

Hi, My Name Is Lola And I'm Addicted To Gay Men

by Lauren Henderson

Hi, everyone. Oh God, I'm uncomfortable. This is my first meeting, and it's something I'm only just coming to terms with. I was in denial for years. I used to complain about never meeting any nice men - well, you all know that one - and I couldn't for the life of me see why. I mean, I was out every night, I had loads of friends. I looked fabulous. All my friends told me I looked fabulous. Well, they would. They were gay men. Straight men never tell you you look fabulous. If you're lucky they tell you you look nice, when you're wearing that same old little black dress you've had for donkey's years. But it shows your boobs and makes you look thin, so what do they care?

That's why we hang out with gay men, isn't it? I know you know this all already, but I'm still working through it, so let me talk it through... Thanks. God, everyone's so supportive here!

Well, gay men are so much more attentive. You can talk to them about anything. (Apart from thrush, maybe. And cystitis.) And they talk back. I mean, they confide in you. Not when they're blind drunk and maudlin and aren't going to remember anything the next day - and deny it when you tell them what they said - no, they're open about their feelings, they let you know what they're going through. They don't throw up when you tell them you love them, like my ex did. You don't have to scheme and be tactful and choose the right moment for starting a discussion with them about the relationship (you know, after you've cooked them a really nice dinner), and then see by the awful haunted expressions on their faces how much they hate having to do this and they're only going through with it because they're hoping to have sex with you afterwards.

Straight men look constipated when they're talking about their emotions, have you ever noticed that? As if they've been travelling for five days and haven't been to the toilet once, and they're too manly to take a laxative, so they soldier on pretending that nothing's the matter while their colons are backed up like Friday night traffic on a holiday weekend.

Gay men spoil you. That's the trouble. Even a nice straight man, one whose clothes fit him, more or less, one who doesn't spend his entire life organising fantasy basketball teams and watching Sports Centre, is a Neanderthal compared to a gay man. They're simply not as evolved. It's incredibly depressing. Gay men like all the things I like; shopping, nice food, cocktails, the latest bars, catching up with obscure French movies where the characters all talk about philosophy for two hours and delicate, almost imperceptible shifts in their

relationships take place until you realise by the end that they've all moved on from where they were before, but you didn't see it happening and you have to watch the movie three times to pick up all the subtle little pointers.

Let me put it another way: in the movies gay men and me like, no-one gets blown up and beaten to a pulp and then has to save the world wearing an oil-stained singlet with only the help of an underage lap dancer who hasn't had time to change out of her work thong and pasties. No-one in French movies uses the word 'renegade', for instance. Or 'maverick'.

I don't mind action movies. I just don't think Cliffhanger is the apex of world culture, that's all.

A while ago my friend Jeffrey's mother came to stay with him for the weekend, and apparently she said to him: "What is Lola doing hanging out with you and Brett the whole time, how is she ever going to meet anyone to date?" Jeffrey reported this to me, outraged, and I was cross too. I mean, I meet loads of people! I have a really full social life! But then I had my moment of revelation. We'd all gone out to this cabaret bar in the East Village, me and Jeffrey and Brett. And between shows they put on this great dance-y music. Not 1970s stuff, but all these gay anthems, one after another, the kind that start slow and then sweep you up with slowly rising chords and the beat kicks in and suddenly the singer's going full blast about heartbreak and loss and making a new start: Baby, It's All Or Nothing Now, and Do You Believe In Life After Love? and everyone screams and whoops and sings along, and I'd had a few appletinis, and it felt as if that music was playing inside my ribcage. I was high on it. It literally lifted me up. I climbed up onto the bar and started dancing, and everyone cheered. I was dancing my ass off, lifting my hands up over my head to get everyone going, and I thought: This must be what it's like when you're possessed by the spirit in church and you get up and testify. I was so carried away. It felt like every song was the story of my life and every singer was singing for me.

The barman cleared me a bit more space, and I looked down to thank him and realised for the first time how cute he was. Really built, with big swollen pumped muscles that I could see clearly because he was wearing a tight, tight t-shirt, and his pecs were round and firm, thrusting through the t-shirt so you could see one of his nipples was pierced. I kept on dancing and then I felt him close his hand round one of my ankles and start to run it up my leg. His hand was incredibly warm, and first I got goosebumps and then I got really excited. It was the perfect moment, dancing on the bar to all these driving, anthemic songs about love and sex, and this gorgeous barman with great tattoos was coming on to me. I was wearing an ankle chain and he started to play with it, sort of wind his finger into it, and though I couldn't move my feet that much, it was so sexy. It felt like his hand was burning heat into my skin. I could see Jeffrey and Brett, dancing in front of me, egging me on and calling:

“Lola! You go, girl!”

My feet were getting wobbly because the barman was turning me on, but I rose above it and kept on wiggling my hips, and people were gathering below me to clap and cheer and whoop, and the barman took hold of both of my ankles now and started running his hands up and down my legs, playing to the crowd, and it was perfect, one of those mythic moments which you recognise even while you're in the middle of them, when you think: It doesn't get any better than this. This is it. I'm here. I'm the queen of the bar!

And it really felt like the barman was coming onto me. I mean, there *are* straight guys who work in gay bars, sometimes.... I know I've met some. They do it for the tips, if they're hot. Or bi guys. They work in gay bars. And I was thinking, OK, it's a barman, so this isn't exactly Mr Right, but still, he could be a ton of fun as Mr Right Now, or rather Mr Coming Round To My Place At The End Of His Shift, And Not Leaving Till Dawn Tomorrow.

And then he let go of me, which was disappointing, but of course he probably had work to do, so I didn't make too much of it, I just kept on dancing, and now I could move my feet again, so I really threw myself into it. I started to spin round, giving the crowd a sideways view, doing some table-dancing moves, and as I did I saw the barman greeting someone at the end of the bar. Actually, he was leaning right over it to kiss the guy. On the mouth. With tongues. And while they were kissing, the guy reached under the barman's t-shirt and squeezed his pecs. It was very sexy, actually. I love watching two guys kiss and make out. But of course it punctured my mood as if someone had stuck a pin into my ass. I finished out the song, to look as if I didn't give a damn who the barman was making out with, and when I swung myself down he came over and said:

“That was fabulous! You are so drinking on the house tonight, girl!” and made me a fantastic Cosmo.

But, you know, all the fun had gone out of it. I had to look at the situation honestly. I sat at that bar while Jeffrey and Brett came up and kissed me and told me I was fabulous and then went back to dance, and I looked round at all the people there. Fag hags and gay boys. Right. I really was the queen of the fucking bar. What was the point of my dancing my ass off and getting everyone going if I wasn't even ending up by getting laid? Night after night we went out, and Jeffrey and Brett had each other to go home with, or sometimes they'd pick up someone else - which was fine, because they had an arrangement - and I kissed them good night and got into a cab by myself and went back to my lonely bed. I don't want to sound too maudlin, but that's exactly what I thought: my cold, lonely bed.

I was pretty quiet for the rest of that evening, but soon enough the cabaret came back on, and we left at the end of it. We shared a cab part of the way and Jeffrey and Brett were making out in the corner by the time I got out. I put my key in the

door and thought: Something Has To Change. And then, two days later, I was going through the Village Voice, turning to the back pages straight away like I always do, to read the Lonely Hearts and cheer myself up by reading about all the freaks out there who are even more messed up than I am, and I came across the ad for this group. I couldn't believe it. It was like a sign.

So here I am. I hope it will help. But it's hard to give up, you know? The compliments, the fun, the great bars. I know Jennifer, who opened the meeting, was talking about learning to meet straight men, and ended by saying: "I have two words for all of you. Sports bars". But that just feels so depressing right now... imagine a lifetime spent with someone you met in a sports bar. And being addicted to gay men is Not like being an alcoholic or a junkie, where you have to go cold turkey. It's more like having an eating disorder. Gay men, like food, are always there. You can't cut them out completely. You have to learn a new attitude to them, get them in perspective, not make them the centre of your life.

Oh my God, someone's leaving. Was it something I said? This is my first time so maybe I've done the wrong thing - I didn't mean to offend anyone - what? Oh! Oh, no, no, sweetie, this isn't the group for people addicted to cocktail waitresses. I think that's down the hall, I remember seeing the sign when I came in - no, that's fine. Bye! Good luck with that one!

Boy, that makes me feel better. I mean, I'd much rather be addicted to gay men than cocktail waitresses. I bet that one's *really* hard to kick.