

a concordance of one's life

People used to come to see the water fall. Today they see nothing out there. They study their little paperbacks, all identical, their covers a pleasing blue and the four hundred-odd pages a phonebook yellow. Their spines are curled and flimsy. Not the peoples' spines, their paperbacks', although the people are spineless too. Tourists in sweatpants and cheap plastic visors and disposable windbreakers. Eyes eagerly darting over the pages of their books, desperate for a new clue to solve its unsolvable puzzle, desperate for a revelation, a key to open the lock they're not even sure exists. That damn book, they tote it along on their pilgrimages here. Names and places and sub-entries underlined, annotated, diagrammed, and deconstructed. Black pen lines swoop across the paper like chalkboard football plays. Furious penciled marginalia take up the rest of the space. The most glorious waterfall in the county park system cascades before them and they've got their noses down inside a book, oblivious to the fury not ten feet from their faces.

FOGGY FALLS: 249, 251, 276-278, 302-365, 416, 424.

SEE ALSO: VIRGINITY (LOSS OF) /

SUICIDE (CONSIDERED) / SWIMMING

LESSONS (SUMMER 1982) / SWIMMING

LESSONS (SUMMER 1983) / PARKER, KERRI

Some don't read. They listen. Not to the falls. To the TourPhone wands. Four dollars per day plus your driver's license or passport as deposit. Why anyone would steal a TourPhone beats me. They're keyed to the wireless stations hidden throughout our township and the county park. These industrial steel canisters are stashed under shrubs, chainlocked to phone booths, and bolted to streetlights. One canister's even hidden under the statue of James Marshall in our town square. Pilgrims from across the world walk and muse over the stations of Arthur

Lyman Buford's tragicomic life.

With the TourPhones to their ears, they study the fig tree where in high school he penned a daily journal. They circle the bus stop he waited at every morning, and visit the house where he received piano lessons on Thursdays. They huddle outside Dee-lite Donuts with mouths open in tender awe. Through the store window they eyeball the seat he occupied on and off over four years' time, drinking coffee and typing his memoirs into his notebook computer. Our town library exhibits in its reserve room, under glass, the copy of *Cruden's Bible Concordance* Arthur Buford serendipitously discovered one rainy afternoon. But the most-visited spot, by far, the holy of holies, is the bungalow he rented in his adult years.

368 1/2 HIDDEN LANE: 404-406, 410, 412, 414-425. SEE ALSO: MAIN LIBRARY / CRUDEN'S CONCORDANCE / BERGEN, FREIDA (LANDLADY) / CONCORDANCE OF ONE'S LIFE, A (AUTHORSHIP OF) / PARKER, KERRI

It was at 368 1/2 Hidden Lane that he indexed his memoirs and created *A Concordance of One's Life*, "a breathtaking achievement," according to the *New York Times Review of Books*, a "mind-blowing . . . literary tour de force," says *Kirkus Review*, a "book promising . . . to rearrange the very future of American literature," assures *Newsweek*. It was on *The New York Times'* bestseller list for forty-two consecutive weeks and is in its fifth printing. Maybe you've heard of it. I sure as hell have.

* * *

The family who waddles into Golden Dragon is fat as anything, all four of them sweaty from the morning heat. Their matching Aloha shirts are soaked through in all the same spots. Chi-Tung greets them with four menus fanned out in his right hand. Exhausted, they follow him, sipping their Big Gulps all the

way from the door to table twelve. Why not bring your own food in here, too? We don't mind.

The minute it takes for them to examine the lunch menu is a minute of pure dread for me. More tourists, ugly and rude and full of halitosis. The kid's not even studying the menu; he's fascinated with his copy of the *Concordance*. Headphones vine up from the daughter's personal CD player into her ears. She's probably listening to Artie Buford narrate the audio book. She's hypnotized by the same baritone he flaunted in high school drama club. He played the Puritan leader in their production of *The Crucible*. That voice: affected, gravelly low, steeped in self-importance, as phony as an election. Here, maybe this is what she's hearing this very moment:

"Golden Dragon Restaurant," Artie intones. "Pages fifty-six through fifty-seven, one hundred one, one hundred twelve through fifteen. See also Chang comma Chi-Tung slash Parker comma Kerri."

Or maybe:

"Crucible comma The open-parens high school production of close-parens. Pages eighty-eight through ninety. See also Miller comma Arthur open-parens letter to close-parens slash Parker comma Kerri."

When I arrive with my order pad the family's buzzing over their day's discoveries in town. The father notices on the menu that Golden Dragon has its own TourPhone QuoteSpot near the greeter's station. They'll have to stop and listen on the way out.

"Maybe we'll see him today?" the son asks.

"Of course not," the mother says. "Arthur Lyman Buford lives in New York City now."

"I can take your order."

"But maybe we'll see Kerri Parker," the mother says.

"I hear she's *beautiful*." The daughter swoons as much as a fat little girl can swoon.

"I see you already have something to drink," I say. "May I suggest an appetizer?"

“When do we go to Foggy Falls?” the son says. “I wanna go today. I wanna, wanna, wanna.”

The mother recites like a tape player: “Foggy Falls, pages two forty-nine, two fifty-one, two seventy-six through—hey.” She looks up at me. “You’re not Chinese!”

Which is something I noticed this morning when I was shaving.

“I can take your order if you’re ready.”

“This is a Chinese food place, right?” She twists her neck to peer around, perhaps for the first time taking in the restaurant. The Chinese ideograms on the walls, the Oolong tea on their table, the Buddha surrounded by lit votives and rotting oranges—how could this place be mistaken for anything else?

Chi-Tung and his family have been in Hidden for twenty years or so. Their restaurant is a town fixture. Hidden is in Gold Country south of Sacramento, way off of Highway 49. About a thousand people live here, not counting the shotgun-waving hermits in the foothills. When the tourist business rocketed after the *Concordance* was published, Chi-Tung had to hire people fast, Chinese or not.

Once I assure the family that, no worries, I may not be Chinese but the food is, they order six plates and pork fried rice. The father asks if I can hurry with that, as they have a tour in thirty minutes. I tell them I’ll put in a rush order, but I won’t.

The mother catches me before I leave. “This is our third visit to Hidden. This time we’re here especially to study the *Mystery of the Denouement*.” She fumbles the French, of course. Whispering to prove the secret will go no further than the four of them, she asks, “Do you know where the *Denouement* happened? See, I think it’s page four twenty-four, at Foggy Falls, but this woman on the Internet insists—”

“I can tell you,” I say, “but only if you keep it to yourselves.”

“Of course, of course!” The whole family leans in.

“The secret is . . . there is no denouement. No climax, no falling action, no trailing exposition, nothing. Art’s

autobiography just stops.”

They fall back, stunned, but soon it's laughs all around. “That's preposterous,” the mother says, waving me off.

“Oh no,” I say. “I've studied the *Concordance* extensively.”

“But there has to be a denouement! How can you end a story without one? Hey . . . you're just funning with us, aren't you?”

I grin back idiotically and shrug a false admission, only because I'm working for tips. I drop off their order in the kitchen and take a minute in one corner for a breather. My chest feels buckled-up. My ribs feel bruised. I get like this whenever I deal with yet another gaggle of tourists. Waiters stream in and out through the swinging doors. We all wear red porter's vests and bow ties, like we're damn bellhops. Sharp Cantonese slices through the air here. The sizzle of the woks and the clatter of knives, the smell of eggy fried rice—everything about this place muddies my head.

Chi-Tung pulls me aside, clearing my stupor. He's wearing a blue suit with faint pinstripes and an American flag tie. He looks like he's prepared to kiss every baby in Hidden before the first Tuesday this coming November.

“We got rush today, Mike,” he says. “Don't spend so much time with the customers. Get orders and go. Your first week, so you're learning.”

“Sorry, C.T.”

“No C.T.! I'm Chi-Tung.”

“Sorry, Chi-Tung.”

“Not Chi-'Tung'. Listen and say it. Chi-Tung.”

Okay. “Chi-Tung.”

“No! Not Chi-'Tung'. Chi-*Tung*.”

“Chi-Tung.”

“Listen, listen.” He grasps my upper arms and elucidates with lips and teeth. “Chi. You say it. Chi.”

“Chi.”

Anticipation makes him glow. “Tung.”

“Tung.”

“Not ‘Tung’. *Tung*.”

“Tung.”

The glow fades.

I say, “Maybe I should just call you C.T.”

“Listen, Mike. My brother is Dennis. His wife, Pearl. Children are Heather, Brittany, and Brooklyn. Makes me so mad. If they forget where they come from, everyone else will too. I don’t change my name. I learn your name. You learn mine.” Still gripping me, he squeezes misplaced confidence into my arteries. “Chi-Tung.”

I’m going to blow it. It’s a lost cause. I need this job and it all rides on the minutia of another language’s inflections. My mouth is as dry as a British novel of manners.

“Chi-Tung.”

Time skips a beat. Maybe I did it. Maybe I tripped and stumbled into the end-zone, ball in hand, for the winning touchdown. Me, the World’s Towel Boy, single-handedly carrying the team on to the State Championships. But no. Chi-Tung releases my arms with thick disappointment and a slight *ga* under his breath.

He says, “You do better tomorrow.”

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Finally the lunch crowd ebbs back onto the streets of our little town. Chi-Tung asks if I’ll come back for the dinner rush around six. It’s a summer Saturday and he expects a full house. I’ve got nothing else going on, so I tell him why not.

I live three blocks away, but it’s too early to go home, too easy to dungeon myself in my bedroom, so I detour for the Nugget Club. A hand-scrawled sign is taped to the door under the “No Minors Allowed” warning. The paper’s crispy and warped by the seasons:

NO TOURS
NO TOUR FONES
NO CORDANCES
STRICTLY ENFORCED

The Nugget Club is a dark hole not much wider than its front door. A brown Formica bar and padded stools run all the way back to the co-ed john. Old Spice and the staleness of yesterday's popcorn lingers in the air along with forty years of cigarette smoke. Milt's behind the bar leaning on the liquor cabinet. Frank's on a stool at the other end working on a can of Budweiser.

I belly up to the bar. "How about one of those fancy beers you pour in a cold glass."

Milt nods and draws me one from the tap.

When the effervescing lager glass stands before me, I announce, "Got me a job."

Milt points at my bellhop uniform with his chin. "Golden Dragon?"

"Better than being a tour guide."

"Congratulations. Means you can buy the bartender a drink."

Actually, I hoped it meant the other way around, but I pay for mine and a can of beer for him. The three of us partake.

Milt wipes the froth from his trim mustache. "Hey, maybe you've got a perspective. You went to high school around here, right?"

The hell? "I lived here my whole life! Class of '88!"

"Me too, '88. And Frank was, what, '86?"

Frank affirms it with a tip of his can.

"See, Frank thinks Art Buford messed up," Milt says. "He wrote the Big Game happening way out in Jackson, not here in Hidden."

Milt reaches behind the cash register. Dear God, not today, not here, not now—he fishes forth a tattered copy of the *Concordance*. How many bar bets it's settled, how many

arguments it's provoked, I have no idea. Milt butterflies it before me on the countertop.

"Right here," he says. "Look how he describes the Big Game."

BIG GAME, THE: 93-99.

SEE ALSO: HIDDEN BUGLE, THE (SCHOOL NEWSPAPER) / BURG, JEROME (BUGLE ADVISOR) / JACKSON, CALIFORNIA (BUS RIDE TO) / "TRUE ARM" TRUDY (TRUDY, MICHAEL) / PARKER, KERRI

"Artie Buford screwed up," Frank says, smug.

"Yeah, well, he's a millionaire today," Milt says.

"Yeah, well, only because no one would publish his memoirs," I say back.

"Smart guy is what he is," Milt says. "I mean, shit. Spends four years writing his life story. Makes a concordance out of it. Destroys the first book and now he's ass-up in money! Everyone on the planet's making timelines and charts and shit. People writing all those books with their theories and maps."

"And that television special," Frank adds.

"It's like solving a crossword puzzle as big as a football field," Milt says. "All because everyone wants to figure out what Art wrote in that first book."

There's no joy in this particular glass of beer. "No," I say, "he's rich because his memoirs were a steaming pile of self-indulgence that no publisher would dare print. And *this* steaming pile's not even a concordance. It's an index, all dolled-up to look hip and postmodern. That's why they published it."

"Dumbo, it says it right here." Milt stabs at the cover. "Concordance? Why would he call it that if it wasn't that?"

"Because 'An Index of One's Life' doesn't sound as cool."

Frank butts in. "Hell, call it 'The Table of Contents of My Life', Buford screwed up! He's got himself riding home from

the game in the bus with Kerri. The Big Game was here in Hidden, not Jackson! I was there!”

“We were all there,” I murmur.

“Good ol’ Trudy passed, what, hundred and twenty yards?”

“Forty,” Milt says. “Hundred forty.”

“Runs the ball in for a T.D. with four seconds on the clock—”

“Brilliant quarterbacking.”

“—and there’s Artie Buford up in the stands making time with Trudy’s girlfriend!”

“Trudy clocked him good.”

“Yeah, but Artie got Kerri Parker!” Frank shakes his head appreciatively. His nicotine-stained grin glows in the jukebox’s black light. “He sure got the best girl in this town. But he screwed up that entry, sure as shit, and I figured it out first. Should be a reward or something if there’s any justice.”

“God dammit all!” I swipe the *Concordance* from Milt. I’ve been in and out of this book, or one like it, for years now. My fingers knead the pages with a dour familiarity. They find Trudy’s entry in short order. “Right here, you dolts. Trudy rode *back* to Jackson with the other team after the game because his cousin was . . .” I follow a see-also reference, skim backwards through the book, overshoot, and bristle forward a half-dozen pages or so. “*Mark Messeridge*, Jackson’s kicker, who told Trudy there was a kegger going on out there—” I scan the sub-entries running down the page. “But when word got around the bus to Trudy that Kerri had been necking with Art, Trudy hitchhiked back and found them at the . . .” Flip, flip, flip. “*Tastee-Freeze*, where he clocked Art in the right eye and busted up his knee, and Art and Kerri limped into Hidden Medical ER,” fan back a hundred pages, “where she holds his hand in the waiting room and he asks her to the Winter Formal and, of course, their love blossoms and the music swells and the camera goes soft and the confetti flies, and soon they’re fucking their brains out like spring rabbits.”

I toss the *Concordance* at Milt. He catches it against his gut with one hand, eyeing me warily. Frank has turned his back to me. It's hot in here now. This place smells of monkey sweat. I wash down half my beer and throw a tip on the bar and get up. Visible through the front door's porthole is a guide and a cluster of tourists. I can't face Milt and Frank now, not after all that, so I plow into the swinging door and elbow through the mob.

Their TourPhones, all tuned to the same QuoteSpot, amplify the narrator's voice. The nonsense mosquitoes my ears. "Nugget Club comma The. Pages two hundred eleven, three hundred sixty through sixty-one, four hundred, four hundred two through four hundred three. See also Johanssen comma Milton slash Beck comma Franklin slash Karaoke night slash Parker comma Kerri. (Ding.) Johanssen comma Milton. Pages one hundred twelve . . ."

Entranced, the mob pays no attention to me. I push free and jaywalk to make my escape. Behind me the guide announces, "The Nugget Club was the second candidate to resolve the Mystery of the Denouement. Today it's considered a Minor Complication, and some experts have proposed demoting it to a Setting or even a Memesis Requirement. Either way, it's established that the Denouement did *not* happen here. Did *not* happen here. Okay, now, we're walking, we're walking, we're walking . . ."

* * *

I can't make my hand twist the knob of the front door. Inside are my parents, semi-retired, watching television or cooking lunch or napping. There will be questions and insinuations. They'll ask about my new job, and Chi-Tung. They'll want to know if I work with any single women.

My bedroom is a meager oasis. Just my bed and a Tandy stereo and a wall of books. Austen and Donne, Swift and Dryden, Tennyson, Blake, the books no one seems to read unless a term paper is due. My Norton anthologies fill the bottom shelf,

their pages marked and highlighted with care, my only souvenirs from nine quarters of English lit at Amador Community College. I have a few copies of *Penthouse* and *Playboy* stashed in my dresser, but I'm not in the mood. I can't even open the window and enjoy the afternoon air. A QuoteSpot is across the street. I can see it from my bed. Even now, tourists are milling around it to hear page numbers and see-also references. Artie was challenged to a fight there. Ray McKinnon, I think, and his jock friends. Something about Artie acting like he was better than everyone else in town. It's only a Foreshadowing, but the completists want to visit everything.

All the talk at The Nugget Club about Kerri Parker left me with an itch. Unlike the family at the restaurant, I know where to find her. The hospital's only six or seven blocks from my house, a fair walk in the heat but there's nothing else to do, so off I go. When I finally make it through the automatic doors, I'm winded and sweaty. I rinse my face and neck with cold water in the lavatory and return to the waiting area refreshed.

I take my usual seat in the rear corner beside a tall potted shrub. Through its branches and leaves I have a wide view of the admissions desk and three arterial hallways. A few other people are scattered about the lobby, some alone, some with kids. Here no one asks about Denouements and Complications and Expositions. They're sick and need help. That's why it's so comfortable here. And if I wait long enough, I'll get to see Kerri Parker again.

After exhausting the magazines piled up on the table, the only reading material left is a beaten copy of the *Concordance*, its pages limp and feathery. Taped across its laminated front cover is a white tag: "DO NOT REMOVE FROM LOBBY." I want to put it down but I can't help myself. It's like a bowl of salty nuts. All I can do is flip to an entry and scan it and follow a see-also reference. Scan and follow, scan and follow, a maze with a billion intersections and no way out. What would Shakespeare think of our literature, or Milton, or Dr. Johnson? Will this crap one day stain the canon? I'm so sick, I toss it aside and slump back in the chair.

There she is—Kerri Parker in a nurse’s uniform, a pink top and crisp white slacks. My aching heart nearly explodes into a juicy mess. She’s hardly changed since high school. Her hair’s different and some lines have taken residency around her eyes, but she’s still lithe and posture-perfect and gorgeous. Usually when I spot her she’s hurrying from one wing to another, some errand of great importance. She’ll have a chart in one hand, or be pushing a cart of medicine and bottle-warmers.

But, strangely, she’s making her way through the waiting area. She goes from person to person, bending at the waist and speaking a soft question. When they shake their head, she moves on to the next person and asks again. Then she’s standing before me. Only now do I remember I’m still in my bellhop costume, looking like a fool.

“Excuse me,” she says. “Are you Anthony Madalitch?”

All I can do in my paralysis is shake my head once.

“Excuse me then,” she says, and begins to leave.

Wait. *Madalitch?*

“Don’t you know who I am?” I say.

She halts and tilts her head to consider me, but only for a moment. “Are you from around here?”

Something vital in me pops, maybe my heart. “I, ah... I *live* here in Hidden.”

“Oh! But did you go to school here?”

Such a sincere, questioning look on her finely crafted face, so tender, and I want to retch.

“Kerri, I went to high school with you for four years. I introduced you to Artie Buford. At the Big Game.”

“Really?” She frowns and tilts her head again, once more considering me, but only for a moment. “I don’t remember that. Did you change your hair or something?”

“We were on a date. I met you at the stadium. We were supposed to go to the Tastee-Freeze afterwards.” I planned to ask her to the Winter Formal.

“Was it a date, or just a . . . you know, a thing?”

“A date, a thing, hell, what do words mean these days,

anyway? You'd just broken up with Trudy. Your best friend confessed to you that she'd slept with him." A weariness gushes into my head. "Check the *Concordance*. You went to the Big Game to get back at Trudy, only I didn't know that. I knew Art though, from English class. I introduced you to him. I went to the concession to get you a brick of pink popcorn. When I got back you and Art were macking. Out comma making, open-parens first base close-parens." See also nuts comma kick in the.

Kerri glances about the lobby with faint embarrassment on her face. Apparently my voice has risen to unacceptable levels. "I don't know what to tell you," she says. "I'm sorry."

I'm sorry. An apology. No, an apology telling me to quit making a scene. An apology implying I'm at fault here. We drain our language the way we drained our swamps two hundred years ago.

With a curt smile and a nod, she signals we're done conversing and moves on to the next person. She doesn't need to worry about tourists bothering her. She's not Kerri Parker any longer. Her name tag reads "Trudy, K." She married the quarterback. Art wasn't crushed. By then, he had his fame and his millions.

Before I exit through the automatic doors, I hear her asking the next guy if he's Anthony Madalitch. Instead of a simple no, he whispers, "What the heck was all that about?" I don't want to hear her answer. I never want to see her again. I hope I'm never hospitalized. Even if I am, she won't remember me.

It's the only mention of the hospital in the *Concordance*.

CITY OF HIDDEN MEDICAL HOSPITAL: 102-104. SEE ALSO: BERSON, DR. GEAORGE / TASTEE-FREEZE (BIG GAME FIGHT) / PARKER, KERRI

The Denouement did not happen here.

* * *

Golden Dragon's early-bird special has attracted a retirement home's worth of elderly. The food and tea cannot arrive at the tables fast enough. Chi-Tung waves me to the kitchen and hands me an order pad.

"Table two, Mike," he says over the din. "They've been waiting!"

"Chi-Tung, could you please—"

"Chi-Tung!" His necktie's lost its snap and his hair's frayed at the ends. Six hours of nattering tourists has worked its toll. "Chi-Tung! I say your name. Mike. Mike. Easy. Mike. Now say mine."

"Goddammit my name's not Mike!"

The clatter in the kitchen scrapes to a halt. The conversation at the tables subsides. Faces from all directions bob toward me: tourists, cooks, porter vests. Beer-drinkers, TourPhone listeners, old people with thick eyeglasses. Parents with tour guides in their hands and children with noodles hanging from their mouths. The calm sustains for only a few moments before the roar returns.

"You're not Mike?" Chi-Tung produces the *Concordance* from a vest pocket. He thumbs it searching for an entry. "You're Mike!"

I have no idea how he got this in his head. "I'm not Mike Trudy. I am not 'True Arm' Trudy open-parens Trudy comma Michael close-parens. Trudy was our star quarterback. Do I look like a star quarterback? Or even a football player?"

"But I told people. Quarterback serving my food." He thoughtfully closes the book. "So . . . who are you?"

He offers me the *Concordance* to locate myself. I take it from him gently and turn the pages one at a time. Precise Chinese ideograms take up some space in the margins, but Chi-Tung's copy is pristine compared to most. I moisten my finger when the pages begin to stick, but my tongue's dry. There's nothing gained by pretending. I shut the book and return it to

him. He needs only a moment to realize. When he does, it comes with a faint sucking of breath and a slight *ga* of comprehension.

“Even if you’re not in the book, you have a place here,” he says. “But maybe you don’t work tonight. You don’t look so good. We can handle the rush. Take it easy. Take some time off. Clear your head tonight.”

I turn around two or three times trying to direct myself to the front door. Chi-Tung assists me, placing an understanding hand on the small of my back. The floor skews and jostles. My inner gyroscope’s loopy. Chi-Tung guides me forward.

“You go on home and rest,” he says.

I shake my head. It’s not healthy there.

“Then do something for yourself tonight,” he says. “But, you be here tomorrow, right?”

I’m wondering that myself. I trudge through the field of oxblood vinyl booths and teacups and spinning lazy Susans. I feel the pressure of all their eyes, the tourists and the waiters and the people I went to school with, all their eyes bearing down on me, but I’m not sure they really see.

* * *

The tour bus charges sixteen dollars for the full package. The ticket stub doubles as a Tastee-Freeze coupon. Buy one Big Game Shake and get one of equal or lesser value free. When we leave the curb, every seat on the bus is taken. The reek of Bengay and diaper shit hangs in the air. I’m the only person without a *Concordance*. My copy’s at home, on my bed stand, as well-worn as everyone else’s.

Over the span of three hours, our tour visits all the Major and Minor Complications, most of the Reversals and the Epiphanies, two Flashbacks, and even an Exposition. We stop at all eight candidates for the Mystery of the Denouement.

Long ago, so young, I steered my dirt bike down Hidden’s thoroughfares. Winding down the streets, the crisp

mountain chill raced over my skin. We never had a true summer, always a frosty bite in the air. It reminded you that you were alive, only existing moment to moment. Today it's stop-and-go traffic and amplified recordings blaring from tour buses. It's hot as almighty Hell from the crowds and their exhaust pipes and their untamed halitosis. We have graffiti now. When I was a kid, I thought graffiti was an Italian dessert.

At the county park we exit the tour bus and troop through the pines. Gold miners carved this dirt path one hundred and fifty years ago using only pack mules and their own two feet. Mrs. Moreland, my fourth grade teacher, taught us Foggy Falls was a dead place. The miners had robbed the pool of all its gold. They cut away all the foliage and scarred the cliffs with tunnels and trenches. She said they stripped it of its worth and left nothing of value for future generations. Today you're charged \$6 to see it, \$2.50 for children and senior citizens, \$4 for students with ID. Staggered pricing for an experience of a lifetime.

We stand shoulder-to-shoulder behind the guard chain fencing the observation deck. The pale blue river parachutes off the cliff high above and smashes down into the pool below. A fine mist clouds the observation deck and envelops us whole. It dusts eyeglasses and soaks the pages of note-ridden *Concordances*. TourPhones emerge from purses and backpacks. Somebody chants with the QuoteSpot narrator: "Foggy Falls, pages two hundred forty-nine, two hundred fifty-one, two hundred seventy-six through two hundred seventy-eight . . ." More join in.

I edge away from the mantras and the nodding until the fog makes me invisible. It's a simple matter to step over the guard chain and curl one's toes over the edge. The fog's thick enough to conceal one's trespasses. Down in the pool, creamy water folds in on itself and foams to the surface, a volatile mushroom cap concealing the jagged rocks below that knifed up so many gold miners a century and a half ago. The cream of the water obscures the turbulence that tumbles a body about like a mischievous boy

passing a dirt clod between his hands.

What would one see looking up through the water? Pilgrims pointing down and shouting for help? Or eyes reverently upward, chanting page numbers and see-also references, unaware? Or maybe nothing but the carbonation of chaos?

A voice in the fog says, "I don't think the Denouement happened here."