

## Love and trust in the gay '80s

*Men who in other times would be good and decent people now are desperately denying their health status, hoping that if they ignore it they will not die. They do not care that their bodies can be lethal weapons.*

BY MICHAEL S. REED

The scene: The Spike, an L.A. bar

The time: February 1988

Action:

**M**en cruising, talking, groping each other in the crowd. The men are handsome and huge, at least seven feet tall and with shoulders wide enough to land a Cessna upon. The variety of men ranges from tortured queens with too much mousse on their bleach-tipped crewcuts to daddies in flannel, jeans and leather; from student-preppies with horn-rimmed glasses and sweatshirts to ordinary men



let you."

"I'm not going to stop having sex."

"Who said you had to stop having sex? I'm saying that your partners ought to be warned so they can make choices. Denying them that right makes you a killer, as simply as if you take a knife and shove it through their heart — except using a knife would be more kind."

"So what happens now?"

"That's a good question."

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The word is trust. The implication is simple: Forget it.

Walk through the bars. Look at the faces. Trust. This one looks healthy. That one looks "clean." Avoid "trash." But it's a lie. There's no way to know. Appearances mean nothing. Look at them. Smile at them. Take them home. In the safe harbor of your bed, hold them and touch them. In your mind, think of their semen as a toxic fluid. Trust. Jerk off for them, have them jerk off for you. Talk dirty. Trust. Safe sex. If you like them, see them again. Love while you can but don't expect everyone to share your moral codes. Assume that everyone is positive. And don't make the deadly assumption that they'll tell you if they are.

This plague has cornered the market on terror, denial, guilt, hopelessness and waste. Men who in other times would be good and decent people now are desperately denying their health status, hoping that if they ignore it they will not die. They do not care that their bodies can be lethal weapons that because of their own denial and ignorance spread the plague among those who are foolish enough to trust them with their health and lives.

Several friends have mentioned that they and their lovers plan to be tested. If both partners' results are negative, they want to rush right home for a rousing, unprotected screw. Silly, foolish, deadly fantasies. Any lover who suggests this as an option is deluding himself. Those days are over. Get used to it. Let *no one* put his cock inside you without a condom on it, no matter how much he loves you, no matter how much you love him.

We must redefine trust in these days of plague. Trust with your heart, not your health. Trust is always a gamble anyway, and gambling with your emotions is perfectly human, perfectly fine. If you lose, those wounded emotions will heal. If you gamble with your health, there is no healing. A long, ugly, wasting death awaits those who gamble with their health and lose.

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The scene: The Spike  
The time: February 1988

Action:

He has been smiling at me all night. He is tall and handsome. His shirt is open, his chest massive and furry. Eventually he stands beside me, touches me. I touch him.

"What do you like to do?" he asks.

"Depends on the person, the situation. What about you?"

"Cuddling, touching. A little affection."

"Sounds good. How about a backrub?"

"I'd love it."

"Something safe?"

"Yes."



who dress simply in wardrobes purchased at K-Mart. Their faces bear expressions in varying degrees of hostility or friendliness, depending on their particular modus operandi in the delicate faggot art of cruising.

Then, in the crush of all those beautiful men, I see a man, also drunk, blond and leather-jacketed with a face that resembles a pouting weasel. He weaves up to me. He strokes my knee and leans in to kiss me. I put my hand out and stop him. "Kiss me," he said. "Come on — kiss me, I'm not dying."

Fade to black.

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Fade in to: A restaurant in L.A., two men talking over coffee in quiet, sometimes anguished tones.

"How long have you known?"

"Three years."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I was afraid you'd leave me. I thought it would be OK since we have safe sex."

"What about French kissing? And we don't know if condoms are always safe — they're in the medium-risk list. If you had told me, we would have done things a lot differently."

"Just because I'm positive doesn't mean I have to tell everyone."

"How about the people you go to bed with?"

"No."

"How can you say that? How can you consciously spread this disease?"

"I'm not spreading anything."

"I feel betrayed. We've been together for months and you wait until now to tell me something this important."

"I didn't betray you, I just didn't tell you."

"Same thing. You put on a condom and you fucked me and the whole time you knew you were antibody-positive. What if a condom had broken?"

"That never happened."

"But what if it had? Then I would be infected too."

"How do you know you aren't infected already?"

"I don't know for sure. But you certainly shifted the odds. You have no business putting your cock inside anyone unless they know that you're positive and make the definite choice to



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