



A Brexit Carol

Stage One

On the uncommonly warm Christmas Eve of 2018, Theresa May the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is heading back to her residence in Downing Street, curved under the weight of unwieldy responsibilities. She is murmuring protests against the climate change that makes her sweat and against Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the beloved European Commission, who recently called her foggy¹. Nebulous in the mind, she spares a thought for David Cameron, her old boss and political partner, who committed suicide a little more than two years earlier by sleepwalking into a lions' cage at the London Zoo.

Theresa dislikes the spirit of generosity of Christmas - her distrust of immigration and diversity lead to the establishment of the Hostile Environment² policy a few years earlier; a policy with no economic sense, that nonetheless pleased the insurgent populist sentiment.

During the night she is visited by the ghost of Cameron, who wanders the earth naked with the only cover of a referendum ballot box. Cameron warns May that she must listen to the three spirits that will visit her or be cursed with a fate more grievous than his: forever walking naked in the company of a drunken Juncker.

Stage Two

The first spirit, the Ghost of Brexit Past, takes Theresa to scenes of pre-referendum campaigns when innocent yet powerful statements were brandished like flags or swords. Taking back control, £350mio a week for the NHS³, have the cake and eat it, the easiest negotiation ever, the Brexit dividend. The tabloids were having a home run. Those days felt good and cosy, full of hope; even if Theresa was on the other side in official speeches⁴, her actions and heart have always been on the Leavers' side. Deep down she was more than sympathetic with Brexit, as she realized when she became a self-appointed paladin of the "will of the people" at any cost.

But most of all, those days were the days when the UK was still thinking, truly not so deep down, that it was still some kind of imperial power, with special rights and concessions that were being reined in by the European bureaucrats. Brexit felt like a way to break free and become great again.

At the time, Theresa's relationship with Cameron was warm and the party was treating her like an heiress. The Tories were a big enlarged and happy family back then.

Finally, they visit a now-employed George Osborne, who was sacked as chancellor by Theresa when she succeeded Cameron. Osborne is having a briefing with colleagues at the Evening Standard, where is the editor: they are putting together another scathing report on her stewardship of the country. Theresa is upset by hearing Osborne saying "I will not rest until I have Theresa May chopped up in bags in my freezer"⁵ and she asks the ghost to take her back.

Stage Three

The second spirit, the Ghost of Brexit Present, takes Theresa to Brussels where Michel Barnier, Jean-Claude Juncker and Donald Tusk are hosting a party for all the remaining member states. Like in a big family, where fights and travails are part of the equilibrium, each member enjoys the security and opportunities offered by putting together the resources and employing a combined effort to overcome the difficulties. There are black

¹ "You called me nebulous!": Juncker explains remarks after heated exchange with Theresa May goes viral"; The Journal.ie, 14/Dec/2018; <https://www.thejournal.ie/nebulous-theresa-may-jean-claude-juncker-4396905-Dec2018/>

² "Home Office hostile environment policy"; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_Office_hostile_environment_policy

³ "Nigel Farage: £350 million pledge to fund the NHS was 'a mistake'"; The Telegraph, 24/Jun/2016; <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/nigel-farage-350-million-pledge-to-fund-the-nhs-was-a-mistake/>

⁴ Theresa May speech on staying in EU (25Apr16); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rII48PE0gOU>

⁵ "George Osborne criticised for gruesome remarks against Theresa May"; The Guardian, 13/Sep/2017; <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/sep/13/george-osborne-criticised-for-gruesome-remarks-against-theresa-may>



sheep and free-riders, and a new attitude is needed in the EU – one that suits the responsibilities of being a global, economic and nuclear power that needs to stand on its own feet. By all means, those are things that only the insiders can think, debate and shape.

Theresa is left out of the conversations and is unable to vote or influence the agenda. The special treatments and deals are gone too: the opt-outs have not become opt-ins. And with this view, the rest of the country has suddenly realized how small Britain has become in this brave new world; its economic and military powers are just part of the many, and alone they don't impress much.

Another thing that the spirit shows to Theresa is that all the funny and reassuring rants against the EU were in fact children of a national ignorance of the history and workings of the EU.

Finally, before leaving, the spirit shows Theresa two hideous, emaciated politicians called Ignorance and Want and tells her to beware ignorance above all – in fact, to beware all sweeping disregard of truth and knowledge, as it undeniably leads to injustice.

Stage Four

The third spirit, the Ghost of Brexit Yet to Come, shows Theresa a day in the near future. The silent ghost reveals scenes of a funeral: Theresa's political death. The images of lost jobs, shortages of medicines and falling housing prices decorate the wreaths. The function is attended by a small number of people, because those coming from afar are blocked in the traffic jam caused by the lorries queuing along the motorways waiting to clear the customs. The spirit also shows images of a new cabinet meeting trying to reconcile the lost tax income with the benefits increase needed to help the families, already strained by the housing crisis. The army is deployed in the street to control the riots and do basic maintenance work. And, God forbid, also in Northern Ireland, where a hard border is summoning old specters.

Sobbing, Theresa murmurs to the ghost "the will of the people".

Stage Five

Theresa awakens on Christmas morning an unchanged woman. She spends the afternoon writing ripping op-ed about the "citizens of nowhere" and the "queue-jumpers", advised by a small cadre of people hyper-motivated to keep darkness and opacity around the truth. A stance that has already earned her government the first ever contempt of Parliament, not exactly a badge of honor⁶.

She thinks that delaying the vote on her precious deal, will force the Brexiters and the Remainers to vote for it, because there would be no time for any other option rather than the no deal. It's a negotiating tactic that might or might not work: she is taking the risk because, on one hand, if it does work, she will crown herself as the Prime Minister that delivered Brexit against the odds; on the other hand, if it does not work she could blame the other extremists and, eventually, she would not personally suffer from the resulting negative economic impact given her upper class status.

Theresa May has nothing to lose now. Unlike the rest of the country. And the markets.

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⁶ "Brexit: MPs find government in contempt of Parliament"; BBC News, 4/Dec/2018;
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-46447341/brexit-mps-find-government-in-contempt-of-parliament>

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