Butch And Moan

Love don’t come easy to middle-aged cabbies with HIV. M. C. Mars drives the point home.

October 1, 2003 By M.C. Mars

Three Years! I haven’t gotten laid in over three years,” I complain to Konrad, my chiropractor, while he’s working on a lower lumbar strain I got a few days earlier when some asshole rear-ended the taxi I drive in San Francisco.

“Don’t feel bad,” he says. “I haven’t gotten laid in eight years—and I don’t even have AIDS.”

“Eight years?” Although he can’t get my back to crack, this snaps me to attention.

“It’s not that bad. At our age, it makes life simpler.” (We’re both 50.) “How about some ultrasound to loosen things up?” he asks while I’m horizontal drooling into some paper. “Sex is a big fucking hassle. Second-chakra energy. You don’t need it.”

“You don’t need it,” I say.

He rubs this cold gooey gel into my vertebrae, then, switching on what looks like a shower nozzle, starts ironing me as if I were a wrinkled aloha shirt.

My whiplash is a joke compared to the blindside hit I took in ’88 when I tested positive. It fell upon me like an apparitional raven that croaked “Nevermore.” Just like that—WHAM!—my sex life, my style with the ladies, my relations with women changed forever. My DNA bore the mark of the beast. And I felt ashamed to confide in my friends—because it was a gay disease and I’m straight.

A few days later, after the initial shock, I made the rounds to tell each of my recent partners—starting with V***. A few hours before my diagnosis, we’d had intense sex in the doorway of my apartment. A fuck for the ages. I’ll never forget it. Now I stood in the lobby of her building, with no idea how to say what I had to say. Baby, guess what....

But I’d showed up unannounced, “violating her space,” and she was pissed off. Bad timing. Her date would be there any minute. She wore her hair up—and looked forbiddingly beautiful in a tight green dress, sleeveless and cut low in the back to show off her curves and flawless skin.

I just stood there, unable to speak. Meanwhile she was thinking I’m jealous. So I blurted out the

facts and watched as tears filled her eyes. “How could you do this to me?” she said—and gently pushed closed forever in my face.

And thus began a series of confessions at the altar of My Lady of Withering Hope. Confessions made in darkened bedrooms and in bright kitchens with the garbage men rattling cans outside. At the Cliff House restaurant at sunset, looking out at the vast metallic stillness of ocean. Wave bye-bye to the playful energy of desire, gone forever. Replace it with confessions made in cars, bars, strip joints….

Fifteen years of them. And it’s never sexy: the hurdle of telling, the waiting for the response. But back in ’88, those reactions stung me to the quick.

One woman cried out, “I’ve got a 2-year-old daughter.” One wept and held me in her arms like Mary Magdalene. One freaked out: “Que? Tienes SIDA!” One told me she was immune because she surrounded herself with the healing light of crystals. One was a prostitute I told before we had sex. “That’s why we use these,” she said, producing a condom. “And no, I don’t give blowjobs on credit. But I’m willing to trade. You drive a cab, right?”

Over the years since then I’ve had relationships—but the specter of HIV always remained, sapping her confidence. A broken condom, a streak of paranoia spurred by just about anything.

Konrad shuts off the ultrasound, still bitching about broads. “Money, status, power—no matter what they say, that’s what they want! Tell ’em you’re a doctor, they wanna blow you right on the spot. When they find out I’ve been living in a rent-controlled apartment for 15 years, I’m king of the shit-heels. This chick I took to dinner last night? What a bitch! She was insulted I took her to the Olive Garden. What does she want, the Waldorf? It’s our first date, for Chrissakes!”

While he’s yakking, I’m cruising his thick, flirty secretary. Tonight, alone with my hand, I’ll place her in an orgy of my choosing.

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