



Perspective

By Jamie Buckingham

The little old lady at the counter of the 14th Avenue store must have been approaching 80. I was standing behind her and couldn't help but overhear the conversation.

The day before she had purchased a small book for 25 cents and now had come back to buy another for a friend. As the clerk wrapped the package the lady noticed the price was 35 cents. "But I only paid a quarter yesterday," she said. The clerk was kind but firm. "No ma'm, the price has been the same all week."

The old woman dug into her ancient handbag and came out with the correct change. "I'm sorry I was such a bother," she smiled at the clerk and turned to leave.

I stepped forward to pay for my purchase when suddenly the old lady reappeared. She looked at me and apologized saying, "I'm sorry to interrupt you, but there is one more thing I must discuss with this young lady." I was in no hurry so I stepped back and waited.

The old woman laid her handbag on the counter, unsnapped the top and began to rummage around inside. Looking up she smiled apologetically and said, "I hate to be such a bother." The clerk looked at the long line that was beginning to form behind the cash register and said graciously, "That's all right, ma'am, take your time."

The old woman laid her pocketbook on the counter and then removed her shawl and laid it on a chair. Very gingerly she began to remove the items from her purse. I was beginning to take an intense interest in what was going on.

The crowd around the cash register had grown larger and the clerk looked up—helplessly. Finally the old lady reached the bottom of her purse and came up with a single dime. Turning to the clerk she said, "I forgot I only paid you 25 cents for the booklet yesterday — when I should have paid 35 cents. I owe you another dime."

"Oh no, that's all right," the young clerk said trying to refuse the dime. The old lady was insistent. "It's the only honest thing to do."

A gruff looking man with a dead cigar in his mouth who had been waiting with the rest of us spoke up with surprising tenderness, "You're right, little mother. It always pays to be honest."

"Oh no," the little lady answered looking up at him as she stuffed the items back into her old purse. "It costs to be honest. It just cost me a dime." Then she added, "But Jesus is honest and I try to be like Him"

She turned and hobbled out. The whole store seemed to brighten up a bit. And unless I am mistaken, there was just a glint of a tear in the eye of the clerk as she pushed the key on the cash register and rang up—ten cents.