

Christine Wiesenthal

THE LAUNDRY CYCLE

blues

*If these tests fail, depend only on an expert. You will save money, time and worry by calling a reliable service organization for a man who knows your appliance thoroughly.*

—*Home Laundry Guide*

what is this weakness that washes over me as I sort through *the blues* always make me think of the sight of his denim clad hips sauntering along in slim cut *jeans* jeans old jeans good jeans his jeans my jeans a combination *I like to fantasize about* pants a couple pair crumpled in a heap tangled legs pockets peeled inside out in haste *slip in* four socks and some lightly scented soap *like ABC* things get out of hand though and the agitator starts churning my gut to slush sucks me into his spin and puts me through the wringer till I find myself all washed up and hung up and strung out on a long thin line or two *flap flap flapping* on about a load of *nothing at all* can console me now *as Dinah Washington sings* I'm seeing red and feeling blue/holding my breath waiting for you *sucker* just can't wait to see him again *can you* maybe get in the last lick *this time* breezing along out the blue give him a smack on the cheek a smart wet one too

whites

*But we have not yet solved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul . . . Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe?*

—*Herman Melville, Moby-Dick*

and all this time *The Ladies Home Journal* huh would have us think we're just doing the basic staple of the laundry room whites and color fast cottons and linens ho-hum and harmless as mashed potatoes or rice pudding when it turns out that in handling this mess of underwear diapers sheets we're actually grappling at a material level with the dirty problems of undiluted metaphysical evil transcendent cosmic horrors and yes even splendid unfathomable spiritual mysteries as well take this bed sheet here for example the shroud of Turin or this limp dish rag a strange and portentous white flag of human mortality these panties on the other hand clearly outline in brief the white Vision of St. John in Revelations and finally this last loner sock the existential vacuum of the absurdist's universe that is to say the whole pile taken together really amounts to an unending epic adventure in epistemology which is why I believe frustrated natural philosophers theologians theoretical physicists and learned men of letters throughout the ages as well as many grown men I know still give up the ghost when it comes to whites and instead pale with staggering effort and bleating like sheep bring their laundry to their wives or their mothers their washday madonnas

delicates

*The wires can be taken out . . . so that the entire bustle can be laundried with the greatest care.*

—*American Mail Order Fashions, 1880*

don't be misled by appearances girls my Home Ec/English teacher said *delicates* aren't necessarily sheer as nylons or heheh flimsy as Kleenex tissue collective roll of eyeballs from class rather take a sturdy looking shetland sweater it's a *delicate* or a big thick cumulus cloud of a comforter definitely a *delicate* too same goes for dingy old drapes or rubber bottomed bath mats you see in the world of fabrics and textiles *delicate* means anything that needs special care because it's easily damaged or affected by normal handling if you're not careful are you listening if you're not careful then things can shrink wrinkle lose their shape heavens actually come apart discolor or fade not to mention pilling prevention is really the key you see laundry is an art yes *an art* Christine and requires skill especially when it comes to your fine woolen knits pure virgins obviously but blends also and I remember her counting off her fingers here cashmere mohair silk polyester synthetics permanent press are all *delicate* so always follow the man *sshhh* manufacturer's instructions on the garment label memorize your symbols girls and remember if in doubt HAND WASH very simple sit down Sandra soak for a few minutes DO NOT RUB squeeze suds through gently rinse just warm mind you not too warm now rinse well lay flat or drip dry and *ta dah* your *delicates* are done you see

colors

*Calypso learns of Dr. Jeremy Wright's infidelity when she opens a letter meant for Polly on this week's episode of The Bold and the Beautiful.*

—*Weekly Soap Opera Digest*

there will always be stains you can bet your babushka on that one yet must admit ink blood sap grass gum grease wax wine lipstick yeh that must be mine chocolate mud rust crayon beet juice can actually look pretty artful when run into other jelly bean bright colors all jumbled up in the basket easter magic like no how to make them come clean in cold hard water is *the real problem* is the lye in the soap which is basically caustic soda and hell if you get it on your hands you're a goner if you happen to have sensitive skin that is all those heavy duty chemical reactions require a science if you want to do it right you need to know all about solvents and deposits ammonia and alkaline chlorine and corrosion inhibitors in any case a good acid enzyme that eats up dirt which is to say launders it can be hard to find as a last resort I recommend you read the *hints on dyeing* section of any reputable home laundry guide believe me it's no snap no such thing as just reaching out for a good stiff shot of *Wisk* or *Viva* or *Arctic Power* when you run into a real beauty of a stain *just Shout it out* won't work either sorry I've tried your true colors you hear me loud and clear just don't come flying back slambang through

color fasts

*The only sure way to stop the blaze of a female's dress when accidentally caught on fire.*

—Entry No. 254 in *The Cook Not Mad; or Rational Cookery*, 1831

she'd always catch me red-handed that's just how mothers are always popping out of nowhere when what you really want is to avoid them these messes these night-time spills these accidental red alerts such a leaky body *what's the matter with you anyway can't you be more careful* and she'd sigh my mother sighed a lot *go soak it* she'd say *go—and don't let your brother see* so I'd go slinking downstairs to the old laundry sink by the washing machine by the sewer drain by the concrete cracked from frost or disgust the trouble with blood being that you need to use H<sub>2</sub>O so ice cold it hurts after a while you know like the freezer burn brain you get from eating ice cream too fast otherwise the stain sets and *that's that missy you're done* but before you leave you must admit sometimes you stood and watched it soak didn't you all those wisps of cranberry blood lifting from the cotton and curling out cloudy into the water like so many sea anemones fanned in their sand beds *didn't you didn't you* but you never told your mother *that* did you