

cranked the window up. Which seemed like a little more than an effort. Gramps nodded his nubs and somehow jerkily, set the car in motion.

And I back tracked, nonchalantly glancing around the yards and house to see if anyone else had noticed. I wondered if that old man thought I was male. His facial expressions reminded me of a time last spring when I was on the road thumbing back to school. I got picked up by this man drinking a Stroh's with the five more cans between his legs. He acquainted me with many of his post World War II thumbing excursions — travelling from the West Coast to the East Coast with literally no problem at all. People who gave him a lift were so friendly to him, sometimes putting him up for the night in their homes. He was trying to repay all the good fortune he had received by picking up hitchhikers, but it really scared him to see girls on the road and how dangerous it is. If he ever caught his daughter hitchhiking it would kill him. "It's just too dangerous for girls to be alone on the road," he said as he popped the tab off another beer can. I don't remember for sure, but as calmly as hell I explained to him that my gender was female.

Returning to my K-Mart shopping cart, I tucked away the strays in my backpack and trudged onward down Sage Street expecting the worst of worsts at any moment. Perhaps it would just be a semi hammering it down on me, or who knows, the way my luck's been running, a whole brigade of K-Mart-a-troopers might be after me to repossess their cart.

The rest of the way was all downhill. When I arrived at my destination, as expected, it was confusion plus. I kinda related it to being at a sideshow of the Barnum & Bailey Circus when I was ten. A feeling of complete disorientation takes place at times like these and I was wishing I was high. Then again, being straight with such bzarities going on is a whole 'nother trip. I wheeled my shopping cart over to the nearest vacant chair, which hardly resembled a chair, and parked. It took me a couple of minutes to decide whether the "what appeared to be" dried up hot chocolate that was spilled all over the seat was actually dried up or not. Deciding that it was and feeling a little self-conscious, I sat down and began the wait for my turn with the Big Green Machine.

It truly amazed me how many little people there were roaming under and around tables, chairs, machines and people. It seemed to me that every single one of them had baby bottles permanently adhered to their lips sucking away... intently on... it wasn't milk... it was Coca-Cola. Little toddlers drinking Coca-Cola! "They sure are getting a taste of reality at an awfully young age," as I recalled just how early I had started smoking cigarettes, but somehow *this* seemed different... somehow.

"I'm done with my washer," a woman's voice startled me as she interrupted my

thoughts, "if you would like to use it." "Thanks," I uttered, as I looked up too soon to avoid direct eye contact. Shifting my focus, I couldn't help but notice her blueish-graish kinks pulled back tight across her scalp, exposing sad brown eyes. She looked forty. She wasn't a day over twenty-five.

As I wheeled down to the Big Green Machine she was pointing out for me, I tried to imagine what life must be like for her. Rounding a table that was oddly situated between two other tables I just missed running over a little person sprawled out on the floor. But it was a close call, and the kid started to cry — wail — and downright bawl. "Where the hell was the mother to let the kid be sprawled all over the floor like that?" I thought, a bit ticked off and quite a bit anxiety-ridden by the commotion this kid was creating. The mother of the sprawler arrived at the scene of the crime with "kill" in her eyes. She gathered up her child from the floor and glared at me like it was all my fault. If I would have actually harmed the kid I swear she would have sued me. She bitched something at me like, "Why don't you watch where you're going, Mister?!" or maybe it was more like, "I'll beat your fuckin' head in you *****!" "I'm sorry, lady," was about all I could manage as she heel-turned back to her Big Green Machine. "What a fuckin' bitch!" were the only words rambling around in my head as I headed towards the corner.

This machine is one of those fifty cent jobs for rugs and like objects, so I decided to conserve and throw it all in together. It really didn't matter to me anymore if the colors ran or not. I didn't feel like sticking around any longer than necessary, so in it all went: whites, darks and multis. Besides, if the colors do run, who'd care? Some of the most creative things I've ever done occur this way.

That fourth and final kick in the first round started the Big Green Machine on its first cycle so I wandered over to check out the happenings on the bulletin board. I can always count on bulletin boards to shift my focus. That is, at least laundry mat bulletin boards haven't let me down. Usually, I just completely forget what was on my mind and try to figure out what types of people put up these ads.

"Wanted to buy Grit," the ad read. "You can receive Grit every week for 25¢." I imagine that is some sort of underground conspiracy as I noted the "what's for sale signs" and where the bingo games were being held this month. In the corner of my eye is this twenty-two-year-old woman standing to the left of me, directly in front of a "house for

sale" sign. She has the same frame, build and hair style as Janis Joplin. Even the way she positioned her body by supporting her weight on one leg while leaning against the wall. It may have been either the "windblown" hair style that caught my eye or maybe it was all those silver bracelets tingling together from her elbow on down. But maybe, just maybe it was the feeling I got from her. That sort of "I know where you're coming from" vibe that I responded to.

"Do you come here often?" asked the Janis Joplin resemblance. "Not too," I replied, wondering if she had read my thoughts that were focusing in on the image she relayed about herself. An image that I like and easily relate to. "I probably make it here once a month if I'm lucky," I added so the conversation wouldn't stagnate, "and sometimes not even that." Her eyes stayed on me as mine glanced back over to the AM/FM radio/cassette player ads that were so abundant. I found myself wondering if Janis Joplin had ever been to a Mr. Sud's laundromat before. She was probably real stoned if she had been to one and probably never let trivial sayings and interactions bother her. Actually, I bet if Janis ever went into a Mr. Sud's she was looking for a pickup for another one night stand. I have often fantasized what it would have been like to have been a "Janis Joplin one night stand" or for that matter to have been her lover.

"Wanna do some coke with me?" she asked in a hushed but anxious, cackly giggle. I was delighted she asked. I felt her energy flowing freely within and without restrictions. So natural she seemed to me that her en-

thusiasm wasn't surprising at all — just high on spontaneity. I felt individual, not routine like so many other times in "funny" situations. My instincts were saying "touch her and let her know" but the conditioned half said, "Everyone knows you don't touch strangers." I looked into her sky blue eyes and a glimmer of warmth radiated from inside her as she touched my arm. She was giving me her strength and reassurance that it was all right, whatever I was thinking or feeling was perfectly all right. "Get it while you can," or "Might as well," I said, verbalizing an answer. She smiled a spacy teeth smile and took my arm again. She stated a fact when she said, "Ah, Women, Women," as we headed for the door.

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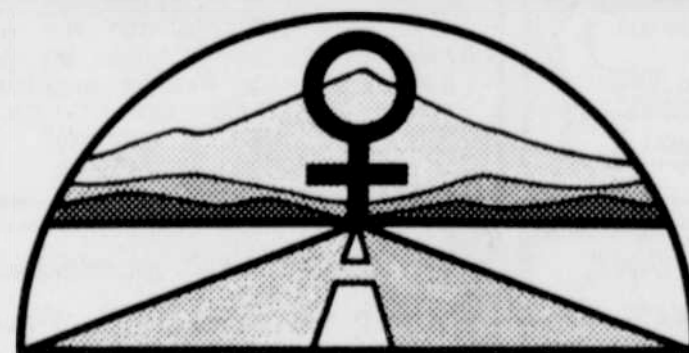
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