

The return of Hyakutake

by mazaher

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Betaed by E., whose idea it was in the first place.

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Mycroft didn't take an hour before he came and told me. There was an inner light in his eyes, which shone through his mortification as he presented his apologies and explanations for having kept me in the dark about Sherlock's survival and whereabouts during these three neverending years.

I don't need his apologies. I know he strives so hard to do the right thing. Sometimes he makes mistakes: who doesn't? He is not God (and anyway I'm not sure He doesn't go wrong Himself, once in a while). Sometimes we just don't agree on something. That's fine. I hate the old hackneyed phrase "because Mummy says so".

Sherlock waited thirteen days before coming to see me.

They felt longer than the three years when I believed him dead.

But I understand.

"He's safe and sound, but he did have a hard time," Mycroft had said. I am not surprised that he wanted to get himself presentable for me. Not as a way of disguising what he's gone through: rather, as a way of telling me that everything is all right again, now. Making his mien not a lie, but a truth. For me, a redress after the piercing lie of his death.

When he finally walked through the door of the blue drawing room, I almost couldn't hold myself. It was hard for me not to reach out for him, but he was looking down, unable to meet my eyes. I felt he was treading a fine line, just this side of being overwhelmed.

I stood.

He stopped four feet from me.

Only then he raised his eyes to mine. Irises pale as ice around dilated pupils. He shivered visibly, although the room was warm enough.

"Come, son," I said quietly. "Sit with me."

He sat carefully. His shoulder muscles tend to cramp when he's worried; I saw them twitch minutely. He leant forward, elbows on his knees, chin on joined hands, in the attitude I saw him get used to taking as a default since he was five or six, when the happy sprawl of his early childhood was giving way to an unconsciously defensive pose against the painful doubts of facing the world of adults.

"You have been ill about two years ago and again last April-- no, late March, but you are well now. You look good. Not aged at all."

"Good news are a drink from the fountain of youth. I had the most excellent news less than two weeks ago."

He gave me a quick smile at that. I longed to hold him, like I did when he was very small and he was upset at something he didn't understand, but it is more than thirty years since the last time he allowed me to. I know he can't afford the weakness now, not if he wants to stand up, get back to work and take his place once again in his world.

Instead, I leant myself over the tea table and offered my upturned palm. He covered my hand with his --large, warm, nervous-- and I saw his nostrils quiver as he caught a whiff of my talcum powder. He's always loved orris root.

I watched him, reading the story these three years have written on him. A slightly hunched pose, as though he had to curl on himself often to disguise his height. Loss of weight he

couldn't afford to lose in the first place. Movement in his left elbow a little awkward, the aftermath of some ulnar nerve trauma. Thin lines around his eyes, left by dehydration and possibly squinting against the sun. I doubt that he had many occasions to smile after... After.

Death always leaves signs, even when it's faked.

I remember him as a child, how fascinated he was by death. Picking up carcasses in the garden and watching them change along the days. The day he turned ten, we watched together Peter Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts*. He was left wide-eyed and full of wonder at the photographic records of decomposition and at the fiendish symmetry pervading each frame of the film.

Suddenly, the lawnmower backfired at the far end of the garden, making him start, but he settled down again with a small sigh.

We always loved our silent, catlike conversations, rare as they have been in the last twenty years or so. How short the time when I could say he was mine-- if he ever really was.

The longer I live, the more I am convinced that there is precious little difference between men and women. We're all in the same boat, navigating the same perilous waters of life.

But one difference, gleaned from observation of others as well as myself, is perhaps this: daughters are meteors, hurtling thorough space on a track of their own and rushing farther and farther from their origin, but sons are comets, going around the most elongated of orbits but sooner or later coming back to their focus.

Daughters always try to escape their mothers; sons will always return to theirs.

My son has come back from the dead. He has been given to me once again; once again, I have two shining sons.

It is more than I could ever hope or ask for.

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About comet Hyakutake, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comet_Hyakutake.

Image credits: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hyakutake_Color.jpg