Bob had come to the TAP to lunch with the ladies at Walter’s, a fourth-floor slowfood joint that boasted the best pea shoot salads in town. As advertised, heart-pumping exhilaration upon arrival would intensify the epicurean experience. Bob reached the balustrade of the restaurant damp with expectation, his taste buds aroused and ready.

The ladies in question were a feral feminist artist group he’d associated with for decades. They called themselves The Bettys. As yet the only male member, he often functioned as querulous pet and scapegoat. He’d long enjoyed the lively irreverent conversation from this cadre of distinctive voices, a mix of generations, ethnic backgrounds, skillsets, and interests. He was demurely proud of his long-term acceptance in their sect.

Bob had survived The Bettys’ lesbian separatist phase as a mute cross-dresser, sneaking chameleon-like into women-only festivals and public toilets, fastidiously covering his prominent adam’s apple with a turtleneck dickey. The Bettys felt a rush of subversive naughtiness during that time, disobeying their own strident political rulebook by harboring straight male flesh in their perfectly idiomatic, crudely graffitied Volkswagen bus.
Though Bob’s performance-artist temperament helped to assuage his acceptance in this particular flock of agitators, his sex betrayed him on numerous occasions. The details of these anecdotes remain undisclosed. Lady Luck on their side, the Bs + Bob soldiered on unscathed through the turbulent waters of second-wave feminist politics.

That was then. As the teeming walls of TAP attest, women had long since taken the reins of attitude between their teeth with the diligence of worker ants. The Bettys’ carpe-diem tactics seized the opportunity this location offered. Hip to the prog politics of TAP’s “un-management,” they embraced a cheerleader role in perpetuating the unfathomable by upending the phrase once pejoratively associated with the hunting/gathering habits of the second sex. Having done what they do, a large banner, black capital letters on a commie-red cloth, hangs like an altarpiece from the upper esplanade of the Arcade:

SHOP TIL YOU DROP

The Bettys played their role in setting the ironic yet zealously affirmative tone that had come to exemplify this strange place. Like their Situationist ancestors, they were inclined to display their worldview on posters, graffiti, banners, and street art. Ritually lunching every year on the anniversary of the STYD banner installation, they discussed the pervasive long-term effects of their whimsy; the palpable change in consumer habits, the heartbreaking collateral damage. And each year, as they amassed to celebrate, the getting there proved perilously s-l-o-w-e-r. But that was the thrill of it. The risk. The high stakes of political counterpoint. The manifestation of the mani-
festo. As the years rolled by, these annual displays of self-congratulation always included the scouting of dining options on more easily accessible floors.

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They lunched heartily, savoring the fresh vegetables, lubricants, and animated conversation. On this occasion Bob sat between Yellow Betty the younger and White Betty the elder who, dressed in a sweat-drenched pink jogging outfit, exclaimed during the prosecco toast that this was most definitely her final appearance at TAP. “I can’t get it up anymore,” she roared, while dusting her kale and carrot salad with marinated sesame seeds. Sitting across the table from Bob were Violet, Orange, and Red Betty respectively.