

BARBECUE

SHORT SHORT STORY NO.14

My best friend and I are having an argument. He takes his glasses off and rubs at the marks they leave on either side of his nose before putting them back on and saying: 'Sometimes I don't know how you and I ever became friends. No, let me rephrase that. Sometimes I don't know how you and I ever *stayed* friends. I listen to you say these things about a man who has done so much good for me, for you, for our families, for our country for Christ's sake, and I wonder whether forty-seven years worth of friendship is reason enough to maintain an acquaintance. I mean I'm a patriot, do you understand that concept? I take care of my family, I protect them. You liberals, you just want to tear everything down and for what? Can you tell me that? For what?'

It's hard to respond when someone speaks to you like this. When someone wants you to know how much they really, really don't like you. So I don't say anything, just nod slowly and frown. We're standing around the barbecue in my back garden and all I can think of is how nice it would be to pick up the lighter fluid, spray it in his face and strike a match. Over his shoulder I can see his wife stepping out on the porch and waving to him, calling his name. She's pretty. I've always liked her. She has a good heart.

'I'm busy, for Christ's sake,' he roars, not even bothering to turn around and look at her. 'Can't you see we're talking out here?' He calls her a name under his breath. It's a word I hate. One I never use.

'Wives are a pain in the ass, aren't they?' he says then. 'Sometimes I think I'd be a lot happier if I was on my own. I'm not saying I want her to *die* or anything, don't get me wrong. But sometimes I think about leaving. Hell, the kids are all grown up, what have I got to lose? And maybe I could get a little action going on the side. These young single guys, they have it all worked out, if you ask me. What do you think? I'm still a good looking guy, amn't I? You think I could get some?'

'You're gorgeous,' I tell him. 'Twenty year-old women will fall at your feet and ask you to make love to them on the steps of their lecture halls while their football-playing boyfriends look on in envy.'

He doesn't say anything for a moment but then shrugs his shoulders and says 'yeah, that's what I'm talking about. And believe me, I'm not just talking about it, I'm thinking about it too.'

I say best friend; I really mean he's my oldest friend.