

The Sacred Art of Conception

I guess it's not a surprise that Canada Customs would be interested. It's not the kind of package that can slip by too easily; with an 8" x 11" label on one side that reads "Notification For Loading of Dangerous Goods." Shit, I hope not. I guess that is always the fear. I mean, you do your research and ask as many questions as you can, but, in the end you know there's risk that you just might be loading yourself up with dangerous goods. Relax. It's just the dry ice. Packers get nervous around dry ice on aeroplanes, so there you go—just some safety precautions.

But why the interest from Agriculture Canada? Seventy-two hours. That's how long the woman at Federal Express counter said Ag. Canada can hold a package without notification. "Go have a coffee and come back in an hour or so," she says, seeing I'm shaken by the news. We don't have 72 hours.

If they open the package this is what they'll find: A waxed cardboard box filled with dry ice and a white envelope containing instructions for care and use. If they search through the dry ice they'll find a sealed baggie and if they open that sealed baggie they'll find more dry ice and then if they continue searching they'll find three wads of cotton and in the centre of those wads of cotton they will find a plastic vile the size of a bullet with the number 368 written on it in black felt pen and inside that vile they'll find .8cc's of what I believe to be non-infectious human semen.

I wonder what it means for Agriculture Canada to be inspecting human semen for infection. Part of me enjoys the idea. Does Ag. Canada really have that technology at hand? Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, CMV IGC, CMV IGM, HIV antibody, Hepatitis B and C, Ureaplasma/mycoplasma, Tay Sachs, Urinalysis, Semen culture, Chemistry panel, Sickel cell anaemia, I know more about this guy's health than I want to. But if I had known Ag. Canada was going

to be so helpful, I wouldn't have been so careful. I could have put a classified ad out somewhere and then Ag. Canada could have taken care of the rest and saved me the expense.

Have they thought out the implications? If Agriculture Canada is in fact setting up a little laboratory downstairs in the Federal Express office, was this the start of new policy? Were they about to screen all semen entering the country?

I imagine rows on top of rows of men from all over the world warehoused on metal shelving sitting neatly side by side and waiting for their turn for inspection. "Are you bringing any gifts?" The inspector asks. And what of those found to be infectious? Are they denied entry or is that just stamped on their penises so that potential sexual partners are made aware of the risk?

Or perhaps the issue here is that this semen is travelling alone. Perhaps according to Ag. Canada and Canada Customs, semen, like children, must travel accompanied by an adult.

I pray that they read the instructions before they do their inspecting. In bold letters at the top of the page they will see written: "*Do not expose vials to room temperature for more than three to four seconds. A thawed vial that is re-frozen destroys sperm motility.*" This stuff is sensitive. It's also expensive. .8cc's stored and tested at the Sperm Bank of California plus travel cost me three hundred and ninety American dollars.

I have my coffee and imagine things depleting - dry ice and my lover's egg. According to our calculations her egg was ripe at some time around eight o'clock this morning giving us twelve hours to do something about it.

I have to get my story together. I suspect that helping a lesbian couple have a kid wouldn't be a high priority for Federal Express or for Customs Canada. But what if this was an act of love for a dying brother who, out of desperation, travelled to California for some miracle cure. He and his wife wanted desperately to have children and while no one knew exactly how much time he had left, we all knew it wasn't much. Every month was precious so he shipped his semen and missing this shipment could mean his not having the chance to see his child. I wouldn't blurt out the whole story of course, just hint at some tragic family goings-on. And I know that I'm angry and upset enough about what's really going on to produce a lot of tears and apologies all at the same time if necessary.

And it is possible that I'm selling everybody short. Remember how things went at the dry ice factory? A Friday afternoon in August. We had made our order a little early that cycle and we needed to keep the stuff cold for a few days. A line up of people waited for the dry ice they'd need for the beer and ice cream they were taking up to their week-end retreats and when asked what the ice would be needed for I answered "It's for sperm." The three beefy guys behind the counter all stopped what they were doing to look at me.

"It's a long distance relationship but we like to have sex regularly," I smile and I'm thinking "C'mon guys, work with me. Keep it light" Luck was on my side that day. They thought this was a hoot and much more challenging than

ice cream so the three of them converged, and, forming a huddle, we exchanged details about how it was packaged and how long we'd need to keep it frozen and in the end they gave me extra ice at no charge - just in case I needed it - and sent me on my way with a hearty team cheer of "Good luck!" and "Come again!" (Really!)

Okay, here's the plan. It's 10:30. I will walk back to Federal Express. They will hand me my package unopened and by 11:00 the box and I will be sitting in the hallway waiting for my love, and her egg, to come home.