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# AROUND THE WORLD IN 365 DAYS

Hannah Thurman

Ariel returned from the airport on the six-thirty bus one evening in the early summer, and no one came to the door to meet her. She kicked off the clogs she'd worn on the flight and set her purse down next to them on the dirty floor. She had not taken much, just Altoids, her phone charger, and a peanut butter sandwich. She still had half of the sandwich, crumpled in a plastic Ziploc. The bread had begun to get soggy but she did not throw it away.

Ariel ran her hands through her hair and inhaled. The smell of the plane still lingered, flat dry air mixed with coffee and sweet disinfectant. She paused a moment, breathing in, but it soon faded, replaced by the smell of grease. She sighed and walked into the kitchen.

Her half-brother Des was cooking a pair of bratwursts in a smoking pan. At 24, he was two years younger than her, a product of her father and a woman who had worked in a bar near his office. They had not met until just before their father died the year before, and had moved in together soon after to save money.

"How was Tallahassee?" he asked without looking up.

"Nashville," she said. "It was okay." But it hadn't seemed like she'd been in Nashville. It would have felt like Nashville if she'd eaten barbecue or heard music or felt the moisture of the buzzing Southern air. But she hadn't left the terminal. She'd walked through the glassed-in atrium near the ticket counter and the sun had looked the same as it did in New Jersey. Then she'd turned around to go home.

When she'd first won the drawing, people had been eager to go with her. She joined her college best friend in Honolulu, and her post-college best friend in Miami Beach. But after a few weeks, the excitement died down. What had at first seemed like incredible good fortune—for a year, she could fly anywhere, domestic or international, for a dollar each way—now taunted her. She had little money of her own so she took to booking trips each weekend just to fly, arriving in places she'd never dreamed of going just to have to get back on the plane. It seemed like the cherry on top of what had been already been a very unfair year.

She hoisted herself up onto the counter and looked into the pan. The wursts were still pink but smoke trailed up the sides, rising from some crumb trapped underneath.

“Are those all right?” she asked, pointing at the pan.

Des ran a hand through his white-blond hair. “They’ll be fine.”

“So what did you do?”

“Today? Not much. Got a call from Blake, he said he and Louis both got poison oak from that trail near Briarwood. My thigh’s been itching like crazy so I guess I got it too.” Des worked clearing hiking paths near the Wanaque Reservoir on the New York-New Jersey border. He was saving up to go to grad school but it was taking longer than expected. The revelation of their father’s double life had crashed through their own like waves, knocking them off their feet so it hard it had become difficult to stand again.

“Did you put anything on it?” Ariel asked.

“No, it’s not that bad.” Des flipped the sausages. The raw parts sizzled as they touched the hot pan.

She moved closer. “Can I take a look?”

They both paused. This was how it usually began, the caged question that flipped the switch from casual conversation to something else. Des turned off the burner and unzipped his cargo shorts. They fell quickly from his hips, leaving him standing in faded boxers. Ariel hooked the elastic with her thumb.

“It looks itchy,” she said. A rash the size of her hand spread across his leg, bright pink against the pale hairs. They were both blonde like their father, but Ariel dyed her hair and eyebrows black every week. This made her feel like what they were doing was slightly less wrong, and allowed her to meet her own eyes in mirrors without flinching.

She ran her hand upwards along the raised skin.

“Be careful,” he said. “You’ll get it too.”

She pressed her lips against the socket of his leg, feeling him tense. She breathed in deep and for a moment, the smell of the plane came back to her.

“I’m going to Myrtle Beach tomorrow,” she said. It wasn’t directed towards him, it was more of an incantation, a ward absolving her from what was about to happen.

But Des put a hand on her shoulder, pushing her away. “Myrtle Beach?” he said. “Why there?”

“It’s a short enough trip to go to for a day and I don’t know—I like tourist airports.”

“Oh,” Des said. “It’s just funny because that’s where my ex lives. Ex-wife.”

Ariel stood up. “You never said you were married.”

“Yeah.” Des looked away. “Only for a year though. I was nineteen.” He turned on the fan above the range.

Ariel watched the smoke wither and dissipate. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It was stupid. You don’t tell me all the stupid things you do.”

Ariel frowned. She thought she told Des everything.

“Anyway, we ended things on good terms. We used to e-mail back and forth a lot but I haven’t talked to her in a while.”

She went to the fridge and began opening the drawers without looking inside. “But you’ve talked to her while you’ve known me?”

Des came up behind her and squeezed her shoulder. “Sorry,” he said. “I should have told you before.”

“It’s fine.” She shut the refrigerator door. “I don’t care.” But she did care of course, and she knew that he knew she cared. On the rare occasions he mentioned it, Des explained their situation matter-of-factly: genetic sexual attraction, a modern-day oedipal story, unconscious compensation for the discovery of their father’s double life. Like the trail-clearing job, this too would pass, once he’d saved up enough money to move on to the real world and a real girlfriend. Whereas most nights, Ariel dreamed of winning the lottery and moving them somewhere far away, India

maybe. She'd once watched a program about Indian weddings on an in-flight TV and imagined Des scraping the henna off her skin with his teeth.

"You know," Des said, "I don't have anything else to do tomorrow."

Ariel shrugged. "Do whatever you want."

"I'll buy a ticket," he said. He twisted his head to kiss her wrist. "Let me just eat these first." He let go of her and picked up the pan again.

"Okay," Ariel said, although her heart was pounding with excitement. "No rush."

\*

Although it was only ten after eight when they touched down in Myrtle Beach, the sun was already hot and high. The flight had been smooth and Des had slept the majority of it. Now, as they stepped through the automatic doors of the airport, Ariel watched him flip his scratched phone open and closed.

"Mandy said she'd be right at the United pickup," he said.

*Mandy*, Ariel thought, *Amanda*. Each time he said it, she imagined him whispering it in her ear. "If she's not here, we could take a cab," Ariel said.

"No, she'll be here." He peered up and down the line of cars. "She's very reliable."

Ariel thought of groceries and health insurance and Christmas cards. She wiped her sweating hands on her jeans. "Maybe she's changed."

Just then, a new-looking white car pulled up and a black woman with short, spiked hair got out.

"Dezzie!" She hugged Des, then Ariel. "Is this your girlfriend?"

"Sister. Ariel."

"Oh, right. You said that in your e-mail."

“Half-sister,” Ariel said. She had not expected Mandy to be black. Back in New Jersey, Des did not have any black friends.

“It’s great to meet you,” Mandy said, popping the trunk. “Let’s go to the beach.”

\*

They sat on towels in their shoes and socks and ate smoked oysters Mandy had brought in a tin. The oysters smelled more fishy than the water itself, which lay bright and flat beyond a stretch of busy sand.

“Sorry we can’t go home yet, the house is being cleaned,” Mandy said. “The cleaners usually come Thursdays, but I had a thing last night. Forty-six people. Someone dented the stove hood.”

“Anyone I know?” Des asked.

“Why would you?” Mandy laughed and then they both stared out at the shining sea. It’s funny, Ariel thought, how no one turns their back to the water. She dug her fingers into the sand, feeling the grains slough at her knuckles.

“You should’ve come up a day earlier, you could have come,” Mandy said.

“Ari was in Saint Louis.”

“Nashville,” Ariel said. “I won free flights for a year.”

“I’m so past flying,” Mandy said. “I just take trains now. Did you know Amtrak stops in every state capital from here to Maine?”

Des said he did not and Ariel watched him smile. He didn’t usually smile like this unless he was drunk. She reached her fingers into the oyster tin again but they sunk into empty oil. She wiped them off on her towel.

“Anyway, I’m glad you’re here today. Two weeks from now it’ll be disgusting out. I don’t leave the house from June ‘til August.”

“By choice or by court order?” Des said.

Mandy laughed and pushed on his arm. "Is he this rude to you?" she asked Ariel.

"Worse," Ariel said. She meant it as a joke but it came out flat. Mandy seemed to take it in stride.

"So you guys live together now?"

"We're making up for years of sibling rivalry." Des reached over and pinched Ariel hard on the cheek.

Mandy shook her head. "Was it a reading of the will thing?"

"Almost," Ariel said. "When they caught dad's cancer, it was too late to do chemo or anything, so he went straight to hospice. He'd been having us come in on different days but then I guess he knew he was near the end so one day my mom and I came to visit and there were two extra chairs."

"My mom and I were late," Des said. "He'd meant for us to all come in at the same time."

"You're always late," Mandy said, but her voice was swallowed by the sound of a crashing wave.

"The tide must be coming in," Des said.

"So you had no idea?" Mandy said. "About each other?"

"It wasn't surprising," Des said. "He spent so much time away."

"We didn't know at all," Ariel said. "My mom was devastated."

"I'm sorry," Mandy said. "At least some good came of it."

Des reached over to pinch Ariel again but she slapped his hand away.

Mandy cackled. "I love it," she said. "This reminds me of me and my brother."

Ariel didn't say anything. She watched the waves break higher over the wet sand.

“So this airline contest,” Mandy said. “Where have you gone so far?”

“Hong Kong, Nassau, Auckland... Miami, Hawaii, Mexico, Orlando, Jackson Hole, Toronto, Seattle, Chicago, Atlanta, Nashville... now here.”

“Looks like you’ve been staying closer to home,” Mandy said. “I don’t blame you. I hate flying.”

“I love it,” Ariel said. “But I’m running out of PTO.”

“What do you love about it?” Mandy put her head in her hand and stared at Ariel. Ariel felt embarrassed by the attention.

“I like the free peanuts,” she said. She broke Mandy’s gaze and looked back towards the approaching water. “We’d better move,” she said, “Or we’re going to get soaked.”

\*

Mandy’s house was large and beautiful, a two-story Georgian colonial with pink azaleas growing underneath the lower windows. Inside, a row of picture frames glinted from an impressive mantelpiece. They were filled with smiling pictures of what must be Mandy’s relatives, wealthy-looking people with shiny, flat hair.

“What does she do?” Ariel whispered to Des as they stepped into the cool sweet smell of air conditioning.

“Tech law,” he said. “You know, when Apple sues Facebook or something?”

“Oh,” Ariel said, trying not to sound impressed. The air smelled like lemon and dryer sheets and she wanted to touch all the polished wood surfaces. She watched Des as he removed his shoes and stepped barefoot onto the soft beige carpet. Mandy walked ahead of them, flipping on lights. It was strange to imagine that Des used to know this woman, used to fuck her. Thinking about them naked together made Ariel horny. She wanted to pull Des into one of the darkened rooms off the hallway and strip his clothes off under the perfect white sheets. Instead she just smiled as Mandy pointed out the bathroom and the staircase and brought them into a large kitchen with a marble island and a 6-burner stove.



“Thirsty? I have some punch left over from the party.” Mandy went to open the refrigerator and when she was turned away, Ariel put a hand on the small of Des’s back. He stepped forward, leaving her clutching at air.

Mandy led them to a white sectional couch and handed them tall glasses of punch that smelled like bourbon. “So do you ever see Kent and Marion anymore?” she asked Des.

“No, have you heard from Casey?”

“Only on Facebook.”

“Me too.”

Ariel leaned back into the couch as Mandy and Des talked about people they knew. Mandy had lived in Trenton growing up, which is where she’d met Des, in a community college course they were taking as high schoolers. When Des got up to use the bathroom, Ariel asked what he’d been like back then.

“Smart,” Mandy said. “Would you like more punch?”

“Sure,” Ariel said. Mandy poured the orange liquid with a steady hand. “So why did you two split up?”

Mandy wiped the sweating pitcher with a blue cloth. “We were just kids,” she said. “We were smart and we thought we were so special. But then you grow up and you realize that there are lots of smart people in the world and you’re not so special after all.” She shrugged. “Des is a great guy. I’m sure he’s got tons of girlfriends back home.” She looked at Ariel like it was a question.

“Oh, yes,” Ariel said. “Lots.”

Mandy pursed her lips and Ariel reddened. She wondered if Des had insinuated anything in his e-mails, if Mandy knew she wasn’t telling the truth. But then Des stepped back into the room.

“Do you have any Calamine lotion?” he asked. “I ran into some poison oak.”

“Just now?”

“No, yesterday.”

“Jesus... I think it’s up with the camping stuff.” Mandy set down her glass on the coffee table.

“I thought you said it wasn’t that bad,” Ariel said.

“It’s gotten worse.”

Mandy rose. “You’ll have to help me with the stepladder,” she told Des. “I’m a little tipsy.”

Ariel watched them disappear into the darkness of the hall. She swallowed the rest of the punch in her glass, shivering as the sweet, cool liquid ran down her throat. Light streamed in through the bamboo blinds and the quiet hum of the air conditioning combined with lack of sleep pressed Ariel into her seat like g-force on an ascending plane. She leaned her head back for a moment and realized she shouldn’t be sleeping, but it was too late.

\*

When she woke, her head hurt and her arms felt heavy. Mandy and Des were gone. Embarrassed, she pushed herself up and padded down the hall. She could hear their voices behind a closed door. She knocked and when Mandy said come in, she hesitated before pushing it open.

Mandy and Des were sitting on a large white bed with their shirts off, although Mandy wore a satin bra the color of a pearl. When she made no attempt to cover herself up, Ariel jerked her head away. Her limbs felt unresponsive, slowed by sleep and by the punch. She placed her hands on the doorframe to steady herself.

“Sorry I fell asleep,” she said.

“It’s okay,” Mandy said. “We did too.” Her smooth breasts curved out of the white bra as if they were extensions of the bra itself.

Ariel thought about her own bra, whose underwire juttred out in the middle,

leaving angry red marks in the center of her chest. "It's almost four. We should probably head out."

Mandy and Des said nothing.

"Des?" Ariel said.

"Give us a moment," Des said. "We were talking."

Mandy swung her bare legs out of the bed. "It's fine," she said. "You should probably go."

Ariel blinked to clear her head. The room smelled like irises, some perfume activated by the heat of Des and Mandy's bodies. "What were you talking about?" she said.

Mandy looked down and spread her fingers against the soft-looking sheets. She wore no rings. "I asked him what was going on with you two," she said. "He said nothing was but I don't believe him."

"Oh," Ariel said.

"Fuck," Mandy said. "I'm right, aren't I? How long has it been happening?"

"A year," Ariel said. Her hands slipped from the doorjamb and fell to her sides.

"That's so wrong," Mandy said. "That's like—Jesus. I can't even think about it."

"No one asked you to think about it," Des said, swinging his legs out of the bed.

"Do you think about it?" Mandy asked. "Do you think about how wrong it is?"

"No," Des said at the same time Ariel said, "yes."

"You're taking advantage of her," Mandy said to Des. "You're like a pedophile."

Ariel shook her head. The blood had begun draining back into her limbs and she felt steadier. "No, he's not. I'm older than he is."

Mandy stood up. Her underpants were also shining white and shaped like little

shorts. “Look at him,” she said, pointing at Des. “He looks just like you.”

Ariel smoothed her long, dark hair over her shoulders. It crackled, dry from the repeat dyeings. “I don’t see it,” she said, turning quickly away.

\*

Mandy drove them to the airport with the radio on and when they got out, nodded at them through the window. “Let’s wait to see each other again,” she said.

At the check-in kiosk, the machine wouldn’t read Ariel’s credit card. She thought it may have been because her hands were shaking, but when she tried again, she got the same error message. She looked over at Des. “It’s okay,” she said. “This kind of thing happens a lot.”

Des shrugged, bent over his phone. He hadn’t said a word since they’d gotten out of the car. Ariel ducked under a nearby stanchion rope and took her place in a line going towards the counter. The familiar surroundings made her feel calmer. This trip had been a bad idea, but soon she and Des would be thousands of feet in the air, moving quickly away from it.

Ariel looked at her phone. “We’ve got plenty of time to board,” she said. “And besides, I bet our flight is running late.”

“I didn’t say anything,” Des said.

As the line inched along, Ariel began to feel anxious. They weren’t checking luggage, though, and maybe they’d hold the plane for her. It would be bad PR to take off without the winner of a national sweepstakes.

It was 6:15 by the time they reached the counter. Their flight left in 30 minutes. Ariel thrust her ID at the ticket agent.

“We’re going to Newark,” she said. “Harding. Ariel and Desmond.”

“I don’t see your reservation...”

“We made it last night. He bought his and I’m one of the Around the World in 365

Days winners.”

“I’m sorry,” the woman said. “I don’t think we recognize that promotion.”

“It’s not up to you. It’s across all United flights.”

“I’m going to have to page a supervisor,” the woman said. “Can you hold on?”

Ariel looked at her phone again. “No, I can’t,” she said. “Our flight leaves in twenty minutes. Look, I have used this code thirty times. It worked in Hong Kong.” She turned to Des for assistance. He looked away.

“Wait a moment.” The woman turned around and left through a back door.

“This is so fucked up,” Ariel said, loud enough for the rest of the line to hear. “We are actually going to miss our flight.”

“Calm down,” Des said. “You’re just going to piss them off.”

“Excuse me, Mrs. Harding?” The ticket agent returned. “We’re still waiting on a supervisor. She’s calling to verify that your code is one of the promotions we currently accept.”

“How many times do I have to tell you? It’s good all year. Look—” She scrolled through her phone and pulled up a picture of the press release. “Around the World in 365 Days Sweepstakes, announced in January. Six winners. See number three? Ariel Harding.”

“Wait just one more minute,” the agent said.

\*

When the supervisor arrived, they had missed their flight. The second woman agreed that they could get on the next open seats to Newark, but that wouldn’t happen until the following day.

“What about Trenton?” Ariel said. “Or La Guardia or JFK? You guys must run up to New York every hour.”

They both shook their heads. “Only first class left. Unfortunately, your promotion is only good for economy. But we’ll book you on the 7am to Newark tomorrow morning.”

“Do we get a hotel voucher?” Ariel asked.

“I’m sure we can stay with Mandy,” Des said.

Ariel turned back to the gate agent. “We’ll need a hotel voucher.”

The woman began typing on her keyboard with two fingers. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Good,” Ariel said, scowling. “You do that.”

Des squeezed her hand. “Hey,” he said. “I’m sorry.”

She shrugged him off and leaned against the counter, feeling the coolness of the blue Formica on her bare forearms. The air inside the terminal felt dry and stale, like old cigarette smoke.

“I bet if I were as rich as Mandy, they wouldn’t have lost my reservation,” she said loudly.

“Maybe,” Des said. “Mandy has her own problems.”

“Well,” Ariel said, turning around. “You should go stay with her, then. I’ll stay in the fucking hotel.”

“There’s no need to get upset,” the woman behind the counter said. With a flourish, she handed Ariel a piece of paper with a Days Inn logo printed on it. Ariel took it silently and began making her way towards the doors.

“Hey,” Des said, walking fast to catch up. “What do you want from me?”

“I don’t know,” she said.

They walked through the automatic doors into the thick, hot air. Ariel looked up and down the dropoff lane but didn’t see any hotel shuttles.

Des crossed his arms. "Look," he said. "Coming here was a mistake."

She bit her lip. "You told her," she said. "Why would you tell her?"

"I don't know," Des said. "I'm so sorry."

A shuttle pulled up to the curb, but its sign read EMBASSY SUITES. Ariel stepped back. "I thought you were smart. Even a stupid person would know not to tell."

Des closed his eyes. "It was too much," he said. "I've never kept a secret like this before."

"Did you think I had?"

"I don't know," Des said. "I don't know everything about you." He paused and asked again, "What do you want?"

A bus rumbled past them without stopping. Ariel turned away. "I just want to get out of here," she said.

Des put an arm around her. She stiffened, then remembered that they were far away from home. She pressed her face into his neck until it no longer smelled like irises.

"I'm sorry," he repeated. "I'm so sorry. I won't do it again."

Ariel looked down at the gum-stained cement. "Okay," she said.

"Come on," he said. "I'll get us a taxi."

\*

They entered their motel room from a door off the parking lot. Ariel was immediately struck by how cold it was. The air conditioner under the window whirred loudly and its plastic top was covered in thick beads of condensation. She set down her bag and walked over to turn it off. Everything became quiet. Ariel sat down on the bed closest to the door. Des sat down beside her.

“Dibs on the lamp side,” he said. Ariel wondered who he had played dibs with as a child and for what.

She turned down the stiff coverlet and got into the bed. “You know, I always wanted a sibling,” she said. “But I’d hoped it would be a girl.”

“I’ve got a cousin in Morristown,” he said. He paused a moment, then lay down beside her. “You could borrow her for the day.” He began to slide a hand inside her shirt. He never undid the buttons and one or two always snapped off. She woke with them stuck to her legs. “You’d let me watch, wouldn’t you?”

“Yeah,” Ariel said. “Sure.” The coverlet felt greasy and smelled like smoke but she pulled it around her anyway.

Des inched closer, breathing lightly on the side of her neck. Ariel closed her eyes, but all she could see were pictures of Mandy’s perfect family, watching them with disapproval.

“I want a house,” she whispered. “A real one, with a fireplace.”

“And a bearskin rug,” he said, pulling her closer to him. His breath smelled like lemons, sharp and clean. “We’ll turn on the fireplace and I’ll lay you down on the rug—”

“No,” Ariel said. “Not an electric one, a real fireplace.”

Des didn’t answer. He squeezed her nipples tightly between his fingers. When she didn’t say anything, he let go. “I don’t know what you want,” he said.

“I just told you.”

“Do you think we should stop?” he said. He turned to her. “Don’t say you don’t know.”

She breathed in deeply, holding the air inside for as long as possible, then let it out in a hiss.

“It’s over,” she said, trying out the words on her tongue. “Just kidding.”

Des pushed himself up on one arm. “Maybe we should stop.”



“You’re not sure?”

“No.” His voice sounded like their father’s then, muffled like when she called him on the phone from college. He always sounded so serious, as if what she were talking about—her car, her classes, her idiot friends—was the only thing that mattered. Of course that hadn’t been true. During those calls he could have easily been at Des’s house, listening to his stories, nodding.

“Did Dad come to your wedding?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said. “But he didn’t stay long.” He reached for her again and this time she pushed him away.

“Tell me about it,” she said. “Was it in a church?”

He began touching the outside of her jeans, fingers grabbing at her belt loops.

“No,” she said. “Tell me first.”

He frowned. “It was in a banquet hall,” he said. “By the shore. We took pictures on a golf course and the ground was wet so I carried Mandy back up to the reception. Her dress was heavy. Her bridesmaids wore yellow. There were flowers on the cake.”

“What kind?” Ariel said but she could feel Des pressing towards her again. “What kind of flowers were they?”

He put his mouth on the side of her face and she felt his teeth cut into her cheek.

“Please,” she said. “Please just tell me.”

His hands moved under her like small machines. Outside their window, the lights in the parking lot hummed. She breathed in the smell of mold and sweat and thought of how bad she would have looked in yellow. Des was hot against her and her stomach felt as if she were falling. She wanted to put her arms around him but she pushed away instead. Then they were staring at each other, and she could see her shape reflected in his dark eyes.

“Fine,” Des said, “They were irises.”

As soon as he said it, she could see them, just as she could see their father standing behind Des in a suit, smiling. The image appeared so clearly she could not imagine a wedding with Des any other way. She tried to call up her fantasies of Indian henna or the sunny steps of a courthouse halfway across the world. They now seemed like cartoons, sketched and unrealistic. She breathed in slowly, wondering if this would make her cry.

“We shouldn’t’ve used irises,” Des said. “They wilted during the reception and stained the cake.”

Ariel’s throat felt open and her lungs full. She wasn’t sad, just disappointed. How many times had her father said that to her? She propped herself up on an elbow. “It’s okay,” she said.

“Don’t ask me anything more about the wedding,” Des said. “We were young and stupid and did it all wrong.”

“Okay,” she said. She straightened in the bed, stretching out her feet so she was almost taller than him. She ran her fingers through his hair, which looked white in the darkness. Her hands felt strong and sure.

“Is that all you wanted?” he said, and raised his pale eyebrows.

“No,” Ariel said, and this time pulled him to her.

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Hannah is a writer living in Brooklyn, NY. Her short stories have been published in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Brain Child Magazine*, and others.