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

It was in the winter of 1894, I believe, that I committed to paper that which I named ‘The Harbormaster’s Tale’. Now that I have it in my hands to read it again, I am driven to admit that it is time to confess my sins. The reader would, no doubt, consider that tale to contain sins enough for any two men, but there is yet another for me to confess. All of it, all of the grotesque indignities which I ascribed to my friend, Sherlock Holmes, all the terrible things I had him commit, they were nothing more than mere fabrication, a tissue of lies of the worst sort. Nothing more than the unhealthy illusions of a man who has done a great disservice to one who has done him naught but good. It is not that I wished ill upon my friend, for the papers were never published; indeed, no living soul other than myself has ever so much as known of their existence. I had, in fact, fully intended to burn the vile pages, but could not bring myself to do so. One day turned into another, and these two years later, I unexpectedly came across them all in my strong-box. It was then that I realised, that if it was possible for me to stumble upon them, then surely it was possible for someone else to find them. Worst of all was the possibility that, were I to die, then the Executor, going through the mounds of paper I would have left behind, could have found these pages and thought them true, accompanied as they were with factual accounts of some of Holmes’ more sensitive cases. It is, of course, impossible for me to take such a risk with the reputation of my friend and colleague, so I must destroy these pages forthwith. Yet, it is very difficult, even painful, for me to do so, for they are all the hope I have of ever knowing my friend, in the Biblical sense. They also contain the only hope I shall ever have of my friend loving me, as I love him. It makes my heart ache fit to break, to face the truth, but face it I must. My beloved Holmes, I fear, is not merely a misogynist, but a misanthrope besides. Love, to him, is an affliction, a disease to corrupt the perfect machine that is his mind and body. Love is nothing more than an illness to be avoided as one would the Plague and as assiduously. It is less a flaw of mine that he could never love me than simply a condition of his finely honed brain.

So once more, where I should cast these pages upon the fire in which they belong, I find myself tucking them away in my strong-box, where they can be kept safe until my melancholy once more drives me to seek them out and give myself a taste of the dream I shall never have.

His hand was trembling as he carefully replaced the sheaf of papers in the battered old metal box, and his fingers trembled even more as they traced the brass plaque that displayed Watson's initials with such military precision. Those pages were far from what he had expected to find when delving into the pile of unpublished accounts. An idle moment, an idle thought, and he had gone to read for himself some of the things Watson was writing for the enjoyment of the great unwashed. But what he had found…

It appalled him—oh, not what he had read, for he had come across far worse in the safes and hiding-places of blackmailers and pornographers. No, what appalled him was his own lamentable stupidity. It verged on criminally stupid that he—he, the supposedly-great detective Sherlock Holmes—could not have noticed. Admittedly, there had been the matter of Watson’s marriage, and his fading from Holmes’ life for that period of time, but even so, he should have been able to see beyond such an obvious smoke screen. He should, after all, from mere observation, have noticed Watson’s reactions to him. Had, indeed, noticed Watson’s reactions, but had always done that of which he was most contemptuous: he had seen, but not observed. It had been staring him in the face and he had shown all the wit and sharpness of a Lestrade. Lamentable, indeed. Shameful, also, that he could live so closely beside, have a life so intertwined with a friend and yet never see either the pain or the love. That word gave him pause, for he was most unaccustomed to that term.
being used in reference to himself. It was...he
hesitated, sorting and discarding until he found
the proper term...unnerving. To think of some-
one loving him made him...vulnerable. Without
so much as a word being spoken, but by their
very existence, Watson’s feelings demanded
some kind of response. They certainly cast a
net of responsibility out to catch him, whether
Watson had ever intended such to be the case.
But then, the strong-box had been securely
locked and the damning pages carefully con-
cealed amongst a tightly rolled scroll of boring
and unimportant documents, a faded blue rib-
bon holding everything together. Clearly, those
words had never been meant for reading by any-
one other than Watson himself.
It was, unfortunately, all too easy to recon-
struct the scene: Watson coming in here in
Holmes’ absence to unlock that box with the
only key—or so Watson believed—and to then
sit in his favourite chair and re-read the pre-
cious words. To re-read, and wrestle, once more,
with the demons of conscience and religion and
the faith of a friend. Holmes didn’t need to look
at the pages again; the meaning and the feel-
ings were too poignant and pointed to be readily
forgotten. He knew, intimately, the compan-
ionship of such feelings, loneliness and he friends
of long standing. He knew, even, the distress of
thinking thoughts unworthy of either a gentle-
man or a friend, levelling them at a man for
whom one professed affection. After all, it was
something he had done himself.
With a wriggle of embarrassing clarity, he
could remember that scene within the dream-
ing spires when he had made his declaration,
the horror bursting upon his friend’s face, the
denouement to the Chancellor that was followed
rapidly by his being sent down. Not an experi-
ence that an honourable man would choose to
repeat, not if he were intelligent and capable of
learning from the past’s mistakes. So it was that
he had put all that behind himself, taking to
heart one path the teachings of the ancient
Greeks taught, concentrating all his energies on
the intellect and casting Eros out to the outer
darkness where it could not harm him any fur-
ther. It had worked, and well, until this night,
when he had read that damned dream of
Watson’s.
Watson. Lying mere yards away, within the
sound of a voice, were Holmes to decide to call
for him. Sound asleep he would be, white linen
tucked up under his chin, the fabric of his night-
shirt ruched up under his body, for in slumber,
Watson was as untidy as he was in waking.
There was no doubt, after the revelations of those
pages, that Holmes would be welcomed were he
to approach the figure that was lying safe in
Morpheus’ embrace. Indeed, there was no doubt
that such an approach was one for which
Watson longed and which he would have ac-
tively sought, had the price of it not been so
high.
Holmes strode to the mantelpiece, roughly
filling his pipe, lighting it from a spill made bright
by the fire. He settled himself in his chair, one
hand idly tracing the brocaded patterns, the
minute ridges of thread interspersed with the
silken valleys of cloth. Smoke wreathed around
his head, clouding his face but not his mind.
That organ was as sharp as the abattoir’s knife
and twice as quick. He marshalled his thoughts,
setting them out in ranks and defensive squares,
wheeling and about-facing them this way and
that, allowing the unpredictability of the Light
Horse to reave in and throw everything into dis-
order, as emotion cast everything into disarray.
Even as he watched the bloody slaughter of logic,
he knew it for an old and familiar scene, one he
had lived through more times than he had ever
cared to concede. There had been his friend at
Varsity, the Right Honourable William Grace
Featherstonehaw. There had been the detective
who had taught him so very much of what was
to become his own trade. Then there was
Watson. Oh, it was the lowest form of coward-
ice to pretend that he had cast Eros out of his
life—lust was an art-form to be indulged with
the proper style and vigour. But that was pre-
cisely it, in a way. There were ways of indulging
the darker passions that were ‘bad form’, un-
suitable for a gentleman, even if that gentleman
were one of the unspeakable few. He had, he
confessed to the smoke coiling greyly round him,
been as guilty of conforming to the strictures of
society as a black-draped widow. All the right
things done, at the right time. All the right things
said, in the right way. All the form followed, to
the letter. Victorian to the core, he was, sitting
there with the fire crackling, a pantry overflow-
ing, and the poor huddled at the corner waiting
for the hope of a day’s work privy cleaning in one of the grand houses. Deceitful as all the others of his class, he admitted himself to being, for although he had not restricted himself from enjoying sex, he had swaddled it in polite and respectable lies. His own voice mocked him, sneering.

Love is a disease that blunts the mind and makes men stupid.
The body is nothing more than a tool to be used and discarded.
The mind is everything…

How perfectly he had played the rôle of æsthete, how absolutely perfectly. The stage was obviously his milieu, not real life. All his claims to have left Eros behind were as true as the nin-nies who covered the legs of pianos, lest the purity of the mind be diseased by the lust inspired by the mere thought of legs, albeit on a piece of furniture. Such protestations of Christian purity, and all to hide minds filthier than the Thames. And no better was he. All his brave talk, that had so convinced Watson that the great Sherlock Holmes was a misanthrope. A misogynist, yes, that he would concede, and gladly, but hardly a misanthrope. In fact, he was entirely too fond of men.

So where, then, logic asked quite reasonably, did the problem lie? If he confessed to being fond of Watson—he did, he replied, Yielding the point quickly—then why not simply take the sheaf of papers in to Watson’s room and ease the loneliness of both his friend and himself?

But that was hardly the problem. No, the problem was how each of them chose to express that which society and law required remain hidden. Watson, with visions of dockland pubs far better than any Holmes had ever seen, his imaginings of the depths of degradation to which Holmes had sunk… Those things were laughable, when compared to the realities of Holmes’ indulgences. A gentleman Watson definitely was, but provincial to a fault. How shocked he would be, to discover the private rooms of the Diogenes Club! Or the even more discreetly private club to which Holmes himself belonged and attended, carefully, very carefully, shrouded from any one who might see him.

What would the very, very nice Doctor Watson do, he a man of the Hippocratic oath, if confronted by a lover who was excessively fond of pain? For Holmes knew his vices well, knew them by the list he had already worked his way down, beginning at the top with all the usual and common divertissements men of his sort indulged, and slowly lowering himself past those mundane activities with their small pleasures to the more complex patterns of sexuality which he himself found to be so…fascinating. To plumb the depths of one’s soul, that was what aroused him, the engaging of the mind as well as the body. To use pain as one’s path, to follow the map left by flagellation all the way to the discovery of self and pleasure…that was Holmes’ delight. All the rest left him cold, now, in his maturity. True, in his Varsity days, he had been moved to passion and ecstasy by the touch of his friend William, but he had seen so much and lived so much more since then, he honestly did not believe he could return to such banality.

Not even for Watson? He re-filled his pipe, settling back into his chair, the room invisible through the fugue of smoke that cocooned him. For Watson… How much of a sacrifice would it be, to indulge the simple fantasies of a delightfully simple man? At least his papers showed that he went beyond the usual, so perhaps, there were paths there that they could explore together? Perhaps Watson had depths to himself that he did not even know existed, had never dared allow himself to suspect? The possibility was intriguing, all the more so for the taboo involved. He had promised himself that he would never do a single thing to hurt Watson again, after the dear man had fainted upon Holmes’ ‘return from the dead’, when they had solved the Mystery of the Empty House. It had been sweet, to be free to caress the beloved face, unseen and unnoted.

For a moment, the smoke ceased to billow from his pipe, as he examined a word anew. Beloved. An interesting word, an interesting way of seeing Watson. Beloved. More than chronicler, more than comrade in arms, far more than ‘my dear friend and colleague’. Beloved. He rather liked the sound of it in his mind and tried to envision himself actually speaking it, but he stumbled upon that picture. No, protestations of affection were beyond him and if it were something Watson were expecting… But no, the papers had been quite clear on that. Watson believed himself unappreciated and merely toler-
ated, with no hopes of affection, never mind words of devotion.

But still, he came back to the differences in how they chose to find their pleasures. Watson imagined feeble fleshpots, whilst Holmes threw himself into them, heart and soul, drowning himself in enough hedonism so that he could maintain his æstheticism for another period of time. Such a contrast of worlds, such a conflict of desires.

Unless he were willing to shrink his sphere of pleasures a little and Watson were willing to expand his horizons a little... The rewards could be quite stunning: freedom from the constraints of the specialised club and the lifestyle he was forced to maintain outside those walls. To have such pleasure by his side, available whenever the mood took him, whenever his choice was ennui or sex or his cocaine solution... Yes, that was a choice he could live with. It was also one that he could persuade his Watson into taking. And were persuasion to fail, seduction would surely succeed. And if even that did not have the desired effect, why, then he would simply resort to corruption. It was, after all, terribly promising that one so sheltered as Watson—despite his protestations to the contrary, for it is one thing to see the top of a mountain, quite another to actually experience spelunking in its echoingly black caverns—should envision the graphic detail of his fantasy, and better yet, set it in an establishment run by thugs and that most emasculating of thoughts for a man like Watson, a man dressed as a woman. If those were his thoughts at this early stage... Oh, yes, there was certainly hope yet.

Meticulously, he banked the fire, ensuring that there would be no spills to burn them in their beds during the night and then he gathered up both the proper candle and the sheaf of papers. Watson was, of course, sound asleep, in a bed unpromisingly narrow, but then, even that could be turned to advantage with the use of a little imagination. Holmes lit the tallow candle he had brought with him, watching the sleeping face revealed to him, the blue eyes closed, the usually smooth cheeks greying with stubble. He smoothed the back of his hand along the roughness of skin, smiling to himself as Watson stirred and his lips formed Holmes’ name. He took the papers, stroking them down to the neck of Watson’s nightshirt, the ribbon dangling into the chest hairs nesting warmly under the white linen. Still only the slightest, sleepy stirring. He doffed his clothes, sliding into the confines of the bed, clutching Watson in his arms as the other started awake, stiff with shock.

The closed eyes had opened and, dangling from a violinst’s beautiful hand, faded ribbon swaying gently, the damning papers hove into view. Holmes could hear and feel the convulsive swallow and he pressed up closely against the ripe body. He placed the papers carefully on the pillow and brought his now free hand down to hush the words that surely would soon begin otherwise. He traced the line of lips, enjoying the brush of thick moustache on his skin, just as he savoured the morpheus-flavoured skin at the nape of Watson’s neck. He allowed no speech, unwilling to allow ill-considered words to break their compact of silence and stop the flow of arousal. His lithe body undulated along the solidity of Watson’s, the linen night-shirt creeping up higher and higher, until he could feel the tantalising kiss of buttocks on his abdomen. He moved down a little, so that he could clarify, expand the feeling, groaning as his prick rubbed against the softly curving underside of buttock.

Watson had finally stirred from his shock, frantically shoving his bed shirt up until the crook of his underarms frustrated him. He contented himself then with the delight of Holmes’ naked flesh pressed against him from shoulder to knee, and most especially in the hardness that was snubly ploughing between his cheeks. Hands moist, he reached around behind, shov ing bedclothes and eiderdown out of the way, until he could feel the play of Holmes muscles on the flat of his palms, the hollowing and rounding of every thrust Holmes made as he rubbed his prick against Watson. But he was in dire need himself, rolling onto his back so that Holmes was leaning over him, making himself deliberately passive, inviting Holmes to take possession of his prick now and his body soon.

Silent as a dream, Holmes picked up the cravat that had been discarded on the bedside table, trailing the end over Watson’s throat, where it had been this evening, keeping the chill out of his dressing-gown’s warmth. He dappled in...
across Watson’s face, brief butterfly touches, and Watson showed himself more knowledgeable than Holmes had hoped, for he opened his mouth and took the end of the cravat into himself.

It was but the work of a moment to tie it as a gag, control of Watson’s speech, and with it, desires, passing over to Holmes, who was stroking the soft waves of brown hair to cover the neat knot of fabric. Holmes caressed him, using soft and pleasing touches to magic the night-shirt up and out of the way, so that Watson lay, completely unsullied to Holmes. No matter what they did, there could be no guilt for Watson, for Holmes had taken the luxury and burden of control away from him in its entirety. Watson had no say, had no recourse, and thus, could have no stick with which to beat himself, no sins with which he had to face his God. Holmes would take all that upon himself, as he had taken so many other transgressions and impieties.

Hands firm and decisive, he moved Watson as he wanted him to be: lying on his right side, face to the wall, left leg raised to expose him to Holmes’ sight. The white skin pinked satisfyingly under the stamp of his hand, the sound of the slap cracking perfectly through the room. With every blow of his hand, Holmes watched the shiver of buttocks and the jut of prick and the peaking of nipples. Watson’s whole body was alive to Holmes’ touch, enlivening under it, the harder the blow the sweeter the pleasure.

Then Holmes moved away and Watson was left displayed on his side that way, while Holmes used his candle to light the wall sconces and the candle that always remained at bedside in its silver holder. Kneeling on the bed again, straddling Watson so that he could be seen, the light from the candles playing over his skin like music, he leant down, close to Watson, until they were almost breathing each other’s air, and then he blew out the candle he had brought, his fingers testing the warmth of the tallow, his lips smiling as everything proved to be just the way it should be. He had always preferred the soft slickness of tallow candle to the messy stickiness of grease or ointment; had always loved watching the white length of it being pushed into a body.

Moving now, his lithe thighs brushing against the heavier muscles of Watson’s, he splayed his hands over the bounteous buttocks, spreading the cheeks, the candle held in his right hand pressing into flesh. He rolled it over the skin, leaving lustrous satin behind, until it dipped into the valley between the buttocks. One long finger probed for the door that was there, found it, pressed home, the muscle as strong as iron, weakening only slowly for him, then giving way suddenly as Watson relaxed and yielded completely.

The tallow candle was eased in, coating the thick muscle with sliding smoothness, preparing the way for Holmes to enter. His groin pulsed, prick jumping, with the sure and certain knowledge that no-one had been allowed this intimacy before, that no-one had been trusted this well before. He pulled the candle free, his fingers diving in to make sure that Watson was well
readied, then he curved his body around Watson, convexity to concavity. The blind head of his penis searched its way, rigid and irrefutable, until it found the puckered mouth and pushed in in a single, long thrust. He felt the shock of it ripple through Watson, making them both tremble and then all the control he had taken was lost to him as he thrust, awash and helpless in his own pleasure. His hands were lonely, so he filled them with Watson’s flesh, squeezing and moulding. His mouth was empty, so he filled that also with Watson, with his taste and the sweetness of his skin. Sweat broke out in a sudden rain all over him, his skin flushing red and his breathing ragged. He needed to be in deeper, be more a part of Watson, needed more, racing ever faster for more pleasure, more. Then there was a moment, an eternity, of exquisite perfection, when his entire body was all in tune, a single note of ecstasy.

Slowly, it faded down: to mere pleasure and to the dwindling of his body where it was joined to Watson and to the shrinking of Watson where he held him still in the palm of his hand. Holmes nestled in closer, hands burrowing between them to undo the slip knot he’d tied around Watson, teeth undoing the simple fisherman’s knot he’d caught the cravat into. He stayed where he was then, tongue lazily licking up the sweat beading Watson’s nape and shoulders, his left hand idly rubbing the fruit of Watson’s loins into the still-trembling belly. He even found the energy to smile when Watson picked up the discarded belt and lifted it to his lips and kissed it. Ah, yes, there were definitely possibilities here for companionship that would fill Holmes’ every need.

Neither one of them bothered with the candles, falling asleep in the amber glow. One white candle lay discarded on the bedside rug beside a sheaf of papers, a faded blue ribbon draped over both, as the heavy covers were draped over the slumbering whiteness of two close-pressed bodies.