

Five Girlfriends

In the early 70s I was in my early 20s, and was driving semi for a small, one owner, outlaw company by the name of Hoth Trucking out of Garnavillo, Iowa. Now, there are a lot of long-haired truck drivers, but back then we were extremely rare. John, the owner, had developed a certain fondness for what he referred to as his “wild Indian driver”. No Native blood, just long hair and an anti-authoritarian attitude. But I’m pretty sure what he really liked was my propensity for doing massive doses of speed and driving for days on end. More miles logged, more money for he and I both.

Another part of the outlaw equation was the open-door policy when it came to hiring drivers. The door was so far open that some didn’t even possess a license or know how to drive a semi. Even the occasional hitchhiker got picked up and ended up going out on runs, learning from one of the somewhat experienced drivers, getting his license, and finding himself on the payroll.

So, I was not surprised when John assigned me a wanna-be novice to ride along and learn the ropes. His name was William and he was older than most of the newbies. He was well into his forties. One of the nice things about having a

trainee along was the conversation. Over the course of a couple of weeks we got to know each other pretty well. He related a sad tale of a good and what he thought was a stable life gone off of the rails. He had been married twenty odd years and had three kids in their late teens and early twenties with one still at home. He owned a bar and his wife was working full time when the cracks started to appear. His first realization that all was not well came one Sunday afternoon when he was taking a rare day off from the bar. As he sat on the couch watching football a plate zinged past his ear and shattered against the wall next to him. There had never been any previous violence in his marriage nor had there been any argument leading up to the incident. When he asked his wife what was wrong, she burst into tears and told him as she howled "I just can't take it anymore", without further explanation.

I have a soft spot in my heart for the downtrodden but it has become balanced by a pretty sensitive bullshit detector. This guy did not appear to be the controlling or manipulative type and seemed genuinely clueless as to why his wife might have been miserable, even in light of the flying plate incident. Shortly after, she hired a lawyer, sued for divorce, got a child support order, and had him evicted from their home. Since the bar did not generate enough income to pay the child

support and get his own place, he put the bar in the hands of his oldest son and set out to find employment.

The best truck driving students are observant, have quick reflexes, and are able to pick up the subtle nuances of steering a 70,000-pound rig up and down narrow roads and turning around tight corners. Where an inch too much or not enough on the steering wheel results in death and destruction. He wasn't the best student I'd ever had but he wasn't the worst either. He did pay attention and tried very hard. After three weeks I deemed him ready to go take his driving test and start driving on his own. He didn't think he was ready but I insisted.

It just so happened that I was without a personal vehicle at the end of his last week. I was prepared to hitchhike, from the terminal, back to the small commune I lived on in northeast Iowa or call one of my fellow communards for a lift. When I informed William of my plan, he would have none of it. He told me that his freshly minted girlfriend was coming to pick him up and that they would gladly give me a ride fifty miles out of their way in gratitude for me teaching him how to drive.

When we got back to the truck terminal there she was. She was a red-haired, green eyed stunner easily fifteen years younger than William. William wasn't a bad looking guy. But he was not a head turner and did not rank high on the charisma scale. And as I already mentioned he was not rolling in dough. So, I was a bit curious about the relationship dynamic. Her name was Maureen and she was high on the looks as well as the charisma scale. She was very engaging and seemed to be intrigued about having a genuine hippie in her car. She asked a lot of questions about life on the commune and soon got to my relationship status. "Do you have a girlfriend" she inquired. "I have five girlfriends" I replied. "Oh, you do not" she said through a giggle. She tried to pursue that line of enquiry but I demurred. She seemed to be "mock flirting" with me. Trying to stimulate my interest without any sincere interest, on her part, of consummating the flirtation. I genuinely liked William and though I was known for flirting with or hitting on my buddy's girlfriends, I didn't think that he needed any more heartache in his life. That and the fact that I didn't believe she was interested in anything more than getting attention, caused me to not reciprocate the flirt.

As we pulled into the sleepy little burg of Harper's Ferry, I pointed out Jim's Bar, the community watering hole as a good spot to stop and wet our whistles. I had no idea what awaited

us inside but it could not have been more perfect. As we entered the bar Maureen was back to interrogating me about my alleged five girlfriends. The timing was sublime. "There they are" I stated grinning broadly. The place was almost empty except for one table of five comely young women. I waved and they all waved back. Maureen went uncharacteristically mute. After a quick trip to the bar to order beers for William, Maureen, and myself, I left them and went over and joined my five girlfriends. Vicki, Pam, and Cindy all lived on the commune, Mary lived in Harper's, and Teri was a frequent visitor to the commune from her home in Chicago.

You have to remember that this was the early 70s and the free love movement was still going strong in the hinterlands of rural Iowa. Especially the communal hinterlands. So, as I sat, I received five beautiful smiles from attractive young females who loved me and loved each other. As we joked and laughed, I could see that Maureen was building up a head of steam and she soon came marching over. She scooted into the booth next to me forcing my two girlfriends on the right to scooch further over as well. She then looked them all in the eye before speaking. "He says that you are all his girlfriends. Is that true?" They all laughed and nodded or replied in the affirmative. She shook her head in disbelief then slowly looked me up and down. She then put her arm around me

and rubbed up against me in a pantomime of seduction. I knew it for the bullshit it was and just laughed. She then turned serious. “He can’t possible satisfy all of you at the same time?” Her voice rising at the end making it a question. I fielded that one. “I don’t have to. They all have other boyfriends as well.”

I almost felt sorry for Maureen. She was used to being the babe, the bombshell, the center of sexual energy in the room, and she had just lost her mojo to a bunch of funky free-love hippies. The air seemed to go out of her. She untangled herself from me, stood up, shook her head again and headed back over to William who was trying to suppress a wry grin.

I saw William occasionally over the next few months. I even went down to visit him at his bar. He was making money driving truck, the bar was doing OK, and he and Maureen were making it work. I was glad to see a decent guy getting his legs back under him.