

A Bit of Scarlet

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A Bit of Scarlet

by [mistyzeo](#)

Summary

"When I first met John Watson, I had just moved to Baker Street and he had been home from Afghanistan nearly six months. We'd both been evicted about the same time: I for a disagreement with my landlord about chemical experiments and he for a plain and simple lack of cash. My brother had picked up the pieces for me; his had not."

In which Watson turns to prostitution after his return from Afghanistan, like plenty of other British soldiers, but of course Holmes finds him anyway.

"A bit of scarlet" is late 19th/early 20th century homosexual slang for sex with a soldier. OBVIOUSLY.

Notes

For Elly, whose support is generous and whose ideas are never bad ones. Thanks owed to BakerStMel, Redscudery, and Chucksauce for the beta work!

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

I took the corner at Portland Street and Hyde Park Place at a full run, the jewel thief George Williams only thirty or forty strides ahead of me. He was headed into the park, presumably as an attempt to lose me amongst the darkened paths, but I was more familiar with the park than perhaps I cared to admit. I walked here often enough during the day, when it was seemly, but had also found myself here at night as well, when the more unsavoury sort were out and about. But, of course, the unsavoury sort were how I earned my bread and cheese, and so Hyde Park at nearly midnight did not concern me in the slightest.

Williams went off the path into the grass, and I followed. My eyes had adjusted to the dimness, a significant contrast to the gas-lit streets, and I was pacing him. He wasn't a particularly dangerous fellow in nature, but I knew he was armed and so I needed to keep my approach strategic.

I had one card up my sleeve, but I couldn't quite be certain that it would be available. My own secret weapon might lie in wait somewhere in the park, but where was not guaranteed. Nevertheless, a little fuss might bring some attention to the chase and any help I could get was worth the effort. I'd been chasing Williams for the better part of twenty minutes and the sprint was beginning to wear.

"Watson!" I shouted, and then again, "Watson!"

Nothing. Williams ran on through the trees, pushing aside small branches that whipped back into my face. We cleared the trees and were back out on the grass again, so I tried once more: "Watson!"

Salvation! There was a noise in the bushes, a shout of indignation, and then a shape barreled out of the underbrush and caught Williams at an angle, knocking him to the ground. Together they rolled, and I slowed my pace finally, reaching the scuffle at a gentle jog. I came to a stop just a few feet away and bent to rest my hands on my knees. Watson was winning.

I waited until Watson had overpowered Williams entirely, and then said, "My dear fellow, you have quite a gift, don't you."

"You know, Holmes," Watson said, sitting back on Williams's thighs and holding both his hands in a tight grip, "a little bit of warning would be preferred."

God, what a magnificent man. "Watson, I cannot predict crime, I can only overtake it."

"Not on your own, it seems," he said, beaming up at me. His handsome face was half-lit in the moonlight and the shadow, and it made my heart thump. I managed a smile.

"Not every time," I agreed.

The bushes rustled again, and over Williams's pitiful whining I heard the sounds of a fourth person departing.

"I'm afraid I've interrupted you," I said, more calmly than I felt.

“Oh, it doesn’t matter,” Watson said. “You know I find helping you considerably more fulfilling, even when you do come out of nowhere. Are the police on their way?”

“I certainly hope so,” said I. “Shall I take it from here?” I had darbies on my belt, and I unhooked them. I bent to fasten them around Williams’s wrists, and then Watson was able to rise. I glanced at him briefly, unable to stop myself, and was selfishly glad to note that his clothing was mostly intact; only his uniform coat had been partially unfastened and his throat was bared.

Watson kept a foot on Williams’s thigh until I had finished and straightened up, and then we both stood there in the grass, awaiting the arrival of Scotland Yard.

“What’s he done, then?” Watson asked, indicating our captive.

“Robbed a jewellery store,” I said. “Hardly worth my time, on an intellectual level, but it kept me busy.”

Watson tsked and shook his head. “Such a shame, what some people will do for money.”

I stared at him for a moment, struck dumb, until I realised he was joking. He shook his head at me, laughing, and began to button up his collar.

“At least I have never stooped so low,” he said.

The police came then, sparing me from figuring out how to respond.

“Ah, Mr Watson,” Lestrade said, “good of you to join us.”

“Mr Holmes does not always call for me when it is convenient for me to assist,” Watson said, stepping out of the Inspector’s way. “But I do try to attend when I can.”

We stood aside as they hauled Williams to his feet and took him away. A wagon awaited on the path, fifty yards away. Beyond it I could see people—men of a certain variety—taking their leave of the immediate area.

“Ride back to the station, Mr Holmes?” Lestrade offered. “Mr Watson?”

“No, thank you, Inspector,” I said, plucking at my damp collar and flapping my unbuttoned coat. “I think we shall walk. Watson?”

“Quite,” Watson agreed. He offered me his elbow, and I took it. I indulged myself for a moment by squeezing his upper arm; despite his illness and the time he had spent back in England, his muscles were still pleasingly firm.

“We’ll need your statement tomorrow, then,” Lestrade said. “I’ll send a constable ’round to take it down.”

“Ah,” I said.

“Very well,” Watson said. “Goodnight, Inspector.”

We let the wagon depart and then stepped onto the path behind it. Watson's limp was not very pronounced tonight, which meant that he hadn't been out for very long. That gladdened me.

"I really am sorry," I said, after a few moments, "if the interruption has cost you. I'll cover it."

He took a breath. "No, it's all right."

"I'm in earnest," I said. "Are you staying at the boarding house tonight? Have you eaten supper?"

"Yes," he said, "I've eaten."

There was a pause, in which I waited for him to answer the first question. When he did not, I said, "You must stay at Baker Street tonight."

"No, Holmes," said he.

"It's very cold, Watson."

"I'll be all right."

"At least let me pay for the services you have provided me," I said, fishing in my pockets. He sighed and huffed, but when I produced a guinea he did not turn it down. "You are quite invaluable," I said. "Your usefulness to me cannot be overstated."

"How did you know I'd be nearby?"

"I hoped." We stopped beneath the curve of Marble Arch. He didn't usually go much further with me. "And you seem to prefer this end of the park, or so I've noticed. I didn't really expect you to be so quick off the block, but it was damned impressive."

He smiled, his eyes crinkling. I wished it were daytime, so that I could admire the blue of them. "Well," said he, "I'm glad to be of service."

My heart stuck in my throat. I tried again, knowing it would be futile, "I wish you'd come home with me."

"You know," he said, "lots of men say that to me, and hardly any of them mean it."

"I do mean it," I protested, grasping both his hands in mine. Despite the chill in the air, they were warm. He squeezed back.

"I know," he said, "which is why I can't."

"That's bollocks and you know it."

He shrugged, releasing one of my hands to brush his fingertips across my cheek. "Goodnight, Holmes. Tell the constables whatever makes sense, of course."

I let his fingers slip from mine and shoved my hands into my pockets to keep him from seeing them shake. I nodded once and turned on my heel. His touch still burned upon my face. Baker Street was less than ten minutes on foot from this corner of the park, and it felt like a personal insult to be walking home alone. It would hardly take him out of his usual orbit to come with me. I couldn't bear to think of him staying out overnight, but that was what the guinea was for. It would keep him fed and housed for a few days at least, if he wasn't frivolous with it. Not that I could blame him for spending it on a drink or a newspaper, or something equally unnecessary but undoubtedly desired.

When I first met John Watson, I had just moved to Baker Street and he had been home from Afghanistan nearly six months. We'd both been evicted about the same time: I for a disagreement with my landlord about chemical experiments and he for a plain and simple lack of cash. My brother had picked up the pieces for me; his had not. I had been investigating a series of muggings that had taken place in Hyde Park over several weeks, each between the hours of ten at night and two in the morning, and each with a distinguished and wealthy victim who had no business being in the park.

Of course, they did have business in the Park, which was, I suspected, why Inspector Lestrade had called upon me to take over the case. He was a sympathetic sort who looked past a man's proclivities and preferences in a bedmate. He knew the victims were visiting male prostitutes, but bringing me on separated him one degree from the truth of it. If I could identify and find the perpetrator, the opportunistic nature of the crimes might fade into the background.

I did it with the help of one John Watson: former army surgeon, hero of the Empire, and opportunistic prostitute. He'd been engaged in an unspecified act of gross indecency one late evening (what, he would not reveal) when the two men nearby began a tryst. Normally, Watson insisted, he would not have taken any note of them at all, but that he had not seen the younger man before. Being familiar with the park and most of the soldiers and others who used it as their meeting grounds, this fact stood out.

Watson could not, of course, admit to Lestrade that he had been accepting money for homosexual acts at the time he witnessed the mugging. When I deduced it, however—not a very clever deduction—he'd come clean about the whole thing. Then the lie we'd told, that he was one of my informants, conveniently placed to gather information for me, became less of a lie. I began to use Watson again and again—for my profession, not for his—and during the day he became one of my most trustworthy resources.

That he would not extend me the same courtesy at night rankled. I wanted him to rely on me, to come with me, not to be so damned stubborn. His pride was keeping him scrounging for coins, eating half as often as he ought to, and sleeping rough two nights out of ten.

The worst of it was that I myself had been tempted by the soldiers that peddled themselves in Hyde Park. I had never taken any of them up on their offers, but that was out of shyness rather than distaste. I had always known myself to be an invert, but acting on the inversion was something I had never quite managed. It was messy, and dangerous, and I believed myself above all physical compulsion. Better to stay innocent, in every sense of the word, than risk my reputation or my self-control for a little gratification.

I unlocked the door at Baker Street and went upstairs as quietly as I could. The fire was banked in the grate and a cold supper sat upon the table; otherwise the flat was empty and dismal. I loved it here, centred in this city of millions, and yet sometimes it was so impossibly lonely. I could picture Watson occupying the other armchair opposite the fire. It would suit him so well.

He was a risk to my self-imposed chastity; or rather, I wished he were a risk. So far he had kept me at arm's length, even though I thought my interest was plain enough. I wanted to risk myself for him. He was such a splendid specimen, and a pleasure to be around. He made me laugh, and since our first case together he had proven himself clever, capable, and excellent at taking direction. Of course he was; he had been in the army, after all. He could be the brawn of the operation, and I the brains, and we ought to rub along well together.

Rub along, indeed, I thought, feeling my pulse jump. Leaning back on the settee, I let my one hand fall into my lap, where my prick felt heavy in my drawers. Guilt sat like a stone in my stomach, but it didn't stop my hand from wandering, from smoothing up and down my thigh and over my belly. I kept the other hand high, resting on my collarbone, thinking about his touch upon my face. I wanted him to touch me like that all over. I could almost feel his fingertips running over my throat, plucking open my collar, unfastening a button or two of my shirt. I did it to myself, baring my skin to the air, and a shiver worked its way down my spine. My prick stiffened shamelessly, so I gave in and covered it with my palm. I heard myself sigh and, embarrassed at the sound in the silent room, sealed my lips together.

I ought to have taken myself off to bed, but the desire was foremost in my consciousness and so I stayed where I was, eyes closed, knees spread, cock hard. I rubbed myself through my trousers until the backs of my thighs were shaking with the tension, hips rocking up into my hand without actually leaving the settee. I was rigid, thinking of Watson's hands on me, the gust of his breath upon my neck, the tilt of his smile. I had never had his amorous gaze directed at me, but I could picture it: the heat of his eyes, the ruddiness of his softly-bitten lips, the bristle of his moustache. His moustache. I had never before considered facial hair attractive, but his tidy moustache hid a wicked smile and said everything it needed to about his masculinity. I wanted to feel it against my bare skin, wanted to be burned by it the next morning. I scratched my fingernails against the underside of my chin, imagining the press of his mouth on my throat, while at the same time I squeezed the head of my prick through the placket of my trousers. I had to bite back another moan.

It was ridiculous, and shameful, I thought, opening up my trousers and pushing my hand inside. The touch of my fingers on bare, hard, humid skin made my hips surge, and I drew my prick out through the gap in my drawers. It was unseemly to imagine Watson this way, even though getting on his knees for a man was something he did without hesitation. I tried not to think about the other men he had fucked, but even that wicked image made my heart pound as I manipulated the hood around my slick cock head. He was practised, and would know how to swallow a man in an instant.

A little desperate noise slipped out between my teeth, and I opened my eyes to look down at myself: my hand circling my prick, the red tip poking out above my fingers, gleaming in the light from the fire. I began to frig myself slowly, my hips rocking on the settee to push through my fist. My nipples were hard beneath my shirt, and pinching them made my cock

twitch in my grip. I was leaking, so aroused my fingers were slick, and my fist moved faster and faster as I squirmed and rocked.

In my head, I heard him say, “Holmes,” softly, like a breath of air, and I imagined his hand where mine was, his lips on mine. I imagined being pressed to the settee by the weight of his strong, lean body, and feeling him shake as he neared his peak, frigging himself roughly as he rocked back on my prick.

My orgasm took me abruptly, surging upwards from low in my gut, and I spurted over my fingers with a stifled grunt. I drew it out, squeezing my cock from root to tip, and lamented the splash of semen on my shirt tails even as I trembled with the echoes of my pleasure. Damn.

I slept poorly that night, my brain confused by rejection and desire. I dreamt of Watson sharing my bed; of the two of us walking in Hyde Park in the daytime, arm in arm; of rolling with him under a bush at twilight and kissing him breathless, and then having him tell me the Yard were on their way. I finally slept deeply a little after dawn, but woke at a tug on the bell, disoriented and with my head aching.

Mrs Hudson answered, and I knew it was the constable come to take my statement. I tucked my head under the blankets, wishing for a few more minutes of peace. My cock was hard again, and I stank of sweat and misery.

There was a rap on the bedroom door, so I jerked the covers back. “Yes, Mrs Hudson?”

“It’s Lestrade,” came the voice from the sitting room.

Good Lord. I scrambled out of bed, found a dressing gown, willed my body into decency, and yanked open the door. “What’s wrong?” I demanded.

“Your man has been arrested.”

“My— what?”

“You look terrible,” Lestrade said, sounding surprised.

“Thank you,” said I. “What on earth do you mean ‘my man has been arrested’?”

“John Watson, the chap—”

“I know who he is.”

“He was taken in last night for prostitution. I need you to come in and tell the Chief Inspector he’s your assistant.”

“Well he is—”

“Get dressed, Holmes,” Lestrade said sharply.

I slammed the bedroom door in his face and threw off my nightclothes. My shirt from the night before was still wet, so I found something slightly cleaner, and was able to put myself into some kind of respectable form in a few minutes. Lestrade was having a cup of coffee when I emerged, but he set it down half-drunk as I put on my overcoat and my hat. We didn't speak until we were in the carriage on the way to the Yard.

"Tell me what happened," I said. My stomach growled and my eyes were gritty. My head still hurt.

"He was in a fight, apparently, around three this morning."

"In the park?"

"No, in Piccadilly," Lestrade said, glancing at me. "An altercation with a gentleman that drew the attention of a constable. The gentleman accused him of being a prostitute, while your man—"

"Please stop calling him that."

"While Dr Watson accused the gentleman of being a thief. I'm sure you can guess which of those charges the constable took more seriously."

I rubbed my hand across my face. "Lestrade, you know—"

"No, I don't," he said, "and I'd rather not. I know he's your assistant, but on how many occasions or in what capacity I don't care. I also know he's not a bad chap, and that you're the right one to sort this out."

I swallowed my protest and sat back in the carriage. We rode the rest of the way in silence. When we pulled up, I jumped out ahead of Lestrade and went striding into the building.

"He's in holding," Lestrade said, hurrying after me. I was still in the lead when we came banging into the lobby.

"Watson!" I shouted.

He stood up; he was inside the holding cell, his hands cuffed together in front of him. He had a terrific black eye and split lip, and there was blood on his uniform collar and his left sleeve was torn as if by abrasive contact with the pavement. There was blood and grit in his hair, too. I went straight up to the bars, barely keeping myself from reaching through to him.

"For heaven's sake, man," I said.

"What are you doing here?" he hissed.

"Lestrade came to fetch me," I said, "to get you out." I turned around to address the constable at the desk. "Hopkins! Release this man at once."

"Holmes—"

“Shut up, Watson.”

He shut up, but his eyes burned.

Hopkins came around the desk with a handful of keys, but he hesitated at the door. “Mr Holmes...”

I turned on him. The poor chap. He’d make a decent officer some day, but just then I needed him terrified.

“Constable, do you have any idea who this man is?” I demanded. “This is Doctor John Watson, late of her majesty’s army, surgeon and hero of Maiwand, and my professional associate and personal friend. It is an insult to him and to me to keep him confined in this abysmal place with this abominable crowd.”

The crowd itself looked a little thin and unimposing; they didn’t keep the hardened criminals out in the open like this. They also looked a little annoyed I’d just called them ‘abominable.’

“Sorry, sir, it’s just... the Chief Inspector...”

“Well, for God’s sake, go get him then,” I snapped.

Hopkins scurried away, still holding the keys, and I turned back to Watson. He was still glaring at me.

“What?” I asked, affronted. I was here to rescue him. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” he lied. His left eye was swollen half shut, the bruising already dark around his orbit. He looked lopsided and dangerous. I could feel my heartbeat thumping in my throat.

“You look like shite. I’m taking you back to Baker Street to get you cleaned up.”

“No,” he said.

“I’m not arguing with you about it,” I said. “Where else would you go? Presumably you’ve been robbed as well.”

He bared his teeth at me, the tendons in his neck standing out, but he didn’t have an answer for me.

Chief Inspector Lloyd walked up with Hopkins at his heels. “Mr Holmes,” he said, and then, after the briefest pause, “Dr Watson. Constable Hopkins tells me there has been a misunderstanding.”

“Dr Watson has been arrested on suspicion of prostitution,” I said, “which is a gross and ridiculous insult. Dr Watson is my assistant.”

“What was he doing in Piccadilly, then, at three this morning, fighting one Mr Gregory of Holloway Road?”

"I believe Dr Watson told your constable that Mr Gregory was a thief," I drawled. "I assume Mr Gregory was also arrested and searched?"

Chief Inspector Lloyd hesitated.

"Right," I said. "Let this man out this instant, or I'll be having words with the Superintendent."

I didn't know the Superintendent personally, but my brother probably did, so the threat carried enough weight.

Lloyd jerked his head, and Hopkins came forward with the keys. He unlocked the door, and then Watson's cuffs, and Watson stepped out of the cell. He was standing up very straight, his chin up, but he was limping. I took his arm and led him away from the cell door to a seat along the wall. He sat and I knelt at his feet, hoping to take a closer look at his injuries. He turned his face away, his jaw tense. His eyelashes sparkled with moisture.

"We're going home," I said, and rose to my feet. "Thank you, Chief Inspector. I'll be in touch. Come, Watson."

Watson came, and we walked out of the precinct together. Lestrade was nowhere to be found, and I wasn't going to go looking for him to thank him just now. That could wait.

I got us a cab back to Baker Street. Watson was silent the whole way, his hands clasped in his lap, his body turned away from mine. He watched the city go by with glassy eyes. When we pulled up to the flat, I offered him a hand down out of the cab; his grip was strong, but he let go immediately.

Mrs Hudson knocked on the sitting room door, shortly after I'd closed it, to offer us breakfast. I accepted, asked for a basin of hot water and a cold compress, and turned back to Watson. He was standing in the middle of the sitting room, looking lost.

"Sit down," I said, indicating the armchair I'd always thought ought to be his. I was right that it suited him. I knelt on the carpet and began to unfasten his collar. The blood was from a bump on his head, and the tear in his sleeve was, as I'd predicted, full of gravel. I helped him get his uniform coat off; underneath he was wearing a thin linen shirt that had also suffered. It was worn and stained, and I suspected it was one of the only shirts he owned, if not the only one.

Hot water appeared, and I barely looked at the maid as she bobbed and vanished again. Watson let me clean the scrape on his shoulder and his cheek, and wash the blood out of his hair. He winced as the touch of my fingers, but soon his soft, blond hair was clean and damp, and the water faintly pink. I cleaned his split lip, too, and saw that his eyes were welling up again.

"It's all right," I said. He pressed his lips together hard and shook his head. "It is," I assured him. "You ought to have a bath, too, while you're here. And something to eat."

"I'll not be kept, Holmes." His voice shook.

"Watson, kindly do not insult me so soon after I've sprung you out of gaol."

"I was prostituting myself with that bastard," he said. "And he did rob me."

"That doesn't mean you should be arrested for it, my dear boy," I said.

"It was certainly warmer in the cell."

"God damn it, Watson!" I stood up and put the bowl aside. "I asked you to come home with me last night, not for my sake but for yours."

"Don't be ridiculous," he snapped, "of course it was for your sake."

"That doesn't mean I wasn't also thinking of your safety!" I cried. "Look what could have been avoided! You've been beaten, robbed, and—"

"I know what happened, Holmes! I was there!" He was on his feet now, his fists clenched. I spared a thought for my landlady, but only to hope that she would have the decency not to interrupt us until our row was through.

"I am trying to help you," I said, pointing a finger at him. "You refuse it for no reason except your own damn stubbornness."

"I don't need your help!" he shouted.

"Oh, no, of course not," I sneered. "It was all part of the plan, was it? Getting thrashed? Getting arrested? Brilliant way to spend the night. You wouldn't have money for bail if it weren't for me."

"I wouldn't have money to be robbed of if it weren't for you," he said, taking a step closer to me. I put my hands up, perhaps in a bid to protect myself, and he grabbed my forearms. His grip was definitely aggressive, but I wasn't afraid.

"I care about you," I said firmly.

"Damn you, Holmes," he said, and pulled me closer. I put my hands on his face, careful of his blackened eye. Which of us leaned forward first I couldn't say, but his lips against mine were soft and dry, and his moustache tickled the corner of my mouth. I pulled back a fraction to look into his eyes, and then kissed him again. His grip on my arms changed; he released my forearms and held my upper arms instead, which allowed me to slide my arms around his neck. He embraced me, his hands on my back. His tongue touched mine. I kissed him more deeply; he winced and I tasted blood.

"I'm sorry," I said, pulling back. His split lip had opened again. He gazed into my face, his body pressed knee to sternum against mine. His stomach rumbled. I couldn't help smiling. "I haven't eaten either," I admitted. "Lestrade roused me straight from bed and I'm starving."

His gaze flickered to my mouth and back up to my eyes.

"Eat with me?"

"Very well." He let me go, but it was with a degree of reluctance. His hand lingered on my back. I went to open the sitting room door to shout down to Mrs Hudson, and found her just reaching the top of the stairs. The woman has always had impeccable timing. Watson was at the window when she came in, looking down into the street, and he didn't turn back until she and the maid had laid the table and departed, taking his coat with them to clean and mend. I uncovered the dishes myself and pulled out a chair for him.

"Watson, please," I said.

We ate in relative silence; I made sure Watson's plate was filled if it ever came close to empty, and that he drank enough coffee to fortify a battalion. Under the table, I stretched out one leg and pressed my ankle against his. Shyly, I felt him press back.

After breakfast, I asked for a bath to be drawn, and the maid and the boy carried the copper tub into the sitting room and put it in front of the fire. It was half an hour of activity to get the bath filled, but once they had made their final retreat I locked the sitting room door again. Watson, who had amused himself by perusing the bookcase, put down the novel that had distracted him and said, "Is that for you or for me?"

I raised an eyebrow at him. "You, my dear boy," I said. "I'll have mine after."

He regarded me for a moment, and then shrugged and began to unfasten his trousers. "It's tuppence to watch," he said, smirking at me, but the joke fell a little flat.

"I'll give you the room," I said, bowing my head.

"No, stay," said he, shucking his trousers and folding them neatly. "I'll need help."

"Is that a euphemism?"

"Would you like it to be? I was shot in the arm in Afghanistan, as well as in the leg. It's a damn nuisance."

"I see," I said softly, taking the trousers and putting them on the settee. He let me unbutton his linen shirt and ease it off his arms. The bruising on his ribs caught my attention first: he'd been kicked at least once in the fight. He shied away from my fingers. I turned my attention to the gnarled pink scar that made up the front of his left shoulder. It was magnificent, and horrible, and I kept my face neutral as I looked, for he was watching me. "It does look inconvenient," I said finally, glancing back up to meet his eyes. "I shall certainly help."

His mouth twitched, almost a smile, and he said, "Good." His hands went to his drawers, and I stepped back to let him dispense with them. I bit my lip as they fell: he was magnificent. His right thigh was also marred by a bullet wound, but this one was smaller. I wondered if the bullet had gone in and stayed there. Aside from that, his legs were long and strong and pale; his delicate toes curled in the carpet. He was thinner than his frame could support, but he wasn't gaunt. At the apex of his beautiful thighs, his soft prick hung heavy and ruddy, its head covered by its generous hood. I itched to have it in my hands, to feel the girth and heft of it. My mouth watered. As I stared, unashamed, it twitched. Watson cupped it roughly in his

hand and gave it a squeeze. My pulse pounded between my legs, making me lightheaded. I swallowed hard.

Watson smirked at me and took a step toward the bath. I mirrored him, drawn like a magnet. He put his other hand out, reaching for my shoulder, and steadied himself on me as he stepped into the hot water. I held onto his elbow, feeling dizzy. As he sat, I knelt, reverent. My cock pressed against the flies of my trousers.

He sighed deeply, leaning back in the tub. It was round and deep, sized to squat or recline. One couldn't stretch one's legs out, which was a shame, but it was generous in other proportions. The water reached to his nipples, making them soft, and he tipped his head back against the rim. When he opened his eyes, his gaze was hazy with pleasure.

"Thank you," he said.

"Not at all," I rasped, and cleared my throat as he chuckled. He shifted again, sweeping the water up his arms, and I rolled up my sleeves in order to make myself useful. There was a bar of soap, which I rubbed with a flannel until it sudsed, and then began to wash his arms. He let me scrub him slowly, thoroughly, up his arms, under his arms, across the back of his neck. I was careful with the pavement graze on his shoulder, and with his scar. He leaned forward to allow me to reach further down his back. I avoided the bruising on his ribs. He hung his hands on the opposite rim of the tub and groaned softly. My arousal surged and I had to bite back an answering groan of my own.

Then he leaned back, and I washed his chest: the hair, which made him sigh; his nipples, which made him hiss; his scar, which silenced him for a moment; then I dragged my flannel lower, under the water, to his abdomen. His cockstand bumped against my forearm. He caught my wrist. The rolled sleeve of my shirt was damp at my elbow. I looked up into his eyes and found them dark and intent.

"Get in," he said, and let my wrist go. I stood, divested myself of my too-many layers as quickly as I could, and climbed, naked as a jaybird and stiff as a pike, into the bath with him.

The water was hot on my bare thighs, my bollocks, my torso up to my ribs. The level of it rose as I sank down, but didn't top the sides. I wished I'd thought to surround the bath with towels, for I expected full well that we might splash. My feet were between Watson's thighs, my arse between his feet. I tucked my toes under his legs. He spread my knees with his hands and leaned forward to cup my face.

This time when he kissed me, it was clear who was taking the initiative. I let myself be kissed, opened, invaded, moaning my relief into his mouth. His hands were strong on my jaw, pulling me closer, and I found myself clinging to his upper arms. I let go and plunged my hands beneath the water to have my prize.

His cock jerked as my fingers encircled it. It filled my grip; my jaw ached just thinking about sucking him. My heart was pounding. He returned the favour, moving one hand down my chest, pausing to pinch my nipples until I gasped and then taking my raging prick in his hand. I wanted everything all at once, and yet I knew I would hardly last long enough. I prayed that this wasn't the only time I'd get to feel him come to glory.

He pulled back to look into my eyes; his were blazing, bluer than the clearest sky. "Holmes, I want you desperately."

"I'm mad for you," I replied. "God, I want— so much, I want everything."

He kissed me again deeply, and then pressed our foreheads together. Under the water, we had begun to stroke one another, and I felt the tremors of his pleasure running through his body. My hips rocked, pushing into his fist, sloshing the water around us.

"Here," he said, "come closer," and we shifted. He threaded his legs over my thighs and we slid together until we were nearly prick to prick. I was sweating, my cock throbbing at every twitch of his fingers as we rearranged ourselves. My bollocks were full and heavy, and his thighs pressed mine apart, making me moan. Then he was guiding my hand and shifting some more, making the water slosh up and down, risking the floor. The tip of his prick touched mine.

"By Jove," I gasped.

He laughed a breathless laugh. "Hold still," he said, and brushed his lips against mine, at the same time rubbing my cock head against his. It sent pleasure arcing through me. Our tips kissed, the shy heads bumping and rubbing. I could feel mine grow bold, the sheath pulling back. Watson broke the kiss to look down into the water between us, so I kissed the side of his face, his ear, the prickly hinge of his jaw. He huffed and put his other hand into the water.

"What," I began, and then stopped myself in surprise. I felt his hand brush against mine, and then the soft touch of his foreskin against my prick head. He drew it down around my head, engulfing me in a tight, hot embrace. He was breathing hard, his hand on my cock unsteady. I gripped his hand with my free one, holding him holding me, and he swore under his breath. His hips shifted, and with it his prick and his hood, and I had to let go of his hand to grab his shoulder instead. My hips jerked wildly, my climax on the horizon. My most tender part was touching his, our slits rubbing together, slick with our excitement even as the water threatened to wash it away. I had to kiss him again, but it was with messy inaccuracy. His mouth was slack, though he mustered some coordination to reply when I licked between his lips.

"Watson," I gasped, feeling the tight promise of my peak gathering low in my hips. "I'm— oh, my boy, I'm so very close."

"I want to feel you spend," said he, and I sucked in a desperate breath. His fingers worked over my tip, holding me inside his skin and fucking against me, and his other hand stroking my cock, pulling the orgasm right from the root of me. I shuddered and tensed, my hips rising, and he hissed, "Oh, God, yes," right before I began to spurt.

I spilled my load into the hood of his prick, coming against his tip, and he moaned loudly. I jerked his prick clumsily; our foreheads bumped together. The pleasure, the wickedness of it, spun my climax out into a long series of spasms.

Finally, when I could take no more, I pushed his hands away and he let me go. I struggled upright and turned over, water streaming down my body. My cock was still hard, semen

leaking sluggishly from the brazenly exposed, swollen head into the water. I was on my knees, holding the tub rim.

"Get between my thighs," I ordered.

He hauled himself up, sending another wall of water over the edge of the tub. His knees bracketing mine squeezed my thighs tight together. He was shorter than me, thank God, so his hips fit neatly to mine, his prick poking between my upper thighs, with no extra fuss. He lay himself along my spine, groaning into the back of my shoulder, and fucked me vigorously. The water surged around us; I spared a thought for the carpet, but more of my attention was focused on the man working himself to a glorious orgasm upon my willing body.

Watson shuddered, his teeth dug into my shoulder, and I felt his cock pulse between my thighs. I watched his ejaculation cloud the water; he muffled his cry against my back.

We sank, entwined, back into the bath. It was still warm. Enveloped in comfort, we rested, silent, breathing together. I tingled all over with pleasure; aftershocks darted up my thighs. Watson's chin was hooked over my shoulder, his arms around my middle.

"Are you all right?" I asked finally.

"My ribs hurt like the devil, and I have a splitting headache," he said.

"Oh," said I, shifting in his embrace, embarrassed.

His grip on me tightened. "But I can stand it a little while longer."

I almost slept. Finally, as the water began to feel cool, he stirred and murmured, "Holmes."

"Sorry, old boy."

I clambered out, dripping, and my feet squished in the carpet. I wrapped myself in a bathing sheet and offered him the other one. He leaned heavily on me as he climbed out. There were a few hand towels in the pile we'd been provided; these I threw to the floor in an attempt to soak up some of the overflow.

Watson stood and shivered, half-wrapped in his sheet, until I could take pity on him and readjust his wrapping. Then I crouched to prod the fire back to a healthy roar. I went into my bedroom to fetch my best quilted dressing gown; upon my return I dressed him in it and sent him to sit in the armchair. I put his bath sheet down on the floor as well. The towels were wet through.

I put my shirt and drawers back on and rang for Mrs Hudson, who came up with a laundry basket. She stopped in the doorway.

"Good heavens, sir, the floor!"

"That is my fault," I said, not looking at Watson. "I did not account for the Doctor's injured thigh; he slipped getting out and I sacrificed the floor for the sake of his balance."

"I'll daresay you did," she muttered, gathering up the wet towels and putting them into the basket. "I'll send up a few more towels so you can mop up the rest."

If she didn't suspect me of indecent behaviour, she'd have the maid do it.

"Thank you," said I. "And Doctor Watson will be staying the night. I am hoping to convince him to let the second bedroom."

"Holmes—" he protested, but I waved a hand in his direction.

"Very good, sir," Mrs Hudson said, hiding a smirk. "I do hope you decide to stay, Doctor Watson," she said, bless her. "I know how Mr Holmes would like a companion. Someone to share the rent with. Someone to keep him out of trouble."

"Share the rent," Watson murmured, almost to himself. "Yes, well."

She gave us both another look, and then departed, repeating her promise to send up more towels.

"Please stay," I said. "I don't want to *keep* you, I just want— Your company is quite agreeable to me. I find you are quite essential to my work."

"Your work," he repeated.

"And my happiness."

He looked startled. "Oh, indeed."

"I realise that's rather forward."

"Very."

"But it's true."

We couldn't discuss it very much more, for the maid was in and out, emptying the tub. When it was done, finally, the clock chimed ten. Late-morning sun streamed in through the windows. The whole day was ahead of us. Watson nodded in the armchair, his bare feet up on a stool.

"Watson, I say."

He roused, making an inquisitive noise and dragging his eyes open.

"You don't mind the smell of strong tobacco, I hope?"

He smiled, exasperated and fond, his moustache twitching. "I always smoke 'ship's' myself," he replied.

End Notes

Further thanks go to Heather, Rachel, Emily W., Jess J., and Jaradel, for their support as well!

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