
MEN'S GILLETTE, STORY
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"Enzo," my mother said to my father, "we need to put him in boarding school.

I cannot manage Nando anymore.

Controlling him is impossible.

Worse than that, he is unpredictable."

She paused.

"Do you know what he did today?"

"No. Tell me."

"He was in the shop with me and, without me noticing, the long scissors disappeared.

The ones I use to cut fabric.

The thirty-metre bolts of fabric.

I had to use the spare pair.

I searched for almost an hour.

Then I saw him coming back.

Calm.

Smiling.

Holding the scissors in his hand."

My father looked up.

"Where had he been?"

"At the bar."

"Doing what?"

"Our son is five years old, Enzo.

You are his father.

Try taking some responsibility instead of laughing like an idiot.

I am worried.

What is going to become of him?"

My mother was frightened.

When I returned, however, I was not alone.

Rocco Pizzimenti, owner of the Orfeo Bar, came back with me.

He was laughing so hard he could barely stand.

According to Rocco, he often enjoyed calling me a cuckold.

That afternoon I had decided to settle the matter.

"You know what he did?" Rocco said.

"He came to the bar carrying those scissors.

To cut my throat.

I kept my distance and continued making fun of him.

The whole place was laughing.

But he would not give up.

In the end they had to drag him away."

My father laughed.

Rocco laughed.

The customers laughed.

I did not.

Eventually Rocco stopped calling me a cuckold.

That was when he understood I was not exactly what he expected.

My mother had reached that conclusion much earlier.

The next morning, she took me directly to boarding school.

The Sisters of Saint Vincent.

She paid the registration fee and the annual tuition in one single payment.

Insurance.

Against my return within forty-eight hours.

She also reached a private understanding with the Mother Superior regarding my future treatment.

My father was a salesman.

The Mother Superior was Neapolitan.

Looking back, the combination of a salesman father and a Neapolitan Mother Superior explains almost everything that followed.

Without attracting much attention, my father also made sure the convent received a steady supply of Gillette promotional material.

Particularly plastic bags.

Five hundred Cartons.

In those years they were worth their weight in gold.

Difficult to obtain.

Expensive.

Indispensable.

The sisters loved them.

Whenever supplies were running low, the telephone would ring.

Mother Superior Maria Franca from Forcella.

"Mr. Frega, perhaps you could stop by for a greeting."

That was when I learned an important distinction.

There was a spiritual greeting.

And there was a social greeting.

One day the Sales Director, Raffaele Di Tullio, called the house looking for my father.

Unfortunately for him, he found him.

"Frega, good morning. How are you?"

"Fine, Doctor. Thank you. But this is not a courtesy call.

Tell me."

"In headquarters we are all curious.

We would like to understand how one salesman managed to consume thirty percent of all promotional material distributed across Italy.

Pure curiosity.

Nothing more.

We delivered close to thirty-two pallets of plastic bags to you.

We are wondering how business is going.

Not Gillette business.

Plastic-bag business.

Are you selling them?

Making a profit?

Or would you care to explain what exactly is happening?"

My father did not hesitate.

"I am helping the Vatican.

They have limited resources.

No budget.

The Sisters of Saint Vincent in Reggio Calabria, where my son is growing up, requested a small partnership in their charitable work.

As you taught me, Doctor, I have not publicized the initiative.

I know you prefer these things done quietly.

No publicity.

The Gillette way."

Silence.

A long silence.

Finally:

"Very well, Frega.

I will send more material."

For eight years the sisters never purchased a single plastic bag.

One question remains unanswered.

What if they had turned the whole thing into a business?

They were nuns.

But they were also women.

Nobody investigated.

The first months of boarding school produced at least three incidents which the sisters found deeply disturbing.

To me they seemed perfectly normal.

The first occurred during hide-and-seek.

Whenever we played, I inevitably ended up inside the sisters' private rooms.

I was curious.

I wanted to see what nuns looked like without their veils.

My greatest discovery was a sister whose hair had been shaved almost to the scalp.

After that, every search party began with the same warning.

"Check everywhere.

That devil could be hiding anywhere."

I had become their nightmare.

The feeling was entirely mutual.

The second incident took place during morning Mass.

Every day at ten-thirty the children lined up as they left the chapel.

A sister would hold out her rosary and ask a simple question.

"Who is the most powerful being on Earth?"

Everyone gave the approved answer.

"Jesus Christ."

Then they kissed the rosary.

One morning I made a small adjustment to the ritual.

Instead of kissing the rosary, I kissed the sister's habit.

Then I said:

"My father says women are more powerful than God."

The reaction was immediate.

My parents were summoned before lunch.

The institution wanted to remove the devil.

A sufficiently generous cheque transformed sin into concern.

Concern disappeared remarkably quickly.

The cheque contained six zeros.

Old Italian lire were highly persuasive.

The years passed romantically beneath the protection of innocence.

Cake festivals were simply opportunities to eat for free.

The theatre was an opportunity to tell the truth.

Whenever I played a prince, I informed the audience that the princess should not be kissed because she was ugly and suffered from unpleasant breath.

The teachers disagreed.

Eventually fifth grade arrived.

Then the final examination.

A member of the commission allowed a private thought to escape into public space.

"At last.

We are getting rid of him."

Everything appeared settled.

Everything appeared finished.

I waited thirty years.

Then I returned.

I placed an order for Gillette razor blades.

Payment in advance.

Nobody ever asked how such a thing had become possible.

Sixty-one years have passed.

Even today questions remain.

Recently my daughter looked at me and said:

"Sorry, Nando.

I do not call you Dad.

But who the hell are you?"

Ah.

Ahahahah.

Ferdinando

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