Tidings of comfort and joy.

by huntingosprey

Summary

It's Holmes and Watson's second Christmas as fellow lodgers and this year Watson is determined to get Holmes into the spirit of the season. Holmes on the other hand is just trying to keep up and keep his inconvenient feelings under control.

Extract from the diary of Sherlock Holmes.

November of 1882 appeared to follow hard on the heels of June as Watson and I worked out our new partnership. There were a few interesting cases, interspersed with many a dull case which served only to help pay the rent and consolidate an already firm partnership. In fact so swiftly did the year pass that it was a shock of the first order when Watson bustled into our sitting room and asked - in the same tone with which he habitually enquired if the post had brought any news - "shall we have the customary argument about when the Christmas decorations go up in here and where the tree is to go now, or next week when the tree arrives?"

I stared at him for a long moment before snatching up the latest paper to check the date.

"It's the first of December, Holmes," Watson said, a hint of amusement colouring his voice. "I know last year I hadn't the health to stir myself, and you don't seem to care for the season, but this year we should make the effort. So - argue now or later?"

"Why should we argue at all?" I asked, stalling for time to comprehend why my obliging companion should suddenly want to argue.

He gave me an amused look and settled on the sofa with the air of a man bracing himself for a long fight.
"It's traditional, Holmes. Any two or more people sharing a house always argue about Christmas." An unhappy memory passed behind his eyes and was summarily dismissed. "Unless, of course, the house is ruled with a very heavy rod. Did your family never argue about when was too early put up the tree? Or start sending cards?"

Again, all I could do was stare in bewilderment at him. Christmas had never played a prominent part in the life of my family, and neither Mycroft or I had kept up even that little pretence once we had left home.

"Holmes," Watson hesitated, "I apologise if I've touched a nerve. It was not my intention to stir up evil memories."

"Nothing of the sort," I waved his apology away with a flick of my wrist. "As you said, I don't care for the season and so have no strong memories of Christmas either way. If you wish to make something of it, I shall leave it entirely in your hands."

Watson gave me a strange look but said nothing more on the subject, and I forgot about it, being absorbed in research. In hindsight, a poor choice, for I was unprepared for the onslaught that was to roll over me.

Tuesday December 5th was cold and wet, and Holmes came to a late breakfast expecting to find Watson firmly ensconced in his chair or at the writing table. However, there was no sign of the Doctor. Mrs Hudson, when questioned, informed the detective that Watson had breakfasted early and gone out on some errands. Holmes eyed the weather and asked Mrs Hudson to make a pot of tea when Watson returned, and made sure to keep the fire well stoked anticipating Watson's wounds to be giving him much pain when he returned from whatever had driven him out of their rooms.

It was early afternoon before Watson breezed back into the sitting room, coat and hat still on, arms full of parcels, limping heavily and trying, unsuccessfully, to hide a broad smile underneath his moustache. Holmes, anticipating the impending collapse, crossed the room in four long strides and caught the first fall of boxes as Watson's leg gave out under him and he stumbled into his chair.


"So I perceive, my dear fellow. You appear to have bought enough stationary to wage the hundred years war with," Holmes said drily, stacks the spilt boxes on Watson's writing desk.

Watson chuckled, despite the pain visible in his face and observable from the way he was digging his fingers deep into his leg to alleviate the cramp.

"Well, we do have rather a large correspondence, Holmes. Lestrade, Gregson and Hopkins to mention just a few at the Yard; our regular beat policemen. Then there are all those people you regularly do business with for information; Mrs Hudson, of course; your very overworked tailor; the clients for whom we have addresses; Mr Cox; that chap at the British Museum..." Watson paused. "I say, Holmes, do you have any family? You never said, but we should send cards if you do."

Holmes froze with his hand still on the last box, and asked tentatively, "Is it obligatory to send cards to...everyone?"

"It's the done thing, Holmes," Watson chided gently. "The season of goodwill, and so on. Having laboured so hard for some, and been the cause of much labour for others, the very least you can do
is send a card."

Something in the mildly disappointed tone of the words killed Holmes’ scathing retort dead before it reached his lips. Instead he nodded his understanding and compliance.

Watson's smile lit the room. "Fetch your client index, ask Mrs Hudson to make some tea, and we'll make a start."

Holmes swallowed around an unexpected mass lodged in his throat and took a few steps towards his desk before his mind caught up with him again, and he spun round to face Watson. "In return, Doctor, I must insist that you get rid of your wet coat and hat, at the very least."

Watson's warm laugh followed him out of the room.

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Extract from the diary of Sherlock Holmes

*Over the course of my career I have nearly drowned on several occasions, but that afternoon I found myself drowning in a medium more insidious than water - affection. It surrounded me, and with every client remembered and every contact explained pulled me down deeper. Watson was endlessly obliging, alternately laughing and commiserating me at my stories. Every card he passed to me for my signature displayed an almost infinite store of words, wit and, where necessary, compassion. By the time Mrs Hudson interrupted with supper we had gone through more than three quarters of the cards Watson had bought, the afternoon had long turned to night, and I was lost fathoms deep. My only hope at that moment was that Watson would not notice and I would be able to find a way to suppress the need for his approval and affection.*

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Holmes returned to 221b on the evening of December 7th after a long and very trying day at the Yard, to find the older and more cunning members of the Irregulars drawn up in military neat rows in the sitting room where they were listening raptly as Watson issued a stream of orders. Mrs Hudson, a bemused look on her face, marked off items on a list and distributed coins. Holmes paused in the doorway struggling not to laugh at the scene playing out in his rooms, and trying to fathom what on earth Watson was up to now.

"Understood?" Watson asked sharply.

"Yes, sir," came the answer in a chorus of voices.

"Dismissed!" Drill Sargent Watson barked, and the order dissolved into a stream of street children filling out.

"Honestly, Doctor," Mrs Hudson began when the last child was clattering down the stairs.

"Mrs Hudson," Watson interrupted, "I have asked them to do nothing illegal, or indeed anything I wouldn't be doing if this damn leg would hold out for more than an hour at a time. In return for which they have a few honestly earned pence for the season."

Mrs Hudson gave him a look Holmes couldn't interpret and shook her head. "As you say, doctor," she said, gathering up her paper, "and a good evening to you as well, Mr Holmes."

"Good evening Mrs Hudson," Holmes said, closing the door after her. "And good evening to you too Sergeant-Major."
Watson snorted. "Surgeon Major, Holmes."

"My apologies. May I ask what campaign planning has been going on in my absence?" Holmes asked, tossing himself into his chair, his eyes sparkling.

"Foraging instructions," Watson replied, limping to his chair, "and a slight amount of charity by subterfuge."

Holmes lost control of his face just long enough for the grin to be fully formed and spotted by Watson, who grinned shyly back at him, all traces of the stern army officer dissolving.

"It's little enough, Holmes, but to the children it may make all the difference," Watson explained, "and it gives them some time to indulge in seasonal fun without worrying about the next meal."

Holmes felt that dangerous but irresistible tug of affection wash through him and for once struggled to find any words.

"Perhaps next year you could demonstrate your ability to pick locks so we could gather holly?" Watson suggested drily. "By then, I should be in shape to run from any dogs."

It was Holmes turn to snort. "My dear chap," he said, "any house I choose to...relieve...of any holly most assuredly will not have a dog loose in the grounds."

The thought suddenly hit Holmes as he reached for pipe and slipper. *Oh dear God! I have just agreed to steal holly with Watson next Christmas!*

The contented quiet that settled over the room allowed Holmes time to sort through his thoughts, formulating and discarding plans for escaping the sentimentality he was floundering in. It was preposterous, illogical, riddled with distracting emotions, and more than a little worrying that in such a short time he could be so deeply entangled in it by one apparently average man. *Ah, the nub of the matter. Surgeon Major John Watson is many things, but he is not average.* Holmes recognised a truth he'd been hiding from himself. *And I am a doomed man.*

The next day brought a flood of mail, mostly cards which Watson insisted they open and read. In Holmes' opinion the day was only rescued by the cards from Watson's old medical school friends, which prompted a few outrageous stories of past Christmas hijinks at the expense of various professors and learned academics. Still chuckling at the Father Christmas tableau, complete with various pickled animals standing in for the reindeer, that had been set-up on the Dean's private lawn, Holmes reached for his violin as Watson busied himself with some writing.

They had finished dinner when a terrible caterwauling drifted up from the street. Holmes sprang to his feet, a stricken look on his face.

"Come on! It must be serious to have such a hue and cry made. Attempted murder at the least."

He was halfway across the room when Watson's laughter registered, spinning to face this inexplicable merriment in the face of vile deeds.

"Ho... Holmes," Watson stuttered out, "It's just carol singers. Not a crime in sight."

"Singers?!" Holmes ejaculated. "That," one pale hand flailed in the direction of the windows, "that is a crime against music of the highest order Watson!"

Watson heaved himself out of his chair, tremors of merriment shaking him. "It's not that bad. A little out of tune possibly. Don't be so hard on them."
"A little.>" Holmes drew himself up to his full height and glared at Watson. "You may be tone deaf and used only to the bawling of soldiers and musical hall screeching, but I have a fine appreciation of the art of singing."

Holmes snatched up his violin and bow and, still in his dressing gown, bounded downstairs. Watson, still struggling to suppress his laughter, followed more sedately, shrugging into his jacket. The sight that greeted him only made that struggle harder, even as he felt his heart warmed by it. A small choir of five young boys plus one young man were being given firm instructions in the art of singing and Holmes was playing the appropriate tune on his violin in an attempt to "prevent any more violence against innocent tunes, and for the cessation of assault upon the hearing of the neighbourhood."

"You'll get him into the spirit of the season yet, Doctor," Mrs Hudson whispered as she joined him on the stoop.

Watson smiled at her and went back to watching Holmes conduct his impromptu and growing choir with his bow.

"A little higher, Holmes."

_I am truly a man damned to hell_, Holmes thought as he strained to even out the swag of assorted festive greenery. "I have the better eye for dead reckoning Holmes." "The fairer sex is your department, Watson,' you said, so let me demonstrate my ability to understand the female mind while you do a man's work." "You have the longer reach my dear chap. I'd topple off the mantle if I tried it." God help you, John Watson. When I've got this damn holly out of my hand you'll get a piece of my mind on the subject of Christmas decorations!

"There! Perfect, Holmes." Watson cocked his head. "And just in time, that's Mrs Hudson coming back."

Holmes dropped from his precarious perch over the fireplace just as their landlady entered her flat.

"Doctor Watson! Mr Holmes!" Mrs Hudson exclaimed as she took in her newly decorated parlour. "Oh gentlemen, how kind of you!"

"Not at all, Mrs Hudson," Watson replied, a pleased smile on his face. "It was no trouble at all. We had more than enough brought in by the boys, we could have decked out half the street."

"We will not be doing that, however," Holmes broke in firmly.

"No Holmes, we won't," Watson agreed readily. "After all, the tree should be arriving this afternoon, and that will take the rest of the day to do."

Holmes eyes widened in horror before narrowing to grey stormy slits. "This time, Surgeon Major Watson, you can do the man's work and I will put the art in my blood to good use."

"Watson, given your habitual harangue about my eating habits, I can not fathom why you have allowed Mrs Hudson to waste a dozen or so perfectly good walnuts."

"What?" Watson craned his head around the outspread branches. "Oh, gilded walnuts. There isn't a nut in there, Holmes. They went into a cake, I expect."
Holmes' eyebrow headed for the top of the tree, which Watson was carefully securing in a large pot. "Why is it traditional to hang empty nut shells from a different species on a fir tree?"

Watson smiled and reached a hand for the glittering nut shell. "Well, they're not totally empty." He shook the nut next to his ear. "There's a fortune in each one, and on New Year's Day, everyone in the house picks a nut and opens it to see what their new year might bring."

Holmes digested that in silence for a moment before holding up another of the offerings Mrs Hudson had left them. "This appears to be a basket made from orange peel."

"Well spotted, Holmes! You're in scintillating form this afternoon." Watson ducked back behind the tree so Holmes couldn't see his grin.

Holmes muttered something about absurd sentimentality before returning to his scrutiny of the decorations.

"Don't forget to leave space for the candles in your decorative scheme," Watson told him as he gently shook the tree to test the security of its anchor.

"Watson, you have an excellent memory for conversations; it is one of your more desirable qualities. So I know that you remember the Fire Brigade's," Holmes pursed his lips for a second, "opinions on the matter of smoke-producing items in this house."

"Their threat to leave the place to burn if you caused smoke, of any colour, to billow out of any window?" Watson asked, face innocent but the devil dancing in his eyes.

The answering fire in Holmes' eyes could have caused the tree to ignite "I would think, Watson, that as that last occasion was by your own admission your fault, you could have the courtesy to refrain from tempting fate any further." Holmes tossed the orange basket back on the table and turned to walk away. "If all I am to get for my efforts to help is mockery and insults, then I shall leave you to do the job on your own."

Watson dodged around the tree to lay a hand on Holmes' arm. "Sher...Holmes, wait. I apologise. You're right. My rudeness was uncalled for. Please," he gave Holmes an imploring look, "stay, help me with this. Decorating for Christmas is not a job to be done without the company of good friends."

*Extract from the diary of Sherlock Holmes*

_I could not refuse him, he looked so wretched. I could clearly see to many lonely Christmases in his past. So, for the remainder of the afternoon I directed him in placing nuts and dried fruit garlands, paper shapes and ribbon twists, and the candles which we had both agreed would remain until. He climbed up and down the ladder and the staircase, occasionally offering a suggestion or explaining the tradition behind a thing; and to my sporadic comments on the sentimental nature of a thing or on his less than perfect execution of my design, he answered "Yes, dear," or, "sorry, Holmes," in much the manner of a hen pecked husband answering his wife's complaints. It should have irritated me beyond bearing, but it served only to tighten the chain which sentiment, affection and my considerable respect have forged in my mind to tie me to John._

"Aren't you glad of all that carol practice now, Holmes?" Watson asked as they threaded their way through the back alleys around Covent Garden.

Holmes snorted and shrugged his rough coat closer around him, fingers clenching around the
battered violin case. The case wasn't all that taxing, but it did require a lot of running hither and thither to gather all the facts. This ruse of playing for coin while observing had proved useful in furnishing several clues, and Watson's barrow selling of the leftover holly, ivy and assorted Christmas fripperies had netted scraps of news and evidence on a dozen or more possible affairs.

"This is not playing, Watson, it is musical murder."

Watson grinned and concentrated on steering the battered and wayward barrow. Mid December had found Holmes staving off boredom with hours of carol playing and cocaine, only one of which Watson approved of and encouraged as much as possible. He had to admit, however, that the instrument Holmes currently carried reflected the state of its case, and the sound was comparable to both.

"Don't worry, Holmes, I won't peach on you," Watson promised as they parted. "Usual spot for lunch?"

Holmes nodded and shuffled off to find a place to play and observe, and Watson set down his barrow in the first unoccupied pitch and added his voice to the cries of the market.

Hours later, Holmes shuffled away from the third irritated stall holder, surreptitiously stretching his fingers which were cramped from the cold and the playing, when he caught sight of Watson. There was an animated crowd gathered around him and the barrow was overturned and ignored some distance away. As fast as his disguise would allow, Holmes joined the fringes of the crowd and had to fake a wheezy cough to hide the laughter that threatened to escape.

Glaring at Watson from a face gone blotchy and swollen was Simon Wells, a notorious and vicious thief who had turned smuggler according to the market gossip. The constable who was talking to Watson was also apparently having trouble not laughing at the helpless and ivy-covered Wells.

"So, Mr Salway, let me check the facts. You were selling holly and ivy and assorted decorations from your barrow when you and," he glanced down at his notebook, "Mrs Segal who helps her husband on his fruit stall noticed this man making off with one of Mr Williams' geese without paying for it."

Watson nodded, answering in a rough northern accent, "that's right, officer. We both saw him snitch the bird off the table and do an about face."

"So you," continued the constable, whose name, Holmes recalled, was Nicholls, "raised the cry of theft and went after him?" Nicholls' tone clearly said he thought that Watson had been foolish and Holmes only partly disagreed with him on that score.

"I did, officer." Watson sounded offended at the implication. "I've seen rough service abroad, and he's far from the worst I've had fisticuffs with."

Nicholls raised an eyebrow and jotted something in his notebook.

"Besides," Watson went on, "It's Christmas. Season of goodwill, and all that. Theft ain't a show of goodwill, and if I can do a man a good deed at this time of the year I reckon I should."

Nicholls smiled. "Quite, Mr Salway. I must ask - my inspector will want to know, you understand - why you went after the man with a holly wreath? I mean it's not exactly a weapon of choice when confronting a man known to be violent and much larger than yourself."

"Ah, well," Watson looked a bit embarrassed, "see it's like this, officer. I wasn't thinking too much, never any call for it as a corporal see, just do as the Sergeant said." He stooped and picked
up the broken remains of a wreath. "And then, well, see, holly's got sharp points to it and I've been in plenty of desperate fights where you take whatever you've got to hand as a weapon. Looks like I got lucky, though, what with him having such a reaction to it. Like my landlady, she can't touch the stuff, even with gloves, without ending up looking like him."

Nicholls nodded and hoisted Wells to his feet. "Very lucky I'd say, Mr Salway. You won't mind, I hope, if I don't take off the ivy? My inspector's going to need to see this if I don't want to end up being written up for being drunk on duty. Not every day you get given a suspect tied up in festive greenery."

"Not at all, officer. Here, let me get you a bag for this," Watson flourished the holly. "Best have all the evidence on hand before going to the CO, I always found."

"Ivy? Watson, really." Holmes said as they left the market later when the excitement had died away.

"There wasn't anything else to hand, Holmes," Watson responded, a smile twitching at the corner of his lips. "Besides, that rather solves the issue of what to get the Yard as a Christmas present."

Holmes laughed. "Unusual gift wrap, Watson but I think my file on the man would be a fitting addition to your seasonal offering."

*Extract from the diary of Sherlock Holmes*

*It was an absurd, utterly ridiculous act, and so true to John's character, that how anyone failed to discover our true identity I can not fathom. The man cannot, will not, allow a good deed to go undone. This season of the year has only exacerbated this tendency, and yet I can not find it in me to reprove him for it, much as I know I should urge him to preserve himself. His warmth and unshakable, consistent friendship have lit a burning fire in me. A fire, it seems, that has reduced me to such statements and quite robbed me of the ability to construct a reasoned path of action. It is now the eve of the Christmas feast, and I have not the slightest idea of how to continue life as it was before. I have heard a good deal about the 'gift of God to man' that is the focus of tomorrow's festivities. I have, of course, an entirely respectable gift for John, but it is not the gift I wish to give him. I am utterly lost to sentiment and John Watson, and I can only hope that once he fathoms what I am he will, after his nature, be kind and deal gently with me.*

"Good Lord, Holmes - did you sleep at all last night?" Watson asked as he took in the rumpled figure half curled in its accustomed arm chair.

"Hmm? Oh, Watson. No, the ends of this last affair drove sleep from my mind," Holmes replied absently, staring fixedly into the ashes of the fire. "Merry Christmas, by the way, my dear chap."

"The same to you, Holmes, and may we have many of them!" Watson knelt at the grate and, with a practised hand, stacked kindling and struck sparks to relight the fire. "Forgive me, Holmes but you look rather melancholy. I hope in my enthusiasm for the season I haven't wearied you beyond bearing."

"Wearied me? No, Watson not at all. I have had some hard thinking recently and it has left its marks."

"Well," Watson grunted as he rolled to his feet, "this, perhaps, may erase some of those marks."

He handed Holmes a small, plainly wrapped box, a thin garland of ivy circling it and a sprig of holly poking from the top.

Holmes smiled at the wrapping. "I trust not to find anything criminal in origin in here, Watson..?"
Careful of the sharp decoration, Holmes opened the parcel. Inside were a pair of grey gloves and a cameo brooch. Holmes gently lifted both items out of the box and examined them closely. The brooch was clearly the sort that a woman of the middling sort would wear on her Sunday best, and the gloves were of much better quality and sized for Holmes' long hands.

"The gloves I can understand, and I thank you for them, but...the brooch?" he asked mildly.

"Well," Watson smiled gently, "I thought your respectable housewife disguise could do with some embellishment."

Holmes laughed and set the brooch aside. "Beware, Watson - gifts like this may well lead to you being pressed into service as my oh-so-respectable husband."

Watson's face suddenly went carefully blank, his eyes trained on the fire. Holmes cursed himself silently and looked at the gloves, turning them over. The buttons caught his attention and his thoughts stuttered to a halt. It could not be, it simply could not be...

"Ah, forgive me if I misread things, but...CEDRUS LIBANI AND COMMIPHORA GILEADENSIS?" Holmes asked softly.

Watson swallowed and said just as quietly, "Yes. I...you...I knew you would recognise them, even from such small and crude illustrations. I was less sure that you would fully understand their meaning."

"A knowledge of such a language is sometimes necessary in my line of work," Holmes admitted. "After all, who thinks that a flower can give away so much?"

Watson nodded sharply. "And have you found anything...CRIMINAL...in my gift?"

Holmes made no answer, but crossed to his desk and picked up a journal. "Nothing that any other would notice, no." He handed the book to Watson "And no more so than anything you will find in here."

Watson took the journal but didn't look through it. Instead, he kept his eyes fixed on Holmes, a flicker of something lighting their blue depths. So intent were they on each other that the faint chink of china and the rattle of the door handle was the only warning of Mrs Hudson's arrival.

"Merry Christmas, Doctor, Mr Holmes."

"Merry Christmas, Mrs Hudson." Watson hurriedly set down the journal and rose to help her lay out breakfast.

"I shall be leaving for my sister's after breakfast, gentlemen," Mrs Hudson told them as she fussed over the placement of dishes and plates. "I have left you a ham in the meat locker for lunch, and I'm sure you can fend for yourselves until evening."

"I'm sure we can manage, Mrs Hudson," Holmes said, again sorting through his desk for their landlady's gift.

Once Mrs Hudson had left them to breakfast, Holmes dropped into his chair like a puppet whose strings had been cut. "Watson."

"Eat, Holmes," Watson interjected, "then once we are alone in the house we talk."

"Just talk?" Holmes ventured, trying to hide his nerves now they stood so nearly on the edge.
"Talk first." Watson amended with a gentle voice. "Other...activities...later. Once we've settled a few things."

Holmes nodded and applied himself to the food set in front of him, content to let Watson lead.

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The sound of the front door closing behind Mrs Hudson was Holmes' cue to spring to his feet and pace agitatedly, shooting glances at Watson who was seated in his armchair apparently engrossed in the paper.

"Holmes, for goodness sake. Sit." Watson jabbed a finger in the direction of the other armchair. "Better," he said once Holmes had settled himself into it. "Pardon the bluntness, but am I to take it that you are not...experienced?"

Holmes swallowed and nodded once. "A few schoolboy fumbles and a few back alley transactions. Sentiment, I do not, well..." he trailed off.

Watson's face said that it was as he'd expected. "Relax, Holmes. I am not expecting you to become a fawning idiot. In fact, that would be the most dangerous thing you could do. It would give the game away even to the thickest head at the Yard."

Holmes' lips twitched briefly in a smile and, emboldened, he asked, "you are not so...inexperienced...in this. Your time in the army, I take it?"

"Indeed. Considerably experienced with both sexes." Watson blushed slightly at the memory of his army nickname. "I shall be honest with you, I do want you. Most desperately. But I cannot regard it as a casual encounter, Holmes. If we decide to walk this path it is for life and to exclusion of all others."

Holmes shivered and met Watson's gaze. "The thought of any other...no. No, it must be you or no-one...John."

"Good. I warn you, I am a jealous lover, Sherlock. If I hold you too tight, you must tell me," Watson said earnestly. "And this thing will be at your pace. I will not push you further than you want to go, I promise."

"So far, you're not pushing anything," Holmes huffed, out feeling his nerves winding tighter and tighter.

"In any courting it's important to set the expectations," Watson smiled. "Patience. It will be well worth the wait."

"Courting? You were..." Holmes stared in amazement.

Watson chuckled. "My dear man, you are without doubt the most oblivious man I have ever pursued. Months I have been hinting and suggesting, trying to sound you out. It's been damn frustrating. I'm not usually as blatant about it as I was with the gloves."

Holmes blushed and looked down at his fingers twisted together in his lap. "Sorry, sentiment is and probably always will be your department."

Watson shook his head and stood holding out a hand to Holmes. "Come, Sherlock, I think we've spoken enough for today. Will you let me show you something of my reputation?"

Holmes slid his fingers into Watson's solid palm and stood. "Please, John, let me give you what I
wanted to for Christmas."

Watson drew them into Homes' bedroom, closing and locking both doors before stepping close and running his hands softly over Holmes' shirt. "You are so beautiful, so very stunning," he whispered.

Holmes' breath grew shallow and the pulse in his neck fluttered. His hand trembled as he reached out to pluck at the buttons of Watson's shirt.

Watson covered that trembling hand with his own much steadier one, and whispered into Holmes' ear, "this time let me do this for you. Let me show you how much sweeter this is where there is love as well as need."

Holmes couldn't entirely swallow the needy moan at the sensation of Watson's breath rippling over his ear and the warmth of Watson's hands bleeding through Holmes' shirt. The sensation of those careful talented fingers brushing just firmly enough to tease the skin under the cotton made Holmes shiver with anticipation.

"You are so perfect, Sherlock," Watson whispered into Holmes' ear, "and so very sensitive. You need to be cherished, don't you? Cared for, worshiped...no wonder you turned to cold pure logic for solace. All those stolen, squalid moments with strangers...no one to be tender to you..."

Holmes shivered, pressed into Watson's hands, and whispered "Please, John..."

Watson leant forward and gently kissed Holmes' as his fingers deftly unfastening the buttons of Holmes' shirt and cuffs. spreading his fingers wide Watson slid his hands under Holmes shirt and slowly eased the fabric up and back until it dropped in a pool in the floor, sliding his hands back over the firm curves of Holmes shoulders and chest he let one rest over Holmes heart feeling it race madly.

"Easy my dear, let yourself enjoy it." Watson breathed into Holmes ear as his finger continued there downward slide to creep in under the edge of Holmes vest and stroke across flesh.

Holmes gave a breathy sigh and recaptured Watson's mouth for another kiss his hands making another attempt on the buttons of Watson's shirt and cuffs. spreading his fingers wide Watson slid his hands under Holmes shirt and slowly eased the fabric up and back until it dropped in a pool in the floor, sliding his hands back over the firm curves of Holmes shoulders and chest he let one rest over Holmes heart feeling it race madly.

"John!"

It was a husky exclamation and plea in one word and Watson knew what his lover meant, kneeling up his gently urge Holmes to lie back on the bed before swiftly undoing Holmes' trousers and with Holmes help stripped them and his drawers off the detective.

"Roll over Sherlock, make yourself comfortable." Watson instructed in a voice thick and low with arousal.

Holmes shuffled on the bed turning over to have Watson in view as the doctor crossed swiftly to the detectives make-up table and picked up a jar before he returned to the bedside toeing off his own shoes as he came. Holmes drank in the sight of his soon to be lover shirtless and barefoot,
lean, still tanned from his service abroad it was an enticing sight.

"Like the view then?" Watson asked teasingly as he set the jar on the night stand.

"To much clothing still in the way." Holmes gathered himself out of the haze of arousal to banter back.

There was a low laugh and Watson's fingers began to work on the buttons of his fly, "An easily solved problem."

A few moments later and Holmes was eagerly cataloguing the naked form of John Watson in much the same way as an avid entomologist examines a new specie of butterfly. Watson stalked the few paces to the bed and knelt on it with the grace of a hunting cat, reaching out the run his fingers across Holmes body in a feather light touch that robbed Holmes of the power of speech for a moment and made his half hard cock twitch. Stretching out beside him Watson precoded to demonstrate some of the reasons behind his army nickname, slowly driving Holmes mad with need as he feathered kisses and touches across Holmes body lightly ever nerve ending and patch of skin until both of them were panting and hard.

"John, please can' last much longer." Holmes huffed out when they broke from an intense kiss.

Watson ran a calming hand across Holmes chest and murmured softly "Relax, I'll take care of everything, trust me."

Holmes nodded frantically most of his self control long shredded.

"Roll over on to your side," Watson said reaching back for the jar, "we'll take our pleasure together."

The sent of petroleum jelly reached Holmes' nose and a few seconds later a cool slick finger slid over his inner thigh, deducing the mostly likely reason Holmes twitched into Watson's touch and tried to control his erratic breathing.

"God how I've fantasised about this," Watson whispered his breath stirring the short hairs on Holmes' neck, "the things I want to do to you, with you."

Holmes couldn't hold back the wanton moan or the grind of his hips backwards over Watson's fingers, hooking one ankle over the other to lock his legs more firmly together trying to signal his readiness and need for Watson to just take him. Watson's fingers withdrew and the sound of slick flesh on flesh told Holmes that his message had been understood and then he felt Watson's prick, thick, blunt and warm rub along the underside of his sac as one of Watson's hands closed around his own cock, slick and slightly cool from the lubricant.

Holmes turned his head in to his pillow to muffle the cry of pleasure that escaped him as Watson slowly began to move hips and hand in tandem. Each thrust of Watson's hip stoking the fire of pleasure as his prick rubbed across Holmes' perineum and sac and his hand sliding and twisting over Holmes cock drawing out drops of ejaculate to mix with the jelly slicking Watson's hand. It was slow delightful torture, Holmes' could feel his crisis approaching like a train, clamping his thighs tighter to give Watson more friction he tried to hold back his release by force of will.

Watson moaned into Holmes' neck at that and gasped out "Close, Christ Sherlock, let me hear you."

Watson thrust his hips a little harder and did some grip/slide/twist manoeuvre with his hand and suddenly Holmes' felt himself shudder and give in to la petite Mort crying out his pleasure as wave after wave of ecstasy crashed through him. He was dimly aware of Watson clutching him hard,
thrust gone erratic before he to cried out in pleasure and spent himself between Holmes' thighs.

For a while they lay spent and heavy limbed before Watson nuzzled at Holmes neck and gently rolled away and off the bed, Holmes heard him pour some water into the wash bowl and wet a flannel and after a few moments Watson returned to the bed and gently cleaned Holmes body, each pass of the flannel evoking tiny tremors. The sound of the flannel hitting the wash board made Holmes roll over onto his back to look up at Watson who was sitting on the side of the bed looking down at him a slightly nervous expression on his face. It took rather longer than Holmes liked for him to come up with the obvious reason for that look on his lovers face and when he did he took the obvious solution.

Reaching up he tugged Watson down into a deep lazy kiss before murmuring "Merry Christmas my dear John."

"And a happy new year my love." Watson responded, "And many of them."

Flower and greenery meanings:
Holly: Domestic Happiness
Ivy: Wedded Love, Fidelity, Friendship, Affection
Cedrus libani (Cedar of Lebanon): I live but for thee, Think of Me
Commiphora gileadensi (Arabian Balsam): Ardent Love

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