

victory in her eyes... But to her dismay she found herself in a narrow dead-end street... She drove forward and backward, worried about the time she had left. A little more maneuvering and she turned the car around. She relaxed and started driving back when suddenly she felt an impact that almost turned her car over. Two men surrounded her screaming and cursing - words she was not accustomed to hear.

Shocked by the accident, she heard one man shout «Get out of your car... see the damage you caused. Women should not be driving. Why don't they leave these things to those who know?»

To men?

The trunk of her car was bashed-in while the other car was damaged in the front right side. Being hit in the back was a clear indication that traffic rules were on her side... She had had the right of way. But before she could utter a word the street began to fill with people each giving his opinion while confusion reigned on all sides. More people came out of shops and cafes to watch the spectacle.

One of the men rudely addressed her «Pay us for the damage and we will leave you alone.» The words shook her out of the nightmare. The fault was theirs and they wanted her to pay for it?

«What are you saying? Are you accusing me? Who do you think I am...? How dare you...!» One of the spectators approached her and in a low voice said «You are a woman alone. Silence these men by giving them some money.»

«Who says I want them to be silent? Let them say what they want. I know the law is on my side... They are in the wrong.»

There was a lot of commotion as everybody around interfered. She could not see nor hear clearly what was going on as the crowd surged around her.

Suddenly she felt a hand tap her shoulder. She almost slapped it away - but a feminine voice said, «Come with me. Don't argue with these men. You can use my phone to call your husband, or father or brother to help you. A woman cannot deal with these men.» She led her to a beauty shop.

She took the receiver to dial... with whom was she going to speak? She had no husband, no brother or father. She looked at the owner of the shop eager to confess that she was alone... But she was ashamed. What could she say? I am the man in the house? I do the work of men? I compete with them at work and do better than them? What is the use of saying all this as the din of the men's voices outside rose even higher?

Then she remembered the insurance company. Surely they would come to her aid. How could she get out her phone book from her purse to find the number? She was supposed to know the number of her father, brother or husband.

She excused herself saying «I can't remember and must look for the number.» The first person she called was not in the office so she dialed the second person in charge and asked him to come to her aid quickly. He asked for the address. For help she looked towards the shop owner who took the receiver from her saying, «Sir, your sister is in my shop at... Its not your sister's fault, I mean your wife...» She hoped the insurance man would understand and pretend to be a relative. She did not know what he answered as the shop owner did not propose another relationship.

She stayed in the shop waiting for the man while images superimposed themselves in her mind... sitting behind her desk, writing reports, preparing for conferences on social issues, writing a story for a magazine, recording an interview...

In the beauty shop around her a number of ladies were sitting under the hair-dryer while others extended their hands to the manicurists. Facing her was a glass cabinet with a variety of false hair-pieces in different styles and colors. A curtain opened and a woman with a towel around her shoulders emerged with her face covered in white cream.

A man's voice calling her with authority startled her. A tall man with broad shoulders introduced himself as the expert from the insurance company. She hurried out with him and gave him her car papers, keys, and driver's licence. Among the papers was her diplomatic identification card. She looked at it and put it back in her purse.

She stopped the first taxi and asked the driver to take her to the shopping centre for women's clothes.

She asked the saleswoman to show her the latest trend in fashion.

The woman asked «Is it for you...?»

She answered «I want the latest most modern fashion.»

The shop also contained false hair-pieces.

She added «I want a false hair-piece too.»

The saleswoman inquired which one she wanted...

«I want a false hair-piece... a woman's... not a man's.»