

Tricks of the (Rough) Trade...

Hustler Bars: Show Me the Money!

The Spotlight in LA

Gay sex is FREE. So a hustler bar is a strange place for a gay man, because a hustler bar is not “gay.” There are hustlers. There are johns. Neither leads a particularly urban-gay lifestyle. Rough Trade Tricks are essentially straight. Johns are essentially out of the gay circuit, often young, and not necessarily “rich.” Neither cares much for the gay bars of Weho, Castro, or Soho. The johns prefer lower-class “straight” males who don’t fuck up sex with sentiment. The hustlers prefer, not necessarily men, but money. Sex is an easy means to cold, hard cash in trade for hot, hard cock.

In a gay bar, the reciprocity is sex for sex. In a hustler bar, it’s sex for money. So there I sat, in Los Angeles, in a hustler bar, the Spotlight, on a stool near the juke box. I had to remember that the johns, many of whom were more attractive to me than were some of the hustlers, aren’t looking for mutual gay sex. They’re looking for a “straight” guy who will ball them the way sex used to be before sex was a lifestyle. The mutual satisfaction is a combo of money, power, and sex. Some guys have a need for money and some guys have a need-to-pay. Probably everything that goes down in life has to do with our toilet training. Or something.

So there, in LA, I stood/leaned/sat/paced/leaned/smiled/watched/cruised with fifty bucks hot in my jeans, begging to pay for it, so I could cross the line and know what the fuck it felt like to buy my way into a specific section of “street-smart, low-life, talk-show trash” that without cash no gay man has any access to. Rough Trade Tricks are usually born in trailer parks in the American south, raised in foster homes, tattooed in juvenile facilities, saddled with one or two young sons by one or two 15-year-old bitches, and educated in prison where the one important lesson they learn is that gay men are an easy mark.

I felt confident as a kid in a candy store. Actually, a john never needs fear rejection, because all he has to do is flash more money at the young and the dangerous. The lower classes are eternally attractive to the middle and upper classes. (Ask Pasolini, the martyred Patron Saint of Rough Trade!) Even heterosexually, every class knows what it's for. No matter what sex trip johns want—S&M, rough trade, suck/fuck, water sports, dirty feet, you name it—anything goes in a hustler bar where the level of play is the kind of primal sex once found in rest stops, YMCAs, bus stations, and carnival midways with mechanics, sailors, hitchhikers, and gypsy men with dirty fingernails who'll do anything for a buck. The natural-born rough-trade hustlers, in their wonderful anonymity and danger and wild taste, should not be confused with the slick urban-gay hustlers who advertise through the "Models Classifieds" in gay papers where the "muscle sex" or "dominance sex" is highly stylized Kabuki ritual. Gay hustlers are high concept. Rough trade is just plain basic fundamental what-it-is.

It's Friday evening becoming Friday night on a full-moon weekend in LA, and the two camps of hustlers and johns sport with each other like friendly Montagues and Capulets. If, in America, money can rent you what you want, then a hustler bar is almost as close as a man can get to sex-with-satisfaction practically guaranteed. Hustlers, in fact, invariably "can guarantee you, man, we'll have a good time."

Twenty-five bucks, average, gets a john a hustler for the first time: no frills, just some laid-back trade getting his dick sucked until the john cums. A return bout costs less. Prices vary depending on the time of night, the night of the week, the proportion of johns to hustlers, and the specifics of the sex trip that the john wants out of the hustler. Frequently, there's cab fare or a tip of about ten bucks tacked on when the "boy" has done his best at turning out a good performance. The essence of hustling, after all, is show biz. And a taxi to a hustler is a status symbol equal to a limo.

A tattooed, well-built, blond, goateed hustler with a buzz cut eyes my table and heads to the jukebox. He plays "I Don't Want to Walk Without You." I stand up and move in near to him, a quarter in my sweaty hand, and scan the selections for a musical reply. My choice: "Hit Me with Your Best Shot." We listen to the music, eyeing each other. *Who is the matador? Who is the bull?* He's more wary that I am. "You wanna beer," I say. "Yeah," he says, "Bud."

At the bar service station, a john leans over to me. "That one," he says pointing at the blond goatee leaning his butt against the jukebox, "will do it for twenty bucks. He's raunchy. Likes to get blown and have his ass eaten. He's quiet. Believe me, I know. He's a bit player in B-movies.

Action-adventure flicks. I've licked all those tattoos on his arms. I sucked on him for maybe an hour and jerked myself off till he pushed me back, sat on my face, and twisted my tits till I came. Yeah. Twenty bucks. He's marked you."

I buy two Buds. I bring them back to the hunky hustler who looks like a street-version cross between all of the Butthole Surfers and the terrific Henry Rollins. His eyes are electric skyblue. With the cold beers in my hand, I never felt more like a straight guy off at a convention in a strange town buying a drink for some B-Girl. I can tell I'm having a Frasier-and-Niles kind of moral dilemma. I have no trouble with sex separate from money. But, migod, when sex combines with money, I think of the stereotype that johns ought to be old and ugly and degenerate. Well, I'm not yet old or ugly. But the degeneracy of paying for sex squats awkwardly on my head this night in this hustler bar. I laugh to myself that my bourgeois conscience is much ado about nothing. Actually, I find I really have an almost politically correct "attitude" about going through with this pay-for-play trip even with this guy nobody would believe would have sex with a man unless he actually was paid!

I remember the words my buddy, Old Reliable, who lives to love hustlers, said to me earlier in the evening: "Hustlers are actors. You're the producer. You got the money. You're also the director. Hustlers are Minimalist Artists. They'll do as little performance art as they can, unless you direct them. *Pose! Flex! Beat your meat! Let me suck your pits/dick/ass! Sit on my face! Spit on my face! Shit on my face!* The price can go up. Don't come off cheap. Offer \$40 for openers. If you hit it off, if you want more than to suck him off as trade while he kicks back and smokes, if you want him to rough you up a little bit, add ten bucks. You want him to pose for some Polaroids, add another fifteen. You want to shoot some video footage, add thirty. You want him to sleep over, add ten. You want him to cuddle, add five, and breakfast. And tip him by giving him some of your clean socks."

Hiring a hustler is like ordering ala carte. You get exactly what you want. (And that makes hustlers basically "safe sex," because you control the fluid exchange.)

"This is Hollywood," Old Reliable said. "It's a circus. But at least it's the Big Top. All the movie stars and TV people hire hustlers. Judy Garland loved rough trade boys. Rock Hudson loved pay-for-play tricks. Stars pay for performances because they themselves are paid for performances. Hollywood is where America brings its dreams. You can hire your fantasy. The world's great performances aren't on screen. Great performances take place in the sack."

I hand Blue-Eyes-with-Buzz-Cut his Budweiser. I want to proposition him. I want to do it. But I can't. He's so shy or sly, he's not helping. Why do I have to pull the quiet type? I came out tonight prepared with cold cash to be nasty, to go slumming, to fucking buy sex! How un-American to become suddenly a reluctant consumer.

I feel the power is in my pocket: the cash. I think: *Show him the money!*

God! Blue-Eyes-with-Buzz-Cut is hot as a street in Venice Beach! The kind of sweaty macho based on the kind of clean you can maintain when you're living out of a knapsack and brushing your teeth at an IHOP. He's my speed. In a post-Judas minute, I'd take him straight to the bar-room toilet, flop him back against a urinal, and, *do him*—if only coins weren't changing hands.

Then good old lust, like cavalry riding over the ridge in the last reel, develops its own logic. I stare into his incredible eyes. "Hustling," I rationalize, "is the world's oldest profession. Moral-religious trips can't reject thousands of years of sex-theater history." I laugh at my puritanical head, but take very seriously my hardening dick that has no conscience. He takes a swig of beer and peers hard at me. Inexplicably, I blurt out: "I want to exploit you."

"Cool," he says.

Nervous as a virgin-bidder at a white-slave auction, I say: "Ya wanna mess around for fifty bucks?"

Fifty? Why did I say *fifty*? My subconscious is worried whether or not he'll like me. I forget rough trade doesn't give a fuck about me.

His blue eyes pierce into my face. "You ain't a cop, are you?"

Flattered—*god, I'm such a kveen!*—I say, "No."

His face lights up. He actually says, "Show me the money." Hustlers are able to work out deals with a john in a heartbeat. "Let's go," he says, and we stroll out together, with the bar full of johns and hustlers watching our cool-as-shit exit.

Before all, for a hustler, \$ = sex.

After all, for a john, sex = \$.

That night, Blue-Eyes-with-Buzz-Cut was what he has long been: a terrific piece of ass. That night, I became, at least for once, what I had long had an attitude about: a john. Mmm, I mean, a patron of the arts.

It was more than okay. It was hot! It was a perfect relationship. Pleasurable. Easy cum. Easy go. No hassles. No personal baggage about his old lady pregnant in some Motel 86 on Sunset Boulevard. No listening to some gay guy dysfunctioning about his 12-step program. Hey! That night

of my initiation into LA hustler bars proved, I guess, there's no business like show business. Plus if you ain't getting what you want, go rent!