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"On my better days, I'm a fairy"

Perhaps their fascination reveals their own inclination toward each other

BY MICHAEL S. REED

Candles flicker on the table in the ancient San Franciscan dining room. Our shadows twitch and shudder against the walls. The antique buffet and china cabinet gleam in the hazy light. Wine has been flowing, cigarettes are being smoked; ashes twirled away in ashtrays during thoughtful pauses. The conversation has danced over politics and the amusing antics of friends. There has been much laughter, a warm and glowing camaraderie.

The subject turns to AIDS testing and the pros and cons involved therein. One man at the table has been HIV antibody positive for some



E. Ann Hinds

"Queers," the old man spits out. Another man titters in the back row.

A look of pained amusement crosses the young man's face. He nods and takes one of the five empty chairs. Softly he says "Queers," pauses a moment and looks at the old man, then says "Asshole."

Dusty and I are walking home from the bars on Stark Street in Portland. We pass two teenage boys who sneer "Queers" at us.

"What's it to you?" I reply.

They mutter something unintelligible, then, "I bet you're gonna go home and suck each other's dicks," one of them incorrectly assumes.

Dusty and I comment on their peculiar interest in this activity and wonder, quite loudly, if perhaps their fascination reveals their own inclinations toward each other.

One of the boys eloquently raises his middle finger at me. He glares malevolently at me. I glare even more malevolently back. Neither of us moves. I am waiting for him to come to me. If he wants to fight, I'm willing to wipe his face on the sidewalk.

Dusty tugs at my arm, "Come on, Michael, let's go. They're not worth it."

I wait a moment, considering this.

Not worth what? I am fed up with this bullshit. I have been called queer many times before: what difference do these walking rectums make? None. Dusty is right. They're not worth it. I walk away with him.

We wonder if they will pursue us, come around the block and jump us. "Let 'em," I say, "They're more scared of us than I am of them. Sometimes you have to fight back."

His voice dims over the telephone wire. He tells me he wants to make a quilt panel for his best friend, Cleo, who died a few years ago. He's not sure what to put on it, though. He speaks of the dusty Texas town Cleo returned to when he became too sick to live alone in New York City.

His voice is edged with sadness as he recalls how three priests had told Cleo that God wouldn't want him because he was a homosexual.

In San Francisco, the Bay Area Reporter has a full page of obituaries. Small snapshots of smiling faces checker the text each week.

Obituaries have become a new art form. Those who have died have "ascended this life, surrounded by loving friends." The obituaries celebrate the lives of the men.

I am struck by our creativity. I am moved by our ability to face our troubles with optimism and hope. I am strengthened by our refusal — no matter what the tragedy — to stop loving each other.

"Trouble, oh trouble
Please be kind
I don't want no fight
And I haven't got a lot of time."

— Cat Stevens

Walking downtown, someone calls Christopher a queer.

He stops, looks them in the eye and says, "That's right, sweetie, and on my better days, I'm a fairy."



time. "Once you know," he says, "You're married to it. You can't run away from it any longer." He turns to another man and asks, "Have you been tested?"

The man's boyish face looks startled. "Yes," he replies, "I'm positive."

Glasses pause on their journey to lips. There is a painful, awkward silence as this group of friends assimilates this information. Our host asks, "How long have you known?"

"About a month. I had the test done twice to make sure."

We are all silent. Too many, too much, it never ends.

"Trouble, oh trouble
Move from me
I have paid my debt
Now won't you leave me
In my misery."

— Cat Stevens

In the employment office in San Francisco a tall, thin, young man wearing a leather jacket comes in and asks an old man wearing a tweed cap if the seat next to him is taken. The old man stands and says loudly, "There are five empty chairs in here, why don'tcha sit in one of those — I don't wantcha next to me."

The young man looks a little stunned. "What are you so afraid of?"

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