

Laundry Room

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I went to sleep, exhausted, to the sounds of gunfire and yelling. I woke up, fortunately, to silence. My roommate had finally gone to sleep and stopped playing videogames. I suffered from these first-world problems. For example, my roommate's audio jack being broken. Going into the bathroom to find spit and piss everywhere and wanting to cry occasionally, going into my room with my roommate's clothes covering the floor so that I could not walk upright to get to my bed, going into my house's lobby to find stains never washed and a special musk awaiting me that only needs an unavailable, open window.

It is frustrating not only because of how disturbed I feel but how helpless I am. I try to clean up after myself as best I can, but I should not have to clean up after others. I should not be taken advantage of. I like to think I have a right to a clean environment that does not occasionally drive me crazy.

Then there's the laundry room, where I found a used condom in the corner once. You walk into the room and are faced with lost dirty clothes littering the floor, actual litter littering the floor, and my favorite: hair and mystery gunk inside of the cracks of the machines. What is it? You don't want to know, nor do I. This is where you will wash your clothes, so find the open washing machine if there is one, and if you are lucky there may be multiple available, in which case you have the luxury of choosing the one that looks the least nasty and hair-filled. Try not to get the mystery gunk or hair on your clothes when putting them in the washing machine. They just keep accumulating the later we get in the year, since it seems they're never cleaned. Once done washing, try not to drop your wet clothes on the floor when transferring to the dryer, especially those slippery damn socks. There are all kinds of shit on the ground that will stick happily to your newly washed and damp clothes!

Try not to leave your cleaning supplies overnight, or over an entire week as I did. Not once but twice. To be honest, I have trouble remembering things. I forget my belongings all the time in all sorts of places, and it is a stroke of luck for me to remember and recuperate myself. Only to find both times as I came down with my laundry, realizing my mistake and hoping too late that there may be something left for me, that both my bottle of detergent and box of dryer sheets were empty and sad.

They made me sad. You may say that I was asking for it to be stolen, to leave something valuable in a public place for that long. Something so valuable that each wash people may steal is worth less than two quarters. Something so valuable that a decent amount of people must have graciously pitched in to take so much of my detergent, since both bottles had been full. So I felt taken advantage of by the community around me that was supposed to be supportive.

I had assumed a mutual respect and morality that was not there. I figured that, since I would not steal from others, they would not steal from me. So it was my fault I was being stolen from and my fault I did not steal back to equalize, to compromise my morality for detergent. At least that is what my friends tried to convince me of when I asked them about it. Because another thing I let happen to myself was allowing the stolen detergent and dryer sheets, enough to last me perhaps a semester, ruin my day. Now I would have to wait another day to do laundry and go buy some from the nearby pharmacy. My friends offered kindly, but it was ok for me and I wanted to wait for the next day.

Let's look at the logic of taking advantage of others by stealing their detergent for a day. A primary motivator I heard when asking was that it saved them money to take from others who left their stuff. Well, considering some of these 'frugal' people were using Tide pods—probably the most expensive and laziest of all the available detergents in the nearby pharmacy—their argument just does not sit well with me. As for those who do not use Tide pods, not to mention what they potentially could have saved switching brands, they were not even sure of the amount they were saving by using another's detergent for the day, it felt natural. It was wrong, I decided.

So I came up with a plan. I had an extra bottle of detergent I had bought thinking it was a cheaper alternative to the main brand and deserved a try. However, once I tried it, I did not like the smell, nor did my sheets feel particularly clean. That's why it sat in my closet for a month.

I may as well put this bottle to good use then. I decided I would put on a nondescript Vanderbilt sweater and Vanderbilt pants and put several drops of food dye into the detergent, leaving it in the laundry room, so that it would stain the outfits of any who would try to use my detergent again without my permission. I decided I would even remind those who would steal of their sin by writing in Sharpie on the side "Do Not Touch!" This way I would remove some of my own guilt at providing them this unknowingly and deservedly destructive option.

Because in this way I was becoming the laundry room vigilante, taking law and order into my own hands and punishing those who were immoral.

"They should have read what the side said," I imagined telling anyone.

I thought giddily of the possibilities, of people walking around with colored clothing, ashamed because finally something as stupid and annoying as stealing someone else's laundry detergent would be shown. And at the same time, I would feel justice for my two bottles that had been drained.

So I planned out how I would do it, wearing the nondescript outfit, avoiding being seen by people or cameras on my way to the laundry room, writing the message in sharpie on the side, and putting the drops of food dye into the detergent. I was wondering where I could get some food dye when I realized I could probably just find some in a cabinet in the communal kitchen and borrow some.

It was all coming together when I realized my mistake and started to laugh almost hysterically at the flaw in my own plan, and the hypocrisy and irony I had beautifully created. I decided to give up and just leave my extra bottle in the laundry room.