

Stories for lipreading



THE WARDROBE by Michael Edwards

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]

Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this autobiographical story, which is called 'The Wardrobe' by Michael Edwards.

The Wardrobe by Michael Edwards

It was sometime in the early 1950s, when my father decided that we needed a new wardrobe. We were not particularly well-off as a family especially in those early days, and so the purchase of a new or even second-hand wardrobe was out of the question. An opportunity arose to obtain a good second-hand wardrobe free of charge, but it would have to be collected from the owner. What a stroke of luck!

"You'll have to carry it downstairs. Is that alright?" said the owner. Of course it would be, but my brother and I would be needed to help Dad with the lifting. We set off to an address somewhere in Tooting in one of the elderly laundry vans which my father had borrowed for the afternoon from the steam-laundry where he worked, eagerly looking forward to collecting the new wardrobe. We arrived at the small back-to-back house, were shown the wardrobe, which was in an upstairs back bedroom, and proceeded to heave and lift it to the narrow stairs, down which it could not and would never fit. A great deal of hopeful manoeuvring by the three of us, and cursing from Dad, got us nowhere.

There was only one thing for it: it would have to be lowered through the bedroom window and into the back-yard. It could then easily be carried through the house to the van. However, it would not fit through unless the window was removed. Some while later, using makeshift tools borrowed from the kitchen, as we had not come prepared for this possibility, the sash window was removed. We now needed ropes to lower the furniture to the yard below. There wasn't anything suitable in the van and the only thing that could be found was a length of ancient rope washing line. That would have to do. My brother and I waited in the yard as the wardrobe was first heaved up onto the window-sill by my father and the aged householder, and then carefully lowered on its rope from the window above. The rope was having none of it.

With the wardrobe halfway down, the rope frayed and parted, and its burden hurtled towards the cobbled yard below. Thankfully, my brother and I were able to avoid being crushed. The wardrobe struck the cobbles and shattered. The window through which the wardrobe had been lowered had to be laboriously reassembled, and the sad remains of our new furniture loaded onto the van for the journey home.

That wardrobe remained unusable in this sorry state in the front bedroom for a very long time, awaiting a repair that never came, a constant reminder of another moment of bad luck or perhaps just plain incompetence.

Moral of the story: if an offer looks too good to be true, it probably will turn out to be!

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