

## ...His Shoes

In the morning, I try, but my wife won't have sex with me. I stink, she says. And also, she says, you stink. I try again anyway. She rolls her eyes and throws back the blankets, groaning and sitting up. Her hair sticks out all over. She goes into the bathroom and stays there for a while. It's Saturday, so I have time; I think about taking care of things on my own. I start to, but I'm really sick of doing things on my own. I'm too tired. Well, not tired, but lazy. I let go. I'll do it later. Or maybe later I can get her to do it.

Now my wife's in the kitchen; I can hear the sink. I know before she does it that she's going to yell, and she does. Uh! Did you put food down in here again? is what she yells. Her voice sounds like it's going right into the sink. I don't answer her. I don't want to get out of bed yet. Maybe she'll think I didn't hear, but I know she knows I heard. Now she's in the bedroom doorway. She still hasn't brushed her hair and I can see new wrinkles on her white face.

"What?" I look up at her. She says that sink is blocked up again. She says did you let food go down there again?

I don't answer her, I scrunch my mouth over to the side of my face like I'm trying to remember if I let some food go down there in the sink. I probably did let food go down there, so I don't answer, and I just look at her with my mouth normal again.

She says uh! What do I have to do to make you stop doing that? Do I have to make you stand in the corner or something? What can I do?

I laugh, and look at her, but she doesn't laugh. She looks at me for way too long and then shakes her head and gets out of the doorway. In a sec I hear her in the kitchen with the plunger. It sounds like she's doing the plunging really hard. Like she's wishing the sink was my ass or something. But then it sounds like she's doing it too hard.

"Don't break it!" I yell. The plunging sounds stops. Then it starts again, maybe even harder now. "Jess!" I yell again. "Come on, you're going to break it!"

The plunging sound stops. I hear her yell what, what did you say?

"I said be careful not to break the sink."

Break the sink? she says and the way she says it makes it seem like I am really just not at all a smart person for coming up with that to say. Don't break the sink, she says again, and this time she says it like she can't believe she even has to think about me.

"Well..." I say, but not as loud as when I yelled before, "It could break. If you do it like that. Hard like that."

She says do you want to do it?

"I'll look at it when I get up."

She says she'll have it fixed already by then. She starts plunging again. Hard, but not as hard as before. I picture her out there in her robe that used to be white but now it's stained and kind of mostly greyish. In her bare feet and starting to sweat and smell like whatever's coming up out of the sink. I can't believe I wanted to have sex with her just a few minutes ago there.

Later I want to watch the qualifying. Jess keeps walking back in forth in front of the TV. She's cleaning up the house, I guess, but I don't know why cleaning involves so much walking back and forth in front of the TV. Once she stops right next to the TV, so that her hip is kind of in the way. She's holding my old chewed up Docksiders. Can I throw these away now she says.

I really don't want her to throw those away. They are so comfortable now, the exact shape of my feet. But I guess they do look pretty awful. I'll try and see if I can hang onto them for a while longer.

"Aw, do you have to throw them away? They're so comfortable now."

Jess is holding onto them by the heel tabs, like she's holding a couple of squished-frog roadkills. She looks at me like she can't really believe we have to talk about my Docksiders.

You really want to keep these she says, look at them, Robert.

She calls me Robert when I'm a pain in her ass. No other time. I wonder if she'll call me Robert at my funeral, though, if I die first. If we make it to that.

I raise my eyebrows and shrug my shoulders. "They aren't so bad, are they? I like them, Jess."

She sighs and goes to put the shoes somewhere. Now I can get back to watching the qualifying. But then she yells can you go through your magazines in the bathroom sometime today?

"I just went through them," I say.

But you didn't get rid of any of them she says.

I don't answer her. I don't want to get rid of any of those magazines. I like them all. Maybe I can go through them and tear out pictures of things I like. Things that will inspire me. There's a good article about how to cook the perfect omelet that I never got to read yet. And there's another one about this dad and son who get caught in the Gulf Stream and have to sleep all night on the ocean with sharks biting them and things like that. And the kid is Autistic or one of those things. I want to read that one, too.

"I'll go through them again after this," I say.

I can't hear her but I know she's sighing some more.

The next morning I'm looking for those Docksiders. "Hey, Jess, where'd you put my Docksiders?"

She says she put them out on the deck. But I step out on the deck and there's no Docksiders. I stick my face in the open sliding door. "Jess, you didn't throw those away did you?"

I told you, she says, they are on the deck.

"I'm standing right on the deck and they are not here. Please tell me you didn't throw them away."

Jess walks, stepping hard, into the kitchen and then over to the sliding door where I am. She sighs and sticks her head out to look onto the deck. But right away she looks more confused than angry. What? she says. Where are they?

"You tell me."

She says but I just put those things out here yesterday when I was cleaning. Right after we talked about them, remember?

"Well I don't know why you didn't put them back in their usual spot."

Because they stink, Robert, because they stink. I was trying to air them out at least.

"Are you sure you didn't throw them away by mistake?"

Yes I'm sure.

"Are you positive?"

I am positive.

"Well, what the hell?"

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Whose are those? she says.

“Whats?”

Those. She points. There are some old nasty looking flip flops on the edge of the deck. She says that’s where I left your Docksiders. Right where those flip flops are.

“Really?” I go and stand over the flip flops. They are almost black with dirt and grunge. They are all lopsided from someone scuffling around in them forever.

I think someone took your Docksiders she says. I think someone took them and left those.

“What? What?” I keep looking down at the flip flops. Now they look weird. Now they are seriously weird. “Someone was up here? On our deck?”

Well... she says, I guess so. Those aren’t yours. And they certainly aren’t mine. And your Docksiders are gone.

“Who would take those nasty Docksiders?”

Someone whose own shoes were even nastier? she says.

I kick at the flip flops, like kicking a dead mole. “What should we do?”

Do?

“Yeah, I mean, should we call the cops or something? Was this a robbery?”

Robert, are you serious?

“Yeah. Well, it’s an invasion, isn’t it? A home invasion?”

I don’t think this really qualifies as a home invasion.

“But someone was up here. On our deck. On our property. Someone took our stuff.”

But that someone also left his flip flops in exchange.

“You think?”

Yeah. Don’t you think?

“Why would anyone think I’d want to swap my Docksiders for these disgusting flip flops?”

Maybe somebody looked at those Docksiders and thought you were ready for a change.

I looked at her. Then I looked at the flip flops. I looked at her again. Then I looked out off the deck, across our yard, into our neighbors’ yards. I looked as far as I could see.