

The Shoplifter

By
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Dan and Donna Ryan, each in their early 30s, often went shopping together. Dan had a thing for Duane Reade, which Donna couldn't understand. "Why Duane Reade or CVS all the time? D'Agostino's or Shoprite has what we need; why do we always go to the drugstore chains?"

Dan was usually noncommittal, muttering something about a better selection of stuff or that he just liked those stores more. Their marriage had become rocky, and Donna didn't need another fight with him, so she usually just went along.

On this visit to a nearby Duane Reade, one of the largest in NYC, they found the Marquis signage had changed to new owners, Walgreens. Dan suggested they each shop for what they needed, and Donna wandered off. Then, so did Dan.

Ten minutes later, Dan was leaning against a wall, a police officer handcuffing him.

This was Officer Wax, an NYC veteran cop with close to 30 years on the job. He'd seen and heard everything and couldn't wait for retirement.

"I hate to do this, but they have a zero-tolerance rule for shoplifters, and they caught you red-handed."

Dan's shaky voice answered, "But officer... it was an oversight, an accident. I meant to

put it in my wife's basket, but she was at the other end of the store, and I walked out, forgetting about it. A mistake."

"I'm sorry," said Wax. "You look honest to me, but the manager insists. Wants to make an example of you."

Just then, Donna walked up, saw Dan handcuffed, dropped the packages she was holding, and became distraught.

"What's going on," she wailed. "Dan, why did he handcuff you?"

Dan replied that it was all a mistake. Donna asked, "Officer, are you arresting my husband?"

Wax replied, "Afraid so, Ma'am. The charge is shoplifting."

Donna said, "What? You must be joking. What did he shoplift? Why would he? We were shopping together. Dan, what's going on?"

Dan looked sheepishly at the ground. Officer Wax produced a small package and showed it to Donna.

"They caught him on video leaving the store with this item in his pocket."

Donna looked at it closely and was shocked. "That's a box of condoms. Why would he...? Dan, why did you steal a box of condoms? We don't use condoms, I'm on... the... pill." Suddenly, a look of understanding crossed her face. "Why, you son of a bitch!"

Dan tried to explain.

Donna interrupted and exploded, "Explain? Officer, lock this man up!"

{This short story is from Arthur's book of short stories — The Big Apple Bites Back.}