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A flight of fancy: Newton in love

Isaac Newton never married, and there is no conclusive evidence that he ever had a romantic relationship. Given the near absence of first-hand information about his personal life, I deem it silly to assume that he never fell in love with a woman. My admittedly groundless and facetious surmise is that when he fell in love with a woman, he would declare his love to her in a poem. Since he was a great scientist, his poems would be, in a sense, “scientific.” When the women read them, they would take Isaac for a crazy nerd and—one after another—heartlessly reject his love. I have taken the artistic liberty to speculate what one of his poems might have been like.

Newton's Love Poem

The Moon, my dear,
 is in a constant fall.
 It desperately tries
 to follow a straight line,
 but our massive Earth
 (not knowing it at all!)
 attracts it with a force
 I recently defined.

The Moon, my dear,
 is always in a fall.
 And so am I.
 And so, by God,
 am I.



I'm in a constant fall
 in love
 with you.
 I cannot leave my orbit,
 but even if I dared,
 you'd still attract me with a force
 proportional to
 your heart times mine
 over the distance squared.
 I try to follow
 my drab life's linear course,
 in which a vapid day
 succeeds a vapid day,
 but a relentless, sweet,
 infatuating force,
 though doing zero work,
 curves my soul's flight your way.

... Let's break the laws
 and crash into each other!
 Infinity's the limit
 of our bliss
 as separation goes to zero.
 I would rather
 not live at all,
 than live without you,
 Miss.



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Chephren pyramid: Finding something in finding nothing

The Quick Study by Giulio Saracino and Cristina Cârloganu (PHYSICS TODAY, December 2012, page 60) correctly identifies Luis Alvarez and collaborators as the first to use cosmic-ray muons to explore terrestrial structures by constructing a muon telescope in the Chephren pyramid's Belzoni chamber to search for undiscovered chambers. However, the authors' statement that Alvarez and coworkers

“found nothing” is incorrect. What the Alvarez team found was that there were no undiscovered chambers. That is a distinction with a difference.

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Correction

December 2012, page 40—In the map, the region that is Michigan's Upper Peninsula should have been rendered in yellow, the same color as the rest of the US. ■