

The City Without Books

by C. T. Martin

David was spending spring break at home and found it to be incredibly boring. It had been raining the entire week. He was stuck at home with nothing to do, since his parents had no plans to take a vacation until the summer. There were of course video games to play, ice cream to eat, and television to watch. However, even those activities can become boring after a whole week of the same thing each day, along with such dreary weather.

David recalled that there was one new thing that he could sometimes look forward to. Every now and then his grandmother would mail to him a gift or a letter. He also had a friend that moved away who would sometimes send him a letter. He wished desperately that he would receive mail from someone, anything to break the monotony.

On Friday the mail man came knocking at the door with a box that was too large to fit inside the mailbox. David was seated in the kitchen having breakfast when his mother approached him with the item.

"It's probably from grandma!" David said with excitement. Finally, something to break the boredom.

"Well, the package is addressed to you, but it doesn't say where it's from," his mother said as she frowned. She started to open it.

"Mom, that's for me, I can open my own mail," David pleaded. "I'm nine years old."

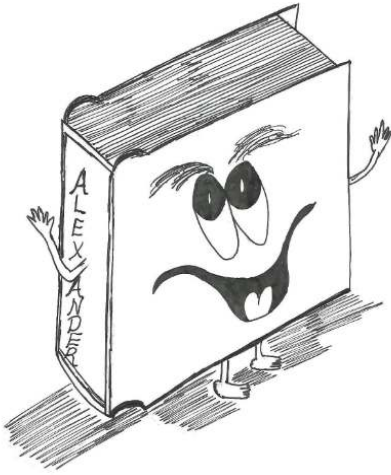
Reluctantly, she handed over the box. "This is very strange," she said.

David took the box into his room and shut the door. When he ripped it open, there was no note to explain where it had come from. He only found a red book with the word "Alexander" written in large gold letters on the front. Inside were blank pages made from beautiful white, shiny paper. As David turned the empty pages, he was astonished to hear a voice coming from the book.

"Hello David!" it shouted.

Surprised, he dropped the book on his bed, staring at it in disbelief. He picked it back up carefully, examining the outside to see if there were any wires on it that might explain why he heard a voice.

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"Hello David!" the book repeated.

"You can talk? I don't believe it!"

he exclaimed.

Suddenly there appeared a pair of eyes on the cover, and below it a mouth. He said, "Of course I can talk.

I am Alexander, and I've been sent to you from The City Without Books."

He started to say, "You must be a gift from — "

"No, I'm not," Alexander interrupted. "I told you, I'm from the city where there aren't any books. I have an important message for you, but when I am done you cannot keep me."

"Why not? You belong to me now," David said resolutely. "You'll be happy here in my room with all my other books."

Alexander looked around. "That's not why I came and besides, I notice that

you have more toys than books, which is why you need to hear my story.”

Alexander began to tell David about a place where there is not a single book left.

He said, “After a long time, people stopped reading books. They became dusty and worn out. When people quit reading, books began to disappear. It was a sad place in which to live. There were no more book stores, no reading time at school or bedtime stories, no fun places or people to read about.

“People didn’t drive because they forgot how to read the road signs and it became too dangerous to drive without them. Nobody drove to the store, on road trips or vacations. Even worse, there weren’t any sweets. No one knew how to make candy or cakes, because all of the books containing the recipes had vanished. Those are just some of the horrible things that happen when people stop reading and giving books to each other.”

“Wow, that’s one of the most amazing stories I’ve ever heard!” David said.

“Think so? You should hear the story inside of me about a man named Alexander who ruled ancient Greece,” the book said in a mysterious tone.

“Why don’t you tell it to me now?” David asked eagerly.

"No, you have to read that for yourself," explained Alexander.

"But all of your pages are blank!" he objected.

"As long as you promise to pass me to all of your friends, so that I can tell them what happened in the city without books, the words inside of me will start to show," he assured him.

David thought for a moment and then said, "Alright, I promise."

Then, as he opened the book and looked inside, the words of the story of Alexander the Great began to appear.