

Erik Zimmerman

Travelling with Baggage.

Cameron had just gotten out of the shower. Once he dried off, he got back into his room, and upon looking out of the porthole he saw the sea. The shade of teal-green and all the icebergs floating around were like something that he had only seen in movies and magazines. Since his phone didn't have enough service to call his family so they could come with him, he went by himself up to the deck with his camera to go take some photos of the sea. As he got up to the top deck of the ship, he couldn't help but think to himself all the cute girls that were onboard. This was his last day on the ship, and he really wanted to at least talk to one of them after seeing them all week.

He wandered around for awhile and found his angles of choice. He wanted to shoot the chunks of ice falling off the glacial walls maybe half a mile away from him. After a few scenery changes, he saw her. It was the girl that he had seen in the cafeteria on the ship the other day. She was beautiful. Her long, blonde hair, slender build, defined cheekbones, sassy outfit, and an SLR around her neck to top it off. Between the post-card landscape and a beautiful, exciting girl giving him a thrill, he was at a lack for words. Finally, he came up with enough courage to talk to her, after noticing she was alone as well.

"Hey, I know this is really nerdy and everything, but would you mind taking a picture of me in front of the glaciers with my phone? I want to send it to some of my

friends back at home. Oh, I'm Cameron by the way."

"Yeah, no problem. My name is Kara, nice to meet you."

After they had met, they ran all around the ship. They talked all about getting into all of the restricted areas, running into the staff only staircases that most of the people onboard didn't know existed. They tried getting onto a private bow that reminded them both so much of Titanic. Even though they just keep getting caught and making up excuses about how they were just lost, they kept trying anyways. This occurred until it was time for both of them to meet up with their families again for dinner.

Just like that, she was gone. All he had was a name to look up on Facebook. Depressed, he headed back to his room to fall asleep. He had to be up early in the morning to catch his train.

Cameron met up with his family and embarked on the second leg of their trip, going through the Alaskan wilderness by train. He put on his iPod, listened to two of his favorite Stars albums, and tried to keep his head up. He knew how great of a trip this was about to be, but he still couldn't help but try to think about if he was ever going to see this girl again. They made their way through Skagway, Talkeetna, Denali, and Fairbanks.

Oddly enough, those extended family members of hers he had met earlier in the trip kept getting paired up with them on side excursions. Out of the thousand people that were doing this portion of the trip, they were consistently next to them. They were in his tour groups, his hotel room neighbors, and would even run into each other to and from dinner. On the last day of the trip he ran into Kara's cousin while walking to dinner, and she actually gave him Kara's phone number.

That was the last time that he would see her cousins the length of the trip. He tried

to Facebook Kara, and he tried texting her. Unfortunately, Sprint didn't seem to believe that Fairbanks, Alaska was worth providing service to, so it wasn't until he got back to Michigan that he had a chance to contact her.

When he got onto his Facebook he had a message from her. "Hey, how is Alaska treating you?" she said.

The two of them talked constantly. Despite the fact that she lived in Seattle, and both of them being in their first years of college, they still set aside time for each other. During the day they would text, at night they would talk on the phone, and every other night they responded to the other's Facebook message. The messages were the biggest part, they would be close to 20 paragraphs, and take Cameron around two hours to write. It was almost like a right of passage for both of them to keep going, it was how they first began to get to know each other.

Cameron began longing for more intimate means of communication. Instead of the usual text or phone call, the two of them began sending care packages, filled with photos, movies, clothes, even baked goods on occasion. Cameron had begun checking on concert tickets, to see if there was any way he could justify flying out to see her. Stars was a favorite band for both of them. Cameron had listened to them for years, and after he showed them to her, she adored them as well. As fate would have it, they were playing at the end of September in Seattle, a 10-minute drive from her dorm at University of Washington.

Two months later, they planned out his stay. He planned to arrive on a Wednesday night, stay for four days, and come home on Sunday night. He knew that he

was going to be on his own sometimes, due to some of her mandatory classes. He saved up \$400.00, spent it on a plane ticket, and gotten class days off. Without hesitation, his dad drove him to the airport wednesday afternoon.

Flustered and unorganized, Cameron fumbled around with his luggage and tried to find his boarding pass and flight itinerary. After being hassled for too big of a bag and cutting himself short of the "get there an hour and a half ahead of time" rule, he was finally on the plane. During the five-hour flight, his anxiety began to get the best of him. What if she showed up and had a boy in the car or something? What if she didn't show at all?

The landing gear came down and touched to the asphalt, waking Cameron up. "Well, looks like this is it," he thought to himself. He sleepily moseyed off of the plane, struggling to get by the crowd of cattle-esque humans in front of him. Having never been to this airport, he wandered his way around until he found the baggage claim. Eddie Bauer bag, check. Laptop, check. He stepped out of the glass doors by luggage claim and picked his spot on a bench outside to call Kara and wait. He called her to tell her he arrived safe and sound, but no answer. While he tried to call her for the second time he dropped his phone on the ground. The screen burst into a bright light, then shut off completely. Another hour and a half went by while he was stranded at the airport, waiting for a girl who was supposed to be there hours ago. With no phone, he struggled to keep himself occupied throughout the next half-hour. Finally, a headlight came towards him through the mess of cars trying to find their passengers.

"Hey! Is that you!?"

"Kara!"

With no hesitation, she took him to his first Seattle destination. Dick's burger joint. The two of them feasted on small burgers, fries, and ice cream. He noticed that the music playing was off of the mix cd he had made her and sent to her in the mail. After the little feast, they headed back over to her dorm room so that Cameron could explore and get acclimated to where he was going to be staying. They spent the night watching episodes of Scrubs on his computer and meeting her new friends. Her dorm room was small, but presented in a way that maximized room and comfort. The beds were bunked, she had a decent array of furniture, a few desks and a plethora of snacks and drinks in the fridge. He didn't want to be too forward, so he insisted on sleeping on the floor for the night.

They awoke and to his delight, she didn't have class in the morning. They gallivanted around the city, seeing new sights, and they made their way to a little breakfast place. Each of them enjoyed some eggs benedict; him being the gentleman that he is, picked up the bill. He began to notice little things about the city that kept him wanting more. The sea air, the Harry Potter-esque library and architecture, and a melting pot of people occupying the area made him feel incredibly comfortable. Unfortunately, Kara had class in the afternoon, so he spent the next few hours tied down in her dorm room.

The next couple of days followed suit. Exploring the city was on the daily routine. He couldn't seem to get enough of the city, and she couldn't get enough of his attention. They would consistently make jokes and do the typical "tourist" things. Climbing the modern architecture with her was considered normal. Taking cliché' pictures in front of the ocean became okay. They were both happy with the time they were having together,

and Cameron was beginning to question whether or not this was going to become more of a regular thing.

The night that he had originally flown out for was upon them. Stars was playing at the Showbox venue downtown. The night seemed to be shaping up perfect: having Thai food for the first time with a group of new friends, a group run from the car to see an all-time favorite band, in an amazing city that he'd always wanted to go to, and to top it all off, he was with a beautiful girl that he had become completely infatuated with. It was all too perfect. When Stars came on, it was like nothing he had seen before. Roses and flowers covered the stage and microphones. The two lead singer's harmonic voices, singing of love and loss, and the powerful instruments, chiming in so melodically and ruthlessly it could have brought a grown man to tears. Despite knowing where he was and how excited he was for that, he couldn't help but look over at Kara as much as he was trying to stay concentrated on the show. The lead singer was throwing roses into the audience, and all he could think about was catching one to give to her.

That night they went to bed, once again, in her dorm. Once again, he spent the night on the floor. This night had a different feeling, more of a "You should sleep on the floor because I don't want you in my bed," type of feeling. True to his instincts, he didn't push it. The last thing he would want to have is an awkward night, and an awkward couple of nights at that. It was only Friday night and they were leaving to go to her parent's house in Edmonds, around 30 minutes outside of Seattle, in the morning.

Kara headed to her car, her clothes and books for the weekend got thrown in the back. "It was probably just an off night," he thought to himself. "I've wanted my own

space before, I'm sure she just needed some time to herself. After all, we've only seen each other in person for a few days. The last thing I want is for her to think that I'm just trying to hook up. I just like this girl."

Random conversation ensued. Talks of music, life, school, all the basic smalltalk that can comprise a short drive. Before they knew it, they were past her driveway and pulling into her garage. Kara introduced Cameron to her mom and dad while her mom prepared dinner. Kara turned on the movie "Hot Rod" and Cameron sat down on her couch. Her big, luxurious couch, that could easily fit two. Without thinking twice, Kara sat down on the chair next to the couch, being sure to keep her distance from Cameron. "Great, if this isn't a signal than I don't know what is. Sure, I understand that she wouldn't want to cuddle up or anything while her parents are here, but we could at least sit together," he anxiously thought. "I'll just play it as it lies." Turns out they still had a great time. It was one of her favorite movies, and after he watched it, it ended up being one of his as well. After dinner, she showed him to his room and they headed to bed.

The next day, things seemed to be shaping up a little bit. They went into Seattle again and went to a market down on the shore, called Pike Place. They shared food from local vendors, bought art from local artists, and all in all had a great time. She would try on clothes and have him take pictures. He would do the same. They even took some funny pictures around town. "This is more like it. Maybe she's just taking awhile to warm up," he thought. The remainder of the day turned out pretty well. A band each of them knew, Black Kids, was randomly in town and they caught the show to cap off the night.

He awoke groggy-eyed. To his surprise, Kara was already awake, and had actually already eaten the breakfast that her mom made for the two of them. "Good

morning Cameron! I hope you like peach french toast," said Kara's mom. "Yeah, definitely. I love it. Do you know where Kara's at?" "Yeah, she just went back into her room." Cameron ate breakfast and made awkward conversation with Mrs. Parker. Afterwards, he walked over into her room to check up on what was on the agenda for the day. Studying.

A few hours went by, and Cameron's paper was finished. "So, are you about done studying?" he asked. "Umm, no, I still have a lot of work to do," she said, while checking her Facebook. "Well, I guess I'll go jump on the trampoline for awhile," he said. After jumping for what seemed like an eternity, he checked his phone to check the time. "Shit, this thing still won't turn on."

"Hey, what are you guys planning on doing today? Poor Cameron, you guys have been inside all day and it's his last night in town. You should go outside and take the ferry across the Puget Sound or something," Kara's mom said.

"Yeah, I guess we could do that," said Kara.

Concerned with the state of the trip and knowing that it was the last day he would see her, he took advantage of the moment. The two of them were alone on the ship, leaning against the guard-rail watching the ocean water break stories beneath them. Cameron contained his thoughts and took a deep breath, he had never been good with this kind of thing.

"Don't get me wrong. I've had a great time since I've been here, and I really appreciate everything that you've done for me, but the trip has just gone a little differently than I expected. When we talked before I came out, you were so open to the idea of me visiting. I guess I just like you a lot, I feel like you've been really distant towards me

since I got here. Maybe I'm just a romantic, I was expecting to have this cute little trip and sweep you off your feet."

"Well this is awkward. I've just never been one for relationships and romance. I'm sorry if you didn't get what you expected," Kara said unapologetically.

The ferry arrived in Kingston, and they immediately got back on the ferry going the other way. Not a word was said between the two. They got off the ship, and drove back to her house for Cameron to pack his things. His flight was leaving in a few hours.

That night, he packed his belongings and they watched a movie while Kara's mom made him a quick goodbye dinner. Once again, he was on the couch and she was on the chair. An awkward tension was had between the two for the rest of the night. Cameron choked down some of Kara's mom's dry rice and salmon, before sliding it into the trashcan when she wasn't looking.

"Did you get enough to eat? How was it?"

"It was really good, thanks so much for everything."

Some departing hugs ensued, safe travels were wished, and Kara and Cameron were on their way to the airport.

"Are you okay? You've been quiet," she said to him.

"Yeah, I'm alright. I guess to be honest I just feel a little led on. I don't really know what I'm going to say when my friends asked how the trip was," he replied.

She dropped him off at baggage claim. He grabbed his bags out of the car and set them down on the curb. "Well, I'm sorry everything didn't turn out like you thought it would," Kara said as she walked to him. "It's okay, I still had a good time," Cameron replied. She gave him a hug, then pulled her head back. The two locked eyes and

immediately knew exactly what the other was thinking, but neither one of them had the guts to act on it. This is, until Cameron said, "Can we just do this?" The two of them pressed their lips into each other, like they were releasing every emotion bottled up in the past few months. All the text messages, the ten-page Facebook messages, the late night phone calls, the mail sent back and forth, it all was expressed in this one action. They pulled back and looked at each other once more.

"You drive safe, okay?" He said.

"Yeah...yeah, give me a call when you land so I know you made it okay." She replied.

He instinctively glanced at his phone to check the time, miraculously he could read it. His phone had turned back on during his last hour in Seattle. Once again, he stumbled through the airport, fumbling to find his flight itinerary and boarding pass. He barely made it onto his flight, then quickly fell asleep. He had class in a few hours.

Weeks went by and finally Cameron received a Facebook message. This was the first time they had spoken since he left, and instead of the semi-remorseful words he was hoping to read, he found a message filled with hate and anger.

"Okay. Uhhh, i have no idea how else to say this, sooo, I can't do this "relationship" anymore. It's impossible. I have way too much going on to talk all the time, and I guess the whole kissing thing just didn't really work for me. You kinda ignored everything I said on the ferry, and went ahead anyways which i let happen bc i felt bad you flew out to seattle to see me and i guess that's what for, so whatever, but I'm super overwhelmed with catching up on school, i pretty much failed my chem midterm because

I did no homework or studying that weekend. I wrote something out right after you left, but its way too angry, emotional, i don't know, and so i wanted to let myself calm down and i guess i have a little. I'm sorry. At least you got to tell your friends you actually did something in seattle, which i knew you were worried about when we were driving to the airport. whatever."

He figured that it wouldn't be that great of a message, but he didn't think it would be that bad either. He was hurt, and caught completely off guard. With his well-being in mind, he sent her one final message.

"I didn't spend all my money on plane tickets just so that i could come home with a "good story" or to say that we kissed or whatever. i guess that you just completely misunderstood my whole reason for coming out."

With the message sent, he realized something. He wasn't nearly as hurt as he thought he was. For some reason or another, he was surprisingly calm. He had come to the realization that he didn't need a stupid girl, or some story to tell to make himself happy. He had just flown across the country to act on his genuine feelings towards another person. Despite his friends and family telling him that it was crazy, that he had only met the girl for a day, he had still gone. He may not have gotten the desired results of a fun, romantic weekend. He had gotten a piece of mind. He realized what he had just done, and how extraordinary of a person it takes to make that journey. If nothing else, he had gotten to know himself.