

The Burden

by James Wong

Samuel was stirred from his nighttime slumber by the sound of a faint electric whizz coming to an uneventful stop and of glass clinking - all against the rhythmic hum of his sleep apnea thingy. And as he came to, he understood the milk had arrived, followed by the realisation he'd awoken to see another day.

On a good day, such waking moments paved a way for him to be grateful and take each day as a gift. This wasn't one of those days. Today, as his mind riffed around variations on "What's the point of me...?", two creases, formed a lop-sided 'V' between his eyes, locking in a face ready for bad things to get worse. Mesmerised, Samuel shook himself free of his troubled thoughts. He knew that little came from dwelling on the past like this. Self-recrimination never delivered on the proclaimed promise of redemption and if he didn't cut it short it would likely snap at his heels and hound him through the day.

Remembering that Patsy was visiting this morning, Samuel seized the moment.

"Come on Sam, up you get and get yourself going!" he commanded - saying it like this both invigorated him and compelled him to actually get up. Lord knows he'd balked and struggled with authority for most of his life, but in times past, like now, he'd needed telling. He was wild when he was young and was not to be tamed. Running feral way back when, felt powerful. The ensuing chaos serving up a haphazard meal of adventure with a side order of unpredictability and consequence. Looking back he saw his yearning to test his mettle, to prove himself and as he slammed up against what the world slung his way. It had left its mark of course; the bruising, scuffing and breakage showing up in the distant stare that held him captive from time to time during his waking hours and left him clinging to the bedsheets on those unfortunately fitful nights.

Besides his crumpled posture and shuffling steps, a few tuts, grunts and sighs to punctuate his morning routine, Samuel moved like a man on a mission. And for brief moments, one could glimpse something about the way this man had flourished in days gone by. And if it was at all possible to level up on bliss during the act of *getting up in the morning*, Samuel's easy look and twinkling eyes were testimony enough to the living proof of such a thing.

Mission accomplished, Samuel took a seat and waited for 10 a.m. to roll around. He was loath to do anything else less he expend his daily quota of *get up and go*. Unhurried by things to do, and not tired enough to find solace within a nap, he was left to his thoughts. That familiar riff began to roll around again, and he began to hate himself for being a burden, for needing others. And for the life of him he couldn't conjure up a world where it wasn't better off without him.

“Brrrringggg” shrilled the doorbell snapping him to attention. Feeling unready for Patsy’s visit he was nonetheless glad of the interruption.

‘Ah, Patsy!’, he thought, brightening up as he shuffled to the door to let her in.

“Hi Grandpa, you’re looking smart today,” piped Patsy brightly.

Drawing his smiling lips more tightly together, Samuel tried his best to let the warm glow of Patsy’s voice be believed, muttering, “Oh, oh, do I really? Aw, you’re just saying that!”

“Well, Grandpa, I’d tell you if you didn’t!” Patsy bounced back.

Patsy’s visits flew by. Samuel loved her company more than he could bear to admit and more than he dared let on.

When the time came, Samuel reeled off his customary farewell, “Always lovely to see you Patsy, but don’t put yourself out, I know you are busy I don’t want to be a burden.”

Patsy became still in that moment and looked thoughtful. Samuel, his guts hardening and beginning to drop with foreboding was beginning to think it must be something he had said, done, or not done.

“Are you alright Patsy?” Samuel asked.

“Yes Grandpa. But I was just thinking,” Patsy said as she gazed at him, “thinking about what you said about not wanting to be a burden.”

“Yes, my dear,” Samuel said, failing to mask his concern.

“Well... I think *you are* a burden, there’s no denying that,” Patsy said, “I mean, me, mum and dad, the others, we all do our bit to look out for you, run errands, take you places etc. But I think you’re thinking that you’re an *unwelcome* burden. And that’s not the case, not for me anyway. I’m happy to there for you. The same way you were there for us, and still are. I know things are different now but you know what I mean”.

Samuel stood quite still, somewhere between troubled and untroubled. It was as if cogs that hadn’t been turned in while, had been oiled by what he had heard. And although he wasn’t at all sure what, if anything, was happening; the panic had left him. And for a few moments during the rest of that day, and a good number of moments thereafter, he found himself deep in thought. Gladly.