

The Terribly, Tragically Sad Man

A parable for today by Loren Seibold

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Once there was a boy who lived in a big house on a hill. He loved dogs and horses, sports cars and music. He climbed trees and went swimming, played football and admired pretty girls. Except for having to pick up after himself, he had a nice life.

One day the boy said to God, “I’ve been thinking, and I know what I want when I become a man.”

“What?” asked God.

“I want to live in a big house with a porch across the front and two Saint Bernards and a garden out back. I want to marry a woman who is tall and very beautiful and kind, who has long, black hair and blue eyes, and who plays the guitar and sings in a clear, high voice.

“I want three strong sons to play football with. When they grow up, one will be a great scientist, one will be a Senator and the youngest will quarterback for the 49ers.

“I want to be an adventurer who sails vast oceans and climbs tall mountains and rescues people. And I want to drive a red Ferrari and never have to pick up after myself.”

“That sounds like a nice dream,” said God. “I want you to be happy.”

One day, playing football, the boy hurt his knee. After that he couldn’t climb tall mountains or even tall trees, much less sail vast oceans. So he studied marketing and started a medical-supplies business.

He married a girl who was very beautiful and very kind and who had long, black hair. But she was short, not tall, and had brown eyes, not blue. She couldn’t play the guitar, or even sing. But she prepared wonderful meals seasoned with rare Chinese spices and painted magnificent pictures of birds.

Because of his business, he lived in a city near the top of a tall apartment building that overlooked the blue ocean and the city’s twinkling lights. He didn’t have room for two Saint Bernards, but he had a fluffy cat.

He had three daughters, all very beautiful. The youngest, who was in a wheelchair, was the loveliest. The three daughters loved their father very much. They didn’t play football with him, but sometimes they went to the park and tossed a Frisbee - except for the youngest, who sat under a tree strumming her guitar and singing lovely, haunting songs.

He had enough money to live comfortably, but he didn’t drive a Ferrari. Sometimes he had to pick up things and put them away - even things that didn’t belong to him. After all, he had three daughters.

Then one morning the man awoke and remembered his dream. “I am very sad,” he said to his best friend.

“Why?” asked his friend.

“Because I once dreamed of marrying a tall woman with black hair and blue eyes who would play the guitar and sing. My wife can’t play the guitar and sing. She has brown eyes, and she’s not tall.”

“Your wife is beautiful and very kind,” said his friend. “She creates splendid pictures and delectable food.”

But the man wasn’t listening.

“I am very sad,” the man confessed to his wife one day.

“Why?” asked the wife.

“Because I once dreamed of living in a big house with a porch, and of having two Saint Bernards and a garden out back. Instead, I live in an apartment on the 47th floor.”

“Our apartment is comfortable and we can see the ocean from our couch,” replied his wife. “We have love, laughter and paintings of birds and a fluffy cat - not to mention three beautiful children.”

But the man wasn't listening.

"I am very sad," the man said to his accountant.

"Why?" asked the accountant.

"Because I once dreamed of driving a red Ferrari and of never having to pick up after myself. Instead, I take public transportation, and sometimes I still have to clean up."

"You wear good suits. You eat at fine restaurants, and you've toured Europe," said his accountant.

But the man wasn't listening. His accountant charged him \$100 anyway. He was dreaming of a red Ferrari himself.

"I am very sad," the man said to his minister.

"Why?" asked the minister.

"Because I once dreamed of having three sons: a great scientist, a politician and a quarterback. Instead, I have three daughters, and the youngest can't even walk."

"But your daughters are beautiful and intelligent," said the minister. "They love you very much, and they've all done well. One is a nurse, another is an artist and the youngest teaches music to children."

But the man wasn't listening. He was so sad that he became very sick. He lay in a white hospital room surrounded by nurses in white uniforms. Tubes and wires connected his body to blinking machines that he had once sold to the hospital.

He was terribly, tragically sad. His family, friends and minister gathered around his bed. They were all deeply sad, too. Only his therapist and his accountant remained happy.

Then one night, when everyone except the nurses had gone home, the man said to God, "Remember when I was a boy and I told you all the things I wanted?"

"It was a lovely dream," said God.

"Why didn't you give me those things?" asked the man.

"I could have," said God. "But I wanted to surprise you with things you didn't dream of."

"I suppose you've noticed what I've given you: a kind, beautiful wife; a good business; a nice place to live; three lovely daughters - one of the best packages I've put together..."

"Yes," interrupted the man. "But I thought you were going to give me what I really wanted."

"And I thought you were going to give me what I really wanted," said God.

"What did you want?" asked the man. It had never occurred to him that God was in want of anything.

"I wanted to make you happy with what I'd given you," said God.

The man lay in the dark all night, thinking. Finally, he decided to dream a new dream, one he wished he'd dreamed years before. He decided to dream that what he wanted most were the very things he already had.

And the man got well and lived happily on the 47th floor, enjoying his children's beautiful voices, his wife's deep brown eyes and her glorious paintings of birds. And at night he gazed at the ocean and contentedly watched the lights of the city twinkling on, one by one.