

## **A Desert Blessing, An Ocean Curse**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/396872) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/396872>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Sherlock (TV)</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Sherlock Holmes/John Watson</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Sherlock Holmes</a> , <a href="#">John Watson</a> , <a href="#">Greg Lestrade</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Sensory Overload</a> , <a href="#">Established Relationship</a> , <a href="#">Mentions of past drug abuse</a> , <a href="#">Hurt/Comfort</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2012-05-03 Words: 3,203 Chapters: 1/1

# A Desert Blessing, An Ocean Curse

by [too many stars to count \(imagined\\_away\)](#)

## Summary

Without cases to help him sort what's useful and what can be discarded Sherlock is left observing everything, regardless of if he wants to or not. John just wants to help Sherlock however he can.

## Notes

The title of this fic is taken from John Green's book The Fault in Our Stars which I highly recommend.

This is both unbeta'd and relies on my fragile (American) understanding of British phrases and words. If you notice a mistake I'd be forever grateful if you could point it out. Thank you!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Everything is so bloody *loud*.

It's been two weeks since Sherlock's had a case.

Two. Weeks.

Two weeks of nothing. Nothing to puzzle over, nothing to find, nothing to solve, just *nothing*. And Sherlock's brain is turning all those brilliantly sharp edges in on itself.

:::

The flat's empty.

That should be good. Hell, it should be bloody marvelous. No distractions to help overload his already strained senses; no jarringly loud noises, or bright lights. There's no telly, no stench of cooking food, none of John's inane chatter, or the incessant hum of Mrs. Hudson hovering. Nothing is forcing him to stay clothed in fabrics that rub and itch so much they make him wish he could tear his own skin clean off. The only noise he's forced to endure is the occasional rumble of a passing car or snatches of conversation drifting up from the street below.

The flat's empty and that should be good. But it's not.

Because somehow the flat seems to assault his senses even more without John around. If John were here he'd be able to tell with one look that something is wrong with Sherlock. John wouldn't cook and try to force Sherlock to eat. And since they've been shagging for nearly five months now it's highly doubtful John would protest his near nudity.

No, if John were here he'd turn the telly and the lights off. He'd take Sherlock to their bedroom and pull the shades, making the room as dark as possible. If that wasn't enough he'd find the blindfold Sherlock keeps for times like this. John would strip down, find the softest blanket they own and wrap it around both of them, shielding Sherlock from the outside world. Then he'd murmur into Sherlock's ear until John's voice was the only thing he could hear. And in that cocoon of nothingness Sherlock could finally, *finally*, relax.

It's never happened before but Sherlock knows John and so he knows exactly how it would go.

There's a reason it's never happened before though. Sherlock hates for *anyone* to see him like this. Mycroft has, of course, especially when Sherlock was a child but it's been years. Lestrade has as well when Sherlock was coming off the cocaine in a bad way, but he's never been able to properly define their relationship anyways. The word *paternal* comes to mind but he fears he may be letting sentiment get the best of him, taking cues that he only imagines (wishes) are there. Regardless Sherlock has always been vastly uncomfortable with being seen by anyone when he feels so disgustingly weak and exposed. The idea of John bearing witness to it is simply unacceptable.

So, when John had bounded into the kitchen of 221b fresh from the surgery and asked Sherlock what he fancied for dinner, he'd done his level best to get John out of the flat. Sherlock had pushed himself up, tried desperately to brace himself for the amount of *noise* he was about to make himself endure, and gone on the best tirade he could manage.

He's the first to admit it hadn't been up to his usual standards. Still, he'd manage to insult John's abilities as a doctor, Harry, and, in a last minute burst of desperation, his performance in bed. John, for his part, had remained unusually quiet. He'd tapped out a text, raised his eyebrows after the result *buzz* signaling a response – the sound made Sherlock rip his own ears off – and left.

That had been an hour and a half ago. Sherlock has spent the entire time trying to force himself into his bedroom. There he has earplugs, and a blindfold, and the softest sheets which never scratch at his skin. But the prospect of getting there – the squeak of the couch, the feel of carpet, then the linoleum of the kitchen, then hardwood, followed by more scratchy carpet in his room, the glare of the lights so he can *find* everything, the possibility of having to change his sheets – had been too unbearable to even contemplate for long. All he's managed to do since John left the flat is peel off his dressing gown and pajama bottoms. Thankfully it was still light when John left so the room has transitioned into a darkness Sherlock can mostly bear. Beyond the haze of pain he's still distantly grateful no one sees him like this. Then he hears it.

John is coming upstairs.

: : :

John stares, waiting for more, but Sherlock's rant is apparently over. Something is most definitely wrong. Sherlock isn't even *looking* at him. He considers his options, then pulls out his phone, *Up for a pint?* Lestrade answers almost immediately, *Sherlock having a bad time of it? The usual in 15?* Well. It seems he's the only one completely in the dark here. Best find out what's going on then.

He considers saying goodbye but after the agonized face Sherlock made when the phone went off he decides against it.

Spring is finally starting to emerge and John doesn't bother to zip up his coat. The days are getting longer and it's still light out when John reaches his usual pub. The Freckled Pig – a name that makes no sense to John or Lestrade but which Sherlock could probably figure out in seconds – is only a couple of blocks from Baker Street. Lestrade's place is only a few minute drive in the other direction and they've taken to sharing a pint now and again. Plus they root for the same teams and trying to watch a match around Sherlock is an exercise in masochism.

Lestrade is already sitting at the bar when John comes in. He's watching the rugby match on the telly but turns away once he spots John.

“Do I even want to know?” John asks.

“You don't mate.” He gives the telly one last glance. “It's an embarrassment to the concept of sport.

They order drinks which Lestrade insist on paying for. “If Sherlock's having a rough time, you will too. Trust me, you don't want to be turning down free alcohol at the moment.”

John smiles despite himself. “Thanks, Greg.”

“My pleasure. You live with the man after all, least I can do. Let's go sit somewhere we can ignore this travesty.”

They do, ending up in the back corner studiously ignoring the groans and yells the other patrons direct at the telly. “So, Sherlock's not doing well I take it?” Lestrade leans back in the booth looking grim.

“I don't know what the hell is going on.” John admits. “There haven't been any cases lately but he seemed fine. A little moody but, Christ, this is Sherlock we're talking about. He was fine last night. I don't think he ever actually came to bed, he was in the sitting room when I woke up this morning, but he does that sometimes. Yelled at me when I was making breakfast, said I was being too loud. But he ate it, even said bye when I left for work. And then I came home and...”

Lestrade takes a sip of his beer and then sighs. “How long has he been without a case?”

John racks his brains, “Uh, two weeks now I think? Yeah, we were on your case with that whole rug smuggling fiasco,” And hadn't *that* been something else. He'd almost gotten crushed to death by bloody *rugs* . “That was the last one. Why?”

Instead of answering, Lestrade asks another question. “What's the longest you've ever seen Sherlock without a case? Not counting these past two weeks.”

John takes a sip of his pint and thinks. “Seven or eight days at the most. This is the longest dry spell he's had in the two years I've been living with him.”

“Yeah, and there's a reason for that.” Lestrade tells him. “You know how his mind works, John. He can't just shut it off as he please. And a mind like that,” he shakes his head. “Mind like that needs stimulation but it also needs something to *focus* on. That's what the cases do for Sherlock. They give all of that raw data he takes in and puts it to a use.”

“And what happens when there's no focus point?” John asks. He doesn't think he wants to know the answer but this is his lover and he needs to know if he's to be of any help to Sherlock.

“His brain goes into overdrive. He's constantly taking in information with no use for it. His sense all get cranked up to eleven.” Lestrade gives John a measuring, searching, sort of look. What he's looking for though John has no idea.

“Listen, I don't know how much of Sherlock's past or how we met you know about, but if you'd have told me that he'd still be alive seven years on, I wouldn't have believed it. He was

half dead when we met.” Lestrade says plainly.

“He told me it was you that helped him finally get clean.” Something John does not even have the words to express his gratefulness for. “Said he dried out at your place.”

Lestrade snorts. “I didn't give him much of a choice. After five months of watching him show up to crime scenes high as a bloody kite I went 'round his and gave him a choice. Get clean or stay the hell off my crime scenes.” John gives a low whistle. “Yeah, and no one else was working with him yet. I like catching murders but I also like not having the death of 24-year-old geniuses on my conscience.” He says with a grim face.

“You know him, couldn't bear to lose the work. So I cleaned out his flat and then brought him back to mine.” Lestrade pauses, shaking his head. “It wasn't pretty, John. Once Sherlock made up his mind to get clean he was committed as all hell but an addiction's an addiction.” John nods, he knows this all too well.

“I thought I'd seen him out of it before but it was nothing in comparison. He was in a lot of pain, especially at the beginning, and had nothing to keep him busy. I thought he might be cracking up for a few days there.” Lestrade admits.

“Did anything help?” John inquires, gripping his drink to keep his hands steady.

Lestrade shrugs. “Liked to keep the lights off, no loud noises. I could barely get him to keep his bloody clothes on half the time. I tried giving him puzzles and stuff at first but it was useless. He solved a month worth of crosswords in under two hours and then spent three telling me what an idiot I was in at least four different languages. After a week I started bringing cold cases home with me. He was still in withdrawal but it was much easier on him once he was occupied.”

John lets out a breath. “Christ, Greg. Thanks. For – fuck, for keeping him alive all these years.”

“Bastard just needed someone to look after him.” He says with a wave of his hand. “I did drugs busts on him on my own for a while – you should have seen some of the flats he was in, too, bloody hell holes – but it turned into a game for him after a while. He'd hide things all over the flat for me to find while I did searched. Relapsed. Twice. But we got him sorted in the end. Been clean four years now.” Lestrade's smile is not unlike a proud parent's and John has to smile back.

“Besides,” he continues, a wicked smile on his face, “He's got you to badger now.”

“It is my duty and my honor.” John says with a mock salute of his drink.

“And the people of London thank you for it.” Lestrade assures him raising his own glass in return.

:::

Twenty minutes later John is nearly back at Baker Street. Lestrade has promised to look for an interesting cold case to send Sherlock tomorrow and John feels much more prepared as he climbs the stairs to 221b.

It's well past dark now but none of the lights in the flat are on when John walks in. He shrugs off his coat and considers turning them on but leaves it reckoning he can see well enough not to run into a wall. "Sherlock?" He calls, turning towards the bedroom.

"Don't turn the light on." Begs a voice from the couch. John turns, reaching for a gun that's not there.

"Bloody hell, Sherlock, you nearly gave me a heart attack. Have you been there since I left?" John walks carefully towards Sherlock, mindful of anything that may have found its way to the floor in the past hour or so.

"You saw Lestrade tonight. Only had one drink. Must have been at the Freckled Pig, you smell like their roasted pork sandwich but not strongly enough to have eaten one yourself. Cologne too. Not yours or Lestrade's, must have been sitting close to someone who overdid it – probably had a date." John lowers himself to the floor next to the sofa. He reaches for Sherlock, only a little surprised as his hand meets the bare skin of his thigh. As Sherlock continues to rattle off deductions at an alarming rate, John moves his hand up his partner's body in what he hopes is a soothing manner.

"Mrs. Hudson took a particularly long bath today before she left to visit her sister for the weekend. Drained it twice to add more hot water. Must be her hip. She should see a doctor, get some actual pain medication, you could see her John save her having to find someone. You've been working long hours at the surgery even though flu season is well over by now, must be the start of allergies, even in an urban setting such as London the pollen count has become absolutely atrocious. The pub must have been crowded, there was a flier on the street for some sort of rugby match, wonderful excuse for idiots to get drunk in large groups. You didn't need your coat, you knew that, you'd just come in, hadn't even taken it off yet, but I suppose you like the heaviness of it, makes you feel safer. You walked home, think we spend too much on cabs even though you've surely noticed Mycroft reimburses you for the case related ones on a weekly basis because he knows I'll refuse the money and it saves Scotland Yard from trying to pick us up in police cars constantly. I suppose – "

"Sherlock." John says firmly cutting his partner off mid-sentence. He presses down on Sherlock's shoulders letting his hands act as anchors. The streetlights and time have allowed John's eyes to adjust to the darkened room well enough to see the sliver of Sherlock's face that is turned towards him. "Look at me."

He does and John almost wishes he hadn't. Sherlock looks so *lost*, his hands gripping John's wrists like they're the only thing keeping him held together. "I need you to take a deep breath and then tell me what's wrong. Okay? Let's try it. Go on."

The breath is shaky and somewhat desperate but far more desperate is Sherlock's voice as he chokes out, "There's *so much* to observe, John. All of it. Every little thing is pressing in on me, and I've got nothing to do with it, it doesn't *belong* anywhere. It's just rolling around in

my head constantly and I can't control it. All of my files are opening one after another and there's so much data to process but no where for it to *go*. ”

His face is pleading and broken and John's heart breaks for his beloved mad genius. He has to find a way to help. Sherlock's entire body is straining towards him and a fine tremor is causing him to shake beneath John's hands. It looks as if at any moment Sherlock is going to shatter into a million pieces. Well, not on John's watch he won't.

“Okay,” John says, cutting into what has become rambling on Sherlock's part. “Okay, I get the idea.” Now what the fuck is he supposed to do. *Think!* He tells himself firmly. Sensory overload, he's in sensory overload. Well, that he can handle, John supposes.

“Sherlock.” He says softly, voice barely above a whisper. “Hush. Just – just be quiet for a moment. We're going to go to the bedroom. Your bedroom,” John clarifies, since it's the closer of the two. For some reason Sherlock, who had been listening impassively, tenses. Oh. Of course. “*Our* bedroom,” John corrects himself. Sherlock's usual distaste of claiming either bedroom as belonging to only one of them has clearly been amplified as well tonight. Sure enough he relaxes and John risks running his hand through tumbled curls.

“Come on,” John urges gently. “You can keep your eyes closed if it helps, I'll guide you. It's okay, Sherlock, you're going to be okay. I've got you, I promise. I'm right here.”

: : :

John reacts much the way Sherlock anticipated he would. And then, because he is the John Watson Sherlock fell in love with, he surprises him.

In a stroke of luck Sherlock's softest sheets – Egyptian cotton, absurdly high thread count, a gift from Mycroft too useful to throw away – are currently on the bed. John strips them both (Sherlock's already down to just his pants), lays Sherlock down, pulls the ridiculously soft afghan Mrs. Hudson knit them for Christmas out of the hall cupboard and covers him with it.

Sherlock closes his eyes but he can still hear John padding around the room. He turns a fan on pointing it towards the wall – *ah* white noise! He's no longer subjected to the outside sounds of Baker Street – and then closes the windows pulling the curtains tight. There's a dip as John climbs into bed and Sherlock opens his eyes to near perfect darkness. “Thank – ”

“Hush.” John admonishes softly. Sherlock feels rather than sees John hold out his arms and he curls into them gratefully. “I've got you.” John promises again arranging them so that Sherlock's ear is directly over his heartbeat.

The steady *thump, thump*, is glorious but not quite enough. He needs *more*, he needs *order* and John, perfect, wonderful John seems to realize it. He stops in the middle of reciting a familiar sounding poem and, after a beat, says “Scapula.”

It takes a pathetically long time – damn his brain and it's current overload – for Sherlock to venture, “Humerus,” in a hatefully shaky voice. He feels John nod and kiss the top of his head.



“Radius,” he prompts and Sherlock manages to respond a bit quicker this time.

Together, slowly at first but with gaining speed and sureness, they go through every bone in the human body. By the end Sherlock's systems are starting to come back online. He's exhausted and only manages a clumsy kiss to a scarred shoulder and a mumbled, but heartfelt, “John.”

“Anytime, Sherlock.” John knows what it means. He always does. He settles them more comfortably on the bed and whispers, “I love you. Get some sleep.”

And, remarkably, he does.

## End Notes

I suffer from occasional sensory overload due to fibromyalgia and other medical issues. A lot of times I want to block everything out however I can. I've seen some wonderful fics in this fandom that explore that idea, often with John to help.

At other times however the right person can help me reign myself in and clamp down on the chaos. They act as anchor so to speak that allows me to find control one piece at a time over my sensory input. I wanted to explore that concept with John and Sherlock in this fic and how I felt it would play out.

I hope you enjoyed and as always I welcome any feedback or questions.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!