

Paper Trail

Proof of Concept

Written by

James Lanser

Copyright (c) 2024

Draft  
December 6, 2024

Contact  
[jameslanser@gmail.com](mailto:jameslanser@gmail.com)

Autumn. Chicago, 1935.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

CARY (m, late 20s) a librarian with round dorky glasses sits among stacks of books at the front desk. He's looking in deep thought at the cover of the CLOSED BOOK he's holding, its title written in GREEK.

CARY  
(decidedly)  
"A".

Categorically sets the book in a pile to his right. Picking up another one from the pile on his left.

A coquettish LADY (early 20s) briskly walks in the library. She's wearing a ruffly fishtail dress and carrying a folder with paper hanging out the sides. She approaches the front desk.

GRACEY  
Would you please tell me where 'non-fiction' is?

CARY  
(gesturing)  
Yes, at the end of the galley on the first floor take the stairs to the second, then go left past history and it's to the right next to the reading area.

GRACEY  
Got it, thank you.

The lady walks off. A moment goes by and she returns.

GRACEY (cont'd)  
I'm not so great with directions.

CARY  
Sorry but I'm rather busy.

GRACEY  
What is that you're doing?

CARY  
I'm alphabetizing the books.

GRACEY  
What for?

CARY

So people like you can find them.

GRACEY

How am I supposed to find them if I don't even know where to look?

CARY

Everything here is arranged intuitively so that you may-

GRACEY

Whose intuition?

CARY

Well, yours.

GRACEY

Not mine.

CARY

Miss, please.

GRACEY

That's "ma'am".

CARY

Ma'am.

GRACEY

If it were intuitive, would I be having this trouble?

CARY

Trouble? You hardly made an attempt to look!

GRACEY

Why should I roam around aimlessly when I could find what I'm looking for in half the time by receiving your warm escort and accompaniment?

CARY

Because I have books to sort. (*places book in pile to right*).

GRACEY

Mr. Librarian.

CARY

Oh fine.

Cary moves around the maze of stacks of books and around the desk.

CARY (cont'd)

This way.

The lady follows.

GRACEY

(looking around)

There must be a million books here! I don't see how you could possibly keep track of them all.

CARY

You see, we keep a book for that.

GRACEY

Have you read all of them?

CARY

Heavens no.

GRACEY

You'd probably be the smartest person in the world if you had.

CARY

I don't think the brain could handle that much information.

GRACEY

I'll bet yours can.

Cary notices the DRAGONFLY PIN in Gracey's hair.

CARY

That's a colorful pin you have.

GRACEY

Thank you.

CARY

Dragonflies are a fascinating animal.

GRACEY

Animal? Are insects animals?

CARY

Of course.

GRACEY

That sounds funny to say.

CARY  
What else would they be?

GRACEY  
Well... insects?

CARY  
You know, the dragonfly has been around for over 300 million years. They've hardly evolved since then because they're such successful hunters of the sky. Although, they used to be almost 2 feet in length in prehistoric times! Can you imagine that?

GRACEY  
(pats the pin in her hair)  
I think I prefer this size.

The two at the section.

CARY  
Here you are. It's the whole isle, and the next two over.

Gracey goes to the first book in the row at eye level with her. She looks intently at the horizontal binding, moving her fingers along the letters.

GRACEY  
No, no.

She points to the book next to it.

GRACEY (cont'd)  
Nooo....

She points to the book next to it.

GRACEY (cont'd)  
Aha!- ... Mmm. No.

CARY  
Eh- Ma'am.

GRACEY  
Yes?

CARY  
You do know the books are arranged in alphabetical order?

GRACEY  
(aghast)  
You think this is my first time in a  
library?

Cary watches Gracey as she continues looking book by book.

CARY  
Is there something I can help you  
find?

GRACEY  
Yes. I'm looking for the Declaration  
of Independence.

CARY  
(surprised)  
The Declaration-... Ma'am this is the  
'non-fiction' section.

GRACEY  
Well, it happened didn't it?

CARY  
Yes but that's not exactly how things  
are categorically arranged!

GRACEY  
Well then where is it?

CARY  
In 'American History'.

GRACEY  
Where's that?

CARY  
Here...

The two walk over two rows.

CARY (cont'd)  
*This is 'American History'.*

GRACEY  
(looking down the  
long isle)  
Ohh.

Gracey looks at Cary, making the subtle request for him to  
find the book for her.

CARY  
(rolling his eyes)  
It's right over here.

Cary hands Gracey the book. She inspects it.

CARY (cont'd)  
Pardon me for asking... might I ask  
why you are looking for the  
Declaration of Independence?

GRACEY  
Is that an unusual request for a  
citizen of this country?

CARY  
Well, no I guess not.

GRACEY  
Ok then.

CARY  
Before I leave then is there anything  
else I can help you with?

GRACEY  
(swiftly)  
I'm getting a divorce.

CARY  
(surprised)  
A divorce??

GRACEY  
(flipping the page)  
Yes.

CARY  
Then what on earth are you reading  
that for?

GRACEY  
I'm preparing my case.

CARY  
For what?

GRACEY  
(glancing at Cary)  
My divorce.

CARY  
Yes, but I don't think that's the  
appropriate literature.

GRACEY

Why is it not appropriate?

CARY

I think it regards a slightly different matter.

GRACEY

How so?

CARY

How so- ... Are you telling me you don't know what the Declaration of Independence is?

GRACEY

(swiftly)

The document expressing a people's severance from unfair and oppressive monarchic rule... I think it suitable, don't you?

CARY

I suppose in *some* a way.

Gracey pages through the book.

GRACEY

This is much too long for me to read right now. I must be going.

Gracey begins walking back to the door. Cary follows.

CARY

Wouldn't you like to at least check it out?

GRACEY

No thank you I think I get the idea.

CARY

Just like that you get the idea?

GRACEY

Well the title pretty much summarizes the main point doesn't it?

CARY

So that's what you came here for?

GRACEY

No actually I came here to learn about the evolutionary success of dragonflies.



CARY  
... You're lying.

GRACEY  
Correct. Really I was just passing  
by. Though I do have a recital  
tonight I really must be going.

CARY  
A recital? Are you a musician?

GRACEY  
(proudly)  
A *composer* you might say.

CARY  
(gesturing to her  
folder)  
Is that your music.

GRACEY  
Yes it is. Goodbye.

Gracey walks to the library entrance, Cary moseys around  
behind the front desk. As Gracey exits the door, a PIECE OF  
PAPER falls from her folder and is blown across the path of  
the entryway.

CARY  
Excuse me! Ma'am!

Cary picks up the paper and goes outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

Gracey is entering a cab. Cary just misses her as she drives  
off. He runs down the sidewalk trying to get her attention.

CARY  
Wait! You dropped this!

Cary in poor judgment passes into the intersection at the  
corner. A CAR slams on its breaks. ANOTHER CAR crashes into  
its back end.

TWO UNDERCOVER DETECTIVES, dressed casually and standing on  
the other side of the street, rush to the accident. TWO MEN  
in topcoats and hats in the front car see Cary waving a  
piece of paper and pointing.

One detective peers around the back and sees A CLEAR LIQUID dripping from the trunk wreckage. Takes a sample with his finger.

DETECTIVE #2  
It's moonshine alright!

The detectives wrestle the men out of the car.

GANGSTER #1  
Hey! What'd I do!?

DETECTIVE #1  
Think you could sneak by us eh?

GANGSTER #1  
You're arresting me!? That guy just hit us! That guy just ran into the street! (*pointing at Cary*)

The detectives are joined by a nearby COP CAR. The force takes the gangsters into custody. The gangsters get a look at Cary as they get hauled off.

GANGSTER #2  
Who is this guy? (*at Cary*)

GANGSTER #1  
(*getting hauled off,*  
*at Cary*)  
YOU! ... You're done kid! You're dead meat! You're chopped suey! You're a fried egg!

Cary very confused taking in the whole situation. An adorable OLD LADY (60s) lady pushing a stroller passes by.

ADORABLE OLD LADY PUSHING STROLLER  
Jeez. That boy must be hungry.

DETECTIVE #1 (O'Reilly) (~45, mustache) returns to Cary and shakes his hand.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
Detective O'Reilly. (*flashes badge*).  
We had a tip there might be a handoff going on around here. Thanks for helping us out.

CARY  
I didn't exactly intend to.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
What were you doing running into the  
street like that?

CARY  
Oh- a lady dropped this and drove off  
before I could get to her.

Cary holds out the piece of paper.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
A piece of paper.

CARY  
Yes. I think.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
So you ran into the street?

CARY  
It appears so.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
Must be some lady you're after.

CARY  
After?- I just met her, I'm not-

The Detective cuts him off.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
What is this matter. (*gestures to  
piece of paper*).

CARY  
She's a composer. I think it's her  
music. (*hands to officer*)

Detective #1 inspects the paper.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
Mhmm, sure is... Interesting quartal  
harmony. A-flat, good key for allegro  
string ensemble. Looks like an  
original draft. I like it. (*hands  
paper back*)

CARY  
You're some detective.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
Sure am.

CARY  
She mentioned she's performing  
tonight. I think she might really  
need this.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
Here. (*points to bottom*). "Chicago  
Symphony Orchestra".

CARY  
I must to get this to her.

DETECTIVE O'REILLY  
Mhmm, tell you what, I'm gona be  
headed downtown just now. I'll give  
you a lift.

CARY  
Fine!

Cary and Detective O'Reilly get in his nearby car. An old  
librarian lady steps out of the library.

LIBRARIAN  
Where are you going!?

CARY  
(*getting in car*)  
I'll be back shortly!

LIBRARIAN  
The books aren't going to alphabetize  
themselves!

CARY  
(*out window*)  
You never know they just might!

The two drive off.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - DAY

INT. PENTHOUSE - DAY

INT. CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA - NIGHT

INT. MANSION - NIGHT