

# The Wondrous Curves of Life

Austin P. Torney



## **The Wondrous Curves of Life**

*A great logician, in a cave in the dark,  
Could infer the universe from a grain of dirt.*

I slept on our wide front screened-in porch, enjoying the wonderful night breezes. It was deep summer, 1963, and I was 16 and a half. I was in between relationships, which was not a terrible thing, but had been a time to recharge, but now the sexy morning airs were really mixing in the fumes of nature, within and without, spurring ever onward the feelings of life, love, and adventure.

I lived in Oak Park, Illinois, just outside Chicago, it being the largest village in the world, having over 70,000 people. After I awoke I paged through the weekly 'Oak Leaves' edition, noting the happenings of what sounded like Pleasantville. Ah, there it is—I had submitted a piece of writing on the Vietnam war, and there it was.

I made some hardboiled eggs for breakfast around nine o'clock and then went out and cut the grass and put new spark-plugs into my motorcycle. What would this day bring, I wondered.

Jimmy Nelson was already up in his treehouse, and Charlene Faust said good morning from the yard in the other direction. As my two neighbors near my age, they had become part of my life on that account, ever a part of the scenery. I went back in.

An hour later a most fortunate event arrived at my front door. It was Cheryl Dykstra's younger sister, bearing an exquisite card from Cheryl, with her clear handwriting inside. This was a surprise, a unique happening in my life as it turned out, a one-and-only kind of thing. I had known of Cheryl and her family, but I didn't really know them well at all, but for some times when I saw them in their front yard from the playground adjoined to Lincoln School, where our group hung out at night. The sisters may even have sat with us on a bench on one of those nights some time ago, and in the summer before.

The writing inside the card said that she, Cheryl, liked me, and hoped that I would come come over. Now this girl had initiative, I thought, to bravely come out of the blue like this. As I recalled, Cheryl must be 15 by now, I having also noted her at high school catching my eye through hers. She had come a long way from her days at Lincoln.

My heart literally jumped as I read the card, and so I told the little bearer to tell sister Cheryl that she had a deal, with me as her new boyfriend. I gave little sis a kiss on the cheek, telling her to send my love, with me to follow in a while. She told me that 12 noon would work out well, a time when Cheryl could surely escape her temporary grounding.

So, Miss Lady Luck headed back to Dame Fortune with my information, which I had also written down on a paper for her to give to the bold and the beautiful one. Of all the things to happen, I thought. Where and when did this all take form without my even knowing. And that card! Such literacy for a sophomore. It's written composition was so excellent that it seemed to be a perfect mini essay in itself, or at least a beautiful abstract of one, in order to fit on the card. How did this person know me?

It was time to go and find out. I stopped at the end of her alley, observing that a car had just pulled off and away from Cheryl's garage, presumably her parents going off on an outing to the relatives or something. They went, luckily, in the other direction from me. I then saw Cheryl come out, she wandering about in the alley, and then looking at a flower.

I rode into the alley, turned off my motorcycle, and coasted up behind her, quite surprising her. We embraced and kissed, and I shall never forget that feeling. She had indeed been grounded, for smoking, and was confined to the grounds of her home.

We soon rode down the alley, though, she holding on quite snug behind me, and onto Lexington Street down to Maple Avenue, and then onto the large and busy way of Roosevelt Road, heading on down to First Avenue, on which we picked up great speed, with good vibrations, all the way out to 31st Street, where there were motorcycle trails, with many hills and jumps that soon sent us airborne. After going around twice, we headed off on a spur through some deep woods.

After about a half a mile we arrived at the train bridge that went over a river, and so we set up camp with a blanket on a grassy area in front of a large rock wall that was just to the side of the trestle. A train rumbled by and brought unto us a new and exciting vibration. Then it was peaceful again and we looked at each other, kissed for a very long time, and then laid down, and eventually played with each other in the buff, these happenings greatly enhanced by our being in the outdoors of sun and breeze.

We later leaned back against the rock wall and lit up our smokes. The prisoner had been sprung and I'd surely get her back home long before anyone could notice. Then one more day and she would be freed. I had a new and adventurous girlfriend, just like that, and one who was quite literate. Amazing. I took out her card and held it to my heart.

"Why me?" I finally asked.

"I like your writing and also what I've seen of you," she said, as she showed me the note I'd sent back with her sister, joining it onto hers to show our union. I thought to myself that we both knew that my note came after her initiative, but I just said "Thanks."

"You'll know more tomorrow," she added, and I accepted that.

What is this Earth with these pastimes so fine? It must be the gift of the Universe's fine sweet valentine. What loveliness brings such soft summer breezes that caress? These winds are the pressured airs mixing up the rest. Yes, these are the times of life, love, and nature. We had now retrieved for ourselves the wingèd hours, those that drudges had ever stole and overpowered: hours gentle and mild, like cleansing showers that fill the cup and freshen the flowers.

As such, such these facts of life had so easily and naturally come to us, as with those fresh winds that had made love to the blossoms of May, causing the spring flowers to reach for the light of day. We wrote them down. Drinking deep draughts of life's sunny delight, the woods now burst with the joy of love's bouquet.

We would tell people of this place, we said, but never where it was, we swore—this wild land near a big city. This forest was to be for our rest. With her I walked the wooded scene, beholding wonders that were, around here, seldom seen: The leaves breathed deep in the wandering airs, with the growth of summer thrust upon them green.

In this secret wilderness we wandered, as a couple made whole, all of it made possible by the delivery of a card of love, and we then returned to the blanket. She was sweet, soft, and inconsumably wild, even as she just lay beside me like a sleeping child. Our quiet breathing stirred not the wooded scene as we rested silently on the forest green.

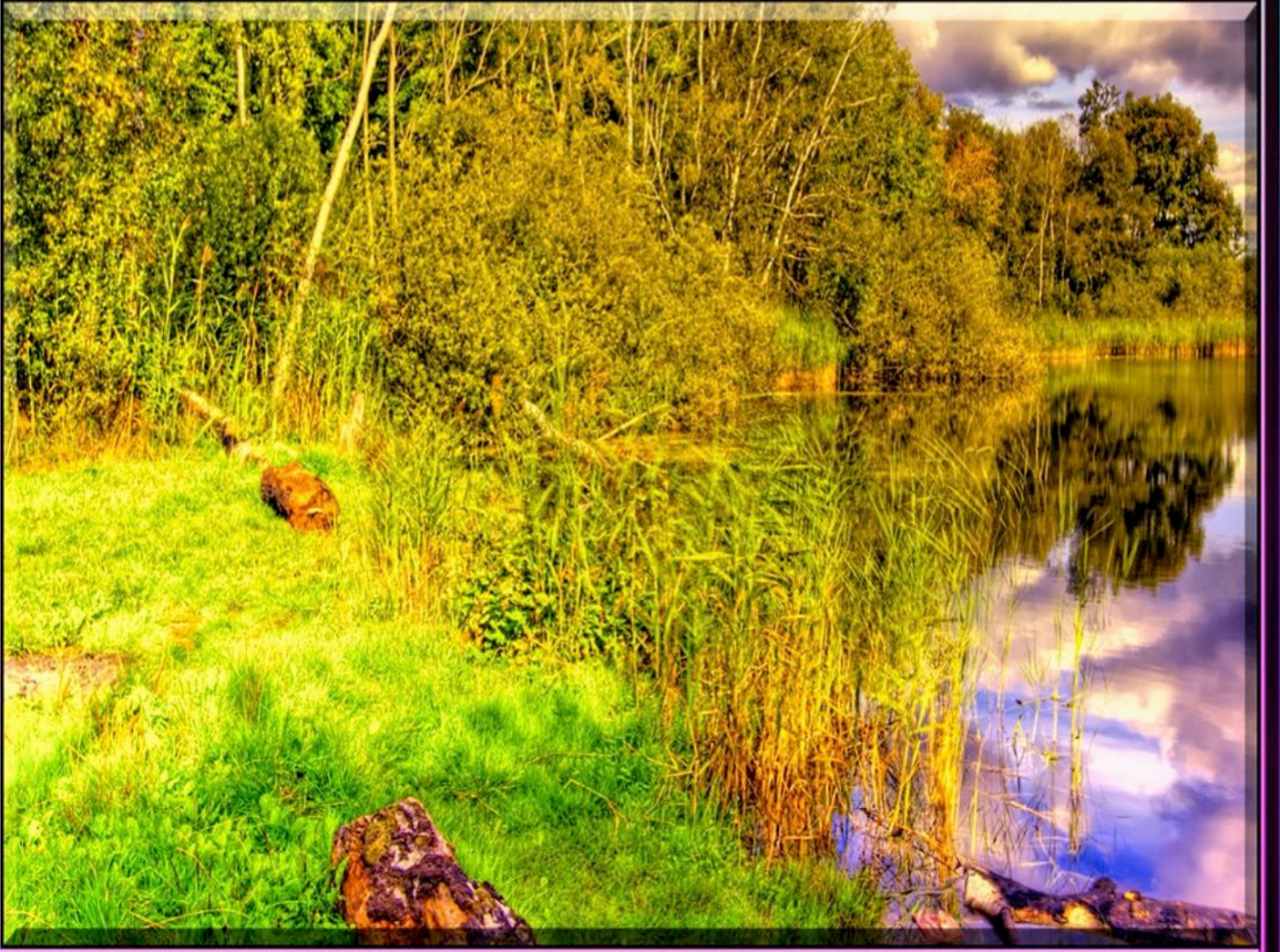
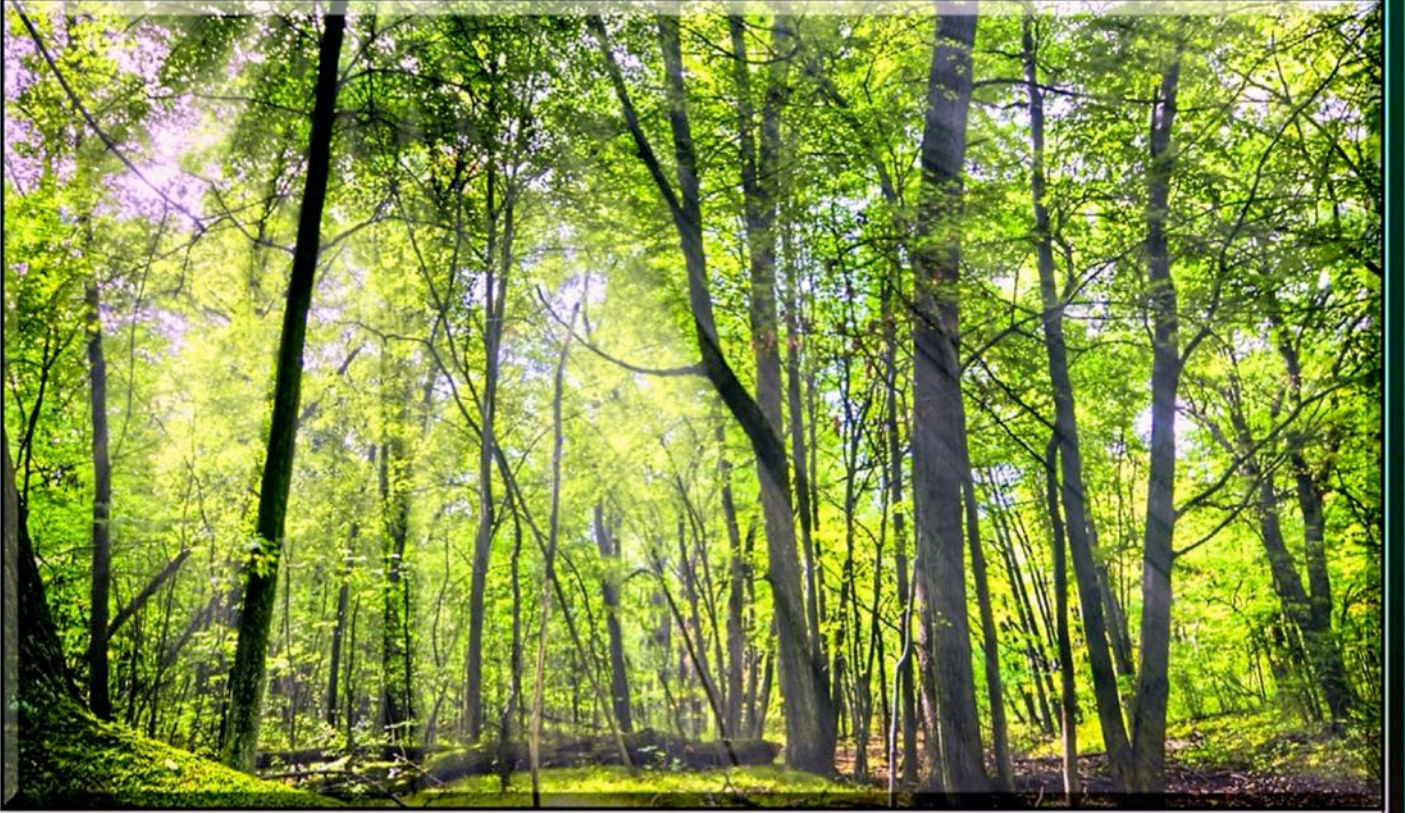
I caressed her tresses in romantic rhythm to the contented sighs she sent toward Heaven. We slumbered where the grass fledged the stream, half-awake or asleep in love's peaceful dream.

Above us the branches slowly swayed and fanned away the little creatures that tried to land. The trickling waters played tinkling lullabies, while flocks of birds flew the skies.

This new relationship had all the signs of life. For a few more hours we lay beside the brook, reading with life its most wonderful book, then merged with each other in this sweet nook—and this of her and me was all it took. And ever on it would be fine. Where this rare river ran, far from any home or throne, we'd rest by the stream-side, just us alone. We'd found the perfect equilibrium: we were poor but rich, home yet free, great but unknown.

On the next afternoon into the evening I went to hang out at the playground, as Cheryl was in her last day of grounding and wanted to safely see it through. Seeing that she and her family were on out on her front porch, I walked way over to the fence for a better view, having to wade through some pricker bushes. “Holy Christ! Cheryl’s mother was my high school English teacher. I really had to smile to myself, for just recently I had poured forth my mind, heart, soul, spirit and dreams into a paper that began with “Love is the finest refreshment of mortal life...”





## On Love

*Love is the finest refreshment of mortal life, providing as it does a glimpse into the heavenly state, a vision which, if maintained, can last well beyond the initial perception and for all of one's life. So, I say that any time not spent on love is time squandered in absolute waste, that if you are idling, not loving, or, God forbid, hating, then life is a-wasting; for love is the greatest experience on Earth, and so I have often sought it out, found it, received it, given it, and lived it as life's one great happiness, for there is no other joy that compares—love being the truth of all truths.*

*Who has not forgotten that first kiss and the magic that attended it? No one, for first love touches one deeply and forever. People newly in love glow for weeks on end. There is nothing like love, although, strangely, some do not actively seek it out, perhaps for fear of rejection. But, even love's worst pain is sweeter by far than any other pleasure; there is, indeed, no contest—and to love and lose is second only to loving in triumph.*

*Not merely just a pleasure, love refreshes, creates, invigorates, and provides sustenance of spirit and life itself.*

*Without love there is no life, at least none worth living. When you give up on love, you begin to die. Love knows no laws or restrictions, for mutual passion is a law unto itself. Love is the cure-all, both for those who receive it and for those who give it. The one tragedy in life is not death, but that some people do not love—aye, nor do they live, for the fear of the one is fear of the other. So, by all means, if you love somebody, go to them and tell them so right now.*

*It is said that the loving are the daring, perhaps because they seek the ultimate adventure, often risking all for that which lies far and above the commonplace, that vision into paradise. Imagination weaves a fairy tale of love and romance, and the mind that is alive soon brings forth the phantasm into reality.*

*Placing our very life and happiness in another through love is the greatest gift one can give, for it is the gift of oneself. Unconditional love is a true gift, one without strings attached, one without any motive for gain in return. Oh, of course, we are human and often love for the sake of being loved in return, and this is not in itself wrong; but, when one loves for no other reason than for the sake of generosity and loving, then this is a saintly type of love which is above all the other kinds.*

*True love loves people for what they are; not for their qualities in particular, but for the person. It's not that we love someone because we need them—for this is quite immature—but that we need someone because we love them. It is, you see, love that is the origin. Love begets love and love, in turn, begets more love, and so on, making us even more loving to others, until Heaven is indeed brought down to earth. Real love is its own reward.*

*Identity is not lost in love, for true lovers do not sit looking only into each other's heart, but, rather, look outward, both in the same direction. It is a seeming violation of arithmetic that in love two become much greater than one plus one; and that the two do not become one, but remain as two, yet still share the same vibration in their souls.*

*It also seems to be a paradox that love, when divided, is not at all diminished, but that each individual love multiplies to exceed the lot. One can never run out of love! It is a miser, indeed, who withholds love from a capacity that is boundless. Hoard not that which can be given. Give love, and even more love comes back full circle to you.*

*What a joy is it to experience life's wonders with someone you love—oh, walks, and plays, and dinners are great enough pleasures when taken alone, but note how much better they are when you have someone to share them with.*

*Another bonus of love is, that, with it behind your actions, you may soon find yourself doing the impossible, as love's inspiration carries you along through any kind of difficulty. For me it was an inspiration to write. Love and a kind heart are much alike, and one is equivalent to the other, love being a triumvirate of truth, beauty, and goodness blended into one great purity. We do not merely love—we are love! We do not create—we are creation itself. We don't just live life—we are life!*

*There are many forms and faces of love, such as brotherly, sisterly, motherly, fatherly, romantic, spiritual, professional, and physical; and it often depends much upon the circumstance which one is the most appropriate form to give to a particular person, but I think you may agree, that, in all of the above forms of love, there is much more that could be given in any case.*



The wonder years continued on, unabated, with Cheryl, my sweet champion of adventure, love, and literature. In between the regular fun with friends, to whom she had even right away told everything about our first meeting, very much straight out, but for its secret location, with flawless speech, while endearing all to her, we often read to each other from books from her mother's great library and from our own writings during much of our own sweet time while lying in the shade on a hill toward the back of the playground. We'd even fall asleep back there sometimes.



Near to the front of the shelter house of this grand Carroll Playground and Park adjoined to Lincoln School was what turned out to be a very large monolith, in the shape of a dome, the top of which rounded shape now carried a lot of dirt, plants, and flowers, but it was hollow inside, with the entrance concealed behind some bushes, yet little sister knew of it and showed it to us one day.

The cavernous inside smelled of earth and cold stone, which, of course, is what it was, and very solid, as if it had been there since the beginning of time and would continue to stand until the very end of it. We really couldn't fathom how it came to be, yet it was there, of all places. Here we could go to light some smokes during the day and have some privacy later in the evenings, even during the winter, adding a candle. And I still don't know how it formed, but it was our home close to home.

So it was that we developed an interest in finding more semi-secret places in which we could hang out in peace and read and play or whatever. We knew they wouldn't be as easily discovered and so fortunate as the ones found so far, such as the magical domed cavern that was right under our noses and our feet.

Meanwhile, we read Longfellow, as that was the name of one of the other Oak Park elementary schools, especially a poem about a leaf falling and fluttering, for which we tried various voices, as well as Whittier, another school's name, and Hemmingway, who lived here, as we explored Oak Park and its namesakes. How on earth can one live happily and harmlessly in the world as-it-is with people as-they-are whilst one nurses malice and sorrow in one's bosom?

We sat on the porch in the rain on the third planet one day. We were in a fortunate solar system near the edge of the Milky Way, out on a spiral arm, on the third planet, wherein the ongoing curves of life had blessed us, for we lived in a civilized time, standing upon the shoulders of all those who had paved the way for millions and billions of years into the present, summer's warmth flooding into us two who were so happy to be alive, as lovers and poets seem to know all too well. We were sitting on an outdoor couch on the open fronted porch with the beautiful and heavy rain pouring down all around us and sending a few refreshing droplets spraying our way every so often.



We smelled and inhaled the delicious moist air as its sensuousness enveloped us, enjoying the sounds of the drenching that was so nearby and the gurgle coming down through the house gutters. We drew a blanket over us as it got a bit cooler. Snug was the word for it. We were the field that was beyond right- and wrong-doing. We made plans to search the world, locally first.



We toured the areas around the schools of Emerson, Irving, Hatch, and Beyes, and then returned to Longfellow and its park, in which we met another social group of hanger-outers, as some we knew from High School, who gave us the idea of following some rivers, of which Oak Park had none. We mulled it over in the meanwhile. Most of the parks were too open to contain any more hidden places, but for a few benches only made so semi-secret by the night and the overhanging trees, especially in Maple Park. (I just now looked on Google street level view and found that those benches and their nooks were no more.)



*The past is never past,  
At least while we are alive;  
Our memories, though volatile,  
Being both ephemeral and re-cognized,  
No doubt have some basic persistence.  
But how does this past remain,  
And what kind of substance  
Could there be  
That lives outside time?*

*What makes it so strong  
That it can survive  
The merciless climate of the brain?*

*And in what storm's eye does it reside  
In the center of the maelstrom  
Of the change and growth of cells?  
What be this grain that persists  
Among the shifting sands of time?*



One end of Maple Park had a large fenced-in garden of secluded wonders that we found by climbing the fence to sneak in. There were vines upon vines about and upon the old and shuttered caretaker's hut from the 1800s, and so it was here that we often lived, too, as like time travelers in a time capsule, being careful not to disturb anything. We stayed as late as we could, each time, noting more and more artifacts, for the guy had been quite a collector. (I need more detail here and can only hope to recall it by thinking on it while falling asleep. This garden, too, and its hut, is gone now, as confirmed by Google.)



*How do we remember  
Long after we have forgotten?  
How do such apparitions reappear,  
Some with no suggestion of their origin,  
And sink and swell, float and change,  
Withering the acids of time's reflux?*

Ridgeland Avenue was said to be named after a ridge that was once a shoreline, and so we dug a bit into the ground of Rehm Park and found sand, and so it went.

*The entire village of Oak Park lies on the shore of ancient Lake Chicago, which covered most of the city of Chicago during the last Ice Age and is today called Lake Michigan. Ridgeland Avenue in eastern Oak Park marks the shoreline of the lake, and was once an actual ridge. One of North America's four continental divides runs through Oak Park. This divide, a slight rise running north-south through the village, separates the St. Lawrence River watershed from the Mississippi River watershed, and is marked by a plaque on Lake Street at Forest Avenue.*

— Wiki

Then there was the famed and feared Peabody's Tomb, but the night and its built-in fears can be conquered, so we found ourselves at the site late one evening. It was quite an expensive monument, there being at least six stone nymphs pouring water into a clear pool that reflected the moonlight. Life is indeed full of delicious sights and senses.

We soon obtained a map of the county, looking into the more outlying and undeveloped areas, and then rented a boat to explore the DesPlaines River, finding beaches, shores, and coves that were not so accessible by land, but we would try for the best ones, in the weeks to come, via land, as a challenge. Old Illinois was at hand, some of it as intact as when the Indians were around, and we ever rechristened those nooks with our love.

The DesPlaines River had taken us through a gigantic cemetery that served all the outlying areas and some of Chicago, too, and then through a golf course and a large forest preserve. The cemetery was ever where the ducks were fed, where we lovers feasted on wine, verse, and bread amidst the flowered trees and quiet streams—the home for both the living and the dead.

One day we took 12th street (Roosevelt Road), which was once called ‘The Lincoln Highway’, all the way out to Galena, and then to the Mississippi River, and crossed it, into Iowa. We were in ‘Driftless’, meaning the place where the glacial drift hadn’t reached, and it was full of caves, gorges, and deeply carved rivers.

Our High School was a massive four story building, it serving for both Oak Park and River Forest. No wonder I had hardly seen Cheryl there before, but now she was ever-present as a glowing spark.

In freshman High school biology class, a revised textbook that was so new it was paperback-bound had told us how natural selection explained the mysteries of evolution, and of the variety of life covering creation, which continuum extended from animals to us. It seems that 'we' were once a lucky shrew, at first nervous and darting all about—until the dinosaurs separated, and then we mammals attached to a favorable evolutionary line in which every single one of our forbears on both sides was attractive enough to locate a loving mate, as had we now each other, being born in a civilized time, and now free to roam in a democratic country. Yes, asteroids or some virus had swept away most of the species millions of years ago, but later on, two monkey chromosomes had fused, leaving chimps behind, DNA/RNA ever remembering all the survivors. Good fortune had smiled on Homo Sapiens.

Of what stars did we shine of their stead?  
Across what ink black river did we have to swim?  
To what ends at length did we search for food? In  
what deep entangled forest were we bred? All this  
and more we talked about and relived during our  
travels. William Smith had noted a correlation in  
fossils in rocks to find the relative rock ages that  
were possible. At every change in rock strata, cer-  
tain fossils vanished, while in others they carried  
on into subsequent levels. What a glorious history  
we stood upon.

There was a large and long tunnel going down  
some steps and underground over to the Field-  
house for physical education, so that the students  
could avoid the weather, and eagle-eyed Cheryl  
had noted an unused door on the school side, just  
to the left of where the tunnel steps began. The  
room looked to be small, but we couldn't really  
see into it through the frosted glass on its door.  
We went around outside to its shade-drawn win-  
dow, seeing not very much, but noting some out-  
lines of desks through a tiny hole in the shade.  
Perhaps most of the classroom had been sacri-  
ficed to the creation of the tunnel entrance, yet  
about a third of it seemed to remain.



We kept an eye on it for weeks but no one ever opened its locked door, not even janitors during, before, or after school. This we knew all the more since we had put a thread across the door at its frame, up above, it having not been disturbed.

Ah, it and its door had become long forgotten, its door even sitting there in plain sight, but not even having a number on it or above it. The door looked ancient, it no longer matching those of the other classrooms. A new secret place?

We each had an honor study hall during the same period, which meant that we didn't have to be in it, and so we could be in the halls after the bell rang, presumably on the way to the library or the labs. The old door latch of the neglected room easily succumbed to the old technology of being undone by a thin piece of metal. We could get in unseen, but how could we get back out unobserved? The ambient light coming through the window shade was enough to show the severed room in its remainder to be still in the state as it had been left in its use very long ago. We quickly shut the door, going off to the library to figure out our next move.



## Oak Park and River Forest High School

The tunnel ran under this land to the Fieldhouse.



We decided that it would be best to try to exit the room when the hallway was crowded, rather than when classes were in session, thus not risking a hall monitor walking by and chancing upon us. We went in for a real good look the next day. It was an educational tomb, covered with dust, and was much more interesting than Peabody's. Shock! A calendar left hanging on the wall said that the year was 1937. The wastebasket full of crumpled sheets of paper had not even been emptied, and all of the dust was unmarked. There was writing on the blackboard: the news of the 30s. A shelf contained old books, some of which were probably valuable, so we made a list of them for Cheryl's mother to analyze. I can't say anything else, however amazing it would be, for I promised to keep it a secret. It is so astounding that you wouldn't believe it anyway.



The next essay:

## **On Adventure**

*Boredom and dull routine have little place, if any, in a life, and it is only by one's own laziness that they are allowed to exist at all, languishing nearby on the doorstep, as it were, as uninvited guests, as all the while terrible complaints are hurled against them.*

*'I'm bored', some say, halfheartedly hoping that some new entertainment will appear out of the blue and carry them away from a dreary commonplace existence, perhaps into a fairy tale. So, adventure calls constantly to us as a cure for the blahs, for routine dulls the senses—even the greatest music soon begins to fall unheard on our ears, and gradually degenerates into that same old song.*

*Although breaking the chains of routine often requires a great burst of energy, adventure can become self-sustaining once the seeds have been planted. Yes, initially, some hard work must be applied, since adventuring is not normal, free, and easy in this world, but, remember, that before all realized realities must come the dream, the creative vision, the attitude and the outlook that will bring adventure into one's life.*

*Even before the dream comes the yearning, though it's dim at first, glowing as a faint phantasm in a fleeting daydream struggling to maintain its shape before it fades into the noise of day. As these shadows pass over the adventurous mind, the vision must be enhanced and then steadily pursued until it, at last, becomes three-dimensional and real. We often look back later, quite amazed at the wonders that we have wrought, but—we had the vision and gave it life.*

*Daydreams are filled with thoughts on promenade: Wishes, fantasies o'er the mind cascade. Listen well to these plans already made, for by sundown the phantom shapes may fade.*

*The rewards of adventure are many; stimulation, experience, and growth are practical results, but foremost comes joy, exhilaration, and thrill—the feeling of being alive. Who has not known the adventure of walking to school alongside a stream, dallying here and there, then crossing over the water on a log, nearly slipping off, but catching one's self at the last instant while skipping a heartbeat? Who has not known the electricity of the first kiss at summer camp? Or of the reading or writing of a great poem or story while basking warm and cozy in the winter sunshine? Or the thrill of a job well done?*

*If we no longer know such things, then, perhaps, now is the time to stop worrying about getting our hair messed up.*

*It's all a matter of style, purpose, and vision. To plant the seeds of adventure one must seek out the uncommon, the unusual situation, the exotic, even in one's own backyard, looking for the odd character, although certainly not those who are unhealthy, the pleasantly eccentric (by today's staid standards), the person willing to try just about anything that isn't illegal, the offbeat but upbeat person, the optimist, the exciting prospect, the person with those excitingly wonderful qualities.*

*And so it is that once you find it, adventure begets more adventure, for, ideas from all over soon begin to interact and build until a person rises above mere existence and really lives! Oh, there can be dreams of far-off adventures, from romance in the south seas to mysterious intrigue in the villages of France, but travel and romance are only a general means to adventure—there are many more, mostly personal, for it depends on what you want from life. Adventure can be had right here in one's own town.*

*Of course, some adventures entail a minor amount of risk-taking and rule breaking, for that which is often uncommon is often the most extraordinary and therefore must draw undue attention from those in the straight world, but, I ask you, does not the element of danger often greatly heighten the excitement? Who has not, in the throes of spring fever, slyly disappeared from his place of employment on some exciting romantic mission, and found adventure in that 'forbidden' quest?*

*Yes, adventure is lived in that delightful middle state in which one is neither drunk nor sober—nor ever reckless, but ever balancing excitement with responsibility, each paying for the other as we walk the thin line between foolishness and safety—the log across the creek.*

*So, I say, to you all, prime the pump; seek out adventure, embrace it. Use your emotions, get up out of your chair and into the arena; open up and invite adventure in, give it, take it; live life with a reasonable passion and with a passionate reason; for adventure will become a living situation that becomes automatic! Then you will say "I'm excited, there's everything to do in this town, the people are mostly wonderful, and I marvel at life's wonders each and every day!"*

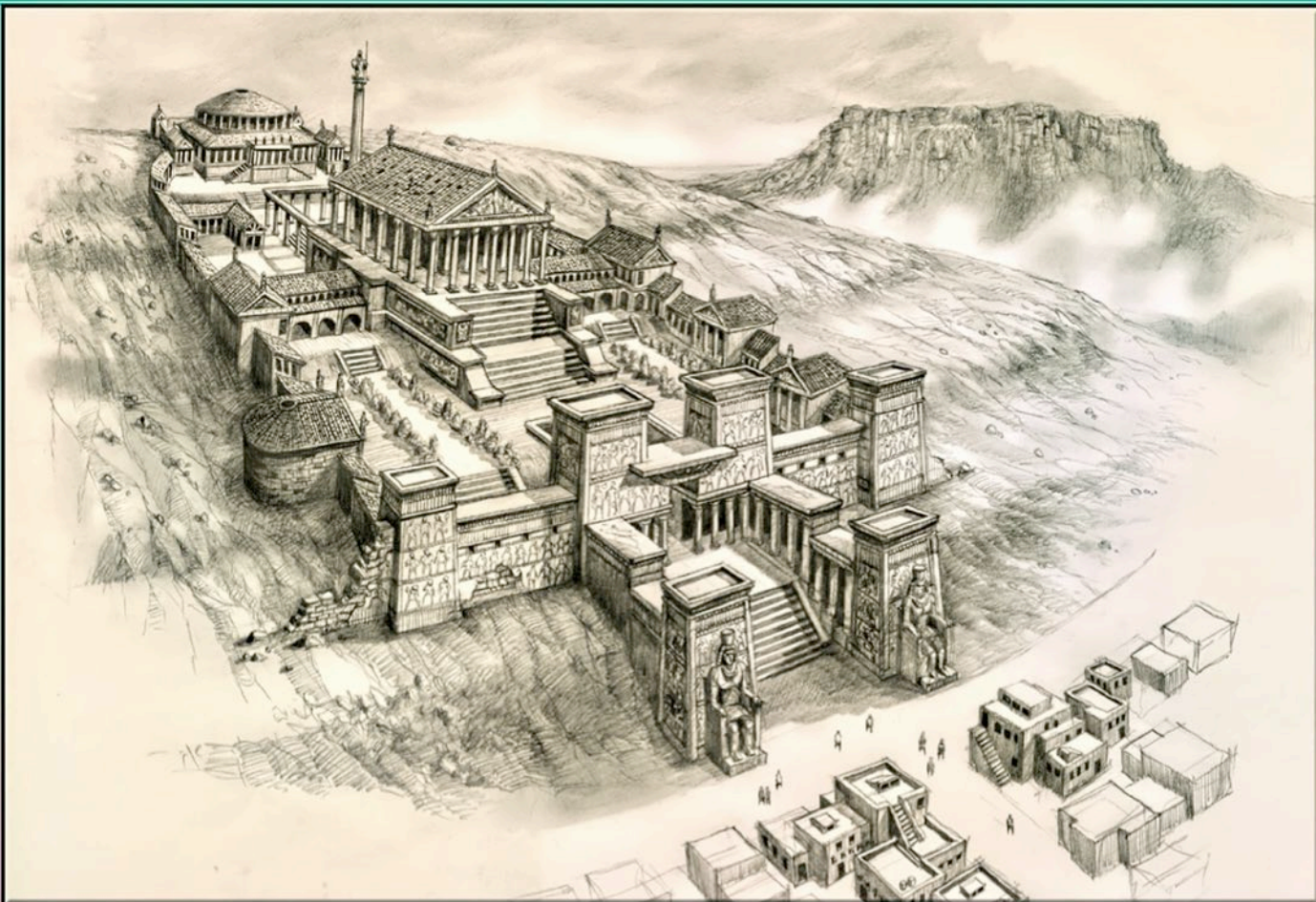
The next day, we found something in the old and secret classroom from 1937. There was a shelf with some old rocks and bones, and we had found this in the wastebasket of the old classroom.

This part was typed:

Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, is also the patron saint of arsonists. As Christianity slowly strangled the life out of classical culture in the fourth century it became more and more difficult to be a pagan. There stood in Alexandria the great temple of Serapis called the Serapeum and attached to it was the Great Library of Alexandria where all the wisdom of the ancients was preserved. Now Theophilus knew that as long as this knowledge existed people would be less inclined to believe the bible so he set about destroying the pagan temples. But the Serapeum was a huge structure, high on a mound and beyond the abilities of the raging Christian fanatics to assault.

Faced with this edifice, the Patriarch sent word to Rome. There the Emperor Theodosius the Great, who had ordered that paganism be annihilated, gave his permission for the destruction of the Serapeum.





Realising they had no chance, the priests and priestesses fled their temple and the mob moved in. The vast structure was razed to its foundations and the scrolls from the library were burnt in huge pyres in the streets of Alexandria.

And this part was handwritten:

*However, this was foreseen by the curator, and a good portion of the books and art were secreted out of Egypt, and even out of the known world in 391 A.D.*

...

*58 days... treasure safely stashed... 7 hills...*

*Big river... barbarians appeared... all soldiers lost... all ships but one burned... escape...*

*storms... repairs on sandy shores with dwarf pines... driven northward... cold... frozen...*

*the end is near...*

The teacher had traced a coin onto paper by rubbing a pencil on it. The coin itself was gone.

When we'd met, many months ago, the music of the spring had been in the breeze, a prelude borne by airy musicians of the trees—the mating calls of the birds, those that had opened for the cosmic symphony. And mighty Zeus, was there, full to the brim with the jollity of the fat man's belly. By Jove, came Saturnus, so very gray with age—lumbering into the party. That spring, the sun had filed the waking and breathing world with the fire of her imagination.

Fresh winds made love to the blossoms of May, as the spring flowers reached for the light of day. Drinking deep draughts of life's sunny delight, the fields had burst with the joy of love's bouquet. Spring had kissed the earth, leaving flowers there, like those whose perfume first scented virgin air, as again, the fragrant glen, in Heaven's prayer, had hailed Earth's anniversary with flowers fair. And now summer was leading to autumn. In a month, the chrysanthemums would drink the mellow day as the falling petals carried the light away. The autumn fog would enswirl, and that mist would upcurl. Into nothingness of winter the wisp would slowly unfurl.

“Today we will work on incomplete thinking,” said the instructor.

“Suppose you go to an assassin’s house to wait for him to return so you can do him in, but you are running late and can’t find a parking spot, so you park in front of a fire hydrant. Then what?”

“Hope for the best?” one student responded.

“That could turn out for the worse,” replied the instructor, “for it will look odd, and the target will note it, plus he may even feel the hood and find that the engine is still warm. Besides, your car is not one that is of the neighborhood. The assassin may then even sneak up on your associate who is watching the house from the outside while you are in it and take him out. All this from bad parking.”

“Park far away and walk?” asked another student. “even though we were late?”

“Now you’re getting it. And don’t be late.”

“Ah, yes.”

“And don’t wait at their house; it could have sensors or be booby-trapped.”

“OK.”

“Good, now, another quandary. Suppose you and your associates are protecting someone from attack in a hotel room. How do you deploy?”

“We would have people in the room, plus in the two adjacent rooms and also those across the hall.”

“That’s all?”

“That should be enough.”

“You have become a victim of incomplete thinking,” answered the instructor.

“We’d also have people outside and in the building across the street in case they were going to shoot through the window.”

“That’s good, but is that all?”

“Should be.”

“The thinking is still incomplete, for it is only two dimensional.”

“How so?”

“The attackers could rent a room beneath or above and shoot through the floor or the ceiling.”

“Uh, oh.”

“Yes, and what would be even better, as a fourth dimensional answer?”

“I don’t know.”

“Have the person just be a decoy, keeping the actual person to be protected somewhere else. Then you can capture the attackers without any other worries.”

“Wow, these are tough.”

“True, so here’s an easy one. What is the first in this sentence?”

“W?”

“Yes.”

In these days, on the houses' steps still rested newspapers, and the sturdy rounded bottles of milk, compliments of Elsie the cow, truly a vision from the grazings of childhood in which we were now teenagers. This was existence over essence. As we adventured along, we told the tales of the joyous forest to the birds, who soon carried them aloft, thence into human ears again: the songs of streams flowing freely, and stories of a glowing sky. The birds were as a species never known and seemed to share a special closeness with us—which we knew and felt and saw as kinship.

Our senses were heightened: touch went deeper; our eyes saw colors beyond the spectrum; we reached into living things, knowing them, And the odours called, mixed with emotion. All things we felt continuously now, as in other time some knew only in rare moments of ecstasy when melded happenings had lifted them heavenward. Our ambition's mist drifted upward each morning, outlining daydreams, although still forming, but rising still into the clear sunlight, and taking shape, sculpting clouds, then sailing, as we were on and ever on. There were country roads, quaint inns, and dilapidated barns.

We danced the song of evening bells rung, in a twilight zone in nowhere's middle.

We began to study the history, the libraries, and especially Cheryl's mother, being a big help, for she was an academic, and also my English Literature teacher.

*The Great Library and Museum of Alexandria was the chief wonder of the ancient world, containing an incredible mass of literature, art and knowledge, from the complete works of Homer and the golden coffin of Alexander the Great to priceless charts of lost gold, mineral and oil deposits that could change the balance of power in the world today...*

*The loss of the library, burned in 391 A.D., has been considered by scholars one of the world's great tragedies.*

We pondered all this during our travels.

“How could some high school teacher know that some treasures were taken out of the Library of Alexandria in Egypt and hidden somewhere?”

“Because he found an old coin.”

“Or someone else did that he knew.”

“We'll have to get the tracing looked up in a coin catalog.”

“There’s a coin shop on Lake Street.”

“And he never came back to his office for any of his things, like the ebooks, rocks, and bones.”

“True, and the tunnel that carved away most of his classroom was built in the summer of ’37.”

“Maybe the janitors thought he would return in the fall and so they left the remains of his room alone.”

“But he had somewhere better to go, and then no one ever worried about his room again.”

“They didn’t even use it as a broom closet or anything.”

“No, and there is a broom closet across the hall, so they didn’t need to.”

“Yet he left some clues on a paper in his wastebasket.”

“Somehow it didn’t get emptied. Looks like those last note fragments were from a ship’s log.”

“Yes, but why didn’t he come back?”

“Either he couldn’t come back or he found what he was looking for and lived happily ever-after somewhere, no longer worried that any material could mean anything to anyone.”

“His name and address is still on the blackboard.”

“302 Lombard, not far from the school.”

...



*Of all the lost treasures of the world, the systematic and wanton devastation of the greatest sanctuary of knowledge in the ancient world, the Alexandrian Library, is the most stupendous of losses. The destruction of the world's great libraries has been commonplace through history; the great collections of Thebes, Nineveh, Baghdad, and Louvain were all destroyed, but none of these libraries can compare to the myth and legend surrounding the library and museum that was the jewel of the sophisticated culture of ancient Alexandria, Egypt.*

*Legend tells us Alexandria contained a library and museum that eventually held every great work of literature in the world. Every great literary work of the Greeks was there, as well as other collections of Roman, Jewish, and Arabian scholars. What became of all these treasures has been the collective wonderment of historical detectives for centuries.*

*Aristotle, Plato's brilliant student and eventual tutor of Macedonia's Alexander the Great, was one of the first scholars to collect and preserve the written word. Aristotle's collection included versions of Homer that were certainly different than what we know today. Aristotle bequeathed his collection to a favorite student who subsequently left the library to a relative (Nelius of Serpris).*

*It is believed that Nelius eventually sold part of his collection to Ptolemy who was responsible for starting the Alexandrian Library.*

The teacher's house was long shuttered, in great disrepair, with paint peeling off.

"Dare we enter?"

"Might as well."

The porch door pretty much just fell off in our hands.

There was nothing interesting in there at all. Just furniture, but for two pictures on the wall in what may have once been the teacher's study. Scribbled on the wall between the two pictures were the words 'Fire and Ice'.

"Who the heck keeps a picture of Greenland and Texas on their wall?"

"Well, he was a geography teacher, which can involve landforms and archeology. The pictures show the topography of those places."

"This is all another dead end."

"Seems to be. I looked in the phone book and there is a lady on the next block who has the same last name."

We walked over and inquired. She was the teacher's sister, who immediately put us at another dead end by saying that she hadn't heard from her brother in more than thirty years.

Furthermore, there were no more living relatives.

“He has vanished.”

“Perhaps taking all these years to decode the scrolls.”

*When Alexander died there was tremendous infighting among his confederates as to who would rule his domain. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals and reputedly a half brother, seized control of a large part of Egypt, which included Alexandria. Ptolemy became the most successful of Alexander's successors.*

*Alexander the Great, son of Phillip II and Olympias, inherited the crown of Macedonia at the age of twenty when his father was assassinated in 336 B.C. Until his death in India of malaria in 324 B.C., he conquered most of the known world in and around the Mediterranean and spread Hellenistic culture into Asia, Persia, and Egypt. His astounding accomplishment in just twelve years - though at a tremendous cost of human life - left a mythical aura around his name. In 332 B.C., he established Alexandria, which became Egypt's largest city for 2000 years.*

*Alexander was embalmed by eastern masters, swathed in malleable plates of gold to fit the contour of the body, and set in a golden casket that was paraded through his kingdom behind sixty-four gold-bedecked mules. For months the funeral procession journeyed from Babylon through Mesopotamia, over Syria, to Damascus and was eventually to end at Aegae, Macedonia where Alexander would be placed with other royalty. Ptolemy realized what a great political coup it would be to have the remains of the great king in Alexandria. He took an army to the procession and persuaded the leader to allow him to perform the last rites. While Alexander rested in Memphis, Ptolemy built an impressive mausoleum in Alexandria made of the rarest Greek and Egyptian marbles. This became Alexander's final resting place that lasted three centuries. In 89 B.C., Ptolemy IX, in a great need of money to continue his reign over Alexandria, had the gold sarcophagus melted into coin. The sarcophagus was housed in colored glass and eventually disappeared completely in the centuries that followed.*

*Ptolemy went about creating the most comprehensive library known in the ancient world. The organization of the library was trusted to Demetrius Phalereus, who was familiar with the library at Athens.*

*Ptolemy went about purchasing scrolls and copying those he could not purchase. His goal was to accumulate all of the known literary works of the world, which was an estimated 500,000 scrolls. Ptolemy ordered that all books on ships that called on Alexandria were to be copied; copies were returned to the ships and the originals were confiscated and stored in the library.*

“A complete life sparkles like a diamond. Each facet of the diamond contributes its view of the world and adds to the lustrous effect.”

“Friends and interests are the shimmering glints and gleams of reality’s sparkle.”

“Each face of the diamond enriches the view of the other faces.”

“All of the facets reflect off each other, combining and then building into the overall brilliance of life.”

“Which makes you a more rounded person.”

“Which in turn adds to the luster of your individual pursuits.”

“Which therefore makes the diamond even brighter still, and so forth, and so forth—it is self-perpetuating, and of infinite growth.”

We had gotten the coin tracing identified. It was circa 400 A.D.!

“Yes, the teacher had a ship’s log, which means he also had the remains of the ship.”

“Logs could last that long?”

“They were carved into tablets in those days, for protection at sea, over frail papyrus.”

“A 58 day voyage. Now that is really far.”

“It could have been slowed by weather?”

“Maybe, but they would want to go such a long way from Egypt?”

“They had to go far or someone would find them.”

“And the notes say they stashed the treasures that must have been the cream of the Library of Alexandria, then were beset by barbarians, only one ship surviving to escape.”

“To a very cold place, where they met there end.”

“On a ship somehow preserved there for 1600 years, in the ice perhaps.”

“Greenland or Iceland or Siberia?”

“Iceland was populated. The ship would have been noted. Greenland was and is still pretty empty. Siberia is hard to get to.”

“Now how would they even get as far as Greenland?”

“The teacher had a picture of Greenland on his wall in his study.”

“That he did. Let us go back and take a closer look.”

Her rose was the flower that the bee ever cruised, meeting there the butterfly that love chooses. The bee unfolded the petals of the blossom, then drank the nectar of love’s sweet juices. We flowed along, immersed in the romantic afterglow, the water sinking into the sands, half drying before wetting again—the moisture rising up into the air.

We were fully immersed in love’s boundless dream, floating in peace on beauty’s quiet stream. Truth was clearly seen—it was so bright and right, for purity’s goodness swelled each sparkling gleam. Awash on the love-made shore, we overcame our senses, leaving them behind, unclaimed, as we floated free, quenched in a sunset sea, basking in reflections of the scarlet flame. As ghostly phantoms—specters with human powers known from myth, we lay, awash, on some distant shore, our senses shining forevermore.

Our blood ran warm with the sun’s heat at noon, and at night our spirits swept by the swelling moon. Air surrounds us and the ocean flowed through us. Earth’s rhythm was always playing our tune.

Minutes, hours, and days do ever sequence the whole, as month after month seasons the year all tolled. Youth, prime, and old-age actualize a life, and generations bridge the centuries old. Castle builders laid stones across the sky and dream merchants gave gifts of unreality; mirages sprang to life at slightest touch; the impossible became our reality.

*By the third century A.D., Alexandria had become a cosmopolitan population with conflicting philosophies and religions that eventually turned the city's cultural melting pot into a boiling cauldron of civil dissent. Under the rule of Aurelian (272) and Diocletius (296) the library suffered several destructive assaults. Areas that contained scientific, alchemy, and other pseudo-science texts were burned but much of the rest of the library remained intact.*

*In 391 A.D. the last great director of the library fell out of favor with the Christian Bishop of Alexandria, Theophilus. It is believed that Theophilus considered the library a hotbed of paganism and convinced the Emperor Theodosius, also a Christian, to burn the library. It is not known how much of the collection was destroyed due to the fact that the library was stored in several buildings.*



There are reports that only one building was destroyed, and the main collection stored in the Library of the Serapeum survived. After all of these disasters the Alexandrian scholar Parsons wrote in his book *The Alexandrian Library*, ". . . if there is one outstanding characteristic of the library . . . it is its genius in surviving destruction."

Throughout the entire history of the library, scholars have found conflicting stories as to how much of the library was destroyed during each assault. Only one thing is certain as of today - it has completely vanished.



“Could it be that something remains of the contents of the great library?” she wondered, as they went back to look at the pictures in the teacher’s house again.

“Yes, the library's curator, a scholar with the gift of action, spirits its treasures away. With a company of Roman mercenaries, a small army of slaves, and a fleet of ships, he transports the priceless treasures of the ancients across an unknown sea to a barren land, where they are hidden in caverns tunneled by the slaves, only to see his company slaughtered by a horde of barbarians, except for the crew of one small merchant ship that manages to escape...”

Nothing was found on the first picture, no pencil marks, nothing, nor on the other picture.

“And they made repairs in a land that had dwarf pines.”

“And this was somewhere between where they’d stashed the treasures and the cold place where they ended up dead.”

“Fire and Ice.”

“The treasures are buried in Texas. That was the other picture on the wall.”

“There are dwarf pines on the Jersey Shore. I’ve seen them. That was part way.”

“Perhaps nor'easters swept them too far north to recover.

“Sailing was rudimentary in those days, with little tacking, for example”

“So, this library/museum curator sailed a fleet to America in 391 A.D.?”

“Why not, for what other place would be safe?”

“A risky voyage. But no one knew of the new world back then!”

“Amazing what knowledge and maps would have been in that library!”

“The barbarians who wiped them out were American Indians!”

“Which happened after the treasures were stashed.”

“But we have no idea where to look in Texas.”

“Big river.”

“The Rio Grande.”

*Ptolemy founded a massive museum and library from scratch. The inventory became monumental. His descendants, through Cleopatra, and later successors all continued to acquire manuscripts and art objects until the museum, and especially the library, became one of the largest storehouses of art, science and literature that has ever existed.*

*This vast collection of knowledge lasted until A.D. 391. In that year, Emperor Theodosius and the patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilos, who was a religious nut case, decided all reference to anything except newly fanned Christian principles was paganism. They masterminded the destruction of the library's contents. Statues, fabulous works of art in marble, bronze, gold and ivory, incredible paintings and tapestries, countless numbers of books inscribed on lambskin or papyrus scrolls, even Alexander's corpse: all were to be smashed into dust or burned to ashes.*

*Researchers and scholars pretty much had the run of the place to examine, catalog, translate and edit, and to publish their findings. You see, the Library and its adjoining museum went far beyond being mere depositories. Their halls launched the true science of creative scholarship. The Library became the first true reference library, as we think of today, where books were systematically catalogued. In fact the complex was known as the Place of the Muses.*

*Later empires and nations owe a staggering debt to the Alexandria Library. Few institutions of knowledge have produced so much. Pliny, a celebrated Roman of the first century A.D., invented and wrote the world's first encyclopedia.*

*Aristophanes, head of the Library two hundred years before Christ, was the father of the dictionary.*

*Callimachus, a famous writer and authority on Greek tragedy, compiled the earliest Who's Who. The great mathematician Euclid devised the first known textbook on geometry. Dionysius organized grammar into a coherent system and published his 'Art of Grammar,' which became the model text for all languages, written and spoken. These men, and thousands of others, labored and produced their epoch achievements while working at the Library.*

*"This is describing a university."*

*Together the library and museum were considered the university of the Hellenistic world. The immense structures of white marble contained picture galleries, statuary halls, theaters for poetry reading and lectures on everything from astronomy to geology. There were also dormitories, a dining hall, cloisters along colonnades for contemplation, and an animal park and botanical garden. Ten great halls housed different categories of manuscripts and books. Hundreds of thousands of them were handwritten on either papyrus or parchment, and then rolled into scrolls and stored in bronze tubes.*

*We took several weeks to think it over.*

The thirsty sun raised the morn's dewdrops, and sculpted a mist, forming clouds of airdrops. Long the world lay dry in afternoon's beam— till quenching darkness cried forth its tear drops. We then looked to the Earth as from the night sky. As the sky began to fall, all around, the sequined stars floated down to ground. Oh, it was a crystal-line cathedral, built from falling stars in the holy night. Among the lights that danced in the sky, this haven waited for she and I—a world where flowers bloomed and fountains sprayed—we were on it—a paradise called Earth to glorify. Now to those of you who ignore life's romance: ignorance, like shadow, has no substance. The shade is removed by the light within; feel the rhythm of the universal dance!

Willy-nilly, we went, whence all there is to knowing... Hence thither we went on hither flowing to find that we were truly free to be in body and mind. Quenchless, boundless, ever bright and burning, our minds' light searched every dark cavern, probing, imagining—its beam alighting upon the Earth or high atop cloud mist. We found that there's an urge between root and flower, plant and soil, leaf and sun, air and water, day-star and planet, valley and mountain, wind and mist, man and woman—for ever.

We heard woodlands that once only whispered, meadows where there was once but a murmur, and prairies and grasslands, unhushed, full of wondrous sounds—the music from near beyond the human range. Like living lenses, we mirrored our love, in feedback loops—images spiraling above, echoing as infinite reflections that filled up the scene, for that’s what love’s made of!

“We’re stumped again.”

“Yes, stumped and more stumped.”

“Let’s go back and take those pictures of Greenland and Texas and analyze them some more.”

“Somehow, those pictures have the answer on them.”

We went there and folded them up and took them with us on our travels on some extended weekends.

*A 120-volume catalog of the contents of the library was written by Callimachus, but nothing of the catalog has survived. It is estimated that the total accumulation swelled to 400,000 to 700,000 at the time of Julius Caesar's infamous arrival in 48 B.C. These works included every major work of the ancient Greeks.*

*It was also the home of great sculpture and the workplace of distinguished scholars like Aristophanes of Byzantium and Apollinius of Rhodes.*

*The complex of rooms for the library and the museum that contained art works was known as the Place of the Muses. In it contained the sacred writings of the Egyptians and Jews, music scores, medicine and science texts, and philosophy. It is believed that the entire works of Sophocles, Euripides, Aristotle, Plato, and Homer were present, though what was lost from these masters is unknown. Claudius wrote a history of the Etruscans, a civilization occupying northeast Italy from 8th to 1st century of which we know very little at present. Pliny wrote the world's first encyclopedia from sources in the library during the first century A.D.; Euclid wrote the first textbook on geometry; Dionysius wrote Art of Grammar, which became a model for much of the world's grammarian ordinances. The last curator of the library, wrote over a hundred books covering two thousand years of the world's known history to that time (350 A.D. ?).*

*And some I know, deeply and humbly see that our species and the rest have no special and designed place here in this entangled forest. As for we, we cherished every moment of existence blessed.*



Starlight was the origin of our being, the source of matter, energy—everything after. Permanent, reassuring, unquenchable—it's our radiant soul—a self-winding mainspring.

Men and women can't exist in isolation, for, like valleys that give rise to mountains, the nature of one makes necessary the other—when they're joined in love, there's wholeness again. The spirit flows from moment to moment, connecting and savoring life's events, drinking-in the sounds, currents, textures, scents, and subtle delights—creating a being that is self-content.

Never struggle against the way things are, but rather, become the way that things are. When you give yourself to the moving whole, natural currents can carry you quite far. Breathe in all that's good, breathe out all that's bad; peace flows into you—it's warm, wet, and glad. Feel it spread throughout your body, and then say, "This is the best life that I've ever had!"

"Holy smokes, there's a city in Texas on the Rio Grande named 'Roma'."

"Perhaps it has seven hills, and the treasures."

"And is ever in the middle of drug trafficking, for there is a bridge to Mexico there."

"We'll be safe. The danger is on the Mexican side."

“Could a ship sail up the Rio Grande to there.”

“No, not now, for it is shallow, most of the river having been siphoned off by many other towns, but back then it would have been much deeper.”

“I’m ready to go if you are.”

We revolve, rotate, turn, and go round the sun; we whirl, gyrate, and circle our most loving one. So thus we wheel, twist and turn, twirl and sing, ever swinging, swiveling, pirouetting, and pivoting. Time on its lovely stream brings all sweet things to us, for time’s the drink that quenches human thirst. Water of life—we drink time, it drinks us! Time on its stream bears all sweet things from us. Yet it is always now and that’s where life is found.

Time, always gray with age, ever hurled its changes ‘gainst nature’s rock, time and time again. Reminiscence weathered, but could ne’er wither; in those mists of time, yesteryear yet appeared. So it is that about every thousand years the Bird of Time flies over a mountain. A feather falls. When the mountain has worn itself away, the end of forever has thus arrived, that day.

Where came it all? Whatever is eternal and is so well defined, could never be as so, for it was never defined in the first place, for that there never was, to define all that it forever did and does. Yes, our mental fabric quilted truths have long been sewn, by evolution that wove and woofed the known. At first we admire but a few strands unknown, but then we blend the weave and weft to all its beauty shown.

We had regained the summer weather by taking a road trip to Roma, Texas.

Indeed, some of the buildings and gas stations had a Roman motif, some selling faux items from that period. Someone must have found some stray objects long ago.

We traveled out to the hills, noting one that had a road leading to an excavation in it, which had happened long ago from the looks of it, most of it washed by blowing sand that had settled everywhere.

We looked in. It was empty. We walked to the far wall of the cavern, checking it and the ground with a flashlight.

“There are still some indentations in the ground here, where the footsteps would have been few.”

“They look like bases of...”

“...sculptures.”

“The great library lives on...”

“...somewhere.”

“We are too late.”

“Yes, probably 25 years too late.”

We returned to Illinois.

Autumn had arrived. The rustling of the trees came to our ears, in this, the most mellow time of year. The harvest brings fulfillment, yearning, too, for autumn is both a smile and a tear. Riverside, we raised our cups to the zephyr: a diamond wealth sparkled upon the water, seen, gleaming, through rosé-colored glasses, as we relaxed on the noon thereafter. A fish swam in the reflected sky; sunset’s image had burned the water dry. I looked in the pond, but saw her face, for we had merged in love, she and I. Over there, the blinding luminosity of Sunflowers, as now. We dried the seeds and ate them, each still a glowing ember of memory of the bright days among a thousand suns.

Evening songs tucked in the planetary paramours, as Jupiter and Venus pulled the cover of night up and over their bed. Then sunk the crescent, sideways into the sea. With sparks from passion’s smoldering embers, we reignited all that our love remembered, then steamed through emotion’s ocean, in the Relation Ship—of which we’re the crew members.



## Roma, Texas

“The treasures and scrolls of the ancient world are still being decoded somewhere by that old high school teacher.”

“He brought them to Illinois.”

“That he did.”

“They are in the ‘Driftless’ area.”

“But we’ll never find them.”

“True, we probably won’t. It’s a large area that touches several states, although the Illinois portion is the smallest.”

“He would have been partial to Illinois, to it’s caves and caverns especially.”

“But it’s large enough. Too much to search.”

“But it is enough for us that we know some of the treasures from the great library survived.”

“Yes, and there will be revelations one day.”

“And then we will know where to look.”

“We could have your mother check with some historians in case anything has already popped up.”

“Actually, I did, some time ago, but she’s heard nothing back yet.”

Oh never did I hear a sound so sweet as when she moaned like a panther in heat. She took me on a wild jungle ride, then purred like a pussycat at my feet. We kissed at the boundary of day and night, our-selves merging in the blend of twilight: She and me, me and her; hers, mine, and ours—as the day-gold melted into the jeweled night. Kissing on the rocks, down by the riverside, our rhythm rippled the water, raised the tide, rang ship’s bells, danced lights across sea and sky—all vibrations from hearts that were satisfied. Where might we be? We are astride the duality of the yin and the yang.

Winter had come and was going on. Perhaps we could go somewhere over the break. If only we knew where the cream of that great library was. Well, we could only scan the news for some related revelation.

We were in the crystal-caverned dome at Carroll playground, camping out, having brought a small gas heater, placing it outside the entrance but blowing in. We stepped outside later.

The Earth's day-star had set, the twilight dusk putting it to rest. Even if one had never seen the night sky, one could infer the existence of many distant suns shining far away as stars in the black velvet.

There was no moon and we were away from the Chicago city lights and so we could see thousands of the glittering jewels of various colors. If these gems had been diamonds on our carpet, we would have been rich. Arcturus was orange, Betelgeuse red, and Sirius blue, with a green companion. We could also deduce the planets of those solar systems. Such can things be foretold from existence.

A misty wide and white highway crossing the night sky was the Milky Way galaxy, seen edge on, and we could also see the Andromeda galaxy through our binoculars. It was no great shakes to intuit many more.

It turns out that in every dark patch sky no larger than a grain of sand that there are over 10,000 galaxies. The universe was surely much larger than it needed to be.

If this universe was here at this time in this place as from an inflating bang, then surely there could be more, making for the extrapolation of an endless Cosmos. There was really much more out there than there needed to be.

So it is that we surmise, reason, interpret, gather, understand, presume, and assume that there are countless numbers of stars and planets out there, as well as endless numbers of universes. What the heck is going on? Why so many? They were perhaps even near infinite, whatever that means. Why is it so overdone?

Well, infinite largeness is so vast because the infinitesimal is so small, but that's not the direct reason, but more like a reason to a reason, which is that Totality would not be as such if it were limited in extent—and from that line of thought we also know that it cannot be limited by duration. Eternity must accord with infinity.

Yet, there is nothing and nowhere for this everything to have come from, so now we understand that nothing and everything must complete the package begun by the figuring in of infinity and eternity. It is the ultimate reckoning.



Everything happens everywhere forever from nothing.



Many months had passed and the school year was already into spring. And that was when Cheryl's mother gave us some news from a historian friend who was another historian.

“My mother got the word that some purported pages of a lost book of Plato's were anonymously dropped at a historical society two years ago. An attached note said only that more would be revealed every month.”

“How did it go over?”

“They declared it to be a most excellent fraud.”

“Yes, so excellent that it was real.”

“But no more of was ever sent.”

“That’s odd.”

“Not if he died.”

“If he was dying then that may be why he was going to release it.”

“Or he was well and just had second thoughts.”

“Or it is unrelated, but he would have been more than 80 years old. Where was this historical society?”

“Galena, Illinois.”

“What! That is in Driftless!”

“I was trying to build up the suspense.”



*The picturesque town of Galena lies in the northwest corner of Illinois where you can find dramatic views of the Mississippi River, lofty geologic precipices, scenic farms as well as historic buildings. It is one of the most unique areas in the state, harboring rare plant species found nowhere else in Illinois. The highest geographical point in the state is in Scales Mound, the next town northeast of Galena, and the darkest area in the state occurs at Apple River Canyon State Park, located in the eastern part of Jo Daviess County. Because northwest Illinois -- and also portions of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa -- escaped the continental glaciers of the Pleistocene Epoch, it is known as the "Driftless Area."*

*A few interesting facts about the natural wonders here:*

*Approximately 271 bird species regularly occur in the Driftless Area of Illinois. This represents almost 90% of the 300 species of birds that regularly occur in the state. Of these 271 species, 138 breed or formerly bred in this area.*

*The species diversity of the area is due to its geographical location and its topographic complexity. Here several species of birds reach or are near their geographical limits.*

*Dry cliff communities are found on the bluffs facing the Mississippi River, with the most spectacular examples in Mississippi Palisades State Park where the cliffs rise 280 feet above the floodplain.*

*There are approximately 1,632 miles of rivers, streams, and shorelines in the Driftless Area of Illinois. The three largest streams are the Plum River, Apple River, and the Galena River.*

*42% (915 species) of Illinois native flora occurs in the driftless area, an area that comprises only 1.7% of the state's total land area.*

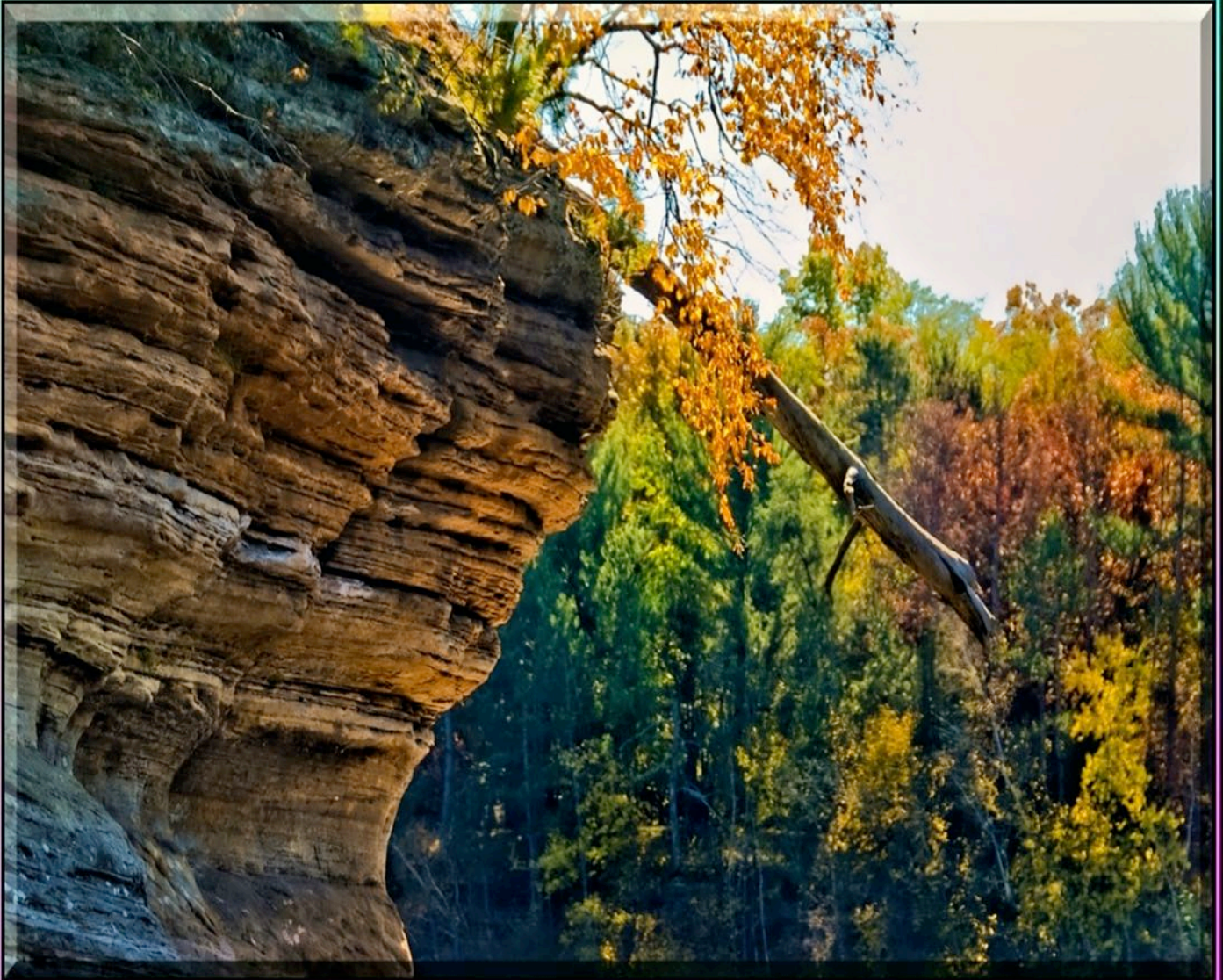
*The Driftless Area is one of the most rural areas of the state, so its public land holdings are relatively large and contiguous, helping to reduce the negative effects of fragmentation.*

*45 species of mammals occur here, representing 78% of the state's mammal species. The state-threatened river otter and bobcat can be found here. The main breeding population of the river otter in Illinois occupies the backwaters and tributaries of the Mississippi River in Jo Daviess, Carroll, and Whiteside Counties.*

*The Driftless Area of Illinois supports 89 species of fish, 39 species of mussels, and 9 species of large crustaceans. Eleven amphibian and 25 reptile species occur here, including the state-threatened western hognose snake and the timber rattlesnake.*

“I guess we’re going to spend the summer in Galena.”

“I guess so.”



So it was that in the meanwhile I took her with me on my part-time summer job of delivering kegs of nuts and bolts around Chicago and even to the far flung suburbs, but that’s another story for a far off day.

“If he lived in Galena, why would he still deliver it to that society there, for chances are someone would connect it to the great library and find him.”

“He was too ill to travel far. And since there were no more deliveries and it was all thought to be a hoax then no one pursued it and him.”

“The teacher is dead.”

“His sister might have known of that.”

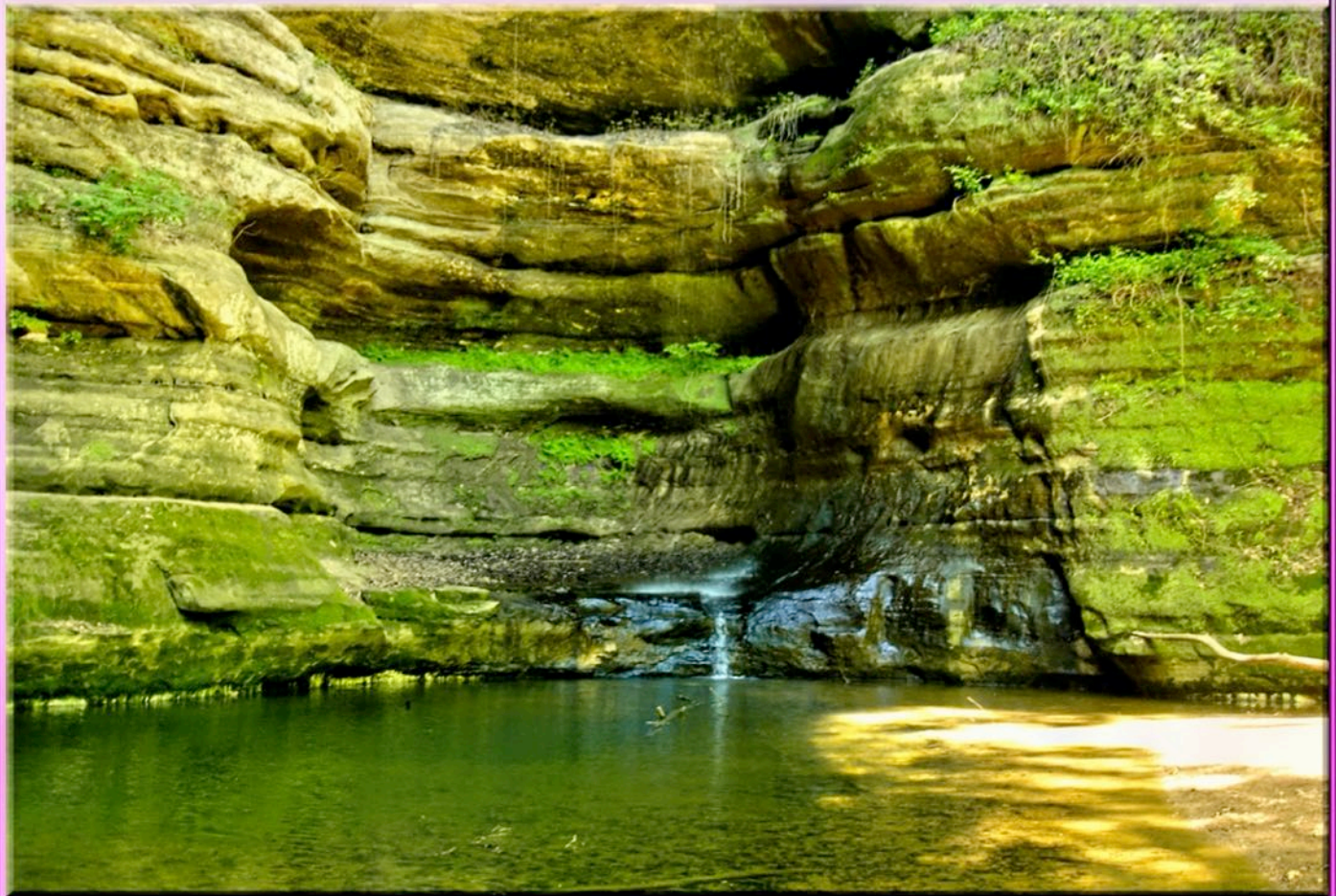
“He changed his name.”

“We’re stumped again. So close...”



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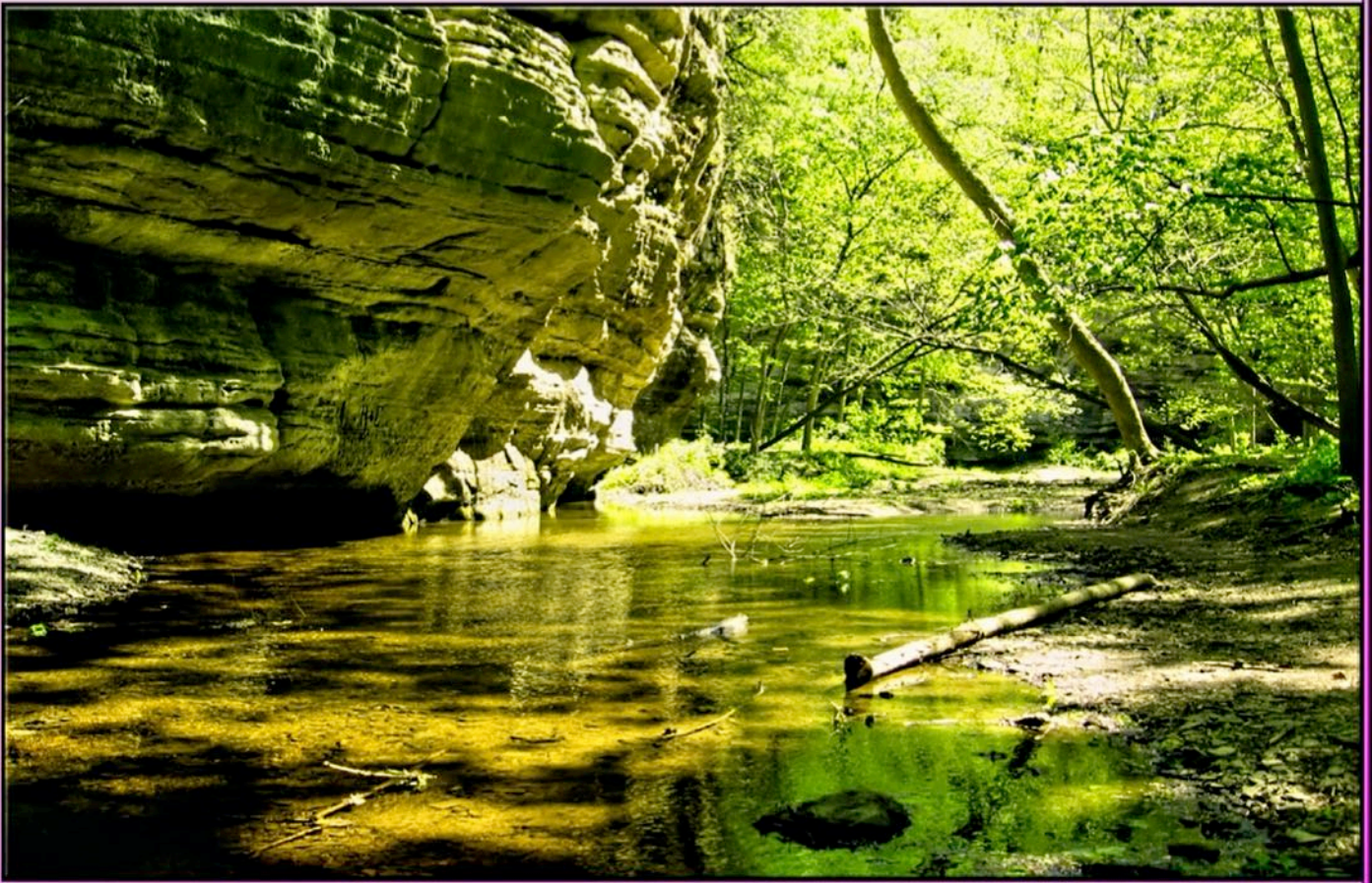
Galena



In Starved Rock Park we walked the cliffside trail to the rock that was starved, meaning that it was all alone. For some humans, being alone could mean that one was in bad company.

Yet, I would hope that one alone would never be lonely since one would still be with their best loving friend. Today we were together alone together, but as soul bridged to soul, standing on the rock of the Illinois river near the Iowa border.

When I was six, I sat on the edge of this cliff, my legs dangling, my mother holding on to me. There are 18 canyons formed by glacial melt water and stream erosion. Horses took us 8 miles out and back on a sunny autumn day.





We had found an old and ancient churchyard, a large one that yet yawns to receive the deceased, as it has for 300 years. Real cobwebs stretched across the archway... Angel statues beckoned us in, but were really just there to carry forth the souls of the dead to the heavens...

An inscription read:

*All the world's wealth can't extend the power  
That drains the cup and withers the flower.  
What would be the price of a moment's breath  
Purchased from Death's hand at this final hour?*

We mummies had crept on into the heart of the graveyard on All-Hallows-Eve, even letting it get to us so as to be totally receptive, and saw some freshly covered graves...

...our rosy cheeks and warm breath exhaling mist—the only life here in Corruption's dim dwelling place, decrepit death everywhere around and underground as the Earth's final benediction composed for the decomposing...

*Alarmed, we wandered among some tombstones,  
Under which rested little more than bones,  
Where from the life had fled when dreams were dead,  
Which under us became life's stepping stones.*

*Not all poems are pleasant; some speak of death,  
Of life's end, separate by just a breath  
We saw tombstones overgrown, under swept,  
Names unknown—and to all the message saith:*

*Read Me, it said, engraved beyond the brink,  
You, who live, up above: of life go drink;  
And you, underneath, now lying so dead:  
Rest in peace, RELAX—it's later than you think!*

...but we saw no souls rising, heard nothing, nor noted nothing unusual at all in any way whatsoever, nor could we ever, for invisible they all were and are and ever will be.

Although it felt quite spooky, we knew that this feeling only came from an association with invented legends, but we could understand how and why they could have been made up, for, in the old days, when there was some sound or movement heard, but nothing found, they still suspected someone or something about, such as spirits and ghosts.

## Whence Cometh Our Help

*Born from stardust and nourished by sunlight,  
I've filled my cup with wonders of delight.  
Life is a treasure, a radiant gem,  
A vision that I'll never see again.*

From the cold night beneath the stars... back...  
to the warmth... of the log fire...

*The stars are eternity's running-lights—  
They shine, even through the fathomless night!  
From what bright star came the gleam in your eyes?  
To what distant sun returns your smile's light?*

*For several centuries the library had served as  
the greatest treasury of learning known to the  
world and successfully escaped any threats of de-  
struction. What eventually happened to the great-  
est collection of knowledge and wisdom of the an-  
cient world, as well as the sculpture, and the tomb  
of Alexandria is unknown, but the beginning of the  
end most certainly began with Caesar's arrival in  
48 B.C.*

*There were many reasons for Caesar to visit Alexandria: to collect debts; to gain political prestige with Egypt by settling a dispute over the will of Cleopatra's father, Ptolemy Auletes, which had created friction between Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy; and to enjoy the culture and civilization of the world's most literate and aesthetic city.*

*Cleopatra offered Julius Caesar, the present day master of the world, a great gift of hundreds of rare scrolls and art objects from the library and museum. A banquet was scheduled to celebrate agreements to the will. As Cleopatra and her guests reveled, Ptolemy's general Achilles seized the opportunity to attack the palace with a force of Egyptian soldiers and slaves. Caesar sent for reinforcements, but realized the Egyptian navy would cause the Roman ships difficulty in rescuing him, so he ordered some of his remaining soldiers to sneak into the harbor and throw burning torches onto the Egyptian ships containing the treasures. His gift from Cleopatra was destroyed as were books stored in warehouses along the waterfront, but Caesar escaped with his life. It was estimated that 40,000 books were lost.*

We pored over the microfilm of newspaper obituaries at the Galena public library for quite a while, finding nothing for the first month, and then going into the next one, and the next.

“I think I’ve found it. Just says he was a teacher near Chicago and a geologist, with one sister surviving.”

“It’s under an alias, Junius Alexander.”

“Holy Christ, that’s him, with a latin Roman first name and the library as his last.”

“The obit is so short, but totally revealing.”

“He suspected that he might die and so he wrote his own obituary just ahead of time. Maybe that’s all he could put.”

“And he took his secrets to the grave.”

“Maybe.”

We found the remains of his house in Galena. It was scheduled for demolition because it was a run-down eye-sore.

“Where are the treasures?”

“I’m sure we’re standing on them.”

“That’s the only place it would be safe.”

“Let us go inside and root them out.”

“And then donate it to the world’s knowledge.”

“For sure, but we’ll spread it around so it doesn’t get lost again.”

Our hearts skipped a beat when we saw it.

“There’s a scroll wrapped in bronze on his desk.”

“It looks as if it might fall apart if we even took it out.”

“Which is why it is back in its tube.”

We explored the basement with a flashlight.

There was nothing apparent, just a furnace, much empty space, and a coal bin room, which we looked into, finding it musty, with a few inches of coal, a rolled up rug, and a lot of cobwebs everywhere.

We stood dejected, then went out to dinner, hoping it would recharge our brains, and return later.

### The Kid From Hell

*From last night’s dinner outing:  
We ate at the Pancake House for a change,  
Not knowing that it was “Kid’s Night”,  
But that was fine—for awhile—  
And I will get to that.*

*There were but kids and their young parents  
And a really lot of really old people, as well,  
Whom I guess must go all of the time.*

*I looked at the menu,  
Skipping over “Half Baked Chicken”.  
Thinking that it would be half raw  
And so not as good as a  
Baked half chicken,  
And, too, bypassed the liver and kidneys.  
For who knows what hour of the night  
They came in and from where and who.*

*I ordered a “Farmer’s Omelet”  
That had been grown by agriculture.  
We began hearing the screeching of a child  
Who was maybe 5-7 years old  
That was much worse than a cat in heat  
And more disturbing than  
The scratching of a blackboard.  
So, we didn’t detach from it  
But followed it to its source  
As it grew even louder  
Like howls from the depths of Hell.*

*The mother began to drag the kid out  
But he begins a sit-down strike halfway,  
For which we knew he’d be dead,  
Deader, and deadest.*

*So he continues to resist getting to his feet,  
Flailing away in every direction  
And manages to knock  
An old guy's full dinner plate onto the floor.*

*The old guy was seemingly unfazed  
And picked up his food off of the floor  
And resumed eating it,  
But we could kind of tell  
That he was turning into Satan.*

*Well, this kid's mother was  
Whacking and whamming the kid  
And then the old guy got one in too.*

*Beautiful silence soon ensued,  
With even the laughter quieting down,  
Until, a few minutes later  
The mother and child returned  
Amid some apprehension,  
She ordering a new dinner  
For the poor old guy.*

*The screeching soon began anew  
And heard wham, wham again,  
But the novelty had  
Somewhat worn off*



*And so our dopamine systems  
Didn't really send out  
Any more high alerts  
And we had a fine meal.*

(But we moved our plates  
More toward the center of the table.)

We returned to the house.

“Even the coal is crushed and useless.”

“But for some whole coals on the sides of the bin.”

“The rug has coal dust on it.”

“Because it was laid over the coals for some reason.”

“And whatever was rolled over it had crushed the coals in the center.”

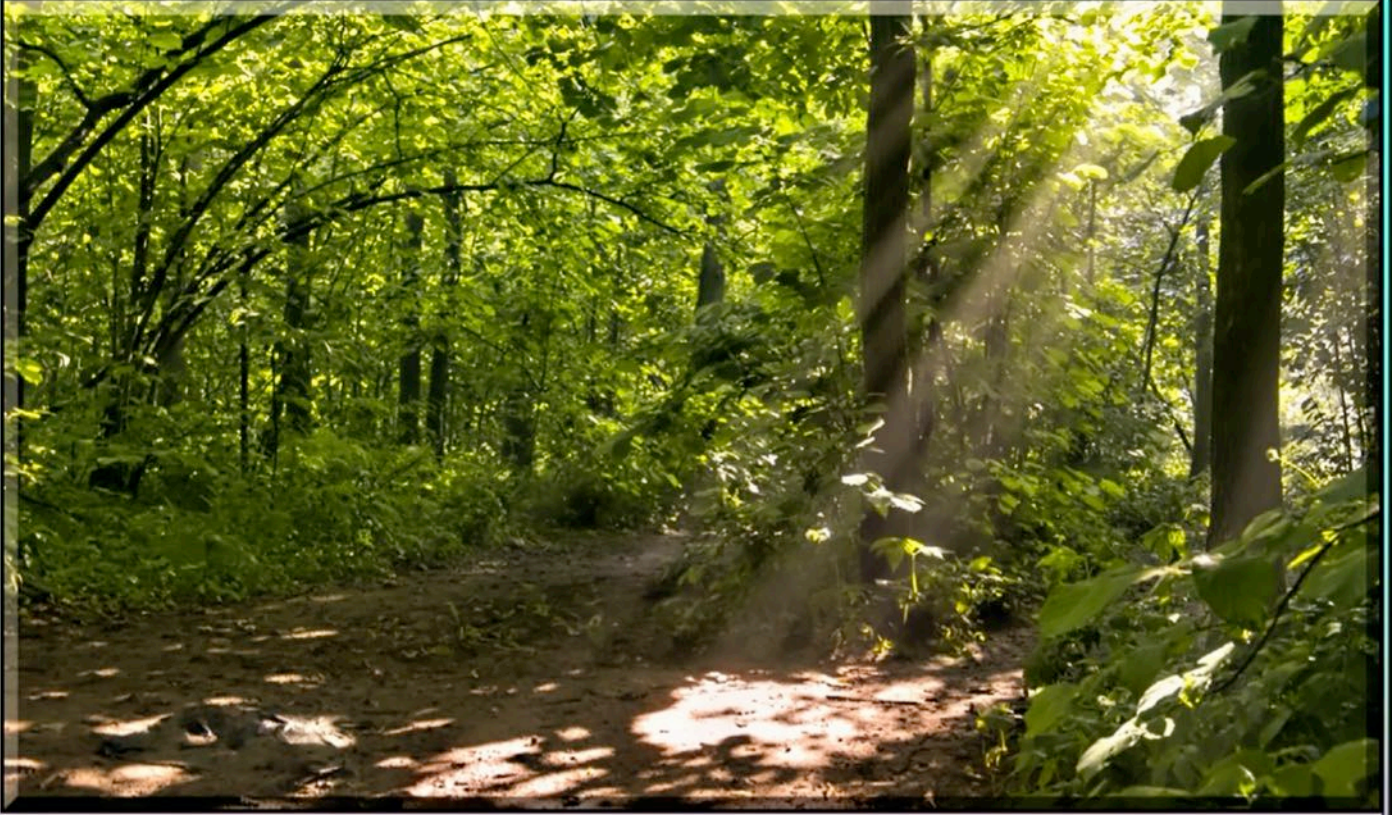
“Let us examine the wall at the end of the coal bin.”

After some pressing and pushing the wall folded down and a light went on, revealing a seemingly endless room. An old sculpture of a black cat greeted them.

And there it all was.

“This is much larger than we can handle ourselves.”

...



“They’ve catalogued 40 different sculptures,” Cheryl reported. “So far we’ve found the complete books of all that were thought to have been lost forever.”

The President walked speechless through the seemingly endless passage.

“Here is the golden casket of Alexander the Great,” Cheryl announced in a hushed tone.

As art, all was beyond price. As knowledge, its value was astronomical.

— The End —