We had, indeed, stopped at Marcini’s for a little dinner on our way to the theatre that night. If the truth is to be told, and I have sworn by all I hold dear to record nothing but the absolute truth upon these pages, Holmes and I lingered so long over dinner that my friend offered the driver of our hansom half a guinea if he were to gain the theatre before the curtain was raised. It was certainly a night to remember, for my companion is not a man given to displaying passions, but on that remarkable night, he was overflowing with emotion, a display the likes of which I had not seen from him since the very earliest days of our acquaintance and long before Holmes and I had truly become friends.

Sherlock Holmes can be a man of the utmost charm when he chooses to exert himself in such a frivolous direction, although he would insist, were he to read this dangerous account, that I impart that he was never frivolous in his charm, rather employing charm in those circumstances in which it would be of the greatest good. He was, however, utterly charming to me that evening, beginning with the game soup and abating not one jot until we had finished the tiny cups of richly aromatic coffee for which Marcini’s is justifiably renowned amongst those residents of our great capital who value epicurean delights. All the while we were eating, and most particularly in the intervals between courses, when our plates had been cleared away and the waiter had not yet returned with the next laden platters of delicious food, Holmes regaled me with entertaining tales of past exploits.

On occasion, he would decipher every secret of our fellow diners, in such a manner that I was near reduced to tears more than once by his rather unkind but exceedingly amusing detections. His grey eyes danced with humour and fondness, his pallid cheeks were yet bronzed by his exposure to wind and elements upon the moor during the dreadful events surrounding Sir Henry Baskerville, an account of which I have already put forth for the public to enjoy. It is a great pleasure to me to write my accounts of Holmes’ exploits for general publication but this, my battered old journal with its ink jots and coffee stains, is a great solace to me. Here is one place wherein I can safely unburden my soul and speak of those things best left unspoken in the society of our day.

To return to that night in the latter half of October, Holmes was more vibrant than I could recall seeing him before, so much so that, I confess with a guilty heart, I suspected him of having fouled his system with another dose of seven per cent solution. I need not have feared such a thing, for I had scarcely had time to conceive such a disloyal thought before Holmes had leaned over the table with scant regard for good manners and said to me, his voice very low and pitched so that none but myself could hear: “Unless you have renounced all your loyalties and are no longer a subject of Her Majesty and no longer count yourself an Englishman, then it is nothing foreign to me that has brought about this…” He hesitated then, seemingly at a loss for words, which could mean nothing but that the subject concerned not the dry
facts of science, but rather, one of those matters in which Mr. Sherlock Holmes is so woefully ill-prepared to communicate.

Knowing him as I had come to over the years of our association, I believed myself to understand the meaning he was attempting to convey as I gazed at him more than a trifle bemused by such an extravagant display of amity. “I believe the word you are seeking is ‘giddy’,” I said, fully as quietly as he had spoken.

“Is that the word, my dear Watson?” He was smiling at me and his eyes were still as bright as they had been since first he had suggested this evening on the Town. “Am I so similar then to a young débutante at her first ball?”

I could not help but laugh at such a preposterous image. Firstly, it was absurd to imagine Sherlock Holmes as a giggling young girl barely stepped across the threshold into womanhood, and secondly, it was utterly impossible to contemplate Holmes as young at all. Consumed though I had been by curiosity about my friend’s past history, I had more than half-convinced myself that he had sprung, fully formed, from the forehead of an esoteric professor of philosophy among the dreaming spires.

“It is not nearly often enough that I hear you laugh,” Holmes said to me and I swear his eyes softened the way a man’s customarily do when he faces someone in whom he had more than a passing interest. It occurred to me, at that moment, that if I were a girl and Holmes himself, then my Mama would be whispering to my Papa, who would then be asking Holmes precisely what his intentions were. Quickly, I shook this foolish and libellous thought from my mind, bitterly ashamed and measured the degree of affection required to show a friend that he is valued. I reminded myself, quite sternly, that this was the pureness of gratitude for my aid and assistance in the matter of the Baskerville Curse that had brought this frothy mood upon my friend. I cast all unworthy thoughts from my mind, and thought instead, of him comparing himself to a giggling, foolish girl.

Still laughing a little over the mental portraits I had painted of Holmes as a blushing débutante, I was very proud of my legerdemain in putting the great Sherlock Holmes off the scent once more. I was secure and certain in the knowledge that if he had not yet discovered my secret, then I would assuredly have the ability to hide it from him forever.

Even here, in my most private journal, I hesitate to record and give name to my secret. A cold fear breaks out all over my body and a faintness creeps upon me as I contemplate what would befall myself and by extension, Holmes, were these pages to fall into the hands of one of the legions of blackmailers and extortionists who inhabit the streets of London like rats. Yet I must give my shame its name, for if I fail to do so, then I shall be lying, by omission undoubtedly, but a truth untold can be a worse sin than a deliberate lie. I love Sherlock Holmes. I love him as one would a cherished brother or a dear friend, but I also harbour a love for him that is cut of the same cloth as the love a man feels for his wife. There, I have said it, and how strange the words appear upon the white page! It is daunting and frightening to think of how much damage these few black scribbles on the pages of my journal could do to both myself and the man I love, were any of this to fall into the hands of one of the evil band.

I wander far from the execution of my tale, but there are none to castigate me in this, for this is but my journal. I’m afraid I am all of a muddle, my head spinning and my heart racing as if I were in the grip of some tropical fever. Perhaps it is a fever that has taken me over, a fever of the heart and soul and mind. I would do anything for Holmes, and this is a fact which he never fails to utilise to the fullest degree. It is also, as I so recently realised, a fact which Holmes has fully understood since before I knew that I would find myself in such a state.

The fog that had so irritated all of London for the past several days, had finally lifted. We were,
by now, replete after an excellent dinner and fine wine, in our hansom on the way to the theatre. The city was bedecked in her finery and fulfilled her reputation as the greatest jewel of the Empire. The lamps were lit, and their bright glow cast colour and shadows upon passers-by and cabs alike. Beside me, so closely that the night chill was kept off as much by his warmth as by the heavy rug across our knees, Holmes was silent now, merely pointing at this or that to draw my attention. In my public recordings of his deeds, I have given naught but the scantiest descriptions of him and in such a way that one could be forgiven if one were to think him less than truly handsome. He was, however, a singularly attractive man, whether pale and melancholy in one of his morose moods or as he was tonight, dark from the weather and vibrant. It took all my strength to refrain from gazing at him to the exclusion of the world around me and it was with the greatest relief that we attained the theatre. For, although it embarrasses me still to think of it, the close press of his person was wringing un-welcome responses from my own more intimate parts.

The theatre stairs were thronged with people, ladies in their gowns and plumes, the gentlemen sober in their dark clothes and top hats. I felt a thrill of pride as we alighted from our hansom, for not only was my companion recognised by several people, but he was indubitably the most handsome man there. He is so much taller than most, and thus carries his clothes well. It is one of his few vanities, that his suits are always of the finest cloth and the most superb cut. Beside him, I felt very much the dowdy city starling in the shadow of a falcon. I would not dwell on such an ignoble thought, and hastened instead to engage my companion in conversation, to entertain him as he had me, and thereby return the great compliment of good companionship. It was a sweet reward indeed, when one of my little jokes brought a smile to his lips and he tucked his arm in mine and led me into the theatre.

The theatre is the world of make-believe, of pretence and artifice, and I indulged myself as we walked up the wide sweep of staircase and entered the perfumed warmth of the building itself. I pretended that Holmes was more than my friend, that he was my escort, my brother-in-arms, in the tradition of civilisations which our society so re-veres, save the never-discussed detail of man-to

man friendships and affections that were indistinguishable from marriage.

The play was stimulating and illuminating. The costumes were stunning and the acting subtle and convincing. I could see Holmes only by the light reflected from the stage, for he had taken a private box and our lamps were not lit.

As the curtain rose, Holmes moved his chair nearer to mine, until we were once more as close as we had been in the hansom and my heart was once more pounding as if I had run miles.

“As you can see, my dear fellow,” he said to me, “the stage is so much more effective if one is distracted neither by the rustlings and fidgetings of fellow play-goers nor by the glow from lamps that have merely been trimmed.”

“Yes, yes,” I said, although perhaps I should admit that I was stammering, for it was most distracting to have Holmes leaning in so close to me. His mouth was at my ear as he whispered, his breath caressing my skin and making me shiver with reactions best left unmentioned. Still, for all that this attention had knocked me for six, I almost reached out to stay him when he at last moved back to sit upright in his own chair. I stifled my emotions and did everything I could to regain mastery of my own body, a task made all the more difficult by Holmes’ restlessness. This fidgeting, for which he was wont to castigate everyone else in the theatre, resulted in frequent small touches of his leg against mine. This, in its turn, caused physiological responses in me that I despaired of either controlling or disguising.

I was in a horrible dilemma. If I were to excuse myself and thence make my way to the gentlemen’s facilities, Holmes would surely analyse such an action, for I had no cause to return to such a place, having used the situation in Marcini’s not a three-quarter hour before. However, if I were to remain seated beside him, with nothing to protect me from his comprehension than the distraction of the play, then I would surely betray myself to him. My choice, then, was all too obvious. No matter which course I chose, he would certainly deduce the nature of my problem. If I kept my seat, then my breathing and my trembling would confess my dreadful secret to him. Yet were I to stand and leave, the most unobservant of creatures could not help but remark on the condition of my anatomy. Holmes, as the entire world must know by this time, is an extra-ordinarily observant man, able to
piece together a man’s entire history by nothing more personal than examining the man’s walking stick. What, then, would be revealed to him if he were to see the effects his presence was having upon me?

Holmes knows I am not a passionate man, needful of the satiation of the flesh simply for the sake of carnal gratification. I am a man of honour and moderation, and have always prided myself somewhat on my ability to control those base needs to which all men are prone. I was proudest of my dealings with other men of my own sort. It was only upon the rarest of occasions that I availed myself of the companionship and release afforded one such as I by another of the third sex. Sitting beside Holmes, in the dark, the brilliant play unfolding in front of me, I was nearly overcome by a wave of misery. Surely, I thought, I have not much longer before he notices my condition. Another thought brought even more melancholy with it. I wondered if Holmes had, in his usual sharp-eyed fashion, seen my problem and was now trying to find a way of separating himself from me.

His attention was fully engaged by the movements upon the stage, and his restlessness had settled down to a steady pressure of his body against mine. Innocent in this as in so many other things (I know not of a single occasion upon which Holmes has had carnal knowledge of a woman, although I am aware of several invitations from women both high- and low-born), he was supremely unaware of my fouling his friendly gesture into something of which he would be bitterly ashamed.

“Look, Watson,” he whispered to me again, and I was hard pressed not to gather him close to my chest and hold him. It was only the contemplation of his response that saved us both from my sinful desire. “If you watch carefully here,” he was yet speaking, oblivious to the turmoil in my body and mind, “then you will see the moment when smoke is puffed onto the stage by one of the hands and the trapdoor is released. Do you see the way the boards do not quite match, there, in the centre?”

“Yes,” I responded, as much as I was capable of at that moment. He had twisted almost full around in his chair and his right hand had come to rest upon my right knee, whilst his left arm was draped affectionately around my shoulders. I wanted, with a fever of passion, to kiss him, but I controlled myself fiercely and he returned to his normal pose, unaware of how dreadfully close he had come to being molested. Tears thickened my throat, and this, in a man who could not remember crying in his lifetime. Not even when I was sent off to school at the age of seven did I shed a tear, nor when I was four and I wrenched my ankle falling down stairs. Now, a grown man who had seen war and death, and had shot his revolver in anger, a man who had leaned on no-one since leaving the nursery, I was on the verge of weeping. My shame, then, was to know no bounds. Desiring Holmes, polluting the naïve beauty of his friendship and now, weeping like a woman. I could not move, dared not draw attention to myself and truthfully, I feared that my legs would not hold me if I were to stand.

“Ah-ha!” Holmes exclaimed. “There, in the wings, you can…”

His words trailed off and I wished only that I could die. I was undone, for he had turned and seen my shame, for I am sure that little light though there was in our box, there was sufficient to mark the passage of my tears.

“My dearest fellow,” Holmes said, and I was ashamed that I had harboured such thoughts and feelings about a man whose only concern was that I was pained. “Oh, my dearest chap, whatever is the matter?”

The very gentleness of his tone made my misery all the worse. To have a taste of the tenderness and then only to lose it when he uncovered the cause of my unhappiness—oh, life is a bitter chore at times. I struggled with my weakness and controlled myself. A handkerchief with initials not my own was thrust into my hand, and I did what was necessary to regain my composure. His fingertips then came and wiped from my lashes a few traces of moisture I had missed. I noticed that his hands were only slightly steadier than mine and I wondered at the cause, until my shame spoke and asked me what else could I expect from a man like Holmes when his companion wept like a woman and responded to him as Ganymede to Zeus.

“There is no need for this,” he said to me, and my cheeks flamed when I discerned pity in his voice. “No need at all and I am entirely to blame.” He gave one his bursts of laughter then, and took my hand in his, where the lip of the box would hide us from those few people who could see in at all. “I thought I was being…well,” he shrugged,
and stroked his thumb along my palm. My heart was pounding again and I was absolutely confounded by his behaviour. It was so unexpected, so unlike the Holmes I had thought to know. Greatly daring and in dire need of something that would assist me in understanding what was occurring between us, I looked up at Holmes. His expression was an odd mixture of diffidence, apology and tenderness. It was, in fact, an expression I had seen not a week since, when I had emerged from the hiding-place on the moor and discovered Holmes. Although I could scarce believe my eyes and ears, he was, indeed, still my friend, and I gazed at him as he continued speaking. “I was trying to be romantic, to wine and dine you. Then an excellent play, and perhaps, if neither of us was too exhausted, then I was going to take you on to a rather unusual club of which I am a member.”

Abruptly, his movements as quick and spare as was his habit, he abandoned me, but for mere moments only. He had loosened one of the box curtains, as if to shield us from a draught. “There,” Holmes said, “that is a distinct improvement. Now, our box is visible only to the stage and to our sister box directly opposite. As that box is empty and the actors somewhat preoccupied, I think I can safely say that we are in private here.” He was beside me again, and took my hand in his. “I don’t know what to say,” I told him, rather less than steadily, although at least my unmanly fit of weeping had not thickened my voice. Holmes smiled at me in a singularly sweet manner. It seemed to me that I had perhaps had more smiles from him this evening than in all the months of our friendship. “You could, perhaps, say that you forgive me?”

“Why ever should I forgive you? You have done nothing! I am the one with the stain against my name, not you.”

He canted his head as he looked at me. “Ah, but my dear Watson, your actions were innocent and restrained by your honour and basic decency. I, on the other hand…”

“What could you possibly have done to compare to my behaviours? Would you force me to admit to you, actually to state to you here and now, the terrible things I have thought and imagined? Would you have me confess my feelings, emotions that no gentleman should ever have for another gentleman?”

He was smiling at me again, but there was less sweetness there and more than a hint of spice. “I would be very much interested in hearing such a confession from you, my dearest friend. You see, I do believe that your confession of such matters would prove a perfect match for mine.”

This was more than I could comprehend in an instant. Words failed me, and I’m afraid I gaped like a stranded fish after Holmes’ pronouncement. “You?”

“Yes,” he answered softly, “me.”

“You,” I began, only to falter. How could I possibly put such a thing into words? I could not be sure that I was not being led astray by the wine I had consumed with dinner, nor could I be certain that I was not deluding myself with something I so fervently wished to be true. “Are you saying…” It was hopeless. Nothing in my life had prepared me for such a moment, and I was floundering.

Then, as he had done as many times for me as I had for him, Holmes came to my rescue. On this occasion, he saved me with words. “Yes, John, I do. I find myself caring about you far more than is either sensible or practical. I had intended to do nothing about it at all, simply ignore it until it went away. But I’m afraid you are too strong an influence upon me for that fate to befall us.”

I understood his speech precisely, but I wanted to hear more. I needed time to come to terms with this singular change in my fortunes, and I also craved the reassurance Holmes’ words were to me. There was a happiness beginning in me, and a hope for something I had long since given up as lost. “So you are saying that you feel for me as I do for you? Is this—” I broke off, not quite satisfied over which word to choose.

Holmes appeared to have no such doubts. “I desire you,” he said.

Flustered, I hushed him and looked all around us for fear that someone had heard him. This was a foolishness on my part, for Holmes had chosen our box well. We were quite safe, fully as safe as in our own rooms, where Mrs. Hudson was never more than a few rooms distant.

“It’s perfectly all right,” Holmes soothed me. “I have taken every precaution, for I had intended to make love to you in this box as I had in the restaurant earlier this evening. I had planned this, dear chap, that I might whisper to you, touch you thus,” he placed, once more, his hand upon my
knee and his arms around my shoulders, “and perhaps, if you were bold enough and willing, I thought I might even dare a kiss.”

So saying, he closed the last small distance between us, and for the first time outside of my fevered dreams, I felt Holmes kiss me. His lips were soft, supple and yielding, and I could not have enough of him. I opened my mouth to his, welcoming his presence within me and then coming to know his mouth. My hands firm upon his nape, I held him to me and kissed him with all the desperation born of the lonely nights I had endured in my single bed with only a door or two between us as he slept or worked. Innumerable heartbeats later, we parted, both of us breathing heavily. My collar was too tight around my neck, and my member was engorged with my passion, so full and hard that my underdrawers were strained by its pressure. I was so overflowing with emotion, I could hardly think. There was one thing I had to say, however foolish considering the magnitude of the events transpiring between us, and it burst from me. “You called me John.” In all our time together, he had never done such a thing before and it betokened so clearly the changes I hoped were to come.

“Would you prefer I did not employ your Christian name?” Holmes asked me and I swear his eyes were twinkling. “You would rather, perhaps, that I refer to you always as Doctor Watson? Or perhaps John H. Watson M.D. suits your fancy better?”

“John is quite perfect, thank you.” I wanted to ask the same of him, that I might use his Christian name, but I was yet diffident with him. I do not believe that I had fully assimilated the implications of our situation. It was all too much, and all too quick. I had entered this theatre convinced that Holmes was trying on the unfamiliar mantle of affectionate friendship, and not an hour later, I was confronted with the notion that Holmes was far from innocent, and knew precisely the Wildean depths that yawed open before us.

“Have you nothing else to say?” he whispered to me and I found the touch of his breath upon my skin to be most distracting, so much so that I must admit that cogency was not fully in my grasp.

“What would you have me say?”

“I would have you return me the intimacy of using my forename. I would have you,” and he paused wickedly, the inference Biblical and thrilling to the depths of my soul, “permit me the intimacy of your person, with nothing forbidden me.”

I am quite sure that I must have taken on the appearance of a rabbit with a stoat, my eyes wide and staring, my breath gasping and my heart hammering in my throat.

“Forbid me nothing, my dearest John,” Holmes said to me, “as I forbid you nothing and give you dominion over me.”

It was more than I had ever dared to dream. Men of my nature did not have happiness handed to them in this manner. We did not find love, not unless that love and happiness were hard-chased by misery and misfortune. Naught but ill ever came of such liaisons, all society knew this. And yet, and yet, this was the great Sherlock Holmes daring to speak of love. This was the most brilliant mind in London speaking words which implied even men of such perverse and unnatural desires as I had the right to declare love and devotion.

I did not know what to think. I wanted Holmes, yeared for him as I had ached for nothing and no-one in my lifetime, but yet, what he was proposing was the most unnatural of vices, one that could have us both in Reading gaol and hounded from the doors of decent society. Overwhelming even that was the dizzying knowledge that it was Holmes saying all this to me. Holmes, whom I had more than half-convinced myself knew nothing of love and was, indeed, as incapable of love as he had always claimed.

“All you need do,” Holmes said to me whilst the actress upon the stage wept and wailed, “is ask me. Whatever is disturbing and confounding you so, ask me, and I shall make it clear to you.” He smiled at me then, a singular smile I remembered from late nights in our rooms in Baker Street when I would wake from an exhausted doze only to find Holmes staring at me. He would bless me with that same smile, and it never failed to cause a stirring and a confusion in me. With so much new data placed before me, comprehension was slowly forming. “Treat it as one of my cases, if that will render the mystery easier for you.”

“But I thought you did not love?”

“Always so willing to believe me. It is one of your many charms. As for love...” He sat back a little, leaving me cold and lonely for all that he was so nearby. “I believed in love, I simply saw neither the use nor the desirability for it. But then you
intruded yourself upon my life…”

I spluttered then, too outraged to remind him of who had requested me to accompany whom on so many occasions. I subsided when he smiled at me once again and took my hand in his.

“I did not think to arm myself against you, and by the time I saw the danger you posed me, it was far too late to save myself. All that remained was to attempt to minimise the damage. Then, as time passed, and I observed how you comported yourself—for I had perceived your emotional attachment to me, I believe long before you yourself had recognised your affliction.”

“Now, really, Holmes,” I began, outraged.

It was not often that Holmes displayed such rank surprise, but I saw that I had shocked him.

“You would deny having such feelings for me?” he asked me.

“No,” I blustered. “I deny anyone but myself the right to call my feelings for you ‘an affliction.’”

“Ah,” he answered, smiling gently at me, and his hand upon mine was of an equal gentleness. “I should know better than to usurp a doctor’s right of diagnosing.”

I was no longer listening to what he was saying, my mind having finally caught up with what he had said before. “You are telling me,” I asked, and my voice was as tremulous as a girl’s, “that you know of my affections for you and also of my…carnal interest in you.”

He answered me in the tone usually reserved for those occasions upon which it was necessary for him to elucidate a point that was, to him, all too patently clear. “Yes, that is precisely what I am telling you.”

“And you are also informing me,” I took a deep breath in the forlorn hope that it would steady my nerves somewhat, “that you share these carnal interests of mine?”

His eyes darkened, as men’s do in the heat of passion. It was an unexpected sight, upon his face, looking at me, and a sight I had never taunted myself with hopes of. “Do not, I pray you, forget the companion of our carnal interests, that other aspect which you and I both share in what I hope will be equal measure.”

This was surely too much. I stared at him, aghast. “You have affections for me?”

He threw his head back and gave a shout of laughter, and at a most inappropriate moment of the play. There were a few hissed calls for quiet, but it was most reassuring to note that none of the audience had but the vaguest idea from whence that shout of laughter had come. “Affections?” Holmes was saying, completely undisturbed by any consideration of what the masses, no matter their class or breeding, would think of him. “Affections? Oh, my dear fellow, surely affection is too banal a word. Affections are what one harbours for a pet or a house or even a favoured strumpet. Between you and me, surely, surely, there are better words?”

There was one word far better than affection, yet I was not certain he would willingly entertain its speaking. I was only too aware of the term appropriate to describe my emotions for my truest friend, but this was hardly a word Holmes had ever welcomed in the past.

“Have I swayed you so, that you will not even speak the word?” He was whispering once more, leaning in very closely towards me, his hands both strong and tender upon me. “Have I so convinced you that the emotion is valueless that you will not confess to it?” He kissed me then, a butterfly-wing against the corner of my mouth. The caress was utterly chaste in execution, but libidinous in effect. I trembled, and I believe he misunderstood the reasons for that physical response. “No, you would confess it, but never to me. You fear me too much. My damnable temper and my callous inconsideration. None of that will change, my dearest chap, but I promise you that you will no longer bear the brunt of my self-loathing for having failed to keep you at a suitable distance.” He repeated the kiss, and as he did so, his hand slipped under my jacket and began unbuttoning my waistcoat. “Instead, I promise that you will know that my affections for you are of the deepest measure.”

I gasped, not only from the impact of his words, but also because he was now spreading my flies open and his hand was searching out the opening to my drawers. His long fingers found the gap, and I felt, for the first time, his hand upon my private parts. I am afraid I made a sound then, but could spare only the smallest amount of concern over public reaction. I knew this to be insanity, but not even the prospect of the prisoner’s dock, the
thunderous face of the magistrate and the stench of gaol could halt the lust rising hotly through my body.

Holmes unbuttoned my drawers and laid them open also, until my groin was exposed to the theatre air, and the dim light displayed my wantonness to his eyes. “Will that make it bearable?” he asked, and neither one of us noticed the double entendre in that until our reminiscing conversations several days later. “Will you be satisfied with that?”

I was too distracted by the touch of his fingers upon my member to answer him. He mistook my distraction for incomprehension.

“I am asking you if you will suffer me as I am, unchanged and unaltered for I cannot pretend to be what I am not. I will not become sweet and malleable, nor even placid and contented. But I will be honest with you, and tell you that I love you and take great joy in showing that love for you.”

“Then for Heaven’s sake, man,” I groaned, “prove your word!”

Had I been in full command of my senses, then I would surely have made an elegant and adoring speech accepting him and this new level of our friendship. I would have spoken of Greek and Spartan ideals, of David and Jonathan swearing a covenant with each other before God and I would have told him, eloquently and poetically, with quotes from Lord Byron and Shelley, of the love I felt for him. As I was not in command of anything at that moment, it was well that Holmes took my frantic desire as proof of all those things I said to him over the next several days.

“I shall more than prove my word to you,” he said. My legs were atremble and my heart was thundering in my chest. I could barely contain myself, and wanted terribly to reach out and have him do certain things to me. However, these were not things one asks a gentleman to do, and Holmes was most assuredly not a Guardsman out to make a few extra sixpences whilst on leave. Holmes was my friend and colleague, and holder of my heart. I could ask him for nothing. I stared at him mutely and wished that he would touch me again. I wanted him to do much, but I would settle for his hand upon me. To show this, I tried to reach the buttons on his trousers, but he dusted my hands away.

“No, no, no, John, that is not what this is to be. This is for your needs and for me to give penance for all the time you have spent yearning for me and I, wrapped in my own doubts and fears, left you to burn with unspent passions. This, my love, is for your pleasure alone.”

He did then that which I most desired but which I most feared asking him to do. He lowered his head, and as he did so, I swear my heart tried to leap from my chest, so great was my anticipation and excitement. In the few instants his movement took, my phallus reached its fullest erection, for I was so stimulated by the vision of Sherlock Holmes willingly lowering himself to take me in his mouth.

I have always been intensely fond of fellatio, both as a performer and one performed upon. The possibility had never entered my mind that Holmes might be of the same inclination. My head was spinning from a combination of shock, confusion, disbelief and outright lust. How could it not? Here was the man I loved beyond Queen and country, a man I truly believed did not share my fleshly desires nor my mortal affections, and he was taking my member into his mouth with such tenderness, I could have wept.

His tongue laved me, there, where his fingers had teased the prepuce fully back. Then his mouth was haven around me, until he swallowed me deeper, and I knew the smooth heat of his throat, and the feel of his lips tight around the base of my phallus and the press of his face against my groin. I can not say whether it was superior talent or simply the depths of my feelings for him, but this was the headiest experience of my life. Heaven could hold no greater joy than this. I caressed his head, slipping my hands down to the sensitive skin behind his ears. My touch left a faint sheen on his skin from his pomade, and this caught the light, illuminating the hollow and fill of his cheeks as he suckled my flesh. I could not resist, and brought my hand between us, that I could feel my own hard phallus be absorbed by the softness of his lips. It was an exquisite sensation, and one that pushed me closer to the dissolution of climax. I could feel the glorious sensation gather deep inside me. My testes tightened, and I felt them move upwards to cling hotly to the base of my phallus. I was almost ready, and although I knew that, I did not inform Holmes, for I was afraid that if I were to tell him, then he would withdraw from me and use only his hands to bring me to a finish. It was, and I did not know why until my mind was
functioning once more, of the most vital importance to me that he should perform this act for me and that he should take my seed inside of himself. Of course, this was purely my need for him to prove his word to me, to give me evidence that my eyes and ears had not deceived me and that Holmes did indeed return my affections full fold.

He was stroking my testes, and I could feel them jump with his every caress. He knew, then, that I was close to \textit{le petit mort}, but he did not hesitate. His mouth closed more firmly around me, his tongue pressed more firmly against me, and he made a sound in his throat, the vibration delightful against my glans. In that moment, I spent myself, and he swallowed me, taking everyth- ing I had to offer and not ceasing his ministrations until I was both drained dry and flaccid in his mouth. Then, and only then, when my pleasure was utterly complete, did he relinquish his physical hold on me, his emotional hold all the more firmly enshrined. I was sprawled inelegantly upon my chair, incapable of either movement or speech. He raised himself with a final, and very moving, kiss to my spent manhood. Then my clothing was rearranged, every button buttoned and every fold smoothed out.

"There," he said, "nothing at all to betray us." The he looked at my face, and my expression must have said more than any mere words ever could. "Well, nothing, if you keep your hat low and your face averted. No-one could look upon that countenance and not see you for a man in love."

I found my voice, and my boldness. "And a man who has recently been well loved. I wish to thank you…"

"For beginning reparation on a terrible debt? I think not."

"I wish to thank you in kind," I replied. Infected with his daring and made brave by the heedlessness of the rest of the audience, I reached for his trousers. Once again, he brushed my hands aside, but not before I had ascertained that he was in a state of some arousal.

"Allow me to do penance in my own way," he said, retreating back to his seat. "I feel myself to be dishonoured for having treated you so shabbily, and these few hours are all I can bear to redress the balance."

I heard my own words once again, as I had stood upon the moor and met him. 'Then you use me, and yet you do not trust me!' I had cried with some bitterness. 'I think that I have deserved better at your hands'. Holmes, it would seem, was in agreement with me. "It does not matter," I replied tenderly, my hand seeking his in the darkness. I found it, and clasped him tightly. He returned the gesture, and also smiled, a little shyly, a little ashamedly. "Yes, I confess that I have felt myself treated harshly in your hands, but what you have just done—" I lost the words, for the softness in his grey eyes brought a lump to my throat and I must needs swallow before I could hope to speak another word. "What you have confessed to me—"

His eyes were twinkling now, and upon his lips hovered that small, quirked smile of which I have always been so enamoured. "In fact, you did not know that I had it in me."

"There is more that you shall have in you shortly," I replied in haste, and then my cheeks flamed with heat as I realised the dreadful crudeness of my speech. Holmes, however, did not seem to find such roughness offensive. Rather, he took my hand that was yet clasped in his and pressed our entwined fingers against the burgeoning strength of his groin.

"I could not agree with you more," he said, and I was astonished to note that his voice was all aquiver. "However, as I have said, I must repay you for the dismay and anguish I have caused, to prove that I am sincere."

I began to protest, unwilling to either wait to know his body or to make him suffer one whit of what I had endured in my lonely achings for him. "No, no," he said, "this is something I must do. There are no marriage certificates for our sort, nor is there a clergyman in the land who would bless our union. We must make our own bonds, John, and we must make our own covenants. This," and again he pressed our joined hands to the heated hardness of his manhood, "is my proof to you that I am sincere in my vows and honest in my devotion to you."

I did not know what to say to such a blatant display of love from a man I had once believed had no human weaknesses at all. "This is not necessary," I told him. "And worse, it leaves me in a deuced awkward position." He was withdrawing from me, untangling our hands and his eyes were shuttered and opaque. That hurt me more than I believed possible. "Don't," I murmured, "please, I beg you, do not shut me out. I love you, as you
love me, and if we neither of us are yet at ease with this knowledge, then we must each give the other time and make allowances for blunders and gaffes. Forgive me, I did not mean that you making a vow to me was unwelcome. I was simply attempting to say that you had a means of proving your intentions, whilst I had none.”

“Nonsense, John!” he cried, once more claiming my hand and honouring me with the sweetest of kisses against my lips. “You have proved yourself over and over to me. And as he spoke, his voice took on the tone of a confession, for he was baring a stark truth to me. “It was your devotion and steadfastness in the face of my most appalling nature that made it possible for me to finally unburden myself to you and tell you the truth of my affections for you.”

“So you require nothing farther from me?”

“I require a great deal from you.” There was a thunder of applause at that moment, disturbing me. Unremarked by myself or my companion, the play had reached its conclusion and the players were taking their bows. The curtains closed and the audience began to filter from the theatre, chattering as loudly as the gaudy birds they resembled in their fine evening clothes.

At my side, Holmes had gained his feet, and was tophatted and elegant as ever. Not a single detail about him disclosed what he had done nor what he had said. There was nothing at all to indicate that I had not fallen asleep and dreamed the entire, wondrous business. He chose that moment to smile and offer me his arm, leading me from the theatre, whilst I floated on a cloud of happiness. That smile had told me that it had not been a dream, merely dreamlike in its perfection. Holmes had said and done everything my heart had desired from him, save for allowing me to reciprocate his ministrations. There would be time for that soon enough, I thought, I confess somewhat hazily as I was more than a little dazed by all that had transpired. It would be less than an hour before we were back in our rooms, and then I would demand that he act upon our covenant, and permit me the liberty of his body.

It was not to be so. Holmes hailed a hansom, and we were soon on our way, our driver jostling his way through the theatre crowds thronging the street. I was stung and angered by the address his way through the theatre crowds thronging the street. I was stung and angered by the address he was making in our fledgling affaire.

There was little I could say in the face of such indulgence. I felt very much a wench with her beau, when nothing she says is taken seriously and everything is in the hands of the man. It was neither a comfortable nor a welcome feeling, and I was weighing up the consequences of demanding we return to Baker Street against the need to show Holmes the understanding I had so foolishly proposed in the theatre. I did not, at that moment, feel at all well-disposed to tolerating this blunder he was making in our fledgling affaire.

“We are almost there,” Holmes said, tapping the roof with his stick. “And in the interests of discretion, we will alight here and walk the last distance.” We strolled arm in arm along the pavement, and I found it impossible to retain my anger. It was too fine a pleasure to be with him in such a manner. To any outsider, we would appear as nothing but two friends walking together innocently, perhaps to work off a too-rich dinner, or even one brandy too generous. However, I knew how unlike those other friends we were. Holmes was pressing my arm tightly against his body, so that I must, perforce, walk so closely at his side that his leg continually brushed against mine. He was also speaking all the while, making up, or so he said, for all the times when he had kept his peace and his own counsel. Now, he told me all the things he had never dared before and all those vulnerable truths which he had so feared to disclose.

There was a house on the corner, almost white in the moonlight, with a tall wall that prohibited any view from the street. Even the traditional gate had been replaced by a door far more suitable to a
country residence than a home in Town, but that was the only odd thing about the place. Holmes raised his stick and pounded in what was obviously a code. After a few moments, a small cache port opened and a shadowed face growled— "Yes? What d’you want and who are yous?"

"We wish admittance and we are friends of Sir David and his cousin, Sir Jonathan."

The door immediately opened to us, and we entered. The shadowy face belonged to a handsome, rough sort of man, of perhaps thirty summers. "Thought it were you, guv'nor," he said, "but I ‘ave ter be sure. Yer’ve picked a good night to come."

"I'm delighted to hear that. For future reference, Jimmy, this is my very special friend, Dr. Watson, and you may admit him without fear."

"Right yer are," Jimmy replied, taking a good look at my face. I knew this man would recognise me again, even were I not to return for ten years. "This way, John," Holmes said, pointing along a white path that was bordered by weeping willows and a brooklet on one side and large rhododendron bushes on the other. I thought I could hear sounds coming from behind the vegetation, and my suspicion must have been obvious. "This is an extraordinarily special house," Holmes whispered. "One can do anything one chooses here. Complete freedom, John, without having to once look over one’s shoulder. We are safe, within these walls, where none but our own kind ever enter."

"I would still rather be home in Baker Street," I replied somewhat churlishly. I had heard of houses of this sort, and I had no desire to share Holmes with any debauchery, nor did I wish to indulge in anything of that nature with anyone but the man at my side. I was in love, and newly told that my love was returned, and had no wish to dally in pleasures of the flesh that might be welcome once the first blush of love has worn into the comfort and ease of long-term companionship. I wanted Holmes, and I wanted him all to myself.

"Come, come," he whispered to me, almost pushing me, reluctant, up the sweeping stairs to the front door. "Trust me in this, as you have trusted me so well in all other things."

Had it not been for his open affection for me and how important it was to him that I trust him still, I should have left that house without setting foot over its threshold. Instead, still dizzy from what Holmes had said and done to me this night, I followed him. A manservant took our coats and hats with a discreet murmur of welcome. Holmes asked him something, low-voiced, and I heard the servant reply, "In the main ballroom as always, sir."

Someone else who knew Holmes well. I began to feel a fool for having thought him innocent and unaware of the demands of the male body. It would appear that Holmes had far more experience to call upon than my few paltry engagements with members of my own sex. Doubt began to settle upon me, as I contemplated how often Holmes must have frequented this house and how many men he must have known in a purely Biblical sense. Darkness weighed upon me, and I wondered if all his protestations were nothing more than a means to an end. Perhaps he was merely curious, or seeking the convenience of a partner he already shared rooms with. I did not truly believe any of that, but I was not certain that all my doubts were born of insecurity. I truly feared that he was doing this out of pity for me. My own words, my own voice came back to me as I had spoken to him on the moor. I had sounded pathetic to my own ears, ill-done by and melancholy. I knew that Holmes had intended to cheer me by dinner and an evening at the theatre, and despite his apparent sincerity, I could not relinquish the insidious fear that all this was done out of his sense of guilt at having used me so poorly.

A liveried servant opened another door to us and we stepped into a magnificent ballroom. The first impression one had was of immense size, and a huge crowd, and then one saw that it was an illusion created by mirrored walls and large chandeliers. There were sofas and chairs encircling the room, and a table laden with a cold supper. It took but a moment for the most uncommon aspect of the room to become clear. There was not a woman present. All the revellers were men, dressed primarily in black, as was proper, but some were dressed in gaudy clothes of a most improper sort. One man, I noted with some astonishment, was bedecked in a formally cut suit of the most livid green satin. Another was in peacock blue, yet another in brightest red. For the most part, the rest were dressed in the usual somber colour of Englishman at play. There were couples—two men, together!—dancing closely, and elsewhere men were discoursing with men. There was nothing
untoward taking place anywhere, certainly nothing that one would not see at any ball in London, save for the fact that the discreet flirtations and the exquisite dancings were enacted entirely by the male of the species. Arousal rumbled through me, heavy, rich, unnerving, my heart beating faster at the sight of such an unending display of masculinity.

"Observe," Holmes said, rightfully amused, "not a woman in sight, nor a policeman, nor anyone else who might either disapprove or put us at risk. There are other rooms in this house for baser entertainments, but this is where I wished to take you this evening."

We were descending the stairs to the ballroom proper, and I was astonished, despite the ambiance of our surroundings, when Holmes took me in his arms and led me onto the dance floor. There was a moment or two of adjustment as I learned how to place my arms so that whilst I was not leading, I was also not taking the rôle of the lady. He was, to my considerable surprise, an excellent dancer and we were gliding perfectly across the floor. Of course, it may also have been simply that my happiness had returned and I was once more floating on a cloud of happiness.

"Why did you so wish to bring me here?" I asked. Although I was almost sure of the reasons, I also needed to hear him say these things for himself.

"Because, my dearest John, I wanted to celebrate this evening with you. I wanted to make it so memorable that you would not require an entry in your journal to remember, a year from now, what we did this night."

I almost stumbled in my shock. Enough that Holmes had confessed love, but now he was admitting something amazingly close to romanticism. I wondered what other delightful secrets I would uncover in this beloved friend now that we had no need to hide from each other that which a cruel society labels ‘unnatural’.

"That was the last answer you expected, was it not?"

He was smug and I could not find the hardness of heart to deflate his high opinion of himself. "Yes, indeed," I replied, smiling at him, allowing myself to relax into the sweet pleasure of dancing with him in a room surrounded by other people so alike to us yet endlessly different. We all of us had one thing we shared, and that was our desire for our own sex, but every face was different, every voice, every person. Holmes and I were not, I was quite certain, the only lovers in this room, but I was equally positive that we were the newest and with the most to anticipate in the future. I was willing, with the music soaring and ourselves dancing in perfect harmony, to abandon myself to my dreamings of our rosy future, but there was one thing I had to ask Holmes.

"In the theatre, you said that there was a great deal you still required of me. What, I wonder, could it be?" I asked of him, pressing forward a trifle closer until my groin was touching his and I could feel his quiescent manliness begin to rise once more.

"I shall certainly require that," he replied, his expression making it clear that if this were any other room of this house, then he would surely kiss me. "That is of the moment, however. What I require from you," he continued, bringing us almost to a halt and becoming very serious, "is the rest of your life."

I was truly astounded. "And if I do not choose to give you the rest of my life?"

"Then I shall yet give you mine and try to persuade you to my point of view."

And none knew better than I how terribly persuasive Mister Sherlock Holmes can be. "Home," I said, taking him by the hand and leading him through the thronging men. "I have more than enough memories stored up from this evening to ensure that I will never forget a single moment. But there is still more I would have to remember, and I am most anxious to begin memorising."

He did not argue with me, and indeed, it was he who was in the greatest haste to return to Baker Street, with our cosy rooms where the fire was lit and an unneeded cold supper was left covered upon the table. Most welcome of all, we returned to the rooms where our beds were, clean and fresh and welcoming, and there we consummated the great happiness which had, indeed, begun after Marcini’s.