The Big Sleep

by marysutherland

Summary

*Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man* – Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*

John needs a bed for the day and Greg wants to help.

Notes

This was inspired by Second Skin's *Lestrade Lies* and by Fengirl's *Five Acts meme* request for "sleeping and bedding themes". Her prompt reminded me how often in BBC Sherlock canon we see John Watson either asleep or just waking up.

Many thanks to Small Hobbit for betaing.

Set at the start of *The Great Game*.

- Inspired by *Lestrade Lies* by second_skin

There are doubtless meaner streets than those of Hoxton, now that gentrification is creeping in. But that hasn’t yet reached Gainsborough House, a.k.a. The Shithole in the Sky, where Greg is temporarily marooned after his divorce. He keeps an eye out whenever he gets near his new flat, in case someone decides that a copper in their patch needs shanking.

Just as well he’s alert, because as he comes along the walkway he can see that there’s someone slumped on his doorstep. At noon on Sunday. It’s he lucky, it’s just an alcoholic; if he’s unlucky,
they could be bleeding to death right outside his front door. He starts to run, looking round to see if there's anyone lurking. And then he stops, because he's close enough now to recognise the man who's daft enough to choose Gainsborough House as a resting place. John Watson is curled up, back against Greg's front door, fast asleep. No sign of trouble at all.

John doesn't exactly look comfortable, but he's notorious for being able to sleep anywhere: in his surgery, at a lab bench, during a Wagner opera. But this is still a pretty stupid place to try; he must have been right out of it to fall asleep while he was waiting. Greg wonders how long he's been there and why someone hasn't mugged him yet. Should have phoned me to say he was coming, he thinks, and then realises why he couldn't have done. Because some bastard has nicked Greg's mobile. Some bastard who happens to be John Watson's flatmate.

If he'd had his mobile, he'd have been stupidly tempted to take a photograph of John. The sort of picture you could pass off as just a joke, like the ones he takes of Sherlock sometimes. And if the ones of Sherlock often happen to have John in there too somewhere, well, that's just chance, isn't it? It'd take a very suspicious mind to wonder why he's holding onto those particular photos. So it's unfortunate that his phone got half-inched forty-odd hours ago by the most suspicious man in London.

No, he thinks, shaking his head. Sherlock won't spot it. He's never seemed to notice what John feels about him, or to wonder why "Three Continents Watson" has a deficit of girlfriends now. And although Sherlock could work out that Alex was cheating on Greg, he'd never understood the despair that had driven her to it. The instinctive acknowledgement that Greg had fallen in love with someone else; that the marriage had to end.

He shakes his head again. He is standing outside his own front door while the man he...cares for is sleeping a yard away from his feet, and any moment now John is going to wake up and wonder what the hell Greg's playing at. He needs to behave like John's friend, like his sane, responsible friend, because God knows John needs one or two of those. He puts his hand out to shake John's shoulder and then stops. John when asleep may look – his mind hastily substitutes harmless for cute – but he's a trained fighter, and God only knows how he'll react to being abruptly woken. Well, that's how Greg somehow convinces himself that it's OK to reach out and ruffle John's hair and say softly,

"Time to wake up, John."

John's brow creases and he mutters, "Piss off, Sherlock." And then he puts a hand to his face and gives a grunt and reluctantly opens his eyes. He focuses them slowly on Greg and a disarming grin appears.

"Sorry about that," he says getting up stiffly, rolling his shoulders. "I was dreaming about Sherlock, and he'd just told me I had to get a train to Basingstoke immediately." He frowns. "At least I think I dreamt that bit."

John dreams of Sherlock. Of course he does. And he looks less like a highly trained killer today and more like someone so worn out they may fall asleep standing up.

"Come in and we'll worry about Sherlock later," Greg tells John hastily and lets him into the flat, which is tidy for once, because Greg's spent the weekend sorting it out. The problem is, now he's sorted out the clutter, he can see just how depressingly awful the flat's decor is. Especially the "cream" paint of the living room, which looks like someone used watered-down school custard rather than paint.

"Do you want a drink?" he asks John, who's dropped down gratefully onto the sofa with barely a glance at its appalling beetroot colour.
"I probably need some very strong black coffee," John replies.

Greg raises an eyebrow and enquires, "Is that medically advisable, doctor?" He's amazed at how casual – normal – he sounds. "I could do you some tea."

"Thanks," John says. Once Greg's put the kettle on, he fishes a packet of chocolate digestives from a cupboard and dumps them on the coffee table beside John.

"I'm guessing you haven't had time to eat, either," he says, and realises abruptly that he's turning into John's mother. But John just smiles gratefully and reaches for the biscuits.

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"OK, so what's Sherlock playing at?" Greg asks, once they both have a mug of tea in their hands. He reckons he has at most about half an hour while John's on enough of a sugar rush not to fall asleep during their conversation. "Late Friday afternoon, you two turn up at Scotland Yard asking about a cold case from 1981. I got the files dug out before I went home for the weekend, and Sherlock still nicks my phone. And now you appear on my doorstep looking like you haven't slept since then."

"I haven't, not properly," John replies. "Sherlock thinks there's a connection between the kidnapping of Alexander Holder, and the old case."

They'd got Holder back three days ago. Well, Sherlock had got him back and they have a couple of suspects in custody right this minute.

"He thinks there's someone else involved as well as Edwards and Rodriguez?"

"He reckons a guy called Peter Ricotta...Peter somebody was responsible both times."

"Peter Ricoletti?" Greg asks and John nods hazily.

"Ricoletti was a suspect in the 1981 case," Greg goes on, "but he had an alibi, didn't he?" He'd only had time to skim the file before giving it to Sherlock, but he's gathered from all the stories he's heard that Mr Peter Charles Ricoletti always had an alibi whenever he got up to mischief.

"Yeah, but Sherlock says six months later they found the man who'd given him the alibi. Well, the bits that were left of him. He'd been trying to blackmail Ricoletti, they reckoned."

Oh, now Greg remembers. He's the one getting confused. It had been 1982 when Ricoletti had finally slipped up, done something that the Met could pin on him. And he'd promptly done a runner.

"He's supposed to have been in South America for years, hasn't he?" he says. "Why would he be back in London, kidnapping bankers?"

"Dunno," John replies. "But Sherlock reckons that the woman in the CCTV footage from outside Holder's flat is almost certainly Sylvia Ricoletti."

"How on earth...? He can't have been born in 1982," Greg protests. "OK, that's not quite true, but was he really pouring over true crime cases when he was...six?" Actually, that's worryingly likely, now he comes to think about it. He can easily believe that Sherlock learnt to read from the News of the World, while Mycroft was being weaned onto the Times.

"He went off to Colindale first thing this morning," John says, "to look at the newspaper archives."
"It's Sunday, they won't be open, surely?"

"One of the librarians owes him a favour. But he said it would be easier for one person to get in, not two."

Sherlock's idea of a fun weekend. Throw a couple of all-nighters to solve a problem and then break into the British Library to confirm it.

"So why are you here?" he asks, and it comes out all wrong, accusing. "I mean, I'm pleased...it's good to see you, but I take it Sherlock is after something."

"I thought you ought to have your phone back," John says. He gropes in his jeans' pockets for a few moments before finally fishing it out, which gives Greg a cast-iron excuse to stare at John's groin. Then he remembers that he's a bloody police officer, not some lovelorn idiot.

"I held off reporting it stolen," he says, "so please tell me Sherlock hasn't been texting obscene messages to any Chief Constables."

"Don't think so," John replies, shaking his head. "I only realised he had it when I suggested we ought to phone you and Sherlock explained why we couldn't."

"He left my warrant card, so I thought at first I was in the clear," Greg says. "And then I decided that if anyone really needed me this weekend, they could come and find me." It's actually been better than he expected, being out of contact for nearly two days. Made it easier to try and unwind. But if Sherlock hadn't taken his phone to make embarrassing calls...

"So why the hell did Sherlock nick it?"

"He's still trying to work out how Irene Adler got her information," John says, frowning in concentration. "She knew all about the boomerang before it was reported. I mean the case we had down in Pangbourne last autumn, where it turned out that the man was killed by a boomerang, not by our client..."

Greg nods hastily, because he's pretty sure that John isn't going to get any more coherent if he keeps going, and then adds: "But Sherlock got Irene in the end." He's never heard the details of that and he's pretty sure he doesn't want to. Not if Mycroft had his manicured fingers in the whole messy business.

"It still bothers him," John replies. "But he hasn't been able to find any of your team up to anything, so we thought--"

"–you thought I was giving her information? Fucking bloody hell, of course I didn't!" Greg finds himself yelling. Sherlock, of course, has no clue about why Greg wouldn't want anything to do with Irene Adler. But John can't stand the woman, after what she did to Sherlock, so why would Greg give her the time of day?

John raises his hands apologetically. "We didn't think that, Greg, of course not. We...Sherlock thought you might have had your phone tampered with. That someone working for Irene had somehow managed to bug it."

"He could have asked to check it," Greg says, a little more calmly, and John makes a weary face that clearly conveys *Sherlock doesn't do asking*. "OK, so was it clean?"

"Yeah."
"And it's still working?"

"Think so." John says, handing it over.

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it," John replies and then he yawns. "Sorry...thanks for the tea, Greg. I suppose I ought..." It's as if his battery's run down now that he's completed his task. He stares vaguely at his feet, clearly trying to remember how to move then. "I ought to get back to Baker Street."

John'll fall asleep on the Tube and get pick-pocketed; he'll walk out in front of a bus with his eyes closed. Or he'll just take himself one step nearer an early grave by not looking after himself properly.

"You shouldn't--" Greg blurts out, and then winces, because "shouldn't" isn't a word that John takes well. "I mean, you won't be any good...you won't be any use to Sherlock till you've had some sleep."

"I can have a rest when I get back to Baker Street," John says, and even he doesn't sound convinced. An idea strikes Greg.

"Give me your phone," he says, and John pulls out a fancy looking mobile and hands it over, apparently too exhausted to disobey direct orders.

"You go and crash out in the bedroom," Greg goes on. "I'll phone Sherlock, tell him you're here. He can get hold of you when he needs you, and you don't have to trek back across London."

"Thanks," John says. "Sorry to be a nuisance."

"It's fine," Greg says. "Bedroom's through there." He somehow manages to avoid offering John his own pyjamas, because that's probably going a bit too far. All he's doing here is helping out a mate, isn't it? Not anything more, absolutely not.

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A couple of minutes later, Greg is back sitting in the living room with two mobile phones. He switches John's off and then picks up his own, which as far as he can see is in one piece. No unexpected messages sent from it. And when he checks the address book, he sees that Sherlock hasn't even changed Anderson's name to something rude, which is probably a good sign. He scrolls down to select Sherlock's name and then starts to type a text.

If you need help, come and get us. Greg.

He sends the message and puts the phone back in his pocket. It may not technically be telling Sherlock where John is, but it's almost the same thing. Greg's got his phone back, so John must have come to his flat. The message says us, so he's still here. And if Sherlock can't remember where Greg lives, or indeed that 'Greg' is DI Lestrade, well he can work it out, can't he? He's a detective genius. Or he can just phone Greg and asks what's going on, if he's really desperate. And Sherlock's in the British Library and it's probably difficult to get yourself killed there...

Greg reads the paper for a bit, till it's time to start cooking Sunday lunch. He wonders if he should offer John some. But when he goes into the bedroom, John is spark out. He has the duvet wrapped firmly around him, but Greg spots his jumper folded up neatly on the floor, so despite the flat's erratic heating, he's probably OK.

You die from lack of sleep before you die from lack of food, and John's had some biscuits at least. Best to leave him, Greg firmly tells the voice that is suggesting that he stay in the bedroom in case
John needs him. As for the even more insistent one that is telling him to get into bed with John...it's a small bed, and it would be bloody embarrassing if John wakes up.

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After lunch, he does the washing-up and then finishes reading the paper. Sherlock hasn't called his number, but when he checks John's phone, he's sees there's a single text message on it from Sherlock. But it just says Why can't anyone file accurately? so he suspects it's not urgent. He switches the phone off again. Sherlock may still be detecting madly, but it's the weekend, and ordinary people like him need a rest.

He watches the football on the telly with the sound turned down low. Tempting to wake up John, to ask him if he wants to watch as well, mates together. But today's not the day for that, especially since John would doubtless crack jokes at Arsenal's pathetic performance. He finds himself wondering what John normally does on Sunday afternoons when he's not chasing after the world's most barking detective. Whether he just mooches around like Greg's doing now, not quite sure what to do with himself when there are no criminals to chase. Though John probably got used to killing time when he was in the army.

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By half-nine in the evening, Greg's wondering if he's going to be kipping on the sofa tonight. Still nothing from the bedroom to indicate John's stirring, but he can hardly go in and turf him out of his bed, can he? He's done enough years of shifts to know that there are times when you need ten hours solid, however much it may screw up your body clock. And the flat's finally warmed up, so he's not going to freeze to death if he has to sleep in the living room.

And then the doorbell's ringing, with the sound of someone prepared to test it to destruction if necessary. Sherlock, of course, bounding into the flat as soon as Greg undoes the chain, doing his familiar impersonation of a expensively-dressed whirlwind, as he calls out:

"Bring your handcuffs, Lestrade, we've a kidnapper to catch. John! John!"

The bedroom door opens and John emerges, rubbing his face, his hair standing up on end. He's now wearing nothing but a pair of red Y-fronts. For a moment Greg stares openly at John's compact, sturdy body and then remembers abruptly that Sherlock's there. But when he looks, Sherlock is staring alternatively at John and him, with a bemused look that clearly says: Does not compute.

"I think your radiator's on the blink, Greg," John says and then smiles at Sherlock. "You've found Ricoletti?"

"I know exactly where he is," Sherlock says, at once confident again. "So get your clothes on and we'll go."

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It's one o'clock before Greg gets back to the flat, and that's only because DC Climpson said she'd finish off his paperwork for him. They've got Peter Ricoletti and his wife in custody, but not before Sylvia Ricoletti did her best to scratch Greg's eyes out. He stares at his face in the bathroom mirror when he gets home and knows tomorrow he's going to look even worse, when the bruises start coming through. He should probably have gone to A & E, but instead he'd talked John into patching him up.

John's hands on his face had been steady and gentle, expertly cleaning and taping the scratches. He'd given Greg stern warnings about phoning his doctor if there was any sign of infection, and managed to find a chemist still open in Hoxton so Greg had some painkillers. And then Sherlock
had carted John back off to Baker Street for whatever it was they did after a case was solved.

Greg fishes out the painkillers and reads the label on the box. John warned him they'll make him groggy, but it'll probably take a while for them to counteract all the adrenaline pumping round his system. That's the thing; right after a case is over you can't sleep for a while, you're still on too much of a high. It isn't just Sherlock who feels that. He'll take the pills and watch telly for a bit to calm down and then he'll go to bed.

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The doorbell rings again, and Greg gets up to answer it. And there's John standing outside, wearing nothing but his red Y-fronts and a cheery smile.

"Can I come in, Greg?" he asks.

"This is a dream, isn't it?" Greg replies. "You're back at 221B, and I'm asleep on the sofa, just imagining this."

"Fraid so," John says. "Is that a problem?"

"It's fine," he says, ushering John in. "Want a drink?"

"Later," Dream-John replies. His grey eyes look confidently up at Greg now in the way they sometimes do at Sherlock, like he's just dying for something really strange and ridiculous to happen. "Thought we'd start with the sex."

"Well you know where the bedroom is," Greg tells him. He can't have John – he knows he can't – but Dream-John's definitely a good alternative.

"Let's get a move on, then," John grins, putting his arm around Greg's waist and reaching up to kiss him. "We've got a lot of things to try before you have to wake up."

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