

## A New Stage of Life

Finally, I had arrived in Copenhagen. It had already been 30 hours since I left my home country, but I still had an 8-hour long train trip before I arrived at my final destination, Stockholm. Already exhausted from the long trip, I was resting on a bench on the platform while waiting for my train. An old man sat down on the bench a little apart from me, and he smiled when our eyes met. “I wonder where you are from?” he asked, noticing my luggage, and of course, I didn’t look like a local. I told him where I was from, and his eyes lit up. He had often acted as a host family, and he began to tell me about exchange students from my country who had stayed in his home before, and how he loved the games that they brought with them. I was happy for the conversation, because I hadn’t talked with anyone in a long time. I gave him some Pocky to thank him.

At last, the train arrived. Once I boarded and found my seat, I fell asleep instantly, because I was so tired. When I woke up, the scenery had completely changed, and it was beautiful. It was my first visit to this country, but it somehow felt familiar, like I had been there before. Here and there were houses whose steep roofs were whitened by snow. The snow was glimmering in the many small lights of the town. As I was admiring the beautiful scenery, the train pulled into the final station of my trip. My heart began to race. I was about to meet my boyfriend for the first time, after a 6-month long distance relationship. I stepped off the train with my heavy luggage, when my phone vibrated with a message. I looked at the message on the screen, which read ‘Baby, OMG, I see you!’ I turned around, and there he was. In person, he was taller than I had expected. But, much like the town itself, I felt like I’d known him for my whole life. He led me to his car, and we headed for his home. During the car ride, we talked about the people I had met during my journey, and how excited I was to start my new life here.

When we arrived at my boyfriend’s home, his parents welcomed me with a warm “Välkommen,” and gave me hugs. For dinner, his parents had made meatballs and mashed potatoes with brown sauce and lingonberries. These aren’t very common in my home country, but I had tried them at IKEA before. His parents’ meal was very different from what I had tried at IKEA, and was so much more delicious. I mean, it was insanely good! After dinner, my boyfriend’s mother gave me lots of welcome presents, including pajamas, snacks, and also some beautiful earrings. I shared the gifts I had brought from home, too, like folding fans, chopsticks, and a bottle of *nihonshu*. My boyfriend’s mom was really happy with the gifts, and she said to me she was happy that our custom was similar to that of Rumania, where she was originally from. I mean, the custom of giving gifts when you meet someone for the first time. I hadn’t known she was an immigrant, but apparently she moved here when she was 26, just a little older than I am now. She will finally be retiring from her job next year. The retirement age here is 65, just like in my home country, which was another thing we had in common.

For the rest of the first night, we all shared many conversations about my future as a student and beyond, my home country, my boyfriend’s mom’s past experience and his dad’s job, amongst other things. My boyfriend’s mom asked me about my previous overseas experience; “How was the job in Australia?” I told her, “My host family were amazing, their young boys were adorable, and we still keep in touch! I sent a package to them 2 weeks ago.” I showed her a video of my host mom opening the package I had sent, and the children’s reactions. Then my boyfriend said to his parents “She is so good with kids! After she goes to the university, she is probably going to get even better with kids, so I can’t wait to see her future.” I too, look forward to learning more, and using my experiences to be a better teacher and role model for my future students.

### Questions, Answers and Hints:

#### 1. What country is the narrator originally from?

**Answer:** Japan.

**Hints/Clues:** She offers the old man ‘Pocky’ in thanks, and also prepares a gift of *nihonshu* for

her boyfriend's family.

**2. Which country was the destination of the narrator's journey?**

**Answer:** Sweden.

**Hints/Clues:** "I still have an 8-hour train trip from here to Stockholm." Stockholm is the capital city of Sweden, and meatballs and mashed potatoes are Swedish traditional food. Also, IKEA is referenced, and is a Swedish company. Finally, "Välkommen," is a Swedish greeting.

**3. For how many hours did the narrator travel in total?**

**Answer:** 38 hours.

**Hints/Clues:** "It had already been 30 hours since I left my home country, but I still had an 8-hour long train trip before I arrived at my final destination."

**4. How did the narrator and her boyfriend meet?**

**Answer:** Likely online.

**Hints/Clue:** "In person, he was taller than I had expected. But, much like the town itself, I felt like I'd known him for my whole life." – this description implies that the two had not yet met in person.

**5. For how many years had the boyfriend's mother lived in that country?**

**Answer:** 38~39 years.

**Hints/Clues:** The boyfriend's mother came to this country as an immigrant when she was 26, and she will retire from her job next year. The age of retire is 65 years old in Sweden. 64 (1 year before retirement) – 26 = 38. (A possible one-year discrepancy exists because of birth months etc.)

**6. The narrator moved to this country to study at a university. What kind of subject will she study?**

**Answer:** Education, or similar field relating to children.

**Hints/Clues:** Hints can be drawn from her boyfriend's reaction to her job in Australia: "She is so good with kids! After she goes to the university, she is probably going to get even better with kids, so I can't wait to see her future," and also her final sentiment; "I too, look forward to learning more, and using my experiences to be a better teach and role model for my future students."