

on the demise of a perfectly good pair of gloves, and other items of clothing

by mazaher

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Believe it or not, this came to me as a hypnagogical image in the middle of the night as, half-asleep, I tried in vain to arrange my aching leg around my sleeping cat.

Warning: Major character clothes' death.

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They say sociopaths lack the ability for empathy.

They say Sherlock's heart was missing in the assembly package and was never implemented. Strange how these are the thoughts that flit like bats through my mind as I lay on the wet dirty pavement in a nearly pitch-dark alley near the docks of London, trying to draw the next breath and failing, while the hurried sound of Sherlock's footsteps dissolves in the distance as he pursues his quarry.

Guess they were right after all.

I make a new effort to pull in air. The ER-trained practitioner in me detachedly observes that unless I manage to inhale some oxygen within the next 50 seconds or so, I'm going to lose consciousness.

My diaphragm however refuses to budge.

I try again.

Nothing.

I start to count down the seconds. It would be nice, before dying, to know if my estimate was right.

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But no, I have been overly optimistic. I barely get to 19 when I start to hallucinate.

I hear footsteps coming this way, then running toward me. Sherlock's.

Or is it... Is this real?

I turn to look, and here he is in the flesh and bone. I feel the warmth of his body. I see the small clouds of condensation as he pants.

He throws himself on his knees on this muck, uncaring for his perfectly creased trousers, and as I try to focus I see him covering his face with his gloved hands.

It is only a moment. He leans forward and raises my torso by the shoulders. His hand slides down along my spine, comes up wet with a dark sticky substance. Just then my airflow unlocks and I gulp, blissful air at last...

Carefully he settles me down with my back to the brick wall as I close my eyes and keep drawing air in and out. There is a horrible rhythmic noise, like a death rattle. After a moment, I realise it is me. I open my eyes again, and see Sherlock's face. He's white as a sheet as he stares at the soggy stains on his gloves. Completely ruined.

But then he looks up at me and I *see*.

He doesn't care for the gloves just now.

I fight to speak.

"Vagal block," I croak. "Push me... up."

He slides his hands under my armpits and sits me more upright, then unbuttons the collar of the shirt I wear under my sweater and jacket. It's the light blue one he gave me. He said it didn't fit him, too short in the arms. But he never makes such mistakes when shopping for shirts. Now the collar is smeared with that sticky dark mess. What a shame. I liked this shirt. He sits back on his heels, hands on his knees, and watches me. Goodbye to his trousers too, then. He keeps watching, I keep breathing. My lungs seem to have come to some sort of an agreement with my diaphragm. The noise decreases to a sort of sick snore. I smile.

He frowns.

"Temporary. Will pass soon."

He shudders and blanches a shade further. He still doesn't get it.

"Not blood."

His eyes go wide, his lips part.

"Not blood...?"

"Paint," I whisper. "Slipped and fell..." (I cough once or twice) "...back on the tin he threw after me."

He gasps.

I look up.

He's radiant.

Like a light has been turned on.

Then he sees me watching him, and he looks to the side for a moment, tames his grin to a small dry smile, then turns to face me again.

"All right, then?"

"Soon."

"Soon. Soon is fine."

"The man? ...the chap you ran after?". When your breathing is short, you are more likely to butcher grammar.

"Fuck the man. I'll catch him later."

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They say things about sociopaths.

They say things about Sherlock.

But I know better.

They are wrong.

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