

## THE UPPER EAST SIDE

If you've ever visited New York City  
you've probably been to the Met.  
It's this gigantic ark of a museum  
on the Upper East Side next to Central Park.  
Six blocks up is the Guggenheim,  
another famous museum. But I've never been *there*.  
It's twenty-five bucks! Because that's the thing:  
the Met's free. Or nearly. You pay what you want  
if you live in the city.  
(Each time I've gone I've only paid a penny.  
I'm always confused by people who pay more.  
I'll see them handing over ten-, twenty-, even hundred-dollar bills.  
I'm like, Dude, you realize you don't have to do that, right?  
But the Met depends on people  
embarrassed to be perceived as *not* having money  
so I guess it balances out.)  
When I first moved to New York in 2017  
I actually lived on the Upper East Side—on 72nd Street  
by the train station with that never-ending escalator in it.  
I say *actually* because  
it's one of the most expensive neighborhoods to live in  
and I was so broke I ate Trix  
with a fork to save milk.  
K, not really. But I *was* pretty broke. Before moving  
I was working as a dishwasher in San Diego  
and had managed to save up  
just over two thousand bucks.  
That meant I could afford a place  
that was around seven hundred a month—  
enough for first and last  
plus money for beer until I found a job.

So I typed my price range into Craigslist and the next day  
moved from the hostel in Bushwick I was staying at  
to the place on the UES.  
It was August but there was no A/C.  
The sole window looked out onto a brick wall  
painted in pigeon shit.  
The bed it came furnished with  
was a three-inch layer of orange foam.  
The one bonus was the location.  
Maybe *you* don't like ritzy shit  
but I do because I've never had it.  
Walking down the avenues there  
with bellhops standing outside gilded hotels  
and ladies in hats walking toy poodles  
and business owners hosing off sidewalks  
which the poodles had pissed on  
despite signs that say CURB YOUR DOG  
was like walking through Disneyland to me.  
It was what I thought of when I thought of New York.  
Brooklyn, Queens? Pshh.  
Give me taxis and corking fees and hydrothermal manholes.  
Give me suits and suites and selfies in front of the 9/11 Memorial.  
Give me digital propaganda in Times Fucking Square.  
Give me the Upper East Side!  
Whenever I wasn't hungover  
I'd get up before the sun crested the buildings  
and walk the four blocks over to Central Park.  
I'd get a triple espresso at Le Pain Quotidien  
and sit down on a bench in front of a fake pond and read.  
I'd imagine Salinger sitting there seventy years earlier  
observing the great-great-great-great-great-great-great

grandparents of the ducks I was now observing.  
And in the evening, if I wasn't working or getting sloppy at a bar,  
to avoid going back to my hovel  
I'd take a penny and go to the Met.  
It's funny because I'm not even a fan of most art.  
I just liked being there, surrounded by it.  
When I moved to Williamsburg, then,  
Land of the Hipsters,  
it wasn't too long before I began to miss the UES.  
But I never went back because my job was in Williamsburg  
and there were plenty of bars to get drunk at there already.  
Also because it was getting close to winter  
and I'd heard the subway in winter  
was an incubator for influenza.  
If I could avoid it I did.  
Then it was spring. Cherry trees  
started blooming, parkas started shedding,  
the East River started sparkling, sort of.  
I thought how full of life Central Park must be  
and remembered my old morning routine.  
So on a Saturday when I wasn't working  
I decided to make a day of it.  
I'd go to the zoo, sit down  
on the bench I used to sit down on,  
walk on the dirt track around the reservoir,  
buy a soft pretzel with salt and mustard on a corner  
then go to the Met for a couple hours.  
And maybe after I'd grab an IPA at a bar  
and strike up a conversation with a beautiful woman.  
I'd tell her my name was Chad Steele  
and that I was a venture capitalist in town on business.

With my itinerary set  
I took the L to Union Square  
then transferred to the 4  
which runs like a catheter up the big dick of Manhattan.  
Right after it got going though  
a shirtless, barefoot homeless dude shuffled in.  
Having been in the city a while now  
I'd seen my fair share of crazy bastards.  
Not all of them homeless either.  
I went out for a drink with this chick I met at Whole Foods  
who said she was a gender non-binary vegan cat-loving socialist.  
She talked about shutting down the patriarchy  
as if it were a slaughterhouse  
and her disgust with the disparity  
between the rich and poor.  
"You live in SoHo," I said. "You workout at Equinox."  
"Your point?" she said.  
But then there's the *homeless* crazy bastards,  
their homelessness not the reason they're crazy  
but their craziness often the reason they're homeless.  
So anyway this dude walks in  
smearing human shit across the floor  
like a janitor doing his job in reverse.  
He'd pinched a loaf in the space between the cars  
and I guess had stepped in it getting up.  
He hardly seemed to care.  
He just kept walking, dragging his shitty foot  
behind him like a zombie.  
We all sat there and looked at each other  
and didn't look at each other,  
praying he wouldn't stop in front of us

and ask for change or a Seventh Generation baby wipe.  
Of course when the train stopped at Grand Central  
everyone rushed to leave, stepping over  
the line of feces and out the doors  
as other passengers filed in.  
If you think I thought this was hilarious, I didn't.  
But what was I supposed to do,  
give the crackhead the penny in my pocket  
so he could go contemplate a Picasso?  
Virtue signal like that "woke" Equinox chick  
but not really do anything?  
No thanks. Instead I got on the next train  
and went to Central Park Zoo  
where I took an iPhone video  
of seals doing tricks for fish.