

Vicissitudes of Plot

GORDON LISH

SHE SAID, "Take them if you want them."
She had opened the drawer, and said, "Take some if you want."
She drew the drawer open and said, "If you want some, take some."
The drawer was almost all of the way open.
She said, "Are you getting a load of this?"
Was she going to pull it out too far?
She said, "Go ahead, take."
I said, "I never saw so many at once."
She said, "It was his nature to stock up on things."
I said, "Mine too."
She said, "Staples. He always stocked staples."
I said, "Me too. Lots of stuff. But not these. Jeez, no."
She said, "Expense wasn't a thing with him."
I said, "It is with me."
She said, "Don't be shy. Take what you want."
I bet it was the kind of drawer you can't pull out too far.
She said, "Talk about hoarding, I could show you something."
I said, "Me, it's canned tuna, canned corn, instant coffee."
She said, "We only used fresh."
I said, "Yeah—brewed, right—that's great."
She jounced the drawer. She said, "Go ahead, take."
I said, "Yeah, and how about chopsticks, straws, cotton napkins?"
She gave the drawer a jiggle. She said, "Please. Take."
I said, "And how about paper napkins?"
She said, "Paper napkins? That's wacky—paper."
I said, "I know, I know."
Tell you the truth, I was trying to get a bead on how many.
Stalling, I said, "Tupperware, natch."
She said, "Well, who doesn't do that?"
I said, "Sweet'N Low, Splenda."

She said, "What's that other one? There's another one."

Truth to tell, I was eyeing the drawer.

I said, "Yeah, a third one, there's a third, you're right."

She said, "He wouldn't touch the stuff. Sugar or nothing."

I said, "The man was a purist, you can sure see that."

She pushed the drawer back in a little.

I said, "Not me. I'm happy to make do with whatever."

She said, "I like that." She said, "A regular guy, good."

I said, "I get by."

She said, "Hey, I'll bet you do."

It looked to me like there were all you ever would need in there.

She said, "You want to see some tennis balls?"

I said, "Thanks, but no, it's not my game."

She said, "Untouched. Brand-new. Vacuum-packed."

I said, "Shit no. Really?"

Wilkerson Swords! The fucking things were Wilkersons!

She said, "Like this greeny color. Of the moment, you know?"

I said, "I think it's an E-word probably."

She said, "What?"

I said, "The third one."

She said, "Third?"

I said, "Never mind."

She said, "How do you say that—one or two words?"

"Say what?" I said.

She said, "Oh, you mean Equal, Equal!—right?"

I said, "Didn't you say you never used that stuff?"

"Him," she said. She said, "Me, I'm no stickler for nothing."

I figured there were enough to last me to the last shave.

She said, "He was the purist." She said, "Me, it's all context."

Wilkerson or Wilkinson?

She said, "Blue."

I said, "Hunh?"

She said, "Equal. The packaging, it's the blue one."

Too far away to tell, but Brit ones. Imported. Shit, yeah.

She said, "Wait here and I'll show you."

I said, "It's okay."

She said, "No, really—I'll prove it to you. Blue."

I said, "Skip it. It doesn't matter."

Was she going to shut the drawer?

I said, "Let me see something."

She said, "Huh?"

I said, "Let me get a better look."

She said, "I said I'll go show you."

She started up.

I said, "No, please—don't go, don't."

She settled back down. She said, "Easy, baby, take it easy."

I said, "It's fine, we're fine."

"We've got all the time in the world," she said.

I said, "Fat chance. Nobody does."

She said, "Oh, you. Don't be so grumpy," she said.

"Here today, gone tomorrow," I said.

"I go for the here today," she said.

"Who doesn't?" I said. "What else is there?" I said.

"Well," she said, "one thing you can say is he's not."

"From the look of it," I said, "he did all right," I said.

She said, "You mean these?" She gave the drawer a bounce.

I said, "Top of the line, they look like."

She said, "Yeah—nothing cut-rate for him, count on it."

I said, "There's a ton of them here, man oh man."

"Yeah," she said. She said, "The man took his pick."

I said, "Those tennis balls must be pips, you know?"

She said, "You want me to go check the brand?"

I said, "No, no—just stay—stay."

She said, "Listen, the man had taste."

"Believe me," I said, "who can't see that?"

She said, "The man treated himself to the best."

I said, "A connoisseur like."

She said, "You can say that again."

"Hey, lady," I said, "if I could I would."

"Oh, a comedian," she said. "I like that," she said.

I took a chance, and said, "Among other things, sure."
She said, "Who doesn't like a man who knows how?"
I said, "Cotton napkins, honey. Some of them even linen."
She said, "Like you swiped them, am I right?"
I said, "Who's telling?" I said, "Am I telling?"
"A man who takes," she said. "Where didn't he eat?" she said.
"I had my moments," I said.
I touched her fingertips where they were touching the drawer.
"Go ahead," she said.
I said, "The blades?"
"They're every one of them yours if you want," she said.
I could see that. Terrific. They were mine, by God.
I said, "Nowadays, wherever you go, they're all synthetic."
"Tell me about it," she said.
I said, "Like a blend or something."
She said, "I've been around. I know what's going on."
I said, "Not that a blend doesn't get the job done."
She said, "But all-cotton, all-cotton feels nice. And linen."
I said, "That's what it's about—like how it feels, you know?"
Together we pulled the drawer out enough for me to see better.
She said, "Like it's not like he's ever going to be using them."
I said, "No, not even one of them once," I said.
She said, "Take them all."
I said, "Madam, these are Wilkinsons. Damn."
She said, "Whatever."
I said, "I'll need a bag or something."
"Don't worry," she said.
I was going to try to pull the drawer all the way out.
She said, "You want we should dump them on the floor right here?"
I said, "Would that be okay?"
She said, "We don't need anything to put it in."
I say she was talking about how old she was.
But I was thinking, Gordo, keep this to a line apiece at a time.
Which it worked out I was doing and nearly did until I couldn't.