in after and made a very erotic sound as the water hit his skin.

“That feels so good. Best thing when you’ve been sick is a good hot shower. Well, second best thing…”

Lestrade reached out again for Mycroft and ran his hand across his lover’s chest, slowly dragging it downwards until it encountered something that was extremely happy to remake his acquaintance.

“Gregory…”

“Yes? Just starting the washing with one of my favorite bits. Actually all of you is my favorite bit, but this piece seems like it especially missed me.”

Mycroft swallowed hard and stepped closer to his spouse raising his hand to pull Lestrade’s head down for a kiss that lasted until both were nearly gasping for air and the thought of washing was the last thing on their minds. As another kiss began, Mycroft let his own hands run across his husband’s skin and allowed himself to pay studious attention to said husband’s firm and muscular bottom and the soft sounds his actions drew out of his lover.

“Do you enjoy that, my dear?”

“I think you know I do.”

“And just what was it you were doing to yourself when I last was present for your shower?”
“M…making myself happy.”

“How might that be, I wonder?”

“Let your fingers explore a little and find out.”

And wasn’t it nice that he had long fingers that could easily nestle into areas he had yet to play with and find a secret little door that made his lover gasp when he discovered it.

“Have I found a sensitive area?”

“Just keep teasing and you’ll get your answer spurted all over you.”

“And what if I actually… take things deeper.”

“You’re going to make me a begging, quivery mess.”

“Then by all means, that shall be my course of action.”

Mycroft gently spun his spouse and felt a harsh surge of lust watching Lestrade put his hands against the wall of the shower, giving permission for Mycroft to do with him as he wished. And what he wished was to see that beautiful body begging and quivering until he decided to bring it satisfaction. Using a little of the conditioner he found among the various bottles in the shower stall, Mycroft returned to stroking the spot he had found and adored that Lestrade jutted his beautiful bottom back to meet his touch. After a moment he dared press a little harder and drank in his lover’s moan like the finest wine. In the next moment, he pressed harder still and slipped inside his beloved’s body, making his own noises to match Lestrade’s because this was exciting. This was more than exciting – it was intoxicating. Directing his husband’s pleasure, making him writhe and whisper ‘please’ again and again… this was addictive and he would willingly take on this addiction even if it consumed it whole.

“Deeper, Mycroft. Please… go deeper and… oh god, yes… back and forth, just like that…”

Using his other hand, Mycroft reached around and paid attention to his lover’s other sensitive area and grinned widely as Lestrade arched his body and began moving it this way and that to try and gain as much pleasure as he could from both of Mycroft’s hands.

“Now, now, Gregory… respect the pace I set. I shall take care of you, my dear, but you must allow me to have my own fun, as well.”

“Fuck, Mycroft… don’t make me wait. It feels too good. Please, love… oh my god! Ohgodohgodohgodohgod…”

Mycroft surmised he had found that particular spot inside his husband that he had read very interesting things about in his… research. Things that appeared to be quite true.

“Did I not say I would take care of you? Be a good boy, now, and let me adore you as I choose. I will bring you release. Eventually.”

And eventually seemed like an eternity because Mycroft was in no manner anxious to see an end to their activities. It was thrilling to steer the course of his Gregory’s passions and listen to him beg for more and more of his touch. Without a hand laid on himself, his body was already highly aroused it was only when he felt he could hold out no longer that he decided to end his love’s delicious torture.

“Such a wonder you are, my love. Truly a wonder as has never existed and that you are mine is
the ultimate joy of my life.”

Mycroft withdrew his finger and used both of his hands to grab Lestrade’s hips. Repositioning for a moment, he inserted his almost-painful erection between his spouse’s thighs and gave Lestrade a nip of approval when he closed his legs tightly.

“Stimulate yourself, my love, and when you come, I shall not be far behind you.”

Mycroft began to thrust his hips against Lestrade’s body and lost himself in the sensations and continuous sounds of sex and love that filled the air. When Lestrade’s body stiffened and small whimpers of pleasure fell from his lips, Mycroft thrust faster and more forcefully and it was only a few moments before he was joining his husband in a post-coital cocoon of bliss that lingered until he was finally able to regain his focus and spin Lestrade once more, this time to kiss him slowly and warmly under the steady stream of water.

“That was… saying it was amazing, brilliant, marvelous, earth-shattering… none of that is enough.”

“That it made you happy is the only thing that matters, Gregory.”

“Happy isn’t enough, either. I like it when you get all commanding… turns me on even when we’re not having sex. You’re just so… Mycroft. That’s the best way I can say it – powerful, sexy, smart, talented… add that all up and that’s what Mycroft means. At least to me. And I love it. I love everything about you and can’t ever tell you how much it means to me that I’ve got you in my life.”

Another lengthy kiss gave the older Holmes time to recover from the impact of Lestrade’s words. He was so fortunate… so incredibly fortunate and would not, never once so long as he lived, lose sight of his good fortune.

“And I love you, Gregory. I never believed I would find all of my greatest dreams achieved, yet here you are and you do encompass them all. All of my deepest desires, my greatest hopes… all of them I find in you and I rejoice in that. And I shall demonstrate how greatly I cherish you each time we share a moment, be it when we can touch or when we have only the sound of our voices for comfort. Now, let us clean you properly and see about a small repast. The children shall want to visit you and we may share our meal with them if that is to your liking.”

“Yeah, that’ll be ok. Good to let them see they didn’t actually kill me. And it’ll be nice to be all together for a change. Eat, maybe play a game or something and then I already know I’ll be ready to get back to bed.”

“Are you fatigued, my dear? If so, I shall have something delivered for us in the bedroom and send word to the boys that they may visit in the morning.”

“I’m a little tired, but that’s not really what I was talking about.”

“Oh? Oh… yes. I believe I shall be ready to take to our bed again, as well.”

“Then let’s get started. Looks like it’s going to be a good night.”

“Yes, I quite agree.”
The one negative aspect of his beloved’s warm and sensual shower was that his muscles were very reluctant to work and a great deal of steadying was required for Mycroft to get Lestrade dressed and return him to bed in once piece, where he crawled in after him and lay close, with his head on his love’s shoulder.

“You are deliciously boneless, my dear. Would that we could relax in this state for the remainder of the day.”

“Yeah, that really took it out of me, but I wouldn’t trade it for the world. Best shower of my life. And we washed all the carnality off ourselves so Sherlock won’t suffocate from holding his breath.”

“I am not loathe to repeat our endeavor to re-scent our flesh with the aroma of our adoration and ensure an uninterrupted evening.”

“Now that sounds like a great plan, but I hate letting the goblins worry. Provided they are worried at all, that is.”

“Oh, I can assure you that their worry is significant. As is their contrition. Even Grandmama was impressed by the level of their upset, Sherlock’s in particular.”

“Well, that’s good to know. Nice that if I did take a ride into the Great Beyond, they’d shed a few tears.”

“They would drown in the deluge of their suffering, I have little doubt. Since that is not in the offering today, however, I suggest we concentrate on more pleasant matters.”

Mycroft reached over to the house phone and placed an order for a plain and simple meal that he hoped would not overtax his spouse’s stomach and gave notice that Sherlock and John should be collected to join them.

“Are we really staying here another day or two?”

“Grandmama has indicated this is the case. If you are concerned, I am quite certain she will make arrangements with your school and has already informed your mother, likely with some persuasive argument that does not involve your health situation.”

“The funny thing is that Mum will probably be thrilled since it gives her a little more time alone at home. And I can’t say I blame her! Poor Mum, she’s young and having me around the house all the time pretty much punched a hole in her love life, didn’t it… good she’s getting some time now to have a little fun. And, depending on how things go, maybe I’ll be out of the house soon, altogether. I really have to figure that out, because I’ll be done with school before you know it. I haven’t had a chance to give it much thought, though I’ve still got it in my head that policing might be a good choice for me. I just need to learn more about it.”

Mycroft slightly changed position so he could look into Lestrade’s eyes.

“Would you… I know you are fiercely independent, my love, but would you allow me to have that information prepared for you? It is an exceedingly simple matter to have the deed done and save you the effort when it could best be devoted to other pursuits. I would like to give this to you, if I may, but I understand if you do not want…”
“Mycroft, it’s ok. And thanks, I would like that a lot. It’d be a big help, actually, since I’m not even sure where to start getting the real information, not just the stuff they put out in those glossy pamphlets to make you think everything’s perfect and wonderful. You’ll do that, right? Get all the real information on what the job’s like, do they pay you enough to live on and all that?”

“I shall not allow to be hidden any unpleasant detail for I absolutely agree that without thorough and accurate information a confident decision cannot be made.”

And, of course, he would investigate the most expeditious routes to advancement, most prestigious postings, safest areas in London in which to work… though, now that Mycroft thought about it, this was another area where his husband might be called to sacrifice. Would he choose to begin his new career immediately, with the care of Sherlock and John resting in his very capable hands? He would surely desire employment, once his studies were concluded, but such a stressful thing was police work and with two boys to raise… Even a local position might be difficult to juggle with the demands of Sherlock and John and, so much as Mycroft could remember, there had not been any additions to their small, but stalwart local force in quite some time. What if they did not need any additional personnel and the only choice was to go further afield? Data… he would have the appropriate data gathered and present it to his spouse so he could make his own decision. And if that decision needed some assistance in being satisfied, all necessary arrangements would be made… away from his loving spouse’s eyes, of course.

“Whatever you consider for your future, rest assured I shall provide all the information you might want for a proper analysis. Your contentment is of the utmost importance to me and I gladly place the full of my resources at your disposal to ensure it. Now, I suggest that we take these few minutes before our visitors arrive and continue to reacquaint ourselves.”

“I have absolutely no objection to that.”

“Excellent. I simply adore a successful negotiation.”

The knock at the door startled both boys out of their embrace, which had fortunately stayed on the less sordid end of the affection scale, though Mycroft took care to smooth his hair before his brother’s rantings spoiled their meal.

“Are you prepared, my dear?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be. Let ‘em in.”

Mycroft took one last kiss from his angelic intended’s lips, then called out for their visitors to enter.

“I am not accustomed to waiting, as if summoned for an audience! This shall not occur again or the consequences will be severe.”

Sherlock and John marched into the room ahead of the dinner tray that Mycroft motioned to be set on the small table near the window.

“Nice to know you’re in a fine mood, you little bastard. John, you had yourself a splendid time with this one, I’m sure.”

“Well, after I had to rub his foot, it was ok.”

“You should be honored to be allowed contact with my person, John Watson”
“Your foot doesn’t really give me a lot of honor, Sherlock Holmes.”

Mycroft and Lestrade shared quiet smiles and Mycroft cleared his throat to divert the flow of the oncoming battle.

“May I inquire as to the circumstances surrounding Sherlock’s foot massage or it some form of secret for one of his darkest and direst research projects?”

“He wanted to see how fast his foot got numb if I tied it to a chair. I had to keep poking it to test how numb it was, then he made me rub it to get it through the tingly part faster once it was untied. AND I had write all his notes because his hands were tied up so he could practice getting away from being captured. I think he needs more practice.”

“It was only my boredom that prevented me from circumventing your pathetic knots! I was weakened by my ennui and for that you are fully accountable.”

John made a rude noise, then turned a hopeful grin towards Lestrade, nearly vibrating with happiness when it was returned warmly.

“Are you… you’re feeling better, right?”

“Yeah, I’m feeling a lot better. Doctor gave me something and it must have been the right stuff because it worked pretty well.”

“And… there’s nothing that’s going to stay wrong, is there?”

“No, no lasting damage. But, I don’t want either of you trying that again just because you think I didn’t die or end up with some permanently twisted-up stomach.”

“We’re not going to. We already promised Mycroft and Mrs. Holmes and that’s two promises, so I think we sort of have to keep them.”

“If it was only one, it doesn’t count?”

“No… but it’s easier to get one person to forgive you when you break it than two.”

Mycroft and Lestrade cut their eyes towards Sherlock who bristled under the scrutiny.

“Why do you assume I am the progenitor of that nefarious mindset?”

“Because we know you, you rabble-rouser. But, to be honest, John’s been showing his own little bastard streak, so I’m not jumping to conclusions.”

Mycroft chuckled at John’s scandalized gasp and his brother’s triumphant smirk, then moved off the bed to begin preparing a plate of food for Lestrade.

“I see my Gregory is well versed in the intricacies of your behaviors and inclinations. It is no wonder that he is so magnificently successful in managing your rearing.”

Mycroft handed Lestrade a small plate where an even smaller amount of food rested.

“Eat what you are able, my dear. If this is insufficient, I shall prepare a second portion for you.”

“Thanks. Looks good, actually. I wasn’t sure if I’d be hungry, but this is going to hit the spot.”

“And mine? Where is my meal?”
“A truly fortuitous outcome of having functional limbs, brother dear, is that one may obtain food for one’s self. Especially when it cannot make an escape like a startled rabbit.”

Sherlock snorted loudly and gave Mycroft a glare that was tempered by John’s high-pitched giggling. When he was certain that neither Mycroft nor Lestrade was going to serve as wait staff and John had already taken a plate and started piling it high with food, the younger Holmes brother marched forward and began to poke among the provided options to find something he wanted.

“No one wants your fingered food, Sherlock. Just spoon out what looks good and NO! You leave those custards alone until you’ve cleared a plate. And do not think one tiny sliver of meat is going to work. I want to see something green.”

Sherlock turned calmly towards Lestrade, licking the sauce from the chicken off his finger.

“Then I shall show you a picture of Mycroft when he consumed far too much cherry liqueur at one of Mummy’s truly abominable Christmas parties.”

“Vegetables or no custard.”

“Tyranny! When the rebellion foments, I shall be riding as the leader of your opposition.”

“No good to be the head man because you might end up without yours. Now get started or the level of what wins you custard is going to go up.”

“Your abuse of power is repugnant.”

“Custard…”

“I shall not forget your cruelty, Lestrade.”

“And I’m sure you’ll make me pay in your own special way. Now, show me something nutritious on that plate.”

Mycroft was simply enchanted by the back and forth between his brother and his husband and that John easily ignored it all, happily eating his dinner and eyeing the custard cups waiting to be exchanged for his cleaned plate. As he served himself and took his place again on the bed next to his spouse, a calm settled into his bones and he so easily pictured this in their future. Nights or mornings together with their family, enjoying the special thing they had created for themselves, without any care or worry about the outside world… It was such a natural matter, so entirely uncontrived and postured. And unimaginably rewarding.

“So, you and Mycroft are happy again, right?”

John’s concern about his and his husband’s marital relationship gratified Mycroft to no limit and it was soothing to know that if he and his love were never blessed with their own offspring-by-blood, they would never lack for the love of a son.

“Yeah, we are. We weren’t necessarily unhappy, lad, more frustrated and Mycroft had it as bad as me. But we talked things out and it’s a lot better now.”

John’s glee was so thick they could nearly taste it and Mycoft reached over to give his lover’s hand a squeeze.

“Yes! That means I’ll definitely get to show off my new suit at the wedding. Better have cameras ready because I’m going to look good.”
Sherlock groaned and dropped face first on the bed, while Mycroft and Lestrade struggled to hold back their laughter. And, how joyful, Mycroft thought, that John would get a new suit for their wedding, color coordinated to the decorating scheme they chose for the ceremony. Or perhaps they would opt for a more sedate event and John would wear a small tuxedo, which would, no doubt, delight the young man boundlessly.

“Now, now, John… count not your chickens before they hatch.”

“Why not? They don’t hatch, then I get eggs for breakfast. I’m happy either way.”

“Is there no limit to your brain’s inability to function?”

“I don’t know, Sherlock, but I’m sure you’ve got some experiment you want to do that’ll figure it out.”

“Actually, yes. We can begin immediately after dinner.”

Lestrade nibbled at his meal and watched Mycroft out of the corner of his eye. His partner was captivated by Sherlock and John’s nonsense. For him, this was normal, common even, but for Mycroft it was all still so new and something, he knew now, that his dear Mycroft highly prized. Maybe someday, someday FAR into the future, they could think about kids of their own. It looked like his partner would really enjoy some tykes of his own in the house… they just had to figure out if Mycroft would have time to enjoy some tykes of his own in the house…

After much less food than he thought it would take, Lestrade felt like another bite would disable him as much as Sherlock’s potion and set aside his half-eaten dinner, much to Mycroft’s concern.

“Can you not stand a little more, my dear? You surely cannot have any appreciable energy in your system and you must rebuild your reserves.”

“I know, but I really can’t even consider another bite. And it’s not like I’m going to starve if I don’t have anything more until breakfast.

Not that it was at all to Mycroft’s liking, but if his partner said he was at his limit, then he would not argue. However…

“A few spoonsful of custard, perhaps? It is very soft and would likely providing a soothing blanket to your troubled stomach.”

The cacophony from the younger end of the bed indicated the boy’s opinion of the idea and Lestrade just laughed, albeit softly to spare his belly any additional stress.

“Looks like it’s time for custard, then. But just a few mouthfuls, ok? Really, I’m at my end.”

Sherlock took that as some form of “Go!” signal and leaped off the bed to toss his plate on the serving tray and snatch a custard cup, which he hugged towards him as if he feared he would have to fight off an army of Huns for his bounty.

“You could do the family a service and clear away the remaining plates, Sherlock, and provide us with our own treat to enjoy.”

Sherlock’s “pfft” came as no surprise to Mycroft, but John was already in motion to clean off the bed.

“Thank you, John. Your manners and considerate nature are greatly to your credit.”
John grinned smugly at Sherlock who pretended to ignore him, but bristled with a poorly-contained seething. The small boy then passed custards and spoons to the older pair, keeping the last one for himself. Mycroft could not miss the almost frightened look on Lestrade’s face, and held his breath as his spouse took a spoonful of plain vanilla custard into his mouth and worked to swallow it down.

“Is it that difficult, my love?”

“It’s not easy. But, I can get another into me if you give me a minute.”

“You may have as many minutes as you desire and take as little as you wish. I am certain we will not lack for volunteers to make short work of your leavings.”

“That’s the truth! Look at Sherlock, he’s already sizing me up like a vulture waiting for the lion go ahead and die.”

“If you expire from the effects of your meal, I promise that no vulture, human or avian, shall defile your carcass. Though I cannot make the same promise for your custard.”

“That’s fair. Sacrifices have to be made and if it’s between me and a pot of eggs and sugar, I know what I’m going to pick.”

“Very wise, my dear. Very wise.”

When the boys were scraping their spoons against porcelain, hoping it would give up more sweet treat, Lestrade handed his over to Mycroft to divide between them and ignored the small frown from his partner seeing he’d not taken a second spoonful into his mouth. Actually, he should have taken the first, as it was sitting heavy in his stomach, along with the rest of dinner. Once Sherlock and John had massacred their new portion of goodness, Lestrade finally felt ok to show how tired he was feeling. Between the activities of the past few days and his bout with imminent death, he was fading very quickly and Mycroft picked up the signals as if they were being beamed into the night by a large neon sign.

“Well, this has been a very agreeable visit, however, I believe that Gregory is ready for more rest. May I suggest that we part ways at this time so that he may achieve the sleep that he requires?”

Sherlock and John looked at each other and came to a silent agreement, which culminated in the nods Mycroft was hoping to garner.

“We accede to your request at this time, however, we have demands for tomorrow that must be satisfied.”

Vigorous nodding from John emphasized the seriousness of the matter.

“Oh, then by all means present them, Sherlock, and we shall give you our full attention.”

“Yeah, might as well know now what time you’ll be dragging me out of bed and whether or not I’ll need body armor. Those damned potatoes probably left bruises.”

“I assure you, my dear, that your skin is pristine. And glorious.”

“Ugh…can you two not save your dreary romantic prattling until I am out of earshot. Already I feel my brain beginning to grow a protective shell to repel the viscous saccharine of your wooing.”

John gave Sherlock a quick smack to the arm, which earned him a glare, but got the young Holmes back on track.
“First, we shall begin early. Our agenda is quiet full.”

“The hour shall be decided based solely upon when Gregory actually feels sufficiently rested to rise. That, I am afraid, is non-negotiable.”

A flurry of whispered discussions took place between Sherlock and John and Sherlock again stepped up as spokesperson.

“Very well. We concede that the bilge bailer could require an extra portion of sleep owing to his embarrassingly-weak constitution.”

“How magnanimous of you. Is there anything else?”

“Yes. We require a vehicle.”

“Do you plan on committing some form of robbery for which a getaway car is necessary?”

“Humorless fool. John has had but one driving lesson and I am fully prepared to embark upon an advanced course of studies.”

“Ah, you desire driving practice.”

“Yes. And I have marked on a map locations from where I desire to take water samples to bring home for analysis. Further, John insists on seeing the utterly boring ruins and has vowed to send my water samples into the sewer via the house’s effluent pipes if I attempt to obstruct his explorations.”

“Ruins?”

Mycroft smiled at his Gregory and made note of the interest clearly written in his eyes. Sherlock’s little plan might have broader value than he had first supposed.

“Yes, there are some very interesting structures, or their skeletons, on the property. There is even a small book that… oh, I believe Great-Grandpapa had commissioned… on their history. Does this interest you, my dear?”

“It does. That sounds very interesting, actually. I love stuff like that. And we’re allowed to go exploring?”

“That we are. The family does not allow public access, but academics may petition for admission to the property for the purposes of serious research. And, of course, we are free to enjoy them as we will, so long as they remain undestroyed when we depart. We have come perilously close to violating that rule from time to time. And by ‘we,’ I mean Sherlock.”

“That was not my fault! You purchased for me the incorrect concentration of several of my chemicals and the volatility of my explosive was unpredictable as a result!”

“And that you actually mixed explosives in Grandmama’s Lalique fruit bowl is in no manner a factor in assigning culpability.”

“The mud-thrower who made her crockery is of absolutely no consequence.”

“Of course not, silly me. Now, are there other items that require negotiation?”

Another hurried conversation and two heads nodding a very strong ‘yes.’

“Ah. Then, may I suggest we table the conversation until breakfast? That shall allow you time
to perhaps amend or append your current list so you are not locked into an agreement you no longer find optimal in the morning.”

“Hmmm… you may be right. Very well. We shall continue tomorrow, but do not think for a moment that we will forget or you shall be able to distract us from our initiative.”

“The furthest thing from my mind, brother dear. John, do see Sherlock safely to your room and, if possible, find a way to keep him entertained or, at the very least, confined for the remainder of the evening. This is truly not the night to require the staff find ladders to reach the roof because you have made your way upwards to test gliders made of cloth and kindling.”

The delighted gasps of both boys chilled Mycroft’s blood and he could only hope that Grandmama routinely secured, heavily, all access to particularly hazardous locations prior to any visit by Sherlock.

“Don’t worry, Mycroft. We’ll wait to do that until Greg’s better. Come on, Sherlock… nothing says we can’t plan and build our gliders even if we can’t test them.”

“That is so. Very well, we are leaving. Kindly keep your lascivious moanings to a polite volume so we are not sullied by the air from your libido-inflamed lungs.”

“You’re halfway down the hall, you rotten troll. What do you think is going to happen?”

“I shudder to even contemplate. Come along, John. They may begin at any moment and we cannot afford to be ensnared by the sticky tendrils of their lust.”

Mycroft and Lestrade laughed at the boys’ full-body quaking as they ran out of the room and Mycroft took the opportunity to place the serving tray outside in the hall to be cleared away.

“And did you enjoy your visit, my dear?”

“Crazy as always. You know we’re going to have to find some cliff somewhere for the Great Glider Competition, don’t you?”

“Perhaps a sufficiently lofty tree?”

“That’s a thought. Though Sherlock doesn’t really like climbing trees. He claims they violate him with extreme prejudice in unspeakable ways.”

“Such a horrible fate for one so young. A tree it shall be, then.”

“I love it when you’re evil.”

Mycroft smiled what he hoped was a truly wicked, supervillain smile and crawled back into bed with his lover.

“And I adore every moment that I am able to express that evil in the most enjoyable ways.”

Which he decided to begin by slowly unbuttoning his shirt and trying to do it in as much of an erotic manner as he could muster. This was in no fashion his strong point, but from the way his husband’s eyes were losing their lovely brown to the widening black of his pupils, a mental pat on the back seemed to be in order.

“You did wish for additional time when we could indulge in relaxation of a more intimate variety, did you not?"
“I remember something like that, yeah.”

And that memory, apparently, was sufficiently strong to propel his dearest to begin drawing his own shirt over his head and tossing it onto the ground with a very saucy flick of his wrist. His lifemate was simply exquisite… admittedly, his opportunities for seeing his love unclothed had been few, but still his breath was taken away by the sheer brilliance of his spouse’s form. In his most secret dreams he had fantasized about a lover who was beautiful and strong, someone who looked at him like he was someone special. And, in his most secret dreams he still never believed it would ever happen… until he met his Gregory. And now he could say with honesty that his dreams came in no manner close to what was now his reality.

“You are truly a balm for my eyes, Gregory. My eyes, my soul, my heart and my mind. There is none so perfect in this world as he who I am privileged to call my beloved.”

“God, how can you be so perfect with words? I guess I should expect it since you’re perfect for everything. Now, how about I get a better look at perfect body of yours?”

With another flick of his wrist, Lestrade popped the button at the top of his trousers and smiled in such a way that Mycroft felt the nerves through every inch of his skin tingle. This was truly the definition of heaven… only this was paradise, time aplenty with his spouse so they might celebrate and indulge the love they shared. And in paradise, one had no reason to be hesitant, so with less grace than he might have hoped, Mycroft divested himself of his trousers and pants and sighed contentedly when his equally bare spouse gently pulled him down to lay on top a body so muscular and warm that Mycroft would gladly make this his bed and enjoy the most comfortable sleep of his life.

“And I do mean that, love. I am obsessed with your body. And everything else about you. I know it’s been rough lately and I’ve gotten pretty frustrated, but I never cared for you or wanted you any less. Never thought you were anything other than the person I wanted to be with more than anyone.”

Lestrade wrapped a large hand around the back of Mycroft’s head and drew it down for a long slow kiss that had them both repositioning so that parts of their bodies had ample room to grow. And though he was, as they say, on top, Mycroft found himself very content to simply lie quietly and let his husband run hands over every reachable inch of his skin and kiss him so deeply Mycroft was certain his dearest was trying to grace him with a measure of his soul. It was not without a soft moan that Mycroft enjoyed the feeling of being held tightly and rolled so he was now in the position of looking upwards into a pair of bottomless brown eyes.

“This is us, Mycroft. No matter what happens, this is us. We work it out and find ways to make things better. And then... well, we give ourselves a little reward afterwards.”

And by reward, his spouse apparently meant starting a downward trek, scattering kisses over skin that was begging for his caress until his most needful flesh was able to find its begging satisfied in a very moist, hot and enthusiastic fashion. And that satisfaction continued long after he began to give voice to his body’s pleading. Perhaps it was a good thing that Sherlock and John were not housed in the adjacent room because Sherlock would surely have investigated the feral exclamations issuing from their bed that peaked as he poured every bit of his love and devotion down his husband’s throat. It was the work of several long moments to gather back the shattered and scattered pieces of his mind so any form of coherent speech could be possible.

“That... I am utterly awestruck by your talents, my love. You are, without doubt, a man of incredible skill…”
“Yrmmm… th’ks.”

“And I nearly quake in fear from the thought of how bitter and empty would be my life without you in it.”

“M’tu.”

“And I am considering erecting a studio adjacent to our home to film our exploits, which I shall allow Sherlock to sell to supplement his laboratory budget.”

“’k. Gd idea.”

“Gregory?”

“Hm?”

“Are you awake?”

“Uh huh?”

Mycroft lifted his head and couldn’t hold back the smile seeing Lestrade’s own head resting against his stomach, while his love’s arms reached up to cling to his body very much like a sloth baby holding its mother.

“I believe my dearest spouse has succumbed to his fatigue.”

Even from this angle, Mycroft could see the wide, pleased grin that spread over Lestrade’s face and felt his heart leap for joy. It had been an unfortunate slip of the tongue, but now… it was the most splendid of happenstances.

“M’be.”

Oh that was now a deliciously sinuous curling of his love’s body tighter to his.

“Would you perhaps prefer to move upward so that you might rest more comfortably?”

Such a precious little shake of the head. His Gregory was positively adorable when nearly in Hypnos’s grip.

“I think it would be more restful in the long term.”

Another little shake and another wriggling curl and Mycroft had to laugh at how truly… happy… he was right now. He had so rarely experienced this before he met his spouse, but now it was a common, and much treasure, thing.

“Then we shall take a vote. Those in favor of my loving husband taking his proper place in the bed, kindly raise your hand. Ah, that would be a total of one. Opposed? That would total zero. How fortunate we are for the strictures of democracy.”

Mycroft leaned forward and gently urged/dragged the nearly unconscious Lestrade up toward the head of the bed and situated him on a pillow, with his body protected from any chill by a layer of warm blankets. Only after Mycroft gave him a gentle kiss on his cheek did Lestrade rouse enough to actually open his eyes, though it was the smallest of cracks through which he was peering.

“Mycroft? That was you right and not one of those bastard phantoms.”
“I must admit to taking a small bit of pleasure while you were otherwise occupied.”

“I fell asleep on you, didn’t I? Sorry about that. At least my Mycroft got his little reward for being the best caregiver in the entire world, though. And the best lover and the best with conversation and the smartest person in the world and a whole lot of other things that I’d list, but I’d fall asleep in the middle of it and look the complete berk for a second time.”

“You appear as nothing but an angelic vision, my dear. Given the stresses of your days of late, I am most surprised you were able to remain awake through dinner. Now, return to sleep and allow your body the rest it needs. I shall guard that you have naught but pleasant dreams.”

“What? No, it’s early. Why don’t…”

Lestrade’s yawn was so large that Mycroft made a mental note to have his intended visit a dentist to tend to the small cavity that was forming in his upper left second molar.

“You were saying?”

“Evil, evil, evil… we could do something, instead.”

“I am most content to lay here and share the heat of your body.”

“I don’t want you to get bored, love.”

“As if time with you could ever be boring. And can you deny this is enjoyable in the extreme?”

Mycroft repositioned so it was his turn to curl around the body of a loved one and drank in his fiancé’s contented hum like the finest wine.

“Maybe you have a point.”

“It is a strength of mine. Now, we shall have an abundance of time to ‘do something’ tomorrow. For now, gather your strength and allow me the pleasure of simply doing what I have desired so forcefully during our separation… holding you in my arms.”

Lestrade folded his own arm around Mycroft’s shoulders and mouthed a silent ‘thank you’ towards the ceiling, hoping that it reached whatever higher power had decided to give him this amazing ginger gift.

“Well, if you put it that way. And… this is what I wanted, too. I can’t explain why it feels so right or what it was I was missing before, because it didn’t feel like I was missing anything. Then I met you and… as soon as you left there was a hole inside me. A big piece was missing and now… now I have it back.”

A sentiment the almost-tearful Mycroft shared unquestionably. He had thought his life to be whole until he met the person who showed him how farcical had been his thinking.

“And you accuse me of perfection with words… truly to you I cannot hold a candle.”

“Liar. But you do it with style, so I don’t mind.”

Another large yawn punctuated Lestrade’s sentence and Mycroft laid a string of kisses across down the heaving chest.

“Rest now, Gregory. Despite their promises, I suspect the children will not allow our morning to begin as late as we might desire.”
“You’re probably right. I’m not sure how much longer I can keep my eyes open, anyway. And we’re really going to be able to do this tomorrow night?”

“Yes, do not fear it is some grand falsehood. Grandmama is most concerned you receive the time you need to fully recover from your ordeal and a further day is certainly not out of bounds for that.”

“I’ll limp around and look sickly, just in case.”

“I shall look gravely concerned and fret noticeably.”

“Sherlock has nothing on us for drama.”

“But let us keep that secret between ourselves. It would crush him horribly to find himself out-acted.”

“Yeah, and the poor thing’s self-esteem is already at rock bottom. Can’t cut him a blow like that; it’d be mean.”

“And by thy grace, Sherlock survives another day.”

“Which hopefully won’t start at dawn.”

“Fingers crossed, my dear. And a small prayer would not be amiss.”

It wasn’t dawn, at least Lestrade could say that much. The third time he swore he heard whispering, his brain finally decided to pay attention and found Mycroft already awake and gazing at him with such an adoring look that he didn’t really care if Sherlock and John watched and took his lover in a kiss that brought him fully awake and the gagging he heard confirmed his suspicions they were not alone.

“Good morning, my love. How alluring you look wrapped in the glow of a peaceful sleep.”

Every morning, in Lestrade’s opinion, should start like this. Minus the gagging.

“Says the man so sexy his smile lights up the room.”

And that retching sounded almost real for a moment, which made Lestrade mentally take a bow.

“If we were not besieged by some form of termite-like insect, I would suggest an activity that would test the limits of our luminosity.”

“We are not Isopterans!”

“I beg to differ, Sherlock, as you bore relentlessly into the serenity of our morning. I believe you are in violation of your most sacred word and I would know the reason why, if you please.”

Mycroft and Lestrade watched two heads rise above the foot of the bed like small moons greeting dusk on some alien world.

“We are bored.”

“That is hardly a sufficient reason for disturbing our rest. Gregory requires as much sleep as he can garner and your disruptions are not helpful for his recovery.”
“Bored.”

“That does not rank as higher priority to the state of his well-being.”

“Very bored.”

“Two words does not make your case more compelling than one.”

“Really, really super bored.”

“And now we are harassed in stereo. Further, given the wealth of activities in which you could currently be engaged, I find your statement premature. Do occupy yourself with something entertaining while we enjoy a longer period of rest and…”

“We should not suffer because his pitiful physical condition and your elephantine weight have sapped your stamina!”

Mycroft readied a reply but Lestrade ran his hand across Mycroft’s stomach under their blanket to help soothe his irritated partner. True, he could use another hour or two, however, it wouldn’t kill him to get up now and if he did, he could barter his goodwill when it came time to get rid of the goblins for a nap later on or getting another early night under his belt.

“First off, you little creeping peeper, Mycroft’s in great shape, absolutely sleek and slim and I’m getting a good feel of all that right now, so I’ve got proof.”

Lestrade waited for the two boys to stop making sounds like they’d just swallowed drain cleaner before continuing.

“Second, if we get out of bed now, that just means we’ll go to bed early again, so you’ve gotta choose. Entertain yourself this morning or tonight… which is it going to be?”

Sherlock and John huddled together and whispered furiously, the only part Lestrade could understand was Sherlock explaining to his friend what a Sisyphean struggle was. Apparently, it was arguing with him.

“We choose evening. It is my duty to remediate John’s inaptitude in chess and that is a burden best suited to the evening where his mouse-like mind is not so fearful to make an appearance out of its bone-rimmed rodent hole.”

John’s loud ‘Hey!’ was supported by a pillow thrown with enough force and accuracy to knock Sherlock backwards onto the rug.

“Oh, very good, my dear. Your aim is most admirable.”

“Thanks, Greg. And we promise that you can go to bed early tonight, because I’m sure you’d like time to do other things, too.”

Mycroft’s eyebrows rose sharply and bemoaned John’s loss of innocence under Sherlock’s tutelage.

“Oh, and what do you think that’s going to be?”

“Really, my dear, this is perhaps unwise…”

“Smooching.”

Lestrade burst out laughing at Mycroft’s surprise and gave his lover a very large and loud smooch, to
the soundtrack of John’s giggles.

“Our John’s a good boy, Mycroft. Shame on you thinking otherwise.”

“John is a ridiculously romantic rhinovirus, who is completely bereft of any cognitive capital on the nature of your grotesque sexual machinations. Which I assume you are hoping to again perpetrate owing to your thankfully-shrouded nudity.”

“They’re naked? Right now?”

John’s eyes bugged and Sherlock used a finger to close his friend’s gaping mouth.

“Did you expect any nod to decorum and appropriate behavior? Pfft… I despair they even understand the concept of acceptable behavior. But you do raise a valid point. The thought of what lies beneath that phlegm-colored duvet does not bear consideration, though now I have done it, I am subject to the extreme mental and physical distress associated with my brain’s center of higher-order thinking being extracted through my left nostril. Let us depart before I become as insentient as… you. Lackey! Whale! We are going to demand our breakfast. You will meet us in our room, demonstrating no evidence of debauchery, or you will answer for your insult!”

Sherlock dragged the still shocked John out of the room, keeping his glare fixed on the older boys until he was out of the room, kicking the door shut behind him.

“I believe we have scandalized young John.”

“He’ll get over it. Probably before breakfast is over. Now, how about we take Sherlock up on his kind offer.”

“Pardon?”

“He vacated the room, didn’t he? Nice to give us a little extra time to get freshened up.”

“Gregory Lestrade… are you indulging in innuendo.”

“Maybe. Why don’t you lay right here and find out?”

Lestrade squirmed down to lie prone and patted his chest in such an inviting way that Mycroft had no choice but to obey.

“Now, you know what I’ve been missing?”

“No, but I am extremely desirous of discovering.”

“I haven’t had one nice territory mark on my body since you left. I think it’s time you fixed that, don’t you.”

The full-body shudder that rocked Mycroft was nearly orgasmic and, again, he had to marvel at how perfect was his chosen mate. Nay, not chosen… fated. Only the Fates could have bestowed such a phenomenally well-matched man into his life.

“Yeah, my Mycroft likes that idea.”

Liked? Was so utterly transfixed by the idea he could barely think was actually closer to the truth. Especially when one of his husband’s hands wriggled between their closely pressed bodies and took to stroking a part of him that greatly appreciated the attention.
“Go ahead, love… take a bite.”

And quick as an adder, Mycroft dug his teeth into the flesh of his lover’s neck, gently at first, but with increasing ferocity as Lestrade wrapped his large hand around both their lengths of needy flesh.

“Why don’t you move for me, too? Mark me up with your come as well as your teeth.”

Nothing in this world could have stopped Mycroft from snapping his hips forward at his husband’s command and continuing to thrust into the tight space his lover had created, moaning quietly and continuously, placing marks across Lestrade’s shoulder and chest until he felt his precious spouse gasp sharply and stiffen, which triggered his own loud and wonderfully messy release, from which it took more than a little while to recover his senses.

“Now that’s the way to start a day. Man I love showing me a good time and now I get another hot shower in the bargain. Really, there’s nothing could be better.”

A sentiment with which Mycroft heartily agreed. As soon as his body again respected his demands, he was able to roll off of his lover and, after another steadying breath, rose and extended his hand to assist Lestrade out of the bed. A hot shower was going to be a true delight this morning. Another opportunity to run hands over his Gregory’s body, another chance to hide away from the world and share kisses that struck directly to his soul. And under the warm water, the new decorations on his lover’s skin would bloom spectacularly and, as his love had expressed, nothing could be better.

“Now you are late! We have nearly petrified waiting for you!”

John vigorously nodded his agreement, but the force of his support was somewhat damped by the fact he was simultaneously pushing a heavily jam-laden piece of toast into his mouth.

“Since there was no specific time for our meeting, it is impossible to be declared late. Kindly police the accuracy of your accusations.”

“Your verbal flooery shall not save you, Mycroft. Already your day sees a black mark. Pray you do not receive another.”

Lestrade ran a hand along Mycroft’s back and the two shared a grin before having a seat at the small table that had been set for breakfast. Mycroft made certain to take a position across from his spouse so that he could continue to stare at the bright red spot positioned low on his Gregory’s neck. It had been an argument of some minutes to convince his dearest to wear a shirt that would allow it to be visible for his viewing pleasure and that pleasure was toe-curlingly delicious.

“So, what are we starting with today? I’m sure you two have things planned down to the minute.”

“Of course! We scripted a carefully-orchestrated plan and you will follow it to the letter.”

“Unless we change it, which might happen because if we find something funner to do than we’re already doing, we going to do that instead. I made Sherlock put that down in writing at the bottom of our list.”

“The manner in which you murder the English language is most heinous, John Watson.”

John’s only response was to run his finger through the jam on his remaining slice of toast and extend it perilously close to Sherlock’s face. For a child entirely content to smear himself with leaf paste, the
thought of being slathered by someone else was, apparently, terrifying, if Sherlock’s widened eyes and leaning back in his chair could be believed.

“Now that we have established that our day’s plan is somewhat fluid, I shall take the opportunity to remind you that nothing you concoct shall be approved if I deem it too strenuous for Gregory.”

“Mycroft, I’m not feeble.”

“Of course not, my dear. However, you are compromised and it is my duty to see that your condition does not degrade further.”

“Then you are too late! Already he has contracted the pox.”

Sherlock thrust an accusing finger towards Lestrade’s neck and John drew up his legs to kneel on his chair and examine the disease.

“I’ll check it out, I’m going to be a doctor, you know.”

“Look, John…”

“Be silent, peasant. For all your vacuous mind knows, you are in the process of organ failure and shall soon be fitted for your coffin.”

“Nope. Sorry, Sherlock… it’s a hickey. Harry’s had them, so I’m pretty sure about my diagnosis.”

Mycroft mouthed ‘Harry?’ to Lestrade who gave him the ‘not now’ shake of the head. That wasn’t a topic to probe at the start of their day.

“Ugh… I should have known. Actually, that is doubly true for I have previously suffered their primitive need to proverbially anoint themselves with each other’s urine. Utterly disgusting, even in this form.”

“Sherlock… people don’t pee on each other. That’s just dumb.”

“Actually, pebble…”

Mycroft quickly shoved a piece of melon into Sherlock’s mouth and wondered for the thousandth time where his brother was getting his education.

“Done looking at my neck, you ghoul?”

“I’m not a ghoul! I’m a doctor-in-training, so that’s my job. Anyway, hickeys are boring. They don’t ooze or anything fun like that.”

And, again, Mycroft mentally rubbed his hands together in delight over John’s suitability for his brother’s bosom companion. For his part, John returned to his toast, Sherlock scowled as he chewed his fruit, Lestrade grabbed his and Mycroft’s plates to fill up and the older Holmes felt such surge of comfort and domestic bliss that it was almost overwhelming. Every second of this he was committing to memory for it was moments like these that he suffered the demands of his work. These are the people he must keep safe, give a good life…”

“Hey! Don’t put sausage in my hair!”

Even if they were somewhat sodden with sausage grease.
After a protracted and eventful breakfast, it was decided that the first order of business was the boy’s driving practice. Mycroft had to admit that he was extremely excited for this day. All the little activities and escapades that were commonplace to his family were now his to share. It might be for only a day, but it was something about which he had longed so desperately.

“Why are you still standing here, Mycroft? Must I provide the sufficient torque to inspire your breakfast-bloated body into rolling towards the garage to secure a vehicle for our use? I am not currently in possession of a tree limb of sufficient length to act as the necessary lever to accomplish that herculean task, so try to shift some of your corpulence slightly to the left and see if that serves the same purpose.”

“Shut it, you mannerless little bastard. Your brother’s not fat, but if he was, that’d just be more lusciousness for me to lick.”

While the two boys held each other, weeping in agony at their disgust, Lestrade snuck a very hot and wet kiss from his lover’s lips and stood up, taking a moment to finish off the very strong tea.

“Come on, love. Let’s go find the most tight-clutched, hard-steering car Grandmama’s got and get it ready for a beating. You two make sure you have all your stuff ready and meet us outside.”

Mycroft gladly followed after his husband and took the opportunity out of sight of the younger eyes to take another kiss to start his morning.

“This is unutterably remarkable, Gregory; I shall not lie. I am very much looking forward to this day.”

“I can’t wait to share it with you, love. Let’s just hope everyone makes it through alive.”

“If it is any consolation, I have already amended my will to ensure you are forever to live comfortably.”

“Aw… that’s sweet of you. Tell you what, if I die, you can have my porn stash.”

“That is a very fair trade. Your taste in erotica is certainly to be to my liking.”

“Maybe that’s something we can check at some point.”

“Oh?”

“Why flip through pages alone when you can have someone do it with you? Get a few ideas… try them out…”

“I shall make that a priority for when we return home.”

And, one day, ‘home’ would be a single dwelling and there would be no need to hide their reading material under loose floorboards and among bountiful whorls of fabric of window treatments. One of the many joys of married life…

With a proper vehicle selected, Mycroft and Lestrade joined the very impatiently waiting boys and endured the long negotiation between said boys as to who would have first right to pilot their car. It finally took Lestrade walking off and returning with a second vehicle from the staff-use pool to end
the battle.

“Here. John, you drive Mycroft and Sherlock, you drive me. We’ll go get your water samples first, so Mycroft, tell the little cabbie how to get where we’re going.”

“What an excellent compromise. I bow to your skills at mediation, my dear. John, shall we?”

“Yeah! I get to be a cabbie! That’s nearly as good as being a doctor!”

“Only you would find a near-servant position to be acceptable, John Watson  I, however, do not.”

“Then you don’t have to drive, you little troll, and we can all get chauffeured by John.”

“That is not acceptable, either.”

“Looks like it’s not a good day to be you, Sherlock.”

“Such is always the case when I am surrounded by buffoons. And lackeys.”

“Alright… John, you lead the way and this one will follow after since he’s having a little mood.”

John scampered to the car and jumped into the driver’s seat.

“WHAT! I shall lead the procession or I shall know the reason why!”

“Just told you, you’re being a tit. Besides, you’re allowed to drive faster than John and I don’t want to lose sight of them in case something happens to the car. You can lead for the second leg of the trip if you want.”

“Very well… I am only partially mollified, but I suppose it shall have to do.”

“Mycroft, you ok supervising our little cabbie behind the wheel?”

“But of course. I am actually most eager for the task. I shall now make him ready to depart. Sherlock, is there any particular water source you first wish to sample?”

“The lake to the east of the old gamekeeper’s house.”

“Very well, we shall see you again shortly.”

Mycroft joined John in the car and Sherlock stormed towards his vehicle, making a grand show of adjusting the mirrors. Lestrade slid in the passenger’s seat and waited for John to get rolling. And waited. And waited…

“See! If I was leading this expedition we would already be at our destination! You know nothing of the proper assigning of responsibility. It shall forever be your fate to toil in the menial ranks of garbage collectors and road pavers because a supervisory position is light-years beyond the range of your paltry abilities.”

“Blah blah blah… I’m definitely putting a sports period back into your school schedule since it can’t be good the only exercise you get is running your mouth.”

“Pfft… even your threats are flaccid. You know full well that if you did impose such a torment upon me, it would be visited back upon you tenfold. And upon the sports instructor. And the inventory of sports equipment…”
“It’d all be worth it to watch your teeny little legs running back and forth chasing a ball or doing a few calisthenics. Of course, neither one of us is going to get our fun if those two don’t get moving. What the hell… wait here.”

Lestrade got out of the car and walked over to knock on John’s window.

“Oh, hi Greg. What’s wrong?”

“The fact we’re still here. Something wrong with the car?”

“Uh… no. Mycroft’s just teaching me about the internal combustion engine and thermoconomics.”

The slightly glazed look in John’s eyes and the very proud one in Mycoft’s warmed Lestrade’s heart.

“Very good John, however, it is thermodynamics. Our discussion on economics was focused on the automotive industry, the impact on the Western European labor base and its comingling with the coattails of the Industrial Revolution.”

Lestrade knew, absolutely and without question, that it was not possible to love his partner any more deeply.

“Well, I tell you what… how about you continue your lesson while we’re actually in motion. Sherlock’s getting fussy and you know how quickly that can roll downhill.”

“Oh, you are quite right. Very well, we shall begin our pilgrimage. John, please ignite our chariot and begin our adventure.”

“What?”

“Start her up, lad. Let’s get going.”

“Yes! Can I do second gear?”

“That’s up to Mycroft, he’s in charge.”

With a large smile at the very excited boy and another at his equally excited partner, Lestrade strolled back to the car, motioning Sherlock to get it started as he approached.

“Well? What atrocity did Fatcroft perpetrate that has impeded my day?”

“He and John were just chatting and lost track of what they were doing. See, there they go. Now, don’t follow too close, because John could stop quickly and you don’t want to hit him.”

“The speed at which we are traveling would be considered laughably slow by a garden slug. A collision would likely not produce the impact required to ruffle my hair.”

“Do it anyway. You gotta learn how to drive with other people on the road and that sometimes means doing things that you don’t want to, like going slow, if it makes things safer.”

“You speaking on the subject of automotive safety? HAH! I would collapse in a fit of uncontrollable laughter if it would not besmirch my stellar driving record.”

“Hey! I’m… I’m doing better about… speed. You have to admit, you don’t yell at me nearly as much as you used to and that’s not because you’ve started to like me or anything.”
“Perish the thought and, if forced, I might admit that your foot has caressed the accelerator with a more gentle touch of late.”

“That was almost romantic. You starting to get a thing for cars? No shame if you are… it’s good for a boy to have a car thing.”

“Do not transfer your fetishes onto me. Automobiles are transport, nothing more.”

“Oh, so you don’t care what kind of car Mycroft gets you when you’re actually old enough to have one?”

“Of course not! As long as it functions, everything else is immaterial. You… do you know what he might be considering?”

The poorly-hid enthusiasm in Sherlock’s voice made Lestrade laugh and he gave Sherlock’s curls a ruffle that didn’t require impacting the car in front of them.

“No, but I told him you can’t have anything until you’re ready and that you should do something to earn part of the purchase price. I probably won’t be working at the shop by then, so maybe you could take my afterschool hours to earn some cash. You’re going to need to pay for petrol anyway, and that’s not cheap.”

“You cannot sell me into slavery! I am not indigent! My flesh is not your Soylent Green!”

“Calm down… Mycroft already killed that idea, so you’re safe. The offer holds, though. Want some spending money, I can probably make something happen.”

“You should discuss that with John. He is poor and has no expectations in life other than that of continual drudgery.”

“Ok, I’ll see if I can get John a job when he’s old enough. But don’t come crying when he’s going to the pub or the cinema and you can’t go because you’re skint.”

“As if that could ever occur. You seem to forget to which family you have given in servitude.”

“And you seem to forget that Mycroft’s not going to give you rolls of notes to play with as you please. It’s always good to have your own source of income that other people don’t control.”

“Finally you say something worthwhile. However, I already have an independent source of income.”

“Oh? What?”

“You.”

“Wrong.”

“I parry with Right.”

“I’m not your personal bank.”

“Bank? Of course not… your limited means barely enable the grossest, leanest of survivals, however, it is sufficient for my purposes.”

“You remember this next time you want some copper wire or that girl wash stuff that made the lady at the chemist’s look at me funny.”
“Actually I do require more douche as my work with masking the smell of decomposition is only half complete.”

“Ok, I’ll pick some up when we get back. Same kind?”

“Yes, but purchase at least eight bottles, for I shall be testing two rat carcasses this time.”

“Fine, I’m sure they’ll be happy to see me at the till.”

“I don’t know why… I am never happy to see you.”

“Love you, too, Sherlock.”

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“You are doing an excellent job, John. I am very impressed with your skill.”

“Thanks! And it’s only my second time driving! As soon as I can, I’m going to get a job and start earning money so I can have a car of my own.”

Such a silly thought. John would have his choice of vehicles and they would already have one selected and ready for the day he acquired his driving license.

“That is very industrious of you. You and Gregory forever astonish me with your dedication to hard work and independence.”

“Well, if you don’t work, you don’t have any money and it’s not a lot of fun not having any money. Sometimes my dad lost his job and we wouldn’t have any money for a few weeks until he found another one. One time, he traded unloading the truck at the grocer’s for the dented-up cans and ugly vegetables no one really wanted to buy and that was great because we had lots of food and some of it I’d never even tried before!”

Mycroft smiled, though his heart ached for the boy. But, it was irrelevant now. As his husband had taken John under his wing, so would he. Whereas he could not, perhaps, give the daily nurturing that his spouse could provide, he could ensure that young John lacked for nothing in his life. And he wanted to be a doctor… work would begin immediately on preparing the path to that goal. What would be a good name for a scholarship? He would have to give it some thought… Gregory would surely object if he simply funded John’s education outright, so steps would have to be taken…

“A very lucky piece of fortune, I do admit. However, you are receiving sufficient food at school, are you not?”

If not, that would be rectified immediately.

“Sure. And Greg gets us something when we’re out shopping. He cooks for us, too, and he’s pretty good. Not as good as his mum, but still pretty good. And Mrs. Holmes’s cooks are amazing! You and Sherlock and Greg are so lucky…”

“And now you share our luck. I do hope you realize that your company is something we enjoy and cherish, John, and that you shall continue to be welcome and included in our visits to Grandmama, as well as our activities when we are home. We consider you a part of our family, Gregory and I, and are very much looking forward to a long and happy association. Is that something you find agreeable?”

John made one of Lestrade’s predicted quick stops and stared at Mycroft with wide eyes and a very
open mouth.

“John?”

“Really? You really think that?”

“But of course! You are a splendid friend to Sherlock and a worthy child on your own merits. How could we not desire your inclusion in our family bond?”

“Oh…”

John launched over and gave Mycroft a hard and long hug, before pulling back and wiping his eyes, though he tried to hide it.

“Thanks, Mycroft. That’s… thanks. Really.”

“You are very welcome, John. Now, I do believe that the incessant blaring with which we are being assaulted is an expression of displeasure at our lack of motion. Shall we rectify that and give Sherlock’s horn-hitting hand a respite?”

“Yes sir! We’re on our way!”

John’s large smile nearly sparked the ignition on its own and in a moment they were back on the road. Mycroft sat back and thought how near a thing it had been for him to miss this. As loathsome as was Sherlock’s plan, it actually accomplished its objective. Perhaps the boy had some Holmes in him, after all…

Two lakes, two ponds, and four streams later, Sherlock announced he had enough water samples for his experiment and the cars finally pulled up to the remains of some ancient great house and outbuildings that Lestrade was fairly certain he’d seen pictures of in one of his history textbooks.

“This is great! Sherlock… I can’t even say how lucky you are! Come on, let’s go!”

John dragged Sherlock off and Mycroft walked over to put his arms around his own amazed companion.

“Does this meet with your approval, my love?”

“This is amazing, Mycroft. Seriously, I’m in awe of things like this. You know it exists, but never seem to ever see it for real. And now I am!”

“And whatever else you desire to see, we shall see, Gregory. That much I can give to you. We shall travel the globe, if that is your wish, and visit whatever has caught your interest. In truth, I am very much looking forward to traveling with you at my side. I have seen many beautiful and wondrous things in this world, however, never with anyone who made those sights something other than pretty pictures with no life of their own. With you, that shall change and it is yet another thing for which you have my thanks and my love.”

Lestrade spun in Mycroft’s arms and kissed him gently.

“Now that sounds like fun. We can start planning our first trip as soon as we get home, so I can figure out how to put away some money.”

A few little white lies concerning student fares and family properties abroad would make that trip
happen sooner than later. And, one day, when all he had was shared with his husband, his Gregory would feel far more comfortable using their money for its intended purpose – funding the little things they could share and enjoy as a couple.

“I quite agree. Now, shall we also begin our explorations? I am a most capable tour guide and I ask little in gratuity beyond your manly presence.”

“And my manly hands on your manly arse.”

“That goes without saying.”

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A long morning into afternoon with the boys roaming through and over the ruins, a picnic lunch that stayed peacefully focused on eating and not food-based combat and a ride back that Mycroft agreed John could upgrade to second and, for the straighter, smoother stretches, third gear, kept everyone occupied and satisfied and it was with true regret that the cars were replaced in the garage and their adventure came to an end.

“My water samples must be handled with care. Do not drop them.”

“I don’t think you can bruise water, Sherlock.”

“Silence, John Watson. You will not contradict me on matters of science.”

“I do believe he has a valid point, Sherlock. As you are not studying sedimentation rates, a jostled sample bottle will not impact your research.”

“Silence, Lord LardPail. You will not contradict me on any matter whatsoever.”

Lestrade thumped Sherlock on the head with a flick of his fingers.

“Be nice or it’s no pub for you for a month. And I know you can’t survive without chips for that long.”

“I can survive quite handily, you idiotic peon. However, since you nearly inhabit the pub as your primary home, given your tendency towards drink and persons of loose morals, that would make infrequent the numbers of instances I could continue my ongoing research on the social behavior of the nightsoil class by directly observing you. That I do not find acceptable.”

“Lovely. John see he gets cleaned up, without punching him if you’re able, and we’ll meet you in the library for a little reading or chess time. How’s that sound?”

“Great! And I’ll keep my fists to myself as best I can. Ten minutes?”

“Ten sounds good.”

Sherlock’s pout lasted as long as it took for John to start running and then it was a race to get to the bedroom first. Lestrade and Mycroft stood laughing a moment then had their own race, which involved as much cheating and skullduggery as did Sherlock and John’s.

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Lestrade was actually surprised by Sherlock and John barging into the bedroom, but he wasn’t really sure why. Nothing the boys did should surprise him one bit.
“Why are you two here?”

“I calculated the probability that you and Mycroft would succumb to your reproductive urges and found the value unacceptably high. We are here to ensure that does not occur.”

“How nice. Look, love, we’ve got chaperones. I thought the little monster had gotten that out of his system, but I guess I was wrong.”

“Sherlock is nothing if not dogged, my dear. Perhaps we should humor him for the duration… it should make our evening a far more pleasant one than if we do not.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Ok you two, consider us officially de-lusted and ready for a quiet afternoon of simple and wholesome activities. That what you want to hear?”

“I prefer words that demonstrate some appreciable degree of polysyllabim, but it shall suffice.”

Sherlock nodded to John and the two boys stood on either side of the open door and glowered until Mycroft and Lestrade started walking and left the room, though the older boys shared a grin at Sherlock’s mighty snort when they held hands strolling through the corridor.

The older boys were still holding hands and smiling at each other when Mycroft pushed open the library door, but quickly dropped them when they heard John’s squeak.

“Mrs. Lestrade!”

Four pairs of shocked eyes stared at the woman having tea with Grandmama, who made a faint wave of her hand to direct the boys to come in.

“Finally you have arrived. We despaired of seeing your faces before my dear Elizabeth had to depart.”

Sherlock stormed in the room and looked around with his hands on his hips.

“And who is this Elizabeth? We have no cousin by that name and the room is blessedly empty of any of my cripplingy boring relatives.”

“She means Mum, you bastard. Oops! Sorry, Mum.”

“And again you demonstrate your dull-wittedness. That is Mother Lestrade. One would think you would have some awareness of this basic fact given she birthed you, which must have been an appallingly horrific experience given the fact that you were what she saw after hours of nearly unendurable pain.”

“Sherlock, please take three or four biscuits and consume them simultaneously, if you please. We would all benefit from the silence.”

Sherlock actually obeyed Grandmama’s order and motioned John over to join him, who, at least waved at Lestrade’s mother before diving into the treats.

“And I did not commission statues of the two of you, so I assume you are actually still capable of independent locomotion. Take a seat and join us.”

Mycroft looked at Lestrade who looked back with as much dread as his lover. This was their worst nightmare come true and it was only the strength they gained by linking their hands again for a moment that spurred them forward.
“Ah, Moth… Mrs. Lestrade, how good of you to visit Grandmama. I do hope you have been enjoying yourself.”

“It’s been lovely, Mycroft. Thank you. Greg… anything to say to your Mum?”

“Uh… no.”

“Love you, too, son.”

“And Grandmama… I do hope you have not been boring dear Mrs. Lestrade with any dusty family tales best left to lie quietly.”

“No, actually. That is precisely the purpose of photographs.”

And yes, there next to Mother Lestrade was an album that Mycroft knew very well was dedicated to him. Specifically the one for his very young years. How delightful.

“You were a cute baby, Mycroft. Next time you visit, I’ll pull out Greg’s pictures for you to look through, so don’t feel like you’re the only one getting cooed over.”

And Mycroft would have copies made of every single photograph known of his beloved for his own personal album. Actually, he somewhat suspected Grandmama had already struck that deal from the slight twinkle in her eye.

“I’m surprised Grandmama can even lift that album. Even photographs of your enormous baby belly have the weight of a bar of lead.”

Greg and his mother both gave Sherlock a swat and Mycroft chuckled at his brother’s annoyance and the fact he moved to the other side of the table in self-defense.

“Mycroft, kindly refresh our tea and serve a cup for yourself and Gregory. There is chocolate for the boys. Gregory, why don’t you entertain us with your day’s agenda. I was under the impression it was a busy one.”

Being in the center of oncoming headlights was not Lestrade’s idea of a placid afternoon tea, but with both his mother and Grandmama staring at him, there was no chance he could leap out the window without anyone noticing.

“Uh… sure.”

And, in the most entertaining way he could, Lestrade told the story of their day, minus any parts involving him, Mycroft and orgasms, though both his mother and Grandmama very pointedly noticing his love bite didn’t help matters any. What did help was Sherlock and John interjecting at regular intervals to actually make the story an entertaining one and by the end, Mycroft was ringing for another pot of tea as the first had long been drained.

“Sounds like you lot had a great time. And you got to learn some history, so I guess I can excuse you from school without too much guilt. But don’t think you’re going to avoid it for too much longer, young man. Two or three more days and that’s it.”

Mycroft and Greg shared a look and hoped they were keeping their very manly cool despite their glee. Two or three more days. Two or three more days. This was heaven-sent and already their libido was rising in anticipation of so many more nights together in each other’s arms.

“Thanks, Mum. But I know it’s just because you like having the house to yourself. You’re not
fooling anyone with your being nice.”

“Ok, you caught me. It’s been party after party with you gone. But I’ve left all the mess for you to clean up. Even bought a new broom for the occasion.”

“Great. Probably a stack of dishes sky high, too.”

“Bought new ones, just so I could dirty twice as many as a surprise.”

“I’ll get some gloves so I don’t get charwoman’s hands.”

“What a good son I have.”

“I quite agree. You have masterfully raised Gregory, Elizabeth. He is a young man of extreme worth and I value him most highly.”

Lestrade hoped the heat he felt on his face wasn’t a blush, but his partner’s smile told him he was being stupid.

“Well, thanks for that. I tried, at least, but I really think he did most of the work himself. My Greg’s a good one and, from what I’ve seen Mycroft’s just as special. I couldn’t ask for anyone better for Greg. Not in a hundred years.”

Now it was Mycroft’s turn to blush and it was fortunate that the tea arrived to distract the women because neither boy was certain they could withstand the motherly doting for much longer. Or Sherlock and John’s self-strangulation…

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After another hour or so that was nearly lethal to Sherlock and John, who were excused halfway through to set up their chess board, it was time for Lestrade’s mother to leave and, after a long string of farewells and exchanges of promises to visit, Lestrade walked her to the waiting car.

“I guess Grandmama made good on her invitation to tea.”

“Greg…”

“Mum…”

It was only now that Lestrade noticed that his mother’s composure was slipping and he was actually starting to worry.

“Greg…”

“Mum…”

“They’re… rich.”

“Um… you knew that already.”

“Nooooo… I knew Mycroft was rich, but not rich. This is a fucking palace! Pardon my French.”

“Actually, they dropped that part since people kept trying to stop in for a tour.”

“Don’t get cheeky with me, lad. And powerful! I had no idea… did you have any idea?”
“Sort of… yeah. I mean, I told you Mycroft did important work. I wasn’t exaggerating when I said that. He does very important things and it’s going to get more and more important as he gets older, I suspect.”

“Greg… she took a call from the Prime Minister right there in front of me. The PM! And she basically told him to sod off and call back later because she was busy!”

“Yeah, that sounds like Grandmama. I think she can pretty much do anything she wants to. Someday, Mycroft will be able to, as well, because he’s being brought up to… well, replace her is my best guess.”

“And… are you ok with that?”

Lestrade stared at his mother, desperately trying to figure out what was at the basis of her question. She’d never shown any problem with Mycroft’s money before…

“Yes, I’m ok with that. It’s hard sometimes, because he’s not been around and that’s going to keep happening but… if you’re worried he treats me poorly because we don’t have any money, then stop. Mycroft treats me like I’m no different from him. He doesn’t try and make me into a copy of him, either. He lets me be me and he wants that – wants who I am now and not someone he remade into a posher person so he isn’t embarrassed at parties. Which he isn’t, by the way. We had people here this weekend, important political people, and he wanted me right in the thick of it, except when they had secret business to do. But that part I understand, so it’s not a problem. For the rest of it, though, I was right there with him the whole time and he never tried to hide that I was his partner.”

That seemed to break his mother out of her mood and earned him a very sly grin.

“Partner, is it? You now, I’m not so old and un-cool that I don’t know what that means.”

“The fact you said un-cool sort of contradicts that.”

“Shut it, you. So, you’re not engaged, but you call him your partner.”

“It’s our word so it means what we want it to.”

“And just what is that, if I may ask?”

Great. One of those talks.

“Nothing more than what I’ve already told you.”

“Maybe my mind’s going soft, so lay it out for me. I did say un-cool, so you understand how bad things could be.”

“Fine. I love Mycroft and he loves me. We’re going to be together for what I hope is forever. I want him in my life however I can have him. Rich or poor, I don’t care. Right now, things are up in the air and we’re not going to make any formal commitments until he… ok, that’s enough of that.”

“No, I really don’t think it is. Come on, Greg. I’m not going to yell, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Yes, that was exactly what he was worried about, but Mum was usually good about keeping her word for things like this.

“Before Mycroft goes off to school we’re going to… we both want something more official
before he goes away. Not a wedding, but maybe something that leads up to one later.”

Lestrade hoped his mother could keep her word about yelling, because he really didn’t want her to shriek at him after the very first time he said aloud that he and Mycroft were probably getting engaged before next autumn.

“Oh… well, that’s about what I was expecting.”

“What!”

“Greg, I’m not stupid. I’ve seen you two together and I may not have had it with your father, but I know true love when I see it. And you’re going about it the right way, learning who you each are both with and without the other one around. He’s not trying to change you and I doubt you’re trying that with him, either. And if you don’t think I know what you’re up to when you get some time alone with him, then you’re completely daft. But, you’re not letting your own life revolve around that or him and that’s what’s important. You’re young, Greg, but I can’t say you’re behaving that way, so if you two decide to make an announcement before he goes off to school, then you’ll have my support.”

Lestrade blinked in shock a few times and sputtered a moment before he could actually get any words to come out of his mouth.

“Really? You’re sure about this?”

“Yeah… because I know you’re sure about this. And… I’ll be honest. All of the money, the power… I admit that I’m still in awe over it all, but it’s more than I ever dreamed for you and I’m thrilled for it. I’m absolutely thrilled that my Greg won’t have the worries I’ve had, suffer the lean times like we had to go through ever again… not that you need Mycroft to build a good life for yourself, but now you can really concentrate on doing what you want to do without having to think about whether or not it’s going to pay the mortgage or put food on the table. Money doesn’t buy happiness, but if you’re already happy, it can make life a hell of a lot easier and I cannot possibly tell you how glad I am you’ve found that. A good man who loves you and a chance to actually do what you want in life. What you want to do, not what you have to do. It’s a huge difference, Greg. A huge difference.”

Getting a hug from your mother at his age should be embarrassing, but Lestrade gripped his mum as fiercely as she held onto him and it was a very long minute before she finally let him go.

“Oh, now that I’ve been all sappy I’ll tell you that I do expect you home in a few days and you will have a lot of work to make up for school. Don’t worry about the shop… your uncle is as thrilled as I am about you and Mycroft so he’s fine covering your shift while you get yourself some sweet loving.”

“You did not just say that.”

“I certainly did. I spared you the hip wiggle, though, because you’re sort of a sensitive boy.”

“You are leaving now.”

“I am leaving now. But, I’m coming back in a few weeks for a little cocktail thing Rowena is having for you two, so you will be helping me find a dress next weekend.”

“Rowena? Do you mean Grandmama?”

“And Sherlock thinks my name is Mother. What is wrong with the younger generation?”
“Ok, I am officially overloaded. And don’t worry about buying a dress; one will probably be hand-delivered to you before whatever the hell you’re talking about happens.”

“You don’t know women at all, do you, Greg. It’s a lucky thing you decided to take up with a man or you’d make some poor girl insane. What will happen is that a nice, new suit will be waiting for you to change into when you get here and that’s with my approval since I am all about seeing my Greg in an expensive set of clothes. The photos alone will make me the talk of the town. Now, you have a good time and don’t cause any trouble. I’ll see you soon.”

After a peck on his cheek, Lestrade watched his mother get into the waiting car and drive off, looking back once and waving to him with a large smile on her face. After a few minutes of staring up into the sky, Lestrade pulled himself together and was entirely unsurprised to find Mycroft hovering just outside the door waiting for him.

“Did… did Mother Lestrade find her afternoon agreeable? I know Grandmama can be intimidating, at times, but she was very taken with your mother, I assure you, and…”

Lestrade settled his nervous lover with a slow and tender kiss and felt something melt inside him as Mycroft’s arms wrapped around his waist to return his affection.

“Yeah… she did. Believe me, she’d have said something if she didn’t. And she’s coming back in a few weeks. Actually we are, too. Some cocktail thing, probably so Grandmama can show off the happy couple to her mates.”

“Ah… that explains her inquiry about both your and my personal schedules for the near future. I suspect there shall be relatives involved, as well, so do expect to be besieged with Holmes family drama from all directions. Sherlock comes by his personality naturally, I am sorry to admit.”

“That’s alright, love. I’m sure it’ll be a good time. You’ll be there, so it can’t go otherwise, can it?”

“Your flattery is most appreciated. Did… I could not hear you, my dear, but your body language was quite confounding. There was nothing in your conversation that upset you, was there?”

Upset? That wasn’t quite the right word, but he couldn’t actually think of any single one that fit.

“No, not really. It’s just…”

Looking into his Mycroft’s beautiful eyes, Lestrade realized that ‘upset’ truly didn’t fit how he felt. He’d been given something very special and if anyone could appreciate how special were his mother’s words, it was the man in whose arms he’d found his future.

“Mum… well, she said… ok, you know what we talked about?”

“I believe I require an additional hint.”

“Yeah, you probably do… ok, you know what we talked about talking about… before you went off to school? The thing we were going to talk about before you left so we could… well, so we’d have a little firmer understanding of who we were. To each other, I mean?”

Mycroft’s eyes nearly popped out of their sockets and it was all he could do to nod.

“Ok, well… Mum said it was ok. She’d support us when it happens. Oh god, are you breathing?”
Mycroft nodded quickly, even though it was an utter lie. He wasn’t breathing. How could he waste time breathing when his mother-in-law had given him her son’s hand in marriage!

“Mother Lestrade… she gave her blessing?”

“I guess you could say that.”

“Gregory… does that mean… you would not have broached the subject if you did not… oh, my love…”

“Mycroft… are you crying?”

“I am. And I do not care a whit. Gregory, my beautiful, precious Gregory… are you saying that if I… if a certain question passes my lips as I prepare to leave your side for a time… you shall say yes?”

Now it was Lestrade’s turn to feel a tendril of wetness slide down his cheek. He wasn’t ready to be a husband yet, but he was getting there, a little more each day, and by the time Mycroft asked his question, there would be only one answer he could possibly give.

“Yes, I’ll say yes. I want all of that with you, Mycroft, even if it takes us a long time to get there… I want to be that for-the-rest-of-your-life person for you.”

It was a good thing Lestrade had his arms around Mycroft or his partner would have collapsed into a puddle on the marble steps and, even though another tear was following the first, he couldn’t help but feel a surge of joy at his Mycroft’s reaction. He had a man who loved him… not everyone had that. Not by a long shot, but he had. He had someone who loved him. Thought he was special and told him that all the time. Meant it, too. It was never empty words with Mycroft. Every ‘I love you’ was absolutely sincere and every compliment… every term of endearment was given straight from his heart. When Mycroft proposed, he would absolutely say yes. There was no way he could ever let go of this man…

“Thank you, Gregory… you have no idea what this means to me.”

“I think I do, because it means that much to me, too. Hey, how about we go inside and celebrate a little? Some of Grandmama’s brandy, a good fire and you in my arms… I don’t know exactly what we are now, but whatever it is, it’s definitely worth celebrating, don’t you think?”

Worth celebrating? They were engaged… perhaps they could not yet use the term officially, but the question had, for all intents and purposes, been asked and answered. And it was a union blessed by both family matriarchs, so the only obstacle between themselves and the beckoning altar was time, and it was a kind obstacle. A gentle one. Oh yes, a celebration was most certainly in order and later, when the children retired, a second celebration would commence. One that would last until dawn…

“I believe that to be a splendid idea. And Gregory… I love you. So very, very dearly…”

“And I love you, Mycroft. Later on, I’m going to show you just how much.”

“Oh, I adore it when we are of like mind.”

“And isn’t it nice that it happens so often?”

Oh yes, it was very nice. Very nice indeed…
Chapter 14

Mycroft and Lestrade returned to the library where Sherlock and John had been drafted into a game of cards with Grandmama with surprisingly little protest from Sherlock, likely because he was trying to slip cards into his sleeve to bolster his chances of victory.

“Ah, Gregory… I take it your mother has been seen off properly.”

“Yes, ma’am. And she’s looking forward to coming back. Said there was some cocktail party you’re planning.”

“Yes, it has been awhile since I have entertained purely for pleasure and I believe I have found an occasion that merits an entertaining gathering. Nothing overly formal, however, it shall warrant new suits for the gaggle of you. Your appointment with the tailor is scheduled for tomorrow morning, so prepare your day’s agenda accordingly.”

John’s ‘Yeah!’ and Sherlock’s ‘Never!’ came in unison, balancing each other out nicely, though John’s excited in-seat dance ultimately tipped the balance in his favor.

“Of course, Grandmama. We shall set aside the necessary time. Not too early, however. Gregory still requires a substantial amount of rest.”

“Mycroft…”

“Fear not, my dear. We shall not rise one moment in the morning before you are ready.”

“Does that include the time you require for your lustful proclivities or simply for Lestrade to waken from what must be a nearly nightmarish slumber regularly interrupted by your mooing and chewing of cud?”

Mycroft ‘accidentally’ shook Sherlock’s arm so his hidden stash of cards was revealed and continued forward to take a seat next to John, smiling as his new almost-official fiancé took the Sherlock-adjacent position.

“Sherlock, being discovered while cheating is careless and decidedly non-Holmesian. Kindly bring your best effort to the game or do not play.”

Sherlock’s ‘Yes, Grandmama’ was muffled as he pushed a biscuit into his mouth to help salve his defeat.

“He was cheating! No wonder I never won a single hand.”

“I am certain, John, that my grandson will gladly provide you with a suitable lesson on the intricacies of game-playing duplicity. Now that you have a foursome, I shall tend to other matters. And John, do ensure that Sherlock is present for your fitting tomorrow.”

John beamed with his newly conferred responsibility and the small pat on the shoulder he received as the elderly woman rose and left the room.

“You’d better not get up to anything, Sherlock, because I’ve got the power now to take action. And I’m warning you… it’ll be punching action.”

“You shall not lay a hand on my person, John Watson, lest that hand be returned to you one
finger at a time.”

John immediately rubbed his hand over Sherlock’s face, causing the flustered boy to sputter loudly and shift his chair closer to Lestrade’s.

“That meets all relevant criteria for a violation, pollen grain. I could have you arrested and someone as minuscule and anemically frail as you would not enjoy a peaceful existence in prison. However, you would not lack for activity in your day as from morning until night you would be fleeing from violations far more execrable as that which you perpetrated on me.”

“Mycroft, you won’t let him have me arrested, will you?”

Oh yes, the familial roles were solidifying nicely and Mycroft was overjoyed that he was being incorporated into the existing domestic framework so readily.

“No fret, John, I shall see you free from any legal actions stemming from Sherlock’s hysteria.”

“It is not hysteria to demand satisfaction for an insult! I now demand satisfaction from yours! Till minder! Bring me the telephone so that I may report these two to the proper authorities!”

“Sorry, Sherlock, but if Mycroft goes to jail, I’d need to bake him a cake with a file in it to help him escape and I don’t know how to bake a cake. You need a new revenge plan.”

“Foiled by another example of your uselessness to the species! And none other will have you because you have nary a hope of passing the admittance exam.”

Lestrade rolled his eyes, then rubbed his own hand over Sherlock’s face before getting up to pour him and Mycroft a brandy, enjoying the soul-freezing wail of the now twice-violated goblin as his personal theme music.

“Truly your singing voice has taken an operatic turn, brother dear. Perhaps we may add voice lessons to your music instruction.”

“How I became enmeshed in this family of grotesques and dull-wits is something I shall never fathom.”

Lestrade handed Mycroft his glass and felt his heart warm at his lover’s nearly radiant glow. This was what his Mycroft wanted… a family. Whether it was a makeshift one or one of flesh and blood, this was what the man he loved craved. Lestrade hadn’t pried, but given that he’d never even seen Mycroft and Sherlock’s mother and the brothers hadn’t visited their grandmother regularly before he came into their lives… it wasn’t hard to see why his partner would grab at a chance for a family, strange and slapped-together as it may be.

“Through luck you questionably deserved, I do believe. Now, what shall we play?”

“Russian roulette.”

“Thank you, Sherlock. Your suggestion has been noted and properly filed. My dear?”

“Well, we’ve got little one’s here, so… Old Maid?”

“Truly something a brain-depleted subservient would suggest. I refuse to take part in a diversion specifically designed for the subset of humans demonstrating the lowest degree of mental-development! We may play Bridge.”
“Wrong, you little bastard. I don’t know how and I’m not playing a game where you can skirt the rules and I can’t catch you. And don’t think I don’t know you’re avoiding Old Maid because I murdered you last time we played.”

“Piffle. And now, apparently, we shall rarely, if ever, interact on a recreational level since it is highly doubtful you know the rules of any game requiring even a hair’s width of skill or intellect and I shall repudiate any request to partake in your favorite pastimes of rock banging and dirt eating.”

“I know how to play poker.”

All eyes turned to John, who grinned widely at the attention.

“And I’m good at it, too.”

“You are delusional, John Watson. Poker requires cunning, which is something you lack as surely as a duck lacks antlers.”

“I knew you’d be scared, Sherlock.”

“What! Gargantublob! Deal the cards. I must teach this arrogant little flea a lesson he shall not soon forget!”

Mycroft chuckled at John’s pantomime of Sherlock’s outburst and dealt out the cards, leaning over to whisper in Lestrade’s ear when he was finished.

“Sherlock is rather accomplished in the gain of monies through card-based gambling. We would do well to be on our best game.”

“That’s ok. Win or lose, he’s in a chair where we can keep an eye on him and not on the roof with wings tied to his arms to test whether they’ll let him fly. I did peek at their sketches of the gliders they want to build and there were a few of Sherlock as Icarus nestled among them.”

“Ah, yes. He has periodically mentioned that he wishes to repeat his work on that particular research question. His last data set was… disappointing.”

“How bad was the crash?”

“Both better and worse than might be expected. His fall was cushioned by a stand of bushes; however, they were Mummy’s prize rose bushes, so…”

“Ouch.”

“In a word. And spare a crumb of pity for your loving partner for it was he who had to accomplish the fallen angel’s disentanglement.”

“My poor Mycroft. Don’t worry, I’ll make all those bad memories go away after these two go to bed.”

“In that case, I shall dredge up from the depths of my mind the worst of my woes so they may be exorcized by your loving touch.”

“CEASE YOUR PRATTLE! It is sufficiently upsetting that I must partake in this spectacularly lopsided contest of wits that I cannot and shall not abide your love-addled imprecations. Lackey! Ring for beverages for John and myself and biscuits so we may have something with which to wager.”
“Not your slave, Sherlock. And I think you’ve had enough treats for the day. We can play for imaginary money.”

“Where is the sport in that? I should have something tangible to show for my inevitable victory.”

“Tell you what… whatever imaginary money you and John win, I’ll convert to credits for when we have another afternoon out.”

“At what rate of exchange? I demand a strong pound to credit ratio!”

“I’ll let Mycroft and you work that out.”

Sherlock shot a triumphant sneer at his older brother, who gave him a knowingly superior smile in return.

“Can we actually play, please? I’m going to win everything anyway and I’d rather get started now, so I have more time to build my winnings.”

Sherlock waved dismissively at John and drew his cards up close to his face, peering over the top to scan for any possible suspicious actions. Mycroft stretched out his leg and ran his foot up and down Lestrade’s ankle, giving his partner a grin that was small in size, but large with promise. John leaned back in his chair and wriggled to get comfortable for the coming battle, which ultimately waged across hours of accusations of cheating, demands for new decks of cards because the current pack was either marked or beset by evil spirits, arguments on topics in no manner related to cards, arguments on topics very related to cards, several trays of relatively healthy snacks and beverages that served as their evening meal and a protracted and heated negotiation of how the boys’ winnings would be converted to tangible goods and services. When even Sherlock began to yawn, Mycroft decided to call an official end to the day and send the younger pair towards their beds.

“I am not a child! You cannot send me to bed as if I were some form of helpless infant!”

“If you had yawned any wider, Sherlock, you would have swallowed whole the table.”

“Something you do regularly, especially on Cook’s baking day.”

“That’s enough, you two. Sherlock, John, write down what you won and I’ll keep that in my wallet so I remember the next time we go out. Mycroft, you want to take care of getting our casino cleared away and pour us a nightcap while I make sure these two actually make it to their bedroom?”

“Of course, my dear. I anxiously anticipate your return.”

Sherlock and John handed over their winnings slips, which prompted a proudly unhumble victory dance from John and a demand for a new round of gaming by Sherlock before Lestrade plucked them out of their chairs and pushed them towards the door and out of the library.

“Alright, you two, nothing crazy tonight, ok? We’ll get to the stuff on your list that we didn’t get to do today as soon as we get measured or whatever for our suits. No need to get started on any of it tonight.”

“I fail to see any reason not to. The use of time efficiently is the hallmark of a well-ordered mind.”

“And sleeping is the hallmark of a goblin that actually wants to do more tomorrow than lie on the floor and stare at the ceiling.”
“Come on, Sherlock. We’ve got a lot to do and I’m not going to carry you if you get tired.”

“Do not be more ridiculous than usual, John. As if you could lift me with those stunted arms and tiny ladybug legs.”

Lestrade had to admire the way John wrestled Sherlock to the floor, only to hoist the taller boy over his shoulders and carry the wiggling and loudly protesting form the rest of the way to their bedroom.

“See! I may be small, Sherlock, but that doesn’t mean I’m weak.”

“Very well… I admit that you are possessed of at least sufficient strength to carry me to safety should we encounter foul play and I am debilitated as a result.”

“Good enough.”

John dropped Sherlock, who scrambled to land on his feet, then triumphantly marched into the bedroom, arms in the air in victory.

“Are you going to be a bastard and make sure Mycroft and I are wide awake bright and early tomorrow morning?”

“Likely. I am not entirely convinced that if you are allowed unfettered access to the object of your lust, there shall not be an impending litter of some form of cake-human hybrids growing in Mycroft’s already distended belly. For the sake of humanity, I must intervene.”

“When you find someone you’re interested in, I am going to repay you for every one of your little bits of nastiness. If Mycroft’s got a baby album, I bet you do, too, and wouldn’t your special someone like to see little naked Sherlock eating his toes or dressed up in a cute outfit with a sailor’s cap. In fact, I’ll see if I can find it tomorrow and we can all sit around and enjoy the fun.”

“Your blackmail is a failure, panhandler. I was a spectacularly attractive child and anyone who looks upon my image shall find their lives immeasurably blessed.”

“Ok… I’ll have Mycroft dig it up tonight and that’ll be our breakfast entertainment.”

Lestrade turned and sauntered back towards the library, counting the seconds until…

“HALT! Grandmama would be exceedingly displeased if any of her precious photographs were compromised and the manner in which you and John eat is far too reminiscent of pigs at a trough to risk allowing my album in your vicinity.”

“Ok… so long as I get a little sleep tonight.”

“And how do you quantify a little?”

“Give me an hour more than you did this morning.”

“What! That shall unacceptably shorten your employment in my service!”

“Make it an hour and a half for that crack.”

“I…. you… very well. But do not believe for a moment I shall not make interesting use of the time.”

“Whatever you break, you buy.”
“Since my personal wealth equals your chocolate-soaked salary, that means I can snap a matchstick and be bankrupt.”

“Then you better watch where you step. Goodnight, Sherlock.”

“So long as my ears are not assaulted by the sounds of your rutting, it shall be.”

Sherlock gave Lestrade what the older boy interpreted as an affectionate glare and slammed the bedroom door. Definitely strange and definitely piecemeal, but if anyone said they weren’t a family, they were idiots.

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“Ah, Gregory… I trust the boys are secured for the night.”

“As good as they can be without bars and barbed wire, but I think we’re safe until morning.”

“Excellent.”

Mycroft’s smile nearly dragged Lestrade to the sofa, where a warm brandy and a warmer body happily greeted him.

“And I know someone who had an even better time today than the pest patrol.”

Mycroft’s smile widened and Lestrade motioned his partner to reposition, so he could lie back against Mycroft’s chest, cradled by his long legs.

“I gladly admit you are correct. This, my dear… a simple day enjoying simple pleasures… I have so long dreamed of such a thing. I cannot express how fortunate I feel to have been able to share this day with you, Sherlock and John. Such a precious, precious gift I have been given.”

“And tomorrow, you get another.”

“I am giddy with the extravagance.”

“I know this is really a holiday for us, but when we’re home again, I think we can still find time for afternoons or days like this. Not every day… but often enough to keep that smile on your face.”

“That is a desire I willingly disclose. Though I realize without any misapprehension the import of my duties, they seem far more meaningful knowing my labors keep safe those with whom I share these remarkable experiences.”

“And we’re happy to have you as part of them, love. Did you see how Sherlock and John behaved today? They adored having you spend the day with them. Not that Sherlock would admit it, but he missed you terribly while you were gone. He probably thinks I can’t read him, but it wasn’t hard to catch the sadness of that face of his when I mentioned your name. These few days are like gold for him. And John, too. Little tyke has been having the time of his life and not because of the wealth or the big house or the new suits. He’s been happy because he’s found people who care about him and let him into their lives and that includes you. You’re a great big brother, Mycroft Holmes. And a great dad, too. I have a feeling we’ll find some use for that frozen sperm of yours one day.”

Mycroft basked in the glow of his husband’s praise because no one had a better idea of what was a good parent than his own spouse, the exemplar of the breed. However, there was one error that had to be addressed.
“That frozen sperm of ours.”

“No more brandy for you, you’re drunk.”

“No, I speak with perfect clarity. It is, of course, my intention to add your own contribution to our future offspring. Did you think I would add to our family only children of my blood?”

“I hadn’t really thought about it much at all, but I am not going to… that.”

“It is not an unpleasant task.”

“I am not wanking into a cup!”

“I shall assist.”

“No!”

“To what could you possibly object?”

“Oh, I don’t know… you doing filthy things to me while some nurse waits outside with her ear to the door!”

“I shall insist she be hard of hearing.”

“This conversation is over.”

“For now?”

“……..ok. For now.”

“Excellent. I adore our ability to compromise.”

Lestrade snuggled deeper into Mycroft’s embrace and couldn’t help but laugh. Kids were not on the horizon for a very long time, but when the time came he had no doubt his Mycroft would be very persuasive to obtain what he wanted. They would probably need a few days to recover from his tactics…

“Me, too. So, suits tomorrow?”

“Yes, the fitting at least. Grandmama likely has something specific in mind for her gathering to commission another round of garments.”

“And I’m happy John’s included. Really lets him know he’s in with us now and… if anyone appreciates a nice set of clothes more than you it’s him.”

Now it was Mycroft’s turn to laugh and his silky chuckle did unspeakable things to Lestrade’s unmentionables.

“He does, doesn’t he? That, I have no doubt, pleases Grandmama greatly. She has forever despaired of Sherlock’s war against respectable clothing. He has a very intriguing set of guidelines for what he finds acceptable and suits do not fall on the correct side of that line in his thinking.”

“Just one more thing he has his own set of rules about and good for him knowing his own mind. But… it’s not going to… there’s nothing I can screw up, can I?”

“To what are you referring?”
“Tomorrow. Getting measured or fitted whatever.”

Mycroft caught the slight hint of worry in his husband’s voice and reminded himself that this was not part of the world his love knew best.

“It is quite impossible, unless you are Sherlock, to destroy the experience. Simply pretend that you are some form of mannequin to be positioned and handled and all shall be well.”

“Ok, that doesn’t sound too bad. Mum is actually looking forward to seeing me in a nice suit, so I won’t do anything Sherlock would do and cock up the whole thing. The best suit I have, well, the only one I have, isn’t anything like the one I wore the other night and she’s hoping to show off her pictures of me in my borrowed clothes.”

“Not borrowed, my dear. I assure you that Grandmama considers your garments to be yours and expects that you shall wear them whenever the occasion arises.”

“Which will only be when we’re here or if you have another cocktail thing at your house. I don’t have any other reason to wear a suit that nice, love.”

There was no tonal change in his fiancé’s voice, but something scratched at Mycroft’s mind anyway and he felt compelled to pursue it.

“Gregory… we have never discussed this you and I, for I have had no reason to believe it an issue, but it might be remiss of me not to raise the subject if you have need to discuss matters.”

“I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I would know… do you have any… concerns or anxieties… we are from different worlds, my beloved and, though I have not suffered a single twinge of worry about our love… if you do, then I would know so that I may do everything in my power to soothe your trepidations.”

“Oh… no, I don’t have any worries. Well, that’s not totally true. I do worry sometimes that I’ll do something or say something common and peasant-like and embarrass you, but I’m getting better at thinking I won’t. And you never, never, make me feel like I’m not as good as you or the people you know. I mean… it is a lot sometimes, looking around and seeing all of this, picking up the phone and being able to make Sherlock’s disasters go away with quick conversation, but this is part of who you are and I’m not going to be one of those who goes on and on about the evils of money because I know it’s not true. I’m happy you’re able to have a good life… there’s nothing for either of us to feel bad about over that. But, Mycroft…”

There was always a ‘but,’ however his love was nothing if not kind with his slings and arrows.

“…you know who I am and you know that I want to be part of this relationship as much as I can. Money-wise, I mean. And doing things-wise. I’m not going to be some kept man with you paying for everything and me just lying around the house all day. That’s not me and I know you know that. I’m going to work and contribute to our life and that’s not something that’s negotiable. I’m realistic, though… I know you’re used to more than I am and I don’t want you to change that. No living the way I do just because I can’t afford better on my own. That’s not fair to you and I won’t have it. We’ll find some formula that works for us, but just know that I won’t be getting fitted for all my clothes or leaving my wallet at home every time we go out for a night. Do you know what I mean? I’m not sure I’m saying it clearly…”

Actually he was being very efficient in his message and it was one that comforted Mycroft greatly. He would not wish to compromise his husband’s independence or sense of self-worth and
accomplishment and would do his utmost to avoid such pitfalls. But, there was also no prohibition against the comforts he so greatly desired to provide for his dearest Gregory. No, he would not have all of his husband’s wardrobe designed as his were, but that did not mean he could not gift him with the occasional suit for a special occasion or a lovely coat, scarf, gloves or a pair of comfortable, yet exquisite shoes. A formula… that was a very good manner in which to phrase the solution. And he was extremely talented in logical, yet creative thinking.

“I understand your meaning completely and I share your viewpoint wholeheartedly. I want you in no manner other than that which you now grace me and it is heartening to know you feel the same. I did feel the need to inquire, however. I did not want to leave any unspoken issues between us on this particular aspect of our life.”

“No, it makes sense and I’m glad you did. I always want you to do that, actually… ask me anything you want. Anytime. Worst thing in the world is to let things fester like a splinter under the skin.”

“I agree. I am truly blessed to have a man such as you, Gregory. I feel regret for the others whom I have deprived of your company, for what they are kept from knowing is a majestic and magical thing.”

“Liar. You’re happy as you can be that you’ve got your mark on me and that no one else is ever going to get the chance.”

Mycroft’s hand reflexively went up to touch the still-red mark on Lestrade’s neck and smiled as his lover hummed contentedly.

“I can hide nothing from you. I find myself rather possessive when it comes to the man I love and shall not apologize for it.”

“Don’t want you to. You’re just possessive enough for my liking.”

And the small wriggle of his hips he gave Mycroft’s body emphasized the point and earned him a small nip on his ear as a reward.

“My love for you is bottomless, Gregory. Its depths are truly unknowable.”

This next nip was just below the ear and Lestrade sighed at the shot of sensation that traveled straight downwards and made him wriggle again in enjoyment.

“And I shall continue to make it very clear that the marvelous man in my arms is loved by me and is mine to cherish.”

Another nip, slightly lower earned Mycroft a soft moan.

“And pleasure.”

A fourth, slightly firmer than the others heightened Lestrade’s response and his breathed-in hiss stirred Mycroft’s blood in a very delightful way. This next one was strong and broad, into the well-developed muscle of his husband’s shoulder in just the manner he had learned made his love’s body arch with satisfaction. And Mycroft knew he could not deny his beloved husband full satisfaction for his body’s wants…

“The doors, my dear. Lock them.”

Lestrade bolted off the sofa and quickly locked the library doors, while Mycroft moved to a sitting
position with his thighs parted.

“Very good, Gregory. Now, strip for me. I trust you know what then is required of you.”

Mycroft slightly widened his legs and enjoyed the thrill that ran through him seeing his spouse’s eager response. Each piece of Lestrade’s clothing was shed in short order and when he was entirely bare, Mycroft made a little spinning motion with a single finger that Lestrade followed, putting every bit of himself on display, framed by firelight. When Mycroft’s nod of approval came, along with the drawing down of the zipper of his trousers, Lestrade fell to his knees between his lover’s legs and made quick work of drawing out his reward from Mycroft’s soft, silk boxers and letting it slide between his lips. With deliberate slowness, he worked Mycroft deeper into his mouth and felt a ripple of flame slide down his spine when his partner fistied a handful of his hair and pushed his head forward gently until Lestrade pressed a small pinch to Mycroft’s leg as a caution.

Letting his partner direct the pace, Lestrade lavished every bit of attention he could on Mycroft’s cock with lips, tongue and teeth, enjoying every moment his partner urged his head forward and back until he was held still while Mycroft thrust upwards into his mouth and he relaxed in preparation to take his lover’s come down his throat. But, Mycroft had other plans and stopped abruptly, breathing harshly and visibly bringing himself back from the brink of orgasm.

“Very good, my dear. You are highly skilled, but I want more from you. You are breathtakingly beautiful, Gregory, and I wish to look upon that fully. In front of the fire, if you will. Let me watch you enjoy your own pleasure, while I partake of my own.”

Mycroft swallowed hard seeing his lover’s glassy and highly-aroused eyes as they locked on his for the briefest of instants before Lestrade rose to comply. And comply with a presentation that defined eroticism. Mycroft had seen his spouse pleasure himself twice before and marveled again at how he made love to his own body. Hands running slowly over the muscles that were defined by the light and shadow of the flickering fire, soft sounds from his lips providing the most enticing soundtrack to his performance. And his pendant… shining brightly as a message that he was a taken man. His beloved did not hurry, savoring each moment that he stroked himself and awarded Mycroft glimpses of tiny, tears of pre-cum that glistened like diamonds. Diamonds that would be deliciously sweet when he was the one on his knees enjoying them.

And, all the while, Lestrade kept his eyes on his lover, who was tending to himself with just as much care, though he was fully dressed in, if not a suit, his fine trousers and crisp shirt and waistcoat. His Mycroft was a vision. So gorgeous and masterful and looking back at him with an expression of such want and adoration that he felt like the most desirable man in the world and that was thrilling. And that thrill lit fires in his body that were brutally hard to contain. He wanted so badly to come, ached to miserably but knew… just knew… he needed to wait. Because it would be so much better if he did… and finally, when Mycroft’s whispered ‘now, my beloved’ hit his ears, he let his body release, feeling his orgasm spike sharply as he watched Mycroft follow not a second later. And, before his wobbly legs could give out, his lover was off the sofa, holding him and taking his lips in a kiss so soft and gentle he felt his heart seize with a surge of love for the man who had captured that heart and would never let it escape.

“Sufficiently possessive, my dearest, dearest love?”

“Precisely perfectly possessive. Pushed exactly the right buttons. You are the most fantastic man and amazing lover ever put on this Earth.

Which was fortuitous, since Mycroft had only watched one of the ‘educational’ films he had obtained through a variety of clandestine channels and had only a very limited repertoire of exotic ideas at his disposal.
“Then I am content as my only wish in this world is to make you happy.”

“Well, in that case… how about a quick clean-up?”

“That would be in order, wouldn’t it?”

“And Mycroft… Grandmama made a comment about their being surveillance cameras. She was kidding, right?”

“Ah… about that…”

“Oh god…”

“Fear not, my dear, they are not operated by a watchful eye and I shall retrieve the incriminating evidence before any eye has laid its gaze upon it.”

“Promise?”

“I do.”

“You’re going to put it in your luggage, aren’t you?”

“Of course. For security purposes.”

“And do security purposes include watching it later when you’re back at home?”

“I must check that it has not been swapped for another item of similar appearance during our journey.”

“I see… sorry, love, but I think that’s too much for you to handle alone.”

“Yes, perhaps you are correct. I am truly a scatterbrain for certain matters.”

“Don’t worry, between the two of us, we’ll make sure it’s the right stuff.”

“My mind is eased. Thank you, Gregory.”

“You’re welcome. Now… us and the room back in order?”

“Yes. And then a return to our own room to again find disorder?”

“I love it when we think alike.”

Sleeping in a common bed was a ridiculously pedestrian thing, yet Mycroft had absolutely no idea how he would survive when he returned home and had to slumber alone. Before they had fallen asleep, he and his spouse had enjoyed a quiet hour of intimate and open-souled conversation that further tightened their bonds as a couple and that golden-hued bliss was sufficiently penetrating to keep him from murdering his brother who was striding into the bedroom, blindfolded and guided by a hand resting on John’s shoulder.

“It is earlier than our agreed-upon hour, I believe. If your explanation does not involve an immediate need for a physician, prepare to find the remainder of your day as bereft of entertainment as that of a prisoner in the dankest cell of the least regarded prison in a gladly-forgotten corner of a country that no longer is listed independently on any map.”
“Sorry, Mycroft, but Sherlock can’t hear you.”

“Pardon?”

“I’m supposed to tell you he’s both deaf and blind and is going to stay that way unless you’re standing up and have clothes on. Since… well, I’m going to guess neither one is true, that’s not going to change.”

At least John was whispering so his husband could continue to rest.

“Then why, if my personal affairs are abhorrent to him, is he positioning himself to be party to them?”

“What?”

“Why is he here if he would rather be anywhere but here?”

“Oh! Because he wanted to do an experiment involving the… saturation of…”

Sherlock furiously whispered in John’s ear while Mycroft rolled his eyes and checked that Lestrade was still sleeping.

“…saturation rates of fibers and the bathtub in your room is bigger than in ours.”

“I doubt the size of the receptacle is a relevant factor to his research question.”

“You haven’t seen how much he wants to test. We’ve got three big bags of things in the corridor and that’s only the first go.”

“May I inquire as to how Sherlock plans to make and scribe his observations if he is not possessed of the proper senses?”

“I think he’s hoping a miracle will happen.”

“Yes… Sherlock has always held fast to the power of faith. Very well, but you must be very quiet so as not to wake Gregory.”

“Ok. We’ll try.”

John escorted Sherlock to the bath, then ran back to drag three very large and very full bags to the newly-christened laboratory. Counting the seconds until the first outburst, Mycroft wasn’t surprised he scarcely made it to twenty before he was skyrocketing out of bed, tossing clothes over his body and dashing towards the growing cacophony to, hopefully, allow his spouse the sleep he desperately needed.

“What in the… can you not keep unbroken one promise!”

“We cannot be faulted for circumstances beyond our control! An unacceptable quantity of these garments is not provided with sufficient information to know the exact proportional blend of fabrics for their construction. How is it possible to conduct an empirical study with insufficient data? They have defaulted to the grossest use of significant figures and that is both insulting and sloppy, which is not at all surprising given that we are dealing with the slave-based garment industry. I am surprised I have yet to find a plea for rescue scribed on the underside of these pathetic labels.”

Mycroft knew very well his brother was not six years old; however, seeing the debris field of clothing, some already suffering a watery death in the bathtub, it was difficult not to believe
“Sorry, Mycroft. I tried to use his blindfold as a gag but he threw it in the tub. It’s floating right there next to his pants.”

As were several others of Sherlock’s pants and, now that he peered more closely, a few pairs of his along with two of his ties. Apparently goblins were quite adept at thievery under the cover of darkness.

“We started with small things first.”

Which explained why his lovely tweed trousers and waistcoat remained unsodden. At least John looked somewhat chagrined at their choice of research methodologies.

“An ascending hierarchy… how structured of you. Now, let us return these garments to their proper owners and find alternatives that are both richer in formulation detail and less costly by their destruction.”

“No. The probability that a corpse shall be shrouded in window treatments or bath towels is laughably low. Do not attempt to devalue my research with unacceptable substitutions.”

“They are also not likely, Sherlock, to die wearing my trousers and waistcoat.”

“If the corpse is you, then your argument is refuted. And not only the tinned-food eaters are victims of heinous crimes, though, admittedly, the result would likely be a benefit to civilization than a detriment.”

Mycroft took a deep breath and tried to smile amiably at the children staring up at him.

“Then, might I suggest that you begin with less expensive and easily replaceable samples as you refine your experimental approach? You may then move up the scale accordingly. I have older garments at home that I shall donate to your cause.”

“I shall have to cancel my tensile strength tests, because your hippopotamus-like body has already stretched the fibers to their limit and weakened their fundamental structure. I hear them crying in your wardrobe at night and nearly weep in pity for their enduring agony.”

“Sherlock, you do realize your brother’s not fat, right? Sometimes I think you’re the dumbest person I know.”

“I am the only person you know, John Watson.”

“That doesn’t really change what I said, now does it?”

As a fresh round of bickering began, Mycroft retrieved the clothing he recognized and bid a fond farewell to those forever lost to him beneath the depths.

“Very well. I shall agree to adjust my research plan, so long as I am provided with all the materials I require as they become necessary. John, divest yourself of your clothing so I may start with the cheapest and lowest quality of materials available.”

“I’m not getting naked for your experiment.”

“That implies you would get naked for other purposes. Do enumerate them.”

“Mycroft, are you sure he’s really your brother?”
“A question, John, I have pondered many a time, but cannot find documentation to the contrary.”

Before he could get drawn into another round of insanity, Mycroft retreated back to the bedroom and, after setting aside his rescued clothing, slid back under the blankets.

“You shouldn’t have come back, you know.”

“Gregory? Oh, my dear… I had so desperately hoped not to wake you. But why should I have not returned?”

“Two boys, one very large, in-ground tub. Filled with water.”

“Oh.”

And, as if on cue, a loud splash could be heard, followed by the dragon-like roar of the wild Sherlock.

“Yeah, oh.”

“I may have some forgiveness, may I not, due to my amateur status as a guardian of two children?”

“I think I can overlook this one. Anyway, the outcome is too good to pass up.”

Lestrade patted his chest and Mycroft quickly accepted the invitation, curling around his lover and resting his head above the sound of a strongly-beating heart.

“Don’t worry, love, they’ll get tired of whatever game it is they’re playing and then they’ll already be bathed, so that’ll be something we won’t have to worry about before we get the day started.”

“How efficiently and productively you approach the little dilemmas of life.”

“Well, with Sherlock and John, it helps.”

“That it does. And, I take it we have a few minutes of privacy available to us?”

“Oh yeah… the both of them are swimming around right now and looking around for things to build boats out of.”

“Excellent. We then have some time to say good morning.”

“That we do. And they’ll let us know when that time’s gone.”

“Loudly, I suspect.”

“And wet. Don’t forget wet.”

“Perish the thought.”

Wet boys were dried and dressed, breakfast consumed with the standard amount of negotiation and admonishment leading finally to each having their turn being measured, pinned, assessed, judged, and sentenced according to the tailor’s standards. Mycroft took first position, mostly to soothe any remaining fears in his husband’s mind, then John shoved his way forward and eagerly let himself be
adorned, re-adorned, adjusted, fussed over, all the while offering his opinion and stopping the proceedings to take a look at himself in the mirror while striking poses that made even the stern-faced tailor chuckle. Just as Lestrade stood to take his turn, Edwards stepped into the room and tapped Mycroft on the shoulder.

“Your Grandmother would like a word, Mr. Holmes.”

Mycroft knew before he looked at Lestrade that there would be anxiety in his eyes, so he smiled as comfortingly as he could and took a kiss from his lover’s cheek.

“I shall only be a moment, my dear. I am quite certain there is nothing about which to worry.”

Lestrade only nodded and Mycroft kept his confident posture perfectly in place until the door was closed behind him.

“For what reason am I being summoned?”

“That is an issue for Mrs. Holmes to discuss. However…”

“Please, Edwards.”

“Brace yourself.”

Lestrade had to admit it wasn’t as bad as he’d feared. And what was being made for him was phenomenal. He doubted anyone he knew had even seen a suit this nice in person! His mum was going to have more pictures of him in that suit than she had of his whole childhood…

“I don’t think Sherlock enjoys this at all.”

John dropped down on the arm of Greg’s chair and shook his head at Sherlock’s twelfth diatribe on the evils being perpetrated on his noble personage.

“No, he doesn’t. And that’s ok; this isn’t to everyone’s liking.”

“Well, I think he’s crazy. It’s fun to get dressed up! And we’re going to get to wear our suits to a party - what could be better than that!”

“For Sherlock, I think being boiled in oil would be a happier option.”

“Well, he’s wrong. And… well…”

“John?”

“It’s just… Mycroft said that I’d get to do more stuff like this with all of you. He said that I’d get to come back here for visits and do things even when we’re home.”

Lestrade never for a moment thought his lover had a hard heart, but, for some things, that heart seemed to be as soft as one of Grandmama’s pillows.

“Well, he’s right. As sad as we are, you’re one of us, John, and always welcome for anything we do.”

“Like… like family? That’s what Mycroft said, anyway.”
Make that as soft as kittens sleeping on cotton in a cloud-lined basket.

“Just like family. And family sticks together even if they don’t live together, so don’t worry that things will change when we’re back at school. In fact, I won’t be surprised if you’re spending nearly every day at Sherlock and Mycroft’s house.”

“Will you be there?”

“Sometimes. I’ve got work, which I’ve been pretty bad about lately and my own studies to worry about, but, I’ll be there enough. And… Mycroft won’t be there sometimes, too, but that won’t change you being able to visit with Sherlock.”

“Yeah, but you’ll be there sometimes, too, and the three of us can keep each other company until he gets back. I don’t think he likes going away, actually; I thought maybe he did, at first, but now I don’t. I can tell he’s happy with us. Especially with you.”

And John’s little trail of musical notes and cheesy grin spoke to just how happy he thought that was. Watching John with his first love was going to be brilliant…

“That’s enough out of you. And look, the Dark Prince of Death, actually made it through alive.”

Sherlock stalked over to Lestrade’s chair and stared at the older boy, who simply waited for the inevitable outburst.

“I feel dirty.”

“You already had a bath.”

“I have been violated.”

“Not that I noticed.”

“Hands were upon me.”

“Is this psychotic break going to take long? I could use a coffee.”

“Silence, lackey! Show proper respect for your betters.”

“When one shows up, I will. Now, what do you two want to…”

Lestrade looked over when he heard the door open and felt his heart freeze into a solid block of ice seeing the distress on Mycroft’s face.

“Love? Are you ok?”

Mycroft’s brittle smile was not at all reassuring and Lestrade started to rise from his chair, only to receive a shake of Mycroft’s head as a sign it was not necessary.

“I am fine, Gregory. It is not as bad as you think, though… there are potential hazards, nonetheless. Sherlock?”

“It is not fault, whatever has transpired.”

“I am well aware. I only… we are having a guest for dinner and you must prepare yourself.”

Sherlock’s eyes widened and his shocked little gasp propelled John to hold his friend’s hand in
support.

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Mummy?”

“Quite.”

Sherlock used their clasped hands to drag John along as he ran out of the room, his face a thundercloud of emotions Lestrade wasn’t sure he would ever be able to decipher.

“Mycroft? Want to tell me what’s going on?”

“That… that would take a very long time.”

“Lucky me… time is something I’ve got lots of.”

Lestrade rose from his chair and copied Sherlock’s actions, though saving the running for younger legs.

“Let’s take a walk, love, and we can talk for as long as it takes.”

Mycroft squeezed his husband’s hand and took comfort from the honest concern and devotion in his warm, brown eyes.

“An exceptional idea. It is quite lovely today.”

“Not as lovely as what I’m looking at right now.”

No matter what had he had lacked for love before in his life, he would never again be a pauper for affection. He had his Gregory and nothing else would ever be needed for his heart to the richest in the world…
Lestrade guided Mycroft though the garden and then began wandering further afield, letting his lover be content with his own thoughts while he pulled them together to discuss in a coherent fashion. Finally, with enough sunshine on his face and fresh air in his lungs, Mycroft felt relaxed enough to speak.

“Mummy is a somewhat problematic individual, Gregory. Not a mean-spirited soul, per se, but one that rises to those heights without purposeful intent.”

Lestrade was not at all certain what that meant, so wisely stayed silent.

“Her view of the world is quite narrow, though the perspective fluctuates at will, and if you do not align with that view, then you must, by design, be faulty in some fashion.”

Now that was something Lestrade could sink his teeth into, and it made him very, very angry.

“Are you saying she thinks there’s something wrong with you?”

“With most people, actually, save her personal circle of acquaintances, admirers and sycophants.”

“That’s horrible! Sorry, I shouldn’t say bad things about your mum.”

“It is quite alright, my dear. It is not something I have not thought before in my own moments of honesty. But, to be as honest, she does believe that any rebukes or criticisms she provides are for the betterment of the one receiving them.”

One of those… Lestrade had endured his share of encounters with pissy little snobs and it sounded like Mycroft’s mum was just an adult version of the species.

“It doesn’t make them any easier to take, does it?”

“No, not really. Fortunately, given the size and competence of the house staff, she has not felt compelled to remain in residence with any great frequency and for any substantial duration, therefore, the opportunities to suffer her tongue are mercifully few.”

There was something fundamentally wrong that Mycroft seemed a little pleased that his mother wasn’t around much, but there were also enough clues in his voice and face to let Lestrade know that his lover wasn’t entirely pleased. Which was better - more of a mum that wasn’t very nice or less of someone his Mycroft obviously loved… no wonder his partner had a heavy heart about the woman who was going to join them for dinner.

“Any reason why she’s paying Grandmama a little visit tonight?”

And, now that Lestrade thought about it, it didn’t seem like Mycroft’s mother and Grandmama would be the type to get along very well.

“Apparently, she feels somewhat the outsider with our little family enjoying itself here and not where she can also enjoy the activities and feeling of familial bonding. In truth, I believe she was miffed to arrive home from abroad and find no one she could force to sit and listen to her holiday tales. Mummy does enjoy an audience and, normally, that would be myself and Sherlock, until she planned and implemented a party to provide herself with a larger and more agreeable stage on which to perform.”
“So now we all have to sit in the pews and listen to the sermon?”

“I wish it were not so, but yes. However, she does evince a slightly more demur persona in Grandmama’s presence. Grandmama was never highly approving of Father’s choice of bride and ensured that the family holdings and privileges were not Mummy’s to claw apart. She receives a very good allowance, more than any person should be able to spend, though she does a very good job of it, nonetheless, but beyond that, everything is held in Grandmama’s hands until her passing, when it shall transfer directly to me.”

“So your mum doesn’t like to bite the hand that feeds her.”

“To some extent, yes. But that does not mean she is very aware of how little it takes to do such a thing. Fortunately, Grandmama is both patient and experienced in this regard.”

Lestrade found it a little funny that he didn’t have much in terms of money or fine clothes or social status, but he was sure he wouldn’t trade any of that if it meant his mum wasn’t the person she was now. For the little they possessed, what they had in abundance was freely-expressed, unconditional love and that was something beyond any price. Seeing a shaded area under a large tree up ahead of them, Lestrade led his partner towards it, sat, and patted the ground to encourage Mycroft to join him, which the older Holmes did gladly and unmindful of the dirt, his eternal nemesis.

“Remember the last time we did this? Took a nice little sit and enjoyed a pretty day. This is the best, you know? Just me and you and even if we’re doing nothing but staring up at blue sky and puffy clouds, it’s still the best time in the world. That’s all I want from you and it always will be. Just you and me, however life finds us… old, young, poor, rich, sick, fit… I don’t care because none of that matters. Just the two of us being together, knowing we love each other more than should be legal… that’s really all that’s important.”

Mycroft stared at his husband, who was plucking blades of grass and tying them into little knots so they were easier to throw out into the distance ahead of them. No matter how dismal his spirits or disillusioned his mind, his spouse could always bring joy into his day. Remind him why everything was not as bleak as he might believe and reaffirm that they were truly were blessed to have found their true soulmate. Leaning over, Mycroft took a kiss from his love’s cheek and sighed contentedly when Lestrade wrapped an arm around his waist and drew him close so Mycroft could rest his head on the broad shoulder that was eager to receive it.

“And don’t you worry about a thing. Maybe dinner won’t be a lot of fun, but it won’t last forever and then we can find a way to show ourselves a good time. And we’ve got all day to do that, too, though the kids are going to be crawling all over us, so that sort of limits our options. It’s a good thing that I’m feeling better or you’d have to ringmaster the circus all by yourself.”

“I have no idea what I would do without you, Gregory. It is only through your grace that my life has become something wondrous and worth living.”

“Lucky for you, you won’t ever have to do without me. So, how about we just sit here awhile and enjoy the peace and quiet, then we can go see what Sherlock and John are up to.”

“Sherlock… yes, he will be wrestling with his own issues at the moment. I am very relieved that John is available to serve as his confidant and source of support.”

“And it’s good they have some time to themselves, just like we’re having. Good practice for when they need to deal with things and we’re not there to help them.”

“That shall not occur for a very long time, correct?”
The very real thread of worry in Mycroft’s voice warmed Lestrade’s heart and he smiled widely at his partner before giving him a kiss on his forehead.

“Ages, love. They’ll be right there under our feet for ages and ages more.”

An idea which Mycroft absolutely adored. It might be unfair to wish for a potion that would keep his brother and John children forever, but wish for it he did. But, at the very least, he could hold the children in his heart, unchanged and unspoiled for the rest of his life. That would not be unfair at all, and such a very easy thing to do.

_________________

“Oh, hi Mycroft. Greg… we were just…”

Not that John had an acceptable explanation. Mycroft and Lestrade stared down at the two boys, John sitting up against the post of the older boy’s bed and Sherlock lying on the floor with his head next to John’s leg, said head bearing a very chocolate stained mouth. That John was holding a truffle above his friend’s face told the rest of the tale.

“… you see, Sherlock was a little upset…”

“I shwas not! I thimply exhibited a proper ammount of dithztress over Mumry’s arrivdal.”

“Swallow, brother dear. And I do understand your plight. However, John, it is not your responsibility to feed him chocolates much like an attendant to a maharajah.”

“I don’t mind. We’re actually testing if he can keep his eyes closed and open his mouth at the right time, just by listening to me say ‘bomb!’ He’s doing pretty good, which isn’t good for me because I only get to eat the ones that miss.”

“You may consume as many fresh and pristine truffles as you desire, John. Please do not confine your enjoyment to those soiled by collision with Grandmama’s admittedly immaculate floors.”

“Yes! Thanks, Mycroft!”

John dove into the box of chocolates on his lap and plucked out a fat one to pop into his mouth, much to Sherlock’s anger.

“That was hazelnut! There are but a few of those in that ridiculously ill-provided sample and they should be reserved only for those with the quality of breeding sufficient to properly appreciate them!”

“Guess that’s me then, because I’m appreciating this one a lot!”

Mycroft purred with satisfaction both at what he was witnessing and from the powerful arms that were slowly encircling his waist.

“You have a peasant’s palate. You look upon a pot of boiled cabbage and turnips and think you are being presented with a feast! If the coarsest variety of dull brown bread was laid before you, it would instantly trigger salivation, much like Pavlov’s dog and if a small and slightly rancid walnut was laid at its center, you would howl like said slobbery dog until the rubbish was tipped into your food bowl for you to devour.”

“One, two, three… all the hazelnuts for me…”
“Lackey! Force the mold spore to return all hazelnut truffles to their proper receptacle and cease his ear-splitting version of what he insanely terms singing.”

“John, wanna share?”

“Sure, here you go Greg. Mycroft, you want one?”

“Please.”

“I think your tantrum’s not getting a lot of support, Sherlock.”

“You have bought their allegiance. I cannot fault your tactics, John Watson, for it is one I would employ, but I shall forever view you with disfavor for your reprehensible disloyalty.”

“I’ll survive. I have chocolate.”

“Which John would most generously share with you, Sherlock, were you to politely ask for a morsel. Though, from the number of empty spaces in the box, I am not certain if your system would tolerate another cocoa-based assault. Perhaps I should intervene and remove the temptation from your reach.”

“It matters not for I know where Grandmama’s chocolate supply is located and can abscond with all I desire at will.”

“I believe Grandmama would take a dim view of your perfidy, brother dear.”

“She would admire my cunning.”

“I think he’s got you there, love.”

Mycroft delighted in the low-pitched whisper in his ear and the slight tightening of his spouse’s arms, which drew him closer to the warmest and most perfectly sculpted body under the sun. Even so innocent a gesture became an erotically-charged lance to his nethers when his fiancé was the one who made it.

“You may be correct. Grandmama does appreciate daring and the subtle, yet stylish application of classical strategies and tactics. However, it would not do to fill yourself like a stuffed goose and spoil your dinner.”

“JOHN!”

John quickly grabbed a truffle and pushed it into Sherlock’s mouth.

“It’s probably best not to mention dinner or your mum right now, Mycroft. It makes him upset. This is actually our second box of chocolates…”

Lestrade squeezed his lover even more tightly and kissed him on the neck, feeling Mycroft’s body stiffen at John’s words. Poor little tyke… Mycroft carried a lot of hurt inside over their mother and the goblin prince obviously had his own heavy share.

“Then we’ll do what we can to perk him up. Is there something on that activity list of yours that sounds especially good right now?”

John looked down at Sherlock who scrunched his nose as he gave Lestrade's question his most forceful consideration.
“We have yet to complete and test our glider designs.”

“Ok, Sherlock, that sounds fun and relatively non-lethal. Let’s see what we can find to get them finished and look around for somewhere to launch them.”

“The altitude must be significant for a proper test to be undertaken.”

“We’ll find a significant altitude for your test site.”

“And we require photographic or video-based data to properly analyze and refine our designs.”

“Love, can you handle that?”

Mycroft looked over his shoulder at Lestrade and marveled again at how easily his husband could handle the children and brighten his brother’s sour mood.

“I believe I can acquire the necessary equipment.”

“Then let’s go see what you two have going on with your drawings and what we need to do to pull them together into something to test.”

“Can we bring the chocolate?”

Lestrade grinned down at John’s very innocent face and tightened his embrace around Mycroft who was chuckling softly.

“So long as you don’t get smudges everywhere. Hate to see you think a blob of chocolate is something important for your glider and make yourself a flying brick because of it.”

“As if I could commit such a bungling of basic engineering principles! I would spit on your attempt at wit, but my spittle is of greater value than the clothing of yours it might possibly defile and I also do not bungle basic economic principles, even for personal satisfaction.”

“Thanks, Sherlock, you’re a real mate. Ok, you two, off the floor and start marching.”

John complied quite literally with Lestrade’s orders, and Sherlock shambled like a very put-upon zombie, but at least the day was officially moving forward and the happy couple took a moment to celebrate their victory with a kiss.

“This should keep them busy awhile.”

“I agree, my dear Gregory. We shall find ourselves quite occupied, I wager, until it is time to dress for dinner.”

“Dress… suits again?”

“Most likely, though I may be mistaken. And it is quite possible you shall find something ready in waiting that is slightly more… casual… that you have worn previously.”

“A casual suit?”

“One must have something more appropriate to wear for less formal gatherings, country affairs, etc.”

“I learn something new every day.”
“A part of the wonder of life.”

Two shrill, impatient voices sounded through the corridor, making Lestrade and Mycroft shake their head in acceptance.

“And that’s another part, isn’t it love?”

“Oh, most certainly.”

If Mycroft was not highly aroused by the physical prowess of his spouse, he might be worried for the man wrapped around the limb of a tall tree and holding a glider gently in his mouth. The video footage of his love’s muscular bottom as he climbed upwards was another item that would be added to his luggage for their trip home.

“If you have compromised the structural integrity of my glider, simian, I shall be most displeased!”

Fortunately, Lestrade’s grip on the branch was not entirely dependent on a certain finger that he used to demonstrate his opinion of Sherlock’s potential displeasure.

“Sherlock, you could have ascended the tree to your desired launch point yourself and ensured the condition of your craft.”

“And again you demonstrate why the cliché of intelligence being linked to unattractiveness is completely without merit! How can I launch the glider and take notes on its performance simultaneously?”

“John could scribe your notes and his handwriting is by far the most legible of the pair of you.”

“Nincompoop! John Watson has not a modicum of my knowledge of physics. He would fill valuable pages of my notebook with toddler-level doodles and misspelled terms not even applicable to the mechanics of flight!”

“I am right here, you know, Sherlock.”

“Be silent, bacterium. I must prepare to conduct my experiment.”

John rolled his eyes and made a series of faces behind Sherlock’s back for which Mycroft solemnly nodded his approval, then followed after his friend who was now waving his arm impatiently for John to come and assist. Mycroft watched the two boys and felt a great sense of relief wash over him. Sherlock was a caustic child, at times, and it had worked against him heavily in terms of finding friends. Perhaps it always would, but now his own worry was lessened knowing that there would always be at least one friend to stand stalwartly at his brother’s side.

“I am not a growth-stunted guppy!”

At greater or lesser fisticuffs distance depending on the day.

“Well, have we properly attributed to each of your designs an appropriate list of successes and failures?”

“Yes. And I already have ideas how to make mine better.”
“A flammable solvent and match is the most expedient option.”

“Shut up, Sherlock. At least mine didn’t lose its wings in the middle of a flight.”

“The stresses associated with its tremendous speed weakened the supports. It is a minor matter to remediate.”

“Yeah, tremendous speed… your glider was slow as a turtle.”

“Yet mine outdistanced yours handily.”

“Until it fell apart and everyone aboard was killed.”

“Your insistence on adding passengers was the height of idiocy. And you gave me the heavier rocks!”

“You said you designed a weight-distribution sling to compensate. Problem with your calculations?”

“My calculations were perfect! I blame the inferior materials my slave foraged for the construction.”

One of Sherlock’s dead passengers bounced off of his head due the very accurate aim of his man in chains.

“You shall be called to answer for that, peasant.”

“Yeah, I’m shaking. And thirsty. Climbing is hard work. What say we go and get something to drink?”

“That is an excellent idea, Gregory. And perhaps a small refreshment?”

“Sounds good. Those chocolates didn’t fill me up like I thought they would.”

“How many of my truffles did you consume, ragamuffin?”

“How many were left in the box?”

Sherlock’s screech of rage was cut off abruptly by the chocolate that was pushed into his mouth by John who gave Mycroft and Lestrade a thumb’s up and started walking back towards the house.

“I do admire John’s instincts and quick-minded actions.”

“He definitely knows how to pacify the Prince of Darkness.”

“For that reason alone, the boy is near and dear to my heart.”

“And because he thinks you’re tops.”

“That might factor into things somewhat.”

The argument over whether the grand glider redesign and testing session would occur today or tomorrow continued loudly and with much gesturing, often with gliders in hand, until they reached the house, where all four boys came to a crashing halt, seeing the tall, elegant figure standing in wait
Lestrade stared at the woman and tried to think of someone he knew who was lovelier than Mummy Holmes and couldn’t think of a single example. She looked a lot like Sherlock, with the fine features and rolls of waves in her long hair, but without the ferocity of expression that usually painted the little goblin’s face, and truly looked like one of those nearly too-beautiful women you saw in paintings and fine photographs. Really, she was a stunning woman…

… at first glance. As he looked closer, there was something in her eyes that set him on alert and it was not by conscious choice that he stepped a little closer to Mycroft to shield his partner from the look in those deep blue eyes. And, glancing down, he mentally added the boys to his list of protectees, since they were already trying to conceal themselves behind his and Mycroft’s legs.

“I am waiting.”

Even her voice was beautiful and Lestrade was very unhappy right now that he liked the way her voice sounded because he knew she wasn’t going to have beautiful words to match. Taking point, he started to close the last bit of distance between himself and the new arrival and felt a familiar hand briefly touch the small of his back, though if it was in comfort or in warning, he wasn’t sure.

“Sherlock, Mycroft… a kiss for your mother?”

Mycroft quickly darted forward, dragging Sherlock behind him and stood rigidly as they imparted a kiss on their mother’s cheek. Then it was a swift scamper back to huddle around Lestrade as if he was a mighty oak.

“Oh Mycroft… you have let yourself go, haven’t you? How much weight have you gained?”

“O…only a bit, Mummy. It was not easy to monitor my intake as closely as necessary while I was in America and…”

“No excuses. You know your tendency to fatten if you are not vigilant. I am quite disappointed for them.

“Oh dear.”

“Mycroft… is that your mum?”

“Yes, my love. That is Mummy.”

“Oh.”

“Yes.”

“She’s…”

“Quite.”

“I think I’ve seen her in a painting or something.”

“It is not impossible.”

“Your mum… she’s…”

“Beautiful.”

“Yeah.”

for them.
in you, Mycroft. I shall notify the kitchen staff to portion your dinner appropriately. And Sherlock… why are you so filthy? I recognize you eschew even the minimal level of proper dress, but must you roll around on the ground like a dog and besmirch the clothes you do deign to wear? I am not happy, Sherlock. Not a tiny bit.”

Sherlock’s ‘are you ever?’ was not lost on Lestrade who, seeing the shamed cast to Mycroft’s eyes and Sherlock’s sullen scowl, decided to brave the dragon in its den.

“Sherlock’s just been out playing, ma’am; a lad’s supposed to get a little dirty when he’s having fun.”

Sherlock and Mycroft both gave a quiet gasp and Mycroft hoped his partner was fleet of foot when Mummy began to hurl her verbal bullets in his direction.

“You must be new here, so I shall say this kindly. It is not your place to speak to the guests of the house, let alone intrude on their private conversations. Now, be off with you; I am certain you have a great deal of work to do…. are you the new gardener’s boy? And who is that little thing next to you? Oh, it doesn’t matter. Mycroft, Sherlock… come along. We have just enough time to discuss your progress…”

“And Mycroft’s nice and fit in my opinion. Doesn’t have any trouble keeping up with these two and their games.”

Lestrade hoped his face looked confident because, being subjected to an intense scrutiny that was growing a frown on Mummy Holmes’s face, he wasn’t feeling particularly confident at the moment.

“Mycroft, who is this… individual?”

It took Mycroft a moment to unstick his tongue but finally croaked out a reply.

“This is Gregory, Mummy.”

“And am I supposed to be enlightened by that response?”

Mycroft had both hoped that the staff had not divulged his relationship to his mother and prayed for it ardently, so he would not have to be the one to do it.

“Gregory is my partner, Mummy.”

“Partner? Have you started some form of business? Well, I applaud your initiative, I suppose, and hiring someone to handle the menial labor arm of the enterprise, however…”

Mycroft hoped that his spouse kept control of his temper, but it was clear from his Gregory’s eyes that anger was quickly escalating.

“No, Mummy, you misunderstand. Gregory is my partner in life. He is… well, it is difficult to affix a completely accurate label given the circumstances and I do know how you appreciate accuracy, so…”

“Do stop dithering, Mycroft. However shall you fill your father’s shoes being an incessant ditherer?”

“Mycroft’s just trying to find the right words, ma’am. We’re not just boyfriends, but we’re not engaged yet, either. Sort of a middle ground and there’s not a very good word for that, so we use partner. And this is John, by the way, Sherlock’s best friend.”
The hardening of his mother’s features spoke volumes concerning her views on his relationship status and Mycroft wondered if providing her with a nice glass of her favorite champagne would be prudent peace offering.

“I shall assume I misunderstood the field hand and remind you that you are expected to dress for dinner. You and Sherlock shall present yourselves at table no later than 6:30 pm as we are dining early.”

Lestrade had to admire the way Mycroft’s mother could spin on her heel and toss her hair simultaneously, so that her nastiness was almost camouflaged by her sexiness… almost. As the woman strode away, with that perfect little sway to her hips, Lestrade put his arm around his lover and made sure to ruffle both Sherlock and John’s hair to bring them into the embrace.

“She’s mean!”

John was bristling with agitation and Sherlock looked at him and nodded slightly before giving a surprisingly lifeless reply.

“Mummy does not have a great care for the feelings of others, but, I have also not seen it act to her detriment in any fashion. In fact, it generally ensures she obtains whatever she desires.”

Lestrade looked down at the disheartened Sherlock, then hugged a very quiet Mycroft more tightly and pulled a Sherlock-John combination against him, as well.

“Doesn’t matter. We know she’s full of shit and that’s all that counts. And I haven’t heard one nasty thing come out of Grandmama’s mouth about any of us. Or Mum’s either. So, I think we can do without her approval very nicely. How about we get that drink and a little snack before we think about getting ready? We’ll all be ready to eat at 6:30 pm and I, for one, do not plan on being late.”

Mycro leaned his head on his darling husband’s shoulder and rejoiced in the utter sense of security he was feeling, something quite different than his usual encounters with his mother. Gregory was a bulwark of strength that was gladly and lovingly given to their family in times of joy, as well as times of hardship, such as now. What a blessing he had been given…

“I heartily agree, my dear. The kitchen staff shall be most pleased to accommodate such physically-depleted visitors.”

“Let’s go, then.”

Lestrade slid his arm down and grabbed Mycroft’s hand, then gave each boy a small squeeze before they started to walk forward, each step lightening their moods, until they reached the kitchen and Sherlock was again stridently voicing his opinion on John’s engineering abilities and John ignoring that opinion in very grand fashion, punctuated by a wave of his still-winged glider in Sherlock’s face. While the boys turned to bombarding the kitchen staff with their demands, Lestrade snuck to one of the refrigerators and pulled out two bottles of the soda he liked that the staff had taken to stocking since Sherlock loudly informed everyone within earshot of his ‘addiction to the nutritionally-bankrupt, artificially-created potion of a decidedly substandard food chemist’ and handed one to Mycroft.

“Here, love. Put some sugar in your system and relax a moment. I’ll get us something to eat. Why don’t you have a seat?”

Lestrade drew out a chair for Mycroft sit and darted off to pull together two plates of food, under the indulgent eye of the house cook and brought them back to the table, just as Sherlock and John were
taking their own seats to wrestle down the sizeable snacks they’d procured.

“Oh, thank you, Gregory. This looks quite appetizing.”

Not appetizing enough to eat, however, as Lestrade noticed. While the boys dove into their food, Mycroft picked at his plate, more moving the food around than actually putting it in his mouth.

“Sherlock, John… Mycroft and I are going to relax a bit. Why don’t you play a little chess until it’s time to get ready?”

“That is not on our pre-sundown approved activity list.”

“Then add it. We’ll be busy for awhile and it’s best you don’t get into any trouble right now.”

Without waiting for an answer, Lestrade rose from the table and nearly dragged Mycroft along after him.

“Gregory! What has gotten into you?”

Lestrade didn’t answer, continuing to pull Mycroft along through the corridors until they were at their bedroom, where he pulled Mycroft inside, closing and locking the door behind them.

“Why were you picking at your food, Mycroft?”

Whatever the older Holmes brother expected, it wasn’t that particular question. A question he was not terribly happy about answering.

“I… I was not hungry.”

“You’re a liar.”

“At times, however, this is not an example.”

“Your mother got to you. Made you think something’s wrong with how you look.”

“That’s… that is nonsense.”

“That’s you lying again. She made you feel bad about yourself.”

“I have long ago learned not to pay heed to her words.”

“Can’t stop lying for a minute can you? Come here.”

Lestrade grabbed Mycroft again and pulled him closer, then forcefully began to remove the clothes from his partner’s body.

“Gregory! Have you lost your senses?”

“No, but you have.”

Not stopping, despite Mycroft’s sputtering protests, Lestrade divested his lover of every scrap of clothing then, still glaring at Mycroft so he didn’t bolt, made short work of his own.

“Now, let it out.”

“I… I beg your pardon?”
“Your stomach. You’re holding it in.”

“Gregory, please…”

“No… I am not going to let anyone put in your head that you’re anything less than perfect. Exactly as you are. And that changes every day! No matter what, you’re the most fantastic man and I love you because of it. If you’re heavy, so what, you’re absolutely gorgeous. If you’re thin, who cares, you’re amazing. You’ve got a belly and it’s a sexy belly. If it gets bigger, it’ll be sexy. If it gets smaller, it’ll be sexy. Because you’re sexy. Don’t ever, not for one second, think you have to try and look any way other than you do naturally because that’s daft. You’re wonderful and drive me completely wild and that’s going to stay the same with no belly, a tiny belly, a big belly, lots of hair, no hair, round bum, flat bum… it’s all beautiful.”

Mycroft sighed and let his small paunch relax, drinking in the way his husband’s eyes ran up and down his body.

“That’s just unbelievable. Should be illegal to be that hot and spicy.”

Lestrade stepped forward and ran his hands over Mycroft’s stomach and made little sounds of pleasure that struck right to the base of Mycroft’s spine.

“My Mycroft… brilliant, handsome, funny and gets me hard as a rock so fast it almost hurts.”

When the kiss hit his lips, it wasn’t gentle or tender, it was hard and rough and Mycroft surrendered to it utterly, letting his spouse take what he wanted from his mouth and roam strong hands over skin was starting to feel like it was on fire. Slowly, Lestrade began to maneuver them towards the bed and released Mycroft just long enough to nod his head to direct his partner to climb onto the mattress, where Mycroft found himself pushed onto his back with a heavy, warm body climbing on top of him.

“I chatted you up that first day at the shop, Mycroft. I asked you out first, too. I’ve been chasing after you since the first time I saw you and I have never, not once, thought you were anything less than spectacular.”

Lestrade pressed another deep and demanding kiss on his lover and moved his body just a little to give Mycroft some friction because he adored hearing the tiny noises the man beneath him made when he was aroused and needy.

“And I will remind you how mind-blowingly gorgeous you are so you never, ever, forget.”

This time he moved his body more forcefully and earned one of Mycroft’s toe-curling moans. Not content with one, Lestrade made sure to get several more before he rolled to sit up, his arms cradling Mycroft’s back so he came upwards, too, and settled the lovely ginger angel on his lap with their legs wrapped around each other. One quick spit into his hand and Lestrade was taking both their erections in his grip and beginning to stroke slowly, but firmly.

“Your body makes me crazy, love. Do you have any idea how hard it is for me not to touch you all the time? Caress that creamy skin, breathe in that scent of yours… it’s hard to think sometimes because you’re right there and the only thing in my head is wanting to get you in my arms and do things to you that would make your eyes roll back into your head. But I get it; maybe you don’t see what I see. That’s ok… I’m going to help you with that. Help you understand exactly why you make my blood boil…”

Which was Mycroft was suffering right now, and that suffering was exquisitely sweet. The sweetest
of all was the sound of his beloved spouse’s words in his ear. Gregory loved him, knowing his imperfections and inadequacies; did not, actually, see them in that light. That was… that was incredibly satisfying… reassuring… empowering… and it was only a few more moments before he was thanking his dear spouse for his kind attentions with a very messy gift that his Gregory contributed to soon after. And after another few moments, he was sporting his own lovely territorial mark that he could choose to display with the right combination of collar choice and motion.

“So, so gorgeous… that’s what I thought the first time I saw you and now all that gorgeousness is mine…”

“And I am glad for it, my Gregory. I give myself to you completely and know that I shall not… I shall not try to conceal that which is myself from your eyes ever again.”

“That’s what I like to hear.”

One long kiss, this time slow and soft, preceded Lestrade shuffling backwards and smiling at the man he adored.

“Time for a shower?”

“I find that to be a splendid idea.”

“I have one now and then. We can check on Sherlock and John afterwards.”

“They have been suspiciously quiet.”

“Since I don’t hear sirens, I think we can linger a little under that nice hot water, though.”

“Lingering… my new favorite word.”

“Feels good on the tongue, doesn’t it?”

“As do other things.”

“I think I might need some examples of that.”

“It shall be my pleasure to present you with a robust selection.”

When they exited the shower, Mycroft’s idea of unlocking the bedroom door before they embarked on their mission of cleanliness gained them two new suits and Lestrade had to say he approved. Tweed with slightly different cuts than the ones they wore to Mycroft’s ‘business’ dinner and Lestrade understood what his partner meant by something more casual. It was still a suit that put everything else he’d seen to shame, but it was definitely more relaxed and welcoming than his previous one. And Mycroft in a rich nut brown was like a warm fire in the hearth…

Unsurprisingly, when they found Sherlock and John, the boys had fallen into some game whose rules were known only to them and seemed to involve a complex algorithm of cards, chess pieces, hand-drawn score cards and grapes.

“Ugh, the fornicators have arrived and I am without my gas mask.”

“We each took a shower before we got dressed, you evil little troll.”

“I laugh at your phrasing since you obviously shared the shower cubicle. Please do not attempt
to conceal the depths of your depravity; it only adds to the general embarrassment that your
personality, poverty, level of grooming and vocabulary already bestow upon you.”

“Well, it’s your turn now, so try not to be as depraved as us.”

“There is not a universe in existence in which that is possible.”

John agreed with a solemn nod, setting Mycroft and Lestrade laughing and the boys into eating the
remaining grapes before agreeing to prepare for the rest of the evening. As expected, getting them to
bathe and dress in a timely manner was as challenging a task as negotiating a nuclear-arms treaty, but
the end result made the older boys smile with pride. Sherloack and John’s suits were very near that of
the adult models, but they were provided with bow ties. Mycroft had to wonder if Grandmama was
making a statement as John’s suit was colored very similarly to his and Sherlock’s was a reasonable
mate to Lestrade’s and no one, seeing them as a group, would question that they were not closely
affiliated, if not by blood then by some other defined and affectionate bond. Care had gone into
choosing these and he was curious now if his mother’s arrival was not as unexpected as Grandmama
had led him to believe.

With everyone groomed and given a final check over for appearance, the four moved towards the
dining room, though not one would admit that their pace could be outstripped by a garden snail.
Their first dinner here had been difficult for Lestrade owing to his responsibilities and strenuous for
Mycroft because of his responsibilities, but it did not carry the unsettling worry that loomed over this
particular event and, after walking into the room, that worry escalated. Mycroft’s mother and
Grandmama were already seated and, though Grandmama was giving them her standard non-smile
smile, Mummy Holmes was noticeably displeased.

“I thought this was to be a family dinner, Mama.”

Grandmama made a grand show of watching the boys take seats, all of them crowding on one side of
the table away from their scowling adversary and took a sip of water before answering.

“It is.”

“Ridiculous. Those two…extra people… are certainly not family.”

“Really, your eldest son’s fiancé, oh, do excuse me boys, partner, and Sherlock’s bosom
companion? I think the definition stretches sufficiently to bring them into the fold.”

“That is utterly ludicrous. Mycroft is in no manner affianced to… whatever his name is. Firstly,
my son does not have unsavory leanings and second, he knows well his place in society and would
do nothing to jeopardize that, such as consorting romantically with the lower classes. And
Sherlock… Sherlock had yet to develop the skills to cultivate any form of friendship. I have no idea
what form of jest you are enacting at my expense, but I do not appreciate it.”

Mycroft bit his tongue sharply and took his own sip of water, wishing Lestrade was seated next to
him to offer quiet and subtle support. His love seemed to have a very stiff spine when it came to
Mummy’s tongue, but they had put John between them and Sherlock on the other side of his
husband so each boy had adult supervision, but his Gregory was not too distant to share a word over
their meal. Should he actually get the chance…

“There’s nothing unsavory about Mycroft, ma’am. He’s in love and there’s nothing wrong with
loving someone.”

But, apparently, his love had decided to make his own opportunities to speak. And that simply
added to Mummy’s displeasure.

“I do not believe I was speaking to you.”

“No, you weren’t and I apologize for putting my nose in, but I wanted you to understand things. There’s nothing wrong with Mycroft. Nothing at all, and I love him with everything in me because he’s an amazing man and surprises me every day with how smart and caring and…”

“Mama, truly, I am growing tired of your little game. Send the help back to his quarters and have him take that… wherever did that child come from? No matter… I had hoped to enjoy dinner in peace and that certainly is not what I am experiencing at the moment. And I hope you did not spend an excessive amount on their suits for it was a criminal waste of money, as they wear them deplorably. A silly extravagance for your little joke.”

Mycroft reached up and stroked John’s hair a moment to calm the increasingly-agitated child.

“I find it interesting that you still cling to the notion that you are being somehow drawn into a parlor game. Your observational skills have atrophied somewhat during your latest trip abroad, perhaps?”

Lestrade couldn’t miss the gleam in Grandmama’s eye as she looked at her daughter-in-law and was happy to see it was not a happy gleam. No matter what, they still had the most important ally in the Holmes family on their side.

“Of course not. If anything, they are sharper than ever. Look at Sherlock, for instance. Surly, disinterested… completely typical for him. A child like that does not have friends, so the assertion that the tiny and clearly labor-class child next to the impertinent ruffian serves as Sherlock’s friend is farcical. And Mycroft is as normal and proper a man as was his father and shall have a lovely wife at his side. In fact, I believe it is time to take a more active interest in that area of his life. It has been an age since I arranged a party and this is a perfect excuse! There are many delightful young ladies on the market, many are daughters of friends of mine, and it is time he made their acquaintance.”

Mycroft felt his heart drop into his shoes and shot a glance to his lover, who looked to be preparing to inform everyone as to his opinion of that idea, likely very loudly and with a great deal of detail.

“Now, who is playing the game, my dear? You have long been aware of Mycroft’s nature; I informed you of it myself.”

Lestrade felt his mouth drop and looked to Mycroft for some anchor in this chaotic conversation, but realized his partner was just as unmoored as was he.

“That does not mean I believed you.”

“Affecting stupidity does not become you, Emma. You are simply hoping to create drama where none exists. Ah, don’t the shrimp look lovely?”

As soon as he was served, John shoveled a plump shrimp into his mouth, and Mycroft absentmindedly handed him a napkin, noting that Lestrade was doing similar for Sherlock who had two shrimp tails protruding from his mouth and a blob of sauce starting to run down his chin.

“I cannot be asked to recall every little detail we have discussed over the years. And anyway… informed or not, I do not have to approve.”

“Of course not. I shall be quite certain to pass along your disapproval to your dear friend Thomas. You were just visiting with him in Milan, were you not? And how is his Andrew? Such a
lovely couple; for how long have they been together? Twenty years? Twenty-five?”

Now it was Lestrade shoving a shrimp into his mouth, mostly to stifle the bark of laughter begging to be let loose.

“Oh very well… Mycroft has not a tenth the style and flair to be homosexual, but if that is who he is, then I shall have to endure.”

“Excellent. And I’m certain you shall do all in your power to increase his flamboyance to a socially-acceptable level.”

“Someone shall have to. That vagabond pretending to be his lover surely cannot. There is no question he purchases his clothing from the charity shops. And will someone explain to me just who is that homunculus sitting next to Mycroft?”

With his partner starting to lift out of his seat after being called a vagabond then snarling at the barb hurled at John, Mycroft decided it was his turn to show courage, but caught the look from Grandmama and closed his mouth.

“Our dear John is Sherlock’s friend and they are most inseparable. And Gregory is most certainly not a vagabond as a vagabond would not demonstrate proper appreciation for my finest brandy, as does he. Now, I am certain we would all enjoy hearing your stories your latest adventure.”

Mycroft understood the signal his grandmother was sending – one victory was sufficient for tonight. It chafed to have his love demeaned, however, it was nothing more or less than he and Sherlock enjoyed on a regular basis and it would not stand unaddressed for long. The next engagement in this war would be making their relationship very clear to his mother and then… well, his spouse was already possessed of a thick skin, which would come very much in handy through the years…

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Lestrade marveled how his future mother-in-law’s mouth could run without stopping for a good hour as they ate. At least she had moved on from slinging her mud at his partner and the kids and, after Sherlock had some bread with butter and sugar to go with his food, the boy’s mood improved enough to actually start a covert note-passing initiative with John. Lestrade crossed his fingers and hoped Grandmama wouldn’t be too angry over having two of her fine napkins ruined by countless messages written in pencil, sauce, butter sprinkled with pepper and melted chocolate ice cream. When they were finally excused from the table, neither Mycroft nor Lestrade were surprised that Sherlock and John marched to the library with frequent looks over their shoulders to see that they were being followed. Once inside, the boys made a very pointed show of looking for spies and listening devices before throwing themselves onto the floor in front of the fire and releasing in-unison groans of frustration/exasperation/relief.

“A bit of brandy, my filthy vabagond?”

“I believe I shall, my no-style homosexual.”

“John and I were subjected to the most fiendish of insults, yet we are not being offered a brandy. I am gravely offended.”

“Sorry, but surly and tiny aren’t evil enough. But you’re right, you deserve a little something.”

Lestrade reached up to take the glass Mycroft was offering and passed it to Sherlock, laughing that John jumped up and smiled winningly at Mycroft, who laughed and passed over his own glass to the
eager boy.

“Tiny sip, you two. If you like it, you can have another.”

Mycroft cut Lestrade a quizzical look, but had to admit his lover, as usual, was a master parent. As soon as the brandy touched their tongues, the boys’ eyes began to water and it was a good several moments of amusement for the older pair to watch Sherlock and John attempt to maintain their composure while suffering the alcohol’s bite.

“Good, John?”

“Oh… yeah… Right, Sherlock?”

“It is… highly palatable.”

“Want a glass of your own?”

John’s look of horror and Sherlock’s quick return of his glass to Lestrade’s hand was quite sufficient an answer.

“How about some of that soda I like that you say is crap?”

“Please?”

Lestrade laughed at John’s plaintive warble and Mycroft quickly rang for the boys’ beverages. After his own long sip of brandy, the vagabond finally felt himself relaxing enough to put his jacket aside and talk about the evening. Before dinner there had been an unspoken moratorium on any further conversation about Mummy Holmes, but now was a good time to clear the air.

“Ok, that was most uncomfortable meal I’ve ever sat through and that includes the one where Mum told me that my dad cut out on us. At least I was relieved over that one.”

Mycroft removed his own jacket and sat down next to his lover, releasing a deep breath when an arm draped over his shoulders and fingers began idly stroking the fabric of his shirt.

“And that was not, by far, Mummy at her most colorful, my dear. It is something to consider if you truly do plan someday to allow me the honor of your hand.”

“I still say she’s mean. She said awful things about Sherlock. Why would she say he wouldn’t have friends? Sherlock’s great and could have lots of friends if he wanted them.”

John couldn’t see Sherlock’s tiny grin, but Lestrade could and, looking at Mycroft, he knew that his partner could see it, too.

“Doesn’t matter what she says, John, we know better.”

“As Gregory says, John… Mummy is often harsh in her words, but as long as we know the truth of things, all shall be well. And Grandmama is a staunch supporter of our, if I may use the term, family, and her opinion has been sought and valued by presidents, monarchs and potentates for decades.”

The small boy pursed his lips in thought, but finally nodded his understanding.

“Ok, but she’d better watch what she says about Sherlock. I don’t let people say mean things about my friends.”
“Oh very good… one should always be ready and willing to defend the honor of a companion. Or a partner.”

Mycroft turned and smiled at his husband, adoring the one he received in return. What a proud and protective man he had won as a lifemate. A fierce spouse ready to challenge any insult to his lowly lover’s character or quality. Few willingly argued with Mummy and his cherished fiancé had done so without hesitation. Was there any feeling as comforting as being championed by such a valiant warrior of a man? He had been lax these past few days about chronicling the saga of their love in his journal, but that would be rectified and today would figure prominently as a shining light in their epic tale of devotion.

“I’m sorry if I made an ass out of myself. I couldn’t stand still and listen to her say things about you, love. I just couldn’t.”

“You would not have to open your mouth to be considered an ass, lackey. Already your proboscis resembles that of a donkey and you have the braying laugh associated with that breed. That you have not been fitted with a bag of oats and shown your stable for the night completely baffles me.”

“Sherlock, do behave. And I believe that is the knock for your beverages. Why don’t you and John go and collect them?”

The boys vaulted off the floor, desperate to wash the remaining fumes of the brandy out of their mouths and Mycroft used the opportunity to give Lestrade a quick, but warm kiss.

“You were magnificent, my dear. You owe no apologies as I was both reassured and gladdened by your actions. I admit that I find it difficult to confront Mummy’s ramblings and have grown too fatigued by them to make even an attempt to do so. It is good that your sword has been added to the fray and I believe it is reinvigorating my own.”

“Anytime I can sharpen up your sword, I’ll consider it my pleasure.”

“Gregory Lestrade, is that innuendo?”

“Not sure, guess we’ll have to wait to find out.”

“I should probably warn you that Sherlock, despite his current demeanor, often has difficulty rebounding from Mummy’s return from her travels.”

“We’re going to have company tonight, aren’t we?”

“I often find him sitting in the chair in my bedroom at home, asleep or awake and waiting for me to do the same, though the hour is exceedingly early in the morning.”

“Well, tonight he and John can avoid the chair and have a nice mattress to sleep on. Though you never know, having John share a room with him might help him take his own sword to some of those troubles.”

“Hmmm… it is a possibility to consider. I suppose we shall know when the time comes.”

“Either way, it’ll be fine. I don’t have to have sex with my partner every night, I guess.”

“But it would be an agreeable thing if you did.”

“Absolutely.”
Chapter 16

A relaxing evening of analyzing Sherlock’s flight data and sketching redesigns of the gliders, along with another round of poker that added to Sherlock and John’s shopping credits, much to Lestrade’s concern since his funds were limited at the moment due to enjoying the life of leisure and not working for a living recently, was the boys’ reward for their harrowing dinner and when Lestrade and Mycroft finally declared it time to end the night, they met with little resistance from Sherlock and John. Of course, it wasn’t fifteen minutes between depositing the two young boys in their bedroom that said young boys marched into their older brethren’s bedroom and demanded to discuss the activity schedule for the next day. The fact that they were pyjama-clad and already looking sleepy-eyed undercut the seriousness of their request.

Alternating turns putting on their own nightwear, the nearly-engaged couple entertained the young interlopers, who had hopped onto the mattress of the tall bed, John with a little assistance from Lestrade, and, after a few minutes of perfunctory conversation, the soft snores of the heavily-asleep goblin-born were making the senior generation laugh.

“Well, I’m glad I didn’t bet you on this.”

“Truly, for you would have lost handily. However, I am glad for this, Gregory. Sherlock has been loath to openly seek comfort for his troubles and this is a heartening step for him. He is not so oblivious that he fails to recognize how I shall perceive his actions, yet he took them nonetheless, approaching us willingly rather than sneaking in after we were asleep. I am very, very excited about this.”

Lestrade affected a bit of child reshuffling, then some partner reshuffling, to get everyone comfortable and obtain his own bliss of a Mycroft-shaped octopus lying next to him and ensnaring him with long and eager limbs.

“I’m happy, too. I don’t want those two to ever think they can’t come to us when they’re upset or have a problem. Hey, what’s the phone situation at their school? John can call anytime he wants, right?”

“Yes, though it is not as private situation as he might prefer. I shall make arrangements…”

“No.”

“Pardon?”

“Don’t single John out for special treatment. He’s already the new kid and that takes awhile for other kids to get used to. If you go and have a phone installed in his room or something that’s just going to cause problems – make kids wonder why he’s getting singled out for privileges and that never works to anyone’s benefit. It’s best if he’s treated no differently than any of the others – don’t forget that he lives there and is going to spend a lot of time without us to keep an eye on him.”

“Ah, I see your point and I must, reluctantly, agree. It would be cruel to take actions that would make John’s school experience a difficult one.”

“If it helps, I suspect he’ll spend every chance he gets at your house, but when he can’t, I just wanted to make sure he could reach one of us if there was a problem. He’s got my number, but I never really thought about him being able to use it.”

“Very prudent and I agree… Sherlock will assume that John’s time shall be his to fill, regardless
if they are sharing a bedroom or not. Once again, I bow to your child-rearing skills.”

“Our skills. Don’t believe I didn’t notice you at dinner keeping an eye on John and helping him calm down when all that bile started to eat away at his feelings. Didn’t even think about it, did you? Just happened naturally, I’ll wager.”

Preening was unseemly, but perhaps it was not so noticeable when one was reclining and could hide one’s smug grin in the broad chest of one’s lover.

“I admit that my instincts guided my behavior, yes.”

Lestrade wrapped his arm around his lover and gave him a very approving hug.

“That’s my Mycroft. Perfect, perfect and more perfect. I am the luckiest man in the world.”

Cursing himself that his journal was not in arm’s reach, Mycroft rededicated himself to scribing the events of this brief holiday in the most ardent terms. His spouse’s splendor and passion must be documented for posterity to look back upon and despair for none such as he still roams the wilds of the Earth.

“And I gladly return the compliment. Now, shall we rest? I am of the opinion that tomorrow shall be a trying day.”

“Your Mum’s still going to be here?”

“I am not entirely certain, however, her behavior is fairly simple to predict and if she did not feel sufficiently acknowledged today, she will seek to gain more attention and admiration tomorrow.”

“Attention I can give her, but admiration’s not going to happen. Sorry, love.”

“That is quite alright, Gregory, I would not ask that of you. Just… it could be a trying day.”

“Is there a reason we have to stay here and take it?”

Now that was an interesting suggestion.

“What do you propose?”

“Nothing out of the ordinary. Let the boys drive, pack something to eat, find someplace Sherlock can test the age of the dirt or whatever the hell he wants to do… just take a day to enjoy ourselves, far away from the inside of this house. I mean… we only have tomorrow and maybe the next day here, right? I’d hate to lose any of that time…”

A sentiment with which Mycroft readily agreed. This time was truly magical and every morsel of it must be maximized. A geographical solution to this problem might not be an utterly cowardly plan…

“Then we shall explore that option at our first opportunity tomorrow morning. At least we shall not find ourselves surprised into waking by the appearance of chocolate-sheathed goblin spawn, bent on shrieking their tribe’s anthem into our now-bleeding ears.”

“I don’t know if we’re going to be spared the concert, love. They do enjoy a good morning serenade.”

“Perhaps you are correct. I shall investigate the best quality earplugs for future incidents of a shared repose.”
“Or if we have to share a tent for a little camping.”

“How quickly your love for me fades.”

“Not even an overnight with a nice campfire?”

“And insects, both flying and crawling.”

“They make a spray for that.”

“They make houses, also, which are a very pleasing thing. One of my favorite, in fact.”

“I’ll change your mind.”

“I find that unlikely.”

“I’ll use my manly wiles.”

“Hmmm… that is a formidable assault weapon.”

“And there’s skinny dipping by moonlight…”

The image of his Adonis-like spouse naked, bathed both by moonlight and glittering water droplets was hereby prohibited from being raised in his mind when a discussion of ‘roughing it’ was on the table. It was far too tempting…

“Go to sleep, Gregory.”

“I’m starting to save for a tent as soon as I’m back at work.”

“Good night, Gregory.”

“And I’ll get you some bug spray.”

“I love you, too.”

Lestrade wondered if you could choke to death on someone’s hair, but felt stupid trying to blow Sherlock’s curls out of his mouth for the hundredth time. The sleeping princeling had used both him and John as supports and formed a bridge that had his legs propped on John’s chest and his upper half propped on Lestrade’s. The sag in his thin middle currently supported a pillow that seemed to have been stolen from under Mycroft’s head and was being gripped furiously as if it were a talisman against the devil. On Lestrade’s other side was a clinging vine that had sent tendrils everywhere and seemed to span the distance from the top of his head to his toes. He was actually afraid that if he sneezed it would be like kicking over a house of cards. When the door to the bedroom opened he sent up a prayer of thanks that no one had lost their pyjamas during the night’s reshufflings and hoped that it wasn’t Mummy Holmes coming to kill him in his sleep.

“What is the meaning of this?”

Dashed hopes were absolutely the worst.

“Shhh… they’re trying to sleep.”

“I… this is… abominable.”
“I think you mean adorable.”

“You… you… you will tell Mycroft that I am waiting for him in Mama’s study.”

“When he wakes up, sure. Now, how about you let us get a little more rest. We’ve got a big day planned.”

Sherlock actually had a better snort that Mummy Holmes and Lestrade made a mental note to tell him. It would probably make the little tyke very happy.

“I shall expect him in ten minutes.”

“I’d go get some breakfast or something, because that’s not happening. It’ll take us longer than that to get Sherlock up and moving, let alone both of those two trolls dressed and ready to meet the public.”

“Ten minutes.”

With another flourish, Mummy spun out of the room and Lestrade gave her an appropriate wave goodbye, though not all fingers were used in the motion.

“Is she gone?”

John’s querulous voice set Lestrade laughing and drew Mycroft’s sleepy head out of the crook of his neck.

“I would also appreciate the answer to that query.”

“Yes, you fakers, she’s gone. And you are not going to run off and meet her deadline.”

“It might be wise if…”

“No, it wouldn’t. Normally, I’d never tell someone not to listen to their mum, but this is a special circumstance. We’ll get dressed like normal people and not like the house is on fire and then you and I will meet with her in Grandmama’s study.”

“Gregory, I do not think that to be the most favorable plan.”

Sherlock finally began to wiggle from the speech-induced bouncing of Lestrade’s chest and started to drag himself awake.

“I am discontent!”

“I’ve got your feet on me. How do think I feel?”

“Privileged. You should feel privileged, John Watson, sing my praises and ply me with humble, yet bountiful, donations of specie or an acceptable substitute, such as gemstones or a fresh cadaver.”

“Why is it always feet? You really do have a thing for feet, don’t you? I’m going to find you stealing my shoes someday or something, won’t I?”

“Likely, for I am certain that they are incubating various mold and fungal species that are previously unknown to science.”

“My feet are clean!”
“Hmmmmm… no.”

“Alright! Sherlock, you’re crushing my lungs. Get up and let me breathe. John let him take a magnifying glass to your toes so he knows you don’t have stuff growing on them. Mycroft, you stay here with me and make good use of Sherlock’s science time.”

“Do not speak in sexually-suggestive language when I am present, deviant. Both the stomach-churning content and the mind-retarding level of your grammar and sentence structure are slowly sapping my will to live.”

“Then don’t be present. John, can you get His Majesty off my chest and moving towards getting dressed?”

“Hmmmmm… no. This is pretty comfortable, actually. You’d need to make it worth it to me.”

Lestrade suffered Mycroft’s warm and breathy chuckle against his neck, which made it even more urgent to get the boys out of the bedroom before they really had something sexually-suggestive to complain about.

“I’ll add two shopping credits to your account.”

“Do not accept! If the lackey is willing to bargain, his need is great and that can be exploited. Squeeze him until his coffers scream in agony!”

“What part of him is his coffers?”

“I am surprised you have sufficient mental ability to remember to breathe, John Watson. I see that I shall have to take command of this negotiation.”

“Love? You want to help me out here?”

Mycroft peeked his head up and locked eyes with his brother, sharing a genetically-similar sneer of pity for one’s opponent. A quick repositioning had his chin resting on Lestrade’s chest, eyes still locked with Sherlock who was doing the same so the two were using Lestrade’s body as a negotiating table with John quickly sitting on his legs to have a better view of the combat. Strangely, the pinned Lestrade couldn’t think of a better way to start the morning.

The negotiations flew fast and furious and Lestrade now knew Mycroft’s urge to bite when excited transferred to negotiations, as he found himself getting a nip every time Sherlock stopped to very theatrically discuss their side’s offer with John. By the time they had settled on how many credits John would receive for his part of their bedroom secession, how many credits Sherlock would earn for his negotiation fee, the exact amount of time the older boys could be assured of privacy, the credit penalty for reneging on the guaranteed duration of the privacy time, the potential to option more privacy time should it become necessary, the cost per minute for time in excess of the agreed-upon privacy interval, the signal that an extension to the privacy interval was required, the exact criteria that constituted an acceptable interruption to the agreed-upon privacy time or extension thereof and exactly how long after breakfast could the consumption of the remaining box of chocolates that was spirited away from their hiding place commence, the latter being a tangential item, but added as a rider to the existing contract before Sherlock and John would affix their proverbial signature, the ten-minute deadline had long passed and Lestrade considered that enough of a victory on its own.

“Very well. We shall now depart, but I am leaving you with fair warning that I intend to honor the letter of this agreement and if you fail to behave in a similar fashion, I shall be contacting that
dusty mummy Grandmama laughingly calls her legal advisor and filing a breach of contract lawsuit against the both of you. From the hand-to-mouth wage slave, I shall win nothing but the satisfaction of his bootickery for the remainder of my life, but from you, brother dear, I shall seek an exceedingly high and immediately payable default sum.”

Sherlock jumped off the bed, followed by John, who rolled off Lestrade’s legs wearing a large grin on his face and waved cheekily at the older boys as he left the room.

“Did I satisfactorily fulfill my role as your advocate, my dear?”

“If the boys hadn’t gotten the fuck out of here, they would found out just how satisfied I am. You know how hot I get when you’re teaching someone just who’s the smartest, most ferocious person in the room. I can’t wait for you to come home at night, in one of your killer suits, all fired up and grinning your sexy grin because you’ve just sealed some deal to prevent another world war and I get to go at you all night long and collect a few more of these…”

Lestrade ran his fingers along the remnants of the small bites Mycroft had given him and Mycroft hissed in pleasure from both the mental image his lover described and the delight his mate was taking in his little tokens of affection. The most stimulating thrill, however, was the phrase ‘coming home’ falling from his beloved Gregory’s lips. So natural, so unthought-of… already his spouse was comfortable with the future they were crafting and inhabiting it in his mind. And continuing to think about it, if the sliding of his Gregory’s hand up and down over the growing bulge in his pyjama bottoms was to be believed.

“And how exactly would we spend that glorious evening? Details, Gregory… I thrive on details.”

Which his spouse was phenomenally talented in supplying as an hors d’oeuvres to the more intense main course that occupied the remainder of their bartered time together…

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“Finally. Is there not an abbreviated form of your perversions that you can perpetrate when you are fully aware you have more important matters to attend to? That benefit me.”

Mycroft was simply happy that Sherlock and John were dressed, not blood soaked and possessed of the entirety of their limbs. In truth, he was happy because he was suffused with a sated glow that he was quite surprised was not adding illumination to the room, but the condition of the children was a welcome addition to the bliss of his morning.

“I believe we abided by our agreement quite handily and it appears you and John have put the time to excellent use. Is that a modified version of your glider I see near the window?”

“It is the scale-model prototype for my redesigned version. The final construction shall be approximately 3.47x the size of this.”

“He got a little carried away. Mine’s only going to be about twice the size of my prototype.”

Mycroft hummed appreciatively at the glider to which John pointed and decided that they would have to find a new launch point for the children’s engineering feats because in no universe was his beloved spouse attempting to scale a tree with meter-long gliders tucked under his arms. Perhaps a launch platform could be constructed and provided with a sturdy set of stairs. Or, better yet, some form of winch to lift the gliders upwards, which would be very useful if the current trend of size-escalating aircraft continued for several more iterations.
“A fine engineering achievement. I am certain we shall find time to build your full-scale vision and see it properly tested.”

“Yes! And I can bring this back to school with me, right?”

“Yes. You and Sherlock shall undoubtedly wish to continue to work on your projects once we are returned home.”

“You shall also have delivered the materials that I specify. That our gliders can fly given the paucity of proper tools, equipment and fabrication materials at our disposal is nothing short of a miracle. Of course, it is a miracle of my own making due to my extraordinary intellect and creativity, but a miracle nonetheless.”

John rolled his eyes and mouthed ‘breakfast?’ at Mycroft who nodded and gave the small boy an encouraging smile.

“Yes, Sherlock, we do appreciate the ability of your mind to overcome even the most intractable problem. Now, I believe it is time to find for you your breakfast. Shall we? My dear? Are you quite done?”

Lestrade glanced up from examining the new gliders and looked a little sheepish at how he’d tuned out the conversation around him. They boys were really doing a good job with their projects.

“Oh… yeah. Breakfast sounds good. Let’s get them settled then we can take care of other things.”

Mycroft pursed his lips and shook his head at his spouse and was not surprised that the nearly superhuman beauty standing in front of him simply put his hands in his pockets, rocked a few times on his heel and attempted to look as innocent as a newborn lamb.

“We shall be discussing this, Gregory.”

“Looking forward to it.”

One hearty sigh and Mycroft was signaling the boys to precede him out of the bedroom, so he could begin that discussion with his lover, but found his words reluctant to come out after his bottom received a very unexpected, yet pleasing, fondle. Apparently, the use of his intended’s manly wiles was not confined to their bedroom.

With Lestrade busy situating the two boys at the table and seeing their hotly debated breakfast choices put on their plates, Mycroft tried to make a surreptitious exit from the kitchen, but found his bottom again pleasurably assaulted not two steps down the corridor.

“Going somewhere?”

“You know very well I am.”

“Mycroft… I don’t want you to go in there and get hurt.”

“This is new to you, Gregory, but it is simply the status quo for me.”

“It shouldn’t be. No one should have to live with that nastiness. I don’t like it… not at all and I don’t want you to have to deal with it if I’m not there to protect you.”

No one had ever wanted to be that for him. Wanted to be the one to protect and defend. That was
always his job. Keep Sherlock safe and well, keep the house functioning and the staff content, perform whatever functions he was assigned and do what he could to keep his own person maintained… no one had taken time to watch over him and jump into the fray on his behalf. And so many times, so many very secret and very shameful times, he had wanted that so desperately. What he had done in this life to have that want satisfied and by such an incomparable example of the knight in shining armor paradigm he did not know, but he would never fail to be thankful.

“And I love your for it, Gregory. I love you deeply and profoundly and drink that love like water, breathe it like air.”

“So, we’ll have a chat with your mum and…”

“Actually, Gregory, I have other matters for you to address while Mycroft conferences with his mother. Mycroft, you have done an admirable of keeping your mother waiting, which shall have her off-balance. Do make use of the advantage. Gregory, with me.”

Lestrade looked towards the woman who had silently snuck up on them and felt the pull of her ‘come hither’ finger motion as forcibly as if someone had tied him to a horse then gave it a hard slap on the ass. But it wasn’t enough to pull him away from Mycroft’s side until his lover leaned over, kissed his cheek and whispered “it shall be alright, Gregory… and thank you.’

“Yes, ma’am. Mycroft… I’ll see you soon.”

Feeling far less calm than he was letting his partner witness, Mycroft smiled and turned away from his spouse, walking towards Grandmama’s study with his shoulders back and his head held high. For his part, Lestrade shoved down the urge to chase after Mycroft, toss him over his shoulder like John had done to Sherlock and run away with him to where there was nothing to worry about except Mycroft’s nemeses, dirt and bugs, choosing instead to nod at Grandmama and follow her obediently. What no one involved in the corridor encounter noticed were two small and unmatched eyeballs peeking around the frame of the kitchen door, paying very close attention to the proceedings. When the corridor was clear, Sherlock and John stepped out and frowned at each other.

“This situation is serious. We must investigate.”

“I think you’re right, but how are we going to do that? There’s two things we have to investigate and there’s only one of us.”

“No… there are two of us you mathematically-deficient marmoset and, though I am very hesitant to place you fully in charge of an arm of my investigation, I see no choice if we are to satisfactorily document and analyze these conversations.”

“We’re going to split up?”

“I see no other option.”

“And I get to do a whole spy mission on my own?”

“I have a spare field notebook and you shall scribe in it copious notes of both the conversation you are observing and any relevant details of facial expressions, body language, overt or subtle physical actions, objects being given or taken and anything else that you feel is relevant. Come, we must hurry.”

“Ok, but… who am I going to be spying on?”

John didn’t like that Sherlock’s face twisted a little as if the question was an unhappy one, so he
jumped in with what he hoped was a good answer.

“How about I take Mycroft and your Mum and you spy on Greg and Mrs. Holmes.”

The relief on his friend’s face told John he’d made the right choice.

“Very well. Let us make haste.”

The two boys scrambled to get their notebooks, with fingers crossed they didn’t miss anything interesting.

John raced back along the direction Mycroft had taken and pressed his ear to a number of keyholes until he heard the voices he was seeking. Very slowly, he turned the doorknob and cracked the door, not enough to be easily seen from inside the room, but enough to make it easier for him to hear and peek in to get a good look at the action going on inside. Kneeling down in the hallway with his notebook in hand, the boy readied himself to do just as Sherlock instructed and hoped fervently that he’d do a good job of his very first solo spy mission.

“…intolerably rude.”

“Mummy, you have been sermonizing on my lack of manners and punctuality since I arrived. Was there actually a purpose for your summons?”

“Keep a civil tongue in your head, Mycroft. Your natural personality is already disabled from attracting a cohort of useful and pleasant companions; adding impertinence to your list of flaws is a further self-defeating decision.”

Mycroft took a deep breath and held his tongue, though he greatly wanted to rebut her comments in a detailed and debilitating manner. His Gregory would surely have a rejoinder and would state it clearly, but he… he found it far more difficult to throw his own stones. Long experience had taught him that first, it would only prolong the time he would have to sit and suffer his mother’s slings and second, those slings would quickly be loaded with spike-laden explosives if she became sufficiently perturbed.

“But, you are correct that there is a reason I desired to speak with you this morning. I am certain you know the focus of my concern.”

John huddled closer to the door and drew a line in his notebook to show this was where the good stuff was starting.

“Gregory.”

“Is that his name?”

“Mummy, please. You know quite well that is his name.”

“Hmmm… in any case, I wanted you to know I understand your attraction to him, Mycroft. That class of male has… appeal… for certain things and I cannot say I have not succumbed to the urge to sample the contrast they offer men of our own class. And he is a comely example of that stata of society, I shall grant you that much. But Mycroft… you cannot seriously believe that what you feel for him is true affection? Or that he can offer that to you in return? It is simply your natural physical desires finding an outlet and, if I am not mistaken, their first outlet. It is completely normal to become somewhat fixated on the first partner with whom you share intimacy, but do not confuse that
with something deeper. And certainly do not drag your brother into your delusions. I saw you this morning, Mycroft, and was completely appalled by the tableau. Did you forget you were human and thought, instead, you were some form of rabbits huddling in a warren?’’

John drew a stick figure wearing a skirt with an arrow through its head next to his notes on the conversation and stabbed at it a few times with his pencil for good measure.

“It is not at all uncommon or unnatural for a bed to be shared for comfort or security among members of a family.”

The kick Mycroft laid to the inside of his head probably cost him a few intelligence quotient points; fortunately, he had a sufficient quantity not to unduly feel the loss.

“Family? Well, there is no arguing that you and Sherlock are described thusly, though, despite your grandmother’s erroneous broadening of the English language, the other rabbits are not included in that term. I take the concept of family very seriously, Mycroft, and am not at all happy that you are so casually applying it, especially to what’s his name and that scruffy, hamster-like boy that has attached himself to Sherlock. Two parasites on the family accounts… really, Mycroft, can I not leave you to your own devices for any length of time?”

This stick figure was lying down with a grave marker drawn next to their head and John delighted in making pencil scratches to mimic shoveling dirt over the miserable dead person. He then watched Mycroft stand rigidly, breathing steadily, clenching and unclenching his hand over and over in an almost ritualistic fashion, all of which was thoroughly documented in the boy’s notes. Then he simply crossed his fingers that Mycroft would just go ahead and throw a punch. That would be a lot of fun to draw…

“I shall not argue the merit of your argument, Mummy, for there is a measure of worth to it and it is not something I shall deny. However, I am not unaware of that argument and is not applicable to my and Gregory’s situation. We are in love and that is something you must come to accept, for it shall not change. Our love has grown, flowered, been tested and proved to be strong and enduring. He has mated his soul to me and owns mine in return. Further, he has taken Sherlock into his heart and Sherlock has made himself at home in that warm and welcoming place. And that heart is so pure, so grand, that it gladly opened itself to John, who joined Sherlock in my affections. It is to my undying pride that John was then was generous enough to accept my own small and stunted heart, though I have not my beloved’s capacity to nurture or create the loving, supportive environment for the boys to thrive as they do. However, I do try… I try my very best because I love both boys dearly and shall forever strive to give them the life they deserve, as well as all of the affection I can possibly bestow.”

John stared open-mouthed at Mycroft and ignored the woman who looked at her son like he’d been speaking the language of the bees.

“Further, to even insinuate that Gregory and John have designs on our wealth is truly the height of delusion! My dearest spouse, and yes, that is what he shall be in years to come when we have settled ourselves, has never asked for anything. In point of fact, he is decidedly uncomfortable with the thought of accepting anything of significance from my hand and, even though he is signatory on several of my accounts, he has never taken even the smallest sum for himself, knowing I would not care in the least. In fact, it would delight me utterly, yet he denies me at every turn. And it is from his own small repository of funds that Sherlock and John’s entertainments are funded. He has served as their protector, their guardian and confidant during my absence and uses not a mote of our funds to provide them with the activities and enrichments for their amusement and growth. And he does it out of love, nothing more. He loves the children as his own and they love him in return. It was the
greatest joy of my life to return from America and find myself included in that love, to be made part of the family... yes, family... they had formed and it is now our family.’”

John wiped his eyes and scribbled frantically to get some of what Mycroft said on paper, though he doubted he’d forget a word of it.

“And John... my dear John... what he has done for Sherlock is as profound and what my Gregory has wrought. He accepted Sherlock for who he is, appreciated his gifts and knew, instinctively, that Sherlock’s exterior masked a heart that was desperate to be touched by friendship. I have not seen my brother so vital, so engaged, so... human... as he is with John. They are as inseparable as are Gregory and I and I could not, not for a single moment, be happier. John is a wonderful child... bright, compassionate, clever, patient, accepting, possessed of a lust for life that is thoroughly refreshing and I cannot in my wildest dreams imagine a more worthwhile child for Sherlock to enjoy as his friend. And Sherlock is absolutely as glad for this friendship as am I. Only someone willfully blind to their relationship would see it for anything that what it truly is – a mating of kindred spirits that shall forever bind them tightly. We are family, Mummy and our John is a cherished member. Perhaps we are not all of shared blood, but we are of a shared heart and that is all that matters.”

John leaned against the door and cried silently. He hated crying because babies cried, but he couldn’t stop and wished he could just run in and grab Mycroft and hug him, but that would mean he’d failed as a spy and he couldn’t do that. But he would later... he would give Mycroft the biggest hug he could and then give one to Greg and maybe even Sherlock, though he’d probably have to chase after him and tackle him in order to do it. He’d been so scared when Harry ran away and left him behind. And he was terrified when they took him away from his dad. And then he got sent to school all by himself and he’d thought he’d always be alone with no one to really care about him, but now he had a best friend and a family and everything he’d ever really wanted... and they wanted him. They wanted him and it was dumb and babyish to cry, but he just couldn’t help himself...

Mycroft felt the fog clear from his mind and realized during his mind-blanked anger, his mouth had continued to run. Rolling back his mental tapes he, in all honesty, could claim he was proud of what he’d said. Not a word would he rescind, though the coldness in his mother’s eyes was doing its best to force him to do so. He was proud of his family. Exceedingly proud and he would fight for them, even if it meant setting his mother against him squarely as an enemy. It was not what he desired, but if his hand was forced, he suddenly realized that he would not hesitate to make the decision. It was his mother’s choice how they would proceed from this point and he was willing to accept whatever that choice might be.

“Am I supposed to be moved by your little speech?”

“In truth, I would be greatly surprised if you were, however, I would assume you would credit the sincerity and grant that I am not speaking carelessly, naively or without due consideration of the implications.”

“You are a child. Your pretty words still fall from the mouth of a child and yes, I believe you to be unbelievably naïve and stupidly sentimental. When your fairy tale becomes a nightmare, do not expect that I shall fail to remind you of this conversation or lift a finger to raise you from the cesspit into which you have fallen.”

Having her son burst out into unbridled and stomach-deep laughter was the last thing Mummy Holmes expected from Mycroft and she wasn’t exactly certain how to interpret it.

“Do you actually think I would expect anything else? That I would anticipate, let alone seek out, maternal behavior from you? Hope for kindness, compassion or understanding? If my world were
to splinter, I can assure you that you are not even on my list of potential sources of support.”

John wished he had a red pencil handy so he could put hair on the little stick figure with its arms raised in victory.

“If you choose to take a place on that list, I would welcome you gladly and with open arms, but until then, do not worry that I shall impose on your time in any fashion for succor or comfort. I have those to whom I can turn and they are those who know I shall be that source of strength for them when it is needed. Gregory is my love, Mummy. He shall soon be my fiancé. Then, when I have achieved my degree or degrees and he has experience in his desired career, we shall wed and make a life for ourselves. And that life shall always include Sherlock and John. During my absence, it is to Gregory I shall look for the care and protection of the children, for I know he is glad for the task and shall do as he has always done, parent them expertly and ensure their education proceeds on course. I do not even seek to impose that responsibility upon you. If you hope to cow me by refusing to dangle a lifeline above my head, it is a failed strategy, for I know there are others who would dive into the coldest, darkest of waters to save me from others or myself. I love you, Mummy, but I do not need you. Now, I shall go and find my family and continue with our day. If you are still present at dinner, we would be happy to share the time with you, provided you recognize that we appreciate cordiality at the dinner table. If not, there shall be other opportunities once we have returned home.”

Mycroft turned and left the room, trying not to run and spoil the moment. He had never spoken to Mummy that way. Not once. But… it felt good. It felt freeing and there was a cold knot in his body he never before knew existed beginning to uncoil and melt away from bitter end to bitter end. And, now that he reflected upon it, Mummy had not actually retaliated. Not taken a knife to his body and torn his flesh from muscle as she was want to do with others. He had no idea why, but would not look the proverbial gift horse in the mouth. Now, however, it was time to find his husband and let the last vestiges of this unpleasantness be washed away. It looked a tad dreary outside and was, likely, too chill to enact their original plan, but there were a host of other options to explore. And lifetime to find new ones…

John dove and hid behind a large hall console before Mycroft exited the room and clutched his notebook to his chest as he tried to make himself as small as possible so he wasn’t noticed. Fortunately, Mycroft’s mind was too focused internally to even remark upon the pencil John had dropped during his leap to cover. As soon as Mycroft turned a corner and there was no sign he was going to be followed by the evil witch, John scrambled to retrieve his pencil and sped off away from the room and Mycroft and kept running until he finally found the kitchen, with a little help from friendly house staff. Now it was time to get everything he remembered on paper that he hadn’t already written down. Sherlock was going to want every bit of information and it was important information. Sherlock needed to know how much Mycroft cared for them and that he’d stood up that horrible woman and given her the what for. Given it to her right between the eyes…”

Sherlock ran as fast as his legs would carry him through the house looking for Lestrade and Grandmama and nearly exploded in fury seeing them stroll by a window, Grandmama with her shawl over her shoulders and Lestrade wearing some borrowed jacket he’d likely been handed as they left the house. Waiting a moment for them to gain some distance from the point where they’d been spotted, Sherlock left the house through the window and crept along the edge of the exterior wall, trying to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. At least they didn’t seem to be talking, so he was not losing vital information.
Luckily, it was only a few minutes before Grandmama led Lestrade to a bench in the garden and had a seat, motioning for her escort to join her. Even more luckily, there was a convenient thicket of bushes that, even with their leaves experience seasonal drop, provided sufficient cover for Sherlock to observe without being detected. Creeping slowly, the young boy took position and readied his notebook to record any pertinent data, though there was a distinct possibility Grandmama had simply chosen to distract the plebian so that Bloatcroft could meet alone the challenge of interacting with Mummy. It was not unlikely that they would need a mop and pail to clean up the aftermath, but Mycroft had pulled the pieces of himself together after a conversation with Mummy more times than Sherlock could count, so all would be well. That did not mean he was happy for it, though. Mycroft was a meddlesome, supercilious bother, but he did not deserve to be slaughtered like a pig. And, though it was loathsome to admit, he was not an altogether awful person with whom to share a house. Or engage in activities. Or talk to.

“Are you sure we should be out here, Grandmama? It’s a bit chilly…”

“I once had to spend two weeks in a rather primitive basecamp in Antarctica, Gregory. I assure you, my definition of ‘a bit chilly’ changed radically after that experience.”

Sherlock began writing and put a large star next to ‘Antarctica.’ How dare Grandmama have an adventure for which he was not provided all possible scientific data!

“Oh… wow, that’s really great. You’ve had lots of fun in life, I bet.”

“I have. And so will you and Mycroft. It may be difficult to schedule at times, but if you choose to, you can see much of the world and the wonders it offers.”

“I’d like that. That’s something I’ve always wanted to do.”

Sherlock just wrote ‘blah blah blah’ down on his paper and waited for something relevant to actually be said.

“Right now what I want to do, though, is ask why you brought me out here, ma’am.”

“I doubt that, Gregory, for I am quite certain you know why I pulled you away from Mycroft’s side.”

Finally! Data!

“My guess is that you think this was something he had to do himself.”

“Exactly. It is something he has needed to do for quite some time, and I believe he finally has the correct inspiration to rise to the occasion.”

“I don’t like it. He shouldn’t have to fight that fight alone. Not when he’s got help.”

“But he will not always have you to defend him, Gregory. Mycroft is extremely capable of facing situations of an impersonal nature, but when the issue cuts to his heart, he begins to falter. He prefers to avoid the issue than confront it directly. He did not handle well the passing of his grandfather or his father and has struggled to interact with Sherlock in the way he most desires. As for his mother… he has never been able to confront his mother. He sits stoically and takes whatever she chooses to deliver, then leaves with a stomach filled with an acid that slowly eats through him and leaves a raw and painful hole in his center. That cannot continue.”

“He shouldn’t have to do it alone, though. Someone should be there to…”
“Provide a crutch that will make any attempt to take a stand a crippled one.”

“I still don’t like it.”

“Nor should you. In truth, neither do I, but correct decisions are not always pleasant ones. It is an unfortunate truth, but a truth nonetheless.”

Sherlock found himself vacillating between Lestrade’s opinion and Grandmama’s and decided that this must be one of those puerile heart versus head issues that he held no truck with, thus pushing his support squarely on Grandmama’s side of the line. Mostly.

“But, this also allows you an opportunity to perhaps gain knowledge of personal interest. I’m most certain you have questions about my daughter-in-law and I shall be happy to answer them.”

Sherlock clapped his hand over his mouth to prevent the Yes! from sliding out. Pencil in hand he prepared to scribe every word.

“Ok… yeah. I do have questions. I mean… I look at Mycroft and Sherlock and a lot of things make sense, now. Mycroft… when I first met him, every time I said something nice his eyes looked like they were going to pop out of his head! It was like he’d never heard anyone say something nice about him before. Probably because he hadn’t…and poor Sherlock. I wondered where he learned how to treat people and I guess I found out. She’s toxic and I can’t imagine how you let her anywhere near your son!”

Sherlock bit his lip and tried not to think about what Lestrade had said. He scribed it, of course, because one did not ignore data, but… no, he would not analyze it until later. Perhaps when John was present.

“I had as much right to refuse my son his choice of wife as she does Mycroft his choice of husband. He was of age and, despite my concerns, loved her very much. And she did love him, though I admit it seems an unlikely thing that she could love anyone. I was not incautious, however, and kept very close surveillance on them for several years after their marriage. Much as I would desire it, I cannot deny that despite her being a somewhat hard-to-manage bride, but my son was not at all unhappy and she was not, never once, unfaithful to him. I do believe that motherhood was not a role she born to play nor did she grow into it as do some women and that has negatively impacted her sons. Had my own son survived, matters would be different, but they are what they are and, it is perhaps a benefit that she has absolved herself of maternal responsibilities and spends much of her time living a socialite’s life.”

No, there was not anything in his eyes because Grandmama was talking about Father. He was not, at all, thinking about how Father was always willing and even eager to read with him anytime he asked. Or how Father asked about his experiments, even when they were embarrassingly rudimentary due to his young age. One cannot be expected to conduct a properly controlled experiment at age five, regardless of the level of genius, but there was never derision or scorn because of his inefficient efforts or questionable results. And he was certainly not thinking about how Father shared the lackey’s unfortunate tendency to laugh frequently and demonstrate great patience when things… when there was perhaps some reason lose one’s temper. And he further was not thinking about how Mycroft had worked tirelessly to buoy his spirits after Father’s passing and how his brother made a point to do as Father did and always be there for him, even when he made it very clear Mycroft’s presence was not appreciated. Which was never entirely true but… BLAST! This was not the data he came here to collect!

“Oh… ok, I can see that, I guess. But… does she have to be so fucking evil to them! Crap… forget I said that. Let me try again…”
“Calm yourself, Gregory… and no, she does not. In truth, she was not as acerbic with her tongue before my son’s passing, though her words were sufficiently damaging during their marriage. Some individuals do not or cannot view actions and words from the perspective of their impact on others; they do not consider the feelings of others as a matter of course and, as such, employ no filters for their words or deeds. My daughter-in-law does not set about a course of action intentionally to harm, unless she feels she has been personally slighted. She simply does not have it within her to even consider that how she treats others is anything but appropriate.”

“Mycroft said something similar. That she actually thought she was helping when she spit out her poison.”

“That is not unlikely. She views Mycroft, for instance, as a child given to a heavier frame and that is not something to boast about in her social circle. She very well could perceive her frequently-stated disapproval as a mechanism to promote change and a foster a greater likelihood of social acceptance for her son. However, it does not excuse her methods and the lasting damage they wreak. Sherlock refuses to expose his inner self to others for fear they will find a point of attack as would his mother and exploit it. He has learned the power of the tantrum and the sense of entitlement that is easier to accommodate than battle against. Though it adds to the weight you already carry, I do recognize what you have done to ameliorate those deleterious effects of their rearing and give my grandsons the chance for a happier and more fulfilling life. That you are to stay at their side is a welcome bit of comfort at my advanced age. I worried greatly, Gregory, that neither would find someone to help them realize their potential in terms of their humanity. Both easily would be wildly successful in life, no matter their inner pain, but now… now they can be so much more. For that I thank you, grandson, and I shall speak with John, also to relay my thanks and reiterate that I certainly consider your trio now to be a quartet.”

Data is sterile. Data has no emotional significance. Data is pure and unfeeling and has no value beyond its usefulness to science. There was no reason he should be feeling as if he wanted to run away to find John or, most shamefully, break cover and crawl upon the bench with Grandmama and Lestrade and demand they take away these cacophonous emotions. Or let him simply sit there… Lestrade was an inveterate hair ruffler and… that would not be entirely unwelcome right now.

“That’s… don’t worry about anything, Grandmama. I love Mycroft, and Sherlock, too. Little goblin’s like my own kid brother… sometimes it feels like he’s my own kid, actually. I’m going to take care of both of them and no one’s going to hurt them, not even their mum, if I have anything to say about it. John, too. I’ve got two kids now and yeah, they’re going to drive me nuts and I’ll probably go off my head again sometimes, but those boys are important to me and I am going to be there for them. And Mycroft… I’ve already started talking to him about certain things and I’m not going to ever stop. He’s the best thing out there and that he doesn’t feel that way about himself is criminal. It’s just fu… it’s just criminal. Yeah, it’s my job to make him see what a wonderful person he is and that’s a job I’m more than willing to do. Don’t worry about a thing; I’ve got this handled. Mycroft’s mum doesn’t scare me, either, so that’s not going to be a problem. She’ll learn pretty fast that anyone tries to hurt my family they’re in for a fight and fight dirty when I have to.”

That was outlandish. It was and that was the last word on the issue. It was the peasant’s job to love him and the whale. He did not do it because he wanted to, he gave them his affections because he had to. It was part of his concubinial contract. The turnip-digger had to care for him… them… and, by any account, the peasant was a dupe, and dupes were prone to love and sentiment and it had nothing to do with real emotion. And, most certainly, he did not feel the same way. He was not soppy and sappy with love for the water buffalo and the indigent farmer to whom the lumbering beast was tethered. No! The subject was officially closed. Love was dumb. Good Lord, now he sounded like John. The situation was deteriorating rapidly.
“Oh very good, Gregory. It is a tremendous waste of energy to engage in a conflict when shackled by arbitrarily-set standards of conduct. No victory of significance has ever been won through the use of entirely ethical means. I am highly pleased you recognize this.”

“Hey! That’s only for battles with my mother-in-law! I am going to be a policeman, you know! I’ve got to be ethical or… well, that just wouldn’t be right.”

“Of course. One should compartmentalize their lives between the personal and the professional. Again, you recognize a factor of significance for achieving excellence. The children shall benefit strongly from the example you set.”

“Oh… speaking of children… how in the world could Mycroft’s mum sit there and pretend she didn’t know he liked men? He’s got sperm frozen just for that reason!”

“When one thrives on the attention of others, there is no lie so large or ridiculous you will not tell to gain you the attention you seek. And, actually, Mycroft’s mother is not aware of that particular fact concerning Mycroft’s reproductive capabilities. It was simply done as a precaution, mind you, and, now that my grandson’s future is beginning to take shape, I shall see to it that sample is discarded. When the time comes, you and Mycroft will donate fresh specimens, which will undoubtedly be more viable, in any case.”

Oh no… first a house filled with rhinoceros spawn, now a tribe of tramps and muck-shovelers. Was there no end to his pain? There would be no room for his laboratory now, as every crevice of the house was to be occupied by droolers, foot gummers and their shipping crates full of nappies. This was intolerable!

“Not you too! I am not wank… I am not… it’s a cup! And I don’t care if the nurse is deaf, Mycroft’s a nutter if he thinks… ok, not talking about this anymore. I told that daft bastard we could talk about it later, when we’re older and married and ready for some little tykes running around and I’m sticking to that.”

Good. At least the lackey was not eager to pollute the environment with his faulty genes. The national unemployment rate was sufficiently high that more unskilled laborers were scarcely needed in the population. As a reminder though, made a very prominent note at this point that he must make it abundantly clear from the onset that he would not, in any manner, be called upon to serve as child minder for that particularly unholy brood. It was far more a burden best carried by John. Though… if there were to be an unholy brood laying siege to the household, the lackey was, at least, not entirely unskilled in providing them with the basics of an acceptable existence. Tailored for common children, naturally. Not geniuses. Geniuses required a far more capable hand, though, wholly by accident, of course, the shop boy occasionally rose to that level.

“As always, you see things in a very agreeable manner, Gregory. It is certainly not a wise decision to bring children into the world when you are not fully prepared for the demands of their rearing. I shall, needless to say, honor your and Mycroft’s timeframe for beginning your second family. However, as Mycroft is also aware, if I am not provided with great-grandchildren before I expire, I shall ensure you can find no measure of citizenship in any nation in the world, save for that in the most humid, overheated, insect-infested, cholera-ridden corner of the globe, where you shall find yourself completely disconnected from the family finances and carrying in your Interpol files hints and whispers of either terrorist or drugs connections that shall surely make your future an uncomfortable one for more than a few reasons.”

Sherlock suddenly regretted not visiting Grandmama more frequently over the past years because there were obviously skills she possessed that he would benefit from learning.
“Yes, ma’am. I understand, ma’am.”

“Good. Very good, Gregory. Another feather for your ever-filling cap. And Gregory… at some point, not today, mind you, but at some point, I should like to discuss with you the plans you are considering for when Mycroft is away at college. I will tell you that I am not content with the fact that Sherlock shall be left alone in his house, with only the staff for company and support.”

Both Sherlock and Lestrade gulped in realization of that ugly truth and Sherlock wrote the question down in very large letters in his notebook.

“Oh… yeah, I guess that’s something to think about, isn’t it.”

“I believe it is. Already I ask so much of you, grandson, and do not for a moment worry that I do not recognize the degree of your sacrifices, but this is an issue that has preyed on my mind of late and I would seek your counsel as the time approaches.”

“Sure… yeah, we will need to talk about that. I’m not going to be an idiot and ask if Sherlock’s mum might just stay home with him, so yeah, I’ll bring it up with Mycroft.”

“Excellent. And you are correct; it is most unlikely that my daughter-in-law shall forsake the life she enjoys to remain home with Sherlock. And, though this is not perhaps something in which I take pride, I have need of her at times for, shall we say, errands and those often take her away from home for lengths of time.”

“Wait… are you saying she does jobs like Mycroft?”

“Well, not along quite the same lines but yes, she is very aware of our family’s obligations and performs her share of the duties as directed.”

“I can’t… I can’t see her doing anything big or important or… nothing like Mycroft does!”

“Gregory, surely you see a role in, perhaps, the intelligence community for an extremely attractive female who manipulates men as easily as a sculptor manipulates clay?”

Another moment of feverish scribbling in his notebook bought Sherlock confirmation that Mummy was a femme fatale and bought Grandmama confirmation that her sharp ears hadn’t been wrong about being observed. Sherlock was showing enormously promising growth in so many diverse ways…

“And that’s another thing we can really just not talk about ever again. Now, are you sure you aren’t cold? Maybe it’s time go inside and have a nice cup of tea. Talk about biscuits.”

Gregory was the most supremely well-matched mate her grandson could ever have found and it was now established that her daughter-in-law was not going to be able to work her wickedness and pull the two apart. It had not been an easy decision to request Emma’s presence for these two days, but it was a crucial one in terms of evaluating the degree of damage she could inflict on her grandsons’ relationships. With that threat level now assessed at zero, it remained only to see how Mycroft fared with his confrontation, though she suspected he finally would be able to face his mother and prove his mettle. And what a nice surprise that Sherlock perhaps learned items of interest today. Believing you are loved and hearing it said aloud, knowing it absolutely to be true, were very different things…

“One of my favorite topics of discussion. It has been good of you to humor me, Gregory, with our little chat. I do enjoy them immensely.”

Grandmama rose slowly with Lestrade shooting upwards to provide his arm for support and received
a pat on the cheek for his efforts.

“I do too, Grandmama. I always learn something and there’s nothing ever wrong with that.”

“A man who appreciates knowledge is a formidable man… Grandpapa would have been proud of you. Yes, the very thing… we shall look through some of my photographs over tea. It is time you became acquainted with other members of the family, those you no longer have a chance to meet in person.”

“That sounds like fun. I look forward to it.”

Greg offered his arm and Grandmama accepted, strolling for a few more minutes in the brisk air before returning indoors. Once they were out of sight, Sherlock crept out from his reconnaissance position and sat on the small bench a few moments to… oh, he had no idea why, but it was something he wanted to do, so he did it. In a few minutes, he would present himself and demand his proper share of the biscuits and command the peon to ring for the resident peons to bring a pot of chocolate for his personal enjoyment, but right now, he would sit here. Just sit. That was all he really wanted to do…

Lestrade was merrily enjoying tea and photographs when John dashed into the library and looked around frantically, carrying one of Sherlock’s field notebooks in his hands. It was only seconds later that Sherlock stormed in, also carrying a field notebook and, seeing John, rushed to the boy and began furiously whispering. As Grandmama called for more refreshments, Mycroft strolled into the library and Lestrade felt his heart skip, seeing the satisfied smile on his lover’s lips. As Sherlock and John huddled on the sofa, swapping notebooks, Mycroft took a seat at the table, gratefully accepting the cup of tea Lestrade offered him.

“Love?”

“All is well, Gregory. I… all is well. You need not worry for me any longer.”

Both Lestrade and Mycroft missed the very slight twitch of the elderly woman’s nose and the extra light that flashed in her eyes, as they clasped each other’s hands and shared their devotion through loving and adoring looks, punctuated by a chaste, but jubilant kiss. Grandmama contentedly sipped her tea and admired their easy expression of affection, mirrored in its own way by the two young boys sitting so close together on the sofa that a piece of paper could scarcely be slipped between them. Such an interesting and successful day… tonight’s dinner deserved to be something most special. All boys loved pizza, did they not? At least, that was what the surveillance of her beloved grandsons had indicated. And her cook did so love a challenge…
Chapter 17

“Pizza!”

John’s exclamation was punctuated by a victory dance that had Sherlock snorting loudly and shaking his head. Of course, part of that bit of theatrics was to camouflage the excited smile that was threatening to erupt over his own thin face. It had been an emotionally-trying day and, once their surveillance was completed and their notes were shared, the two boys had crept away from the others and gone to their bedroom to talk about what they’d learned. When Lestrade and Mycroft came to check on them an hour later, it was two red-eyed and snuffly-nosed boys that they found sitting on the rug and clutching small field notebooks in their hands. A second hour later, it was four red-eyed and snuffly-nosed boys sitting on the rug, two small forms, cradled against the bodies of two larger forms, letting out their emotions in a variety of barely coherent, but completely heartfelt ways. When the last of the hugs had been given and whispers breathed into grateful and loving ears, Sherlock and John had vanished to get themselves clean, while Lestrade and Mycroft wiped their eyes and held each other to enjoy the last vestiges of the moment before starting to get themselves ready for a little quiet time with the boys and, then, dinner, which each fervently hoped would not be a formal affair. Today was a family day – suits and ties were certainly not welcome.

With Sherlock failing completely to hide his glee at the dinner offering, Mycroft and Lestrade shared a quiet laugh and gave each of the boys a small shove into the dining room, which had only been set for five. One of whom was already seated.

“Ah, good. I trust you found productive ways to amuse yourselves after tea?”

Which, Mycroft was certain, his grandmother already knew about in detail.

“We did, Grandmama. A very useful interval to reconnect and refresh. And… shall Mummy be joining us?”

The older woman found the highly expectant looks on the four boys’ faces absolutely precious, and quite telling.

“No. Your mother had other calls upon her time and returned home. I believe you might enjoy her presence for a few days once you also return, but then, if I remember correctly, she shall be touring North America for a period of some weeks. At least. Now, is there a reason you are still standing?”

Not that the condition lasted more than a split-second further, as four hungry boys dove towards their seats and after a nod from Grandmama, began to serve themselves, groaning with delight as they took their first bites

“This is great! And I don’t have to worry about keeping my suit clean while I eat it!”

“If you had anything other than a pig’s table manners, that would not be your primary concern when served your dinner.”

“Do pigs have table manners, Mr. Animal Expert? I sort of doubt they ever get to eat at a table in their entire lives.”

“You are a nonsensical little gnome, John Watson.”

“You’re just sore that I’m right. And have two slices of pizza now.”
The second coming from his outright theft from Sherlock’s plate. Before his brother could screech his disapproval, Mycroft dropped another slice in front of Sherlock, as Lestrade filled the boys’ water glasses.

“There is quite sufficient food for all to enjoy and do enjoy all you like. My cook has outdone herself and, as of tomorrow night, you shall not be availing yourselves of her talents for a time.”

The four winces verified that the boys’ stay, despite its more turbulent periods, had been an enjoyable one and Grandmama mentally rubbed her hands together in delight. Too many years had passed in worry that her Mycroft and Sherlock would never be happy children, but that worry was officially defeated.

“So soon?”

John’s disappointment at the news almost cost him the slice of pizza he stole from Sherlock, but quick reflexes and a sharp fork prevented the re-theft.

“I am afraid so, John. I think we have prolonged your holiday to its maximum length and now it is time to bring it to a close. However, I shall expect you back soon, so do not feel too aggrieved at the impending deadline.”

“Mycroft?”

John’s large puppy eyes turned towards the older Holmes brother, who struggled mightily to keep a serious and somber look upon his face. It was very clear that, just as Sherlock had defined his and his Gregory’s paternal roles, John had done the same.

“Grandmama is quite correct, John. We all have responsibilities to fulfill and they have been set aside for long enough. However, we shall return soon and… perhaps for another visit of protracted duration during, say, a school holiday or the summer interval.”

That was a very risky proposal, however, Mycroft greatly wanted to study how John responded to the offer.

“Really? Yes! That’s going to be… the best! Sherlock and I can plan all sorts of things and have lots of time to think of even more!”

John’s large smile brightened the room and Mycroft now had to hope that when the time came, John’s aunt would allow him the opportunity to remain with them for selected breaks and a portion of the summer. A furtive glance towards Grandmama assured him that there would be a strategy meeting on this issue to ensure the plan was able to move forward unimpeded. At this juncture, separating John and Sherlock for prolonged durations was not wise for either boy. He refused, however, to dwell on his own prolonged separation from his Gregory… there would be many strategy meetings before that particular event occurred.

“Why would John not spend his holidays with me?”

Thank you, Sherlock, for pushing the first strategy session to this very moment in time. So profoundly helpful.

“I would assume that John’s aunt might desire to share those days with her nephew and it would be terribly impolite to assume anything before permission was actually secured.”

Sherlock scowled at John as if this was his fault and John scowled back.
“I’m not worried. She’s… she’s nice. Really. But… I don’t think she was ready for a kid when she had to take me in. I could sort of tell she didn’t know what to do and was having to cancel plans and make arrangements for when she had to go to work so that I could live with her. I feel bad about it, actually. She didn’t ask for me, but if my dad… well, if he could have kept me or my sister hadn’t run off… I have no idea where she is… but that’s what happened and I can’t change it.”

John sat quietly a moment and Mycroft reached over to stroke his hair, an action he had found soothed the boy very effectively.

“So… I don’t think she’s going to mind if I spend extra time away from… her house.”

It wasn’t lost on the older generation that ‘her house’ was not the same as ‘home.’ Mycroft shared a look with Lestrade and each reaffirmed that if John didn’t have a home anywhere else, he had one with them and they would gladly offer it for as long as he wanted it.

“I should hope not. We have a great deal of work to do, John Watson, and I will not allow your lackadaisical and shilly-shallying ways to impede our progress. In fact, you should simply resign yourself to living in my house and devoting your time solely to me as that is most certainly your ultimate fate and, obviously, the only fate that might possibly see you being of benefit to science or civilization. But, mostly science.”

John’s happy gasp made Mycroft laugh, but it set a few wheels turning in his mind. Whereas John’s aunt might not approve of his moving into their home on a permanent basis, it was common, was it not, for friends to visit each other over holidays and share a residence? Not that Sherlock would ever consider reciprocating, but the principle was sound. And it would be a tidy solution for overseeing each boy’s activities. This would certainly be something he would discuss with Gregory… Gregory, who would likely be the one tasked with the lion’s share of the overseeing.

“That is a discussion for another day, Sherlock. But, I am certain we can find a satisfactory situation to allow you and John to continue your very valuable research.”

“As well you should! And be quick about it. I will not tolerate your inefficiency in this matter, Mycroft. I have not had opportunity to put your manservant to the whip yet, but I shall do so gladly if your actions displease me.”

“Can I have a go, Sherlock?”

“No. Lilliputians are not permitted to beat the help.”

Lestrade laid his head on the table and Sherlock laid a napkin over it as a burial shroud.

“My dear, do you require some form of physical assistance?”

This once Mycroft chose not to chastise Sherlock for his abominable behavior towards his spouse for it was actually a reassuring thing after the torrent of emotion the boy had experienced that day. And he was quite certain Sherlock had shared some very soul-baring, whispered confessions with his beloved Gregory in the aftermath. The sum of the trials of the day could have made his brother very wrong-footed, but he was rebounding nicely and feeling safe that his particular brand of interaction would not find him attacked or abandoned. Besides, his darling Gregory seemed to have no issue consuming food while beneath the coroner’s sheet, if the slice of pizza slowly crawling beneath the fabric was to be believed.

“It’s ok, Mycroft. Greg’s just dead. I don’t think it’s permanent, though.”

“Hmmmm…. I am not entirely certain how I feel about sharing my life with a member of the
undead, however, life is for nothing if not new and challenging experiences.”

“If the sluggard’s limbs fall off during his bath, I demand possession of them!”

“Sherlock, have we not already a contract on the disposition of Gregory’s body post-mortem?”

“There was no clause for the event he became a zombie.”

“Ah. You are correct. We shall recommence negotiations after dinner.”

“Poor Greg, it’s sort of sad that he can’t have any peace, even when he’s dead. ‘Rest in peace’ isn’t going on his tombstone.”

“No, it shall state “Property of Sherlock Holmes” and a return address shall be branded upon his flesh so that any attempted escape can be halted and his wayward carcass returned to its proper storage receptacle.”

“His coffin?”

“Precisely. I do not want the effluvia of his demise dirtying my laboratory at times when he is not the subject of an experiment.”

Greg’s muffled ‘I don’t even get a room?’ was met by Sherlock’s hearty snort.

“Zombies do not merit rooms. They would only soil them disgracefully and any potential pathetic moaning might be audible from my own bed chamber. That is not acceptable.”

Mycroft cast a glance at Grandmama and tried to remember when she had ever seemed so contented. As ludicrous as was the conversation, it was natural and shared and, at its core, affectionate… not at all what she had endured when he and Sherlock had visited in the past and he felt a stab of shame for that, because this was something, very obviously, she absolutely treasured. As did he. Although…

“Sherlock, you may not use Gregory as your personal serving tray. Please remove the salt cellar and your utensils from his person immediately.”

… one certainly had to keep an eye on this particular treasure…

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After dinner, which continued on as spiritedly as it began, Grandmama left the boys to their own diversions which, for Sherlock and John involved a game of chess and for Mycroft and Lestrade, refereeing the game of chess between passages of the books they were reading. Nestled on the sofa, with Mycroft leaning back against Lestrade’s chest, the older boys relaxed, Mycroft receiving the occasional stolen kiss when the sensitive-stomached chessmasters weren’t looking. And, as his body relaxed, so did Mycroft’s ever-frantic mind and his iron-grip self-discipline.

This was… how foolishly he lost control of his emotions when his family was involved. He wanted, at this moment, to weep at the beauty of the tableau he was witnessing. The children engaged in a quiet and entertaining pursuit, his husband embracing him gently and lovingly… this he would have in his life whenever it was possible. That would not be as often as he would prefer, but that he could have it at all was a gift from the heavens.

“Good book?”
The low and thoroughly masculine voice in his ear produced the most delicious frisson of Mycroft’s life and he was exceedingly happy the low hum of satisfaction he emitted wasn’t detected by young ears.

“Very. A most interesting treatise on the formative years of the Cold War. I find it quite fascinating.”

“I’ve got astronauts colonizing an alien planet. They just found huge space bugs.”

“And this pleases you?”

“More than you can imagine.”

“Then I am glad for you selection.”

“We’re going to have two separate bookshelves when we get a place together, aren’t we?”

“Hmm… I admit I am not entirely certain how my demure tomes shall fare against your more boisterous ones, so that solution is not out of the question.”

Though he would fill the library of their home with as many examples of his spouse’s preferred reading material as possible. If Sherlock was in residence with them, that might mandate a secondary library, so he would have room for his already copious stocks. My, my, my… their first home was quickly growing in footprint. And there must be space budgeted for John and his requirements. He was an active child and would be an active boy, then young man, so there should be a substantial amount of property and, likely, a well-equipped gymnasium for his use as he matured… perhaps Mummy was ready for a primary residence in London and would be content to leave them to their own devices on the family estate…

“You’re picturing some massive library like this one with my stuff on one side and yours on the other, aren’t you?”

“I… I might admit to that particular mental image, yes.”

“Well, I guess no matter what shitty flat I live in while you’re away at school and getting that career going, I’ll have something nicer waiting for me in the future.”

The possibility of his beloved inhabiting any residence that could appropriately be described by a vulgarity hovered exactly at zero.

“If that is your current thinking on the issue of housing, then we shall ensure that you ensconced in a suitable dwelling before I depart.”

“You’re not putting me up in a flat, Mycroft.”

Flat, no. House… that was an entirely different issue.

“If you are not to reside with your lovely mother after the completion of your studies, then you should at least maintain the standard of living to which you are currently accustomed, should you not?”

“Not if I can’t afford it on my own, no. And… I don’t know what’s going to happen once school’s over. I’m going to have to talk to Mum about things. But, if I do decide to have a place of my own, it’s on me to pay for it. You can help me look for something, but you’re not covering my rent. Or, before you even think it, my bills or food or whatever else I have to buy.”
“But, Gregory… I cannot bear to think of you living in a situation where your needs are not properly met. I shall concede they need not be met royally, but the basics, my love… I must insist that you not be without the fundamentals of a healthy life. You cannot deny me this, Gregory. You simply cannot.”

Lestrade huffed little puffs of air against Mycroft’s temple as he thought and grinned at the wriggle each one drew from his partner.

“I’ll tell you what. That information folder you’re pulling together for me is going to have salary information, right? Being the new lad, I’d start at the bottom of the ladder, so let’s see what that figure looks like and you can help me work up a budget. Then we’ll see what’s available in the price I can afford. If even I can’t stomach the idea of living in those places, we’ll see what it would take to adjust that up a bit and, if I wouldn’t be able to make my pay stretch that far… we can talk about you covering the extra. JUST the extra mind you. I doubt I’ll be able to take a second job what with being new on the force and…”

Lestrade stopped speaking and Mycroft knew he was sending his eyes towards Sherlock and John who were now arguing about what would happen if their chess pieces were set on fire.

“… I probably wouldn’t have time for one anyway. I’d need to stay near home, too because of… well, you know.”

Another sacrifice his beloved would be called to make and that was one of the many reasons why Mycroft refused to have his fiancé suffer an inadequate residence or poor quality food and the infiltration of the winter’s chill.

“And, therefore, you should allow me to ensure you are able to do so with reasonable comfort. I did agree, my dear, that you would contribute as a full partner in our relationship, offering your finances fully to our household accounts. It is only fair that you allow me the same honor.”

“That was for when we were married. Or, at least, living together.”

“A minor technicality.”

“Your definition of ‘minor’ doesn’t exactly ring a bell.”

“I will obtain a copy of the OED for you at my first opportunity.”

“You know… I could just get a flatmate. That might solve my problem nicely.”

Had his beloved gone insane! Another person in proximity to his husband’s sleeping form? What if they were a serial killer? His poor, vulnerable mate would be tortured and dispatched within a week of acquiring his new address! Even if the villain did not commit murder, there would be some manner of sexual defilement, that was a certainty…

“Do I want to know what you’re thinking? You suddenly went tight as a knot.”


“Ok… serial killer or sexual predator?”

“I have no idea to what you are referring.”

Lestrade chuckled and nuzzled his partner’s hair. He really should have known better.
“How about I take the flatmate idea off the bargaining table for now?”

“Flatmate? I do not remember you mentioning such an absurd thing. You must have dozed off for a moment and dreamt that portion of our discussion.”

Serial killer and sexual predator, most likely. Poor Mycroft… regular life was absolutely not his area of expertise.

“Step one, we’ll see what my imaginary paycheck will cover. You got that salary information coming?”

“Actually, yes. I suspect there is a folder waiting at home for me to inspect on that very subject.”

“Ok then, we’ll do that first and move forward from there. Sound ok to you?”

Not as ‘ok’ as finding his intended an exquisite cottage with sturdy furnishings for the visitations by his rather rambunctious friends. However… it would do.

“Fm find the idea very agreeable.”

“No, you’ll tolerate it for now but keep looking for a way to change my mind if you possible can. That’s why I love you, Mycroft. You just don’t give up on things that are important to you. But you’re still not paying my way.”

There would be further conversations on this issue, so Mycroft was not seriously worried. A sexually sated and blissful Gregory was a far more accommodating Gregory… and he intended to bring his love to that particular state very, very frequently…

“Discussions, Gregory… we have an abundance of time for discussions.”

“Then may you have them at a later time? Your attempts at discourse lay upon my ears as heavy as the enormous sacks of pork fat that are attached to the base of your spine and quiver sickeningly as an additional despair-inducer.”

Sherlock’s queen was picked up and popped into John’s mouth where he rolled it around dramatically before replacing it wetly on the board and Mycroft nodded his gratitude to his small ally. Sherlock’s look of sheer repulsion was enough to make his heart sing…

“That is an act of war, John Watson.”

“You declare a lot of wars, Sherlock, and I’m not sure you’ve won one yet.”

“Your impertinence will be dealt with in a most heinous fashion.”

“The only fashion I care about is the look of my nice new suits. And how good I look in them.”

“To another amoeba, perhaps.”

“Yep. It’s true. People do turn green with envy because you look like a great big frog right now.”

“Your insistence on comparing me to some form of animal is further evidence of your laughably small brain. It is, in fact, so miniscule that if it was removed from your skull and placed in the head of a housefly, it would greatly resemble a grain of sand in the hold of a cargo ship. I am at the apex of the evolutionary tree. There is naught above me but sky.”
“And the birds in that sky that are going to poop on your big green head.”

Lestrade wrapped his arm more tightly around Mycroft and gave him a kiss on his back of his head. Tomorrow night they’d be back in their own homes, unable to do this and that idea wasn’t something he was especially happy to think about, but there’d be other times. Mum knew they probably weren’t sleeping in different beds here, so she might not mind if he spent a weekend at Mycroft’s house now and then. And, as much as he’d love the sex, he loved this just as much. Rule #1 for his first flat was that it had to have room for all four of them to fit and be able to do exactly what they were doing now, something simple that was valuable in ways it was actually hard to exactly define.

“That reminds me of an experiment I wish to conduct on the diet of city versus rural-dwelling pigeons as evidenced by their excrement. We shall begin this weekend.”

“Bird poop? You want to study bird poop? There’s something wrong with your brain, Sherlock. A lot wrong.”

“Only that its capacity nearly exceeds the volume of my cranium.”

But, defining that value wasn’t really all that important, now was it?

__________

It took an effort of epic proportions to get Sherlock and John to bed and, most pointedly, to stay in their beds, though both Mycroft and Lestrade had to fight their own internal conflict between wanting the time to themselves and wanting one final night as a group before they went, to some extent, their separate ways. If the rather lustful glances they were giving each other had not been quite so entrancing, the night might have ended in a puppy-pile on Lestrade’s bed and not the current twining of two bodies that seemed to be starving for the kisses of their partner.

“I can’t believe I’ll be alone in bed tomorrow night. It just seems… wrong… after these few days. I have a feeling I’m not going to get any sleep at all.”

“I concur. You are what is necessary for my comfort, my dear. My security, my happiness… when you are not with me, I feel the impact in a thousand different ways, each more painful than the last.”

“I was thinking… I don’t know if you’re willing, but… maybe, once in awhile, I can stay over at your house? Maybe a weekend now and then. I know you’ve got the staff and maybe you don’t want them to think…”

“I care not what they or anyone else may think and I can assure you that they will think nothing of our cohabitation. In fact, they shall likely celebrate it as that is less time they are required to keep watch over Sherlock. And, now, John, who I suspect shall be as nearly a resident in our home as can exist without relocating his clothing and personal goods. It is a… I truly would be in ecstasy if you were to grant me the benefit of your company in such a manner. I never wish to be parted from you, Gregory, and any time with you I may snatch, I shall do so eagerly.”

Lestrade draped his leg across Mycroft’s and pulled his lover closer for another kiss and to better feel the heat that his normally-cool partner was emitting like an open flame. Heat which increased as he let his hands wander across Mycroft’s naked back and parts a bit south of his naked back.

“Then I’ll talk to Mum about it. I doubt she’ll mind; she’s made it pretty clear she knows we’re not just kissing and holding hands.”

“Mother Lestrade is an observant woman and one with a practical turn of mind. But, as you say,
you should seek her permission before… ooh… Gregory, how am I to properly form a sentence when you are performing such delicious actions with your fingers.”

“Maybe that pretty mouth of yours just wants to make sounds other than words. You’re very… eager… tonight.”

Lestrade’s slight wriggle against Mycroft’s extremely rigid erection gained him more non-words, but that was as good a way of communicating in his opinion as any paragraph full of description.

“Always with you, my dear. When I was away, I lay in bed imagining so many things I wanted of you…”

“Like what? Tell me something you want, Mycroft. Anything you want.”

What he wanted? The list was endless…

“Hmmm… still thinking? That’s ok, you keep doing that. I’m happy playing with that beautiful bottom of yours and, since you seem to like it, too, I may just do that for awhile until you have an answer for me.”

Lestrade licked the tip of Mycroft’s nose, then moved away from his lover, rolling Mycroft gently on his stomach, then repositioning himself until he could use his tongue to lick the very base of Mycroft’s spine.

“Don’t pay any attention to me, you just keep thinking.”

And how did his lover believe that was possible when he insisted on trailing those warm, firm lips downwards, licking lightly at the separation between the flesh of his highly-pleased bottom? He could think of nothing but the sensation and what it was doing to the nerves scattered everywhere through his body.

“Someone seems to be enjoying his thinking… or did I find out I’m not the only one who likes a little play in this area?”

Like? Such a flat and uninspiring word…

“Well, let’s see just how much you like it.”

With soft lips trailing over his skin, hands massaging and separating, how could he…”

“Gregory!”

“I think my Mycroft might have a sensitive spot, too. And in the same place as mine, fancy that. Luckily we just took showers…”

And probing with his tongue… the incubus. The tip of his tongue and the flat, stimulating something that… and it was… why wouldn’t his body stop shaking? And was that him making such lewd and wanton sounds? Oh, this was an unexpected… oh, heavens…

“That’s what I want to hear from your beautiful mouth. And you can stop that wiggling, right now. No rubbing off while I’m busy having my fun. You just wait until I’ve had a chance to play. Now, let’s see how you like this game…”

“GREGORY!”

And of course an incubus has a wicked and evil chuckle. But, the wickedness was so…
indescribable. Penetration… such a visceral word and so appropriate for the… oh good lord, not again… oh, that tongue…

“That’s my boy. My Mycroft mews like a cat in heat and it’s the most gorgeous sound in the world.”

“A…again.”

“Your wish is my command.”

Gregory’s tongue was a national treasure. A treasure of humanity. A… oh yes please wriggle it just like that…

“More… please, Gregory… please… just a little more.”

“You know how hot I get when you beg, you little tart. Here how about this?”

“But…”

“Shhh… hold on…”

Where did his tongue go? Why did… oh… oohhhhh…

“You wanted more, he’s a little more. A little more stretch to enjoy. Now, do you want deeper, too? I’ve only got my fingertip inside right now.”

You expect me to be verbal? Silly man…

“That moan is a ‘yes’ if I’ve ever heard one. Ok, but just a little. I don’t have any lube, so…”

“k’s.”

“Kiss?”

“C…case. I have… brought it to America.”

“Hmmm… couldn’t keep your hands off yourself, could you? Love that… love that thought so much. Well, you keep your hands completely off yourself right now, while I go get it… don’t want to have to swat that lovely bum of yours because you’ve been a naughty little thing.”

Evil, horrible man… who needed to come back right now because laying here waiting was its own form of torture and it was making him very desperate to be that naughty little thing and simply rut like a wild stag against the mattress…

“Now, now… it’s ok, I’m here, I’m back… no whimpering anymore… just one second, let me get ready… I know, love… look at that amazing arse trying to get my attention… just a second… ok, there we go, shhhhh… there we go…”

Yes, oh blessed night, yes…

“More? Look at you push back to get it yourself. Now, you wouldn’t let me do that, so you can’t either. I’ll make you happy, don’t worry, but let me take this slow. Don’t want to push you too fast. These fingers of mine aren’t exactly thin…”

No, they were not… they were perfect. Such a delicious stretch… and so delightfully deep…
“That’s my, Mycroft. That skin of yours is nearly glowing… deeper? It’s ok, love, don’t push, I’ll take care of you. And…oh, you have no idea what those sounds are doing to me… let’s see if…”

Mycroft nearly leapt off the bed and felt his heart clench at the sharp stab of pleasure that shot through him.

“…yep, there it is. Think I’ll amuse myself a minute, if you don’t mind…”

Mind? Villain… had he no idea how… the sensations were… was he crying? It was so… unimaginably pleasurable… so breathtakingly intense…

“Every bit of you is trembling… I think my Mycroft is enjoying himself. Now, do want me to go deeper? Yes, that sounded like want to me, but let me know if you want me to stop.”

Stop? No, that request would not be forthcoming. Quite the opposite, in fact… and his love was quite thorough in complying. This was… euphoria… his Gregory was masterful with his attentions… a warm, strong hand across his back, a languid, rhythmic pace to his lover’s ministrations, every cell of his body humming with desire and sheer ecstasy… but… it was still not enough…

“More, Gregory… please, give me m…more…”

“I can’t, love. This is deep as I can go.”

“Gregory… please…”

“Ok, ok… hold on a second…”

“No!”

“Just pulling out for a second… just a second… I won’t leave you, not for a moment, I’m just… hold on… ok, here we go. How’s this? Oh yeah… that was a happy sound…”

Happy? With twice that glorious thickness stretching his body with the most perfect ratio of painful and pleasurable…

“So beautiful… you are so, so beautiful, Mycroft. Is this… this is ok, right? Not too much?”

Too much… was that possible? As he was laying here, his husband loving him with two of his powerful fingers and his body was crying out for the sensations to climb even higher? He felt utterly tawdry and shameless and it was… extraordinary…

“Not… not too much. Harder… can you, please… harder?”

“I can do harder. You tell me if it hurts.”

It did, a little. And he adored that bright splash of sting that was like a burst of tart amidst the sweet that made the flavor all the more complex and satisfying.

“Gregory…”

“Yes, love?”

“Is there… just a little more… it is so… good… please, Gregory…”
“More? Well… I could… how much more?”

“I…”

“Mycroft, tell me how much more you want.”

“I… oh, please, Gregory…”

“Give me something to work with, love.”

“Just… more.”

“More… ok, I can… Mycroft, talk to me… are you asking me to fuck you?”

Yes… oh yes… that was what he had been chasing…

“I need more than a moan for an answer this time, love.”

But why? Ah, his husband was the most protective, loving, caring, solicitous, concerned, doting, adoring man in the universe. That was why.

“Yes. A th…thousand times yes.”

“Allright. Ok. Yeah. Anything you want. Anything you ever want. Just… ok, let me get you ready. You just relax and enjoy it. Tell me if you want me to stop or change anything I’m doing.”

Which would not be necessary. His dearest, beloved spouse knew precisely how to make his body respond in the most profound and primal of ways. Such as now… if they were not songs of adoration to his intended, the noises he was making from the sensation of three of his Gregory’s thick and agile fingers giving him pleasure would have him utterly mortified for such a display.

“God but you’re magnificent. Seriously, Mycroft… I’ve never seen anyone as perfect as you.”

Of course, that simply made his display even more demonstrative. Not that his brain ordered the action… it had taken a holiday quite some time ago.

“You’re everything I ever wanted, you’re things I didn’t even know I wanted until I met you. I love you so much…”

Such words in his ears… was there any part of him that his spouse did not delight in pleasuring?

“Are… are you ok? I’m not… it’s not too painful, is it?”

Only if prolonged and decadent thrusts, stretches, rubs and innumerable threads of sheer electrical bliss could be described as too painful. It was animalistic, though so weepingly gentle it was virtually indescribable.

“No… it is exquisite…”

“‘k… just let me know, you know?”

Was that… was his husband nervous?

“G…Gregory? Are you alright? If you do not desire this…”

“I do! I can’t tell you how much I do. I just don’t want to hurt you and I’ve never done this
before, so I’m… yeah, I’m a little scared.”

His husband… this was new for him? That meant… oh, there should be no manner in which he could feel even more aroused, but this was entirely a new level…

“I am your first?”

“Hah! Yes, yes you are. You are absolutely my first for this. I’ve never cared for someone enough, trusted them enough to do this. Someone I wanted to take a lot of time with so I could do it right. No one, love. No one until you. And when it’s your turn, I’ll be your first. Now, just listen to you… someone is very happy…”

He was his husband’s first! For, perhaps, only one manner of their intimacy, but he was! This was incalculably exciting! Oh! Oh yes, that was, too… his spouse’s fingers could inspire symphonies of the most hedonistic fashion.

“So beautiful and fuck… so open and slick. You should see what I’m seeing right now. I think you’re nearly ready, but… I really like watching you writhe around like that…”

“Gregory… please do not tease… I need you…”

“Don’t worry, love, I’m not going to tease you. Just a little more to make sure. I want this to be good for you, as good as I can possibly make it. Ok, just a little… you are so gorgeous laid out like that… ok, I think it’s time. Any… how do you want me do this? What would be most comfortable for you?”

Hang comfort! There was only one way he wanted this to happen…

“Ok, hands and knees… that’s… christ, that’s hot. I could come… just seeing you like that I could let go right now and make a big mess all over that perfect skin. No, please don’t look at me with those wicked eyes, Mycroft… it’s hard enough not to just stare at you and beat off when you’re a fucking sex god… who feels so amazing…”

A sex god that was being petted by its mate like a large cat. His husband was unmatched as a lover, there was definitely no doubt. And he wanted that lover inside him now.

“No… no no no no… don’t shake that arse at me… christ, it’s like you’ve got me in a spell… I can’t fucking look away from you.”

“Gregory, please…”

“Ok. Seriously, ok. You… you have to talk to me, Mycroft. You have to let me know if anything doesn’t feel right. I don’t want to hurt you…”

“Gregory…”

“Ok… ok ok ok… just let me lube up… ok, not a good idea putting on lube when you’re already about to blow. Just give me a second to… yeah, need to breathe… NO! Stop grinning at me! You’re too fucking gorgeous to ever grin at me when I’m this close to coming! Just… you just pay attention to something else a minute…”

He was doing this. Him. He was stoking the fires of his spouse so high that they were consuming his dearest love with their embrace. Every time they made love, he did this to this magnificent man. Him. That was truly a feeling of power…
“Alright, a bit more lube and… ok, just a little to start and you tell me when you want me to go on.”

Aaahhhh… that was… large. Large and thick and it burned and it was spectacular… The slight burning sting was like a dash of strong pepper to take an already kingly dish to the heavens. But, perhaps a moment to, again, relax…

“That’s my Mycroft… so amazing. So, so, so amazing…”

Kisses… soft kisses across his back and strokes and pets along his sides and thighs and his skin was on fire from his husband’s touch.

“More…”

“More? Ok, just try and relax.”

Oh dear… that was… large. Still very, very large and, perhaps, larger than a moment ago. But, it was… yes, this was what he had wanted. Without question, this was his body had been craving…

“You good?”

“That is an un… understatement. Perhaps, though… a moment?”

“Great idea… I need one, too. You… you’ve got no idea what this feels like, love. But here, you focus on this for a minute.”

Focus on… oh, that. A rough, trembling hand on his own flesh that was trying to decide if it was appropriate to regain its erection and distract from the sensations from a very new pleasure zone. But, it could never deny his spouse its full attention when he lavished such talented care upon it.

“A little more, Gregory?”

“What? Oh, ok… I was losing myself there a minute, this just feels so fucking good. Here… breathe a little…”

“Urk.”

“Mycroft?”

“You… you are… enormous.”

“Too much? I can… here, shhh… let me pull back a little.”

“NO!”

“Not out, love, just back… just a little… there. Better?”

“Yes… but only for a moment, correct?”

“Oh huh… just relax. Relax for me, Mycroft. Relax as best you can…”

Relax? When his world was tilting on its axis? Spinning out of control and he was lapping up every bit of it like a cat with cream? Wait… that made absolutely no sense, but that was his point! This was dizzying, wild, fiery, real…

“Now, my love… move now.”
“Ok, only a little bit more, but tell me to stop if you need to. Here we go…”

His husband was a satyr! That was the only explanation for… he was filled to bursting! And it was glorious as the breaking dawn. His beloved Gregory was inside him, welding them together as one body as he had bound their hearts and souls. This was… the only proper descriptor was spiritual…

“Don’t wriggle you bastard! I’m trying not to come!”

How eloquently he was worshipped as the idol of their private shrine. And held like the most fragile porcelain doll. Kissed and, if he was not mistaken, his body was receiving the most fervent and devoted utterances of love pressed by whispering lips into his skin.

“Gregory…”

“Mycroft… my Mycroft. All mine… and so tight and hot. I need to move now. Now, I need to move. Can I move? If you’re not ready, I’ll try my best and…”

“If you do not move, I may have to take the action for you. And I am not breakable.”

“Don’t… don’t tempt me, because it’s taking all I’ve got not to just lose it and take you as hard and fast as I can.”

And that is a poor idea why?

“You can’t imagine… this feels… I can’t even come up with words right now. I’m going to start slow, ok? Stop me if you need to.”

Stop? When… ohhhh. Ohhhhhhh…

“Oh god… this is too good. This is too fucking good.”

“Harder, Gregory. I will not break.”

“I… oh yeah, I can do harder. And here, let me try this angle… fuck you’re sexy when you moan like that.”

“More. J…just like that.”

“Hitting that magic button?”

“Yes… continue.”

“Pushy. Just for that, I’m slowing down…”

“Gregory!”

“Just slowing down a little so I can do this…”

This? Oh, that… his spouse had the hands of a deity.

“I want my Mycroft stiff and dripping. See? Still taking that beautiful arse of yours, but now I can actually use a hand for something else. And… oh yeah, starting to drip already. Such a good boy. I know I’ve been leaking a river since you posed for me on all fours, licking those sweet lips of yours and making my blood boil. And I know I still am, but now it’s in you…”

Which was nearly shattering to contemplate. And the deep, full thrusts of his spouse into his body…
he could nearly feel his skin glowing with the sheer vibrancy of the experience.

“Please, beloved… harder…”

“Ok, but… work with me on this. Move forward and grab the headboard. Right at the top.”

“What?”

“Just do it, Mycroft. I promise, you’ll like it.”

But he would lose his connection to his spouse! Oh, that was already accomplished. The villain. Headboard…

“Both hands, love. Prop yourself sort of upright so I can kneel like this and… there, see? Slid right back in and now I can reach your cock and your belly and your chest and do this…”

Biting! Marking the base of his neck, thrusting within him and… yes, returning that large, strong hand to stroke firmly and quickly…

“Someone’s bollocks are getting like rocks. You’re close, aren’t you, love? You like me fucking you, don’t you? Tell me…”

“I do.”

“Tell me.”

“I am alight with the sensation of you taking me this way. I feel devoured, consumed, possessed, desired… I am yours and bursting with love for you and your passion. Fuck me, Gregory. I want it so desperately…”

“Oh christ…”

Yes, that is what I want, my dear. Hard and fast as if you want to impress your very essence into my flesh. Deep and… oh yes, stroke me faster. Adorn my skin with your marks and let my ears hear your own pleasure moaned low and rough in waves of warm, sweet breath. Yes… just a little faster…

“You’re going to come aren’t you, Mycroft? Going to come all over my fingers…”

Yes…”

“… and scream out my name…”

Oh, yes…

“… feel your body give everything to me…”

So close…

“And I’m going to follow right after you…”

So very close…

“… filling you up…”

Almost there…
“… filling up my husband with my come…”

Mycroft’s head rolled back and the scream that erupted came from so deep inside it drew energy from every cell of his locked muscles and added force to propel the ropes of semen that painted the headboard of the bed. He might have collapsed onto that bed if he wasn’t gripped tightly by his husband, his dearest, proclaimed husband and was granted the favor of savoring the experience of him seeking his own orgasm roughly and loudly, finally hearing the sharp inhale of breath and tightening of their embrace as he was filled with the unequivocal evidence of his spouse’s love, each lingering thrust ensuring he had taken all his beloved had to give.

At that point, his senses simply shut down so he could sit inside his mind and replay his experience, swim in the ocean of his bliss and be warmed by the penetrating heat of his undying love for the man he had chosen to wed. When his mind decided to release his awareness back to the physical world, Mycroft had no idea how long it was before he even remembered where he was, but the powerful arms around his waist and the gentle kisses being laid on his shoulders and neck reminded him quite nicely.

“You alright, Mycroft?”

“No, I am not merely alright. I am enraptured. Transcendent. I have bathed in your passion and emerged cleansed of all worry and sorrow of mind.”

“I love you, too.”

“Something for which I am eternally grateful.”

“You might not say that tomorrow. You’re probably going to be sore.”

“A minor matter. I would not trade tonight for any amount of discomfort.”

“But I bet you’d like a shower.”

“You know me to the depths of my soul.”

“Then I’ll get you clean and tidy up in here, hold you close and watch over you until you fall asleep. How does that sound?”

Like he had been given an angel for a spouse instead of a man. But, of course, he already knew that was the case.

“Heavenly.”

“Let’s get started then.”

“Gregory… we shall repeat this experience in the future, shall we not?”

“As long as it makes you happy, then we absolutely will.”

“And… we shall have the opportunity to exchange roles, correct?”

Lestrade took his partner in the first deep kiss they’d been able to share since they began and wondered what he had done in a past life to warrant such a remarkable man as his future fiancé.

“Oh yes. I’ve never had anyone do that to me, but… well, let’s just say I’ve done it to myself, so I know I like it. And having you fuck me is something… it’s actually one of my fantasies.”
“I do enjoy the thought of fulfilling your fantasies.”

“Then I’ll make sure you get your chance. We’ll just need to find some time when we can be alone.”

“You did say you desired to explore the idea of taking small weekend holidays at my home, did you not? Long nights in my bed, which you already know is quite comfortable and accommodating.”

“Forgot about that… ok, time to stop talking about this or we won’t get our shower.”

“Gregory Lestrade… are you again feeling the pull of lust?”

“I can’t help it. You’re still here with me.”

“I love you, too.”

———

“Sit down! I refuse to suffer your looming as I consume my breakfast. Your vulture-like qualities are sufficient without perching on the proverbial branch above my rotting corpse!”

Mycroft simply smiled at his brother, then cast another at his spouse, who was standing next to him, arm around his waist as they sipped their tea and nibbled on the breakfast that Sherlock and John were attacking. Quite literally, since they had arranged their food into a battlefield map and were launching repeated assaults against their breakfast, gleefully consuming their victims of war.

“Mycroft doesn’t want to get between you and your enemy line and wind up with casualties all over his clothes. Just eat your breakfast so we can get started on the day. We’ve got to make the most of it.”

Which, in Mycroft’s opinion, was already off to a phenomenal start as his day had begun with tender kisses all over his body and a massage that both soothed his muscles and energized him for the day ahead. And ache was certainly the watchword of the morning. But it was not one that could be easily massaged away and, quite frankly, he was thankful for it. All morning he had been wearing a slightly smug and triumphant grin, one that was matched beautifully by his husband’s own. Husband… now that unearthed a particularly splendid memory… the jewel in the crown of their night. Every step he took and the slowly-easing pain he felt with it was a visceral reminder of their lovemaking and held its own particularly sensual appeal. His body, apparently, gladly embraced a bit of physical challenge… And his dearest love… so protective and concerned… nurturing and caring… solicitous and doting all morning long. When their roles were reversed, he would strive to be just as attentive, though he was surely the apprentice to the master.

“We’re going to, Greg! Sherlock and I have lots of ideas and not a one of them is going to get us in trouble.”

“That’s good to hear. Hate to end the day on a sour note. And we should also spend some time with Grandmama to thank her for having us here.”

“She should be grateful to me for sharing my extremely valuable time with her. The number of experiments I could have performed in my laboratory is legion and the impact to posterity cannot be overstated.”

“Ok, you tell her that and let’s see what happens. I think our future visits will be as a threesome and not a foursome after your little speech.”
“Pffft… your opinion was neither solicited, appreciated nor expressed particularly eruditely. I am deleting it immediately from my mind to allow room for something more important. Which, in case you are not capable of following the thread of my meaning, would be anything else in the universe. Including matters concerning the whale, so you are aware of the seriousness my decision.”

John took advantage of the distraction to take the more desirable portions of Sherlock’s breakfast off of the battlefield and left his friend’s troops severely depleted, a move which gained Mycroft’s professional approval. Always use your adversaries’ foibles against them.

“You know, you’ll earn a good wage if you can find a job that pays you by the word. Love, are there any jobs like that out there?”

Mycroft reveled in the tiny pinch his spouse applied to his waist and the grin that accompanied it.

“Hmmm… I am unclear how a town crier is recompensed, but that is certainly a possibility. And it does require a strident presentation, for which, as we know, Sherlock is highly suited. The only other option might fall in the arena of politics, though I am not certain as to how my brother’s patience will fare by the fourth hour of a committee meeting on the grazing rights of sheep.”

“I will not serve when I am elected!”

“I believe, brother dear, the likelihood of that is fairly low.”

“I’d vote for you, Sherlock.”

“Thank you, John. For this one issue, you are in the majority, for you recognize, as would the other feeble-witted citizens, my superiority to the other candidates.”

“Who are they?”

“It matters not, for I am superior to everyone.”

“Except in Top Trumps. And gliders. And horse riding.”

“You shall pay dearly for your slander John Watson. And for the reprehensible war crimes you have committed on this field of battle. WHERE IS MY TOAST?”

“Where you can’t get it. And look! My plate’s clean. Looks like I’m ready to start my day. Greg, Mycroft? Can we practice driving first?”

Lestrade chuckled at Mycroft’s slight gasp and gently stroked his partner’s back.

“How about we do another round of glider building first. Then, we can look at taking out the cars. I’ll… I’ll see if we can find some big comfortable ones to take out to give you boys a chance to try your hands at something new. How does that sound?”

“Great!”

“I demand the Bentley!”

“Of course you do, Sherlock. Let me guess, is that the big fancy one?”

“One of them, my dear. Grandmama has quite the collection of vehicles. Which reminds me that I have yet to take you for a tour through her main garage. Might I add that item to our agenda?”

“Yes, Mycroft, you most certainly might. You know I love cars.”
“Me, too! Cars are great!”

“The only car properly sized for you, John, is one designed as a toddler’s toy.”

“Just you wait until I get my own car, Sherlock. It’s going to be so much better than yours; you’re going to drool over it.”

“My saliva is far too precious to waste moistening your three-wheeled scrapheap reject.”

“There’s that green color again… you’re already jealous of my great car.”

“And exactly what makes your vehicle braggingly noteworthy?”

“Got any paper?”

“Lackey! Obtain paper and drawing supplies! I must show the anal mite how a quality vehicle is designed!”

Lestrade laughed at the new competition and kissed Mycroft on the cheek.

“So, car design for the morning, I guess. Love, think you can find them some pencils or pens?”

“I believe I can, and in a variety of colors, also.”

“A morning in the library, maybe? They can draw and we can read? Maybe lay down on the rug in front of the fire and be on hand for technical support?”

“What a delightful idea. Tomorrow shall be a trying day, I am certain, and a bit of relaxation today would be a welcome thing.”

Especially if a few hours of sitting in a vehicle on bumpy roads was on their horizon.

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“I believe I can, and in a variety of colors, also.”

“A morning in the library, maybe? They can draw and we can read? Maybe lay down on the rug in front of the fire and be on hand for technical support?”

“What a delightful idea. Tomorrow shall be a trying day, I am certain, and a bit of relaxation today would be a welcome thing.”

Especially if a few hours of sitting in a vehicle on bumpy roads was on their horizon.

“I believe I am unclear about the task you are attempting to assign me. Please do detail your request again, Sherlock.”

John nodded at Sherlock who was holding up their drawings to Grandmama for her inspection.

“You are to direct whichever automobile manufacturer for whom you own the greatest number of stock shares to build our vehicles so that we may properly test them and assign a winner to our competition. John insanely believes aesthetic appeal is of greater value than aerodynamic quality and I need to show him clearly the befuddlement of his tiny mind.”

“And did you provide schematics for the engine, transmission, suspension system, fuel system, exhaust system, electrical system or cooling system? The other minor considerations when one manufactures an automobile?”

“Lesser minds can manage the mundanities.”

“I see. You have done a fine job of presenting your designs, I must admit. Multiple perspectives, as well.”

“Mycroft said you need those for a real engineering drawing. He helped me with mine and Greg helped Sherlock with his.”
“Which explains why mine are clearly superior. The globular folds of adipose that hang pendulously from Fatcroft’s face obscure his vision and impedes any endeavor which requires visual acuity.”

“You’re the blind one, Sherlock. Mycroft’s not fat. You’ve just got a fat obsession, which makes two, since you’ve also got a feet obsession. I think I’m seeing a pattern.”

“I am not obsessive!”

“Feet and fat prove you wrong.”

Grandmama set the boys’ drawings on her desk and looked over to the older pair who were standing well out of harm’s way and received a cheeky little wave from Lestrade for her troubles. Exemplary parents, the both of them. And maintaining their own bond as a couple, in the face of the demands of rearing two very vigorous boys. Though she hoped that Mycroft did show foresight thought the years… certain intimate activities were best not undertaken if one faced a day of sitting at a conference table and could not, for a moment, be distracted by physical discomfort. Well, there were some things one had to learn for themselves and she could only hope it would not be too distressing a lesson…

“Leaving aside your assessment, Sherlock, I would say both drawings are of excellent quality.”

“And you will have them built.”

“I did not say that. But, I shall hold onto them, if I may until I make a decision on the issue.”

“That’s fine, Mrs. Holmes. We can make more. In fact, I already have ideas for another car I want to design. This one’s going to be for people who go on adventures in jungles and things.”

“What do you know of adventures, John Watson?”

“I’ve read books. Watched films. I know exactly what kind of a car they’d need.”

And, one day, Grandmama thought, John would have the chance to visit those places, should he still desire the opportunity. Of course, he would be accompanied by Sherlock, which was its own particular brand of adventure…

“Then, by all means, do make a start on your creations. Thank you very much for sharing these with me; it has been a very interesting experience.”

“You’re welcome, ma’am. We’ll… we’ll see you again before we leave, right?”

Oh, such a perfect companion for her grandson. Sherlock’s emotions ran very deep, but he had such a tremendously difficult time expressing them. Such a thing was always helped by having an exemplar to study…

“Most certainly. I would never see you depart without a personal farewell and reassurance that you soon would be returning.”

John’s ‘yes!’ was punctuated by a little shimmy that made Sherlock’s eyes roll and he dragged his friend out of the room before John could embarrass himself further. The elderly woman watched the boys leave and pursed her lips at the remaining two, who went quickly on alert.

“Steps will be taken to facilitate their association once they return to school, correct?”
“Yes, Grandmama. Gregory has already established a series of routines and activities that the boys enjoy and now we may add John’s visits to our home to that repertoire. We shall not allow this flower to wilt, Grandmama. You have my solemn word.”

“Good. With the holidays approaching and the various gatherings that might occur between now and then, I do expect that I shall find Sherlock and John paired in attendance for each one.”

Neither Mycroft nor Lestrade missed that she did not include them in that statement. Whether it was because it was an assumed thing or because she knew that wasn’t necessarily possible, they absolutely refused to contemplate.

“You may rest assured that where Sherlock goes, John shall follow and that it will be entirely by his will and desire that he does so.”

“Excellent. Now, make good use of these last few hours. Your mornings begin early, I know, and you will need time to reestablish yourselves at your homes before you rest tonight. You shall dine at your own tables tonight, so the car will be waiting for you before evening. Ensure you and the children are prepared to depart at that time. You might… one of you might offer your dinner table to John tonight, so that he does not have to end his holiday quite so abruptly or alone.”

“We’ll see he gets dropped back at school right at bedtime. And he’ll see Sherlock first thing tomorrow morning, so he shouldn’t have too hard a time getting back into his usual schedule. I won’t be able to take them out for awhile because I have a lot of hours to make up at work but… I’ll do what I can to keep an eye on him. And Mycroft’s back now, so he’ll do the same thing, I’m sure.”

“That I will. And I assume Sherlock will demand John’s presence over the weekend and John will surely agree. You could join us in the evening, could you not, my dear?”

“Maybe. But I’m going to have stacks of work to do for school and I can’t do that if I have to referee Sherlock and John. You might have to be on your own for this one, love.”

On his own? That an unsettling thought. Quite an unsettling thought…

“Could you not bring with you your studies? In fact, the children could as well, for I am certain they shall have assignments they must complete from their absence. We could have a quiet evening of study and work on Saturday…”

“Mycroft, one would think you were afraid of being left alone for an evening with the children. If Gregory requires time to fulfill his obligations, then time he must have.”

Afraid… how ridiculous. A Holmes was afraid of nothing. And he had shepherded Sherlock for many years on his own. Not, of course, the Sherlock that was currently emerging from his cocoon. Nor the Sherlock that had had drawn a companion to his side. A companion that very synergistically escalated the energy of any of Sherlock’s endeavors to an astounding level. And Mummy would be in residence…

“It’s alright, Grandmama. Actually, it’s not a bad idea, in case I need a little help because I wasn’t there for the lesson on what I have to do. I think a quiet Saturday night’s a great idea, love.”

And not only because Mycroft’s face looked like he’d just been told he’d have to watch a houseful of newborns armed with one bottle, one nappy and they all had colic.

“Gregory, you must promise me that you will not allow yourself to neglect your own affairs, especially since Mycroft, despite his nearly palpable terror, is perfectly capable of managing on his
Said with a firm tone and look at his soon-to-be fiancé that Gradmama thought most appropriate. Mycroft was developing quite the damsels-in-distress ability and Gregory would have to be ever-vigilant that he was not caught in its clutches. How delightful that her grandsons were already developing those private and domestic sides to themselves that no one else in the world would ever see… well, besides her. Their life as a couple was going to be quite the interesting thing to observe…

“Of course, my love. Mother Lestrade certainly will appreciate that you are spending time with her and you are greatly deserving of a few hours to settle your own affairs and replace your stamp on your own household. Naturally, you would desire that and I would do nothing to interfere with that most necessary time. Not a thing, for I love you dearly and only want what is best for you. Whatever that might be. At any time.”

Ok… thanks for that very long and slightly confusing reassurance, Mycroft. But, you do realize Sherlock will probably bring John home with him tomorrow night, too, don’t you?”

“What? I mean… of course. It is almost a certainty. One I easily anticipated. Matters are in hand, Gregory… matters are in hand…”

Lestrade shared a glance with Grandmama who was fondly remembering the first time she told her husband he had to watch their two-year old son while she enjoyed an afternoon with friends. A house filled with servants and it was still as if she had asked him to defend the boy from hungry tigers while armed only with a spoon and a piece of tape. It took three whiskeys to steady his nerves after her return…

“One should always embrace a chance to prove one’s mettle, as Mycroft is well aware. Now, if you two will excuse me, I do have items of business to which to attend. I shall see that Edwards reminds you of the time as the hour of your departure grows near.”

“Thank you, Grandmama. Gregory, have you heard Sherlock or John in the last few minutes?”

“No and I can’t say that doesn’t worry me. We’ll see you later, Grandmama.”

This time it was Lestrade dragging Mycroft out of the room, both boys crossing their fingers that the silence in the house didn’t mean Sherlock’s much-vaunted nerve gas formula hadn’t been fabricated and released into the ductwork. The last time it simply stained the wallpaper, but he had announced he’d refined his formula…

When Edwards arrived to announce their holiday was drawing to a close, Mycroft and Lestrade stepped in quickly to stem the quickly rising tide of Sherlock and John’s upset and remind them that they would return sooner than later and, to reinforce that idea, encouraged the boys to leave things in the room to mark it as theirs, something they themselves did after they left Sherlock and John alone to pack their travel bags.

“This is it, love. It’s been like a dream, even the hard parts.”

“A dream we shall repeat, both here and in my own rooms. We have created something magical, my dear, and I know we shall both battle to protect it. And, as we are aware, my bed will easily host
four bodies if it is called to do so in the near future.”

“Yes! Crazy as it sounds, I didn’t mind our communal bedtime. They trust us to take care of them and that means a lot.”

“It does. And it is an utter joy that I was able to experience it these past days.”

“You want a family, don’t you, Mycroft. I mean kids of your own, not just Sherlock and John.”

“In truth, I do not know. No, that is an untruth. I would adore filling our home with offspring, but I fear the reality of my life will make that untenable.”

“And if I’m a cop, it’ll be hard for me, too. But lots of people have busy lives and still have kids, so I’m not worried. Besides, that’s a long way off, so I’m not even thinking about it. If it turns out it won’t work for us, though, we’ll have to rent one now and then, so Grandmama will have something to coo over during our visits.”

“Yes, our lives will not be worth a counterfeit penny if she does not have new addition to the family to dote upon. A lease agreement might be a very sound backup plan should our own efforts prove fruitless.”

“I think you’d be very fruitful, Mycroft. My lover is nothing if not virile. You have no idea the amount of virility I had to scrub off the headboard last night while you were drying that sexy hair of yours.”

Was there a time he would ever not feel special in his spouse’s presence?

“And I well remember proudly displaying your own potency down the lengths of my thighs.”

“Hmmm… that was a breathtaking sight. But then, it’s always a breathtaking sight when it involves you.”

“Gregory… do you think we might have sufficient time to… just something…”

“Quick and dirty.”

“A very apt description.”

“First one with their bag packed is on their knees.”

“Mine were already taken care of while you were encouraging the children to actually dress for breakfast and not march to the table in their pants.”

“I wondered what took you so long to join that fight. Ok then, you win.”

“That I do, Gregory. That I do.”

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“Mycroft, I expect a phone call that you have arrived home safely.”

“Yes, Grandmama.”

“And the repeat of that action every other day or so.”

“Yes, Grandmama.”
“And I expect I shall see you in person within two weeks.”

“Yes, Grandmama.”

“In three weeks, however, is my little gathering of friends and family and you four shall present yourselves sufficiently early that you have time to try on your suits and present them to me so that I might choose the best options for the atmosphere I am crafting.”

“Yes, Gr… suits? Plural?”

“A selection is being prepared for each of you. Dressing you at the last moment is too tiring for someone of my age and I would rather you had a wardrobe to select from to facilitate matters. Now, form a queue.”

Four boys jumped into a straight line with John pushed to the front as the first victim.

“It was very good to meet you, John. You are one of them now, god help you, and, therefore, consider yourself as welcome in my home as any of those three. I look forward to seeing you again very soon.”

John accepted his peck on the cheek and ran back to stand by Sherlock, hoping no one saw the moisture in his eyes he was fighting to hold back. Mycroft got shoved forward next, no matter how valiantly he tried to fend off his husband’s push to his back.

“You performed very admirably with the Americans, Mycroft and, though I wish it could have been different, the learning you demonstrated concerning being a Holmes spouse is highly encouraging. I am very proud of you, grandson.”

Mycroft stoically received his own kiss and darted back to escort John to the waiting car and share a quiet word with the boy whose heart was as heavy as his own.

“Sherlock.”

Sherlock slunk forward at the summons and stood rigidly in front of his grandmother to await his peck, which came quickly and with a second on his forehead that confused the boy mightily.

“You are growing so quickly, Sherlock, and what I am observing pleases me to no end. You shall be a fine young man, never think otherwise. Now, run along and join your brother and John. I need a word with Gregory.”

Sherlock turned and ran in the direction of the car, completely unnerved by the praise and Lestrade chuckled watching him flee.

“He’ll be a misery now, you know. The whole way home he’s going to do everything he can to prove you wrong.”

“I am well aware of that, but it is my privilege to send my grandchildren home in a state of agitation for their parents to handle.”

“You know that means me and Mycroft.”

“I do. I was not, at all, using the term ‘parents’ generically. And I could not be more delighted. Remember well that you are your family’s rock, Gregory. It is a terrible responsibility and, often, a thankless one, but there is no one better suited to the role than you. It is you who shall keep your family united in times of turmoil and… you will be the one who enables Mycroft to do what he must
because you will keep him strong and confident in the knowledge that he is loved and *worthy* of that love. It is a role I know well, grandson, and I am comforted to know that the next to wear the mantle shall more than do it justice. Now, go and tend your family, Gregory. They are likely completely disheveled and in need of your particular skillset.”

A quick peck for her last boy, though, truly, a man, and Grandmama whirled on her heel and strode away, leaving a shocked Lestrade standing in the entranceway. After a few moments, he swallowed down his own emotions and walked to the car where… well, it was clear Grandmama was right. Three people needed him and it was his honor to be the one they looked to in times like these.

“Peasant! Why are you standing there when you could be feeding me the cake Mycroft does not think I know the cook placed in the car for our… I mean *my*… enjoyment!”

“That’s for after dinner, you little bastard.”

“Then provide me a finger or toe to consume so that I might declare my evening meal completed and have my cake!”

Yes, it really was an honor… toes and fingers, notwithstanding…
Chapter 18

The car first stopped at Lestrade’s house and all four boys climbed out, the two smaller ones running ahead and barging through the front door, leaving Mycroft and Lestrade to bring up the rear, Mycroft chivalrously carrying Lestrade’s luggage. It surprised neither of the older boys that Sherlock and John were to be found in the kitchen, begging something sweet from Lestrade’s mother.

“We’re starving! We barely had anything to eat at all while we were there!”

John’s plaintive cry was highlighted with a sucking in of his stomach and Sherlock’s pitiful glancing and pointing at the extreme concavity. Once again, Mycroft had to remind himself that his brother was not, in fact, six years old.

“Then dropping a big slab of cake into that hollow space is just going to hurt. How about a little broth, instead?”

“Broth is only a single step above air on the nutritional scale! You, a mother, should be highly aware of that fact, Mother Lestrade!”

“And how are you, Sherlock, going to argue that cake is a better option?”

“Flour! There are… materials… in flour. Eggs are possessed of semblance of protein. There is…”

Sherlock whispered furiously with John for a moment, then returned to his lecture.

“… butter, which is necessary to promote absorption of the lipid-soluble materials in the flour. Sugar… sugar is extremely nutritional, as the most esteemed experts agree and that alone should mandate we be fed cake at every meal! Chocolate cake, specifically, because chocolate is significantly correlated with a wide variety of positive health benefits such providing antioxidants and helping with menstrual issues.”

“You haven’t really researched cake much, have you, Sherlock?”

“It is unnecessary; the biochemistry is childlike in its simplicity, John Watson.”

“And you do know we don’t do… that.”

“Specify.”

“I don’t want to.”

“It is alright, John. The holes in my brother’s knowledge for the area of basic reproductive physiology are well known. By his very aberrant version of biology, I should already be expecting Gregory's and my first child.”

“Oh, really?”

Mycroft felt a raging flush of heat light up on his cheeks as he slowly turned towards Lestrade’s mother, who was wearing a very wicked and very interested smile.

“Please, Mycroft, I’d love to hear the details.”

“Mum, leave Mycroft alone.”
“Goodbye, Mum.”

Lestrade dragged Mycroft away to his bedroom with Sherlock’s ‘Mycroft’s teats are sufficiently sized to nurse a wildebeest!’ screeching in their ears. With the door closed firmly behind them, Lestrade took Mycroft in a quick, soothing kiss, then flopped down on his bed. His narrow, lumpy bed.

“Welcome home, Mycroft. Worst part of a holiday is when you get home and realize you’re back to your normal life and nothing changed while you were gone.”

Mycroft sat down next to his partner and gently rubbed his stomach.

“That is not, however, an unhappy thing, is it, my dear? Your mother’s sense of humor is quite robust and, as you previously indicated, speaks strongly to her knowledge of our intimate relationship. I find that quite relieving, as I feel when you seek her permission to spend overnight time in my home, she will agree, though after, perhaps, some good-hearted maternal teasing.”

“We’ll see how calm and… what’s that non- word?... nonchalant! Yeah, you won’t be so nonchalant when it’s your mum asking about us shagging.”

“Mummy making such an inquiry is actually near the very bottom of my concerns.”

Lestrade put his hand on top of Mycroft’s and gave it a squeeze.

“Sorry, love. I forgot you don’t have a typical mum. And she’s going to be home, isn’t she?”

“Most likely, though she might have gone out for the evening or have invited friends to join her for a gathering, so Sherlock and I will not be the focus of her attention.”

“But she’s off again soon, right?”

“So says Grandmama and she is never wrong about these things.”

“Then there you go. Life will be back to normal soon. And you can spend time here whenever you want. I know it doesn’t offer what your house does, but at least my mum is more than happy with you just the way you are. Same as me.”

Lestrade pulled Mycroft down so his partner lay on the bed next to him and long, slow kisses began, which grew more and more heated until the banging on Lestrade’s bedroom door nearly shook the floor in force and Sherlock’s voice cut through the air like a knife.

“Mother Lestrade commands your presence at the dinner table and says that you should have had sufficient time to satisfy your libidinous urges, so she will accept no refusal.”

Lestrade threw his pillow at the door and used language that immediately was pronounced reportable by Sherlock who ran off to gleefully divulge Lestrade’s words to his mother.

“Ugh… you know, Mycroft… you want that houseful of kids, this is going to be an everyday
thing. You might want to keep that in mind.”

“True, but to whom would our children tattle about your colorful language? Me? They would quickly find I enjoy your rather salty tongue.”

“My Mycroft likes a rough boy now and then.”

“So long as he is you, I like him very much.”

Another round of banging began and a statement that their judge and jury waited to pass sentence for inappropriate conduct followed quickly.

“I’m going to miss this, Mycroft. You and me, Sherlock and John…”

“It is just for a short while, Gregory.”

“Yeah… call me if you get lonely?”

“I would be forever on the telephone if that were the case, my dear. But, rest assured, I shall maintain contact and I am quite certain Sherlock shall not hesitate to barrage you at all hours as he has proven himself want to do. Now, shall we? I believe we have a family meal awaiting our presence.”

Lestrade took one last kiss from Mycroft’s lips and hopped off the bed, smoothing his clothes and hand-combing his hair.

“Yeah, might as well before Sherlock is back with some form of battering ram he and John made out of chicken bones and a pair of Mum’s shoes.”

Mycroft followed his partner’s lead and reached over to take Lestrade’s hand as they moved towards the door, making a mental note to have the doors of their first residence reinforced heavily against just such an onslaught by a Sherlock and John who would be far more technologically-advanced than they were now. The same should likely be applied to windows…

After a boisterous dinner where Lestrade’s mother happily excused herself from all child-minding duties and left the work to the two older boys, and a final few hours of cards once the dishes had been washed and put away by highly-complaining large and small hands, it was time to deliver John back to school and let Sherlock and Mycroft continue home. It was by no means unexpected that when Mycroft and Sherlock dropped off John, it was a difficult extraction process to separate the two boys and Sherlock only agreed to leave once he had verified personally that John’s room had not been the victim of any form of nefariousness in their absence. It also gave Mycroft the chance to himself verify that John’s room was suitable and that his comforts were properly provided for. Gregory might disapprove, but a few little conveniences here and there would surely not be out of line, would they? No, they would not. Every boy here had some supply of luxuries sent from home to make their stay more agreeable and he would see that John experienced the same. But, the extent of the little luxuries might have to stay a secret from his spouse for the moment…

With John finally settled, the siblings returned home and bid farewell to Grandmama’s driver who shook his head as the boys walked up the steps to the front door, wondering if he’d ever seen sadder faces on two people in his entire life. On the boy’s part, it was more trepidation than sadness as they approached the house and were glad, once they walked inside that they heard voices and the sound of music, indicating some form of small party. They were less glad when, as they climbed the stairs to their rooms, they met their mother, who had, apparently, gone in search of them.
“Finally! I have been terribly worried!”

The slight slurring in her words told Mycroft that her worry was more an effect of alcohol and an inquiry by her guests than any maternal feeling, but he chose not to comment.

“We stayed until late at Grandmama’s and then dined with Gregory and his mother in their home.”

“Should I have sprayed you for fleas?”

“That is uncharitable, Mummy, and certainly not amusing. Mother Lestrade maintains an exceedingly clean home and offers a generous table. We enjoyed a very pleasant evening, as do we always.”

“Mother Lestrade?”

“Mother-in-Law Lestrade is too ungainly upon the tongue.”

“You are still clinging to the ridiculous notion that you shall wed that gardener’s boy?”

“Yes, and we have the approval of both Mother Lestrade and Grandmama, so I would say the degree of obstacle to mine and Gregory’s union is nil. I love him, Mummy, and that is something you must come to accept. Besides, Grandmama highly favors my soon-to-be fiancé and shall lavish upon us, I am certain, a wedding that shall set society at each other’s throats for an invitation. You would not want to miss such a spectacle, now would you?”

Mycroft watched his mother try and decide if his words were an enticement or a threat and gave himself a silent congratulation that she never quite came to a firm conclusion.

“Very well. Sherlock and I have early mornings so we shall bid you goodnight. Do enjoy your party.”

Striding away from his mother with Sherlock at his side, Mycroft finally let a little smile show and was very proud to see Sherlock was wearing a highly similar one on his own lips. Yes, this little holiday definitely had some very fortunate outcomes.

Well, he was right. Last night was miserable; he barely got any sleep, at all. It all felt wrong and he was alone and the warmth was just from the blanket and not another person and he couldn’t smell Mycroft or touch him… and there weren’t any feet in his face or demanding voices assaulting his ears. It was a quiet, peaceful night and he hated it. The only good thing was that his body had gotten used to getting up at the crack of dawn because of Sherlock and John, so he had plenty of time to get ready for school.

Which was also going to be miserable. He had so much work to catch up on and then… it was going to be a hundred people asking questions and wanting to know where he went and what he did. They probably already knew a little because Mum certainly told her friends and they would spread the word around, but his friends would want details. And there were countless details about his holiday that people would love to know, but not all of them was he was prepared to share. The ones his mates would want to know about most he definitely wouldn’t share, none of their fucking business the filthy perverts, but the rest of the holiday… he could share that. Well, except exactly who was at Grandmama’s big meeting. That very well might be secret. He probably should have asked. Ok, so no saying just who was at the meeting, until he got the ok from Mycroft. But, Americans in big, shiny black cars with bodyguards carrying concealed weapons… that much he
could tell and would have a great time doing it.

“Greg! Breakfast!”

Lestrade poked his head out of his bedroom and smelled the familiar aroma of his mother’s cooking and had to admit this was something he had missed. Grandmama’s cooks were fantastic, but they weren’t his mum.

“Already dressed! Look at me, not a shabby pair of shorts facing you across the breakfast table, either.”

“I live a charmed life. Oh, and here… these might help you today.”

Lestrade watched his mother take an envelope off of the counter and drop it in front of him. Looking inside, he found a thick stack of photographs.

“These are from Grandmama, aren’t they?”

“Naturally. But having some photos might make talking about your holiday a little easier. I know how difficult it is to really explain just what it’s like over there and it’s simpler when you can just point and say ‘here’s where my son was staying and here’s his boyfriend and isn’t the library lovely’ and let the pictures do the talking for you. It was especially nice to show Mycroft around… I don’t think he and Sherlock ever got out much because people really don’t know what he looks like. They’ve heard of the family and that big house of his, but nothing about him or Sherlock.”

“They’ve been pretty narrow in what they do I think. I don’t think if Sherlock hadn’t devoured a king’s ransom of their mum’s chocolate, Mycroft would ever have set foot in the shop. I know he had never been to the pub or cinema or anything until I took him. Sherlock, either. It is funny, though, because the people at school think he’s some sort of ghost or something. Like I’m seeing someone who’s not real.”

“Well, we know he is and now you can show him off. And try to include him in things with your mates when you can.”

“I will. He’s happy that I spend time with my friends and do things with them, but I don’t ever want him to feel he’s not welcome when we’re off having a bit of fun.”

“Good. Now finish your food so you can get out of here. It’s probably a smart idea to get to school early so you can talk to your teachers and get your work. It looks good when you take the initiative.”

“Ok. If I can’t get caught up tonight, I told Mycroft I’d spend some time over there this weekend so I can finish and help Sherlock and John get sorted with their work, too.”

“That sounds like a nice idea. Are you going to bring a toothbrush?”

Lestrade dropped the fork holding the last bit of his eggs.

“Mum! Don’t… don’t say things like that.”

“Want me to write it down instead?”

“Stop having fun with my relationship with Mycroft!”

“Life’s about fun, my darling boy, and I plan to have as much as possible. And don’t think for
one minute I believe you aren’t hoping to have an overnight stay whenever you can. I’m not going to meddle in your relationship, Greg, but if you let your schoolwork suffer or I never get to see my own son once in awhile, you’ll only be seeing Mycroft during the afternoon and, further, only if I or Sherlock chaperones. Do you understand me? Weekends are your time, but during the week I want you home where I know you’re getting a full night’s sleep and you’re paying attention to your studies.”

Well, that was that conversation sorted without him having to bring it up himself. Maybe today wouldn’t be as miserable as he thought.

“I don’t have a problem with that. Mycroft and I are both very clear that I’ve got my responsibilities, just as he’s got his and we don’t want to do anything that compromises that. We talked about, maybe, some weekend time now and then, but that’s all. Still not being an idiot about things, thank you very much.”

“Good to know. Are we getting visitors tonight, by any chance?”

Lestrade laughed and got up to put his plate in the sink.

“No, I told Mycroft that I needed tonight to make a dent in my assignments, so he’s going to have to stay home alone with Sherlock and, most likely, John.”

“Will he survive?”

“I think so, but I’m not sure he does. Don’t be surprised if the phone rings a few times.”

“I’ll try and intercept the calls and dole out the motherly advice so you don’t have to.”

“Much appreciated.”

Lestrade gulped as his teachers handed him the lists and sheets of work he’d missed and decided that if Mycroft wanted to give him a hand with any of it tomorrow, he wasn’t going to refuse. But, at least, he did have the weekend to get it done and began to suspect that’s exactly why Grandmama sent them home last night rather than letting them take one more school day off and come back on Sunday. At least he’d be caught up and back on track Monday morning.

And his mum was right… having photographs helped a lot when trying to describe how his little holiday had gone and who was involved. His mates nearly fell over seeing Grandmama’s house and laughed themselves silly over photos of him in a suit, though they at least admitted he didn’t look the total berk in his new clothes. Maybe one day he could have his closest friends come with them when they visited Grandmama. The more bodies out there, the more victims for Sherlock’s experiments and hands to corral the goblin and John when they’d snuck a little too much sugar and were like live wires bouncing off the walls and ceilings.

The funniest thing, though was showing around Mycroft’s picture, especially ones when they were both in the shot together, or it was them with the boys. People honestly had wondered if he really existed! That this was all some elaborate story he had created and spread around for what reason he couldn’t fathom. Did they think he was suffering from some massive hallucination? Or making it all up for some reason? People could truly be daft, but seeing his Mycroft, looking so bloody fantastic, changed their minds quickly. His love in those amazing suits, but also out with the boys with his hair mussed from the wind, laughing while they played cards… he didn’t want to know how Grandmama got all of these photos, actually he did know and was profoundly relieved Mycroft got their private
footage before anyone had time to view it, but he was so happy to have them. The house, the grounds, the luxury… that was all amazing, but it was the times that they were just having fun as a family that was the most important part of it all. And it was good that his friends thought that, too. They actually commented on how much fun it looked like they were having and wanted to hear as much about that sort of thing as the posher parts of his holiday. Sherlock, John and the horses, the gliders, the sword fights… the felt-like-death vomiting was happily omitted from either his stories or photographic evidence, but there were even a few photos of their last night eating pizza that made his mates start laughing again. Yeah, just because Mycroft and Grandmama were rich as King Midas, they were still people who did normal people things and liked normal people likes. Sometimes. More than he would have predicted though and that was a very pleasant surprise.

Was there sniping? Yes. Were there people who made less-than-nice comments about him being with Mycroft or about him dipping his fingers into a rich man’s pockets? Yes. Did he get his share of envious, jealous, angry looks from people who didn’t think he deserved what he’d found. Yes. Did he care? No. Fuck them. And, actually, he got less trouble than he’d worried about and mostly from the people he already knew were going to be bastards. By the time the day ended, he could say his worries about miserableness were officially dead and he had an evening at the pub with his friends next week to look forward to, as well. Provided, of course, he could actually conquer this mountain of work that he was carrying home with him...

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“I get to see your house!”

“That is stating the obvious and, therefore, inefficient.”

“Pffftt… you’re just angry you’ve got more work to catch up on than I do.”

“That is because my courses are far more advanced than your rudimentary selections. That we share any courses together is a clear and penetrating statement as to the incompetence of the administration and instruction in that stack of crumbling brick that is laughably termed a school.”

“Well, I think it’s a good thing, because we get to sit together and pass notes when it gets boring. You have to admit it’s better to have someone to pass notes with when the lesson makes you want to fall asleep than just falling asleep and getting into trouble because of it.”

No, Sherlock did not have to admit it. But… his less rigorous courses were far more tolerable now that John was in proximity to vent his spleen upon. And he had been subject to fewer chastisements by the pedantic dull-wits who perched upon the lectern at the front of the classroom. This allowed him to concentrate more fully on his own very important thoughts without needless interruption.

“Correcting your grammar and pointing out the technical errors in the cartoonish drawings you create does make the time pass more agreeably.”

“And now I get to see your lab and your room and I bet you’ve got a really good cook, too. This is going to be a lot of fun!”

“My residence has far more amenities than Grandmama’s. Our various water bodies boast a much increased diversity of macro- and microfauna, as well as plant life and, of course, the opportunities for science are far more numerous due to the presence of my equipment, which Mycroft must supplement soon, for I have a growing number of projects that are stagnating due to my insufficient inventory.”

“Does that mean we get to go shopping again?”
“My equipment cannot be purchased from the dross-offerers we frequent with Lestrade. It is far too technical and expensive, as are the majority of the chemicals I require for my experiments. However, we may examine my science catalogs and prepare a list for the mastodon to order. Lestrade, we may yoke to bring us shopping for the more mundane supplies.”

“You know, Sherlock, it’s not good to order about Mycroft and Greg like that, but I admit that it might be nice, one day, to have someone I could wave my arms around at and order them to bring me lunch or change the channel on the telly for me.”

“You may consider Lestrade and Mycroft on indefinite loan. Since it is unlikely you shall not be where I am not for any extended period of time, there is no reason to duplicate resources; simply use the slaves we already possess.”

“You also probably shouldn’t call them slaves.”

“What term do you feel the slaves would prefer?”

“You’re the word person; you think of something.”

“Hmmmm…. lackey, peasant, bootlicker, dogsbody, coal shoveler, muck raker, street sweeper, till minder, dole recipient, indigent, rubbish rummager, chamberpot scrubber…”

“That is completely gross.”

“A vital service nonetheless for the contentment of royal bottoms.”

“I think we have to keep thinking. I don’t like any of those.”

“Your ridiculous tendency towards rose-tinting the natural order of existence is tiresome.”

“You know I don’t know what that means so you’re just making noise to entertain yourself.”

“To rebut using your own words – Pfft.”

“Is that actually a word?”

“We shall research it when we arrive home. Driver! Make haste – there is knowledge to be acquired!”

“I notice you didn’t call him a lickbottom or whatever.”

“Driver knows where my emergency chocolate supply is kept.”

“I understand.”

Perhaps Grandmama was right. Mycroft tugged at the collar of his school uniform and, though he had been, of course, excused of any assignments he had missed to date, the mere thought of returning to the day to day requirements of a scholastic schedule chafed. Not that he would find a college environment any less chafing, but at least he could quickly propel past the more monotonous, woefully-basic courses and begin to sink his teeth into subjects of greater consequence and challenge. And the people… he had quite forgotten the bother of the pressing hordes, as well as the embarrassingly-juvenile behavior of his so-called peer group. For all the majority crowed about their supposed superiority to the working class, those of the working class he had actually met were head and shoulders above that infantile group. His Gregory was a superlative example of a human being
and his friends, though boisterous, were solid-minded citizens of good character. If he had to endure the remainder of the scholastic year actually completing the scholastic year… why hadn’t he spirited away any of Grandmama’s brandy…

“AAAAAAAAHHHHHHH! Someone has dressed a hippopotamus in a school uniform and allowed it to run amok! The marble floors shall fracture under its gargantuan feet!”

“And good afternoon to you, too, Sherlock. And John, I am delighted you elected to accompany Sherlock and spend with him the afternoon.”

“I’m spending the weekend. See!”

John held aloft the bag containing his schoolbooks, as well as his clothes.

“Ah. And did you notify the school of your decision?”

“I put a note on my door that said ‘Gone to Sherlock’s. Back Monday.’ Sherlock said that was ok.”

“Yes, well, I shall take the precaution of informing those in charge on the off-chance your thoughtful note is caught by a gust of breeze and blows away, unable any longer to perform its intended duties.”

“That’s probably a good idea. And we’re going to get all of our work done as soon as we can so we can go shopping and do experiments and all sorts of other things. And Sherlock’s going to ask you nicely to order some things for him that we find in his catalogs.”

Mycroft chuckled at Sherlock’s rude noise at the word ‘nicely,’ and decided if the boys could find a few items for Sherlock’s laboratory, a few simple items, he might consider placing an order. It was for educational purposes, after all.

“I shall be happy to discuss potential acquisitions, but, for now, shall we divest ourselves of these garments and change into something more suitable for relaxation? And, I am quite certain you would welcome a small repast to refresh yourselves for your studies.”

“Yes! I’m starving and Sherlock ate my fruit at lunch, so I’m even more starving than I usually am.”

“I offered to share with you the fruit, John Watson, so do not speak about me in a scornful tone.”

“You said I could have the piece of melon that was sort of yellowy and the bit of banana that had some mushy brown on it. You left me the mushy yellow-brown stuff, so I’ll be scornful if I want to.”

“If you were not satisfied with your share, you could have begged more from the staff.”

“You would have just stolen that, too.”

“Perhaps, but there might have been sufficient of my leavings to make for you an acceptable portion for someone of your diminutive size.”

“Mycroft, when we have our snack, I’ll get my own, right, and not have to share with Sherlock?”

“You shall certainly have your own plate, John, and whatever quantity you desire.”

“Thanks, Mycroft. You’re tops!”
“Currying favor like the perfect toadying vagrant, gleeful for a crumb or crust from his betters."

“The only thing I’m paying attention to in all of that, Sherlock, is ‘currying’, since it sounds like curry and I’m really hungry. You wasted a lot of words on reminding me of snacktime. Good job.”

Before Sherlock could launch into his retaliation, Mycroft plucked John’s bag from his hand and motioned for the boy to follow him upstairs to Sherlock’s bedroom. How silly he had been to worry that the return to school would distress the boys, but their relationship seemed quite on track. And an entire weekend to spend together… as long as he could keep Mummy at bay, the boys should have an exceptional weekend. And he was absolutely prepared to steward their care this evening. A Holmes could manage any situation and this one would in no manner strain his abilities.

“Sherlock! Do not push John up the chimney. He is not a sweep!”

“Should I even inquire as to who wrote ‘Mycroft is fat’ in grease pencil on my mirror?”

“Do not eat that! From where did you even find coconut oil? I do not care if it tastes agreeable with sugar!”

“John Watson! Take off my mother’s lingerie!”

“What do I smell burning?”

His abilities were well and truly strained. Mycroft felt as if he had been charged with shepherding a troop of chimpanzees through a minefield. Keeping the children from slathering themselves in their afternoon snack, ensuring their post-snack activities stayed on the coffinless side of lethality, since they had forgotten, apparently, they had schoolwork to attend to and decided, among other things, to launch a series of chemical tests that had a frightening tendency to burble and hiss as if they were in the preparatory stages of eruption… not to mention the refereeing of their arguments, judging of their contests, peacekeeping for their disagreements and… participating in their more physical pursuits. It was utterly without shame that he took a stolen moment to call his beloved and take strength from his soothing words and prudent guidance.

“Hello?”

“Ah, Mother Lestrade. How are you this evening?”

“Kids already making you insane, Mycroft?”

Damn her prescience!

“Perish the thought! Matters are in hand… matters are most certainly in hand.”

“You sound out of breath.”
“Heavens no! I was simply… repositioning and may have compressed my lungs to a noticeable degree.”

“It’s cute when you and Greg try to hide something from me. It’s ok to admit that the boys are running you around like a madman, Mycroft. What do you think we mums do when we’re together? Gripe about how our kids run us around like crazy people. Even when they’re perfectly behaved, they can be a handful and we’re talking about Sherlock and John here. And age doesn’t matter, either. I still gripe about Greg and he’s not exactly a toddler anymore. Part of being a parent. Anything I can help you with?”

Mycroft let out a large sigh and allowed himself to relax a little. Of course Mother Lestrade would be a source of inspiration and courage. She birthed his husband, and dear Gregory would naturally inherit his incomparable parenting skills from her.

“In truth, I cannot express a single item for which I require assistance, however…”

“Just looking for a little reassurance you’re not making a mess of everything?”

“That is an accurate summary of my position.”

“Another thing parents do when they get together. And, as long as you’re really trying to do your best, I can tell you that a mess is \textit{not} being made of things. And even if it is, kids know that you’re trying and that means everything to them. Mycroft, we had days when Greg came home and all I could give him for dinner was toast. He had to stand there a few times and watch me plead with some bloke not to tow my car because I was behind on the payments. When I was working two jobs, I’d miss things for his school or get behind on the laundry and he’d be sent to class in clothes that were dirty… I messed up all the time, Mycroft… \textit{all} the time and in huge ways… but Greg knew that I was doing the best I could. He got angry sometimes or hurt or embarrassed and I didn’t fault him a bit for it, but at the end of the day, he knew that if his mum could do anything better she \textit{would} be because she loved him more than anything. So a little scraped knee here and there, you losing your temper and shouting, the house being drenched in mud or masterpieces made from permanent marker are decorating your walls… believe me, that’s \textit{nothing} to worry about. As long as you put on the plaster, apologize for blowing up at them, make them clean up when they’ve made a mess and tell them they’ve done a good job when it’s over… it’s all fine. I promise you, it’s all fine.”

His mother-in-law was a saint... In her life, Mother Lestrade would want for nothing, that was a vow he made most solemnly and he would begin to make suitable plans immediately. A small trust set aside for her dotage, perhaps a detached cottage on his and his dear husband’s property... if they made their home in London, their townhouse would have a room or an entire floor for her use when the time came when she required a watchful eye. And what a splendid grandmother she would make for their offspring... every day he found new and profound reasons to consider himself a man graced by Fortune.

"Thank you, Mother Lestrade. It... it is painful to hear of your and Gregory’s hardships; however, your words give me great hope and I do feel relieved that the chaos visited upon my household this evening does not signify I have failed utterly in my obligations. Gregory... I cannot hope to emulate his level of mastery with the children, even Grandmama has pronounced him a superlative parent, but I do want to be successful, in some small way, with Sherlock and John.”

“That you worry is already proof you’re succeeding, Mycroft. The failures don’t give a shit. You’re doing a great job and you’ve done a great job with Sherlock helping him become someone who he is, which, I really believe, is a kid with a very bright future. Someday, you and Greg might have some little ones of your own and I don’t have any worries that either of you is going to do a bad job raising my grandchildren. Keep your chin up, Mycroft, it’s going to be alright. Now, enough of
the serious talk. Tell me what the little bastards have been up to so I can have a giggle.”

And Mycroft did. He allowed every detail of Sherlock and John’s antics to flow out, happy that they were actually quietly playing chess at the moment and he could see them lying on the floor in the library, which John had pronounced very acceptable, though it was much smaller than Grandmama’s. And it drained even more of the concern from his body to hear Mother Lestrade laugh at the boys’ foolishness and devilry as he described their day.

“Well, they have been giving you a fun time, haven’t they? They’re good boys, but they have both imagination and the energy to do something with it, which is a pretty potent combination. Don’t worry, that’s perfectly normal, though they do have access to more opportunities to really do bizarre things than other kids might. Honestly, Mycroft, it sounds like a very typical night of babysitting. Pat yourself on the back for a job well done.”

Mycroft soaked in the praise, confident in its honesty from such an unimpeachable source. He was performing his duties appropriately and, he did have to agree, the children had not suffered any undue distress or dismemberment. Perhaps there was hope for his parenting abilities…

“Now, how long have they been quiet?”

“They have been engaged in a game of chess for some fifteen minutes.”

“That’s going to end soon, so you better get ready for the next round.”

“But, Sherlock and John are happy to enjoy a leisurely game of chess, especially when they are provided with a comforting fire.”

“One, it’s early and they won’t have burned off all of their energy yet and two, you’re not in there with them and they’re going to start missing the attention. Get back in there before they use that comforting fire for something other than warmth.”

“Ah… yes. I see your point. Thank you, Mother Lestrade. I am forever in your debt for your sage advice and profound wisdom.”

“You’re welcome. And you can…”

Not that Mycroft found out what that was since the cry of ‘NO! Not my hair! AH! It’s melting!’ sent him running and marking again just how far he had to go before he was anywhere near Mother Lestrade’s level of parental achievement.

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“Are you going to catch a ride back or do you want me to come back to pick you up?”

Greg wished and not for the first time that he had a car of his own and didn’t have to borrow his mum’s or have her drive him places when she needed the vehicle and couldn’t give him the keys.

“Mycroft will bring me home or have his driver do it. Don’t worry about being home for me to call.”

“Well, that frees up my Sunday nicely. Not too late, though. You know how early Monday morning gets here.”

“Not something that’s easy to forget. Don’t worry, Mum. John will have to get back to school, too, so I’ll see he gets back to his room early and come home after he’s dropped off.”
“And then Mycroft is going to have a big drink, a hot bath and good book.”

“Speaking from experience?”

“What do you think I used to do when you finally passed out for the night?”

“I’m sure Mycroft’s handling things brilliantly. He gets a little flustered sometimes, but nobody has the… command of things… that Mycroft does.”

“Oh yes, I’m certain you’re right.”

“Gregory! Oh thank our dear stars you have arrived. My Gregory… by sweet and beloved Gregory…”

Lestrade caught his wild-haired, disheveled partner as Mycroft launched himself into his arms.

“Love? You alright?”

“Now that you are here, I am reinvigorated and made again whole.”

“Is that… glue behind your ear?”

“Most likely. We have been spending the morning with a variety of construction-based activities, concomitant with destruction-based activities with the objects previously constructed.”

Lestrade pulled Mycroft’s head down so it rested in his shoulder and held him warmly, a large smile breaking out on his face as he tried to hold back the laughter.

“Busy day?”

“That is a rather egregious understatement.”

“Must be, because I don’t think you noticed something very important.”

Mycroft gasped in indignant shock and pulled back from Lestrade, prepared fully to refute that statement when…

“You have… Gregory, I am assuming that your books are in your school bag. May I assume a happy surprise in your second burden?”

“You may. Mum says it’s ok to say here tonight, just as long as I don’t get home too late tomorrow, so I brought along a change of clothes. But, now that I’m here…”

Lestrade looked around and started to pay more attention to the little thread of worry building in his spine.

“… I never thought about what your mum might say.”

“Ah… yes, that is a consideration of some concern, but we are happily unfettered with it at this time. Mummy has gone to London for a few days, so your presence shall not be called into question. The house is ours and the boys’ and we shall be able to enjoy our opportunity to the fullest.”

“That’s good. Worried myself there for a moment. So, let’s get my stuff put away and I’ll help
you take care of your goblin infestation. Two of them now… that’s a very perilous thing, Mr. Holmes.”

Truly the surname issue would need to be addressed at some point. Though they would not be wed for some time, any monogrammed gifts bestowed upon his spouse in the interim should be inscribed with an eye towards their future appellation.

“Truly the situation is dire. Your sword added to the fray, however, shall surely turn the tide of battle towards our inevitable victory.”

“There’s nothing we can’t do when we do it together.”

“Truer words, my dear, were never spoken.”

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“What the fuck! Does that even wash off?”

Sherlock stopped in mid-brushstroke, where he was applying his version of military camouflage to John’s torso.

“Greg! You really came!”

“Yeah, and a good thing because you two little bastards seem to be determined to give Mycroft a evil time. What is he painting you with?”

“I’m not sure, but Sherlock says it’s not poisonous. Mostly.”

“I am experimenting with pattern variations and their ability to conceal a person in low-to-moderate density vegetation. John shall attempt to evade capture through visual and behavioral camouflage.”

“Behavioral?”

“I have to act like a bush. I’m not really sure how to do that, though.”

Lestrade picked up a container of the paint Sherlock was using and gave Mycroft an oh-thank-god nod because it was washable.

“Sherlock even added some chemicals to the paint to make it more plant colored.”

Hopefully.

“You are an accommodating friend, John, to indulge Sherlock in this fashion. I am certain being festooned with craft paint cannot be the most comfortable of situations.”

“Thanks, Mycroft. It actually did itch a little, but now my skin’s sort of going numb, so that’s good.”

“AND that’s our cue to get this paint off of you. Mycroft, want to get him scrubbed off while Sherlock and I clean up in here and get rid of his deadly paint?”

“It is not deadly! Not one of the plant alkaloids I added to the formulation has been demonstrated to have permanently-impairing effects on human health! At least… there is no extensive research to support a government-issued warning. That certainly does not exist. In some countries.”
Mycroft snorted loudly and escorted John to rid his body of whatever illicit substances had been added to it, before a call for an ambulance was required.

“You two want to paint yourselves like some kind of circus clowns, then we’ll buy you fresh paint to do it with and you’ll keep your secret ingredients out of it this time.”

“Your disrespect for science is abominable, Lestrade, though entirely unsurprising given the limitations of your intellect, foresight and prospects for the future.”

“And hello to you, too.”

“I presume you have decided to inflict your presence upon us for the entirety of the weekend? I already smell the nauseating stench of your lust rising as your body secretes its hormone-laden sweat upon your skin and releases your cakehuman-enticing pheromones into the air. My only hope is that your offspring are well-provided with buttercream so that they might at least do some service to humanity by pleasing me as I consume them.”

“Cannibalizing your nieces and nephews… that’s harsh.”

“It is not as if you could not create more. And, truly, what life would they endure elsewise? Cupcakes do not have limbs or sensory apparatus. They would die from boredom within days, before even they grew stale.”

“Harsh, Sherlock… but I can’t say you don’t have a point.”

“It matches nicely the one perched upon your head.”

“And you couldn’t be a little less insane your first few days back home? Give Mycroft some time to settle back into actually being home?”

“Some days it seems as if you have acquired amnesia and forgotten you have ever before met me.”

“I’m not that lucky. Alright, let’s get this cleaned up. I actually have a lot of work to do this weekend and thought I’d make an early start so we can have the evening to do something fun. How much work do you have to make up from being at Grandmama’s?”

Sherlock’s face scrunched into a ferocious scowl and Lestrade laughed in sympathy with the boy’s plight.

“A mountainous quantity! I am very certain the buffoons who falsely claim to ‘teach’ me have added items to my assignments that no other in my classes was tasked to do.”

“Aw, teachers getting a little revenge for you being a pisser? Poor Sherlock having the tables turned on him.”

“They are fools! No matter the enormity or complexity of the assignment, I shall have it completed in a trice!”

“And, of course, you haven’t actually started on any of it, have you?”

“Such pedestrian matters are low on my list of priorities.”

“Meaning you haven’t lifted a pencil. So, a big study session it is. You, me, John… poor Mycroft. He must be drowning in work.”
“He is drowning in the absence of work, is more the case. He has abused his authority like the tin-pot dictator he aspires to be and nullified any academic demands his instructors sought to impose.”

“I wish I could have done that.”

“So do I, but my status as dictator-by-association was not recognized as a valid position of power.”

“Well, that just leaves him more time to bring us snacks and drinks, doesn’t it?”

“Finally you say something that does not make me want to wash clean my brain.”

“You say the nicest things.”

One clean John and one surly Sherlock were deposited in the library with their schoolwork, while Lestrade showed his undying devotion by helping his dictator boyfriend gather together something to satisfy their appetites.

“Alright, Mycroft, be honest with me. Did you really snap your fingers and make your school assignments disappear into thin air like Sherlock’s accusing you of doing?”

“I can assure you most sincerely that snapping was in no manner involved.”

“But you don’t have anything to catch up on like the rest of us.”

“In truth, I looked over the items I had missed and, after discussing the material with my instructors, I was excused from formally providing written documentation of my mastery of the topics involved.”

“You were too smart for your work.”

“I would not state the situation in such flattering terms, but that is the gist of it, yes.”

“That’s my Mycroft. Probably doesn’t need to be in school at all. You should just ask to take your exams and be done with it. Take the rest of the year off to… do whatever you wanted. You could probably even start on your degree and get ahead on that.”

Lestrade chuckled at the idea but stopped when he realized he was the only one doing it.

“Mycroft?”

The elder Holmes looked as if he’d swallowed something unpleasant, and was trying to swallow it down and maintain a slightly creepy smile on his face while doing it.

“Want to tell me why you look sort of guilty?”

Having wrestled the bolus of discomfort down into his stomach, Mycroft took a breath and directed his mind to show greater attention to his mental reminders for issues concerning his marital life.

“Guilty only because I made a promise to Grandmama and forgot to enact it. Your suggestion was one she made to me, and, though I refused to even consider leaving for university at this point, I did agree to discuss the matter with you. I forgot to do so and, for that, I do apologize.”
Lestrade leaned back against the counter and stared at his partner.

“You really could start on your degree now?”

“It would be a simple thing to set in motion, but I would not do that to you, Gregory. It would be criminally unfair and I shall not subject you to unnecessary hardship. The necessary hardship you shall endure at my hands is more than sufficient for a lifetime.”

Mycroft watched his lover think and took his hand to hold, though who the act was supposed to comfort he was not entirely certain.

“But… if your lessons now are just a waste of time, then it’s stupid for you not to move onto something more challenging.”

“I am not going to leave you, Gregory. We have just reunited and you have sufficient obligations that the additional ones provided by the children should not be yours to bear alone.”

“That’s not a good enough reason, love. I can… I can handle Sherlock and John, you don’t worry about that.”

“I do worry, my dear. I worry because I know the strain to which you will be subjected and, with your own studies and employment to consider... it is too much for you. You would, as you say, handle the children, however, you would suffer greatly, forsaking your social time with your friends, your private time to relax and tend to your own health and well-being, perhaps even the job you enjoy. And I am not so unaware as to believe that the funds you earn are not important to you for the entertainments and activities you treasure. You would do all of that to give Sherlock and John every minute of time and manner of attention they require and I love you deeply for it, but I cannot ask you to sacrifice in that fashion. I simply cannot.”

“So you’re just going to go to class every day and be bored out of your mind when you could be doing something more interesting and useful?”

“You have described nearly every year of my scholastic career.”

“But now you have a choice! You can change that I think you should consider it!”

His spouse’s stubbornness would be irritating if it was not utterly directed towards what his Gregory believed was best for him. So loving and devoted… his intended greatly deserved every bit of worship and care he could bestow and that, most certainly, did not include abandoning him to struggle while he, himself, embarked on a venture to benefit his future.

“Consider leaving you here as you seek to find your own career? As you establish your independence from Mother Lestrade? As the boys grow their relationship and perpetrate ever greater tests of your patience? I would be a vile and black creature if I thought for a moment this was an appropriate choice. As I told Grandmama firmly and with utter finality.”

“Consider getting ahead on your degree! I know you say you’ll move through it quicker than other people, but did you think about all the times you might get called away to do something? Times that maybe you might not be able to make up lost work and have to sit out of a class and take it later? See a whole term pass you by because you’re doing something you can’t even talk about? I’m wondering if it’s going to take you even longer than an average person because you can’t actually attend regularly.”

“I do not consider that an issue of concern.”
Well, he hadn’t before, but his husband, as always, had offered a fresh perspective that did merit consideration. Not that this fact would be shared with the man staring angrily at him.

“In many ways, a degree or degrees is a formality for me and an opportunity to engage with and study others with whom I will likely have dealings in the future. It is not entirely for me to learn, from the perspective of acquiring content knowledge, but to ascertain how others interpret issues and improve my skills at predicting such things and managing them in the future.”

“You’re saying Uni is just going to be a practice pitch for you?”

“To an extent, yes. It shall not be without opportunities to acquire skills and information that will be useful to me and I plan to take my studies quite seriously, however, if I am forced to absent myself for a time, it shall not be the catastrophic setback you are envisioning.”

“Why do I think you’re not really telling me the full truth?”

Mycroft sighed and rubbed Lestrade’s hand, kissing it gently and stepping closer to his spouse so he could look deeply into his warm brown eyes.

“Because you are no one’s fool. Perhaps I exaggerate the situation slightly, but only slightly, I promise you. I agree that an argument, and a powerful one, may be made to move forward at this time with my education plans, however, the benefits are clearly overshadowed by the costs. And those costs are not mine to bear, so they tear at me mercilessly. I love you, Gregory and I will have to leave you soon enough. Do not ask me to shorten that time, beloved. Please do not press me to begin my life without you near, when the mere thought of it inspires in me a dread that chills my blood. And do not, for one moment, ask me to do the one thing that I fear most of all – making you suffer. I cannot bear that thought for a moment.”

“Stop trying to get my emotions… going.”

“One uses every possible advantage in a negotiation, my beloved; surely you know that by now.”

“I just want the best for you, Mycroft. I don’t ever, not ever, want you to lose something because of me. I don’t want to be an anchor around your neck. It’s not fair to you.”

To an unfortunate many in his position, the person with whom they became involved specifically cared little for them and greatly for their wealth and status. What had he done to be granted someone who perfectly met the Platonic ideal of good as his Gregory? If he did not need to maintain his composure to ensure this argument ended as he desired, he would be weeping softly against his husband’s shoulder.

“And should it not be the same for me? Should I not want the very best for you and to never see your life diminished because you have chosen to share that life with me? It is a minor matter, Gregory, for me to spend this final time at home. To savor these months in your company, loving you in every manner possible… that is worth far more to me than beginning early on a future that shall span the remainder of my life. A handful of months is but a drop in that ocean of time…”

“That’s true. I just… I don’t want you to waste your time when you could be doing something important with it.”

“I am! Time with you is of supreme importance. And do not forget Sherlock and John. When I leave you, I also leave them and I cannot admit to being prepared for that eventuality. I know it will come, but the thought that it should arrive soon is not something I am willing to contemplate.
Sherlock and I are forming a new and more dynamic relationship and dear John… I have only met him! I cannot leave with only this small amount of time forming the basis of our history. I am not making my decision lightly, Gregory. I have weighed every aspect carefully and am confident and committed to the choice I have made.”

“Could you… I don’t know, but is there some way you could still get started? Get the books you needed to read or list of papers you had to write and do the work ahead of time? Maybe even do a course or two before you had to actually be there in person?”

Now that was something he had not considered.

“Hmmm… it is an intriguing idea. There are always a certain number of mandatory obligations one must endure, but they are generally of the most elementary nature. It should not prove difficult to arrange to meet those obligations while not actually attending the associated lectures. You are, as always, a man of astounding creativity and insight for problem solving.”

“Then you’ll think about it?”

“Indeed I shall. In fact, I shall discuss the matter with Grandmama today if that would ease your mind.”

“It would actually. And I’m sorry I got a little… upset, but…well…”

“I understand perfectly, Gregory, and your devotion inspires me each day to be worthy of the love you give to me. Now, shall we complete our task and return to the boys? We have been out of both visual and audial range for perhaps a bit longer than is acceptable.”

“You’re right. And Mycroft… thank you.”

“You are quite welcome, my dear. Your happiness is of paramount importance to me and I strive always to provide what contentment I am able.”

“Does that mean I get your share of the biscuits?”

“My poor Gregory, you are obviously exhausted from our discourse and are losing touch with reality. Here, I shall carry the tray and you may simply concentrate on following along without becoming lost on the way to the library.”

“It was worth a try.”

“Always, but one must always remember against whom one is battling.”

“You’re right, I’m no match for the Biscuit King.”

“But you are, by far, my favorite subject.”

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Mycroft was actually surprised that Lestrade wasn’t hovering over his shoulder during his conversation with Grandmama, but his love never once looked away from him as he spoke, as if trying to read his lips to follow along with the conversation. Apparently, having his hand cast in plaster for John’s art project did not require much active input on his part.

“And you say this was Gregory’s idea? How interesting.”

“I wholeheartedly agree. Gregory is nothing if not an imaginative individual and finds solutions
where others fumble in the darkness.”

“Such a delightful addition to the family. His skill set is wonderfully complementary to yours.”

“Truly I could not ask for a better partner in this life. But, do you believe this is feasible?”

“I do and if you are certain this is what you desire, I shall have a chat with the appropriate individuals to make the arrangements. How much time will you require to prepare for your examinations?”

“I should be prepared by midweek, if that is convenient. However, are they truly necessary?”

“Do not overlook any opportunity to have a record of your competence, Mycroft. The Holmes name shall take you far, but there are those who would demand proof that you are worthy of the regard you are given. In school, there will be a number who will know who you are and will choose to test you against your reputation. They will look for evidence and it is helpful to have a portfolio they can discover and examine, in addition to whatever other challenges they may offer you. And, frankly, it is not worth the bother of forging your records and implanting them into educational system when you can simply have them recorded honestly.”

“I see your point.”

“Good. Lies shall be a prominent feature of your work, Mycroft, but never forget that truth does exist and can be just as useful, depending on the situation. I shall make the arrangements first thing on Monday morning and notify you when you may expect to sit your exams.”

“Thank you, Grandmama. I believe this is a very advantageous compromise.”

“I do as well. Please give Gregory my regards and, also, my congratulations.”

“I shall, Grandmama.”

“And you will visit soon.”

“Yes, Grandmama.”

“Excellent. Good day, Mycroft.”

“Good day, Grandmama.”

Lestrade only needed to see Mycroft smile to know their idea had won approval and raised his hands in the air in victory, though one lagged behind owing to the heavy plaster cast surrounding it.

“My Mycroft’s a Uni boy!”

“Well, there are still the technicalities to fulfill, but for all intents and purposes, I can consider that phase of life well and truly embarked upon.”

“Still going to go to school every day?”

“Grandmama shall see that particular burden lifted from me. I shall have to pass all relevant examinations, but that is an inconsequential matter.”

“This is unacceptable! I demand to take my examinations and throw off the yoke of academic oppression!”
“I am afraid that option will not be made available to you, Sherlock. However, we may, if you wish, revisit this conversation when you are in your final year.”

“No! Sherlock, you can’t leave school because then I’ll be there alone!”

Sherlock shook his head at John and waved off his concerns.

“At that point, through my expert tutoring, you will also be ready to flee that altar of mental stagnation and follow me to university.”

“Yes!”

Lestrade gave Mycroft a strong ‘now look what you’ve done’ glare, which made the older Holmes sibling nervous that his lover would be choosing to sleep in one of the guest rooms tonight.

“As I said, Sherlock, we will revisit this conversation later. Now, I believe it is my turn to be immortalized by John’s artistic endeavors.”

“I’m going to do your foot. I don’t have to tell you whose idea that was. Here’s a hint – he’s silly for feet.”

“You continued slander will not go unanswered, John Watson.”

“You continued foot thing will not go… I have no idea what, but it won’t, I can tell you that much, Sherlock Holmes.”

“The irritating buzz of nonsense, how typical for those with a fruit fly’s mind.”

“At least fruit flies can’t fall in love with feet.”

Mycroft settled himself next to Lestrade and smiled his most contrite smile, which morphed into his most besotted one when his partner leaned in and kissed him.

“I’m so happy for you, Mycroft.”

“I admit to being rather pleased with the situation myself. This shall also permit me time to begin furthering my, shall we say, employment education.”

“Think you’re going to get sent off for more… errands?”

“More? I am not certain, but certainly not less. Perhaps, however, I shall be dispatched for a greater number of short excursions than I am accustomed. A day here or there in London, a night or two in a nearby, allied country… I can foresee the possibility of those things and I cannot say that possibility perturbs me significantly.”

“You’re right, I have to say that doesn’t sound so bad. And that’s another productive use for your time, rather than sitting behind a desk listening to your maths lesson.”

“I am actually fond of mathematics. So very logical and invigorating.”

“Then you can help me with my maths assignments while waiting for your foot to dry.”

“I would be delighted.”

“And I’ll give you a few more football lessons this afternoon.”
“What?”

“We’ll all need a break and what’s better for getting the energy back than a little exercise?”

“I could make you a very substantial list if your inquiry is sincere, my love.”

“Bastard. It’ll be good for the boys to run around for awhile and there’s no reason we can’t join them. Besides, I have a suspicion John’s a great player and I want the chance to see for myself if I’m right.”

Lestrade winked at Mycroft and waited for the boy to sound off.

“I am! I played a little at my old school and I like it, too.”

“Then you and the peasant may entertain yourselves with the rolling, round object like the good dogs you are while, I, a creature of intelligence and sophistication, shall engage in more intellectual pursuits.”

“Nope, you’re outside with the rest of us, Sherlock. You too, love. Good solid day with the books, then some fresh air in the lungs. Tonight, we can see what’s on the telly. Maybe we’ll get lucky and there’ll be something scary to watch and we can stay up late with a bit of popcorn and all the lights off.”

Mycroft had to chuckle that John looked both excited and frightened simultaneously and even Sherlock seemed intrigued by the idea. For his part, he would ensure that if the BBC failed to offer up a suitable program, there would be a supply of videos waiting that would meet their requirements.

“But, football first.”

“You are a hard taskmaster, Gregory.”

“Remember you said that once we put the kids to bed.”

“I doubt I shall ever forget it, now.”

“You still have to play football, though.”

“I shall consider it an offering at the shrine of your strength and beauty.”

“And I’ll accept it gladly, so long as I can give you my own offering a little later.”

“I so adore it when we are of like mind.”

“Me too. But Mycroft… is plaster supposed to start smoking like that?”

“No, I do not believe so. Sherlock?”

“Be silent, I am observing the actions of my proprietary formulation in the name of science.”

“A hacksaw, love? If you don’t mind?”

“Of course not, Gregory. John, I suspect we shall have to begin anew.”

“Sherlock! You ruined my art project!”

“Art grovels at the feet of science!”
“Feet again! What is wrong with you?”

And as the bickering continued and Mycroft raced off to find something to cut the soon-to-smolder plaster off his lover’s arm, Lestrade leaned back and closed his eyes. Life was good, there wasn’t really any other way to describe it…
Chapter 19

Mycroft despaired that he had somehow suffered a brain trauma and was now in the grip of a horrific mental construct where he was outdoors, at night, on the ground, with a tent at his back, a fire in front of him and the very unfamiliar sounds of nocturnal creatures whispering in his ears. That he could remember clearly his husband’s cajoling of the boys to agree to a night under the stars had to be proof of his infirmity, which showed no signs of diminishing as his hallucinated spouse refused to accept any well-considered and valid reason for ending his suffering.

“There is not even a source of potable water available.”

“Mycroft, the house is right there and there’s plenty of potables inside if you get thirsty. And I made sure there is a jug of water in our things, along with this nice wine, just so you didn’t have to go inside and, probably, never come back out again.”

Mycroft huffed and pouted forcefully at his lover, as the triumphant sound of one of Sherlock’s scientific victories filled the air.

“I did previously state, and in unmistakable terms, my feelings on the subject of… ugh, how the word sticks in my throat.”

“Camping. Cam – Ping. Two easy syllables and I know you can say a lot of syllables when you want to. And it barely qualifies, since we have a big crate of food and water, lanterns, you had your staff set up… that looks like one of those big tents you see in the Arabian Nights movies! We’ve got a great fire and a radio and if the boys get nightmares from the film we watched, it’ll take all of five minutes to get them inside and up to their beds.”

“Where we should now be. The temperature is frigid…”

“It’s actually a warm night for this time of year and we’ve got a cozy fire, plus plenty of clothes and blankets.”

“There are insects.”

“Which Sherlock is having a great time studying. You saw how excited he was at the idea of exploring what goes on around here at night. Sounds like he’s discovering all sorts of things.”

“Such as more insects. And… dirt.”

“Which we’re not sleeping on. We’re barely sitting on any! As of this moment I’m officially going to assume that whatever it is you do when you’re off doing secret things, it doesn’t involve leaving your desk.”

“Why… that is…”

Damn Gregory and his practical turn of mind!

“How’s my sweet little spy going to do his job if he can’t even sit on a patch of grass on a pleasant night with a glass of wine in his hand and survive?”

“Very well. I shall endure, I suppose.”

“That’s what I like to hear. Anyway, I think it’s romantic. Me and you, the smell of a campfire
in the air, a sky full of stars… I bet you know all about them, too. Look, that one right there, which one is it?”

Mycroft eyes followed Lestrade’s finger and examined the area of sky to which he was pointing.

“I believe you are pointing at Vega.”

“And what’s its story?”

“Story?”

“Don’t stars have stories? Where their name comes from or what they’re supposed to mean to witches? Things like that.”

“Ah… well… it is a hotter and larger star than our Sun, I suppose one could say that its bluish color makes it an appealing star…”

“Where’s the witches?”

“Your tabloid sensibilities betray you, my dear.”

“Witches!”

“Are nonexistent. Though… Vega does belong in the Lyra constellation, so-named for the harp of Orpheus, which was a transfixing instrument. Bewitching, one might say. There is also an Asian tale involving a romance and separated lovers, however, practitioners of Wicca are notably absent.”

“Ok, that’s better. How about that one?”

“Deneb. A Super Giant, actually, though extremely distant. Part of the Cygnus constellation, however, it also forms the top of the Northern Cross, which is naught by an asterism.”

“Tough being a naught.”

“I expect it is.”

“You know a lot about the stars, don’t you?”

“Some. I have made a study of the night sky of both the northern and southern hemisphere for the purposes of navigation and positioning.”

“And now you get to share all that with me, because I know fuck all about it. Think you could do that? Teach me about the stars and planets and constellations and things?”

“Gregory Lestrade, are you attempting to entice me into further evenings with only the sky as our ceiling?”

“Would I do that?”

“Unquestionably.”

“Yeah, you’re right. But, now I have an actual reason besides adoring how your skin glows in the moonlight.”

Even at the apex of his suffering, his spouse could both soothe and beguile him in equal measures. Truly the crises of his future years would find their balm in his husband’s arms.
“You flatter me, my dear. And it is you who are positively sparkling this evening, much as the stars that have attracted your interest. I suspect you shall inveigle me into further such nights and I find my abhorrence of the idea waning as the darkness at dawn.”

“Another thing I like to hear. And maybe next time, we won’t have Sherlock and John along so we can have that mountain of cushions in the tent set up out here and we can stretch out naked and make love all night with the breeze across our skin and the stars in our eyes.”

And Mycroft’s body apparently very much liked that suggestion because it was already beginning to respond to the offer, delivered in his love’s intentionally-seductive tone.

“I believe that shall be the thing I look forward to most as we re-enter the warmer months of the year. There are many beautiful areas of the estate well-suited for such a tryst.”

“That will make it a very special summer, indeed. Maybe that’s a thing with us. This summer was the best one I’ve ever had and next one is shaping up to be the same. Though I have a feeling this winter is going to be brilliant, too. Me and you and a lot of evenings by the fire or taking a walk on a really cold, snowy day…”

“Such a divine notion. The quietest, simplest moments are something I cherish now that I have you to share them with me.”

“And does kissing qualify as a quietest, simplest moment?”

Simple? How utterly absurd. The emotional typhoon alone rendered that description woefully inadequate.

“If it earns me the grace of your embrace then yes, it does.”

Lestrade grinned widely, then took Mycroft in his arms and began kissing the lips of the man he loved. Quiet and simple, because the boys could come back at any moment to catch them in the act. Next time they did this as a group, he’d make sure two tents were set up instead of one…

Falcon to Eagle. Eagle, this is Falcon. Come in, Eagle.”

“This is Eagle. Report.”

“They’re kissing. What else did you expect?”

“Little, but science does not make assumptions. Is the chocolate in sight?”

John looked around from his vantage point of the stand of shrubbery a small ways away from the makeshift campsite and spied the box of chocolate Mycroft had agreed they could add to their supply of provisions, but had doled out with a very stingy hand, hence their secret mission. And he had a walkie talkie! Sherlock had snuck them into his pockets before they left the house and now they were like real spies. Not that there was much to actually spy on since he’d seen Greg and Mycroft kiss a lot, but if they kept going Sherlock should be able to sneak in and grab the chocolate without them noticing.

“Yeah, the box is in the big crate. I can see a corner of it from here. If you sneak around the side of the tent and move really quietly, you can probably grab it without them noticing, especially if they keep kissing like that, and you know how long they can kiss once they going.”
“True, their lustful urges completely consume their mental faculties and they become tunnel-visioned on their rutting. This is a mental defect we can use to our favor.”

“Well, if you’re going to move, you’d better move. They do have to breathe, though I admit they don’t have to do it as often as I would think with all that mbrchua mbrchua mbrchua.”

“Have you lost your already-compromised ability to utilize verbal communication?”

“Those are kissing sounds.”

“I disagree. I was put more in mind of a teacup-sized elephant trumpeting its arrival at the watering hole to the others of its miniaturized herd.”

“Shows how much you know; those were perfect kissing sounds. Now, hurry up or you’re going to miss your chance!”

Sherlock shelved his rebuttal and began to make his way towards the tent. As his agent reported, the objective was in sight and with his native stealth and cunning, the prize would soon be his. It would require a low-to-the-ground approach and he would have to remain upwind of his adversaries due to the instantly-recognizable perfume of his mental superiority.

Dropping onto his belly, Sherlock decided on an anole-like approach, using fingers and toes to propel him across the ground. When that reached critical annoyance levels after four seconds, he adopted the cruder, elbows-and-knees maneuver, reaching the supply crate quickly and within moments had his objective in his grasp.

“Stop right there, you thief!”

“I am not a thief! You slanderous remarks will not go unchallenged, Lestrade!”

“Sherlock Holmes! I explicitly informed you that if the chocolates were to be brought with us they would be dispensed solely at my and Gregory’s discretion. Your hand wrapped around the source of your obsession speaks loudly to the nature of your treachery.”

Sherlock quickly rubbed the chocolate box with a corner of his shirt and let it drop back into the crate, storming forward to confront his accusers.

“You can prove nothing. There are no fingerprints, you have no photographs and no unbiased testimony. My guilt, which is entirely nonexistent, could never be determined in any reputable court of law, which, admittedly, is, in this country, nearly as extinct as the dodo!”

“Methinks thou doth protest too much, brother dear.”

“Spare me your thespian aspirations. My reputation remains unsullied and there is no power in creation that can alter this fact!”

“You’re funny, Sherlock. So funny, you can amuse us while you have a little sit-down in the…”

Lestrade quickly plucked a small cloth out of the crate and laid it out on the ground.

“… square of shame and contemplate the wages of sin.”

“Despite your ridiculous attempts at a stern countenance, I scoff at your penalizing efforts.”

“Square of shame, little man. Now.”
“Unacceptable! I am not stripped of my human rights! The Geneva Convention prohibits this form of abuse! I shall see you in irons!”

“Since you are not recognized as any form of sovereign body and, further, are not involved in a formally-declared conflict with either myself or Gregory, those protections are not afforded you. I am sorry, but you must endure your chastisement for your behavior. The weed of crime bears bitter fruit, Sherlock. You would do well to remember that.”

“Did you just quote The Shadow, love?”

“I did. Are you impressed?”

“Oh yeah, and I’ll show you just how much when our prisoner serves out his sentence. Now… Sherlock… where did that box of chocolates go?”

Mycroft looked to where his lover was pointing and saw nothing but an empty space where the box had been.

“Sherlock Holmes, have you an accomplice in your duplicity?”

“Hallucinations! You further invalidate your testimony with your proof of mental instability. There was no box of chocolates. I have been wrongly accused of a crime that was not even perpetrated! How grandly you disgrace yourselves. I am sickened by your presence and will now take myself away to vomit my disappointment into yon shrubbery.”

Sherlock marched imperiously towards the darkened thatch of bushes and Mycroft and Lestrade grinned at his performance and the giggling they heard once Sherlock was out of view.

“We have, as they say, my dear, been had.”

“In high style, too. We’re going to have to keep a closer eye on them. And anything of sugary value.”

Such a remarkably synergistic pair. I despair greatly that I shall, one day, have to leave my brother, but my pain has been greatly lessened by the knowledge that Sherlock is no longer alone in this world and has access to those who love him as dearly as do I.”

“I’d say don’t worry about him, but I know you will anyway. He’ll be alright, though. I’ll do what I can and Mum… she’d let him move in with us if it became necessary. John, too. They’d probably get my bed and I’d have to sleep on the sofa from then on. And you know Grandmama is going to, probably already has, a hundred eyes on him. None of us can replace what you give him, Mycroft, but we can keep him safe and sound until you come back for holidays. And with John around, the time will pass a lot more quickly for him, so… it’ll be alright.”

How indescribable was the feeling of being part of a loving and supportive family. His own pains of separation would find some ease knowing he did not leave Sherlock abandoned to a cold house with only staff for companionship and attention.

“Only you can assuage my concerns so easily, my love.”

“And I’ll do it as often as I can. Some days, I think about us, in London, and we’ve got tough jobs that make us crazy sometimes, but we know, we always know, that when we come home there’s someone there to make the world seem right again. That something I always wanted, I guess, because I’ve seen Mum have to make do without anyone but me and I know how hard it’s been for her sometimes to not… well, not to have someone to really talk to. Someone to give her a little
affection like a husband or boyfriend would to take away whatever shit the day threw at her. I tried to do what I could, but it wasn’t the same. I always said that’s something I really wanted in my life... someone to come home to who I could talk to. And look who I found – someone who I can talk to all day and all night and love every minute of it.”

“Something I look very forward to, as well. I have always known my life would be a challenge and one that would not follow the pattern of most... it was a worry that I would not be blessed with that special person who would willingly share that life, but then I gazed upon you and felt that worry dissipate as would a mist in the hot, summer sunshine.”

“You’re good with the flattery, you know that? Professional-quality.”

“I shall strive to keep my certification current.”

“That’s my Mycroft, always doing what’s best for me.”

“Eternally, my love. And now... ah, John. How... sullied you look.”

“What? Oh, that’s mud. Really it is. See, it’s brown, just like mud should be. I’ve got mud on me.”

Lestrade and Mycroft stared at John’s brown fingertips and the smudges around his mouth and pinched the other as each started to laugh at the boy’s story.

“Such is to be expected with your and Sherlock’s critical research endeavors. Have you found, perhaps, a species of annelid hitherto unknown to science and had to till for specimens to present to the commission on zoological nomenclature when you propose the official name for the creature?”

“What?”

“Have you boys been digging for things?”

“Oh! Yes, actually we have. Sherlock found lots of worms and bugs and we’re going to collect some next time to take pictures of. And it’s been very thirsty work, so we could really use some water. And something to wipe our hands with since it’s also been dirty work. That’s why I have mud on me.”

“Of course, of course... my dear, will you hand John the water and a flannel if it is available. A coarse one to assist with the scrubbing of that oily chocolate.”

“Thanks, Mycroft! Yeah, we were just smearing it... oh.”

Sherlock’s frustrated roar shook the leaves in the trees and John turned his most charming smile on Mycroft and Lestrade before grabbing the water and running for the bushes.

“Many such weekends, Gregory. I hope for many of these now that John has been added to our fold.”

“I don’t think there’s a chance of anything else, love. We may have to ask Mum to babysit now and then if we really want some time alone.”

“Hmmm... you might be correct. However, I believe I can supplement the pay of a member of my staff to keep a watchful eye on the boys if we desire an evening of entertainment. Though they are used to minding Sherlock in my absence, the addition of John escalates matters substantially.”
“Combat pay?”

“The perfect term.”

“You admit you attempted to violate my rights as a prisoner of war!”

Sherlock’s muffled proclamation started Lestrade giggling and not even Mycroft’s shushing could stop him.

“As you were not formally taken into custody, through your refusal to accept your due incarceration, you cannot claim prisoner status. Ergo, you suffered no violation of your rights. However, if you wish to plead your case in a more personal manner, please join Gregory and myself by the fire and we shall happily hear your claim.”

“And suffer your scrutiny as if I were some form of defendant in the docket! Your insults further erode your reputation, a feat I did not think possible as you already consume the entirety of my pity and scorn, gluttonously leaving none for those who rightly deserve a share such as your concubine.”

“I do apologize, my dear. Feel free to take a sliver from my plate if you feel the need.”

“Very kind of you, love. And if you and John want, Mr. Criminal, I mean, Sherlock, we can listen to the radio a little and play some cards until you two get tired.”

“And what are the stakes? I shall not leave my stronghold for anything less than substantial stakes!”

“A bush isn’t much of a stronghold, Sherlock.”

“It is an impenetrable boundary for… AAAAAHHH!!!! I have been assaulted!”

Greg had had a very difficult time not laughing as Mycroft used the distraction to skirt around the vegetation and snare for them two small captives, who were now being marched towards the fire, the evidence of their nefariousness, the top and bottom of the chocolate box, worn on their heads as punishment.

“Isn’t that a pathetic sight. Grandmama would just cry seeing you being sent to the gallows like that.”

“We were denied basic sustenance! It was a civil action against the restrictive and subjugating grip of our oppressors!”

“And we were hungry!”

“As I have informed Sherlock multiple times, John, one cannot exist purely on the buoying effects of fine chocolate. Now, we shall hope that there is no disastrous and imminent effects on your digestive systems and enjoy a quiet hour or so before we retire.”

“And if you two do get a runny bum, you’re not going inside to take care of it. Plenty of ground to fertilize and there’s paper to wipe if necessary.”

“Greg, you’re disgusting. Sorry, but it’s true.”

“That hurts, John. But not as bad as your bum will because the paper I brought isn’t exactly soft and cushiony.”

“Torture! Again, the abuses of your dictatorial regime are tangibly demonstrated. I am not,
however, surprised. Every self-deluded potentate requires a thug to enact his cruelty, because his overt or suppressed effete nature renders him too cowardly to do so himself.”

“He’s talking about feet again, love. I think it’s time you took him to see someone.”

“Verily, I do believe you are correct.”

Sherlock snatched the playing cards out of the supply box and held them aloft like his personal declaration of independence.

“John and I shall rend your bank accounts to atoms!”

“Yeah… you’d better watch out because I’ve been taking it easy on you two and I’m not doing that anymore.”

“Gregory, I am beginning to quake and pale. Do protect me from the ferocity of our captives.”

“Don’t worry, Mycroft. This thug has your back.”

“Such is the joy of my life.”

The card game and details of Sherlock and John’s natural history experiments lasted well into the night and it was four exhausted bodies that crawled into the tent and took their places to enjoy a pleasant night’s sleep. Waking earlier than the others, Mycroft had to admit that the rather resplendent appointment of their tent had provided a surprising amount of comfort and he had passed an agreeable night with his husband at his side and the children scattered in various and varying locations in the tent. Apparently, given sufficient room, Sherlock would migrate across every possible millimeter of free space, scent-marking his territory without his conscious mind being even marginally aware of his actions and the few times Mycroft had woken during the night, he had witnessed his brother in a strikingly different location and position than at last viewing.

But, what a splendid time their weekend had been, so far! A wonderful day of activities, with a sprinkling of schoolwork, and a relaxing evening where the focus was centered entirely on family and the joy they could derive purely from interacting with each other. Sherlock… Sherlock had spoken at Grandmama’s home, when he was at his most emotional, of his memories of Father and how he had never believed such things could again exist. Here, though, were those dearly remembered times made manifest. The laughter, the activities that allowed both him and Sherlock to enjoy themselves and the opportunities to display their talents and interests and win praise for their accomplishments. With Gregory and young John, they had been granted another chance to find again those opportunities and create new and uplifting memories. Father’s death had broken their family, but his dearest love had repaired the breach and young John was strengthening the repairs so they were strong and would never again destruct.

“Someone survived his camping experience.”

Such beauty should not be allowed to exist in one man, especially when that beauty was drowsy and draped across his body in a most enticing fashion.

“Much to my extreme astonishment. I am convinced, however, that if I attempted such a thing with anyone but you, my love, I would not have experienced such nirvana.”

“I’ll make you a deal that if we do this again, it can be just as lacking in true camping hardships so you can have fun, too.”
“My Gregory’s love for me is deep and true.”

“What can I say? Whatever makes you happy. And I think the boys had an easier time not having to sleep with a rock in their back or boil water so they could have a drink.”

“That does not in any manner destroy components such as fish urine or wayward pesticides.”

“And that’s why we won’t ever have to do that, so don’t get excited. Nice big tent with lots of cushions, food, tap water, entertainment, oceans of insect spray when necessary. I’ll take care of you, don’t worry.”

“I have full faith such will be the case, for I know as an unimpeachable truth, that my welfare is completely secure in your hands. Your very skilled and practiced hands…”

Mycroft grinned at Lestrade with what he hoped was some semblance of a salacious grin and enjoyed the reward of his partner wriggling slightly against him and placing a small kiss on his pyjama-clad chest.

“Look at you being wicked when I can’t do anything about it. That’s my idea of torture.”

“Perhaps we might interest the children in another film and…”

“As much as I’d love that, you do realize that those two have scarcely done any of their schoolwork and I still have a bit on my plate, too. No play until after the work’s done.”

“Your mother’s heart would swell with pride witnessing your diligence.”

“Yeah, well, it’s part of my bargain for getting to spend weekends here. No trouble with my studies.”

“And that shall be a responsibility I will share with you. Always a vigilant eye cast towards your marks and remedying any setbacks before they become problematic.”

“I’ll count on that, because I’ll need someone at my back what with Sherlock and John and the extra hours I’m going to need to put in at the shop…”

“Extra?”

“Gotta save some money, don’t I?”

“Whatever for?”

“A flat! Or not… ok, I still haven’t decided anything or talked with Mum, but I think I’d like my own space and not having to worry about waking Mum if I have to work late hours or get called out early because there’s an emergency. It’s hard enough when Sherlock gets it into his head to call at fuck o’clock a.m. and I’m a little slow answering the phone. If I’m getting a flat, I’ll need money to make that happen and I don’t have much to speak of right now.”

Mycroft had his comment poised and ready and realized it would not be well-received. Must always safeguard his husband’s pride…

“Everything I can do to see you achieve the goals you set for yourself, I shall gladly do. You have simply to name the task and it can be considered accomplished.”

Lestrade grinned and wriggled a hand under Mycroft’s top to stroke the not-as-smooth-as-when-they-met chest. His lover was aching to simply pay his way, but was biting his tongue, no matter
how painful it might be. If Mycroft was any more perfect, it would probably defy some law of
science Sherlock was always going on about and they’d all wind up wiped from the universe by an
explosion or something. Time to turn the conversational tide…

“You know, I think you’re going to be nice and hairy. I like that.”

That was a non-sequitur of herculean proportions, however, Mycroft had no reticence for following
the new trail because it touched on a subject about which he was, or had been, quite uncertain.

“You do? I… I had not expected such a substantial showing, however, I believe you are correct
in that I shall have a robust measure of chest hair when I have seen the growth reach its fullest. I had
hoped you would be pleased, but many do not appreciate such a thing.”

“Lucky I’m not many then, I’m just me and, oh yes, I’m going to like it. Nice and warm and…
what’s the word for feeling something with your hands? Starts with a ‘t.’ “

“Tactile?”

“That’s the one. Tactile. Getting to rest here and feel that loveliness. Having you lie on top of
me and get rubbed by all that soft fur. What’s not to like about that?”

“As you describe it, I would say nothing. I am quite relieved by your perspective, Gregory. I
shall encourage my follicles to deliver you their finest performance.”

“Yes! I love it when we think alike. Which is more often than not, if you think about it. We do
fit like puzzle pieces…”

“An abhorrently hirsute puzzle! Mycroft’s body is sprouting hyphae like the corpulent, fish-
belly-white fungus he is and shall soon begin to insert them into the body of his victim and feed upon
the bodily fluids because his own cells are too lazy to even photosynthesize their nutrients! Nothing
shall remain of you, lackey, but a shriveled, empty husk!”

“Mycroft, am I going to be lucky enough to have you suck out my bodily fluids?”

“Later, Gregory, when we have less of an intrusive audience.”

John groaned loudly and began to move to the flap of the tent.

“Sherlock, they’re getting that look in their eye. There’s going to be kissing and I don’t want to
be here for that. Let’s see if the fire-starting invention you made actually works.”

“Sherlock…”

“Whereas your primitive tribe is both confused and frightened by fire, peasant, it is rather a
necessary thing when the temperatures plummet to near zero as they have today. Mycroft, with his
simian-like pelt, is, of course immune to the ravages of the chill, but I require an external heating
source, even if it must be obtained by my own efforts. Do not impede my comfort or the science
required to bring it to pass.”

Then it was Sherlock moving to exit the tent and, in an instant and with a glare thrown over their
shoulders at the older boys, Sherlock and John vanished from view.

“Should we be worried?”

“If it is the device I noticed earlier, then it is a simple contraption of lenses and a focusing wheel.”
“He could just use a magnifying glass, you know.”

“Ah, but the phrase ‘just use’ is entirely inapplicable to Sherlock, as you well know.”

“You’re right, totally lost my head there for a second. And we’ll have a fire to look forward to! Hopefully, not being fueled by their pyjamas, hair or… you know, the whole supply box is out there…”

“And Sherlock never overlooks a chance to experiment. Let us make haste.”

“Fluid sucking later?”

“Unquestionably.”

Mycroft had to admire his partner’s determination in getting both his and the children’s schoolwork completed and it was the long work of the morning and afternoon to finally close the books on everyone’s studies. Making it longer, of course, was the uninterrupted complaints and grievances from the goblin-born he and his spouse had been charged to oversee. He truly did have to admire, however, the creativity and abundance of issues Sherlock and John found to raise and argue. If they had simply concentrated on their studies, they would have finished their tasks in fully half the time.

“Finally! My mind is suppurating from the quantity of useless facts that has been inserted into its tissues!”

“Knowledge is not useless, Sherlock. You would be surprised how often some minor detail you previously thought inane becomes meaningful, be it to further a simple conversation or in a matter of work.”

“Perhaps with the useless people and in the even more useless arenas of your toil, Mycroft, however, that is not the case for me. I shall immediately delete the entirety of this irrelevance the second any potential examination on the subject is completed. My mind is highly valuable and one does not place plastic posies in a Ming vase.”

“But it’s fun to learn! Some of the things aren’t the most interesting, but Mycroft’s right… sometimes you say something and the only way I know what you’re talking about is because I learned about it in school.”

“That, John Watson, is because your baseline of knowledge scarcely hovers above that of a boiled parsnip and it is only through enforced study that you are able to comprehend anything beyond the grunt-and-point-method of communication favored by the lackey’s species.”

Lestrade leaned back in his chair, the dining-room table having been drafted into service as a mass-service study desk, and let out a heavy sigh. He actually felt a little like a club-dragger today. If Mycroft hadn’t been there, he would have had a lot of trouble helping Sherlock with some of his work because he didn’t remember much from his science classes and wasn’t actually sure they covered what Sherlock was studying in the first place. Same for maths, though he had the little bugger when it came to history, because Sherlock felt obligated to forget everything he learned in that area and that bit him in the arse when he had to pull out of his head things that he was supposed to have remembered from earlier. But that was going to cause problems later when it was all on him to help both boys with their schoolwork. Well, there was nothing for it but doing his best, so that’s what he would do and suffer Sherlock’s frequent and colorful wrath when he didn’t quite hit the mark.
“Both Gregory and John have knowledge and skills in areas for which you are poorly equipped, Sherlock, and that body of knowledge and ability is valuable and shall bring them great success in life.”

“Success as defined by the amount of dust they can gather with a single sweep of their broom.”

“That’s not true! I’m going to be a doctor!”

“You mean you shall be tidying up after the doctors with your broom.”

John threw his pencil at his friend and stormed away from the table, leaving a confused Sherlock in his wake.

“I…”

Sherlock looked between Mycroft and Lestrade for explanation and Lestrade finally reached over to ruffle the mass of dark curls and give Sherlock a smile.

“Go and say you’re sorry. Then why don’t you do something John likes to do for a little while? Maybe play chess or one of his games. It’ll be alright, Sherlock. If you say you’re sorry and mean it, he’ll forgive you.”

Sherlock hopped off his chair without speaking a word and followed after John, his face pinched with emotion. When he had left the room, Lestrade reached across the table to cover the visibly distraught Mycroft’s hand with his own.

“He’s going to be fine, love. They’ll both be fine.”

“It pains me, Gregory. It pains me when he has committed an affront and, also, when he suffers because of it.”

“That’s because you love him, Mycroft. And did you see how he jumped up to do the right thing? Just a little nudge in the right direction and off he went.”

“I do admit that particular aspect of the situation was extremely gratifying.”

“He is learning and getting better with this sort of thing. Maybe he never develops the instincts to do well with most people, but he’ll definitely do well enough to have some people on his side. And it will be enough people, mark my words.”

“I had not thought such a thing would ever be possible, but I am far more hopeful, now that he has your loving hand guiding his progress.”

“Our loving hands, Mycroft. Stop laying everything on me; you’ve done more than your share and will keep doing that until… well, you’ll never stop, I suspect, even after he’s an adult.”

“I know that you are correct for I cannot envision a time I shall not be a proactive presence in his life. I would like that to be the situation for young John, also, if he will allow it.”

“Oh, he will. John adores you. And you love it.”

Mycroft’s face broke into a tender smile and he cut a very shy glance towards his beloved spouse.

“I do, for that I shall not lie.”

“My Mycroft’s a great dad. And now, he’s going to come with me for a nice bit of relaxing on
that sofa in your library. It won’t be long before Sherlock and John join us, I wager, so we might as well get ready for them.”

“Do you… is it possible that next weekend shall find us in this manner?”

“Hmmmm… not exactly. I’m going to have to work, but I can probably spend the nights here if you can get me to the shop and back.”

“That is an extremely minor matter and, even if it were not, I would see it done, regardless.”

“Then I think we can assume you’ll have me bothering you next weekend, too.”

“How felicitous. I am very pleased with the structure of our burgeoning domestic equilibrium.”

“You know how hot it makes me when you toss around vocabulary like that.”

“I do. And I have a verbally vociferous speech prepared with which to tantalize your ears as soon as we have a moment of solitude.”

“I think the boys are going to need a film soon.”

“Let us choose a very captivating and time-consuming one.”

Sherlock found John sitting at the bottom of the main staircase, arms folded, with his elbows on his knees and a very angry expression on his face.

“Hello, John.”

“Come to make fun of me again?”

“No. I want to say that I apologize for upsetting you.”

“Do you apologize for saying I’m stupid?”

“No, because I do not recall saying that.”

“You did. You didn’t use the word ‘stupid,’ but you think I can’t be a doctor if I want to and… and that’s not true! I can! Maybe I don’t have money and I’m going to have to work harder in school since I have a lot to do to catch up with the rest of you and… and I know I’m not as smart as you, Sherlock, and being a doctor means I have to be very smart… but I can do it. No matter what anybody says, I’m going to do it. I’m not worthless!”

Sherlock knew that, for all of his claims to the contrary, he wasn’t supremely talented in every possible area, however, not even he could miss that John’s upset seemed to have more than one fork in its road.

“Has someone told you that you were worthless?”

John didn’t answer for a long time, then gave a tiny nod that enflamed Sherlock with his own dose of upset and anger.

“Who? You will tell me their name.”

“I don’t know them all.”
The taller boy rocked back a little on his heels and found himself sitting next to his friend on the stairs.

“Explain.”

“Explain what? That the kids at my other school knew my dad was a drunk and said I’d never be any better than him? That I’d never have a real job or do anything with my life? Or the kids here who tell me I’m too poor and common and stupid to ever be anything but… like you said, someone to sweep up after them. Lots of people have told me that and I’m not! I’m not…”

John started crying and Sherlock shuffled over to sit closer to his friend.

“I am sorry I upset you, John. I didn’t… I know you are not feeble-witted or worthless.”

“Then why do you say that? All the time?”

Sherlock sat silent a moment, then shrugged his shoulders, unable to meet John’s eye.

“I have no explanation, but I do not believe that about you.”

“Well, it hurts when you make me think that’s how you feel. You’re my friend and you are smart, so when you say… I’m not… I believe it. I don’t want to, but I do because I know you’re right about a lot of things… it hurts, too, because you know that’s mean to say and you say it anyway.”

Sherlock wished he could put into words anything that he thought or felt at the moment, but he couldn’t. He couldn’t begin to frame anything he was experiencing in a verbal manner, but he did know that distressing John was as unpleasant for him as it was for his friend.

“I will apologize for that, also. I do not enjoy causing you pain and that is never something I wish to do. I am also sorry that others have; I would change that if I could.”

Though, perhaps he could do something, now that he thought about it…

“Thanks.”

John wiped his eyes and smiled a weak smile at Sherlock.

“It’s just… it’s hard sometimes when nobody thinks I’ll have a good job or do anything important. I’m going to have to work for it, I know that, but I am going to do something with my life and I’m not going to be a drunk.”

“If it helps to know, I predict that you will find success in life, in fact, I do not see how that cannot be the fact. You do not wallow in confusion when we converse and have proven that your academic skills lack, compared to the norm, only in areas where you have not received appropriate instruction. Further, you have a manner of approaching problems that is successful for affecting effective solutions.”

It was not without some mental finger-crossing that Sherlock tried to salve John’s bruised feelings and hoped that he could do more in the future. How could anyone be so utterly mentally deficient as to think that John would not meet his future in anything but a successful fashion? It might take effort on his own part to elevate John to the point where he could reach the goals he had set for himself, but that was inconsequential. John would be set in the career of his choice and that was the end of the matter, even… even if he had to solicit the assistance of Mycroft and his pleasure-slave to accomplish the task.
“Really? Do you mean that?”

“Yes. And you do well not to believe otherwise.”

“Ok… I’m glad you said you were sorry. It helps.”

“I am certain it does. Now, we shall engage in some pursuit you find enjoyable. I suggest chess, though the chessboard is in the library, where the sausage and the hound are likely in residence.”

“That’s ok, I like spending time with Mycroft and Greg. They’re nice. They never say I can’t do something or make me feel dumb. They tell me I can do things and give me the chance to show it, too.”

“Once in a very great while, they have their uses. Come along, we do not have many hours remaining in the day before you must return to your prison.”

“Ok. But, I get to come back tomorrow, right?”

“Of course. Where else would you go?”

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Lestrade nudged Mycroft and nodded towards the door when Sherlock and John walked into the library.

“Ah, boys. How delighted we are that you have chosen to join us.”

“John and I are going to play chess. You shall not disturb us.”

“Heavens, no. Gregory and I shall be quiet as church mice.”

“Church mice are not found in cathedral-caliber sizes.”

“So pleasant, Sherlock, as always.”

Lestrade shook his head and gave Mycroft’s thigh a comforting rub as the older boys watched the younger pair set up the chessboard and launch a game that had both engaging in their usual level of argument and discussion. No traces seemed to remain of John’s distress, so they considered the matter closed and Mycroft breathed a massive internal sigh of relief. Sherlock was learning, and John was apparently agreeable to suffering the growing pains associated with Sherlock’s development.

As the afternoon progressed, Lestrade and Mycroft found themselves loath to leave the sofa and the chess match flowed from one to the next with only a break for a snack. However, after a look at the time, Lestrade said a foul word under his breath and gave Mycroft a kiss before setting down his book and giving his lover a sad grin.

“Time to go, love. I promised Mum I wouldn’t be late and I can’t break that, especially if I want to do this again next weekend. Think I can get a ride home? I thought I could see John home, too, if you don’t want to send the car out twice.”

“Already? Can’t I stay tonight and go back with Sherlock in the morning?”

John stared at Mycroft with pleading eyes and Sherlock joined in as forcefully as he could until Mycroft sighed and nodded.
“Very well, it seems unnecessary to send you back to school at this point when it would accomplish nothing of benefit. You are welcome to stay with us again tonight, John.”

John’s cheering only partially covered Sherlock’s ‘good, now we have time to plan’ and Mycroft hoped that his decision wasn’t a poor one.

“Well, there you have it. Everyone gets the good time but Greg. Typical. Well, see if I have time for you three this week. I think I might find myself otherwise occupied if you happen to call or stop by the shop for a visit.”

“Gregory, your attempts at peevishness are not succeeding.”

“Not even a little?”

“I am afraid not.”

“Damn. I guess I just don’t have the talent.”

“And I pray that you never acquire it. We have quite enough of that with Sherlock.”

“Slander!”

“And that’s my signal to leave. John, have fun tonight.”

“Goodbye, Greg! Are we going shopping soon?”

“Not as soon as I’d like. I’m working every day after school, so I won’t have time. Ask Mycroft if you need something or call me and I can get it and bring it by next weekend.”

Both John and Sherlock huffed a very put-upon sigh and Mycroft took Lestrade’s arm to escort him to the car.

“You going to be ok all alone with those two, love?”

“I have gained quite a bit of confidence these past days and am hopeful that we shall pass the rest of the evening very harmoniously.”

“Call me if you going insane, ok? Don’t want you going mental because those two caught a second wind and are terrorizing everyone in the house.”

“I will do so immediately, if the need arises.”

“Good. Well, I guess I’d better leave now. I suppose your driver will have to take me home, since it’s probably not the best idea for you to drive me and leave Sherlock and John alone.”

“Unfortunately, yes. That is certainly the most cautious decision.”

Not that it met with either of their approval. In fact the thought of separation after this wonderful weekend was putting a cold lump in each of their stomachs. Though not a moment of intimate time had been shared, the hours had been highly treasured, nonetheless.

“Then I’ll see you on Friday. Of course, you could visit the shop one afternoon and we could talk while the goblins ate my wages’ worth of sweets.”

“That is a very agreeable suggestion, Gregory. How very accommodating of you. John did indicate he was hopeful to conduct a shopping excursion, in any case.”
“Be prepared, love. For those two, shopping is a full-contact sport.”

“Ahh, forewarned is forearmed. Thank you, my dear. You forever protect my welfare.”

“Always a pleasure. Well, goodbye, Mycroft. I love you.”

“And I love you, Gregory. I shall see you again soon.”

Lestrade turned and walked towards the garage, while Mycroft notified the driver that his services would be needed. Of course, if his husband had a vehicle of his own to pilot, such measures would not be necessary…

Mycroft was both suspicious and relieved that Sherlock and John took to the library table to whisper and draw and write and perpetrated none of their more physical disruptions for the remainder of the night. And the morning was just as quiet, with the boys eating their breakfast and giving each other knowing nods and smiles. It was out of worry that they were not planning some form of escape from the country, that Mycroft himself drove them to school and watched closely that each boy actually entered the building, before returning home to begin preparation for the exams that were close upon him.

“This is going to be great, Sherlock!”

“I agree. The names you divulged are known lummoxes and we shall make their lives not worth living. If we can, in any way, prevent their genetic material from continuing in the population, we are doing humanity a great service.”

“No death. You promised that nothing would be lethal.”

“Crippling embarrassment and gross humiliation in sight of the females shall be sufficient to forestall any furthering of their diseased line.”

“Ok then, what do we do first.”

“Odor. The sense of smell is most closely linked to memory, so that shall be our first salvo…”

Sherlock, I received a call from your headmaster today.”

“Since you are both boring to the point of coma, it should have been a very collegial conversation.”

“What information do you possess about aerosolized sulfur compounds that were somehow exploded onto a number of the students in your school?”

“Knowledge about other students? What piffle! I actively avoid learning anything about anyone in that house of mental decay!”

“Sherlock…”

“If the fools were shortsighted enough to, perhaps, pick up certain self-contained devices that might have resembled the pointless rubber balls that the rabble-class children use for amusement, that would be no fault but their own!”
“And how are you in possession of the details of the crime?”

“It is impossible to avoid every bit of gossip and storytelling that the time-wasters inflict upon each other. I am not deaf, you know.”

“I see… so you learned of this situation second-hand?”

“I also possess a nose and the aroma of ammonium sulfide is quite pungent. It is, as John termed it, stinky.”

“Very well, I shall inform the school officials that you were not party to this atrocity.”

“I care not.”

“Of course.”

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“Do you have the map, Falcon?”

“Right here, Eagle.”

“Have you marked the target locations?”

“With big red X’s.”

“Very well. I shall return shortly. You must remain vigilant that we are not apprehended.”

“Don’t worry, I have this under control.”

“See that you do.”

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“Sherlock… I have had another call from your headmaster today. What do you know about select students being adhered to their chairs as they took their seats to begin their lessons?”

“That you believe I have cultivated an interest in the pranks and frivolities of the pack of fools through whom I am forced to wade through as one must through sewerage is befuddling.”

“The particular adhesive in question does not appear to be a commercially-available product and they are at a loss to find a solvent to remove the students from their desks.”

“That is understandable. The knowledge of basic chemistry by the geese they employed to serve as science instructors is woefully lacking.”

“And you assert that you have no knowledge of this act or, perhaps, how a solution might be enacted?”

“Pfft. I would spit at the idea, however, I am rather parched and spittle is difficult to muster at this time.”

“Very well. Let us tend to your music lesson.”

“My day seems to be fraught with adversity.”

“Little crosses, Sherlock. We must all bear our share.”
“What are those? Water balloons?”

“What does that mean?”

“When they impact, the devastation to the target’s reputation shall be disastrous!”

“That sounds good. What’s in them?”

“Since they shall make contact with the groin area, it is a material that is very suitable to have been issued forth from that area.”

“You didn’t!”

“I have been collecting my output since we embarked on our mission. I have quaffed tremendous quantities of fluids to increase volume and, also, foodstuffs known to increase the odiferousness of the contents, reinforcing the lesson of two days ago, as a coup de gras.”

“Want me to throw?”

“You may launch the first strike. I shall use the confusion to launch the rest.”

“Sherlock… no, never mind. I am most certain not even you would perpetrate such a disgusting action. Carry on.”

“Sherlock…”

“Yes…”

Mycroft looked at his brother and his brother’s… well, the term accomplice must now be bestowed officially… and the bright blue faces they sported.

“I received a call from your…”

“Do not embarrass yourself further. Twas I who manufactured the pigment bombs and I am not ashamed of the fact! Perhaps there is some shame in that the final example triggered prematurely, but it is a barely a mote!”

“With evidence now squarely against you, is there anything else for which you would like to confess.”

“No. I would not like to confess anything to you.”

“Let me rephrase… confess, whether you would like to or not.”

“No.”

“Then offer explanation.”

Sherlock looked at John, who shook his head in what Mycroft was startled to see, was a slightly
panicked manner, which seemed to cement Sherlock’s resolve.

“No.”

“Sherlock Holmes!”

“You can apply any torture and I shall not confess! Even if I did, I will never tell…”

John punched Sherlock in the arm and the taller boy quickly shut his mouth and glared at Mycroft.

“Very well. Consider yourself both confined to your bedroom until I say otherwise. I shall speak to Gregory about this to consider the next step.”

Two sullen and defiant boys marched up the stairs and Mycroft sternly watched them go until they were out of sight and he could run to the telephone to call Lestrade.

“Hello?”

“Gregory… my beloved…”

“Mycrof?”

“There… there is a crisis.”

“What! Who’s hurt?”

“No, not of that sort. Sherlock and John have evinced troublingly disruptive behaviors and will neither confess to the actions, nor offer explanation. This is highly atypical… Sherlock has never shied away from the credit for any of his behaviors, be they for good or ill.”

Mycroft took a moment to inform Lestrade as to the various activities for which Sherlock had been suspected during the week. When the saga was concluded, Lestrade rubbed his eyes and looked at the clock.

“Any idea what’s going on?”

“Not a scintilla. Sherlock has given no indication about his involvement or motivation. John has been equally as silent.”

“Ok… I don’t get off work for awhile, but… I can get Mum’s car and come by after I close. Will that be alright?”

“Yes, and thank you. The children are confined to Sherlock’s bedroom in punishment and I believe, at least I hope, they are sufficiently intelligent not to further erode their situation.”

“Ok, I’ll be there soon after closing. It’ll be alright, Mycroft. I’m sure things aren’t as bad as they seem.”

“I think you might reconsider that statement when you arrive.”

“You’re right, I’m reconsidering.”

Lestrade stared at the hurt and angry boys with their blue faces and took a deep breath before speaking.
“What the *fuck* did you do?”

“As I did not confess to Mycroft, I shall not confess to you.”

“I don’t care about confessions; tell me what you did to make yourself look like a blueberry.”

“I… I constructed a small device that would release dye at the moment of triggering. One of the devices malfunctioned.”

“Ok… did the others?”

“They functioned flawlessly.”

John nodded eagerly at the statement and there was a glee in his eyes that set Lestrade’s brain in motion.

“My dear, I do not…”

“Hold on a second, love. Your bombs got their targets, huh? That’s good engineering. What about your other stunts? They work flawlessly?”

“Yes! This was the only aberrant event in the entire campaign!”

“Same targets?”

“Of course! They were the ones who…”

Sherlock’s voice trailed off and he looked at John rather sheepishly, realizing his ego had led him to perhaps divulge a little too much information. For his part, Mycroft sent a quizzical glance towards Lestrade, who nodded at him to sit next to John, while Lestrade took a seat next to Sherlock.

“Are these kids bothering both of you or just one?”

The light went on in Mycroft’s brain and he felt the complete idiot for failing to even consider that this had been a *retaliatory* action. And Sherlock’s eyes turning in John’s direction provided the answer to Lestrade’s question.

“John, something you want to talk about?”

“No.”

“Well, I think it will help. Get a few things off your chest.”

“I… I don’t want to.”

Lestrade looked over to Mycroft who took point in the discussion.

“John, both Gregory and I are very concerned and care about you deeply. We would be most grateful if you would let us hear your troubles so that we might offer our support and assistance.”

“No! I don’t want you to help!”

Mycroft started to protest, but Lestrade interrupted.

“It’s alright, Mycroft… I know what he means. Sometimes it makes things worse when you involve parents or… whatever we are. I’ve seen it happen, so I do understand, John, but that doesn’t
mean you can’t tell us so we can at least… well, listen.”

John looked over to Sherlock who hesitated, then nodded.

“Ok…”

John spent a moment describing his experiences and it was only Lestrade’s hand gripping Mycroft’s finely-tailored shirt that kept his lover from vaulting off the bed and starting immediately towards the school. When the boy was finished, Mycroft wiped John’s cheeks and pulled him into a firm hug.

“Do not pay heed to the Visigoths and blackguards that would say such things, John. Their opinion means less than a speck of dust on a hillside and it is certainly not shared by anyone in this room, nor, I feel extremely confident in saying, the others in your school.”

“Mycroft’s right, lad. You can be whatever you want to be and it doesn’t matter if you don’t have bags of money in your pockets. You’re smart and clever and hard-working… and you’ve got a good heart on top of it. You’re going to go far, John. Mycroft and I have talked about that, about how far you and Sherlock are going to go in life. Mum and Grandmama have talked about it, too. You two are going to make your mark on this world, and that’s the truth of it. Those stupid bastards have no idea what they’re talking about.”

“I agree completely. Your future is bright, John, and I do not say this to be kind; it is simply a fact that is indisputable. Do not take their own issues of esteem to heart and let them darken your mind with their turpitude.”

“What?”

“Wickedness. My brother cannot contain his loquaciousness for even a moment.”

John looked up at Mycroft and examined his expression closely for any sign of being nice. He didn’t want Mycroft and Greg to say things just to be nice right now, he wanted what they said to be real and, from what he saw, it was.

“Ok… and thanks. It’s hard sometimes, but I don’t like to act like a baby about it. About anything. I want to fight my own fights and handle things myself, because that’s what you’re supposed to do and not cry about people being mean to you.”

“Your self-sufficiency and maturity are highly admirable, John, however, it is always appropriate to share one’s troubles with the one’s you love. They can provide reassurance and offer strategies to help you with your battles, even if they do not themselves take up a sword.”

Which Mycroft would be doing as soon as the boys were settled in their classes in the morning.

“Just tell us when something’s bothering you, John. If you don’t want Mycroft and me mucking in, we won’t, but we do want to know so we can at least be someone you can talk to so you feel better.”

“Oh, Greg… I can do that. And I do feel a little better, actually. I felt a lot better after Sherlock and I… just talked and didn’t do anything we can get in trouble for… but I promise I’ll come and talk to you if I have a problem again.”

“Excellent. Gregory and I are very proud. Of both of you. Now, shall we attempt to remove the dye from your skin? And then, perhaps, we might discover what flavor of ice cream Cook had delivered with the grocery order. I anticipate it is something quite enjoyable and I suspect the quantity is plentiful.”
John looked at Sherlock and, in a second, the two boys were running towards Sherlock’s laboratory and his solvent supply, yelling for Mycroft and Lestrade to follow.

“You’re not going to let this be the end of it, are you love?”

“Would you?”

“Not for a moment. Just… anything you do, think about how it might come back to impact John or Sherlock.”

“I understand and I admit it would not have been something I would have considered had you not mentioned the situation. However, I shall ensure, at minimum, that the boys are not punished for their transgressions. I am supposed to meet with the headmaster tomorrow to discuss the matter and he shall find that our meeting shall commence both earlier and on a different trajectory than he is anticipating.”

“Want me to be there? I can… if I miss my first class or two, nobody will really miss me.”

“Gregory Lestrade! I shall not condone truancy.”

“Not even for a good cause? And standing up for those two little bastards is a very good cause, I think.”

“As do I. Sherlock… I know that Sherlock has been the victim of less-than-positive remarks in the past, though he would never provide the details or the names of his tormentors. And, to my knowledge, never enacted any vengeance, choosing instead to simply withdraw from situations that might place him again the crosshairs of a verbal assault. Yet he concocted the most delightful and effective means of visiting humiliation upon John’s detractors. Such growth, Gregory. Such devotion and affection… to defend John’s honor with that degree of effort speaks strongly to their bond and how my brother has adapted his behavior to show his commitment to that bond. I could not be more pleased.”

“Me, too. Little man did the right thing, in his own insane way, of course. I’ll wait outside the building before school begins and you can collect me for our little discussion with the headmaster.”

“Gregory…”

“Showing support, Mycroft. Besides someone has to keep an eye on you.”

“Me?”

“Can’t have the school needing a new faculty and student body because the head man got snippy with you.”

“His employment, as for that of all the faculty, is at the discretion of the board of directions.”

“Which means you.”

“And student attendance is also at the discretion of the board of directors.”

“You, again.”

“Perhaps your presence might be necessary, after all. Where family matters are concerned, I cannot guarantee that my conduct shall not be as exemplary as it is normally. Sherlock and John should not have been required to take matters into their own hands and I shall make the headmaster
fully aware of my feelings on that particular issue. I expect more assiduous monitoring of student behavior and a clear understanding that such behaviors as those against young John shall not be tolerated.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll keep you on the leash and the school functioning, but if the prick gets uppity, I’ll be happy to hold him down, at least, while you kick him. Then we can come back here and celebrate our victory.”

“I would greatly enjoy a bit of celebration after a hard morning’s work.”

“I think hardness will definitely be part of the celebration, too.”

“Then it shall truly be a day to remember.”

“Until the next one.”

“I am already giddy with delight.”
Once Mycroft reached the age where matters of a romantic or sexual nature garnered his attention he frequently indulged in fantasies and daydreams where different personas of partner played a co-starring role. The slender and sensitive intellectual, the muscular and valorous soldier and… well, there was one of his favorites right now, standing against the corner of his school building, smoking a cigarette, his schoolbag dangling rakishly off a shoulder… the roguish and rebellious schoolboy. Was there not a day his spouse would demonstrate his utter perfection? His unquestioned superiority to all others who might vie for the hand of a lonely Holmes male? Not that anyone had ever presented themselves to this lonely Homes male besides his spouse, but the reasoning was sound nonetheless. And the scandalous, smoldering truant was now smiling at him. It was going to be a glorious day…

“There’s my Mycroft, looking ready lower the boom on any that get in his way.”

Lestrade walked over to the car and gave Mycroft a kiss through the open driver’s side window before darting around to the passenger’s side and taking his seat in the large Jaguar.

“I suspect there shall be little boom lowering once all is said and done. I reserve that for the more obstinate types and it is my sincere hope the headmaster shall not evince that particular quality during our meeting. He is a difficult to predict fellow, however, so there may be some entertainment yet.”

“A bit of smiting?”

“Very biblical of you, my dear. I heartily approve.”

“Yeah, well… he did give me a little trouble when I had to sort out Sherlock and John’s last adventure, so if he gets smote I’m not going to complain. Not that he didn’t have a right to give me trouble after that fiasco, but he did get a touch rude and that wasn’t called for.”

“And you were the epitome of tact and manners, I’m certain.”

“If I answer that, you’ll know if I’m lying or not, right?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Shit. Then I’m going to plead my right to silence and save my skin.”

“Very wise. It is always best to say little so it cannot be used against you at a later time.”

“I’ll try to remember that because I know someone who doesn’t forget one little thing.”

“I promise to use my recollection very judiciously.”

“You bastard! You’re already lining up a few things I’ve said to hit me with later on, aren’t you?”

“Surprises are the spice of life, my love.”

Lestrade had spent his share of time sitting on a bench or in a chair outside some school official’s office alone or with his mum next to him because of the stupid things boys did before they realized just how stupid they really were. Sitting in a chair now, he still had that fluttery feeling in his
stomach, but he was lucky he didn’t have long to suffer since Mycroft took the secretary’s proclamation of ‘just a minute’ as gospel and timed out exactly sixty seconds before he got up and strode through the headmaster’s door, much to Lestrade’s glee. And the glee continued as his partner systematically destroyed every argument put forth for Sherlock and John’s punishments, which were slated to be, in Mycroft’s terms, unconscionably draconian, and only a few times did Lestrade have to wade in and pull his lover back from the brink of terminating the headmaster’s employment contract on the spot. After a tense half-hour of argument it was agreed that Sherlock and John would clean the two school walls that were splattered with blue dye and Mycroft would pay for desks to replace those destroyed by the now-infamous glue incident. For his part, the headmaster would impress upon both the teaching and dormitory staff that further incidents of harassment would be brought directly to the school’s board of directors and it was with no small measure of satisfaction that Mycroft presented a copy of the full school charter documents that bore both his grandmothers and his names. Mycroft, however, did not inform the headmaster that the students currently marked as unsuitable for this institution would not be returning after the Christmas holiday, those letters having been dispatched this morning after receiving Grandmama’s very approving signature.

After a reminder that though his presence would no longer be felt daily within these walls, his eyes would still very much be on the workings of the school and he would take whatever steps and enact whatever protocols were necessary to ensure those workings ran smoothly and to his satisfaction, Mycroft terminated the meeting and strode out of the headmaster’s office, Lestrade following right behind him.

“Ok, that was brilliant.”

“Thank you.”

“You knew how hot you were making me, too, didn’t you?”

“Most certainly.”

“Thought so. You’re an evil man, Mycroft Holmes, but at least it works to my benefit unlike that poor bastard you just left in bits and pieces. I’m surprised you let him win anything, actually.”

“It never hurts to demonstrate compassion to one’s opponent, Gregory. And it will do Sherlock and John good to see that using such overt methods can come with a cost that they must be willing to pay. Besides, I cannot have my school vandalized in such a manner by anyone. It sets a terrible precedent.”

“Look at you ascending the throne. Sherlock’s going to be livid if you get a nicer crown than his.”

“I shall keep mine locked away from his envious eyes. But, I do intend to take a more active role in the administrative proceedings for the remainder of the year and a lesser, though notable one, afterwards. While Sherlock and John are still attending I do not wish another such hardship to befall either of them if I can possibly prevent it.”

“Just keep a low profile for that if you can, love. Really, it doesn’t do a lad any good for everyone to know he’s got special consideration.”

“No, in that you are correct and I shall endeavor to keep my influence a somewhat shadowy affair.”

“The trolls will appreciate it. Now, since we finished that a lot earlier than I thought we would, how about a little me and you time to start the day?”
“You have classes to attend, Gregory.”

“I’m sure I’ll learn something if I get you naked and on that big bed of yours. Can’t argue that’s not educational.”

“You are the soul of temptation, my dear, however, I do believe neither of us shall retain our satisfaction with the moment if your presence in class is missed and your mother is notified.”

“But Mycroft… I won’t be able to see you again until tonight…”

“What a delightfully Sherlockian tone you managed. I applaud your mimicry.”

“But I didn’t use any four-syllable words, so it doesn’t count.”

“Gregory…”

“Fine. I have to be dad when it’s needed and then get pushed right back into punk kid when nobody wants me. It’s a great life. Everybody should want to be me.”

“Excellently theatrical. Truly, you have my compliments.”

“You’re full of quips today, aren’t you? Hope you enjoy your weekend alone with the boys. I think I’ll see if a few of my mates want a night out at the pub tonight, maybe a good film tomorrow. Yeah, it’ll be nice to have some time without insane trolls running around making me check for scorpions before I change my pants.”

“What a marvelous idea! I admire your attention to your personal social ties. Of course, Sherlock and John have also expressed a desire to have for themselves an evening at the pub and a trip to view the latest cinematic offering and this weekend would be a very opportune time to escort them for a bit of entertainment.”

“You’ll sit right next to us won’t you?”

“I cannot be expected to predict the distribution of free tables or seats at these locales! However, I also cannot be expected to predict what the children might do to secure a station with close proximity to yours and your peers. And what they would continue to do subsequently.”

“You are an evil, horrible, terrible person.”

“The affectionate names you bestow upon me always gladden my heart.”

“Cock.”

“I am awash with contentment.”

Mycroft dropped the pouty Lestrade at school, laughing as his lover made a grand show of sneaking into the building, then drove home to review the latest envelope of papers from Grandmama and feel a cool, but not cold, wind blow through his body as he absorbed the information. If he was not sent upon a small assignment soon, he would be quite surprised, however small did, likely, properly describe the initiative. A few days to settle some petty issues that amounted to little more than insults and name calling, which, unfortunately, was all that was required at times to light the fire on a much larger problem. And he could not argue he had not the time. The probability was zero that he failed to pass his examinations or, for that matter, achieve an exemplary mark. The only possible issue
preventing a perfect mark was the essay portions due to the potentially… limited… ability of the reader to comprehend the depth and breadth of his arguments.

It was no matter, however, for already his admittance papers had been duly filed with his new educational institution and his books and syllabi were soon to arrive for his perusal. What a grand suggestion had come from his spouse! Work through his most rudimentary and tiresome courses in the comfort of his own home and shorten, ultimately, the amount of time he must remain away from his beloved and their family. And, this would give him greater opportunity to focus on his other responsibilities for a time and increase his skill repertoire. His insightful and creative husband… in so many ways his life was enhanced because he had met his dearest Gregory. For each portion of his day, he found some manner in which his love had improved the quality of his life. Surely something was due for all of his husband’s attentions and efforts? Some gift or reward? Not that Gregory would ask for or expect such a thing, but was it not proper for one loving spouse to gift the other to demonstrate their affection and appreciation for all that they selflessly gave to their relationship? He would have to give the matter his greatest level of attention. His dearest was a proud man and his tribute must not in any manner damage that pride. This would definitely require thought…

Mycroft spent the remainder of the day occupied with his documents and the various phone calls made necessary by those documents and nearly missed the return of Sherlock and John. Fortunately their stage-worthy moaning could garner the attention of a marble statue.

“I have been ill-used!”

“Everything hurts!”

Two small bodies now lay on the floor of the library, face down in front of the fire, schoolbags standing solemn vigil at their sides.

“Ah, I see your punishment was enacted swiftly.”

“We should not have seen even an iota of punishment! Our actions were completely justified!”

“For the most part, yes, however, the school building did not act as your enemy, but was assaulted all the same. It was fair that you make reparations for its suffering.”

“My hands resemble those of a charwoman’s! If the sensitivity of my fingers has been impaired by the caustic materials I was forced to wield in the course of my torture, I shall demand satisfaction!”

“And it took FOREVER! We missed lunch!”

“Which is John’s favorite part of the school day. Our taskmasters timed their vile deeds to deny him even that bit of grace!”

Mycroft set aside the folder he was examining and swallowed down his laughter. It was highly likely that their next bit of vengeance, should it be required, would, at least, spare school property.

“Then I must express my curiosity as to why you are attempting to graze upon the hand-knotted Persian rug and not indulging in a more palatable repast in the kitchen.”

“The kitchen is a great number of steps away and we are near to death.”

“Yeah, near to death.”
“I see. Do you perhaps harbor hope that I shall take pity on your rapidly-emaciating forms and summon for you an appropriate snack from the kitchen?”

“I place neither hope nor faith in your succor, however, it has likely been in excess of five minutes since you have fed and you are already clinging to the cliff’s edge of a blood-sugar collapse. Soon, your gluttony shall bring to us the nourishment we require.”

“Sherlock, can there be pickle with the gluttony?”

Mycroft shook his head and placed an in-house call to the kitchen to have the now-traditional afterschool snack delivered to the library. With the addition of pickle.

“Now, if you can but linger until your provisions are delivered, we may discuss how to use your time after you have been refreshed.”

“Are we to be burdened with the presence of the lackey?”

“Gregory will be joining us, yes, but not until later in the evening.”

“Ugh… if he is to darken our doorstep, he should pay us the courtesy of doing so before dark.”

“Greg’s got to work, Sherlock. He told us that, remember?”

“Do not impugn my memory, John Watson.”

“I don’t need to because it only seems to work when it wants to anyway. I bet you forget everything I just said before the food gets here.”

“You raise a valid point. The details of the peasant’s contract of indenture is of little consequence to me, therefore, it does not deserve space within my temporal lobe.”

“Well, try to at least remember we have an exam on Monday on those awful poems and you said you’d help me understand them. I have no idea what they’re thee’ing and thou’ing about.”

“I shall leave that to the dirigible who rang for our invigoration. He is sufficiently love-addled that the nauseating verse is to him as mother’s milk.”

So, a portion of the weekend would be devoted to study… that was easily accomplished and early in the day so their time with Gregory would not be consumed by practical concerns.

“I shall be delighted to assist you, John. Is that the extent of your academic obligations?”

“No, but that’s the biggest part.”

“Very well. We shall budget time for your schoolwork and see it accomplished both quickly and thoroughly, leaving you free to enjoy the remainder of your scholastic respite unencumbered by your intellectual pursuits.”

“What?”

“If words were water we would be drowned by his pedantic speechmaking!”

The polite knock on the door, brought excited gasps as the boys anticipated their snack.

“Ah… our rejuvenation has arrived. Fatcroft! Retrieve our victuals!”
Sherlock and John hopped off the floor like fish on a pier leaping towards the water and dashed towards the library table, to take their seats and glare at the older Holmes. Mycroft sighed, deciding it was less effort to simply oblige than argue, and took the tray from the young woman waiting patiently to deliver the food.

“Here… restore your energies. May I assume you shall then devote yourself to research pursuits?”

“Yes. I have highly important experiments to conduct and John shall serve as my assistant and test subject.”

“Sherlock, kindly do not perpetrate any potentially-damaging actions on John’s person. I would very much appreciate not having to call for an ambulance. Mother Lestrade likely would be happy to have her vehicle this evening and not loan it to Gregory so he might hasten to John’s deathbed to receive the benediction of John’s final words.”

“Then purchase for him a vehicle! Mother Lestrade’s automobile is a sardine tin with wheels, at best, and I suffer perilous humiliation every instance my imprisonment within it is witnessed.”

A vehicle… now, that was a highly suitable and practical gift for his darling husband. And the thought had crossed his mind in the past. But how to inveigle Gregory to accept…

“I do not believe such a gesture would be appreciated. Gregory is a fiercely independent man and prefers to rely on his own efforts to purchase his amenities.”

“He is a fool. A penniless fool who cares not that I suffer for his muleheaded devotion to poverty.”

“Me, too! Not that I’ve actually suffered but… no, I haven’t actually suffered at all so I can really help you for this one, Sherlock.”

“I am surrounded by dolts!”

Mycroft pressed a bit of cheese into his brother’s mouth and patted John’s head in sympathy. However, dear Sherlock’s anguish could be useful as negotiation tool…

“Concentrate on the most important matters of today, brother dear. I doubt your scientific investigations will suffer from the venerable state of Mother Lestrade’s vehicle.”

“Perhaps not today, however, I require a replenishment of supplies and at the nudibranch’s pace at which Lestrade’s vehicle crawls along the road, it shall take a fortnight to complete my provisioning.”

Nudibranch’s pace… that must be some archaic synonym for supersonic speed, since the future Mr. Lestrade-Holmes was often heard to break the sound barrier in his mother’s automobile. The local birds were nearly nude from the loss of feathers due to the vibration of the pressure waves.

“I shall convey your concerns to Gregory at my earliest convenience.”

As the boys turned attention to their snack and the nature of the experiments Sherlock had planned for the afternoon, Mycroft returned to his own work, but allowed his mind to linger on the structure of the remainder of the day. There would be children to supervise, a few matters of business to complete and, as his reward, the loving arms of his betrothed. Though their last weekend together had been highly fulfilling, it had also been chaste; this one would not follow that pattern. There was only so much self-control he could exercise and his supply had dwindled to the barest, meanest dregs
and from last night’s telephone conversation with his spouse, Gregory was suffering just as mightily…

Of course. Of fucking course. It just had to rain, didn’t it? Couldn’t have waited until he actually reached Mycroft’s house, oh no… that would have been too easy. Already he had to actually walk all the way out to the mini-palace because Mum needed the car, after walking home to get some clothes and a toothbrush, and now another walk. In the rain. With his clothes and, probably, his books getting soggy. The only thing that had gone right today was that he hadn’t been called out for missing class in the morning. The shop had been extremely busy, as it always was on Fridays, he had to walk to the ends of the Earth and beyond to get to Mycroft’s house and the boys would be…

the boys. Wonderful and completely insane and he was just so tired…

After a further hundred years, Lestrade saw the Holmes estate and wondered if he just lay in the road, would the flood waters carry him the rest of the way to the door. Deciding that wouldn’t happen, he continued to trudge onward until he reached the door and sounded the bell.

“Gregory! I… oh, dear lord… Sherlock! John! Quickly!”

Lestrade smiled a weary smile as small legs pistoned down the stairs and the boys gasped at his sorry state.

“The lackey is more of a fool than even I believed! Too imbecilic to come out of the rain until he is drenched to his feeble-witted core!”

Screeched simultaneously with Sherlock’s race back up the stairs and towards the bath towels. As Sherlock ran for towels, John grabbed Lestrade’s hand and dragged him further into the house, with Mycroft’s fretting and tutting providing the background music for the activities.

“Gregory… what has become of you?”

“Just a little wet, love.”

“A little wet… my beloved, are you so impaired, so ill that you have lost the ability to discriminate levels of saturation? You are infiltrated with water!”

“Just my things, Mycroft. I don’t think I swallowed any and my family’s famous for our tiny, tight pores. No water sneaking in that way, either.”

“This is not a time for jesting, Gregory. Ah, Sherlock… good.”

Sherlock pressed a towel into Lestrade’s hand and pointed towards his schoolbag, which John quickly pried out of Lestrade’s hands to carry with him towards the kitchen, yelling that he would return with tea.

“Why did you not telephone, my dear? If you are not taken with pneumonia, I shall be most surprised!”

“The rain came up while I was already walking. Mum needed the car tonight to meet some of her friends and I felt a little silly calling you to come and get me… it wouldn’t have been a problem, but the storm came up quickly and… everything just happened at the wrong time.”

This was absolutely unacceptable. His husband’s poor stressed body was this very instant fighting the ravages of the weather’s debilitation and that was an intolerable situation. This must never
happen again…

“We will speak further of this once you are warm and dry. John, thank you for your kindness in bringing Gregory a hot beverage. And to you, Sherlock for supplying a towel. Now, I shall take up the duty of caring for my sp… Gregory and we shall meet soon for, perhaps, a film. Is that acceptable?”

“If I avoid the possibility of viewing any portion of the peasant’s nudity, then I am agreeable.”

“Excellent. Come, my dear. Drink your tea and let us find for you some dry and comfortable clothing.”

Mycroft took Lestrade’s hand and urged him up the stairs to his bedroom where the order to strip was given and slowly obeyed.

“Oh my love, you are as bedraggled as a cat caught in a storm, which I suppose, is exactly what you are.”

“I’m just wet, Mycroft.”

“Just? I would refute that term in most expansive terms, however, I believe you are very well aware that your qualifier is ill-applied. And… you are also fatigued, are you not? No… do not answer. I cannot abide further dissembling. It is written upon you as the holy words on the tablets of Moses. Your day was long and tiring and now… this. I cannot allow it, Gregory… I simply cannot.”

Lestrade sighed and continued to dry his bare skin while Mycroft searched for clothing, making his argument over his shoulder and glaring at his partner. Running the towel through his hair, Lestrade had to admit that he couldn’t muster up a lot of annoyance at Mycroft’s mother-henning, because his lover was concerned for his welfare and that was the only reason for the discussion. He’d dated his fair share of people who would just have smirked at his misfortune and this, actually, did feel a lot better. Though… it was still a tiny bit irritating because, with Mycroft, you could never be exactly sure where a statement like ‘I cannot allow it, Gregory’ was going to lead. Tomorrow he’d probably have some form of weather monitoring equipment installed in his bedroom or something…”

“I’ll survive, love. Yeah, it was a long day… Friday usually is, but it’s nothing serious. It just seems serious because I did show up looking like a nearly-drowned cat, but with the water off my skin and something to wear, I’ll be fine. Anyway, how was your day? No crazed calls from Sherlock and John’s school because they had one last assault they wanted to launch, right?”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes and weighed the options of letting the discussion take the intended detour or continuing it along its previous trajectory. Perhaps a measure of both…

“No, no panicked communications, though the boys had an active day. As a final balm to your rain-battered body, let us enjoy a small glass of port while Sherlock and John regale you with their hardships. It is quite the story.”

“That sounds good. I could use a little theatre in my life.”

“So could we all.”

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Of course, Sherlock and John had to roll on the floor laughing at Lestrade’s clothes, which were actually Mycroft’s clothes, but a request for the epic saga of their torture yanked them straight from
the floor and into their performance positions to orate and mime every detail of their experience, sometimes several times with different stage directions to fully cement their point. Lestrade and Mycroft sat on the sofa, with Lestrade leaning slightly against his partner as the older Holmes idly ran his fingers across Lestrade’s thigh.

“So you see that this, clearly, was an inhuman punishment, fit only for the most heinous of criminals which we certainly are not!”

“Sherlock, your headmaster had far worse things planned for you, so you should thank Mycroft you only had to do a bit of scrubbing.”

“I extend my gratitude onto to those who have done for me a boon when it was not a required thing. As my slave, I mean, brother Mycroft is contractually-bound to tend to my needs. One does not thank a person for performing their job.”

“And I missed lunch!”

“Behold! John has been completely undone by the brutality of our incarceration and shall likely suffer permanent mental defect!”

“You’re still lucky you little bastards, because if it had just been me, you’d have been scrubbing more than two walls. I’d have brought along a book and had you working all weekend making the school sparkle.”

“Your ridiculous autocratic self-delusion is as pitiful as your appearance in the beluga’s garments. Further, Mycroft holds your leash, so why should John or I quake in fear?”

What a beautiful act of love… his dearest Gregory assuming the mantle of the stern parent to protect him from further of Sherlock’s derision when the truth of the situation was the reverse. If he had not been present, Sherlock and John would likely have been chastised with a bag of sweets and a short trip to London to shop for a greater range of supplies for their creative antics. Such a doting man was his lover… so kind and caring…

“Yeah, well, it’s going to be just me next year, so you’d better straighten up and be happy you’ve got anyone to fight for you.”

“Hah! Already you undercut your own argument! As Mother Lestrade withheld her vehicle from you this evening, so might she at any time and then you would be required to trek the miles to school on foot, sweating and gasping to arrive clownishly presented at the headmaster’s office where your efforts would be for naught! You would be laughed out of the rear door to huddle amongst the maggot population that calls them their home!”

John raised his arms in victory and Sherlock beamed in pride, prompting a very inappropriate chuckle from Mycroft, more for the opportunity the tirade presented than the substance of the words.

“He does have a point, my dear.”

“You, too! What is it, beat on Greg day?”

“Certainly not, but one simply cannot ignore a well-structured argument.”

“That was well-structured?”

“For a child of Sherlock’s tender years, most certainly.”
“What exactly did you put in your port and why didn’t I get any?”

“I give you full assurance of my sobriety, my love, however… it is perhaps a topic that bears discussion.”

“Me living in the rubbish with the maggots?”

Lestrade straightened himself on the sofa and Mycroft took as a warning the loss of warmth from his partner’s body. His husband was fatigued and battered… it would pay to step cautiously through the coming conversation.

“Of course not, as well you know. However, it occurred to me that the foundation of Sherlock’s argument, that of transportation, is a valid concern. Mother Lestrade requires her vehicle, though she has been most generous in lending it for our purposes, some of which, I have no doubt, has reduced its longevity due to harsh use. And, if you choose to find a new residence after you have completed your studies, that vehicle shall not be as readily available to you as it is currently. You shall be alone to tend the children, my beloved, and you will be called many times to transport them and/or yourself to fulfill their needs. How shall this occur if you do not possess reliable access to an automobile?’

Sherlock and John leapt aside and engaged in a round of furious whispering that concluded with another raised-arms victory pose from John. Apparently, Sherlock had caught the thread of his meaning and it met with both his and John’s approval. However, their votes did not count for this particular election.

“So we’ve got a lot of walking ahead of us? Nothing wrong with that. Exercise never hurt anyone.”

“With my books? And supplies? When we desire a film and you cannot obtain Mother Lestrade’s vehicle because she has driven herself to some location for the purposes of fornication, how shall we attend? Will John and I be led through the darkness, along tree-lined roads where any manner of paedophile might lie in wait for us? Has your love for us grown so cold that you would condemn us to defilement and death! Woe is me!”

Sherlock clutched his heart and John used his hand to fan the obviously-distressed boy.

Lestrade ran his hands through his hair and cut his eyes towards Mycroft, who tried to evince the most innocent smile he could manage.

“What’s going on?”

“Must you immediately leap in judgment to a conspiracy, Gregory?”

“With you lot? Yes.”

“Ah. Verily, I cannot deny that it is not sometimes merited.”

“Like this time.”

“I made no confession.”

“You didn’t have to. There’s so much guilt on your face that it’d take an hour for me to chisel it off.”

“Is guilt an encrusting material? Truly, I had no idea.”
“Mycroft… I’m tired and absolutely not in the mood to dance around like we did this morning. Stop groaning, you little bastards! Verbal dancing, than you very much… just say what you wanted to say and stop trying to maneuver me into somehow making your argument for you so you can just smile and call me a good boy.”

Very cautious treading through this conversation…

“Very well. It occurred to me today as I collected you from your school building, and reinforced by tonight’s events, that with the demands of the children, you must have access to guaranteed transportation. I know that you will ever refuse to simply make use of my driver, so there exists only a single alternative.”

Lestrade’s eyes widened as Mycroft’s meaning finally became clear.

“You are not buying me a car! I put my foot down to you buying one for Sherlock and I’m putting both down for this!”

“Then offer an alternative.”

“I’ll think of something!”

“And while you do, reflect upon the following. How enthusiastic would you be if you had been required to walk from your home to school, then to the meeting with the headmaster, followed by a return to school? And forget not that you would then have to hither to your place of employment, back to your home and then here, to monitor the boys entertainments. I do not see that as something you would find agreeable, even as exercise, for any prolonged duration of time. And Sherlock is not being entirely histrionic in his query about their shopping trips and excursions for entertainment. And when you are ensconced in your own residence… we have, at this point no knowledge of its location, which could dramatically worsen your predicament.”

“I’m not moving to Mongolia! I’m not sure I’m even moving out of the house at all! Mum’s car is…”

“Is perfectly suitable for a single woman and her son, however, it is not as suitable for a single woman, her son and his children. Who do not share a residence. And have strikingly demanding lives.”

“Those little buggers aren’t my kids!”

Sherlock and John immediately threw themselves onto the floor and clung to Lestrade’s legs bleating Papa!, We love you!, You need a car!...

“ARRGGHHH! Stop drooling on my legs!”

“The children are simply demonstrating their undying affection, my love. And their desire to continue enjoying the wonderful adventures which you have introduced to their lives.”

“You’re not buying me a car!”

“Consider it our car, Gregory. Our family car. The vehicle that we use for family matters so that no other automobile is subject to Sherlock and John’s burgeoning driving skills or less tidy endeavors.”

“Nope!”
The lamentations of the small figures on the floor escalated until Lestrade stood and began trudging across to the liquor bottles, dragging one child with each foot.

“Gregory… you must listen to reason. Consider the children. How greatly they treasure your companionship and attention. Would you deny them that which I know you also hold dear?”

“I’m not a fucking chauffeur!”

“No, that would be Driver, but you would look quite stunning in his uniform.”

Lestrade let out a bellow of frustration and with a kick honed by years of football, dislodged each boy and stormed out of the library carrying his now lethally-full glass of… something. It was alcoholic and that was really all that counted.

“Behemoth! Manage your marriage!”

Mycroft glared at Sherlock before racing out to intercept his partner before any rash actions were taken. Likely, there were no solicitors in their offices at this hour to prepare their divorce declaration, but this matter was far too serious to take anything for granted.

“Gregory!”

“That’s Driver to you!”

Lestrade was heading towards the door and Mycroft sprinted forward to forestall his abandonment.

“Gregory, please… may we speak? You do not wish to return outdoors… the rain continues and the temperature is most chill. Come, we shall not be disturbed in Father’s study. It is a quiet and restful room; I believe you will find the space pleasing.”

Lestrade hesitated because he really didn’t want to talk about this anymore, but, at the same time, he didn’t want to behave like an infant, even if he was ready to throttle his lover with a rope made of bank notes. Nodding once, Lestrade followed as Mycroft led him towards a room off of the library that was… well, his partner was right. It was a great room. As warm and inviting as the library, but obviously made for work. A large desk sat in front of the window and the rest of the furnishings were made of dark, heavy wood. Definitely a man’s room and it appealed to him greatly.

“This was your dad’s?”

“It was. Now, I suppose it is mine, though I admit I have yet to occupy the space as my own. Will you sit with me? I fear I have aggrieved you with my suggestion and I wish greatly to relieve your upset.”

Lestrade moved to the leather sofa and dropped onto it, taking a long sip of his drink while Mycroft took his own seat a few inches away.

“I did not wish to distress you, my dear. It seemed to me to be the most efficient and practical solution to the problem.”

“You can’t buy things like that for me, Mycroft. It’s not right.”

“By whose manifesto?”

“By mine! Look, love… I already get the tossers at school who ask me what I’m doing to keep a rich man like you around. What I do to get my hands on your money. How is it going to look when
I show up at school with a car that everyone knows I can’t afford?”

“It will appear that you were provided with a vehicle to ease your day-to-day responsibilities.”

“It’ll make me look like someone who trades sex for money!”

“Gregory Lestrade! I will not condone such talk!”

“Then don’t make it necessary!”

“I know very well that you are not looked upon negatively by any appreciable number of individuals. This is an issue of your own pride and conscience. Do not paint it with a blacker brush simply to support your position.”

“Mycroft… the real world thinks just like me. You can’t sit there and tell me that if you had a mate involved with someone like me and they bought them cars and things, you wouldn’t think exactly what I just said. That it wasn’t right, that it wasn’t real. That the common lad was using the posh one for what he could get and didn’t really care about him at all.”

“Gregory, that is a very… cinematic… perception of the issue.”

“Where do you think the films get their ideas? From what really goes on!”

Mycroft clucked his tongue in disapproval and lifted the glass from his partner’s hand for his own sip of nerve-soother.

And am I to expect aliens from outer space to land soon and attempt to take control of the government through body possession, because we viewed that very film not so long in the past?”

“No, you’re doing the black brush thing.”

“Merely highlighting that your evidentiary base is rather a shaky one.”

“My own two feet, Mycroft. That’s the way I have to live my life.”

“It is the dynamic of a couple that they cooperate, work together for the betterment of each other.”

“You start that argument and you’re going to sink yourself like the Bismark. I can’t ever give you things like a car. Ever. I can’t and I’m not going to be in a relationship where you’re handing me nice things and all I can give you… cheap things that would make your friends laugh if they saw them.”

Lestrade’s eyes flared open when Mycroft slapped away the hand he was using to fiddle with his pendant.

“You are skirting many uncrossable lines this evening, Gregory. You know well, I value my pendant as I value nothing else. And we have already come to the understanding that our lives shall be a blended one that acknowledges both our means and celebrates what we, as individuals, bring to the lives of the other. You are being purposefully difficult and I do not appreciate that particular tactic.”

Lestrade stole back the glass and drained it nearly dry.

“Sorry. And you’re right… that was just me being a bastard. Look, Mycroft… I’m not going to be my Dad, ok? Every penny Mum earned he spent on something, his girlfriends half the time.
When he left, we had people coming by for months afterwards looking for him because he owed them money. Not that Mum had anything to give them because he didn’t leave us with anything. Took the last few hundred in the bank with him and didn’t look back. John doesn’t want to be compared to his Dad and I don’t want to be compared to mine. I don’t want anyone saying I’m like him… taking and taking and taking… why are you laughing? I’m being serious!”

Mycroft grabbed Lestrade by the shoulders and gave him a firm and jubilant kiss.

“I am simply delighted that my beloved partner is a man of unimpeachable character. You, my dear, are in no manner like the person you describe and it is not possible for you to ever be so. I consider myself a very astute judge of character, it is absolutely necessary for the work I will do, and I can assure you that you are someone who stands as a model for honor, diligence and decency. And Grandmama’s eye is far keener than is mine; you know well how easily you gained her approval. I am happy I finally understand better your reluctance to accept any of my hoped-for indulgences and I do understand now, Gregory… I truly do. I shall not again speak against the worries you harbor for your pride and reputation for I see the foundation on which they are built, but I will do everything in my power to help you grow away from those worries and embrace the fact that you are your own man and one whose words and deeds will cripple any lingering prejudices born of blood or class-based misperceptions.”

“Really?”

“You know I speak the truth.”

“Yeah… I guess do. It’s hard though, Mycroft. You want to get me a flat, a car, and that’s not easy for me. Me and Mum worked hard for everything we have and… those things mean something because they were hard won. And I like that, as strange as it sounds. I like that what I have earned myself, but…”

“Yes?”

“You’re right that I’m not just me now. I’m part of an ‘us,’ and that’s important. Have to change the way I think, I suppose. At least a little.”

“How little?”

“You still want to get me a car, don’t you?”

“Want is not the proper word, I feel. Need is far better suited to the occasion. You are subject to a host of responsibilities, my love, and they will grow in number. Without transportation those responsibilities will become more and more onerous and it is my duty as your pre-fiancé to step in and make those responsibilities easier to bear.”

“Pre-fiancé?”

“I… it is properly descriptive.”

“You’re turning red.”

“Balderdash.”

“Red as a cherry.”

“Malarkey.”
“And turning redder.”

“Twaddle.”

“Let’s see… oh yeah, nice hot, red cheeks.”

“Flummery.”

“My Mycroft’s looking forward to the future, isn’t he?”

What a phenomenal understatement. And his Gregory seemed to be quickly losing his tension…

“Of course. As are you.”

“That’s true. And maybe I can actually pull the pole out of my arse and not be so stubborn about some things.”

Victory!

“We shall begin our shopping in the morning.”

“I didn’t say that! First, I’ve got to work. Then… I’m going to talk to Mum first. See what she thinks.”

Snatched from the jaws of victory!

“But you stated that your mother considers our affairs our own to manage.”

“True, but this… I want to talk to Mum. I’m trying Mycroft, but don’t expect things to change overnight.”

Damnation! Despite his assertions of expertise in deciphering a person’s nature, Mother Lestrade had proven to be troublesomely hard to properly interpret. His skills for deciphering matriarchal types required further honing.

“Of course, my love. A very prudent decision.”

“And I’m sorry for getting angry. Sherlock got his last weekend and you got yours this weekend. Maybe these weekend things are a bad idea.”

“I would say they are an exceedingly welcome idea for they are allowing ideas and issues to be expressed and explored, which is a very good outcome indeed.”

“I suppose. But, is it time for a little fun, now?”

“I believe it is. I have a selection of films we might find amusing and the children undoubtedly have some ideas of their own for the time.”

“Then we should get started. I am tired and I’d hate to fall asleep on you.”

“But I adore it when you rest upon me, my love.”

“Ok, I’d hate to fall asleep in all my clothes and start snoring so you can’t hear the film you’re watching.”

“Ah. I agree. Sherlock and John would likely be displeased and create some disruption to
disturb your slumber. And you know how… energetic… their disruptions can be.”

“Creative, too.”

“Truly beyond compare.”

Lestrade worked his morning hours at the shop as, as soon as Mycroft collected him from work, they drove, along with the boys to Lestrade’s house to continue the discussion from the previous night. Sitting at the kitchen table, Mycroft ran through his carefully-prepared speech, which succinctly outlined the reasons why his spouse should be provided with a vehicle of his own and his husband’s thoughts on the subject, but had no idea how his proposition was being evaluated by his mother-in-law. Last night had somewhat calmed his lover’s lingering anxieties through a slightly slapstick film, which also had Sherlock and John laughing and, worryingly, scripting notes, then, after the children had been put to bed, a long night of tender, sensual lovemaking that brought him to release twice before his husband’s fatigue became too heavy and he was given his most favorite gift of watching his spouse drift quietly to sleep. Now he was rested, buoyant from residual sexual satiation and using every of the kinder weapons in his arsenal to highlight the necessity of what he was proposing.

Once Mycroft had finished, all eyes turned to Lestrade’s mother, with Sherlock even stopping the rapid consumption of his stack of biscuits to await the verdict.

“Let me see if I understand you. You say Greg needs a car so things like last night don’t happen again, which I am sorry about, son. If I’d known we were expecting rain, I would have shared a ride with someone. And, before you go through with whatever you’re preparing to say, Mycroft, I know that’s not the only reason. You also say he’s going to need something to keep up with these two little miseries and their nonsense. And did I hear something about my son leaving home?”

Mycro cut eyes at Lestrade who nodded slightly. It was something upon which they had decided before he left for work this morning… today was as good a time as any to broach the topic of Lestrade’s change in address at some point in the foreseeable future.

“It is only a possibility, by no means a certainty. It was something mentioned in passing as we discussed the trajectory of the months before we both embark upon the next phases of our lives.”

“I see.”

But, was that a fortunate or unfortunate see…

“I’m not moving out on you, Mum. I was just thinking about a flat of my own once I started whatever job it is I’ll have once I finish school. And not even right away… once I get settled and know what to expect.”

“Simply an area of discussion, not yet even tiptoeing into the planning stage. Hypothetical, at best. However, should that eventuality occur, the free access to your own venerable automobile would be restricted.”

Lestrade’s mother pursed her lips and nodded, standing to start for herself a second cup of tea and every voice remained silent, too frightened to break the spell and destroy even the possibility of her being in favor of the idea. After a moment, it was the only female voice in the room that broke the silence.

“I’ve got to agree with Greg, Mycroft. It doesn’t go well for people like us when we start taking expensive gifts from those with money, like you. Down the road, when you’re more established and
it’s been made clear that you’re together for love and not money, it’s a different story, but right now… he’s not worrying for nothing. Greg’s mates know the truth and so do mine, but there’s still enough people out there who might think otherwise that will make his life difficult. So, I’ve got to say no. Right now, I don’t think it’s a good idea you get Greg a car.”

Mycroft reasoned that the gravitational force in the room had, against all strictures of physics, instantly intensified because it felt as if his entire spine was being compressed to a small square on the seat of his chair.

“That being said, nobody says his mother can’t buy him one.”

The re-stretching of his vertebral column hurt nearly as much as it’s crushing and Mycroft found himself choking a little from the experience.

“I… I was given to understand that such an expenditure was, do forgive me for saying, out of your reach.”

“It is. That’s why you’re going to loan me the money and I’ll use it to pay for something for my lazy son.”

John fell out of his chair and Sherlock followed suit to show solidarity.

“Mum… how are you going to repay Mycroft? You can barely afford an extra quid a week right now!”

“Easy. I’m not.”

Lestrade thought about joining Sherlock and John on the floor, but that would have left Mycroft unprotected and that wasn’t what a proper pre-fiancé did.

“What? I’m completely confused.”

“Well, let’s see. Think I haven’t noticed the extra dings and nicks in my car? Or that the brakes have gone a bit squishy and the transmission a little dodgy? My poor old girl’s getting beaten like a prisoner of war and I know I’m not doing it.”

Sherlock’s ‘Slander!’ went entirely unremarked.

“And I’m getting eaten out of house and home, have a new dress I have to buy for a big party I’m going to in a couple of weeks and there’s the ages of child minding I’m in for, I have no doubt, when Mycroft’s away at school and there are days you have to work late. The cost of something from Georgie’s dad’s is going to be a good bargain for our Mycroft, compared to the cost of what you lot are getting for free. And nobody has to know anything besides I put my name on the bill of sale and got my son a cheap, raggedy car that, who knows, maybe he saved his wages to pay for a bit himself.”

No… no, he would not weep at the beauty of this mother-in-law’s mind. Such a clever plan. Ingenious, even. Entirely duplicitous, yet efficient in accomplishing the objective without loss of face for his beloved. It was little wonder his dear husband’s own creativity and wellspring of ideas was so very formidable.

“I do think Greg should have a car, Mycroft, and I don’t see anything wrong, necessarily, with you getting it for him. It’s what you do… use what you have to get what you need and sometimes one of you will have the right thing and sometimes it will be the other. Just remember that your relationship is… prone to misunderstandings… by quite a lot of people, on Greg and my side and on
yours, too. Once you’ve got some years behind you it won’t be as much of an issue, but keep it in mind, ok?”

“I shall. And I am inexpressibly thankful for your very creative solution to our dilemma.”

“Does this mean we get a car?”

Mycroft smiled down at John who was lying there as if his and Sherlock’s protest against furniture could help sway the balance.

“We?”

“Yeah… Greg, Sherlock and me.”

Very good. The boy was viewing it properly as the family vehicle. The Jaguar or other option was fine for certain occasions, but the day-to-day affairs were best conducted through the use of a more child-friendly automobile. He did not want to know the cost Grandmama absorbed because of the necessity of cleaning her fine and vintage upholstery every time it hosted Sherlock and his chocolate artistry.

“I believe we are.”

Two small bodies jumped off the floor and back into their seat, grinning widely and cutting eyes towards the front door.

“Mum… are you sure about that?”

Mycroft rubbed his lover’s leg under the table and smiled encouragingly.

“Yes, Greg, I am. It’s something I’ve actually thought about, but… well, it isn’t like I could do much about it. But the petrol comes out of your pocket! And if I hear that you’re piling in all of your mates and getting up to no good, don’t think I won’t be taking the keys off of you until you learn some responsibility.”

Finally, Lestrade’s brilliant grin stretched across his face and he reached out to give Mycroft’s hand a hard squeeze.

“Thanks! And I won’t do anything stupid, I promise!”

“Then get out of here and go looking. If you see something you like, call me and I’ll come down to sign the papers. Mycroft, do you have cash to slip me if this one finds anything?”

“I shall retrieve an appropriate quantity from home before we begin our browsing.”

“Good. Alright you four… you don’t want to be inside with me. Take my car and bring that big beauty of Mycroft’s back where she belongs. You won’t get a good price on anything showing up in a lovely thing like that.”

Four bodies jumped up from the kitchen table, two small ones quickly filling their hands and pockets with biscuits before they ran after the larger ones to start their shopping excursion. Once they were gone, Lestrade’s mother let out a big sigh then started laughing. She never, ever believed that her son finding love would turn out to be quite this entertaining…

“Gregory… are you quite sure this is the correct location?”
“Sure! My mate George’s dad sells second-hand cars and good ones, too. Well, at least cars that aren’t stolen or likely to fall apart after a week of driving them. And we’ll get a good price, since Georgie knows us and his Mum and my Mum have been friends for… well, since before I was born. This is going to be great!”

Mycroft looked around and reflected on the vehicles he saw before him and wondered if it was too late to try and convince his lover into a trip to London to peruse the wider range of cars available for the… more discriminating… buyer. However, Sherlock and John had already abandoned their current vehicle and sped forward to investigate the possible offerings, and corralling them at this point, not to mention the extended trip to the city with impatient children in tow… no, they were now committed to the task. It was not, however, out of line, perhaps, to hope that the current selection did not meet with his lover’s approval.

“And off they go! You’d think it was them getting a car and not me.”

“I believe they perceive it as theirs, in some sense, as a portion of its purpose is for their benefit. And, their driving lessons shall now take place within its confines. When they, however, become of age, we will need to consider again what possibilities exist for their personal use.”

“And you’re thinking about John in that, too, aren’t you?”

“Of course! Dear John will have long earned his own automobile after the time and effort he will have expended in weathering Sherlock’s hysteria.”

“Another little trade program, like for Mum.”

“Precisely. I do admire your mother greatly, my dear. It is quite a simple matter to understand from where your stellar qualities arise.”

“And my naughtier ones, too. Mum doesn’t think I know that she had her share of fun before she and dad got married, but I do. Used to go dancing most every chance she got and always with a handsome lad on her arm.”

“Every day, my esteem for Mother Lestrade grows.”

“Plus she lets you get what you want.”

“That is her most appealing attribute.”

Mycroft’s tiny smug smile would have earned him a little time in the car’s rear seat under a very eager spouse, however, the cacophony of familiar screeching, mixed with a deeper, confused tone forestalled any spontaneous eruptions of lust. Quickly exiting the vehicle, the older boys moved towards the sound and the fury until they found Sherlock in the driver’s seat of a relatively new, moderately-sized car that Mycroft had to admit wasn’t a completely horrendous option.

“That’s my car, you little terror! Who do you belong to, anyway?”

“That’d be me, Mr. Stuart. And Mycroft.”

The large man turned and, when he saw the new arrivals, let a smile replace the irritated grimace on his face.

“Greg! And this must be your boyfriend. Georgie told me about him. He’s around here somewhere... are you looking for him?”
“Actually, no. I’m here to look for a car.”

“You?”

“Yes, sir. Mum’s going to pay for it, but it’ll be mine to drive. As soon as she agreed, we came right here. Best cars for the best prices, that’s what I told Mycroft.”

Good, my love. Flattery is a powerful negotiating tool. Not that any vehicle on this particular plot of land could make even a perceptible dent in the cash he had withdrawn from his personal safe, but it was good to stay in practice.

“And you’re right! May not be the prettiest things, but everyone knows they run like a racehorse and will last you. None of that losing a transmission or an electrical system getting gremlins like you see on cars these days. The wife’s brother does all the mechanical work and he’s the best in the area.”

“It does look like a good engine.”

Mycroft rushed forward and pulled John away from his inspection duties, although how the small boy actually opened and secured the bonnet was unfathomable.

“This is not an available option, John. Let us, perhaps, seek something that is actually purchasable.”

John huffed loudly and shouted for Sherlock to follow him, leaving Mycroft to hope that other employee vehicles were property secured.

“Those two are little missiles, aren’t they? Good for them. Boys that young should have a strong spark. I’ve heard the stories about them, too. Tell me the truth, Greg, did they really blow up that science lab at school?”

“Well, not so much explode as fill it with toxic gas, but nobody got hurt, so I got it settled quickly.”

“Good to hear. Let me tell you, Mycroft… this one has a good head on his shoulders and there’s not a harder working lad as far as you can see. You’ve picked a quality one and don’t let anyone tell you differently.”

Greg shuffled his feet and just knew Mycroft was preening a little, although he refused to actually look and find out. Mycroft’s little smug smile had already nearly gotten them in a compromising position; his lover really looking prideful would be too hard to resist.

“I shall not and I agree wholeheartedly with your assessment. Gregory is a marvel and I plan to hold fast to him come what may.”

“That’s what I like to hear! Now, let’s take a look at what I have and see if something interests you. If not, let me know what you’re looking for and I can put out the word. Always someone willing to sell if the price is right.”

Mycroft and Lestrade shared a grin and followed behind the older man, who didn’t seem to have a problem talking even if no one was actually responding. Slowly they meandered through the available automobiles, periodically intersecting Sherlock and John who seemed self-propelled by their own agenda, until they actually found the two boys standing in front of a smallish, bluish, oldish car, their arms folded and familiar, serious scowls affixed to their lips.
“You will purchase this one. Telephone Mother Lestrade immediately.”

Mycroft ignored their host’s laughter and began to walk around the vehicle, conducting his own evaluation.

“Your rationale?”

“We like it.”

“That is not quite the robust body of empirical evidence I would have hoped to receive, John.”

“But liking something is the most important thing!”

“I would put that criteria, actually, somewhat below road-worthiness, safety rating, fuel economy, comfort of ride, projected repair costs…”

The twin moanings of ‘Boring!’ started another round of laughter that, this time, had Lestrade joining in.

“Mycroft’s got a point, little men. Got to look at the whole package, not just the wrapping on the outside.”

“The wrapping on the outside is appalling! It is almost too hideous on which to gaze! I feel my eyes blistering in their sockets and if I am relegated to a life requiring a seeing-eye dog, you will follow me to remove the dog waste that pollutes the floors!”

“Then what do you like about it, you little bastards?”

Sherlock and John had a whispered conversation, then Sherlock took point as their reporter.

“First, it appears suitably constructed with no obvious leaks. It is sufficiently sized that both myself and John may ride in some approximation of comfort, however, it is not so large that you can transport the full pack of wild dogs you call your friends.”

“You know, Mr. Stuart’s son is one of that pack of dogs.”

“Yes, the vaguely mastiff-looking one. He, at least, does not explode into peals of laughter when someone releases gas.”

“Yeah, that’s Georgie. He’s the most genteel of us all. What else you have for evidence?”

“The rear storage compartment is acceptably large to carry my supplies, unlike Mother Lestrade’s vehicle which can scarcely house half of a blade of freshly clipped grass. Also…”

Sherlock extracted a small booklet from his pocket.

“I have studied the manual. Based on the data, I conclude that the thrust provided by the engine will be suitably poor to retard your tendencies towards violating driving speed regulations and, as a side benefit, reduce your need to purchase petrol, leaving the bulk of your laughably-small wages for my and John’s benefit, as it should be.”

“And both Sherlock and I can reach all the pedals! I’ll still need a little help to see out of the front, but we’ll be able to get our lessons without any problem at all. The radio works, too!”

Mycroft hid his grin at his lover’s noticeable deflation at the assessment of the vehicle’s speed, but, himself, rubbed his mental hands together in satisfaction. The fewer chances his beloved had to
marry himself to a utility pole, the greater the chance of their own marriage in the future.

“A very admirable synopsis, boys. Thank you. My dear, your thoughts?”

Though his love’s words were only perfunctory at this point. He could already read the signs on his husband, which were loudly proclaiming that the decision was made, in no small part attributable to the fact that if the children were happy, it would reduce greatly the degree of their complaining while out and about.

“They put a lot of thought into their side of the debate, didn’t they?”

“Truly, they have crafted a very effective argument.”

Lestrade nodded and turned to their host who looked back with eyes that were already seeing the world ‘Sold’ written across Lestrade’s forehead.

“Can Mycroft and I take her for a drive?”

“And John and I!”

“Can we all take her for a drive?”

One set of keys was retrieved and dropped into Lestrade’s hands and in a minute, the entire family had occupied the car and started down the road. Mycroft sat in the passenger’s seat and wriggled a bit before pronouncing it acceptable. And his ears did not notice any worrying sounds from the fore or aft of the vehicle signaling an overt crisis. Besides the children, of course, who were already arguing as to who would have which side of the car as their personal kingdom.

“My love?”

“Well, the steering’s tight. She shifts cleanly. Brakes are a little soft, but that’s probably air in line and I can make George take care of it the lazy berk. Says he wants to take over his uncle’s shop someday, but can’t be fucked to actually work unless you threaten to pound his skull. Not much pep, though…”

“Something for which John and I are immensely thankful. There is not nearly enough insurance on my life to cover the cost to humanity if I were to die because of your addiction to speed!”

“And I sort of get carsick!”

“You did not inform me of this, John Watson.”

“Well, it’s normally not a problem unless we’re going really fast and taking a lot of turns.”

“Testimony! The menial’s vehicular behavior is vomit inducing! I shall not be drenched with John Watson’s stomach contents to satisfy his unseemly machismo!”

“I am afraid, Gregory, that the aforementioned lack of ‘pep’ cannot be relegated to the detriments side of the argument.”

“Shit.”

“Another thing John shall likely do at some point because of your unbridled lust for velocity!”

“Hey!”
As a new argument raged, Mycroft simply reclined, turned on the radio and found a soothing station to provide the soundtrack. Sneaking small glances towards his spouse, he followed the train of his Gregory’s thought through several twists and turns from the various smiles, frowns, thoughtful purses of the lips and distracted tapping of his fingers on the steering wheel. However, it was clear to what end the path was leading.

“I like it.”

The three words stopped World War Rear and prompted a small cheering before a further argument started on who would be the first to have a lesson the ‘their’ new car.

“I am so pleased, my dear. I admit that it seems a sturdy vehicle and one which you are already piloting masterfully and comfortably.”

“It does handle the road nicely, that’s true. Not as maneuverable as Mum’s, but it’s a bit longer, so that makes sense. All in all… it’s a good choice. Now, we just have to get it for a good price.”

“Pish tosh. Whatever the man wants…”

“No, that’ll look weird. Everybody negotiates for their cars and poor people fight even harder for the best deal. You think you’re up to doing Mum proud?”

Lestrade adored how Mycroft’s whole face lit up when he was presented with a challenge. It made him even more gorgeous than he usually was.

“Oh, I do believe we shall receive a very fair price for your new chariot. A very fair price, indeed…”

Lestrade almost felt sorry for his friend’s dad because Mycroft, even using a gentle hand as he’d asked, still dominated any negotiation he was part of and when they finally called his mum and she arrived, even she was surprised by how little of Mycroft’s clandestinely-slipped cash she was asked to part with. While she filled out the necessary paperwork, Sherlock and John thoroughly mapped every part of the car and began planning the various activities to which it would be put and Mycroft watched carefully that they did not become overeager and begin disassembling necessary and expensive-to-replace components.

“So, Dad was right. You’re really getting a car?”

Both older boys turned to see Lestrade’s friend George grinning at them.

“That I am. Mum decided that I could use something what with her needing her car for work and me having more to do and people to chauffeur. I think we picked out a good one.”

“You did. Never been wrecked and well-maintained from what I could tell. It’ll serve you well. I’m surprised though… I sort of thought when I heard that your Mycroft here decided to give you a little present.”

Even though his friend was joking, Lestrade gave Mycroft a look that the older Holmes interpreted easily. For not everyone would such a thing have been said in jest. Now, however, their intended cover story would spread and his darling husband would be spared any distress from potential detractors.

“The sort of presents Mycroft gives me don’t involve us being clothed and talking to the likes of
you.”

“The very best kind! And now that you’re independently mobile, I’ve got lots of ideas of places we can go when Mycroft’s off on one of his holidays.”

“Back, peasant! You will not attempt to commandeer our vehicle, lest you find your attempts repelled with maiming force!”

Sherlock and John stood in front of the potential pirate, fully prepared to defend their prized car from any possible attempts at theft or corruption.

“And little Sherlock, with his good friend John. Still cute as ugly puppies.”

“Something about which you will become very familiar as your offspring shall differ from canines only in level of intelligence, with the canine’s easily having the upper hand.”

“Hah! You’re still quick, Sherlock. I see why Greg likes you. With you around people forget about him being a big, dumb, shop boy.”

“Finally! Someone who properly recognizes the peon’s lack of societal potential. You might not be as worthless as I had previously assumed.”

“Well, that’s my day made, then. And it looks like your Mum’s finished with the paperwork. Dad will take care of the rest and since you haven’t gotten your driving license torn up for being a bastard who drives like a drunken Formula 1 racer, I think you’re ready to go. Congratulations, Greg. You’re the proud father of someone else’s rubbish car.”

“Thanks, George. Next time me and the boys see you when we’re out shopping, I’ll let them go ahead with their plan to make you their next victim. Sherlock’s got some great experiments he’s been desperate to try.”

“And I shall! It is a simple matter to carry with me a prepared syringe.”

“Mycroft, how do you manage this miserable lot?”

“With great difficulty, George, I assure you.”

“I can believe that. Well, have fun everyone. I’ve got to go work for a living.”

With a large wink, Sherlock’s new best friend left the happy family, who was joined by one of their queens.

“All taken care of. Try not to crash the thing before the ink is dry on the papers, ok?”

“I’m not going to crash, Mum. I’ve got three very cautious people watching me, so everyone’s getting a safe ride home.”

“Good. Here… take some of my actual money for a little celebration. I’m sure everyone’s going to be hungry after a very long afternoon of driving. All of you planning to take a turn at the wheel, I’d wager.”

Four gleeful smiles was all the answer she needed.

“Then I’ll take my poor old car and be on my way. Have fun, boys. And remember, son… don’t be home late tomorrow.”
“I won’t, Mum.”

Lestrade tossed his mother her car keys who, before she was even halfway to her car, heard a valiant attempt at a speedy getaway occur behind her and crossed her fingers that someone remembered to look at the petrol gauge very soon.

Several hours of driving, one stop for a very filling multiple-pizza meal and an hour or so at the pub for the older generation to enjoy a pint and the younger to complain about being served juice when champagne was decidedly in order made for a picture-perfect afternoon. And, by the time the drinks arrived, Lestrade was already being congratulated on his new car, with Mycroft soaking up the enjoyment of being included in the banter as Lestrade’s friends crowded around their table, demanding details and making plans for this newest source of transportation. And those plans embraced him as part of the ribaldry, which made the older Holmes brother positively giddy. So giddy, he agreed to at least serve as team strategist for the next football match in which his Gregory was able to participate. When they were finally able to make their way back outdoors, it was still quite awhile before they could start for home, owing to the amount of inspection and short test drives through which the newest member of the family was put by Lestrade’s friends.

“I nearly expired from both the stench of the unwashed masses and their ceaseless prattle!”

“Oh, that wasn’t you happily collecting those hair samples you’ve got spread around you and John’s pockets?”

“That’s science, Greg. It has nothing to do with fun.”

Lestrade watched Sherlock’s solemn nod of approval and patted his partner’s leg to help Mycroft control his urge to laugh.

“Sorry, forgot about that. Well, at least you two have something to work on tonight while Mycroft and I have some time together.”

“And we are thankful for it! Already I feel my life force ebbing from proximity to your inferior autosomes.”

“Shame that. John, give him a hand stuffing that all back in.”

Their car… their family car… Mycroft knew he was nearly purring with satisfaction and had not a care for it because this was glorious. His spouse, himself and the children enjoying a ride in a vehicle that was purely for their use. Their first item to build their household. And how bewitching did his lover appear piloting them confidently back towards their current home, though that, too, would change someday. They would have their own home and their own belongings… so many wonderful things lay in store as the future approached…

Sherlock and John vaulted out of the vehicle as soon as the engine was turned off and, after a look back to make sure their newest toy wasn’t going anywhere, quickly ran into the house and up to Sherlock’s lab to begin the rest of their evening.

“Good, they’re gone.”

Mycroft tuned a quizzical eye towards his lover, but had his puzzlement satisfied by the very fiery kiss he received.
“You have no idea how happy I am right now, love. This is going to be amazing! And helpful… already I feel like a weight’s been lifted off me and I never really thought I’d had the weight on me to begin with.”

“I am positively thrilled for you, Gregory. I know how you value independence and this shall assist with that immeasurably.”

“It will. It definitely will. My own little ship on the miles of winding oceans.”

“Scintillatingly poetic.”

“And ships get christened, don’t they?”

“It is traditional, I believe.”

“Then come on. They won’t miss us for a bit.”

Lestrade nudged Mycroft towards the passenger door and leapt back behind the wheel, to drive them a little ways away from the house, out of sight of any curious eyes peeping out of windows. As on their very first date, once the car was stopped, Lestrade ran around to open Mycroft’s door, but this time, took him in the kiss he would have adored to give his partner that first night.

“There we go. Now, how about we give my little ship a proper welcome?”

Watching his partner take a step back, Mycroft began to get an inkling of Lestrade’s plan and that inkling grew into anticipation seeing his lover begin to remove his clothes piece by piece.

“It’s a little chilly tonight, Mycroft. Come keep me warm.”

Mycroft hoped his gulp wasn’t audible as Lestrade lay on the bonnet of the car, humming contentedly at the heat on his back. In three heartbeats, Mycroft was as bare as his dear spouse and standing between his lover’s spread thighs.

“Now, how about you do some very filthy things to me that are going to make me and my new girl very, very dirty.”

Mycroft ran his hands over his partner’s skin and drank in Lestrade’s hiss of pleasure.

“I believe I have a few ideas to implement.”

“Then please do. Nothing I love more than being implemented on by you.”

“And what you love you shall always receive.”

“You know, I don’t think anyone in the world is luckier than I am.”

“There is one person, my dear. And he is currently exploring his luck with great delight.”

“Got myself an adventurer. This just keeps getting better!”

A thought that Mycroft had each day. His husband was absolutely correct… they were astoundingly lucky and he, for one, was not going to waste a moment of that luck. There was far too much of his spouse’s skin begging for his attention…
Chapter 21

Mycroft lay in bed, spooned tightly with the center of his world and reflected on life as he scattered light kisses across Lestrade’s shoulder. They had obtained a family vehicle. A vehicle for their family. His beloved would be able to care for the children with much greater ease and tend to his own matters more efficiently, but there was so much more to the joy… their car. Only for them, with himself and his Gregory serving as the parental pair to Sherlock and John who were chauffeured in the rear, as was appropriate. And now, they slept in their bed, which is only how he could now think of the bed in which he had slept since he was a very small boy. It was theirs, christened thusly by their passion and devotion. So many nights in his life, he had not even seen his bed, due to other obligations and necessities, but now it was a joy to pass the hours in such a manner, lying quietly in slumber, sharing heat that was a symbol of the flame of their love.

In truth, as he reflected further… he could broaden his thinking. The house, for all intents and purposes, was his. Not Mummy’s, but his, with Grandmama as the conservator. And what was his was his husband’s. Therefore, this was their house. Their residence where they raised the two young chicks under their care. For a small while, he could have a taste of their future, with him and his spouse in their own home stewarding their family and, therefore, a step forward was not inappropriate. It was time, it was finally time to move into Father’s study. It was time to take that room finally as his workspace as Father had done, and delight in the other spaces as family areas, where they shared the joys and hardships of their lives. It was time to step away from being the son who tried to contain the fury of his younger brother and don the mantle of a greater responsibility. Not that he had not done so before, but it was not the same. With his spouse, the dynamic had changed and he gloried in that change. He could never, not in a thousand lifetimes, fill Father’s substantial shoes or match the incomparable parenting skills of his own beloved, but it was time to reach as high and far as he could to emulate their model. Their house, their vehicle, their family… the ecstasy was nearly overwhelming…

“Hungry?”

Mycroft snapped out his reverie and sheepishly released Lestrade’s shoulder muscle from between his teeth.

“Merely euphoric.”

“That’s reason enough, then. Carry on.”

“My love enjoys being nibbled.”

“My love enjoys nibbling.”

“We are supremely well-matched.”

“There’s no doubt about that. And I’m finding out a lot about myself just by knowing you. Never knew I liked being marked like that or that I wasn’t bad with kids. Definitely didn’t know how hot a really brilliant man could get me. Or, maybe that’s just you. Guess I’ll never know which it is, since I’m not giving anybody the chance to let me find out.”

“Something for which I am forever grateful.”

A gratitude that was expressed by a long lick up Lestrade’s neck and a wandering of Mycroft’s hand across the firm muscles of Lestrade’s stomach.
“I love you eternally, my Gregory. I lie here now and know that you are what permits my heart to beat and my soul to find peace. This, what we have found, is of paramount importance to me. And so, my beloved, are you.”

“You’re feeling very romantic this morning.”

“I find that I am. Something I have learned about myself. I have never considered myself to be someone whose heart was more than a mechanism to move blood through my body, but now… now I know it is far more critical to my existence.”

“Another thing I like. It’s nice to be thought of that way. Usually, it’s me being the romantic one, but now it comes my way, too, and that’s something I enjoy a lot. My Mycroft is a romantic gentleman and that makes him a very special person, indeed.”

Mycroft rolled Lestrade in his embrace and gave his lover a small kiss on his nose.

“And I give you my solemn word, Gregory, that I shall always be that for you.”

“That’s what I like to hear. As long as I have my Mycroft, life’s going to good.”

“Something I enjoy hearing. And feeling… I do believe something good is happening right now, if I am not mistaken.”

Mycroft wriggled his hips slightly to more fully feel Lestrade’s growing erection.

“I would agree. And I’m not one to let something good pass me by without making the most of it.”

“Have you an opportune suggestion to take advantage of the situation, my dear?”

“You know, I didn’t get a taste last night.”

“An oversight you are anxious to correct?”

“Nothing better before breakfast than a little taste of my partner.”

“Then do enjoy yourself.”

Lestrade grinned broadly and, after using a finger to direct Mycroft onto his back, slithered downward, laying a line of kisses over his lover’s milky skin, ending with a long, low hum as his lips pressed against something that was more than happy to offer a jerk of greeting.

“Perfect morning snack. Looks beautiful, feels beautiful, tastes beautiful… not surprising since it’s yours…”

With a slow slide of his lips, Lestrade began to take Mycroft into his mouth, humming again to match his partner’s moan of delight. His lover really was delicious, every one of his senses thought so. And, since no one ever accused him of self-denial, sampling that deliciousness as often as possible was something he definitely intended on doing. For as long as possible.

“Please, Gregory…”

Delicious… and lingering licks of his tongue along very sensitive skin bought him even more lovely flavor. Sucking was the best, though. Gentle sucking and lapping always bought him Mycroft’s needy whimpers and tiny drops of the most amazing…
“We are ready to commence the day!”

Mycroft yanked the duvet up and over Lestrade and tried valiantly to quiet his frantically-beating heart as the door was pushed open a microsecond after Sherlock announced his warning.

“Sherlock! It is appropriate to wait until being invited before entering our bedroom!”

“Piffle. You were warned, that is sufficient.”

“Where’s Greg?”

John looked around, finally realizing that the large mound under the thick bed covers wasn’t just Mycroft’s legs.

“Why’s Greg under the blankets? Are you playing a game?”

“What! How dare you engage in an entertainment and fail to include us!”

Mycroft glared back at his brother, desperately trying to keep the nature of his and his husband’s game out of his voice and off his expression. Apparently, his dearest Gregory pressed close to and breathing on his refusing-to-wane erection was its own form of sensual pleasure.

“It is not required that Gregory and I include you and John in every one of our diversions.”

“Then you admit our exclusion!”

“I admit nothing except that as you and John often elect to partake in your own enjoyment, so, at times do Gregory and I.”

“The peasant and you exist solely for our benefit, if you have yet to fully comprehend that simple fact, and I am very aware I did not grant permission for any form of independent recreation. Therefore, this is an unsanctioned action and subject to penalty.”

Which could not be in any manner as great as the penalty to which he was being subjected currently. Apparently, beloved spouse found their predicament amusing and delighted in demonstrating his amusement with quick flicks of his wicked tongue.

“No, penalty is not warranted and I would greatly appreciate your absence from our bedroom.”

“But we want breakfast!”

“The kitchen staff is awake and ready to provide you with your morning meal, John. Do say hello to them for me, will you?”

“But we also want to drive!”

“Which cannot occur simultaneously with your breakfast, so tend to your nutrition and, then, we shall consider your driving lesson.”

“Do not agree, John Watson. His blatant attempts to coerce our eviction tell quite the tale. The degree of his urgency likely correlates directly with the entertainment value to be had if we remain.”

“Sherlock, that is simply not the case…”

“We shall now embark your mattress. Do not attempt to counter our actions.”
Sherlock and John began to march towards the bed, spurring Mycroft to try and pull Lestrade upwards, though his spouse obviously had other plans.

“Anyone jumping on the bed is going to get bounced right back off. Listen to Mycroft you miserable goblins and go eat your breakfast!”

“Your muffled garble is joyfully unintelligible, lackey.”

“How’s this – piss off!”

“Vulgar, but not entirely unexpected.”

John snuck around to the empty side of the bed and began to crawl upwards, only to find the blankets he was using as a vine snatched from his grip.

“This is not a Navy ship and you are not pirates! Cease your bothersome conduct and find your own amusement for the moment!”

Which was precisely the wrong thing for Mycroft to say as Sherlock and John both began a loud round of aarrr’s and matey’s and commenced an attempt to overtake the bed via the foot of the mattress, this time, using Lestrade’s legs as boarding ropes.

“Fuck! Get off of me you bastards!”

Lestrade kicked sharply, but Sherlock and John held on like monkeys on a tree branch.

“Still yourself, gangplank!”

“I’m getting sick!”

“Cease your molestation of my husband!”

The resulting tussle lasted several minutes, with Mycroft desperately trying to preserve the modesty of his spouse, conceal their personal activities and dislodge the parasites that had affixed themselves to his beloved. The war might have raged all morning if Sherlock’s piercing wail had not split the air like a thunderclap and everyone froze in place.

“I have been blinded by the buttocks!”

Mycroft followed his brother’s accusing finger towards his currently-exposed backside which was clearly displayed as he lay stomach-down on the bed.

“Me too!”

John tried to roll his eyes back in his head like he’d seen in films, but decided it was too difficult, and shut them instead. In a millisecond, they shot back open and a second shriek filled the room.

“That means we’re on naked Greg!”

Sherlock’s gasp of terror shook the bed.

“I am defiled!”

After making a decidedly Catholic sign of the cross, Sherlock dove off of Lestrade’s duvet-shrouded body and ran for the bedroom door with John hot on his heels.
“My dear… are you alright?”

The trembling of the mass of bedding was making Mycroft quite concerned, until he lifted a corner and found his spouse shaking with laughter.

“Little trolls got more than they bargained for, didn’t they?”

“I believe they shall carry the scars for the reminder of their days.”

“Might make them think twice before barging in again.”

“Perhaps, however, Sherlock has shown a questionably-admirable ability to forget all life lessons within minutes of their instruction.”

“You’re probably right. I guess we’d better get dressed and make certain they’re not taking their disgust out on the kitchen staff.”

“That might be wise. I’m afraid we shall not be able to continue our interlude, my dear. I shall mourn the loss greatly.”

“Well, the day’s not over yet…”

“And the children shall surely find some time-consuming endeavor in which to engage.”

“Or they’ll find some brandy in a nice cup of warm milk to drink with their lunch.”

“Such a nefarious man you are, Gregory.”

“What can I say? It’s a gift.”

“You shall not perpetrate your nudity upon us again. John and I have lost the entirety of our appetite for what might be eternity.”

Of course, the obviously cleared plates and smudged faces on the two boys told an entirely different story.

“I do apologize, Sherlock, however, you cannot claim to have never witnessed me in an unclothed state before this morning.”

“If I have, the agony of the experience has purged the memory from my mind, likely taking with it valuable brain tissue as collateral damage. For that, you shall not own my forgiveness.”

“Calm down, little man. Nobody wants to perpetrate anything on you, so don’t perpetrate things on yourself and you should be fine.”

“Your attempts at conversation teeter so near to the edge of the pit of nonsensical prattle that a fluttering oak leaf falling upon your shoulder would pitch you headlong into its murky depths.”

“And you don’t want to fall into any murky pits today, Greg, because we’ve got a lot of fun things planned.”

Mycroft patted Lestrade’s shoulder in sympathy and began to prepare for them a cup of coffee, while two additional plates of breakfast were laid on the kitchen table.
“Nice long day of quiet reading and a nap?”

“We are not infants! We do not require a mid-day restorative!”

“Yep, naps are for babies, so try again, Greg.”

“It was worth a try. What do you want to do?”

“We shall first take the car for driving practice, then work to affect the proposed modifications to our gliders. At some point, there are experiments for which I must script observational notes and that is of paramount importance. Further, you and Fatcroft shall gather for me soil samples from areas I shall indicate. This is vital for my research and you will follow my instructions to the letter!”

“I notice that finishing your schoolwork isn’t on the list anywhere.”

“Inconsequential matters do not merit a space on my agenda.”

Lestrade grinned at Mycroft, who passed over the morning coffee, then took his seat at the table.

“That’s ok. I’ll remind you.”

Sherlock and John huffed in unison and Mycroft chuckled at their shared annoyance. Before he could make comment, however, one of the staff informed him of a phone call and he huffed evidence of his own annoyance before rising from the table.

“If you will excuse me?”

“The sound of our rejoicing should sufficiently describe our delight at your absence.”

“Thank you, Sherlock. As always, it is a joy to share meal with you.”

A meal which was quickly being relocated to John’s plate so it wouldn’t have to be lonely. Or uneaten.

“Bye, Mycroft. Don’t be long or you’ll miss all the fun.”

“I shall endeavor to make haste.”

A quick kiss on his fiancé’s forehead preceded Mycroft leaving the kitchen and Lestrade noted the slight tension in his partner’s posture as he strode away.

“Do you get many phone calls on Sunday mornings, Sherlock?”

“No, not unless Mummy is at home. Ah, you also suspect a matter requiring Mycroft’s meddlesome attention.”

“Just curious, that’s all.”

“Mycroft’s not going to leave again, is he?”

Lestrade smiled at John and gave his hair a little ruffle.

“I’m sure it’s nothing. Now, are you two finished with your breakfast?”

“I require a cup of chocolate.”

“Me too! And more toast.”
“Does your stomach have any bottom, John Watson, or is it simply a wormhole to another dimension where the contents are spilled out to pollute another universe with chips and jam?”

“What? We’re going to be busy today and I’m going to need a lot of energy! See if I carry you back after you’ve run out of power and can only crawl around on the ground like a worm.”

“You shall port me if it becomes necessary, because that is part of the job description of an assistant.”

“Which means I’ll need even more toast! Hah! Enjoy watching me eat all my yummy toast, Sherlock.”

And, of course, the young woman bringing John his new round of breakfast made sure to pile the boy’s plate high with toast and provide a fresh pot of jam for his enjoyment. And Sherlock’s irritation. As John’s face lit up with glee, Sherlock drowned his sorrows in the hot cup of chocolate given to him and Lestrade took the opportunity to eat his own breakfast before the next battle erupted. Lesson learned at Grandmama’s about eating when you had the chance; once these two got going you might not get an opportunity for quite some time…

When John could no longer stall, waiting for Mycroft to return to the table, the day finally got its official start in the form of the laying out of Sherlock and John’s pages of plans for their gliders and the gathering of the materials for the construction needed to bring the boys’ visions to life. Which was something Mycroft had obviously planned for, thought Lestrade, since there was an abundance of supplies available perfectly suited for the great glider initiative. The building phase was well underway when the older Holmes finally rejoined the group.

“Mycroft! Look how much we’ve done!”

John smiled widely and pointed to his and Sherlock’s partially-built gliders.

“Exceptional, truly exceptional. An aeronautic accomplishment, to say the least.”

“We won’t get to test them today, probably, so… are you going to see it when we do?”

The boy’s large and insincerely-innocent eyes looked up at Mycroft, whose heart warmed at both the insightful deduction and the obvious concern over the upcoming answer.

“Perhaps… but not if your launch occurs within the next several days.”

Mycroft turned towards Lestrade, knowing and hating the darkness he knew would be in his lover’s eyes.

“You are leaving.”

“Only for a few days, my love. Some minor issues that would benefit greatly from my attention, else they grow into major ones.”

“That’s my Mycroft… the man who saves the world. When are you leaving?”

“In a few hours. There are some small issues I must attend to first, then I shall depart.”

“I shall ready a series of experiments for you to oversee on the helicopter!”

“Alas, Sherlock, I shall not be traveling by that method, but do have a series of tests at the ready
for the next possible opportunity.”

Sherlock pouted dramatically and John patted him on the arm.

“It’s alright, Sherlock. After we perfect our gliders, we can start building helicopters, instead.”

“Hmmm… that is not a completely ridiculous idea. Lackey! We must shop for motors immediately!”

“Gliders first, Sherlock. One thing at a time. Mycroft… I take it you’re going to busy until you leave?”

“Unfortunately, that is the case, however I am committed to spending what time I can with you and the children before I must leave.”

“Ok, you’d better get started, then. Let us know if there’s anything we can do to help.”

Mycroft refused to crumble at the hint of sadness in his lover’s voice, because he knew he would hear it often in their lives. His Gregory ached at the news of his departure, but would support him fully no matter how deep the pain. A truly superlative spouse; he could want for none better and would weep tonight at the beauty and strength he had left behind.

“I shall.”

Lestrade watched Mycroft turn and leave, wishing he could wave a magic wand and erase whatever it was taking his partner away from him. But, wishing wasn’t going to do anything but waste energy, so he turned back to the two, slightly sullen faces starting at their gliders.

“Hey, none of that! Mycroft’s just going away for a few days; that’s not too bad. Probably be back by the weekend, so there’s nothing to be upset about.”

“Then why are you obviously distressed at the thought of his leaving?”

Miserable little observant genius…

“Because, Sherlock, I love him and am always going to be sad when he leaves. So… I suppose I shouldn’t tell you not to be, that’s not really a fair thing to ask, is it?”

“I am not distressed at the behemoth’s departure! Nothing in the universe could make me happier! Now, I am the lord of the manor and the staff must obey me unquestioningly.”

“You give that a try and tell me how well it works for you. Now, let’s keep working on your gliders… show Mycroft just how talented you two are when you actually put your mind to something.”

“I am supremely talented in everything I attempt! And I shall extend that decree to encompass all activities I have yet to try since it is a certainty that I shall excel at them all!”

“Your humility is amazing.”

“Thank you, peasant. It is time you properly recognized my glory.”

Mycroft found that preparing for his departure was not as easy a thing as he had assumed, as the telephone kept commanding his attention and he had finally to direct one of his staff to pack his
luggage, so he could handle the other matters consuming his time. Time which finally dwindled to zero as his driver announced it was the appointed hour to leave for London and Mycroft’s heart sank like a large block of lead as he realized the time he had hoped to share with his family was not to come to pass. This was why it was so important, so absolutely crucial, that he not waste any opportunity to spend time with his spouse and their charges – at any point it was possible that the opportunity would not be presented.

Taking a moment to steady himself before he reentered the library, Mycroft finally pushed open the door and imprinted the scene on his mind to serve as a soothing device when, in these coming days, his temper might grow short and his frustrations grew large. His handsome and caring husband lying on the rug, supervising the children with a loving and nurturing hand.

“Mycroft! And looking sharp and sexy, too. Come on, the boys and I were just going to sketch out some designs to paint on their gliders. These beauties going to be big enough to warrant some designs like you see on fighter planes and logos for airlines. We’d love your help.”

In the instant after Lestrade saw the apology in Mycroft’s eyes, he felt his smile dragged from his lips and simply gave his partner a small nod of understanding.

“But, it looks like you’re ready to leave. Don’t worry, you’ll get to see these when they’re complete and ready to fly.”

“What! Mycroft, you can’t be leaving now! You said you’d spend time with us!”

John’s disappointment was nearly as thick as his husband’s and Sherlock’s surly glare spoke volumes as to his inner thoughts.

“And I am profoundly sorry that I cannot. I was besieged with a legion of concerns and… I can only apologize, John, though I know it is an insufficient thing.”

“Don’t worry, love. We’re going to be fine. Just a bit taken aback, that’s all. We’ll see you off, though. Let’s go, boys. Give Mycroft a nice goodbye.”

Sherlock and John snorted at the suggestion, but got up from the floor and began to march towards the door.

“Gregory…”

“Like I said, Mycroft… it’s fine.”

Lestrade rose from the floor and stepped forward to give his lover a long farewell kiss.

“You do what you have to do, right?”

“I simply wish that it did not involve such hardships for you and the children.”

“It’s only a few days, love. That’s nothing to get upset over. We’ll miss you, though. Are you going to get to call?”

“At this juncture, I am not entirely certain.”

“It doesn’t matter, we’ll manage, but not a minute’s going to go by that I’m not thinking about you.”

“Nor I of you, my dearest. I am sorry for this, Gregory. For leaving and for… for failing to
make good on my intentions to enjoy at least part of this day with you.”

“Couldn’t be helped, could it? I know you would have taken some time for us, if you were able. Now, let’s go. Sherlock and John are probably starting to dismantle your car or filling it with experiments Sherlock wants you to conduct during the ride.”

“You are undoubtedly correct. Fortunately, Driver is well-practiced in keeping Sherlock’s chaos controlled.”

“And how practiced is he in controlling Sherlock’s chaos, when Sherlock has an accomplice, who also happily acts as a distraction so there can be more chaos?”

“Ah. Yes, we had best hurry.”

“I’m right behind you.”

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After a round of hugs and a final kiss for his partner, Lestrade watched the car drive away and tried to ignore the harsh sting in his heart when it was completely out of view.

“Greg? Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m ok, John.”

“You appear much as Mycroft does when Cook has burned the cake he was anticipating for his midnight feeding.”

“Thanks, Sherlock. I can always count on you to put things in perspective.”

“Naturally, since I am the only clear-headed member of this family and must, therefore, act as the voice of reason and reality in all things.”

John mimed a man having a laughing attack for a full minute before he fell on the ground from lack of oxygen.

“Yeah, that’s something we all count on. Ok, so… back to your gliders?”

“No. We shall take the car and continue our driving practice.”

Sherlock’s haughty tone didn’t fool Lestrade for an instant. The boy had been suspiciously silent about Mycroft leaving, but that was telling on its own.

“We can do that. It’s a little chilly today, but we can ask your cook if she’ll pack our lunch and we can take it with us. Find a nice spot to eat and enjoy the fresh air.”

“Fresh air… one day it shall be the death of me.”

“Right. I’m sure the hospital gets lots of death by fresh air cases.”

“Well, I like fresh air! And food! This is going to be a great afternoon… though, it would be better if Mycroft was here, too.”

Lestrade agreed, but there was no use dwelling on what couldn’t be.

“It’s going to be a good time, anyway. And Mycroft wouldn’t want us not enjoying ourselves on
his account. Sherlock, think you can survive the air long enough to have a drive and lunch, maybe out by that lake you like to pillage for samples?"

“I am not certain, however, it is possible that I might be persuaded if someone offers to collect substrate samples from said lake for my experiment with rates of eyeball decay for submerged corpses.”

“That’s disgusting, Sherlock. Can’t we experiment on something not disgusting for a change?”

“My work is vital to the scientific community, John Watson, and petty descriptors such as disgusting are entirely inappropriate. Groundbreaking, paradigm-shifting, Nobel Prize-worthy… those are all acceptable for your use.”

“They give Nobel Prizes for eyeballs and mud?”

“For my work, undoubtedly.”

“Do we get to wear our suits when they have the ceremony to give it to you?”

“Always letting your vanity guide your sensibilities, aren’t you, John?”

“Better than muddy eyeballs.”

Lestrade reached down and hoisted John up from the ground, then clasped the boys’ shoulders and marched them towards the kitchen to beg their packed lunch so they could get started on the rest of their day. A little distraction from their absent fourth was a good idea right now. Let the boys enjoy the new car, give them some time to work off their upset and… oh crap… he and John had to leave tonight and that meant Sherlock was going to be home alone. It was funny, but the thought of Sherlock being home alone hadn’t bothered him as much the first two times Mycroft had been away, but it was eating away at him now. Maybe because he knew, he truly knew, how lonely Sherlock was and how much he missed his brother, even if he would die rather than admit it. And maybe because Mycroft was right when he went on about them being a family. They were, it was as true as his name being Greg Lestrade, and you weren’t supposed to let a family member suffer or be alone when they didn’t want to be. This was going to be harder than he expected…

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“I don’t want to go!”

John was standing, arms crossed and feet spread, with Sherlock standing next to him nodding emphatically with John’s words.

“John… you have to go back to school.”

“No! Sherlock will be here alone and that’s not right!”

“There is an army of people here, John…”

“But are they going to play with him? No. Help with his experiments? No. I’m not leaving Sherlock to be bored and lonely!”

“You’re going to see him tomorrow morning…”

“That’s not good enough. I’m staying here.”

Lestrade counted to ten and tried to think of a new tactic for convincing John to go back to his room
at school. And no help would be coming from Sherlock, that much was already clear. The curly-haired goblin was happy to support John’s rebellion in all its tiny fury.

“John… you can come back and visit tomorrow after school…”

“I am! And I’m going to sleep here again, too. There’s no reason I can’t.”

“I think the fact that you’re supposed to be at school where they’re legally bound to keep an eye on you is a pretty good reason.”

“John Watson cares nothing for you arbitrary and pedantic legal natterings.”

“Yeah, your natterings aren’t getting you anywhere, Greg.”

“Ok… look. This is how it’s going to be. Tonight, you’re going to sleep at school and Sherlock’s going to sleep here. I’ll stop in tomorrow and tell your dormitory supervisor that you’ll be staying nights at Sherlock’s occasionally and that we’ll let him know when you’ll be gone. A couple of nights a week you can stay here and keep Sherlock company. How does that sound?”

“That doesn’t include weekends, right? Those are extra.”

“Those are still extra.”

“But what about the other nights! It’s not fair that Sherlock has to be here all by himself with nothing to do and nobody to help him with his experiments.”

“I’ll think of something. Right now, I need to get you back to school. Sherlock can ride with us and I’ll bring him home afterwards or… maybe he can come and visit with Mum and me for awhile before bedtime.”

As soon as the words were out of Lestrade’s mouth, he knew he was an idiot.

“I want to come, too! Why does everyone else get to have fun and I don’t?”

“John cannot be denied entertainment! It is barbaric!”

“Greg the Barbarian… I don’t like the sound of that. I doubt they’ll let anybody on the police force with a name like that. You should starting thinking about a new career.”

“Thank you, John. I’m touched.”

This was not going to end easily and Lestrade was very reluctant to simply put his foot down and press the issue. The day had gone well, in some ways, but Mycroft’s absence was palpable and had both boys off-footed. For someone John had only known a short while, the older Holmes had made a powerful impression and the boy was feeling for the first time what he and Sherlock already knew – being left behind wasn’t easy. And Sherlock… he still hadn’t rebounded very much. It was strange that not being on the receiving end of an unending string of insults was worrying, but, in this case, it definitely was. If the boys were simply being twats, it would be easy to pluck John off the ground, toss him in the car and that would be that, but… but this was something very different.

“Besides, Mother Lestrade would not stand for leaving John neglected while we frolic and feast on biscuits.”

Ok… point scored for Sherlock. Once Mum found out that Mycroft had gone, her first questions, after asking him how he felt, would center on Sherlock and John. And John sitting alone in his room
was not going to be an answer that would make her happy.

“Fine, here’s what we’re going to do. We can all go and visit Mum and then drop John at school just before bedtime. I’ll bring you back, Sherlock, and, before you know it, you’ll both be in classes tomorrow morning. Maybe your driver can bring you to school early so you and John can have a little time together before classes start.”

“And you will collect us in the afternoon?”

“Umm… no, Sherlock, I’m sorry. I have to work… but I can stop by after I close and see how you’re doing.”

“And what are John and I to do in the meantime? You are our primary dromedary and we might need your portage potential at any moment!”

Now, that sounded a little more like the Sherlock he knew.

“You and John don’t have any trouble keeping busy whether I’m here or not. John, go and get your things and we’ll see if Mum is willing to have a horde of monkeys invading her house.”

“A group of monkeys is not a herd, lackey. Your level of education is woefully lackluster. You should be thankful your only recourse for employment is menial labor for you would humiliate yourself spectacularly in any other range of pursuits!”

Sherlock snorted and marched upstairs with John at his side. Watching them climb the steps, Lestrade let out a deep sigh and gave his head a shake. Maybe the two would feel a little more secure tomorrow and have a better time of it, but this was a taste of what was to come. It wasn’t going to be easy, but they’d muddle through. It wasn’t as if they had much of a choice.

Lestrade watched the two small boys eat, each with one eye on their plates and one eye on the refrigerator where they had spied a large bowl of something that they were told they couldn’t touch until they’d eaten all of their dinner, and knew that his primary responsibility right now was to keep them content and feeling safe and cared for. How he was going to do that, he wasn’t exactly sure, but it wasn’t a responsibility he was going to shy away from. Sherlock and John needed him, that was a basic truth. Mycroft being gone a few days wasn’t a big problem, but Mycroft being gone a few months was going to be a different story and he needed to prepare for that and build a very solid foundation that would stand the tremors from his lover’s absence.

“This is very good, Mrs. Lestrade.”

“It is not entirely ghastly.”

“Well, thank you both. Only a few more bites and you can have some of the chocolate custard that I have chilling. And I’ll send you both home with a little package of treats if you don’t set the house on fire or something just as bad tonight.”

John’s hurray was accompanied by a wave of his fork in the air and Sherlock’s subsequent theft of the last of his friend’s unguarded potatoes.

“And you two are going to be on your best behavior with Mycroft gone, right? No doing something that’s going to make Greg turn to drink or cry every night into his pillow?”

“He shall commit both of those shameful acts, in any case, because the warthog is not within
rutting distance, so there shall be no bargain made on that score.”

“He’ll do them and make you watch, how about that?”

“True… the lackey is not above such reprehensible tactics. And he knows the boredom of being subjected to his amateur dramatics would undo me utterly.”

“Then there you have it. Be good boys and don’t be undone.”

Lestrade smirked and cleared Sherlock and John’s empty plates, replacing them with bowls while his mother drew the custard out of the refrigerator.

“Once you two finish this, we can watch a little telly, but then you have to go home and straight to bed.”

“Ridiculous! I have a very important experiment to tend to and I shall not be ordered to my crib with your domineering paternalistic proclamations!”

“You’ve got school tomorrow, little man, and no being late because you overslept. You either, John. I expect you to go right to bed after you get to your room.”

“Well, let’s see how tired I am after we watch a film. Or two.”

John smiled sweetly and turned large and loving eyes towards Lestrade, whose mother cackled at the performance.

“Those puppy eyes don’t work on me, John. Wait until Mycroft gets back and try them on him when you want a second film.”

“Boo! You’re no fun.”

“That’s right. I’m the mean one, and don’t you forget it.”

John stuck out his tongue and Sherlock applauded his technique. For her part, Lestrade’s mother simply sat back and watched her son manage the boys. If he and Mycroft decided to bring kids into their lives, they would be the luckiest kids in England and without any undue spoiling. At least by her son and his partner. There would be enough of that from the old women in the family…

After their television time and a bit of bonus because they put up only their version of a minimal fuss about helping with the dishes, Lestrade bundled the boys into the car and started the process of bringing them home and tucking them in. John was first and it was long and tortuous endeavor getting him separated from Sherlock, situated in his room and ready for bed. Lestrade was only able to leave after giving his most solemn word that he would put in an appearance at Sherlock’s house the next evening. Then, it was an even longer and more tortuous trial pacifying Sherlock, getting him to put off starting a new experiment, then negotiating just how long he could stay up tomorrow night since tonight’s bedtime was burdensome and cruel.

“Ok, there you go. Sleep well, Sherlock.”

“I am not fatigued.”

“Yeah, you are. Go to bed.”

“I require a story.”

“You’re not five years old.”
“Narrative fiction is not age dependent.”

“Go to bed.”

“I must be lulled to sleep because I am not fatigued, despite your insistence to the contrary.”

“Your yawning sort of punches a hole in your argument.”

“Yawning is simply a mechanism to cool the brain and my brain exists eternally in a high-temperature state due to its increased level of activity over the average human.”

“Really?”

“Yes, other humans are incredibly stupid compared to me.”

“You know what I mean.”

“It is one theory, yes.”

“Ok… learned something new. See, that’s a story! Now, go to bed.”

“I am thirsty. I require water.”

“You already had water.”

“I must urinate.”

“You had a piss stop before you got into bed.”

“I must defecate.”

“I’ll get you a nappy.”

“I feel feverish.”

“Yawn a little more. That should take care of it.”

As Sherlock desperately tried to think of another stall tactic, Lestrade’s heart both soared and ached at the boy’s obvious attempt to keep him here. Poor little thing… what in the world would Mycroft and Grandmama have done if he and Mycroft hadn’t met? Probably hire someone to watch over Sherlock when Mycroft went away and that wasn’t a thought he liked to dwell on for very long.

“Sherlock… it’s only until morning. Have a good night’s rest and then you’ll have a good day with John tomorrow.”

“And what are we to do?”

“Whatever you like, within reason. And I am going to stop in once I’ve closed the shop. With the car, it’s going to be a lot easier to visit in the evening. It’s going to be alright, Sherlock. Mycroft will be back soon and…”

“This time.”

Sherlock’s pout vanished in a second as he drew the blanket up so only his eyes were visible.

“Yeah, this time. Next time it could be different. But we’ll get through it because we have each other. Me, you and John. Mycroft counts on us to have each other’s backs while he’s gone, take
care of each other and that takes a weight off his mind when he can’t be with us. So, you’re going to get a good night’s sleep, have a fun day at school and you can tell me all about it tomorrow night.”

The blankets rose and fell with Sherlock’s very grand sigh and Lestrade gave the boy’s curls a thorough messing as he reached over to turn off the light.

“Good night, Sherlock. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“And thus my suffering continues.”

“Try not to let it give you gas.”

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Ok, so Mycroft was right… he needed a car. He hadn’t needed a car but now it was clear that he needed a car. Walking to school, work, Mycroft’s house, back home… it would have gotten very old very fast. And, couldn’t forget returning Sherlock home after he perpetrated a very clever hiding in the boot after he left to drive John back to school, then remembered he had no fresh clothes or books for the next morning. That was an early-morning run to retrieve His Majesty’s garments and scholastic materials to deliver to John’s dormitory room and, because he was a complete idiot, a quick drive back home with the two boys for a shared breakfast before classes began.

And there were the late-night calls, both from Sherlock and John, who had discovered he could sneak out of his room and access a telephone in one of the administrative offices. Apparently, getting up for water or to pee was enough reason to place a call to see if he was still alive, discuss the growing list of needs for their next shopping trip, reaffirm the status of their shopping credits or the entertainment agenda for the next evening and any other excuse the boys could think of to connect briefly with him before going back to sleep. They should be too old for this sort of thing but both had suffered the loss of their dads and it wasn’t too surprising they’d be very touchy about potentially losing a surrogate one. Or to cling like koalas to the other one.

Which made the last two nights especially difficult since he really couldn’t spare the time to visit. He called, but there was so much he had to do for school… one big paper to write and a couple of major exams that he had to do well on and trying to do serious schoolwork with the boys was difficult enough with Mycroft to help manage things, but alone… he was going to have to figure something out. Some form of sacred, silent study time so he could be there for them and still keep up with his own studies, too. Hopefully, he’d get enough done here at the shop tonight that he could spend a few hours with Sherlock and John having a little fun. It was a slow night and those were good for catching up on school assignments or taking some time to just read a book. There was a lot of value in a truly quiet, calm evening…

“Behold! I told you my manservant would be here! That you would not simply take me at my word and allow John and I to continue our travels unimpeded is both insulting and demeaning. And do not think your failure to provide me your full given name and employment number shall not go unreported to your supervisor!”

Lestrade looked up from his books to find Sherlock and John being escorted into the shop by a very irritated policeman.

“What the fu… hell? Sherlock, John what did you do?”

“Your name, sir?”

Lestrade smiled as pleasantly at the glowering man as he could and hoped this wasn’t going to end
with him spending the night in a cell as the man showed his warrant card for identification.


“There! Proof of my veracity! This has been a monumental waste of my time and I demand a written apology!”

“Shut it, Sherlock. John…”

“Hi Greg. We got in trouble. Sorry.”

Lestrade rubbed his eyes and walked around to the other side of the counter, immensely grateful that there were no customers in the shop to witness the show.

“What did they do?”

“Try to get here, apparently. They were walking on the side of the road, waving down cars for a ride. Since they refused to tell me where they live, I brought them here instead.”

Just wonderful.

“Do you two have any idea how dangerous that was?”

“Now you demonstrate concern for our safety! If there was not a lunkheaded jailor in our midst, you would be pooh-poohing my terrified declarations of potential molestation!”

Fortunately, the legally-worrying final part of that sentence was counterbalanced by the insulting first part so Lestrade was spared further scrutiny by the…. oh, good. Those were sergeant’s markings.

“You watch your mouth, Sherlock. I’m sorry for this, sir. I’ll see it doesn’t happen again.”

“Are either of these yours?”

“No, but I’m listed as a guardian for the evil one and the one actually showing some remorse is his best friend. They were supposed to be at home specifically staying out of trouble…”

“They’re a bit young to be left alone, son.”

“They’re not alone. There’s staff aplenty to keep an eye on them and…”

“I’d say that didn’t work out very well.”

“Yeah… yeah, you’re right. I’ll have a talk with them and with this lot, too. I promise you this is the last time you’ll have to see these two.”

“You do not speak for me, peasant! Ugh… the acrid waft of the unwashed working class is making my eyes water. Combined with the stench of ineffectual job performance by this sad excuse for a law enforcement official, my physical and mental health are gravely endangered!”

“Sherlock! You say you’re sorry to the constable. Greg wants to be a policeman and if you’re a nasty git to them they’re never going to let him have a job!”

Lestrade hoped the heat on his cheeks wasn’t making them as red as he knew it was and he grinned through his agony as he patted John on the head and failed to acknowledge Sherlock’s ‘I shall ignore you completely, John Watson’ snort.
“You want to join the force?”

“Yes, sir. I’ve been learning about the job and I think it’s a good fit for me and my skills. I’m going to apply as soon as I’m done with school.”

“Well, if you’re willing to take responsibility for that little devil, I guess you’ve got the fortitude for the job. Just remember to think ahead next time. You can’t count on others to tend your obligations… sometimes it doesn’t work.”

“I’ll remember that, sir.”

“Good. When you’re ready to fill out your paperwork, ask to see me. We’ll see what we can do about expediting things. I think having the power to arrest these two is going to come in handy.”

With a quick glare at Sherlock, the officer left the shop and Lestrade marveled that this day had actually delivered him a real break.

“I am drained by this humiliating experience! I demand chocolate as a rejuvanitive!”

“You’re not in a position to demand anything, you miserable goblin. Come here, both of you.”

Lestrade went to the rear of the shop and brought out two stools which he deposited next to his. Pointing at the seats, he waited for Sherlock and John to hop up and waited for them to stop fidgeting before handing each a piece of chocolate and taking his own seat to start the interrogation.

“What the fuck did you think you were doing?”

“Cmng hr.”

“Swallow, John.”

“Ok. We were coming here.”

“Yes, I know that, but why? And why not have Sherlock’s driver bring you?”

“We weren’t sure you were going to visit us tonight. You said you would, but you said that last night and then changed your mind about wanting to see us.”

“I didn’t change my mind, John. I had to prepare for two exams today and I couldn’t do that if I didn’t spend the evening at home. But we can talk about some ground rules for when I have to study so I can be there and get my schoolwork done, too. And onto the second question, where’s the driver?”

“It is the ridiculous menial’s day of rest! If Grandmama would simply treat the help in the manner they deserve and undoubtedly expect, this would have not been an issue!”

“Everyone deserves a day off work, Sherlock. And you could have called here, you know. Asked if I was still coming?”

“Didn’t know the number.”

“Weak, John. Very, very weak.”

“We were bored! You condemned us to two days of interminable boredom and we sought to throw off the yoke of your oppressive neglect!”
“Sherlock… you can’t do something that dangerous just because you’re bored. And I know you have lots to do at your house, so there’s even less excuse. You have to promise me not to do this again. All those paedophiles you go on about do exist, dangerous people are out there, and making yourself a target isn’t something you want to do.”

But, Lestrade was very well aware that boredom wasn’t really the factor that spurred their little adventure. Mycroft hadn’t called. Not once. Every time he talked to Sherlock and John, they asked if he had news and it broke his heart, for more than one reason, to say no. Further, the ‘a few days’ was looking more and more like it wasn’t going to be the real story. And then he wasn’t there… New rule… no expecting two days without a visit would end in anything but anarchy. The sergeant was right… he couldn’t expect others to fulfill his obligations, even if that’s what some of them were actually paid to do. And he would be plugging those holes so that Sherlock and John didn’t have a chance to sneak away again, at the very least, without him being notified.

“We promise, Greg. It wasn’t that much fun anyway. No one wanted to give us a ride and I was getting tired of walking in the cold. We didn’t wear warm enough jackets.”

“It was expected that some peon would recognize our plight and offer the comfort of their vehicle, however, the milk of human kindness is sour and foul in this country.”

“Well, at least you paid some price for being loony. Luckily, for you, it’s warm in here and I can’t very well send you home on foot. I’m not closing for another hour, though, so let’s find something for you to do in the meantime.”

“John and I shall undertake a quality-control inspection of your merchandise. Make samples of your offerings available to us and we shall collect our results in a table. John shall render the appropriate graph for you to understand our findings.”

“Ok, no. You can have a few sweets, but I’m going to guess you haven’t eaten dinner yet, right?”

“That is immaterial.”

“No, Sherlock, it’s not. Chocolate isn’t going to be your meal. We’ll get something after I close.”

“Can we go to the pub?”

Considering his mates might be there and he actually hadn’t had any time to see them lately except in school, that wasn’t a bad idea.

“Yes, John, I think I might be able to arrange that.”

“Then I shall need my tongue fully inured to a pleasing flavor before we enter that hovel of culinary blasphemy.”

“You can have a couple of chocolates, but that’s it.”

“Ten pieces.”

“No negotiation.”

“There shall be negotiation.”

“Felons don’t get to negotiate.”
“Our so-called justice system proves otherwise.”

“He’s got you there, Greg. I see it all the time on the telly.”

“I’m the justice system in this little kingdom and I say felons get what they’re given. And the better your behavior, you more you receive.”

“Extortion!”

“It’s good to be king.”

Lestrade watched through the window at the boys running riot with their pretend swords through Grandmama’s gardens and was glad something was making them happy. It had been a full week without a word from Mycroft and both Sherlock and John had gotten cranky since this quick little trip was, obviously, something more extensive. And he refused to dwell on how he felt. Why did Mycroft have to make light of it? Say it was only a few days? Bastard… when was he going to stop tossing out assurances when this was going to happen?

“Mycroft did not know the extent of his obligation, Gregory. He is not at fault for the length of his absence.”

Couldn’t hide anything from Grandmama even if he tried…

“Just a few days, he said. Those two have been waiting every day for him to come home or at least call. He can’t just say it’s not a big deal and then scurry off leaving them with hopes.”

“And you, as well.”

“I’m not worried about me.”

“How cute that you try to conceal your feelings from me. I am reminded much of Mycroft when he attempts the same and just as ineffectively.”

“Oh, I’m a little upset, but not as much as those two. They miss him terribly, John especially. Sherlock went through the first time Mycroft went away and was gone longer than we expected, but John put faith in what Mycroft said and after a few days it began to worry him. That’s the worst part, I think… we don’t know if he’s ok and that’s hard. John actually asked me if Mycroft has gotten hurt before when he went away and I wasn’t about to tell him about Mycroft’s black eye from his first mission… or whatever you want to call it.”

“That is certainly the most painful aspect of an absence such as this and I will not dishonor you by denying it. I would recommend that you and Mycroft have a frank discussion with the children about this very thing when he returns. They should be aware that he cannot always know precisely the duration of his assignment, the level of communication he may maintain or… or the degree of risk to which he will be subjected.”

“John will probably never want to leave Sherlock’s house again after that conversation. It’s hard enough now to get him to spend a couple of nights at school…”

“And I shall not say I am unhappy about that fact, since both boys benefit greatly from their continued companionship. However, it has been an extra burden on you, though, has it not?”

Just as he couldn’t hide his feelings, he couldn’t hide his exhaustion and he chuckled tiredly as he
smiled.

“It’s rough, that’s true. But, I’m managing. It’s taking time to learn, but I’ll need all the trial runs I can get before Mycroft goes away to Uni. Already I’m learning how long I can leave these two alone, what to watch for when they’re getting moody or feeling lonely… how to make sure they never feel neglected or abandoned. For one unexpected week, it’s been an important one. Maybe I should be thankful, but right now, I could just use a nap.”

“Something to cherish. One takes rest whenever one can with such rambunctious boys for whom to care. I would offer you the opportunity now, however, I know you must return soon as the hour grows late and tomorrow begins early for you all. And you return in such a *stalwart* vehicle.”

This time, Lestrade’s laugh was more than a dusty chuckle.

“She’s a beauty isn’t she? Lots of room for all sorts of wars, but they realize that when they make a big mess, they’re the ones who have to clean it.”

“Teaching responsibility and care for one’s possessions. I highly approve. I do enjoy our Sunday teas, Gregory. Always I find reason to be confident that your and Mycroft’s future shall be a happy one.”

“If he ever comes home. I mean to ask… I know we’re supposed to come back here next weekend for your party…”

“That event shall occur whether Mycroft is in attendance or not. It is not a party *for* you, grandson, if that is your concern. It is simply a gathering of friends and family, a coterie for which you are now an integral part. I am quite hopeful that he shall have returned by that point, but, if not, we shall carry on without him. For heaven’s sake, dear John would be most aggrieved if he was not able to don his new suit next weekend and we cannot allow that.”

“I think he’d collapse into tears.”

“There is little doubt.”

“Mum would be upset, too. She already has her dress and takes it out of the closet and looks at it now and then.”

“How wonderful. And there shall be quite a number of age-appropriate eligible men present with whom she might converse.”

“Do not try and set Mum up with a man, Grandmama.”

“Oh, has she developed a liking for women in the interim since your birth? No matter, there shall be a plethora of available females, as well.”

“No matchmaking.”

“Such a silly term.”

“I mean it, she’s got a bloke, anyway.”

“Hmmm…”

“Wait… what do you know?”

“Nothing for your tender ears, dear.”
“Grandmama…”

“Oh look, John has slain Sherlock and is attempting to carve his body into easily portable pieces.”

“Grandmama…”

“Hush, Gregory. Give me a moment to admire John’s work. He is definitely suited for a career as a surgeon. And Sherlock makes a delightful corpse. I believe a beverage is called for. Something red, I think, in the spirit of things.”

“Brandy for me.”

“A large one, perhaps?”

“Just hand me the bottle.”
“These are unacceptably small.”

“The man said they’re the right size for a model helicopter, Sherlock.”

“The man is obviously a cretin and should turn over the till of his business to someone with a modicum of intelligence though, in this village of the damned, I have no idea who could be presented as a suitable candidate.”

“My fingers are stuck together.”

Lestrade looked down at John, who had misstated his problem, since his fingers were not only stuck together, they were also stuck to the tube of adhesive that he’d opened.

“Again?”

“I wanted to see if it was better than the last tube I tried.”

One large sigh preceded Lestrade retrieving another bottle of solvent since they’d used up the first bottle on John’s previous accident and Sherlock dribbling it on several pieces of construction materials to test their durability. All of which was now sitting near the till and duly added to the growing bill.

“You two realize I’m not made out of money, right?”

“Since your specie is worthless except for the boons it provides me, if you have but a penny left, it is mine to claim and claim it I do!”

He’d learned the look, by now. The look from the person in a shop that said ‘Isn’t it positively brilliant to have kids? How much are you drinking at night?’

“There won’t be much to claim if you drain my pocket dry.”

“You shall simply toil and obtain more. Or, if you have a single neuron remaining in the lump of ossifying grey matter you laughingly term your brain, acquire funds from the cohesive oil mass that poses as my brother.”

“Not taking Mycroft’s money, Sherlock.”

“Dunderhead. We are sufficiently wealthy that our funds birth additional funds as your class births illegitimate children – continuously and at a spectacularly high rate. I shall not suffer neglect because you are too sheepish to wrest a farthing from the bottom of our proverbial wishing fountain!”

Lestrade released another large sigh and focused his attention on breaking the death grip John’s fingers had on each other. Sherlock had no idea of the value of money. Zero idea how much difference a few pounds here and there made to regular people. Little bastard burned nearly £100 to nothing to determine if you could identify the denomination of a note just by the ash! £100! And what Mycroft had in his safe… he’d never seen stacks of money piled up like that. Incidental funds, Mycroft had called it. Neither one of them had a clue what simple, regular people did to earn their living and there was nothing wrong with that until… until he was the one having to handle the pound-foolish goblin and wonder how long his bit of savings was going to hold out.
“Sorry, Sherlock. When Mycroft’s here, he can spend what he likes, but when it’s just me, you have to make do on what I can provide.”

“Unacceptable! I shall not wear sackcloth! This is not a gulag!”

John patted Greg’s hand with his sticky and solvent-scented one and smiled comfortingly.

“It’s alright, Greg. I understand. And I don’t mind being poor and living in a gluebag.”

“You disgrace the flea population from which you sprung, John Watson.”

John made a finger gesture Lestrade knew the boy learned from one of his own bastard mates and gently closed John’s hand back into a tacky little fist.

“Do we have everything yet? You two seem to have broken a lot, but do you actually have what we came here to buy?”

“No. My provisions list remains unfulfilled.”

“Fine. John, help Sherlock fulfill his list and keep your hands away from anything remotely chemical. I’m going to…”

Not step outside for a smoke, or step outside for a scream… the shop owner would surely block his way if he tried to escape.

“… wait right here for you to finish.”

“Very well. Come along, John. You shall carry the bag and I shall obtain the supplies.”

“Why do I have to carry the bag?”

“Can you reach the top shelf?”

“No…”

“Precisely.”

As the two boys walked away, seriously discussing the construction of some form of stilts to raise John’s height, Lestrade leaned back against the counter and did his best to calm his mind. This week had been as ridiculous as the last and if he wasn’t a raving madman by the weekend, it would be a bloody miracle. It was becoming a full-scale war to get John to sleep at school for even a night here and there and, regardless of where either boy slept, there was at least one phone call per pre-dawn hours that he had to attend to. Mum, the evil thing, had taken to unplugging the house phone as she went to bed every night so the only one that rang was the one in his room. Oh, let’s not forget the mad race out to Sherlock’s house in the middle of the night when John was sick. The fact that he was sick because he ate an overly-massive late-night snack apparently didn’t matter to either of the boys and it was two hours of film watching with John’s head on his lap before he could crawl home to salvage what sleep he could.

And all of this was on top of the continuous demands for activities, questions about when Mycroft was coming home, schoolwork help, working at the shop, bringing science projects and history projects to school and back again, questions about when Mycroft was coming home, doing his own schoolwork, the inevitable shopping trips and driving practice, questions about when Mycroft was coming home… he was exhausted, out of funds, feeling torn in a thousand directions and this was only two weeks alone with the boys! There wasn’t any rest to look forward to this weekend, either,
because of Grandmama’s party and their visit started tomorrow night. Mum wouldn’t be arriving until Saturday afternoon, but he had to bring the boys early to give them time to visit and play and, as a priority, see how their clothes fit before the guests arrived. The only thing that was keeping him from going mad right now was the thought that whatever he was going through, Mycroft was probably having it as bad or worse…

“Lackey! We are ready to make our purchases. Do not forget any items or it will not go well for you.”

“Oh, aren’t you going to stand there and watch that I don’t make a great mess of everything?”

“If you are not yet properly trained, I shall thrash you once we return home. For now, John and I are going to go to your secondary indenture and demand chocolate. We shall charge the cost to your account.”

“I don’t have an account, Sherlock. Or any money.”

“Neither of which is my concern.”

Sherlock tried to make a dramatic exit, only to find that very difficult to achieve with Lestrade’s grip on his collar.

“Unhand me, transient!”

“We’ll all leave together as soon as I pay. Then we’ll go back to your house, where I know there’s already enough chocolate to build a castle. John, keep an eye on Sherlock while I take care of this, alright?”

John’s snappy salute brought a much-needed smile to Lestrade’s face and he was even able to laugh when John positioned himself between Sherlock and the door, glaring as if daring the taller boy to make a break for freedom. That bit of support helped soothed the sting of turning over the dregs of his cash to the shop owner… it was actually a good thing he had no non-family social plans for the foreseeable future, since all he’d be able to do is sit and watch everyone else have a nice time…

“Greg! How late do you plan on being?”

Thanks, Mum. It wasn’t as if he didn’t have to work a few hours at the shop to try and rebuild his finances, get the boys packed and ready to go, cry a little as his few hours of work got poured into the petrol tank of his car, get himself packed and ready to go, try to just unwind a second before he had to start the drive… At least both Sherlock and John had a Mum-provided snacks bag and their chosen arsenal of games, experiments and field notebooks to keep them busy until they got to Grandmama’s house. With any luck, he’d have a solid ten minutes peace and quiet on the trip and that was ten minutes more than he’d had today. You would swear his life was some form of telly drama that had the whole school as an audience! What are you doing, who will be there, what are you wearing… it was good, really good that his mates took an interest and actually thought he was the luckiest bastard in the world for what and who he’d found, but it was like he was a bug under Sherlock’s microscope! The biggest rule, the most inviolate rule tonight was going to be he got to sleep alone and until he fucking woke up on his own. If those two were shaking him at the crack of doom because they wanted to play, they were going to find themselves tied to the bedposts with dirty socks in their mouths until he was good and ready to make a start on the day!

“I’m coming. Just… making sure I have everything.”
One quick look around his room and a shoulder shrug since anything he forgot, there would be a replacement for in whatever color, size, fabric or style he might ever want, then Lestrade was shoudering his overnight bag and leaving his room behind. Not that he’d seen much of it the past two weeks, but maybe one day they’d have a chance to get reacquainted. When Mycroft got back, he might have to declare a couple of days off and let his partner handle the kids. Which likely meant that Mycroft would lose his mind… again…

“We have been waiting an eternity! John has gone grey and become a shriveled shell of a man in the time it has taken you to find your two pairs of unstained underpants and a shirt that does not immediately scream your poverty in the language of the stylistically despondent!”

“You might want to consider being polite, Sherlock, or you’re going to be riding to Grandmama’s in the boot.”

“I shall escape and notify the relevant authorities!”

“And they’ll see how much of a little tosser you are and put you in with the bad kids they’re sending off to the bad kids school.”

“Can I have his room?”

“I don’t see why not, John. He won’t be using it. Not for a few years, at least.”

Sherlock’s roar of indignation was met by a quick push towards the door with one hand, as Lestrade picked up the boy’s snacks and luggage with the other. John waved at Lestrade’s mother and grinned as he followed the other two out of the kitchen, waving his own bags with big gleeful swings. They were on their way to Mrs. Holmes’s house for a BIG party and new suits and lots of time to have fun before and after the BIG party. The only bad thing was that Mycroft wouldn’t be there. He was worried about Mycroft, but wasn’t going to be a baby and let everyone know how worried he was. Mycroft hadn’t called or sent them a letter and that made his stomach a little sick if he thought about it too long. And Greg wasn’t doing well, either. He tried not to let it show, but he was having a hard time and felt sad and lonely. Sherlock was, too. Maybe he should tell Greg how quiet Sherlock got sometimes when they passed by Mycroft’s bedroom, but that would probably just make Greg even sadder and he couldn’t do that!

“Come on, John! Let’s get started before Sherlock eats his all of snacks and the upholstery, too.”

No, he couldn’t do that. This weekend was all about fun and he wasn’t going to ruin that by making anyone feel sad. Maybe next week, if Mycroft still didn’t call he’d say something. But maybe Mycroft would call and he wouldn’t need to…

“Where’s my suit?”

John looked around his and Sherlock’s room and was gravely disappointed that his promised garments weren’t hanging in wait.

“Probably where your other suits are hiding. Let’s get settled before we worry about trying on clothes, ok?”

And by settled, Lestrade meant letting himself have a chance to breathe for a few minutes and clear his head. The drive wasn’t a short one and the boys were filled with the particular brand of energy that kept them busy, but noisy, and in danger of leaping out of the car because of some ridiculous competition or wager every twenty minutes. He wanted a good nap, a good beer and a good snog.
The first two, at least, were possible, but not particularly likely, since the boys were already restless from the drive and would need to work off that restlessness in a highly-supervised fashion. The last one… well, he could daydream it was possible and would be doing so the first chance he got.

“You shall not drape me with the fetid fruits of the textile industry until the last possible second, if at all, for I shall resist most forcefully my incarceration in the threads and weavings of its strangling fabric!”

“Don’t worry, little man. I want you having the smallest possible window of opportunity for destroying the nice clothes Grandmama bought for you. And you won’t do anything to your suit unless you want to attend the party in your pants. Or less.”

“My anatomy is a marvel and would immediately shame the other attendees by comparison with their own bloated and saggy forms.”

“Fine then, naked it’ll be.”

“No, for the despondent weeping would sour the intended conviviality of the event and Grandmama would probably enact some form of punishment that John Watson, being puny and paltry, would not likely survive.”

“What? Why me? I’m not the naked one!”

“You are my whipping boy, therefore, the lashes shall be yours to endure.”

“Don’t worry, John, he’s wearing his suit, so nobody’s getting whipped. Let’s go and find Grandmama so we can say hello, then you two can start on that rock thing you wanted to do.”

“Your commitment to precision of language is only exceeded by your commitment to thoroughness of bathing. My experiment will document in scientifically-appropriate detail the permeability of various mineral species to bodily fluids. This is highly valuable research and you shall not diminish that fact with your denigrating descriptors.”

“Do we need to have some antibiotics or something nearby?”

“Dolt. Neither urine nor spittle are appropriate culture media for bacteria.”

“John, you know you’re free to run away at any time, right? Keep your urine and spittle safe from his evil little hands.”

“It’s ok, Greg. I already made Sherlock promise he won’t take any blood and that made him pout for an hour. A whole pouty night won’t be any fun at all!”

“I do not pout! I…evince a disappointed and contemptuous visage.”

“And you do it marvelously. Come on, I’m sure they told Grandmama we’re here and she has something waiting for us, not that you two need it what with all the food Mum packed, not a crumb of which remains alive.”

“Our rations were insultingly small. Barely enough to sustain a gnat. I have already prepared a memo for Mother Lestrade on the correct quantity of victuals to pack when she prepares for us a travel repast.”

“Mum will be happy to get it.”
“Of course. When I am a world-renowned scientist any sample of my handwriting shall be considered a national treasure.”

“Oh good. That means the paper that has ‘I will not throw peas under the refrigerator when Mother Lestrade is not looking’ written a hundred times is going to fund my pub nights for a month.”

“We were never again to speak of that.”

“Sorry, I got blinded by your fame.”

Another, according to Sherlock, insultingly-small repast later, Lestrade had the honor of stewarding the boys through their groundbreaking contributions to science, a film from the video library Grandmama seemed to be establishing for their entertainment, a filling dinner, a bit of so-called ‘quiet time’ in the library, a pre-bedtime raid on the kitchen, complete with dark clothing, masks and stocking feet so the boys could spirit away additional portions of the cheesecake they’d enjoyed after dinner and the inevitable argument on sleeping arrangements, which ended with Lestrade settling each boy in their own bed in their traditional bedroom and having his bed completely to himself. Which was something that had sounded glorious when he first thought about it and now… now he sort of hoped two little bodies would crawl up and join him at some point. Or, failing that, one lean, sexy body with a voice like a panther’s purr…

Which, of course, didn’t happen, but he could say, when Sherlock and John finally began tapping on him with a fireplace poker that he’d actually gotten a restful night’s sleep.

“Why are you beating on me with that?”

To avoid contact with your sleep-soured form.”

Lestrade took a quick sniff under his arm and had to admit Sherlock had a point.

“Fair enough. Ready for breakfast?”

“Yes! We’ve got lots of things we want to do before the party and we’ll need lots and lots of food for fuel!”

“I have come to the conclusion, John Watson, that you were simply put on this Earth to convert usable food into dung, a feat you accomplish with stunning capability.”

“What can I say – I’ve got talent.”

Sherlock snorted loudly and Lestrade used the opportunity to swing out of bed, get the boys set up with a deck of cards and take his turn washing the sourness off his body. Breakfast, playtime, suits, party, probably pre-party stuff he didn’t know about yet, Mum… this day was going to be achingly long. John was probably right about filling up with fuel or he’d be running on fumes before the first cocktail touched his lips.

After a surprisingly peaceful meal, it was time for John’s favorite and Sherlock’s most dreaded activity – the suits. And it was all the more joyful/torturous since each person had several suits ready for a final fitting and John delighted in protracting his suit-modeling experience as long as humanly possible. For his part, Lestrade hoped his sheer amazement at what was being put on his body wasn’t as obvious as he feared. There were four suits for him, ranging from ‘oh holy fuck’ to ‘well that looks smart’ and each one was purely fantastic. There was, also, a surprise selection of other clothes… extra trousers and shirts, a couple of jackets… Grandmama was, apparently, making
certain there was a full posh wardrobe waiting for whatever little social functions might drop in their laps during a visit. John looked like he wanted to throw the whole mass on the floor and roll in it…

“This is great! Look at all of these clothes! I can’t wait to get to wear everything and show it off!”

“A poodle with a diamond collar is still a poodle, John Watson.”

“They get to travel with circuses and perform and see the world. What’s wrong with that?”

“Your inability to properly process and wither from an insult is infuriating.”

Something for which Lestrade was exceedingly grateful.

“Oh, blah blah. You’re just testy because you had to sit in your cloth prisons and that always puts you out of sorts. I’m sure Greg will be happy to give you some chocolate to make you feel better. And give me some chocolate since I’ve not complained a single time.”

And out come John’s puppy eyes to drive home his sneaky request. The boy was learning the power of persuasion at a very rapid rate.

“We’ll see what we can find once we’re finished and your fingers are well away from all of these nice things.”

“The quality of this garb can only be described as tramp-worthy and the addition of artistic flourishes can only enhance their appeal.”

Not for the first time, the older boy hoped Grandmama was paying the nice tailor a king’s ransom for his efforts.

“Enough of that. A few more minutes and we’ll be done; then we can see how much mischief you two can find.”

“Shall I quantify for you the likely amount?”

“Not necessary, Sherlock, I’ve gotten good at estimating that by now.”

No, he wasn’t hiding. Just because Mum was here and taking a more extended tour of the house with Grandmama, he wasn’t skulking around so there was absolutely no chance they would see him. That was positively, unquestionably not what he was doing. He was certainly not worried about being the mouse that the cats would find and play with before they killed.

“Why are you hiding?”

“Shut it, Sherlock. And I’m not, for your information.”

“You are cowering and peering around the corner as if you are expecting the Nazi guards to be marching down the corridor.”

“There aren’t any Nazi’s. Just Mum and Grandmama.”

Sherlock gasped and pressed himself against the wall, pulling John with him to prevent the smaller boy carrying through with his intent to say hello to the women and reveal their location.
“Why are we all hiding now?”

“Be silent, dust mite! If the females are alerted to our presence, they shall demand our attention and likely commit such atrocities as straightening our garments or making us sit in shame as our photographs are displayed and commented upon with vaguely dove or chicken-like noises.”

“But they might let us have biscuits and the special chocolate drink the cook makes for us!”

“Your stomach shall not compromise my dignity!”

“May I inquire as to how John’s stomach is able to perpetrate the dissolution of your integrity, Sherlock?”

All three boys turned sheepish eyes to Grandmama, who was standing with Lestrade’s mother and staring at them with eyes that said there was no universe in which the boys had not been truly and utterly captured.

“And now my reconnaissance position has been compromised by your bottomless gullet! You are no ally of mine, John Watson!”

Lestrade patted both boys on the head and turned his most charming smile on the presiding matriarchs.

“We were just playing a game, you know these two love their games.”

“Ah, and here I thought you were continuing your mission to avoid intersecting our path at all costs. How dodderly of me.”

Lestrade’s smiled so widely at the elderly woman that he wasn’t entirely sure it wouldn’t freeze in that position.

“But now that you’re out of your rabbit hole, son, you can come with us for a little chat about the party tonight.”

“Can we have biscuits and chocolate, too?”

Sherlock erupted in a strangled screech of frustration as John’s arms were taken to escort the two women to the library, leaving behind the two boys who obviously didn’t have their priorities properly sorted.

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Alright, they had marching orders. Eat a good early dinner, be dressed and ready for inspection a half-hour before the guests were slated to arrive, Sherlock and John were to remain in custody of an duly-designated warden as much as was humanly possible for the two hours they were required to remain in attendance, he had to… well, he got to be man of the house for the night, standing in what should have been Mycroft’s shoes. Greet guests, smile, keep an eye out that everyone had drinks and nibbles, keep an eye out for people enjoying too much drinks and nibbles, keep both eyes on Sherlock and John, keep three eyes on Mum because… well, just because. She was looking forward to this a little too much, in his opinion. Apparently, that man she was seeing wasn’t being seen anymore…

“Greg! Where are my shoes?”

“Next to your feet.”
“Which direction?”

“What the fuck?”

Oh, it seemed John wasn’t able to see his shoes since he was too busy posing in the mirror and standing so close he couldn’t actually see anything below his knees.

“Mother Lestrade shall hear of your profanity. If she does not chastise you and invite the guests to watch, I shall be most surprised.”

“Yeah, that’s the biggest of my worries. Now… fuck! What happened to your hair?”

The ends of Sherlock’s hair were singed and his head smelled like a campfire.

“I was experimenting on the use of alternative materials for detonation cord and… poof.”

“Poof?”

“That was an accurate representation of the resulting sound. The visual aspects, however, were far more impressive.”

“And you had to do this now?”

“I was bored.”

“At least you took your suit off first. Thanks for that.”

“It formed the basis of my test materials.”

Lestrade counted to ten. Then twenty. Then thirty, with a few accompanying sympathetic pats from John on his arm.

“Into the shower. Now.”

Sherlock wisely followed orders and, after a shower, two washes of his hair, a fingers-crossed hair trim and a fresh suit, found himself presentable once more.

“The clutches of this garment are suffocating me.”

“I will suffocate you past death if you do one thing to it.”

“Your inanity is as boring as this gathering is sure to be.”

“Sherlock… you just need to stop squawking and start having fun. Mrs. Holmes said we’d even get special drinks like everyone else!”

“Only you, John, could be enraptured by the thought of juice or a pallid milk punch.”

“Juice or milk… I can’t find anything wrong with that. Greg, is it time yet? I need a drink.”

Lestrade mentally gave his wholehearted agreement.

“Ok, everybody looks good, Sherlock’s got a fresh haircut, which Grandmama will appreciate, and you actually got your shoes on your feet. I think we’re ready.”

Taking a second to check his own hair and shoes, Greg then ushered the boys out of the bedroom and to Grandmama’s study, where they had been commanded to present themselves for inspection.
“Good, you are here. And… Sherlock, that is not the suit I chose for tonight’s festivities.”

“Since that is correct and you asked no question, I have no comment to make.”

“I take your point. Do let me make a second attempt. That is not the suit I chose for tonight’s festivities. Does your previous suit survive in any recognizable form?”

“The trousers are… no, I must rescind that. The beast has been well and truly repurposed.”

“I see. And is your new coiffure entwined in the saga of your suit’s change of career?”

“You are not a magistrate! You cannot command my testimony!”

“I shall enter that as a guilty plea. Gregory, you have demonstrated quick thinking and I greatly appreciate your efforts. Dear John… how delightful you look. You shall be quite the talk of the guests, I have no doubt.”

John took a little bow and let his grin light up the room.

“Thank you, Mrs. Holmes. And thank you, too, for the suit. It’s the nicest I’ve ever seen!”

“A handful of castoffs you stole from a rag bag would be the nicest you have ever seen, peasant #2.”

“Why #2?”

“There are now two peasants haunting the fringes of my intellectual glow and I must distinguish between you.”

“And with that, we’re off to find these two a drink to occupy their hands and me to…”

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders in the first gesture of nervousness he had let show.

“You shall excel, Gregory. Little is expected of you besides representing the household and you shall comport yourself flawlessly in that role; I would not ask this of you if I were not convinced you would bring honor to the Holmes name. Now, seeing as Sherlock is near to chewing through his tie and John’s commitment to fashion is waiting to be displayed, please take a few minutes to relax and acquaint yourself with the setting. I shall join you shortly.”

Taking the dismissal gladly, Lestrade pulled the younger pair out of the study and got directions from Sherlock to the room where the party was to be held, whistling softly when he saw the space. Large, but with scattered seats and floor plants to make it seem cozier. A piano was set off to the side and there were doors that opened to one of the gardens, which had been provided with lanterns for soft lighting for those who wanted to take a stroll in the brisk night air. It looked like something you saw in an old movie, where people dressed in their nice clothes and milled around with glasses of champagne, the ladies smoking cigarettes with those long holders. The whole setting sent another wash of nerves flowing over the desperate-to-run-his-hands-through-his-hair Holmes-for-the-evening and he hoped and prayed that Grandmama was right.

“This is amazing! And it’s going to be filled with people! Are they going to play the piano? I hope so, because there could be dancing who doesn’t love dancing?”

Two non-John hands went up, Sherlock’s because of nightmarish memories of dancing lessons and Lestrade’s because it would be the kind of dancing that went with a grand piano and long cigarette holders and Mycroft wasn’t here to guide him through it.
“You’re both boring. Luckily, I’m fun enough for all of us.”

John strutted off to better inspect the room as Lestrade tried to calm Sherlock’s apoplexy. Fortunately, one of the staff came into the room carrying a tray with what the older boy recognized as a snifter of brandy and two colorful concoctions for the boys. Even Sherlock didn’t complain… much… as he was handed his drink and took a few preliminary sips.

“John Watson shall have to be watched closely. I believe he has become deranged.”

“No, John’s just got a good attitude. He’s ready to have a nice time and that’s the proper way to be tonight.”

“Then you are decidedly improper since you appear much like a quivering reed in a typhoon.”

“Thanks for that. And I’m not quivering, I’m… surveying.”

“The stench of your lie has fouled the room.”

“Shut it. But… how many people do you think are going to be here tonight, anyway?”

“Hmmm… it depends. If Grandmama has only condemned moderately-close family to suffer through this ritualistic torture then the number may not exceed forty, but if she has included the aged and spiderweb-shrouded members of her peer group, then…”

Sherlock broke away and pushed open another door, waving his free hand in annoyance.

“…there is no foreseeable limit! Behold! A chamber to house the overflow of freeloaders on my inheritance.”

That it was. Another room about half the size of the current one, set up and ready to receive visitors.

“And you shall act as cabin steward and entertainment director for this Titanic-sized cruise of despair!”

Sherlock laughed long and deep and Lestrade had to take possession of his juice or another suit would fall victim to the boy’s enthusiasm for the evening.

“Hey, what’s… yes! Two party rooms! This just gets better every minute!”

Lestrade left the two boys to explore the rooms and nearly took a seat on one of the small sofas, remembering at the last second that he should probably keep his trousers unwrinkled until the guests arrived. Mycroft was going to owe him rather grandly for this. In fact, he was going to start drawing up a list. A big list. A several-page list of what his partner was going to do to repay the debt. Pictures might be included, too. And instructions. Detailed instructions…

“Is this actually my son?”

Oh good, Mum was here and feeling funny.

“Yes, as you… can… see…”

That wasn’t Mum. It might be somebody’s mum, but it wasn’t his. His mum didn’t have… hair. Or… were those diamonds? Hanging down where there should be dress, but there wasn’t dress there was only skin and why hadn’t he noticed Mum’s dress had the potential to reveal… frontal
skin.

“See something you like?”

“No… do not say another word. Words are hereby forbidden from this point onward.”

“I’m glad I had you, Greg. You keep life interesting. So, I take it you like your mum’s new look.”

“It’s… definitely new.”

“Well, I did get a little help, but just the finishing touches. The rest is all me.”

Mums do not twirl like princesses showing off their new gown. Not done. Something not to be stood for.

“Mum, do you have to act like a girl?”

“How else am I supposed to act? Like a boy?”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“You know, Mycroft uses barrels full of words, but somewhere in there is usually the bit about what he meant. You might want to try that for yourself sometime.”

“You’re not a girl, you’re a… mature woman.”

“Did you just call me mature?”

“Is that bad?”

“It's not good.”

Oops.

“I mean…”

“Yes?”

“You look pretty?”

“There’s the boy I know and sometimes love! And you look very smart, too. Actually, you look very handsome; I can’t wait to show around your pictures. You look like you belong here, Greg, you really do.”

“I’m not sure I feel like it, though.”

“Well, neither do I, but that’s not going to stop me from enjoying every minute of it. The little weasels look like they’re ready to enjoy the night, too. They actually look proper in those tiny suits, don’t they?”

Damn the swell of pride at how good Sherlock and John looked tonight. Might as well officially adopt them and be done with it.

“They’d best after the effort it took to get them into those suits. Well, for Sherlock, at least. For John, the biggest fight was not having him put his on to wear to breakfast.”
“You did a fine job, son. I know a lot of responsibility is on your shoulders, and a lot of trust, but you never disappoint. I’m very proud of you.”

One small kiss was… relatively given to Lestrade and he decided he needed another drink.

“Did you just air kiss me?”

“Do you see these lips? Do you know how long it took me to get them to look this delicious?”

“I’m going to be sick.”

“No you’re not, because I hear people moving this way. The show is starting, Greg… good luck.”

And abandoned to the oncoming tiger herd! Perfect… just perfect. Luckily, he could smile and nod with the best of them. Champion ranking, actually. And the Greg Lestrade charm hadn’t failed him yet. Smile, nod and ooze charm… this was going to hurt…

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Smiling and nodding wasn’t working! He had to talk! What was wrong with these people? Didn’t they understand the universally-understood meaning of smiling and nodding? It means you’re trying not to talk! How was he supposed to remember his name and who he was when he was staring at person after person who looked just like the old movie people he’d been imagining, minus the long cigarette holders! And they were all Cousin This and Cousin That, Major A and Colonel B, Earl Right and Duke Left, and if they thought he remembered any of it, they were batty! At least no one had asked him to take their coat or shine their shoes or anything, but maybe that was because he looked like he might faint away if they did. Which Sherlock, the bastard, was waiting for with a tiny antique camera he’d found somewhere jammed in his pocket.

“That you have not been hurled into a muckpile where the odor of your poverty would be well and truly at home continues to astound me.”

“Thanks, Sherlock. You’re my favorite demon child.”

“Something I would gladly embrace if it granted me the ability to sprout wings and flee this crippling boredom.”

“You’ve been practicing your pickpocketing, so don’t tell me you’re bored.”

Sherlock’s shocked gasp was half surprise and half indignation, but he elected not to comment.

“Did you give it all back?”

“If, and I use the term if with all appropriate boundaries of meaning, I had chosen to hone a valuable life skill, then it would only make sense to put myself to the ultimate test and stretch the limits of my abilities to their fullest. And mind that we are still operating fully under the flag of if.”

“Yes, your flag is fully unfurled. Are you sure you got the right stuff back to the right people?”

“Of course! At least within a statistically-acceptable margin of error.”

Perfect.

“Go re-steal what you stole and double check. I’m probably the one who’d get blamed since I’m the…”
“Money grubber?”

“No. The…”

“Dole defrauder?”

“Stop that! I was going to say…”

“Pet-food quality livestock animal?”

“You’re going to have a hard time sleeping tonight with your feet tied to a tree branch so you hang like bunch of bananas!”

“Notice my failing to quake with fear. Besides John shall thwart any attempt you make to discomfit my slumber.”

“Not if I let him wear his suit to bed, he won’t.”

“Foiled by the ostracod’s unseemly vanity!”

“Yeah, that always gets in the way. Where is the cod, anyway?”

“Finagling away from the serving staff another plate of hors d’oeuvres and a fruity beverage.”

“One plate?”

“I have no control over his actions! If he returns with duplicates of his spoils, it is not my concern.”

At least all food and beverages had remained off of the suits, out of the hair and not down the shirts of either of the boys. In truth, they’d been on their best behavior so far and with enough snacks and criminal diversions, things might stay that way.

“What is my concern, however, is the number of specimens of this inbred gathering who have sought you out for coitus. Mycroft would not be pleased if he were to be made aware of this fact.”

Oh good, Sherlock had noticed the other feature of his exciting evening… nobody had mistaken him for a servant yet, but a flustered number seemed to believe he was the fresh meat in the tiger cage. A few of whom were currently waiting for Sherlock to move away so they could pounce a second time. Or third.

“You expect flirting at parties, Sherlock. A few more years and it’ll be you getting chatted up when you’re out for an evening.”

“Abominable. I shall make a point to announce clearly and at the onset that I am not interested in tedious romantic behavior or sexual escapades and will express my disinterest in withering tones.”

Which was completely, unsurprisingly and distressingly believable.

“Well, there’s time yet before it’s a worry so we can think of a less bastardy strategy for you to make your point.”

“I would prefer weapons be involved.”

“I’m certain you would. Oh look, here comes John bearing gifts.”
And a very large smile, since his little plates had something suspiciously sweet-looking on them.

“Look! I went to the kitchen and got two of the coconut tarts we had at lunch and the cook put it on little plates so no one will notice we have a something they don’t have. She told me to say they were quiches if anyone asked, though.”

Sherlock promptly appropriated his share and glared at everyone around him, whether they noticed or not, to ward off competitors for his prize.

“How much is that worth?”

“It is incalculably valuable. Now, let us continue our observations of the mummies that are dragging their burial shrouds across the floor.”

“Ok. And it’s time to take data on Mrs. Lestrade again. She’s with another man, but this time she’s smiling!”

An additional factor brightening his evening. Mum was in the tiger cage, too! And she liked it! Giggling... a woman her age did not giggle! Not that he’d say anything because the ‘her age’ part might slip out accidentally and he’d have a hard time watching Sherlock and John, what with being confined to his room for the next few years. But it wasn’t right... all those posh gents chatting her up and making her smile and laugh... except the few that didn’t, but she got that sorted quickly and just moved on to the next one waiting their turn! At least Sherlock and John had a big chart they’d made so he’d have all the names of these blokes in case any of them got too forward and needed to be taken down a peg. That would be first on Mycroft’s agenda when he got back. Giving it to the lustful bastards right in the wallet or title or business or whatever hurt them most. Not that anyone had done anything Mum didn’t like yet... he’d been completely mistaken about any hand touching or ear whispering his stupid eyes tried to tell him he was seeing... but he was staying on alert anyway.

“Gregory? Are you hoping to burn a hole in your mother’s chest from the force of your incendiary glare?”

“Oh... hi, Grandmama. And no, I was just... thinking very hard. It’s easy to mistake that for incendiary glaring.”

“Well then, my mistake. Anyway, how are you enjoying the event, my boy? You have made quite the impression on my guests, Gregory, and that impression is a highly favorable one. You should be most proud.”

Ok... maybe he could enjoy a little pride. Not too much, though, or he’d jinx things.

“Thanks. I’ve tried to do what I think Mycroft would do and it seems to be working.”

“Mycroft is an exemplary host and you are well served following his example, however, you have inserted, perhaps more than you realize, your own personal touch and that is making the evening a very admirable display of your hosting ability. When you and Mycroft entertain in your future residence, I believe your invitations shall quickly become some of the most eagerly sought among your social circle.”

Maybe he could enjoy a tiny bit more pride and avoid a jinx. It was good to know he was getting a passing mark for this test because the last thing he wanted to be was the partner who Mycroft had to cross his fingers over so their nights with posher friends didn’t embarrass everyone involved. And
there would be business things, too, and he definitely couldn’t make a mess of that! It was too important to Mycroft, so getting the good word from Grandmama meant a lot. A very, very lot.

“I appreciate that. I worry sometimes, you know… I’m not… well, it’s not like I’m…”

“If you are attempting to cast aspersions upon yourself, kindly spare my ears your ridiculous assertions. You are a man of quality and that is the end of the matter. Though… I will not deny that certain individuals present are moderating the more, shall we say, toffee-nosed aspects of their natural personality due to their knowledge of where you shall stand in the Holmes hierarchy. However, no gathering of individuals shall be bereft of those whose conceit is completely disproportionate to their personal worth.”

Holmes hierarchy… someday he’d have to start thinking in those terms, he supposed, but… no, no buts. He could do that. Nobody wanted him to be any different than he was and welcomed him into that hierarchy with open arms. Up at the top of that hierarchy, actually. Ok… he might be the working-class man of the family, but he was of the family and that was the important thing to remember.

“And how many of the assembled could contain the rather nuclear energy belonging to Sherlock and John? The children have been positively angelic by their own standards and that is another credit to your burgeoning account. I am very pleased with Sherlock’s progress for bits of sleight of hand, as well. Dear John is a marvelously complementary distractor for their little amusements.”

“I’ve already had one member of the force realize that I’ll probably be arresting those two at some point in the future. Nice to know it’ll be for a simple, happy little crime like lifting wallets.”

“Oh… have you made progress advancing your future career?”

“Well… I had a conversation with one the local lads, a sergeant, too, and he said to see him when I’m ready to make an official start with things. Give my application a bit of extra attention.”

“Excellent. A person of authority properly recognizes your potential and superior qualities. I am very pleased, Gregory. Already you are making an impression on those with whom you will work and the superiors who will evaluate your performance. And you are trepidatious about your showing at my little party?”

Grandmama tsk-tsked as she walked away towards a cluster of her guests and Lestrade felt no shame standing a little straighter because of the praise. He was lucky, he really was. Not everyone had people who believed in them. Thought they had the right stuff to make something of themselves in this world. That they… what the fuck! Did that medal-chested bastard just kiss his mother’s hand? And why was she giving him that little sultry smile? That was worse than giggling! Apparently Sherlock and John were the least of his worries tonight. Why couldn’t mum just pick a few pockets? That was so much less upsetting…

Wouldn’t a stroll be lovely?

Sorry, I have to watch the boys.

Are you sure that’s all you want to watch?

Oh look, there’s cheese. I do love a bit of dairy. Excuse me?
How about we find a nice quiet place for a… chat.

This place is tops for a chat! We’re having a brilliant one right now, for instance. Oh look, they brought out... some lovely cheese. Excuse me?

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I wager you shag like a professional.

More cheese! This really is my night. Excuse me?

___

Young man, I do believe Sherlock has my watch.

Have you tried the cheese? It’s absolutely amazing!

All night he was fighting off the grabby hands, keeping Sherlock and John from enacting any of their threatened experiments, giving the evil eye to the brasher blokes who had their eye on his mum and making sure everyone was fed, boozed, and enjoying themselves. When the final guests said their goodbyes and the staff began to clear away the evidence of the party, Lestrade let loose a massive sigh, gave an even larger stretch and shook his head like a wet dog to loosen up the gel that was keeping his hair looking as posh as his suit. He’d reached the finish line and hadn’t fallen flat on his face on the way. A definite victory to put on his record.

“Well, son… I have to say this was a night to remember.”

“I’d say so. You looked like you were having fun.”

He’d have to practice getting the pout out of his voice. Even he could hear it.

“Poor thing. Someone’s not happy his mum had a good time. You’re so cute when you’re scandalized.”

“You can’t scandalize me! I’m not John, I’ll have you know.”

“That’s true, you sound more like Sherlock.”

“I’m forgetting you said that.”

“Yeah, that might be for the best.”

Lestrade struggled with his moral indignation and had to grudgingly admit that it was a little hypocritical to be happy for his mum to have a social life, but be scandalized when he actually saw her having a good time.

“I’m… I’m glad you had fun, though.”

“Truly?”

“I suppose. No… I am glad. You deserve a nice time and this was a nice party.”

“Thank you, Greg. It was definitely a nice party and I’m happy I came. I was a little nervous when I got the invitation, but I’m very happy I accepted. This is something you dream about, you
know? Getting to attend a real upper-class party, just like in the movies. It really was a wonderful night. And now, Rowena said I could have a room and leave tomorrow, instead of riding home this late. I will be taking that offer because I am positively knackered.”

“And you want to find out what the beds are like, don’t you?”

“Ok, that might be part of my decision.”

“And breakfast.”

“Stop reading my mind.”

“I’ll tell Sherlock and John you’re staying so they have another target when they decide they want a late night… well, early-morning… change of bedroom.”

“Oh no. That’s the parents’ job.”

“I’m not their dad!”

“Close enough. Goodnight, Greg. I’m going to make use of the enormous bathtub I saw in my room for the night and then get some rest. You should do the same.”

“I will, just as soon as I make certain everything’s alright here.”

“That’s my son… stepping forward to be the man of the family.”

“Mum…”

“I’m proud of you, Greg. You were something to watch tonight. Guarding your virtue, while making sure everyone had a nice time…”

“Oh. You noticed that.”

“My son is irresistible to the rich and powerful. You sure you still want Mycroft? I think you could have your pick if you want to trade.”

“Very funny. Besides, he’s at the top of the mountain, so anyone else would be trading down.”

“Good point. And I honestly can’t picture any of your other admirers taking an afternoon to play a little football or enjoy a pint with you and your mates.”

“My Mycroft’s special. That’s why I love him.”

“Feel good saying that?”

Lestrade couldn’t have held back his smile if he wanted to.

“Yeah. Every single time.”

“That’s my Greg. Well, my bath awaits. I’ll see you for breakfast?”

“I’ll let Sherlock and John be the ones to wake you.”

“I’m locking my door.”

“Sherlock can pick locks.”
“I’ll ask him to build a trap for the door.”

“He’d probably do it, too. That’s a smart plan.”

“I have my moments.”

Lestrade watched his mum cheekily wave goodbye as she sashayed out of the room and waited until she was gone to start laughing. What a night… but he’d done it. The next one, and he was absolutely certain there would be a next one, it’d be even easier.

“John requires assistance.”

“Oh, and am I allowed to know why he needs assistance, goblin lord?”

“If he is to be retrieved from the chimney in the Yellow room, then yes.”

“John would not go up a chimney in his suit.”

“He is not wearing his suit.”

“No suit?”

“Prepare yourself for flagrant nudity.”

“Wonderful. Lucky for me, I wasn’t ready for bed, anyway.”

“No, you were not. My data set for tonight’s debacle is nothing if not robust and both you and John are necessary to properly collate the volume of information.”

“A little chat about the party? Ok, we can do that.”

“Do not describe science in such frivolous terms.”

“I’ll get a dictionary and find something non-frivolous.”

“See that you do.”

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One naked, sooty boy extracted from chimney, washed, dried and into pyjamas. One non-naked, non-sooty boy into pyjamas and both pyjama-wearers set into a single bed to facilitate the discussion of Sherlock’s observations and the spontaneous eruptions of sketching and scribbling for new ideas about future experiments and research projects. After an hour, the two pyjama-wearers were snoring softly, and Lestrade removed Sherlock’s notebook to the side table, arranged the blankets and quietly left the room. Those two would still be awake early in the morning, but maybe a touch later than normal since it was already half-past fuck-me-I’m-dying in the morning and they had tired themselves nicely before dropping off.

His own quick shower and pair of child-preparedness pyjamas, brought Lestrade finally to his own bed which never failed to be large, comfortable and maybe, just maybe still smelled of Mycroft. Which was a very nice thought to fall asleep to. Not that it lasted very long, because he knew it hadn’t been more than a few breaths since he fell asleep, ignoring the drool on his chin telling a completely different and, obviously, untruthful story. What in the hell did the boys want now?

“Shhh… do not rise, my love. I am quite certain you h…had an eventful night and are in need of rest.”
What?

“What?”

A larger-than-child-sized body crawled slowly into the bed and wrapped itself tightly around Lestrade’s body, providing fully the answer to his question.

“What… oh my god! You’re home! Here, hold on. Let me turn on the light…”

“No! No… please, Gregory. My dearest, beloved G…Gregory. Let me simply lie here. Please, my love… just let me lie here with you…”

Something wasn’t right. Something was not at all right…

“Love, are you ok?”

“I am home, Gregory. I am home.”

“What?”

“Just allow me to hold you, Gregory. Allow me that. Please, my love. J…just for awhile.”

Lestrade felt a terrible worry begin to slither under his skin and rolled slightly to wrap his arm around his lover and take a kiss of his lips. His slightly-shaking lover with the dry, overly-warm lips and… the bandage taped to his shoulder.

“What?”

“All will be well, Gregory. My dearest, dearest Gregory. Let me s…sleep here, next to you and we shall speak in the morning. Allow me this, my love. My precious, cherished spouse. All will be well, I give you my word.”

Lestrade bit back his reply and simply repositioned himself, sliding an arm around so Mycroft’s head could rest on his shoulder while he drew his partner’s body closer, desperately ignoring the small pained whimper that lanced through his brain like a sword blade taken straight from the forge.

“Whatever you need, love. We can talk tomorrow. You sleep now and I’ll make sure it’s the best sleep you can imagine. I love you, Mycroft. I love you with my whole heart and soul. I’ll take care of you. I’ll take care of everything, so you just rest, ok. You just rest…”

Mycroft curled more tightly around the body he had been longing for and Lestrade felt all of his fatigue burn away as he settled in to protect his lover from all threats, external or internal. Yeah, they would talk tomorrow… after he made sure Mycroft knew he was safe, loved and his family missed him more than he could possibly imagine...
Chapter 23

Mycroft wasn’t dead. Mycroft was *not* dead. He looked dead, though. Not that Lestrade actually knew what a real dead body looked like, but he *did* know they didn’t breathe and Mycroft was breathing. He’d checked. Several times. Lying there, watching the room steadily grow lighter as the sun rose and he could get a better look at his lover, he’d catalogued every aspect of his appearance and breathing was something he put right at the top of the list. Under that was the terrible color, the dark circles under the eyes, the bruise here and there and that bandage… whatever his partner had gone through it wasn’t pleasant and right now he was raging with a desire to find whoever did this and teach them the error of their ways.

Slipping very carefully and quietly out of the bed, Lestrade made certain Mycroft was bundled warmly and added to his list of worries that his lover didn’t stir even slightly with the action. Mycroft was the most aware sleeper he knew… but, sleep was good right now and he was going to make certain the man he loved got as much as he needed, which meant heading off the human alarm system that would probably be storming into the bedroom soon, demanding the official start of their day. Quickly tossing something other than pyjamas onto his body, Lestrade then made one further check on his partner before exiting into the corridor and starting to move towards Sherlock and John’s room. Not that he got far since the head of the household was bearing down on him like a fighter jet.

“Ah, Gregory. I have been informed that Mycroft returned early this morning. He is in the bedroom?”

Lestrade could only bring himself to grab the older woman’s sleeve as she started to walk past him, but he held fast to the fabric, praying he didn’t hear anything rip.

“I’m sorry, Grandmama, but he’s sleeping.”

The Holmes matriarch stopped and looked at Lestrade, then his fingers and back to Lestrade, who quickly lost his grip, but moved slightly to block her from continuing down the corridor.

“And he may sleep again after we speak.”

“No… no, he needs to sleep now.”

“Is there a reason why you are so insistent that Mycroft enjoy a leisurely morning in bed?”

“Because he’s not enjoying a leisurely morning. He’s exhausted, beat up, I think he’s running a fever and I have no idea what’s under the bandage on his shoulder, but I know it’s not good… he needs to sleep. Probably needs a doctor, too, but I was going to wait until he woke up and found out more about what was going on before I made that call.”

“Gregory… that is all the more reason for me to speak with him now.”

“If he thought he needed a doctor immediately, he’d have made that happen. If he thought there was something he needed to talk to you about when he got here, he would have. I don’t care how much… how much Mycroft needed quiet and rest, if there was anything he needed to involve you in, he would have done it. He knows what he does is very important and takes it very seriously. So, no… you don’t need to talk to him right now. Nobody needs to until he’s gotten some sleep and I know he wants to talk to anyone.”

Lestrade hoped he didn’t look as nervous as he felt, but it ultimately didn’t make any difference.
Mycroft was going to get the rest he needed and then as much time free from stress and activity as he wanted and that was the end of the story. Mycroft was his to protect and that was something he took very seriously.

“And are you certain he is thinking clearly?”

Shit. Why did Grandmama have to be so smart and rational?

“Not completely, but, on balance, I’d say yes. He would never not do his job and… yeah, he might put a health concern aside, but I checked him over a little and I think he’s alright for now. At least well enough to get some rest before a doctor pokes and prods at him, if that’s even necessary. His bandage was clean on the outside, so that’s a good sign, right? I promise I’ll let you know the very minute he’s ready for visitors. I promise that, but… just not right now. He needs his rest.”

Lestrade endured the scrutiny, knowing he’d probably need an ice bath to cool his skin from Grandmama’s blistering gaze, but felt a surge of relief when he received a little nod.

“Very well. I shall leave matters in your hands.”

“Thanks. I’m going to go tell Sherlock and John they need to leave us alone for now, too. Mycroft definitely doesn’t need their nonsense.”

“Do be careful, Gregory. Both are very likely to be affected most significantly by this situation.”

“I know. I’m going to… well, just say that Mycroft’s back but needs rest. He and I can meet with them together after I know Mycroft’s ready for it. That way, they’ll see he’s ok, just roughed up a bit.”

“A sound strategy. Good morning, Gregory. I shall await your notification.”

Holding back the urge to salute, Lestrade continued on towards the boys’ room, failing utterly to notice the decided crinkle that developed above the older woman’s nose. Such a protective young man, which matched him well with the protective young man lying, apparently, in need of care and attention. That particular character trait would be crucial in their future for there would be many times Mycroft would need care and attention, a sympathetic ear and warm arms wrapped around him. But then, as a police officer, so would Gregory. Wonderfully complementary… and now she had some time to discuss with her counterpart the upcoming Christmas holiday. Which would be especially festive this year, to say the least…

Lestrade sometimes wondered if there was just something wrong with him. Standing there, watching the two boys sleep made him happy. Just seeing them asleep and peaceful and safe… they never really talked in the books or movies about men feeling this way, it was always the women getting gooey over the kids, but maybe the books and movies got it wrong. Maybe the stubbly, rough working men got just as gooey over their kids when they were watching them sleep, tucked in their bed, looking like little angels. Angels who spent the day as devilish as Satan himself.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Lestrade gave both boys a gentle shake and then another to bring them awake and felt his heart grow even softer, seeing the big yawns, tousled hair and sleepy eyes that were trying their best to pry themselves open.

“If there is not a fire or peasant uprising, you shall suffer dire consequences for this disturbance!”

“Yeah, Greg… we didn’t go to bed until late…”
Ok, maybe part of his glee was getting, just this once, to turn the tables on the miserable early birds.

“Poor little tykes, having their sleep blown to pieces. I wonder what that reminds me of? Oh yeah, me! Every morning I’ve been here.”

“Sarcasm… the sign of a deficient mind.”

“That’s a bit hypocritical, don’t you think, Sherlock?”

“Since I am entirely certain you are not aware of the definition of any word possessing greater than a single syllable, you shall not have my agreement.”

“Lovely. Anyway, there’s something we need to talk about and I need you two fully awake so you understand me.”

Sherlock cut eyes towards Lestrade and then at John, who simply shrugged and rubbed the remaining sleep out of his eyes and frowned at the older boy.

“I’m awake. This had better be worth it, though, because I was having a great dream and you woke me up right when I was getting to the best part! And Sherlock had completely stopped wiggling!”

Ignoring Sherlock’s snort of indignation, Lestrade smiled and gave John an extra second to sit up and get comfortable.

“Oh, I think you’ll believe it’s worth it. Mycroft came home.”

Fortunately, Lestrade was prepared for John’s leap out of the bed and had an arm ready to stop the small boy from launching himself onto the floor, though John continued to piston his legs for some time, attempting to break through the barricade keeping him from his escape.

“Settle down, John. Mycroft’s not ready for visitors right now, and that’s what I came to tell you. I need for you and Sherlock to leave Mycroft alone until he actually gets some rest and is ready for visitors. I know you want to see him, and I’m sure he’s very anxious to see you, too, but he really needs the rest and you know that won’t happen if people are coming in and out of our room.”

“The overly-plumped partridge can indulge in his nap at a later time. John and I require a report concerning his absence and he must be dusted for pollen specimens without delay!”

“No, Sherlock… all that can wait. Mycroft got home very late and he’s absolutely exhausted. Really, he needs the rest and you two are going to be decent and give it to him.”

Lestrade felt a tugging on his sleeve and smiled at John, who was suddenly sporting a very worried expression.

“Is he ok?”

Well, that was the question of the day, now wasn’t it?

“I think so. We really didn’t get to talk much, he fell asleep almost immediately after getting in bed, but… I think he had a rough go of things, to be honest. When he’s awake, I’m going to talk to him and find out how he’s feeling and as soon as he’s ready for visitors, I’ll let you know. It’s all going to be fine, John. Don’t worry about anything.”

“You are only being partly truthful, indigent. What are you attempting, very poorly I might add,
to conceal?”

John nodded sharply at Sherlock’s accusation and Lestrade wondered why he’d thought he could get away with a little calm reassurance.

“I’m not concealing anything. I haven’t talked to Mycroft yet, so I don’t know the full story. He just looks a bit ragged, that’s all. Got a few nicks and bruises, nothing more than what I’ve gotten during a fast and furious match with my mates. He’s tired, though, that much I do know and I want him to get as much sleep as he can, ok? Can you do that for me?”

Sherlock and John looked at each other and the older boy did not like the little smile they were sharing.

“Oh no, whatever it is you’re thinking, you just put it right out of your heads.”

“Do not pretend to know my mind, plow pusher. It is far too advanced for you to begin to comprehend.”

“I don’t need to know what you’re planning, Sherlock, to know you’re planning something. Just leave Mycroft in peace, alright? I will let you know when he’s awake, but let him get the sleep he needs.”

Sherlock, obviously had an opinion on the subject, but his dissertation was put on hold by John’s silence-promoting shake of his head.

“We’ll stay out of your room, Greg. We promise.”

“Good. And thanks. Mycroft will appreciate that. Now, you two can go back to sleep and…”

“I think I’m awake for the day. How about you, Sherlock?”

“Since my slumber has been permanently compromised, I, too, am prepared to begin my day.”

“Ok, well, I’m sure the kitchen will be happy to feed you and Mum’s still here, so you can chat with her, if you like. Though, she might sleep late, too. Anyway, Grandmama’s awake, so you can…”

“We are not infants! We do not need your condescending attempts to schedule our morning!”

“Thank you, Sherlock. My hearing needed a good test for those high pitches that only dogs hear very well.”

“I am not a castrato!”

“Is that what I think it is?”

“Are you feeling an uncontrollable urge to grip your testicles?”

“Sort of, yeah.”

“Then you have gleaned the correct meaning of the term.”

“Ok, I’m leaving now.”

“That is probably for the best.”
Lestrade quickly left the room, unpleasant images filling his mind, and he had a very good idea how to erase them. One nice nap with someone who he had personally verified was quite the opposite of Sherlock’s word for the day…

Warm. He was warm and comfortable… quite a change from the last few days. And there was, beneath his fingers, skin that was so familiar to his touch that he would never need to see it to know its owner. The scent he was breathing in… the finest perfume ever created was a sad substitute for the beauty of this aroma. Home. He was home, in his husband’s arms, and nothing in his life could have ever prepared him for the overwhelming feeling that was crashing through every fiber of his being.

“Now there’s a gorgeous sight. Two beautiful blue eyes trying to decide if they want to open all the way or close up for a bit more sleep. Either is fine with me, I’ve got a lovely view, no matter what they choose.”

His beloved spouse was here… not a figment of his imagination, not a desperate image conjured in a dream… his Gregory was holding him close, softly stroking his skin…

“In truth, they have not decided on the most agreeable course of action.”

“I cast my vote for sleep. For as long as you want to.”

“I cannot deny the appeal of your ballot choice. What… do you know what is the time?”

“A little before noon.”

“WHAT!”

Lestrade smiled and nuzzled his lover’s slightly greasy hair. It had been quite the morning. Two pairs of small eyes peeking around the cracked-open door at regular intervals, two sets of older eyes peeking in slightly less often, but with a regularity that shouted their concern in a very loud voice. But no one had taken any action to wake his partner and that was all that really mattered.

“Surprise!”

“Gregory… I have not remained in bed until this hour in… I have never remained in bed until this hour!”

“You needed it, so enjoy your little luxury.”

“Oh dear, Grandmama must be…”

“Concerned about you, but not going to disturb you one second before I say it’s ok. We already worked that out.”

No, no he would not weep. It was a poor greeting for his dearest and, in truth, he was not entirely certain he was sufficiently hydrated to accomplish the task, but that did not quell his urge to shed a bounty of tears at his husband’s words. So protective, so devoted… to brave Grandmama, who most certainly had attempted to enter their boudoir at some point to extract whatever information he might be prepared to deliver… so very, very courageous. And warm…

“I am in awe of your strength, my love. And I am more grateful for it than I can successfully express. I will admit that this rather decadent time in bed has… helped. It has helped greatly.”
Lestrade laid a kiss on his lover’s forehead, then gave Mycroft a very gentle squeeze.

“Want to tell me what happened?”

Mycroft sighed and curled more tightly around his partner, wincing at the stiffness and pain he suffered from the action.

“The specifics I cannot divulge, I’m afraid.”

“Then don’t divulge them. But you can give me something, I know you can. And I do want to know, love. Hear what you went through, let you get some of it off your brain. You were… devastated last night.”

Devastated, the word was not inappropriate. Stumbling out of the car, he had seen nothing besides what was directly in front of him and that was only so he could find his spouse and take comfort in his embrace. How many days in the cold, running, hiding… he did not want to remember. Everything had gone awry. A rogue with a complement of supporters, not for their contingent, but for the opposition in this initiative, instigated his own agenda and the degeneration into chaos proceeded quickly for all sides. It had taken the entirety of his wits and training to extricate himself from the disaster and make his way home, though there had been several instances of near… not returning home.

“That I shall not deny. It was…”

Horrid. Abysmal. Demoralizing. Frightening, though it chafed to admit it. It was unexpected and unpredictable and he was still having great difficulty putting together the pieces of the situation… and of himself.

“Go on, Mycroft. Let some of it out so you feel better.”

And he would. Sharing his troubles with his husband could do nothing but soothe his torment and his beloved would listen for as long as he wished and with nothing but a compassionate ear.

“Very well. It was a scenario that spiraled rapidly out of control. The plans I crafted were rendered useless and it was somewhat of a difficulty to disentangle ourselves from the situation. Those I was with in… we had to go on the run and even then we found ourselves confronted by situations set in motion by players not party to the original assignment. It was not an easy process to find a way out of… where we were and for the last few days I have been alone and…”

Lestrade rolled slightly to more fully hold his lover and let him simply lie there, heaving large breaths as the emotions of his experience overtook him once more. No, none of this would make it to the boys’ ears, but he would listen. He would listen to everything Mycroft ever wanted to tell him and be there for him, even when Mycroft couldn’t say anything, but it was clear he was desperate for someone to help take away the pain he wasn’t allowed to voice.

“It’s ok, love… you’re here now and that’s all that matters. And I can’t begin to tell you how proud I am of you. It must have been a nightmare and you just spit in its face and came out the winner. That’s my Mycroft, always the conquering hero. Doesn’t let anything beat him. I am the luckiest man in the world and not a day’s going to go by that I don’t feel that way and make sure you remember it, too.

Mycroft took Lestrade in a crushing hug let his dark emotions be pushed back beneath the surface by his husband’s pure and undying love. Finally easing his hold, Mycroft looked up into Lestrade’s warm, adoring eyes and smiled for the first time in a very long while.
“I love you, Gregory. I knew, I absolutely knew and held fast in faith was that your embrace lay in wait for me at the end of that experience. It gave me purpose beyond that of any duty or obligation.”

“And I’ll always be waiting for you, Mycroft. Always. But I have to ask… why didn’t Grandmama just swoop in and fix things? I can’t imagine she didn’t know what was going on and she would never leave you in trouble like that if there was anything in the world she could do to help.”

“It is an unfortunate fact that not even Grandmama can monitor a situation continuously, for much must happen quickly and, often, away from fertile lines of communication. I have no doubt she was apprised of the dissolution of the agenda, however, at that point there was little she could set in motion because we did not take… there was worry that part of the reason we and our counterparts were compromised was that it would bring additional support in the area and… increase the number and quality of targets. As such, we remained out of communication until such time as we were forced to separate. At that point, I cannot say what did or did not occur.”

“But if you were alone… you could just have called home!”

A thought which he had battled every moment he huddled away from eyes that were looking for him. And sometimes found him. He battled with it terribly and for a reason he was not precisely proud to admit, but… Gregory would not judge. He would never judge…

“I contemplated that action, my dearest, but there were two obstacles that I, ultimately, did not choose to challenge. First… where I was located was not replete with telephones. Or telephone lines. The few I could likely have located… well, there is some detriment to appearing the way I do when that appearance makes you rather a memorable figure in certain parts of the world. Especially given my age. It would not have taken many inquiries to track me if a local shopkeeper watched me place a very long-distance phone call in his establishment.”

“Ok, that makes sense, I guess. What was the other obstacle?”

The shameful one.

“Ego. No, that is not exactly the proper term. A desire not to appear a failure. To prove my mettle and not be forced to cry home to my grandmother and beg she cast out her apron strings. It was my first assignment with any degree of non-administrative action and it was already a failed mission. Though the failure was not by my action or inaction, it was a failure and I could not compound that by showing myself to be incapable of managing at least my personal escape from the situation. How could I face Grandmama after such a thing? Ask her to continue to place her trust in me to handle whatever I might encounter in my duties. How could I face you? Ask you to continue to remain at my side when I had shamed myself so utterly.”

Lestrade glared at Mycroft and poked him forcefully in the chest.

“Bollocks! The only thing I care about is that you always come home to me. I don’t care how it happens, just as long as it does. That’s the important thing and I think it’s part of your job that you use every resource you’ve got when you get in a jam. You call Grandmama, you get a big stick and fucking knock a nest of wasps on someone’s head… you do what it takes!”

Lestrade’s worry for his partner flared feeling the trembling in Mycroft’s body, but realized the sounds Mycroft was making didn’t match a body wracked with tears.

“Are you laughing at me?”
“Wasps! Have you been watching cartoons with the children?”

Mycroft rolled onto his back and swallowed the pain as his giggles continued. There was no one, not a single person in the universe who could soothe his soul as well as his precious spouse. Who was beginning, himself, to giggle in the most delightful fashion.

“You’re not going to be laughing when your back’s against the wall and there’s a big wasp nest in arm’s reach to make the tosser coming after you regret he was ever born.”

“I shall see that your strategy is added to every training manual produced by the armed forces and intelligence community.”

“I want credit, too. Greg Lestrade’s Wonderful Wasp Whackery or something just as impressive.”

Mycroft’s giggles grew and only a long, soft kiss brought them under control.

“I am absolutely in love with you, Gregory Lestrade, of Wasp Whackery fame. And I will, from this point forward, do everything, take every opportunity and exercise every resource to always return to your side.”

“Alright, then. We’ve got a deal. Now, what can I do for you? A shower? Some food? I’m going to wait until you feel a little better to shag you through the mattress, but anything I can do in the meantime, you just tell me and I’ll get right on it.”

“A shower does sound heavenly. But… can I not have a small amount of sullying beforehand, so your cleansing efforts are maximized?”

“Mycroft, you’re in pain and I think you’re running a fever. I haven’t asked about that bandage on your shoulder, but I’m worried that whatever’s under there is infected. I don’t think a good sullying’s what you need right now.”

“Perhaps I shall tell you the story of how I received that particular infirmity. It involves hand-to-hand combat. And knives.”

“Knives!”

“Yes, knives. But all good stories require payment.”

“They do?”

“It is, I believe, a law.”

“You’re an evil man. Probably made that law yourself. It’s got to be gentle payment, though. Very, very gentle payment.”

“Something at which you excel, my dear.”

“Alright then, some very gentle payment then a shower. Then you tell me when you want to… shit.”

“Is that something you truly want to know?”

“Take a look at the window. And wave.”

Mycroft cut his eyes towards the window and couldn’t muster any irritation at the sight of the small,
homemade periscope peeking up above the windowsill. In fact, it started another round of giggles and a very royal wave from the newly-returned Holmes.

“They missed you, love. They missed you terribly.”

“And I missed them. To do this, Gregory… to return home and be again with you and the children. The feeling is indescribable.”

“Well, there are lots of stories of our own to tell, so we’ll have a nice time sharing. Though the knives one, we can keep from the little goblins.”

“Yes, that is probably wise.”

“Ok, then. I’ll help you with your shower and then we’ll let Sherlock and John in for a visit. Unless you want to talk to Grandmama first.”

“No… I would prefer to spend some time with you and the children before I return my mind fully to the matter of my assignment. I already put in place a number of actions as I was being spirited away from… where I was working and Grandmama has likely been following the reports of the results quite closely. There is little more I can add beyond some detail that is of interest, but not critical to anything at this moment.”

“Sounds good, let’s get you up and clean.”

Lestrade helped Mycroft out of bed and hid his own distress at how slowly and painfully his lover was moving. It wasn’t a hardship to stop the motion for a moment to crack the window and address the spies lying in wait below.

“Nice job, you little bastards.”

“We were worried about Mycroft!”

“The beluga never beaches himself for this prolonged a time! If there were ambergris to harvest from his carcass, I should have the privilege of its collection and required immediate notification of his passing to begin gathering the necessary tools for his dissection!”

Lestrade held the giggling Mycroft more tightly so he didn’t fall and gave him a quick bum pinch away from small and disapproving eyes.

“We’re getting a shower and then you two can visit. How does that sound.”

“Yeah!”

“Open the window further so we may enter!”

“Just what is it about you not wanting to use doors, Sherlock?”

“The nearest door is a league away! By the time we reach it and make our way back to this location we shall need torches to penetrate the dark of midnight!”

Mycroft’s whispered ‘how greatly I have missed this, Gregory’ brought a large smile to Lestrade’s face and he opened wide the window.

“Come in. While you’re at it, find some clothes for Mycroft and me to wear and put them just inside the bathroom door. Unless, of course, you want an eyeful of Mycroft and me in all our glory.”
“The disgust I am experiencing at that thought is so massive it is rending my bones to dust and liquefying my muscle and connective tissue.”

“Then you know what to do, Sherlock, to keep yourself from being a gooey mess. We’ll see you two in a minute.”

“After, of course, you lower a rope we may climb.”

“Ummm… no.”

“I am not an arachnid! I cannot scale this façade with my fingertips alone!”

“Then you’ve got some thinking to do. John, try to keep him from getting brain damage, alright? Either from the thinking or the climbing.”

“I’ll do my best. But… Mycroft, can you hear me?”

Mycroft smiled just slightly smugly at Lestrade and leaned towards the window.

“Yes, John, I can.”

“I was wondering if you wanted, maybe, for Sherlock and me to take… let’s say a sheet to the laundry for you? You could just hang it over the window sill and let it dangle down for us to grab, for instance. Doesn’t that sound nice?”

Said with John’s most heartwarming smile and pleading puppy eyes, which made Mycroft chuckle in utter defeat.

“That is most considerate of you, John. My dear, would you accommodate his request?”

Now, it was John’s turn to smile smugly and the two older boys held back yet another round of giggles and Sherlock’s time-space destroying pout. Making sure Mycroft was steady, then being smacked on the shoulder for making sure Mycroft was steady, Lestrade pulled both sheets off of the large bed, tied them together and was about to hurl them out the window, when Mycroft reminded him that if the boys required it, they would certainly fashion a grappling hook and the insult to the wallpaper would be looked upon poorly by Grandmama. Instead, one end of one sheet was affixed to the leg of a very heavy bureau and the other end was tossed out of the window.

“There you go, John. You’ll have to get up here to get the other end though. It accidentally got tangled around something. We’ll see you soon.”

Lestrade wagged a finger at Mycroft, who was failing to hide his laughter and marched him into the bathroom. There wasn’t much they could do with the boys right outside the door, but Mycroft would have his own price to pay if they got a moment alone. Very, very gentle payment, of course…

“Finally! If there is a drop of water remaining in England, I shall be extraordinarily surprised.”

“Piss off, you bastard. And thanks for the clothes. Didn’t it occur to you that I might want pants?”

“Firstly, I would rather suffer an amputation than touch your undergarments. Secondly, you shall wear your clothes only until you can drag Mycroft away to slake you lust. You should offer me
gratitude that you have not so many garments to remove prior to fornication.”

Lestrade continued to escort Mycroft to the bed, ignoring his partner’s smirk since John had kindly provided him a pair of clean pants. Once Mycroft was comfortable, John, who had been nearly dancing with excitement launched himself at the bed, the second try assisted by Lestrade and beamed brightly at Mycroft when he finally made it on top of the mattress.

“Hi, Mycroft. We’re glad you’re home.”

“Thank you, John. I am very happy to be home.”

“That’s good. We were worried that something happened to you, but you’re ok, I suppose, even though you really don’t look very good. Greg said everything was going to be fine, though, and I’m sure that’s right since Greg wouldn’t lie about something important like that.”

“No, he most certainly would not. And I am well, John. A bit tired and somewhat ragged from more physical work than I am accustomed, but nothing more than that. I am sorry you worried, however. I cannot always determine the degree of communication I may maintain while I am absent, nor the exact duration of my absence, but do know that you, Sherlock and Gregory are never out of my thoughts.”

“That’s good. What did you bring us?”

Lestrade barked out a laugh and Sherlock showed the first obvious sign of interest in the conversation to date, although both Lestrade and Mycroft were sufficiently skilled to know the boy had been carefully observing his brother for any sign of a real problem. Fortunately, the shirt John had provided the older Holmes sibling did a very good job of hiding the slight bulge from his bandage.

“I am afraid I was not able to shop for gifts, but we shall take an afternoon for a little shopping once we return and you may have an item of your choice to stand in your absent souvenir’s stead.”

“I guess that’s alright. I understand that you might not always be able to bring us presents. Sometimes you’ll be able to bring us presents and that will be good enough.”

Mycroft smiled broadly and hoped he did not appear too foolish with the act. A glance at Lestrade found his spouse smiling, also, but at him and the joy he was taking from the moment. To be loved so deeply… already the misery of his experience was fading. It would not vanish completely, not for a very, very long time and after what would likely be even worse situations through which he would have to battle, but his heart had not felt so light since nearly the moment he departed.

“I believe we have reached an accord. Sherlock, have you nothing to say to your brother?”

“I did not believe it possible for you to be a more unattractive human being, but you have proved me wrong. You are appalling in appearance and if the staff does not run in terror from your lumbering form stalking the corridors, I shall be greatly surprised.”

“So devoted a sibling. I am truly blessed.”

Sherlock waved off the sarcasm and joined John on the bed, most certainly not to get a closer look at his brother for anything he might have missed in his first round of observations. With both boys present and as calm as they ever were, Lestrade decided it was a good time to broach the conversation Grandmama said should happen sooner than later.

“You are, too, you miserable thing, so don’t be cheeky. But, let’s talk about something for a
We know we were upset while Mycroft was gone and had a lot of worries about what he might be going through. A lot of times, like this one, Mycroft won’t be able to tell us anything about what happened while he was away and now and then he might come home tired and beat. Or… maybe even worse. He might actually get hurt and we have to be ready for that. It’s… it’s going to happen sometime and we’re going to have to accept that.”

John gasped loudly and Mycroft quickly stroked the boy’s hair to settle him down. Sending Lestrade an inquisitive look, Mycroft read Lestrade’s various facial expressions and minute gestures and came to a conclusion that was not at all surprising. Apparently Grandmama had engaged his lover in a conversation all their own.

“I wish I could deny Gregory’s assertions, John, but I cannot. There will be times that my return home will not be as peaceful as have been the ones up to this point and we must all acknowledge that fact and be prepared to face it. When Gregory takes employment with our law enforcement service, the same worry shall extend to him. Not all lawbreakers go willingly with the constables and he may acquire the occasional injury. And this is in addition to the fatigue, both physical and mental, he shall endure at times, which shall pain us as deeply as seeing him sporting a wound.”

John looked over to Sherlock who was looking back and exactly as gravely and the two fell into a round of whispers that Lestrade took advantage of to take his own seat on the bed and wrap an arm around his lover.

“John and I do not find this acceptable.”

“In truth, neither do I, nor does Gregory, but one cannot deny the demands of reality.”

“And what are we supposed to do when you drag your battered form to the doorstep and collapse into a pool of agony on your first step across the threshold?”

Oh, as he very nearly did last night when he moved forward solely because his mind was able to will his legs to at least push onward for a further few minutes to reach his beloved?

“Much as you are now. Provide quiet when it is needed, companionship when it is wanted, demonstrate concern and sympathy, give no cause for further agitation. Do not forget, this is something Gregory and I shall also have to endure when the time comes you or John are similarly afflicted. You have been very lucky, brother dear, that your experiments have not damaged you in any way, but that may change at some point. And I am firmly convinced both you and John shall enjoy a great many adventures as you age, any of which might find you encountering less than placid people or situations. As great as shall be your distress when an unhappy fate affects Gregory or I, ours shall be just as great when you are suffering.”

Another round of whispering erupted and Mycroft leaned against Lestrade to soak in his warmth. This is what families did… confront problems and discuss solutions. Work together towards common goals. Even if those goals were not particularly pleasant to discuss. Which ended with two somber and grim-faced boys staring fiercely at them.

“Very well. John and I remain displeased with the situation, as it opens the door for the potential depletion of our slave stocks…”

Lestrade gripped Mycroft’s hand and Mycroft gripped back, realizing that the whispered discussion touched on topics that were indeed very dire.

“… however, we acknowledge this is something we cannot change. You will acknowledge, in return, that unnecessarily hazardous behavior will not be tolerated by either of us and you will suffer
harsh penalties for each instance of self-endangerment.”

“Of course, brother dear, that is only fair.”

“And for every example of molly-coddling we are forced to provide, we will be provided with unlimited access to your cheque book and whichever of you remains ambulatory to carry our purchases.”

“We shall negotiate your repayment on a per-incident basis. But, there shall be remuneration, I shall promise you that.”

“Our demands also have a time component. We shall be given time equal to the amount of the infirmity period to use as we wish for our entertainments.”

“Gregory and I will happily give you all the time you require.”

“We may… would that include time we might require for… conversation?”

Mycroft rubbed Lestrade’s leg and made it a point to reward the boys with something special at his earliest convenience for their willingness to discuss such matters so openly, even if the discussion was in Sherlock’s particular negotiating style.

“As much as you desire. And that may be as a full group or in smaller subgroups as you deem appropriate.”

Sherlock and John began whispering again and the older boys waited until their final reflection came to an end and judgment was rendered.

“That is acceptable. We do, however, have one further demand.”

Of course.

“And that would be?”

“That you are honest with us. If you anticipate danger or a situation of considerable uncertainty, you will inform us. And, if you return in a reduced condition from which you departed, you will not attempt to hide the fact. Duplicity is not something we shall tolerate.”

Mycroft sighed and looked at Lestrade, who shrugged and leaned away so Mycroft could comply with the boys’ wishes.

“That is also acceptable. Gregory and I never wish to distress you or John and if you feel you are better served with full disclosure, then you shall have it.”

Unbuttoning his shirt, and accepting help from Lestrade to pull it off his body, Mycroft revealed his bandaged shoulder, feeling no surprise when the boys moved to get a better look after taking in the occasional bruise that mottled his skin.

“What happened?”

John’s soft, concerned voice warmed Mycroft’s heart and eased his worries about frightening the children with his injury.

“A small altercation. The perpetrator suffered far worse, you can believe me on that score.”

“Reveal your shame! I must inspect the carnage!”
“Me, too! I’m going to be a doctor, don’t forget, so this counts as practice.”

The years ahead would often have difficult periods, but Mycroft realized that there would be support, unflinching support, for whatever those periods would bring.

“My dear, will you assist?”

“My pleasure.”

The couple shared a grin and Lestrade began to gently pull away the taped edges of the bandage, biting his tongue to stop the hiss that threatened to erupt, seeing the obvious stab wound.

“Lackey! Provide me a measuring tool!”

“In my professional opinion, you should have gotten stitches, Mycroft. I can do them if you want. My mum sewed and I watched her a lot.”

Mycroft swatted at Lestrade who was laughing at his plight, but couldn’t help but joining in. Yes, giving the boys a tangible focus for their worry was helpful, though feeding their bloodlust would undoubtedly return in the future to haunt him and his spouse.

“I was not provided with the opportunity for medical treatment, I’m afraid, but I am certain that shall be remedied at some point today.”

“Good, because this is also a little gross and you might have an infection.”

“Lackey! Why are you not obtaining my calipers and depth-finding instrument? Leave now and add to your list cotton swabs, so I may sample the pestilence and begin to culture it for further study.”

“I think that can wait for the moment, brother dear.”

“No, your microbial flora must be sampled now so I can monitor any possible spontaneous mutations.”

Lestrade sighed and gave Sherlock a soft swat on his arm.

“Here, you evil thing, take his bandage. There has to be all sorts of stuff growing on that, right?”

“Hmmm…. that is not an entirely unworkable solution. I am surprised a member of the lower strata of the proletariat could conceive such an idea.”

“We have our moments. Love, think you can eat a little? I can get you whatever you want if you’re hungry.”

“Not at the moment, if that is alright. Rather… I believe it is time to conference with Grandmama.”

“Are you sure? That’s probably going to upset you and you don’t need that right now.”

“It is time, my dear. And, in honesty, I doubt this shall be as distressing a meeting as you are envisioning. Would you be so kind as to notify Grandmama that I am prepared for her visit and, perhaps, amuse the children while we are occupied? Afterwards, I am certain I shall be ready for a lovely meal with all of you.”

“Ok, if that’s what you want, then that’s what we’ll do. Sherlock, John, come with me. We’ll find something to do until Mycroft’s finished working.”
“We shall begin crafting bacterial culture media.”

“Ok, we can do that. John, anything on your list?”

“Ummm… I sort of want to practice doing stitches in case the doctor needs some help.”

“Alright… we can probably find some needle and thread. Maybe there’s a roast or something in the kitchen you can work on.”

“I, also, want to practice. Should it become necessary, I may have to treat Fatcroft’s injuries in John’s absence and his complaining if the scarring is excessive is not something I wish to contemplate.”

“We’ll see what we can do. Mycroft, I’ll tell Grandmama you’re ready.”

“Thank you, my dear. And thank you, as well, boys. This has been a very helpful visitation.”

“Bye, Mycroft. We’ll make sure there’s something especially nice for lunch.”

“I appreciate that, John.”

“We shall have to order an entire cow to feed, Mycroft, who will not bat an eye at the inexcusable cannibalism.”

“And we’re gone. Love you, Mycroft. I’ll see you soon.”

Lestrade hopped off the bed, plucked John off the mattress and nudged Sherlock onto the floor to start walking to the door. With a last look over his shoulder, Lestrade left the room with the boys and Mycroft released a deep, cleansing breath. A better homecoming he could not wish for himself. Even with the interrogation he would now have to endure…

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As soon as Lestrade gave the word, he wasn’t surprised that Grandmama made straight for the bedroom, but what did surprise him was that his own mother was still present in the house, visiting with the family matriarch. With Grandmama on her mission, Lestrade sent the boys to find their needle and thread and took the time to talk to woman looking at him with her own set of worried eyes.

“I thought you went home, mum.”

“With what’s going on? Sorry, Greg, but part of a mother’s job is being there if your child might need you. How’s Mycroft?”

“Better now. He was a mess when he got home, but he’s a lot better now. A little roughed up and he’s got a nasty cut on his shoulder; nothing serious.”

Lestrade’s mother patted the space next to her on the small sofa and it was occupied quickly.

“Are you alright?”

“Me? I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah… I mean, there’s really no other choice, is there? I’ve got to be fine because Mycroft
needs me and that’s the only thing that’s important.”

“No, you’re important, too, and you’ve got to keep yourself in good shape if you want to be of any use to him. So, try again… are you alright?”

Lestrade ran a hand through his hair and leaned back on the sofa.

“Really, I’m fine. If you’d asked me that last night, I’d have said something different, but now I know Mycroft’s ok and the boys are alright, so I’m not as torn up as I was when Mycroft got to bed.”

“Ok, that’s good. It couldn’t have been easy for you, but it seems as if you’re handling things well. Did you… did you expect that he’d… that this sort of thing would happen?”

“No. Mycroft and I would laugh about him having adventures and being like James Bond, but I really just thought he’d spend most of his time being behind a desk or around meeting table. I thought he’d do what I’d always seen him do or what he complained about when he was in the US. But that’s not true. He’s going to do other things, too, and I can’t say I like that. He got hurt, Mum. He got hurt and he was… I don’t know any details, but he was in danger and alone and that makes me… it scares me! This is going to happen again, probably a lot of times and that absolutely scares me. He’s amazing, he’s brilliant, he’s unique, he’s fierce… but he’s not invincible. I want to think he is, but he can’t be. Nobody is. He can get hurt or sick or scared… or worse. And there’s nothing I can do about that. I can’t tell him not to do his job, I’d never do that, but I’m going to be scared now, every time he goes on one of his assignments and I can’t say that makes me happy.”

“Are you going to be able to live with that?”

“Yes, I will. It won’t be easy, but I will. It’s not different, I suppose, than if he was a soldier. Or a policeman. Mycroft raised that point when we were talking to Sherlock and John. One day it could be me coming home in bad shape and he’s going feel what I’m feeling right now. As soon as I put on my uniform he’s going to worry about what’s going to happen to me when I’m doing my job. That’s the hard part of loving someone, isn’t it?”

“At least you’re learning that now. It’s not an easy lesson, but one you need to learn and learn well. And it’s not only for a husband or wife. It’s also for your children. The first time you got hurt when you were small, your first time you came home from school in tears, the first time you got your heart broken… all those times put a new worry in my head and they’ve never gone away. And this is another. Mycroft gets hurt, my son gets hurt… this is definitely the hard part of loving someone, but the alternative is not loving anyone and that’s no way to live.”

“No, it’s not. At least it’s not how I want to live. I just wish it could be easier.”

“We all do, but wishing isn’t the same thing as having. We make do as best we can and keep our eyes on the good times. So, now that I know everyone’s alright, I make my way home, but I think you can count on staying through tomorrow so Mycroft can get some rest.”

“That’s good. He needs it and it will be easier for him to get that rest here than at home when he’s the one responsible for everything. You sure you don’t want to stay an extra day, too? Grandmama wouldn’t mind.”

“Oh, I’d love an extra day in this fairytale, but some of us have to work in the morning. Another thing you’ll learn about soon enough. Now, you should find Sherlock and John. I haven’t heard them since they left and even in a house this size, that’s not good.”
“You’re right. Thanks, mum. This helped.”

“Anytime you need to talk, Greg, you know I’ll listen. I’ll see you tomorrow, ok?”

One quick kiss on his head and Lestrade was left alone to enjoy a few extra moments of quiet before starting to track the boys. At least he’d have tonight with Mycroft in his arms to help them both feel better about life. As much as Mycroft needed it, he needed it just as badly.

“Greg? Is your mum gone?”

Apparently his tracking skills were so good he didn’t even have to get off his bum to find his quarry, who were peering at him through the open door.

“Probably not yet, but she’s leaving soon, yes. We’re going to be staying the night, though, I think.”

“Intolerable! I have many experiments to conduct and I must have a proper facility to conduct my research!”

“You’ll be home tomorrow, Sherlock. Today, you can do other things. Did you two find your sewing supplies?”

John held aloft their prizes and Lestrade smiled in spite of what those supplies were destined for.

“All right, then. Let’s see what the kitchen has that’s suitable for you to work on. I’m sure you’ll have plenty of time to practice your stitching while we wait for Mycroft and Grandmama to finish talking.”

“We don’t want to practice people stitches anymore.”

“Oh. But you’re the one who wants to be a doctor.”

“True, but we’ve decided to work on making disguises instead. What if we find a really good disguise but it doesn’t fit quite right? Or we can’t find what we want at all and have to make it ourselves! That’s going to take some practice.”

“And we will purchase a sewing machine post haste. As well as bolts of appropriate cloth and ancillary materials for the construction of our disguises. A body form will also be required. John and I will expect to be measured for those the moment we return home.”

“Sherlock, it’s a fight to get you to stand still for a tailor to take your measurements or check the fit of your suit. How are you going to tolerate the process of making and fitting disguises?”

“Disguises serve a useful purpose. Suits do not. I do not appreciate my time being wasted on useless endeavors. John and I will amass a collection of suitable disguises for any possible situation so we are prepared when we must participate in a covert action.”

“That’s nice, you wanting to take after your brother. He’s going to be happy to hear that.”

“Buffoon! Mycroft’s capacity for true investigative work approximates that of his ability to pass a roasted leg of lamb without stripping it to the bone in a feeding frenzy worthy of one of the appalling horror films you find enjoyable.”

“Hey! You loved that zombie film. Gave you a whole notebook full of ideas to experiment on if you and John ever get your hands on a fresh corpse.”
“That’s true, Sherlock. We even made drawings.”

“As my assistant, John Watson, you are forbidden from making treacherous alliances with the enemy.”

“Sorry, but the truth is the truth. Anyway, I was thinking that we should add zombie disguises to our collection, just in case what we saw in that film actually comes true one day. We can pretend to be other zombies and then they won’t eat us.”

“Hmmm… that is not entirely idiotic. Since I am the most likely candidate to rectify such an apocalyptic situation through my advanced intellect and masterful command of the scientific method, my survival must be ensured at all costs. The skilled application of performance-quality makeup will also be required. We must add that to our repertoire of skills. Lackey! Peddle your body to the female staff in exchange for their cosmetics! John and I will begin assessing the various brands for their suitability for our purposes.”

“Sometimes you’re so funny, Sherlock, I laugh so hard I actually hurt my brain so I don’t remember laughing at all. Like right now. I have zero memory of laughing at anything you said.”

“You are very fortunate Mycroft’s lusts have blinded himself to your lackluster and humorless nature, broom wielder.”

“I’m the luckiest man in the world. Now, let’s see what we can find for you to use for your sewing practice and leave the zombie makeup for later. Maybe you can talk to Mum about that sort of thing and she can give you some ideas. She’s also a pretty deft hand with needle and thread herself, so she can help you with your disguise making.”

“Very well. But we are adding this delay to the invoice we will present to the manatee for his burdensome behavior. While he floats and grazes in his sargassum patch, he can ruminate on his strategy for our compensation.”

“I’m sure that’ll be his highest priority.”

“If he knows what is good for him, yes.”

“And is that all?”

“Yes, Grandmama. I do not know what else I can say but you have my most sincere apologies for the manner in which this assignment devolved.”

“Mycroft, this was not your fault. There is always a measure of unpredictability to any situation and, despite our best intentions and efforts, we cannot always salvage an initiative once the unpredictable has occurred. From what I have discovered, you did an exemplary job minimizing the impact of his fiasco and salvaging the very fragile agreements we were beginning to put in place. Already a fresh round of negotiations have commenced and I believe the outcome of the first attempts shall actually help ensure success for this round. The work you did has already laid the plan that will be followed and, from all accounts, it is only a series of minor matters that must polished before we may consider this issue closed. And I have also heard, from all sides, that your personal conduct was instrumental in securing us this second chance. You took steps not only to assist our own operatives, but those of our counterparts, and those actions likely saved lives. You could have made your own escape earlier and more easily had you not expended time and energy for others.”

“I could not… I did not know what, ultimately, might happen to me, but the work we were doing
would continue regardless of whether or not I would be present to participate in it. I did what I could to maximize the chances that our efforts would not be wasted completely and forging some bonds of trust would go a long way towards that goal.”

“Ah, so your only thought was for the mission?”

Not that an answer was necessary. Mycroft’s squirming in the bed told the tale on its own.

“No… we have our agenda and others have theirs. I have learned… whereas some individuals are simply villainous, others are merely those who have priorities that do not agree with ours. This does not mean they are necessarily ‘bad,’ they simply do not complement our own goals and desires. I cannot consider them enemies because of that, simply the opposition. An opposition populated by human beings no different, in many ways, from me. It did not feel… right… to withhold assistance, when I was perfectly capable of doing so.”

“Even if it potentially compromised your own safety?”

“Potentially. I cannot predict how I would respond if the scales had tipped further against my own well-being, but I was not yet entirely out of options for… surviving… this incident. Others could not say the same.”

Mycroft waited for some sign of disapproval from his grandmother and felt his energy drain as he did so. He had made choices based not solely on logic and duty and that was not appropriate for the work he had to perform.

“Mycroft… I am very, very proud of you.”

What?

“You have demonstrated understanding of a key point for the work we do. An agenda or action that does not coincide with our own interests cannot unquestionably be considered a form of evil. It has a purpose, a root cause, that has real and significant meaning to those who are supporting it. If you understand that, acknowledge it and seek to learn the specifics of that cause, then you are far better positioned to negotiate a solution to a problem that agenda has created. Beyond that, you understand keenly that what we do is not done for theory or as a game. It is to benefit those we serve, and that number does not end with the population of this nation. You will often be called to make decisions which will bring misery, even death, to a few or to many, but for the betterment of an even greater number and that is a cold and hard truth I cannot deny. But whenever possible, it is honorable to protect and assist, even though the beneficiaries may not stand on our side of the proverbial line in the sand. We work for order, for through order society maintains itself at its most successful level, but we never forget that goal and purpose. When we make decisions that are needlessly callous, harsh or apathetic we win nothing but a pyrrhic victory and there is no value in a throne that sits in a burned and salted field. I could not be more proud of your actions, grandson. All the trust I place in you, every bit of it is deserved. Now, I shall inform Gregory that you, he and the children shall remain tonight so that you may rest and be tended to by my physician. I assume you have no objection to that plan.”

“N… no. Not at all.”

“Excellent. Expect your family to assail you soon and you will eat something before the doctor arrives. We will speak again later.”

Surprising him nearly lethally with a kiss on his forehead and a rearrangement of his blankets, Grandmama left Mycroft alone and he used the time to catch and stitch back together his scattered
emotions. Grandmama was proud of him. He was not an utter failure. The mission had gone staggeringly awry, but he was not a failure. He had learned some brutal lessons and suffered terrible pains, but he had not failed. He had not failed. And his family was proud of him…

“Love, you ready for an invasion?”

Mycroft grinned at the voice on the other side of the bedroom door and sat up straighter in anticipation.

“I am. Do begin at your convenience.”

And an invasion it was. Not only did Lestrade, Sherlock and John barge into the room, but the familiar figure of Grandmama’s personal physician stepped into the space and began his examination of his patient.

“John decided he wasn’t going to miss this, since he didn’t get to assist with my poisoning and Sherlock decided… well, you probably don’t want the full details, but I at least got him to agree not to press for a biopsy or pint of your blood. If this is going to bother you, though…”

“Not at all, Gregory. I am quite content with your presence.”

John’s ‘Yeah!’ and Sherlock’s ‘His opinion is not relevant to my interests, in any case.’ went unremarked as the boys crowded together on the side of the bed opposite the doctor to observe the examination process.

“We’ve got lunch coming, too, and the boys are about to burst with stories about Grandmama’s party.”

“Ah… that had completely slipped my mind. I am most certain you made a glorious appearance, my dear.”

“Well, I didn’t shame your name, so I’m calling that a victory.”

“He was preyed upon by every deviant in the family! If it was not for John and my efforts, you would have suffered multiple forced cuckoldings.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes and stared at his partner, but couldn’t maintain his performance and felt another bout of laughter grow in his chest.

“I apologize most profoundly, Gregory. There are more than a few predatory members of our family and Grandmama’s circle and to leave you unprotected was terribly inconsiderate of me. I am happy the boys were able to act in my place.”

“They did a brilliant job. And kept Mum’s honor intact, too.”

“Oh my. Yes, Mother Lestrade would present a very tempting trophy for the most discriminating of hunters.”

“She liked it.”

“I am certain she did. Yet kept everything at the point of intent, no doubt.”

“Wrong. There was hand kissing.”
“The vixen. My pride in my mother-in-law grows every day.”

Lestrade gave a very Sherlockian snort and Mycroft wondered how much more laughter would his body endure today.

“You and I are going to talk about that, Mycroft.”

“I look forward to it.”

A quick shushing by the doctor silenced the room while he listened to Mycroft’s chest and in a moment he was packing away his stethoscope and removing other tools to continue his work.

“Well, Mr. Holmes, I am going to ask your entourage to leave us for a moment while I tend your shoulder, but beyond a course of antibiotics, you’re going to be fine. Try to rest and take things easy for a day or so, though with those two to manage, I’m not certain how possible that will be. Do your best, however.”

Sherlock and John both scowled fiercely, especially as Mycroft began laughing yet again.

“I shall follow your advice to the letter. My dear, will you excuse us for a moment?”

“Sure, love. Boys, let’s go and get your chess board. You two can play while Mycroft and I read. How does that sound.”

“Can’t we stay and watch, Greg?”

“Let’s give Mycroft his privacy. You and Sherlock can ask the cook for biscuits in compensation.”

“Ten biscuits. Each.”

“We’ll negotiate on the way to the kitchen, Sherlock. Mycroft, if you need anything, scream.”

“With my most full-throated delivery.”

Lestrade shuffled the boys out of the bedroom, leaving Mycroft alone to collect what he hoped were only a few stitches.

“You are a lucky man, Mr. Holmes.”

“Yes, some of my compatriots had far worse befall them.”

“I didn’t mean your shoulder. I mean what just walked out of the door.”

Mycroft nearly caught fire from the heat of the inner glow that began to burn in his chest. He was lucky and not a day would go by that he would not give thanks for that luck.

“That I am.”

“Try not to get yourself killed and ruin that luck, what do you say?”

“I say, I shall do my best.”

“Good. Now, this is going to sting a little, but I’m going to make the stitches nice and tidy so you don’t scar a great deal. Unless, of course, you want a bit of a battle scar for your young man to admire.”
Now, that was an idea worth considering.

“I suppose a small reminder of my experience could be inspirational.”

“Do I want to know what you are hoping it will inspire?”

Dastardly man… and no, he did not want to know. It was far too tawdry and sensual for someone of his advanced age. The heart palpitations alone would be deadly.

“I see why you and Grandmama have been friends for so long.”

“Birds of a feather, Mr. Holmes. Birds of a feather…”
“And the next.  Another vial, John.”

“Sherlock… it is quite unnecessary to scrape beneath each of my toenails.  Surely, any scientifically-interesting materials would have been removed during my shower.”

“If you were not the size and shape of Europa, that might be the case.  However, since it is utterly impossible for you to see your feet, let alone bend or stoop to perform any type of hygienic action, I suspect I might be able to use the stratification of collected filth to not only study your previous location, but the entire history of your life since birth.  It will be the most boring scientific undertaking known to history, but excitement is not a relevant criterion for evaluating a research project.”

Mycroft gratefully received John’s shoulder pat as the boy handed Sherlock his collection vial, then returned to his own assignment of collecting hair samples from Mycroft’s head, under his arms, lower legs and, after some rather intense negotiations, chest.

“You know, Sherlock, there are people who do this sort of thing for a living.  Give people’s feet a nice bit of pampering, toenails a trim and polish.  You should set up a little shop in town.  You can do the feet and John can do the hair and I think you’d make a tidy living taking care of all of mum’s friends.  I wager they’d be very happy for a pleasant day out with two cute lads being their servants and buffing their bunions or whatever they need to have pretty feet.”

“Be silent, peasant.  Your preposterous natterings are impeding the progress of science.”

“Besides, Greg… it takes a lot of effort to cut toenails and file them and paint them and soak the feet and… why is everyone staring at me?”

“Zeppelin!  Verify John’s manhood immediately!”

“No, Sherlock, I believe that is a task better suited to someone whose fingers are not currently wrapped in paper bags.”

“Ah… true.  You cannot release the camphor fumes.  Lackey!”

“Uh, no.  Anyway, there’s no reason a bloke can’t work on people’s feet if he wants to.  You and John open your business and I’ll send all the birds I know your way to give you a hearty start.  Bring my mates by, too.  You might have to charge them double, though, because… I’ve seen what they’ve got on the ends of their legs and… it’s life changing.”

“If they are anything like your cloddish feet, then a stick of dynamite would be required to fully remove all of the encrusted barnacles and lichens.”

Mycroft leaned back, very much like a woman enjoying a day at the spa and let himself sink into the bliss of simply being home.  It was a rather asylum-like home, filled with happy, yet terribly insane inhabitants, but it was home.  Wherever his family was to be found, he could be content and find balm for whatever wounds his day inflicted.  Hopefully, they would not be quite the types of wounds he suffered recently.  His shoulder was merrily stinging like a line of angry wasps.

“Now, what are you evil little trolls going to do for the rest of the night?  We’ve only got a little time before Mycroft needs to sleep, so you should think carefully, if you want us to help with your lunacy.”
“The plesiosaurus slept a full fortnight. There is no reason to abbreviate our entertainment.”

“Mycroft slept what he needed to sleep and now he needs more. Besides, we’ve got tomorrow for you to bring down civilization or whatever the fuck it is you want to do.”

“But, Greg… we only got to play chess for a little while tonight and have dinner. We need a lot more time to do things and I’m sure Mycroft needs it, too, since he obviously didn’t have any fun while he was away.”

“Tomorrow, John. There’s plenty of time tomorrow.”

“But what if we want to do something that can only be done at night?”

Mycroft stifled his laughter, but received Lestrade’s glare anyway.

“And your example of night-only fun would be?”

“Uh… looking for owls?”

Sherlock’s reaction to that suggestion was completely predictable and as rude-sounding as expected.

“That’s not a bad idea, we can do that. Nice walk with a couple of torches. What do you think, love?”

“I do know there is a healthy owl population in the area. Grandmama is very thankful for their efforts in controlling the rodent numbers on the grounds.

“What is wrong with you ridiculous… twitchers! Have you lost what little remains of your appropriately-termed bird brains?”

“Brother dear, did you know that owls regurgitate their stomach contents as solid boluses, each containing the skeletons of their prey items, bereft of soft tissue and ready for reassembly by the studious researcher?”

Sherlock dropped his small spatula and stared open-mouthed at his research specimen.

“John! I require a sack!”

Both boys rolled off the bed and, after helping John back to his feet, Sherlock ran out of the bedroom, followed closely by his partner in crime.

“Mycroft, is that even true?”

“Gregory! Do you believe I would deceive my own brother?”

“Yes.”

“Well, there is merit to that, however, I am being completely honest this time. Actually… collecting owl pellets and investigating them was an activity that I found very enjoyable when I was young. Father and I would seek them out and spend the rest of the day identifying the species they contained. It never occurred to me until now to share that experience with Sherlock.”

“You should tell him that. He’d like knowing this was something you did with your dad. He misses him horribly, not that he wants anyone to know.”

“That he does… as do I. And you are quite correct, he would appreciate knowing this is
something Father enjoyed and would have shared with him, were he able. Your paternal instincts are awe-inspiring, my dear.”

“Bollocks.”

“Those, also, are awe-inspiring.”

Lestrade grinned and leaned over to give Mycroft a kiss on the cheek.

“You are a filthy man, which is one of the many reasons I love you. Let’s get these bags off of your hands and find some shoes for you. I probably should have asked if you feel well enough for an evening stroll, but I figured you’d box my ears if I did, so I kept my mouth shut.”

“A very wise decision, for you would surely have felt the lash of my tongue.”

“I like the sound of that, to be honest.”

“Yes, I realized my mistake at the moment of utterance.”

“Then we’d better get you dressed fast or the boys are going to get a lesson in behavior that I don’t think they’re ready for.”

“I agree. We would not enjoy the pleasurable experience for which we would be hoping with Sherlock’s unceasing demands for a change of position or repetition of action so he could properly document our activities in his notebook.”

“Which he’d have to write one-handed since the other one would be over John’s eyes. Poor little tyke would be frozen and couldn’t lift a finger to protect his tender brain.”

Mycroft chuckled softly and waved his hands for Lestrade to free, then accepted a small amount of assistance getting out of bed to prepare for their adventure. Actually, a nighttime walk in the crisp, chill air was a splendid suggestion for their evening. The boys would be occupied, the pace would be slow, his Gregory would be bathed in moonlight, which was a stunning look for his husband… positively perfect. And after their promenade, despite Gregory’s nay saying, another bit of time in the library, for a warm fire, a warmer brandy and a chance to lie again in his spouse’s arms while they read and listened to the boys bicker as they engaged in their games. Sleeping was something he could do at any time. Spending precious hours with his family… that was a very different story…

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After John was settled from overexcitement at finding owls, after Sherlock was settled from the thrill of finding his quarry and packing his treasure carefully for the trip home, after the boys had played another few games of chess, after he and his spouse had enjoyed a good book apiece and he could no longer hide his fatigue from said spouse, Mycroft found himself helping tuck in Sherlock and John, then crawling into his own bed to wrap himself tightly around Lestrade.

“Well, love… how are you feeling?”

“Content. Purely and utterly content. I will not lie that in my darkest moments, my mind turned to you and the children and I would imagine myself doing exactly as we did this evening… indulging in time where the most important aspect of any activity was that we did it together. And, of course… this. Lying here with you, walking with you hand in hand, having each of my senses taking in every aspect of your splendor. When I could not sleep, which was the majority of the time, I simply rested and replayed in my mind the times we have lain together and shared our rest. With that, my mind could lapse into quiet state and we again shared a night together, though you were so
very far away."

“I wish I could have been there. I know you have to do what it takes to get your job done, but I wish I knew you’d always be safe. And I think about you, too, when you’re gone. At night, I mean. So, at least, we can always be certain that if you’re away and out of contact, we’ll be thinking about each other when we go to bed, even if you’re on the other side of the world and you’re going to bed when I’m getting up in the morning.”

“That is a very comforting thought.”

“And… now, I don’t want you to read anything into this but… if ever you don’t want to do what you do, that’s alright with me. I’m not asking you to stop, I would never do that, but just know that no matter what you do, I’ll always love you. You can be an average bloke with an average job and I’ll be just as happy and adore you exactly the same as I do now. If you ever don’t like what you do, if it gets to be too frustrating and isn’t giving you what you want, don’t worry about what I’d think if you walked away from it. I won’t care, as long as you’re happy.”

Mycroft hugged Lestrade tightly and felt something loosen inside of him. He hadn’t truly worried about either wanting to leave his path in life or that his spouse would disapprove, but knowing that door was open and he could walk through it if necessary, was reassuring.

“Thank you, my dear. I cannot envision another future for myself, but it is good to know that regardless of my career choices, you will remain at my side. And in my bed.”

Lestrade recognized that tone of voice and smiled, giving Mycroft’s head a kiss.

“Oh, I didn’t say that. Big beds are expensive, you know. We’ll probably have a couple of little ones, instead. Those are cheap and you can get them at any second-hand store. “

Oh yes, there was the little petulant nip he was anticipating.

“Don’t like my idea? Well, we could have bunk beds, instead. I always wanted to sleep in those when I was young. And we can get Sherlock and John their own pair. We could all fit in one room easily, if we had to. Not a problem at all, except for Sherlock wriggling his way out of the top bunk and breaking every bone in his weedy little body. Probably have to put a cushion or something on the floor to break his fall.”

“Gregory… you are a maddening creature.”

Lestrade snuck a hand downwards and grinned when he shook hands with something that was very eager to greet him.

“Which is something you like.”

Mycroft hummed his appreciation of Lestrade’s astute analysis and thorough verification of hypothesis. His spouse’s hands were fantastically talented…

“I very much do. I seem to have a weakness for the maddening.”

“And for a little attention. Look at you, already hard enough to cut stone. I can’t imagine what would happen if I really gave this some effort.”

“Please, by all means, do investigate.”

With a little wiggle, Lestrade moved downwards so he could take a long kiss from Mycroft’s lips,
then continued along, laying additional kisses across his lover’s chest, lingering on the soft stomach that he loved to nuzzle and finally using the flat of his tongue to take a long, slow lick of Mycroft’s very stiff and needy flesh. He’d missed this terribly… of all the ways he could love his partner, this was his favorite. Mycroft was beautifully responsive and he could spend hours teasing him with his tongue, sucking him lightly, which made Mycroft both insane and highly vocal. Then, when the man he loved couldn’t take any more, only a few firm pulls with his mouth were needed before he got his reward running down his throat. Well, that was one reward. The other was the dreamy look on Mycroft’s face that truly meant the world to him.

“Oh, so that’s what happens.”

“I am gratified your curiosity has been satisfied.”

“I’m always willing to satisfy my curiosity. And yours, too.”

Mycroft laughed, but mentally began refreshing his list of curiosities to explore with his devoted spouse.

“I share your commitment to experimentation. And now… how might I assist you?”

Lestrade hoisted himself up and straddled Mycroft’s thighs.

“Watch me? My blood goes straight to boiling when you watch.”

How powerful a feeling it was to know your lover simply needed your gaze to become aroused. Mycroft, not for the first or last time, felt he was the luckiest man alive.

“Then watch, I shall. And, Gregory… I do expect a very impassioned performance.”

From the little groan of pleasure, Mycroft was convinced this would surely be a show to remember…

Lestrade cracked one eye and immediately wished he hadn’t.

“Has the sun even risen?”

“Fully ten minutes ago. That you and the sluggard are not prepared and ready for the day is damning testimony to your lack of commitment to our welfare.”

“I will pay you, hand on my heart, I will give you real money if you just go away and let us sleep another few hours.”

“John and I regularly inspect the contents of your wallet and what you carry would be an insulting bribe to a homeless mouse.”

“Where is John, anyway?”

“Locating a source of kerosene and pure beeswax candles.”

“Dabbling in black magic now? Can’t say I’m surprised, but I didn’t think that sort of thing took place at dawn. Go away and come back when it’s a more evil time of day.”

“Fool. If you did not have a sufficiently strong back to function as my pack animal, you would be utterly useless. And you may speak, Mycroft. You are doing a spectacularly abysmal job of hiding your wakefulness.”
Mycroft peered over Lestrade’s chest and glared at the goblin prince who was currently picking the flesh of his most recent victim out of his teeth.

“I will also pay you a cash bonus if you make yourself absent. Gregory and I would…”

“What you would would take an unacceptable amount of time and forever cripple my extremely valuable mind. Control your hormones and prepare for work. John and I have a full itinerary and not a moment shall be wasted!”

Sherlock stormed out of the bedroom, leaving the two older boys to groan loudly, though not in a pleasurable manner.

“Well, there’s nothing for it. If we don’t get out of bed, he’ll be back or worse, he’ll do something so horrible, we’ll have to get up because the house will be on fire.”

“Unfortunately, you are correct. It already appears that flammables and open flame make a prominent appearance on today’s calendar.”

“Only one of us has to tend the herd, love. How about I get up and you get a few more hours in bed. You can join us later when you’re awake and had a little something to eat.”

“Gregory, I am quite recovered from my ordeal and shall take my due share of shepherding duties. I will manfully manage young John and you may tend to Sherlock’s personal needs.”

Lestrade reached under his head and, grabbing his pillow, proceeded to smother Mycroft with it.

“There… you’ve officially been murdered for being a miserable, selfish twat.”

Mycroft giggled beneath the thick layer of down then peeked out from around the edge of his vehicle of death.

“Then my suspicions have been confirmed… you are certainly an angel and this is heaven.”

“Now why did you have to say that? My murderous rage just punctured like a tire. A man can’t even go on a murder spree around here without someone loving him out of it.”

“I shall try to be less contentious in the future. The next opportunity for homicidal mania that we encounter, I shall gladly let you experience it to the fullest.”

“That’s my Mycroft, always looking out for what’s best for me.”

“And so our day begins. A small amount of feathery death and a reaffirmation of our devotion. I really could not ask for better.”

“We’re blessed, we truly are. Race you to the shower?”

“Is there a prize for winning?”

“Winner gets to tie the loser’s hands to the shower head and… hey! Come back here!

Lestrade jumped out of bed to race after his cheating lover, though if he stopped to look out of the window a second to ensure the ache-slowed Mycroft won by a wide margin, that was certainly something that could remain his secret…
Through Lestrade’s mightiest efforts, the remainder of the day was properly paced for his recovering partner and by the time they were preparing to leave for home, he was content that Mycroft hadn’t suffered from the day’s chaos.

“Gregory, a word?”

Lestrade turned from packing his bag to see Grandmama standing in the doorway.

“Of course, Grandmama. There… there’s no problem, is there?”

The older woman strode into the room, shaking her head as she approached Lestrade.

“I think that is for you to tell me. How is Mycroft?”

“Oh! Good. I’ve made certain he didn’t overexert himself and I think the boys were doing the same. Their level of insanity was fairly minimal for what they usually throw at us. We talked a lot, he and I, and did the same with Sherlock and John. That wasn’t easy or very pleasant, but it was good it happened and I think Mycroft feels a little better knowing that he doesn’t have to hide everything from us. He can talk about… what he can talk about… and we’re not going to break into pieces. He likes to protect us, that’s very important to him, but he understands that we’re there for him, too. He’s going to be alright, I suspect, with a little more time to pull all his pieces back together.”

“Excellent. It is a very, very unfortunate thing that he experienced such a hardship, but it was inevitable that he encounter a difficult situation at some point and now he has greater confidence that he can rise to the challenge. Mycroft has great faith in his intelligence and ability to put it to use, but physical scenarios have always been something he has dreaded, though he has been loath to discuss it with me. All in all I must consider this initiative a success and for far more than its at-surface reason. Now, I will be involved with some issues for the rest of the day and shall not have the opportunity to make my goodbyes when you depart. Thank you, Gregory. You did a magnificent job with your duties for the party and have, again, piloted your family successfully through treacherous waters. I could not be more pleased. And your mother is equally proud, as I am certain she will duly inform you.”

Before Lestrade could even say goodbye, Grandmama was out of the room an on to other things and the young man had a good few minutes to enjoy his praise before Mycroft returned from his emergency snack-or-death assignment from Sherlock and John.

“Empty holes all filled in?”

“Quite. I marvel at the quantity of victuals John can consume. “

“He’s active and growing. That’s a high-food combination.”

“Truly. But it does ingratiate him nicely with the kitchen staff and Sherlock actually eats something from his plate other than the sugar-containing items when John is present, though the negotiation of just what he will eat and what will be gifted to John is a joy to observe.”

“One of my favorite bits of theater. Oh, and Grandmama stopped in for a chat. She’s going to be busy for the rest of the day, so the boys won’t get their goodbye kiss. I think they’re going to be heartbroken.”

“I think they will use the opportunity to sneak away an even larger quantity than normal of the kitchen’s baked goods to the boot of our car.”
“Hah! You’re probably right. One day I’m going to look in there and find a wedding cake with fist-sized chunks ripped out of it.”

“I have already planned for a decoy when the day comes we celebrate our union. While they hide away, stuffing their mouths with their stolen goods, we shall be able to present our guests with a pristine specimen of what London’s finest baker can produce.”

“That’s quality thinking, love. Really, I am very impressed.”

“I do try. And I take it, by your luggage, that our visit is soon to come to an end?”

“Some of us have to get up in the morning. Standard school day and I want to get there a little early to find out what I missed today. Not all of us get to lounge about in bed with our big brains and do our schoolwork in a blink of an eye. I meant to ask, do you have any schoolwork yet?”

“Likely. I was expecting a delivery at any time before I left. But really, my dear… lounging in bed like a wastrel… would I do that to you?”

“I hope so! Just because I’ve got to wake up early and spend the day trying to push something into my head, doesn’t mean you can’t have a lie in, a bit of breakfast with the morning newspaper, and a little music while you make quick work of whatever you have to do. I’m going to be daydreaming about you doing that, actually. You’ll be naked, of course, but that’s just a tiny perk for me, you can dress however you like.”

Mycroft laughed, but immediately made a mental note to enact that particular scenario with his spouse at their earliest possible opportunity.

“You have the most delightful fantasies, my dear. And I am thrilled to be given the unclothed, starring role.”

“So, there might be photos?”

“Unfortunately, I believe I shall have quite a busy agenda tomorrow and enacting your narrative will have to be delayed to another time.”

“Drat. Oh well, I’d rather be there to take the photos myself anyway. Come on, then… help me get the rest of our things packed. It’s going to take a year or so to get the boys ready and if we don’t start now, we won’t be getting home until I’ve gone gray.”

“You would be breathtaking with silver locks, Gregory.”

“Too bad you’ll never know for sure. First old man’s hair I see, I reach for the bottle of dye and never look back.”

“I object most strenuously.”

“Try not to hurt yourself.”

“You do know I will win this battle, do you not?”

“My hair, my rules.”

“My bottom, my rules.”

“Damn. You will win this battle, won’t you?”
“There really is no doubt.”

“I’m going to have old man’s hair.”

“And it will be glorious.”

There was no combination of blankets and pillows that could in any manner substitute for his spouse, though Mycroft continued to try for some time after he went to bed. They had prolonged their evening as much as possible, but, finally, his dear spouse had to return home after an obviously-traditional war with John, who refused to go back to his dormitory. A quick peek as he put the boys to bed found what must be John’s entire wardrobe in Sherlock’s closet and a very clear division of Sherlock’s bedroom into what was the John zone versus the Sherlock zone. Apparently, neither boy had an issue with John being a resident here, rather than a visitor.

A fact, Mycroft found supported, when we woke from his admittedly terrible dream, to find John sitting on the edge of his bed, suspiciously sans Sherlock.

“John… are you alright?”

“Are you?”

Mycroft sat up and motioned the boy to sit next to him, wrapping an arm around John’s shoulders and giving him a gentle squeeze.

“I am.”

“You were making noise. I got up to pee and could hear you.”

“John, you cannot hear anything in this room from the toilet in Sherlock’s suite.”

“I… I have really good ears.”

“I’m certain you do, but I am more of a mind that you decided to check on me and assess my condition.”

“Was that wrong?”

Mycroft gave John a firmer squeeze and smiled.

“No, it was not at all wrong. And I am happy to report that I am well. I was having a slightly upsetting dream, but nothing that was unduly disturbing my sleep.”

Well, that was a lie of monumental proportions, but his promise to be honest about his assignments did not extend to their aftermath. His nights with his fiancé had kept his demons at bay, but now, alone without the calming influence of his Gregory’s love and strength, they were coming out to play.

“Ok… I just wanted to be sure.”

“And I am very grateful for your considerate gesture. It is an immense comfort to know my welfare is being so vigilantly guarded.”

“It’s only fair… you do the same for me.”
If that was not a mighty sword against his demons, Mycroft had no idea what else could possibly qualify.

“And I will continue to do so. I notice you have made yourself at home in our little abode… that shall be very handy for our mutual safeguarding, will it not?”

“Yes! Sherlock said I should just bring most of my things over since I sleep here most nights.”

“Much to Gregory’s consternation.”

“He does get a little mad when I don’t want to go back to school. I don’t know why, though… the people who work for you are very nice and check on us to make sure we’re alright. We’ve only escaped a few times, so they do a very good job, I think.”

Setting aside that particular headache to a later time, Mycroft decided to pursue an idea he had been mulling for some time.

“Yes, that is quite a good thing. And, I have been thinking, it is likely time to establish for you your own space to facilitate your visits.”

John stared up at Mycroft, and the older boy could almost see his mental wheels spinning furiously.

“Does that mean I get my own room?”

“It does, if you would like one. The suite across from Sherlock’s is empty and we can easily provision it to make your visits more comfortable.”

“That could be… nice.”

If John thought he was hiding his excitement, he was sadly mistaken, but Mycroft would never call attention to his need for acting practice.

“Then we shall begin tomorrow when you return from school.”

“Hurray! Thanks, Mycroft! That’s going to be especially wonderful when I stay here at Christmas.”

Oh yes… there was that particular matter to sort out, wasn’t there…

“Very forward thinking, I heartily approve. Now, shall we return you to bed? Your morning begins quite early, I’m afraid.”

“That’s probably a good idea. Will you be alright here by yourself?”

“I believe I will fare well, now that we have had our chat.”

“Good. I’m going back to bed, then. Goodnight, Mycroft. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Goodnight, John, and thank you.”

John hopped off the mattress and scampered back to Sherlock’s room to finish his night, leaving Mycroft in better spirits than when the small boy had arrived. He would have the staff prepare John’s room first thing in the morning and ensure he had all the little things a child needed for comfort. And some new clothes, of course, so his closet did not look empty. Maybe a small shopping trip would be prudent when the boys returned from school to take care of any last minute details… just as long as they avoided his husband…
As he had hoped, Mycroft had a series of packages to tend to waiting for him from his college, all containing materials for his custom-crafted home study program, and it was the work of the morning to orient himself as to his responsibilities and make a good start on the first series of assignments. Then it was his own bit of property acquisition as he took a deep breath and set up his father’s study for his own use. Then it was a tremendous bit of dithering as to whether to add a second desk for his spouse. Gregory had his own studies and a quiet space would be beneficial for that; however, he needed a space when he would tend to matters that, and this broke his heart, his dearest could not be privy. So one desk it would be, however, he would declare the library a quiet, serious space whenever his partner needed to work. The house was not small; the children had countless places to commit their atrocities other than the one his Gregory needed for himself, though that would be the one they would most greatly desire the second it was denied to them.

That done, Mycroft took care of a series of seemingly endless household matters before Sherlock and John returned from school and demanded to see John’s new home away from home.

“AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

“I take it you are pleased, John.”

“If John Watson were any more excited about this hovel, he would likely commit an insult to his pants.”

“Mycroft… this is amazing! And it’s mine? It’s really mine?”

“For as long as you wish it. And, of course, anything you would care to add to it to make it more cozy, you have simply to ask.”

“Already your skills at provisioning are a failure. John has no equipment to conduct experiments.”

“John does not have a need to perform experiments in his bedchambers.”

“John *does* have a need to perform experiments in his bedchambers because he may work on one set, while I work on a second and we may double our productivity.”

“I can do my own experiments!”

“One laboratory is quite enough for the household, Sherlock. Kindly stop attempting to annex John’s quarters into your territorial borders.”

“John Watson is highly committed to science! He gladly cedes his sovereign rights to me!”

“What? Wait! No, I don’t! I want to be king of my room!”

“You shall not have my crown, you scurrilous pretender!”

“I don’t want your crown. It isn’t comfortable at all.”

“Sadly, that is true… we will examine the auction catalogs for something more suitable. A pair, perhaps. You may have the queen’s.”

“That’s fine with me. The ladies always have the nicest jewels anyway.”

Mycroft listened patiently as the two boys explored the room and made a very comprehensive list of
mandatory additions that must be provided immediately for the space to be habitable. Apparently, the next stop was shopping…

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“This is the height of inequity!”

“Sherlock… I am very sorry, but you are not going to drive the Jaguar.”

“I fail to see why. It is a car. I am supremely capable of driving a car, having proven it on numerous occasions. Including for this particular vehicle!”

“You still have headway to make with your lessons and, in any case, we purchased a car specifically to accommodate your automotive scholarship.”

“I thought that car was for Greg, Mycroft.”

“It is, John, however, it is also the appropriate vehicle for your driving lessons.”

“But, Sherlock’s right. A car is a car, so why can’t we drive this one?”

His husband surely had not these troubles…

“The Jaguar is not really a vehicle one uses for driving instruction.”

“Why not?”

“Well…”

Mycroft didn’t need to look in the rearview mirror; he could feel Sherlock’s evil glee beaming directly into his brain.

“Yes, Mycroft… why is this car inappropriate, yet the peasant’s oxcart passes muster?”

“It is a matter of… ease of piloting.”

“That is a lie! I took my first lesson in this vehicle and performed masterfully!”

“I want a turn! It’s not fair that Sherlock got to drive this car and I haven’t!”

“Inequity! Again! You are shaming yourself spectacularly, Piecroft, and I laugh at your degradation.”

Loudly and venomously, at that.

“Sherlock… John… it is simply that the Jaguar is… delicate.”

“How dare you impugn our driving skills! Or… is that your ineffectual attempt to divert attention from your true and unutterable purpose?”

“Wait… what can’t Mycroft utter?”

“The overstuffed portmanteau does not want to admit that he considers the shop boy’s trolley to be a base and common machine, deserving of whatever we choose to enact upon it, however, the Jaguar is too refined and higher-class to stoop to rough use. His snobbery is repellant and will earn him uncountable nights bereft of intercourse when I report his arrogance to the lackey.”
“Mycroft… I don’t think Greg is going to be very happy about that. Just because his car is denty and a bit scuffed, that doesn’t mean it should get all the kicks and be treated poorly.”

“Mycroft is a complete bounder and if he does not spend the remainder of his life as a celibate, I shall be greatly surprised!”

There would be boiled tongue and kale for dinner tonight and if there was any way on Earth to boil a chocolate sponge, the boys would have that, also. With double portions.

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“Well?”

“Ummmm…. there was a monkey…”

“Why in the world would a monkey open eleven packages of plasters? Was it dragged through a hedgerow?”

“Monkeys are rather clumsy…”

“Thank you, John. Your parade of animal facts has been most helpful.”

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“No.”

“Yes.”

“Cotton.”

“I counter with lace.”

“Unnecessary.”

“It is my disguise and you will not disable it with your lack of fashion sense!”

“You do not need black, lace women’s undergarments!”

“You are correct. I require lilac. To match my dress.”

“Dear heaven…”

“Wait here, I must find a bra.”

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“Sherlock! Why is that pail bubbling?”

“Do not interrupt my experiment!”

“This is a pet shop!”

“Not for long.”

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“No! Give it back!”
“John Watson, where did you find a hunting knife?”

“In the till.”

“Oh god…”

Mycroft contemplated what his fiancé would say if he hired a personal assistant to attend shopping trips with him and the children. This was exhausting! And mentally debilitating! If they hadn’t been forcibly evicted from the pet shop, he would have purchased a matched leash/muzzle set for each boy and perhaps survived the afternoon in one piece.

“Pub!”

“Yes!”

“No.”

“Incorrect!”

“We’re starving!”

“No.”

“We require refreshment!”

“I want chips!”

“No.”

“Intolerable!”

“We’re going to die!”

“Unlikely.”

“CHIPS!”

“CHIPS!”

“FINE!”

Mycroft glared at the two jubilant boys and dragged his package-laden body after them as they sprinted towards the pub and stood waiting with impatiently-tapping feet until he reached the door.

“You are a failure as a guardian. We could have been molested by any of the drunken laborers who slink around this downtrodden house of debauchery.”

A push of the door and two boys stormed inside, quickly commandeering a table.

“Why do I not have a menu?”

“Sherlock… you have occupied your seat for a sum total of four microseconds. Besides, you know well that you shall order a platter of chips and if I insist that some form of secondary food product be added to the plate, it would have to be something that John found palatable for he would be the one eating most of it. If anyone should be beckoning for a menu, it would be him.”
There was a contentment, Mycroft thought, in being recognized in an establishment and the object of honest pity so that he had scarcely to set his bottom in the chair when a pint appeared in front of him, delivered by a sympathetic server.

“Now, barring a stop at the bookshop, may we call this endeavor completed?”

“Well, I got the things I needed for my new room and Sherlock got his science supplies and knickers… I think we might be finished.”

Mycroft’s highly uncharacteristic mental fist pumps occupied his attention for a moment, then he smiled gently at the two waiting boys.

“Excellent. The we shall have a leisurely respite, make our book purchases and return home to stow John’s belongings in his room. I take it you are staying with us tonight, John?”

“Of course! I’ve got to sleep in my room the first night I have it!”

“John is sufficiently puppy-like that he must spend the night rolling around in his den to properly scent-mark his territory.”

“I’m going to roll around in yours after you go to sleep so it all smells like me and you’ll go insane.”

“You will not do one thing to the function of my brain, John Watson, lest you find yourself needing rubber sheets to protect your bed from the damaging effects of urine.”

“You keep your pee poison to yourself, Sherlock.”

“Do enjoy your before-bed glass of water, John.”

Mycroft drained his lager and wearily waved his glass to order his second round. His personal assistant would have happily let him drink beer and then chauffeured them home in their expensive, wheeled snobbery. Damnable lazy person… lack of existence was no excuse for dereliction of duty…

Two stuffed children later, Mycroft waited for the delivery of the bill and only screeched like a trod-upon chicken when his ear was flicked.

“Hah! Look at mum out with the kids. You’re a lovely wife, Mycroft. Greg’s a lucky man.”

“And you are a scintillating humorist, George.”

“The mastiff’s excited yelping has impaired my digestion.”

“Good to see you, too, Sherlock.”

George pulled up a chair and ruffled Sherlock’s curls into a writhing nest of snakes.

“Day to spoil the boys, Mycroft? Looks like you’ve bought out all the shops!”

“We have been busy bees, I must admit.”

“It’s for my new room!”
John’s smile could outshine the sun and Mycroft’s ‘no no don’t venture in that direction’ motions went completely ignored.

“New room? What are you going on about, lad?”

“I’ve got my own room at Sherlock and Mycroft’s house! I don’t have to sleep at school unless I want to, which I won’t, and I’m going to spend Christmas and summer holidays there, too, since I’ll have my own space and not cause a fuss at all!”

Sherlock nodded forcefully and Mycroft tried to slide under the table unnoticed.

“So… you’re living with Mycroft and Sherlock now?”

“Basically. I mean, I’m still officially living at school, I just won’t actually live there, since I have a real room all my own at Sherlock’s house. And it’s a brilliant room, too. It’s huge and I have my own toilet, which is good, because Sherlock says I stay in the loo so long I should pay rent.”

“Oh… well, that’s great. Definitely a piece of luck for you.”

“It really is. So, we bought lots of things today for my new room and Sherlock needed supplies for his experiments and next we’re going to buy books. This is an amazing day!”

John’s exuberance nearly spilled him out of his chair, but Mycroft’s quick actions kept him in his seat. The trouncing he would receive from his husband should this news be received without proper, likely sexual, preparation for it, would already be ferocious, let alone if they spent the remainder of the night at hospital for John’s broken neck.

“Good for you, John. I’m sure that will give you and Sherlock huge numbers of opportunities to make Mycroft’s life completely miserable.”

“Fatcroft exists only for our benefit, in any case. Should he take his own life to escape his due burden, I shall simply purchase a replacement from a livestock auction.”

“Your brother’s going to pack you up one day and send you to one of those countries where little bastards like you work eighteen hours a day and get beaten the other six.”

“Pfffttt… without my example to follow, his brain will cease to function and he shall lapse into a vegetative state until the peasant retrieves me from my captivity.”

While Mycroft contemplated learning what was the quality of brandy on offer, several more of Lestrade’s friends burst into the pub and descended upon them, much to Sherlock’s annoyance.

“We are being mauled!”

“George, do you and your friends require a projectile of some form for one of your athletic pursuits?”

“Skinny, shaggy, mouthy projectile?”

“The very one.”

“Perhaps… me and the lads are always up for a challenge.”

“You will not soil my person with your calloused, cabbage-sized paws.”

“We’ll give them a little wash first.”
“We are leaving. Obstruct the door at your peril.”

Sherlock hopped off his chair and John followed after one last check for stray food on their plates.

“And it appears we continue on. It was good to see you all. I hope you have an enjoyable evening.”

“Have fun yourself, Mycroft. Keep those devils away from innocent victims, ok?”

“I shall. I truly have no strength left to flee from the agitated, torch-wielding villagers.”

Hearing the laughter at his attempt at humor, it boggled the older Holmes sibling yet again that he was gladly accepted by his husband’s friend, though it was something he absolutely treasured.

“Hah! We’ll tell Greg you probably made it home safely, then.”

“Oh… are you seeing Gregory tonight?”

“Yes, he’s supposed to stop in for a pint after work.”

The treasure was officially tarnished.

“Ah… I am heartened to hear it. He takes on so much; it is good he has opportunities to relax and socialize.”

“Don’t worry… we’ll make sure all his important bits make it home with him.”

And, after receiving a very well-coordinated filthy wink from the new residents of the table, Mycroft chased after Sherlock and John and could only hope and pray that certain news didn’t reach his precious fiancé’s ears…

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“Mycroft.”

“Gregory.”

“Is there something you want to tell me?”

Mycroft stared at the phone in his hand, which had rung precisely twenty minutes after they finished tailoring John’s room to his exact specifications and he had settled the boys down for a film on the telly he had placed in John’s bedroom.

“I love you?”

“Nice try, you bastard.”

“Then… no?”

“When I get home we are going to have a little chat, you and I.”

Mycroft’s joy at his husband’s cold-fury-based slip of the tongue was cut down by… well, his husband’s cold fury.

“Conversation with you is always joyful, my beloved.”

“I’m leaving as soon as my fists unclench and you had better be home when I get there.”
Damnation! There went his ‘run away and hide in the woods until Gregory dies of old age’ plan right out of the window!

“I… do drive safely, darling.”

The phone line went very, very dead, much as Mycroft knew he would be in a half-hour or so and, for a moment, he seriously considered throwing his dignity out of the window and answering the door fully nude with a bottle of lube in one hand and a bottle of champagne in the other. Deciding that his partner’s practical nature would be its own defense against his wiles, Mycroft excused himself from the boys, slowly descended the staircase and began to look for his will. Might as well make it easy to find when they were loading his body into the hearse…

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When the knock at the door came, it was not actually a knock, but the sound of a battering ram slamming against the wood and Mycroft plastered his most ingratiating smile on his face before opening the door to face his fate.

“Ah, Gregory… my dearest love. Do come in.”

“Don’t you dearest love me, Mycroft. What did you do?”

“I have enjoyed a very busy day and have many activities on my ledger…”

“You’re already in for a bollocking, Mycroft, don’t make it worse.”

“Gregory…”

“Show me.”

Mycroft gazed into the most gorgeous eyes in the world and saw his imminent demise clearly etched within the rich brown.

“Very well…”

Lestrade followed Mycroft up the stairs and kept his temper in check as Mycroft knocked on the door to gain admittance.

“Come in!”

“Ah, John… how clearly you enunciated your greeting. Very welcoming.”

“Thanks, Mycroft. Greg! Did you come to see my new room? Isn’t it brilliant!”

John waved off Sherlock’s watching-my-film shushing and jumped up to drag Lestrade farther into the room to proudly show him around.

“It’s perfect! Mycroft had it set up for me while I was at school and then we spent the whole afternoon shopping for the last few things it needed. Look! I even have a telly! Sherlock doesn’t want one in his room, but I have one here, so we can sit and watch films in my room and use his room when we want to play games or read. And since we’re across from each other, we can keep watch on two sides of the house at once! What do you think?”

John was bouncing with happiness and Mycroft breathed a sigh of relief that his lover was holding all of his displeasure aside to rain on him and leaving John in the sunshine.
“I think it’s incredible. Really, it looks like a terrific room. You put a lot of work into it and it shows.”

“Thanks! The bed’s very comfortable, too, which is good since I’m sleeping here from now on and I really do need a good night’s sleep to do my best in school.”

Mycroft could feel the tremors from Lestrade holding in his ire and took a step closer to the door to facilitate his getaway.

“Sleeping here now… interesting. Just going to give up your nice room at school?”

“Yeah… I mean, it is very nice and they were especially nice letting me have it, but this is much more convenient. And bigger. And I have a telly and a bath all to myself. And I get a snack whenever I want one. And Sherlock’s here. And Mycroft. It’s just better this way.”

“I see. Well, we’ll leave you to your film. Mycroft and I have a few things to talk about.”

“You’re going to come back, right? Since you’re already here, you are going to stay and spend time with us, aren’t you?”

Sherlock’s ‘oh, kill me now’ went unremarked as Lestrade smiled down at John and said he’d try, before grabbing Mycroft by the sleeve and tugging him out of the room and into Mycroft’s own.

“Mycroft… what in the hell got into that head of yours?”

“Gregory… John is here most nights anyway and this is what he wants…”

“He’s a kid! Of course this is what he wants! That’s like saying he wants to live in a toy shop!”

“Then why not allow him…”

“He’s not our son, Mycroft! You can’t adopt him! He’s got family…”

“Who sent him away so he was not under foot.”

“You don’t know that!”

“I do, actually.”

Lestrade glared at Mycroft, who suddenly realized that he had, perhaps, revealed more than he should have.

“I think you need to explain that.”

“I… I had John’s home situation investigated to determine if, given his appalling excuse for a father, it offered him any better.”

“So, you did have him checked out.”

“Not him Gregory… be very clear on that point. I had his aunt investigated, as well as the quality of her home and financials. I was not pleased with the results.”

Mycroft saw the first break in Lestrade’s anger, as his concern started to take the driver’s seat.

“Why not?”
“For nothing villainous, I assure you. John has a simple, yet comfortable living environment and, so far as I was able to determine, was treated most acceptably. However, his aunt clearly was not desirous of a child in her life and was very much taken aback by the situation and the changes it would mean for her own life, which would be substantial. It was shortly after John arrived that she began seeking a boarding position for him and it was by chance that we offered a scholarship for which he was able to qualify. I will not say she feels ill will towards John, quite the contrary, all evidence says she does care for her nephew, but is young and not at all prepared to be a mother.”

“Oh… well, I guess that makes sense. It had to be a shock to have a knock at the door and there’s John saying ‘hi, I’ve come to live with you,’ but, that doesn’t mean you can simply decide that John’s living here, now. First, I’m not entirely sure it’s legal and second, it’s not right to try and keep John from trying to have a relationship with his family.”

“That is not at all my intention, Gregory. I would never put an obstacle in the path of John forging ties with his kin, but I do not see how residing here rather than at school would accomplish that, in any case.”

“Holidays. Did or did not John tell Georgie he was spending Christmas and summer holidays here?”

“Ah… yes. About that. That was not my doing; that was purely a statement by John of his own intentions.”

“Didn’t tell him we’d have to talk about it, though, did you?”

“No… I admit I did not.”

“Or ask if he’d brought it up with his aunt?”

“Also, no.”

“Well, we’re going to have to. I’m sorry, but that has to happen and if she says no, she wants him home, that’s the end of it.”

“And if she does not?”

“Then fine, but she’s his blood and, like it or not, she’s got first say in what happens to him.”

“As you wish. May I take it, then, that you are withdrawing your objection to John residing here during the school session?”

“No, you may not take that. It’s not a good idea, Mycroft.”

“Why on Earth would you say that? We can offer John everything he needs and the affection he deserves.”

“I’m not arguing that. Look… what did I do tonight?”

“Are you having memory issues?”

“Don’t be smart with me. Answer the question.”

“Very well… you spent time with your friends at the pub.”

“Exactly. I had a little time out with my mates. I love you, Mycroft, and I never regret one second I spend with you, but I like spending time with my friends, too. We talk about stupid things
and... well, we do stupid things, sometimes, too. We get a little pissed now and then and we beat on each other like idiots when we play football. They like the crap films that I do and will yell at the telly at just the right moments. I have a world of fun with you, Mycroft, but I have fun with them, too. Sometimes the type of fun I can’t have with you because you’re not them. And that’s right and proper and normal.”

“Gregory... I have no idea what I am supposed to be gleaning from your declaration.”

“Mycroft... John goes to class, then comes straight here after school. Now, he’s supposedly living here. When is John going to make any friends other than Sherlock?”

Mycroft stared at Lestrade in a haze of shock and confusion.

“I... I do not understand.”

“How is John really going to get to know any other kids if he never has the chance to spend time with them? That’s why I try so hard to get him to go back to school at night. Give him a chance to meet other boys, talk to them, find some who don’t give him a hard time... Sherlock’s great for John and I’ll do everything in my power to make sure they stay best friends, but, I don’t want John to find himself only doing things Sherlock likes and not being able to have fresh people to talk to, like I have my mates. And, have you thought about your mum? What she’s going to say when she comes home? If he gets booted back to school when she’s here, he’ll just be alone in his room every night because he never had the chance to form any friendships besides Sherlock. What happens if he and Sherlock have a real fight... not a little bruised feelings, but a real fight? That’s when you go to your mates for support and a little help cooling off and he won’t have that. I don’t want John to want to kick a ball around or do some of the foolish things I did growing up and he can’t because it’s only you and Sherlock in the house and he doesn’t know anyone he can even call for a different type of fun than you two enjoy!”

“Gregory... I don’t know what to say.”

Lestrade saw emotion after emotion storm across Mycroft’s face and felt the last of his anger ebb away.

“You love John, Mycroft. You love him with all your heart. And John means everything to Sherlock. I know that. I never, ever doubt that. I know that both of you want everything in the world for him; so do I. But I don’t want him to miss having a group of friends like I have. I’d do anything if I could give that to Sherlock, too. If I could get him to open up a bit more and make friends at school, I would take that as my personal mission in life, but we both know that just letting John in was a... miracle. Now, maybe I’m wrong and John doesn’t want his own group of mates, maybe he’ll be perfectly happy with it just being him and Sherlock, and having a few acquaintances at school to say hello to and talk to during class. I want him to have the option to find out for himself, though. Does that make any sense?”

Unfortunately, it made complete sense to Mycroft. He was greatly comforted by the fact that his spouse had a wealth of friends to satisfy those areas of life where he, himself, was not proficient or, frankly, interested. And to provide companionship when he was a world away. For Sherlock, he had often wished as did his lover, for his brother to find friends to enrich his life. It was hoping in vain, he feared, for his brother to embrace a cadre of comrades, but he continued to hope, nonetheless. However, without time and opportunity to meet and interact with others, that was unquestionably a failed dream. Further, he could not deny, it was something he had always secretly wanted for himself... Oh dear...

“What do I do?”
Lestrade walked over to Mycroft and took him in his arms, holding him gently and giving him a kiss on the cheek.

“Nothing. What’s done is done. Walking in there now and telling John that he’s welcome to stay here a night or two a week and weekends, but no more… it’s going to seem like you changed your mind and that won’t be good for him. Maybe though… take some time and find out if there are any activities or sports he can get involved in at school. That could give him something to do that Sherlock wouldn’t want to be a part of anyway, and let him try some new things and meet new people. When there’s two of us here, we can split them up now and then. One take Sherlock for some science thing and the other take John to do something where there could be other kids around for him to talk to. I know I’m probably being hysterical about this, as Sherlock is fond of telling me, but I just want both boys to have what they need in life and never close any doors that might help them get it.”

Mycroft lay his head on Lestrade’s shoulder and breathed in the warm and manly scent. This was why he needed his partner. He had, since the onset of their shared destiny, provided the balance and grounding their family needed to thrive…

“Thank you, my dear. I, as always, am eternally grateful for your perspective and abiding devotion to our family.”

“And thank you, Mycroft, for loving the boys with everything in you. You’re wonderful for them and don’t think I ever believe any differently. Now, let’s go celebrate John’s new home. Oh, and you might want to think about what you’re going to tell the school and how to handle things if his aunt calls unexpectedly and finds out he’s relocated.”

“Yes… it seems I have some business to attend to in the morning.”

“Have fun with that. Hey, tell you what. I’ll buy you an ice cream to make you feel better.”

“Oh, and with what flavor am I to be treated?”

“What does your kitchen have?”

“A diverse selection of delights.”

“Then it will be something delightful.”

“With you, my love, I expect nothing less.”
John lived here now. Which meant, Mycroft realized, as his beloved departed for the night, that he was now responsible for two small, active boys and convincing them to go to sleep. Then convincing them to rise in the morning, which should have not been an issue, except their usual at-dawn wakefulness at Grandmama’s did not translate to the morning of a school day. Grooming and breakfast was an initiative that rivaled that of D-Day and it was with no small surge of glee that Mycroft waved at the car as their driver chauffeured the boys to school. But it had been a phenomenal experience. As a family, they had enjoyed time together, shared their plans and hopes for the day and he had the satisfaction of seeing his charges off safely to school. The only thing missing was Gregory and that was a substantial loss. At Grandmama’s house, they were blessed with time where they could truly interact as a full family unit, but now… well, it was not given for anyone, save a wastrel, to live their lives completely according to their whims and desires. Responsibilities were always hovering in the shadows waiting to be fulfilled and such would ever be the case.

Which brought him finally to face his own day’s agenda. Besides his studies, there were matters of work to attend to and… fulfill his duty to his spouse and notify both the school and John’s aunt as to his current residential status. Which, from John’s utter joy this morning, was a good decision for the boy… though his husband’s concerns were exceedingly valid and would be taken very seriously. John did not perceive any detriments to the situation, but it was not expected that he should. That was for he and Gregory to consider and worry through… it was the privilege of childhood that life be enjoyable and rife with wonder. For the older generation… it was the privilege to provide for that.

Mycroft’s first task was accomplished swiftly and to his satisfaction since, as he predicted, the headmaster raised no objection to having John live off-premises. John off-premises meant Sherlock would also be off-premises and that was never, in the headmaster’s opinion, something to be regretted.

The second task… well, that could wait a bit. Mycroft picked up the telephone several times to place a call to John’s aunt and put it down within seconds of lifting it to his ear. How to approach this? He could negotiate and discourse with any manner of political, military or business personage, but had no concept of how to broach a discussion of import with an… aunt. Stepping over to his new desk, Mycroft sat down and began, again, to read through the folder that had been prepared on the woman for information on which to base a strategy. After an hour of contemplation and a few additional phone calls to relevant parties, he felt confident in the offer he was going to present.

“Roundcroft! Attend us immediately!”

Mycroft looked up from his papers to the doorway of his study and suppressed his grin at Sherlock’s imperious glowering.

“Pardon?”

“We’re home.”

“Thank you, John. I am happy to know that my eyes are still providing to me correct and timely information.”
“Yeah, that’s good, but… we’re home.”

“Is there some form of code word I am to utter to enable you to continue your day?”

“Flatulent fool! We are now returned and it is your duty to feed and entertain us.”

And so it begins.

“No, it is my duty to provide you with the means to be fed and entertained and that I have done. When I am finished with my own work day, I shall happily join you for some diversion, however, in the meantime…”

“Greg would get us a snack. He’d play with us, too.”

“Verily, the lackey knows his place and performs his service with… admittedly, I cannot say he does it without complaint for he wails much as a donkey denied its feedbag, but he does discharge his obligations. Albeit noisily.”

Mycroft mentally rubbed his hands in joy at the attempts at manipulation. It was absolutely to be expected for children to use one parent to coerce the other and he could not be more delighted at how well their family functioned.

“Alas, Gregory is not present at the moment, so you have two choices from which to select. Find the kitchen through some use of your senses and locomotory appendages, then wander about until you find the living spaces assigned to you, which, I believe, are positively brimming with entertainment options or… do not. You make quite a pleasant-appearing tableau standing in my doorway, almost painting-like in quality, and I have no objection to you remaining there for the afternoon.”

Which was very true. Two scowling, irritated boys trying to set one’s hair ablaze with the power of their righteous indignation was positively heart-lightening.

“This neglect shall not go unaddressed.”

“Can’t we… can’t we do our schoolwork in here, at least?”

John turned the full force of his puppy eyes on Mycroft and the older Holmes felt his resolve wavering.

“I do have a good bit to accomplish myself, John…”

“We won’t bother you, we’ll sit… you don’t have anywhere for us to sit.”

Sherlock gasped loudly and pointed accusingly at his brother to punctuate John’s observation.

“Sadly, no. This space must be dedicated for work that is specific to me and cannot be considered a common-use room.”

“You don’t want us to be with you?”

Oh John… no no no no no… do not allow your voice to quiver…

“I feel blessed to be able to share our days, John, but I am tasked with matters that I cannot, by their very nature share with you, Sherlock or Gregory.”

“But… we w…want to be with you.”
The situation was growing dire…

“Perhaps, if I can hastily complete this last item…”

Trembling lips and misty eyes… oh, damn the paperwork!

“Very well. Let us find a suitable nibble to reward you for a successful day at school, shall we? And we may discuss all of the details of your day while you relax.”

“Hurray! I’m starving! And we did have a great day, too. Our history teacher wears the same jacket every day and… oh, awhile ago, Sherlock made this ink that glows in the dark and wrote IMBECILE on the back of it when our teacher wasn’t looking. Today was the first day he turned out the lights to show us some slides and it was amazing!”

Mycroft sighed heavily and set aside his papers to escort the beaming boys to the kitchen for their snack. Apparently a discussion of rules for use of afterschool time would need to be had to establish clear boundaries and understandings. That was something Gregory was very skilled at conducting, so that would be his first order of business when he was next in residence. And, must remember to recompense the history instructor for one jacket. Which the man had worn every day, even during his own attendance in that particular class…

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Sherlock and John sat on the floor of the library and tried to race at lightning speed through their schoolwork, so they could turn attention to more important matters, such as Sherlock’s experiment on the effects of drain cleaner on heart muscle, using the beef heart they’d stolen from the kitchen so it did not become, in any way, part of the evening meal. It took Mycroft’s most vigilant monitoring to ensure they finished their work with a quality that was academically-acceptable. With the boys finally released from their self-proclaimed scholastic prison, Mycroft leaned back on the sofa and contemplated a very long nap before returning to his study. This was exhausting! Their shopping trip, the… morning, afternoon and night of supervision and giving of attention… it was undeniably satisfying and joy-inducing, however… Cook might need to begin stocking a more bracing brand of tea.

And how greatly did his fingers itch to place a phone call to his spouse to hear his voice. To drink in his dulcet tones and invigorating words. To convince him to visit again tonight and see the boys bathed, pyjamaed, and secure in their own beds. No! No… he could not do such a fiendish and pitiful thing. But, he was rather fiendish, even at the best of times, and purely pitiful concerning family matters, so it was not exactly an unexpected urge. Rather a reasonable one, really. Perhaps he could simply extend a cordial, affectionate greeting and if his beloved fiancé chose to rescue him from child-minding, well… it would be terribly rude to refuse.

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“Ah, Gregory… it is like hearing the angelic chorus when your voice dances into my ears.”

“Should I ask what you’ve done now or just say thank you for the very creative compliment?”

“The latter… entirely the latter.”

“Then, thanks, love. It’s good to hear your voice, too. Always has that silky purr that makes me tingle in very naughty places.”

Such a bawdy man… perhaps that could be leveraged in some manner…
“And I would be quite the bounder if I did not offer to escalate that tingle to something more… formidable.”

“I’m not taking charge of the boys tonight, Mycroft.”

Drat.

“Perish the thought, my dear. Perish the thought… I simply hoped to fan the flames of your passions so you could share with me my own libidinous urges.”

“What have they been up to this time?”

Evil man.

“Their conduct has been exemplary.”

“Now I know you’re lying.”

Yes… that was very poorly thought out…

“In actuality, no… the children have comported themselves neither above or below their standard level of maniacal lunacy. I simply… how do you do this!”

Lestrade held the phone away from his mouth so Mycroft didn’t hear him laugh. This was one his reasons against John living in the house that he didn’t want to mention to his lover. It really was something Mycroft needed to learn for himself.

“Oh… the tykes already have you needing a holiday?”

“They are incessant! I have not had a moment to complete my own responsibilities since they arrived home! And to get them to leave home this morning was its own herculean battle.”

“You’re great with them, Mycroft. Really, no one could do any better. They just need to know you mean business when you say something and they can’t use weepy eyes to get their way.”

Now, that was simply un sporting.

“Weepy eyes… Really, Gregory, I am not so easily swayed.”

“Yeah? What’d their weepy eyes get you to do this time?”

“Abandon my own pursuits to provide for them a snack and shared time in the library while they completed their schoolwork.”

This time, Lestrade didn’t hide his laughter and Mycroft found himself joining in.

“My Mycroft can bring any president or dictator to his knees, but falls apart when a little blonde tot gives him sad puppy eyes. How could I not love a man like you?”

There would never come a day, Mycroft knew with perfect certainty, that his spouse’s expressions of love would fail to make his heart skip a beat.

“And that love should find its reward, should it not? Its debauched, unbridled reward?”

“You do realize you’re going to have to learn to be the single dad at some point, right? I can’t be there every night to help you with Sherlock and John.”
“Perhaps if you discussed the matter with Mother Lestrade…”

“Mycroft, you are not setting up a room for me in your house.”

“Of course not. You would share mine or we would find another more suited to a dual-occupancy.”

Lestrade grinned broadly and shook his head. His lover was as much of a handful as the boys, sometimes.

“Not gonna happen. Remember that talk we had about the car? Well, replay that in your head, but this time it’s about living in your house. Weekends are enough and you know I’ll visit in the evening when I can during the week, but I’m not moving in with you until… well, until we’re… officially official. And, even then, you’ll be away at school, so it wouldn’t be until you’ve got your degree and we’re ready to settle somewhere.”

“Officially official? You can say the word ‘engaged,’ Gregory.”

“I know, I’m just worried I’ll jinx things somehow.”

“Ah, the thunderous power of the jinx. I had no idea you were concerned about the influences of the mystical powers of the cosmos.”

“Don’t joke about things like that. I’m not saying I believe in things like jinxes, but… I keep an open mind.”

Now it was Mycroft’s turn to shake his head and wonder how anyone could not love this man.

“I shall, then, tread very lightly on the subject and avoid calling one from the nebulous depths of the unknown.”

“Good. Now, how’s your shoulder?”

“Better. It was given an inspection scarcely a half-hour ago and pronounced free of plague.”

“John or Sherlock?”

“Both, actually. They conferred in a very professional manner after their individual examinations.”

“Then I definitely have faith in their diagnosis. Look, I’ve got a customer, so I’ll talk to you later, ok?”

“In person?”

“You’re a bad man, Mycroft Holmes.”

“At times.”

“We’ll see.”

As the line went dead, Mycroft allowed himself a small wiggle of rejoicing. Time to check on the children then find something handsome to wear. The seed had surely been planted and a little attention would bring it to full flower. And with the children having their own expanded kingdom, a bit of time alone with his husband was all but assured…
“Got a ladder?”

The newly-arrived Lestrade looked upwards at the two boys who had fashioned some form of sling, tried to use it to lower themselves down from the highest window of the house and gotten twisted, tangled and stuck, with only their plaintive cries and one of Sherlock’s feet making it out of the sling.

“Not of that height, I’m afraid.”

“I’ve got some mates whose dads paint houses; they might have something. I’ll make a couple of calls.”

Mycroft watched his partner walk into the house and wondered if it was specifically illegal to keep young boys in cages until they reached the age of reason. Yelling encouraging words at various points, Mycroft kept the boys reassured until Lestrade returned with a smile on his face. Twenty minutes, three painter’s vans and the local fire service was milling about on the lawn, discussing the various ways to perform the rescue, all enjoying the hors d’oeuvres and beverages Mycroft had ordered prepared when he realized the size of the gathering they would be hosting, while Sherlock and John screeched their displeasure at being left to hang while others enjoyed a relaxing evening on the lawn. Finally, a consensus was reached and the various ladders, scaffolding, hooks and ropes were put together in what Mycroft could in no manner call a safe or efficient manner, however, it did reach the boys’ location and provide access for Lestrade and a few other of the lighter members of the rescue party to climb up and carefully extract the children.

After the several rounds of mutual congratulations and multiple checks that Sherlock and John hadn’t suffered any harm, the consumption of food and drinks recommenced and, after a few nudges from Lestrade, Mycroft suggested the adding of family members to the evening and braced for an impromptu party, quickly alerting the staff to make the necessary rooms ready.

Very soon, the house was bustling with guests and Mycroft realized fully why his own love had been so trepidatious about Gradmama’s soiree. A house filled with individuals he did not know, save for some of his spouse’s friends, none of whom exactly trod the same path he did in life. He had no idea about safe topics of conversation, or appropriate behavior and, if it were not for his husband remaining solidly at his side, he might have scurried off to a quiet corner to wait until the festivities ground to a halt.

“How you doing, love?”

His intended was becoming a very skilled mind reader.

“I am greatly enjoying the proceedings. I do believe our guests are finding it agreeable, as well.”

“Everyone likes a good party and this is good, you know? A proper ‘thank you’ for the bother and a nice show that you’re a decent bloke who doesn’t look down on a man because he’s got paint behind his ears. And look – there’s mum!”

Mycroft brightened further now that he had two allies in his corner and beckoned his mother-in-law over to their side of the room.

“How you doing here?”

“Mum, what are you doing here?”

“Well, after I got four phone calls about the great child rescue, I got another from the targets of that rescue to come and rescue them again from the unwashed masses. That was Sherlock’s take, at least. John said to come and join the party. Two parties in a week! I haven’t had this much fun in
ages. Oh look, wine…”

Mycroft bemoaned the loss of his new ally as Lestrade’s mother hustled off to get her drink and vanished into the crowd, but his own glass of wine pressed into his hands by a smiling spouse nicely soothed the sting. The arm wrapped around his waist soothed it even further.

“Feeling a little out of place?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“No, not at all. I just know the feel of your body when you’re relaxed and when you’re not.”

Lestrade gave his lover a tighter squeeze and Mycroft gladly leaned into the embrace.

“I adore you, Gregory, most especially for your keen and insightful mind.”

“Well, you’re doing a grand job of playing host and people are happy with the little gala and with you. And they see us together, don’t they? See us working together, not me being your bought man in my fine clothes, hanging on and waiting to give you a shag when the party’s over. They see us as who we are, a real couple, and that’s important. Everyone here is learning just what a wonderful, funny, amazing man you are and that we treat each other as equals. That we love each other and that’s why I’m standing here with my arm around you, not because you pay me to do it. Consider that a little bonus of your party. Now, let’s go and be the best hosts we can be. Though… do we even know where Sherlock and John are?”

Mycroft leaned over and kissed his spouse, utterly enamored of the man who was holding him like a precious piece of art. A vision of beauty and a mind that was intelligent, agile, and ridiculously stimulating.

“They are currently testing different methods of taking fingerprints, using our guests as their test subject. It is keeping them occupied.”

“Wonderful. Let’s just hope they stay occupied. I really don’t want to have to chase them because they’re driving away in the fire truck.”

“I already gave that some thought. The ignition wires are safely in the pocket of one of our valiant firefighters.”

“Mycroft… Sherlock’s a professional pickpocket.”

“Hellfire. Do keep your ears open for the sound of a siren and diesel engine, will you, my dear?”

“We really need to start keeping tranquilizers on hand, you know.”

“ Might we invest in one of those delightful guns employed by wildlife workers? That would be most amusing and highly efficient.”

“You have my permission to add that to the weapons room.”

“My lucky day. I shall begin shopping in the morning. For the moment, our guests require our attention. I hope the hour does not grow too late, for the morning brings a day’s work for everyone.”

“Nice thing about a small community, love… if you drag in late for work, everybody knows why and can be jealous of your good fortune. Hey! They’ve got more of those tomato things. Let’s get some before they’re gone.”
Lestrade leapt towards the tray of food and Mycroft laughed as he was pulled along behind him. What an unexpected evening… but not one he would ever come to regret.

The slow push of guests out of the door, ending with Lestrade’s mother, who hotly protested the end of the evening and could only be evicted with a promise that Mycroft and the two boys would have dinner at her house the following night. With the door finally closed for this adventure, Mycroft and Lestrade herded the yawning boys upstairs to their rooms.

“I am not fatigued!”

“I’m not either!”

Sherlock and John both looked ready to drop from exhaustion and the older pair simply tutted at their sad and pathetic lies.

“That’s the saddest, most pathetic lie I’ve ever heard, you little bastards. It’s fuck o’clock in the morning and you’re barely keeping your eyes open. Mycroft, which one do you want?”

“Sherlock is lighter, I believe.”

“Sounds good to me.”

Lestrade scooped up John and pushed open his bedroom door with a foot, Mycroft choosing to scoot his brother forward with a series of small shoves that Sherlock lacked the energy to battle against. Just as he lacked the energy to battle brushing his teeth or putting on his pyjamas. With a hop, Sherlock was in bed, with his blanket lovingly tucked around him.

“I feel grossly unclean.”

“You may begin your morning with a shower.”

“The stench of the menial class cannot be vanquished with soap and water.”

“I would keep a more civil tongue in your head, Sherlock Holmes. Your situation was quite precarious and without assistance, I am not at all certain Gregory, myself and the house staff could have rescued you as quickly or without putting you or ourselves at great risk. It is good that Gregory is well-liked and was able to muster such a rapid response to your situation.”

“As opposed to you who can count the number of friends on one hand with five fingers left unused.”

“One’s true mate, besides being the other half of your soul, is the person whose strengths compensate for your weaknesses.”

“Since you are well-described as a skin-lined sack of weakness, that would have to make the lackey the strongest man in the world and I have documented evidence that he is not.”

“Goodnight, Sherlock. Do make the most of these last few hours before your new day begins.”

“May I assume you shall spend the time fornicating?”

Mycroft sighed and doused the light next to Sherlock’s bed.

“I shall see you in the morning, brother dear.”
“If you are not first eaten alive by venereal disease.”

Closing the door behind him, Mycroft could only hope his dearest was having a more appropriate bedtime conversation…

“…You really should just move in like I did, Greg. It’s a lot easier and look at all of the fun we can have!”

Lestrade rubbed the back of his neck and waited for John to finish putting on his pajamas, before getting him settled and tucked into bed.

“I’d say getting so twisted up around a fucking gargoyle that you can barely breathe probably doesn’t count as fun.”

“Well, that part wasn’t, but the rest of the night was! And if Sherlock and I had made our outdoor lift work, that would have been great fun, too. We have some redesigning to do, I think.”

“Will you please let Mycroft or I know when you plan on doing that so we can find a safe way for you to do your tests?”

“Do we have to? I think everyone would be happy to come and have another party if we get into trouble.”

“Let’s give Mycroft’s bank account a little rest shall we. All that food and booze isn’t cheap.”

“Yeah, that’s true. And they did eat and drink A LOT! Almost as much as they did at Mrs. Holmes’s party. You’re right… we’ll try not to make Mycroft spend a lot of money again for awhile. Unless we need something, of course, but that can’t be helped. Are you staying here tonight?”

Said with hopeful eyes that made Lestrade chuckle, as he flicked off John’s lamp. Apparently, his mother had similar ideas and had handed off a set of clean clothes for him to one of the house staff before she made her way into the party.

“Yes. It’s a little silly to go home now, since I just have to be awake again soon. Don’t make me lose any more sleep tonight, though, ok?”

“I promise. Goodnight, Greg. I’ll see you at breakfast.”

“Goodnight, John. Sleep well.”

Lestrade made his way out of the room and to Mycroft’s bedroom, not at all surprised his lover was in his own pajamas, lovely blue silk that made his eyes nearly glow with color.

“May I conclude your mission was a success, my dear?”

“All bundled up and falling asleep before I left the room.”

“Much the same as Sherlock. They do believe themselves invincible, do they not?”

“That they do.”

In a moment, Lestrade was undressed and realizing that there wasn’t a pair of pajamas laid out for his use.
“Mycroft…”

“Yes, my spectacular, virile Gregory?”

Oh, but his Mycroft was single-minded when he wanted to be.

“Someone needs a little attention, don’t they?”

As if the tent forming in Mycroft’s pyjama bottoms wasn’t evidence enough.

“Well… I would not scoff at the offer if it was extended.”

With a slight licking of his lips, Lestrade grinned widely and crawled onto the large bed, covering Mycroft with his own body and sinking into a kiss that gave him plenty of time to let his anatomy catch up with Mycroft’s level of anticipation, which he happily rubbed against his lover’s extremely firm erection.

“You were magnificent this evening, Gregory. Taking charge of matters to see the children safe and well. How masterfully you managed the assembled to see the deed done. And to put yourself in such peril… it was quite the arousing experience.”

“Now you know how I feel every time you show a room full of people just who’s in control of things.”

Lestrade turned his random rubbing into a rhythmic, slow thrusting and drank up the shudder that went through Mycroft’s body.

“And now you’re here, with your gorgeous body wrapped up in the softest silk and I have the chance to do something about that feeling.”

Another long, slow kiss started and Lestrade began unbuttoning his lover’s pyjama top, freeing the milky-pale skin that he adored and found unbelievably sexy. All that lovely, lovely skin and the coppery hair that decorated it.

“You’re the most amazing man, Mycroft Holmes. So bloody perfect…”

Just like the small nubs of flesh that responded quickly and tightly to his tongue. And teeth. His Mycroft moaned so deliciously when he was happy.

“… and mine.”

Taking a moment to pull the top from Mycroft’s body, Lestrade peppered his partner’s chest and belly with his own marks of devotion and continued downward as he slowly removed the pyjama bottoms from Mycroft’s long legs.

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and his control, letting the bliss he received be the only thing in the world that mattered.

And bliss was absolutely Lestrade’s intent, slowly tormenting his lover into a writhing, whimpering mass of need, taking time and action, as necessary, to keep Mycroft from the point of orgasm. When it would have been cruel to continue on, Lestrade crawled back up his partner’s body and kissed him deeply, before rolling Mycroft onto his side and, grabbing the bottle of lubricant from the nightstand, slicked between his lover’s creamy thighs, then pressed himself to Mycroft’s back, wrapped an arm around to begin stroking Mycroft’s iron-hard erection while his own slid between those long, lovely legs. Thrusting slowly at first, then faster and harder as he copied the pace with his hand, Lestrade nipped at Mycroft’s skin and whispered roughly in his ear things so filthy that Mycroft found himself gritting his teeth to keep from screaming his agreement to everything his lover was describing.

When Lestrade felt his own orgasm rising, he sped up his hand, twisting in just the way Mycroft liked best and waited until he felt the warmth of his lover’s semen coat his fingers before letting his own release break through, holding Mycroft close until both their bodies’ tremors finally came to a stop.

“Now you can tell me how you feel, love.”

Mycroft rolled over and draped an arm and leg over Lestrade, tenderly kissing him, then gazing into his vibrant, brown eyes.

“I feel as if I have been loved as no other in this world.”

This time it was Lestrade who took a kiss and smiled at the man he did love as no other in this world.

“If we’d had time, I would have lubed something else and had a different kind of fun, but, maybe this weekend there’ll be opportunity for that.”

That sent a very pleasant tendril of electricity down Mycroft’s spine, despite his completely spent state.

“Or… maybe you could do that to me.”

Lestrade chuckled and enjoyed his anticipated bite of excitement and if they weren’t both exhausted, he’d already be on his stomach, letting Mycroft get him ready for the next round.

“I would be honored, my dear.”

“We’ll keep that in mind, then. Here, I’ll clean us up so we can get a little rest.”

One quick dash to retrieve a wet cloth and thick, dry towel, followed by a gentle cleaning and drying of wonderfully-messy skin and Lestrade was back in bed with Mycroft curling around his body.

“I love you, Gregory.”

“I love you, too, Mycroft.”

Mycroft curled more tightly around Lestrade’s strong form and indulged in one of his favorite fantasies of his husband and himself, sharing their marriage bed after delighting in each other’s bodies, their children safely asleep in their own beds and the house peaceful and positively glowing with the love they all shared.

“I know what you’re thinking.”
“Oh? Please, do tell.”

“You’re thinking about the future. There’s a special look you get when you’re looking ahead and picturing what it’s going to be like.”

A profoundly stimulating mind…

“I confess that I am. It is a beautiful place to which I go, at times, to experience a moment of pure and unconditional joy.”

“Yeah, I have to admit to doing that a few times, myself, though what we have now is pretty special, too. Me, you and the trolls… I never thought about anything like this and now I can’t think of my life being any different.”

“And I shall do everything possible to ensure our small island of contentment remains unspoiled. In point of fact…”

Perhaps it was not the right time, but his Gregory was so magnificently accommodating and relaxed when he was sated.

“… I took steps today in that very direction.”

Even though the older Holmes sibling couldn’t see the expression on Lestrade’s face, he knew he was being scrutinized and took a moment to swirl his tongue across a spot on his fiancé’s chest and follow that action with a tiny nip that bought him the small sigh for which he had hoped.

“Ok… want to share?”

“I merely followed your directive to notify relevant parties about John’s relocation.”

That both surprised and didn’t surprise Lestrade, which wasn’t a pleasant place for his mind to be, so he hoped Mycroft had some detail to add to his announcement.

“And what did they say?”

“The headmaster raised no objection to the situation and John’s aunt… saw the merit of my argument.”

If Mycroft hadn’t paused, Lestrade might have let the issue lie, but…

“What did you do?”

“Why do you assume I did anything?”

“First, you want John to live here almost more than he does and… you’re you. So you might was well tell me, because I’ll find out at some point.”

As much as Mycroft would like to assume his love would remain mercifully ignorant of his methods, he also knew the degree of his Gregory’s persistence.

“We had a highly collegial conversation on the topic and…”

“Oh god…”

“No… I simply… John’s aunt works in the travel industry and one of our investments is a travel firm that is expanding its operation. An experienced, competent manager would be a welcome thing
and I… offered her the job.”

“You gave her a job?”

“It was advantageous for the both of us. And she was actually quite excited about the move to Geneva.”

“What!”

Mycroft nearly vaulted off the bed as Lestrade sat straight up, wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

“Well… the new office is in Geneva and…”

“You shipped her off to Switzerland!”

“That is rather a harsh manner of expressing the situation. She was extremely eager for the opportunity, and since there is a flat waiting for her…”

“You bought her a flat!”

“No… I bought the firm a flat as an incentive for the manager. She will simply occupy it while she holds the position, which I do believe will be for quite some time. Apparently, our company has a very prestigious reputation in the industry and our salaries are most generous.”

“You… you bought John!”

“I did no such thing; that is entirely illegal, as you well know. And the proper term, should one be necessary, would be ‘traded,’ in case. I simply made the offer and a further one to see John properly safeguarded in her absence, though, telephone communication and the occasional visit is, of course, expected. You will enjoy Switzerland, my dear, and the children will certainly appreciate new vistas to desecrate.”

Lestrade slumped back onto the mattress and Mycroft waited for the explosion… which arrived as a long, slightly manic giggle, which mellowed into his beloved’s familiar, soothing laughter.

“Gregory… I did try to achieve a solution that was beneficial for all parties and…”

One muscular arm reached over and pulled Mycroft over to give the nervous Holmes brother a long, calming kiss.

“You did, didn’t you? In your own, special, Mycroftian way, you really did try to make sure everyone was happy.”

“You are not upset?”

“I probably should be, but I really can’t say I am. John gets his dream home and his aunt gets her dream job. My Mycroft gets his dream family, too. How can I be mad about any of that?”

Mycroft hoped his smile didn’t make him look dangerously insane and quickly retook his original position, wrapped around his lover’s warm and inviting form.

“Thank you, my dear. For your great and understanding heart, I offer you my undying thanks.”

“Flatterer. Have you told John yet?”

“No. I believed it a topic we would broach together, though we were not obviously provided
with an opportunity this evening to do so. When next you visit, perhaps.”

“Alright, then. He already believes he lives here, but he might get a little upset to hear his aunt’s moving away. Don’t forget that his sister ran off and left him behind, so he could have a little problem with the news. If we’re both here, though, that should ease things. Maybe we can plan something special, like a night at the cinema or find a new game that we all can play.”

“Yes, you do have a point. It shall be a priority to make clear to John that he is in no manner being abandoned and will always be considered a valuable member of our family.”

“Well, looks like we’ve got that settled. Ready for some sleep?”

“Very. It is quite the task to motivate the children to prepare themselves for school, so these few remaining hours of rest are somewhat critical.”

“Why am I not surprised? Ok, then… goodnight, Mycroft. Sleep well.”

“You, also, my dear. I suppose it is too much to expect to indulge in this manner tomorrow night, as well.”

“The weekend’s not that far away, Mycroft. But someday, you and me, we’ll have this whenever we want.”

“And we shall want it often.”

“Yes, yes we will.”

As predicted, dragging Sherlock and John out of bed was like trying to extract tree stumps from the ground and the momentum to get them cleaned, dressed, fed and out the door never really grew past the barely-minimum mark, but it was with a grin that Mycroft and Lestrade waved the two sleepy boys off to school. Then it was Lestrade’s own rush to get ready for his day and make his way out of the door, slowed somewhat, by Mycroft’s attempts to entice him into quick and partially-naked interludes. By the time he made it to his car, there was one interlude on his record for the day and the image of his lover staring up at him with those large blue eyes as he was sucked and licked into a perfect state of ecstasy. There were far worse ways to start the day…

… such as being bombarded with questions about the party and why there weren’t invitations issued to everyone he knew. Unfortunately, only a few of his closest mates caught the word and made an appearance, gawking at Mycroft’s house and gobbling every bit of food and alcohol they could lay hands on, so the rest were now demanding equal treatment. With a promise that the entire group would be invited to the Holmes estate for some form of recreation, Lestrade was finally able to make it through the day with a minimum of fuss…

… which began again at the shop, as his Uncle gave him the wagged finger and his cousin punched him in the arm, a second punch only avoided by yet another promise that the Holmes house would again be opened to friends and loved ones. But the time he returned home, the additional admonitions from a few customers convinced him that when he and Mycroft did get married they’d better plan on everyone he knew, living or dead, expecting invitations and a gullet’s worth of free food.

And the rest of the week was about the same. Interest in his and Mycroft’s relationship never fully waned once it began, but it had flared again after the rescue party and there was both good and bad in that. Luckily, the showing they’d made did earn him some extra support when someone was
being particularly nasty. He was getting used to it, though, and knew it was something he’d never escape. There would always be someone who looked at him with suspicion and have evil things to say about his relationship with a man who could… buy a fucking flat in Geneva and not think twice about it. But, that was a nuisance and nothing more. Actually he was a little more worried about the ones who were especially spiteful and the ones that would come after them. If Mycroft ever found out some of the things they said… Geneva wasn’t the likely place they’d be spending the remainder of their days, unless Geneva was also the name of a one-cat village in the middle of some bug-infested jungle…

But now he had some promises to keep and since tomorrow was Friday, added to the fact that he actually didn’t have to work, it would be a good time to see about it.

“Oh, my love, it is gladdening to hear your voice.”

“You, too, Mycroft. How are the boys?”

“Much as ever… currently, they are brewing some form of concoction made from tree bark and roots that are, fortunately, only mildly toxic to humans. Sherlock is convinced this will be some form of reagent for the poison-identification kit he and John are creating.”

“Useful stuff. Mycroft… I was wondering if I could ask a favor.”

The tingle of excitement that tore through Mycroft’s body made even his hair vibrate with glee and he quickly reviewed the funds level in his safe and location of his chequebook.

“Anything, my dear. Your wish is my command.”

“Well… the lads were a bit miffed that they weren’t invited to that party, not that they should have been since none of them have dads who paint or work in the fire service, but they were and I said they’d get their own chance to have a bit of fun at your house. I was thinking that, if it’s alright with you, I’d ask them to stop by tomorrow after class for some football and maybe a few sandwiches and beer. It’s perfectly alright if you say no, because they’re sort of being infants whinging about this, but…”

Not quite the favor Mycroft had been expecting, but it was something his husband considered important, therefore, he would take great pride in granting the request.

“Gregory… calm yourself. It is absolutely fine with me and I am delighted to host your friends in this, what I consider to be, our home. I shall notify the kitchen to have a suitable repast prepared and to stock the particular lager of which you are most fond. What a splendid idea! A rousing afternoon of sport and camaraderie; I wholeheartedly applaud your creativity.”

“Thank you, love. Really, thank you. And don’t worry about anyone breaking anything. I’m going to make it very clear that anyone doing anything stupid is going to have a cracked head to take home with them, plus one of my shoes so far up their arse, they’ll taste my toenails.”

“I have no worries about your friends, Gregory. In fact, I worry for them because both Sherlock and John shall be at home and they shall surely find some method by which to create their standard measure of chaos.”

“They’ll love it. As insane as Sherlock is and as happily as John fuels it, my mates have a still soft spot for those two. They’d still thump the goblins a good one for being cheeky, but the lot of them never fail to break a smile when the boys are out with me for the day.”

“Dear me, I had no idea your associates had suffered brain damage at some point.”
“I think Sherlock put something in their drinks at the pub.”

“It *is* a distinct possibility.”

“I’ll check their beer tomorrow for any funny smells. And thanks again, Mycroft. I appreciate you letting me do this.”

“I am not *letting* you do anything, Gregory. The property is yours to use at will and I am very pleased you have crafted such an entertaining way to enjoy it. Of course, it you would like to pay a visit tonight to preview the potential sporting grounds, I would not at all object.”

Mycroft was not ashamed to have used his seductive tone, or that he had been practicing said tone when Sherlock and John were not in earshot. It was torturous not to have his spouse in his arms at the end of the day!

“If I didn’t have schoolwork that reached to the ceiling, I’d say yes, but I will be there tomorrow night, now won’t I?”

Oh well, he could not be faulted for hoping. But his Gregory *would* be home tomorrow, and Mycroft *had* imagined over and over exactly what tomorrow and Saturday nights were going to bring. His… research material… had been the subject of very intense study.

“Something I am greatly anticipating.”

“*I* am, too. Alright, then, I need to get to my books. I love you, Mycroft.”

“And I love you, Gregory. I will see you tomorrow.”

Mycroft set down the phone and rubbed his hands in satisfaction. It was right and proper that they play host to his spouse’s comrades and this week was a marvelous confluence of events to help even their entertaining scales. And with the children to manage, the provisions to oversee… what a pity there would be little to no time for him to be drawn into their ball-based amusements…

Lestrade wouldn’t admit to feeling a little smug by his mates’ reaction to Mycroft’s house, but he didn’t have to admit it to feel it, now did he? It felt good to show off his lover, let everyone see just how amazing he really was. It wasn’t the money, it was the way his Mycroft could be the handsomest, sexiest, smartest, funniest man no matter where he was. Whether in this massive place or in the pub or in his little house, Mycroft was mind-boggling and why not show off someone like that as often as you could? His glorious Mycroft… standing right there smiling a smile that lit up every bit of this fuck-all huge entryway.

“The circus must be in town, John, for the performing monkeys have escaped.”

“Shut it, you little bastard. Another word and you won’t get a chance to play.”

As expected, John squeaked in excitement at Lestrade’s announcement and Sherlock snorted in contempt.

“I would as soon swallow an amalgam of ground granite and floor wax.”

“Well, we’ve got lager, but not any of your amalgam stuff. I’ll try and remember for next time.”

“Cretin. Come along, John. We do not want to be contaminated by their idiocy.”
Sherlock began to storm away and it took a moment for him to realize that he was storming alone.

“John?”

“Ummm… can’t we stay and watch them play?”

Lestrade cut eyes at Mycroft who nodded his acknowledgement, earning Lestrade’s arm around his waist as a reward.

“Absolutely, John. I am most certain that Gregory and his friends are hoping to be observed and receive your critique on their performance. And, very likely, to allow you to demonstrate yours.”

Mycroft gave his own smug smile at the squeeze he received from his lover, as well as from the whoop of joy from the small boy. Within moments, Lestrade’s friends joined in and grabbed up both Sherlock and John and carried them outside, despite Sherlock’s highly vocal protests.

“Think you can keep Sherlock’s attention with some science things while we play and John cheers?”

“I believe I can accommodate you nicely, my dear. And will John get his chance to be involved in the activity?”

“Oh, that’s for certain. Someone has a little brother watching for a lot of our matches and we always give them their chance to play. There are a few of them I’d like John to meet, actually, so this is a good introduction to how my football afternoons usually go.”

One quick kiss preceded the couple following the rest outdoors and Mycroft took in a few deep breaths of the crisp, cold air as they stepped outside to the sound of laughter and Sherlock’s shouting. An afternoon with friends… one of the wonderful the joys of marriage…

Lestrade whipped his head around and laughed at Mycroft’s and Sherlock’s shrieking and attempts to dodge the flung sweat. This was the stuff! Good hard afternoon of football, a few nice bruises to show for it and John as sweaty and dirty as the rest of them. Little man wasn’t scared to play rough and when it was his turn on the grass, he made a bloody good show of it. Even Sherlock got out there to play a few times when he was overcome with scorn for what he termed the ‘lackluster and ambitionless game play of the sluggardly rabble’. Not his Mycroft, though, and that was perfectly fine. Actually, the thought of that beautiful skin collecting any more bruises or cuts made his stomach a little sick, so no… his lover didn’t need to join in a match; it was enough he enjoyed watching and providing small strategy sessions for whichever side needed it at the time.

“Filthy swine!”

“Ah, it’s just a little sweat, Sherlock. Not going to hurt you.”

“No, but it will soil me unduly with stray bits of your watery DNA and that is a fate I would not wish on a half-dead dung beetle.”

“Lovely. And you, my tidy fellow… want to give me a big hug and kiss?”

Mycroft shuddered at the thought and Lestrade leaned over from a good large step away and placed a peck on his partner’s cheek, receiving a few hoots and catcalls from the onlookers who were wiping off their own sweat and helping themselves to the first round of beer that had been brought out for their consumption.
“That was brilliant! And I think we won!”

Not that John really had an idea of which team it was he was playing for, since the rosters seemed a bit fuzzy, but that didn’t matter because he scored a goal! And Sherlock actually cheered! This was the greatest thing ever! Everyone said he did a good job, too, and Mycroft and Greg said they were proud of him.

“We might at that, John. Makes every drop of that stinky sweat worth it.”

Lestrade leaned over with arms open wide towards Mycroft, who backed away and narrowed his eyes at his wet and redolent partner.

“And that moisture will soon chill you and your teammates to the core if you remain outdoors and inactive.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I told the bastards to bring a… change… of… what the fuck is that?”

All eyes were now looking upwards at the helicopter flying low and getting lower as it passed over the tree line. Then all eyes were looking at Mycroft, who sighed wearily and felt his heart sink into his shoes. With the sudden flurry of questions, Sherlock’s and John’s demands for a ride and his own heartache at the likely outcome of his unexpected event, his spouse’s arms wrapped tightly around his shoulders now held tremendous appeal.

“You ok, love?”

“I wish more than anything to provide an answer to that question. Let me go and dispatch the driver to collect whoever has arrived. I shall only be a moment. Do make our guests comfortable and request their meal be served.”

Lestrade let go of his lover and wished he could do more to help the slump-shouldered figure who was walking towards the house. But, he could do what he was asked and got on it quickly, hustling everyone inside to make use of the showers that were waiting and change into clean clothes so they could invade the dining room and replenish their energy supplies. In short order, two small boys and a gaggle of larger ones were lounging about waiting for an early dinner and a few with military instincts stood up straight and tall when a door opened and Mycroft led four men out of the library, three of whom had more decorations on their uniform than could be counted. With a nod towards his study to direct the older men, Mycroft broke off from his new guests and walked over to his partner, wearing a face so long, Lestrade hoped he wouldn’t have to help lift it off of the floor.

“How long are you going be gone?”

“In that, you may ease your mind, my dear, for I am not leaving; however, I shall not be available to you, for the next day or so. I hate this, Gregory, but I need to beg your help with the children, for the work in which I shall be involved will not benefit from any substantial disturbance or disruption.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on them. I’ll chuck my mates out, too, so you’ve got some quiet.”

“Heavens no! I have already informed my visitors that we are hosting for the evening and I can assure you that the dining and entertainment rooms are sturdily constructed so they contain sound quite efficiently. As is Father’s… my… study. As long as Sherlock and John’s more creative antics are kept in check, everything shall be fine. Now, I must go. Please, my dear, enjoy this evening with your friends and consider the house completely at your disposal.”

Mycroft kissed his beloved spouse and thrilled in the feel of being kissed in return before walking away to begin a long series of strategy sessions that would, most likely, steal away ever second of his
weekend. It could not be helped… but that did not make it hurt any less.

For his part, Lestrade turned a large and completely fake smile to his friends, tried to answer their questions as best he could and reassure Sherlock and John that Mycroft was staying home with them. Then it was a shoving of bodies towards what he hoped was piles of food waiting for them in the dining room. Get this lot eating and drinking and nobody was going to have the time to ask any questions that made his heart turn to lead. And, if the house was his to command, maybe they’d take over one of the rooms with a telly and see what they could find to watch. That’d be good for John, and Sherlock, too. A bit of football, a hearty dinner and then a couple of hours of trash telly that they could yell at and be stupid over.

This was going to be his life in the future, wasn’t it? Might not be for a long time, but this was going to be it. Sometimes Mycroft would be gone, but sometimes he’d be home and still gone. This was why a bloke needed friends and his own things to keep busy with when those times arrived. Have something of his own so those alone times weren’t as hard to bear. So, tonight would be as foolish as he could make it, the boys would be tired out by his mates and their nonsense and, maybe… just maybe… he’d catch minute or two here and there with his Mycroft, to sneak a feel of his skin and a kiss from those luscious lips. Good practice, that’s how he was going to look at it. Another night of valuable practice to add to his education on being part of the Holmes family. He just hoped Mycroft stocked a lot of lager, because, valuable practice or not, he could use a pint or six…
Chapter 26

Lestrade looked around Mycroft’s bedroom and shoved aside the urge to just crawl back into bed for a few hours because he had to get his arse to school. But he was exhausted! This weekend had tired him out completely and what sleep he did get was that thick, heavy kind that when two goblins woke you up by shrieking in your ear, left you feeling like you still were a hundred feet under the water.

Driving lessons, experiments in Sherlock’s lab, experiments outside, games indoors, games outdoors, two shopping trips, films and basic get up/go to bed activities that seemed like close combat actions when two small boys were involved… it was a nonstop whirlwind of activity. And Mycroft’s few catnaps didn’t coincide well with times he could leave Sherlock and John to their own devices and join him. Not that he likely would have, though… when he’d checked on his lover, Mycroft had been deep asleep, even when he’d made it to the bedroom only five minutes after Mycroft stepped inside. This was hard on his partner, very, very hard, and making sure Mycroft got what sleep he could was going to be a priority, no matter how much he would have liked to share a little warmth for even a few minutes of time.

And now, with the kids finally fed, dressed and off to school, he had to get himself pulled together and ready for his own lessons. After that, it was a full afternoon of work. And then… probably back here. He’d have to call when he got to the shop to find out if Mycroft was finished with his business and whether it was going to be necessary for him to stop in and spend time keeping the boys occupied. Actually, he should probably call before he went to work and cross his fingers he could get the afternoon off for Sherlock and John duty if Mycroft was still waist deep in his work. Yes, there were plenty of people in the house, good people, too, for child minding, but the boys could get into so much trouble when they were out of sight for even a few minutes… not that they saw it as trouble, of course. Really, there wasn’t an evil bone in either of their bodies, but you had to watch them like a hawk and anticipate as best you could what they were going to suddenly think was a brilliant idea. If Mycroft was still busy, he’d definitely have to step up to make sure the fire service wasn’t out again interrupting whatever the meetings were about, and then see the tykes made it to bed in one piece for some sleep before tomorrow morning.

But, maybe, he should do that anyway. If Mycroft shook off his guests, he’d be completely knackered and the last thing he’d need was to have to watch two live wires all afternoon and evening. It would be the right thing to do to come back here and let Mycroft go to bed early so he could put some charge back in his batteries. So, a call to mum to say he was staying another night and a note for Mycroft to say he was coming back. That should be a nice thing for his partner to find. A little good-morning gift of one worry off Mycroft’s already burdened mind…

So, why was a note being passed to him during maths class?

Dearest Gregory,

It is to my discredit that I must leave you with this impersonal correspondence as your sole notification of my departure, however, the situation has turned in a direction that mandates my presence in London and I must leave immediately. I would ask, if it is at all possible, for you to let the children know before they are informed by a member of the staff and reassure them, as I do now for you, that I should return home tomorrow night or the following morning. I shall not promise, for I realize the peril of doing so, but that is my current prediction and I offer it for what it is worth. I love you, my Gregory, and will do my best to award you a night solely for your own enjoyment when I return.
Oh, joy. Well, no use in being upset, since it wouldn’t change anything and Mycroft had showed some very-welcome sense by not giving him a firm time for coming home. So, it would be a quick phone call to Sherlock’s driver to bring the boys by the shop when they got off of school so they all could have a chat, before they continued home. No, wrong idea… race to the shop right after class and ask for a late start in order to pick up the boys and have a chat while bringing them home. Or maybe bring them back to the shop for the afternoon. Or go back to having the driver bring them to the shop, but leave them, instead. Monday’s were never very busy and they could do their schoolwork, eat his wages in sweets and maybe take a walk to the bookshop if he put John in charge of getting them there and back. Yeah, that was the best plan. Then, they could all go home together and he could get his work done while the miseries spent time doing one of Sherlock’s experiments. Maybe. Needed to set some rules for when this sort of thing happened. An hour or two of time when nothing swattable could be perpetrated, so he didn’t fail out of school and end up living, as Sherlock continuously predicted, in a box behind the shop.

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“Greg!”

Lestrade smiled at the boy who burst into the shop and nodded his thanks to the driver.

“Hi, John. Have a good day?”

“John Watson’s day was as tedious and inane as was mine.”

“Thank you for the summary, Sherlock. Now I don’t have to waste any breath asking you about yours.”

“Are you coming home with us, Greg? Sherlock and I have a lot of work to do because we have essays to write and the teacher said all of our ideas for topics, like Sherlock’s experiments, weren’t very good since the essay is supposed to be about nature. Sherlock tried to say that a LOT of his experiments are about nature, like how much water a sheep bladder can hold before it bursts, but our teacher said to concentrate on non-bursty things, so we’re a little stuck for ideas.”

“We’ll see if we can think of something that doesn’t involve bladders. And, no, I’m not coming home with you… at least not yet. You two are going to be with me at the shop for the afternoon, but we’ll have time to think about your essays and get you started on them anyway.”

Sherlock scowled at Lestrade, but accepted being pushed into the shop by John and waited until he was seated on one of the stools Lestrade had brought out before probing further.

“Why are we sentenced to suffer penance in your shabby place of work?”

Well, might as well get this over with now.

“Because Mycroft wanted me to tell you that he had to leave today and won’t be home until tomorrow night or Wednesday morning. I thought we could spend the afternoon together since Mycroft wouldn’t be there when you got home.”

Now, it was two boys scowling at Lestrade, who tried to look as nonchalant as he could. Nope, nothing to be upset about here…

“Mycroft has again abandoned his responsibilities for the pointless machinations of politics. Utterly contemptible, but certainly not unexpected.”
“No! He can’t be gone again! What if…”

John looked so distressed that Lestrade quickly caught the thread of his worry and ruffled the small boy’s hair, something he wished someone could have done for him since the exact same worry had taken a good run through his mind when he got the goodbye note.

“He’s not going to get hurt, John. He said he was going to London, not somewhere far away and I suspect he’s just going to keep doing what he did all weekend – have meetings and talk to people.”

“Are you sure?”

“I can’t be entirely sure, because something could change, but I don’t think they will. This time he didn’t even say he’d be gone a few days, gave a definite timetable. It’s going to be alright, I really do believe that. And I’m going to stay with you two tonight, so none of us have to suffer any little twinges of loneliness by ourselves. Now, why don’t the both of you pick a little treat and get out your pens and paper for those essays? I bet you can have them finished by the time I close.”

“And then we shall have pizza.”

“Sorry, Sherlock, but not tonight.”

“I counter with ‘Yes, Sherlock, that will be fine.’ ”

“Since I don’t have enough money for a night out and I doubt you’ll be satisfied with sitting at a table sniffing what the people around us are having for dinner, I think we’ll be eating at home.”

“What is Mother Lestrade preparing?”

“Your home, Sherlock.”

“I believe you referred to it with the phrase ‘at home,’ implying, that it was the home you considered yours. That has significant implications for your domestic perceptions.”

“Just a turn of phrase, you little bastard.”

“I think you’re wrong, Greg. I think you daydream about living with us and smooching Mycroft all the time because he’s right there when you want a smooch. Except when he’s not, like today, but you know what I’m talking about.”

“No, I do not…”

“Dissembler! Your rosaceous complexion shouts to the world the enormity of your lie!”

“It’s not a lie! I admit… I sometimes think about the future, when Mycroft and I do live together, but that’s not now and it’s not going to be. The only reason I’m with you two today is… well, Mycroft and I both knew you wouldn’t be happy with the news and might want someone around for company. I’m not moving in, though, so don’t let that thought get into your heads.”

“I think he’s just saying a lot of words for the sake of talking, don’t you, Sherlock?”

“There really is no question. He is attempting to emulate the pachyderm and sling syllables into a sad syzygy of stated, implied and hidden meaning.”

“What?”
“You are as numb of neuron as is the lackey, John Watson.”

“And you are just mooing like a cow, Sherlock Holmes.”

“How dare you!”

“Mooooooo!”

And, as the battle escalated, Lestrade saw fit not to intervene, since it was keeping the demons occupied and off the previous topic of conversation. Maybe he’d had a slip of the tongue... nothing to persecute a man over. Simple bit of miscommunication. Didn’t matter that it seemed that he spent as much time at Mycroft’s as at Mum’s house. Or that he was feeling a lot more comfortable about being in a house that large, even with the staff going about their business. And that sleeping in his own bed didn’t feel right anymore. Maybe it would if Mycroft was there with him, but he and Mycroft sleeping together with Mum in the next room… no. No, he’d have to wash his brain with soap and water if he thought about that.

It was alright to have another place you called home, anyway. What was wrong with that? Nothing, that’s what. Home away from home, wasn’t that the expression? Yeah, nothing wrong with that, at all. When Mycroft went away to school, he’d have to divide his time between Mycroft’s house and his flat and it would be good if he felt like both of those places were home. If he had a flat, that is. Which was still to be decided. It seemed like all the good intentions he had about figuring out his future finances, making decisions about how to spend those finances never quite came to pass. It was just so dull! You had money, you held onto it as tightly as possible and crossed your fingers that when the week ended, you still had some left in your pocket for a few pints with your mates. That was the way life should be, but, really, it was only possible when you lived with your Mum and he was smart enough to realize that. Mycroft needed to apply those long legs, and feet, to his bum and kick him into being a responsible adult. Man with a good job, two kids, lovely fiancé and sensible, solid flat… that was his future and he needed to make plans so it was a successful one.

“I AM NOT BOVINE!”

“MOOOOOO OOOO!”

And cows. Couldn’t forget the cows... had to start that planning soon…

And cows. Couldn’t forget the cows… had to start that planning soon…

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And, to his credit, he did. Did a lot of thinking last night after they got back to Mycroft’s house and the boys were caught up with working on the larger-scale versions of their gliders, which were getting very close to their first round aerial testing. And today, he’d spent a little time before school talking to the people who handed out careers advice, then took the very deep breath and begged an hour off of work to make a real visit to the local station to get more information about the job. Yes, he’d stopped in before, but it was more of a general chat, rather than a serious talk about things… what was the daily job like, who did well at it and who didn’t, what kind of life did you have on their wages, how hard was it to handle the things they had to see and do sometimes… had some very productive discussions talking to different people, including the sergeant who said he’d give him a bit of a leg up onto the first rung of the ladder.

At this point, he felt confident saying he’d made his final decision… police work was the right choice for him. It was going to be hard and completely miserable at times, but he’d take all of that because it also sounded interesting, fun and he would get to make a difference in people’s lives, which was something he’d come to realize he valued. It gave him a sense of satisfaction, of purpose, and this was undoubtedly a path he could take to see those rewards as a regular part of his life.
So, that was done. Decision made. And now, here he was at Mycroft’s house looking through that folder of information his partner had pulled together for him to make sure his final decision was actually as final as he believed. So far so good, and he’d even taken out a pencil and pad of paper to start jotting down some ideas about what his budget might look like. Needless to say, nothing he was writing was pleasing the Crown Princes of WeWant.

“Unacceptable! You have made no allowances for my supplies!”

“Or chips!”

“Yes, I have. Right there.”

“I refuse to have my crucial research besmirched by the term ‘miscellaneous.’ It is an insult to science that I, its most stalwart champion, shall not let stand unchallenged!”

“And my chips are insulted, too!”

“Look, you little bastards, what it’s called doesn’t matter. You’re lucky I’m planning on any of my hard-earned funds paying for your things, anyway.”

“Hard earned? Hear me, yokel, while I laugh loudly and heartily at your ill-applied descriptor!”

And Sherlock did. For an annoyingly long time.

“You shall haunt the local pastry shops with your badged brethren and grow fat from your extorted crullers, while the criminals run amok through the streets, raping, pillaging and committing countless other heinous acts of hedonism. I shall lose valuable time for my experiments from the need to safeguard my person from the unchecked hands of emboldened paedophiles.”

“And you’ll be too fat to play football!”

“You two have been watching too much telly.”

“Moreover, the figure you have set aside is demeaning. We demand a heftier portion of your pittance.”

“Sherlock… this is the best I can do. Maybe when I know a real figure for rent and other things, I can make some adjustments.”

“There is little to adjust from your pathetic lack of funds. The rug on which your soon-to-be pastry-plumped feet rest is worth nearly twice that sum and I speak the mathematical truth because I was shown the insurance value by the beast that poses as my brother when I experienced a completely understandable accident and nearly set fire to the aesthetically unappealing mass of dyed animal byproduct.”

Perfect. Now he’d be terrified of dropping a crumb or dripping a little beer onto the damned thing and owing Mycroft his first year’s wages. The sofa under his arse was probably worth Mum’s house.

“The pay’s not a king’s ransom, I admit, but it is respectable. Maybe when you compare it to what your family sees in a year, it’s not much, but it’s a good amount for someone starting out in life, which, thank you kindly, is me.”

“What about John and I? You have obligations to your dependents.”
“You’re not my kids!”

“I don’t know about that, Greg. I think I look a little like you, actually. So did that lady at the petrol station. And that lady at the pub. Maybe it’s because we’re both handsome, but I think there’s more to it than that. What do you think, Sherlock?”

“You both somewhat resemble the American hognose snake, so a resemblance can be stated with an appreciable level of confidence.”

“I’m going to look that up, you miserable troll.”

“You cannot spell it, therefore I have little worry.”

“Well, if it does look like me and Papa Greg, it’s got to be a very nice-looking snake.”

“I am NOT your dad!”

“The lady doth protest too much, methinks.”

“Don’t quote things at me, you little bastard. And I am not a lady!”

“You’re the handsomest lady in England, Papa Greg. That’s why Mycroft gives you all those kisses and is going to make you his wife.”

“I am not a lady! Or your dad!”

“In that you are correct. When you are Mycroft’s wife, you would be more appropriately termed John’s mother.”

“Mummy Greg!”

“AAAAHHHHRRRRRGGGGGHHHHHHH!”

“Is your brassiere causing you discomfort?”

“You… listen and listen very well. First, I am not a woman. Blokes can be women if they want to, but that’s not me. Second, I’m not anyone’s dad. Or mum. Third, Mycroft and I aren’t even getting engaged until summer, so I’m certainly not his wife. Even without the not being a woman piece factored in.”

Sherlock and John both gaped at Lestrade who didn’t think the reaction really matched his rant until he ran through the dialogue once more and found the oopsie part waving merrily at him.

“Probably shouldn’t have said that.”

“YOU’RE REALLY GETTING MARRIED! Not maybe someday, but really, really getting married! This is the best news ever!”

“Oh no, the peasant has fully inveigled himself into my bloodline. Expect not the offer of my brotherhood, regardless of your marital status.”

A declaration that was somewhat tempered by the small flash of glee on the boy’s face.

“I shall expect it not. But… you two can’t go telling people about me and Mycroft, ok? It’s not official yet and I don’t want people thinking we’re engaged when we aren’t. We’re not quite ready for that and certainly not ready to get married, so… just don’t tell people, ok? Anyway, we’re going
to want to make a proper, formal announcement when the time comes and nothing should spoil that.”

“I have no doubt Grandmama and Mother Lestrade have already divined your intentions, so I see no reason to hold this to my bosom like one of Mycroft’s nonsensical state secrets. Or his favorite trifle.”

“Yeah, Greg. You might as well just let everyone know because they already know you and Mycroft love each other and that’s the normal thing that happens to people who are in love. Besides, that’s twice now you’ve told Sherlock and me a big romantic secret, so I think you really want to tell people and your subconscious is trying to get us to do it for you.”

“Subconscious, you illiterate poppy seed, though, I do agree with your premise. The lackey is obliviously eager to plant his flag on my bank balance but fears his obvious avarice will frighten away the beluga. He, therefore, hopes to make us accomplices to his robbery.”

“Shame on you, Mummy Greg. Making Sherlock and I criminals when we’re not. Mrs. Lestrade is going to be very mad at you.”

Now, it was officially time to move from beer to something stronger.

“Look… I’m happy about Mycroft and me. I love him and want to spend my life with him and maybe, maybe, I let things slip sometimes that I shouldn’t. But I’ve been really good about not spreading around my personal business to the people I know and I just want you two to keep things quiet until Mycroft and I are ready to spread things around. Can I trust you to do that? Let me and Mycroft be the ones to tell people what we want when we want?”

Sherlock and John made an extremely elaborate show of conferencing and cutting eyes at Lestrade before further conferencing, which led to a final round of head nodding and a serious facing of the older boy.

“We agree. For a price.”

Of course. He hadn’t really expected anything different.

“How much?”

“We demand to be allowed to pilot our vehicles without your retarding influence and take the cars around the estate at will.”

“Oh, no. We have one car, so you saying ‘cars’ leads me to think you’re going to try and get your hands on the cars in your garage and that is not going to happen.”

“I am an expert driver and demand access to our fleet!”

“Not gonna happen. You put a ding in my car and it’s not a problem. You put a ding in one of those beauties… that really would be criminal. And cost a bloody fortune to fix. So ask for something else.”

“You are woefully ignorant of the basics of negotiation from the weakened position.”

“You’re still not getting the cars, so if you can’t think of anything else…”

“Oh, very well.”

Another fierce round of conferencing and side-eyeing ensued, with the outcome being two smugly-
satisfied faces beaming at Lestrade.

“You will rescind your moratorium on chocolate for breakfast.”

“You need more in your stomach than chocolate to start the day, Sherlock.”

“Your opinion matters not to John and me, only your acquiescence.”

“Fine. As long as you eat some proper breakfast food, you can have chocolate as well.”

“And before bedtime.”

“The purpose of going to bed is to sleep and filling your gullet with chocolate isn’t going to help with that.”

“Your rationalization is of the most embarrassing quality. Comply or do not. The choice is yours.”

John nodded happily, eagerly rubbing his hands together and Lestrade hoped he could find the boys’ sweets stashes and confiscate the contents to keep *some* degree of control over their diet.

“I suppose a piece or two later in the evening won’t hurt you.”

“How small you think. Another clear sign of your deficient mind.”

“Always happy to be of help. Now, do I have your word on this? No sharing Mycroft and my personal business with anyone and that includes Mum and Grandmama.”

“We agree. However, abrogation of your portion of our treaty will be met by full disclosure both verbally and in writing on our part. We shall purchase space in the insipid tabloid that poses as the newspaper of the dung-hut hamlet in which you toil to announce your betrothal and record a notification to be broadcast by radio, for which I shall perform Mendelssohn’s Wedding March as accompaniment to the words that seal your doom.”

“Very thorough of you. Now, how about I put away my sums and we see about finishing your schoolwork so, if Mycroft comes home tonight, you can visit awhile time with him before you go to bed.”

“That is not the most effective use of my valuable time.”

“Come on, Sherlock, I have a lot to do, even if Mycroft doesn’t come home tonight. Anyway, the earlier we finish, the earlier we can work on the missile launchers for your glider.”

“Yes, that is critical. At least John can present an argument of merit even if you, peasant, cannot. I have several ideas for the explosive process to set the missiles in motion that I have been hoping to test and if they do not meet with success, our servant can provide a new suite of materials for the second round of testing when he does our shopping tomorrow afternoon. Come, we must get our study materials.”

Sherlock dragged John away, but the blonde boy broke away to race back to Lestrade to give him a bone-crushing hug before dashing back to join his friend in starting on the road to blowing up their construction efforts. For his part, Lestrade ran a hand through his hair and took the free moment to pour himself that much-desired stronger drink to nurse while he supervised the schoolwork session. Well done him, spewing information like water from a fountain right into the most absorbent ears in existence. Maybe the little grinning goblins were right… maybe he *did* want to shout to the world
that he and Mycroft were going to be engaged soon. He’d found the world’s most amazing man and that man was going to ask, someday soon, for them to get married. The married part was a long ways away, but the engaged part wasn’t, really. Christmas was looming on the horizon and then it was just a short run through the spring and quick hop through another month or so and… that’d be it.

Mycroft would probably be unbelievably romantic about it, too. Drive himself insane planning the perfect situation to ask his question and then be so flustered he’d barely get the words out of his mouth. Which would be absolutely brilliant. Mycroft was adorable when he was off his game and a bit babbly. Hands would probably shake when he held out the ring. If there was a ring. Did blokes have engagement rings? Now that he thought about it, they really didn’t, at least not that he’d ever seen. So… no ring. Or maybe ring. Mycroft was very much one for marking his territory and, though his fiancé would be happy with the fact, he wasn’t going to go around for a few years with a love bite on his neck. Not that Mycroft would be around often to give them a little refreshing, anyway. So… maybe ring. Or not. Something to think about when there weren’t determined little men stalking into the library dragging schoolbags in behind them.

Was there a better feeling than returning home after a long, dreary period of work? No, no there was not. And he was sufficiently early that the children would be awake so he might share the news of their day. He had nothing to share of interest to young and vivacious children, but Sherlock and John could simply spend an average morning at home and have a hundred tales of adventure to detail… oh, and was that the family vehicle sitting contentedly in the drive… this was truly a splendid night…

Mycroft quietly entered the house and, after handing his overnight bag to a member of the staff to deposit in his bedroom, the elder Holmes went in search of his family, experiencing no surprise that he found them in the library.

“… by me again.”

“I am going to create a multitude of my gliders and when the rabble attempt to lay siege to our property, I shall send them into the skies to wreak havoc with their missile complement and the explosive crash that will ensue when the spent gliders collide with the ungrateful masses.”

“Or zombies. We could use them for zombies, too.”

“I am quite certain, John, that your gliders would be a devilish scourge for the zombie invaders.”

Three heads whipped around towards the new voice and John nearly jumped out of his clothes seeing the new arrival.

“Mycroft! You came home!”

Now, John did jump up and ran towards the door to greet Mycroft and the returned Holmes didn’t fail to notice that the greeting came with a very thorough inspection that the young boy was doing his best to camouflage.

“That I did. I had suspected that my absence would not be a lengthy one, but I am very relieved that my suspicions were well-founded. And, I am certain you made productive use of the time while I was not in attendance.”

“We’ve had lots of fun, though it’s always better when you’re here to have the fun with us. Come on, I’m sure you want to kiss Greg and then you can help us plan our zombie defense
strategy.”

John grabbed Mycroft’s hand and pulled him into the library, giving a little shove to drop Mycroft on the sofa next to his partner.

“I believe I am not supposed to impart a kiss, my dear. Do you mind?”

Lestrade smiled widely and laughed as John sat down on the rug and settled in to watch the romance.

“Oh, if you must.”

Now it was Mycroft’s turn to laugh and he ended his giggle with a soft, lingering kiss on Lestrade’s lips.

“Too great a hardship?”

“Nah, I managed. I’m glad you’re home, love. Very, very glad.”

Something Mycroft read easily in his lover’s eyes and gladly indulged himself for a moment in those warm pools of brown, savoring the peace that settled into his soul from what he continued to see shining in them.

“And I am very, very glad to be here.”

“I, for one, have no interest in your actions, save that your skulking back into the house will surely disrupt the progress of my research.”

“Thank you, Sherlock. As always, I am heartened by the enthusiasm of your greeting.”

The young boy waved off his brother’s response, much to the older pair’s amusement, especially since neither had missed how his face had lit up when he first heard Mycroft’s voice.

“You should be thankful I gave to you any acknowledgement. Now, to important matters. Where are John and my gifts?”

John’s excited gasp nearly bowled him over and Mycroft did his best not to laugh at the boy’s excitement.

“Hmmmm… I seem to remember…”

Mycroft made a show of looking through his pockets until he muttered a very audible ‘ah ha’ and withdrew two small parcels from his jacket. Parcels which were immediately snatched by grabby hands when the gifts were extended for inspection.

“A knife!”

John bounced happily on his bum, turning his prize around in his hands. In moments he was joined by Sherlock, who quickly realized he was revealing his pleasure and immediately assumed his standard blasé affect.

“Are any of these blades suitable for anything besides removing dirt from beneath one’s fingernails?”

“This is the best knife ever! Look at all the things it has! I don’t even know what half of them do, but they’re all amazing!”
The two boys began pulling open every part of their knives and deciding what they could do with his unexpected arsenal, losing touch with the fact that the older pair were even in the room.

“A Swiss Army Knife? Did you really just give tools of mass destruction to the most destructive forces in the universe?”

“Pish tosh, my love. Their natural abilities for chaos make these trinkets almost superfluous to the havoc they habitually wreak.”

“Yeah, you have a point. And I have to admit they’ll put them to some very creative uses.”

“I do approve of encouraging creativity.”

Lestrade’s whispered ‘don’t I know it, you sexy bastard’ made especially lonely regions of Mycroft’s body feel a little encouraged, themselves.

“There shall be no licentious language in our presence. As it is, we have already been assaulted by the news of your impending betrothal and our stomachs cannot tolerate any additional erosion by excess stomach acid.”

Mycroft stared at his brother, then turned towards his lover with a look of startled confusion.

“Gregory?”

“It slipped out, love. Things were… you know how they can run a conversation around in circles until you have no idea what’s coming out of your mouth!”

“John and I are convinced his utterance was a classic example of a Freudian slip. He desires to bellow your cringe-worthy relationship to the four winds, but is too cowardly to do so himself, resting his hopes on John and I to do the deed for him. We duly shamed him for his behavior.”

Lestrade desperately tried to sink through the sofa, but Mycroft’s arm snaking around his waist prevented his descent.

“I see. Gregory, are you becoming anxious for a certain conversation?”

Mycroft grinned wickedly at his lover, knowing well how it acted as a bellows for the fire of his Gregory’s passions.

“I… no. And yes. But mostly no. Well, not mostly, but sort of mostly. With some yes. There’s a solid piece of yes, too. Yeah. Makes sense?”

“Was it supposed to?”

“I don’t know. Now, you’re running me in a circle! What is it with you and those two? Is it fun to watch me chase my tail?”

Mycroft budged closer to his partner and gave him a kiss on his cheek, loving the heat he felt under his lips. His Gregory was breathtaking when he was flushed.

“I apologize if I flustered you, my dear. But, I do believe, in your special way, you have given me the answer I was seeking. We shall talk more on this, yes?”

“We should, probably. A lot. And, I’m happy about what we want to talk about. You know how I feel about it and that’s not going to change. I just told those two monster boys not to run around telling people because we’re not at that point yet and, when the time comes, we want to be
the ones to break the news. Does that make sense, at least?”

“It does. And I agree wholeheartedly. The timeline we agreed upon is a very sound one and I heartily concur that the announcement of our engaged status should come from no one but us. I trust you impressed upon the children the seriousness of this issue.”

“We blackmailed him!”

John looked so smug that Mycroft’s heart expanded three sizes from his own pride at the boy’s accomplishment.

“And what did you win for your efforts?”

“We get to have chocolate at breakfast and before bedtime anytime we want.”

“The lackey should feel fortunate that our demands were simple and easy to accommodate.”

“When you two have upset stomachs because you’ve got a brick of undigested chocolate sitting in them, don’t call me again to drive out here and sit with you until you feel better.”

“You love it, Mummy Greg. There’s no point in lying about it.”

Lestrade’s pained groan was the most precious thing Mycroft had ever heard.

“Mummy Greg, my dear?”

“Don’t ask. Truly, just don’t ask.”

Mycroft gave his partner another firm squeeze and tabled the issue for the moment, though he would find out more later because this promised to be a very entertaining discussion.

“As you wish. Now, I am highly interested in hearing your news and that of the boys. I am certain that it has been an active few days.”

Sherlock and John immediately launched into a performance of their adventures and tortures at school, while Mycroft settled himself comfortably on the sofa and against his partner to listen to their stories. What a phenomenal thing to have in one’s life. And what a phenomenal man he had found to share it…

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“Gregory, are you quite done, yet?”

“I still have paint in places paint has no business being!”

Perhaps agreeing to allow the boys to demonstrate the Mark 2 versions of their paint bombs had not been the wisest course of action, even when outdoors and at a substantial distance. The directionality they had designed into the new examples was positively inspired… unfortunately, this left his beloved in no mood to share his shower as he washed away the traces of the boys’ experiment.

“I will again offer my services for inspection and apply all due diligence towards returning your body to its pristine form.”

“Absolutely not! When I yelled ‘Watch out!’ that wasn’t a signal for you to jump behind me to keep from being splattered!”
“However, my swift action did spare my waistcoat untold insult.”

“That’s why you get no wet, naked me to play with, you tosser.”

“Such a harsh penalty… my punishment in no way fits the crime, Gregory Lestrade.”

“Pfft. If you want even the slightest chance of getting back into my good graces, as well as my pants, you should be finding me some fresh clothes, pouring me something pleasant to drink and seeing that a warm fire is waiting for me when I get out of my shower.”

“I shall ensure every possible detail of your comfort is properly tended to. Now, may I have just a small peek as a reward for my attentiveness?”

“Only if you want a sponge thrown in your face.”

“You are a petty man, my dear.”

“I’ve got paint in my nose!”

“I assure you I shall not be looking at your nose.”

The sound of a sodden sponge colliding with the door of the bath was Lestrade’s response and Mycroft couldn’t help but chuckle at his partner’s sour mood. It would be a positively lovely time turning it from sour back to sweet and he was very much looking forward to the task.

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One warm fire, one good brandy, fresh clothes and two children happily occupied with a game of chess in which their new knives played a key role… Lestrade had to admit that Mycroft had done the trick of making him comfortable. Not that he’d had any doubt because his Mycroft was nothing if not supremely talented at creating unimaginable comfort.

“Alright… my good graces are firmly restored.”

Really, how could they not be with his lover reclining with him on the sofa, lying between his legs and resting that long, lean back against his chest.

“I am delighted to hear it. Truly, your graces are something I forever long to be in.”

“I think it’s guaranteed that when you do send me raging, you’ll be able to wriggle yourself out of trouble fairly easily, what with all your sexiness and brilliance. I can’t hold out for long against that.”

“Something for which I shall be forever grateful. And did I notice evidence of financial planning as I cleared away the boys’ schoolwork?”

“Oh, that. Yeah… I thought it was time to stop being a child and actually start some proper planning for my future.”

“Interesting. And what did you set in place?”

“Nothing, really. Can’t until I’ve got my wages coming in, but I did do up a tentative budget and… made my final choice about what I want to do with my life. I’m going to go into police work. No more, ‘I’d like to’ or I’m thinking about.’ I had another talk with the lads at the station, a long, honest one and it’s what I want to do. Got a good overview of the application process and what it will take to get myself the job, too. And I double-checked what I was told against the information
you got for me to make sure I had the full picture. It’s what I want to do, love. I don’t have any doubt about it.”

Mycroft shifted slightly to look his partner in the face and saw nothing but conviction and satisfaction in his eyes.

“That is wonderful news! I am frightfully happy for you, my love. I know you shall excel, simply excel, in your work.”

“Thanks. It feels good to have a firm direction, too. That was why I was working on the budget. Your figures for salary were spot on and I took a look at some of the listings for flats for an idea of the rent. We’ll still have to look at them to see what they’re like, but… it would be tight, but I can do it, I think. Provided those two don’t pick my pockets every day, I should be able to have a flat of my own and, just maybe, not live on pasta for the rest of my life.”

“You have my sincere congratulations, Gregory. I know this is very important for you and I am thrilled that you are seeing your goals coming within reach.”

“I still have to work out how I’m going to manage tending to Sherlock and John while you’re gone, but I’m considering that a worry for another day. We are going to have to start thinking about it, though.”

“Yes, that we will. I believe they have grown accustomed to our presence and may not take kindly to any prolonged time with only the staff’s eyes upon them.”

“They won’t, I know they won’t. We’ll think of something, though. It’s going to work just fine, I know it will.”

“I believe fully that you are correct. But, yes, we shall examine the situation closely to find the most effective solution.”

“Which is something you’re very, very brilliant at. So, how much longer do you think we have until the boys are ready to go to bed?”

“I believe we would see the sunrise before that occurred if left to their own devices.”

“You’re probably right. Give them another hour, do you think? Then, send them off to get some sleep and start Part Two of our night?”

“I would say that was an appropriate agenda. Such young, tender things need all of the sleep they can obtain to recover from their busy days.”

“And to give us a much needed break. Let’s get a few more chapters of our books to our credit, then we can set the great chess war aside and get them in bed.”

“A worthy plan. Some additional time to enjoy this moment is very welcome since I must admit to being loathe to move from my current position.”

The pleasurable nestling of his Mycroft against his body made Lestrade start to rethink their schedule and consider tossing the boys into their beds right now, with their doors locked and bolted from the outside.

“Then you stay right there as long as you like. The boys won’t mind a little extra time with their game. As it is, they haven’t completely beheaded their kings yet.”
Which Sherlock and John had been actively engaged in trying to accomplish for the past few minutes with the saw attachments of their knives.

“Sherlock is not much of a royalist, I’m afraid.”

“Unless he’s the one wearing the crown.”

“Oh, most certainly.”

The kings’ bodies and heads were set aside with the rest of the royal court and the boys were finally shuffled off to sleep and, with them tucked in, it was time for the older boys to crawl into their own bed and Mycroft purred with happiness at having the firmest, warmest, most intoxicating body in existence lying on top of his naked form.

“You’re the most gorgeous man I’ve ever known, Mycroft. I love you so much.”

“And I you, Gregory. There is no day of my life that is not made better by your presence. Especially when you move your hips in that particular manner.”

“Like that? Then I’ll continue on. And maybe add a little of this…”

“Ooohhh…. yes, that is also most appreciated.”

“I dreamed about you last night, you know? Dreamed that I had you in my mouth, listening to those lovely sounds you make when you’re especially happy…”

“How interesting, since I fantasized about something very similar during a particularly uninspiring moment of my work.”

“Well, since we’ve been thinking along the same lines…”

Lestrade laid a series of kisses across his lover’s chest, nuzzling the newly growing hair, while Mycroft spread his legs wider to better accommodate his partner’s intentions.

“And still you have not come to your senses.”

Mycroft stiffened hearing the sultry, yet icy voice and Lestrade did his best to make sure no part of his lover was visible to the evil witch that had invaded the bedroom.

“It’s polite to knock, you know.”

“In my own house?”

“Ever heard of privacy?”

“My son has nothing to hide from me. Well, at least until he met you.”

Mycroft wriggled and gently rolled Lestrade off of him, careful to keep the blankets over both of them as much as possible.

“Mummy, Gregory is absolutely correct. This is our bedroom and the fundamental civility of privacy is the least we should expect from anyone in this house.”

“Our? Observe your pronouns, Mycroft. This is your bedroom, regardless of who is your
“This is my and Gregory’s bedroom, Mummy. When he is in residence, this is the bed we share. My use of language is precise, as always.”

“Disgraceful. I have learned more about your bedmate, you know. Quite the active social life… and I am using the term ‘social’ very euphemistically.”

Lestrade grabbed Mycroft’s hand under the blankets, more to stop himself from saying something he regretted than comforting his distressed lover.

“I am well aware that my Gregory has enjoyed a healthy sexual life in the past, however, his faithfulness to me is something I never question. And, if you had evidence to counter that claim, you would have presented it at the onset, which you failed to do. If you are going to challenge me, Mummy, do ensure you have the proper weaponry to at least survive the first salvo.”

“So unaware of human nature… when you are disconsolate from his inevitable betrayal, you will realize my salvo was not as impotent as you believed. In any case, there is an issue of greater importance I wish to discuss.”

Mycroft swallowed down his anger and kept his face as calm and placid as the surface of a still lake.

“Oh, and what would that be?”

“You have turned this house into some form of home for unwashed waifs and I would know the reason why.”

Oh dear…

“John is certainly not unwashed because I, myself, saw to his pre-bedtime hygiene ritual.”

“Have you gone completely insane?”

“Look… how about you get out of here and let me and Mycroft get dressed, so we don’t have to talk to you stark naked. We’ll meet you in the library.”

“Your impertinence is not nearly your least appealing feature, but it one of the more serious contenders for the title.”

“Mummy, Gregory is quite right. This is a very undignified way to have a conversation. Even you must see that.”

“I suppose that if pressed, I would concede the point. We will continue this discussion in the library. Do not keep me waiting.”

Barely a breath passed before the couple was again alone and Lestrade drew in a deep breath as he drew Mycroft close and kissed him on the forehead.

“How are you doing, love?”

“I am sorry, so very sorry, you had to endure that, Gregory.”

“Don’t worry about me, because I just get angry and that blows over. I’m worried about you, though. Hurt doesn’t blow over that easily and I hate, I absolutely hate, for you to get hurt for any reason, but, especially, if the reason is me.”
Mycroft curled around his lover and breathed in the spicy, soothing scent of Lestrade’s skin.

“You are not the cause of any distress, my love. Mummy wields the weapon she calculates will be most devastating and it is my honor and privilege that you are the blade that cuts me most deeply. However, her jabs are as ridiculous as those Sherlock provides, though, I will admit, their sting is far sharper.”

“Want me to go down there and handle this? I don’t have any issue giving your mum a piece of my mind.”

That, at least, gave Mycroft a much needed, cleansing laugh.

“That, I know very well, and I adore you for it. No, we shall tend to this together. After our conversation at Grandmama’s house, I feel far more at ease engaging with her in discussion and, besides, the issue is our John and I believe he is best served with both our championing.”

“Sounds good. We’ll lay the law down and then get back up here for a bit of celebration. I am very anxious to celebrate with you, Mycroft Holmes, and am going to make sure it’s one you remember.”

And, after one long, fiery kiss, Lestrade hopped out of bed and extended his hand to beckon Mycroft to join him. Taking in the undeniable masculinity and virility of his lover, Mycroft rededicated himself to his new attitude towards relations with his mother. If he was denied his Gregory’s favors for much longer, there could be bloodshed and dear Mummy would not come off well in the aftermath.

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“Finally. I was coming to be of the mind that you had again succumbed to your carnality and I would be greeted with the mingled stench of sweat and testosterone.”

“Gregory and my personal business is none of your concern, Mummy. Now, if you would be so kind as to state your position, we may be done with his issue as quickly as possible.”

“So curt and concise. Not the approach I would expect from someone obviously experiencing such an uprising of the charitable spirit.”

“Charity underlies none of my actions; my love for my family is at the core of any domestic decisions I might make, such as providing young John a more accommodating and welcoming home than that bounded by the walls of his school.”

“Love… again you mistake love for what it is not. You have grown an attachment to this boy, that much is certain, however, the same can be said for thousands of individuals and their pets. Would you term that connection ‘love?’ “

“Is it at all possible for you to participate in a discussion without being profoundly insulting?”

“I see you have no answer to give to my question.”

“Maybe because your question is complete bollocks. You’re just trying to get Mycroft agitated, probably because it gives you some feeling of power or control, but, really, it just makes you look petty and rude. John’s not a dog, he’s a great boy that Mycroft and I both care about and if we can make his life a little nicer, then that’s what we’re going to do. It’s not like you’re having to share a room with him or something; this house has more bedrooms than a hotel!”
“Rooms that are for our family, not for leeches on our wealth and hospitality.”

“Neither is John, ma’am. He’s a good boy and Sherlock’s best friend. They are fantastic together and Sherlock’s happy as he can be that he’s found someone who realizes what a special person he is, too.”

“Apparently, Sherlock is as prone to delusions as his brother.”

“Gregory is correct and there is no misunderstanding how important the children are to each other. Having John here is an efficient method of ensuring Sherlock’s own happiness, as well; something I did consider in making my decision.”

“That, at least, I understand. Purchasing a friend for your brother is something I, myself, have considered in the past.”

Mycroft laid a hand on Lestrade’s shoulder to prevent his partner stalking forward to continue this conversation nose-to-nose with the lady of the house.

“Sherlock and John are friends by their own choice and their relationship is one Gregory and I fully support. As does Grandmama. She is exceedingly pleased with what they crafted and knows, as do we, that it is the basis for a lifelong friendship.”

“Unless, of course, John was no longer available to continue it.”

This time it was Lestrade holding his partner back from a frontal assault, as well as keeping him upright against knees that had suddenly gone unsteady.

“What… what do you mean?”

“As I said, I have conducted my own investigations. John’s father was quite easy to locate.”

Lestrade had never felt any fear for the woman he was facing, but now a cold wind was blowing into him, purely from her direction.

“Don’t you fucking dare.”

“Your threats do not impress me, gigolo.”

Mycroft began to see a very dangerous shade of red clouding his vision and was relieved there was nothing in his reach that could be used as a projectile.

“You will not insult my husband! And you will do nothing, nothing, to compromise John’s safety and happiness!”

“Husband… getting rather ahead of yourself, aren’t you, Mycroft?”

“It is inconsequential, for in my heart, our love is no different than that between those who are legally wed. You will not besmirch him with your degrading terms and you will not, not for one instant, consider bringing into John’s life the father who offers him nothing but a future with no opportunity, comfort or happiness.

“Oh, and how do you know that?”

“You assume I have not amassed all there is to know about the man? I begin to wonder about your own tendency towards delusion. He has not changed his ways, not improved his circumstances or sought help for the problems that plague him. He offers John nothing but a life I would wish on
“It is not really your choice, though, is it, Mycroft? The boy was in the custody of his aunt and you have assured she has left the country, abrogating her agreement with the authorities to be the guardian of young John. I feel certain they would appreciate notification of that fact, though they shall likely discover it on their own when they make the standard inquiries about his welfare. Such a tiny little thing… I doubt he would fare well in the clutches of the state and their system for tending to unwanted children. Probably as well as with the father who scarcely remembers his son’s given name.”

“You fucking witch!”

Lestrade was pulled back and shoved onto the sofa by Mycroft who was experiencing a very different type of emotion and feeling the raw, metallic flavor of his rage mellow as he sensed something odd about his mother’s threats. Threats that were, in truth, wholly uncharacteristic and something for which his mother was not well known, besides a few viperous ones she might hurl out of spite in the heat of the moment.

“Well played, Mummy, however… you have no interest in John, even in the fact that he now makes this his residence. What is your real purpose? What is it that you want?”

“What makes you think I want anything?” That sharpened glint in your eye, for starters.

“Kindly cease with the game-playing and answer my question. You were in the States and not slated to return for some while, yet here I find you arrived home with a ludicrous attempt at villainy on your tongue. Again I ask, what is it that you want?”

If Lestrade wasn’t becoming somewhat used to the Holmes ability to manipulate, he would be staring stupidly at the woman who was showing tiny traces of a smile on her damnably perfect lips.

“I see your time with… him… has not dulled your wits as much as I expected.”

“Please come to the point and leave Gregory out of this.”

“Very well. Let us say I hoped to lay some ground for negotiation should your response not be to my favor.”

“Response? What response?”

Mycroft watched his mother stroll towards the fire that had, apparently, been laid for this meeting, and made a show of warming her hands with its heat.

“As you said, I have been in the States and, perhaps, this trip has offered me more… engaging… amusements than before.”

“That, in no manner, alleviated my ignorance.”

“I met someone. Is that sufficiently succinct for you?”

This brought Lestrade back to his feet, moving quickly to wrap his arms around his partner, who had gone slightly pale at the admission.

“Met someone?”
“A very charming man who delights, as do I, in enjoying what life has to offer. Fortunately, his business dealings allow him many opportunities for travel, yet do not consume the lion’s share of his time, leaving much for other, more interesting pursuits.”

Lestrade held Mycroft more tightly, worrying slightly about the trembling that was beginning to shake his partner’s body.

“M…Mummy, are you saying you are getting married?”

“What? Heaven’s no! I do treasure Robert’s company, however… I do not foresee him keeping my interest for longer than a few years, at best. Like your father, he is extremely devoted to his work, but unlike your father, I predict that devotion will eventually sap the vitality he now demonstrates. However… it does beg the question…”

Suddenly, the light went on in Mycroft’s mind and he felt far more in control of things than he had since the conversation began.

“You are concerned about Grandmama’s reaction. And response. Especially if you did someday marry again.”

“Would you agree it is a valid concern?”

In the interests of full disclosure… yes.

“Perhaps, though Grandmama is not one who leans towards the sentimental.”

“After your various adventures of late with the puppies that trail after you and the food bowl you carry, do you honestly believe that to be a true statement?”

In the further interests of full disclosure… no.

“Touché. Grandmama’s capacity for sentiment for matters of family is boundless, as I have come to understand.”

“There you have it. Someday, Mycroft, I may find someone who I care about enough to again enter into the bonds of matrimony or, at least, some degree of cohabitation, and I doubt it would be a joyful experience with your grandmother’s talons tearing at me and the meager funds I am currently allotted.”

“I see. You hope to secure my support should the time come.”

“Knowing clearly who are one’s allies and enemies is a valuable thing. And… I do not consider your feelings inconsequential in this matter, Mycroft. I know you loved your father dearly, as did I.”

Whether this was genuine or another attempt at manipulation, Mycroft wasn’t certain, but it hit him with a crushing force, nonetheless.

“I did. And I miss him terribly.”

“Which is why I am aware that your opinion on any future decision on my part might not be a positive one.”

Mycroft let the comfort of his lover’s embrace calm his mind and give him much-needed support as he dealt with his feelings, most of which he had never anticipated experiencing.

“I see. In truth, at this instant, I cannot give you a firm prediction on my own reaction, but… I
can acknowledge that your life is yours to live and if Grandmama responded poorly to your choices I would make my opinion well known to her. I cannot guarantee she would listen or even care about my view on the subject, but I would do my best to turn her mind towards a favorable outcome for you.”

“Thank you, Mycroft. That is all I can reasonably expect.”

“Are you… is Mycroft going to get a chance to meet this bloke?”

The older Holmes brother was very happy to hear from his tone of voice that his Gregory was as discombobulated by the turn of events as was he.

“If he desires to, I can arrange it. I left Robert in London, he has business to conduct in the city tomorrow morning, but, if you wish, I can bring him here in the evening. We can easily reschedule our flight and…”

“No! I mean… no, thank you, Mummy. That is not necessary at this time. I predict that Sherlock would require a rather large amount of preparation for such a thing and that is not nearly enough time to do the deed properly. Another day, perhaps.”

“Of course. Now, I have some phone calls to make to friends in Los Angeles, which is Robert’s and my next stop. Good night, Mycroft. And… whatever your name is. I will rise late, so do keep the household quiet so that I might have my rest.”

With a twirl that swirled her dress around her, Mycroft’s mother strode out of the room, leaving two very off-kilter persons in her wake.

“Come here, Mycroft. You have a seat and I’ll pour you some brandy.”

Lestrade led a slightly-unfocused Mycroft to the sofa, prepared their drinks and pressed one carefully into his lover’s hands.

“Are you alright, love?”

“That is a very difficult question to answer at the moment, I’m afraid.”

“Yeah, I understand that. Here’s an easy one, then. How did you know your mother was full of shite about John?”

“Ah. She overplayed her hand, as she is apt to do at times. I believe she thought me unaware of what sending John’s aunt to Switzerland would mean for her custody agreement, but I tended to that matter the very day I spoke to her.”

“Please don’t tell me you adopted him.”

“No, but Grandmama is now John’s legal guardian, though I feel it best not to inform him of that fact at this time. At least, not until we have a discussion with him about the situation as a whole.”

“Good idea. For both bits of that, I mean.”

“I am happy you approve, my dear, and do apologize for not informing you of this sooner. I simply slipped my mind with all of the other matters with which we have been dealing. In any case, at the point of her misfire, I knew something was amiss, as Mummy is nothing if not thorough in her scheming. Also…”
“She’s not intentionally evil. That’s what you said, at least.”

“And you are correct. I simply had no idea her true motive was… this.”

“It was a shocker, I admit. I’m still not happy about her thinking about threatening John, even if it wasn’t real, but I sort of understand why she might worry about what Grandmama would think if she found someone to get serious about.”

“I agree, though Grandmama is a practical-minded individual and… it has been a long time since Father died. I forget sometimes, because I feel him still in this house, but… Mummy is young, in a relative sense, and I suppose she might harbor hopes of finding someone again to love. I have never given it any thought, given her lifestyle, but knowing as I do now the incomparable feeling of loving and being loved in return… after so long, why would she not look ahead to the long years ahead and wonder if it was at all possible to find some sliver of that feeling again. Perhaps that is another reason she disapproves of our relationship… she sees us happy, in love, planning to take each other in marriage and despairs that she has not that joy anymore in her life.”

“Could be… I admit I’ve looked at Mum’s life differently since I met you and we started building a life of our own. Were you telling the truth, though? Will you say something to Grandmama if things take that path?”

“Yes, I was completely truthful in that. I do not know my own mind on the subject yet, but I was honest in that her life is hers to lead and I would plead her case to Grandmama should the situation arise.”

“Good. I think you should, actually. I can’t say I like your Mum, because I don’t, but fair is fair and besides… if she marries some poor bastard in America or somewhere else fuck-all far away, wouldn’t that make visiting a difficult thing to do.”

Mycroft broke his first smile since he walked into the room and leaned over to give Lestrade a soft, brandy-flavored kiss.

“That it would. How I adore your cunning intellect.”

“Do you adore it enough to lean back and let me pick up where we left off in the bedroom?”

“Here? Now?”

“My Mycroft needs to relax so he can think about all of this clearly. I figure I can help with that and then we can sit here, enjoying this lovely fire, and talk for as long as you want to. How does that sound.”

“ Heavenly. I love you, Gregory. I can never say that enough to you for it will never be enough for what you deserve.”

“Then don’t worry about talking for awhile and just let me take care of you.”

And with his brandy plucked from his fingers, Mycroft released a deep sigh and leaned back while Lestrade made quick work of his trouser buttons. His Gregory… such a magnificent individual. And one who would have his own reward before the sun came up in the morning, provided no other surprises were lying in wait for them. He’d had quite enough of them for the time being…
Chapter 27

Lestrade knew this was stupid. Really bloody stupid. Keeping a chart of when Mycroft was home and when he was gone to see which category actually saw the larger amount of time was just a clingy, stupid thing to do, but he’d been pulling out his hair lately and he needed something right now that said he was being… stupid.

But he wasn’t. At least not from a maths standpoint. Mycroft had almost been gone these past couple of months more often than he’d been home. Admittedly, some of that ‘gone’ time was time spent at home when he wasn’t available to do anything but take meetings with people who wore serious faces like they were being paid to do it. Which they were, he supposed. But, that didn’t change the fact that his lover was becoming more of a guest in the house than a resident and that didn’t feel good. It didn’t feel good at all.

It wasn’t that Mycroft was happy about it, though, or didn’t notice. He did notice and it made him very upset, but it wasn’t as if either of them could change anything. And his partner made certain that when he was home they spent every bit of time together that they could, doing things that both of them liked. Mycroft was very adamant about that. Nights at the pub, watching him play football, listening to music he liked on the radio and lots of other things… there wasn’t another person in the world as attentive as his Mycroft. Some days, though, like today, it was still hard, even when he knew he was being complete twat.

“Greg, I think the mice are awake.”

From his cozy bed, no less. Apparently, Sherlock and John found it as easy to sleep in his room as they did in their own when the loneliness of that big house got to them. So, he’d had to make several trips out there to collect houseguests, armed with their arsenal of portable experiments that Mum had at least forbidden be conducted on the kitchen table. She did not, however, demand they sleep on the sofa or floor, since they were just ‘wee little things who needed something comfortable to get a good night’s rest.’ Stupid maternal instincts… not a bit for her own kid, though, who got the sofa when they visited.

“Toss them some cheese and let me sleep for another hour.”

“Get your lazy arse up and see your kids washed and fed, Gregory Lestrade.”

No, that was not a rude gesture he made his mum that she couldn’t see, thank god.

“No my kids, thank you very much.”

“Might as well be, so you get to do the dreary dad part and I get to be their Gran and have all the fun.”

Oh, and she was. Took the boys for a shopping excursion of her own yesterday and, naturally, they behaved better for her than they ever did for him and earned ice cream for being a little gentleman, in John’s case, and not arrestable, on Sherlock’s part. And breakfast smelled especially tasty… probably made something completely elaborate and wonderful because her little angels were visiting. If it’d just been him, she’d probably have made gruel.

“They’re not toddlers. They can scrub their teeth and wash their bums without my help.”

“I am not paying a plumber to fix whatever damage they cause because Sherlock wants to know if poor people’s plumbing is made of wood or something like that.”
He would, too. That was actually a serious concern.

“Fine. I’m awake.”

“I already knew that, now be *useful* and awake and I’ll be happy.”

Ugh… at least he’d have a relatively quiet day once things got moving. Surprisingly, it wasn’t hard to work Saturdays and have the boys with him. By now, everyone in the area of the shop recognized the troublemakers and were quick to step in if they were doing something loony or call him with the invoice for the havoc they’d wreaked before they’d been wrestled to the ground. And their driver was collecting them right before lunch so they could spend the rest of the day at home, though he’d be joining them later, since Mum was kicking him out so she could… entertain. And, he wasn’t allowed to come home until tomorrow. Ugh…

“*You are late.*”

And hello to you, Sherlock.

“No, I’m not, because I never said what time I’d be here. Had to stay a little late and do some clean up and stocking the shelves. Anyway, I thought we settled this a long time ago.”

“John is expiring from starvation.”

“Yeah! Expiring!”

“Oh? No food in that fuck-all huge kitchen of yours? Get a plague of rats run through and gobble everything in their path?”

“The fetid waft of your breath is made all the more redolent by the stench of your attempts at wit.”

“At least you’ll always know where I am. Just follow the waft. Now, did you finish those reports you had to write?”

“Ummmm…”

“That’s not a very encouraging sound, John.”

“No, I guess it’s not. You see, Sherlock and I had a LOT of work to do for the case of the missing cat and…”

“What? Oh lord, please don’t tell me you’re kidnapping pets for ransom.”

“Buffoon. Though we did earn a reward for our very successful resolution to the case.”

If the two goblins weren’t beaming like the moon, he’d be reaching for the brandy bottle and diving inside.

“Alright… let’s have a seat.”

Lestrade marched the two boys into the library, ecstatic, as always, for the fire that was burning brightly and dropped onto the sofa, waiting for Sherlock and John to get settled on the rug before motioning them to tell their story.
“Well, it’s like this. The cook has been feeding this cat for the past week or two and she’s very friendly, the cat, not the cook, though she’s very friendly too and makes amazing food… anyway, we knew she had to be someone’s cat since she had a little collar, but Cook called the houses nearby and asked if she was theirs and she wasn’t. So, today I was playing with her and I took her collar off because she was scratching and noticed that there was some writing on the inside! You couldn’t read it because it was very faded, but Sherlock took the collar and… you tell him, Sherlock.”

“I was able, due to my highly-advanced intellect and mastery of chemistry, to make even the nearly-invisible sections of the writing legible, at least for a brief moment. John accurately scribed the data, which was ‘Mrs. Periwinkle.’ Since the beast possessed a purchased collar, I telephoned the pet shop and made inquiries as to their knowledge of the feline. Our lead bore fruit and I acquired the contact information of the owner. In a trice, I had negotiated the transfer of Mrs. Periwinkle to her owner, an aged female, which came as no surprise, and she, quite rightly, provided John and I a suitable reward.”

“Scones!”

Now it was Lestrade who was beaming and he wondered how two small boys could find so many adventures, but, looking back, he had to admit that he and his mates had their share, too…

“I have to tell you, I am impressed. And as proud as I can be. The two detectives solving their first case. That was a solid piece of police work and for a good cause, too. I’m sure the owner was very happy to have her cat back.”

“She was! She thanked us over and over and kissed us on the cheek almost as often as she kissed her cat.”

“That was not the most agreeable part of the investigation.”

“Awww… little tykes got some Granny kisses for their troubles. I really am proud of you two. That was a very nice thing you did and I know that Mycroft is going to feel the same way. It’s important to use your skills and talents to help other people, just like he does, and he’s going to be thrilled that you two did that very thing.”

John’s smile was so wide, Lestrade hoped his face didn’t split in two and Sherlock, the grumpiest goblin in the village, was failing miserably to hide his own delight from the praise. Poor little boys… they’d had it hard in life and it was a brilliant feeling to give them a bright, honest smile.

“And now, you will provide us with a tangible demonstration of your admiration.”

“I will? What might that be?”

“We have examined the fish wrapper that poses as a local newspaper and have discovered that there is a film tonight that may offer some paltry measure of amusement. At the very least, it shall tantalize John’s and your deficient intellect and I may take my own amusement from watching you hoot and beat your chests like the remainder of the simian audience.”

“You want a night at the cinema, is that what you’re saying.”

“Was I not clear?”

“Not really, no. Got a bit lost what with the fish and monkey business.”

“Your amygdala is the size of a dust mote, hence your thoroughly off-putting juvenility.”
“I’ll try to remember that. And I suppose you two deserve a film after your big day. We’ll eat dinner before we go, though, because I can’t afford pizza.”

“What savagery is this? You expect us to dine on offal?”

“Is that what Cook is making?”

“… no. She is preparing pork.”

“Then, we’re having pork.”

“Does your pitiful bag of coins hold sufficient lucre for popcorn?”

“You can have popcorn.”

“Then the experience shall not be a complete disaster. Now, you will sit quietly and listen while John and I describe the details of our experiment on the effects of common household solvents on the structural integrity of cat hair.”

“Please tell me you didn’t shave the cat.”

“Only a small… mostly unnoticeable… patch.”

“Thank you for your restraint.”

“You are most welcome.”

One film that actually kept the boys occupied, one large mass of popcorn eaten more than thrown, one bit of driving quiet roads so Sherlock and John could practice maneuvering the car at night, one game of chess for the drivers to unwind and two little bodies tucked into bed for a good night’s sleep… couldn’t have asked for anything better. Well, that wasn’t true, but it was the best given the circumstances. Now, one good book, a warm fire, no brandy because he was becoming to like the stuff far too much and…

“Such a glorious sight. The finest of the Old Masters would never be able to properly render the beauty I am now privileged to witness.”

“Mycroft! You’re home early!”

“That I am.”

Lestrade leapt from the sofa and gave his lover a long, tender kiss as he slowly danced him around the library, ending the greeting with both of them back on the sofa.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were coming?”

“Because I knew you and the children would likely seek to enjoy some form of entertainment this evening and it would have pained me to have you forego that to, instead, wait for my return when I could not guarantee the hour.”

“That’s a good reason. And we did make a night of it, too. The miseries had an exciting day and wanted to celebrate.”

“Oh… may I know the reason for the excitement?”
Mycroft nestled against his lover and let his body relax. This was becoming the norm for them and, though it was not a situation either particularly desired, the ‘coming home’ experience was one they had grown greatly to savor.

“Not from me. I’ll let the boys tell you their tale themselves. But there are plenty of other stories I can share if you’re going to be awake awhile.”

“How mysterious! Today’s activities must have truly been momentous. Very well, I shall curb my curiosity and await the children’s highly theatrical storytelling. Now, regale me with the tales of your days. Mine have been of the dullest nature, so I am anxious to feel my soul refilled with the vitality of human existence through basking in your vivacity.”

“Well, then, I’ll be happy to help with that. Do you want to hear about me and my mates having a dust up with a pack of mongrels who tried start something at the pub?”

Mycroft’s gasp was equal parts concerned, scandalized and titillated, which made Lestrade very, very pleased.

“You… Gregory… fisticuffs?”

“A bit. Few boots to the ones dumb enough to fall when they caught a punch. Nothing to really hurt, though. Just a few bruises and scrapes, but it’ll keep that lot from saying rotten things about Danny’s girl ever again. Just because she gave one of the animals a good slap for having a grope of her bum. He… well, he may have come away with more than a few bruises and scrapes, but not that I’ll admit to with a government man sitting next to me.”

If Mycroft had any doubt that his spouse was a man of bristling masculinity it was forever erased by the mental image of his love battling the discourteous bumpkins who dared perpetrate such an insult.

“I would give all that I own to have witnessed your valor.”

“Don’t worry, love, it’s not like it won’t happen again. Not that we try, but me and my mates find ourselves in a brawl more often than is probably good for us. Luckily, a lot of them happen when some idiots think they can cheat their way through a match and leave a few of our boys with bloody noses.”

“So very tribal… it is good that you band together so fiercely to protect your own. And, when you don your police uniform, you may use your official position as another layer of defense for those you hold dear.”

“Actually, those sad excuses for friends are anxious for me to join up with the police so I keep their arses out of jail when they do something particularly stupid.”

“One cultivates one’s resources whenever one can. A very sound strategy.”

“Must have happened by accident. Oh! And John got top marks on that history project you helped him with. He did a great job with the suggestions you gave him and paraded around the house holding his folder over his head like a trophy.”

“Much to Sherlock’s fury, I’m certain.”

“There might have been a tiny amount of fury, but that calmed down fast when John shared his chocolate prize for being a good student.”

“Yes, my brother’s rage is very subject to sugar-based pacification.”
“True. Let’s see… oh yeah, they finished working with the last of the owl pellets, so we need to find some more to keep them occupied. Nice little skeleton menagerie they’re making. And then there was…”

Such was the peace flooding into Mycroft’s form that he was scarcely aware anymore of his husband’s words, only the comforting flow of assurance that his family was happy. It was the one thought that kept him from despondency when he, again, received notification that his presence was required away from the ones he loved. He did the very best he could when he was home and, in his absence, his spouse maintained their familial bond, one that never failed to welcome him back enthusiastically when he again stepped into their lives.

“… so, mum’s been no help there. Little trolls have me sleeping on the sofa like the family dog!”

“Sherlock and John do appear to have a special and powerful effect on both Mother Lestrade and Grandmama. Perhaps age has compromised their perceptions.”

“Don’t let you hear them say that or I’m not sure we’ll be able to sit down for a week.”

“Yes, and I do feel we would have some small difficulty sleeping while standing up.”

“True. So… how long are you going to be home this time?”

The wording of the question cut to Mycroft’s core, but he couldn’t deny that, of late, it was more to be expected that he would be leaving than remaining for any extended period. If only the world would cease its nonsense and behave in a rational and orderly fashion, his family life would be far more harmonious. However, this time, he had, an answer his Gregory might not find objectionable.

“Until next weekend. Though, my departure shall not, I hope, be made alone.”

“What do you mean?”

“There is a function in London I am expected to attend and it is my fondest wish that you be there at my side.”

“Oh, another party?”

“In a sense, though this one has an intended goal. There are times when conversations of the most private manner can only safely take place in a public setting with the participants are expected to be found.”

“You’re saying there things you need to talk to people about but you can’t just ring them up and say hello?”

“Most certainly! When one has a stated allegiance in one direction, a collegial phone conversation with someone not professing the same allegiance is looked upon… well, shall we say, with suspicion.”

“So, you mill about a party where lots of people are invited and if you share a few words, it’s expected because that’s polite and what you do at parties?”

“Precisely.”

“That’s spy stuff.”

“Not a wholly inaccurate description.”
“I get to do spy stuff?”

“Does that appeal to you?”

“Yes! But… won’t people be suspicious anyway since they know who you are?”

“My functions are not as well known as you might believe, my dear. There is value to maintaining a low profile and I have successfully endeavored to do so. According to records, I serve as an assistant to a minor government official and, as this is a social gathering, it is not unexpected that the lower office ranks might be allowed to attend so their superiors can assess their mettle for these sorts of events.”

“My Mycroft, the office tea boy.”

“I do prepare a lovely trolley.”

“You most certainly do. But, what about Sherlock and John?”

“Grandmama is going to mind them for the weekend. She is rather looking forward to it, actually. I forget, at times, that she is a grandmother and desirous of the various experiences and opportunities that bestows.”

“Mum’s caught a case of that, too. And, don’t forget, Grandmama’s got even higher aspirations.”

“No, that is not something I shall forget for I am quite certain I shall be reminded of my procreative responsibilities the moment the ink is dry upon our marriage certificate, as well as each week afterwards.”

“Well, it won’t be for lack of our trying. I plan to exercise my procreative urges on you every chance I get.”

“And I shall make myself available to you upon demand for your procreative proclivities.”

“That’s what I like to hear. So, are we just going to London for the day or…”

“I had hoped that we might depart on Friday afternoon and return Sunday, so that we had some time that was purely ours to enjoy. Our obligation is Friday evening, and the remainder of the time finds us unfettered and free to avail ourselves of what London has to offer. Or, luxuriate in the comfort of our hotel suite.”

“This sounds like it could be fun.”

“It is my intention that it be so. I know I have not been able to give to you the time you deserve and that we both desire and… it was my intention to offer you a small holiday as a token of my regret.”

“You don’t need to do that, Mycroft. But… I’m glad you thought of it. It’ll be nice to get away for a bit. And any time I get to focus just on you is time very well spent. Thanks, love. This is going to be brilliant.”

Mycroft breathed a very deep internal sigh of relief as he had carried a small worry that his betrothed would balk at the thought of accepting what would seem to him an extravagance. And he did plan to shower his beloved with extravagance while they were away. It was the very least he could do for such a patient and devoted man. Who else would have someone such as him, with all the burdens he
imposed on their lives? Only an angel could love him and it was surely an angel he had found.

“Excellent. We shall have a glorious time, my love. The cocktail gathering may not be the most entertaining of experiences, but the aftermath is something we shall certainly enjoy to its fullest. Now, I will hear more of your adventures. The relaxing tone of your voice is soothing my mind far better than any morsel of sleep, though that shall offer its own benefits since I shall finally be able to slumber in your arms.”

“Missed me?”

“Extremely.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll make you forget we were ever apart. Over and over, if you’d like.”

“Oh, I would.”

“Then, you relax for awhile and then we’ll take the conversation elsewhere.”

“Splendid. And, Gregory…”

“Hmmm?”

“I love you dearly.”

“I might like you, too.”

Mycroft swatted his giggling partner’s thigh and repositioned them both so he could lie against Lestrade’s chest and enjoy the feel of strong legs curling around his own as they reclined on the sofa. And, tomorrow, there would be more of the family to greet…

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“Why have you returned?”

“To hear the dulcet tones of your voice, Sherlock. How greatly I have missed them.”

“Well, I’m happy you’re back!”

John gave Mycroft a crushing hug and, the older boy was proud to note, patted him down for hidden gifts at the same time.

“Thank you, John. And, I believe you will find something to your liking in my valise, which I will obtain for you shortly. Now, let us enjoy our breakfast and you may share your exploits, which, I am told are quite extraordinary.”

“They are! Sherlock and I have had amazing adventures and a case!”

Mycroft cut eyes to his partner across the breakfast table and narrowed them slightly, which made Lestrade laugh and Sherlock snort like an angry boar.

“Do not affect a visage of impugnation! John is correct… we are more experienced, and successful, contributors to law enforcement than the peasant. Admittedly, that is not a stellar recommendation for our resumes, but it is expected that more minor items be listed at the onset of one’s career.”

“Just how was that a law-enforcement issue, you little bastard?”
“In a manner that you are obviously too dull-witted to comprehend, indigent.”

“MAY I know, please, the details of this, clearly, serious and important event?”

Lestrade shook his head and grinned at how quickly Sherlock and John puffed like overfed partridges and began regaling Mycroft with every possible detail of their missing cat investigation. And, from how his lover glowed listening to their performance.

“I am utterly taken aback. What a stupendous use of your natural gifts and I absolutely applaud both your effort and your success. Bravo. Truly, I am suffused with admiration for your accomplishment.”

Since no amount of praise was too much for Sherlock and John, Mycroft’s effusiveness was absorbed like a plant taking in the sunshine.

“Thanks, Mycroft! We’re proud of ourselves, too.”

“And the lackey, should the local constabulary be sufficiently stupid to allow him to wear a uniform, will heretofore provide us with interesting and vital cases on a regular basis. Without John and my assistance, anarchy will surely reign and this blighted area will fall further into the Stone Age than it can currently claim.”

“I solemnly promise that all lost pet reports will be handed right over to you.”

“And murders!”

“Murders are gross, Sherlock. And, I’m not shaving a dead body, no matter how much you want to experiment on their hair.”

“I believe the magistrates would not look kindly on evidence for such a serious crime being provided by a source other than officially vetted criminal and forensic investigators.”

“Confounded by ageism and the slavish devotion to occupational titles! This is intolerable!”

“If that means we’re not poking and sniffing a dead body, then I’m fine with it.”

“Another assistant would not be difficult to procure, John Watson.”

“Yeah, good luck with that. Mycroft, can I have more toast. And jam. Oh, and some bacon, too?”

Sherlock’s roar of frustration shook the table, but, thankfully, left the toast, jam and bacon unscathed.

“I am certain some compromise can be reached once Gregory is in a position to, shall we say, outsource investigatory assistance.”

“I’m not sure that’s going to happen, what with Greg failing his exams like he’s been doing.”

John stopped the shoveling of toast into his mouth and shot an apologetic look to Lestrade, who was turning red as the raspberry jam.

“Gregory… is this the truth?”

“It was only one! Or two. And I turned in a few assignments late. That’s all. Nothing to worry about.”
Though, from his partner’s expression, Lestrade knew Mycroft was worrying enough for both of them.

“The lackey is, unsurprisingly, ill-equipped for the rigors of academia. Why he does not simply end his embarrassment and assume his natural role and my and John’s indentured man, is simply beyond me.”

Mycroft glared sternly at Sherlock, then leveled another one at his spouse, who was trying to slip under the table and out of sight.

“Gregory, you are well aware, are you not, of how greatly this concerns me?”

“Just a little bump, love. Happens now and then.”

“Oh, and exactly when has this previously occurred?”

“I’m too full of breakfast to remember.”

“Gregory! Your scholastic progress is of the utmost importance.”

“Why, don’t want to be seen with a stupid man?”

“Do not attempt to divert my attention with a rather obvious attempt at inciting an argument.”

“It was worth a try.”

“Most assuredly, although your technique could use refining. I will provide you with some suggestions when next we have a free moment. But now, back to the most pressing matter…”

“It’s not pressing! Really, I just got a little behind with things, but it’s ok now. Really, everything’s fine.”

“And what does Mother Lestrade have to say about this?”

“Ummm… she understands.”

“He is dissembling! If Mother Lestrade knew of his disgrace, she would have enacted such chastisement that he would still bear the marks!”

“Thanks for that, you fucking troll.”

“I see. Well, I suppose there is no reason to make her aware of this if, as Gregory has indicated, the situation has resolved itself. However, my dear, you and I shall speak of this later.”

“Oh good.”

“It’s alright, Greg. Everyone has a bad paper now and then.”

“Really, John? Is there something you would like to divulge while we are enjoying this atmosphere of full disclosure?”

John squeaked like a frightened mouse and joined Greg in trying to hide from Mycroft’s penetrating stare.

“Oh… no?”
“That was not entirely convincing, I’m afraid.”

“Do not interrogate John! If he has, speaking purely hypothetically, of course, scored less than winningly on a nonsensical assignment concerning the insipid writings of Yeats, then there is no shame in it! Anyone obtaining a respectable mark on such an assignment is most certainly of uselessly artistic temperament and should be avoided like a biblical plague!”

“So, you also scored poorly on that assignment.”

“I gave no confession!”

“It appears we shall have to revise our set of study regulations.”

“You are not a king! You cannot command I follow your preposterous manual!”

“A document of three pages can hardly be called a manual, brother dear.”

As this detour raged on, John took the opportunity to finish his breakfast, as well as Sherlock’s and Lestrade added the last of the fruit to the boy’s plate in a show of solidarity with someone else on Mycroft’s radar of displeasure, then, decided to dive into the fray to, hopefully, push the day towards a more positive direction.

“Hey! Here’s an idea. How about we set this aside for later? As it is, we all have some schoolwork to do today, so that’ll be the perfect time to rework Mycroft’s manual so none of us have to worry about getting another bollocking. Now, why don’t Sherlock and John go and get ready for their cosmetics practice and you and I can… do something while they drag out their mountains of mascara?”

“I shall not allow this matter to lay quietly, Gregory.”

“Yeah, I know you won’t. But these two really want some time to try on a few faces and they bought new colors of lipstick and eye… stuff… yesterday. So, run along little ladies; Mycroft and I will find you in a few minutes.”

Sherlock was already invested in the scholastic battle and fully intended to remain in his trench to see it through to the end, but John dragged him out of his chair and pushed his sputtering friend towards their rooms to start collecting their various cosmetics, hair products, dresses and accessories. The contest for who would make the more stunning woman had yet to be waged and both wanted as much practice as they could get so that they made the most appealing candidate when they paraded through the streets documenting the quantity of admiring glances they received.

“Now, I’m the only one in the line of fire and those two can enjoy their day.”

Mycroft sighed and caught the shift in tone of his lover’s voice.

“Was I too stern?”

“Not really, but they didn’t need to sit there and catch shrapnel if it’s me you’re really upset with.”

“I am not upset, per se, Gregory… merely concerned. I know you take seriously your academic performance and if you are demonstrating lesser success than normal, then I feel the situation warrants concern.”

Lestrade ran a hand through his hair and nodded slightly.
“Ok… but it’s really nothing. Just went through a busy patch and I got behind with things. Sherlock and John had a lot to do for school, on top of the other things they get into. My uncle caught a good case of flu and I had to take on extra hours at the shop, mum’s had to work extra hours lately, too, so I tried to help with the errands and keep the house in order. But that was just a couple of weeks! Once it passed, things got back to normal. And don’t worry about Sherlock and John. They had a short composition to write about a couple of poems they just didn’t have a bit of interest in and didn’t understand anyway. I wasn’t much help because I was in the same situation, so they didn’t turn in the best essays. But that’s the only time. They’re both great students and are doing well, so please don’t be angry at them for that one thing. It’s not warranted and it’ll just make them upset for no good reason.”

Mycroft nodded and had to admit that the situation, for the children, at least, was not as dire as he had surmised.

“I understand and I shall not mention it again. But, Gregory… your own circumstances… they are not recent and yet this is the first I am hearing of them.”

“Because it’s not worth bothering you about! Everyone goes through tough weeks and that’s no reason to drag someone else into them. You’ve had your own worries, haven’t you? Between all these little trips you’ve had to make and your own studies… I’m not going to distract you from that for something that’s not very important.”

“You are the most supremely important thing in my life, Gregory Lestrade, and do not forget that for one moment.”

Lestrade knew he was coloring again, but this time, it was just because… well, it felt amazing to hear Mycroft say that and he didn’t think he’d ever grow used to it no matter how long they lived.

“I know and that’s how I feel about you, too, which is why I don’t want you to have to take on problems that aren’t yours when I can manage on my own.”

“Failing your exams does not constitute managing, my dear.”

“Just two! Or three.”

“What!”

“It’s my own fault! I could have given up a night out with my mates to study. Put in an extra few hours at night and started the next morning with stronger coffee. I could have worked harder, love, and, because I didn’t, I suffered the consequences. It’s as simple as that.”

Did his partner have any idea what he was saying?

“Gregory, do you have any idea what you are saying?”

“Yeah, it wasn’t exactly anything complicated.”

“No, I think you do not. As it stands, you see your friends far less frequently than I would prefer and often suffer from fatigue because you have spent long nights tending the children or completing your schoolwork. You exist directly atop the cliff face, my dear, and to say that you could crawl closer to the edge… you would plummet!”

“That’s a bit dramatic.”

“No, I do not believe it is. I have feared this, my love, and, apparently, my fears were entirely
well-founded. You will drive yourself to the breaking point if someone is not there to temper your urges. Well, this ends now.”

Uh oh.

“Mycroft…”

“Gregory…”

“Whatever it is you’re planning, the answer’s no.”

“The answer is yes. But, rest assured that I have no intention of bruising your pride with anything overt or emasculating. I shall simply assist you in preparing a time budget and work with you to refine it as new obligations arise. And we will both have a conversation with Sherlock and John concerning your availability when I am not present to help tend to them. We are a family, Gregory, and though we love the children dearly, we must ensure that our own needs are properly met to ensure that we are in prime condition to see their needs met in an appropriate fashion. Though they behave as if they are infants, neither is incapable of taking responsibility for themselves and it is time that they be tasked to do so more regularly. Is that agreeable to you?”

Ok, that didn’t sound so bad. And it wouldn’t hurt to let Mycroft feel like he was being helpful and supportive. That was something that was especially important to his partner and he’d be an arse not to step up and let him have his way.

“Yes, that I can agree to. I really don’t think things are as bad as you believe, but what you said is a good idea in any case.”

His poor Gregory… Grandmama said to expect that after his partner’s admission of feeling overwhelmed during their visit with the Americans present, he would likely be reluctant to admit such again, even after vowing that he would do so without hesitation. Such a self-reliant and noble man… but his pride was definitely something that could not always be counted as a strength… and he would have to be vigilant and actively take steps to learn when the situation again was becoming problematic.

“Excellent. Then we are in agreement. Now, shall we find the boys? Today shall be a creative day, I assume.”

“For the morning, then it’s back to the books. But, yeah, expect their artistic skills to be on display in some very lovely ways.”

“Our sons, as well as our daughters, are very attractive children.”

“We’re definitely blessed.”

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The somber-looking men in expensive suits didn’t so much as break a smile at seeing Mycroft wearing lipstick and rouge-dotted cheeks, instead following him silently to his study, as the older Holmes brother wiped his face clean, leaving behind a bevy of beauties in his wake.

“Why can’t they just leave Mycroft alone?”

John’s pout was nicely accentuated by his perfectly-sculpted and passionately-red lips and Lestrade took a moment to rub the boy’s back in sympathy.
“Because he’s got important things to do that mean a lot to a lot of people. What he does keeps us safe and a lot of others, too. It’s the price he has to pay that his time isn’t always his own.”

“Well, I don’t like it. If we don’t have school on Sunday, he shouldn’t have to work, either.”

“I’ll mention that to him. He’ll probably be impressed with your thinking. Now, ready for hair? I see you’ve got lots of pretty ribbons and clips to choose from.”

Both Sherlock and John glared at Lestrade’s attempt to get back to business, but started sifting through their hair-care treasure, nonetheless. It wasn’t as if they could do anything to bring Mycroft back, short of another poisoning, and neither was anxious to repeat that again…

Two hours later, with their noses cleaned of powder and deep into their books, Sherlock and John gasped in shock as Mycroft returned to them and, surprisingly, wasn’t wearing the particular frown that meant he was leaving again.

“All done, love?”

“I am. In truth, I have no idea why they did not simply pick up the telephone and conduct our meeting in that most efficient fashion, however, I suppose there is value in discussions undertaken face to face. And we have moved on to our studies, I see. Did we decide upon the specifics for the beauty pageant we are to host in the near future?”

“John believes he has crafted a clown face and costume suitable for the task, however, he is woefully mistaken.”

“Jealousy makes you evil, Sherlock, and you really can’t handle being more evil than you already are.”

“Your understanding of the arbitrary concept of good and evil is pitiful even by piglet standards, John Watson.”

Lestrade motioned Mycroft over to join him on the sofa and took a kiss before pulling him close and wrapping an arm around his shoulders.

“Glad you’re back. And to stay.”

“As am I. And I do not predict that I shall be called away prior to our weekend in London.”

As soon as the words left his mouth, Mycroft knew he had committed a grievous error.

“LONDON! We’re going to London!”

“Why was I not informed of his earlier? It shall take me every bit of spare time I possess to choose the experiments I wish to conduct, pack the necessary equipment and supplies, and obtain those which I currently lack!”

Lestrade held in his laughter and just shook his head when Mycroft looked to him for assistance. His partner had let the cat out of the bag, now he could suffer the cuts and scrapes from shoving it back in.

“I am very sorry to disappoint you, however, it is Gregory and I who are traveling to London for the weekend.”
“And what shall become of John and me? Sold to slave traders for despicable purposes, I suppose.”

“I don’t want anyone doing despicable things to me! I want to go to London!”

“You and Sherlock shall enjoy the weekend at Grandmama’s. She is very much looking forward to your visit.”

“Oh, well that’s not a bad thing. But you and Greg won’t be there, so what are we going to do for fun?”

“Grandmama is the oldest person in England and cannot provide the entertainment John and I require. I object most strenuously to this ludicrous proposal!”

“Object at your leisure, brother dear, however, Gregory and I are going to London and you are going to visit Grandmama. That is quite the end of the matter.”

“But Mycroft…”

“Turn not your mournful eyes upon me, John. My resolve for this will not weaken. Gregory shall be my escort for an official function and we will also take time to relax, something from which we would both see benefit. If you like, we may plan a future London excursion for us all and enjoy the experience as a group. This one event, however, is for Gregory and me, alone.”

The two young boys scowled ferociously and turned very pointedly away to ignore the older pair, who delighted in the fact that there were no real tears or visible upset. Sherlock and John were annoyed, but that was all and that was something to celebrate.

That’s not to say, the boys went quietly into that good night, leveraging their upcoming abandonment to obtain extra luxuries and quantities of Mycroft and Lestrade’s time, all of which pleased Mycroft to no end and was summarily reported to his grandmother who agreed the pair was becoming quite the formidable manipulators, in true Holmes fashion. By the time Friday arrived, though, it was the work of some moments to pry the boys off of the older pair and get them shoved, along with their lorry’s-worth of belongings into the car to take them away for their weekend at Grandmama’s.

“Oh my god… you’d swear we were sending them off to war.”

“Depending on their behavior, that might not be terribly far from the truth.”

“Are our things ready to go?”

“Most assuredly and waiting patiently for us.”

“Good. Where’s the car?”

“A car would not see us arrive with much time to prepare for our party, now would it?”

“I don’t understand.”

“Come along and all will be clear.”

“A HELICOPTER! When did this get here?”
“Last night. I thought it prudent to have everything in order and to have something with which to distract Sherlock, should he experience any last-minute uneasiness about our separation.”

“And we get to ride in this all the way to London?”

“Most certainly. I want to ensure you have sufficient time to relax before we enter the fray. Shall we?”

“Oh yes, yes we shall.”

A helicopter ride. Which was positively, fucking brilliant. And now… this…

Lestrade looked around the hotel room, well… rooms… and felt no shame that his mouth was hanging open in shock. There was something about the luxury of their suite that was different than the luxury of their bedroom at Grandmama’s that made it feel more… decadent.

“Are you satisfied with our accommodations, my dear?”

“This is amazing! And is that champagne I see chilling over there?”

“Very good. Would you like a glass?”

“Yes, please. That’s something I never thought I’d do… have a glass of champagne in a fabulous hotel suite with an amazingly sexy man.”

“And I easily can say the same. It is positively delightful, is it not?”


Lestrade took both glasses of champagne from Mycroft’s hands, set them aside and took his lover in a kiss that stoked both their flames to a pleasantly warm level.

“Now, that’s the best.”

“I gladly stand corrected. Would you like to see your outfit for the night?”

“I would. Something special?”

“That is for you to decide.”

Lestrade picked up his champagne and made a soft moaning sound that nearly caused Mycroft to change his plans and take his lover immediately to bed, but there was more than sufficient time for that later.

“Voila!”

This little moaning sound was for what his eyes were seeing and Lestrade almost rubbed them to make sure this wasn’t a hallucination.

“A tuxedo!”

And a spectacular one, at that.

“Yes. And crafted precisely to your measurements, so it should fit perfectly.”
“You’re wearing one, too, right?”

“Of course.”

“Oh god, I’ll be hard all night.”

“Then the assembled will understand how lucky a man I consider myself.”

“Filthy man.”

“My best feature.”

“It’s up there, that’s for sure. So, we have some time before we have to get dressed, right? Sit on that massive sofa and drink our champagne, looking out over London…”

“Hence my desire for haste in transport. We have an abundance of time to relax and enjoy the comfort we are afforded. And I assume you will desire a shower before we dress, will you not?”

“I’m going to like it, aren’t I?”

“Full-body jets, my love. All angled for your cleanliness and pleasure.”

“This is going to be a phenomenal weekend.”

“It already is, for you are here with me.”

“And you’ll be in that shower with me.”

“An invitation I shall never refuse.”

Mycroft looked around the large room and took stock of those in attendance. Absolutely as expected, but that was not something he found uninspiring. The fewer unexpected variables, the better.

“This is… wow.”

“And you are the most striking individual here, my dear. Already there are eyes being cast in your direction and those eyes are filled with both admiration and lust.”

In that, Lestrade thought, Mycroft was completely wrong. Those looks were for his partner, who, though he hadn’t thought it possible, looked more stunning in a tuxedo than in one of his suits.

“Now I know you’re daft. So… what am I supposed to do?”

“Nothing, in truth. Mingle with the guests, consume whatever you desire of food and drink… I shall be with you the lion’s share of the time, I hope, but there will be points where I will have to break from your company to perform the task I am here to complete.”

“Don’t worry about me, love. After Grandmama’s cocktail soiree, I not afraid of anything. I doubt any of this lot are as terrifying as the ones she invited.”

“By no means. Truly, you were among the lions that night. This shall be a far less feline experience, however, do expect that you will attract the attention of quite a few, both for your incomparable masculinity and from curiosity, as you are a new face amongst the familiar.”
“That’s fine; it’ll give me people to talk to. And I remember everything you said about what you’re supposed to do for a living, so no worries there.”

“I have absolutely no concern that you will comport yourself perfectly, my dear. Now, shall we?”

“First stop, that man pouring drinks?”

“Great minds do think alike.”

Lestrade wasn’t surprised that Mycroft was almost immediately scooped up to chat with a group of men and women he seemed to know, but had to admit, his partner’s covert bum-pinch of goodbye was an especially nice touch. And things were going exactly as he’d expected, too. Chat with a few people by the bar, another few who clustered around the servers carrying trays of nibbles… and the chats were fairly simple and common, just like what happened when people who didn’t know each other shared a few casual words. He was good at that, actually, he’d discovered. And, so far, no one had tried to convince him to pin them against the wall behind one of the potted plants and shag them senseless.

“You’re a new one, aren’t you?”

A quick swallow of his latest hors d’oeuvre and Lestrade was smiling at the middle-aged woman to his right.

“Yes, ma’am. First time at one of these.”

“New to government service?”

“Actually, new to him.”

Lestrade used his glass to point out Mycroft, who was listening intently to some story being told him that involved a lot of hand gestures.

“He’s the government man, though on the low rungs of the ladder right now. But, he’s climbing. Going to be someone to watch.”

“Oh, how exciting. I remember when my husband was first starting out. All the long days, working himself near to death to make a good impression and get a chance to move upwards. It was hard, but it was wonderful seeing him succeed and get what he wanted all through his own hard work. Now, he’s got the luxury of passing off work to others who are just starting out and eager to show what they’re made of so he’s home in time for dinner most nights.”

“Now I know who to blame when Mycroft’s phoning to say we’re not making our film.”

Lestrade shared a giggle with his new acquaintance and plucked a glass of champagne off of a passing tray to hand to her.

“Thank you. That’s the best part of these things… eat and drink your fill on someone else’s bank account.”

“Nothing wrong with that. Especially when it’s your bank account that funds the festivities from time to time.”
“Precisely! My husband and I hosted a small party for some of his colleagues just a few weeks ago and he nearly choked when he saw the invoice. Of course, I may have been a bit extravagant in my choices.”

“And that’s why people say your parties are the best, am I right?”

“Exactly! You have a very keen grasp of social politics. That will be very valuable as your young man moves his way up the ranks. Promotion is as much based on social concerns and niceties as it is solid, honest work, I’m afraid to say. Not much different than the political scene, though the wars rarely involve any fatalities.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. Mycroft’s an assistant now, but I’ll get onto him about having a few people over now and then for little parties of our own. Of course, he’ll actually have to be available to attend those parties. Flitting about here and there, wherever they need him.”

“Oh yes, that really is a problem, at times. I was worried, actually, that my last event would have to be cancelled because Geoffrey was called away for several days. Fortunately, it didn’t become a problem, though, he could have let me know in advance when he was coming home. The silly thing tried to tell me he’d been somewhere in remote South America and communication lines had been washed out in a flood.”

“Why was that silly?”

“Well, for one, I’ve found a satellite phone in his luggage on more occasions than I can count and he wanted Chinese beer when he got home. He’s terribly fond of beer and when he travels, he always puts on our weekly spirits order something from wherever he’s just been. I don’t think he realizes, in the slightest, that it’s a little habit of his. Silly man was in China or thereabouts, but I didn’t say anything. I never do. I know he can’t always tell me the truth, it goes with the job, and there’s no use pointing it out to him when I know he’s lying. That’s another thing you should remember for your young man. It’s just the way for that lot, so don’t get too upset about it.”

Well, good to know he wasn’t the only one who had to live with someone who had to keep secrets. And it was especially good to know that life could go on happily, regardless.

“I won’t forget. That’s good advice.”

“Talk to the wives and husbands who have been doing this awhile and you’ll keep your perspective. It was what kept me going many a time when I wanted to bash him over the head with my shoe and strangle him with his tie.”

“Well, that won’t be me. I adore Mycroft’s ties.”

This round of giggling preceded the entrance of another guest into their little group and Lestrade relaxed further into his role. Brag a little about his Mycroft, share war stories with the other significant others… this he could do. And wasn’t it perfect that every now and then, his Mycroft looked over to give him a smile…

“‘You appear to be enjoying yourself, my dear.’

“I am! Lots of small talk, good food and drink… not something I’d want to do often because I’d run out of my small talk quickly, but it’s not bad. If we have to make the occasional trip to London for one of these and I can’t say I’d complain.”
“That is very good to hear, because it is likely that we shall be tasked to do so.”

“Not a problem. And I’m learning things, too! Getting all sorts of hints from the other wives.”

“Very industrious of you. I did notice you deep in conversation with Mrs. Gray. Her husband is rather highly placed in the diplomatic service. They have been married for a very long time, so I am certain her advice is something to which to pay heed.”

“I think so. We talked about what it was like when he was starting out and how things were when the kiddies came along and all his trips abroad, like the recent one to China…”

“Bolivia.”

“No, that’s what he wanted her to think, but it was really China.”

Lestrade had no idea why his partner was scrutinizing him like he would Sherlock, who had just told a monstrous fib.

“Gregory… if you are jesting…”

“No! She said he gave her some story about being in the middle of nowhere in South America, but, when he got home, he didn’t want her to stock the larder with South American beer. He always wants beer from wherever he’s just been and he wanted a Chinese brand. So, he’d been in China. Or somewhere where they serve a lot of Chinese beer. Mycroft, are you ok?”

It was a valid question, since his partner was staring at him, but didn’t actually seem to be staring at him.

“Yes, thank you. And thank you, my dearest. You have… your information is extremely interesting.”

“Really?”

“Oh yes. It answers several questions that have, of late, puzzled more minds than mine.”

“Hurray?”

“I think that is most deserved. You have done an exceptional job with your first assignment in espionage! Far better, I fear, than did I. My information was rather expected and bland in nature, though it was valuable, nonetheless. This… this is quite exciting.”

“And I can’t know why, can I?”

“I regret not. But rest assured that you have done your country a great service and I will see you appropriately rewarded as soon as we are able to depart and return to our suite.”

“I like the sound of that. How much longer are we here?”

“Another hour, I expect. Perhaps a tad less. There is right and wrong time to exit a function such as this, so we shall wait for the proper moment to make our farewells.”

“That’s my Mycroft… even at a party, he’s in command of the situation.”

“Parties are simply another form of politics, my dear.”

“Yeah, so I’ve been told.”
“Falcon to Eagle. Come in Eagle.”

“Falcon, this is Eagle. Report.”

“We have confirmation, Eagle.”

“Then we initiate plan Alpha-One.”

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Mycroft Holmes in a tuxedo was fucking amazing. Mycroft Holmes in a slightly-rumpled tux sans jacket with his tie untied and hanging loosely around his neck was absolutely the sexiest thing to ever walk the planet and, as his partner handed him a final nightcap, Lestrade knew he was the luckiest man to ever exist.

“I hope that was not too boring for you, my dear. I know those affairs are not the most exciting of times.”

“It was fine, Mycroft. Got to chat with a lot of new people, the food was great and fell into a little adventure without my even knowing it. Really, it was a nice time.”

“Only my Gregory can turn a dreary cocktails evening into a true exercise in espionage. I am enormously proud.”

Lestrade followed his partner to the sofa, toed off his shoes and took a seat next to Mycroft, hoping the glow of pride on his face wasn’t making the room too bright.

“Thanks. But it was all an accident, so it doesn’t really count.”

“It certainly does! One of the most valued qualities of an agent is the ability to collect information, make connections when situations arise and communicate those connections to others or act upon them directly. You could have allowed my misapprehension to stand, thinking it of no importance, but you did not and that was key.”

“Of course, now we have to see our holiday interrupted so you can do something about this.”

“Only for a brief while, as this is really something Grandmama desires to handle personally. She has known the Grays for some time and this requires a delicate hand. It is certainly a concern of Grandmama that Mrs. Gray not suffer unfairly for her husband’s, shall we say, political indiscretions.”

“Good, because I worried about that, too. She’s a nice lady and I don’t think she has a clue that anything’s wrong.”

“I wager you are correct. Spouses are often kept in the dark for all aspects of certain business for both security and affectionate reasons.”

“One, I could blab to the wrong person and, two, you love me enough to keep me out of jail.”

“Something like that, yes.”

“Well then, lucky me. Not that you’d ever do anything wrong. Not my Mycroft.”
“In the sense that my duty is fixed and immutable, you are correct. However, I have no doubt many actions I have taken and will take would be interpreted by ethical or moral standards as wrong. Unfortunately, that is sometimes the only way in which we can attain a goal whose benefit outweighs the harm caused reaching it.”

One small kiss was placed on Mycroft’s cheek and an arm snaked around his shoulders to draw him towards the person who was happy to be the one to offer comfort when those decisions weighed on his partner’s mind.

“Which is why I could never do what you do. I’d dither and waffle and not make any decision. I know I’ll have to deal with all of that as a policeman, but not to the extent you do. Hmmm… let’s see… let the little bastard off with a warning for stealing sweets or drag them home and give their mum the report directly? What a horrible responsibility! Whatever will I do?”

Of that, Mycroft had little doubt. His love would sternly lecture the child, then pay for the sweets so the tot could have a treat and regain their smile after their chastisement.

“Yes, that is quite the conundrum and, fortunately, one I am not forced to ponder.”

Lestrade pulled Mycroft closer and nudged him so that he lifted his legs and reclined on the sofa and against his lover in a position for which both of them had grown quite fond.

“We all have our crosses to bear, I suppose. So, what are we destined for tomorrow?”

“Grandmama will arrive mid-morning, so I believe lingering in bed with the hotel staff delivering our breakfast is a tempting option. Then, if you desire a swim, there is an indoor, heated swimming pool available for use. You might enjoy that while Grandmama and I discuss this latest turn of events or avail yourself of the other amenities this hotel offers. A massage, perhaps? No, I believe I shall veto that particular option before it ever reaches the parliamentary floor.”

“No one massages me but you?”

“I believe it is an immutable clause in the nation’s codified body of law.”

“Then I’ll make sure to remember it. A swim sounds good, though. I don’t get to do that often, but I enjoy it a lot. You can join me once you’re finished with Grandmama.”

“Excellent. And, in the afternoon, we may stroll about or take a car wherever you would like. I was wondering… would you like to see a theatrical or musical performance this evening? There are several minor plays with performances tonight, but the symphony is also performing and they are said to be rather exceptional this year.”

“The symphony? That sounds amazing! I’ve never been to anything like that before.”

“Then I shall arrange for our attendance and dinner beforehand.”

“Is this another tuxedo thing?”

“No, not necessarily. However, it would not be amiss to wear a suit. Perhaps something casual and comfortable for a night about town.”

“And, let me guess… you have something like that lying in wait for us.”

“Well, I may have ensured that whatever we chose to do, we would not lack for proper attire.”
“Good. My Mycroft doesn’t let any of those pesky details slip by him. Sounds like we have a plan. And Sunday?”

“Whatever you would like. I recognize we must return home at a reasonable hour, however, the day is ours to use at our discretion.”

“Perfect. We’ll leave that discussion for Sunday morning, maybe. See what strikes our fancy.”

Sipping whisky, talking about normal, couple things… this was the life. The tuxedos were just icing on the cake. The important things didn’t need money or power, they just needed the right someone to share them with and Lestrade had that right person here in his arms. And a whole night to do other normal, couple things with that person… hopefully, the walls to this suite were thick…

“Are you about ready for bed?”

“Hmmmm… perhaps, though, I do enjoy resting here in your arms, my love.”

“Ok. Then you do that for awhile. I’ll find some way to keep myself occupied. Oh… and don’t spill your drink…”

Mycroft’s curiosity lasted only a moment, since Lestrade wasted no time using his free hand to unfasten his partner’s trousers and draw out something that quickly began to respond to his touch.

“… the cleaners are going to have enough trouble as it is with your nice clothes.”

Lestrade smiled smugly hearing Mycroft’s soft moan, which grew louder and sharper as the moments ticked by. Not that Lestrade had any intention of making this a quick thing. The decadence of reclining on the sofa, sipping his drink and bringing off his lover was too good not to make last as long as possible. Especially, since Mycroft made the most amazing sounds that he could control to his liking. Nothing they heard at the symphony was going to compare to this…

“Gregory, please…”

“Oh, I like that. Those pretty lips begging so sweetly. Don’t worry, love, you’ll get what you need, but, right now, you just be still and let me enjoy myself.”

And… go a bit slower and lighter to make his lover want to squirm to get more friction, but refuse to do so because he wouldn’t dare lose a challenge or spoil his partner’s fun. His Mycroft could be such a good boy when he tried…

“Gregory… please… so unfair…”

“Oh, it’s very fair, because I’m liking this a lot and, besides, can’t jostle too much and have my lovely whisky slosh around in the glass, now can I? That wouldn’t be suave.”

So, for that bit of complaining, his partner would have a wide, rough thumb rolling about, catching drops of happiness and spreading them all around a very flushed and needy head that absolutely housed all of his partner’s brain right now. Luckily… for Mycroft… he only had a small sip left to go and his lover was doing his very best to be quiet and still…

“Yum… whisky’s just brilliant if you sip it slowly. And now, my Mycroft can have his reward for letting me enjoy it properly.”

And, with Mycroft so desperately aching to come, it took only a second or two of firm, rapid stroking for Lestrade to send the man in his arms arching upwards and covering the front of his
tuxedo trousers and shirt with copious evidence of his satisfaction. Debauched, disheveled and dreamy-eyed was a look his future husband wore exceeding well…

“Happy, love?”

“Indescribably so. You are masterful in your attentions and I am forever thankful for that particular fact.”

“And I’m forever ready to put that smile on your face. Think you can finish those last sips of your drink before we go to bed or do you need me to step in and do the job for you?”

“I believe I have just the quantity of energy remaining to quaff the remaining libation, if you are amenable to assisting me with the undressing and showering portion of our evening.”

“I think I can manage that. Really, I can’t think of a better compromise.”

“And we do love our compromises, do we not.”

“Oh yeah. They’re the best.”

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“Falcon, are you prepared?”

“I’m prepared, Eagle.”

“Our timing must be flawless. We cannot fail.”

“We won’t. Not going to have even a single flaw.”

The boys peered around the corner, waiting for their mission to begin.

“Shall you return this evening, Mrs. Holmes?”

“Unlikely, however, you should expect me tomorrow at the very latest. Do make certain, regardless, the boys are returned home in time to see their beds in preparation for school on Monday.”

“Of course, Mrs. Holmes. And I assure you that the children will enjoy the remainder of their time here. I already have quite the selection of board games and child-approved films stockpiled for their entertainment.”

“Very good, Edwards. I will inform you when I arrive in London.”

Grandmama walked to the car, sat next to her overnight bag and waited until she received the signal from Edwards to direct the driver to start the engine. For his part Edwards, returned inside the house and watched through the window as the two boys shot out from their hiding place, jimmed the boot lid, loaded their very overfilled schoolbags, loaded John and finally pulled down the lid of their new hiding place. With that accomplished Edwards gave the signal and the car started towards the train station. Madam wasn’t overly fond of train travel for short journeys, however, the opportunity to test the small boys’ abilities to carry out their mission was simply too tempting to pass up. Now, time to get himself ready and meet them at the station. Well, a harried businessman with slicked hair, spectacles and a rather rakish provisioning of facial hair was going to meet them at the station and, coincidentally, be traveling on the same train, keeping a close eye on the two rogue travelers. And, to think, his brother called him a ridiculous secretary…
“I’m glad we hid this foam in the boot last night. I’m not sure I’d be in one piece when we get to the station without it.”

“Yes, my degree of forethought is staggering in its magnitude.”

“But, Sherlock… the foam isn’t exactly cushioning my bladder.”

“You will not urinate on me, John Watson, if you value your continued existence.”

“How long’s the trip?”

“If you had not protested carrying our knives, I could have removed the safety light fixture near your head and provided you an opening through which to relieve yourself.”

“I’m not peeing through a hole! And, anyway, if we’d got caught with our knives, they’d think we were bad kids and we’d go to jail, not to Mycroft and Greg’s hotel.”

“You may have a point. The Neanderthals masquerading as the law enforcement personnel would undoubtedly recognize my genius and pronounce me a criminal mastermind, with you identified as my henchman. By the time Grandmama’s solicitors secured our release, we would lose the better part of the day!”

“This means I have to hold it, though, don’t I?”

“My urination prohibition remains in full force.”

“Ok… I’ll try.”

And, in the front seat with an earbud in his hear, the driver made the decision to add a little speed to their journey. With two children of his own, he was well aware of the size and fortitude of young bladders…

“Grandmama chooses to live in the most remote corner of the world and, therefore, expecting a train station of any robustness in this wasteland is the height of foolishness.”

“For your information, I was thinking in terms of our mission. How are we going to hide from Mrs. Holmes and the ticket taker when everything’s small and there aren’t many people here?”

“We shall don our disguises.”

John clapped his hands together and rubbed them in eager anticipation.

“Yes! Which lavatory should we use to change?”

“The ladies. Women often bring their male children into a female lavatory, however, the reverse is rarely true.”

“Why?”

“Urinals! What young female wants to be presented with the sight of pale and bloated males
holding their shrunken manhood, hoping to pass a few drops of urine past their enlarged prostates?"

“Well, when you say that, I don’t want to go in the men’s loo, either.”

“That is wise. The communicable diseases that run rampant in there are legion and, that is above and beyond the danger of paedophiles, who already have their penises exposed to commit their dastardly deeds.”

John shuddered mightily and dragged his schoolbag behind him towards the women’s toilet, Sherlock following close behind. They had to do this quickly because there wasn’t much time until the train for London departed and there was no way they were going to left behind for this adventure.

"Yes… young lady? May I help you?"

Sherlock and John shared a smile of triumph, then turned their tastefully-fixed faces towards the ticket seller.

“You may.”

John elbowed Sherlock in the ribs and Sherlock cleared his throat loudly and started again in a higher-pitched voice.

“You may. We require two tickets to London.”

“And are you traveling alone?”

“No, I am traveling with John. Jane! I am traveling with Jane. This is Jane.”

Sherlock pointed and John curtsied politely in acknowledgement.

“I see. And where are your parents?”

“Dead. They died in a hideous accident, so please do not again raise the point as it causes us great distress.”

“Both of your sets of parents are dead?”

“I believe we agreed not to discuss this matter further.”

John looked as mournful as he possibly could and bit his tongue slightly to make his eyes start to water.

“You have distressed Jane! Provide me with my tickets immediately, so we may board and I may begin my attempts to provide comfort!”

Sherlock slapped a card on the counter and the ticket seller looked at it skeptically.

“Now you’re telling me your name is Mycroft?”

“It is… Mycroftina! That is simply a diminutive. All the females in my family are so named to honor our great-great-great grandmother who was a renowned scientist and suffragette. Mock my name at your peril, scurrilous misogynist.”
John’s whispered ‘be nice, Sherlock. I mean Mycroft! I mean… whatever all that was…’ was only audible to people as far away as Iceland and Sherlock’s roar of fury threatened to have him and John evicted, however, the eviction was put on hold as the station manager strolled over and had a short conversation with the ticket seller who nodded and wondered why he didn’t phone in sick this morning.

“Alright… Mycroftina. Two tickets for London.”

Sherlock snatched the two tickets and scowled furiously.

“These are not First Class!”

Now, John snatched the tickets and smiled widely and the ticket seller.

“Thank you, sir.”

Pulling Sherlock behind him, John darted towards the train and didn’t notice the businessman climbing aboard after them, taking a seat a few rows behind with a good book. Or the student a row ahead to their right and the soldier sitting near the rear exit. With the additional personnel riding, in First Class, with Mrs. Holmes, this was the busiest day the Saturday train had seen for quite some time…

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“Sherlock, we don’t have any money! How are we going to pay for a cab?”

“We shall manifest as damsels in distress and find a sentimental fool to part from his riches.”

“That’s not very nice.”

“Do you wish to walk to the hotel? Or… dare I say it… take even more offensive means of public transport?”

“That could be fun actually. I’ve never been on the Tube or ridden one of the big buses.”

“Ugh… you are as addled any of the loathsome tourists who plague our country.”

“We are tourists! And I want to see everything! London’s supposed to be brilliant and we should try and see and do everything we can!”

“At least London offers items of scientific interest. For that, alone, it receives my kind regard.”

“Want to see the sights first or find Mycroft and Greg?”

Edwards crossed his fingers and hoped for the latter. With Sherlock and John loose in the city, even the full protective retinue they’d brought might not be sufficient and he did hate to bother police superintendents during their off hours. The poor things needed their weekend mornings at home when they could get them…

“We must first inform the beluga and his blubber scrubber that we are here so that we may be given our due praise and reward for our successful endeavor. And I require a refreshment before we venture further afield.”

“Yeah, I’m hungry, too.”

“Very well, then. Prepare to appear distraught and disconsolate.”
“Does that mean upset?”

“In the language of the wage grubbers, yes.”

Sherlock’s histrionics and rather elaborate story of being separated from their now-alive parents, and therefore, needing to return to their hotel and find safety from paedophiles earned him and John enough money for cab fare and a quick snack to tide John over until they arrived at their destination. However, as the hotel was near some very appealing shops, a small detour was taken and the last of their street-performance wages vanished as they purchased several new scarves and two small vials of perfume that Sherlock pronounced ‘sufficiently exotic for a woman of mystery.’

Only after they had well and truly depleted their pockets did they turn back to the hotel and stroll through the doors, Sherlock snapping his fingers for their bags to be ported to Mycroft’s suite. The screeching from lack of attention to his monarchical aspirations did attract notice, however, and it was the work of some moments for John to convince the desk clerk to have them escorted to the suite and not out onto the street. Mention would not be made of the small smile on the clerk’s face from John’s punch to Sherlock’s arm because his ‘stupid yelling sounds like boy yelling and their disguise was ruined.’ If only all guests could be so easily silenced…

“Grandmama… that is the third time you have checked your watch. Are you expecting a call?”

Mycroft was becoming quite anxious to get this business over with, as, while enjoying tea and sandwiches with Grandmama was a pleasant event, the longer this lingered, the less time he would have with his beloved, who was showing his own bit of anxiety. It was a fortunate thing that the hotel provided a very generous tea service as his husband had a tendency to soothe his anxieties with nibbles.

“Hmm? Oh no, I simply prefer to be cognizant of the time than lost in its waters.”

“I see. Now, shouldn’t we be…”

Mycroft rolled his eyes at the knock on the door, but, perhaps, it was a replenishment of their sandwich tray, which would keep his lover satisfied until Grandmama decided the moment was right to make her move.

“Yes? What may I… oh good lord.”

“Behold! You have been discovered!”

“Sandwiches!”

John ran into the suite and gave an astonished Greg a huge hug before taking four of the small noshes in his hands and jamming them into his mouth.

“Hi Mrz. Hlms!”

“Hello, John. How fetching you look in your lovely skirt and blouse.”

“Thanks! I… hold on… ok, I swallowed… skirts and blouses are better for traveling than a dress. They’re a lot more comfortable and practical. Your cook said so and I have to say I think she’s right.”
“And I must agree. Now that your traveling companion has been released from the custody of the hotel staff, I am certain we would all like to hear how you perpetrated this grand surprise.”

Mycroft glared at his grandmother and wondered how quickly the empire would crumble if he throttled the elderly woman before she fully relinquished the reins of her oversight. As if this ‘surprise’ had not the aroma of her particular handiwork wafting about it... regardless, Sherlock and John launched into emptying the suite of all edibles and reenacting their adventure, with only minor embellishment, and Mycroft’s intense frustration began to ebb. His dear brother would never know how closely guarded he had most certainly been during his journey and that was perfectly acceptable, because the amount of pride and sense of accomplishment evident in his brother’s and John’s eyes was boundless.

“And I am not surprised you chose this substandard establishment as your den of decadence. The staff is both surly and incompetent and the food is insubstantial and tasteless. Ring for a meal to be delivered by the finest restaurant in London. John is famished and he becomes most testy when his stomach is displeased.”

John collapsed on the sofa, smoothing his skirt primly before pointing to his stomach and moaning pitifully.

“Mycroft, dear, order the children a pre-lunch refreshment and then we shall depart. We do have a busy day ahead and an early start to it is certainly prudent.”

Now, Mycroft was back to glaring, since the day would have started long ago if it wasn’t for Grandmama’s indulgence of the children’s lunacy. As it was... well, there would be other opportunities to attend the symphony if this one proved useless.

“Very well. Sherlock, John, kindly return yourselves to your standard gender and... my dear, I know the imposition is a terrible one, but will you watch the children while Grandmama tend to certain matters?”

Sherlock and John had some rather specific comments to make about being termed an imposition and voiced them loudly and with the abundant use of hand gestures.

“Yeah, I can do that. Are we... no, I suppose the symphony isn’t going to happen tonight, is it.”

Mycroft cut another burning glare at Grandmama and was happy he saw a small look of chagrin tinge her expression.

“If not, then another night. We are nothing if not able to repeat this experience at our leisure and I shall see you repaid for forfeiting this one so abruptly.”

Mycroft called room service for Sherlock and John’s food, while Lestrade took them to wash off their makeup and change into other clothes. With the children and his spouse out of earshot, Mycroft decided it was a good time to make is displeasure known.

“This is not acceptable, Grandmama. This weekend was for Gregory and me, alone. Do you have any idea how difficult it is for us to find time simply to celebrate the love we share without other responsibilities hanging like the sword of Damocles over our heads?”

“...very good idea, as you well know. And I spoke to Gregory several times this week, so I am also very aware how greatly he was looking forward to this, however, you must admit the situation has changed and must be addressed with great haste.”

A quick kick to the sofa made Mycroft feel slightly better, but not enough that he would give up on
the argument yet.

“I do agree, however, that does not explain the arrival of the children. Really, Grandmama… was that necessary?”

“If we did not want them to follow unsupervised, I believe it was. I would rather not leave my household staff on high alert for an escape, even for the short time I will be absent. However… I will admit I believed you and Gregory would be more inclined to spend the time close to your suite than enjoying an evening on the town. For that, I am sorry. In any case, I had planned on returning tomorrow, so it is no inconvenience to continue my child minding duties so that you might squire your fiancé around London.”

“That is something, at least. Gregory is sorely in need of both my attention and the opportunity to refresh his humors and I will see that done. Though Sherlock will surely complain that he is not allowed to attend the symphony this evening.”

“Who says he will not attend? You and Gregory are free to use your time at will, and so are we.”

“Grandmama…”

“Oh, Sherlock is right. You absolutely lack a sense of humor.”

Mycroft counted to ten and hoped his dearest spouse was having an easier time at the moment.

“And you will take them home with you in the morning, won’t you, Grandmama?”

“Must I? I am a rather feeble old thing…”

“Then accept them as my gift and use them to compensate for your physical weakness and age-related dementia. They take relatively well to commands, as long as a reward-based system is implemented and properly explained at the onset of any activity.”

“How convenient for me, then. But, they will return to you by nightfall.”

“Oh, goody. I am gleeful with anticipation.”

“Evidence you shall be an exemplary parent, Mycroft. Already you sound exactly like one.”

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“John, stop admiring yourself in the mirror and work on scrubbing that face of yours.”

John huffed and continued soaping the cloth he’d been handed, while Lestrade worked on carefully removing Sherlock’s eye makeup, the boy having already nearly blinded himself with the over-application of waterproof mascara remover.

“I don’t see why we can’t wear our makeup for the rest of the day. It’s not like we look ugly with it or anything.”

“If you want to, you can, but I was planning on going swimming and I don’t think it’s a good idea to go swimming with cosmetics on your face.”

“Swimming!”

John nearly fell off the bathroom counter and Sherlock gasped as extravagantly as he could with his
head being held in place by Lestrade’s hand.

“Mycroft says this hotel has an indoor pool, so we can swim, even though it’s cold outside. You can buy swim clothes in the hotel shops, so we can suit everyone up and have a swim while Mycroft and Grandmama do their work. How does that sound?”

John started scrubbing his face with a force that threatened to tear off his skin and Lestrade applied a bit of resistive force to keep the boy’s head from becoming a naked skull.

“I do have several experiments I have hoped to conduct with a body of clean water larger than that of my bathtub.”

“Messy and destructive ones they’ll throw us out for?”

“Imbecile. I wish to gain a more precise understanding of Archimedes Principle, Bernoulli’s Equation and Boyle’s Law as they pertain to putrefaction and the floating of corpses. I can conduct my experiments with a balloon at this point and shift to a more accurate model at a later time.”

“Alright, we can find you a balloon.”

“And a measuring tape. Preferably metric.”

“I’m sure we can find that, too.”

“I also require a pressure sensor that functions both in liquids and gases.”

“That’s not going to happen.”

“Assign another of your menial race to secure one for me!”

“Just have the fun you can with your balloon and then challenge John to a holding your breath competition or dive for coins like other kids.”

“I am not a pitiful island waif who cavorts in my bamboo canoe for your entertainment and dives for the pennies you toss in a sad and, for you, utterly inappropriate enactment of noblesse oblige!”

“I’ll dive for money! I take Sherlock’s share, too, so I have money to spend when we go shopping. We spent all of the money we got from the people who wanted to save us from molestation anyway, so I’ll take all the coins I can get so we can buy more scarves and perfume. Oh! And earrings. We saw some pretty ones, but ran out of funds, so now we can get them.”

Nothing in that speech did Lestrade want to explore in any depth, so he simply smiled and nodded while the boys raced to get themselves clean for their swimming excursion. Normally, he didn’t like spending Mycroft’s money, but this would be an exception. The last thing he wanted to deal with was bored boys in an expensive hotel where whatever they could get into and break was going to cost more than the price of luxury swim togs, snacks and a package of balloons. And, speaking of…

“My dear? Grandmama and I must leave now, but I do want to be certain you have everything you need.”

“Well… could you leave a little cash behind or tell the desk I can sign for a few things? I thought I’d take these two swimming and we’ll need shorts for that and they’ll likely want something more to eat later, too…”

Mycroft looked so excited that Lestrade simply had to lean over and give him a kiss. Nothing made
his Mycroft happier than making them happy and that was insanely adorable.

“I have one of Mycroft’s bank cards and can make purchases at will.”

Something that was not insanely adorable. Mycroft and Lestrade glared at Sherlock, who began to grow fidgety under the scrutiny.

“And from where did you obtain that, brother dear?”

“That you fail to secure your wallet after you go to bed is in no manner my fault.”

“Forfeit my bank card to Gregory, if you please.”

Sherlock dug in his handbag and produced the card, which was passed to Lestrade with a very audible sniff of disdain.

“My love, please make use of this as you wish to ensure your time today is both successful and entertaining. I cannot predict how long I will be, however, Grandmama has stated that our night at the symphony is not to be considered a lost cause at this point.”

“Really?”

“I demand to attend!”

“Me, too!”

“Then you must discuss the issue with Grandmama, for Gregory and I will be enjoying this evening as a couple. Until later, my love.”

One more kiss that lingered until a cosmetic-stained cloth collided with Lestrade’s face broke their embrace and Mycroft was gone again, leaving the trio alone to finish the cleanup and make their own start on the day.

“Just so you know, Greg. Sherlock and I really like music.”

“Then we’ll see if can find some recordings to play for you of whatever we listen to tonight.”

“I am a virtuoso, as you are well aware, and if anyone should be present to critique what passes for musical competence in this country, it should be me.”

“Sorry, Sherlock, tonight’s for Mycroft and me, provided he’s done with his business early enough. But, I’m sure we can bring you two to a performance another time we need to come to London. Or to a football match.”

“YES!”

“No.”

“Sorry, but the ‘yes’ wins. Maybe, though, John and I can go to the match and you and Mycroft can visit the museums or catch a matinee of a concert or something.”

“That will be acceptable. The Lord of Lard is relatively easy to control, so the day would focus entirely on items of my personal interest, as is appropriate.”

“Lovely. Now, are you two ready for your snack, a little shopping, then some swimming?”
Two boys hopped off the counter and marched out of the bathroom shouting for Lestrade to follow along with, they made sure to emphasize, Mycroft’s bank card. This was going to be a splendid day…

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This was a splendid day! Apparently, large bodies of water weren’t harmful to goblins, because the two boys were using every inch of the pool for their entertainment, with only a few apologies needing to be issued to the other people who decided a swim was a good thing on a chilly day. And, with the coins he’d purchased from the hotel, when they lost interest in whatever experiment or competition was going on at the moment, it only took a few cash dives at the shallow end to get shake their brains loose to think of something new to do to start another round of fun. This left him free to swim occasionally, but, mostly, lounge around poolside, reading and partaking in the tasty beverages the staff was happy to provide their thirsty guests. As an occasional treat, he could get used to this…

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“Oh no, not again.”

“What?”

John shook the water out of his ears so he could hear what Sherlock had to say. There was at least a fifty percent chance it might be important.

“The peasant… he is again attracting lustful intentions.”

John looked across the pool to where Lestrade was sharing a few words with a young woman who seemed to be hoping that he’d clear space for her to share his lounge chair.

“He does that a lot.”

“I fail to see why. Whereas by some aesthetic criteria, which are entirely subjective and, therefore, scientifically invalid, he might be scored in the ‘failing to induce vomiting’ category, that parameter does not compensate for the lack of money, education, breeding and prospects that set him at the bottom of the mating pool.”

“I don’t think she really cares about that, Sherlock. Or the other three people that gave him that same smile.”

“Ah, you mean the one that would make Mycroft seethe with jealousy and, likely, suffer a stroke from the increased blood pressure? Hmm… perhaps you are correct. I do not see how coitus can be an end in of itself, however, I am a higher-order being than these pitiful livestock specimens, so it is understandable that their motivations are utterly foreign to me.”

“You want me to go or do you want to do it?”

“You may take this round and return with one standard-size and one cocktail-size straw. I have several lung-pressure tests I would like to conduct.”

“Ok. I’ll make sure they’re attached to drinks, because I’m thirsty and I like all the little umbrellas they keep giving us.”

“Yes, good. I am anxious to test their air resistance values, so ask for two umbrellas per drink. Implement the Puppy Eye Protocol, if necessary.”
“I’m on it.”

John climbed out of the pool and skipped innocently towards Lestrade, dropping onto his chair and smiling even more innocently at the older boy who sighed in preparation for the upcoming bit of theater.

“Papa Greg, can Sherlock and I have something to drink?”

And, of course, John would look up smugly at his current conversation partner and budge closer to set the very clear bounds of family territory. Well, it was better than Sherlock’s ‘Away with you, sexual predator!’ that the last person got.

“Yes, John. Tell them to put it on my tab.”

“Oh, thank you, Papa Greg. You’re the best papa a boy could have. And when you get married, Sherlock and I will be real brothers like we’ve always wanted.”

The large hug before he scampered off to order his juice was the icing on the cake and Lestrade had to admire the enthusiasm of the performance, in addition to how effective it was in producing the polite excuse that preceded the nice young thing he was chatting with walking off to find a better prospect. Oh well, nothing wrong with a little flirting. Does a body good, especially when you’ve got two kids playing around your skirts all day…

“Here, Papa Greg. The man who made my drinks said you might need this.”

John pushed what smelled like a nice whisky into his hands, then raced back to collect his juice/fruit/double-umbrella drinks and Lestrade put the odds as high the bartender had a few of his own juice-drinkers at home.

“Dear me, Gregory. The life of leisure suits you very nicely.”

Lestrade smiled broadly and looked up at his lover who was wearing the same suit he’d had on earlier, but, in a nod to the casual poolside atmosphere, had unbuttoned his jacket.

“I could get used to it, at least every now and then. Are you finished for the day? The pool is fantastic and we’ve got plenty of time before tonight for you to join me and the boys for a swim.”

“Alas, this is but an interval in my day, but we are moving the proceedings to Grandmama’s hotel suite. There is value in hosting discussions away from certain sets of eyes and pairs of ears. However, I could not let the opportunity to see you pass by without capitalizing upon it. And, I must say, you look ravishing, my dear.”

Which Lestrade exploited by stretching lazily and taking a sip of his drink, running his tongue over the glass to catch what remained on the rim.

“How wicked you are, Gregory. And what a fortunate man I am for it.”

“How wicked you are, Gregory. And what a fortunate man I am for it.”

Can you stay for a drink, at least?”

“That I can.”

Mycroft waved over a server and ordered whatever Lestrade was having, then pulled over a chair to sit next to his reclining lover.

“Making headway, love?”
“Yes, actually. There is a tangle of threads that we are now beginning to pull apart and that is a very beneficial thing. And, I, again, credit you with the pulling of the very first thread free from the mass. Grandmama is very impressed with you, Gregory. I would not be surprised if she began to tempt you away from the police service towards a slightly different career path.”

“Too late. My mind’s made up. Unless I can have some of those gadgets you see in the James Bond films. That might be the tipping point.”

“I shall make serious inquiries on the matter. However… I do have to report that our trip to the symphony shall likely have to be postponed. One of the less desirable outcomes of our current successes is that we are able to push forward and it must be done in a timely fashion. I am sorry, Gregory, but, to look on the proverbial bright side, I believe that we can now consider London a manageable location for short holidays and I plan to take frequent advantage of that fact.”

Mycroft knew his beloved spouse would be disappointed at the news, but the warm smile he received was, at least, honest and understanding.

“Yeah, I can’t say I’m surprised. But, I appreciate you coming here to tell me in person.”

“You are positively angelic, Gregory, and I am happy I can offer you, at least, a relaxing atmosphere in which to spend your time. However, if you alert the desk, there will be a car and driver made available if you would like to venture into the city.”

Mycroft’s drink arrived and he took a long sip, letting the warmth slide down his throat, as he indulged in this moment of his own relaxation. The day was going to be a long one, but, and this was horrendously selfish, it was made easier knowing his Gregory was nearby for the occasional brief respite where he could lose himself in his husband’s affections.

“Thanks. I’ll see how things work out with those two first. They’re doing very well now, so we might spend a few more hours here and bundle ourselves for a stroll if they want to get out of the hotel for awhile. Any idea what tomorrow will be like?”

“Some, actually. I genuinely believe we can see the end of this today, albeit rather late, and if there are lingering issues, they can be dealt with by others. Grandmama has promised to take the children home with her when she departs, so I am hopeful for a day tomorrow that is ours to enjoy. Though…”

“Oh no…”

“Now now, my dear, I was only offering a possibility for tomorrow that might… I hope… appeal to you.”

Lestrade knew that he’d never read Mycroft’s thoughts, but it didn’t hurt to see if he could make any predictions and, from his lover’s hopeful expression, those predictions didn’t lean towards anything that would make him want to tear out his hair. Or, with Mycroft, a hopeful expression could lead exactly to hair pulling. Life was never boring, that was for sure…

“Ok, what’s going on?”

“Well, you are very well aware that I have been called somewhat frequently to London of late and I do not anticipate that will change, even when I more formally attend university. Grandmama owns several pieces of property in the city, including a lovely residence that is well-situated both for the work I must do and the cultural opportunities that London offers in abundance. She… she would like to deed that residence to us and I thought we might take time tomorrow to pay it a visit and
decide upon its suitability as a potential home as we look towards the future as a sporadic residence that we make use of when we pay the city a visit for work or pleasure.”

“Wait. Grandmama wants to give us a house?”

“Yes.”

“Yes a house?”

“Are your ears bothering you?”

“No… but us a house?”

Mycroft reached over and ran his hand across Lestrade’s shoulder, marveling anew at how his lover took nothing in their lives for granted.

“We are as one in her eyes, Gregory, and shall, someday, call London our home. To Grandmama, this is a prudent and efficient use of resources that satisfies several needs both short- and long term. Though this hotel offers exceptional amenities, I do long for something more familiar and graced with your touch and remnants of your presence.”

“A house?”

“I am now concerned for your sanity. Or your sobriety… how many cocktails have you enjoyed today?”

“The lackey has effectively transfused his blood with alcohol. John and I could drown a hundred times and he would neither notice nor be able to drag his liquor-sodden carcass from his chair, if notice he did.”

Mycroft hoped there was security footage he could appropriate, because the sight of Sherlock and John with their swimming shorts, personal flotation devices and large, colorful, umbrella-laden drinks was a delight to behold. And spectacular future blackmail material.

“Funny, you little bastard. Now, why don’t you order another platter of greasy kid food and have a rest before you jump back into the water?”

“No. John and I have a very important experiment to conduct. We require your towel, so hand it to him immediately. Oh, and matches.”

“Wrong. And, in case I slurred a little… wrong.”

“You are not a friend of science!”

“But I am a friend of people in the fire service, and I’d rather not have the story get back home that I let you two burn down one of London’s finest hotels.”

“How dare you accuse me of ignoring basic principles of laboratory safety!”

“Because safety isn’t a word you know the meaning of. You probably think it has to do with colors or something. Now, how about that test you wanted to do where you tied your legs together to see if mermaids could really swim like that? Or that one with sound where you yell underwater and see how far it travels? See? Lots of no-flames things to experiment on after you eat.”

“Food is for the weak.”
“No, it’s… actually, that’s true, so you’re right. Now, go and tell the nice people you want lunch and order whatever you want. Doesn’t even have to be anything green on the plate since we’re on holiday.”

“Chips!”

“How about some fish with that, John?”

“Yes! Fish and chips! And chocolate ice cream with melted chocolate on top!”

Lestrade looked at Mycroft who made a ‘oh no, this is your doing, so you deal with it’ gesture that Papa Greg vowed he would pay dearly for later. That creamy bum would look lovely pinked up from a good paddling. Ok, that was quite enough thinking about that while he had nothing on but very erection-revealing swim attire.

“Whatever you want. Mycroft’s paying, so go big, why don’t you? Have some cake with that ice cream, too. Oh, and Mycroft will be the one to wake up tonight when your stomach hurts and you want someone to rub it. Now, go on and get your lunch, so you can work on the rest of your experiments.”

“Not until you reveal the contents of your discussion with Mycroft.”

“Uh, no?”

“Sorry, Greg. We were eavesdropping and only heard a few words, so we need you to fill in the rest.”

“John Watson, that is a prime example of poor manners and I am most ashamed of your behavior.”

“Mycroft… if you didn’t want us to know what you were talking about, you shouldn’t have been talking loud enough for us to almost hear.”

Sherlock nodded solemnly and, now, it was Lestrade’s turn to grin at his partner and give the ‘well, go on, answer the boy’ signal.

“Very well. Grandmama has offered to give to Gregory and I one of her London properties, so that we might have accommodations when we visit the city and a home to welcome us when we, eventually, move to London.”

“Oh. Do I get a room there, too?”

John was nothing, Mycroft acknowledged, if not a practical child.

“If I remember correctly, there are sufficient rooms for you and Sherlock both.”

“Oh, well that’s ok, then.”

“And I demand a laboratory be established at the earliest possible convenience.”

“That is something we shall have to investigate and decide upon, brother dear.”

“A pool! Does it have a swimming pool?”

“No, I believe it does not.”
“Well, it needs one. Can you get them to build a swimming pool in it? Or on the roof, if they put a heater in it so we don’t get cold in the winter. Actually, swimming when it’s snowing could be a lot of fun.”

“If John acquires a swimming pool, I DEMAND my laboratory!”

“I’m nice, Sherlock, and you’re not, so I’ll get my pool and you’ll get a plastic spoon and bottle of vinegar and that’s all for your experiments.”

The furious dance of the enraged goblins is an entertaining sight at the leanest of times, but during their ceremonial season when their colorful libations can be raised and shaken at the heavens, it was positively mesmerizing.

“At this point, John, Gregory and I have not viewed the property, let alone made a firm decision on acquiring it, so any discussion about renovations will have to be postponed until a later time.”

“And my laboratory will be first and foremost on the list of negotiations!”

“Of course, Sherlock, now I believe it is…”

“And what London property is Grandmama going to give John and myself?”

Now, both older boys desperately tried to lob the conversational ball into the other’s court and it was only Mycroft draining his glass and making a grand show of trying to attract the attention of a server that kept the ball on Lestrade’s side of the net.

“Uh… why would Grandmama do that? Mycroft needs a place here since he has to visit London a lot for work, but…”

“As will John and I. How am I to properly demonstrate my scientific skills to the world from the Stone Age settlement in which we live? And John desires to become a doctor. What is he to treat but bunions, venereal disease and alcohol-induced cirrhosis of the liver if we do not inhabit an appropriately-populated area? Especially one rife with riff-raff carrying the most arcane and disastrous of diseases? John and I will move to London as soon as possible to begin our careers and Grandmama should gift us with a residence that suits our needs, just as she has you and the heffalump.”

Lestrade was not at all certain how he felt about being given a house, in London of all places, but he had to admit that Mycroft could use it and… well, if they were going to live in London as they’d planned, there was some comfort in knowing that there would be a place to live in when they were ready to make the move. Finding decent housing in the city was not easy, from what he’d been told and if Grandmama already had a house sitting empty…

“Look, let’s just see how this goes for me and Mycroft first and then we can talk about you and John and what you want to do in the future. Right now, you’re a few years away from the working world, so one house should do for all of us.”

And did his Mycroft’s eyes sparkle from the sort-of agreement to the new house? They sparkled like diamonds…

“Very wise, my dear. Now, I have but a few remaining minutes, so I suggest that the two of you discuss this further over your lunch and Gregory and I shall take full advantage of the last vestiges of this respite.”

“Ugh… they’re going to kiss. Come on, Sherlock. We can talk about what we want in our
London rooms while we have our fish and chips.”

“Yes, let us leave now before my appetite is well and truly spoiled by their amateurish gropings.”

The two boys stormed away and Lestrade knew he wasn’t mistaken when he saw the poolside staff push one of their own into their path as the official human sacrifice.

“Gregory…”

“The answer is maybe, ok? Let’s see the house and talk about it a little more. You know this isn’t easy for me, love.”

“I do know and that you are even considering it without a plethora of my tears lubricating your thoughts is something from which I am taking great hope.”

“Funny man. You’re not related to Sherlock by any chance, are you?”

“For my sins, I must claim that penance.”

“It’s well deserved, too. But, yeah… let’s see it tomorrow and, at the very least, it’s a place to stay for London trips. Beyond that… well, we’re not there yet, so I’ve got time to ease myself into the idea of being a working man with what I just know is a beautiful house in a very nice part of London.”

Mycroft set down his drink and moved to sit next to Lestrade on his lounge chair, leaning in to kiss his spouse and gaze deeply into his eyes.

“I love you, Gregory. Every day I believe I have loved you as dearly as I can, yet, every day, I find I am mistaken when that love grows and strengthens to new levels.”

“And I love you, Mycroft. I know you’re busy and it means a lot that you made a point to spend a little time with me today.”

“Know that you are ever on my mind, even when we are parted, my love, and I will endeavor to sneak to your side whenever the opportunity presents. But now, I must return to my duties.”

“I know. One more kiss, though?”

One more kiss, which lasted long enough for Sherlock and John to place their lunch order and return to decorate the older boys’ hair with plastic monkeys the bartender had dredged up from the 1970’s.

“Thank you, John. I assume this is your gentle method of urging me back to work.”

“No, you just look good with monkeys in your hair.”

“Well, let them instead ride in my pocket as I return to my toil. My dear, I shall see you later?”

“And we’ll make the most of it.”

Sherlock choked and fell to the ground seeing Lestrade’s lecherous look, prompting John to begin ringing his body with monkeys in lieu of police chalk.

“That we will.”

Walking away from his family was never easy, but Mycroft could take comfort from the fact they were enjoying their day and would continue to do so in his absence. And tomorrow… oh, the joys
that particular adventure would bring…
Chapter 29

This was the life. Lying in bed with his lover, Sherlock and John in a completely different suite, so there’d be no early-morning sneak attacks, the day spread out ahead of them, room service a few button taps on the phone away…

“I need not ask your thoughts, my dear, for you are affecting the most perfect look of contentment ever witnessed by mankind.”

“I should be! You actually made it to bed before the sun rose! And by enough of a margin that we actually got to enjoy a little sleep together, which is one of my very favorite things, thank you very much.”

“As it is mine. It is utter bliss to have you share my rest.”

Mycroft nestled closer to Lestrade and laid a kiss on his tropically-warm skin.

“And I hope to do so at every possible opportunity.”

“Well, you won’t get any argument from me. Mum’s past caring where I sleep at night, what with all the nights I have to look in on the boys or they’re chucking me out of mine because they want to sleep at our house. And today, we think about another house we can sleep in.”

Lestrade laughed at Mycroft’s excited wriggle and pulled him closer so one firm kiss could be placed among his gingery waves.

“I am very hopeful you will find it agreeable, Gregory. Of that, I cannot lie.”

“Oh, I’m sure I’ll find it agreeable. I’ll probably think it’s fantastic. It’s just going to be whether I can swallow my pride enough to… Mum will probably give me a good smack for even thinking about it.”

Mycroft shook his head slightly and nestled more closely to Lestrade’s naked form.

“In perfect honesty, my dear, I doubt your assertion.”

“Oh, why?”

“Your mother’s argument for disclosure of my role in purchasing our family car is not applicable to this situation. There will be no question about ownership since the assumption will be that our London residence is in my name, likely already a property in my portfolio that I am now choosing to use, with you at my side. Given the lack of potential misunderstanding, I foresee no objection on her part. She is aware that, upon our wedding day, what is mine shall be yours and, further, that Grandmama views you as an integral part of our family. I understand your perspective, my love, and further, I admire it. But I also believe that you deserve reward for your unflagging worth ethic and sense of responsibility.”

“Talk like that makes me think you like having a hard-working man in your life.”

“You know very well that I do. You complement me perfectly, though our areas of work are in different arenas. You are very aware that diligence, commitment and dedication are things I value most highly and I have not met another who exhibits those qualities to the level as do you.”
“Now you’re just being flattering.”

“A weapon of much potency, especially when sincerely wielded.”

“Now, see… that makes me not want to get out of bed at all today. Just stay here until we have to leave for home.”

“Something I would not, in the least, find distressing, however, at some point we shall have to make our farewells to Grandmama and the children and it is best, I believe, to do so while clothed.”

“You’re probably right. Shower first?”

“A very reasonable suggestion.”

“Filthy things in the shower?”

“An even better suggestion.”

Some very filthy things later, Mycroft leaned back in his chair and admired the ferocity and forethought of Sherlock and John’s argument that, not only should they be allowed to stay in London for the day, but that they should be allowed to view all available properties for one that would suit their needs. And undertake a truly heroic round of shopping.

“When you and John are of age, we may take up again this conversation, Sherlock, however, for the time being, I am most certain Mycroft and Gregory will happily play host to you both when you choose to visit the city.”

“John and I are not infants! We have proven our ability to manage without the sea cow’s supervision! All the rest is paper and, though his hands have ballooned into flippers and are slippery from holding his precious sargassum for his maw to consume, Mycroft is very capable of handling paper, such as bills, invoices, taxes and other items of business that my mind should not, by natural law, be bothered.”

“And, I’m sure they have great schools in London, Mrs. Holmes, so Sherlock and I could even go to school when we decide to visit and then have the whole afternoon to explore and see things and do things and I think that’s a very good plan, actually.”

The twin nods of conviction made Greg laugh and Grandmama take an emergency sip of tea to camouflage the slight twitch of her lips. The children would go far in this world and it was a joy to know that wherever they went, they would go together.

“Perhaps it would be more efficient, brother, if I were to instruct you on the ways and wiles of paper-based issues, so you could completely divorce yourself from a need for my presence.”

“No. My mind is too valuable a resource to clutter with nonsensical detritus. You may, however, instruct John, as it shall be his role in our household to tend to the mundanities.”

“I don’t want to have to do mundanities! I’m not even sure what that is, but it certainly doesn’t sound fun. Get someone else to do it. Can you pay people to do that? Maybe Mycroft can hire someone to do that for us so we can just concern ourselves with fun things. And school. Can’t forget school because we’re good boys and know that an education is important.”

John’s bright and winning smile earned him another piece of toast with a large dollop of jam, as
Mycroft admired his very practical turn of mind and utterly conniving argument. In truth, when his brother was turned out into the world to stand on his own two feet, it would have to be with the aid of a solicitor, accountant, correspondence manager, housekeeper, cook and driver if any within his sphere, including, if it came to it, the citizens of London, were to remain safe from his disorganized and chaotic wrath.

“Well, I am certain we shall revisit this conversation many times before you and Sherlock are ready to set out to seek your fortune. Now, Gregory and I will review the house to decide upon its suitability and we shall happily host both you and Sherlock in the very near future so you may begin to acquaint yourselves with the amenities both it and its environs offer. I am certain, however, that Grandmama has a host of entertainments planned for your day and when you return home you can rest assured that Gregory and I shall soon join you.”

John frowned as he ate his toast and shared a look with Sherlock, who was also frowning and, more worryingly, thinking.

“And, if you have any plans of circumventing your return home, kindly realize that without access to my bank card, your enjoyment of the city shall be tragically reduced. Such a shame, having to find your lunch from whatever the citizenry has discarded in the gutters.”

Sherlock and John’s coordinated hiss of disapproval buoyed Mycroft’s spirits nicely and he felt no shame enjoying another bit of bacon as his reward.

“I do hope the children do not attempt an escape, as I would hate having to marshal the police force to find and return them to me, along with the appropriate cages in which to transport them home, which I am certain any of the local pet shops will be happy to provide. In fact, John, why don’t you take Sherlock back to our suite and pack your belongings, as we shall are soon to leave? We may discuss an appropriate stop or two in the city before we leave its borders, so you might begin to contemplate your options as you prepare for our departure.”

Sherlock had a definite opinion about this, but John again showed his practical side and dragged his friend from the breakfast table before Grandmama’s ‘appropriate stop or two’ was removed from the itinerary. And it wasn’t as if they weren’t going to come back. Greg wasn’t dumb… a house in London? That was the best thing ever! The hotel was great, of course, but a real house all for them? Where they could play wherever they wanted and have their own rooms and their games and films and clothes… that would be amazing! Maybe they could come back next weekend and see their new house. And pick their bedrooms. And move in some things…

“Thank you, Grandmama. Breakfast is such a lively event with the children in attendance and I find myself, today, preferring something more sedate.”

“Yes, do enjoy it, for when you have your own offspring, this shall be a rare and precious event. Have you given any thought, yet, to the timing of your children? Without the need for either of you to carry your progeny, you can set a most rapid pace for providing my grandchildren. Verily, we may effectively see multiple births at a time, increasing handily the chances for me to greet each of my lovelies before I fade away. And you do know my thoughts upon that particular issue, do you not, Mycroft?”

The two remaining males at the table froze and smiled rather sickly at the glaring woman, wondering if their idea of renting babies for Sunday visits was even a remote possibility.

“Yes, Grandmama, you have made that very clear to me.”

“Good. And, you, Gregory? If you believe for one moment that Mycroft is the only one from
whom I expect to be presented a small, swaddled bundle, you are sadly mistaken.”

“Uh… no, Grandmama. I mean, yes. By no, I meant I don’t believe that. One bundle, all swaddled and waiting for Granny kisses.”

“Excellent. Now, I believe I shall tend to a few matters while Sherlock and John make themselves ready. We shall notify you when we are prepared to depart.”

Both Mycroft and Lestrade leapt up and escorted the older woman to the door, making sure it was shut, locked and barricaded after she was gone.

“How’s Grandmama’s eyesight? Can I put a puppy in one of those little baby dresses and we get away with it?”

“Unfortunately, the hawk would envy Grandmama’s vision, but, at least, she shall not expect to be gifted with grandchildren until we are wed, so we have, as they say, breathing room.”

“Good. I can’t even imagine a baby with the other babies we have to raise right now. I know I have a healthy appreciation for a bit of a drink in the evening and there’s no question I’d double your monthly spirits bill if we had three kids right now. Though, oddly, the one in the nappy would be the least of our worries.”

“Quite so. And I cannot say our sleep would be any more disturbed than it is currently. Now, while we have a moment, shall we prepare our own luggage? I hope to fill our day with entertaining and relaxing activities and I would hate to end such a delightful bit of time with such a banal act as packing.”

“Fine with me. I can barely remember that I’ll be back home in my own bed tonight, so remembering to toss my clothes in a bag isn’t something I’m going to count on.”

“And if I offer you another bed for the night? One to be shared with a man who loves you dearly and only feels wholly alive when you are near?”

Lestrade pulled Mycroft close for a deep kiss and gave his bum a little pinch.

“Mum really might have my head. Got to see her now and then, don’t I?”

“I am certain that Mother Lestrade is content to exchange pleasantries with you over the occasional cup of tea.”

“I’ll let you have that argument with her while I go off to the pub for a pint, what say? You can join me later if you’re still alive.”

“Maternal affection should not be an impediment to the progress of romance.”

“And that can be the leading statement of your side of the debate. I’ll just go ahead and drink your pint since you won’t be needing it.”

Mycroft laughed and took Lestrade in a warm embrace where he tried to imprint the feel of his spouse’s body into his mind, so the loneliness of tonight’s unshared bed would be somewhat easier to bear.

“I believe I shall sidestep that particular discussion and live to fight another day.”

“Smart plan. Let’s get started? I’m actually a little anxious to see the house.”
Something that made Mycroft’s heart swell. He was going to take every bit of positivity on the subject as a good sign that, very soon, he would be overseeing the provisioning of their London home and spending his first night under its roof with his beloved husband.

“Excellent, then I shall do my best to hasten our departure.”

“You’ll do my packing?”

“Perish the thought. That is what hotel staff are for.”

The spectacle of getting Sherlock and John into Grandmama’s car was such that bystanders took a moment to stop and enjoy the free entertainment, which consisted of threats, pleas, lethal illnesses, mental debilitation, crocodile tears, distractions for bolts for freedom and playing dead. Really, if he had sold tickets, Lestrade figured he could easily have treated Mycroft to lunch at a very nice restaurant.

The two older boys waved to the small, distraught faces pressed against the car’s window and breathed a long sigh of relief. The day was officially ready to begin and Mycroft escorted his partner into the second waiting car for the ride to Grandmama’s townhouse.

Which made Lestrade gulp loudly when Mycroft announced that they had arrived. Not that he’d really expected anything different, but it was still a shock, nonetheless, to see the property, which was exactly the sort of thing you see in the films and on the telly about the ultra-rich families and their London homes. It didn’t seem real! And all he had to do was say ‘yes’ and it was his. Something that, looking at the multi-storied, exquisite townhouse façade, he wasn’t sure he could do. What in the world would the neighbors think when he stepped out for the newspaper in the morning, with his raggedy hair and normal person’s early-morning clothes? They’d probably send their butlers out to drive a knife through his heart!

“Gregory? Are you suffering some form of mental event?”

And a policeman? A regular bloke whose yearly wage was what these people spent on silver polish in a month? They were going to set the dogs on him!

“Gregory…”

But, since they’d probably have tiny, prissy dogs in the city, they’d have to send to their country homes for the hunting dogs to chew his arse like a squeaky toy.

“Gregory!”

Lestrade blinked a few times and noticed that Mycroft was standing outside the open rear door of the car, waiting for him to get his squeaky arse out of the vehicle and join him in front of their… the house.

“Whereas I grant that one can make a decision based on the superficial appearance of an object or person, I have found that a more detailed investigation is required for that decision to actually have credence.”

“What? Oh… yeah, I suppose I should get out of the car.”

“That would be helpful, yes.”
Moving slowly, Lestrade crept out of the vehicle and hoped it wasn’t obvious that he checked for witnesses before he peeked out of his hiding place and took his place at Mycroft’s side.

“Is there something you wish to discuss with me, my dear?”

Under no circumstances.

“No, just taking it all in. Bit by bit. Chewing on things and swallowing before taking another bite.”

“Is this your way of saying you are ready for brunch?”

“No. I’m not actually sure I could eat anything right now.”

There wasn’t a person on this street who had murdered a greasy platter of chips in their lives and he’d bet money on it.

“Oh? Are you feeling well, my…”

It had taken awhile, but Mycroft took in the signs, including the fact that Lestrade was now surreptitiously trying to straighten and neaten his clothes, and the light went on in his brain. Silly, silly Gregory… not that he would ever dishonor his lover by saying so aloud. And, in truth, there was merit to his Gregory’s worries. There were as many potential detractors within his own social class as there were in Gregory’s, in terms of their relationship. His love had been fortunate to be spared those of his ilk, to date… besides Mummy… but that would undoubtedly change at some point in the future and he vowed with all his might to spare him the worst that he might encounter. And to exact revenge when his diligence was circumvented.

“Gregory, my beloved, it is naught but stone and wood. And it is a welcoming structure… Grandpapa and Father made this their residence when they had London business and it housed other members of their family for countless visits. Grandmama has spoken of this house as one of her favorites, because it was a comfortable one and one for which she accumulated many happy memories.”

That’s because she wasn’t having to fend off hunting dogs who were trying to shred her skirts!

“Yeah… stone and wood. Lots and lots of stone and wood. How many rooms does it have?”

“In truth, I do not remember precisely, but easily enough for our bedroom, a room apiece for Sherlock and John, one for Mother Lestrade should she choose to visit, studies for the both of us, an entertainment room for us and one for the children, a wine cellar, a…”

“Stop. Just… stop. I get the picture. I suppose we should go inside.”

“That would be the next logical step, yes.”

Lestrade swallowed hard and nodded, accepting Mycroft taking his hand and leading him through the door, where his nerves flared again.

“Oh god… it’s beautiful.”

Mycroft wasn’t certain if that was a happy or distressed statement, so wisely made no comment, contenting himself to stand quietly as Lestrade took in appearance of the entranceway.

“Um… we should walk around, I guess.”
“If we want more data for analysis than this single space designated to greet visitors.”

“Ok… you go first.”

Mycroft rubbed his partner’s back a moment, then took his hand to begin walking through the rooms on the ground floor and then through the patio in the rear, which gave his lover quite a surprise. Next was a prowl through each of the upper floors and Mycroft knew it was callous of him to want to laugh at Lestrade’s growing unease, but his beloved seemed to be attempting to avoid all contact with any physical matter in the house besides air and it was… adorable.

“Gregory… are you able to articulate you thoughts?”

“No.”

“Alright… can you provide me with some idea as to the leaning of your opinion?”

“No.”

“Very well. I suppose a simple ‘yay’ or ‘nay’ as to your final decision is out of the question.”

“Uh….”

“Perhaps we should have a seat.”

Mycroft thought a moment, then led Lestrade back to the kitchen, and sat him down at the table in the corner.

“Please, Gregory… talk to me.”

“I would, but I… I don’t know what to say.”

“I believe you do. Or, perhaps… it is more a case that you do not want me to hear what you have to say?”

The small grimace of being caught out was another item to add to Mycroft’s list of adorable things about his pre-fiancé, but now was certainly not the time to reveal that fact.

“If you are not happy with the house, Gregory, all you have to do is…”

“I love it.”

Oh.

“Oh. Then I do not understand…”

“I can’t live here.”

“I see. No, that is not true. I fail to see is the correct sentiment.”

Lestrade ran a hand through his hair and looked around the spacious and well-appointed kitchen and tried to put his thoughts into words.

“This is a gorgeous house and… it’s got a… masculine… feel that I really like. But…”

“Yes?”

“I can’t live here!”
“And why not?”

Should he mention the dogs?

“Because I’m me, Mycroft.”

“If that was supposed to clarify your point, the attempt failed utterly.”

“I’m just me, love.”

“The level of failure has not diminished.”

“Be honest… can you picture me living here.”

“Yes.”

“No, you can’t.”

“Is my input even necessary for this conversation?”

“Mycroft… you know who I am.”

“The man I love and my future husband.”

“I mean, besides that.”

“The most honorable, respectable and hard-working individual I have ever had the good fortune to meet.”

“No, not that.”

“The most breathtaking, sexually-pleasing man one could ever hope to find in this life.”

“Would you be serious?”

“I assure you, I am.”

“I can’t even afford to keep the lights on in this house!”

“At this point, no, because you are not employed in what will be your full-time career, however, once you have reached that point, you concern will not be an issue.”

“Bollocks!”

“Are not involved in the funding of utilities.”

“You know what I mean.”

Mycroft reached over and squeezed Lestrade’s hand remembering well the conversation in which he and Grandmama had engaged about this very thing. She had duly warned him this might not be easy and, as always, she was correct. However, ‘not easy’ was in no manner synonymous with ‘impossible.’

“I do, my love, and it is something we have discussed many times. Why is this, now, causing you such distress? You know, you know well, that our lives shall be unlike that of your peers. In truth, it shall be unlike that of my peers, as well. We are a unique couple who shall have a life that follows its own path, but that path shall be of both our making.”
“I know! I do, but…”

“You do not appear overly upset when you are in residence at my home.”

“No, but…”

“Or at Grandmama’s, which is a far grander structure.”

“I know, but…”

“And this residence is, of the three, the most modest of the offerings.”

“But the others aren’t mine, are they?”

“I consider my family home as much yours as mine. When we wed, it shall pass as equally into your hands as it is in mine.”

Mycroft squeezed his partner’s hand more tightly as Lestrade leaned his head back and released a frustrated groan that echoed through the kitchen.

“My dear, would you be willing to do for me a favor?”

“Does it involve putting a bullet through my skull?”

“No, but we may discuss that at a later time if you desire it. Now, describe to me what we are currently doing.”

“Going insane.”

“I did say we, not you. Answer the question as asked, please.”

“Fine. We are sitting in the kitchen. The big, beautiful, spotless, expensive kitchen.”

“Very good. And have we done this before?”

“No, this is the first time we’ve been here.”

“Expand the situation, if you will. Have we ever sat together in any kitchen?”

“You know we have!”

“Answer, please.”

“Fine. Yes, we have.”

“Will you tell me where this has occurred?”

“Your house, Grandmama’s, my house.”

“And, have we held hands in these locations?”

“Yes, we have.”

“And did we enjoy the time any more or less when we did so around Mother Lestrade’s table than Grandmama’s?”

“No.”
“Did our love rage hotter or chill colder based on our location?”

“You know it didn’t.”

“Did we, in those places of family and acceptance, care, for lack of a better word, that we were in a small, humble kitchen or one that can easily cater a feast for a battalion?”

Lestrade’s sigh was one Mycroft recognized easily. It signaled his message was being received and, at least, being considered.

“No.”

“And it would be no different here. I will not dissemble and claim that your colleagues will not, perhaps, be taken aback if you host them for an evening’s entertainment, but I believe that they will quickly recognize that our love and the happiness in our home is not tied to the structure or the furnishings. And, if you are ever accused of the taking of a bribe, I believe it will be very easy to demonstrate why such a thing is a rather laughable idea.”

This time, Lestrade laughed, and it was a real and honest laugh, which made Mycroft heave his own, quiet sigh of relief.

“That’s actually true, isn’t it?”

“And I shall gladly open our accounts for scrutiny to prove your innocence.”

Mycroft watched his partner take a deep breath and look again around the kitchen, knowing Lestrade’s mind was replaying the joy they had experienced in all of their family’s kitchens and that what was truly important was the people present and how deeply they cared for each other.

“Walk me through again?”

“I would be delighted.”

“And… tell me about the place. I’d like to hear some of the stories and history.”

“I shall provide all you would like. Grandmama can provide you with more, but I do remember some from Father and I recognize certain items that belonged to him or Grandpapa that I will be happy to discuss with you.”

“Ok. That might help.”

“Whatever you require, my dear. Shall we begin?”

Lestrade nodded and stood up, though Mycroft had to wait a moment while his partner looked through every cabinet and drawer, inspect the pantry and turn the burners of the stove on and off several times.

“It’s just a kitchen.”

“That it is.”

“All the normal things a kitchen has, just… lovelier and there are more of them.”

“That is not an incorrect analysis.”

“And the bathrooms are just bathrooms.”
“I sincerely hope so. That is a particular area for which I am not hopeful of finding surprises.”

This time it was two rounds of laughter than rang out in the room and Mycroft took Lestrade’s hand for a kiss on his palm, before pulling him along to walk, again, through the house, this time narrating the tour where, before, he had stayed said little, knowing his words were falling on nonfunctional ears. This time, his future spouse seemed actually able to hear his voice…

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“And, once more, I ask your thoughts, my dear.”

Lestrade sipped the whisky that Mycroft had found and let the floorplan of the townhouse play through his head. It had everything that he loved about Mycroft and Grandmama’s house, but it was smaller in scale and, if he allowed himself to admit it, cozier. And there was a library with a fireplace, which he loved, along with plenty of space for him to have his own study, which would be useful when he was a detective and had to bring work home with him. And the outdoor space was fantastic. They wouldn’t be able to set up a huge tent for a night of camping, but they could sit outside and have dinner or just enjoy the weather and talk. There was just one more thing…

“Can we… could we take a walk? See what’s in the area?”

Mycroft gave an inner clap of glee and quickly retrieved Lestrade’s jacket, pressing it into his hands and dragging him out the front door to begin walking the streets. As they explored, Lestrade couldn’t help but feel he was in some period film. Everything was beautiful. Clean and quiet. There was an air of age, and sophistication and money and history that was nearly overpowering to experience. And here they were in a park not far from the house that would be perfect to stroll through in the evening and, even with the chill in the air, was appealing enough for him to motion Mycroft towards a bench and have a seat.

“No sweets shop in the vicinity, is there. Or somewhere to buy second-hand books?”

“Actually, we are not as far as you might believe from a series of shops, if I remember properly, as well as a pub that might interest you.”

“Pub?”

Mycroft laughed at his lover’s excited eyes and patted his hand sympathetically.

“Calm yourself, Gregory. I do not believe the proprietors will be as willing to turn a blind eye to my youthfulness as those of our favored establishment.”

“That’s no fun. But I did have some nice whisky today, so I suppose I can make do without a pint of quality lager.”

“Your sacrifice is duly noted. Now, back to the question at hand.”

“Right. Ok… I’m sort of overwhelmed again.”

“Is there a reason?”

“Nothing different than what we’ve already talked about. I look around and there’s not a pack of kids yelling and running about, leaving toys everywhere. No houses needing a coat of paint or work on the roof. It’s just not what I’m used to, I suppose. I think of what I own to wear, what I’m wearing right now, and wonder why nobody’s chasing me off their stoop with a broom.”
“You most certainly do not appear as a street urchin, my love.”

“Probably closer than this neighborhood has seen this year, though.”

“I would not accept that wager, for you are your own harshest judge. There is nothing amiss with your appearance, Gregory, except the picture it presents in your own mind. You are clean, groomed, and provided with flattering and well-maintained garments. If you believe you shall cut an embarrassing figure, my dear, you are completely mistaken. Now, speak to me of your impression of our environs.”

“I like this park.”

“It is most relaxing. I have no definitive memory of it in the spring and summer, but I suspect it is a lovely expanse of land through which to walk or sit and enjoy the sunshine, sharing a word of greeting with other patrons.”

“Which is another thing…”

“Yes?”

“I’m not going to know anybody.”

“Neither shall I.”

“No, I don’t think that’s true. You’re working in London a bit now and you’ll get to know the people in the neighborhood. People like you, with money and education. Not many people like me around, unless you count the staff working in their houses.”

“You have proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you can stand tall among the wealthy and powerful, and not be chased away as you seem to fear. And, while I have no doubt that if I perused a list of names of the owners of the nearby properties I would know more than a few, at least by reputation, those that you have met of my family and acquaintances, with whom you will continue to encounter now and then, are names that, when mentioned, shall immediately make anyone on this street and those surrounding it take more than a little notice of you.”

“I thought you kept a low profile here. Just an assistant, you said.”

“True, but it is not unheard of for one of a powerful family to desire to begin where any might begin, among the lower ranks. It would be ridiculous to try and hide my identity, but that does not mean I must disclose fully how I am using my identity to a greater number than those who have a reason to know. I am Mycroft Holmes and many are well aware of what that means, in terms of wealth and social standing. But, that is all they know.”

“I guess that makes sense.”

“And it shall not be long before your name is unequivocally tied to mine, though, in my heart. I truly do not believe that shall be the element which cements your reputation with the individuals we shall come to meet through the years. Grandmama collected a bulging portfolio of positive testimonials during her party and she is very able to discern a truthful statement from one given to curry favor. You made a grand showing, my dear, and it shall be the same here. Do not believe yourself an outsider, my love. I shall admit that it might feel that way, at times, especially at the onset and there will likely be those who shall never warm to you, as there are those of your peers who shall never warm to me, but they are inconsequential and shall not, impact our lives in any tangible fashion.”
Lestrade narrowed his eyes and looked for any sign that Mycroft was trying to pacify him with words he wanted to hear, but he couldn’t find a single one, beyond the hopefulness in his partner that he would take his speech to heart and give the answer Mycroft very much hoped to receive.

“And, I suppose, it’s not like I’ll be living here next week or anything. Got time to say hello to a few joggers or people out for a stroll so they get to know my face when I have the opportunity to visit.”

“Very true.”

“And once Sherlock and John have a few turns around the neighborhood, I’ll be the least of anyone’s worries.”

“Very, very true.”

“Yeah…”

“And?”

“And…”

“Gregory!”

Lestrade laughed and felt a large, heavy weight fall from his shoulders.

“Yes, love. I think this would be a fantastic home for us and we can start whenever you want getting it set up to actually be our home.”

Mycroft surprised them both with his loud shout of “YES!” then took Lestrade in a firm hug, which morphed into a kiss that would have raised a few eyebrows if there had been anyone else in the park.

“Oh, Gregory… thank you. Thank you so much. I had hoped… but I also worried…”

“And I didn’t help you much with that, did I?”

“Which was absolutely your right! If you had said no, I would have politely declined Grandmama’s offer and used the house only as my London based until you and I were ready to find a residence that appealed to us both. We are partners, my dear, now and forever. Though, I will admit, I am happy you approve of this house for… it does have meaning to me and I had so greatly hoped to share that with you.”

Lestrade reached around and put his arm across Mycroft’s shoulders, pulling him close and realizing that this could easily be them in fifty years, sitting in this park, more in love than anyone could possibly imagine and happier than anyone could possibly dream.

“I have an idea… if you’re not busy next weekend, why don’t we come back and bring a few things to start moving in. Some clothes, a few personal items, maybe a picture or two. We can pick our bedroom today and figure out what we’d like to get to make it perfect for us.”

“I think that is a wonderful idea and I will plan on that very thing. You do realize, of course, that we shall not likely be alone in that excursion.”

“We’ll definitely have two little chimps riding on our shoulders, but they can use the time to pick their rooms, too, and we can start laying down some rules for when they visit. And… maybe when you’re at school, the boys and I can take the train on my free days now and then and visit London.
There’s lots of things for them to do and I’d like to learn more about the city, too.”

“That is certainly something we bring to fruition and know that, if you require it, a vehicle shall be made available to you to facilitate your travel within the city.”

“What’s wrong with public transportation?”

“Would you like a written list or will a verbal enumeration suffice.”

One kiss kept Lestrade from laughing at his lover, then he stood and extended his hand for Mycroft to take to continue their walk. A blended life, that was the right way to go. Though, his pre-fiancé was going to encounter as many bumps as he was. He would absolutely have a great time making sure of that…

The rest of the day was spent sightseeing, making a few notes about the house and, finally, taking the helicopter back home, with Lestrade having to browbeat Mycroft when he assured him that the vehicle would also be at his beck and call for the trips to London to shorten the travel time. After the quick drive back to the house once they landed, neither of the couple was surprised that they were besieged by their personal chimps the moment they set foot indoors.

“Finally! John and I are intolerably bored and are suffering near-lethal effects from our inactivity!”

“And we missed you!”

John’s traditional hug and patting down of Mycroft commenced, with the boy finding the conveniently placed book of card tricks for him and species of toxic plants for Sherlock in very short order.

“Thanks! These look great! And…”

“Pardon?”

“You heard John. And…”

“You have me at a loss, brother dear.”

Though the look Lestrade and Mycroft shared confirmed that each was extremely clear about the boys’ question.

“Do not be disingenuous! Divulge your decision and do it now!”

“Very well. Gregory and I have decided to have porridge for breakfast. I admit it was a hard-won battle, but he eventually saw the merit of my argument.”

When goblins find themselves confounded, the ritual to purge themselves of fury was a colorful one, with dance steps a choreographer would be challenged to follow and scribe on paper.

“Clodpate! We demand an answer!”

“Yeah! An answer!”

Two small, highly irritated boys glared at the older two, who made a show of putting down their luggage, stretching, checking their clothing for lint and clearing their throat a few times before
Lestrade answered.

“What was the question?”

The combined goblin scream tore a hole in the fabric of the space-time continuum and the nearly-engaged pair finally decided to take pity on them.

“Oh yeah! The house. Well, after much discussion and thinking… we’ve decided to take the house.”

Now it was a shriek of triumph as the two small boys began a new dance, one which Sherlock participated in for a full ten seconds before he remembered he was showing an emotion other than scorn and stopped in his tracks.

“Well, at least you are not completely stupid, though I am certain it is still a near thing.”

“Hurray! We get a new house!”

Mycroft held back his smile and tried to look as curious as he could.

“We?”

“Yes, you, Greg, me and Sherlock. And a house in London, too. Which is amazing! Grandmama, which I’m supposed to call her now, took us to see lots of things and I love everything! Even Sherlock wasn’t bored!”

“I was incontrovertibly bored, John Watson, I simply withheld that fact from Grandmama to ensure she would continue to purchase accessories for our disguises.”

“We did get some nice shoes and handbags.”

“And I am hopeful to utilize the new mirror to assess its impact on the efficiency of applying our cosmetics.”

“We should get another one to keep at our new house so we don’t have to bring this one back and forth with us.”

“That is not an entirely foolish idea. In point of fact, we must make an inventory of all our possessions and present the hippopotamus with a list of items that will require duplicates be purchased to store in our new abode.”

“We can do that tonight, so we have lots of time to shop.”

“Yes, come along. I will dictate, you will scribe.”

Sherlock and John marched away and the older boys waited politely until they were out of earshot before laughing.

“Looks like you have a lot of shopping to do before next weekend, love.”

“Oh dear, how unfortunate that I am positively laden with scholastic duties and matters of state.”

“I’m not going to take them shopping! Little trolls need lipstick, they can buy it themselves!”

“I believe their stocks of that particular material are still robust, but they are running somewhat low on face powder.”
“I know what they like, so I’ll buy a container before work tomorrow. Well, two containers, since they have different complexions.”

“And how quickly your resolve crumbles.”

“I’m an easy target, aren’t I?”

“Only for your family, as it should be.”

“And, let me guess, you’re going to work on crumbling my resolve so I agree to stay here tonight, aren’t you?”

“Would I do something as heinous as that, given your prior refusal?”

“Yes.”

“Alright, yes. And my convincing technique will be a very sensual and heated one.”

“I’m doomed.”

“I shall make your downfall as pleasant as possible, I assure you.”
Chapter 30

“Gregory…”

“Just give me a moment.”

“I have. In fact, I have given you a plethora.”

“Is that a kind of bear?”

Mycroft ran his hand up and down his partner’s back and lightly massaged his neck.

“She is your mother, my dear.”

“Who’s going to hear that her son is about to own a house that costs… a thousand times the price of this one. It’s… insulting, in a way.”

“I doubt Mother Lestrade will hold that particular opinion.”

“Hullo, Mum. Just got myself a posh house of my own, to go along with all the other posh houses that I’ve been visiting, so there’s even less reason for me to spend time in this rather shabby place that I know you practically gave up your youth to pay for to keep a roof over my head. No, that’s not insulting, at all.”

“And, again, you demonstrate more flare for dramatics than Sherlock. I recognize this is an area of difficulty for you, Gregory, but do not fall into the habit of projecting your insecurities and worries onto others, for that shall not lead anywhere good. Your mother is well aware you are marrying into a family of considerable means, so your viewpoint is both baffling and obstructive.”

“Did you just chide me?”

“I do try to restrain my chiding urge, releasing it only when the situation has risen to crisis level. I believe that level has been reached.”

Lestrade tried to glare at his lover and couldn’t even muster an intimidating frown. He was being an idiot and an overly-dramatic one, at that. Droning over and over about an issue that should have been laid to rest, but it kept eating at the edges of his mind and this… this was one of the major reasons. Mum had done everything in the world she could to give him a good life and it seemed like a kind of betrayal to start setting up a life for himself as a… barely adult… that was far grander than anything either of them could have imagined. Where did that leave all of her sacrifices? Where did that leave her, actually? Living here while her son flitted back and forth between amazing houses and living in a world that was like a dream…

“I worry about her, ok? You didn’t grow up watching your mum try not to cry when the bills came due or sneak out of bed for water and find her trying to mend the new shirt you tore at school because she’d just spent the clothing budget for the month and couldn’t afford to buy another. Or… find her just staring out the window looking like she was trying to find everything in life she’d lost, but knowing, really, it was gone forever.”

This time, Mycroft took Lestrade in a long, firm hug, not caring who in the bustling neighborhood watched him try and comfort the man he loved.

“I understand, my dear, I truly do. But, do you think your mother desires that you suffer the
same? You know she does not. She encourages and celebrates our union and has from the onset. Do you know what she asked of me in the earliest days of our acquaintance? To treat you well. To respect you and treat you as you deserved and I vowed to her that I would. Now, let us broach the subject and see to what degree your concerns are justified. Only then can we assess the true situation and work towards seeing everyone satisfied and happy with our decision.”

Something Lestrade had been dreading all day at school. Yes, Mum knew he was going to marry a rich man and that they’d have lots of privileges in their lives… but being handed a house? A massive and beautiful house? At his age? He’d called his mum last night and told her they’d gotten back safely, but left out any mention of that part of the trip, feeling it was something that should be discussed in person. Now, it was time for the ‘in person’ to happen and Mycroft was an evil sod being rational with him when a bit more hysteria and bone-rattling anxiety was called for.

“I suppose you’re right.”

“I am confident I am. Now, apply your hand to the knob, provide it a substantial turn, then push forward and behold the miracle of torque and angular acceleration.”

“You’re not funny, you know.”

“Oh, my poor Gregory… your mental distress has drained your wellspring of humor. Fear not, for I shall provide you with some form of playthings and assign Sherlock and John to mind you until your jocularity returns in full.”

Lestrade pinched Mycroft’s bottom and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, as an extra bonus.

“What would I do without you, love?”

“Suffer a dreary, bleak and lonely fate.”

“Finally you say something I agree with!”

“My heart soars. Now, open the door.”

Rolling his eyes and sighing loudly, Lestrade did as commanded and took a fortifying breath as he strode through the house to the kitchen, where he could hear the house’s single occupant puttering about while listening to the radio. Just say what he needed to say and that’d be that. Not a problem. Easy as could be. But… holding Mycroft’s hand for strength wasn’t the worst possible decision, now was it…

“Once again?”

Both Mycroft and Lestrade hoped their faces wouldn’t split from the large smiles they were holding fixed in place as they stared across the kitchen table at the Lestrade family matriarch who had narrowed her eyes and was fixing them with rather a laser-intense glare.

“Grandmama thought that since Mycroft was going to have to do a lot of work in London, even when he’s away at school and that we both want to live in London when we have our careers going… that having somewhere to call home already in place was a good idea.”

“So… she decided to give you a house.”

“Yes.”
“To own.”

“Yes.”

“A house.”

“Mum, are you ok?”

A question about which Mycroft was also starting to worry. His discussion with Grandmama on the subject of the London house had not left out Mother Lestrade’s perceptions and potential objections, but both had believed that they would not be the Shakespearean tragedy that Gregory had conceived in his mind. However, who, really, would know a mother better than her son…

“Big house?”

“Yeah, it’s very big. Not as big as Mycroft’s, but… yeah.”

“Nice?”

“It’s gorgeous. And in a beautiful neighborhood with a lovely park a short walk away.”

Both boys waited, clutching their hands under the table and Mycroft, especially, was disturbed because he could not read anything from his mother-in-law’s body language or facial expressions.

“I see.”

Not an answer to dispel the tension, nor was the long sip of tea and tapping a fingernail on the edge of the cup.

“What’s my room look like?”

Not an answer to dispel the tension because the boys were now confused and growing more so as Greg’s mother began to rub her hands together and giggle.

“Mum?”

“Free lodging in London? You think I’m about to say no to that! Have myself a nice weekend away and not have to pay for a hotel? And the holidays… Christmas in London is supposed to be beautiful and now I can have the chance to see it myself and not worry about not being able to pay for petrol for a month or so. Finally, you’ve become useful to me son. It’s about time. My breasts are just recovering from feeding you and that mouthful of teeth you were born with, so this is the best thank-you present you could have given me. When can I see it? Got to take a feel of the pulse of things, you know. Find the good pubs and gathering places. Time to broaden my socialization pool, a bit, especially of the male variety. Nice looking gents in the area? What’s the average age? I don’t mind a little snow on the roof as long as there’s a fire in the furnace, if you know what I mean.”

Mycroft gave his partner a few sharp slaps on the back to start him breathing again, but felt his own worries melt away like butter in the hot sun.

“Mum… you are not going to bring men home to… my home!”

“Look at you, certain that your ol’ Mum is going to pull like a champion when she’s in London. That’s so sweet and very perceptive, actually.”

Mycroft didn’t know to whom to dedicate his grin, since both his spouse and his mother-in-law were equally amusing to watch. His Gregory was positively green from mentally-visualized scandal…
“I take it, Mother, that you are not offering objection to Grandmama’s gift?”

“Of course not! Housing in London is stupidly expensive, from what I hear, and if that’s where you two want to live, that’s one worry you won’t have sitting on your shoulders. And I’m not joshing about visiting. I plan to visit a lot, because I know you two… you’re going to go off for romantic weekends and leave me with Sherlock and John, so if you don’t think I’m going to extract my fee in the most enjoyable way possible, then you’re idiots. Oh, the fun I’m going to have… I’d better start saving for some new clothes…”

Mycroft patted his partner’s hand and now-now’ed him as Lestrade teetered on the edge of quivery, maternally-induced breakdown and spoke in soothing tones as he urged him to start for them another cup of tea.

“I, for one, am gladdened by your acceptance of the situation and extend the unlimited invitation to visit, at will. Gregory and I had already planned to allot to you a room for your exclusive use, so it seems we are of like mind in facilitating your enjoyment of London and the entertainments it offers.”

Though no mention would be made of Lestrade’s dropped teaspoon at the thought of ‘entertainments.’

“Such a good boy you are, Mycroft. Hear that, Greg? Our Mycroft knows how to make the ladies of the family happy.”

“Well, then, you marry him.”

“That would probably get me a better bedroom in your new house, but Mycroft might object when his wife goes out for the evening with the nice man she met at the local café and doesn’t come home until morning.”

“This is your mess, Mycroft. You deal with her.”

“Of course, my dear. Mother Lestrade, would you have time this weekend to come with us to London and examine our new property? They children will also be in attendance, however, Gregory and I shall tend to them, leaving you free to explore the area at your own pace. A car, of course, will be available to you for the duration.”

“What!”

“Yes, my beloved?”

“You… you’re useless!”

“My poor Gregory, I believe you are suffering from low blood sugar. Here, let me find for you a biscuit or two to help correct your physiological imbalance.”

Mycroft rose from his chair, after sharing a smile with the lady of the house, and gently kissed his lover on the cheek, whispering his love and devotion into Lestrade’s ear, before pushing him back towards the table to deliver the tea. Which Lestrade did, then commenced glaring at his mother, which wavered between horrified indignation, confusion and uncertainty and finally made him ask the question he knew was really the only one that mattered.

“You’re not mad that I’m going to get a big, posh house and have access to money and fine things?”

Mycroft kept himself busy looking through the cupboards to give the mother and son some
semblance of privacy because he knew that his lover desperately needed to purge that particular notion from his mind and there was only one person who, really, could accomplish the task.

“Mad? Greg, love… why would I be mad?”

“Because…”

Lestrade waved his arms around to indicate the kitchen and his mother finally caught the thread of his off-footedness.

“Because I live here and drive a crap car and work a decent job, but nothing like what I dreamt of when I was your age? I’d be a pretty shite mother if I felt that way, don’t you think?”

“But, Mum…”

“No, you listen to me Gregory Lestrade. We’ve had this conversation before, but maybe you need to hear it one more time for things to really sink in. Everyone has a life to lead and the cards everyone gets to play during it are different. What you hope for is that your kids get better cards than you got. I have always hoped and prayed that you’d be able to have the job you wanted, rather than one you had to work to pay the bills and that you’d not have to worry about those bills in the first place. I’d love you if you moved in next door and lived your life a stone’s throw away from me, struggling through life like the rest of the people we know, but I’ll love you just as much if you have your dream job and live in a lovely home in London. Where you live and how much money you have doesn’t factor into how much you love someone, son, or in what you want to see life give them. If you’re worried about me, Greg… I’m going to thank you because not all sons would care about their mum like that and worry about what she feels or what’s going to happen to her, but I’m going to tell you to stop. Stop right now. I am very, very happy for you and never, not ever, want you to turn away from an opportunity because of me. Actually, I’ll kick your arse to Greenland if I find out you did, so consider yourself warned.”

Lestrade took in every bit of his mother’s features and, with Mycroft finally setting in the chair next to him and pressing a biscuit into his mouth, nodded and felt a very large weight slip away onto the floor.

“And I’ll see if I can get Saturday off to accept your invitation, Mycroft. If not this weekend, then one soon, though. I’m very anxious to see what trouble I can get into. I’m sure Sherlock and John are, too.”

Which was something of an understatement, she suspected, if the slightly frightened looks on the boys’ faces were to be believed.

“Yes, they are. Already they are packing a series of boxes and sacks with items that they feel are requisite parts of their new surroundings.”

“Good for them being excited about your new house. Now, why don’t you two go out and do the shopping and I’ll make something special for dinner? Bring Sherlock and John back with you so we can have a little party to celebrate your news.”

“What a delightful idea. My dear, don’t you agree?”

“A nice family dinner? I don’t see a problem with that. Of course, we’ll have to buy something chocolatey for afters or Sherlock is going to be apocalyptic, since Mum will make him eat all his vegetables.”

“I am certain we can find a suitable offering. In fact, why don’t we begin now, so that we might
enjoy an early meal? Tomorrow, as you know, is a school day.”

“Fuck you. Oops! Sorry, mum.”

“Don’t tease, Mycroft. Greg’s his mother’s son and I know a thing or two about getting my revenge. You’ll be making best friends with your right hand if you don’t keep a watch out for his temper.”

And that was the signal for Mycroft and Lestrade to silently to rise from the table and leave the house as quickly as they could. Which was exactly the plan to begin with. With the boys in tow, it would take them ages to get back here to get the cooking started, so there was no reason to waste time with chit chat. Besides, there’d be plenty of time for that while they were doing the washing up…

“Unacceptable.”

“It is identical to the one you already possess, brother dear.”

“That is why it is unacceptable. The one I already possess is substandard and inefficient.”

John added his forceful nod to the argument and joined Sherlock in an arms-crossed standoff with the older Holmes brother, who was wishing, not for the first time today, that his beloved was present to referee the combat.

“Sherlock, your calculator is state of the art, so I believe you are simply being difficult for the sake of amusement.”

“No. I must have in London the highest quality equipment for the variety of experiments I shall be able to conduct far surpasses what I am able to manage in this science-forsaken corner of the globe.”

“And we’re going to need big closets for all of our disguises, too. There are lots of new disguises we want to try in London, so we need space for them. And a big telly.”

It was villainous of Gregory to plead scholastic responsibilities and return to his mother’s house after work. Perhaps a word should be had with his instructors to impress upon them the need for his husband to be available in the evenings to do his part to shepherd their charges.

“The closets in the London house are most spacious, John, and it is a minor matter to have a television installed in your room.”

“But does John receive a boon and I am denied? That is preferential treatment and I will not let it stand without stating most thoroughly my thoughts on the matter! Prepare for my lecture, beluga.”

“Sherlock… I shall provide you with a new calculator, however there is no reason to purchase one different from the model you already own. That was my only point of contention.”

“You hope to disable me with inferior equipment so I am tied to your apron strings for the eternity of my useless and tortuous existence. I shall not permit you to rip from me the future that is rightfully mine! And the revolution that shall foment when it is learned that my vast intellect has been so heinously subverted shall tear asunder this nation and all for which it stands! Enjoy your imprisonment, Fatcroft, though it shall not be lengthy, for the calls for your execution shall be strident and ceaseless.”
And this was only Tuesday…

“Can I have two?”

“For what possible reason, John, would you need two globes for your London room?”

“Well, Sherlock says that when scientists are put in charge of the world, since he’ll be the most important scientist, he’ll be able to rename everything sensibly and nobody will be able to stop him. That’s going to be one of our London projects and I figured we could just write the new names of the countries and cities on a globe to see how it works. Oh, and redraw all the lines so the country borders aren’t so… fidgety.”

Of course.

“May I suggest, instead, a globe and an atlas, since globes do occupy a substantial amount of floor space?”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll need all my floor space for my big mirror.”

“Big mirror?”

“One of those that goes to the floor like at Grandmama’s. I thought that when we’re in London, there are going to be lots of opportunities to wear my suits and other nice clothes, so I’ll need a big mirror to make sure I’m dressed properly and look smart.”

“Very tidy and forward-thinking of you.”

“Thanks! Oh, maybe I should have two of those, too, so I can see my front and my back at the same time. Put that on the list.”

How could today only be Wednesday? Surely they had vaulted into the new year by now…

“Absolutely not.”

“Your agreement is not germane to the issue.”

“I believe it is, since, in the inconceivable circumstances our bank would issue you cheques and a bank card, I would have to provide you with access to the family accounts. Which shall not happen in this life nor the next, for that matter, until you have reached an age where I am convinced of your ability to reason and properly manage your finances. That, most likely, will be age seventy-five.”

“I demand a private income! How am I to navigate London and conduct my affairs if I present as a pauper?”

Mycroft turned to Lestrade and gave the most potent ‘help me’ gaze he could muster. Fortunately, enough of the boys’ antics had been reported during the week for Lestrade to take pity on his poor, put-upon partner…

“I have an idea. Mycroft gives you an allowance, right?”

“A paltry sum that can scarcely fund a housefly’s breakfast. And I have to share it with John Watson, since his purported allowance reaches not even that pathetic height.”
“Then how about you ask Mycroft, nicely, for an increase? Then you’ll have a little extra to spend and can put some aside for when you go to London and want not to look like a poor person.”

“Hmmm… the idea is not entirely without merit, much to my nearly-lethal surprise.”

“Me too? Do I get an increase, too?”

The slightly hesitant look in John’s eyes made both older boys decide to give the younger pair extra personal attention for awhile. They’d told John, finally, about his aunt moving to Switzerland and, though he took it well and was happy that he would get to stay with Sherlock, it was clear the boy had some issues to work through on the subject of being left behind.

“I am amenable to extending an allowance rise to both of you. Of course, I will expect a properly-prepared portfolio outlining why the increase is needed and your evidence to support the figure for which you are arguing. As soon as that is prepared, we may begin our negotiations.”

The two boys looked at each other and immediately raced off towards Sherlock’s room to start planning.

“A portfolio, love?”

“Practice for the future, my dear, in case they ever decide to seek some form of business loan.”

“For which you’ll also make them present a portfolio, because you’ll be the person they’ll go to for the money.”

“Best to keep good business practices whenever one can. Besides, they shall be engaged in their work for a goodly while, I think…”

“And you’re hoping to take advantage of that, aren’t you?”

“I have been very lonely, Gregory.”

“How lonely?”

“I shall detail my distress in very colorful terms once my body is entwined with yours.”

“Well… can’t miss that, can I?”

“I think not.”

“First one to bed gets to use their mouth any way they want to.”

And, knowing his lover’s competitive instincts, Lestrade grinned as Mycroft sped off before he even finished his sentence. Well, wasn’t that a spectacular defeat for him. What a lucky man he was…

It took two cars to make the trip to London. Not because of the quantity of people, because the only invited female couldn’t get the time off work, but because of the quantity of items that Sherlock and John insisted on bringing to stake their claim on their personal territories. A lorry would have actually been a smart choice, but Mycroft and Lestrade decided the bulk of what they hoped to bring over could wait for another trip and were happy to settle for a few personal items, changes of clothes, books to read and certain supplies that couldn’t be mentioned with certain ears around to hear.

When the lead car carrying people, in addition to cargo, turned onto their street, John’s barely
contained excitement finally broke containment and he began whooping loudly as the car slowed to a stop in front of the house.

“IT’S BRILLIANT!”

“And which is ours, John Watson?”

“Doesn’t matter! ALL OF THEM ARE BRILLIANT!”

Mycroft gave Lestrade’s hand a firm squeeze and committed John’s bright and jubilant face to memory. If he had ever harbored any doubt, the feeling in his heart right now, that of pure and unsullied happiness, drove home that the most important thing in his life was his family and their own happiness.

“I find them all ghastly and pretentious, mirroring, undoubtedly, the personalities of the owners. Well, I shall not bid them good day and that is my final word on the subject.”

“Why aren’t we out of the car, Mycroft? And which house is ours? I bet it’s that one, because it’s the nicest.”

And didn’t John have most *exceptional* taste…

“You are quite correct, John, and if you simply manipulate the handle for the door, you might find yourself out of the car and moving towards your target.”

Which was all the signal John needed to crawl over Sherlock to get to the curbside door and make his way out of the car to run as fast as his short legs could take him towards the front door of the house. Needless to say, Sherlock was hot on his heels, decrying his ill-use and John’s despicable and livestock-like conduct.

“Well, love… we’re here. Me, you, the kids… in *our* house.”

As expected, Mycroft’s face was the most breathtaking thing Lestrade could ever imagine, especially with the tiny glisten of emotion making his eyes shine like jewels.

“I love you, Mycroft. I love you deeply and passionately and there is nobody in the world I would ever want a home and family with except you.”

“Oh… Gregory…”

That was *more* than a little emotion, but Lestrade held his partner gently and let Mycroft compose himself a second before kissing him softly and helping him out of the car to catch up with the boys who were practically tearing through the door like tigers trying to return inside their home after their evening constitutional.

“We are not milk bottles! We should not be made to wait as if we had been left on the stoop alongside a pound of butter!”

“Thank you, brother dear. Our neighbors are now fully aware of your voice and shall not be perturbed when it rings out in the night, mistaking it for that of a banshee come to herald their untimely demise.”

Mycroft unlocked the door, pushed it open and, unsurprisingly, the boys ran through at top speed, leaving behind all thoughts of luggage as they began their inspection of their new home away from home.
“Shall we enjoy a cup of tea, my dear? The boys shall be quite awhile, I suspect.”

“Sounds good. Can we…”

“Yes?”

“Have it in the library?”

“With a fire burning merrily on the hearth?”

“You read my mind.”

“This is our home, Gregory. We may do as we like.”

“That’s true. That’s really true, isn’t it? It’s still bizarre to me, but this is our home.”

It was bizarre to Mycroft, too, because he never believed he would have something like this as his own, a home filled with loving family, but he was not going to, for a single moment, look the proverbial gift horse in the mouth.

“Thus we may have our tea anywhere we like.”

“And walk around in our pants on lazy Sunday mornings.”

“I believe we might make better use of our ‘master of the house’ status than refusing to fully dress in the morning.”

“Ok… then we can walk around naked on lazy Sunday mornings.”

“A superlative example and one I support wholeheartedly.”

“And I, for one, can’t wait to get you naked tonight and make use of that nice, big bed of ours.”

“Something that has occupied a substantial portion of my thinking all week.”

This next kiss made many promises of things to come and each member of the pair decided that having the boys’ rooms on a floor different than theirs was a very good thing. Two floors in between might be even better…

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“And it has been definitely decided?”

“Yes. John will have that room and I shall take this one.”

“Very well. We shall move in your belongings and you may consider the spaces yours to use.”

Mycroft leaned back into Lestrade’s embrace and rested against his spouse’s welcoming chest. The boys had spent an hour exploring, investigating, measuring, debating and arguing and, he felt certain, it was only the rumbling of their stomachs that brought the great territory grab to a halt.

“Now, shall we see what we can secure for our midday meal? Would you prefer to dine here or explore the area to see what it holds for culinary options?”

“I’d like to eat here, Mycroft. That’ll be faster and then Sherlock and I can get our rooms just the way we want them. Then we want to go for a walk and then, maybe do one of Sherlock’s
experiments, then have dinner and a film and take another walk to see what things look like at night, then have a snack and maybe go to bed, but not early because we don’t want to waste any time sleeping that could be used for having fun.”

John’s pride at his speech warmed Mycroft’s heart and he gave the boy a nod in acknowledgement of his sensible itinerary.

“They then Gregory and I will see what we might to do accommodate you. Why don’t you both begin bringing upstairs your things and we shall alert you when food is available.”

John’s ‘ok’ and Sherlock’s ‘I do not do manual labor!’ echoed through the halls, as John grabbed Sherlock’s hand and dragged him out of the room that was now officially Sherlock’s bedroom.

“Well, love… it begins. And I will wager they take over this entire floor before the weekend is over.”

“It is a certainty, but I cannot bring myself to care. Their own domain where they might play and grow…”

“And stay out of our hair?”

“Again, you read my mind. Now, shall we see what might be delivered to satisfy our young overlords?”

“Or what there is to cook.”

“C… cook?”

“Sure! You said there’d be groceries laid in, right? Let’s see what we can make for lunch and save the cost of having something delivered.”

“Us? Cook?”

“It’s alright, Mycroft. I’ll walk you through it. And you’ll look gorgeous in a little apron. Especially on naked Lazy Sundays.”

“Well, that is certainly something to consider for the future.”

“Thought you’d like that. Now, come on. Let’s see if that kitchen of ours is up to the challenge.”

That kitchen of ours… Mycroft adored the delicious tingle that particular phrase inspired in him. He and his husband, in their home, tending their family and being the couple they would forever be since the day they met. Truly this was a glorious day…

“Why are you continuing to trespass in my kingdom? I shall levy a tax that shall make my pittance of an allowance increase seem scarcely a groat in comparison!”

Simply glorious…

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Through his husband’s patient teachings, Mycroft successfully helped cook a meal that even the children consumed, then the day followed much along John’s original plans. Preparing the personal rooms, strolling along the streets and letting the children explore the local park and nearby shops, and then a long evening in front of the fire interrupted only by the delivery of the dinner that he had
convinced his spouse was appropriate after their long and tiring day. Sherlock and John played a game of chess with their new set and he and his husband enjoyed a good book until the novelty of the new surroundings were no longer able to keep the boys from yawning and the tucking in session began, which gave the elder Holmes sibling another surge of emotion that his dearest spouse had to step in to soothe.

“It’s certainly a powerful thing, isn’t it, love? Seeing those two safe and comfortable for a good night’s rest so they can enjoy another day of terror and mayhem tomorrow.”

“I… I confess it is.”

“Then how about a little brandy before bed? You get it poured while I take a quick shower?”

“Shall I join you?”

“Nah, this one is really just for a quick wash. Someone I know kept having a case of the vapors every time there was lifting and furniture moving to do.”

“I shall have the situation investigated and the culprit dealt with most harshly.”

“You do that. I’ll be down in a minute.”

This surge of emotion was not as intense, but more of a blanketing feeling that wrapped around Mycroft like a soft blanket. So utterly domestic… it was everything he had ever hoped for…

“Of course. And, Gregory… I love you.”

“I love you, too. And I’m never going to let you forget it.”

After a quick kiss Lestrade strolled towards the shower and Mycroft watched his broad back and incomparable backside as he walked. Such a magnificent man… and wholly his to love and cherish. Perhaps, one day, the intensity of his feelings for his beloved spouse would mellow, but that was certainly not today. Today… yes, a good brandy was certainly called for, else his love would find himself ravaged before ever his fingers touched the soap…

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“Ah, there you are? Clean and refreshed?”

Mycroft smiled at Lestrade who returned it gladly and accepted the brandy Mycroft held aloft for him to claim.

“Very. Felt good and… that’s a nice shower. The tub is going to be fantastic, too. It’s huge! And the whole room seems designed for lingering, I guess is the best way to say it. Big, comfortable, rich colors… I see a lot of long, shared baths in our future.”

“Heavenly. Simply heavenly. I am delighted you are finding our home a welcoming one.”

“I am. I worried that, even after all we talked about, I wouldn’t be able to feel settled, but I was wrong. Today really helped knock into my head that as long as you’re here, any place we decide to live will be home.”

Lestrade wriggled against the leather as he sat on the sofa next to Mycroft and smiled broadly.

“Look at that fire. We’ve got our own fire and two books to read. Feel like relaxing a little? Maybe mixing relaxing with a little affection now and then?”
“I can think of nothing better. Shall we?”

Mycroft shifted slightly so that Lestrade could move and take position behind him, both bodies reclining on the sofa in the manner they’d fallen into as their natural pattern.

“This is something I’ll never get enough of.”

“I concur. Especially when you wriggle in that particular manner. I suspect you are developing a liking for our sofa.”

“It is the sort a man imagines himself having in his house. Sturdy, big enough to have a nap on…”

Another wriggle and kiss on his neck pleased Mycroft to no end, since said wriggle pressed his husband’s body against his in very enjoyable ways.

“What a joy it would be to share a small nap on chilly winter afternoon.”

“We’ll find a good blanket to keep close by just for that purpose.”

“Agreed. Now, a bit of reading?”

“Got my book?”

Mycroft reached back to hand Lestrade the book he had kept nestled between him and the sofa.

“Great! Just the right number of chapters left to make a good read before bed.”

“I believe I can say the same.”

And with a quick kiss on Mycroft’s neck, Lestrade made a shushing sound, which had the opposite effect and caused his partner to laugh at his foolishness, but both turned to their books and the feel of cozy warmth of the cocoon they had created on the sofa. *Their* sofa… and wasn’t the night more delicious because of that fact…

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“Time for bed?”

Mycroft blinked slowly and let his head clear away the pleasurable haze that had clouded his mind the past few minutes as his husband rubbed his stomach and nuzzled his neck in a very enticing manner. Was there any doubt as to the answer to that question?

“I believe it is. Shall we?”

“We shall.”

It was a terrible effort for Mycroft to leave his husband’s arms, but for the cause of enjoying even more of his love’s warm flesh and romantic attentions, he would rise to the challenge. And, neither was surprised that the race to the bedroom was fast and slightly giggly as they shushed each other not to wake the boys, sleeping a floor above. Then it was a quick undressing… somewhat quick undressing, since it was difficult to undress one’s lover when one was trying to kiss that lover at the same time. By the time they finally fell into bed, there was no question what trajectory their bodies were anticipating the evening to take and both were happily in agreement with their physical forms.

“Is the mattress to your liking, my dear?”
“I could sleep on a board and, as long as you’re with me, it would be to my liking. But, yeah… it’s… wait a moment… it’s just like yours.”

“I had the same model as mine delivered to provide for us that sense of familiarity and ensure a good night’s rest.”

“And because we already know how to roll around on yours without actually rolling off.”

“You are of devious mind, Gregory. I heartily approve.”

“And maybe there’s something else you might approve of.”

“Oh? What would that be?”

“You’ll find out.”

Mycroft started to question, but was taken in a kiss of such fire and need that all thoughts of… thought… went out of his mind and he fell into the depth of his spouse’s love, adoring the way his body’s own fire rose to unquenchable heights from his lover’s touch. His fingers, his lips… roaming over his skin and then it was his own chance to explore his mate’s body, which never failed to delight. So blazingly hot, so musky and masculine, muscles like those of a statue, a bottom that…

“Gregory…”

“Mycroft?”

“Is… what… oh dear…”

Lestrade smiled wickedly and stretched, repositioning with his feet flat on the mattress so his starting-to-shake partner could get a better view of his surprise.

“See something you like?”

Like? An ebony insertion into his Gregory’s body, nestled in skin shining with lubricant... penetrating his lover since…

“You have been harboring… since your shower?”

“Uh huh… laying against you, giving my bum a wriggle to feel that lovely little plug shift inside me… making me desperate for when something else would be inside me… and I can wear it whenever I like. Or whenever you want me to…”

Mycroft moaned softly and reached out to touch what his eyes had been fixed on.

“Go ahead… give it a wiggle. Or a bit of a pull. I’ve been on that sofa all night feeling that inside me, imagining it was you…”

Mycroft fingers stroked the slicked skin around the base, before giving the plug a small turn, drinking in Lestrade’s pleased hum like fine wine. Pulling it out slightly and pushing it back in earned him more than a hum and his spouse’s sounds did as much to stimulate his own body as a hand stroking his stiff and eager erection. Repeating the action a few times had fingers shaking from the sight of his Gregory’s body expanding to accept the thicker parts of the plug and contract to hug the thinner parts and he prayed to whoever could hear him that he didn’t embarrass himself and end their encounter too soon because this was… orgasmic.

“Like that?”
“You… you know I do.”

“Do you… you’re going to fuck me tonight, Mycroft. I’ve been dreaming about that for so long and I am absolutely aching for you be inside me, but… I know how big your eyes get when we’re looking at certain magazines and… look in the nightstand.”

It took Mycroft several seconds to process Lestrade’s words and then it was a mad dive and flail to open the nightstand, which made him groan loudly at what he saw.

“That one’s like the one I have at home. I think my Mycroft likes the idea of toys and would very much like to use some toys on me and see what he could do with them. I did a bit of shopping this week just in case it seemed like things… were going to go a certain way. If you take the plug out, you can put that in and fuck me with it first. Get me nice and open and screaming to have you take me with that beautiful cock of yours…”

Mycroft held his gift in his hands, marveling at the heft and how his trembling fingers had already started to run up and down the shaft.

“Want me to lube it or…”

“I shall do it.”

Lestrade grinned widely. He just knew Mycroft would love a few toys and games…

“Ok.”

“You… you will provide me with something to watch while I tend to the matter.”

And said with that crisp tone that, when he was in the right mood, sent Lestrade’s arousal spiraling nearly out of control. Even if he wasn’t already dying to touch his leaking cock, his hands would have started stroking himself just to satisfy his lover’s wishes. And it wasn’t as if he wasn’t getting his own show watching Mycroft stroke their toy as lovingly and thoroughly as he would the real thing, slicking it well and beginning to breathe heavily like a man who is trying his best to shove down a passion that is trying to claw its way out in a very messy and magnificent fashion.

“I believe this is prepared. Continue with what you are doing, however, I hope you will not deny me the prize of your orgasm until I am ready to receive it.”

“No, I’d never do that. Tonight, I’m all yours and what you want, you get.”

Mycroft struggled to maintain control of himself and simply nodded, before slowly extracting Lestrade’s plug, marveling how the flesh stayed open and inviting. If he wanted, he would only need to stretch his lover a slight bit more and he could sink into that welcoming place to release his desire into his husband’s body. And he would. Just not now. His beloved was right… he wanted to play a little first…

“You will tell me if you experience undue pain, correct?”

“I will, I promise.”

“Good.”

His voice might be calm, however, Mycroft’s hands shook constantly as he pressed the head of their new plaything against his Gregory’s body and began to push it past the mildly-protesting ring of muscle, feeling his own cock twitch sharply from the hissed intake of Lestrade’s breath that rang in
his ears.

“Remember your promise, Gregory.”

Mycroft slowly continued pushing, constantly watching Lestrade’s face for any sign of problem and taking in every signal that his partner was enjoying their play. Of course, constantly was a relative term, since there were the occasional lingering glances on his love’s busy hands and the devastating sight of the toy sliding into his Gregory’s body. Which, when it was fully seated, he began to draw back out, smiling at the needful whimpers falling from his husband’s lips.

“Your body is exquisite, Gregory. It so happily accepts the pleasure I give it and begs me for more. Truly, I could not be more satisfied.”

Especially when he began to rhythmically thrust the toy into his husband and watch him writhe from the attention.

“Continue to be good, Gregory, as I…”

Mycroft angled his motions a bit and grinned evilly at the shout and extended moan that accompanied finding and continuing to find his lover’s special pleasure spot.

“Please, Mycroft… I need…”

“What do you need?”

“I need to come. I didn’t think… it feels so good… please let me…”

“Oh no, it is far too early for that. For instance, I have full faith you will be able to obey even… I have the perfect thing.”

Mycroft repositioned so that he could continue to fuck Lestrade with their plaything, but now he could swat away Lestrade’s hands and replace them with his own mouth, slowly sucking and licking in the way he knew his spouse most enjoyed.

“No! No… I can’t… it feels too good. It feels… I can’t hold out long…”

Hoping he remembered the technique properly from the… educational manual… he had read, Mycroft grasped Lestrade’s cock firmly near the base and began to fellate him rapidly, adoring that his lover’s whimpers merged into a suppressed scream before he cooled his pace and simply lapped gently until his partner’s body calmed.

“See. So very, very good you can be. But, now, you may have some rest. I do not want to see your hands upon you again unless I say it is allowed. Is that understood?”

Lestrade could only nod right now, but he did it quickly and continued to put himself in Mycroft’s talented and loving hands. That bastard knew exactly what would make him wild and had no problem giving it to him. Was anyone else in the world this lucky?

For his part, Mycroft was so over-excited, he felt close to blowing apart like a firecracker. His incomparable Gregory playing him so utterly masterfully. Every action designed to stoke the heat of his desire higher and his spouse knew every bit of it. That blackguard knew and he loved him boundlessly for it…

“Excellent. Now, simply lie there and rest. I shall take a moment to indulge myself.”
Of course, that moment lasted an eternity, as Mycroft used his hand and lips to stimulate his lover’s body, from the tips of his toes to the hard pebbles of his nipples, continuing to use his toy to send Lestrade’s body into a turmoil of pleasure and need, reading his responses and tailoring the speed, depth, angle and pace to keep his lover on the edge of release, but never letting him tip over that edge until Lestrade was begging, pleading, bargaining and nearly weeping to be allowed to come. If he only knew that Mycroft was doing the same to himself… not letting his own overwhelming need be satisfied until he knew that his spouse was truly at the end of his rope and had taken every bit of pleasure this form of lovemaking could give him. His beloved deserved no less…

“So beautiful… you are indescribably beautiful, Gregory and I must sample that beauty to its fullest. Are you ready?”

“Please… don’t make me wait any longer. I’ve wanted you inside me for so long…”

This time, it was Mycroft’s small whimper that sounded in the room, but Lestrade was not able to hear it over the sound of his blood rushing through his veins, his heart beating out of his chest and his nerves thrumming with an electric hum that blanketed out everything but his Mycroft’s clearly spoken words. Everything else was meaningless…

“Then I shall not deny you any longer.”

Mycroft slowly removed the toy and swallowed hard seeing how open and ready was his husband’s body. And sent up another prayer that he could give as satisfying an experience to his spouse as he had been given the first time they did this. Grabbing an extra pillow from the bed, he nudged Lestrade’s hips slightly and shoved the pillow underneath, quickly applied a coat of lubricant to his own very sensitive erection, then knelt between his lover’s thighs and, after a deep breath and a grasping of Lestrade’s hips, began to press into his husband’s body, moving very slowly, not entirely for Lestrade’s comfort, but to keep from coming immediately from the sensations that were rocking his already too-excited form.

“Oh god… Mycroft, please…”

“Yes, my love… my dearest, dearest love…”

Mycroft used all his willpower to begin thrusting and hold back his orgasm, focusing on the man he loved… how he moved, how he smelled, the feel of his body, both inside and out… how he matched the rhythm of his thrusts so that they moved as one…

“So good… wanted this…”

“As did I, Gregory… I want everything with you…”

Moving faster and harder, Mycroft felt tears start to form in his eyes, both from his overpowering need to come and from the love that was filling his heart to the point of bursting. When he knew he couldn’t take any more, he reached out and began stroking Lestrade’s cock, savoring the animal growl that rumbled in his partner’s chest as his body arched even higher off the bed.

“When you are ready, my Gregory. Show me that I have pleased you well.”

It was scarcely three more strokes before Lestrade was crying out and spraying his belly with semen, the sight of which undid Mycroft completely and he gripped Lestrade’s body tightly to begin thrusting wildly, making sounds that were as old time, before feeling his own orgasm crest and his seed spill inside the body of the man to whom he had pledged his heart.

Pulling out of his husband took another monumental act of will and Mycroft would never apologize
for nor forget the sight that greeted him when he did, because the well-used image with which he was presented made his feral side very, very happy. There was no mistaking his man had been properly and thoroughly claimed and his possessive instincts were overjoyed by the fact. Of course, the physical portion of him was now signaling imminent failure and, collapsing onto Lestrade’s chest, Mycroft struggled to catch his breath, helped along by the large, warm hands that ran over his back as if they were feeling his skin for the first time.

“That was… I can’t tell you how good that was, love. I just can’t. There’s no way I can find the right words… how can you be so good? How can you… that was incredible…”

Mycroft lifted his head and budged upwards to take his lover in a kiss that was sweeter than any nectar from any flower ever grown.

“And I can do no better. You know my desires better than even do I and what you do with them… I am in awe of you, my beloved. Simply in awe… and I love you madly.”

“I love you, too. I love you, Mycroft Holmes, and am ecstatic to share this big, wonderful bed and big, wonderful house with you. Along with that big, wonderful shower…”

“Ah, yes. Though not this instant, correct?”

“No… I’m perfectly content to be where I am right now. Cozy, warm, man I love in my arms… there’s nothing better than that.”

Though Lestrade knew Mycroft’s fastidiousness would get them out of bed sooner than later and that was alright, too. They’d come back to his bed, with fresh, cool sheets, and continue to celebrate the amazing thing they’d found – each other. Just as they would every night they were together. Whether in this house or another, it didn’t matter. All that counted was that his Mycroft was at his side and he’d fight the Devil to make sure that was always the case…

“Gregory?”

“Yeah?”

“Might we… perhaps it is presumptuous to ask…”

“We can get more toys and leave them at your house, love. Don’t you worry about that.”

“Excellent. And… if I might ask…”

“I can give them a try on you, too.”

Mycroft nestled deeper into Lestrade’s embrace and began to count his blessings. Perhaps he was the one who should invest in new and powerful calculator because the tally of those blessings was going to be mountainously high…
“Oh look, it’s the loveliest mum in the land.”

“Fuck off, Will.”

“And he’s still got his figure, lucky bird.”

“You can have part of that fucking off, Georgie, and shove it where it will do the most good.”

Lestrade grinned at his friends and dropped into a seat around their table at the pub.

“At least my kids get good marks in school and one of them is even polite and well-mannered.”

“John’s a good boy, that’s true. Even says sorry when he kicks you during a match.”

Lestrade really grinned now and didn’t fail to notice the other lads did, too. Not for every chance they got to enjoy a little football, but for a number of them, John came along to watch and get in a bit of playing time for himself. And, what really made Lestrade proud, was that John was meeting some of the other kids, little brothers and cousins, and forming connections with them. Maybe it wasn’t more than having a chat while the bigger boys played, but it was something and a good chance for John to have a small holiday from Sherlock’s particular brand of interaction. And with Christmas looming large, the new football John was going to get for his very own might make its way into some matches between the toddlers that could run alongside the bruising play of the older idiots.

“I’m blessed, I really am.”

“Blessed enough to be going back to London this weekend?”

All those bastardy grinning faces… luckily, the answer to that would crush their spirits to dust.

“No, can’t this weekend. I actually have Saturday off of work, but I promised Sherlock and John I’d spend the day with them. And you know we have that composition to write for English and that’s going to take me a century or two, even without those two evil things biting my ankles the entire time.”

Something that nearly drove Mycroft to tears since he’d been in London for two days now and tried his best to wheedle and whine a visit out of his lonely partner. As it was, he’d taken advantage of the holiday house more often than was smart and had to put his nose back into the books and arse in the shop for extra hours to make up for the times he’d snuck off to London for a weekend.

Which were glorious. Mycroft had been right about it not being as terrifying as he’d expected and the neighbors, the few he’d actually seen, didn’t pelt him with dung when he was out for a stroll or, to Mycroft’s horror, a quick jog to keep the extra food and drinks indulgences from adding to his waistline and truly making him useless for a good match now and then. A lot of curiosity and maybe a few looks here and there that weren’t the kindest, but it was hard to say for certain what they weren’t being kind about. He and Mycroft were, by far, the youngest people he had seen in that area and old duffers and dufferesses weren’t always known for pleasant thoughts towards youths.

Not that any of it mattered, though… he and Mycroft had a home. Maybe it really wouldn’t be their permanent home for a long time, but he was already starting to think of it that way. They were getting their bedroom the way they liked it, the kitchen organized the way that worked best for them… the goblins had staked their claim and, surprisingly, were content with their territory and
weren’t seeking to expand their borders onto the other floors of the house. It was home. His Mycroft, the kids and him. God… he really was a mum, wasn’t he…

“We’re still good for tomorrow night, though, right Greg?”

“Sure! Once I finish work, I’m going straight to Mycroft’s and they know I’ll have you raggedy lot in for a visit. I think the staff likes it, actually… gives them something to do besides hide from Sherlock.”

And Mycroft was nearly delirious every time he could offer his house and amenities to said raggedy lot. His poor love… he hadn’t met one person yet who Mycroft called a friend, so it wasn’t surprising that he was more than happy to host the people who had stood up and claimed him as a part of the pack. A peripheral part, which was very much to his Mycroft’s liking, but a part, nonetheless. So, a film or game of cards, some good beer and a meal… same thing he did at his mates’ houses, just with more expensive furniture. And it helped cement Mycroft as someone whose nose wasn’t up in the air and who appreciated that being a good person wasn’t an issue of money.

“Good. And we can see if it’s really the Christmas paradise you’ve been describing, you lying sod.”

Oh, that wasn’t the half of it. Apparently, the staff always did the house up for Christmas, but, this year, Mycroft had lit a fire under their toes and it was positively indescribable. It was exactly the sort of thing you pictured in your head that the wealthy did at Christmas, but knew, at heart, you were probably being poor and stupid because nobody would go to that much trouble just to decorate for the season. Dear John had started crying when he came home from school and saw the entrance decorated floor to ceiling with lights and garlands and flowers and the tree. The massive, glorious tree. There were a couple of others in the house, too, that were smaller and had ornaments that were more personal in nature, but the one that greeted visitors had overwhelmed the young boy and Lestrade was certain the staff had worked like dogs to get that part of the house done just to give John a surprise when he came home.

“It’s like something from a film, but nicer. I think Mycroft asked that it be especially special this year, though, what with Sherlock and John having their first Christmas together. His mum peeked in for a few days and didn’t have it all torn down, so I guess she liked it, too, and for her to like something, it has to be something a magazine would want to photograph and publish.”

And more bastardly grinning faces… they were going to drain the house dry of festive food and beverages and try to make off with whatever sparkly things they thought they might be able to wrap and give to their mums or girlfriends to put on their tree or on the mantle. Cheap, cheap bastards… luckily, the staff had already given him some of the sparkliest to take home and wrap up to give to his mum so those idiots couldn’t grab all the good stuff.

“That’s what I like to hear… get to spend my Friday night in luxury. Think the little monkeys will wear cute little uniforms and serve us our beer?”

“Rule #1, George, you stupid prick – never put anything Sherlock hands you into your mouth.”

“I can see why that would be a good rule.”

“Anyone who’s met Sherlock would agree.”

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“We had a Christmas party!”
Greg laughed ruffled John’s hair as he helped the boy into his pyjamas, Sherlock’s already-pyjamaed form scowling from the foot of John’s bed.

“We were overrun by livestock and I am very certain I have contracted cowpox as a result of their proximity.”

“Well, we can say we had guests, but I’m not sure my mates putting their big feet all over the rugs and eating Mycroft out of house and home really qualifies as a party. It’s a fairly normal Friday night, actually.”

“Well, I say it was a party. We even sang!”

Also, fairly normal for a night out where there was lots of beer and there wasn’t any school the next morning.

“That we did. Sherlock… you enjoy the singing as much as John?”

“As greatly as I do the wailing of cats in heat.”

“Thought you would. And you got to show all the lads your laboratory.”

“At least the swine kept their snouts to themselves and didn’t sully my equipment with mud and nasal discharge.”

“They’re polite that way.”

As if the little bastard hadn’t puffed up so hugely with pride showing off his laboratory and experiments that he looked like one of those fish that blew up like a balloon when they were startled.

“And all the compliments you got on your rooms…”

“The natural admiration of lesser beings when presented with the spoils of their superiors.”

“Yeah, that’s it. Now, are you two ready for bed?”

“No, because Sherlock and I have things to do, which we can do in our pyjamas, so it’s not a problem that we’re already in them.”

Oh no…

“I think you’re already dreaming, John, because there’s nothing you two need to do at this time of night. And I did let you stay up quite late already since my friends were here and I knew you wouldn’t want to be left out. So why don’t you…”

“Silence, mendicant. You have no need to know of or interfere with John and my machinations, so take yourself away and tend to your long overdue mooning over the eye-searing photograph of my whale-like brother that currently resides on the nightstand beside your bed.”

“No, I think I want to hear a little more about these machinations of yours. What’s going on and it better not involve a trip to hospital.”

“That is not entirely out of the question, as John will undoubtedly eat a quantity of baked goods to distend his stomach to the point of bursting. Since he is nearly as stupidly besotted with Mycroft as are you, it is not entirely surprising that he would seek to emulate the elephant, however, I shall not stand in the shrapnel zone if he subsequently explodes before the arrival of the ambulance.”
Ok, a sneak down to the kitchens for a stolen snack. At least that was age-appropriate.

“I see. Planning a little raid on the larder, are we?”

“Fool.”

Hmmm… usually a few more insults followed that one, so there was definitely something troubling in the wind.

“John, what is Sherlock not telling me?”

“Lots, probably.”

Fair enough.

“Look, will you two just tell me what’s going on? If it’s nothing that’ll make my hair fall out, I’ll leave you alone to it. If it will make my hair fall out, I’ll try to find some alternative that won’t make me bald.”

Sherlock and John shared a look and a shoulder shrug, then a dramatic put-upon sigh before John began to speak.

“We’re working on a Christmas gift.”

That was not what he was expecting. Not that it was a bad thing…

“A Christmas gift?”

John and Sherlock nodded, but it was clear that the rest of the story was going to have to be dragged out of them by a couple of yoked oxen.

“For who?”

“That is none of your concern, lackey. Now, we have divulged our intentions, and you have not begun to shed like a mange-afflicted canine, so begone and let us not be repulsed by your visage until morning.”

“Oh, no… come on, lads. Maybe I can help.”

Another sharing of looks, shrugs and sighs and John was pulling out a largish photograph from his nightstand.

“This is one of them.”

John handed over the photo, which was one of the two boys at Grandmama’s house. In suits.

“We thought that Sherlock and I could make a frame for this, since Grandmama likes how we look in suits and that could be her gift from the two of us. We still have to decide what we want to make it out of and how to decorate it, so we were going to think about that tonight.”

Each boy would earn a massive hug if it wouldn’t kill Sherlock, leaving John to do all the work alone. That was a very smart idea and one that Grandmama would adore. Probably sit right where everyone could see it, from princes to the man who delivered the milk.

“That’s really good thinking. No matter what you make, you know it won’t be something she’ll already have, so it’ll be a brilliant gift. Nicely done. But, I don’t understand the baked goods bit.”
“That’s for our second gift.”

John drew in a very deep breath for this one and Lestrade noted that Sherlock moved a little closer to stand next to his friend.

“My mum used to bake a cake that was amazing and I used to help her make it. It was a long time ago, though, and I don’t remember exactly what went in it or how to do it, so Sherlock and I were going to experiment until we got it right, so we could make one for Mrs. Lestrade and give her the recipe. That’s a good gift, right?”

The two boys looked so anxious that Lestrade’s heart swelled to the point of choking him where he stood.

“That’s a fantastic gift. Anything you make yourself is always wonderful and if it has special meaning, that’s even better. Mum will be thrilled, and so will Grandmama. So, let me guess… you were hoping to use the kitchen while Cook was asleep.”

“If we do not, I have no doubt John and my efforts would be immeasurably curtailed by her naysaying and demands for cleanliness.”

And they wanted to do it without help from someone who probably could replicate the recipe with her eyes closed, meaning they didn’t actually do it themselves.

“Oh, I think I understand. How about this…”

Sleep was for the weak, anyway.

“… since most of the things in the kitchen are out of your reach anyway and someone will need to have their hands free to call the fire service, if necessary, I’ll come with you and read that book I found in your library while you work. Sound alright?”

A protracted, whispered conversation ensued, peppered with furtive looks, until the boys began to drag off their pyjamas.

“We agree. However, we do not agree to remain imprisoned in these useless garments.”

“Fine, you can put on regular clothes instead.”

“And you will function as our menial, obeying our commands to the letter.”

“No, but if you need something and ask nicely, I’ll likely do it.”

“I fail to see the connection between my cordiality and you performing your duty as per your station in life.”

“I’ll explain it to you. In detail. With rope, tape and a gag to make certain you fully understand my point.”

“You can’t do that, Greg, since Sherlock needs to help me and he can’t do that when he’s tied to a chair like a hostage.”

“Not even for an hour or two?”

“Well, ok. Maybe while the cake is baking.”

“I shall remember this tandem of treason and enact my revenge when it is least expected, yet
“Highly efficient of you, Sherlock. Your brother would be very impressed.”

And, after the anticipated shudder of disgust, Lestrade oversaw the redressing and the slow and stealthy skulking back down the stairs towards the kitchen, making only a slight detour when the continued shrieking about how unstealthy were his and John’s footsteps woke half the staff, including the cook, to reassure concerned ears that matters were in hand. The fact that they laughed at him was not, unfortunately, unexpected.

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“I have washerwoman’s hands! And have likely become afflicted with some form of dermatitis from using soap fit for only menials and prisoners.”

Not surprising after having to wash the dishes from a night’s worth of baking experiments, but Lestrade decided to keep that to himself. As it was, the boys actually worked more than they played or argued and, though they weren’t quite satisfied that their recipe was a duplicate of John’s mum’s, they declared their progress satisfactory. And warranted a reaping of a reward King Midas would find extravagant.

“That’s just toughened them up for your shopping trip. Think of all the packages you can carry now without worrying about getting a blister.”

“I think we should buy a little cart, so we can shop and put the packages in the cart and pull it along behind us.”

“It is the shop boy’s role, John Watson, to serve as pack mule. What we can purchase is saddlebags for him to wear into which we can put our purchases so they do not burden our hands while we continue to shop. In fact, we might hire him out to other shoppers and fill our pockets from his toil while we enjoy an afternoon refreshment. He is not a recalcitrant beast, so I anticipate no legal action due to misbehavior or a besmirching of clothing with his foul wastes.”

“Greg likes to work hard, too, so he’ll probably enjoy it.”

“I am here, you know, you little bastards.”

“Sure! It’s not polite to talk about people behind their backs.”

John could win prizes for his manners.

“Very courteous of you. Now, have a shower and we’ll take the car out for some driving practice until the shops open. Remember, though… everyone has schoolwork to do, so we will be back early.”

Well, didn’t he feel like a villain for throwing an enormous raincloud into the boys’ faces. No, sorry, he meant to say didn’t he not feel like a villain for throwing an enormous raincloud into the boys’ faces. Someone had to make certain they didn’t fail their classes or else they’d be home all day every day and Mycroft would go dribblingly insane.

“Entirely unfair!”

“Yeah, not fair!”

“It’s very fair and you both know it. If you get your schoolwork done early enough, you can
have the whole evening free, as well as all of tomorrow.”

Which meant he would have the whole evening and tomorrow to continue on with his own schoolwork while they kept themselves busy with other things. Setting study rules had worked fairly well, so far, and declaring himself off limits because of school reasons was mostly respected by the goblin children. After the one very rough patch he’d suffered, there hadn’t been any more poor test scores or missed assignments, something Mycroft took pains to ask about on a regular basis. Maybe there had been a few close calls here and there, but nothing that he felt compelled to share with his partner, who would have worried needlessly and that wasn’t right or fair to the man he loved.

“Oh, fine. Come on, Sherlock. Greg’s got that look in his eye, the one when he thinks he’s being an adult and you know how stubborn he gets when that happens.”

“Verily he becomes as obstinate as a miser when asked to donate a farthing to an orphanage.”

The boys trudged off as if they were being condemned to said orphanage and Lestrade took the opportunity to make certain the kitchen was as clean as they found it and start for himself a very strong cup of coffee to throw down his throat before taking a moment to give his own body a quick cleansing. The baking escapades had gotten rather… physical… at times and there was batter turning to concrete in places that neither batter nor concrete had any place being.

Then he would be shepherding the boys through driving lessons, shopping for Sherlock’s experiments and some new socks for John, his current supply having again been depleted by Sherlock’s research projects and, if he could afford it, buying a particular handbag that mum looked at every time she went to the shops. Christmas was coming and she certainly deserved something nice for what she’d had to put up with this year. Two bits of which were, apparently, now using a rug to slide down the stairs in the entranceway, rather than taking their showers. This was going to be a busy day… luckily, the kitchen had lots and lots of coffee…

There was no amount of coffee to give him the energy for this…

“How many times do I have to say no?”

“You may say it as often as you wish. That, in no manner, affects my inclination to pay heed to it.”

“I think it’s a good idea, Greg.”

Of course John would. What boy wouldn’t?

“You two are not getting a motorcycle.”

“Why not? There, advertised for a pittance, is a specimen that is not entirely uncomely and boasts a most critical feature.”

“It’s got a sidecar!”

Yes… someone’s old banger that probably belonged to their dad that they were hoping to get off their hands. The motorcycle, not their dad.

“First, it takes skill and practice to manage one of those, even without the sidecar and you still need a license to ride that on the roads, if that’s what you’re hoping for.”
Oh, if pouts were coffee he’d be getting a boost right now that would have him dancing.

“But… it’s cheap!”

Very. And John was still too young to understand that cheap was something you usually paid dearly for…

“That’s because they want to see the end of it as fast as possible, most likely because it’s a complete mess. Always worry when something’s being sold too cheap, John. There’s a reason for it and that reason is why you don’t want to buy it.”

“If that is the only substantial barrier to our purchasing the vehicle, then I shall assume you will acquiesce to purchasing for us one of higher price and, therefore, better quality. Come John, let us look through your periodical for another that is more suited to the peasant’s sensibilities.”

John began to flip through the newspaper section he’d found abandoned on a bench that listed goods for sale, only to find it plucked from his fingers by Lestrade.

“That is not my only objection and you’re not getting a motorcycle. And Mycroft will support me 100% on that decision and, since he’s the one who would have to pay for it, I’d say you need put it out of your mind. Now, are we done?”

Coffee… really, really in need of coffee to replenish his force field to withstand the scowls of agitated goblin babies shaking their bone, stone and hair-based rattles at him.

“No… despite your dedication to eliminating all sources of entertainment from our shopping experience, I refuse to cut short our excursion. I still require oil of cloves, magnesium salt, borax, acetone, several forearm’s lengths of copper pipe and twenty rubber balls.”

“Any chance they have all that at one shop?”

“Buffoon.”

“Didn’t think so. Ok, a trip to the car to stow this load of cargo and on we go.”

“You know, Greg… if we had a motorcycle with a sidecar, the sidecar could hold all the bags and packages.”

Which, since he was carrying most of them right now, didn’t actually sound like the world’s worst idea, but that might have been the coffee withdrawal talking. Just another hour or so… never let it be said that Greg Lestrade couldn’t manage a sleepless night and then a day of work. That spelled bad things for his future sex life and that was certainly not an encouraging thought…

Mycroft was going to kill him. He couldn’t manage a sleepless night and then a day of hard work! Their all-night sexathons were in serious jeopardy…

“Are you falling asleep? This will stand as a very black mark on your record. I shall instruct Mycroft to order another barrel of black ink and begin a new ledger.”

“I’m not sleeping, you little bastard. I’m just resting my eyes while you two decide what brand of foot powder you want to buy.”

“Brand matters not. The percentage of talc is the critical attribute.”
“Sorry, Sherlock. My mistake. Now, if you don’t mind, I’m going to get back to checking my eyelids for holes.”

“Just admit it, Greg. You’re like an old person who needs an afternoon nap. Or a baby. Which is odd, if you think about it. Anyway, it looks like either Sherlock or me is going to have to drive home, so you might as well give us the keys before you fall asleep on them and we can’t dig them out of your pocket.”

And that signaled the official end of the shopping trip.

“You’re right, John. So, I’m going to start walking towards the till and if you’re there with your foot powder when I arrive, I’ll pay for it and then we’ll start for home. If I get there first then I’m just going to turn towards the door and start for home anyway. Bye.”

Sherlock and John ran into each other trying to grab their prize and barely made it to the front before Lestrade, who had been dragging his feet like the zombie he desperately felt like. Foot powder bought, all three began walking to the car, though they didn’t make it very far since both boys tended towards distraction and found a lot of it on a crisp December day when half the town was out, the decorations were up and all the merchants were doing their best to showcase their wares to entice gift-needing shoppers. And… he couldn’t bear to pry them away from their fun. Sherlock had probably never gotten to enjoy a full day of shopping here in town when it was wearing its Christmas best, and John surely hadn’t. And they were actually behaving themselves, so he needed to stop whinging about being tired and let them enjoy themselves. Besides, that nice little café a few doors along made truly delicious caffeine-laden beverages and sold them at very reasonable prices.

Which he would enjoy just as soon as he figured out why John was slowly walking backwards away from Sherlock, who was examining a display of what appeared to be perfumes in a shop window.

“Can I help you, John?”

“Yeah…”

“Want to tell me with what?”

“Yeah…”

This was going well.

“So…”

“It’s…”

Very, very well.

“Go ahead.”

“Ok… I… I don’t know what to… I don’t really have much…”

“Can you end one sentence for me, lad?”

“Yeah… Greg… I don’t know what to get Sherlock or Mycroft for Christmas and I don’t have any money to buy things anyway. Mrs. Lestrade and Grandmama were easy to think of something for because mums and grans like handmade things and Sherlock helped decide on just the right idea, but…”
Lestrade looked down at the small boy who was obviously distressed and wondered if the day in town had actually been that good of an idea. But, on the other hand, what he knew about, he could work to fix…

“Well, it sounds like we both have the same problem.”

John’s startled gasp made the Lestrade smile and ruffle John’s hair through his knitted hat.

“Well?”

“Sure! I know what to get Mum, but I looked at the price and I’ll have to save in other areas if I want to afford it. But… that’s all. It’s going to be a lean year for me, John, so don’t feel bad if it’s one for you, too. But, you have two great ideas so far, for Mum and Grandmama, and I bet you can come up with other ones for Mycroft and Sherlock that will be just as wonderful and not cost very much, if any, money at all. I’ll help you think, if you like, and work on things with you so they can stay secret until Christmas.”

“You will?”

“Absolutely. We go off for an afternoon now and then for a little football, so we can do the same, except go to my house for some thinking or a bit of handiwork. How does that sound?”

The big hug he received gave Lestrade the impression John liked the idea.

“Thanks, Greg. And I’ll ask Mycroft for help with your gift. He looooves you, so I bet he has lots of ideas.”

John’s typical sing-song romance voice devolved into giggles as the boy sped back towards Sherlock who was just now noticing he’d been talking to thin air. Poor John… but if there was one thing that was a Lestrade family specialty it was lean Christmases and one positive note about that was it made you creative, something John already showed a flair for in the area of gift giving. And you learned all sorts of skills so you could make things for the ones you loved or earn the money to buy what you needed. Not that John would probably ever really need to worry about it really, what with Mycroft on hand to give him an allowance rise or a special Christmas gifts fund, but… Mycroft wasn’t here right now, was he? Besides… all boys should learn how to wield a needle and thread or hammer a few bits of wood. And John was just the type of boy to find all of that a world of fun…

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“Mycroft Holmes.”

“I know and doesn’t it make my heart beat faster to hear it.”

His husband!

“Gregory, my dear. How delighted I am that you have phoned. Or am I delighted? Have the children committed an atrocity of historical proportions or is this simply an opportunity for convivial conversation?”

“The latter, thank you very much. Sherlock and John are working on their school assignments, so I have a somewhat quiet moment to sit and chat.”

A placid and productive home… his incomparable partner was ever a parent of the most astounding skill.
“Excellent. And may I ask how you spent the day before binding the children’s pencils to their hands and laying a lash to their backs?”

“Oh, we had a lovely time. Haven’t seen a wink of sleep yet since we were awake all night for the boys to work on Christmas gifts, if you can believe it.”

No, belief was not quickly rising to the fore.

“Sherlock actually worked to craft a holiday gift? My ears did not misperceive you, did they?”

“Oh no, he and John both worked like little demons.”

Lestrade regaled Mycroft with the details of their overnight baking session and the elder Holmes had to hope that his misty eyed-ness was not perceptible over the phone. It was becoming a more common thing to encounter helpful and thoughtful Sherlock, but more common compared to never was still a rare event. And to imagine his spouse attentively tending to the children’s efforts to see them reach their goal… oh, why did he not have cameras installed in the house to monitor these things? To be a part of them, if only as a passive, yet thoroughly entranced, bystander.

“I am overwhelmed, Gregory, I truly am. Such well-considered and meaningful gifts they have devised. The Christmas spirit has surely infused them and I could not be happier. I admit that Sherlock and I generally buy our own gifts and present them to each other to wrap and tag, pantomiming surprise when we later open them, but I had hoped deep within my heart that this year would mark the start of a new tradition. It seems steps are solidly being taken in that direction.”

“Oh, this will be a Christmas to remember, I have no doubt. You should have seen them today, caught up in all the hustle and bustle of shopping, though it was all for Sherlock’s experiments. And… I think I might have an idea for their gifts, if you want to hear it.”

“I certainly do. I have some devoted some thought to the issue, but hoped to broach a more comprehensive discussion with you on the topic upon my return.”

“Great minds think alike! They should have little things to unwrap and find in their stockings, but, and this might sound loony at first, but… how about bicycles?”

Now, his ears were definitely deceiving him. There was no universe in which his beloved could believe that to be a prudent decision.

“Are you serious?”

“Yeah, I know, it sounds bizarre for Sherlock, but I think those two are anxious for more independence and they’re not infants, despite the way they act most of the time. They tried to convince me into letting them have a motorcycle today, for example.”

“And you gently dashed their spirits, I hope?”

“Very gentle dashing, but… it’s not that far to the village if you’ve got transportation besides your feet. And mum’s house is reasonably close to yours if you can count on something wheeled to get you where you’re going. I’d not have that great a problem letting them ride to mum’s or to see me at the shop, provided I drilled bicycle safety into their thick heads and made sure they actually knew how to ride the bloody things. Besides, you have that airstrip, which we never got to use for our race… that would be brilliant for two creative boys to have their own races and get a bit of exercise at the same time. Sherlock can design the course and all the insane things he wants to experiment on and then… well, they can both have fun for an afternoon.”
Apparently his Gregory was some form of divine being for, now, *this* universe seemed to believe that the lunacy actually might *be* a prudent decision.

“Mycroft? You’ve gone very quiet.”

“Oh… I do apologize, my dear. I was simply reflecting on the efficacy of your suggestion.”

“You think it’s a bad idea, don’t you.”

“No… not at this point, necessarily. When first you broached it, yes, I questioned somewhat your sanity, however, your argument is a compelling one. I worry that Sherlock will be most difficult to convince, though, he has surprised me greatly of late. And if it enhances his independence to conduct investigations or access his supply of biscuits and chocolate… he might find the idea appealing. The competition aspect will also pique his interest, I suspect.”

“Nothing fancy, either. Just two solid bicycles that can get them around a bit if I’m at the shop. The roads in this area are fairly good and lots of people bicycle on them, so cars are always on the lookout and I don’t ever hear of collisions and accidents.”

Sherlock’s abhorrence of physical exertion was legendary, but, he *had* shown greater willingness to participate now that John was in his life and he had a loving parent to steward him through the introductory stages. And dear John… he would be ecstatic to receive his own transport. Such an active and vital child, much like Gregory, and that was certainly something worth supporting and cultivating in any manner possible.

“I find myself becoming swayed to your point of view, my love, and have little to offer as opposition beyond what has already been stated. We shall commence examining appropriate models at the earliest opportunity. And I have other gift items to discuss that I feel you will agree are appropriate for the children. Has Grandmama issued any edicts as to our attendance for Christmas festivities?”

“Not yet, but it’ll be soon, I’m sure. We only have a couple of weeks left, but I wouldn’t be surprised if she talked to Mum first to work something out. We’ll just get the schedule and be told what to wear and what will happen if we’re late.”

“Yes, you are quite right. Grandmama is most used to doing as she pleases, but *has* shown proper respect for your mother’s maternal rights and privileges since our union began.”

“And don’t think Mum hasn’t noticed and appreciated it. So, when are you coming home?”

Coming home… no matter how often his beloved said it, the words were like a river of gold flowing into his ears…

“My work should be accomplished by Monday at the latest but…”

“Yes?”

“I was considering, if you approve, taking another day to do some research towards several papers I must write for my courses. The libraries here shall greatly facilitate that objective, however, I do not wish to disappoint you with an extended stay.”

“Take the extra day, Mycroft. Take a couple if you need them. I know you’re having to juggle more than a man should have to and you might as well take advantage of the situation while you’re there. We’re not going to wither away and die because of an extra few of days, though I will miss you terribly. But, I miss you terribly if you’re gone *one* day, so there’s nothing different there.”
Did anyone in creation have as doting and understanding a spouse as did he? No, that was a statistical impossibility…

“You are certain you shall not be cross?”

“I am completely sure. And… oh no.”

“A crash, scream or explosion?”

“More like a heavy thud, but it was heavier than if either of them dropped dead, so that’s good news. I’ll talk to you tomorrow?”

“Nothing shall please me more. Goodbye, Gregory. I love you.”

“And I love you, Mycroft. Take care of yourself, ok?”

Mycroft set down the phone and was suddenly very pleased his spouse could not see how poorly he had been following that directive. This particular incident was unexpectedly grueling and he had eaten little and slept less since he arrived. Perhaps his beloved husband’s offer of an additional day in the city might prove useful. One day to conduct his personal matters and one day to sleep, eat and make himself presentable to return home and not arouse upsetting suspicions. There was no reason Gregory and the children should be subject needlessly to his hardships and an extra day of separation might be the kinder path to tread.

Besides, this was London and there were few cities in the world more wonderful for Christmas shopping… and he had such a great deal to do for his family. This Christmas would be a blessed one… simply a blessed one. The first that he and his husband would share and that required a celebration of no small proportions. Fortunately, treating his Gregory as he deserved was a celebration in and of itself…
Chapter Notes

I'm breaking up the Christmas experience into 2 pieces. This one runs us up to Christmas Eve day and the next will take up from there. Since I have the bits sorted in my head, expect part II sooner than later...

“Gregory!”

“Nope, I’m not moving on this, love.”

“But… why?”

“Because you’ll go off and spend a bloody fortune and there’s no reason to. I’m happy to just enjoy Christmas with you without opening a heap of expensive presents.”

“I believe your Christmas gifts are the most deserving of reasons.”

“And I love you for it, but I’m not going to open package after package of King Midas’s treasure, while you open yours and find… not that.”

“You know well that I shall adore whatever you choose to gift me.”

“Yes, but I still don’t want you spending a lot of money on my presents when you spend enough on the day-to-day things. You bought me a car, for god’s sake!”

“But, it’s Christmas!”

Lestrade looked at his lover, who was positively quivering with desire to shower him with gifts and reminded himself that Mycroft just didn’t think the way he did and that was not a bad thing.

“How about this… one.”

“Pardon?”

“One. You can buy me one gift that’s… Midas-y, but anything else has to be simpler. Or nothing! It’s a tight year for me, Mycroft, and I’ll tell you right now that I don’t have much to spend on presents for anyone, so don’t expect the same from me because I just can’t. But, I’ll happily open a beautiful box with something wonderful from you. Can we agree on that?”

“Only one? For all that you do to maintain our family, you should see some appropriate reward, especially at this time, the season for celebration, family and thankfulness.”

His Mycroft was not going down without a fight. Which was why he was the most successful man alive.

“One. As it is, the boys’ gifts are coming from both of us and you’re paying for most of that, right?”

“A pittance.”
Holmes’s pouts were the most adorable things Lestrade had ever seen.

“Pittance it may be, but it’s money all the same. Now, how about we make some plans for those pittance presents while we have the time and Mum is entertaining the goblins.”

By royal command, too. Apparently, John’s mum wasn’t the only one who liked having tots in the kitchen for baking time and today was a full day of laying in nibbles for all the guests that would be popping in over the next week, to share the Christmas spirit. When he was small, his hands had been the one steadying bowls and stirring like he was trying to conjure up a whirlwind, but now it was time for a new generation to take over and they were more than happy to do so. John was so eager, he had practically leapt out of his skin at the order and Sherlock made a very loud announcement that without his supervision, some form of national catastrophe would occur, which would render baked goods as extinct as the dodo, which was very much the equivalent of John’s reaction.

Mycroft narrowed his eyes, but decided to let the issue be tabled for the moment. His Gregory would likely not be convinced away from his argument and it would only provoke a more heated discussion if he were to push forward with his carefully-scripted and unequivocally-logical treatise on the topic. Besides, his husband had made a concession, had he not? And concessions could always be brokered into larger and larger things…

“A splendid idea. We have a tantalizing assortment of gifts already, but I would like to find several more.”

“You’re simply dying to see them open their presents on Christmas, aren’t you?”

Dying? What an underwhelming word for his desire. A Christmas where there was laughter and joy, the children’s eyes wide with wonder at the spectacle of their gifts and stockings… perhaps his Gregory had chosen the right word. He felt right now that if he was not there to share it, he would surely die and painfully, at that.

“It will be a majestic experience, I have no doubt. They, themselves, are most anxious, as well.”

“Climbing the walls, you mean. And searching every nook and cranny of this house to find where they’re hidden.”

“Which is why they are not in this house.”

“You’re a brilliant man, Mr. Holmes.”

Not even Sherlock would think to look in the tiny attic in his house. Even if he did, he wouldn’t start that search until this massive place had been completely torn apart and that would take ages…

“Then how about this? Let’s go and do a little shopping of our own, together. Spend some time browsing about and see what else we can find to wrap to give those two miseries an extra smile on Christmas. How does that sound?”

“Divine. Simply divine. I had hoped that you and I would be able to share something of the sort, but with the calls upon my time… I despaired that simply would not be the case.”

And it nearly wasn’t. With Christmas sitting on their doorstep, Mycroft had been away for most of the run up to it and there was a scare that he wouldn’t be here at all. Luckily, a scare was all it was, but it did make for a close call and a short window to enjoy the holiday season as a couple.

“I’ll get my coat.”
Mycroft smiled widely and allowed himself a moment of extreme sentiment that required a hurried wiping of his eyes. Normally, at this time, the house would be lovely, Sherlock would be anticipatory of the gifts he would receive, but there would be no real fire in the eagerness or brilliance to the decorations. This year… his Gregory was truly an angel on Earth. He had believed that at first sight and that belief had never wavered. How profoundly had their lives been impacted… to the point of adding another family member to the fold! This was really the only Christmas gift he required, the only one that mattered. Everything he had ever truly wanted was in his hands and that was a blessing beyond his wildest dreams.

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“Steady on, love.”

This however, was certainly not a blessing. Whereas he was groomed to successfully handle any and all situations, regardless of severity, he was simply not bred to mill amongst the teeming masses for shopping and his husband had absolutely no sympathy for his plight. The villain actually found it amusing and would have suffered intolerably for his laughter if he wasn’t an unparalleled vision of loveliness when laughter lit upon his exquisitely-formed lips.

“Must everything be… touched?”

“If people want to know what it feels like, how heavy it is, if it’s strong or… bendy, then yes.”

“You are aware that hands are highly effective vectors of bacteria, are you not? And sniffing! The rubbing on the face and sniffing… it is as if they are hounds coming across the discarded skin of a snared rabbit!”

“You don’t have any problem with my hands running all over you, or giving you a long sniff in certain places, so you might want to reconsider that argument.”

“I am immune to your personal pathogens. We are quite cordial, in fact, and nod politely at each other when I am sufficiently fortunate to feel your body beneath my fingers.”

“Glad my germs are so polite. How about this… you see something you want to examine more closely, just tell me and I’ll brave the germs and pick it up. I’ll even report on anything you’d like me to test. I’ll be John to your Sherlock for the day.”

“What a ghastly mental image.”

“Would you rather fondle the toys and clothes yourself?”

“If you will, John, kindly manipulate that blue scarf and rate it on softness, durability and heat retention.”

“Sure, Sherlock. With that dark, swirly hair of yours, a jaunty blue scarf will look very nice.”

“Thank you, John. As always, you are correct that I am a scandalously attractive individual.”

Lestrade leaned in and kissed his grinning partner, then made a grand show of running the scarf through this hands, with all appropriate hmmmm’s and I see’s.

“It’s nice. I think this would be a good choice, actually, because it’s long enough that, if we need to, we can make a noose and hang the little bastard from a tree when he’s being a nuisance.”

“That would be a daily occurrence and Sherlock surely does not deserve that much attention, in
addition to that which we already bestow. But it does appear highly suitable, so let us add that to our wares.”

“And a hat for John. His met a sad fate and the poor thing could use something to keep that little head of his warm.”

“Dare I ask the nature of said sad fate?”

“They had a nature day at school and roamed around some farmland. He tried to feed it to a sheep because Sherlock wanted to know if a sheep would eat wool as a ‘generally benign and ineffective cannibal.’ It didn’t, if you’re interested, but it did chew on it a little and between that and the sheep slobber… we gave it a nice burial in the bin. For his part, John wanted to know if the sheep would poop it out whole or if it’d be in bits, so he’s not entirely blameless, either.”

“Our dear John shall receive a very handsome new hat as part of his Christmas trove, albeit with a reminder that one’s clothing should not be fed to livestock.”

“That’s fair. So, one scarf and one hat, which is about the absolute limit of clothing a boy should see for Christmas and now it’s off for fun things. Though I’m not sure how many more things they need. You must have bought out every store in London!” Well, not every store, for the children would certainly have no use for maternity clothes or plumbing supplies, but he had spent a very productive day securing an admirable selection of gifts for the two curious, energetic boys. And his husband was generously liberal with his definition of ‘educational’ so the quantity of the gifts did not meet with the dreaded spousal thrift-based disapproval.

“The opportunity presented itself and I would have been a fool to let it slip through my fingers. Though, it would have been far more pleasurable an experience had you been there to share it with me.”

This time it was Mycroft who leaned in for a kiss and let it linger just long enough to give his dearest husband a taste of things to come. He had been in London, away from his family, for far too long and that was time he planned to recoup in full. Perhaps Mother Lestrade would be willing to allow the boys to remain overnight to provide her son and son-in-law an unencumbered night of loving debauchery.

“That would have been amazing, I admit. Maybe, next year, time won’t be in such short supply and we can find a day to simply enjoy a bit of wandering and shopping in London. After all, we have the house for it. I didn’t even really think about decorating it, but next year… we’ll put up something to make it look festive. I may be working as much as I am now, but I shouldn’t have to worry about writing essays on my days off, so a trip to London, just to have a nice time, is easily in order.”

Their home would overflow with the holiday spirit, if Mycroft had any say in the matter. Time had been in short supply for any substantial appreciation of their new home or the amenities and opportunities it offered, but there was a lifetime of Christmases ahead, most when they would actually live in their home and could return to it each night after a long day of service.

“That shall be set squarely as a priority. Now, shall we make our purchases and move on? It is becoming quite brisk outside and I, for one, would relish a hot beverage before we turn to another round of shopping.”

“Sounds good. I wouldn’t mind a blistering coffee right now.”
And by right now, Lestrade meant six years ago, because he had been awake very late helping the boys finish work on their gifts and Mycroft came home *punishingly* early in the morning. They’d let Sherlock and John sleep, but he decided sleep was a poor greeting for his lonely lover. Next time, his lonely lover could read a fucking book until *he* actually got more than two hours of bedtime. Between the boys and Mycroft, he was starting to forget what sleep actually was…

Along that line, Lestrade made quick work of hustling them through getting the scarf and replacement hat and out of the shop to find the strongest coffee a man could endure, along with a respectable cup of tea for his partner. What a glorious day! The season really brought out the best in people, the weather was perfect and his Mycroft was right there on his arm, looking sexy and gorgeous and happy. This was what life was about. And, from the huge smile on Mycroft’s face, he seemed to think so, too.

“Such a delightful day… I admit that Sherlock and I have had little desire to interact with the goings-on outside our grounds, but, I find that, now, with my incomparable escort, this has become something I have come to greatly enjoy, as has my brother.”

“It’s good you do, too. Have you noticed how many people today have given us a nod hello or stopped to chat? It’s not just because they know me, either. They’ve gotten to know you a little and like what they’ve learned. I’m asked about how you are more often that I suspect you’d imagine and there’s more to it than them being polite. And *everyone* is getting to know who Sherlock and John are. They’re not exactly subtle when they’re out planning world domination.”

“My mind simply boggles at the thought. Both that the community has found me acceptable to include in their midst and that Sherlock and John have so firmly pressed their stamp upon their environs.”

“You’re brilliant, funny, confident and completely, heart-crushingly gorgeous, so it’s not surprising people want you around, love.”

Mycroft hoped his pleased grin was not growing to an unseemly size, but it was so hard not to preen when his beloved flattered him so ebulliently.

“How satisfyingly you feed my ego, Gregory dear.”

“It’s gorgeous, too. And, now that the trolls are going to be more mobile, I suspect your presence is going to be even more noticeable out and about. Want me to point out the police station and introduce you around so when you have to collect those two from jail, it’ll be an easy thing?”

Mycroft snorted a laugh, then giggled harder at his own foolishness. Finally, the outside world would have a taste of what he had been enduring since Sherlock was born.

“That might be wise. And I shall delight in making regular and substantial contributions to any police support funds, so that the numbers of those occasions shall be, perhaps, diminished. A firm word and firmer kick home should suffice for most of the children’s indiscretions. They might use the funds to purchase sturdier shoes specifically for the occasion.”

“I’ll suggest that. I’ll go ahead and put up Sherlock and John’s pictures at the station too, so the lads can get used to what they look like before the real hurricane hits.”

“Which shall be Christmas morning.”

Something that had Mycroft nearly singing with joy. The idea of Sherlock on a bicycle had seemed so ludicrous, at first, but the more he reflected upon it and observed the boys’ play, the better an idea
it seemed, if only to support his brother’s thirst for knowledge and discovery. The exercise and, hopefully, burning of excess energy was simply a fortuitous side benefit.

“And I think we picked the perfect ones for them, too.”

Another thing that had Mycroft’s inner voice raised in song. He had bowed to his Gregory’s sensibilities in the selection process in trade for paying for the bicycles, so his dearest spouse could secure the practical, solid machines he wanted without having to further drain the Gregory Lestrade financial portfolio, which was securely guarded, much to his dismay, in a sock at the back of the Gregory Lestrade vault, behind several old pairs of shoes and a set of trousers that had lost both knees to overly-vigorous football matches. Successful relationships were built upon compromise and they were learning very well how to make effective compromises…

“I concur. I believe that the inevitable hardships their valiant vehicles will endure shall be weathered handily by such sturdy frames.”

“And I’m going to tell Sherlock right from the beginning that if he takes his apart, he’d better be able to put it back together again, because that’s the only one he’s getting.”

“I rather doubt that Sherlock will disassemble his bicycle, my dear.”

“You’re right. I’m going to tell John right from the beginning that if he lets Sherlock take apart his bicycle, he’d better be able to put it back together again.”

“A far more realistic goal. Though, I suspect John shall guard his steed quite closely from my brother’s grasping hands, given the freedom and expansion of play opportunities it offers.”

“Want me to teach him a thing or two about fighting?”

“Our John is quite capable of delivering a mighty blow when the situation calls for such, I do believe.”

“That he is. Lost my head there for a moment.”

“Fret not, my dear. It is a symptom of the season, nothing more.”

Lestrade hugged Mycroft close to him and steered him directly to their beverages of choice. There just wasn’t any question about it - this was what he wanted to be doing fifty years from now. Walking arm in arm, laughing about silly things… his Mycroft would be the cutest old man. Probably use a terribly posh cane, even if he didn’t need one, and be ready to knock the head of any young idiot who was giving him a problem. Then they’d go home and he would show his cute old Mycroft just how hot his cane-wielding self was. Fifty years of sex with his Mycroft… life was definitely good, Christmas cheer or not…”

Few good pints with his mates before everyone was sucked into the last-minute holiday preparations – done. Obligatory round of visits with mum to give Christmas greetings to everyone who had been at their house doing the same the past few days or would in the last remaining few – done. Supervising Sherlock and John while they put back everything in every closet of the house after a final, frantic search for their Christmas gifts – very done. Ready to go to Grandmama’s for a Christmas gathering of friends and family, like her cocktail party – done and waiting for Mycroft to set down the phone and get his lovely arse into the car. Then come back, sleep like a dead man, and make ready for their own Christmas celebration and, finally, mum and Grandmama invading the house so the boys could have a true Christmas morning at home – most certainly yes. Deep breath
and anticipate that being done. No… not done. That was going to be far too much fun to think
about it ending, though it would likely leave him desperately trying to remember what it meant to
have an ounce of energy in his blood…

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“My tie!”

John’s distraught wail was only the most recent in a string of distraught wails from seeing the status
of his laid-out suit. The suit Sherlock had reached first and put to what he considered far better use.

“I now have data on the effects of a variety of household cleaning products on the structural
integrity and color retention of silk. You may thank me now for allowing you to contribute in such a
tangible and significant manner to the progress of science.”

“What am I supposed to do now? Go to the party naked?”

John threw himself face first on his bed and Greg sat down next to him, gently rubbing his back.

“Grandmama has plenty of ties, lad. And suits, too, since… Sherlock, is there any part of John’s
suit that you didn’t sacrifice to science?”

“I believe his left sock remains intact, but I do have an experiment on tensile strength for which it
is well-suited.”

He knew he shouldn’t leave the boys alone even for a minute, but it had been a hellacious day and
an hour’s nap before the party had seemed a good thing at the time. Apparently, his brain had
abandoned him in his greatest hour of need, the bastard.

“Since we don’t have the time I would really need to give you the kick in the arse you deserve
for being the worst sort of troll, Sherlock, consider yourself lucky and march your evil self to the
bathroom and get your face scrubbed clean. I’ll help John find another suit and, I swear to god, if
you do anything to it, every single present you’re expecting is going into the fire.”

“You would not dare! Grandmama despises wastefulness and she would see you clapped in
irons!”

“Grandmama despises wastefulness so if she finds out what you did to John’s suit, she’ll make
certain you don’t sit down for a week.”

“We are, it seems, at an impasse.”

“Scrub.”

Lestrade pointed at the bathroom door, accompanied by Sherlock’s trumpeted snort, but the boy
marched away, snatching John’s last unmolested sock in a final act of rebellion.

“Alright, John, let’s find you something to wear. What were you even thinking leaving your suit
unprotected with Sherlock in the vicinity? His war against formal wear hasn’t called a ceasefire, you
know.”

“I had to pee.”

“That must have been a long pee.”

“Well, then I got thirsty, so I went to find some juice. They were taking out some of the food for
the party, so I got to try a little. I think I lost track of time.”

“Still have room for more?”

“Yes! There’s always room for more food and the better the food, the more room I seem to have. Do you think Grandmama is going to be mad I’m not wearing the suit she picked out?”

“Considering she knows how likely it is that Sherlock would get hold of it and make it into rags, I don’t think so.”

John looked up from the bed and Lestrade nodded encouragingly, prompting the young boy to hop up and heave a big sigh.

“Then I want to wear a suit that’s nicer than Sherlock’s so he looks like the poor people he’s always insulting.”

Going straight for subtle revenge. Mycroft was going to be so proud. Fingers crossed that Mycroft actually arrived on time to give John his due congratulations, though. His partner’s lovely arse hadn’t made it to the car because his lickable, though all-business, ear couldn’t be pulled from the phone, but he’d been promised an appearance later once this latest bit of work was over. He was going to hold his lover to that promise, too, and there would be hell to pay if it was broken. Since the boys’ lunacy had been increasing exponentially with the oncoming holiday, weathering the car ride and the few hours of free time before the party had been brutal. Sherlock’s shoes hadn’t even made it to Grandmama’s since they were now lying on the roadside after being hurled out the window to test their flight efficiency and he’d needed a brandy too badly to ask the driver to stop so they could go and hunt for the aerodynamic failures.

And, did his own darling mother offer to lend a hand with any of the aforementioned lunacy? No. Not one bloody finger. Swanning about like Lady Bountiful with Grandmama, talking about… things… and generally being uncharitable, which was a sin at Christmas. Oh yes, Mycroft had better get his shapely, lovely arse here very soon and take point as party host or there would be the full seven circles of hell to pay because his first priority of the night was a drink and the ability to drink it in peace. Several drinks, maybe. Or more than several… it was a party, after all…

“Who stole my drink?”

“To which are you referring, my dear? My last observation credited you with two, from which you seemed to be alternating quaffs in some formula for intoxication known only to you.”

“Oh yeah… I forgot about the whisky that nice…”

“Duke.”

“That nice duke handed me. Wasn’t bad! Bit of a heavy taste, but good for slow sipping on a cold night. Went well with that wine I had, which was very light and sort of freshy, so it all balanced out.”

Mycroft laughed and felt not a bit of guilt for the rather draconian tactics he had taken to see an end to his unexpected business in order to take his place at his husband’s side for the party. Dear Gregory deserved a night where he might simply enjoy the revelry and the… warming… effects of fine libations. The children were miserably hard to control at his point, yet his spouse had soldiered on with utmost strength and perseverance; a small cocktail or six was certainly his due. And, of course, his betrothed was positively radiant when he was tipsy…
“A connoisseur would envy your sensitive palate and discriminating taste. And, how marvelously you mingle even with the most troublesome of guests.”

“I made it very clear that nobody was allowed to shag me at the last party, so they know to keep their hands to themselves, this time, lecherous bastards. And bastardesses.”

Not actually that to which Mycroft was referring, however, it was undoubtedly a welcome highlight of the night.

“Truly you are a man of character.”

“Unlike Mum! Look at her… positively shameless. Though she has a grand time with it, I have to admit.”

Another warm giggle erupted and Mycroft wrapped a comforting arm around Lestrade’s waist. Oh yes, his mother-in-law was certainly enjoying herself, yet had each and every prospective suitor held tightly in her grip, hurling them to the floor if they dared crossed the line into disrespect. Truly, she had been educational to observe.

“Mother Lestrade is a formidable woman and that is a highly attractive attribute to many in attendance. It is good that she reap some small reward for her prowess and the fawning attentions of her legion of male admirers does the trick nicely.”

“Shameless. I tell you what though… she has another kid, she can forget having me mind the little stoat while she and her fawner go off dancing or something.”

“Gregory! Such churlishness.”

“Fine, I’ll mind my little stepstoat, but they’re going to have to be in the same playpen as Sherlock and John so I hope its got decent survival skills.”

“Highly magnanimous of you. Though if her current prospect is the contest winner, she would have a bounty of servants to direct to mind your weasel-like sibling.”

“Another Duke?”

“Earl, actually, but from a very wealthy family. So is the more age-appropriate colonel who is waiting to pounce as soon as your mother finds this current game tiresome and seeks fresher and more vital prey.”

“My mum’s a huntress. She’d like that... I should have bought her one of those leather bikini outfits the jungle women wear in the films as a Christmas gift.”

“I suspect the sound of John’s apoplexy would create a rift in time and space that would pull us all into the cold oblivion of nothingness.”

“That might ruin Christmas.”

“It is a concern.”

Mycroft handed his slightly frazzled spouse what remained of his own drink and motioned over a server for a fresh round. This was a fabulous night! Gaiety and merriment all around and…

“John is once again stuck in the chimney in the Yellow Room. He is also, once again, naked. I disavow any and all knowledge of his existence and leave it to you and your concubine to extract his
sooty nudity and make him presentable for the remainder of the party.”

Lestrade reached over and downed Mycroft’s newly-acquired drink in one swallow, before squaring his shoulders and giving his hands a good clap and rub together.

“I’m ready. Let’s find that filthy little nudist and give him a good dunking in Grandmama’s big fountain.”

“It is even provided with a heater to forestall freezing in frigid weather, so John might enjoy some chance of avoiding hypothermia.”

“There we go! Sherlock, watch Mum and make sure she doesn’t become the next Earl of Diamond Mine or Colonel Bulging Moneybags.”

“I shall not be the monitor of her hedonism! The wantonness of her gyrations is making it nigh on impossible to hold down the substandard victuals we have been offered as refreshments and I certainly did not anticipate my evening culminating with a lethal bout of projectile vomiting.”

“Hey! Mum’s a great dancer. Taught me everything I know.”

“Do you deny the wantonness?”

“Uh… no. No, the wantonness is definitely wanton.”

“My point is proved. Pray you are not gifted with a newborn sibling as a New Year’s offering.”

“See! Even Sherlock’s worried about the stoat!”

Mycroft took Lestrade’s hand and patted it sympathetically, while he led him away to participate in the extrication of John from his smoky prison. His love was so… agreeable … right now that he would certainly be amenable to performing the physical aspects of the process without assistance. There was really no reason that both of them should be painted in soot like a chimney sweep, now was there? Efficiency was a thing to prize, even in the most harrowing of circumstances…

“Hmmm… this is nice.”

Lestrade stretched in their traditional bed in Grandmama’s house and pulled Mycroft closer to him.

“And you are titilatingly boneless, my dear. You enjoyed yourself quite a bit tonight, I suspect.”

“It was fantastic! A lot better than for the first party because I was nervous as cow near a butcher’s shop and, of course, you were with me, which made it all the better.”

“And how many can boast a mid-party shower to invigorate one for the second half of the festivities?”

“Nice and warm, too. That would also have been better if you’d been there with me, but someone had to keep an eye on the Christmas goblins so I didn’t need a second one before the night was over.”

Though it was a near thing as Sherlock decided the discussion surrounding Grandmama’s fountain merited his scientific exploration as he was determined to document any microfauna communities living in the water. It had taken an explicit directive to the house staff to forcibly block the exits if either boy tried to escape to collect Sherlock’s demanded water samples to keep the boys
successfully corralled, though there were a few close calls and one rather memorable flying tackle by one of the younger footmen.

“You may have a second tomorrow morning, if you desire, and I will gladly share it with you. We should make an early start for home, however, as we have a great deal to oversee for our own holiday gathering.”

“Party!”

Mycroft happily enjoyed his husband’s excited wriggling and mourned its loss when Lestrade settled back down to simply grin like a Cheshire cat.

“By the invitation acceptances, I can assure you, my dear, that nearly the entirety of your comrades and their families shall be in attendance, along with the additional guests your mother deemed it socially vital to invite.”

“Those would be her own friends, who have a thousand questions about us and make her tell stories about Sherlock and John over and over again. They’re also furiously curious about your house, because they’ve heard the tales from the rescue party and want a piece of that fantasy. And we won’t have to worry about John becoming another lump of coal because, frankly, nobody will care if he toddles about with smudges on his face. Or arse. Just one more dirty child like the ones they probably cleaned up at the last second to send to a relative for the evening.”

Not that his beloved had been so confident when the suggestion of their own Christmas party had been broached. Rather like an ostrich, he had hidden his head in the sand for awhile and could only be coaxed out with the promise of a relaxed and non-formal atmosphere. Apparently his self-assurance for their impromptu child-rescue soiree did not extend to their first planned, large-scale party as a couple.

“Excellent. Then there shall be no impediment to our enjoyment of the festivities.”

“I’m sure Sherlock will try, but at least we can send him to his lab to work on his science if he gets cheeky or starts pickpocketing again. He get anything good tonight?”

“A few bits of jewelry, a selection of very nice pens and a most elegant woman’s hat pin. The latter is a most impressive feat, I do admit.”

“All back to the proper owner?”

“I believe so. If not, the recipients were happy with their new possessions and remained mum on the subject.”

“Good lad. He tries anything like that with my lot, all he’ll get for his troubles are a few stray coins and sweets wrappers, but I suppose it’s the exercise that counts and not the prize.”

“Oddly, I believe he would agree, though his concurrence would be shrouded by an impenetrable veneer of derision and condescension.”

“That’s alright. And when his scorn and derision are spraying all over the party guests, my mates will probably be so drunk they won’t understand a word he’s saying, especially if he’s talking fast like he does when he really gets up a head of steam.”

“All, then, should be well. Might I tempt you now into obtaining some rest?”

This wriggle was also an excited one, but for an entirely different reason than the first.
“How about I tempt you into something other than rest for an hour or so?”

Well, if the offer was being made…

“I am not opposed to that idea. Do work your wickedly wiles upon me and lead me down the most sensual path of temptation.”

Lestrade rolled on top of Mycroft and kissed him deeply. Those beautiful lips… as magical speaking as they were kissing. And farther south of those lips was something else that was equally beautiful, and waking up nicely from the attention. Maybe an hour was a poor estimate for savoring his temptation victory. Best keep an open schedule and let nature take its course. A few times, at least…

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“The stench of the stockyard is sapping my soul!”

Screeched from the marble floor of the entranceway, where Sherlock’s incapacitated body lay anything but quietly.

“Everyone had a shower before they arrived, you little bastard. I made sure that we started late enough for everyone to have time to get ready after work.”

“Work… how common a concept.”

“Yeah, well, no work equals no rent or food, something you’ll learn when Mycroft finally cuts you loose into the world to sink or swim on your own.”

“Pfft… as if the gargantublob would do such a thing. It is only through my reflected brilliance that he is noticed at all in this life.”

“And you’re not living with me if that happens. I’m not going to have a mouthy, evil, snappy, yappy dog shedding on the sofa, using all the hot water and giving the postman a fright.”

“My hair follicles are robust and tightly adhered to my head! There is no alopecia in Mummy’s genetic line, so I shall always possess a copious volume of hair, unlike Mycroft, who already shows signs of thinning and must sweep the floor after he uses even the broadest-toothed of combs.”

“Fine. You’ll probably be taking a piss on the sofa anyway out of spite, snappy yappy puppy that you are, so that’s one less worry for me. Not that it’s really much a worry, actually, because, as stated, you are not living with me.”

“You cannot stop me. I shall claim squatter’s rights and be as immovable as an infinitely-immense inertial mass.”

The infinitely-immense inertial mass apparently didn’t apply now, as Lestrade grabbed Sherlock by the ankle and dragged him towards the rooms where the party was getting underway, stopping only when Sherlock’s kicking made it hard to keep a grip.

“I am not some form of early mammal for you to drag to your cave, you ridiculous Neanderthal!”

“Then get on your feet, don’t talk about livestock, and start being a good host.”

“I shall agree to one. You may choose.”

Lestrade decided that a prone Sherlock was fine with him and continued dragging until Sherlock’s
fear of being perceived as anything but supremely… supreme… was in serious jeopardy and reared back his foot to begin the process of standing.

“That was disgracefully unchivalrous.”

“Sorry, ma’am. Hope your petticoats weren’t damaged.”

“Grub eater. You will immediately obtain for me a drink to soothe my temper or the consequences shall be dire.”

“Juice, water or milk?”

“Insult me not with your toddler’s beverages! Get thee to the wine cellar and choose something appropriate.”

Maybe the flick of the wrist was a *tad* too much, Sherlock pondered, as he was shoved into the crowd of guests with his jacket pulled up and over his head. This was John’s fault, disloyal cur that he was. Undoubtedly, he was wagging his tail and barking happily for the serfs’ entertainment, reaping his much-desired pats on the head and pronouncements of ‘good boy.’

“What did you say to Greg, Sherlock?”

The puppy appears.

“Only the truth, as always. However, also as always, he responded in a fashion that further exposes his nearly bankrupt vault of intellectual capital.”

John pulled Sherlock’s jacket back into place and handed him the juice Mycroft said to bring over to help divert the oncoming firestorm.

“If you’d just come downstairs when it time to say hello to people, Greg wouldn’t have had to go and get you and you wouldn’t have had to see him expose himself.”

No, the obvious retort was simply too easy to make for anything like a satisfactory jest.

“My experiment required the full of my attention.”

“You have chicken legs soaking in treacle. I don’t think that needs much watching.”

“The rate of osmosis must be monitored carefully, lest all of my efforts be for naught.”

“And, before you ask, I’m not going to taste your treacly legs or see how easily they chew.”

Drat. The disloyalty was at a record high this evening.

“We shall have words about this, John Watson.”

“When *don’t* we have words? Come on… Mycroft says we should at least say hello to the people we recognize and wish them Happy Christmas. After that, we can just concentrate on the food or see if Greg’s friends want to play cards or something.”

“Gambling… that is not an entirely ludicrous idea. The lummockes will certainly be unable to defend themselves against my mental dexterity with mathematics and probability and I shall quickly make their pockets as empty as their skulls.”

“Wrong. You’re going to be the one with empty pockets. In fact, I’m going to win the pockets
and your trousers to go along with them, too!”

“You shall rue your arrogance and do not believe for a moment that I shall show pity when you are utterly destroyed by my unquestionable superiority.”

“No pockets and no trousers… and I’m going to see how many people I can get to play with us so everyone will get to see you sitting there in your pants with a big frown on your face.”

“An audience we shall have, for I relish the thought of your ignominious defeat having a multitude of witnesses to bear testimony to my greatness.”

Both boys nodded and turned attention towards the holiday revelers mentally marking likely prey for their gambling joust. Fortunately for them, there were quite a number of prospective participants though, unfortunately for the boys’ hoped-for financial windfall, all were experienced with card-playing evenings with younger siblings where crisps and biscuits were the stakes and bank robberies were more common than in the American old west…

“Your stomach hurts…”

Mycroft hmmm’d commiseratively and rubbed the groaning John’s tummy, while Lestrade let an equally groany Sherlock lay across his lap like a long and stretched-out cat.

“And was a victor determined for your competition?”

“No. After awhile, everyone stopped caring and we just ate crisps and biscuits and party nibbles as fast as we won them, so there wasn’t anything left to count when the game was over.”

“Well, if it’s any consolation, my mates said you both played like champions. Could go to any of those casinos in Monte Carlo and take everybody’s money.”

“And our guests were very much taken by your comportment during the party. Very gracious and welcoming. Well done, John.”

Sherlock lacked even the motivation to complain, so settled for a finger gesture he’d learned during the evening, which was quickly quashed by Lestrade before Mycroft saw it and went volcanic. Christmas wasn’t the time for volcanoes. Too bloody hot for these nice cold nights.

“Thanks! It was a great party, Mycroft. Everyone had a fun time and the house is so beautiful… I don’t think anyone stole anything, either, which I know Sherlock was worrying about.”

“I suppose even the vilest of pilferers can see their villainy moderated by the social mythos of the Christmas spirit.”

“Thank you, brother dear. Your input is noted and duly discarded.”

At least this response was a rude noise and Lestrade didn’t have to test his reflexes a second time.

“Now, do you think you two can make it up to bed? It’s late you’ve had a very busy day…”

“Are you attempting to be amusing, lackey?”

“Apparently not. Mycroft, can you manage your bloated little misery up the stairs?”

“I believe that even with the extra bulk of a bakery’s worth of biscuits, a dozen bags of crisps
and several trays of fine hors d’oeuvres, he remains in a weight range that my arms can port.”

“Alright then. Sherlock, prepare for liftoff.”

Before Sherlock could either prepare or protest, Lestrade swept him up and got to his feet and started the march up the stairs.

“I shall endeavor to be gentle in deference to your agitated stomach, John.”

“Thanks, Mycroft. I’d hate to vomit on you and ruin your nice shirt. And the rug. The wall’s pretty close, too.”

“Your thoughtfulness is, as always, much appreciated.”

“Success?”

“Sherlock’s in bed and has a book in his hands. I put it at even odds he’s in John’s room before he reads five pages, but they don’t have school in the morning, so I say let them have their fun. How about you?”

“John was very amenable to being undressed, redressed, carried to bed, having his pillows plumped, provided a glass of water, seeing his blankets adjusted and nighttime reading material selected. I find myself quite worn out from the effort.”

“Then come here and let me take care of that.”

Mycroft smiled and crawled on the bed, emitting a contented sigh when Lestrade motioned him to lay on his stomach, which left him in the perfect position for the massage that his lover was preparing to give him. And his Gregory had the most talented hands for so very many activities…

“Little bit of stiffness here, and I’m not talking about what you’re laying on, either.”

Unrepentant seducer… everyone in the world should be so lucky.

“I am highly confident that your touch shall soothe away any pesky, lingering tightness.”

Of course, settling oneself to straddle a very appreciative bottom was simply going to increase the tightness and stiffness in a region other than the shoulders and neck, however, complaint would certainly not be made about this particular technique.

“I’m going to try. Can’t have you anything but relaxed and comfortable, now can I? Long hard evening of being the perfect host to a very pleased group of guests. Fucking glorious, you were. Absolutely in charge and lord of the manor, but made everyone feel like you were pleased they came. Simply amazing… you are one very amazing man, Mycroft Holmes, and it is my honor and privilege to do this…”

Lestrade kneaded hard on the spot he knew from experience kicked the head off of Mycroft’s muscle tension and grinned widely at his partner’s long, deep moan of relief.

“My love for you knows no bounds, my dear.”

“And I promise that even when I’m old and arthritic, I’ll still give you a massage after a hard day. May need my spectacles to actually find your shoulders so I’m not rubbing your legs by mistake, but you’ll have a nice rub down either way.”
“Such a rosy picture you paint and I would see it framed and hung where all could see how greatly I treasure that vision of our future.”

“Two old naked gents looking down at visitors from above the mantle? Really, that might put them off their tea.”

“Oh, I was not certain you were referring to a more form of erotic massage. I do see your point, however, I suspect that no matter the age, your unclothed form would inspire the most bawdy of daydreams in any who might be sufficiently fortunate to gaze upon it.”

“I do plan on staying fit so I can still show you a good time, even if I’ve got old man’s hair and dodgy knees.”

“Our intimate life shall be a model for all pensioners and members of the silver-haired gardening set.”

“Good to be known for something important. Of course, that means a lot of practice on our part. Professionals and inspirations have to get lots of practice to stay on top of their game.”

“Your assessment as to the likelihood of child-based interruptions?”

“Less than fifteen percent. I have a suspicion that Sherlock will bring his book into John’s room and they’re going to still be in there tomorrow morning, passed out on John’s bed with their books still in their hands.”

“I find those odds quite acceptable.”

“Then you just lay there and let me see you tended to properly.”

“Now, who is being the lord of the manor?”

“Me, definitely. Have a problem with that?”

A problem with being lifted to heights of pleasure that could not be spied with the most monstrous of astronomical telescopes?

“No, none at all.”

“Good, because I have a rather powerful urge to see my Mycroft hard and leaking for a very long time tonight.”

Something that was already starting to occur and Mycroft knew his lover was very well aware of the fact, the devilish incubus.

“I shall endeavor to provide you the fullest satisfaction.”

“Oh, that’s something I never worry about. Now, you just relax and let your pre-fiancé take care of you.”

And, with a cleansing, anticipatory breath, Mycroft put himself at Lestrade’s disposal and gave his muscles permission to enjoy their massage to the fullest. This was going to be an eternally-protracted night, in all likelihood, and they should get some rest while they could…

“Jam!”
John dived towards the breakfast table and gave the jam pot a kiss before sitting down in front of his plate, which was already provided with two pieces of toast to keep him occupied while everyone else got situated and the remainder of breakfast was readied.

“Very good. Now, we find ourselves in what, I believe, is termed the ‘home stretch’ for Christmas and I think it prudent to verify our preparedness for the occasion.”

“Only you, Bloatcroft, could make Christmas sound like a siege that we must endure like peasants huddling behind fortress walls.”

Given that Sherlock was involved, the analogy was in no manner inapt, in Mycroft’s no-so-humble opinion.

“In that the traditions and expectations of the season are looming around us like benevolent specters, moving closer with each second that ticks by, I see much to compare between the two situations.”

“If this is an example of the quality of my Christmas morning, then assume I shall take the appropriate number of sleeping tablets to sleep through the dreary disaster and not wake for a fortnight.”

“That means I get Sherlock’s presents, right?”

John’s eyes lit up so brightly that Sherlock gasped in fear that the bright, shining eyes and even brighter, shining smile would cast an unbreakable spell upon his brother that would lose him forever the tribute that was hidden somewhere, rather well, he must admit, within these bleak and tedious walls.

“Though the peasant might grasp and grovel for a few extra morsels of kibble in his Christmas stocking, I had not thought you would sink so low, dust mite. I am appalled. Thoroughly and unwaveringly appalled.”

“I’m afraid, John, that after this conversation, Sherlock will most likely provide his stocking and your bedroom door with some form of booby trap that will severely compromise your enjoyment of the day. I believe that your own selection of gifts shall have to suffice, I’m afraid.”

“That’s alright, Mycroft. I’m sure I’ll have plenty of fun things to open and I won’t need his boring presents. Father Christmas has probably been collecting the most boring and stupid things all year to give to Sherlock for being naughty and I’m going to laugh when he finds shriveled, moldy oranges and some rocks painted brown in his stocking.”

Sherlock’s counterstrike of stealing the jam and swallowing it down was not as vengeful as he had hoped as the sugary mass didn’t want to choke down and he had to sit there, rolling it around in his mouth to break up the gel with what was certainly not a steely and wrathful presentation.

“SPEAKING OF stockings… John, you have your new one, right? It’s still in one piece?”

Something John had needed a small bit of quiet time after he received. That had been one of the things Mycroft had found in London and it matched well with the ones Mycroft and Sherlock owned. Once Mycroft had presented it, Lestrade decided to take Sherlock away for some time in his lab while his partner and John had a private moment together, one from which Mycroft had emerged with some very moist eyes and the most heart-lifting of smiles.

“It is! Sherlock measured them to make sure his was the largest, but I think his was because it’s been stretched with presents before while mine is new. I suspect mine will be stretched fairly heavily
on Christmas morning so he’ll have to find something else to complain about.”

Mycroft grinned at Lestrade who was helping Sherlock sip some water to help force down his gag of jam and delighted in the grin he received in return. They had taken great pains to ensure both the boys would have nicely stretched stockings to empty, even if the contents was heavy in the range of new decks of cards, small field notebooks or bags of sweets. The larger items would be under the tree, but what boy didn’t want to find bulging stockings hanging by the fire when they ran down the stairs on Christmas morning?

“Well, I have no doubt that the morning shall be an invigorating one, regardless of the status of our property acquisitions. Along those lines... both Grandmama and Mother Lestrade have mandated we attend church, so do factor that into your plans for tomorrow.”

Three pairs of eyes stared at Mycroft, with one becoming thunderous, especially with John’s gleeful ‘hurray!’ ringing around the table.

“There’ll be singing, won’t there, Mycroft?”

“I suspect so, John. It is a traditional thing they do, if I remember properly. I am not terribly well-versed on this particular set of rituals, I’m afraid.”

Sherlock’s head hitting the table rang out at loudly as John’s glee and Lestrade stroked the boy’s hair to show support.

“Mum hasn’t dragged me to church since I was a lad and… oh. I see. She and Grandmama feeling very grandmothery, are they?”

“I believe your thrust has struck home, my dear. They are determined that this Christmas be as rich with classical experiences as one can wedge into the fixed number of holiday hours available to them.”

“Lackey! Rifle Mycroft’s safe and bring me at least three ounces of silver coin. I need to fabricate a pentagram to ward off the influences of the psalm-spewers and women with unattractive hats. I shall begin on the mold immediately and design a small furnace that you will construct to properly bring the silver to its melting point.”

“There really is no time for that I’m afraid, brother dear, but I will happily draw one on your chest if it will make the experience easier to bear.”

“It is a poor substitute, but I shall consider that my secondary plan.”

“What is wrong with you all? Christmas Eve at church is great! There’s lots of candles and singing and stories and… it’s the best!”

Sherlock, Mycroft and Lestrade knew very well who would be sitting between the two grandmothers for the service, hopefully in a pew several rows in front of where they languished in agony.

“You excitement shall warm their maternal hearts, I have no doubt, my boy. And look! More jam from which you may partake. And the remainder of breakfast, as well.”

As the food was served, Mycroft and Lestrade exchanged another of their endless ‘we’re on the same page about this, right?’ looks and cut eyes towards both Sherlock and John. The angel and the devil in church. On Christmas Eve. This could very well be the end of the tradition in their family if things went as they tended to with the boys. It could very well be the end of the tradition in this part of England, once word spread of the great Christmas Eve catastrophe that rendered a venerable and
Mycroft looked up from his desk and felt both a leaden weight land in his stomach and a tendril of unease thread up his spine in the most uncomfortable of combinations.

“Mummy. I was not expecting you.”

Not hoping to see, was closer to the mark, however, there was no benefit in injudiciously poking a tiger when you were sharing its cage.

“You believed I would not be here to share Christmas with you and your brother?”

“Given that happens less often than your absence, I have learned not to anticipate.”

“Well, I suppose you have a point.’

The hope that his mother was simply the hallucination of an overworked mind vanished as Mycroft watched the extremely well-dressed woman walk further into the study and look around.

“You have finally taken over your father’s space. I wondered if you would ever muster the manhood to do it.”

“Manhood was in no manner involved, rather a respect that I had no wish to violate by taking what was so eponymously his. Father’s study has always been just that, but, as I am more fully taking his mantle upon my shoulders, so must I have the tools to wear it appropriately.”

“Not an entirely inane argument.”

“Thank you. Are you… might we expect you to spend the holiday with us? Grandmama will arrive tomorrow and Mother Lestrade shall also take a room so we may enjoy Christmas as a family. You are welcome to be part of our celebration if you so choose.”

Was that a mote of curiosity or interest in her eyes? Mycroft decided not to dwell upon it as he had given up long ago trying to know his mother’s mind or intentions.

“I have plans, actually. In fact I am only here to deliver your gifts and take with me a few items from my bedroom. I doubt I shall return before the new year arrives so I shall also impart my greetings for that and wishes of luck, for whatever that is worth.”

“And I shall return the same to you. But, while you are here, you may take along your own Christmas gift. Though it will pain you terribly to hear, Gregory helped inspire the idea, but I feel… I hope you will find it suitable.”

Rather than gather the family to watch the present being opened, Mycroft simply excused himself to open the safe in the room and extracted the handsomely-wrapped, albeit small, box.

“Happy Christmas, Mummy. I would… if you do not like it, I shall take steps to replace it with something more to your tastes.”

Mycroft refused to admit he was holding his breath as he handed over the box and watched his mother undo the ribbon and open the lid.

“I see.”
That was singularly unhelpful.

“This… this is my mother’s broach?”

“Not the original, for that still lies deep in the mud of the lake where Sherlock hurled it when he was four, but I found several photographs in which you or her were wearing it and worked with a jeweler in London to fashion as exact a copy as was possible. We had to estimate the scale, but it falls within what I remember, so…”

Mycroft let his words taper off and simply waited for either the perfunctory nod or the lips pursed into a moue of dissatisfaction.

“This was certainly not what I was expecting.”

“I understand. I shall purchase for you something more along the lines of…”

“No, that will not be necessary. This is… thank you, Mycroft. I have little of my mother, since she died quite young, and the loss of her broach was… impactful. This was very thoughtful of you.”

It would be both disrespectful and embarrassing to ask if she actually meant that, but… it really was unnecessary. It was rare his mother looked anything but seductive or contemptuous and neither described the almost approving look she was wearing on her face.

“I am happy you like it. Gregory shall be pleased that his input was productive and appreciated.”

It did not require a geneticist to glean from whom Sherlock had inherited his characteristic snort.

“I am certain he shall dance with glee.”

“I do hope so. Gregory is astonishingly beautiful when he dances, though, I admit, his preferred lack of clothing enhances greatly the appeal.”

This time the snort was a quickly cut off bark of laughter and Mycroft patted himself firmly on the back for the very successful rejoinder.

“I have never thought you a very interesting boy, Mycroft. Far too somber and lacking in any appreciable spark of vitality. I am happy to see that might be changing.”

If nothing else arrived under his tree, the genuine compliment from Mummy would be a more than sufficient gift and Mycroft clasped it firmly in his heart.

“Age does strange things, I suppose. For example, I shall find myself at church tomorrow evening, so do make yourself available for any subsequent funeral services.”

“Church? This was your grandmother’s idea, I suspect.”

“Hers and Mother Lestrade’s. I believe they are hoping for a traditional Christmas Eve and are overlooking that Sherlock will be in attendance.”

“Or you.”

Pardon?

“Pardon?”

“Your father was much of the same mind as his mother on the issue and, for your first Christmas
with us, we diligently dressed in the insipid and galling garb of the average churchgoer and he paraded us towards the church for the Christmas Eve service, as proud as any general leading his victorious army. With my first step across the threshold, you began to wail in a particularly demonic pitch and did not cease until we skulked out the doors some ten minutes later as we made a hasty retreat before the other attendees declared us unholy and lit the proverbial torches. Such was the end of that particular tradition. I do hope you fare better than did we.”

Apparently, Sherlock’s pentagram idea was not as ludicrous as believed.

“I shall attempt to keep my wailing to the barest minimum and Sherlock shall be fitted with a suitable gag.”

“Excellent. Now, I must gather a few items and be off. I am expected in Paris by evening and have a few additional stops to make.”

“I understand. I shall gather Sherlock so he might…”

“No, let him continue with whatever ridiculousness currently occupies his time. I shall phone on Christmas Day, so do be available to take my call.”

“Very well. I... I am happy you came, Mummy. I do hope you visit again soon.”

“Perhaps before we fly to the Caribbean. It is a lovely location to spend the ugliest of the winter months. Enjoy your Christmas, Mycroft. And... thank you for the broach. There is little that I feel the urge to keep with me wherever I go, but I believe this is one of those things.”

And, without another word, she was gone and Mycroft found himself in need of a few moments to regain his composure. In his life, there had never been a time when he felt he could successfully communicate with his mother but... perhaps she was correct. He was changing and those changes were having some very unpredictable consequences. What a wonderful thing was life when one found true love and let it take you along new and surprising paths...
“The staff has truly outdone themselves this year, Mycroft.”

Mycroft smiled proudly at Grandmama’s words and took his own look around the main entrance, feeling anew the spirit of the season in the vastness of the lights and decorations.

“Most certainly. I believe the enthusiasm of Sherlock and John was somewhat contagious and we are blessed with this result.”

A result that pleased the elderly woman to no end. The house was always appropriately appointed for the holidays, however… it had always lacked that indefinable spark of something that made the lights and decorations truly shine. Now, that indefinable spark had been identified. Her grandsons were happy. They were finally happy and this was the first Christmas in so many years where the sense of family and joy actually filled the halls. Her newest grandsons would forever have her gratitude for bringing this back into Mycroft and Sherlock’s lives and she would make a point of seeing that their own lives were forever enriched because of it.

“I suspect that the children have become quite incorrigible in their anticipation.”

“Somewhat like wild animals who have been denied their meal, yet see it sitting just out of reach on the other side of the bars of their cage.”

“I would expect nothing less. The exuberance of children at Christmas is certainly one of its most enjoyable features. Have they yet found their gifts and nullified the traditional Christmas-morning surprise?”

“No, they have not. Gregory and I have confounded them completely and that is profoundly exacerbating their anxiousness.”

“Excellent. One should learn to gracefully endure anticipation.”

“Grandmama… you do remember we are referring to Sherlock and John.”

“Ah. True… well, they shall learn that anticipation is something that must be endured, whether it be accomplished gracefully or not.”

“Better. Though they are honing their skills for investigation and manipulation. Just this morning, I caught Sherlock distracting the kitchen staff, while John crawled through the lower cupboards in search of their gifts. Yesterday, it was the attempted issue of a bribe to our driver for information about their gifts location. Unfortunately, they have both depleted their finances and were trying to bribe the man on credit, so their attempt was not a highly successful one.”

“One cannot fault their effort. Do provide some focused instruction on the topic, Mycroft. I would hate for them to enact their schemes on the public at large and meet with a similar outcome. The family name would certainly receive a black mark and I do not find that acceptable.”

“Certainly, Grandmama. I shall tend to it at my first opportunity. Now, I presume you would like to rest after your journey, and…”

“You presume incorrectly. Where is the remainder of the family?”

“In the garage for vehicle maintenance lessons. Gregory has decided that if the boys decide
someday petition for a vehicle, which is, really, an assured thing, they should know the various maintenance routines it will require and be able to perform small repairs in case of a problem.”

“And you are not watching? I can think of little with a higher potential for amusement. Well, perhaps if Sherlock decided to become an American rodeo clown, but this truly occupies a top spot on the list.”

Mycroft knew sniffing his grandmother’s breath for evidence of early-day imbibing of Christmas cheer would not be appreciated, so contented himself to wonder if the woman had always had a sense of humor or if it had been birthed anew, as had so many things, when his husband graced them with his presence.

“I thought it best to allow Gregory to make inroads before I set my own foot on the path.”

“You are nearly quaking in your shoes at the thought of grease.”

“No, that is entirely incorrect.”

“Do not worry, it shall be our little secret.”

“You are obviously overcome by the splendor that surrounds you. Let us find you a nice cup of…”

“Bring it to the garage, if you will. I will meet you there.”

Mycroft watched Grandmama regally stroll away and had to hope that at some point he would reclaim some semblance of mastery over the holiday chaos. Unfortunately, he also knew that would not occur until the revelers were good and ready to allow it.

Quickly obtaining Grandmama’s beverage, Mycroft raced out to the garage and tried not to drop said beverage in shock at the sight of his spouse and charges coated in grease, John far more than Sherlock as to be expected, and Grandmama sitting primly on a stool that Lestrade had dragged over and done his best to dust off when she arrived.

“Ah, Mycroft. Good. Haven’t the children done a remarkable job?”

Of becoming the filthiest children in history, yes.

“I… suppose?”

“Insult us not with your hesitancy, beluga! John and I have successfully performed an operation on the beast’s circulatory system.”

“And I’m going to be a doctor, so this counts as double practice, one for people and one for cars!”

“Gregory? A translation, if you please?”

“Oh! The boys changed the oil.”

“Ah, yes, I see.”

“And the filter! Do not diminish our accomplishment with your descriptive feebleness, lackey.”

“Two filters! The air and the oil! It was sort of a complicated operation, but we did it and the car still runs, too!”
Mycroft nodded understandingly at the pair of smudged faces staring up at him and relished the pride glowing in their eyes.

“An admirable accomplishment for your first venture into the healthcare of the automobile species.”

“We’re going for the plugs next, if you want to help, love.”

Lestrade honestly wasn't sure what was funnier, the look on Mycroft’s face or Grandmama’s highly amused snort at the look on Mycroft’s face.

“I would love to, however, I would hate to dilute the experience for Sherlock and John by dividing the task among a greater number of hands.”

“That was pretty good. Almost convinced me it wasn’t about the grease and grime.”

Mycroft pursed his lips at this second female snort and hope his dissatisfaction at her treacherous behavior was clearly presented on his face.

“I do try. Now, please… carry on.”

The very clean member of the pre-engaged pair drew up his own stool and dusted it thoroughly before having a seat to watch the next stage of the car’s surgery.

“Sherlock and John are thriving, Mycroft. That is something to celebrate, though a less tidy methodology might serve your purposes better. Perhaps you might take point for their next growth opportunity. Balancing ledgers should make for a bracing family afternoon.”

Lestrade’s giggle made it impossible for Mycroft to chastise his grandmother, especially since the boys had their heads under the bonnet and hadn’t heard a word.

“I shall have a selection of the finest sharpened pencils standing at the ready.”

“Very good. You know… your father had an interest in automobiles.”

No, he didn’t.

“I have no memory of that.”

“I believe it was more a feature of his youth, but he would spend many an afternoon discussing with our driver the details of various models and features of the latest vehicles on offer. Later, I feel, he was too busy to indulge his interest with as much enthusiasm, however, I do know it persisted as his eye was forever wandering towards whatever intriguing machines might belong to guests or travel alongside him on the motorways. I believe he would have greatly enjoyed the addition of Gregory to the family and the opportunity to pursue a shared interest. And, he would have been very proud that you chose a man of worth to bring into the fold.”

Mycroft simply nodded and felt the characteristic pang of loss from the mention of his father. However, Grandmama was correct. Father would have adored Gregory, as well as young John and he gladly would have opened his heart to welcome his new sons.

“Thank you. And, thank you for the information about Father. I have tried to tell Sherlock what I remember, but have rather run dry of fresh tales and anecdotes.”

“Something we shall rectify. There is no reason for you to lack knowledge of your father and I
shall make it a point to share whatever I can provide. I admit… it has not been an easy topic to discuss and I know you still grieve his passing, but grief shared and a life celebrated can help lessen one’s pain.”

He felt stupid, again, nodding, but it was hard to speak with a lump in his throat. He had wanted to talk about his father, so very often, but had no one to lend an ear or bend his own with memories and stories. And, it was to his shame that he had never given Grandmama a chance to be that person for him. Well, that was certainly something to change and another reason that this Christmas was going to stand as an eternal bright light in the course of his life.

“We have accomplished the first extraction! Provide us with appropriate adulation!”

Fortunately, dwelling on emotional issues never lasted very long with Sherlock in proximity.

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Two boys cleaned with the strongest soap and the most rugged wash cloths and a spouse subject to the same treatment preceded Mycroft’s gathering of all family members in the library for a more quiet and… clean… mode of relaxation as they mentally prepared for the oncoming pain of the evening’s primary activity – church.

“I shall annihilate you, John Watson.”

“You say that every time we play chess, Sherlock, but you’ve got as many pieces with their tops taped back on as I do.”

The penalty for losing a game had become the ceremonial beheading of one of the losing player’s pieces, though the bandaged combatant was returned to the board to continue their eternal struggle.

“That is because I woefully underestimated your capacity for duplicity and conniving.”

“What?”

“He said you cheat, lad.”

“I never, Greg! Well, that’s not entirely true, because sometimes it’s easy to cheat since Sherlock doesn’t always pay attention because he’s talking and talking and talking and talking. Anyway, he’s usually been evil and deserves it, so I don’t feel too bad.”

“Evidence!”

“Yeah, but you always catch me, anyway and I just do it to make you loony. All your dead pieces are your own fault and another one is going to die today, so be prepared with the tape.”

Grandmama nodded approvingly at the bloodthirstiness and willingness to use an opponent’s weakness against him. John was very well placed in their family.

“I shall take great pleasure in beheading your queen, John Watson.”

“My queen is going to punch you right in the checkmate, Sherlock, and then you might need some tape for you own head.”

Now that the traditional trading of insults and steely glares to begin their chess matches was over and done with, the boys got to work massacring their opponent while the older generations cast and indulgent eye on their play. There was really very little need for a radio, television or even extra
conversation with the theatrics that accompanied Sherlock and John in a competitive event. Something Lestrade’s mother slid directly into when she was announced by one of the staff.

“Anyone draw blood yet?”

“Just started, Mum, but give them a chance and we’ll have to find the bandages and iodine.”

“Well, let’s hope wherever they stab, bludgeon or throttle is hideable because I don’t want to take those two to church and have everyone thinking they’re being abused.”

“Mum… people do know Sherlock and John.”

“You’re right. Everyone knows we’re the ones being abused. People will probably be happy we finally got a lick or two of our own in.”

“John and I are not deaf!”

“Except when I tell you not to eat all the dough or batter before we have the chance to bake it! Then you’re deaf as one of those old men with an ear trumpet!”

“I have no idea what you are saying, but I am convinced it is slander of the most heinous nature.”

Sherlock’s imperiously-waved hand still bore ghostly traces of the raw baking material he’d scooped up with his fingers, or so it seemed to everyone else in the room except him. Given the probable trajectory the conversation would take if that was pointed out, Mycroft felt it prudent to begin the cocktail hour and made certain everyone but the two boys was provided with something relaxing to drink. It was going to be a long night and with a soothed soul was likely the best way to greet it.

“I’m in agony!”

However, Lestrade thought, the agony hadn’t seemed to increase any since he started getting Sherlock into his suit to go to church. And, thankfully, the suits were the more casual ones they had worn for his first dinner with Mycroft’s mum, so Sherlock had actually screeched a bit less than expected, but it was still a battle to get the boy clothed and keep the clothes in one piece.

“You look nice in your agony, though, Sherlock. Grandmama and Mum will be happy.”

“As if the opinion of older females is of any consequence to me. At least, when the strangling strands of these fibers bring me to my last breath, I shall be close at hand to the graveyard and a giver of last rites.”

Not that Lestrade’s own view of the evening was any more optimistic, but… now that he thought about it, maybe a distraction was in order.

“I’ve got an idea.”

“I highly doubt that.”

“Fuck off. Anyway, why don’t you bring your field notebook with you? You can take all sorts of notes about what goes on and the people you see there. I’m sure that data will be good for something, someday.”

Sherlock opened his mouth to denounce the idea, then stopped because he had to admit, grudgingly, that it was not altogether the worse idea possible to help survive the upcoming torture.
“That is not entirely the most pathetic suggestion you have ever put forward, lackey.”

“Listen to you being all complimentary. Is that my Christmas gift?”

“No, because it is was not presented in a rubbish bin, which is wrapped in discarded clothes from a debtor’s prison.”

“Ok, at least I’ll know which gift is mine under the tree. It should be fairly obvious. Now, do you need me to tie your shoes to your feet, I mean, tie your shoes or are you able to do that yourself?”

“Your flippancy strives to impart unto you a debonair affect, yet it serves only to bring your doltishness into sharp focus.”

“Whoo! That was a lot of words. Not as many as I know you can muster, though, so you must be feeling tired. It’s alright, because you can have a nap in church. I promise I won’t tell Mum and Grandmama. Maybe.”

Sherlock performed one of the goblin species most dreaded war dances, however, it’s potency was sorely lacking, likely due to festive dazzle of the household’s Christmas spectacle and not even the smallest declaration of hostilities was accepted by Lestrade, keeping the various sides in a state of peace.

“Why are you wriggling? Got your pants wedged in your bum? Just give them a tug and then get on with your shoes. Mycroft said there’d be something warm to drink before we left, and I don’t want to be late and miss that.”

A tremulous and shaky peace, but peace, nonetheless.

“Will it be chocolate?”

“I’m not sure, but if I had to wager… yes.”

Sherlock dove for his shoes and got them on his feet in record time, even with the stop to put them on the other feet after the first try went rather awry.

“I am prepared.”

“Oh, good. Let’s see what we can find, then. But, one spot of anything on that suit and you’re going to church naked.”

“They should be honored to gaze upon my perfectly sculpted form.”

“The pew is hard and cold and how’s that going to feel on that bare bottom of yours?”

“My suit will remain pristine.”

“Good lad.”

John was already dressed and happily enjoying a hot cup of chocolate when Sherlock arrived downstairs and the goblin war dance began again in earnest.

“Intolerable! The fungal spore is imbibing while I remain parched!”
Mycroft smiled at his brother’s gyrations, happy to watch the free show which was made all the more enjoyable by the liberal spiking of brandy in his own chocolate beverage.

“A reward, brother, for his efficiency and effectiveness in grooming. Now that you have achieved a similar level of mastery, you may also partake. There are also sandwiches, as we will dine quite late this evening.”

Something Mycroft would ensure his brother consumed, since, given the opportunity, Sherlock’s caloric intake would consist solely of hot chocolate and dragging him off the ceiling of the church was not the way he wanted to spend his Christmas Eve. Though, it was very likely the entire fire brigade/painter’s van rescue party would be in attendance, so he would have ready access to the proper tools and talent.

“Ugh… peasant food.”

“Actually, they are the tea sandwiches Grandmama prefers in the afternoon. I am certain she would be pleased to discuss with you her sudden decline in social status.”

That, at least, set Sherlock in motion, if only to have his fair share of the chocolate before he was beheaded by the Holmes family reigning queen.

“And, may I ask where is Gregory?”

“Attempting to ameliorate his simian appearance.”

“A small measure of holiday spirit would not be amiss, Sherlock, and greatly appreciated, also.”

The small boy’s rude noise surprised no one, but John still drained the last of the chocolate directly from the pot into his mouth to show support of Lestrade. This earned him a highly-pleased smile from Mycroft, who, however, immediately rang for another pot before Sherlock’s wrath left a crater the size of Wales in the floor.

“John, do wipe your mouth. Sherlock, do curtail your typhonic tantrum. Mycroft… continue to enjoy your chocolate. It has put quite the radiant flush upon your cheeks.”

Mycroft narrowed his eyes at his newly-arrived grandmother and quickly retracted the tongue that had made a leap back to childhood and was preparing to make a bold statement of opinion in the form of sticking out between his lips.

“Sorry, Grandmama. Did I get it all? I wiped very hard.”

If John only knew how much the elderly woman enjoyed hearing him use what she felt was her proper title, he would flush as brightly as Mycroft was from his brandy.

“Nary a trace of moustache remains. And, if my nose does not deceive me, here is another pot of chocolate for you to enjoy though, I hope, with a cup this time.”

The second round of hot chocolate was set down, along with a fresh sample of nibbles to fortify the troops, the next of which was just making their appearance.

“Ah, Mother Lestrade. Let me pour something warm for you to drink.”

Mycroft engaged in a battle of wills with Sherlock who had both hands wrapped around the handle of the hot pot and wore an expression that screamed he would defend his prize to the death if necessary. But, since John was feeling particularly treacherous this evening, poking Sherlock
sharply in the ribs satisfied his traitor’s urges and gave Mycroft an opening to abscond with the chocolate and pour out a cup for Lestrade’s mother, as well as Lestrade himself, whose footsteps he could hear coming down the stairs.

“The season of kindness and giving has not set one finger upon this cold, cruel and unwelcoming house!”

“Which should suit you nicely, brother dear, however, behold! A cup bearing your rightful share of the spoils. And, lo! The most appealing of the refreshments on your own plate to guard like a dragon with his hoard.”

Something Sherlock happily did, glaring at everyone in clear warning than any attempts at theft would be dealt with harshly.

“Well, this is certainly something new for us, isn’t it Greg? Usually it’s just me and my lazy son enjoying a quiet dinner and a bit of telly after we stop in at the neighbors for a final Christmas hello. And Greg certainly isn’t wearing a suit. I’m lucky if I can get him to toss on a bit of real clothing over his pants and get some slippers on his feet.”

His mother’s off-hand tone didn’t fool Lestrade for a second. There was a light in her eyes that was as bright as he’d ever seen and it struck him that this was probably what she had hoped for when she’d gotten married and had him. Actually, there was a light in everyone’s eyes tonight because, thinking about it, nobody in the room had enjoyed a ‘real’ Christmas for quite a long time.

“That’s not true, and you know it, Mum. There’s always some hideous jumper you’ve got for me to model and I’ve got to suffer the neighbors laughing at me while I stand there like a clot and you spread whatever new gossip you picked up since the morning.”

“And why is my Gregory not provided with a traditional jumper this Christmas? I am quite certain he cuts a fetching figure in his typical holiday finery.”

If Mycroft had any thoughts of Christmas Eve bedroom frolics, they just flew out of the window in his partner’s opinion because he had jumped for joy at the thought of avoiding that particular Christmas hell and wasn’t that bastard just putting it right back in his mum’s mind. Probably had one right on hand in case she got a chance to toss it over his head for another year of embarrassing photos that she’d show all her friends and unsuspecting bystanders for weeks to come.

“Oh… he’s too old now for Mum’s Special Christmas jumpers. Though, I’ll reconsider for next year if you’d like to keep the tradition going. Think hard about that, though, because I suspect my son inherited my talent for revenge in all sorts of painful, lonely, and frustrating ways.”

Mycroft had been trained since birth to read the nuances of communication by those around him and felt the slithery sensation of high alert thread through his nerves. Perhaps it was time for another brandy.

“I LOVE Christmas jumpers! They’re fun and colorful and warm and you only wear them once a year so they’re very special.”

John Watson was rapidly becoming the most infuriating male in the Holmes household, at least in the opinion of the household’s other males…

“Very good, John. You properly credit the importance of both tradition and whimsy at this time of year.”

John puffed at Grandmama’s praise and Sherlock began to plot his downfall in whatever method was
the most humiliating and spectacular. When John least expected it… he should expect it…

“Love, is that brandy I smell in your cup?”

Mycroft wondered if his body would ever not shudder when his husband whispered softly in his ear.

“It is. I seized the opportunity when it was presented.”

“How about a little for me? I had to dress Sherlock, remember?”

That absolutely merited a reward and Mycroft was quick to provide it while Lestrade used his own body to shield his actions.

“There, my dear. An especially warming drink for this chilly evening.”

“You’re a prince, Mycroft. And you should definitely have a good amount to eat because, we’ve got a long night ahead of us.”

That was certainly true. There was the family obligations, then shuttling gifts from Mother Lestrade’s house to wrap and place under the tree, all of which had to be completed by the crack of dawn when the children would bolt from their beds and race like lightning downstairs to begin their Christmas morning. The precise time of their abandoning their beds had been a fiercely-negotiated topic that brought all forces to bear, often taking turns so the other member of each negotiating team could have a run to the bathroom.

“That we do. I have instructed Cook to have the necessary materials for both coffee and tea easily available so we may continue to fortify ourselves as we move forward.”

“Perfect. We’re not getting to bed tonight, that much I know, so it’s good to have something I can rely on to keep me up and going.”

“Oh… and I am not sufficient to keep you, as you say… up and going?”

Could his husband’s smile be more deliciously wicked? No, it was not possible and the joyful family atmosphere of the room be damned.

“You’re more than sufficient, love. Stroke the back of my throat, now don’t you, when we’re having a little private fun?”

Erections were definitely not on the approved list of Christmas Eve activities! Damn Gregory and his lovely licentiousness…

“That bit of pink on your cheeks isn’t the brandy, is it? My Mycroft thinking about me and him naked with him down my throat and my fingers playing in other areas that always love a bit of attention?”

It was now officially impossible to face the remainder of the family with any measure of dignity. And, didn’t his spouse reek of satisfaction at his accomplishment… though the gentle kiss on his neck and soft licking of his ear was a marginal peace offering.

“You are a villain, Gregory.”

“Yeah, and what sophisticated, posh man doesn’t love a villain?”

None. It was a cultural impossibility.
“Touché.”

“Don’t worry, though, the boys have Grandmama and Mum occupied, so nobody is going to notice how you’re thinking about me on my knees, looking up into those beautiful blue eyes of yours.”

Stop chuckling into my ear! The frisson is rubbing my erection against my pants in a most arousing fashion, which I certainly do not need at the moment!

“Father Christmas will be most cross with you, Gregory.”

“Why? He having a bit of a dry spell at home?”

Oh very well, it is permissible to chuckle in my ear, if you hold me with such supreme tenderness and the scent of your adoration perfumes the air I breathe.

“Besides, in this house, Father Christmas is right here in my arms and I know for a fact he has someone who loves making certain he gets all the attention he needs.”

And wasn’t that the most luscious of feelings. Both the thought of his spouse’s attentions and his own small role in bringing the children the most merry of Christmases.

“Look at that smile… you’ve done the most magnificent job imaginable, Mycroft. Sherlock and John are having a wonderful time and the whole business about Christmas magic actually seems real this year. I’m so proud of you and love you so much…”

This kiss was on Mycroft’s lips and it might have lingered for a very long time if a small fist hadn’t started pounding on Lestrade’s back.

“Our sentence has not been commuted. We must now depart.”

The couple looked down at the scowling boy and sighed in unison.

“Very well. Let us get our coats and make a start for the car. A reminder, Sherlock… this is very important to Grandmama and Mother Lestrade. Kindly do not give them cause for distress.”

“I plan to sink immediately into a coma and not emerge until presented with another cup of chocolate and, perhaps, a selection of our finest biscuits.”

“Oh good. Gregory, do be prepared to port Sherlock on your back like a sleeping toddler.”

“Not a problem. I’ve done it for my mates now and then when they’ve been too pissed to walk and Sherlock weighs about a twentieth of what they do.”

“Excellent. Shall we?”

Sherlock’s snarl lifted their hearts and the couple quickly found their coats and joined the rest of the family in Grandmama’s enormous automobile. One thing was for sure, they were going to make a grand entrance at church…

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Greg looked around as the car approached the church and decided this part, at least, was brilliant. The whole village was staring at the gorgeous car pulling up to the church and… yes, his mum was beaming like the cat who’d got the cream. Nice little thumbed nose to all the biddies and pearl-wearers who gave her the turned-up nose since she was a young, divorced, working woman who
never had any time to spare for all their charity work and social things, not they’d invite her to them, anyway. And didn’t they all look like they’re eyes were going to pop out of their heads, while mum’s friends were grinning at the sight. Nice little win for the rabble crowd, wasn’t it? Not that the thought was at all appropriate for either church or Christmas, but, as already established, his lover was Father Christmas, so there wasn’t much worry he’d be seeing coal tomorrow morning.

The family exited the car, with John jumping out first to hold the door for the ladies, much to the older boys’ amusement and then it was the slow promenade to the church, with the frequent stops along the way for introductions and passing pleasantries until they were finally inside, with Sherlock, Mycroft and Lestrade dragging their heels so they could take seats behind the maternal figures, only to be thwarted when said maternal figures turned and glared at them, the power of which levitated the three figures into an open pew, which was subsequently filled with the rest of the Lestrade-Holmes clan.

“I am being uncomfortably compressed!”

“That’s because you’re trying to squeeze yourself through me to make some kind of escape, which you are not doing by the way. I’m not spending my evening crawling around on the floor trying to find where you’re hiding and getting kicked by ladies who think I’m trying to look up their skirts.”

“It is either squeeze against you or Mycroft in this ridiculous railroad plank of a pew and I do not want my presentation besmirched by his tendency to ooze whale oil when he is being especially tedious.”

Mycroft gave his brother a distracted swat on his arm while he devoted the lion’s share of his focus to his lover, who positively glowed from the soft, golden candlelight that surrounded them. Perhaps an evening wedding was the correct plan if the angel of his life could sport a warm and loving halo of light while hearing his heartfelt vows of devotion.

“This is brilliant! See! Just like I said… candles and people in their nicest clothes and flowers and look! The choir is getting ready to sing!”

John was bouncing up and down so hard, the scrooges at the other end of the pew could feel every jolt like a ivy-wrapped holly branch in their bums.

“Such a good boy you are, John. You know… the children’s choir always needs a lad or two to fill the ranks…”

Mycroft and Greg’s twin groans were scarcely noticed by the small boy who lit up like a firecracker.

“Really, Mrs. Lestrade?”

“Oh yeah. I hear that all the time. The vicar is forever moaning and groaning that it’s hard to find reliable boys and girls to fill the slots. Want me to put in a word for you?”

The desperate hoping beyond hope that Grandmama would disapprove was tragically dashed by the woman’s firm nod of agreement on the subject.

“A fine idea. Our John is a boy who takes commitments seriously and would be a fine addition to the children’s chorus.”

“Intolerable! Any time hooting, tweeting or bleating would be at the expense of my experiments and that I refuse to allow!”
Then, we shall see if the vicar is sufficiently charitable to take a second body into the fold. Your volume alone presents you as a suitable candidate for a vocal performance.”

Sherlocked glared at his grandmother and seethed in fury that she could muster a better glare with a single lift of her eyebrow than he could with his entire face.

“I have far more important things to do with my time than yodel.”

“Very well. Elizabeth shall set the plan in motion and Gregory… I assume I may count on you to see John to his practices and performances?”

What?

“What?”

And stop laughing at me Mum… this is all your fault and your Christmas gift is now seriously in jeopardy.

“John will require escorting to his various rehearsals and performances and you are the most likely candidate. Besides, it is good for both from a public relations and public management standpoint to have a close tie with the village vicar, especially for a new PC.”

Shite. That actually made sense.

“I suppose that’s not a problem. Besides…”

When he was brilliant, he was brilliant…

…it’s not too far from the house to here, so if I have to miss a practice or two, it’s not as if John won’t be able to… get himself here under his own power.”

Lestrade shared a smile with Mycroft and won a hand squeeze for his trouble.

“Is no one heeding my objections? They are of the most serious nature and I demand full consideration for each of my points of opposition!”

“When your objections are relevant, grandson, we shall. Until then, no. Ah… I believe we are about to begin.”

Sherlock huffed loudly and slumped in the pew, but John’s excitement was enough to compensate. Mycroft absolutely adored seeing the boy’s face alight with happiness and his lover was correct… John needed time to pursue his own interests and breathe in fresh air lacking Sherlock’s… Sherlock. And it would be worth sitting through the occasional service if he could watch his John in a crisp little outfit singing away with all eyes upon him. Naturally, John would be in a position of high visibility to the audience. Had he made a contribution to the church or its various charities recently? Or ever? Something to, perhaps, be remedied as soon as the banks reopened. His John deserved no less…

The various death rattles heard during the service rang in three substantially different tones and earned their fair share of chastising looks from the matriarchs, with Sherlock’s pencil scratchings in his notebook earning it’s own measure, as well. As predicted, though, they were left blessedly alone since the female attention was happily turned towards the enraptured John whose excitement at the pageantry never waned throughout the service. As part of his survival strategy, Mycroft imagined
the many impending evenings taking the children to the cultural events London offered in
abundance, though his husband could still have the sole honor of escorting John to any sporting
ventures that might interest the child. What a delightful picture of the future that made… sitting
there, he could feel it as a tangible thing and if Sherlock had not been wedged between him and his
Gregory, he would be seeking the strength and support of his spouse’s warm body as the emotion
welled up, as it was apt to do in the evenings when he allowed his mind to wallow in the love of his
spouse and family.

“You appear as if you are to start one of your ridiculous binges of weeping and I, for one, shall
not sit quietly and suffer embarrassment-by-proxy.”

“Since you sit quietly for nothing, Sherlock, I am experience a surprise level of naught. And, for
your information… I am simply contemplating the splendor.”

“That is a lie. You were but one moment away from napping when Mother Lestrade pinched
you to forestall your snores trumpeting over the shrill and toneless voices of the ostriches that make
up the so-called choir.”

“It is not a lie, in fact, I was cementing certain plans for Gregory and my wedding.”

“I suppose I shall have to, again, be dragged into this cathedral of Christian mythology to suffer
the dronings and ceremonial dances associated with the event.”

“Perhaps, though I will stipulate that the dancing and offerings of sacrifice be kept to the barest
minimum.”

“That is something, at least. And how much longer do we have to endure this particular trial of
Hercules?”

Mycroft looked around and took in the various clues from his fellow attendees.

“Not long. Already, handbags are being placed on laps and the overall posture of the crowd is
straighter than it was but a moment ago.”

“Good. I am more than ready to flee this house of brainwashing and into the loving arms of my
chocolate.”

“How utterly romantic of you.”

Sherlock’s rather wet and spitted reply earned a new glare, this one from the vicar, and seemed to be
the final signal to get everyone moving towards the door to finish Christmas Eve at home.
Something which seemed a simple matter to both Holmes brothers until they were introduced to the
post-service socialization period on the church lawn that, despite the chill, lasted until the dawn of the
new century as Grandmama seemed on a mission to meet everyone who might have contact with her
grandsons and Mother Lestrade was more than happy to accommodate her. For his part, John
rejoined the Y-chromosome owners who reluctantly allowed him back into the club after his blatant
and unrepentant siding with the enemy.

“Wasn’t that great! We got hear stories and listen to music and it was lovely and smelled nice
and it was all free!”

“You are insane. I have yet to find evidence of drooling, but there is no doubt about the
diagnosis.”

“Your opinion doesn’t count, Sherlock, because it’s well-known that you’re allergic to normal-
people fun and you’re just upset because your bum is itching or something like that.”

“My bottom is entirely free of histamine-prompted hives!”

“Now, now, children… let us keep to the spirit of the occasion and remember the sentiment concerning goodwill towards men.”

“John is not a man, Bloatcroft, and shall not receive my goodwill. He will, however, receive a shriveled and moldy potato in his stocking as a symbol of my regard. Kindly control yourself, brother dear, and leave it uneaten so it might fulfill its rightful purpose tomorrow morning.”

Mycroft shared a look with Lestrade who silently agreed that Sherlock had been on good behavior, in a relative sense, but it was taking a toll on the boy who found it difficult to control his more egregious behaviors for more than a few minutes. It was time to go home.

Another shared, silent conversation had Mycroft grinning in victory as Lestrade strode away in a sulk to try and shepherd the social butterflies towards the vehicle, which was idling a short distance away. It surprised no one that he was, instead, caught in the maelstrom and used as a prop for the various conversations while Mycroft guided the boys into the car where he withdrew a pack of John’s Top Trumps cards from his pocket and immediately expressed his opinion that Sherlock would have great difficulty winning with this particular topic. This launched a fierce battle that completely occupied Sherlock and John’s attention until, a decade later, the rest of the family joined them.

“Truly an appropriate Christmas service. Uplifting, properly provided with the bolstering of community pride and mercifully lacking in moralistic preaching that is simply not in the spirit of Christmas. I was most impressed by your vicar, Elizabeth. Most impressed, indeed.”

Which meant, Mycroft feared, that the man would soon be a bishop and shuttled away from their quaint village, but a bit of negotiation with Grandmama might ameliorate the situation. Perhaps after she had enjoyed a glass or two of her favorite sherry…

“Can we possibly end this experiment in sanctimony and return home? I have been more than patient and have had no reward but the data I acquired on ritualistic behavior of the unwashed. That is not entirely a poor reward, however, it is better savored with a cup of chocolate in my hand.”

And that was the final signal that their experience was at an end, as Lestrade’s mother reached into her handbag and extracted four biscuits, two each for Sherlock and John, as their prize for not leaving their town without a church. And, when those two vanished, it was a very nice chocolate toffee that Lestrade had brought from work. It was hard to chew. You couldn’t really talk while eating it.

The ride home was mercifully peaceful…

Sherlock and John were the first through the door and racing up the stairs to change out of their suits and into clothing more appropriate for what they expected to jumpe an all-night vigil for the arrival of Christmas day. Mycroft and Lestrade took it upon themselves to bring out some refreshments while the women of the family also found something more comfortable to wear and Lestrade scarcely made it out of sight of the main stairs when he was taken in hand, spun and kissed soundly by the man he loved.

“Thank you, Gregory.”
“Thank me? What did I do?”

“You were there, at my side, and that is enough for my eternal gratitude.”

“Someone had a nice time, despite himself, is that it?”

Mycroft laughed and gave Lestrade another kiss, pausing to run his hands through his lover’s hair.

“In truth, I would much rather have remained here and continued on the trajectory that we were following prior to our departure, however, it... there was meaning to the event. I know that our relationship is not one that has received universal approval and that you continue to proudly proclaim our love and never, not a single time, shy away from the normal activities in which any couple might engage... that is a profoundly meaningful thing to me. Our first Christmas, shared with those who are important in your life, as well as our family is something I shall not soon forget.”

“And there will be a lot more to come. This was good, though, for all of us. I can see doing it again next year without a lot of trouble.”

“As can I, oddly. Of course, Sherlock shall be a year older and possessed of a far more robust arsenal of avoidance tools. We shall have quite the fight on our hands, I’m afraid.”

“John will get him there. He’s building his own set of tools and most of them are countermeasures for Sherlock’s.”

“True. As always, your wisdom is an inspiration. Now, shall we prepare something to restore the family’s energies?”

“Got any sleeping powder for Sherlock and John? You know they have no plans on seeing their beds tonight, don’t you?”

“Of that I am well aware. And, fear not... matters are in hand.”

“Do I want to know?”

“Beforehand? Likely not.”

“Then off we go! I love being blissfully ignorant.”

“Plausible deniability is a thing to be treasured, my dear. Something to remember.”

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“What the fuck is that? Oops! Sorry, Mum and Grandmama.”

Lestrade wavered between embarrassment and the urge to put a toddler over his knee, settling finally on a long sip of the wine Mycroft had poured.

“I believe that is self-evident. Granted your intellectual prowess might not be able to properly analyze the various contextual clues, but I did think you retained enough of your wits to read your own name, provided it was, and is, written in large, clearly legible letters.”

G-R-E-G-G was written in thick, black letters on what appeared to be one of the socks he usually wore for a football match. One that had been worn actually, because it was as dirty as could be expected. And Sherlock was affixing it to the mantle next to the Christmas stockings.

“You didn’t even spell it right!”
“I gave the matter the attention it deserved.”

Sherlock hopped down from the small stool he was using and made a very grand show of wiping the peasanty dirt off of his fingers with the napkin handed to him by the newest of his grandmothers.

“Et tu, Mum?”

“Look at you, using that education like a truly learned man. I’m so proud, I feel a little cry coming on.”

“I feel a good drunk coming on.”

“Spoken like a true Holmes. Mycroft’s grandfather positively adored indulging himself on Christmas Eve and it was sometimes the work of two or more servants to get the bottle of whisky out of his hand and the rest of him into bed. Surprisingly, he was always the first one awake in the morning, even before our son, though I cannot say he ever struck me as a man with a fast metabolism. We decided it was a Christmas miracle and let the issue remain a mystery.”

Mycroft stared open-mouthed at Grandmama, but Lestrade helpfully closed it with a finger under his chin.

“Well, it’s nice to know I’m in good company. Love?”

Lestrade waggled his wineglass and Mycroft hastened to refill it.

“And where is John’s and my wine?”

“Spell my name right, you little bastard, and maybe I’ll let you sniff my glass.”

“Tut tut, Gregory… it is Christmas, after all.”

Now it was Lestrade who stared open-mouthed, as Mycroft took a different bottle off of the sideboard and poured a measure for both Sherlock and John, in their own fine crystal glasses.

“It’s sweet!”

“I thought you might approve.”

Sherlock took a tentative sip and tried not to telegraph his approval as the taste hit his tongue.

“This is abysmal.”

“And Happy Christmas to you, too, brother dear.”

As Sherlock and John continued to sip their glass of spirits and the next that followed, the conversation swirled through a myriad of topics until there were two small bodies passed out on the rug and Lestrade was hoping they were still breathing.

“They’re pissed out of their skulls.”

“Ummm… not quite.”

“Want to explain that, love?”

“Your assessment is not entirely on point.”
“Was that supposed to help?”

Because it hadn’t, nor did the slight twitch of Grandmama’s lips that Lestrade now recognized was her equivalent of bursting out laughing.

“I do apologize. The children enjoyed a flavorful, yet terribly low-potency liqueur to help celebrate this marvelous Christmas Eve.”

“And the passing out part?”

“Well, it was you who mentioned sleeping powder, was it not?”

“You drugged Sherlock and John?”

“Only a tiny bit.”

Which seemed to meet with the approval of his own mother, who nodded with a ‘wish I’d thought of that’ look on her face.

“The shall sleep soundly and we shall have the night free to prepare their Christmas surprises. Now, lest I have to prepare another set of special cocktails, might Gregory and I assume that the night is officially over?”

Mycroft fixed both older women with an expression that reminded them how cute the younger generation could be when they tried to be formidable, but it was growing late and there was much for the boys to do before morning. Mycroft’s sleeping solution wouldn’t last forever…

“Alright, I’ll leave you two alone. Have fun. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

Lestrade gave his mother a scowly goodnight wave, happy it blocked any attempt at a motherly kiss.

“I, too, shall retire for the evening. If you tie the children to their beds as a secondary measure, remember to use a synthetic rope. It should withstand their sharp, little teeth with greater fortitude.”

And, with that cheery thought, Grandmama made her way to bed, leaving Greg and Mycroft to relish just what it meant to host Christmas Eve with their strange, yet wonderful family.

“Alright, love… which do you want?”

“I believe Sherlock is still the lighter of the two and my back has been somewhat troublesome of late.”

“Funny. I’ll remember that next time you want to get adventurous in the bedroom.”

“I shall gladly welcome a soothing massage by your talented hands before we pursue more vigorous endeavors.”

“Ok, that’s actually a good idea, so I’ll happily carry the little food bucket. How many of those little cakes did John eat tonight? Eight?”

“I believe the total was closer to five, but, unlike Grandpapa, I believe his active lifestyle has provided him with a very healthy metabolism.”

“Maybe we should put him in a diaper for tonight, just in case. Hate for the little tyke to need to get rid of those cakes and be too drugged to get up to poop.”
“Digestion takes a bit longer than his expected slumber, my dear, so John shall remain accident free, I suspect.”

“Good, because that would not make his Christmas a happy one.”

“No, and we did not make new sheets part of his holiday hoard.”

“Put that on the list for next year, just in case.”

“Consider it done.”

Two cars making a late night visit to his house – check. Two cars leaving his house filled with gifts – check. Stockings filled, including the few things he made Mycroft turn his head for so he could slip them into his partner’s stocking – check. Gifts sorted and negotiated as to which would be wrapped and which would be left visible to the boys in the morning when they came down the stairs – check. Many cups of coffee drank – check. Time for a kiss – check. Really good one – double, maybe triple, check.

“Gregory… such passion!”

“Do you know how stunning you are right now, Mycroft? Hair all mussed, bits of tape on your fingers and stray shards of gift wrap on your clothes? You are the most gorgeous man in existence and who could resist kissing that!”

His Mycroft preened like a peacock when he said nice things about how he looked and that made him even more kissable. So, why not kiss him? Maybe a few times for good measure.

“My dear, I believe you are quite overcome with Christmas cheer this morning.”

“Just overcome with you, love. Really, you’re simply stunning and if it wasn’t getting close to the time Sherlock and John are likely to join us, I’d have you right here, under the tree. Unwrap you like the most beautiful gift in the world and play with everything I found inside all morning long.”

Well, that would make for a memorable Christmas morning, now wouldn’t it? His Gregory was a font of admirable ideas…

“Perhaps a small amount of unwrapping? It is still very early and do we not deserve some reward for our Christmas preparations, my dearest?”

Mycroft was on his back before he could blink with his trouser buttons quickly falling victim to his lover’s nimble fingers.

“Can’t resist you when you’re logical like that. You’re a very persuasive man, Mycroft Holmes.”

Mycroft had no time to answer, as the only sounds his mouth now could make were of the lewdest variety, due to Lestrade’s own highly talented mouth, which was delighted to lap, lick, suck and nibble until the room’s twinkling holiday lights were not nearly the brightest flashes in Mycroft’s heavy-lidded eyes.

“If I can put that look on your face every Christmas morning, I’ll die a happy man.”

“There is no man in existence as perfectly mated to me as you, my beloved. You know my body
“as the artist knows his clay, working it with the finest care and skill.”

“That’s because you are a work of art, Mycroft. That’s how I feel every time I see you or touch you. A fucking work of art and I’m the luckiest man alive.”

Lestrade tucked Mycroft back into his trousers, buttoned him up and smiled widely at the sight of his partner splayed languidly among the Christmas wrapping debris field. He was the luckiest man alive and nobody could ever tell him differently. And, from the gleam in his partner’s eyes, he was about to experience another of the reasons he was the luckiest man alive.

“Now, my dear, I do believe it is your turn.”

“I think you may be… dead wrong.”

The discrete throat clearing didn’t quite mask his mother’s laugh, but, at least, he was sure she didn’t actually peek in on any of the fun. Not that it wasn’t pretty obvious some type of fun was being had but (1) she was a mum and (b) it was Christmas, so she had best not be thinking evil thoughts or… well, the Christmas Ghosts would have a turn at her at some point today.

“That’s my boys, looking like a lorry ran them down, backed up and did it again. Just the way you should look on Christmas morning with little ones in the house. Get any sleep at all?”

After checking the various cups for stray caffeine, Mother Lestrade cleared a place on the library sofa and had a seat. This was exactly how it should be. The room looking like a Christmas wonderland and the dads looking moments from death from the effort of getting it that way. Not for the first time she thanked her lucky stars that her son found someone like Mycroft. Wealthy or not, he was a good lad and a very good match for her Greg. And didn’t he look fetching with that crown of ribbon and paper stuck in his hair…

“Not a wink, I am both sorry and happy to report. Gregory and I had a most busy night, but it was wildly successful and there is a great deal of satisfaction in that.”

“Though another pot of something how would make it even better, right?”

“Your wisdom never fails to astound me.”

“I’ll make coffee. I know, you prefer tea, but believe me… you need coffee.”

Something with which Mycroft couldn’t argue. He could remain awake for very extended periods for matters of work, but the sheer force of his anticipation and excitement for this day had him completely drained. Though in the most pleasant and welcome way.

“It’s starting, love. If mum’s awake, you know Grandmama’s been awake and waiting for the right moment to make an appearance.”

“True, and that shall likely be in no more than a handful of minutes. Let us begin tidying so we are prepared when the tsunami sweeps into the room and truly brings devastation.”

“Hours of wrapping for it to be shredded in an hour. That doesn’t seem very efficient, does it?”

“No, but it will be a glorious thing, nonetheless.”

It was halfway through their first cup of fresh coffee that the sound barrier was broken by John’s
piercing shout and the sound of stocking feet stomping down the stairs. Then it was a second piercing shriek and it was only Greg’s quick reflexes that kept John and Sherlock from sliding into the tree as they came to a crashing halt seeing the Christmas spectacle laid out in the library.

“Oh… oh, Sherlock…”

John began to cry and the older generation felt their own emotions rise, especially when Sherlock reached out to hold John’s hand, not making the slightest attempt to hide his gesture.

“Oh Happy Christmas, boys. I do hope you slept well.”

Mycroft was proud his voice didn’t quaver, though he mentally acknowledged the support of his husband’s hand holding his, much as Sherlock was holding John’s.

“H… Happy Christmas, Mycroft. And Greg and Mrs. Lestrade and Grandmama. It’s… it’s so beautiful…”

Realizing that John would continue to dissolve under what had to be one of his fondest dreams coming true, Grandmama tapped Mycroft’s shoulder and pointed to the stockings.

“Ah, yes. Come boys, I believe Father Christmas paid a visit and your stockings seem all the fatter for it. Shall we investigate?”

That broke John out of his emotional grip and it was a spirited race as to which boy would be to the stockings first.

“A new field notebook!”

“I got one, too! I can take my own notes!”

“A magnifying glass!”

“Cards!”

“Sweets!”

“Sweets!”

The boys dug through the small gifts in their stockings with a joy that not even Sherlock tried to hide and it made the rest of the family happy that, though they had the world at their feet, the boys remained relatively unspoiled and could take pleasure even in the simple things in life.

“Now, where are our main gifts?”

_Relatively unspoiled_ was, by definition, a relative term.

“I believe if you wipe the Christmas cheer out of your eyes, brother, and but look towards the tree…”

Sherlock and John’s head whipped around and both gasped that, despite staring at the tree as if it was the coming of an alien spaceship, neither had fully registered that the gifts were… gifts… and that a number were in plain sight.

“My own football!”

“A camera!”
“A telescope!”

“Antibiotic test media!”

“An aquarium!”

“A calorimeter!”

The boys practically rolled in their gifts and while they scent-marked their territory, Mycroft and Lestrade hurried off to bring more coffee and the cold breakfast tray the kitchen staff had left prepared, since they wouldn’t be back to work until the afternoon to put the finishing touches on Christmas dinner.

“It’s going well, love. Did you see how happy they were? Oh, you did. Look at that ‘burning this into my memory so I can think about it over and over and it stays perfect’ look on your face.”

His husband knew him far too well…

“I am ecstatic, Gregory. Truly ecstatic. This is the Christmas I have always wanted for Sherlock, but lacked the acumen to provide. He has lacked greatly in his life and now… did you see his joy? It was real and true and unhidden and I could not, I could not, be more pleased.”

Lestrade kissed his lover, who was noticeably quivering with glee, then popped a bit of melon into his perfect and perfectly kissable mouth.

“Then let’s get back to it. There’s still a long way to go… we’ve got gifts, letting the boys play with their gifts, Christmas dinner to eat, more watching the boys playing with their gifts… busy, busy, busy…”

So very different from what Mycroft and Sherlock had enjoyed over the years and the hectic nature of the day was absolutely agreeable to the oldest Holmes brother. He had his husband at his side to help control the chaos, so all would be well.

“Mycroft, Greg… where’s breakfast? Sherlock wants to start… ummm, let me get this right… culturing the various virulent bacterial species in our holiday offering.”

All would be as well as an impromptu microbial experiment would allow…

“Food!”

John immediately grabbed a bun off of the tray in Lestrade’s hands and Sherlock was quick to follow.

“My, if I had known we had lost our manners, I would have dispensed with the plates and utensils and made the portage a much easier thing.”

The duet of rude noises was accompanied by a small shower of pastry crumbs that the boys wisely directed away from their treasure hoard.

“Lovely. Now, shall we begin opening the remainder of the gifts? I am certain there a still a few surprises to be found this morning.”

While Lestrade served his mother and Grandmama, Mycroft began distributing the colorful boxes, smiling that the boys gasped in surprise with each box laid next to them on the floor. But, his smile
broadened as he watched them grow even more excited as their gifts were delivered to the intended recipients.

“I believe that is enough for now. Shall we take turns or…”

Apparently his breath was a completely wasted thing and Mycroft laughed as the family simply tore into their boxes with varying degrees of primness and civility.

“Greg Lestrade… how did you… I love this bag!”

Greg smiled at his mum and was very thankful his last bit of wages from the shop was able to cover the cost. She was so surprised and his mum deserved a surprise.

“If you’d made eyes at it any more often, you would have to marry it to save its reputation. Oh, and open Mycroft’s gift, while you’re at it.”

A nearly frantic shredding of paper preceded the sharply inhaled breath and Mother Lestrade holding her prize over her head like a trophy.

“The matching wallet! The shop said they weren’t being sold anywhere but London! Thank you, Mycroft… this is perfect!”

The someday-married couple shared a grin that they’d successfully navigated one minefield. Now, would the second go as smoothly.

“Ah… yes, very good. Very good, indeed…”

Grandmama lifted the antique silver hair combs, from their tissue and then the silver-and-pearl hat pins that were nestled beneath them. They had prowled the most upscale of the antique jewelry shops during one of their London trips and the elegance, yet practicality, of the items made them, they hoped, perfect for Grandmama’s sensibilities.

“These are exquisite and something worn by the most elegant of ladies in my youth. I remember very distinctly envying greatly their loveliness, but had not age to properly sport them in my hair. By the time I reached my majority, they had gone out of fashion, sadly, but now… I care not what fashion dictates. Thank you, boys, I am truly delighted.”

And she was, too. Mycroft and Lestrade knew the look on Grandmama’s face and it was the same one she wore when Sherlock and John did something that particularly tickled her sense of humor.

“Open ours, for it is phenomenally of higher quality that what the unimaginative minds of the lovesick simperers have concocted.”

Such as now.

“Very well. Give me a moment…”

Because Sherlock and John had insisted on wrapping their own gift and the paper, tape, ribbon seemed to be almost an architectural concern much as with building a concrete bunker.

“Oh… good heavens, children… I have no idea what to say. This is quite a wonder…”

Grandmama showed off her picture frame, which Sherlock and John had made of wood, which they had painted white and decorated with an assortment of dried flowers that Sherlock had sprayed with his own formulation of preservative so they would withstand being picked up and dusted on a
regular basis. And, with some help, they’d chosen colors that were bold, yet gentle on the eye. Lestrade nudged his partner and smiled at the obvious emotion in Grandmama’s eyes and Mycroft wrapped an arm around his waist laying a kiss on his cheek. It was the poorest payment for his husband’s hard work with the children as they crafted their gifts, but there would be a larger sum paid as soon as they had a measure of privacy.

“You like it?”

“I do, John. Both the photograph, for you and Sherlock are very handsome in it, and the frame which, if I am not mistaken, is made by hand.”

“It is! Sherlock and I made it ourselves. The whole thing, too.”

“Needless to say, our workmanship is of the most exalted order, so it is most pleasing to the eye and sturdy in construction.”

Sherlock’s bombastic speech did nothing to hide his pride in the reception of his gift and, as Mycroft tried to remember another example of his brother’s handiwork that did not directly pertain to this or that experiment, he came up empty. Dear Sherlock must have worried terribly that the gift would not meet Grandmama’s high standard, but now, that worry could be laid to rest.

“I quite agree. I am very thankful for this, children. Very thankful, indeed. And I know the perfect spot on which to place it so it receives the highest level of visibility.”

Both boys beamed brightly and basked in the praise before turning and smiling brightly at Greg’s mother.

“Oh, is it my turn?”

“Yes! And Mycroft?”

Mycroft melted, as always, under John’s puppy eyes and obediently excused himself to retrieve the second part of the present, while Mother Lestrade carefully opened the very small package that was thin and light as a feather.

“And what is this? JOHN AND SHERLOCK’S AMAZING CHRISTMAS CAKE THAT USED TO BE JOHN’S MOTHER’S CAKE BUT WE ADDED CHOCOLATE ON TOP. Ooohh… a recipe… and it looks wonderful!”

“It was my mother’s recipe. She used to make it, and it’s very good, but I couldn’t remember how, so Sherlock and I worked very hard and figured it out, but, then, Cook made some biscuits with chocolate drizzled on top and we thought that was a good idea, so we put that part in, too, even though it wasn’t part of the original recipe.”

“Cook required some pressure to relinquish her chocolate glaze formula, but I was certainly up to the challenge.”

Which might explain, Greg reasoned, why the woman had spent a whole day giving him the evil eye. Oh well, at least it was for a good cause.

“Boys… I don’t know what to say. This is the nicest thing anyone’s ever done for me. Thank you. I’m going to treasure this and it looks delicious, too.”

Sherlock and John started vibrating with expectation and Mycroft took that as his cue to bring out the finished product to present to his mother-in-law.
“You may verify that first hand, Mother. The children were adamant that they have an example on hand to demonstrate their skill.”

“You two made this?”

Sherlock and John smiled triumphantly and nodded once, in perfect unison.

“Well, I can scarcely believe it. It looks like a professional made this. How about we all have a taste?”

Something the boys had been hoping for and Mycroft had anticipated, having brought a fresh round of desert plates and forks in his other hand, along with a cake knife. One generous slice was given to each member of the family and small gift-opening break commenced while cake was consumed and Lestrade ran off to get more coffee and, finally, for Mycroft, a cup of tea.

“This is positively delicious, you two. I’m going to make this every chance I get.”

“I do admire both your industriousness and deft wielding of a batter bowl. Very well done, children.”

The positive reviews of the two women in the family had Sherlock and John nearly blushing and they stuffed more cake into their mouths to keep from blurting out anything that made them sound stupid.

“I concur and I can add that Gregory was most effusive in his praise during the preparation stages of your project.”

And was most effusive in his complaints of batter in his hair, vanilla stains on his new shirt, chocolate glaze fingerprints on the walls and burnt fingers from trying to remove a baked cake and forgetting oven gloves, but that would remain his secret for now.

Once Lestrade returned with the beverages, the gift-opening took its second breath, with Sherlock and John tearing open the various gifts from Mycroft and Greg, which ranged from their scarf and hat to chemistry equipment for Sherlock and a large selection of puzzles, army men and toy cars for John. And, with each package, the older boys breathed a sigh of relief that their judgment seemed to be spot on. The true wildcard was still waiting and the more goodwill they built up now, the easier they’d have it if Sherlock decided to express his disapproval in his typically-colorful terms.

“Go for mine now, boys. That box over there.”

John followed Greg’s mother’s finger to the large box and eagerly dragged it over to start prying it open, with Sherlock’s help.

“Books!”

“Is this fiction?”

“Yes, Sherlock, you serious little thing. It’s fiction every young boy or girl should read. There’s Jules Verne, Edgar Rice Burroughs, H.G. Wells and a few others tossed in for good measure. I know those two old men over there like having a read in the evening, and you two can join them.”

It had taken quite some time and effort to gather good-quality, second-hand copies of those books, especially since she wanted full sets of some of the tales, but it had been worth it. John’s eyes were wide with the treasure in the box and even Sherlock looked intrigued by the lurid covers.
“This is great! Look, Sherlock! All these books! We can read them and talk about them and they look brilliant, too, so the talking will be just as much fun as the reading!”

Sherlock didn’t respond, but his continued digging to see farther into the box and the gleam in his eye said John’s plan wasn’t far off the mark.

“Thanks, Mrs. Lestrade!”

“You’re welcome, John. Sherlock, you happy?”

“I shall provide my report once I have more thoroughly assessed the situation.”

Which would begin soon, it seemed, as Sherlock casually slipped one of the Verne titles out of the pile and into the pocket of his dressing gown. Mother Lestrade was more than slightly pleased.

“I’ll give it a good read once you have it written out.”

“Perhaps I might assist with that. Sherlock, do pull over the two blue boxes and open those next.”

Sherlock narrowed his eyes at his grandmother, but complied, grunting slightly at the weight.

“If you have wrapped bricks as a jest, I shall be most cross!”

“Yes, such is a prank I am most likely to perpetrate. Get to work.”

Actually, Grandmama had done similar in the past, on more than one occasion, to vex both her husband and her son, who were notorious for trying to ascertain the nature of Christmas and birthday gifts long before their proper gifting date. Fortunately, neither had ever been very good at sidestepping the most straightforward and clichéd vexes… and, oh my. Could Sherlock’s eyes grow any larger?

“It… it is a computer.”

“What? Really? They have those for normal people?”

“Silence, flea! Speak in reverent tones in the presence of advanced technology.”

Sherlock looked as if he was going to crawl into the box with the computer, prompting Mycroft to intervene and help him remove it from its packaging and set it out for the boys to investigate.

“The second box is a printer, so Sherlock’s various manifestos can be distributed efficiently for perusal. Oh, and for the occasional school assignment. I do expect you two to make productive use of your computer and not fill it with… games, and such.”

Because that would not do with the British launch of the NES on the horizon, spurred on with some vigor by a few personal phone calls and a rather stern chastisement for heel-dragging and slipshod marketing tactics. Dear John would adore these ‘video games’ from what she had surmised and it would not do for him to have to sit and wait an eternity while the beastly American children got their grabby hands on a console and mauled it to death in the first week of ownership.

“This is brilliant! I don’t know anybody who has one of these! Sherlock, do you know how to use a computer?”

No.
“I am somewhat of an expert on the subject.”

“Good, because I’m not and you’ll have to show me what to do. Thanks, Grandmama! I can’t wait to start learning how to use it because I’ve heard computers are amazing and can do all sorts of wonderful things!”

Sherlock remained mute on the subject, because his mind still hadn’t quite processed the fact that a computer was finally in his hands. The research potential was unlimited…

“While Sherlock’s in his trance, it’s time for another. Mycroft… Greg… open mine.”

Lestrade gave Mycroft the honors then laughed when he saw the contents of the bright red box in his partner’s hands. Apparently, Mum had a theme for the day.

“Cookbooks! And… that’s not your special skillet, is it?”

“A new one, but yes. Can’t have a repeat of your fry-up disaster again, now can we?”

Both Lestrade and Mycroft shuddered at the thought. They’d gotten a bit… amorous… while cooking breakfast in London and their pan had paid the cost of their lustful behavior. Not that they’d told that particular version of the story to Lestrade’s mother, but it didn’t change the fact they were lacking one proper and functional skillet.

“No, that we cannot. And Mycroft is really enjoying our cooking experiments, so we’re going to see a lot of use out of the books, too.”

Which was very true. Mycroft loved cooking in their big kitchen, with a glass of wine in his hand and a partner who didn’t mind taking on the actual physical work while he supervised. And, honestly, Lestrade had to admit he wasn’t at all unhappy with the arrangement. He was taking quite the liking to cooking and making things for his partner was a fantastic way to while away the time while they chatted, listened to some music and, generally, relaxed in a way that was different than their time in the library, but just as enjoyable.

“So, thanks, Mum! Mycroft and… love?”

Mycroft startled and nearly dropped the pencil he was using to underline dishes in their new books that looked particularly appealing. Just because he was not as prone to wield a saucier as his husband, he highly prized his role as administrator and quality control inspector. Truly, they were a flawlessly matched pair…

“I do apologize. Yes, my thanks, Mother Lestrade. This is a very thoughtful gift and will see extensive use.”

“Expect Elizabeth and I to assess your performance at some point in the near future. Though I suspect you will employ a cook once you formally take the London home as your permanent residence, you must be able to prepare a palatable and filling meal whenever guests arrive and members of the staff have their days off.”

Oh good… a family meal to cook. Could there be anything more… stirring… to have waiting for one in the future? Mycroft couldn’t think of anything and he was trying very, very hard.

“Excellent. We shall gladly welcome you to our table.”

That would teach her grandson to let such a monstrous lie stand unchallenged. Mycroft would cut off his fingers before wrapping them around a spatula. Now, to put a small amount of salve on the
“Do take the silver package near the stairs, Gregory, and with it, my wishes for many happy Christmases to come.”

Lestrade rose and returned with the large box which, when opened, contained an eye-widening selection of fine crystal glasses underneath a layer of elegantly-shaped snifters.

“Every man should have a solid drinks service and, if memory serves, your current selection in London, is not up to par. One must both impress and entertain guests, however, one must also take pleasure when one simply indulges with family. There are also a number of bottles of my preferred brandy waiting for you for your next visit. Please use them wisely.”

So, the maternal influences were already setting up their house. Mycroft and Lestrade shared a smile, as well as the thought, and wore that maternal approval and acceptance like a warm, comfortable blanket across their shoulders.

“Thanks, Grandmama. Really, these are beautiful. These brandy glasses… they’re certainly nicer than the ones we have and those others feel right in my hand, you know what I mean? That proper feeling that the glass fits your hand like it was born there?”

“I do and it is the mark of the correct glass choice that it not distract from the drinking experience with an awkward fit to one’s hand. I am very glad to have chosen an appropriate pattern.”

Which wasn’t terribly difficult given the auditioning of a number of potential candidates by a selection of young men with similar builds and hand structure to her grandsons.

“And I, also, offer my thanks, Grandmama. They are very handsome and will enliven our entertaining, I have no doubt.”

As well as their intimate life, for his spouse, was positively breathtaking lit by the glow of a roaring fire, with a glass of spirits in his hand.

“Now, boys… have you something for Gregory? Or should I say, are you in a fit state to present your gifts to Gregory?”

Two moles peeked out of their tunnels made of boxes, paper and gifts to peer out at Mycroft, squinting at the forgotten brilliance of the Christmas lighting.

“Oh! Right! I nearly forgot about the rest of the gifts. Sherlock, where’s our boxes?”

Sherlock was tempted to shrug, but decided he actually was excited about bestowing his gifts, so packed away the gesture for a later time and pushed over the two boxes for Lestrade.

“These are from us. We hope you like them!”

The older boy had no doubt he’d like whatever the two rascals had for him, but simply fell in love with the items he pulled out of the heavily-wrapped boxes.

“My own hat and scarf! And… I do believe these weren’t bought in any shop, were they?”

“Mother Lestrade subjected us to the tortuous process of… crafts.”

Said with his usual scornful tone, but with a light in his eyes that said Sherlock hadn’t exactly died from the experience.
“She taught us how to knit with our fingers! Mycroft helped us with the idea, though. He thought that since you’re out a lot with your friends and the shop gets cold in the winter, that you could use something to keep you warm. Your mum said she knew how to knit an easy way and showed us how to do it! We picked the yarn and everything.”

Which, to their credit, was tasteful and thick, so he’d definitely be warm in the winter and look smart, too. Well, as smart as one could with rather chunky and uneven winter wear on offer, but not a bit of that mattered, because this was the best hat and scarf Lestrade had ever owned and he’d wear them proudly.

“I think I understand why you two have been spending a lot of time with mum lately and I have to say I’m glad for it. These are special, truly special. And… see! They fit!”

John smiled and clapped at Lestrade’s modeling and even Sherlock had to admit to himself that they hadn’t done as bad a job as he’d feared. You really couldn’t see the problems with his scarf when it was wrapped and tied and John’s hat’s crookedness didn’t show nearly as horridly when it was actually on a head as large as the lackey’s. And the lackey… Lestrade… did seem genuinely pleased…

“Very handsome, son.”

“I must commend you, children… you have done a very serviceable job and I am impressed by the diligence required to accomplish such a task with this degree of success.”

Mycroft laid a kiss on his beloved’s cheek and nuzzled said cheek for good measure. Sherlock and John had tied their fingers together so often and had so many frustrations that he and his mother-in-law feared they would give up their challenge, but their concerns were, ultimately, unfounded and his spouse was absolutely radiant wearing their efforts.

“Hurray! Oh! Sherlock! Get Mycroft’s presents!”

“You are, by far closer.”

John looked around and realized that Mycroft’s gifts were about one hand’s width from his bottom.

“Right! Mycroft, these are from Sherlock and me. Happy Christmas!”

Mycroft accepted the boxes, one heavy and one lighter, and asked which to open first. Sherlock and John conferenced and made their decision.

“Open the bigger one first. That’s mine.”

“Very well, John. Give me but a moment and… well. John, this is quite lovely…”

Mycroft picked up the wooden box and turned it round and round, taking in the pattern shallowly carved into the sides and top.

“Open it.”

Complying with the small boy’s wishes, Mycroft opened the box and was greeted by a padded, green, velvet lining that bore only the smallest traces of John’s unfamiliarity with working with fabric and glue.

“I am most impressed, John. This is a very attractive chest.”
“We found the box at a shop, but it was very plain, so Greg showed me how to carve and stain it to make it nicer and then how to make the lining.”

“I am astounded by the detail of the work. Thank you, John. I shall only use it for the most important and meaningful items.”

“Yeah, well… that’s sort of the point. Open Sherlock’s now.”

Ah, so there, again, was collusion. There was nothing more heartwarming than the children working in tandem towards a common goal, especially when his dearest spouse had his hands upon their shoulders.

“I shall. Let us see what secrets this very sturdily-wrapped package might hold.”

This time, it was John who grabbed Sherlock’s hand and the two waited with little patience for Mycroft to pass judgment. Which was taking a very long time as Mycroft simply stared into the opened box, saying nothing to anyone.

“Love? Are you alright?”

“I… I believe so. Sherlock… this is Father’s pocket watch. And it is functioning.”

Mycroft finally lifted out the watch by its chain, which carefully had been placed in the box so its case was open and the hands could be seen to move.

“Your concubine said you would appreciate a gift that had personal meaning, perhaps something that you had owned once and had lost. I know this does not meet that criterion, however… I have seen you holding the watch when you are especially missing Father. I investigated the problem and, after researching it thoroughly, obtained the proper tools to clean the mechanism and perform what was, ultimately, a simple repair. John made a box that was fitting to house the watch when it is not being worn.”

Lestrade wondered if he should take his partner for a little walk away from family eyes, as there were tears on his cheeks, but decided that if you couldn’t be honest in front of your family, there was something wrong with your family.

“This… this was very good of you, Sherlock. I have often thought about having Father’s watch repaired, however… I simply didn’t. I did not feel it, perhaps, my place. But now… now it feels right to see it working and warming to another hand. Thank you, brother. And thank you, John, for giving it a splendid bed in which to rest.”

Mycroft wiped his eyes and forced himself to set the watch into its new home. Sherlock was right… the watch had become something of a comfort item for him, something that was purely Father’s and worn by him nearly every day. When he was loneliest, most frustrated, overwhelmed or afflicted with the deep and penetrating sadness that memories of his father brought him, the watch helped soothe his mind like nothing else ever could. And, now… now it was his and he knew, absolutely knew, Father would be happy for it. From the look in Grandmama’s eyes, she believed so, too.

“And you, my dear… I see now why the idea for Mummy’s gift was so fresh in your mind.”

Lestrade kissed away the last of his lover’s tears, uncaring of the eyes watching him, and smiled gently.

“I’m not very bright, love. Only a couple of ideas per year from me, so sometimes they have to be reused. Speaking of, didn’t I see a couple of presents from your mum for you and Sherlock?”
Said with a firm squeeze of Mycroft’s hand that let Mycroft know they would talk more about this later, something he was unutterably glad to know. Grandmama was correct… it was time to talk about Father and there were no ears so loving, patient and compassionate than his husband’s.

“Ah, I had almost forgotten. Sherlock… will you get them? I believe they are towards the back of the tree…”

Sherlock scowled, for a number of reasons, but dug through the mountain of paper and empty boxes to find the packages with his and his brothers’ name on them, written in a familiar hand.

“So, with what has Mummy burdened Sherlock and me this year? Last Christmas was a book on manners for Sherlock and a professionally-prepared diet and exercise plan for me.”

“You’re lean as one of those gazelles, Mycroft. Your mother is a daft one, and I can’t wait for the day I meet her so I can say so to her face.”

Mother Lestrade’s expression said clearly that said meeting would not be one that Mummy would find highly entertaining, which intrigued Mycroft to a very extreme degree. Mummy meeting a truly formidable opponent would be a grand thing to witness.

“Thank you, Mother, however, Mummy’s views of svelteness do not match terribly well with the norm. Now, what have we here… oh. Well, this is certainly unexpected.”

Mycroft pulled out a gadget he didn’t immediately recognize, but Lestrade did and felt as surprised as did his partner.

“It’s one of those new portable CD players. You can carry them around wherever you go and listen to your music, like with the cassette players. And… oh, you’ve got some new CD’s, too. Classical, just what you like. This will be nice for you when you’re traveling, love. I’d say this was a well thought-out gift.”

Which was what was shocking Mycroft to no end. It was well thought-out, but actually for what he would like or could use, rather than what she thought he needed. Very, very interesting…

“I shall thank her most genuinely when she phones this evening. Sherlock… your turn.”

Sherlock looked a bit less wary after seeing his brother’s gift, but still opened his box slowly, ever watchful for a trap, since the box was very heavy.

“A chess set. It’s… it’s a chess set.”

As the set was slowly taken from the box, everyone could see why the boy was so flustered. The board was elaborately decorated, with lions for feet and, as Sherlock extracted the pieces, everyone gaped at the figures which were made of metal and cast with the most detailed and striking forms. And they were large, as was the board, which would certainly add an air of gravity to the play. For someone who enjoyed a healthy measure of theater in everything he did, it was the perfect set for a boy like Sherlock.

“Wow! Everyone has faces and the horses are real horses and they have clothes, the people not the horses and… wow!”

Lestrade watched the two boys carefully pick up each piece to study more closely, then began to study his lover more closely. Today was hitting Mycroft with a lot of force, but it was good. All of it was good, even if Mycroft looked a bit like he was unsteady right now.
“How are you doing, love?”

“I… I am fine. Mummy has surprised me and that is something I can say she has done only rarely. Twice in one day is quite a record. A real gift for Sherlock that he would both appreciate and enjoy…”

“I think you’re forgetting something, though.”

“Oh? What?”

“Your mum knows he can’t play chess alone and she knows who he’s been playing with. I’m not saying it’s an olive branch but… take it for what it’s worth, I guess.”

And another punch of emotion to Mycroft’s gut, but he happily accepted the blow. Yes, Mummy was quite aware with whom Sherlock was playing chess, having made a remark about the intellectual lopsidedness of the contest when once she witnessed a game between the boys. Though this could be interpreted as a method to make John feel inferior during gameplay, he chose to believe it was not. That it was, as Gregory said, some form of effort on her part and he would snatch it to hold fast, small and vague as it was.

“I believe you may be correct.”

Mycroft shot a quick look at his grandmother and interpreted that slight narrowing of her eyes and evidence of thinking along the same lines. Christmas seemed to be a wealth of surprises, now didn’t it?

“Are you content with your gift, brother dear?”

“It is adequate, I suppose.”

Said while never taking his eyes off the king in his hand and as his fingers traced the lines of the royal robes and symbols of office.

“Excellent. Then I believe we are done for the moment…”

“Wrong. If you two think you’re holding back your own gifts to each other, then you’re sadly mistaken. Let’s see the embarrassing and probably inappropriate things you bought so we can all have a laugh.”

Lestrade glared at his mother, but Grandmama was nodding in approval of the plan, so he was doomed whether he liked it or not.

“Christmas harassment. Another fine family tradition. Thanks, Mum.”

“Get moving.”

“Fine! Wait a minute…”

Making a show of dragging himself out of his seat, Lestrade took down Mycroft’s stocking, which, like his, hadn’t been explored and handed it to his partner.

“You dig through that while I get your present.”

A statement that puzzled Mycroft, but this was the Great Surprise Christmas, so he decided to simply ride along with the lunacy and started pulling things out of his stocking.
“The sweets I enjoyed! I thought your shop no longer stocked this particular flavor? Gregory? Gregory!”

“What! Good lord, a man can’t step out of your sight for a minute, can he?”

“I do apologize. The sweets?”

“Oh! I knew you liked those, so I had my uncle special order a bag.”

The fact that Mycroft looked like a bloody sex god with a sweet in his mouth, sucking it and rolling it around with his tongue in no way played a part in his gift-giving decision.

“Well, I thank you. And a polishing cloth! For my watch, I suspect.”

“You’d be right. The jeweler a few doors down from the shop said gold doesn’t tarnish, but can use a nice rubbing to keep the shine.”

“Most practical. I highly approve. Oh…”

“Like it?”

“Were you inspired, perhaps, by the children this time?”

“I might admit to the theft of an idea or two.”

That perked up Sherlock and John’s ears and the two leaned over to see what was going on.

“Though, I must say, the photograph of the children collecting soil samples is more to my taste than their suits. And how handsome you look, as well, my dear.”

Mycroft showed the family the small travel-sized frame with the photo of Lestrade kneeling by the boys, holding a vial for Sherlock to fill while John stood ready with the cap. He was the one who took the photograph, actually, and had adored it deeply for its perfect crystallization of his family’s love for each other.

“I found the frame in one of the second-hand shops and gave it a bit of a cleanup. Then I had another print made of the negative of that image, because I know it’s one of your favorites. Now, you can take us all with you when you go off on one of your trips.”

“It shall be a tremendous balm at the end of my day to have this near me.”

“As it should be! My attractiveness should soothe any manner of ill-temper.”

“Thank you, Sherlock.”

Mycroft continued on in his stocking, giggling at the toys that filled the bottom of his stocking, all silly things that he had and his spouse had played with while shopping for the boys’ Christmas gifts during their one shared day at the shops. It had been glorious and whimsical and a breath of the freshest air and now, small reminders of that day were in his fingers to fire those memories again at will, though Sherlock was already looking covetously at his collection of marbles and bounce balls, all handsome samples with vibrant swirls of color. Protective measures would have to be taken.

“And this, love… I didn’t want you to guess what it was too soon, so I hid it in the coat closet.”

The long, thin box came out from behind Lestrade’s legs and Mycroft’s mind went through the potential contents, quickly settling on the likeliest of candidates, the identity of which was confirmed
when he finished undressing his gift.

“An umbrella! Oh, Gregory… it is positively lovely.”

With a handle of dark, polished wood, possessed of a rich selection of whorls and highlights and a band of polished silver at the hilt, it was a striking accessory to carry.

“I thought about those days when it’s raining and the driver holds the umbrella over you to get you to and from the car. That can’t always happen, I’m sure, so you should have something to keep those nice suits dry when you have to go around in London or wherever you might be for business. I had to put some work into getting it fixed up and looking like new, but it’s a beauty, I think. The loveliest I could find and with some polish and a bit of tinkering… well, listen to me go on…”

“As well you should! This is an exceedingly comely model and I would never have thought it to be anything but come straight from a fine London shop. And you are quite right… I have suffered more than one occasion of being caught without benefit of a handy, umbrella-wielding driver to preserve the dignity of my suit. I positively adore it, my love. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

How could his lover see so clearly into his soul and find the thing that would match his needs and his tastes to such a staggering degree? It was a miracle that stood out even in this season of miracles.

“And, as Mycroft’s grandfather believed, a man of stature should have with him a signature item that marks his presence, be it a quality pen, a watch or, in this case, an umbrella. Which, actually, he was apt to carry quite often, even on days the sun shone quite brightly in the sky. I will not state for the record that he believed it made him appear alternately dashing and imposing, but… he did, and I am confident it will add the same to Mycroft’s presentation. Very nicely done, Gregory.”

“Is it possessed of a sword?”

Dear Sherlock, ever the creative boy. And as bloodthirsty as any pirate.

“Yeah! You can chop off people’s heads if they get cheeky!”

And his First Mate, John.

“I daresay this particular model does not offer that particular feature, but I shall keep that in mind for the future if I am in a position to seek a replacement.”

“Then it is boring and worth naught of my attention.”

“My spirit shall withstand the crushing. Now you, my dear? I cannot boast your level of inspired thought, but I hope you shall be pleased, nonetheless.”

Mycroft carefully brought down Lestrade’s filthy sock and glared at the two boys who were giggling at his germophobia.

“The children asked the honor of filling this, so even I am not entirely certain what it contains, though I did add one or two items on the top.”

“Little tykes wanted to be Father Christmas? I’m flattered. Let’s see… plasters and muscle cream. These are from you, aren’t they love?”

“Your comfort and health are ever my concern.”
“That they are. And… a purple comb.”

“Your hair would disappoint an overgrown sheep.”

“A gift from Sherlock! Thanks, lad. And the color is just what I would pick for myself.”

“It was supposed to be insulting.”

“Too bad for you. What’s this… ah, a bottle opener to hang with my keys.”

“You drink a lot of beer, so it should be useful.”

“Thanks, John. That’s very observant of you. We’ve got a quality selection of sweets wrappers…”

“Sherlock! Did you eat Greg’s chocolate!”

“I will not confess, field mouse!”

“Eating someone’s presents isn’t nice at Christmas!”

Implying it was alright at other times, Lestrade noted. John had an amusingly-fluid moral code.

“If you find forensic evidence that I was the perpetrator, present it. Otherwise, cease your slanderous accusations.”

John’s finger wagging was ignored entirely by Sherlock, though he did it a fraction of an inch from Sherlock’s nose.

“Moving along from the pretty papers… more paper! In a nice little notebook and some pencils and pens to go along with it.”

“That’s for your notes when you’re a policeman. I know from the telly how important that is.”

“Thanks, John. And you’re right. A copper needs to have his notebook on him at all times and a handy supply of things to write with. This is going to be very helpful. And now we have… who sold you cigarettes?”

The collective gasp from the occupants of the room went completely unnoticed by the boys sitting happily on the floor.

“Your friend Mark! None of the shops would sell them to us, so we gave him the money and he bought them for us. Don’t worry, he said he wouldn’t do it if we were going to smoke them, but if it was a gift, that was alright.”

“That the local till-minders refused to add our coin to their purses is clear evidence of why this region is rapidly eroding due to economic disintegration.”

Ok, only a mate to beat senseless and not some idiotic shopkeeper. That last one would probably mean paperwork for the police and he had to start thinking about things like that since he’d be the one filling out the necessary forms soon enough.

“Greg… I thought you said you weren’t smoking anymore?”

Forgot about the mother and grandmother looking over the shoulder…
“Uh… I’m not?”

“Ending a sentence with an upwards inflection is highly damning, Gregory. Highly damning, indeed.”

“Yeah… is it?”

“Mycroft also smokes, though he believes he successfully camouflages the fact with breath spray. Both of them should be horsewhipped for their filthy habit.”

Sherlock caught Mycroft’s thrown stocking with the head, where it flopped down across his smugly-smirking face.

“I see. Words will be had, gentlemen.”

“Oh yes. You two know better, especially with those two around. I’m surprised they haven’t eaten a few fags by this point the way you usually forget and leave them lying around, Greg.”

“We are not infants! We do not shove everything in our path into our toothless, drooling maw!”

“CAN we return to our jubilant Christmas morning and leave aside the chastisement for Gregory and my highly infrequent indulgence for a later time.”

“I am making a mental note, Mycroft.”

Grandmama’s mental notes were housed in a mental warehouse of mental file cabinets that stretched back to near her birth and she could revisit any at will. Lovely.

“I hope the experience is a pleasant one. Gregory, why do you not take a moment and open the larger of your gifts. I am not entirely certain that Sherlock and John will not open them by accident to provide additional construction material for their fort.

Which the boys had been creating with the boxes and paper littering the floors. At this juncture, a second story was being contemplated and Sherlock had stolen one of Lestrade’s new pencils to begin the architectural drawing.

“Alright. Hand it to me.”

“It? So terribly singular of you, my dear.”

“Mycroft… we agreed.”

“We agreed to one, as you termed it, Midas-y gift. You set no limit besides that. Fear not, though. I used a very light hand with my bestowment.”

Lestrade gave Mycroft a cautionary look, but waited silently while Mycroft motioned John to find the remaining boxes and push them over towards the recipient. Much to Lestrade’s surprise and delight the pile totaled three.

“Any order I should know about?”

“Hmmmm… the green one will be a good start.”

The flat box gave little resistance to Lestrade’s eager hands and Mycroft beamed brightly hearing his husband’s loud, excited laughter.
“The shirt! You hated this shirt!”

Lestrade held up the shirt, which was boldly emblazoned with the symbol for his favorite, as Mycroft called it, football organization. They’d seen it in a shop window where it was immediately pronounced ghastly by the man currently smiling as proudly as he could.

“But you do not, so I hope you wear it gladly.”

“I will! My mates are going to be so envious… thank you, love. This is great.”

“You are welcome, now… do choose the gold next.”

“Alright. Oh, this one’s a bit heavy… yes! A football book to go with my football shirt!”

“You do seem to enjoy the various facts, figures and history of the sport, so I thought this would be a useful and entertaining reference.”

“Oh, it will. My nose is going to be stuck in it until I hit the last page and then it’s going to dive back in every time me and my mates have a fight over who did what during that match back in 19 who can remember. Perfect. Really, this is perfect.”

“And, to continue the theme…”

Mycroft pointed to the last and largest of the boxes and was thrilled that Lestrade dove in with an almost manic glee, tossing the paper and ribbon onto Sherlock, who looked up from his blueprint and snorted loudly in indignation.

“This… ok, it’s something electronic, that’s for certain. Hold on, let me see it better… wait a minute. Mycroft, you didn’t…”

“I know that your schedule is a busy one, Gregory, and when you begin your career in law enforcement it shall become busier still. Already you bemoan the times that you are forced to miss a programme that you had hoped to view or one of your beloved sports matches, so…”

“A video machine! This means I can record things, right, and watch them when I want to?”

“Precisely. Do you feel it will be of use to you?”

“It sure as fuck will! Sorry Mum. And Grandmama. And you two on the floor forget you heard that. This is fantastic, love! I don’t know anyone who has one, but everyone wants one and it’s going to be super for those times… well, just like you say, when I’m too busy to sit and enjoy a show I’ve been wanting to see. Thank you, Mycroft. This really is wonderful and I can’t wait to try it.”

Mycroft preened slightly and congratulated himself for not making a complete fool of himself with his gift giving. He hadn’t really done it before, strangely, and the price for failure was a disappointed spouse, which was not at all acceptable. Of course, there was still one thing for his dear husband and that might change his scorecard, in no manner for the better.

“Now, I suggest we return to the topic of your small gifts. Is there anything else, my love, in your… sock?”

Lestrade smiled and stuck his hand back in the stocking to hit… something.

“I suppose so. Let’s see…”
It took a little tugging to pull out the soft mass and Lestrade watched it unfurl into… a stocking.

“I thought it might just be some paper stuffing the toe. This, I think, needs explaining.”

“Well, as John lacked a Christmas stocking, so did you. I obtained this one for you at the same time I found John’s, but… decided a surprise was called for.”

Because Mycroft knew the story of how his husband had his stocking, as a child, thrown into the trash by his father one night after too much alcohol and too little money to spend on more alcohol which, somehow, became his husband’s fault. After that, his love never wanted a stocking and nothing his mother could say would make him change his mind. Now, he could only hope his beloved would accept the gift, though, he really did not react poorly to Sherlock’s little jest, nor the traditional rituals associated with it.

“You did, did you?”

Lestrade cut eyes both to Mycroft and his mother, who both were watching him anxiously and he couldn’t help but start laughing. Standing up, he put his new stocking back in the spot his temporary one had been and ran a hand up and down to smooth the rumples.

“Well, I think you were right. It’s great, love. Haven’t had a real stocking in long time and it’ll be wonderful to have one again, especially since it’ll nestle in with the rest of them. Thank you, Mycroft. It definitely was a surprise and a very good one, at that.”

Mycrof and Greg’s mother heaved a small sigh of relief and felt a spike of happiness for the person they both loved. Everyone had their ghosts and those ghosts dutifully paid their respects at the holidays. It was a true blessing when one finally had an exorcism.

“So, maybe it’s time for one final surprise. What do you think?”

Mycrof grinned widely and even more widely at the cautious curiosity on the older women’s faces. Not even mum knew about the ‘final surprise,’ as they’d left the bicycles at the shop until yesterday and had Mycroft’s driver retrieve them and hide them in the garage before he left for his own Christmas Eve celebrations.

“I think you are a very wise man.”

“Give me a minute, then. Why don’t you see if everyone is fine for a nibble or two and meet me outside in five?”

“The countdown begins.”

Now, Sherlock and John were curious and set aside their plans for their box-based fortress to glare at Mycroft who obviously knew something they didn’t, which was not acceptable.

“What ridiculousness are you finagling, Mycroft. And do not dissemble, for I will know and will subject you to shame and derision.”

“Well, won’t that be a welcome bit of familiarity. Have another slice of your delicious cake, brother dear, and raise your blood sugar.”

Sherlock had a response to make, but the word ‘cake’ beat it into submission and instructed Sherlock’s mouth to make better use of itself.

“Good. In fact, let us all enjoy a bit of refreshment while Gregory prepared our little surprise.
Sherlock, John… please do eat your fill. I would hate for you to lose your vigor so early in our Christmas celebrations.”

The boys didn’t need to be told twice and turned attention away from presents and back towards food, while Mycroft countered maternal looks with a very practiced, cool confidence. When the agreed-upon wait time was over, a clearing of the throat gathered the family with Sherlock and John pushed along at the front so when they opened the main door, they were the first to see what lay in store for them.

“BICYCLES! REAL BICYCLES!”

John ran forward faster than Mycroft had ever seen him move and dove towards the bike that he had correctly guessed was his, hugging the handlebars and hopping up and down so wildly that Lestrade had to lay a hand on his shoulder to settle him back down.

“BICYCLES! This is great!”

Mycroft looked down at Sherlock, who was still at his side, and waited for either the explosion of temper, the snort of disdain or the spark of curiosity.

“SHERLOCK! YOU’VE GOT TO COME SEE OUR BICYCLES!”

That, at least, pulled the dark-haired boy forward and Mycroft was now flanked by the two women, who seemed to share his uncertainty about how Sherlock would react.

“See! Aren’t they brilliant!”

“Why in the world is a peasant’s mode of transport brilliant?”

“Because they’re fun! And we can ride around your property and go to the lake for samples and have races and get to the shops quickly and go exploring and visit Mrs. Lestrade and…”

As John continued on with his list, Mycroft ticked off everything he and his husband had thought of as possible points of argument to demonstrate to Sherlock why the bicycles were a good idea and John seemed to hit every one, with a few thrown in that they had completely overlooked.

“AAAAAAAAHHHH!!! THIS IS AMAZING!”

John hugged Lestrade’s legs tightly, then ran and did the same to Mycroft before running back and getting on his bike to ride around the drive, whooping and waving with so much enthusiasm and sheer happiness that Mycroft was positive he saw his grandmother crack one of her extraordinarily rare and nearly invisible smiles.

“Well, Sherlock… what do you think?”

Sherlock looked up at Lestrade and scowled ferociously, but there was a tremble in his lower lip that prompted the older boy to squat down for a more private conversation.

“I…”

“Yeah?”

“I do not know how to pilot one of these contraptions.”

But, from the tone of his voice, he very much wanted to and Lestrade had not missed the flashes of interest in Sherlock’s eyes as John stormed through his sales pitch.
“That’s not a problem. They’re easy to learn, really, and I’ll help you every step of the way. That’s if you _want_ to ride it, of course.”

Sherlock bit his lower lip and looked over at John who was pedaling as fast as he could and having the time of his life, before nodding slightly and hesitantly and completely missing the thumb’s up sign Lestrade made behind his back to signal his lover that all was well.

“All right, then. How about I send the others inside to have some real breakfast and we can have a few lessons. Then you can show them how masterfully you can ride. You picked up driving easily enough, so I bet we can get you up and riding faster than you can even imagine.”

Sherlock nodded again and kept his face away from the family members standing on the steps while Lestrade went over to shoo them inside to spy on the boys through the windows instead. Which, of course, they did while Lestrade patiently worked with Sherlock until he could make a slow, wobbly ride on his own and was, himself, banished for the boy to ‘perfect his technique without distraction.’

“Well, love… I think they like their gift.”

“Look at them, Gregory… having such a… normal time. It is positively astounding and I am utterly thankful for it.”

“You two do realize how much trouble you’ve made for yourselves, right?”

Mycroft and Lestrade turned to flash a ‘yes, we do, but it’s worth it so keep quiet, thank you’ smile at Greg’s mum, who smiled back with a ‘you poor, stupid bastards’ grin.

“The children are ready to experience a greater degree of independence, however, that will be accompanied by the requisite greater degree of responsibility and accountability.”

“Oh dear, Elizabeth… the poor boy actually believes that.”

“Some things you have to learn the hard way, I suppose.”

“I concur, and this ‘hard way’ shall be a true exemplar of the breed. More tea?”

“Love some.”

Leaving the happy couple alone to keep watch on the goblins, the experienced parents set off to find a bracing cup of tea and begin preparing a hot breakfast for their charges. The day was off to a rollicking start and there was so much more ahead of them. Perhaps coffee was a better choice than tea…

The boys finally had to be dragged off of their bicycles by Lestrade and brought inside to eat a late breakfast and put their gifts in their bedrooms. Then it was back on their bicycles until the Queen’s speech, which they groaned about having to suffer through, but had to admit to themselves was made far more tolerable by Grandmama’s running commentary on the parts she, personally, added, the inside meaning of certain of the statements and similar about other speeches in the past. Then it was Christmas dinner after the staff returned, complete with crackers, which kept the boys occupied long enough to stop badgering the rest of the family to go back outside to ride their bicycles or set up the computer or start a game of chess or pick a book to read or any of the countless things they wanted to do all at the same time. And, of course, the phone call with Mummy which went shockingly well and when both Sherlock and Mycroft wished her well for Christmas, they meant it with more sincerity than they had in a long, long time.
By the time dinner was finished, each and every person over the age of puberty was desperate for a drink and Mycroft and Lestrade held a silent debate over who should take first watch with the over-stimulated children. Since the battle ended in a draw, the boys were nudged towards the library to set up their chess board and settle into a game while the various spirits were distributed and refreshed until a late-night nosh was served to put the final nail in the coffin of the Christmas festivities and womenfolk gathered their goodnight kisses and retired for the evening, Sherlock and John were washed and put to bed and the nearly-engaged pair collapsed on the sofa in the library and marveled that they had survived their first family holiday.

“We did it, love.”

“We most certainly did. In grand style and with stellar success.”

“Have I told you today that I love you? I’ve sort of forgotten bits and pieces of the day… I think I may have fallen asleep on my feet a few times… but if I didn’t I want to say it now – I love you, Mycroft Holmes, and this has been the best Christmas of my life.”

“And I love you, Gregory, with, in full, your sentiment returned. This has been a Christmas such as I could not have dreamed and it is only our first. Our first of so, so many…”

“Ready for bed?”

“No, not yet, if you do not mind. I am far too comfortable, here in your arms.”

Lestrade wriggled slightly to make his partner even more comfortable and settled in to relax and enjoy the feeling of being deeply in love.

“Then that’s where you’ll stay. Of course… you do know Sherlock and John will be awake at dawn again, don’t you?”

“Ah, yes. That is likely true.”

“Do we still have coffee?”

“The kitchen is very thoroughly provided with that particular substance.”

“Then everything’s fine. Sleep is for the weak, anyway.”

“Which in no manner describes us.”

“Not at all.”

“Perish the thought.”

Luckily, the rug was thick and the glasses were sturdy so they survived the fall from sleeping hands as both boys drifted off a few minutes later to dream of each other and the joy the coming years would bring. Christmas was only one day, a special day, but only a single one and they had this joy in their lives always, now that they had found each other. What wasn’t quite so joyous was the crooked backs they would suffer in the morning, but, with two still-excited boys to manage, that really was the least of their worries…
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

And we come to the end of this installment of the Ages of Man saga. Soon, the next story - The Police Man - will make its appearance, picking up a heartbeat after this tale ends. It’s been a wonderful ride and I have greatly appreciated every bit of support people have given to this story. See you for the next one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Again?”

“Be silent, peasant, and accept your burden.”

Sherlock marched into the shop and dropped yet another load of found/bought/pilfered goods onto the floor behind the counter, with John repeating the action a moment later. Since they had gotten their bicycles, the amount of terrain the two had covered in their explorations was indefinable and, beyond a few scrapes and bruises from ‘the monstrous and uncouth acts of heartless nature and incompetents charged with maintaining roads’ Sherlock and John had found every bit of hoped-for joy that Lestrade could wish. Of course…

“A basket. One nice basket for each of you. How about it?”

“Baskets are for babies, Greg. You have a car with a boot, so why can’t you carry our things home for us?”

Acquiring countless bits of flotsam and jetsam during their travels was one the boys’ favorite pursuits. Porting said flotsam and jetsam back with them, however, was apparently beneath their dignity.

“Because I’m not off work for another two hours and trying to get things done with a trash pile underfoot isn’t the easiest or most sanitary thing.”

“There is nothing unsanitary about my paint samples!”

Lestrade looked at the pile of broken radios, plumbing supplies and women’s shoes and wondered if Sherlock’s brain had overheated.

“There’s no paint there.”

“The paint samples, microwit, are in my jacket pocket.”

Definite overheat.

“Here, why don’t you two have a seat and I’ll get you a nice glass of water.”

“John and I have a full agenda and no time for your cholera-laced beverage.”

“I have time for cholera, Sherlock. We haven’t had a break since we came home from school.”
Sherlock huffed loudly and made ‘away with you’ motions to Lestrade, who drew over two stools and found a couple of clean glasses for water.

“Please tell me you did your schoolwork first, though. Mycroft and I both said that if you ignore your studies, those bicycles are going to be locked away until things get back to normal.”

“The time required to complete my nonsensical assignments can be slotted between my fork leaving my plate and finding my mouth, so I do not share your petty concerns.”

“John, you want to put a real person’s opinion out there?”

“We actually don’t have much to do today, Greg, so it’s alright. A few problems for maths class and we have to think of a topic for a history essay, but that’s all.”

Not that Lestrade was terribly worried about the boys’ schoolwork, actually. John had turned bleached-bone white at the threat of losing his valiant mount and had remained highly attentive to his academic demands, dragging along Sherlock so his riding partner remained at his side.

“That doesn’t sound like an issue, then. And, dare I ask what you’re going to do with the rest of the time?”

“Experiments!”

“Football!”

“There seems to be a difference of opinion.”

“Not really, Greg. I get to practice by kicking the ball against the house and Sherlock is going to work on footprints.”

“Yours?”

“No, different footprints.”

John pointing to the ladies’ shoes solved the mystery nicely.

“Well, it’s good that you’re each getting to do something interesting.”

And that was a holy truth, in Lestrade’s opinion. Sherlock would do his science and John could run off his overflowing tank of energy in his own, special way. Despite his fears, John wasn’t doing an altogether poor job of making time for things he enjoyed and wasn’t afraid, when he was tired or really wanted to do something else, of telling Sherlock no.

“Time permitting, I shall, also, conduct various tests on John’s accuracy and cardiovascular fitness.”

Which would let John run around more and play with his new football. Nice job, Sherlock.

“After dinner, we’re going to experiment with the paint samples Sherlock collected. I get to chew some and see if they taste sweet. That means there’s lead in them.”

Yes, nice job keeping your test subjects fit and healthy before you poison them.

“Well, let’s see if there’s another test for lead than having you drop dead on the floor, shall we?”

“Sherlock! You said lead wasn’t poisonous! You’re a horrible liar.”
“No, I am a tremendously-talented liar and, despite the shop boy’s hysterical doom-spouting, you are highly unlikely to die from the miniscule amount of lead you shall consume. Besides, with the quantity of food that shall be in your gullet after dinner, the chance the relevant molecules shall find a portal into your body tissues is small within all levels of scientific acceptability. Hmmmm... we could, however, monitor your elimination to document the rate of clearance from your system.”

“That sounds disgusting.”

“Only for those who fear science.”

“Fear’s not my problem, Sherlock. Poo is my problem.”

“Since, as you say, it is your problem, I shall begin planning.”

Lestrade sighed, handed John something sweet to chew on and patted him on the shoulder. There was a smelly, ugly future ahead of the boy and he might as well enjoy his tasty, fragrant treat now while his senses still worked.

“Are you two done rubbish collecting or are there any other errands on your list?”

“We thought chips might be on our list.”

Said with perfect cute-puppy eyes that made Lestrade laugh and wish he could accommodate the little beggars. Unfortunately, Christmas had left him skint and with the boys’ demands on his wallet, he still couldn’t get ahead, even though Christmas was becoming a distant memory. So, nights out with the boys were few and far between. Nights out with any of the boys... his mates were in the same boat, though, so their occasional night ‘out’ had been at someone’s house where they could watch telly and drink parental beer if said parents were foolish enough to leave their supply without a heavy lock and chain around it. Needless to say, the hue and cry to stage their frolicking at Mycroft’s house was always ear-splitting, but he’d done a good job keeping the barbarians from the gates every night of the week.

“Not today, I’m afraid. First, I have to work until the shop closes and, second, I don’t have the money to buy dinner for the two of you. I get paid in a couple of days, though, and we can plan a night at the pub or the cinema after that. Alright?”

From their frowns, it was about as alright as it had been the last few times he had to turn down the boys for something he was too broke to buy, but at least they’d understood after he’d shown them his wallet and his money sock, which was now just a sock whose mate had been lost in the wash. That understanding was showing strain, though, and he didn’t begrudge them a bit. Only a few days after Christmas, Mycroft had to scamper to his college to make up a few oral exams and then went straight somewhere undisclosed for a week. That somewhere led, next, to London, where he had tended to be far more often than he was at home. In fact, that was where his partner was now, so he was feeling a little needy at the moment, himself, but what he needed couldn’t fit in a money sock.

“No.”

“Come on, Sherlock! If I could take you for chips, I would. You know I would. Here’s an idea... you get an allowance, so why don’t you take me out for chips instead?”

The scandalized look on Sherlock’s face was about what Lestrade expected, but it did his heart proud to see John pat both his and Sherlock’s pockets for money.

“Sorry, Greg, but we spent all of our money on nail varnish remover and moth flakes.”
“Tell me you’re not making a bomb or something.”

“Uh… Sherlock?”

“I am not at all convinced there shall be an explosion.”

“We’re going to make a barricade with sofa cushions just in case, Greg, so don’t worry that we’ll get hurt.”

“And how’s your lack of allowance money going to fare if you have to replace the sofa cushions because you’ve ruined the old ones with your maybe explosion?”

“The petty concern of provisioning is not mine to ponder.”

“Nice job using all those ‘p’ words, Sherlock. Almost like you planned it.”

“Preposterous.”

Sherlock got his own sweet treat to chew and it was actually a good hour before the boys made their way out of the shop to start the journey home. If they kept to their normal pattern, that would involve another spin through town to make certain there was nothing nefarious happening that they could get in on, a stop to break into his house to see if there was anything to snack on that his mum might have left out in the open for Sherlock to claim as ‘plain sight’ spoils, and a progressive check on various outdoor experiments that Sherlock had going. By the time they actually made it home, he might actually be off work and have a little time to kick the ball around with John and prance about in ladies’ shoes to make footprints for Sherlock to study.

And, maybe, if he got really lucky, Mycroft would call and they could all chat for a bit, which would make his lover happy. Nothing made Mycroft happier than when he knew they were together and having a nice time. Well, one thing did, and that was when Mycroft was there to share that nice time with them but… well, he should be home soon. Hopefully.

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“You have no head for mathematics!”

Sherlock slammed both fists down on the table and glared at Lestrade, who was hoping that the maths fairy would flutter down and touch his head with a magic wand, filling it with knowledge. What were they doing letting kids play with this witchcraft! At least John was spared these arcane incantations and black magic.

“I never said I was a maths genius, Sherlock. You need your brother for that and, if you haven’t noticed, he’s not here.”

“How could I not notice? The absence of elephant droppings and trumpeting at the kitchen door were two highly relevant clues.”

“Funny. I’m afraid you’re going to have to ask your teacher about this business, though. Get to school a little early and talk to them before class.”

“Your uselessness is not surprising, as most bumpkins have little value outside of the fields they are charged to till, however, as it is inconveniencing me, I am formally taking offense and shall make note of your lack of service in your weekly performance review.”

Delightful. Another multi-page report typed and printed on Sherlock’s new computer. Life was
Sherlock, you can’t expect Greg to know everything.”

“No, John, but it pleases me to do so at this time, so I shall.”

“Well, it’s not right. Don’t worry, Greg. Sherlock didn’t know anything about important things like Top Trumps and football until I taught him, so he’s just being evil. I think he misses Mycroft.”

“Outlandish! The day I miss the gingerpotamus is the day you may place me in the asylum and fasten the straps of my straightjacket.”

“Don’t tempt me, you little bastard. But…”

Lestrade looked at the clock and decided it was late enough that there was a chance Mycroft might be done for the day.

“… what say we give Mycroft a call and see if he’s home?”

“Yeah!”

“I have no wish to suffer bleeding from the ears!”

“It’s unanimous, then. Hold on a moment.”

Sherlock’s shrill protestations serenaded Lestrade as he walked to the telephone and dialed the number he’d known by heart since the first time he heard it. However, what he didn’t expect was it to be answered by a voice he hadn’t heard before.

“Hello?”

“Umm… hi. Is Mycroft there?”

“Yes, he is.”

Well, one question answered. Now, should he address the second question of who the fuck he was talking to or the third about the music and other voices he was hearing in the background? Oh, might as well stay in numeric order so he didn’t get lost in the details.

“And may I ask to whom I am speaking.”

Said in my poshest voice so you know you’re not dealing with a peasant, though I should likely have had Sherlock say it just to be sure.

“Is there something I can help you with?”

Arschhole.

“Yes, you can go and get Mycroft and tell him he’s wanted on the phone.”

“Myc is rather busy at the moment, so if you could… oh… yes, here you go.”

Myc?

“Yes? Mycroft Holmes speaking. May I help you?”

“I honestly don’t know at this point.”
“GREGORY! Oh, my dear, I am so sorry you were forced to wait. Edmund has indulged in a few cocktails and his manners are suffering for it, I’m afraid.”

Edmund?

“I see. And may I ask who is this Edmund, about whom I’m never heard once in my life?”

“Merely a classmate, beloved.”

Classmate?

“What do you mean by classmate?”

“Did I forget to mention that a few of the individuals with whom I shall share classes at college are in London at the moment?”

“Yes, you entirely failed to mention that, as well as the fact that you had actually met anyone at your college yet.”

“Dear me, I have been remiss in sharing my news, haven’t I? In any case, I had the opportunity to speak to a few of those who shall be in my college cohort and quite a number have family in the London area. In truth I am not entirely certain how the invitation to visit came about, save via a general pleasantry that my colleagues chose to capitalize upon.”

“So, you’re having a party.”

“Not so grand a thing, really. A few cocktails and hors d’oeuvres, nothing more.”

“I see…”

While he was catching Sherlock’s eye daggers in the heart because he couldn’t cast maths spells and would be up late tonight doing his own work because the idea of chewing lead paint was still skulking around, eyeing the boys with anticipation so they couldn’t be left unsupervised until their tiny heads were strapped to their pillows. Maybe that wasn’t fair, since he had a night with his mates now and then, however, a good number of those was spent here where he still had child-minding duty, but with a larger number of children.

“… I suppose that sounds like fun.”

“One cultivates connections where one can. A few of those with whom I associate during my… work hours… are also in attendance.”

“Connections, again?”

“Most certainly.”

“Yeah, well…”

Well, what? Be angry that Mycroft was having a fun night in? That was stupidly immature. Wasn’t Mycroft’s fault he was feeling a little bit lonely, what with spring almost in the air and everyone he knew getting that randy feeling that spring always seemed to bring.

“… good for you. Hope you have a nice time with that.”

“Oh, it is a trying thing, in truth, but social niceties can be powerful tools when wielded by a capable hand.”
“I’m sure you’ll make the best of it. I’ll let you get back to it, then. Really didn’t have anything to say, so… yeah. Have fun.”

“That is not necessary, my dear, let me hear…”

A crash was what Greg heard, followed by the exasperated huff usually saved for Sherlock’s antics.

“Perhaps it is better if I speak to you at another time.”

“Sounds like it. Bye, Mycroft. I love you.”

“As I do you, Gregory.”

Lestrade set down the receiver, then turned to nearly trip over two small boys who were standing about a foot away from him.

“Is there any chance of privacy in this house? Ever?”

“You were speaking to the beluga and that information could have bearing on John and my comfort and convenience, therefore, we have a right to know the details in full before you present your filtered, edited and censored version for our inspection.”

“Well, you dragged yourself over here for nothing.”

“As we observed. My brother is attempting to form a cult, which is laughable, since a cult leader must have a personality sufficient to draw followers to his depravity and Mycroft’s personality is completely nonexistent, though the same, unfortunately, cannot be said for his depravity.”

“He’s having a few people in for drinks, that’s all.”

“That is not possible, for Mycroft cannot claim to know any people. They avoid him like the plague and for demonstrably good reason.”

“Well, he does now. Met some of the lads he’ll be with at college and he’s got a few he works with that he invited, too. It’s good he’s having a nice time and not being so lonely. You don’t want him to be miserable do you? Wait, don’t answer. It’s really not necessary. Forgot myself there for a moment.”

“But Greg… Mycroft said he couldn’t come home because he was busy. Having a party doesn’t sound very busy to me.”

Nor to me, John, but that’s because I’m a selfish bastard right now and need to pull the telephone pole out of my arse about my lover not drowning in loneliness.

“No, it does, really. There are people he’s going to work with in the future and, what did he call them? Connections! That was it. Connections that could be helpful later on. It’s like a business party, but with people more his own age.”

“That sounds boring.”

Actually, it had sounded anything but boring, but that could stay Lestrade’s secret for now.

“It probably is, John, so don’t think poorly of him, alright? I’m sure he’d be here with us if he could. You know Mycroft loves us, he’s proven that many times, so, even if he did have a fun party or go out for the night with a new friend, don’t worry it means he loves us any less.”
“If you but slather yourself with whipped cream he will never leave your side.”

“Thank you, as always, for your kind and compassionate input, Sherlock.”

“You are welcome.”

Lestrade spun the two boys and marched them back to the library table to continue with their schoolwork. Mycroft would be home soon, anyway, and he’d salve any of the boys’ bruised feelings. Actually, he should be back in three days, to be precise. Coincidentally, just in time for the weekend, and he had already told Mum to expect him home until Monday night at the earliest. Mycroft had been away for a few weeks and he had a lot of pent-up libido to release on his lover’s pale, beautiful body.

“He is fantasizing, John. Witness the look.”

“Yuck. He is.”

“Hey! I’m just thinking about what sorts of things we can do when Mycroft gets home. He’ll be back in a few days, you know.”

“Do not think we believe your duplicity, menial! John and I did not factor in any way into your lust-crazed sexual imagery. May the gods of science be praised.”

Well, that was true.

“How about some juice?”

“You have damned yourself with your fruit-based attempt at distraction, however… I am a tad parched.”

“And the cook got pineapple juice!”

“I am not averse to pineapple.”

“I’ll race you.”

“You will lose.”

“Big talk for someone who doesn’t play sports or do…”

John shot off towards the kitchen, with Sherlock hot on his heels, shrieking his opinion of John’s treachery. Lestrade gave a silent cheer that attention successfully diverted from things that toddlers had no business giving their attention and the evening could get back to is regularly-scheduled programming. Three days more, that wasn’t so bad was it? Not at all…

“Say that again?”

“I am sorry, Gregory, so sorrowful you cannot begin to fathom my distress, but I shall not be returning home tomorrow, as planned.”

Count to ten. Count slowly to ten. Just yesterday, yesterday!, Mycroft said he was coming home and damn if Sherlock and John hadn’t started getting ready their own show-and-tell about what they had been doing. A whole album of photos of their adventures and books of data from their experiments… now he had to tell them that Mycroft wasn’t coming home to see it. Fucking
“Mycroft… just yesterday you told me…”

“I know, my dear, I know and it tears my heart to pieces to have to relay this news, but matters have arisen that require my immediate attention. There is simply nothing I can do.”

Count to ten. Count slowly to ten.

“Ok. I understand. You have to do what you have to do, right? I’ll break it to the boys, though, so you don’t have to deal with their nonsense. They miss you terribly, love, and were looking forward to you being back.”

“Thank you, Gregory. I miss them, as well, and do not feel I would fare well having to impart my news directly. John would somehow find a way to project to my vision his sad, pleading eyes and I would be undone.”

“You’re probably right. He’s become a professional and certainly doesn’t always use his powers for good. So… another day or two?”

“That is my hope, though I shall not dishonor you by making a promise I am not certain I can keep.”

“That’s probably smart. We’ve not had good luck lately, have we?”

“Merely a bump in a very long road, my dear. Though, if it could be different, I would have it so in a heartbeat.”

“I know. Alright, let me go and give the news. I suppose you probably brought work home with you and should get on to it.”

“A few items of business did return with me, however, I hope to see those concluded soon so that I might actually meet my bed at a reasonable hour.”

“Then I’ll let you get on with it. Bye, Mycroft. I love you and miss you terribly.”

“And I miss you, my beloved. Perhaps Mother Lestrade will be willing to watch Sherlock and John and we might have the house to ourselves when I return?”

“That sounds wonderful. I’ll see what I can do.”

Lestrade wished that, at least, Mycroft would be difficult to get off the phone, but that seemed to be somewhat a thing of the past. Which was good, really. It meant they were coming to grips with their situation and not being stupid and needy about it. But… a little stupid and needy would be nice right now. So…

“Do not bother to blubber your libidinous anguish over John and me, for we shall respond with all due vigor to keep our persons free from your besotted boo-hooing.”

And, of course, he had naught for privacy, not even for a single second to pull himself together. At least Sherlock and John didn’t look upset by things.

“How could you let Mycroft stay in London! He’s supposed to come home! Is he ever coming home? Does he have a new family?”

Maybe a little upset.
“You know better than that, John. And it’s only a few days more. Just a few.”

“Oh, and what then? Another phone call to say he’s not coming home?”

“Mycroft has forsaken his responsibilities like the craven blackguard he is and I, for one, am not surprised in the least. I have full faith he has already ensconced another concubine in his bedchamber.”

“Sherlock… we’ve been through this once. You poisoned me, you little bastard, to prove just how much Mycroft cares and now you’re willing to believe he’s leaving me behind? Where’s your science and evidence speech now?”

“Mycroft has scarcely been home since Christmas. During that time, he has vetoed a visit by you, John or I on more than one occasion and spends a full 48% less time on the phone, on average, than he has in the past. There is your evidence, science denier. If you have a microgram of critical-thinking ability, the conclusion should be clear.”

“It is. Mycroft is ridiculously busy with things that are important and he can’t say no to and we have to accept that and not be evil about it.”

“You are a door mat.”

Apparently, Mycroft’s absence was weighing very heavily on the two boys… they were never this negative about Mycroft not being home. His love would need to spend some very substantial quality time with Sherlock and John soon or they were going to be completely incorrigible.

“No, I’m just realistic. So, how about you two get back to your chronography experiments and…”

‘Chromatography, you baboon! I expect to perfect my technique by night’s end and add it to my already incomparable arsenal of scientific skills.”

“We’re separating the colors in leaves!”

Which wasn’t quite what Sherlock had originally wanted to try, but he was getting better at tailoring his experiments to be more interesting to John. Their bicycle physics tests were the stuff of legend and John proudly wore every scrape and bruise he received because of them.

“That sounds amazing. How about you show me what you’ve done and we can see what’s on the telly later? Maybe there’s a good film on and you can go to bed a little later tonight since there’s no school tomorrow.”

“The quality of television programming in this country is both appalling and boring. I have no doubt it is an intentional attempt by the dictatorial government to keep the rabble de-energized so that the slightest hint of rebellion would be crushed under the weight of their ennui.”

“A film on the telly it is, then. Come on, you two. Mycroft will only be a couple of more days and, by then, you’ll have the results of your crowmography experiments to add to your portfolio to show him.”

“Chromatography! I am imprisoned by the intellectually-crippled, with no hope of escape!”

“I’ll bake you cake with a file in it, lad. Don’t worry about a thing.”
Mycroft tried the next possible place his family might be hiding and wouldn’t make a formal claim of worry when he found it unpopulated, but… where in the devil was Gregory and the children? They knew he was to come home today… or not. The actual date of return had been rather fluid at their last point of communication so it was feasible that they had taken the day to enjoy an off-premises recreational pursuit.

Finally, a helpful member of staff had directed him towards the small airstrip and it was somewhat to his discredit that he stopped the car some distance away to simply have the chance to watch his family at their play. He and Gregory had never found the opportunity to create their race course, but, apparently, the boys had taken the initiative and crafted their own course, one with many various ramps, twists and turns… the children had been busy, it seemed, however… however it was now being used by his spouse and it was the most breathtaking sight in the world. Gregory’s muscular legs pumping the pedals of a bicycle, making jumps and undertaking small tricks that Sherlock was busy documenting and John was cheering. There was sweat drenching his shirt and his hair on this reasonably-mild day and… his smile. Gregory’s smile was large and unrestrained, nearly outshining the sun with its brightness.

Such an incomparable man. A doting parent, a virile lover, an unbridled taker of joy from life… and he was his. His Gregory, his beloved spouse… to know such a man was waiting at home made anything in his dreary days a tolerable act. And now, he could partake of his spouse and enjoy the antics of the children. Well, as soon as he came out of hiding and joined them, that is…

“Mycroft! You’re home!”

John ran towards Mycroft as soon as he stepped out of the car and gave him a tremendous hug. Then a painful punch on his leg.

“Why didn’t you come home sooner!”

Lestrade just smiled at his partner’s predicament and really had no compelling reason to jump in and save him. Let Mycroft know just how much the boys had missed him, even if they might be a tad forceful about it.

“Yes, I do apologize, John, however, matters required my attention and I could not turn away due to their importance and immediacy. But I am here now… does that help?”

Mycroft knew his puppy eyes were absolutely not of the caliber John could make, but he made his best try and drank up John’s giggling as a soul-quenching reward.

“I suppose so, but you had better be home for a LONG time or you can expect another punch and that one will actually be hard.”

Hard? Good heavens, but John was becoming a formidable little warrior if he considered this punch lacking in vigor.

“And you, brother dear? Have you any vitriol to spew in my general direction.”

“I am pretending you do not exist.”

“Parsimonious. I applaud your efficiency.”

And, saving the very best for last…
“Gregory… how are you, my dear?”

“I missed you, love. I missed you so very, very much.”

“And I missed you, my dear. Every hour of every day.”

“Are you… are you here for long?”

“Long enough to remind you how desperately I love you and want you with me always. But…”

“Here we go…”

“No, it is not as bad as you might think. I simply must make an appearance at college this week to deliver an essay and present my findings to the others in the course. It is a minor thing and should not disrupt significantly our time together.”

Ok, not so horrible, then. Mycroft might even be home by nightfall if he finished early enough. What it was like to have his lover home for an appreciable length of time, Lestrade was beginning to forget, but he was very happy to be reminded of it at any time Mycroft saw fit.

“I think I can live with that.”

“Now, do tell me about today’s events. That… I do not believe I have seen that bicycle before, my dear.”

“Hah! That’s mine! Sherlock and John were having so much fun that I decided to join in. I stopped in at the shop where we found the boys’ bicycles and asked if they had any second-hand ones for sale. They did and, well… I still couldn’t afford one, but the shop owner needed a bit of work done around the shop and at his house and I traded the work for that old thing. It’s a good one, though. Sturdy and able to take whatever I give it. Which is a lot when Sherlock needs data or they want to go riding somewhere that isn’t gentle on the wheels. Or the bum.”

“You are a masterful guardian of the children, Gregory. Giving so greatly of your attention and effort for their benefit.”

“And you can, too. That shop has a lot of bicycles, so we can choose one for you so we all can ride together.”

Ride? Which meant exerting himself to a perspirational degree. Perspiring for a more lascivious pursuit was quite acceptable, however…

“Look at you thinking about sweating and pedaling and sweating some more. You’re so cute when you’re worried about getting dirty.”

“If Mycroft but leaks one drop of perspiration, it means his body has reached the melting point of lard and he shall begin to liquefy where he stands.”
“Thank you, brother. Your concern for my welfare is always heartwarming. Now, shall we return to what I am certain is highly important research?”

“It is incalculably valuable! Knowledge of the peasantry’s dexterity with crude machinery will be vital when the ridiculous anti-slavery laws are repealed and we may yoke their kind to carriages for transportation, extending our dwindling supply of fossil fuels for use by the more worthy members of society.”

It was good to know that, despite his brother’s boundless growth since acquiring a large and loving family, he remained at heart the boy he was born to be.

“Then, let us get to it. I shall observe if you do not mind.”

Which, of course, prompted Lestrade to lose his shirt and drink in Mycroft’s aroused gasp.

“You watch whatever you’d like, love. It’s going to be a great show.”

And, with that, Lestrade ran back to his bicycle and started pedaling around Sherlock’s test course, with John throwing in so he wasn’t left out of the fun. His husband had been correct... there should be multitudes of diverse opportunities for each boy to enjoy their pursuits and the excitement, both of John and Sherlock, who was busily scribbling notes, was evidence of the philosophy’s merit. And he could savor it all, at a distance from flung sweat and tire-produced clouds of dust. Really, this was the way all lovely days should be spent – enjoying the sunshine with one’s loving family.

“Lackey! Perform a jump over yon shrubbery! If your physical condition fares poorly on the landing, John will drag you to hospital.”

And sitting at the bedside of one’s spouse as they healed a fractured skull…

Two children fed, entertained, washed and put to bed. One spouse naked and warm next to him in bed. One body enjoying the small kisses being laid on its skin, softly and tenderly as said spouse again made its acquaintance. Such was the nature of true bliss…

“It has been agony to sleep alone in our London bed, my love.”

“I know what you mean. I’m here a lot of nights and nothing feels right when you’re not with me.”

“Someday, we shall not have to worry about such things to this degree. It will not be too long, Gregory. Before we know it, we shall share the London house and truly make it our home.”

“That’s going to be brilliant. I should make a trip there soon, actually. It’s probably forgotten all about me by now. The boys, too.”

“A stellar idea. Let us seek a weekend when you and the children are not encumbered by scholastic demands and my schedule permits it, shall we?”

“We shall. I know Sherlock and John miss visiting London quite a bit. They have a fantastic time when they’re there and it has been awhile. Let’s make it soon, alright?”

“Of course. At the very first opportunity.”

“That’s what I like to hear.”
“Enough to reward the bearer of glad tidings?”

“And how does my bearer want to be rewarded this fine evening?”

“Oh, I am certain you will think of something appropriate.”

Especially since your mouth is already doing lovely things with my skin. Simply worship all available skin, especially the extremely sensitive and currently growing variety and I shall be more than happy…

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“Hurray!”

John leapt out of the car and ran towards the door of the London house, leaving Lestrade to hope that it wasn’t locked or the boy was going to be knocked cold when he collided with the wood.

“John is mentally dysfunctional. His obsession with running is unfathomable.”

“Energy has to be burned, Sherlock, or it… well it does something unhelpful, so there we go.”

“Does your shack of learning even offer courses in the life sciences?”

“It might. I broke a few of my clay tablets on the first day and may have missed something important.”

Sherlock snorted and far more regally, in his mind, approached the house, though Lestrade couldn’t miss the eager spring in his step. The boys had been frantic to visit ever since they’d planned a weekend, had it cancelled, then planned this one in its place. Mycroft had been home for two weeks after his last visit, then here for another two and the boys had just about used up their supply of patience. If ever Mycroft worried that they didn’t care about him, the amount of upset they suffered when he was gone should always serve to convince him otherwise. Anyway, might as well get his own arse out of the car and get this visit started. Spring was starting to peek out everywhere and his mating season hormones were flowing faster than they ever had before. Maybe that was because he actually had a mate now… shouldn’t have dropped those tablets or he might be able to read up on the subject.

“Gregory! Are you going to guard the car all day?”

His mating hormones had summoned Mycroft. Nicely done.

“Coming!”

Lestrade slid out of the car and put on his most wicked smile to greet his pre-fiancé.

“How delightful you look today, my dear. The children were not a burden, were they?”

“Nothing out of the ordinary. We had to stop for a few piss breaks because John drank too much juice. And kept drinking too much juice. Sherlock rode part of the way in the boot so he could work out how to escape if he was taken hostage. The usual thing.”

“Then I am certain you will welcome the brandy I have waiting for you.”

“Oh yes. I will welcome it gladly.”

Following Mycroft into the house, Lestrade’s senses started to tingle and tingled harder as they made
their way further inside and into the library where their drinks were waiting.

“You… you’ve changed things.”

“Hmmm? Oh, here and there. Really it is more of a reorganization than a change. Our stamp should be firmly on the house and a little bit here and there does the trick nicely.”

Well, it would be nice if he could have a hand in the stamping, but Mycroft did live here a lot more than he did so… it was a silly thing, anyway. Who cared what the house looked like as long as they were here together?

“It’s… yeah, it’s nice. And there’s my brandy waiting patiently for me. Very kind of it. But, there’s something even more important I have to tend to first.”

“Oh?”

Mycroft’s curiosity was satisfied by hard and passionate kiss Lestrade pressed to his lips and he quickly responded with a heat that warmed Lestrade’s heart, and body, very nicely.

“Maybe the boys will go to bed early tonight. I’m not going to lie… I need you, Mycroft.”

That such a magnificent man could desire him so greatly… it was something that still boggled Mycroft’s mind, but he was ridiculously thankful for it.

“And it is both my honor and my joy to satisfy those needs, my beloved. I have laid in a stock of films that I feel the boys will enjoy and that should keep them occupied while you and I, at the very least, have a small introduction to the remainder of our evening.”

“You think of everything, don’t you?”

“It is my stock in trade. Now, let us have a seat and relax. The children will join us soon, I suspect, and a few moments to prepare ourselves is certainly not amiss.”

From the growing volume of the noise upstairs, that joining was fast approaching, so the older pair quickly settled on the sofa, drinks in hand and readied themselves to meet the rest of the night in comfort. The boys would probably start with some chess and they could share stories that their phone conversations hadn’t left time for. Then the toddlers would watch a good film while they tore their clothes off and made fast, hot, rough love to take the edge off their lust before retiring later for the slower, warmer, sweeter lovemaking that would sweep away all the loneliness that had grown over these last few weeks.

“John and I demand a beverage. Something… red.”

“I see. And is there a reason you are specifying color, brother dear.”

“Yes.”

“And, may I know the reason?”

“No.”

Just like being home. Truly with the family in residence, any structure was home. With Sherlock, that structure could someday be a psychiatric research center, so, really, it was for the best.

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“That was amazing! I love London! And everybody knew who Mycroft was, so we got the best of everything!”

Lestrade ruffled John’s hair and smiled. Oh yes, Mycroft was quite well known, wasn’t he? The restaurants they visited, the bookshop, the local pub which didn’t mind having kids in, apparently, as long as they belonged to Mycroft Holmes… it was right and proper, of course, but… but it would be ages before he could do that. He wouldn’t be more than a visitor here for years and Mycroft was already building ties, meeting people… no, that’s not where his brain was going to go. He had ties and knew people at home, where Mycroft was sort of the odd one out. The one who had to try and break into that world where he wasn’t sure how he’d fit in.

That was the right way to look at it. At home, he was the established one in the community. In London, that would be Mycroft and, just like his partner was becoming a part of their community at home, he’d grow to part of the one in London. It was his own problem that it felt strange having people know Mycroft, call him Mr. Holmes, and not have a clue who he was. When summer arrived and he took a little time off before joining the police force, he could come to London more often and let people get to know him, too. Easy. And the boys would have more time to visit as well. Summer was just a few months away, really, so the wait wasn’t even a long one.

So, deep breath, you sniveling idiot and smile. You have a man who loves you and nothing’s going to change that. Not even the miles that stretched out between them sometimes…

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“This is amazing, Grandmama! Thanks!”

Not everybody would want tires for their birthday, but the ones on his car weren’t in the best shape and he certainly couldn’t afford to replace them with new ones.

“I am happy you are pleased, Gregory. Your mother indicated it might be a useful gift and I do prefer to give items that shall actually see use and not sit in a closet gathering dust.”

Lestrade looked out the window where the boys were watching Grandmama’s chauffer swap out the tires so he could drive home with the new ones and smiled wistfully at the scene.

“And how has been your birthday, grandson. I trust you have enjoyed it fully?”

This look was from Lestrade to his mother, who carefully sipped her tea and maintained her resolve not to bring up the subject unless her son did it first.

“It’s been great! Can you believe the little monsters made me breakfast! It was edible, too, with enough chewing. And gave me some new music, which was a surprise. Can’t ask for better than that.”

Avoiding Grandmama’s falcon-like gaze because he really didn’t want to be a mouse today and end up being lunch.

“That is most astonishing. But, perhaps not; the children do cherish you immensely. And, tell me, what did Mycroft do to make the day special for you?”

“Umm… well, the day’s young, right? Sort of, at least.”

Lestrade grinned his most winning, isn’t-life-grand grin and wasn’t surprised Grandmama didn’t return it in the slightest.
“Mycroft did not leave you a gift?”

“Uh… maybe he did and I just haven’t found it yet.”

“I do not count deception among your strengths, Gregory.”

“No? Ok, well, that’s good to know.”

“Has there been a telephone call?”

“Like I said, the day’s still young. Mycroft usually calls in the evening anyway, unless he can’t, but that’s not his fault because he’s so busy so you can’t really blame him, now can you?”

The last half of the sentence practically raced out of Lestrade’s mouth and he sincerely hoped he hadn’t actually seen the look shared between Grandmama and his mother. That look did not mean good things. For whom, he wasn’t entirely certain, but the not good part was guaranteed.

“I see. Well, I do believe we have a little time before lunch is prepared, so why do you not spend the time with the children while your mother and I speak of womanly things.”

Neither Grandmama nor his mother were particularly womanly women, at least in that old-fashioned way ‘womanly thing’s was about, so the not good was about to begin.

“Sure. Two eyes on those two are always a better idea than one.”

Lestrade hoped what he did as he left the library wasn’t called running, though it felt a lot like running, just at a slightly slower pace. He was so doomed…

“Elizabeth… how upset is he?”

“Miserably. Mycroft hasn’t been home much, which Greg is trying to come to grips with but…”

“Yes?”

“He’s not calling as much either. And when Greg or the boys phone, it’s even odds that he’ll be out or actually at home but say he can’t talk for long.”

“Is that all?”

In for a penny…

“Greg’s tried to visit in London, too, and been told no. Good reason, Mycroft was working, but… it’s a lot and I won’t say Greg didn’t put a lot of hope into today. He knew Mycroft wouldn’t be here and that hurt, but to have nothing from him to even say Happy Birthday? Greg sent Sherlock and John to my house after their breakfast, supposedly to help me finish the cake I was making, but I think he just wanted a little time alone.”

The older woman tapped her fingernail on her teacup and looked out the window at Lestrade, who was taking time to change one of the tires, with John and Sherlock looking on closely.

“This is a difficult time for Mycroft, that is something to which I can attest, however, he is not so inundated with obligations that he could not spare a moment to send birthday greetings to Gregory. It is not impossible that it simply slipped his mind given the myriad of directions in which his attention is being pulled of late, but he must learn strategies to ensure such slights do not happen. I will speak with him later and provide what advice I can on the matter.”
“Thank you. It’s hard to see Greg suffer like that. He loves Mycroft, loves him dearly, but… it’s going to be hard for him to get used to being apart like this. Being set aside for other, more important things. He understands, but…it’s still hard.”

Grandmama nodded and reflected on her own experiences learning what it meant to be a Holmes. No, it wasn’t easy, but Mycroft certainly did not need to make things more difficult than they had to be. Yes, it was time for a small talk with her grandson. They had not enjoyed one in awhile and now was an excellent time to indulge in a one of some length. Though, for Mycroft, *enjoy* might not be the best descriptor to use…

Now what? He was just setting foot in the door and the telephone was ringing. Who could be calling at this time of night?

“Yes? Mycroft Holmes speaking.”

“Which is a good thing for I was contemplating sending the police to find you as this is my fourth attempt to reach you, grandson.”

Grandmama! Oh no, what had happened?

“What is wrong? The children, are they alright?”

“And do you not spare a thought for your fiancé?”

“What? Gregory! You must tell me what is the problem! Is he ill? Injured? What is the matter?”

“No, nothing of the sort, though I would not say he is in the best of sorts today. Of all days.”

“Why? Stop speaking in riddles, Grandmama, and speak plainly! What is wrong with my husband?”

“Let me see… does nothing in your rather impressive memory strike a chord about today’s date?”

“I… no? Well, besides the fact that I am considering scripting a rather stern letter to the director of the National Theater to complain about the atrocity I witnessed tonight. Really, if they cannot cull a better quality of actor out of the masses who proclaim that as their calling, then the doors should be shut and the space used for a new museum or library.”

“The theater? Well, well, well… that is certainly a fine way to spend the evening.”

“I found myself with several hours free and decided to use it productively. A few of my cohorts from college were in the city for the weekend and agreed to accompany me. Now, I shall surely have to write a series of additional letters, these, however, of apology for our deplorable evening.”

“I see. Taking in the arts with a cadre of friends. Quite a change for you, Mycroft.”

“I would not use the term friends, for it is undoubtedly misapplied. Rather a few individuals who shall likely prove useful in the future, so setting a few hooks into their hides is a prudent measure.”

“And have you any hooks left for your Gregory?”

“What is the purpose of your call?”
“Shouting will not put me in a more charitable mood, Mycroft, and my charity is something you might wish to value at this moment.”

Oh dear…

“I apologize, Grandmama. The day has been long and tomorrow shall be no shorter.”

“I understand, but I wonder if it might be sufficiently short to allocate ten minutes to phone your fiancé and bid him a belated happy birthday.”

No.

“Gregory’s birthday is not until…”

Oh no.

“Has time, as they say, gotten away from you, Mycroft?”

“No, it cannot be…”

“We enjoyed a lovely day, if you are curious. The children did their utmost to make the day special for your partner, though, it did not erase the disappointment of being forgotten by you.”

I could not be… this was a disaster! He had marked the date clearly in his schedule but… he never looked at his schedule! His memory more than sufficed, except… except when the issue was not immediately pressing, it appeared. No… he could not have forgotten his spouse. But he did. Forgotten Gregory’s one special day and after the weeks, no, months, now, of neglect. This was a catastrophic disgrace!

“Was he… tell me how he was, Grandama, and do not spare my feelings.”

“If you believe I am likely to do that, then your theater experience must truly have been more distressing that I perceived. Gregory attempted most valiantly to present a contented and happy face to those of us who celebrated with him, however, it was a fractured façade, at best. I do not believe the children were aware of the depths of his distress and I was even fooled for a brief time, but he could not maintain his composure when I inquired about your contribution to the day. Elizabeth tells me that this was not entirely out of pattern, though.”

“What… what do you mean?”

“Are you maintaining a fertile line of communication? I hear the answer to that question is no.”

“That is untrue! I… if pressed, I might admit that I have not been able to speak with Gregory or the children as often as I would like, however, you know well that situation and realize that I am not always the master of my time.”

“True, but I will counter that you had quite a bit of free time this evening and spared not a moment of it for your family. Will you offer a satisfactory explanation for that?”

“I… I did not come home before I left for the theater.”

“And do telephones not exist in that quaint little office I had set aside for your use?”

“I had matters on my mind, Grandmama, and, I will admit, Gregory and the children were not among them. I take no pride in that, but there is no other explanation I can offer.”
The tone. Grandmama used the tone which sounded most loudly her dissatisfaction and he could not claim to feel otherwise. He had shamefully betrayed his husband and that was not something which deserved a mote of compassion from anyone, let alone Grandmama, who knew better than anyone else his ability to remember.

“I am not offering defense, Grandmama, for my unacceptable conduct with respect to Gregory’s birthday. I simply… I did not intentionally hurt him! I have no… the thought of bringing pain to my husband is my own worst ache and I will do whatever it takes, you may rest assured, to rectify my error.”

“See that you do, Mycroft. We have spoken on this issue previously and also on the hazards that await you if you fail to actively maintain your bond with your fiancé. I trust we shall not have to speak about this a third time.”

No… he would slit his own throat before he would render that necessary.

“We shall not. Thank you, Grandmama, for the information. I will act on it with all due haste.”

“I hope so, grandson. Gregory will suffer countless pains during your years together… do not add to his burden the hurts that could have been avoided had you worked to avoid them.”

Mycroft was happy he had no opportunity to make a reply, given the termination of the call, for he had no substantive reply to make. This was abominable. And now, John’s rather strange conversation about Gregory having put a tear in his jacket and needing a new one made sense. The boy had thrown him a lifeline and he had let it fall, ungrasped, into the ocean of despair in which he now waded.

No gift, no greeting… no statement of gladness that on this day the love of his life had been born. And it was much too late to make a phone call now. Gregory needed his rest after what must have been a trying day. Tomorrow, though. First thing in the morning, before even breakfast was had… he would make this right. It was his duty to do so and he would do that duty to the best of his ability. It was also his joy, something that eclipsed his entire fortune in terms of value. Tomorrow… he would make his amends tomorrow. And pray he could actually sleep tonight, so heavy was his black and villainous heart…

By——

“Oh, Mycroft… don’t cry.”

“I am not crying… I simply am overcome with shame at what I have done to you.”

Lestrade wished he could pull his lover close and hold him tight, but that wasn’t possible across phone lines. Mycroft was devastated! Which should make him feel good about getting a little revenge, but it actually made him feel the opposite. He hated it when Mycroft was upset, even if he had been the cause of it himself.

“It’s alright, love. You finally remembered, so that’s brought the scales back to level, right?”

“No. No, there is no balance here. You were cruelly wronged and that is the only matter of importance here. I shall be home in a few days, my dear, and I promise that I will shower you with the attention, love and devotion your justly deserve. There is that small inn near the village of which I have heard, the one which boasts a fine menu and a respectable selection of wine. We shall have an evening to ourselves and enjoy a romantic dinner away from the house and the children. I love
you, Gregory, and want desperately to demonstrate that truth, despite the insults I have perpetrated upon you.”

“A real night out, just the two of us? That would be wonderful, actually. We haven’t done anything like that in a long time, so yeah… I’d like that.”

Salvation! Though it was not nearly the degree of penance he needed to perform to clear his own conscience for his treatment of his spouse. However, it was a start…

“Then it shall be so. And you will not object if I find something appropriate with which to gift you?”

“As long as it’s not extravagant, I have no objection, at all. It’ll be like having two birthday celebrations in one year and that’s one more than most people have, so I’m thrilled.”

“Excellent. And Gregory… I am ashamed that I forgot. There was no reason for it besides not allowing, in my mind, proper attention towards your special day and that is not something I find acceptable. I will not make the mistake again.”

“Thanks, love. I… I’ll admit I was upset yesterday, but I feel a lot better now.”

“And I will do everything in power to never give you cause for this upset again.”

“I know you will. So… just a few more days, right?”

“The exact number I do not know and I will need a day to focus on my studies, which have also not seen the necessary amount of my attention of late, but it shall not be long, my love. It shall not be long, at all.”

“Good, because I can’t wait to see you. Do you… you probably have to go soon, don’t you?”

“I do, but a few more minutes of your enthralling voice and enticing conversation will not put me substantially behind schedule.”

“Oh… and what do you want my enthralling voice to talk about?”

“My choice of topic?”

“Absolutely.”

“Well then… let me make this, as they say, worth my while…”

“That’s what I’m counting on.”

“HONG KONG!”

“Gregory, please do not shout. I have yet to take any sleep and my head is exacting a steep price for it.”

Lestrade gripped the phone so hard he was sure he heard it cracking under his fingers.

“How… why in the world are you going to Hong Kong? You’re supposed to be coming home!”
“And that is exactly what I would be doing if it were not for... well, for a matter that cannot discuss, but I assure you that it is one of consequence.”

Of course it was. It always was.

“How long?”

“That I cannot say, though not for secrecy’s sake, but for an honest lack of knowledge or expectation. If I were to give any tentative timetable, I would place it at no more than ten days. Two weeks at the most. You must know I do not want this, Gregory. I did my utmost to see the situation managed without a need for my physical presence, but it is either I or Grandmama and I am not content with her traveling such a distance for anything other than a recreational holiday.”

“Oh... that last part I agree with, especially since she’s had a nasty cold lately and that’s not good when you have to fly, from what I’ve heard.”

Oh, that was rather news to him. However, it had been some days since he had spoken to his grandmother and, no... it was not because he was still smarting from their last conversation. One whose transcript was screaming in his mind and had been since he realized he must pack his luggage.

“I know this is unfair to you, my love. I know it well and clearly and... I will make it up to you. For every minute of neglect, I shall repay you with plentiful interest.”

“Yes, I know you will. I’ll tell the boys. You... you should make a point of really finding something special to bring them from Hong Kong. A good souvenir will do a lot to keep their fangs out of your leg.”

“Very wise. And I have not forgotten you, Gregory. We will celebrate your birthday the moment I return.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“As am I. Goodbye, my love. I will see you soon.”

“Goodbye, Mycroft. I love you.”

Not that Mycroft heard because he was already off the phone, probably to get himself ready to travel. Which, if it wasn’t likely to be miserable for his partner, sounded like a lot of fun. Maybe they could do a little of that this summer. Take a trip or two to someplace he hadn’t been before. Nothing fancy, but just a chance to see something new and do something different. That would be nice. He’d have to mention it to Mycroft when he got back. Whenever that would be...

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“It’s still wrong.”

“John, you need to let this go.”

“No, Mycroft promised you a nice birthday and he still hasn’t given you a present. I don’t think he even remembers.”

Which was exactly what Lestrade thought, but that was not something he’d be sharing with John. Mycroft had been doing a lot better with phoning and coming home as often as he could and something as stupid as a birthday was no reason to put a hex on their good luck. Of course, his lover was still gone more often than he was home, but that was just the way it was going to be for a long
time, so no good was going to come from fretting over it.

“It’s not important, lad, so I do not want you bothering him about it.”

“But, Greg…”

“No, not a word. It’s not like I won’t have another birthday next year, right?

“It won’t be your first birthday together, though. And you told me you did something nice for his birthday, too.”

Oh, that was a fun night. They hadn’t been seeing each other for long and he’d had to ask Mum for a few quid to take Mycroft to the pub and, then, borrow her car to take him for a drive to a nice romantic spot, where he put down a blanket, opened a bottle of surprisingly decent wine for the price and they spent the night talking, kissing and being stupidly love addled while they listened to the tape he’d made for Mycroft’s present. He’d begged albums from everyone he knew and made a tape of the very best classical and opera pieces he could find. Mycroft had loved it...

“Which doesn’t matter in the least. Loving someone isn’t a competition. Sometimes you get pampered and other times you do the pampering.”

“So, when is it your turn to get pampered?”

When had John grown a pugnacious streak? Oh, probably when he called London for the hundredth time to tell Mycroft about some victory at school and listened to it ring without anyone answering.

“When it’s time and not a minute sooner. Now, why are you bothering me and where is Sherlock?”

“He’s trying to wash some dye off of his hands. He was making slides for his microscope and… it got a little messy.”

“What color this time?”

“Green.”

“That’s a nice change of pace.”

“I’m going to try and get him to wear something yellow so he looks like a flower.”

“It’s on his face, too, isn’t it?”

“Just a little.”

“How little?”

“A lot.”

“I’ll get the solvent.”

“I’ll get the scrub brush.”

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Ugh. Why did he stay awake so late last night? Oh yes, the boys wanted to watch a scary film and then had nightmares, which could only be remedied, apparently, by watching a funny film. At least
the little bastards were shambling as slowly as he was today. Maybe that would teach them to listen to him when he said scary movies before bedtime was a bad idea.

And, ok… he knew he was probably hallucinating a bit due to lack of sleep, but that was the fourth person who had given him a strange look this morning. Not that he wasn’t used to strange looks, what with the periodic summoning out of class and endless supply of new stories about Sherlock and John’s shenanigans, but this was a different sort of strange look. Fuck it, it was too early for this, so full-force ignoring was about to commence.

“Oh, hi Greg.”

Why did Georgie sound weird? This day was going to chew him up and spit him out, wasn’t it?

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing.”

“Try again. Your cock is going to fall off if you keep lying like that.”

“You asked what was wrong with me, you bastard, so no lie there. But… how are things with you, Greg? Anything you want to… look, blokes aren’t supposed to talk about things, but is there anything you want to talk about? If there is, I’ll… look, I’ll be happy to listen. How about we grab a pint after class? That sound good?”

What the fuck was he talking about?

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“It’s ok, mate. Happens to all of us. Admittedly, we didn’t think it would happen to you, but… we’ll get that pint and talk, ok? Look, I’ve got to go. If I don’t beg an extension on that stupid science project, I’ll fail and my dad will kill me, but I’ll find you right after class, ok?”

Lestrade watched his friend dart off towards their science classroom and wondered if he’d fallen asleep at some point and nobody had bothered to wake him. They were happy to give him those strange looks, though, evil sods. Could at least be decent and jostle him awake before he got in trouble for sleeping in class.

“Well, look who it is… Greg Lestrade.”

Diane. Oh, his day had just leapt into a new level of hell, now hadn’t it?

“Strange, I know. It’s almost like I’m here every day or something.”

“I thought you’d be at home sulking or pouting or hiding in shame, but I guess I was wrong. I always did like that you didn’t care what other people thought. I suppose that’s going to be useful now, though.”

“What… what the fuck is going on? Georgie’s acting strange and now you… well, you’re acting fairly normal actually, but, thank heavens, you’ve been avoiding me since I gave you the toss at the pub, so this is new.”

Ok, that was not a happy smile. That was what they called a triumphant smile and that could not, in any way imaginable, mean good things for him.

“Oh, don’t pretend you don’t know. It just makes you look stupid.”
“I have no idea what you’re talking about!”

Lestrade watched as Diane’s smiled took on a slightly cruel slant and she reached into her book bag to draw out a newspaper. A London newspaper.

“I always get a copy of this to read the fashion and society section, since I plan to move to London someday and mingle with the real people. Imagine my surprise to find this…

A section of the paper was pulled out and thrust into Lestrade’s hands, which certainly were not recoiling from the unexpected gift. Flipping through the first couple of pages didn’t satisfy his curiosity, but by the fourth page… well, that was a thing wasn’t it? His Mycroft having dinner with someone at a fancy restaurant. Nice photograph, too. And another one of Mycroft and the same person at some nice function where tuxedos were the uniform of the day. There was an article, too. A nice article about Mycroft and his family and how it was great he was becoming a part of London society. Being seen at parties and concerts, the theater and the opera. Going to the right restaurants and hobnobbing with the right people. With his good friend, Edmund Pierce, who was his ‘inseparable’ companion, always at his side. Well… that was a thing, wasn’t it?

“Looks like your bank account has found another playmate. Not that anyone was surprised. Everyone I showed this to said they expected something like this to happen, sooner or later. It’s natural, of course. Nobody that rich really wants a scruff like you unless it’s for a good shag and it looks like he’s found someone how will give him that and is presentable enough to take out on his arm around the people that matter. Maybe he’ll keep you on as his nanny, though. I can’t think of anyone else who would be willing to deal with those beastly children. Oh, class is about to start. You go ahead and keep that. I have another copy or two for everyone’s reading pleasure.”

Lestrade had no idea when he was left alone, nor when the halls cleared of bodies, save for his. He didn’t really even have an idea of when he left the building or got into his car. He certainly didn’t have any clue as to when he decided to drive around aimlessly, burning through two tanks of petrol before turning towards London and fumbling his way to and through the city to reach his… Mycroft’s… door sometime long after the moon had come up. He still had a key, didn’t he? Yeah, he did, with the rest of them on his ring. So, he could go inside, which was good because that’s where he wanted to go. It was quiet, too, which was nice. His head had been shrieking at him for hours and the quiet was a help.

It was dark, as well, which was also good. That was easier on his eyes, which were stinging. They’d been stinging for a long time and he wasn’t actually sure why. However, there was noise coming from the kitchen, so he’d look there first. Mycroft wasn’t cooking, he knew that much, because Mycroft never cooked, but… was he hungry? He seemed hungry, but the thought of food wasn’t… no, don’t think about food. Just…

Ok… that wasn’t Mycroft. It was Mycroft’s dressing gown, though. On a person who didn’t seem to have anything on underneath it. In their kitchen. Mycroft’s kitchen. Looking for something in the refrigerator. Ok.

Ok.

Lestrade left the house as quietly as he entered, stopping only to leave his key in a drawer of the small table near the door and decided a little drive would be nice. Just a small one. And when the sun came up, he still wasn’t ready to stop his small drive, so he pointed the car in one direction he hadn’t tried yet and drove for hours until a large, familiar house loomed ahead. It was good to see it one last time.
Using the bell, Lestrade announced his arrival and waited patiently for the door to be answered by a staff member who was highly confused by his refusal to come inside and, instead wait for the lady of the house where he stood. And the lady of the house was not slow in coming.

“Gregory? What is wrong? I was told…”

Reaching up, Lestrade unhooked the pendant from around his neck, took Grandmama’s hand, placed the bit of jewelry in her palm and closed it gently before turning and walking back to his car to begin the drive home. Yes, it was good to make one final visit. You should always close a chapter properly before you move to the next one.

This was absolutely farcical. A chimpanzee could see the way out of this ludicrous stalemate, however, the individuals involved had neither the intelligence nor the manners of a chimpanzee, hence the problem. And he had two books to read by tomorrow for his political science course, neither of which had he begun… luckily, he should see his particular mess tidied within the hour and then could close his door and spend the next few hours digesting his academic material. That would leave the evening free to put up his feet, sip a bit of brandy and…

“Mr. Holmes?”

And be interrupted in his ruminations by a very hesitant-looking secretary. Apparently the day’s overseeing gods were going to amuse themselves at his expense.

“Yes?”

“I… there’s a man here who says… you have to go with him.”

“Pardon?”

“He was rather insistent, sir. Quiet and polite, but insistent.”

And, apparently, not one to stand on office protocol, however Edwards rarely was.

“Ah, thank you… Daphne, is it? I shall handle matters from here.”

Yes, do scurry away and leave me here with Grandmama’s henchman glaring the particular glare he reserves for those who have spilled tea on Grandmama’s rugs.

“Come with me, Mr. Holmes, if you please.”

“And if I do not please?”

“I have instructions for that particular scenario and they are not to your benefit.”

Uh oh.

“Very well. Let us make a stop at home first so I might…”

“Mrs. Holmes is here in London, sir, and waiting at your residence.”

Very uh oh.

“Might I have a hint as to what is on her mind?”
“And spoil her fun? I think not.”

Extremely uh oh. Well, he could use the ride home to script final amendments to his will. Must make certain all the pesky details were in order. It would be much easier on the family that way…

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“Ah, Mycroft. There you are. I must say… there have been a number of changes made to the house. I can’t say I like them.”

Uh oh of the most astronomical quantity. Must be calm… must be calm…

“I suspect you are not here to criticize my decorating choices, Grandmama.”

“Are they your choices, Mycroft? Really, I don’t see your hand in them, at all.”

“What? Well… I suppose I have taken suggestions about creating a more convivial space.”

“Oh… suggestions. Yes, how collegial of you.”

Something was very wrong and Mycroft felt something he usually didn’t with his grandmother – fear. Of what, though, he wasn’t entirely certain.

“Grandmama… why are you here?”

“To give you this.”

Mycroft watched as a graceful hand reached into a very expensive handbag to extract…

“That… that is Gregory’s pendant.”

“Oh, do you remember it? I was of the mind that I might have to identify it for you.”

The coldness that ran through Mycroft’s blood put to shame the most frigid of arctic waters and he wondered how his heart could be racing when it was quickly being frozen in to a solid mass of ice.

“What has happened to Gregory? Is he… tell me he is not hurt.”

Or dead. No… Gregory could not be dead. Grandmama would not be radiating a coldness near to his own core if Gregory had met a sad fate.

“He is very hurt, actually. I would say, ‘torn to shreds’ is an apt descriptor. And humiliated, which is its own brutal form of pain.”

“I… I do not understand. You are not making any sense.”

This time, Grandmama’s hand reached over to the small table by the library sofa and picked up a large envelope that Mycroft was just consciously noticing.

“Perhaps this will help. I do apologize for the, most likely, incompleteness of the record, however my representatives had little time to amass anything more comprehensive.”

Mycroft did his level best to keep his hands from visibly trembling as he took the envelope from Grandmama’s fingers, but that failed him utterly when he looked at the contents. Photographs. Lots of photographs and articles from the newspaper… what did it mean?
“This… I still have no understanding.”

“No? You have no understanding of keeping close and extensive company with the youngest son of someone with whom I serve on several arts committees? Margaret Pierce is a dear woman, though not possessed of the most cunning intellect. I am certain she is most happy with this turn of events. Your former fiancé, however, is not.”

“F…former fiancé?”

“Gregory is a man of dignity, Mycroft. It is to be expected that he would object when he finds he has been cuckolded.”

“NO! How dare you say such things!”

“Let us see… you have been spending an extensive amount of time in London, far more than is necessary for the work you must do. You have distanced yourself from communication with your family, eschewing phone communications and denying their requests to visit you to renew their ties. You have been photographed throughout London with this young man on your proverbial arm, as well as the flotilla of sycophants that he steers through the city. What an active social life you have been leading, Mycroft… a social life that has pointedly excluded one specific person.”

“That… that is untrue! I mean… yes, I have not sat idly when I could make more effective use of my time…”

“How facilely you phrase your abandoning of Gregory in such sterile terms. Truly, it is a skill that will serve you well in the future.”

“I HAVE NOT ABANDONED MY HUSBAND!”

“Oh, then why do I not see any evidence of his inclusion in your merriment?”

“Is it… am I not allowed any recreational time for myself? Is it impermissible for me to seek the company of others to… I work tirelessly at your direction! Can I have nothing for myself to make the experience more bearable?”

“Is that now your excuse? You were lonely?”

“I AM LONELY!”

“Thus, I suppose, we have the reason for your infidelity. Common and vulgar, true, but certainly not unique.”

“I HAVE NEVER BETRAYED GREGORY!”

“Then why is he never on your arm? Why is London society aflutter at the news of Emma Holmes’s son finally stepping into the social spotlight with, how was it phrased in one periodical… ‘his bosom companion, Edmund Pierce?’ And in another he is your ‘dearest friend.’ I am certain you are well aware of social coding, Mycroft. They will not say openly that this boy is your lover, for that is certainly not done, or tie you romantically, for your personal sexuality is not openly accepted in many circles, however, few are sufficiently blind to miss the message between the lines. Why is your former partner not the one to whom the connection is being made?”

“I…”

“Why are there countless pieces of evidence of you enjoying yourself with Edmund and his
"No, it is not…"

"Not what? Not what you wanted discovered until the children were out of school so his child-minding services were no longer required."

"YOU WILL NOT INSULT MY HUSBAND IN THAT MANNER!"

"The insult is not laid by me, Mycroft. It was laid on him by one of his own peer group when they shared… oh, that one… the newspaper account of your ongoing affair. Apparently, his entire school was made aware of his shame and with the evidence of your continued neglect and now proof that your absence was not exactly an unpleasant one for you… according to Elizabeth, he is devastated. Of course… this did not help…"

A third time Mycroft took something from Grandmama and blinked back the growing shock to stare at the key in his hand.

"He gave you his key to the house."

"No, actually. I found it in the table in the entranceway. Now, I wonder how it might have gotten there?"

"Gr… Gregory was here?"

"Quite late last night, actually. To confront you, I assume with the situation. Imagine his surprise to find your 'dearest friend' in the kitchen, in your dressing gown."

Oh no…

"There… there was no impropriety."

"Oh, so Gregory overreacted to the obviously overnight visit of your 'bosom companion' when he, himself, is denied continually the right to visit what is actually his half-owned home?"

"Edmund… it was late and he was rather… well, he had had rather a lot to drink, so I offered him a place to sleep."

"In your dressing gown."

"YES IN MY DRESSING GOWN! I COULD NOT BEAR… I could not bear to have him use Gregory’s. It is all I have… it smells of my husband, do you not see? It has touched his skin and I when I touch it…"

The smallest thaw in Grandmama’s wrath was forming as she watched her grandson falling apart at the seams...

"You could touch him, instead, but you deny him the honor."

"I DON’T! Gregory would be… he would be bored to tears with all of this!"

"Bored by nights at the symphony? I do believe he described that as something he would treasure."

"Not that! The… all that accompanies it. The small talk, the insipid conversations that touch on nothing of import, but insinuate a legion of lies and gossip. The vapidity of it all…"
“Yet you embrace it wholeheartedly.”

“Untrue! I… I tolerate it, at best! Every day I put the entirety of my energies into my work, my studies and… it is wrong to want, even if the situation is not optimum, some form of engagement? Some… bit of time where there might, just might, be something to occupy my mind in a welcome manner. To have… people… to whom I can point to say I am not alone?”

“And, in none of this, there is room for Gregory.”

“I did not say that.”

“I believe it was implied.”

“No, it was not. Gregory simply… this is not a sphere in which he would be comfortable.”

I see… just as you are uncomfortable with his friends? The ones who do not open their arms to make you welcome and keep his head turned from you so that you suffer neglect?”

“That is not fair.”

“What is not fair is that Gregory suffers because you have discovered a clique that will allow you entry, even if it is only for the addition of your wallet to their revelries, and you have placed a higher value on that than the love of a man of quality. Gregory will surely balk at the inanity of society, no person of intelligence and character would not, however, he would endeavor to navigate the ill to find the good and you have deemed him unworthy of the chance to try.”

“NO! THAT IS A LIE!”

“You have excluded him from your life here, as you have, apparently, the children, as well, and enjoy what London offers while they sit at home wondering why they are no longer considered important. Well, not Gregory. Gregory is now very aware of why he is not considered important, and so is the rest of his community.”

Mycroft dropped into a chair and held his head in his hands. This… this was… he had no word to describe it. All the useless, pointless words he carried in his head and he had none to describe what had happened.

“I did not mean to hurt him. And I never, never, betrayed my spouse.”

Her grandson was an amazingly talented liar, however, she knew even the slightest hint of untruth in him, none of which was present now.

“Then you have choices to make. You are young, Mycroft, and I can forgive much based on that. Gregory, however, will not be so accommodating, and rightly so. If you wish to salvage this, you must choose wisely and act swiftly. Elizabeth is not certain whether she can even convince him to return to school after his humiliation, however, at present, I do not believe the children are aware of the breach. If you choose to let it stand… then you should be the one to tell them. If not… think carefully about what you want, Mycroft. And, either way, tell Gregory face to face. It is dishonorable to do any less.”

Mycroft was fairly certain he heard his grandmother leave, but he honestly didn’t care if she stayed to watch him weep until his body was dry and brittle. How had this gotten so far out of hand? How had he… no, it was easy to see if he but opened his eyes. Grandmama was right… Gregory found friends easily but he… he could not even say now that he had found friends, but rather, he had found individuals who were willing to socialize with him and that was more than he had ever discovered in
this lifetime. At least, not without Gregory’s help.

But he had not intentionally excluded his husband. Not… not really. Yes, he had in the most literal sense, but not in his heart. In his heart, he honestly did believe that Gregory would abhor the snobbery and lack of honest camaraderie, but… this was disastrous! And to believe he was betrayed… to have it known amongst his peers that he was a cuckold…

Very well… Grandmama said choices must be made and made they would be. His history of conduct with respect to his beloved was disgraceful and Gregory certainly did not deserve the pain and degradation through which he had been put. He was a good man, a decent, honorable and caring man and he deserved better than someone who could not treat him in a manner befitting his character. Yes, choices would be made and he would tell Gregory in person. Grandmama was correct, it was extremely undignified to do any less and, though he had little dignity remaining, Gregory deserved every remaining scrap.

Mycroft took a moment to straighten his tie and neaten his suit, the finest he owned, then nodded to his driver to wait for his return. He would not return, of course, the same man, that much was certain, but he could not spare a thought for that now. All that mattered was Gregory and that, from this moment forward, he could hold his head high and go forth to lead a life that was a happy one. One where he did not have to worry or feel insecure. Where he was properly respected and honored as the half of a shared life. His love deserved that and the best gift he could bestow was the freedom to begin that life now.

Walking with his head high, Mycroft strode forward to where he calculated his former pre-fiance would be found and hoped his gulp wasn’t audible as he pushed open the door of the school cafeteria and heard the noise level drop to an eerie quiet that sounded louder in his head than an explosion. Looking around, he found the table at which the man he loved was sitting and mentally smiled an approving smile that his love’s friends were clustered around him and, now, budging imperceptibly closer in a strikingly protective pose. Except for the one that was leaning towards him and snarling with teeth bared.

“You’ve got no business here, Mycroft Holmes.”

Oh, he certainly had business. He had to wipe the haunted look out of his Gregory’s eyes and return the smile to his face, regardless of the humiliation he might suffer in the process.

“I believe I do, George. Gregory… I am certain you do not wish to see me, and you are well within your rights to feel that way, however, there is something I must do and I prefer that it be done with witnesses.”

No, I don’t expect you to answer, my dear, but please do not appear so distraught. Do not let those who disparaged you see the distress on your face. You are better than are they. You are better than am I…

“I… I know what apprehensions you labor under, my dear… what stories have been spread and what evidence exists to support those stories. I know the proof your own eyes bought you, though I doubt you shared that with your peers. Did you tell them you found a man in our home? Wearing the dressing gown belonging to me?”

From the eruption of gasps, Mycroft supposed not.

“You have evidence and right to hate me, Gregory, and I will not say you are wrong to do so. I
will, however, lay myself bare so that you no longer suffer the scorn and derision of those who have been envious of you and our… well, what we shared.”

One deep breath and Mycroft plunged ahead, hoping he would make it through to the end without shaming himself with another bout of weeping.

“Firstly, there was no infidelity, my dear. I have never, not a single time, turned to another, not even when we were parted for what seemed an eternity. I have loved you with my entire heart since first we met and that love has never been tarnished by betrayal of the intimate kind. However, I will not claim that I have not betrayed your loyalty, disregarding you shamefully, though I continued to rely on your dedication to the children to keep the home we were trying to build a safe and joyful one. I have spent these past months indulging myself in the cultural and entertainment opportunities of London, though the company I kept was not of the caliber I have known here, and the disgrace of that will dog my heels for as long as I live.”

If the assembled could not hear his frantic heartbeat, Mycroft would be greatly surprised. But he had to do this. His Gregory could not move forward if he did not clear the path to let him walk free.

“I am not worthy of you, Gregory. In truth, I do not know who could be, for you are the most loving, compassionate, honorable, vital and courageous man I have ever met. You should not be burdened by my weaknesses, my neglect and my inability to treat you in the manner you so richly deserve. And you should never have to be besmirched by my poor decisions, which are fodder by the treacherous among your peers for malicious gossip and sadistic glee at your ill-fortune. You should never see your life diminished because of me nor have a heavy heart because of what I have done or failed to do. It is not right and I will not permit it.”

No, my beloved… do not let your tears rise. Mine are enough for us both.

“I cannot promise that I will never again cause you pain. Nor can I promise that I will not give you cause for distrust…”

Mycroft dug in his pocket and curled his hand around the one anchor he had to help him make to the end of this in one piece and gripped it fiercely.

“With another you could have a safer life, an easier one… a life where you knew each day what the next might bring and know that the joys and troubles you face would always be with your partner at your side…”

Unmindful of what truly disgusting matter he might encounter, Mycroft got down on one knee and held out Gregory’s pendant in his hand.

“… but that partner could not love you as deeply as do I. You would not be the other half of their soul and the reason their heart beat each day. I can never offer you a perfect life, my beloved, because I am not a perfect man. Far from it, in fact, but I can offer you a life where I try and I learn and I strive each day to be a better man than the day before. I can offer you my heart, my body, my devotion… I can offer you everything that I am and offer it gladly. You know my flaws, my beloved, you know them well and I ask you now, before those you call both friend and enemy if you can accept them and the love I offer. The love which has never wavered and which I treasure above all things on this Earth.”

Wiping his eyes, Mycroft stared directly into Lestrade’s widened gaze and smiled as hopefully as he could.

“Gregory Lestrade… will you marry me?”
As we close this one down, any last comments (and kudos!) are greatly appreciated :-)  
See you all again very soon!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!