Two by Two

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Abstract

I SAT IN THE SECOND CHAIR of Howard’s Barber Shop in Dogtown yesterday. I watched the girls walk by. Always two by two. Always in wool tubes and sweaters. Always with short hair, white anklets and loafers. I waited for a girl with braids or green socks, but there weren’t any...
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“Howie, have you got any New Yorkers around? The barber surveyed the dip in the butch hair cut he was working on. “New Yorker? Who you trying to impress?”

“Nobody.” I picked up the top magazine on the stack. “I like the cartoons. Charles Addams and Arno, you know?”

“Never heard of them.”

“Just cartoonists.” I pretended to be content with an article on what’s wrong with the American woman. I didn’t find out her main faults, for Lanky-One in chair 1 was finished, and it was my turn.

“I just want the duck tail trimmed and the sides a little shorter. Not too much. I have funny ears,” I said as Howie pinned the towel around my neck.

He wet the back of my hair. “You girls sure are going for the short hair cuts. How come?”

“They’re easy to take care of. Besides, everyone’s doing it.”

Two by two
Two by two. No green socks.
"Great game Saturday. You go?"
Typical barber talk. What did he care if I went or not.
"No, Howie. I didn’t make it."
"You out of town?" he asked as he cut too much over my left ear.
"Yep."
What a damn liar. Why didn’t I tell him that I read Chekov instead. Is it a crime against the state? Push yourself in that mold, girl. Everyone else is doing it. And you’ll step out looking like all the other castings. Laugh at the right jokes. Like the right boys and go to the right parties. Order spudnuts and black coffee and smoke Pall Malls. "I think I am an elephant who’s following an elephant who’s following an elephant who really isn’t there."

In the mirror, I saw Rita come into the shop. Greasy-faced Rita with her red schedule book and white anklets.
"Well, Rita Engler! How are you, kid? I haven’t seen you in ages."

There’s one girl I can’t stand. Be nice to her! She’s good to have as a friend. Wonderful name to have as a recommend on a student application blank.
"Say, girl, you having your head shaved this time?"
"Nope, just a little off the back. You know how it goes. When did you take the big step, Rita?"
"Oh, two weeks ago."
"It looks terrific."
Rita, that word doesn’t mean a thing. It is last year’s word. Your hair is spooky, according to the accepted vocabulary. It makes your face look wider than it is long. Have you ever considered braids?
"How about coming to Bobby Rogers with me after I get mine cut. I want to get one of those angora collars."
Have mercy. A girl your size will look like the Easter Rabbit himself in all that fuzz.
"Aren’t they darling? Gee, I’m sorry I can’t go. I’m meeting Donna right after this. We’re going to walk home together."
Two by two.