

mately back to town, or you can turn left and ride out to Race Point.

RACE POINT

The beach at Race Point is, to my mind, superior to the one at Herring Cove, and I, who enjoy a beach full of gay men, have often wished my brothers had elected to colonize Race Point instead. Its sole disadvantage is the fact that it is several miles from town, and you can get there only on a bicycle or in a car. If you drive, you may very well find the parking lot full by ten A.M. on a summer day.

The beach at Race Point arcs north to northwest. It is more directly canted toward the open ocean than the one at Herring Cove, and so the water there is prone to do something more exciting than just splash quietly up against the sand. It has actual waves, though you'd have to go farther still, to the beaches of Truro and Wellfleet, before encountering anything that could be called surf. To get to the beach, you lope down a bank of dunes, on which patches of low grass have drawn windblown circles around themselves in the sand. The beach is broad and generous, at all tides, and not nearly so strewn with stones. Being less accessible, it is never as crowded as the beach at Herring Cove, and the people who go there are much more a mixed bag. You'll find yourself among tourist families, townies with or without families, and the occasional renegade gay man or lesbian. It was at Race Point, several years ago, that we encountered a lesson in the mutability of desire, courtesy of Uncle Donald.

Kenny and I had gone with our friend Melanie to Race Point on an August afternoon (Melanie has a car) and put down our towels near a small family gathering. Beaches are, of course, perfect sites for eavesdropping, and as we lay in the sun, we quickly discerned the following about our neighbors. They were a handsome, dark-haired Englishwoman, her American husband, their five-year-old son, and the woman's gay younger brother, Donald. We knew his name was Donald because the little boy, transported by love, said "Uncle Donald" whenever it was called for and sometimes when it was not. Uncle Donald was a lithe man in his early thirties, wearing blue Speedos. He was wonderful with the child. They played together in the water, played in the sand; Uncle Donald was patient if ironic about the child's endless assertion of suddenly devised games with arcane and elaborate rules. When Uncle Donald reached his limit, they lay down together on his towel. The boy announced that Uncle Donald was his mattress, sprawled on top of him, and fell asleep. Uncle Donald teased his sister, who teased him back. The phrase "looking for love in all the wrong places" was mentioned. In repose, with a slumbering child on his stomach, Donald might have been carved from pale pink marble. His lean, compact body was hairless except for two light-brown tufts in his armpits. His face, in profile, was angular, with a potent brow and a firm jut of chin. Kenny and I agreed, in whispers, that we wanted him and wanted, with roughly equivalent ardor, to *be* him.

Melanie declared her willingness to give up women, at least for a while. Donald was wry and kind; innocently virtuous the way a prince might be if princes ever managed to live unashamedly among fountains and marbled halls, so adored that they returned adoration automatically, as a matter of course, because they had known nothing else.

Less than an hour later the little extended family prepared to leave. We watched, surreptitiously, as Uncle Donald woke the child, set him on his feet again, stroked his hair. We watched then as Donald put on baggy chinos and a polo shirt, as he plopped a dramatically unflattering canvas hat on his head. Standing, in clothes, he slouched. They departed, with the child scampering and cavorting around the object of his affections, who had by then transformed himself into a citizen in poly-blends; a regular guy, unenchanted, with ordinary features (we saw, once he was dressed, that he in fact had a pleasant but unremarkable face, with too much chin for its modest nose and too much forehead for its close-set eyes); someone you wouldn't glance at twice on the street. He went off (I imagine) to join the multitude of others cruising the streets or nursing beers in the semidark at the edges of dance floors; off to hope and wish and wonder; to admire the flashier guys dancing shirtless or laughing heedlessly with their packs of friends; to try his luck along with everybody else who was out there, the whole wistful, unruly crew, looking for love in all the wrong places.