

FOUR HOURS

“Wow!” Ross exclaimed with the final throb of his ejaculation.

Terry purred in his ear. “That rates two ‘wows,’ at least.”

Ross rolled off Terry onto his back. She nestled close to his body, whispering, “You’re really amazing, for a guy well north of 70,” her tone warm and sincere.

“Yeah, well, it was a pretty fair piece of work,” Ross replied. “But I can’t claim all the credit. You bring out the best in me – or should I say ‘the beast’.”

“That’s because you arouse me so” –

“And how about a few kudos for that little pentagon-shaped green pill I popped into my mouth an hour before going on stage....”

“The miracles of modern medicine.”

Ross reached for the nearly empty wine glass on the bedside table. “I’d like to propose a toast to the makers of *Stiph*, the wonder drug,” he said, sweeping the stem of the glass over his mid-section in mock salute before swigging the last of the grape.

It was a Saturday afternoon in the early fall. The rendezvous was taking place in the small bedroom of Terry’s downtown Cleveland apartment. Ross had told his wife, Sandy, that he needed to attend to some work – an excuse, he rationalized, which wasn’t entirely untruthful – but that he’d be home in Shaker Heights by seven, in plenty of time for the dinner she was preparing.

The affair with Terry had begun a few months earlier. Ross spotted her the day she first came to work – an attractive new employee at the large travel agency Ross ran in town. They soon connected during a late night rush assignment for a major client. A

few evenings later, after several cocktails, they cemented relations at her convenient apartment.

This wasn't altogether new territory for Ross, who strayed on occasion – though he deemed himself a happily married man who loved Sandy and would never consider leaving his wife. But with their kids long gone from the house, and none of the grandchildren in Ohio, the marriage had become a little stale; and as the years went by, Sandy held less sexual allure for Ross than in earlier decades.

Meanwhile, Terry was proving to be the dream girl for his senior citizen antics. She was in her late 20's, good-looking, fun, and a superb sexual partner. She readily acknowledged his marital status as inviolable, didn't pressure him in the slightest, and seemed to genuinely enjoy the intermittent moments they spent together.

At times, Ross would speculate on what Terry saw in their relationship – why she seemed so satisfied and even fulfilled. He would have liked to think that it related to his well-toned masculine attributes, but he was too much the realist to believe that. *More likely, he thought, she senses the advantage of servicing her boss; and she must reckon that the fewer her demands, the smoother the relationship. I don't even know if she has an age-appropriate boy friend on the side, and frankly, I don't much care.*

A little later that afternoon, Ross reflected on how enjoyable his relationship with Terry had become. *Today, for example, we engaged in some extended foreplay, went at it in earnest, and each experienced a notable climax. Afterwards, we nuzzled together for a good while. Then, after waiting a suitable interval, I asked Terry if she minded my turning on the tube to watch a big college football game. It was the kind of change of pace that Sandy would likely have greeted with some consternation at home, but Terry wasn't fazed a bit. "No problem," she replied, reaching for her little book of sudoku puzzles on the night stand and starting to fill in the blanks.*

And so Ross switched on the television and became absorbed in the game, which lived up to expectations. It was, he mused at one point, especially pleasant to watch it from the very bed on which he'd just performed so admirably.

During one of the time-outs on the field, an ad came on for – of all things – the product *Stiph*, his prized pentagonal green pill. The voiceover sang the praises of this latest erectile dysfunction remedy, and then closed with the usual mantra – a line that had greatly amused Ross upon his first hearing it – “In rare cases, when you have an erection lasting longer than four hours, consult your physician.”

Ross snickered audibly and mumbled under his breath, as the game came back on, “Yeah, right, it should only happen... .”

A few minutes later, his gaze having drifted downward to the vicinity of his private parts, he noted with surprise that he was still exhibiting an erection. “That’s odd,” he thought, recalling the usual flaccid state of his post-coital member. But then, abruptly, the message of the voiceover came into his head – when that hard-on exceeds four hours, you’ve got a problem.

After a glance at the bedside clock, which read almost 5 pm, Ross went back over the timeline of the afternoon. He had taken the *Stiph* pill upon arriving at Terry’s apartment, which was around 2:15. After about 45 minutes, they began fooling around, so the hardening must have begun near 3:00. The foreplay and main event lasted about an hour and a quarter, and they nuzzled afterward for a half hour. He’d been watching the game for 15 minutes or so. In short, he concluded – as the hands of the clock reached 5 pm – he was sporting a two-hour erection.

Well, he mused, *two is only half of four, so there’s really nothing to fret about*. Still, this was an unusual occurrence for Ross; and since he didn’t intend to have another go with Terry today, he would have preferred his pecker resume its normal modest size.

Aha, Ross thought, *I haven’t peed lately – it’s probably what we used to call a “piss boner.”* He got up, ambled to the bathroom, and –experiencing some discomfort – urinated. “That’ll do it,” he muttered, heading back to the bed from which he’d been watching the game.

To his dismay, however, a visual inspection several minutes later revealed no reduction in size. *There must be some other cause for this*, he reasoned – and then it hit him. *Hey, dummy, it's having Terry on the other side of the bed – that's the turn-on. Her skimpy tee-shirt, the sweet aroma she exudes....* Plus which, he realized, his own state of nudity might be sending the wrong message to his private parts.

So Ross got up, put on his pants and shirt, and said to Terry – without referring to his erection, which she, absorbed in the puzzle, hadn't seemed to notice – “Honey, would you mind getting dressed? I don't want to be tempted again, since I'm going to have to leave pretty soon.”

Terry smiled across the bed at him. “I certainly wouldn't want to re-arouse my septuagenarian stud,” she said – sexily alliterating the word he used to identify his decade. She got on her feet, pulled on jeans and a loose-fitting sweater, and left the bedroom for some chores in the kitchen.

When Ross checked things out a few minutes later, he was discouraged to find that their donning of street garb and her exit hadn't solved the problem. In frustration, he cuffed his offending member a few times with the side of his hand, but with no discernable effect. At this point, he realized he'd have to stop watching the game and focus attention on his current predicament – now at 2 hours 15 minutes and counting.

As he pondered how best to proceed, a favorite scene came into mind from an early Woody Allen movie, *Everything You Wanted To Know About Sex*. It was a mock space-age segment, in which Woody – dressed all in white with a long tail, unabomber hood, and horn-rimmed glasses – is a sperm, assembled with his brethren, preparing to be ejaculated into a desirable female vagina. After some foreplay, the male protagonist achieves an erection, and mission control gives the order to attempt penetration. A few moments later, an exasperated technician cries out. “It's no use, we're losing it.” Just then, some orderlies haul a white-collared priest into mission control and report, “We found him tampering with the machinery in the cerebral cortex – turning up the guilt

reflex.” The problem now solved, they lock the priest up and proceed “full steam ahead”.

“That’s it!” Ross exclaimed to himself. It’s all in the mind. What I need to do now is fill my head with a few of those multiple turn-offs I’ve encountered over the years – things like Woody’s priest – and this erection will be history. . . .

So Ross seated himself in the armchair by the bed, loosened his trousers, and reached back into his memory bank for some fitting images.

The first one wasted no time in arriving. He was a barely pubescent 12-year-old, secreted in the stacks of the school library, luxuriating in back issues of the *National Geographic* magazine. *Let’s face it*, Ross recalled, *this was what passed for sexual stimulation in the days when Hugh Hefner was still a pup – dusky Congo women, openly flaunting their unclad mammaries*. He could feel a familiar pressure against the crotch of his corduroy pants.... And then, suddenly, a “clop, clop” sound echoed through the stacks – the trademark approach of Miss Sourpuss, the stern-faced, square-toed spinster librarian, prowling the aisles, on the alert for the slightest sign of adolescent prurience....

That should do it, Ross thought. The image of Miss Sourpuss bearing down on him still caused small beads of perspiration to break out on his brow, more than six decades after the fact. To his consternation, however, it didn’t work down below – his J.Crew khakis still bulged ominously. “So much for elementary school,” he mumbled dismissively and headed back to the drawing board, where the early images were coming at him thick and fast.

He was 13, in a coed dancing class his parents made him attend, fox-trotting with Alice. *Ah, Alice, the first of my nubile classmates to develop a significant chest. . . .* He remembered wondering whether Alice could tell how aroused he was – and then suddenly they were sashaying by the wizened instructress herself, who was casting the full force of her gaze on his throbbing midsection.... *I’ll always remember the puzzled look on Alice’s face as I deflated within seconds – she must have feared she’d lost her*

touch. But the spell cast by the beady-eyed instructress hadn't survived the intervening years....

Enough of aged crones, Ross thought, as a memory surfaced that he'd often recalled with a chuckle – *this should do it*. He was 16, carrying the ball on an end run for his high school JV football team. In the huddle moments earlier, his mind had strayed to a date he had that night with Dora, the town slut – a prospect that immediately kindled stirrings below. But now a large ugly linebacker hove into view, bearing down on Ross, intent on making a brutal tackle in the mid-torso area.... On the field, this sighting had caused an immediate shriveling of his dingus. But today, in Terry's apartment, the image had lost its potency to deflate.

Now it was a year later, and he saw himself on the first tee of the local country club – playing in a foursome with his father, his father's close friend, and the friend's enticing teenage daughter. A crowd of onlookers had gathered. The daughter hit a potent drive, then turned, tossed her blond locks, and gave Ross a playful wink – thereby causing immediate penile tumescence. Now it was his turn to step up to the tee, in front of all those observant onlookers.... *Come to think of it*, Ross recalled, *that particular stiff never really did go down. I had to take the bottom of my polo shirt out of my trousers to cover it up. . . . Not really a helpful memory. . . .*

Well, Ross thought, *this isn't getting me anywhere and time's a-wasting*. The clock showed he was at the two-and-a-half hour mark. The real-life images he'd summoned up had lost their power to recreate the pecker-drooping sensations of yore.

Terry appeared at the door to the bedroom. "I've fixed up a little snack if you're hungry," she said – but one look at her fetching presence, and Ross knew that any time spent with her now would impede his quest for a perceptible sag.

"No thanks," he said, "maybe later – just give me a few more minutes in here, and I'll join you."

"As you wish," she replied, and retreated into the living room.

Ross resumed his search for an antidote. *Wait a minute, there's a different avenue I can pursue.* In his youth, he had often experienced nocturnal stirrings that accompanied suggestive dreams. Back then, in an effort to prevent sticky emissions, he had mastered the technique of waking briefly and redirecting the dream on a de-sexing path. *If only I can remember a few of those....*

After a few moments, one came to mind. He was at an Army induction center, standing around in a group of young men, waiting for his physical to begin. One of the guys produced some sexy French postcards, the sight of which noticeably stimulated Ross. Just then, the de-sexing agent entered the scene – a burly master sergeant, barking out an order for all draftees to strip naked for rectal examinations....

After that, the redirected dreams came back into his head thick and fast, such as one that involved incarceration. Ross, having committed a victimless misdemeanor, had fallen afoul of a get-tough-on-criminals civic administration and was sent off to prison. For some unknown reason, his dork turned hard as the guards marched him to his new cell. When the steel door was unlocked, Ross became aware that the sole other occupant of the tiny quarters was a huge, tattooed man in a pink tank top that framed monstrous biceps. The last thing Ross wanted, he recalled thinking at the time, was for his new cellmate to think he might be interested....

Now he was back in his early 20's, carousing in a dusty Mexican border town, crammed into a rundown shanty with a sensuous but clearly high-risk whore. Uh, oh, time for a de-sexer – and presto, the hooker was heard to say in broken English, “Meesta, don't wear no condom – I have good clap for you....” That night, his pecker had dissolved to nothing – but today, no such luck.

That last dream reminded him of something that actually occurred later in his life. The scene was a motel room – his companion, an attractive young woman he'd picked up in a bar. As her clothes began to come off one by one, Ross was visibly titillated down below. While stripping, she launched into a tale about her “girlfriend,” who apparently had contracted genital herpes from an

unidentified male. The girlfriend was so angered by this masculine affront that, in retribution, she had started sleeping around town, trying to infect as many unknowing lads as possible. The problem for Ross was that, just as his pick-up was finishing her tale (while unhooking the bra), she inadvertently substituted the pronoun “I” for “she” – at which point Ross began to suspect that *he* might be one of the lads.... Talk about an unconsummated night – after this verbal slip, the Ross dingus was mush. But in Terry’s apartment, the painful memory caused no shrinkage.

And a furtive glance at the clock told Ross that another twenty minutes had gone by – getting close to three hours in total.

The problem, Ross realized, is that I’ve been trying to use youthful recollections and my old fantasy world for the task – but it’s a brave new world out there today. Shifting positions in the chair, he whacked the back of his hand against his crotch to get the big fellow’s attention, and proceeded to focus on some saltpeter-laced events of the 21st century.

There was that time several years ago when he was going through airport security before a flight. *Just ahead of me in line was a young woman with a marvelous butt. As I removed my shoes and belt, she directed some joshing remarks my way – something about how beltless pants can fall down, and a reference to guys in early porno flicks who kept their black socks on during intercourse.* Her selected topics and suggestive tone caused some palpable stirrings in the Ross mid-section. Then, before he could make the necessary adjustment, he found himself poised at the scanning gate, face-to-face with a steely-eyed female security guard whose gaze was focused on his bulging trousers....

Or how about that MRI procedure I had to take recently for a bad back? Lying prone in readiness, his penis suddenly started acting up – was it the provocative image of the slit-skirted receptionist in the waiting room? Ross had been well aware that his body was about to be inserted into a tiny tubular opening. He envisioned strobe lights flashing, sirens going off – the pulsating Nazi kind so familiar to World War II film devotees – and a spectral

voice intoning the words, “Mayday, Mayday – Ross has some foreign object on his person that’s disrupting the process!”

Ross stayed with this last one for a full minute before looking down with dismay at his still swollen member. And now he became aware that the prolonged hardness was producing some real pain that he’d been previously ignoring. *It’s no use – I need some help.*

But where was help to come from? Terry was the only assistance presently available – *and frankly, I’d prefer the librarian or the tattooed convict. Isn’t Terry – my delicious turn-on – just going to make the problem worse?* But he realized he had no choice. . . .

“Terry,” he called in to the living room, “I’ve got a little....er...big problem.”

Terry came into the bedroom, saw the bulge in his pants, smiled and purred, “You look like you’re ready for Round Two.”

“Hey, no kidding, this is serious.” He glanced over at the clock. “It’s now almost six pm. That means it’s about three hours since I first got my erection. In another hour, according to the *Stiph* ads, I’ll be toast. You’ve got to help me get rid of this thing.”

“That sounds like a fun assignment,” Terry said, and began to tug her jeans downward.

“No, not that way – ” Given the penile pain Ross was experiencing, he didn’t feel up to another round of strenuous intercourse.

At that point, Ross recalled in panic his promise to Sandy that he’d be home by seven for dinner. Now it looked like he would probably be late. *I can live with being late, but I don’t want this pecker protrusion to give away where I’ve been.*

Realizing he should alert his wife, Ross called home on his cell phone and told her, “I’m afraid I’ll be home late, Sandy. I’m

really sorry. I started out on time, but I've been held up by terrible traffic."

"Traffic on Saturday?" was his wife's quizzical reply. "Oh, I'm so disappointed – I thought you'd be home a few minutes from now. I've made us a fantastic dinner that will get cold, and then – when I have to microwave it – will be inedible. Please get here as quickly as you can."

After hanging up, Ross forced himself to contemplate what he would likely face in a little while, assuming his erection remained beyond redemption. He tried to envision the scene in the frenzied emergency room of a city hospital. *What would be worse – having to wait interminably (with the post four-hour clock still ticking away) before any medic or nurse checks me out, or having to respond to a Nurse Ratchit in starched whites, asking, "Well, old man, what seems to be your problem?" And how about Sandy – where will I tell her I was, and why did I go there...?*

Once Terry realized the seriousness of his condition, she readily joined in with Ross on his minimalizing quest, displaying some real enthusiasm for the task. The two of them spent the next half hour in a veritable jumble of home remedies and folklore reduction strategies for his problem. But nothing seemed to work – not even the large fan they hooked up to blow on his unclad penis, nor the suction end of the vacuum cleaner hose that they applied as if gassing up an SUV.

On the theory that movement trumps memory, Ross got Terry to act out some of those off-putting scenarios. She gave it her all, and in fact did quite an effective job imitating the Mexican whore, for which playlet she even donned a bolero skirt and sombrero. She was less credible as the middle-aged librarian, her Jimmy Choo heels belying the thump of Miss Sourpuss's clodhoppers. And though Terry gave it a good try, the tableau she devised featuring Mother Teresa ("Did you know I was named after her?"), tending to a group of disfigured lepers, never got off the ground.



Just when Ross was about to lose hope, Terry came up with an inspired scenario. Charging through the bedroom door brandishing a large kitchen knife, she bore down on him with menace in her eyes, howling, “John Bobbitt, I’m gonna get you where it hurts!” Ross’s hands immediately smothered his pelvic area in defense, but when the charade played out, the bulge was still there – and the bedroom clock showed they were nearing the four-hour limit.

At that moment of despair, Ross happened to glance at the television, which had inadvertently been left on. The ad in progress was promoting a rival product to *Stiph*, and the voiceover intoned these words:

“A four-hour erection, while rare, can be painful and cause permanent damage to blood vessels and tissue. In most cases, a simple ice pack will make the swelling go down.”

“We’re such jerks,” exclaimed Ross, as he hastened to the frozen food section of Terry’s refrigerator. Filling a large plastic bag with ice cubes, he pulled down his pants and – oblivious to the frost – plunged his member into their midst.

The suspense didn’t last long. His teeth were chattering, but when he looked down below, lo and behold, his penis had returned to its modest normal size. Much gratified, he glanced at his watch, confirming that it was exactly three hours and 59 minutes since lift-off.

“Hooray!” cried Terry, holding out her arms to him in embrace.

“No time to celebrate,” Ross said, somewhat ungraciously. “I’m already an hour late, and Sandy’s going to have a fit.” He zipped up his trousers, gave Terry a peck on the cheek, and fled the apartment.

At the wheel of his car, Ross drove almost recklessly to get home to his wife as soon as possible. He had submerged the passion he felt earlier that afternoon for Terry under a tardy bundle of

affection for his long-suffering wife. With husbandly warmth, he pictured her puttering Julia Child-like around the kitchen – stirring and slicing, intent on providing gustatory satisfaction for her man. *How could I be so unfaithful to her. . . ?*

But a little later, the pangs of guilt had mostly dissipated. And since there was little traffic on the road, his mind morphed into devising a variety of phony supplementary excuses for his tardiness.

At last Ross arrived home, dreading the expected reprimand. When he opened the front door, Sandy was standing there in the hall, clad in an attractive translucent robe and slippers. To his surprise, she offered no rebuke – just a moist kiss on his lips.

“This is how you dress for dinner?” Ross asked, pulling back slightly to take in her appearance.

“I’m sorry, honey,” she replied sheepishly, “but that simmering supper was just a little white lie I made up. There’s nothing in the oven – we can send for take-out later on.”

“So what was the rush all about?”

Sandy gave him a provocative look and said, “I don’t know why, but I’ve felt incredibly sexy all day.” At that point, she threw open her robe, revealing a flimsy negligee, and sidled closer to him. “Someone – was it you? – must have slipped some Spanish Fly into my granola. I just couldn’t wait to get my hands on you.”

Ross, his mouth agape in astonishment, couldn’t believe his eyes or his ears.

“And darling,” Sandy said, “just look at what I’ve managed to procure for my love – ” Whereupon, she reached for a silver tray on the hall table and held it out to Ross. In the center of the tray, atop a decorative hankie, perched a single green pentagonal tablet.