Between the Stacks

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This is what happened when Ethos went to Parks Library to find out if the age-old rumors about hooking up during those study breaks were true. What we found was more than they teach us in the books.

The girl’s sweater is tight. She is relaxed. Her feet are planted firmly and her hands are set comfortably on her book, but she’s not reading. The boy’s left foot is awkwardly placed atop his right foot while his hands are grasping his book so tightly his veins become visible. Both the boy and girl’s heads are tilted toward the book, but their eyes give a different interpretation. Though their heads are facing the direction of the books, their eyes glance over as if they are watching the other, waiting.

No, this is not about how in 2008 and 2010, a student named Jake and his now-ex-girlfriend had a couple quickies in the top-most tiers of Parks Library (we’ll get to that in a minute). The above is about a sculpture. But this story is also about how almost ten years ago, Ethos tried to do a similar story proving the rumors true of students having sex in the library, only to find a few late-night studiers. This is a Cyclone history lesson about art, Parks and love.
A PLACE OF DISCOVERY

Olivia Madison, dean of Parks Library, has been at Iowa State for 12 years and has seen and heard stories—stories as romantic as a couple exchanging vows in the library to the unconfirmed rendezvous spots around the stacks. She believes she has this sculpture figured out.

Since the dawn of time, (and by that we mean 1944), Christian Pettersen’s work titled Library Boy and Girl has been located across from the Grant Wood mural, through Bookends Café on the way up to the room that’s really quiet and no one visits until finals week.

“I’ve always been a bit of a romantic,” Madison says. “When I really started looking at that pair, and particularly their placement, you figured out.

“We were in the tiers on a Saturday afternoon when it was empty and had a quickie. No clothing removal necessary,” she says.

“The tiers do act as the perfect secluded hideaway for a quickie, but there is one spot in the library that is infamous. Fourth floor just past the bookshelves. A wooden door that leads to the elevators for the tiers opens to a room with concrete floors and brick walls amplifying any murmur or groan. Unlike any spot in the tiers, this room has accessible light switches that easily add to the ambience. Madison says Parks has plans for eventually renovating the room by installing a door with a window to disclose what goes on inside.

“It was a great adrenaline rush, and something I am proud to be able to mark off my bucket list,” Streif’s ex-girlfriend, with whom he had the sexual encounter, remembers both times as a breach.

“Stained carpets, dusty smells and cold bookshelves. It may have not been the fact that the library was sexy to Jake Streif, senior in mechanical engineering, but it was the rush he got that made the experience so thrilling. Streif certainly thanks Parks for its discreet tiers deeply tucked away.

“I have looked up in the library twice. Both just quickies in one of the quiet tiers,” Streif says.

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— JAKE STREIF

“TIL DEATH DO US PARKS

The hopeless romantic dean isn’t the only alumna who found chemistry between the books. Professor Jim Roth in the College of Veterinary Medicine met his wife Jeanne in junior high, and they continued their relationship while attending Iowa State in 1969.

In addition to a curfew, Iowa State also required separate dorms for men and women. Roth and his wife would sneak out of the dorms some nights and head to Parks.

“We would go to the library every night to study, and we both worked in the library, also,” Roth says.

They would stay until 11pm and get off work at midnight so he could walk her back to her dorm.

“It was a really convenient place,” Roth says. “We have fond memories of the library.”

A year later, they were married.

Hanzheng Guo, graduate student in materials science and engineering, has used more than the abundance of books and other resources at Parks while working for his Ph.D. Guo made a video to send to his girlfriend in China. He videoed five patrons in Parks at random to have them state one sentence, “Marry Hanzheng.”

“IT LIKE TO THINK OF THE LIBRARY AS A PLACE OF DISCOVERY IN SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS.”
— DEAN OF PARKS LIBRARY, OLIVIA MADISON

“She gave me a warm hug,” Guo says. “I could feel she was so happy.”

Guo knew he should marry her after graduation. As for the site of his video, Guo was confident in his choice.

“I love the library. I spend most of my time there!” Guo says. “The first place I thought of should be the library.” Guo completed the video and sent it to his girlfriend in Chongqing. She said yes.

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