

People in Cars Outside the Coin Laundry

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It's about privacy. We're itinerant people, and that's why we don't have our own appliances. And we don't want to risk conversation with strangers. Where are you from? Why do you ask? So we play FM radio in our cars and hang our feet out the side window. Some of us smoke, some eat pistachios, some buy fountain sodas from the mini-mart next door. But we are alone, as we like it, in our cars. Even if you wanted to talk, the TVs are too loud in the coin laundry. And the owner is an outdoors nut, or a religious nut, or a European-sports nut, and you can't change the channel because he keeps the remote. Plus all those wrappers and potato chip packets on the floor, blue detergent stains to which your shoes adhere. We're in and out switching loads to the dryers, get back to the car, recline our seats. The morning is always hot and languid, even when it's afternoon or early evening. The sun on the concrete makes it that way. I've seen people stacking quarters or sketching in notepads, one man playing solitaire with actual cards on a plank of construction wood laid across his lap. If anyone sleeps, they will sleep indefinitely, and when they wake, they might find their clothes piled into a wire roller basket. The digital clocks on our stereos take their own sweet time. Finally, we go inside and make a decision: fold here or

fold at what counts as home? The answer is different for everyone. But I usually stick around. These are my dish towels, my boxer briefs, the pillowcases on which I rest my head. You can see my clothes in stacks on the Plasticine table. Torn pants, thin shirts, worn and ragged like the rest of us.

