The Canyon

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"As I start out on the trail, I can feel the heat of the sun, even at this early hour. It is sure to be a day of rising temperatures, and the city dwellers will probably all head to the beach. The drive on the expressway was quiet - there weren't many cars headed in this direction. This place is virtually empty, and the solitude is a welcome companion."

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I take my time walking my usual route. Soon I am in the woods. I am greeted by the cool shade provided by the canopy of the many tall trees. These trees must be a few hundred years old. I wonder how many people have walked this trail before me? It’s a relaxing walk. I hear scurrying in the brush and realize I have disturbed some raccoons who thought they were alone in the forest. I hope my presence hasn’t interrupted anything important.

I move on. There are signs of forest life everywhere. My ears tune in to the subtle buzzing and humming of insects. I hear the shaking of the leaves and branches as birds land, and once again take flight. The sound of my own breathing is the only foreign noise in this natural community.

The trail is gradually beginning to slope. The terrain gets steep in this area, and I begin my descent carefully. As I move toward the bottom I can hear the rush of the river and the gentle whisper of the waterfalls. The river is running high - the rain has been relentless for weeks. This makes the waterfalls more abundant in their splendor. As I get closer, I can almost feel the waterfall’s mist gently kiss my brow- although I can not yet see it.

I reach the bottom of the trail and take a deep breath. This is the absolute crescendo of my journey; resting my eyes upon this landscape instills a calm inside of me; an elusive feeling that is impossible to achieve elsewhere. I haven’t been here in a while, and my return is a soothing remedy for the trivial stresses that have been polluting my soul.

The river’s shore consists of large slabs of shale that have been long weathered to a cool gray. Across the river is a cliff much taller than the one I just climbed down. To the right- and the top of the river, the water comes rushing down, hurrying toward its ultimate destination, which is a mammoth waterfall that drops to about thirty feet below, where it will continue its endless journey.

The gorge is vast and deep. Its cavernous walls reverberate even the gentle sound of the water’s rush. If I were to shout, there would surely be a tremendous echo. But I do not want even the sound of my own voice to interrupt the stillness. It is almost perfect in its tranquility.

I’m not exactly allowed to be here - this is unregulated park property. This is because in some areas, the water is moving so fiercely that an ocean-like undertow is created. But experience has taught me exactly where to wade when I want to cross the river.

I sit on the rocky shore and relieve my feet of the now unnecessary burden of my heavy hiking boots. To my left, I notice a half-empty bag of pretzels. The litter looks out of place. I quickly stuff it into my pack so that I may later discard it properly, and so that I won’t have to see it all day, disrupting the natural innocence of my retreat.

I step into the water and wade over to a rock that sits in the middle of the river. It is large enough for me to lie down on, and it extends two or three feet above the water. Situated in my favorite spot, I allow myself to become caught up in the beauty of the view in every direction. For me, Heaven couldn’t be better. I believe that if each person in the world could be able to spend
an hour alone here, all of humanity would come to realize the urgency of preserving nature and its inhabitants.

I take off my shirt and roll it into a ball, resting it between my head and the rock. I close my eyes and let my body be warmed by the sun. Up above, the canyon walls display their greatness, reminding me that I am a mere human - a small life on earth for just a moment in comparison to their amazing and timeless vastness. Long after I am gone, this place will sustain. Or at least it is meant to.

Meanwhile, down below, the river rushes by, passing my rock, turning into rapids, leaving me behind as it gets closer to the waterfall. I let the sun’s rays and the river’s mist gently ease me into their silence.

I could spend a lifetime in this very spot, but all too soon it is time to make my way back up the trail and head for home on a crowded city block that is packed with man’s most progressive inventions - cars, concrete, and apartment houses.

As I drive home along the expressway, the sun is slowly setting in a majestic display of fiery reds and oranges, a burning ember against twilight’s pinkish horizon. I leave the river behind and take with me only the vision of the canyon in my mind’s eye, and hope that it will be there tomorrow.