



“I feel so stupid that I don’t know anything about AIDS,” Elizabeth admitted, in between bites of sweet and sour chicken.

Carly shook her head full of blonde hair.

“You aren’t stupid,” she told her newfound friend. “You’re just uninformed, like most people. That’s why I am so open about having AIDS. I know a lot about the virus and I’m willing to answer any questions that you have.”

“There’s no cure for AIDS, right?” Elizabeth asked.

“You’re right. There is no cure for AIDS right now.”

“Well, I heard that if you have AIDS and you have sex with a virgin that you can get cured?”

Carly laughed.

“If it were only that easy,” she sipped her soda. “Not only is it not a cure, but the virgin can be infected by the virus. There are a lot of myths like that floating around. Another myth is that the virus can be spread from sharing food or by mosquitoes. That is completely false.

Elizabeth felt slightly relieved, as the girls had shared an appetizer earlier in the evening.

“I have a question,” Jade suddenly piped in. “Two HIV-positive people can have sex and be safe, correct?”

“Nope. There are actually different versions of the virus and those can be transmitted between the two people. The re-infection can also increase the viral load and treatment for these cases is so difficult because of resistance.”

Jade nodded her head as she agreed. She learned something new every time that she was around Carly and tonight was no different.

“You’re teaching me a lot,” Elizabeth told Carly. “Earlier today, I was skeptical of coming to dinner. I thought that I would get AIDS by just being near you, but Jade explained it to me.”

Carly smiled at Jade, pleased that someone else was spreading the truth about AIDS.

“There are only three ways to get AIDS,” Carly clarified. “You can get AIDS through sexual contact, blood-to-blood contact and from mother-to-child. It is completely safe to be around me and not contract the virus.”

“So, say that you have a child, will they have AIDS?” Elizabeth asked.

“It is possible that they won’t get AIDS. Of course, precautions need to be taken and knowing your HIV status is very important for these precautions to take place.”

“I just have a couple more questions and I promise we can get back to talking about Homecoming,” Elizabeth said. “What was it like for you when you found out that you had AIDS?”

Carly nervously bit her lip, remembering vividly the day that she found out.

“I was terrified, to be honest, but then my doctor assured me that I would not die immediately. He told me that most people live healthily for many years. There are treatments that can extend my life and many people have successfully lived very long lives with the treatments. It is also important for everyone to know their status of their HIV-virus. It is a common misconception that women cannot pass the virus onto men, but it is very possible. Whenever I get into a serious relationship, I will do all the precautions before having sex.”

“Alright, last question... Say that I end up marrying my boyfriend. He doesn't have AIDS and I don't either. We're safe not to use condoms then, right?”

Carly shook her head.

“Sorry, Elizabeth, but that's another myth. One of you might have contracted the virus before getting hitched or the virus might enter your marriage after you say your vows, for various reasons. It is important to be tested in all cases.”

“Thanks for clearing this all up,” Elizabeth said, feeling more confident about her knowledge of AIDS. “Now, let's talk about our dresses. I'm thinking of going for a light pink...”