

A shopping cart filled with books is parked on a snowy sidewalk at night. The cart is filled with various books, some of which are visible on the shelves. The background shows a snowy street with a glowing street lamp and a building with warm lights. Snow is falling, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere. The overall scene is a whimsical illustration of a library or bookstore in a winter setting.

The Borrowed Buggy

By Elizabeth Ragona

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Chapter One: The Store Closes

The snow came earlier than expected.

It fell in slow spirals through the parking lot, covering car roofs and sidewalks in quiet white. The store lights buzzed overhead, glowing yellow in the storm like distant porch lights.

Inside, the last shoppers hurried through the aisles—pulling coats tighter, zipping up boots, grabbing what they needed before the storm got worse. The manager flipped the “Open” sign to “Closed,” and the heater kicked off with a loud clunk.

Out in the parking lot, a row of grocery buggies stood lined up neatly near the entrance—metal baskets stacked one inside the other, wheels squeaking in the wind.

All but one.

This buggy sat alone, facing the far edge of the lot. It had been pushed there by the wind—or maybe by a child who let go too soon. Either way, it was too far out to be seen.

The boy who gathered the carts jogged through the snow, shoulders hunched, pulling the rows back toward the store. He never saw the last buggy.

By the time he locked the door and flicked off the lights, that buggy was half-covered in snow.

And for the first time in its life, it was completely alone.

The buggy had never been anywhere except the store and the parking lot. It had rolled across yellow lines, over bumpy pavement, and sometimes got stuck in potholes. It knew the sound of car doors slamming, of babies crying, of someone whistling while loading their groceries.

It knew what it meant to be useful.

But tonight, it was quiet.

Snowflakes gathered on the cold metal frame. The buggy’s wheels shifted slightly in the wind. It didn’t know what to expect—only

that something was different.

Maybe this was what it meant to be forgotten.

Or maybe... this was the beginning of something else.



Chapter Two: The Mother and the Girl

The snow and biting wind continued.

It tugged at scarves and sleeves, whistled through gutters, and chased scraps of newspaper down the street.

A woman walked quickly beneath the glow of the streetlamps, pulling her coat tighter around her shoulders. Her boots crunched through the thin ice, and her breath rose like smoke in the air.

Beside her, a little girl in a pink coat tried to keep up.

She was maybe five or six. Her hands were buried in her sleeves, and she dragged her feet a little—not out of defiance, but because she was too tired to lift them.

The woman hadn't meant to walk so fast. She was thinking about the heater at home, the milk in her bag, the fact that the buses had stopped running early because of the storm.

"Come on, baby," she said, turning back. "We're almost there."

But just as she reached for the girl's hand, the child slipped—her boot skidding on a patch of ice—and fell to her knees in the snow.

The woman dropped to her own knees beside her.

"Oh no," she whispered. "Oh, baby."

She brushed the snow off the girl's pants, her fingers stinging from the cold. The little girl's eyes were wide and wet—not from crying, but from trying not to.

The woman glanced up the street. No buses. No taxis. Just the long walk home.

Then—she saw it.

Across the street, at the edge of the empty lot, sat the buggy.

Still, dusted with snow. Waiting.

She stood slowly, lifting her daughter into her arms. The child rested her head on her mother's shoulder, already dozing.

The buggy's wheels creaked as the woman pushed it forward, but it didn't resist. It leaned into the snow with her. It understood.

She placed her daughter inside the basket, wrapping her coat around her legs. The girl curled into a ball, sighing as her eyelids fluttered closed.

The woman began to walk, pushing the buggy gently down the street.

The wheels turned. The cold metal warmed beneath her hands.

And for the second time that night, the buggy was not alone.



Chapter Three: The Old Man and the Candle

The buggy waited.

It waited outside the woman's small house, beneath the wooden stairs, where the wind blew in from the side alley and tugged at the fringe of the little girl's pink scarf, now caught in the handle.

The woman had carried her daughter inside, whispering, "I'll take it back tomorrow," but tomorrow hadn't come yet.

Morning melted the last of the snow. Afternoon brought shadows on the fence and children's voices a few streets away. Evening brought quiet again.

And then, as the sky darkened to a dusky blue, a figure appeared at the end of the block.

An old man.

His coat hung heavy on his shoulders, too big and too thin all at once. He walked slowly, stopping every few feet to shift the bags

hanging from his hands. One arm cradled a sleeping bedroll; the other dragged a duffel patched with tape and string.

When he saw the buggy, he stopped.

“Well, look at you,” he said softly, blinking at it like he wasn’t sure it was real.

He reached out and touched the handlebar. It was cold, but sturdy. He nodded.

“A blessing,” he whispered, and smiled.

He loaded the buggy with care. His bags fit perfectly inside—like it had been waiting just for him. The squeaky wheels grumbled, but they turned.

Together, they walked.

They made it to the underpass just before nightfall.

Stone walls rose on either side, and overhead a bridge held the hum of a passing train and the rattle of loose bolts. The buggy bumped along the edge of the sidewalk and settled beside the man as he sat down and pulled his coat around him.

From one of his bags, he pulled an old coffee can. Inside was melted wax and a shoestring, set like a wick.

He lit it with a match pulled from his coat pocket, and the flame flickered to life—orange and warm against the gray stone.

“Better,” he said. “That’s better.”

The buggy didn’t speak, but it listened.

“You know,” the man said, “my Irene used to light candles like this during storms. Said it made the darkness behave.”

He chuckled, then coughed—a deep, rattling sound that didn’t go away quickly.

“She made the best cornbread. Always sang while she cooked.”

He reached into a torn envelope and pulled out a photograph.

“There she is.”

The buggy leaned closer, as if it could see.

“She wore yellow on Sundays. You’d like her.”

He patted the buggy’s side, letting his hand rest on the handle.

“I used to be a strong man,” he added after a moment. “Built houses. Worked in the heat. Got drafted for Korea, came back

with more bones than sense. Carried a book in my pocket the whole way. Still have it.”

He reached into a plastic bag and pulled out a small, leather-covered volume—creased and fragile, held together with a rubber band.

“This little thing’s been through everything.”

He shifted, wincing, and pulled the buggy closer to shield himself from the wind.

“You’re a good one,” he murmured. “Don’t let the rust fool ‘em.”

The candle flickered lower.

He wrapped the army jacket tighter around himself and closed his eyes.

The buggy stood still beside him, holding his belongings, catching the heat of the flame, listening to the night.

And that’s where they stayed.

Together.

The buggy stayed with the old man for three days.

They moved slowly—his cough growing heavier, his hands shaking more than before. He leaned harder on the buggy’s handle now, using it not just for carrying, but for walking.

Each step was effort.

But he never let go.

They passed brick buildings with narrow windows, a diner with a flickering sign, a closed library with ivy crawling up the wall. The buggy’s wheels scraped and squeaked, but it never wobbled. Not once.

The man would stop sometimes—coughing into his sleeve, catching his breath—and always whisper, “Just a little farther.”

The buggy didn’t know where “farther” was.

But it kept rolling.

On the fourth morning, they reached the steps of a small church on the corner of a quiet street.

It had white siding, worn wooden doors, and a crooked sign that read:

“You Are Not Forgotten.”

The man smiled when he saw it.

“Nice words,” he said softly.

He sat down at the edge of the steps, resting his back against the low wall. The buggy stayed beside him, still holding the bags, the candle can, the jacket, the book.

The man placed a hand on the buggy’s frame, like someone holding a friend’s hand.

He exhaled slowly, watching his breath drift into the morning light.

And then he closed his eyes.

The minister found him several hours later. He was gentle when he spoke, and even gentler when he called for help.

When the ambulance arrived, they moved the buggy to the side.

They lifted the man carefully—his hand falling from the handlebar like a goodbye.

The doors closed.

The siren did not sound.

And suddenly, the buggy was alone again.



Chapter Four: The Festival People

Days passed.

The buggy sat beside the steps of the little church, facing the street.

Its wheels were crusted with old snow and gravel. The pink scarf from the little girl still fluttered from the side. Tucked safely inside were the old man’s worn bags—still filled with what he had carried: the coffee-can candle, the army jacket, the rubber-banded book, the envelope of photographs.

No one had touched them.

The minister had called for help that morning, but in the quiet rush of what came next, the buggy had been left behind—with everything still inside.

He'd meant to return later. Maybe to move it. Maybe to clean it out.

But something about it made him pause.

So, he left it where it was.

And the buggy stayed.

Rain came and went. The last snow disappeared from the rooftops. Daffodils pushed through the ice in the churchyard.

Each day, the buggy sat in the same spot—watching, remembering.

Until one afternoon...

Laughter came drifting down the street.

They came in a loose, wandering group—half walking, half dancing, with music pouring out of a little transistor radio one of them had tied to their backpack.

They wore clothes the buggy had never seen before. Colorful pants with big, flared legs. Vests with fringe that swung as they moved. Long hair, beads, wide-brimmed hats, and laughter that rang like wind chimes.

They were like the season itself—bright, unexpected, and full of movement.

The group passed the church, chatting and laughing, their footsteps tapping on the pavement.

Then one of them—a tall boy with curly hair and a denim jacket covered in patches—slowed down.

“Hey,” he said, stopping beside the buggy. “What’s this?”

The others gathered around.

It wasn't just the cart that caught their attention—it was what was inside. A faded army jacket, a few canvas bags, a photograph peeking out of a torn envelope, and a coffee can with old wax still melted to the sides.

A girl with long blond hair and bare feet leaned over and picked up the jacket. She wrapped it around her shoulders without a

word.

Another boy reached in and lifted out the small leather book. “Check this out,” he said, flipping it open gently. The writing inside was faded, but careful. The kind of writing that gets smaller when people try to fit too much into too little space.

The girl with the blond hair cradled the jacket like it belonged to her. “Someone left all this?” she asked.

“Looks like they needed it once,” the curly-haired boy said.

“Guess we could too.”

They didn’t take everything. They placed the photos carefully back in the envelope. One of the girls tucked the book into her satchel with quiet hands. Another person examined the candle can and smiled. “Still good,” he said. “We can use this tonight.”

And then someone climbed in.

It was the girl with the long hair. She laughed as she sat down in the buggy, folding her legs in like a child.

“You’re ridiculous,” one of her friends said. But they were smiling too.

“I’m tired,” she said. “Push me.”

The buggy’s wheels groaned, but they turned.

The girl pulled a scarf from around her neck—colorful silk, printed with suns and vines—and tied it through the side rails. It fluttered as they rolled down the street.

Someone else added a ribbon. Another tied on a bright red handkerchief.

By the time they left downtown, the buggy looked like a traveling festival all on its own.

The group walked for hours—singing, joking, pushing the buggy in turns.

Sometimes someone rode in it. Sometimes it carried bags and blankets. Sometimes it just rolled along beside them like a quiet friend.

By the time they reached the fairground, the sun had started to lower in the sky.

The place was already alive.

Bright tents curved like petals across the grass. People were dancing barefoot. Someone strummed a guitar near the edge of a stage made of crates and wooden planks. There was music, and food, and banners painted with suns, moons, and open hands.

The buggy rolled straight into the middle of it, its wheels bumping softly over the earth.

Someone parked it near a circle of tents and placed a blanket beside it. The girl who had first ridden in it lay down and rested her head on its side like it was a pillow.

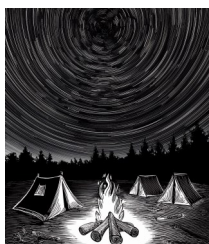
Another person hung more ribbons from the frame.

Someone painted a mandala on the front panel—the one where the store's old paper advertisement used to be. Circles within circles, swirling with color.

In the center, they drew a bright **peace sign** in purple and orange.

The buggy didn't understand what the symbol meant.

But it felt right.



Chapter Five: The Journey Home

That night, the group built a small campfire beside the buggy.

They sat around it cross-legged, passing bread, playing a guitar, and talking about the world.

“We have to do better,” one said.

“End the war,” said another.

“Feed people who are hungry. Take care of the Earth. Love who you love.”

They weren't angry. They weren't loud.

They just believed in something better.

The buggy listened, warmed by the fire and the voices.

It had carried groceries. It had carried a child. It had carried the

weight of memory.

But here, it carried **hope**.

For three days, the buggy stayed by the tents.

It watched dancing, heard singing, and caught the smell of windflowers and roasted corn. People rested against it, painted on it, tied things to it, and once, someone even used it as a drum.

No one questioned whether it belonged.

It did.

When the festival ended, the young people packed up slowly.

The buggy was fuller now—carrying backpacks and rolled-up blankets, flowers woven into its handle, and the soft shape of a friendship bracelet hanging from the side.

They took turns riding in it again on the way back.

No one asked where it came from.

No one said where it should go.

But when they returned to the edge of town, they left it in the parking lot of the grocery store.

Still painted.

Still decorated.

Still holding every moment it had carried.



That Night – A Quiet Interlude

The parking lot was quiet again.

The buggy sat near the edge, just where it had been so long ago—only now it wore colors and ribbons instead of silver shine and a store label.

The moon rose over the rooftops, casting soft shadows across the asphalt. Wind passed through like a whisper.

For the first time in a long time, the buggy didn't feel lost.

It wasn't being pushed. It wasn't carrying weight.

It was simply resting.

And in the stillness, the buggy remembered.

It remembered the little girl curling up in its basket, her mother's hands brushing off the snow.

It remembered the warmth of the candle, the old man's voice telling stories in the dark.

It remembered music and laughter and soft voices saying,
"We can do better."

The buggy didn't have a heart, not really.

But something inside it had changed.

It wasn't just a cart anymore.

It was a piece of everyone it had carried.

Far off, a dog barked once, then fell silent. A single car passed on the street and didn't stop. Somewhere, a radio played a slow song through an open window.

And the buggy—painted and quiet, covered in memories—waited for the morning.



Chapter Six: The Store Owner

The sun rose slowly, brushing the buildings with soft light.

A few birds chirped near the telephone wires. The pavement sparkled faintly from the morning dew. And at the far edge of the grocery store parking lot, the buggy waited—still wearing its colors, still holding its stories.

The store owner pulled into his usual space, half-distracted, sipping from a steaming paper cup.

He stepped out of his truck, locked the door with a click, and

turned toward the store.

That's when he saw it.

At first, he didn't recognize it.

The buggy was covered in paint—flowers and circles, a bright purple peace sign at the front. Ribbons trailed from the sides. A scarf fluttered gently in the breeze. Inside were a few quiet reminders: a coffee can with wax melted to the bottom. A photograph. A worn-out army jacket, folded neatly and tucked in one corner.

The owner frowned, stepping closer.

He looked around. No one in sight.

“What in the world...” he murmured.

He reached out and touched the handle.

It was warm from the sun.

He could've called someone to haul it off. Could've tossed the scarf, peeled the paint, and pushed it back into the line with the others.

But he didn't.

He stood there for a long moment—silent, thoughtful.

Then he took a breath, lifted the handle, and slowly rolled the buggy toward the front of the store.

He placed it near the entrance, beside the faded bench and the red newspaper box.

It didn't block anything. It didn't ask to be noticed.

It just sat quietly, as if it knew it had come home.

The owner went inside and returned a few minutes later with a small scrap of cardboard and a black marker.

He knelt beside the buggy and wrote, in large neat letters:

WHEELS WITH A STORY

Let it rest awhile.

People noticed.

Some chuckled. Some stopped to stare. A few smiled like they understood—maybe not the whole story, but enough to know that something had happened.

Children pointed at the peace sign. Someone tied a new ribbon to the handle.

No one moved it.

No one asked why it was there.

It simply became part of the store, part of the town, part of the story.

The buggy never said a word.

But it had been borrowed by love, carried by kindness, and returned with grace.

And that, somehow, was enough.

The End