

Introduction

The thing that's touched me most since being in New York City is that the other day, walking down Washington street, I saw truly the smallest dog try and take a shit. It was walking in circles the circumference of a melon until it found the chosen spot. Then it was as if it took the muscles of its entire body to find its squatting position, which was strangely vertical just because of its size, and shit. It was looking up at its owner, eyes wide, as it happened.

I wouldn't call myself an animal person. A girl once told me I look like I hate animals. The truth is I love certain dogs, I'm allergic to cats, and I've been scared to death of rodents my entire life. Birds are fine unless they fly too close to me, and large animals are fine too, unless they're dirty, or have fleas, which they always do.

But I have a strange affinity to the animals in this city. When I see a small bird waddling by or any dog. Confused dog on the stairs of a brownstone. Dog peeing on cement. Big shaggy dog waiting in line for the Gucci store. Small black dog, with bangs covering its eyes, chasing a squirrel.

In a city so consumed with the artificial, the animals are a reminder of being here. Like seeing a family with a baby on a blanket in the park. It's a place where life is happening at its largest, most influential, most spectacular; it's also a place where life happens in its most basic form. The geese saunter, the pigeons stretch their necks, the small dogs take their shits.

This story is inspired by the animals (dogs) in New York that have somehow made it here. And the absurdity of the fact they have.

The President of New York

Barkley was a 1st anniversary present. When Mrs. Reinstein opened that envelope to find that beautiful dog inside of it, she said, "you're going to get lucky tonight Mr. Reinstein." He was a soft, dreamy puppy, born under a peach tree in Georgia. He had big eyes and loved to sing.

Barkley's childhood was the same as any other New York City dog. He ate, he lounged, he attended Horace Mann where he learned how to jerk off. For the most part, he adored his life; but in the city, he always wondered what more was out there for him. He would watch the fast-paced humans on the way to their private equity jobs, and influencer jobs, and underwater jobs, and think, someday maybe that will be me.

Then, on a fateful Tuesday when Barkley was in his sneaky teens, prancing down second avenue, he saw a flier on a bodega window. It read, "Goldman Sachs President Tryouts Saturday." Barkley had no job experience, why would they want him as president? But something about the flier so fatefully placed

above a lost dog sign made him decide he would try out. After all, Saturday the Reinsteins were out of town for a bake sale.

The Goldman Sachs Presidency tryouts were at Chelsea Piers.

When he reached the piers, secretary Bonnie was waiting outside seated at a desk.

“How can I help you?” she asked.

“I’m here to try out for the presidency job,” Barkley said.

“Name?”

“Barkley.”

“I’m not seeing that name on the list,” she said, “Are you sure that’s your name?”

“Actually, I changed my name yesterday,” Barkley said in a stroke of genius, “You see, I was defrauded.”

“Ohhhhh,” said secretary Bonnie. “Got it. Right this way.”

She escorted him to the tryouts.

There were all kinds of people at the tryouts. Some had light brown hair, some had dark brown hair, some were named Will, and others were named Jake.

The tryouts consisted of the regular: push ups, two-legged race, the pacer. Then there was the staring contest, the tic-tac-toe tournament, and the kissing booth. The final test in the tryout was who could say the largest number. Barkley said five hundred.

When it ended, Bonnie slow-clapped for the contestants and announced that the decision for who would be the next president of Goldman Sachs would be announced later that night.

At 8pm EST, Goldman released their decision for who would be their next president on Facebook.

Barkley couldn’t believe it.

They chose him.

The difficult part was now Barkley had to tell his family. Mr. Reinstein was a bassist in a small Slavic band who could afford his lifestyle because of his trust fund he liked to call a side hustle to his outer borough buddies. You see, he was a Reinstein; His great grandfather had invented talking to parrots. Mrs. Reinstein, or Lulu she insisted you call her, was a martial artist. She had built a home of a niche space in the artworld, painting watercolors of little kids in Karate classes.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Reinstein, the artists they were, despised the financial elite. The two found it embarrassing and simply tasteless to want to make money.

Knowing this, Barkley felt they would be unsupportive of his presidential selection. He feared they would frown, give a blasé hand motion, and say, “you are no dog of mine.” Worse, he feared they would make him buy his own place. He hated sleeping alone. And he hated the bitches in this city.

So, Barkley decided he would not tell them about his job. Instead, he would pretend he got another job they liked.

That night, at Christmas morning, the economy came into conversation. Now was his time, thought Barkley.

“There’s something I have to tell everyone,” said Barkley, swallowing his bold Barolo.

“What is it, dog?” said Mr. Reinstein.

“I got a job actually.”

“Who would want to hire you?” said the neighborhood bully (the neighborhood bully always came to Christmas morning).

The questions swirled around the table. Then Mrs. Reinstein spoke and everyone quieted. “So, what’s the job?” she asked.

He didn’t know how to say it. He couldn’t bear the blue look of disgrace on either of the Reinsteins’ faces.

“I’m becoming a landlord,” said Barkley quickly.

“You can do that?” asked Mrs. Reinstein, “you can just be hired as a landlord?”

Barkley had no choice but to go with it. “Yeah,” he shrugged, “I just applied to own this building and they said yes.”

“Well I’ll be damned,” said the angel.

Everyday, Barkley would get ready for the office, and Mrs. Reinstein would walk him to the 1 train, kiss his furry head and say, “go make me proud, my little landlord.” Of course, she wondered what a landlord did all day, but then again, as a martial artist, she firmly believed in just doing whatever.

When Mrs. Reinstein would walk back towards their state of the art townhouse, Barkley would exit the 1, and find his black car service. In the car, he would prepare for the day by reading Barack Obama's biography, *Dreams of my Father*.

Barkley had it all: the job, the job title, the job salary, the job bonus. Still, being president of Goldman Sachs was no walk in the park. Barkley was working hours in the upper double digits. Hadn’t he always – at least ever since he walked past that hiring sign – wanted to work here? Wasn’t this the life of his dreams? So why did he cry into the Hudson river on Saturdays. Why did he think about his puphood with great longing?

Mrs. Reinstein was becoming concerned too. Her Barkley was coming home at scandalous hours. His apricot fur was growing pale. And he showed no interest in the things he once loved, most noticeably the squeaking caterpillar.

Her concern necessitated more verbs when one day, while washing the cereal boxes, she found a key with white powder in the shape of cocaine. She gasped when it happened. Sure, she had always suspected that landlords had a raging drug problem, but Barkley? Her own dog? Her best friend on cold nights when Mr. Reingold was out with the Slavs?

That night, Mrs. Reinstein stayed up waiting for Barkley to come home. Unfortunately, she fell asleep while staying up. It was six days until Barkley arrived at an hour Mrs. Reinstein was still awake.

“You. I need to talk to you,” she said, seriously.

She took him by the collar and brought him into the kitchen. It was lime season and the kitchen was stocked with those magnificent, green fruits. Barkley went into bite one, but Mrs. Reinhold knocked it away.

“Not today,” she said.

Now, Barkley looked up at her with his big eyes. He was worried she had found out the truth: he was not a real landlord.

Barkley was ready to admit everything – the interview, the salary, the commute – but before he could, Mrs. Reinstein pulled a cereal box out from under her shirt.

He had been wondering what was under there.

From the cereal box, she pulled out a key.

“What the fuck, Barkley,” said Mrs. Reinstein. “What the fuck is this?”

It took Barkley some time to remember. Then he did. One day when Barkley had been talking to his key, an idiot pigeon had dropped a bag of cocaine from its pigeon feet, which exploded all over the key. That was the day Barkley had to fire the janitor, Jime, because who, if not the janitor, was responsible for the pigeons in Goldman Sachs.

Of course, he knew Mrs. Reinstein would not believe this story. She would never believe that a janitor could be named Jime. So instead Barkley said nothing and made the whimper of a sad dog.

“I can’t have drugs in my house, Barkley. I’m a respected martial artist,” she said.

Barkley understood. He had two choices: to leave home or the presidency. But if he left the Goldman presidency, the whole world economy would collapse. And even if the whole world economy did not collapse, he would never again get hired to be the president of a big bank. And even if he was again hired to be president, the neighborhood bully would probably stick his tongue out at Barkley.

So he left home.

He packed his doggie bags and his dollar bills. He left behind the Reinsteins, this apartment, the only place he’d ever been loved and known.

He bought a new place downtown with his Whole Foods gift card. It was a four-bedroom with a panoramic view and a spanish gazebo. It was both an apartment and a helicopter at the same time. Along with the apartment, he bought two pairs of Gucci dog shoes, a rice paddy in the far east, and a Monet.

But Barkley was doing no better and if anything, worse. He hired a masseuse. Nothing. He hired the world’s first and only dog therapist, Natalia Papanova. Nothing. He bought those thousand dollar happiness pills they sell on seventh avenue. Not nothing, but nothing good.

He wanted to call Mrs. Reinstein and tell her, “The work is too hard. I am not getting enough sleep. I have a client meeting with God tomorrow and am working twenty more hours than there are in a week.”

He wanted to call Mr. Reinstein and ask him, “What should I do, dad?”

He wanted to call the neighborhood bully and say, “kill me.”

Winter became spring. The park snow melted and he missed those days he’d spent grazing languidly in The Great Lawn, Mr. Reinstein tossing tennis balls, Mrs. Reinstein humming Vivaldi, the April air so soft and parsley. He missed the strange dogs that would smell him, fight him, and flirt with him.

Far away from his kind, he was overcome with a peanut butter nostalgia for his childhood. He remembered living in the womb, where he would roll around and play the lottery. He remembered the Cross Bronx Expressway on Sundays. He even remembered living in that envelope during his move to the city. Even the envelope appeared in his memory like a place of freedom.

One April day when Barkley was walking himself down the street – in youth he had always wanted that freedom, to walk himself, but now he missed the feeling of a leash around him, the gentle force of another person behind his body – he passed a small palm reading shop called “Little Small Palm Reading Shop.” When, instead of going inside, he walked past the shop, the lady began to put a curse on him.

“Okay, okay, fine, I’ll come in,” said Barkley not wanting a curse today.

The lady palm reader smiled a toothless smile. She gestured for him to sit on the chair.

“What brings you to me today?” she asked.

Barkley rolled his dog eyes and didn’t answer.

“Let me guess, your parents are not your real parents?” This was obvious because he was a dog. But in his sleepless state, Barkley was shocked she could know such a thing. What genius, he thought. He wanted to know more.

“Can you tell me why I feel this way?” he asked.

“Ah. You do not feel great. You’ve felt better.”

“Exactly!” said Barkley, shocked at her omniscience. He noticed her palm-reading certificate hung on the wall. She’d been trained at a Taco Bell.

“You do not know what you want from life.” The lady said. It was a total shot in the dark.

Barkley thought about this for a second – what did he want from life?

“What do you do?” she asked.

He told her about the presidency.

“Do you want money?” she asked.

What would he do with money? He didn’t wear clothes. He was banned from Emirates first class. He had no tail to take on romantic getaways in the Hamptons. He had no children to spoil with prestigious educations. Also, there was the fact that he was a dog, he would not be alive for many more years. So what was he building all this wealth for?

“I don’t really,” he said.

“Do you want power?”

He thought about this too. He hated the letter *p*.

“So what do you want?”

“Uhhhh,” said Barkley, “What are the options?”

The lady consulted the onion. Then the onion unfolded with the options.

They were: money, power, achievement, fame, family, exploration, well-being, expression, helping others, and legacy.

Barkley looked carefully at the options. Achievement meant little to him. Fame also meant little. Family meant something. He hadn’t intended to ever have baby Barkleys of his own, but he thought about the Reinsteins, long walks and lazy Easters. Exploration meant something. Well-being too. Expression meant little. He was also not interested in helping others. And he didn’t know what legacy meant—was that french?

“Can I choose two options?” Barkley asked eagerly.

“Sure.”

“Okay, can I choose three options?” Barkley asked again.

“You have to pay extra for that.”

Barkley had the money so he chose three: family, exploration, and well-being.

“Think about what you’ve chosen,” said the lady – she was still winging it – “family, exploration, well-being. Are you getting that where you are now?”

He thought through the words one by one. Family: once or twice a year, one of the workers at Goldman would remember their family. Exploration: Barkley enjoyed exploring his office. The first day, he had wondered what was under the table and then he went under the table. Well-being: before he was fired, janitor Jime had hung an inspirational quote in the bathroom that read, “be yourself.” That had to be doing a lot.

Still, it seemed that none of those were as present in his life as President as they had been when he had been just a dog.

“I don’t think I am,” he finally said to the lady.

Her jaw dropped.

His tail began to tremble.

Her eyes grew teary.

“You’re killing yourself, dog. For what?”

He didn’t know.

“You don’t need to do that,” She said. “I mean look at me. I’m a palm reader and I make two thousand dollars a day.”

“You do?”

“No, but still.”

“Oh.” He was confused. Did the lady have a point?

“But I make enough. I just bought a new futon.”

“That’s great,” said the dog.

“I know. And since I take my lunch breaks some days for five hours. You might notice, the shop says open, but I am not here! I am out at my lunch!” She reeled it in. “What I’m saying is, this life of mine, I like it the best I can. And I chose it too. I was born in the Himalayas. I was training to become a medical doctor, but that’s when I came to become a palm reader.”

She shifted to a praying mantis position.

“See. I’ve changed many times. And I know I’ll change again if the sky pushes me elsewhere. So that’s what I say to you dog. Fly away. Become a bird. Fly away from where you are and where you hate.”

Barkley now understood the point. He didn’t have to be the president. He could do something else. He could go back home to the Reinsteins. He could join a book club. He could be a mother. He could sniff the air and dig, stare at the clouds, yawn, and fall asleep.

