

In silence speaking. A ghost story

by mazaher

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London SW1Y 5ER.

Rain.

Friday night.

An unassuming corridor in an unassuming apartment building in Waterloo Place, round the corner from Pall Mall.

Click. A key slips in the latch.

Cla-clack. The key turns.

Ssshh. A well-oiled door turns almost silently on its hinges.

Shrt-shrt. A quick brush of smooth wet leather soles on a thick palmyra doormat.

Tap, tap, tap. The tip of an umbrella in synch with a confident step through the threshold.

Slap-click. The door snaps shut.

Mycroft Holmes is home for the weekend.

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He takes off his coat and jacket and hangs both in the hall wardrobe.

He slips out of his shoes and carefully arranges them at the end of a queue of six other pairs at the bottom.

He puts on well-worn nappa leather slippers, burgundy, a New Year's gift that Anthea (then Kivarose, if he remembers correctly) gave him in 2000.

He unbuttons his waistcoat and loosens his tie.

He had Welsh rabbit¹ earlier at the Diogenes Club, and he doesn't feel like dinner right now.

He pours himself some cognac and sits on his father's old leather chair in front of the unlit fireplace.

One year and nine hours ago his brother plunged to his death from the roof of St. Bart's.

The glass feels cold in his hand. He swirls the amber liquor, sniffs the aroma. Backlighting by the lamp, the colour is rich like red gold. He raises the glass.

"Sherlock," he murmurs.

He drinks, then stands, and throws the glass in the fireplace. One sliver rebounds, catches his cheekbone, draws one drop of blood as he pulls it out between thumb and index. He flicks it among the rest of the shards.

He sits down again.

He turns off the lamp.

He falls asleep.

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Dawn is still two hours away, but something draws Mycroft suddenly to complete wakefulness. He shivers --his hands are chilled-- but it was not the cold that broke his sleep. He can feel his hair rising on the nape of his neck. No sound, no smell, no movement of air, yet he can feel a presence near, and he can't say in which world: the inner world of dreams, the outer world of the so-called consensual reality.

He doesn't turn on the light. It would partially blind him for about four minutes, and distract him anyway from an immediate scan of the space around him.

He closes his eyes instead, slows his breathing to a noiseless rhythm, and tries to filter out the accelerated beat of his heart.

He listens.

He tries to catch a pattern, as though chasing the identity of a smell so well-known that it becomes unrecognizable out of its usual context. What does **this** feel like?

It feels like...

¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2011/oct/27/how-to-cook-perfect-welsh-rarebit>

Like...

"Sherlock?" he whispers.

Impossible. He's seen his brother's body, smashed and bloodied, limp and *dead*.

So very dead. More than Father's ever appeared, composed and serious in his casket, a white carnation slowly wilting in his clasped hands.

Inner world, then. A dream.

But Mycroft isn't so sure he's awake right now, because he's hearing the tiniest tick right behind the chair, where one plank in the oak floor is minutely warped out of line.

He takes a deeper breath and holds it for a moment.

Then,

"You are welcome here," he whispers.

He surprises himself when his next breath threatens to become a sob. But in whichever world the words are going to be heard, there is something he needs to say, and he will say it.

"I am very sorry. I should have had Moriarty killed when I could, and I didn't. The wrong moment for moral scruples, as it turned out."

He passes one cold hand over his face, pinches the bridge of his nose.

"What do you need?"

The silence is complete, unnerving.

Mycroft knows with chilling clarity that he could be very well be talking to himself. He doesn't care a damn.

"I'd give anything... almost anything, truth be told, to grant you some peace."

The sound of an ambulance siren breaks the eerie quiet, comes nearer, sharper, then fades low and disappears.

Mycroft shivers.

"I don't know what the view is like from where you are right now, but you should know that Dr. Watson refuses my help. In fact, he refuses to have anything at all to do with me. He's looked after by the landlady and is again on good terms with D.I. Lestrade. He took twelve sessions of therapy with Dr. Ella Thompson. He has been writing a long article about... It will be published soon on the newsletters of five human rights organizations. He appears to be seeing rather a lot of a Miss Mary Morstan. It seems he still fights tears whenever your name is mentioned. As inconvenient as you and I may think it to be, he cares. Many others do."

Mycroft stops, squeezes his eyes.

"*I* do."

That tick again. A woodworm? Or...

"I have been keeping an eye on Moriarty's organization. It's being unraveled bit by bit. How and why, it's unclear. It may just be that things are falling apart after his death, like a sphere puzzle when you pull out the pin. Sometimes I almost think it looks like you, working to bring them down. But you're dead. I saw you dead. Didn't I? ...aren't you?"

Nothing. A sudden nothingness surrounds him.

Mycroft reaches for the lamp switch and turns on the light.

The room is empty, but a curtain is fluttering weakly. Mycroft walks to the window-- ajar; he looks out, down, up. Night, rain, the terse lights of London reflected in drops and puddles.

Mycroft pulls himself in.

He closes the window and draws the curtain.

He goes to bed.

He sleeps deeply.

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