



A jagged flash of lightning tore open the night sky over Baker Street. For a moment it was as though someone had switched on a giant floodlight, lighting up the buildings below – then, just as suddenly, it was gone and everything was even darker than before. The lightning was followed almost immediately by a crash of thunder that sounded like a thousand cannons being fired at once.

“Blimey, that was a close ‘un!” exclaimed Sarge. The old soldier usually counted the seconds between flash and thunder, to tell how far away the lightning was – five seconds for every mile, he reckoned. This time there had been no gap, which meant it must be right overhead. He looked anxiously around, to see if anything had been struck. Then, hanging on tightly with

his one good hand to the pitcher of beer he was carrying home from the pub, he hurried back to the Baker Street Bazaar.

As he pushed through the wrought-iron gates and hurried into his lodge, the deep rumble of the thunder echoed overhead like a roll of drums. Strangely, though, there was no sign of rain. Another lightning flash and a bang as loud as a volley from all the guns of the Royal Artillery made him jump so hard that some of the beer slopped over the edge of the jug and splashed onto the floor.

“My oath!” he cried. “It’s enough to waken the dead.”

Sarge put the pitcher carefully down on the table and reached for a cloth to wipe up the spilt beer. As he straightened, he glanced out of the door and along the Bazaar to Madame Dupont’s waxworks exhibition – and froze. There was a dim light moving behind one of the windows.

“Hello,” he said to himself. “What’s goin’ on? Looks like somebody’s in there!”

Tucking a truncheon under the stump of his amputated left arm, he lifted a bunch of keys

from their hook on the wall, picked up his bull's-eye lantern and set off to investigate.

The waxworks gallery was always a bit spooky at night. Standing in their shadowy alcoves around the wall, the wax figures often looked as though they might be coming to life. But Sarge was used to this, and it did not worry him. He shone his lantern around the room in case an intruder was hiding among the models. There was no one. Then he heard a sound – the quiet, stealthy sound of someone moving. It came not from the main exhibition, but from the side room that Madame Dupont had recently turned into the Dungeon of Horrors.

Sarge was not a nervous man, nor was he very imaginative. But he didn't like going into the Dungeon, particularly at night and on his own. True to its name, this gallery was full of horrors: lifelike – or perhaps death-like – wax figures of murderers and their victims splashed with gore; unspeakable monsters and deformed creatures so revolting they made your stomach turn. It was so scary that Madame Dupont had offered a prize of the princely sum of five pounds

to anyone who would spend a whole night alone in there. So far, no one had dared to take up the challenge. Could it be, Sarge wondered, that somebody was doing so now? Or was there a more sinister explanation?

Seeing light seeping through the crack under the heavy oak door to the Dungeon, Sarge summoned up his courage, took a deep breath and gave the door a cautious push. It creaked loudly as it opened – a sound effect that Madame Dupont had installed especially to make people nervous. Inside the room, someone or something moved. The beam from Sarge's bull's-eye lantern swept over the wax models, picking out a headless corpse, a grinning skull and finally the agonized face of the murder victim in Madame Dupont's latest tableau. Next to it stood the figure of another man, his face lit eerily from below. And it was the same face.

Sarge let out a yell and screwed his eyes tight shut. When he opened them again, there was no one there. Only a thin wisp of smoke hung in the air. The figure had disappeared.



SEEING A GHOST

The morning dawned bright and sunny, with no sign of the previous night's electric storm. The Baker Street Boys were cheerful as they left HQ, their secret cellar home, for another day on the streets of London. Rosie, the little flower girl, filled her tray with posies for the ladies and buttonholes for the gentlemen, and set off to sell them on bustling Baker Street. Shiner headed for Paddington railway station carrying a green wooden box holding his boot polishes, brushes and cloths. Queenie started on her round of shops – grocers, greengrocers, butchers, bakers – looking for yesterday's leftovers to beg or buy cheaply from friendly shopkeepers to turn into one of her tasty stews. Everything seemed like a very normal, ordinary morning – until Wiggins,

Beaver, Gertie and Sparrow strolled up to the Baker Street Bazaar.

As they approached the entrance gates, they were surprised to see a small crowd of people on the pavement outside. Most of them were the owners of the little shops that lined the inside of the Bazaar, plus a couple of coachmen whose carriages were parked inside. At the front was the unmistakable figure of Madame Dupont, wearing a vivid purple cloak over an equally bright red satin dress. The tall green ostrich feathers in her hat swayed backwards and forwards as she pushed and tugged at the heavy iron gates and shouted for Sarge to open them.

Being an old soldier, Sarge was usually up and about long before anybody else. It was unheard of for him not to be “on parade”, as he always put it, bright and early. But on this morning there was no sign of him, and the big gates were still firmly locked.

As the four Boys arrived from one direction, PC Higgins appeared from the other.

“Ello, ’ello!” the burly policeman called out.
“What’s goin’ on here, then?”

“Ah, officer,” Madame Dupont greeted him. “We are locked out. Locked out of our own businesses. It’s a disgrace!”

“That’s not like Sergeant Scroggs,” said PC Higgins, pushing back his helmet.

“D’you think something’s happened to him?” Wiggins asked.

“Could have.”

“But there’s no way we can find out without getting in,” said Madame Dupont impatiently. “And the keys are in his lodge.”

“That’s soon fixed,” said Wiggins. “Gertie here could be over that gate in two shakes of a dog’s tail. Climb anything, she can.”

“Is that right?” PC Higgins looked suspiciously at the tousle-haired girl in boys’ clothes.

“Sure and haven’t I been cloimbin’ trees since I was knee-high to a grasshopper?” Gertie told him with a cheeky Irish grin. “Shall I show you?”

“Go on, then,” grunted the policeman.

“And just get a move on,” Madame Dupont snapped. “We’re sick of having to wait here like ninnies.”

Wiggins and Beaver gave Gertie a leg-up, and

in no time at all she had hopped over the gate and down the other side, run to the lodge and knocked on the door. When there was no answer, she lifted the latch and opened it.

“The keys should be hanging up just inside,” Wiggins called to her. “The one for the gates is the biggest.”

Gertie stepped in and reached for the key, then let out a shriek.

“What is it?” Wiggins asked as she came tumbling out of the door, clutching the key and looking pale. “What’s up?”

“It’s ... it’s Sarge...” she cried. “I think ... I think he’s dead!”

There was a gasp from the little crowd. Gertie’s hands were shaking so much that she couldn’t get the big key into the keyhole, so Wiggins reached through the bars and took it from her.

“What’s he look like?” he asked as he unlocked the gate from the outside.

“He’s stretched out on the floor, all stiff and still.”

“Everybody stay where you are,” PC Higgins ordered. “This is a job for the police.” He pushed

through the gates and went into the lodge, placing his large boots very carefully so as not to disturb any possible evidence. The others watched breathlessly and waited for him to emerge, which he did very shortly.

“Well?” demanded Madame Dupont. “Is he dead?”

“Dead *drunk*,” PC Higgins replied, holding up an empty bottle. “What you might describe, ma’am, as paralytic.”

“Drunk on duty!” Madame Dupont declared, trembling with indignation. “It’s a disgrace! The man’s clearly not to be trusted. I shall see to it that he is dismissed from his post and never works again.”

“That’s for you to decide, ma’am. It’s not a police matter.”

“Poor old Sarge,” said Beaver. “Ain’t there nothin’ we can do for him?”

“Only one thing you can do, lad,” the policeman replied. “Make him as comfortable as you can and let him sleep it off. Now, if you’ll excuse me, folks, I shall return to *my* duties.” And after touching his helmet in a salute to Madame

Dupont and the others, he turned away and plodded off down the street.

From round the corner came the sound of one of the little German bands that could regularly be seen and heard on London's streets, and soon afterwards the four musicians appeared, wearing military-style uniforms and playing a jolly oom-pah tune as they marched slowly along the pavement. Their leader paused to give the policeman a smart salute and held out his collecting box as he passed them, but PC Higgins kept his hands firmly behind his back.

The Boys just about managed to lift Sarge from the floor and onto his bed. He mumbled something in his sleep about a dead man walking, but he didn't wake up and they decided to do what the policeman had suggested and leave him where he was.

"Can't understand it," said Wiggins. "I know Sarge likes a glass of beer or two, but I ain't never seen him blotto. Not even a bit tipsy."

"P'raps somethin' upset him," said Sparrow.

"You mean he was like drownin' his sorrows, ain't that what people say?" asked Beaver.

“My da used to do that sometimes,” said Gertie, “when he was thinkin’ about my poor ma and how much he missed her.”

“P’raps Sarge was missin’ his arm,” said Sparrow. “Or his days in the army, with all his mates.”

Later in the day, when they went back, the four Boys found Sarge awake and nursing a bad headache – and they discovered that the reason he had drunk a whole bottle of spirits was something quite different from what they had thought.

“I seen a ghost,” he told them. “In the Dungeon of Horrors. It was that chap what murdered his wife and done hisself in. Madame’s latest tableau.”

The Boys stared at him, open-mouthed.

“You mean the waxwork come to life?” Beaver asked.

“No! It weren’t the waxwork – it were *him*,” Sarge groaned, holding his throbbing head. “Standin’ right next to it. Large as life and no mistake.”

“But he’s dead ... ain’t he?” asked Sparrow.

“And buried,” Sarge asserted. “And if he hadn’t done hisself in, they’d have hanged him for murder anyhow.”

“So you reckon you seen his ghost?” said

Wiggins, thinking hard. “What exac’ly was he doing when you spied him?”

“Doin’? He weren’t doing nothin’. Just stood there, starin’ at me, like *he* was the one what’d seen a ghost.”

“I see. Then what?”

“Then he vanished. Like in a puff of smoke.”

“Cor,” Sparrow breathed. “No wonder you wanted a drink.”

“Trouble is, when I’d had one drink I wanted another. And my jug was empty.”

“You didn’t get like that on one jug of beer, though,” said Wiggins.

“No – I always keeps a bottle of brandy in the cupboard, in case of emergencies. Like if a lady or gent was to come over all faint.”

“And this was an emergency?”

“Well, it ain’t every day a chap sees a real live ghost, is it?”

“Or even a dead one,” Sparrow joked, then quickly shut up as the others glared at him.

“Well, live or dead, he’s done for me,” Sarge moaned. “Madame Dupont says as soon as Lord Holdhurst comes back next week she’ll get him

to sack me. I'll have no job and no home."

"She can't do that!" Beaver protested.

"She says I must've been seein' things 'cos I was drunk. But I weren't drunk when I seen that ghost. Only afterwards. I swear!"

"We believe you, Sarge," Wiggins told him.

"Yeah, but will His Lordship?"

"We'll tell him," said Sparrow. "He knows us from when we saved Ravi and the Ranjipur Ruby."

"It's no good. He won't listen to you."

"Then we'll find somebody he *will* listen to," said Wiggins. "Don't you fret – just leave it to the Baker Street Boys."

Billy opened the door of 221b Baker Street and looked down his snub nose at the four Boys standing on the step.

"Oh, it's you," he sneered. "What d'you want?"

"Hello, Billy. That's a fine way to welcome your old mates what saved your bacon after them Chinamen pinched Mrs Hudson's valuable ornament," Wiggins said cheerfully. "I see it's back in its rightful place," he added, pointing at the jade dragon standing on the hall table.

The pageboy turned to look at it, and nodded.

“Yeah, well, thanks,” he said grudgingly. “Mrs H was pleased about that. Now, what can I do for you? Mr Holmes ain’t here. He’s away on a case.”

“Like he always is,” chuckled Wiggins. “But it ain’t him we’re after. We want to see Dr Watson.”

“Then you’re in luck. ’Cos he’s just got back from his rounds. I’ll see if he’s at home.”

“What you talkin’ about?” said Gertie. “You just said he was.”

“What I said was, he’s in the house. Being ‘at home’ means he’s prepared to receive visitors. That’s how it’s done in polite society,” Billy sniffed.

“Never mind all that,” said Wiggins. “Just go and tell him we’re here and we gotta talk to him about something, and it can’t wait.”

Billy trotted off upstairs and returned a moment later to usher them up to the rooms Dr Watson shared with Sherlock Holmes.

“Now, then, my young friends,” the doctor greeted them. “What is it you want to see me about that’s so urgent?”

“It’s Sarge,” Wiggins blurted out.

“Sarge?” The doctor looked puzzled. “Oh, you

mean Sergeant Scroggs?”

“He’s in trouble. Big trouble. And we thought, seeing as you told us how he saved your life on the Khyber, you’d want to help him.”

“Indeed I would, if it’s within my power. Tell me what this trouble is.”

“They’re gonna sack him and throw him out of his home,” Sparrow blurted out.

“All because he seen a ghost,” added Gertie.

“But if he hadn’t seen the ghost, he wouldn’t have needed a drink,” Beaver joined in, his words tumbling out helter-skelter, “and if his beer hadn’t all gone he wouldn’t have needed the brandy what he kept in case of emergencies, and if he hadn’t—”

“Wait, wait!” cried Dr Watson, holding up his hands to silence them. “You’re making my head spin. One at a time, if you please.”

“Right,” Wiggins said, taking command. “You three be quiet and leave this to me. It’s like this, Doctor. When we went round the Bazaar this morning, we see Madame Dupont and all the shopkeepers and coachmen standing outside the gates, what was locked ’cos Sarge was still asleep. Only

he wasn't just asleep, he was spark out. Sozzled."

"Ah, he was inebriated."

"Eh?"

"Drunk."

"That's right. Like you say, Doctor. Inebriefed."

"A very serious offence for a soldier, being drunk on duty."

"Yeah, we know that. But he had good reason."

"He'd seen a ghost, you say?"

"That's right. In the Dungeon of Horrors last night. The ghost of the bloke what murdered his wife then topped hisself."

The doctor nodded. "I can understand a man needing to fortify himself after an experience like that. He might well find such an apparition somewhat unnerving."

"Exac'ly. Only Madame Dupont don't see it like that. She reckons he must have been drunk already and that's why he was imagining things."

"And we know he wasn't," Gertie burst in, unable to contain herself any longer. "He's not like that, is Sarge. He never gets drunk and he never tells lies."

Dr Watson stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I quite

agree – it's not like the Sergeant Scroggs I know."

"If he had been drunk, he'd have owned up and took his medicine," Sparrow declared. "It's not right. We gotta help him."

"Very well," said Dr Watson. "I shall see what I can do. Perhaps I could have a word with Lord Holdhurst. I believe his family owns the Bazaar."

"We tried that already," said Wiggins. "We went round his house, but they said he was on his estate in Scotland till next week."

"So we got till then to sort it out," Gertie said, brightening up.

"We better had," said Beaver. "'Cos if we don't, when Lord H gets back he'll give poor old Sarge the boot."

Dr Watson agreed to go and see Sarge and also to talk to Madame Dupont and the shopkeepers. When he spoke to his old comrade, however, Sarge was adamant that he really had seen a ghost and that he had not got drunk until afterwards. Dr Watson gave him a thorough examination but could find nothing wrong, apart from a bad hang-over. Knowing Sarge to be honest and trustworthy,

the doctor believed him. But although he did his best to persuade Madame Dupont and the others, they refused to budge. The businessmen (and women) of the Bazaar were determined to report Sarge to Lord Holdhurst and demand that he be sacked. They could not trust a drunken man to guard their premises, they said – especially one who claimed to see ghosts.

Gathered in HQ that evening, the Boys were depressed and downhearted. Not even the fact that Queenie had managed to find some tasty scrag-end of mutton to go into her stew could raise their spirits. The idea that their friend was about to lose both his job and his home was too much to bear.

“If only there was *somebthin*’ we could do to help him,” wailed Rosie.

The others nodded glumly, then after a moment’s silence Wiggins suddenly perked up. “Hang on,” he said. “P’raps there is!”

“What?” asked Beaver.

“Well,” Wiggins began, “they all say Sarge *imagined* seeing that ghost ’cos he was drunk, right?”