

## In defense of the revolution

*These men make promises of freedom and then enslave us to their own ideology*

BY MICHAEL S. REED

In Cuba, there is no word for snow. We understand rain, for it rains in the heat of summer; a brief deluge then sunshine. The tears of God, then sunlight. Rapture.

It is raining now. The rain is tapping at the sill. I am glad I am not political. They would not give me this white room or this television set if I



were political. They would not give me this place to hear my breath grow shallow, my limbs grow weak. Outside, I hear a dog barking. I know, this way, that life is going on outside this room.

And when I have the strength, I take my cane and walk the halls. Others are here. Others like me. We are infected with HIV. We have been put here to protect the masses, to protect the revolution. Here, in these hallways, we are keeping the revolution alive. We are doing our

part. Sometimes they let us out, but only with chaperones.

It is a life. I get up in the morning and eat my breakfast. I inspect my body for new bumps or lesions. I take an inventory of how I feel. I go to Julio and Carlos to see if they are well. We talk in whispers so the guards won't hear. We speak of days when we laughed in smoke-filled nightclubs, when a flashing smile or dark, brooding eyes could capture our attention. Julio tells us breathless stories about the men who lured him into their beds with sparkling baubles or golden coins; the men with sprawling smiles in suits of smug content. Julio speaks of his hasty exits as the giggling bubblehead, the pouting tramp, or the spoiled princess. He has done them all, Julio has. And as his body grows more like a skeleton every day, he drapes his satin robes around himself and paints his lips a ruby red. When he walks past the guards, they snicker at him but he holds his head up high and tells himself, "I'm still beautiful, I'm still Julio. There was a time when my name was on the lips of gentlemen, lawyers and doctors, magistrates and priests. It was me, Julio, they wanted. Not some boors in black belts and glittering guns." He flutters his eyelashes at the guards and they let him pass. They are afraid to touch us.

And for Carlos, books are his rescue. He has friends in America that send him books. What America must be like. All that freedom. They can love who they choose. They are not put into a prison because they have a disease.

The doctors come. They take our blood. They give us pills. They measure what we eat and shit. They strip us naked, peer at us, scribble notes and mumble, then walk away.

Sometimes I cannot eat the food. Sometimes I can only push it away. Carlos tells me I must eat. He tells me I look pale. Carlos loves me. I cannot bear it.

It isn't the food, it's the earth. The earth that soaks in the bones and blood of so many lives. A billion armies, a storm of wars. The countless revolutions, evolutions, absolutions. To die in infamy, to die in honor. To die for God, to die for a plan devised by a man, or men or families of men; men who are charismatic, men who are leaders, men who tell the hopeless that there is hope. Men who can pick up the hearts of a country and rouse them to passion and bloodshed. Men who may teach us to seek a better way, to leave a place better than we find it.

These men tell the hungry that there can be food for everyone. Give up for now, they say, what we can use to keep the enemies of social injustice and oppression away. What these men won't tell us is that while we are fighting the revolution and going hungry in the streets, their children are well-fed, educated in fine schools, clothed in expensive suits.

These men make promises of freedom and then enslave us to their own ideology.

Carlos tells me an imagination is a good thing to have. "That is how you fly," he tells me. "To you, anywhere is a prison and you make the best of what you have. Making notes all the time, whispering as you capture the world. They say strange flowers bloom in small corners. And our corner has become very small, indeed. That is why I read my books. That is why Julio pretends to be a star of the silver screen. Why must you always tell our secrets?"

And I have no answers. Suddenly, I notice how his hands touch the table, how he taps his ear when he thinks, or how the lines crinkle around his eyes when he smiles, which is seldom. Carlos is very serious. Very intense. That is why he sometimes bores me.

Julio has on that green kimono. The one that has seen better days. He has lovely eyebrows,

though. He tweezes them every Tuesday and Friday. He sings along with the radio while he works. His voice, had someone trained him long, long ago, would be pleasant to hear. It makes him sparkle, however, so one could hardly dampen his good spirits. Carlos is scowling into his book, sneaking occasional glances at me. I, of course, ignore him completely as I write this.

I wonder if there will be a package today. Of late, boxes have been arriving, filled with small gifts, a cylinder of cheese, a bottle of wine, a swath of fabric which Julio immediately draped around the light "to soften the glare."

I have my suspicions as to who it might be, sending these presents. It drives Carlos wild when they arrive. He stands, glares at me and storms from the room. Julio and I just giggle and open the presents like children at Christmas.

Later, Carlos will come back, indifferent and arrogant, to see if perhaps some cheese has arrived.

In Cuba, 240 Cubans (171 men and 69 women) have been confined to a quarantine center for people infected with HIV. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Cuba is the only nation that has mandated universal HIV testing. One-third of Cuba's 10.2 million people have been tested. Those infected with HIV are confined to camps for the rest of their lives.

For Christmas, I wish everyone three things: wisdom, strength of heart and health in the year to come.

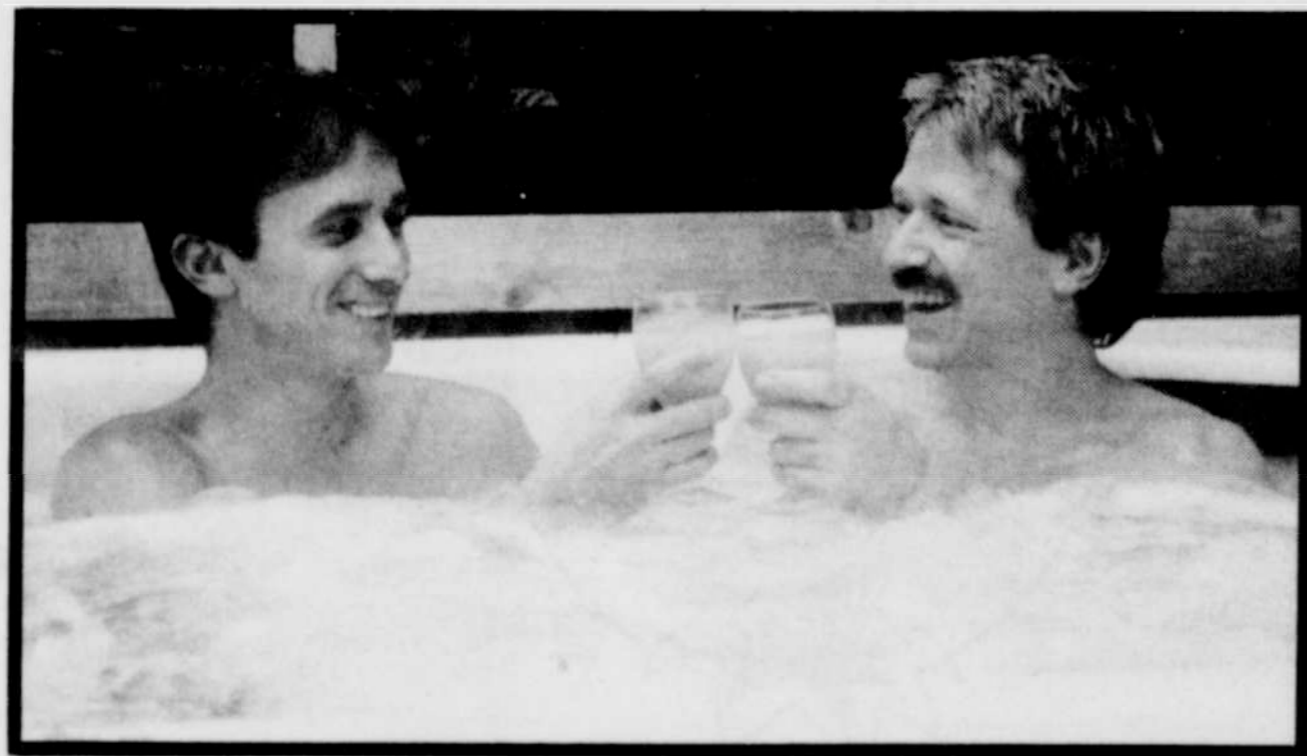
Merry Christmas,  
— Michael

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