

A Happy Ending

By Jonathan Dalton

Sam saw the four wheel drive barrelling towards him. He saw the woman at the wheel had a mobile jammed in her face. He supposed that he himself could have been cycling a little slower down this residential street and he knew that whatever happened next was probably going to hurt. His fingers clammed on the brakes but instinct stretched no further than that and about him the world slowed. The bike drifted towards the kerb, the car drifted towards him. The drizzle a glittering bead curtain. His heart thumped sticky blood about his body, each dizzy wave came closer to bursting forth. The woman's eyes widened. Something crunched.

In a moment of zero G the bike fell away from him.

Then everything hit him all at once and punched him back through the air into the road where the parts of him that still could squirmed and screamed. Through the pain he saw the car consume his bicycle then slew towards him and he had time to register the smoke fuming at its wheels and feel its metallic heat and hear a tremendous boiling roar, closer, faster, closer, *faster* -

'Stop.'

His vision swirled black. Utter silence.

'Dear me. This won't do.'

Footsteps.

'No, won't do at all. Just look at this. What a mess.'

Sam opened one eye then shut it. The afterimage was of something very heavy not very far above him.

'By the way,' came the voice again. 'Sam, is it? Yeah. Well, Sam. Feel free to climb out of there.' Sam did nothing. The voice: 'Don't worry. You're perfectly fine.'

He paused, then said, 'Back - hurts -'

'Oh. Yeah, it was broken, true. Not any more. Trust me. You're fine.'

And the voice was correct. He didn't hurt, he realised. Where there once was pain there was - warmth. But he couldn't move his arm.

He began the process of opening his eyes. Vision crept in. The - thing - was still suspended above him; and became the car's bonnet. He could smell the metal and plastic, the petrol. Which meant to his side - yes. The reason he couldn't move his arm was because

it was snuggled against the car's front wheel. He closed his eyes once more, took a breath, then tilted his head towards the light. The voice came again.

'Come on Sam. I don't have all day.' A pause. 'So to speak.'

Right.

Trying not to think too hard, he rolled away from the car and towards the voice. Once. Twice. Thrice. He paused. Braced himself. Then in one breath he opened his eyes and stood.

'Hi there.'

Before him stood a young woman. Athletic build, dressed in a neat blue/grey suit, arms folded, short brown hair, a half smile on her face. The air about her glowed. He knew he was staring and felt entitled to continue.

'You're looking for a halo, right? Well, you won't find it. I try and avoid cliché when I can. Oh. Manners. My name's Amy.' She stuck out a hand. 'Nice to meet you.'

Sam took her hand and shook it. When they parted he said, 'You're an angel?'

'Yep.'

'Christ.'

'Hah.'

To this he was unsure how to respond so took the opportunity to broaden his stare. The world was frozen. There was a complete absence of sound. He experienced a sudden and total sense of loneliness.

'Shit,' said Amy, 'that's not good. Hold on.' She nodded at him and suddenly he felt okay again. 'Better? Good. Okay.' She paused. 'Listen, Sam, I need get back to work. Shouldn't take long, but nothing gets done without doing it, and all that. So - yeah. I'll have time moving forwards before you know it. Oh, and if you start feeling bad again, just shout.'

A smile, then she disappeared behind him. He noted the strands of drizzle collecting on her skin, the tunnel of rain-free air that trailed her. After a pause he turned. The car was sliced diagonally across the road, the driver inside locked mid-scream. Amy was studying the vehicle intently and dispassionately. He felt dizzy and looked away and went towards an empty parking space, where he sat. Sleep moved to claim him and he allowed himself to doze. Amy's voice phased through his consciousness - '... move this here... null three deaths... adjust space but not... careful... and...'

... done!'

Amy stood before him again, grinning. 'All sorted. No deaths, no injuries, no memories. I've even given you a new bike. How's that?'

'Thanks,' he said as he stood, in the absence of any other reply.

Amy's grin faltered. 'Yeah, a lot to take in. I understand. Well, not to worry. Time to get you back where you belong.'

'Amy.'

'Yes?'

'What's - happening?'

'Well, I -'

'Why are you doing this? Does this happen to everyone? What's - why - I don't -'

'Okay. Okay. Uh. Will the short version do?'

'Any version will do.'

'Right. Okay. Well, basically, uh - you know how there's a lot of pain and suffering in the world?'

'Yeah.'

'Yeah. And there're a lot of needless deaths. A lot of stupid deaths. A lot of things that you look at and just go, that's wrong. How can that happen. Be allowed to happen. Yeah?'

'Yes.'

'Okay. Well, I'm someone in a position to do something about all that. Really do something about it. And now I'm going to do something about it.'

'Okay.'

'Yours was the first. Your death, I mean. Along with that woman's in there' - nodding at the four wheel drive - 'and the baby's in the car over there' - nodding at a Smart Car parked on the kerb. 'All totally needless. What I've done is adjust things so that none of them will happen. And this is just the start. All over the world, stupid, awful things like this happen every day, every second. Correction. Used to happen.'

'But - there are so many - I mean, if you're an angel - what about God. All that.'

'Yeah. God. All that.' She paused. 'Well. How about - I'm going to do what I can and use what I've got and to me that's all that really matters now.' She looked at him. The air was glowing again. 'But anyway. Time to get things moving. Nice meeting you, Sam. I reckon you might notice quite a change over the next couple of days.'

He stared at her, thoughts fizzing within him and all evading articulation.

She smiled. 'Don't worry. I've got it covered. From now on, I've got it all covered.'

And with that she disappeared and the world blinked and he was standing on the pavement holding his new bike and thinking it was probably time to get home and feeling that it really was a beautiful day. He smiled and a passing man smiled back. A four wheel drive drove by, the woman inside nodding to music that he didn't recognise but that sounded wonderful. Today it was all okay.

And everyone lived happily ever after.