

THE SILENCE OF A WILKINSON FAREWELL

What a strange fate mine has been.
Always alone.
Seated among so many women.
Never at the center.
Only a guest.

Truthfully, that role never felt uncomfortable to me.
There was something else that always captured my attention.
Something women take without asking.
Not money.
That has always been the least interesting part.
They take attention.
Curiosity.
Thoughts.
Fragments of time.
Entire portions of your cognitive energy.
And most of the time, they do it without even realizing it.

The first rule always remained the same.
Make them smile.
But without acting like a fool.
Because there is a great difference between humor and stupidity.
The first opens a conversation.
The second closes it.
Otherwise even the most elegant dinner eventually becomes little more than a fast-food meal.

It was then that I began to explain my personal anthropological theory of steel.
I hoped to sound credible.

Not necessarily believed.

I imagined a distant morning.
A man had left his cave to meet a romantic appointment.
But his companion had no intention of letting him go.
She followed him through the forest.
She wanted to know where he was going.
With whom.
And why.
In those days everyone was free, and promiscuity had not yet been invented by sociologists.

At some point he became furious.
He picked up a stone and threw it toward the woman to drive her away.
The stone struck a rock.
A spark.
Then another.
Then smoke.
The wind did the rest.
And fire was born.

The romantic appointment ended immediately.
What had happened was far too important.
It was not yet described in any manual.
Not even in Amazon's manuals.
It had to be observed.
Understood.
Used.

The women at the table listened in silence.
No one was eating.

The waiter had to take the soups back to the kitchen and reheat them for a second time.

Then something even more curious happened.
Several couples sitting at nearby tables moved their chairs closer to us.
It felt like a theater performance.
And yet I only wanted to make them smile.

That was the moment when I stopped being credible.
And became believed.
I was telling a story nobody had ever written.
A possible story of our ancestors.

I stopped.
I looked at Maggy.

“Do you want me to continue?”

She did not hesitate for a second.

“Yes, you magnificent son of a bitch.”

And we all burst out laughing.

Then I continued.

With fire, woman began to understand that this discovery could be used for food.
Heat changed flavors.
It transformed nature itself.
Without realizing it, human life expectancy, which barely reached twenty years, slowly moved toward forty.
Fire had doubled it.
Bacterial contamination decreased.
Infections retreated.

The human body gained time.

Then, one ordinary afternoon in front of a cave, that same woman picked up a number of stones.
She examined them closely.
Struck them together.
Studied them.
Without blast furnaces.
Without steel mills.
Without engineers.
She began the long journey that would eventually lead to metal.
And later, to steel.

For that reason, if it had not been for a woman, I would not be here today.
I would never have met you.
I would never have appreciated you.
I would never have been able to wrap inside a farewell what I have become.

The table remained silent.
A silence different from all the others.
It was not the silence of expectation.
It was the silence of farewell.

I looked at Maggy.
I looked at her daughter.
I looked at her granddaughters.
And I realized that I was not saying goodbye to a family.
I was saying goodbye to a story.

Wilkinson Family
You are welcome.

I stood up and walked away.
Because I could never bear the tears of a woman.

Ferdinando Frega
Gillette Man