

Written on the Wall

Lila's Adventure
by Kaylie M. (age 16)

June 1st, 2026 Age 20 Location: Rexburg, Idaho

My parents gifted me this journal; they know me so well. But for my future readers, (hopefully my prosperity), let me explain who I am.

My name is Lila (short for Delila) Sophie Mitchell. I am twenty years old. I was born on a clear evening, in 2006, the fourth of ten children. Right from the start, my parents knew I was different. I learned to speak faster than any of my siblings, and no matter how hard they tried, my parents simply couldn't keep me out of the dirt. I was always digging, searching for what I claimed to be buried treasure. I had quite the imagination, coming up with what I deemed to be "lost civilizations" and sharing my finds with my family and friends. I was always so animated, excitedly explaining what I had found and the story it told.

When I was only four, I taught myself to read and do basic arithmetic. I was ahead of all my classmates, so my parents pulled me out of school and homeschooled me. I was usually a quiet child, happy to entertain myself. Any spare time I had was spent either reading or digging. I entered high school at age fourteen and graduated at age fifteen. I was allowed to continue attending high school, even as I was doing college level and higher coursework. This allowed me to make friends my own age. I got my master's and PhD in archaeology by the time I was twenty, and set to work learning more about the past.

And that brings us back to now. One thing I should note that I didn't include in my introduction is that I do enjoy writing, though in a journal. As a scientist it is important to keep detailed notes. So I am an avid journalist. Each of my previous journals is filled with loose papers, notes about what I was currently working on, and entries typical of a journal. This particular journal was a gift; in honor of my first excavation. One of my professors, Dr. Miriam Vance, is the head of an excavation in the Andes and she invited me along. I am ecstatic, and so I decided that this journal will be a little different from my other ones. This journal is going to tell the story of my first excavation! (So it might read more like a story than a scientist's journal of findings.) I will start traveling tomorrow, June second. By about July tenth, we should be at the site for the excavation. I won't be writing more until then, (I thought I would warn you beforehand in case you got worried about the jump in time), but I can't wait! Getting ready to dig!

July 11th, 2026 In camp in the Andes:

We finally made it into camp late yesterday afternoon. I have to say, it's not glamorous, but I kind of like the rugged vibe of the camp. We spent all day today setting up camp, which basically involved doing what we were unable to finish last night. Dr. Vance said that we would start digging tomorrow; I'm so excited! However, I fully intend to do some exploring. I'm not really a part of her team; she invited me along as a guest because she thought that I would enjoy the experience. So from here on out, you will be hearing about my own adventures! I hope to find something really interesting to show for my efforts, but the

chance to explore the unexplored Andes was too good to pass up!

I would also like to add that I met one of her crew, a student Dr. Vance brought along. His name is Callum Julian Reed; he is simply wonderful! He said that I could call him Cal, and only his close friends get to call him that! (I may or may not like him, but that is top secret information!) I can't wait for tomorrow!
Almost ready to dig!

July 20th, 2026 In camp in the Andes:

It has been nine days since I last wrote in my journal, sorry for the delay. I have spent the previously noted time exploring the jungle around the camp, and trying hard not to die from the overwhelming heat. It's really hot and humid in the jungle; I almost don't have to bathe, there's so much water in the air! It's crazy! Anyway, back to my exploring. I walked around the camp in a one mile radius, and found to the east what appears to be a virtual wall of foliage. It's so thick and dense that I couldn't see through it, and there was no way I could force my way through. But I have never accepted being told no, so earlier today I found a way through! (I guess you could say that I am stubborn, but I simply state that I am determined.)

Some of the others in camp keep telling me that I shouldn't wander off on my own, that it's not safe to wander the jungle alone. But I can protect myself; and I know survival skills to boot. So there! (I will say though, some of my skills don't transfer easily to the jungle, but I'm working on it.) I haven't found much else, though I did try to tell Dr. Vance about the jungle wall. But since it's made of plants, it doesn't count as being human made. So she wasn't overly interested, and besides, she's busy with her dig. But that doesn't matter. I will continue my investigation!
Started digging!

July 25th, 2026 In camp (still in the Andes):

Ok, sorry about another long wait, but I was so tired the last four nights that I couldn't write anything. But I promise your wait was worth it! I found this small animal trail that goes through the jungle wall, and I followed it all the way to the other side! That was four days ago. You might be asking what took me so long to write, and why on earth was I so tired at night? Well my readers, I can answer that question. I got to the other side, and I found...

(Did you like the suspenseful moment there? I thought it was kind of clever.) You'll never believe what I found. There is a huge caldera on the other side of that wall! And even better, below are these really tall trees, (in a moment I'll explain how tall), and nestled amongst the trunks I saw buildings. Yes, buildings! I found a civilization! And if I am right, one that hasn't been found before! The only problem is that there is a couple hundred foot drop to the caldera floor from the edge. That is what took me so long to write. I let everyone know that I would be gone for a couple of days, and set out to try and find a way down. I was unsuccessful, as there is a sheer drop all the way around the caldera. That said, yes, I did walk all the way around, hence the three day gap between my discovery and this entry. I thought about it as I walked, and decided that there was no other way around it. I will simply have to repel down the face of the cliff, with all my supplies, and hangout in my city. (That is what I have taken to calling the ruins I found. I haven't thought of a good name yet, so it will have to work for now.)

I intend to let someone know where I'm going and what I'm doing so that if something

happens to me, there will be others who will follow. (This journal may become a record of what I find; in the event that I don't make it.) I intend to tell Cal, because he claims he's an outdoorsman. I told him to give me two weeks before he comes looking for me. I plan to take my journal, (yes, all of you get to go with me on my adventure), to document my finds. Now I have to go; but as a last note for tonight, I intend to leave in two days. That should give me enough time to gather supplies, explain where I am going, and set up a potential rescue party if they don't hear from me within fourteen days. I only hope that is enough time. As for now, still digging!

(Here is the promised description of the trees. From the edge of the caldera, these trees appear to be incredibly thick, possibly thicker than the redwood trees in California! The tops tower at least a hundred feet above the edge of the caldera, and they grow straight up from the bottom! They're giants. I can see why no one has found this lost city, it's completely sheltered! I also checked, just to be sure, and the volcano this city is built in is classified as extinct, so I should be fine. Anyway, still digging!)

July 27th, 2026 In Linitia Day 1 of exploration

I have done it! I repelled down the caldera walls, and now I am camped in Linitia! (I named the city I found Linitia. It simply felt right.) It's amazing down here. A lot of the buildings have at least four floors, and are built from brightly colored stone that matches the walls of the caldera. I haven't yet dared to enter the buildings; I don't know how stable they are. So I have spent my first day in Linitia exploring the streets. They're strangely clean. I don't see any trash lying around, but I guess that, after who knows how long, all waste would likely have decomposed. The streets themselves are made of cobblestone, with all sorts of patterns weaved in. The streets feel more like works of art rather than something you would walk on.

I found the strangest thing as well. One of the buildings had writing on the side, almost all the way up to the top. I couldn't read any of it, but it looks like different languages. But the weird thing is that they look like our modern languages, not like the old, lost to time nonsense that I learned about. I can tell from the wear and tear on the buildings that they're old, like thousands of years old. Which is really strange. How would this people have known our languages years and years before they were first spoken?

I have looked inside some of the buildings; they appear to be houses. I could see what resembled tables, beds, and chairs. Some of these homes even had dishes on the table, completely untouched; almost like those lived there would be right back. (I certainly hope not, because I am not fond of meeting any skeletons.) Others looked more like their owners left in a hurry; items I can't identify strewn around the rooms. And still others appear to have been abandoned, all that's left is empty shells. My curiosity has been piqued; I have to know what happened to these people. But I've had a long day, and it's time that I got some sleep. (Don't tell anyone, but I am a little frightened to be sleeping in an empty Linitia. Who knows what's out there; but that is what I intend to find out.)
Still digging!

July 28th, 2026 In camp in Linitia Day 2 of exploration

I spent all day walking around the city, and to my surprise I found more walls covered in writing. This time, however, I found part of the message written in English. What I read will

haunt me for the rest of my life. I have written it here to document it:

I am the last of my people who dare to stay in this place. Many have either left, died, or simply disappeared. I don't know what I should do, so I write. I write the sad tale of my people in as many languages as I know, hoping to warn others away. Danger lurks around every corner; in every shadow.

And that was it. I can feel my curiosity growing, itching to find out who this person was and what they meant. But reading these words had my spine crawling, almost like I was being watched. Though I won't leave, at least not yet, I will do my best to be cautious. That is all I can write for tonight, but tomorrow I will continue my search for answers.
Still digging.

July 29th, 2026 In camp in Linitia Day 3 of exploration

I found more parts of the message today. I find myself consumed with the need to learn more of the story.

In all of my peoples' history; the danger here is one we haven't faced before. This is a new threat; one we can't fight against with sword and spear. The only way we know is to run. Run hard and far, hoping this evil won't follow us.

And on another wall:

Our first warning signs were when people started to disappear. The reports stated that they went to the south stream to collect water, and never returned. We never found a trace of them, though this valley is shaped like a perfect bowl, cradling us in the middle. There was nowhere for them to go.

I did find a single line of text: numbers; a date.

1500 BC

It was written in the same handwriting as the rest of the words, scratched into the wall. I desperately want to know what was making these people disappear, who were they? How did they know my language? I haven't found the answers to these questions, but I won't stop digging until I do.
Still digging.

July 30th, 2026 In Linitia Day 4

I don't know what is happening. I have been all over the northern part of the city, but I can't find any more parts of the story. The farther north east I travel, I find more homes abruptly left, no one taking thought as to the state of things tossed haphazardly around the house. For the first time, I ventured into the buildings, no longer caring that they might not be structurally sound. I thought that maybe the writer had left parts of their message scrawled on the walls inside the buildings, but I didn't find anything. Besides, if these buildings have stood for more than 3,500 years without crumbling, it's unlikely that they will start now. (Or at least that is what I tell myself.)

On the other hand, the more north west I go, I find homes that appear to be waiting for their owners to return, though every now and then there are buildings that have been outright

abandoned, almost like no one ever lived there. I don't stay long in this part of the city; it creeps me out to think that the inhabitants might come back while I am there. I keep imagining skeletons walking into a house while I am exploring and starting up a conversation with me. (Apparently when one has no one to talk to, their imagination takes on a life of its own to entertain itself.)

For now I'm still digging.

July 31st, 2026 Linitia Day 5

I found more messages. They were on the walls of buildings more to the south than I had originally traveled. What I read chilled me to the bones:

Not long after people started to disappear, we started to find half dissolved corpses next to the south river. As I watched, their skin and innards simply melted, leaving behind stark white bones. I once watched a man dip his hands into the river. Within seconds he was on the ground writhing in pain; and before my very eyes I watched as his skin writhed and bubbled before dripping off his bones. It quickly spread until all that was left of him was a mass of gleaming, white bones. We pushed the remains back into the water, letting the river claim what it had taken.

This is the longest section I had found so far, and on a neighboring building was another piece to the puzzle:

A few people were found dead in their homes, evidently having drunk the water.

I had to stop and return to my camp, horrified by what I had read. I have no idea what happened. Poison? Possibly acid in the water? But that made no sense. What kind of poison melts a person's skin off? And where would acid have come from, and how would it have gotten into the river? I can only guess at the answers to these questions. But how I long to learn more. (But to be safe I won't go near the south river, if I happen to find it.)
Still digging.

August 3rd, 2026 Linitia Day 8 of mystery

I moved my camp more to the south so that I wouldn't have to travel so far every day. It's been a couple of days since I last wrote, but I learned more of the story. The pieces are fitting together slowly, showing a gruesome decline to what was once a prosperous people.

Those that had succumbed to the poison in the water were tossed back so that the river could finish what it started, and their homes weren't entered. Their families became outcasts, as it became the popular belief that they had been cursed by demons or evil spirits. Those cast out were never heard from nor seen again. I have my suspicions as to what is causing the death of my people. But I was too late to save them. I warned those I that I could, and I only hope that they made it to safety.

After that I couldn't find anymore. So tomorrow I move my camp again, and the next day I will try to find the last few pieces. I also have my suspicions as to what killed this people, but I won't write it until I am sure. I would hate to worry my readers unnecessarily. Still digging.

August 5th, 2026 Linitia, the more southern part Day 10 of mystery

I found more of the story, though I think it might be more towards the beginning than the end. I won't write it here, as I don't want to confuse you readers. (I am trying to write the sections in the order they should go in.)

This piece of the puzzle mentioned the earth rumbling and moaning; occasionally giving a small heaving motion as if it was a creature that was in its final death throes.

I am a little more certain now that I know what happened; my only problem is why the city stills stands if I am right. I will continue the search for the answers I am seeking. Still digging.

August 6th, 2026 Linitia Day 11 of mystery

I only have a few more days till I have to return, though I know I am so close to the end. I just need one or two more pieces to the puzzle and then I can go. I only hope I have enough time.

Late last night I felt tremors in the earth, like those described by our mysterious writer. Time is officially ticking, and not because I have three days till Cal comes looking for me. I will leave you with that cryptic message; hopefully you will figure out what is going on faster than I did, dear reader. Here are more pieces of the puzzle:

I saw something last night that made my blood run like ice in my veins. I saw to the south, on the other side of the river, was a glowing, angry red line. It could only be one thing. I watched the last of my people leave this place this morning. Now I remain alone, carving messages onto walls hoping to save an innocent soul. What will become of me, I don't know. But time is no longer my friend. How I came to be here in this death trap, I don't know. But I do know that the founders of my people had no idea what they had done when they settled this valley. I close my tale with my name and a prayer that no one else will succumb to this place.

The name by which they call me is ...

And just like that the message cut off. I will search more tomorrow. But I don't know how much time I have left. I can only hope and pray as the writer did.

September 29th, 2026 Back home in Rexburg, Idaho

I never did find the name of our mysterious writer, though I searched for the last three remaining days. I believe from the clues that I found that the people of Linitia were killed by the volcano. The founders of Linitia didn't know that they had doomed their prosperity to death, and the volcano believed to be extinct since 500 BC was in fact quite alive and biding its time.

I found evidence that my claim is correct on the last day of my camping trip in Linitia, when I went as far south in the city as I could. I found there, to my dismay, a glowing, bubbling pit of lava, and helplessly watched as a building crumbled into the depths below. Horrified, I turned to run, only to see a skeleton, perfectly preserved by time, to my right. I knew the minute I set eyes on it that it was my mystery writer, and that they had died before finishing their self appointed mission. Next to them lay a rust covered knife, the one they used to carve their last

words into the walls of their city. I don't know how they died or why they never finished their message. But I know without a doubt that they gave their life to save their people and to preserve the story of their demise.

After I had studied my friend for a couple of minutes, I made my own escape, if only to share what I had learned. I made it to my camp and packed up with as much haste as I could. I was leaving the edge of the city when Cal and a team of scientists finished their climb down the cliff face. I explained what I had found, and together we escaped. Upon returning to the main camp, I explained again and we quickly packed up to go. I only learned today, (after our long return home), that the volcano had erupted on September first, firmly erasing Linitia from our world. But I have my photos, memories, and journal to keep the writer's tale alive.

(I am also happy to say that Cal and I started dating on the trip home; we had a lot of time to talk and get to know each other. And at the rate things are going, who knows, there may be wedding bells in the near future.)

The End