Over Disclosure

A trick proposes, Dominic discloses, then calls the ho thing off

February 1, 1996 By Dominic Hamilton-Little

Looking at his lips -- lined by the gods with a slightly darker hue than his pure gingerbread complexion -- I want to kiss them again. I've kissed them once. Briefly. On the dance floor of the nightclub we've just left. Instead, I smile at him, as those lips cradle the cold beer I've just cracked open for him, and launch into that brief routine that's become oh so familiar since I got my test result back at 11:30 a.m., September 9, 1993.

"Just so you know the score, Angelo, I play safe, and I'm HIV positive."

He splutters, sending a dribble of beer down his chin, and wiping it off with the back of one gorgeous hand, says, "Jesus Christ, that's fucked, man."

I am used to either the sweetly mundane -- "Oh, I'm so sorry" -- or the all-too-frequent, "That's okay, so am I." But what I hear this time, as he nearly chokes on his brew, pinches a nerve. Suddenly the evening is not progressing quite as it should.

"Well, I suppose you could say that." I attempt a smile. "I take it from your reaction that you haven't heard this very often."

"No, never." He pauses, and I wait in a ghastly, yawning chasm of eternity, wondering where he might be going. Believing, as a boy of the HIV brigade, that education is a burden I must carry, I am usually prepared to explain the intricacies of being fabulously positive. Any such pedagogic thoughts come crashing about my winsome head, however, with his next remark.

"Why didn't you tell me before we left the bar? I mean, then I could've...." He sounds petulant, almost churlish, as a child who has entered a candy store only to be told that all the candy had been sold.

"I beg your pardon?" My back stiffens.

"Why didn't you tell me right away?"

"Because. Because, I am not in the habit of disclosing such details whilst flirting on a dance floor and shaking my tight white rear end to Billie Ray Martin's 'Put Your Loving Arms Around Me,' and

because I suppose it is my belief that if you have a problem with it, and suddenly don't want to fuck me, I'm not going to make it as easy for you as just walking away from me and up to the bar to order another cocktail from the stunning buffed bartender you like so well."

Listening to myself, I am mortified. I can't believe I've just said that. But bile is beginning to flow, and as my friends constantly say, I am moved by my spleen to utter the unutterable.

Sensing my ire, he turns his head away, picks an imaginary piece of lint off his beautifully cut woolen trousers, and says quietly, if somewhat desperately, "But I'm only 22. I don't want to die."

"None of us do. And though you will eventually, you shouldn't die of AIDS if you play it safe," I reply with more asperity than I intend.

"But what *is* safe?" His big, brown eyes brim with concern for his own well-being. "And what if a condom breaks?"

Good Lord, I think to myself, I've suddenly had enough. It snaps. *It* snapped, as Martha says to George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Snap, snap, snap.

I suddenly don't want him and am simply too weary for the conversation and too bored to get angrier. "Listen sweetheart," I sigh, "there's plenty of places where you can pick up all the literature you could want on this, and you could even call the hotline for info. I'm a little tired, and I think it might be best for both of us if you left now." I get up and walk toward the door.

"Wait," he almost yells and grabs my arm. "Couldn't we perhaps, just, well, you know." He grins, and next thing I know his hand is rubbing my crotch. I feel stifled and awkward. This sudden remorse and change of heart confuses and annoys me. I mean, I'd wanted him. Yeah, since that first moment I saw him, before my pride was hurt. And I felt dirty. But now he wants me again.

No way. Pulling back, I open the door. "Look, sorry, but I'm just not ready to be your first openly HIV positive lover. It's not going to be that easy." He turns toward the door as I continue. "And please be safe, always. Just because you heard it first from me, don't imagine you haven't had sex with someone who is HIV positive and just didn't want to tell you -- precisely because of how you've just reacted."

"You're something else, that's for sure. Take it easy." And with that he turns and walks out of my flat.

I am surprised at how much my hands are shaking as I light a cigarette and collapse onto the sofa. God, what a vile ending to the evening. As I remember dancing with him, and laughing, and kissing those lips, I realize with some relief that I don't want to kiss them anymore, not after what they'd said.

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