

# On being friendly in bars

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P.S. I can't do much to repay you but here is a sort of souvenir of today for you.»

«Run out to the airport» indeed, I thought — well, one is only young once. And reading the third sentence I realized we neither of us even knew each other's name — it had just never arisen. Nor, I suddenly remembered, had the word love ever been mentioned between us.

By the side of the note lay his white beach shorts. I put them on, and trying to imagine they conveyed to me some of the grace of their owner, I lay down and slept again till late.

## On Being Friendly in Bars

One of the more curious manifestations in the gay world is the widely differing opinions held about the value of a convivial attitude in gay bars. This fluctuates all the way from those who will be friendly to anyone who is not tedious or downright repulsive, to those who will cut short any overtures of conversation from anyone who does not excite a physical response in them.

There are people who dread going alone to a gay bar for fear that no one at all will speak to them and who will enter such an establishment only in the company of others. This often precludes any opportunity for meeting strangers — unless the companion-protector perceives his presence may be nipping romance short and tactfully absents himself; but it does protect the sensitive from the pang of rejection.

There are those who are suspicious of meeting anyone who is not introduced by some third party who presumably thereby vouches for them, and who will not even pursue an interesting chance contact which may be made through the greater conviviality of their accompanying friends.

There are also the snobs who do not wish to accept, even on a platonic friendly basis, someone who is not authenticated for them as belonging to the social level of the gay world they wish to inhabit. These people have a compulsion to belong to a in-group and keep everyone else out of it.

There are those who are not even looking for companionship of any sort. They have come to the bar because they would rather drink «in company», than alone at home. Sometimes they are happily married and think it unfairly misleading to permit someone to play a hopeless gambit with them, even buy drinks for them, under the false assumption that they are available. Sometimes they are recovering from a bitter romantic experience and do not wish to expose themselves to another, or even a careless adventure in overnight libidinal escape. They want to brood.

There are also those who have come out of curiosity to «case the joint». They have heard about this bar, but as this is their first acquaintance with its atmosphere and clientele, they are leery of encouraging encounters. They do not yet feel enough at home in the place to let down their hair to the habitués.

The difficulty is that none of these individuals wear little buttons of various colors which identify their state of mind. Consequently many yearnings are wasted, many overtures are made in vain and many hearts are stabbed by sudden, unaccountable departures which seem to be in the nature of rejections although they actually may not be explicitly so.

A peculiar factor in the situation is the monetary one. A person who is looking for affection many spend what money he can, then afford on a useless conviviality with someone who finally reveals that 1) he has just been divorced and is through with sex for a while; 2) he is faithfully married; 3) he only goes for a particular other type — and so forth. This leaves the blighted suitor no funds to sustain him any longer «on the town», and he may have to leave for home, thereby missing the very person who does desire him and has just been waiting for him to be free of access. How many potential romances are strangled every night because someone ran out of ready money — it would be too sad even to estimate!

No gay boy can ever be persuaded by another one to alter his *modus operandi* in the bars; he will only come to a change by a trial and error process which persuades him of the desirability of doing so. Thus it is probably futile for anyone to propose a change to anyone else, even out of motives of sheer compassion.

Still, it does seem regrettable that so many boys appear to injure their own chances by being either cool to the idea of general friendliness or simply shyly afraid of it. The short-sightedness of the first attitude is very hard to bring home to its perpetrator. He fails to perceive that by being decently amiable to someone in whom he may have no direct interest it is possible that on another evening, in that same bar or in another, he may meet just what he seeks through the intermediary of this person. He also fails to recognize that, by being persistently aloof, he creates an aura of unapproachability about him, which is perceptible to all. Consequently someone he might like, but who would be too timid to approach him easily, will be thrown off for good by deriving an initial impression of chilly disdain. People, after all, do not enter into private relationships solely for sensual reasons, but equally as much because they seek companionship. The person who establishes in bars the impression of not being a good companion is not too likely to draw toward him someone who yearns for a *friend* as a lover, rather than simply a brief bedmate.

After all, the personal life of a gay boy who is not «married», is apt to contain a considerable measure of loneliness. Very few people intentionally want to be lonely. They are lonely because they cannot help themselves out of loneliness; but they are never going to succeed in doing so if they assume a persistently distant and guarded pattern of behaviour.

One of the smartest policies a person who wants to enlarge his social acquaintance and so reduce his loneliness can adopt is that of becoming a gentle listener. Most people want to talk about what is troubling them — whether it be family worries, business troubles, or maladies of the heart. They are much more apt to open up to someone who offers a ready ear, who just looks and listens. This is especially true if one chances to make some conversational overtures to a repressed person who has been sitting for quite a while unapproached, longing for some agreeable contact with another human being. People do not go to bars, we must repeat, just to «make out»; they also go to pass the time, to feel among their own, to escape from solitude. Helping them to do so will diminish your own loneliness.

So much of the secret of physical attraction lies in personality, rather than in age, in coloring, in physique, or in pulchritude, that a person who does not make his personality known *somehow* is hardly going to exhibit what powers

of attraction he may have to bring him the love the needs, nay, even the plain companionship he needs.

One regrets to admit, though it is true, that a fair amount of the unfriendliness one sees in individuals or in certain chatting chi-chi groups in gay bars is based on two unfortunate human traits: vanity and cruelty. The vain ones may not be thorough narcissists, but they do consider themselves in some way superior (in beauty, in prestige, in profession or what not) and they enhance their own sense of superiority by being disdainful and snubbing advances from strangers. They wish to convey the effect that they are something special and can't be bothered with most «characters» in bars. The main result they often achieve by this attitude is to convey the impression they would be better *not* to know.

With the cruel there is often a mixture of vanity involved in the cruelty, making it difficult to separate the two symptoms for examination. The cruel faggot may not be a physical sadist, but he is usually a psychic one. He may wish to torment someone else in order to inflate his own sense of personal power. This can proceed either from too much inner security or too little of it. This is also a person it is better *not* to know — unless, of course, one is oneself a psychic masochist and actually in search of an experience of exquisite suffering.

But the majority of gay boys have enough anxieties and tensions in their lives already without deliberately faring forth to bars in quest of *more* anguish. It is usually a relief from anguish that they seek, some balm for sagging spirits, defeat, fear, and weariness of courage.

It is true that some unhappy inhibited souls *want* to be friendlier than they are, but do not know how to begin. However, it is just as true that unfriendliness among gay boys can proceed many times from a lack of wish to be convivial. With this attitude it is hard for a humane person to have much tolerance. The life of homosexuals is hard enough as it is without having so many of them set out purposely to be mean to each other. If there is one single quality from which gay life in America suffers more than any other, it is the quality of scorn. It is said that this is less true in Europe, where homosexuality is not as neurotic as it is in America, but this may be hearsay.

One cannot but feel that it scarcely behooves those who are scorned by the «straight» world to turn around and scorn their own kind. Actually, they have very, very little to gain by it — that is, if they are genuinely hoping to find any happiness in this short life of ours. And if they are not, just why are they living?

Perhaps it will encourage all of us to attempt being generally more friendly if we remind ourselves that, after all, man cannot live by scorn alone.

*by Hadrian*

*From a recent letter to our office.*

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