Swap Meat

Dominic flaunts at conventions and trades sex for financial security

April 1, 1996 By Dominic Hamilton-Little

Always on the make for new ways to pick up men -- and enduring what I am not so pleased to call a “touch of a dry spell” -- a marvelous and novel idea strikes me. Why not cruise the AIDS convention circuit? For years I’ve heard from friends who attend political action groups, informational gatherings and support networks that the field is ripe with menz ready for plucking.

Flipping through an agency journal, I am astonished at the plethora of meetings I could choose to attend -- though even I, ruthless optimist that I am, question the romantic possibilities to be found at “All You Need To Know About AIDS-related Diarrhea.”

Eschewing my signature sequins and flounces, and donning the ubiquitous plebeian garb of the activist -- though I do draw the line at socks with sandals and Patchouli -- I go off to my first meeting: “Serious Finance and Personal Illness.” Or is it the other way around?

Having finally found the church hall where the event is being held, I walk in on a slide show and about 15 men learning what to do with their money. If only I *had* some money, investments, life insurance -- the viatical worth of nothing is nothing, after all. I don’t even have my virtue left to sell.

Bracing myself, and remembering the task at hand, I take the packet handed to me and scan the room. Not much over there...*that’s* a fright...wait! Yummy! It’s Freddie Mercury without the overbite. Inwardly thrilled yet serenely composed, I turn back to the screen. I suddenly realize that some very pertinent health insurance matters of direct concern to yours truly are being dealt with. I become more engrossed, even going so far as to raise my hand and ask a question.

Break time -- gracious, are we there already? Stepping out for a smokie-treat, I see Freddie’s also taking the elevator down. We smile at one another. Good. Later, back in the meeting, I am so enthralled with learning about all these options I had no idea were mine that I don’t even notice Mr. Mercury slipping out. Of course, when I am packing up my burlap bag (everything in keeping with the costume), I notice his absence. Momentarily crushed, I fly home in a whirl regardless, consumed with my newfound fiscal knowledge.

Next on the agenda is a tea dance for guys with HIV. My brain is still hurting from money matters, and I figure the disco ball and house music should put all to rights. Intent on a chemical-free

evening -- this is research work -- I get on the dance floor and go. There are some great-looking guys, the music's fierce and I'm having a ball. Shirts are off, gay and free. Boys, bass and a strobe. It's all about the lyric in Boy George's best ballad: "Laughing, tumbling, screaming queen/Like the most amazing light show you've ever seen." There's nothing like clean-and-sober cha-cha for three hours of hot nonstop, sweat-breaking fun. Good Lord, it's only as I'm catching the train home at 10 p.m. -- oh so early, to be fresh for Monday morning -- that I remember I never even bothered to cruise.

I resolve to attend a conference on protease inhibitors.

Arriving at the university hall late -- all the better to make an entrance -- I realize within minutes the hardest part will be staying awake. I know I should be "dying" to learn more about my disease, and I know I should have applied myself with greater enthusiasm during biology and algebra classes. But after 10 minutes of "diffusing across permeable membranes" and "in a bound state to effectively inhibit activity of HIV-1," I am reduced to a confused mass and can't help but giggle when one of the scientists says "indogenous" instead of "indigenous."

Apparently most of the studies are being done on rats, monkeys and dogs. I want to know how many of my ex-boyfriends were enrolled. After "clinical end-point studies, transcriptase and pharmacokinetics," I think of my night sweats and nut-hard lymph nodes and want to scream, "Look: Just tell me what drug I should have, even though I'm not eligible for any of your studies because my T-cells are too high or I'm not a woman or a minority."

Leaving the meeting, knowing only that I'm more worried than when I walked in, I see a pretty blond with high cheekbones and clear blue eyes. I'm tempted to follow him. Except he's going way out of my direction and it's getting cold.

OK, so maybe the convention thing hasn't yet worked out "that" way for me. At least now I know I should know a lot more than I do. Oops, better dash -- have another meeting to get to. You know what they say: "Try, try and try again." And each time I learn a little more.

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