Naked Curiosity: Flexing Our Muscles



dennis scott-bush

eel my peccoral." It was an unexpected request to hear from across the crowded locker room.

Jaime, one of my gym buddies, hasn't learned much English, since he's been in this country. He also hasn't learned that asking me to feel his "peccoral" raises an eyebrow or two (and, perhaps, perks up a couple peccorals, as well). Like many of the Latino men who work out at my gym, Jaime lives in a rather insulated world. His co-workers speak only Spanish, he listens to Spanish-language radio and TV, and his girlfriend speaks his mother tongue, too. So, understandably, his use and pronunciation of words in English suffers.

Jaime and I bonded quickly, as we trundled on the treadmills. He told me he wanted to get "more skinny" around his mid-section but didn't want to lose his muscles in the dieting process. He joked that, for me to stay so thin, my wife must not feed me. I clarified the gender of my spouse and, after a moment to process the information, he smiled and remarked, "Different people have different lives." And different people have different peccorals.

Doing manual labor, day after day, has given Jaime a lot of strength. But, because he favors his dominant hand, he's concerned that his right pec will be larger than his left and that the same size differential will also be true for his right and left arms. So, without asking whether I was interested in the position, Jaime appointed me arbiter of muscle comparison. My responsibilities include feeling pecs, biceps, triceps and, yes, gluts, in an effort to guard against the dreaded muscular lopsidedness.

Jaime doesn't think this is even the slightest bit

unusual. Sometimes, he asks me to measure his muscles against those of his friends. They stand around the locker room, posing and flexing for me, in their briefs. It's like the beginning of a scene from a Kristen Bjorn porn flick. Except that Jaime and his friends are all straight. No, not pretending to be straight or a few cervezas away from a blowjob. Really straight. My never-beenwrong gaydar confirms their heterosexuality.

Jaime's friends and I aren't buddies, though. They keep to themselves for the most part. Aside from the occasional request for translaHe assured me that, if I wanted him to, he would put a stop to the use of the nickname. Chivalry's not dead. And, if I'm vigilant, it won't be lopsided either.

Last week, I got an email from an acquaintance, Warren, who told me that he'd run into some trouble, while out for the evening with five of his friends. The group was leaving a gay bar, when a young man came up and started taunting them. The miscreant shouted an epithet and pushed Warren.

Buckling under the force of the shove, Warren tripped and landed on the sidewalk. All five of his friends ran away. They scattered like leaves in the wind. There had been five of them and one basher.

Some odds. Some friends.

Jaime had been willing to confront his friends on my behalf. He didn't have to come and tell me about the nickname, in the first place.

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tion assistance, they are interested only in my opinion of the size, shape and general lopsidedness of their muscles. A few weeks ago, some of Jaime's friends were using the punching bags near where I was stretching in the aerobics room. They watched, as I gradually slid into a split. One of them gasped quite loudly, then, giggled. They pointed and muttered among them-

Now, Jaime's friends have a name for me.

Later that afternoon, while I was on the StairMaster, Jaime approached me like a little Catholic boy heading into the confessional.

"My friends call you a name," he admitted, in Spanish. "They say you are Elastic Man."

I laughed. Jaime was relieved. He was afraid I'd be offended.

He could have let it slide, without worrying how I'd feel. But he was looking out for

With the new year upon us, I've been thinking a lot about Jaime. And not just when he's stripped down to his skivvies and asking me to feel his firmness.

We need to look out for each other more. We need to care what happens to those folks who get pushed aside and lost in the shuffle. It's time to develop the kind of compassionate and protective emotional muscles that Jaime has in abundance. Let's flex those muscles.

Dennis Scott-Bush has always been curious - naked and otherwise. His work appears in publications throughout the country. Direct e-mail to: NakedCuriosity@aol.com.

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