

It's a game for just me. But then sometimes your friend is in the car and it's like your second time ever hanging out one on one and that's super chill and you scare her even though it's platonic.

The basis for the dinner was that she was curious about my decision to move back to Detroit despite me not really enjoying it, my plans to move back to New York, and why I am the way I am. The first two are relatively easy answers, the third is something I don't even really have the answer to.

It was a blizzard and I had dinner plans that had already been rescheduled once and if you reschedule the same dinner plans twice, then they don't deserve to happen at all. It's a rule I stick to even though I just made it up.
It just makes sense.

Everything I do just makes sense. That is a lie.

Anyways. It was me and Ella's second time hanging out. Or maybe the first. Well kind of the fourth, but *literally*, who's counting? I met her at a rooftop networking event for soulless and lost individuals (venture capitalists). I was dating a woman I affectionately referred to as Audbae even though we were never compatible romantically.

I had a hunch. She had a hunch. We were mean to each other and nice to each other in all of the best ways that dissolve potential romance into definite friendships. She's hot and this is an aside.

Audbae attended the mixer/networking event/douche-off with me on the grounds that there would be free seltzers and a spread of artisan cheeses. Unfortunately we were rained out as soon as she drizzled miel over some Majorero chevre from the Canary Islands.

All the nerds and the dweebs and even the cool people from outside and dripped down elevators, pouring into the mezzanine where they could one-up each other over the dogs they bought, the code they wrote, and venture capital raised.



I saw Ella again a month or so later. I was walking around *Dally in the Alley*, the quintessential Labor Day Weekend street fair with my friend Axel whose name I have tattooed in slime green Old English on my left forearm. She was wearing sunglasses that were probably a little too big and drinking a beer that was probably also a little too big. I introduced her to Axel and Axel to her. Light chit chat tapered into detached ramblings because small talk is just so boring and impossible.

We went our separate ways.

“You should set her up with Pranav—” Axel said as soon as we got out of an earshot.

I heard him, squinting as the cobwebbed gears in my brain started turning turning turning until they spit out a complete thought, “Totally”.

I shot her a text. I set up a blind date. It worked. It didn't work. It kind of worked. It kind of didn't. It's none of my business.

A few months later it was a blizzard and my weed addiction was becoming boring to me and ketamine was becoming even more boring.

I think I have high blood pressure for my age, but I don't know what to do about it. I needed friends. Axel was in Puerto Rico visiting his chica's familia.

Nicky, 25, learned how to cook bacon for *literally the first time* and was preoccupied with that.

Pranav was, like, “working” or whatever he calls it when he paces around his apartment, tv blasting, while an excel sheet stays open and motionless on his laptop.

I don't really know what he does for work. Consulting? Manufacturing? Private equity? I know factories are involved and efficiency is his main priority.

He belongs to member's only clubs.

I know his family well.

They are great people.

I feel the same about all of my closest friends' families.



The idea of men not being able to make new friends in adulthood is a concept that constantly gets shoved down my throat by This American Life, and Radiolab, and The New Yorker, and meme pages, and randoms on substack.

I'm not a normal man, man.

It was months and months after I'd met Ella. We'd exchanged a couple dozen conversations over text and in DMs. We kind of knew each other and felt comfortable getting to know more. She's funny and sometimes feels like a republican even though I know for a fact she is far from it. I think it's the *venture capital* in her.

Our conversations had me alluding to some vague but massively devastating moment that led to me being jaded and disillusioned, pushing me back to Detroit.

"It's just not easy to explain over text,"

"So we can get one of those dinners you always post pictures of on instagram, you can tell me there,"

I picked her up in the blizzard. Playing with the rear wheel drive on my car, swooping and drifting— every turn was shaped like a Nike logo. I would faux-freak out but I was in control. She would for-real freak out because she didn't know I was faux-freaked.

But then it made sense.

15 minutes later, moving at tortoise-like speeds for a car that can go at least 115 miles per hour. The destination couldn't have been more than 2 miles away.

There were five cars in the parking lot despite the blizzard. Thick wads of snow, pounding down, softly. In a way only snow can. I was wearing Bottega Veneta puddle boots in black, and I made sure Ella knew that. I don't remember what her outfit was as I write this, but it was certainly more practical than mine.



Ugh, I wish I had more time to write this story because so much happened. We're greeted by a woman working there, she whisks us away to our table for two in front of the kitchen's service window. A peak into the action.

I speak a little Spanish, "Que tal chica? Regalarme un menu porfa" I smoothly rap out of my mouth. I talk in slang and rhythm like a jazz cat with a traumatic brain injury. She giggles "Compredes espanol?" or something, is what she asks. It was longer, more complex, but I can't exactly remember. Ella's face already reacted to my rudimentary spanish. The waitress did too. I made a joke. "Yo se mi acento es muy gringo, pero comprendo la lengua," materialized out of my mouth in a way that also kind of surprised me. You can do things like that when you fall asleep to the sounds of Spanish-speaking NBA podcasts.

The other waitress pouring water behind me laughed. Self-awareness is rare I guess. I cheated towards her, pursing my lips, hand on my hip vibes, and pointing at her "tu sabes, tu sabes", in a sassy little way. A way that makes me understand why people in the midwest sometimes think I'm a gay man, even though I'm just a sassy straight dude. She laughed. The other waitress laughed. Ella's confused. A man walks down the aisle of tables towards the bathroom. Stops to compliment my shirt;
Sun Studios. Memphis, Tennessee.

The soup of the day was jalapeno something or other. There was cheese aka Queso. It was of the day so I don't remember what else it was and I am pressed for time so it doesn't seem important to give you the details anymore. It was good. It was creamy. It was lightly spiced. It was a soup that came with a salad that's included with your entree.

I love that shit.



I had a steak, ribeye, smothered in some sort of sauce. Side of rice and beans, or as we say in espanol “arroz y frijoles”.



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She ordered mole. Dark and complex. You know, how every other food writer ever has written about mole. Mole is good. We all know this. It's bitter and weird and complicated. I like that shit.

Everything was perfect. I am not going to kid you, the food hit hard. Everything was great. Like lovely. We ate like 40% of it because 97% of the 75-minute meal was me explaining how my life fell apart in New York City. How I stopped doing stand up comedy, how my ex girlfriend went to a mental hospital and never spoke to me again, how I had to move all my belongings out of the apartment we shared, how I went to Detroit and my parents thought I was going to kill myself even though there's just no way I would ever.

About how I was sad and hollow and psychiatrists put me on medication and I flew all over the world to deal with it and still felt nothing. About how lucky I was that a multimillionaire CEO of a tech company (venture capital) kept me on retainer to make memes for him while I traveled the world, how I had been abandoned by people I loved, how I had been bullied by people I'd never met, how nuance was eliminated so the concept of Me could be eliminated. How I flew home early to do a stand up set for Netflix. How nobody showed up and the show was aggressively mid, never airing. How disappointed I was and how rainy the weather was. How I flew to Mexico 36 hours later because of how disappointed I was. How bad and lazy my memes were and how a family of german lunatics assaulted me in a mansion in Roma Norte. How I did a bunch of molly and ketamine and that seemingly "fixed it".

75 minutes. "Dos cajas porfa! Y la cuenta, en medio," my request to the waitress. We packed leftovers and went home. She seemed kind of sad on my behalf. Like, the way I shot that out was very emotionally draining and bizarre but also interesting. And like, that's probably accurate. She feigned something. She shared some trauma, to assure me of something vague. We became better friends. We ate pho together on a cold night a few weeks later.

El Asador was really good.



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<https://runnerdetroit.run/MeltdownMeals.MichaelHirsch.html>

