

A Depressive In New York

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Please note, this work includes content related to depression and substance abuse.

In March 2024, I failed the delicate operation of firing someone without breaking up with them. That makes me sound bad, but a professional and romantic relationship began simultaneously like twins in the womb. I was helping him become a personal trainer, and he was sending me shirtless videos about how much he loved me and what a stud I would be/already was.

In the case of real twins sharing a womb, the death of one would sustain the other. I just spent the following months heartbroken and wearing a gold nose ring he got me. He emphasized his ring was silver and mine was gold. That was the closest thing to selflessness he ever did. I continued a friendship with him, but I knew it was terminal.

He was the kind of person who could never accept that he was wrong, so things between us could never be right. Like the two weeks of fake kindness, the gold soon wore off, and we had another fight. I had coffee with my father the following week, and he suggested I go on a trip. Summer was just about to start, and without any rigid obligations, I gave it some thought.

I am rich but don't like or hate myself enough to flaunt it. I can do whatever I want in theory only because I don't want anything too crazy most of the time. I could, however, go anywhere in the world. Inspired by a clip in *Family Guy* where Peter recreated a sitcom opening of a show called *That Girl*, I chose New York.

I booked a hotel, got tickets, and was depressed for another month and a half. This paints a bleak picture but I was excited. I just don't like to think about trips until I am on them. I also don't want to fight depression. I much prefer feeling bad to the false hope brought on by the small breaks of a depressive episode.

When the day finally came my plane lowered itself into the overcast New York sky. After getting my hotel room and going for a walk, I decided the whole trip was a bad idea. It could have been the weather or exhaustion, but I decided it was my hotel room. I suspected my room was depressing but didn't like the idea I was that spoiled.

The man at the front desk offered me an upgrade for an extra hundred a night. I turned it down because when a trip is done right a room is just a hub. All the same, I entered the room with a *FOMO* mentality. The room was oddly shaped and looked out onto another building, but it was also just off Times Square. The truth was simple and redundant. I was depressed because I was depressed.

Like a petulant bald teenager, I sulked through a big city under a gray sky. Trash blew softly in the wind and steam from underground merged with the wet dust of construction. If I had kept my bad mood to myself I might even look back on the experience as poetic. Instead a very nice woman offered me free entry to a strip club.

I don't like women sexually but she didn't need

that yelled at her. If I was a better liar I could blame being psyched up. My Mom lived in New York when the whole city was a Charles Bronson movie. She told me the big city demands a shell. The woman's reaction broke my heart. There was no poetry to that walk.

I had texted as much to my best friend earlier. He had been screwed out of a master's degree earlier in the spring. Despite this I for some reason felt comfortable bitching to him about my vacation. He compassionately told me I was a neurotic depressive set to ruin a good time by seeking a perfect experience. I agreed and had dinner at a place just outside my hotel.

Famous for their breakfasts and open for lunch and dinner I had no trouble getting a table at a diner called Jr's. I say nice dinner in reference to my demeanor, the food was mid and I ordered too much of it. I chatted with my waiter and smiled, and he asked where I was from and what brought him to New York. Though I didn't realize it until much later that dinner was the first time I had really opened up in a while.

The following morning I woke up surprisingly well for someone who ate a full rack of ribs, fries, and a quarter of a chicken. All the hostility I had previously ascribed to my hotel room was gone. The light of a clear lilac dawn shone through my window. I took an ice-cold shower, put on my golden nose ring, and left my hotel room.

There was a gym on my room's floor. I was greeted by the warring of twenty ellipticals that always seemed to be occupied greeted me as I stepped out of my hotel room. I thought about hitting the gym but ultimately decided against it. I had considered going to a gay bar and if I did I'd rather go with a gym pump.

If I am going to talk to guys I need my pecs big enough to distract them from the fact I was homeschooled. My lack of social skills, confidence,

and social confidence meant I had never gone to a bar to socialize. Bars were however nighttime thing and it seemed I woke up faster than the city that never sleeps.

Time Square was mine that morning and a couple of other people's. Since nothing was open I just walked around listened to music and scouted out some places. I walked past a huge sign depicting a Ru Paul drag show special called *Drag Saves the World*. I texted my sister about it and paid no more attention to it. I had started to take my friend's advice and just let things happen.

I said earlier I don't like to plan trips. I went to New York because you really can just aimlessly wander around there and have a good time. I had however not applied my own rule to the trip. I was planning to be happy and that's what I had wrong. In Chinese philosophy, there is an idea called *Wu Wei*. The idea is that you should not paddle against the stream. In more modern vernacular I needed to *just vibe*.

The day as it unfolded was perfect, I got a Lego piranha plant, and cool new clothes from a place my new personal trainer suggested. Later I got lost because Google maps sucked and found a great doughnut shop. I ended the afternoon with Chinese food, because of *Wu Wei*. Yes I travel to places inspired by a Family Guy and eat lunch based on whose philosophy suits me that day.

I collapsed into my cozy hotel bed later that afternoon. The clothing bags on my desk and suitcase on my couch made me feel at home. I started watching more Family Guy content with the idea I had full day. I planned to get room service and start fresh tomorrow. Then my friend texted me.

To my disappointment, he challenged me on if I was going to a gay bar. I had told him I wanted to a week earlier it seemed. Now I told him I was too tired. I had also previously been to the doctor for my annual and was not ready to give up being

empirically HIV-negative just yet.

My friend felt that outlook was internally homophobic. I responded that I merely had a utilitarian view of being gay. He said that was more internal homophobia. I started Googling gay bars in New York. I mostly did this because I felt like I owed it to my bro.

I had originally looked at a place called *Verse* offering reservations. Feeling this was done to keep men like myself out I looked elsewhere. Five miles from my hotel was a place called *Boxers*. Reviews said all the servers were stuck-up jocks in their underwear who ignored customers. Ever the dyslexic and often the optimist I read what mattered.

The bar was nice but not really my vibe. It was a place where people went with their friends rather than to make friends. I don't know why/how I realized that. After leaving *Boxers*, I got a video text from my ex apologizing for being hostile a small fight we recently had.

He wanted money, and I wanted to know why. He in turn felt I needed to know I was an autistic loser and the backbone of our time together was pity. I accepted his apology and applied it to all the mean things he ever did. I did this because I am a dumb ass and he wasn't wearing a shirt in the apology video. So you see it's not entirely my fault. I did eventually stop talking to him but that's not this story.

Emboldened by booze and hearing from my ex I went to *Verse*. The bar was tucked away among other businesses and lots of trees. Before stepping in, I saw a fried seafood place with a great view of some trees. If *Verse* weren't my thing, I would eat a giant plate of fried shrimp. It was a beautiful, picturesque scene of the city at dusk.

Couples, families, and friends eat and drink in the cool evening air. A gentle wind rattled through verdant trees and rolled a McDonald's cup down the street. Cars passed in no real hurry, or at least

resigned themselves to the traffic. Inside I saw something more beautiful than a marriage of industry and nature.

I saw an open chair at the bar. Sitting down I noticed they were projecting the Ru Paul special I had seen advertised. Wow, I was watching Ru Paul in a New York gay bar. I got out my phone to relay as much to my friend but decided to wait. I wasn't doing this for him anymore.

I had a nice conversation with an old French couple and had a huge plate of tater tots and my second evening drink. While I watched the drag special I pretended I had a favorite as I talked to other guys. Ironically I did something similar as a kid with sports because I didn't want to seem gay. It seems the more things change the more they stay the same.

I tried to order from a specific red-haired bar-hand who I deduced might have found me physically attractive. I usually dismiss anything flirty from servers. I am awkward naive and pathetic, but not that awkward naive, and pathetic. The bartender didn't meet my smile with anything playful though. He laughed bit his lip, and had to turn away. That's authentic!

It might have been the travel-sized sunscreen bottle I kept in my pocket but a second redhead spotted me. He was concerningly drunk and body hair burst from the back and front of a white dress shirt. He asked me if I wanted to talk to his date while he peed. Intrigued by my situation I agreed.

Sober and cute I decided I did want to talk to this guy. He asked me where I was from and then complained about the date he was on. As he spoke with me he enunciated his points by digging the back of his finger into my left pec. Had I had any self-respect or confidence I would have mentioned it hurt or said something cool. Instead, I just smiled to myself thinking *the gargoyles has landed*.

The plastered ginger guy returned and we all

left the bar into the now dark New York streets. The cool wind carried the din of people's passing conversation. I was forced to ask what I was doing in the sobering silence. I never imagined the opportunity to steal someone's date would be presented to me.

This reflection was thankfully stopped when after a few blocks, the drunk guy loudly pouted "I want a snack to go to another bar." You need to want a cookie to enter the claustrophobic aesthetic of an *Insomnia Cookie*, so I stayed outside with the date. We talked about our lives and he told me he was Korean. For privacy I will refer to his as Snowball due to the heavy amount of pale foundation he wore. My new friend looked for another bar on his phone and I returned to asking myself what I was doing.

Drunk on my luck and alcohol I can only barely remember the third bar, mostly because I was only there for a few seconds. The bouncer introduced us to his place of work with a warning.

"Keep your eyes on your drinks and hands on your wallets at all times." Upon entering I immediately lost sight of both men.

Blaring Rihanna vibrated the bar floor. I planned to use the bathroom and call it a night. I was close enough to my hotel and had a good story. Stepping out into the dark much seedier than I remembered, streets of New York I saw Snowball alone on his phone. He was texting an ex to save him from his bad date and invited me to tag along.

Agreeing to wait for the new second wheel of the evening he and I talked again. He never said exactly what he did but he mentioned he would leave the job if it didn't sever his coke connections. I mentioned I was going to school to become a therapist. He asked if I thought pedophiles were needlessly stigmatized.

The silent disappointment my answer created gave me the time to remember we had just

abandoned *Ginger Schnapps*. To be fair I don't think I could have done anything. Which is convenient because I didn't. Once the ex, a guy I will call John arrived we just disembarked.

The fourth bar of the evening was just across the street from *Verse*. I didn't catch the name but it looked like they sold margaritas. They didn't, but the Texan in me associates patios and blackeyed peas with frozen margaritas. It was an integrated place, perhaps what you would call a bisexual bar.

My new friends and I handed our IDs to the platonic ideal of a bouncer. He was seven foot something and fat-jacked. On my first full day in New York, I met the Kingpin from Spiderman. Eat your heart out other people!

The bartender got John and Snowball each a beer. Weeny I am I just asked for water and we all went to a table. Despite insisting I was a lightweight it seemed I was being rude not ordering more booze with my new friends. I walked to the bar and ordered a beer I could nurse.

When I returned Snow was doing *something* to John under the table.

Apparently noticing this was like not getting a beer, rude. I sipped my drink and talked more about my experience in New York. They suggested places I could go and the night retired into a pleasant evening with new friends. When I was too tired to have fun, I thanked them for the great night and we all exchanged Instagrams.

I walked back to my hotel with a smile on my face. A thousand little conversation snippets carried on that clear night. I was happy to share this night with so many people and excited about what tomorrow and the rest of my life could hold. I knew what I felt that night was not respite but the end of a depressive episode.

The End