A Farewell to Regular Sleeping Schedules

by mysongsknowwhatyoudidinthedark

Summary

Fred Henry and Rinaldi Belmonte both work at their local hospital. When a new nurse, Catherine Barkley, arrives at the hospital, it complicates relationships and reveals long-kept secrets that should have stayed secrets.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

It was a brisk autumn day. Not a normal autumn day, mind you; it was nearing winter, and the leaves on the trees were gone, and the cold bit your nose and your cheeks and every vulnerable spot it could. With hot air expelled from the lungs, you could see your breath.

I lived in the crappy part of a nice area, and although it was a city, it felt more like a town. A deafening quiet silenced the town, and only in bars, or at sporting events could you hear the roaring life of people.

My apartment was a block from the hospital where I worked, so Rinaldi and I walked. He and I had been roommates since college, when he was a foreign exchange student from Italy. He ended up staying in America, and with me, and we got along pretty well.

We arrived at the hospital and parted ways. He was in surgery, and I was in ER, as a paramedic; we hardly ever saw each other all day, until we came home, weak and weary from the job.

It was seven a.m., on the dot, when I entered into the ER. I went to my locker and changed into my uniform and went over to my department. When I arrive, there stood Ethan Moretti, a member of my team.

He was fairly young—in his thirties. He had a tendency to pick fights and make fun of people who didn’t deserve it, but he did his job all right, so I didn’t bother chastising him.

Before I even greeted him, he got into business: “Henry, a patient just called, male, in his seventies, complaining of chest pains. He thinks it’s a heart attack—he’s had one before.”

I nodded. That was the tenth heart attack patient in the last week. “No coffee then?” I laughed, as he stared with annoyance.

“The rest of the team is almost ready. You’re driving.” I followed him over to ambulance. The rest of the team met us there.

He handed me the keys, and we all got in, and we reached the patient, and it all went fine. Back and forth, we went from hospital to patient throughout the day, with me driving. There were heart attacks and older people who fell and kids with allergic reactions. It was twelve midday when I came back for a break.

At twelve was my lunchtime, and I could go to the cafeteria and eat with Rinaldi. He wore scrubs and bags under his eyes. We both ate in almost silence, until he started talking about some girl who started working in his department as an intern.

“She’s a nurse—name’s Catherine. Didn’t get her last name, but she was really pretty, baby.” He took a sip from his coffee like it was liquid gold, like it was from God himself.

Rinaldi called me “baby,” and every sort of pet name, ever since we fell asleep on the couch one night in a drunken stupor, and I woke up in his arms and called him that. Naturally, I didn’t know who it was, and I was rather embarrassed at the time when I realized it was him, and not some girl I brought home, but it’s been a tradition ever since.

“She sounds nice.” My voice clearly held little interest in the conversation. He always talked about some girl.

“You don’t care, do you?” he asked. “Ah, baby. Let’s see a movie tonight. It’s the weekend. I
need to go out.”

“It’s Wednesday.”

“Neither of us have work tomorrow. Other people call it the weekend. I’m gonna call it our weekend.” He shook his head. “Keep up, will ya?”

Lunch ended for me, so Rinaldi and I parted ways. I was about to head back to work, when a man in scrubs walked up to me and stopped me in my tracks. He looked like he was a nurse—I could usually sense the doctors from the nurses.

“You friends with Rinaldi?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

“Tell him he’s an ass, and I never want to see his face ever again.” He stormed off, though in a very dignified, surprisingly quiet manner outside of the huff he made when he finished speaking.

I stood with my mouth gaping wide as Helen Ferguson, a nurse, smiled at me. “Someone’s not happy with you.”

“Not with me. With Rinaldi,” I corrected her.

“Oh, was that the boy he spent the night with?” She grinned, carrying her paperwork to a desk. “He cried about him. I told him, if he wants to be a heartbreaker, he better be careful. He doesn’t listen to me.”

“Spent the night with? Like he—”

“Had sex, yes.” She grinned. “You can say it, you’re a paramedic.”

“He didn’t tell me this.” I frowned. “I didn’t even know he liked… you know… guys…”

“Oh, this was his experimental phase. He didn’t get one in college,” Helen explained. “At least, that’s what he told me. I don’t know. You should know, Freddy.”

“He never told me.” I looked down and wrinkled my brows. He always told me.

“Oh, baby, you can ask him about it later. I believe you have a job to get to.” She patted my shoulder before she headed off to do her job.

“I told you not to call me that!” I yelled playfully across the hallway.

“I’ll call you what I please, Mr. Henry!” she yelled back over her shoulder.

I was certain to ask him about it, but I continued on my day as normal. I didn’t see Rinaldi again until after work was over at seven p.m.
Chapter 2

Walking home was much more of a struggle in the evening. The way to the apartment was overwhelmingly more grueling than the way there.

The way there, the cold morning air brought you out of your slumber. The way there, a restful night’s sleep gave you the energy to make it a couple blocks down a hill. The way there was manageable.

The way back was as though your feet were being pulled down further and further into the ground, like quicksand. The way back meant your already exhausted body had to trek up a tremendously steep hill. The way back meant tired feet and minds had to find a way to muster enough energy to make it back home.

The way back was horrible enough that a public confrontation over something as meaningless as whether or not Rinaldi had slept with another human being could not be worth it. I could not find it in me to ask him about it, certainly not while we were trying to fight back strained muscles.

I settled for after we arrived at the apartment, with no one around us. I no longer felt guilty about asking him at that point.

I approached him, but he was rather sleepy. He put his hands on my shoulder. “You’d never believe the day I’ve had. So many surgeries, baby.”

“Do you know a nurse in my department?” I asked. I moved him to the couch, so he could lie down.

“Yes, Helen,” he mumbled.

“No, a male. Tall. Black hair. Kinda in your face. Didn’t know him, so I’m not sure,” I explained. “He asked me about you.”

“Did he?” Rinaldi asked, still clearly unaffected by what I was mentioning. “What’d he ask about?”

“Do you want Chinese or pizza?” I asked.

“No, tell me, baby. I’d like to know.”

“Well, he asked if I knew you, and I said yes,” I started. “And then he asked me to tell you that you’re an ass, and that he never wants to see you again—can you blame him, though?”

“Don’t know who that could be. Maybe I slept with his girlfriend. I do that a couple times. I don’t mean to, really,” he rambled.

“It felt more personal than that, Rinaldi.”

“Baby, trust me. I know my people. It’s probably unimportant. You don’t need to worry about me.” His eyes drooped, and he grabbed onto one of the pillows for comfort.

Before I could stop myself, and before he could fall asleep, I blurted out, “Helen told me everything—she said you slept with him.”

He jumped straight up, panic written all over his face. “She told you that?”
I could not speak. I didn’t want to come across as caring about the fact that my roommate had sex with a guy—that’s the least of my worries. I didn’t want to act like I was invading on his own personal discovery, or whatever this happened to be. I just stood silent, while he opened his mouth wide, flabbergasted that I knew this information.

So I merely nodded.

“Don’t trust Helen.” He took a step toward me. “Fred, I bet she told you that to freak you out—that’s gotta be it.”

I played along with his game. “I’m sure you’re right,” I said.

“I’d never sleep with a dude, you know that right?”

That must be why I found lube in the trashcan when I was taking out the garbage.

“I couldn’t do that.”

This revelation explains so much, all the weird things I’ve seen throughout the apartment.

“I’d have to top. It’d be too weird if I didn’t.”

At this point, he was just digging himself into a deeper and deeper hole that I had to drag him out of before he embarrassed himself. “Cut the crap, I know you’re lying.”

He pretended to look surprised. “I’m not! I’m not gay!”

“First of all, the only person in this whole situation that’s a lying piece of shit is you, not Helen. Second of all, you can have whatever experimental phase you want—I don’t care. Just don’t be too loud.” I paused. “So, Chinese or pizza?”

“Chinese.”
Weeks go by, and I still hadn’t heard anything more out of Rinaldi. If anything, he crawled deep into his shell and shut me off. I saw him come down to my department a couple times, and I assumed it was for work, but then I saw him talking to that same nurse he supposedly slept with.

Regardless, the whole situation is not of import to me—I shouldn’t try to be involved, much unlike Helen Ferguson’s approach. Poor Fergie had a different viewpoint on things. She was very controlling but also alone, so I don’t blame her for meddling with the love lives of others.

One day, I came back from driving the ambulance, and I see a nurse standing at the counter, writing something down on a clipboard. It was late at night, so the ER eased up a little. She had beautiful blonde hair, pulled back in a ponytail, and grey eyes.

I looked at her from afar in a sort of curious admiration of her appearance. She must have felt someone staring, as she turns her head a bit to see me and smiles.

“I’ve seen you out in that ambulance. Very brave, I might add,” she said, continuing to write notes on a patient. She had some sort of British accent, and I almost wanted to ask why, but I didn’t bother. “Catherine Barkley.”

It was her. It was the nurse Rinaldi mentioned. It had to be. She was so much more beautiful than any way he could have described her.

“Fred Henry.” I opened my hand for a handshake, but she clearly was preoccupied with her current task that she didn’t notice. I put my hand down. “I’m the ambulance driver.”

“I know.” She nodded, not looking up at me. “What made you want to drive ambulances?”

“I don’t know,” I replied. I hadn’t really thought about why. “I can drive, and it takes less work than being a doctor to save lives, I guess.”

“You know, nursing is starting to require almost as much schooling as doctorate programs? I might as well have gotten my M.D. with all the credits I have,” she stated. “I like actually talking to patients, I guess.”

“This your first job?”

“Just got certified. I was working up in OR, but they moved me to ER. ‘Understaffed down in ER,’ they said. Apparently a nurse just quit,” she explained. She sighed and put the pen down, turning to me. “What about you?”

“Paramedic for as long as I remember, I guess.” I shrugged. “I wanted to go into med school, but my parents couldn’t afford it.”

“Shame. You look like doctor material.” She frowned. “I guess I’ll talk to you later?” she asked, walking away toward a patient room.

“Yeah, nice meeting you.”

I watched as she entered the room. I heard the sickening sound of fake happiness that nurses often exude when they greet a patient, so I decided to start heading out. Rinaldi greets me when we exit. We don’t talk much, except about work.
The walk back that day was somehow less exhausting than usual. I had a spring in my step, and Rinaldi asked me what was wrong with me to be so happy after rushing around and picking up patients, and I said nothing, because I wasn’t even sure myself.

I just had a really good feeling.
I never liked the dim lights and loud music of bars. I never liked the sports fans screaming in agony over the loss of their favorite team, next to the girls throwing a bachelorette party, next to the twenty-first birthdays of shy and slightly tipsy college kids, next to the adults who acted like they owned a seat at the bar because they were regulars. It was always too much, too overwhelming.

But it was Fergie’s birthday, and even though she was twenty-seven, and we were all about the same age, we acted like teenagers who just discovered the joys of alcohol for the first time.

My mind melted with each sip of my drink, driving away all my inhibitions, as alcohol generally does. I talked louder, more often, and with more emotion and passion than what was normal for me.

Rinaldi wasn’t much better. He laughed at jokes that weren’t even funny, and he sang along loudly to the music that was playing in the background, and he flirted with anyone that even mildly piqued his interest.

Only one girl seemed sober, and she had familiar blonde hair and gray eyes. The smell of her perfume drew me in closer, as I tried to act like I wasn’t on my fourth beer.

“I didn’t know you knew Helen,” I shouted over the music.

“Yes, we went to secondary school together. She was a year thirteen when I was a year eleven. We both played girl's football together,” Catherine explained.

“Oh.” I chuckled a little. “You’re from England, aren’t you?” I frowned “Helen doesn’t have an accent.”

“She’s lived here longer than I have. You can tell with some words.” She giggled. “Ask her to say tomato.”

“Yeah, okay.” I laughed. “Why’d you come to America?”

“American healthcare makes the most money.” She shrugged.

“I like it. A girl who knows what she wants.” I grinned, clearly demonstrating the full extent of my intoxication.

“You’re drunk,” she pointed out. “But I like you. You’re a good boy, aren’t you?”

“The best boy. Just ask Rinaldi.”

“Mmmm.” She nodded.

I moved closer to her, reaching my hand to touch her cheek. “You have such soft skin.” I leaned in to kiss her when a sharp pain reached my reddened cheek.

“Oh gosh! I’m sorry.” Her eyes expressed extreme guilt. “I don’t know what came over me. I just—you are way too drunk to be making these kinds of decisions.”

“Ms. Barkley, I like you a lot.” I touched my cheek where she slapped me. “Would you let me kiss you?”
She frowned, pondering my question. “Alright. But very quick. You can kiss me longer when you’re sober.”

The kiss lasted mere seconds, but the feeling of intoxication made it seem like much longer. I enjoyed kissing her. She had soft lips, and though I’ve kissed many girls before, she was the only one that gave me that fireworks feeling that many describe their first kiss to be. Or maybe that was just the alcohol talking.

End Notes

There’s no other explanation for this other than the fact that I’m a nerd and I needed this in my life and I have no shame.

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