

Close Quarters

an *Enola Holmes* fanfic

by Rodo

for *midwinterspringwrites*

“THIS WASN’T WHAT I had in mind when you said you wanted to spend some time with me,” Tewkesbury whispered against my cheek.

Well, to be quite honest, it wasn’t quite what I had in mind either. Not that I would have been any more keen on an excruciatingly long walk along Covent Garden’s flower market. But even so, being trapped in a very tiny secret room (well, more like a closet, except there was a tiny window somewhere up top) filled to the brim with boxes and books was emphatically not my idea of a good time either. Being trapped in uncomfortable places might be something of a professional hazard, but in the vast majority of cases, it didn’t involve entirely too handsome viscounts. I sighed and tried to loosen my muscles, hoping that they wouldn’t seize up with my body bent to the side over an overstuffed cabinet. Tewkesbury, by the look of him, did the much same, steadying a shelf with one shoulder. Although maybe he *was* pressed a little too close to me to be comfortable – it was, quite frankly, distracting. He had rather pretty eyelashes if you looked at his face up close. Unfortunately, this really wasn’t the moment to be thinking about eyelashes, pretty or otherwise.

“Find anything?” A rough voice in the room beyond the secret door asked, a smoker, probably, and if I’m right (which I am, of course), he’s the shorter, more heavy-set of the two fellows searching for what I have already found.

“Nah. Never seen a room this messy. This is going to take a while,” the other answered, punctuating the sentence with a rustle of paper and a tap of a cane.

I rolled my eyes while Tewkesbury made a whiny sound in the back of his throat.

“A while,” he quoted, shifting a bit until the shelf groaned.

“Shh!” I hissed.

Another tap close to our hiding place made both of us tense up. This really wasn't what I'd had in mind for the day. This was supposed to be a rather simple case. A young lady of some renown had approached Edith, of all people, who had sent her directly to me. The young lady was being blackmailed by someone who had intercepted some salacious correspondence between her and her beau (an up-and-coming actor). Once I'd ruled out the beau as a suspect, I'd looked at his colleagues at the theatre (a veritable font of unrelated intrigue and romantic drama) and her household (ditto), which only left a handful of suspects – specifically: the postman. It appeared the young man in question had found a rather profitable if illegal way to expand upon his legal employment, judging by the nest of secrets we'd found behind his broom closet.

“Who are these people?” Tewkesbury hissed once the steps had moved to the far side of the room. “And what are they doing here?”

Oh, that was simple. “Most likely, they were hired for the same reason I was: to find the secrets their employer is being blackmailed with.”

“Let's hope they don't find them, then.”

Yes, I was. I was also hoping that they would get on with it already. The papers outside didn't contain any incriminating information – we'd checked. They were wasting their time (and mine, and Tewkesbury's) and it would be better for everyone involved if I could just find the young lady's letter before anonymously tipping off the Post Office without any more interruptions. Even if this situation was kind of... not exactly nice, but a word related to it. Tewkesbury was wearing his most expensive cologne, and we usually didn't get to spend this much time in this close proximity to each other. Maybe we should do this kind of thing more often – not the getting-stuck-in-a-closet thing, obviously. You know what I mean. He was smiling at me nervously now, and I smiled back, trying to look anywhere but his obnoxiously handsome face. I really wished I could punch him right then. Or kiss him. Both options seemed equally attractive.

“You know—”

But I wouldn't get to know what Tewkesbury thought I knew because, at that moment, the annoying men outside finally decided to throw in the towel.

“Forget it. It's not here,” the short one growled.

“Where else would it be, then?”

“Dunno. A safety deposit box at the bank? His locker at the post office? A tin at his mum's? Not here, in any case. Look at this mess: letter from his mum, newspaper clippings, leaflets... I bet the guy hasn't thrown anything away since he moved in.”

“Wouldn't that make this the perfect hiding place?”

“Yeah, but not one where we’d find anything. Our best bet is catching the bugger and roughing him up a bit.”

“Now that’s an idea I can get behind.”

I could not, but I would be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy hearing the sound of their footsteps moving out of the room and the door of the flat falling closed behind them. I breathed a sigh of relief, and Tewkesbury did the same, head knocking against mine. For a moment, an awkward silence reigned. I suppose this might have been the moment when the couple in a romance novel would have kissed tenderly, but that was more Tewkesbury’s area of expertise than mine.

“Now,” I said, straightening myself as best the circumstances allowed, “we need to find the letter.”

Which was easier said than done. Mister Postman was not the tidiest of men, which might have worked to our advantage in dissuading our competition, but it did prove to be something of a problem when I tried to deduce where in all this mess he would hide the letter. There had to be a system, or else he would never find anything himself.

“Do you have to do that?” I asked Tewkesbury when he began leafing through the papers at random.

He looked at me and stopped moving, an unasked question in his eyes. I just rolled my eyes and sighed, shaking my head slightly, trying to focus. Was he alphabetising by victim? Ward? Address? Or was it chronological? Most valuable target to least valuable?

“Is this it?” Tewkesbury asked, grabbing one of the myriad of letters and holding it up. The addressee was right, and a quick look at the contents affirmed that it was indeed the young lady’s sappy love letter.

“How did you find it?” I asked.

Tewkesbury shrugged.

“Well, I have seen your house, I do suppose your minds work in similar ways.”

“Why does that sound like an insult?” he retorted with the cutest pout I’ve ever seen. He should really learn to stop pouting if he didn’t want me to tease him. It was just too tempting.

“It wasn’t an insult.”

“Oh, so it was a compliment?”

“It most certainly was not. It was merely an observation.”

“Then may I observe something?” he asked, face suddenly very, very close again. There was that another silence, only this time, Tewkesbury leaned in and let his lips brush against my earlobe. It was making me flustered, and he was doing it on purpose, the oaf. “I think we’re done here.”

I resolved to make *him* very flustered once this was all done with. Later.

“Then lead the way, Viscount Tewkesbury, Marquess of Basilwether.”

“Now *that* was an insult,” he said, laughter in his voice.

“Oh, stop it,” I said. I was absolutely going to kiss him silly. He deserved it.

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