

relaxed part of him would chat over the breakfast kippers or if the tense man would simply storm off at the least little word. It was all terribly upsetting, all the more so for the sure and certain knowledge I had that he would stop all this, give it all up, if I would only say the word. I could not. To say the word, I would needs must follow through with action in kind, and I simply could not allow myself to commit such a heinous sin, even for a friend I love more dearly than my own family and respect more than any other human being I have ever encountered.

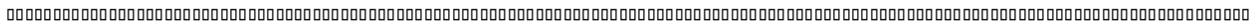
It is, I believe, impossible to know what it was that drove Holmes to this aberration, no more than I could positively avow what drove him to his dreadful bouts with cocaine, but I believe that in both cases, it was the genius of the man, the splendour of his mind that isolated him so from the gentler sex, that, I am quite, quite certain, had much to answer for. Perhaps, if he were less singular in both mind and habit, he would have been able to form some kind of fondness for the weaker sex, but I fear that he was as misogynist as his brother, the esteemed and reclusive Mycroft. For whatever reason, however, he suffered from this disability and it, as with his addiction to cocaine, was growing that winter, by leaps and bounds. By the time Yule had passed and the New Year had been ushered in with gaiety and brightness by all and sundry, Holmes excepted, of course, it seemed to me that it was then that Holmes never went a day without either his foul potion or his clandestine excursions. There was nothing I could do, for discussions on the one were met with acrimonious rejoinders and for the other, he would simply refuse to speak, beyond declaring that there was only one possible answer and that that was far beyond his reach and held by another. It was from the way he would look at me as he said this, rather than by his words, that I was able to discern, to deduce, if you will, that I was the one who held sway over him.

My first reaction was one of horror and outrage, naturally enough, as would be the reaction of any decent, God-fearing gentleman, but

as I stormed from our rooms, even as I descended the stairs two at a time with a fine disregard for Mrs. Hudson, I found my memory haunted by the expression that had darkened his already solemn eyes. It was not often that one saw emotion of any kind displayed by my friend, and never, in our long acquaintance, had I ever seen such misery in him. I was troubled, as I walked through that night, the lamps casting flickering haloes through the rain. Indeed, as I paused to catch my breath and gather my addled wits on the new bridge, a constable approached, to ascertain my state of mind. I believe that, upon seeing my grim visage, he feared that I might be contemplating some foolish notion of ending it all! I reassured him, of course, and in doing so, I found I had reassured myself. After all, it was not that Holmes had suddenly started harbouring these appalling emotions for me, merely that I had chosen this moment to open my eyes and see what had surely been staring me in the face these many months past.

As I walked back to our rooms, I looked up at our windows, barely in time to see him spring back from the glass. I am quite sure he had no intention of me seeing him; indeed, I am quite sure that he did not even know that his secret was revealed, for, if it had not been for the chance of a passing hackney, its lights briefly settling upon our bow window, I would never have caught so much as a glimpse of Holmes. Strangely, I was less disturbed by my realisation of his shameful feelings for me than I was by the thought that I had distressed him to the point where he, of all people, had to stand by his window to watch and wait, until he knew that I was returning that night and had not been horrified into an hotel. It was terrible, to think of Holmes suffering so that he would be driven to such a display of emotions, he, who reviled such weaknesses. For a considerable time after, the memories of that night would spring into my mind, most unexpectedly, and cut me to the quick. My dear Holmes, so terribly, frighteningly vulnerable, and he and I, both knowing all the while, that I could end his suffering with a mere word. Unfortunately, we

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both also knew that I could never utter such a thing, could never allow myself to wander so far from the paths a gentleman must tread.

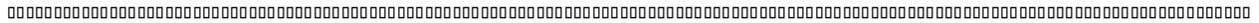
In the summer of '96, his strange wanderings had settled into a regular pattern, and I found myself to be consumed by curiosity. Where did he go? Whom did he see? What kind of place catered to men with such unacceptable tastes? Was this place of a piece with the brothels I had visited in the necessary practice of my medical arts? Or, perhaps, was it of the nature of the opium dens Holmes sometimes frequented for the information let slip by drug-loosened tongues? I applied Holmes' own techniques to the matter, learning through careful observation, that it was only when he affixed certain cuff-links to his linen that he would leave, not to return until the morning, a very different man. It was with a curious pang of mixed guilt, pride and repugnance that I noticed the cuff-links were the very gold ones which I had gifted to him on the occasion of the first publication of one of my accounts of his great talents, the tale I so fancifully termed 'A Study in Scarlet'. If he were to see me watching him dress, a flush would heighten his pale skin, as he affixed his cuff-links, which of course first led me to wonder at the nature of his secret.

It was the night I importunately managed to do this function for him that I decided I must follow him and decipher my answers. For, as I threaded the cuff-links through his linen, it was with utter amazement that I perceived that Holmes, the automaton, unfeeling Sherlock Holmes was all a-tremble at my closeness, and that my participating in this intimate ritual with him had set him as all a-flutter as a young girl with her first *beau*. It astonished me, shocking me into silence, and delayed me so long that I came perilously close to missing my chance to follow him. For shameful though it is for me to admit, I must confess that I did indeed follow my dear friend with the express intention of spying upon him. As my only excuse I hold up my deep and abiding affection for this great and lonely man.

As I have stated before in this narrative (which shall never see light of day until such times as both Holmes and I are long dead and the mores of society changed to such a degree that this revelation of Holmes' vice shall not cause people to revile his name and shudder with repugnance), I am not so *naïf* that I am unaware of the depths to which people are so tragically capable of sinking. As I am sure my reader is aware, there exist in this great metropolis of ours numerous dens of iniquity, where all sorts of unnatural vices may be purchased, without so much as a passing thought for either morals or the poor unfortunate miscreants upon whom these aberrant and abhorrent behaviours are exercised. It was a horror thrilling deep within me, that my dear friend's vice might be one even more terrible than the craving of one's own sex. I had heard of, and indeed, had even seen on one horrifying occasion, the hideously maltreated bodies of tiny victims from a vile house which catered to those who roused to the mistreatment of children.

My head was in such a spin, after years of suspecting Holmes and after long months of realising that Holmes suffered from viewing my person in a most inappropriate light, that I found myself tossing and turning many a night, fearing what despicable vices he might indulge. And so, the night when he trembled so at my touch, I resolved to follow him, to set my own mind at rest, and if my worst nightmares proved to be fact and not the product of fevered imaginings, to at least attempt to return Holmes to the paths that might lead him back to righteousness. I did not, even for a moment, hold on to the foolish notion that he might one day meet and marry a woman, for it was obvious that was simply not in his nature, any more than sweet-temper filled him. Indeed, it shows the slipshod state of my own morals that I was hoping to find that his vice was nothing more than the practices of Sodom.

Thus it was that I hastened into my greatcoat, pistol in pocket, I know not why, save only that it gave me some semblance of security. I hurried out into the night, turning to my left as



I left our rooms, for past observations had intimated that this was the path Holmes invariably took. Shortly, I saw his tall, lean figure striding on ahead of me, only his uncommon height serving to lift him above the crowds thronging the streets. I did not believe myself to be observed, for he seemed lost in thought and as downcast as ever I had seen him. This black depression was different from his usual bouts of being in low spirits, for then he would simply take to the couch and his needles, never venturing to move a muscle. This mood of his tonight seemed to be more one of deep sorrow, and a familiar, lingering one besides.

I confess that the guilt I harboured grew ever the more strong, as I followed him so slyly that night. We continued for many minutes, he in the lead, I coming along behind, until he at last ducked into a moderately respectable rooming house. I lingered outside, careful to remain on the same side of the street where I would be unobserved from any window. It was not long before his figure emerged, but dressed completely differently from before. Now he wore the unfashionable tweeds of a country gentleman who had neither the style nor the finances to wear Town evening clothes. By slouching, he had lopped some inches from his height; false moustachios and sideburns filled out his face and had I not known to expect just some such trick, I would surely have missed him.

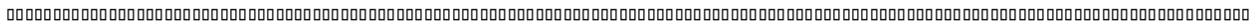
On we went, through streets that were still fortunately busy, until once more, he slipped into a building. By now, we were in a far less respectable part of town, although an area still by no means seedy. A tradesman eventually emerged, a man obviously well accustomed to earning his daily bread, with hair of carrot-hue, hunched shoulders and a bushy beard. Still, I recognised Holmes almost immediately, from some indefinable instinct for knowing him amidst even such a press of people. I continued on behind him, as the streets became more and more unfashionable, until we finally reached a depressing brick building, with a 'rooms for let' sign over the crumbling door-mantle.

There was some considerable delay upon this occasion, and indeed, I began to fear that he had slipped away from me. I was on the verge of leaving, my impatience almost getting the better of me, when a poor fellow emerged from the building. It was only a glance of sympathy from me, but it served to keep me on Holmes' trail. The man looked to have been born an urchin and never risen above his station, the grime of a lifetime discolouring the skin of his face and hands, lending him an almost skeletal appearance. It was with a thrill of pity that I realised that this was Holmes! Where was he going, that he had to stoop to such degradations? I was horrified even more as we continued upon our separate but linked journey, he still gloom-ridden and self-absorbed, I, filled with sympathy and horror.

The air was becoming thicker as night fell, a fog rolling in and deadening the faint glow from the newly-lit gas lamps. Still we walked on, until we crossed that invisible line that demarcates civilised London from the mazes that even our faithful bobbies hesitate to penetrate. Holmes hesitated not for an instant, and I followed on behind, spurning the fawning, foul-mouthed attention of our unfortunate sisters who have sunk to the dreadful levels of selling their bodies on the streets for the price of a four of gin hot. Holmes paid these harlots rather less attention than did I, hurrying on now like a bloodhound hot on the scent. By now, the heavy smell of the docklands was in the air, vying with the fog to see which could offend our senses more. Old fish, tar, the putrid rot of vegetables and the unmistakable stench of homes without drains to carry effluent away. It struck me that it was no wonder that typhoid fever is still so rife in our city and that so many children die before their fifth birthday, if these are the unsanitary and unsafe conditions in which they must live.

As we came close the docks themselves, Holmes paused at the street water pump, wise enough not to drink, but obviously heated enough to require some water to splash on the back of his neck. He looked around, very casu-

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ally, but sharp-eyed, and I thanked the instinct and the many years of sharing in his exploits that had guided me to hide myself in a doorway, regardless of the slime upon the ground. He did not see me, and indeed, I barely saw him, as he disappeared down an alley-way. It was obvious that the end of our journey was close at hand and I became more worried with every moment. Patently, our destination was not a reputable house of sin, and so the question once again arose as to what terrible vice Holmes was going to indulge in himself. I feared greatly for him. Why could he not go to one of the clean, discreet houses that catered to men of that sort? The answer came to me almost immediately. Were he to go there, he would run the very serious risk of being recognised, and thus compromised into assisting a man of influence in some case or other. Such a thing would be anathema to him, for he revered his profession as I believe he did not even revere God Himself. To be recognised, and thus have the subtle pressure to help, or perhaps cover some deed, or even to act in the way a certain Right Honourable gentleman had importuned him to do, not a month past—such a thing would strike terror into him, for his profession was the only thing, as he had told me upon one occasion, that he could hold high to the shining light of rectitude.

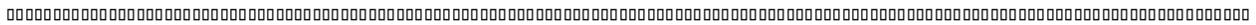
Due to the need for concealment, I had needs allowed Holmes to travel quite a distance before me, and now I discovered to my profound annoyance, that I could not discern into which establishment he had gone. Along the docks I walked, turning aside the offers of prostitutes, male and female alike, as I perused the bright-lit windows of public houses and hostelrys, all of them equally tawdry and roisterous. As I hesitated before one door amongst many, I was approached in a most sinister and determined manner by a creature the likes of which I had never seen before. This woman, although I hesitate to use the term, had a jaw broader than my own, and numerous seafarer's tattoos marring her flesh, upon which grew fully more hair than upon my own chest. Her dress was cut uncom-

monly high, with short sleeves revealing muscular arms, such as one would more usually expect upon a stevedore, and yet her voice was as light and as sweet as any lark I have ever heard. She seemed reluctant to accept my protestations of disinterest and so I found myself hurrying through the doorway in search of haven. It was thus that I was able to catch the barest glimpse of Holmes as he trod upstairs.

Thus, by purest chance, I had come across him again and in the kind of establishment that catered to men and men only. The entire room, being neither large nor small, was filled with men and those places usually occupied by prostitutes were taken by men of all shapes and appearances, dressed in a most ungentlemanly manner. Not one of these fellows wore shirt-cuffs or collar, and indeed, most did not even have their shirts fully buttoned. Two of them even wore nothing but trousers, exposing bulging muscles and great expanses of skin in the warmth of the room. There was a pianoplayer and men dancing, one with the other, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. I was shocked to my core, however, when I realised that at one of the tables, two men were engaged in kissing and as I could see, their mouths were open and one had even dared to place his hand inside the other fellow's trousers. I could not believe my eyes, nor understand how Holmes, although notoriously untidy but yet a chap of tremendous decorum, could possibly bear to bring himself to such a place where men were engaging in carnal pursuits publicly. The operator of this establishment—I do not quite know how else to name him, for although he was rouged and powdered as any madam would be, he was still definitely a man—approached me with barely concealed hostility and two very large common chaps at his back.

“Han’ wot d’yer want, toff?” he cried, in a most lisping and unattractive voice.

I had heard and read quite some considerable amount about this kind of place, although none of it had prepared me for the physical truth. “I wish,” I said, then had to pause, for my voice



besmeared wall.

Thus it was a moment after I opened the spy-hole before I placed my eye to it, and so my ears and brain had warning ere my eyes ever saw. The voice I heard was instantly recognisable as Holmes, but in tones to which I had never once before been privy. He sounded hoarse, as if he had been racing, and almost mewling, as if in a terrible state, but I knew it was not pain. To hear Holmes, in so private a moment, in such pleasure gave me pause, but I was too weak to turn aside without first looking. I had, after all, still to ensure that his vice was only that of the Greeks and nothing more infamous. With trepidation, I looked through the hole. The room I saw was lit flickeringly by fireplace, candles and the steady low glow of lamps gilding the place somewhat and taking the edge off the insalubrious, sorry state of the room. The walls were bare brick, yellowed plaster clinging tenaciously here and there, the floor bare wood, with suspicious staining in several spots. There was a wash-stand in one corner and upon it, a chipped and aged cheap enamelled water jug and bowl, a threadbare, greyed linen towel hanging over the bar. No window alleviated the gloom of the walls, nor any prints or brightness of any kind.

It was only after I had examined the room that I could bring myself to look upon my friend. My breath caught in my throat and tears sprang to my eyes. Holmes, my dear friend, was humiliated, on the floor upon bent knees, allowing another man's member entry to his mouth. But there was such an expression on his face! It was as if he did not perceive the shame of his actions, only the pleasure he was so obviously gleaning from this vile act. His mouth was wide-opened, and all around it gleamed wetly, even as he pressed it into the brown pubic hair of the man he had paid. It was then that I dared to observe Holmes' partner in this sinful act.

Thus was it, in that seedy, debased room that I found my answer of why Holmes came here, and nowhere else. It was here that I found out his darkest, most painful secret. The man was of average height, quite stocky, but not fat.

His skin was extremely fair, although his complexion was slightly ruddy, the mark of a man in excellent health. His hair was brown, with some waviness to it, moustaches well-trimmed and thick. His eyes, as I could see even in this light, were of a most unusual shade of blue. His hands were strong, used to work, but not of the manual kind. He was, then, in other words, a very reasonable facsimile for me.

So that was Holmes' secret, that was why he always began this adventure by donning the one gift I had ever given him, for he observed neither Christmas nor birthdays. He came here, amidst this filth and disease so that he could have from me that which I was unable to give. I felt the pain stab me deep in my heart, that I should be the cause of Holmes' slide to a place so repugnant as this, where he risked far worse than recognition. The disease that must abound here, fed by the incalculable numbers of men that must use that body as Holmes used it. Yet, as I watched, I began to perceive that he did not so much use that body as worship it. It was heart-breaking to watch him as he, with eyes closed, kissed so tenderly every inch of that man's chest. You can imagine what kind of shock it was to me when I found myself thinking of him not as 'that man', but rather as 'me', for it was dreadfully obvious that to Holmes, 'that man' was his 'dear Watson'. It was my repeated observation that he had always said that phrase with peculiar warmth, and although my intellect had known it for long, this was the moment my heart grasped it. Holmes loved me as truly as ever a man loved a woman, and with as much sincerity and depth of feeling as any of God's creatures has had the grace to know.

I could not tear my eyes away from the depraved scene in front of me, such debauchery quite beyond my ken, despite my well-travelled background. I considered myself a man of the world, and that part of me was not in the least surprised to see what before had been mere clinical descriptions of mentally deranged behaviour and off-coloured jokes in the Mess Hall, but the gentleman in me recoiled, my heart

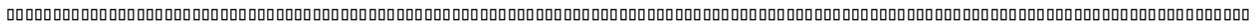
stunned and reeling, whilst my body remained transfixed. A peculiar change came over me, not all at once, as it does when one feels quite ill, but rather gradually, as one absorbs a new lesson in life. The more keenly I observed Holmes—observed, not merely saw—the more difficult it became to remember that this was a sin, and if one had, as I had, reason to be less than didactic in the following of fire-and-brimstone Scripture, then there was still the knowledge that my own profession would label Holmes unbalanced. The mere thought of it! It was so utterly preposterous to think of Mr. Sherlock Holmes as deranged, to consider that great brain to be diseased, he, who had the sharpest, keenest, most stupendous intellect in all of England! It was then, I believe, that the scales were ripped from my eyes and I saw as Holmes had so often tried to make me see, which is to say clearly, with logic and reason, not the preconceptions of habit. I fear he would have been sorely disappointed in me, however, for although it was intellect that allowed me to see him clearly, it soon was passed over in favour of feeling. How my heart was wrung for him! I would not have believed it possible that he could feel so, that all those years of cold disdain had hidden so very much passion and such sweet affection. There was in me no small vanity, and it distressed me to see that approbation and fondness which I had so long sought, squandered on nothing more than a prostitute rented for a few hours. To see all that love poured out onto the sere and dusty floor of that squalid apartment, all that bright and pure feeling sullied and dirtied by the fetid atmosphere of this foul place, oh, how it infuriated me.

Through all this thought and stormy emotion, I kept my watch. In the other room, Holmes was now lying on the greyed linen of the bed, the rustling of the straw reaching my ears quite clearly. He was writhing now, in that manner so familiar to any man who has known the joys of carnal love, save that it was he, not a woman, who had legs wrapped around a body that was to cleave to him. He was moaning, those same noises I had heard before, but now there

were words intermingled, words I blush to even remember. They were the kinds of words a man likes to hear from his bedmate, unless of course it is his lady wife. If it is, however, his mistress, those are the very words to gladden his heart and quicken his body.

The other man, or as I have already said, I was thinking of him as ‘me’, was caressing Holmes, with very firm gesture and lingering tongue, suckling on his nipples as a babe would his wet-nurse. In my unsuspecting ignorance, it had never occurred to me that one man could take such time and consideration over another. This, for all its vile surroundings, was no six-penny fumble against the barracks wall. This was so painfully clearly Holmes’ little fantasy, his dream, what would be if I were only to say the word. His chest hair was so astonishingly dark against the milk of his skin, my eyes were drawn to it constantly, more especially so with ‘me’ using mouth and tongue to swathe a path through the straight, glossy hair to find twin pink nipples. Every time the other man would suck on Holmes’ pap, my friend would groan and reach his hands up to slide his fingers through thick brown hair. The other man pulled back, and it revealed both of them, as naked as the day they were each born. Both of them were in a state of extreme arousal, and Holmes’ member was standing up so straight that it quivered with his excitement, and with his every breath it would tap against his stomach, as if to remind him that it was ready. It was very flushed, a delightful rosy colour, and such a fine example of manhood that it was easy to understand why the Greeks had considered men the ones to be beautiful.

That part of me that is base was roiling, puerile curiosity raging as to what they were going to do next, whether or not I would see it all, or only what had already befallen. It was then that Holmes turned, kneeling like a dog on the bed, his weight taken on hands and knees, dark head bowed as he waited, gleaming in the flickering of candles. The other man—‘I’—moved in behind him and grasped ‘my’ member and—no, it is too shameful to admit. I cannot confess, and



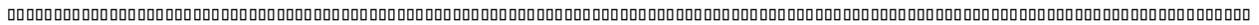
yet I must. To tell the truth all unvarnished is my only possible penance. As the other man grasped his member, I was overcome by the sounds and smells in the other room; I was overwhelmed by my own long abstinence after the death of my wife and quite without conscious thought, fumbled with my trouser buttons, breaking the thread of one in my haste, until I held my own member in my hand, as did my counterpart who even now knelt poised behind Holmes. As anyone who has seen the Greek collection in the magnificent Victoria and Albert Museum would agree, there was no possible doubt as to what would happen next. My breathing was hoarse and shallow, sounding like a locomotive, so loudly that I was sure Holmes must hear, but he was so completely enraptured by his own dreams that he was oblivious to anything but his love. My other self leaned forward, using his—my—hands to part the twin globes that gleamed so palely in the gentle light and then he used his right hand to hold his member and guide that fully erect flesh into my dear friend.

My heart was close to bursting as I saw this, all the old, sacred words tumbling through my head as my feelings tumbled through my heart. ‘And two shall cleave as one.’ ‘And ye two shall be as one, joined in the flesh and the spirit.’ All the while, my hand was moving rapidly, a piston of pleasure upon my manhood, keeping rhythm with the deep plunges of my other self. In fulfillment of my base curiosity, Holmes suddenly arched up, until he was kneeling tall, a Priapus statue, his back pressed against ‘my’ chest, my other hands wrapped around him, stroking through that hair that looked softer even than an infant’s silken locks, and Holmes was once more exposed to my eyes. The visible proof of his love was standing straight before him and as I watched, as my hand moved upon myself, as my other self moved within Holmes, he tightened his fist around himself and joined with us in this atavistic, primal rhythm, forging us all together, until I felt myself to be more surely the master of his pleasure than the man he had paid to impersonate me. My phallus was anxious in

my hand, and I could see the intensity of the moment carved upon Holmes’ face, imbued with all the warmth and deep affection that I had long despaired of seeing upon his face for any human being. But it was there, indeed, to a magnitude I had not conceived possible in anyone, and I was thrilled to the depths of my selfish soul to know that it was for me and me alone.

I was sorely stimulated by the cries coming from that other room, by the smells and sights of them—of us—so heavily engaged in the pleasures of the flesh. It was so astoundingly beautiful! The scabrous room faded in shame from impinging upon such glory, paling from my vision, from my mind, until it was only Holmes, and I, and the love he bore me which I could finally believe equalled the fondest feelings I harboured for him. It was wondrous warm, to feel my hand upon my phallus and believe it to be the chintz-smooth heat of his inner being hastening me home. My shoulders remembered the weight and solidity of his arm around them, my hands remembered the times when he had slipped his own long-fingered elegance in to join with my more prosaic limbs, but all of me remembered with a shudder of affection, the way he would look at me in our rooms on Baker Street, which we had shared for so many years. Nights stole over me again, of Holmes lying languid upon the sofa, scraping his bow ‘cross his violin, the sweetest strains of romance singing forth, to be met, and matched, by the warm brown of his eyes as his gaze alit upon me in my chair by the fire. He always preferred that I sit there, ‘where I can see you, my dear fellow’, and now I understood so well that desire of his. In the room beyond, in the glow and the orange softness of light, if one slitted one’s eyes, one could be back in Baker Street, were it not for the scrofulous furnishings here.

In that light, it was I who was with Holmes, it was I who gave him his heart’s ease, yet it was also I who stooped before a peep-hole, massaging my member, bringing myself to the pinnacle of pleasure with Holmes, carried along beyond thought, beyond morals, beyond ethical



considerations, washed away by the intensity of emotion flooding through me like the worst storms of January. Holmes was an image of perfection before my eyes, a long, clean line the Masters would have hastened to paint. He was arched, taut and lean as a longbow, and as trembling with contained power. His body was milk white, fairer than any beauteous lady ever seen by man, his hair blacker than the ebony from the Dark Continent, and by far the more mysterious. My fingers so longed to touch that soft dark-hued silk, but I could not. It was with a groan from both our mouths that my 'other' spread his fingers 'cross Holmes' chest, tangling blunt, practical fingers through hair. Holmes echoed us, the merest instant behind, and then his head dropped back, to lean on the clavicle of the man who was giving him love for me. The line of his neck, the strength of his jaw, art to be displayed in a gallery, gilt with the glow of fire and light, but it was his expression of purest ecstasy which superseded it all.

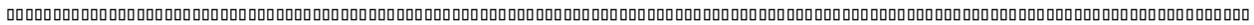
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I—the other—was still moving deep within Holmes, sliding in and out with small, tender movements, occasionally slowing his pace until all I—he—did was make tiny, circular caresses inside, caresses which drove Holmes to distraction. I could feel my body ready itself for climax, the heaviness below my phallus rising up to cradle my member, the pleasure shooting all through me, setting my every nerve to tingle and my very soul to singing. Holmes felt it too, keening his pleasure, his hand blurring in his desperation to attain that most exquisite of peaks, and I pushed him forward, bending over him, thrusting into him now as one never must with the gentler sex for fear of bringing hurt or fear or revulsion, but oh, how Holmes loved it, the more a man I was for him. Hard, I pushed, with all my strength, trying to fill him, to take away all the lonely isolation that cursed him so. I succeeded, his face contorting with delight, my body pounding into his, both our voices joining together to cry a litany of praise all the way to Heaven's Gates. He was calling my name, over and over, fervently, passionately, begging me to

love him. With one last great, heaving thrust, our bodies yielded to my will, and our seed pulsed from us, to be spent, wisely spent, in the expression of love.

I came to myself with my trousers and drawers around my knees and my hand wet and sticky with unmentionable passion, my seed mingling on the wall with the sins of the many. Shame washed over me, my skin turned ashen, my legs weak from both the carnal excess and the horror filling me. I reeled, stumbling, to collapse against the wall and thence the floor. To have committed so despicable an act! And upon—with—my dearest friend! How could I do such a thing, how could I sully the name of friendship so? A soft sound from the other room brought me to my feet once more, and I compounded my sin by returning to peer through the peep-hole at my friend in this most private of vices. Holmes, stoic, cold, unfeeling Holmes, was lying on his back, cradling the man he pretended to be me to his chest, stroking his hair, whispering words of love to him, all those words barricaded inside from the first days of his cruel and unloved childhood, all the way until the days of cruel and unloved majority. To see so much love, and to infer, therefore, the agony that must reside alongside it in the dark secrets of his mind, it was no wonder, then, that he was so moody and so fraught. Some of the guilt of his reprehensible drug practices fell upon my shoulder to weigh upon me. As I had known before I began this night's misadventures, I had it within my power to change it all, were I only to say the word.

I left him then, ensnared in the lying embrace of a man who would forget him as soon as the money was spent, to return home to the rooms I had for so long shared. In the hansom and in the comfortable old chair, with the smell of Holmes' tobacco still lingering in the air, with his violin propped carelessly upon the mantle, his smoking jacket draped untidily across the back of the sofa, I sat and thought of my friend, and of my duties to him. I thought of what he wanted and of what I needed from him. I thought of the carnality of his love, as compared to what



I had always believed was the purity of my own. I thought also of my reaction to what I had seen and was sorely troubled, for how could I tell what had spurred such a reaction? Was this some secret part of myself I had never known, or merely the over-reaction of an unwillingly celibate man? Even if it were some dark secret of my own, the seeing was all very well, but could I actually do the physical? I had proved that I could watch such debauchery, but would I be able to perpetrate it? If I were to do so, would my conscience let me be, or would it hound me, poisoning all and destroying Holmes in the process? And what of Holmes, harbouring such deep and abiding passions for me in such lonely crenellations? What of him, with all his years of love unrequited? What to do for a man who needed so that he was willing to commit crime—for let us not forget that what he and I had done this night was indeed criminal and carries a terrible sentence, prison being the least of it—to have a mere facsimile of me? Holmes, sinking to the putrid depths of the docklands to grasp a will-o'-the-wisp of pleasure as the nearest he could come to my hands. What to do for him? Was I willing to give up all my beliefs in what makes an Englishman a gentleman, for Holmes? Were I to prove willing, would I be able to do so, or would I cave in to the wrongness of it all and hurt him ever more by cutting him off after it started?

And then I thought of him again, as I had seen him from that coffin of a glory hole, arched and erect, a living pæan to Priapus, all aglow from without from the lamps, all aglow from within from the love. So beautiful, so strong, so needful. So very much mine, were I only to ask. I thought of the feeling of my flesh grasped firm in my own hand, and contemplated the image of my flesh gripped by Holmes' flesh. I thought of his loneliness, and of his pain, and of what a

dreary little lot life promised him, without me. Love is a safe harbour, and I was its master.

I sat up until the light of day began to gild our windows, bringing beauty and promise with it, the cleansing light of God. And still I thought of Holmes, and of the wages of sin. As I heard his weary tread upon the stair, I rose to face that window, and the light of God as it rose over the tattered and inconsequential rooftops of man, so that I would not need to gaze upon Holmes as I told him what I must. His hand was upon the handle, as God's was upon the world, his step spilling into the room, as God's light spilled into the room. I heard his sudden intaking of breath, sensed his horror, sensed his pain, crucified upon my morality. I turned then, for I could not be such a cad as to turn my back to him as I turned him out of my life. For a moment, I caught him unawares and I saw all the agonies of Hell writhing in his eyes; then his chin came up and he steadied himself, girding his loins for the sentence he knew I was going to carry out, the Black Cap upon my head. There were, just faintly, the smallest glimmerings of tears in his eyes, and I hesitated before such pain. The light filled the room, and I felt God's warmth upon me and heard the warmth of Holmes' voice as he had cried my name in love and passion, as my body had filled his and taken away all the coldness within him. The light, the dawning of God's sacred day, was warm upon me and in that instant of life, I changed the course of ours forever. I put one hand out towards him, reaching for his strength to guide us both through this, as I sought His Love and Forgiveness at the same instant.

“My dearest Holmes,” I said, and then his hand was in mine and His Hand rested warmly upon us both.