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For a few days after he'd left the water farm—or he didn't know how long, really—Bargelt had been more or less delirious: he'd holed up in the poor shelter provided by a boulder and the intertwined branches of two of the tough, scrubby bushes that dotted the desertscape. He'd wake in the night after the storm, the fine sand banked against his back and trickling down his neck, and then he'd wail, assaulted, it seemed, by every memory he'd ever had of the world before the end-of-civilization-as-we-know-it. He remembered everyone randomly: the little fat man with the puckered red lips and the comb-over who ran the deli near where he'd lived; the hotel clerk who'd been so rude to him once he'd wanted to punch him and had always felt bad about losing his temper; his mother who could be so loving and distracted at once; the woman at university he'd so admired, slept with, then never called, never knowing why; the lank blond hair, broad, tanned shoulders and even wider smile of the landscape gardener who'd been a friend of a friend, and he remembered the friend, breaking his thin cigars to smoke half at a time, picking shreds of tobacco from between his teeth; and there was the friendly, honey-skinned girl who was a prostitute and a junkie he'd shared an apartment with one summer, till she dropped a lit cigarette in her bed, on the nod; and the woman who'd owned the apartment, who'd locked the girl in her bedroom while she went cold turkey; the childhood friend who'd kick balls at him while he played goalie; and the gravel-voiced mechanic in another country who'd kept his car running past the point of no return. Every time he woke up a different stream of faces ran through his head, with no beginning, no end, no order he could make out. All my Vanessas, he thought.

Bargelt knew he had to move to get it under control, or he might really lose it. So he'd decided to head as close to directly south as he could manage. Returning to himself somewhat, he treated his plan as a conceptual project: How To Go Straight South Without Benefit Of Compass, and without much help from anything but the sun, come to that, itself increasingly obscured by gauzy drifts of dust so fine it filled the tracery of fine lines on his face. Sand to wear you down, dust to fill you in: after a couple of weeks on his project, Bargelt began to think he wouldn't go mad, after all, might be able to live with his memories: the day it occurred to him that after-the-end-of-the-world, irony was as much sustenance as food or water and a lot easier to come by. Gradually, he began to develop a perverse pleasure in looping back to his southward path, trudging off to the east or west and back, around unclimbable rock formations, uncrossable canyons, once having to bail out on his path to avoid a settlement tucked into an arroyo at the base of a series of hills, where he heard the crack of what sounded like a whip before he saw the barbed wire fence and took cover, darting off later under cover of

darkness. Bargelt had had enough of the New Economy for now.

After a month or so, the landscape flattened out—Bargelt occasionally wondered whether he might now be walking on what had once been the ocean floor—which made his project easier, but also meant finding cover in the evenings harder, especially as the dust clouds were beginning to blur the time of day. How To Go Straight South Without Benefit Of Enough Bloody Visibility At All, Bargelt reflected one late afternoon, after having to dig himself shelter in the lee of a shallow dune to avoid being caught in the storm.

Climatic emergencies were one thing, Bargelt saw them as within the parameters anticipated by the project, but he was a little less certain about the possibilities of post-civilized social emergencies. The South apparently had some kind of magnetic pull, because in the flatlands Bargelt began to cross tracks with other pointless pilgrims more often. Or maybe it was the Antipodes? Bargelt had found himself thinking that he might simply continue south, as far as he could walk. He maintained a policy of watchful neutrality: he kept to himself, acknowledged greetings in kind, hung back to avoid larger groups of walkers. These days, he felt he had enough people in his head, though step by step he was better able to control and narrate his own memories, stringing events together, connecting them to faces, finding shape in the world that had been, while the world that was, threatened to dissolve in front of him: the dust clouds sometimes hung lower, now, so he could only move forward with a cloth wrapped around his face to stop from choking, or had to abandon his path to feel his way to early shelter.

The fellow-travellers Bargelt encountered were as ragtag as he was. Many were less methodical, chasing rumours and ghosts in the thin dry air. Most went alone, and over time had shed the need for company, as well, though there was the odd group of one or other form of post-civilized fervour, penitents, seekers after El Dorado or the New Babylon—or Melbourne, in the case of one trio Bargelt could only think were badly misguided. Some were curious to see whether there was an end to the end of the world: there were mystics and rationalists, those looking for a way out, and those lost who didn't care. A man carried an empty birdcage. Four women in burkas shuffled in single file. An Englishman lifted his knees to march, counting in a bad German accent, 'ein, zwei, drei, vier.' Bargelt glimpsed someone as the dust drifted, man or woman he couldn't tell, in a clown suit. Humans, he thought, not that long at the top, really.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Frazer Ward.*