

God Knows I'm Good (for DB)

by Jeffery Greb

She entered the superstore under the protection of the supreme madness of the holiday season and strolled as nonchalantly as she could past the multitude of honest, clean faces. Carts were lined up five and more deep in the check-out lanes, as merchandise exchanged, and money roared. Outside, snow fell gently, but inside the heat was instantly cloying in her full length down coat. It was a burgundy coat, and her hair was mostly stuffed into a purple knit cap with a pink pom dangling from the crest.

Moving to the left, she weaved her way toward the seasonal specials and then past paints and automotive, finally turning again at sporting goods. As she walked, she occasionally feigned interest in various products while surreptitiously checking to see if anyone followed her. She moved in this manner past electronics, shoes, pet products, until she reached grocery. Perspiration trickled down her forehead from under the cap. She undid the zipper of the coat and worried that her odor, so sharp in her own nostrils, would be noticed by others.

Eventually she arrived at the isle with canned meats. Her face hot with worry, she scooped cans into the interior pockets of the coat as quickly as she could. Glancing furtively about, she saw no one who seemed to notice, just a woman with a full cart angrily berating one of two small children at her feet. She carefully rezippered her coat and closed her eyes to keep her conscience blind. She thought, *God knows I'm good. God may look the other way today!*

As she moved toward the exit, her hands clutched her coat, and the perspiration began anew. Her mind drifted to the shopping cart filled with her belongings left in a place obscured by some dumpsters. Hopefully, the snow had not yet gotten everything too wet. Hopefully, the cart was still there. Hopefully, she could find a place indoors tonight. If she hurried, she might get a bed as well as a meal at St. Teresa's. Hopefully.

Close enough to the exit she could see the snow enveloping the parked cars in a kind of austere purity, she felt the blast of cold when someone triggered the electric eye and caused the doors to fly open. A hand laid on her shoulder. Her heart, it leapt inside her. Her mind became bewildered and amazed. She made out words like "stop loss" and "management" while allowing her body to be guided toward the area opposite the check-out emblazoned with the words "Customer Service." Her escort asked her softly for her name. Her deafened ears could barely make out the words through the cash machines shrieking on their counters.

Before she could muster a reply, a tired old lady collapsed while pushing her cart from the check-out. She lay stunned, her body strangely stiff and supine on the filthy linoleum, her eyes wild in her head like those of a frightened horse. A crowd of honest people rushed to help her. They sat her up with her back against the check-out counter. The old woman looked confused at their faces. Someone called for others to “Give her room to breathe,” and the crowd relaxed. Someone else ran to the drinking fountain to get her some water.

Just before she disappeared through the door behind the customer service counter, the women’s eyes locked on one another. In a quavering voice the old woman said, “God knows I’m good. Surely God won’t look the other way!”

The door closed, and she was gone.