



The Dead Jenny Tour

Plane tickets, hotels, passports, tropical wardrobes—scattering Jenny to the four winds was going to cost a fortune.

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t a recent mother-daughter dinner, the subject of that last big getaway—the funeral—came up. It started with the recent sendoff of their grandmother: how great she looked (why *had* she waited to die before getting a manicure?!); the memory board (something new and innovative in the world of funeral homes) and the mishaps (the pallbearer I'd once had a fling). After a few glasses of wine, we started speculating about our own journeys into the Great Whatever.

"I don't want to be buried or burned," said Kristin, my oldest daughter. "I want to be on one of those shelves above ground. Don't put me on the ground floor, and don't forget the manicure."

"I'll take the shelf too," I agreed. "In fact I'd prefer to be wrapped in a ceremonial robe and hoisted on a platform into the top of a tree in the authentic way of ancient Native American burials—I saw it in *Jeremiah Johnson*—or maybe it was *A Man Called Horse*. Since I'm getting pecked to death by ducks in life, I might as well be picked over by vultures in death. The only hitch is that I don't think a hotel bathrobe qualifies as a ceremonial robe."

"First of all, Mom, I don't think *A Man Called Horse* is an accurate source of ancient burial customs," said Jenny, the anthropology student. "But regardless of that, I definitely want to be cremated and then I want you to divide my ashes into baggies and give them out to my friends and everyone in the family and have them scattered all over the world. I want to encourage everyone I know and love to visit countries like Zaire and New Guinea and experience non-Western cultures."

Kristin and I exchanged looks because we knew right away that Dead Jenny was going to be a very high-maintenance project. I could see it so clearly: a Dead Jenny spreadsheet to track where and when the baggies were going; friends getting unlisted numbers to avoid their fair share of ashes; groveling phone calls to strangers we'd heard were heading to Mount Kilimanjaro on their honeymoon.

I once agreed to take a Flat Samantha paper doll with me on a trip to Hawaii. The idea was to have it photographed in different locales so that my goddaughter could get extra credit in kindergarten. I accidentally left Samantha in a tattoo parlor, spilled a Bloody Mary on her and failed to take one single photo. She came back looking and smelling like a trollop who had been picking up sailors on shore leave. Clearly, I can't be trusted with a Flat Samantha, much less a Dead Jenny, but, of course, the chances are pretty high that I won't be

around to be involved in either the shelf afterlife of Kristin or the Jiffy Bagging of Jenny. If I *were*, though, I knew I'd be in for years of exhausting vacations (possibly involving camping) to inaccessible sites in order to fulfill my third-world daughter's last wish. Instead of five-star meals, we'd be dining on roasted salamander and drinking sap from a sacred cactus. Her sister, as the oldest child and only responsible member of the family, would undoubtedly be in charge of the arrangements, and I imagined our voice mails might go something like this:

"Mom, this is Kristin. I know you're screening your calls because you have not met your Jenny quota for the quarter. You're scheduled for that remote prehistoric dig in Siberia that she read about in National Geographic. As you know from Jenny's last willful testament, the permafrost situation makes it impossible to excavate except during their short summer. If you don't get over there ASAP, we'll have to postpone it til next year. And we really need to get rid of Jenny this year!"

"Kristin, this is Mom. I haven't recovered from that snorkeling trip off the Great Barrier Reef. I can't swim, remember?! It's kind of hard to scatter ashes when you're going under for the third time. Why can't your brother go to Siberia?"

Mom, the last time we trusted Sean with Dead Jenny, he took her to Disney World! She wouldn't have been caught dead there, and he even left some ashes in the Country Bears show. And I really didn't appreciate his phone call when he was scattering her in the Magic Kingdom: 'Hey, now that you've died, Jenny, what are you gonna do? I'm going to Disneyworld!' It was really uncalled for. So stop whining—after all, we had to take Dead Jenny to a Dead concert and my husband is a registered Republican! We all have to make sacrifices."

Kristin, this is Mom. How about this...I have a chance to go on a barge trip through France. Granted, it's not third-world, but it would be really educational. And I could get rid of at least two packs of Dead Jenny.

Mom, France has been done...stick a fork in it! Remember when I got the crossing guard at the elementary school to take a bag with her when she went on that Elder Hostel trip to the caves of Lascaux? By the way, don't forget that we have to sign her up for the Great Wall of China Marathon well in advance...and I don't want to hear a word about Bird Flu!"

Whoever came up with cremation as a simpler, cheaper alternative to the Great American Funeral never met Jenny. Plane tickets, hotels, passports, tropical wardrobes—scattering Jenny to the four winds was going to cost a fortune. But at least she won't need a manicure.

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