

She's Pushing a Cart...

She's pushing a cart up the sidewalk when I find myself blocking her path, standing right where she wants to go with her battered grocery cart filled with neatly wrapped packages, trying to get somewhere when she's stopped by a big gray slow-moving old guy. I step to the side just as she moves that way to go around me and for a moment we do the politeness dance, except she's not particularly polite, saying 'Com'on you big bastard, get out of my way. Which I'm trying to do but can't seem to get the timing right, so I stop dead in my tracks and just look at her.

She doesn't look like a bag lady and by that I mean she's neatly dressed in contemporary clothes, a little dowdy, but not a street person. She looks like she might be a clerk in a used bookstore or a secretary for some company that doesn't care about their image, maybe a small air conditioning or plumbing company, one owner, three helpers, two trucks and an 'office manager' who kites checks to make the payroll. No. She doesn't look like she could do payroll, just some filing.

'Goddam it are you just going to stand there?' she says.

'Yes I am,' I say.

We look at each other.

'OK then,' she says and starts around me. I look down in the basket and see a dozen or more small square packages, wrapped in brown paper, tied with string.

'What's in the boxes?' I ask.

She keeps on going, not looking at me. It's cold out and she's got a heavy cotton coat and a scarf that blows in the wind and a small cap that suddenly is whipped off her head by the breeze and lands flat against my chest. I trap it as she turns around to race after it, then comes up short in front of me.

'Gimme the cap,' she says with her hand outstretched.

I notice for the first time that she's wearing flesh colored leather gloves. They make her hands look like she had some kind of accident and lost all the skin on her hands so they did a skin graft from a pig. A nice pink healthy pig, but nevertheless. I hand her the hat. She snatches it from me and turns back to the cart.

'What's in the boxes?' I ask. 'Come on, one good turn deserves another.'

She's already moving off with the cart, but over the squeak and rattle of the wheels I hear her say:

'Little tiny used up old dicks, just like yours.'

I watch her go to the end of the block and turn out of sight. Then I go on my way, thinking that some really hot tea would go down pretty well on a day like today.