

Local Hero

“You should be ashamed of yourself; a man your age still reading those silly comic books!”

His wife’s harsh words that morning accompanied Dave on his drive to work. They had argued because he got home later than usual the night before because he stopped at his favorite comic shop to pick up some new books. She always rode him about his hobby, saying things like, “You waste too much time reading those things!” or, “Where are we going to find the room for all those boxes full of that junk?”

“I wish I was as decisive as the superheroes I read about,” Dave said to the windshield. “When confronted with a problem, they know just what to do. Everyone respects them.”

He thought of his kids; seven-year-old Evie and ten- year-old Jason. He wondered if they had any respect for him.

“I’m probably the last person they would consider a super hero.” he said bitterly.

Dave’s down-in-the-mouth mood continued all morning. The work he did as an accountant didn’t help to lighten it up either. Of all the boring jobs! The clock crawled through the morning hours until his lunchtime reprieve. Dave decided to walk to the fast-food joint down the street for lunch.

“A boring lunch spot for a boring person,” he said under his breath on his way there. He ordered his burger, fries and soft drink and searched in vain for an empty seat in the crowded room, just one among many who wandered in the land of the seat-less. Dave finally gave up and went outside, where he wound up sitting on the curb out front to eat his already cooling lunch.

“I’ll bet superheroes always get a seat,” he mumbled in between bites.

He finished his food and idly sipped his soft drink, when he happened to look in the front window of the restaurant. Cathy, one of his co-workers, sat by the front window and seemed to be having trouble. It soon became evident to him that she had begun to choke on her food! Some of the people around gestured in an agitated fashion. Without another thought, Dave jumped up and ran into the restaurant. He pushed past the people milling about and made his way to Cathy’s table. When he got there, she rose from her seat. He took her arm to stop her from running off and moved behind her.

“Just relax, Cathy,” he said, as he positioned her in front of him to perform the Heimlich maneuver. Cathy slumped a little.

I surely hope this works, he thought, or I’m going to have a lot of explaining to do as to why I have a dead woman in my arms!

He grasped his right fist with his left hand, positioned his fist on Cathy’s breastbone, just below her bosom and pulled his fist back sharply. Cathy emitted a loud “Ooof!” and a piece of food popped from her mouth onto the floor. She inhaled for what seemed like a full minute.

“Are you okay, Cathy?” Dave asked.

Cathy turned to face him and nodded vigorously, a smile forming on her face. She then surprised Dave by hugging him and planting a kiss on his cheek!

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The rest of the day became a blur for Dave. Everyone at work wanted to shake his hand and find out what had happened. His boss told him he planned to put Dave in for a company award for what he had done.

In the hearing of many of his co-workers, he told Dave, "This is the kind of clear-headed thinking this company needs."

Dave felt ten feet tall! The drive home proved a much brighter one than his drive in had been. He kept replaying the scene in the restaurant. When everyone panicked, he knew just what to do. A thought struck him. He had acted very much like the superheroes he read about. A serious problem had occurred and he had acted decisively to confront and ultimately solve it, saving a life in the process.

So, that is how you do it! he thought. *You do the logical thing at the time with what you have inside you.*

Eager to tell his family about his afternoon adventure, Dave hurried up the front steps and opened the front door.

"I'm home!" he yelled from the doorway.

The house seemed empty and no answer came back. His good mood began to droop.

Oh well, back to real life, he thought glumly.

At that moment, little Evie came running toward him. "Daddy! Daddy! You're on TV!" she exclaimed in her piping voice.

"On TV?" he asked, confused.

Evie grabbed his hand and pulled him toward the family room. "Come and see!"

When they arrived, he saw his wife and son watching the Six O'clock News. A reporter stood in front of the very place he had eaten his lunch!

"... local hero, who's quick thinking saved the life of a choking woman. We have some actual footage of the incident, captured on someone's cell phone."

The scene changed and Dave saw himself administering the Heimlich maneuver. The video had even captured the hug and kiss Cathy had given him! The reporter came back on, finished the piece and the news continued with its litany of grief.

Dave's wife Mary snapped off the TV and she and Jason joined Evie in a long session of happy questions and excited chatter.

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That night, after the kids were in bed, Dave and his wife sat in the living room, sipping tea.

"It's been quite a day, Mary," Dave said, pleased with how everything had gone.

"I'll say. It's not every day you get on TV," Mary agreed.

"It sure ended on a better note than it began," Dave said.

"Oh? Why was that?"

"I was feeling pretty low this morning on the way in to work," Dave answered.

"It wouldn't have anything to do with my comments this morning, would it?" Mary asked, her voice low.

Dave felt his face flush. "Well, yeah, if you must know."

"I've been thinking about that all day," Mary continued. "I realize I was being overly harsh with you. If you want to read and collect comics, I shouldn't berate you for it. It's your thing. You're a good husband, so why not?"

"Thanks, Mary!" Dave said, looking intently at his wife. "That means a lot to me."

"I know it does," she replied. "Besides, a local hero should read heroic stuff."

Just like in the comics, their conversation ended with a kiss, a promise of better things to come.

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On the way to bed, as they passed Jason's room, Dave heard a small voice.

"Dad?"

"Yes, Jason," he answered, looking into the darkened room.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure thing. Go on to our room," he said over his shoulder to Mary. "I'll be there in a few minutes." Dave entered the room and sat on Jason's bed. "What is it that you just *have* to talk to me about, so long past your bedtime, young man?"

"I couldn't sleep. That was *so* cool, Dad!"

"You mean, about the TV and all?"

"Yeah! You were just like Dr. Wonder! And to think ... you're *my* dad! Wait 'till I tell the guys at school!"

"You read comic books too?" Dave asked, surprised.

"Sure! I love 'em. I have a whole collection, right here under the bed."

"Hmm, Mom doesn't mind at all?"

"Are you kidding? She *buys* them for me when she goes shopping!"

"Really? She never lectures you about how dumb they are?"

"No. Dad, I'm a ten-year-old kid. I'm *supposed* to read comic books!"