

A GOOD MAN

A One Act Play by Joey Maya Safchik
Based on a story by Zulieka Maldonado

Lights up on **Richard**, a middle aged man whose eyes give away his exhaustion, though his jolly spirits are a decent mask. He stands at a bare table, “the taco stand.”

Richard

(Switching between English and Spanish) Tacos! Tacos! 3 for 3 dollars!
Tacos de pastor, tacos con pollo! Everything you want!

Maria enters cradling a baby. She joins her husband.

Maria

Ay, we haven’t sold much today. Jorge needs *leche*.

Richard

We’ll eat. Hey, if nothing else, we have more tacos than we know what to do with.

Maria

Si, so does everyone else on this block. And the next.

Lights shift to **Zulieka**. She is holding a simple pad and paper.

Zulieka

I used to babysit for little Jorge. He never cried. He loved warm *leche*. He’d grow to love tacos con pollo too. You really can find those stands on every block out here. East LA. Taco heaven. Almost.

Maria

What happened to the customers, mi amor?

Richard

They’ll come. I promise. Dance with me!

They hum a tune and dance joyfully.
Lights up on Zulieka.

Zulieka

In sixth grade, I memorized part of the Declaration of Independence for history. It says all men are created equal. It’s right, we are. But we don’t seem to be listening to that today.

Zulieka enters the scene. She takes the baby from his mother.

Maria

Ay, love, take Jorge for a minute, no? We're low on tortillas.

Richard takes Maria to the side of the stage. In hushed tones:

Richard

We bought tortillas yesterday.

Maria

And we used every one! You just *had* to give the free tacos a la señora y a la nina on her way to the school bus!

Richard

I can't buy more tortillas.

Maria

Have you thought about joining your brother at his stand? He'd be lucky to have you on the grill!

He is upset; the arguing intensifies.

Richard

Ven para aca. Did we come to this country so I could cook pollo on my brother's grill?!

Maria

We came here to give Emily and Jorge a better life!

Zulieka

They thought I couldn't hear. They probably thought no one could hear. I just held the baby. We'd seen immigration raids on the news. They even came to my cousins one time. But not to my building. Not my neighbors. Not the people I'd known my whole life.

All

Not us.

We go back to the ensuing argument.

Maria

I'll ask my sister for the tortillas. She'll be happy to spare, Richard.

Richard

No! Please. I will get the tortillas if it means I don't eat tonight!

They continue to argue, though it is far from violent.

There is a loud knock.

Zulieka

The knock was deafening. Not scary yet. Just loud. It could've been Anna with tortillas or my mom bringing me a treat to give Jorge. But Jorge began to wail. His cries matched the knocking as it amplified. I guess he knew.

Maria tenderly opens the door. An immigration officer enters firmly.

Maria
(under her breath)

Ay...

Officer

We received a complaint about noise. Have you been hurt?

Maria

No...no, not at all... *(she turns to Zulieka)* Cuida la Jorge por favor?

Zulieka nods.

Richard

Can I help, sir?

The officer briskly approaches Richard and, in front of his wife and children, shoves the man's hands behind his back.

Zulieka

'Everything will be ok,' I whispered to the baby. But I was eleven years old and I knew it wouldn't be.

Richard

Please, officer, I believe there's a misunderstanding...

Officer

Your papers?

Richard and Maria stand, frozen. They stare at each other at a loss. The silence is painful.

Officer

(as he ushers Richard harshly to the door) Come with me.

Richard

Please, my Emily, she's at school. She's at the day care just nearby. Please let me say goodbye.

Maria

Please, he's a good man. We have the vendor permit, please.
You don't know our lives!

Officer

Let's go. He'll be at Park and 24th.

Richard

I love you, Maria! Te amo, Maria.

They exit.

Zulieka

Maria followed. I didn't even know my times-tables, but I had seen my father's closest friend pulled from his wife, deported. I hugged his child.

Maria re-enters, face covered in tears.

Maria

He was gone. Se fue. Se lo llaveron. Maybe back home. Maybe...never again.

She gently takes her child and sobs. Zulieka is left alone on stage, now writing at a desk that was once the taco stand.

Zulieka

My family isn't perfect. We fight and argue and scream and love and cry. But we've got each other. (Beat.)

You know, I had a dream that I got into USC. The first in my family to go to college. We jumped for joy. I dreamt that we were so loud in our celebration that we heard a knock at the door that sent shivers down our spines. We live in fear.

(Beat.) Jorge hasn't seen his papa in six years.

You probably think of being torn from your family as the extraordinary. It happened many years ago, in places miles away. We read about it in our textbooks. It doesn't happen anymore. But it does happen everyday in East LA.