

The curse of Lestrade

I no longer bled.

Looking beyond my skin, it was pale. Dry. And the fool I was, I went searching for more definitive proof. Better would have been to find a mirror of silver coating. Took to walking in the sun. Foster a better acquaintance with a well-placed fence post.

But I was a coward.

I always was.

And I was drawn to what I shouldn't have.

I remember too well their scent on my tongue. It drove me forward to their utterly provocative side. There, a window was open despite the autumn air, and it was nothing if not a compelling invite. *I could feel them...* their heartbeat was as if my own at this diminishing distance.

Standing over their sleeping form, I watched them. I convinced myself I was only...

Curious.

Lonely.

Surely, all senses had left me.

They used to be on my mind often. Now, they were a constant.

Deep breaths, soft, supple breaths. Sleeping so well... I never did intend to wake them. Only to watch them, despite my now misplaced blood screaming for—

Would they taste sweet? Soft? My dry mouth salivated. Is it like wine, like something warm and ever comforting—

They turned, sighing deeply—and I stilled. Yet they did not wake.

I can't be here.

The old house I had hidden in creaked well by mortal feet.

Evidently, *someone* had found me again.

And I pretended other humans might share that scent and that I had disappeared successfully. That I had left no trace all those months ago. I pretended it couldn't be them. That they did not always find who they searched for...

If it's not them... then they aren't...

"Lestrade..."

But there are limits to the lies I can tell myself—on this matter. Because, To my wretched fate, I could never forget their exact tone, the lilt of their voice.

"I have been searching for you..."

They shouldn't have. They *really* shouldn't have...

"You are going to call me mad, *I swear I have since...* but the night you disappeared, I saw you in my dreams..."

Their voice approached. Closer.

But in my corner, in the cold and dark house, not even moonlight reached me. And whatever was still in my veins now burned. “*Stay back—*” I warned. I did not remember my voice ever to be this dark, roaring, and rough. I had not had use of it for months...

At the sound of me, if they even think it is something like me, they—stilled. “Why did you leave?” they asked. I had felt I knew their voice so well... but it was... *weaker* than I remembered.

“I had my proof.”

“Of... what... Lestrade?”

I didn’t answer. Couldn’t.

They stepped further, and I felt my throat rumble with some new primal warning, “Stay. Back.”

By the darting of their eyes, I saw their weak sight could not separate my shape from the cloak of darkness; I saw them as clearly as if in sunlight. Their gaze grew larger. Worried or scared. The reckless curiosity, whatever brought them to me, now brought them still forward.

Come closer.

Leave. Run.

“Sherlock.” Find me. “Return home—”

Does their skin still feel the same?

“I was never very good at leaving a mystery unsolved... You know this.”

I grappled with anger—why were they the same when I was so changed?

“You won’t find,” I tried to search myself for whatever I used to be and speak convincingly, “A game here—”

One step closer. “Then, what will I find?”

My throat, its muscles clenched in pain around me. If I were a breathing thing, it would have stolen my breath.

“Sherlock—”

One more step.

“Don’t—”

One final step.

And the remaining resolve drained. I advanced out of the dark, grabbed at their throat and pulled them in with painful force. Their warm pulse played under my thumb.

I saw my features in the reflection of their expanded pupils.

I felt their breath on my face.

Yet they did not move.

Nor scream.

There was no thrashing against a monstrous creature sharing their space so forcefully.

With my inhuman precision, I could see new lines on their face, further darkened under-eyes. There were differences in their appearance. I saw that then. But I only wished to revel in what would be a scream, a face of panic—at

this—my reveal. And how, with it, I would finally find the courage to end it all.

My teeth bared, and the new planes of my distorted face flared as I reached for anger and answered their question, “A monster.”

The warm pads of three fingers caressed my clenched jaw, and I felt... I felt.

I felt beyond anger and craving. I remembered them beyond the obsession; I remembered myself beyond the pain and the shame.

I swallowed the want. I let the anger melt. I asked because I couldn't comprehend, “*Why?*”

“I know, Lestrade. I know everything.” They smiled as my grip turned to something more akin to an embrace. “I figured it out. After you left... *why did you leave?*”

“How could I not?” My voice is whispered, no longer the one I did not recognise. Their fingers were warm on me, soothing something that existed long before the transformation. “What if I... hurt you?”

“You hurt me by leaving. I would have helped. I can help...” They hesitated, “I thought you left because of what happened... before—”

“No—” I swallowed. “No. Never.” I shook my head, then allowed my forehead to find rest against theirs. “The memory of you... You. Were everything—are—everything I... It was all that kept me these months.” My confession spills, “I found you—that night. I couldn't. Resist. *That* was why I left. You were my proof that that I was far beyond something defective. More broken than can be healed...”

“You're a *fool*, Lestrade.” They smiled at me. Truly smiled. “I am incredibly scientifically inclined, and our friend is a surgeon. There's nothing we could

not put back together... *If that is your wish?"*

I only sighed. "You're too confident in—"

"Either way, you're coming home with me."

I studied their face. They looked a little less tired. As if some heavy weight had evaporated in a moment. "You're underestimating the burden," I said.

"Do you not remember what we promised all those months ago?" *I... I do remember, but...* "You carry my burdens if I carry yours. Do you remember?"

"I remember..."

This is my solemn vow.

"Then, are you going to break your word?"

Until parted by death.

"To you?" I find the corners of my mouth tug upwards. "If I ever do, may God strike me down."