

The Embarrassing Blush

By Dennis Knight

Like any Catholic school boy who has made it into his seventies, I still blush at the slightest provocation. In fact, chances are good I'll be blushing in the course of making this confession. I don't have control of it. I turn pinkish at a kiss on the cheek, and crimson at a swat on the butt. And a pinch? Lord help me! And that is only when I'm the recipient. God only knows what will happen when I decide to be the perpetrator. I'll admit I've thought about it, and it may happen yet.

In his poem "My Rival," Rudyard Kipling said, "I cannot control my girlish blush, my color comes and goes, I redden to my fingertips, and sometimes to my nose." Charles Darwin described blushing as "... the most peculiar and most human of all expressions." And Mark Twain had a pretty good idea of my own essence when he said, "Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to."

This next quotation comes from a perverted rascal whose very name makes me blush, but I'll say it anyway. The Marquis de Sade avowed, "One is never so dangerous when one has no shame, than when one has grown too old to blush."

The Greek philosopher Diogenes justified the embarrassing spectacle thusly, "Once he saw a youth blushing, and addressed him, 'Courage, my boy; that is the complexion of virtue.'"

Well, that is a lie, and I think old Diogenes knew it. In fact, I know deep down that blushing is much more likely to be the complexion of something quite the opposite of virtue, at least in the flavors they espoused at Catholic school.

I suppose there is counseling available for the affliction, but I am too embarrassed to ask. Articles I have found on the Internet say I may have *erythrophobia*, which is defined as the fear of blushing, or a distressing tendency to blush frequently. In applying that to my own experience, I'll admit, while I do blush like a schoolboy, I do not have a fear of it nor am particularly distressed by blushing. I don't think a session with that psychologist will do me much good.

Maybe, or at least I can hope, it is not such a bad thing at all. In his 1927 book, *Studies in the Psychology of (blush) Sex*, Havelock Ellis wrote there is no doubt the blush is attractive. "The ancient use of rouge testifies to the beauty of the blush." Ellis went on to quote Darwin stating that, in Turkish slave-markets, "...the girls who readily blushed fetched the highest prices."

So am I blushing now? I'm so used to this state, I don't even feel it coming on, and it takes someone else to tell me. Hearing I'm doing it merely reddens the bloom, and when I do begin to sense it, the informant chuckles at my discomfort, my ears get involved, and the blush becomes a royal flush.