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Spririt of '76 at 54

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Spirit of '76 at 54

Bodies glistening with desire pulsate to the bass fertility drums. Golden idols inlaid with precious and semiprecious stones adorn their limbs while elaborate ceremonial gowns and robes form a swirling kaleidoscope of colors. Occasionally, a young woman is lifted above the mass as if in sacrifice to the gods, longlegged and bare breasted, head thrown back in abandonment, only to be welcomed back into the ocean of humanity below. Is this the decadence Moses saw on his descent from the Mount? It's another Saturday night at Studio 54.

Dom Perignon flows, silver spoons appear and disappear into a multitude of Halstons, Calvins and St. Laurents. High-cheekboned women prowl, hoping to be discovered. Young men rub against other men, as well as their Midwest morals, searching for a break. Surrounding the dance floor are dark, cushioned areas where the ballet "Favors" is constantly being choreographed and revised. The curious, the lonely, select tourists, youthful adventurers all blend to make one of America's most notorious nightclubs.

Amidst this flashing background I find my attention drawn to an exquisite young man in his twenties. He appears as if he stepped out of the glossy pages of Gentlemen's Quarterly, except there's no questioning his masculinity.

He stands head and shoulders above me. Broad shoulders taper into a narrow waist. Long legs meet at trim buttocks, snugly hugged by Jordache. Surely Michelangelo would have chiseled his symmetry.

Flashing colored lights give me teasing glimpses of face, and as he turns toward me I am jolted. The electricity is tangible. Brown, almost black, eyes meet mine. I see approval subtly register in his glance as he scans my body. His eyes leave me and continue to survey the rest of the crowd.

His presence is incongruous. Here is a man who knows who he is and what

he wants. It is inconceivable to imagine him allowing himself to be bartered over like fresh meat in a butcher shop. In this sea of lemmings, he is a lion. Men and women alike are drawn to him, so many followers who sense a leader.

With amusement he toys with his admirers, tolerating the men, somewhat receptive of the women. Occasionally, he allows himself a smile. He possesses the smile of a five-year-old boy; the display of innocence is surprising. A man, a boy--women's hearts overflow with maternal instinct. Here is a Herculean man who seems to need to be mothered, a fantasy so many women harbor deep in the recesses of their sexuality.

Men and women pass business cards to him. He turns down offers, chances that the others hope for, with a sarcastic smile. He deplores the "Beautiful People."

The attraction grows. Men and women alike strut before him, preening themselves like so many peacocks. Eventually he chooses one of the most beautiful of the women. They begin to dance.

He is liquid, completing the music, so aware of his body yet so comfortable. His partner ceases to exist. He has taken an imaginary lover. Eyes half shut, he begins to sweat. Slowly he opens his shirt and lets it slip to the floor. He knows that he is being adored. He laughs at his admirers; he has no respect for their weakness.

The dance ends. His shirt seems to magically appear and he carelessly flings it over one shoulder. Walking through the crowd he acknowledges the many compliments with a nod, a smile. Occasionally he reaches out and playfully touches a particularly lovely woman on the nose, gracing her with the full impact of his childlike smile.

People move aside as he makes his way to the door. I realize he is leaving and try to follow. I am fascinated and long for more clues to his identity. I make my way outside breathlessly. Cabbies wait for passengers, a bag lady scuffles by asking for change, my breath forms white clouds in the cold wet air, and he is nowhere in sight. As quickly as he arrived, he disappears without a trace.

Once again I join the people inside. The heat of the club assaults me, and I pause, trying to catch my breath. My eyes scan the crowd, the users, the puppets, the people who are lost, looking for themselves and each other, never satisfied, living a glossy, superficial existence.

So strange to have seen a man of such strength in a place of such weakness. A line from a movie keeps running through my head, ". . . he allows himself to be adored, but never loved."

I begin to dance.