



The Beauty of Men

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Lark's mother has been paralyzed for twelve years. On weekends she stays with him; during the week, he visits the nursing home, where she can do nothing but wait for him to arrive. He was used to an endless round of excitement in the Manhattan demimonde. Homosexual adventures were everyday occurrences. Opportunities in provincial, intolerant North Florida are rare, risky, and generally unsatisfying.

Not only that, but in twelve short years he has become an "aging queen." Younger gay men have no interest in him, while he has no real interest in the older gay men he can still attract. Nevertheless, when he goes for his health check-up he confesses that he has managed to have twenty-four sexual encounters with ten different partners in the past year.

The only man who excites Lark is Becker, a handsome, suntanned construction worker with whom he spent one memorable evening. Lark spies on the younger man and frequents gay bars where he hopes to encounter him. Becker, who is raising a teenage daughter and leading an outwardly "straight" life, finally seems to sentence his would-be lover to permanent solitude when he confronts him and says, "I've about had it. You've got to leave me alone."

Throughout this intensely introspective novel, Lark keeps remembering friends and lovers who have died horribly of "the plague"—acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). He realizes he would probably be dead himself if he had not been forced to move to Florida. When his mother dies he does not feel liberated; his Manhattan has turned into "a vast cemetery," while the local homosexual underground is a pitiful shadow of the sophisticated, cosmopolitan world he knew. He feels that his chosen lifestyle has condemned him to loneliness, guilt, anxiety, sorrow, and bittersweet memories.

Holleran's critically acclaimed novels, *DANCER FROM THE DANCE* (1978) and *NIGHTS IN ARUBA* (1983), have become classics of the exponentially proliferating gay literature. *THE BEAUTY OF MEN*, his third novel, is so unremittingly plaintive and claustrophobic that it is only saved by the author's admirable candor and often remarkably beautiful prose.

Sources for Further Study

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