

The Lady Who Meets a Writer
Y York

"I saw her at the grocery store, somebody pointed her out, told me she was some big writer. So I meet up with her in one of the aisles, I say aren't you so and so, the writer? I say I think writers are interesting. She says that's because writers make writers the most interesting characters in their novels. So, I ask if she's working on a novel. No, non-fiction, same topic as the last three books. Well, I don't know what that topic is, so I ask her how she likes it here; she doesn't answer, she asks me how I like it here, gets me talking, she uses those writer tricks to get me talking, and they work. I grumble something about my work, things are tense at my work, everything. We get a recycle bin, suddenly everybody's an expert. I throw in my postits, next thing I know, they're on my desk with a note about how you can't recycle gummed material. What do I know from gummed material? Then job evaluations come up, it's an office full of rattle snakes. If somebody gets a promotion over me, it's going to be on account of affirmative action. If somebody doesn't get a promotion over me, he thinks it's racist. I just want things to be the way they used to be. Racist, people screaming racist like people used to scream communist. I say that to her, this writer. She doesn't SAY anything. She doesn't say something to me about this. If she says something to me, maybe it makes me think, maybe I change my mind, maybe I don't, but she doesn't say anything. She looks at me like she's seeing me for the first time. A minute later she's buying me double espressos, making me talk about stuff, well, why not, she's white, I'm white, why not talk about it? So, later, 3, 4 months, LA's burning down, the country's on the edge of a race war, and she's on tv. On national tv, she's some expert. Well, I find out what her books are about. What is this? What's she talking about? She's a white woman. What's she care? What is this, anyway? She's talking about where they put garbage dumps; where they put chemical plants. What's this got to do with racism? Then she says something about a factory nearby a community, and I realize, she's talking about this town, she's talking about here; she's not talking about some place else. And then she's talking about me, she doesn't say my name, but it's me. How in my ignorance I compare the cry of racism to the cry of communism during the McCarthy era. I didn't want to leave my house; I thought everybody'd know she'd been talking about me. I stayed awake the whole night figuring out how to FIX her, I was going to fix her wagon, call the Enquirer, Fix her. But turns out nobody knew it was me, and almost everybody I know was watching the last episode of the Cosby show anyway. The book, her book, twenty-four ninety-five, mind you, it's got stuff in it I never heard, but so what, at that price who's going to buy it, and she said it probably won't go into paperback. Oh yeah, I talked to her. She

showed at the grocery store. I told her she wasn't fair to me. How am I supposed to know the stuff in her book? They don't teach it. It's not on tv, but, if it's true, I agree with what she said about America, and about me. She nodded, told me it was up to me to find out if the stuff in the book's true. She said she didn't tell me anything because she didn't think I could change. And then she said, she's not going to make that mistake again. So I told her I was glad to be of help, and she could call on me anytime."