

THE GOOD MAN NEXT DOOR

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*A commentary by **Roberto J. De Lapuente**.*

All night he watched at his daughter's bedside. She wasn't seriously ill, but he was concerned. And he didn't want to put his wife through an all-nighter. Not because she was weak, but because he wanted her to sleep. She was a good woman and he wanted to give something back to her. So he patted the sweat from the child's forehead, handed her tea and found comforting words.

The little girl woke up several times and he told her short stories in the middle of the night. Mostly they were episodes full of fantasy and funny characters doing good and supporting each other. She soon fell asleep again with a smile on her lips. He took a seat again on the chair next to the crib and dozed off. Every movement of his little darling made him jump up.

In between, he slipped into the bedroom, checking on his wife. She was snoring sweetly. He approached her, covered her and stroked her hair, lost in thought. Strands caught between his fingers and he struggled to release them without pulling.

Over to the flower shop

Back in his daughter's room, he thought about giving his wife a little pleasure. He wanted to prepare the breakfast table. After that, he had to leave. Business was calling. A gesture of this kind would certainly make the separation more bearable for her. She deserved it. He loved her deeply and she had always been a good wife to him.

He quietly made plans to himself about how the table should look: The napkins and what he wanted to serve. He regretted that he couldn't get a fresh flower arrangement. He didn't want to leave his daughter alone for too long. But candles, of course, were firmly in place. She should have it nice. She should repeat that her husband was a good man. A stroke of luck. The good that lived under the common roof.

The closer the time for breakfast came, the more he was bothered by the table, which would not carry flowers. Still he was struggling. Should he hurry up and get some?

Then he gave himself a push. He could quickly leave the apartment, go to the flower store and get some tulips. The little girl wouldn't wake up and call for her father right now. Sick people always slept more deeply in the morning than at the times when they were supposed to be in a deep sleep.

At the old man's hand

She loved tulips. And so he quickly put on a jacket and ran over. It was still early, dawn was slowly coming up. The fog rose from the manhole covers. A picture of a cliché. As one draws a morning in the same way, when one is supposed to draw it. It looked like the cheap backdrop for a Michael Curtiz or Leo McCarey flick.

Just before he reached the store, he encountered an old man shuffling down the sidewalk with heavily loaded bags. He could barely heave the load and looked very lost anyway. For the husband rushing for tulips, there was no question. He went to give the old man a hand, asked him where his apartment was, and was lucky, it was only a few yards away. The old man had shopped at the weekly market early in the morning to avoid getting into the mix and getting lost.

When the old man offered him money, he refused to accept it. It was out of the question for him. It was almost an insult that his helpfulness should be settled with a fee.

But now he hurried to the flower store. He had already spent enough time. The store was just being supplied. He asked for three tulips and made a harmless compliment to the saleswoman, pressed a bill into her hand, did not wait for the return money and hurried to be home if possible before his wife woke up.

Out of conviction

On the way back, some neighbors met him. All of them greeted him joyfully. He was not unknown in the district. They appreciated his helpful nature, his ability to listen and not only to hear the problems of the people around him, but also to actively participate in solving them. One of the neighbors who greeted him was someone he had helped move a few years ago. She became a widow, her husband died suddenly of a heart attack, and she had to move to a smaller apartment for financial reasons. Weeks before moving to the

new apartment, she lamented her sorrow to his wife. She in turn told her husband. And he organized volunteers and helped out himself. He found many volunteers in the local branch of his party. He whistled and they came.

A mother who was leading her daughter by the hand and who now crossed his path called him from the other side of the street and waved. He had gotten her husband a job some time ago. Some of his party friends thought he was helping all these people just to make a political career. But that was far from his mind. His parental home had shaped him. There he learned that you should be there for your fellow human beings. You don't help out of calculation, but out of conviction. That was a striking difference. And every help he offered or provided was marked by this conviction. A smile, the thanks in the eyes of those he had helped, was reward for him. A political career was never on his agenda anyway.

He walked up to the apartment. Ran into the room of the sick daughter. She was still asleep. He felt her forehead. She was colder. The fever was leaving. He kissed her head and headed for the kitchen, setting a nice breakfast table. The tulips were the crowning touch.

He looked snasy

Then he laid down next to his wife and kissed her tenderly awake. He reached under the covers and hugged her. He felt her breasts tremble and he trembled just as much. She blinked and when she saw him, she smiled and gave him a kiss. He almost had the desire wrapped around him, but he pulled himself together. His wife didn't like sleeping with him in the morning. As a decent husband, he respected that.

They got up and strolled into the kitchen. She was pleased when she caught sight of the tulips. Breakfast was accessory. She enjoyed it anyway. They both smacked bread and butter and licked the honey. After breakfast she would have desired him, but time was hurrying. He had to leave soon. Work was calling. He ran again to his daughter. She was still half asleep when he promised to take her and her friends to the zoo very soon. Then he hugged his wife, gave her a kiss and told her that she was the happiness of his life.

She had tears in her eyes as he put on his leather coat and cap. The skull and crossbones flashed. He looked

snasy. He had to hurry. The special train to Treblinka would not wait for him.

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Thanks to the author for the right to publish the article.

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