



Beauty and The Beasts



## Beauty & The Beasts

by Bret Gilliam

One of my dearest friends (and a great ambassador for diving) recently celebrated a landmark birthday. Lauren Hutton, famed actress and the original supermodel, marked her 60th birthday on November 17, 2003. We were introduced back in January 1998 when she visited me in Maine during a savage ice storm that closed airports, highways, and paralyzed the Northeast for almost a week. She had originally planned to stay a few days at my island house before accompanying me to Fiji for a three-week diving trip but the ice storm left her stranded over the Super Bowl weekend.

I explained that I traditionally hosted a Super Bowl party for about 20 male friends who would begin showing up in the early afternoon and the festivities wouldn't break up before midnight or so. My tone was apologetic because Lauren had exactly zero interest in football and I knew she'd rather have spent the time exploring the beautiful snowy Maine woods around the island. But she surprised me by saying, "Then we'll have to make sure

that we start cooking early. Get me to the grocery store that morning and I'll do dinner and snacks for you guys."

I protested that I couldn't possibly ask her to cook for 20 strangers but she was adamant. So off to the local supermarket we went and I followed the blonde dervish as she organized about five shopping carts streaming in her wake while signing a few autographs for local Mainers, who couldn't quite believe that the actress was actually squeezing melons and directing the butcher in cutting the racks of ribs in their local Shop & Save.

Returning to the house, she made a quick change into a pair of black tights and one of my flannel L.L. Bean shirts and took over the kitchen. The first guest arrived around 3:00 and stuck his head into the kitchen to grab a beer before heading for the home theater where the pre-game show was cranking. After a cursory hello to the stranger busied over the stove, he made it halfway across the house before stopping dead in his tracks to ponder the reality he had just entered.

I found him staring back toward the kitchen and pointed him toward the TV room. He shuffled forward but turned to me shaking his head to say, "I'll tell you the kind of day I'm having. I thought I saw Lauren Hutton making dinner in your kitchen when I walked in."

"Yeah, you're screwed up all right," I replied. "Have a beer and you'll be okay."

It was like that all day as a score of football fanatics stormed into my house, made a left turn into the kitchen for a drink and then headed for the game. Most stopped halfway and did a double take before hurrying onward as the kickoff neared. It wasn't until halftime, when Lauren appeared to announce that dinner was served, that my guests finally made the connection.

It was as close to the ultimate male fantasy as they would get: The Super Bowl on a 75-inch HD color monitor, unlimited adult beverages, and Lauren Hutton was personally serving dinner.

She circulated among the guys chatting them up, getting drinks, telling a few stories and expressing her joy for diving. It was a captivating performance that surpassed the game itself. She seamlessly went from celebrity goddess to everyone's newest best friend as the

Hutton and hammers at Cocos



afternoon turned into late evening.

Finally, as the last guest was being pointed to the door he couldn't resist tossing a dig her way. "You know, Lauren, last year Bret had Madonna over to cook Mexican food for the game and she's a better cook than you are!"

Without missing a beat, she countered, "Maybe, but can she dive Cocos on a rebreather?"

Since that delightful evening nearly six years ago, Lauren has become one of my closest and most valued friends. We've been diving all over the world together and she's been a frequent return visitor to my Maine houses where she never fails to charm other friends who marvel at her lack of pretense and warmth to strangers.

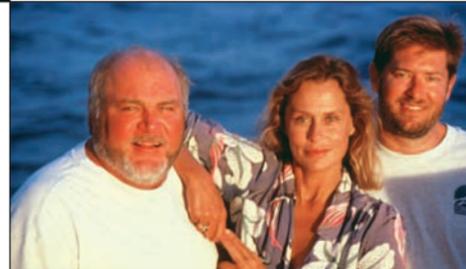
Back in the summer of 1998, Lauren joined Fred Garth and me for a month in Costa Rica aboard the *Sea Hunter* diving the phenomenal sites of Cocos Island. She made friends with mantas, hammerheads, and even a passing whale shark as she reveled in using a rebreather at one of the world's best sites.

Diving has been a passion for her since 1965 when introduced to the then fledgling sport for the first time in Cozumel. "Diving was for fringe

lunatics according to everyone I knew... so of course, I fit right in!" she laughs.

Hutton has always done it her way, on her own terms. Diving was no exception. "That first time was a revelation for me. I remember being fascinated by the innocent wonder and sheer joy in life that my adolescent godchildren found in everyday growing-up experiences. I found that in diving."

She survived a close call with death in October 2000 when she crashed her motorcycle while riding in a charity event. A year of tough convalescence and rehab left her even more determined to resume diving and her active lifestyle. She's also made a commitment to promoting diving at every opportunity in her interviews, magazine articles and public appearances. She's a staunch conservationist and a generous donor to specific causes. A few years back when we visited an isolated village in Fiji, she quietly arranged funding for



Gilliam, Hutton and Garth aboard Sea Hunter

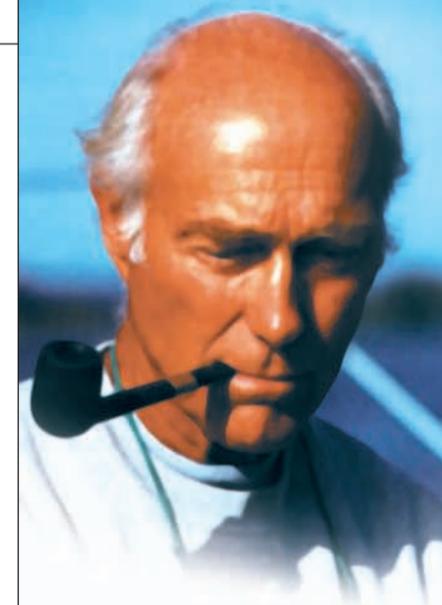
a new home for the elderly.

She's back diving again and will join the 2004 *Fathoms* trip to Indonesia's Komodo Islands as well as several of our future trips. Diving becomes her; at 60 she can still pass for less than half her age. NBC's *Today Show* had her on for an interview on her birthday. She told Katie Couric, "Diving makes me feel alive - it's a precious gift and I'm happy to be an ambassador for the sport!"

The *Today Show* set surrounded her with my photos of her diving in various venues, and as she championed the sport, she sent me a wave and wink across the airwaves.

I'm convinced that there must be a *Dorian Gray*-like portrait of her aging in a hidden-away closet.

Happy Birthday, Lauren! 🎂



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