

An afternoon of extreme heat with Marie, we decide to spend our time at the swimming pool in Brooklyn. In the apartment, before we go out, Marie asks me to show her my swimsuit; I think this question is a bit weird but I show it to her. Her answer surprises me even more: she says it should be ok.

I really didn't get why she was asking me to show her my swimsuit. At first I thought it was just out of curiosity but it was something else, because then she asked me to show her my towel too. The swimsuit shouldn't be a problem she says but the towel might be a bit more complicated. It might not be accepted. I asked her to repeat the question, thinking I've misunderstood.

Misunderstandings often happen between us because of our specific accents coming from two different mother tongues. Mine is of course stronger because I've just arrived. Marie has lived here 4 years now. She explains to me that the swimming pool has a very strict policy. They only accept specific models of swimsuits and towels otherwise you can't go in.

We arrive close to the swimming pool: there are 500 meters of metal fences installed to contain the crowd that we have to follow before getting in. We walk this path even though no one is there at this time of the afternoon. There, we have to pass through a first security check: a man controls if we have our locks. Without a lock you can't go in. Then we go to the dressing rooms. After having changed cloths and put on our swimsuits, we arrive at another security checkpoint. Two women are standing at the dressing room exit, they point their fingers towards the showers and then to a sign we can read: "shower obligatory."

It is indeed obligatory, otherwise impossible to reach the pool area. After having taken a shower, we reach the final control, the one for the swimsuits and the towels. First they check the swimsuits — it seems to be ok — then they ask us to open our towels to see if nothing is hidden inside. They look for weapons and mobile phones or any items which can take photos: they are forbidden in the swimming pool area. So we open our towels and it's all clear. They say our slippers are not 100% ok. My towel seems to be a problem as well. Marie looks at me and I can read on her face that she is a bit worried. But she tells me that it's going to be fine. A woman standing next to us starts to speak to me: "You know you have all kind of religions, sexual orientations and origins in there — it's mixed — so they have to be really careful that no one feels offended because tensions can rise fast when it's all mixed. Usually everything works out good but I heard that there have been problems in the past." Probably because people are almost naked here, it seems to be a bit more tricky than in the subway.

The two guards start to scream at us: “Where are your slippers?! Show us! Those slippers are not allowed here! You have to go change! You have to take a regular towel. No! This is not a towel. This is a sheet! You can’t enter with this! Have you closed your lockers with a key? It’s obligatory! Let me check your towel. This is NOT permitted here! THIS is a sheet! THIS IS NOT A TOWEL!” So Marie's worries are confirmed. Our slippers are accepted, finally, even if they are not totally according to the rules, but I can't come in with my towel. I bought this towel in India, it’s hand woven and looks really nice, white with two thin red stripes, woven so fine that it's almost transparent, the classic Indian towel. But here it seems that this towel is a sheet. Luckily, Marie anticipated the problem and took a second terry towel for me just in case.

Later Nora comes to dinner at Marie’s place. I’ve been living together with Marie for a month now. I will cook a pot-au-feu. Not east to find the right ingredients though. The meat that I bought isn't what it looks like. It's not a roast but a flat steak rolled as if it were a roast. So when I open the plastic, the meat opens itself wide and flat on the table. I hope it will be fine too. Well probably it will be. Let's try. Anyway there are no other options.

Nora has also just arrived in New York. She needs to rent a van for a transport, and doesn’t know how to do it. First a car company told her that she couldn’t rent a van because she doesn’t have an international driving license. I think it’s not true since I did it myself with a Swiss driving license last year in Texas. Marie tells her that a friend knows a place. The thing with New York is that everything is complicated, but you have to ask. You shouldn’t be afraid to ask for a favor, this European thing... as European it’s hard because you don’t like to ask. You’re always afraid of asking for money too. But here everyone is so used to it. And people are used to being asked and to talk about money! You have to ask and talk about money otherwise people think you’re stupid and they try to take advantage of you. Make it simple and clear. People here don’t like messiness and confusion, which is typically European. It’s the most capitalist country and we are in the most capitalist city. It’s a trade system clearly run by money, which makes everything really clear. Nora is a bit afraid of driving in New York. Driving in a foreign city is always frightening the first time. But in New York, I personally love it. The way the streets are built, this grid system, it makes it really clear and easy. I felt good and reassured even the first time. You always have large perspectives, and it's impossible to get lost. Nora just had her visa accepted and that’s also why she’s a bit afraid of renting a car now. It’s always complicated. She also needs to open a bank account. First she goes to Chase but Chase doesn’t want her. She brings her security number, her visa, but they need a letter from her employer with her address and how much money she earns, none of which she can provide, plus they charge 12 dollars per month. And they are like: but you will maybe succeed, with us, and you have a great network, and maybe your situation will improve in the future! She leaves to

go to Santander because she also wants to support this company. But they say that she has to pay every time she gets money. Finally she goes to Citibank and they open an account for her immediately. She accepts even if she has to pay something every month since it's a cheaper deal. Nora explains to the guy of Citibank that she was already a Citibank's client before, in Germany, but then this other Bank swallowed Citibank. The bank guy says: you could still come back to the family! So at least now she has number, and a visa so she can work.

Then she changes her iTunes to an American account so she has other options for films and music. Much better options. When you link your iTunes to an American Bank account you have a totally different range of everything.

Marie downloads everything illegally. Pirate Bay. She's done that since she was a teenager living in Sweden, over 10 years ago. For all the programs, she goes on Pirate Bay and she cracks the code. But Germany is crazy, a friend of Nora was caught for watching a bad movie. They can delete things on your computer. They are so formal. It's all about formalism in Germany. Marie explains that another solution is to use Little Snitch. And it's so fun to crack codes! You go into this other dimension of the software programs. You just understand better how they are done. Most people have no idea of how it works. You need to be offline when you do this. But it's not that difficult. You just have to not be afraid, look at the tools and use them. It's like making art. If you see how art is made... You just have to dare to do it. Nora also has to find a new flat soon. Well basically you have two kinds of people: The ones that have to work all day to pay their rent, and the ones that own real estate. Today real estate is a very good and safe investment. The other solution is to sublet your flat if you live in an attractive city. So in 5 days you can usually make back all the rent you have to pay in a month. It's a kind of job too. You have to manage the organization, clean the flat and the sheets, those kinds of things. That's what one of Marie's friend does. So she can be free with her time, and do what she wants. It's also a good way to share a bit of the profit with her landlord. We eat the pot-au-feu, it tastes of course the same but also different. It definitely looks different because of the flat meat.

Oh I love your style! Later Marie introduces me to Juliana and Jacolby at the Shade party, and we immediately get along. Juliana comes to me and says: Oh I love your style, it's so cruise!

I'm wearing more or less the same clothes I've worn since I was 10, I chose my haircut when I was 7. Juliana has long dark brown braids that match with her skin color, they fall around her body down to the knees. She changes her haircut almost everyday but the long braids coiled in a snail shape on top of her head are what I prefer. She is tall and thin, wears platform shoes, has a beautiful, rather

deep voice because she was born both male and female. She has always decided very precisely what she wants to wear. She invents herself a new character almost every week, and it's become her work. She's an artist, a performer, a writer, never went to an art school, and the first Friday night of the month, she DJ's at 11 :11, a club in a bar's cellar, hidden behind a door dressed up as a pile of boxes. It's always really warm there. It's the only place where I dare to go alone. One evening, the men were dancing bare-chested, and so I took my t-shirt off too since there was no reason for me to keep it. You can dance, drink and smoke in that cellar. The light system is lasers projecting all kinds of patters on the crowd and walls at various speeds.

That evening there was such a lack of oxygen that my lighter's flame couldn't burn. It would just extinguish instantly every time I lit it. Mike arrives and says hi but he looks a bit special. He tells me not to kiss him because he's just had his entire black skin face painted with black make up. He starts to vogue as if he hasn't left this place since the 90's. The lack of oxygen becomes more and more intense and I start to have problems breathing. I look at the door and think: that's it, if I pass out here, I'll stay forever with this crowd dancing on my body, I'll never manage to go out. But this doesn't really matter since Juliana's music is so good. I think it's because she's in a really good mood. She tells me that she's just found a sponsor for her make up. It costs her a lot of money since she often paints entire parts of her body. Tonight she has blue pearl lips and one green arm. Here everyone has a style: you have to have one. You see all kinds of styles and everyone seems more dressed up when you walk down the streets. They just have a bit more distance, so it becomes really funny, people make comments on each other's style all day, especially in the subway.

I'd bought cheese in the mountains just before coming to America, so a few weeks later Marie and I organize a fondue dinner for my last night here. I find the longer forks that I need pretty easily. No one has eaten this dish before. The dinner is going well until one of the guest vomits all over the table.

He couldn't hold it. In the middle of a sentence, vomit sprays out of his mouth and spreads out all over the table, over the phones and the guests. He's been a vegetarian since forever; his stomach must be a bit more sensitive. Apparently this happened to him once as a child: His parents forced him to eat a steak. he just couldn't bear it.

At the airport my flight is among the last ones to leave before the storm. The haze is now so dense and it's so foggy that it's impossible to see what's happening outside.

They say that it will be the worst storm ever to hit the city. The airport is empty and about to be shut

down. It's really quiet, as it probably must have been here during the final decades of the last century.

What happened in Paris last week doesn't seem to have made any impact: The guards are relaxed. The only new protocol is the one with the kind of vacuum cleaner looking for forbidden particles on your hands, but this had already started few months ago. The plane is taking off. Luckily I get the last aisle seat. I have no screen in front of me because I sit near the emergency exit but it's ok, I will just open my computer so I can look at something and I also feel reassured by the wifi connection and battery plugs situated under my seat. The wifi in the plane: I never had this before. I'm chatting with AnnE up in the air. It seems strange. The flight is quiet and we don't feel any sign of the approaching storm. I have a sleeping pill with me, I never took it but I always have it with me since a year now, it's better to be prepared just in case.

I also have Marie's clothes with me. I left her my pants, shoes, jewels, my favorite red suit jacket that my grandmother bought in Deauville a long time ago — the cruise one — and the bracelet with two sea horses embracing each other that Anne gave me. Jean Painlevé, the French scientist, filmmaker artist and designer made it: He had to stop his jewels production in the 40's because of the war. Marie has chosen three outfits for me that she was wearing last week. When she stops wearing something after an uncertain period of time she can never wear it again. So it has to be the clothes she's wearing now. I'll wear them for a week and she will do the same to see what happens.

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