Blood Brothers

When Dominic Hamilton-Little lost his Fire Island virginity last summer, he found himself meditating on family, friendship, love and lipo. He'll be smearing the sunscreen this *year, too.*

February 1, 2001 By Dominic Hamilton-Little

To look at the Meat Rack from the resplendent white beach one might wonder how this bucolic stretch of pines and dunes acquired such a name. One afternoon last summer, in these very woods, I found out for myself -- in a scene of unusual depravity.

For the uninitiated, a little geography lesson: Fire Island is a sand bar hugging the southern shore of New York's Long Island, 32 miles long and about a half mile wide, peppered with tiny communities. The Meat Rack is that portion of the isle between two gay-ghettos-in-the-sand: the old-school Cherry Grove and the more rarefied enclave of Fire Island Pines. In the interest of full disclosure I must state that I am, indubitably, a Pines queen.

I did not know this till recently. I had long dismissed Fire Island as a snobbish milieu of shallow faggotry. But having declared that 2000 would be my year of saying Yes! to customs I'd derided for years -- sunbathing, working out and, naturally, inhabiting a Fire Island share -- I decided to see what all the fuss was about. Amid the extraordinary beauty of the island, where nearly tame deer wander the same scented groves that nearly tame men roam in fashionable undress -- I had the happiest summer of my life. This was due to the fact that up until then I had never felt I belonged to that nebulous "brotherhood of gay men"; suddenly last summer I enjoyed a level of peer acceptance I had never dare hope for. I lived with a tribe that enjoyed one another enormously. We would dine *en famille* each evening after having spent the day playing Kadima on the beach, kayaking in the ocean or simply swimming and sunning. Four of the 12 men in our house were HIV positive; higher than average, but about right for the Pines. The latest look of AIDS -- lipodystrophy -- is, of course, an integral part of the landscape. Barely contained by Raymond Dragon bikinis, tanned and handsome men with sunken cheeks and hollow eyes, big barrel chests and thin, veiny legs bear witness to the myriad deformations of antiretroviral side effects. In moments of gallows humor whilst watching the beach parade, my housemates and I joined in playing Spot the Queen of HAART.

Twenty years after Larry Kramer immortalized it in *Faggots* -- and long since the best sex went from being hot to being safe, and back again, the place to go and be a satyr is still the Meat Rack. And it would be dishonest to speak of this perfect summer without mentioning its one dark stain. Not far from a small bridge built and dedicated "to all cocksuckers," I found myself happily fellating a fella. To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, "a blow job is a blow job is a blow job," so I shall not

go into detail, except to say that suddenly this was no longer simply skilled fellatio. In abandon, my partner thrust his pelvis forward as he gripped my head, making me choke and causing a vast stream of blood to shoot from my right nostril. A crimson jet exploded on his lower abdomen. Panicking, he pulled away as I, in total mortification, stanched the flow and wiped him clean.

“What’s that?” he said. His eyes -- white-rimmed in fear -- said more.

“Don’t worry. It came out of my nose, not my mouth.”

“What the hell’s wrong with your nose?”

“Too much cocaine, darling.”

He turned and disappeared into the leaves and branches, and I tried to stop giggling at my Tallulah-esque retort and raw embarrassment. Even as the sight of the scarlet life-liquid terrified this man far more than semen, its untoward appearance suddenly threw aspects of my life that my mother would hardly approve of -- anonymous sex and drug use -- into sharp relief, with an acute reminder that HIV is a sexually transmitted disease. Shame immediately turned me into a child lost in the woods. With the appearance of the vermilion juice I was as naked psychically there in the Meat Rack as I was physically. I was reminded that I am damaged goods, a fact I usually manage to gloss over with stylish turns of phrase.

I reflected on this world in which I, nose a-bleeding, was taking care of a stranger’s fear, while he seemed oblivious to the fact that, seconds before, he had been ramming away in an anonymous encounter whose rules preclude basic introductions, let alone discussions about sero-stats. Denial is so much a part of life. Not just for me, apparently -- but for this Pines queen as well.

Moments later another faun stopped in front of me and dropped his trunks, and I went back to the business of the day.

See you on the ferry in May!

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