

Appetite(s)

by Stephen Stark

See, what I was gonna say, was I knew, right out of the gate, that she was a nympho. But that's not right.

Pop....

But that's not right. I didn't know she was a nympho. I didn't even know what a nympho was. I just thought she was crazy about me.

Pop. Come on. Is this what you want to be talking about?

Why not? No, don't answer that. Just shut up.

Whatever. But what makes you think she wasn't crazy about you? I mean, really.

Her brother—I think it was your Uncle Trent, but maybe she was the one who told me—anyways one of them told me that when she was a kid, she used to take off her clothes and run around the neighborhood.

Oh, God.

What we're talking about here is, when she was like six or seven. Or younger. It wasn't like she was a teenager or something. She just wanted to be naked.

Do you want a glass of water or anything?

Can you just shut up? Will you? I got a glass of water here.

All right, Pop. Sorry.

Just shut up. I'm trying to think here. I'm trying to think how old I was the first time I ever saw your mother naked. The way you people are these days. You know so much. I didn't know anything. We didn't know anything. I was 19, maybe 20. She was away at school. I got us a hotel room. Okay, a motel room. I didn't even have a credit card in those days. I was working, going to school at night. We were so young.

—
So I open the door for her and we go inside. Your mother wasn't the first one, my, ah, first experience. I'm not telling you because you want to hear it, or because you need to know it. I'm telling you this

because this is what I want to think about. Plug your ears if you don't want to hear it.

I get it, Pop.

You look like her when you grin like that.

Pop, you're supposed to take this one now. You've got to take it half an hour before.

All right. Can you help prop me up a little. The pillow. Yeah.

There.

Shit. I can't even drink a glass of water without spilling it all over me. Do you see my hands?

I know, Pop.

God.

—

— So. — I got to catch my breath.

It's okay.

Okay is one thing it is not. You don't want to know this. About how it is.

You were saying. The motel.

Yeah, so first thing is, she goes into the bathroom to freshen up. I put on the TV. She's in there forever, but you know women. I don't even remember what was on. But why would I? I was just waiting for the door to open.

—

Listen, I don't want to get all teary and here I am getting all teary, but it's not what you think. What it is is that I think about that very first time, when she comes out of the bathroom completely naked and she looks like heaven's very best neighborhood. And then I think about when I found out about that fucking French fuck.

Daddy.

What'd you call me?

What?

Daddy. You called me daddy. God, I can't laugh any more. The laughter doesn't work. You're going to make me choke.

I didn't.

You did.

Well.

Anyway, there she is, right in front of me. I can still see that. The way her legs came together and there was that triangle. She said, Turn off the TV, Bud. I was always the wise guy. So I said something like, What for? But that was even on account of my heart going like NASCAR, you know what I mean? She says, So you can fuck me till your heart's content. I said, Yeah. Okay. But what about your heart? You better fuck me till my heart's content, is what she said. I didn't know I wasn't going to be able to do that.

Pop, it's not your. Her choices.

Ah, bullshit. A man is an easy thing. A man has two settings. On or off. A woman. She's got a million switches, and even she doesn't know the right combination, most of the time. Speaking of time. Is it time, yet?

Yeah.

How many do I take?

All of them.

God, even this isn't gonna be easy.

It's like you always told me, If it's worth doing, it's worth doing, even if it isn't easy.

Yeah, well. We both know what a stupid fuck I am.

Pop, will you quit?

What your grandfather said to me when she disappeared with Frenchie was, George, Bud, I don't pretend to understand her appetites. He was smooth, your grandfather. I always loved him, and with my own Pop gone, well. Cheers.

Down the hatch.

Ack. It's so fucking hard to swallow.

I'm sorry, Pop.

When she lay down on the bed—can you get me some more water?—see, oh. Spread-eagled. Where does that come from, Mr. English Whiz?

I don't know.

I know now I shoulda just stuck with her. But it was awful. I hope you never have to have that experience. Because I was working then

and doing a lot of traveling. I'd been gone two weeks and I come home, and she doesn't seem all that anxious to see me, you know? I was missing her like hell. We go to bed. I'm getting sleepy.

You better take more.

God, this is awful. The laughter broken, the swallower broken.

She used a diaphragm—I know it hurts for you to hear this and I'm sorry for that. But I need to do this.

It's okay, Pop.

And there's that goop. And it doesn't go away right away, you know? But not two weeks. So I come home. Let me get some more of that water. Yeah. God. And we make love. And that stuff comes out. I was stupid and didn't expect anything. I just thought she was being honest with me.

Shit, Pop. I didn't. I'm—I don't know what to say.

I remember those years now. I remember those years with her. I think that house, we must have had sex in every nook and cranny even when she was pregnant with you, we were having sex. That's why you got that dent in your forehead.

It's okay to laugh. Very okay. I feel drunk.

—

Your mother, she taught me. She taught me so much. She was reading books about sex. Did you know that?

You never told me.

She was, she was looking. Looking to learn everything she could know about how it all worked. I'd come home beat and she'd come out, completely butt naked and shaking her boobs and she, just enough, she was provocative is what the word for it is. She'd say, Hey, sailor, come see what's cooking. What was I going to do? I thought I was doing everything in the world to please her. I read that book on the end zone, or whatever.

You're getting dopey. Erogenous zone.

You'd know that shit. But it was never kinky. Your mother was never that way.

I guess that's good to know.

You have no idea how painful. That first time, finding out. I was stupid.

You weren't stupid, Pop. You were human.

How many more are there?

Two.

Give them to me.

Yes, I was stupid. I was hurt. When you haven't seen your wife for two weeks and you pull your dick out and there's spermicide on it and no doubt the sperm of some French fuck.

Don't, Pop. That was a long time ago.

What I'm talking about is forgiveness. I loved her. I love her. That's why I was there when. You know. I was there.

You were. Right to the end.

You got to get out of here, now.

I will.

Right to the end.

