

# The Prairie Light Review

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Volume 29  
Number 2 *Further Reflections*

Article 55

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4-1-2009

## A Chance Lost

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### Recommended Citation

Wysopal, Bryan (2009) "A Chance Lost," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 29: No. 2, Article 55.  
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol29/iss2/55>

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# A Chance Lost

Bryan Wysopal

Like many remembered summer days, this one was sweetly scented and soothingly warm. A young boy, clad in everyday clothing befitting of an average eight year old, but wearing an out of place, blue hat of an indescribable nature, armed with a knapsack full of strange and useless contents (including a sandwich) and a walking stick just barely taller than himself which he referred to as a “staff,” closed the door to his home and stepped into the warmth and promise of a new morning.

Though cars passed on the street and power tools buzzed and clamored all about the neighborhood, the boy did not take much notice. His mind was on other places as he crossed the yard via the lawn, ignoring the convenience of the sidewalk so graciously laid out for him by higher hands. Today was *adventure day!* He continued on beneath the glowing, tsavorite canopy of a tree that has long since died and been removed from the front yard, and headed north.

The best place to start adventuring was the park of course, just down and across the street; an infinitely malleable location, always suited to the needs of whatever fantasy required a stage. And there he found himself, crossing the little ditch which separated the orderly, paved road from the tracts of wild lands, stepping on a large, flat rock out of habit, and entering the wide, wide world.

In those days, it was easy for one to dismiss the tennis and basketball courts next to the brightly colored playground, and the general riff-raff who crawled over the lawns, the trees and the single, dominating hill like ants on discarded fruit. Today, the boy’s mindset was perfect, just the right amount of *belief* was working his eyes away from earthly, man-made modern things and shifting his gaze to all those more elusive that dwelt beneath the obvious surfaces.

At the back of the park, on the northernmost edge, there stood many trees which comprised the bulk of what was then simply called *the woods* (sometimes it had more specific names, but this was its general title). Here was where the white, gravelly, stone road which cut the park in twain met the shadows of the thickest trees—the outer wall of the woods, and here was where the boy came to a halt before two tall birch trees and decided that it had been an arduous journey thus far and the time was ripe to turn his attention to the aforementioned sandwich.

The spot was inconspicuous enough, much like the entire wood itself, and there was nothing outstanding about it. The trees were normal, there were people about, and no one at all took note of the young boy who sat chewing a hastily constructed sandwich and scrutinizing a pair of tall birch trees, whose black and white charcoal trunks looked, to his eyes, curiously like a door. Ignoring the summer riff-raff buzzing all around him, he finished his sandwich quickly, stood, and passed between the trunks without ceremony.

Perhaps it was mere imagination, of which a young boy is never short, but something was incongruous and deviant from his expectations upon emergence on the other side. For the entirety of his life he had explored and adventured in

this park, he had not really expected there to be *an other side*. This was not the place he had expected to find himself upon passing twixt the birches—of course he had never thought to pass between these two particular trees before.

What met his gaze was a glade whose walls and overhanging ceiling completely shut out the surrounding park. Patches of red, purple, yellow and green dotted the ground in the form of various flowers and clover forests. While not particularly unnatural of the woods at the back of the park in those bygone years to resemble at least a *small* forest, the boy felt oddly as though he was somewhere very *vast*. He was quite positive as well, that this place could not physically be contained within the little wood given his formidable knowledge of its twists and turns, at least not without having been discovered before. What is more, there was a distinct sound of water in motion coming from some undefined source! So here he stood, in a place for which he had absolutely no recognition, nor memory of, surrounded by flowers that he was sure could not be there, and beset by the sound of moving water of which he was positive the park had none! To his left and straight ahead, there was a pile of sticks that appeared to have been stacked by animals. He attributed this to the “beavers” (which were actually woodchucks) that inhabited the park in those days, and it was from beyond this “dam” that the sound of moving water seemed to be emanating, although it was rather directionless.

This moment absolutely sang with the song of something important and out of the ordinary, yet the young adventurer made no attempt to explore this place. He was hesitant. *Perhaps I should not be here*. He thought to himself. *Perhaps I was not meant to see this*. His imaginative mind convinced him, after the space of what could not have been more than a few minutes that it was time to leave, and without having stepped more than two paces beyond the threshold, he turned back and disappeared through the birch-trunk doorway and left the weird glade behind.

That night, after a day of adventuring elsewhere, the young boy returned home having found nothing of equal or greater interest than the strange glade between the birch trees.

As he settled into bed, sleepy, aromatic summer air gently puffing though his window, causing his curtains to fill and fall like sails, the boy resolved that he would have to go back. He did not know why he had left without exploring more thoroughly, and he could not explain to himself why he had not gone back at some point later in the day. But now, as his eyelids became uncontrollably heavy and he drifted off to even more intangible worlds, he was positive that there was something not to be missed. He would return to the birches on the morrow.

The following day began like its predecessor, with the selective discrimination of memory, which rules out mosquitoes, excessive humidity and heat, leaving only the golden radiance and fragrant, breezy purity of the ideal summer day. The boy was once again up in arms and passing by yet more landmarks and bits of the old neighborhood long since lost to time, on his errand of mystery. Once again, he passed over concrete and dirt, over the threshold of the park, across the

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big flat stone, past the tennis and basketball courts next to the playground and the big, towering hill with its trees and slopes, until he came again to the edge of the woods and stood beneath the shadowy heights of the tall, plain birch trees.

This was it. The idea crossed his mind that if this were something out of the ordinary, something truly different, and if he were not supposed to bear witness to it like he had considered was the case, he may be punished. (The dividing wall between reality and fantasy is so incredibly transparent when one is a child!) Resigning himself to whatever fate awaited him and experiencing a strange tingling sensation—a mixture of nervousness and brewing excitement perhaps, which began in his middle and quickly spread all throughout his body, he straightened his funny little hat, adjusted his grip on his staff, took a breath, and left the glowing morning behind as he passed between the trunks once more.

He could hardly believe his eyes. The glade was still there, out of place as ever, only now...it was dead. Where flowers and clover had been, all was withered and brown, the splendid, though earthly colors had given way to an even more earthly shade of umber which permeated all that the boy could see. The “dam” was still there, but nearly invisible among the rest of the drained flora, and the sound of running water was nowhere to be heard. It was gone.

More shocked and confused than anything else, the boy looked around perhaps thrice then backed out, his mind racing all the while, attempting to understand the implications, the reality of his hidden glade. He left then, not so much sad as introspective, and went home without further distraction. His adventures for the day were done, nearly as quickly as they had begun.

Years later, through a series of renovations which culminated in more harm than good (though the renovators would argue otherwise), the woods at the north end of the park was destroyed, bulldozed to the ground by private interest, and the birches were lost forever, as was the glade, which never showed itself again, in any case. Of course, the boy never thought to go looking for it again. Or, perhaps he did return, only to find what he had first expected: tangled thicket and thorny briar, something far more suited to the laws of logic in place of the remains of the hidden glade. Whatever the truth, the boy resigned himself to the knowledge that he had seen something, of what nature he could never be sure, and as he grew, he decided that perhaps it was best that way.