

The Circular Library of Stones

By Carol Emshwiller

4/30/01

They said all this wasn't true. That there had been no city on this site since even before the time of the Indians . . . that there had been no bridge across the (now dried up) river and no barriers against the mud. "If you have been searching for a library here," they said, "or for old coins, you've been wasting your time."

For lack of space I had put some of the small, white stones in plant baskets and hung them from the ceiling by the window. I don't argue with people about what nonexistent city could have existed at this site. I just collect the stones. (Two have Xs scratched on them, only one of which I scratched myself.) And I continue digging. The earth, though full of stones of all sizes, is soft and easy to deal with. Often it is damp and fragrant. And I disturb very little in the way of trees or plants of any real size here. Also most of the stones, even the larger ones, are of a size that I can manage fairly well by myself. Besides, mainly it's the stones that I want to reveal. I don't want to move them from place to place except some of the most important small ones, which I take home with me after a day's digging. Often I have found battered aluminum pots and pans around the site. Once I found an old boot and once, a pair of broken glasses; but these, of course, are of no significance whatsoever, being clearly of the present.

Gaining access to their books! If I could find the library and learn to read their writing! If I could find, there, stories beyond my wildest dreams. A love story, for instance, where the love is of a totally different kind . . . a kind of ardor we have never even thought of, more long-lasting than our simple attachments, more world-shaking than our simple sexualities. Or a literature that is two things at once, which we can only do in drawings, where a body might be, at one and the same time, a face in which the breasts also equal eyes, or two naked ladies sitting side by side, arms raised, that also forms a skull, their black hair the eye sockets.

For quite some time now I have had sore legs, so digging is an exercise I can do better than any other, and though at night my back pains me, the pains usually go away quite soon. By morning I hardly feel them. So the digging, in itself, pleases me. There is the pleasure of work. A day well spent. Go home tired and silent. But mostly, of course, it is the slow revelation of the stones that I care about. Sometimes they cluster in groups so that I think that here must have been where a fireplace was, or perhaps a throne. Sometimes they form a long row that I think might have been a wall or a bench. And I have found a mirror. Two feet underground, and so scratched that one can see oneself only in little fish-shaped flashes -- a bit of an eye, a bit of lip -- but for even that much of it to have been preserved all this time is a miracle. I feel certain that if they had a library, it's logical they would also have had mirrors. Or if they had mirrors, it certainly follows they could have had a library.

I keep the mirror with me in my breast pocket. (I wear a man's old fishing vest.) When people ask me what I'm doing out here, I show the mirror to them along with a few smooth stones.

At night I write. I shut my eyes and let my left hand move as it wishes. Usually it makes only scratchings, but at other times words come out. Once I wrote several pages of nothing but *no, no, no, no, no*, and after that, *on, on, on*, and *on*, but more and more often there are longer words now, and more and more often they are making some kind of sense. Yesterday, for instance, I found myself writing: *Let us do let us do and do and let us not be but do and you do too*. And then, and for the first time

[Frames ON](#)

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[Poison \(part 1 of 2\)](#)

by Beth Bernobich
1/20/03 *Our keepers, the scientists, had used complicated words like metamorphosis and hormones and camouflage to explain us. We could turn invisible, they'd said. We could change from male to female and back. Survival adaptations, they'd called it. I wondered if what Yenny did was for our survival.*

[Rushes #1 of 12: One Is All Alone](#)

by Jay Lake
1/20/03 *"So," says a voice of rattling leaves and creaking branches. "At last you return."*

[Interrupt](#)

by Jeff Carlson
1/13/03 *Whatever happened to the sun seems to be intensifying. This time I blacked out for at least five days.*

[L'Aquilone du Estrellas \(The Kite of Stars\)](#)

by Dean Francis Alfar, illustration by Hal Hefner
1/6/03 *He told her that such a kite was impossible, that there was no material immediately available for such an absurd undertaking, that there was, in fact, no design for a kite that supported the weight of a person.*

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