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Money Where Your Mouth Is

Vote with your ballot, your feet and your cash

Kennedy will not be voting. No, I'm not talking about JFK, or Democratic party lion Ted Kennedy, or even queer boy Bobby Kennedy. I'm talking about a youngish Portland chap named, simply, "Kennedy." He's a new stripper at Silverado.

You probably haven't heard of him, either; I met him only last weekend while out with a few friends to decompress from a depressingly dull opera performance. Long Islands in hand, we riffed about the tacky costumes onstage earlier that night and the variety of man-drag outfits around us right there in the bar. Then—and this sort of thing only happens at Silverado—a chiseled dude in bulging red briefs and sneakers suddenly materialized at our table.

"Hey guys, how's it goin'?" he said with a goobery grin. "I'm Kennedy," and he extended his paw for a firm handshake. I studied Kennedy's impressively tattooed torso with just the slightest hint of paunch, and considered the voice speaking from that lucrative body—lazy and colloquial, puppy-dog friendly, measuredly masculine. No bones about it: Kennedy was definitely playing for Team Het.

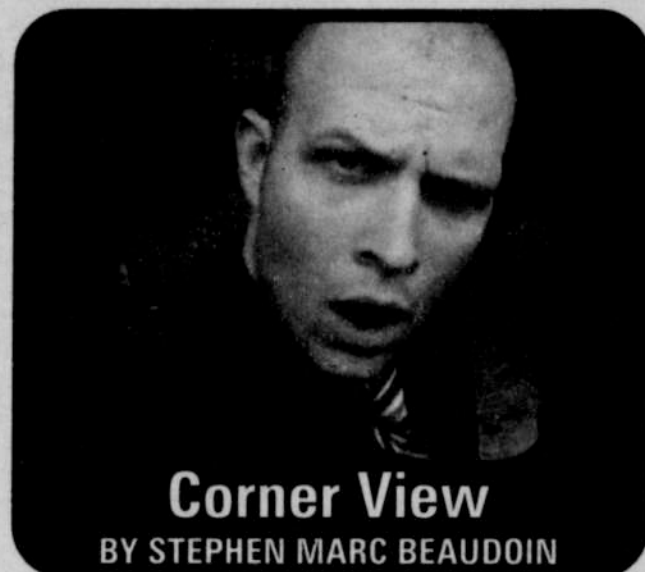
After he sidled up for a chat, I offered to buy him a drink; he asked for a Red Bull, sugar-free. I brought it back, and he started to pour out his life story between sips.

Kennedy said he'd just gotten back to the States from a tour of duty in Afghanistan as a Marine—he said he'd been in the service since just after high school, and has the tats ("Death before honor" in thick gothic script across his lats) to prove it.

He expressed a real disdain for "civilian life" ("It just doesn't make any sense") and seemed himself a little surprised by his current post-service career. "I don't make anything on disability," he said. I asked what made him eligible for disability benefits—he showed me a scar on his right hand, where he'd been hit by sniper fire. "It messed up the tendons and stuff," he said.

"A lot of guys here ask me if I killed anyone while I was over there," Kennedy said, eyes scanning the crowd, hands tugging on his briefs. "I say it's none of your fucking business what I did over there." He turns and looks at me square in the face: "Why is it anyone's business?"

I didn't have an answer, but was eager to change the subject. "So since you just got back to the States, did you cast your primary ballot overseas, or..." and he cut me off. "Hell no!" He slammed down his Red Bull and started ranting on politics and patriotism: Nobody understands him, government is corrupt, war is hell, and this, he said, is his only option left to make some extra cash. He exploits his war-chiseled heterosexual



Corner View

BY STEPHEN MARC BEAUDOIN

body to intoxicated fags for five-spots.

A few nights later, same place, and I spot Kennedy again as he mounts the Silverado mainstage. He does that snaky undulating torso dance they teach all the strippers there, and grinds his crotch against the upstage wall, pulling down his briefs to expose some ass. He looks pretty polished, if a little overeager.

"I wanna see his cock," a new friend of mine blurts out, then approaches Kennedy to drop trou for a tip. Kennedy, all nervous smiles, obliges; the friend returns, looking satisfied. "Yeah," the friend says, "it was worth a buck."

Was it? As much as I admired Kennedy—both his wrenching personal story and his impressive

personal physique—I wondered exactly how helpful I would be to him by stocking his shorts with tips. I also found something about it to be...ironic...contrary.

Nobody understands him, government is corrupt, war is hell, and this, he said, is his only option left to make some extra cash. He exploits his war-chiseled heterosexual body to intoxicated fags for five-spots.

I do not support the raging wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I do not feel young American men are best served in their development as members of a humane and civilized society by being shipped off to armed services in their most fragile maturing years.

From many reports, these young men coming back into "civilian life" are having much the same shock of experience as Kennedy, struggling to cope, grasping at straws. Many share his distrust of government.

A major primary election is upon us, in case you've missed that. Voting is on the mind, and I hope you've already mailed in or dropped off your primary ballot. But gays have other ways to vote—with our bank accounts and wallets, with our voices and feet.

Kennedy, you're a hot man and a good guy. I hope that you're able to adjust to civilian life and that you make a full recovery from your injuries. But much as I like to window shop, I won't be buying your goods. 10

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