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## The Cost of Breaking Up

Breaking up is expensive, especially in New York. When Oliver and I ended our 13-month relationship last year, I didn't realize that not only was I embarking on a journey of self-discovery and self-abuse, but also financial ruin.

Our relationship was not a traditional one since he lived in England, but that didn't make things any easier. On the evening in question, a beautiful one in late September, I made the fated *three-hour* phone call to him. Even with the greatest long-distance plan in the world a conversation of this length is going to set you back quite a bit. Little did I know that the \$16.20 it cost was nothing compared to what was to come.

I estimate that if I used 15 tissues per night I cried over Oliver, and there were some tears for at least five weeks, and there are approximately 250 tissues per box, he cost me a good \$4 right there.

Then there was the eating. Suddenly, as my life stretched meaninglessly before me, the prospect of eating fat, sugar and an excess of calories, and possibly bringing my days to a close a little earlier, didn't seem so much of a bad thing. Ordered-in pizzas, burritos and Chinese really add up when you eat them night after night, especially when complemented by gourmet gateaux from high-end delicatessens or tubs of premium Haagen Dazs. Tips to delivery men must be generous because you know you'll be seeing them again in a few days.

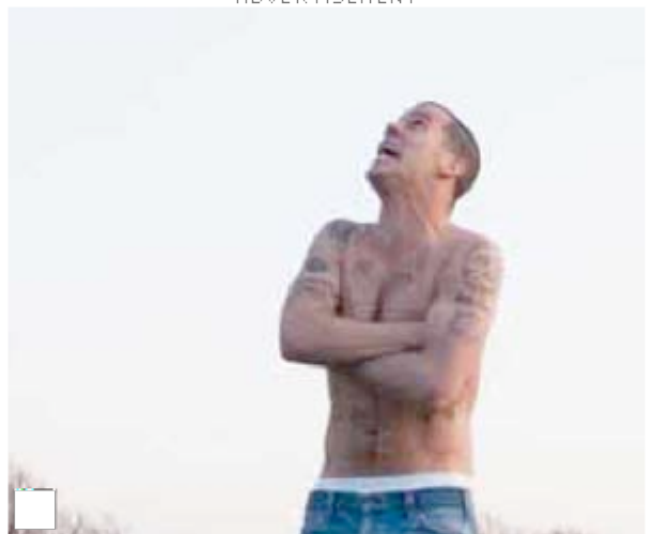
One can't just eat, one must drink. "Only the best for me," I thought as I bounced around Manhattan from liquor store to cut-price liquor warehouse, my arms full of bottles of red wine, finally knowing why alcoholics shop around. Wine estimate: \$60 per week.

There's only so much a person can cry and when you've come out of your nightly blubfest, you

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better have something to do or you'll succumb to the temptation to call him. I became a regular at Blockbuster and the employees got to know me by name, especially when I began ordering titles that weren't to be released for three months.

The trashy magazine aisle also lured me in, but sadly they're only published once every four weeks and I could get through the month's titles in two sittings.

Monthly video and magazine expenditure: approx. \$110.

There were nights when even cheap entertainment couldn't divert my mind. So I'd spend yet more hours on the phone talking to friends, complaining about my pain and talking about Oliver, over and over *and over* again. I figured the cost of these calls I'd have previously spent talking to him, but that didn't make the \$90 long-distance, \$47 nationwide charges I racked up any easier to write the check for.

After a month of sniveling self-pity I decided to take my friends up on their offers and actually leave the apartment for something besides work. If only I'd realized at that point that the extortionate charges I was running up with my personalized home entertainment mecca were nothing compared to what was about to come.

In order to cheer myself up, I whiled away many hours in the trendy boutiques on the Lower East Side. "We may be cute but we'll sure as hell hurt your wallet," should be their motto. They line the grubby, half-dilapidated streets looking out nonchalantly with paint peeling off their doors and usually no name outside. But step inside and you're whisked into a female fantasyland where shop assistants lavish you with attention, rubbing fabrics softer than a rose petal across your skin and telling you how elegant/beautiful/irresistible you look in that skirt. "And don't you think it would look fabulous with this little blouse? It's just \$245." Who can resist? Clothing, bags, jewelry, makeup. "I deserve it, don't I?" and "It's all helping my healing process" were the two phrases running constantly through my head as I watched my credit card being swiped time after time.

A bottle of wine may set you back \$9 in Manhattan's liquor stores, but a decent glass of wine in a bar will rob you of the same amount. Add to that the obligatory drinks you have to buy for your friends for putting up with your miserable whining and the generous tip you have to leave in your compassion-for-all-human-beings state of mind, and that \$9 can easily have a zero plonked on the end of it.

"Shall we have a little dinner?" friends would invariably ask. Average meal out for two, again my bill as recompense for their ears and oft-damp shoulders: \$73.

The healing process is long and goes through many cycles. Once the hermit stage and the out-with-my-friends stage were over, I found myself in the "How will I ever meet another man" stage. Single friends invited me to swanky soirees where it cost more to check my coat than I usually paid for my lunch. Married friends dragged me to house parties to which I'd have to take an elegant gift from Saks or Tiffany, just in case the love of my life was watching when they opened it. Heaven forbid I should be considered a cheapskate.

Since both of these men-meeting routes proved fruitless, I took what I saw was the last resort: online dating. For \$25 a month you can meet your future husband and, as the site promised: "Bring the romance to your life that you've always wanted." What they don't tell you is that you have to go on dates with dozens of losers before you ever find this oh-so special man, and hardly anyone does find him because it becomes too tiring sifting through everyone else's rejects.

About five weeks and 19 dates into meeting men from the Internet I started wondering: Was I the reject, or were they? I stood naked in front of the mirror after a particularly painful date and realized what was wrong: all the junk food and alcohol had taken their toll.

"What you really need is a personal trainer," said John as he handed over the card that gave me full gym membership for one year.

"H-how much?" I stuttered.

"We'll do you five sessions for \$450—our pre-spring special," he gushed, his face lighting up to show me what a deal he was offering. He did have a point, and after the five sessions, aerobics and yoga classes, weekly manicures, once-monthly facials, and once-in-six-week massages, eyebrow pluckings and leg waxings, I felt fantastic and looked like \$100. Just a pity it had taken me almost 10 times that to achieve the look.

So finally, come early spring, I realized that not only did I look fantastic but I felt incredible—physically, mentally and emotionally. Oliver was now such history that I'd forgotten all of his phone numbers, which I used to have memorized. I beamed at my reflection and knew it was time to celebrate.

I put on my new dress, which had to be belted in two more notches due to my new svelte self, and took myself to dinner in the restaurant I'd always dreamed of eating in. I washed down a perfect meal with two glasses of champagne and realized then that dating Oliver had not been time wasted but had, in fact, done me the world of good. Now, can anyone lend me \$20?

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