

## In Series

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*One hundred years, pondring the intricate mazes of Providence  
Unhappy tho in heav'n, he obey'd, he murmur'd not.  
--William Blake*

**(September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004)**

William Felker is alone on the floor with a pack of cheap matches. A moment ago the matchbook was propping up one leg of a study desk in Alderson Memorial Library, but William removed it. The desk wobbles a second longer than it should, then stabilizes with half an echo. Hesitant moonlight intrudes on his solitude, filtered through off-white Venetian blinds (designed to blend in with the off-white walls and the off-white ceiling) and landing on the desks, the carpet, his face. He scratches his chin. It's been some time since his last shave. He goes through the motion of glancing at his watch before he remembers having smashed it against the pavement a few days prior. Time had become too fragmented, too fractured. It stifled him with its endless finitude.

The library is otherwise uninhabited. It is every night. The head librarian is an old family friend, knows William's situation, looks the other way each night at closing while William nestles among the fiction paperbacks. He can't sleep most nights and instead spends them leafing through Chekhov and Henry James. Though he has been on leave for the past three semesters, his academic habits refuse to fade--he fights off periodic compulsions to underline key passages for later examination.

Now he shifts the matches to his left hand, picks up a book in his right, flips a couple pages, and promptly forgets what it is he's reading. The pages blur together and

the moments do the same. He thinks he can see the moon moving outside, through the blinds, drifting inevitably. There is a sharp pinching in his chest, probably a spot of indigestion, and for a second it grounds him. The momentary pain gives him something to focus on, something to define himself by, but it is gone and there is nothing but the legion of silent tomes around him and the intermittent buzz of the air conditioning unit. The air is thick around his head, saturated and artificial, and he breathes slowly and hesitantly.

He leans against a shelf to prop himself up--he's only fifty-six, but his joints seem to be the first part of him to have started dying. He walks in and out of moonlight glare, through the patterns of the blinds, and settles himself into a cushioned desk chair. His left hand is still gripping the matchbook. He lets it fall on to the table in front of him and stares at it. The air conditioning unit clicks off and then back on like a snoring infant. William opens the matchbook, removes a match. Strikes it. Watches the flame, the rhythm of it. Without the moments, there is no rhythm. His fingers begin to burn. He tosses the match aside, into one of the bookshelves. Removes another match, strikes it. Lets it burn down a little farther, drops it on the carpet. Removes and strikes a third match, drops it on the table, and stands up.

He moves to the window and presses his face against the blinds as the flames flicker behind him. "The things we do," he says, sighing, and the one unavoidable truth is that time must by necessity run forwards.

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**(August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004)**

The sun is down and the moon is hidden behind cloud cover. In the darkness, William approaches his house, a two-story suburban castle. He hasn't been here in days, maybe a week. It intimidates him the way large cities do. The interior lights are all off, but a single overzealous spotlight shines across the driveway, buzzing politely. William feels the familiar hardness of the front steps, his feet the only parts of him that seem to possess any memory. His hands move palms first to the heavy wood of the door, scraping over the surface as if testing the waters. He finds no sign of acceptance, though he is unsure of how such a thing would feel to the touch.

He fumbles in his pocket, hand closing around a jumble of loose keys. Almost desperately he picks out the front door key by touch (his fingers are perhaps starting to remember), slides it in the deadbolt lock, but the key won't turn. He pulls it out and checks to make sure it's the right key, thicker and more obtrusive than the keys to his office or his car, but the key still doesn't unlock the deadbolt. Teresa must have changed the locks after he left. When was that? He presses his hands up against the door again, willing it to open, but it is more stubborn than he is.

He follows his shadow over to the living room window, surprised to see Teresa inside, asleep on the couch, her chest moving rhythmically up and down. She is considerably younger than he is, still in her late thirties; her breathing is steady and healthy. In the moments before his eyes adjust to the deeper darkness of the house's interior, William realizes that he can't recall his wife's face. The lines and planes and

curves begin to form in his mind, but they tangle and distort before withering into nothingness. The image in front of him comes into focus as his eyes adjust.

The heat of late August is in the air, but inside the house, he thinks he can see his wife's breath crystallize.

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**(June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004)**

The baby's cry brings William immediately out of his dreamless sleep. His senses have become sharpened in recent months, attuned to the acoustics of his newborn son's restlessness. Teresa stirs beside him, eyes remaining shut in the semi-conscious hope that William will attend to his son. He tosses the single sheet back and rises. He is old to be a father, but he was also old to be a husband, and he's managed that with reasonable success.

He steps into the adjacent room where his son's agitation is even louder. A change of diaper isn't enough to silence the baby. William cradles his son to his chest and walks down the carpeted stairs towards the kitchen.

At the foot of the landing there is a small pile of books that has been tipped over. William plants his left foot directly on one of the books, which slides forward instead of providing friction. His arms fly up instinctively in an attempt to grab on to something, losing hold of the baby. A beat. William falls to one side. A beat. The baby flies, swimming through the humid air, infant arms immobile, completely devoid of instinct.

He spins, twists, lands on his back with a sickening thud. William completes his fall, legs crumpling, arms flailing. A beat.

There is movement again, and Teresa thunders down the stairs, instantly awake; the sound cut off whatever dream she was having. She sees William, then the baby.

There are sirens, flashing and screaming. In a matter of moments the baby is dead. "Jeremy," Teresa cries.

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**(August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2004)**

It is midday. William stares at the calendar, which still says June, from his place at the table. He says, "It's been over two months now." What he means is, *We'll survive this. We'll make it.* Teresa doesn't look back at him, but nods. She fiddles with a strand of her hair. They haven't talked about the baby in weeks. They haven't talked about anything in weeks.

"We'll survive this," Teresa says. What she means is, *This is tearing me apart.*

William nods, pauses, looks at her. "This is tearing me apart," he says. What he means is, *Because of me, my son is dead. I have to leave. There is no more time for me here.* She nods back at him.

William stands up, pushes in his chair, carries his lunch dishes into the kitchen, washes them. He picks up his keys, closes the door behind him, and starts walking.