



Supermarket

Eleven lanes open and some hoary hag with enough obscure and unlabeled items to supply a tinker community monopolizes the only one without a line. But it's seven p.m. and I should know better. These are precisely the nefarious shenanigans you face when food shopping after rush hour. I was fucked before I even left the driveway.

The cashier can't find a label or bar code on half the stuff this woman's piled onto the conveyor belt, so yes let's commence with the price checks. Let's perform a store announcement about the mysterious beige tins and sloppy sacks of over-ripe vegetables. Let's ask a manager to come sort this out.

And in the meantime the old woman argues over the prices.

"This wasn't the listed price for ham in last week's circular."

This isn't a bazaar, lady, this isn't fucking Cairo. Just pay the four cents extra or here, you can take the spare change rattling around in my wallet, it's four damn cents. But fuck me, she has a card and she doesn't know how to use the touchpad. Swipe the card the other way, the other no the other way. Yes. Now put in your PIN. C'mon lady, read what it says on the screen and put in your PIN already. Put in your PIN. *Put. In. Your. Mother. Fu—*

"Here, ma'am, I can swipe the card from over here."

Finally. Fuck's sake.

"Oh but I have some coupons!"

Oh but of course you do. You'll have coupons, double coupons, value club member cards, newspaper clippings, cutouts from circulars both current and ancient-old, price labels from other stores you'll demand they match, printed out internet ads from the company's corporate website, government reports on the rise and fall of commodities prices and a plethora of other means to keep us all here until Rapture. Please, yes, let's bring out the fucking coupons.

The cashier and I stand and wait while she fishes them all out. The world carries on around us. Customers come and go, days and ages pass. Empires rise and fall. Stars die out and explode, celestial bodies form from leftover pockets of billowing stardust. At long last, the old woman grabs her receipt and shuffles toward the exit doors.

I drop my handful of groceries onto the belt. Thirteen items, no coupons or card, paid for in cash. No, I don't need a receipt. No, I will not have a nice day.

Outside, I notice the old woman pushing her cartful away from the parking lot, toward the project community up the road. It's raining and she's tied each of her bags up into tight plastic spheres.

She's aiming straight for a steep wheelchair ramp but doesn't see it over the cart. It'll buck the cart, likely cause it to tip. She should turn but she isn't. C'mon, lady. Turn.

The cart dips down into the cement trough and she loses control. It tilts sideways, one wheel off the ground, two, crashes with a metallic bang. Bags spill out into the street and settle into a sopping mess.

She's staring down at the pile of bags, trying to decide between picking them up from the wet pavement and righting the cart by the time I reach her.

"Need some help?" I ask, grabbing the cart to put it back on its wheels.

"Oh I'm sorry yes, thank you," she says. She picks up some of the lighter bags while I handle the heavier ones, placing them back in her cart. "Aren't you a nice young man!"

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