

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/3

Yaron Goldman

ERR MAIL

In May of 2004 I took a trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. I was turning 30 that year and had always wanted to go, so I bought a ticket, booked some tours online, and headed on my way. It was a fabulous trip with wonderful memories and I would recommend it to anyone looking for a truly unique experience.

When you go to Galapagos, there is a unique feature regarding mail delivery that can test the honor system like no other. You see, in days gone by, Pirates and other seamen, would leave their mail in a mailbox waiting for the next group to come thru and take it back for them. So if I wanted a letter to go to France, then I would leave the letter waiting for the next ship headed to France to take my letter. Conversely, I would take any letters headed for my final destination with me, and so on. Today, that tradition carries on as a folksy tourist attraction.

When I arrived to the "mail depot" I was the only American in a group of ten. The guide informed us all of the tradition and then began going through the addresses of all the mail. Most of the mail was postcards, but there were some letters as well. As he called each country out, he would hand each country's "representative" their mail. Of the couple hundred pieces of mail, over 150 of them were addressed to the United States. Everyone on the tour seemed to get a good laugh as I walked back to our boat trying not to lose any of the mail.

I made sure to promise everyone that I would put postage on each and every piece of mail as soon as I got back home and not to worry, they could count on me! I dutifully placed all the mail in my backpack taking care not to damage any of them. I had day dreamed about coming back to my office in North Carolina and having my secretary put all the mail thru automatic postage machine and how grateful all of these people would be to their anonymous international mail man.

Well, those letters & postcards did not see the light of day again, until a year later when I moved in with my then girlfriend and future wife. She had asked me about them, and once I explained how it worked, and why I had all of these people's mail, she gave me this look of utter disbelief. She then explained to me about her thoughts on Karma and that if I did not mail them off right away, there would be hell to pay. I totally agreed and promised to send them off. She could count on me!

Needless to say, I forgot about them again and since that time my wife and I have moved to Colorado and just recently unpacked all of our boxes. To explain the shame I had when she saw these cards would be too difficult to put into words, but needless to say, she was disappointed. Now, at this point, my wife thinks I should just trash the mail. Her point being, it's so late now, it defeats the point. In my mind it's the opposite. I almost feel like Tom Hanks in cast away, who has been saving that one piece of FEDEX mail, unopened, to bring back to the rightful owner.

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So, today, July 22nd, 2009, over five years after the promised delivery date, I am sending out all of the mail. I will admit, I have read all the postcards, but I have not opened any of the actual letters. I hope that when the recipients of these cards receive them, it brings them some joy. Although, I also have this fear in the back of my mind that some of the senders or recipients may not be too excited to receive this mail. There could be divorces, broken hearts, strained relationships, or even deaths. But this is a risk I am willing to take. If anyone who receives one of these letters/postcards reads this, please let me know if I should have just thrown them out.