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Dream or Nightmare?

Erma Fiste

It all happened the other day when I dropped into the girls' clubroom to rest a bit and munch on a homemade cupcake. I gazed about me momentarily, and seeing no one with whom to discuss the amputation of a small mole from my left cheek a few weeks ago, I settled back in my chair and gazed absently at the ceiling. The pose was restful and soon . . .

"Now look, Ruthie," I protested, "I am perfectly content to just sit here all by myself, munching my homemade cupcake and enjoying life. If you care to do the same, you are perfectly welcome to pull up a couch and sit down beside me and enjoy the serenity. As for going shopping: Does a bus driver spend all his free time driving his automobile around the block? Does a banker stack and count his own money on his day off? Does a sailor spend his leave sailing miniature sailboats on a pond? I ask you." Ruthie parted her lips to speak, "Well I . . ." "I knew you'd see it my way," I said, feeling like an allied victor.

I sulked as I walked down one of Rike's aisles with Ruthie. Some day, I vowed, she would lose an argument. I reluctantly cast a glance to either side of me. THEN I LOOKED AGAIN. Two clerks were sitting behind the counters with a checker board balanced between them. In wonderment, I walked over to the counter.

"I say there . . ." I ventured. The clerks cringed close to the floor. One of them whispered, "Keep still and maybe she'll go away." I turned slowly, still dazed . . . on the other side of the aisle was something else. A group of clerks were gathered in a semi-circle. In the middle was a small giggle having her hair done. "No, Gertrude," said the happy victim, "I don't think my face is long enough to wear my hair on top of my head. Try a few fluffs and maybe a pompadour." The crowd clapped their hands in childish glee. This is a joke, I thought . . . a mad, impetuous joke. I ran on stumbling from counter to counter. Each was the same . . . sales people stretching gum . . . elevator girls sticking out their tongues and passing up people with an empty car . . . information employees asking how much one would pay to know where the merchandise is located . . . cashiers with feet propped up on their registers sipping cokes . . . screams of, "If you don't want it, I don't care . . . Help yourself . . . your arm's not broken . . . would I wait on you—why pick on me?" filled the air. It was all a horrible dream . . . a horrible dream . . . a dream.

"Hey, you with the cupcake crumbs all over your blouse, wake up." It was Ruthie. "Whatsa matter, bad dream?" "Yeah sure, just a bad dream," I said. I walked down the dignified aisles to the elevators. "Up car," smiled the attendant pleasantly. I smiled too.