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D Murphy

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Will's Notebook



List of Characters



Will Cotter: Hero? Possibly.
On a quest for knowledge of worth...



Joie Paideia: Oricle. Spirit of the
Eternal Spring.



Modèrna Ramus: Principal of UKC
(United Knowledge Confederate).



Old Norse: Donor of parental wisdom.



Rupert: Companion and helper
(sometimes).



Pythia (Alethia): Serpent of the River
Acura. Mother of Paideia.



Wise Owls: Devout Masters of
knowledge. Aoki, Djin, Dewey



Statica Major: Comander of the
Northern Clan Service.

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Will's notebook, September 4:

Labour Day

The noise was overwhelming. Will was in a panic to get everyone organized. There were so many students all making unrelated sounds that it was a cacophony! Every year the orchestration of events became more and more complicated. There were so many requests and systems to implement, lists to check, and it was Will's job to make sure Labour Day sounded great. Labour Day was the biggest celebration of the year, it marked the beginning of Newterm, and it was only one day away!

Will was a teacher, he and many other teachers prepared and orchestrated groups of students, who were younger and unfamiliar with Newterm festivities. Will enjoyed the challenge of helping students learn but the scale of the events had become more frightening every year. It was a strange feeling, like he was participating in destroying the thing he loved. It felt like a Ferris Wheel that is accelerating and no one can get off. Like that little pin... if it falls out of a machine a catastrophe of epic proportions would occur. What was it called...?

The Cotter Pin... how could he forget? Ol'Norse used to give advice about such things, an interesting device that is in-itself not important, but if one breaks the whole operation could go down. Ol'Norse liked Will, he liked to give him advice, especially about knowledge and worth. Will knew that Ol'Norse lived in a world very separate from the daily running of the Clan and especially the task of preparing and conducting courses for Newterm, but he always liked talking with him and somehow it always made the preparations easier and more enjoyable.



Labour Day's Eve is a quiet, somber time of reflection and meditation that precedes the first day of Newterm. Normally, Will would be quite relaxed, all his preparations done, a quiet moment of excitement and satisfaction, but this term there was a particular feeling that something was going to change. It was his conversation with Ol'Norse about the Cotter Pin.

Ol'Norse came by, as he often did, to see Will at his dwelling one Labour Day's Eve with the news that he had received a letter from the highest level saying that all Newterm activities would fall under the supervision of Statica Major the new leader of the Northern Clan Service. From now on all activities and events must adhere to a Rubric from Stangard. This meant that teachers would be responsible for making sure every student does the same course, plays the same, and is tested the same way.

This would spell disaster for Will, he was never able to get any two students to do anything the same let alone follow a Standard. In all the years he had been a teacher, Will had never even been able to orchestrate a course the same way twice. If following the

Standard is to be enforced by the Clan Service, Will would be in big trouble.

Will knew Statica very well, they had grown up together in T'sian. At one time many years ago they were neighbors and would play in concerts together. However, over the years Statica had become a powerful leader in the Clan Service, his rigor and perseverance were without rival. Unfortunately, Statica knows that Will can't seem to follow the Standard.

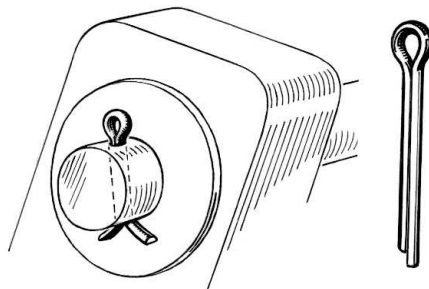
Ol'Norse startled Will by bursting in and saying.

"Will, you must put down what you are doing and take heed in what I say."

After a pause, Will sat down next to Ol'Norse and listened.

"As you know I am a devout member of the ancient followers of wisdom, who over the years have vowed to protect the people of T'sian. We are the teachers of teachers, who protect knowledge and judge worth. There has been a call for a conference of the followers. I must attend and I must leave immediately."

Will was having trouble controlling his jaw. It kept dropping open. Everyone called Sir William Norse, Ol'Norse because he



The Cotter Pin

was so old! As far as anyone could remember he was always old. How could an old man attempt to go into a forest as complicated and disorientating as where this group of followers met? Even the name gave Will the shivers: The Forest of Dispersion, a forest whose trails are so full of bifurcations one could get lost in minutes and spend the rest of their lives searching without finding a clear path. The dangers of loosing your mind trying to find a path was terrifying to Will, he had to shake his head to stop thinking about them.

Ol’Norse continued. “ There is more... I need you to come with me.”

Will remembered a muffled ringing sound just before the room spun around and he ended up on the floor. This was an odd felling for Will looking up from the floor with Ol’Norse looking down at him saying something but it was too distant to understand.

Once Will was sitting in a chair with a glass of water Ol’Norse began the conversation about a Cotter Pin. Ol’Norse found it quite amusing that Will’s second name was Cotter. Will was less amused.

Will found it difficult to follow everything that Ol’Norse said, but before he knew it he was putting some extra clothes and food in a bag and writing a note explaining his absence, which was difficult because Will didn’t know why or how long he would be gone.

It came down to this. Somehow Ol’Norse convinced Will that his role in this meeting was so important that the whole of the T’sian culture would fail if he didn’t put down everything he was doing and leave on some crazy journey to a scary forest with an old man in the dark. Immediately!



On Our Way

They had been walking for quite a while. It was still very dark but the calm and the stars made it nice to be outside, half-asleep, following someone you trust. Suddenly there was a loud crash in the bushes. Ol’Norse reached in and pulled out a small creature that they both immediately recognized.

It was Rupert. He was small compared to Will and very small compared to Ol’Norse but he was such a nice little fella no one could stay mad at him.

“Hey Guys!” Said Rupert with a bit more enthusiasm then the situation called for.

“Rupert! What are you doing here?” Demanded Ol’Norse.

“Well, ha, that’s kinda funny. You see, I was stopping by to see Will when I saw you two heading for the Valley. I just kinda tagged along.”

You could see Ol’Norse was considering the situation deeply.

Finally Ol’Norse said. “You will never find your way back so you must continue on with us.” With that he turned and continued down the path.

Will and Rupert were best buddies who had worked together on Newterm events for many years. Will was happy to have a friend with him.

Later that night when they stopped to rest for a while.

Will asked Rupert. "What is it you think we are doing on this trek?"

Rupert replied quietly. "I don't know but I heard the word 'moribund' again and I know that means our situation is about to change..."

Ol'Norse sat by the fire in deep thought, staring at the embers...

~



The next morning Rupert and Will had a great time talking about the pleasures of teaching. They had taught courses together for many years. There was a lot to remember and laugh about. The way the groups sounded was what Will and Rupert always loved. The sound was always different, always beautiful with unexpected combinations, harmonies, resonances, relationships.

Will was starting to get that strange feeling again. They approached the Forest of Dispersion and the feeling only grew stranger.

Entering into the forest was easy, only one path in. Maybe this would not be so bad. But after a time, as Will looked around, the trails would go off in dozens of directions...

How could they ever be sure which was the right way back, or forward?

The forest felt like it was closing-in behind them...

~

The Great Walled City

Perhaps it is time to back up a bit.

Will, Ol’Norse, and Rupert were part of an era that had witnessed a great change in how the world was run. The T’sian at one time exchanged ideas freely with other Clans. Ideas were shared and everyone prospered. There was a period of great development, a Renaissance. However, over time ideas became more and more valuable and fighting started to break out between Clans over who’s ideas were right, or what an idea was worth. This created divisions between Clans and many of the battles were vicious and shattering.

The strongest and largest Clan belonged to the United Knowledge Confederate (UKC) and they started to dominate all other clans. Eventually the administration of UKC brought together almost everyone to live in the great Walled City of Polis. A city so large it is said that you could walk for a week and still be within its walls.

The wall was so great it had a name, Acura. It surrounded and protected Polis. It was constructed using a formula so sophisticated and elegant that no wall as big has ever been constructed. The formula, so they say, is so powerful people themselves have been taken under its spell and turned into part of the wall! Will never took that old story very seriously but he had seen people who worked their whole lives on the wall and they certainly had become set in their ways.

At the center of Polis is the UKC School and the office of the great administrator, Moderna Ramus. She was the principal and she extend her power to every corner of the world. At first they seemed like good and practical ideas that everyone agreed to. But over time the orders became more and more standardized

and there started to be stronger discipline for anyone who went off course.

Will, Ol'Norse, and Rupert were from the T'sian Clan. It was one of the most remote and Northern Clans in the world. As a result, they were somewhat cut off from the great changes that were happening behind the Wall of Acura. When Will and Ol'Norse found out about the Standard it was a shock because they never thought anyone cared what they did in T'sian.



The Forest of Dispersion

It felt like nighttime but they had been walking only a few hours since breakfast. The forest grew darker the further they went. Will's feeling of strangeness was becoming overwhelming. All trails had disappeared, he could see nothing but impenetrable forest. There was a disorientation that felt like all your thoughts were being spoken at once. A cacophony of thought. When all thoughts call out at once you lose direction.

Then suddenly Ol'Norse said. "Stop! We are here."

"Great!" Thought Will, "here is a dark scary forest where I'm losing my direction and my mind."

Ol'Norse continued. "Quiet. We have come to a secret and very precious spot. Listen"

In the quiet that followed Will was slowly aware of a faint sound of water. It was gained interest the more intently he listened. It was more than just the sound of running water, it sounded composed. Like it was saying something, everything...

Ol'Norse proceeded to part the vines to reveal a wonderfully inviting pool of water in an opening that was bright and spacious.

"This," he said with obvious excitement, "is the *Eternal Spring!*"

Ol'Norse explained that the Eternal Spring was a forest spring of fresh clean water. The water contained pure imagination and it flowed from a spring fed waterfall to the large reflective pool. When Will looked at his reflection in the pool it felt like he could see every idea he had ever had and the waterfall sparkled with

every new idea to come. Will looked at both Rupert and Ol'Norse and could tell by their expressions they felt the same way. They were in awe.

"This is unbelievable!" Yelled Rupert. "We never have to come up with an idea again. All's we have to do is hang around this pool."

As Rupert danced around happily, Will began to have the feeling they were not alone. Will froze but it took Rupert a few more rounds of the song he was dancing to before he realized that there were many eyes watching him...

There stood three very imposing figures. It was The Three Owls, the keepers of knowledge, the judges of worth, and the guardians of the Eternal Spring. These three were legends to Will and Rupert, so seeing them in real life was very intimidating. The oldest Owl named Aoki stepped forward and spoke with authority.

"Master Norse, you are welcome. We have been expecting you. I see you have brought," He paused to clear his throat, "*friends...*" He was still looking at Rupert, who had turned an interesting shade of red.



Conference with the Owls

Aoki wasted no time and called to order a conference to address the matters at hand.

“As the protectors of the Eternal Spring it is our duty to allow it to flow and not be controlled by the UKC. We have fought long and hard to maintain the independence and freedom of our Spring. It has always given energy and ideas to the T’sian Clan and without it we would loose our Calling. They would use our spring as a resource to expand and develop Stangard. As we speak Statica Major, the newly appointed leader of the Northern Clan Service, is heading across the Accura River. He is on his way to T’sian as we speak! We have reports about a great army amassing in the Plains of Reason. We call upon all of you to help with this.”

“How can Statica cross the river? Called out a ruffled old Owl named Djin. “The Serpent of Accura guards it. She has devoured anyone who tries to cross the river since before the time of tales.”

Aoki replied. “It has been said that Modèrna Ramus has tricked the Serpent into believing that the Standard would allow her to go home.”

The third Owl, a very large white creature named Dewey, exclaimed. “Modèrna Ramus! Is there no end to her ambitions? First she becomes Principal of UKC, then she makes everyone follow one Standard, and *now* she is sending her army North across the Accura!”

A great disharmony of voices started all at once. Everyone had something to say. The sound was getting loud.

Will sat quietly amazed at all the noise.

Will had grown up listening to the Masters talk of the awesome power of the Spring. One drop of its water contained a universe of infinite possibilities. Was it possible that someone could control that? And if the Spring was always flowing shouldn't there be more than enough for everyone?

Will was so deep in thought that he didn't realized that everyone had stopped talking and were looking at him. Did he just say what he was thinking out loud?

Will made a very quiet gulping sound.

The Masters looked shocked. The Spring had always been protected by the Masters, no one had ever even suggested to share its power. Until today only a Master had ever been allowed near the spring. Rupert looked as uncomfortable as Will felt. There was an awkward silence.

Then Aoki started to laugh, soon all the Masters were laughing. Sharing the spring was the funniest idea they had heard. It takes years of study and dedication to become a master worthy of the waters from the Eternal Spring! It was decided. More research was required. This matter would have to wait until later.

Will felt very uneasy about how the conference ended but it didn't seem to matter because tonight they would Play! Will loved to listen to the masters. Ol'Norse and the Owls may be old but when you hear them play music, there is no better energy. They would make up lyrics and change melodies all the time. It is like they are tapping into multi-generational dimensions. Voices from Players who are long gone, but are as alive with the music as they ever were. The Owls were famous for their three part

harmonies that would include contemporary commentaries and many jokes, puns, rhymes, alliterations, and other rhetorical tricks to expand the music. It was endlessly entertaining to listen to. And could they play... every song would turn into a 20-minute jam that could end up anywhere. Tonight they would Play until dawn.

Will had begun his lessons late in life but he had complete confidence that Music would never let you down. No matter how bad a situation in life, Music has a way to make it better. If it were not for Music, Will could not keep going. It was the part he liked best and he made sure to include it in every lesson. Music could make everyone in a group feel like they belonged. Will treasured that feeling.

Then the band began to Play. Aoki on drums, Djin singing and percussion, Dewey on keys. Ol’Norse was unstoppable on the guitar. Rupert laying down the bass. Will joined in with his guitar and sang a very old but lively favorite song and it sounded a little something like this...

The Wild Rover

-
I’ve been a Wild Rover for many a year,
I’ve spent all my money on Music and Cheer,
But now I’m returning with gold in great store,
And I never Will Play the Wild Rover no more.

And it’s no, nay, never.
No nay never no more,
Will I Play the Wild Rover,
No never no more.

I'll come home to my parents with all that I've done,
So happy they'll be to see their Prodigal Son,
And when we Play together as oft times before
Sure I never Will Play the Wild Rover no more.

And it's no, nay, never.
No nay never no more,
Will I Play the Wild Rover,
No never no more.

The sun was coming up as Will drifted off to sleep, singing in his
dreams...

The Wild Rover

I've been a wild ro-ver for man-y a year, I've spent all my mo-ney on
Music and Cheer But now I'm re- turn- ing with gold in great store, I nev- er will
play the wild rov- er no more. And it's no, nay, nev- er. No nay nev- er no
more, Will I play the wild rov- er, No nev- er no more.

Plan of Action

The next morning the Owls and Ol’Norse were up early drinking Spring water and talking. By the time Will and Rupert arrived there seemed to be a consensus of talk about The Plan of Action. Will and Rupert are to cross the Plains of Reason by somehow convincing Statica Major and his enormous army to allow them to pass. They then have to convince the notoriously vicious serpent Pythia to kindly take them across the river. Once they enter Polis, they go to UKC campus and convince Mordèrna Ramus to call Statica home and stop telling people how to teach. Simple.

Will often took a while to understand things in the morning. There was a particularly enjoyable Tea made from spring water and a plant fed by it, perhaps another cup of that... Rupert was way worse. He didn’t have a clue what The Plan was. He was watching the preparation of Tea so intently that he could not have noticed anything else.

After a few cups of Tea, Will realized what was being asked of him.

Will and Rupert were to pass through a very dangerous open field and face the entire Clan Army. Then ask a serpent to take them across a river into Polis, locate a specific office on UKC campus, and tell a mean and powerful Principle that the whole plan is wrong. Whaaaat?

From what Will could recall in the rush of preparation for the Away Team (The Owls where having a lot of fun coming up with names for things) there was much discussion about methods and theories to solve possible problems. A lot was said but Will was feeling something else...

After the plains and the river Will and Rupert have to convince Ramus that the plan to standardize all teaching was wrong. Ramus had been promoted to Principal by following the current plan. Hmmm. Will was feeling panic, he was about to start running...

Suddenly Dewey spoke. "First." Everyone went quiet. "You must seek advisement from the Spirit of the Spring about how this should be done. You must speak with Joie Paideia..."

Will froze. He had never imagined that Paideia was someone you could talk to. If the Owls were legends, then Paideia was from the heavens. It is said that it is Paideia's voice that speaks the Calling. The voice that calls people to become teachers. Could Will actually talk with Paideia?

Aoki continued. "Take this vial of Eternal Spring water with you Paideia will instruct you" Aoki put the vial on a string around Will's neck.

This was intriguing to Will, so he asked quietly. "How does one find Joie Paideia?"

Aoki answered. "At the Trivium in the road to the South, take road closest to the setting sun. Continue to the river bank and you will find Paideia there at the Tree of Life, she is really very nice..."

"No!" Dewey replied. "It is at the Quadrivium further down the road, take the path of the stars. Follow the music, The Tree of Life is at its source."

There was confusion.

"I'm sorry Will..." Aoki spoke with a smooth and deep voice. "The path is unique for every traveler; we are still in the Forest of Dispersion so no matter which path you choose you will still have to decide for yourself if it is the right path."

"One thing for certain," Said Ol'Norse, "Any attempt to cross the river would be met with demise. Unless we can use the power of the Serpent to our advantage we will never cross. Will and Rupert are our best bet to get to Ramus. They must be advised by Paideia of the course to be taken..."

"It is agreed then." Said Aoki with grave tone of authority. "Will and Rupert will leave immediately to the Tree of Life and seek Paideia's advisement."

"Why does every course of action have to start *immediately*?" Thought Will.

Forks in the road

To navigate the Forest of Dispersion one has to choose a path and understand that often it will lead you back to where you started, but you have to keep going. The way the Owls understood this was based on a map that was rigorously detailed and had been honoured by Masters for many years. The map systematically goes through every path. Aoki gave a copy to Will as they said goodbye. Will asked Ol’Norse to keep it for him. Will decided to travel light.

Ol’Norse and the other Owls gathered to wish the travelers well. Their task seemed very unclear and daunting but the opportunity to meet Joie Paideia was exciting and this was evident in Rupert’s mood. He was dancing around and singing again. Will thought it best to get moving before things got awkward...

After walking for some time on the path Will and Rupert sat to take a rest. Things seemed so peaceful and quiet that they both fell sound asleep.

Will awoke slowly to notice a small cat sitting very quietly between him and Rupert. Unsure what to do Will looked over to Rupert who was awake and looked even more unsure. What happened next shocked Will and Rupert into frozen silence.

The cat spoke in a calm and peaceful voice. “My name is Wabi Sabi. I see you are confused so take your time but I can help you find your way.”

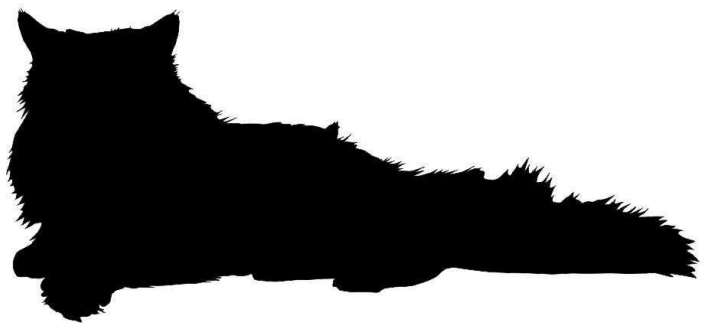
“If you *know* where you want to go then any path will take you there...” Said Wabi-Sabi as he slowly and silently walked away.

Will and Rupert looked at each other, shrugged and took the path marked Music.

Further along their path, Rupert remarked to Will. "I was considering taking Astronomy."

"Yea, me too." Laughed Will. They continued happily singing together...

After a while they came out of the forest to a beautiful and enormous tree that grew on the shore of a great sea. Will and Rupert knew that this must be The Tree of Life, home Joie Paidia the Spirit of the Spring...



Spirit of the Spring, Joie Paidia

Paidia appeared almost weightless. She seemed to blend into the environment as if there was no clear distinction between her and the surroundings. Her home was in the most enormous tree Will and Rupert had ever seen. The tree seemed to breath with life. Everywhere you looked there were families of squirrels, or birds, or owls, or butterflies.

Paidia spoke, "Will, Rupert, I have been expecting you. Please feel welcome here and tell me of your quest."

Will and Rupert explained their journey to Paidia. They were to bring the source water from the spring and use it to convince Ramus to stop the enforcement of the Standard. Will felt a bit foolish explaining how few details were known about this elusive and dangerous plan.

Paidia listened and waited until Will finished. She was silent for a while, then she said. "You have the right idea but one part is wrong. It will be up to you to find that part and decide if you want to know the truth or not."

Will looked at Rupert, who's jaw hung open as it often did when he could not believe what was happening, Will was getting used to that look.

"How would we know..." Will mumbled weakly.

Paideia stood up. It was like the whole tree behind her stood up at the same time. She spoke with a sound that seemed to come from every branch, very quiet but with a depth that was so inviting. "The mistake you make is to think you have found where the Source comes from."



Will looked at his vial of Spring Water. He was very confused. The Source had always been from the Spring. He saw it with his own eyes...

Will asked with hesitation. "What about the water from the Eternal Spring? Is that not The Source?"

Paideia spoke reassuringly. "Keep your vial, you will know what it contains soon enough. You have a long journey ahead please come and rest."

Paidia welcomed Will and Rupert into her home for the best vegan meal they had ever had. The sense of welcome and hospitality surrounded them like a warm, soft blanket.

~

The next day Paidia and an entourage of animals gathered to see the travelers off.

With a voice that filled both Will and Rupert with hope and confidence Paidia said. "Please take with you these gifts. For you Rupert I have the Veil of Wisdom. From behind this veil all words you speak will sound wise and true to whoever hears them. And for you Will, I give you a seed from our tree. It will remind you that the Source of great things is already within the tiniest beginnings."

"Great!" Thought Will. "Rupert gets a nifty cloak what makes him sound smart. I get... what was that exactly? A seed? Knowledge that I know the Source but I don't recognize it?"

Paidia continued. "If you follow the path to the river you will come to the Plain of Reason. There you will meet Statica Major

who is coming with orders from Ramus to unite all Clans under one Standard. Statica has an army and you can not defeat him any other way than to challenge him to a debate. This is something his pride will not allow him to refuse. In order to win this debate and convince Statica to allow you to proceed you must beat him at his own game. It is already within you and all around you. Your stories of experience will help you find it. Be open to uncertainty and have faith in the spirit that guides life itself."

Will was bewildered and somewhat disappointed as he and Rupert set off. It didn't help having Rupert hiding behind his Veil constantly saying profoundly wise statements.

After a long day of hiking over mountains Will came to ridge that looked out over the great Plain of Reason. In the distance they could make out the camp of Statica Major and his army. Tomorrow they would confront Statica but tonight they rested as Rupert continued his wisdom statements.

Debate with Statica Major

Will was so nervous. The idea of confronting Statica was making Will feel sick from worry. Statica knows Will very well. When the grew up there were many times that Will beat Statica using unconventional methods. Statica always resented that and would take every opportunity to beat Will by proving his adherence to the Standard was superior. Will was even awarded a commission from the Guard at one time, with very generous pay. But Statica stoped that by convincing Ramus to implement mandatory testing. Will was hopeless with tests. He failed, and lost the commission. Statica got promoted and is now in charge of leading an army to enforce the Standard through out the land.

In the daylight Will and Rupert could see that the army was enormous. As far as they could see there were very structured rows of UKC service people marching in order. They covered almost the entire Plain of Reason. Will and Rupert walked as confidently as they could right toward the advancing army. As they got closer they could hear Statica give the order to halt. A moment passed in silence. Will and Rupert stood alone facing the largest army every assembled. Will could hear a tiny “gulp” sound from Rupert.

Statica and a small group of guards advanced toward Will and Rupert.

“Will Cotter?” Yelled Statica with tone that mixed disbelief and fury. “What in the name of Learning Outcomes do you think you are doing?”

Rupert made another “gulp” sound but this time with a distinct tremor.

Will managed to call out in a voice that belied his fear. "We are here to challenge you to a debate!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Statica, in total disbelief. The silence was enormously awkward.

Rupert now trembling visibly and was almost completely hiding under his Veil of Wisdom yet somehow he managed to say in a most convincing manner. "We challenge you to debate the question: What knowledge is of the most worth?" No one spoke for a length of time that seemed longer than it was. Rupert continued. "If we win the debate then you will allow us safe passage into the City of Polis and the UKC campus to speak directly with Ramus."

Statica turned to one of his guards and said in a very low voice. "The guy under the blanket says words that are wise and true... What do you think? The guard nodded. "Very well!" Statica declared. "We will have a debate!"

Statica ordered the army to make camp and a tent was setup to accommodate the debate. Luckily Statica also ordered lunch to be served before the debate so Will and Rupert ate as much as they could. While sitting eating, Will and Rupert talked quietly.

"So what are you going to do Will?" Asked Rupert.

"I don't know." Said Will. "I thought you had the wisdom." Will thought about what Paidia had said as he looked in his hand at the tiny seed and his little vial of Spring Water. He put the seed deep in his pocket but gave Rupert the vial so Statica would not see it.

And then Will remembered. He was good at math. It was the

easiest subject for Will. Back in school Statica was always mad at how hard it was for him and how easy it was for Will. Will needed data.

“Rupert, put on that Veil of Wisdom and gather us some data!” Yelled Will.

In a flash Rupert disappeared to collect...

While Rupert was collecting data he could not help playing with the vial of water from the Eternal Spring. He thought maybe just one little sip would help his task, but as he took the cap off the vial he dropped it and all the water spilled onto the ground.

“Oh no!” Cried Rupert. “That is not good.”

Rupert quickly filled the vial with some of his drinking water and decided that was a problem for later...

By the time the debate began Rupert had returned and all manor of statistical analysis was done to prove their arguments. The details of the debate are quite boring but the outcome was that Statica failed to prove anything and Will won the debate easily. Statica was really mad. However, Statica always followed the rules. So, begrudgingly, he had to grant Rupert and Will safe passage across the river.

They walked away toward the river and were silent for a long time. Rupert finally dared to speak. “I’m too scared to look back. I can’t believe that worked” He was gaining confidence now so he turned to look behind him. “They are not following us! We did it!” Rupert performed his now familiar happy dance. They could see and hear the Acura river directly in front of them.

The Serpent of Acura

Both Will and Rupert grew up hearing stories of a serpent in the River Acura. Her name was Pythia (Pie-thea, like a Python), she was the head priestess and partner to Apollo, together they had a daughter, Joie Paideia. Anyway, the story goes that one day Apollo got so mad at her that he turned her into a huge water snake and gave her the name Pythia. She forgot her original name and became angry and wanting for revenge. She lived the River Acura and guarded the entrance to the great city of Polis. Without her permission no one could cross the river or enter the city. There are stories of people trying to cross in the dark and disappearing forever.

Will remembered that Pythia was once known as Alethia, the oracle. Will had the idea that if she heard her name she might remember her daughter Paideia. And maybe she would be nice to them.

Before Rupert even knew what was going on, Will was at the bank of the river calling out, "Alethia, wise oracle... I have a message from Joie Paideia... Please grant us an audience."

A great serpent appeared, it looked more curious than mad, but its voice made a sound that sent Rupert hiding under his blanket. It sounded like a hundred voices all speaking together. When the serpent spoke nothing else could be heard, it masked out all sound from the highest birds to the low rumble of the great city of Polis. It was frightening but compelling at the same time.

"You call me by my true name and speak of my daughter..." spoke Alethia, "What message do you carry?" The reverberation of her voice took a long time to fade away.

Will cleared his throat, and said, "Paideia has recognized the Source as you once did, you should go to her. You can follow the river to the Sea and follow the coast to the forests, she lives in the great tree."

"Wow!" thought Rupert. *"This can't possibly work..."*

But the oracle seemed to get smaller as it approached. When she spoke there was a different sound, more like an orchestra in tune with the birds and the river. As she approached she sang, "I will take you across the river through the gates of the city but then I will return and go to my daughter..." "

Will and Rupert climbed on Alethia's back.

Rupert asked Will. "Shouldn't she tell us the future, or something?" The Oracle laughed and sang,

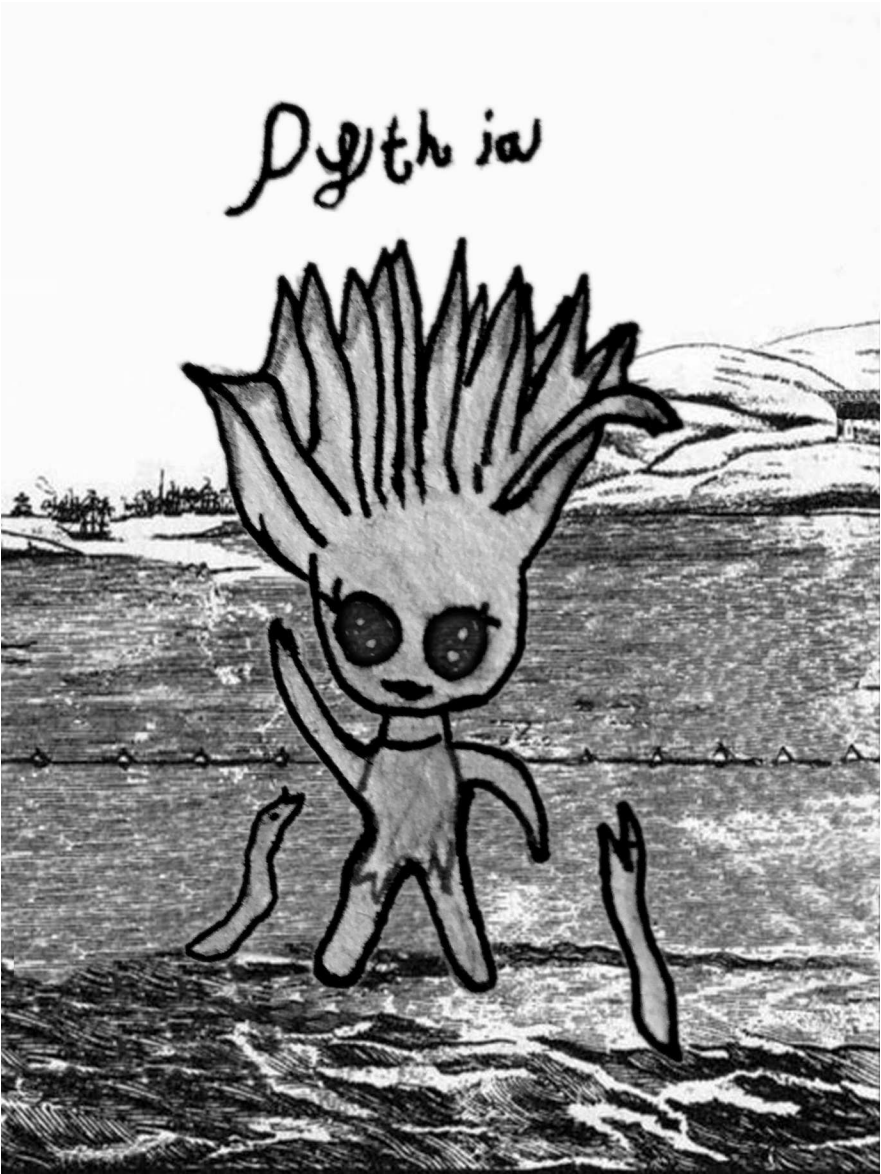
"To me you speak not.
If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favors nor your hate."

The Oracle spoke with a melodic voice. "I know you are trying to talk with Ramus and convince her to end her crusade but your expectations will remain even if I tell you what will end and what will not."

Will and Rupert stood on the side of a great canal watching the serpent swim away down the river.

Rupert said. "Ok, I have no idea what just happened but it looks like we are in the city. Shall we find something to eat?"

Will and Rupert walked into the city in the direction of the UKC campus and the office of the Principal, Modèrna Ramus.



The Office of Ramus

Modèrna Ramus has the best office in the entire campus of the UKC. She holds office hours between 10:30 and 11:40 every morning but both Rupert and Will know the stories of waiting for days, even weeks, to get in. Lacking any other plan Will and Rupert showed up at 10:35. The line went down the hall. People had the look of resignation and defeat. Before you can see Ramus you had to register at the large intimidating desk of Sophia the Administrator. Rupert and Will looked high above them at Sophia and asked to be allowed to speak with Mordèrna Ramus.

Sophia spoke with a voice that resonated with depth. “Are you certain?”

Rupert and Will looked at each other. *What could that mean?*

Will, not knowing how to answer but certainly not feeling certain, said hesitantly, “no...”

“Very well, you can go right in...” Said Sophia with voice that was humble and conclusive.

The large door swung open and Will and Rupert walked into the largest office they had ever seen. Rupert whispered into Will’s ear. “Did all those people in the hall say *yes*?”

As it turns out no one has said *no* for a very long time. It was considered rude or a challenge to the order of things to be *uncertain*. Ramus and the entire system of the UKC considered *certain* as, well, right. It just was not *right* to be *uncertain*.

Will could only manage a nod as they walked into an amazing room with views of the entire city of Polis, Will thought he could



make out the mountains of the T'sian in the far distance. The other side of the office were the doors to the greatest library in the world.

This moment was terrifying. The whole journey to this point started to retrace in his mind. The Eternal Spring, The Wise Owls, that cat, Joie Paideia, Statica Major, Alethia... Will started to feel dizzy. They had been so focused on getting here he really had no time to think about what he would do once he got here. What was the plan again...?

Oh yea, give Ramus a tiny vial of water from the Eternal Spring and convince her to reverse her plan of attack. Wow, did that plan seem stupid now. Where was that spring water anyway? Will whispered to Rupert. "You have the vial of Spring water, right?"

Rupert looked shocked and whispered intensely. "Yea, I have been meaning to tell you something about that..."

"Quit fooling around Rupert and give me the vial." Will said impatiently

"Umm." Hesitated Rupert. "I... um, think... um you... hmmm... there is something I need to tell you..." Rupert trailed off...

Will was getting nervous.

Rupert blurted, "I lost that spring water and I don't think our plan is still in play."

Will almost fainted but bumped against Rupert and remembered where he was. It had been 12 weeks since he began this quest and what does he know. Will thought of Ol'Norse and how he used to say that in the twelfth week a teacher must demonstrate

strength and have faith in The Source. Will had always thought The Source was water from the spring, but he was now not so sure.

Just then, Modèrna Ramus entered the room from a rear chamber. Rupert and Will froze.

Ramus sat at her enormous desk and spoke with a tone of authority that made Rupert and Will tremble inside. "Tell me what knowledge you think is worthy of a pass." Ramus had a way of saying "pass," slow with an extra emphasis on the "a." The sound made one feel both judgment and shame.

Will spoke. "Thank you, for hearing us today. It seems that through our quest for knowledge we have stumbled upon its source."

Both Ramus and Rupert looked shocked.

There was a long silence, then Ramus laughed out loud. "You are telling me that my entire Clan Service is out looking for the source of knowledge and you and your friend have it right here, in my office?"

Just then a great flash and a magical sound rang out: "FLABAM"

The next thing Will and Rupert knew they were on the back of Alethia with Joie Paideia and Ol'Norse heading up the Acura River toward T'sian.

Week 12 The Return, final submission...

To be home is a wonderful feeling.

Safe, comfortable, quietly happy. Thinking about all the people he met this term, what an adventure! The whole journey started to retrace in his mind. The Eternal Spring, The Wise Owls, Wabi Sabi, Joie Paideia, Statica Major, Alethia. This would take some time to think about.

Alethia, Joie, Ol'Norse, and Rupert all came over to Will's place for spring water tea. Will was so happy to talk with his friends and to have such interesting stories to tell.

As Will watched the sunset over T'sian Campus he was certain he would set out on another quest soon...





Tree of Life painting by Sheila Karrow





Illustrations by Lyra Kathleen Murphy
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