

MY MOTHER'S BEST ADVICE

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I GREW UP WITH A CRAZY MOTHER – not the conventionally crazy mother you know like she wasn't overbearing or mistrusting or searching my room for porn or anything like that. Actually, she showed me my first porno. It was during the big sex talk, and she was explaining to me the most important thing for a young woman is to remember to keep her vagina clean. "*Always wash your pussy, you don't want a smell coming out of there,*" she said between puffs. I nodded my little head at six years old and dutifully followed my mother's advice, even got overzealous with a can of lemon-scented pledge once. I was always an overachiever. I still associate citrus with chemical burns.

No, my mom is certifiably an immediate threat to those around her, just a thrilling force of destruction. Please, do not let this lady have kids. I'm not sure if she saw that Faye Dunaway movie, *Mommy Dearest*, growing up and just decided that's what she wanted to do? Like, the other kids wanted to be cowboys or pirates or doctors and when the teacher called on her, she said she just wanted to be old enough to blow cigarette smoke in her kid's face one day; and God-willing, that dream came true.

I met that teacher once too, and she did seem to sniff around me. She was probably relieved I smelled more like lemons than menthols.

I remember at 21, my mom calling me after my divorce and telling me how proud she was of me, and she immediately follows it with "*it's good to get the first one out of the way early.*" It really stuck with me.

She said it like it was some mundane thing like a pap smear. Like marriage, to her, is routine maintenance where you pay a few hundred bucks to spread your legs and hopefully you picked someone who lets you keep your socks on. Is that weird? I noticed socks can really divide a marriage. My ex-husband was always put off because I never took mine off. I can't help that my feet get cold! I was born with that poor-white-

trash circulation, where my blood tries to hang out near my womb because it's been ready to incubate since the seventh grade. It was always my biological destiny to get impregnated by the first guy I met named Ricky. He'd love Nascar and smell like Arizona Peace Tea, and I'd listen to Deana Carter and watch my hips explode. Thank God I married out of that.

When I think about it, my first marriage went a lot like my first pap smear. I took my bra off for both and was immediately met with this look like they were trying to maintain a serious face, but eye contact was a challenge. My doctor, fortunately, put me at ease. *"Don't worry, breasts come in all shapes and sizes,"* as he was trying to arrange his hand in a way that was professional, yet sympathetic. At least there wasn't fluorescent lighting in the double wide I shared with my ex-husband; fortunately, I was only contending with the soft glow of his Margartaville alarm clock. And I was already plotting my escape before either had finished.

I like having small breasts. My mother used to tell me to look at the silver lining, that small breasts were a blessing. I mean sure, she had her pick of men with 38DDs, but me? If a guy picked me out of the crowd it was because he really loved me, she explained, and real love is rare.

We put our feet up on the coffee table at the same time and she gave me a side-eye glance because I'd stolen a pair of her socks. Sentimental

moments are scarce for us, but this was surely one for the books.

"You know you get almost everything from me. Those smarts, that hair, now even socks apparently," she said between puffs before finishing her thought. *"It's just too bad you get your tits from your father."*

I shoot Big Edie a look before I render any comeback useless. I figure, at least she let me keep the socks on. ✱