

The Box Room

By

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The Box Room

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The Box Room

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We see a small living room of a flat above a shop . Although it is full of furniture and the walls are almost covered in pictures everything is neat and tidy . There is a drop leaf dining table with a cream, lace edged, cloth. A bowl of china fruit stands exactly central on the table. There are three easy chairs with high backs and seats that are at a comfortable height to get into and out of. The belongings are those of one from a past generation but have been well looked after by the only occupant of the room. He is Bernard. A neat fastidious dresser in his forties.

He has on a longish oatmeal cardigan, sage green cavalry twill slacks, light natural coloured suede shoes. His shirt is oatmeal-combed cotton and he wears a maroon tie with a single Windsor knot.

Bernard:

When they came to me, to report Sidney's death, I thought at first it was about my complaint to the RSPCA. The Deardons, next door, keep pigeons and they play havoc with my window boxes! I spend hours with a used toothbrush cleaning the accumulated droppings from my wrought iron bracketry! It takes the shine off the Moss Green lacquer you see. Anyway. I was sat in my chair beginning to regret my experimentation with mixed oriental spice in my hot pot, when there was this knock at the door. I knew it wasn't Sidney because he always beat a military tattoo with the knocker. No, this was an urgent, single, efficient rap.

Well, as I say, it wasn't the RSPCA. This young policewoman stood there. All very modern. You know, cherry red lips, uplift bra and a clipboard! "Mr. Tollchard," She says, and I nod, as you do. "I'm afraid I have some bad news, can I come in?" Which she did. Well they do don't they. They don't wait for an answer. Sidney always said it was called assuming consent. They taught him that at a sales school he attended. It was for now what was it not Sunlight Soapoh yes, Sun Life Insurance! Anyway, in she comes as bold as brass. I managed to get in front of her to steer her away from my Jardiniere at the top of the stairs, it's very vulnerable there, especially to anyone with hips the size of hers. So, as I say she stands next to the table and gives me the news that Sidney had collapsed and died in the premises of Benny's Burger Joint. It's on the high street. Next to Pallister's Pets Emporium. Anyway, having got that news out of the way, and made suitable palliative remarks at me designed to show due regard to the gravity of the situation she asks if I know anything about a Mr. George Sherrup. Apparently his name was on some receipts in Sidney's pocket. Now. I told her that Sidney had been renting out a cardboard box to a gentleman of that name, who had, apparently, fallen upon hard times. It was quite a nice little earner for him and the local hostels were glad to get some of the economic migrants off their hands, so they tended to turn a blind eye to what some might regard as exploitation of the needy. I explained that Mr Sherrup had not been seen frequenting said box for several days." Why do you need to see him?" I asked, and she went all starchy and said that they needed to "tie up some loose ends". Then she said could she see Sidney's room. It's the spare room, or as my mother would have put it, the Box Room. Well I was a bit put out. You see, Sidney and I are notwere not of the same persuasion when it came to matters of neatness and cleanliness. Whereas I go round my quarters at least twice a week with Porchester's Beeswax with lavender,

The Box Room

Sidney's room would be lucky to see a quick flit with Mr Sheen twice a year ! That's not to malign the excellent properties of spray polish mind you ,but there is a difference to the discerning eye . In a nutshell Sidney's room was a disgrace . Mind you there was some decent stuff in there , especially the French occasional table that I got when my sister died . She fell off her roof when she had a nosebleed as she was trying to adjust the television aerial . But it does badly need a good buffing with Porchester's as I say

Any way the long and the short of it is we go on up there . She pokes around a bit and asks me if I can see anything missing . So I asked " Of his , or mine ? " Either . " She said . Well I didn't know really . Sidney used to bring odd things in every now and again , he'd go to boot sales that seemed to sell everything but boots , and house clearance sales , you know ? Sometimes he'd come back with some little thing or other . I remember he came in once with a rather fine-tooled leather bound edition of some fellow's diaries . He reckoned it was worth quite a lot , but I don't know if he knew anything about antiques or books . He did go to the library a lot .Trouble was his room was always such a jumble I couldn't tell if anything was missing or not . " In any case " I told her . " He often used to sell some of his finds so it's hard for me to say ." As for the things that were my property , they were , as far as memory would allow , all present and correct . She hummed and hahd a bit and came downstairs and as she left she asked me to ring the police if I should see Mr Sherrup again . When I enquired if he was in any sort of trouble she flashed me white smile , I think she must use one of these baking soda tooth pastes , and assured me that it was just a matter of tying up loose ends . " There she goes again with these loose ends ! " I thought and she left making some throw away remarks about what people would do just to have a bed for the night .

The thing I didn't tell her was that Sidney and this George character became quite close acquaintances . Although he rented the Box from Sidney it was only for a few days and then Sidney re-let it to some Bosnian bloke who sold The Big Issue . George had found a room . But he used to come and visit Sidney quite often . Well he won't now .

I never really took to George . True he was very fond of my sausage and red wine casserole , made with fresh ingredients , not these cook in sauce things . It was more in his mannerisms . Little things he did . I'm like my mother in that you see . We notice little things . A really rude remark would pass unnoticed , but if someone continually fiddled with their quick , or moved a coaster that had been carefully and strategically positioned such that a cup could be placed upon it with minimal effort , then our hackles would inexplicably be raised . I never let on to Sidney about my misgivings regarding George. As his landlord it wasn't my place . I don't find it pays to offer opinions of that sort . It can so often lead to

The Box Room

frictions of a personal nature best avoided .

The news of Sidney's death didn't come as a complete surprise. He led a somewhat bohemian and profligate life . Mixed with some people that mother would have most definitely not approved of and consumed the most bizarre combinations of foods and drink imaginable at all hours of the night and day . I once saw him sit down to a giant Mars Bar with a huge spoonful of Granny Sugden's Homemade Relish ! Mother was very fond of Mars Bars although later on in life she did graduate towards a penchant for Tobelerone . She'd sit and eat it and then remove her dentures and with a pin , carefully secreted into her cardigan especially for the job , she would extricate the