



## MAKES YOUR LASHES LONGER THAN LONG.

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## CAN THIS BE

# LOVE?

by Bette-Jane Raphael

*When a pack rat lives with a clean sweeper, one of you may just have to pack it in.*

My lover believes in the adage that he travels fastest who travels without his old suits. Every spring and fall he looks into his closet and starts pulling out those garments that are either worn out or have worn out their welcome. When he has a nice, big pile, he folds them all neatly and calls the Salvation Army. To some people this might seem like an everyday act of charity and common sense; to me, it is a feat rivaling the successful transplant of a human brain, for the simple reason that I have never, under any circumstances, been able to throw anything away. Locking in my closet is like taking a walk down memory lane. There's a pair of go-go boots in there somewhere, a couple of pair of hot pants, and some glow-in-the-dark shoelaces, last worn to a friend's ninth birthday party.

So, while my lover attends to the semi-annual defoliation of his drawers and closets, I'm sitting in the background bemoaning the loss of every shirt, every handkerchief, as if he were giving away, one by one, my teeth.

"What!" I say, horrified, "You're throwing out that terrific shirt?" I jump and grab it. "I'll wear it if you don't want it anymore." "Fine," he says, "just leave *something* for the charity to pick up, and don't (this, with a warning look in my direction) put anything back in my closet when I'm not looking." I suppose he is referring to last year, when that is exactly what I did, on the off chance he'd change his mind about a perfectly decent brown tuxedo.

Ours is not the only household in which a pack rat and a clean sweeper try to live together without either packing it in or sweeping one another out. Annie complains that none of the drawers in her apartment open anymore, since she began sharing them with Harold. "What," she asks him, holding up what is either a hopelessly knotted wad of string or an old mop head, "are you saving this for?" Pushed to the wall, he answers, "I just need it," an explanation that he can tell, from the way she rolls her eyes heavenward, doesn't fully satisfy Annie. Looking into another drawer for more evidence, Annie then challenges him on his "need" for half a scissor and a ballpoint pen that hasn't seen ink since the Carter administration. At this point, matters really turn nasty between them.

My friend Stanley's home looks less like a one-bedroom apartment than it does the Salvation Army warehouse to which my lover's old suits are sent. Stanley reckons that the last time he threw out a magazine was the year he moved from his old apartment. That was 1968. When Stanley's girlfriend, Norah, walked out on him a year ago, her parting words were meant quite literally: "You have no room in your life for me," she said, slamming the door on the largest collection of periodicals outside the Library of Congress.

Margery says she would be "overjoyed" if her roommate, Mel, stuck to collecting magazines, but he is into bigger game, forever storing away large pieces of broken equipment—stereo turntables and old vacuum cleaners, etc.—which, he feels, are "too good" to throw out, but which, as good as they are, don't work. "And these bulky things take up vast amounts of room in our closets," Margery moans, "but when I suggest we throw them out, he looks at me as if I'd suggested we throw out hundred dollar bills from our windows."

"Stereo equipment I could understand," says my friend Andy, "but Phil has what appears to be a sentimental attachment to his underwear. I can't get him to throw out any of his torn old T-shirts and briefs. Last month we went out together and bought him a whole new supply of snowy white underwear, but when we got home and I said, 'Okay, now we can get rid of the old ones,' he got this stricken look on his face and sort of mumbled that he thought he'd better hold onto them, 'just in case.' I'd throw them out myself, but I'm afraid it might cause him some kind of trauma."

Andy reminds me of another minimalist friend, a woman who would, if there were such a thing, undoubtedly win the Nobel Prize for Neatness. She has allotted her husband just one drawer in their apartment for his "junk," by which she means his assortment of old newspaper and magazine clippings, ancient pamphlets with titles like "Cuba, Land of Fun and Frolic," and railroad timetables from the era of the Twentieth Century Limited. When it comes to getting rid of unwanted possessions, she is as implacable as a Soviet commissar purging political dissidents. During one recent ousting of all non-essential books, papers, clothing, records, etc., from their apartment, her husband reluctantly went along with her, until they got to his junk drawer. "That, too," she said, looking at him purposefully. But here, with a look in his eyes like a cornered animal, his back against the wall, he drew the line. My friend reports that she finally left the drawer alone, since it was obvious that he was prepared to defend it with his life.

I think she made a wise decision. We pack rats obviously have an investment of some kind in keeping ourselves embedded in our past and present possessions, and tampering with them too much could cause unforeseen upheavals. Containment is about the best thing our partners can hope for. Like my friend who has allotted her husband one junk drawer, my lover is scrupulous about allowing me to keep whatever I want in my closet. His only stipulation is that I don't open the door to it while he's in the room. And considering what's in there, this seems fair enough to me.