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Kingdom

THE ROCK DIDN'T have a name and sat in the center of the island. You got there on dirt roads, but almost every road was dirt there, except for the main one and a few in the island's only town, which was named after the Mormon who'd crowned himself king. He'd brought his whole group over, hogging from the Irish. The main road was called Kings Highway and others were called things like Sloptown Road and Miss McCauley, Orr Err Og. Some Mormon foundations were still standing, just their wood with nothing on top, abandoned after the king was shot five times and six weeks after that, dying in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

The stone was in the forest, alongside Fox Lake Road, yet not quite on the gravel, and it was grayish black, its shape mostly round like most rocks are and should be—yet its top was almost at an angle. You could climb it if you wanted, but it was only seven feet high, surely not a mountain. Tree roots hugged its base, like not letting go, yet fighting for space.

Now everything was wet. Branches dripped in clumps from last night's sprinkles, and I sat in a dusty van staying dry. I was there with eight students and a driver. Now they were writing, part of their assignment. I wondered if they felt as uninspired as me. The day before, we went to Protar's home and then his tomb and I couldn't get enough, wanting to know

everything about him. We traveled the dirt roads, the dust flying everywhere around us, and I tried to breathe, keeping my mouth covered with my sweatshirt. We went to a lighthouse on the island's southern end, where we walked to the top, then down again, and while my students wrote, I wandered down the lakeshore, picking up pink rocks, filling up my pockets. On a cape, I found a big stone with an engraved plate that read: Dominick Gallagher August 7, 1867 to December 24, 1953. Keeper of the Light. I stood there looking until I'd had enough.

Later on, my chauffeur drove us to the northern end, Gull Harbor, the place known for its fossils. My students looked worn and tired and I dug around the ground, getting excited. I found a bedrock with a perfect shape of something looking like a seashell which I couldn't name and my chauffeur told me what it was, and I tried pronouncing it then gave up. Later on, at supper, I asked a biologist about it, and he said it was a trillion years old.

Now, at the big rock, students hopped in the van and I heard scribbling, pen on paper, glad to hear that. It was our fourth day and we had three left. It was an honors course and some had been to the island before. I hadn't, but you can write anywhere, and all we'd do was drive around and find things, write, then drive and write some more, quiet along the way.

An owl kept on hooing and other birds sounded far off. All the students were in the van now, and I asked if everyone was ready. No one said anything. No one ever said anything. We would ride and write some more, ride and write, ridewrite. We left the boulder. We would ride some more, looking for the biggest birch in the state.