



The Swab

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Death and taxes may be the only two things in life that are inevitable, but as a young single man in his twenties, (all right, LATE twenties, but its still the twenties, dammit) there is one more thing you can pretty much count on if you're sexually active with more than one person and you are somewhat attractive. Take the "U" out of "stud" and you have your answer my friends: STD.

In the age of serious sexual diseases like AIDS and Hepatitis C (has Pamela Anderson-Lee-Rock-Anderson taught us nothing?) one must always put one's pig in a blanket, wrap the sausage, balloon the animal, sheath the sword, bag the trouser snake, plastic the furniture, or armor the vein-laden purple headed warrior and his yogurt cannon before his climactic battle on the gooey fields of Onenightstandia.

Condoms are essential to stopping the spread of these diseases when intercourse, be it gay or straight, is to occur. But what about the sexual gray area, the elusive but whimsical world of oral sex? Does anyone in his or her right mind *really* want to lick a rubber tip?

Let me present an interesting personal case study for your horror and enjoyment. It's a cautionary tale of dumb decisions, sex, urine, and Q-Tips. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

In my salad days as a young, hip, starry-eyed newbie gay boy, I was well aware of how serious some STD's were. I'll admit that, like most men, when getting a drunken blowjob from a virtual stranger (a rite of passage in the gaying process) I knew that chapstick alone did not equal STD Kryptonite. As an ignorant young brave, though, I neglected to listen to the advice of my homo forefathers whispering on the fragrant summer wind.

Our noble savage felt very pleased with his adventure and conquest, but as he traveled along his brave path a fortnight later, he noticed he felt the sting of the wasp whenever he drained his anaconda. Tecumseh! Quite simply, peeing felt like emitting molten steel. Realizing this was not only abnormal but also quite excruciating, since one never realizes how much one pees until it burns like magma, our courageous tenderfoot decided to take a vision quest to the local shaman for some herbal remedies.

Okay, native allegory aside, I actually went to a friends house, smoked a lot of dope and hoped everything would just work out. When that didn't work, I drove Halle Berry-style to the free clinic to get a (*insert scary organ music here*) STD test.

After putting on my very best "celebrity incognito" ball hat and glasses, I entered the waiting room, nervous and a bit sweaty. I approached the nurse sitting behind what appeared to be bulletproof glass (apparently they have a lot of shootings in the free clinic?

"Burn off these herpes or it's a cap in your ass!") and gave her my Health Card number. She waved me towards a waiting room filled with people from all walks of life, people who were young, old, men, women, and even teenagers. We all sat in silence, sharing a common bond of being in the wrong face at the wrong time.

I sat down with those other lost souls, all bearing one of two looks on their face—either the "How did this happen to me?" or the more exciting "Fuck that asshole! Not cheating my ass!" I blankly flipped through a semi-mangled *Highlights for Children* magazine. I was nervous. The comic foibles of "Goofus and Gallant" did nothing to calm my fears. As a twin, I was always the Goofus to my brother's semi-Gallant, but I digress. All I could think of was what if I had something serious? What if it was life threatening, or worse, penis threatening?

If I may digress again to a more serious note, STD's allow anyone who thinks they may have them a chance to reconnect with a spiritual side they never knew they still had. From the time I thought I was seriously ill (so melodramatic) to the time I was diagnosed, I was saying "Our Father's" and "Hail Mary's" and "Whoa Jesus!" and "Sup St. Peter's!" even though I had long abandoned the idea of an omnipotent, Gandalf-like paternal deity who tossed thunderbolts and somehow had a son with no wife. As the Marquis de Sade once said: "Virgin mother? A whole religion based on an oxymoron."

After finding all the differences between the back and front covers of my *Highlights* magazine (Hey, that lawnmower wasn't in the tree before!) and silently praying for the one trillionth time to Jesus-Allah-Buddha-Krishna-Mohammed and Madonna (not the Virgin, the singer; I figured she would understand), I was shrilly called up by a nurse that looked like Chris Farley in a smock.

She took me into a little viewing room that was blandly colored in a sickly, genital warts-pink and peppered with posters of human cross-sections and stirrups. After I described my condition to her, she coldly and almost gleefully handed me the one thing no one ever wants to get at the doctors office. The cup.

Not the Grey Cup or a coffee cup or even a protective cup. No, I mean the pee cup. The "You must pee at least *this much* to be healthy" cup. She directed me to a private washroom that faced the very crowded waiting room and told me to "Fill'er up!", like I was her gas attendant. Where was my squeegee?

I'm not sure who measured or created this cup, but NO ONE could possibly fill it on one try. It looked like a beer stein with a plastic lid. Only horses could successfully urinate to capacity in this thing; it was like trying to fill a swimming pool with your own spit. I

panicked. Thinking fast, I hastily downed a shitty pharmacy coffee, jumped up and down, and then proceeded to the washroom. This forced me to parade my pee-pee shame cup in front of twenty complete strangers. They knew what it was for—they might have even been next. But the best was yet to come.

The one and only bathroom, the one that was directly in front of a packed waiting room of people who have already decided due to my cup that I am either homeless, a male prostitute, or a male prostitute who sleeps with the homeless, had a door with a broken lock (insert random stock footage of volcano's exploding, baboon's attacking a village, and a me throwing myself through a plate glass window). What that means is anyone could now fling open this door and reveal my Quest to Fill the Pissy Grail. I only had one option; and yes, it required yoga.

Thinking fast, and with a painful stream of urine already descending to its final destination, I lifted my right leg backwards to securely hold the door shut and then balanced myself on one leg while unzipping my pants and subsequently holding the Grail in front of me. I was in a complete T-stance, with a plastic cup in one hand and my poor sick penis in the other. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, and I looked like a cherub on a really vulgar lawn fountain. "The Angel of Herpes" or "Gonorrhea Seraphim and the Golden Shower."

By some urinary miracle, I filled the cup up to the line. A sense of accomplishment washed over me. Maybe things were looking up. Maybe I could get through this without being totally humiliated!

I marched through that waiting room with my brown paper bag in confidence, mentally giggling at the thought of replacing it with somebody's bag lunch. I triumphantly handed it to the bitch nurse, who waved me back into the private room to wait for the doctor. She looked like she was going to slap me when I said "To the line, and then some!" just to spite her. She rolled her eyes behind her windshield-sized bifocals and slammed the door. (*Insert footage of army flame throwers, Godzilla attacking Japan, and me drinking from the nurse's skull, her face still contorted in a shocked scream.*)

After thoroughly analyzing the diagram of the lower intestine and learning in graphic detail what Lyme Disease can actually do to a person (we should send deer ticks to Iraq), I finally had the doctor walk in. After some brief small talk, I described my symptoms ("It's like my urine is lemon juice and it's escaping out of a paper cut!") and the doctor, who resembled my friend's dad (!), asked me to take down my pants.

I gave him the standard "Aren't you gonna buy me dinner first?" gag, and he gave me the same look the nurse did ten minutes ago. (I was mentally tapping the microphone: "Is this thing on?").

Now, let me remind you, I had never HAD an STD test, and my expectations so far were hideously accurate (the cup, the line, the bitch nurse, the "seen it all" doctor, the shame, the filth). But nothing prepared me for the final stage of the STD test. It involved one word, a word that will have men everywhere crossing their legs tightly and whispering "Aw, *dude!*"

That one word (drum roll) is "SWAB."

The doctor said in his best "This won't hurt a bit!" non-threatening tone, "Okay Patrick, we're going to have to SWAB you now."

Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Like a massage, or a spa treatment, or a reward of some kind? Wrong my friends. The "swab" is where the doctor takes your already scared and hurting wang, and then produces this really long and really thick Q-Tip, dipped in what I'm convinced is paint thinner, and RAMS it into the tip of the penis. And then "swabs" it around.

It's the equivalent to a woman getting a Pap Smear, right when they use that duck-billed thingy that looks like a prop from *Hostel*. Having said this, please, ladies, don't write to me and say, "Pap Smears are SO MUCH WORSE! You men are FUCKING BABIES!" because my response will be to put a cotton ball on a fire hydrant and then sit on it. Quickly. That's what it's like.

After the stars stopped exploding behind my eyes and I was breathing at a normal rate, I turned to see the doctor putting my "swab" into a test tube. My whole body relaxed. It was over. I had survived. He had taken his sample, and this roller coaster of degradation was finally over. Our young noble savage had faced the dark terrors of the Freeclinic Caverns as a boy and was emerging a man! Champagne corks popping! Crowds cheering!

The doctor turned to me.

"You're doing so well! I know it hurts, son, but we need to check everything. Are you feeling better now?" he asked.

I shook my head and smiled, reaching down to pull my pants back up.

"Now, one more swab and you're all done!"

(*Insert that scene at the end of "Psycho" where Vera Miles turns the chair around to discover Mrs. Bates is a corpse, and launches into that really long and petrified scream. If you haven't seen it, rent it. That's the sound of the swab.*)

As Dr. Killdick approached me with another swab, I was praying it

would turn into something less horrible, like a hot poker or a boa constrictor. No such luck. He jiggled another medicated pain stick in me, wiggling it like it was keys in a stuck lock. It was in that moment that I vowed to be celibate.

Or at least use condoms. Yeah, that's it.

I received my test results two weeks later, and it was nothing more than a common, run-of-the-mill, cured-with=antibiotics urinary tract infection. I was relieved, and I realized a few things in the process:

- Sex is fun, but just like playing “tag” with firecrackers, you have to be careful.
- The free clinic is free because no one in his or her right mind would want to have to pay after being tortured and humiliated for two hours.
- You want to win the war on terror? Fuck nuclear arms, give them a good swabbing and watch how fast they surrender.

Oh, and yes, I have renewed my long-abandoned subscription to *Highlights* magazine. And purchased a big box of condoms.