

Proof of Life

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Proof of Life

by [LuvAtFirstRead](#)

Summary

Sherlock's been missing for 24 hours now, when the video arrives at the station.

Whumptober day 6:

Prompts: ~~Ransom Video~~ | ~~"I've got a pulse."~~ | Screams from Across the Hall

Sherlock's been missing for almost 24 hours now, and John is about to **actually** go insane. There's been nothing, nada, zilch, since the self-proclaimed consulting detective had left to go meet a client, only for her to get into contact with John an hour later, fuming, going on about how Sherlock had never shown up for their meeting.

Now, this was not immediately alarming, as he did tend to go off to do his own thing at the most inopportune times, often leaving John behind to clean up after him. So the latter just assumed that this was another one of those cases, where the detective had seen something shiny and run off after it.

It was slightly concerning when he didn't respond to any of John's texts at all within the next few hours, though he didn't attempt a phone call in fear of putting his housemate in peril. After four hours of radio silence, John finally decided on going to the police station, if anything, to check if Sherlock had contacted them. Although it was certainly not the longest amount of time that the other had been gone, the soldier couldn't help but have a bad feeling in his gut that something was very, very wrong.

Apparently, Sherlock hadn't been there or in contact with them at all all day, but what was slightly worrying was that they hadn't handed him any new cases recently either. Things had been slow recently, which John's flatmate had been extremely vocal about, but that meant that he had stumbled onto a case on his own; never a good thing.

Sherlock is as Sherlock does, though, so there wasn't much to be done besides hope for the best and return to the flat. Lestrade did promise John that he would keep a lookout for the rogue detective though, which was something, and so he left with that bad feeling still lingering in his gut.

Mrs. Hudson also seemed to sense that something wasn't right when he returned, and decided that they would eat dinner together. It was a somber affair with little discussion, the only sounds during it those of chewing and utensils sliding over ceramic plates.

That night, John went to bed early, though the bad feeling stayed and kept him awake as he listened for loud steps on the staircase, that familiar obnoxious voice yelling through the flat, grating music on the violin, anything to prove that his worry was all in his head and that Sherlock was just being a jerk as usual. Silence prevailed.

True sleep that night proved a futile thing to attempt, although John seemed to fall off into a light and troubled doze at one point, waking up feeling absolutely terrible. He was ready to lay back again, since he had nothing better to do and no motivation to do anything anyway, when he heard a crash in the kitchen. In a flash he was up and out of his room, thinking that he was going to tear the blithering detective a new one but with a huge smile on his face, until he actually reached and looked inside of the kitchen.

Mrs. Hudson was in it, kneeled down on the floor, picking up the shards of what looked like a broken cup. She looked up at him apologetically as he approached. "Oh, I'm sorry for bothering you, John. I've never been the most graceful, and old age doesn't help." She chuckled to herself and stood up, the largest pieces in her hand.

As Mrs. Hudson went to throw them away, John couldn't help but let his face fall. The older woman sent him an understanding look.

"I know. Usually it's him making the messes in the kitchen." She smiled sadly.

John sighed. "Yeah, I guess I'm just..."

"Worried about him?"

"Seems about right," said John, breathing out heavily. An awkward silence, one unfamiliar to 221b, fell over the two and, after a moment, John cleared his throat and said, "Well, I had better... be off. Should probably check in at the police station."

"That's a good idea, dear. Tell me if anything happens. I've made tea if you want any, and I'll be out of your hair."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hudson. And I will. Keep you updated."

From there on, the day progressed in a grey blur. John attempted to text Sherlock again, but there was no reply; not even the messages from the day before had been read. The police station had nothing new to say, and it was only as he was on his way back from it when the seemingly obvious thing to do struck him.

Honestly, John was amazed that it took him so long to think of it; in just a few seconds, waiting for a cab, he had dialed Mycroft.

The man responded almost immediately, and the soldier could detect worry and panic, but also hope masked beneath his response of "John. I assume this is about Sherlock?"

"Yes, it is. I wanted to know if you had anything on him, being the British government and such." His cab had arrived by then, and John got in absentmindedly, biting his lower lip in anticipation for the other's answer. Mycroft sighed on the other end of the line, and he felt his heart sink to his stomach.

"Only a minor position," he mumbled, seemingly on instinct. "I was actually hoping you could tell me something. I guess it's up to me to dig my idiot brother out of whatever hole he's gotten himself into this time." The disappointment in the older Holmes' voice was evident, which said a lot for his mental state at the moment.

John sat in silence for a second before asking, "So he really is missing, then?"

"Obviously, although I do understand your mistrust over the situation. I currently have people looking for him, but we have no leads so far." Frustration bled into his tone now, which was very worrying.

"Well prepared, then," John hazarded.

At this, Mycroft chuckled softly. "My brother's had an influence on you. Maybe there's more up there in that empty little mind of yours than I had originally thought."

It was not meant seriously; not completely, at least. Their relationship had been, well, not friendly, per say, but nice. Nicer than a lot of both of their relationships with others. John chuckled sadly. “Not enough, apparently.” Pause. “Tell me if you learn anything.”

“As long as you do the same,” Mycroft responded.

“Yes, sir.” The cab returned to the flat on Baker Street just as the line disconnected, and John braced himself for an underdetermined time of crippling silence.

It was actually only a few hours later that he received a call from Lestrade, bordering on frantic, telling him to come to the police station immediately. At this, the soldier was up in a flash, thoughts going a mile a minute as he grabbed his coat and hailed the nearest cab. Had they found Sherlock? Was he injured or in trouble? ~~Was he alive?~~

In the cab, which seemed painfully slow, he received a second call, this time from Mycroft.

“John, are you at the station yet?”

“I’m on my way now. Mycroft, what the hell is going on? Have you found Sherlock?” Silence covered the other end of the line. “Mycroft?”

“...You’ll see it when you get there. Just know that I have men on it right now.”

“What are you going on about? Can’t you just tell me what I’m walking into? Mycroft?” A long beep resounded from the device, and John shoved it into his pocket with more force than strictly necessary. “Shit.”

As soon as the cab pulled up at Scotland Yard, its passenger door was open and John threw some amount of money at the driver, practically careening head first out of it. In a second, he had flung open the doors to the building as well and looked around quickly. His dramatic entrance had been noticed by the three people in the otherwise empty reception area, including Lestrade, who was behind the secretary desk and who waved him over.

The officer’s expression was grim as he turned his eyes from the rapidly approaching soldier and back to the computer on the secretary desk. Next to him were Donovan and Anderson, the latter of which moved to the side to give John a better view of the computer. What he saw on it made him gasp in alarm and surprise; the video, which he realised dimly was a live stream, was easy to make out as showing Sherlock, tied to a chair, unconscious in what looked to be an empty warehouse of some sort.

He was stripped of his iconic coat, leaving his upper body in only a black t-shirt. His hands and legs were tied tightly to the arms and legs of the metal chair and his head flopped on his chest, dark, curly hair covering his face. He looked relatively unharmed, but the low light of the room and the poor quality of the video made it almost impossible to tell.

“What is this?” John asked in a half whisper, almost as if talking too loud would disturb whoever was on the other side of the video as well. The question was stupid, of course, but there were still so many blank spots in his knowledge that he had to ask **something**.

Donovan, surprisingly, was the first to answer. “We don’t really know. We just got this a few minutes ago and what you’re seeing here is the only thing we’ve seen as well.”

Here, Lestrade took over. “Anonymous email to the secretary. It’s a live feed, but we don’t know anything else.”

Right then, almost as if he had overheard their conversation, a man walked onto the screen. He was a larger man, probably 180-190cm in height, arms definitely muscled, with relatively short, dark hair and a crooked nose that looked as if it had been broken just a few too many times.

Looking straight into whatever camera he was using to film, the man cleared his throat, grinned like a man with nothing to fear, and stated, “Hello, Scotland Yard!”

There was nothing remarkable about his voice. It wasn’t dark or gritty or maniacal, as one might expect, but just like you might hear from any other man you would meet on the street. He continued, “You’re probably wondering why I’m sending you this; we’ll get to that in a moment. First, let’s have a look at your detective!” He moved around Sherlock until he was behind him and leaned casually on the back of the chair. “Oh, don’t worry! Except for maybe a concussion, he’s completely unharmed. For now...”

The way he said that made the hair on the back of John’s neck stand up. He and Sherlock had encountered a good many empty threats in their time, but they had encountered a good many more actual threats, and he was sure that this was an example of the latter. The man wanted something, and the casual way he moved about belied experience with violence.

“Now,” the man went on, “to what I want. I actually have nothing against the little detective here; it’s actually more his brother that I find issue with. Mycroft Holmes.” The last part he spoke with so much resentment, John could have sworn he saw venom dripping off the name as it fell from his mouth, and it sent a shiver up his spine.

“See, I also have a brother. Guess where he is. He’s in bloody prison!” Rage contorted the man’s formerly placid face, making his movements jerky as he started to pace in front of the camera. “He was a good man, and honest man, and Mycroft fucking Holmes gets him a 20 year sentence in some shithole where men go to die. He was innocent! He was framed, I know it! Take my brother out of there, or so help me-!” By now, his face was less than a foot from the camera, and he was practically screaming into it. Abruptly, though, he moved back, deep breaths moving his chest up and down as his eyes closed. He moved his hands with his breathing until he seemed to have calmed down.

“I’m sorry,” he said, turning back to the camera. “I’ve been trying to work on that. Breathing exercises and the such.” The odd thing was that he looked actually apologetic, but John felt a fear settle deep within him that **this** volatile man was the one left alone with his best friend, who just happened to be extremely gifted in the art of pissing people off.

“So yeah,” the man went on, as if nothing had happened at all. “Mycroft Holmes. Older brother of the famous Sherlock, master detective.” He looked to Sherlock, still unconscious, apparently, a small smile playing on his lips. He chuckled, “Well, I couldn’t help but see the irony of all of this. Poetic, almost, if I do say so myself.” His face turned grim, “A brother for

a brother,” and he went back to addressing the camera directly. “Well, get in touch with Mr. Holmes at your convenience, or maybe you already have. That would be optimal, of course, because I hope he sees every minute of the *fun* I have with his little baby brother. Oh, how I would love to see his face.”

This cemented John’s dread, which he now felt pulsing through his veins like ice, clogging his throat and lungs, weighing him down, even as he leaned against the desk in front of him. Although he couldn’t bear to turn away even for a second, he could sense that the others felt similarly.

Unperturbed, the man smiled jovially once more, like a showman in front of an audience. “But first, we need to wake our sleeping beauty!” Lightly, he tapped against Sherlock’s cheek and whispered with fake kindness and concern, “Hey, time to get up.” The only response from the detective was a groggy shake of the head and a murmuring of some kind, though it was impossible to tell what he said.

Not at all disappointed and exuding an air more of excitement, the man looked at the camera and stated, “Guess he’s not really feeling it. But don’t worry; cold water always works wonders.” He disappeared off the screen for just a second before he came back, a bucket sloshing with water in his hands, and he honest to god *winked* at the camera just before he flung all the water at Sherlock.

As expected, this woke the detective with a jerk, his head snapping up with unfocused eyes as water dripped from his hair and down his arms, making his shirt cling to his chest.

“There! Isn’t that much nicer, Mr. Holmes?”

Sherlock seemed to be coming more to himself as he just glared at his captor, who seemed to remain unperturbed. “Not very chatty, are we? Oh well, you’ll be singing like a canary soon enough anyway. I wonder if you have a pretty voice...” At this, he stroked the detective’s face gently with the backs of his fore and middle finger, the other flinching away almost imperceptibly.

Finally, Sherlock spoke, his voice raspy. “I’ve always had more of an affinity for the violin, to be honest.” Eying the man up and down with a critical eye, he said, “Although I doubt you would be worth my talents, I might make an exception for whoever you have on the other side of that camera.”

John knew that Sherlock couldn’t see him, obviously, but it still somehow felt that way when those piercing blue eyes looked straight at the camera, and therefore also straight at him.

His captor looked amused. “Nothing gets past you, does it, Mr. Holmes?”

Sherlock hummed noncommittally as he observed the other man, who was heading towards something offscreen. Suddenly, the air around the detective shifted and he asked, with no preamble whatsoever, “Are you aware that your girlfriend’s cheating on you?”

The man froze in his movements and, on his side of the video, John muttered a “shit” under his breath as Lestrade gave a warning “Sherlock...,” despite the fact that the object of his

warning could not hear him.

In one quick movement, Sherlock's captor had grabbed a long, thin knife from offscreen, presumably off of a table, and was back next to the detective, the knife less than an inch away from his neck.

"What did you say?" he asked, his eyes blown wide as he stared at Sherlock.

Nonplussed, Sherlock answered. "And with someone you know, no less. A close friend, I presume. Tell me, has she been distant recently? Maybe going over to her friend's house more often?"

Surprisingly, the man didn't rise to the bait. This did not change the vaguely maniacal look in his face as he drew back, running his free hand through his hair and releasing a breathy laugh. He turned to Sherlock and, with an odd look on his face, said, "Looks like someone wants to start playing around. Well, I'm game."

In second, he was in front of Sherlock, partially obscuring him from the camera and the onlookers. Although hard to make out, it seemed as if he had his left hand on the detective's arm, which was still strapped to the arm of the chair, with the knife in the other. This one he dragged slowly down the other's torso, starting in the middle of the chest and making his way slowly down to the naval area.

John could still see bits of his friend's face, which attempted to hide a grimace as the knife made its way down, through cloth and skin and flesh. It was hard to determine the depth of the cut, but the former medic didn't think it looked too extremely bad, which was, well, something.

Sherlock though, being Sherlock, couldn't keep his mouth closed to quite literally save his life. "Oh, do hurry, please. Your drugs aren't going to take themselves, after all."

The man stiffened and made another cut, this one across the chest, faster and sloppier.

"I guess you take after your mother in that way."

A third cut.

"Just because dear old daddy hit you doesn't give you a free pass to do it too."

A fourth, quick. Deeper.

"Chronic smoker; not good for the lungs, is it?"

Cut number five. Donovan had to leave the room at this point; probably to go throw up.

Sherlock's breath had become laboured by this point, blood dripping down what chest could be seen through his tattered shirt.

"Drug trade isn't a smart business, but your brother probably wasn't a very smart ma--"

Sherlock's breath stocked, a look of shock on his face as his voice cut off.

"Oops," the man breathed out, an unhinged smile on his face, and as he stumbled back, away from Sherlock and to the side, those watching could make out the handle of the knife sticking straight out of the left side of his chest. The blood was gone from the detective's face, and he looked down at the leather-wrapped piece of wood jutting out from him like a macabre extra limb.

John couldn't help the strangled gasp that escaped him at the sight, and Anderson next to him let out a small whimper. It was like the three of them were frozen, though, unable to rip their eyes away from the screen in front of them.

On it, the man had stalked back up to the stunned detective. "Didn't observe that, did you?" Looking down at his hands, the man continued, saying, "You know, I haven't heard you sing yet," and in a whisper, "don't be shy." He grinned and grabbed the handle roughly. He didn't pull it out, which was a small mercy, but instead he twisted it, and Sherlock let out a blood curdling scream as the blade shredded his flesh and moved even deeper into his chest.

John barely noticed as Anderson also walked away quickly, down the same hallway Donovan had disappeared down.

As the detective's cry faded and he slumped over, exhausted, his captor moved away, looking satisfied. "Nice," he said, making his way offscreen again. From there, the two onlookers left could still hear as he talked. "Could be better, though."

He came back in frame, this time with a metal bat in hand, slung over his shoulder. "You were being modest, Mr. Holmes. You do have such a nice voice."

Gripping the bat with both hands, he brought it up over his head, his face splitting into a terrible smile, eyes blown wide. Despite not being the intended victim, John flinched as it came down on Sherlock's arm with a horrible *crack*. This scream was worse than the last one, raw and wet, forcing the detective's head back as he attempted to move away in a blind panic.

Without a word, the bat came down a second time, this time straight into Sherlock's shin. It glinted as it moved, before another *crack* resounded and Sherlock screamed, this one with just as much energy yet quieter, his voice already starting to go hoarse.

Then a third time, the metal bat went up, this time crashing into his upper arm, and as it pulled away, John could see the already-discolored flesh over what was most certainly another break. This time, Sherlock's scream was cut off in a violent bout of coughing, speckling his mouth and chin with a deep red.

John could feel his stomach lurch and his eyes squeeze closed as the bat went up a fourth time, but the sound of a gunshot forced them wide open again as he scanned the screen, frantic for information. The room seemed brighter, and men were rushing in. Sherlock's captor was on the ground, crying and clutching his arm as he was dragged away, and another man had made his way to the now seemingly unconscious detective.

John's heart leapt to his throat as he pulled a knife from a holster on his thigh, but all the new man did was cut away the ropes tying down one of his arms. He went to turn Sherlock's arm around, but something stopped him and he just slipped his hand around the other's wrist. After a few seconds of nothing, he yelled out, "I've got a pulse!" and quickly went to cut away the rest of the ropes from his arm and legs.

More men walked up, a stretcher held between them that they carefully laid Sherlock on before carrying it out gently yet efficiently. John felt panic rise within him as his friend was taken out of sight, and he quickly pulled out his phone, the camera forgotten. The phone was picked up almost immediately. "Salisbury District Hospital," was all that Mycroft said, and it was enough. Within seconds, John and Lestrade were out the door and hailing a cab.

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