

It was Father's Day 2006.

And I received some pre-emptive karma.

I was in a coffee shop the other day--Father's Day, in fact, sitting by the window, sipping on a latte, when I saw this pretty desperate looking girl walk up. Probably not a girl-- I was 40 at the time and she looked my age, though she may have been 10 years younger, or older--it was hard to tell.

She was moving slowly-- very slowly--in an outfit that looked like it had been put together by drunken gypsies: a wedding or prom skirt, white taffeta and tulle, a heavy sweater, a straw hat, boots, socks and her greying hair in braids. She carried with her a black garbage bag, I fancy it was filled with her worldly possessions. She left it on the patio, and I could tell by the uncomfortable stares of the patrons out there, she had asked one of them, semi-coherently, if they would watch her stuff. I couldn't hear the conversation, but I could tell by the exchanged glances and uncomfortable body language her presence was not welcome, or at least understood.

She came into the shop, then, and headed straight for the bathroom. She was in there a long time. Long enough that I was starting to get concerned--she was so very small, and with it slender-- scrawny, probably, under all the clothing, possibly even wasting away. She had the look of someone chased by demons--be it addiction, withdrawal or worse, the demons of mental illness. I decided I would buy her something to eat-- a glass of milk and a muffin, or something. AND this was years before people started the "Pay it forward in the Tim Horton's line. I was trying to decide how I would do this, without causing her embarrassment or insult, when she emerged from the bathroom. "Maybe I'll give the barista \$5 and tell her to buy the girl something" I thought to myself.

As the girl/waif/lost soul shuffled slowly, painfully, from the bathrooms, she moved towards the counter--and she was holding up a set of keys. My keys, as it turned out. I had visited the washroom when I first came in, and hadn't realized I left them on the washroom counter.

I jumped up and said "Oh! Those are my keys!" and she dreamily handed them over. I thanked her, and asked if I could buy her a drink, or something. She stared vacantly at me in response.

She was someone's daughter. Or maybe sister. Possibly a mommy. I suddenly couldn't look anymore, and she turned to the barista in confusion and sort of stepped away from me. I gave the barista the \$5 and asked her to please buy the girl whatever that would buy. I made my way out of the shop in hurried self-consciousness. As I stepped out the door, I heard her say to the girl "Could I have some water? I didn't really understand what that lady said to me"

I didn't wait, watching through the glass to see if she got any nutrition. I hope the barista-- just a young girl herself, probably still in high school-- understood the situation, and tried to make the transient woman comfortable. I like to think she did.

I like to think the woman understood I was trying to offer her some comfort, with some dignity. I hope she felt good about returning my keys and felt she deserved a reward.

I hope she called her dad and let him know his little girl was ok

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