

I slept well last night. It's good to sleep well; often the day depends on how well you sleep. I feel good. Had a nice breakfast, and I'm looking forward to a good day of study, for that's what I always do on Saturday.

After breakfast I relax with a cigarette and a cup of tea - and then to the university, for that's where I study. "We're going shopping today, Stan," I hear my mother say. With one sentence she wiped out my whole morning, for I hate to shop. If only she would shop when she does shop, but not my mother; she must go through the entire K-Mart department store before she can settle down to buying her groceries which are in a separate department altogether. I cannot understand women shoppers. Why can't they go and buy what they need, and then leave? No! It's somehow a special occasion during which time they lose their heads as they wander from one item to the next, feeling, touching, grabbing, comparing and so on.

Finally, we get to the grocery department. I must hurry her here for, if she dilly-dallies here like she did in the department store, I may never get to the University. Thank God! She senses how I feel (which is beginning to show), and gets serious.

There is so much of everything, everywhere - stacked to the ceiling. No matter what you want it is there - in abundance. There is soft music playing - they want you to relax - get you in a shopping (buying) mood. How clever of them. But they also appeal to your gullibility by piling goods as high as the ceiling, which makes you react with a healthy "I won't!" and so, you grab. Don't be surprised if you buy more than you intended, for they have clever devices for the unwary.

There are many people in the store, pushing grocery carts piled high with items - the victims. But it shows they have healthy pocketbooks. How nice.

Our shopping cart, too, is full, for I can feel the strain of its load - for that is my job when we go shopping - to push the cart. She fills the cart as fast as she can

while I follow behind wondering what she will do when the cart is full; because I know that is the only reason she ceases to shop - because the cart is full! The people at K-Mart would sell a lot more food if they had bigger carts.

There are people in the store whom I know. I don't want to meet them. What would I say to them? "Hello?" "Nice day, eh?" No! I hate superficial conversation. I hate that situation when you're trapped in the encounter and "must say something." But, why? I know them! "Yes, but you know them in certain situations in which you know how to interact with them; but when you encounter them in an unusual environment an unusual situation, you no longer know how, because the situation is different." "You see, you learn how to interact according to certain situation. Like those in the classroom, the coffee shoppe, etc., but when a new situation presents itself without a prescribed pattern for behavior, you are left to your own resources, which implies responsibility to act appropriately. If you cannot act of your own accord, and do so responsibly - that is, if you always depend upon on external prespective source - you will become anxious; consequently, to evade the situational encounter with another so therefore, you invade the person."

So, I direct my mother and the food cart down on the aisle away from those I know. I hate anxiety!

We are now at the last leg of our shopping tour; we're at the fruit and vegetable department. There's a section at the bottom of the cart which must be filled, and so, mother proceeds to fill it while I steal a grape to avenge these capitalists who bow to your wallet while scheming how to wrench that extra buck from it.

There are many people in this area -- all with full carts. But wait! There is something not right here. There is a person not like the rest. An old woman. But that is not the difference, because as I look around me, I see three other old women. Wait! we all

have full carts, but she does not even have a cart she has an arm basket with two items! She's old her hair is gray and unkempt; her clothes are old, cheap, and do not match; her purse is dirty and torn; Why! she's...she's...poor! So, that's the difference here. But her face, her face, is not cruel, there's no revenge there, why, she looks almost... happy.

I must watch her, I have a reason. "Don't go away, old woman! Wait! Where are you going?" She's going over to the manager's office window. I wonder what she's going there for? Somehow, I know why she went there. "Oh God!" "Please, please don't let her go there for that reason!" "Any reason, but that one!" "I couldn't stand it if you did."

I was right she did.

In her hand she has a narrow, white slip of paper - a food voucher! She's coming back. "What shall I do?" Act nonchalant; yeah, that's what to do. Don't give yourself away. Stay where you can watch though. But don't let her see you!

The food clerk weighs some bananas for her. Now, this is when it shall happen. She presents him with the voucher he asks her to sign it. Slowly she forms her fingers about the pen he gave her; she glances about her to see who's looking. She mustn't see me staring. I pretend to look elsewhere, but quickly glance back at her. She writes slowly, in big letters, her name.

I must listen very carefully, for she may say something; it's not the words I care to hear, but that all important tone in her voice. I

wait in fear! "Perhaps I should leave now".

"No! I will wait."

She speaks.

Was that fear? Was it defeat? Or, was it despair? Yes, it was all those. I cannot contain myself any longer....

"Look, old woman, it is not my fault!"

"I did not make you

poor! I don't even know you! Besides, why did you come here? Don't you know what you've done? You're the odd one here, not us! We all have full carts, and everything was fine until you came." "But you, but you show yourself for what you are - poor!"

"Don't you know what

you do to me? It is not my fault! I was minding my own business! "If you don't leave, I'll have to hit the food clerk or somebody! Leave! Leave.. O.K. if you won't, I will!"

"I'm sorry old woman, I'm sorry you're poor. Im sorry you're not happy." At the check-out we proudly display our enormous purchase. We are not poor, you see - not anymore!

Out of the corner of my eye, I see the old woman at the counter with the sign that reads "6 items or less." She had three items. Her voucher would not allow her to approach any of those ceiling high piles and grab what she wanted to, like us. Unlike us, she could not buy butter, only margarine. We can buy anything we see, but not her, for she's not allowed any unnecessary items. I wanted the face of the girl at the check-out counter where the old woman was. She did not have the respect for the old woman that our check-out girl had for us. We were paying customers. The old woman was a drain on everyone else's wallet, including the check-out girls. She was unworthy of respect. She was treated accordingly. But it is not my fault.

Stan Dalton