Dear Diary,

I’m currently laying in bed on the 4th (which is actually like the 8th) floor of an apartment complex, where I’m sharing a 2 bed/1 bath airbnb with some local Danes, in Copenhagen, Denmark. It’s 12:05 am (so really still September 16th in my mind, and also in my physical body, which is still very awake considering it thinks that it is actually 4 pm in Colorado).

I’ve had a lot of thoughts on my mind about this place, about travel, about Europe, and life today - so it’s time to type.

I never felt awfully compelled to travel to Europe. I always assumed it would pretty much be the USA, but with more historically significant architecture. I thought that the people would be white and homogeneous, that the landscape would be filled with colonial looking homes, the culture would be westernized, and there wouldn’t be many challenges for me.

In a way, a lot of my original thoughts were true, and in a way they weren’t as well.

This place is **definitely homogenous**. Everyone is white here. Like, everyone. Maybe 1% isn’t, and that 1% seems to only be RecSys attendees.

Not only that, but it seems like everyone **looks like me**. I see myself in so many people’s facial structures. I see Steve Stafsholt in so many men. I see my grandparents in every old person’s eyes. I see my mom and my dad in people’s smiles and foreheads.

I see my lineage here.

I’m definitely nordic. I imagine it would only be more profound in Sweden. I was thinking of going there on Wednesday or Thursday on the train. Apparently it’s $20 and like 30 minutes away.

Anyways, yeah. Everyone is white, blonde, and looks similar to me. They are also really tall. Which means all the men are **insanely attractive.**

I’m not going to lie, if I was to choose one country I’ve been to where the men are the most attractive, I think Denmark has Colombia beat. Though I am more physically attracted to Latin men in general, the height in Denmark has my stomach in knots.

It’s funny to visit a place where I am not a minority. In fact, I’m the opposite. Everyone keeps assuming I’m Danish. They’ll speak to me in Danish when I order food, when I’m on the street, etc. It’s pretty cool to feel so comfortable here, but also such a different experience than Asia and South America.

I feel **so comfortable** here. So comfortable in fact that I had no problem walking / biking home for about an hour earlier tonight after dark without checking my GPS basically at all, in a place I had never been, almost wanting to get lost. It’s nothing like Asia and South America. I could already see myself easily living here (in a ‘I could easily assimilate’ kind of way, not in a ‘I’d enjoy my life here’ kind of way).

Though I will admit, Danes are nice. They are also a little stand-offish. It depends on who you interact with. When they do smile, they smile with their eyes though. I like that.

Their noses are also so cute. Especially on girls.

Okay 2 things I want to discuss actually that came to mind :

1. There were some boys in a group on my walk home who were checking me out and basically cat called me, but in Danish, and it was great and made me smile (idk why I enjoy getting catcalled in other countries so much… but maybe it made me happy to know that I still get catcalled even in a country where I look just like everyone else) But I was also laughing because those boys have no clue that I had no clue what they were saying… for all they know, I heard every word of their *probably not great* pick up lines yelled at my back as I walked past them.
2. I’m pretty positive that I’m bisexual and I’m just too nervous to every initiate anything with a girl.

Let me talk about that one more. I wasn’t expecting to type about that tonight, I’m actually not sure where it came from, maybe my comment about Danes noses?

Yeah, I remember when I was first discovering this in Arizona 3 summers ago. I think it was a much bigger deal to me back then. Now I think it’s something that I just kind of know but don’t really need to do anything about.

Part of me knows if I don’t ever try sleeping with a girl in my life I’ll probably regret it, just because I’ll never know if I enjoy it until I try it. And lesbian porn is much better to me than normal porn so I feel like that’s at least a little bit of an indication. Plus I find some women so attractive, and some women honestly turn me on more than lots of men do. To be honest, I’ve had worries at times in my life that I’m secretly in love with Claudia and that was a big reason why I felt so jealous of her and Andrew. But I think that’s not the case anymore. I definitely love her, but just as a friend-soul-mate, not as a romantic-soul-mate. Though she has admitted she thinks she’s bi to me, and I think I have in some words or less admitted the same thing, so I think we are probably going through very similar phases.

Part of me wishes I wasn’t too chicken to put myself out there for women. But I know me, and honestly, if it’s on my bucket list in life to get with a girl to see what it means to me, then I know I will. So I’m not too worried.

Anyways… moving on.

Speaking of romantic things… something interesting happened tonight:

Yeng asked me in a very suspicious (not actually suspicious, but I know Yeng and I know *something* must have happened to spawn this question) way… if I would ever date Sam tonight.

It made me reflect on a lot of things.

I promptly told him I can’t answer that question, and he understood.

I think that was the best way for me to answer that question.

Here’s why:

Part of me thinks I’ve secretly liked Sam all along. Since I met him that one Fall during Sqzee, I think that he had a brief crush on me at first. Because Yeng (in his typical suspicious way) asked me a very similar question about getting with Sam and how I could never speak to Sam about the fact that Yeng had asked me that.

At the time, I could see myself slightly crushing on him… but of course he was dating Lindsey and I had bigger fish to fry. Plus, he and I started becoming good friends and I didn’t want to fuck that up. Then I got depressed and I didn’t have time to think about it.

Though, I do explicitly remember during that awful winter of depression, I admitted to maybe having feelings for Sam to Claudia. I think at the time though I was just feeling lonelier than ever, because during that same winter I had a dream about Yeng that made me have potential inklings of feelings for him for a few days too.

Either way, Sam was definitely a presence in my romantic mind, but never at the forefront.

Then I left the USA. To be honest, when I left I was ready to be away from Sam. I even wrote (hand wrote) in my travel journal that I thought he was a bad influence on me. I thought he pushed me to smoke too much, to eat too much, and to feel anxiety / pressure to do what he wanted.

In hind-sight I realize all of those were me not being comfortable enough in my own skin, and having to deal with my own demons. But, now that I look back on that, I think that I see a lot of similarities between the way I act with Sam and the way I act with people I am into.

I pretty much always do what Sam wants, even when I don’t want to. Usually though, I will want to do it. I don’t know if it’s actually because it’s just what I want or if maybe <1% of me does it because I know it’ll make him happy and seeing Sam happy from my actions makes me happy.

After seeing Sam in Sequoia, I got worried again about our friendship, because I felt like I had really fallen back into a weed-smoking junk-food-eating slump being around him and I wasn’t happy about that. Again, it may have been induced by him, but I don’t think it was *caused* by him.

After seeing Sam in SF, I felt great. He and I had such a great time hanging out. I really felt like our friendship jumped a few leaps. We felt really comfortable sharing a bed together basically the whole trip, it was even his idea every time. It’s clear we’ve become insanely close.

Honestly, I’m closer with Sam than I am with anyone else in my life. I also talk with Sam more frequently than I talk to anyone else in life. He’s my best friend. I’ve told him this.

Since coming to Colorado, I’ve only talked with him even more than in the past. We watch Netflix together, we shoot the shit together, we’ll just do our own stuff with each other on Facetime together… we’ll be brutally honest to each other.

He’s such an amazing support system and best friend to have. It’s like everything that I would need from a boyfriend, but he’s physically distant and I can still be the person I want to be in every way.

But of course, whenever a thought of romance may pop into my head on the occasional occasion, I dismiss it. I think about what Sam says when others joke about us dating “dude that’s gross, dating Jessie would be like dating a sister, it’s different.”

That statement grounds me and brings me back to reality. Realizing that I am best friends with Sam. He’s like a brother to me. I wouldn’t ever want something more than that. If something did ever happen, it would fuck up our friendship anyway, and that is **not worth it at all**.

So, I’ve made complete peace with our friend-ness. And it makes me happy to know that I’ll have him as my best friend forever. Until he finds a wife that is, and we’ve talked about that too. But I’ll handle that down the road.

So anyways, that’s why Yeng’s comment today threw me off guard. That’s the only slight inkling of any actual talk of Sam and I being together since Yeng’s question almost 2 years ago after first meeting Sam in Sqzee.

These kinds of questions don’t come from nothing. There’s three options:

1. One of Sam, Yeng, and I’s friends asked Yeng about it which made Yeng think about it, which made him curious enough to ask me
2. Yeng has observed how often Sam and I talk and digitally hang out that he has been building his own conclusions and his own curiosity
3. Sam said something that threw Yeng so off guard and made him so curious enough that he had to ask me

The first two are probably more likely, and if they are true then they mean nothing to me. The last one however… has a lot of implications.

If Sam has in any way considered the possiblity of he and I… then that would knock down the biggest thing that I use as a guard for having feelings for him, the fact that we think of each other as siblings.

After Yeng asked me that, I stalked Sam’s Facebook. I looked at pictures of him and his family, I smiled when I saw his dad (love his dad), I smiled when I saw him as a kid, I pictured what his childhood might have been like, I smiled when I saw Henry, who I have now met. I smiled knowing that he is going to be in my life for a long time.

But then I got confused.

I can’t let myself have romantic feelings for Sam, in any way. Initially after seeing Yeng’s message I thought maybe depending on what he said I could let some creep up. Honestly some feelings did creep up for an hour or so there. But I’m glad I wrote this out, because after having thought about the progression of our friendship, I think I am more sure now than ever that I could never risk something so amazing. Sam is my best friend and it isn’t worth it to risk that for anything.

Honestly, Yeng probably just felt curious, or one of our friends did. I won’t feed the thought in my head anymore.

It’s good to think it through though. I feel much more clear about this.

So with all of that now…. Moving on!

It’s 12:40 am now, and I have to be awake in about 6 hours…. Fuckkkkk this jet lag. I am so tired all day and now I’m wide awake as fuck at 1 am. At least it’s only a week. Maybe if I don’t let myself adjust then I’ll just never have to deal with jet lag back in the USA. Hmm maybe I’m onto something here?

So some more thoughts:

Seeing all of the speakers at RecSys today made me realize how much of a power house I can be in my field if I continue working my ass off. My public speaking skills are **fire** compared to every presenter I saw today.

Actually, I should put working on public speaking on my to-do list. If I made that my best skill, I would become **unstoppable**.

I don’t get nervous meeting new people anymore.

Sometimes I don’t love it, and I don’t love being put in a room with strangers for long periods of time, but that’s usually only when the strangers are introverts. It’s a lot of effort to be the only extroverted person in a room, I have to start, continue, and control the conversation; but in a way that is inclusive and non-dominating. It can be draining. If there’s at least one other extrovert to fall back on, that usually helps.

Honestly, I’ve had some interesting thoughts about travel today.

When I first got to Copenhagen, I was feeling pretty negative. I think that might have been in large part due to my huge amount of sleep deprivation. But now that a day has passed, I’m feeling much more optimistic.

Walking home tonight made me feel **so good**. It reminded me of that warm glowing feeling of traveling and being so unaware and unknowing of the world that exists around me. Hearing people pass me on their bikes while speaking a different language makes a subconscious smile appear on my lips every time. I love seeing things spelled differently, I love seeing the Danish alphabet, I love the different architecture and social norms. Every part of travel makes me feel so exhilarated.

But, I definitely felt one thing in the last two days :

I am so grateful I didn’t choose to go to Switzerland for my PhD. It would have been beautiful and I would have been able to travel a lot. But it would have been an awful program for me. I wouldn’t have been able to research what I wanted. I wouldn’t have been surrounded by the kinds of peers I wanted to be. I wouldn’t have been in a warm and welcoming community…

Europe is beautiful, the people are beautiful, some are nice, but most are cold. It’s a very different place than Colombia, very different from Thailand, very different from the USA. Well, okay. It’s **super similar** to the USA. But, I think culturally, the people *feel* more stand-offish, I’ve been told that it isn’t to be rude, it’s just the social norms.

I wouldn’t have fit in in Switzerland. I would have felt *alone*. I wouldn’t have made it.

But I am super happy and grateful to be here. In a sense, I feel less guilty by not spending every extra minute that I have to explore. I think it’s in part because I’m here on “business”, in part because there isn’t much time for me to explore, and in part because I know that it won’t be anything crazier than what I experienced in the last 9 months.

I shouldn’t self edit like that. If I looked hard enough, I’d find some crazy stuff here.

I think I’m going to go to the hippy section of town when I have some free time. Maybe even tomorrow. I’ll fit in much better there.

But yeah, I haven’t felt incredibly compelled to put myself out there to meet more locals or try crazy experiences here, and I don’t think it’s the trip for that anyway. Which is helping me not feel guilty about it.

**I really hope I get a good reason to go to RecSys in Brazil next year.** It would be awesome if I got the position to do the RecSys challenge… then I could even get to work (and possible intern??) with a latin company too! I know I’ll be going to FAT\* in Barcelona, Spain at the end of January (at least I’m pretty sure! Keeping my fingers crossed just in case), which is **amazing**. That is the country I am most interested in visiting in Europe, because of the Spanish. Well… okay visiting Amsterdam would be sick too (maybe just for the drugs…?)

The funny thing is though, even though I don’t feel compelled to put myself out there here in Copenhagen, I don’t feel afraid to either.

I feel so fundamentally changed from my travels. I know how to meet people that I’ve never met. I know how to speak with people who I share nothing in common with. I know how to find commonalities in someone who is seemingly opposite from me. I know how to hold my own. I know how to experience real shit. I know who to trust and who to not trust.

I know how to travel.

I know how to *live*.

I was feeling happy for one reason or another today or yesterday, and I started feeling worried again at how happy I was. I was worried that if I am too happy, something will catch up to me karmically, and I’ll inevitably fall into my depression again or I’ll find the ‘real’ me again (the dark me). With every passing day though, especially in Boulder, that is just feeling less and less likely.

I’m realizing that maybe the fog of my depression and eating disorder and unhappiness really were just temporary. There may be small pieces of them that surface at my most trialed moments in life… but maybe I am just inherently a happy person. Maybe I’m one of the lucky ones who gets to live in a range of happiness between 6 and 10. I’ve felt a 6, and now I’m back at my average of an 8 or 9 on a daily basis. I was always an optimistic kid. I’ve always been a happy person. Sure, I’ve had my days, weeks, months, years, and countless angsty moments, but there’s something that makes me think I am destined for life-long happiness;

When I get sad, it makes me happy sometimes. When I feel lonely, sometimes I love it. Happiness makes me happy (duh), but sometimes sadness does too. It makes me feel independent and stoked to be in such control over my life, my actions, and my emotions. The more tools I add to my mental-health (yogi) toolkit, the more that I enjoy the saddest moments of my life.

Breath and yoga and meditation and spirituality are **incredible**. English words couldn’t do justice to how much they mean to me.

So yeah, I’m happy. Not in a ‘everything is perfect, every day is perfect’ kind of way… but in a more real way. In a way that shows that I know that life isn’t easy… but I’m just grateful to be on the journey, no matter where it takes me.

I’m forever grateful for my travels that I took this year.

I’m grateful for traveling right now. Especially the introspection that it encourages.

I’m beyond grateful for all of the traveling I’ll do in the future.

Feeling full.

I should try to go to bed (aka watch youtube videos for another hour and *then* probably try to go to bed). Either way, it’s time to put the wraps on this journal session.

Until next time,

Jess

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