

Truly: A Story in Three Parts

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Part Two

by [James Como](#) (April 2023)



Faraway Eyes, Matthew Wong, 2017

Truly had been accepted on a full scholarship to Columbia University, where she would study physics. There she met a boy, rather plain, a philosophy major from Poland, and began dating him. She liked his accent and his manners. He was religious, so when he invited her to church she would go with him. Always curious, Truly found this 'orientation,' as she called it, interesting, especially since religious belief and practice were just about unknown in her family.

Her mother and brother were also curious, since Truly had never had a boyfriend. Adelaide invited Jozef to lunch. It was on a Sunday, after the eleven o'clock Polish Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, on 90th Street.

Adelaide served fried Kielbasa with sauerkraut. There was a loaf of pumpernickel bread (one had to cut off a chunk) next to a block of butter, room temperature, so it could be slathered lavishly. For dessert there was Szarlotka, an apple cake, with whipped cream. Col had already told his mother that she was trying too hard, but Jozef was clearly thrilled.

“Mrs. Harding, I ... I haven’t eaten this well since, well, since my grandma died. She used to make her own kielbasa. I would help. This ... this is like being at home.” He choked up.

Col looked askance at his sister, for the second time. The first was when Jozef, out of the blue, had said grace. Truly smiled.

“I’m so pleased, Jozef. Please tell us more about your grandmother.”

A couple of hours later Jozef said his goodbye. He hugged Adelaide, shook hands with Col, and kissed Truly on the cheek. When the door closed behind him, Col said, “so, how long before I’m an uncle?” Truly was still smiling.

That night the sound was clear, as clear as it had ever been. She was very tempted to travel, but, for some reason, she felt—felt, not thought—that she could overdo things, so she stayed put and she thought. A “two-way street” her father said.

She needed a theory. She decided to tell Jozef of her adventures. The next day they met at Butler Library in a large room with plenty of space to be apart from others.

“I smell a mystery,” Jozef joked.

“More than you could guess,” Truly answered.

“Sounds deep, and personal. So I’m nervous.”

“It’s sort of ... metaphysical.”

“Good. Now I’m not nervous.”

So Truly told Jozef about her travels in great detail, including her feelings about it. Jozef was mesmerized. Finally Truly said, “I need a theory. How does it happen? Why? Why to me? Why those places and times?”

“Ah,” he smiled, “you mean the little questions, like the nature of space, time and impossible travel within the two.”

Jozef was the only person outside her family who could joke with Truly about Truly, so she smiled and said, “yes. That’s right. You didn’t think I would ask a ridiculous question, did you? Like how to ace Organic Chemistry?”

They stared into each others’ eyes, both in love but not yet ready to know it.

“Okay then. I have an answer.”

“Hold on.” Truly was taken aback. “I tell you all these strange things happening and you’re ... you are not amazed? Struck dumb? Incredulous?” Her voice got higher and higher as she went on, laughing all the way.

“Oh, I would be all those things if you weren’t named Truly, which, as you told me, is no accident. And if I didn’t believe in more amazing things than what you’ve told me.”

“Oh, really. Like what, for example?”

“Oh, like God coming to earth as a baby, then rising from death, eventually taking us with Him. You know, like that.”

“Oh yeah. Yes. You’re right. That is more amazing. Well, let’s stick to the slightly less amazing and explain— ”

“I already know.” Jozef was almost solemn. “So do you.”

Truly stared, but not at Jozef. She was watching the clock on the wall. She could see the minute hand moving, and then the

hour hand. She looked back at Jozef.

"It's dark outside," she almost whispered, "and raining."

"I see that," he answered, softly.

"We should listen."

And together they listened to the night sound, rich and oh-so-clear, each soft drop on the window beckoning.

Right there and then Truly and Jozef had their first real kiss, passionate, and somehow they both knew that they would marry.

On Sunday evening they walked in Central Park.

"I have an idea. I mean a group of ideas. Related ideas." Truly was excited.

"So do I," Jozef answered, less excited. "You first."

"It's easy. Time and space are quantum phenomena, tangled in a helix and subject to all the uncertainty that reigns inside an atom, except it's not an atom. It's the entire cosmos. It's not strings, like some say. It's planes. But here's the thing, Jozef, it's not random like in an atom. I do believe there is purpose."

Once again Truly was surprised by Jozef's utter lack of surprise. "I know," he said.

Truly could only stare. "*You know?*"

"I've never traveled like you, Truly. But I have traveled, in visions and dreams."

"You mean in your imagination."

"No. No no. Somehow a part of me has gone to different times and places. Truly, I believe your explanation. But I also

believe that science, physics, is only part of it.”

Truly, staring again. “You’ve been ... *elsewhere*?”

“Yes. Not in body, but in, well, in my spirit.”

“But what other parts could there be, Jozef? Time. Space.”

“Listen, you drop a pencil it falls, yet it’s made of atoms, *inside of which there is no gravity*, Truly. Even Einstein could not explain that. Nobody can. Nobody.”

“Listen, Jozef, I’ve read a bit of those crackpots like Swedenborg and Jung, who saw angels or met their own souls. You’re don’t mean like that, do you?”

“I mean there are no boundaries between disciplines, between physics, theology, psychology. And, Truly, I don’t think Swedenborg and Jung were crackpots. They saw something. They met ... something. And they didn’t lie. But, you know, we see through a glass darkly.”

“Jozef, I’m ... I’m sorry. I know there may be more than we know, or can know. And what you say is—I mean *how* you say it, about seeing darkly through a glass.”

Jozef laughed heartily. “Ah, Truly, maybe if I didn’t love you so much I could lie, but I do, so I can’t. That’s from the Bible.

“Truly, my Truly. I know you know two things for sure. One, there are no one-way streets. Two, your name is no accident. Now number three. Do you know why your name is no accident? Because there are none. Seeming uncertainty for us, yes, but not randomness. I will show you.”

So Jozef took Truly’s hand and lay back on the grass, eyes closed. And there they were, not in the park but on a Manhattan street, tenements with fire escapes, and pushcarts selling fruit at the curb, with a few old men and women

closing them down for the night.

They heard Italian softly spoken, and what Jozef knew was Russian, and some German—or Yiddish? Yes, Yiddish. There were more voices than there were people. They came from the ground, the bricks, and the sky. Even out of the air. Low and friendly voices.

“Faulkner was right,” Jozef said. “The past is not even the past.”

“My human book of quotations!”

“Like this one. ‘There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio’ –that is, Truly– ‘than are dreamt of in your philosophy’ –that is, in science.”

“Finally one I know. *Hamlet!* ... right?”

They decided to stroll. As they did they nodded greetings to the pushcart folk, who smiled back. A mandolin was playing what seemed to be an old Italian song. Jozef said, “I have a confession, Truly.”

They stopped and faced each other. “I grew up here.”

“Here? Right here? This is your old neighborhood?”

“Sort of. I wanted you to know me, where I’m from. And I don’t mean only the neighborhood, either.”

Truly’s eye widened. She took a step back and looked around. Then she nodded. “I know, I know. This is *when* you grew up, too.”

“That too, yes. But not only that.”

Truly got close and put her hands behind his head. “Well, keep going, Hamlet.”

“Let’s walk westward, to Mt. Morris Park. There’s a rock ... ”

When they got to that rock, they climbed and sat and looked, but mostly they listened.

"I've been traveling since my parents and grandma were murdered. Russians did it. I was ten years old. I found I could travel to see people, to witness events, to be amazed by customs. Truly, regions of time are not on planes but on some sort of transparent, pliable tissue, a gauzy wave. They flutter. They intersect, passing through each other. Do you remember I said there are no walls separating knowledge? Well, I can travel—Truly, don't look so shocked, I'll stop if you want."

"No. Shock is good. Keep going."

"Hah! You want to know if I'm nuts?"

"I already know *that*, silly."

"Okay then, I can travel to specific memories and moods. I can travel to parts of my knowledge or parts of my feelings."

"You mean you can travel outside *and* inside?"

"Yes. We are part of the fabric, after all. It is part of us."

"What about people?"

"Well, sometimes I pass through them and they through me, sometimes not. Sometimes they don't see me at all."

"This is a lot, Jozef. I know my experience would seem crazy to my mother and brother, so yours shouldn't seem crazy to me. But it does."

"I saw you on the nighttime bus, Truly. I was there. I've loved you since that moment. I knew I had to stay, so I jumped off after you did. I'm not going back. I belong here. You're here. If you go somewhere or somewhen else, I will too, and I'll belong there."

Truly took a deep breath. "Are you real, Jozef?"

"What, 'when you prick me do I not bleed'?"

Truly chuckled. "I know that one! *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock!"

They hugged tightly.

"So, Jozef, welcome to my space-time."

"Thank you, but to be exact, it's your space-time-spirit. That's where the depth comes in. Remember that window?"

"Uh oh."

"Well, you see, that's what the tissue is, the gauze. It's spirit. His spirit."

"You mean God?"

"Yes, yes a part of God."

"Listen Jozef, I'm not giving up physics for philosophy—let alone theology! —if that's what you're thinking."

"Oh, no. No. What a mistake that would be! No no."

"Okay then." Josef was staring.

"What?" Truly asked.

"Before we marry, maybe you could become a Catholic?"

That's when they heard shouting.

"Russian," Jozef said. "Actually, Russian-Polish. Those people are from Minsk, Belarus."

"Jozef, you are more amazing than anything that happens to us." She was gazing at him.

"They sound angry. Shall we go?" she asked.

“Not before I kiss you.”

Over the course of her freshman year, Jozef would visit Truly’s mother and brother after Mass, for brunch. Adelaide would keep it simple—eggs, muffins and a pile of sausages, mostly for Col. A few weeks after their visit to Jozef’s where and when, they decided to make an announcement.

“Mother, Col, Jozef and I are getting married—oh, not right away, so don’t worry mother—we’re both finishing our degrees, of course—and I’m becoming a Catholic.”

Col said, “it took you long enough.” He was grinning.

Adelaide nodded. “No, it didn’t. Just long enough. I think it will be good to have all those saints looking over us. That’s what they do, right Jozef?”

“That’s exactly right, Mrs. Harding!”

“Saints aside, I have an impression.” Col’s tone was sardonic.

“Uh oh,” Truly groaned.

“Yeah, well, why do I have the feeling that we’re your Greek chorus? No real agency, but we do listen, with every now and then some commentary.”

Truly leaned straight back in her chair, her eyes widening, a vein popping out on her forehead.

“That is not true, Col. You and mother are my rock. Maybe rocks don’t say much, but they’re solid, you build on them, and you go to them for safety.” Her eyes glistened.

Jozef stood, as though to leave, but Adelaide instructed him to sit, “please.” For a while no one spoke, then Col said, “I’m sorry, Sis. Sorry, Jozef. Jozef, we don’t want to lose Truly. She doesn’t know this, because she doesn’t think about herself like this, but she is *our* rock.”

Truly was softly crying.

Looking right at Col, Jozef very solemnly said, "I would like to be part of the rock, Col. But— "

Adelaide interrupted. "Well, you three, just listen. This chorus says 'yes.' The four of us will make a strong rock that will stand up to anything, even when little pebbles come along!"

"I'm so grateful to hear that, Mrs. Harding. My parents and grandma were mine, until some thugs took them."

"Randomly?" asked Col.

"No. They always hated bullies, whether Russian or German and so, in the old country, they resisted. But bullies don't forget or forgive. My people had done much damage during the war, and during the Cold War. I don't know details. But I do know they were famous, or infamous, as the bullies would have it."

"Hold on, Jozef." Col couldn't believe his ears. "You mean some Russians tracked them here to kill them?"

"Col, yes, there is real evil. Evil spirits, sure. But more immediate are the evil people around us. I thank God that there are good ones, too. Like the Hardings."

"Doesn't he sound like Poppa, Mother?"

"Just like him, Truly, dear. Just like him."

In their senior year Truly and Jozef collaborated on research that led to a published paper. They used their actual names but withheld their undergrad status. The paper, which refuted String Theory and, by implication, the great Stephen Hawking, gained traction.

Their notion of a 'supra-natural physics,' as it came to be

called, was based on math formulae and much 'speculative theory-building' (actually their personal experiences, which they used as so-called 'mind experiments'). Jozef made reference to philosophers and theologians, but only as examples. Some critics called it science fiction, others crypto-theology. Still others said that it need not be called anything, that is was fresh and defied the many artificial categories of thought. Their theory was referred as the Gauze-Time Theory. They were accepted directly into their respective doctoral programs, philosophy and physics, at Columbia University, where they enjoyed modest celebrity.

Before entering graduate school Truly was baptized, and shortly after that Truly and Jozef married. They moved into Truly's room.

Then one day, in a class on Ontology, the study of Being itself, a professor whom Jozef had never before seen walked into the lecture hall. When he called himself Professor Sapiens, half the class chuckled, but not Jozef, who quivered like a small branch in spring when a breeze rustles its leaves.

"Ontology studies the properties of objects, as well as their etiology. It is systematic. Yet, like all systems, it is ... how can I put it? ... prideful. It wants everything, the way particle physics wants everything. But, like all systems of thought, it overlooks one thing."

Jozef leaned in. He expected 'uncertainty' or 'randomness' but instead he heard, "Loki." The class was quiet until Jozef said, "you mean the Norse god of mischief."

"The very same," said Professor Sapiens, "but he is much more than mischief. Never take him for granted, Jozef" –how he knew Jozef's name was a mystery– "and do not confuse him with randomness, or uncertainty, or chaos, each of which seem real. Those are names only. As such they give the illusion of

knowledge. In reality they are one: the result of his actions.”

No one ever saw Professor Sapiens again.

Jozef told Truly of the lecture. “Mythology?” she asked.

“Mythologies transmit truth in their own ways, Truly. But the important question is, Why did he show up? Loki has been trivialized, so that he seems to be a mere jester. But he is not that. And ‘mischief’ is too small a word for him. He was responsible for the death of Baldur, the most beautiful and beloved of the gods of Asgaard.”

“I see. Um hm. I know what he is.”

Astonished, Jozef blurted out, “that was quick, even for you!”

“He’s a black hole. Or, rather, he is *The Black Hole*.”

“That’s seems a bit much. How would he be— ”

“A black hole is absolute gravity. It not only swallows light, it can swallow whole systems, in fact the entire cosmos. There are many of them, but some believe there is one giant one and that we’re headed towards it.”

“We already now that the universe is breaking apart, that— ”

Again Truly interrupted. “Jozef, my Jozef. A poet would call the big swallowing a whimper, not a bang. But it’s best to call it nothing. That is what Loki is. In your language of philosophy, Loki is nothing, the great nihilist. Wreckage unto oblivion.”

“We know creation will end, Truly. We’ve been promised that.”

“I know, I know. Armageddon. Maybe we’re surrounded by a black whole and the universal expansion is its event horizon, it’s rim, sucking us in.”

“I think we have another paper! Certainly heretical but still ... ” Jozef was trying to not giggle, which was often his nervous reaction.

“Yes! *The Loki Effect*. Do you think Nobel Prize maybe?”

Is she serious? Jozef thought.

“Of course, if there’s anyone left to give it to us,” he practically shouted. They laughed until tears flowed.

When they had gathered themselves, Truly said, “let’s think on this, Jozef.”

“Agreed. But let’s kiss first.”

Neither knew that thinking big could be too big, and that Loki knew the power of small.

[Table of Contents](#)

James Como’s new book is *Mystical Perelandra: My Lifelong Reading of C. S. Lewis and His Favorite Book* (Winged Lion Press).

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