

## Reykjavik: I Didn't Come Here to Sleep

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030212

Wind unrivaled understands me. Whirling me around, the wind identifies me, picks me apart by its gale, and sympathizes with who I am, from where I came. It questions my motives. The wind tries to show me every direction imaginable, like an excited spirit. I love the wind here. Iceland.

[Who am I? I came from nowhere: rural Pennsylvania where opportunities are mere folklore, where every once in a while we hear wind about someone from years past who ended up in New York City or somewhere else out of state but we don't know if these people ever existed. Most of them come back. Anything past the United States was beyond them, and even some of those strange states were foreign. I come from the land of chocolate and fields, the land of familiarity and meat. Iceland does not exist to us, here. One day, I want to be folklore.]

I understand things here, as things understand me [Pennsylvania doesn't get me, she doesn't even try], as if the wind blew away dust and sediment: clear. I could easily see living in Reykjavik; I love it. The architecture [the Icelandic people implemented roof-siding for their homes because of its low cost and efficiency], the people [some of whom have distant Irish blood since previous Nordic residents owned Celts as slaves, others of whom have Danish blood since Iceland fell under Danish rule for 500 years], the windy air [average wind speed: approximately the time it takes for someone to buy Skyr, Icelandic yogurt, at 24—not long at all], the soul. I feel settled in.

They said the rain made bad weather today, but I love it. Rain always cheers me up. I feel good, sensitive. Speaking of sensitive, the bed creaks with every blink of my eye, every breath I steal. Top bunk and next to the window, the puffy sheets radiate such a strong, pure white my light blue eyes need to cover in fear. I need shades just to get into bed. But who cares, I didn't come here to sleep.

030312

We take the Golden Circle tour today. I keep to myself, but I hear the ecosystem. I hear the grass, the rocks, dirt and deer, streams, they all shout out to me. Luring me in like silent sirens' songs. Staring out the side of the belt-buckled bus [law]; I want to lie in the middle of nothing so badly and understand independence. I want to meld into the fields and melt into the ground like the winter ice. Become invisible while my soul sinks slowly into the land, many kilometers from a single home.

*A board of broken glass all over downtown Reykjavik greets the early-risers this Saturday morning like a massacre of random bodies. I don't know what happened last night.*

In the town, I want the culture. Consuming me, I want everything. I don't have any of it yet. Like the Lopi sweaters, an intricate circular design at the top with vivid blank in the center a staple for any Icelander. I want that. Experiencing restlessness for the first time today, I don't like it. Tried going out tonight but it didn't work, didn't know where to go, what to do. Will I not know happiness even in Iceland? Even given this amazing opportunity, will the chemical imbalance tormenting my brain jeopardize my puny hope? The shower water smells strongly sulfuric. With the amount of sulfur here, it's inescapable. Can't forget my soap in the shower, I share the bathroom with the entire floor of the hostel.

The wind mostly disappeared today, but I don't mind, we will flirt later. Perhaps the wind could sweep the glass into the gutters, let that which lies beneath take care of the garbage.

030512

*Iceland* is the land of fire and ice? The volcanos spitting lave are just my mood swings; the icy glaciers are just my rejecting heart.

030612

Still, a good opportunity to steer from the group and escape to the delicate local cafés has eluded me. A chance to order coffee and a freshly baked something and sit by the window, always the window, and stare out, looking for solemnity in the grey clouds, silently billowing just beyond human consciousness. Not yet. I can tell my mood stabilized more today and I can also tell I could not live here, rather travel here often. It seems most people know each other. Things are too small. However, getting on national television is ridiculously easy. Everyone's connections paired with flare in an interesting story is more than enough to land a spot on national TV.

New trip goal.

030812

Two zippers. This jacket has two zippers on the same side. Not only that, but it's the left side. I have to sheepishly ask the sales woman how the heck to zip it up. It takes me way too long to really get it, stupid foreign clothes. Both zippers must align before the other side can glide through. Try that. None of that makes any remote sense, but I buy this jacket anyway. It's a *good* jacket.

We go on the Northern Lights tour tonight. The tour bus first steers us to a distant church miles outside Reykjavik. We don't see the fickle auroras there, among the freezing darkness. On the way to another destination, the tour guide decided to let us have a ten minute stop at the Keflavik International Airport for a cup of coffee or to use the bathroom and the second we step off the bus, there they are: aurora borealis. Collisions of charged particles, the northern lights mirror the southern lights; when one changes, the other does at the precise moment. The auroras occur nonstop throughout the day, but are only visible at night. Our portal into Iceland is also the place where we saw the auroras. It makes sense.

I like looking around here. Looking at all the houses, who lives in them? Who are these people? That's one thing my pictures lack: people. The people are as much a part of a place as the place itself. But it's awkward to ask for a picture. I only wish I could connect with more people, even

though I'm content by myself. Last night, I walked around Reykjavik alone. The streets mesmerized me. I needed to get away from the others; they don't know me. The darkness on the streets blanketed me like the sexual partners I never had; the glowing lights tucked me into bed. I slept well.

030912

I did not *lose* my virginity. Misplacing it like a wallet in slippery darkness. I knew damn-well what I was doing. I gracefully handed it over and said "Here, I don't want to ever see it again." And I never will.

031012

I sleep in another bed. The second night in a row where I have not used the creaky bed provided me. On this night, I am in the cozy third-floor apartment of a German who lived in Reykjavik for three years now [*Wie spät ist es? Spät genug.*] We left our shoes outside the door. Kisses like greedy bites, beasts dying of starvation, nourishment necessary for survival; we used teeth. I saw the Northern Lights two days ago. I can no longer complain about not connecting to the people—that would be insulting.

*Finally, I learn the reason for all of the broken glass: it is perfectly legal to have open alcohol containers outside in Iceland and once bars close around four in the morning, the people just congregate outside. When they finish their drinks, the drunks just smash them into the sidewalks. Shattered faces left behind, the trickling remnants of beer their blood.*

031112

I walk back proud in the morning. Around this time, an Icelander tells me it is illegal to have a leash on your child. What a progressive country. However, and I *saw* this, parents--presumably the parents--will leave their children in their strollers outside and go inside a noodle shop and just order food to go. No big deal. They'll just leave their kids outside. No one steals them. Why does this feel

so weird that people won't steal babies in strollers? Why *would* people steal babies in strollers? I guess they're expensive. I feel bad thinking that it's weird people *don't* want to steal babies in strollers.

031212

The last thing before flying back, I go to the Blue Lagoon [the largest natural geothermal pool in the world, water as blue as light skies even though you can't see past two inches of the water]. The natural moisturizing cream it produces, perfect for healthy skin, squishes between my fingers as I cover my face. But I don't really care.

Taking a break from the waters, I venture inside, bracelet safely secure around my wrist. My bracelet tracks how much I spent on lunch and allows me access to my locker. A secluded row of wooden patio recliners and I snatch one for myself. Eat my lunch. Daze as my skin dries in the sun let in from the glass. I feel my skin drying.

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The wind. He is here; he has been here almost every day with me. He has my back; he says there are so many things in the world. But the wind doesn't want to protect me; the wind wants to shake me off my branches and make me feel vulnerable. I just keep walking. Back in Pennsylvania, we don't have this wind. Back in Pennsylvania, there is no wind that pushes me, makes me vulnerable, nothing to stir my settling leaves. I just keep walking.

*This is Iceland, where each person is an opportunity. I am to discover and mature among the night, the broken glass. Sometimes I think I am one of those broken glasses, strewn haphazardly among all the other glasses and bottles, my shards intertwined with others. But here, maybe I am not broken, maybe not yet. I may be one of those people shattering the glass bodies. Or simply someone walking by, walking over them cautiously until the omnipotent street sweeper comes and cleans them up in the morning. I will learn confidence, I will learn intimacy, I will learn where I can live and I will learn that I can't live in America for the rest of my life. Yes, I will.*