



The Accidental Messenger

a short story

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My guess was that Carl Maynard's views were not that unusual. He was searching for guidance in the only way he knew how. I don't know why I stopped or why I went along with him. I was off from work so had the time. I thought I might be able to help him and he sure looked like he could use some help.

Carl closed the front door, but he could still hear his wife crying inside. After their son was picked up by the school bus she felt free to voice her concerns about their marriage. Carl, never being able to cope with confrontation, walked out. He felt he had to get away. He reached his car and realized that he had clutched his keys so hard they left marks on his fingers. He felt lost, so lost. He needed someone to tell him what to do to save his marriage.

He drove and as he turned the corner he saw Father Reynolds opening the church door for Monday morning confessions. It was a sign he thought. It must be a sign. He parked his car and walked toward the large deep colored door covered in gold trim. The door squeaked a bit as he stepped into the dark and silent vestibule. His footsteps echoed through the hall as he went to sit in the pew. He saw the door to the confessional just close as he rounded the column. Father heard his steps and even before Carl could sit, he called out.

“Step inside,” Father said.

Carl opened the door to the adjoining booth that was separated by the dark screen, allowing only shadows to be seen. He sat on the hard wood bench and pulled the door closed.

“You may begin, my son,” Father Reynolds said.

“Bless me Father for I have sinned. My last confession was over four months ago.”

“My, you have been busy,” Father said.

“I know, Father, but I’m not here to confess my sins. I need someone to tell me what to do to save my marriage. I’ve always provided for my wife and son. They have everything they need and more. I often work late, but it’s necessary if I want to get anywhere. I have never even looked at another woman, never dreamed of cheating. It just doesn’t seem to be enough.”

Father, hesitated for a few moments and said, “It sounds like you mean to be a good husband. Maybe you can bring your wife here with you for counseling. We can read from the bible. The Lord can help you.”

“I’m afraid that it will be too late, Father. I need to know now what the Lord wants me to do. How can I know what he wants me to do, Father?”

“Some times he talks to you through your heart, my son. Many times he chooses a messenger who comes out of the shadows to lead you into the light of our Lord’s wisdom. I will pray for you my son.”

He dropped the wooden cover down over the screen signaling the end, so Carl walked out. Trying to make sense out of his life, he left his car parked so he could walk and think. He wandered into the small town up the road.

A new bookstore opened in town and I was looking in the window, feeling a bit frustrated that there wasn’t a clear sign indicating which door to enter. I thought it might be in the back so I started to walk through the narrow alley. Half way I could tell that even in the daytime it was too dark so I turned around. That’s when I saw Carl. It seems I startled him as I emerged from the dark alley.

“Do you know the way in,” I asked him?

His face turned white and he just stared at me for a few moments, silently.

“You’re the messenger from the shadows. No, I don’t know the way in to the light of our Lord’s wisdom. Can you help me? Please help me,” he said.

I could see this as being amusing if he didn’t look so lost and pitiful. It couldn’t hurt to listen to him when he obviously needed someone to listen.

“Hey, come on, let’s walk and talk,” I said.

As we walked he told me his name, never asking for mine. He told me all about his life, his wife and son. How he’s faithful to his wife and provides well for all of their needs. But he is certain his wife wants to leave him.

“I give her everything,” he said. Please tell me what the Lord wants me to do.”

“The Lord can not tell you what to do, Carl. Only you can fix it. Only you control how you live your life and how you react to the things you can’t control.”

“You are talking about how the Lord gives us free will.” he said.

“You can say that.” I told him. Only you steer the course of your life. You told me how faithful you are and all you do for your wife and son, but there was something that I didn’t hear you say.”

“What’s that,” he asked?

“That you give her your friendship. That you let her know she’s there to be more than the woman who goes through the motions of marriage.”

“I didn’t consider that.” He said. Why did I stop thinking about that? You’re right. That had somehow gotten lost at some time. So the Lord gives us free will, but at least he sent you for guidance.”

“No, Carl, we’re just talking. I’m just making an observation. You are already half way there because you want to make it right. It shows that you have a conscience. Take time off from your job. Go into the travel agency at the corner and buy tickets to take your family somewhere. Surprise your wife. Better yet, put the tickets and hotel pamphlet on a flower arrangement and have the florist across the street deliver it. I happen to know they will deliver it today.”

“You’re right. I will do that. I can’t thank you enough.”

“You’re welcome, Carl. Never forget that everything you do is up to you.”

“I understand; that free will thing.” He said, and walked off to the travel office.

“And sign the note, -with love from your best friend,” I told him as he walked away.

A couple of days went by and I went into town to buy the book I wanted the day I ran into Carl. I wondered how things went for him.

I was beginning to look for the entrance to the bookstore again when I saw him walking up from the corner. He seemed incredibly surprised to see me.

“You’re back,” he said. I guess you came to hear, but you must already know that things went great. My wife and I tucked our son into bed and we talked late into the night. We hadn’t done that in years. She loved the flowers and we are all going to Florida for a week. She couldn’t be happier.”

“I’m glad it worked out. Actually, I was just wondering about you when I got here to buy the book I wanted the other day,” I told him.

“What kind of book does a messenger of God read, he asked?”

“Well, yeah, about that. My name is Ian. I live on Sherman Oaks Road, down about a half a mile. I was here two days ago to buy a new Richard Dawkins book. Actually, I’m atheist, far from a messenger of any god.”

“But you changed my life,” Carl said.

“No, Carl. You did. I just gave you a few ways you could take your life into your own hands and hopefully got across that you should stop looking for guidance. Just act. How you design yourself is up to you. You’re human so you’ll make mistakes, but good things will come as well.”

“Well thank you, Ian. You helped me a great deal.”

“It’s nice to know you, Carl, take care. Now for that book I wanted to buy. Do you know the way in,” I asked?