Enter Soul Mate

Love comes in the most unexpected places

April 1, 1997 By River Huston

This month I was supposed to go to an HIV positive heterosexual singles retreat and report back. I was truly looking forward to this weekend in the Poconos, with heart-shaped tubs and infected single fellows. But, alas, I couldn't get out of bed that Friday morning until an ambulance arrived to take me to the hospital for a little hemorrhaging problem that popped up while I slept. Lying in my hospital bed, I couldn't help being grateful I didn't end up at the glorious retreat. Spontaneous bleeding can be so unattractive in those passionate moments.

It dawned on me that I'd become so enamored with my sex-goddess image I had not noticed the earthly deterioration of my sex-goddess body. I couldn't shake the image of me in a hot tub with all those singles: Do I want to be showing off the football-size hematomas that cover my now-unshavable legs?

But all of life isn't bad. Who would have thought right in that lovely hospital -- which I've come to call the Allegheny Spa for the Chronic and Toothless -- I would meet a potential soul mate?

I was making my way down to the basement to attend one of the weekly 12-step meetings in the cafeteria. And there he was, the man of my dreams, sipping Sanka from a Styrofoam cup. OK, he was the only male in the room, but who was counting?

I shuffled into the meeting in my imitation Dior nightie and powder-puff slippers, tethered to my ever-present IV. It is really hard to get makeup on with an IV -- and why even try in the fluorescent harshness of a hospital bathroom -- so I was au naturel. My hair couldn't decide what century it was from; lack of grooming had sent it into an early Victorian beehive.

I could tell my intended was mesmerized -- or farsighted. We gave each other smoldering looks during the 12-step meeting (or at least I think I was smoldering -- I might have just been feverish and having early-dementia-related hallucinations about his expressions).

Perhaps I had been abstinent too long. Or maybe he really was the one. I did know one thing -- I was going to find out. We lingered after the meeting and chatted. I didn't have the courage or the energy to tell him what ailment plagued me so. It has never been a simple task, this disclosure business, so I did the next best thing. I thought up a good lie in case he inquired about my health. Late-stage narcolepsy -- yeah, that's it (No darling, you're not boring...).

But he didn’t ask! He did accompany me up to my room to hold my hand while a nurse removed some blood. That in itself is worth a complimentary blow job, but since I was maintaining my virtue, I refrained.

He came to visit every day. I gently steered the conversation away from medical queries, which is some feat when you are sweating like a pig and hooked up to dripping bags of stuff. I used my charming personality and talked about other things. “How ’bout those Mets?” It became clear, though, that he was smitten. He really liked me. In the past, this had been enough for me. But I had grown, changed; I wasn’t going to that painful place written about so well in country and western songs just because someone liked me. So I decided to get to know this man.

But then there was the eternal question: To tell or not to tell? And for the first time since diagnosis, I realized I didn’t yet have anything to say. I haven’t committed to anything. I haven’t even kissed this guy. (I splashed a little blood on him, but I didn’t see any broken skin.) I was flooded with virginal feelings. I could actually date this man, get to know him. What a concept.

I am not ashamed of being HIV positive. I have come to accept that this is my reality. I also know I am more than a PWA. I am a desirable, sexy, hot, intelligent, witty, cute, talented (did I forget anything?) woman who happens to be HIV positive. It was a spiritual moment.

When the time comes, if it comes, for me to tell this man about my HIV status, I will be able to accept his reaction. This felt different from the anxiety or obsessive need-to-tell-and-get-it-out-of-the-way feelings that have plagued me when I don’t tell. If this man is truly my soul mate, he will get over it. If not, who needs him? God, it felt good.

By the way, this whole revelation occurred while he went to find me a seltzer. Does this guy sound excellent? Well, we will see.

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