



THE LIMESTONE CATHEDRAL *When Summer Baptized Us*

Dana Wall

THAT SUMMER, THE ONE when heat shimmered above the pavement like spirits rising, we discovered the quarry. Not the municipal swimming hole with its concrete edges and lifeguard chair, but the abandoned limestone pit three miles beyond town limits where No Trespassing signs hung from rusted chains. Nature had begun to reclaim this manmade wound in the earth—columbine and wild clematis spilling over the edges, swallows carving homes into the highest stone faces—transforming human excavation into accidental sanctuary.

The journey required bicycles, determination, and the belief in hidden wonders that seems to flourish most vibrantly in the fertile soil of summer days. We were five: Ellie, with her sketchbook always in her backpack; Mark, who took black-and-white photographs with his father's old Pentax; the twins, Sara and Jacob, both devoted to classical piano but secretly writing folk songs on borrowed guitars; and me, the writer, always half-participating, half-observing, col-



lecting moments like river stones to be examined later in solitude.

The quarry revealed itself suddenly after a twisting path through dense woods—a perfect geometric void carved into the landscape filled with water so clear, and still it mirrored the sky with such precision that the boundary between above and below dissolved. It was as if we had discovered a rent in the fabric of the ordinary world, a glimpse into something both ancient and newborn.

“It’s like a cathedral,” Ellie whispered, her artist’s eye immediately recognizing the sacred geometry of the space—the vertical limestone walls rising like flying

buttresses, the perfect circle of sky above reflected in the water below creating a sphere, oldest symbol of wholeness.

Even Mark, usually quick with ironic commentary, fell silent. He raised his camera, then lowered it again, understanding instinctively that some moments resist being captured. “I want to remember how it feels, not just how it looks,” he said.

We stood at the edge, thirty feet above water that held the concentrated blue of summer skies. Layers of limestone formed horizontal bands in the quarry walls—geological strata representing millions of years of ancient seabeds, now exposed by human hands seeking building materials for temporary structures. The paradox wasn’t lost on us—how destruction had created this unexpected beauty, how absence had created space for presence.

“Who’s first?” Mark finally asked, breaking our collective trance.

None of us moved. We had come for this—the thrill of jumping, the temporary flight before water received us—but the reality of the height made us hesitate at the threshold.

“Together?” Sara suggested, her voice small against the vastness of the stone amphitheater surrounding us.

We formed a line at the lowest ledge, fifteen feet above the water, fingers linked in a human chain. The rock was warm beneath our bare feet, heat radiating through skin to bone. Ellie counted: “One . . . two . . .”

Before “three” could part her lips, Jacob pulled away, disrupting the chain. “I can’t,” he said, backing away from the edge, his face flushed with vulnerability.

We stood in suspended animation, our collective courage faltering. The day suddenly seemed to pivot on this moment—whether we would make the leap or retreat, whether summer would fulfill its promise of transformation or remain merely a succession of ordinary days.



Without discussion, Ellie sat down beside Jacob on the sun-warmed stone, her legs dangling over the edge. She opened her sketchbook and began drawing the view—not the panoramic vista, but the intimate details: a tiny fern growing from a crack in the limestone, the pattern of light on water, Jacob’s hand resting on the stone.

“Tell us about the water,” she said as she sketched.

Jacob looked confused.

“What do you think it feels like?” she clarified. “The quarry water. Not like the pool, right?”

He considered this. “Colder,” he said finally. “And . . . softer, maybe? No chemicals.”

Mark joined them, then Sara, then me, all of us sitting in a row like birds on a wire. “I bet it feels like falling through sky,” Mark offered. “Like you keep expecting to hit something solid, but you just keep going.”

“You know how in dreams sometimes you’re falling but you never land?” Sara said. “I think it’s like that, only you do land, but gently.”

We sat building the jump with words before our bodies would commit. The sun tracked across the sky, painting our shoulders pink, then red. Our voices echoed off limestone walls, bouncing back to us as if spoken by other versions of ourselves. Ellie’s pencil moved continuously across paper, capturing not just what she saw but what she heard and felt—the quality of light, the texture of anticipation.

When we finally stood again, the chain reformed naturally, our hands finding each other without hesitation. This time Mark counted, his deep voice steady: “One . . . two . . . three!”

We leaped as a single organism, five bodies momentarily suspended against gravity’s insistence. For a brilliant fragment of time, we inhabited the space between earth and water,

between intention and consequence, between the about-to-be-known and the known. Sunlight struck the limestone walls, transforming ordinary rock into amber cathedrals.

The water, when it received us, was exactly as we had described it: cold, soft, dreamlike in its embrace. We surfaced spluttering and laughing, transformed by the simple courage of surrender. For the rest of that afternoon, we claimed the quarry as our kingdom, diving deep to touch the smooth stone bottom where sunlight filtered through in rippling patterns, floating on our backs to watch clouds morph from dragons to ships to faces and back again.

Later, as the sun began its slow surrender to evening, we lay drying on flat rocks still radiating the day’s heat, our skin tightening with evaporation, hair drying in wild patterns. The quality of light changed, golden hour transforming the limestone from white to honey. Ellie showed us her sketches—not just the quarry as it appeared to the eye, but as it had registered in her deeper perception: a place where the boundary between the material and something more mysterious dissolved.

“It’s like we’ve been baptized,” Sara said quietly, watching light dance across the water’s surface. Though none of us were particularly religious, we understood what she meant—the sense of having been immersed in something larger than ourselves, of emerging changed in ways we couldn’t yet articulate.

That was the summer we learned to see in a deeper sense—not just the mechanics of light on retinas, but the more essential perception that recognizes the sacred within the ordinary, the art within nature, the infinite contained within finite forms. The quarry became our teacher, the place where we practiced paying attention.

We returned often, though not every day. Summer intervened with family obligations and the mundane necessities that adults insisted took precedence over communion with

abandoned quarries. But we went often enough that the path through the woods became worn smooth by our bicycle tires and bare feet, often enough that Mark captured the changing light on film, Ellie filled a sketchbook, the twins composed a song using the natural acoustics of the space, and I filled pages with observations that seemed inadequate to the experience but necessary to attempt nonetheless.

Now, decades later, when summer arrives with its particular quality of light and air, I return to the quarry in memory. The physical place has long since been filled in, sacrificed to the town’s expansion, buried beneath a housing development where sprinkler systems create pale imitations of natural water cycles. But in my mind, it remains intact—a hidden cathedral of stone and light where five young artists discovered the thin membrane between the visible world and what lies beneath or beyond it.

On the hottest days of summer, I can still feel that moment of suspension before gravity claims you, when your body exists in perfect equilibrium between earth and sky. That singular moment when time expands to accommodate wonder, when ordinary perception gives way to something more profound—the gift that summer offers those willing to leap. ●

