



**ICELAND
INDIA
INTERSTATE
BY COLIN WRIGHT**

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Iceland India Interstate

by Colin Wright

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Muchas gracias.

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Categories into which this book can be filed:

1. Memoir
2. Travel
3. Business
4. Biographical
5. Nifty Books About Things

Traits of a successful South American Malbec:

1. A little jammy
2. Round and mellow in the middle
3. Peppery at the end
4. Just a hint of leather
5. \$8 or less

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**ASYM
METR
ICAL**

For my parents.

Sorry about the sex stuff.

Acknowledgments

To everyone reading this: I sincerely appreciate you taking the time. I hope you enjoy the book.

To the people who I met during the year in which these tales take place, whether or not your portion of the story is told herein: Thank you. Thank you so much.

To Jóna: you made an excellent chronological yard stick after all!

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Truth

A note about “truth.”

This book is true, in that everything in it is pulled from my memory, and all of the events within the memory did, in fact, transpire in real life.

That being said, memory is imperfect. The difference between “fact” and “truth” is that one requires evidence and proof, while the other is what one person believes to have happened. This book is the latter. I’ve made an attempt to sync my experiences with reality as precisely as possible while still relating events in a coherent way and concealing a few identities here and there. I’ve made up almost all of the dialogue completely; as is true of most travelogues, I don’t have an always-on recording device that captures everything for playback later, though I’d likely buy one if such a thing became available.

Let’s just say these are stories of things that happened, told through my eyes, interpretation, and perspective. Beyond that, I make no promises.

Iceland

Bathtub

The tiles that made up the bathroom walls were blue, but her hair was bluer.

There was also a patch of blue, sparkly *something* over one of her eyes, while a similarly sparkly pin shape surrounded the other.

I leaned in to try and get a closer look — to figure out what flexible, glittery, colorful type of material she might have painted all the way up from her cheeks to her eyelashes — but she pushed me back and grabbed my arm. Without saying a word, she pulled my wrist toward her and started scrubbing my inner-elbow vigorously.

As Otis Redding crooned melodically from the iPod-and-tiny-portable-speaker combo that was rigged up atop the closed toilet seat, I sat naked in a bathtub with a drunken, azure-haired Icelandic girl doing my best not to cringe as she callously tore the top three layers of my skin off with a stiff bristled brush.

I had met Jóna two weeks prior, and though our coupling was a happy one, and our personalities were quite a nice fit from the get-go, it was kind of a marvel that we ended up meeting in the first place.

My arrival in Iceland was unceremonious, and honestly, somewhat subjectively marred by the hangover I had from the previous night's escapades. My ex and I had gotten together for a bit of fun, and the gal-half of an open couple she had hooked up with months before decided to come be our thing the night before I was scheduled to leave for Reykjavík.

We drank and drank and drank, and when we all woke up in the morning, we were still feeling happy and playful, but our headaches were beastial. I stumbled onto Seattle's light rail, slogged my way through the parking lot to the airport lobby, slimly smiled my red-eyed way through security, and plopped myself into an airplane seat, immediately falling into a state of half-sleep, but still experiencing full-head-pain.

A double-handful of hours and about 3600 miles later, I grabbed my bag from the conveyor belt and hauled all of my worldly possessions through the big glass doors that guarded the airport lobby from the bureaucratic miasma of international air travel. I silently promised myself that my time in Iceland would be for me and my work, not for dating. I would meet no one halfway, would refuse to be drawn into any eye-locked conversations with members of the opposite sex, and nary a flirt would pass my lips.

My meals? Portioned for one. My life? Lonely, but in the way of great artists. My time would be my own. This would inspire great things, I decided. I had shit to do.

And for the first three months in Iceland, I did very well; I really did. I networked and I tended to m

businesses. I started a new one a few months before leaving the US, and it had grown to the point where ~~two new co-conspirators were necessary~~. The infrastructure evolved and so did my list of responsibilities, to which I attended diligently.

When I wasn't tilling my entrepreneurial field, I was attending metaphorical farm festivals, meeting new and interesting business-savvy locals and imports, always asking them at some point in the discussion whom else I should meet, thereby leaving with stockpile of introductions. I followed up with the new batch of acquaintances, reaching out to the e-voices on the other end of the email, resulting in an endless cycle of e-relationships-turned-coffee-meetings.

One such coffee-centered caucus was with a man named Halldór.

Among other things, Halldór was a writer of short fiction and movies. He had spent many years hiding from Icelandic society, but for the few years leading up to our meeting, he had emerged and created an impressive body of work that spanned everything from designing the interiors of restaurants (I gestured around the restaurant we were sitting in when mentioning this), to writing the satirical end-of-year movie which covers the cringe-worthy actions of Icelandic celebrities, politicians, and still-detested bankers from the year leading up to it.

I was suitably impressed by his achievements by the end of our caffeine-laced conversation, and asked Halldór if there was anyone else in town I should meet. He gave me a few names, which I wrote down, and then — almost as an afterthought — mentioned one more that stood out: “This guy Helgi you should meet him. He's a crazy motherfucker who says whatever comes through his mind. You'll like him.”

Done.

A few days later, I arranged to meet up with Helgi at a local bar. Like most Icelandic bars, the place was brimming with jovial locals, wearing their high-end, loudly-patterned sweaters and scruffy beards, and — it being the off-season for tourists — only a smattering of visitors, clean-cut and wearing North Face jackets while seeking out local flavor and finding it.

Helgi definitely added to that flavor, with his shoulder-length hair, rock star looks, and a jacket that appeared to have been pulled directly from one of the marching band leaders on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. He told me, “I've got a band called ‘Helgi Valur and the Shemales.’” He also said, “I hope you like sushi, because my wife is a chef and I want to take you to her restaurant sometime.”

I did like sushi.

I took him up on his offer a little over a week later, as I was looking for things to entertain my older sister who had flown in for a weeklong visit to Reykjavík. I was coming up short on activities, as his idea of visiting another country tends to be ‘seeing some monuments,’ while mine is more about ‘drinking coffee with locals.’

When my sister asked what we should do for dinner the first night she was in town, a lightbulb appeared above my head, cartoon-like, while I snapped my fingers and proclaimed, “A-ha! I know ju

the thing!”

Fast forward a bit: my sister, my then-roommate Tomasz, Helgi, and I were sitting around a small table in the basement of *Sushibarinn*, a dimly-illuminated little sushi restaurant on Reykjavík’s main drag, filled with what I would call hipsters and punks, but which Iceland would call, ‘normal people.’

Thankfully, any concerns about my sister being embarrassingly un-hip proved to be wasted, as Helgi ended up being quite into her, flirting incessantly and letting up only the tiniest bit when a petite Scandinavian-faced girl wrapped tightly in a kimono and apron arrived at the table to present a platter laden with all manner of fancy-looking morsels.

Her hair was blue, and the first thing that went through my mind was, *Oh shit, she’s totally my type.*

The second thing that went through my mind was, *But oh shit, I think she’s Helgi’s wife.*

The third mind-thing, trailing the second by mere quantum-scale metrics, was, *But it’s okay, you’re not dating anyway, remember? And that’s been going great; think of all the time you’ve had to write and network and meet people with sushi-wives! Stay the course, my friend. Eat some sushi. Don’t be weird. Brain out.*

I shook my head a little to clear the thoughts I could almost feel seeping from my ears and nose, and along with everyone else at the table, thanked the girl — who was introduced to us as Helgi’s wife, Jóna — for her delicious-looking offerings.

I turned my attention back to the platter (cautiously identifying a few unknown but carefully-sliced bits as Icelandic pony and maki whale), but Jóna lingered in my mind even after she left. I had a moment where I felt like I was waving to myself from an unclear future — one that somehow involved the blue-haired girl, and one where, through some unforeseen set of circumstances, I would come to know her much, much better.

The Situation

Frankly, premonition isn't my thing.

I'm a firm believer that there are fields of knowledge that we're incredibly uneducated about, but um... I see some real, solid, measurable evidence of someone being able to predict the future with accuracy. I'll remain psychic-agnostic. If the Mayans had the wherewithal to predict the end of the world, why are they all dead, their formerly-glorious monuments in ruins? If the tarot-card-slinging street-side psychic can truly tell you what trials and tribulations your upcoming year holds, why is she not Scrooge McDuck wealthy, swimming in a vault full of gold? Do her powers conveniently not extend to lottery or stock-ticker numbers?

It's for this reason that, despite my strange intuition about Jóna, I turned my attention back to my work and the interconnected-web I was stringing between the movers and shakers of Iceland, with myself in the middle as the weaver-in-residence.

Upon arriving in Iceland, I found myself being pulled along with a movement of sorts, one that had been percolating in the area since the economy crashed in 2007.

A little Icelandic history that I pieced together from conversations while living there:

For the longest time, Iceland was a barren rock, devoid of all but the most hardy of individuals, and they only stuck around because they were proud, stupid, or banished from warmer climates.

This stayed more-or-less consistent through the 20th century, when, during World War II, Hitler sent an emissary to Iceland, to find out what kind of utopia it must be due to the racially 'pure' circumstances under which they existed (they were all white, with lots of blonde hair and blue eyes among them). When this representative arrived, however, he found Iceland to be inhabited by dirt-covered, sod-hut-living farm-people who subsisted primarily on fish and sheep. He ended up writing a letter to the Führer, essentially telling him that things were not as they had hoped, and that if this was what a pure community of whities looked like, their plans might need revising.

For some reason I can't fathom, most Icelandic children have to read this letter as part of their schooling. To teach humility, perhaps?

The Danes held on to Iceland as part of their international land portfolio until independence was declared just after the war in 1944. It was around then that a navy base was built by the United States (who took it upon themselves to protect the country from German invasion during the war), and money started to flood in to Iceland, which at that point in history held 150,000 people or so.

This is where we enter an awkward point in Iceland's social history. A trend referred to by locals as 'The Situation' arose, which referred to the tendency of Icelandic women to fall for American men.

because of their uniforms, the confidence of their stride, and their access to all kinds of modern amenities that Icelanders couldn't get, like stockings and razors. Icelandic men, it goes without saying, found this trend to be a disturbing one, and as a result, much ado is *still* made when an Icelandic gal falls for an American guy in Reykjavík.

From that point forward, however, things got pretty dang good pretty dang fast in Iceland economically and socially.

The standard of living shot up, as an influx of cash from the American Marshall Plan funneled more money into Iceland than any other country on the list, and suddenly Icelanders were awash in foreign currency. They invested it wisely, doing what they could to improve their standard of living, and once the war was over and the big chunks of cash stopped coming in, they worked hard to keep the standard stabilized. Education, health care, jobs; they had it all. In a single generation, Icelanders went from living in earthen huts to becoming one of the most metropolitan countries — with one of the highest standards of living — in the world.

Prevailing wisdom during Iceland's golden age (a vague collection of years between the late 80's and the early 2000's) was that their quality of life stemmed from their culture's natural ability to handle money. While US babies grew up wanting to be astronauts, Icelandic babies were hoping to hop the fast track to banker-dom, knowing full well that if they wanted to make massive chunks of change from a young age onward, becoming one of the country's vaunted 'Viking Bankers' was the way to go.

This meant two things for Iceland:

First, it meant that when the global economy collapsed in 2007/2008, and when all of Iceland's banks went under in the same timeframe, people lost everything, including their delusion that their wealth stemmed from their own smart management of money, rather than the nice lump sum given to them during the war, along with some well-thought-out investments mixed liberally with fraud and bootlegging.

And second, it meant that they had a brain-drain for most industries outside of banking for a decade or more. If you were smart, you worked for the bank, and that was that. When the economy collapsed, there was no start-up culture to fall back on, and few small businesses aside from the day-to-day grocery stores and such. It was go big or go home on the tiny island of Iceland, and when 'too big to fail' started to mean 'dead,' they weren't quite sure what to do with themselves.

Aiming Higher

This is where I entered the picture.

I started traveling full time in 2009, after a few years of running a branding studio in Los Angeles. It killed my motivation to make more money than god in my mid-twenties. That profit-pursuing drive was replaced with an omnipresent need to get out and see the world and to fill in the experiential gaps. I became more acutely aware of every day.

I scaled my studio down so I could run it from the road, and eventually started investing my time in other small ventures; everything from a t-shirt company to writing books.

At the center of all my mobile activities was a blog called [Exile Lifestyle](#). There's a fine line between insanity and innovation, and I found that it was a line drawn with experimentation and shared information: two things I focused on in my writing. I set goals, made hypotheses, and wrote about what I learned so that others could glean value from it. This allowed me to get away with doing just about anything without being called a nut — including traveling the world full-time, moving to a new country every four months based on the votes of my readers.

I arrived in Iceland at the beginning of 2011, a time when most folks had started readjusting their hopes, dreams, and investment accounts to the new monetary reality around them. A solid quarter of the population still walked around with their jaws dragging on the floor, shocked that they were using coupons while shopping at the grocery store, while all of their adult lives they'd never had to think twice about buying another summer house outside the city, or a fancy new car to celebrate whatever.

Some people were moving fast to adjust to the new rules of society, however, and I was scooped up by them pretty quickly.

One guy named Haukur seemed especially intent on picking my brain about entrepreneurship and how start-ups worked in the US and around the world. Haukur ran an online summer house rental company called Bungalo that allowed Icelanders to rent out their superfluous real estate to tourists and locals who wanted a little R&R away from the (somewhat) hustle and (kind of) bustle in Reykjavík.

Haukur contacted me before I even arrived in Iceland, and as a result he was one of my initial coffee dates when I touched down, introducing me to everyone he knew while also giving me office space to work in and someone to hang out with beyond my roommate, Tomasz, who was a nice enough guy, but a bit attention-needy, which didn't really jive with my somewhat regular cravings for solitude.

I spent a great deal of time working at and writing from the desk Haukur reserved for me in his office, staring out the window as the season slowly changed from day-long dark to day-long light.

Downtown, one parade made way for the next which made way for the next, marking a seemingly

endless procession of holidays that, in my mind, were a bit of a throwback to the easy-breezy early 2000's of the Icelandic culture — one in which an office-worker could wake up at nine, make it in work by ten (for a company-paid breakfast), work for a few hours, enjoy lunch (also provided by the employer), work for a few more hours, and then spend the last hour of the work day with some coffee or tea and some biscuits. One's boss would deliver the biscuits himself, I imagined, and amidst the baby-kissing and hand-shaking, a bit of work would be done, but that came secondary to the happiness-quotient or some other smile-inspired metric used to measure whether the employees were (1) somewhat bored with their work, or (10) feeling chipper and happy about the environment and the biscuits. They would aim for all 10's.

When the parades cleared, it was tourist season, and a stampede of out-of-towners replaced the local. Instead of BMWs, they tromped around in stretch-Hummers and ginormous all-terrain vehicles with tires taller than even the most gravity-ignoring, bearded, Viking lad.

The office space I worked in was on the second floor (that's the third floor, in the US) of a building on downtown Reykjavík's main street, Laugarvegur, which meant I had a hard time avoiding the frequent socializing that seemed to be the foundation of the local (metaphorical) Food Pyramid for Community Building.

They claimed it was tradition that made them go party every weekend, shutting down their mental faculties as much as possible from Thursday night through Monday morning with the intention of getting hammered, going home with a stranger or two, and then working a modicum so that they would have sufficient funds and social standing to do it all again a few days later.

For all I knew, this might be true: Icelanders have a long history of justified imbibing, due to the nearly-Biblical weather conditions and geographic instability. If I spent half my time being blown up by volcanoes and the other half being blown away by gale-force winds, I would probably spend whatever moments I could scrape together drowning myself in anything I could brew, too.

One night, I was out with my roommate, cruising for chicks. Or rather, he was cruising for chicks, and I was busy telling him the usual: I'm not interested in cruising for chicks, I would rather be at home working, please don't make me go because I've got all this stuff to do, okay, fine, I'll go, but I won't be happy about it.

Most of why I was hesitant to go was that I knew we'd head straight for the same loathsome bar I always dragged me to; one that was filled to the brim with old couples and smarmy tourists, with not a dance-floor or interesting person in sight. For him, though, there was one very interesting person, and she worked behind the bar, serving said smarmy tourists booze all night long.

She came from the same city in Poland that Tomasz was from, and he was desperately in love with her. Unfortunately, she had a long-distance relationship, and although she was somewhat aware of my roommate's infatuation, she was also terrible at being firm with him, which he took to mean that she was in love with him, but unable to show it because she wasn't the cheating kind. This led to a back-and-forth that would have been hilarious, had I not somehow been dragged into it.

It was the same, sad scene every time. Tomasz would strut up to the bar and flirt in a kindly, non-threatening sort of way. She would smile at him, serve him drinks, and awkwardly grin in m

direction, as if asking me to fend him off. When she'd go serve another customer, I'd tell Tomasz that I didn't think he should put all his eggs in this basket, maybe we should move along. He would inform me that I was wrong, this was the way they did things, he knew what he was doing, don't worry about it. Tomasz would run to the bathroom, and while he was gone, she would ask me if I would please please tell him that she wasn't interested, because you know, she had a boyfriend already and she didn't want to hurt Tomasz's feelings. Tomasz would return, see her leaning forward, talking to me, assume this meant that she was in love with me instead of him, would get jealous, and his kind demeanor would make way for a sort of self-hating diatribe, during which he claimed that I took all the women from him, and this is why he had trouble finding love. It turns out there's a lot of narcissism in self-hatred. He would then revert to a far more aggressive tact in flirting with her, which led to her avoiding him (and in some cases moving herself to another part of the bar). Tomasz would get drunk and cry on my shoulder. I would drink more and question the choices I'd made that had led me to where I was in life.

The next day, Tomasz would call the poor girl dozens of times, apologizing for getting drunk and becoming rude. I'd hear all about how much she hated him until she finally called him back late that night, telling him it was okay. He took this to mean that she was desperately in love with him, and he would make me promise to wingman him next weekend, when we would do the whole thing over again.

It was in the middle of one such routine that I shifted away from the back-and-forth of Tomasz and his female target, only to have an older, well-dressed gentleman — who looked like a cross between Gordon Gecko and someone pulled from a photo by The Sartorialist — saddle up next to me at the bar. He looked me up and down and looked at the girl Tomasz was hitting on, who he seemed to assume was with me.

He leaned in close, looked me dead in the eye, and in an appropriately vague European accent, said, “With your face, you should aim your cock higher.”

The man then took a sip of his drink, gave me a nod and a raised glass, and then lurched back toward the group he had left to stroll over and impart this bit of wisdom.

Papers

Midweek was less exciting in an alcoholic sort of way, but far more interesting in a ‘learn about the people who comprise the culture in which you’re living’ sort of way.

There was a creative company called Íslenska that produced a series of videos under the moniker ‘Inspired by Iceland.’ In one of the videos in the series, a camera flew through various Icelandic landscapes as locals in all manners of local dress danced around to a Björk song. The video was quite fun and did very well online, and when I saw that video on the website of a rep from Íslenska who invited me to come speak at their office about what I do and how I find creative solutions to branding problems, I was flattered and looking forward to meeting the folks who had produced such catchy commercial collateral.

A week later, I meandered my way through a blizzard, eventually identifying the Íslenska logo on a large house-looking structure through the blustery haze of snow-dust. I arrived soaked and with numb extremities, but I was given some hot tea and watched as they brought out tray after tray of beer and snacks for the event. I jumped into an improvised talk without a hitch.

Partway through the talk, the silenced phone in my back pocket started vibrating. I thought nothing of it at first, but it kept going and going as if it had always harbored ambitions of becoming a sex toy and was choosing that moment to tell me. Turns out that wasn’t the case, as interesting a story as that would have made. Instead, the phone indicated I had about thirty phone calls and texts. From Helgi.

Helgi was trying to get in touch because he had been served with divorce papers. *I thought, I wonder how many people he called before me, who were at work or otherwise unable to commiserate?* Then I thought, *Shit, that means Jóna is going to be single.*

Finally, I thought, *Don’t be a tool: that’s a weird thought to have at this moment. Go buy the poor guy a drink and let him talk it out.*

I called him as soon as I was done with the short presentation, and we arranged to meet at a nearby restaurant, where I bought him a meal and a few drinks, and he told me everything.

I knew from past discussions that he and Jóna had an open marriage. I also knew that he considered her to be quite heartless and mean — a real ball-breaker — but that he was also quite proud to be associated with her in a way. He often flaunted the fact that he was out with new girls every night, and that his wife back home didn’t care. “Would you like to sleep with my wife?” he had asked me a few weeks before the day-of-the-divorce-papers, over coffee. “Don’t you think she’s attractive?”

I had told him that I did think she was attractive, but that I didn’t think that was a good idea. It would be awkward, I said, and I was probably right.

The story that he told after the papers had been served was along the same lines, though mixed in with a bit of angst-turned-to-anger that I didn't expect. "She's a heartless bitch, you know. I'm a romantic guy, and she seemed to be romantic at first, but it was all an act. She was the one that wanted this open relationship to begin with. I just wanted her. She's so cold and calculating, though."

I didn't have the heart to tell him right then, but the girl he was describing was sounding more and more like someone I would get along with.

At Least One Murderer

I was almost three months into my Icelandic lifestyle when Halldór, the influential and creative introvert whom I'd met when I first arrived and with whom I'd caught up only briefly during the months in between, invited me to a massive birthday celebration, one that he said I absolutely could not miss.

The venue was fancy — it was in the ballroom of one of the hotel/restaurants that Halldór had designed, and the owners made sure to take good care of him. I greeted the man of the night when I entered (I was one of the first people to arrive; American punctuality is a hard habit to break, even after years of travel overseas), and he told me what this party meant to him.

“A few years ago,” he said, “I was essentially a recluse, hiding myself and my work from the world. I was depressed as hell, and as a result I didn't do anything, or create anything.”

“But I decided to accept any rejection that might come my way, and focus on work I believed in. As a result, I'm still a reluctant artist, but now I'm more of a *mannblendinn einfar*: an introverted socialite. In attendance tonight will be politicians, celebrities, businessmen, and fashionistas. There will also be at least one murderer, and a few other wildcards, like yourself, who should spice things up.” I looked around and saw a few people who I recognized from the local tabloids and television, though I didn't know their names or why they were famous. I asked who they were and Halldór shrugged and said, “Just friends.”

I released Halldór so he could go mingle with his other guests and wandered aimlessly for a while, sipping on glasses of wine and admiring the massive chandelier and beautiful architectural details lining the room.

I pictured myself inside a giant, inside-out cake, one that was big enough to house a great many people, and which had incredibly elaborate decorations made out of icing daubed on all exposed surfaces. This cake, I thought, was for Halldór. The guy had pulled himself up by his bootstraps, not out of anything truly horrible, but worse: out of limbo. He had nothing to push against, no friction, not even orbital momentum from a quick fall from grace to count on as he scrambled up and out of the pit of nothingness he'd found himself in. It was like he'd become a self-taught rocket scientist: he'd invented combustion that would work in a vacuum, catapulting him to whatever insane heights he cared to visit.

It wasn't long before a familiar face came through the door. “Helgi!” I said, happy to have someone from my generation to talk to. “How're things, brother?”

I didn't ask him that just as a greeting: the last time I saw Helgi was the day he was served with divorce papers. I had heard through the grapevine that he hadn't been handling things particularly well, but my life had been quite busy in the meantime, so I hadn't been able to get any details straight

from the horse's mouth about it.

“Colin! Things are great, just great. How are you? Oh wait, meet my girlfriend, Anka!” As he said her name, Helgi pulled a small, short-haired twenty-something girl from where she was sizing up the food table nearby and pushed her in front of me, as if presenting a personal hidden talent that he was happy to share with the world; not just for his own benefit, but for humanity as a whole.

Anka was delightful. She was cute and perky and flirtatious and never more than the exact right amount of tipsy. I spent the rest of the night drinking and dancing and singing and hugging with Halldór, Helgi, and Anka, and the photos that were posted to Facebook the next day spoke volumes about what a good time we had.

And thank goodness there were photos, because partway through the night, I lost some time; memories erased by alcohol.

I know that Tomasz showed up to the after party with a girl that he liked (a new one he'd started pursuing, after the girl at the bar told him her boyfriend would be in town to visit for a while), but beyond that, I had trouble remembering more than snapshots, something that hadn't happened to me for years; not since an ill-fated MTV Halloween party in Argentina, where I ended up making my own drinks (a big mistake, since I don't know how to make drinks) and locked my good friend (and hostess) Tali out of her own apartment in the middle of the night.

The morning after in Iceland was similar to the morning after back in Argentina. I stumbled out of bed and shambled to the kitchen to get a large glass of water. I prayed to whatever gods might be working the weekend shift that hydration would help the throbbing pain behind my eyes. While downing a liter of tap water, I noticed Tomasz sitting at the kitchen table and a few things rushed back to me from the night before.

First, I remembered making a bit of an ass of myself after returning home, dancing around and interrupting people, and generally being an annoying drunk. I chugged the rest of my water, apologized to Tomasz, and walked back to my room, barely waiting to see if he would accept the apology.

Second, I remembered making a promise to Helgi and myself, one that I was rushing back to my room to fulfill.

Partway through the night, when enough drinks had been consumed to make everyone good and unhindered by societal politeness, Helgi, Anka, and I sat around, talking about the recent divorce.

“It really sucks, man, the whole divorce and stuff. But seriously, it seems like you're doing great. Anka is amazing, and you seem happier than I've ever seen you. Maybe you and Jóna just weren't a good fit.”

Helgi smiled and hugged Anka close when I mentioned her name. He took a sip of his beer, put his arm around my shoulder and said, “Dude, you're right. Everything is as it's meant to be. Now that I'm happy, it's up to me to make sure Jóna is happy, too. Colin, you have to promise me that you'll talk to her. Go and talk to her and fuck her if you want, because she's a good person, just not for me.”

It was probably the most lucid statement I'd heard Helgi make since I met him.

People in Iceland will often tell you that it's not a great place for new adventures, but it's an excellent place to write past adventures down. Up until that point, I had spent my time in Iceland inside my own head, endlessly cycling through the events and lessons I had learned in the previous two years on the road, condensing what I could about the world and myself into habits and practical philosophies. At that moment, though, after months of living single and enjoying my solitude, I realized I could start to have a girl in my life. The time for writing had passed, and the time for experiencing anew had arrived.

I considered the possibility.

"I'll ask her out on a date, man. No promises on anything beyond that, but I will introduce myself and see if we get along."

"You will, man. Seriously. She's like a female version of you, except with more drugs and tattoos."

When I arrived back in my room, post water-chugging and Tomasz-apologizing, I opened up my laptop, logged into Facebook, and started typing a message to the blue-haired girl I had briefly met so long ago.

The Healthy Type

I do pretty well on dates.

I don't say that to brag, but to express the general sense of comfort I've long felt during stressful new-people-meeting situations. There's something that clicks on in my brain that gives me the guts and charisma to plow through the otherwise-uncomfortable barriers that present themselves and quickly establish a relationship with the new people I'm interacting with.

Dates are, at their most fundamental level, just interviews, but (one would hope) without the financial stress and incentive that comes in tandem with a job-related back-and-forth. The person on the other side of the table is asking questions, mentally tallying pros and cons of you working with them, and at the end of it all, either making an offer of some sort or saying they'll call you later with their decision.

I like job interviews, or I guess I should say, I *liked* job interviews. It's been years since I've done one because it's been years since I've had a job.

I really should come up with another way to phrase that, because it's exactly that kind of explanation for what I do that puts girls I date on their guard; that guard gets pumped up to full-blown DEFCON 1 when they find out I'm homeless as well.

Of course, if they make it past the initial shock, both of these titles come with explanations that lessen the blow a bit. I don't have a job because I work for myself. For the past five years or so, I've been self-employed, and though there have been ups and downs, the average level of success has been quite good, to the point where I don't have to worry about people thinking that I'm not financially viable because I very clearly am.

The homelessness is a bit more recent; two-and-a-half years and counting. It was back then, in 2007, that I decided the LA lifestyle I was living — running a branding studio, partying all week to meet clients, living with my girlfriend in a big ol' townhouse near the beach — wasn't the one I wanted. It wasn't something that fed me intellectually or psychologically, and after a deceptively normal series of events, my girlfriend and I ended up throwing a breakup party, replanning the paths our lives would take, and then going our separate ways. From initial conversation to complete reroute, it took a total of four months.

Of course, this is all information that comes up later in the date. The first bit of info is always the simplest, and that means the opposite party locks in on whatever they *do* know about you already, which tends to be something quite arbitrary or even deceptive, should one put too much stock in it.

When I arrived at Jóna's flat, located in a small neighborhood just a few blocks from the bus station, I had come to know quite well, I was looking for a red light; one that she said she would turn on, so I knew I was at the right place.

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