

Querida's Quilts

by

Zalman Velvel

Querida watched her neighbor's children through the window over her kitchen sink.

The two sisters, aged 8 and 6, were playing so nice on the new swing set in their backyard. The older sister pushed the younger girl because she couldn't get herself going by herself. When the younger sister was going quite high, the older one stopped pushing.

Then she pinched her little sister's behind each time her swing came back. The younger one screamed in pain each time she was pinched.

"Damn it! Stop it out there!" Their mother yelled out the window.

Querida felt an ache in her heart, wishing it were her own children that were playing in her backyard. She wouldn't yell at them. Never.

Never was a painful word, and she pushed it out of her mind as she busied herself with dinner. It would be burritos, and then ice cream for dessert. Manny loved them both. She smiled when she thought of him and how, even at forty, he hadn't lost his simple boyhood tastes.

As she moved around the kitchen, her mind drifted back to when she was a teenager. She was so proud then of her figure, her curves. The boys and young men noticed her. Now, at thirty eight, she still got noticed, but not like then. Manny said he loved her even more now, she was more "womanly", but she thought he was just being kind. Of course he was, she told herself, and that was why she loved him. He was the kindest man she knew.

She heard Manny's key in the lock, washed her hands quickly, and dried them on her apron. She got a beer from the frig, and arrived at his side just as he was closing the front door behind him.

"How was your day, Manuel?" She handed him a cold Corona.

"Pepe was hung over, and the big mower was giving us trouble - I think it's the carburetor - but we got our work done." He handed her the money he collected during the day.

"Go and shower, Manuel. I'm almost done with supper."

When Manny finished cleaning up, he sat down at the head of the table, barefoot, wearing shorts, and a clean white t-shirt. He was a small man, yet powerful, each muscle defined by years of hard work in the sun. He smiled and rubbed his stomach when Querida placed a stack of burritos in front of him. He pulled the top off his second Corona.

"How was your day, Querida?"

"Nothing special. I went to the market and cleaned the house. Oh yes, I weeded the garden and cut down some bananas. I will fry them tomorrow for dinner."

Querida decided she would wait until after dessert before she told him about the letter. She took away the large dishes, and got out the cookie crunch ice cream from the freezer, a scoop, and two bowls. Cookie crunch was Manny's favorite, and he ate it, lost in his own pleasure. When he licked the empty spoon after he finished his second helping, she pulled the letter out of her apron pocket.

"I got another letter today, about one of my quilts."

He did not ask her to read it. He did not have to. She opened it and began:

Dear Querida,

I saw your label on the quilt and got your phone number from information. I tried to phone you many times over the last two months, but each time, I stopped because my voice would not work right after I dialed. It felt better to write. I hope I am not intruding on your privacy.

Samantha was staying at the Ronald MacDonald House in Orlando, near Disney World, when she received your beautiful quilt, the one with blue and red patches, and the design of the mother holding a child. She was in the final stages of her disease then. At night she felt chills, even though the temperature was in the 90's and quite humid, and the air conditioning was fighting to keep up with it. When she was cold, we wrapped your quilt around her, and it helped.

Querida could not read aloud anymore. The tears were running down her face and her voice sounded like a frog croaking. She handed the letter to Manny.

Manny held her hand, tightly, as he read the remainder of the letter to himself:

When it came time for Samantha's burial, they asked if I wanted your quilt to be placed with her, and a voice deep inside told me not to. Instead, I placed the quilt on the bed in the guestroom, which used to be her bedroom.

I do not know why God gives us children, and then takes them from us. It could not have been anything Samantha did. She was a wonderful child, and even if she weren't, what could a child do to justify dying? I searched my soul for my own sins, found many, but none that would be worthy of this ... what crime would a mother have to commit to justify the taking of her child at four years of age?

I wondered how a loving God could do such a thing to a mother, have her struggle to have a child, and then take that child away. Sometimes, it is all I can bear to wake up in the morning. And when it is almost more than I can take, I go into Samantha's room ... I mean the guestroom ... and take her quilt, the beautiful red and blue quilt that you made, with the design of the mother holding her child, and I wrap it around myself. I can still smell Samantha on the quilt, I will never wash it out. And when I smell her, I cry because I hurt, and I cry because I am happy to know that there is love in this world - your quilt assures me of that. And when I am done crying, the love is what remains.

Thank you so much for your beautiful gift of love. Words can never express how much it meant to Samantha, and how much it means to me now, and will always mean to me.

God Bless you.

Jane Miller

When Manny was done reading the letter, he wiped his eyes. He handed the letter back to Querida and looked into her eyes and smiled. In his eyes, Querida could see how proud and sad he was for her. He stood up and pulled on the back of her chair. When she stood, he held her and hugged her for a long time. When Manny hugged her, Querida felt complete.

When the dishes were cleaned, Querida went to the spare bedroom, which she converted to a sewing room when it was sure that they would never have children. She

took some thumbtacks from the middle draw in her desk and tacked the letter on the wall, next to the others.

Then she gathered some material and her favorite scissors. She would begin another quilt, one with green and white patches, and a Christmas design. She turned off the light in her sewing room, and sat next to Manny on the couch. They watched tv while her hands were busy doing their dance with the scissors and material.

THE END

** This story is dedicated, with love, to Fran, my own Querida. **

www.ZalmanVelvet.com

Gift Section

Dear _____

This Story is a special Gift for a Special Person

on the occasion of your _____.

I love you,

Person Giving Gift

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