

the beginning of

OFF THE MAP (from **FOREIGN AFFAIRS**)

a short comedy by Rich Orloff

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OFF THE MAP is also in Playscripts' anthology **NOTHING SERIOUS**.)

Time: The recent past
Place: Someplace very cold
Characters: A GUY
A GAL
A LOCAL RESIDENT (male)

A fairly barren terrain, except for some rocks of all sizes, from boulders to pebbles. JEAN and SCOTT, a young married couple, enter, carrying knapsacks. They've both been hiking long enough to become very tired and very, very irritable.

SCOTT
I can't go any further.

JEAN
We can't stop here.

SCOTT
Why not?

Scott takes off his pack.

JEAN
It's too bleak.

SCOTT
I don't care.

JEAN
It's freezing here.

SCOTT
Any place else we go might just be worse.

JEAN
Does this place look familiar?

SCOTT

This place looks even less familiar than every other unfamiliar place we've been.

Jean opens a map.

JEAN

We must be someplace, Scott.

SCOTT

We've been to 14,000 someplaces, Jean. I think we've finally arrived at No Place.

JEAN

I've never felt so lost.

SCOTT

Maybe we're in South No Place or No Place Heights.

JEAN

You're not helping.

SCOTT

So? Even when I try, you don't appreciate it.

JEAN

Maybe if you tried harder, we wouldn't be lost.

SCOTT

Jean, we've been lost since we got married.

Jean looks at the map.

JEAN

I, I think we took a wrong turn after our honeymoon.

SCOTT

That's because you refused to linger in Newlywed Bliss.

JEAN

I think if we had headed straight towards Parenthood –

SCOTT

Jean –

JEAN

It would've been so easy to get to.

SCOTT

But impossible to get out of.

JEAN

Scott.

SCOTT

I just want to visit some other places first.

JEAN

You keep wanting to steer us back to Partyland.

SCOTT

And we would've gotten there if you didn't turn us off at Biological Clock World.

JEAN

I just found it more real than Extended-Adolescenceville.

SCOTT

I would've been glad to settle down at the intersection of Love and Lust, but, no, you had to drag us to Responsibility Gulch.

JEAN

It was a nice gulch.

SCOTT

It was a ravine! With a dead end!

JEAN

Having children is not a dead end.

SCOTT

I'm just not there yet.

JEAN

Well, I can't stay here. It's too cold.

SCOTT

Maybe, maybe we should just admit we'll never find a place we both like.

JEAN

Do you think that's true?

SCOTT

All I know for sure is – I'm tired.

JEAN

Well, I'm going to look around
and see if there's a way out.

SCOTT

I'm just going to sit here,
and see if there's a way in.

JEAN

Good luck.

Jean exits. Scott thinks, perhaps kicks a pebble or two. Someone from the area – A LOCAL RESIDENT – who happens to be a PENGUIN – enters. Noticing Scott, the penguin approaches cautiously. Scott, in his own world, doesn't see the penguin. Scott moves, and the penguin scoots away. Working up courage, the penguin moves closer, and closer, and closer, till –

SCOTT

What the –

The penguin scoots far away. The penguin and Scott study each other.

PENGUIN

You – you're not a penguin.

SCOTT

No, I'm a person.

PENGUIN

A person?... Oh, yeah, I've heard about
your kind. You'll eat anything, won't you?

SCOTT

I don't eat penguins.

PENGUIN

Prove it. Show me your teeth.
(peering into Scott's smile:)
No feathers. Okay, I'll trust you.

SCOTT

Thanks.

PENGUIN

You go near my wife or kids,
I'll peck your balls out.

SCOTT

Okay.

PENGUIN

People. Whoever heard of creating a species whose genitals make such easy targets?

SCOTT

We have opposable thumbs.

PENGUIN

(sarcastic)

Ooo, I'm impressed. So what are you doing in Antarctica?

SCOTT

I'm in Antarctica?

PENGUIN

Didn't you notice how cold it is?

SCOTT

I thought it was a chill in the marriage.

PENGUIN

Problems with the little hen?

SCOTT

Yeah. Are you married?

PENGUIN

Of course. Most penguins mate for life.

SCOTT

And the others?

PENGUIN

They just stand around and occasionally scream at the sky.

SCOTT

Oh.

PENGUIN

And humans?

SCOTT

Well, we're *supposed* to mate for life –

PENGUIN

But?

SCOTT

Some of us get married too early.

PENGUIN

I'm glad I waited till I was eight.

SCOTT

You got married at eight?

PENGUIN

I know, I know. My dad used to say, "You're 7½, when are you going to settle down?"

I wasn't ready; I was still having too much fun sliding down icy hills on my belly.

SCOTT

I remember days like that.

PENGUIN

And then one day I waddled past her, and suddenly there was more to life than belly-sliding.

SCOTT

I walked past my wife, and I thought, what a fox.

PENGUIN

Oh, you have an inter-species relationship?

SCOTT

No, no, it's – She just has some of the qualities of a fox.

PENGUIN

Is she furry?

SCOTT

No.

PENGUIN

I'm confused. I've never looked at a penguin and thought, "What a sea lion!"

SCOTT

I –

PENGUIN

This may sound odd to you, but what I look for in a penguin – is a penguin. Tight feathers, webbed feet. And when I met her, well, I grabbed the first stone I could find and placed it at her feet.

SCOTT

Why?

PENGUIN

How else can I show her I'm capable of building a good stone nest for our chicks? I gave her lots of stones.

SCOTT

Really?

PENGUIN

Well, how did you impress *your* hen?

SCOTT

I gave her *one* stone.

PENGUIN

Like a boulder?

SCOTT

It was smaller than a pebble.

PENGUIN

You must live in a very barren terrain.

SCOTT

Only since we got married. You two fight?