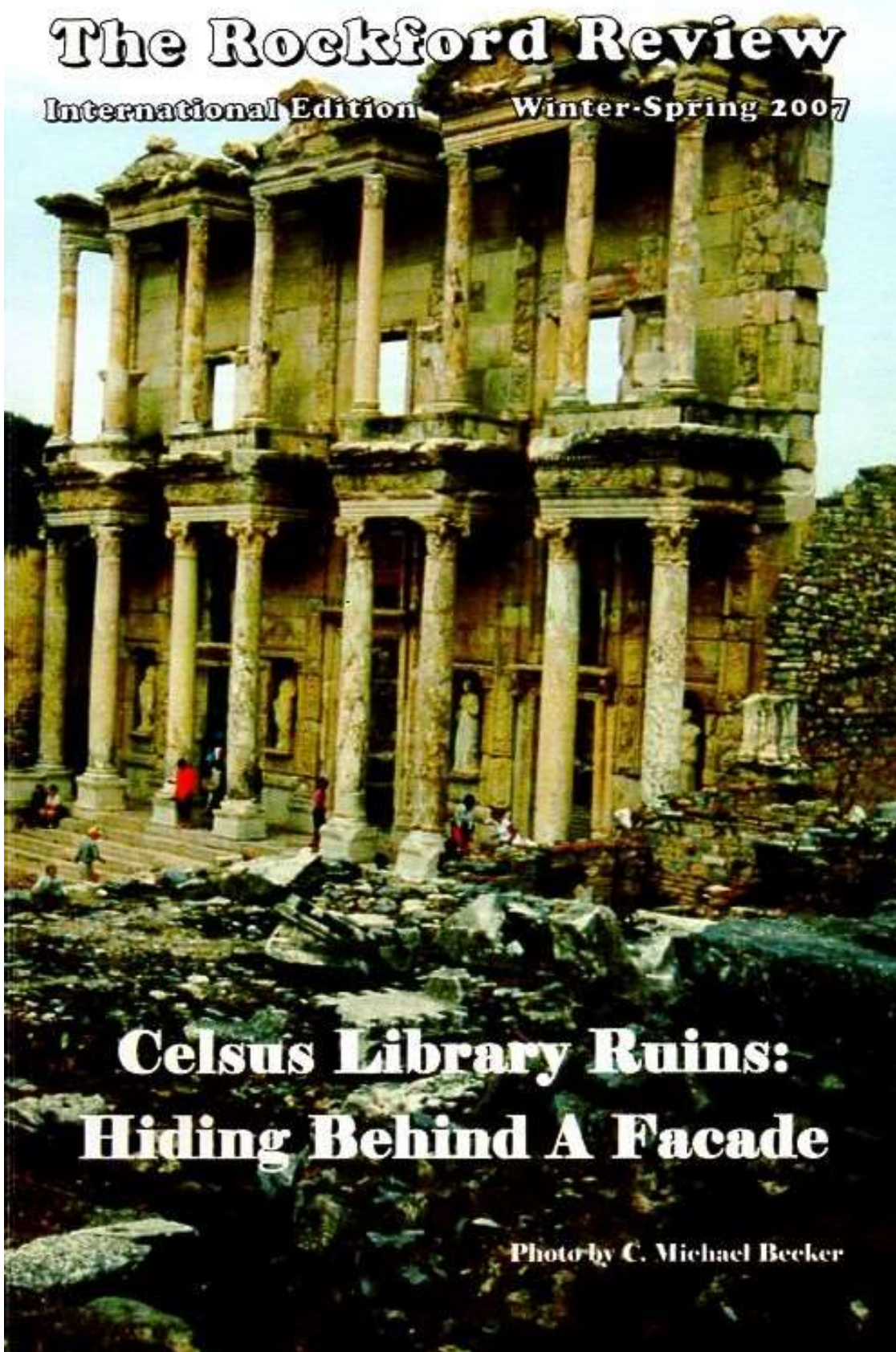


# **The Rockford Review**

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## **Celsus Library Ruins: Hiding Behind A Facade**

**Photo by C. Michael Becker**

*Eva Schultz  
Plainfield, IL*

## Quality Time

A kite is cheaper than an apology. Besides, who apologizes to a four year old? Jake seems happy with the big red and yellow kite I bought him, and it certainly took me long enough to get it flying. The effort was the apology.

I let Jake hold the string roll once the kite is firmly in the sky. He laughs like always - like he was never yelled at.

It's different with Cindy. But then, of course a little boy is different from his mother. She won't forget a word I said, not ever, even if I didn't mean it and I'm not even mad anymore. It's carved into the giant stone wall that our relationship has become.

Jake is different. He doesn't give it back when I yell. He doesn't cry or complain. He just disappears, and when I find him later, he just looks up with solemn eyes. Ice cream usually fixes the problem.

But after this last time, I knew it would take more. Cindy left overnight, and she took Jake with her. I knew she must have gone to one of her girlfriends' houses, so I didn't worry. I threw a few couch cushions and yelled at nobody, and then I straightened up the house and went out and bought the kite. I thought about buying flowers, too, but they probably wouldn't have made a difference. She returned icy, and I could see on her face that she was trying not to object when Jake ran to me for a hug.

I grab the string from Jake as the kite dips on a downward gust. "Watch it!"

Jake leaps out of my way. I fight the winds until the kite hovers again, lower, but still in the sky.

I turn to offer Jake the kite. He is staring at me, his arms crossed over his chest so that his fingers touch either shoulder. "Are you mad?" he asks.

I stare at him. I don't know why, but all I can think about is his birth, Cindy's shiny face and exhausted joy, Jake's red newborn skin. A tug on the string draws my attention, and I wrestle with the kite until it dances and shivers low. "Here." I hold out the string roll. He hesitates. "Here, take it!"

Jake doesn't look at me, but he takes the string. We both stare at the kite, and I think about putting a hand on his shoulder, but I don't do it. The kite looks low enough to fall, but it hangs in there as if on its own willpower.

I wonder what Jake is thinking. That seems like a strange question. Don't little kids just think about the moment they're in? For the first time,



it occurs to me that I could just ask him.

What would he say? Things Cindy used to say, before she stopped bothering? That I scared him? That I hurt his feelings? I wonder, again, who would apologize to a four year old.

The wind bursts on the kite and pushes it lower. Jake fights back before I can step in. The red and yellow diamond dips and then soars.

"I did it!" He turns an ecstatic smile to me. It flickers as if he has remembered something. I smile big, and he turns back to the apology in the sky, content.

The moment is gone. The kite has done its job. Everything is fixed.

I think of Cindy, of the tears that have long since turned to indifference. I always called it peace when she'd stop crying, but it isn't peace. I don't know if we'll ever really talk again.

"Dad, did you see when I made it fly? It almost fell down, but I made it fly."

I could say anything to that - something effortless, something safe. Anything a dad would say.

"I saw," I tell him. It sounds small. Jake grins. He isn't asking for anything more.

I don't want to say this. I feel like I'm naked. I kneel down so that my face is near his. He glances at me.

"Jake," I begin. "I'm sorry."

*I work as a business proposal writer for a Fortune 200 company and have drafted three novels. My publishing credits include Vox, Buffalo Carp, VerbSap, The SiNK, Downstate Story, Peeks & Valleys, and The Pegasus Review.*