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The Burden

**The Burden**

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Edited by Marisa Chenery

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This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents and dialogues in this book are of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

Chester doesn't know why his ex-wife sent him a VHS titled EVIDENCE, but he's sure it goes back to when they were married years ago and the turmoil that spawned. What was The Burden behind the tape, and what will Chester do about it?

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Bo jumped to the sound of the mailman's fingers sliding through the slot. The louder clatter of a package arriving was even more cherished, as he quickly made his way to the front door. Chester Daniels, The Burden seventy-eight, looked on joyously as Bo did a pirouette for attention. He always expected treats for his performances—the beagle knew how to beg when he wanted something from Chester. And it didn't just stop at peanut butter spoons, but new tennis balls and belly rubs. The dog was spoiled through and through.

There was a loud thud that spilled into The Burden the still air of the home—

And then boots raked some snow from the door in departure. The mail had arrived. Or a man had just stolen the wreath right off Chester's front door. One or the other. He thought about grabbing his gun just in case, but didn't.

Part of him hoped it wasn't a gift. It was The Burden always an onerous task for Chester when he needed to send a reply. He loved hearing from friends, old and new. He was a lover of people, and when he went to bed he would think about all of them and the impact they had on his life. Souls were precious to Chester, precious and finite, but he could only handle so much.

"What do you think it is, boy?" asked Chester, focusing on the thud at the door.

Not that Chester expected there to be a response. His pup was a creature of silence, apart from his occasional barks and cries. Too many cries lately. Something was wrong with him, but Chester couldn't quite figure The Burden it out. He had a problem with his appetite and his ability to go on walks—that much was clear.

Chester moved as swiftly as he could, his bones a bit rusted this morning, and opened the door.

There was a package from the UPS man, Joe Sanderson. He always had it waiting for him so all Chester had to do was open the door a crack and bend slightly at the knees to retrieve it. Some days Joe would wait and just hand him the package, especially when the winter hit and his body would freeze up. As Joe would say, "Just scoop it on up, Chester."

He didn't know who sent it, not that he really cared to know right away. That was part of the surprise. A Christmas morning thrill, even in old age, had some pleasures. There was a small thistle of curiosity growing beside him, but that was mostly Bo The Burden vehemently chewing on a dog biscuit he must've missed near his bed. Roughly pushing the cotton cover aside, he nibbled and idled near the door and waited for Chester to make his move. "Should I open it, The Burden boy? Should I?"

Joe The Burden didn't have much time for simple chitchat when he was on deliveries, but when he did, he was an overall interesting human being. In The Burden the Army by eighteen and out by twenty-one, jaded by the war. How could he not be? Lucky he was never injured, or worried by PTSD that afflicted comrades The Burden of his, some who had violent outbursts at night and screaming and punching fits. They'd throw lamps across the room and

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shatter them then and there, Joe had told him. More intrigued than frightened.

Chester looked forward to his chats with Joe, and he seemed to appreciate it too. But there still was that little faint sensation Chester had in his gut that said, *This guy blew foreigners away with heavy artillery. What happens when he wants to do the same with you?* It kept conversations short, brief. The Burden Chester never revealed too much, and neither did Joe. But they still enjoyed the company, a thirsty traveler looking for a drink and a handkerchief to wipe the sand and salt from his eyes.

## The Burden

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