

Coriolis Effect

I'm just getting out of the shower and toweling off when I hear the bingbong of my front doorbell. Yelling *hang on please* and dancing alternately one-legged jigs down the hall in a frantic scramble to dress while in motion, I reach the door only to see a white van pulling away down the street. On the step, at my feet is a small cardboard box. *Handle With Care* is written in cursive along the side, in handwriting that seems vaguely familiar but I can't place. There's no return address, but there is a swirly blue logo with a company name: The Coriolis Effect.

The box is light in my hands and I feel nothing move when I shake it. It has no heft at all, but I swear I hear the sound of screaming, as if from a faraway television. There's a waybill tucked in a plastic adhesive window on the back. I unfold it and read my own name as the recipient, with no indication of the sender, followed by the words:

“In your hands is one category five Atlantic hurricane. You must forward this hurricane on in 3 hours after reading this letter to at least 10 different people. If you do this, you will receive unbelievably good fortune. John Dawson of Cleveland, Ohio sent his hurricane to 12 people last year and shortly after won a 115 million dollar lottery prize. If you do not, bad luck will strike you. Pamela Williams of Green Bay, Wisconsin died in a fire two days after ignoring her letter in February of this year! THIS IS NOT A JOKE! The consequences of ignoring this hurricane are severe. You MUST send this on or face dreadfully bad luck. P.S. I did not make this up, someone sent it to me and I am passing it on!”

I shake the box again. I hear crashing surf followed by more screaming, and then loud ticking. I take the hurricane inside with me. I place the box on my coffee table and flip open my laptop. The box is making whooshing sounds that gust from time-to-time as I do a Google search for the company's name. All the returned results are either videos of moms making hurricane models in bowls of hot water with food coloring and shaving cream while their children fight each other for the chance to stir the water even faster, or explanations of how the French mathematician-engineer Gustave-Gaspard Coriolis discerned in 1835 that resistant or inertial force must be included in Newtonian laws of motion calculations when applied to a rotating body.

I search for Pamela Williams and find her obituary. According to Green Bay Metro Fire, the house fire, caused by a faulty ceiling fan, was reported by neighbors at 1pm when they noticed smoke pluming from 1249 Vanderbraak Street. Pamela Williams was rushed to Bellin Hospital but died shortly thereafter from smoke inhalation.

I take the box into my kitchen, open it and peer inside. I see a small, cottony, spinning disc. I close it again. I get a bowl of ice water ready and dump the hurricane in. The spinning slows dramatically, but the ticking continues unabated.

John Dawson shows up on a list of Ohio Powerball winners, and I manage to find his contact information. I dial his number.

“Hello.”

“Hi, is this John Dawson?”

“It is,” came the wary reply.

The ice is already melting from the friction and the hurricane is threatening to outgrow the bowl.

“My name is Brett Pribble, and I’m calling to ask you something about your Powerball Lottery win.”

“Listen, I’ve been offered every service under the sun since that win, and I’m not interested in whatever you have to sell me. Please take me off your call list.”

“Please don’t hang up. I’m not calling to sell you anything, I promise. I have a strange question. Did you receive a hurricane in the mail before that Powerball win?”

A long silence, then, “yes.”

The hurricane is spinning faster now, and the curtains are beginning to sway from the wall.

“Did you forward the hurricane to anyone?”

“Yes, like ex-girlfriends, co-workers, and a few other people.”

Hard droplets of water are starting to splatter off the disk, and it's getting harder to hear John Dawson’s replies over the increasing howl.

“Was anyone hurt?”

“Pfft. I have no idea.”

I think about my own exes and co-workers, about people whose lives I've passed through. I think about my sons and Lilly.

"Thank you for your time."

The rush of wind pounds my ear drums. The smell of ozone fills the darkening room as the hurricane begins to lift from the bowl. I grab it, and feel a shooting, burning pain in my palms as it tears through my skin. In one swift motion, I stuff the hurricane in my mouth and swallow hard.