

Martha and Belinda's Excellent Adventure: Part 4

Belinda Darcey

Day 4 - Colorado Springs to Manhattan, Kansas. September 16, 1993

God, what a morning! I was grumpy, cranky and irritable. I snarled at Martha when she tried to tune in to some local talk radio show (her attempt at soaking up some Americana.) There was no way in hell I was going to endure the misinformed, bigoted opinions of the white bread Bible Belt at seven a.m. We drove on in silence. I turned to my book (having developed at an early age, the uncanny knack of being able to completely tune out all things unpleasant), and eventually nodded off while Martha fumed away.

A hundred and fifty miles later, we pulled into a truck stop diner for breakfast. Martha ignored me as I whined about not being given the common courtesy of a five minute wake up call, which would have at least given me time to put my sneakers back on and get my bearings. She stared at me in disbelief and slammed the car door behind her. I finished tying my laces and followed her inside. I made a concerted effort to cheer up over hot pancakes and eggs, pointing out Judy, the flustered cashier-in-training and a booth of four old geezers in John Deere uniforms who appeared to be permanent fixtures. Martha just nodded, not saying much.

Back in the car (my turn to drive) she exploded. Half an hour of yelling and crying ensued, after which I agreed to be less of a princess and more flexible about all the inconveniences of life on the road. Things got better fast.

Martha is falling in love with Kansas. I don't quite get it. We stopped so that she could have her photo taken standing in a field. It's at least ninety degrees and there's

nothing but flat, flat land in every direction. While I can appreciate the gorgeous blue sky after L.A., in my opinion, the view is one big yawn. She's delirious.

We pass billboard after billboard welcoming us to the area on behalf of the First Church of Someone-or-other, and even see a few hastily-erected signs inviting us to attend a local revival meeting with the Right Reverend James. I ponder whether he is "Right" as

in right-wing or "Right" as in the assumption that all others are "wrong".

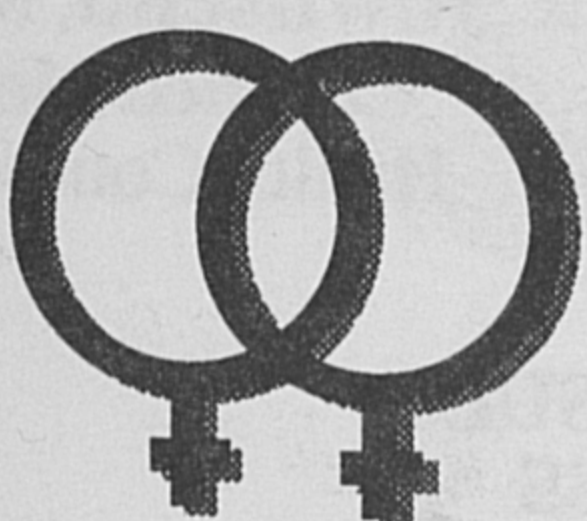
Meanwhile, Martha is watching for a Dairy Queen. Suddenly, we see signs for, of all things, a London Fog outlet. Driven by curiosity and the need for gas, we stop to have a looky-look. Big mistake. It turns out to be a huge collection of retail outlets. I kept wondering where on earth they got their customers from and who the hell would shop here for Bugle Boy shorts and Wedgewood China. Well, as it turns out, bored fools like us, with nothing better to do while driving cross-country. What started out as a bargain \$13.50 flannel shirt purchase, quickly turned into a whopping \$81.00 expenditure. We justified this spending spree over a picnic lunch at the next rest area. Half-way through her long-awaited turkey sandwich, Martha found herself the unwilling object of desire of a rather large and very persistent bumble bee. We tried various methods of discouragement, including waving a napkin at it, all the while trying not to panic. This only seemed to encourage him, and then I started laughing which only made matters worse. I'm sorry, but as I said at the time, it was very funny, okay? Needless to say, she wasn't the least bit amused. I threw everything in the hamper while she danced around, and we ran back to the safety of the car.

To Martha's immense satisfaction, we reached the Best Western in Manhattan, Kansas by 4 pm. Not so much as a blink from the sporty-looking receptionist as she passed us our room key. (M: Big dyke. B: Really? M: Please!) I lugged the cooler up a flight of stairs (this was a very big deal, since I generally like to let Martha do any heavy lifting), and spent the next hour in the sorry excuse for a pool. Martha convinced me to wear some shorts, a Jog-bra and a tee-shirt ("There's no one else down there honey"). Of course as soon as we were in the water, two middle-aged straight guys showed up. We did our best to ignore them, but they kept staring at my wet tee-shirt, so we decided to try out the more private, enclosed jacuzzi instead. Despite the ubiquitous signs warning us that we were being watched by video cameras, presumably to discourage any hanky-panky, I indulged my long-suffering Beloved in a luxurious little foot massage. We could only hope that our receptionist was getting an eyeful.

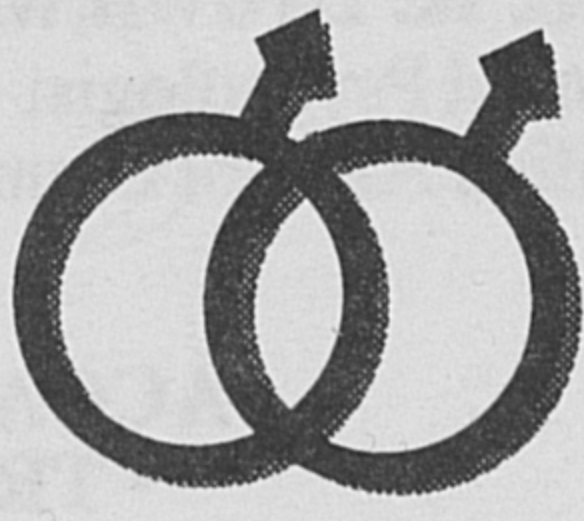
Later, we walked across some train tracks to the Pizza Hut for dinner, where we consumed a large deep-dish special (half pepperoni, half pineapple and ham...one guess who ordered which.) Sated, we strolled back to the motel bathed in the warm, balmy evening breezes. Thousands of crickets heralded an imminent tropical storm and it felt like we were on a peaceful, tropical island. It felt like everything was going to be just fine. It felt really wonderful.

(To be continued...) ▼

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