GOOD MORNING, OLD WOMAN

And in the morning, early, she would walk pulling the cart behind her. It was always with the dim morning light that she came. She would cross from the oppressed side to the free side of the city to attend Mass at the church as she had been doing for almost sixty years. It made no difference to her, the political boundary, and she would always attend the earliest Mass; then walk back, pulling the two-wheeled cart behind her.

Just over the political boundary, on the oppressed side, a boy would always be standing. The young boy would greet her. At first she never answered. But soon she would nod as she passed. The boy began liking her more. Not knowing her name, he would smile toward her saying, “Good morning, old woman.” And later, she began to nod to his greeting.

Once, when she passed close by he saw her eyes looking dark and large and soft and kind. The old woman was strong from years of hard work, but she walked stooped forward and she wore bent black shoes. She always wore a black knit shawl like a hood around her deeply lined face, and the hood would nod toward the boy. Sometimes the hood would shake while she walked along, as she talked to herself inside of it.

One morning, she offered the boy some bread from her cart. She threw back the clean, old rug—a covering—and gave the boy the bread. It was good and the boy saw much more bread in the cart. And food was scarce on the oppressed side, so the boy was amazed at seeing so much, like this.

Later, the boy mentioned to his father about the bread. The father, an official, investigated the old woman. It was discovered that the old woman was smuggling food for the poor from the church. The officials arrested her. They arrested her one day. They did not shoot her until the next.

They shot her at early morning, at the time she would be at Mass, and the sun was bright and warm in the wide, high-walled courtyard. Three drab soldiers, shouldered rifles as a firing squad. The old woman, standing, cast a long shadow across the dry ground. Only a bluebird was there on the wall, and when they shot her, it flew quickly away.

The boy waited at the corner every morning, but the old woman never came again, and the boy never knew why.

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