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Brenda's Easter Visit

Mary Graham Bonner

Every Easter, Brenda started with a list. She went first to the head nurse of the children's ward to find out the name of every child who would be spending the holiday in hospital. Then she went shopping.

She chose carefully. For each child: a big round chocolate egg that rattled when you shook it — inside it were small sugar candies — along with a chocolate bunny and a chocolate chicken. She always picked the ones with the most expression, the ones that looked genuinely pleased to exist. She tied a red ribbon around each egg, a green ribbon around each chicken's neck, and a purple ribbon around each bunny's, then tucked everything into a small box with the child's name on the lid.

Last Easter she arrived the day before the holiday. The day was cold and grey, with no sun at all. The children had just had their wounds dressed and were lying quietly in their white beds, holding very still and trying not to let the tears come.

Brenda asked the nurse if she might come in.

"Please do," said the nurse, very softly. "The first child's name is Elsa. She's hurt her back, and we don't know how long she'll be here."

Brenda went to Elsa's bed. "Happy Easter," she said. "A chocolate bunny, a chocolate chicken, and a big chocolate egg all asked me to say hello."

Elsa's eyes opened. She reached for the box and opened it carefully — and there they all were. The chocolate bunny had the funniest expression, his purple bow twisted to one side at quite a jaunty angle. Elsa burst out laughing.

Later, the nurse found Brenda in the corridor. "That's the first time she's laughed," she said quietly, "since she came in."

Brenda made her way around the rest of the ward. Everywhere she went, something loosened.



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