

News from a Distant Relative

by strannikov

Well, no, he had not heard from any distant relative. The fortune cookie had offered its prediction a month earlier, he recalled, and since that day he'd gotten not a letter or a card, a phone call or an e-mail from any relative at all. No telepathic communications, either, nor anything coming to his attention in any dream from belabored sleep.

He had distant relatives still living: six first-cousins (none of whom he had seen in years, none of whose spouses or children he'd've known if they'd fallen on him) and three second-cousins, an elderly aunt also clinging to life and geriatric existence, along with one estranged brother and one estranged sister (both older). —yet an entire lunar month after the fortune cookie's authoritative prediction, no word from any of them.

Likely, few of them were aware that he'd moved from Colorado to Tennessee in the past year (this he'd confided by telephone months earlier—only after the fact—to the lone second-cousin with whom he maintained intermittent contact). Granted, he had not broadcast this news, but he did not seriously consider he had any substantive news to impart (how many of them had ever known that he'd moved from North Carolina to Colorado years earlier?). He was retired: does anything actually occur to or with someone who's retired (apart from death or serious illness or injury)? He'd had a storm door installed the previous week, a new kitchen window, too: did either of these occurrences count as news? Hardly: at least, not without going into the back story of how or why they came to be replaced, and if his putative correspondents didn't know that much, he hardly saw it as his task to inform them.

Suffice it to say: he had no intention of crossing over the Appalachians to deliver any messages to the family and friends he'd

left behind in eastern North Carolina. They, it seemed, were no more inclined to cross the mountains and hills from east to west, probably a good thing, too.

At least he had learned that his local purveyor of cellophane-wrapped, industrially-confected fortune cookies was not to be trusted with access to a latitude or a wide spectrum of randomness, although he still enjoyed their preparation of shrimp lo mein. He would have been astonished, in fact, to have read any fortune derived from the Zhuangzi, the Dao De Jing, or the Liezi. (Suddenly, too lazy to pull even one title from his shelves, he thought: if it's now the "Dao De Jing", shouldn't it also now be the "I Jing"? Alas, he was no translator.)

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