

THE BOX

A duologue

By

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We see a shop front in a deserted city street; it is about one o'clock in the morning during a frosty November. Left of centre of the shop door is a large cardboard box.

(Enter George, a property speculator. He is cold and is wearing a light jacket and smart trousers, both of impeccable pedigree! Unlike their owner!)

George: (Hears for the box) Well, George old son, needs must and all that!

(He is about to climb in the box when Sid Watt enters. Sid is a man in his late fifties? Untidily dressed with a heavy Coat with voluminous pockets.)

Sid: Hey!

George: Are you addressing me?

Sid: Is there a crowd then?

George: (A little scared) Well ... I ... what can I do for you?

Sid: You can get your hands off me box!

George: Your box? Sorry I didn't...

Sid: Yes mate my box! Took me weeks to find that! I hung around the back of Tesco looking for a big'un ! It's all recycling now . They don't chuck 'em out any more you know !

George : No I didn't know you see I

Sid : First night is it ?

George : Beg your pardon ?

Sid : First night ? Al Fresco sleeping and all that!

George : Oh I see , yes , as it happens . How could you tell?

Sid : Not exactly dressed for it are you ? Scott of the Antarctic you aint!

George : Ah , no suppose not . Cigarette ? (Offers one to Sid)

Sid : No thanks , bad for me sinuses . How are your bowels ?

George : What on earth

Sid : Plays 'avoc with yer bowels , the cold . And yer hemorrhoids !

George : Really !

Sid : Oh yes . I never travel without me Germaloids cream .

George : Well I can see you

Sid : Course this as been my humble abode for some months now ?

George : Good lord !

Sid : Oh Yes . Before that it was next to the laundry at the Grosvenor Hotel !

George : Why the laundry ?

Sid : 'Cause they do the laundry at night and the hot waste water pipes run outside. Put your box next to them and you've got yerself central heating. see ?

George : Remarkable !

Sid : (He sits in the shop doorway .) Not really ! Common sense .

George : Well , sorry about the erm I'll let you get bedded down , nice to talk to you and (He makes as if to leave)

Sid : Look mate , I hope you don't mind but , where do you think you're goin' to sleep tonight ? And why are you out here anyway ? I'd have thought you would have been having your last malt of the night before donning the Calvin Klein silk jim jams and sliding between the sheets with she who must be obeyed !

George : You're right , except it's Armani

Sid : Eh ?

George : The jim jams , Armani not Calvin Klein !

Sid : Oh ! But why not go home , you're not cut out for this are you ?

George : (Sits next to Sid) I don't have a home , not any more . My wife has thrown me out . Says I'm a failure ! Weak ! Not strong enough for her ! Everything's gone you see . It's all crashed ! My career's in tatters , the bank has cancelled all my cards , and the only cash I can get my hands on is in my trouser pocket right now ! And that's not enough for a hotel room . The hostels are full , even the Sally Army . So , for the first time in my life I'm out on the street.

Sid : No relatives alive , mother , father , some port in a storm you can turn to when the croupier of life gives you a bum deal ?

George : No ! I'm afraid not .

Sid : Oh dear me ! You are in dicey predicament aren't you mate ! Not even a mother in law ?

George : My mother in law professed to love men , she ate them in small pieces taken from the freezer !

Sid : So not the mother in law then !

George : In that we are in accord !

Sid : Are we ? What chord is that then , C major , pajama chord , what ?

George : In accord (Sid looks blank) it means we are in agreement !

Sid : Oh ! Well that's good . How about a Friend , with a floor they'd share ?

George : I never made many friends . Friends are like money .

Sid : How come ?

George : They're easier made than kept ! At least that's what I found .

Sid : Well you know what they say mate ?

George : No ! What do they say ?

Sid : The only way to have a friend is to be one !

George : Yes right well look , I don't want to keep you I'll just

Sid : What's your hurry my old son ? Got to rush off to your club or summat ?

George : No it's just that it's rather late and I need

Sid : You need a safe dry place to hang up for a few nights , correct ?

George : Exactly ! And if I can't stay around here I might try the bus station !

Sid : No good there mate . Too many coppers . They'll move you on .
Sandwich Tesco's meat paste ?

George : Thank you no !

Sid : Suit yourself !

George : Look could you help where do you suggest I stay tonight ?

Sid : Call me a softy , but you could have me box .

George : But you said

Sid : That was before . D'you wanna drink ? (Offers a flask to George)

George : That's very kind but

Sid : It's coffee , hot .

George : Costa Rican ?

Sid : No . Costa packet ! (They laugh) Here . (He pours out two cups)
So what was you doin' before it all went pear shaped then ?

George : I played the markets .

Sid : Which ones , Covent Garden , Billingsgate , which ?

George : The property markets !

Sid : Bit ironic that ain't it , in the circumstances so to speak ?

George : Yes , I suppose it is . Look , about your box .

Sid : My old man was in property you know .

George : Seriously ?

Sid : Absolutely mate ! He sold grave yard plots to the council !

George : Not quite a top mover and shaker then ?

Sid : Don't knock it . It might only be a small plot on the surface , but it's four thousand miles deep ! And that's some property !

George : You have a point there ! Now , about your box

Sid : It's a good'n is that box .

George : So you said , but can we

Sid : It 'ad tea bags in it . Earl Gray , you can still smell it a bit .

George : Yes , but the point is , I can't just take over

Sid : I bet you used to have Earl Gray , didn't you ?

George : Well actually I preferred Assam .

Sid : I can't stand all these foreign teas . Give me good British tea !

George : But all tea is grown abroad .

Sid : Ah ! But can you buy it in the Co-op ?

George : (Looks confused for a second then continues) Okay ! Now this box of yours

Sid : Came from India , it says so on the side . Have you been to India ?

George : No but I have been to Singapore .

Sid : Sing a poor what , sing a poor aria , song , what

George : No ! The place called Singapore .

Sid : Was it nice ?

George : Very . Warm and friendly , marvelous food . My sister settled there .
Married a musician called Bala .

Sid : Oh ! Did Balalaika ? Eh ? D'you get it ? Married a musician , see ?

George : He who makes a pun will pick a pocket ! D'you know that ?

Sid : Sorry mate ! No offence meant ! My cousin Concepta was in India .
She didn't like it though.

George : Where did she go ?

Sid : I'm not sure of the exact location but she spent three hours in
hospital when she arrived .

George : Lassitude ?

Sid : God knows , about twenty degrees south I should think ! No , she
was a martyr to in-growing toe nails . Comes from wearing
tight shoes you see ! I told her to take her Scholl sandals , but would
she listen

George : Well interesting as that is I wonder if I could get back to your box

Sid : You haven't been in it yet !

George : Yes , I know , but I would like to , only I feel guilty about taking it off
you .

Sid : Well you needn't worry about that . I mean there would be a rent .

George : A rent !

Sid : Well obviously ! You don't expect to get accommodation in the city center for nothing surely ?

George : But it's a box ! A cardboard box !

Sid : From India ! With blankets !

George : I don't care if it comes from New York and is coated in silk from Syria . Its still a cardboard box . How can you justify

Sid : Look , mate . I'm offering you a property in an area that is highly desirable location wise . It comes complete with bedding , heating from the ventilation slots in the wall of the adjoining permanent structure, and has the additional advantage of being provided with a temporary waterproof covering should the weather become inclement !

George : What the hell does that mean ?

Sid : There's a tarpaulin in the bottom !

George : I don't believe this !

Sid : You should think yourself lucky that you met me . You could have been taken for a right ride by some of the less reputable agents around here .

George : Less reputable agents look . You are trying to charge me for the privilege of sleeping in a cardboard box !

Sid : Now just a minute . A few moments ago you were desperate for a place to stay , correct ?

George : Correct but

Sid : Then you meet me . Being a man of a compassionate disposition I offer you shelter , basic in the extreme I agree , but shelter nonetheless ! Now if you watch the documentaries , on the telly , you'll have seen parts of the world where people are living in conditions not dissimilar to you in this box .

George : True I grant you .

Sid : And are they paying for it ? You bet your life ! So why D'you think I should treat you any different ? You privileged or summat ?

George : I'm not privileged ! I have never been privileged ! I came from a working class home . My father was a scrap dealer .

Sid : Ooooh ! One of our black economy merchants ! Cash only transactions and devil take the tax man ! Whilst the rest of us , less privileged , pay our taxes, which are artificially high to make up the shortfall, caused by the likes of your old man !

George : Now look I don't have to listen to any more of your inane ramblings ! Sod you and sod your box ! I'll go and kip down on the underpass to the station !

Sid : Got a rubber sheet with you 'ave you ?

George : What ?

Sid : Burst water main in the underpass ! It's flooded ! And I might tell you that'll increase the demand for decent pitches tonight ! Listen mate . You take my offer . I'll charge you a fair price ! I don't know where else you'll find to stay tonight ! Listen , it's supply and demand . You believe in the market economy , the law of supply and demand , don't you ?

George : Of course , but I can't see what

Sid : There you are then !

George : But this is just sheer greed !

Sid : Steady on mate ! You're a bit free with your moral judgments
aren't you ?

George : Sorry I didn't mean

Sid : No , your sort never do . Tell me this , just explain to me how you come to
be strolling the streets with no fixed abode ? Were you sacked or did you
jump , which was it eh?

George : Look this is

Sid : Come on , come on ! I bet you were sacked , am I right ?

George : As it happens , yes you are . (Makes his mind up to clear up this point)
I tried to do a few deals of my own on company time , using company
money

Sid : I see ! Now who was being greedy ?

George : No , you don't see ! I was going to pay the money back
from the profits I made on the deals

Sid : (Highly Skeptical of this) Ohhh ! Of course you were !

George : I was ! I could have got away with it as well .

Sid : So what went wrong then ?

George : I didn't make any profit on the deals did I ?

Sid : Oh dear !

George : In fact I made a three quarters of a million loss !

Sid : Oh double dear !

George : Oh dear indeed ! My boss carried out a regular audit . And although I'd done my best to hide the computer files and fudge the figures my misdeeds were discovered !

Sid : And the brown stuff hit the fan !

George : Enough to fertilize the Thames valley !

Sid : Did you need the money ?

George : Which money

Sid : The money you were hoping to make from your little scam .

George : It wasn't a scam ! They were perfectly legal deals ,
on the property market

Sid : Using somebody else's money !

George : Well if you must be pedantic yes .

Sid : So like I said , did you need the money ?

George : My wife did .

Sid : Wives , who'd have 'em ?

George : I only had the one !

Sid : Sounds like more than enough though .

George : In most respects she's a very good wife !

Sid : “ In all the woes that curse our race , there is a lady on the case ! “

George : “ In the case “

Sid : You what ?

George : The quote , it's in the case not on the case . But I take your point !

Sid : So she wanted to spend more than you had ? Do you know every woman I've ever known spends half her time buying things she can't afford !

George : Mine seemed to spend the other half taking them back !

Sid : Right . So when these little deals went pear-shaped she more coffee by the way ?

George : Why not ?