

Individuality Lost

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"Escape. The palm trees, with their lush and glossy leaves, will bend to your will. The ocean, with its clear water and calming waves, will undulate at your request. The fragrant air will continuously fill your lungs with the sweet smell of flowers and coconut. You will forever be at peace. This is life living to its fullest. Let the essence of the tropics tantalize and elevate your senses.

Tropical Breeze Aromatherapy© dish soap is cleaning like you've never experienced before."

At least this is what they promised me. My name is Sharon, and I am a forty-five year old housewife. I have an insensitive husband and two beautiful, ungrateful children, but that information is of small consequence to the story of my life, at least after today. Today I bought dish soap that promises me a tropical breeze life. This is no small feat for

a dish soap to accomplish. It is a good thing that not many people buy this brand of soap (it's 93¢ more than the regular, non-aromatherapeutic kind), otherwise there would be a massive epidemic of frustration amongst the masses. Centuries of human quests for inner peace would have been embarrassed by this simple, new product. This quick fix that they told us did not exist. Well, here I have it in my hand. This is the key to my salvation.

I begin to fill the sink with the aqueous catalyst for my journey toward nirvana. I searched the house for every hidden cup and plate that may have been forgotten or hidden due to the massive self-indulgence that my family gorges themselves in. I knew where all of the plates were, of course. Two months ago, I decided to conduct an experiment. I left the dishes that resided within the crevices and nooks of our furniture, closets and window sills. I said nothing

to any member of my family. I waited to see what they would do, hoping that the guilt would eventually eat them up. However, yesterday my husband complained that I had been neglecting unwashed dishes that were strewn about the house. Today I got dish soap.

I never wanted to be a housewife. I don't even know if I wanted to be a wife or mother. Somehow, it all just happened. Like one day I slipped into a coma and awoke the bride of a compromise and the care giver of one mistake and one guilty obligation. I don't know when I became characterized by a title. My individuality must have atrophied while I was in that coma. But today, with the help of a specially formulated dish soap, I will learn to identify myself again.

I know I should not talk this way about my family. Let there be no mistake that I do love them dearly. And sometimes it scares me that my resentment has compounded to this level. However, the pain of living your life completely for others, and knowing that they live none of their life for you, should be understood. I am past the half way point of my life. The better half. The part where I am able to be crazy and spontaneous, and go to a tropical island with my friends, or, dare I say, a lover. I have nothing to show for my years of toil and labour, nothing for myself, at least. Instead I have my missed life bottled and packaged in this convenient squeezable, plastic container. Ahh, my quick fix, my drug. You offer me an escape. You are the key to my salvation. If you do not work, there is nothing left for me.

The sink is half full.

At other points in my life, I tried to free myself from the monotonous chains that bind me. I joined church groups, women's groups, exercise groups, book groups, spirituality groups, cooking groups,

sewing groups, and charity groups. But within each of these groups, I failed, yet again, to establish myself beyond a generalization. I was a Christian, a feminist, a jogger, a reader, a troubled soul, a cook, a sewer, and a pro-lifer. I was not Sharon. I wanted to be separate from a group. I longed to be left on a deserted, tropical island. It would be then that I could breathe and not fear suffocation or categorization by others.

The sink is almost full.

I cannot bring myself to work. When I was in high school, I was one of the smartest in my class. I graduated in 1986, and planned to attend Queen's University. The summer before I was to leave, I made a mistake, literally. Nine months later, Susan was born. My new husband had a well paying job as a plumber. He said that there was no reason for me to put myself under the stress of simultaneously obtaining a degree and taking care of a child. After a few years and another pregnancy, I gave up the dream of secondary education. I settled for this life.

The sink is full.

I can't bring myself to remove the plastic seal that winds itself around the neck of my liquid salvation. I cannot take the chance. The soap bubbles may annihilate the protective bubble I have fashioned for myself. I need the prediction that is killing me. I can't risk the failure of my sudsy Valium soap. I have had problems in the past with my immunity to outside forces for happiness. But it may work. I'll keep that in mind. For right now, I'll put it in this cupboard. I am sure that I will use it someday soon when I feel particularly in need of perfect tranquility. There is some happiness in that.

There is water everywhere.

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