

## Gerald Lynch / ONE'S COMPANY

Here, one neither smiles approvingly nor nods promptly when you pause. Such company is bidingly solicitous. Such company is (if one may be permitted the frank expression) after something. You may act so yourself under exacting conditions, which is fine and as it should be. But one neither concurs nor flatters by grunt or grin.

One sits silently as you talk. To maintain one in dumb witness to your discourse, you have but to buy one's beer. When details of domesticity or profession steal centre stage, you need suffer no apprehension at their cuing interruption. You can concentrate solely on such things as the progress of a pregnancy, the miracle of acquiring language/syntax/grammar, the security of your job, the rewards of your work that surpass material gain, etc. You can, in short, learn to couch your self-obsession in other-referential terms. This is fine and as it should be.

One has no home, no family, no wife, no job. One's company is, as it were, one's company. One skittishly harbours no tales to talk of, so he will not obstruct the ascent of your anecdotes to climax. One was once wont to reflect and expound on his life at length and brazenly to fashion all manner of meaning between what was, what is, and what shall be. At the omega of time and space, there rested a musing one. But some time ago one's life gave up its ghost of meaning. One admitted that his tales had been told before, and better. As a teller of tales, one began to distrust his paling persona. Words soon ceased to have significant reference. To make a long story short—*Amen*. (Words to live by, those last seven.)

*Ahem.* Here, then, and now, one pours instead the foundation of trust for our acquaintance: what one was is of no further interest; what he is he will remain, silently so. To repeat, you have no call to concern yourself about distractions along these lines. Here, you may speak, or you may eavesdrop on others.

One appears here each day to pass his time from noon till six-thirty. People like yourself come to know one, to sit with him when they are alone and buy his beer. But one waxes self-indulgently.

You come here for rest and relaxation. This is fine and as it should be. Though expectations will also be met. There is no call for concern over being seen to enjoy yourself alone when one is present. For example, you may laugh as freely at your own jokes in one's company as you would snort fearfully at your discontinuous life in lonely circumstances. But you must not expect one to laugh while you are here, as he has heard most jokes before. By way of illustration, one offers the following:

Some time ago, an old mailman asked himself at one's table, "Why do dogs lick their own genitals?" He paused too short a time, but let that pass. "Because they can!" he shouted and howled freely. After he left, one retired to one's nondescript room above. There, the humorous insight of the joke appeared quite striking: the inexhaustible (it must appear) incongruity between aspiration and achievement, the (as it were) bare-balled somatic deflation. (You see already that one is not entirely without a sense of humour.)

You may choose to bring some of your many superior friends here, to slum, as they say. One used to caution with vain looks against such indiscretion, but one has come to tolerate this perfectly human foible. (The unfaithful spouse is compelled to arrange to see the unimaginative mate in the same room with the accommodating lover and so forth.) A few conditions in the event of such daring-do:

- 1) do not feel anxious
- 2) do not shirk
- 3) do not covertly signal
- 4) do not indicate your and your friends' natty attire.

Nor should you secretly send a draft or pitcher to one's table. Nor should you drop a five-dollar bill when you pass on the way to the men's room. Unexpressed affront has been taken at such presumption. One is neither fool nor whore . . . though both can be found here.

If one is sitting alone when you arrive with your well-to-do friends, that is fine. You should consider that one is not here. If another customer is sitting at one's table, that is at it should be. You should use the other's presence to assist the obliteration of one from your considerable conscience. Should a member of your party look about this empty room and notice one, he will turn to you and say some such thing as, 'You've been in this hole in the afternoon before, you said? Do you know that one over there?'

You must feel free to look in one's general direction and say, 'Who? I see no one.' Then slap the table and laugh gregariously as you hurriedly shout your order to the bartender. Such behaviour will promote camaraderie in your party and may assist a sale or purchase. This is fine and as it should be.

Should a member of your party then order a conciliatory beer sent to one, that, too, is fine and as it should be. One will lift the gift glass to him only. Thus one makes sympathetic acquaintance.

Should you return alone after your business with your friends is successfully transacted, you must act as though nothing happened between us. Ideally, nothing did. When you order our beer, simply shout at one, 'What'll yours be? One . . . ?' This is fine and as it should be. Your voice argues volumes for your sociability: you could *choose* to be alone. But one does not answer, of course, let alone order preferences. Whatever beer you drink, order two. Similarly, if you must buy our beer in pitchers, order two pitchers. If, after two or three glasses, you feel absolved and eager to be off, do not concern yourself about waste. Simply joke about the shame of leaving good beer . . . what with all the thirsty children in the world! Laugh, burp loudly if you wish, and leave. One will drink what is left in your pitcher after you have gone.

But if you should choose instead to relax and drink pitcher after pitcher, or thirty glasses of draft, or fifteen bottles, that is of course fine and as it should be. The beer here is inexpensive, promptly served, and passing cold. You must feel free to get as drunk as you feel inclined. One will stay with you. Nobody, but nobody, has ever been taken from one's table and ejected for simple drunkenness. Allow one to illustrate:

Once upon a time at one's table, a male nurse on the day of his forced retirement threw up beer and partially intact pepperoni sticks. He felt that he had wasted his life in a traditionally female occupation and that "they" should not have been allowed to "boot him out on his fanny, anyway." Pathetic? Tut, tut. He was allowed to persevere in a raw drunk, and he proceeded to bounce some memorable good times off one.

Another time, a middle-aged gentleman whose assets had been put in receivership silently left one's table. He cut his wrists with a broken bottle in the men's room. He was back the following afternoon with a detective, a psychiatrist, and an officer of the Salvation Army. The detective demanded to know with whom the gentleman had been sitting the previous afternoon. The bartender answered, "With no one." To the apparent dismay of the Army officer, the bartender then agreed with the psychiatrist that brighter colours would help; however, he insisted that his clientele prefer it here as it is, though he did not look to one for confirmation. The Salvation Army officer was allowed to tape up a poster in the men's room. The poster, barely a pencil sketch, depicted a huge and transparent Jesus Christ standing back of a bank of telephones that were manned by Army personnel. For purely business reasons—for the sake of one's company—one removed the poster to his room above.

The draft glasses here are filmed. You are well advised to drink from the bottle.

(Incidentally, you, too, may choose to consume pepperoni sticks or pickled eggs or microwaved corned-beef-on-rye. Such nutrients may well be bracing for the time of late beers. But one, in his relentless thirst, does not confuse his stomach with food. Never badger one to accompany you to an eatery.)

If you are a frequent binge (i.e., therapeutic) drinker, you will soon exhaust your impressive store of lore. May one presume here to present a list of subjects and idiomatic segues for the time of middle-to-late beers? One directs you to the first column, though you might find some of the second engaging. In fact, feel free to browse, to read up-and-down, across, or both, or not at all.

<i>Unwanted</i>	<i>Untitled</i>	<i>Unbearable</i>
Unions once filled a need, but now they don't.	Creative financing temporarily saved the housing market/your ass.	Post-modernism, post-structuralism, and the Spasmodics
Dad was a tough old bugger, but principled.	The old man saw it all coming, but would he help you?	Androgyny and <i>fin de siècle</i> decadence
The school of hard knocks	You could have been where <i>Ms. M-B-A</i> Armstrong is, but for the kids.	A business degree from Harvard, and they kicked him out on his fanny at sixty-five.
<i>Playboy</i> was better when it stuck to big knockers.	Some of that stuff you can rent is pretty hot, but they keep the hard-core for their own parties on inventory day.	If the big guy can afford to let you go, you may take early retirement to write a novel.
Women don't really want equality.	Statistics show that a Black woman wearing knee pads can waltz into the exec.'s can in 3.7 years.	Look at Germaine Greer. Or better not. Haw-haw.
Vasectomies shrivel 'em up like two sunkist raisins and cause leukemia.	You'd cut it off for a key to the exec.'s can.	Youth is wasted on women.*
More men have hemmies than will admit it.	Ballbreakers gave you the bleeding ulcer.	The big guy's collection of flagellation imprints is quite striking. But some of that stuff you can rent...
You're doin' all right, thank you.	And of course they're off "sick" at least three days a month.*	The young negress in purchasing
Let's get serious for a moment.*		See "Untitled," item five.
*Order more beer.	*Laugh and spray martini as though you don't mean it.	*Do not smile or fiddle with your swizzle; one sits still for the aphorism.

The time of late beers will bring on the tender feelings, and the confusion of beer and sentiment will prove, one knows, a breeder of bathos. Nonetheless, you must feel free to turn to one of the three walls that protect you here and cry silently and manfully. You will then talk freely of old loves, of those you hurt with the ambivalence of your pure passions. One will listen and understand what a lover you were in your day—and are yet. Power and passion will salute the unworthy world in the way you toss back your beer and lift your eyebrows. Do not cock even a fleetingly self-conscious eye over the rim of your tilted glass and read irony into one's enduring silence. One does not judge. You, on the other hand, must feel free for the sake of flagging monologue to assume that one holds any number of incendiary opinions.

As you consume more and more beer, you will talk of death, of course, of those who are gone and to whom you never professed your love. Somewhat like one, you will determine the uselessness of words and conclude with a concession to impenetrable mystery. That is all that can be said, is fine and as it should be. One's silence in this respect should be gainfully employed as mute testimony to your common sense. Who in his right mind, and after so much beer, could be expected to see, let alone to concede, the uselessness also of, uh, "impenetrable mystery," was it?

Fortified so, you will then revile life, rant, condemn, rave, curse, and resolve to rutting indiscriminately. No, indeed not! A growing family and a mortgage do not constitute psychic emasculation or the death of your, uh, "dream."

In the morning, when your throat is raw from singing and smoking and snoring and . . . ? No-no, no need to scurry blindly like a crosseyed cockroach in a suddenly lighted toilet. Forget those wet images from the previous afternoon that sit like a bale of waterlogged tobacco in your belly. You must feel free to return here, to sit with one and proclaim that you are on the waggon. One has been known to forget himself more thoroughly and toast such resolve.

You may of course inquire if you did anything foolish in the time of ultimate beers. You will selectively recite what you choose to recall and end by exclaiming, "Jesus H! Imagine! Singing those old Beatle songs! I'll be damned. . . . Uh, I didn't. . . .?"



Tut, tut. That is all you need bother to remember. All is all right. We were both too drunk to remember. Memory plays tricks; a drunk's memory plays drunken tricks. Sit still for Christ's sake! . . . Pardon please. This is fine and as it should be.

Between such low and high spirits—in mid-cycle—you will have time only for a quick beer. In this event, you should consider lending one some money, ten dollars, say. You see, one has neither low nor high points. One rests outside vicissitude, so one must have his beer. It is disconcerting to one and all the way one's memory can be jarred by thirst and/or financial stringency. One remembers a generous man who resented his third child, a fleeting acquaintance who had to be coaxed and who loved only his first wife, a stingy stranger who covertly cheated a powerful friend, a . . . But pardon, please. One again reflects self-indulgently on his a-history.

As you move out of these periodic troughs of restorative mediocrity, the number of beers you allow yourself will increase dramatically. You will come then to realize more fully the relative inexpense of one's being here—especially so when again you enact exactly the same routine of singing and crying in precisely the same detail. But this, too, is fine and as it should be. And yes, it must have been the solitary drunk at the far table who cried lonesomely. One makes no claim to perfect recall.

To conclude this introduction: aside from the small matter of remuneration, you must never imagine that one can be offended. You can always be certain that one has seen much worse (if one may so designate such justifiable exposure): the male nurse and the bankrupt businessman, to name but the two previously mentioned. One could mention others, but they are living still, generously so.

Finally, when you move from this city, there is no call to inform one. One disdains the artificial scene. If you lend more than is customary for you, one will forget, naturally.

But one *does* reflect overmuch. Already you are reading one's thoughts. Yes, *do* sit down. A quick cold one? Yes.