

The Realtor

(Christmas play, monologue)

I'm in real estate.

My name is Sanderson, perhaps you've heard of us: Sanderson Real Estate.

It's a good organization: there are three of us, three partners and we are well known in the town. We're doing well, working ourselves into the ground of course, but definitely successful.

My wife Anna works too. She's in computer sales.

We have a son who's twenty and an eighteen year old daughter. They are both still living at home, both still students.

It's a good life. Nice house, two cars. We don't go short of anything.

Our marriage could be better. Why that is? I don't really know. We both work. We both have our own lives. We've been rubbing along like that for years. We just make the best of it. We don't talk a lot, just the necessary things. Not that there's a conflict or anything like that. Just a lot of silence, not a bad relationship. Sometimes I wonder if it's what one would really call a relationship..

We had a bit of a problem last weekend. Suddenly we were in the middle of a fight. And that just before Christmas.

What it was about? I couldn't tell you, it's not really even worth mentioning. It was just a futility really but all of a sudden there was this tremendous scene. First Anna and I had words, then the children started putting their oar in. They were all siding against me. I was standing alone. It just made me furious and one word led to another. At a certain point my son slammed out of the house and went to his friend's place. My daughter ran up to her room and locked the door.

My wife seemed very busy in the kitchen and there I was, all alone in the drawing room.

The four of us, apart, on a Saturday evening.

Then the doorbell rang.

I opened the door. It was Jim, our neighbor.

I said: Hi, what can I do for you?

I know them well, our neighbors. Great folks. Religious, but nice anyway.

Jim said: Can you help me? I have to get my wife to the hospital, the baby is on its way.

I knew that she was expecting their second child but I hadn't realized that she was that far on.

No, no, he said, it's too soon. There are complications too. She was going to have the baby at home but the midwife says it would be better for her to go to the hospital.

She's four weeks premature. Hospital is the best place under the circumstances.

He said: Would you drive us there, then I can care for my wife and we keep an eye on my little boy as well.

I said : Sure, fine. It was also a welcome opportunity to get out of the house. The atmosphere there was so thick you could have cut it with a knife.

So I went outside, drove the car round and we all set off for the hospital. My neighbor's wife was weak. She'd been having contractions for some time and wasn't up to making any sort of conversation. Jim was very caring, supported her the best he could as you would expect. Patrick, their little boy, kept very quiet and still. We drove straight to the emergency department. He had already called to say we were coming. They laid her on a gurney and wheeled her away. I suppose they took her to a delivery room or something. Jim went along too of course.

I just waited in the hallway, with Patrick sitting quietly next to me, until there was news.

All of that evening's argument passed through my mind again. We hadn't had a fight like that in years. It was like a sort of cold war

Perhaps it was years of frustrations and disappointments suddenly coming to a head. All four of us had flared up. It was like some sort of release of grief or something.

There wasn't an awful lot of happiness around in our house.

I sat there thinking about how little time we really spent together. We all lived separate lives. I felt guilty. I 'm not a good father, I thought, and I 'm not a good husband either.

Over the years I'd devoted more time to building up my company than I had to building a family.

I was comfortable sitting there. That Saturday evening it was quiet. I tried to get my thoughts sorted into a more orderly pattern. It wasn't the first time that I had had such thoughts but now I suddenly had the chance of spending more time on them.

I sat there waiting for quite some time. After an hour or more Jim came through the swing doors.

I asked: How's it going?

He said: She's had the baby, it's a boy.

Everything alright with your wife? I asked.

He hesitated. I noticed he wasn't looking all that happy either, it made me wonder if there was something wrong.

Yes, he said, she's well.

So it all went well? I asked. How's the baby?

Yes, he said, it all went well.

That's great, I said.

The baby has Down's Syndrome, he said.

It's got what?

Downs Syndrome, it's a Mongol, he said.

That puts you at a loss for words.

A Mongol, I thought, that's sad.

But your wife is still quite young, I said.

I know, he said, but these things can still happen.

How is she handling it? I asked.

Jim said: She said she was happy. It didn't matter she said. It didn't make any difference to her, she said, she still loved it just as much anyway.

Another silence.

I said: What about you? (I can be very direct at times)

He said: I've still got to get used to the idea, we hadn't been expecting anything like this.

Hadn't you had any of those tests done? I asked.

No, he said, we saw no need. It wouldn't have made any difference for us, not with our beliefs you know.

I was really feeling for him. I felt so sorry for him, it was as if he couldn't take it all in. And suddenly I was just so mad. I thought: These people are believers. Why has God let this happen to them of all people? I thought: If God really exists then He must be pretty cruel to let a thing like this happen!

I kept my thoughts to myself, they weren't what Jim needed right now.

I did ask him if he felt angry about it.

No, not really, he said. I just have this odd feeling. I still have to get used to the idea.

I said: What are you going to do now, do you want to come with me? Shall I drive you home?

No, he said, my wife needs me, particularly right now. I'll stay here with her. Can Patrick go home with you and stay the night? I'll be there tomorrow morning to pick him up.

Sure thing, Jim, I said. I would have done anything for the man at that moment.

So I took Patrick with me, back to the car. We drove off and Jim stayed to spend the night at the hospital.

On the way home I started thinking again. A child has been born this evening. Sooner than they had expected. In a different place. Not at home, like they had planned, but in a hospital. And a different baby to the one that they had been visualizing. A handicapped baby.

Strange really. I thought. Christmas.

Suddenly I saw the link.

What is this, I thought, am I getting mushy and sentimental or what?

I carried on thinking anyway: At Christmas we celebrate the birth of a child. A birth that was all quite different to what the parents had been expecting.

Mary had to go on a journey in spite of her pregnancy. Riding on a donkey or something, or walking. She didn't get to have her baby at home either. She had to have her baby a long way from home, in a strange place. Not in an inn, certainly not in a hospital, but in a stable. If the story is true at least. In the straw, in a cowshed if you can believe it.

I wondered: Is it a load of nonsense or did it really happen?

If so then that child was supposed to be the Son of God, come down to earth.

That's what I was thinking, in the car, with little Patrick next to me.

God was supposed to have come down to earth. Not with Downs Syndrome, but a helpless baby anyway. Who would make up a story like that?

A baby instead of a king and a stable instead of a palace.

That Jim's baby is a Mongol, God let that happen.

That baby in the stable, He let that happen too.
Suddenly I wasn't mad anymore.
Jim hadn't been mad. His wife didn't mind, he'd said. Didn't mind.
He did have one question: Why? That's the big one: Why?
Why was this all happening.
So I drove home and chatted to Patrick a bit too.
You've got a new little brother, I said.
Yes, he said.
Are you pleased? I asked.
Sure he was, he said. He didn't know yet, couldn't understand it all yet either, he's only three.
I got back home.
We tucked Patrick into bed.
In the mean time my son had returned home.
Then I called the four of us together.
They were all a bit surprised. There we all were anyway, sitting in the drawing room, Anna, my son, my daughter and I.
I told them all about Jim. I shared my thoughts about Christmas with them too.
I said: When you experience something like that all your own problems become insignificant. We get uptight about futilities and miss the really important things altogether.
I said to my wife and children: I want to ask your forgiveness.
I haven't been a good husband lately. Nor a good father either.
I've been too busy with my work and, to be honest, with myself.
I haven't paid enough attention to you all.
I've been cynical. I've become hardened. I've neglected the most important things of all.
I don't want to be like that any more.
Through what I saw this evening I've come to understand something.
I want Christmas to be different this year. I don't want to ruin your Christmas. I want there to be peace for us.
They didn't say anything. They just listened.
I said: Christmas isn't just any old feast.
It has a deeper meaning.
And that's why I'm asking your forgiveness.
There was a long silence.
They did forgive me. It happened during the silence. They didn't say a lot but they accepted it.
Anna came over to me and hugged me, then the children too.

It's different now.
My neighbor's wife is back home.
They celebrated the birth of the baby. Maybe a bit less exuberantly but it was festive anyway. They sent out cards and had a lot of visitors for mom and the baby.

There was peace. Peace at the neighbor's place
And at ours too.

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