

Wash That Man

by Ulrica Hume

The washing machine at home was broken. It was an old leaky Maytag. A discouraging mess—twisted panties, sky-blue jeans, and an old lover or two or three floating downstream (the reverse of spawning salmon). Each man was slightly drowned, and resuscitation given to one caused the other to be jealous. I put the lot into a wicker basket, and went off to the Soap & Suds.

DO NOT OVERFILL. After stuffing my failure into a front-loading machine, I carefully added detergent, but it could not be enough, even if bubbles overflowed, whimsical and sweet, it could not change the vitriolic words, sad looks of contempt over a shoulder, the running back to hollow hugs. Coin after coin dropped into the hidden chamber in a satisfying way, and I regretted selecting warm. Scalding hot would have been better. Or even cold, ridding them all of attendant passion. I wanted to get on with my life.

And so past loves were sanitized, a thrill to see David's face go by, that urgently polite expression, water sloshing as the drum rapidly turned. There went limber Hadley doing cartwheels, and if I listened hard I could make out the sad *thunk thunk* of Paul. My hand pressed the little porthole in solidarity.

THE LAUNDRY IS NOT RESPONSIBLE. Into the dryer I tossed the damp, clotted clothes and writhing ex-lovers. I fed in more coins. I slammed the door and the next phase began—this of forgiveness.

They leapt in the perforated chamber of my heart elegantly. Their eyes were closed. Arms and legs like wheels of flesh. How clueless their penises seemed, manifest heirs warped by the cycle's violent speed, and yet so emboldened.

First meetings, first kisses, clashes, rendezvous, phones that would

not ring. Regrets like the foam articles one is not meant to put in but does. I peeked. A bewildering warmth rushed out. This promise not made, or made but denied, or the illusion of a promise only.

At the folding table I labored over the flattened, sea-breezed bodies. All the tender, origami folds shameless in their right—a swift and happy, happy-swift forgetting.

Then a formal wonder: this sock without its mate.

