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The emperor penguin died en route

Once upon a time there was an Antarctic Emperor penguin that was mailed to a cold place in Wyoming called Little America. This cold place was named Little America after Admiral Richard Byrd's ice-shingled, circa 1933 Ross Shelf expedition camp down where the Emperor penguins roamed, which was how someone got the brainy idea to mail a penguin to Wyoming in the first place.

The Emperor penguin died en route. But that's all right. Its carcass was preserved, not on ice but in glass, destiny conspiring with destination to make the bird a fun curio for the Ross Shelf's foster child, the Little America haven for travelers bested by Big Daddy America's comprehensive sea to shimmer shining sea gluttony in Wyoming's southwestern desert.

Plants, weather, funeral customs etc. have regions to which they are specifically native, or such is the pedagogical idea. Nevertheless, the summer monsoons that nourish India are generated by the planetary heat engine in Africa, and the ash that was wiped up, as dust, off a Victorian sideboard in Kansas City on September 2, 1883, had its source in the August 27, 1883, eruption of Krakatoa in the Dutch East Indies; and that is how the conclusion is very scientifically drawn (with much supporting data, of course) that "indigenous" is a misnomer. 200 million years ago all the world was one stage called Pangaea, which grew weary of its neighbors (or

lack thereof), migrated and became multiple continents. Is not one of the initial archaeological records of *Homo typicalis* the imprint of a foot at Olduvai Gorge. Why? Because it wanted to get to the other side. *Homo typicalis* has always been a migrant worker. And when it stopped migrating was when former migrators inhabited the land it wanted. At which time *Homo typicalis* became an invader, whereas *Homo atypicalis* threw a big party and married into the family. What this goes to prove is Human is not indigenous to anywhere and, following after the example of rocks that Ice Age glaciers moved hundreds of kilometers, should be classified Erratic. For Human to be other than Erratic indicates, if not an aberration, a dramatic shift in consciousness, which is in itself another *exempli gratia* of the inclination to change.

Symbols of Human should not be astrologically or sexually sub-classified but should be, universally, the sign of the moving van.

See the world. Plant spores do it. Butterflies and salmon do it. Canadian Snowbirds sun featherless limbs on the Gulf of Mexico. Via satellite, raft, horse and buggy, automobile, train, boat, bike, balloon, or a fully restored 1949 Harley Davidson 45 CI, by land, by water, by air mail, and military service, the instinctive urge to trip the globe fantastic transpollinates culturally, and otherwise, whether purist or prejudice likes it or not. Phone and TV recapitulate, to the global minority who possess them, the One World message of Pangaea that migration did not dispel but confirmed with broader horizons.

Even Mother Earth likes to travel. Once a year she loop-de-loops the Sun.

Shifting landmasses cause earthquakes all so a clump of sagebrush—yea, eventually San Francisco Bay—be supplied a new neighbor, and a river or stream is permitted an occasional change of beds. Technically, these earth-shifting occurrences are a natural outcome of pressure and the means of releasing tension. Naturally then, to alleviate a long build-up of what could be thus termed as motivation, Faith had the final option of standing still and volcanically erupting or effecting a move.

Or maybe she didn't do anything. Maybe the world was happening to her when she'd strolled into her future in-law's dining room that Monday morning to trip on a lace noose the family dog had made of her trousseau, collide with the treacherous edge of the "picture window" dining table (hammered copper embracing cut

glass, more than one game of eye spy guess-who's flowered undies had disgraced a dinner guest), then rise, head bleeding ("piquant" was how the interior designer had described the assailant) and drop the first piece of wedding silver into her bag. Without forethought, the compulsion so strong she was helpless to stop and consider either the motivations or possible consequences of her actions, she circled the dining table, transferring into her sole possession the sterling weight of fashion's creamiest designer conscious cutlery, asparagus servers, sardine and ice cream forks, teaspoons and cucumber and butter picks.

All the while, visions of outlaws danced at the end of a rope in her head, macabre tourist-interest photos she'd once been treated to as just desserts visual appetizer at a steak restaurant somewhere in Texas, the Friendship State. The outlaws as well had been trying to escape something, hadn't they? she considered.

Nor did the ravaging of the prenuptial haul end there. The congratulatory promise of holy wedlock gathered in dazzling display, weighing down the sideboard and shelves of a massive hutch, stacked on card tables brought in to catch gleaming overflow, relinquished its pride to her like a too-effective golden hen. The groom's family playing host to the blessed event, seven of the eight traveling bags which she'd been presented upon her arrival several days earlier soon jingle-clunk-clank-jangled the tune of all good returns. Seconds thereafter, a blushing pink leather golf bag (6 way full length fur dividers, 5 zippered pockets including full length apparel pocket and roomy ball pocket) emptied of its clubs (gift from her future father-in-law, owner of a pro golf shop) proved a handy receptacle for the twenty-six place settings of platinum-rimmed china courteously produced by a cornucopia of a bridal registry.

She debated over the Osiris and Isis pewter chalices. What she'd had in mind was the fine Osiris crystal glassware collection, stems intended to recall heathen columns adorned with lotus flowers, not ritual ware which when held upright symbolized the open womb, ready to receive; when inverted, spoke of birth and realization.

Just as well. Crystal would have crushed to sand under the Zojirushi Rice Cooker.

The house was empty. With no unnecessary hysterical protests to hinder pilgrim's progress, Faith loaded the bags in her car. Down a steep hill to the left, Mrs. Hodges' chlorinated, bright blue pool,

one of the smallest human-made bodies of water in the world, glittered happily, favorably impressed with its pine wood deck upon which no one lingered though two iced drinks rested on a table shaded by a sunny, yellow and white striped umbrella.

Mrs. Hodges, a friend to the Harms, bobbed up from a breast crawl to witness Faith's theft but not wearing her glasses she was none the wiser

"They gave me these bags. They wanted me to do this, to leave."

As for the neighbor on the right, if the kitchen window had eyes, the dermatosciphobic, tight-lipped silence of the ever drawn curtains wasn't saying.

Faith, blood still dripping past her left eye and by now completely paranoid, pushed her Ferrari to the top of the mountainous driveway, dropping the negligee she'd used as bandaid. A blight of conscience seemingly under way, she climbed in and rolled silent wheels down the drive of the house which, to the unskilled eye, was indistinguishable from any other suburban fortress on the street.

Before she is gone, a mention should be made of the backyard and its swing set, both long unused, not even the green for putting practice. The house that occupied 3636 Locust Court, though its facade advertised a three or four bedroom nuclear family chain reactor, had, yes, four bedrooms, but also eight bathrooms, living room, den, study, game room, kitchen, dining room, breakfast room, exercise room, sauna, and maid's quarters all crammed on a pencil width's two acres of prime real estate within Birdie's view of one of the more famous courses in the golfing world. That narrow two acres of real estate had meant that with each addition to the house, Mrs. Harm aggrandizing, the rear became further and further removed from its suburban middle-class front, and still it nowhere approached the forlorn swing set where Marshall Harm's tennis shoes once shaved the earth bald, which is where the displaced and torn trousseau of his bloody bride-to-be would later be found buried. This is only mentioned in order to bring up again the existence of the family dog, a fetching dachshund, and not because it would later, tail wagging, uncover a white negligee dotted with blood that it was in the process of burying even as Faith slipped silently away down the driveway. No, this is mentioned because those who aren't interested in neighborly suspicions of homicide will certainly be animal lovers and desire that the generally unappreciated family pet find a good home in the end.

Let's terminate, here and now, the fear that a homicide or four may find its way into the plot. There are enough heinous crimes committed, in fact and fiction, without Marshall Harm, his fiancée Faith Hazy, or any with whom they will be closely acquainted drawing a blood bank nickel's worth of someone else's plasma for sake of avenging Abel, or to provide Cain company in his exile. Not everyone acts out the murder in their heart. But let's not underestimate Faith's ability to frog leap minor legalities qualifying what rates a good scream. As a runner-up to out-and-out premeditated murder, the crime of the here-undifferentiated outcast, the sense of his treason against the status quo, claims its fair share of indignant howling recompense, and Faith was doing a good job to make certain a number of households would be screaming down god's vengeance when that afternoon's facts were had.

Faith's predilection for bulldozing sacred totems, combined with no sardonic acceptance of the less sanitary side of what mirrors often had to offer (in short, the truth) had made life in Valentine, Georgia difficult for her.

Which leads us to wonder what was her attraction to Marshall Harm in the first place.

Never mind. It's more important to get to the subject of Valentine's trains.

Bypassed the privilege of accommodating the seceding South's Civil War capital (that's "Great War of the Confederacy" to the girl in the Dixie Chick silver glitter top and her beau in his "Got Balls?" Cannon & Battle Flag cap, \$7.95 on the internet, free wooden nickel with each purchase), for all its fascination and preoccupation with gold, the garden-strewn belle had succeeded in becoming, by statistical revelations (at some point in time, when being irrelevant) the venereal disease capital of North and South, East and West. How to deal? The Daughters of the Confederacy, knowledge deficient as to how to soothe over the sores, resorted to Dark Age tactics popular during the bubonic plague's reign and with the aid of the Chamber of Commerce anointed the stink with (if not posies) magnolia bouquets and azalea garlands.

When in doubt, send flowers.

This has nothing to do with Valentine's trains except for the fact that the Daughters of the Confederacy weren't responsible for that problem. Not that they were responsible for the high STD rate. They

weren't responsible for the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments either. Polite ignorance can't be blamed for anything, not unless you're one of those beings ("Foul tempered," Mrs. Harm would shiver in protest of such ilk) who damn that brand of Corporate Saving Grace as Pride, Prejudice and a Blind Eye.

There was a greater comparison between the vile train situation and Wild West wagons protectively rounding themselves up to fend off American Indian rights than might be first, facetiously, considered. If no one could enter the circle, by that same token neither could anyone escape, which meant that downtown Valentine was, often times, entirely disconnected from the remainder of the world, and even its hospitals unable to export or receive any of those insufficiently wounded unto death.

What this has to do with anything at all is it stands as a metaphor for Faith's terrified avoidance of Valentine for several years. For which reason she had not, until the previous few days, ever viewed Marshall Harm in his natural habitat--god bless his impoverished soul.

Faith no longer lived in Valentine but her genuine allergic response showed she was ruled by what had transpired during her post-formative, post-Wonder Bread years there, Cartesian mind-body split tossed aside.

Now, the Wonder Bread thing may seem like nothing, but to a prepubescent transplant reared on red, yellow and blue balloon polka-dotted packages stuffed with cellulose filler, it was true tragedy that the Georgia grocery stores eschewed Wonder's adlicious light as air calories for some daddy's Shirley Temple styled Sunbeam lass gobbling carbohydrate and fat on every loaf. Seemed everywhere she looked there was another jailbait beauty contestant. Also, the move had ensured complete isolation from rich relatives, and if eating deviled eggs at family reunions was requisite to getting one's name in a will, Valentine's jealous trains meant life was thereon reluctant, no matter how many relatives did demise, to materialize a comfy trust fund more prodigious than a few birthday-ribboned, bubbly Coca-Cola shares, an Atlanta old family staple Faith's San Diego great-aunt had blessed her with, saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." One supposes this was intended to teach Faith something.

Nothing to be sneezed at. Not the conformity motto, but the Coca-Cola shares.

Why, after all, Marshall Harm? What was the attraction? Not his money if he'd carefully hidden the fact he had any. ("Surprise!")

Salmon bucking current to return to the place of their spawning, Faith was the current and Marshall the salmon eager to fertilize. But that was Marshall's excuse for towing Faith back to Valentine. Excuses for Faith's going, when ignored, would give way to the old adage that the human trail always circulates back to Ground Zero in personal apocalypses.

Fish were now also why Faith Hazy was silent sailing the Harms' driveway, past the magnolias, the camellias, azaleas, past the white African-American iron stable boy poised to take your horse's reins, past the bird house camouflaged mail box, into the street without looking both ways until she was a block away, near the grade school grounds, before she cranked the car.

Intelligent forces of nature may accept a thimble's worth of blame. The general hubris of civilization occasionally warranted the sky, winds, rocks, water and relations pulling a trick or two for a laugh, maybe even to try to knock a couple quarters' sense in an occasional brain that had left its back door open and was just asking for it as far as they could figure. If a tornado came blowing through and deposited Faith out in left field without a map, she ought not to have had so many flat surfaces lying around that the wind could catch and have their way with.

Faith had been struck hard enough that her mind would be assessing damages for a while. The internal insurance adjuster, however, was already on his way with pen, no pencil, because his mind was made up. Something Faith wasn't aware of yet, though it seemed she had an intuition, considering her recent theft. But, no, she didn't have any capital "P" Plan; Faith was still in shock and deep denial, and had no plan at all except that a good number of her cells still believed they were on her way to a lunch date with southern born and bred Marshall Harm, who had given her the Ferrari as a wedding present. ("Surprise! Didn't know I was quasi kind-of rich, did ya!")

The internal insurance adjuster would tell Faith that she may have paid extravagantly for the tailoring but she was wearing no clothes.

Faith would reply, "That's immaterial."

The way people listened/didn't listen to others and themselves around there, "Never Mind" was a popular middle name.

Never mind also how she loved the leather smell of the new old 1967 330 GT 2+2 Ferrari; loved to open its hood and gaze with doting eyes on mechanics she didn't understand but which made it run and were therefore endearing (just like one's own heart is, well, one's own true endearing tick-tock heart); loved to sit and talk with her car (all of three days hers and eager to be tested so to please its master with high road performance); would have almost (not quite) liked to move into her car to sleep there, eat there—Faith would certainly not wed for sake of an Italian automobile, would she? Her subconscious waiting for her to recognize this fact, that she would not marry for sake of a posh auto, had taken her out of her way to strand her at Fifteenth Street in the lunch hour tangle of traffic and conflicting train schedules. “Think,” it said, “Think!” But Faith had for pleasant company her beautiful car, its pretty knobs and gadgets, the tachometer, oil gauge, the talk-back burglar alarm...

Valentine's best radio spat at her a bevy of soft rock Top Ten from a calendar year that decayed even while on a gas station's wall. “Think, think!” her subconscious begged. Which she did. Grief stricken, angst ridden, innocently bored, and filled with obligation to the very threshold of terror.

Her thoughts were swirling eddies. They were tornadoes. Maybe the family dog knew that for every wedding there should be a good story, which was why it tripped her.

Weddings occur with the frequency of births and deaths (divorce abetting). They are a multi-million, maybe even a billion dollar industry (certainly, divorce abetting). Inspirational for some, sentimentally adored by others (double ring ceremony, give the mothers a flower), though they be red hot coals funding the flames of future familial insecurity heaped on the hopeful heads of matrimonial march inebriated singles, there are a number of dry-eyed individuals who would prefer not to be invited to weddings, or read about them, are either bored or frightened by them, even see them as infantile regressions. These persons are perhaps hoping Faith will escape the impending nuptial knot tout suite and the story get on with it so they'll not have to hear any more about weddings. A war, la peste, international intrigue, drug bust, just plain musings in tepid bath water—anything but the most mundane and exceptional unification of two souls in wedded bliss for as long as they both shall live.