

CHAPTER 30--NOTES AND LETTERS

The peaceful and zen like atmosphere of the airline lounge was a welcome sight after looking at mostly ice for the better part of two weeks. Amanda found herself here again after a late arrival and a night spent at the transit hotel. As she went to find a seat, she walked by a mirror and noticed that she had lost quite a few of those extra pounds she'd been piling on over the last year. Adventure was good for you. She flashed the mirror a cautious smile and took a seat.

It would be nice to hear some familiar voices she thought. She searched out the nearest phone and rang up Jack and Haley. Their familiar voices were comforting to her travel weary mindset. A few pleasantries aside, the toughest questions were from Haley who wondered whether stuffed Polar Bear enjoyed the trip. To Haley's surprise, Amanda informed her that he wasn't coming back and that he decided to stay there, Haley could visit him in the future in his new home.

As Haley asked about the pictures she took, Amanda answered that while her camera was

broken, a picture only told a thousand words. She would have to try and show Haley how she felt.

Now that she was back in civilization, Amanda thought about what really happened out there again as she hung up the phone. It was something magical and unexplainable. Perhaps it had something to do with the sunken nuclear weapons affecting animal behavior. Maybe there was some truth to that Inuit curse and magic. Or maybe it was just as Lars had described, a friendly and unafraid bear that saved her life. The beauty was in the mystery. It would forever remain one.

A trite and romantic explanation was that there were two bears. The stuffed bear of her childhood who listened to her troubles while far away from home, and now the free bear – who helped teach Amanda her most important lesson in life. Maybe the bear was trying to tell her something all this time when she and Stephanie played with them. Perhaps things would have turned out differently if they had ‘listened’ sooner. What about all the other stuffed animals out there ? What if everyone started listening to their stuffed animals more? Maybe she was indulging in this fantasy too much. Whatever the case, stuffed animals weren’t just for children. Out of the closets!

With that, Amanda wondered just what she could possibly show Haley that would convey any semblance of the photographs in her heart, not in her hand. A sense of dread over going back to the concrete jungle entered her mind. Almost as quickly as she thought of the words concrete jungle, she realized there was something wrong about it. A jungle, a wilderness, was a place of harmony and timelessness. Not crime, confinement, fear, greed, despair, brand names, beastly

machines, nor bloated egos. It wasn't a jungle she was returning to, it was a concrete zoo.

She went over to the counter and grabbed a few pastries, then decided to drink a beer. It was still morning, but if this trip had taught her anything, it was that thinking and acting differently were ok. The Danish treated beer casually and drank it frequently. It wasn't evil, it was just a drink. It was like how the Danish looked at bicycles, not as a toy, but just as a mode of transportation. This wasn't a drink of guilt, but an affirmation of life.

It was time to get back in touch with what was going on at work in her other life. As she looked around for a computer, she noticed an open newspaper lying on a desk. It was the Daily Mirror, a popular British tabloid newspaper, with four million daily readers it proclaimed. She leaned down and glanced at the story that someone had been reading, the heading said: World Values Survey – Denmark Is Happiest. She leaned over and read the first few paragraphs. It said that the people of Denmark were living in the happiest country in the world. Notably, they were one of a few European countries to have gotten happier since the mid 1970s. France, Italy, UK, Greece, Germany, and others had all declined in life satisfaction. The disparity was only increasing.

The article also noted how Leeds in Yorkshire, England was the favorite place to visit again in the UK in a visitor survey. In no small part perhaps, due to the influence of Denmark just across the water. It said that the belief in a set of guiding principles called Janteloven was prevalent there too. As Amanda read the description for Janteloven, she immediately recognized that while different, they sounded similar to the phrases on how to achieve a state of mind / no mind.

She stood up and glanced around the lounge and noticed an open computer terminal. As she looked into the computer screen, nearly unconsciously, she saw her complexion was blurry, yet, she was feeling rejuvenated and full with a new sense of freedom.

She had been incommunicado with the whole world that she had ever known for more than two weeks, it was one of the best decisions she had ever made. It was time to return. Changes would be in store, but she didn't know what they were yet. She logged on and checked her email. There was a message from Kayla.

Hi Amanda,

I hope everything is going well over there in Greenland. I'm having a great time here in France. You are never going to believe what happened after you left on the train back to the airport. The guy you bumped into at the bicycle stand, the tall charming one, he started bicycling to an important meeting, then realized he had to meet you. So he went back looking for us. He ran around looking for us in the Strøget.

After you left on the train, he saw me at the train station. What luck! Of course he asked all about you and where you were going. He really wants to meet you.

I met him for lunch the next day to see if he was legitimate before I bothered you. We talked about you like we were old friends. Forgive me for any embellishment and excess flattery. I even got to meet the people he put off to find you.

Who is he? Did I tell you that high ranking officials and powerful people still bicycle in Denmark? Well, he turns out to be an influential businessman in the city. He said the people he was going to meet were not terribly happy, but understood his predicament when he told them. Danish tolerance! Danes aren't normally like this so you must have really put a spell on him.

By the way, our meeting was with the Queen of Denmark.

– Kayla

She turned away from the computer screen and noticed the mobile phones and laptops. They brought back memories of her boss and Billy. She scanned the other emails waiting in her inbox and realized that she had forgotten to send an important presentation file to Billy. A potential multi million dollar account was dependent on that file.

“Damn it,” she whispered to herself.

The email continued that it was urgent that she return for the meeting. The client was ready to make a decision. She committed the meeting to her mental to do checklist. She always did the right thing, it was nothing to worry about. Perhaps they were just exaggerating in the email anyway. Drama kings and queens. There was a difference this time though, she felt a pang in her stomach.

She got up from the computer and headed over to the restroom. As she walked past the sinks she saw herself in the mirror again. It was different this time when she looked. She suddenly realized that for her whole life, she had been looking at the wrong mirrors and

reflections to figure out how to live. It wasn't the mirror or works of man, it was the mirror of nature, wild nature, that should be her model. Just as the True Mirror in Copenhagen had shown her, most mirrors did not present an accurate image of who we truly were. As she turned away, she also realized why she had never given Polar Bear a real name.

She left the restroom and sought out a desk. She started a letter.

Dear Haley,

Happy birthday! The world around you is a magical place. Don't believe for a moment that it exists only in some artificial kingdom. It exists all around you in nature, wild nature. As you get older, forces will conspire against you to try and crush your soul, which wants to be wild and free. Trust your instinct more, not completely, but more.

Don't every try to grow up too fast, and don't ever lose your ability to see the world as a child. Adults are stubborn and get set in their ways. If you trust your instincts, someday, when you least expect it, spontaneous, unexpected magic, will find you. It's the best kind of magic there is.

Enclosed, please find your birthday present. A round trip ticket to Copenhagen, Denmark to begin a European adventure. I know you are mature enough. If your father has any concerns about you being mature enough to go alone, send him to me. I'm your godmother after all. I want you to experience the magic in a place that is dear to my heart. The Danish call it hygge. Maybe someday everyone will understand it, a global

Hygge.

PS: You don't have to be sneaky there to drink alcohol, it's legal to buy and drink there at sixteen. Sixteen! Sweet sixteen! Sweet magic. It's ok to hug your favorite stuffed animal too

She folded up the letter to give to Haley when she was older. She ripped out an empty page and started writing a short note. It said that the joy of living free was when we learned to trust our instincts. And that the quickest way to trust our instincts was to let go of your pride. She wrote down her version of the mind / no mind phrases.

Amanda grabbed her bags, picked up her empty beer bottle, and walked up to the agent counter in the lounge. "Excuse me, can you confirm when the flight to Seattle is scheduled to leave?"

"It is on-time and scheduled to depart at 4:00 p.m., arriving Seattle at 4:55 p.m.," the agent responded.

She checked her watch, it had stopped working. It must have been when she fell into the frigid water, it was supposed to be waterproof. Perhaps it wasn't Arctic cold waterproof though. There was an irony to this. While during her adventure she felt a sense of timelessness, now that it was over, she could remember everyday, night, and story, distinctly. The days had not blurred together, like they did in the rat race. "What is the fastest way to the seashore?"

"You can either hail a taxi and go to Dragør, about 5 km away, or Kastrup. You can also go back into Copenhagen and bike, walk, or hail a taxi there. There is a map at the information counter outside."

Thanking the agent, she ran out of the lounge. She decided to do it the Danish way, by bicycle. Throwing caution and fear to the wind, she put her large backpack in storage once again and ran to the train station as quickly as she could.

There was one stop to make before the sea. She needed to see her true self again. Returning to the small shop, she gazed into the special mirror again. There was no need to turn away now. She was not scared of her true self. Pride was no longer masking who she really wanted to be. The beach just north of the city beckoned. A feeling of satisfaction swept over her.

True freedom wasn't loud and boisterous like fireworks. It was a quieting of her restless mind. She felt guilty about her past behavior, but now she was willing to forgive herself, and forgive others now. Jack, mother, father, and anyone else. Now that she was willing to forgive herself, she didn't want to feel shameful anymore either. No wonder she didn't think twice about two men she barely knew touching her naked body. The body was nothing to be ashamed about either. Lars was right about the self-esteem. Self-respect, that's all she wanted now.

Bicycling as far as she could go, she hopped off and ran to the shoreline. She opened her small backpack. Grabbing the note she wrote earlier, she stuffed it in the empty beer bottle and capped it with a wine bottle cork she had spirited away at the lounge.

The phrases on the note read: I shall never feel special. I shall never feel important. I shall never feel smart. I shall never feel I can teach anyone. I shall never feel anyone cares about me. I shall never feel shame.

"Live free or die," she yelled out as she threw the bottle as hard as she could out into the sea. It was a phrase first spoken by an American revolutionary war general, though Amanda

didn't know this. The current picked up her bottle and floated it out to sea. It was a message of joy, not a curse. Amanda breathed a sigh of relief. She knew how those women felt when they decided to jump off the cliff in Ilulissat. They weren't afraid at all, they were just following their instincts. She turned the bike around and headed for the city, to see if she could make some more magic.

Maybe this mystery man would turn out to be her knight in shining armor in a fairy tale romance, but maybe he wouldn't, that was ok. It was like the lesson from the original story of the Little Mermaid, life wasn't about happy endings, it was about winning the battle between over her own nature. Happiness wasn't in encouraging things that gave her a sense of self, rather, it was of losing herself as much as possible.

The goal should be to use our minds to create more effortless and instinctive lives. Satisfying the ego was a never ending proposition and only created a more complex and demanding world. It would take courage and humility to look in a mirror to see one's own true nature, and she had done it. Massaging her ego had kept her from even acknowledging important issues like global warming.

Rather than lusting for immortality, like vampires or the young mermaid, the key was to live more fully in the present. The past and future were important, but not at the expense of the present. The lust for immortality led only to a fear of life itself, like sun on a vampire. The very act of lusting for immortality too, also meant that she was beholden to a deep cycle of good and bad. The very idea that romantic love between two people lasting forever, that was a lust for immortality too she realized. There was only one enemy, the enemy within.

Life wasn't about always trying to feel good. It was good to dream, but to not lose touch with real life, as that could be much more satisfying. If she lived life with too many expectations of herself - a life of discontent would follow. She couldn't make joy and happiness, she had to grow them. Besides, the best moments would probably sneak up on her when she least expected them. She turned off her brain, and followed her instincts.