

## **Where we belong**

by mazaher

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*The time after EMPT, from the pov of Mrs. Martha Hudson.*

*A threesome, prompted by the challenge issued by tweedisgood during the rewatch of the Granada episodes of The Final Problem and The Empty House.*

*Because, why should mature women be denied sex?*

*Posted in haste –unbetaed-- on Epiphany day, when the ancient lonely hag, Befana, brings small gifts to the children. To honour all the older ladies through the fandoms.*

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There comes a time in life when the losses begin to exceed the gains. When every year takes away something, and you know nothing will come to fill the void.

I am an old woman, and that moment came early enough for me. At 23 I lost my second, newborn son Albert to measles, at 37 my husband Richard to tetanus, at 41 my first son Edward to a carriage accident, at 59 my best friend and neighbour, Sarah Turner, to heart failure. I was exactly 60 when my lodger, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, died in Switzerland.

I only knew of the tragedy nine days later, when my other former lodger, Dr. John Watson, knocked on my door with a lonely, long-stemmed red rose in his hand and grief on his face.

I felt suddenly old, and so did he.

It feels wrong, being left behind when someone younger dies...

And Holmes was a flame burning so bright.

The world seemed darker, more gray.

For three years I felt like I wasn't really awake. Watson would visit, of course-- but we both felt like the only topic we could really talk about was the very topic we didn't want to touch.

We were waiting, with nothing to expect anymore.

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Then, one day, he was there at my doorstep. Tired, so tired, and much too thin, and tense as a bowstring, but as alive as he had ever been. I thought I'd die then and there, and we'd only have that brief, glorious moment to touch again: but then I didn't. He opened his arms, and I nestled there as though I had never been left behind. As if he'd never left. Nobody was there to watch. We stood for a long time in the hall, silent, listening to each other's breath calming down slowly.

He was the first to move.

"I'm still in danger," he murmured, placing the gentlest kiss upon my hair. "Would you please help me?"

"What a silly question," I answered, my heart bucking in my throat. "What shall I do?"

He told me what, and he's clever, oh such a clever young man. Clever, reckless, brave, and as true a steel as was ever forged.

It was an eventful day. By the end, I was dead tired with tension and effort. It was worth it just to see the Doctor's face gone all soft and happy – he looked ten years the younger. We celebrated with Veuve Cliquot. I didn't want to leave them. Even as the night grew old, they didn't ask me to.

This happened a week ago.

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After a day's work, it is a relief to slip out of stiff clothes and into my nightgown. I let my hair down and brush it, then I make it into a long loose plait. It is late now, well past midnight, and they're sleeping. But an old woman like me needs less sleep and more time alone. The wealth of events that makes up a life is wasted if its owner doesn't take regular inventory; night-time is ideal, when London is quiet and darkness makes it easy to see the past clearly.

I have lost much. But since Holmes returned to his Doctor, and since both returned to me, I find that much is being given me, freely, unexpectedly, generously. My life is not going out in a whimper. It's curling up in warmth and licking upward like a flame. After years sleeping alone, I'm sleeping with them. Or rather, not always sleeping. Why, you may ask. Shouldn't I have left behind by now the urges of the flesh and reached what is euphemistically called "the peace of the senses"? To say nothing of the ungodly liaison I tolerate under my roof: I should cut it at the roots and burn the remains, not compound it by taking part. A woman, a lady, at my age...! Why not, I answer. I am old, but I'm more alive than I felt since a long time. Affection, fondness, love, have a million ways to manifest if only given free rein. We choose to share it. Love overflows and nothing is wasted. There's more: what they have between them is magical, and magic needs three, taking turns at giving, receiving, witnessing. I am the rod discharging the lightning of their contact. Sometimes, when they gaze at each other like the rest of the world doesn't exist, the intensity is such that it hurts. It's easier for them both when they watch the other with me: like looking at sunlight spreading over the rooftops of London, rather than staring directly at the sun. But what about the practical matters, you will mischievously insist. How can I...? You know, one is clever, the other is patient: they can still make my body join my mind and my heart, all rejoicing in the sharing of life. Or, if you look at it from the other side... They are easy for me to pleasure. Men nowadays are so embroiled by the shackles of society that a myriad simple delights are left untasted; moreover, they are trained from early childhood to be wary of each other's bodies, so that they sometimes hold back in bed in a way they won't with a woman. And -bless them-- a woman is how they see me. Not a widow, a mother, a housekeeper or a landlady; not a role, but a person. Who loves them, and is loved in turn. I can imagine no higher honour. So I don't care a damn for what would be thought of me, of them, if this was known: we take good care that it remains strictly our own business. I care even less for my immortal soul, if ever it should turn out that I have one: I'm sure the three of us can agree that there is no worse sin in this bright, cruel world than that of love denied.

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I check the lock on the door and the curtains at the windows.  
I turn off the gaslight.  
I pad to the bedroom and step out of my slippers.  
The Doctor is sleeping supine and lightly snoring, his compact, strong body slightly rounded in that middle age my husband never reached. One arm is folded across his chest, his hand held fast by Holmes who is deeply asleep on his side, his face hidden in his lover's neck and one long leg thrown across both the Doctor's. I slip into bed behind Holmes, enjoying the warmth of that lean, tight greyhound body of his, and curl my arm around his side to lay on his belly. I listen to our breaths synchronising.  
We are where we belong.

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