

What is that they say about a guilty conscience? I think it's the same as the idle mind, but I would like to forewarn my parents that one day I will write a book about them, and blame my life and my conscience on their upbringing. They so fully instilled a sense of honesty in me that even the THOUGHT of lying makes me break out in a cold sweat and the possibility of pulling a fast one can make me shake.

And while you might think this is a good thing, let me assure you, it is not. There are times when a person must break the rules, defy the standard in the name of justice, truth, or in my case, a potty break.

Last week I went out for lunch with some girlfriends on Whyte Avenue. I had three HUGE glasses of coke – and yes, mother, I still finished my lunch. Anyway, we decided that we would do some shopping. Before I left the restaurant, I went to the bathroom. But as anyone who has ever traveled with me knows, that was the wrong move.

It was like Niagara finding a hole in the wall, the spigot on a keg being broken. Two blocks later, I have to pee all over again. BAD. BBBBAAAADDDDDD. Dance in the street, voice jumping three octaves, please God where's a bathroom, bad. Now my friends and I had split up to plug our meters and were to meet on the corner by the Chapters.

So I buy another ticket for my parking then go to Chapters. Then inspiration hits. Go and use the Chapters bathroom. This thought is IMMEDIATELY followed by: but Brown, you are not a customer. You can't just waltz in and use the people's toilet. Then another thought: but I REALLY have to go. So now, I'm not only dancing trying to prevent an accident, but I'm also dancing in indecision. And quickly, the idea of a moral lapse is diminishing in the wake of a potential liquid lapse in the middle of the street.

So I go in, trying to look all nonchalant. And since I take after mom, who can't hide her feelings if her life depended on it, my guilt has me looking like a freakin' criminal. I walk around, trying to pretend that I'm browsing, all the time looking for the washroom and doing a poor job at both. So then I go upstairs and same thing: no bathroom and a dismal performance at pretending I'm a shopper.

So I give in. I approach a CSR and noticing his nametag, politely say, "Excuse me, Don, where can I find your washrooms?"

He's bending over some books and when I speak, his head whips back like he's been rear-ended by a MAC truck. He stares at me and says, "Well fine, but who are you?"

Oh God! Oh God! They're taking NAMES if you have to go to the bathroom? Are they going to compare it at the cash desk? Oh God. Now I'm sure I'm caught and

they're going to kick me out and then I'm going to pee my pants and I'll never live down this humiliation.

But I'm still trying to channel the spirit of The Bibi – brazenness will win over rightness – and say, "My name is Brown. Can you tell me where to find the bathroom?" I keep my voice calm even though anxiety and the fact that my bladder is going to burst makes my voice climb high.

"Sure." He stares at me like he's just waiting for the right time to call my bluff. You know, like when there's an appropriate crowd lingering, he's going to halt, throw his arm in front of him, point at me and proclaim, "CHEATER! DECEIVER!! Look at this woman, pretending to be a customer and all the while all she wants is our toilets!!!"

Then people will shake their heads in disgust, tsk-tsk me, and then bring out that wooden thing that locks you in by the hands and head and then they're going to throw rotten tomatoes at me...after which, they'll head to a nice bistro, have dinner whilst discussing their throwing techniques and all over a nice glass of chianti.

"I'll take you there," Don says, but he's still staring and I'm sweating like Martha Stewart at sentencing (delicately, but profusely). "But you have to give me more."

Whhhaaaa????

"More?"

"Yes," he said, "Tell me more about you."

Then I get it. The rusty wheels of my brain turn and I realize that I've completely thrown off this poor man because I called him by name. I start laughing – slightly relieved that my ruse isn't caught.

"You don't know me, Don. I just saw your name tag and I figured that calling you by name was more polite than saying, hey you, where are your bathrooms?"

He laughs and apologizes, saying that he has a bad memory and thought that we knew each other. Then he takes me to the bathroom, wishes me a good day and leaves (I think).

I use the facilities, studiously avoid looking at the big sign that says: WASHROOM ARE FOR CHAPTERS CUSTOMERS ONLY, thanking God for Chapter and clean bathrooms and congratulating myself on a trick well played. Wash my hands, and satisfied and satiated, I leave...but what is this?

Jeez, there's Don WAITING FOR ME OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM.

Oh God. Now it's really over. They've had me on the security camera, they saw my sad attempt at pretending to be a customer. Oh dang it. Daddy always said that things done in the dark soon come to light. Now I'm going to be busted and my friends will wonder what the hell happened to me.

So, like mom and the elevator, I channel my heritage. I pretend I don't see him and head for the escalators. But what is this? OH MAN, he's RUNNING AFTER ME. I'm going to be on the six o'clock news. I'm going to be a punch line on the Jay Leno monologue. Oh God, Oh God, Oh God, save me, your earnest but stupid child.

"Hi, listen I just wanted to say sorry again."

"No problem, Don." Yeah right, you want to apologize. You're just here to delay me. You think I don't watch Law and Order. This is a sting. I'm going to be set up.

"I really thought you and I knew each other."

"It happens. Listen, have a good day." This is my exit line as I curl my rodent tail around me and run (while trying to look like I'm not running) for the escalator.

Darned if he doesn't keep pace.

"Is there anything I can help you find?"

Oh, I know what this is. This is MY MOMENT. This is where I can redeem myself and say, 'yes, I'm looking for journals.' And he'll help me find it, and then I'll be a customer and a legitimate user of the toilet. He's reaching out, trying to steer me from the criminal cliff off which I'm about to jump.

But sadly, this is where my rebel without a clue kicks in. I don't need anything and if they push I'm going to point out that the sign says, "WASHROOM ARE FOR CHAPTERS CUSTOMERS ONLY & not WASHROOMS ARE FOR CURRENT CHAPTERS CUSTOMERS ONLY."

And since I've been a customer in the past and will be again in the future, I have ever right to their precious toilet. So a moment of rashness, I gather my sabre and rattle: "No, thank you Don."

Now he's talking to me about the weather. And I know my chance is gone. They're going to handcuff me. The toilet police are coming. I step off the elevator and I smile my goodbyes. I think maybe, I'll buy a journal after all. What's the harm? I'll use it one day. But then I see my friend waiting outside and there's a big line up and I know I can't delay here anymore.

So I take a deep breath and steel my reserves. And I walk through the revolving door (because it will give me an extra couple of seconds of time and I just need long enough before they grab me by the waist and drag me back into the store to yell, "Call my husband! I need a lawyer!!").

Thank God, no one follows me. I'm breathing with relief, almost crying at having gotten away with my crime.

Then my friend says, "What happened?"

And guilty conscience, I blurt it out. Now she's laughing AT me, rather than WITH me and I know I deserve it. Then our other friend comes up (when I wasn't at the corner, they split up and went looking for me. Talk about an arrow in the heart. I'm breaking the social laws and they're worried that they might have miscommunicated the meeting place).

So then I have to RE-EXPLAIN and relieve the horror and tragedy. And while one friend is again laughing at me, the other looks at me, quite worried and says, "You should go see a doctor. I don't think that peeing that often is normal."

Like anything about me is normal. But I assure her that I'm fine. And so we proceed to our shopping. But the after effects of my brush with the criminal life takes its toll...that's right, I have to pee again. This time I ask the shop owner and she lets me use their bathroom. But my second friend is now convinced that something is medically wrong and I spend the rest of the afternoon trying to assure her that I don't need to go to emergency.

Which goes to prove: Crime doesn't pay, but it does provide great relief.