

Isolation

By James Anthony

George loved hot-cross buns. He didn't just consume them at Easter, they were a permanent part of his diet. It showed. He liked to think of himself as 'chunky', it had an inference of solid, dependable, the characteristics he associated with himself. His friends might describe him differently, if he had any friends. Obsessive or possibly over-indulgent might have been their descriptions.

He had always been 'chunky', as far back as he can remember. His mother had insisted that he should have three square meals a day. 'Need to keep up your strength' she used to say, although he was never sure why he needed his strength. Since his mother had passed away last year, outlasting his father by five years, he had become something of a recluse. At thirty, he'd inherited the house, there were hardly any bills to speak of and his disability benefit cheque covered those. His only excursion outside was his trip to the supermarket every week to stock up the kitchen cupboards.

His Aunt Grace used to visit him occasionally, but as she had watched his decline into isolation and the degeneration of the house around him, she had stopped coming. 'Pull yourself together!', was her advice, a particularly unhelpful phrase. He couldn't see that he was falling apart.

This particular morning, he'd had a visit from the Environmental Officer at the council. Apparently, his neighbours had complained about rats in their garden and they felt that the piles of rubbish outside his back door was the problem. He'd told him to 'bugger off and mind your own business'. 'If the neighbours have got rats then go and check their garden.' The officer had gone off muttering about coming back with a policeman. 'Good luck if you can find one' he had shouted at his receding bald patch as the official talked into his mobile phone. 'I haven't seen one of those around here for years.'

Now, it was lunch time and the smell of frying bacon temporarily overpowered the stench of rotting cabbage that drifted through the broken kitchen window. His first egg had broken when he cracked it into the pan. Luckily, his second, and the last one from the discarded egg box on the floor was more successful. Sliding the contents of the pan onto a wedge of white bread, he soaked a second slice with the residual fat and pressed it on top of the yellow oozing egg.

The first bite was heaven. He licked the egg yolk that was running down his hand and filled his mouth with a second bite. A stray piece of bacon escaped his masticating teeth and slid down his throat, lodging on his oesophagus. His chest heaved with an automatic reflex, half eaten sandwich spattered the kitchen table, his eyes bulged and his face went deep crimson. He struggled to raise his bulk from the overstrained

chair, but it collapsed, he hit his head on the edge of the table on the way down and his convulsions slowly abated.

"Looks like he's choked on his sandwich, must have been lying here for days. Good job the council came back or he could have been here for months. Look at the state of this place!" said the fast response medic.

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