Things Missed

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Every now and then I make it a point to go without knowing to these places, try to discover a view of my own, be surprised, have an experience uncluttered by history or the facts. I try to imagine my way to a bit of truth or the answer to some awkward childhood riddle.

I went to Giza once this way, entered the wind-dusted space, dodged the thronging hawkers, slid sideways past the harried shirtsleeve tugs of the pleading guides, as they offered to sell me a day or two of knowing.

I lingered at Cheop’s boat, counted the oars, thought of his trip to the longer side of eternity. I measured step by step the footprint of the pyramids and climbed on a few of the metered blocks—wondered how long they’d been there, how much longer they would stand. I considered the angles and the sides, tried to recall their geometry and physics, as explained by Mrs. de Jong at Brigham Young Junior High.

With my shoe I shuffled the underside of the sand. I exchanged smiles with the camels, complained with them about our thirst. I curled my lips, bared my teeth, made a low bellow as they do, and thought of the crumpled, sepia portrait of my grandparents riding theirs fifty years before. Then, I squinted into the west-leaning sun as the day began telling me to leave.

I went to Giza once this way and failed to find the nose-broken Sphinx haunching coyly just beyond the brown edge of the afternoon shadows there, a little down and to the left of where ignorance had taken me that day.