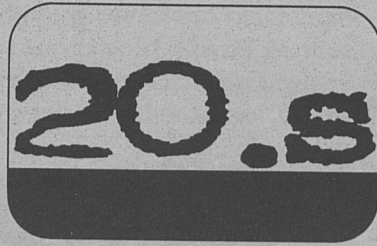


TWENTY SOMETHING
by thomas henning



What's in a Kiss?

There is something so exciting about flirting with someone, or in my case, groups of someones. The way that your eyes meet and lips respond, either with a smile or a slight contortion – I absolutely love it.

If I had my way, I would flirt and kiss people every day of the week; oh, yeah, I said “kiss.” That’s another one of those things that I find intoxicating. I love to kiss (and am told I am quite good at it, but I digress). There is something so... so... ummm... about kissing someone. I am so free when I am kissing a person. I can’t say the same about sex always. Don’t get me wrong; I enjoy sex, but not always as much as I enjoy kissing or flirting with someone. I wonder why.

I only recently have noticed how much of a flirt I can be, and I have to admit that I like it. I like trying the game of it. The idea that you could get that check-out clerk’s eyes to follow you out the door or make a person blush with just a play of words – it’s thrilling, no? The nervous feeling, the excitement of the sexual tension, the agitation when they don’t flirt back – it is all so much fun. I don’t know why more people don’t do it. Sometimes I flirt to sharpen my skills, other times I flirt to see how far the other person will go.

Kissing is the same way for me. There are a few people I am dying to kiss. There is one who winds me up just seeing him

smile that flirty smile. It drives me crazy – shivers crazy; now pumpkins, that is a skilled flirt.

It is also an amazing ego booster. Try it sometime.

time to see how people respond to you – how they look at you, laugh at your jokes, smile at your thoughtful comments. Begin the love affair with your-

Growing up gay, in what I assumed was an all-straight high school, I never got to flirt or explore all those “butterfly feelings.”

Everyone loves attention, maybe not as much as myself, but to some degree. Next time you’re somewhere where you feel the urge to flirt, pick out someone to flirt with, casually and innocently, and see how he or she responds. I don’t mean you should pull a Cherie Tartt and check to see if their “produce” is fresh. I’m just talking about subtle plays of the eyes and lips to see their reaction. Also take

self, that’s what I’m talking about pumpkins. I mean it. I flirt with people because it makes me appreciate myself more.

Now, kissing I have always enjoyed. There is something about that exchange of desire and the sensual nature of the act I have always been fond of. It can be so exhilarating. I have never heard of anyone worrying about the size of his or her tongue, in relation to kissing, or

someone getting too excited. I kiss those I am attracted to because it makes me feel something inside. I want to feel alive always. Lilacs in bloom make me feel alive, moonlit nights make me feel alive, and a man who knows how to use his mouth makes me feel all warm and fuzzy, and that is alive.

All of you who suffer from Catholic guilt may feel compelled to label this behavior. Pumpkins, take your best shot. I don’t apologize for exploring my sexuality. I don’t apologize for exploring who I am and trying to understand myself better, but mostly, I don’t apologize for not hiding in the shadows, afraid of what the mediocrity has to say about my life.

I have many needs, pumpkins, which I am sure comes as no surprise to any of you. I firmly believe we all have the need to be stimulated both mentally and physically in the primal and ethereal sense, and no one should ever have to defend that. Life is too short to feel guilt for who we are and how we think.

Now, pumpkins, let me be clear. I am not saying that I seek external power through flirting and the occasional kiss. It is not validation so much as curiosity. Growing up gay, in what I

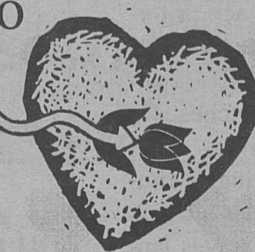
assumed was an all-straight high school, I never got to flirt or explore all those “butterfly feelings.” I went from feast to famine in a NASCAR second. I went from avoiding eye contact to avoiding waking the trick up while I sneaked out the door. My experience is probably somewhere in the middle of unique and common in terms of the gay experience. I guess this is just my way getting to know what excites me, what makes me feel good inside; as Ms. Ciccone says, “I’m not sorry, it’s human nature.”

When Mr. Right come to my door, I will be ready. I will answer that door confident of my needs and my ability to meet his. I will be content in knowing that I have no regrets, that my life has been an amazing experience leading up to this moment. I remind myself, daily, how precious life is and my responsibility to be alive and present in each moment. This is just one way I chose to do it, and between you and me, I learned a lot about people, myself, and the power of both love and lust.

Happy Valentine’s Day, pumpkins, and if any of you are wondering, I prefer white roses, fruit over chocolate, and books over stuffed animals. ▼

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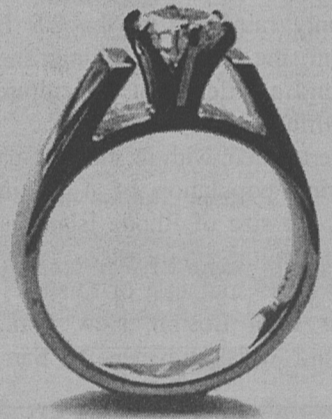
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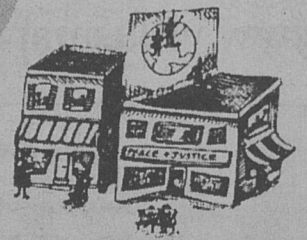
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