Lazarus: Love Among the Ruins

A miracle man goes where friends cannot follow

May 1, 1998 By Peter Kurth

In one of the many fictionalized versions of the Lazarus story, the turn-of-the-century American poet Edward Arlington Robinson invented a scene between Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Lazarus had just been raised from the dead, and Martha, known as a shipshape housekeeper and the most impatient woman in the Bible, was fretting over the look on her brother's face. Lazarus seemed lost in his thoughts, utterly oblivious to problems of the real world. He'd been moping around the house, Martha complained. What was the matter? Why couldn't everything be "as it was before?"

It was Mary, the gentler and more soulful sister, who corrected Martha before she could cause Lazarus any trouble. "No, my dear," said Mary, "not 'as it was before.' Nothing is ever as it was."

Just between us, I need more friends like Mary and fewer like Martha. A year and a half into my protease rebirth, with an undetectable viral load, impressive T-cells and nothing disturbing my sleep except chronic poverty and a neuropathic leg, my friends all seem offended -- insulted, even -- by my current contented state. Nowhere is this more apparent than in their attitude toward my lover, John -- the light of my life, the fire of my loins, the man I waited 43 years to meet and who only came along after each of us had been rescued from the brink of death.

Granted, it must be quite a stretch for old friends to hear me say, "I'm in love" and know I mean it. I, who swore by the motto "Men are pigs" and dismissed marriage as a romantic fantasy with nothing to recommend it but tax breaks and the KitchenAid mixer some guest might be considerate enough to give you at the wedding. I, whose sex life, after many trials and travails, had dwindled to the occasional Saturday night at the baths and the laughing-on-the-outside, crying-on-the-inside survivor's quip, "Sure, I like a bit of sex, but it has to be brisk!" I, who prided himself on his adventurous tastes and his refusal to bow to the repressive institutions of a patriarchal society, have fallen -- kaboom! -- for domestic bliss.

For John and me, it was at an HIV support group, but what the hell. We like to say that we met sneaking cigarettes underneath the bridge to the 21st century. We have seen the future and it has our names on it. As long as I lived I never expected to meet anyone as wonderful as this, let alone have my love returned and be gazing confidently at a future that seems brighter by the hour.

OK, so maybe it is a little hard to take. But nothing prepared me for the skepticism that's greeted

this most wonderful of relationships, this blessed development in my life -- a skepticism that seems especially pronounced and cruel against the backdrop of AIDS. It's as if my friends can't believe that something might work out, and beautifully, for two homosexuals with a fatal disease. I hate to seem ungrateful, but I sometimes think they preferred it when they thought I was dying -- when I was sick, anyhow -- and in need of care. Now they look at me and John and say: "Do you know what you're doing?" "I'm worried. As a friend I have to tell you." "Relationships are hard, hard work." And my favorite: "Congratulations. Enjoy it while it lasts."

And they call me a cynic! No wonder so many relationships fail -- people talk about them as if they were blownout tires, endlessly difficult, nothing but trouble.

In our case, of course, trouble is the strongest glue. There's nothing so powerful as shared suffering to inspire passionate devotion. Neither John nor I expected to be still walking around in 1998, as the AIDS epidemic approaches its third decade. We both looked at death and we prefer what we have. We need each other, and we intend to live happily ever after, however long "ever after" turns out to be.

So to the Marthas who prefer their Lazaruses ill I say: Relax. If John and I can still believe in a rosy future, why can't you? We're already hard at work on our first book, a self-help manual for people who want to put the "up" back in couple. We're calling it *Codependent Now, Codependent Tomorrow, Codependent Forever!* Because the view from here is wonderful, and we deserve that $1 million advance.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Lazarus-Love-Among-the-Ruins-259-3352