

# q life: with GABRIAL TABASCO

## More Trick than Treat: Working as a Barman on Canal Street

As a student, having finished my dissertation and with some time to spare I went looking for a bar job on Canal Street in Manchester's gay quarter. Walking into one bar I asked if there were any available openings. Bill, one of the two gay owners, looked me up and down, turned to his colleague and asked 'what do you think? Is he a top or a bottom?'

*'Looks like a total bottom to me'* said Reynash, the manager. *'I think I recognise you from your online profile. You're the guy posing with his bum on the beach right?'* I nodded. Turning to his boss Reynash said *'yes, definitely bottom!'*

*'Bottom, no. Power bottom, yes'* I responded, playing along.

Perhaps it was my sass they liked, or my ass, but I got the job. *'Come in tonight'* said Reynash.

There were no RSA certificates to complete, no training, no processes. I just went to a bar and instead of pulling punters I was pulling pints. On my first night were just two of us manning the bar. It turned out to be the busiest night since Pride. I was a total disaster: rushed, unknowledgeable and clumsy. Just like my first time. I didn't do a good job. My disco may have needed me. My local gay bar didn't.

*'A Snakebite please'* ordered one patron.

*'Where do we keep our snakes?'* I asked Reynash who gave me a look that said #WTH #SMH.

Two gay men owned the bar. Dave was a big, buff man who towered over us. When he met me he shock my hand so hard he seemed to pull it out of its socket. It was a warning. Overtime he grew to respect me because of my strong work ethic. The other owner was Bill; he was a close relation of Jabba the Hutt and had an insatiable drinking habit. The only thing worse than a teetotaler in a gay bar is an alcoholic bar manager.

'Come and meet my favourite bottom', Bill would drunkenly tell clients, much to my embarrassment. If I made an error Bill would shout. 'You undercharged them by a pound! You're eating up my profit' he would say stamping his feet.



'Wrong. You're drinking up your profit' I wanted to shout but held my tongue. His behaviour became increasingly loutish as he got increasingly drunker. Forget the devil wears Prada. At that bar, the devil drinks lager.

From flirting for drinks I was flirting for tips. I made minimum wage, being paid around GB£50 per shift but making double that in tips. What payment I lacked in cash I received in compliments.

*'You look like one of those Greek statues'* said one regular. He must have meant it since he was only on his second drink. He couldn't have had his beer-goggles on yet.

*'Thank you'* I smiled. *'I am Greek... but hardly like the statues.'*

In one gulp he downed the rest of his pint then gurgled. Beer gurgling was the new beer-goggles.

Other regulars included an older straight, heterosexual couple. The wife always wore marginally transparent tops. As I was serving her I noticed that her left breast was hanging out of her top. I made intense eye contact and didn't mention anything. What could I say? *'Excuse me ma'am but your boob is hanging out of your blouse?'* It happened the following week. And the following. By then I got used to it and assumed she enjoyed either shocking young gay men or flaunting what she had. If only how to manage that was included in the RSA training.

One mole-like looking man in his 50s always has an entourage of twink around him who carried heaps of shopping bags. He got into a fight with one twink after he refused to show him the text he received.

*'Let me see who that is'* screamed the mole trying to grab the phone. When the boy refused he said *'give me back those trainers,'* which triggered a bout of tug-and-war over the twink's shopping. It was funny. It got me through my shift. But I felt sorry for the twinks.

*'Don't feel sorry'* my said Reynash as he prepared their third G&T *'those twinks make more money than we all do combined.'*

I change my mind: The only thing worse than an alcoholic bar manager are drunk suburban housewives let loose in a gay bar while their husbands were at the soccer match. It was Desperate Housewives meets Girls Gone Wild. The housewives ordered the most ostentatious, complicated cocktails as if they were trying to get drunk on the gayness of it all.

Dressed up as sexy nurses or as scary fairies they would behave outlandishly by grabbing our crotches and asking rude questions.

*'Are you the man or the woman in bed?'* they asked Brent, the Aussie barman.

*'I'm everything. And I like to mix it up. In the kitchen'* he said.

*'Mix it up? Like a blender?'* asked one housewife whose interest was whetted with the talk of kitchen appliances.

*'Like a whisk... because you got to work for it!'* purred Brent.

When it came to drinks Drag Queens tortured us with their indecision over which cocktail to order and then complained they were being over-charged. Bears, usually in couples, came in on Sundays for brunch and Bloody Marys. Gym Junkies were predictable: they ordered Vodka Soda (64 calories). Twinks ordered a Rum & Cola (248 calories) and were as irritating as the sugar that gets stuck in the straw of a Mojito drink. Straight men came in asking *'you boys serve beer? Or is it just cocktails?'* emphasising the 'cock'. We couldn't help but roll our eyes. My favourite customers were the lesbians who were as cool as the cucumbers in their G&Ts.

But it was the barmen who were the wackiest characters of all. Brent, the Aussie moved to Manchester as a barman 'for as long as it was fun.' They partied all night after work and went on more dates than there were dates in the calendar. And Nick, one of the bar men did nude oil wrestling in a club nearby.

*'You should come check it out'* said Nick, handing me a flyer.

To be continued...



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