

One night in London

by mazaher

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After more than half a lifetime of effort, even ordinary days can be hard.
Lestrade needs some help, and help is there for him.
No asking even required.

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This short story is set, more or less, within the scope of fennishjournal's Rites of Passage series at <http://archiveofourown.org/series/18534> (at least I hope so: she's promised a threesome!). It stands on its own and doesn't strictly require any prior reading, but it is a direct answer to the double shock of what happens to Lestrade in chapter 4 of Transition, in the above series, and in impishtubist's Retribution, chapters 1 and 2, at <http://impishtubist.livejournal.com/70186.html>: the cliffhangers from hell! Because the poor man deserves some peace and quiet, and I couldn't wait for the above stories to be concluded before giving him some on the side. Thank you to the writers for their truly inspiring stories. Thank you to my brave beta athens7, who never fails me despite everything.

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During his career at NSY, Lestrade has seen a lot.
He's been held hostage and threatened with a gun to his head.
He's given himself in exchange for hostages.
He's seen people murdered, and even worse, people being murdered.
He's been shot at (five times; twice wounded; once seriously).
He's been knifed (superficial graze: he's more agile than he looks, even in his grizzled years).
He's even been buried alive for 4 hours and 28 minutes, until Sherlock found him.
He's been decorated, which he doesn't care about and tends to forget anyway.
He's been suspended, pending a review of his cases with Sherlock, then reinstated (the Chief Superintendent wasn't).

During his life --which he knows by now is at least half gone-- he's seen more.
How a man discovers his vocation and chooses his path.
How he falls in love, and how he deals with the unthinkable, the end of love.
How to catch his luck by the tails of his elegant tailored coat.
How to pick himself up and walk on after having been too slow, too dull, too law-abiding to stop in time a natty devil's crazed spree of destruction.
How to take in on the same day, at almost the same time, the best and worst news he could ever receive: that his old friend had come back from the dead, and that his new lover had cheated on him.
How what had seemed the loss of the latter (after two, much too short years of slowly discovering each other) and a second burial of the former (after almost three, endless years of bone-bare grief), had incredibly turned into the gain of both.
How good it is, to love and be loved by the two best men he's ever known.

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But tonight, Lestrade is tired.

The day has been quiet, but for some reason he feels every hour of his years today, and he has the nagging feeling that perhaps, just perhaps, he's getting too old to enjoy what has always been the best part of his life.

The thought sends a chill down his spine. What if...?

Nothing.

Tonight, Lestrade only wants to quit thinking and rest.

He leaves work earlier than usual.

He takes the long way home, slipping into his driving mode: his hand smooth on the gear shift, his feet precise as a tango dancer's on the pedals.

He likes driving.

He never speeds, but he doesn't need to. He can have as much fun at 30 mph as any idiot on a Jag at 120. It's all in the grace of the curves and the gear shifts, not the speed.

Any other day, he'd have relaxed halfway home.

Any other day, by the time he parked he'd be humming to himself.

Tonight, he's silent as he turns the key in the latch at 221B, climbs the steps, opens the door.

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John and Sherlock stare at him as he enters.

Then:

"John. Tea." Two long strides, and Sherlock is slipping Lestrade's coat off his shoulders and throwing it on a chair.

"Earl Grey?" John is already starting the kettle.

"Lapsang Souchong."

Lestrade allows himself to be gently pushed toward the sofa. He sits in the middle with a small sigh, unbuttons his jacket, stretches his arms at his sides. Sherlock kneels to untie his shoes.

"No, wait..."

Sherlock stops. Their eyes meet.

"Let me."

"But..."

"Let me."

Lestrade breathes out a deeper sigh of thanks as Sherlock eases his shoes off and begins to knead his feet. The slip and press of long fingers over socks over smooth skin... it feels good. It feels heavenly.

Sherlock finishes with careful tugs on each toe just as John brings in three mugs of fragrant smoky brew and a tray of salted goat butter and honey on wholemeal toast.

John is thrifty by education, by character and by choice, but he's taken upon himself to always have something a bit different at hand for Sunday breakfasts, Mycroft's random visits and special occasions-- treating Sherlock to some of the luxuries he grew up with, and Lestrade, in John's opinion, should have gotten more of. Nothing fancy, but even Tesco sells Twinings, goat butter and a few varieties of monofloral honey.

"Clover?" Lestrade asks.

"Heather," John answers with a smile, affection and concern in equal parts.

They both sit and sip their tea and watch in silence as Lestrade eats: Sherlock perched on the tea-table, John square in his chair.

When he's finished, it is Sherlock who picks up the tray and carries it to the kitchen. Lestrade doesn't miss the graze of his elbow on John's shoulder as he passes.

"Bad day?" John asks. Lestrade finds it endearing that Sherlock has taken to delegating delicate matters to John. He also finds a little endearing, a little flattering, that *he* seems to be a delicate matter in Sherlock's estimation after all.

"Not really," he answers. He sounds old, even to himself. "It's just that some days... I don't know."

"Some days, one feels like everything has already happened, and there's nothing good to expect anymore...?"

Lestrade nods.

"But there is, you know."

"I do know. I don't *feel* it."

"Perhaps there's something we can do about it."

John stands, glancing purposefully at Sherlock in the next room, and sits on Lestrade's left.

Sherlock brings a rug, an old afghan throw Lestrade favours.

"Move over," he murmurs, and eases himself on Lestrade's right, tucking the rug deftly around John's and Lestrade's shoulders, then his own.

"Better?"

"Definitely better."

"One more thing," Sherlock mumbles, and without disturbing the cocoon enveloping the three of them, he extends one foot, hooks his toes under the tea-table and pulls it nearer.

"Feet up," he orders. "John, you too."

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It is 10:22 pm at 221B Baker Street.

There are three pairs of feet, crossed and mixed on the inlaid tabletop, three men comfortably slouched on a sofa.

One is sleeping and softly snoring.

One is almost asleep.

One is very much awake and yet (how unusual!) ...peaceful.

London hums and buzzes outside, and life is a lot of hard work one sometimes is not quite willing to do.

But tonight, Lestrade's last thought before his eyes close is that it's worth the effort after all.

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