

Meditation at the Bell Tower

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This is one of those places that is supposed to be important. It is here so you can have a place to go (not so you can do anything there) but just because it is nice to have somewhere to go. More specifically, this place is a place for two people to go together, a place to spend a delightful springtime afternoon, a place to watch the sunset. In short, this is not a spot for the loner, looking for a quiet reprieve (although today I am that loner, and that is what I am doing); this spot is for love.

I mean is it coincidence that the cast-iron fencing is embellished with heart-shaped adornments? Perhaps you could make the argument that these are not hearts, but rather two swans touching heads. But even if that is the case, is the swan image any less romantic than the heart one? And what about the configuration? This spot is in a valley, displaced from the road, and as I look out over the pond, a fountain attempts to silence the chatter of the outside world. This place wants me to feel far away from others, far away from work and worry and the notion of “progress,” and closer to the one that I love.

Consider the fact that the benches here cozily seat two people (no more, no less). In fact, the other half of my bench appears mockingly lonely to me.

And perhaps the most meaningful symbol here, the object that truly captures the spirit of this place: the bell tower. Looking across the pond I am confronted with this massive thing, which now marks the passing of an hour as if it were something to celebrate (and maybe it is). As the history goes and as the plaque reading “In memory of Mrs. Holcomb” suggests, Mr. James Irving Holcomb erected this bell tower to show his wife that he still loved her. The Holcomb’s were married one year for each step leading up to the bell tower (52 in all) and this monument is trying to tell me that forever is possible. This whole place

is a prayer – “may love never end.”

All around there is a promise of lasting unity. Legend has it that if you kiss your girl at the top of the bell tower, you will stay together forever. Many have had weddings out here, and it was tradition long ago for the bride and groom to be thrown into the lake after the wedding. If there is one thing I am sure of, it is that this is a place for love – a place to celebrate love, a place to create love, a place to think about love. If nothing else, there must be a lot of left over love floating around in the pond.

That is why I find it appropriate that today, floating on its back in the middle of the pond, there is a dead, bloated beaver. He is old enough to be wearing that rigid death jacket, but not old enough yet for the death smell. His eyes are closed and his arms are outstretched (toward what?). Perhaps he died longing for something, or (even more likely) longing for someone. Yes, he died thinking of someone he loved, and in a pitiful, last attempt (filled with sorrow and futility) he extended his arms to the sky. It seems offensive that this haven of togetherness should be tainted by the presence of death. But the beaver is an appropriate part of the scene (perhaps more fitting than the huge bell tower on the opposite side of the pond). Work is the thing that kills love. This beaver knows that, and so it calls out, saying: “Love today! Forget what you feel you must do and enjoy the company of one another; celebrate in what you have been given!” He reminds me that hours are quick, and they are better spent in good company. He exists here, dead in the middle of the pond, so that we may learn his lesson yet avoid his pain. Imagining his dying thoughts (knowing that he would die apart from the one he loved; knowing that all the time spent away was time wasted; longing for some type of reconciliation and forgiveness; seeking it in the empty air above him) fills me with a certain feeling I do not wish to describe.

And yet I, hypocrite that I am, sit here and (although I am alone) this place speaks to me too. Despite my neglect and the fact that I left a beautiful place in search of something (don't ask me what), this place still calls out to me, and I come. I come here and I think of you (my dear) and as I do I am sure that the spirit of this place reaches my soul. I have heard the prayer of the bells and I know love can last forever.