

PUZZLES

Alida tried to hold together every element in her immediate surrounding. The house was blessed by her watch. If she dropped a vase, she would meticulously pick up each of the broken pieces and do her utmost to reimpose the form on the object. The re-glued vase would sit on the kitchen counter and wait to dry. Then she would touch up the broken edges with paint. The spirit was blown back into the newly restored treasure.

Alida would rebind a book that was falling apart. She would take apart an old dress and create a completely different garment. Anything was subject to a full transformation. The world was moving towards the vision that she had for it. She fought for such a higher resolution.

Within these walls, salvation indeed seemed possible. Alida could not avoid the chaos that touched her experience, but she did her utmost to impose an order on the whole. If this meant rescuing the lost in her midst, then she was committed to her calling. She understood that much of her time would be devoted to the dreary routine that it took to mend all the broken pieces in the reconstituted whole. This was all part of the process. If she could not find joy in the mundane, then she would never attain a greater promise. As much as her quest was interminable, she found comfort in each small victory.

Weary after a long day, Alida would spend hours trying to figure out a cross world puzzle. Even amidst her fatigue, she savored the minor triumph when she would figure out a clue. The puzzle would offer a strange view of the world. Genealogies mixed with etymologies. Words spoke their origins or their desired beginnings. Humanity remade itself on the map of language. Heroes were born from the random scraps of discarded letters. Gods were broken up and resurrected from their body parts. More than ever. The puzzle maker seemed to describe the world in a way to reflect his desires for the future. Alida was enthralled by the invitation.

The puzzle offered a sense of peace within the upheaval that shook the cosmos. An inspired Attila would challenge the sacred compact of a divided empire. Zeus would emerge victorious from a battle among the gods. The fauna of Galapagos would amaze Darwin. Any moment had the potential to explode with the astounding wonder of knowledge. Each word had its own story.

The gods were held in a loose compact that was riven through with rivalry. The puzzle seemed to magnify the storms unleashed from Olympus. The inopportune utterance was enough to send the universe into a frenzy. The more ominous threat was how one's manhood could be threatened by a bad judgement. Sampson had seen his powers curtailed in an unhappy tale. The Titans faced premature demise. Othello's grand exploits were not enough to stifle his jealous streak. In every story, the champion's ambitions were endangered by the foreboding skies.

Alida felt herself at the center of a great battle. She was being tested herself. And she responded with self-assurance. The puzzle gave her a feeling of confidence. She rode the wave of triumph amidst these fallen marvels. She needed to stay at the forefront of her game. She had her lists at hand. They were the keys to these puzzles. She tried to anticipate the puzzle makers. Each time that she unfolded the newspaper and saw the puzzle's criss-crossing form she felt joy. She had again been invited into the inner circle. Her views truly mattered. As she pushed deep into the game, she felt even more at one with the developing creation. This was where she was supposed to be. She was touring these ancient palaces. She was accepted in these places of

pomp. She was allowed to share the spoils with the great generals. There was no turning back. She needed to persevere.

In the puzzle, these stately creatures became sonorous names that could be exchanged like trading cards. Their stories were more or less exchangeable. Their flesh and blood exploits were simple reflections in the setting sun. The lofty hierarchies were reduced to momentary flashes of light in the parlor. And their devotees were scattered with the occasional hope of rekindling the old fire by the simple mention of their names. More than ever the varied personalities served as the pretext for the moods of the individual. The mythological charts allowed the user to compare Zeus to Odin, or the rumble of Olympus with the roar of Valhalla. The gods had lost their independence and now helped to reveal the mysteries of human psychology. The list of characters was not that different than a dream key that helped convert the most bizarre dreams into a simple variations on our daily routine. Our anger during a frustrating situation at the grocery store brought out the Mars us in us. Or Venus clouded our amorous moments. Even the most fleeting reconciliation between opposing sides could be attested by our temporary victories. The gods lived among us because they were part of us.

The puzzle often hinged upon the actions of a mortal who had benefitted from the intercession of the gods. This gave the sense that any individual could somehow be blessed by such a visit. Could the gods do more than inspire our will? Human determination sometimes seemed god-like. But did the gods bring good fortune that could rescue the most ill-fated? The puzzle-doer felt that her dark corner could be illuminated with a rush of bright light. Such was the feeling when the appropriate clue prompted a correct entry. So the names of the gods figured in an elaborate litany. As each name was uttered, the appropriate service was rendered to the self.

In mythology, the self could transform its identity when needed. The puzzle offered the individual a glimpse of these powers. The proliferation of words primed the imagination. It only took a little to put the user in this magical place. Words were special. And they started to reveal their wonder. This was way more enticing than any natural grace. The shape-shifting was all of a more radical form. And the poetry called to the listener to abandon the mundane to enter a world of true promise.

The puzzle was remaking the myth for its own uses. Words invoked the supernatural. But the spells did not last. The puzzle had its own logic that it imposed with exactitude. Any particular mystery had to be connected to a remote bit of knowledge. The puzzle may have benefitted from a theme. But the user was often at a loss to make sense of these contrary forms. There was little room for a narrative transition. And the deficiencies of the imagination were offered no remedy by the author. This reiterated the modern character of the puzzle. The ancients tried to sound the valiant call, but the puzzle maker resisted these distractions. Similarly, the user was not supposed to get lost in her flights of fancy. There was work to get done.

The gods realized that they were being yoked into a strict service. And their rebellion was always short-lived. It simply offered insight into the next clue. Were these tasks humiliating? The puzzle user did not countenance sedition. Turmoil manifested itself outside of the puzzle. Questions were raised to be answered. Clues were offered to reveal actual solutions.

Alida had the power had her finger tips. She needed to remain proud. It was easy to get distracted. The struggles for greatness were often fraught with misery. Alida observed the battles and tried to learn from the failed efforts. These were creatures who had risked their existence so that they could attain the heights. She could not mock their noble quests. She immersed herself in the rich pageantry.

For Alida, what did it mean to twist her mind around the puzzle? It offered her clarity under the guise of a question. The intent was to bring a sharp relief to the contours of her life. The challenge was focused and more or less immediate. It was somewhat dramatic in its nature. But it also moderated the upheaval. It presented her dilemmas in a fashion that could be resolved. She could distract herself from her physical ailments. She could let her worries drift into the nether world.

She liked the fact that the puzzle still made her feel as if she was keeping busy. It filled up the idle moments with a purpose. There were many irksome matters over which she felt little control. The puzzle let her put all that away. She'd go from clue to clue with a confidence unequalled by any other task. If the question was too obscure, she could look it up in her almanac. For many of the clues, she only had to mull over the answer for a couple of seconds. This added to her feeling of power. It brought back old memories. An Orson Welles movie would briefly play before her. Or she would recall an incident from American history. A detail from electoral politics would emerge. Or she would scour the collective names of animals.

With each entry on the puzzle, she felt herself move closer to an understanding. She felt that she was part of something significant. Others were engaged in the same quest as her. Each person had her trusty pencil and was moving up and down the puzzle with a shared commitment. This wasn't a quandary that separated her from the rest of humanity. She felt herself planted in the midst of social activity.

Much of Alida's life exhibited a resistance to the fool hardy. She kept her distance as others became bewildered by a rash of conflicts that had the potential to upend their plans. The puzzle was very much about keeping her wits about her. A trying day could be put on permanent hold the moment that the puzzle was first attempted. It had its own urgency that allowed her to forget any other pressing matters. The world could wait until tomorrow. This evening Alida was deep into her puzzle.

The crossword puzzle was not elaborate. It was not boisterous. It wasn't meant to whip the user into a frenzy. It was all about maintaining an even keel. Obviously, some questions were meant to be more nagging. And there was a little bit of a tug of war in the application of the intellect to a tricky clue. The whole puzzle would seem to hinge on figuring out a couple of words. Alida would go back and forth with her guesses. One word would go along with a clue, but it wouldn't line up with the other words in the puzzle. She would go back and forth in her efforts to get a perfect fit.

For a brief instant, the user could see the shades of meaning in a single word. But the puzzle was not about encouraging ambiguity. Such confusion needed some kind of resolution. Thus, the puzzle would provide layers of complexity to help restore order amidst this uncertainty. Of course, there was meant to be humor in the puzzle. And the individual would have to step back from her situation to see the fuller picture. Puzzles were all about connecting together the

mosaic. And the same word would function in different way to link everything together in a grander scheme. This was just enough complexity for the self to encounter a greater design in the universe. The puzzle led the searcher along a clear path. There were multiple threads, but everything flowed in a single direction. And the individual learned to submit to the guidance of the puzzle maker.

In doing the puzzle, the user needed to develop confidence in the maker. In an especially difficult puzzle, it was often easier to see the hand of the creator. That was why the puzzle was so delightful. It truly engaged a love for words. The roots danced before the speaker as she marshaled the inner intent so that she could move closer to her goal. The symphony played under the direction of an assured conductor. The maker understood the limits. And the orchestra answered back with a flourish of excitement.

How did Alida's challenge differ from the riddle put to the mythic traveler? How did Oedipus react differently to the Sphinx? Could a correct puzzle end a mysterious curse? Sure, the user felt inspired. And she was locked in a struggle to overcome the trickery of the maker. But she didn't want to get too far beside herself. A failed entry wasn't going to threaten the architectural integrity of the Eiffel Tower. No tidal wave was going to sweep the coastline after a simple mistake. That didn't mean that the user could ignore the demands of the recalcitrant puzzle. It was all about theater. No one was screaming from his seat. And histrionics was not encouraged in the performance. But the puzzle was all about making a mountain out of a mole hill. This was language's power to evoke a world. A syllable or two could get the Roman legion marching on to Carthage. Or a single letter could link the Union Pacific Railroad to the Bay of Bengal. A giant tiger could leap onto the field of Yankee Stadium. Then the next clue would put all the distracting images away as the user concentrated on word meaning personal challenge. The puzzle was developing a level of self-consciousness. And the individual was immersing herself in its awareness.

You could always bury a puzzle under a pile of newspapers. That would be the end of its dialogue. Nothing could revive its loveable cacophony. The puzzle recognized the thread that linked it to its user. It didn't want to disappoint. The puzzle didn't have to be easy. It wasn't meant to flatter the self. Instead, a good puzzle would cause a person to muster all her resources towards a solution. This was all about playing fair. Things were supposed to balance out. There was no deception allowed. Obscurity was all part of the game. But the maker wasn't supposed to cheat. That was the bargain.

A bad puzzle just seemed all garbled. Maybe, there would be an attempt to articulate a theme. But the structure would be incomplete. Words would hang in the middle of nowhere. Answers would be incorrect. They would fit the letter scheme, but they would contradict the stated question. Lear had three daughters. Charles the First was beheaded by the Roundheads. Wrigley Field was the home of the Chicago Cubs. Quinine was discovered as a cure of malaria. The diseased puzzle could give someone a case of brain fever.

The puzzle spoke of an accord in the world. It connected words and things in an uninterrupted conversation. There was no Bishop Berkeley nattering about his skepticism. The sun rose proudly in the east, and the world turned on its axis. And the mighty rivers flowed into the sea. And that was that! Any dark passage would eventually bear light. And the seven wonders provided the landmarks to our eventual understanding of the great mysteries.

With her puzzles, Alida was able to attain a clearer grasp on the form of creation. It was no longer a mishmash of dogma and edicts from remote lands. Its inescapable nature emerged from the power of words. She could make sense of the intersecting portraits and the cascading landscapes.

Alida told me that she could spend a whole day looking for a set of lost keys. Or she could misplace the sales receipt from a store the very day that she made her purchase. She strove for order in her house. But it was simple for an object to lose itself in the complexity. At that point, Alida felt as if she was taking her life apart just to find the lost item.

“Does it really make that much difference?” For her, it did. Time seemed to come to a stand still. Nothing else mattered. It wasn't so much that panic set in. It was just that she couldn't concentrate on anything else. And so she pursued her search with an air of inspiration. If luck was on her side, she would find success. Maybe a word to Saint Anthony would set the gears in motion.

She would mentally retrace her steps. She would open up trash bags. She would look over store receipts. She needed to get to the bottom of things.

Even when she found the missing object, that lingering feeling would remain that something was out of place.

“Have I really found my keys?”

She held them in her hand.

“I'm not getting absent-minded. I just can't hold on to things.”

She was coming to understand an important reality about her world. Things were meant to get away. That was what the matter was about. As she moved about the house, the objects followed their own orbits. In the intersection, she could feel as if everything held together as one. But she so often lived in a realm isolated from that intimate connection. Things just lay there without the soul to link them back to anything else. There was nothing attracting things to each other. They veered off in every direction.

For a while, she could share in the delight of keeping it all together. She'd keep a set of tools under the sink. She was content with the order. But that was all that it would take to shake things up again. The hammer wouldn't do the job. She'd need something more precise. There were more tools in the case in the basement. Surely, one of them would do the trick. Already, she was off on another search. She'd only hope that everything was in its proper place. All it took was for one tool to be off somewhere on its own.

There was something that was unsettled about the whole picture. Whenever something went missing, she would be reminded how fragile was her sense of security. Even when she found the lost thing, the lingering feeling remained. Ultimately, when you found what you were looking for, you were right back where you started. You really hadn't gone forward at all. You just came back to where you started. Even in looking, Alida had gotten to know the stuff in her world all too well. She had peered into every hiding place. She had disrupted the grand order. She had failed to discover the buried treasure.

She had been on a greater search. Each time, she would come up short. So she would have to console herself with a lesser prize. What could she really do with a set of keys. They weren't going to open a mysterious vault full of purloined loot. There was no masterpiece stuffed in the attic. There was no mysterious formula buried among her pile of papers. This was it pure

and simple. Where were the messages from heaven?

She was afraid that she was chattering to herself. Sure, she was frustrated. She had found success, but it really hadn't made her feel any better. In the pit of her stomach, she felt significantly worse. But she didn't want to let on what she had realized. She preferred to become immersed in another search.

Amidst the clamor, she could presently find comfort that the keys were now firmly in her hand. She went through each one as if she might come across that special key that she had forgotten about. But it wasn't to be. She put the keys back on the hook that she had left by the door. She walked around the living room and straightened up the furniture. She had been off on a wild goose chase, and now she was back. What was she supposed to do now? Part of her really loved the endless trek. She looked in the mirror as if her double was lurking in the shadows behind her.

On a rough day, a challenging puzzle could wear the self down to nothing. In a good player, there always seemed to be enough resilience to prevent this end. After all, the puzzle was only a distraction. It just seemed wrong to let it overwhelm the self. Nevertheless, a particularly tricky clue would have a way of sticking in the craw. There was little that the individual could do to shake the obsession. The player would just have to roll with the imposition. And the feeling would continue to jab away until it was completely inside. Even the solution wasn't sufficient to dispel the upset. It would only open up other misgivings about the rest of the puzzle.

Alida would try to prepare herself against such a disturbing outcome. She would slowly look over each clue. She would try to make sense of the whole puzzle. But once she started to play, she knew that she was caught. This was not something that she could deal with using common sense. The puzzle inspired her own craziness. Here it was, these ordered columns and rows, and it would take only a shove to shake her composure. She tried to hold it together. She would hold her pencil to the page. She would try to figure things out based on the contact of two physical objects. But that nasty clue would just spin around like a stubborn house fly. She would put her hands over her ears to shut out the buzzing.

People loved puzzles because they each had their own personality. Try as she may, Alida couldn't cut these monsters down to size. And she fell for the lure every time. She was attached to the drama. If it wasn't for the magic, puzzles would be just like filling out your taxes or keeping the books for a business. She enjoyed the distraction.

She would throw herself into the action and use all her ability to navigate around the confusion. In her efforts, she would let herself get tossed back and forth. It was all part of the script. And if things became too harried, she could put the puzzle on the shelf and do something else in the house. The puzzle was always just that, a respite from her other business. Even if it did stir her emotions, its appeal was only a temporary preoccupation. It was never really a matter of life or death. She could file away the theater and get on with more pressing matters. But she loved the sport. And it did bring out the apex of her analytical skills. She was using a well-known map to venture into new territory. She would grope along until she found the familiar signs. It was similar to translating a new language. There were a host of broken fragments which began to move towards each other until the picture started to come into view.

Then everything would seem to take off on its own. The words would explode in concert. It was similar to observing the flowers bloom in the garden. The predictable turned into something that was completely delightful without any precedent. The puzzle was coming to life.

Most of all the puzzle seemed to keep her company. Evidently, the words seemed to come alive. More than that, she was being invited into a splendid dialogue that echoed all around her. This was not the usual conversation among friends. There were greater mysteries contemplated in these get togethers. World travelers were sharing their astounding discoveries. Among all these resounding confessions was an understanding that seemed far greater than any particular adventure. These wandering souls were pulling back the massive door that led to a secret passageway. It was a true journey to the center of the earth.

Every time, Alida would find her curiosity was piqued. She would jump at the opportunity. She didn't want to get left behind. If the conveyance seemed to slow, she would scour the clues again for the inspiration to get things going again. She would wait patiently on the sidelines to get the needed momentum. And then she would be off again. She didn't want to be held back.

Other explorers had set sail with less purpose. Alida felt as if she was helping to educate the world. These eloquent words were the key. If she was repeating them in her humble living room, then some learned jurist was using their intent to inform a great legal decision. They were all linked by the same fabric. And the puzzle embraced that very integrity of meaning that was inherent to the language. This was more than the canon that served each speaker. It was what brought this magic garden to life. That was why she was so conscientious in its tending.

There were times when the puzzle became just that, the ultimate brain twister. It created the belief that the solution would offer so much more in our understanding of the world. The intricate connections that held all the words together in a single arrangement were the blueprint for every serious connection in the world. It was as if the crystalline form of matter suggested a more encompassing organization for the rest of creation. As the building blocks were pieced together, the ultimate form achieved the universal resonance that vibrated throughout the cosmos.

Indeed, it seemed quite extraordinary that a little puzzle could contain all that power. But weren't the features of chemical formula built from some quite basic building blocks. Complex polymers could find their origins in simple bonding structures. Similarly, the puzzle developed from its own deceptive simplicity.

Alida tried not to let on that she was in touch with this complex arrangement of things. It was nothing but a crossword puzzle. But it had the power to command her attention. It was no random thing. It must have had a special form that corresponded with something deep inside of her. I found little that I found appealing when I perused the finished puzzles. But she had drifted so far into the inner workings of the puzzle that she recognized its basic truth. That alone was cause enough for me to look for more.

These puzzles were more than a simple omen. They allowed the user to pull back the veil and view the workings of the other side. What could all these signs reveal? Did the player have to adjust her world view to be prepared for this knowledge?

I forced myself to look deeper. I wanted to know. These were the classifieds for the supernatural realm. I wanted to understand what was available. Was there an inherent risk to the psyche by searching for answers. The player kept an air of calm in piecing together the words.

Everything was so focused. The attitude was total concentration.

There were a million Caesars who tried to avoid the condemnation of the gods. Each one wanted to overturn the order of Olympus and impose his own law. At the heart of this battle, the great poets had their own approach to the rights of man. The truly free understand how words provided the wisdom to order man and machine. Every tempest in a tea cup was about to blow up into the Great Hurricane of Galveston.

The puzzle could offer a premonition of a portentous event to come. The player would balance on the edge of this promise. The words of warning would be at the tip of the tongue. Without a real announcement, the truth would remain immersed in darkness.

As long as Alida played, she knew that the puzzle was not her last. Each victory led to another set of clues and a new challenge.

The puzzle enabled the player to adore this world of words. She was not surrendering to realm of the flesh. She was ennobled by the King's English. She honed her craft. She understood the volumes which were full of criss-crossing words. She benefitted from the constellation of meaning. This was the first glimpse of the magnificent pattern that blessed the universe.

“There is much more to learn.”

Then there was the ultimate puzzle. It would enable the prisoner permanently to escape his confinement. Each clue had something to do with his life. He came to understand that his way of thinking had led to his imprisonment. And now he was learning how to dissolve the iron bars with each one of his answers.

What were the words which entrapped him in his ignorance. How could he free himself from his self-imposed darkness. I wanted to play along. I hardly wanted to get involved with the puzzle, but I wanted to learn the secrets. How did the fabric hold together? I needed to follow each thread and its infernal purpose. These were words that could kill. They would condemn the user to time inside, and the prisoner realize his sentence. The puzzle promised freedom, but it also reinforced his present. It spoke of all the crimes of commission and omission. And it also documented his motive and opportunity. It condemned him in spite of his protests of innocence.

What was the prisoner's dilemma? He recognized that he was in because someone remained on the outside. He hated to contemplate this trade off. Perhaps that was what he figured out. What did his counterpart know that enabled him to remain free. Was it more than words? Was it a philosophy? An attitude?

I thought about the nature of the puzzle and how it described the grotesque boredom of the man in solitary. He was beyond the point of self-examination. His resentment now dominated his days and nights. His frustration hammered away from the inside. His disorganized thoughts made it harder to decipher the puzzle. This was all part of the entangled image which he contemplated.

The puzzle was just that. It was a maze of well-known ideas which together formed a prison. How could the prisoner get the distance which he needed when he was caught so deep in this place? He couldn't leave his jail. He couldn't obtain a view from the outside. He was reinforcing these moments on the inside. It was a water torture. Each drip reinforced the last. These noises exploded inside his head. He needed clarity. These silly words were saying so much more.

He took a breath. He tried to find solace in the physical world. His silence was a temporary victory. But that did not absolve the judgment which had put him in this place. His puzzle were the precedents which would finally grace him with a new view with regard to his trials.

In many ways, this puzzle should have been the easiest of all. Where the prisoner gave in to his life of transgression, the free person veered in the opposite direction. That should have been the key. In some ways, it was.

As the puzzle player continued, he saw his own entrapment. He was heading in the same direction as the prisoner.

“Alida, can you figure it out?”

“I don’t play that one.”

But she had played. And she mastered every word. I studied what she had put down. It seemed so obvious. She knew how to play the game. If it had been me, I would have found a thousand ways to er. I would gradually become tied to my isolation. My words would fail me. And the guard would lose the key to the outside.

“What is a four-letter words for freedom?”

“I’m not sure.”

“That’s an easy one. Where is the treasure buried in *Treasure Island*?”

“I don’t remember.”

“What is the country of origin of the Statue of Liberty?”

Suddenly, I was keeping company with Napoleon in Elba. Even the easy answers could not help in my search. I was condemned before I spoke a word.

“Alida, I need you to free me from this place. I need you to get the answers for me.”

“Who was the only person to escape from Alcatraz?”

“Is that a trick question?”

“What was the name of the last prisoner released from the Bastille?”

“I plead innocent!”

“What was the name of the thief crucified next to Jesus?”

I wanted to speak my own name. I was accommodating myself to my desultory condition. I had been condemned to the prisoner’s fate. I needed to find Alida’s acumen something fierce.

I had been sentenced because of my foremost crime. I knew what it was. It was what made my fiction sag. I did not want to admire elegance and beauty. I wanted to immerse myself in the filth and the fury. I wasn’t going to wait for my own time. I didn’t have the patience to devise my own history. I was forced to repeat the past of my gallant predecessors.

“You are never going to make it out of here.”

I needed to review the puzzles for a clue. The five-letter words that started with a. The triangles and ellipses. The angles and the parallel lines. I dove into the jumble of words. I wanted eloquence and found verbosity.

“There is an art to the puzzle.”

I was hearing the words of Cicero.

“I am ready for a funeral oration.”

“Oration is one of the words. You are a couple of steps to escaping your confinement.”

“Am I getting good at this?”

I thought about the great discourses put together in jail: “To Althea, from Prison.”

“To the Angels from Hell!”

“That kind of thinking is only going to keep you here.”

“Are you my judge?”

“Steven, you are your own judge.”

What did that mean?

“In these old houses, the cold seems to get everywhere.”

“Escaping imprisonment begins by getting over your pain.”

I wanted to feel every aspect of my captivity. It went beyond the reason to the effect.

“Being a prisoner is not a matter of backward thinking. There are people who want to keep us in this place.”

I couldn’t simply think myself out of jail. If someone wanted to keep me inside, I was here for good. I couldn’t let it come to that. I didn’t want to get set up for my vulnerability.

I understood that Alida did not think like this. The puzzle player was a more focused sort, nothing like me. I felt the panic take me over.

“You have to take it slowly. Everything would make sense over time. Get your impressions down on paper. Some words. A few letters. You will see it all come together.”

I was too used to seeing it all at a glance. This was taking on the world a few chinks and dent at a time. The great wall would fall after countless assaults. I was becoming a different person. I held my pencil and examined the puzzle. I never felt the claustrophobia of the four walls. I was enjoying the protection of the indoors.

Alida had even more patience with a visual puzzle. She knew what it meant to find those critical parts. She could section off the world into these essential parts. These clumps of matter that came together to form structure and architecture.

She knew something amazing about the composition of the world. She was not afraid to immerse herself in the unknown.

“No is ever ready to leave their home for good.”

Alida was making her home among these words. There were times when I felt as if I was with a mind reader. I needed to learn the method.

“Steven, look to the stars.”

I examine the puzzles as a star map. The skies were full of the constellation. Rooms in the houses of each god.

“I would like to invite you in, but there is something going on in here that bring shame to my house.”

The heavens were full of revenge.

“You need to learn about the dimensions of meaning.”

Words could speak one way. In their impetuosity, they could say something completely different.

“Look at the constellations. Learn these stories of betrayal.”

“A hero goes on a long ocean journey. He becomes one with the waves. He witnesses the great currents. When he returns home, all is changed. His wife no longer knows him. She now prays to different gods. His children pay their loyalty to other elders.”

“You have been gone to long.”

“I left to protect the kingdom for you.”

“Who can rid the land of its new curse?”

“Our former hero is now a nuisance.”

“He barely escapes with his life. The old order had been reversed. What is nine letter word for liberation from tyranny?”

“How has the puzzled condemned me to infamy. I am the great liberator!”

“We don’t need tyrants to gives us liberty.”

“Give me liberty or give me death!”

“Is the cost worth it? What do I get nothing?”

“Nothing from nothing gives nothing!”

“Who is keeping score?”

Our lives were always more than met the eye. This was the key to the puzzle. There were the other layers.

“You will miss them if you get distracted.”

The curse seemed to stop time. I was losing my concentration. I wanted to know. The rhymes and the homonyms.

“This god has two names. The Roman and the Greek. The noble and the common.”

I wanted to make it to the court. I wanted to overthrow the tyrant

“Why are you here, Steven?”

“I am the happiest man alive. I live by my words.”

“Your words are ambiguous.”

The puzzle was saying too many things to me. It was the delirium of the words. Alida had a special skill. She realized that real poetry was based on truly feeling the words.

“I write for my life.”

“Are you ready to make a deal with the devil?”

“Never! I can use the double meaning of words to my advantage!”