

## **An unlikely association in seven fish**

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# **An unlikely association in seven fish**

by [BoldAsBrass](#)

## Summary

Of course they haven't met up *every* Friday for fish and chips.

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

### **Month 3: Cod.**

“This is a head,” said John. “This is a fish head, with stuff coming out of it.”

“Yes,” said Mycroft. He consulted the menu. “Cod's head and shoulders stuffed with veal, baked and served with an oyster sauce.' Queen Victoria's favourite, apparently.”

John put down his knife and fork and pushed his plate away. “I didn't want to come here in the first place and I certainly don't want to be eating this.”

“My apologies,” Mycroft's tone approached conciliatory. “The club has a new chef and he does get a little carried away. Try a chip; they've been cooked in hay-infused water.”

“Why?”

“Savour,” said Mycroft. He bit neatly through a chip with an audible crunch. “Are you sure I can't tempt you? They're very good; Heston insists that they're triple-fried.”

“No. I mean why did you ask me here?” said John. “Sherlock's dead. I don't need to be,” he gestured around the empty dining room of the Diogenes club, “here. Making small talk. With you.”

“Think of it as catching up with an old friend,” Mycroft suggested.

“Friend?”

“Associate then. Next time you can choose the venue.”

John's smile contained no trace of humour. “There won't be a next time.”

### **Month 6: Possibly pollock. In a bun.**

“‘Fillet' traditionally has two l's,” Mycroft observed looking down at his meal. “And I'm not sure this is even fish.”

“Sustainably sourced pollock.”

“Really?”

“Says so on the poster.”

Mycroft glanced at the large blue poster plastered across the restaurant window. It depicted a gargantuan version of his burger, tartare sauce oozing from every crevice. “So it does.”

“Eat up,” said John. His own tray contained only a portion of French fries and a drink. “I paid for that out of my army pension.”

“Perhaps, were you to investigate finding a job, you could afford somewhere more upmarket,” Mycroft said. “However, in the circumstances, I would be more than happy to pay for something else. Somewhere else.”

“Nope,” said John. “You said I could choose the venue and this is what I chose.”

“This is punishment,” said Mycroft.

John said nothing but dipped a fry into his milkshake and ate it, defiantly.

Mycroft winced. “This is punishment for what you perceive as my role in Sherlock’s death.”

“When you put it like that, you’re getting off quite lightly.”

“I’m not so sure.”

“I didn’t think you’d turn up,” John admitted, “to a burger bar. But then I realised it’s the same reason that I’d come to the Diogenes club.”

Mycroft was investigating the contents of his bun. “There is cheese in this,” he said in accents of despair.

“You miss him. You miss Sherlock and I remind you of him.” John’s expression hadn’t softened but his chin jutted at a slightly less aggressive angle. “I’m right, aren’t I?”

“If I say yes, do I still have to eat this monstrosity?”

“Damn right.”

Mycroft picked up the burger with the air of a condemned man.

“That’s the spirit,” John said. “Think of it like a fish finger sandwich.”

He paused. “A what?”

“On you go.”

Mycroft shuddered, closed his eyes and bit.

### **Month 9: Wild halibut pan-seared with trompette mushrooms, samphire and roasted heritage potatoes.**

“Do you have the two thousand and one?” said Mycroft to the waiter. “No? Pity. A glass of the two thousand then, please.”

“You’re looking tanned,” said John after a pause. “Been abroad?”

“A brief sojourn in the Maghreb.”

“Holiday?”

“No.” He indicated John’s barely touched plate. “The dish isn’t to your taste?”

“No it’s fine. Nice even.” John lifted his chin from his hand with an obvious effort and glanced around the empty tables surrounding them. “Surprising it isn’t busier.”

“Yes,” said Mycroft, “isn’t it. Well,” he raised his glass, “to your new job.”

“Oh,” said John. “Yeah. Gets me out of bed in the morning, I suppose.” He picked at his halibut for a little longer then put down his fork. “I thought things would get easier, you know, with time? But I think they’re actually getting worse.”

“I see,” said Mycroft. He sipped at his wine and said nothing more.

## **Month 12: Scampi and curly fries.**

“Oh lovely,” said Mycroft as he slid into the booth. ““Pub grub.”” The inverted commas were clearly audible.

“Don’t be a snob. There’s nothing wrong with a nice piece of scampi.”

“I’m sure you’re right. What you’re eating however, is not langoustine but a preformed product made mostly of catfish.”

“Tastes okay,” said John unperturbed.

“Yes. While I’m delighted you’ve recovered your appetite, I may order the chicken. Oh, it comes in a *basket* - how very retro - takes me back to Berni Inns. Catfish it is.” He shut the menu with a decisive snap.

“That’s showing your age,” said John once Mycroft had ordered.

“Chicken in a basket reminds me of nineteen seventy-six,” said Mycroft, “a year I have no desire to recollect.”

John wrinkled his brow. “Bit before my time. Hot summer? Hosepipe ban?”

“Arrival of my new baby brother,” said Mycroft. “I was not best pleased; I tried to bury him in the sandpit when Mummy wasn’t looking.”

“Right,” said John half sad, half amused. Then: “hang on. How old were you?”

“Ten.”

John stopped eating.

“Oh I dug him out soon enough,” said Mycroft a little irritably. “I dare say it didn’t do him any permanent harm. I was more careful after that.”

“Okay,” said John. He shook his head. “So. Why did you want to see me?”

Mycroft lowered his voice. “The IPCC are launching an inquiry into the Richard Brook case.”

“Took them long enough.”

“It will be comprehensive.”

“Good.”

Mycroft paused as a waitress set down a heaped plate and glass of water on the table in front of him. “It will examine all the cases where Moriarty may have been involved,” he continued when she had gone.

“That would make sense, yes.”

“Though of course,” said Mycroft, “you weren’t around for all of all of them.”

“I think I was.”

“No you weren’t.”

“No,” said John. “I was.”

There was a long pause. Mycroft stared across the booth with narrowed eyes.

“You’re trying to tell me something,” John said eventually. “I can tell.”

Mycroft cast his eyes to the heavens then, taking a fountain pen from an inside pocket, jotted rapidly on a napkin: *CCTV and mobile phone data will show at the time of Jefferson Hope's shooting you were meeting me in a warehouse in Beckton.*

“Right,” said John and watched as Mycroft dunked the napkin into his glass. Black ink spiralled into nothing. “And why would you do that?”

“No need to overcomplicate matters.” Mycroft turned his attention to his lunch, probing at a ramekin of stodgy green mush with his fork. “Is this guacamole?”

“Mushy peas.”

## **Month 16: Clown knifefish.**

“Fish cakes,” said John.

“*Tod Mun Pla Grai,*” said Mycroft, the tones falling from his lips with practised ease.

“You speak Thai?”

“I dabble. More rice?”

“No thanks. So,” John looked around the restaurant, all dark wood and exotic flowers. Large orange fish swam lazily in the numerous tanks which lined the walls. “Why all the fish do you think?”

“An interesting question,” said Mycroft, he put down his fork and folded his hands beneath his chin. “In China the goldfish is symbolic of wealth and good fortune, whereas in Japan the koi represents perseverance. Christians see resurrection; Bengalis, fertility...”

“But here?”

“I’m not sure...In Buddhism the fish can represent fearlessness - I shall enquire.” He turned to the owner, exchanged a few words, then smiled. “Ah yes, of course.”

“Well?”

“She says: customers just find their presence soothing.”

“Well they're not bad,” said John, “the fishcakes, but I feel a bit weird eating something when all its friends are watching.”

“These are ornamental fish John, not culinary.”

“All the same.”

Mycroft sighed. “I wonder,” he said in perfect Thai, “if it would be possible to get this gentleman some chips?”

## **Month 20: Eels, pie, mash and liquor.**

“What,” said Mycroft, “is this?”

“It’s a pie and mash shop,” said John. “It’s traditional.”

“Traditional what, precisely?”

“Traditional working class London,” said John.

“I see,” said Mycroft, he looked up and down the busy street thronged with tourists and well-heeled locals, then peered into the shop window. “Explain it to me.”

“Well there’s pie,” said John, as though talking to a small child. “Which is pastry filled with meat, minced beef normally.”

“Yes, thank you.”

“And there’s mash, which is mashed potato. Not swede, not parsnip, not heritage turnip, just potato. Mashed.”

“Yes.”

“Then there’s liquor, which is parsley sauce made with the water used to cook the eels.”

“Eels?”

“You eat the pie, and you dip your mash in the liquor.”

“I see,” said Mycroft, “but returning to the eels?”

“And then you eat your jellied eels.”

“*Jellied* eels.”

“You haven’t lived until you’ve had a jellied eel.”

“It does sound terribly traditional,” said Mycroft. “Perhaps your friend Greg would like it?”

“He’s the one who took me here in the first place,” said John. “So are we going in? Only I’m meeting somebody in an hour.”

“Are you?” said Mycroft. He eyed John's brand-new moustache doubtfully, it bristled with vigour in the summer sun, but stepped aside without comment and let John precede him into the shop.

### **Month 23: Haddock and chips.**

“Well,” said John looking around the packed cafe, “this is authentic.”

Harsh electric light reflected off the red Formica topped tables and steam clouded the windows and dripped condensation onto the tiled floor.

“One can always tell a good fish and chip shop by the number of taxi drivers who frequent it,” said Mycroft indicating the long line of black cabs parked outside.

“Why's that?”

“Cos cabbies know good fish and chips,” said the burly man behind the counter.

“Just so,” said Mycroft.

“Oh,” said John, “I thought it might be something more...” Mycroft raised an eyebrow, “never mind. Haddock and chips, please.”

“And for me,” said Mycroft.

They watched as two large, semi-translucent pieces of haddock were dipped first into a bubbly batter then plunged into the waiting fryer with a triumphant fizz.



“It’s a beer batter and they fry in beef dripping,” said Mycroft dreamily. The golden glow from the glass-fronted display cabinet gave his pale skin a warmer hue.

“As a doctor, I’m not sure I can endorse that.”

“I have seen you consume a milkshake which was a third part margarine; your moral high ground is severely limited,” said Mycroft. They collected their cutlery and went to sit at a long canteen table. “The fish doesn’t fry in any case; it steams within its batter coat. You may remove the batter if you wish. Although, of course, you will be missing the best part.”

“Right,” said John. “And how do you feel about breadcrumbs?”

“A travesty.”

“Okay.” Behind the counter, two portions of golden rustling chips had been removed from the fryer. A warm, glorious fug filled the air.

“Fish and chips are really very simple. The fish, as here, should be sparkling fresh, the potatoes Maris Piper and cut thick. The beef dripping provides richness and flavour; the beer lightness. The batter must be cold and the consistency of single cream, and the oil heated to precisely one hundred and eighty-five degrees.”

“I should have known you’d be connoisseur.”

“I simply ask for perfection,” said Mycroft, “and here it is.”

“Two haddock and chips, gents. Bread, butter and a pot of tea.”

For a while there was an intent silence. The fish encased in its golden billowy batter demanded their full attention, its white flaky flesh too hot to eat but too good to leave to cool. The chips were crisp on the outside, fluffy in the middle. The bread was soft and doughy, and cool with salty butter. They fell upon their meal like men half-starved.

When eventually they were done, nothing remained but few crumbs and some small scraps of batter. They sat for a while, each man thinking his own thoughts, sipping reflectively at his cup of tea.

“Well,” said Mycroft finally, dabbing his mouth with a handkerchief, “that was very satisfactory. Excellent, in fact. But now I fear I really must be going.”

“Already?” said John, rousing from his post-postprandial reverie. For the first time he noticed the neat suitcase parked by Mycroft’s foot. “Another business trip?”

“It appears so.”

“Going anywhere nice?”

“Depends how you define ‘nice’, I suppose,” said Mycroft. He ate one last crisp fragment of batter, a little regretfully. “Serbia.”



## End Notes

The stuffed cod head and hay infused chips are both genuine Heston Blumenthal recipes.

The guacamole comment was, apocryphally at least, made by Peter Mandelson one of the inspirations for this version of Mycroft Holmes.

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